

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

맘충 (*MAM-CHUNG*): CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF

DISCURSIVE DISCRIMINATION OF GENDER ROLE CONSTRUCTED

ON KIM JI YOUNG: BORN 1982 FILM

Written and submitted by

MUHAMMAD HAYKAL



**A thesis submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Bachelor's Degree in Communications Studies**

DEPARTEMEN ILMU KOMUNIKASI

FAKULTAS ILMU SOSIAL DAN ILMU POLITIK

UNIVERSITAS HASANUDDIN

MAKASSAR

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis is my own work containing, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material published or written by another person except as referred to in the text. None of the material submitted as part of this thesis has been accepted to award any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of gender role discrimination in South Korea constructed in the film *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982*. This study uses Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1993) and Christian Metz's Semiotics Film analysis (1991) to unpack the formation on the discourse of discrimination of gender roles in South Korea and its construction on the film. The film is intended to construct discourse on gender roles in South Korean society, focusing on the Confucian patriarchal value in Korea, functioning as a critical discourse that aims to challenge particular discursive discrimination. This study concludes that the Author of the film successfully depicts un-emancipatory practices experienced by women, the discourse surrounding what women should and should not do are greatly represented and elaborated, making the audience aware or feel that they are confirmed with their daily life experiences.

Keyword: *Confucianism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Film Analysis, Gender Role Discrimination, Kim Ji Young: Born 1982, South Korea*

ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi diskriminasi peran gender di Korea Selatan yang dikonstruksi di dalam film *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982*. Penelitian ini menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) Van Dijk (1993) dan analisis Semiotik Film Christian Metz (1991) untuk mengurai pembentukan wacana tentang diskriminasi peran gender di Korea Selatan dan konstruksinya di dalam film. Film ini dimaksudkan untuk mengkonstruksi wacana tentang peran gender dalam masyarakat Korea Selatan, dengan fokus pada nilai patriarki Konfusianisme di Korea, berfungsi sebagai wacana kritis yang bertujuan menantang diskriminasi peran gender. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Penulis film berhasil menggambarkan praktik-praktik yang tidak memberdayakan perempuan, wacana seputar apa yang harus dan tidak boleh dilakukan oleh perempuan diuraikan dalam penelitian ini, membuat penonton sadar atau merasa bahwa mereka dikonfirmasi dengan pengalaman hidup sehari-hari mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Analisis Wacana Kritis, Analisis Film, Diskriminasi Peran Gender, Kim Ji Young: Born 1982, Konfusianisme, Korea selatan*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
CHAPTER 1	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Question	5
1.4 Significance of Research	5
CHAPTER 2	7
Introduction	7
2.1 Discursive Gender Role Discrimination in South Korea	7
2.1.1 Construction of gender role discourse in South Korea	7
2.1.2 Counter discourse against discursive gender role discrimination in South Korea.....	9
2.2 Construction of Discourse on Film	13
2.2.1 Introduction to the construction of social discourse on film.....	13
2.2.2 <i>Kim Ji Young: Born 1982</i> as Construction of South Korean discursive discrimination on film	15
CHAPTER 3	17
Introduction	17
3.1 Study Approach.....	17
3.2 Theoretical Framework	21
3.2 Conceptual Framework.....	28
3.3 Data Collection	30
3.4 Data Analysis	31

CHAPTER 4	32
Introduction	32
4.1. Paradigmatic Analysis (Macrostructure)	32
4.2 Syntagmatic Analysis (Microstructure)	35
4.2.1. Kim Ji Young's Family	38
4.2.2. Dae Hyeon's Family	45
4.2.3. Dae Hyeon	49
4.2.4. Kim Ji Young	50
4.2.5. On Public and Friend's Surroundings	55
4.3 Synthesizing Analysis of The Macrostructure and The Microstructure	59
CHAPTER 5	69
5.1 Conclusion	69
5.2 Recommendation	70
REFERENCES	72
APPENDICES	77

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

This study examines the discrimination of gender roles represented in *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* Film, particularly in the context of criticism towards patriarchy in modern South Korean society. The primary discourse concerning discrimination of gender roles in this study focused on the Confucian patriarchal value in Korea, functioning as a critical discourse which aims to challenge particular discursive discrimination.

According to Eungjun Min, Jinsook Joo, and Han Kwak (2003), in South Korea, Film and literature have constituted the Korean imagination by representing social life and criticising the social and political structure through languages and styles. They later argue that film also joined other media, helping to standardise language, encourage literacy, and reduce mutual incomprehensibility. Furthermore, because of the Western science and technology of moving pictures, Korea's rich storytelling tradition has manifested their imaginations of a nation to film.

As mentioned above, one of the films that construct the discourse and criticisms of social life is *Kim Ji-young: Born 1982*, a blockbuster movie that premiered in 2019. This film quickly became popular in South Korea, seeing the number of people watching skyrocketing. The film, screened for the first time on October 23rd 2019, has crossed 3 million viewers, beating *Joker's* most-watched Film in South Korea.

Numerous awards are also given to the film due to its success. In South Korea alone, *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* won eight awards in multiple categories from 2019-2020, such as Best Actress, Best Film, and Best Supporting Actress. This film also received numerous nominations because of its popularity in the nation. Not only topping up Korea's movie chart, *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* also got international recognition, proven by numerous articles covering its success. New York Times (2020) published an article about how this film created a new discourse in South Korea when the number of celebrations and criticism is equal. Another positive review comes from National Public Radio (2020) about how the story gives public voices to private pain, merely a compelling message.

Kim Ji Young: Born 1982 film was adapted from Cho Nam Joo's best-seller novel of the same title. It tells the life of a woman named Kim Ji Young (Jung Yu-Mi), born in 1982 as a child, wife, mother, and co-worker. The condition forced her to resign from her job after becoming pregnant and having children. Like it or not, she has to give up her dream of being a writer and focusing on caring for children to become a housewife. As a housewife, Ji-Young tries to make a good mother, despite various social stresses, even from her husband's family.

The film emphasises the socio-cultural expectations for a woman that was told from the Asian perspective, and it resonated with and triggered women from all over Asia, and perhaps even in the West. This film showed that even in this modern-day, a married woman was expected first and foremost to serve her husband and take care of her children. Her personal development and professional fulfilment

must be shelved or even denied. Filial respect is primary and unconditional, with no questions asked.

Furthermore, Nam-Joo's writer constructs the novel explicitly to spark a discourse on the discrimination of gender roles in South Korea. In her interview with Guardian in February 2020, she claims this story responds to numerous inequalities in the country. Although the change is slow, she believes Korean people will stay strong.

Francis Gateward (2007), in his book about culture and identity in contemporary Korean cinema, argues that Korean filmmakers and companies realised film's value as an entertainment commodity and a medium for symbolic expression. He said the film represented a social issue, especially in South Korea. Even though people go to be entertained, it cannot be denied that film as a cultural text is a primary arena of the social contest in producing cultural meanings. Dealing with commercial pressure and widespread criticism, filmmakers presented various narrative strategies, struggling to decide what to tell, narrating stories, and entertaining. In a situation where they achieved unprecedented freedom in dealing with their stories, filmmakers cultivated Korean cinema's cultural value through diverse cinematic themes.

In line with the passage above about social issues represented in Film, Eungjun Min, Jinsook Joo, and Han Kwak (2003) claim that film and literature have made up Korean imagination by targeting social life in modern Korea and imitating the nature of the country through languages and styles. They continue their argument by claiming the film also joined other media to help standardise

vocabulary, promote literacy, and common mutual incomprehensibility. Another factor, according to the following, is with Western science and moving picture technology; Korea's rich storytelling heritage has continued to encourage people to understand the depiction of a specific issue. A film provides a site for forming an unsettled mixture of different ideas and styles, like a novel. Thus, one should not be obsessed with the determinate historical form of the film but try to see what it is made of.

Specifically, in this study, the film representing the gender role discrimination discourse in South Korea is *Kim Ji-young: Born 1982*. This film is a blockbuster film that premiered in 2019. It tells the life of a woman named Kim Ji Young (Jung Yu-Mi), born in 1982 as a child, wife, mother and co-worker. The condition forced her to resign from her job after becoming pregnant and having children. Like it or not, she has to give up her dream of being a writer and focus on caring for children to become a housewife. As a housewife, Ji-young seems trying to be a good mother, despite various stresses from society, even from the family of her husband.

Even though the film is seen as a revolutionary breakthrough in the Korean movie industry and its gender discourse, criticism is put on how the movie is presented. The cinematic and story centralisation of Ji-Young's Husband and the redemption of Kim-Ji Young's relatives (family and people who interacted with her) illuminated as manifestations of realistic gender discrimination that operate at the expense of women in said film.

Another criticism claims that gender representation in the media affects how people perceive gender issues because some specific gender stereotypes enhance and improve the image of men. This film may show the structure of gender power in which men are portrayed as the stronger sex. While some women in films are portrayed as strong and independent, the apparent gender power structure cannot be disputed (Fahad, 2016).

With all the criticism towards *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* movie, the researcher was more concerned about how this movie became a tool for massive criticism of gender role discrimination by South Korean citizens.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the discussion mentioned above, this article explores the following research question: How was the discursive discrimination of gender roles constructed in *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* film?

1.3 Objective of Research

This study aims to unpack the formation of discursive discrimination of gender roles constructed in the film *Kim Ji Young-Born 1982*.

1.4 Significance of Research

This study is in significance of contributing to the field of film studies and gender studies, as it unpacks the formation of discursive South Korean gender role discrimination in film. By analysing how the film depicts and influences the social realities and challenges women and men face in South Korea, this study can offer a

deeper and broader understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between film and society.

Moreover, this study has a practical implication for media practitioners, particularly those who work in the film industry, to be more conscious and responsible of the discrimination of gender role discourse in South Korea. This study can help them to recognize and address the stereotypes, biases and inequalities that may exist or be reproduced in their film productions.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The Critical Lens of Gender Role Discrimination Discursive in South Korean Family

Introduction

This chapter investigates the discourse surrounding gender roles in South Korea and the representation of gender discrimination in various media platforms, focusing on the film *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982*.

The review first examined the history of gender roles inside a family in South Korea. Then moving on to explore how gender role construction is perceived as discrimination against women. Lastly is the discourse surrounding the issue of gender role discrimination in the Korean film: *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* as a case study.

2.1 Discursive Gender Role Discrimination in South Korea

2.1.1 Construction of gender role discourse in South Korea

Park and Cho (1995) claim that South Korea's gender role exists because of Confucianism's land appearance. Confucianism was given new impetus in Korea during the late occupation of the Chosun dynasty (1650 - 1910). However, both Park and Cho also consider the possibility that the origins of gender roles subsisted in the historical and social conditions of two millennia before. Park continues that

gender roles are flourishing because there is an acceptance of the idea of male superiority within the patrilineal family, and it became more prominent in the late Chosun dynasty than it had been during the early Chosun dynasty (1392–1650). This idea, also supported by the rule of "three obedience" - of daughters to their fathers, of wives to their husbands, and mothers to their sons in later years - has come to the surface, making gender roles more visible within Korean society.

Because of the Chosun Dynasty invasion, many scholars claim that it strengthens gender roles discourse in the Korean peninsula. Starting from the traditional Korean context, Lee, in his work about Confucian tradition in Korean families (1989), claims that the Chosun Dynasty emphasized family solidarity and lineage; also, Premodern agriculturally based Confucianism supported the family as the basic unit of production and consumption. Since production in agriculture depends totally on the family's human resources, it encourages parents to have many children.

Lee also argues that traditional Korean family characteristic is a strict division of labour and the separation of roles between men and women. In the social sense of rights and obligations, women occupied a subordinated position. However, women control the consumption and allocation of resources within the family and the household. For example, the house and farmland belonged to the household's head, but the housewife handled the keys to the rice box and storage rooms.

Moving to South Korea in the 1900s, the discourse of gender roles caused by Confucianism's values is covered by Dayoon Lee (2017). Lee claims that since the late 1980s, the subordinate family systems that dominated the previous period -

the state intervention in the family - have begun to vanish and changed to more revolutionised and clear family policies involving family care functions and income support. Leading to less state intervention in the family structure and roles.

However, Dayoon extended his analysis by claiming that family-centeredness, patriarchal family ties, and gendered family roles based on Confucian familism have been ingrained, resulting in no difference in gender role construction inside a family relationship. This prompted that Confucianism has been deep-rooted Korean family culture and societal construction.

2.1.2 Counter discourse against discursive gender role discrimination in South Korea

In this part, the ignition and counter-discourse process towards the discourse of traditional gender roles in South Korea examined by showing various researchers' viewpoints.

It starts with the acknowledgment of gender role discrimination in South Korea. Ji-Hyun Ahn (2012), in her writing about the reception of multiculturalism discourse and its discursive disposition in Korea, indicates that large influxes are entering the state and influencing people's way of thinking because of globalisation. It is happening because a very homogenous country was suddenly introduced by a hundred thousand until millions of immigrants arrived. By 2007, one million were entering the state and living with the locals.

With a similar idea about multiculturalism, Dayoon Lee (2017) asserted that new family social services exist in modern South Korea. Later on, this program raises South Korean people's awareness to create a contemporary discourse

regarding criticising discriminatory gender roles that they claim are not progressive. An excellent example is the South Korean government's policies: the Healthy Family Support Center (HFSC; 2004) and the Multicultural Family Support Center (MFSC; 2008). The HFSC delivers educational, cultural, and counselling programs for families intending to prevent family problems. The MFSC helps foreign spouses quickly adjust to South Korean society and solves family relations and childcare/education problems in multicultural families.

To understand the gravity of gender role discrimination discourse, especially in South Korea, a survey conducted by the South Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI) in 1998 showed that most South Korean women did all the housework in their households. Consequently, South Korean women marry later and have fewer children because they feel marriage is a form of revocation of women's rights. Another statistic shows that South Korean man headed households, on average, earn 30% higher income than women headed households (Y Mansury & K Baek, 2019). In the same period, Mansury and Baek continue; the projected discrimination results indicate that, in the absence of sexism, the measured male-female income ratio exceeds the income ratio by 26%. Furthermore, households headed by a prime-age man with 20 years of on-the-job experience receive, on average, double the income of households led by a prime-age woman with similar qualifications.

Human Rights Watch (2020) confirmed systematic gender discrimination in South Korea. Gender-based stereotypes about women's role in family and society are normalised— including widespread social stigma and discrimination against

unmarried mothers— and often go unchallenged or even encouraged by the government. On the International scale, the global gender gap data are shown by the World Economic Forum in 2020 and ranked South Korea an abysmal 108 out of 153 countries in gender equality.

Furthermore, Fang Lee Cooke (2010) highlights several aspects of gender role differences in South Korea, particularly within the context of marriage. According to her research on women's participation in employment in Asia, after getting married, women's involvement in the workforce decreases significantly. A wife's need to participate in the workforce is often determined by her husband's social status. Male-dominant cultural values view women as inferior to men, and this is reflected in the lower participation of women in the workforce. All of these factors are significantly related to engrained Confucian values, even if the number of women who experience them is decreasing.

Feminists in South Korea are working on challenging traditional gender roles that limit women to undergo only domestic and reproductive duties and devalue their contributions to society. One of the ways they are doing this is by fighting against the use of the term “*맘충 (Mam-Chung)*” or “mom roach”, combination of “mom” and “roach”, implying that they are like cockroaches that live off their husbands' income and interfere with their children's lives. The term is used to derogate mothers and makes them seen as overly protective, irrational, or obsessed with their children's education (Seo & Choi, 2020). This term reflects the male-dominant cultural value that views women as inferior to men and is a product of

engrained Confucian values that have historically limited women's participation in the workforce.

With all the data presented above, discourse regarding combating gender role discrimination arose among South Korean citizens. Pew Research Centre (2010, 2019) has analysed South Korean women's awareness of their discrimination of gender roles. Those women believe that men in their country have more opportunities to get high-paying jobs. In 2010, 26% of South Korean women believed men had a better life than women. In 2019, however, that percentage went up to 47%, displaying that South Korean women are more sceptical of their equal rights than before.

The Economist in April (2020) showed another occurrence of counter-discourse against gender role discrimination in their special report regarding women taking the fight against misogyny, exclusively discussing marriage. In 2018 only 44% of women surveyed still felt that they needed to tie the knot one day, down from 68% in 1998. The number of unmarried women's percentage rose from 30% in 1995 to 77% in 2015 for those aged 25-29 and 7% to 38% for those aged 30-34. That brings South Korea in line with many European countries and Japan. This phenomenon happens because the expectations and roles placed on a South Korean wife are burdensome. She faces intense pressure to look after her husband's extended family, deferring to her mother-in-law and preparing endless snacks. Therefore, it is still taboo to have a child unless married.

Lastly, Jamal Patterson, on his article in Borgen Magazine regarding equality for South Korean Women (2020). He claims that the narrative is also changing in

South Korea. Those ages 18 to 29 are more likely to disagree with those ages 50 or older about the right that men have preferential treatment of jobs over women. Notwithstanding, the fight continues for South Korean women.

2.2 Construction of Discourse on Film

2.2.1 Introduction to the construction of social discourse on film

Throughout the development of social changes and activism, the film significantly contributes to changing society's perspective. In recent years, filmmakers have been creating films as their platforms to describe the social phenomenon. They show their stances towards specific issues to make society aware of things that happen around them. *Saving Private Ryan (1998)* that constructs the discourse about the horrors of war and advocates for society to be aware of how bad war is until *Fight Club (2001)* represents the societal discourse about how people value their lives.

The earliest research about films representing social issues can be found in 1964 when MacCann discussed the challenge of identifying the movie of the social problem and gave a short overview of the genre from the silent era to the writing age. After that, film identification with the social issue portrayal comes to the surface when a practical term, "Social Problems" discovered and used to explore ten films in their connection to classical Hollywood plot norms throughout the genre's history (Charles Maland, 1988). The social problem film, in this matter, has the characteristic of its difference from another genre by emphasising the issues within the present period's context, engaging with the social problem of a certain

age as it relates to that era with a style that is far more didactic than its contemporaries (MacCann, 1964; Maland, 1988).

Various countries worldwide also celebrate the construction of discourse in the film. Multiple researchers claim that social changes are happening, and social discourse construction revolves around their region in film. In China, Hao Xiaoming & Chen Yanru (2010), in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, argued that film production is changing its focus based on the political situation in the country. They also conclude that the construction of said discourse is shown in the movie since Chinese movie makers are urged to portray their social issues inside the films. In other parts of the world, such as the United States, since the creation of *Let There Be Light* in 1946, portraying discourse of war veterans' post-traumatic disorder, the film industry in the US welcomes the construction of societal discourses in the Film (Quart & Auster, 2011).

In addition to the passage above, explicitly talking about gender, Brook Shapiro (2017), in his journal *Examining Portrayals of Female Protagonists by Female Screenwriters*, claims that there are several notable films such as *Telma & Louise* (Callie Khouri, 1991), *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003), and *Juno* (Diablo, 2007) that gained their popularity, in line with their initial purposes of projecting gender-related discourse in film.

What makes this type of film receive its popularity? Metz, in his book on language and cinema, tells us that the construction of societal discourse in the film happens because it is the "impression of reality," the picturisation of what is happening in real life, is a very straightforward to hold on perception, and it has the

power to draw crowds. Similarly, Leonard Quart and Albert Auster (2011), in their book about the development of Film in the United States, argued that such film could reach a mass audience signifies those films do connect with some part of the conscious or unconscious experience of the general public or, at least, a large proportion of it.

Moreover, in portraying the importance of producing the portrayal of social issues in Film, Erwin Panofsky in *Film, Theory, and Criticism* (1974) argues that films are a powerful and significant art form, and it is hazardous if we do not let this type of film produced. He wrote, "If all the serious lyric poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would seriously regret it. If the same thing were to happen with the movies, the social consequences would be catastrophic."

2.2.2 *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* as Construction of South Korean discursive discrimination on film

Kim Ji Young: Born 1982 film was adapted from Cho Nam Joo's best-seller novel of the same title. Tells the life of a woman named Kim Ji Young (Jung Yu-Mi), born in 1982 as a child, wife, mother, and co-worker. The condition forced her to resign from her job after becoming pregnant and having children. According to Cho Nam Joo when interviewed by the Guardian (2020), this story portrays how women should undergo their role just because they are born with it, and it resulted in discrimination. She also portrayed the discrimination and said "There is still sexual abuse and discrimination. Recently in the news, an applicant could not get a job because the public officials gave her a lower score just because she was female.

However, there has been some change. Women have been protesting and petitioning; they have begun to gather in solidarity. Although change is slow, I believe that we will not go backward."

While seeing that, and realising that it is becoming a discourse in South Korea, *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982* Author Kim Do-young in an Interview with South Korean Herald (2019) said that she must raise this issue to become the discussion for society. She said, "Since the book had presented several topics of discussion for society, there was pressure about whether or not I could create a movie and preserve the value of the original, this being my first feature film. But I thought it was a story that was worth telling, one that must be told."

To conclude, this film was intended to construct discursive gender role discrimination in South Korea, judging by the intention of the story maker and the Author of *Kim Ji Young: Born 1982*.