Mediating Gender in Post-Authoritarian South Korea

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Introduction

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Michelle Cho and Jesook Song

Our volume focuses on the relationship between media representation and gender politics in South Korea. The chapters that follow are linked by the central thesis that gender discourse and representation are central to sociopolitical, economic, and aesthetic processes of mediation in South Korea. In the post-authoritarian period we examine (the late 1980s to the present), media representation and popular discourse condition lived gender forms, just as gender preoccupies popular media representation and discourse. In other words, gender relations and processes of identification are inextricably found at the core of civic, political, and cultural debates.

As a simple illustration of the centrality of gender to seemingly unrelated discourses, in the beginning of 2020, two media events happened to converge: the ascendance of South Korean auteur Bong Joon-ho's (Pong Chunho)'s *Parasite* (*Kisaeng ch'ung*) to the pinnacle of global cinema arts and the emergence of a new national image, propagated by major media outlets in Europe and the US, of South Korea as a techno-state marvel of coronavirus pandemic management (despite its own citizens' criticisms of pandemic containment policies). While the nation's strong association with the parasite and the virus arose as a historical contingency, the significance of the two figures help demonstrate the core gendered stakes of mediation in the imbricated field of politics and cultural industries. The virus responsible for the COVID-19 global pandemic showed itself to be powerfully generative, capable of uncontrollable circulation. The metaphor of viral media seeks to capture this very characteristic of self-replicating influence and circulation. The South Korean government's

rapid response to the spread of the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19 elevated the nation to the upper echelon of advanced societies, according to media outlets like *Time*, CNN, NBC, Forbes, *The Guardian*, and the BBC. Thus, the virus was also responsible for the virality of a media image of the nation that bolstered the nation's soft power, increasing the popularity of South Korean cultural industries and the perceived global influence of the country's cultural norms and values, and temporarily bolstering the Moon administration's legitimacy.

While the metaphor of virality grants media forms autonomous life, indeed endowing them with the capacity to operate independently of human awareness and control, the discourse of parasitism increasingly biologizes social relations. Bong Joon-ho's 2019 film *Parasite* presents an image of capitalist class division in contemporary South Korea whose inevitable consequence is dehumanization (a theme taken up in this volume by Miseong Woo in Chapter 4 and Eunjung Kim in Chapter 6). While Bong's film brought this degradation of social relations into being onscreen in novel ways, the metaphor of humans as parasites does not originate with his film. Scholars and critics of South Korean popular discourse have noted the spread of the suffix *ch'ung* to deem various groups as non-value-producing and thus parasitical on the social body. Key examples of this include the slang terms "*mam ch'ung*" (mom/housewife vermin) and "*noin ch'ung*" (elder vermin). The use of "*mam ch'ung*" as a derogatory term appears in the popular novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (*82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng*, Cho Namju, 2016) and its 2019 film adaptation (*82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng*, dir. Kim Toyŏng), a work that drew popular attention to the very ordinariness and ubiquity of sexism across private and public domains of life in South Korea. Thus, the figure of the human bug, conveyed through the rhetorical shorthand of "*mam ch'ung*," "*noin ch'ung*," or the abject, lower-class "*kisaeng ch'ung*" of *Parasite*, signals the class-gender matrix that conditions the default human subject in South Korea, defined as the productive, male citizen-subject, and the absolute interdependence of this subject and his others, who have been deemed subhuman. Following on scholarship that has revealed the androcentrism of South Korean nationalism and cultural citizenship, particularly in the period of postwar industrialization under authoritarian rule, the volume's chapters track how gender becomes an overt mediator of historical and socioeconomic processes as well as how gender forms and relations are mediated by those processes.[1]

The extreme polarization of society into grubs and men reflects entrenched classism and ableism that are fundamentally gendered—i.e.,

rooted in everyday misogyny. Our volume maps the ways in which popular media and public discourse make these social dynamics visible and open them up for debate and dismantling, thus registering what Jacques Rancière terms "dissensus." In presenting innovative new research on how popular ideas about gender gain concrete form and political substance through mass mediation, our contributors investigate the discursive production of gender in contemporary South Korea through trends, tropes, and thematics, as popular media become the domain in which new gendered subjectivities and relations transpire. Using the lens of the popular politics of gender, the essays in this volume present cases and media objects that span multiple media and platforms, from cinema, television dramas, reality variety shows, video, online forums, podcasts, and comics, to Twitter, DCInside, and other social networking sites.

As a group, our authors reveal gender to operate as a *platform*—not only in the context of digital networking, but in the sense of the term as a metaphor for addressing a broader public. In other words, gender as a platform produces identity and shapes exchanges between individuals and institutions, and we take this framework of gender's public expression in media to mark its translocal histories of remediation, such that, despite our volume's focus on South Korea, we nonetheless position our study as a contribution to global studies of gender and media.

Moreover, the volume also addresses a disjunct between academic and public intellectual discourses on gender and media in South Korea, where this area has flourished since the mid-2010s. In contrast, Anglophone scholarly literature on gender and popular media outside of the US context remains thin, despite the transnational impact of discourses such as #MeToo, as seen in the uptake of the #MeToo hashtag across regional and national media markets outside of North America. By featuring notable voices of South Korea's burgeoning sphere of social-media-enabled gender critique, our volume does what no other academic volume has accomplished in the sphere of Anglophone studies of gender, media, and South Korea. Seeking to interrogate the role of popular media in establishing and shaping gendered common sense, our project fosters cross-disciplinary conversations between scholars in cinema and literary studies, communications studies, disability studies, anthropology, media and cultural studies, and gender and sexuality studies, from across North America and South Korea. In addition to diverse disciplinary approaches, readers of our volume will encounter a variety of discursive styles, ranging from openly polemical cultural criticism in a public intellectual vein to close textual analysis directed toward specialist academic audiences. As a core

editorial principle, we aimed to preserve the plurality of academic voices, to push against the tendency of Anglophone scholarship to homogenize knowledge production by privileging certain methods and discourse styles as legitimate and authoritative. As several of our contributors are researchers and faculty who write and teach primarily in the Korean language, their work has been painstakingly translated into Anglophone academic writing, in ways that inevitably show the traces of this impossible transposition.

While many of the chapters discuss twenty-first-century feminism and its antifeminist backlash, the volume seeks to lay out the imbricated fields of new gender ideals, which include new masculinities (as in Moonim Baek's interrogation of BL-inflected action cinema reception or Yoon Heo's analysis of new models of fatherhood in reality television), femininities (as in Youngmin Choe's reading of the revision of ideal Confucian femininity through neoliberal entrepreneurial values or Jinsook Kim's comparison of competing figurations of motherhood in recent political debates), queer alliances (as in Hyun Gyung Kim's assessment of the pairing of female fans and gay men in revisionist television shows), or gender-nonconforming subjects (as in Sunyoung Yang's assessment of cross-dressing in period television dramas). Overall, the volume situates these analyses of media objects and discourses that emerge in the contemporary conjuncture of amplified debate within a broader post-authoritarian period focus and the central importance of gender to concepts of modernization, economic development, and the liberal, cosmopolitan ideals of cultural globalization in South Korea.

The volume's historical parameters begin with the democratic transition to civil governance, and the new society this transition promised, and continue to the present, particularly the centering of gender debates within the participatory media domains of the post-#MeToo era. Within this time frame, the South Korean mediascape transforms as a result of multiple factors: media liberalization paired with the aggressive globalization of cultural contents and media industries following the Asian financial crisis, the digital turn, and the ways in which new ideas of the popular emerge in democratic South Korea after (and in contrast to) the *minjung* (the populist figure of 1980s democracy activism) era under authoritarian regimes. We consider the relationship between gender and populism and how gendered forms of contemporary subjectivity result from popular/populist media forms, from the reconfiguration of masculinity by consumer cosmopolitanism in *hallyu* (Korean wave) contents, including television and genre cinemas, to the revival of twentieth-century feminist

discourses in online communities and on social networking platforms such as Twitter, since 2014. We aim to introduce new ways of thinking about gender as a platform: a framework for mediating person-to-person and/or transactional exchanges, and a conceptual infrastructure and juridical frame that furthers contemporary capitalism's affective operations. The volume also aims to bring what seem like disconnected forms of populist sentiment in South Korea into genealogical relation: from ideals of *minjung* as the subject of history to the appeal of globalist/cosmopolitan "common sense."

The volume's primary fields of intervention are gender studies, media studies, and East Asian area studies. Within the broader scope of gender studies, we see our work contributing to a transnational feminist project to resist the homogenizing effects of globalization rhetoric. And at the intersection of critical Asian studies and media studies, we focus on the particularities of the South Korean context, which emerge predominantly in the global and regional media industries of film, television, comics, and digital content, under the rubric of the Korean wave. Although much attention has been paid to "new media" in South Korea, we offer a means of accounting for the subjectivating impacts of this "newness" beyond new user devices and media infrastructures. Further, in our approaches to popular representation and the social implications of media use, we offer an important alternative perspective to technology or policy domains, which have been addressed by existing scholarship in communications studies that focus on South Korea (Jin 2010, 2017). By the same token, substantive engagement with non-Euro-American content and reception is currently scarce in theoretical approaches to fandom, new media, and participatory cultures.

Gender as Mediation: Historicizing Media Aesthetics

In addition to presenting varied cases of media texts focused on gender roles and dynamics in South Korea, our volume specifies gender—an axis of identity and a set of social forms produced by discourse, images, and iterative performance—as mediation. Put differently, gender identity and its embodied forms constitute a field of mediation or a mediating assemblage. We mean this in multiple senses: while the dictionary commonly defines mediation as an intercessor's work to achieve reconciliation or agreement, the term also names key processes in cultural theory and critiques of political economy. In dialectical critique, mediation denotes the

process whereby contradictory and antagonistic forces are synthesized and transformed; as such, mediation drives history, as the mechanism of historical processes. Our volume presents gender as an identity category constituted by mediation, following media and gender studies scholar Ani Maitra, who defines identity as "a *multiply mediated* process" that is experienced at both the registers of the individual subject and the social body. For Maitra, identity is "a continually unfolding aesthetic mechanism," as it is mediated by concrete and familiar forms of representation. Correspondingly, our volume's authors analyze gender as an assemblage of ideas, social facts, and embodied experiences that crystallizes in any single media text, object, or encounter as an "intermedial fragment" that synthesizes multiple processes of aesthetic and historical mediation (Maitra 2020, 6, 8).

Our volume's focus on mediation thus extends our purview beyond a narrow assessment of media's material substrates, technological standards, or aesthetic conventions, or the ways in which gender is represented in mass media, even as our authors also analyze their objects as media commodities that mediate social relations of reception, economic exchange, and public debate. By proposing to assess gender as a mediating assemblage, then, our contributors necessarily address multiple mediating processes, without seeking to prioritize the political-economic over the aesthetic, or vice versa. Indeed, our volume's prime directive is to demonstrate the ways in which these fields are inextricably entangled in intermedial processes, of which gender is a core domain. The mediating function of gender seems to have eclipsed other categories of minoritized difference indexed by the hierarchies of race, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and sexuality in the three decades that mark the historical parameters of our study— from the democratic transition in the late 1980s to the present conjuncture of hypermediated gender discourse. If class and ideological affiliation were the primary vectors of antagonism in the democracy movement period, gender has emerged in the post-authoritarian period as the identity category that galvanizes the most vehement essentialist and antiessentialist arguments. Yet we contend that mediation can be both reifying and dereifying; in the field of gender (and culture more broadly), aesthetic mediation results in both a stronger defense of normativity through overrepresentation and emergent and expansive new articulations and imaginaries, whether pitting competing gender forms against each other or coopting existing paradigms, or both.

In the arena of popular representation, questions of modernity and its many associated processes, including urbanization, internal migration, and the formation of national publics, have been expressed through a

focus on the transformations of gender roles. As many scholars of the colonial period have asserted, colonial modernity gave rise to gendered tropes and figures such as the *sin yŏsŏng* ("new woman") and her denigrated sister, the "modern girl."[2] New subjectivities that knit together gender expression and modern consciousness traveled across geographical space, as a feature of what has been termed "vernacular modernism," just as contemporary gender politics express translocal currents.[3] Film scholar Miriam Hansen (2000) built on her theorization of classical cinema as vernacular modernism using the example of Shanghai silent cinemas of the 1930s, to resist the prevailing notion of modernization as a unidirectional flow of transmission from Europe to the rest of the world, or from center to periphery. Instead, the tropes of urbanization, cosmopolitan consumer culture, and the embodied shocks of modern life that German sociologist Georg Simmel described in his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" came to the fore in the new stage performances of *sinp'a* (new style) narratives of Japan, which strongly influenced the melodramatic tenor and topoi of Korean film and media in both the colonial and postwar periods.[4]

In South Korea, the celebrated golden-age film culture of the 1950s and '60s focused on the genre of melodrama, centering its narratives on women protagonists whose suffering, in their transitional roles as military prostitutes/fallen women, adventurous yet foolhardy housewives, unruly factory girls, or faithful and abiding wives and mothers, amplified the symbolic significance of feminine types as well as further heightening gender's key function in maintaining the cohesion and health of the national collective. Just as the print media had trafficked in sensationalistic narratives of feminine transgression (contra masculine enlightenment), film culture assigned women the demanding role of suturing the contradictory allure and peril of capitalist modernity, particularly in the early postwar period.

The historiography of South Korean cinema has cast these postwar melodramas as a paradigmatic *national* film culture that undergoes periods of boom and bust. After its emergence as a popular visual culture, from the mid-1950s, Korean national cinema was choked by the grip of authoritarian censorship, then stifled by poor economic conditions, until the rise of a millennial film culture spurred by blockbuster action styles and new industry practices to support film export after the Asian financial crisis. However, the overdetermined, gendered nature of this widely accepted narrative of the birth, death, and rebirth of South Korean national cinema has received less scholarly attention.[5]

Kim Soyoung (2005) discusses women's reception of box office hits such as *The Housemaid* (*Hanyŏ*, dir. Kim Kiyŏng, 1960) and *Madame Freedom* (*Chayu puin*, dir. Han Hyŏngmo, 1956) as sites of postwar women's culture, these films being deemed *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* or "women's film."[6] However, she and other feminist film scholars distinguish this midcentury commercial women's film from the late-twentieth-century emergence of a new type of politicized *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* intended to give voice to women erased by androcentric nationalist accounts of history and identity. These films were made by women directors who were also active in feminist organizations of the liberalization period, such as the documentary filmmaker Byun Young-joo (Pyŏn Yŏngju), who dedicated years of her life to recording the lives and accounts of "comfort women"—survivors of military sexual slavery under Japanese empire—in her *Murmuring* trilogy.[7] In her essay on women's film, Kim summarizes the perspective of a 1990s cine-feminism that grew in influence in the post-authoritarian, media liberalization period, which also coincided with the transformation of culture industries from a nuisance that needed to be managed by the government to a sector of the export economy to be fostered by state support and public funding, as they have been since the mid-1990s and, especially, after the Asian financial crisis.

Given the history of film culture as an arena of political debate, especially during the 1990s, when liberalization, following the end of military dictatorship, fostered both the re-emergence of feminist and LGBTQ activism and a lively cinephile culture representative of changing social attitudes and expectations of an open society proper to the newly democratic nation, several chapters highlight film culture as an important domain of gender mediation, particularly in the account with which the volume begins—Hee-jeong Sohn's proposal of contemporary gender politics as a "feminism reboot," by which she situates today's platform-enabled feminist politics within the longer trajectory of liberal imaginings of feminist and queer representation in cinema. The centrality of film to the historicization of gender as platform and mediator stems from this medium-specific history of the cinematic mediations of modernity as inextricable from gender politics.

Translocal Gender Politics

In defining gender as a field of mediation, we emphasize the view of gender as a platform, both in the literal sense of the term—as the mechanism

by which a subject enunciates her position to an audience or public—and in the everyday metaphorical usage of the term in contemporary technoculture. Media platforms are virtual spaces that host and facilitate the exchange of goods, information, money, and communication, making possible the fabric of social relations through mutual recognition, articulations of desire/desirability, antagonism, under- and over-valuation, and equivalence.

A recent study on gender as a mediator of politics and technoculture that offers helpful comparative context for analyzing contemporary, mediated gender antagonisms in South Korea as an emphatically translocal phenomenon is American communications studies scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser's *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (2018).[8] In this study, Banet-Weiser foregrounds the interdependent media conditions of popular feminism (which often blurs into postfeminism) and online misogyny in the US context. Banet-Weiser's primary insight consists of tracking online discourses of feminism and misogyny, not as opposed but rather as complementary facets of a multiply mediated populist shift. As she writes in her preface, "[m]isogyny has existed for centuries, to be sure. In the current moment, however, popular misogyny responds to, reacts against, and challenges popular feminism—precisely because it is so visible" (Banet-Weiser 2018, xi).

Three facets of the relational dynamic between popular feminism and popular misogyny in Banet-Weiser's study can shed light on what our contributors observe about the transformations in gender discourses in South Korea: reactivity, popularity, and a public sphere that is increasingly shaped by networked media participation. For Banet-Weiser, two related but distinct frameworks of media visibility help us to understand how gender is being remediated in the present moment: "the economy of visibility" and "the politics of visibility." The economy of visibility names the ways in which images are immediately commodified either as advertisements or as data, incorporated into a media economy of value-producing circulation. The politics of visibility, on the other hand, refers to the claims that individual groups or counterpublics can make when they register as visible interests within a broader national or international mediascape. These frameworks accord with the workings of media industries in South Korea as well, yet with some modifications.

What distinguishes the South Korean context from the American one is the relatively recent emergence of the discourse of popular feminism. While in the US, popular feminism, expressed in various commercialized images of "girl power," is often presented as mainstream, common sense,

in South Korea, ideas of feminine empowerment are still anathema to a longstanding notion of proper familial relations that retains widespread support and thus maintains normative force. This is why, even in the act of claiming to support universal human rights, some South Korean progressives reject the call for LGBTQ rights or redressing gender inequity. In Banet-Weiser's view, popular feminism's ubiquity and deep entrenchment in consumer capitalism in the West establishes it as a force to which popular misogyny reacts. However, in South Korea, newly visible enunciations of networked popular feminism could also be said to be reactive, pushing against the ubiquitous, naturalized misogyny of Korea's traditional adherence to Confucian hetero-patriarchal social relations, since "the 'commonsense' appearance of misogyny as the norm—leads to its invisibility as a politics" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 3). Hence, the intensification of misogyny in online spaces has had the salutary effect of bringing contemporary expressions of misogyny into view as a reactionary politics of oppression. This misogynist political ideology vehemently opposes women's increasing autonomy and social influence that have opened a space for women's claims to self-determination. To be clear, the latter are not necessarily voiced in the name of feminism or feminist political goals. But, the consciousness-raising potential of a politics of visibility across media platforms is showing itself in a broadening of public interest in gender equity and feminist politics.[9]

Another feature of the mainstreaming of discussions of feminism in South Korea is the fact that mediated popular feminism has become decidedly translocal. The uptake of the 2017 #MeToo hashtag in the US centered on complaints directed at producer and media mogul Harvey Weinstein. As a consequence, his accusers galvanized public support around the sentimental figure of the young, beautiful, cis-gendered, heteronormative starlet, whose very vulnerability is premised on racist and sexist norms that have often imperiled people of color, while excluding those deemed outside the narrow parameters of femininity in need of protection. While the 2017 #MeToo movement, at least in its inception, drew on a version of mainstream, white, Western popular feminist empowerment, the use of transnational platforms like Twitter led to wider expressions of solidarity across the globe, broadening the scope of inclusion of who might claim injury. In the South Korean context, however, the explosiveness of the #MeToo movement and its capture of public attention owes significantly to the respectability and normativity of its first named representative—prosecutor Seo Ji-hyun (Sŏ Chihyŏn).[10] As the discourses of feminism and misogyny (or misogyny and antimisogyny) battle for vis-

ibility, the resources of global discourse communities through transcultural, mediated networks are appealing for both sides. Thus, this translocal dimension of the remediated dynamic between feminism and misogyny is also a crucial aspect of the South Korean mediascape. Banet-Weiser's view that "we are in a new era of the gender wars, an era that is marked by a dramatic increase in the visible expression and acceptance of feminism, and by a similarly vast amount of public vitriol and violence directed toward women" (3) is thus shared by those in South Korea who are newly politicized by flashpoints like the Kangnam station murder in 2016 (discussed in this volume by HyeYoung Cho in Chapter 2), by the #MeToo hashtag and its revelations in South Korea, and by Korean feminists' intergenerational, public Twitter debates. Similarly, Hee-jeong Sohn in Chapter 1 and Hyun Gyung Kim in Chapter 9 address the contemporary gender wars in the South Korean context mediated through popular, postfeminist representation, and Bohyeong Kim in Chapter 5 elucidates the dramatically changed audience reception of a popular podcast in the thick of the antimisogyny movement in South Korea.

Our volume asserts that South Korea's gender debates are not only analogous to those occurring elsewhere around the globe, but, more importantly, they are manifestations of broader, ideological, and material connections enabled by platforms, activist networks, and media circulation. This is one way to think about the ways that popular ideas and the movements to shape them operate. In other words, the ability of one public gesture or utterance to echo and be echoed by another, until their ubiquitous presence takes on the feature of shared common sense, serves as a snapshot of one way that popular gender representation mediates popular discourse to bring about broad changes in public opinion. Our volume's contributors track these changes in popular media forms, considering the popular as a terrain of struggle over political, historical, and cultural meaning. For example, Youngmin Choe in Chapter 7, though not directly engaged with the historical background of Korean popular feminism or postfeminism, effectively demonstrates how a Korean TV drama recasts Saimdang, a neo-Confucian virtuoso wife-mother-artist from the Chosŏn dynasty, as a savvy businesswoman, spinning the image of female empowerment as a neoliberal cultural artifact of (self-)entrepreneurship. Similarly, Bohyeong Kim in Chapter 5 demonstrates how women's consumption, which was initially depicted as pathologically compulsive in the financial podcast show at the center of Kim's analysis, was recuperated as empowering in the context of sexual harassment accusations that engulfed the podcast's host in scandal.

Just as popular feminism and gender activism have used digital platforms to cross borders of culture, language, and nation-state, mediated popular misogyny has also found highly effective transmission circuits through transnational networks of affiliation, including the often male-dominated spheres of online gaming/e-sports, an arena in which South Korean gamers and content industries figure very prominently. Moreover, international content-sharing platforms like YouTube have gained market share alongside Twitter's growing relevance in the South Korean mediascape for distributing political content across a broad spectrum, from progressive to ultraconservative viewpoints. The use of transnational social media platforms to extend the spaces and civic norms of public debate in South Korea has exacerbated and entrenched domestic political divisions and wedded political speech more firmly to affective expression. In this heightened space of political emotion, what might be considered mainstream, popular feminism in the West, when transposed into the South Korean context, triggers claims of misandry. Thus, corporate feminist slogans like "not all girls need a prince"[11] suddenly take on an affective intensity that produces an extremely vehement reactionary misogynist response.

In the context of discussions of new media, "convergence" is a popular paradigm to describe how media forms not only remediate earlier ones but also inter-mediate and reference one another, aesthetically, ideologically, and historically. While convergence culture, also known as transmedia, is now a common topic in discussions of new media, fandom, online community, and adaptations of popular culture across media forms, many have also noted an important feature of *divergence* within convergence cultures, namely the affective polarization and alienation that seems to have accompanied the rapid expansion of online discourse communities and media worlds. This affective divergence is modeled in the media industries' turn toward niche markets and in the extreme discourses of online misogyny and antimisogyny. If Jinsook Kim in Chapter 8 exposes the convergence of cultural norms that has emerged through intense media contestation between conservative motherhood campaigners and progressive motherhood advocates, Moonim Baek in Chapter 12 attests to a divergence of affects impelled by the bromance genre, a particular niche on which media industries seek to capitalize, and yet whose aesthetic implications are not reducible to mere commercialization.

Yet an overemphasis on affective intensity, in spaces of gender-political discourse, also speaks of the convergence of neoliberal values of entrepreneurial individualism and the liberal values of human rights and equality.

Regimes of technocratic, liberal governance have also subscribed to a popular notion of women's rights as human rights, within the framework of the dominant, middle-class, ethnonational, cis-gendered, heterosexual norms of South Korea. Thus, the scholars in our volume raise concerns about the fact that the version of gender equality that prevails, in its current, popular-mediated forms, relies on the ascendance of neoliberal values to the status of irrefutable social fact. Our volume calls for further work of historicist mediation to open spaces of imagining gender politics beyond privatized sentiment. To give a few examples, Dahye Kim in Chapter 3 demonstrates the powerful potentials of historicization in her account of the gendered remediation of *manhwa*, the Korean graphic novel, in national cultural promotion, especially as *manhwa* moves online in the form of webtoons; Eunjung Kim in Chapter 6 traces the genealogy of desirelessness as a form of resistance to neoliberal technocratic management of gendered bodies by contextualizing Han Kang's novella *The Vegetarian* (*Ch'aesik chuŭija*); Hyun Gyung Kim in Chapter 9 raises suspicions of historical revisionism in a popular TV show that highlights the progressivism of the 1990s, yet neutralizes the transformative ethos and legacy of the period's feminist and LGBTQ activism; and Yoon Heo in Chapter 10 tracks the ideological reification of patriarchal hegemony within the domesticated fatherhood images circulated in popular media, in response to weakened masculine economic power and authority throughout and following the financial crisis.

Intermedia and (Re)Mediation

To situate media studies approaches to cultural mediation in relation to historical context, our volume focuses on questions of mediation, intermediation, and remediation, to bring representational/mass media and their corresponding technological conditions, such as print, photography, television, cinema, digital, and social-networking media, to bear on questions of how contemporary social concepts around gender take shape. In accord with Maitra's proposal that identity categories, including and especially gender, be conceptualized as mediating processes, we also enrich our approach to mediation with media and cultural theory paradigms that insist that media are not merely mechanical conduits or representational forms that are independent of constitutive social, cultural, and political forces. As media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin write in their influential study of remediation, "there is noth-

ing [including media] prior to or outside the act of mediation" (Bolter and Grusin 1998, 58). Further, all mediation is always already remediation. In Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams's view, this extends the purview of mediation throughout and beyond specific cultural texts: "[in] their accessible forms [cultural productions] are of course made and remade within specific cultural traditions, which may indeed be extended and borrowed" (Williams 1978, 188).

Bringing Bolter and Grusin's assertion of the always imbricated relations between media alongside Williams's now canonical approach to culture as mediation, we conceptualize (re)mediation in two dimensions. In the register of media technologies, this volume demonstrates (re)mediation as repurposing already existing media forms to more closely represent the real—by deploying both immediacy and hypermediacy. In the terrain of (popular) cultural creation, many chapters in this volume unveil remediation as the historicization of cultural creation that is "at once 'material' and 'imaginative'" (Williams 1978, 97) and "economic as well as aesthetic" (Bolter and Grusin 1998, 48). In other words, (re)mediation is embedded in and constitutive of the formation of social forms, such as gender relations, in postcolonial, late-capitalist daily life.

While remediation is nothing new, many media theorists identify remediation as the core of digital media—in aesthetic, material, and ideological terms.[12] This is because hypermediacy has perhaps paradoxically become digital media's primary technique for enhancing the latter's sense of immediacy and logic of transparency. As a result, remediation is both what is unique to digital worlds and what denies the possibility of that uniqueness (Bolter and Grusin 1998, 50). This aporetic feature of digital media's conjoined immediacy and hypermediacy appears in the relationship between online and offline activism, or virtual participation and physical embodiment, which is constantly activated by gender's mediating operations. In Chapter 2, this feature of contemporary gender politics is highlighted in HyeYoung Cho's extended comparison between social media posts and hand-written sticky notes circulated and recirculated in public discourse after the murder of a young woman in a restroom at Kangnam Station. Other chapters that focus on remediation include Youngmin Choe's discussion of the aesthetics of historical revisionism through hypermediation, in the television show *Saimdang*.

In addition to this framing of media, especially digital media, through the perspective of remediation, Williams provides an understanding of remediation in the dimension of cultural creation that is "economic as well as aesthetic." Williams's focus on mediation is less about the relation-

ship between different temporal and spatial media forms and technologies (e.g., between analog and digital, between multiple synchronic media, or within the same medium) that compete and are conjoined by immediacy and hypermediacy. Rather, he stresses the dimension of remediation as meta-mediation for cultural production, namely, the historical and political-economic processes that condition cultural creation as "at once material and imaginative." Williams elucidates mediation as "an act of intercession, reconciliation, or interpretation between adversaries or strangers. . . . The distinction between 'mediate' and 'immediate' had been developed to emphasize 'mediation' as an *indirect* connection or agency between separate kinds of act" (97–98). In this approach, cultural creations are necessarily mediated by historicity that is contingent on material forces (e.g., industry, transportation, infrastructure) and social relations (e.g., class, gender, race, sexuality, kinship).

In that regard, all of the chapters in our volume distinguish mediation from mirror reflection. Despite the fact that both might perpetuate a basic dualism, for example, between material and social, reflection is didactic (vis-à-vis the role of culture as a mirror of classed materiality) and alienating (barring materiality from artistic and cultural expression), whereas mediation challenges the framework of reflection. Artistic activities are intermediaries of the material and the social that cannot be reduced to subordinate relationality or direct connection. As such, mediation, as Williams writes, "is always [a] less alienated concept" (99–100) than reflection. Distancing from both the Jungian absolute collective and Durkheim's relative collective, the collective subject posited by Williams that infuses cultural production is not a trans-individual subject, but rather is the "creative sense of new responses and formation . . . of specific new forms and structures of feeling" (195).

Also relevant to our discussion of mediation, remediation, and gender is the more recent scholarly frame of media populism, which has been theorized primarily in Euro-American contexts as a form of neopopulism made possible by media technological platforms. Rather than simply denoting populist sentiment or political discourse that is circulated by various media such as television or the internet, media populism's conditions of possibility are the media forms and interfaces that shape the discursive spaces that such media create. In other words, contemporary media populism refers to a populist politics that owes its existence to the media effect of horizontality and broad participation that inheres in social media platforms (Kramer 2014).

It is by expanding our understanding of gender as mediation that we

bring these conceptual frameworks to bear on media representations of gender identities as intermedial processes by which political contestation is voiced in contemporary South Korea. Gender is currently a touchstone of political and social antagonisms; our volume situates these debates as mediating the contemporary conjuncture. Beyond posing South Korea as a case study, our volume instead posits South Korean gender politics as translocal (as opposed to hermetically national or generically global); the essays herein point to networked and relational shifts in the operations of gender as a platform for recognition, contestation, and debate that are reverberating through and beyond South Korea. While the visibility of the #MeToo hashtag among Korean Twitter users positions South Korea as a current in the tide of global feminist advocacy through platform activism, what mediates gender in South Korea are multivalent acts and engagements across quotidian and exceptional fields of mediation. As a transnational feminist project, our volume insists on the translocality of South Korean locality, moving beyond both a global/local binary as well as the framework of regional or national area studies.

Volume Organization

This volume focuses on gender mediation in the last three decades of South Korean history through the domains of popular media. It showcases twelve chapters organized into three sections. If the first section focuses on illuminating historical processes of understanding the remediation of gender in the present moment, the second and third sections center on the political-economic processes of gender mediation and media aesthetics, beyond gender binarism. While we provide here a brief overview of each section and the chapters therein, detailed chapter descriptions are presented within the volume in brief section introductions.

Section I, "Historicization of Media: Gender as Platforms and Polemics," features contested histories of media and gendered citizenship, as the larger backdrop of the entire volume. Although the chapters in this first section focus on and illuminate different media domains—cinema, social media, offline protest media, and comics (*manhwa*)—they fill in the historical background and mark paradigm changes that help to shape gender as a prominent field of mediation in the translocality of South Korea, on which the rest of the volume chapters zoom in.

Chapter 1, by feminist activist and public intellectual Hee-jeong Sohn (Jay Sohn), investigates the relationship between postfeminism in the

1990s and 2000s (after authoritarianism and the Asian financial crisis) and the anti-misogyny-cum-#MeToo conjuncture of the mid-2010s to 2020s, by tracing transforming cinematic representations of gender relations. Her proposition that the post-#MeToo period constitutes a "feminism reboot" of South Korea's 1990s and early-2000s media feminism has circulated widely in intellectual and activist circles. Thus, we publish her chapter here as both an analysis of the changing media landscape of gender representation as well as an example of a public-intellectual polemic. Chapter 2 by feminist film critic and media scholar HyeYoung Cho focuses on the unexpected intermediation of digital and analog public expression in the Post-it Note memorials that spontaneously appeared amid fierce online debate about the infamous Kangnam Station murder in 2014. Chapter 3 by Dahye Kim illuminates the history of Korean comics of the last three decades, which have become nationalized cultural products through their incorporation into the Korean wave, at the expense of gendering subgenres and by privileging "masculine realist" works. In parallel to the legitimation of male-dominant cultural industry texts on the basis of so-called realist aesthetics, Chapter 4 by Miseong Woo tracks the success of the thriller film genre in the last two decades under the global financial crisis that relies heavily on the mediation of gendered images, in particular monstrous femininity and extreme violence against female bodies.

Section II, "Consuming Gender: Gendered Consumerism and the Consumption of Gendered Claims," highlights the hypermediation of gender through consumerism using the visual strategies of remediating existing media. Gender's hypermediation emerges in interplay with the historical contexts laid out in the first section: media liberalization in the post-authoritarian transition (since 1987), economic restructuring after the Asian financial crisis (since 1997), and the anti-misogyny/post-#MeToo contemporary debates (since 2015).

Chapter 5 by Bohyeong Kim examines how gendered consumption produces multiple layers of meaning by assessing the dramatic rise and fall of the popular podcast program *Kim Saengmin's Receipts*. This podcast on financial asset building targeted an audience receptive to gendered claims about consumerism, given its repeated trope of women's pathological consumption. Yet this very image of women's consumption became the basis for empowering women in the shift of dynamics among the female comedienne hosts following the male host's sexual harassment scandal and delegitimation. In addition, the chapter casts intermediated self-help as comedy, through a podcast that remediates traditional reality programs found on broadcast television. These processes make possible generative

albeit vexed meaning production through the ongoing refashioning of gender as a platform in relation to changes in popular conventions concerning consumption and consumerism. Chapter 6 by Eunjung Kim engages Han Kang's acclaimed novel *The Vegetarian* to interrogate the ways in which gendered consumption associated with reproduction is implicated in the Anthropocene and undergirds ableist exclusion. In other words, this chapter identifies gender's indispensable role in mediating disability and otherness, offering clarity in the midst of what are often muddled viewpoints produced by gender's entanglement in consumption and consumerism. Chapter 7, by Youngmin Choe, provides another hermeneutically rich decryption by close-reading the 2017 SBS TV drama *Saimdang: Memoir of Colors*. It demonstrates the consumption of gender as a hypermediation process not only because Saimdang, the neo-Confucian virtuoso woman figure, is reconstructed by the show as a Sino-Korean tradeswoman and commune leader, reflecting the mid-2010s trend of K-drama production for a China-centered market. But further, this chapter argues that the show thematizes (and thus mediates) remediation itself—through portraiture, painting, and photography—in order to signify the anxiety of authenticity (vis-à-vis fraud) in the context of the Korean art market. This chapter can be juxtaposed with Dahye Kim's chapter or Miseong Woo's chapter from Section I for their analyses of the production of authenticity through claims of verisimilitude or realism. In Section II, this chapter complements Bohyeong Kim's chapter for its emphasis on intermedial processes of consuming gender. Chapter 8 by Jinsook Kim delves into ambivalence in the consumption of the trope of motherhood at the height of public debates about the Sewol Ferry tragedy. Staking the authority of the mother figure as a key gendered claim in these social movements, whether used by conservatives or progressives, the chapter examines the pitfalls of seeking social justice based on motherhood identity politics.

Section III, "Pop Remediation: Beyond Binary Gender Forms," broadens the volume's focus to remediation across the gender spectrum, connecting the previous sections' focus on consuming gender to the hyper- and remediation of masculine and nonbinary figures. While earlier sections focus on the contemporary antimisogyny discourse in the context of a dualistic gender war, the aim of this last section is to consider a wider and more complex field of gender representation that mediates and is mediated by the historical conditions and social antagonisms analyzed throughout the volume.

Chapter 9 by Hyun Gyung Kim illuminates the effects of postfeminism

on the historical depiction of the relationship between feminism and queer activism by tracing the representation of liberal gender-nonnormative characterization in two installments of one of the most successful TV drama series of the last decade—the *Reply* series (*Reply 1997* [2012], *Reply 1994* [2013], and *Reply 1988* [2015]). In line with Sohn's chapter on postfeminism's influence on the feminism reboot, Kim's chapter complicates assessments of the current era by referencing the impacts of pop cultural mediation on queer politics. Further, by approaching the romantic revisionism found in the show as a memory politics that selectively adopts and erases ongoing struggles and solidarity, the chapter recaptures the historical processes that gender mediates and by which it is mediated at the same time.

Chapter 10, by feminist scholar and critic Yoon Heo, focuses on the novel phenomenon of domesticated masculinity that forcefully emerged in popular media through the iconography and discourse of "daughter-fool" (*ttal pabo*) fatherhood. Tracing the history of conventional masculinity in the course of liberalization and neoliberalization that is the counterpart to changing gender relations, Heo argues that the anomaly of softened paternal masculinity is the other face of misogyny as a coeval development of the antimisogyny movement. Chapter 11 by Sunyoung Yang joins the core theme of Section III in nonnormative gender representation in popular media by discussing the aesthetics and reception of a period TV drama that features a cross-dressing protagonist and a seemingly queer relationship. The chapter also echoes Bohyeong Kim's chapter and Youngmin Choe's chapter on intermedial effects by illustrating the fandom of the TV drama that traverses different media (e.g., TV and social media) and different positions of consumers and producers. Chapter 12 by Moonim Baek also focuses on complex intermedial processes by demonstrating the remediation of masculine camaraderie from male homosocial genres like the buddy film, through fan fiction and women-centered fan revisioning in reception contexts. While it revisits the history of gender mediation in comics (Dahye Kim's chapter) and in cinema (Miseong Woo's chapter), the chapter presents homoerotic bromance, another unique historical mediation of nonnormative gender forms through aesthetic refashioning. As much as the chapter recaps Section I's historicization, it also provides a capsule genealogy of Boys' Love (BL) as a popular, Korean women's culture that gains new significance when viewed through the lens of translocality.

While the volume is meant to be read with a historical trajectory in mind, it deviates from strict chronology and invites readers to draw the-

matic, historical, and material connections and comparisons across chapters. In the hopes of building on existing work centering gender in Korean cultural studies, our volume endeavors to ground the political and aesthetic significance of gender's centrality in the landscape of public discourse in contemporary South Korea. Alongside this modest contribution, our volume aims to document the complex field of signifiers, tropes, and modes of mediation in a historical period of unmatched importance in the way that gender roles and gendered cultural norms have come to be questioned, disputed, discussed, practiced, and understood. In bringing together gender debates, media transformations, and historico-cultural mediation as imbricated fields, we aspire to contribute to a fertile field of discussion of the translocal dimensions of gender's mediated and mediating function in late capitalism.

NOTES

1. Essays in the edited volumes by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (1997) and Kendall (2001) are influential works in English that investigate the androcentrism of modern ideals of South Korean national subjectivity. See especially the chapter by Seungsook Moon (1997). Katharine H.S. Moon (1997) and Lee (2010) analyze the imbrication of androcentrism, militarism, and postwar industrial modernity.

2. The study of modernization under Japanese colonialism is a rich subfield of research in Korean studies and has yielded many important monographs on the topic of gender in colonial Korea, available to Anglophone readers (H. Choi 2009, 2020; Yoo 2008; Yang 2017; Rhee 2019).

In addition, Korean publications in the last two decades have focused on individuals who became known as "new women," battling the tides of normative gender constraints in the context of Korea's modernization (Yi 2009; Ch'oe 2018; Na 2018).

3. Throughout this introduction, we frequently employ the terms "translocal" and "translocality" over "transnational/transnationality." While translocality as a theoretical framework has mostly gained prominence in the work of cultural geographers and urban studies scholars, especially those who investigate diaspora and migration across space and place, the term is now used beyond these initial field-specific parameters, to move beyond a default national purview when analyzing networks of mobility, exchange, communication, and social relation (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013; Brickell and Datta 2011).

4. Korean cinema scholars Kelly Jeong (2019) and Jinsoo An (2018) have written about *sinp'a* and golden-age cinema.

5. Notable exceptions include feminist film scholars Kim Sunah (Kim Suna), Joo Yu-shin (Chu Yusin), and Kim Soyoung (Kim Soyŏng).

6. Another noteworthy contribution to film studies that are attentive to gender representation is the work of Moonim Baek (who also appears in this volume), whose study of horror cinema focuses on the iconography of the female ghost in Asian horror genres.

7. Byun's trilogy includes *The Murmuring* (*Najŭn moksori*, 1995); *Habitual Sadness* (*Najŭn moksori 2*, 1997); and *My Own Breathing* (*Najŭn moksori 3*, 1999).

8. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication*, Samu Kytölä brings translocality to the study of digital communication networks. Kytölä writes that "translocal mediated networking" demonstrates "dynamic and dialectical interplay of the local and global, as translocality is a bidirectional process in which local and global discourses impact and shape each other" (2015, 371).

9. As reported in the *Korea Herald*, "feminist" was the most searched word in the Naver portal's online dictionary in 2018 (Yeo 2019).

10. Seo Ji-hyun (Sŏ Chihyŏn), a prosecutor in the Changwon District Prosecutor's Office, South Kyŏngsang Province, appeared on the cable television network JTBC on January 29, 2018. Seo spoke of the molestation she had endured by a senior official at the Justice Ministry, while appointed as a prosecutor in the Seoul Northern District Prosecutor's Office. Prosecutors in South Korea, however, are highly educated and well-connected government employees who wield considerable power. Thus, Seo's credibility derives from her membership in an elite group of legal professionals. Seo's interview is archived on the JTBC YouTube channel (*JTBC News*, 2018).

11. In August 2016, voice actress Kim Ja-Yeon (Kim Chayŏn) tweeted a photograph of herself wearing a T-shirt with the phrase "Girls Do Not Need a Prince" printed on it. Kim was employed by the Korean gaming company Nexon to voice a character in one of its popular online games. Nexon terminated Kim's employment after players of the game inundated the company with complaints. The T-shirt was sold by the antimisogyny group Megalia, which has been accused by a growing men's-rights movement in South Korea as well as members of the public of being a misandrist hate group. This incident became known as the South Korean version of "gamergate" (*BBC* 2016).

12. As Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin write, remediation is "the defining characteristic of the new digital media" (1998, 45). In addition, new-media theorists Alexander Galloway and Lev Manovich echo this point in foregrounding the interface—a threshold, portal, and mediating platform—and meta-media, or the remediation of older media forms such as photographs, drawn images, video, film, or printed text, in their conceptualization of digital media (Galloway 2013; Manovich 2005).

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Historicization of Media

Gender as Platforms and Polemics

This section features contested histories of media and gendered citizenship, as the larger backdrop of the volume. Although the chapters in this first section focus on different media domains—i.e., cinema, social media, offline protest media, and comics (*manhwa*)—they fill in the historical background and mark paradigm shifts that help to shape gender (identities and relations) as a prominent field of mediation in the translocal Korean context that the rest of the volume chapters zoom in on.

The four chapters in this first section illuminate the trajectories of gender becoming a catalyst of mainstream discourse and media infrastructure in South Korea, which culminated in gender emerging as a primary platform of public debate in the anti-misogyny-cum-#MeToo conjuncture (since 2015). The chapters in this section, however, show the recent explosion of gender activism and debate to be the outgrowth of multiple vectors of hegemonic gender representation and counterhegemonic struggle. These chapters mark the importance of gender as a platform for assessing public responses to the impacts of post-authoritarian liberalization (since 1987) and the Asian financial crisis (since 1997).

This first section begins with Hee-jeong Sohn's chapter, which sketches the historical process of feminist intervention that catalyzed what she terms "a feminism reboot" in the current moment (anti-misogyny-cum-#MeToo movement) as the crux of gender mediation in the last three decades of South Korean history. Focusing on cinema's mediation of gender relations during the post-authoritarian liberalization and the Asian financial crisis eras, the chapter shows how gender was mediated by political-economic and ideological processes—for example, how misog-

yny intensified as much as it was resisted. At the same time it highlights how gender became the most obvious form of social relation to mediate the public's increasing fragmentation throughout the neoliberal period in South Korea, as contrasted with the reified image of the national public advanced in prior eras by authoritarian regimes, when the prevalent image was of unified national advancement and shared sacrifice in high-growth periods of industrial development. Viewed in this context, the chapter examines the relationship between *postfeminism* (i.e., gendered consumer subjectivity) arising under the influence of neoliberalism and social media and the *rebooted feminism* that has emerged in South Korea since 2015.

Following Sohn's temporal demarcation of the escalated gender war, HyeYoung Cho's chapter pays close attention to the development of the present conjuncture's antimisogyny and #MeToo politics in South Korea as a translocal phenomenon. The chapter analyzes the key impetus of gender contestation as a signal case of digital and analog inter-mediation, through an extended comparison between online public speech on social media platforms and the use of Post-its or sticky notes as analogous offline versions. Cho notes how both these hand-written and typed comments mutually inflect and shape each other as part of a larger field of public speech to underscore how popular feminism as a platform for public enunciation emerges through a process of intermediation.

Paralleling Cho's analysis of intermediation between analogue and digital media, Dahye Kim's chapter showcases the fascinating genealogy of gendered subgenres within the graphic novel form by analyzing an epochal transition—from print media to digital media—that was accelerated in conjunction with the nationalist promotion of comics (*manhwa*) as a cultural industry after the Asian financial crisis. Covering the history of popular media from the post-authoritarian liberalization era, the chapter demonstrates how gender serves as a mediating platform in the process of making comics a national symbol, as masculine comics became the privileged way of representing national culture in the name of realism, while feminine-style comics (*sunjŏng manhwa*) became demoted as unrealistic and foreign-influenced derivatives.

Echoing Dahye Kim's analysis of the masculine, nationalist project of undermining the feminized subgenre of girls' comics, Miseong Woo's chapter chronicles a similar pattern of oppositional binary gender assemblages in popular thriller films of the new millennium. In particular, Woo highlights how postmillennial South Korean crime thrillers of the 2008–2018 period that were successful both domestically and internationally were built on extreme violence against women. While they deploy "real"

violence as the base of cinematic representation, these genre films mediate long-standing misogyny in the film industry. This was accentuated during the global financial crisis when anxiety regarding masculinity manifested in figures of monstrous femininity and unruly rurality as dual forms of otherness within modernity.

Taken together, this first section of the volume establishes the historical parameters of the visibility of gendered discourse and media in South Korea over the last three decades. In so doing, the chapters situate the unprecedented surge of feminist discourse in popular media in the contemporary moment as the mediation of unstable and contradictory social forces, namely the demands of liberal-cum-neoliberal consumer subjectivity and a recalcitrant political economy of hegemonic gender relations and representations in and beyond the domain of twenty-first-century culture industries.

1

Feminism Reboot

Neoliberalism, Korean Movies, Misogyny, and Beyond

Hee-jeong Sohn

In 2015, feminism underwent a reboot in South Korea. In the parlance of the film industry, the term "reboot" refers to the removal of continuity in an established series or franchise in order to recreate a new universe while maintaining certain basic characteristics of the series.[1] This is a safe but flexible business strategy to tell new stories while drawing from a franchise's existing brand value and fandom. From the 2015 social media hashtag declaration of feminism (#IAmAFeminist) to the emergence of the web forum MERS Gallery,[2] as well as the gender wars taking place in various forms across popular culture, we can identify a greater trend that had taken place—mostly online but offline, too—which is sufficient to be called a "feminism reboot." This term describes the rise of fourth-wave feminism (Munro 2013; Chamerlain 2017) in South Korea.[3]

This most recent feminist trend in Korea stems from a context that cannot be placed into the same genealogy as the cyber feminism staged by the "Young Feminists" from the late 1990s throughout the 2000s. Rather, it has been shaping an unprecedented discourse that remains distinct from the Young Feminists' cultural movements (Kwŏn Kim and Sohn 2017). The post-2015 feminist movements stand much closer to the notion of women as consumer subjects that originated from the early 1990s when the Korean civilian regime began. But more importantly it shares the post-feminist mentality often phrased as, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." In this sense, the latest feminist trends in Korea should be understood in relation not only to traditional feminism, but also to postfeminism, which could

be seen as a subsection within the transnational movement of feminism since the mid-1990s. As the expression "reboot" is derived from the capitalist rhetoric and practices of cultural productions and their consumers, it allows us to recognize the political and economic conditions of the "feminism reboot" under the influence of global postfeminism. This reboot thus actively exposes the phenomenon's cultural characteristics and its relationship with popular culture.

This chapter examines the post-2015 feminist movements that have emerged in South Korea as an extension of the misogynic popular culture that arose and intensified following the Asian financial crisis in 1997–98, along with their surrounding postfeminist discourses and practices. It further aims to propose a critical interpretation of how social media–based feminism, for instance, the MERS Gallery, was made possible by the conditions stemming from institutional democratization and market liberalization. To capture the topography of postfeminism and identify the background behind the phenomenon of the feminism reboot, this chapter examines the political, economic, and cultural changes in Korean society in the context of popular culture, particularly in the realm of cinema. Korean films, as representative cultural products, are crucial in tracing the relationship between the cultural industry and women, who have become the principal agents of consumption since the 1990s (see Section II, "Consuming Gender," in this volume). Therefore, the chapter focuses on the social context during the post-authoritarian period and the post–Asian financial crisis period (i.e., this volume's first and second temporal foci), which had produced the political and economic conditions for the "feminism reboot" in 2015. In the next chapter, HyeYoung Cho discusses fourth-wave feminism in South Korea after the feminism reboot through the discourses produced by the Kangnam Station murder.

Following the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998, one can locate a narrative trend in which representations of gender became manifest through female characters going missing while their male counterparts dominate narratives. These include big box-office hits such as *Friend* (*Ch'in'gu*, dir. Kwak Kyŏngt'aek, 2001), *Silmido* (*Silmido*, dir. Kang Wusŏk, 2003), *Taegukgi: Brotherhood of War* (*T'aegŭkki hwinalimyŏ*, dir. Kang Chaegyu, 2003), *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (*Welk'ŏm t'u Tongmakkol*, dir. Pak Kwanghyŏn, 2005), and *D-War* (*Ti-wŏ*, dir. Sim Hyŏngrae, 2007). These narratives, in which female characters are largely absent, suggest a form of symbolic annihilation of women (Tuchman 1978) on screen, whereas male characters are overrepresented. Films released up to the middle and late

1990s had incorporated more diverse female characters, in contrast to those of the 2000s. This may be in part because star actresses such as Sim Hyejin and Ch'oe Chinsil were so influential; their roles in such films as *Marriage Story* (*Kyŏlhon iyagi*, dir. Kim Ŭisŏk, 1992) and *Mister Mama* (*Mistŏ mamma*, dir. Kang Wusŏk, 1992) were indispensable to any discussion of 1990s Korean cinema. For both men and women, diverse female characters were a vital driving force behind box-office hits and the then-nascent consumerism. In the 2000s, female characters increasingly disappeared. This trope registers the gendered character of Korean society following its aggressive acceptance of neoliberal values in the aftermath of the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis. This new capitalist framework of neoliberalism, as it turns out, was not gender-neutral; it reflected the gendered social perception of Korean society that had tried to overcome the economic crisis culturally by replacing it with the fantasy of a "crisis of masculinity" and economically by reorganizing the male-centered labor market. Gender has been a platform where social relations are mediated and formed, and it also shapes popular culture. Women believed there should be a trickle-down effect from the economic reorganization, only to find out that the flexibility of women's labor provides the prototype of the neoliberal labor market. As the victims of a gendered structure, and under the influence of fourth-wave feminism, women have begun to awaken as feminists, and gender has become the venue for mediating uprisings against injustice and inequality.

A "New" Generation of Women: Romantic Comedies of the 1990s

Korean cinema in the 1990s witnessed a kind of renaissance after overcoming the cultural downturn of the 1970s and 1980s, a period of military dictatorship. A new era of culture and consumption began, thanks to the political democratization and economic liberalization of the 1990s. This coincided with the belle epoque of the film industry, when cinema became enriched in narrative, film aesthetics, and discourse, while expanding its point of contact with the public. Under these circumstances, the representation of women also changed. In particular, during the 1990s the growing purchasing power of women caused Korean cinema to present new types of female characters, mainly through a stream of romantic comedy films that targeted women from the initial planning process of film production. For instance, in *Marriage Story*, the first high-concept movie in Korean

cinema, the protagonists are a double-income couple, which was a new trend at the time of its release. The heroine, played by Shim, is given the relatively new occupation of broadcasting station writer and has a voice to express her opinions about work, love, and her desires, despite the traditional patriarchy, which is manifested in the form of domestic violence. A huge success, the movie was followed by countless other romantic comedy films that depict professional women as the norm; characters included, for example, a video copyright manager (*Mister Mama*), the marketing chief of a film production company (*How to Top My Wife* [*Manura chugigi*], dir. Kang Wusŏk, 1994), a song lyric writer (*Doctor Bong* [*Dakt'ŏ Pong*], dir. Yi Kwanghun, 1995), and a car designer (*Ghost Mama* [*Gost'ŭ mamma*], dir. Han Chisŭng, 1996).

The advent of new female characters in the above-mentioned movies registers changes in Korean society in the late 1980s. Thanks to the booming economy and heightened social awareness of the 1970s and 1980s, women were encouraged to seek self-improvement and participate in socioeconomic activities, which appeared to signal the fruition of long-standing efforts to realize the traditional feminist agenda of women's empowerment in the public realm. The enactment of the "Act on the Equal Employment for Both Sexes" in 1987 was an outcome of this change, which further provided an institutional foundation that reinforced these new gender norms (Pak et al., 2009). The Act was successful in that the feminist movement expanded to encourage and guarantee women's presence in society and economic participation. However, it also coincided with the society's and the state's need to be integrated into the global tides of neoliberalization. The changing perceptions of women's economic participation were further deeply related to Korean society's transition into the system that Silvia Walby (1996) coins a "public patriarchy" in the North American context. In this system, women are encouraged to participate in public activities, as if they are empowered to believe that everything is a consequence of their choice and efforts. Yet gender discrimination in the public sphere still persists, and capital and the state secured greater control over the female workforce. In this respect, the successful romantic comedies of this transitional period served as an ideological mechanism that reflected and induced the social changes of the time, subsequently positioning women as a potent labor force and a highly relevant consumer group within the framework of a capitalistic patriarchal system readjusted to the advantage of the state. The female characters in these films are depicted as being active, adventurous, and independent; however, this representation of women, which evokes a sense of "I am who I am" (a

popular statement of the time), fostered new desires that resonated with the era of consumer capitalism.

Korean society of the 1990s called for women to become liberal subjects and autonomous agents, and women responded by opening up to enjoy newfound autonomy. This was all confined, however, within a context of patriarchal capitalism, which conveniently yoked women back into the private domain at crucial moments via the ideology of motherhood and reproduction (see chapters by Eunjung Kim and Jinsook Kim). Women were encouraged to participate in the public domain under the public patriarchy, but at the same time the system required a pretense of regaining control over the agency of women on both a conscious and unconscious level. Women had to remain a flexible and adaptable labor force, yet were compelled to abide by the expected gender norms to maintain traditions and to stabilize the rapidly changing Korean society. In other words, the new space of liberty granted by consumerism and an apparent cultural renaissance simultaneously withheld the possibility that women could take their opportunities further.

Most of the female protagonists of movies like *Mister Mama*, *Ghost Mama*, and *Doctor Bong* end up taking maternal care of the children of their male counterparts and become absorbed into the patriarchal nuclear family despite their professional competence and recognition. These movies demonstrate and/or construct women's status as changed in Korean society in the 1990s. However, these films tend to advocate for and reinforce traditional gender norms, as well as the trope of "replacing the wife" in which the male protagonist substitutes a new wife for his old one. In *Mister Mama* the male protagonist (played by Ch'oe Minsu) finds a new wife (played by Ch'oe Chinsil), who is both professional and maternal, after his former wife has left him to study abroad for the sake of her unfinished self-improvement. *Ghost Mama* presents a widower (played by Kim Sŭngu) whose first wife (played by Ch'oe Chinsil) passed away; he later finds a new wife (played by Pak Sanga), who is a car designer yet embodies traditional femininity. These films portray a "new" kind of desirable femininity: professional women who act in accord with patriarchal values.

Tensions arise when women are required to balance traditional feminine virtues and their new identities. The representation of motherhood as the ultimate virtue of women implied that their success depended on their male partner's recognition in the private domain. In this sense, motherhood in the 1990s romantic comedy film genre corresponds to the romance found in "chick-lit" TV series from the 2000s, such as *My Lovely Sam Soon* (*Nae irŭm ŭn Kim Sam-sun*, MBC, 2005) and *My Sweet City*

(*Talk'om han na ŭi tosi*, SBS, 2008). Likewise, the role of motherhood in the 1990s was encouraged by the above-mentioned state ideologies, and was also reflected in the desires of women themselves. In an era when the compatibility of professionalism and motherhood was socially fabricated and fostered, the apparent desire to reconcile the two was perhaps the ultimate ideological fantasy.

All of a sudden, at the dawn of the 2000s, female characters with the apparent agency of the 1990s seemed to disappear. The horror genre became the main genre with female protagonists, all of whom turned into figures of the monstrous-feminine (Creed 1993). They are unable to express themselves unless they became a ghost or a monster (see Miseong Woo's chapter in this volume). And all those "monstrous-feminine" figures haunt the world, trapped in the manufactured fantasy of so called maternal instinct. [4] We see this trend in such horror films as *Unborn but Forgotten* (*Hayan pang*, dir. Im Ch'angjae, 2002), *H* (*Eich'i*, dir. Yi Chonghyŏk, 2002), *Sorum* (*Sorŭm*, dir. Yun Chongch'an, 2001), *The Phone* (*P'on*, dir. An Pyŏnggi, 2002), *Acacia* (*Ak'asia*, dir. Pak Kihyŏng, 2003), and *Princess Aurora* (*Orora kongju*, dir. Pang Ŭnjin, 2005).

Women after the Asian Financial Crisis

The economic crisis of the late 1990s significantly affected gender representation in South Korea, and continues to do so to the present day. The International Monetary Fund's bailout of Korea played an important role in reconfiguring gender roles both on and off screen, as the country was forced to accept the proposal to increase labor force flexibility. The country thereby even further integrated itself into the global neoliberal economic system under the hegemony of the United States. A nationwide wave of corporate restructuring soon started. Korea's unemployment rate, which was approximately 2 percent during the 1990s, spiked to 6.8 percent in 1998, and rose to 8.6 percent by February 1999 (An et al. 2001, 11). As severe unemployment shrank men's ability to support their families, they were driven to midlife crises stemming from the loss of their patriarchal authority, and this issue emerged as a serious social concern (see Yoon Heo's chapter in this volume). The number of unhoused people increased, a growing number of men deserted their households and in the worst cases ended in death, with the suicide rate jumping from 15.6 per 100,000 in 1997 to 21.7 in 1998 (Yi 2016, 44). Discourses regarding the economic downturn and its impact on families focus on the excessive burdens and

family responsibilities shouldered by men. These circumstances led to the social campaign that I might call "Support and Empower Husbands Again." From TV series and commercials to newspapers, magazines, and other publications, the whole nation was busy cheering up their husbands and boyfriends (Song 2006, 2009).

But men were not the only group to suffer during the economic downturn of the 1990s. Women, who had been participating in socioeconomic activities under the system of public patriarchy, were the first to be driven out of the public domain. After the IMF bailout, women's social activities decreased considerably. Men's participation in economic activity remained similar before and after the IMF crisis—75.6% in 1997 and 75% in 1999—but for women, the decline was twice as large—49.5% in 1997 and 48.2% in 1999. The figure suggests only about a 1 percent point change, but women's jobs had become more unstable and conditions were worse than for men (e.g., many held part-time or outsourcing contract jobs, known as *pagyŏn chik*), and one may infer that the decline of their participation in real life was greater than that figure suggests (An et al. 2001, 26–40). Some women were forced to find employment because their partners were suddenly unemployed. Under these conditions, women's labor was exploited and the domestic workload imposed on women within the household never fully diminished.[5] These individuals, particularly women, in underemployed and unstable working conditions were reduced to a kind of "waste" (Bauman 2008), while the state focused on rationalizing this tragic fall. When liquidity is the most effective rationale for governance, the labor force becomes more disposable (Bauman 2009, 2010), and the society had become a vast wasteland.

This anxiety was soon perceived and gendered as an issue for men. Korean popular culture has focused on understanding and consoling the anxiety of *wasted men* in a symbolic attempt to give them the space to stand on their own again (see more in Chapter 11 by Yoon Heo). Such mainstream efforts were not always successful. The more society focuses on male anxiety, the more prevalent and pronounced the sentiment of insecurity becomes. The patriarchal system after the Asian financial crisis saw economic activity as a male domain, and the archetypal image of the strong mother was invoked from the past into the present; the maternal, sacrificial woman became the ideal in both representation and discourse. Women's desire for self-realization was criticized, and instead their obligation to have children was stressed. Threatened by the low birth rate, which dropped dramatically via the state-led population control of the 1960s to below 1.5 in 1984, conservatives went so far as to enact the Framework Act

on Healthy Homes (*Kŏn'gang kajŏng kibon pŏp*) in 2004. This signaled the arrival of neoconservatism in Korea. In this ideology, the new, better wife became a kind of scapegoat for overcoming social unrest (see Chapter 6 by Eunjung Kim).

After 1997, Korean society can be described as an era in which the entire nation endeavored to resolve the prevalent chaos of men's vulnerability in imagined cultural narratives, while implementing nothing to address it in reality. However, this culture was clearly gendered, and made personally responsible. Furthermore, in both real life and the narrative sphere, economic crises and disasters were portrayed as conflicts of gender. A question then arises: how are portrayals of women fed into the popular imagination? It appears that women actively began to seek the position imposed on them in the face of national crisis. Once society began to exploit the female workforce by excluding them from the official spheres of production and forcing them to accept flexible working conditions to survive cutthroat competition, women began to hammer out a survival strategy of their own. These circumstances were aligned with global postfeminism.

Postfeminist Fantasy: *Sunny* (2011)

As many Anglophone scholars argue, postfeminism remains a contentious concept. But some consensus does seem to exist; it underlies a generation of feminism's close relationship with media that could be "regressive and conservative" (Faludi 1992; Walters 1995). Some see postfeminism as having resulted from a misunderstanding, or perhaps an intentionally hasty conclusion, that the goals of feminism have already been met. Scholars such as Lynne Alice and journalist Susan Faludi once named the antifeminist tendency observed in the popular culture of the Reagan era as "postfeminist" (Faludi 1992; Alice 1995). In contrast, scholars such as Chela Sandoval and Ann Brooks locate a value in postfeminism in an epistemological shift: its political and theoretical stance calls for the deconstruction of existing identities and boundaries of feminism along with postmodernism, postcolonialism, and poststructuralism (Brooks 2002; McRobbie 2004).

Postfeminism as the term is used in the discussion of the South Korean "feminism reboot" is closer to the positions of Alice, Faludi, and Suzanna Walters, where it forms an inseparable relationship with neoliberal femininity that stresses the autonomy of women in their choices and consump-

tion. In the South Korean context, the term "postfeminism" gained currency in the mid-2000s. Korean audiences encountered representative postfeminist texts such as *Ally McBeal* (ABC, 1997–2002), *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004), and *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006), which informed the release of Korean chick-lit and television series: novels like *My Sweet City* (*Na ŭi talk'om han tosi*, Chŏng Yihyŏng, 2006) and *Style* (*Sŭt'ail*, Paek Yŏngok, 2008) and popular TV series such as *My Lovely Sam Soon* and *My Sweet City* (the latter an adaptation of the novel with the same title) (Yi 2012, 436).

Further discussion is needed regarding the consumerism associated with both Young Feminism in the 1990s and early 2000s and postfeminism since the mid-2000s. There is continuity between the consumerism- (or consumer-)driven popular cinema of the 1990s, in particular romantic comedy examined earlier, and the interesting success of the period drama *King and the Clown* (*Wang ŭi namja*, dir. Yi Chunik, 2005) in the post-IMF era—although the latter redirects its object of desire from female to "male" or "androgenous" characters. But in the remainder of this essay, I focus, rather, on analyzing *Sunny* (*Ssŏni*, dir. Kang Hyŏkchŏl, 2011) to draw significant attention to female viewers as consumers. Doing so helps us understand how women of the twenty-first century have been influenced by the postfeminist topography or the fantasies of postfeminism. Noteworthy issues here are the strengthened identity of women as consumers and its close connection to neoliberal femininity (see also Bohyeong Kim's chapter in this volume on women as consumers).

Although the box office has been dominated by male protagonists across countless screens in the new millennium, this is not to say that no films with female protagonists have been made. Rather, films with female protagonists failed to garner significant ticket sales. In the first half of 2015, for instance, only 15 of the top 100 grossing films featured female protagonists. The predominance of male characters, or women characters of a certain type (motherly, or maternal) seems to be the production trend that succeeds at the box office. However, the Korean box office of 2011 showed a stark contrast to the previous decade, as if to mock the anemic box office results of previous female-protagonist films such as *Take Care of My Cat* (*Koyangi rŭl put'ak hae*, dir. Chŏng Chaeŭn, 2001), *A.F.R.I.K.A.* (*Ap'ŭrik'a*, dir. Sin Sŭngsu, 2001), *Girl Scout* (*Kŏl sŭk'aut'ŭ*, dir. Kim Sangman, 2008), and *Girlfriends* (*Kŏl p'ŭrenjŭ*, dir. Kang Sukbŏm, 2009).

With seven million tickets sold at the box office (KOBIS, n.d.), *Sunny* was a breakthrough female-protagonist film that depicted female friendship among middle-aged women. In *Sunny*, the female characters are not

confined to maternal roles, nor do they abide by heterosexual romance, yet the film became a so-called smash hit. This was an exception that seemed almost bizarre. However, on close examination of the film, its success appears much less extraordinary. The film alludes to women who had become flexible laborers between the late 1990s and 2010s under the public patriarchy, but it also foregrounds female subjects as "consumers" in both the 1980s and the 2010s, which the film juxtaposes by evoking the protagonists' past as high school girls.

Sunny shares a trend with two "makeover films" that enjoyed popular acclaim: *200 Pounds Beauty* (*Minyŏ nŭn koerowŏ*, dir. Kim Yonghwa, 2006) and *Dancing Queen* (*Taensing k'win*, dir. Yi Sŏkhun, 2012). A makeover film is a cinematic narrative in which a woman of "undesirable" appearance, having faced undeserved consequences, subsequently attempts a physical transformation, through which she attains both professional and romantic fulfillment. Makeover films conventionally feature a makeover sequence that illustrates the female protagonist's aesthetic beautification alongside a shopping montage, which directly associates the principal subject's dramatic transition with consumption. In this regard, makeover films have some characteristics of postfeminist texts (Tasker 2011; Sherman 2011). Furthermore, the fact that the heterosexual relationship achieved or restored is often a sign of desired femininity in makeover films may lead the general public to attribute the pursuit of self-improvement or professional success to the makeover process portrayed. *Dancing Queen*, for instance, suggests that women must cultivate their own bodies and exploit their sexuality as a resource in order to find success, as shown by the female lead, Chŏnghwa, who dreams of becoming a singer. In the film, the need to commercialize sexuality exists as well for the male lead, Chŏngmin, who is running for a mayorship but remains oblivious to his wife's pursuit of her dream. Chŏngmin ultimately discloses his private life to survive in the election and utilize his private life as a resource. In the climax of the movie, Chŏngmin regains popularity as a candidate through a display of private conversation with his wife. In that dramatic scene, he reconciled with Chŏnghwa, approving her dream. Normally couples have such conversation in their own bedroom, but in this case, it unfolds in front of a nationwide broadcasting camera. Chŏnghwa's success is predicated on her sexuality, while Chŏngmin's is made possible by piggybacking on his partner's dream and sexuality.

When analyzing *Miss Congeniality* (dir. Donald Petrie, 2000), both a makeover film and a prominent exhibition of neoliberal femininity, Yael Sherman (2011) describes a dominant form of femininity in its neoliberal

strain. Attacking the welfare-state model, the film seems to assert that to receive help from the state is to make oneself sick and dependent, and that "the citizen-consumer must look after oneself." The worldview of neoliberal society encourages individuals to "look after themselves, take responsibility for themselves, and enterprise themselves" (Sherman 2011, 82). The neoliberal concept of femininity that emerged out of these conditions assigns beauty and intelligence to the same camp, instead of the two competing against each other. If the traditional, middle-class notion of femininity allowed "success" in the personal domain through marriage, neoliberal femininity uses femininity as a resource in both the personal and the public domain. In that regard, neoliberal femininity embodies elements of feminism, neoliberalism, and traditional femininity (Sherman 2011, 83). As the subject of self-improvement, Chŏnghwa fully demonstrates the notion that what is personal is also public, thereby conforming to neoliberal femininity.

Sunny follows the narrative structure of makeover films, albeit in a slightly altered form. The protagonist, Nami (played by Yu Hojŏng), by chance encounters an old school friend, Ch'unhwa (played by Chin Hŭigyŏng). Nami subsequently transforms from a housewife who became an "invisible ghost" in her perfect life to a "woman with a history" who is honest and vocal about her wants. In this film, the memories and dreams of young girls become the resources required to improve their current selves and to fulfill their given mission, with Ch'unhwa's financial support. "Nami and the other members of the 'Sunny' group unearth dreams of their youth that were buried deep in the subconscious, and use those dreams to change and improve their current selves and test their potential" (Kwŏn 2012), while continuing to complete the missions given by Ch'unhwa, who is the CEO of her own company. These missions bear some resemblance to the format of television variety shows such as *Infinite Challenge* (*Muhan tojŏn*, MBC, 2006–2018), which dominated popular culture in Korea in the neoliberal era. In these shows, a small elite team would continue to compete and survive only if they could carry out their mission and win the game.

Sunny differs from the other films that show female protagonists mainly as "mothers," an approach that had proven successful in the Korean film industry. Instead, it features female protagonists who reject the status of women allocated by the patriarchy while realizing the ideal of feminism through creating friendship and solidarity among women, and portraying the process of self-realization in the public domain. However, the film displays "feminine identity as the CEO of 'Me Inc'" (Kwŏn 2012). This per-

spective is subordinate to, and resonates with, the self-improvement myth of the neoliberal era, as its story revolves around the competition for the fulfillment of missions. It subtly resolves and navigates beyond the conflict between female solidarity, as envisioned by feminism, and the hypercompetitive individualism advocated by neoliberalism. In this way, feminism is introduced and subsequently denied, in accord with the trend of post-feminism, and ultimately becomes a "safe" story free of elements of danger and conflict (Sherman 2011).

Postfeminism provided women with a fantasy they could use to endure the era of neoliberalization. Indeed, a "bank account in one hand" became a meaningful slogan in the 1990s; having capital opened a space of liberation for women but soon lured them to accept new contradictions in social reality. Deemed "flexible labor" through various stages of capitalism, from the industrial capitalism of the early stages to neoliberal capitalism, women in the neoliberal era defined the characteristics of fluid labor and were recruited to fill gaps in the labor market. Postfeminism presents potential resources for women to enter this situation again with a promise of rewards for becoming accustomed to the living conditions of "each woman for herself." At the same time, the postfeminist imagination summons a few female characters who have penetrated the bulwark created by the patriarchy of the industry, giving false hopes to women while at the same time creating in men a sense of reverse discrimination. However, women of this era have learned by experience. We are not the glamorous inhabitants of *Sex and the City*, but the inhabitants of so-called Hell-Korea ("Hell Chosŏn"), who must struggle for survival.

Conclusion: After the "Reboot"

The postfeminist fantasy and neoliberal femininity showcased by the makeover films examined in this essay embody the characteristics of female-dominant online communities, such as Yŏsŏng Sidae,[6] which could be seen as directly linked to the "feminism reboot." The emergence of female-dominant online communities from the 2000s in tandem with post-2015 feminism were established through co-constitutive conditions of postfeminism and the prevalent social media.

In the early cyberspace of the 1990s, when the internet began to be disseminated, women at first had limited access to the "male-oriented technology" of the internet, and they faced verbal abuse, violence, and sexual harassment by male users. Cyberspace, for women, was a space in which

gender hierarchy was enacted, not a space for solidarity and liberation. As Kim Sua (2011) observes, "in terms of gender politics, cyberspace was an even more intense battlefield than real-life society," because "there were fewer [women] participants than in real-life society and the rule of law was lacking" (113–15). In the 2000s, to resolve gender issues in cyberspace—including accessibility, information disparity, and sexual violence—female activism began to build a system of actions and responses and organized cyber-feminist movements around young feminists, creating websites such as UNNInetwork ("unni" [ŏnni] means "elder sister"). Although these feminist websites did not earn universal support, women voiced their wish for a safe space in which "they could discuss diets, dating, and ways to find a good man to marry," a space free from male cyber violence (sexual or otherwise) and the political correctness of feminism (Kim 2011, 118–21). Women gradually found such spaces in commercial websites such as miclub, Lulu, zubu.com, and azoomma.com.

Toward the 2010s, women gradually began to identify themselves as autonomous and wise consumers and further deviated from overtly commercially driven, female-oriented websites, migrating into somewhat more independent communities such as the "Three Kingdoms"[7] and Yŏsŏng Sidae. This fittingly demonstrates, as Chŏn Hyeyŏng (2013) observes, "the emphasis on pride and independence as adult women in their twenties is the contact point between the equality emphasized by postfeminism and the individual effort highlighted by neoliberalism." And "by emphasizing their self-improvement and smart consumption, they seek to prove how well they are leading their lives as principal agents" (123). In another regard, Chŏn adds, they occasionally "adopt the language of feminism to reflect upon their own experience and status, in order to grow their ability to resist against the culture of misogyny and sexual discrimination in society" (129). This provides insight into the kind of influence exerted by feminism on the "new women" of the postfeminism era (see the introduction of this volume). As Chŏn claims, "most members did not identify themselves as feminists but realized that their opinions resonated with feminism in certain aspects" (129). The limits of postfeminism, however, remain. Although the participants in the above-mentioned communities tried to avoid the discrimination and oppression experienced by earlier feminists, they failed to critically contemplate the nature of the rewards that they will receive by internalizing the neoliberal patriarchy and to realize how such actions function to maintain the status quo.

The limit in failing to resist the fundamentally gendered neoliberal system as the source of social contradictions is linked to the hatred directed

toward minorities, even in female-dominant communities. In a study regarding racial hatred in Korea, Ryu Chinhŭi (2015) states:

> [A]version to multicultural families and immigrant women through international, interracial marriage [is a] common topic of discussion [among young women in social media imbued by post-feminism in 2010s], which is particularly pronounced in the hatred directed toward Jasmine Lee, the Philippine-born National Assembly representative from the Saenuri Party. . . . Just as men were opposed to female-oriented policies that emerged to the public foreground during the Kim Dae-jung [Kim Taejung] and Roh Moo-hyun [No Muhyŏn] administrations, these women dissented from the multiculturalist policies put forward by the Lee Myung-bak [Yi Myŏngbak] and Park Geun-hye [Pak Kŭnhye] administrations. (49–50)

The dissatisfaction manifested among women, as demonstrated by the "exposure of the Lai Dai Han or Kopino issue to criticize male wrongdoings" (Ryu 2015, 47–48) in the MERS Gallery of the popular website DCInside, should be critically addressed.

Aversion toward misogyny is clearly a reflection of the misogyny experienced. Although misogyny shares a long history alongside patriarchy, it was more actively summoned and incited to overcome the gendered and individualized economic crisis as examined above. Misogyny has driven women to become victims of physical violence and has naturalized systemic discrimination. As a result, women who truly could not bear their situation reverted to feminism out of disdain for misogyny. However, we should reflect on the feminist movement if women themselves continue to express hatred toward other minorities.

Despite all such concerns, however, it is both fascinating and dynamic that women, who had been unable to stand out as citizens and subjects in Korean society as well as in cyberspace, have newly emerged as principal agents in the post-2015 era. In particular, formidable feminist communities, collectively referred to as "Megal," succeeded in closing down the illegal adult site Soranet in 2015. This was a task that the police had operated for sixteen years without any outcome, and Megal activities have created a milestone public forum for the discussion of feminism, which led to Kangnam Station Exit 10, #MeToo, etc. (see HyeYoung Cho's chapter in this volume regarding the Kangnam Station Exit 10 and #MeToo). Feminists have been fighting against male-domination of society, yet feminism

and gender issues are still unwelcome subjects in many realms of society. There is a critical need to examine how the post-2015 feminist movement grows in different directions in the process of rallying against those challenges.

NOTES

1. It is not clear when the computer science term "reboot" was appropriated by the entertainment and film industry. In Korea, it first appeared in 2010 to describe a new trend in Hollywood of remaking franchises, such as the Spiderman series. The first article referring to "reboot" was published in the film magazine *Cine 21* (Yi 2010).

2. #IAmAFeminist in Korea may be compared to #YesAllWomen in the US. The MERS Gallery refers to a website created by online community users in response to the outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in South Korea in 2015. As misogynistic allegations emerged in this online forum, accusing women of being the origin of the MERS outbreak, female users migrated to this website to "take over" the community, later developing the discourse of satirizing misogynistic expressions.

3. Fourth-wave feminism is a feminist movement that globally began around the early and mid-2010s and is characterized by an emphasis on the empowerment of women, intersectionality of gender and other identity categories, and the use of digital devices.

4. See Baek (2008) for the correlations between gender representation in horror movies and Korean modernity during the authoritarian period. Sohn (2005) examines the connections between horror movies after the 2000s and Korea's modernity in relation to the ideology of motherhood.

5. Statistics show an interesting number. Right after the economic crisis, wives with unemployed husbands performed more housework than wives with employed husbands. Wives with unemployed husbands take charge of 69 percent of domestic labor, while wives with continuous working husbands handle about 60 percent, and those with re-employed husbands about 64 percent (An et al. 2001, 119).

6. Yŏsŏng Sidae literally means "the era of women." It opened up at 2009 in the internet portal Daum, and the number of members reached 800,000 as of 2020.

7. The three largest female-dominant online communities in Korea, Ssanghwacha Cocoa (Ssanghwach'a k'ok'oa), Soul-Dresser (Soul dŭresŏ), and Hwajangbal (Hwajangbbal), focus on frugal consumption and beauty.

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2

Intermedial Feminism

Megalia and Kangnam Station Exit 10[1]

HyeYoung Cho, translated by Aliju Kim

"Therefore"

It all started with two short lines left on Twitter by an eighteen-year-old with the surname Kim, who had gone missing in Turkey in January 2015. Kim, who was later discovered to have joined ISIS, had left the message "I hate feminists. Therefore, I like IS" on his Twitter before he disappeared. After this incident was broadcast, the words "feminism" and "feminist" soared to the top of the most-searched-words chart on Naver and Daum, which are the most popular web portals in South Korea and serve as the main search engines, news feeds, and discussion platforms in use there. In addition, on Naver *jisikin* (chisigin, i.e., "Intellectual"), a Q&A site, questions like "What is feminism?" started to appear. Whether they agreed with feminist ideas or not, whether they misunderstood them or not, the general public had suddenly come to perceive this strange word.[2] Kim's action and words, which initially seemed as ridiculous as a joke, became a catalyst in rewriting the history of feminism in South Korea. Since 2015, feminism in South Korea has radically transformed as it has been incorporated into the social-media-attention economy, where attention and information, negative or positive, produce profit as a commodity. A series of antifeminist incidents like Kim's drew attention to feminist ideas and practices and in turn encouraged more antifeminist attacks and hate speech on the internet. Many young women no longer restrained their

rage, and on social media voluntarily voiced their opinions against gender discrimination and violence more loudly and clearly than ever before.

The magazine *Grazia Korea*'s February 2015 issue contained a piece titled "Brainless feminism is more dangerous than ISIS" by pop columnist Kim T'aehun. This piece displayed the typical sorts of arguments that fed hatred against women/feminists. To support his opinion, the author distorted the history of feminism and distinguished "bad feminists" from "good feminists." In response, enraged by the misogynistic culture that branded feminists and enforced women's silence, young women came to actively participate in the hashtag movement (#IAmAFeminist, or *#Na nŭn p'eminisŭt'ŭ imnida*) on Twitter to declare themselves as feminists. They also added narratives about the reasons why they became or wanted to become feminists. They reflected on their "past of denying that they were feminists" in fear of retaliation, explained their motive for becoming feminists in the present, and resolved to transform society as feminists in the future.[3] In April 2015, controversy arose over the famous comedian Chang Tongmin's routine misogynistic comments on podcasts and shows, specifically his comment that he disliked "wild, loud, thinking" women. Women ran a boycott campaign on Twitter with the hashtag #GoWild-SpeakLoudThinkHard (*#Sŏlch'igo ttŏdŭlgo saenggak hara*).

In September 2015, women obtained a public apology for the aestheticization of brutal crimes against women from the adult men's magazine *Maxim Korea*, which for its cover page had staged a scene that implied that a woman had been abducted and murdered by the cover model, a "cool bad guy" played by the male actor Kim Pyŏngok. From November 2015, women campaigned for the shutdown of Soranet, a file-sharing site that enabled the distribution of illegal pornography and rape schemes; at last, in April 2016, prosecutors seized, searched, and shut down Soranet. These campaigns and achievements were not organized by a specific feminist organization or a renowned feminist with campaign experience, but were entirely driven by public efforts. Meanwhile, before prosecutor Seo Ji-hyun (Sŏ Chihyŏn) exposed that a senior prosecutor had sexually assaulted her and the official #MeToo movement spread across the country and over various fields in 2018, already in October 2016, the hashtag #SexualAssault_In_EntertainmentCulture had started, and allegations were being brought against established male writers. This hashtag and its accompanying allegations subsequently generated offshoot hashtags, such as #SexualAssault_In_Otaku, #SexualAssault_In_Literature, #Sexual-Assault_In_Art, #SexualAssault_In_Movies, and #SexualAssault_In_Publishing.

The reception of a popular novel published in 2016 offers a useful case study to show how feminism and attention in the digital information age can influence a work, and how the novel has become a medium that defines and communicates feminism. The novel received acclaim for capturing women's experience of gender discrimination in Korean society, and became a bestseller, selling over two million copies in South Korea alone.[4] To elicit immense empathy, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (*82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng*, Cho Namju 2016) collected and adapted the most high-profile feminist issues of the day and provided statistics about gender inequality. The novel is written like a medical report by a psychiatrist who is counseling Kim Jiyoung; it describes Jiyoung's mental condition and traces the social reason for her illness. In addition to its literary merits, online debate fueled the novel's ascent as a record bestseller. Immediately on publication, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* became a standard work for reflecting on gender inequality in Korean society, and was recommended by famous politicians and artists.

Notably, RM and Irene of K-Pop idol groups BTS and Red Velvet recommended the novel, saying that they had enjoyed reading it. The problem was that when the male idol star RM said he had been inspired by the book, there was little reaction, but when Irene mentioned in passing that she had read the book, men who claimed to be former fans uploaded on Twitter and other online forums videos of themselves burning her picture. The argument made by some male fans who vehemently attacked Irene was that she as a girl group member (or a commodity) had a responsibility to not offend them, but by reading *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* she had declared that she was a feminist and betrayed the fans. These male fans used the book as an indicator of whether one was feminist or not. Interestingly, debates revolving around *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* have occurred multiple times, and each time book sales soared.

It was a sort of gender war. Each side incited the other's attention and rage in a feedback loop. Feminist or gender issues all of a sudden became the hottest topic in news media, politics, and among the general public in South Korea. However, this popularity also led to feminism's distortion through misinformation, oversimplification, and false claims of causality.

What is noteworthy in Kim's message is neither "I hate feminists" nor "I like the Islamic State." The core of the utterance is the adverb "therefore" (*kŭraesŏ*). "Therefore" is an adverb used when the preceding sentence contains the reason or the condition for the following sentence. In other words, the two separate admissions are presented in a causal relation. If we consider that Kim was a teen recluse (the Japanese term widely used in

Asia to describe this phenomenon is *hikikomori*) who was socially with-drawn and stayed in seclusion in his own room, he was not likely to meet feminists or ISIS advocates face to face in his real life. South Korea has no direct political, religious or geographical connections to ISIS. Stories about ISIS's ruthless terror, violence, and oppression of women could only be accessed through occasional news reports. Even then, the mainstream legacy media mostly reported news written from an American perspec-tive. How, then, did Kim's antifeminism or misogyny lead straight to his fondness for and actual enlistment in ISIS? The reason Kim's two state-ments nevertheless became connected was the social media platform, Twitter. In his world, the two admissions could have been connected because they share the same communication system, where the local and the global, the material and the immaterial, the virtual and the physical, and theory and practice seem to be indistinguishable.

It is a well-known fact that ISIS actively used social media such as Twitter to recruit soldiers. Twitter reported that it deleted 125,000 accounts sympathizing with ISIS in 2015, and 325,000 more in 2016 (Koerner 2016). Kim, who was being homeschooled because he had trouble adapting to school, was enthralled by ISIS's ideology as it was reported from time to time in South Korea. His Twitter account overflowed with writings and videos expressing admiration for ISIS and dissatisfaction that "the age of reverse discrimination against men by women had arrived." After a user approached his account promising to teach him how to join ISIS, he even-tually headed for Turkey. The shared basis for his connection with ISIS was misogyny and Twitter.

Also in 2014 and 2015, the statements of account owners with a deep interest in feminism and popular culture trended among Korean-language Twitter users. Of course, this trend was interconnected with a new wave of feminism coursing through social media across the globe.[5] In South Korea, no other social media platform was as influential as Twitter in ani-mating a new generation of the feminist movement, such that the phrase "Twitter feminism" came into common use. I believe that popular femi-nist activism flourished on Twitter because it was more individualized than traditional web portals, and also more anonymous and randomly connected than Facebook. For young women, retaining individuality but having anonymity or an alias is important, for several reasons. First, pub-licly revealing one's opinion about feminism can have adverse effects on one's status in real life in South Korea, and having anonymity or an alias that protects one's identity in real life ensures freedom of speech. Secondly, random connections, short and simple statements with a 140-character

limit (which doubled to 280 in 2018), and repetitive looping via the function of retweet and reply, help spread one's words widely. One can influence others without giving one's name, and without presenting oneself as an authority based on membership in an established social organization or institution, while still giving young women a sense of belonging and community against misogyny.

Kim's event created a stir in South Korean society. It raised many social issues, from teenagers' failure to adapt to school and isolation, to the influence of social media and misogyny that reflected young men's distorted discontent with society. Since this coincidental spark that linked the gendered origin of the "Kim Incident" and global political and digital communication systems, South Korean society has successively faced events that laid bare a misogynistic gender subconscious, as its feminist movement worked within a digital network environment to enable new and unprecedented methods of activism: the intermediation between the material and the immaterial, the virtual and the physical, and theory and practice. However, online feminists in South Korea exposed the materiality behind the immateriality of the internet space—they wanted real change for gender equality and safety against gender violence in policy, institutions, and law. The materiality was a sort of a portal through which one could escape from the internet's infinite feedback loop.

In what follows, I examine the intermediation between the material and immaterial as a strategy of new feminism in South Korea by exploring two key cases from 2015 to 2016: the online forum *Megalia*'s [Megallia]'s campaign strategy, and the memorial rally for a woman murdered at Kangnam Station.

Megalia: A New Wave of Online Feminism

This new feminist movement has some attributes that differ from those of former feminist movements. Foremost is that the new feminist movement began online, and its main basis for activism is also online. Of course, online feminism did not come into existence today—its history in South Korea goes all the way back to the days of Bulletin Board Systems (BBS). In the mid-1990s, BBS servers like Hitel, Chollian, and Nownuri offered discussion boards to discuss gender issues. These online communities were usually directly linked to, or made by, activist, social, or student organizations or by those working at such organizations. The period of small communities was followed by the emergence

of online journals and sites. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, young feminists started to problematize the male-dominant and violent internet culture and established independent webzines or portal communities that they could run and maintain by themselves, such as *Dalara* (*Tal nara ttal sep'o*, i.e., "Moon-Nation Daughter-Cell"), published in July 1998; the feminist website *UNNI ne* ("Older Sisters") established in April 2000; the feminist journal *Ilda* ("Rise") established in May 2003; and women-friendly online spaces *Chumma ne* ("Married Middle-Aged Women's Place") and *Sallyujyu* ("Please Let Me Live") (Yun 2014, 166–80). These Young Feminist sites were likewise maintained and organized by those who shared offline networks in the real world, and were therefore communal and activist-centric.

Twitter and *Megalia*, which led online feminism in South Korean society in 2015, have a different character, however. These sites are anonymous and open, and no separate societies or organizations operate these online spaces in the real world. Even if these societies or organizations are subsequently created, online spaces are primary. Regarding anonymity, Twitter and *Megalia* are dissimilar. Twitter is anonymous, but usually one person runs one account, so each Twitter account is unique. *Megalia*, on the other hand, takes the form of a board or a page and is more grounded in anonymity. Anonymity and openness with easy accessibility make a difference in the expansion and boldness of linguistic expression. However, although Twitter and *Megalia* are both anonymous, their users reveal their gender either explicitly or through their storytelling. This subjectification through embodiment is uncommon in open online communities or channels.

Megalia was first established in 2015 on the online anonymous discussion board DCInside, a community site that epitomized South Korean internet subculture, allowing users to establish discussion boards on all kinds of topics, such as sports, games, politics, food, fashion, celebrity, drama, and films. *Megalia* started with female users' retaliation against male users who behaved misogynistically on "MERS Gallery" (MERS kaellŏri), a forum to talk about the then new viral outbreak of MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) in Asia. After female users problematized the baseless and explicit hatred directed toward the female patients who were believed to have refused quarantine after going to Hong Kong, but who actually struggled to communicate in English, *Megalia* was born as a separate discussion board. Female users coined "Megalia" by combining the name of the viral disease "MERS" and a name from Gerd Brantenburg's 1977 feminist novel *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes*.[6] They

stated that women should claim a space online to assert gender equality and voice their opinions. In short, a territorial war had begun. *Megalia* committed itself to the task of being a "mirror" to expose men who were not aware of their misogyny and make them reflect on their utterances. This strategy of "mirroring" parodied men by repeating their misogynist utterances as hate speech but flipping the gender. *Megalia* flipped the gender on "kimchi woman" (*kimch'i-nyŏ*), used to demean Korean women, by using words like "kimchi man" (*kimch'i-nam*) and "*Hannam*" (short for Korean man, or *Han'guk namja*). *Megalia* also mirrored men's use of terms for women's genitalia to demean and criticize women, coining a term for men's genitalia accompanied by a pinching hand gesture ("*sochu*," meaning small penis). The gallery moderator of DCInside had turned a blind eye to the use of "kimchi woman" for ten years, but within a few days after the word "kimchi man" appeared, it was banned from use, and an effort was made to delete all mirroring posts for "fomenting hatred." This incident revealed how long DCInside, which boasted of having the largest and most diverse boards and information among open communities in South Korea, had ignored and perpetuated misogynistic comments. Female users moved to neglected and largely abandoned galleries like "Lee Myung-bak Gallery" and "Involuntarily unmarried men gallery" and continued "mirroring," inventing colorful slang to label men, like *Hannam ch'ung* (Korean men vermin), *ssipch'i nom* (fucking-kimchi man), *soch'uso shim* (lit. "small-penis-small-mind"), and *silchot* (lit. "thread-cock").

Unlike on closed communities that require member registration and operate by the moderator's approval, on open boards like DCInside, female users typically did not reveal their gender. This is because the moment a woman identifies her gender, she becomes highly exposed to risks of sexual objectification or verbal sexual harassment. One reasons the internet in its early days was thought of as a utopia in terms of equality was because it could seemingly erase social and physical identities such as gender and race. Wouldn't things be equal if the body were erased and everyone had identical information about each other? The reality was different, however, and it was impossible to erase the body entirely,[7] just as it was impossible to erase gender and race entirely when users shared their perspective and thoughts. Furthermore, even when gender seemed to be hidden, male users were usually seen as the default. For a long while, men have placed the burden of physicality on women and imagined themselves as free and disembodied. This tendency has rendered men as the universal or standard, while women have become specific bodies that can be described or branded. For this reason, South

Korean women internet users have either operated closed communities where only women could become members, or have not identified their gender on open communities.

Megalia broke this unwritten rule. *Megalia* users openly displayed their gender, which they had previously concealed as women. As a result, male users, who had previously been thought of as universal users or as the default value, were exposed as male. (Some female users left comments like "You are a man, right?" on posts that were misogynistic or sexist.) Once women started to display their gender rather than hide it, those who had been in an antagonistic relation with these women and were attacking them also had to indicate their gender. This could be seen as a mirroring of embodiment, a strategy in which one would expose her body to expose the other's, thus rendering him vulnerable. Embodiment in online space tended to unite and strengthen women while making men, who had less experience of physical exposure, more vulnerable. *Megalia* did not simply reveal gender, but by mirroring the ways in which women's bodies are displayed and sexually objectified, it also exposed men's bodies to critique and judgment.

This is meaningful in two aspects. First, the materiality of online space became apparent. Online space is not a disembodied space or an immaterial space, nor is it a space of equal values. In Korea, honorifics are standard in communication with strangers, but the website DCInside, where *Megalia* was first established, used colloquial language without honorifics and operated under the rule that users do not reveal their identities or their offline relationships with one another. It was believed that this rule would purge hierarchy and create a space where people could debate and share equally. However, the internet was not much different from physical reality, and it became a space that instead laid bare the issues of hierarchy and discrimination endemic to Korean society. By making noise about gender discrimination, *Megalia* disturbed the unwritten rules of internet spaces such as DCInside that professed to be equal. Corporeality disrupted the merging of virtual and physical space, which is both continuous and discontinuous. The reason that *Megalia* incited a type of gender war was because of this noise. Even though what *Megalia* attacked was the misogynistic culture and patriarchy of present-day society, given the recursive flow of information that evokes reactionary response, individual male users could not help but react to *Megalia*'s strategy of exposing the materiality of online space. This effectively exposed them as perpetrators embodying the structural and ideological problems of misogyny.

DCInside was a site whose most important values were indiscriminate

mockery and parody, or, according to users, laughter and fun. However, it never questioned the cost to those sacrificed for laughter and fun. When *Megalia* made puns to mock men as its mirroring strategy, male users initially reacted by calling Megalians "*net k'ama*" (Yun 2015, 44–45).[8] They could not imagine that women could be so brazenly funny and witty. Laughter, especially laughter based on parody, is communal, social, and contextual, unlike tears, which are private, emotional, and bodily. Thus, although laughter is a physical reaction like tears, it is discussed as more in the realm of intellect and choice. In a patriarchal society, men usually become established as those who make others laugh, and women as those who laugh. By using laughter as a strategy, *Megalia* upended this stereotype and power relation.

In an "intermedial feminist movement" characterized by complex feedback loops, mirroring could be seen as inevitable. Although mirroring is not a new strategy, in online spaces where utterance through imitation, repetition, and reply is the norm, "mirroring" would have exercised a bigger influence than in other discursive spaces. The problem is that this link through a recursive loop is neither linear nor causal. A recursive loop does not have dualistic poles. It has a dynamic structure and is complex. In addition, code, or digital text, is much more discrete than speech or writing. Mirroring is different from reflexivity. Although both have a meta character, mirroring is open, and the digital agent performing mirroring is anonymous and is often the agent of several discrete groups. An original intention that one reflexively has within its context when mirroring the character or event is soon diffused by decontextualized capture on the internet. There is always noise and diffraction. Reflexive mirroring or play on the internet has a short life. *Megalia*'s mirroring makes use of the expressions of an online community that regards minority hate as a fun activity, as represented by Ilbe, the far-right online group. *Megalia* mimicked and made fun of the hate expression of far-right online groups like Ilbe, but those who oppose *Megalia* soon remove the original object, Ilbe, in front of the mirror and themselves make use of a fragment of the mirror, criticizing *Megalia*'s violence and sensationalism, characterizing *Megalia* as itself a hate group. Because the difference between the original target and those who targeted it is easily blurred, and because the ease of cutting, attaching, and manipulating is characteristic of digital codes, *Megalia*'s citational practice of mirroring could not help but disappear after a short time. Thus, "mirroring" was widely acknowledged to have had a powerful but temporary effect.

Megalia, then, although it boiled with passion for a short period, did

not last long due to the nature of "mirroring," and it shut down in mere months. Some users who were very active on the board moved over to a Facebook page. *Megalia*'s Facebook page was subsequently removed from Facebook three separate times; since 2016, it operated as a Facebook page under the name "Megalia 4." *Megalia 4* focused on media monitoring and publicizing gender-discriminatory incidents and various campaigns and rallies, rather than on mirroring, and stopped posting in 2018. Even after *Megalia* disappeared, the word "Megal," short for *Megalia*, continued to be used by misogynistic men as a general term to demean women who voice their opinions (Kwon 2021).[9] Meanwhile, some former users of *Megalia* have formed "Womad" (wǒmad), a closed online community. *Womad*, grounded in a separatist and radical gender binary, inflicted discriminatory and hate-driven attacks on transgender people, homosexual men, immigrants, refugees, and other minorities, and as such was criticized within the feminist movement. *Womad* effectively became another hate-driven group, strengthening the binary opposition of men and women predicated on biological sex, and hand in hand with right-wingers, took the route of increasing discrimination against minorities.

Meanwhile, the nonlinear recursive loop has also affected methods of commemoration of the murder at Kangnam Station Exit 10. In the world today, physical reality is always in intermediary connection with virtual reality. In May 2016, in a public bathroom near the tenth exit of Kangnam Station, a woman in her twenties was murdered. This murder case, contrary to what the police and many media outlets reported, was not a "random crime." The criminal did not harm to the six men who used the bathroom before his victim, but murdered the first woman who came into the bathroom. Women in online communities and social networks defined this incident as a clear-cut case of femicide. Many women identified with the victim. Kangnam Station is a highly commercialized public space, and the bathroom could have been used by anyone. The fact that any woman could have been the murder victim elicited complex emotions, including mourning, survivor's guilt, fear, horror, rage, and a resolve for change, as well as requests for solidarity. The event itself and the emotions it inspired constituted a consciousness-raising event, as was reflected also in the feminist declaration movement on Twitter (the trajectory running from reflection, to raising awareness, to resolve). This time, however, the reaction was intensified by what was experienced as a realistic threat to the lives of those women who participated. The hashtag #ISurvived came into widespread use following the murder at Kangnam Station Exit 10.

The Political Science of Post-it Notes: Intermedial Feminism

Online feminists did not simply stay in the virtual world, but instead gathered at Kangnam Station to hold a memorial rally. What is notable about this rally was the medium used to convey their messages. The outer wall outside Exit 10 of Kangnam Station is made of glass and iron, and after the murder mourners as well as members of the broader public began to cover in Post-it notes. Most were empathetic statements of mourning, but some were counterattacks saying that men should not be treated like potential assailants. Why Post-it notes? Post-it notes can be easily attached and removed, and thus are a physical analogue to platforms like Twitter that are often used to send simple messages as well as to record important reminders during one's work or daily life. Post-it notes are associated with white collar work and with the image of "working women." I do not simply mean that these women have office jobs, but that they may be scattered and over-stretched, simultaneously very organized and professional, suggesting that Post-it note activism inevitably embodies characteristics of neoliberal productivity and consumerism. We can assume that their organizational skills and systematic activities are reflected in their experience participating in fandom cultures that proliferate on sites like DCInside. Fandoms in the Korean entertainment industry operate in accord with the unwritten rule that they can survive only if they are organized, systematic, transparent, and, to preserve impartiality, do not promote personal friendship among members. Many young women must have experienced these fandoms in the online world.

Post-it notes are remarkably similar to digital texts on Twitter and online discussion boards. The first similarity is their length. A sticky note is not a medium for lengthy expression. Its brevity is akin to that of tweets, which are limited to 140 characters. The rhetoric of witticism, known as "*tŭrip*" (originating from ad-libbing), is important in short writings. Metaphors and alliteration are often used. This is similar to copywriting for advertisements. The most popularized Post-it writings include such representative examples as "Save (wo)me(n). You (men) survived" (*Sal [nyŏ] chuseyo. Nŏn sara [nam] atchana*) (996), and "Because women scorned me (X) / Because even women scorned me (O)" (*Yŏja eke musi tanghaesŏ [X] / Yŏja eke kkaji musi tanghaesŏ [O]*) (916).[10] The first text, in particular, went on to be massively transmitted through hashtags and other media. Short writings are discrete, but they are also conducive to repetition. Like tweets, the Post-it messages had a modular, functional character. They had the tendency to move autonomously and independently, despite being analogue texts.

This leads to the second similarity, their fluidity of arrangement. Post-it notes can be freely moved and arranged. However, although they are physically free, they are not entirely semiotically free—they are still context-bound. This is because the arrangement of Post-it notes has a logical flow, because they are tacked up in real time.

This logical, cumulative flow of discourse is their third similarity to tweets. The spread of online speech, as followers transmit or live-stream comments on Twitter and in other online spaces, is also reflected in the arrangement of Post-it notes. Digital texts transparently reveal the process and show traces of the texts' retention and protection. One may read them at any time, but for those who want to investigate these traces, what unlocks this space is the writing technique of digital texts. The Post-it notes on the glass wall can be read from any direction, but at times, because of the continuity between one Post-it and another, the sequence can be important.

The fourth characteristic, their conversational tone of writing, highlights this continuity. Below the Post-it "You must be devastated as a boyfriend, I will pray for you" (*Namja ch'in'gu pun ch'ung'gyŏk i kŭsil t'ende kido hae tŭrigessŭmnida*) (941), another Post-it reads "[You put aside] the victim, the victim's family, and the women who live in fear on this earth while you reserve your prayers for her boyfriend?" (*P'ihaeja, p'ihaeja yugajok, kongp'o sok e salgo innŭn i ttang ŭi yŏsŏng ŭn twi ro hago kido nŭn namch'in ege?*) (940). Many Post-it notes question men as potential assailants for their failure to understand the women who fear for their lives or the link between misogynistic culture and patriarchy. The recursive feedback method common to digital texts appeared here as well. This is a narrative strategy to escape becoming a silent, powerless victim. Examples of such strategy ranged from direct questions such as "Why can't you understand women's fear?" (*Yŏsŏng tŭl ŭi kongp'o ka ihae an toeyo?*) (844), "Because you and I were women. Rest in Peace. Is it so wrong to want to become a 'human' before becoming a 'woman'?" (*Tangsin kwa nae ka yŏsŏng iŏtkie. Samga koin ŭi myŏngbok ŭl pimnida. 'Yŏja' igi chŏn e 'in'gan' igo sip'ŭn kŏt i kŭrido chalmot toen kŏt imnikka*) (394), to requests or commands, such as "'Do not kill,' do not say this is a 'generalization'" ('*Chugiji mara,' yi woech'im ŭl 'ilbanhwa' ra haji maseyo*) (587). As in one note that said "Media coverage that hurts the victim, her family, and friends must change" (*Yi sagŏn ŭi p'ihaeja wa kŭ kajok, ch'in'gu pun tŭl ege sangch'ŏ chunŭn ŏllon podo nŭn pakkwiŏya hamnida*) (533), these Post-it notes demanded a response from the assailant or the dominant structure, including the media discourse. The core of this narrative strategy can be found in the next Post-it. "The focus is on you, the assailant" (*Ch'otjŏm ŭn*

nŏ ege, kahaeja ege) (1001). This strategy, like mirroring, aims to talk to the assailant and thus reveal the narrative that the assailant imagines. The phrase "how/what women should do" constantly brands women via male language to isolate and reify them. Here, women change the subject. This is a war of narrative. To talk to the assailant and make them explain themselves is also to question the assailant's ethical responsibility. This is because the narrative that "I" have composed inevitably reflects social experience (Butler 2005, 31–34). For mirroring, women reveal their gender to others, and take the risk of exposing themselves in rallies in order to expose the assailant through his self-explanation. To try to monopolize victimhood, men claim to be traumatized, although they are not often victims of gendered violence. The assailant stealing the narrative of trauma is symptomatic of an unstable and precarious neoliberal society. By claiming that everyone is traumatized, this overarching narrative of trauma effectively ignores the specific pain of the victim, who is structurally underprivileged. In this situation, women are actively employing the recursive storytelling function of digital texts in order to pressure the assailants to explain themselves and to demand their ethical accountability. I suggest that this may be seen as a process of development of women's language. Going further, independent publisher Baumealame published the volume *We Need a Language: Speaking Feminism* (*Uri eken ŏnŏ ka p'iryo hada: ib i t'ŭinŭn p'eminijŭm*, 2016), describing how women can respond to men's replies. This book raised about forty million wŏn (about US$34,000) on social crowdfunding platform Tumblbug in its first campaign and was reprinted twice by August 2016. As a kind of militant treatise for emerging feminists or a guidebook on "speech for basic-level feminists," *We Need a Language* exemplifies how conversational narrative can be employed for feminist ends.

The fifth characteristic is transmission and transmissibility. Quotes seen frequently on Twitter and *Megalia*'s Facebook page comments are shared and recirculated. These are internet memes. The memes, repeated through forms of quotation, repetition, and hashtags, may be seen as vectors of affective expression. The number of times a meme is repeated determines its strength. The Post-it is, in size and number of words, whether considered individually and together, highly shareable, especially via photographs. In other words, Post-it notes are photogenic. The photos taken are circulated on internet newspapers that provide news with many photo images and a short caption line, and on social networks like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Furthermore, the Post-it notes render an ordinary space into a memorial space of special affect, underscoring its

photogenic image. A patchwork of colorful Post-it notes, flowers, candles, and dolls often seen in site-specific performances is arranged in this memorial space. Unless there is a collective disaster or a nationwide event, it is uncommon to see an ordinary space transformed into a memorial space voluntarily by citizens. However, the transformation of an ordinary space into a memorial space is often seen in American TV shows. The negotiation of the virtual world and the real world, reproduction and physical reality, has many effects.

Sixth is the archival characteristic. The Post-it messages were collected and finally archived by Seoul city. However, some of them have continued to wander the internet as photos or texts, and are preserved in digital and printed books as well as on other platforms. In that they provoke the desire to collect and preserve them in their entirety, the Post-it notes are similar to an archive, just as digital texts allow information to be accumulated and searched.

It is important to note that materiality and physicality are disparate. Materiality refers to the material basis for hybrid text and subjectivity. Materiality is "the emergent quality created through the dynamic interaction of material characteristic and semantic strategy" (Hayles 2005, 16). Hence, materiality indicates the point at which physical reality and human intention converge. *Megalia*'s strategy of revealing women's gender therefore gains materiality by showing fellow "activists as a group" rather than commanding individual physical bodies. Whereas previous online feminism started out in physical reality and used the online space merely as a tool to gather willpower in the real world, materiality heightened the possibility of intermediary connections in the real world. Twitter feminism and *Megalia* do not simply create change and action online, they also produce and sell merchandise to fund offline feminist movements, hold rallies, and publish books. The tweets from the feminist declaration movement on Twitter were edited and published in print by Yun Nari, whose publishing costs were covered in full by Neta's Kitchen (Net'a sŭ k'ich'in). This brochure, *#IAmAFeminist* (*#Na nŭn p'eminisŭt'ŭ imnida*), was distributed for free. Works that cross over between the virtual world and the physical world are actively pursued.

Commemorative Post-it notes placed at Kangnam Station Exit 10 were archived as photo images, digital texts, and printed texts. Because this movement is scattered through various images, texts, platforms, and media, its direction could be regarded as paratextual. Through comments, retweets, mentions, internet memes (imitation and reproduction), citations, illustrations, low-tech videos such as GIFs, citations, picketing,

masks, and Post-it notes, the movement takes on a paratextual quality that acts as a frame as well as the main text. Katherine Hayles claims that digital textuality, which is paratextual and hypertextual, is more feminine than masculine. Nonconventional writing is "amorphous, indirect, impure, diffuse, multiple, evasive. So is what we learned to call bad writing. Good writing is direct, effective, clean as a bleached bone. Bad writing is all flesh, and dirty flesh at that. . . . Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine" (Jackson 1997, 524). These women meet in the physical world through the mediation of materiality at Kangnam Station. This method of feminist movement organizing could be seen as intermedial. It is an engine that propels narrative reconstruction by drawing its power from language and code, simulation and narrative, a calculative universe and a physical universe, printed text and digital text, or the mutual penetration of analogue and digital reproduction, and complex feedback among autonomous agents who recursively interact with the environment (Hayles 2005, 26). Katherine Hayles introduces the concept of intermediation to underscore the materiality of the digital, echoing both Donna Haraway's peculiar companion species' cat's cradle (Haraway 2003, 315–317), which connects things that are not easily linked by conventional customs, and Alexander Galloway's interface (Galloway 2012, vii–viii), which enables the access of heterogeneous dimensions in a feedback loop.

Online feminism focuses on the creation and utterance of women's language. However, after the memorial rally for the murder at Kangnam Station, digital feminist subjectivity is emerging in a more complex way amid the negotiation of the discontinuous digital and the continuous analogue. In the process of intermediating a system with another system, error and noise are unavoidable. What does it mean to be a digital, nonanalogue subject? It is to become a creative but also a freakish body made up of links, lexia, memory, command, and hypertext. Even within one word, we can hear grumbles and see unfamiliar but surprising performative gestures. Because mirroring was a temporary strategy, its efficacy was short-lived. This is the nature of recursive feedback. Because an object does not return to the same place but instead moves in a helical form, even if the process is repeated, it will not have the same effect. At this point, we must refer to and create another strategic language of online feminism.

This does not mean that digital feminist subjects of mirroring must disappear. Digital subjects do not follow a theory of evolution. Although "Megalia Gallery" no longer operates, its name still exists and exercises some kind of effect. In addition, those who practiced mirroring are also

those who put an end to Soranet, and split up, criticized, and reflected on each other across various online communities and forums and Facebook pages. They are those who renounced name power on Twitter and dispersed into anonymity, organized the memorial rally outside the tenth exit of Kangnam Station, reported sexist expressions used by the media, participated in and supported the #MeToo movement, voluntarily attended court to be present for cases related to the MeToo movement, funded related women's organizations, and, endowed with the identity of activists, founded new feminist organizations.[11]

Conclusion: Self-Creation of Feminism

The digital subject is discontinuous, discrete, intermediary, complex, and multifaceted. Most importantly, it does not exclude the analogue. Negotiating between the analogue and the digital world, the digital feminist subject is moving in the direction of affecting both worlds. A unitary, consistent frame cannot be used to capture this subject. Even the method of utterance is not consistent. *Megalia*, which was coincidentally prompted by the MERS epidemic in 2015, operates in entirely different guises today. Some digital feminists have expanded the direction of practice through queer activism, the disability rights movement, and environmental activism; some have created parties to realize feminist politics; some have started publishing companies and planned seminars to educate the public about feminism; some have made policies to stop cyber sexual assault and support victims in real life. At the same time, many of them fund feminist movement organizations with their hard-earned money and share their opinions on Twitter and Facebook each time an issue related to feminism arises.

However, at the same time, putting up oppositional fronts to draw public attention online to feminist issues has trained some digital feminist subjects to exclude rather than include, and as a result has created groups that alienate and discriminate against transgender people, gender queers and nonbinary people, and refugees, all under the banner of "feminism." The attitudes of those who call themselves "radical feminists" are not much different from those of right-wingers who continuously seek to alienate and hate and claim that they alone have the right to power. They see their power as fixed, they hate other minorities, they compete for "who is more victimized," and they are afraid of "losing their slice of the pie."

Megalia's "mirroring" has always presented these risks. *Megalia* served

the meaningful role of publicizing and visualizing misogyny, but it also subscribed to an oppositional gender dualism and actively used a strategy that could obscure and alienate other minorities. As such, "mirroring" was a temporary strategy, one that risked strengthening the binary thinking that feminism has criticized. To understand this situation, it is necessary to study how feminism is understood and applied in each group—not only in antifeminist groups but also in feminist groups—as well as today's media-attention economy that nonetheless provides the infrastructure for feminism's publicity and transmission as a core set of ideas. In this way, we must see how feminism crosses online and offline spaces, transforms, and intermediates across various online platforms and groups. Only then will it be possible to reflect on the coincidental, multitudinous spectrum of self-creations of feminism, as well as its less positive effects.

NOTES

1. This is a revised version of an essay that originally appeared in Korean (H. Cho 2016).

2. In Korea, the terms "feminism" and "women's rights movement" first appeared in magazines and newspapers in the 1920s during the colonial era under the influence of Japan and Western Europe (*Tonga ilbo* 1921; Ssangdu mach'a 1938). It is impossible to summarize the long and complex history of the usage of "feminism" in South Korea. Here, I focus on the recent usage in terms of online feminism. Two big watershed moments publicized and democratized feminism in Korea. The first democratization occurred on internet spaces that gained popularity among college students, intellectuals, and civil right activists, where the word "feminism" was mentioned and actively discussed following key changes to the law, institutions, and policies, such as the establishment of the Ministry of Women and Family in 1998 under the Kim Dae-jung [Kim Taejung] administration. The Constitutional Court ruled that giving extra points to men who sought jobs at public institutions as part of the military draft compensation procedure was unconstitutional, on the grounds that conscription of men was compulsory. In 2005, the traditional family registry system was abolished. However, backlash has always accompanied publicization and democratization. Vehement ridicule of and attacks on the Ministry of Women and Family, on women's student government at universities, and on feminist clubs took place both online and offline. As such, a negative perception of the word "feminism" spread among the young generation, regardless of gender. With this negative perception and tainting of the term, and taking into account postcolonial practices, women's studies academics and activists used the term "*yŏsŏng chuŭi*" (lit. "woman-ism") instead of "*p'eminijŭm*"[feminism] for a while. If the first democratization resulted in attacks by some young (especially college) men on feminist activists, academics, and students who actively practiced feminism, and also induced negative or apathetic reactions among young women, the second democratization in 2015 engaged young women beyond the circle of feminist activists and academics in the movement. The second wave of online feminism depended on the powerful influ-

ence of social media and the capacity to spread great volumes of information digitally. Now, the word "*p'eminijŭm*" is known by almost everyone, not just special interest groups, and both feminists and antifeminists actively and strategically use the word. In some aspects, the word "*p'eminijŭm*" could be seen as having already transcended its content.

3. Regarding the temporality of the hashtag "feminist declaration" on Twitter in 2015, see Cho HyeYoung (2015).

4. Detailing the protagonist Kim Jiyoung's [Kim Chiyŏng's] experience with gender discrimination, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* was translated into Taiwanese and Japanese in 2019 and became the number-one bestseller on Readmoo, the biggest e-book site in Taiwan, and the number-one bestseller on Amazon Japan's Asia category. As of 2019, book rights had been sold to seventeen countries, including Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the US, the UK, Spain, Germany, France, Hungary, and Russia. The film adaptation was released in thirty-seven countries.

5. On the North American case of Twitter feminism, see Ott (2018) and Kim et al. (2018).

6. The novel is about the land of Egalia, where gender roles are reversed such that "*wim*" wield the power while "*menwim*" are relegated to the domestic sphere.

7. The Turing test, which consists of questions to differentiate whether the unseen answerer is a human or a machine, is often introduced as a case study to show that gender is nothing more than a pattern of information on cybernetics. However, scholars such Katherine Hayles, who claim that embodiment inscribed with gender is still an important feature, understand the Turing test as a case study that shows how a represented body and an enacted body become as one on a machine interface that constantly changes. A human's intellectual faculty flickers and appears in the circuit, while the body inscribed with gender does not disappear from the system in which our body, environment, and artificial material are dispersed [In a system where our intellectual capacities are distributed across our bodies, environments, and artificial material, our gendered bodies do not disappear, but rather flicker in and out of circuits.] (Hayles 2008, xi–xiv). Cybernetics emphasized the liberation of the mind from the material world and imagined a utopia in which bodies are deleted, but the default value of the virtual world that they imagined was still male for the men who erased from history the female typewriters at the Macy Cybernetics Conferences who formed the foundation of cybernetics and the women in charge of mathematical calculations at NASA (Hayles 2005, 79–83).

8. "*Net k'ama*" is a subcultural term referring to male internet users who pretend to be women on the internet for various reasons, including to catfish other men into giving them game items and to draw negative attention toward women.

9. Kwon reports on the antifeminists' usage of Megal in 2021 as an instrument to fabricate a conspiracy about collusion in which the government and private companies are working together to promote a feminist agenda.

10. The numbers in parentheses, such as 996 and 916, refer to the sequence in which the 1,004 Post-it notes at Kangnam Station Exit 10 were organized in the book *Kangnam Station Exit 10, 1004 Post-It Notes* (2016). This publication was published in both digital and print formats in 2016 by *Kyunghyang sinmun*'s news reporters, with the digital edition being open-access. The reporters did not edit the order of the texts when organizing them for publication, and they recorded repetitive texts as well. Based on the order of the writings, it appears that the arrangement as it appeared on the outer wall was pre-

served as much as possible. The commemorative Post-it notes tacked on Kangnam Station are now archived at the Citizen's Office and the Seoul Women and Family Foundation on the basement floor of Seoul City Hall.

11. Some of the women who voiced their opinions on Twitter have since formed organizations. These include Korean Cyber Sexual Violence Response Center (Han'guk saibŏ sŏng p'ongnyŏk taeŭng sent'a), which responds to online sexual violence; Femidangdang (P'emi tangdang, a wordplay on *tangdang*, which denotes majesty or confidence, and *-tang*, which is a suffix for political parties), which is planning to run candidates for office as a feminist political party; and groups like We Are Each Other's Courage-Party (Uri nŭn sŏro ŭi yonggi-tang), Kangnam Station Exit 10 (Kangnam yŏk 10-pŏn ch'ulgu), and Peppermint Travel (Pakha yŏhaeng), activism groups that continued even in 2020. Women whose activism revolved around Twitter have created new organizations that distinguish themselves from well-established women's rights organizations. These organizations held street rallies to protest a woman's murder near Kangnam Station in 2015, campaigned to sentence traffickers who sold illegal spycam videos as pornography, ran demonstrations supporting the prochoice movement (which culminated in the 2019 Supreme Court ruling that abortion ban is unconstitutional), and ran rallies demanding the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye [Pak Kŭnhye] in 2017.

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3

The Birth of "Korean" *Manhwa* and the Discourse of Gendered Realism Since the 1990s

Dahye Kim

This chapter investigates changes in the critical discourse surrounding *manhwa*, a genre of comics and graphic novels in South Korea that began in the 1990s. The term *manhwa* has now become almost synonymous with their contemporary digital form, called *webtoons*, but they used to be circulated mainly via print media such as books and periodicals. Printed *manhwa* underwent a rather abrupt and rapid demise in the early 2000s. If printed *manhwa* were generally regarded as a low cultural form and were often censored by the government and denigrated by cultural critics prior to the 1990s, now it is one of South Korea's representative cultural exports, distributed and consumed via both domestic and global digital platforms, such as Naver Webtoon, Lezhin Comics, Kakao Webtoon, Tapas, Tappytoon, and Bilibili Comics.[1] According to *Forbes*, Naver Webtoon alone drew more than seventy-two million monthly active users worldwide as of 2021 (fourteen million in the United States), creating revenues of over US$100 million per month by attracting teenage and adult readership of both genders: "GenZ and younger millennials make up 75 percent of Webtoon users worldwide, and 70 percent of the users in the US are under age twenty-four. Fifty-eight percent of Webtoon users are female" (Salkowitz 2021). One *Le Monde* article notes that Korean *manhwa* once "remained in the shadow of Japanese [*manga*] creations," but have now become globally popular because "shrewd publishers and entrepreneurs" have given this art form a new life by adapting it to screens. "In South Korea, comics are no longer read by turning the pages of a book but

by 'scrolling' on your smartphone" (Duneau 2022). Indeed, many have argued that *manhwa*'s transformation from a lowly art form to one of the nation's major cultural exports is related to the medium's successful remediation in the globalized digital environment since the early to mid 2000s. Once a plebeian art form based on print media, *manhwa* now dwell in the new global media ecology of smartphones and other digital devices.[2]

One major argument this chapter makes is that *manhwa*'s rebirth and remediation as a legitimate art form had already started in the 1990s, in the post-authoritarian era, before the digital remediation process began. More accurately, I contend that to comprehensively understand the still-ongoing, multilayered remediation process of *manhwa*, we need to first examine the critical and aesthetic project of what I call *gendered manhwa realism*, in which gender served as a major platform that transformed and molded the critical understanding and artistic practice of *manhwa* throughout the 1990s and later. As the South Korean government began to actively promote the medium as a product for cultural export with strong national characteristics during the 1990s, *manhwa* were re-framed as "realistic" (*riŏl*), which allowed critics to rehabilitate *manhwa*—previously derided with terms, such as "childish" (*yuch'i han*), "overtly imaginative" (*hwangdang mugye han*), "freely imaginative" (*kongsangjŏk in*), "escapist" (*hyŏnsil top'ijŏk in*), or "Japanese-influenced" (*waesaek*)—and to examine the genre anew as a serious art form for male adult readers. I explore how this new critique, which began in the 1990s, conceived of *manhwa* as firmly rooted in domestic (more accurately, national) *reality*, rather than as a transnational media genre characterized by imaginative conventions and tropes shared at the global level. Even though *manhwa* are now regarded as an important cultural product ambitiously targeted at the global market, the medium first had to be remade as a "national" product—-i.e., "K-Comics"[3]—in order to be branded as an exchangeable unit circulated in the global cultural market. Ultimately, this chapter shows how gender served as a crucial mediating platform in the metamorphosis of *manhwa* as a realist art form and a national cultural product throughout the 1990s, the era marked by shifting governmental policies from "negative" censoring to "positive" fostering, which signaled a significant turning point in *manhwa*'s history.

This chapter engages with two strands of scholarship that focus on gender. The first is the scholarship on perspectives concerning gendered nationalism. By visiting this older school of scholarship at a time when global and transnational attention tend to undermine focusing on national boundaries and nationalism, I aim to invoke new conversations on the

broader signification of cultural phenomena where "national" cultural products are now more widely circulated and consumed globally than ever before. This approach is especially inspired by the growing voices both of concern and curiosity within the South Korean public sphere (which are in fact often mediated by global platforms such as Twitter), over the increasing international popularity of "Korean" cultural products such as global Netflix hit shows and *webtoons*, whose highly gendered cultural politics have been long criticized by South Korean feminists and critically minded consumers. As scholars such as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989), Patricia Hill Collins (1998), and Joane Nagel (1998) have shown, gender plays a central role in the construction of national identity as well as in the operation of nationalism. In Korean studies, the seminal collection *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism* (1998) examines the various social, cultural, and political processes through which modern South Korea has been and continues to be constructed as an "androcentric nation" (Kim and Choi 1998, 3). This chapter extends these conversations, investigating how the new media of *manhwa* and *webtoon* in the age of the "new global cultural economy" (Appadurai 1996, 32) are also deeply associated with the gendered construction of national identity. Korean readers and audiences now ask: how do *webtoons* and their TV adaptations' cultural politics, embedded within the long history of gendered nationalism, rekindle in different social contexts that all share the reality of gendered capitalism or reviving nationalism? Although this chapter does not directly engage with these very much ongoing public conversations, I want to mention them here for this essay's readers, as an important contemporary backdrop to my attempt to bring the issue of gendered nationalism and its cultural politics back to the table in the reconstruction of *webtoon/manhwa*'s post-authoritarian history.[4]

Regarding the second strand of scholarship, I engage with issues of realism and gender in the fields of literary studies and visual studies, aiming to question realism's political signification and pertinence in the post-authoritarian and contemporary cultural landscape. While Fredric Jameson has questioned realism's political relevance for a long time now via his theory of postmodernity, in South Korea the trinity of Marxism, realism, and nationalism has remained powerful under the name and institution of *minjok munhak* (national literature), which positioned the construction of national subjectivity as central to its tenets during the harsh years of dictatorial rule (Jameson 2007).[5] Here, in problematizing the ongoing appropriation of national literature's Marxist, realist tenets in the institutionalized *manhwa* criticism in the post-authoritarian age of

the "K-wave," I focus on gender as an axis central to the mechanism of realism. In the introduction to *Spectacles of Realism: Gender, Body, Genre* (1995), Christopher Prendergast points out that feminist criticism influenced by post-structuralism and psychoanalysis has shown the conjunction between the "representational strategies of realism" and the "production and the reproduction of the ideological terms of patriarchy" (3). Building on such post-structuralist understandings of the gendered relations of the gaze, this chapter focuses particularly on the institutionalized processes mediating the very judgment of whether a text is realist or not. As I will show, such critical judgment is inextricably tied to conservative gender norms, especially the idea that the penetrating, overarching gaze of a talented (if not genius) male artist can grant readers access to the core of local reality. Various examples from English and French literature are fruitful to mention here, including Phillip Barrish's investigation of how American realist male writers of the late nineteenth century discredited the contemporary works of women writers as shallow *fantasy* in order to affirm the realist characteristics of their own writing as well as their "masculine" (Barrish 2011, 17) status. A similar move can be found in the history of *manhwa* criticism.

Lastly, I would like to clarify that my aim here is not to examine nationalist realism's theoretical tenets in depth. The goal of this chapter is instead to examine the popular cultural appropriation of these old tenets, notably instantiated in everyday, mundane loanwords such as *riŏl* (i.e., realistic or verisimilar). Through this approach I examine how the legacy of national realism has been appropriated by both the state and globalized cultural industries, even including those in the Marxist tradition and its connotations. At the same time, this chapter retrospectively questions the problematic structure of realism closely conjoined with gendered nationalism. To summarize, this chapter demonstrates how the triad of realism, nationalism, and Marxism is co-constitutive of mediating gender in the genre of *manhwa*. But to properly comprehend the early critical history of gendered *manhwa* realism of the 1990s, it is worthwhile to first examine the current landscape of *manhwa* criticism and media discourse, precisely because the earlier history significantly molded the latter.

Realism and Fantasy: How to Argue that *Manhwa* Is Realist

The notion of *manhwa* as a representative national art form was almost inconceivable before the 1980s and 1990s. One example of post-1990s

manhwa discourse is a *Seoul Shinmun* article titled "K-Comics Leading the New Korean Wave: (7) Realism" (Hong 2012). The article opens with a lengthy summation in bold type, followed by a list of titles of "realist *manhwa* in a broad sense," co-selected by the newspaper and the Korean Manhwa Content Agency (*Han'guk manhwa yŏngsang chinhŭngwŏn*, hereafter KOMACON):

> There is a saying, "like a *manhwa*." Meant positively, it means fantastic. Meant negatively, it means absurd and childish. It is also an expression that emphasizes the imaginative quality characteristic of *manhwa*. But if you look at the roots of modern *manhwa*, they go way back to the European caricatures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. . . . It means *manhwa* has its roots in "reality."[6]

The article finds the positive origin of "realist *manhwa*" in Korea emerging in the 1980s, with two major strands. The first was based on the left-wing *minjung* (people's) movement—as in T'ak Yŏngho's short story, "The Story of the Crane Village People" (*Hak maŭl saram tŭl iyagi*, 1982)—and the second led by better-known *manhwa* artists such as Yi Hŭijae and O Seyŏng, who implemented a *kŭkhwa* (realistic drama) drawing style[7] as well as a focus on "realistic content" combined with serious social criticism. The article argues that realist *manhwa* was dormant throughout the 1990s but was rejuvenated during the mid-2000s as creators used new media forms such as *webtoons* to express what they "want to say to society" and as an older generation of readers, who were youths in the 1980s, yearned for more "serious" *manhwa* to help them "relieve [their] political weariness and helplessness." Emphasizing the social "task" of better fostering realist *manhwa* by creating a market that financially benefits the creators, the article cites the opinions of two experts. Pak Inha, a famous *manhwa* critic and professor at Chungkang College of Cultural Industries (*Chŏnggang munhwa sanŏp taehakkyo*), argues for the social necessity to encourage views different from "the point of view of the privileged and capital." The other comment is from Pak Sŏkhwan, a *manhwa* critic at KOMACON: "Realist *manhwa* has created a new market, but it is not satisfactory yet. It has achieved a lot in the niche market while the *manhwa* market in general has been shrinking, and we need more efforts to broaden the genre." Pak Inha's and Pak Sŏkhwan's views on realist *manhwa* share the same presumptions and context, where even a socially critical form of *manhwa* can be considered as a potentially potent force behind the "Korean Wave" of cultural exports and therefore worthy of official govern-

ment support. The article states that realist works of the genre "can endow artistic value to *manhwa* that has grown out of the logics of the entertainment industry, so it can grow equal to other art genres."

The *Seoul Shinmun* article, which conveys the aims of KOMACON and promotes what the article refers to as "*manhwa* society" (*manhwagye*), condenses the key characteristics of what I call "*institutionalized manhwa criticism*" that blossomed in the mid-1990s. With the overarching interest in fostering specifically "Korean" *manhwa*, critical discourse has been legitimizing *manhwa* as a "true art form" (*chinjŏng han yesul hyŏngsik*) for more than two decades, in part thanks to its close association with governmental and public institutions, such as KOMACON (1998–present) and the Korean Creative Contents Agency (*Han'guk k'ont'ench'ŭ chinhŭngwŏn*, hereafter KOCCA, 2009–present), and *manhwa* departments established around the 1990s at various public universities and colleges. One of the critical methods used to support this aim describes *manhwa* as an art form firmly rooted in local reality, which in turn emphasizes *manhwa*'s national characteristics as well as its association with high-cultural traditions of realism, especially those of literary realism. The logic through which a work of realism becomes regarded as the best possible cultural import of the "Korean Wave" should be understood against this backdrop.

Reading *manhwa* as a realist genre is common practice in the new millennium, as instantiated in the book *Manhwa Draws the World: Chi Sŭngho Meets the Manhwa Artists of Our Era* (Chi 2014), which includes in-depth interviews with six male *manhwa* artists who, while working in different subgenres, unanimously "represent" the local reality of South Korea for adult (male) readership. The book cites, for example, the critic Yi Myŏngsŏk's account of the famous *webtoon* artist Yun T'aeho (b. 1969): "Yun T'aeho is a *manhwa* artist who has attempted various topics with the most realistic insight since Hŏ Yŏngman. While contemporary young *manhwa* artists travel to fantasy worlds of unknown nationalities, employing their sophisticated and trendy techniques, Yun's sticky sense of reality has proved that a trendy-but-also-Korean *manhwa* exists" (Chi 2014, 246). Similarly, *manhwa* critic Pak Sŏkhwan states in an interview with KOCCA that he mostly reads "men's *manhwa*" (*namsŏng manhwa*), recommending the works of Yi Hyŏnse, Hŏ Yŏngman, Kang Toha, and Yun T'aeho. He contends that these male artists' works illustrate "the representative characteristics of *manhwa* of their era," adding that for him, *manhwa* offers "windows" through which he encounters the world anew (K. Pak 2012). The nineteen so-called realist *manhwa* artists enumerated in the above *Seoul Shinmun* article (Hong 2012) are almost all men, with the single

Fig. 3.1. The cover image of *Chang Kilsan* (1987), created by a famous "realist" *manhwa* artist Paek Sŏngmin. The work is based on Hwang Sŏkyŏng's famous novel of the same title, which features the infamous historic thief Chang Kilsan as a people's hero. A significant number of realist *manhwa* are based on literary classics (K. Pak 2017).

exception of Chŏng Kyŏnga of the *Comfort Woman Report* ("*Wianbu*" *rip'ot'ŭ*, 2006). Given the high number and ratio of talented and popular women *manhwa* artists in the industry, this would seem to indicate a strong gender bias.

I argue that it is not a coincidence that the "realist" *manhwa* artists (a list that is in fact determined not by popularity among readers but rather by critics or even by governmental agencies) are predominantly men. A national cultural subjectivity that is strongly gender-biased by and for men has been effectively mediated through the legitimization of *manhwa* as a "national" medium and cultural product. As we will see, such a reading of *manhwa* as a realistic representation of society only becomes possible after the long transitional period of the 1980s and 1990s, when critical terms such as "*riŏl* (real)," "*kŭkhwa* (realistic drama)," and "*han'gukjŏk* (local and Korean)" were introduced to describe male *manhwa* artists' works at large. My question here is not just about the exact meaning of relatively mundane expressions like *riŏl* (e.g., realistic or verisimilar), but
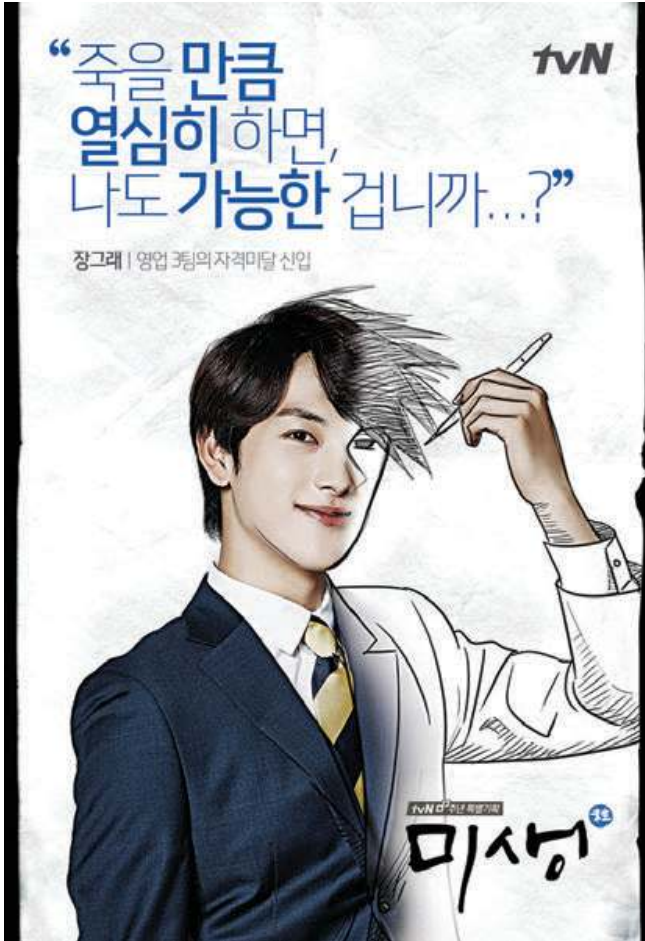
Fig. 3.2. An advertisement for the tvN television series *Incomplete Life* (*Misaeng*, 2014). The critical and journalistic discourse surrounding Yun T'aeho's seminal work *Incomplete Life* (*Misaeng*, 2012–2013), which has sold more than two million copies and was adapted into a popular TV serial with the same title (produced by the cable network tvN, 2014, and now distributed on Netflix), epitomizes the trend described above. *Incomplete Life* was so influential that the South Korean government established the Chang Kŭrae Law in 2014, named after the protagonist of *Incomplete Life*. The law was created to protect young, irregular workers like the fictional character in the work (Kwak 2014).

also critical judgments concerning whether a piece of art is a work of *realism* or not, fantastic or not, or Korean or not, and the connection between these judgments and issues of gender and national subjectivity.

Gendering *Manhwa: Sunjŏng* and Fantasy with Unknown Nationality

For the critical project of reinstating *manhwa*, the already gendered reality of the *manhwa* market and the existence of the "women's genre" of *sunjŏng manhwa* served as a convenient starting point in the 1990s. A very brief historiography of *manhwa* would be useful here: *manhwa*, which was regarded as a medium for children of both genders until the 1970s, has slowly expanded its readership to young adults and beyond while strengthening the gender dichotomy already incipient in the market since the *manhwa* publishing boom throughout the 1980s (No 2000; I. Pak 2018).

This was when a new generation of talented, mainly female artists started to newly interpret the already existing tradition of *sunjŏng manhwa* for girl readers; this genre had characteristically featured young girl protagonists since the 1950s and had been significantly influenced by Japanese *shōjo manga* since the mid-1960s with the notable debut of the female artist Ŏm Hŭija (Han 2016; Kim 2015; Yi 2015). *Sunjŏng* became noticeably popular in the late 1970s with the remarkable domestic popularity of Japanese *shōjo manga Candy Candy* (j. *Kyandi kyandi*; k. *K'aendi k'aendi*), which inspired the younger generation of woman artists in South Korea. Especially via the platform of the newly founded *sunjŏng manhwa* print magazines targeting girls and young woman–identified readers, *sunjŏng manhwa* gained its momentum against the backdrop of unprecedented expansion of women's education, literacy, and popular readership throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the rapidly industrializing nation state (An and Mun 2007; H. Yi 2015). As we will see, *sunjŏng*'s ascendence paralleled the rise of *manhwa* for an adult male readership during the same period, instantiated in the remarkable success of *manhwa* artist Yi Hyŏnse, whose *kŭkhwa* (realistic drama) style was also significantly influenced by Japanese *gekiga* tradition. In fact, the postcolonial anxiety surrounding the questionable national identity of *manhwa* at large motivated many *manhwa* critics of this early period. Again, the gendered structure of the *manhwa* market in the 1980s and 1990s gave critics a rather convenient scapegoat—that is, *sunjŏng*. In the new attempts to establish a "healthy" national tradition of "Korean" *manhwa*, the denigration of *sunjŏng manhwa* as particularly *opposed* to other (male) *manhwa* genres accelerated in the 1990s.

Here, I want to emphasize that the category of *sunjŏng* is not only based on actual practice in the industry and reading habits, but is also a discursive construction strengthened by critics. As many scholars, such as Han Sangjŏng, point out, the very definition of *sunjŏng manhwa* remains inconclusive and even ambiguous due to its diversity (Han 2016). Its content material was highly diverse and expansive; *sunjŏng* refers to a wide range of *manhwa* texts, including romance, science fiction, and the epic, although they often share the characteristic of being primarily created and consumed by women and have the distinctive features of female protagonists or experiments with themes of gender fluidity. More importantly, a significant number of artists have questioned the very categories of *sunjŏng manhwa* or *sunjŏng* artist and refused to be categorized as such merely because the creators are women (Han 2016). Delving into this controversial characteristic of a "women's genre," I argue that the ideal of realistic

and virile "Korean" *manhwa* was discursively constructed at the expense of its less desirable counterpart *sunjŏng* throughout the 1990s (although there were precedents in the 1980s), and that the very category of *sunjŏng* should also be understood as a byproduct of this process. To many, *sunjŏng* refers to a proud and rich cultural history of women's art and popular subculture (Kwŏn Kim 2001; No 2000). For others, it is linked to the ghettoizing of *manhwa* created and consumed by women, as well as the willful negation of the lived experience that the consumption of *manhwa*, whether *sunjŏng* or not, has been highly gender-porous, in contrast to the industry (and also critical) approach to the market.

One good example to help understand the cultural atmosphere of the 1990s comes from *sunjŏng manhwa* artist Pak Mujik's short satirical and parodical *manhwa* pieces from 1996 and 1997, during a time when such debates were picking up steam. For instance, his satire "A Healthy Manhwa: We are the Honor Students," (*Kŏnjŏn manhwa: Uri nŭn udŭngsaeng*) in his anthology *Black & White* (*Pŭllaek & hwait'ŭ*, 1998), starts with an author's note stating that the work intends to satisfy "critics" by rejecting *sunjŏng*'s characteristic aesthetics. This satire features plain, identical-looking boys, a conscious choice highlighted in the text: "Beautified characters breed *hwansang* (illusion/fantasy) among teenagers! But you are a protagonist with a realistically ugly face," praises the protagonist's teacher, who, armed with a baseball bat, signifies the close, powerful alignment of critics and the media with governmental censorship of *manhwa*. When a beautiful girl drawn in a characteristic *sunjŏng* style appears to meet the protagonist, his teacher drags her away. The teacher says, "These big eyes, this non-Korean face that follows the Westerners' standard of beauty, this is an unrealistic look that offers only illusion to the readers" (M. Pak 1998, 163). On the critical reception to these satires, Pak writes that this piece "received fervent responses" from *sunjŏng* readers and artists, including the renowned *sunjŏng manhwa* artist, "the godmother of *sunjŏng*," Hwang Mina (b. 1961), who stated that she wept after reading it (quoted in M. Pak 1998, 191). Another of Pak's short works in the aforementioned anthology, "Normal Country (*Nomal kŏnt'ŭri*)," parodies Kang Kyŏngok's famous science fiction *Sunjŏng: The Normal City* (*Nomal sit'i*, 1993–2001), with the names of the protagonists (named after Greek gods and goddesses in the original) substituted with countrified Korean names and set in a fictional future Mars and Earth transformed into a 1970s Korean farming village. Pak's parody features a patriarchal village head who tries to forcibly cut the long hair of a young man and calls the heroine, who can change her sex/gender in the original, a "demoralizing woman" (*p'unggi mullan-nyŏ*). Armed with Park Chung Hee's

Fig. 3.3. An excerpt from Pak Mujik's "A Healthy *Manhwa*: We are the Honor Students" from his anthology *Black & White* (M. Pak 1998). The teacher drags the female student away to "protect" other students from her "bad" influence, which stems from her "unrealistic" (*sasiljŏk iji mot han*) beauty and facial features, which conform to "a Western standard of beauty" (*sŏguin ŭi mijŏk kijun e ttarŭn*).

dictatorial nationalism and cultural conservatism from the 1960s and '70s, the village head mirrors what Molly Hyo Kim names as the regime's characteristic repressive attitude toward popular and youth cultures (2006, 37–50). Pak's satire rests on the claim that such attitudes were still visible in the post-authoritarian 1990s.

But who are these critics who "slandered" *sunjŏng*, deeming it unrealistic or "non-Korean?" Was sexism or biased taste behind such denigration? As a case study, we might examine the second volume of *The Complete History of Korean Manhwa* (*Han'guk manhwa t'ongsa [ha]*, 1998 [1996]) by *manhwa* critic and journalist Son Sangik (b. 1955). The volume attempts to rescue the history of *manhwa* from accusations of Japanese influence and crude or childish taste, yet in doing so treats *sunjŏng manhwa* as a distinctly inferior genre. For Son, *sunjŏng* is problematic first for its ambiguous national identity. He dedicates about seven pages to the tradition of *sunjŏng*, largely distinguishing the older tradition of *sunjŏng manhwa* for children from the newer strand of *sunjŏng* for girls and young adult female readers that came out of the late 1970s. While he favorably depicts the former by analyzing the style of each individual artist (many of

Fig. 3.4. An image from Pak Mujik's "Normal Country" from his anthology *Black & White* (M. Pak 1998). The village head is giving a speech in front of the national flag, rather ridiculously appropriating the patriotic discourse of developmentalism from the Park Chung Hee era.

whom are men, unlike the latter group of artists who are predominantly women), he simplifies and denounces the genre of contemporary *sunjŏng* at large, as an imitation of Japanese *manga*. Son often bemoans the fact that *manhwa* in general have long been an imitation of *manga*, and here he argues that the degree of imitation found in *sunjŏng* is unprecedented and exceptional. "Our *sunjŏng manhwa* has long been criticized because it hasn't simply copied Japanese *manga* partially or temporarily, but rather has faithfully reproduced Japanese *shōjo manga* for a long time, enabling it to take root in Korea" (Son 1998, 297). The subtitle of the chapter on *sunjŏng* itself is entitled: "*Sunjŏng Manhwa* and Japanese Color (*Sunjŏng* and *waesaek*)." Because *waesaek* ("Japanese color") is an idiomatic expres-

sion contemptuously referring to something as Japanese-styled, the title echoes Son's degradation and sidelining of *sunjŏng manhwa*.

Such a sweeping generalization about the "women's genre" of *manhwa* serves an important discursive function, for it defines the embarrassing (according to Son and many other critics) history of cultural "imitation" as being overwhelmingly characteristic of *sunjŏng manhwa*. Son praises many examples of *manhwa* created by male artists whose styles are explicitly European or Japanese as works that represent strong "Korean" characteristics or foster healthy "national values." For example, Yi Wŏnbok's drawing style is significantly influenced by Albert Uderzo (and Yi's earlier style is closer to that of Tezuka Osamu). Son repeatedly states the importance of constructing a healthy national identity for Korean *manhwa* in the book, echoing the discourse of cultural imperialism popular throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[8] But the history of cultural "imitation" constantly haunts Son's project of establishing a healthy "national" tradition of Korean *manhwa*, as his book repeatedly reveals.

It is significant that *sunjŏng manhwa*'s national identity problem is explicitly entangled with gender identity issues. For Son, the fundamental problem of *sunjŏng* lies not only in its apparently imitative characteristics, but also in its undermining of sexual difference through its drawing style. To explain the defining characteristic of *sunjŏng manhwa* he provides a cover image of Japanese *shōjo manga*, *The Sons of Eve* (j. *Eve no musuko-tachi*; k. *Ibŭ ŭi chasik tŭl*). Already from this choice of example, he implies that there is really no difference between *sunjŏng manhwa* and *shōjo manga*. The image features three beautiful young men with flowers in their hands or between their lips. He writes:

> After *Candy Candy*, works like *Orpheus's Windows* (*Orhwesŭ ŭi chʼang*) were introduced one after another, and the characters of our *sunjŏng* became dominantly gender-blending, with feminized male characters. The reason for this is that Japanese *shōjo manga*[9] is often staged in a European context, with both male and female characters depicted with long, blond hair and wearing decorative costumes.
>
> There is a meaningful history hidden behind the tendency for so many *shōjo manga* to be staged in European contexts. In the process of Japan modernizing itself by adapting advanced culture from Western powers like the Netherlands, Japan developed a profound longing toward Europe. . . . Fukuzawa Yukichi, the representative scholar from the Japanese enlightenment period, even came out with the bizarre logic of *Datsu-A Ron* (De-Asianization Theory),

which argues that "Japan must de-Asianize itself and be incorporated into Europe." From our viewpoint it is such an abnormal way of thinking, but the majority of Japanese people are sympathetic to Fukuzawa's ideas even nowadays. . . . The reason why many [Japanese] literary works are staged in Europe is not irrelevant to such a way of thinking. (Son 1998, 298–99)

The above passage reveals several interesting rhetorical moves. It again defines cultural adaptation as something negative and secondary ("imitation"), and as a feminine process for its subordinating nature. Moreover, it defines the "feminine" act of cultural imitation as characteristically Japanese and not "ours" (i.e., Korean), as something that seems "bizarre" from "our viewpoint." With these discursive acrobatics, the "us" (i.e., "Korean," or more specifically, Korean *manhwa* excluding *sunjŏng*) is newly reconstructed as masculine, independent, and culturally pure, with its long history of cultural adaptation exorcised as the defining characteristic of *the other*. Thus, Son's short chapter on the genre of *sunjŏng* or so-called women's *manhwa* serves a significant function in the book overall. Even after several bitter acknowledgments of the significant influence of *manga* on *manhwa* at large, Son manages to discursively establish the autonomous national subjectivity of "Korean" *manhwa*, which is essentially masculine. It is noteworthy that the perceived reduction or effacement of sexual difference, or the theme of gender fluidity in the genre of *sunjŏng/shōjo*, is implicitly but strongly associated with a crisis of national identity, although no visibly logical connection is made. Son (1998, 299) demands the "immediate" awakening and "de-Japanization" of *sunjŏng manhwa* artists who have fallen behind in the project of cultural purgation, but it is in fact Son himself who constructs the contemporary history of *sunjŏng manhwa* as a history of second-rate imitation, appointing it as *the other* in the said purgation/enlightenment project of a truly Korean *manhwa*.

To summarize: the *feminine* genre of *sunjŏng* becomes severed from, and furthermore constituted as an antithesis to, the newly invented identity of Korean *manhwa*. This would at least partially explain why "the godmother" of *sunjŏng*, Hwang Mina (2009), later remarked that she does not subscribe to the very category/term of *sunjŏng* at all, nor to the tendency of "viewing all woman *manhwa* artists as *sunjŏng manhwa* artists," while not fully taking account of the fact that there have been male *sunjŏng* artists like Kim Tonghwa (b. 1950) or Yi Chinju (b. 1952). It is notable that Kim Tonghwa (the former chief director of KOMACON) has successfully positioned himself as a "*manhwa* artist" (*manhwaga*) rather than a

Fig. 3.5. An image from Kim Tonghwa's short webtoon, "Apple Blossom" (*Sagwa kkot*, 2016), published online on Naver Comics.

"*sunjŏng manhwaga*," increasingly creating works with "traditional Korean" themes like the *Hwangt'o pit iyagi* (*The Color of Earth*), the title directly conjuring the Korean literary classic "Loess Valley" (*Hwangt'ogi*, 1949).[10] Kim has also adapted various Korean literary classics into *manhwa* since the 2000s and created other works that feature traditional Chosun-era courtesans (*kisaeng*) for adult male readership, changing his drawing style from what could be called typically *sunjŏng/shōjo* to one that imitates traditional Korean paintings by appropriating so-called "*hyangto*" (rural area) aesthetics. In the above interview, Hwang implies that her own gender played a more significant role in her labeling as *sunjŏng manhwaga*, unlike male peers like Kim, despite her wide range of works and her long career comparable to his.

Son's view is worth examining not only because his works have been widely read and are still cited online, but because his Korean Manhwa Research Institute (*Han'guk manhwa munhwa yŏn'guwŏn*), founded in 1995 and later becoming a quasi-governmental institution, has fostered a prolific cluster of *manhwa* critics as well as those working in government or government-affiliated institutions such as KOCCA and KOMACON. One of Son's pupils who also attended the Hankyoreh Publishing Manhwa School (*Han'gyŏre ch'ulp'an manhwa hakkyo*), Kim Sŏnghun (2007), writes that it was Son who "built the foundation of *manhwa* criticism" in South Korea (70–71). Three of Kim's books have been published by KOMACON.

Among them, the two-part series *Korea's Manhwa Artists* (2010), features three women/*sunjŏng* artists out of the total of twenty *manhwa* artists examined, demonstrating the biased gender ratio common in books on *manhwa*.[11] Another of Son's pupils, Pak Sŏkhwan, is a professor in the Manhwa Contents department (*Manhwak'ont'ench'ŭgwa*) at Korea College of Media Arts, who previously worked for KOMACON and its former entity the Puch'ŏn Manhwa Information Center (*Puch'ŏn manhwa chŏngbo sent'ŏ*) for many years; he even deemed himself a "*manhwa* policy entrepreneur" (*manhwa chŏngch'aek saŏpka*) (Webt'un p'ipŭl 2016). Pak's comment that he mostly reads "men's *manhwa*" is meaningful, especially if we read it alongside Son's work, for these critics have wielded significant power over government policies and public events related to *manhwa*.[12] Such gender bias partially explains Hwang's frustration and her refusal to be labeled as a *sunjŏng manhwa* artist.

Riŏl and Realism

If *sunjŏng manhwa* is considered problematic for its "unrealistic (*pihyŏnsiljŏk*)" qualities as well as for its ambiguous cultural identity, one can infer that the opposite qualities are expected from ideal *manhwa*. Various critical attempts to identify *realistic* characteristics in "men's *manhwa*" can be found throughout the 1990s, a tendency that started in the 1980s. Even though cultural critics were yet to claim that popular *manhwa* could be understood within the category and theory of "realism (*riŏllijŭm*)" aside from a few exceptions, the critical discourse that pays attention to the realistic qualities of *manhwa* began to develop and become entrenched.[13]

One of the best examples to examine is the critical and journalistic discourses surrounding Yi Hyŏnse (b. 1956). In fact, he is one of the *manhwa* artists who has been most loved by critics and also by the generation of male readers who were youths in the 1980s. One of Yi's major works, *Alien Baseball Team* (*Kongp'o ŭi oein'gudan*, 1983), has been perceived as a game changer that initiated the "*kŭkhwa* boom" (*kŭkhwa pum*) in the early 1980s, attracting adult male readers to *manhwa* that previously had been a medium mainly for children, and subsequently drawing critics' attention.[14] What, then, was the secret of *Alien Baseball Team*'s unprecedented success? Critics have argued that one of the major characteristics of Yi's work is the representation of "hyper-masculinity" (I. Pak 2018) that "emphasizes [the] physical ability and violent characteristics" of male protagonists, which strongly appealed to politically oppressed and economi-

cally discontented young men (*chŏngnyŏn*) under the dictatorial Chun Doo-hwan [Chŏn Tuhwan] regime. Critics themselves were attracted to the same quality, and in 1996 Son praised Yi's works using the term "real" (*riŏl*). But what did these critics exactly mean by such a term and description?

Here I want to turn to the famous trial of Yi Hyŏnse from the late 1990s, where the "obscenity" of his work *The Myth of Heaven* (*Chŏn'guk ŭi sinhwa*, 1997) became grounds for prosecution.[15] A particularly telling aspect of Yi's trial is the language Yi used to defend his works. While the prosecutor problematized the detailed descriptions of violence, bestiality, gang rape, and incest in Yi's work, Yi countered that he had merely tried to depict the "reality" (*riŏlliti*) of the prehistoric age in his creation (which is based on the infamous hyper-nationalistic, quasi-historical book *The Old Records of Bright Heaven and Earth* (*Hwandan koki*, 1979). His defense argument heavily relied on the notion that as long as the work depicts reality and not fantasy, an artistic work could be exempted from certain moral accusations. (Yi also strongly emphasized in the trial that his work, and *manhwa* at large, is a true art form, an argument that was suggestive of the changing status of *manhwa* in the 1990s.) But what did Yi Hyŏnse mean by contending that this nationalist fantasy, describing how the ancestors of the Korean people once ruled the wide land of China, depicts reality? When Son praised Yi's works using the term "*riŏl*" in 1996,[16] what is this categorization's relation to Yi's self-defense that his work only depicts "*riŏllit'i*"? Is it accurate to understand these more vernacular expressions as entirely separate from the culturally privileged notion of realism (*riŏllijŭm, sasil chuŭi*), which wielded a remarkable degree of discursive power in South Korea throughout the 1980s and long afterward?

The term *riŏl*, which means realistic, vivid, or graphic, has been widely used in the field of *manhwa* criticism at least since the 1990s, from the names of private *manhwa* teaching institutions, titles of prominent *manhwa* drawing technique textbooks, to *manhwa* artist Kim Sŏngmo's self-description of his works as *riŏl* works that founded the "*riŏl kŭkhwa*" genre.[17] In "Drawing Real with In-Depth Research for Adult Manhwa" (Na 2012), Kim Sŏngmo says his research based on his friendship with gangsters enabled the realistic description of their world and their demeanor in his gangster genre works. We can already see how the term *riŏl* means many different things—a realistic drawing style, verisimilitude, graphic and vivid depictions, and possibly others. In another interview, Kim says, "As I draw *riŏl kŭkhwa*, I have focused on the stories of the people who live at the bottom of society as well as the alienated."[18]

Kim's usage of the words *riŏl* and *kŭkhwa* in fact has a long history based on the transnational circulation of leftist ideas between South Korea and Japan, conveyed via the media of *manhwa*/*manga*. The term *kŭkhwa* originated from the Japanese word *gekiga*, which was coined by the Japanese *manga* artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro and appropriated by *manga* artists who tried to distinguish their "dramatized" and more realistic drawing style of *gekiga* from the simpler drawing style of *manga* from an earlier era.[19] Closely affiliated with leftist politics in Japan throughout the 1960s and 1970s, representative *gekiga* works are characterized by qualities such as "realistic visual representation of characters and background" and "depictions of extreme class confrontations" (I. Pak 2018). Kim and his master Yi Hyŏnse's style of *kŭkhwa* is highly influenced by Japanese *manga*, especially *gekiga*. Pirating Japanese *manga* with human hands was prevalent in 1970s Korea, when the *manhwa* industry was led by publishers who were interested in easy profit-making.[20] In other words, there was no clear or conscious distinction made between *manga* and *manhwa* during the early development of what is now called "Korean" *manhwa*, due to such a unidirectional but also border-free cultural exchange.

Gekiga's representative characteristics also ground many of Yi's canonical works, including *Alien Baseball Team*, which features various social outcasts and the poor, one of the major reasons that young South Korean Marxist or leftist critics like Wi Kichŏl, Ch'oe Sŏkt'ae, and Ch'oe Yŏl paid close attention to its remarkable popularity, as instantiated in its film adaptation in 1986. The critics were especially impressed by Yi's works and *kŭkhwa's* powerful and dramatic depiction of class resentment and bodily anger, which was understood to successfully "stimulate the passionate impulse" of the masses (Ch'oe 1995, 155). To summarize, *kŭkhwa's realistic* quality is that it is not merely an authentic or indexical visual rendering of objects as drawing style (C. Chŏng 1991, 712), but is also related to the vivid description of urban proletariats or peasants and to Marxist connotations originating in Japan. However, although South Korean leftists identified a certain political possibility in the popularity of Yi's *kŭkhwa*, they were quite critical of *Alien Baseball Team* for its political limitations— offering an unrealistic, individualized success "fantasy" as the solution for social injustice (Ch'oe 1995, 162–64).

One cannot simply say that it was an *objective* characteristic of Yi Hyŏnse's works that caused them to be often criticized by critics as escapist fantasy. At least some of this "popular" *manhwa* artist's works are now read and credited as "realist" creations. One *Ilgan sŭp'och'ŭ* article introduces Yi Hyŏnse's *A Report on the Daughter-in-Law Flower* (*Myŏnŭri*

papp'ul kkot e taehan pogosŏ, 1988), which was originally consumed and viewed as a popular text and serialized in the *Weekly Manhwa* (*Chugan manhwa*), as a realist "classic" that shows "the spirit of realism that exposes social problems" (S. Chang 2017).[21] The official website of KOMACON also uses the exact same expression in their introduction to the work, showing the shared critical language between media and governmental cultural institutions.[22] If we turn toward contemporary examples, Yun T'aeho's representative work *Incomplete Life* (*Misaeng*), which has been widely praised as a work of realism by both critics and the media, in fact reveals a kind of worldview in which conforming to the capitalist logic of a *chaebŏl* (Korean conglomerate) workplace is justified as a wise survivalist tactic of individuals. This a view that is fundamentally not that different from what is conveyed in *Alien Baseball Team*. I argue that the difference between the critical language used to describe Yi Hyŏnse's works in the 1980s and that which is used now to describe his work (and contemporary works mainly produced by male artists and featuring male protagonists) should be understood as based on the altered cultural status of *manhwa* at large, accompanied by changes in the critical and everyday language that characterize the medium of *manhwa*. At some point, Yi's works, once widely characterized as "escapist" fantasy or excessively "romantic" (C. Chŏng 1991, 706), were no longer characterized that way. Turning focus on the "*riŏl*" quality of "men's *manhwa*" in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, rather than the genre's fantasy qualities, served as a turning point of this change, as is evident in the evolution of the very ambiguous and complicated connotations of gendered words like *riŏl* or "realistic." Explaining a popular *manhwa* work using terms like "realism" sounds much more natural than it used to, largely because the process of the cultural legitimization of *manhwa* as a *riŏl* art form has succeeded to a certain degree.

The 1990s was the time when such critical and artistic attempts to redefine and transform *manhwa* as *riŏl*, virile, and a nationalist medium came to be institutionalized with the foundation of governmental institutions like KOMACON and the development of a number of *manhwa* and animation departments at colleges. This change coincided with the process in which the tradition of *sunjŏng* became increasingly marginalized in the realm of criticism and exempted from various governmental attempts to foster and support *manhwa*. This example points to the impoverishment of critical language to properly analyze the genre of *sunjŏng* and also quite possibly the entire medium of *manhwa* as a whole.

Most importantly, such endeavors have significantly shaped the current, digitized form of *manhwa* now called *webtoon*. Many young genera-

tions of *webtoon* artists were educated at the *manhwa* and animation departments built in the 1990s, absorbing various aesthetic tenets (such as valuing a "*riŏl*" drawing style over "Japanese-influenced" ones) that were systematically taught there or that students were required to adopt in advance to gain admission to these educational institutions. Possibly as a result, the *manhwa* market, which had long been dichotomized by a binary approach to gender, is now more integrated than before in the platform of *webtoon* in terms of drawing style and readership. The role that the new technology of digital media played in this post-1990s remediation of *manhwa* deserves separate, substantial research on its own. This chapter's aim was to show how an assemblage based on gender has served as a major mediating platform for *manhwa*, by examining the discourse of gendered realism that undergirded the institutionalization of *manhwa* criticism throughout the 1990s.

Conclusion: *Sunjŏng* and Realism

A discussion of the great realist works by women artists could be a satisfactory conclusion to this chapter for both the author and reader. However, I want to take a different path and consider the pitfalls of such an approach. Here, I want to question the political meaning and validity of the very judgment that decides which texts are works of realism in contemporary contexts. In this case, *manhwa* criticism and scholarship are inseparably entangled with the state-led project of cultural commodity development that seeks to confirm new media's aesthetic and economic value through the peculiar appropriation of the language of Marxist realism of the previous era.

In a 2015 essay, Yi Hwaja, a professor in the Manhwa and Animation Department at Kongju National University, explores the realist roots of 1980s *sunjŏng manhwa*. Yi and Kim Sowŏn, whose work Yi heavily relies on, both admit that it is hard to connect *sunjŏng*, characterized by an exaggerated drawing style and romantic content, with realism, which "reflects reality as it is with a keen social awareness." But both *manhwa* scholars still try to read a few *sunjŏng manhwa* as works of realism in their shared critical attempt to reinstate the cultural significance of certain *sunjŏng* works. What is interesting here are the vocabularies they use as well as the content of the *sunjŏng* works that are being claimed as faithful works of realism. Both Yi and Kim repeatedly problematize "Western characters and background" or "European protagonists," faithfully echoing Son Sangik's

Fig. 3.6. The cover image of the first volume of Yu Si-jin's four-volume *Mani* (*Mani*, 1996). The work centers on a strong-willed princess of the dragon kingdom, who flees to the human world to escape her fate of being sacrificed in a ritualistic battle for the throne.

and his pupils' criticism of *sunjŏng*. Even though these scholars admit that some of the *sunjŏng* works staged in Europe nonetheless feature a certain kind of social criticism, the works they praise the most are those that demonstrate what they call "Korean realism" (*Han'gukchŏk riŏllijŭm*), with "Korean characters and Korean background" (*Han'gukchŏk k'aeriktŏ wa paegyŏng*). According to Yi, the *sunjŏng* work that best achieves such "realism" is Kim Hyerin's "Our Maria" (*Uri tŭl ŭi sŏngmo nim*, 1987), which offers "a detailed description of 1970s South Korea, with the depiction of a student activist protagonist chased by police and his encounters with the ordinary peasants and proletariat (*minch'o*)." Yi continues: "It also depicts the Korean folk beliefs and indigenous world view (characterized by the benevolent bodhisattva in 'Our Maria'), which reflects the author's sensible historical view and national consciousness (*minjok ŭisik*)." As Kim Sowŏn notes, Kim Hyerin was in fact very much influenced by literary and filmic realism. But it is the *manhwa* scholars, not the *manhwa* artists themselves, who introduce and reproduce the language of realist literary criticism and *minjung* (people's) discourse from the 1970s and 1980s in their contemporary criticism, using words like *minch'o* (grassroots people) and *minjok ŭisik* (national consciousness). What is also notable is that many of these "realist" *sunjŏng* works feature male protagonists instead of the heroines who appear in the majority of *sunjŏng manhwa*, leading one

to question the hidden critical assumptions that characterize "Korean realism." Even though Yi criticizes the marginalization of *sunjŏng* along with what she calls "male-centered dominant ideology," one wonders if the critical tactic of reproducing the vocabulary and theory of nationalist realism is effective for the project of reinstating a history of *sunjŏng manhwa*, especially because the tactic itself marginalizes the majority of the genre and its central characteristics yet again. *Sunjŏng*'s characteristic depiction of strong and intelligent heroines (warrior queens, goddesses, super-humans, scientists, blacksmiths, and various others), which itself compels our attention if we consider how 1980s and 1990s South Korea was a highly gender-discriminatory society, is worthy of proper analysis of its own. O Kyuwŏn (b. 1941), a poet and one of the earliest *manhwa* critics, remarked about forty years ago that the genre of *manhwa* is fundamentally about imagination (as well as humor, defamiliarization, and poetry), and I find it fitting to offer his last word here: "*Manhwa* is one of the art forms that best shows what our free imagination can achieve" (1981, 81).[23]

NOTES

1. Even though *manhwa* in general started to gain a certain degree of cultural legitimacy throughout the 1990s, the censorship of *manhwa* continued under the so-called democratic government, perhaps to a lesser degree but still enough to induce self-censorship among *manhwa* creators. For instance, famous manhwa artist Yi Hyŏnse was put on a trial in 1998 for his work *The Myth of Heaven* (*Chŏn'guk ŭi sinhwa*, 1997), on the grounds of obscenity. The censorship of *manhwa* during this period should also be understood in relation to the Youth Protection Act (*Chŏngsonyŏn poho pŏp*), which also served as a crucial basis for these charges, and to the activities of the YMCA, which launched a *manhwa* "monitoring" group in the late 1980s "for the sake of children and youth" (S. Chŏng 1989).

2. *Manhwa/webtoon* is also a major source material for numerous film and TV adaptations, closely entwined with other major cultural industries in the country that are now widely regarded as a source of global soft power. On Netflix, for instance, *manhwa*-based South Korean TV shows such as *Love Alarm* (*Choha hamyŏn ullinŭn*, 2019), *Sweet Home* (*Sŭwit'ŭ hom*, 2020), and *All of Us Are Dead* (*Chigŭm uri hakkyo nŭn*, 2022) are distributed and consumed with notable success, being ranked in top ten lists of popular shows in Asia, Europe, and North America.

3. The word "K-Comics" was possibly coined by and has certainly been appropriated by the KOMACON (Korea Manhwa Contents Agency) in their effort to develop *manhwa* as a transnational cultural product similar to K-pop. Kim Pyŏnghŏn, a former chief of KOMACON, commented in 2012 that KOMACON has been rebranding *manhwa* as "K-Comics" in their efforts to "internationalize" it for the transnational market, with plans to make it another "Korean Wave" product like films, TV dramas, and music (Sin 2012).

4. Here I am inspired by Verónica Gago's observation that "[s]ituated thinking is inevitably internationalist thinking" (Gago 2020, 5).

5. This interview was conducted in 1989 and first published in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 348–71. As Sunyoung Park (2018) rightfully points out, literary realism suffered a "precipitous decline" following "the global collapse of communism and the tempering of domestic activism after the establishment of the first civil government in 1992." Partially agreeing with Park's observation, I argue that the discourse of realism has still wielded significant institutional power, in this case instantiating realism's unruly afterlife in the realm of popular culture.

6. The Korean words for realism are *riŏllijŭm* and *sasil chuŭi*. Note that all English translations of Korean texts here are by the author of this chapter.

7. The term *kŭkhwa* comes from the Japanese word *gekiga*, which refers to *manga* works with more realistic drawing style and content for adult readership.

8. No Suin (2000) elaborates on the discourse of cultural imperialism and *manhwa* widely circulated in South Korea throughout the 1980s and 1990s (10–14). As No observes, Son's approach could be read as a representative example of this discourse.

9. The original text reads "Japanese *sunjŏng manhwa*."

10. In the online Naver exhibition, Kim Tonghwa is included in the first group of "the Masters of Korean *Manhwa*" despite his early career as a prolific *sunjŏng* artist. His work featured there exhibits typical "*hyangto*" (rural) images, and many other artists included in the group similarly present traditional Korean scenery for this online exhibition.

11. These two volumes were originally serialized on Naver under the title "Korean (*Han'gukin*)," as one of the various attempts to canonize the list of *manhwa* "masters" (*kŏjang*) for the public via the biggest South Korean portal platform.

12. For instance, between May and August 2014, the Chungkang College of Cultural Industries, the National Library of Korea, and the Association of Korean Manhwa Artists (*Han'guk manhwaga hyŏphoe*) co-curated an exhibition titled "All *Webtoon*" (*Ol wept'un*). The first-ever exhibition about *webtoon* on such a scale, it curated "the ten representative *webtoons*," all created by male artists with the one exception of *Dieter* (*Taiŏt'ŏ*), co-created by a married heterosexual couple. Part of this exhibition was an event called "Conversations with *Webtoon* Artists," where thirteen *webtoon* artists were invited, only two of them women. For the exhibition, the National Library published a brochure called *The Ten Year History of Webtoon* (*Webt'un 10-nyŏnsa*), in which it introduced two female *webtoon* artists as "woman artists" (*yŏryu chakka*), strangely reviving a misogynistic term from the past century that referred to female literary writers to mark their exceptionality (apparently despite their gender); the term has often been criticized since the 1930s by Yim Sundŭk and other women literary critics and is now rarely used (S. Yi 2009).

13. See Yi Myŏngsŏk's account in Chi Sŭngho (2014) for how Yun T'aeho's works are analyzed by contemporary critics and how Choi Kyu-sŏk's works are published and advertised as "*riŏllisûtû* (realist) *manhwa*" by the prestigious literary institution *Creation and Criticism* (Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng). Also see Chang Chŏnga (2019).

14. This version of *manhwa* history is widely cited, but others also claim that such an expansion of *manhwa* readership started in the 1970s, led by Ko Uyŏng or Kang Chŏlsu. In 2003, Son reflected, "*Alien Baseball Team* showed most of all that 'the medium of *manhwa* can lead other popular cultural media.' It surely proved that *manhwa* with a

solid storyline and a refined drawing style can provide source material for other popular media genres such as movies and pop songs" (Son 2003).

15. Regarding this trial and *manhwa* censorship generally in the 1990s, see endnote 1 above. This cultural history could be considered along with similar trials of literary writers such as Chang Chŏngil and Ma Kwangsu (C.-w. Yi 1997).

16. Son's assessment was made with regard to Yi Hyŏnse's *Blue Angel* (*Pŭllu enjel*, 1996).

17. Examples of these include: The Riŏl Motion *Manhwa* Hagwŏn (*Riŏl mosyŏn manhwa hagwŏn*), located in front of Hongik University; *Real Technique: The Practical Textbook for Manhwaga and Animators* (*Riŏl t'ek'ŭnik: Manhwaga wa aenimeit'ŏ rŭl wihan silgi kyogwasŏ*, 2003); and *How to Draw Real Manhwa: The Comic School Taught by Professional Manhwa Artists and Manhwa Journalists* (*Igŏt i riŏl manhwa jakpŏpsŏ: P'ŭro manhwaga wa manhwa kija ege paewŏ ponŭn siljŏn k'omik sŭk'ul*, 2010).

18. "Riŏl kŭkhwa ŭi chajonsim, Kim Sŏng-mo." This interview with Kim Sŏng-mo was available on the DCNEWS website until 2019. However, it could not be retrieved when I attempted to access it again on February 26, 2020.

19. As Yuriko Furuhata (2013) explains, "The word *gekiga* refers to a particular genre of *manga* or comics that targets a young adult readership. . . . Unlike mainstream *manga*, which avoided elements considered inappropriate for children, *gekiga* emphasized dramatic (and often violent) actions, contained complex plot structures, and included nudity" (19).

20. Yi has said that he learned how to draw not from his masters, but by copying the works of American artists or Japanese artists such as Shirato Sanpei for a living (S. Chang 2014).

21. Pak Inha (2018) criticized such interpretations without providing a reference or example in the book above, a gesture that proves he is conscious of such an approach. Here, Pak focuses, rather, on romanticism in Yi's works, straightforwardly denying the reading that claims *A Report on the Daughter-in-Law Flower* is a work of realism (I. Pak 2018, 61).

22. "A Report on the Daughter-in-Law Flower," KOMACON official website, accessed August 9, 2022. https://www.kmas.or.kr/search/detail/2014002615. Such reevaluations of Yi's works betray a revisionist impulse in contemporary *manhwa* criticism, and reveal how the judgment of whether a text is realist or not is socially and institutionally constructed and historical.

23. As O Kyuwŏn also states, "In *manhwa* what is impossible in reality (*hyŏnsil*) is presented as a possible form, and the pictures drawn with exaggerated manner free us from the reality that is bound with common sense and fixed ideas. The most important reason we enjoy viewing *manhwa* lies there" (1981, 47).

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4

Gendered Violence, Crisis of Masculinity, and Regressive Transgression in Postmillennial South Korean Crime Thrillers

Miseong Woo[1]

Beginning in the new millennium, South Korean cinema burgeoned into one of the most active and thriving film industries outside of the United States and India, "with local cinema accounting for 45 to 50 percent of overall ticket sales, and individual films outperforming the biggest Hollywood blockbusters" (Paquet 2005, 32). Even during this early stage of international attention, South Korean films shocked critics and audiences with their visceral violence. Kim Ki-duk's (Kim Kidŏk's) cruel yet original films *The Isle* (*Sŏm*, 2000) and *Bad Guy* (*Nappŭn namja*, 2001) gained public attention and widespread press coverage for their aberrant sex and deviant violence, such as piercing the mouth and vagina with fishhooks. Headlines reported that some critics and viewers vomited during the screening of *The Isle* at the Venice Film Festival. As Jordan Adler (2018, 57) points out, the programming of shocking, salacious, and sexually charged art films is now expected, even routine, on the international festival circuit.

The year 2003 offers an interesting point of departure from which to discuss how cinematic violence emerged as a dominant aesthetic in the mainstream South Korean film industry. Released in November 2003, Park Chan-wook's (Pak Ch'anwuk's) *Oldboy* (*Oldŭ poi*) won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival the following year, garnering acclaim from Western critics, particularly from the American director Quentin Tarantino, who served as the president of the jury. Exploring the so-called unpolished and coarse B-film aesthetics combined with Japanese

manga tactics of horror/mystery and the post-9/11 sentiment of disruption and discontinuity, Park's film boldly challenges social boundaries and taboos by staging shocking *mise-en-scène*. The character T'aesu, for example, cuts off his own tongue, both as penance for the indiscreet remarks he made in high school that led to someone's death and as an attempt to prevent his daughter from learning about the incestuous nature of their relationship. The barbaric scene of him eating a live octopus became a signature image not only of the film but of extreme Asian cinema more generally. Park's Vengeance Trilogy—*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (*Poksu nǔn na ǔi kǒt*, 2002), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* (*Ch'injǒl han Kǔmja-ssi*, 2005)—was extolled for its cinematic staging of the revenge trope taken to both physical and psychological extremes. Western critics, inspired by the European art-house films and New Hollywood movies of the 1970s, tend to perceive South Korean cinema's excessive violence as an artistic attempt to infuse a rebellious spirit into genre conventions by disrupting them with grotesque aesthetics. Overt cruelty and sexuality have often been aesthetically justified in these films because they are seen as a critique of bourgeois gentility, patriarchy, and capitalism—these grand ideologies' failure to sustain humanity as the sign of ultimate catastrophe in the twenty-first century. Although the dumbing down of films via predictable plots that expose the supposed selfishness of human nature (often set in scenes of urban decay), and the use of shocking visual images, have been recognized as international trends in thriller, horror, sci-fi monster, and zombie films, this chapter explores South Korea's unique context, sociopolitical subtext, and allegorical position to investigate how the nation's film industry has mediated gender issues, particularly through violent images in the thriller genre, since the global financial crisis of 2008.

Mediating Gendered Violence as Realistic Trope in Cinema

It was Bong Joon-ho (Pong Chunho) who emerged as the most successful commercial *auteur* in May 2003 with his thriller *Memories of Murder* (*Sarin ǔi ch'uǒk*). Recognition for other directors (including Lim Kwon-taek [Im Kwǒnt'aek], Kim Ki-duk, and Park Chan-wook) came more from international film festivals than from the domestic market, but *Memories of Murder* became the most watched film of 2003 in South Korea. It is adapted from Kim Kwangnim's stage play about the real case of Korea's

first serial murders, which occurred in Hwasŏng, Gyŏnggi Province, a suburb of Seoul. More than ten women were killed in the vicinity between 1986 and 1991, but the identity of the killer remained unknown, and the crimes passed the fifteen-year statute of limitations.[2] Described by the director himself as "a thriller from an undeveloped nation" at the 2004 Cognac Film Festival, where the film won the Grand Prix, the detective characters are portrayed as incapable of protecting civilians, while state officials abuse their military power, deploying it against protesters to keep the regimes in power. In *Memories of Murder*, the Hwasŏng of the 1980s is a space of allegory, one that reveals the symptoms of the nation's accelerated industrialization under the authoritarian military regime. The film's meticulously staged stark realism shocks viewers through confrontations with the nation's ugly and shameful past, while Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy focuses more on the aesthetic naturalism of human tragedy. Both Park's and Bong's films serve as a powerful criticism of the problematic process of Korea's modernization and an effective political satire of its historical irony and absurdity.

While the year 2003 effectively marked the beginning of the South Korean film renaissance, that year the country also witnessed the most infamous serial killer case in its history. Yoo Young-chul (Yu Yŏngch'ol) brutally murdered more than twenty South Korean seniors and women between September 2003 and July 2004 in the metropolitan Seoul area.[3] South Koreans were shocked by this unprecedented case, which included the gruesome mutilation and burial of dead bodies in an inner-city apartment in Map'o district and on the quiet trail close to the Pongwŏn temple in a residential area of western Seoul. Yoo, who openly expressed his resentment toward the wealthy and toward women who were working in the escort service and the sex industry, confessed that his killings were inspired by movies such as the 2002 South Korean film *Public Enemy* (*Konggong ŭi chŏk*, dir. Kang Usŏk) and some American films from the 1990s such as *Very Bad Things* (dir. Peter Berg, 1998) and *Normal Life* (dir. John McNaughton, 1996) (Yi and Kim 2004). Although it might be coincidental, Yoo's killings had much in common with the methods depicted in the DVDs found in his apartment, particularly *Public Enemy*, which featured a remorseless psychopathic killer targeting wealthy seniors. Yoo not only dismembered corpses with a chainsaw, like the protagonist played by Christian Slater in *Very Bad Things*; to evade the police's attention he pretended to walk with a limp when he was arrested, imitating the character Kevin Spacey portrayed in the film *The Usual Suspects* (dir. Bryan Singer, 1995). His scrapbook was filled with clippings of the material things

he wanted to possess, such as computers, furniture, stereos, and luxurious cars, along with magazine and newspaper ads for family package trips to Cheju Island, the most popular vacation destination in South Korea. These revealed the stark disparity between his personal desire for an affluent, happy family life and his reality as a serial murderer. Although Yoo's crimes stemmed from an extreme case of antisocial personality disorder, it was a disturbing wake-up call for South Koreans, who saw how much South Korean society was suffering from polarized class and gender inequalities. A serial killer who never attained a middle-class lifestyle but remained a violent outlaw serves as a powerful metaphor for the capitalist system's limitation to the class mobility of a diverse group of people. As in most serial killing cases, what might have begun as uncontrollable frustration and outrage turned into a routine of planned searches for victims, brutal killings, and mutilation of corpses—a never-ending source of vindication-by-attention in media-driven modern society.

The Chaser (*Ch'ugyŏkcha*, 2008), Na Hongjin's debut thriller, was inspired by the story of Yoo's murder cases; thus, the film's raison d'être and its bleak realism in portraying sensational violence was concomitantly justified and set the tone for other thriller films seeking commercial success. Closely following Park's naturalistic viewpoint of human character and Bong's social realism, Na's violent and visceral South Korean thriller was the third most popular movie in the nation in 2008, and it received "best film" prizes at the Grand Bell, Baeksang Arts, and Korean Film Awards, the most prestigious mainstream film awards in South Korea. In this film, Yŏngmin (played by Ha Chŏngwu), a serial killer, kidnaps Mijin (played by Sŏ Yŏnghŭi), a single mother and sex worker, taking her to his dark, grisly house. Sensing that something is wrong with her client and spooked by his dilapidated bathroom, which looks like a slaughterhouse for butchering human bodies, Mijin desperately tries to make a phone call for help, but she is brutally beaten and tied up by Yŏngmin, who crushes her face on the damp bloodstained cement floor and aims to break her skull with a hammer and chisel. Mijin briefly escapes by jumping out a window to a garden, where a dog is feasting on mutilated human hands, but Yŏngmin captures her again at a nearby store, brutally beheads her with a claw hammer, and puts her severed head and hands in a fish tank in his living room. Yoo's serial murder case and the film *The Chaser* had a strong social and cultural impact on the evolution of crime thrillers in Korean society. Warner Bros. Pictures bought the remake rights to the film for $US1 million in March 2008, considering casting Leonardo DiCaprio as the lead and signing William Monahan as the script writer

(Paquet and Fleming 2008). Both Monahan and DiCaprio, however, were already involved in Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006), a remake of the classic Hong Kong thriller *Infernal Affairs* (codirs. Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, 2002). Warner Bros.' hurried decisions illustrate the extent to which Hollywood had been turning to East Asian cinema for new sources of inspiration and storytelling, ever since the lead-up to the global financial crisis beginning in 2007.

The Global Financial Crisis Mediating Local Collective Memory of the Asian Financial Crisis

Considered to be the worst financial crisis in America since the Great Depression of the 1930s (*Business Wire* 2009), the 2008 global economic downturn reset filmmaking and marketing strategy between the US and Asian countries. Hollywood studios and some other Western film companies went out of business or reduced the number of film productions. As a result, more foreign funds have been invested in the Asian film market, including the South Korean film industry, which has proven to be one of the rare robust and stable entertainment outlets in Asia. In May 2007, when signs of the global financial crisis began to emerge in the US, Peter Smith, president of NBC Universal International, expressed his company's strong desire to enter the Korean entertainment industry. Many Western investors believed, moreover, that the Korea-US free trade agreement and the relaxation of government regulations would accelerate the trend of transnational production.

Another significant turning point in the Korean film industry occurred midway through 2006, when the Roh Moo-hyun (No Muhyŏn) administration (2003–2008) halved its screen quotas, a legislated policy in South Korea since 1967 requiring a minimum number of screening days for domestic films each year. The Roh government's decision was prompted by heavy pressure from American trade negotiators after talks between South Korea and the United States as part of a free trade agreement. In a way, South Korea's yielding on quotas signified that the nation's film industry was mighty enough to compete with Hollywood films within the domestic market. However, halving the screen quota had an immediate deleterious effect: after the release of Bong Joon-ho's *The Host* (*Koemul*) in 2006, Korean films saw a box office drop, the first in a decade (Choi and Wada-Marciano 2009, 8). This drastic change in the domestic film market led younger filmmakers to pursue predictable scenarios to avoid financial risk.

Screen culture in the Asian region has also been rapidly affected by the changing cultural flow in the global mediascape. While millennial Hollywood aims for PG-13 blockbuster films such as the Marvel and DC Comics hero series such as *Iron Man, Batman*, and *The Avengers* to secure their income from global markets, Asian films have begun to serve as a niche market for alternative aesthetics or subtypes of cult films featuring graphic sexual or violent content. It is well known that the London-based film distributor Metro Tartan labeled Kim Ki-duk's and Park Chan-wook's films—together with the millennial Japanese horror films including Nakata Hideo's *Ring* (*Ringu*, 2001), Miike Takashi's *Audition* (*Ōdishon*, 2001), and Shimizu Takashi's *The Grudge* (*Ju-on*, 2002)—as "Asia Extreme." They chose to disseminate these Asian films in the global market through online platforms, and the new subgenre became popular among cult film consumers worldwide.

In this context, South Korean postmillennial thrillers featuring excessive violence and gore may be seen as an ironic outcome of Hollywood films' hegemonic position in the standardized global production and distribution for a transnational audience. In light of Hollywood's superhero action movie tendencies, which are both commercially driven and aimed at earning a wider spectrum of audience, contemporary South Korean films have responded to the global market's demands through branding gruesome and gory films, which contribute to essentializing "Asia" as a signifier of the mysterious Other. Asian filmmakers' desire to produce internationally recognized films in the post-2008 global economy, crossing borders from the local to the global and between minor and mainstream aesthetics, has resulted in the proliferation of crime thrillers in the South Korean film market.

Since the U.S. military occupation immediately following the Korean War (1950–53), South Korean films have taken note of Hollywood blockbusters and Hong Kong films and produced genre films based on formulaic, money-making scripts and dialogue (Stamatovich 2014); crime thrillers were the most popular, dominant genre. While most of the Japanese horror films are haunting ghost stories incorporating supernatural elements by implicit means, such as suspenseful tones, the South Korean horror film genre, inspired by traditional American slasher films such as *Halloween* (dir. John Carpenter, 1978) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (dir. Wes Craven, 1984), tend to be crime thrillers with an explicit exposure to monstrosity by way of optical realism. While slasher films in the US gradually lost their initial low-budget indie-film spirit after the *Friday the 13*th series, sensational gore and lack of creativity in plot became pervasive

briefly in the 1980s film and video market, and ultimately the genre did not survive through the new millennium.

Since fewer American thrillers were produced in the US cinema industry in the 1990s, the table has turned, and since the early 2000s South Korean films have become a source of inspiration to some American thriller film directors. Explaining the cinematic influence he derived from Korean cinema, Eli Roth, director of American post-9/11 "torture porn" such as the two *Hostel* movies (2005, 2007), says of Park Chan-wook's films: "They aren't exactly pure horror movies. . . . There is a wave of these ultraviolent films that are much more horrific than scary. . . . It's about real people, doing real things, and it's just horrifying and disturbing. And that's the type of film that I really wanted to make" (quoted in Kerner 2016, 215). This sort of extremely graphic and ultraviolent visual imagery in South Korean crime thrillers is frequently justified in the name of bringing social justice to a community, in the guise of personal redemptive revenge.

The financial ramifications stemming from the 1997 IMF bailout in the Asian financial crisis created yet another type of tension and collective anxiety in South Korean society during the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. Under the banner of IMF-instructed restructuring, anxiety about unstable employment and declining social status was salient in South Korean society. "Lifelong employment" (*p'yŏngsaeng chikchang*) rarely became available, and the majority of job seekers joined the precariat, the new lower class suffering from unpredictable economic conditions and a precarious, insecure daily existence.[4] In this context, it became a new norm for the "IMF generation" to subscribe to the neoliberal financialization that makes financial asset building a priority to achieve socioeconomic security.[5] Widespread insecurity regarding a potentially prolonged downturn in the economy on top of the extremely competitive job market may have created recession-based collective anxiety.

Amid these complex social changes and in light of the international recognition and box office success of the South Korean *auteur* directors such as Park and Bong whose initially renowned brands were thrillers, the thriller genre has dominated the Korean movie industry as the fastest-growing category. Korean cinema has become known for more polished productions than extreme films from other Asian countries, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Unlike traditional American horror films, which are often B-level films with low budgets, few mainstream stars, crude production values, and rough aesthetics, the new-millennium Korean thrillers, particularly those produced

between 2008 and 2018, have been blockbusters with relatively high budgets, detailed production styles, and commercial marketing techniques.

Mediating the Cultural Legitimacy of Violence against Women as Social Realism

Many of the now million-ticket-selling star filmmakers made their debut through thrillers about women characters.[6] Every new crime thriller explores new twists and more hardcore violence in the storylines, rendering the films both uniquely Korean and global in their prominent use of violent content, narrative, visual styles, and promotion. Contemporary cinematic violence in the South Korean film industry contains several distinctive variables. The makers of crime thrillers since 2008 have frequently attempted to accentuate the fact that their films accurately reflect real-life crimes, and the marketing process frequently alludes to real-life crimes in its storytelling. Kim Hanmin's 2007 film, *Paradise Murdered* (*Kŭngnak to sarin sagŏn*), is set on an isolated island called "Paradise," where only seventeen people reside. The plot takes place in 1986, when South Korea was hosting the Asian Games in Seoul. The tone for the film's violent vignettes is set by a ghastly opening scene in which a fisherman catches a human head that flies up in the air and lands in the kimchi stew he is about to eat. The island inhabitants believe that someone is seeking revenge against those who cheated and betrayed the murderer during a gambling night. Following the typical countryside or island thriller formula, everyone becomes a suspect. The seemingly peaceful, idyllic community quickly becomes the site of brutal serial decimation. Village people are killed one by one, and growing mistrust, fear, and paranoia sweep through the confined community. The influence of *Memories of Murder* is apparent in the filmmaking. The film draws on the island residents' dialect and simple-minded temperaments as a source of comic relief, and it visually satirizes the backwardness of Chun Doo-hwan's (Chŏn Tuhwan's) military government (1980–1988). Even on this small island, residents must gather for potential war drills under signs proclaiming the "New Village Movement," which was the most frequent visual backdrop and signature slogan of the modernization process under the regime of Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi) (1963–1979), Chun's predecessor. The visual markers of the authoritarian governments of Park and Chun remind the Korean audience of the traumatic periods of Cold War tension and a top-down suppression of local tradition and beliefs as backwardness.

Serial killings in *Paradise Murdered* arise from a confidential medical drug experiment conducted by an ambitious young resident physician in the community health center who has earned the respect of the islanders. Here one can find the influence of another of Bong's successful blockbusters, *The Host* (*Koemul*, 2006), in which a member of the American military in South Korea carelessly instructs his Korean assistant to dump formaldehyde into the Han River, spawning the emergence of a genetically deformed giant fish monster. The legacy of Bong Joon-ho's style is noticeable in *Paradise Murdered*'s promotion as well. The film company and the director mentioned that the film was based on a real-life incident that occurred in Sinan Province; but when residents in Sinan protested against the negative and presumably false depiction of their local district, the director retracted his statement and stated instead that he had heard a similar story from a friend as a high school student (*Dailian* 2007). That was not the only South Korean crime thriller to claim provenance in actual events. *Fatal Intuition* (*Kŭ nom ida*, dir. Yun Chunhyŏng, 2015) revolves around a high school girl being murdered by a village's respected pharmacist who was traumatized by his mother's sexual promiscuity and his stepfather's violence toward him and his younger sister. Similarly, the makers of *Fatal Intuition* claimed that their film was based on the true story of a female college student found dead in Busan in 1991.

This trend of conflating onscreen fictional plots with actual social reality has legitimized Korean filmmakers' cinematic depictions of gruesome horror in South Korea, as if the films were urgent, valid commentaries on society. In reality, however, the pervasive onscreen violence can more credibly be seen as a marketing strategy and a reactionary product of South Koreans' collective anxiety born of social tensions. European arthouse films such as the Italian-French movies directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in the 1970s and the Danish productions by Lars von Trier, from which South Korean film directors have found inspiration in the past, tend to use rather expressionistic depictions of violence based on D. H. Lawrence and Georges Bataille's notion of transgression as striking a blow for free will. The transgressive nature of contemporary extreme cinema, however, revolves around the theme of dehumanization.[7] Korean cinema's stylistic insistence on realism and frequent close-ups ushers the audience into a sensational optical theater experience of criminal acts. The visual and auditory experience of sensation, extending to the display of extreme physical and sexual violence mostly against female victims, became a convenient tool to reinforce the (mis)perception of "reality" on the audience to fortify the film's memorability within the competitive film market.

From the audience's perspective, horror films exploit the tension between wanting to look *at* and wanting to look *away* from their scenes, which live on in memory long after they are viewed.

This dynamic operation in cinema of sensation is conducive to a psychological reaction to the abject. In the audience's viewing experience, the horizon of expectation plays a critical role in the reception of cultural products. Knowing that what they are about to see onscreen has actually happened galvanizes a sense of urgency in the audience, thereby creating a stronger emotional and psychological reaction. Thus, the filmmakers attempt to valorize films through their historical, empirical, and political implications. By heightening the sensational experiences in the theater of the violent transgression itself, its motivation, its spectacle, and its actual presence, and associating them with social validation, the Korean filmmakers claim to convey the horrors of the era to viewers as a forewarning or mirroring of society's real crimes. Very often, the optical depiction and intensity of the violence go far beyond what is necessary for the plot. Instead of lamenting the unspeakable atrocity and national trauma caused by modern history portrayed in other aesthetics or styles, as in Lee Chang-dong (Yi Ch'angdong)'s *Peppermint Candy* (*Pakha sat'ang*, 2000), postmillennial South Korean crime thrillers imitate life far too crudely, such that the lurid optics of recreated violence frequently trespass onto the social cruelty outside of it.

Regressive Transgression as Cinematic Effect

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, regression is an "action, fact, or process of returning to a former state or condition; reversion to or towards an earlier type or form, esp. one that is less developed."[8] In this chapter, regression is used as a phenomenological term to indicate social anxieties and discontent about progressive social and political changes. The derogatory term "*Hell Chosŏn*" (*Hel Chosŏn*) appeared in about 2010 and was frequently used in around 2015 by younger South Koreans as a sarcastic metaphor referring to hell-like living conditions in Korea. "Chosŏn" refers to Korea's old monarchy system under the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1897), and through calling their own country "Hell Chosŏn" in the twenty-first century, the economically active generation of South Koreans have portrayed modern-day Korea as a dystopian and hopeless society that has not made any progress or development for the past several hundred years. Regressive reactionary expressions of discontent led younger

South Koreans to focus on various social inequalities between the "silver spoon" (*ŭn sujŏ*, i.e., the privileged class) and the "dirt spoon" (*hŭk sujŏ*, i.e., ordinary or working-class people). In the absence of any expectation of social change, let alone putting any effort into political actions, a deep sense of pessimism, distrust, depreciation, and destruction has influenced Koreans' outlook on life and social relations.

Contemporary depictions of violence in postmillennial South Korean films go beyond injuring human bodies, showing acts of bludgeoning and stabbing with hammers, chisels, axes, and sickles, displaying a reduction of humanity akin to blowing off heads and cutting away body parts in comic books or violent role-playing video games. Concerning the use of obscenity laws to combat violent representations, Kevin Saunders (1996) argues that "what strikes us as obscene, in this non-legal sense, are actions or depictions in which people are afforded subhuman treatment or treated as nothing more than physical entities" (3). Victims' bodies become sites of spectacle, conveying serial killers' regression into a primal state, and the victims become as violent as their attackers in order to get even, in the process obliterating the human mind and spirit at a societal level. Particularly pervasive in South Korean thrillers is the extent to which violence is not just gendered but based on profound misogyny. By repeatedly featuring salacious acts and the lurid bodies of naked women tied up, killed, and thrown into dark tunnels and swamps, cinema provides an instantaneous sadomasochistic shocking effect to viewers.

Released in September 2010, *Bedevilled (Kim Poknam sarin sagŏn ŭi chŏnmal)* was the most-discussed thriller of the decade[9] and provides a slightly different trope of violence worthy of our extended attention. The film is the feature directorial debut of Chang Chŏlsu, who worked as an assistant director on Kim Ki-duk's films *Samaritan Girl* (*Samaria*, 2004) and *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter . . . and Spring* (*Pom yŏrŭm kaŭl kyŏul kburigo pom*, 2003). The film's ten-minute introduction effectively unfolds the image of Seoul as a site of paranoia in which one is either predator or prey. When Haewŏn is called to a police station as the sole witness of a sexual assault, she will not identify any of the men simply because she does not want trouble from any of the three suspects. Although Haewŏn is infatuated with her hectic urban life, deep down she longs to return to a time when things were less complicated. The raw-food diet program on the radio symbolizes her desire to escape the urban habitat for a simpler one closer to nature, a metaphoric space of the past. What Haewŏn is about to embark on, however, is indeed an unforgettable "raw" experience far more primal than the stressful life of urbanites.

In the horror or thriller genre, a protagonist's return to a place signifies the character's journey to their repressed, hidden past. The isolated countryside and islands are portrayed as places where the rules and ethics of civilization do not operate. In her influential book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1992), Carol J. Clover points out how the people from the countryside are frequently presented in thriller films as the "rural Other" (124). The supposed benightedness, primitiveness, and backwardness of the countryside becomes a serious threat to the urban protagonist, who must engage in a nightmarish struggle for survival without the protection of the judicial system. In Michelle Cho's (2014) insightful analysis, "*Bedevilled*'s play with various genres and modes of representation simultaneously evokes dread and nostalgia for its natural landscapes, enveloping urban development and rural marginalization in a holistic critique of patriarchy's chain of misogynist exploitation" (M. Cho 2014, 140). She goes on to point out that the rural landscape in the film "figures as a site of horrific beauty, unable to contain the sexual abuse and murderous violence that erupts out of its idyllic tableaux" (140).

The first half of the film's primal depiction of Poknam's everyday life is more psychological than physical, more transgressive than violent. Unlike the act of simply breaking rules, transgression takes the form of going beyond a boundary or limit set by a social law or convention, violating social taboos, and carries religious and legal implications. Morally and psychologically ambivalent feelings of regression are combined with a desire for transgression; thus, the rural space is represented as the primitive Other of moral and ethical vacuity.

Poknam, the low Other from whom humanity has been stripped away, exists on the peripheral threshold of human life. She is regularly raped by her husband's brother, Chŏljong, while her husband, Manjŏng, is sexually molesting her young daughter. The unbearable and horrifying nature of this experience is not relegated to a single incident but is part of an everyday routine. To justify the use of the typical revenge trope at the end of the film, the director Jang captures on the silver screen the most shocking and disturbing state of human existence possible. Fundamental and primal desire prompts human acts, and their interactions are driven by carnal instinct. If two-thirds of the film is psychological transgression, the last third focuses on Poknam's extremely violent rampage of brutal vengeance. After slaying the elderly matriarchs with a sickle, Poknam beheads Chŏljong and hangs his head on a tree so that the blood can drain into the fountain from which the other two men will soon drink. As an act of foreplay for her final act of execution, Poknam even boldly performs a palate

caress with the sharp blade Manjŏng is holding, before she stabs the aroused Manjŏng multiple times. The camera zooms in on blood gushing from his body. As her last act of revenge, Poknam pours a pot of soybean paste, a visual symbol of excrement, on the dead body of Manjŏng, who used to trivialize her physical and emotional pain after beating her by saying, "Just a pinch of soybean paste will cure the bruise." Throughout these revenge scenes, the bodies of the islanders, including Poknam's, are covered with dirt and blood, which heightens the dread and the horror of the primitive. Poknam's dark stained skin visually contrasts with Haewŏn's clean fair complexion.

Bedevilled stages a fascinating final moment in which two female friends confront each other in the prison cell as slashers, followed by the role of the last surviving girls. The scene subverts the "final girl" character, typically one in which the dramatis persona who defies her extreme fears triumphs over the assaults of her attacker, receiving in the end a chance to recount her traumatic experiences. Initially, as the final girl, Poknam's revenge is directed at her long-time selfish friend Haewŏn, but in the desperate struggle, Haewŏn puts a sharp broken recorder, a symbol of their childhood memories, to Poknam's neck and kills her. In a metaphoric visual image, Haewŏn as the "final-final" girl and Poknam's physical struggle in a prison cell at a police station evoke the sense of futility, vanity, and negation; the two female childhood soulmates are trapped in the small, confined space signifying borders of civility, law, and patriarchal order. The dominant affective experience of this ending is similar to watching extremely violent and sensational films—futility and vanity are derived from utter pessimism (Young 2010, 168–69).

The last scene portrays Haewŏn returning to Seoul and being called to the police station again. This time, she courageously points at the three men who assaulted the young woman in the film's first scene. Poknam's vengeance and death may have been necessary for Haewŏn to realize her emotional and ethical failings. However, her realization comes far too late, and at the cost of many other people's lives, including Poknam's—the weak, vulnerable, exploited woman that Haewŏn has been trying so hard to ignore and get away from. By using Haewŏn as a dramatic bookend, the director attempts to make a point about female solidarity and empowerment; however, apart from the film's lesson about the dangers of Haewŏn losing her humanity and sympathy, all that the island of Mudo offers is a site to display the psychologically regressive status of humanity and the historically backtracked status of pre-modern Korea—a cinematic portrayal of Hell Chosŏn when the Confucian

notion of patriarchy was never challenged. Human societies undergo periods of progress and regression, and the cinematic depiction of the regressive mode of sensational violence seems to be fueled by anxiety related to exploding social change that requires very speedy adaptation. In the South Korean film industry, filmmakers and writers are predominantly male, so the gendered violence on the screen can function as a self-serving outlet for South Korean men to experience aggressive transgression, which is regressive primal masculinity.

The pattern of Poknam rising from the position of ultimate victim to the most determined and monstrous female executioner is similar to that seen in Yŏngji in *Moss* (*Ikki*, dir. Kang Wusŏk, 2010), and a surprising number of critics and viewers have admitted that these transitions of female protagonists taking revenge prompted a sense of catharsis. As one blogger writes in his review of *Bedevilled*, "From a miserable but plucky abused woman desperately clinging on the faint glimmer of hope at the start, she turns into the wrathful exterminating angel with a sickle, and then, in the climax, she comes off as a tragic monster" (S. Cho 2010). While the film's cathartic effect may vary with each viewer, the film's projection affirms the binary of the countryside as depraved and antiquated, while urban space is modern yet emotionally disconnected. Seoul is portrayed as a violence-inducing urban space full of fragmented individuals who suffer from random accusations and hysteria as a result of the collective discontents of rapid urbanization, and the rural and remote area is a site of outdated hierarchies, subordination, and primal oppression, all operating under the guise of tight kinship. In that sense, films like *Bedevilled*, *Running Turtle* (*Kŏbuk i tallinda*, dir. Yi Yŏnwu, 2008), *No Mercy* (*Yŏngsŏ nŭn ŏpta*, dir. Kim Hyŏngjun, 2010), *No Tomorrow* (*Sŏm, sarajin saram tŭl*, dir. Yi Chisŭng, 2016), and Na Hongjin's hit thriller *The Wailing* (*Koksŏng*, 2016) reflect a conflicting fear of backwardness, of being left behind in the process of modernization, urbanization, and social competition, while at the same time showing anxiety and resistance to social change and the impulse to guilt-free hedonism.

The Crisis of Korean Masculinity and Patriarchal Anxiety

This is not the first time that masculinity has been discussed in the analysis of Korean film. However, a new portrayal of masculinity, of insecure masculinity that must be compensated for, makes its appearance in postmillennial Korean thriller films. With the discussion of *Hide and*

Seek (*Sumbakkok chil*, dir. Hŏ Chŏng, 2013), this chapter continues to the final section that connects masculinity to the extensive violence in the thriller films.

If *Bedevilled* can be labeled a countryside thriller, Hŏ's directorial debut, *Hide and Seek*, stands at the opposite end of the spectrum as an urban thriller dealing with a case of serial homicides.[10] The tagline of *Hide and Seek* reads, "There are strangers living inside our condominium." The film's trailer starts with a voiceover of a child whispering, "A strange rumor started going around our neighborhood, about people who entered other people's condominium units and hid there." As an affluent businessman running a coffee store in an urban district, Sŏngsu (played by Son Hyŏnju) has been successfully hiding in a nice, well-protected condominium from a disturbingly guilty past of manipulating his adoptive parents and falsely accusing his half-brother of sexually assaulting a young girl who he actually assaulted himself. Flashbacks and nightmares reveal Sŏngsu's troubled childhood memory as a boy adopted into a wealthy family who's biological son was suffering from a skin disease. Gradually winning over the adoptive parents' affection and trust, Sŏngsu usurps his brother's position as the legitimate heir to the family assets. When Sŏngsu sees signs of an enigmatic intruder, or possibly the now-abandoned half-brother from his childhood who may be seeking a personal vendetta, his paranoia and obsessive-compulsive disorder get worse. As his past traumas keep causing severe anxiety, panic attacks, and insomnia, Sŏngsu reluctantly attempts to find his long-lost brother in the grimy rundown tenement block occupied by the poor, the working class, immigrants, illegal aliens, and single moms who do not belong to the impeccably organized bourgeois world of Sŏngsu.

Soon, the true identity of the villain is revealed. Chuhŭi, the single mother who rescued Sŏngsu's family from the potentially dangerous neighborhood, turns out to be the serial killer. She is a phallic mother who can castrate the male protagonist. The film portrays Chuhŭi's monstrosity, her abnormal obsession, by showing the tightly wrapped corpses kept in her closets, and displaying her extreme speed and unusually powerful physical strength. Chuhŭi is a typical instance of the monstrous-feminine who gets rid of her targets one by one simply to acquire more and to occupy more space, following her desire to securely land in a middle-class status for her daughter's bright future. Throughout the last chasing sequence, formidable Chuhŭi, in her baggy outfits and the oversized black helmet, carries a metal bar, and with her unbelievable physical strength, she almost beats Sŏngsu to death. Although fears invoked by the image of

the monstrous mother reveal a great deal about male anxieties, they do not tell us much about the context of the woman's affects and desires. What is lacking in the film is Chuhŭi's story, her struggle as a poor single mother living in the highly competitive capitalist environment of South Korea. The monstrously greedy representation of the female villain and her distorted family ideology prevent viewers from identifying with her struggle and motive. Sŏngsu attempts to negotiate with Chuhŭi and tries to burn his penthouse; the horrified Chuhŭi screams, "It's mine!" and ends up burning to death in a futile attempt to stop the fire. *Hide and Seek* ends with the restoration of boundaries and the patriarchal social order, although the surprising revelation that the slasher turns out to be a single mother speaks of symptomatic male anxieties and gendered hatred in a Korean context today.

The monstrous feminine image of female aggressors such as Poknam and Chuhŭi foregrounds the male anxieties that permeate South Korean society, in which traditional gender dynamics are changing and the traditional Confucian notion of social relations is being challenged and deemed irrelevant. *Hide and Seek* effectively reveals the crisis of bourgeois patriarchy—the central conflict of the narrative involves its male protagonist's internal struggle over maintaining his class standing and continuing his seemingly stable family life. Kyung Hyun Kim (2014) points out how the new Korean cinema since the 1980s has concerned the crisis of masculinity and anxiety about male identity, which is channeled into remasculinization as an imagined empowerment. As he explains, Korean men are scarred by the trauma of having enduring three decades of military dictatorship and "modernity's violence, which is far beyond the powers of any individual" (34). Seen through that lens, the predominant violence and trope of revenge in recent Korean cinema can be interpreted as Korean men's attempt to exercise agency on the silver screen during and after global financial crises but in a regressive, stagnant pattern of anxiety triggered by recession and collective discontent.

In a slightly different take on the relationship between violence and revenge, Kyu Hyun Kim (2013), another Korean film scholar, writes, "[a] typical revenge plot in a Korean film is triggered by the glaring incapacity and indifference of the legal establishment and police toward redressing a grievance. [For example, a] serial killer either evades capture until the statute of limitations closes in," as in the case of *Memories of Murder*, "or [revenge] is released on a technicality, such [when the] rapist of a little girl is protected by his wealthy parents and is never prosecuted," as in *Hide and Seek*. Very often, both tropes evince a profound distrust of the legal sys-

tem. In the case of other Korean films with much different sentiments and aesthetics, such as *Mother* (*Madŏ*, dir. Bong Joon-ho, 2009) and *Poetry* (*Si*, dir. Lee Chang-dong, 2011), a distorted male sexual desire projected onto women's bodies is at the core of the violence of one or more of the aggressors. Kyu Hyun Kim (2013) points out that "money and personal connection always override the law in Korean society." This analysis indicates again that women's bodies, or violence done to the female body, have been used as a metaphoric marker of problematic social inequalities. In this regard, South Koreans' collective frustration with their society's rigid social structures and the lack of social justice has created tensions and anxieties in different genders and social classes.

The Intricate Weaving of Sex and Violence in Postmillennial Korea

As Kyung Hyun Kim insightfully pointed out, South Korean crime thrillers can be interpreted as Korean men's efforts to redress the violence produced by the country's traumatic national history, particularly the trauma done to women. In that sense, every sexual impulse in Korean films "ignite[s] guilt and shame," and "by amplifying the horror of sex" and "focusing on abhorrent, illicit, and transgressive sexual encounters, films' crises become men's crises, justifying the restoration of 'tradition' and order under a recharged masculine ethos" (2014, 78). In the convention of South Korean crime thrillers, however, a happy, sustainable matriarchal home does not exist, and the films tell the audience nothing about feminine desire. In this mode of representation, Korean women, as victims of rape, body mutilation, and serial murder, remain unchanged, undeveloped, and helpless casualties of the masculine recession. On the one hand, postmillennial South Korean crime thrillers' narratives seem to redress gendered violence and inequalities through revenge plots, but on the other hand the visual sensation of the transgressive mode of violence amplifies crushed women characters' monstrosity, creating a vicious cycle in which women can never be free from men's violence—whether on an island or in an urban space.

Conclusion

In postmillennial South Korean crime thrillers, victims often turn out to be just as mercilessly brutal as their slashers and antagonists, and so dis-

cussing identification positions is almost meaningless. The multiple levels of identification and violent mimesis between an aggressor and a victim resemble the mechanism through which cinematic violence transgresses the boundaries between film texts and the real world, between pain and pleasure, and between purgation of and contamination by the supposedly violent nature of human beings. The preponderance of these Korean thriller film excerpts and images on Asian extreme cinema sites online proves that the categories of art, *auteur* films, and hardcore commercial films are increasingly unstable. The dominant trajectory represented by recent Korean films—that of combining social commentary on the lack of justice and extreme tensions in society with outrageous crime images of rape and revenge—indicates that justice can be said to exist beyond the boundaries of the law in Korean society. Collective discontent about the consequences of financial crises in the new millennium produced violent imaginaries located in both the urban center and the rural countryside in targeting different effects (i.e., reality claim and instrumentalizing primitivity). The levels of violence in social acts serve as a defining referent for individual and institutional relations and social pressures, including mental fatigue based on individual frustrations and economic inequities.

The proliferation and ubiquity of digital media have numbed viewers through providing overwhelming amounts of information and visual stimulation. At the same time, the transnational filmmaking and distribution process causes uneven cultural flows across national borders. The current situation in which South Korea is emerging as a powerhouse of popular cultural content will allow the nation to lead new cinematic trends, even in the category of Asia Extreme. Qualitatively, what constitutes the extreme or transgressive seems to be continually shifting and extending to meet the audience's anticipations, and excessive gendered violence on the silver screen reframes dehumanization to an extreme status. Cinema itself, as an art form and commercial product, tends to encompass transgressive representations opposed to social restraints and norms, constructed in accord with the filmmakers' calculated artistic and commercial intentions. Irrespective of the future route that South Korean cinema takes, a cinema of transgressive sensation will continue to serve as an effective window and a contested site for negotiating social and cultural fears and anxieties in an increasingly saturated and globalized mediascape.

NOTES

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2. The fifty-seven-year-old Yi Ch'unjae, who has been serving a life sentence since 1994 for the rape and murder of his sister-in-law, confessed to the murder of an additional fourteen women in Hwasŏng in 2019.

3. Yoo was the first person sentenced to death in a South Korean court since 1997. He even claimed that he ate four of the victims' livers; South Korean police could not find any evidence of this and dismissed it as typical of a psychopath's exaggeration.

4. "Precariat" is a compound word of "precarious" and "proletariat," indicating a rapidly growing group of economically unstable people falling into the lower class in the current world. Guy Standing, a British labor economist, introduced the precariat as a new class to replace the proletariat in his best-known book, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2010).

5. The "IMF generation" (*IMF sedae*) refers to the generation of South Koreans who attended college in the latter half of the 1990s, witnessed their parents losing job security in the Asian financial crisis, and struggled to find employment themselves on graduating from college in its immediate aftermath. In the early 2000s, enjoying a cup of Starbucks coffee could make one a target of class resentment and misogyny, as indicated by such epithet neologisms as *toenjang-nyŏ* ("miso woman") and *Kimch'i-nyŏ* ("Kimchi woman"). See Bo-hyeong Kim's chapter in this book.

6. For instance, Kim Hanmin, who directed *Paradise Murdered* (*Kŭngnak to sarin sagŏn*, 2007), became the highest-grossing film director in Korean cinematic history with his historical film *Roaring Currents* (Myŏngryang, 2014). Chang Ch'ŏlsu, who directed *Bedevilled* (*Kim Poknam sarin sagŏn ŭi chŏnmal*, 2010), had a huge commercial success with his next film *Secretly, Greatly* (*Ŭnmil hage, widae hage*, 2013), which was based on a *webtoon* of the same title. Kang Wusŏk, the director of the *Two Cops* (*Tu hyŏngsa*) series (1993, 1996), the *Public Enemy* (*Konggong ŭi chŏk*) series (2002, 2005, 2008), *Silmido* (2003), and *Moss* (*Ikki*, 2010), is one of the best-known commercially successful film directors and producers in South Korea.

7. See Eunjung Kim's chapter for dehumanization in another context of gender mediation.

8. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, n.3a, https://www-oed-com.myaccess.library. utoronto.ca/view/Entry/161387?redirectedFrom=regression#eid. Accessed February 4, 2023.

9. According to KOBIS (Korea Box-office Information System), *Bedevilled* drew an audience of 164,450 in South Korea. It premiered as part of the Official Selection of International Critics' Week at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the 2010 Fantastic Fest. Visit: https://www.kobis.or.kr/

10. *Hide and Seek* dominated the box office on its opening weekend with 1.35 million ticket admissions, although it was a low-budget film of $US2.5 million.

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Consuming Gender

Gendered Consumerism and the Consumption of Gendered Claims

This section's chapters highlight the hypermediation (i.e., the strategies of refashioning existing media through layering, repetition, and juxtaposition) of gender through consumerism and consumption, which emerged in the historical contexts that the first section laid out: media liberalization in the post-authoritarian transition (since 1987), economic restructuring after the Asian financial crisis (since 1997), and the antimisogyny/post-#MeToo debates (since 2015).

The four chapters of this middle section cover incisive case studies in which gender has been refashioned across a range of media—e.g., podcasts, novels, TV dramas, and social media—through the prevalence of claims linking gender and consumption. Centrally, gender is the content of the media commodities consumed (watched, read, listened to, and seen). These chapters also reveal how gender is the vector of deflecting, if not disguising, historical, economic, and social norms at the height of popular media consumption (e.g., through financial habits, ableist violence, THAAD-Hallyu tension, and the association of motherhood with social justice). Hence, consuming gender includes consuming ideologies of properly gendered consumerism and consuming gendered claims. Given that this volume locates gender as a platform for addressing mediated historical, ideological, and economic processes to address concerns in the wider public, consuming gender is a field of hypermediation that refashions existing media and processes of mediation.

Bohyeong Kim's chapter provides an excellent case of hypermediation through the way in which gendered claims about consumption themselves

become consumed as media content. The chapter exemplifies gendered consumerism in the way the featured podcast program on financial asset building is premised on pathologizing female consumers. At the same time, the chapter illustrates the consumption of gendered claims through the dramatic transformation of the gender dynamics of the comedian hosts and their audience throughout the #MeToo movement. As a result, the chapter demonstrates how consuming gender is refashioned through intermedial convergence, such as within existing popular media and/or by devising a combination of comedy skits, podcasts, and reality variety shows. Further, consuming gender in certain specific podcast(s) hyper-mediates gender claims in relation to consumerism by rendering women as pathological consumers, while simultaneously empowering women through consumption in order to retain them as both an audience and as consumers of cultural products.

Eunjung Kim's chapter discloses the complex critique enacted by Han Kang's acclaimed novella *The Vegetarian*, relating the hypermediation of gender as a properly desiring body to the nexus of meat consumption and the scapegoating of women for South Korea's catastrophically low birth rate. Further, the chapter offers an original interpretation of the novel by challenging ableist violence that neglects the institutionalization of mentally disabled people in the thick of the antimisogyny movement—that is, when gender claims are problematically assigned to able bodies, this ableist violence justifies institutionalization, as when mentally ill men threaten nondisabled women with institutional confinement. Thus, consuming gender through the chain of associations—desirable and desiring women → able-bodied → meat consumption → sexuality for reproduction—hypermediates the figure of the being deemed human, overriding the older and more generic opposition between human and savage and/or animal. In other words, as Kim writes, "gendered social life is not enacted without the mediation of disability and otherness that established the gendered boundaries of proper human beings" (156).

Youngmin Choe's chapter most directly speaks to the section's theme of consuming gender as a hypermediation process. It delves into the ways in which Saimdang, a classic neo-Confucian virtuoso woman figure, is consumed as a TV drama character in a rather unprecedented way—as an economically savvy businesswoman and benevolent matriarch of a commune—in a time of China-centered political economy of drama production. Most importantly, Choe contends that the figure of Saimdang is itself a form of media because it is refashioned in Korea's self-reflexive worldview and is a vector of mediation of political-economic exchanges/circula-

tions/accumulations. This refashioning was as inflected by the China-centered Korean wave of cultural production as it was by consciousness of the Eurocentric art scene. The inflection is performed through multiple artifacts, including the most popular (50,000-wŏn) banknote, portraiture, photography, painting, and visual technologies in the TV drama. Beyond the TV drama, Saimdang's gender matters significantly to the wider public. By deflecting the authenticity controversy of transnational Korean art in the late 2010s (which particularly places women artists and entrepreneurs under scrutiny for fraudulence), Saimdang as a newly integrated media and gendered figure repairs the damage by showing her contribution to keeping Sino-Korea trade and peace possible— in both historical fiction and the current market. In short, it demonstrates how consuming gender through a revisionist view that reconfigures idealized premodern femininity as postfeminist entrepreneurialism re-embeds gender ideologies and economic processes to mediate public concerns.

Jinsook Kim's chapter interrogates the trope of motherhood as a pivotal terrain of consuming gendered claims that evinces gender as historical mediation. It analyzes translocal discourses of mothers' political activism on social media at the height of public debate over the tragic deaths of numerous youths from the sinking of the Sewol Ferry in 2014, which attracted global spectators and escalated domestic opposition against then-president Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye), who was eventually impeached. Kim's analysis traces not only points of divergence between different mothers' groups across the political spectrum, but also converging gender ideologies of motherhood as ideal femininities that were paradoxically brought about by competing mothers' claims as entitlements for justice-seeking. This language of rights became the ground of consumption of gendered claims in ambivalent directions. While the consumption increases the militancy of political activism on both sides, it also reinforces motherhood as the ideal form of femininity.

5

Female Pathology and Marginal Humor in a Thrift Podcast

Kim Saengmin's Receipts

Bohyeong Kim

Kim Saengmin's Receipts (*Kim Saengmin ŭi yŏngsujŭng*), a podcast radio show that premiered in 2017, enjoyed a short-lived but extreme virality until it ceased airing after its male host was found to have sexually assaulted two women. I examine this show to discuss the intersection of gender, comedy, and consumption in contemporary South Korean popular culture. *Kim Saengmin's Receipts* (hereafter, *Receipts*) relied on Kim Saengmin's persona as a frugal, hardworking, and money-savvy man to offer financial advice to audience participants. Creating enormous buzz, this podcast was quickly adapted into a network TV show, and Kim Saengmin became an A-list celebrity, signing a contract with a top agency and filming numerous commercials.

This chapter discusses the production as well as the text of *Receipts*, as *Receipts* provides an intriguing case of the conjoining of ingrained misogyny and a popular feminist commentary on misogyny, all in the same text. *Receipts* was a spinoff of an existing podcast, *Keeping Secrets* (*Pimil pojang*, 2015 to present), created and hosted by two women comedians, Song Ŭni and Kim Suk. Having been marginalized in male-dominated mainstream television comedy, Song and Kim turned to a new media platform to create their own show. After a series of hit projects following *Keeping Secrets*, their astute intuition regarding what listeners would want to hear in a down-turning economy led to the creation of *Receipts*, which brought

conversation about personal finance into popular culture. Their podcast experiment helped them make a wildly successful comeback to network television. More importantly, with the success of *Keeping Secrets*, Song Ŭni became a thriving producer and creator, while Kim Suk became a celebrity icon of popular feminism and one of the most sought-after women comedians. On the surface, *Receipts* might appear as a failed project since Kim Saengmin—their male mentee who they helped rise to stardom for the first time in his broadcast career—was revealed to be a sexual aggressor in the wake of the #MeToo movement. I take this unfortunate case to demonstrate how gender was hypermediated while comedy became intermediated across old and new media platforms.

Whereas Kim Saengmin was a protégé of Song and Kim professionally, he took the role of adviser in *Receipts*, while the two women took positions as underachieving advisees. Significantly, the performance of these two women—and of Kim Suk in particular—was as crucial as Kim Saengmin's financial advice to the multiple ways *Receipts* mediated gender. Given that Kim Saengmin's financial advice was essentially a rejection of consumerism, such hierarchical roles echoed the ways in which consumption discourses operated as gendered moral discourses during South Korea's processes of modernization and globalization. As will be shown later, consumption discourses also dwell at the heart of contemporary popular misogyny, as is exemplified by the number of highly sexist labels used to refer to female consumers. My contention is that Kim Saengmin's financial advice exemplifies ingrained misogyny—though set apart from an outspoken hatred against women—by reproducing stereotypical images of pathological female consumers and naturalizing their "irrational" behaviors.

At the same time, however, the role played by the two women hosts complicated the ways in which *Receipts* mediated gender. Focusing on Kim Suk's defense of consumption in *Receipts* and her intertextual persona as the "matriarch," I will show how *Receipts* juxtaposed a male pedagogue lampooning female consumers with an unruly woman transgressing ideal femininities, including the feminine stereotypes created by highly gendered consumption discourses. Kim Suk's status as an "underachieving," shamelessly consumerist woman in *Receipts* was established by her self-deprecating humor. I maintain that through this self-deprecating humor, she performed the marginality of pathological female consumers, who have long been viewed as bearers of social ills. Through this hypermediation of gender, Kim Suk made the existing stigma on women more visible, rather than dismissing its currency, thereby commenting on misogynistic consumption discourses.

In what follows, I first situate the creation of *Receipts* and its parent show, *Keeping Secrets*, in the context of women's marginalization in television comedy and the career comebacks of Song Ŭni and Kim Suk. By contextualizing the production of *Receipts* within the broader frame of gendered comedy, its successful reception will be understood as part of the two women comics' creative redressing of their own marginalization. The second section of this chapter turns to the actual content of *Receipts*, its personal financial advice. Paying special attention to how women's consumption was problematized in the show, I demonstrate how its financial advice made use of the long-standing trope of the consumerist woman. My analysis shows that Kim Saengmin's financial advice promoted extreme frugality, which relied on the ideologically charged repertoire that links women and consumerism. I will discuss how the trope of the consumerist woman emerged as a constitutive outside of frugality discourses and how it fed into contemporary misogyny as well as into *Receipts*. The third section takes account of the role played by the two female hosts in redressing comically pathologized female consumers. Focusing on Kim Suk's self-deprecating humor as an excessive consumer and on her intertextual persona as a popular feminist icon, I argue that her unabashed disclosure of her antiprudent, indulgence-oriented lifestyle constituted a performance of the marginality of pathologized female consumers. At the same time, her "marginal humor" (Gilbert 1997) provided an enactment of gender nonconformity that offered female listeners a sense of bonding and catharsis.

Against Marginalization: Women Comics Move to Podcast

Keeping Secrets, the parent show of *Receipts*, was created as a result of women's marginalization within the television comedy scene. While the marginalization of women comics was nothing new, it was aggravated by the predominance of a particular comedy genre called "real(ity) variety" (*riŏl pŏraiŏt'i*). Consisting of many subgenres and modifications, real variety refers to a television genre that emerged around the mid-2000s in which cast members carry out a variety of tasks, such as games, parenting, dating, travel, outdoor activities, and so on (see also Hyun Gyung Kim's and Yoon Heo's chapters in this volume). In contrast to Anglophone reality TV shows, Korean real variety shows tend to feature celebrities—including comedians—rather than ordinary people, while emphasizing their character development and focusing on emotional sympathy rather than sheer competition (Cho and Zhu 2017). Stand-up comedy has almost

never been the premier venue for Korean comedians; the main venue for popular comics on television has shifted from sketch comedy to real variety. Faced with the dominance of the new genre, women comics faced a new challenge: instead of performing deviant femininity as they had previously been expected to do, they now had to be themselves but still be funny (Yi and Chang 2018). The predominance of real variety in television entertainment resulted in the further marginalization of women comics, as many of these shows featured all-male casts.

The marginalization of women has been chronic. A 2018 survey reported that 72.4 percent of those starring in television comedy shows were men, with women accounting for only 27.6 percent (MBC sŭp'esyŏl 2018). Song Ŭni and Kim Suk, veteran women comedians and close friends who began their television careers in 1993 and 1995, respectively, saw that their heyday was long past, if it had ever existed. Song aspired to create her own show instead of waiting for unlikely casting calls. In various interviews, she recalled that her decisive moment came when Kim was supposed to appear on a show but her starring role was cancelled the day before shooting. Saddened and infuriated, Kim wanted to leave the industry entirely. Song persuaded her to make their own show, as Oprah Winfrey and Conan O'Brien had done (A. Chŏng 2016). The driven Song took the initiative in producing their podcast show by renting a production studio, purchasing recording equipment, and hiring a scriptwriter (Im 2018). As a result, the first episode of *Keeping Secrets* was uploaded in April 2015, marking the outset of the whirlwind remediation of gendered comedy.

Keeping Secrets was highly participatory from its inception, with a focus on different life predicaments sent in by listeners. Audience questions ranged from the trivial (e.g., "Should I take a class on a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule, or a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday schedule?" or "What should I eat for lunch?") to the weighty (e.g., "I'm gay. Should I come out to my parents?"). Whether serious or humorous, the two hosts solicited pieces of advice about each issue by phoning their acquaintances, including celebrities, social experts, and noncelebrity friends. The use of noncelebrity friends was a big hit. Their friends, who were idiosyncratic, awkwardly funny, and relatable, played a pivotal role in forming a solid fan base for *Keeping Secrets*. They also helped Song and Kim let down their guards and reveal more of their authentic selves. Kim's unruly character shone especially strongly when talking to her likewise transgressive noncelebrity friends. With little to no regulation of podcast content by the South Korean government, the two women got away with remarks, includ-

ing swearing and bawdy conversation, that would have been deemed inappropriate on television or radio.

The two hosts took creative approaches to work around the scarcity of resources, and this itself became a running joke. For example, they could not afford to pay for the creation of a theme song or for copyrighted music. Instead, they created their own sound library by recording and crowdsourcing funny audio materials, including Kim's snoring (as recorded by Song), one of their celebrity friends' naggings, a cat drinking water, a fitness trainer punching a sandbag, and so on. Listeners participated by sending in their own eccentric sound material.

Listeners to the podcast were enthused about such an unprecedented format and the marginal humor of the two hosts. Early on, *Keeping Secrets* proved to be successful. In just ten episodes, it topped Korea's iTunes audio podcast chart and garnered eight sponsors (C. Ch'oe 2015). In a year, it also recorded seventeen million downloads (Pak 2016). Despite incredible growth in the number of podcasts created since it began, *Keeping Secrets* remained strong on the audio podcast chart over the last five years with its loyal fan base. As of July 2022, the show was ranked thirteenth of all podcasts on the chart of *Podbbang* (*P'atppang*).[1]

Kim Saengmin was one of *Keeping Secrets*' advisers. As a close friend of both hosts who was known for his frugality and industriousness, he had been invited since the show's early years to comment when audience questions concerned financial matters. In May 2017, two years after its inception, *Keeping Secrets* aired a pilot segment that later came to be regarded as the very first episode of *Kim Saengmin's Receipts*. As it was described in the pilot episode, *Receipts* was meant to be a program of "one-on-one financial advice that helps listeners reflect on their spending habits and brings them to a path towards wealth."[2] The pilot episode went viral and *Receipts* became a stand-alone podcast show, a kind of *Keeping Secrets* spinoff that focused solely on personal financial counseling. The show's format was similar to what personal financial advisers would do with their clients. A listener would send in a list of expenditures over a month with receipts and annotations. Based on the participant's profile (e.g., job, sex, marital status, and hobbies), financial status (e.g., salary, fixed costs, and assets), main concerns, questions, and goals, Kim Saengmin would review the receipts, analyze consumption patterns, identify bad spending habits, and offer his penny-pinching tips. *Receipts* quickly created such a large amount of buzz that a television broadcasting station (KBS2) decided to air it just three months after the pilot was published on its podcast platform. The television version

proved to be successful as well, and thus its airtime was soon extended from fifteen minutes to seventy-five.

The success of *Receipts* should be understood in conjunction with the striking achievements of the two women comics following the creation of *Keeping Secrets*. Remarkably, *Keeping Secrets* became a steppingstone for Kim Suk and Song Ŭni to make a spectacular comeback on mainstream television and radio. Six months after they launched *Keeping Secrets*, the two comics were cast as the hosts of a network radio show entitled *Sisters' Radio* (*Ŏnni ne radio*) that adopted the same format as *Keeping Secrets*. While working together and separately on-screen, Kim Suk became an unparalleled comic performer and Song Ŭni reinvented herself as a producer and creator, making behind-the-scenes contributions to multiplatform comedic content. Soon after the successful launch of *Keeping Secrets*, Song Ŭni founded Vivo (Pibo), a production company that has garnered more accolades for her behind-the-scenes work in addition to her on-air performances. Song calls her company a content lab, and Vivo has been a pioneer in creating multiplatform comedic content. Utilizing its YouTube channel, it produces a variety of experimental content, such as parody music videos, dance performances, and web dramas.

Vivo produced a number of hit projects that were adopted by network and cable channels—these were precedents set before *Receipts*. More importantly, Vivo provided other women comics with a venue in which to perform. For example, one of its several hit projects was a temporary girl group called Celeb Five (Selŏp p'aibŭ) that was composed of four women comedians and Song Ŭni. With 1980s-inspired retro fashion and flashy makeup, Celeb Five performed covers of a Japanese high-school dance team. Their cover dance video went viral on its upload to YouTube, receiving more than 1.5 million views in just a few hours after its release (Min 2018). In response to its online success, Celeb Five even performed on stage on several television music shows. Another show Song Ŭni created was a food reality show, *Bob Bless You* (*Pŏp pŭlesŭ yu*), that featured an all-women cast and initially aired online. While Celeb Five consisted of younger-generation women comics, *Bob Bless You* featured Song Ŭni, Kim Suk, and two of their best celebrity friends who were in their fifties. The show mostly highlighted their friendship, represented by their sharing lots of food and chatting at a dining table. As an anonymous social media user commented on Reddit, "the four of them ha[ve] such great chemistry and it's like seeing a gang of best friends just hanging out and eating out" (*Reddit* 2018). Remarkably, this show also ended up airing on cable television.

These examples demonstrate that, before *Receipts*, Song Ŭni had

already attained extraordinary achievements in content production, which paved the way for marginalized women comedians to rebound. Not only did her content intentionally feature women, but also her self-reinvention as a creator established a model to emulate. Inspired by her success, a number of other women comics began to create their own content to circulate on alternative platforms. *Kim Saengmin's Receipts* was not a one-hit wonder but should be understood as building on the strenuous efforts of the two entrepreneurial women comics who had forged their way out of marginalization. Broadcast media's adoption and adaptation of many of Vivo's contents testify to the significance of remediation for gender mediation. The two women comics refashioned gendered comedy in legacy media by breaking ground in nonmainstream media forms.

Anticonsumption Sagas in *Kim Saengmin's Receipts* and the Trope of the Consumerist Woman

The Format of Kim Saengmin's Receipts *and the Promotion of Extreme Frugality*

Central to Kim Saengmin's financial advice in *Receipts* was the cultivation of a frugal lifestyle and the maximization of savings, rather than taking aggressive investment risks. The show largely relied on the apparent authenticity of his personality and lifestyle. He had never been an A-list comedian, but was known for his dedication to whatever small roles he got. He appeared on a television entertainment news show for twenty years, mostly reporting on and interviewing other celebrities. His persona was likened more to that of a salaried worker than a celebrity. It was known to the public that he lived in a famous luxury condo, an iconic residential building in Kangnam that was emblematic of affluence. While the wealth of celebrities is often derided in South Korea, it was believed that he had acquired his wealth not through stardom or fortune but through hard work and frugality. In this sense, Kim Saengmin was seen as an unfunny comedian, better known for his industry and thrifty lifestyle. Song Ŭni and Kim Suk picked up on his authentic character and helped it resonate with a wider audience.

Receipts was inherently participatory as it was meant to be financial counseling for listeners. To participate, audience members had to leave their requests online, anonymously or not, including a brief bio and financial details such as income, fixed costs, savings, and debts. Importantly,

they also had to send in receipts for all of their spending incurred over the span of one month, annotated with contextual details surrounding each instance of spending. The opening credits of the show, read alternately by Song Ŭni and Kim Suk, announced:

> If you are the kind of person who spends all your money as soon as it's in your hands, we will give you some shock therapy. Send your receipts along if you are desperate and want to get alarmed by a sharp tongue. Deadly financial counseling by Kim Saengmin, *Kim Saengmin's Receipts*!

Each episode usually focused on one participant. After being briefed on the participant's profile, Kim Saengmin made overall judgments about the ideal amount of monthly savings given the subject's salary, what type of person they seemed to be, whether their overall economic behaviors deserved praise or criticism, and so on. Audiences often heard the clicking sounds of a calculator, indicating that Kim Saengmin was doing some math to figure out spending sums in a particular category, the size of debts, or interest rates. He would then begin looking at each receipt one by one, judging each spending decision as either "great" (*kŭreit*) or "stupid" (*sŭt'yupiit*). At the end of this detailed analysis, Kim would decide on "the best buy" and "the most stupid [purchase]" (*pesŭt'ŭ sŭt'yup'it*) of each participant. Lastly, he presented various prescriptions including concrete suggestions for saving and a "big punishment" (*ŏmbŏl*), a particularly distressing prescription personalized for the participant.

Firmly grounded in thrift and frugality, Kim Saengmin's advice placed the greatest emphasis on anticonsumption. He asserted in every episode that each person needed to minimize spending and save aggressively if they had a goal they wanted to achieve. Through hyperbole and humor, Kim Saengmin made suggestions for audiences to restrain their consumption. For instance, he jokingly scolded a soon-to-be bride who purchased a pedicure service, saying that nobody could see her feet covered in a wedding dress. When a listener pointed out in a later episode that brides do a pedicure for honeymoon photos on a beach, not necessarily for the wedding ceremony, Kim told them to cover the feet with sand on the beach. Other suggestions he made for practicing extreme frugality included:

- Don't drink coffee. Drink tap water.
- Don't subscribe to music streaming services. Use a one-minute preview of each song. Don't pay to watch a TV show. Watch free clips on the web and do some jigsaw puzzles.

- Don't live on your own. Live at your parents' home as long as you can.
- One purchase motivates another: If you live on your own, you want to buy a microwave. And then, if you buy a microwave, you are likely to buy shelving for it. Think outside the box: put your microwave (and the TV) on the floor.
- People are not qualified to wear a leather jacket unless they have savings of 90 million wŏn (approximately US$90,000) or more.
- Young and healthy people don't need to eat fresh fruits. Those who have savings of less than 35 million wŏn (approximately US$35,000) should eat brown bananas.

Although these suggestions were pushed to the extreme to be funny, the moral of anticonsumerism remained intact. Enthusiastic audiences shared online how they practiced what Kim had preached, some of which was introduced at the beginning of each episode. Some fans of *Receipts* even began to use the name Saengmin as a verb ("*Saengmin hada*" to mean "acting like Saengmin") to indicate acting extremely thriftily. One listener apparently had "a day of acting like Saengmin" (*Saengmin han nal*) when they did not have time to brush their teeth at home in the morning; instead of buying a toothbrush outside, they went to a bank to open an installment savings account and received a free toothbrush as a promotional gift. They did not forget to enjoy a free cup of coffee at the bank either. This story was evaluated by Saengmin as "great."

However comical Kim intended to be, his position as a counselor and the demographic of his listeners bore a significant implication for the show's remediation of gender tropes. Partly due to the female-centered nature of its parent show, *Keeping Secrets* (C. Yi 2018; Pak 2016; H. Sim 2016), the majority of participants who sent in their receipts throughout the year-long program of *Receipts* were women (i.e., twenty-six out of a recognizable thirty-three). By judging each participant's specific spending decisions as either "great" or "stupid," Kim joined the legion of male life coaches who dispense advice using entertainment and instruction. By denouncing luxury shopping, overseas travel, and dining out, as well as by relying on self-help discourses, he took on the position of a male financial pedagogue scolding extravagant female listeners.

Gendered Construction of Frugality Discourses

Kim Saengmin's advice ran parallel to a long history of the discourses of frugality and opposition to excessive consumption (*kwasobi*). His promo-

tion of extreme frugality illustrates how *Receipts* relied on the ideologically charged repertoire of frugality while responding to the current economic environment of neoliberal financialization and polarization. The point to be stressed here is that such historical discourses of frugality and anticonsumerism drew on a gender binary. The normativity of frugal or "anti-excessive" consumption needed its constitutive outside, and the trope of the consumerist woman continued to emerge as such an outside.[3] As will be discussed later, the trope of the consumerist woman not only persisted during the developmental era, it tenaciously fertilized contemporary misogyny. *Receipts* operated within this regime of representation that linked women and consumerism. It is crucial, therefore, to historicize Kim's financial advice in relation to the gendered discourses of consumption and frugality to better understand the complex ways *Receipts* mediated gender.

Historically, discourses constraining consumption and promoting frugality were pervasive in South Korea, particularly in relation to state-led economic development and industrialization. After the Korean War, for instance, the Rhee Syngman administration posited the moral value of parsimony and hard work as integral to postwar recovery and national rebuilding (Ŭ Kim 2009). Park Chung Hee's military government likewise promoted "the *restraint* of consumption as vital to national economic growth" (Nelson 2006, 191, original emphasis), publicly criticizing luxurious lifestyles to establish a national preference for frugal modesty. Note that this public advocacy of frugality entailed ideological functions such as holding individual households accountable for poverty and rendering income disparity invisible; it didn't just serve a practical purpose like mobilizing capital for export-oriented growth. In this respect, the consumption discourses mediated national aspirations and a national identity during the eras of postwar restoration and economic development.

In a similar vein, *Receipts*, or what can be broadly called thrift media, should be seen as popular media's response to the growing precarity and economic polarization of millennials. While personal finance coaching became widespread alongside the financialization of the economy and the rise of mass investment culture in the new millennium, it is significant that Kim Saengmin underscored the importance of self-control, moderation, and prudence, far from promoting the risk-taking, entrepreneurial spirit of investor subjects. As I have elsewhere discussed, South Korea witnessed the emergence of "thrift media" in the mid 2010s that presented aggressive saving and extreme frugality as the solution to the financial

hardships of millennials (B. Kim 2022). *Receipts* exemplifies such a broader genre of thrift media, playing a crucial role in mediating the economic situations and sociocultural anxieties of its time.

While it was common for thrift media to take young women as a main target for intervention, which effectively masked structural gender inequality, I am more interested in how the financial advice offered in *Receipts* used an old trope of female irrationality and pathology produced within the long history of consumption discourses.[4] To reiterate, the trope of the consumerist woman was crucial to the ways in which the normativity of frugal consumption became a moral discourse. The consumption-related normativity was established by means of the gender binary of rational masculinity versus irrational femininity. Numerous images of pathologically consumerist women were found across a range of discursive sites, as a constitutive other reinforcing the normative ideal of frugal consumption. A number of studies about 1950s popular culture, for example, found that images of overindulgent women were prevalent in films, literature, and radio drama, many of which linked women's consumption to sexual promiscuity and moral decay (Baek et al. 2003; B. Kim 2017; C. Sim 2010). In the realm of post–Korean War popular culture, it was common to paint women's consumption as a threat to traditional womanhood and the Korean nation.

In a similar vein, the heightened sociocultural anxieties of the 1970s and 1980s, triggered by rapid growth and unprecedented social mobility, were once again transposed to female consumers. Middle-class housewives often became a target for criticisms of excessive consumption, which was perceived as counter to the national interest (Abelmann 2002; Kendall 2002). *Pokpuin*, or "Mrs. Speculation," was one of the most striking manifestations of the trope of consumerist woman and female pathologies, illustrating how upwardly mobile middle-class women came under fire from the 1970s through the 1990s. Hyperactive in investing as well as in shopping, *pokpuin* referred to a woman involved in house-flipping and real estate speculation. Condemned as shopaholics for property assets, they were accused of ruining the morale of society. *Pokpuin* was stereotyped as "[a woman] with several checkbooks in their purses, driving their luxurious cars to apartment lotteries" (quoted in Yang 2019, 53). Media published numerous morality tales featuring "affluent women and their debauched lifestyles," describing such women as "selfish, indulging in alien forms of leisure, starkly contrasting with 'traditional' ideals of female chastity and modesty" (Nelson 2000, 147). As Yang (2019) rightly points out, the *pokpuin* discourse contributed to turning attention away from

massive speculation by *chaebol*—family-owned conglomerates—and effectively policed women's economic activities.

The Trope of the Consumerist Woman in Contemporary Misogyny

Such stigmatizing images of female consumers, as a recurrent trope in public and popular discourses, continued to be revamped in the new millennium, often in a much more derogatory manner and in conjunction with online misogyny. Indeed, the trope of the pathological, consumerist woman was at the heart of online popular misogyny, manifesting itself in different offensive labels for women. Beginning in the mid-2000s, openly misogynistic discourses found their place and expanded in male-oriented online communities. During that time, young women's consumption became a particular target, leading to the coining of a new, strikingly sexist term: *toenjang-nyŏ* or "soybean paste girl."[5] First coined online in 2006, and since spread widely elsewhere, *toenjang-nyŏ* referred to overly materialistic women, specifically those with a blind affection for expensive luxury goods. *Toenjang-nyŏ* saw its visual caricature emerge early online, painted in a comic strip as "a young woman with long, dark hair wearing sunglasses in a revealing top and short skirt on a shopping spree with an (empty) Starbucks Coffee cup in her hand" (Song 2014, 443). Women labeled as *toenjang-nyŏ* "were criticized for their lavish consumption patterns and blind preference for high-end goods; they were seen as vainglorious and were disparaged for supposedly using men to pay for such goods" (Song 2014, 443). Underlying this misogynistic discourse, Song concludes, were increasing anxieties around class disparities under neoliberalization.

A decade after the coining of *toenjangnyŏ*, Korean society became even more saturated with palpable misogyny. Many feminist scholars point out that by the mid-2010s misogyny emerged as a major issue in popular culture and Korean society at large (S. Kim 2015; N. Yi 2016). The years 2015 and 2016 witnessed particularly disturbing and tragic events: a teenage boy joined ISIS after tweeting that he hated feminists, and a man with schizophrenia murdered a young woman in a public bathroom because, according to him, he was ignored by women (see Sohn's and Cho's chapters in this volume for these incidents that prompted post-2015 feminism and the antimisogyny movement).

The misogyny of the 2010s was not only appearing as femicide, death/rape threats, and revenge porn; it was deeply ingrained in every corner of society. What set the most recent form of misogyny apart from its precur-

sors was that it began to wage a battle against all "Korean women," not just against young women. The term *kimchi-nyŏ* or "Kimchi woman" was a case in point. As one of the countless misogynistic monikers that continued to emerge by building on the epithet of *toenjang-nyŏ*, *kimchi-nyŏ* picked up on the distinctively Korean food kimchi to describe the supposed nature of Korean women. The characteristics of those who were called *kimchi-nyŏ* were far-reaching and arbitrary: "feel[ing] no social responsibility, lack[ing] etiquette, [being] selfish, gold digging, addicted to cosmetic surgery, sexually promiscuous, hav[ing] no shame with regard to abortion, and so on" (quoted in J. Kim 2018, 158). The development from *toenjangnyŏ* to *kimchinyŏ* was indicative of the intensification of misogyny. While the *toenjangnyŏ* discourse attacked mostly twenty- and thirty-something women as vain, entitled, and irresponsible, the label *kimchinyŏ* was used as a blanket term to generalize about Korean women as a whole (S. Kim 2015). In other words, *kimchinyŏ* was used to represent "a racial trait for Korean women" (J. Kim 2018, 157). Despite their differences, the discourses of *toenjangnyŏ* and *kimchinyŏ* shared in common a rebuke of female consumers. Crucial to the *kimchinyŏ* discourse was the belief that selfish, lavishly spending Korean women took advantage of Korean men. As I will show in the following pages, such misogynistic baggage in consumption discourses is central to understanding *Receipts*, a show that meticulously reviewed the consumption behaviors of (mostly) women.

Comical Pathologizing of Women's Consumption in Kim Saengmin's Receipts

Given the surge of open and brazen misogynists and unapologetically sexist discourses defining women as parasitic consumers, *Receipts* took a much more progressive stance toward women's consumption and garnered an expansive female fan base. Kim Saengmin avoided *overtly* misogynistic claims when evaluating and diagnosing women's behaviors. While slamming lavish consumption and preaching the importance of frugal lifestyles, Kim retained a comical tone and avoided offensive statements. In this regard, his show set itself apart from the blatant forms of misogyny represented by the discourses of *toenjangnyŏ* and *kimchinyŏ*.

It might seem somewhat jarring to associate *Receipts* with sexism or misogyny at all, especially at a time when overt, outspoken hatred against women prevailed. Kim Saengmin was even given an award by a woman's organization in 2015 for his clean and respectful language toward media consumers (S. Yi 2015). However, it is not inconsequential that Kim Saeng-

min's advice had recourse to the trope of the consumerist woman shared by openly misogynistic discourses. Essentialized understandings of gender appeared at its core, which often operated as running jokes in the show. Ingrained in such jokes, everyday misogyny was expressed in much more subtle and nuanced ways.[6] Images of pathological, consumerist women—shared by the *toenjangnyŏ* and *kimchinyŏ* discourses—were ubiquitous in *Receipts*, pivotal to its comedic value. Recurring patterns across the audience's stories, which must have been carefully selected, included images of financially careless, irresponsible female spendthrifts who recklessly spent money without planning. While Kim's advice appeared gender-neutral in presenting frugality as crucial to *both* men and women, his evaluations still contributed to reproducing the negative image of pathological female consumers.

An episode that featured a female participant nicknamed "Cat Woman" (*K'aet umŏn*) illustrates the comical pathologizing of female consumers (episode 12). One of Cat Woman's receipts showed that she went online at 7:00 a.m. to buy cat toothpaste, which cost more than twenty dollars. Starting from this, Kim Saengmin used his detective skills to closely examine her lifestyle, not just her consumption decisions. Looking through her receipts, Kim Saengmin discovered that she ate a burger after 11:00 p.m. one night—which he attributed to her emotional insecurity—while purchasing diet food online. Likewise, she purchased expensive diet medicine the day after she had dined on pig trotters (*chokpal*). She went on to buy a bento box at a convenience store fifty minutes after paying for this diet medicine. Described as self-contradictory and failing to control herself, Cat Woman simultaneously became the butt of jokes and the object of criticisms for her supposedly unreasonable consumption patterns. However funny and entertaining this was meant to be, the Cat Woman episode nonetheless exemplifies the show's comical pathologizing of thirty-something unmarried women and their consumption patterns. Furthermore, the identification of women's consumption as "frenzied, mindless, antisocial, and out of control" (Negra and Tasker 2014, 18) tends to hold individuals accountable for their financial insecurity in a struggling economy.

Kim Saengmin tended to identify what he perceived as the irrational consumption patterns of female participants as attributable to women's *nature* while regarding men's overindulgence as passing mistakes. This undertone was clearly voiced in a press conference when Kim Saengmin stated that "Men usually overspend when they are under the influence. In contrast, women do not have a clear sense of what they want versus

what other people want" (T. Yi 2017). Underpinning such a statement is the idea that women are reckless trend followers; they do not even know what they want but keep following the herd. By pathologizing and naturalizing women's irrational consumption—instead of considering their contradictory behaviors as women's responses to gender discrimination—Kim's rejection of consumerism and the unequivocally misogynistic figurations of women as *toenjangnyŏ* and *kimchinyŏ* became two sides of the same coin.

In Defense of Consumerist Women: Kim Suk, the Icon of Popular Feminism, and Her Marginal Humor

Rather than Kim Saengmin's financial advice itself, it seems that the real pleasure fans derived from the podcast was from the role played by the two female hosts (T. Chŏng 2017; C. Yi 2018). Whereas Kim Saengmin was called a "passbook fairy (*t'ongjang yojŏng*)" in homage to his aggressive advocacy of savings accounts, Song Ŭni and Kim Suk assumed the role of "consumption fairies" (*sobi yojŏng*), often acting as spokespeople for female over-spenders. Challenging their male counterpart as a pedagogue who lambasted female consumers, they (Kim Suk in particular) defended and empathized with female participants. They pointed out what might have motivated these women's seemingly irrational acts of consumption and how they must surely have controlled themselves to some degree when things could have been much worse. The two women therefore often took what Kim Saengmin perceived as frenzied behavior and redressed it as a moderate choice. For example, with respect to the Cat Woman's spending seven dollars on "refrigerator pants" (*naengjanggo paji*)—thin, light slacks made from wrinkle-free polyester fabric, popular in the summer—Kim Saengmin suggested instead that she wear only underwear at home to beat the heat. Kim Suk said, "FYI, I have five of these." The Cat Woman episode was titled "Smacks of Kim Suk: The Cat Woman's Mysterious Receipts" (*Kim Suk sŭmel! K'aet umŏn ŭi misŭt'eri yŏngsujŭng*), and all three of the hosts, Kim Suk included, agreed that the Cat Woman's consumption pattern was similar to Kim Suk's.

Kim Suk played the primary role in defending female consumers. She equated herself with those who appeared particularly impulsive, irrational, and out of control. Her self-deprecating humor emphasizing her own wasteful lifestyle was one of her central gags, which often marked one of the most entertaining moments of each episode. For example, again refer-

encing the Cat Woman who enjoyed a variety of late-night foods and spent nearly 180 dollars on diet medicine the next morning, Kim Suk commented, "She's really like me. Do you know why she did this? She gobbles up pastries, pork, and chicken and then she regrets it. [And then she thinks] 'Okay. This is my last feast. I'll go on a diet tomorrow!'" When the Cat Woman's two-day spending spree was summarized by Kim Saeng-min and Song Ŭni, Kim Suk added, "I love her. I hope she becomes successful. [. . .] She must be a nice, honest person." Asked in what ways this was so, Kim Suk went on, "It's so human to eat this much with diet medicine next to you. How human she is!" Song Ŭni, close friends with Kim Suk for a long time, asked immediately, "You ended up not taking the diet medicine you had bought, when you were told to take it on an empty stomach, right?" Kim Suk quipped, "My stomach was never empty."

Scholars of gender and humor such as Helga Kotthoff hold that such self-deprecating humor, joking at their own expense, emphasizes "commonalities, equality, and group ties" (quoted in Lauzen 2014, 109), and prompts the audience "to laugh with, rather than at, the speaker" (Lauzen 2014, 109). Although these studies took up Western cases, their claims seem applicable to the context of Kim Suk's humor in *Receipts*. Because of her nonjudgmental, sympathetic, and witty responses, female audiences found it entertaining to hear fellow women's amusing life stories of being caught in self-contradictory consumption patterns, probably resonant with their own, since such contradictions are mostly caused by the unrealistic standards imposed on them in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, self-deprecating humor can operate as cultural critique (Gilbert 1997). In the case of *Receipts*, Kim Suk played a pivotal role in adding commentary about the highly gendered cultural values of consumption. Whereas consumption-for-empowerment rhetoric has functioned as one of the most predominant postfeminist tropes in the West, Kim Suk's self-deprecation as an irrational, excessive consumer should be seen as a form of what Joanne Gilbert calls "marginal humor" (1997, 317) performed by a historically marginalized group of people. The marginality Kim Suk performed, I argue, is that of the stereotyped woman as a pathological consumer, the bearer of social ills.

By considering her intertextual persona, we can better understand how Kim Suk's role as a consumption fairy in *Receipts* was a commentary on misogyny. Although Kim Suk never publicly defined herself as a feminist, in various venues she drew attention to the marginalization of women comedians. The instance that captured the most media attention was when she appeared in a real variety show on network television titled *Infinite*

Challenge (*Muhan tojŏn*)—a show that coined the very term "real variety" and was for years Koreans' favorite TV show. In January 2016, it aired a New Year's special where top television comics were invited to reflect on the prior year's trends in TV comedy. Thanks to the popularity she was gaining from *Keeping Secrets* and another television show she starred in afterward, Kim Suk was one of only two women comics among the total of fourteen starring in the episode. While other male comedians opined over genres and styles, Kim Suk diagnosed the year of 2015 as being completely dominated by men. She asserted, "Even cooking shows featured all male chefs. It was tough for women to survive. . . . I hope to see a better balance between men and women in 2016" (T. Kim 2016).

As mentioned earlier, her rebellious personality was brought into relief in *Keeping Secrets*—a podcast that was not regulated by official censorship bodies—through swearing, loud laughter, bawdy conversation, allusions to being a smoker, and so on. Her unapologetic transgression of femininity was unprecedented and was intertextually consistent. One television program she appeared in after the success of *Keeping Secrets* was a reality show about fictional marriages, *With You Season 2: The Greatest Love* (*Nim kwa hamkke*, JTBC, 2015–2017). In the program, which paired a male celebrity and a female celebrity as a virtually married couple, Kim Suk role-played a wife married to a male comedian. Whereas most programs about heterosexual dating and (fictional) marriage were criticized for reinforcing traditional gender roles and patriarchy (Han 2017), Kim Suk gained the nickname of "the Matriarch (*kamojang*)" by reversing the gender roles between her and her virtual husband (see Heo's chapter in this volume regarding an earlier example of transgressed gender roles in a married heterosexual couple on a TV comedy series).

In the show, in which celebrity cast members were required to act as if their marriages were real, Kim Suk announced that their marriage was contractual, making it clear that it was being staged. In addition to breaking from the script of heterosexual romantic love, she also proclaimed that she wanted a docile, obedient househusband who was talented at domestic labor. She performed "masculine" roles such as giving her effeminate husband an allowance, helping him put on his seat belt in the car, and dominating date activities. Moreover, she evidently oppressed her husband on-screen by verbally putting him down and dictating that he should speak quietly, display a demure demeanor and modest countenance, and not wear provocative clothing. Through such reversals of their gender roles, Kim Suk effectively mirrored Korean patriarchy (M. Paek 2018; H. Sim 2016), thereby revealing how uncool it is (for the popular feminist

practice of mirroring, see chapters by Cho and Sohn in this volume). In this context, Kim Suk gained various nicknames, such as "the Matriarch," "God Sook" (*Kat-Suk*), and "Furio-Sook" (*P'yurio-Suk*) (the third nickname references Imperator Furiosa, a protagonist of the 2015 Hollywood film *Mad Max: Fury Road*). In a similar vein, one of this volume's contributors elsewhere described Kim Suk as a warrior carrying out feminist warfare in the misogynistic world of comedy entertainment (Sohn 2016, 52). Her mirroring of patriarchy and her intentional, tireless reversals of gender stereotypes therefore set her humor apart from what Western feminists have named "postfeminist humor." Whereas the latter "does not emphasize the gendered hierarchy . . . [but] focuses on gender differences" (Swink 2017, 17), Kim Suk's humor brought our attention back to the gendered hierarchy.

The years 2015 and 2016 heralded the intensification of misogyny, but simultaneously witnessed unprecedented strides in popular feminism (see Sohn's chapter on the feminism reboot). It is not surprising that Kim Suk as "the Matriarch" became a primary icon for popular feminism. This added complexity to the ways in which *Receipts* mediated gender. Kim Suk's established persona that "took on both femininity and masculinity, or unsettled both of them" (H. Sim 2016, 75), was as central to the show's well-received humor as Kim Saengmin's advice. By juxtaposing a male adviser and his didactic exhortations, on the one hand, against their violation by a female indulger who transgressed gender norms, on the other, *Receipts* made a case for what Banet-Weiser calls "the interlocution of feminism and misogyny in popular culture" (2018, 31).

Conclusion

At the height of his stardom, Kim Saengmin faced a sudden fall. In early 2018, South Korea's #MeToo movement took off, with a female prosecutor charging a senior Justice Ministry official of sexual harassment (Y. Kim 2018). With this rallying cry, the #MeToo movement surged, with numerous women coming forward. A number of high-profile men, including politicians, writers, and media personalities, were charged with rape and/or sexual misconduct. In April 2018, online news reported that Kim Saengmin had sexually assaulted two female staff members in 2008, based on a six-page testimony written by one of the two victims (Kim and O 2018). In response, Kim Saengmin released a public letter of apology and

dropped out of every show in which he was starring (P. Chʼoe 2018). This is how *Receipts* came to an abrupt end.

The termination of *Receipts* was in line with Kim Saengmin's quick removal by the entertainment industry, but it also struck a blow to Song Ŭni and Kim Suk, who had continuously endeavored to address the marginalization of women comedians. I believe the termination of *Receipts* and Kim Saengmin's elimination elsewhere was reparative, but at the same time I wonder if this quick fix took away an opportunity to reflect on a more mundane form of misogyny ingrained in *Receipts*. If we can think of *Receipts* in relation to the ongoing and intensifying misogyny of its time, as I have done in this chapter, it is not just because Kim Saengmin turned out to be a sexual culprit, but because his well-intended financial advice—which appeared to be gender-neutral—operated in keeping with the trope of the consumerist woman. His advice might have helped female listeners suffering from financial insecurity, but it simultaneously harnessed the image of pathological female consumers that was deeply entrenched in South Korea's regime of representations and affective economies of misogyny. In other words, *Receipts* shared with historical and popular misogyny the trope of extravagant, vainglorious women, although it was expressed not in hateful/punitive ways but in corrective/remedial ways. If we fail to understand the linkage between such benevolent economic guidance and the wider logic of sexist discourses, everyday misogyny will not be contested.

Instead of challenging the trope directly, Kim Suk's marginal humor, which performed the pathological, consumerist woman, made the sexist stigma more apparent, rather than rendering it invisible. I have shown how Kim Suk shamelessly disclosed her indulgent lifestyle in her defense of female consumers and their seemingly irrational acts. Such self-disclosure should be seen as her enactment of gender nonconformity and as a form of marginal humor that made visible how female consumers were stigmatized. Her self-deprecating humor signaled a performance of marginality, a marginality historically lived out by pathologized female consumers. In this sense, *Kim Saengmin's Receipts* was a cultural text of subtle, inferential misogyny entwined with a commentary on misogyny. A female pathology, in the form of the consumerist woman, was simultaneously harnessed and contested in *Receipts*, making a strong case for the interlocution between misogyny and popular feminism.

NOTES

1. In the Podbbang app, the ranking charts are viewable in real-time, daily, and weekly updates.

2. All translations from Korean are mine.

3. As feminist scholars have shown, normativity of economic subjects (e.g., the rational economic subject) and practices (e.g., the financial market) was established by means of a gender binary (Goede 2005; Ho 2017; Joseph 2013).

4. My discussion of the trope of the consumerist woman is inspired by Miranda Joseph (2013), who points out that financial discourses in the United States resuscitate a long-standing binary opposition that associates women/femininity with emotion and men/masculinity with reason.

5. *Nyŏ* is a feminine suffix, and *toenjang* refers to the paste form of fermented soybean, a staple Korean food and a symbol for Koreanness; soybean paste soup is still one of Koreans' favorite daily meals (Song 2014). The origin of this term is largely unknown. I had conducted online research in 2007 about why *toenjang* was used in attacking womens' extravagance. The most plausible explanation to me was its connection with an earlier misogynistic backlash against feminist movements. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when feminist activism became prominent around college campuses, online haters would retort that no matter what Western feminist theories those feminists endorsed now, they would eventually marry Korean men and end up cooking *toenjang* soup for their husbands at home. I have been unable to retrieve the source of those remarks, but it is telling that the criticism against supposedly selfish and lavish female consumers borrowed its trope from criticism against feminists. This is in tune with Kim Sua's (2015) observation that online misogyny of the mid-2000s, *toenjang-nyŏ* discourses being its prime example, built and expanded on the hate against feminists and women's organizations of the earlier era.

6. Misogyny, the hatred of women, manifests itself not only through extreme gender violence (e.g., rape and femicide), but also through pornographic images of women, devaluation of women's work, institutional discrimination against women, stereotyping of women, and so on. Exhibited willfully or involuntarily, misogyny is an embodied culture in male-dominant societies (Yi 2016, 163–64), representing the "broader implications of hatred and hostility toward women as a class by men as a class" (Rozee 1999, 946).

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6

Against Confinement

Degeneration, Mental Disability, and the Conditions of Nonviolence in *The Vegetarian*[1]

Eunjung Kim[2]

After dreaming of seeing the reflection of a face in a pool of blood, Yeong-hye stops eating meat.[3] *The Vegetarian* (*Chʼaesik chuŭija*) by Han Kang (2007) tells the violent story that unfolds over Yeong-hye's changes, which include ceasing to eat meat, have sex, and sleep. She experiences repeated nightmares, marital rape, physical violence, and a suicide attempt, which lead to her hospitalization and divorce. Settling into her new life alone but still having nightmares, she is visited by her brother-in-law, who asks her to be a model for his video art, which will feature her body painted with flowers. After forcing himself on her, he learns that Yeong-hye feels sexual only because of the flowers. Soon he returns to her with flowers painted on his body. Han Kang turns what could be a clichéd affair into something that Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye, perceives as "queer and bereft" (*kimyo hago hwangnyang han*) and not sexual, "a desperate bodily struggle to escape from the human species" (Han 2007, 218). After watching video footage of their sexual intercourse, In-hye has them forcibly taken to a mental hospital.[4] Later Yeong-hye's doctor recommends outpatient care, but In-hye fears that Yeong-hye will relapse; she decides to send Yeong-hye to a remote institution, even though she knows that it is her hatred of Yeong-hye that led to this decision. Yeong-hye acquiesces—"the hospital is comfortable" (173). Arriving at the institution, where "homeless people and patients with intellectual disabilities" are also confined, Yeong-hye looks at the tall zelkova trees of early winter and senses the kinship she is about

to form with them: "Trees in the world are all like siblings" (175). After being found in the rainy woodlands near the institution in spring, Yeong-hye believes she is no longer an animal and starts to barely eat at all. She pleads in vain with her sister to be released from the institution; instead, she is subject to force-feeding and sedation. She begins to gradually turn into a tree, not just in her mind, but quite literally: she is becoming a vegetative human (*singmul in'gan*) as she falls into a critical condition and is carried out of the institution in an ambulance, with In-hye accompanying her and gazing at the summer trees in green flames.

Plot summaries of a text, popular discourses on its main theme, and its critical analyses are themselves creative processes, serving as mediations that construct specific meanings of a text. They distill certain political implications, while eliminating others. I have opened this essay with my own summary of the novel in a way that highlights Yeong-hye's struggles with mental experiences, her becoming desireless, her traumatization by domestic and sexual violence, and her escape attempt. The summary hints at the possibility of her life outside the institution, her asexuality as a human being and sexuality as a plant being, her hospitalization in response to her sexual transgression, and In-hye's awareness of the violence of institutionalization. It also implies Yeong-hye's status as a woman with mental disability who is connected to other disabled and marginalized people who have been removed from their communities and confined in institutions, and to other people living in a vegetative state.

In English and Korean critical scholarship, three interrelated theoretical approaches to this famous novel have emerged: first, an ecofeminist reading of the novel's resistance to patriarchal violence and meat-eating, in which vegetal existence is interpreted as an ethics of antiviolence; second, a posthumanist and new materialist critique of anthropocentrism, speciesism, and ecological destruction; and third, an assessment of the efficacy of political resistance by a "madwoman" in literary texts.[5] These rich explorations of the novel most often center on gender or the human as a category of analysis through which violence and resistance become legible, while situating certain experiences in the novel in metaphorical and symbolic dimensions.[6]

While scholars and critics have paid attention to the text's feminist theme since its publication, the book has largely avoided the kind of anti-feminist backlash that other texts, such as *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (*82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng*, Cho Nam-joo, 2016), have received in South Korea.[7] Despite the different degrees of association with feminism in popular readings of *The Vegetarian* and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*, both novels

feature women with mental illnesses who undergo psychiatric treatments, but with opposite outcomes. Yet both texts have rarely been read as representing mentally disabled women (*chŏngsin changae yŏsŏng*), evincing how people with disabilities are considered a specific minority group excluded from the realm of cultural representation.[8]

To explore the nodes for analysis I highlighted in the summary, rather than approaching them as questions about humanity and modernity in a universal and ontological sense,[9] this essay situates *The Vegetarian* within the minority politics of South Korea. I start from the unusual place for a literary analysis of sociological indicators—specifically, an ultralow fertility rate, livestock epidemics, and a high suicide rate. In the name of improving the national image and sustainability, the rhetoric of national crises formed around these indicators imagines normatively gendered citizens—with specific desires and responsibilities—as a solution and justifies social surveillance of nonconforming subjects through the desire-making apparatuses that promote reproduction, meat consumption, and suicide prevention. I read *The Vegetarian* as a text not only about degeneration as a cause, and a result, of violence, but also about mental disability, nonnormative desire, and desirelessness, which are connected to the history of state-enforced institutionalization and of violence against disabled people, along with other minoritized populations. Ableist violence is made illegible when gender is employed as a singular lens, because "people with mental disability" are erroneously regarded as "dangerous men posing threats" to "(nondisabled) women," especially after the 2016 murder of a woman near Gangnam Station by a man with a diagnosis of mental illness.

How is the legibility of violence also tied up with species-specific scripts of "compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness" as conditions of being human (Kafer 2013), as well as gendered scripts of "compulsory sexuality," consumption, and reproduction (Gupta 2015)? What do Yeonghye's mental disability and the queerness of her nonnormative desire and desirelessness reveal about gender or the human as analytics through which violence and resistance are named and understood in South Korean society? When does humanity's conceptual coherence in opposition to animality and vegetality fall apart in the text? How are women, children, and nonhuman animals in the text variously situated in relation to violence against them and against sexual transgression, and in relation to pathologized desire and desirelessness? Addressing these questions requires being open to multiple interpretive possibilities and connecting them with corporeal experiences situated within political, legal, and his-

torical contexts. To imagine a different feminist politics is to engage gender, disability, sexuality, desire, and consumption simultaneously, beyond the public representations of bifurcated gender struggles or a false competition between human interests and nonhuman animal suffering in South Korean society.

Desire and Growing Forever

As the country with the lowest total fertility rate in the world (Lee and Botto 2021), South Korea's rate fell from 4.53 in 1970 to 1.19 in 2008 and to 0.84 in 2020 (T'onggyech'ŏng 2021). Various policies to increase childbirths have been implemented since 2006, including support for infertility treatment for married couples, childbirth grants and leave, tax reductions, a childcare allowance, and housing support for newlyweds and households with multiple children.[10] Some local precinct offices hosted coupling events for employed men and women under the age of forty to facilitate marriage. As a way to manage reproduction, care labor, and welfare, encouraging heterosexual marriage has frequently been a political strategy during times of national crisis, including the economic crisis of 1997 (J. Song 2009; consult Yoon Heo's chapter in this volume for the impact of low fertility on reshaping masculinity). Social assistance to women has been geared toward protecting maternity, excluding women who are older, divorced, or single, who are not seen as having a clear reproductive role (J. Song 2009, 2014).

Slogans from the past (1962–1996) urging birth suppression, such as "Even Two Are Too Many" (*tul to mant'a*) and "From Three on Up, It Gets Shameful" (*set put'ŏ nŭn pukkŭrŏp sŭmnida*), have been replaced with slogans promoting birth, such as "One Is Lonely" (*hana nŭn oerop sŭmnida*).[11] In an effort to raise awareness of the crisis, in 2016 the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs published a "fertility map" on its website showing the number of women between twenty and forty-four years of age by district, color-coded in shades of pink, with the following stated aim: "In order to respond to the crisis of population decrease due to low fertility rate, this map informs the citizens of the severity of the low birth problem according to region and encourages collective participation to overcome low birth."[12] This data visualization generated public outrage, as it framed women as being solely responsible for reproduction and as resources that need to be tracked, drawing a connection between women and livestock. One online commentator called it a "cattle barn map" (Y.

Chŏng 2016). This critical metaphor captures the reductive framing of women whose value is socially determined as tools of reproduction and thus as exploitable resources.

Campaigns to increase births have sometimes employed negative rhetoric concerning having no children or only one child. In 2014, the Korean Productivity Center awarded a prize to a poster featuring the slogan "One Is Lacking" (*hana nŭn pujok hamnida*) alongside a short text: "Because an only child doesn't have any siblings, the only child has a slower social skill and overall human development. Because they get everything they want in their homes, they are likely to become self-centered" (H. Chŏng 2015). The poster juxtaposed an image of a browned and withered one-seed-leaf plant (a monocot) with an image of a green and flourishing two-seed-leaf plant (a dicot). The negativity is framed by the possibility of disability implied in the language of developmental delay. The use of ableist ideology that promotes developmental normalcy as inherently superior pathologizes children without siblings and alienates many families, especially those that include a child with a developmental disability. It recognizes no possibility of extended family or community connections for children beyond the nuclear family and assumes that the fear of developmental delay and personality problems would motivate people to give birth to more than one child.

Even though criticism of the fertility map is warranted, there is another layer of rhetorical othering embedded in the invocation of non-human animals to condemn the treatment of women as resources in the metaphor "the cattle barn map." It assumes that domesticated animals exist for human consumption and reflects how their management is regarded as an unproblematic site. Similarly, the use of a comparison between plant species to valorize one form of family and pathologize others illustrates our tendency to employ species-crossing metaphors in our meaning-making endeavors, a tendency that relies on a fixed hierarchy among species. This very hierarchy of species and of nonnormative bodyminds enables violence and determines how violence becomes legible and illegible. Species hierarchy and the desensitization to violence against those of lower rank are the ones that utterly collapse in Yeong-hye's dream world in *The Vegetarian*.

Critics of policies that provide incentives for childbearing point out the need to shift our attention to the structural causes of low fertility rate: unemployment, insufficient childcare, workplace discrimination, a competitive education system, and poverty in general (S. Chung 2018). They suggest structural changes to promote gender equality, reduce the income

gap, and expand social services for housing, parental leave, and childcare, while eliminating workplace discrimination and harassment. Yet it is assumed that once structural and external barriers are eliminated, people would choose to have more children. If the unquestioned need is to augment the number of births, a decrease in population is something that has to be prevented rather than prepared for.

Meanwhile, the millennials of South Korea have been characterized as the 3-*P'o* (3-relinquishments), 5-*P'o*, or 7-*P'o* generation, because they have given up three, five, or seven things in their lives: dating, marriage, reproduction, careers, housing, hope, and social relationships. Another term, *N-P'o* generation, refers to those who may have to give up an unspecified number (*n*) of things (Seo, 2019, 57). Such disengagement from what are viewed as the universal activities of adult life might itself not be assumed to preclude the desire for sex or marriage, but it provides a sense of distance that people experience from the normative path regardless of their interest or volition. Meanwhile people who are seen as disinterested in coupling are described with the terms "dried-fish woman" (*kŏnŏmul-nyŏ*) and "herbivore man" (*ch'osik-nam*).[13] Rather than describing anyone's actual diet, these terms reflect the tendency to figure disinterest in heterosexual dating in terms of food, i.e., chewing rubbery dried seafood is seen as "unfeminine" or eating vegetables as "unmasculine." At a higher degree of disinterest rather than abstinence—a desireless or asexual and nonromantic orientation—"man who fasts" (*chŏlsik-nam*) emerged as a cause of the low fertility rate, accompanied by increasing numbers of unmarried people below age fifty (Yŏm 2019). The link between an appetite for food and an increased sexual drive, as well as the association between hunger and libido, has been a persistent theme in sexology, the scientific study of sexuality, and in popular culture, which also sexualizes food itself, especially meat.[14] When low desire or desirelessness is identified as a threat to biological and social reproduction, how does a capitalist nation-state work to produce actions in citizens' bodies? And more importantly, what are the consequences of these interventions?

With these troubled desires in sexual realms being expressed via dietary metaphors, broadcasting one's eating on live social media (*mŏkpang*) and network television shows has emerged as a major trend in entertainment. Watching someone eating as a pleasurable activity is centered on the universalized desirability of meat, expressed in axioms such as "Meat is always right" (*kogi nŭn ŏnjena olt'a*) and "Meat is the truth" (*kogi nŭn chilli ta*).[15] The emphasis in the media on the appeal of meat-eating can paradoxically be contextualized in recurring outbreaks of

infectious diseases and the ensuing drop in meat consumption that poses a threat to the farming industry. Following major outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (2010), avian influenza (2016–2017), and African swine flu (2019), mass destructions of infected, exposed, and susceptible animals, including chickens, ducks, pigs, and cows, were carried out.[16] Massive culling has become a regular occurrence due to the increase in density of livestock and its proximity to wild animals. Consequences of mass culling that started to emerge include suicide and posttraumatic stress disorder of workers and the environmental pollution of burial sites (Park, Chun, and Joo 2020; Joo 2020). Meanwhile eating meat is persistently promoted by the media as not only safe but also helpful to farmers who are struggling due to outbreaks.

Furthermore, many television shows frequently feature meat consumption and give out packaged meat as prizes, often directly increasing the availability and popularity of particular meat dishes. Cows and pigs bred and raised in South Korea are branded as providing the highest-quality meat. Gifts of packaged meat are highly desired and often exchanged during holidays, including *Ch'usŏk* (Full Moon Harvest Festival) and *Sŏlnal* (Lunar New Year's Day), and family holiday meals feature various kinds of meat-incorporating dishes. Loving and consuming Korean meat is considered not only a cultural but a patriotic desire. This universalization of meat love assumes and reinforces the idea of the public as a mono-ethnic community with shared dietary preferences. Given the strong emphasis on collectivity in the Korean ethos, not eating meat or otherwise requesting accommodations at the dinner table, whether in a restaurant or at home, is considered an act of "disrupting harmony" (Yoo and Yoon 2015). Not consuming meat can be met with pushback and be perceived as a refusal to belong to a community. Vegetarians, especially those concerned with cruelty to animals, are often perceived as eccentric, overly sensitive, and politically correct purists. In many cases, this perception leads to social prejudice and ostracization, especially in military or school settings. Meals provided at schools and on military bases do not consistently include vegetarian options, an omission that has led vegetarians to pursue legal measures (H. Kim 2019, 2020).

Gaining approval for one's nonnormative dietary preference depends heavily on a popularized rhetorical framework, whether it be an emphasis on health or a religious practice. Attention paid by Western culinary celebrities to the food in Korean Buddhist temples has also helped the global promotion of temple food as part of traditional Korean culture connected to health and well-being. Nevertheless, the need for promotion of

meat-eating also reveals the fragility of the desire for meat, which is entangled with fear of animal diseases and with the moral ambivalence arising from the knowledge of animal suffering (Kang 2018). Vegetarian and vegan diets have been gaining visibility, and the number of vegan restaurants and commercial products has increased. The animal rights consciousness and the problems of factory farming and disease outbreaks also help increase the visibility of vegetarian diet.

Another global ranking that contributes to the sense of national crisis is the annual suicide rate. In the recent decade (2009–2019), South Korea's suicide rates (age-standardized to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] population for comparison) ranged from a high of 35.3 per 100,000 in 2009 to a low of 23.8 in 2017 (OECD 2022). Because South Korea's suicide rate ranks first or second for the last sixteen years among the member countries of the OECD, since 2004 the government has established plans to prevent suicide, improve its international reputation, and reduce economic losses.[17] The Moon Jae-in government (2017–2022) included suicide prevention in its priority list, and in 2018 drafted the Suicide Prevention National Action Plan (*Chasal yebang kukka haengdong kyehoek*) (Kwan'gye puchŏ haptong 2018). This plan assesses the suicide crisis in terms of its costs: an expected loss of income of 6.5 trillion KRW, the suffering of families, and a poor national image, as reflected in the term "the Suicide Republic" (*chasal konghwaguk*). The plan repeatedly mentions the goal of relegating the national disgrace of this ranking to the past. It even states, "A high suicide rate negatively affects the image of the nation and the citizens' understanding of our society. Together with high road fatalities and occupational fatalities, a high suicide rate—one much higher than the OECD average, does not match national prestige" (*kukkyŏk*) (Kwan'gye puchŏ haptong 2018, 6).

This focus on the international ranking and shame also appears in rhetoric that targets the public, including individuals who might be contemplating suicide. A public announcement posted on a subway train urges, "Don't give up. 80% of suicides are due to depression." Next to it, a gray-scale global map with the Korean peninsula in color is marked "OECD suicide rate No. 1 Republic of Korea" (I. Song 2012, 27). Another poster in the campaign encourages bus riders, "Let's do it together, suicide prevention!" (26). The word "suicide" (*chasal*) is repeatedly printed at various angles, creating an effect of motion that reverses the syllables until it eventually turns into the words "let's live" (*salja*). Seoul's municipal efforts to prevent suicide included an emotional appeal. Inspirational phrases, such as "The happiest moment is yet to come," "This too shall pass," and

"Life is worth living," were displayed on the railings of Mapo Bridge—once also known colloquially as the "Suicide Bridge," but officially rebranded the Bridge of Life. These phrases were supposed to deliver a sense of hope that would evoke the desire and will to live. Despite these efforts, the bridge's fame attracted more people who had decided to commit suicide, actually increasing the number of deaths at the site, and the displays were removed in 2019 (S. Yi 2019).

If the nation-state cannot rely on the once-thought-to-be-natural desire for reproduction and self-preservation, what kind of governmentality emerges and what kind of violence does it enact? The Act on the Prevention of Suicide and the Creation of the Culture of Respect for Life (2012) requires the government to create a surveillance system to keep track of people who are at risk of, or have attempted, suicide (Choi and Choi 2014, 161). What does it mean to reject suicide and to respect one's own life with the goal of improving the nation's status, when the nation views some people as not belonging in its public space?

Transnational contexts might illuminate how this nationalist desire for economic growth constrains possibilities for support of people with different desires and bodyminds. Anthropologist Karen Nakamura observes the notion of "a life of descent" in a community of people with mental illness in northern Japan called Bethel (2013, 111). One of its core principles is to "go from a 'life of ascent' to a 'life of descent.'" This is to accept that things "will almost certainly get worse" (107, 154). Nakamura explains that this philosophy is "well suited to post-bubble Japan," where economic growth and prosperity are no longer possible because of the lack of natural resources and the declining birth rate, "well below the self-sustaining rate for a country" (111). In contrast to the dominant biomedical model, which is expert-driven, Bethel community's goal is not to determine the root cause of the illness and cure it, but to negotiate the problems and the particular needs that people have, to recover "interrupted lives" (154). Voluntary hospitalizations for psychiatric care and community integration coexist through peer support and "self-directed research" (154). Japan's nationwide response, by contrast, is geared toward reversing the trend of population decrease. The government has promoted nuclear family ideals through campaigns such as the "Hunky Father" (*ikumen*) project to increase paternal involvement in childcare through attractive images of father-child relationship coexisting with masculinity (Robson 2018).

When the nation-state works to generate and increase its citizens' desire for what it views as essential to its development and growth, what kind of subversive power might desireless subjects hold? While inviting

citizens to monitor their desire and to act on it, and then intervening by pathologizing and punishing desireless subjects, society separates its fate from that of its constituents, denying symbolic and physical space to those who seek to exist without being blamed for threatening national sustainability. If the need for population growth and suicide prevention were not tied up with economic growth, if the prospect of decline was not treated as a state of emergency that needed to be reversed but as something to be expected, whose knowledge and what kinds of knowledge are needed to prepare for the future? Meanwhile, whose future is guaranteed by the liberal capitalist state and private actors? These questions are critical to understanding the violence waged against Yeong-hye's vegetarian, asexual, and suicidal existence in *The Vegetarian*.

Ianna Hawkins Owen (2020) searches for these kinds of knowledge through his exploration of the queerness of asexuality and its liberatory potential through challenging its implicit whiteness in the US context. Owen focuses on a former leader of the Black Panther Party, Ericka Huggins, who was imprisoned in solitary confinement, where she found herself in a "kind of stillness" through which she felt longing for freedom and, also, a connection to asexual feeling. What would "modes of relating and translations of feeling [that] are invented by incarcerated people" teach us about a life in multiple forms of confinement (Owen 2020, n.p.)? What would "modes [that] come into sharper focus, as asexual frames of connection, kinship, and survival," offer for imagining a future without violence (n.p.)? Owen argues that asexuality "lend[s] its language of desire to think about freedom," desire as "something one can be oriented toward, or away from" (n.p.). This crucial insight, merging asexuality with the prison-abolitionist thought of freedom from confinement (and any kind of coercion), provides an important ground for solidarity against confinement between Black people with and without disabilities, and marginalized people with and without disabilities, and refugees who are confined in various types of institutions in South Korea. Following Owen's pursuit of these modes of being and longing for freedom from confinement and violence, in the next section I return to *The Vegetarian*. In a de-animalizing—that is de-humanizing—life that is shaped by violence and that coexists with violence in medical confinement, Yeong-hye's degeneration occurs in contrast to the seasons' progression from winter, when she is moved to the institution, to summer, when plants' lives flourish. Yeong-hye's degeneration can be read as her life moving toward stillness by shedding her abilities and withering in a society in which growth is no longer feasible but remains an unquestioned value.

Degeneration and Nonviolence

In a passionless yet compatible marriage, Yeong-hye's husband explains that they have postponed having a child until they can afford a house. When he judges that it is about time for him to become a father after they move to a high-rise apartment complex, he witnesses Yeong-hye suddenly throwing away all the meat in the apartment. Her husband describes this change as selfish, irrational, and stubborn (Han 2007, 20–21). In the absence of any socially acceptable explanation for adopting a vegetarian diet, such as health or religion, her not cooking or eating meat is considered a nonconforming behavior for which her sister and parents must apologize and must vow to intervene, as if a husband has a claim on his wife's birth family to make amends for any supposed marital failures. The heteronormative class-based temporal script for reproduction serves as a background for Yeong-hye's refusal to wear restricting garments, to cook and eat dead animal flesh, and to have sex with her husband. It is not that Yeong-hye's changes set off violent reactions automatically; rather, they reveal the forces that already exist in the form of compulsory desires and the willingness to participate in those activities. In addition to social alienation, punitive violence against her desireless body is perpetrated by all of the family members except children: not just by her husband, father, and brother-in-law, but also by her mother and sister. "Desirelessness" here does not mean that Yeong-hye has no desire at all, but instead refers to the absence of normative desires at the normative levels that constitute the human in ableist understanding—namely, the desires to eat, to have sex, and to sleep—to highlight the degree to which their absence registers as disability and inability and can deny someone the status of being human.

Yeong-hye is a central figure in absentia despite her physical presence throughout the novel. Her monologues, printed in italics, are scattered within the husband's first-person narration of the events that unfold in the first chapter. These monologues do not center on the stories of her traumas caused by others; rather, they focus on her embodied sense of her own cruelty and on the lives that she has consumed. Readers who are privy to her inner narratives may feel intimately connected to her through her monologues that orient to the desire for nonviolence.[18] Yet those monologues contrast with the coherent voice of the husband and the interiority of the brother-in-law and the sister. The patriarchal, misogynist, and ableist othering and sexual exoticization in these unbalanced narratives create distance between Yeong-hye and other characters, framing her as an unknowable figure. Like other female figures in Han's earlier texts,

Yeong-hye is a "vanished other who left the track of everyday life" and is rendered unintelligible to others (Hŏ 2007, 239).

Yeong-hye's monologues echo the monologues of the girl in Ch'oe Yun's "There a Petal Silently Falls" (*Chŏgi sori ŏpsi hanjŏm kkonnip i chigo*, 1988), who survives the 1980 massacre in Gwangju but goes missing, never appearing to those who are searching for her.[19] In Ch'oe Yun's story, when the girl's mother is shot by the military, the girl is most traumatized by her own force, which she used to free herself from her mother's grip. Like Yeong-hye, the girl communicates with readers only in her internal narratives and is also connected to plants in the wild, as she survives by eating the flowers and fruits she finds. When Yeong-hye's domesticated and later institutionalized life is no longer livable, she escapes to the forest, continuing the association between women's madness and the wild in the Korean literary imagination. Unlike the girl who escapes "the gray building" in which she was "locked with other girls" her age and is never found (Ch'oe 1988, 768), Yeong-hye is discovered standing still like a tree in the rainy forest and is brought back into the institution. In both texts, disembodied faces that are simultaneously strange and familiar enact violence and experience pain. The girl in "There a Petal" sees a face reflected in the window: "The face I have never seen before, staring at me, as if it is observing me from the other side of the window" (765). Similarly, Yeong-hye narrates, "It was so vivid. The texture of raw meat in between my teeth. My face, my eyes. It was the face I have never seen before, but it was my face. No, the opposite. It was the face I saw countless times, but it wasn't my face" (Han 2007, 19).

The parallels between the two figures go beyond those of women who are traumatized and haunted by their experiences. Given that Han Kang wrote about the Gwangju massacre in *Sonyŏn i onda* (Han 2014; translated as *Human Acts: A Novel*, 2016), the missing girl's dissociated self—haunted by her own capacity for violence—resonates with Yeong-hye. Although *The Vegetarian* makes no specific mention of Gwangju, Yeong-hye recalls a scene in her dream of a massacre in which "someone kills someone countless times" (Han 2007, 36). Two figures living under the description of madness—one roaming in wilderness after escaping private and institutional confinements, the other confined within an institution—overlap in their worst fears about their own capability to commit violence in the midst of the mass killings of human and nonhuman animals. Yeong-hye feels that her body is stuffed with all the lives that she has consumed in a way parallel to how the girl in "There a Petal" feels stuffed with blue birds that enter her body whenever she is assaulted. For Yeong-hye, this feeling

of being stuffed is later undone when she spews blood from her mouth and through the tube inserted into her nose by her doctor for force-feeding. These memories of violent penetration of one's own body become the epistemological ground for nonviolence. The formal and ontological parallel drawn between the two texts illustrates that the state's political violence and the domestic and social violence that eliminates space for mentally disabled people are interconnected.

Filled with the sensory images of her recurring dreams, Yeong-hye's monologues tell the stories of two events. First, when her husband is rushing her to prepare a meal, she gets a small wound on her finger while cutting a frozen piece of meat. The taste of her own blood released by her act of cutting flesh blurs the distinction between the subject exerting force and its object. She says, "When I lifted my index finger, a red drop of blood blossomed fast. Round. Rounder. When I put the finger in my mouth, I felt peaceful. With its bright red color, strangely it was as if the rusty sweet taste was calming me down" (Han 2007, 26). Her husband yells at her when he finds the broken tip of the knife in the piece of meat in his mouth, angry that it could have killed him. But his abuse no longer invokes anxiety, which she used to feel as heat behind her neck. With a sense of calmness, she is chilled by her husband's anger and fear of his own death, and perhaps by his simultaneous lack of awareness of the violence involved in eating a dead animal. This thermal shift in her body signals her somatic, epistemological transformation: no longer dominated by the force of his patriarchal violence, she is overwhelmed by the call of nonviolence toward nonhuman beings that she feels in her dream.

This merging of the subject and the object also appears in her dream in which she cannot remember if she killed a person or was the person who was killed, recalling only the feeling of killing or being killed. As if she is "locked behind the door without a handle," she is forced to experience her world in confinement. She wonders, "Did I just realize that I was here from the beginning? Dark. Everything is blended in darkness" (Han 2007, 37). The darkness is a place of awareness, a counter-enlightenment of sorts, contrasted with the social space filled with bright light, "swarming" children, the delicious smell of cooking meat, and singing, laughing sound outside in the forest (19). Occupying a liminal space, with bloody mouth, hands, and clothes, she is hiding behind a tree in between the dark forest and the bright open space, not able to walk out. Seeing a face reflected in the pool of blood while experiencing the vivid and uncanny feeling of chewing raw meat leads her to stop eating meat and to stop sleeping, so that the dream will not return.

The second story told in Yeong-hye's monologue is about an incident in her childhood when she was bitten by a dog. Her father believes that to heal from a dog bite one needs to eat the dog; he tortures the dog before slaughtering it, cooks the flesh, and hosts a feast.[20] She recalls how she "felt nothing but fine," even though the image of the eyes of the suffering dog were projected onto what she was eating (Han 2007, 53). Years later she embodies the opposite of this apathy, and the transformation compels her to break her familial ties.

Yeong-hye tells of her feelings of hunger, her capacity to kill other animals, and the salivation in her mouth. Like the story of her childhood, Yeong-hye's narrations focus on her fear and on the pain of reckoning with her own violence and cruelty, which she embodies through her desire. Yeong-hye's remark to her sister, who tries to feed her, worrying that she might die—". . . Why can't I die?" (Han 2007, 191)—is formed as a question and located on the opposite side of the claims of "I exist" or "I will live" that are considered agentic (Owen 2018, 72).[21] Yet this passivity registers as the irrevocable transformation, the state of no longer desiring to continue living as a human being.

From these stories it is easy to simplify the origin of violence in Yeong-hye's life: their father, the patriarch. Yet the novel hints at how the father's violence was nurtured in the geopolitical and historical specificity of South Korea. He was deployed in the Vietnam War and rewarded for killing seven Viet Cong soldiers, crucially connecting domestic violence to state violence and imperialist US–South Korea relations. The stories from Yeong-hye's monologues are not to be understood as revealing one origin for her change, as would commonly serve as a path to healing in a psychoanalytic narrative. Yeong-hye's changes depend on individual differences and interiority as much as on violence, trauma, constriction, and inherited collective trauma by external forces. Her species orientation toward the nonhuman is not triggered by a singular event with an onset and an end, but rather occurs over time as she undergoes changes, each met with more coercion and confinement. Her spiritual-corporeal transformation, which the critic Hŏ Yunjin calls a "'regressive evolution' from human to nonhuman" (Hŏ 2007, 232), and the loss of abilities mark her slow progression toward nonviolence set in motion by her perception of her own capacity to inflict violence and by confined existence without freedom. Her departure from being human and being animal is the only nonviolent way of existing that is open to her.

Her family intervenes in response to her change in diet at the family meal, when her father slaps her and forces a piece of meat into her

mouth—in the name of her health—while others are watching and urging her to comply. To stop the violence without committing violence against others, she hurts herself in the act of symbolically killing her human self and seeking to untie herself from her family. As much as her cutting her wrist is an act of violence against the force of her father—especially in the sight of the children, who burst into tears—the effect of her self-harm illustrates the point made by Judith Butler about nonviolence being incomplete: "Nonviolence is an ideal that cannot always be fully honored in practice. To the degree that those who practice nonviolent resistance put their body in the way of an external power, they make physical contact, presenting a force against force in the process" (Butler 2020, 23). Later at the institution, when she is about to be injected with a sedative, Yeong-hye bites the nurse's arm.

With a nod to Hŏ Yunjin's observation about "regressive evolution," but without reframing Yeong-hye's regression as an evolution in which the notion of progress is embedded, I think of the process of becoming non-human as a degeneration that needs to be attended to in connection with the life in descent. But the notion of degeneration comes with a pernicious history, especially in the contexts of Western science. As a precursor to eugenics, the idea of racial degeneration emerged from the detrimental racist formulation of the need for racial "improvement" in Western Europe. Some of the ideas that undergirded this scientific racism in the late nineteenth century strikingly resemble the ways that Yeong-hye's changes are perceived by her communities. The French ethnologist Arthur de Gobineau, who asserted the superiority of the white race, explained, "The word *degenerate*, when applied to a people, means . . . that the people has [*sic*] no longer the same intrinsic value as it had before" (1915 [1853], 25). Gobineau's articulation of degeneration predates eugenics, and his ideas reflect a general tendency to devalue disability, non-whiteness, and other differences constructed as "deviant."

One of the main motifs of the novel and the title of the second part, Yeong-hye's "Mongolian spot," bears the racial classification of "Mongolian" beyond the reference to an ethnic group—collapsing peoples in Asia, Pacific Islanders, and indigenous peoples in North America into one category and racializing them as primitive and inferior to the white race.[22] Even if to most ethnic Koreans "Mongolian spot" hints at immaturity, as the birthmark that it refers to usually disappears after childhood, it nevertheless highlights Yeong-hye's Asian femininity and alludes to her infantilized feral innocence as a depoliticized natural primitivity of her plant ontology. "Mongolian" also bears the trace of the reference to people with

Down's syndrome, an intellectual disability that was historically racialized. Yet, from the perspective of degeneration, rather than disputing these connections, Yeong-hye's lasting birthmark connects her corporeally to disabled people, children, and plant beings, and moves the narrative away from the hierarchies and the singular trauma identified as the cause of her degeneration.

This movement transforms the notion of "the degenerate" into a process of degeneration into a "vegetative state" as a form of day-to-day living towards death without violence. It requires a space in which degenerating and withering bodies are witnessed and accompanied with care and respect. Degeneration can describe the ways that disengage from the incessant need to generate, produce, and grow under the capitalist system interlocking with ableism—which creates the need to remove degenerating bodies from the public. Attending to ways of honoring the presence of bodies that shrink, wither, and decline is a central element of social interdependence. Rather than being oriented toward a more evolved state of being, degeneration depicts a crossing, a transformation in which the value system is undone as the abilities that characterize a species are shed. Leaving the network of social recognition of a species by becoming disabled proves to be dangerous but crucial. In particular, non-membership in a species and race has authorized widespread violence in the Capitalocene and Plantationocene that connect the capital accumulation of profit in "extractive and enclosed plantations relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor" and deracinating plants, animals, and people, especially in globalized factory meat production (Haraway 2016, 206).

The patriarchal network from which Yeong-hye separates includes her mother and sister. After her suicide attempt, her mother yells at her, "Look at yourself, now. If you don't eat meat, everyone in the world will eat you up. Look at yourself in the mirror. Look how your face is" (Han 2007, 60). Yeong-hye's monologue signals that she breaks away from the gender-based connection, feeling estranged from her mother in that moment: "I don't know why that woman is crying. I don't know why she is looking into my face as if she would swallow it. . . . No one can help me. No one can save me. No one can make me breathe" (Han 2007, 60–61). Her mother's warning that Yeong-hye will be consumed if she does not eat meat and Yeong-hye's realization that her mother would be the one who consumes her reveal violence disguised as benevolence and care.[23]

In an analysis of the novel, Lee Dong Eun views In-hye as the only person who is sane and reasonable (2016, 200). Yet viewing In-hye as the

innocent one who is shouldering her responsibilities ignores her own admission that she locked up her sister.[24] In-hye reveals this awareness through her encounter with another woman in the ward, Hee-joo, who cares for Yeong-hye. After In-hye intervenes at the institution to stop the forced injection of sedatives into Yeong-hye, she sees Hee-joo and feels the urge to hug her. Hee-joo is bereft, because Yeong-hye is about to be transferred to another hospital. As Hee-joo reaches her out to touch Yeong-hye's bony hand, In-hye turns her face away. Moving from hatred, resentment, distancing, and guilt to an awareness of her own violence, In-hye realizes that she is merging with Yeong-hye and following her sister's path of degeneration. The narrator asks, "Should the blood that Yeong-hye vomited up have come from In-hye?" (Han 2007, 220).

As Yeong-hye degenerates, the space she can occupy also shrinks. After all, the novel ends inside an ambulance on its way to the city hospital to keep her alive. Confined in the ambulance, In-hye stares at the trees engulfed in flames, hoping that it could be their dream. The dream world in *The Vegetarian* is a space in which beings' unconscious can communicate and merge without language. Yeong-hye and her husband, In-hye and her son, and Yeong-hye and In-hye communicate through the images and words in their dreams. The wish that they might be in their dreams together signals that In-hye longs for that connection and is starting to enter the epistemological space that Yeong-hye inhabits. Yet the violence of Yeong-hye's mother and of In-hye emphasizes how the familial efforts at curing are based on ableist othering and the confinement of bodies marked with madness and difference. Gendered social life is not enacted without the mediation of disability and otherness that establish the gendered boundaries of proper human beings.

The Conditions of Nonviolence

Han Kang's text uses the narrative of degeneration to interrupt the legacy of historical violence and injustice against racialized and disabled people viewed as subhumans, not only by defamiliarizing violence but also by deconstructing the units of social relations that normalize it. In an interview about *The Vegetarian*, the author stated the following: "I thought of the novel as a story of a person who refuses to be a member of the human species, a person who risks her life to push out humanity's violence in her extreme isolation" (quoted in Y. Kim 2014, 318). Han explores how nonviolence could be made possible by removing one's own capacity for violence

and the physical needs that justify it. Ableist violence enacted against this disabled body as a response ultimately makes survival impossible.

Analyses of *The Vegetarian* that focus on the ethical ontology of plants and an ecological orientation conceptualize animality as a location of violence in opposition to vegetality. An expression of human violence (against animals) as "animalistic" displays a particular view of animals as unruly and inherently violent. Even if this attribution of violence to animals includes the violence of human beings, it is undeniable that the notion of "animality," along with the "savagery" of nonhuman animals and subordinated races as a threat to those deemed fully humans, has long justified the need to conquer, exploit, torture, and kill certain humans and nonhuman animals. For Yeong-hye, violent animality resides in humans. Yeong-hye's nonviolence in the absence of solidarity with human others leads her to become disabled and desireless, to undo her familial ties, and to seek a radical belonging with animal and vegetal beings. Her attempt to join the trees in the woods outside the institution shows how nonviolence and confinement are incompatible.

Curative interventions—including those of her sister and her mother—to remediate Yeong-hye's desirelessness occur within the broader biopolitical apparatus of institutionalization and campaigns to increase births and prevent suicide in South Korea. Her withdrawal from violent relations and her simultaneous embrace of becoming disabled by shedding abilities and undoing growth manifest as a process of degeneration. For resisting violence in the name of the normative human not only reinstates the power that is capable of inflicting harm but also affirms the need to consume human and nonhuman others. Hardly a willful choice, degeneration and its entanglement with confinement show how social interventions to increase the desire to reproduce, to consume, and to live could be dangerous, even murderous, as they expel those who are not incorporated into biopolitical citizenship. Yeong-hye's degeneration toward radical dependency deprives society of the relationality and multiplicity on which its own survival depends.[25] Portraying a figure who withdraws herself from the capitalist and ableist mandate of growth, generativity of production and reproduction, prosperity, and healing, *The Vegetarian* presents degeneration and nonsurvival—rather than upholding agency, desire, and survival of othered subjects—as a nonviolent response to confinement.

If Yeong-hye's transformation into a tree through refusing certain forms of care is to be read as a journey to becoming a vegetative human without detectable consciousness, desire, agency, and capacity to consent or refuse, in order to arrive at radical dependency, what kind of care can

be given to her? How can her plea to be released from the institution be honored as being as valid as the imperative of survival? Involuntary hospitalization and institutionalization characterize the historical and ongoing oppression of people with disabilities, including mental disabilities, in colonial Korea and South Korean society.[26] In this regard, I view Yeong-hye's becoming a vegetative human by refusing confinement, force-feeding, and sedation as her existential strike against the ableist juridico-medical regime as much as against patriarchal and anthropocentric violence, as a crucial element of nonviolence even if its result is nonsurvival. Ironically, her plantlike existence can be sustained only by certain forms of care she might have refused, if she enters into a "vegetative state" as a way of becoming a tree. The question is not whether the doctor's force-feeding her is justifiable or not as a treatment based on Yeong-hye's mental faculty—as a psychiatrist explores in "An Apologia for the Psychiatrist in *The Vegetarian*" (Pan 2016)—but rather what justifies confinement in the first place, what constitutes care that is ethical, and how such determination changes as a being is in the process of degeneration or is projected to recover and function.

Yeong-hye embodies a radically dependent state for survival, as the maintenance of her life depends on medical treatment. This corporeal dependency highlights society's need to address ableism and heterosexism in its bioethical and biopolitical decision-making about meaningful care, as life-sustaining treatment without the prognosis of getting better is considered meaningless. If degenerating and shedding the abilities that activate personhood and its meanings are Yeong-hye's nonviolent response to confinement, what could be society's nonviolent response to desireless, traumatized, and debilitating bodies and those with the "wrong" kinds of desires, or insufficient ones? What would be the connection between the culled bodies of animals and people who died in institutions, and what might that connection open up in terms of a different imagination of a society? What would a suicide prevention effort look like, if it were not undertaken mainly in the interest of national reputation?[27] In the meantime, suicides of queer, trans, and disabled people in poverty in South Korea are erased by the guideline of avoiding the word "suicide" in all reporting or referring to it indirectly as an "extreme choice" (*kŭktanjŏk sŏnt'aek*), a phrase intended to assign blame and assume other possibilities. In order to prevent suicides, the government and the media's guidelines recommend not reporting on suicide cases; rather, the account should mention only a person's "death" (*samang*) or "passing" (*sumjida*) (Han'guk kija hyŏphoe, Po'gŏn pokchibu, and Han'guk saengmyŏng chon-

jung hŭimang chaedan, 2018). Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano's question, "Has the queer ever been human?" challenges the violence enacted by the exclusionary definition of personhood in the process of "dehumanization" (2015). Yet, they ask further, "When the 'sub-human, in-human, non-human queer' actively connects with the other-than-human, what might that connection spawn?" (Chen and Luciano 2015, 186). To be sure, I am not arguing against medical care, hospitalization, state support, and intervention in situations where individuals become suicidal. Warning against simplifying suicide as inevitable for minoritized people in South Korea, I question the suicide-prevention measures primarily motivated by the desire to change the national image and by economic interests. Such measures tend to erase the complex histories, circumstances, systematic failures, endless violence, isolation, and neglect in which minoritized individuals are placed, and to blame them for not respecting life. By contrast, I call for accessible and affordable medical and socialized—not familial—care and social connections of human and nonhuman beings living with illnesses and disabilities, and with nonnormative desire and desirelessness in communities, and the respectful attention to our presence in unconfined states, regardless of the prospect of un/wellness.

The Denied Realness of Dreams and Screams

A recent analysis that focuses on Yeong-hye's mental illness puts the text in conversation with feminist debates on madness in English literature. If women's madness is a form of resistance, how powerful or politically effective is it? Examining *The Vegetarian* along with the Australian novel *The Natural Way of Things* (2015), Alix Beeston (2021) argues that the women in these works who merge with nature—by becoming either a tree or a rabbit—figure the limits of a feminist resistance. While appreciating In-hye as displaying "the power of women's speech and solidarity in the face of male brutality" (699), Beeston offers a less optimistic conclusion about Yeong-hye's resistance. Comparing the madwoman's resistance with "the cultural moment of #MeToo" in the United States, Beeston argues that "it is harder to see how animal or vegetal alterity can offer to women a model of defiance and empowerment" (697). She concludes, "Women's dreams of trees and rabbits in these contemporary novels reveal the vast imbrication of androcentric and anthropocentric violence, but they are, in the end, nightmares from which women must wake—to return to the city, to disorder the order of nature, to sing out in a clear, collective voice" (699). Con-

sonant with In-hye's wish in the ambulance that she were dreaming, this emphasis on the imperative to wake up from a nightmare is in line with Han Kang's remark on the need to still live as a human (quoted in Y. Kim 2014, 318), yet it denies the nonnormative corporeal presence of Yeong-hye with her mental disability to be carried on. Beeston's focus on the resistance to violence against women represented by #MeToo leads her not to recognize Yeong-hye's repeated screams against confinement maintained by her family and by an ableist juridico-medical regime that sustains forced institutionalization. Her screams do not occur in dreams, and in fact echo the cries of many activists who have been exposing the abuse within various institutions and demanding the complete shutdown of all residential institutions established for the purpose of removing nonnormative people from communities in the name of specialized care and protection (Changae yŏsŏng konggam, 2020).

If existence is the only method of resistance against the forces that aim to annihilate, how do we reckon with those who cannot and will not exist? As a manifestation of radical nonviolence that recognizes one's own capacities to harm, Yeong-hye's nonsurvival bears a social consequence beyond the individual. A society that enacts violence against its others is enacting violence against itself (Im 2010).[28] Nonviolence as a form of praxis requires refusing the requirement that society be sustained through progress and growth and challenging the conditions that justify confinement, including desires and capacities.

NOTES

1. This essay contains descriptions of several instances of physical, sexual, and self-inflicted violence, as well as violence by and against animals. Careful attention to these instances is needed to imagine the possibilities of nonviolence.

2. I am deeply thankful to Michelle Cho and Jesook Song for their editorial insights and guidance and to Alison Kafer, KJ Cerankowski, Mike Gill, Alice Falk, David Anderson, Ianna Hawkins Owen, and anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions and encouragement.

3. All English translations of Han Kang's text are mine made in consultation with Deborah Smith's translation, because I wish to consistently render the words on which my analysis focuses. Smith's translation is the focus of a growing body of scholarship in English and Korean, ranging from criticism for its errors and omissions to appreciation of its creativity and feminist interpretation of the original text (Chang 2018; D. Kim 2016; W. Kim 2018; Yoon 2020). This essay uses the McCune-Reischauer romanization system for Korean words, except for widely accepted or official spellings and for the names of characters, which for consistency follow the spelling in the published English translation. For example, the main figure's name is transliterated as Yeong-hye. All Ko-

rean names of authors follow their own romanizations; if the chosen spellings are un-known, I use McCune-Reischauer romanization system.

4. Until 2009 (the novel was published in 2007), Article 24 (1) of the Mental Health Act of 2000 (Hospitalization by Guardian) allowed a person with mental illness to be involuntarily hospitalized for six months, if one psychiatrist determined it necessary *either* because treatment of mental illness requires hospitalization *or* because the health and safety of that person or others were at risk and if their immediate kin (or the desig-nated guardian) consented. Article 26 (Emergency Hospitalization) also allowed anyone who finds a person who is deemed a threat to themselves or others and suspected to have mental illness to request hospitalization for a seventy-two-hour evaluation, with the consent of a police officer and a doctor (currently Article 50). Article 24 (6) allows the immediate family member to request release of the patient without delay, unless the psychiatrist informs the head of the hospital about the danger the patient poses. From 2009, Article 24 (1) required the consent of two family members and the determination of one psychiatrist for the hospitalization. In 2016, Article 24 (1) and (2) were ruled "unconformable to the Constitution" (2014-Hŏn-Ka-9). In 2017, the Act on the Im-provement of Mental Health and the Support for Welfare Services for Mental Patients was enacted; Hospitalization by Guardian (Article 43) requires that two immediate fam-ily members (or a legal guardian) request and a psychiatrist recommends two weeks of hospitalization for diagnostic evaluation; hospitalization for another three months is allowed only when necessary *both* for the treatment of mental illness *and* for the safety of oneself and others, with the agreement of two psychiatrists affiliated with different institutions. For the details of the law and its history, visit http://law.go.kr

5. Consult M. Jeong 2008; Y. Kim 2008; Im 2009; Shin 2010; C. Lee and E. Lee 2010; T. Yi 2016; Oh 2016; Ryu 2016; Sin 2016; Y. Yi 2017; Beeston 2020; M. Kim 2020; Taylor 2020; Casey 2021. Many essays listed here suggest multiple approaches, rather than one. This should not be understood as a comprehensive review of all the scholarship pro-duced on the text or the author. The body of scholarship on the text in multiple lan-guages is likely to grow.

6. For example, Im Ok-hŭi argues that Han Kang views "metaphorical anorexia" (2009, 296) as a possibility to be freed from human addiction to violence and to undo the embodied habituation of desire produced by capitalism and moves beyond ecofemi-nism by considering human civilization itself as violent.

7. The film adaptation of the novel, with the same title, also did not generate signifi-cant response, in contrast to the strong objections and backlash against the film adapta-tion of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*.

8. Han Kang has written many pieces about characters with disabilities, including those with mental disabilities, aphasia, deafness, and blindness, yet scholars have rarely read them as representing the lived experiences of disabilities. Exceptions to this trend are the analyses of disabilities in *Greek Lessons* by S. Lee and Song (2018) and *The Veg-etarian* from a mad studies perspective by Chloë Taylor (2020).

9. Han Kang said in an interview that *The Vegetarian* has layers of "questioning hu-man violence and the (im)possibility of innocence; defining sanity and madness; the (im)possibility of understanding others, body as the last refuge or the last determina-tion, and some more" (Patrick 2016). Rather than being "a singular indictment of Ko-rean patriarchy," Han emphasized, the questions she had about "the possibility and im-possibility of innocence in this world" are "universal questions" (Patrick 2016).

10. For various limitations of these policies and the need to expand social support for diverse forms of families, consult Chung Sungho (2018).

11. Chung Sungho (2018) explains three paradigms for South Korea's population policy: suppression of childbirth (1962–1996), population quality and welfare promotion (1996–2004), and childbirth promotion (since 2004).

12. This map and the contents are no longer available. Consult Chŏng Yu-gyŏng (2016) for the image of the map.

13. The term "dried-fish woman" originated from a character in a Japanese television drama, *Hotaru no Hikari* (2007). "Herbivore man" was coined in Japan by two writers to refer to men who are not aggressive or masculine (Yi Tong-chun 2016).

14. For example, in 1836, the German physician C. W. Hufeland wrote: "Loss of sexual desire is analogous to the loss of the nutritive instinct. It may generate in the same way as anorexia" (1855, 279). The asexuality visibility movement in Korea also employs comparisons to food to explain what asexuality is. Consult, for example, K'ei (2016).

15. Vegan *mukbang* exist, but in comparison to the meat *mukbang* they have very few viewers.

16. From 2016 to August 2021, government record showed that 87,308,130 animals were killed in response to outbreaks and for prevention (Ko 2022).

17. The Act on the Prevention of Suicide and the Creation of the Culture of Respect for Life law controls the tools and information of suicide methods and emphasizes medical and psychological treatment rather than the provision of emergency resources and comprehensive welfare. Although the law recognizes individuals' rights to request material support from the central or local government, it does not mandate such support or specify what it should entail. Furthermore, medical treatment after a suicide attempt is not covered by national medical insurance, unless one is diagnosed with a mental illness (Choi and Choi 2014, 161).

18. I owe the insight regarding readers' felt connection to Yeong-hye to KJ Cerankowski. This lack of speech is in contrast to the voice—belonging to her mother—that Kim Jiyoung summons to speak on her own behalf in her embodiment of a dissociative state in *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho 2016).

19. Ryu Jin-Sang also points out the connection between the Gwangju massacre and *The Vegetarian*, arguing that "the enigmatic nightmare can be understood as the process of Yeong-hye's being possessed by the spirits of Gwangju" (2016, 181).

20. Dogmeat consumption is now a minority cultural practice, and international attention to the custom, especially around the time of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, led the government to suppress it. Currently, according to the regulations of the Livestock Industry Act, dogs are categorized as livestock, but they are not included in the Livestock Products Sanitary Control Act for slaughtering their meat, creating a loophole for dog farms to operate without regulation ("Kae sigyong" 2018).

21. In exploring the possibility of black asexuals as queer subjects who cannot take desire or humanity for granted, Ianna Hawkins Owen speculates that the relevant question might instead be, "For whom do I exist?" (2018, 72).

22. In a 1902 article, "Evanescent congenital pigmentation in the sacro-lumbar region" in *American Anthropologist*, H. Newell Wardle credits E. Bælz as the first to record the observation of this mark in 1901. "Mongolian" as a category of race was named by Christoph Meiners in *The Outline of History of Mankind* (1785) (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014).

His colleague Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, in his book *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, further utilized the category for people he believed to be originated from the Mongolian nation (1795 [1969]). This classification system was used by his contemporaries to constitute white supremacy and justify European imperial expansion in scientific racism. Influenced by Blumenbach's classification, John Landon Down used the "Mongolian" type to refer to people with intellectual disability, which was later named Down's syndrome (Ward 1999).

23. In my other work, I have theorized this as "cure by proxy," by which cure of disability is attempted by a family member's sacrifice and dedication and the desired changes in disability status are considered as a reward (Kim 2017, 83).

24. Jeong Mi-sook calls In-hye a "fearful tyrant" (2008, 23), as she has the power to order the forced transportation of Yeong-hye to the psychiatric hospital.

25. It has to be noted that the turn toward plantal being does not automatically challenge the primary position that agency and subjectivity occupy in Western knowledge-making endeavors. Gagliano, Ryan, and Vieira (2017) speak of plant studies as focusing on the signs of the agential subjectivity of plants: "Recent literary studies of plants are beginning to focus on the representation of the intelligence, behavior, and subjectivity of the vegetal world in works of poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction. Importantly, these new texts release the vegetal from a background position in literary discourse and underscore the vital role of plant narration, voice, presence, and sensoriality" (Gagliano, Ryan, and Vieira 2017, xvi). Unlike this direction of claiming plant subjectivity based on ability, the plant-becoming in *The Vegetarian* eliminates language, thoughts, voice, and subjectivity, as they are seen as a capacity to violate other beings.

26. Writing in the context of the United States, Esmé Weijun Wang explains, "For those of us living with severe mental illness, the world is full of cages where we can be locked in" (2020, 110). And she continues, "I believe that being held in a psychiatric ward against my will remains among the most scarring of my traumas" (110). The rate of involuntary hospitalization for treatment in South Korea has decreased since the legal change in 2017 made it more difficult, but the majority of hospitalization still requires the consent of family members or evaluation by the mental health evaluation committee for discharge. By the end of 2018, 45.6 percent of all hospitalizations for treatment were voluntary hospitalizations that allow the patients to leave the hospital voluntarily (Po'gŏn pokchibu 2019, 30). It has been reported that there are cases of people involuntarily committed to hospitals under the category of "consensual hospitalization," which requires the consents of the patient and an immediate family member (or a guardian) for admission and discharge (Kukka in'kwŏn wiwŏnhoe 2021, 153).

27. Some researchers identified that suicide prevention policies by local governments do not have significant impact on local suicide rates, or rather are correlated with the increase of suicide rates in South Korea (T. Chŏng 2019, 684). Chŏng Ta-jŏng argues that the suicide prevention policy that focuses on individual mental health conditions, including depression and stress levels, is not enough, but that demographic and social factors and economic situations are also important factors (2019, 685).

28. Im Ok-hŭi explains the inseparability of the self and the other, "the other who swallows the self is the self; therefore swallowing the other is to kill the self" (2010, 242).

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7

Gendered Mediation in Yun Sangho's *Saimdang*

Memoir of Colors

Youngmin Choe

As with most banknotes worldwide, the design of the South Korean 50,000-wŏn banknote (worth about US$45) includes intricate antiforgery measures to prevent counterfeits. These antiforgery measures also contribute to the aesthetics of the bill. The banknote reflects high-tech digital techniques as authentication features that also enhance the bill as an aesthetic object: intaglio latent images that are visible only when the note is tilted, for example, and tactile marks with granular texture on the portrait of Lady Sin Saimdang (1504–1551) and the *Wŏlmaedo* painting that can be felt by touching the image. Color-shifting ink plays with light to shift between varying shades of green and magenta, and watermark images and bars indicate the varying thickness in the paper to reveal images hidden in the depths of light and darkness. A special press and soldering are used to produce watermarks, while see-through registers combine images on the obverse and reverse sides to create a single image, such as the two-comma roundel (the *t'aegŭk*). Security threads of special hidden film add shadow around the portrait, like negative space, using microlettering along the collar, for example, that can only be discerned with a magnifying glass in light. The increasing size of the digits on the serial numbers from small to large, the endless patterns that overlap when folded, and the image of Saimdang's painting, *Mukp'ododo*, has fluorescent security fibers and ink that are seen only when illuminated with ultraviolet light. Holograms (a map of Korea, the *t'aegŭk*, the four trigrams, and the face value number depending on the angle), and moving images are additional visual features

that give the banknote an aura of authenticity (Han'guk ŭnhaeng 2004).[1] The legitimizing markers of this banknote prominently feature Saimdang's portrait on the right and a mirror-reversed image as a watermark on the left; and in the center, there is an overlay of her *Mukp'ododo* and *Ch'och'ungdosubyŏng* (*Insects and Plants*, National Treasure No. 595).[2]

The face on this banknote is of Sin Saimdang, famous as a paragon of Confucian matriarchy and virtue in the Chosŏn dynasty (1395–1910). She was the mother of Yi Yulgok (1536–1584), a mid-Chosŏn period Confucian scholar and politician who was first featured on the Korean 5,000-wŏn banknote in 1972. The Sin Saimdang banknote has become the most circulated currency denomination in Korea, but ironically it has also become the most counterfeited and embezzled banknote in Korea. In the first half of 2017, nearly 80 percent of "the entire volume of currency in circulation" (with a value of approximately 70.9 billion wŏn) was in the form of 50,000-wŏn banknotes (J. Son 2017). Since it was introduced in 2009, demand for this bill has been especially high, due in part to its use as gifts and in bribes, slush funds, illicit transfers of wealth, tax dodging, and gambling. Its utility in such endeavors leads to its circulation through underground economies, on the one hand, and hoarding on the other. Because of their utility in these less legitimate uses of currency, it was reported in 2014 that 50,000-wŏn bills kept mysteriously disappearing from circulation, with a recovery rate of below 20 percent (*Chosun Ilbo* 2014).

Tracing the circulation of Saimdang's iconography through another kind of economy, this essay explores the iteration of Sin Saimdang in Yun Sang-ho's television drama *Saimdang: Memoir of Colors* (*Saimdang: Pit ŭi ilgi*, SBS, 2017),[3] reading it as a self-reflexive televisual example of a genre of *Hallyu*'s soft-power economy that is conscious of its own emergence in a moment of Sino-Korean tensions between China's economic power and Korea's cultural power. Tying *Saimdang*'s stylistic exhibition of digital technologies and transnational imaginaries to its aesthetics drawn from multiple classic art forms, I show how *Saimdang* processes a crisis of generic differentiation and questions what constitutes authenticity in inter-aesthetic forms. As I argue, it does so by deploying the iconic historical figure of Saimdang to mediate between forms and to advocate values associated with soft power and cultural production. South Korea's diplomatic conundrum of shoring up a liberal democratic front against authoritarian states, yet relying ever more on trade with China, is negotiated through the figure of Saimdang as an embodiment of temporal and media boundaries. She functions as a gendered and mediatized "interface" in Alexander Galloway's sense; that is, not as a static boundary but as an

"'agitation' or generative friction between different formats," "an effect," and as "a process or a translation" (Galloway 2012, 31–33).

On one level, these stylistic devices are premised on the goal of deploying Saimdang as an embodied physical presence in various art forms (for example, painting, portraiture, and photography) in order to explore the variance between them. In *Saimdang*, the interdependence of various art forms in establishing authenticity in the plot about art fraud includes forms and technology conventionally not considered media technology, and thus critiques the anchoring of TV dramas (here K-dramas) in TV studies and criticism based in conceptions of television as a discrete, self-contained site. On a deeper level, the stylistic devices emphasize Saimdang's mediation between these forms. As premised in this volume, gender operates "as a platform—not only in the context of digital networking, but also in the sense of the term as a metaphor for addressing a broader public," producing "identity and shaping exchanges between individuals and institutions" (see this volume's introduction).

In this essay, I suggest that *Saimdang* goes beyond a representational dramatization and individualization, and that in this production, the figure of Saimdang mediates, embodying forms of mediation not unlike media technologies. Gender matters here because Saimdang's gendered body is associated with fraudulence and fakes in its questioning of authenticity in art forms. This relation was highly visible in Korean culture since at least the 2007 incident when art curator Shin Jeong-ah's (Sin Chŏnga's) fraudulence in faking her art credentials from Yale came to be intimately tied to her gender. In embodying media in states of intermediality and inter-aesthetic forms, Saimdang lends the materiality of her body to the materiality of media beyond subjectivity and identity. Her interactions and movements between artifacts and art practices reveal how they are defined not only by the materiality of the media, but also recognize gendered identity as being both material and discursive. *Saimdang* bears the traces and conditions of the material conditions and dimensions that manifest themselves in televisual form.

The iconography of Sin Saimdang is particularly useful in that she traverses operations of social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital as a gendered figure. As in the banknote, the iconography of Saimdang in the television drama operates as an element of authentication processes carried out by visual technologies—both in its narrative focus on Saimdang and her role in the authentication of art, and in its self-reflexive concerns about television as an authentic art form. The function of Sin Saimdang's iconography in the drama in relation to media forms here is analogous to

how media artist Lee Lee Nam "realizes" Saimdang's classic imagery in his video art piece *Two Video Installations: Chochungdo (Insects and Plants) of Shin Saimdang* (2007). In *Chochungdo* (Ch'och'ungdo), he reinterprets the classic imagery of Saimdang's paintings in two framed screens; the plants and insects of her paintings change slowly over the course of four seasons, bringing her iconic work, as well as Lee Lee Nam's interpretation, to multiple new fruitions.

Whereas the Saimdang iconography undergirded by technology in the banknote serves to authenticate economic value symbolically and materially, the Saimdang iconography in the drama *Saimdang* can be read as allegorically and self-reflexively questioning its own value and authenticity as a televisual form and as a crisis in generic differentiation of inter-aesthetic forms. It seeks ways of authenticating itself as an art form that transmutes the boundaries of authenticity. Both iterations of Saimdang—banknote and drama—circulate as twofold forms of value, as hard currency with economic value, and as soft currency. In the latter sense, I refer to a kind of affective currency in what I have elsewhere described as *Hallyu*'s "affective regime," registering a political economy under Korea's increasing soft power, in which both hard and soft currencies circulate and test the limits of currency exchange and value. In this sense, *Saimdang* dramatizes mediation (as individualization) and the tension between media technologies and other forms of art, developing a conception of mediation in which we come to see how gender itself functions to mediate.

As John Caldwell has argued in his influential work on televisuality and the cultural logic of television's stylistic exhibitionism, the television industry has the ability to "self-theorize" and attribute meaning and cultural significance to visual codes and systems, and to perform this televisual style (Caldwell 1995, 45). In the following, I show how this is played out via the example of the iconic figure of Sin Saimdang and the values attributed to her image in the drama *Saimdang*. James Hay (2001) thinks about the televisual by drawing on Raymond Williams's notion of "the development of television as an assemblage of practices, as a social technology dependent on and instrumentalized through a broad array of practices and technologies."[4] Hay argues that "within the interplay of exchanges, the televisual refers to mechanisms linked by/to particular sites and by/to other mechanisms at these sites, and it refers to mechanisms adapted to tasks of linking/delinking subjects and places. Thinking about the televisual in this way requires not only a different logic of mediation but a different understanding of TV as site" (2001, 211). He criticizes TV studies' preoccupation "with the distinctive features of the medium or its audi-

ence" as generalizing the site of television or dwelling on "TV's separateness as both identity and sphere/site," seeing the site of TV "as language and the psyche or to ascribe it to culture as a distinct and separate sphere in social relations and history." Hay argues instead that "television . . . matters or matters differently at different sites," turning his attention to "the play of exchanges and intermediaries," which he sees as suggesting "another conception of site—one that is not produced or occupied by a single entity and one that matters in its relation to other sites" (211).

Taking these observations as a point of departure, this essay sees the logic of mediation operating in *Saimdang* not simply as one in which a series of representations of Saimdang get mediated through multiple forms (writings, paintings, photographs, etc.), but one in which Saimdang herself mediates various art forms and media technologies. By this, I mean that she functions as body and as icon much as a medium does, extending from premodern forms of media circulation and production to digital interfaces and telepresence. In this essay, I first provide some background to *Saimdang: Memoir of Colors* and the significance of the decision to foreground her as artist and render her fictitiously as a Chosŏn-era entrepreneur, and subsequently as an underground art authenticator and fraud investigator. I then lay out some stylistic devices that facilitate our understanding of how Saimdang mediates, and what this reveals in terms of generic differentiation, the authenticity of inter-aesthetic forms, and the self-perceived legitimacy of television drama and its production of values as a vehicle of soft power when faced with economic power.

Saimdang as a Genre of the *Hallyu* Economy: Gender and Value

In her study of financial (and economic) and literary writing in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, Mary Poovey (2008) argues that "money also constituted a form of writing" (7). Poovey's study shows how literary form was used to develop "genres of the credit economy" that helped people navigate a credit economy based on value that was not yet concrete, and to mediate between credit money and the values it promoted. She locates the presence of political economy in the increasing literary development of values that were defined less in market terms (such as price, labor, and utility) and more "in terms of subjective qualities that defied quantification, were immune to exchange, and were sometimes difficult to grasp or convey" (166). This included qualities like imagina-

tion, genius, and originality. Money, she suggests, was as much about these inchoate qualities as it was a practical tool for commerce and exchange. Poovey's treatment of money is relevant to this study of the television drama *Saimdang* because, in addition to the possibility of reading *Saimdang* as allegorizing the production and circulation of the banknote on which she is featured, the televisual form in twenty-first-century Korea develops what we could call a genre of the *Hallyu* economy. In this context, *Saimdang* seeks to mediate between economic power (for example, such as that exerted by China) and soft power (wielded by Korea), and attempts to develop and shift values from economic to affective terms. A fuller elaboration on the question of commensurability between these different forms of values, regimes, and currencies is beyond the scope of this essay and volume, and the focus here is on *Saimdang*'s articulation and formulation of its televisual mechanisms within these contexts.

Saimdang: Memoir of Colors employs a parallel time structure set in the Chosŏn past and in the present. An art history student, Sŏ Chiyun, played by the actress Yi Yŏngae, discovers a journal by Sin Saimdang that promises to reveal clues about a landscape painting she is researching. The life of Sin Saimdang, played by the same actress, unfolds in a separate narrative as Chiyun delves deeper into the provenance and authenticity of the painting, which leads her to expose corruption in the art world. In the past, Saimdang's role as an artist is foregrounded over her role as mother; she is reimagined as the resourceful founder and benevolent matriarch of a papermaking commune and provider of Koryŏ *hanji* (*Koryŏji*) paper to the Chinese royal courts. Sin Saimdang was of noble background, but the drama stages her sudden fall into poverty and gradual rise to the ranks of the royal court through skilled labor—replicating a formula that proved popular in *Daejanggŭm* (*Jewel in the Palace*, 2003). Saimdang loses her home and wealth as a result of her husband's gambling debt, and the drama simultaneously presents a parallel present-day narrative in which the character Chiyun turns to art authentication as a profession after her husband falls into severe debt and goes into hiding.

But if the present is made to parallel the past, so too does the past echo in the present. Although her engagement with the minutiae of painting in the "plants and insects" genre is featured prominently, the drama also develops Sin Saimdang into a royal portraitist and landscape artist with the capacity to practice genres forbidden to women at the time and to capture subjects of much grander scale, such as the Kŭmgang mountain-scapes produced by court painters like An Kyŏn, with whose works she is said to have been particularly fascinated.[5] Compared to earlier representa-

tions of Sin Saimdang, which remained relatively close to accepted historical understandings of her life, the 2017 version takes liberties that seek to align historical periods and events with contemporary realities.

Sin Saimdang's portrayal on the banknote reflects a further conflation of moral and economic value in Korean history, a conflation reflected in the various uses of the historical figure for commercial purposes. For example, the actress who plays the title role in the drama *Saimdang*, Yi Yŏngae, is the face of Whoo Cosmetics, whose products are placed prominently in the show. Furthermore, artfully packaged cosmetics and teas featuring the drama and Sin Saimdang's artwork were exhibited and sold at the Saimdang Media Art Inside exhibit and shop, which opened at the Doota Duty Free mall in 2017. Familiar museum gift shop items such as scarves, fans, and silk cushions printed with Sin Saimdang's paintings of birds, flowers, grass and insects were displayed in this self-claimed gallery space, alongside sanitary pads, tea, and baby bottles adorned with the same artwork printed on Chosŏn-style boxes and packaging. The concept of this Saim Gallery was to have duty-free shoppers (who would be buying products sponsored by the highly popular actress Yi Yŏngae) purchase products associated with the drama "while viewing an exhibition of Sin Saimdang's artworks reinterpreted into modern forms through media arts and product designs." Sin Saimdang's art is reinterpreted within this exhibition space through the drama's integration of media art technology.[6]

The commercial ambitions associated with the drama were revealed to have transnational implications in 2017, as South Korea's decision to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system angered the Chinese government and prompted threats of a series of trade sanctions that extended to cultural products. Around the time of its release in January 2017 it was feared that *Saimdang* would be especially affected by Chinese retaliation over the deployment of THAAD because it was a preproduced drama targeting the Chinese market, where the lead actress Yi Yŏngae is popular. Her comeback fourteen years after the success of *Daejanggŭm*, also a period piece frequently credited as one of the foundational texts formative to the rise of *Hallyu*, was highly anticipated. In August 2016, the *Saimdang* production team was told it had not met Chinese censorship standards, although the drama had already been scheduled to air. After the deployment of the THAAD system, China strengthened nontariff measures against Korean products via stricter regulations and sanitary inspections during customs clearance, selecting targets from service sectors such as tourism, entertainment, and retail manufacturing so as not to adversely affect the

Chinese manufacturing industries (Yang 2019, 18). Several cosmetics brands, for example, were banned in January 2017, although China and the Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety denied it was in response to the THAAD fallout (Yang 2019, 11). There were rumors of a Chinese boycott of *Hallyu*, and a list of Korean stars were banned from promotional activities in China. Regardless, *Saimdang* eventually went on to report overseas earnings of 17 billion wŏn (US$15 million), 75 percent of its total budget (22.5 billion wŏn, or US$19.8 million) through distribution rights in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China, among others (Maala 2017). In the context of this success, perhaps it was not surprising that the show itself registered and thematized the broader pacification of China that was necessary for its success even prior to the THAAD fallout. Indeed, the fictional export and esteemed value of *Koryŏji* paper in *Saimdang* are clearly depicted as reliant on the consumption and satisfaction of the Chinese royal court. It is Sin Saimdang's ingenuity and integrity in paper production that offsets the impact of lower-quality paper sent to China and tempers Sino-Korean relations with the court.

The THAAD-*Hallyu* tensions exposed Korea's vulnerability to economic sanctions and pressure, as well as its susceptibility to political concessions. Although Korea's soft power exerted considerable influence in China, the extent of its trade dependence on China constituted an "asymmetrical interdependence in the Sino-Republic of Korea dyad," leaving it open to China's strategic exploitation (Yang 2019, 2). In its anxieties regarding authenticity, counterfeits, value, and multiple iterations of Sin Saimdang, the drama exemplifies the dilemma of moral-aesthetic order as Korea's present-day security concerns (as demonstrated by THAAD) diverge from its trade concerns in the context of China's increasing centrality to South Korean economic well-being. The need to take control of a political and economic situation that seems increasingly dependent on the whims of other forces produces an alternative, somewhat fantastical, discursive regime. As I will show, this regime arises from an engagement with an artisanal tradition that not only asserts itself as different from China's association with mass production, but also aligns itself with value systems associated with artisanal labor and European art conventions.

This discursive, pictorial regime that is mediated through Saimdang is imagined as going beyond Sino-Korean relations. Released around the time of the THAAD tensions in 2017, *Saimdang*, in its unfolding of an implied pictorial space, presents a self-reflexive worldview of the present frictions in multilateral relations between Korea, the US, China, and Europe. In addition, because the formal ambivalence in the aesthetics of

the show becomes congruent with this larger geopolitical ambivalence at this moment in South Korean history, the question of authenticity becomes complicated, especially when mapped onto the equally vexed logics of gender and morality that are the undeniable backdrop of *Saimdang*. The ways in which the gendered forms of Saimdang—for example, her subjectivities as a woman artisan, mother, icon of femininity, benevolent matriarch of a commune, heterosexual lover, and wife—are put to work as a vector of mediation for political-economic exchange, circulation, and accumulation; they merit attention because they illustrate how the question of authenticity is mapped onto her gendered body materially and discursively.

Historically, Sin Saimdang has been known foremost as the mother of the Confucian scholar Yi Yi (1536–1584) from the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), and as an ideological figure and quintessential model of the "good mother, good wife" (*hyŏnmo yangchŏ*) (Choi 2009, 1). Thus, on a superficial level, the creative reimagining of Sin Saimdang in the television drama seems to be simply a continuation of this version of the historical figure. More critically, however, the bifurcated transtemporal treatment of Sin Saimdang also seems to reference self-reflexively the ongoing ideological reconstruction of Sin Saimdang that scholars have traced throughout history. In short, the drama reveals Sin Saimdang to be a contested discursive site that reflects the stakes of each subsequent appropriation. As Soojin Kim has shown, Sin Saimdang's image was historically formed "based on multifaceted, incompatible interpretive frameworks" from the Korean Enlightenment to the colonial period, during which she came to represent "an active mother-educator of a civilized nation, a distinguished woman who overcame the oppressive patriarchal system of old Joseon [*sic*], a woman who practiced the Confucian virtues of modesty and prudence, and a historical model for the mother of the militant nation (who represented the Japanese Empire)" (Kim 2014, 283–84). Later in the 1970s, under the developmental statism of the Park Chung Hee regime, these past constructions were selectively appropriated to create a dominant image, one in which the "vacillating memories and multifarious images transformed Shin [*sic*] Saimdang into a fossilized embodiment of tradition" (Kim 2014, 285). Sin Saimdang came to be recast in more multifaceted terms under the feminist rhetoric of the 2000s, including a more pronounced emphasis on her matrilineal upbringing and her role as an artist of grass-and-insect or bird-and-flower themed paintings.[7]

The historical transformation of Sin Saimdang as a figure reveals a history of selective appropriation and adaptation according to the prefer-

ences of specific historical periods, and suggests that the present recon-figuration of Sin Saimdang as an entrepreneur of an artisanal enterprise and community can be read as an indicator of contemporary anxieties. More specifically, in this allegorical reading, the layers of representational meanings attributed to Sin Saimdang, beginning with the historical figure representative of Confucian moral values and principles, imbue paper-making and present-day currency with a specific kind of matriarchal, filial work ethic associated with artisanal values and processes, and addition-ally take on the moral values with which she has come to be associated.

Where the televisualization of Saimdang departs from this historical pattern of selective appropriation is in the shift in emphasis from her soci-etal and ideological function to her art practice, which turns our focus from the historical construction of Sin Saimdang to an understanding of Sin Saimdang as part of the visual composition and function. In her art-work, Sin Saimdang is associated with her *Ch'och'ungdo*. In these studies of Sin Saimdang's art, the various plants and insects are regarded as symbolic (Kim 2016). In the drama, her artwork functions more as a medium of communication and interconnectivity across time and space (e.g., through collaboration on a grass-and-insect painting and a landscape painting) and as means of questioning authenticity and authorship.

Soojin Kim's overview of how motifs and views on Sin Saimdang were adopted and interpreted according to varying historical circumstances is very useful here. Kim distills the Sin Saimdang discourse to four thematic motifs "that were selectively adopted and differently emphasized or inter-preted depending on the individual and the purpose," as follows: she was believed to possess "learned wisdom and artistic talents," "extraordinary filial devotion," an education and strong character that enabled her to "provide valuable guidance to her husband," and she was "described as her children's teacher" (Kim 2014, 276). Clearly, the construction of Sin Saim-dang in the drama departs from the previous inventions of Sin Saimdang emphasized by Kim, in which "the representative wise mother and good wife of [Chosŏn] society—a symbol of the ideal traditional Korean woman"—is transformed "into a historical heroine" (Kim 2014, 274). Instead, we see how in *Saimdang* the figure of Sin Saimdang (both in the present and in the past) prioritizes work over family, her prominent neglect of her children and husband being justified by dedication to work. Because Chosŏn-era Sin Saimdang and present-day Sŏ Chiyun are engaged in work related to the arts, their labor foregrounds artisanal and aesthetic labor, its authentication and relation to artistic and commercial production. The recasting of an historical figure specifically as an artist

and artisan draws attention to the body engaged in artisanal labor, and by having Sin Saimdang as the representative of that body, it imbues that specific labor with virtue.

The drama reimagines her as a manufacturer and seller of a particular kind of paper that is almost impossible to reproduce, and also of such superior quality that it raises the level of trust in the Chinese royal court that imports the paper. The paper, once authenticated, becomes crucial to Sino-Chosŏn relations. The paper also possesses an aura derived from its historical use for Buddhist scrolls and paintings. Saimdang's life changes course due to her attempt as a child to secretly view a Buddhist painting of a goddess in a temple in the mountains. She unwittingly witnesses the killing of laborers employed by the temple to make *Koryŏji* paper and is forced to marry Yi Wŏnsu (whom Saimdang really married) to protect her life and that of her true love, the fictional Yi Kyŏm, who is related to the king. This event later serves her when she turns to papermaking, determining her devout dedication to the process and her virtuous sense of duty toward the larger community under her employment. Saimdang relies on her vast acreage of mulberry trees to supply the production of *Koryŏji* at her paper mill. In a scene where her children complain of hunger and general deprivation, she takes them up into the mountains to look down on the mulberry trees spread before them. This will all be theirs one day, she explains, so they must endure and understand why she cannot afford to feed them well or send them to school. Though she is not depicted as literally printing money on the paper she makes—the same paper on which she also paints her *Ch'och'ungdo*—the relevant banknotes today depict these very paintings, in addition to her face, thereby conflating her face value with aesthetic, moral, as well as economic value.

Through the selective historical liberties taken in *Saimdang*, the drama in its engagement with the past is a useful commentary on Sino-Korean trade in the twenty-first-century present (both in representation and in production) by serving as a means to reassess aesthetic labor and the notions of value underlying such labor. As an entrepreneur of a *hanji* papermaking enterprise and purveyor of *hanji* paper (and specifically the superior quality *Koryŏji*) to China's royal courts, Sin Saimdang learns the craft from a monk formerly employed by a Buddhist temple where *Koryŏji* used to be produced. She employs the displaced and homeless, incorporating them into a growing commune that welcomes all those willing to work. In exchange, they are provided with food, board, a share of the profits, and cultural education. The growth of this artisanal enterprise is organic and fortuitous, using the mulberry trees on her vast

property as a resource. Sin Saimdang herself participates in the labor, and though she conspicuously neglects her children in the process, this neglect is justified. Her dedicated labor itself becomes the model of motherhood, and the skills she possesses from being a good mother become useful in the artisanal papermaking process. By the final episode, Sin Saimdang's small artisanal business has grown considerably, and she is an esteemed matriarch of a vibrant artisanal papermaking village and community, the *Yangyujiso*. We observe her overseeing what she has built and commanding great respect from the commune's inhabitants. As the growth has expanded, she has come to offer on-site classes in music and the arts, which she has organized to foster the education of the children and illiterate adults who work for the *Yangyujiso*. This rendering of Sin Saimdang as a benevolent artisan with an entrepreneurial spirit reflects the recent commodity enterprise created around the drama *Saimdang*, which exploits the image of Sin Saimdang as well as the portrayal by the actress Yi Yŏngae (herself a mother to young twins) to sell "holistic" items associated with beauty, motherhood, spirits, and local herbal medicines and beverages. And more generally, it attempts to transhistoricize the accumulation imperatives unique to capitalism's commodification of socio-ecological life.

Saimdang as Interface: Gender and Remediation

The economic uncertainty resolved in *Saimdang* through this fantasy of affective currency also produces a problem of intermediality in the drama. In this regard, it speaks to the concerns regarding intertextuality between media also addressed in Bohyeong Kim's chapter on the interplay between podcasts, comics, and reality variety, and in Sunyoung Yang's chapter on the intermedial relationship between television drama fandom and the DCinside gallery in the consumption of *Param ŭi hwawŏn* (*Painter of the Wind*, SBS, 2008), which reimagines the Chosŏn-era painter Sin Yunbok (1758–1813) as a woman disguised as a man. The questions of authenticity initially associated with currency come to concern the articulation of a suitable relationship to artistic media, as if stability could be achieved by realizing an appropriate relationship to artistic materiality. In its portrayal of Sin Saimdang as an embodied medium, the drama utilizes a wide range of common digital techniques to stylistic effect, repurposing the various media and art forms to processes of *remediation*—"the representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 45)—that are fore-

grounded in *Saimdang*, especially in the form of portraits that function intermedially and like interfaces.

Remediation, making one medium suit another, becomes a strategy for negotiating other kinds of unstable relations. Take, for example, the official portrait of Sin Saimdang at her maternal home, *Ojukhŏn*, produced in the 1960s and authorized as official by the government in 1986. It is the work of renowned painter Idang Kim Ŭnho (1892–1979), the last portraitist of kings before the demise of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Kim Ŭnho's portrait of Emperor Sunjong (r. 1907–10), *Sketch for Portrait of Emperor Sunjong* (early twentieth century, ink and colors on paper), and of the grandson of Emperor Kojong (r. 1863–1907), *Portrait of Yi U* (early twentieth century, hanging scroll, colors on silk), are believed to be based on photographs (Woo 2014, 288–91).[8] These portraits mark the transition from the formal procedures of royal portraiture, which required audiences with the king (a practice referenced in the drama), to using photographs as the model (289). The introduction of photography in Korea changed how portraits were drawn, with an emerging preference for heightened realism comparable to photographs (293). Kim Ŭnho's portrait of Sin Saimdang is done in the same photography-inspired style he used in these early-twentieth-century portraits, frequently blending one media form with another in scenes in *Saimdang*. If we consider the prominence of portraiture in *Saimdang*, including the portrait of Saimdang herself, such inferences illustrate how remediation functions as a negotiation strategy.

Saimdang reflects the influence of a material culture, exemplifying economic and cultural tendencies in the twenty-first century in much the same way that Kim Ŭnho's early-twentieth-century portraits reflected the reception of a new cultural and visual system with Chosŏn's entry into trade with Western nations such as the United States and France. But if the last royal portraits indicated a transformation to modernity with the end of the king as an in-person portrait subject and a shift to the photograph as a model, *Saimdang*'s focus lies in its visualization and recognition that it exists in a cultural context of digital media that opens up boundaries. And if the television drama here is the "container for a previous media format" (to use Alexander Galloway's [2012] terms) such as painting and photography, the array of portraits in various media function like an *interface*, as suggested earlier in this chapter, understood as "the point of transition between different mediatic layers within any nested system. The interface is an 'agitation' or generative friction between different formats" (31). As Galloway argues, the interface is "this state of 'being on the bound-

ary." It is that moment where one significant material is understood as distinct from another significant material. In other words, an interface is not a thing, an interface is always an effect. It is always a process or a translation" (33).

Saimdang is full of interface effects. In episode one, Chiyun (present-day Sin Saimdang), is led by various mysterious circumstances to a portrait hidden behind a mirror at a villa called Siesta di Luna in Tuscany, Italy. The scene in which she comes to face her portrait (of Chosŏn-era Sin Saimdang) stages a sequence of interface encounters, beginning with a shot in which her body walks through the approaching spectral body of the portrait painter, walking toward each other from opposite sides of the screen. As she approaches her own mirror image with a sense of uncanniness, the scene cuts to flashbacks of the year 1551, where we see the portrait being placed into a wall closet by the painter. As the portrait painter closes the doors to the closet, the mirror shatters, breaking the boundary between these two forms (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2). In other words, this scene consists of the drama image of Sin Saimdang layered onto the mirrored image, with both layered over the hidden portrait. Differentiations between the genre forms are literally shattered as the mirror explodes into pieces to bring the drama's representation of Sin Saimdang face-to-face with the portrait. She opens the hidden triptych to face the scroll portrait, and the face of the portrait is superimposed onto Chiyun's face.

From this point on, portraits abound, as do such confrontations between portraits. Of Sin Saimdang, there is the portrait dating back to 1551 (the year of her death), the television portraits (usually shown in slow motion before they come to a brief halt in the signature slightly-over-the-shoulder gaze of the original portrait), the mirror image, and the photograph portrait. Played by the same actress, there are no representational variations in the face itself between the differing portraits, aside from the medium, suggesting that it is the confrontation resulting in continuity and fluidity between the portraits that is being emphasized. There is also the portrait of the king and Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume*, which I discuss below. Sin Saimdang's own style of royal portraiture is marked as distinct in the drama because she paints the king in an emotional way sufficiently provocative that it evokes the king's wrath; he recognizes in his facial features the insecurity and cruelty the public associates with him. Her ability to generate and assess face value is illustrated in a subplot in which the unveiling of the king's portrait is socially manipulated to generate public pleasure and praise, countering the king's own reading of his portrait. *Saimdang* gives literal visualization to the concept of the interface through

Fig. 7.1. A mirror in a sixteenth-century Italian villa shatters, revealing a triptych with Saimdang's portrait.

Fig. 7.2. Chiyun discovers the concealed portrait of Saimdang.

the frequent use of fades from faces in one medium of portraiture into another, operating as a repeated motif throughout the episodes. Other examples, such as intermedial interfacial blends, mirroring, and duplicates in split screens embody Sin Saimdang the subject and *Saimdang* the drama's circulation in an interface culture and raise questions about the nature of her value in a global network.

Saimdang as Digital Realm: Gender and Mediation

One of the creative liberties of the show is its imagination regarding the incorporation of Rubens's subject in the portrait *Man in Korean Costume* as Saimdang's true love. In terms of plot, it weds the dramatization of two iconic portraits. In terms of our focus on how gender mediates, as art subject and physically, Saimdang's encounter with the various forms that Rubens's portrait takes attempts to create fluidity and coherence between the aesthetic forms while also functioning as the site of mediation. In the opening sequence, the subject of one portrait, Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume*, produces another portrait—that of Sin Saimdang—which in turn will narratively explain how the fictive Yi Kyŏm came to be the subject of Rubens's portrait. Based on the real painter of the early Chosŏn period, An Kyŏn, who painted the *Mongyu towŏndo* (*Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*) for Prince Anp'yŏng in 1447, Yi Kyŏm (fictional) is imagined as having been the subject of Rubens's renowned (real) portrait. The character, Yi Kyŏm, is also in part loosely based on another mid-Chosŏn-era painter, Yi Am (1499–?), known for his portraits and paintings of animals, flowers, and insects (Lee et al. 2009). As described above, the drama opens with Yi Kyŏm deliriously painting Sin Saimdang from memory in a palazzo in Tuscany, where he is in exile. This is also a moment of death, as we know that 1551 was the year Sin Saimdang died. Yi Kyŏm is grief-stricken, though he would not have been able to know, while in exile, that Sin Saimdang had just died. This scene can be read as an attempt by the artist Yi Kyŏm, who is also imagined as being the unidentified subject of an artwork (by Rubens), to suppress and isolate a representational form. Rubens's portrait becomes a crucial link to establishing the authenticity of the landscape painting at the heart of *Saimdang*'s narrative plot, and the artist's identity. In one of the few scenes in which Saimdang and Chiyun occupy the same frame, they meet face-to-face in a blank digital realm where Chiyun hands Saimdang a postcard of Rubens's portrait, which Saimdang recognizes as Yi Kyŏm. In this digital realm, both iterations of Saimdang hover, their body forms isolated in space, extracted from their respective historical contexts. In their exchange of the postcard of Rubens's portrait (of Yi Kyŏm), both Saimdang iterations—one of whom embodies a painting, the other a photograph, and both the television drama—mediate and legitimate the mass-produced postcard of Rubens's work in different terms.

The story of Rubens's subject in the portrait *Man in Korean Costume* is both well-known and contested. The question of how a young man of the

Chosŏn dynasty came to pose for one of the greatest painters in Europe during the golden age of the Dutch Renaissance of the sixteenth century has yielded various accounts. The most compelling is perhaps the theory that the man—in some accounts identified by the name Antonio Corea, whose descendants, it has been claimed, can be traced to the village of Albi in southern Italy—was a Korean slave kidnapped by the Japanese during an invasion in 1592 (Kwak 2004). It is postulated that Corea was sold to merchants, possibly a Dutch merchant in Japan, or an Italian merchant, Francesco Carletti.[9] Because only those of a certain high status would have merited having their portrait painted by Rubens during this period, by implication the very existence of his portrait is seen in a nationalistic hypotheses as visually documenting that a Korean was active in global trade between Asia and Europe as early as the sixteenth century,[10] "in contradiction to the prevailing belief that Korea was closed to the West until the nineteenth century" (Schrader 2013, 10).

The digital-realm scene in which both iterations of Saimdang meet is also the scene in which it is first revealed that the fictional Yi Kyŏm, Sin Saimdang's lover, is Rubens's *Korean Man*, Corea, and does not come until the end. This space is a void, a kind of blank screen that functions like an interface of their unconscious states in which the two figures can meet and communicate. The women face each other and converse, imparting knowledge from the future about how to save the subject of Rubens's portrait. The space functions like an interface in which they encounter the artwork while simultaneously presenting how the whole series itself is structured and conceptualized. This moment of identifying Yi Kyŏm as Rubens's *Korean Man* is also the moment that present-day Sin Saimdang (Chiyun) comes into full recognition of her own identity as Chŏson-era Sin Saimdang. It is a moment of authentication. The fictional biographical account of Sin Saimdang thus becomes an account of Sin Saimdang as a medium or vehicle through which Rubens's portrait of *Korean Man* is simultaneously realized. Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume* was painted during Rubens's stay in Italy, and the contemporary revival of this figure in *Saimdang* imagines the circumstances in Chosŏn preceding Corea's departure, via the route scholars have pieced together through Ming China, Goa, India, and eventually to Italy. Although *Saimdang* begins and ends with Yi Kyŏm's exile and death in Italy, the main function of Rubens's portrait is as a frame for the dramatization of the life of Sin Saimdang, or vice versa. In this way, the interlocking biographies—one symbolic of early "trade" with Europe and one representative of Confucian virtue and morality—result in an intertextual biography of two fused historical fig-

ures, each borrowing definitive characteristics from the other, to imagine Rubens's subject as having been a royal patron of the arts and an upstanding figure of moral integrity, and Sin Saimdang as an artist and entrepreneur of cultural production, trade, and commerce.

Saimdang's Telepresence in Inter-aesthetic Forms

The drama *Saimdang* as a whole is preoccupied with modes of relationality between aesthetic forms. Structurally, the drama is neatly framed by related acts of portraiture, one traditional and the other digital, that foreground the process of portraiture and its intermedial composition. We see Saimdang physically occupying and witnessing these processes, although she is not actually there. In the opening sequence, Yi Kyŏm paints her portrait on paper. In the ending sequence, the drama stages a series of shots in which the subject in the portrait—Sin Saimdang, who was shown as painted on paper in the opening sequence—moves about in the actual place where the portrait was painted and discovered, constituting a kind of moving portrait in digital form. She is displaced here spatially, medially, and temporally, because the scenes take place in Italy, somewhere the historical Sin Saimdang could not have visited. Sin Saimdang is seen running through the hallways of the palazzo, gazing out the window, and walking about the gardens, before her body disappears and is replaced by Chiyun in the same position. Chiyun is then photographed by a photographer, whom we recognize as Yi Kyŏm (Rubens's *Man*), who later turns out to be the director of a global art authentication organization. Thus, the same portraitist who had painted Sin Saimdang in the opening here photographs her present-day reincarnation, just after she has seen an enlarged version of Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume* hanging in the palazzo gallery.

The drama *Saimdang* thus self-reflexively references its own intermediality by gesturing to archaic precedents, which in turn are folded into the various intertextualities between media. The scene where Chiyun encounters the mirror that conceals the triptych enclosing her (Saimdang's) portrait, which gets superimposed onto the close-up of Chiyun's face, for example, televisually actualizes a process that Ivan Gaskell describes in his analysis of the *Carondelet Diptych* as the "activation" of the "literal spatial incongruity" of an open diptych in which "the actualization of its effects and meanings, can be said to take place in the space between the two plates," expanding and distorting as the diptych gets unfolded

(Gaskell 2006, 331). An inter-aesthetic relationality between forms is established between the mirror image, the triptych, and the portrait. In art, a triptych traditionally consists of two panels or tablets joined by hinges to a third, central panel that is twice as large; the side panels close like window shutters to protect the inside. To invoke Deleuzian parlance, it literally folds. The center panel in these threefold works pulls together the two side panels, adhering to a dialectic logic or simply synthesizing two variations into a principal idea or subject. In the painting, Sin Saimdang's figure dressed in a *hanbok* fills the traditional scroll, which hangs unfurled and encased within two large wooden doors hinged to the center, which holds the portrait, reminiscent in its pose of Sin Yunbok's (pen name Hyewŏn, 1758–1813) portrait of a beauty in the Chosŏn era, the *Miindo*,[11] although Sin Saimdang (1504–1551) would have predated the *Miindo* by over 200 years. Saimdang's presence mediates and shatters the separation between these forms and initiates a televisual development of these forms.

Saimdang's role in mediating this inter-aesthetic relationality is digitally reinforced in the preceding scene, where the parts of a televisual diptych (like a split screen, functioning like two panels conjoined by hinges) get pulled into each other and past the "fold" holding the two parts together. In this scene, Chiyun (yet unaware that she is the present reincarnation of Sin Saimdang), finds herself drawn by mysterious forces toward the hall where the portrait was painted. Chiyun, pictured on the left moving toward the hall, faces the phantom of the painter of the portrait (whom we see, but she does not)—the fictive Yi Kyŏm—as they walk toward each other and pass through each other's bodies, a conjoining movement that unites the narrative diptych of past and present that will structure into a single object the parallel narratives of the Chosŏn period and the present.

By folding together the spatiality and temporality of various media and multiple subjects (including their various representations), the overarching frame becomes one in which archaic modes of portraits are shown in the process of translation into digital form through the presence of Saimdang's body. Within this framework, various iterations and renderings of Saimdang are at play simultaneously and in conversation with each other; as a variegated composite in multiple media and forms, it constitutes what I call a kind of *teleportraiture*. In its production of a portrait of Saimdang, the television screen endows Saimdang with what Kris Paulsen terms *telepresence*, a capacity for "the feeling of being present at a remote location by means of real-time telecommunications devices. One can be visually,

aurally, and even tactilely present to distant, mediated environments through networked devices, such as video cameras and telerobots" (Paulsen 2017, 2). Similarly, Saimdang can be visualized as being present in Italy through her writing, interacting with Yi Kyŏm while he is in exile, and present also with Chiyun in Italy, who sees both Sin Saimdang and Yi Kyŏm strolling together at Siesta di Luna, the estate in Italy where Yi Kyŏm spent the last days of his exile. As Chiyun narrates their togetherness in a voiceover, the screen frames Sin Saimdang and Yi Kyŏm together, holding hands and embracing in Italy, forming a televisual portrait made possible by the presence of Chiyun herself, who is present as if facilitating and mediating Saimdang's telepresence there.

Conclusion

The crisis in generic differentiation goes beyond inter-aesthetic forms and extends to questioning the distinction between the real and the fake, connecting the drama's concern for intermediality to the historical association of its central figure to currency, and the problems of authentication with which I began this essay. The landscape painting *Kŭmgangsando*, attributed to the Chosŏn court painter An Kyŏn in *Saimdang*, is a forgery of a fictive work of art. Both the real (in the fictive narrative) and the fake paintings are by the artist Chang Pyŏn'gŏn, who was commissioned in 2015 by the producers of the drama. Based on an in-depth study of An Kyŏn's only known existing work, the *Mongyu towŏndo* (T. Son 2017), Chang's works are said to be so plausibly that of An Kyŏn's that to an untrained eye—especially when viewed on television—they could very well be assumed to be real. Verifying the artist and provenance of the *Kŭmgangsando* drives the narrative, and this process necessarily entails an intermedial relationship between texts, including literary texts such as the diary belonging to Sin Saimdang discovered in Italy that becomes crucial to establishing the true existence of the *Kŭgkangsando* and to authenticating the artist. The diary text is given to Yi Kyŏm (imagined as Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume*) by Sin Saimdang when he leaves for exile. In this intermedial way, various forms and texts come to constitute a kind of affect-driven currency that legitimates alternative forms of value as they circulate within the affective regime associated with *Hallyu*. In short, the intermediality reflects how unquantifiable and intangible values are articulated concurrently with currency at the intersection of hard and soft economies.

In conclusion, I return our discussion briefly to the initial focus on the authentication and circulation of Sin Saimdang's banknote. As Sin Saimdang's presence in the final episode, set in Chosŏn; Italy; Goa, India; China; and present-day Korea suggests, the purpose of the authentication motif as a narrative process is ultimately one of affirming an interconnectivity and accountability that transgresses borders. At the same time, the continuous circularity of her presence as text in the form of letters, aesthetic influence, and embodied form registers anxieties accompanying this transgression as it becomes more complex and difficult to differentiate genres and spatio-temporal boundaries. The montage of Yi Kyŏm walking through a city in China, crossing the desert in a sandstorm, and climbing mountains in a snowstorm until he reaches the ocean to sail to Europe is sustained by his reception and possession of Sin Saimdang's diary and gifts. In other words, she accompanies him, if not in person, then at least in materiality as a kind of currency. She is the money that sustains him in his travels, and his travels visually undergird the growth of her papermaking enterprise—the montage of his travels across the globe is interwoven into scenes showing the different sectors within Sin Saimdang's papermaking commune, under her economic authority, and subject to her generosity. The more he travels sustained by her support, the more her business grows. This logic extends also to aesthetics. In Italy, he continues his pursuit of the arts, incorporating Italian art styles into his paintings, working on murals inspired by Saimdang's *Ch'och'ungdo*. Dressed as the subject in Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume*, his circulation gestures to the possibility of Chosŏn's place beyond Asia. The final image that Yi Kyŏm takes with him to his exile and eventually comes to paint is the image of Saimdang on shore to see him off, but as this chapter has shown, it is not simply that the representation of Saimdang gets mediated, but that Saimdang mediates.

NOTES

1. The Bank of Korea Money Museum (Han'guk ŭnhaeng hwap'ye pangmulgwan) has an interactive "Anti-Counterfeiting" exhibit. A summary of elaborate anticounterfeiting features and the details of the design of the 50,000-wŏn note is also available on the Bank of Korea's website: https://www.bok.or.kr/eng/main/contents.do?menuNo=400172. Accessed February 5, 2023. See also Han'guk ŭnhaeng (2004).

2. The reverse of the note features Yi Chŏng's *P'ungjukdo* depicting bamboo and Ŏ Mongryong's *Wŏlmaedo* depicting plum blossoms, both typical paintings of the mid-Chosŏn period.

3. The production costs for *Saimdang* were estimated to be 21.6 billion wŏn (about

US$18.5 million). Its Chinese rights were sold to Hong Kong–based Emperor Entertainment Korea for $267,000 per episode. Previously, *Descendants of the Sun* (*T'aeyang ŭi huye*, 2015) had held the record for $250,000 per episode. Additionally, the rights to *Saimdang* were sold to US-based Netflix for $20,000 per episode, and in Japan for $90,000 per episode. Further anticipated profits included up to 34.7 billion wŏn in sales of merchandise and products placed in the show (Doo 2017).

4. See Hay's (2001) discussion of Raymond Williams's (1992) *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*.

5. Sunglim Kim (2016, 214) cites Yi Yi, *Sŏnbi haengjang*, quoted in O Sech'ang, *Kŭnyŏk sŏhwajing* [Compilation of Biographies of Korean Calligraphers and Painters] (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1992), 339.

6. In these aspects, *Saimdang* falls into the same category as other portraits of contemporary trade, such as the promotional web series *Seven First Kisses* (*Ch'ŏt k'issŭ man ilgop-pŏnjjae*) produced for Lotte Duty Free Shop, which aired online through Naver TV Cast and YouTube from December 2016 to January 2017. Featuring a line of *Hallyu* celebrities whom a duty-free-shop girl imagines kissing, the web series is structured as short playful takes on popular drama genres that take place mostly within the duty-free shop.

7. Saimdang was first studied as a historical figure by Song Siyŏl. For dramatizations of her life, see, for example, the films *Yulgok and His Mother* (*Yulgok kwa kŭ ŏmŏni*, dir. Yi Chonggi, 1963) and *Yulgok and Sin Saimdang* (*Yulgok kwa Sin Saimdang*, dir. Chŏng Chinwu, 1978).

8. They illustrate appropriations of Western artistic techniques of portraiture, such as a "soft rendering of the face" in which there are "no discernible lines or outlines," with shading used to create volume and highlighting areas of the face through variations in brightness to "evoke a sense of reflected light" (Woo 2014, 288–91).

9. See Stephanie Schrader's illuminating discussion of the "Joseon Man" hypotheses in her essay, "The Many Identities of Rubens's *Man in Korean Costume*: New Perspectives on Old Interpretations," which opens her edited volume on Rubens's portrait (Schrader 2013, 1–24).

10. See Schrader (2013, 10) for her discussion of Chi Myŏngsuk and Boudewijn Walraven, *Pomulsŏm ŭn ŏdi e: Nedŏllandŭ gongmunsŏ rŭl t'onghae bon Han'guk kwa ŭi kyoryusa* [Where Is the Treasure Island? Seeing Netherlands-Korea Relations Through the Dutch East India Company's and Other Archives of the Dutch Government] (Seoul: Yŏnsei Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 2003), 4–41.

11. Sin Yunbok's *Miindo* (*Portrait of a Beauty*) is itself the subject of the 2008 SBS TV series *Painter of the Wind* (starring Mun Kŭnyŏng as Sin Yunbok), which is the focus of Sunyoung Yang's chapter in this volume, and the 2008 film *Portrait of a Beauty* (starring Kim Minsŏn as Sin Yunbok). The two works are based on Yi Chŏngmyŏng's novel *Painter of the Wind* (*Param ŭi hwawŏn*, 2007), in which Sin is imagined having been a woman disguising herself as a man.

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8

"I Can Speak Because I Am a Mother"

The Trope of Motherhood in Mothers' Political Activism Relating to the Sewol Ferry Disaster

Jinsook Kim

On April 16, 2018, then-president of South Korea (hereafter Korea) Moon Jae-in (Mun Chaein) addressed the nation, declaring that "The Sewol tragedy changed us. . . . The Candlelight protests and the vow to create a new South Korea began with the Sewol [disaster]" (Jang 2018). This speech was delivered on the fourth anniversary of the sinking of the Sewol Ferry; it was Moon's first since becoming president, which happened thanks in large part to the so-called "candlelight movement" that worked to impeach his predecessor, Park Geun-hye (Pak Kŭnhye). For Park, the Sewol tragedy marked the "beginning of her own political demise" (N. Kim 2017, 7), revealing as it did the incompetence, irresponsibility, and corruption of her regime, though there were other political motives behind the impeachment as well.

The Korean ferry named Sewol (Sewŏl) capsized and sank en route to Cheju Island on April 16, 2014, carrying 476 people. The news media initially reported that all of the passengers were alive and would soon be rescued. However, Koreans watched live broadcasts in horror as the ferry quickly sank with hundreds still trapped onboard. While some of those on the deck were rescued by fishing boats and other commercial vessels, most of the passengers drowned. In all, there were 299 dead, 172 survivors, and 5 still missing as of August 2018. The majority of the deceased were students on a field trip from Tanwŏn High School in the city of Ansan.

The Sewol Ferry disaster[1] shocked the nation. It caused national trauma

and mourning and revealed complex social and political irregularities and dysfunctions within Korean society (Suh and Kim 2017; Woo et al. 2015). Much of the criticism was directed at the captain and crew members, who had abandoned ship while instructing the passengers to stay put and await rescue, though later most proved to be inexperienced temporary workers. Worse still, the Republic of Korea Navy and Coast Guard failed either to communicate with the ferry or to conduct timely rescue operations—indeed, not a single passenger inside the ship was rescued by the Coast Guard. In addition, it was revealed that the Chonghaejin Marine Company, the owner of the ferry, had purchased it from a Japanese seller when it was already eighteen years old and decrepit, and had then illegally modified it to carry passengers and cargo beyond its capacity.

Above all, the Korean government revealed its negligence both in failing to exercise oversight of the corrupt ferry company and in its incompetence when attempting to handle the situation. Scholars have attributed the disaster to collusion between the neoliberal state, with its penchant for deregulation, and corrupt private businesses, with their privileging of profit-making over public safety. These trends have been described as symptomatic of Korea's compressed modernization process, which has created a risk society (Cho Han 2017; G. Kim 2016; Suh and Kim 2017). The disaster has even been called a "massacre committed by political power and capital" (G. Kim 2016, 161). In this sense, the sinking of the Sewol Ferry was not an unfortunate accident but rather a noteworthy social and historical "incident" (Cho Han 2017, 168).

With the passage of time, however, the nation has become divided in its reactions to the follow-up measures adopted in response to the disaster (Choe 2014). On the one hand, the victims' families and their supporters have engaged in ongoing protests, demanding passage of a special law that would provide for an independent committee to investigate the tragedy endowed with the authority to subpoena information and to initiate prosecutions. On the other hand, Korean conservatives, including politicians from the ruling party, have tried to refute criticism of the government's handling of the incident, and extreme right-wing groups, nationalist evangelical organizations, and supporters of former president Park soon began to produce a counter-discourse accusing the families of making excessive demands and causing social unrest and economic recession (Cho Han 2017).[2]

Of particular interest for my analysis of the response to the Sewol disaster are the voices of mothers, both conservative and progressive, who have spoken out about it. Some of these voices have been heard in the context of organizations and online communities led by mothers, such as

the Community of Natural Childbirth Family, I Can Speak Because I'm a Mother, and the Republic of Korea Mom's Brigade Volunteer Group. Indeed, the National Institute of the Korean Language reported in 2014 on the coinage of the neologism "angry mom" to describe mothers who speak out regarding social issues (Y. Yi 2015; Chŏng and Chŏn 2014).

However, these emerging mothers' movements have been framed by the mass media as merely "ideological proxy wars between the conservatives and the progressives" (Paek 2014; see Figure 8.1). For example, an article in *Kungmin Ilbo* reported that "Experts view these motherhood-dependent social movements as the product of a backward political system," arguing further that "the failure of the political system resulted in relying on the name 'mother,' which symbolizes the most fundamental humanity" (Paek 2014). Yet while these mothers' movements have been framed as veiled battles between progressives and conservatives waged through the mass media, little critical or scholarly attention has been paid to their specific claims and actions.

Accordingly, in this study, I consider the widespread social and political participation of women in mothers' movements as representative of a significant emergent phenomenon in Korea. In some respects, the notion of maternal power embodied in these movements derives from and builds on long-held neo-Confucian principles according to which women exercise authority within the domestic sphere (Deuchler 1992). The trope of motherhood thus serves as a rhetorical point of departure for women's activism in a manner that is related to their limited resources and social roles. Women have long been discriminated against and suffered alienation in Korea's male-centered and misogynistic culture, even within the context of democratic progressive movements (Moon 2002; Sin and Chang 2001). Consequently, movements based on motherhood represent an important arena for Korean women across the political spectrum to speak out in public against the dominant discourse, according to which motherhood should remain confined to the domestic sphere and mothers themselves should remain apolitical and generally uninterested in public affairs (Deuchler 1992; Kim and Cho 2011). As this volume emphasizes, these movements show that gender—in this case, ideal femininities—plays a pivotal role in making and claiming rights for political action and social change. In particular, the claim of rights vis-à-vis motherhood demonstrates how the deeply ingrained gendered tropes of an ideal mother, mediated by mass media, constrain both progressive and conservative mothers' movements in terms of the scope of the claim and its potential in the neo-Confucian Korean context.

Fig. 8.1. Opposing voices raised in the name of "Mother" (Paek 2014).

Since the 1980s, Korean women's movements have prioritized married women and maternal issues, such as maternity protection for working mothers, in advancing women's rights. A noteworthy aspect of contemporary activist mothers, such as the "stroller moms" discussed in this chapter, is that they tend to share their concerns through a grassroots process, organizing voluntarily rather than being mobilized by existing women's organizations. In recent years, moreover, public interest in and support for gender issues in Korea have been growing in what has been described as a "feminism reboot" (Sohn 2017, 47; see Chapter 1 of this volume). Though today's mothers' movements do not explicitly identify themselves as feminist, their activism has significant implications for gender-based activism and women's empowerment in Korean society and beyond, since the notion of motherhood can serve to reinforce or contest gender role differentiation. Furthermore, the range of political orientations represented by these groups is inconsistent with the dominant conception of mothers. Married women have generally been represented as a homogenous group of housewives regardless of distinctions among them based on location, age, class, employment status, dis/ability, citizenship, or immigration status (C. Kim 1999; H. Park 2010).

The activism surrounding the Sewol Ferry disaster has made it especially clear that these women are anything but univocal, and instead are rather sharply divided in their politics. The disaster has thus created an opportunity for the social discussion of motherhood and also revealed it

to be a contested term. The present study highlights the mobilization of the trope of motherhood by progressive and conservative mothers alike in their capacity as political actors, thereby providing a breadth of perspective that has been lacking due to the tendency in previous academic discussions of women's activism to overlook conservative women.

In this study, I foreground the mediation of motherhood and its implications in relation to gender politics by investigating news media coverage of the topic. I explicate the discursive use of motherhood in progressive and conservative movements with particular attention to the aforementioned stroller moms and the Republic of Korea Mom's Brigade Volunteer Group (*Taehan Min'guk ŏmma pudae pongsadan*, hereafter the "Mom's Brigade"). In performing the research, I identified and examined news reports about mothers' movements in connection with the Sewol Ferry disaster primarily by accessing the Korea Press Foundation's *BIGkinds* website (http://www.bigkinds.or.kr/), which covers the country's eight main nationwide daily news publications, including two major progressive newspapers, *Kyŏnghyang sinmun* and *Han'gyŏre*. I also analyzed articles from three major conservative newspapers, *Chosŏn ilbo*, *Tonga ilbo*, and *Chungang ilbo*, that are not included in the *BIGkinds* news database. My search covered the period from April 2014 to August 2018 using the keywords "stroller mom" (*yumoch'a ŏmma*), "stroller brigade" (*yumoch'a pudae*), "Mom's brigade" (*ŏmma pudae*), and "Sewol Ferry mothers" (*Sewŏl-ho ŏmma tŭl*).

In what follows, I first review the relevant literature to explore the various social discourses surrounding motherhood and demonstrate the strategic use of the trope of motherhood by various mothers' movements. Next, I reveal distinct differences in the use of motherhood by progressive and conservative mothers in their activism by focusing on two groups. One group, the progressive "stroller brigade," has insisted that the safety of children is intertwined with the broader social and political system—rather than viewing individual mothers as largely responsible for child-rearing and education—and has accordingly taken the government to task for failing to ensure the safety of the passengers on the ferry. This kind of activism, by invoking social responsibility, has the potential to transcend what has long been the dominant ideology of motherhood in Korea. By contrast, the right-leaning Mom's Brigade has approached the Sewol Ferry disaster as an unfortunate accident, thereby denying or at least downplaying the government's responsibility for it and placing the burden of dealing with it on individual citizens and households—that is, on the victims and their families. Championing what they consider to be patriotic values

and the path to national development, these mothers emphasize the moral influence and responsibility represented by motherhood by positioning themselves as mothers of the nation as a whole. Their emphasis on women's responsibility for the well-being of the family and the country thus reproduces the neo-Confucian model of the good mother.

Despite the differences between these groups, I reveal that the media coverage of and mass-mediated public discourse about them have continued to rely on a fixed, gendered conception of motherhood that reinforces patriarchal and identitarian logics. Thus, the trope of motherhood becomes a double-edged sword for these mothers in that they are asserting their authority as mothers to ground and lend weight to their claims (and, in turn, potentially limiting these claims) while criticizing the social structures that place mothers in untenable positions. As such, I discuss the implications of and dilemma regarding emerging motherhood movements, which have both created a foothold for and placed constraints on women's social and political activism.

Motherhood as a Patriarchal Institution

Feminist scholars have long been invested in demonstrating that motherhood is not the natural, biological, or essential role and experience of women; rather, it is a socially, culturally, and historically contingent institution that occupies ideologically contested terrain (Dally 1983; Ŭ. Kim 1996, 2003; Rich 1976; Thurer 1995; Wollstonecraft 2004 [1891]; Yeo 1999). In Korea, the mobilization of motherhood and reproductive issues has been closely related to the developmental state (Bae 2010; Hwang 2005; Ŭ. Kim 2001). For instance, from the 1960s to 1980s, family planning programs made contraception, sterilization, and abortion services available to women for the purpose of regulating the population at large. In particular, under a national program of eugenics, disabled women were forcibly deprived of their reproductive rights—supposedly in order to limit the population of the disabled—in an especially dramatic display of the strategic deployment of motherhood at the intersection of ideologies of gender, disability, family, and nationhood (E. Kim 2017).

As mentioned, the ideals traditionally associated with motherhood in Korea have also been deeply influenced by enduring gendered norms founded on neo-Confucian ideology. This ideology establishes a hierarchy by designating female and male spaces as domestic and public, respectively, and by differentiating the roles of women and men therein (Deuchler 1992).

Thus, the status of women has been largely contingent on their relationships with men in such familial roles as wife and mother. Beginning in the early twentieth century, a more modern ideal of Korean womanhood emerged, in no small part owing to the efforts of American missionaries to educate Korean women. This education, however, still emphasized women's roles as good wives and mothers and thereby reinscribed the notion that women belong in the domestic sphere, leaving them caught between Victorian ideals of domesticity and the Confucian ideology of virtuous womanhood rather than challenging these notions (Choi 2009a). As in the modern West, the trope or discourse of essential motherhood and the invention of full-time motherhood are closely intertwined with the emergence of the private/public dichotomy (Mack 2018; O'Reilly 2011).

The persistent patriarchal notion in Korea of motherhood as inherently private has provided a basis for the criticism, problematization, and stigmatization of women who emerge from the home and refuse to uphold traditional domestic roles and values. This situation became clear in the 1990s, when married women became actively involved in social activities, and mothers who challenged established notions were criticized as selfish, ignorant, antisocial, and vain (Ŭ. Kim 2003; Nelson 2000).

This point has been made by, among others, Nelson (2000), who, in a book on consumer nationalism in Korea, showed that Korean women in the 1990s, particularly housewives, were depicted as responsible for the consumption of domestic goods—as opposed to imported luxury items—as part of an effort to boost the country's economic development and international reputation. As a result, the discourse about overconsumption became highly charged, with women, especially affluent ones, being condemned for neglecting their children, deviating from the ideal of feminine chastity and modesty, and failing to embody, in Nelson's words, "the importance of frugality as a national cultural trait and as a national responsibility" (2000, 152). Motherhood as an institution and the various social discourses associated with it, then, continue to limit the public presence and activities of Korean women by confining them to the domestic sphere.

Motherhood as a Rhetorical Strategy and Point of Departure for Social Activism

The existing scholarship has revealed that, within the context of women's limited resources and social roles, motherhood can form the basis of effec-

tive rhetorical strategies. From the perspective of neo-Confucian gender norms, for example, women's roles as mothers in the domestic sphere are elevated because their responsibility for educating their children gives them a foundational role in the development of the nation (Choi 2009a). Thus, Cho (1996) spoke of the two sides of Confucian patriarchy in Korea that simultaneously empower mothers and suppress female autonomy so as to accommodate women within a male-dominated system. Choi (2009b) also argued that, while the "wise mother and good wife" ideology is certainly oppressive in many respects, it is also liberating in the sense that it creates a circumscribed domain in which women exercise power.

Similarly, Campbell's (1989) account of the rhetoric of the woman's rights movement in the United States in the nineteenth century showed that femininity and rhetorical action have often been seen as mutually exclusive. In the vision of domesticity and "true womanhood" that she described, women were not to speak publicly or otherwise exhibit "masculine" attributes in the traditionally male public sphere. Many female rhetors, therefore, strategically adopted a "feminine style" in order to persuade their audiences and exercise political power. In this context, women's alleged moral superiority was utilized to oppose injustice and solve social problems (Hurner 2006). Thus, for example, in a study by Tonn (1996), symbolic motherhood was found to have played a crucial role in the work of labor union organizer Mary Harris Jones, who identified herself as "Mother Jones" and cast male mine workers as her "boys" or "children." For Jones, motherhood was a rhetorical strategy conditioned by the limited roles available to women at the time. In other words, her rhetoric of motherhood—her militant mothering—empowered Jones within the male-dominated union culture of her time.

Women in social movements worldwide, both progressive and reactionary, have likewise taken motherhood as a rhetorical point of departure for activism (Peeples and DeLuca 2006; Rogers and Jacquelyn 2004). For example, since the 1970s, motherhood has played a significant role in mobilizing and staging women's activism and raising issues ranging from reproductive rights to state violence in such Latin American countries as Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, and Mexico (Mooney 2007; O'Connor 2014). The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, for instance, organized and protested against human rights violations, in particular the disappearance of their children under the military dictatorships, claiming that doing so was consistent with their maternal responsibilities (Fabj 1993; Taylor 2001).[3]

Similarly, family members of the democratic activists and those killed

by the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s have been actively participating in democratization movements in Korea by forming organizations such as the Association of the Family Movement for the Realization of Democracy (*Minjuhwa silchŏn kajok undong hyŏpŭihoe*) and the Korean Association of Bereaved Families for Democracy (*Chŏn'guk minjuhwa undong yukajok hyŏpŭihoe*). In the past few years, several articles have been devoted to the study of the families of the victims of political oppression. For example, a study of the activism of bereaved mothers following the Gwangju May Uprising movement has shown that mothers' sense of responsibility for their children's well-being can motivate transformative social movements (Kim, Kim, and Park 2016). Commenting specifically on the Sewol Ferry disaster, Lee (Lee 2017) revealed that the bereaved families became resilient political actors in large part owing to two factors: their deep mistrust of the government and political leaders and their profound guilt and regret over the loss of their children. Her research provides insights into the transformation of the families' worldviews by the disaster that led them to question the government's postdisaster responses. The social and political impact of the disaster extends beyond the families of the victims to broader groups of citizens, however, including the mothers' movements. There is thus a need for further examination of the role of motherhood as a discursive strategy that mediates women's broader participation in politics and society.

To be clear, as Korean women's and feminist movements have continued to find success by raising awareness of a range of women's issues, marriage, maternity, and the work-family balance have remained central to their activism and to the research into it (Chŏn 2015). In addition to advocating for the rights of female workers, organizations such as Korean Womenlink, founded in 1987, have tried to include "housewife movements" within broader women's movements (C. Kim 1999). For several decades, then, women's movements have been treating such everyday concerns as environmental policy, housing, and education as social issues based on "life politics" (K. Kim 2002)—as documented, for example, in research on women's participation in consumer cooperatives and food politics (Baek 2012). The housewife movement, however, was initiated by existing women's organizations seeking to extend their reach beyond committed activists (C. Kim 1999). The emergence of the stroller brigade in connection with the 2008 protests in Korea against the importation of US beef (Chae and Kim 2010; Kim and Cho 2011) is therefore noteworthy in that it took shape as individuals came together voluntarily in online com-

munities based solely on their shared identity as mothers, rather than in connection with an existing women's organization.

The activism of the stroller brigade was controversial because these activists made their strollers part of their political action. Feeding a family thus came to be viewed as a political issue in 2008 and persisted as such after the controversy over imported beef waned. As a study by Chae and Kim (2010) revealed, activism in the context of the stroller brigades seems to have raised the participants' consciousness and caused them to change their practices. Thus many members of these brigades have continued speaking out on such social and political issues as the free school lunch program, toxic humidifiers, and, since 2014, the Sewol Ferry disaster (Chŏng and Chŏn 2014). Little scholarly attention has been directed, however, to their ongoing activities or, particularly, to the nexus between their activism and motherhood. Moreover, the social protests relating to the Sewol Ferry disaster differed from the previous mothers' movements in that conservative women organized and claimed to speak for mothers generally.

On a related note, there is another significant gap in the literature with regard to conservative mothers' movements in Korea, though they have received considerable media attention in recent years (Chŏng and Chŏn 2014). After their debut in connection with the Sewol Ferry disaster, the conservative mothers represented by the Mom's Brigade have, like the progressive members of the stroller squads, continued their initial burst of activism in connection with various political issues. These issues have included support for the 2015 agreement between Korea and Japan regarding the "comfort women" issue (which was reached over the survivors' objections), antiqueer activism, protests against the resignation of former president Park, and antirefugee demonstrations. These conservative women have been understudied in part because gender has not been considered a significant analytical category in Korean politics—since feminist scholars tend to focus on progressive women and to dismiss conservative women as collaborators with patriarchal society (C. Yi 2016). The present study helps to restore balance to the scholarship by treating both progressive and conservative mothers as important political actors as well as by exploring the various strategies that they have used to justify their claims and to mobilize activism.

As the varying approaches that scholars have taken to these issues indicate, no clear definition of the term "motherhood movement" has yet emerged. Rather, the definition has been a point of contention, with some

viewing motherhood movements as mother-focused and others as child-focused (O'Reilly 2011). Further, absent a unifying politics for the motherhood movement as a whole, the various motherhood movements have pursued a range of goals and strategies. Thus, according to Tucker (2004), "several strands of political philosophy float through the logic and rhetoric of the emerging mothers' movement" (1), among which she distinguishes liberal feminism, maternalism, and the ethics of care theory as the dominant influences. From the perspective of liberal feminism, mothers are individual citizens to be provided with a vocabulary of rights. Maternalist approaches, by contrast, assume an essentialist notion of motherhood and support mothers' care work as a precious resource. And, from the perspective of feminist care theory, care is a social responsibility, and those who advocate for the public good should oppose both the dominant ideology of motherhood and the ideology of rational individualism.

The broad variety of philosophies and approaches that share space within the context of existing mothers' movements highlights the need for an investigation of the various uses of motherhood and their implications for gender politics in Korea. The critical criteria for the analysis are "whether these different frameworks support or contest the dominant ideology of motherhood and whether they serve as a useful basis for developing advocacy positions that will advance, rather than obstruct, gender equality" (Tucker 2004, 1–2). Put another way, the question concerns "What ought to be [the] goals, strategies, and tactics of the emerging mothers' movement, especially if it is to be compatible with feminism" (DiQuinzio 2006, 55). The critical examination of the trope of motherhood in the context of the Korean mothers' movements associated with the Sewol Ferry disaster presented here helps to answer this question.

The Stroller Brigade: Progressive and Militant Motherhood

Since the 2008 protests against US beef imports, there have been growing calls by young progressive mothers for social change in Korea, especially with respect to safety, food quality, and education issues involving children. A typical demographic representation of the stroller brigade is a "married young woman in her 30s raising one or two kids," which in fact describes more than 80% of Korean women in this age group (Kim and Cho 2011, 7).

In regard to the Sewol Ferry disaster, many young women have spoken out based on their shared identity as mothers. On Children's Day, for

example, more than 200 stroller moms participated in a silent protest, carrying picket signs reading "The best gift for Children's Day would be living in a country that is just and safe," "I want to live safely with my child in Korea," and so on (S. Park 2014). Many of the participants in the protest were prominent members of such online child-rearing communities as *Madame Pangbae* (*Madam pangbae*), *Community of Natural Childbirth Family* (*Chayŏn ch'ulsan k'ap'e*), and the *Mothers' Community in Sŏch'o* (*Sŏch'o ŏmma tŭl ŭi moim*) (Han 2014; Koh 2014).

Young mothers frequently expressed empathy with the victims' families for the loss of their children. In an interview, one of the women who had organized a silent protest stated:

> I can say my life has turned 180 degrees after becoming a mother. I can't express in words how I feel about the Sewol Ferry Disaster from a mother's perspective. Bereaved families must have been really heartbroken, because even I feel that way just hearing about it. I cried so hard with my husband watching the news about the Sewol Ferry Disaster. Because I have a kid, I totally understood their feelings; to me, it was not somebody else's business. (Han 2014)

Affect, especially this empathy for the bereaved families, proved transformative for these mothers' activism (G. Kim 2016), as the following quote illustrates:

> After the Sewol tragedy, I came to realize that all of the small things necessary in our daily lives—food, clothing, and shelter—are connected to society and politics. The government should take care of it and salvage the ship, and the best that we can do is not to forget the tragedy. (Kim and Kim 2015)

Based on shared empathy, then, these mothers began to speak out, demanding stronger child-safety measures, and they felt that they could do so because of the very fact that they were mothers. If the persuasive power of rhetoric "exists in the shared symbolic and socioeconomic experience of persuaders (rhetors) and audiences" (Campbell 1989, 2), for the stroller moms, the shared experience of bearing and rearing children provided a basis for addressing the ferry issue. They accordingly argued that change was necessary for the sake of their children, as the following interview excerpts show:

I cannot believe the fact that no one was rescued after the ferry sinking. It could happen to my daughter, too. Just thinking about it scares me. I think we have to discuss how to change this society. (Paek 2014)

When we first heard about the Sewol accident, we felt helpless because there was nothing that we could do. But we couldn't just stay home. If people are apathetic about society, nothing will change. We took part in the parade with the hope for change in the society where our children will live. (S. Park 2014)

If I am silent about the Sewol ferry issue, no one will care and speak for me when something happens to my family. (Han 2014)

These mothers' claim, then, was that they had to bring about change in order to protect other Korean children from similar disasters (S. Park 2014). In this sense, the stroller brigades expanded the child safety issue from an exclusively individual, maternal duty into a matter of social responsibility. In doing so, they criticized and offered an alternative to "the dominant neoliberal values and norms of personal, monetary success" (G. Kim 2016, 176). Thus, the rhetoric of motherhood provided a path out of the private sphere toward raising a public voice about the issue of safety. The stroller mothers' activism in this respect is consistent with precepts of feminist care theory and activism according to which the socialization of care must extend beyond the dominant ideology of motherhood (Bae 2010; Chŏn 2015; Tucker 2004).

In addition, for the stroller brigade, motherhood has a militant face in the form of bringing their young children with them to street protests. This image was particularly powerful during the 2008 protests, when stroller moms stood at the forefront, facing down water cannons to protect other protestors from police violence (R. Kim 2008). Popular commentators, online observers, and politicians have debated the ethics of bringing children so young to a demonstration. For Tonn (1996), mothering's militant face is a "fierce other side occasioned both by systemic oppression and isolated external threats to the welfare of children" (5). The stroller moms offered various reasons for bringing their children, asserting, for instance, that no babysitters were available, that the aim of the protest was a benefit to their children's welfare, or that the demonstrations were an experience to be shared with their children (Han and Heo 2010).

To quote Tonn (1996) again, militant mothers "not only confront their children's enemy" but also "train their children to do likewise if the threat they face is ongoing and systematic" (5). In this sense, then, the stroller moms' participation in protests also reveals mothering's militant face as it confronts government power.

Nor was this phenomenon confined within the borders of Korea, for the Sewol Ferry disaster resonated with and sparked activism among Koreans living overseas as well. Thus, for example, a series of full-page ads on the issue ran in the *New York Times*, and rallies were held in the United States under the guidance of *MissyUSA*, an online community for married Korean female immigrants. The ads, under the title "Bring the Truth to Light: Why Are Koreans Outraged by President Park Geun-hye?," offered a political critique of the Korean government, "demanding an immediate end to the South Korean government's control of the media, censorship of the truth, manipulation of public opinion, and suppression of the public's freedom of speech" (H. Park 2014).

Not surprisingly, media outlets to some extent did portray the mothers' various activities in ways that reflected their political orientations. Conservative newspapers tended to depict the mothers as overly political and sympathetic to extreme leftist ideologies, while progressive newspapers depicted them as ordinary, usually apolitical, housewives. According to the conservative *Chosŏn ilbo*, for example, *MissyUSA* promoted "a creepy advertisement critiquing President Park and the government" that was funded by progressive online communities, including a women's community that had been stirring controversy since the 2008 protests (M. Kim 2014). *Chosŏn ilbo* further reported that protests about the Sewol Ferry disaster had become violent under the influence of "professional protestors" or "outsiders" (Y. Yi 2015). It has even come to light that the Park administration pressured the country's media organizations to identify *MissyUSA* as a pro–North Korea group (Sŏ 2017). Thus, conservative voices characterized the women who contributed to the ads as rebellious antigovernment forces exploiting the Sewol Ferry disaster for political purposes.

Progressive newspapers, by contrast, expressed the view that the stroller moms' voices were rooted, not in their political perspectives, but in their ostensibly pure maternal hearts. The coverage of a rally in *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, for example, represented the women's concerns in largely emotional terms (Son 2014), as is apparent in the following interview with a participant:

> I've been indifferent to politics and only devoted to child-rearing as
> a housewife. I've never participated in any political demonstration.
> However, I am here now [at the protest] because I feel the same
> pain as a mother. (Son 2014)

Thus, the members of groups such as *MissyUSA* were said to "protest not for political reasons but to make sure their home country is safe and to protect their children" (G. Kim 2016, 174).

This conception of motherhood takes the problematic step of essentializing the stroller moms' identities as caring housewives. And indeed, the media analysis of these issues has not gone beyond discussion of the mothers' ostensible politicization of domestic issues. Alternatively, however, the representation of these activists as apolitical can be understood as part of a rhetorical strategy on the part of the activists to legitimize their movement and forestall criticism, in particular the charge of affiliation with the established political parties and organizations discussed above. In other words, these activists seem to have declared themselves free of political ideologies and affiliations as a means to legitimize their claims in the eyes of skeptics. Chae and Kim (2010), in their study of the stroller moms' involvement in the 2008 demonstrations, suggested as much when they observed that these protesters exploited the dominant cultural norms associated with motherhood by claiming to be "not political" but rather maternally "pure," again, in order to shield themselves from the criticisms of their conservative families and political opponents. It therefore appears that the progressive newspapers, in failing to consider the activists' rhetorical strategies, have reinforced the valorization of political disengagement and pure motherhood and downplayed the militancy of the progressive motherhood movements.

The Mom's Brigade: Conservative and Patriotic Motherhood

The Mom's Brigade has, for its part, played a prominent role in the response to the Sewol Ferry disaster by opposing critiques of the government by bereaved families and their supporters, including the stroller moms. Like the stroller moms, however, the brigade's members have grounded their actions rhetorically in their role as mothers. The Mom's Brigade was established in 2013 by women, most between the ages of 40 and 70, who identified as patriotic conservatives. The group has aligned with other conservative groups, such as the Korea Freedom Federation and the Korea Parents'

Federation, and now finds itself in the vanguard of such organizations (Chang 2014b). Although it claims that it is not officially affiliated with any existing political party, several members of the Mom's Brigade have since played active roles in the conservative party (M. Kim 2015). For example, in 2017, Chu Oksun, a brigade representative, was appointed vice chairperson of the digital communication committee of the conservative party.

As the Sewol Ferry Disaster became an increasingly potent political issue, the Mom's Brigade and other conservative groups, as well as members of the mainstream media, began pressuring the bereaved families to cease their public grieving and protesting. There was talk of "public fatigue" with regard to the incident (Cho Han 2017, 174). In addition, the conservatives downplayed the government's role in safety regulation and disaster relief. Thus, for example, members of the leading conservative party have compared the sinking of the ferry to a traffic accident, thereby shifting responsibility from the government to the company that operated it and the individuals who ran the company. The conservative Mom's Brigade concentrated its efforts on calling for prosecution of the ferry company's chairman, Yu Pyŏngŏn. When Yu was found dead just a few months after the disaster, members of the brigade argued that, with the responsible individual being now beyond reach, the bereaved should cease protesting (Chang 2014b) and no special governmental investigation or legislation was necessary.

Though the bereaved families never asked for special treatment (T.-h. Kim 2014), Korean lawmakers proposed a controversial bill to compensate them. According to its provisions, those who died on the Sewol Ferry would be designated martyrs and their survivors would be eligible for financial compensation and assistance with medical costs from the government, while the students rescued from the ferry would be eligible for special admission to universities. As this legislation was being debated, the Mom's Brigade was protesting against members of the bereaved families who were engaged in a hunger strike and calling for legislation—a special Sewol Law—to investigate the cause of the disaster. Chu Oksun explained the situation in the following way during an interview:

> Why did we hold a rally? The victims died because of the ferry accident. Demanding special college admission and designation as martyrs for the accident is too much. (C. Yi 2014)

Brigade members carried pickets reading "We don't understand! Victims are not patriots who gave up their lives for their country," "Children

are martyrs? People are turning away because you have demanded too much," and so on (C. Yi 2014). Such assertions can be understood as strategic efforts to influence and manipulate public opinion regarding the bereaved families. Indeed, it has been alleged that the government and conservative ruling party participated in, or at least condoned, the spreading of rumors about the bereaved families' supposed opportunism in an effort to deflect criticism away from their policies (G. Kim 2016; Suh and Kim 2017; Sŏ 2017).

The Mom's Brigade asserted that not even the families of the sailors lost in the widely publicized 2010 sinking of a Korean Navy ship had received such special treatment, and described the bereaved families as "bad parents" seeking only to profit from their children's deaths. For the Mom's Brigade, the proposed special college admission would amount to reverse discrimination against other students. This misrepresentation of the bereaved families' wishes proved effective, with the belief becoming widespread—especially among older Koreans—that they were merely seeking financial gain (Cho Han 2017).

Indeed, the Mom's Brigade even inverted the rhetoric of grief with the claim that "bereaved families should feel sorry for the other people" (C. Yi 2014) who had been mourning alongside them and had suffered months of economic stagnation because of the ferry incident and their supposedly excessive demands. In this way, the brigade members justified their partisan notions of "patriotism" and the "public good." In the words of one member:

> I don't get it; it's not like your kids laid down their lives for their country. It was just an accident on the way to a field trip. Isn't it abnormal to break the peace in the country and to threaten other people's livelihoods because of an accident? (C. Yi 2014)

The Mom's Brigade further argued that, if the families of the victims continued their protests, their intention must be to harm the country by sowing discord and exploiting the dead in the service of their own agendas (Chang 2014a). The Mom's Brigade and other far-right activist groups even insisted that the victims' families, most of whom lived in a working-class suburb, were, as alluded to earlier, aligned with the political left or pro–North Korean communists (Borowiec 2014; Choe 2014). According to a study of such right-wing groups as the Korea Parents' Federation, it has been mainly the elderly who, as "noble anti-communist patriots," attend right-wing rallies, doing so largely as a means of coping with social,

economic, cultural, and generational alienation (Lee and Brown 2018, 62). In claiming to defend patriotic values and promote national economic development, these right-wing groups have asserted a kind of parental authority, arguing that "innocent young people know nothing about politics, so there must be some force behind them to manipulate them" (C. Pak 2016). This authority is rooted in an ageism based on filial piety and respect for the elderly as well a broader ethnic nationalism based on ideologies of normative heterosexual kinship and family relations in Korea.

In addition to this generational rhetoric, gender, especially the notion of maternal duty, has been deployed in the service of the Mom's Brigade's political arguments and activities. The representative of the group quoted earlier, Chu Oksun, for instance, claimed the following on her YouTube channel:

> [The] moms' role is to save their children from such danger and risk; even the left can be our children. So even though the leftist children blame their mom, mom should sacrifice herself to save her children and the nation because mom has power in the Republic of Korea. (MFN Ŏmma pangsong 2018)

This video, titled "I Am a Mother" (*Na nŭn ŏmma ta*), promotes various activities of the Mom's Brigade and explains its members' reasons for taking to the streets—namely to save their children from the propaganda of the left and to satisfy the mother's instinct to sacrifice herself for her children. Thus, the video appeals to audiences and justifies the group's activism by assimilating the various modes of authority in the members' capacity as elders, parents, guardians, and/or educators.

For example, the Mom's Brigade has used the rhetoric of motherhood to position audiences—especially left-leaning young people—as children to be educated and guided along what it considers the right path. The brigade's activities have accordingly emphasized traditional gender norms, in particular the trope of "true motherhood" with its attendant moral responsibility to oversee the domestic sphere for children, society, and the nation. Their motherhood encourages these women "to engage in political activism for conservative causes, such as national security and devotion to the good of the country" (Osawa 2015, 57).

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Mom's Brigade has been highly critical of the stroller moms. In fact, the group's name appears designed to present the group as an alternative to the "stroller brigade" hailed by the mass media. Thus, for example, the Mom's Brigade joined other conserva-

tive women's organizations at a press conference during which the stroller moms were accused of child abuse (C. Yi 2014). Again, the argument was that they had selfishly endangered their children by bringing them to protests, and they were scorned as "stepmothers" based on the notion that "real" or "biological" mothers would never have done so. That is, the members of the Mom's Brigade used the trope of motherhood not only to assert symbolic and moral superiority, but to reinforce the essentialist idea that only biological motherhood is "real" motherhood. By claiming for itself the role of the "true" mother, then, the Mom's Brigade has sought to delegitimize the progressive stroller moms' activism, painting them as irresponsible and generally bad parents.

The Mom's Brigade's picketing of the bereaved families elicited considerable criticism, but, again, much of it—even condemnation by the left—reinforced the brigade's idealized notion of motherhood rather than challenging it. Thus, the progressive newspaper *Han'gyŏre* editorialized:

> The first word that babies say after they enter this world is "mom." The word that we utter in a low voice when life is trying or lonely is "mom." The last word that we cry out in our final hour is also "mom." The word that we blurt out unconsciously when we are filled with the fear of death is "mom." The final word screamed by the children at Tanwon High School who were screaming for help and choking on salt water as they went down with the Sewol Ferry was probably "mom," too.
>
> And then there's a group of fork-tongued serpents who also claim the name of "mom": the ROK Mom's Brigade Volunteer Group. . . . Expressing differences of opinion on political matters is a good thing. However, there is no excuse for plunging another dagger into the hearts of mothers who have lost their children and doing so in the name of moms. . . . We hope that they will think of their own children, too. This callous practice of using the language of killing under the name of "mom" has got to stop. ("Stop sullying the meaning of the word 'mom'" 2014)

This editorial, then, criticized the Mom's Brigade for maliciously spreading false claims about the bereaved families and cruelly attacking the mothers of the victims. However, as the title of the editorial made clear, the criticism of the Mom's Brigade was focused largely on the appearance of the word "mom" in its name. In essence, the editorial criticized the brigade for using in its name a word that articulates and signifies the uncon-

ditional love and natural caregiving that women are expected to feel for their children and for others. Such criticism further reproduces the notion that motherhood is natural and sacred and therefore separate from political ideology and discourse—thereby reinforcing the rhetoric of motherhood adopted by the Mom's Brigade.

Another progressive newspaper, *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, ran an editorial similarly critical of the Mom's Brigade and another conservative group on the grounds that, because parental love is unconditional, parents should embrace social minorities as they do their own children, and also should not treat the bereaved families cruelly ("Where are 'mothers' or 'parents' like this?" 2014). Many comments on news articles about the Mom's Brigade similarly accused its members of dishonoring the notion of motherhood, such as "You [the Mom's Brigade] don't have the right to use the word mother"; "It's an insult to all mothers"; "How dare you use the name of mother?"; and "Shame on you! You have dishonored the name of mother" (C. Yi 2014; Chang 2014a). However, these kinds of critiques of the Mom's Brigade have been ineffective for the now-familiar reason that they reinforce the essentialist notion of the mother's responsibility to do anything to protect her children.

The Potential and Pitfalls of Motherhood Movements

I turn now to a discussion of both the potential and the limitations of the mothers' movements emerging in Korea and, in particular, on the manner in which the rhetoric of motherhood provides a basis for women's activism while simultaneously constraining it. First of all, the rise of motherhood movements can be usefully understood within the broader context of a post-authoritarian Korea in which new types of actors and new repertoires for social and political activism have emerged. Thus Kang (2016), in her book on the internet-born youth activism associated with the candlelight movements in the 2000s in Korea, argued that a new mode of political participation has appeared. It is characterized by the absence of preexisting activist identities and disassociation from earlier ideological frames and should be understood in the context of the broader structural changes in Korean politics and culture since the 1990s. According to her, compared with the militant and organized actions against the military dictatorship and authoritarian regimes in the 1980s, this new mode of social activism is characterized by new democratic sensibilities, including peaceful civil protest and the casual participation of heterogeneous groups, such as

teenagers. Relatedly, Nan Kim (2018) connected the mobilization of peaceful protests on a massive scale in Korea with a shared notion of fragility that became evident during the Sewol Ferry disaster, discussing in particular how the yellow ribbons used to commemorate the victims became emblematic of the resistance to state violence and the call for solidarity organized by progressive social movements during the Park presidency.

Against this backdrop, the emerging mothers' movements in Korea offer a case study in the transformation of motherhood and women's maternal experiences and responsibilities into a political strategy for participating in the political arena. As has been seen, mothers are often perceived as politically inactive in Korean society owing to their focus on the domestic sphere, while, paradoxically, it is for precisely this reason that motherhood can serve as a source of power and legitimacy for women participating in social and political activism in public spaces. Women who do so have opportunities to transcend the patriarchal frame of the private/public dichotomy through motherhood movements. As the aforementioned neologism "angry mom" indicates, Korean mothers have become increasingly visible and influential as a social group with the capacity to lead public opinion and influence the vote (Y. Yi 2015; Chŏng and Chŏn 2014). At the same time, "pure" or "true motherhood" has become a contentious political notion, as shown in the appropriation and deployment of these terms, as well as "maternal love" in the context of the Mom's Brigade as a means to normalize extreme right-wing arguments and critiques of the left.

I have been arguing that, in general, the media coverage—even by progressive newspapers—consistently interprets mothers' movements based on essentialist notions of maternal love and of women as natural caretakers. This universalizing and idealized conception of motherhood ignores the fact that, to return to an earlier formulation, this concept is in reality a product of historical, ideological, and social forces at play at the intersection of gender, sexuality, class, race, and nationhood (Stearney 1994). Within this maternalist frame, progressive and conservative mothers' movements are represented as the loci of the struggles over the meaning of true motherhood without consideration of their different approaches to motherhood.

One problem with the idealization of motherhood in these ways is that it provides a basis for policing and condemning "bad mothers" who do not live up to a given set of ideals. Thus, for instance, when I searched a newspaper archive for the term "stroller brigade" as part of the research for this study, the results included not only progressive mothers speaking

up about social issues but also a group of mothers united by the propensity to disregard both etiquette and disciplining their children, thereby disturbing others in such public spaces as restaurants and cafés. In this context, the derogatory buzzword *mam ch'ung* (literally "mommy insect," connoting a pest or vermin), coined in 2015 (Ock 2015), casts contemporary mothers as selfish, overprotective, lacking in social graces, and vain. Such slang terms are emblematic of the manner in which motherhood outside domestic contexts in Korea has been targeted and condemned, and of efforts to limit mothers' public presence and activities (Ŭ. Kim 2003; Nelson 2000). Simply put, mothers are praised as "angry moms" when they engage in social activism on behalf of their children, but are at the same time branded with the misogynistic epithet *mamch'ung* for failing to fulfill their roles as mothers properly.

In discussing the politics of the mothers' movement in the United States in relation to feminism, DiQuinzio (2006) has sounded the same warning, that the appeal to maternalist politics that invoke motherhood as the basis of women's political agency can essentialize motherhood and endanger women's political agency in general. That is, though women may garner attention and legitimacy in the public sphere by leveraging and appealing to motherhood, the trade-off is that their social and political activities thus remain linked to their role within the family. When women as political subjects are represented as either "mothers" or "future mothers" whose chief motivation is the instinct to protect the welfare of children and the family, this rhetoric reinforces their traditional roles, continuing to make their children and family their main connection to the nation-state (Han and Hŏ 2010). The mothers' claims may, accordingly, have undercut their own importance while elevating that of the family unit. Moreover, a situation in which women are entitled to political participation only in their capacity as mothers serves to "undermine women's demands for gender equity outside and beyond their role as mothers" (O'Reilly 2012, 12). The essentialist understanding of motherhood thus has the potential to weaken any feminist or women's movement that is not tied to maternalist notions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the various ways in which progressive and conservative mothers' movements in Korea have mobilized the discourse of motherhood using the Sewol Ferry disaster as a case study. Although

social discourse focuses on the role of Korean women primarily in relation to their families, and thus to the exclusion of external social and political issues, these women have, somewhat paradoxically, used the rhetoric of motherhood to step out of the private sphere and assert a public voice.

I have shown that progressive and conservative mothers' movements, despite their shared use of the trope of motherhood for their activism, differ fundamentally in their definitions of the concept. For the progressive stroller moms, the shared experience of child-rearing has provided a basis to call for a safer society; that is, they have raised the issue of child safety from an individual maternal duty to a matter of social responsibility. In addition, their act of pushing their children in strollers during the protests over the ferry disaster showed the militant face of mothering in confronting governmental power. Thus, their activism has been revealed as having the potential to challenge the dominant conception of motherhood by disputing and politicizing maternal roles and duties.

The conservative Mom's Brigade, by contrast, has spoken out against criticism of the government by families of the bereaved and their supporters, whom its members accuse of merely seeking to profit from their children's deaths rather than behaving like "real parents." This group has also been critical of the stroller moms, accusing them of endangering their children—by bringing them to protests—in the service of their own interests. In claiming for themselves the mantle of "true motherhood" and the moral duty of domesticity, the Mom's Brigade has sought to delegitimize the stroller moms' political participation and justify its own. This use of motherhood thus again reinforces an essentialist notion of the concept by idealizing maternal love as the main source of protection for children and reproducing a dichotomy between "good moms" and "bad moms."

While the two mothers' groups studied here have utilized the trope of motherhood differently due to their different political orientations, I have argued that the media coverage of them has concentrated on their members' ostensibly pure motives without acknowledging their politics, and has reproduced the persistent notion of maternal roles as natural caretakers. Even progressive newspapers have remained confined within this essentialist notion of motherhood when seeking either to legitimize the stroller moms' activism or to criticize that of the Mom's Brigade, rather than exploring the contested meanings of motherhood. As such, in the mass media discourse, these mother-activists have been unfairly cast as either apolitical subjects and/or simple proxies of other politically polarized interest groups, regardless of their intentions or identifications.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on gender, media,

and activism by approaching motherhood as a rhetorical trope for women's activism in the context of contemporary Korea and by centering the role of the media representation and discourse of mothers' activism. The findings presented here position progressive and conservative women alike as political actors and provide the basis for a reevaluation of the implications of their activism for gender equality. Further, this study reveals that the deployment of motherhood tropes in mass media has consistently reinforced the neo-Confucian imaginary of motherhood despite the differences among the groups of mothers that they describe. Thus, the potential of mothers' activism across the political spectrum remains similarly confined, and their public activities and political agency therefore continue to be impeded. This situation demonstrates the importance of mediation in shaping the dominant public discourse and constraining gender politics.

As has been seen, in the time since the protests over the sinking of the Sewol Ferry began, progressive and conservative mothers alike have expanded their political activities, especially through such new media platforms as Facebook, YouTube, and KakaoTalk. In 2017, for example, a representative of the Mom's Brigade started a YouTube channel called "Mommy Broadcast" (*MFN Ŏmma pangsong*),[4] while a group called "Political Mamas" (*Chŏngch'i hanŭn ŏmma tŭl*) was launched in 2017 with the mission of promoting gender equality and social welfare and in particular drawing attention to the issue of accounting fraud by private kindergartens. These efforts make clear that the political activism of Korean women based on motherhood is an evolving and ever more diverse political phenomenon in Korea. Therefore, mothers' activism merits ongoing scholarly attention to assess the various goals and strategies of mothers' groups and their potential for producing both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses rooted in motherhood.

NOTES

1. In this chapter, I use such terms as "incident," "disaster," and "tragedy," rather than "accident," because I understand the Sewol sinking to have been a consequence of systemic failure within Korea.

2. As Tae-jong Kim (2014) reports, the Park administration and conservatives argued that the bereaved families, civic groups, and opposition parties calling for an investigation into the truth about the Sewol Ferry disaster were causing political turmoil, decreasing consumer confidence and spending, and wasting government resources, thereby putting the nation at risk of an economic recession.

3. Korean mothers' movements resemble those in Latin America in terms of high-

lighting the negligence and connivance of the state in addressing and handling national disasters and political violence and holding officials responsible for such incidents as the mass disappearances of children and young adults in Argentina and mass deaths of teenagers in the Sewol Ferry disaster. These movements also demonstrate the crucial role of mothers' participation in the democratization process and movements against political oppression under authoritarian governments. However, the responses to the Sewol Ferry disaster show that the rhetoric of motherhood can also be used in other ways, i.e., to defend a conservative government and deny state violence. Further, both progressive and conservative mothers' movements in Korea as well as their deployment of motherhood are continuously reconstructed by mass media in the manner explored in this study.

4. MFN Ŏmma pangsong's account was terminated for violating YouTube's Community Guidelines. Chu Oksun, the representative of the group, then moved to her personal channel "Ŏmma, Chu Oksun" (Mom, Chu Oksun), but it was later terminated for the same reasons.

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Pop Remediation

Beyond Binary Gender Forms

This last section broadens the volume's focus to remediation across the gender spectrum, connecting the previous sections' focus on consuming gender to the hyper- and re-mediation of masculine and nonbinary figures. While the earlier sections focus on the contemporary antimisogyny discourse embedded within gender wars, the aim of this last section is to show the latter to be a constitutive aspect of a wider, complex field of gender representation that mediates and is mediated by the historical conditions and social antagonisms analyzed throughout the volume.

The four essays in this section showcase diverse gender identities and relations beyond heteronormative womanhood that have been remediated during the last three decades. In short, these four chapters address diverse gender forms, including queer or gender-nonconforming characters, seemingly domesticated fatherhood, and homoerotic bromance masculinity. Their remediations focus on popular media forms including mainstream TV series, reality shows, digital message boards, and transmedia, webtoon-adapted cinema.

Hyun Gyung Kim's chapter unpacks the complex layers of remediation of nonnormative gender representations in *Reply 1997*. The complexity derives from key temporal nodes that Kim brilliantly triangulates to representations of nonnormative gender figures in the popular TV program. These temporalities include post–Cold War (corresponding to the post-authoritarian period), postfeminism, and the production of *Reply 1997* (approximately between the Asian financial crisis and post-#MeToo movement). Kim meticulously unravels the politics of memory that simultaneously romanticizes and erases alliances of gender minorities through-

out the period. In other words, *Reply* provides positive images of nonnormative gender forms, but at the expense of nullifying the ongoing misogyny and patriarchal order in social, domestic, and work spaces. Analyzing the current homosexual exclusionary feminism of the post–Asian financial crisis era as part and parcel of postfeminism, Kim illuminates postfeminism's effects on the disconnect between extremist feminism (particularly the position known as trans-exclusionary radical feminism) and the queer movement. In other words, in line with Sohn's chapter that ascribes the feminism reboot to postfeminism, while coming to counter it, Kim's chapter plumbs the contradiction of postfeminism being produced out of social liberalization (of the post-authoritarian era) while also fueling a return to extremity through antagonistic dualisms, such as feminism versus queer activism, public versus counter-public, and normative/familial versus nonnormative/nonfamilial.

Running parallel to Hyun Gyung Kim's chapter, which traces the first two eras' formation of gender politics in anticipation of the most recent era, Yoon Heo's chapter also focuses on the first two eras' gender remediation process that built up the recent context's forms of contestation, namely, the convergence of antimisogyny discourse and #MeToo. If Kim exposes the implication of postfeminism's ascendance in the second era to the hatred of queerness in the most recent era, Heo unveils the virulent effects of remediation of masculinity that compete with and undermine the antimisogyny movement in the current moment. A potent figure of remediated masculinity is the emergent image of the "daughter-fool" in the father-daughter dyad, marking a shift in fatherhood from authoritative, absent, and cold to soft, caring, and affectionate. This seemingly domesticated fatherhood is multiply mediated by political-economic and ideological processes in a range of popular media, including reality shows, TV dramas, films, and novels. On the one hand, the new fatherhood is mediated by the liberal atmosphere of the post-authoritarian era that achieved an almost equal ratio in higher education of women and men, and by neoliberal material conditions in the post–financial crisis era that refashion the father figure's masculinity to be more flexible or accommodating due to heightened layoffs of male breadwinners. On the other hand, as Heo sharply criticizes, the emergence of this new fatherhood in numerous popular media has ultimately been mediated by the desire to continue patriarchal hegemony and mitigate criticisms of ascending misogyny. As much as fatherhood is mediated by historical and economic circumstances, gender ideologies including conservative and recalcitrant desires mediate the mutation of fatherhood representations.

Echoing Heo's example of gender as a platform that mediates, and is mediated by, popular media and discourse, Sunyoung Yang's chapter extends this framework to the context of gender-nonconforming identities. As the volume's introduction explains, identity politics became crucial in the mediation of historical processes as it is an "intermedial fragment" in tension with essentialist and nonessentialist forces. Yang examines the intermediations producing gender-switching figures and their romantic (queer) relationships in *Painter of the Wind*, a legendary historical fiction TV drama, that reach the unprecedented recognition of the actors who played gender-nonconforming roles as the best actors in Korean acting awards. The case is thus analyzed as a multiply-mediated process effected by diverse actors who helped to positively represent nonnormative gender in popular culture, including the production team, fandom, and the actors themselves. Moreover, the case is also an instance of intermediation in that different media forms—such as TV dramas, digital message boards, and fandom event productions—were contingently deployed to afford nonnormative gender representation to mediate aesthetic and historical processes.

Regarding the issue of intermediation, the final chapter by Moonim Baek epitomizes mediation through transmedia—between media adaptations and interactions between domestic and international forms of "bromance"—to yield a unique form of masculinity tailored to women audiences and their participatory practices: homoerotic bromance. This chapter captures the essence of the entire volume: the remediation of popular media through gender in the translocality of (South) Korea. Rooted in the cinephile context of the last three decades of translocal (South) Korea (see introduction and Section I), the chapter vividly exemplifies the process of the aesthetic refashioning of cinema through the adaptation of genre-bending bromance. At the same time, Baek provides a nuanced interpretation of how contradictory gender norms are historically mediated—i.e., the need for man-to-man social/emotional bonds yet unreconciled to heteronormative/homophobic ideologies. Here gender, beyond binary sex/gender identification, as a mediating assemblage of ideas and embodied experience (Cho and Song introduction), formidably emerges in translocal Korean history and political-economic processes of the last three decades. Consequently, all sorts of remediations of popular media become conduits for mediations of (and by) gender.

9

A Spunky Girl Meets a Queer Boy

Neoliberal Remediation of the Post-Authoritarian Period in the Korean *Reply* TV Series[1]

Hyun Gyung Kim

About six months after the antimisogynist online community *Megalia* (Megallia)[2] was established in June 2015, one user posted that feminism must not care about "disabled people's human rights" and "homosexuals' human rights" due to its agenda's priorities. This post quickly gained more than 200 "recommends" and almost no "not recommendeds." *Megalia* gained notoriety and public attention through its unique "mirroring" (*mirŏring*) strategy—trolling, spamming, and parodying misogynist discourse by reversing or "mirroring" the genders in such statements. Through mirroring's defamiliarization tactic, posters on *Megalia* were able to reveal the perversity of often-normalized misogynistic assumptions (Jeong and Lee 2018). However, when some users started to upload hateful misandrist posts using terms like "*ttongkko ch'ung*" (asshole vermin) or "*eijŭ ch'ung*" (AIDS vermin), its feminist identity came under question. *Megalia*'s board members decided to prohibit certain statements demeaning male homosexuals, which caused huge debate and strong reactions within the community. These disagreements eventually led to the fragmentation and closure of *Megalia*. Still, it is not difficult to find posts that express hatred toward gay males in the combative, antimisogynist online communities of Korea (see also the introduction and first two chapters of this volume).

How can we understand this seemingly contradictory logic and politics of current online feminist communities? Is it an unintended by-

product of the battle for visibility between misogynist and antimisogynist groups in digital space? Or is there deeply embedded hatred against male homosexuals within the Korean feminist agenda? As some digital feminist activists assume that "biological women" have been the only victims of gendered antagonism and therefore should be the sole subjects of activism, the misandry in Korean feminist online discourse seems to be a local version of the Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism/st (TERF) politics found today in the United States. In today's viral mediascape, it is possible to observe instantaneous interactions among feminists from different parts of the world. However, these interactions and mediations occur not only coevally across geographical space, but also across time. On one side, as TERF developed within the specific historical context of second-wave feminism in the US (Kim 2011), the current misandrist, homophobic, antimisogynist activism in Korea should also be situated historically—that is, linked to preceding discourses, especially 1990s "young feminism," 2000s postfeminism, and 2010s mainstreaming of misogyny in popular culture and digital space.

This chapter aims to articulate how gender has been mediated and remediated in Korea in the decades just before the recent feminist revival of the mid-2010s, the implications of which can be observed in the current gay-male-exclusionary feminist discourse. Toward this end, this chapter focuses on the *Reply* (*Ŭngdap hara*) TV series, which was aired from June 2012 to January 2016 on tvN, a cable channel owned and operated by Korean media conglomerate CJ E&M. The *Reply* series provides an excellent case to demonstrate how particular gender forms, such as a spunky girl and a gay male, mediate the particular historical ideology of the post-authoritarian period.

The *Reply* series was produced over three seasons and comprises fifty-seven total episodes. All three seasons, titled *Reply 1997* (*Ŭngdap hara 1997*, 2012), *Reply 1994* (*Ŭngdap hara 1994*, 2013), and *Reply 1988* (*Ŭngdap hara 1988*, 2015–2016), enjoyed massive popularity for a cable television series. The series garnered consistently high audience ratings, with the third season peaking at 18.8 percent nationwide. This made it the highest-rated Korean cable television series at the time it was broadcast. Indeed, this series has been credited as the content that was responsible for tvN becoming one of the Korean broadcasting and entertainment industry's leading players, long after its establishment in 2006 (Chŏng 2019). Additionally, the young actors of this television show, including K-pop idol singers, became sought-after celebrities after the success of the series, which was still being distributed internationally through Netflix as of 2022.

In each installment of the series, six young leads—two women and four men—drive the plot. In *Reply 1997* and *Reply 1988* they are high school students, and in *Reply 1994* university students. The show's storylines, characters, and sentiments can be compared to the American sitcom *Friends* (NBC, 1994–2004), which gained legendary popularity in the 1990s and 2000s. Like *Friends*, which depicts six friends' relationships and everyday lives in 1990s New York, the *Reply* series also represents six friends' ties, romantic emotions, and daily lives in 1990s South Korea. Each episode of *Friends* and the *Reply* series features storylines for its entire ensemble, mixing sentimentality and humor.

However, this similarity ends by the midseason in the *Reply* series. What the latter part of each *Reply* series emphasizes is the tension created by keeping viewers guessing which of the two male characters will marry the main female protagonist—the spunky girl. Additionally, the *Reply 1997* and *Reply 1994* installments create further drama by having a male member of the friend group fall in love with one of the two groom candidates, who eventually marries the spunky girl. These settings allow viewers to immerse themselves more fully in the narrative. Thus, it is two unconventional characters who lead and invigorate the game narrative of the series: a spunky girl and her gay male friend. Indeed, they are characters who embody the democratization and liberalization of 1990s Korea while simultaneously undermining the feminist and sexual minority activism of that time.

Additionally, what makes the *Reply* series different from *Friends* is how past and present are arranged in the narrative. *Friends* is presented chronologically—episodes unfold in linear time, with occasional flashbacks. Instead of the simple flashback structure, the *Reply* series frequently manipulates temporality, setting most of its action in the past as an elaborate flashback (the 1990s) and flashing forward to the present (i.e., the time of broadcast) (H. Yi 2014, 78–79). For example, in *Reply 1997*, the story unfolds by constantly alternating between the main characters, who meet at a 2012 reunion, and their younger selves in 1997. In *Reply 1994*, the narrative oscillates between the ensemble of characters who gather at a housewarming party in 2013 and the same group in 1994.

Notably, the series interprets the 1990s from the present point of view. More specifically, the overarching sentiment presented by *Reply 1997* is feeling lucky to have survived the brutal economic restructuring of the IMF crisis. The last installment of the series, *Reply 1988*, uses nostalgia for the past as the series' main structure of feeling, as in previous seasons. Therefore, this series is an excellent case to understand how the post-

authoritarian period of the 1990s has been mediated through a neoliberal lens, which requires erasing the actual political dynamics of the period in which antimisogyny activism takes root.

Also, the format of the series reflects transformations in the political economy of the media industry, which is entangled in neoliberal ideology. Since the late 1980s, lower-cost productions like nonscripted reality TV shows have increased as the Korean media industry has become more flexible. This shift reflects the rise of neoliberalism as the prevailing post-IMF ideology, because these reality shows mainly deal with ordinary people's frustrations and their overcoming them through self-help management. Since the 2000s, by which time the neoliberal mindset had become deeply rooted in people's daily lives, reality TV shows have enjoyed a heyday in Korea. One of the main factors in the *Reply* series's massive popularity is the adaptation of the reality show format, which followed a "guessing the heroine's husband among male characters" game narrative. The *Reply* series is an intriguing case to show how TV drama remediates the reality TV show, an emblematic pop culture format of neoliberalism.

I began this chapter by articulating the temporal politics of the *Reply* series, which focuses on the post-authoritarian period of the 1990s from the nostalgic view of the post-IMF period. The following section explores how the reality TV show format in which a spunky girl seeks her husband negatively remediates the Young Feminist activism of the 1990s. This section links to the final section, which focuses on how gay liberation movements were erased by the remediation of the gay male character in the series.

Concerning atypical figures' conventional heterosexual return within the backdrop of the 1990s, this chapter explicitly shares the same interests with other chapters of the third section, broadening the gender spectrum to masculine and nonbinary figures and focusing on how gender remediation works within a particular historical context. By analyzing how gender and sexuality remediate certain temporal and character representations in the TV series, this chapter aims to revive a contested Korean feminist genealogy to challenge the current male homophobic antimisogynist activism and renew feminist activist discourses.

The Way We Were in the Post-Authoritarian Period, Really?

The *Reply* series' massive popularity and compelling invocation of the post-authoritarian period have attracted several scholars' attention in the Korean academy. For example, Kim Suhyŏn, Chang Minji, and O Chiyŏn

(2013) argue that *Reply 1997* was so popular because it used nostalgic sentiment to appeal to diverse generations to reshape the collective memory of the Asian economic crisis through familism—only the family survives all difficulties. Paek Soyŏn (2014) analyzed the conservative political effect of the self-comforting sentiment of the series, namely, the sentiment of "we survived such hardship—the IMF crisis" that prevailed especially in the second season. Kwŏn Ŭnsŏn (2014) claimed that such a self-comforting sentiment, with its reality-show format, functions as a technology to promote self-development discourse in the neoliberal era. Furthermore, Yi Hwajin (2014) shed light on the dual feature of the memory politics of the series' narrative. Those are memories invented by popular culture and commodification, oblivious to the political events of the 1990s. Accordingly, Yi contends that the series' success was due to the conservative reconstruction of memory based on selective forms of remembrance and forgetting of the post-authoritarian period of the 1990s. In summary, these studies complicate the analysis of the series's success by demonstrating the nostalgic reconstruction of memory based on the selective remembrance and forgetting of the post-authoritarian period.

"Nostalgia" used to be a medical term for the various symptoms of Swiss mercenaries who could not return to their homeland in the seventeenth century (Davis 2016). In the United States in the nineteenth century, it evolved to describe a normal phenomenon that occurred when ordinary people reluctantly accepted the irreversibility of historical change and the consequent losses (Davis 1979). The emergence of mass media in the twentieth century facilitated the commercialization of nostalgia. Literature critic Fredric Jameson argues that nostalgia has become a means of commercial marketing in the postcapitalist consumer society as "nostalgia for the present" (Jameson 1989, 1991).

The sentiments of non-Western societies regarding their past have been analyzed by anthropologist Marilyn Ivy. She argues that Japan, which has undergone modernization in a way that is constantly conscious of the West, has preserved its past in a phantasmagoric image, rather than inventing it as the West did its own past. Intriguingly, Ivy links this process to Jameson's discussion of postmodern nostalgia: "the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the idea of the 'generation'" (Ivy 1995, 57).

According to Jameson and Ivy, popular TV series use nostalgic representation for more than selective memory and forgetting. Put differently, cultural representation is not a transparent mirroring of facts, but instead refracts reality. What is worth noting is how certain narratives and images

in TV series reflect a mediating process. The politics of the 1990s, which Yi (2014) points out as being effaced in the *Reply* series, is nonetheless represented in unexpected ways by the show's neoliberal mediation of gender and sexuality. This is my focus in this study because there is no previous literature that attends to this point, although feminism and the gay liberation movement in the 1990s were among the most critical forces that led to social change in Korea.

The fame of Korean college students and people's protests to achieve democratization in the 1980s often obscures the ensuing political events and activism of the 1990s. In 1996, for instance, a law school student at Yonsei University, No Susŏk, was killed by police violence during a protest to demand the disclosure of funds used for the presidential election campaign of then-president Kim Young-sam (Kim Yŏngsam). With this sort of fight against civilian authoritarian control under the rubric of democratized Korea, new feminist activism called "young feminism," centered on college students (Tal kwa ipsul, 2000) and the gay rights movements, was in bloom in the 1990s as well. Following on from earlier feminist activism, which dealt with various institutional issues such as women's labor within camp towns near US military bases, women's rights as workers and farmers and the sexism inherent in the traditional head-of-household system, young feminism raised new topics focused on more comprehensive democratization in the private sphere of everyday life. Some themes were opposition to sexual violence, sexual harassment, date violence, and the gendered hierarchy in campus culture, along with cyber-feminist activism. Also, young feminist groups joined lesbian and sexual minorities' activism, although some feminist and lesbian groups experienced political tensions and infighting regarding these issues (Park-Kim, Lee-Kim, and Kwon-Lee 2007). The local context of the post authoritarian developmental state, the post–Cold War period, and the globalization of the feminist agenda—as through the World Conference of Women in 1995 in Beijing—greatly influenced the 1990s feminist movement in Korea. In short, the post-authoritarian 1990s were far from being nonpolitical.

The *Reply* series makes the activism of the 1990s visible on the TV screen, but turns it into a caricature by utilizing it as comedic material. *Reply 1994* depicts progressive students' movement circles and protests in a college in the 1990s. One of the male characters falls in love with a female senior, who had an attractive appearance at first glance when he joined the famous students' progressive music circle. How she attracted him was described in a conventional comedic way by exaggerating her appearance. The protest episode repeats this mode of representing 1990s

college political culture. In one episode, the characters visit a character's house in a provincial city during the summer holiday. Local people ask them to instruct them in how to protest the change of their city's name by administrative order. By portraying the contrast between the local people's awkward gestures and the main characters' skillful manners in a comedic way, the series successfully instrumentalizes political issues as the stuff of jokes. Moreover, caricaturing student-movement activism produces a nostalgic view mediated by the post-IMF sentiments embedded in the show; this kind of twisted representation is based on the perception that the 1990s were the good old days, when people could casually join progressive movement groups without serious commitment. This view has the effect of simplistically erasing the contentious politics of the period.

The spunky girl main characters even exacerbate the distorted remembrance of 1990s feminism. These unusually energetic girls evoke the image of "girl power," which was popularized in 1990s Western popular culture (McRobbie 2009). The heroines of the first (*Reply 1997*) and second (*Reply 1994*) seasons are "teenage girls who are crazy about celebrities." Their interest in celebrities continues even after they get married and have their own families in the 2010s. The third season (*Reply 1988*) introduces two female characters: Pora, a student activist, and Tŏksŏn, Pora's younger sister, the second daughter in the family. Pora's personality is far removed from the typical character of a first daughter, who in the Korean culture of those days was expected to be docile and self-sacrificing. She enters a renowned university and is respected by other family members. Although her parents oppose her activism at the university, she does not give up her commitment. When her boyfriend tries to control her life, she firmly says, "You have no right to tell me what to do and what not to do." Here, we realize that Pora is an example of a new woman. Her representation overlaps not only with the figure of the empowered girl in a globalized world, but also with the figure of the new woman emerging after the democratization of Korea, who does not limit herself to roles based on her position within the family.

Tŏksŏn seems like the opposite of Pora. Tŏksŏn is presented as not as intelligent and opinionated as Pora. However, she problematizes the limited options for women in her position. As the second-eldest daughter, she experiences gender and age discrimination within the family, which she tries to resist by having a tantrum. In this light, we can say that Pora and Tŏksŏn are examples of young women who embody feminist struggles against positioning women only within the family.

Considering that some of the main themes of young feminism in the 1990s were the male-centric culture of student movement groups (C. Yi 1998; Ihu p'yŏnjipbu 1998) and resituating the position of young women as daughters (Y. Chŏng 2015), it is clear that these spunky girls' energy raises issues about society and family that are still oppressive after the democratization of the political realm.

The series fails, however, to explain the girl characters' energy in a contextualized way regarding their still-conservative but changing society. Furthermore, the main female characters' tensions in the face of a gendered social order and traditional family roles disappear once they enter relationships with men. For example, the female heroines' fandom in *Reply 1997* and *Reply 1994* had the potential to highlight girls' agency and sexual desire for their celebrity stars (Kim Yi and Pak 2001; Kang and Kang 2016). Instead, it focuses on the niceness of the men who like the girls, meticulously enumerating the process by which these male characters accompany the heroines to their idol group's concert to prove how deeply they understand these women's passionate inner lives.

In *Reply 1988*, Pora discovers that her boyfriend is cheating on her, secretly dating her friend. When she wants to break up with him, he is not apologetic but slightly mad at her, violently accusing her of being a woman who is not feminine enough. This episode ends with Pora seeing a new boyfriend, a high school student who lives in her neighborhood. The series does not offer the viewers any clues regarding how Pora feels about the ex-boyfriend and how she recovers after the relationship's cheating and violent end. We can only guess, based on fragments of critique of the violent, gendered cultures within student activism.

These girls who have uncontextualized excessive energy resonate with the description of the position scholars have referred to as "post-feminism," which is concerned with cultural sensibilities celebrating women's empowerment and the right to choose what they want in consumer and neoliberal societies; feminist politics not only disappear but its accomplishments are nullified (Lazar 2006, 2009; Gill 2007; 2008; Tasker and Negra 2007; McRobbie 2009; Gill and Scharff 2011; Chen 2012; Gwynne 2013; Dosekun 2015). The spunky girls in the series reflect the democratization and feminism of 1990s Korea in a twisted way by mediating neoliberal postfeminism. I support this claim by providing more details about this process, delineating how the *Reply* series successfully integrates the reality TV show format and the narrative of its spunky girls' conventional return to heterosexuality.

Desperately Seeking (Compulsory) Heterosexuality

Since the reality TV show arose as an emblematic format of pop culture in the 1990s (Grazian 2010), it has been argued that it constitutes a neo-liberal televisual formula in the post–Cold War era, when there no longer seems to be an alternative ideology to capitalism (Redden 2018). First, it was adopted as a cost-effective form of production during the time of privatization and increasing flexibility of the global media industry. It focuses on ordinary people's travails in live scenarios, and so does not require professional talent such as actors and writers. Also, as Redden (2018) explains, making ordinary people into celebrities is expected to generate other content linked to profit, and media convergence, celebrity culture, and the international trade of formats accelerate the production of reality TV shows.

Defining the reality TV show genre as a key neoliberal televisual form does not refer only to the production logic of the current political economy of the media industry. Instead, the content of the shows, which focus on individual participants' successes and failures through the ideals of self-help management, serves as cultural apparatus that promotes neoliberal self-entrepreneurship (Kwŏn 2014).

The *Reply* series successfully remediated reality TV as drama by adapting a reality dating-show format like *The Bachelor* (2002–present) to structure the unfolding narrative of the main romantic couple's relationship.[3] Indeed, the element that draws the viewer's attention the most in this series is guessing which of the childhood friends the heroine ends up marrying. The series conscientiously follows the reality show format by introducing all of the male characters during the first episode as if they are all potential husband candidates for the heroines. They drop out one by one as the episodes go on, and the final winner is revealed in the last episode (Kwŏn 2014, 49).

The romance plot is highly typical in many Korean TV series. However, *Reply* is distinctive in that there are several possible love interests for the heroine, unlike in other Korean shows which have one leading groom candidate and one alternative, for a typical love triangle. After the middle of the series, though, the number of candidates for the groom is narrowed down to two. Thus, in the *Reply* series, the audience's attention to and support for each player is crucial to move the stories forward—like winning a game set in a reality TV show. *Reply* drew viewers' attention by allowing different players to emerge in repeated platforms with other stories.

Chang Iji (2015) argues that the character-centered Table Role Playing Game narrative reflects the condition of lives in the neoliberal era, which does not allow people to see their lives as a consistent story they create, but makes them feel helpless in an increasingly flexible world. This reading can be applied to the prevailing narrative and drama style in reality TV shows. People appear to be able to choose and win, but this is only possible via a few prescribed routes. That is, they "choose" something "passively." The heroines in the *Reply* series are "given" possible men to marry, and they make their "choices" based on their desires, and thus seemingly lead their lives. Indeed, the series ends by presenting the resolution to the game: it is always the man who kisses the woman first. There is no room for the heroine to make her own choices, except in selecting an appropriate husband. In this sense, this series shares one of the features of the postfeminist narrative, what McRobbie, in analyzing *Bridget Jones's Diary*, calls "a tenacious search for a man" (2009, 20–22). Accordingly, this kind of reality dating show enhances the heterosexual imagination and heteronormativity (Tropiano 2009). The end of the series always involves a moment where the spunky girls return to safe heterosexual relations and the family, although they once possessed incredible energy to resist society and family. With this narrative strategy, the series shows us an example of an ostensible "choosing" of "(compulsory) heterosexuality" (Rich 1980), which young feminism in the post-authoritarian period criticized, but which intensified in the neoliberal era when the ideology of "choice" was in bloom (Seo 2011).

One more refracted point in the *Reply* series is a gay male among the heroine's potential husband candidates. Stephan Tropiano (2009) analyzes how the reality dating show *Play It Straight* (2004), which mixed straight guys and gay males as the heroine's partner candidates, reveals that heterosexuality relies on the recognition and ensuing exclusion of homosexuality, emphasizing heteronormativity's performative dimensions. The gay male characters of the *Reply* series are not exceptional in instrumentalizing homosexuality to enhance heteronormativity.

Queer Boys in the 1990s Who Are Not Queer Anymore

Postfeminist content has often featured characters who are sexual minorities. For example, in *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004), four career women enjoy the company of their gay male friends and even queered their friendship (Gerhard 2005). *Bridget Jones's Diary* also features a hero-

ine with a gay male best friend. In the novel, he is depicted as having a natural bond with a thirty-year-old heroine because both are "accustomed to disappointing their parents and being treated as freaks by society" (Fielding 1996, 38). Also, his gaze plays a role in confirming the heterosexual hero's attractiveness. *Ally McBeal* presents a unique transgender character (Cooper and Pease 2009) and a chic lesbian figure (Mckenna 2002). These characters have the potential to open up possibilities for a nonstereotypical lesbian figure (Mckenna 2002) and a nonheterosexual influential community (Gerhard 2005). However, if they are presented merely as trendy accessories for straight postfeminist heroines, these characters only serve to reinforce "heteroflexibility" (Diamond 2005).

While these American and British dramas and films brought in gay male characters to represent gender/sexual diversity as individual interests, the gay characters in the *Reply* series help to indicate the historical context of 1990s Korea, during which the movement of sexual minorities as a collective identity prevailed. In this light, the series speaks to the historical problematics that have been diluted by the mundane nuclear family dynamics that limit gender/sexual relationships.[4]

The *Reply* series presents the gay characters in more complex terms than conventional representations of gay sexuality in the Yaoi, or Boys' Love (BL), genre. Yaoi or BL refers to same-sex, male coupling, and is arguably a straight female subculture in East Asia. In the original context, the Yaoi genre contains subversive gender performativity that unsettles the double bind imposed on women, offering a possible alternative position of sexual desire and gaze for women readers or audiences drawn to fantasizing about feminized masculinity (Nagaike 2003). However, once it expanded to mainstream popular culture from the mid-2000s, the Korean film industry began to utilize BL as a technique to attract female audiences to androcentric films that lacked significant women characters (Son 2015; see also Chapter 12 on BL by Moonim Baek). From this perspective, Chang Minji (2016) maintains that gay male figures in the *Reply* series provide other examples of the reappreciation of the Yaoi or BL genre by mainstream pop culture in Korea. This study, however, argues that the series's representation of gay people requires more careful analysis of the historical background of the series, the 1990s, which was a time when the collective politics of sexual minority identity emerged in Korean society.

It is true that the Korean media still hesitate to make sexual minorities visible directly, while cultural contents that deploy the genre codes of Yaoi, strong homosocial friendships, or female cross-dressing are quite commonly represented and often enjoyed by Korean viewers. In this regard,

the gay male characters in *Reply* are unique, for their desire toward a member of the same sex is vividly and realistically described. For example, Chunhŭi, in *Reply 1997*, falls in love at first sight with the hero when he finds him resisting the high school policy that categorizes students based on test grades. His affection is not temporary, and he confesses his romantic feelings to the hero when the hero misreads Chunhŭi as having a crush on the heroine. After being rejected as a romantic partner, Chunhŭi still maintains his attachment to the hero, attempting to give up their shared dream of enlisting in the air force academy. When Chunhŭi finds out that the hero cannot make it due to bad eyesight, they even live together after entering the same renowned university in Seoul. The tension between them and Chunhŭi's natural desire for the hero are essential elements throughout the series to engage the audience.

Furthermore, Chunhŭi is a stunning man. He is the only man sensitive enough to understand the heroine's passionate affection for her favorite idol star. In contrast, other male characters, including the male protagonist who loves the heroine secretly, cannot understand her fan affect. Chunhŭi excels in both school and sports and can also dance like a professional. Because he is such a close friend of the hero and the heroine, the love triangle is full of tension that intermingles friendship and subtle attraction. Through these aspects of characterization, he goes beyond the role of accessory to the straight heroine.

In *Reply 1994*, Tongjun—nicknamed Pinggŭrae—feels affection for the main male character, Chaejun—nicknamed Ssŭregi—who is a senior at medical school. Tongjun is forced to study at medical school by his father, but he secretly wishes to be a musician. The series details how Chaejun cares for Tongjun, who is not interested in studying and desperately seeks to leave school to pursue his dream. Chaejun even touches Tongjun often, and once kisses him as punishment in a game among friends. Because their relationship is depicted subtly and romantically, it opens possible ways to reinterpret homoerotic desire. It also fills the triple relations among Tongjun, Chaejun, and the heroine, Najŏng, with a physical tension such as was seen in the first season, *Reply 1997*.

The background setup—i.e., that they attend Yonsei University medical school–renders Tongjun's desire toward a same-sex senior a realistic element, recalling the Come Together Incident at Yonsei University. Come Together (Kŏm t'ugedŏ) was the first gay group to be formed at a Korean university, and it created a massive sensation in 1995. As we can see, Chunhŭi and Tongjun belong to sexual minorities who embody and demonstrate the rising social liberalization and new sexual politics of 1990s Korea.

However, the way the series represents their present lives in the show is problematic. The first season, *Reply 1997*, does not offer any substantive information about Chunhŭi's current life, unlike those of other characters. The others are all already married, or soon will be. They celebrate each other's news at their reunion, but Chunhŭi lacks news to announce and be celebrated. Nobody even asks him if he has any significant updates to share. The audience can only speculate about his current life as a gay man, as when he gets in the passenger seat of his car, which someone has driven over to collect him. The camera does not show the driver, except as a vague silhouette. His current gayness is visible in the way that he is invisible. As a result, he is fixed as a past being—the heroine's cool gay friend.

Tongjun's current life is even more questionable. His desire toward the same-sex senior is described along with his wish to be a musician. When he gives up his dream, his sexual desire toward Chaejun is repressed more deeply, as is shown by him kissing a woman to test and conform to his assumed heterosexual attraction. He seems to fall in love with her, and he marries her, graduates from medical school, and becomes a doctor. His choice is shown through the following narration: "I cannot ignore the wishes of my loved ones. I cannot pursue my wish by destroying theirs. I believe that changing myself for my loved ones is an honorable thing to do. I do not need to feel self-pity."

This self-comforting narration is quite complicated. It implies that Tongjun's being heterosexual, not gay, and being a doctor, not a musician, are not his wishes, but his (beloved!) family's wishes. As such, the show intriguingly suggests that he is indeed struggling between a forced decision and a willing choice. He is trying to make a personal choice out of the socially forced decision. Besides, when he decided to return to medical school, give up his attraction to men, and partner with a woman, it was 1997, when the IMF crisis occurred and accelerated the neoliberalization process in Korea. After he decides to deny his desire, he painfully confesses his hidden affection to a senior in a veiled way, saying, "It is lovely to have you as a senior," instead of "I love you." Indeed, he could be a bisexual man. However, the way the series represents his choice is not as an attraction to both sexes, but as the transition from gay desire to compulsory heterosexuality.

Considering that subjectification under a neoliberal regime is a continuously self-governing process as *Homo economicus* (Foucault 2008), Tongjun's seemingly free choice to return to the renowned medical school and live as a heterosexual man is a self-governing struggle to repress his

queer desire and to develop as a normative, (re)productive male citizen in neoliberal Korea.

Notably, the gay rights movement, as well as feminist activism, encountered escalating resistance and hatred in mainstream and online media after the IMF crisis in 1997 ignited a backlash. Due to massive unemployment and broader economic insecurity, the 1997 crisis was unilaterally represented as a crisis of male breadwinners and the family, resulting in antagonism not only against women but against sexual minorities' rights—although its impacts differed depending on class, gender, and sexual identity (Kim and Finch 2002; Song 2006; Cho 2017). Based on this sentiment, homophobic groups based in fundamentalist Christian churches (Bong 2008) blocked antidiscrimination legislation in 2007 and 2008, which included sexual identity as an element that could not be used as a basis for discrimination. Yet this was the only initiation of overt hate speech and behavior against homosexuals. Mainly due to not only the antihomosexual groups' lobbying but also so-called "progressive" leaders' disinterest and insensitivity, the antidiscrimination law has still not passed in the National Assembly. A representative instance is that of Moon Jae-in, a progressive candidate in 2017 who served as president from 2017–2022, who has openly stated his opposition to homosexuality. It is in this context, I argue, that the *Reply* series presents gay figures as realistic queer characters who simultaneously embody and undermine the achievements of the gay rights movement of the post-authoritarian period.

Conclusion

In the era of robust antimisogynist digital activism, this chapter aims to revisit contested feminist precursors by revealing how gender and sexuality are remediated in temporal, formative, and character representations in the popular *Reply* series, which depicted the post-authoritarian 1990s from the point of view of the post-IMF period. Like other chapters in this section, it also tries to enlarge the gender spectrum by analyzing queer male and nonbinary figures whose sexuality and gender expression mediate neoliberal ideology in South Korea.

By highlighting the 1990s, the *Reply* series is representative of the sort of nostalgic cultural content that gained popularity in the early 2010s. These include the talent show competition program *I Am a Singer* (*Na nŭn kasu ta*, MBC, 2011), the film *Architecture 101* (*Kŏnchukhak kaeron*, 2012), the TV show *A Gentleman's Dignity* (*Sinsa ŭi p'umgyŏk*, SBS, 2012), and the

reality show *Infinite Challenge: Totoga* (*Muhan tojŏn: T'ot'oga*, MBC, 2014–2015). In the 2010s this trend was extensively observed not only by the major broadcasters, including terrestrial broadcast networks and cable television, but also in other cultural content, such as films and musicals. With these other cultural texts, the *Reply* series significantly augmented the nostalgic image of the post-authoritarian 1990s. In these works, the 1990s are typically portrayed as a hopeful time that fostered optimistic expectations for a new society. At the same time, the rapidly transitioning countryside is preserved in presentations of pastoral and benevolent tropes. In other words, the 1990s are now reproduced as the only peaceful decade in South Korea's history of hardship. A gay boy and a spunky girl who are nonbinary but return to conventional relationships represent the neoliberal diversity of the 2010s, while bearing the traces of the 1990s.

The digital antimisogynist activism of 2015 onward in Korea has seemingly adopted the biological essentialism of second-wave radical feminism in the United States. Yet we should rigorously examine the current circumstances, because they are a product of specific historical mediation and remediation of local gender and sexuality issues. In this sense, the seemingly contradictory combination of feminism and antifeminism needs to be more carefully historicized in the local context, which in this case is a globalized and transnationalized local.

As feminist cultural studies scholar Rosalind Gill has aptly noted, stories of feminism are not linear; they do not represent stories of progress or backlash (Gill 2016). They are complicated and contradictory, because gender and sexuality, which are central frames of feminism, are always remediated via certain male-centric historical ideologies (i.e., neoliberalism), which feminism as a movement attempts to overcome. In this sense, this chapter attempts a renewal of diverse feminist politics by demonstrating how the reflection of the post-authoritarian period of the 1990s—including the gay rights movement and feminist activism—was mediated by neoliberal narratives that prevailed after the IMF crisis, thereby consigning the historical affinities of the 1990s movement politics to obscurity, despite the revival since 2015 of antimisogynist politics.

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter are revised sections of the author's Korean thesis "The Postfeminist Family Narrative in the Neoliberal Era: Focusing on the drama series Reply" published in *Media, Gender & Culture (Mitiŏ, Chentŏ & Munhwa)* 32(1) (2017), included here with permission from the Korean Women's Association for Communication Studies.

2. During the 2015 Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) epidemic in Korea, a misogynistic rumor spread online that two young women who had been to Hong Kong were the first spreaders of MERS. Some female users began to occupy the discussion board of DCInside on MERS and shocked the public by using "masculine" styles of posting such as trolling and spamming. Soon after, a new website named *Megalia* appeared, its name being a combination of MERS and *Egalia* from the 1977 feminist novel *Egalia's Daughters: A Satire of the Sexes* by Gerd Brantenberg. See Chapter 2 by HyeYoung Cho in this volume.

3. Indeed, producer Sin Wŏnho and writer Yi Ujŏng of the *Reply* series are famous for writing and producing reality TV shows on KBS.

4. In other words, the *Reply* series mediates a dominant liberal reconciliation framework when it portrays characters who were previously invisible, unseen in the social order, during the democratization era, yet simultaneously erases such characters' radical history. The *Reply* series' impacts might be compared to those of the TV series *Sandglass* (*Morae sigye*, SBS, 1995) in the context of how television drama was a key mediator of redress politics: the show made possible the widespread acknowledgement of the Gwangju Uprising and massacre as a critical event of the anti-authoritarian movement. Yet *Sandglass* also deflects the ongoing traces of authoritarian ideological and neocolonial injuries by rendering the event nostalgically, and thus definitively past.

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10

The Emergence of "Daughter-Fools"

The Mediation of Masculinity via New Fatherhood After the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis

Yoon Heo

The Return of the Father[1]

In 2009, the term "daughter-fool" (*ttal pabo*)[2] infiltrated South Korean public discourse. In 2010, the KBS evening show *Live Tong* selected "daughter-fool" as one of the top words of the year, heralding the arrival of a new father figure. Casting off the hegemonic masculinity of strict and indifferent fathers, the "daughter-fool" represented a more progressive form of South Korean masculinity. The expression is used by men to identify themselves as men who practice an ideal type of masculinity—that is, a husband who is willing to share housework and childcare duties with his wife. Such "daughter-fools" appear in Korean society as postmodern figures who integrate modern masculinity with feminist sentimentality. This emphasis on fathers who love their daughters is not limited to celebrities, but extends to the public in general. Even actors and male idols without daughters are often called "daughter-fools" as a way to indicate their tenderhearted, affectionate disposition.

Why has this affectionate form of fatherhood become popular in the media? The "daughter-fool" father emerged alongside various sociopolitical and economic changes triggered by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and subsequent mass layoffs, which eroded the authority of male breadwinners. Fathers who could no longer find family-sustaining jobs lost their status in both the family and the workplace. In this context, the image of

the "caring father" offers men a new way to demonstrate their social efficacy. The media also support male involvement in child-rearing, and government policies meant to increase the birth rate employ rhetoric that calls on fathers to share housework and child-rearing responsibilities. Likewise, women who want to maintain their careers after giving birth ask their husbands to share in the housework.

According to Statistics Korea, only 4.1 percent of men with access to paternity leave used it in 2021 (T'onggyech'ong 2022b). Although there is a system in place to provide paid paternity leave for men, the atmosphere in South Korean companies discourages them from doing so. In particular, at small companies with four or fewer employees, male employees very rarely take paternity leave. Indeed, it is so rare for men to take paternity leave that when they do, company bosses treat such men as if they are quitting their jobs (S. Pak 2022). Although the percentage increases each year, men still constitute just one-eighth of all parents taking parental leave. While minor, this increase in male participation in childcare marks a significant change brought about by two pieces of legislation, the Framework Act on Gender Equality (*Yangsŏng p'yŏngdŭng kibon pŏp*) and the Basic Plan Regarding Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (*Chŏ-ch'ulsan koryŏnghwa sahoe kibon kyehoek*).[3] Both acts, which support the use of paternity leave, recognize that career breaks for women and childcare burdens are the two main reasons for Korea's low birth rate (see Eunjung Kim's chapter in this volume).

It is still unusual for fathers to contribute to child-rearing in Korea. Therefore, these changes in masculinity were inevitable, and political liberalization via anti-authoritarian government has transformed Korean men into figures who are neither hegemonic nor repressive. Ironically, fathers who are able to embody these new norms of masculinity are elite, upper and middle classes, and in privileged positions. These practices of affectionate fatherhood stem from class privilege. Indeed, male parental leave is somewhat less shunned at larger corporations and in the public sector, which tend to recruit elites and provide relatively stable employment. Moreover, because paternity leave pay is low, it is mainly only available to financially well-off families. For this reason, there has been recent debate in Korea over the need to raise paternity leave pay for men (H. Kim 2021).[4] This form of "enlightened" fatherhood "trickles down" from men occupying top positions in the economic and political hierarchy.

Although the "daughter-fool" has enabled the diversification of the archetypes of fatherhood, it also serves to reproduce the patriarchal authority of men as heads of the household. There are many advantages to

this new masculinity: men take on increased responsibility in the family and deepen their emotional ties with family members. However, this new masculinity is predicated on the authority of fatherhood. It reinforces heteronormativity and the patrilineal structure through nostalgia and daughters' sympathy. Just as fathers demanded virtuousness and obedience from daughters under traditional patriarchal family ideology, fathers who emulate the new model of fatherhood also seek to control their daughters' sexuality. Therefore, I argue that the popularity of progressive representations of masculinity is inherently linked to an increase in misogyny to intolerable levels. They do not simply compete in popular media (e.g., variety shows, movies, TV dramas, novels); rather, they conjointly reproduce patriarchal hegemony, regardless of the emergence of new representations of fathers as weak, gentle, self-sacrificial, protective, commanding, virile, and self-centered. In other words, the new daughter-fool discourse stubbornly adheres to and sustains patriarchal hegemony through a remediation of gender norms—in this case, the masculinity of fatherhood.

The number of spin-off reality programs featuring celebrity fathers and their children is increasing. These shows, commonly referred to as "child-raising variety shows" (*yuga yenŭng*), have gained immense popularity. Among public broadcasters alone, there are *Dad! Where Are We Going?* (*Appa! ŏdi ka?*, MBC, 2013–2015), *The Return of Superman* (*Syupŏmaen i tora watta*, KBS, 2013–present), and *Oh My Baby* (*O mai beibi*, SBS, 2014–2016). Excluding *Oh My Baby*, these programs feature father-child relationships and are what Koreans refer to as "daddy shows" (*appa yenŭng*). The stated intention of these daddy shows is to depict healthy father-child relationships based on active communication, which were previously absent from TV screens due to fathers' absence from the home as heads of the family.

The strict separation of the public and private spheres that has undergirded gender roles in Korean society denied male participation in housework and child-rearing. Indeed, common expressions such as "entering the kitchen makes the penis fall off" explicitly refer to castrated masculinity and reflect the social norms of hegemonic masculinity, which define men as providers. According to Kaja Silverman (1992), hegemonic male identity is an essential element for maintaining the status quo. Hegemonic masculinity operates as a "dominant fiction," a fantasy that men must believe and follow. However, the Asian financial crisis resulted in mass layoffs and labor flexibilization, making it apparent that men were no longer sufficient as the sole providers for families, bringing about the collapse of this dominant fiction of masculinity. R. W. Connell (1993) emphasizes

that hegemonic masculinity is a part of a gender politics organized through practices of inclusion and exclusion. As a configuration formed through historical and social negotiations based on political, economic, and demographic changes, masculinity requires continuous redefinition and renegotiation. Thus, hegemonic masculinity inherently invites competition, and the formation of the gender practices accepted as "normal" is an ongoing process, one that is subject to change. The recent trend of daddy shows should be understood as a mediating component in a larger reconfiguration of gender norms following the Asian financial crisis. For example, recently, many reality programs have featured celebrity husbands and fathers who, while working only intermittently for their careers, stay at home and take full responsibility for child-rearing and housework while their wives work full-time jobs. Likewise, sentiments such as "sexy men who cook well" (*yosek-nam*, abbreviated from *yori chal hanŭn seksi han namja*) have become commonplace.

In this article, I argue that patriarchy was reconstructed in Korean mass media through the model of the "daughter-fool." To analyze this process, I review the sociopolitical situation mediated by mass media surrounding the Asia financial crisis. The changes in Korean masculinity are revealed through fatherhood, at the center of the family. I illustrate changes in Korean gender norms under the neoliberal framework since the Asian financial crisis. I also examine the reinforcement of the ideology of the family and heteronormativity. I highlight the simultaneous appearance of daddy shows in the public sphere with the explosion of misogyny in South Korean society. I also connect the two phenomena to unpack how media representations have brought about a shift in gender norms in South Korean society since the 2000s.

The Genealogy of Fatherhood Before and After the Asian Financial Crisis

In Korean popular culture, fathers have been depicted either as patriarchs who use violence to maintain order within the family, or as lonely, middle-aged men who reproach themselves for their failure to fulfill their familial responsibilities. These depictions have their roots in Korean colonial masculinity and hypermasculine modernization. Kwŏn Kim Hyŏnyŏng (2007) points out that men of colonized states feminize the colonization experience during the process of nation-building following liberation, and separate themselves from the previous male generation's failure to protect their

country. During this process, however, Korean men erased not only the voices of women but also the alternative voices of men, denying the existence of other masculinities. Anticommunist ideology and militarism combined to construct a competitive, aggressive form of masculinity, and this violent masculinity is intimately related to the civilian massacres of the 1940s and the discourse of "industrial warriors" (*sanŏp chŏnsa*) of the 1960s and 1970s. Beginning in the 1960s and even throughout the 2000s, only "healthy" men were recognized as proper citizens under the universal conscription system maintained since North and South Korea declared a ceasefire in the aftermath of the Korean War of 1950 to 1953 (Moon 2005; E. Kim 2016; Lee 2010). In this historical context, the discourse of masculinity in Korea provided no space for alternative voices. This hegemonic masculinity ultimately led to the absence of men in the family. Whether serving as "industrial warriors" at companies or as soldiers in war, men did not participate in the reproductive or private domains. Fathers' complete lack of participation in household chores is reflected in the common joke: "The only thing dads say at home is 'give me food' (*pap chwŏ*)." Any deviation from this form of masculinity became the target of jokes; a prime example is the extremely popular TV comedy show that ran from 1988 to 1990, *Ssurirang Couple* (*Ssŭrirang pubu*, KBS2). In this show, the wife, Sun Akchil,[5] threatens her husband with a baseball bat over a small misunderstanding. This reversal of the husband-wife relationship made audiences laugh, and viewers' laughter was directed at the loser husband who failed to conform to the dominant conception of masculinity.

The patriarch in South Korea, and by extension the norms of hegemonic masculinity, began showing signs of transformation in the early 1990s. The TV drama *What Is Love All About* (*Sarang i mwŏ killae*, MBC, 1991–1992) received an average viewer rating of 59.6 percent, with its highest recorded viewer rating reaching 64.9 percent (Chŏn 2007). This is a representative text that demonstrates changes in the norms of hegemonic masculinity. *What Is Love All About* depicts the merging of a conservative household and a liberal household. The female characters on the show reflect the generational dynamics of the time. Mothers of the older generation—both conservative and liberal—are devoted to domestic chores and taking care of their parents-in-law. Sim'ae, the mother of the liberal household, makes her daughter study hard in the hope that she will be able to lead a better life. Although Sim'ae herself dropped out of university, she hopes that if her daughter receives a BA degree, she will be able to enjoy a life that is more than just doing housework. In this way, the show depicts the common trajectories of Korean women's lives in the 1970s and

1980s of becoming a homemaker even after graduating from university. In the 1970s, only 3 to 5 percent of Korean women attended university, and 70 percent of women stopped their formal education before entering middle school (Yi 2012). Moreover, Sunja, the mother in the conservative household, works like a servant for her husband and obsesses over her son. She makes strikingly different demands of her son and daughter, ordering her daughter to make the son's bed and do his laundry. The TV drama illustrates how conservative men, who believe that "man is heaven and woman is earth" (*namja nŭn hanŭl, yŏja nŭn ttang*),[6] are transformed by the marriages of their children, who belong to a new generation of the late 1980s post-authoritarian regime. The final scene of *What Is Love All About* portrays the stern patriarchal father, Pyŏngho, cooking a meal for his sick wife. The "progressive" image of the good patriarch who knows how to help his wife continued into the mid-1990s.

Such media images led to the formation of a social consensus beginning in the early 1990s that fathers must change. In particular, younger fathers in their thirties and forties came to recognize that the patriarchal father figure/breadwinner model needed to be understood as a relic of the past. Men themselves had begun to recognize the need to transform hegemonic masculinity, and they searched for a way to make this change. Representative examples of this cultural shift include the Duranno Father School (*Turanno abŏji hakkyo*) and Daughter-Loving Fathers Group (*Ttal sarang abŏji moim*). In the 1990s, these civic organizations actively participated in the movement to abolish the family register system (*hojuje*). The official mission of the Duranno Father School was "to promote a good father figure, reinstate the fallen paternal authority, and return fathers to place within the family in recognition of the fact that the problem of the family is essentially the problem of the father." The Duranno Father School started the "good fatherhood movement" (*choŭn appa toegi p'ŭrojekt'ŭ*), which sought to restore the father's place in the family. The Daughter-Loving Fathers Group took a leading role in abolishing Korea's patriarchal family register system. The group criticized the "business culture and social climate that has forced men to assume the role of the authoritative patriarch who is responsible for earning money and neglects home life." The group also vowed to "make efforts to bring about social and systemic change that will lead husbands to take equal part in childcare and housework with their wives and induce them to not discriminate between sons and daughters while raising them" (Yosŏng yŏnhap 2002). Such movements strengthened around the time of the Asian financial crisis. For example, the Duranno Father School was founded in 1997 under the para-

church organization Duranno Sŏwŏn by Onnuri Church, and it has since expanded its activities to include non-Christians with the opening of the secular Open Father School (Yŏllin abŏji hakkyo) in 2004. The Daughter-Loving Fathers Group was inaugurated in 2000 by the Korean Women's Associations United (Han'guk yŏsŏng tanch'e yŏnhap) as part of a concerted endeavor to abolish the family register system.

The good fatherhood movement gained momentum after the Asian financial crisis, reflecting that the domestic roles of fathers had become subject to revaluation amid the collapse of the father-as-breadwinner model. Under pressure from employers, many fathers took early retirement, while others were forced to take jobs as irregular workers. Meanwhile, an increasing number of women entered the workforce, taking low-wage jobs to supplement the lost income of their husbands. As a result, men were required to perform care work within the family. Novels that feature sacrificial and caring fathers, such as *Father* (*Abŏji*, Kim Chŏnghyŏn, 1997) and *A Thorny Fish* (*Kasi kogi*, Cho Ch'angin, 2000), became bestsellers during the financial crisis by appealing to readers with melodramatic narratives of fatherhood. *A Thorny Fish*, the best-selling novel of 2000, tells the story of a father who gives his all to cure his son's blood cancer, only to die himself from liver cancer. Whereas the mother in the story abandons her son after a divorce, the father devotes himself to taking care of his son. Eventually, he sends his son to live with his mother to keep his own incurable disease a secret (see also Song 2009). By making the silent, supportive father the hero, the novel builds on the father syndrome first depicted in Kim Chŏnghyŏn's *Father*. Indeed, *A Thorny Fish* reinforces the idea that ordinary fathers are the true heroes of the time. *Father* sold three million copies in just a few years. The popularity of these novels indicates that the diminished economic power of fathers after the Asian financial crisis led audiences to sympathize with narratives that highlight the silent suffering of fathers who sacrifice for their families.

It was also during this period that the media began depicting images of fathers actively participating in childcare responsibilities. As sports nationalism engulfed Korea following the Asian financial crisis, successful athletes such as the women golfers Park Se-ri (Pak Seri) and Park Ji-sung (Pak Chisŏng) became popular public figures, and it was commonly thought that the devotion of their fathers was a reason for their career success. After Park Se-ri dramatically won the United States Women's Open Championship in 1998 and became a national star, she gave an interview where she acknowledged "the devotion of her family" as the reason for her success. Subsequently, the media gave considerable positive attention to

her father, a "golf daddy (*kolp'ŭ appa*)."[7] The media's interest in the fathers of Park Se-ri and Park Ji-sung continued to spur discussion on the topic of how to raise successful children. Park Ji-sung's father published a parenting book entitled *The Dream of the Heart Leads to a Happy Future: A Special Message from the Father of Park Ji-sung, the Global Star* (*Kasŭm ŭro kkun kkum i haengbok han mirae rŭl mandŭnda: Pak Chisŏng ŭl kŭllobŏl sŭt'a ro mandŭn abŏji ŭi t'ŭkpyŏl han mesiji*, 2010). The book was subsequently made into a documentary, leading to a boom in parenting books targeting fathers. Whereas fathers of male soccer athletes emphasize the use of scientific training methods, fathers of female golfers stress that they followed their daughters while on tour, protecting them from sexual temptations. In this way, the parents of famous athletes behave differently depending on the sex of their children. Parenting books written by fathers emphasize that children who are close to their fathers are better at critical thinking, logical reasoning, and mathematics; they also claim that sons who are close to their fathers can better embody the form of modern masculinity demanded in the public sphere. This has led to the belief that children become "smarter" when fathers participate in childcare (Kang 2012; Cho 2012, 2014). This assertation is based on a very simple gendered belief. Men are more rational, mathematical, and scientific than women, and therefore, it is thought that dedicated fathers can teach these attributes to their children.

The emphasis on care by fathers has emerged in response to the perceived crisis of a loss of paternal rights in Korea. Historically, the crisis of parental rights has been exaggerated in the Korean public sphere. The discourse on the crisis of parental rights existed even in the 1970s, when Korean society was hypermasculine. At that time, it was said that industrialization would weaken the traditional values of filial piety and make fathers "tigers without fangs" (*ippal ppajin horangi*). The main drivers of such changes were cited as strengthened maternal rights and the rise of feminism (Yim 2006). In other words, the expansion of women's rights was interpreted as a crisis for fathers. The 1990s was a decade of ironies and contradictions. For example, throughout this period of historic expansion of women's rights, most public sympathy was still targeted toward fathers. An example of this is the children's song "Cheer Up Daddy!" (*Appa him naeseyo!*), which blanketed radio and television during the period surrounding the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Weakened fathers asking for sympathy eventually strengthened the nostalgic memory of the powerful patriarchy.

However, ruptures began to form in the facade of hegemonic mascu-

linity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, popular media started to highlight the flaws of hegemonic masculinity. In the TV drama *Madame* (*Ajumma*, MBC, 2000), Kang Sŏgu, an actor who had formerly played hero roles in romance dramas, was cast as Chang Chin'gu, an ostentatious part-time university instructor. Previously, male intellectuals had served as leaders in Korean society. However, this character, who lacked true political convictions and a high-earning job yet ignored his less-educated wife and spoke arrogantly, was so popular that he became a trope character, as in "like Chang Chin'gu" (*Chang Chin'gu kat'ŭn*). *Ajumma* was also the first show of its kind to depict a university instructor, which often serves as a synonym for a prodemocracy activist man, as a loser character. Such portrayals indicate that the media had begun to actively question masculinity during this period.

"Daddy Shows" and Reinforcing Patricentric Family Ideology

The transformed father figure portrayed in TV dramas and sitcoms made its way onto variety shows in the late 2000s. Reality shows and TV dramas featuring fathers were relatively popular with viewers. Conventionally, Korean reality shows featured female celebrities and their children and emphasized mother-child relationships: for example, *Moms Are Running with High-Heels* (*Haihil ŭl sin'go tallinŭn ŏmma*, SBS funE, 2013) and *What It Means to Be a Mom* (*Ŏmma ka mwŏ killae*, TV Choson, 2015–2017). And, despite the obvious beauty and glamour of the on-screen talent, audiences were told that such female celebrities were simply mothers doing their motherly duties, such as taking care of children, making them study, and scolding them. Mother-centered media productions are not necessarily antipatriarchal narratives. Matricentricity mediates patriarchy by performing family and gender norms. What is unique about popular Korean TV narratives after the late 2000s is the rise of the role of fathers. It is noteworthy that in these narratives, hybrid masculinity has shifted its focus to the father as a nurturing man who manages the house. Nevertheless, fatherhood also reinforces the patricentric family ideology.

Dad! Where are We Going? (MBC, 2013–2015)—the pioneer "daddy show" that filmed dads and their children on a two-day trip without mothers—inaugurated the golden age of child-raising programs. The program entertained audiences with a combination of dads who are inexperienced in child-rearing and children who are unaccustomed to having their dads around. The episodes of *Dad! Where are We Going?* feature

fathers—who normally were too busy "making money"—taking their children on trips to the countryside, where entertaining and funny incidents occur. In this way, the show sought to reclaim the place of the father within the family. For this purpose, a variety of father characters appear in the show—a friend-like dad, a patriarchal-but-warm dad, a patriarchal dad who is always telling his son that he's tired, and a "daughter-fool" dad who favors his daughter over his son. By bringing these characters together, the program makes visible the changes in the Korean father figure. The popularity of *Dad! Where Are We Going?* immediately influenced the Korean public. After the program first ran on TV, Korea witnessed a national camping boom, and the hiking-goods industry enjoyed brisk growth. It also became the norm for fathers to take their children on overnight camping trips or day trips to the suburbs. The cast of *Dad! Where Are We Going?* was also featured in commercials for camping goods and instant noodles.

The Return of Superman (hereafter, *Superman*), a reality show about celebrity fathers taking their children on three-day trips without their wives, is currently the longest-running "daddy show" in Korea. Variety shows portraying men taking care of their children became successful because they engaged with changing trends regarding father figures, and it is during this time that the expression "daughter-fool" gained purchase in society. In *Superman*, Ch'u Sŏnghun, a Korean Japanese celebrity whose Japanese name is Akiyama Yoshihiro, played the role of the daughter-fool. As a UFC martial artist, Ch'u possesses rough masculinity; however, as a caregiver, he also displays fatherly warmth. In this way, he represents the ideal man. The program's subtitles construct Ch'u as a "manly man" who speaks curtly to his wife but is almost foolishly warm and sentimental with his daughter. The way his face brightens up with a smile when his daughter calls him "daddy," coupled with his awkward Korean, endeared him greatly to many Korean viewers.

The Reproduction of Family Norms

Superman's pilot episode consisted of multiple parts entitled "Oppa Becomes Daddy" (*Oppa, Appa toeda*), "Dads in Crisis" (*Wigi ŭi appa tŭl*), and "In the Name of the Father" (*Abŏji ŭi irŭm ŭro*) that construct a narrative that follows how men who transform from *oppa* to fathers and overcome crises to emerge as "superman" fathers. Conventionally, *oppa* is a form of address by women and girls to their older male siblings; however,

it is also an affectionate form of address by women to an older boyfriend or male lover. The practice of referring to one's husband as *oppa* is due to the norm of younger women marrying older men in Korean society. This narrative is typical of Korea's family norms, in which an older man marries a younger woman and overcomes hardship to ultimately become a "superman" who protects the family. Even though this form of fatherhood appears new and unconventional, the show mediates the affective aspects of patricentric family ideology. Ironically, what is strengthened in this process is the role of the wife as primary caregiver. Fathers experience, for a limited time, the difficulties that mothers face daily while waiting impatiently for their wives to return. Although present-day society encourages fathers to take care of their children, the mother's position is immutable, just as wives/mothers on the show resume their positions after the short forty-eight-hour respite of a weekend.

This program consistently inserts scenes with grandfathers. Such scenes juxtapose the fathers of the 2010s with those of the 1970s, strengthening the show's focus on the father as the central figure of the family narrative. The narrative that present-day fathers have more time to spend with their children whereas fathers of the past broke their backs to make money for their families and were strict with their sons represents a nostalgic longing for past hegemonic masculinity. In the pilot episode, Yi Hwijae, a famous television host, helplessly cries tears of guilt as he takes his crying son to the emergency room and realizes how little he knows about his son. Throughout the program, he takes care of his twins while bonding emotionally with them, becoming a better father. The underlying message of the scene is that the experience the father gained through the program prompted him to better understand his own father. The grandfathers on the show watch how their sons take care of the grandchildren, prompting them to reflect on why they were unable to do so with their own kids; they also occasionally offer excuses, emphasizing that they had to work hard and did not have time to be fathers. And without fail, the program features scenes of fathers and sons resolving their differences via conversation. These scenes represent the reconciliation of the son and father, with the son forgiving the father for being absent due to his duties as the head of the family. That is, although the main caregiver is the mother, the family history focuses on the men of the family.

This phenomenon can also be identified in narratives surrounding Ch'u Sŏnghun. Ch'u Kyei is the father of Ch'u Sŏnghun, and he became famous through his appearance on *Superman*, where he was portrayed as a strict father who became an extremely affectionate grandfather. Through

Ch'u Kyei, the viewers are made to understand the true feelings that fathers are forced to keep hidden. The three generations of the Ch'u family form more intimate relationships with each other as they travel and cook together, and their mutual affection is strengthened in scenes about Ch'u Sŏnghun's UFC matches. The show features crosscuts of the Ch'u family waiting for their father/husband/son to return home after the match with shots of brutal fight scenes, and a close-up of Ch'u Sŏnghun's muscular body as he steps into the ring to defend his family is an allegory for the protective father. The bloodied and battered father has an emotional effect on viewers regardless of the outcome of the match. These sequences come together to form a narrative that reaches its emotional climax with the subtitle "You are still our champion" (*Yŏjŏnhi uri ŭi ch'aemp'iŏn imnida*), thereby reproducing the dominant fiction of the father as the protector of the family.

The Reinforcement of Gender Norms through Heteronormativity

"Daddy shows" reinforce gender norms via heteronormative narratives. Season 1 of *Dad! Where Are We Going?* features one girl and four boys. Kim Min'guk, who is eight years old and the eldest, is the smart older brother. Yun Hu, who is six years old, is the friend-like older brother. Sŏng Chun, who is six years old, is good-looking and behaves like a mature older brother. Finally, Yi Chunsu, who is five years old, is the mischievous younger brother. The program establishes romantic relationships between Song Chia, who is five years old and the only girl, and the four boys, and within this heterosexual framework, Song Chongguk, the father of Chia, becomes engrossed in protecting his daughter. Song keeps an eye on the boys, who have become friendly with his daughter. He continues to be overprotective; when playing games with children, he "protects" his daughter, going so far as to push other boys over. *Dad! Where Are We Going?* is filmed mostly in the remote countryside, and Chia's father carries her almost everywhere, to the point where it is said that "Chia's feet touch the ground for no more than ten minutes." At times, Song's love for his daughter causes him to neglect other family members. He pays little attention to his wife and sons, showering all his love on his daughter. This monopolized affection for the daughter is accompanied by narration stating that "a man's life shines the brightest through his love for his daughter"

(*namja ŭi insaeng i kajang pit nanda*) (Ki 2013). Any mistake made by Song is explained away as a result of him being a "daughter-fool." Although it is acceptable for sons to play rough and get hurt, daughters must be protected.

Most of the children on the show were born in the late 2000s, an era during which the low birthrate became a prominent social issue in Korean society. Since the 2000s, Korea's fertility rate has fluctuated between 1.1 and 1.3 births per woman. In 2018, this rate fell to .98, and lower yet to .81 in 2021 (T'onggyech'ŏng 2022a). Korea has the lowest rate among OECD countries. Korea's low fertility rates are clearly related to the phenomenon of "daughter-fools." Given such low birth rates, daughters have become just as precious as sons. Yet, fathers' over-protectiveness toward their daughters comes from daughters being gendered as women.

Appearing in season 1 of *Dad! Where Are We Going?* with his son Chun, Sŏng Tongil acts as a "father of the past era" who does not know how to deal with his son because he himself lost his parents when he was young and did not experience fatherly love. Assuming the traditional father figure role, Sŏng Tongil is curt and unfriendly to his son and constantly reminds his seven-year-old eldest son that he will be responsible for his mother and sister if Sŏng dies. Regardless of age, men are to take on the responsibility of protector. However, in season 2, his five-year-old daughter Bin joins the cast, and Sŏng repeatedly tells her to "act more femininely" and "sit discretely." The program excuses such behavior as that of a "daughter-fool" and emphasizes to viewers that the little girl on screen is a future woman. Moreover, the young girl herself does her best to perform the role her father demands of her, as can be seen in the scene where Sŏng takes his daughter on a date to the restaurant where he first met his wife. He seats his daughter where his wife had sat, orders the food he shared with his wife, and recounts the conversations he and his wife had together—essentially substituting his daughter for his wife. This scene is meant to touch viewers emotionally by depicting Sŏng sharing a deep conversation with his daughter. However, in this scene, the daughter is merely objectified in place of the wife. Her mother's modest behavior is compared to her tomboy-like manners. And the young girl attempts to mimic her mother's mannerisms and words throughout the scene. She was encouraged to be a "good girl" rather than herself. This gender norm repeats throughout the entire series. This is how the message of the "daughter-fool" is disseminated in Korean society.

As such, the young daughter is identified as a woman first and a human

being second, and this is the same with adult daughters on other shows. The TV variety show *Take Care of My Dad* (*Appa rŭl put'ak hae*, SBS, 2015) sought to capture famous Korean male actors and comedians and their daughters in their twenties getting to know each other. According to the official website, *Take Care of My Dad* is "a real father–daughter variety show for all 'daughter-fool' fathers in Korea," encouraging all "daughters in their golden years of life" to take care of "their fathers who are no longer the head of the family but mere pieces of furniture at home" (SBS 2015). In this program, fathers and daughters go on outings together, where they learn to communicate with each other. However, what is actually portrayed are the daughters' attempts to cater to their fathers' wishes. The father-daughter relationship here is no different from Sŏng Tongil reprimanding his five-year-old daughter to "behave like a lady" and "sit discretely." The first "daughter-fool" father introduced on the program is comedian Yi Kyŏnggyu, who tries to find out how much his daughter drinks and whether she has a boyfriend. The daughter of actor Cho Chaehyŏn, an archetype of the curt Korean father, plays the role of a charming daughter who speaks to her father in the tone of a ten-year-old girl. The wish to control the love life and drinking habits of his adult daughter comes from a desire to treat one's daughter as a perpetually underage child. This program repackages such desires as a form of love typical of the "daughter-fool." Before marriage, Korean women are trapped under the authority of their fathers, and after marriage they are subordinated to the authority of their husbands. In a culture where the sexuality of unmarried women is controlled and independence is not allowed, propagating the "daughter-fool" as a form of parental "love" is no different than infantilizing women. That is, on these shows, women are represented as dependent beings who require the protection of "daughter-fools."

Fathers on *Take Care of My Dad* are able to assume such strong control over their daughters because they are successful breadwinners. Early on, the program draws interest from viewers who want to voyeuristically observe the private lives of male celebrities, including their home lives and wives. The program is structured to showcase the economic power of celebrities. However, the show has been criticized because many of the daughters appearing on the show are women in their twenties who wish to become celebrities themselves or work in TV. In Korean society after the Asian financial crisis, social mobility was low, and having a father who can facilitate his daughter's dreams is a significant social privilege. Since the 2000s, businesses have been hiring fewer permanent employees and have

expanded irregular employment. As young workers face difficulties in achieving economic independence, their parents' financial resources have become an important pillar of support. A father's control over his adult daughter's sexuality and autonomy is accepted as a condition of benefiting from the economic stability that fathers can provide for their daughters, thereby enabling "daughter-fool" fathers to more freely wield power. These TV fathers provide their daughters with the best environments money can buy. These shows, in turn, continue to reinforce the logic that fathers, as wage-earners, have the right to control other members of the family. Once again, the family is configured with the patriarch at the center, and the patriarch is glorified via the image of the "daughter-fool."

Many viewers of these daddy shows have said they no longer watch the shows because, ultimately, the programs rely on the economic power of the patriarch (P. Yun 2015). The sons and daughters of the already-established celebrities who appeared on these reality programs are criticized as "silver-spoon celebrities" who have an unfair advantage (K. Yun 2015). In the case of *Take Care of My Dad*, the pilot episode recorded an audience rating of 12 percent. Afterward and until its eventual cancellation, the show recorded an average rating of 5 percent. These poor ratings at the end are due to public scrutiny of established celebrities passing down their celebrity status and class privilege to their children. To be a father who can drop everything for an overnight camping trip, like the men on daddy shows, one must already own a car, tent, an outdoor folding table, hiking clothes, and more. That is, to partake in activities with one's children every week, one needs money. Moreover, these TV shows serve as important venues for product placement, giving advertisers direct access to consumers (C. Pak 2016; T. Yun 2015). In this way, bonding moments between fathers and children are fantasies that the media and corporate businesses create to make people think that real dads should be able to provide such experiences to their children. It is evident that the class divide operates in the enjoyment of "daddy shows." In his analysis of the crisis of masculinity, John MacInnes (1998) states that the optimistic acceptance of the crisis of masculinity is only possible for young and talented men. Relatively old, low-income, and less-educated men react sensitively to this crisis, while economically entitled and highly educated men find it interesting that they are able to take on diverse masculinities. The level of interest shown by men in daddy shows is, in actuality, related to their individual political and economic status. The breadwinner norm becomes more powerful during periods of socioeconomic turbulence.[8]

The Protective Father Fantasy and the Good Father as an Alibi

In 2018, several daughter-fool fathers were called out as abusers by the #MeToo movement. Two actors who appeared in *Take Care of My Dad* were accused of sexual violence against young women. It was reported that they sexually assaulted their students and actors who they had performed with. One of the accused men committed suicide in response to this disclosure. Because he had appeared as a kind and thoughtful father on the show, viewers were shocked. The victims were revealed to be near his daughter's age. On the show, these men say they want "to be a father who is as affectionate as a lover." The sexual assault survivors revealed that their abusers had made similar statements, asking for a kiss while saying they reminded them of their daughters (Ch'oe 2018). In the Korean #MeToo movement, whenever a male celebrity has been accused of sexual assault, the wife and children have often supported the accused in denying the allegations. The relatives of former Seoul mayor Park Wŏn-sun (Pak Wŏnsun) denied the sexual harassment accusations and filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (C. Yi 2021).

Whenever the authority of the father has been weakened during times of social turmoil, fatherhood melodramas become popular and concerns over weak masculinity have increased. Through the archetype of the "daughter-fool," gender mediates the patriarchy of Korean society, and the image of the "daughter who is loved by her father" functions to obscure the gender inequalities and misogyny that continue to undergird Korean social structures. The state's responsibilities, such as providing social welfare and ensuring gender equality, are placed on the shoulders of fathers, and so fathers cannot help but continue to fail. Meanwhile, the media continue to present the role of fathers as protectors of the family. When fathers went to war in Vietnam or left for jobs in the Middle East, their actions were interpreted as sacrifices to protect the family. Until the 1970s, when state rule was justified by the need for industrialization and modernization, the absence of fathers was considered inevitable. Dispatching troops to foreign lands was justified as necessary to secure the financial health of the family and the political security of the country by strengthening diplomatic relations. In this process, daughters replaced fathers as wage earners by getting jobs in factories. Even if the father had never actually protected the daughter, emphasizing the father as the protector freed the state from the duty of protecting its citizens, both politically and economically. Women in Korean society have never been protected as it gestures (Lee 2010; S. Kim 2009; Koo 2001).

This coexistence of "daughter-fools" and misogyny in Korean society is based on hegemonic masculinity. After the Asian financial crisis, when the patriarch's economic power was substantially reduced, the role of the father figure within the family needed to be rearticulated. Now, fathers are caregivers who love their children. Protective masculinity took the form of "daughter-fools" and acquired a softened image. However, fathers who claim to be "daughter-fools" have become strong patriarchs in their own right, as their love for their daughters is part and parcel of ownership. As narratives of economically capable fathers protecting their daughters continue to propagate, so do narratives of obedient, dutiful daughters. Daughters who do not listen to their fathers must be reprimanded. This also means that children should forever remain under their fathers' umbrella of protection. The two sides of male-centered family ideology in Korean society are "daughter-fools" and misogyny, and the media help reproduce this gender regime. Fathers regain their power over the family in the guise of "daughter-fools." In this framework, women are called on to validate masculinity or are cast in the role of perpetual second-rate citizens.

The "daughter-fool" syndrome emerged amid the economic crisis, the decline in birthrates, and the anti-authoritarian atmosphere following the Asian financial crisis. As "daughter-fools," affectionate fathers have replaced the aloof, traditional form of fatherhood. However, as the daddy shows reveal, the protective father/immature daughter dynamic reinforces gender norms and heteronormativity. Fathers recuperate their authority via their roles as "daughter-fools," and this transformation mediates Korean patricentricity.

NOTES

1. This article deals with masculinity in the family structure. Masculinity is not always about heteronormativity and male sex. In South Korea, however, media usually focus on the heteronormative family.

2. The neologism "daughter-fool" emerged in the late 2000s. It refers to "fathers who love their daughters so much that they become fools in front of their daughters." Because of its meaning, it is often used to represent loving fathers and ideal men. Women are rarely described as "daughter-fools," and the term "son-fool" (*adŭl pabo*) is also rarely used. Therefore, it can be said that this expression is used nearly exclusively to describe father–daughter relationships.

3. This plan (2016–2020) is in its third iteration since it was launched by the Committee on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (*Chŏ-ch'ulsan koryŏng sahoe wiwŏnhoe*) as part of the 2005 Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (*Chŏ-ch'ulsan koryŏng sahoe kibon pŏp*). The plan is updated every five years. See Pogŏn pokchibu (2015).

4. The Korean government improved the system by establishing an arrangement that pays 100 percent of respective monthly wages for the first three months when both parents use parental leave, raising the replacement rate of parental leave benefits from 50 to 80 percent of respective monthly wages for the fourth to twelfth months of leave (Pak S. 2022).

5. "Sun akchil" means "pure evil" in Korean. Giving this name to the wife character, who is violent and abusive to her husband, reflects how such women were viewed by the public at the time.

6. This is a Korean proverb meant to convey that men are high in status, like the sky, and women are low in status, like the earth; that is, it is a spatial ontology of the hierarchical status of men above women.

7. Golfers often require a helper who can drive them long distances, serve as a caddy, and accompany them on long stays, and fathers who perform these tasks for their daughters are known as "golf daddies." In particular, Korean "golf daddies," such as the fathers of Park Se-ri and Kim Mi-hyun (Kim Mihyŏn), actively involve themselves in their daughters' sport activities so that they can control their daughters' sexual activities. For instance, Park Se-ri's father proudly stated that he intervenes in his daughter's love life (K. Kim 2012).

8. The first Asian Marvel hero movie, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021), raises questions about Asian masculinity in the United States. In the film, Asian American director Destin Daniel Cretton rewrites the Asian American stereotype by figuring Asian men as fun and attractive (Ito 2021). This work, however, differs greatly from Korean masculinity as represented in Korea. In the United States, Asian American men are considered boring model citizens who are second-class citizens after white American men. In contrast, in Korean cinema, while male archetypes are also shifting, men continue to serve primarily as agents of hegemonic masculinity.

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11

Discontent with Gender and Sexuality in *Painter of the Wind*

Sunyoung Yang

> Now, I'm going to talk about one person.
> Now, I'm very happy but, at the same time, heartbroken.
> I'm happy to think of that person,
> I'm heartbroken because I'm going to lose that person.
> That person was my student,
> That person was my teacher,
> That person was my friend,
> And that person was my lover. (Painter of the Wind 2008)[1]

The initial scene in the first episode of the Korean period drama series *Painter of the Wind* (*Param ŭi hwawŏn*, SBS, 2008) flashes forward to the show's finale. Painter Kim Hongdo walks into an empty studio and finds a full-length portrait of a beautiful woman, which was very rare in the patriarchal Chosŏn. His body shakes, as he is gripped by overwhelming emotion, and he starts to cry while running his fingers over the image. It is a portrait of the painter Sin Yunbok, who was not only Hongdo's[2] student, but such was Yunbok's talent that she in turn inspired him with her genius. The portrait is rife with sentimental significance, because Yunbok not only trained under Hongdo, but she was also his lover. She had to disguise herself as a man in order to become a painter. Yunbok faces the dilemma of living as a man to continue as an artist while keeping her female gender[3] a secret; but in the end, she decides to run away, leaving her self-portrait as a parting gift. Hongdo laments his loss and the inability to confess his love, and knows he will miss his lover Yunbok forever.

By disrupting the narrative's chronology to disclose the vital information of Yunbok's gender masquerade, the series reveals the tragic secret that the entire plotline revolves around: Yunbok, a famous painter of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), was not a man but a woman. The TV drama, and the original novel of the same title written by Yi Chŏngmyŏng (2007), are based on the imaginary premise that Sin Yunbok—a historical figure (1758–ca. 1814)—was secretly a woman. Yunbok's secret plays an important role in the novel's "narrative trick" (Kim 2014, 13), but using techniques found in detective novels, the novel does not allow this development to surface until later in the story. The drama starts with the ending, making it an open secret shared with the audience and a few other characters in the drama series, because the drama cannot hide the premise that Yunbok is played by a female actor (Kim 2014, 13–14). While readers of the novel are surprised by the unexpected twist, audiences of the drama experience a different kind of pleasure, finding a thrill in being included in the secret and in being held in suspense as they anticipate the disclosure of the hidden knowledge.[4]

As the plot of *Painter of the Wind* shows well, Korean TV drama and cinema have placed "melodrama," with its excess of affect and plot, as their dominant "narrative convention and sensibility" (Abelmann 2003, 22–23). The foregrounding of melodrama and its excesses mediates the "lived experience" of South Koreans under compressed modernity (McHugh and Abelmann 2005, 2–4). Korean TV dramas have developed particular tropes since the very first one, *The Gate of Heaven* (*Chŏnguk ŭi mun*, Ch'oe 1956), was aired: strong familial bonds, fatal secrets about one's birth, conflicts between in-laws, Cinderella-type fairy tales, adultery, terminal illness, and amnesia (Chung 2009, 96, 103–5). *Painter of the Wind* shares some of these long-standing characteristics, including strong familial bonds, secrets about birth, and love stories, while simultaneously adopting new features, such as female cross-dressing[5] and the homosexual romantic storylines that this enables.

To analyze the implications of the drama's imagined premise, this chapter addresses the following questions. What is the underlying message of Yunbok's masquerade? What purpose is there in remediating a famous historical figure by centering on issues of gender and sexuality? How did audiences and fans of *Painter of the Wind* react to old K-drama clichés, as well as the new themes that *Painter of the Wind* deploys? This chapter elaborates how the gender and sexuality of the characters in the show are performed and become destabilized, denaturalized, and resignified through their relationships with Yunbok based on the drama's revi-

sionist premise: Yunbok's secret gender performance. This chapter will then analyze audience and fan reactions both online and in the real world through the gallery of *Painter of the Wind* on DCInside, one of the most popular Korean anonymous user forums for various fandoms and interest groups.[6] While different groups supported different romantic pairings, supporters of the female-female romantic storyline between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang, a female courtesan, outnumbered the supporters for the female-male one between Yunbok and Hongdo, which was considered the major love story of the show. The rivalry over the two romantic pairings caused heated disputes in the gallery, with accusations of "disgusting" homosexual love and "Lolitaism" appearing in posts and comments on its bulletin board system (BBS). As a result, the plotline and the sad ending of the main love story between the female and male protagonists were left unresolved, as Hongdo's opening narration can be interpreted as a statement of self-centered male love, which does not necessarily confirm that Yunbok indeed reciprocated Hongdo's love.[7]

Against the backdrop of all the confusion, conflict, disappointment, ambivalence, and hope surrounding *Painter of the Wind*, I draw on Lauren Berlant's theorization as a lens through which to interpret gender and sexuality politics in Korean society. In *The Female Complaint* (2008), Berlant offers an analysis of intimate publics by examining women's culture in the United States, including novels, films, and poems. Her close reading of women's culture articulates how American women find their national and gendered belonging in conventional forms of femininity and normativity. Although women have sustained their optimism, the female complaint results from their commitment to "love" having been betrayed by patriarchal capitalism, resulting in disappointment and dissatisfaction. The female complaint is not located in the arena of politics, but in a women's culture heavily based on a fantasy world that complies with the existing gender and heterosexual normativity of patriarchal society. Simultaneously, however, the female complaint demonstrates the potential of political solutions resulting from women's dissatisfaction within the current social system, which Berlant conceptualizes as "juxtapolitical" (2008, 10). Whereas the arena of politics "is more often seen as a field of threat, chaos, degradation, or retraumatization than a condition of possibility" (10–11), the juxtapolitical sphere offers people a sense of a common emotional world with relief from the political, but adjacent to it (2008, 10).

While Berlant focuses on American culture, the theories and methods that interrogate the formation of modern subjects and societies through intimacy, emotion, attachment, and affect provide insights into other

modern societies. Korea has experienced compressed modernity in which the quickly built modern nation has actively utilized government propaganda that reflects both traditional and modern values. This gendered modernity, based on the divided gendered spheres, both public and private, has played important roles in accelerating the process of becoming a modern nation (Cho 2002). Korean women have struggled to be visible and to be heard in the public sphere while sustaining their lives mainly in the private sphere, and creating intimate publics, in Berlant's terms (2008, viii–ix). Berlant's articulation of the female complaint is useful for understanding Korean TV dramas and their popularity, which is long-lasting even in the context of a rapidly changing Korean society and despite the genre's tired clichés. Why do Korean TV audiences, especially women, stay loyal to a cultural genre filled with the gendered clichés that can themselves be an obstacle rather than a tool for their advancement? What kinds of desires do Korean female audiences have? How can their female longings and complaints create a juxtapolitical sphere with the potential for political action? By closely analyzing *Painter of the Wind*'s plotline and fan reactions, we can see how Korean women's female complaint is voiced collectively and projected outward through the megaphone of online communities.

Painter of the Wind: Two Versions

The novel and TV drama versions of *Painter of the Wind* are centered on the story of two famous Chosŏn painters, Kim Hongdo (1745–ca. 1806) and Sin Yunbok, who lived during the late eighteenth century. The two painters are in fact quite famous historical figures, and the introduction of genre painting into mainstream painting circles in Korea is attributed to their talents. The premise of the drama is largely based on a fictional device in which the painter Yunbok is actually a woman who has disguised herself as a man to become a painter. For a woman in the patriarchal Chosŏn dynasty to pursue such a career was unheard of, since women were forbidden from entering professional careers, especially government service, except in rare instances, such as with court ladies. As the first scene opens, Yunbok appears disguised as a male painter attending the national academy of art, following her foster father's aspirations to develop his family's reputation as the most distinguished painters to the royal household for generations to come. Hongdo belongs to the same academy as a government teacher and painter, and he comes to know Yunbok as his

young disciple. Artistic license influences the brushstrokes of these two highly gifted artists as a means of intertwining the politics of the late Chosŏn progressive ruler, King Chŏngjo, into the storyline. The main components of the dramatic plot include progressive political reforms, great artwork by two creative geniuses, the concealed gender of the female protagonist Yunbok, love between Yunbok and Hongdo as well as Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, and the secret murder of Yunbok's real father by opposing political factions.

Painter of the Wind was immediately well received, due in part to the decision to cast popular actors Park Shin-yang (Pak Sinyang) and Moon Geun-young (Mun Kŭn'yŏng) as the male and female protagonists, respectively. Not only was the acting applauded, but the show was noted for its visual aesthetics. The series claimed to be a historical fiction drama (*p'yujŏn sagŭk* in Korean, to borrow the English term), a genre that defines itself as a historical drama composed of both historical facts and fictional components (Son 2015, 115; C. Ch'oe 2016, 23–24).[8] This genre has become more and more popular in Korea because it allows both producers and audiences to enjoy more creative freedom, since exact historical records or present customs are not adhered to.[9] While audiences can appreciate the historical basis for this show, they are also entertained by the imagination used in filling gaps in historically based records. While fictional creations bring history to life, historical records satisfy the viewers' curiosity about the time period. The flexibility of this genre provides *Painter of the Wind* with more possibilities for imagining history, and the real paintings of Kim Hongdo and Sin Yunbok play an important role in allowing the fusion of historical facts and their mediation by fictional elements to be more plausible, especially in view of the speculative principal plot point that Sin Yunbok was female.

Before *Painter of the Wind*, the TV series *The Flagship Shop of Coffee Prince* (Y. Yi 2007, hereafter *Coffee Prince*) became a tremendous success, in part because it included female cross-dressing. *Coffee Prince* is categorized as "trendy drama," a genre that targets youths with new lifestyle and consumer cultures; it became popular in Japan in the late 1980s (Lukács 2010) and in Korea in the early 1990s (Chung 2009, 96).[10] The popularity of trendy dramas played an important role in the emergence of historical fiction drama, transforming the existing historical drama genre into a fusion of historical narrative, fictional elements, and trendy fashions such as music and scenic locations. The emphasis in historical fiction drama is not on history; instead, history is mobilized to create new types of trendy dramas. For example, while *Coffee Prince* offers audiences the pleasure of see-

ing the metropolitan scenery of Seoul, a trendy café, different types of handsome men, and the androgynous styles of the cross-dressing female protagonist, *Painter of the Wind* offers the reimagined scenery and customs of the Chosŏn as well as remediated genre paintings, music, and the politics of the period. Similarly, the rapidly growing popularity of masculine performance by women characters is used to make the plot of TV shows more exciting, by creating unique situations and feelings among characters and reflecting on gender issues. While *Coffee Prince*, which deals with contemporary times, invites viewers to look into the everyday lives and relationships experienced differently by men and women from a new angle enabled by gender masquerade, *Painter of the Wind* invites viewers to reexamine contemporary gender issues through the different time of the late Chosŏn. The cross-dressing gender masquerade in *Painter of the Wind* also creates room for reimagining relationships, work, and life back in those days.

Compared to other shows based on female cross-dressing, such as *Coffee Prince* (Y. Yi 2007), *You're Beautiful* (Hong 2009), *Sungkyunkwan Scandal* (Kim and Hwang 2010), and *Love in the Moonlight* (Kim and Paek 2016), *Painter of the Wind* is a major departure in terms of the show's formation of gender identity. Most female protagonists in these shows grow up as girls but disguise themselves as men by their own choice. These female cross-dressers usually show themselves as women when they do not disguise themselves as men for purposes of the dramas. They also develop heterosexual love for male protagonists. Yunbok in *Painter of the Wind* does not follow these predecessors. The drama *Sungkyunkwan Scandal* (Kim and Hwang 2010) offers a useful comparison. Kim Chihye (2011) analyzes the issues of gender and sexuality seen in this historical fiction drama, in which the female protagonist dresses like a man to attend Sungkyunkwan, the all-male national university of Chosŏn. Kim Yunsik, the female protagonist of *Sungkyunkwan Scandal*, grew up as a girl and continues to show her female gender in the show. Yunbok from *Painter of the Wind* was born as a girl but started living as a boy from an early age. Furthermore, Yunbok does not express her identity as a woman clearly in the show. While Yunsik is a feminist with a gender identity as a woman who later cultivates an alternate gender identity as a man, Yunbok is an ambiguous figure in terms of gender identity who destabilizes gender categories and compulsory heterosexuality throughout the series.

Another noticeable difference regarding female cross-dressing between *Painter of the Wind* and other historical fiction dramas, including *Sungkyunkwan Scandal*, is the gender ratio among the main characters of the show (C. Ch'oe 2016, 36–37). In these shows, the female protagonists are

surrounded by a tight-knit group of handsome, talented, and mostly rich male friends. The female protagonist can join the group because of her gender masquerade, and can develop different types of intimate relationships with the male characters. While female cross-dressing can result in quasi-homosexual love and friendship based on misunderstandings of the given character's gender, the shared secret of her "true" gender also cultivates heterosexual love relationships. In this process, female protagonists are often heavily identified by their relationship with the privileged men surrounding them. *Painter of the Wind*, on the other hand, does not rely on different love relationships among Yunbok and the attractive male protagonists in her circle of friends, even though Yunbok attends an all-male academy of fine art. Rather, the potential romance between Yunbok and Hongdo remains an ambiguous possibility until the end of the show—as does Yŏngbok's one-sided love for Yunbok, which Yunbok knows only as brotherly love throughout the drama. Two romantic storylines emerge between Yunbok and Hongdo as well as Yunbok and Yŏngbok in the academy, but these lines do not emphasize Yunbok as the only woman. Instead, the female-female relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang is as central and as significant as that between Yunbok and Hongdo, if not more.[11] As a result, Yunbok is not overly defined by her relationship with male characters. Instead, the relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang illustrates an equal, respectful relationship between two artists who want to be recognized due to their work, not by their gender.

The growing popularity of historical fiction dramas, as well as female cross-dressing[12] in Korean television dramas, is strongly supported by various fan sites producing multimedia content on the internet. The impact of the paintings and the historical figures on the viewing audience is reflected in the keywords searched in real time on major Korean internet search engines such as Naver and Daum, which show that the genre inspired an interest beyond passive viewership. Its genre of historical fiction drama played an important role not only in unfolding the plot but in creating room for audience engagement. As a result, *Painter of the Wind* earned high viewer ratings and elicited playful fan activities. These included parody posts and fan-made stationery sold to other fans, as well as more controversial reactions such as lengthy debates between supporters of different romantic pairings and a collective boycott of the network's annual TV show award (discussed later in this chapter). The enthusiasm for *Painter of the Wind* deserves further scrutiny, especially in terms of how audiences make sense of the show's representations of gender and sexuality. These points will be addressed in the following sections.

The Denaturalization of Gender Through Performativity

In this section, through close analysis and description of key scenes and elements, I show how the show denaturalizes gender through its narrative. I also demonstrate how the show's reception is an important aspect of its gender-bending mediation. A detailed summary of Yunbok's childhood, how and why she ended up living a life of hiding her female gender, will be useful to convey the sentiments the show evokes.

Yunbok is born female and raised as a girl by her biological father, Sǒ Ching, who is also a painter trained in the national academy of art. Ching's friend Sin Hanp'yǒng, who has trained at the same national academy of art, sees Yunbok's artistic talent when they visit Hanp'yǒng's house and Yunbok draws a picture for them. Hanp'yǒng is deeply envious of Ching's gifted child; his own son, Yǒngbok, is also talented but nowhere near as skilled as Yunbok. It is not until Yunbok's father is murdered and she comes under the guardianship of Hanp'yǒng that her life starts to change. Having received news of Ching's death and that a neighbor is temporarily taking care of Yunbok, Hanp'yǒng decides to bring Yunbok to his house. It is Hanp'yǒng who convinces young Yunbok to live as a boy so that she can become a painter in the future. Hanp'yǒng lies, telling people that Yunbok is his biological son, Yǒngbok's younger brother, who has been raised by their grandparents because their mother passed away. His lie is accepted without question, since it was common at that time for grandparents to look after their grandchildren. Hanp'yǒng convinces Yǒngbok to act as Yunbok's older brother, to protect Yunbok's secret and to keep her safe. He also reminds both Yǒngbok and Yunbok that they have to be successful at the national academy of art, become great painters, and extend their family legacy as painters for the royal household over three generations.

Within the drama, Yunbok's secret identity is only known to her foster father and foster brother, but it is also shared with the audience. This secret is repeatedly revealed to viewers through different scenes in the drama: Yunbok's camouflaging her bosom by winding cloth to compress her chest, Yǒngbok's crush on Yunbok, and Hanp'yǒng's request for Yǒngbok to take care of Yunbok. Such hints do not appear often but are clearly presented, implying that the secret will be vitally important to the future of Yunbok and her family. Audiences sharing the secret with these three characters are invited to follow the plot as it dramatically unfolds. Yunbok, despite often being called a "feminine" boy by some of her peers because of her slight stature, is not intimidated at all but takes center stage at the academy as a gifted artist and mischievous young man. While her foster

brother, Yŏngbok, is continually aware of the secret because he must protect Yunbok from possible disclosure, and also because of his romantic feelings for Yunbok, Yunbok does not seem to be constrained by or identify with her female gender but blithely explores her life as a talented apprentice in the academy.

Yunbok's self-identification with her male gender disguise is depicted through exchanges with her peers and interactions with other women, especially the other female protagonist, Chŏnghyang. The first episode features the annual painting-from-life excursion (*oeyu sasaeng*) for the academy's apprentices. Excited by the rare opportunity for outdoor activity, the apprentices, who are mostly young male adults, are all captivated by a group of *kisaeng*[13] passing by on horseback. Chŏnghyang is among the group, marking the first encounter between the two female protagonists. Yunbok does not behave any differently than her peers, who are captivated by the group of beautiful women and eager to share their opinions about them. Yŏngbok avoids participating in the boys' talk and watches Yunbok's facial expressions to see her reaction. Yunbok and Chŏnghyang soon run into each other again when Yunbok is running away and hiding from a group of men, who chase her because of her painting of a woman in a private backyard; the subject of the painting turns out to be the former queen, King Yeongjo's widow, the step-grandmother and political foe of King Chŏngjo. Recognizing Chŏnghyang, Yunbok is attracted to her and initiates a conversation using a long-standing cliché that metaphorically outlines gender roles based on a flower and a butterfly. It offers a script for heterosexual flirting for these young adults, who are supposedly a man and a woman:

> YUNBOK: I followed the scent, there is a flower.
> CHŎNGHYANG: What kind of butterfly tramples a flower down?
> YUNBOK: It is natural for a butterfly to sit on a beautiful flower.
> CHŎNGHYANG: The flower is not for anyone to sit on.
> YUNBOK: Is it possible for a flower to dislike a butterfly . . . ?

Based on the overly sexist cliché, this dialogue between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang establishes Yunbok's bid to show off "his" masculinity and Chŏnghyang's rejection of this clumsy and unoriginal attempt. This traditional script reflects theatrical characteristics in and of itself, delineating masculinity and femininity as well as compulsory heterosexuality. The actress Moon Geun-young acts out Yunbok's male gender disguise with a straight face in this scene. Her acting, especially her facial expressions,

reveals that she has a crush on Chŏnghyang. The camera rolls over Chŏnghyang's body from head to toe, following Yunbok's gaze, which is another cliché, visualizing women as sexual objects in film and TV. Yunbok performs both the visual and verbal clichés, as if she truly believes she is a man and is "naturally" attracted to a beautiful woman, just as a butterfly would be attracted to a beautiful flower with a pleasant scent. It seems that Yunbok successfully deceives audiences, characters in the show, and most of all herself through her successful parroting of clichéd "male" tropes. Many posts in the *Painter of the Wind* gallery express delightful surprise that when they are watching Moon Geun-young's performance as Yunbok, they totally forgot that Yunbok is actually a woman. If someone performs a gender that is not biologically matched and deceives others, should we not endorse the performed gender? The social norms of heterosexual patriarchy, however, do not allow such liberty. Instead, the "natural" performance of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, as well as the theatrical characteristics and irony in this scene, function to denaturalize the premise of "natural" gender through the very fact that Yunbok is actually a woman, not a man, further underscoring Judith Butler's (1999) notion of gender performativity. The male gender portrayed by Yunbok enables audiences to question the inborn character of what appears to be the given sex and gender of the actor/actress, and to instead view gender identity as prescribed and embodied through repeated performative acts.

Yunbok's disguised male gender continues to be reinforced and embodied through her relationships with other characters in the show, although some of those characters experience confusion and uncertainty in terms of her gender. One of those relationships is between Yunbok and her foster brother, Yŏngbok, with whom she shares a room in the academy dormitory. While living in the same room, Yunbok behaves like a mischievous younger sibling. For example, she teases her older brother about his crush on someone, although she is unaware that she herself is the object of his affection. Where Yunbok embraces the role of the younger brother, Yŏngbok is continually aware of Yunbok's "true" gender and develops feelings for her. Another important relationship is between Yunbok and Hongdo, and their liaison unfolds as the perfect stage for the performance of her role as a man. These two gifted painters meet as master and apprentice and inspire each other to draw pictures of everyday life, which King Chŏngjo orders so that he can see the vivid scenery of his citizens' lives. Throughout their journey to complete these tasks, Yunbok absorbs Hongdo's instruction and demonstrates her artistic ability, performing as any young male artist would and meeting every expectation. As a master

painter as well as Yunbok's teacher, Hongdo is inspired by Yunbok and develops feelings for his student that confuse him. Hongdo is uncertain whether his feelings are those of a mentor for his young apprentice or a homosexual attraction, because the feelings he is experiencing are far stronger than the affection characteristic of an average teacher-student relationship. Similar to Yŏngbok, it is Hongdo rather than Yunbok who is confused and uncertain about the male gender Yunbok performs and through which she disguises herself.

Yunbok does not seem to be confused or bothered by her gender ambiguity until the drama begins to focus more on the love relationships in the later episodes. Raised as a boy to perform expected male gender roles, Yunbok seems comfortable with the male gender disguise she must perform. She fully enjoys herself as a man who can pursue a career as an artist. Even in the scenes in which Yunbok must deal with her female body, such as winding cloth to compress her chest, Yunbok conducts these necessary tasks rather calmly. Simultaneously, Yunbok's gender performance, which makes Yunbok look natural as a young man but awkward as a young woman (especially in comparison with Chŏnghyang), is an embodiment of extreme femininity in terms of her physical features, dress, and gestures, which results in a denaturalization of gender that is supposed to be unambiguously legible. Yunbok's handling of both genders in the show makes her gender even more ambiguous. If Yunbok's "true" gender indeed becomes ambiguous, what does it mean for other people—e.g., her foster father and foster brother, and the entire audience with an omniscient viewpoint—to know Yunbok's secret? The following section explores the implications of this question through the sexualities of the other characters in the show vis-à-vis the gender-ambiguous Yunbok.

Homosexual Romance Questioning Heterosexual Normativity

Yunbok complicates sexuality not just for herself, who must live out such a life, but for others around her. Audiences are expected to follow the development of the plot, knowing the secret from the outset of the drama, and therefore to enjoy the tension built up as the story climaxes in the revelation of the secret and resolves all the complications and confusion. The fact that viewers already know the truth allows the show to indulge in different homosexual relationships that transpire due to this very secret.

Yŏngbok has known Yunbok's secret since his father brought her to their family home. Since then, Yŏngbok has guarded her secret and, thus,

her safety, and Yŏngbok's love toward Yunbok can therefore be considered heterosexual. However, their actual interactions reflect a homosexual relationship, especially because Yunbok performs her male role sincerely. Yunbok as a woman exists only in Yŏngbok's mind and imagination. As Yunbok's keeper, to realize his heterosexual love, Yŏngbok would have to betray his duty to his family, disappoint his father, and risk committing incest. Even though his apparent homosexual and incestuous behavior would be revealed to be based on falsehoods once the secret was disclosed, because the secret must be protected, Yŏngbok's love for Yunbok must be suppressed. After falsely confessing to drawing the former queen's secret love affair in order to save Yunbok, Yŏngbok is expelled from the academy, but he continues helping Yunbok develop her artistic talent. In the process of making new red pigment for Yunbok, Yŏngbok is poisoned and, as a side effect, starts experiencing hallucinations. In Yŏngbok's vision, Yunbok appears as a beautiful woman, not disguised as a man. After drawing Yunbok's portrait in his imagination, Yŏngbok follows the disappearing illusion and falls to his death. Yŏngbok was not confused by an unexpected homosexual crush, because he knows the secret of Yunbok's female sex all along, but he still grapples with thoughts of incest and homosexual love for his foster sister who lives as his brother.

Hongdo, who is not privy to Yunbok's true identity, experiences unexpected homosexual inclinations. As the teacher, Hongdo spends extensive time with Yunbok on many different projects, including painting King Chŏngjo's portrait (*ŏjinhwasa*), drawing different pictures in a competition using the same subject matter (*tongje kakhwa*) suggested by King Chŏngjo, and looking for a lost portrait of Prince Sado, King Chŏngjo's father, who was killed by his own father, King Yŏngjo. In the process of looking for the lost portrait of Prince Sado, the two investigate the homicides of two other painters, Hongdo's teacher who drew the portrait, and Hongdo's friend, who is also Yunbok's father, murdered while investigating Hongdo's teacher's death. Throughout their artistic and political journey, Hongdo develops feelings for Yunbok. His feelings are difficult to define because they combine a teacher's love, respect, and jealousy toward his pupil; later on, he also experiences sympathy for his murdered best friend's daughter. These mixed feelings confuse Hongdo about the possibility of homosexual love until Hongdo finds out that Yunbok has been disguising herself as a man; this process is shown through the acting of the conflicted character Hongdo. Audience members who have known the truth from the beginning figure out that Hon-

gdo's feelings are not homosexual, but rather a heterosexual attraction that cannot be diverted by cross-dressing. Without knowing the secret truth, however, Hongdo experiences confusion and yearns for homosexual love, which is compounded by ethical issues since he is Yunbok's teacher as well as her father's best friend.[14]

Yunbok's disguise pushes Yŏngbok and Hongdo toward homosexuality. This possibility functions as a plot engine, but Yunbok's secret is known to the audience from beginning to end. Although Yŏngbok appears to be "in danger of" homosexuality, and Hongdo feels he actually is "in danger of homosexuality," the attraction to Yunbok reaffirms that heterosexuality as inevitable, since in the end both men see Yunbok for the woman she is. The open secret, however, does not invalidate the homoerotic tensions or the stigmatized homosexual identity within the show, since rather than accepting her female sex as natural and fixed, Yunbok's interactions with her male and female companions remain ambiguous. Yunbok's carefree attitude minimizes the influence of her secret and keeps homosexual suspicions circulating within the diegetic space of the show.[15]

Conversely, a similar predicament arises with Yunbok and Chŏnghyang's relationship, which can be interpreted as heterosexual on the surface, but for Yunbok there is also a lesbian element to the attraction. Yunbok and Chŏnghyang meet each other by accident on the street, and later in a linen shop during the academy's day out for a life painting lesson. Yunbok tries to flirt with Chŏnghyang, but Chŏnghyang makes fun of him and leaves. They run into each other again at the *kisaeng* house (banquet hall) where Chŏnghyang works and lives. The apprentices of the academy succeed in finding the banquet hall that is the home of the *kisaeng* they saw on the day of their life painting class. They gather there to celebrate the birthday of the leader of the apprentices. Yunbok, who has just learned from Hongdo that she will lose her hands as punishment for drawing an irreverent picture in the life drawing class, attends the birthday party and drinks too much. The drunken apprentices invite Chŏnghyang to play the *kayagŭm*, a Korean harp, not because they are interested in her artistic performance, but because the leader of the apprentices has a crush on her. One of the drunken apprentices even throws a wine cup toward Chŏnghyang, cutting one of her harp's strings as he yells at her to serve drinks, but Chŏnghyang does not stop playing. Yunbok is the only one who appreciates Chŏnghyang's outstanding performance, which Chŏnghyang senses, and they feel a connection through Chŏnghyang's music. Still drunk and devastated by the impending loss

of her hands the next day, Yunbok asks Chŏnghyang to continue playing through the night so that she can produce what, for her, will be her very last painting. Yunbok offers five *nyang* (the currency unit of Chosŏn), a ridiculously small amount (approximately US$5), to buy Chŏnghyang's time for the night, but it is all the money Yunbok has. The entire night, Chŏnghyang plays her harp while Yunbok draws pictures. While Chŏnghyang clearly develops feelings of love for Yunbok, Yunbok's feelings remain ambiguous throughout the show. In the drama, the relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang starts as heterosexual because Yunbok disguises herself as a man. Moreover, Yunbok is sincere in her performance as a man, which results in her believability. But to viewers who are aware of the secret, their relationship resembles lesbian love. Self-aware of her gender performance, Yunbok is not free from questioning her sexuality, but their relationship continues oscillating somewhere between heterosexual and homosexual love.[16]

These three relationships surrounding Yunbok gesture to "heterosexual melancholy" (Butler 1999, 89) and further denaturalize gender identities in the show. Butler uses Sigmund Freud's concepts of melancholia and the taboo against incest and homosexuality to delineate the ways in which gender identities appear through the "internalization of a prohibition" (81). Heterosexual melancholy conceptualizes the process in which "feminine and masculine dispositions" are the result of the "melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed objects" (mainly same-sexed parents) that become lost objects (8). Butler emphasizes the precedence of the taboo about homosexuality over the taboo of incest (81–82). Yunbok's ambiguous gender and homosexual/heterosexual relationships take center stage to control the direction of the show through concealment and disclosure. By presenting this secret as disastrous, the plotline of *Painter of the Wind* endorses the inevitability of heterosexuality and conventional gender identities as its consequence. While offering dramatic momentum, Yunbok's fluctuating gender and the confusion other characters experience simultaneously denaturalize heterosexuality and destabilize the once-fixed sexualities of the other characters. This process deconstructs "heterosexual melancholy," which Butler argues "is culturally instituted and maintained as the price of stable gender identities related through oppositional desires" (89), stirring the characters' prohibited homosexual desires. The struggles endured by the four main characters invite the audience to feel sympathy for their heterosexual melancholy, which can possibly awaken the audience's self-awareness of destabilized sexuality.

Voicing the Female Complaint: Audience/Fan Reactions

It was not only the characters within the drama who underwent the dramatic turmoil of destabilized gender and sexuality, but also the audience, despite the fact that they knew the truth the entire time. Audience and fan reactions to *Painter of the Wind* brought about numerous controversies while it was on air and long after the show ended. I interpret these controversies among audiences and fans in online communities as their own version of the female complaint. If we consider the female complaint as a genre of women's culture (following Berlant's usage), fans creating reviews and products can comprise and further expand the genre of female complaint. This expanded genre can have a tremendous impact on the political and the juxtapolitical realms that the female complaint has embodied through the ever-growing influence of the internet as a media outlet, especially for ordinary people such as fans. When Berlant (2008) analyzes the female complaint as a genre, she mainly delves deeply into the texts women consume while creating women's culture and intimate publics. In the previous sections, I analyzed the show *Painter of the Wind* as a text in the genre of the female complaint that builds on Berlant's approaches. In this section, I analyze how the genre of the historical fiction drama opens up thematic space for audience and fan debates on gender and sexuality. Active participation, facilitated by new information and communication technologies and an ever-expanding fandom, provide the foundation for an "experimental prototype" for "media and cultural industries" (Jenkins 2007, 361) and play an important role in bringing about fan exchanges surrounding *Painter of the Wind*.

One of the venues for exploring the important role of the internet in the active participation of audiences has been the realm of TV fandom (Bury 2005; Lukács 2010). The majority of audiences might not have cast themselves as active participants and fans of certain cultural products had they not been internet users. The internet as a medium is a perfect fit for these fans, because online fan forums involve accumulating knowledge, building communities in the context of common interests, and producing and circulating fan products (Baym 2000; Hellekson and Busse 2006). While existing fans benefit from becoming internet users in terms of user-friendly software and networks, existing users easily become fans because the digital media they are dealing with enhance active participation and feed their quest for information, including the obsession with TV shows.

Reconstruction of narratives has been one of the main activities that

TV audiences indulge in, an observation noted long before the internet appeared (Ang 1985). Audiences who access more advanced multimedia tools, including the internet, have not only drawn on their own imaginations and interactions with other audience members in the offline world to reconstruct narratives, but have gone a step further, producing new multimedia texts in both the online and offline worlds. The editing technologies of video and audio enable audiences to reconstruct original television content through various kinds of new multimedia products. The internet allows user posts to be even more influential by putting enhanced distribution power in the hands of ordinary users, which explains "going viral" as a new way to distribute cultural products online. The online fandom of *Painter of the Wind* precisely demonstrates such power in the hands of ordinary audiences, users, and fans, which I discuss in further detail below.

From the very first broadcast of a new program, all Korean TV shows run websites on the internet. This has been the case since the three major national terrestrial broadcasting companies (KBS, MBC, and SBS) started online and digital broadcasting in early 2000. Broadcasting companies build official websites for a TV drama series and open up online spaces, which their audiences are expected to fill (SBS Internet News Team 2010). In addition, internet users open various unofficial and unsanctioned online spaces related to these dramas, offering social networking services such as blogs, mini-homepages, and virtual cafés. The *Painter of the Wind* gallery opened under the subcategory of TV shows on DCInside, becoming one of the central meeting points for the show's audience. The gallery allows for a large number of user posts and fan products, which became popular on the internet as many DC galleries do, not only while the show was on air, but long after it was over.

Although the heterosexual love between Yunbok and Hongdo was the main focus of the drama, the audience interest in the relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang was just as strong, if not stronger. Audiences and fans online became divided between those who cheered for the relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang, known as Team Tannyang (Tannyang rain, lit. "Five-Buck Line"), and those who supported the pairing of Yunbok and Hongdo, known as Team Saje (Saje rain, lit. "Teacher-Student Line"). The debates between Team Tannyang and Team Saje were extremely fervent while the drama was on the air. Those opposed to Yunbok and Chǒnghyang's coupling accused supporters of being lesbians. The supporters of Yunbok and Chǒnghyang disputed charges of homosexuality, claiming that they supported the love the two female characters shared

only because it was a situation within the drama (fiction), and also because, whatever the gender of the participants, it was a beautiful love between two honest characters. The love relationship between Yunbok and Hongdo probably would have been considered mainstream if the audience had not been so strongly active on information and communication technologies. The technologies that enhanced the active participation of audiences and fans gave women, who mainly supported Yunbok and Chŏnghyang's love, a forum to express their opinions, allowing their voices to take center stage in public.

There are many diverse themes in audience and fan activities surrounding *Painter of the Wind*, but in this chapter, I focus on the implications of the fans' strong support for the relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang in terms of the female complaint. I argue that the characters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang gain attention from their supporters because they are not conventional models of the female gender. A post from the *Painter of the Wind* gallery demonstrates the frustration and discontent of female users:

> Title: *Painter of the Wind* Wants to Show the Process by Which Genius Painter Sin Yunbok Finds Her Femininity
>> Don't beautify it with the ridiculous title of "well-made drama . . ."
>> The funny thing is, well it's fine for her to find her femininity . . .
>> But why the heck is someone that was totally fine at the beginning becoming an idiot while finding her femininity?
>> So, what the producer wants to say is that no matter how much of a genius you are, if you find your femininity, you become like that (an idiot)?? (Yu 2008)

By breaking the mold of gender norms, Yunbok and Chŏnghyang attract fans who feel an affinity for them and their relationship, serving as evidence of these fans' female complaint. Discontent with normative heterosexuality and gender expectations as well as a desire for alternatives finds expression due to these two female characters and their lesbian love. By supporting Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, these women can convey their female complaint, and through collective action take their discontent further so that their voices can be heard within their own fan communities and in the larger public.

Yunbok's nonconformity to female gender roles starts when she begins disguising herself as a man to pursue a career as a painter in service of her foster father's familial ambition, and her personal investigation into her

father's murder. In the case of Chǒnghyang, she is a *kisaeng*, one of the roles in which women in Chosǒn could be artists rather than housewives. However, such privilege comes at the price of lower social standing as a courtesan, whose place in society was equivalent to that of a slave and whose destiny was mainly determined by men. Chǒnghyang's character is typical of that of a female Chosǒn artist, while Yunbok represents a nonstandard female artist and ultimately a work of fiction. That being said, Yunbok's character is only conceivable because she disguises herself as a man, an irony that demonstrates the male supremacy in perceived heteronormative gender roles.

The possibility of challenging the status quo can be found in the relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang. Chǒnghyang, as a female artist, cannot determine her own destiny, but relies on a man to pursue a life as an artist. In the drama, she is sold to Kim Chonyǒn, a rich businessman with a discerning eye for art and sharp insight into politics. Chonyǒn wants to own Chǒnghyang in every way, including her love, but she is already in love with Yunbok, who treats her as an equal and an artist, not just as a woman or a courtesan. Despite the social constraints limiting her to the status of a man's possession, no matter how great an artist she is, she experiences the possibility of becoming who she wants to be through her relationship with Yunbok, because Yunbok is not a man or a woman but stands somewhere in between or beyond. Even though Yunbok is located outside the heterosexual gender division, she is in danger of falling back into normative heterosexuality as a woman if she chooses the love relationship with Hongdo, which would jeopardize her future as a gifted artist.[17] The official poster of *Painter of the Wind* succinctly shows the two very different lives of Yunbok: Hongdo is giving a paintbrush to Yunbok as a young male painter, while giving a flower to Yunbok as a beautiful young lady. For Yunbok, then, staying in the relationship with Chǒnghyang enables her to exist as an artist as well. The lesbian relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang thus breaks out of the confines of heterosexuality and femininity.

Although fans support the relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang, their language does not endorse homosexuality or lesbian love. In fact, their words show indications of homophobia—they insist that they support the sublime love between two great artists and loving human beings. Given this, can we view the fan support of the relationship between Yunbok and Chǒnghyang as indulging in what they consider a harmless girl-girl pairing while still holding on to their homophobia, which ultimately results in a condemnation of homosexuality and a reaffirmation of

heterosexuality? According to Berlant (1988, 243), the female complaint enables women to speak out against "patriarchal oppression" without jeopardizing their "allegiance to a phallocentric ideology." Supporters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang express their female complaint "without fear for [their] position within the heterosexual economy" (1988, 243) by avoiding the direct endorsement of homosexuality and lesbian love. The asexual relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang helps supporters of this pairing legitimate their support, while the asexual relationship between Yunbok and Hongdo enables supporters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang to continue to indulge in the love between these two female characters. Yunbok's asexual position with both Chŏnghyang and Hongdo creates room for different possibilities in terms of her sexuality, love, and gender.

The responses of supporters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang vary from a firm denial of lesbian love to aggressively asking, "So what if it is lesbian love?" I interpret the seemingly homophobic responses of these audience members and fans as an attempt to avoid being defined in terms of homosexuality by those who hold homophobic and heterosexist points of view. For the most part, audiences and fans seem committed to a practice of "actions speak[ing] louder than words," while trying to create their own language. They express their unconditional love to Yunbok and other characters of their choice, or they support their preferred romantic pairing no matter what. Creating their own language is a powerful action. I find strong evidence in many posts of collective action through resistance and the practice of creating a language unique to themselves. For instance, a popular expression is "Yunbok of devilish power" (*masŏng ŭi Yunbok*), which was coined to explain everything from why Chŏnghyang cannot escape Yunbok's appeal, to why female fans are attracted to Yunbok although she is actually a woman, to why male fans are attracted to Yunbok in male attire even more than when she is dressed as a female. So, the term for all these complex issues is "Yunbok of devilish power," the power that comes from her nonconformity to normative gender roles. This power breaks down the boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and those of masculinity and femininity, through the use of a character who is in between or beyond the existing categories—in other words, queer. Audience and fan support for the characters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang reflects their uncertainty and discontent with normative gender and sexuality in the real world.

The power of collective action was demonstrated during the 2008 SBS Annual Drama Awards. Fans of *Painter of the Wind* campaigned for the show and its actors to win awards, including for best couple in a TV

drama. Yunbok and Chŏnghyang were originally not even nominated for this prize, since they were not considered to be a couple by SBS, whereas Yunbok and Hongdo did appear on the ballot as a couple. SBS was prompted to add this female couple to the nomination list later by the fervent demands and protest movements of fans. The gallery users exulted when the nominations were revised, and they encouraged one another to vote for Yunbok and Chŏnghyang to achieve an outright win. They even rallied their family members and friends to vote, and to hand over their personal information (such as phone numbers and national registration numbers) so that they could cast a vote on their behalf if their relations could not be bothered to do it themselves. Thanks to the passionate efforts of the users, the couple Yunbok and Chŏnghyang won the first round of audience voting, advanced to the final round, and actually won the prize. This outcome, which supporters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang had wished for but had not really anticipated.

Most posts in the gallery during the award night express the extreme excitement and happiness of its users (e.g., "Wooohooooo!!!!!!!!," "Holy cow, they really got it. Lol," "Umhahaha! They were the general trend on the internet," "Woowaaa lol hurray for Korean Independence lol lol lol," "As we wished lol lol lol lol, Tannyang of Victory~~~~~~"). As this event shows, through their collective action, audience members and fans articulated their female complaint, had their voices heard in public, and experienced the joy of victory. Does the relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang clearly demonstrate queer politics fighting against a patriarchy based on heterosexual normativity? Do supporters of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang's pairing take political actions to support LGBTQIA movements? Probably not. However, Yunbok and Chŏnghyang and their supporters are located in the juxtapolitical sphere, actively participating in the operation of aesthetic worlds created by the TV drama as well as in audience and fan communities. The cultures they create would be "occasionally crossing over in political alliance, even more occasionally doing some politics, but most often not, acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response and conceptual recalibration as achievement enough," as Berlant states about women's culture (2008, x).

Conclusion

Painter of the Wind is a controversial drama open to different interpretations regarding gender and sexuality, depending on the perspective of the

viewer. The character Yunbok appeals to both men and women, but as she presents herself as an effeminate man, she oscillates between different genders, in the process denaturalizing and destabilizing existing gender norms based on compulsory heterosexuality. As other characters interact with Yunbok in the drama, they begin to exhibit ambivalence toward conventional gender roles and to question themselves. The provocative script of the drama offers controversial topics that engage the audience and spark passionate debate. This chapter examined the possibility of redefining gender and sexuality by looking at it through the lens of the controversial series *Painter of the Wind* and by examining audience and fan activities. The audience and fan activities reflect a concrete process in which conventional and prescribed gender roles and sexuality are tested and reconfigured. Moreover, fan posts and interactions provide vivid examples representative of the female complaint, which resists the conventionality of heterosexual normativity and gender expectations to the point that fans were angry at the producers for letting the producer's internalized heteronormativity influence the plot and characters of the series. The controversies sparked by fans who support different characters and romantic storylines from various perspectives create an arena in which not just one but many complaints conflict with and influence each other, demonstrating the political possibility of the juxtapolitical, which lies beyond the political that serves elites to sustain their dominant power (Berlant 2008, 3). Standard clichés, which are notorious features of Korean TV dramas, might have significant reason to continue to exist while the clichés of gender in everyday life persist. Simultaneously, however, female complaints continue to challenge clichéd lives and TV dramas. Berlant (1988, 200) anchors their hope in a future that will see women aligning themselves with their differences, embracing diversity and creating controversies that will continue to challenge the category of women as singular. To accomplish this, interactive TV programs that inspire and engage audience and fan participation are arenas that certainly deserve our attention.

NOTES

   1. Kim Hongdo's (played by Pak Sinyang) voiceover narration from episode one (Aired September 24, 2008).
   2. After introducing full names (where the family name comes before the first name, following the Korean order), I use only their first names to avoid the confusion that similar surnames can cause, many of which are very common Korean names. Audiences also refer to the characters in this way.
   3. I use the term "female gender," rather than "feminine gender," in this study since

the key of Yunbok's secret is her sex rather than the qualities Yunbok performs to prove her gender as a woman.

4. The TV drama series and the original novel share several main features, such as characters, plotline, and events. Some changes were made for the TV series, however, such as the timing of the exposure of Yunbok's female gender and the death of Yŏngbok, Yunbok's foster brother whose story the novelist stops telling readers about in the middle of the novel. Hereafter, this chapter discusses the plotline only from the TV show.

5. I use the term "cross-dressing" to indicate the Korean term, *namjang yŏja*. Cross-dressing by a female protagonist to disguise herself as a man brings up the question of gender and sexuality in different relationships with other characters in the show. While other terms, such as "transgender," could be more appropriate to explain complex aspects of gender fluidity and sexuality, I decided to use "cross-dressing" since this term is used popularly in these types of shows and among audiences. I elaborate on complex aspects that "cross-dressing" cannot convey through my analyses of *Painter of the Wind* and fans' reactions.

6. The data used in this chapter were gathered from the *Painter of the Wind* gallery on DCInside. I collected my data mainly from 2008 to 2009, when the show aired, but also after those years, because the *Painter of the Wind* gallery is currently still active. My anthropological field research used archival research, participant observation, and in-depth interviews as methods in both the online and offline (real) worlds. I conducted participant observation in the gallery to examine interactions among fans, as well as between fans and the TV series as a text. I interviewed ten people (two men and eight women) from the *Painter of the Wind* gallery whom I got to know through a collective fan project publishing a review book for *Painter of the Wind*. DCInside is an anonymous internet user forum based on imageboard, which is similar to the bulletin board system (BBS) with the function of uploading images. DCInside has been one of the most popular Korean internet portals since the early 2000s. Despite its characteristics as a subcultural rather than a mainstream outlet, or because of its distinguishing characteristics as a subculture, DCInside has been a leader in Korean internet trends (Yang 2017). "Gallery" is the umbrella term for each of the interest groups, which range from politics to baseball, pets, stock investment, celebrities, and TV shows. At the time of writing, the number of DC galleries has grown to 30,000. Refer to Youjeong Oh (2015) on Korean TV dramas and online communities to see how DC galleries publicly and actively engage in the production process of TV shows.

7. While most Euro-American TV dramas are made in a pre-broadcast production system (*sajŏn chejak*), the majority of Korean dramas have been produced in a (semi-) live-shoot system (*pan-sajŏn chejak* or *saengbangsong ch'waryŏng*, in which half to nearly all of the episodes are shot within the period in which the episodes are broadcast on air), which explains the Korean dramas' particular responsiveness to viewer reactions. It is not uncommon for the writers and directors of Korean TV dramas to change the direction of the plot while their dramas are being produced and on air, including endings, usually from a sad ending to a happy ending, in response to the opinions of their audiences.

8. I translate the Korean term *p'yujŏn sagŭk* as "historical fiction drama" rather than the more widely used term "historical period drama" in English contexts to convey the specific emphasis on fiction in *p'yujŏn sagŭk* in Korean contexts. Some scholars (K. Kim 2016) use more subdivided categories, such as "historical drama" (*chŏngt'ong sagŭk*)

based on the "actual reality," "faction (fact + fiction) historical drama" (*p'aeksŏn sagŭk*) creating augmented reality based on the combination of historical facts and fictional imaginings, and "fiction historical drama" (*p'ik sagŭk*) mainly based on fiction. What constitutes historical "facts" and "imaginings" is controversial; it has been an important topic in history, in both research and storytelling (Kim K. 2012). Although the labels reflect different levels of "fiction" in "reality," the various labels applied to historical dramas do reflect agreement about the importance of historical imagination (Yi Ŭ 2009).

9. What constitutes a historical fiction drama can itself be an important research subject in relation to such topics as postmodernism, late capitalism, and the transformation of genres of TV drama and film, among others. Refer to Ch'oe (2016), Ŭ. Yi (2009), Son (2015), and Yu (2011) for discussions of the implications of the popularity of historical fiction drama. This chapter positions *Painter of the Wind* within this fast-growing new genre.

10. Japan has influenced media production in Asia, from popular music to comics, animation, video games, and TV dramas. Using Japanese media products as exemplary references, each locale has developed its own characteristics, especially in the Korean and Taiwanese entertainment industry. Trendy drama is defined as "youth-oriented dramas . . . in which lifestyle, music, and location are of primary importance" (Lukács 2010, 211–12). The popularity of trendy dramas is related to consumer culture in late capitalism, in the sense that it plays an important role in advertising commodities, in the form of elements of "lifestyle" (81–83). Female cross-dressing, therefore, functions as an effective medium for conveying a lifestyle characterized by various commodities—from coffee and food as markers of refined taste, to popular music, to different tourist attractions, and to fashions and leisure activities.

11. The ambiguity of Yunbok's feelings for Hongdo, and the romantic storyline between two female characters, Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, make *Painter of the Wind* less similar to the genre called "male/male slash" in English contexts and "yaoi," also known as "BL" (Boy's Love), in Asian contexts. See Kwon (2019), and Baek's chapter in this volume, for in-depth discussions of female fandom around BL and this genre in different media.

12. Cross-dressing, hidden gender identities, and same-sex love are not unfamiliar themes to English readers; they appear in Shakespearean plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. See Shapiro (1994).

13. *Kisaeng* were traditional Korean female entertainers trained in the fine arts, poetry, and music, as well as being courtesans. While *kisaeng* enjoyed more liberty than other women in terms of education, the possibility of having an art career, and freedom in romantic relationships, in the patriarchal Chosŏn dynasty the social status of *kisaeng* was similar to that of slaves. Women whose names were placed on the *kisaeng* register were forced to remain *kisaeng* until they died, filled their own spots with their own or a foster daughter, or were bought by rich civilians or nobles.

14. User posts of the *Painter of the Wind* gallery comment on Hongdo's confused feelings toward Yunbok (Sindŭtpo 2008).

15. The ambiguity of Yunbok's gender identity throughout the entire drama resulted in different opinions and debates (Kaenyŏm hyonga 2008; Pebahwa 2008a, 2008b).

16. For an example of audience/fan responses to the relationship between Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, see "Pahwa" (2008). For an example of fans' sharing their lived experiences regarding Yunbok and Chŏnghyang, see Kaeri (2008).

17. This decision was one of the principal concerns of the audience. Many posts criticized Yunbok's changes brought about by her relationship with Hongdo. This concern was shared by the supporters both of Yunbok and Chŏnghyang and of Yunbok and Hongdo.

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12

BL-ing Bromance, Bromancing *Ŭiri*

Investigating Inter-Male Intimacy in Contemporary Korean Cinema[1]

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The Curious Case of *Pulhandangwŏn*: Female Fandom of *The Merciless*

On May 19 and 20, 2018, fans of the film *The Merciless* (*Pulhandang*, dir. Pyŏn Sŏnghyŏn, 2017) organized special screenings to celebrate the first anniversary of the film's 2017 release. *Pulhandang* has been advertised as a "bromance" to describe the complicated relationship between its two male protagonists, Chaeho (a gang leader) and Hyŏnsu (an undercover cop). These special screenings took place at Lotte Cinema World Tower in Seoul and the Pusan Cinema Center—two premium theaters. They supplemented the film's official first anniversary event, entitled "Thank You Screening," which was hosted by the film's production and distribution company, CJ E&M; that itself was a rare event in Korean cinema culture. These commemorative screenings acknowledged the strength of the film's niche fandom, which was centered on female fans. The fans who organized these special anniversary screenings call themselves *Pulhandangwŏn* (literally "members of *Pulhandang*"), and the group had managed to keep the film in continuous release throughout the year, renting major theaters all around the country on at least forty occasions. This kind of extended theatrical run organized by fans was the first in the history of Korean cinema. As a supporting actor in the film stated at the first anniversary event

on May 17, "*Pulhandangwŏn* seems to be rewriting the history of Korean cinema" (Yŏn 2018).

These special screenings were initially intended as a space for fans to grieve the film's poor initial reception; in just the second week of its release in 2017, the number of screenings was curtailed due to false rumors that the director was a misogynist and a member of an extreme right-wing group.[2] Thus, this fan activity of coming together to rent theaters, invite actors, and produce fan goods for themselves was recognized both inside and outside of the film industry as a unique form of fandom for a specific film. While there has long been a media fan culture in South Korea, mostly consisting of female fans of K-pop idols, there has rarely been such a participatory fan culture for films or their actors. Also, unlike so-called "cult movies" that appeal to small fan bases with minority tastes, *The Merciless* was a mainstream, neo-noir action film, which is one of the most popular genres in the contemporary Korean film industry. As one fan explains, "The hero that helped *The Merciless* make its mark on Korean cinema in 2017 was *Pulhandangwŏn*," a group composed of female spectators in their twenties and thirties. The fans' strategy of showing their dedication through theatrical screening events, rather than on the customary digital platforms or through supplemental, fan-produced paratexts, calls for further examination. Why did these fans show their affection by means of renting out major theaters? I offer here a number of possible explanations.

First, fans wanted to compensate for the film's initial box office failure, bringing the total tickets sold to over a million as a way to resist certain trends within the contemporary film industry. The film had an audience of just 912,000 in the first few weeks, due to the film industry's practice of defining popularity solely on the basis of opening weekend ticket sales. Resisting this fast-decision-making trend in the industry, fans who wanted to see the film in theaters started renting major theaters to *slow down* the process. During the time of the film's first theatrical run, fans held eighteen rented-theater events, and continued to do so until its first anniversary, even after the end of the official screening period.[3] According to fans' own statements, their "*tŏkchil*" (practices of excessive fandom, or *tŏkhu*, a Korean equivalent of the Japanese *otaku*) aimed at "resisting the commercial film industry and reviving a commercially failed film." In effect, the official box office numbers reached 953,000 at the first anniversary and numbered 966,195 by June 2023 according to the Korean Box Office Information System, mostly due to this slow increase in screenings by fans.

Second, the persistence of *Pulhandangwŏn*'s screening activities dem-

onstrates a new trend in Korean film fandom: repeatedly viewing the same film. There is a fan cultural practice called "*N-cha kwallam*" (limitless repeat viewing), in which a fan watches a particular film in the theater numerous times and uploads images of her movie tickets (sometimes over a hundred) on social media to other fans as evidence of her loyalty. These repeat viewers often share their close readings of the film, and in this way *Pulhandangwŏn* fans built their own archive of interpretations ("*Pulhandang*" 2017). Cultural critics argue that one of the reasons *Pulhandangwŏn* prefer to rent premium theaters is that those theaters are equipped with larger screens with high resolution and high-quality acoustics. Fans can discover such aspects of the film as the "limpid eyes" of characters and delicate details of acoustic sounds, eliciting new interpretations and contributions to the fan archive. The archive is so rich that film critics invited to moderate fan events are often far less knowledgeable than the fans in attendance; fans who know every detail of the film through "limitless viewings" can outperform professional film critics. This activity seems to restore emphasis to the spectator's visceral movie-watching experience in the physical theater spaces, and to the material dimension of film exhibition, leading to distinct viewing experiences, depending on the screening equipment, spatial environment, and fellow audience members.

Third, the slow expansion of screenings of *The Merciless* occurred alongside media coverage of the film's female fandom, which highlights their sense of empowerment. *Pulhandangwŏn* have made their existence public by adopting long-standing pop-idol fan activities such as buying billboard space in Kangnam Subway Station to dedicate to the main actor Sŏl Kyŏnggu, shouting fan chants, and voting for *The Merciless* at film awards. Besides the exclusive sharing of fan goods such as mugs, bracelets, lighters, key holders, and even jumpers, this public presence of film fandom finally influenced the film company to publish "merch" in the form of film scripts and DVD releases. This publicization is a way to show off the self-empowerment of female fans, and going "above-ground" rather than staying underground.

In this chapter, I first examine how fans' public and persistent appreciation of *The Merciless* is a film-culture version of long-standing trends in Korean female fandom[4] that began with K-pop idols in the 1990s. This has catalyzed fans to create a series of fan fictions that parody the competing forms of dominant and emergent masculinity, as well as the seamless slip between the homosocial and the homoerotic in the continuum of masculine intimacies. The pairing ("coupling" in Korean usage) of older, taller, gruff Chaeho (performed by Sŏl Kyŏnggu) and younger, shorter, and pretty Hyŏnsu (played by Im Siwan, a member of the male idol group
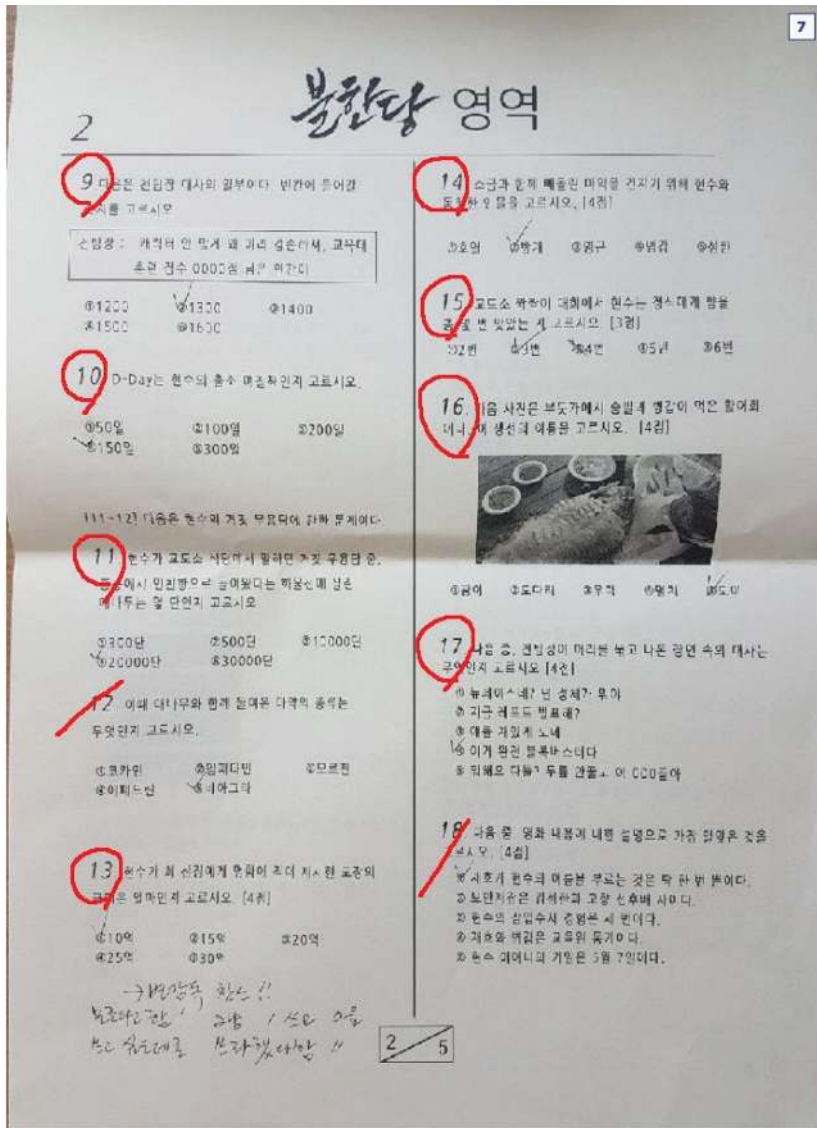
Fig. 12.1. A *Pulhandang* test created and circulated by *Pulhandangwŏn*
to assesses how many details fans can recognize. Borrowing from the
format of the College Scholastic Ability Test in Korea, it purposely
asks detail-oriented, often trivial, questions, such as "How many times
is Hyŏnsu slapped during a slap match in prison?" Sŏl Kyŏnggu, who
played Chaeho, also took this test and scored 86 out of 100 points
(1ch'a chogong/ch'ŏngdae1 2017).

ZE:A) in *The Merciless* corresponds to the generic convention of "boys'
love" (hereafter, BL) that focuses on the romantic tensions between mas-
culine and feminine same-sex partners who are generically labeled by
their gendered position in the relationship: masculine/aggressive *kong* (
攻) and feminine/submissive *su* (受). The extended viewing accompany-
ing the continuous fan activities reveals women's desire for ultimate con-

trol of sexuality by playing with competing masculinities—traditional *ajŏssi* (middle-aged male) masculinity versus postmillennial *kkot minam* masculinity (literally "flower handsome man," connoting a pretty young man) in mainstream popular culture.

While these female fan activities mediate commercial bromance films, the bromance phenomenon that prevails in contemporary Korean popular culture itself mediates post-IMF homosocial male bonding, i.e., *ŭiri*, foregrounding intimacy that erases the hierarchical relationship among men that is otherwise demanded by the institutions of family, work, and the military. Embraced not only by women but also by men, bromance films have a unique expression in South Korean media of the last decade: relationships between South and North Korean special agents or detectives have been portrayed repeatedly, as exemplified in the film *Secret Reunion* (*Ŭihyŏngje*, dir. Chang Hun, 2010). By examining the competing masculinities seen in both these bromance films that mediate *ŭiri* and in BL interventions that mediate bromance films in Korea, I further envision the hybrid figure of the *kkot chungnyŏn* (pretty *ajŏssi*) as a product of this mediation and cultural compromise.

Gender Parody Reading

"You get bruises in a pretty way" (*Nŏn mŏng to chʾam yeppŭge tŭnŭn kuna*).
"Honey, I'm here" (*Chagi ya, na wattaeyi*).

These are the lines that *Pulhandangwŏn* deem to be the most heart-fluttering in *The Merciless*. Both are spoken to Hyŏnsu by Chaeho. He speaks the first when he goes to see Hyŏnsu in person after being impressed by his boldness during a prison fight. Although Chaeho reigns over the prisoners, he expresses his fascination with Hyŏnsu's face, using the affectionate adverb *yeppŭge* (prettily), which most straight Korean men would be reluctant to employ with each other. The second line is spoken at the moment when Chaeho enters a rumble scene to help Hyŏnsu, where Hyŏnsu, who became a member of Chaeho's gang, had been struggling alone. Those sweet words, "pretty" and "honey," used between a rough gangster and a crazy young cop, appeal to female spectators who appreciate the more intimate relationship between characters than the action in the narrative, which is typical noir.

On the one hand, this film addresses female spectators who read it

Fig. 12.2. An
official pro-
motional
image of
The Merciless
(KMDB 2017).

through the long-standing tradition of BL and who have emerged as a
notable audience demographic since the mid-2000s. In addition to the
sweet appellations, the pairing of Chaeho and Hyŏnsu reveals that this
film deliberately targets BL-ers.[5] Generally written as an "x" mark between
kong and *su* in fan discourse, this pairing is known to be the strictest genre
criterion for BL content, with a variety of possible qualifiers, such as ruth-
less *kong* x pretty *su*, wild *kong* x pregnant *su*, to name a few. One viewer
labels Chaeho and Hyŏnsu in *The Merciless* as "chubby *kong*" and "reckless
[*chiral*] *su*," respectively, which describes the bigger physique of Chaeho
and the rash and frantic behavior of Hyŏnsu. Although there is little evi-
dence in the film to suggest a sexual relationship between the protagonists—

Stephen Dalton notes that "the unspoken homoerotic tension between Hyŏnsu and Chaeho . . . is vaguely teased but never honestly addressed" (Dalton, 2017)—female spectators familiar with BL read their relationship as a homosexual one while expanding its emotional aspects beyond the limits of the narrative. The structural antagonism between a gang leader and an undercover cop strengthens the pleasurable tension in the development of their relationship from suspicion and investigation to trust and, ostensibly, romantic love, rather than mere enmity or competition, with one eventually vanquishing the other. Further, the "vaguely teased but never honestly addressed" relationship is, for female spectators, a familiar and pleasurable gap in mainstream cultural texts that demands their active participation through reading with their own imaginations. They fill out the unrealized possibilities within the original film with strong sexual connotations, sometimes changing the setting into another context or "universe" in their own transformative works, as shown in various fan art and fan-fiction texts (*i-cha ch'angjak*) created and circulated among subculture communities. In these supplementary or alternative imaginings, the main focus is on the intimacy or love between two male characters, whether or not the fan works conform to the original narrative.

A few fan-fiction novels elaborately describe the emotions of the two protagonists, going so far as to change the tragic ending of *The Merciless* into a happy one. In the film, undercover cop Hyŏnsu finally kills Chaeho, not because Chaeho is a lawbreaker, but because Hyŏnsu realizes that Chaeho ordered the murder of his mother. In a short fan-fiction novel that writer Miyŏl (2017) categorizes as parody, Hyŏnsu fails to strangle Chaeho to death and continues his relationship with him, saddled with the painful understanding that he still loves the foe who killed his mother. As director Pyŏn mentions, there is a "Romeo-and-Juliet-like" (Y. Chŏng 2017) tragic destiny in the protagonists' relationship. This strengthens the perception of Hyŏnsu's loss—he must inevitably punish the only man he has ever trusted—and of Chaeho's fortitude, in ultimately surrendering to Hyŏnsu's act of revenge. Creators of various "Chaeho x Hyŏnsu" derivatives interpret the agony more as hopeless love, and, further, shift the setting into a virtual universe called Omegaverse, where the Omega class is prohibited to "inscribe" (*kagin*, which connotes sexual intercourse) with the Beta class, underscoring the impossibility of their love (Kongbaek 2017).

On the other hand, the affectionate expressions in *The Merciless*, which are set in esoteric homosocial environments such as prison and the world of organized crime, are forms of appreciation of a metrosexual sensibility in postmillennial Korean masculinity. In contrast to using slang or pro-

vincial dialects to signify the hyper-(re-)masculinization of gangsters and detective protagonists in traditional male genres of gangster and crime action, *The Merciless*'s honeyed words suggest a demand for softer, sensitive masculinities.[6] Further, *The Merciless* rearticulates *ajŏssi* (middle-aged)[7] masculinity by pairing the middle-aged Chaeho character with the youthful metrosexual masculinity of Hyŏnsu incarnated as a *kkot minam* (pretty boy), idol singer/actor Im Siwan.

This pairing of *ajŏssi* and *kkot minam* has a short history in Korean bromance films, starting with South Korean *ajŏssi* and North Korean *kkot minam* in *Secret Reunion* in 2010, which resolves its Cold War antagonism via ethno-nationalist homosocial bonding. Here, the dominant *ajŏssi* masculinity that usually accompanies a hierarchy-centered, condescending, arrogant, misogynistic attitude is contrasted with an emerging metrosexual masculinity best represented by male idols in *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) cultural products. The tension between these rival masculinities is then overcome by the affective signature of traditional homosocial bonding, that of *ŭiri* (loyalty), which ultimately reorients the pairing in a hierarchical relation as *hyŏngje* (brother), a term widely used when Korean men try to settle their relationship into balanced, non-antagonistic brotherhood. There is always a clichéd moment in which either the older protagonist invites his younger counterpart to call his elder counterpart "*hyŏng*" (older brother) or the younger protagonist volunteers to do so, which in these films connotes the approval of the hierarchy.

However, while this cliché imaginatively solves the tension and struggle immanent in the competition of masculinities in postmillennial South Korea, it leaves behind the unresolved question embedded in the initial process of their mutual investigation: the gaze that intertwines the social with the erotic. An established *ajŏssi* ogles the emerging metrosexual masculinity inscribed in the *kkot minam*'s body. This gaze serves as a critical expression of the competition between dominant and emerging masculinities, where in the final instance, the *ajŏssi* fascinated by the *kkot minam* goes so far as to incorporate the latter into himself. *Secret Reunion*'s *ajŏssi* character, Han'gyu, ultimately adopts the metrosexual characteristics of cooking for himself, and Chaeho in *The Merciless* transforms himself from *ajŏssi* to *kkot chungnyŏn*, the term used for a middle-aged man who adopts metrosexual fashion. Further, Chaeho invests and sacrifices all his social power to maintain an intimate relationship with Hyŏnsu, in order to attract Hyŏnsu's interest; these portrayals of the *ajŏssi*'s self-negation or sublation to emerging masculinity remain quite rare in the history of Korean cinema.

BL productions that partly emerged from idol fan fiction in the 1990s parody this competition between and fascination with the dominant and emerging masculinities, as well as the seamless slip between the social and the erotic in the continuum of homosocial desire. The contrast between the characteristics of *ajŏssi* and *kkot minam* in bromance films, which themselves reflect "*gaep moe*," or the fetishization of "gaps" or extreme differences in social status, external appearance, age, etc., between *kong* and *su* characters in BL culture, easily supplies BL-ers with elements for imaginative pairing. The gap in social status or external appearance between the protagonists aids in the formation of a dramatic relationship between them, which in effect strengthens the pleasure in the process of overcoming the gap. BL-er fans assert that *su* is usually unaware of his charm, which appeals to *kong* and makes him crazy about *su*, which makes *su* not just blindly pursued by *kong* but allows him to control *kong* as well. Chiwŏn (played by *kkot minam* actor Kang Tongwŏn in *Secret Reunion*) and Hyŏnsu (performed by idol star Im Siwan in *The Merciless*) perfectly fit the *su* character in BL imaginaries, in which there are many instances of a *su*'s leading and controlling his counterpart. Imagining *su*'s dominance in the pairing is transgressive, in that it not only parodies the homosocial resolution in the original text but also reveals women's desires to control sexuality by imaginatively pitting competing masculinities against each other in mainstream popular culture.

Unlike in the slash fiction in the West where the pair can switch positions, in BL in East Asian countries, where Confucian patriarchy is still dominant, *kong* and *su* have fixed positions. Unsurprisingly, feminist criticisms have problematized the ways in which BL-ers enjoy these pairings, insofar as the fixed positions of *kong* and *su* conform to and reproduce the heteronormative patriarchy: *kong* embodies an active masculinity and *su* practices passive femininity. However, the dynamics between *kong* and *su* are not simply reducible to the dichotomies of masculine/feminine, active/passive, etc.; they invite various subversions. The BL scholar Han Yurim argues that the focus of BL lies in positioning a female ideal or self-identity that does not follow the direction of heteronormativity. BL-ers do not only identify with feminine, passive *su*, but also with masculine, active *kong*, or sometimes with both at the same time (Han 2008). Further, as BL critic Piikŏ puts it, BL-ers identify themselves more as omniscient observers (sometimes referred to as the "flowerpot viewpoint," i.e., the point of view of a flowerpot, or whatever object in the room can observe the secret interactions between characters), who create and control the relationship of their creations as proxies that act out their emotional and sexual experi-

ments (*Piikŏ* 2017). These agents are figured in male bodies, because men can be equal sexual counterparts. Thus, BL presents a way to avoid the heteronormativity that (un)necessarily requires female subordination to male counterparts.

Also, the intense relationships in BL do not necessarily follow homonormativity either. Descriptions of (beautiful) boys and men in BL do not always represent gay romance; rather, as BL scholar Mizoguchi Akiko (2018) puts it, they dramatize intimate relationships between equal counterparts as well. In this respect, the pairing reveals women's desire for a world without sexual difference, enacted through male bodies. This could be called gender parody, as Judith Butler (2006 [1990]) argues: "Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization" (188).

BL-ing the Bromance Database

In this section, I would like to examine how contemporary bromance films provide BL-ers with a database that is open to borrowing, manipulating, and parodying, which Japanese cultural critic Azuma Hiroki (2009) interprets as a postmodern phenomenon. This database model differs from a traditional model of narrativity that prioritizes the correspondence of representation and reality, which is based on the concept that the grand narrative (the deep inner layer) regulates the representation (surface outer layer). Azuma calls this the modern "tree model" (or "projection model"), and argues that it gives way to the postmodern "database model" (or a "reading-up model") in which signs are linked in diverse patterns over the outer layer alone (the deep inner layer having been extinguished). In the latter model, he maintains, "The agency that determines the appearance that emerges on the surface outer layer resides on the surface itself rather than in the deep inner layer; i.e., it belongs to the side of the user who is doing the 'reading up,' rather than with the hidden information itself" (Azuma 2009, 32). Since the databases display various expressions depending on the differing modes of "reading up" by users, consumers can produce any number of derivative works that differ from the originals.

As is widely criticized, the representative share of Korean cinema is quite male-dominated, while Korean women comprise the majority of Korean film theater attendees, of which the domestic market share has been around 50 percent for the last decade (Han'guk chinhŭng wiwŏnhoe

2017).[8] This is best exemplified by the recent phenomenon of bromance films that incorporate the trend of "*namnam kʻemi*" (male-male chemistry) into the traditional homosocial bonding genres that thematize *ŭiri*. This *ŭiri* is widely considered to be the most valuable virtue among men and usually reflects a hierarchical order in gender. Accordingly, most female spectators have begun to grow tired of the monopoly of male-centric films and genres in the box office, giving rise to neologisms like "*alt'ang yŏnghwa*" (cock films), which derogatively connote films filled with too many male actors, and "*ajae pŭro*," which was coined in 2016 by combining "*ajae*," an abbreviation of *ajŏssi*, with "bromance" (*pŭromaensŭ*), to call out the discrimination prevalent in casting and producing male-centered films.

This criticism seems to contrast with the counter-reading of male-centered films by female spectators who participate in the BL subculture and read the homosocial relationship in mainstream films as homosexual fantasy. Most of the fan works produced by BL-ers, I argue, transform the relationship between male protagonists in bromance films by reading against the grain of traditional male bonding of "*ŭiri*." In other words, this reading erases the homophobia that disrupts the continuum of homosocial desire in imaginings that foreground how the "the social and the erotic slip seamlessly into one another" (Woledge 2006, 102). Further, I argue that the bromance phenomenon in Korean cinema itself is a reflection of, as well as a response to, the tastes of female spectators.[9] Since young female spectators' buying power was revealed by the unexpected box office success of *The King and the Clown* (*Wang ŭi namja*) in 2005, a film that centers on male homosexuality through a character played by *kkot minam* actor Lee Chunki, the Korean film industry has promoted the casting of more than one male star and focused on "male-male chemistry," and the various forms of intimacy among male characters. As the executive of a film investment company stresses, the prevalence of bromance films is a response to contemporary spectators who "prefer the casting of two or more [male] stars, to enjoy the chemistry among them, to a single hero" (Sŏ 2017). This film-industry strategy of playing to the shifting tastes of young, female spectators is one of the causes of a recent trend of overrepresenting male characters, which has resulted in the underrepresentation of women onscreen.

The feminist film critic Sohn Hee-jeong (Son Hŭijŏng, author of Chapter 2 of this volume) criticizes the subjectivity of young female spectators only as *consumers* of those male-dominated films (Sohn 2015,

14–47), while disregarding the influence of female spectatorship on these productions. Amid a glut of male-centric films, female spectators choose films that suit their taste, turning their backs on merely macho films.[10] *The Merciless* is a groundbreaking example of the popular compromise between the mainstream film industry and long-standing BL subculture; the film's producers and director are conscious of the active subculture and have reflected fans' tastes in the film production. In response, female fans in their twenties and thirties who organized *Pulhandangwŏn* voluntarily assembled to revive a film that unfortunately had failed at the box office. Thus, this contradiction between feminist criticism and female fandom for a series of bromance films invites further attention that focuses less on the overrepresentation of men (which characterizes the whole history of Korean cinema), and more on the emergent phenomenon of South Korean "bromance" as foregrounding "male-male chemistry." This perspective acknowledges the role of young, female spectators who read the relationship through the participatory subculture of BL, and further, gives expression to transforming representations of masculinity in commercial cinema.

As a neologism that associates "brother" with "romance," bromances began to appear on a regular basis in American media in 2005, when films focused on male friendship, like *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (dir. Judd Apatow), were released. Due to its dynamic oscillation between homosociality and homosexuality (in that it refers to intimate relationships between heterosexual men), bromance has drawn much interest, not only from spectators who find pleasure in it, but from scholars who seek to theorize the term. According to Michael DeAngelis, what makes the contemporary bromance a unique or distinctive phenomenon is the notion of intimate but nonsexual male bonding that insists on drawing attention to its own sexuality (DeAngelis 2014, 4–5). In other words, bromance represents a new tendency to experiment with the intimacy produced in homosocial relationships, as R. W. Connell (2005) puts it, which has long been repressed or even taboo because of intense homophobia in modern society. With the help of the media visibility of homosexuality since the 1990s, millennial popular culture began portraying intimate male relationships within homosocial bonding, and thus revising heterosexual masculinity. These depictions, though, often indicated a need to manage new anxieties concerning prospective *new intimates* of straight male culture.[11] As DeAngelis notes, "it would be problematic to posit such an acceptance as an indication of any broad-based, unqualified panacea to a lingering cultural

homophobia" (DeAngelis 2014, 9–10) in the Korean case, too, as bromance is a way to test the limits of the acceptance of sexual difference.

I argue, however, that the bromance phenomenon in Korean cinema is also a contemporary outcome of cultural and economic struggles to incorporate the *jouissance* shared by female spectators/creators of BL who are yearning for freedom from the sexual difference that usually accompanies sexual discrimination. In their book, *Poijŭ Lŏbŭ (Boys' Love)*, BL-er writers Yi Miho and Pŭmori define bromance as a part of BL that "can positively appeal to ordinary people who still find homosexuality intolerable, while convey[ing] the emotions and harmonies of BL" (27). As such, the intimate but not homosexual relations in bromance films provide, at least for BL-ers, a *plaisir* that is a popularized form of *jouissance*. According to John Fiske's elaboration of Roland Barthes's usage of the terms, *plaisir* is "socially produced, its roots lie within the dominant ideology, it is concerned with social identity, with recognition," while *jouissance* produces the pleasures of evading social order (1989, 54). If BL culture presents more special, carnivalesque moments, bromance films in mainstream culture furnish an everyday pleasure that involves the negotiation of social identity. The latter is the pleasure of conforming to the dominant ideology of heteronormativity, but at the same time it provides the pleasures of opposing or modifying that ideology and its subjectivities.

The Merciless is an interesting case in that it positions itself within the mainstream film culture as a bromance film, foregrounding A-list male actors, but it also plays up its subcultural BL connotations. The ostensible reiteration of the traditional homosocial bond called *ŭiri* is imbricated with homoeroticism from BL culture, thus issuing an invitation to queer spectators. What is intriguing is that this queer spectatorship struggles with the marketing strategy of insisting that bromance "just refers to chemistry, not homosexuality," while BL spectatorship does not care for or even approve of bromance as a popular database that triggers their imaginations. A few criticisms from queer film theory reproach bromance films' allegedly deceptive characteristics, which camouflage the prevalent homophobia in Korea on the one hand, and caricature homosexuality on the other.

Queer studies scholar Kim Kyŏngt'ae (2015) argues that only a few gay celebrities, those who caricature themselves in entertainment programs or define their role in very limited professions such as chefs, have been accepted in Korean society, while legal rights are not secured at all for sexual minorities. Kim insists that the bromance phenomenon suggests

that repression of homosexuals has disappeared, while actually further supporting it. That is, it exploits homosexuality in *fictional* descriptions while ignoring the *real* condition of homosexuals repressed in a compulsory heterosexual society (Kim 2015). When queer critics prioritize representations of various *real* issues, they are based on the traditional concept that the grand narrative regulates the representation.[12]

For BL-ers, however, bromance films (as well as other popular forms of entertainment) do not have the status of grand narratives in a traditional sense, but instead serve as a database that is open to borrowing, manipulating, and parodying, which Azuma interprets as a postmodern phenomenon. These databases—repositories of images, associations, character traits, narrative snippets, etc.—can be linked to specific characters or situations, and further, associated with elements from another database, just as the Chaeho x Hyŏnsu pairing from *The Merciless* is elaborated into the pairing of high school students in a series of "school life" (*hagwŏnmul*) fan works based on "school life" databases.[13] By extension, bromance films are a valuable source for BL-ers to enhance homosocial narratives into stories about intimate relationships. Female spectators who appreciate the inventiveness of the fan works will not mind the lack of accuracy or realism in the filmic representations; rather, they enjoy picking up the elements from the original texts, such as the *kong* x *su* pairing, that are open to their active manipulation, i.e., their "reading up" activity. They would not want *The Merciless* to be categorized by producers and mainstream viewers as BL, because the very activity of transforming the heteronormative bromance into BL itself strengthens their agency as spectators as well as creators.

In this respect, bromance films, unlike consciously gay films, are more welcomed by BL-ers because bromance films trigger a sense of polysemy, foregrounding "the intimacy between men who may be homosexual, but whose intimate relations are not defined by their sexual identities" (Woledge 2006, 102). Although most bromance films end up confirming *ŭiri*, or the traditional homosocial bond, the basic setting and elements are open to "reading up" and to being transplanted into parallel worlds (as many BL-ers call the worlds they create through their imaginative activity) defined and shaped by their own rules and codes. Elizabeth Woledge points out that this world is "a world of male intimacy, yes, but not the world of the modern homosexual" (2006, 103). Bromance films themselves in Korea stem from a compromise between mainstream popular culture and BL subculture, as they supply databases supportive of homosexual activity in "vaguely teased but never honestly addressed" ways.

Bromancing *Ŭiri*

The popularity of bromance films among not only females but also young male spectators invites speculations on this genre's rearticulation of *ŭiri*, traditional male bonding. *Ŭiri*, which literally means "a logic that humans in public should maintain," or the honor of the Confucian philosophy of the Chosŏn dynasty, has, during the modernization process, come to connote in popular usage the interpersonal morals among individuals in close relationships, thus losing its public implications. If a man supports *ŭiri*, he will probably be appreciated by his colleagues and friends. If he doesn't, however, he will not be punished, as *ŭiri* is neither a law nor a regulation, but simply a set of ideals or norms. *Ŭiri* remains a masculinized concept that usually describes a man's fidelity to other men or people in his limited network: The title of "a man of *ŭiri*" (*sanai*) is given to the most valuable man; it is not applied to women because they are not expected to be in a network that demands *ŭiri*. Women are supposed to devote their fidelity exclusively to family relations, which is regarded not as *ŭiri* but as natural duty. In this vein, *ŭiri* can be seen as a form of male fidelity to other men in a network that supports homosocial bonding, which was widely strengthened by the impact of the 1998 Asian financial crisis that endangered the existing paradigm of masculinity, when many Korean men lost their jobs and thus their status as bread-winning patriarchs. *Ŭiri* can be translated into homosociality, but with the addition of an ageist/classist hierarchical order that is specific to Korean culture.

Meanwhile, the notion of bromance has been widely accepted among young, male spectators as a new trend since 2010, based on the distinct characteristic of *ŭiri* as equality. According to the definition in Namuwiki (a Korean online, crowd-sourced encyclopedia site that combines general topics with "urban dictionary" features, in which many younger Koreans, especially males, participate in updating idioms that are widely used in their subculture),[14] the concept of bromance is defined as follows, although incoherent and tentative because the definition is updated anonymously and continuously:

> Bromance is an ambiguous term that does not fall under a clear categorization of male friendship [or *ŭiri*] or of homosexuality. Nevertheless, bromance is a neologism that has been adopted as an exact expression for the relationship between two men (at the same time, not quite homosexual), which is more intricate than heterosexual couples. There are many descriptions of bromance in popu-

lar culture in which two men form "an exclusive world only for themselves" [*kŭsase*, an abbreviation of *kŭ tul i sanŭn segye*] that is viewed with doubt and envy by their heterosexual partners. Also, bromance can be created even in antagonistic relationships: as long as there is fascination, whether violent or loving. ("Pŭromaensŭ" n.d.; author's translation)

In this description, contributors to Namuwiki describe two key characteristics of bromance in Korean popular culture. First, the term "bromance" established itself as a new trend and answers people's demand for an exact term for same-gender male relationships that are different from both traditional male friendships (or *ŭiri*) and from homosexual ones as well. Although Namuwiki users do not mention the term "homosocial," a term that has yet to be popularized among Korean internet users, the site registers the difference in the nature of intimacy between bromance and *ŭiri*, the latter being closer to the meaning of homosociality. However, intimacy is defined as different from homosexuality, a homophobic definition that, according to Sedgwick (1985), radically disrupts the continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual. Second, the most appealing aspect of bromance for Namuwiki users is its hipness and contrarian "cool," whether it is described in violent struggles or in romantic relations. This explanation assumes that younger males value the equality immanent in bromance—both the violent struggles (which are ubiquitous in action films) and the romantic relationships (in TV dramas and webtoons) that foreground a strong opposition between equal counterparts, which is quite rare in hierarchical intermale relationships in Korea. If we compare this definition of bromance to that of "man crush," as defined on Namuwiki, we see that this term, which describes a man's admiration for a "superior" male counterpart who has higher (social) status than him, is rarely used. This is probably because unequal relationships such as admiration would instill a wariness about being subjected to a superior, which means the loss of one's masculinity in a competitive, male-dominated world. In other words, "bromance" is a popular word used in male youth culture because of its novelty and uniqueness, despite still preserving a sense of homophobia compared to the traditional inter-male relationship of *ŭiri* as well as its concomitant hierarchical order.

Historically speaking, the Asian financial crisis (colloquially known as the IMF crisis in Korea) of the late 1990s was an unprecedented economic downturn in the country's postwar development trajectory, which threatened the traditional patriarchal system based on family men as breadwin-

ners. The introduction of the new concept of restructuring layoffs (*kujo chojŏng*), which required the modification of human resources in financial institutions that resulted in bankruptcies, family breakdowns, and even homelessness in nationwide populations, endangered the existing family structure. Although more women lost their jobs than men, due to their vulnerable, temporary positions, both social and cultural formations of crisis discourse placed more emphasis on the torment of men who lost their patriarchal authority. Post-IMF cultural productions foregrounded the remasculinization project in various ways, such as nostalgia for the booming economic times (the so-called Miracle of Han River) of the Park Chung Hee regime (1961–1979), or for a naïve boyhood that could compensate for the impotence of current masculinity. Meanwhile, the widespread anxiety around men's sense of insecurity strengthened the management of human relations based on regionalism (connections between those from the same province), school relations (alumnae of the same high school or college), and kinship (including distant relatives), which have been known to be the three major supports for men's social activities in Korea. Dependence on personal relations, as cultural critic Yi Sŏnguk points out, reveals that the public system for securing people's lives is lacking, and people distrust it; a man's networking skills are regarded as the most important evidence of his social viability (Yi 2004). Yi interprets the boom of gangster (*chop'ok*) films in the post-IMF era as the valorization of *ŭiri*, a strong sense of fidelity among men in the three relationships mentioned above.

A dependence on *ŭiri* as personal relations, however, derives less from intimacy than from the hierarchic order that follows either one's age or one's social position. A reason for the popularity of gangster films since the early 2000s is that Korean gangsters are imagined to be well systematized in a hierarchy, just as in military organizations. It is quite evident that Korean male culture has traditionally been hierarchical; for instance, when two men meet, they start ranking themselves by asking each other's age, school, occupation, and birthplace, and this hierarchical distancing inevitably forecloses the intimacy that homosocial bonding idealizes. Most filmic representations of post-IMF inter-male bonding deal with the hierarchical order, which becomes codified into narrative conventions—one gets *rescued* for maintaining the social order, while one gets *punished* for going against the order.

One example of this imaginary resolution of male crisis is a 2001 popular gangster film, *Friend* (*Ch'in'gu*, dir. Kwak Kyŏngt'aek), which depicts a

stratified order under an unrelenting process of (re)construction when intimate relations threaten it. Revolving around four men, the narrative reveals what happens when one of them threatens the hierarchic order they agreed to among themselves in the name of friendship. As childhood friends who grew up together in a small town, the group assigns Chunsŏk to be their leader, who protects them from high school bullies through his superiority—not in terms of seniority, but of fighting skills. They regard their relationship to be that of friends, although a hierarchical order is still attached to the relationship. If someone threatens the order by resisting Chunsŏk's wishes, as Tongsu does when he grows up to become a leader of Chunsŏk's rival gang, he is punished by death. Here, we see not only the narrative punishment of Tongsu, but also the fetishization of his death, which contributes to the alienation and exclusion implicit in the terror that results from the destruction of the hierarchized inter-male bonding. During the scene when Tongsu is stabbed by a hired killer—this is when Tongsu, as he slowly dies from the fatal wounds, utters a famous and much-parodied line, "You can stop [stabbing me] now. I've had enough."— the image of Tongsu's pierced and mutilated body under the heavy rain is aestheticized as it is sublimated to a final submission to the leader. Order is finally reestablished in the name of friendship, showing that the male bonding of *ŭiri* is less an instance of equal, intimate relations and more of a hierarchized order.

Ostensibly, the scope of the intimacy in recent bromance films has not changed all that much from what *Friend* earlier espoused. The hierarchized relationship continues to reconstruct and reconfirm itself, in recent cases under the name of *hyŏngje*, a Korean term for "brother," but one that has the more limited connotations of a hierarchical order between an older superior and a younger inferior. However, an extreme interest in male bodies emerges, which has been cultivated by consumer capitalism since the 1990s, by the visibility of BL-ers' existence, as represented via the visual cues of Korea men's metrosexuality (like slim builds and fine muscular bodies), and by a focus on the investigative gaze directed toward such characters in a series of bromance films.

Many researchers have recognized that the ideal image of masculinity in Korea has changed remarkably since the turn of the century, but the current preference is geared toward metrosexuality, with the addition of a refined sensibility and a well-groomed look. The intense opposition between two protagonists in bromance films is described in terms not only of their conflicting positions or ideologies, but in their contrasting

external appearance and physical ability. This is mostly expressed in the gaze of the *ajŏssi* character at his counterpart's body, a gaze toward the to-be-looked-at-ness that is incarnated in the *kkot minam* character, who is competing with *ajŏssi* masculinity from a comparably equal position.

In this respect, the most interesting motif in Korean bromance films is the inter-male relationship between South and North Korean special agents or detectives, especially older *ajŏssi* South Koreans and younger *kkot minam* North Koreans as in *Secret Reunion* and a subsequent series of films. In the context of the antagonistic relations of the previous Cold War era, the initial relationship between two protagonists develops during an intelligence operation, where the two confront each other as deadly enemies. They get to know each other through looking over their files, and by talking about their backgrounds and physical strength. The main object of the gaze in these films is the body of younger, North Korean soldiers/special agents, bodies that are not just highly disciplined and display sheer physical power (with the help of the North Korean martial art technique known as *kyŏksul*), but that also have a dapper, shining appearance. This is usually contrasted with the older, out-of-shape "dad-bod" of South Korean counterparts. The Chiwŏn character in *Secret Reunion*, as exemplified by the actor Kang Tongwŏn's youthful, androgynous physique—his boyish face seems like a descendent of the original *kkot minam*, pop star Pi, also known as Rain, who was referred to as "A Boy in a Man's Body" (Jung 2010, 109)—is the first example of a North Korean man who established the convention. In addition to this *kkot minam* attractiveness, Chiwŏn's *humane* attitude toward social minorities, and his willingness to perform gendered labor such as house chores (e.g., cooking), contrast with the hegemonic yet feeble *ajŏssi* masculinity of Han'gyu, who is fired from his job, divorced by his wife, and reduced to living by himself in a small studio apartment. Chiwŏn becomes the object of his gaze, interconnected with simultaneous feelings of envy and doubt. The gaze of *ajŏssi* masculinity presented by Han'gyu is the object of ridicule as well as pity for its backwardness in Korea.[15] An increasing number of *kkot minam* actors have played the part of North Korean protagonists (e.g. Kong Yu, Kim Suhyŏn, D.O., and Hyŏn Pin), while many middle-aged, plain-looking actors have acted as South Korean men (e.g. Han Sŏkkyu, Song Kangho, Park Hŭisun, and Yu Haejin). This process has established the convention that helps spectators investigate how the new masculinity is reimagined in the North Korean body through the gaze of established, ordinary *ajŏssi* characters who are awaiting displacement.
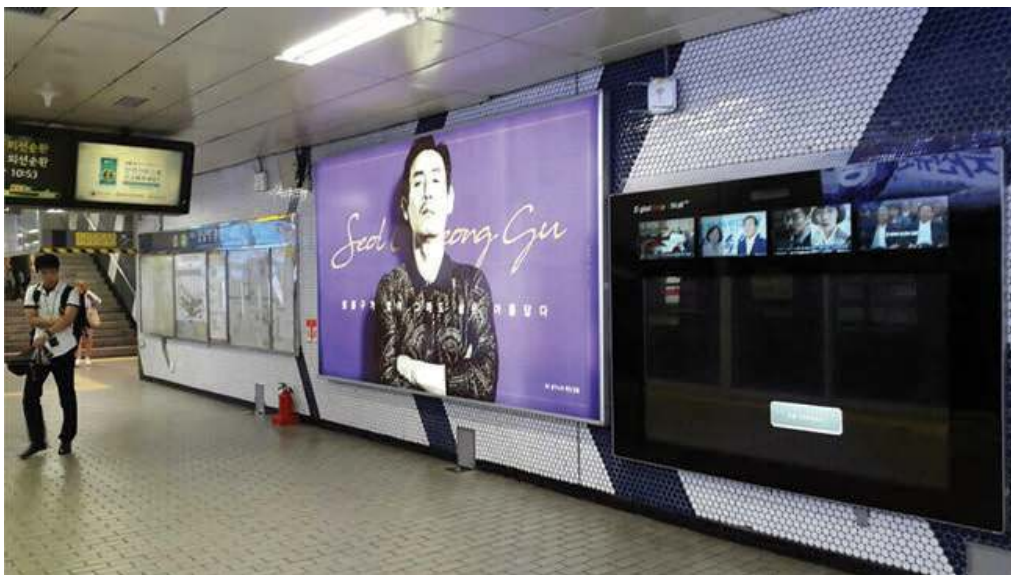
Fig. 12.3. A billboard by Sŏl Kyŏnggu fans of *Pulhandang* dedicated to Sŏl Kyŏnggu at Kangnam Subway Station (Kukka taep'yo kwanggo 2017).

Conclusion: The Emergence of *Kkot Chungnyŏn*

The narrative resolution by *ŭiri* is still prevalent, mostly by bonding the two competing masculinities *ajŏssi* and *kkot minam* under the rubric of *hyŏngje*, in which the *ajŏssi* takes the superior position of older brother. However, that brotherhood is read as a mere sign either of mourning for declining *ajŏssi* masculinity or as presenting an adaptation of *ajŏssi* to metrosexual masculinity. In *The Merciless*, *ajŏssi* seems to be renewed as *kkot chungnyŏn*, having gone through the period of adjustment. Many spectators are fascinated with the sex appeal of the Chaeho character, and with the actor Sŏl Kyŏnggu, the *ajŏssi* masculinity adopts a competitive edge that is not outstripped by his *kkot minam* counterpart. Even when Chaeho asks Hyŏnsu to call him "*hyŏng*" (a male form of address to an older brother), an appellation that confirms the hierarchical order between two protagonists in most bromance films, it is more because Chaeho wants to be treated as his younger and vigorous companion than as his senior. Chaeho's request is made as a form of resistance to being called "*ajŏssi*" by Hyŏnsu. Furthermore, Chaeho does not demand any *ŭiri* from Hyŏnsu. At first, he wants to turn Hyŏnsu over to his side, even by any artifice so far as to kill Hyŏnsu's mother, and then he wants Hyŏnsu to grow to become "merciless," at the cost of Chaeho's life. It is as if Chaeho approves of the dynamics of same-sex bonding that is not reduced to traditional *ŭiri*

through emotional heroism. In this vein, *The Merciless* is a story of how a tough *ajŏssi* gangster adapts himself to the emerging metrosexual masculinity, chastened through the long process of female spectators' BL-ing practice as well as younger generations' yearning for equal relations, fulfilling a unique desire of Korean bromance films.

At present, then, we are confronted with two kinds of *homme fatale*—*kkot minam* and *kkot chungnyŏn*—who appeal both to BL-ers and young males, and who are thrilled not by *ŭiri* but by intimate relations different from and deeper than hetero- or homosexual ones. As is seen in a variety of fan works for bromance films, one of the potentialities that this "intimatopia" (Woledge 2006, 99) suggests might be the status of sexual *indifference*, in which the limitations on all sexes and genders disappear.

NOTES

1. This paper collates sections of two articles originally published in Korean: Baek 2017 and Baek 2019. Earlier drafts were presented at the 2018 International Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present Symposium at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and at a seminar called "East Asian Cinema: From Colonialism to Fandom" held at Sheffield University in 2019. I would like to thank Kevin Smith for helping me with the revision of the draft. This work was also supported by the Yonsei University Future-leading Research Initiative of 2015 (2016-22-0118).

2. Immediately after the release of *The Merciless*, old Twitter messages that director Pyŏn wrote years ago were unearthed and spread through social media and invited critical commentary. Besides a few erroneous accusations that he deprecated his fellow directors, there were misunderstandings over the term "skate fish" (*hongŏ*), a synecdoche for a people from Chŏlla Province who are usually ridiculed by a series of extreme rightists. Pyŏn frequently mentioned the term because he really liked to eat "skate fish," as was later explained by one of his close friends. But before the misunderstanding was cleared up, *The Merciless* had already started to lose theater support due to the boycott, and finally ended up with fewer than one million viewers. Director Pyŏn apologized for attracting criticism and went into seclusion for almost one year.

3. This annual screening continued to take place on the second and third anniversaries, and after the two years of hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on the fifth anniversary in 2022. New fans who have only recently viewed *The Merciless* on various platforms continue to join the online fan communities and express their desire to watch this film again in a theater. In response to this expanding fandom, a few multiplex theaters held special screenings of *The Merciless*, and the fourth anniversary event was held even during the pandemic. *Pulhandangwŏn* organized and held the film's fifth anniversary screening on May 14, 2022, at Lotte Cinema World Tower in Seoul.

4. Jungmin Kwon (2019) calls this female fandom of homoerotic or gay-themed media "FANtasy culture." While Kwon's project targets similar fan communities, I come to different conclusions in my analysis of *Pulhandangwŏn*.

5. I use the term BL-er (BL+-er) to refer to female prosumers who consume and

produce works in the BL genre. There have been different names for them: "*tongin-nyŏ*" (women coterie), "*yao-nyŏ*" (women who enjoy *yaoi* culture), and "*hujyosi*" (a transliteration of the Japanese word *fujoshi* [lit. "rotten women" 腐女子], a self-conscious wordplay on *fujoshi* ["women" 婦女子]). But they converge into BL-ers as BL subculture becomes visible in mainstream society. Compared to the (self-)deprecating nuance attached to the other terms, BL-er sounds more neutral and less reactionary, legitimizing BL as a culture with its own traditions and modes.

6. See also Chapter 10 by Heo on softened masculinities in representations of fatherhood.

7. *Ajŏssi* denotes a "middle-aged man," but these days it pejoratively refers to an adult man who has an aggressive attitude toward social minorities or who falls behind the times while sticking to traditional patriarchy. More extreme expressions recently invented and circulated, especially among women in younger generations, include "*kaejŏssi*" (lit. "dog *ajŏssi*") and '*K-jŏssi*' (lit. "Korean *ajŏssi*," which scorns the aggressive and/or patriarchal attitudes of Korean adult men).

8. According to an annual report published by the Korean Film Council (KOFIC 2017), the average market share of Korean films occupied 51.35 percent of the Korean market on average between 2007 and 2016. The report noted that an average Korean watched 4.2 films in theaters in 2016, which ranked as second highest in the world after 4.22 films by an average Icelander.

9. Kwon (2019) provides a comprehensive account of the emergence since the 1990s of young female groups who have formed what she calls FANtasy culture.

10. One example of the female boycott is a 2017 rally against the film *V.I.P.* (*Bŭiaip'i*, dir. Pak Hunjŏng, 2017). This film was criticized for its graphic and gratuitous violence against female bodies.

11. DeAngelis (2014) devotes pages to differentiating the bromance genre from the 1970s buddy film. While both focus on the relationships between male protagonists, a bromance is a product of the post-millennium, when homosexuality is a more visible presence that foregrounds intimacy in a way that can be "both appropriated by and spoken about in mainstream culture ripe for exploration." In this vein, "bromance enables and requires home to become a defining, stabilizing space," while the background of the 1970s buddy film was "the collapse of the concept of home" (2014, 10–11).

12. For the same reason, a recent phenomenon since 2019—which film scholar Yun (2021) calls "political consumerism" by young female fans, who exclusively support "women's narrative" (*yŏsŏng sŏsa*, cultural products that focus on women or imagine alternative female subjects)—can be regarded as based on this "tree model" that prioritizes representations of various *real* issues. Some of these female fans express regret that they have been enjoying male-dominated popular culture and demonstrate "*t'aldŏk*" (leaving male-star fandoms) or "*t'al piel*" (disconnecting from BL-ers or leaving the BL genre) as a sign of conversion to feminist movements. Despite their authentic aspiration to a nonpatriarchic world and their crucial contribution to a balanced representation of women in cultural products, they seem to limit themselves to a genital-centered dichotomy under which only biological women can be supported. Yun points out that this new fandom is dedicated more to social movements than to traditional fan activities such as fan fictions, which have long been a secret field of *plaisir* for female fandom. We will see how this new female fandom for women's narratives will converge with or diverge from BL-er activities in the future.

13. As the database becomes richer and more diverse, it engenders more variety. As seen in the fan works for *The Merciless*, there is a pairing of Chaeho with Pyŏnggap, a supporting character who is Chaeho's best friend, and Pyŏnggap with chief Chŏn, a female detective who is Hyŏnsu's boss. Given that Pyŏnggap and chief Chŏn are the only characters who know about and keep an eye on the relationship between Chaeho and Hyŏnsu out of a fear of betrayal, spectators can easily identify with those minor characters as observers. Sometimes taking pity on Pyŏnggap, who has crush on Chaeho, and sometimes identifying with the voyeurism of the chief, Chŏn, who monitors Hyŏnsu through a wiretap rigged to his body, BL-ers multiply the *jouissance* in polysemic play of secondary fan creation.

14. Namuwiki was launched in 2015, claiming to be a Korean Wikipedia. Ranked twelfth in popularity among Korean websites, it has almost 300,000 entries that are consistently updated and edited. Although the entries in Namuwiki are not always or necessarily reliable, considering that there have been criticisms against the anonymous users' biased perspectives especially on gender issues (exemplified by the fabrication of Emma Watson's "HeForShe" address at the UN in 2014), Namuwiki is still useful for understanding widely used subcultural vocabulary and its currency in web-based communications. For reference, there are a few alternative wiki sites, such as Femiwiki and Areumdriwiki, built by feminists who stand against Namuwiki, but they do not yet have as much content or as many updates (including the article for "bromance") as Namuwiki.

15. This idealized image of the North Korean male body was quite extraordinary, considering its backdrop of South Korea's contemporary politics. The conservative regime from 2007 to 2016 promoted an official agenda of anticommunist sentiment, which was also championed by many extreme rightist groups, who claimed that there were (too) many "*chongbuk*" (slavish followers of North Korea) among the South Korean populace. Political scientist Chŏng Chŏnghun argues that, unlike the "commie" (*ppalgaengi*) discourse of the past, which was motivated by the long period of military rule and dictatorship that repressed resistant socialist activities, the *chongbuk* discourse accuses not just specific groups or personnel, but anyone who is critical of the South Korean government (C. Chŏng 2014, 96–103). While people did not trust the government-announced "commie" discourse very much, since the mid-1990s it has not been uncommon for civilians to participate in one way or another in the rightist incitement by projecting, under the handy name of *chongbuk*, their discontents and the anxiety projected in neoliberal society onto minorities such as women, immigrants, gays, those of Chŏlla provincial background, the disabled, and in recent cases, refugees. The most repressive term that has recently emerged from right-wing groups (including conservative Protestant Christians) is "*chongbuk* gay," a term that equates sexual minorities with the ideology of "*chongbuk*." This kind of phobia against *chongbuk* and homosexuality is still prevalent, but as the term "*chongbuk* gay" reveals, *chongbuk* can be adjectivized to combine with any other minority, such as *hongŏ* (lit. "skate fish," a synecdoche for Chŏlla Province) and *p'emi* (short for *p'eminisut'ŭ*, or feminists), who are being accused of threatening the vested interests of beneficiaries of the past conservative political regime. But in Korean popular culture, North Korean protagonists and their bromance relationship with South Korean counterparts are constantly being featured in films and media, which appeal to the national sentiment for a possible reunification of divided Korea and to an idealized masculinity of disciplined body and sensitive mind among younger generations. The image of North Korea in popular culture is thus more like a

floating signifier for anything detestable or enviable. For them, North Korea is less an actual threat than a decorative signifier of hostility or envy.

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