

A Discussion of *Mr. Housewife* in Relation to the Social Construction of Masculinity in South Korean Society

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the socially constructed notion of Korean masculinity by examining Yoo Sun-Dong's *Mr. Housewife* (*Misenteo Jubu Kwizyeuwang*, 2005). By regarding masculinity as a value or 'place' that one can obtain through practices rather than as a fixed identity, this article takes the view that masculinity is also dependent on adopting culturally specific practices and roles. Yoo Sun-Dong's film presents a male positioning himself as a housewife, giving the audience a different perspective outside the social construction of rigid gender boundaries. Through critical discourse analysis, the article discusses three themes of narrative: non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, and context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity. It is argued that Jin-Man's Korean masculinity is different not only from the soft *kkonminam* masculinities, but also other domestic masculinities reflected in the media, both in terms of his relationship with the female gender and divergence from hegemonic masculinity. The film also successfully subverts the conception of the home as 'a place to rest' which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea.

Keywords: masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, man as nurturer, domesticity, hybrid masculinity

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of New Korean Cinema dates back to the mid-1980s and late 1990s when politically South Korea moved from authoritarianism to democracy, and filmmakers felt more free to explore new themes (Paquet, 2009: 3). Masculine identity can be considered as one of the most prominent themes of this new wave of Korean cinema (Kim, 2004). With the political and economic traumas that took place in South Korea during these periods, South Korean men perceived that they lost their power within the family and society, which led to a tension around the male identity (A. Lee, 2017: 201). To re-negotiate this traumatic past, there was a search for a new masculine identity in the New Korean Cinema (K. Kim, 2004: 9). Films such as *Happy End* (1999), *Shiri* (1999), and *Joint Security Area* (2000) depicted the change in male identities through portrayals of loss and the regaining of masculinity (K. Kim, 2004: 233-259). The decreased influence of masculinity in South Korean society due to economic problems, gender roles becoming uncertain, and the feminist movement led to a representation of excessive masculinity in the Korean cinema through which males were nostalgically reminded of when they had powerful masculinity (A. Lee, 2017: 224, 226). This excessive masculinity was often depicted through the violent character of the protagonists. For instance, in *Old Boy*, the protagonist Dae-Soo portrays a 'savage but cool' male character which symbolises a 'transgressive and dangerous masculinity' (Jung, 2011: 102, 121).

According to Connell (1995: 68), how masculinity is constructed differs based on the cultures and historical periods. Therefore, each culture constructs its own masculinity through culture-specific behaviours of daily life. The definition of hegemonic masculinity as 'particular kinds of behaviour and ways of being which are made culturally dominant and come to be seen as the pattern of masculinity in general' (Kessler *et al.*, 1982: 10) was later used by Moon (2002) to define the features of hegemonic masculinity in South Korea as military service, distance from daily reproductive labour, and providing for the family. The depiction of hegemonic masculinity through themes like male heroism and military culture has been salient in films such as *Silmido* (2003), *Shiri* (1999), *Brotherhood* (2004), *The Host* (2006), and *D-War* (2007) (A. Lee, 2017: 202, 228).

In the twenty-first century, South Korean popular culture has also seen the emergence of other masculinities (*kkonminam* or 'flower boys') characterised by soft, romantic behaviour and attractive looks (Jung, 2011: 58). However,

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for such images to be accepted by the audience, they still needed to possess other traditional characteristics of the manly man such as strong muscles or personal characteristics such as courage, loyalty, and honour (Shiau, 2017: 222). Rather than a loss of masculinity or ‘mere’ feminisation, *kkonminam* has represented a hybridisation of male and female identities (Kim 2003 cited in Jung, 2011: 58).

Yoo Sun-Dong’s *Mr. Housewife (Miseuteo Jubu Kwizemwang, 2005)*, which is the focus of this article, is different from the mainstream films in which the protagonist is presented within the boundaries of the traditional definitions of masculinity. On the contrary, this film deals with different themes that are centred around the notion of male domestic masculinity. I argue that Yoo’s film depicts the transgression of the normative boundaries of gender and deconstructs traditional gender roles, offering an alternative vision to masculinity. In order to posit this view, the article discusses masculinity as a fluid, culturally negotiated and changeable ‘place’ (Connell, 1995: 71; Moon, 2002: 82-83) which is contested and negotiated continuously through gender-specific roles, practices, and discourses within the South Korean socio-cultural context.

Yoo’s film was selected because contrary to most popular visual cultural texts in South Korea, it reverses the gender roles of both male and female characters. Whereas the male characters in films, dramas, and reality shows exercise a form of hegemonic masculinity, even though they might be aesthetically androgynous or celebrate domesticity (Jung, 2011; Rhee, 2019), the female characters are often portrayed as feminine, weak and slim enough to fit into the conventional standards of male-gaze in order to be supportive of hegemonic masculinity (Elfvig-Hwang, 2011). This is in line with the concept of emphasised femininity that is ‘practiced in a complementary, compliant accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity’ (Messerschmidt, 2018: 136). On the contrary, *Mr. Housewife* portrays a female character occupying the position of masculinity through her practices and through her relationship with the male protagonist (Jin-Man). The article aims to discuss whether the male masculinity depicted by Jin-Man is different from South Korean domestic masculinities reflected in the media, in terms of its relationship with the female gender and hegemonic masculinity. The concept of home as ‘a place to rest’ which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea is also discussed in order to address this question.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF ‘NEW MEN’

In gender studies, the concept of masculinity has been less critically examined as compared to femininity, as is usual with representative norms. The meaning of the former is made through opposition to the latter. Reeser (2010: 8-9) argues that because of the way language functions, we are inclined to consider masculinity in direct opposition to femininity, and we assume that there is a binary opposition between the two. In that sense, masculinity is ‘unmarked’. Nevertheless, this does not mean that masculinity’s meaning is absent; rather, it has a ‘significant absence’. When we ponder more about the meaning of masculinity, we notice that it is unstable and constantly contested in relation to various opposites whose meanings are not fixed (Reeser, 2010: 14-15). Therefore, it is difficult to think about the existence of an essentialist gender binary. Following Butler’s (1988: 527-528) understanding of gender as a performative act, Connell takes a social constructionist approach to masculinity, describing gender as a social practice. She asserts that gender is a social structure that constitutes the social practices where power relations play an important role, opposing the essentialist views that view bodies as deterministic of gender (Connell, 2000: 12, 24). She proposes a hierarchical social structure of gender that is constructed around power relations where heterosexual masculinities have a dominant position over women and other masculinities (Connell, 1995). While agents construct masculinity, they are influenced by the dominant form of masculinity that is also defined as hegemonic masculinity and which defines ‘how men should act’ (Connell, 1995). Even though most men try to position themselves in relation to the hegemonic masculinity, many men do not fit into these masculine ideals and construct and practise their masculinities differently (Frosh *et al.*, 2002: 76). Because such a hierarchy exists, men have traditionally felt a burden of having to prove their heterosexuality and against behaviours that could be perceived as feminine (Anderson, 2009: 28-29; Zurbriggen, 2010; O’Neil, 1981) as a defence against being perceived as homosexual (Kimmel, 1994).

However, recent transformations in masculinities such as changes in dressing styles (Demetriou, 2001) and male grooming (Shiau, 2017: 222; Lim, 2008), the emergence of softer, more effeminate male images and metrosexual males in the West, (Anderson, 2009), *kkonminam* males in South Korea (Jung, 2011), and *bishōnen* males in Japan (Jung, 2009) which have been defined as hybrid masculinities, are being widely discussed by prominent scholars. While Anderson (2009: 93-105) and McCormack (2012) try to explain the emergence of hybrid masculinities (termed as ‘inclusive masculinities’ by Anderson) which challenge hegemonic masculinity in some settings, on the opposite side, Messner (1993), Demetriou (2001), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that such alternative masculinities do not pose a significant challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, these new gender practices have made hegemonic masculinity seem softer and less oppressive (Demetriou, 2001: 355). Yet, it is also argued that these masculinities – both in representations and practices – are often produced through the

hybridisation of traditional traits with softer forms of masculinity but without any significant divergence from hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou, 2001; Lim, 2008; Messner, 1993: 725). Therefore, the construction of these masculinities is not equal to the deconstruction of the gender hierarchies (Donovan, 1998: 837; Moon, 2002: 100).

In South Korea, the emergence of new masculinities was a result of the consumer culture within which 'new men' were constructed as a trend whilst a strong heterosexist patriarchal society has been maintained (Lim, 2008: 116). Hegemonic masculinity is difficult to challenge in South Korea as it is based on Confucianist tradition (Hoffman, 1995; Wrochna, 2018: 66-67; G. Lee, 2020: 368). Even if there is hybridisation, still an excessive deviation from the dominant masculinity is often not supported. Therefore, the soft masculinities need to stay within their limits to be socially acceptable. For example, although attractiveness is very important for success in some spheres of life (Jang *et al.*, 2019), men still consider traditional determinants for success such as financial ability as more important (Lim, 2008). Indeed, the representations of *kkonminam* masculinities in Korean drama and film narratives are still developed around culturally specific elements of hegemonic masculinity such as military service (military masculinity), distance from daily reproductive labour (housework and childcare), and providing for the family (Moon, 2002). These characters represent financially capable males who are strong providers, often heirs to wealthy family businesses. In other words, they are strongly grounded in the economic sphere and separated from reproductive labour. They possess characteristics like strength (muscular bodies), courage, and leadership which can be considered as the characteristics of militarised ideals of masculinity (Hwang, 2019; Shiao, 2017).

On the other hand, the depiction of male housewives (*chubu*) in popular culture and TV shows like *the Return of the Superman* (Praptika, 2016), *Teacher Paek* and *Three Meals* (Rhee, 2019) follows a different trend as these films try to foster the image of domestic men and reconstruct gender roles through reproductive activities like cooking and taking care of children, which are traditionally assigned to women.

KOREAN HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The characteristics of ideal representations of hegemonic masculinity in South Korea could be generally defined as military service, distance from daily reproductive labour, and providing for the family (Moon, 2002). Military masculinity's influence on the construction of the masculinities within social and business contexts has been discussed by prominent scholars (Kwon, 2019; A. Lee *et al.*, 2019). South Korean traditional discourses constructed the national duty of men to serve their nation and their families, not only in the military but also in the economic sphere, constructing two elements of hegemonic masculinity (ability to materially provide, and military masculinity) in relation to a warrior-like manhood (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

In South Korean society, family roles and division of labour are defined in favour of the traditional patriarchal system that reinforces men's authority in the family and society. Collier (1995: 192) argues that women's increased involvement in the workforce in the modern era makes it more difficult to assert that there is a breadwinner/child-rearer dichotomy between male and female, in practice. However, socially embedded familial ideologies continue to preserve this division while women are expected to 'do both': earn money and be responsible for domestic chores. On the other hand, the masculine identity and status of men are still constructed in relation to their work and income (Collier, 1995: 193-194). In modern South Korea, the gendered division of labour is not as rigid as before. According to the data from Statistics Korea, the number of double earner households in South Korea reached 5.662 million as of October 2019 which accounted for almost half (46%) of the married couple households (Koreaherald, 2020). However, the ability to provide is still considered as the basis of the patriarchal authority of men.

The South Korean ideal of men's separation from domestic activities is traditionally rooted in Confucian *seonbi* masculinity. *Seonbi* were the scholar-officials who studied official texts to obtain 'wisdom' (*wen* in Chinese) and advised the king during the Choson era (1392-1910). They strictly distanced themselves from manual labour or economic activities since it would be considered degrading. Still, being a traditional ideal model of Korean masculinity (Jung, 2011: 27), *seonbi* masculinity contributes to the gendered division of labour as domestic labour is still considered as 'emasculating' (Moon, 2002: 99).

CHUBU MALES AS THE 'NEW MAN AS NURTURER'

As Foucault (1980: 92-94, 142) argues, some discourses ('true discourses') construct meaning systems that define how the social world is defined, whereas alternative discourses are marginalised but still provide places where hegemonic practices can be contested and resisted. Within the social structure of gender relations, it is natural that discourse and practices resist and transform hegemonic masculinity and the traditional gender roles of work and family. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 853, 854) argue that the meaning of hegemonic masculinity is

under constant construction and change. There is a constant struggle of power and interests amongst different masculinities and femininities within the gender in order to generate the hegemonic definition of masculinity. Understandably, the recent changes and shifts in gender relations have led to a crisis among men in which they try to renegotiate masculinity (Jang et al. 2019: 683).

Beynon (2002: 83-86) states that masculinity is in a crisis which resulted from a loss of what had been taken for granted as masculine rights and changes in male employment. Considering that men used to have absolute dominance in every field, it can be argued that their perceived autonomy is threatened in most social aspects such as law, finance, politics, and business with the widespread recognition of women's rights and the challenge to breadwinner ideology. Men are confusedly caught between the modern values of equality and traditional values of patriarchy, thereby affecting their concepts of masculinity. Gerson's (1994) study demonstrates how men can react in different ways to the crisis of masculinity. In the twentieth century when men's sense of economic security weakened, they began to reassess their commitments to family and work. As a result, some continued being breadwinners, some fled the responsibilities of parenthood, whereas others got significantly involved in family life. Kaufman (2013) argues that the group of men involved in family life increased even more in the twenty-first century and a new group which he names 'superdads' emerged. Beynon (2002: 100) uses the concept 'new man as nurturer' that is characterised by the nurturing and domestic features of men while referring to the more involved type of masculinity that emerged amidst the crisis of masculinity.

The number of these 'new men as nurturers' who are known to be involved in daily work, such as housekeeping and nurturing, inside the house is growing in South Korea (G. S. Kim, 2019). Compared to the older generations, the sharing of domestic chores is somewhat more common in South Korea, and the perception of traditional gender roles has changed to a certain extent. Advanced policy measures such as paid family leave for men also support more equal gender rights and have led to an increase in the number of fathers taking parental leave despite the fear of social stigmatisation (Byun and Won, 2020: 593). Recent studies found that more women seem to disagree with the traditional division of labour of husband as the breadwinner and wife as the housekeeper, and with the notion that the wife needs to help her husband develop his career rather than her own (R. Kim, 2019). Between the years 1999-2019, the percentage of men who engaged in housework on the weekdays increased from 44.8% to 60.8%, although women continue to cover most of the share of the housework; the percentage of women who engage in housework on the weekdays was 92.7% in 1999 and 91.6% in 2019 (Oh, 2020).

Despite some relatively positive changes in practice, the traditional heteronormative perceptions of 'how a man should be' are also still salient in South Korean society due to Confucianist values. The results of a survey conducted in South Korea in 2019 showed that 76% of the participants agreed that 'a man staying home to look after children is less of a man' (Statista, 2019). Joo Hyun, a full-time working mother, whose husband is a stay-at-home father (househusband), admits: 'In Korean society, they say that if a man even steps foot in the kitchen, his penis will fall off' (Shin, 2015). The use of traditional discourse which defines the kitchen and other places of recreation as the place where a man loses his manhood strengthens hegemonic masculinity. Despite the modernisation and emergence of new masculinities in South Korea, the traditional gender binary still exists in dichotomies and assigns to people gender-specific roles and places.

The role of housekeeping is also discursively linked to the female in the Korean language. The definition of the word *chubu* (housewife) in the Korean dictionary can be translated as 'the female owner of the household who adopts the housekeeping role'. In *Hanja*, this word consists of the syllables *chu* 'owner' (of the house) and *bu* 'wife'. This can be translated as 'the wife of the house owner'. Lakoff (1973: 45) asserts, 'the speech about women implies an object[...], whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men'. In a relevant sense, linguistically it can be interpreted that the woman is put in the second position after the 'house owner', who is considered to be the husband. The emerging generation of men who are stay-at-home husbands or engage in domestic chores are referred to as *sallimbaneun namja* which can be translated as 'man who does housework'.

A study by Han (1997 as cited in Moon, 2002: 100) shows that although men idealise a family-oriented father, they face anxiety regarding the possible decline of paternal authority. This is a slow process in which the social construction of meanings and gender norms are constantly modified. The discursive reconstruction of the dichotomised gender relations happens through different channels including the media.

DOMESTIC MASCULINITY IN KOREAN MEDIA

The modern societies' trends in the family and social life brought about shifts in gender roles in family and workplaces; while the role of the female as an economic provider gained strength, the caring male role came to the fore (Oláh et al., 2018; Goldscheider et al., 2015). In line with these globalising trends, domestic masculinity has been salient in several visual products in South Korea. *The Return of Superman* is a variety show where celebrity fathers stay at home and take care of their children and engage in domestic chores while their wives are sent away from the house. The father figure portrayed in this show represents a type of masculinity that is gentle and

nurturing but is able to become strong if necessary. However, in *The Return of Superman*, the division of traditional gender roles seems prevalent, and men require women's assistance for specific chores (Praptika and Putra, 2016). Praptika and Putra further argue that in the show, there are instances the male character engages in behaviour that is related to traditional characteristics of men; he controls emotions and tries to show a strong image. Suppressing the expression of emotions has been related to the reflection of hegemonic masculinity on television (Scharrer and Blackburn, 2018: 152–153). In other words, although the portrayal of the 'superman masculinity' is in line with the 'new man as a nurturer' in Beynon's (2002) conceptualisation, although he is caring for children, willing to help women in domestic jobs, he does not strictly reverse the gender dichotomies and still conforms to the traditional hegemonic masculinity.

Korean TV cooking shows provide a space for male celebrities to perform 'culinary masculinity' that is distinct from traditional masculinity. However, in shows like *Teacher Paek* and *Three Meals*, men use the kitchen as a space for male bonding and leisure rather than using it as a space to represent domestic labour (Rhee, 2019: 63-64). Although South Korean cooking shows include male chefs who defy traditional masculinity, they put them in authority positions whereas the female actresses act like students, servers, and tasters who engage in 'food porn', consuming large amounts of food while looking slim and fit (Tavassoli, 2020). Hence, these shows create platforms for maintaining hegemonic masculinity in the media.

In sum, while the South Korean examples of domestic masculinities in popular media exercise different masculinities, they still adopt the traditional components of hegemonic masculinity and female actresses conform with the ideals set by the emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987).

METHODOLOGY

The article aims to discuss whether the domestic masculinity of Jin-Man adopts the traditional characteristics of hegemonic masculinity within the South Korean context, or whether it follows a different trend from other popular visual cultural products that have dealt with domestic masculinity in South Korea.

Taking the relational nature of hegemonic masculinity into consideration, the analysis focuses on the representations not only of hegemonic masculinity but also emphasised femininity and female masculinity. These representations are analysed through critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach that assumes that the social world, social identities, social relations are constructed through discourse which is a social practice, and discourse can be used to transform, dismantle, maintain, restore or legitimise the status quo (Wodak *et al.*, 2009: 7-8). It differs from other poststructuralist discourse analysis methods in that it is used to understand the causal relations between the discursive practices, events, texts, and broader social and cultural structures, in particular looking at how it shapes power relations (Fairclough cited in Aydın-Düzgüt, 2014: 357). CDA was selected as a method because it is useful for analysing gender relations that are about unequal power relations, but are legitimised through discursive practices.

The critical discourse analysis of Jin-Man's exercise of masculinity is conducted in relation to the gender practices of his wife Soo-Hee. After watching the film three times, observing the interactions of Jin-Man with other characters, noting the dialogues, watching the key scenes a few times to observe the clothing, gestures, and other visual details, three themes of the narrative were arrived at. The themes identified for critical analysis were: non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity.

MR. HOUSEWIFE (*MISEUTEO JUBU KWIZEUWANG*): AN ANALYSIS

Mr. Housewife depicts the life of a full-time stay-at-home father (Jin-Man) who takes care of his daughter and takes the responsibility of housework when his wife is working at a broadcasting station. After winning the big prize in a quiz show for housewives, he becomes famous as the 'Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang' (Mr. Housewife the Quiz King) in the media. Jin-Man gives a soft, feminine impression, which is in contrast to the mainstream stereotypical masculine father.

Non-hegemonic Nurturer Masculinity

Jin-Man is introduced to the audience in the opening scenes of the film where he is shopping in the grocery store. In this introductory scene, he is struggling with *ajummas* (married Korean women with kids) to buy the last bag of squids on sale. Although he is wearing a suit, he behaves and uses the same mannerisms as the *ajummas* and persuades them. After he comes home, the audience can observe that he has created a cosy, homely environment that is traditionally linked with *ajummas* in the Korean context.



Figure 1. 'Jin-Man is cooking in the kitchen', *Misenteo Jubu Kwizeuwang* [Mr. Housewife]. 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment



Figure 2. 'Jin-Man is making kimchi', *Misenteo Jubu Kwizeuwang* [Mr. Housewife]. 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment

However, Jin-Man acts differently from the other male *ajummas* that audiences are used to seeing on Korean TV channels, who assume 'the kind of authority a female *ajumma* lacks in real life, being empowered by the kind of femininity that disempowers women in everyday life' (Rhee, 2019: 60). On the contrary, he uses his culinary masculinity to portray an image that is close to the real Korean *ajumma* who shows dedication to her family.

Jin-Man constructs his culinary-domestic masculinity through his clothing, stances, and language in the kitchen (Figure 1). It is possible for the audience to notice that he does not make any efforts to separate himself from the daily work of social reproduction and caring labour in different contexts. In South Korea, staying away from the reproductive activities of the household is expected from the man as part of hegemonic masculinity. The role of man as the family provider and military serviceman is considered to justify man's disengagement from such activities. Among the housework duties that the husband is conventionally separated from are preparing food, cleaning, washing, caring for the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and children. If the man performs any of these activities, he is considered to be emasculated (Moon, 2002: 99). Contrary to the domestic masculinities depicted in culinary shows, that emerge only in specific places and contexts, Jin-Man's domestic masculinity portrayal is multidimensional and spreads into other spaces than the kitchen such as the school of his daughter, Da-Na. He is the neighbourhood representative and guides those who move into the neighbourhood. In terms of caring labour, his tasks include picking up their daughter from school, attending various activities with the mothers of other kids, and looking after their daughter when she is at home. In terms of reproductive work, he does all the housework including cleaning, cooking, and even preparing kimchi with his mother (Figure 2). Since hegemonic masculinity necessitates staying away from those tasks, he is perceived to be unmanly and loses the respect of his male friends and even the friends of his daughter. His daughter is made fun of by her schoolmates who shout behind her, 'Da-Na has a daddy for a mommy!' because Jin-Man does not fit the ideal breadwinner father role.

Some of the conversations between Jin-Man and his wife represent a failed masculinity in the South Korean context. While having dinner together, Soo-Hee argues *'I bought you [that suit] for finding a job', 'Are you looking for a job?'* Ideas and practices that define men as the principal income earners of the family justify men's domestic authority and dominance in Korean society (Moon, 2002). As Kim (1998: 177) indicates, in Korea, this division of labour was built upon Confucian gender ideology according to which women were assigned to the 'inside' and the men to the 'outside' of home. According to these gender constructs, the role of the family provider and men's earning power are an indicator of men's authority in the household and his manliness. Failure to provide for the family results in a loss of respect, loss of authority in the family, and loss of masculinity. Jin-Man's masculinity is considered as a failed masculinity by his parents as well. While they are making kimchi together – which is a woman's task in Korean society – Jin-Man's mother's words reflect disappointment: *'I am confused whether you are a son or daughter'... if your father finds out (that we are making kimchi) I am dead... he was very happy when you were born... how long will this thing last?'* However, Jin-Man continues to say that he likes his job, and he prefers to live like that, and doing the housework is a very difficult task that should be appreciated. It could be stated that his reaction towards his mother's criticism depicts a feminist resistance to hegemonic masculinity.

Jin-Man's refusal to get a job is also a rejection of the ideals related to military masculinity. As explained above, within the South Korean context military masculinity has been considered ideal in relation to corporate life. Before the 1997 financial crisis which led to a loss of masculinity through unemployment and loss of income, a permanent employee status signified masculine power in South Korea. In the 2000s, Korean television series such as *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Coffee Prince* (2007), and *Boys Over Flowers* (2009) introduced new kinds of soft masculinities and *kkonminam* masculinities, reflecting the idea that the hardworking salaryman image was not the only measure of masculine achievement (Elfvig-Hwang, 2017). However, in order not to threaten the traditional masculinity ideals, these male characters often showed masculine bodies and financial strength while the female characters were represented as weak, economically dependent, and subordinated. In contrast with the *kkonminam* masculinities that do not shift the symbolic structures of gender (Elfvig-Hwang, 2011), Jin-Man's masculinity does not put the male subject in a primary position and offers a new perspective for symbolically resolving the crisis of masculinity within the same period. *Mr. Housewife's* message is meaningful because it potentially gives the male audience the idea that domestic labour matters (which is also in contrast to the contemporary cooking shows that fail to depict it as labour) and implies it is possible for men to have a meaningful existence outside the corporate sphere that can be the source of primary stress for most Korean men.

Home as Woman's Place to Rest

In *Mr. Housewife* we see that the social roles of the husband and wife in the family do not fit into the roles that the traditional dichotomy of homemaker-breadwinner defines (Yanagisako and Collier, 1987). The mother is the breadwinner, and the father is the homemaker. Most of the dialogues are stereotypical of homemaker and breadwinner, while the 'places' of the man and woman have been shifted. The dialogues involve themes related to the man's domestic chores and the women's job.

For example, in one of the scenes, Jin-Man asks his wife Soo-Hee when she will receive her bonus. In another scene, Soo-Hee is getting ready for work in the morning and asks Jin-Man where her clothes and accessories are. Jin-Man also frequently engages in nurturing acts. In one scene, Soo-Hee asks him if he can cook bean sprout soup for breakfast. He replies, *'Ok, if you two finish all your food today'* (addressing his wife and kid). When Soo-Hee is in front of the main door, leaving for work, he insists that she has breakfast and brings a spoon load of food to her mouth (Figure 3). Overall, the behaviour of this nurturing, domestic husband, and the wife who has masculine and authoritarian features do not fit into the image that society expects. So, they face many reactions from other character's comments outside. In one of the scenes, a woman who is watching the Housewife Quiz Show that Jin-Man is competing in asks: *'Is doing housework something for a man to brag about?'* Another woman answers: *'His wife must have asked him to earn money.'* It can be noticed that for her, a logical explanation is only possible by rationalising Jin-Man's behaviour in the public sphere (earning money by joining the quiz show). Her answer is reflective of the traditional mindset in Korean society, where the work-public sphere is the place where masculinity is exercised.

Kim (1998) argues that in Korean middle-class families, the home was culturally constructed as a 'place to rest' for men, from the public sphere of production. She argues that in the past, gender roles had been constructed in terms of traditional hierarchy; the man was viewed as 'heaven' or 'outside' and woman as 'earth' or 'inside'. However, in today's Korean society, with the influence of rapid industrial growth, the division of labour has been used to rationalise the gendered division between family and work. The idea that the husband should be recharged before going to work the next day and the wife should help him feel comfortable at home became acceptable. In this sense, the conception of the home also changed into a 'place to rest' as the western concept of 'home sweet home' was accepted by Korean society.



Figure 3. 'Jin-Man brings a spoon load of food to Soo-Hee's mouth', *Misuteo Jubu Kwizeunwang* [*Mr. Housewife*], 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment

The hierarchical model of gender division is increasingly rejected in today's Korean society. Traditional ideas which saw the husband as superior are becoming less acceptable for most married women in the younger generation. Whereas men value women's economic and social activities outside the family, women are engaged in social activities and the number of working women is increasing. According to the data from Statistics Korea¹, the number of double earner households in South Korea reached 5.662 million as of October 2019 which accounted for almost half (46%) of the married couple households. In today's middle-class families, the husband is expected to help with the housework. However, the segregation of gender roles is still rigid when compared to the West, but it is important to note that this gender segregation is rationalised by the new conception of home 'as a place to rest' (Y. Kim, 1998). Women no longer see gender segregation based on the traditional mindset which is based on the 'inside/outside' distinction but based on the 'work/home' distinction.

In one of the scenes, Jin-Man is peeling apples for Soo-Hee while she is watching TV comfortably on the couch. Her mannerisms and the way she eats the apple give a masculine impression. She then asks Jin-Man: 'Where have you been all day, you know our housewife (Jin-Man) is neglecting his duties a lot lately.' In *Mr. Housewife* we notice that the gender segregation based on the work/home distinction is shaped in contrast to social expectations. The roles of breadwinner and homemaker are switched to the opposite gender. It is also possible to notice that home is a place of rest for the woman rather than the man. The husband is waiting for the wife with the delicious meals he has cooked, and the wife is very tired after work.

Kim (1998) mentions the communitarian ideology according to which the wider collectivity outside the family is considered to transcend the family. The communitarian ideology is about the male identity (based on Confucianistic principles) and his membership and commitment to the wider community outside the family. Family matters are considered as a simple, private matter by the work environment and are expected to be secondarised. She also adds that women are excused to some extent if they need to prioritise their family responsibilities over work because work commitment is expected from the men as a part of the male identity. However, because of their commitment to family, women are discriminated against in the labour market. In the film, it is possible to see that the woman has to prioritise her work over her family in order to fit into the Korean communitarian work ideology. In order to do that, she has to entrust all the family matters to her husband. The working woman in the film has to spend the after-work hours in restaurants or bars. In one scene, she comes home very tired at night and finds her husband and daughter sleeping, contrary to traditional expectations. Moreover, the idea that 'home is a place to rest' is hardly reflective of the situation of women in real life. When the middle-class wives have a full-time job, they are expected to do the housework even if they are working because their work is idealised in terms of 'self-development' which became a status or attraction symbol for them to often do double shifts (Y. Kim, 1998). Korean society is slow to adapt to the woman's place as a breadwinner and is challenged by the man as a stay-at-home father. Even though men are expected to help with the housework and women are welcomed to work full time, both genders find it difficult to escape the place they are assigned to within the dichotomy. The career of a wife is considered to be for her 'personal interest' rather than for 'family interest'. The reason is that only the work the woman does inside the house is categorised as for 'family interest' and the commitment to family roles is still expected from the wife, even if she is working. Consequently, by successfully subverting the conception

¹ KoreaHerald. (2020). [Monitor] Half of married couples have double income. Available at: <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200624000545>.

of the home as 'a place to rest' which rationalises gender segregation in modern South Korea, Mr. Housewife provides a different perspective to the audiences.

Context-bound Female Masculinity/Emphasised Femininity

Prominent scholars (Brod, 1994; Messerschmidt, 2018) have argued that the study of masculinities should not be biased towards the relations among men but should focus more on the interrelations of men and women. *Mr. Housewife* allows us to investigate the male-female inter-relationship and how both characters construct their gender roles in relation to each other. While reading into the film, the audience could notice that it was impossible for Jin-Man to construct his domestic masculinity without Soo-Hee, nor would Soo-Hee be able to build her female masculinity without Jin-Man.

According to Butler's concept of gender performativity, masculinity is constructed through the repetition of bodily performances such as acting, dressing, and speaking (Butler, 1993; Moon, 2002: 83). However, the subjects who construct masculinities are mostly assumed to be male, since the mainstream category of masculinity has been traditionally defined in relation to males. Yet, female masculinity is also produced by women with sexual variance as well as heterosexual women (Halberstam, 1998: 268). Even so, it has not attracted as much attention as male femininity in social life or academic literature (Halberstam, 1998: 2).

Existing studies have demonstrated that women may themselves adopt characteristics that are considered 'superior' gendered qualities and preserve hegemonic masculinity (Irvine and Vermilya, 2010). In the film, Soo-Hee is portrayed as an ambitious woman. She carries the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity such as competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence, and independence (Mann and Krane, 2017). Soo-Hee's masculinity is also supported by her mannerisms, facial expressions, and way of speaking. Earning money is known to contribute to the sense of masculinity in men (Gould, 1991). It is also used as a signifier of power and masculinity in the small and big screens as well as advertisements (Timke and O'Barr, 2017). In the film, we observe that Soo-Hee adopts the full responsibility of providing for the family which is one of the features of hegemonic masculinity in Korean society. Soo-Hee also organises the finances. In one scene where they are eating together, Soo-Hee ponders about what to do with their remaining money and asks Da-Na: *'What would you like for us to buy you?'* The personal identity of a man in a family is derived from his willingness and ability to manage and maintain the family unit (Bowman, 2016: 1433). In the film, the opposite can be observed since Soo-Hee feels responsible for opening the discussions about finances, future plans, and setting schedules.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Soo-Hee's female masculinity is more salient when she is at home. Talbot and Quayle (2010) discuss that different forms of gender relations may be constructed depending on the context, while women may construct either emphasised or liberated femininities. When Soo-Hee is introduced to the audience in the opening scene, she is hosting a cooking show. Her mannerisms, and her way of speech seem more feminine compared to when she is interacting with Jin-Man. When she communicates with the audience and her male co-workers, her behaviour corresponds to emphasised femininity that is "defined around compliance with the subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987: 183). Nam-Gyu, who is the producer of the new television program, constructs his masculinity through objectifying and devaluing Soo-Hee's femininity. The legitimisation of his masculine dominance becomes possible through Soo-Hee's adoption of emphasised femininity. While hegemonic masculinity is legitimised through her compliance within the working context, Soo-Hee seems to be burdened and struggles to exert her true character in the form of liberated femininity. In the scene where Nam-Gyu gives Soo-Hee a ride home, he stares at her and says: *'I really like your voice, it's warm'*, which makes Soo-Hee very uncomfortable. In another scene, Soo-Hee is giving Nam-Gyu ideas about their upcoming show over dinner, but he does not seem to listen carefully and opposes all of her ideas. Later when he makes Soo-Hee the host of the show, he begins to ask for a sexual relationship in return for this favour. Soo-Hee, in the working context, is devalued into an object of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999). Shippers (2007) argues that maintaining hegemonic masculinity and exerting male dominance also depends on making sure that the traits related to hegemonic masculinity are not available to women. Moreover, different exercises of feminine characteristics other than emphasised femininity are stigmatised. In order to keep her job, Soo-Hee feels obliged to put up with the behaviour of Nam-Gyu and she tries to comply with what is expected of her. The Confucianist tradition of femininity attaches to women attributes such as submissiveness, caring, obedience, and dependence on men's protection (Lin and Tong, 2008: 121). The female characters depicted in the South Korean dramas also signal an emphasised femininity; the main male character is often attracted to the girlish charm of the female character lacking any social power, waiting to be saved by him (Elfving-Hwang, 2011).

In *Mr. Housewife*, the audience can observe the shifts between Soo-Hee's female masculinity and emphasised femininity that emerge in different contexts. Female masculinity is also portrayed as a resistance to the current gender segregation and sexual harassment in the work context. In one scene, Nam-Gyu enters the hotel room that Soo-Hee is staying in and sexually harasses her. Soo-Hee finally decides to punch him and makes his nose bleed. It is the only scene Soo-Hee's female masculinity is asserted in another context outside of her relationship with

Jin-Man. As a film produced in the mid-2000s, it reflects the notions behind the global feminist movements that took place in the millennial era. At the beginning of the 2000s, feminist movements sought to promote gender equality and ameliorate women's work and domestic conditions (Wrochna, 2018). A contemporary example of a similar resistance is the 'Escape the Corset' (Edraki, 2019) movement in which South Korean women cut their hair short, stopped wearing make-up, and spent their money on cars as a rebellion against the traditional standards of appearance set by conventional femininity and unequal gender relations. As Connell (1995: 261) argues, 'Gender inequality produces resistance.' Social inequalities of gender in the South Korean context led to the construction of female masculinities. Within such a context, occupying the position of masculinity can act as a resistance, a rebellion against the conventional weaker position of the female that is assigned by the patriarchal system. Despite these, because of the Confucian legacy, the traditional notions regarding gender roles are still prevalent in society (Wrochna, 2018). The film successfully reflects this Confucian legacy: although Soo-Hee subverts the traditional gender boundaries with her female masculinity, she still thinks conservatively in terms of the roles that a man is supposed to have in the family. Soo-Hee desires that her husband would find a job and maintain a masculine character in the traditional sense.

CONCLUSION

The article discussed whether the male masculinity depicted by Jin-Man was different from South Korean domestic masculinities reflected in the media, in terms of its relationship with the female gender and conforming to hegemonic masculinity. The critical discourse analysis of Jin-Man's exercise of masculinity was conducted in relation to the gender practices of his wife, Soo-Hee. Three themes of narrative were arrived at and discussed in detail; non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that Jin-Man portrays a type of non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity. In contrast to other examples of domestic masculinities in popular media that have exercised different masculinities, but still adopt the components of hegemonic masculinity, Jin-Man portrays an example of a Korean father who does not fit the standards of hegemonic masculinity in all three aspects – ability to provide, separation from daily work of social reproduction and military masculinity. Jin-Man's masculinity is different not only from the soft *kkonminam* masculinities, but also other domestic masculinities reflected in the media, both in terms of his relationship with the female gender and divergence from hegemonic masculinity. The film provides a unique perspective for symbolically resolving the crisis of masculinity when compared with *kkonminam* masculinities that gained popularity in the same time period. Instead of reaffirming the normative standards of masculinity, Jin-Man's character gives the male audience the idea that men do not have to be the primary subjects in order to resolve the masculinity crisis. The film provides a space away from the actual world's demands of hegemonic masculinity that are stressful for the white-collar male workers and new graduates who are struggling to find a position in the job market.

The film also successfully subverts the conception of the home as 'a place to rest' which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea by depicting home as a woman's place to rest. Although the idea that "home is 'a place to rest'" is not reflective of the situation of women in real life, *Mr. Housewife* provides a different perspective to the audience. Moreover, the film communicates the difficulties that women could experience due to the communitarian ideology.

Mr. Housewife is successful in depicting how male and female characters construct their gender roles in relation to each other in different contexts. While reading into the film, it could be observed that Soo-Hee's female masculinity is apparent mostly in the home-context and when she is interacting with Jin-Man. On the contrary, in the work context, Soo-Hee seems to conform to the ideals set by emphasised femininity. The female character cannot exercise her female masculinity in the working space due to her obligatory relationship with hegemonic and toxic masculinities. Although the film is empowering for the female audience, it also reminds them of the marginalisation of women in corporate life.

In a nutshell, this film can be seen as a part of the discourse that transforms the traditional gender roles. It demonstrates the inherent tension within a historically rigid but still changeable gender dichotomy, where it is difficult for both sexes to exist in a different place than what has traditionally been assigned to them. *Mr. Housewife* successfully presents how, despite the challenges, manhood and womanhood can be renegotiated through alternative ways.

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