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INDICE

FOREWORD

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The year 2024 marked the 18th anniversary of the Korean Studies Graduate Students Convention, widely recognised by its acronym, KSGSC. Since its inception, the convention has served as a vital platform for emerging scholars in the field of Korean Studies to share research, foster academic dialogue, and strengthen international networks. For its 18th edition, the convention found its home in the historic city of Naples, Italy—an inspired choice that brought together participants within the antique, frescoed halls of Palazzo Corigliano, one of the oldest and most esteemed buildings of the University of Naples "L'Orientale".

Founded in the Eighteenth century by the Christian missionary Matteo Ripa, the University of Naples "L'Orientale" began its journey as the Collegio dei Cinesi, a religious institution dedicated to the education of Chinese seminarians destined to return to China as missionaries. Over the centuries, it has evolved into a distinguished institution for the study of Asian and Oriental cultures. It is within this deeply rooted tradition of intercultural scholarship that Korean Studies at "L'Orientale" found fertile ground to develop and flourish.

Notably, "L'Orientale" holds the distinction of being the first higher education institution in Italy to offer formal courses in Korean language and Korean Studies. What began as a pioneering initiative has since inspired a wider academic movement, with numerous universities across Italy now offering opportunities for students to explore the rich linguistic, cultural, and historical heritage of Korea.

It was especially for students and early-career researchers in Korean Studies programmes that KSGSC was organised, and for eighteen sessions it has aimed to support researchers at an early stage, helping them connect and collaborate. For this reason, expanding opportunities for academic engagement through the publication of papers presented during the convention appeared vitally important. This initiative found fertile ground among some of the convention's participants, as well as within the KSGSC Committee, creating multi-layered benefits for both participants and organisers.

This publication represents a valuable opportunity to highlight the work of early-career researchers and to showcase the outcomes of their contributions to the convention. It also aims to support them in gaining experience and confidence in the academic publishing process. The

following pages feature six papers presented during the three-days convention in Naples, selected from a total of twenty-five presentations. The event was organised around six thematic panels: K-heritage and museum studies, language and literature, migration and society, history and politics, gender studies, and Cold War and North Korea studies. Although only a selection of papers could be included in this volume, four out of the six panels are represented.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of presenters and committee members, this publication seeks to illustrate the rich and multifaceted connections between Korean Studies and a range of other academic disciplines. The diversity of approaches reflected in the selected papers speaks to the enthusiasm of young scholars in forging new interdisciplinary links. This, in turn, contributes to the ongoing enrichment of Korean Studies in Europe—where such cross-disciplinary perspectives are still emerging within many academic programmes.

Thanks to the continued support of the Academy of Korean Studies and the tireless efforts of young Korean scholars, this year's convention in Naples upholds the tradition of KSGSC as a meeting point for emerging scholars, offering a dynamic and interdisciplinary space in which to engage with Korean Studies in its many dimensions. We hope this volume of proceedings reflects not only the diversity and quality of the research presented, but also the spirit of collaboration and intellectual curiosity that defines the KSGSC community.

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EXPLORING THE *OUGHT-TO GENDERED L2 SELVES* OF BRITISH LEARNERS OF KOREAN

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Abstract

This study examines how British learners of Korean construct their ought-to gendered L2 selves within the context of Korean language learning. Drawing on data from a series of semi-structured interviews, this paper analyses representative gendered narratives that illuminate how learners perceive and navigate normative gender expectations in contemporary Korea. Employing critical narrative analysis, the study reveals how the participants negotiate their ought-to gendered L2 selves in their responses to the discursively constructed ideals of femininity present in K-pop and Korean society. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the ought-to gendered L2 self and the interplay of gender ideology and learner agency in its construction.

Keywords: gendered L2 selves, normative femininity, gender ideology in Korea, Korean language learning, critical narrative analysis

Questa ricerca esamina, all'interno del contesto dell'apprendimento della lingua coreana, come gli studenti britannici costruiscono il proprio sé L2 di genere "doverizzato" (ought-to gendered self) nello studio della lingua. Basandosi su una serie di interviste semi-strutturate, l'articolo analizza narrazioni rappresentative di genere che mettono in luce come gli studenti percepiscono e affrontano le aspettative normative di genere nella Corea contemporanea. Attraverso un'analisi narrativa critica, lo studio mostra come i partecipanti negozino il proprio sé L2 doverizzato in risposta agli ideali discorsivamente costruiti di femminilità presenti nel K-pop e nella società coreana. I risultati offrono un contributo per una comprensione più articolata del sé L2 di genere doverizzato e dell'interazione tra ideologia di genere e agency degli allievi nella sua costruzione.

Parole chiave: sé L2 di genere, femminilità normativa, ideologia di genere in Corea, apprendimento della lingua coreana, analisi critica della narrazione

Introduction

This paper investigates how British learners of Korean construct their *ought-to gendered selves* in the process of studying Korean as their second

language (L2). Due to the hegemonic status of English as the global language, research in second language acquisition (SLA) skews learners of English as the L2 [1]. This often undermines the motivations for learning languages other than English (LOTEs) [2];[3]. In this regard, British learners of Korean remain an under-researched group despite the growing popularity of the Korean language and culture in the UK [4]. This study aims to address this gap by examining how these learners navigate the discursive constructions of gender in Korea and how they envision their gendered selves.

Expanding the concepts of the *ideal* and *ought-to L2 self* within Dörnyei's [5]; [6] L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), this study introduces the concept of *gendered L2 selves* which consist of the *ideal, ought-to,* and *feared gendered L2 self.* Using critical narrative analysis, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What gendered narratives are produced by British learners of Korean as they study the Korean language?

RQ2. How do British learners of Korean negotiate their *ought-to gendered L2 selves* in relation to the discursive constructions of gender in contemporary Korea?

British learners of Korean

The monolingual mindset in the UK is often criticised to have led a crisis in language learning [7]; [8]. The decline of interest in foreign language learning has been widely reported as a common issue in mainstream Anglophone countries [2]; [9]; [10]. Given the normalisation of monolingualism the Anglophone contexts, the recent growth in demand for the Korean language is worth noting [11]; [12]. Studies suggest that Korean popular culture, especially Korean pop music (K-pop) plays a substantial role in driving this trend [13]; [14].

In the UK, K-pop has been identified as a significant factor in the recent growth of student enrolment in Korean degree programmes at universities [4]. Despite the increasing number of Korean learners in the UK and the recognition of K-pop as the initial attractor to study Korean for many, particularly among younger generation, British learners of Korean remain as an under-researched group in the field of LOTEs research.

The construction of the gendered L2 selves

Drawing on the concept of possible selves [15] and the self-discrepancy theory [16], Dörnyei [5]; [6] introduced the ideal and ought-to L2 self as central factors of motivation for language learning, alongside L2 learning experience. The three components constitute the L2MSS, with each L2 self-representing distinct motivational orientations.

The ideal L2 self indicates learners' aspiration to be a fluent L2 user to fulfil their integrative and internalised instrumental motives. On the other hand, the ought-to L2 self consists of attributes which learners believe they ought to possess to avoid negative outcomes and meet externally imposed expectation as an L2 user [5]; [6]. Since its theorisation, the L2MSS has been widely applied to study language learning motivation [1].

However, the motivational factors which construct the L2 selves place a heavier focus on the achievement of second language proficiency, and the linear approach to understand the L2 selves has faced criticisms. To address these issues, Ushioda [17] highlighted the importance of context as learner motivation is better understood when their personal, social, and historic contexts are considered. In addition, Henry [18] argued that possible selves are not fixed; they have dynamic nature and reflect learners' evolving experiences. Building on these perspectives and incorporating gender as one key component of identity [19], this study revises the ideal and ought-to L2 self, and includes the feared L2 self [20] in its proposal of gendered L2 selves. The reconceptualised gendered L2 selves are elaborated in the table below:

Ideal gendered L2 self	The ideal gendered L2 self represents the learner's aspirations for their gendered identity in the target language. Shaped by the learners' personal values and their evolving understanding of the target culture, the ideal gendered L2 self-embodies the learner's vision of how they wish to be perceived and how they desire to interact as a gendered individual within the target language community.

Ought-to gendered L2 self	The ought-to gendered L2 self reflects the learner's perception of the gendered expectations imposed by the target language community. This self encompasses the learner's understanding of the rules and norms governing 'appropriate' gendered behaviour in the L2, which they may feel obligated to conform to in order to gain acceptance and avoid negative social consequences.
Feared gendered L2 self	The feared L2 gendered self represents the learners' fears and insecurities related to their gender, sexuality, and gender performances in the target language. These fears may arise from negative stereotypes about their gender or culture within the target language community, past experiences of discrimination or misunderstanding related to their gender identity, or a lack of confidence in their ability to perform gender 'correctly' according to the perceived norms of the target culture.

Table 1. The construction of the *gendered L2 selves*

Methodology

This study employed semi-structured interviews to collect gendered narratives of British learners of Korean as they studied the language. The first interview was conducted as a focus group interview with six Korean major students at a UK university before they went to study abroad in Korea. This was followed by a second, one-on-one interview with one of the participants during her study abroad in Korea. All participants' names are anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo, with the ought-to gendered L2 self emerging as the most salient theme. For this study, three representative narratives centred on the ought-to gendered L2 selves are selected and analysed. The analysis is guided by critical narrative analysis [21], which integrates critical discourse analysis (CDA) and narrative inquiry. CDA examines how certain discourse is produced within the wider sociocultural structures [22]. In this regard, CDA facilitates identifying dominant gender ideologies in Korea perceived by the participants, and how they shaped their gendered narratives.

The ought-to gendered selves in gendered narratives of British learners of Korean

1. K-pop as the source of the ought-to gendered L2 self before study abroad

The participants' knowledge of the social gender norms in Korea was informed by various sources, with K-pop emerging as a substantial influence. In K-pop, idealised masculinities and femininities are consistently reproduced and promoted, shaping the participants' understanding of gendered expectations in Korea. The section begins with Kate's pre-study abroad concern about having to "try and fit" themselves into what they perceive as normative femininity in Korea:

> Kate (they/them): Like all of the presentations of women with the cutesy things (in K-pop), I was feeling like I will have to try and fit within their box to not to stand out too much, because I'm already gonna stand out. But I don't know if I would want to.

Kate identifies as a non-binary person and shared this identity prior to the interview. Their ought-to gendered L2 self is shaped by the prevailing cuteness performed by K-pop girl groups. Kate's hesitancy to conform to this particular gender ideal in Korea is reflected in their heavily hedged statement "I don't know if I want to". The performative cuteness frequently found in K-pop girl groups consistently emerges as a major source of the ought-to gendered L2 self among the participants. The participants perceive "being cute" as the dominant form of femininity in Korea, sensing a social expectation for women to behave accordingly. Anna's following narrative reflects this sentiment, as she shares her pre-study abroad concerns regarding her gender expressions and their potential reception in Korea:

> Anna (she/her): The only thing I kind of feel like I need to be, not need to be, but sometimes, being like cute would help. But also, I feel like as being a foreigner in Korea, I'm gonna stand out anyways. I'm always gonna be seen as a foreigner, no matter what I do. So, I don't think I'd actively

> change myself at all. But I'd be more, like, cautious of maybe what I wear, or what I am doing or where I'm going. Especially when I was thinking about if I study abroad, maybe I should try and lose some weight that was definitely in my mind, because so many Korean girls you see, especially in K-pop, you see they are all so tiny. So maybe I should try to get fit and get healthy and get smaller before I go over, so I won't stand out even more so than I already will. But you do have like Hwasa and Jessi, that you see are bigger and more like normal and standard size you would be here (in the UK). So it makes me feel more comfortable to be like "you know what, I'll just be myself". I'm gonna stand out anyway so there is no point of changing. But that was like an initial thought, "okay, a lot of girls in K-pop are skinny"(…)

Anna's ought-to gendered L2 self stems from the discrepancy between dominant femininity in K-pop and her perceived feminine self. Her assumptions that "being cute would help" and the pressure surrounding physical appearance such as "losing weight" and "becoming smaller (in terms of body size)" indicate that dominant feminine images in K-pop may function as guides to what women ought to behave and look in Korea.

However, the ought-to L2 gendered self is mediated by Anna's agency. Anna's personal agency is practised within the safe space that she creates for herself through her foreignness. Being foreign affords Anna a degree of freedom in terms of her gendered behaviours and appearance. Additionally, Anna's statement "I don't think I'd actively change myself at all" implies that the ought-to gendered L2 self may not be actively pursued.

2. *Negotiating the ought-to gendered L2 self through fashion choices and body image*

Leah's study abroad experience illustrates how social gender norms in Korea place certain expectations on women's body image and fashion choices. Leah discusses how she navigates the presentation of her body image through newly adopted fashion choices, aiming to align her performative gender closer to what she perceives as the Korean norm:

> Leah (she/her): I think I feel quite confident about my gender. I feel here (in Korea), it's quite – obviously, it's very split. It's very male and female. You don't see many people being orientated to any other way. I think for me it's more about physical body image than gender identity, because a lot of girls would dress certain ways that you would like to emulate. But as a different body type and as a different ethnicity, it just doesn't feel as comfortable to do it. Because you are gonna get stared at no matter what but sometimes you don't want to make it more of an issue to be stared at. Girls here obviously would wear very short skirts and tops and things, but I feel the need to cover up more because I feel like there's more of me than them because they are so small. I still, I try to adhere to the fashions here more, I guess. I buy most of my clothes now from Korean owned businesses. There's a store called Romi Story and it's for normal sizes and plus size and a lot of foreigners think their style is granny style and they think it's really uncool. But to me, you all call it retro, but I think it's a romantic thing. I think I feel more comfortable adhering to this style than trying the sexy K-Pop style, because I can't emulate that, but I can be the floral, nice cardigan, you know the soft way of feminine? When it's expressing identity, I guess I'm more of that way rather than the kind of widely seen Korean style that we see in the West. It's more of the softer styles I prefer to be and perceived as.

Leah's narrative implies that she observed a dominant pattern in how Korean women dress, which shapes her ought-to gendered L2 self. She explains how her physical features (body size and ethnicity) create a disparity between her current self and the dominant form of femininity in Korea. To reduce this gap, Leah negotiates the way she performs her femininity by choosing clothing styles which make her appear "soft" and feminine. For Leah, "physical body image" emerges as a significant factor in shaping perceptions of gender in Korea, with gender ideals often performed through fashion.

Leah's narrative demonstrates that her body becomes a site of negotiation between societal expectations and personal agency. While she exercises agency by choosing a version of femininity resonates with her sense of identity, the gender ideals she perceives in Korea exert a significant influence on how she responds to her ought-to gendered L2 self. By adopting softer, retro-inspired fashion from Korean-owned

business, Leah reconciles her own preferences with the broader sociocultural norms she encounters in Korea.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how British learners of Korean construct their ought-to gendered L2 selves. The representative narratives suggested that dominant gender norms, particularly those promoted in K-pop, play a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of gender expectations in Korea. The findings also indicated that the learners practise some agency in responding to their ought-to gendered L2 self. Through nuanced cases of ought-to gendered L2 selves, this study has highlighted the importance of considering gender ideology in L2 learning.

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NARRATIVE TOOLS CONVEYING MORAL JUDGEMENT IN KOREAN FOLKTALES

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to provide a more solid methodological footing for research concerning the value system of the common people as reflected in folktales. The article is presenting the findings of an analysis based on a Korean folktale collection of 68 traditional tales. The study found the importance to differentiate between observations made by the narrator and utterances of characters conveying their judgement.

Thanks to the analysis of a collection of tales, this research identified the following narrative tools used for conveying moral judgement: explicit statements including aphorisms, recurring descriptive words, occasional descriptive words and expressions that convey the opinion of the community or other characters. This study outlines the general characteristics of each of these narrative tools. It also examines the role of descriptions of a character's outer appearance, arguing that such descriptions do not function as a means of conveying moral judgement. Finally, it considers whether characters' moral judgements are presented as static or dynamic within the narrative.

Keywords: cultural values, Korean folktales, moral judgement, moral perception, traditional society, value system, worldview.

L'obiettivo principale del presente studio è quello di fornire una base metodologica più solida alla ricerca sui sistemi di valori presenti all'interno del gruppo generico delle persone comuni e tradotti attraverso la scrittura di racconti popolari.

Attraverso l'analisi di 68 fiabe tradizionali coreane, questa ricerca ha riscontrato l'importanza di distinguere tra le osservazioni del narratore e le espressioni dei personaggi che trasmettono giudizi, ciò ha permesso di identificare i seguenti strumenti narrativi, utilizzati nella trasmissione di giudizi morali: affermazioni esplicite, inclusi aforismi; aggettivi ricorrenti; parole descrittive occasionali; espressioni che riflettono l'opinione della comunità o di altri personaggi. Il testo si prefigge di spiegare brevemente le caratteristiche generali di ciascuno di questi strumenti, seguito da un'analisi del ruolo delle descrizioni dell'aspetto esteriore dei personaggi, quest'ultimo non necessariamente legato all'espressione di giudizi morali. Infine, l'analisi

presenterà una discussione relativa ai giudizi morali dei personaggi e alla loro classificazione tra statici e dinamici.

Parole chiave: valori culturali, fiabe coreane, giudizio morale, percezione morale, società tradizionale, sistema di valori, visione del mondo.

Introduction

Folktales can serve as an excellent source of information for studying the Korean common people's traditional worldview and value system. The main factor which makes them fit for this type of research is that they are pedagogical devices used for the transmission of the community's cultural norms and values [70]. Moreover, they serve as an important tool in maintaining conformity to the accepted forms of behaviour [70].

Although much research has been devoted to analysing the worldview and values reflected in folktales, less attention has been paid to how these stories convey moral judgement of the characters and particular forms of behaviour. However, by systematically examining the possible means of expressing value judgements in these narratives, the research concerning the value system of the common people could be placed on a more solid methodological footing.

In the current literature regarding the study of value systems as reflected in folktales, most of the emphasis is placed on the system of reward and punishment – in other words, these analyses focus on whether a character is rewarded or punished when determining their moral perception.[1] This is based on the assumption that the good are always rewarded, while the evil always receive their 'just punishment'. However, this assumption does not hold true for all fairy tales,[2] so it

[1] While in some cases the author displays this strategy in the focus (Grayson [71]), in many of the studies it is not stated explicitly that the system of reward and punishment is regarded as an important factor in determining a character's moral perception. However, even in these cases, there is usually mention of a character receiving a reward to support the claim that they are good, or a bad character receiving a punishment is viewed as confirmation that they are morally negative.

[2] This is especially true in the case of trickster tales since characters who belong to this archetype may not be subject to punishments due to their unique functions, as evidenced by La Shure's analysis [72] of the famous Korean trickster tale called the Clever Servant Tale (꾀쟁이 하인 설화).

seems worthwhile to explore other possible means of expressing moral judgement.

The classification of Korean folktales

When defining the concept of folktales, I found it important to rely on the notion that appears in the title of the source that served as the basis for the analysis. In order to best align with the concept used by the editors of the folktale collection, I adopted the following categorization system: the broadest category is 동화 (童話, donghwa), which can be identified with the notion of 'tale' based on the definition[3] given in the encyclopaedia. This can be further divided into two subcategories depending on the creator of the story. The concept called 창작 동화 (創作童話, changjak donghwa) is defined as a tale created by writers [69]. In contrast, the notion of 전래 동화 (傳來童話, jeollae donghwa), which can be translated as 'traditional tale', also known as 옛날이야기 (yennariyagi) or 옛이야기 (yesiyagi) meaning 'old story', is a subcategory which „includes stories passed down through oral tradition as well as stories that were created by rewriting or recomposing orally transmitted stories" (Kim [69]). In this paper, I use the term folktale to refer to the category of jeollae donghwa.

Methodology

The analysis was based on a Korean folktale collection featuring 68 traditional tales [1-68]. I chose this folktale collection as the source for my analysis because I believe that in stories specifically aimed at children, value judgement tends to be expressed more clearly, while also using more diverse narrative tools and at a higher frequency than in stories tailored for an adult audience. Another influencing factor was the importance of the tales being written in Korean, as trans-creating folktales in a different language can lead to modifications in the narrative structure [73], which may affect the usage of narrative tools conveying value judgement as well.

[3] "어린이를 대상으로 한 이야기. A story aimed at children." Kim [69].

In this study, I analysed text fragments conveying positive or negative moral judgement about characters. I found it worthwhile to differentiate between statements made by the narrator and characters' utterances. The reason for this is that, while the narrator's statements reflect an objective perspective, utterances spoken by a character are inherently biased, thus unreliable in certain stances. As characters' utterances reflect their own subjective opinion, the acceptability of the moral judgement conveyed in their statements may be influenced by their moral perception.

Therefore, I separated the categories of the narrator's statements and characters' utterances. Within these categories, I have identified the following types of narrative tools used for conveying value judgements: explicit statements including aphorisms, recurring descriptive words, occasional descriptive words and statements that convey the opinion and attitude of the community or other characters. Explicit statements refer to those sentences whose main function was solely expressing value judgement. Their subcategory, which I termed aphorisms, include passages that explicitly state and express the moral of the story. In the case of recurring descriptive words, the condition was for a descriptive word to appear at least three times in mostly unchanged form and referring to the same character. Occasional descriptive words include text fragments whose main function was not solely the expression of moral judgement and that appeared less than three times. The last type was statements expressing the opinion of the community or other characters.

Discussion of the results

1. Frequency distribution of different types of narrative tools

Based on my analysis of 68 Korean folktales, value judgement tends to be expressed more frequently in statements made by the narrator than in characters' utterances. The frequency of value judgement appearing in the narrator's statements was 69.7% compared to 30.3% of emergence in a character's utterance. The most used types were occasional descriptive words (41.9%) and explicit statements (37.2%, including the subcategory

aphorisms 40.3%), while recurring descriptive words and aphorisms proved to be the least frequently used methods for expressing value judgement at 5.3% and 3.1%.

2. Main characteristics of different types of narrative tools

Explicit statements

This narrative tool proved to be used quite frequently. A unique subtype in this category were sentences conveying self-reflection and (complete) change of personality. In these sentences, the narrator or the character themselves expressed that they realized their mistake, regretted them, and in some instances, the narrator also indicated that the character changed their behaviour. However, it is important to note that promises were not included as they were not a reliable indication whether the character would actually change their ways.

Aphorisms

The use of aphorisms, passages that state and express the moral of the story, was very rare. They were only used 11 times in 8 tales out of the 68 analysed tales. They emerged as a character's utterance 9 times out of 11, so in 82% of cases.

Among these utterances, there were some that conveyed a general truth, while others expressed advice aimed at another character in a concealed manner. In a few instances, these sentences served the purpose of validating a character's decisions and transmitting Confucian teachings.

The most unique aspect of this tool is that in the case that it appeared as a character's utterance, the speaking character's moral judgement was positive or neutral, so there were no instances in which a character with a negative moral perception would express the moral of the story.

Recurring descriptive words

Recurring descriptive words were used 166 times in total in 14 tales, for describing 18 characters. The frequency of the recurring descriptive word appearing in the narrative in relation to the same character ranged

from 3 times to 33 times, with an average of 8.4 times. They appeared almost exclusively in the narrator's statements.

A noteworthy phenomenon unique to recurring descriptive words is their function as nicknames. The most widely known tale in which this plays a central role is the story of Ondal the Fool (바보 온달과 평강 공주, [39]). This tale is also unique from the aspect that it was the only narrative in which this tool appeared in characters' utterances. In this narrative, the word 'fool' only had the function of conveying value judgement in characters' utterances, while in the statements of the narrator 'Ondal the Fool' was only used as a nickname, without insinuating moral judgement.

Occasional descriptive words

There was a wide array of value judgements expressed using the tool of occasional descriptive words throughout the tales. The case of the word 'diligently' (열심히, yeolsimhi) was noteworthy. This positive word was used not only to describe a character with a positive moral perception, but also the actions of characters that were otherwise viewed negatively. Based on this, we can deduct that this word is not always used to convey a positive value judgement, but rather as an adverb of degree.

Statements conveying the opinion or attitude of the community or other characters

This narrative tool mostly appeared in the narrator's statements (93.3%). A characteristic of this tool is that negative moral judgement was usually expressed by indicating the rejection of the community.

There were three categories based on the entity whose opinion was expressed indirectly in the folktales. In order of the frequency of their emergence, the first category (53.2%) was the wider community, with typical examples being sentences revealing the opinion of the people in the village or people in general. The second category (31.9%) was that of characters in close relation with the character concerned, for example their parents, siblings or scholars working under their supervision. Lastly, there were a few instances where the entity whose opinion or attitude appeared was someone with a high position in the (social) hierarchy (14.9%), more precisely the king, God or heaven.

Opposition and elaboration with examples as strategies for emphasis

The strategy of opposition can be summed up as the tales featuring characters representing the two ends of the good-bad pole, or in other words, the stories having two characters in parallel with total opposite moral perceptions. This strategy also appeared in the use of recurring and occasional descriptive words that conveyed value judgements total opposites of each other.

A unique tale type using opposition for emphasis are those which Grayson [71] termed as 'double contrastive narratives'. These folktales have a structure "composed of two contrasting narrative sections or acts composed in turn of a parallel series of scenes" [71]. This narrative structure puts emphasis on the moral teachings by having two characters with opposite moral perception carry out the same actions, however with different outcomes (e.g. Chodanggeulbang [3; 13; 18]).

Another strategy used for emphasis was elaboration with examples. This means that in the folktales, the passages following a statement conveying some type of value judgement often elaborated on the actions of the concerned character to better support the value judgement expressed in the narrative.

3. The role of a character's outer appearance

Negative descriptions of a character's outer appearance were rare and seemed to have no relation to the character's moral perception, since they were used also in the case of characters who were otherwise deemed morally positive. Although positive descriptions of appearance were used only to describe female characters with a neutral or positive moral perception, in the case of male characters, positive descriptions appeared also in relation to characters with a negative moral perception.

Based on the above reasons, it can be concluded that positive or negative descriptions of a character's outer appearance do not function as tools of conveying moral judgement, but instead their role is to portray stereotypical character types and roles, especially within a family structure.

The static and dynamic nature of moral judgement

In Korean folktales, many characters with a negative moral perception change at the end of the story. This change of character ranged from not demonstrating that specific negative form of behaviour anymore (e.g. Chodanggeulbang [3; 13; 19]), to representing the opposite positive value (e.g. Chodanggeulbang [10; 12; 16]). In the process of change of personality, self-reflection played a key role. This means that examining one's own behaviour and reflecting on their negative personality traits was a crucial step in the process of a character changing their personality and thus their moral perception.

Overall, in the cases explained above the moral judgement of these characters showed dynamism. This indicates that the moral judgement of characters with a negative moral perception is capable of change in Korean folktales. On the other hand, there were also some characters whose perception remained negative. The moral judgement tended to be static and unchanging in the case of animal and supernatural characters and characters representing stereotypes.[4]

Conclusion

Through this analysis, I have established the following categorization for narrative tools conveying value judgements in folktales. The two main categories are statements made by the narrator and utterances of characters. Within these two categories, explicit statements including aphorisms, recurring descriptive words, occasional descriptive words and statements conveying the opinion of the community or other character(s) are the subcategories. However, descriptions of a character's appearance proved not to have the function of conveying value judgement.

It is worth noting that opposition and elaboration with examples were strategies used often for emphasis and to support the previous statements

[4] As examples for characters representing a stereotype, thus having an unchanging moral perception, we can mention the greedy woodcutter (Chodanggeulbang [8]) and the main characters in the Scrooge Tale (Chodanggeulbang [57], 구두쇠 이야기).

expressing value judgement. Also notable is the case of the occasional descriptive word 'diligently', which in some cases served as an adverb of degree rather than a word conveying positive value judgement. Another instance in which a term that otherwise would function as a means for conveying moral judgement had a different purpose, was the case of recurring descriptive words being used as nicknames.

By analysing 68 Korean folktales, I aimed at establishing a categorization of narrative tools that could serve as solid methodological footing for research concerning the value system as reflected in folktales. Moreover, by observing the exceptional cases, I intended to shed light on certain factors that may distort the perceived value judgement in these tales.

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WOMEN'S ECO-IDENTITIES ACROSS THE LITERARY SPECTRUM: THE CASES OF HAN KANG AND YUN KO-EUN

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Abstract

This study examines two prominent Korean writers' works – "*The Vegetarian*" by Han Kang and "*The Disaster Tourist*" by Yun Ko-eun – in an ecofeminist perspective. The analysis, which is grounded in the framework of fundamental theories in this field, reveals how these writers intertwine gender and ecological concerns to critique patriarchal and capitalist structures. In "*The Vegetarian*", Han Kang explores the process of a woman's metamorphosis into what is referred to as a "vegetable feminine", which can be interpreted as a rejection of the societal constraints that bind her along with her pursuit of liberation that is aligned with the natural world. In contrast, Yun Ko-eun offers a critique of the exploitation of both women and the environment within a capitalist system, using a dystopian narrative that reflect on the resilience of individuals and communities. By incorporating traditional Korean ecological perspective into global ecofeminist discourse, this article aims to highlight the contribution of both novels to the development of a distinctly Korean ecofeminist literature, offering insights of the interconnected struggles of women and the environment in the contemporary society.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Korean Literature, Han Kang, Yun Ko-eun.

Questo studio analizza le opere di due importanti scrittrici coreane – *La vegetariana* di Han Kang e *The Disaster Tourist* di Yun Ko-eun – in un'ottica ecofemminista. L'analisi, fondata sui principali riferimenti teorici in questo campo, rivela come queste autrici intreccino questioni di genere e tematiche ecologiche per criticare le strutture patriarcali e capitaliste. In *La vegetariana*, Han Kang esplora il processo di metamorfosi di una donna in ciò che viene definito "femminile vegetale", interpretabile come un rifiuto dei vincoli sociali che la imprigionano e come una ricerca di liberazione in armonia con il mondo naturale. Al contrario, Yun Ko-eun propone una critica allo sfruttamento delle donne e dell'ambiente all'interno del sistema capitalistico, attraverso una narrazione distopica che riflette sulla resilienza di individui e comunità.

Integrando prospettive ecologiche tradizionali coreane nel discorso ecofemminista globale, l'articolo intende mettere in luce il contributo di

entrambi i romanzi allo sviluppo di una letteratura ecofemminista distintamente coreana, offrendo spunti di riflessione sulle lotte interconnesse delle donne e dell'ambiente nella società contemporanea.

Parole chiave: Ecofemminismo, Letteratura coreana, Han Kang, Yun Ko-eun

Introduction

The intertwined crises of ecological degradation and gender-based oppression have led scholars to explore their intersections through the lens of ecofeminism. As a philosophical and political framework, ecofeminism critiques the dual domination of women and nature under patriarchal and capitalist systems while advocating for relationships based on care, reciprocity, and sustainability. [1] Korean literature – especially from the early years of 2000s – is providing fertile ground for examining these themes, as it is starting to interweave ecological concerns with the lived realities of women in a society shaped by both tradition and modernity. This paper focuses on two major works, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Yun Ko-eun's *The Disaster Tourist*, to explore how ecofeminist discourse manifests itself in contemporary Korean fiction. These two novels were selected for their distinctive and profound engagements with specific themes that can be rooted into ecofeminist discourses and perspectives, miking them particularly significant for the analysis examined in this study. Both novels exemplify the intersection of gender and ecological crises in ways that are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical contexts of Korea, while also contributing to global ecofeminist discourse.

The Vegetarian by Han Kang encapsulates the transformation of its protagonist as a rejection of patriarchal and societal constraints, symbolizing liberation through alignment with nature. This intimate narrative of personal metamorphosis aligns with ecofeminist ideals, offering a profound critique of the ways in which women's bodies are controlled and commodified. Its symbolism and layered narrative elevate it as a seminal work in exploring the interconnectedness of women and the natural world.

On the other hand, *The Disaster Tourist* by Yun Ko-eun critiques the commodification of both women and ecological disasters within a capitalist framework through a satirical and dystopian lens. Indeed, it

explores the intersection of corporate exploitation and ecological collapse, presenting a broader societal critique that resonates with the global challenges of environmental degradation and gender inequality. Also, the narrative has been presented as structurally complex with a sharp critique of modern tourism industries, underscoring a unique contribution to ecofeminist literature. Together, these novels provide complementary perspectives—one deeply personal and symbolic, the other societal and systemic—that enrich the discussion of ecofeminism in Korean literature. Their ability to bridge local cultural elements with global eco-critical themes underscores their significance, making them ideal focal points for this analysis.

This study contributes to scholarly discourse by situating these works within both global and local ecofeminist frameworks. By examining the cultural, historical, and ecological contexts that shape these narratives, this paper highlights the potential of Korean literature to enrich global ecofeminist thought. It also aims to fill gaps in the literature by providing a focused analysis of these two novels, which exemplify the intricate interplay between ecological and gender issues. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions: how do *The Vegetarian* and *The Disaster Tourist* embody ecofeminist themes in their narrative structures and characters? What do these novels reveal about the broader socio-ecological realities of contemporary Korea, and how do they contribute to the development of a distinctly Korean ecofeminist literature?

Placing this study within the broader field of ecofeminism and ecocriticism not only highlights the unique contributions of Han Kang and Yun Ko-eun but also emphasizes the importance of literature as a medium for ecological and ecofeminist advocacy. The following sections explore these themes in detail, beginning with an overview of ecofeminist and ecocritical theories, followed by an analysis of the cultural and historical contexts of Korean literature, and culminating in an in-depth examination of the selected novels. In particular, the theoretical overviews offered by prominent scholars of Western ecofeminism such as Vandana Shiva and Karen J. Warren will be essential to lay the foundation for how to accurately interpret and examine its broad spectrum for this study, which conveys Western and South Korean discourses to structure a clearer and broader research.

Ecofeminism and Ecocriticism: Intersecting Perspectives on Gender, Nature, and Power

> "As a political movement, ecological feminism began in the 1970s. French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "*ecological feminisme*" in 1974 to call attention to women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution. […] The umbrella term "*ecofeminism*" refers to a plurality of positions, some of which are mutually compatible and some of which are not." [2]

Ecofeminism – considered as a diverse and interdisciplinary philosophical and political movement that explores the intricate connections between gender, ecology, and systems of power – can be used as a tool to both analyse and criticize the historical and cultural associations of women with nature, arguing that the domination of women and the exploitation of the environment stem from similar ideological roots in patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial structures. Since the 1970s – when the "ecofeminism" term has been officially recognized and its theories developed – it has evolved into a multifaceted framework that addresses the intersectionality of gender, ecology, class, race, and global capitalism. Ecofeminists point out that the same mechanisms of power and control that have historically oppressed women are responsible for the degradation of the natural world. This "dual oppression" – as can be labelled – is frequently perpetuated by patriarchal and capitalist ideologies that prioritize dominance, hierarchy, and exploitation over care, cooperation, and sustainability.

> "One of the crucial insights of ecofeminists is that the human/nature dualism intersects with the dualism between men and women. Just as the human/nature dualism is used historically and presently as justification for human subjects exploiting the natural world as mere objects, the man/woman dualism is used as justification for exploitative attitudes and actions of men toward women. Subjectivity is attributed predominantly to maleness and masculinity, while femaleness and femininity are objectified." [1]

Therefore, the objective of ecofeminism is to dismantle the hierarchical dualisms that exist between different social groups and between humans and the natural world. These dualisms, which include

man/woman, human/nature, and culture/nature, are seen as reinforcing the subjugation of both women and the environment. As can be seen, especially through Shiva and Vakoch's theories and statements who challenge these dualisms, ecofeminism also advocates for a more ethical and sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world, grounded in reciprocity, care, and mutual respect. One of the core tenets of ecofeminism is the interconnection between environmental issues and social justice concerns, particularly those pertaining to gender.

From a Western perspective, especially the marginalization of women's knowledge – particularly traditional ecological knowledge – is regarded as an integral component of a larger system that devalues both women's labour and the environment itself. It is possible to divide most of ecofeminist's thoughts and criticism in two main groups: cultural ecofeminism and materialist ecofeminism. Those who align with the cultural ecofeminist perspective place significant emphasis on the spiritual and symbolic connections between women and nature, frequently celebrating women's roles as life-givers and nurturers, which resonate with earth-based spiritualities, also arguing for a revaluation of feminine principles, such as care, empathy, and cooperation, which they see as instrumental in establishing a more harmonious relationship with the Earth. This branch of ecofeminism frequently invokes the notion of a profound and intrinsic bond between women and nature, both of which have been subjugated by patriarchal systems.

In contrast, those who align with the materialist perspective employ a socio-political and economic lens, concentrating on the tangible circumstances of women's labour and environmental deterioration within the global capitalist system. Notable ecofeminists –such as Vandana Shiva, Ariel Salleh *et al.* – suggest that the exploitation of women and nature is deeply entrenched within the structural foundations of capitalist development, pointing out how it prioritizes profit and growth over ecological sustainability and social equity. This group also offers a critique of the global systems of power that commodify both women's bodies and natural resources, often at the expense of marginalized communities. It calls for the acknowledgment of the unpaid labour of women, particularly in the context of caregiving

and subsistence farming, and advocates for systems of production that are ecologically sustainable and socially just.

For instance, the Indian scholar and environmental activist Vandana Shiva – considered as "one of the world's most prominent radical scientists [who offers] a scholarly and polemical plea for the rediscovery of the 'feminine principle' in human interaction with the natural world" [3] – deals with an outspoken critic of the so-called "*maldevelopment*": which she defines as the Western model of development that marginalizes women and destroys traditional, sustainable ways of life in favour of exploitative, industrialized agriculture and globalization:

> The dichotomized ontology of man dominating woman and nature generates maldevelopment because it makes the colonizing male the agent and model of '*development*'. (…) The ontology of dichotomization generates and ontology of domination, over nature and people (…), it leads to reductionism and fragmentation, thus violating women as subjects and nature as an object of knowledge. [4]

As cultural ecofeminism is also mentioned, the contribution of the philosopher Karen J. Warren is crucial. With her work cantered on the interconnections between gender and ecology – particularly through her formulation of the concept known as the "logic of domination, a moral premise that specifies that the superiority of humans as Ups (here, their superior ability to radically alter their environment in consciously self-determined ways) justifies the domination of nonhuman natural others as Others, as Downs (here, rocks or plants that do not have this ability)" [2] – Warren is a scholar who classifies the patriarchal societies as the root cause of the systematic oppression of both women and nature. Exploring the ethical, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of ecofeminism while also establishing her as a pivotal figure in the field of cultural ecofeminist thought, her ideas resonate with materialist ecofeminist concerns, particularly in her analysis of power structures. Warren's theoretical framework is primarily aligned with cultural ecofeminism, particularly in her focus on the ethics of care and her critique of dualisms, which have been central to Western thought. The use of

dualisms, such as man/woman, human/nature, and rationality/emotion, has been a means of justifying the oppression of women and the environment. Warren critiques these hierarchical binaries, emphasizing how patriarchal societies justify the domination of women and nature by promoting masculine-associated traits – for instance, strength and reason – over feminine-associated traits – such as care and emotion. Her studies call for a transition away from these exploitative power structures and toward relationships defined by reciprocity and care, both between humans and with the natural world.

Although it can be stated that Warren's work aligns more closely with cultural ecofeminism, she does not entirely dismiss material concerns, placing less emphasis on the political and economic structures that are central to materialist ecofeminism. Advocating for a transformation of what is relatable to the natural world and each other, Warren's approach entails a shift from domination to mutual respect and relational ethics, which contrasts with the materialist ecofeminist demand for the dismantling of global capitalist structures.

Ecocriticism from a Korean Theoretical Perspective

If the preceding discussion provides a general theoretical framework, how has the subsequent ecocriticism developed in the East and especially in South Korea?

One of the most significant contribution is the one of Kim Won-chung, Professor of Ecological Literature at SKKU, who emphasis on the interconnection between Korean literature and the natural environment, underscoring the unique Korean perspectives on ecological and environmental concerns, while also incorporating traditional Korean cultural and philosophical factors, such as '*han*' (한) – a profound sense of sorrow and resentment arising from historical adversity – and shamanism, into his ecocritical framework. While linking to the cultural and historical context of Korea in an ecocritical perspective, Kim shapes a noteworthy ecocriticism particularly filled with ecological concerns with postcolonial critique, connecting environmental degradation in Korea and the legacies of colonialism and modernity.

> The ecological literature of Korea deserves more attention because it can promote globalizing ecocriticism by introducing a new perspective. […] Political persecution and environmental exploitation went hand in hand, and this is the reason why Korean eco-writers emphasize life, not only that of humans but also of nature. [5]

At the core of Korean ecocriticism, scholars frequently tend to underscore traditional or cultural factors as well as historical experiences that are distinctive to the peninsula, distinguishing themselves from the more general Western perspective. Although this focus offers valuable insights, it tends to overlook the ecofeminist critique developed by scholars such as the already mentioned Vandana Shiva and Karen Warren, thus excluding significant debates on dualism or the intertwined exploitation of women and the environment. Given the necessity of integrating Korean cultural and historical contexts with Western ecofeminist theories, an approach that incorporates literary analysis could facilitate a more comprehensive approach to ecocriticism. This would allow for a broader range of perspectives to be reflected and foster a more nuanced understanding of such complex issues. An intersection of ecocriticism and ecofeminism produces narratives and characters within a literary context that can simultaneously convey both theoretical perspectives and the interconnection between women and nature. This approach involves the spiritual and ethical dimensions, in addition to an introspective analysis of female characters who interact with a wilderness or embody aspects of nature – such as the protagonists of both *The Disaster Tourist* (밤의 여행자들; *Bamui Yeohaengjadeul*) by Yun Ko-eun or *The Vegetarian* (채식주의자; *Chaesikjuuija*) by Han Kang considered in this research. It is therefore evident that literature plays a pivotal role in the advancement of ecocritical and ecofeminist discourse:

> Earlier collections on ecofeminist literary criticism (Gaard and Murphy 1998; Carr 2000; Campbell 2008) have provided examples of literature that reveal the oppressiveness of patriarchal, dualistic thinking. […] In this view, ecofeminism should not be confined to critique but should instead identify and articulate liberatory ideals that can be actualized in the real

> world, in the process transforming everyday life (Carr 2000). In the process of exploring literature from ecofeminist perspectives, we can expect to reveal strategies of emancipation that have already begun to give rise to more hopeful ecological narratives (Murphy 1991). [6]

"*The Vegetarian*" and "*The Disaster Tourist*": Literary Echoes of Ecofeminism

Given the theoretical framework outlined so far, the two mentioned novels considered in this paper serve as examples of how literature functions as a "bridge" between ecocriticism and ecofeminism. These narratives do more than simply explore ecological themes or gender dynamics; they also filter through distinctly Korean cultural and historical elements, thereby contributing to the development of a specifically Korean ecofeminist literature, which articulates eco-identities that intertwine ecological consciousness with human existence, particularly the experiences of women within their environments.

This leads to the question of how the reflections on ecofeminism and ecocriticism, as discussed in the broader context, manifest within these Korean novels. Both *The Vegetarian* and *The Disaster Tourist* intricately intertwine themes of environmental degradation and gender oppression, thereby illustrating the ways in which women's identities are shaped by and respond to the ecological and patriarchal structures that surround them. These novels are not merely accounts of individual characters; rather, they offer sophisticated reflections on the broader socio-environmental realities that shape and confine the lives of these characters. In this way, they demonstrate the capacity of Korean literature to contribute to global discourses on eco-identity while maintaining a profound connection to the nation's cultural and ecological particularities. Through the intricated intersections depicted between gender, environment, and identity, both Han Kang and Yun Ko-eun provide authentic plots filled with the analysis of the distinctive characteristics of Korean ecofeminist literature, situated within both local and global contexts.

Starting with Han Kang—born in Gwangju in 1970 and who made her literary debut in 1993 [7] — her critically acclaimed novel, as well

as winner of the 2016 Man Booker International Prize, exemplifies a profound critique of patriarchal indifference to women's voices and experiences, offering a deep, compelling, and thought-provoking analysis. Behind the title itself, it can be argued that *The Vegetarian* encapsulates something more than the basic action of eliminating meat from the diet out of ecological and feminist consciousness. Instead, it stands for the intricate processes of dehumanization and alienation that the protagonist, Yeong-hye, is subjected to, as the term, in and of itself, is deceptive, concealing a profound symbolic unravelling of human nature. Beneath the surface of this seemingly simple term – '*vegetarian*' – lies a symbolic unravelling of human nature, where the protagonist's rejection of societal norms leads to a psychological fragmentation that mirrors the oppressive structures of gender and power in contemporary South Korean society. An oppressive system that has its roots in the old Chŏson Dynasty (1392 – 1897), with the establishment of the Confucian ideology that brought virtues such as modesty and wisdom as core principles of how women should live and behave in order to become "wise mothers and good wives," to the present days, such as the Park Chung Hee era (1970s), which revived such discourses to "create a dominant image" that eradicated the idea that "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)." [8]

Although it is mostly known for its vivid and raw narrative, as well as its inscrutable female protagonist –who never speaks from her own perspective, but it's always described from the outside gaze of the others – Han Kang's novel is also filled with crucial symbols and motifs that allow for an ecofeminist and ecocritical reading:

> Body Autonomy, for all genders, is a necessarily prime aspect of life and is advocated for in the novel. Moreover, the novel has immensely moved imagery of vegetation, animal and human cruelty, family dominance and so on. Flowers, painted over the bodies of the characters, and especially the flower-shaped mole on Yeong-hye's back, symbolize the strife to be closer to nature and give in to one's primal instincts of love and living as one might please. Finally, the theme of

> vegetarianism, a movement that both feminists and ecologists promote, is the very core of the novel. These themes, symbols, and motifs aid to promote the movement of ecofeminism clothed in the apparently harmless cover of popular fiction. [9]

Although vegetarianism is regarded as the "the very core of the novel," [9] it primarily symbolizes the protagonist's metamorphosis, which serves as a poignant metaphor for the broader struggle of women to reconcile their inner selves with the demands of a patriarchal society. The ecofeminist perspective in the novel can be found more in Yeong-hye's desire to separate herself from her own humanity, where her choice of becoming vegetarian serves only as the initial step of a transformation that symbolizes her pursuit of freedom, as well as the total rejection of societal impositions, corporeality, control, jealousy, and remorse —all of which embody the mechanisms of patriarchal exploitation. Her journey thus reflects a deeper critique of the ways patriarchal systems impose these forms of domination, not only on women but also on society:

> She [Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye] was no longer able to cope with all that her sister reminded her of. She'd been unable to forgive her for soaring alone over a boundary she herself could never bring herself to cross, unable to forgive that magnificent irresponsibility that had enabled Yeong-hye to shuck off social constraints and leave her behind, still prisoner. And before Yeong-hye had broken those bars, she'd never even known they were there. [9]

In her sister's words, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the whole meaning filtered by Han Kang's writing, the core of the novel: a "vegetable feminine", a "woman-plant" who suggests the idea of liberation from the invisible chains of a patriarchal society who still embodies Confucian's precepts from the past, trapping women in judgements and constraints.

> Nature was seen as the embodiment of all the characteristics that women possess. The violence of nature has been used to explain the violence against women. Both the environment and women have been viewed as an exploitable resource that

> are significantly undervalued. Therefore, destruction of the environment results in the elimination of women's method for survival. [10]

A comparable, yet distinct, phenomenon is observed in *The Disaster Tourist*, where the novelist Yun Ko-eun presents a dystopian narrative that intertwines individual and collective chaos within a devastated environment. The novel employs satire to critique modern society's involvement with catastrophe, integrating ecofeminist themes with a critique of social structures. The female protagonist's journey, Koh Yona, serves to illustrate the convergence of individual identity and societal roles within an environment undergoing collapse, thereby underscoring the broader implications of ecological degradation for women's lives. Offering a critique of the commodification of disaster and its impact on both individual and communal well-being, it is possible to catch glimpse of women's efforts to establish themselves in challenging circumstances combined with the examination of nature's exploitation, building a literary interconnectivity between women's oppression and environmental degradation, underscoring the necessity of ecofeminist critique as a vital framework for comprehending the protagonist's experience – the same process seen in *The Vegetarian*. In the context of a tourist company that offers travel to ecologically disaster-stricken places in Southeast Asia as well as Western realities, the plot involves both human suffering for profit and the negative effects of capitalism, while also addressing the conditions of South Korean women in such a society, thereby intersecting with both gender and nature exploitation.

First, there is a clear distinction between '*travellers*' and '*tourists*', starting with the original title in Korean language itself, which is "*Bamui Yeohaengjadeul*" (lit.: '*Travelers of the Night*'), implying the cut between the first and the second part of the novel, highlighting Yona's transition from being a simple worker went on Mui, a devastated island near Vietnam, just to explore and eventually renew the journey package for her agency to a complete stranger in a land far from her home, where she is not only unable to understand the language, but is totally unaware of the real nature of Mui and its people. As the plot progresses, Yona will discover secrets and truths that she had previously overlooked during her time as a mere

traveller. As she transitions from a '*traveller*' to a '*tourist*', Yona gains a deeper understanding of the island and its people. However, this transition also leads her to realize that her previous beliefs about Mui's reality were merely illusions: as a '*traveller*', Yona only observed the planned attractions – disaster areas, chasms, a desert, a village where ancient peoples still in conflict between each other stayed; however, as she became a 'tourist', she discovered that Mui was under the control of a powerful landlord who determined the island's fate. This realization led her to understand not only that everything she witnessed was not completely real, but also that the landlord's decisions – even on life and death as well as the occurrence of disasters – were crucial elements in the island's destiny itself. In this realization, also Yona's destiny is fulfilled as she becomes the only one to know the truth, as well as being the only one who can ensure the continued prosperity of Mui's tourism industry and the survival of its people, all of which was undertaken with the awareness and implicit approval of a planned disaster that would be able to attract financial and media resources.

Therefore, the theoretical dualism previously mentioned seems to be realized in the relationship between Yona and his male superior in the agency environment, Mr. Kim, and between Seoul, or the capitalist reality and Mui, the island that stands for nature, figuring the imaginary dichotomy: Yona/Mr. Kim, Human/Nature, and Culture/Nature, highlighting not only the exploitation to which both Yona and Mui are subjected to, but also how much they seem to be each other's representation. Indeed, towards the concluding part of the novel, Yona herself feels such a strong connection with the island that she starts to identify with it: "The truth was that Yona's sinkhole-like collapse resulted from several years of pressure. […] The island's situation resembled Yona's, although it was significantly more dire." [11]

The ecofeminist perspective is evident in the clear and compelling connection between the portrayal of women and the exploitation of the natural world, combined in the unavoidable circle of violence and subjection:

> Yona's chest pounded furiously, although not because she was seeing the unsavory side of Kim for the first time. Nor was it

> because her *boss* was sexually assaulting her. No: according to what Yona knew, Kim only targeted has beans—employees who'd been given a yellow card, or who were about to receive one. She was horrified to think that her rejection of his advances might be the grounds for a yellow card. […] If his sexual offences remained covert, she was inclined to bear the discomfort. […] What made her most uncomfortable right now was that she'd tolerated his actions three times without doing anything. She felt like she was somehow cooperating. But victims would understand her hesitation to act. [11]

If this can be considered as the calamity that every woman must endure because of patriarchy, the island is compelled to make the unavoidable decision to be destroyed by the landlord and manager's actions, which were designed to recreate a fictitious disaster. This decision not only devastates the territory, but also results in the loss of innocent lives.

> Foregrounding the natural environment means reversing the conventional power dynamics between the human and the nonhuman in the narrative art. Yun, in *The Disaster Tourist*, raises several questions about the narrative reversion with her readers, such as "Who marks off the conceptual boundaries, and under what authority, and for what reasons?" or "Have those boundaries and that authority been contested, and if so, by whom?" (Mazel 143). By using the irregular narrative radius and arc, Yun reassures us that our logocentric humanism "marginalizes nature" until it becomes silent in modernity (Manes 16). Yun's apocalyptic narrative evinces that our environment is not "a mute object" but rather "the genuine agency at work," regardless of human intervention in nature (Manes 17; Mazel 139). It is not necessarily a dire ending because the narrator states that we humans, whether alive or dead, are "stories," "debris by the waves" from the natural environment (179, 184). [12]

Conclusion

In conclusion, although Han Kang and Yun Ko-eun offer contrasting representations of women and their struggles against environmental exploitation – as Han Kang presents a transformative

female character who rejects humanity and societal constraints, embodying ecofeminist ideals that connect women's bodies to the natural rhythms and freedom of the earth, while Yun Ko-eun, on the other hand, critiques corporate manipulation by intertwining the fates of women and nature, culminating in a natural disaster that exposes their shared vulnerability to commodification – it can be stated that both writers emphasize resistance to capitalist consumption – whether through an alignment with nature or by depicting a world in which even disasters are commodified. Nature emerges as more than a mere analogy for women; it becomes a refuge, a mirror that reflects women's unmediated essence, free from social, cultural, and economic domination.

This study contributes to the fields of ecofeminism and Korean literature by unpacking these nuanced intersections of gender, environment, and capitalism in the works of Han Kang and Yun Ko-eun, showing how their narratives challenge dominant paradigms of commodification and exploitation while proposing alternative perspectives rooted in ecological and feminist ethics. Although ecofeminist discourses in South Korea have recently reached a wider audience and gained more attention – also due to feminist consciousness following the unrelenting wave provoked by political and cultural systemic oppressions – and have yet to reach the state of an established academic field, this study can provide innovative results and lead to the purpose of expanding ecofeminist theoretical frameworks in contemporary Korean culture through the lens of women's literature.

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EXPLORING WESTERN PERCEPTION ON KOREAN CULTURAL HERITAGE: A CASE STUDY OF THE "ARI-ARIRANG. KOREA - FASCINATION HERMIT KINGDOM" EXHIBITION AT THE HUMBOLDT FORUM

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Abstract

Due to the exchange with Korea from the late 19th to the early 20th century, Germany has significant collections of Korean artefacts. The "Ari-Arirang. Korea - Fascination Hermit Kingdom" exhibition offers valuable insights into Korean society and culture in the late 19th century through the display of the Korean collection. Through this exhibition, the study can gain a new perspective on how the West perceives and interprets Korean culture.

In this case study, it explores how the curatorial decisions and presentation of the exhibition may influence Western perceptions of Korean culture. It examines the factors that shape these perceptions, including the historical context, the selection of artefacts, and the educational programmes.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the global visibility of Korean cultural heritage and the challenges and opportunities associated with its presentation in Western institutions. It also highlights the need for interdisciplinary research to promote a more nuanced and inclusive appreciation of Korean culture beyond the generalised label of "East Asia."

Keywords: Cultural exchange, Global cultural narratives, Humboldt Forum, Korean collection, Korean cultural heritage, Western perception.

La Germania possiede importanti collezioni di manufatti coreani grazie agli scambi avvenuti con la Corea tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo. La mostra *Ari-Arirang. Korea – Fascination Hermit Kingdom* offre spunti preziosi sulla società e sulla cultura coreana della fine del XIX secolo attraverso l'esposizione della collezione coreana presente nelle collezioni tedesche. Questa esposizione consente di acquisire una nuova prospettiva su come l'Occidente percepisce e interpreta la cultura coreana, grazie all'analisi della mostra e alle scelte curatoriali adottate lo studio permette inoltre di capire le possibilità, insite in questa tipologia di eventi, di influenzare la percezione occidentale della cultura coreana. Lo studio di

fattori come il contesto storico, la selezione degli oggetti e la programmazione educational proposta dalle istituzioni tedesche permette inoltre di esaminare i fattori che plasmano tali percezioni.

Lo studio contribuisce a una comprensione più approfondita della visibilità globale del patrimonio culturale coreano e delle sfide e opportunità legate alla sua presentazione all'interno delle istituzioni occidentali. Inoltre, sottolinea la necessità di una ricerca interdisciplinare per promuovere una comprensione più sfumata e inclusiva della cultura coreana, oltre l'etichetta generalizzante di "Asia orientale"

Parole chiave: Scambio culturale, Narrazioni culturali globali, Humboldt Forum, Collezione coreana, Patrimonio culturale coreano, Percezione occidentale, Orientalismo

Introduction

Germany has the largest number of Korean cultural artefacts after Japan and the United States. According to the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation, 24 public institutions, including museums and libraries, and three private collectors in Germany owned more than 15,000 items recorded as of January 2025. The Ethnological Museum Berlin, in particular, houses over 1,400 artefacts. This makes Germany the European country with the most extensive collection of Korean cultural heritage.

In most Western countries, including Germany, there is still little understanding of Korean traditions and cultural heritage. This is partly because Korean heritage is often subsumed under the broad category of "East Asian heritage" [1], which can lead to Korean culture being underrepresented in broader cultural institutions. This underrepresentation was also evident in the initial setup of the Humboldt Forum, which was opened to the public in 2021. The Humboldt Forum manages two Korean collections from the Ethnological Museum Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin. As a centre for cultural exchange and historical reflection, the Humboldt Forum plays an important role in making these artefacts accessible to the public and promoting a deeper understanding of Korea's historical heritage in a global context.

However, despite its aim to facilitate cultural dialogue, the Humboldt Forum initially faced considerable criticism from the

Korean media regarding its handling of the Korean pavilion and cultural heritage [2, 3, 4]. At the opening of the Humboldt Forum in 2021, the Korean pavilion was notably smaller than other East Asian sections, such as those dedicated to Chinese or Japanese artefacts. This limited space, approximately 60m²—only one-tenth the size of the Chinese and Japanese sections—was understandable, as the limited number of artefacts influenced the size of the exhibition space, reflecting the significantly smaller collection of Korean artefacts—around 160 items—compared to over 6,000 items for China and Japan. The Humboldt Forum also addressed this by integrating contemporary art with historical artefacts, aiming to create a narrative that harmoniously blended tradition and modernity [5]. This approach held great potential, as it could provide visitors with a fresh perspective by presenting heritage in a dynamic and innovative manner.

Despite this promising direction, the execution fell short. According to the exhibition design proposal of the Humboldt Forum [5], while the designs for contemporary art and architecture were explicitly outlined for the Chinese and Japanese sections, there was no mention of such plans for the Korean pavilion. This omission is particularly regrettable given the forum's stated commitment to fostering intercultural dialogue.

The Korean pavilion, as unveiled in 2021, featured two guardian statues inscribed with Hangul, lighting installations, calligraphy pieces, and ceramics, combined with contemporary works of art. However, the artefacts were displayed with minimal contextual information, lacking the depth necessary to convey their unique cultural and historical significance. As a result, the exhibition struggled to accurately represent the richness of Korean culture and failed to engage visitors in a meaningful and impactful way.

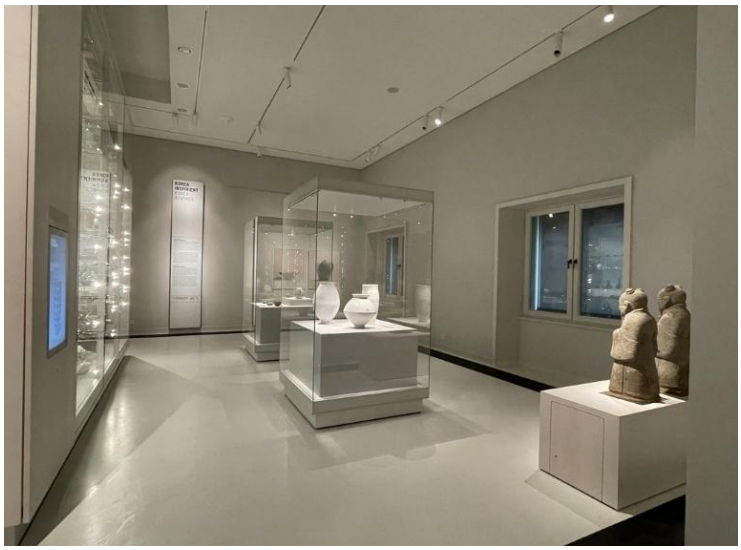

Figure 1. Korean Pavilion at the Humboldt Forum (2021), © yna.co.kr, 2021.

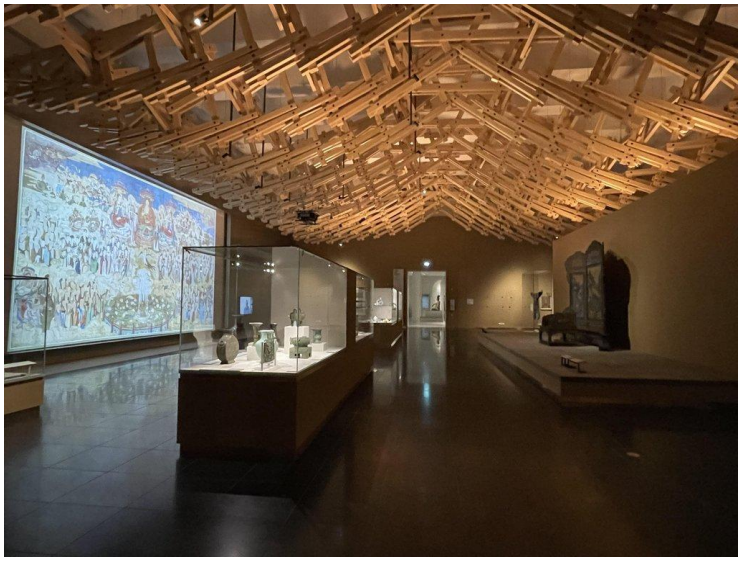

Figure 2. The Wang Shu Room in Chinese Pavilion at the Humboldt Forum (2021), © yna.co.kr, 2021.

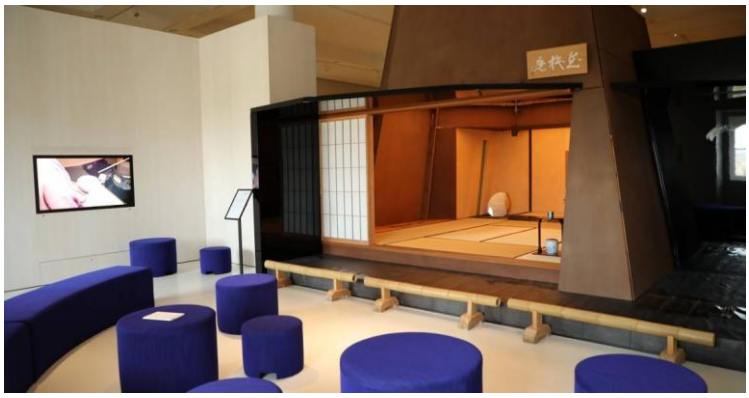

Figure 3. Tea house in Japanese Pavilion at the Humboldt Forum (2021), © Japandigest / Photo: Nakamura Masato, 2021.

In response to the initial criticisms, a new curatorial position was created at the Humboldt Forum in 2022 to manage the Korean collections of the Ethnological Museum Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin. This is part of a joint project between the Prussian Foundation and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea to further promote Korean art and culture in Berlin [6].

Subsequently, the Humboldt Forum has taken several measures to enhance the representation of Korean cultural heritage. The Humboldt Forum has collaborated with Korean cultural experts and its partners, the National Museum of Korea and the Korean Cultural Center in Berlin, resulting in the creation of the "Ari-Arirang. Korea - Fascination Hermit Kingdom" exhibition (hereafter referred to as "Ari-Arirang"). This included providing more detailed contextual information on each artefact through an in-depth study of the Korean collection of the Ethnological Museum Berlin [7]. The introduction of this exhibition on Korean culture aims to provide richer and more nuanced narratives that give visitors deeper insights into the significance and historical context of Korean artefacts. Educational programmes have also been developed to engage the public more effectively and promote a greater appreciation of Korean heritage.

This study examines how the curatorial approaches of the Humboldt Forum can increase the public's awareness and comprehension of Korean

culture by analysing curatorial decisions and educational programmes. This study evaluates representative strategies for presenting Korean and other non-Western cultures in the West to offer valuable insights into effective practices while fostering a nuanced interest in Korean culture and history. At the same time, the intentions behind these strategies and their wider implications are critically examined to ensure a balanced perspective that avoids uncritical adoption of specific interests.

Historical Context of Korea - Germany Relations

Korea, Japan and China have historically maintained relations with the outside world at different times and in different ways. Japan and China opened their doors to Western powers earlier under pressure [8]. Japan signed the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854 after Commodore Perry's fleet arrived in Edo Bay in 1853. China, on the other hand, was forced to open its doors by the Western powers through the Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860). Korea, however, maintained an isolationist policy, limiting interactions with foreign countries. Joseon's isolationist policy was affected not only by reasons for protecting its sovereignty and culture but also by the delicate balance of power in the East Asian region at the time. In particular, the Treaty of Giyu (1609), a diplomatic agreement between Joseon and Japan signed after the Imjin War (1592-1598), played an important role in restricting Joseon's direct contact with foreign countries by placing it under Japanese jurisdiction. As a supporting example, Gary Ledyard's *Dutch Come to Korea* [9] records the detention of Dutch sailors in Joseon during the Joseon Dynasty and refers to the trade agreement with Japan as one of the reasons why contact with foreigners was prohibited. These records show that Joseon maintained its isolationist policies because of its complex international considerations beyond just cultural protection. This led to its nickname, the “Hermit Kingdom” [10]. Korea's selective contacts with China, Japan, and other countries have shaped its unique cultural identity, which has continuously evolved while maintaining core elements throughout its turbulent history. Although the term “Hermit Kingdom” might imply a completely closed society, Korea's isolationism was not absolute [8, 10].

Formal relations between the Republic of Korea and the Federal Republic of Germany began in the 1950s, with consular relations

being established in 1954 and diplomatic relations in 1957. However, the roots of this relationship go much farther back to 1883 [11]. The background of Korea-Germany relations during Korea's period as the "Hermit Kingdom" is closely tied to the international situation of the late 19th century. As the Western powers expanded their influence in Asia, Korea became one of their targets, and against this backdrop, Korea established diplomatic relations with Germany [12].

Lee and Mosler [13] trace the roots of Korea-Germany relations back to 1883, when the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation was signed. This treaty, the third Korea signed with a Western nation, established formal diplomatic relations and guaranteed freedom of trade and navigation [13]. The treaty strengthened economic and cultural ties between Korea and Germany, offering Germany new economic opportunities in Korea and securing a new partner for Korea in its dealings with Western powers [13].

The historical context of Korean artefact collections in German institutions is deeply tied to the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation in 1883. Cultural exchange between Korea and Germany became active, leading to artefact collections by German scholars, collectors, and diplomats [11]. These artefacts, including Joseon Dynasty clothing, jewellery, documents, calligraphy, paintings, and Buddhist art, were collected as part of diplomatic relations and cultural exchange and are important materials that show Korea's traditional culture and aesthetic sensibilities [11].

The Korean collections are on permanent display in some German museums, including the Humboldt Forum, the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne, and the Grassi Museum for Ethnology in Leipzig. Research reports have been published, and conservation works have been carried out with the support of the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in Korea. However, many artefacts remain understudied and undervalued, stored without much attention.

Despite the global spread of the Korean wave (Hallyu), many Westerners remain unfamiliar with Korean culture, and their understanding is limited, often focusing on modern popular culture. While Hallyu is popular, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of Korea's traditional culture and historical heritage.

To explore the challenges surrounding the limited understanding of Korean culture among Westerners, research and education are needed to bridge the gap between traditional and modern Korean culture. In this context, exhibitions such as the Humboldt Forum's "Ari-Arirang" play a significant role by not only showcasing the history of the Korean collection but also serving as educational platforms. Through detailed curation and public programmes, the exhibition highlights contemporary artworks that emphasise cultural exchange between tradition and modernity, as well as between Korea and Germany, fostering a deeper appreciation of Korean cultural heritage.

This study focuses on the Humboldt Forum's approach to contextualising Korean culture and presenting it appropriately to Western audiences. It highlights the importance of bridging the gap in Western perceptions of Korea's rich and diverse cultural heritage. The findings will provide valuable insights into how international museums and cultural institutions can present their foreign ethnographic collections and artefacts, including those representing Korean culture, more accurately and effectively.

Study Approach

This study uses a qualitative research framework to explore the representation and perception of Korean cultural heritage in Germany, focusing on the "Ari-Arirang" at the Humboldt Forum. As a case study, it examines Western perceptions of Korean culture by analysing curatorial strategies, audience engagement and interpretation, and the challenges and opportunities associated with presenting Korean cultural heritage. The study integrates content analysis, semi-structured interviews and observational research to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Korean cultural heritage is presented and received.

The data focuses on the collection as a whole and its curation, including a review of records and documents related to its provenance. Interviews with the exhibition curator examined specific curatorial decisions, such as the selection and arrangement of artefacts, as well as insights into Western audiences' reactions to the display and programmes. Relevant documents, including curatorial

notes and exhibition leaflets, were also reviewed to understand the official narrative and the intended messages behind the Ari-Arirang exhibition. This data was analysed to explore themes such as cultural expression, audience perception, and educational impact.

By integrating qualitative methods, the study captures the complexity of cultural representation and audience engagement, offering insights into the effectiveness of curatorial strategies for promoting cross-cultural appreciation and education. The findings will contribute to a broader discussion on the role of exhibitions in shaping cultural narratives and enhancing global understanding of non-Western heritage.

Case Study: The "Ari-Arirang. Korea - Fascination Hermit Kingdom" exhibition

The exhibition "Ari-Arirang. Korea - Fascination Hermit Kingdom", presented at the Humboldt Forum from 13 October 2023 to 15 July 2024, showcased previously unpublished Korean artefacts. The exhibition marks the first time these artefacts from the Ethnology Museum Berlin have been publicly showcased. It highlights Germany's historical interest in Korea, which dates back to the 1870s [14].

The title "Ari-Arirang" refers to the Korean folk song *Arirang*, registered by UNESCO Memory of the World in 2012. It is a symbol of Korean culture, passed down through generations, representing unity, national identity, and collective emotions [15]. During the exhibition, a recording of *Arirang* was played, sung by second-generation Koreans held as Russian prisoners of war in a Prussian camp during the First World War. Preserved in the Laut Archive at Humboldt University in Berlin, this audio provided visitors with an immersive cultural experience, connecting the song's historical significance to its enduring role as a symbol of Korean identity and resilience.

The exhibition reflects late 19th-century Korean Neo-Confucian society through curated artefacts, such as portraits and traditional hats that symbolised social class and Confucian ideals. Most of these objects were peacefully acquired by diplomats, merchants, and missionaries from the late 19th century to the 1930s, offering valuable insights into the daily life and culture of that period. [16].

Masks from various regions of Korea, traditionally used for satire and rituals, offer a broader understanding of Korean identity and self-expression, highlighting the artistry and cultural values of Korea within its historical context. The exhibition also explores the influence of cultural heritage on contemporary artists, featuring works by Western designer Fiona Bennett and contemporary Korean artists Pai Unsong and Yerin Hong. Fiona Bennett's modern reinterpretation of traditional Korean hats connects historical traditions with global modern perspectives while showcasing the evolution of Korean heritage. Meanwhile, Pai Unsong and Yerin Hong delve into themes of identity, history, and globalisation, expanding the narrative to illustrate the interaction between Korean and Western culture.

By juxtaposing traditional and contemporary elements, the exhibition creates a platform for discussing how to preserve and reinterpret traditional heritage in modern contexts, maintaining cultural continuity while embracing innovation.

The exhibition was enriched by accompanying programmes including guided tours, artist talks, a concert, and a lecture designed to engage the public and promote a deeper understanding of Korean cultural heritage and its influence on contemporary art and society [14, 16]. Through this multi-layered approach, "Ari-Arirang" not only illuminates Korea's past but also explores its ongoing cultural resonance.

The focus on *Arirang* demonstrates the importance of intangible cultural heritage in shaping global awareness of Korea. By making these artefacts and cultural symbols accessible to Western audiences, the exhibition introduces facets of Korean culture that have not yet gained mainstream recognition and encourages reflection on how this heritage is understood, valued, and represented in Western cultural institutions.

The exhibition is significant as it provides a comprehensive platform to explore Western perspectives on Korean cultural heritage, encompassing historical interest, cultural representation, modern reinterpretation, and cultural interaction. The exhibition shows how Western institutions actively participate in and contribute to the global narrative about Korean culture.

Figure 4 (Left) The "Ari-Arirang" exhibition view, © FNW / Photo: Dorothée Thomas.

Figure 5 (Right) 'Talking Hats' programme with Fiona Bennett and curator of the exhibition "Ari-Arirang" at the Humboldt Forum, © FNW / Photo: Dorothée Thomas.

Discussion

The "Ari-Arirang" exhibition offers a unique insight into the rich history and culture of late 19th-century Korea. This exhibition provides a comprehensive understanding of the society and culture at the time by showcasing a vast collection of Korean artefacts. One of the highlights of the exhibition is the collaboration with Western designer Fiona Bennett. The hats on display, once symbols of social status in the Joseon Dynasty, have been reimagined as modern pieces, demonstrating the harmonious meeting of Eastern and Western traditions. This innovative approach has resonated well with visitors, sparking interest and appreciation for Korean culture. In addition to its cultural significance, the exhibition also offers valuable educational opportunities. Various educational programmes have been designed to enhance visitor understanding and encourage participation. These programmes have contributed to the exhibition's success in attracting Western audiences and opening new perspectives on Korean culture.

While the exhibition has been praised for its innovative approach and cultural insights, some critics have raised concerns about the Western-centric explanations and interpretations. In particular, the key words written in Korean and Chinese characters in the German and English descriptions may lead to cultural misunderstandings, especially when Korean words are not translated but transcribed directly using their English pronunciation. Moreover, the occasional inclusion of Chinese characters alongside Korean terms could further complicate understanding for non-Korean audiences. This could lead to confusion between Korean and Chinese culture or give the false impression that Korean culture was absorbed into Chinese culture. To address this, further collaboration with Korean cultural experts could enhance the accuracy and nuance of the explanations, building on the advice and input already provided by Korean institutions.

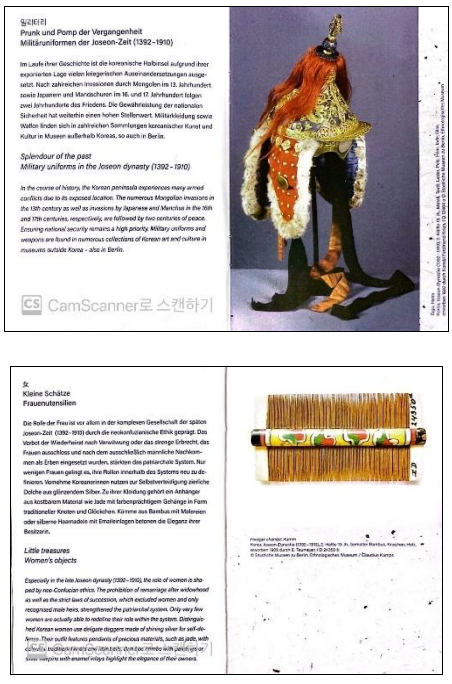

Figure 6. Examples from the exhibition leaflet showing Korean words written in English transliteration '밀리터리' (left) alongside a Chinese character '女' (right), © Staatliche Museum zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, 2022.

Overall, the exhibition has successfully showcased the various aspects of Korean cultural heritage and demonstrated its potential for the ongoing transformation and growth of Korean culture. By fostering a harmonious encounter between tradition and modernity, East and West, the exhibition has the potential to engage Western audiences and encourage a deeper exploration of Korean cultural heritage. Future exhibitions should strive for interdisciplinary research and expert consultation to convey the multifaceted nature of Korean culture in a way that balances its historical and contemporary complexity while remaining contextually nuanced and accessible to diverse audiences

Conclusion

This study examined the "Ari-Arirang. Korea - Fascination Hermit Kingdom" exhibition at the Humboldt Forum to explore how Korean cultural heritage is presented and perceived in a Western context. The exhibition introduced Korean cultural heritage through interactive and educational programmes, promoting intercultural understanding. However, the display also showed some limitations influenced by Western perspectives, such as using Romanised Korean words or Chinese characters for key terms, even when Korean words are available. While this might have been intended to make the exhibit easier to understand for Western visitors, it ended up overshadowing the Korean language and distorting its cultural meaning. This reflects a Western tendency to focus more on external visual or phonetic appeal rather than preserving the original language and context.

Key factors influencing this exhibition's success include the collaboration with Korean cultural experts and institutions, which provided crucial cultural and historical insights. This partnership ensured that the artefacts were presented with authentic narratives and meaningful educational programmes, allowing visitors to engage more deeply with the significance of Korean heritage. The exhibition also stood out for its ability to blend tradition with modernity and bridge East and West, showcasing not only the richness of Korean culture but also its evolution and potential for growth. This approach demonstrated how cultural heritage can remain deeply rooted in history while continuing to

adapt, innovate, and resonate with contemporary audiences, making it both engaging and forward-looking.

Based on this study, future exhibitions can improve the representation of ethnographical collections by prioritising collaboration with originating cultures and ensuring that narratives are inclusive and balanced. Emphasising cultural nuance while avoiding oversimplification will foster greater mutual understanding and appreciation between cultures, making ethnographical exhibitions more meaningful and impactful in a global context.

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EMERGING FEMALE ROLES IN SOUTH KOREAN CINEMA DURING THE 1990S: FOCUSING ON FEMALE PRODUCERS AND SCHOLARS

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of women's roles in South Korean cinema, focusing on relatively less publicly visible sectors such as production and academia. Adopting a historical, gendered and institutional approach, it highlights a pivotal shift that preceded the South Korean Film Renaissance starting in the mid-1990s. This transition led to greater recognition of women's contributions, especially in specialized production, marketing, and historiography, whereas until the mid-1980s, women were both underrepresented and largely invisible in the industry's recorded history. First, the study aims to reveal the main factors of this shift, which led to the influx of educated women into the field of cinema, focusing on the 1985 fifth amendment to the Film Law and the new wave of young, highly educated professionals entering the field. Secondly, it examines how the presence of female producers affected cinematographic representation. More importantly and inspired by the question of gender in writing history, it also shows that female scholars contributed to establishing the history of women in South Korean cinema

Keywords: women, South Korean film industry, Korean Film Renaissance, producers, scholars.

Questo studio analizza l'evoluzione dei ruoli femminili nel cinema sudcoreano, concentrandosi su settori relativamente meno visibili al pubblico, come la produzione e l'ambito accademico. Adottando un approccio storico, di genere e istituzionale, mette in evidenza un cambiamento cruciale che ha preceduto la *Korean Film Renaissance*, avviatasi a metà degli anni '90. Questa transizione ha portato a un maggiore riconoscimento del contributo delle donne, in particolare nei settori specialistici della produzione, del marketing e della storiografia, laddove fino alla metà degli anni '80 le donne erano sottorappresentate e ampiamente invisibili nella storia documentata dell'industria cinematografica.

Il primo obiettivo dello studio è individuare i principali fattori di questo cambiamento, che ha favorito l'ingresso di donne istruite nel

settore cinematografico, soffermandosi in particolare sul quinto emendamento del 1985 alla Legge sul Cinema e sull'emergere di una nuova generazione di professionisti altamente qualificati. In secondo luogo, si analizza come la presenza di produttrici abbia influenzato la rappresentazione cinematografica. Più in generale, ispirandosi alla riflessione sul genere nella scrittura della storia, lo studio mostra anche come le studiose abbiano contribuito a costruire una storiografia delle donne nel cinema sudcoreano.

Parole chiave: donne, industria cinematografica sudcoreana, Korean Film Renaissance, produttrici, studiose, cinema

Introduction

The first known film in the world was released in France in 1895 by the *Lumière* brothers. Just a year later, in 1896, Alice Guy (1873-1968) became the world's first female director with her film *La Fée aux choux*, now recognized as the first narrative film in cinema history. Korean cinema dates back to 1919, but it wasn't until 1955 that Korea's first female director, Park Nam-ok (1923-2017), made her debut with the film *The Widow* (*Mimangin*). Korea lagged 20 years behind its neighbouring country, Japan, in producing women directors, for instance. Given Korea's colonial history and the Korean war, the emergence of a female director so soon after the conflict is particularly notable. However, from 1955 until the mid-1990s, only five female directors surfaced indicating that this lag was not easily overcome. Aside from actresses, women were almost invisible in the South Korean film industry as in other countries. Yet it's in the 1990s that a groundbreaking change in women's activities and status is observed, ending this long period of neglect. However, although many cinematographic studies have explored this period as a pivotal turning point in South Korean cinema, few have analysed women's activities within this context.

This paper, therefore, first examines women in cinema, approaching cinema primarily through the lens of industry and institution, rather than as an art form or medium. It focuses particularly on women working in production and academia during this transition of the 1990s, as mentioned above, therefore from a gendered perspective. It will explore how this phenomenon was

possible, in contrast to the earlier years, and how it has affected the writing of women's history in cinema.

The paper is structured in three sections, following a chronological framework and drawing primarily on cinema magazines and interviews among other sources. The first section briefly covers the early years up until just before the 1985 revision of the Film Law, to show the historical underrepresentation of women. The second section spans from the late 1980s to the early 2000s focusing on their increasing presence in emerging fields, such as specialized production and marketing. The third section addresses female contributors to the writing of the history of women in cinema during the same period.

Women Behind the Camera Before the mid-1980s

According to the *Dictionary of Women in Film*, published in 2000, a few female professionals[1] were active during the 1950s. That doesn't mean that the film industry was favourable to women. In 1961, data showed that out of 11,356 people in the industry, only 1,234 – approximately one-tenth – were women, while women represented for one-third in the entire labour market [1]. Even in fields where a higher presence of female professionals might be expected, such as costume design, women accounted for only a quarter of the workforce. Surprisingly, the role of the script clerk[2] stood out with 57 out of 63 workers being women in this data, indicating that it was one of the rare feminine-gendered professions. As mentioned in the March 1982 issue of the institutional magazine *Monthly Movie* (*Wŏlgan Yŏnghwa*) [2], published by the former Korean Film Council, the widespread use of terms like "*Sŭk'ŭripkŏl*[3]" or "*Sŭk'ŭript'ŏgŏl*[4]," underscores this gendered aspect of the role. A scripty's job involved meticulous notetaking on set to ensure

[1] Script supervisors, producers, costume designers, cinematographers, editors, projectionists, directors, assistant directors, screenwriters, and theater owners.

[2] Today, the term "script supervisor" is the most commonly and formally used. However, in this historical context, the term "script clerk" seems more appropriate for conveying the role's status and perception at the time.

[3] Is supposed to originate from "script girl"

[4] Is supposed to originate from "scripter girl"

continuity during both filming and editing, as well as coordinating with nearly every department. Although there were a few film schools at the time, producing trained film workers was an entirely different matter. In *Chungmuro*[5], it was customary to start on set as assistant directors, gradually gaining experience before advancing to directional roles or, in the case of women, as script girls. However, until the 1980s, Hong Eun-won (1922-1999), the second female director, was the only woman who managed to transition from script girl to director in a conventional way. The other three female directors had the means to produce their own films. This suggests that many women working as script girls were rarely given the opportunity to advance through traditional pathways. Instead, they were likely hired more as meticulous assistants or secretaries—a feminine-gendered role in contrast to the masculine-gendered role of director— rather than as future directors. For example, Park Nam-ok who also worked as a script girl and assistant director, had to borrow money from her sister to make her film, eventually establishing her own production company. Anecdotes from Park's autobiography [3] such as directing with her child strapped to her back, cooking for the crew herself, and being told at the recording studio, "We can't start the year by recording a woman's work on 16mm", provide a glimpse into the difficulties women faced in the film industry at that time. These challenges included balancing a professional career with family obligations and confronting stereotypical prejudices against women.

[5] A metonymic expression for the South Korean film industry like Hollywood in the USA.

Figure 1. Park Nam-ok with her daughter strapped to her back ©KOFA (Although she mentioned in her autobiography working on set with her baby on her back, this photo wasn't taken on set).

As South Korean cinema entered the 1960s, it experienced a golden age. During this period, women began to slowly break into various male-dominated fields, such as cinematography, editing, projection, and assistant directing. However, starting in the late 1960s, Korean cinema entered a dark period due to a combination of factors: the rise of television, the concentration of productions in only about 20 companies, and increased censorship. This period was also bleak for women in the film industry, as it reduced opportunities for them and led to the disappearance of roles like script girls. Only a handful of female filmmakers emerged, including producer Kim Hwa-sik (1922-), experimental film artist Han Ok-hee (1948-), and director Hwang Hae-mi (1936-). It wasn't until 1984 that the fifth female director, Lee Mi-rye (1957), made her debut.

Emergence of Women in Film Production in the 1990s

However, surprisingly enough, films that marked the Korean Film Renaissance that goes from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, were often driven by the work of female professionals, taking on newly emerging roles such as producers and publicists. This starkly contrasts with the previous situation and represents a significant shift in the South Korean film industry. What led to this sudden surge of activity among women in film? To understand this phenomenon, it is important to consider the decade before.

With the end of the Yushin regime in 1979 and the onset of the Fifth Republic, significant legal changes were initiated in the film industry. The fifth amendment to the Film Law, implemented in 1985, transformed the film production business from a licensing system to a registration system, relaxed production conditions, separated production and importation, and opened up new possibilities for independent film production. While these changes made the industry more accessible to production, and by 1987, 83 production companies had registered, this did not immediately result in a surge in Korean film production, as many of these companies were primarily focused on importing foreign films. Yet, the industry was brimming with anticipation.

In parallel, there was a spectacular influx of women university graduates into the job market. This trend was also seen among men, as university enrolment had increased by more than 30% annually since 1979 for both women and men [4]. By the mid-1980s, these graduates began entering the workforce, with women replacing less-educated women in fields like publishing, marketing, and film planning departments. Figures such as Chae Yoon-hee of *Samho Film* and Shim Jae-myung of *Seoul Theater* rapidly distinguished themselves in the film industry from the late 1980s onward [5].

It is important to note that during this period, a generational shift also occurred in *Chungmuro*. This shift was first palpable in the production field rather than in directing. The younger generation easily entered a more liberated production environment, introducing new strategies. Their methods differed from the traditional director-centred approach, which often lacked clear planning and relied on a hit-or-miss strategy, with producers primarily serving as financial backers.

Shin Cine serves as a key example, as it played a pivotal role in the significant developments of this period. *Shin Cine,* founded by the new generation, transformed the film planning department into a more specialized and distinct field – also an alternative approach necessitated by limited financial resources. Their first film released in 1988, *Happiness Does Not Come in Grades* (*Haengbokŭn Sŏngjŏksuni Anijanayo*), achieved great success by using a data-driven and well-researched plan without substantial capital. After this success, *Shin Cine* finally transitioned into a full-fledged production company and marked a watershed moment in *Chungmuro*'s production landscape with the film *Marriage Story* in 1992. This film was significant as it introduced and formally recognized the role of a line producer[6] in the Korean film industry – a specialized position filled by Oh Jeong-wan, the wife of Shin Cheol, one of the company's two leaders. Oh Jeong-wan, who had been with him in the company from the beginning and came from a marketing background, played a pivotal role by actively integrating a marketing perspective into the film production process.

Another noteworthy aspect is the nearly equal gender composition within *Shin Cine* [6]. The company demonstrated a noticeable openness and less hesitation in fostering collaboration between the new generation of men and women. All employees participated equally in meetings and learned on the job. Shim Jae-myung, who was in charge of promoting *Marriage Story* as a freelancer then, discovered this innovative system during her time there [7]. Soon, women who had worked at or collaborated with *Shin Cine,* or had gained experience elsewhere began to establish themselves independently or solidify their positions. Shim Jae-myung founded *Myung Planning* in 1992, and later *Myung Films* in 1995, producing notable films like *The Contact, Joint Security Area,* and *Forever the Moment.* Chae Yoon-hee of *Samho Film* founded *All That Cinema* in 1995, Korea's first film publicity company, and achieved rapid growth by successfully promoting Korea's first blockbuster, *Shiri.* Oh Jeong-wan from *Shin Cine* established the film production company *Bom* in 1999, producing films like *An Affair, The Foul King,* and *A Bittersweet Life.* Line producers such as Kim Seonah and

[6] One of more subdivided roles in production, responsible for the day-to-day management of the budget and logistics.

Kim Moo-ryung from *Shin Cine* also undertook significant film projects, to name but a few. The increased activity of women in the industry, spearheaded by these pioneering figures, marked the beginning of a new era for female professionals.

This evolution made South Korean cinema even more intriguing, particularly enhancing and diversifying female representations and increasing diversity, in ways that were distinctly different from the films of the previous generation. For example, the script for *Marriage Story*, a film about a newlywed couple, went through more than 20 revisions during meetings that included all personnel [8]. This collaborative process likely incorporated the perspectives of the female staff and contributed to the portrayal of a new image of women, in this case, successful working women. It should be noted that these on-screen changes due to the increased presence of women in the production environment, became a defining characteristic distinguishing the Korean Film Renaissance from the earlier period.

Women in Cinema Academia and the Historiography of Women in Film

The influx of women into the job market from the mid-1980s onward was also mirrored in the publishing world. By this time, women made up more than half of the workforce at *Screen* and *Roadshow*, the two leading film magazines created in the 1980s. Additionally, women such as Joo Jin-sook (1953-), Han Ok-hee, Kim So-young (1961-), and Yoo Ji-na (1960-), who had studied film abroad after their studies in South Korea, began returning in the early 1990s. They entered the fields of criticism and academia, alongside female film journalists like Kim Hong-sook, who was the editor-in-chief of Screen magazine.

Fundamentally, women have often been excluded from historical narratives due to the socially prescribed roles that confined them to the domestic sphere. Even when they made significant contributions, these were frequently minimized or erased from the record. In this context, the researcher couple Lang [9], in 1990, questioned why renowned 18th-century American and British women engravers had been disappeared in art history. It was reasonable for them to examine these artists' lack of awareness about record-keeping, among other factors. Yet, in the context of the Korean film industry, where most films had

been stored in film laboratories, internal factors – those stemming from women themselves – are less likely to have played an important role. Instead, it seems more relevant to consider that women's works were automatically neglected, along with the fact that the general awareness of the need for archiving was almost absent from the broader context of Korean film history [10]. Until the mid-1990s, it was believed that only one film directed by a female director remained from the first four female directors.

Moreover, the issue of who writes history cannot be overlooked. Historically, the recording and preservation of history have predominantly been carried out by men, who traditionally had greater access to educational opportunities.". This considerable gender imbalance inevitably led to the underrepresentation of women in historical narratives due to gendered homophily [11], compounded by the prevailing social contexts. Thus, it can be anticipated that this situation would evolve as more highly educated women entered academia. This shift became evident in South Korean cinema. Female film scholars, emerging in the late 1980s, were the first to introduce Western feminist film theory and gendered criticism into the discourse. By the mid-1990s, efforts were underway to uncover and document the history of Korean women film professionals. For instance, the first public screening of Park Nam-ok's *The Widow* (*Mimangin*) – the first film directed by a woman – took place at the opening ceremony of the inaugural Seoul International Women's Film Festival in 1998. Subsequently, the film *The Girl Raised as a Future Daughter-in-law* (*Minmyŏnŭ-ri*), directed by Choi Eun-hee (1926-2018) – the third female director and a famous actress – was discovered and screened at the Women in Film Festival in 2000, through the efforts of the collective Women in Film Korea. Female film scholars such as Kim So-young and Lee Soon-jin (1968-), who contributed to these events, were instrumental in bringing these films that had been lying dormant in the Korean Film Archive, back into the public eye.

In particular, scholarly members of Women in Film Korea, an association established in 2000, took on the task of developing a comprehensive white paper on female film professionals – a project initially planned by the Seoul International Women's Film Festival [12]. This effort is transformed and culminated in the publication of

the *Dictionary of Women in Film* in 2001, encompassing 250 women film professionals from the 1950s to the 1990s. Despite limited archival resources, this ambitious project involved not only female film researchers such as Joo Jin-sook, Lee Soon-jin and Byun Jae-ran (1961-) but also male researchers and students from Chung-Ang University's Graduate School of Advanced Imaging Science, Multimedia & Film. In its early years, Women in Film Korea focused on activities centred around an awareness of women's history. Its initiatives included publishing the *Women in Film White Paper*, releasing books in English that introduced Korean female directors and their works, and producing documentaries, among others. This process of uncovering the history of female film professionals would not have been possible without the dedication of these female film scholars, which brings us back to the earlier mention of homophily.

Conclusion

Until the mid-1980s, women in the South Korean film industry were not only numerically few but also largely erased from its history. However, the role of women in the South Korean Film Renaissance starting in the mid-1990s reached a level that could no longer be overlooked compared to the past. This phenomenon was initiated by the influx of young, highly educated individuals, who entered the industry after the liberalization of film production, brought about by the fifth amendment of the Film Law in 1985. This transition marked a break from the previous generation in *Chungmuro* and became a turning point, establishing a more specialized and transparent system. Crucially, this change no longer excluded women but actively included them and fostered collaboration with them. We've seen a noticeable emergence of this educated female workforce particularly in the fields of production and academia. This phenomenon has contributed not only to diversity in cinema, but also to documenting and writing the histories of women in film, which had largely been ignored by male historians.

In fact, during this period of generational change in *Chungmuro*, three female directors finally emerged in the late 1990s, signalling progress, though the pace of their emergence lagged behind that of the other professions mentioned above. This suggests that roles like

producing and researching are seen as more feminine gendered compared to directing. It is noteworthy that quiet a few female producers are married to male directors, which may reflect the persistence of distinct gendered roles within the film industry.

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List of films cited, in order of appearance in the paper:

Original title – Translated title (Director, Year)

La Fée aux choux - The Fairy of the Cabbages (Alice Guy, 1986)

미망인 - The Widow (Park Nam-ok, 1955)

행복은 성적순이 아니잖아요 - Happiness Does Not Come in Grades (Kang Woo-suk, 1988)

결혼 이야기 - Marriage Story (Kim Ui-seok, 1992)

접속 - The Contact (Chang Yoon-hyun, 1997)

공동경비구역 JSA - Joint Security Area (Park Chan-wook, 2000)

우리 생애 최고의 순간 - Forever the Moment (Yim Soon-rye, 2008)

쉬리 - Shiri (Kang Je-gyu, 1999)

정사 - An Affair (E J-yong, 1998)

반칙왕 - The Foul King (Kim Jee-woon, 2000)

달콤한 인생 - A Bittersweet Life (Kim Jee-woon, 2005)

민며느리 - The Girl Raised as a Future Daughter-in-law (Choi Eun-hee, 1965)

THE COMMONING OF URBAN SPACE AS A PRACTICE FOR COMMONS FORMATION: THE CASE OF GYEONGUISEON

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Abstract

The concept of commons, originally referred to shared natural resources managed collectively by a community, has evolved over time. In contemporary scholarship, in response to the argumentation envisioning the failure of commons caused by the utilitarianism of individuals that would lead to the exploitation of the resources, the *neo-institutionalist* paradigm sustained that the democratic management of common resources could be sustainable under specific circumstances. In the mid-1990s, the emergence of the *New Commons* paradigm expanded the debate on intangible resources and urban studies. Converging with critical urban theory in the criticism of current society, urban commons emerge as a potential response to privatization and space enclosure. The *Gyeonguiseon Commons* in Seoul exemplified an interesting case of social transformative use of urban space. Following the squatting of the Gyeonguiseon rail tracks, the square was used as a shelter for individuals displaced amid urbanization. This case helps illustrate the range of challenges that alternative social organizations face in urban settings. The work's first section, after a brief overview of the evolution of the commons debate, introduces the analytical frameworks adopted in this study. The second section presents the Gyeonguiseon case and, finally, the work provides insights concerning the challenges embedded in the management of the urban commons.

Keywords: Gyeonguiseon; right to the city; space commoning; spatial justice; urban commons.

Il concetto di *commons*, originariamente riferito alle risorse naturali condivise e gestite collettivamente da una comunità, si è evoluto nel tempo. Nella riflessione contemporanea, in risposta alle argomentazioni che prevedevano il fallimento dei *commons* a causa dell'utilitarismo individuale e del conseguente sfruttamento delle risorse, il paradigma neo-istituzionalista ha sostenuto che una gestione democratica delle risorse comuni potesse risultare sostenibile in determinate condizioni. A metà

degli anni Novanta, l'emergere del paradigma dei *New Commons* ha ampliato il dibattito includendo risorse immateriali e studi urbani. In convergenza con la teoria urbana critica nella sua analisi della società contemporanea, i *commons urbani* emergono come risposta potenziale alla privatizzazione e alla recinzione degli spazi. Il caso dei *Gyeonguiseon Commons* a Seul rappresenta un esempio significativo di uso trasformativo dello spazio urbano a fini sociali. In seguito all'occupazione delle rotaie ferroviarie del Gyeonguiseon, la piazza è stata utilizzata come rifugio per persone sfollate a causa dell'urbanizzazione. Questo caso consente di illustrare l'ampia gamma di sfide che le organizzazioni sociali alternative affrontano nei contesti urbani. La prima parte del lavoro, dopo una breve panoramica sull'evoluzione del dibattito sui *commons*, introduce i quadri analitici adottati nello studio. La seconda parte presenta il caso Gyeonguiseon e, infine, vengono fornite alcune riflessioni sulle difficoltà legate alla gestione dei *commons urbani*.

Parole chiave: Gyeonguiseon; diritto alla città; *space commoning*; giustizia spaziale; *commons* urbani

Introduction: The Evolution of the Commons Debate

In contemporary times, the debate around commons, understood in literature as the autonomous management of natural resources – e.g. land, pastures, fisheries, water flows – shared by a rural community for livelihood, was brought back to the attention of Western scholars in the late 1960s, with the publication of *Tragedy of the Commons* by Garrett Hardin (1968) [1]. His argument, based on the prisoners' dilemma and rational choice theory, posited that community members would adopt utilitarian attitudes to maximize individual profit, leading to the exploitation of resources and failure of the commons. According to Hardin, sustaining commons throughout time would require the intervention of public actors, such as the state, or private actors, such as the market. Elinor Ostrom challenged Hardin's hypothesis with *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* published in 1990 [2]. Her research, based on the study of rural communities spread worldwide, demonstrated that local self-management of shared resources could be sustainable over time if based on democratic decision-making and cooperative communication. Adopting an economic perspective, Ostrom defined the *Common Pool Resources*, featured by high

subtractability[1] and low excludability[2], as those resources suited to foster commons social systems. She observed that communities adhered to self-imposed rules - summarized in the eight principles[3] - to coordinate the collective action and overcome the challenges of *Common Pool Resources* management. With her studies, she emphasized the role of institutions in the governance of the commons, laying the foundations for the n*eo-institutionalist* paradigm, adopted by many scholars as the main theoretical reference.

From the mid-1990s onwards, the *New Commons* paradigm emerged within academic debate drawing on different epistemological traditions and theoretical frameworks. With the diffusion of personal computers and the invention of the Internet, the knowledge-as-a-commons movement emerged in opposition to forms of information enclosure. The concept of commons began to encompass intangible resources - such as knowledge, atmosphere, water, and friendship [3] – advocating a universalistic view that underscored the idea of resources belonging to everyone. With the new paradigm, particularly in urban studies, the commons are envisioned as a third way to the state-market property and a template for social transformation. On the one hand, moderate theoretical frameworks - such as *Neo-Institutionalism*, *liberal* and *reformist* traditions [4] - envision the co-existence of commons, market, and State. On the other hand, the *radical* perspective posits the comprehensive transformation of the existing social structure replaced by the commons-based system in the means of production, the cultural dimension, and the political structure [5].

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[1] The limited number of resources suffers the augmentation of users.

[2] The cost of excluding users is high, though not impossible.

[3] (1) Clear boundaries and membership: Resource boundaries and membership of resource-using communities must be clearly defined; (2) Congruent rules: The provision of resource use and provision must conform to local conditions; (3) Collective choice arrangements: User groups must be able to collectively select the rules or conditions required in a shared environment; (4) Monitoring: Users should properly monitor the rules they establish to ensure they are adequately observed; (5) Graduated sanctions: If users violate the rules, there must be sanctions corresponding to the degree of violation; (6) Conflict resolution mechanism: There should be a system for resolving conflicts that occur between internal users or between users and managers; (7) Recognized rights to organize: The right to autonomy must be recognized free of threats from authorities outside the community; and (8) Nested enterprises: All the above self-governing activities are organized in multiple layers that are consistent with each other.

This new paradigm marked the shift from the *neo-institutionalist* resource-oriented approach to the process-oriented perspective which emphasizes the social and conflictual dynamics underlying the formation of new commons [6] and the socio-relational value of the commons embedded within the social structure. So, regardless of the economic categorization, "the core of understanding of commons can be said to be the relationship between the relational nature of commons and commoning as a social practice that constitutes it" [7]. Commoning is understood as routinized actions of mutual aid, solidarity, and communication among peers striving to build a cooperative network of resource pooling, thereby fostering new forms of communal social life in a shared place [3; 8]. Thus, commoning "is less a noun than a verb" [9], and, from a critical point of view, it seeks to create commons social systems, often in opposition to state institutions and market forces [10], through innovative methods of organizing social life in everyday practices [11; 12].

The South Korean academy has followed the major trends of the international debate, reflecting the division between *Neo-Institutionalism* and the critical approaches. While the former constitutes the major reference for commons studies, the latter is particularly adopted by sociologists, researchers of public administration, and law scholars affiliated with leftist and anti-global social activism. The debate showed a significant surge around 2010, right after the global financial crisis in 2008 and, previously, the East Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, breeding the ground for the anti-capitalistic frame [13]. Furthermore, the South Korean debate followed the evolution of global commons movements. The first stage, which began in the early 1990s, focused on preventing the exploitation of commons - particularly the land - by state or market forces. The second stage, where the South Korean debate is ascribed to, is featured by the struggles and demands for alternative social systems and different solutions to social issues. The third stage is focused on the regional coordination of various commons struggles. This stage is characterized by a growing internationalization of the debate and planning the cooperation between commons, inviting a global perspective on this phenomenon [14].

The Urban Context: Critical Theory and New Commons

Critical urban theory is "grounded on an antagonistic relationship not only to inherited urban knowledge, but more generally, to existing urban formations" [15]. Contemporary cities, rather than being understood through "transhistorical laws of social organization" [15], are analyzed through relations of power. This theoretical tradition starts from the critique of the current social reality and neoliberal institutions that maintain and reproduce the prevailing urban structure. Instead, it provides a theoretical foundation for the intervention in urbanization processes that foster a more democratic and just society. Keeping an eye on future possibilities for social change, the focus is on emergent, oppressed forms of knowledge, subjectivity, and consciousness arising from specific socio-economical conjunctures.

Building on Henri Lefebvre's *right to the city* [16] to live the urban society in all its degrees and to have access to the diverse resources and commonwealth increasingly undermined by neoliberal enclosure, urban commons, that advocate for the participative collective management of social resources – e.g. public space, infrastructure environment [17] -, could be seen as a response to the ongoing wave of privatization. The *right to the city* is a cry out of necessity and demand by those excluded from essential services. According to Peter Marcuse [18], the materially deprived lack the basic means necessary for dignified living, and the discontented are culturally alienated and oppressed by the rhythms of urbanization. Mayer [19], drawing on Marcuse [18], posited "that new coalitions bridging the gap between the materially deprived and the culturally disenfranchised are emerging" in response to "the impacts of the housing crisis, gentrification and large-scale development projects (that) affect not just lower income groups but also increasingly 'middle-class' groups, laying the ground for new cross-class urban struggles [20].

Careful attention has to be paid to the concepts of *space* and *urban*. Firstly, critical urban theorists depart from viewing space as a mere container for social actions, instead they deliver a constructivist approach defining space as politically, ideologically, and socially contested and constructed [15]. Secondly, it is necessary to stress the importance of urban space as a resource crossed daily

by a diverse array of strangers and featured by high density. On the one hand, density could lead to conflict and dissent, but, on the other hand, it is also a space of possibilities and cooperation [12]. This relational value serves as a resource for urban commons to foster new forms of social organizations [8]. Thirdly, the adjective *urban* doesn't refer to the geographical place where commons proliferate quantitatively, rather it refers to the features of the commons in urban settings and the related challenges: the large scale, the contested character, and the effort to tie cross-sector collaborations between a variety of stakeholders [21]. In this sense, urban space, with its agency, is an influential dimension that determines the formation and reproduction of the commons, which also depend on key relationship with the social context in which they are embedded [22]. Firstly, the collaboration with the local state facilitates the dialogue between institutions and citizens. Secondly, the relationship with the neighbourhood is determinant for the legitimization of the often informal practices of urban commoning. Thirdly, relations with broader social movements are necessary for commons sustainability.

Critical scholars emphasize the importance of certain properties that define the transformative potential of commons phenomena. First and foremost, urban commons are characterized by *openness* which welcomes heterogeneity and collaboration, enhancing the participation of newcomers who share resources and knowledge, and opposing the exclusive benefit of common goods - both tangible and intangible - by a confined community. Opposing forms of enclosed and exclusive commoning, commons spaces, which are the product and the means for *openness*, are reproduced through space-commoning which "is not (...) simply the sharing of space, considered as a resource or an asset, but a set of practices and inventive imaginaries which explore the emancipating potentialities of sharing" [8]. These practices, mutually co-constructed with self-imposed rules produced by horizontal decision-making, fuel the formation of communities tied by new social relations and subjectivities. Indeed, commons spaces are social laboratories where new reference values emerge as an alternative to the normative system of the capitalist structure. In a similar process, a*utonomy* is

"generated by the recursive interaction of components across a social network in such a way that the network that produced those interactions is regenerated" [10]. "In this light, commoning is thus the recursive social force and life activity that regenerate and develop the social relations constituting the commons", reproducing the social representations and the set of values that orient these social experiences [10].

Radical positions emphasize the high transformative value of the urban commons attributing an anti-capitalist role to these mobilizations. Caffentzis and Federici [23] draw up six core attributes that distinguish commons resisting neoliberalism and prefiguring post-capitalist scenarios. Especially the following two points are relevant to this work[4]:

(i) "To guarantee our reproduction 'commons' must involve a 'commonwealth', in the form of shared natural or social resources: lands, forests, waters, urban spaces, systems of knowledge and communication, all to be used for non-commercial purposes. We often use the concept of 'the common' to refer to a variety of 'public goods' that over time we have come to consider 'our own', like pensions, health-care systems, education. However, there is a crucial difference between the common and the public as the latter is managed by the state and is not controlled by us. This does not mean we should not be concerned with the defence of public goods. The public is the site where much of our past labour is stored and it is in our interest that private companies do not take it over. But for the sake of the struggle for anti-capitalist commons it is crucial that we do not lose sight of the distinction";

(ii) "One of the challenges we face today is connecting the struggle over the public with those for the construction of the common, so that they can reinforce each other. This is more than an ideological imperative. Let us reiterate it: what we call

[4] To have a deeper look at the six points: Caffentzis, George & Federici Silvia. 'Commons against and beyond Capitalism.' *Community Development Journal* 49: 92–105. 2014.

> 'the public' is actually wealth that we have produced, and we must re-appropriate it. It is also evident that the struggles of public workers cannot succeed without the support of the 'community'. At the same time, their experience can help us reconstruct our reproduction, to decide (for instance) what constitutes 'good healthcare', what kind of knowledge we need, and so forth. Still, it is very important to maintain the distinction between public and common, because the public is a state institution that assumes the existence of a sphere of private economic and social relations we cannot control."

In synthesis, the properties of *openness*, *autonomy*, and the public-common values association outlined by Caffentzis and Federici constitute important reference concepts for the analysis of urban commons and their social transformative potential. They are strictly entangled since the foundational principle of *openness* is fuelled by a set of self-imposed rules and commoning institutions that constitute the core of commons *autonomy*. "Commoning is about complex and historically specific processes through which representations, practices and values intersect in circumscribing what is to be shared and how in a specific society" [8], thus challenging the crystallized precepts of the capitalistic structure and the ideas of private, public, and common. These properties can be related to three interlaced dimensions that several scholars [17] point out as significant for the definition of commons: communities; institutions; resources. O*penness* defines the form and fluidity of the community producing and reproducing the commons; *autonomy*, operating on the symbolical and cultural dimensions, fosters a shared identity through the process of self-imposing rules; the association between public and common concerns the social representation of the resource itself (and the related perception of individuals).

The theoretical framework serves to interpret the major difficulties that the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* case in Seoul, introduced in the next section, faced during its five-year experience (2016-2020). The *Gyeonguiseon Commons* is representative of the commons movement in South Korea. The mobilization of social activists, the participation of civil society, and the intervention of individuals marked the

transformation of a public square destined for private investments, to a self-governed urban common designed as a haven for displaced people amid urbanization, exemplifying a significant case in how space can be conceptualized as a shared resource. Embedded in the urban structure, the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* struggled to overcome the issues with the social surroundings (especially with local state actors, and the neighbourhood), resulting in "the constant boundary negotiation of a fluid community"; "conflicts arising around the use and meaning of the shared resources based on a difference in interest or perspective"; and "the need for a democratic institutional regulation between the wider social context and the complex internal dynamics" [22].

The Case of Gyeonguiseon

The Gyeonguiseon, constructed in 1904 during the Joseon dynasty by the Japanese, was initially built to provide the infrastructure necessary to sustain the Russo–Japanese War. Following the Korean War (1950-1953), and the subsequent division of the peninsula, the railway on the South Korean side remained unfinished. In the early 2000s, discussions resumed among key stakeholders – Korea Rail Network Authority (KRNA), the owner of the railway, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG), the Mapo-gu District Office (administrative institution of the neighborhood where the site was located), and various private actors - regarding the integration of the railway to the subway system. In 2005 the Gyeonguiseon Underground Extension Project was launched, and the railway was relocated underground. An agreement was reached to redevelop part of the sites vacated by the old tracks into the Gyeonguiseon Forest Trail and a public park extending for 6.3 kilometers [24]. KRNA ultimately assigned the redevelopment of the rest of the area to large corporations: the Gongdeok Station site was allocated to Gongdeok Gyeongwoo Development, the Hongdaeipgu Station site to Mapo Aegyeong Town, and the area around Gongdeok Station to E-Land Group [25].

Due to delays in the last project, the Gongdeok Station site was temporarily leased to the *Neuljang* cooperative from 2013 to 2015 [26]. This cooperative of farmers and social enterprises used the space to

host a variety of cultural and recreational activities, including a market. Upon the expiration of the lease, *Neuljang* was required to vacate the square. Nevertheless, a group of the cooperative members, supported by activists and civic organizations, squatted in the square driven by demands for greater transparency in redevelopment planning and citizen participation in the decision-making process. The transition from legal tenancy to unauthorized squatting, and the subsequent formation of the *Civic Action of Gyeonguiseon Commons* (CAGC) - the coalition composed by various actors already involved in *Neuljang* market and activists - marked a shift towards a new model of organization and management of the square. This development signified the politicization of the space and its uses [24]. The local and the central state, despite the CAGC efforts to open a dialogue for negotiation, filed a lawsuit against the squatters claiming a total of KRW 3.6 billion of compensation for damages. In 2020 the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* experience ended, and the activists vacated the square.

3.1 Gyeonguiseon as Urban Commons

The *Civic Action for the Gyeonguiseon Commons*, by envisioning the public space as commonwealth [23], designated the square as a "shelter for refugees who had been evicted from their homes amid urban development" [25], attracting a heterogeneous array of participants, including street vendors who had been evicted from Ahyeon-dong where they had operated their businesses for decades[5]. The *Gyeonguiseon Commons* was meant to "serve as a temporary camp and not a permanent settlement for new people" [24] allocating the space for temporary use only and enhancing turnover among tenants. "The temporary use of spaces has been a foremost principle in the GC because the commons were borne as a platform of solidarity among people" [24].

[5] Ahyeon-dong was an area involved in the New Town project in 2007, a project aimed at the improvement of urban areas' economic competitiveness. In the regeneration process, street food vendors who had been carrying on their business (selling of alcohol and snacks) for nearly four decades, have been evicted. The eviction has been supported by the new residents of Ahyeon-dong who petitioned the local state building on "the schoolchildren's right to study in a safe environment" [24].

This system ensured newcomers the same opportunities as the older space tenants to benefit from the spatial common resource, thus preventing the accumulation of exclusive usage rights. The self-imposed rules for governance practices, the development of shared political objectives, and the convergent vision of space as a resource for the socially excluded, contributed to co-creating a sense of community and *autonomy* [27]. The self-declaration of the square as the 26th district of Seoul in November 2016 was a manifest effort to establish an emancipative identity as "we wanted to be seen as a new borough consisting of people who were driven out of the other 25" [24]. The declaration contributed to the construction of identity by leveraging "place-based subjectivities of a neighborhood marked by a legacy of (...) social struggles" [20]. Because of its illegal status, this new subjectivity gained momentum through the shared efforts to maintain and reproduce the commons in the short term. The *survival* task cementified the internal solidarity, particularly during the confrontations with the local state and the police, the main social actors challenging the legitimacy of the commons.

Alternative social movements viewed *Gyeonguiseon Commons* as a prominent example of the commons movement; residents and those interested in communal activities used the space to engage in diverse initiatives; and displaced individuals, socially disadvantaged people, and artists unable to meet profit-driven objectives found a refuge [27]. The heterogeneity of participants in the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* reflected the broad range of social backgrounds that urbanization affected, resulting in the variety of activities carried out in *Gyeonguiseon Commons*: small businesses run by street vendors; the market organized by farm-keepers associations and social cooperatives; the urban garden; and several cultural activities.

4. The Urban Challenges

The *Gyeonguiseon Commons* encountered significant internal and external conflicts, concerning the coordination of actions and organizational tasks. Internal issues were exacerbated by tensions between long-term space holders and newcomers. Activists, space holders, and participants co-constructed norms of sharing and

conviviality. Nonetheless, these guidelines often proved abstract and lacked practical enforceability. "GC participants have rather deliberately avoided committing the rules to words. For what is truly important in GC activism is not the establishment of some fixed rules no one can dispute but ensuring that the rules in effect are naturally accepted and shared by all participants" [24]. One notable example of the internal conflicts started from the proposal to establish a "researcher's house". Indeed, the increase in participation enhanced the visibility of the movement, attracting the attention of local and international scholars, NGOs, and activists [26]. This proposal faced resistance from some long-term space holders who argued that the new facility's primary users—researchers and academics—did not align with the commons' original purpose of supporting socially disadvantaged individuals displaced by market and state forces [27]. On the one hand, such disputes underscored the difficulty to prevent exclusionary attitudes towards new participants, causing significant issues. On the other hand, such disputes synthetized the essence of collectively deliberating, democratic decision-making and space-commoning that, repeated and routinized, constituted the values featuring the commons and its *autonomy*. Secondly, although some participants in the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* were volunteers, passersby, and local residents, complications arose concerning the relation with the neighbourhood. In early 2019, the eviction attempts were not solely motivated by Mapo-gu office but were influenced by the dissatisfaction of approximately 400 nearby residents. These residents petitioned local authorities, demanding the construction of a park or cultural facility "as promised" with the redevelopment project and the removal of the squatters [26]. Such dynamics are indicative of a broader issue in eviction scenarios, where the opinion of the residents significantly influences the approval for displacement (as evidenced by similar cases such as the eviction of Ahyeong-dong street vendors), often worried about the socio-economic value of the neighbourhood. "Legitimacy is thus the first resource that must be generated and accumulated by many illegal commoning practices, and the key question faced by many movements is how not to be criminalized" [10].

Thirdly, the local state and institutional authorities demonstrated over time a consistent unwillingness to engage in dialogue with the

participants. Instead, their presence in the site was characterized by frequent patrolling. In July 2019, an eviction attempt was carried out against the squatters, reclaiming the space for the state. Local government officers initially erected fences approximately three meters high around the square. These barriers reported with eviction notices accusing the occupants of "illegal architectures" and "occupying state-owned land without permission" [26]. When the eviction efforts failed, the state and Mapo-gu office resorted to legal measures. In November 2019, they filed a lawsuit against the Gyeonguiseon activists demanding an immediate evacuation of the space and imposing fines for the illegal occupation.

One significant challenge faced by the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* was reconciling the struggle over public spaces with efforts to build and sustain the commons. Even if it is crucial to maintain a clear distinction between public and common spaces, as the public sphere often aligns with state interests that intersect with private economic ones, the concept of public extends beyond state institutions to encompass collective wealth that requires reappropriation [23]. This contention was clearly described by the movement's slogan "restoring public space for citizens" [24]. As a matter of fact, "the 'public space' that the CAGC seeks to reclaim is a conception fundamentally rooted in opposition to the enclosure of what used to be public land by for-profit corporations [24]. Though providing a space for the more vulnerable social strata targeted by neoliberal politics, the distinction between the public and common space was the main argumentation for the neighbours to consider the commons as illegitimate.

Clearly, public space, even if reappropriated by citizens pursuing social justice, is regulated by state rules that legitimize, or not, social behaviour, construct social representations, and influence the perception of the public opinion. These set of factors open to a reflection on the strategies through which the concepts of public and common can be merged. Adopting the activists' and participants' perspective, everyday practices of commoning are the means through which this goal is pursued. Indeed, "it takes a certain social process for the members of a given society to come to recognize certain resources or spaces as commons. (...) Recognizing something as belonging to the community and to 'all-of-us' requires changes in participants and their social relations" [25].

Although a reflection on the concept of legality goes beyond the ambitions and goals of this work, it emerges that the public space and commoning practices are strictly related to legitimacy, which is "determined by society, it is subject to change depending on social conditions and public opinion" [28]. Legitimacy played a fundamental role in the relationship with the neighbourhood and the related perception of the residents concerning the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* experience. "In many instances, wider community legitimacy of a commons is thus an acquired commonwealth that can, in sufficient degree, be used politically against state criminalisation of commons activities. Like any other elements of commonwealth, also, legitimacy is (re)produced through commoning" [10].

Conclusion

The *Gyeonguiseon Commons* case underscored the complex dynamics of urban commons as both a strategic response to displacement and a contested space disputed between multiple social actors. The transformation of the Gyeonguiseon square from a market into a haven for displaced individuals represented a significant case in how urban spaces can be conceptualized as transformative resources. The choice of implementing a rotating system of the space users, rejecting definitive allocations, exemplified the idea of space as a resource to be shared. Interpreting the *Gyeonguiseon Commons* through Caffentzis and Federici, the commoning of space is fundamental for the urban commons formation with a high political transformative value.

Gyeonguiseon Commons faced both external and internal challenges. In the first case, state and local authorities enacted resistance through legal and physical measures, reflecting broader struggles between state interests and grassroots initiatives. In the second case, the commons grappled with coordination and management issues, reflecting, at the same time, the concerns about balancing *openness* with effective governance, and the essential practices of *autonomy* and commoning.

The association between the concepts of the public and the commons was the biggest challenge. The different ideas of space seemed to be the common element of the several difficulties encountered on multiple levels. The concept of public space, instead of

coming closer to the definitions of urban commons [21] or public commonwealth [23], seemed to be closely linked to the strong legitimacy that public property (belonging to the state) brings with it, consequently legitimizing the predisposition of public space to private investments.

Obviously, the illegal practice of squatting was the main problem perceived by neighbours and the local state. Beyond this, why private investments are preferred to grassroots, informal practices of sharing and solidarity by neighbours? The idea that residents feared the devaluation of the own apartment because of the urban commons illegal status answers partly to the question, while a deeper reflection on informality, space, and legitimacy could lead to further research questions.

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During her doctoral studies, Soyoon taught Korean modules at York St John University for four years, which deepened her interest in the relationship between language learning, socialisation, and identity, particularly in relation to gender and race. Through her work, she seeks to advance understanding of how gendered selves in L2 (second language) are shaped within the ideological contexts of second language socialisation.

Soyoon Park è dottoranda in Linguistica Applicata presso la York St John University. La sua ricerca indaga come gli studenti di lingue costruiscano discorsivamente le proprie identità di genere attraverso la socializzazione in L2, con particolare attenzione al modo in cui le narrazioni degli studenti riflettono esperienze di genere e si intersecano con ideologie sociali di genere più ampie.

Durante il suo dottorato, Soyoon ha insegnato alcuni moduli all'interno del corso di lingua coreana presso la York St John University per quattro anni. Questa esperienza le ha permesso di approfondire il suo interesse per la relazione tra apprendimento linguistico, socializzazione e identità, in particolare in relazione al genere e alla razza. Con il suo lavoro, intende promuovere una comprensione più approfondita di come i sé di genere in L2 vengano modellati all'interno dei contesti ideologici della socializzazione attraverso l'utilizzo della seconda lingua nel suo contesto naturale.

AJSA DOBÓ

Ajsa Dobó is currently pursuing a master's degree in Korean studies at Eötvös Loránd University. Her research interests include applied linguistics, as well as the worldview and value system reflected in folktales, with a particular focus on traditions preserved in contemporary settings. She completed her undergraduate degree in Oriental Languages and Cultures along with a minor in Applied Linguistics. Her undergraduate thesis examined the influence of Confucianism on the value system of the Korean people as reflected in a modern Korean folktale collection. She has presented her research at various conferences, and this paper marks her first publication in international conference proceedings

Ajsa Dobó sta attualmente conseguendo un Master in Studi Coreani presso l'Università Eötvös Loránd. I suoi interessi di ricerca includono la linguistica applicata, nonché la visione del mondo e il sistema di valori riflessi nei racconti popolari, con particolare attenzione alle tradizioni preservate in contesti contemporanei. Ha conseguito la laurea triennale in Lingue e Culture Orientali con una specializzazione in Linguistica applicata presso la stessa università. La sua tesi di laurea ha esaminato l'influenza del

confucianesimo sul sistema di valori del popolo coreano così come riflesso in una raccolta moderna di fiabe coreane. Ha presentato i suoi lavori in diverse conferenze, e il presente contributo rappresenta la sua prima pubblicazione internazionale in Atti di Convegno.

ANTONELLA GASDIA

Antonella Gasdia graduated in Oriental Languages and Civilisations from "La Sapienza" University of Rome, specialising in Korean language, philology, and literature. She furthered her studies in South Korea in 2016 and 2019 through intensive courses. Since 2020, she has been collaborating with the Korean Cultural Institute in Rome as a reporter for *Corea Today*, writing articles on Korean literature, tradition, and culture. In 2021, she joined the editorial team of the journal *Asiatika*, contributing academic articles. Between 2023 and 2024, she taught Korean Literature at the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies, part of "La Sapienza" University of Rome, where she has been a PhD candidate in Asian and African Civilisations since November 2024. She actively participates in conferences dedicated to Korean literature

Antonella Gasdia si è laureata in Lingue e Civiltà Orientali presso l'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma, specializzandosi in lingua, filologia e letteratura coreana. Ha approfondito i suoi studi in Corea del Sud nel 2016 e nel 2019 con corsi intensivi. Dal 2020 collabora con l'Istituto Culturale Coreano di Roma come reporter per Corea Today, scrivendo articoli su letteratura, tradizione e cultura coreana. Nel 2021 è entrata nella redazione della rivista Asiatika, occupandosi di articoli accademici. Tra il 2023 e il 2024 ha insegnato Letteratura coreana presso l'Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali dell'Università La Sapienza di Roma dove, a partire da novembre 2024, ha intrapreso il dottorato in Civiltà dell'Asia e dell'Africa. Partecipa attivamente a conferenze dedicate alla letteratura coreana.

HYEJIN HAN

Hyejin Han is a PhD candidate at the University of Bonn, Germany, and a research fellow at the Bonn International Graduate School Oriental and Asian Studies. Specialising in Korean ethnological collections in Germany, her research explores museum heritage, transcultural heritage, and institutional practices. With a background in East Asian history, world heritage studies, and contemporary curating, she has held research and curatorial roles at institutions such as the Asia Culture Institute and the National Asia Culture Center in Korea, focusing on exhibition histories and diasporic curation. Previously, she contributed as a research fellow at the International Curators Forum in London, facilitating cultural exchange initiatives. Through her expertise in exhibition curation and international heritage studies, she continues to bridge cultural dialogues between East Asia and Europe..

Hyejin Han è dottoranda presso l'Università di Bonn, in Germania, e research fellow presso la Bonn International Graduate School Oriental and Asian Studies. Con una

specializzazione nelle collezioni etnologiche coreane in Germania, la sua ricerca esplora il patrimonio museale, il patrimonio transculturale e le pratiche istituzionali al di fuori dei confini coreani. Con una formazione in storia dell'Asia orientale, studi sul patrimonio mondiale e pratiche curatoriali contemporanee, ha ricoperto ruoli di ricerca e curatela presso istituzioni come l'Asia Culture Institute e il National Asia Culture Center in Corea, concentrandosi sulla storia delle esposizioni e sulla curatela di oggetti legati alla diaspora. In precedenza, ha collaborato come research fellow presso l'International Curators Forum di Londra, dove ha condotta attività di promozione e iniziative di scambio culturale. Grazie alla sua esperienza nella curatela di mostre e negli studi sul patrimonio internazionale, continua a favorire il dialogo culturale tra l'Asia orientale e l'Europa.

SUJIN KIM

Sujin Kim obtained a master's degree in contemporary art history from Paris 1 in 2021, then received a research grant from the AWARE association for her work on the history of women artists. Since her master's studies, she has been interested in women in the field of art. In 2022, she joined the CRC-CCJ team at EHESS in Paris, where she is working on her doctoral project focused on women in the South Korean film industry during its Renaissance, which lasted from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.

Sujin Kim ha conseguito un master in storia dell'arte contemporanea presso l'Università Paris 1 nel 2021, per poi ricevere una borsa di ricerca dall'associazione AWARE per il suo lavoro sulla storia delle artiste donne. Fin dagli studi magistrali si interessa alla presenza femminile nel campo dell'arte. Nel 2022 è entrata a far parte del gruppo CRC-CCJ presso l'EHESS di Parigi, dove sta portando avanti un progetto di dottorato incentrato sulle donne nell'industria cinematografica sudcoreana durante gli anni Novanta la sua Renaissance, periodo compreso tra la metà degli anni '90 e la metà degli anni 2000.

GWON SON

Gwon Son is a second-year PhD student at the Department of the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Rome "La Sapienza." He graduated in 2017 with a degree in Sociology from the Department of Economic and Social Sciences at "La Sapienza" and earned a master's degree in Applied Social Science in 2021 from the same department. In 2023, he spent eight months in Seoul, affiliated with the Institute of Social Development and Social Policy at the College of Social Sciences at Seoul National University, conducting fieldwork related to urban studies. As part of his doctoral research, he is focusing on the analysis of the urban commons' phenomenon and contemporary grassroots collective action in Seoul. His academic interests also include social movements and the Korean diaspora, a topic explored in his master's degree thesis on the identity construction of the second generation of South Korean youth in Rome.

Gwon Son è dottorando al secondo anno presso il Dipartimento dell'Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza." Si è laureato nel 2017 in Sociologia presso il Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche e Sociali dello stesso ateneo, dove ha conseguito anche la laurea magistrale in Scienze Sociali Applicate nel 2021. Nel 2023 ha trascorso otto mesi a Seul, affiliato all'Istituto per lo Sviluppo Sociale e le Politiche Sociali del College of Social Sciences della Seoul National University, dove ha condotto una ricerca sul campo nell'ambito degli studi urbani. La sua ricerca dottorale si concentra sull'analisi del fenomeno dei commons urbani e delle azioni collettive dal basso nella Seul contemporanea. I suoi interessi accademici includono anche i movimenti sociali e la diaspora coreana, tema approfondito nella sua tesi magistrale sull'identità della seconda generazione di giovani sudcoreani a Roma.

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