

A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUNJÔNG MANHWA
BY HWANG MINA, KIM HYERIN AND CHOI IN-SUN

by

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Abstract

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine how today's *sunjông manhwa* (Korean girls' comic) writers are striving to free their works from the influence of *shôjo manga* (Japanese girls' comic) that was predominant in the *sunjông manhwa* of the last few decades. The concept of the girls' comic is presumed to originate in Japan. To go over this issue specifically I have chosen to talk about the works of three Korean *sunjông manhwa* writers who are especially popular among today's readers.

Before exploring the works of these three writers, the first two chapters address the history of the relationship between Japanese comics and Korean comics in general and the history of relationship between Japanese girls' comics and Korean girls' comics in particular.

In Chapter Three, I review the aforementioned three writers and their works. The first writer, Hwang Mina, is like a godmother figure in the *sunjông manhwa* world who opened up the new possibilities for the *sunjông manhwa*'s uniqueness. Hwang Mina had difficulty defining the ethnicity of her *manhwa* in her earlier works. Nevertheless, going through various stylistic stages in her work has enabled her to mature her idea of *manhwa*.

The second writer, Kim Hyerin's case is slightly different from Hwang Mina's. Kim Hyerin does not believe in the theory of the autogenesis of cultural products. Instead she thinks it is very natural that ideas should be borrowed back and forth, including cross cultures. In fact, she tries to apply her theory of 'absorption-maturity-fermentation' to her

works. The fact that the Japanese originated the concept of comics, her works are not Japanese any longer since she has developed it into her own style.

The last writer, Choi In-Sun has written only a small number of short *manhwa* so far. Nevertheless, she plays a very important role in today's *sunjông manhwa* world as she has come up with very unique and distinctive styled works.

Borrowing the theory of absorption-maturity-fermentation, I argue that the works of each writer represent a stage in this process. The progression that has been made from Hwang Mina's early works to the works of Choi In-Sun reflects how today's *sunjông manhwa* has become a firmly established subculture genre in the Korean *manhwa* world.

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Introduction

In present-day Korea, the genre of “comics” has gradually become a well established subculture in the Korean pop world. The word *manhwa* is used to denote the term “comics” in Korean. (From now on the term *manhwa* will be used when discussing Korean comics). The popularity of *manhwa*, in Korea is so great that more and more *manhwa* are being published. One *manhwa* critic, Sohn Sang-Ik, even argues in his book “*Manga versus Manhwa*” that *manhwa* plays a very important role in today’s pop culture world as a new medium.¹ As *manhwa* have increased in popularity, numerous diverse genres have developed. *Sunjông manhwa*, which means girls’ comics in English, is one of the sub-genres that has grown out of the *manhwa* genre. Among all the *manhwa* sub-genres, the *sunjông manhwa* is the most controversial because of its popularity, originality, and creativity. The concept of the girls’ comic itself originated in Japan where it is known as *shôjo manga*.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the way in which the style of Korean *sunjông manhwa* today has undergone processes of change and developed into its own unique Korean style-- despite the fact that it originated from Japanese *shôjo manga*. I will address the history of the relation between *manhwa* and *sunjông manhwa*, as well as the history of *manga* and *shôjo manga*. This brief historical background is integral to providing a better understanding of the texts.

¹ Sohn, Sang-Ik, *Manga VS Manhwa* (Seoul: Chorokbae Magics, 2000), p.11.

This thesis comprises three chapters. Chapter One deals with the history of Japanese *manga* and Korean *manhwa*, respectively. Chapter Two more deeply examines the specific history of *shôjo manga* and *sunjông manhwa*. Since, as mentioned earlier, it is believed that the concept of *sunjông manhwa* originated from Japanese *shôjo manga*, my explanation of the history of Japanese *manga* and *shôjo manga* precedes that of Korean *manhwa* and *sunjông manhwa*. Finally, Chapter Three reviews and discusses specific writers and their *manhwa*. Each section in this chapter will address an individual writer and discuss her *manhwa* style. In the conclusion I will discuss how these writers and the *manhwa* writers of nowadays are trying to achieve an independent status for the *sunjông manhwa* genre.

Chapter One: Historical Aspects of Japanese *manga* and Korean *manhwa*.

1.1 A brief history of Japanese Manga.

It is very difficult to ascertain precisely when or why people started drawing *manga* in Japan. Until the present day, no concrete historical proof has been found with regard to the emergence of *manga*. Paintings like 'zenga' or wood-block prints like 'Ukiyo-e' are consistently speculated to be the origins of *manga* because of their humor and occasional similarity of themes with some genres of manga.² However, it was not until the nineteenth century that the term '*manga*' came into regular use.³ The term was used at that time mainly to refer to wood block prints with comical content.

Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis we will begin the history of *manga* in the nineteenth century, when the term '*manga*' first became known. Once the Meiji Restoration had taken place, in 1868, more and more Americans started traveling to Japan.⁴ Furthermore, European-style cartoons were first introduced in Japan during this time. Among the Western cartoonists living in Japan during this time, George Bigot (1860-1927) from France, and Charles Wirgman (1832-1891) from England, were the

² In the mid 17th century, the picture style imported from China for the purpose of inducing spontaneous humor for a serious purpose is called 'zenga.' 'Ukiyo-e' which means 'floating world pictures' in English is the woodblock printing that was popular during the Edo period. Schodt draws a comparison between the cruel and explicitly sexual scenes in some Ukiyo-e, and similar themes in some *manga*. (*Manga, Manga*, p.30)

³ Kinsella, Sharon, *Adult Manga* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2000,) p.19.

⁴ Beasley, W.G. *The Rise of Modern Japan* (London: Weidefeld and Nicolson, 1993,) p.53.

most well-known mainstream Western cartoonists.⁵ Both were married to Japanese women and stayed in Japan for a long period of time. As mentors, they introduced western styles of painting to Japanese artists. They were not only excellent *manga* writers, but also accomplished artists who taught Japanese artists.⁶ Because of Western artists like Bigot and Wirgman, many new printing technologies were introduced to Japan. Specifically, the introduction of new technologies such as copperplate printing, zinc etching, lithography, and photoengraving made it possible for the cartoon to become the *manga* of today.⁷

The cartoons of Honda Kin'ichirô, a famous *manga* writer in the late 19th century, reflect the extent to which his drawings were influenced by Western -especially British- styles. The cover of the humor magazine Marumaru Chimbun (1877) in particular (which was drawn by Honda) clearly illustrates a strong similarity to the original British Punch.⁸

In the early 20th century, one event that cannot be ignored-especially in terms of its impact on the *manga* world-occurred in Japanese society in 1911: the socialist Kôtoku Shûsui was executed in the incident referred to as the 'Taigyaku Jiken' (High Treason Incident). Before his execution, Kôtoku Shûsui wrote a series of political cartoons in which he was highly critical of the political situation in Japan during that time, including the Japanese expansion into Manchuria and Korea. As a result of his critical stance against the government, he was among the people executed on a charge of attempting to assassinate the emperor. After Kôtoku's death, the comic magazine Tokyo Puck was forced to close down for a period of time because of intense government pressure. The

⁵ Sohn, Sank-Ik, Manga VS Manhwa, p.145.

⁶ Schodt, Frederik L, Manga, Manga, p. 40.

⁷ Sohn, Sang-Ik, Manga VS Manhwa, p.147.

magazine Tokyo Puck, first published in 1906, had been known for printing cartoons that were very critical of the police and governmental structures in Japan.⁹

Meanwhile, cartoonists like Okamoto Ippei - who started working at the Asahi Shinbun newspaper as a cartoon journalist- developed new styles of *manga* such as 'eiga shôsetsu' (movie stories), 'kodomô manga' (children's comics) and 'manga shôsetsu' (narrative cartoons) around the same time. These *manga* opened up the new *manga* genre called 'nansensu manga' (Nonsense *manga*) which depict the human world with a comical touch.¹⁰

Okamoto Ippei continued to play an important role even in the 1920s with his introduction of American comics to Japanese readers. George McManus's 'Bringing up Father,' Bud Fisher's 'Mutt and Jeff,' and Pat Sullivan's 'Felix the Cat' were among the American comics introduced during this time. Several other people also introduced American comics to Japanese readers: after trips to America, they brought back to Japan samples of American comics. Suzuki Bunshirô by then the chief editor of the Asahi Graph, was one of them. In fact, Suzuki Bunshirô is the person who came up with the first successful children's comic strip 'Shô-chan no bôken' (The Adventure of Little Shô), the story of a little boy and a squirrel drawn by two of his staff members.¹¹

Around the same time, the popularity of political cartoons for adults rose as well. In fact, the important role played by the political situation of that time in shaping the development of *manga* cannot be overlooked. The Marxist -influenced movements of feminists and the working class began to spread in the cities: as well, new forms of

⁸ Schodt, Frederik L, Manga, Manga, p.41.

⁹ Shimizu Isao, Manga Tanjô, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1999,) p.14.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.2-3.

popular culture were introduced to society. These new social movements, combined with the introduction of new popular culture, affected *manga* writers. New associations of cartoonists such as the 'Nihon Mangaka Renmei' (Japan Manga Artists' Federation) were formed.¹² Murayama Kazuyoshi, Yanase Masamu, and Shishido Yayuki were members of the federation. They wrote *manga* for publications like Rôdô Shinbun (Laborers' News), and Musansha Shinbun (Workers' News,) for the proletariat.¹³ The *manga* writer Yanase Masamu wrote a comic parody of George McManus's 'Bringing up Father' entitled 'Kanemochi Kyôiku' (Bringing up a Rich Man.) Many ideological cartoonists - including Yanase Masamu- suffered from torture and imprisonment by the police; some of them even died as a result of torture. By that time, the censorship on any kind of art form from the government was very severe. Cartoonists were not exempt from the restrictions.¹⁴

By 1925, the government cracked down on the democratic political movements by implementing the new "Peace Preservation Law." The arrest of many editors and *manga* writers became widespread and many magazine companies closed down altogether. In 1930s, government suppression of critical *manga* publications and *manga* writers became increasingly severe. Thus it was only innovation in the fields of children's comics and nonpolitical *manga* that could take place without much censorship. In 1931, the publishing company Kôdansha started a monthly children's magazine, Shônen kurabu

¹¹ Kinsella, Adult Manga, p.20-21.

¹² Ibid, p.22.

¹³ Shimizu, Manga Tanjô, p.152.

¹⁴ Schodt, Manga, Manga, p.51.

(Boy's club), that consisted of long serialized comics.¹⁵ Each episode of these comics usually ran to twenty pages and was printed in color.¹⁶

However, even the content of children's comic magazines became restricted: from the mid-1930s onward, following the outbreak of Pacific war, these magazines were required to contain more military adventure stories and fewer *manga*. Only those *manga* writers who were members of 'Shin Nippon Manga Kyôkai' (New Japan Manga Association) could write *manga* for the few existing children's magazines. The New Japan Manga Association was supported by the government in order to place *manga* writers under the control of an official policy. The early 1940s then, became a disastrous time period for the *manga* world. In 1943, as a result of a paper shortage caused by the 1942 breakdown in trade, all paper distribution was put under the control of government. From the middle of 1944 onward, all comic strips were prohibited from publication in newspapers. In 1944, the cartoon magazine Manga was the only magazine still running.¹⁷

During a brief segment of the post-war period -- approximately from 1946-- rakugo (storytelling) and kamishibai (picture-card shows) provided entertainment for the devastated Japanese people. As picture-card shows became very popular, picture card artists began to work for publishing companies devoted to producing books for 'kashihonya' (book rental shops). With the growth of book rental shops, the *manga* writers who wrote for rental *manga* publishers began to develop *manga* with more realistic style: the teenage artist Tatsumi Yoshihiro, who came up with serious adult *manga* dramas, is one example. Around this time, street vendors in Osaka were selling

¹⁵ Kinsella, Adult Manga, p.23.

¹⁶ Schodt, Manga, Manga, p.51

¹⁷ Kinsella, Adult Manga, p. 25-26.

manga printed in red ink called *akabon* (red books) and in 1947 Tezuka Osamu, who became the most widely known figure in the Japanese *manga* world, published the *akabon* 'Shin Takarajima' (New Treasure Island). Tezuka Osamu was only twenty years old.¹⁸ Following the enormous success of 'New Treasure Island,' he began serialized *manga* like 'Jungle Taitei' (Jungle Emperor) and 'Atomu Taishi' (Ambassador Atom) in boys' magazines such as Manga Shônen (Manga Boy) and Shônen (Boy). Years later, many of Tezuka Osamu's *manga* were made into TV series.¹⁹

In the late 1950s, publishing companies such as Kôdansha and Shôgakukan started the first cheap weekly *manga* magazines for direct retail. The impact of the weekly *manga* magazines' popularity on the rental *manga* industry was so great that it converted half of the rental *manga* writers to this new *manga* industry. The popularity of the weekly *manga* magazines was significant not only among children but also among teenage readers. By 1966 their monthly circulation approached one million and by 1974 there were seventy-five magazines with a total circulation of twenty million.²⁰

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, some publishers started looking for political and social themes to include in their *manga*. The serialized historical *manga* on the Chinese cultural revolution, 'Mô Taku Tô' (Mao Tse Tung), and the *manga* protesting American army bases in Japan, 'Ningen no Jôken' (Human Condition), are representative works of these *manga* with political and social themes. Meanwhile 'Ashita no Joe' (Tomorrow's Joe), a *manga* by Chiba Tetsuya, became very popular among university students around same time: serialized in Shûkan Shônen Magazine from 1968 to 1973,

¹⁸ Ibid, p.29.

¹⁹ Schodt, Manga, Manga, p.64.

²⁰ Kinsella, Adult Manga, p.31.

the story is about a boxer who fights to reach fame. 'Ashita no Joe,' however, was blamed for inciting violent and anti-social activities among young Japanese, especially the university demonstrators of the 1960s.²¹

But by the mid 1970s, political stories could no longer be found in *manga* magazines. Instead, unrealistic drawing styles and the themes of fantasy and romance began to appear in *manga*. Kinsella suggests that the hippie movement of the 1970s and its notions of a naturalistic aestheticism influenced the *manga* world.²²

Yet despite the consistent changes in the style of *manga* (with significant changes occurring almost each decade), the popularity of *manga* has been continuous through to the present day. In 1980, roughly 4.3 billion books and magazines were published in Japan and 27 percent of these were comics. Comics in story format are currently the most common form of Japanese manga and most of these story comics are serialized in manga magazines. The comic magazines are directed at readers of different genders and ages: girls and boys, women and men. In fact, the most popularly read comics are *shōnen manga* (boys' comics) and *shōjo manga* (girls' comics).²³

Five companies (Shūeisha, Shōgakukan, Kōdansha, Hakusensha and Akita) that publish popular *manga* magazines dominate the *manga* industry. In 1993, the first four of these companies controlled 75.3 per cent of the total *manga* market. In this sense, the contemporary *manga* industry in Japan is very exclusive and launching a new *manga* magazine is, therefore, considered very risky business. From the 1980s to the 1990s, the weekly boys' comic magazine Jump was the best selling *manga*. In 1995, an average of

²¹ Ibid, p.34.

²² Ibid, p.37.

²³ Schodt, Manga, Manga, p.14.

6.5 million copies of Jump were sold each week, (although the actual readership of *manga* magazines is estimated to be about three times higher than the circulation figures indicate). In the mid-1990s the entire *manga* industry also started to decline with the introduction of internet and computer games to Japanese children,²⁴ but there is no question that *manga* remain an extremely popular and important medium in contemporary Japan.

²⁴ Kinsella, Adult Manga, p.43.

1.2 A brief history of Korean *manhwa*.

By contrast, the Korean situation was very much constrained in that published *manhwa* could only cover subject matter that promoted governmental information services. Japanese *manga* publishing, accordingly, has covered far wider areas and subjects than that of Korea. And, in comparison to the development of Japanese *manga*, the history of Korean *manhwa* started relatively late due to extremely harsh censorship from the government.

The first art form of cartooning in Korea is presumed to be the painting style called ‘*minhwa*,’ meaning folk painting, which was popular from the 18th century to the 19th century.²⁵ *Minhwa* was a form of painting enjoyed by the common people and it is now considered to be a form of cartooning because, like *manhwa* today, it functioned as part of the public mass media. Usually the pictures were about old legends or fairy tales such as ‘*Kuûnmong*’ and ‘*Chunhyangjôn*.’

In addition to *minhwa*, there was also ‘*pungsokhwa*,’ meaning secular traditional daily life painting, another kind of painting enjoyed by the common people. *Pungsokhwa* appeared a bit later than *minhwa*: *pungsokhwa* were popular from the mid-18th century to the early 19th century (in the late *Chosun* dynasty). *Pungsokhwa* is a form of painting that depicted the common people’s daily lives with a light touch. For example, in his paintings, Shin Yun-Bok, one of the most famous artists, primarily depicted love relationships between *kisaeng* (courtesans) and men of high class.²⁶ The contributions of

²⁵ Sohn, Sang-Ik, *Manhwa Tongsa, Sang*, (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1999,) p.38.

²⁶ Ibid, p.42.

minhwa and *pungsokhwa* are quite important in *manhwa* history particularly in the sense that they established an art genre for the common people. Before the introduction of *minhwa* and *pungsokhwa*, art was considered the property of the aristocracy.

By the late 19th century, Korea was forced to open its market to foreign countries by Japan and the Western powers. Being exposed to foreign powers meant that new Western printing skills were introduced to Korea. Foreign influence also brought about a breakdown of the Confucian order within Korean society. In fact, the breakdown of Confucian order was directly caused by various social movements working in favor of equality among people. Eventually, the people's demand for mass media to share information was generated as well. From this historical background, we can derive an understanding of how *manhwa* (or the comic) was first introduced to the people during this time. The cartoon strip in the newspaper is the first form of *manhwa* that functioned as part of the mass media to satisfy public demand.²⁷

However, Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910, and the Japanese authorities imposed many restrictions on Korean artists, including cartoonists. Although *manhwa* encountered inevitable discouragement, new *manhwa* genres for adults and children were established through various magazines throughout the colonial period. Adult magazines like Dongmyông (Eastern light, established 1922) and Kaebiyôk (Enlightenment, established 1923) and the children magazines like Haksaeng (Pupil, date unknown) and Shinsonyôn (New boys, established 1922) provide good examples.²⁸

²⁷ Sohn, Manhwa Tongsa, Sang, p.60-66.

²⁸ Ibid, p.151.

After the Japanese Occupation ended in 1945, the range of *manhwa* expanded extensively not only in subject matter but also in terms of style. During the post-World War Two period, *manwha* was firmly established as a pop culture genre in Korea. After the 1960s in particular, the variety of *manhwa* genres began to vary widely as a number of publishers created magazines aimed at readers of various ages, from very young children to older generations.²⁹ Specific *manhwa* genres for girls and boys were also established.

I must point out, however, that there has so far been very little published research done on Korean *manhwa*, despite their great popularity and social importance. I have based my comments on *manhwa* history in this paper on the work done by scholars such as Sohn Sang-Ik, but it is my hope that this essay will extend the as-yet limited information about *manhwa* through the introduction of the work and careers of three important *manhwa* writers.

²⁹ Sohn, Manhwa Tongsa, Ha, p.95.

Chapter Two: The Development of *shôjo manga* in Japan and *sunjông manhwa* in Korea

As we have seen, with the increase in popularity of manhwa and manga, new genres were developed that targeted readers by gender and age group. Among other genres, this diversity of readership brought about the birth of *shôjo manga* and *sunjông manhwa* in Japan and Korea respectively. In this chapter I will briefly relate the histories of the Japanese *shôjo manga* and the Korean *sunjông manhwa*. As a specific genre, the establishment of Japanese *shôjo manga* predates Korean *sunjông manhwa*. And since the idea of *sunjông manhwa* in Korea originated with Japanese *shôjo manga*, the history of Japanese *shôjo manga* will be discussed first.

2.1 The Case of Japanese Shôjo Manga

We can only speculate about the exact time period in which girls' comics appeared to the readers as the firmly established genre of '*shôjo manga*.' In the 1920s and the 1930s, practical magazines aimed particularly at a young female readership were first published, and it was not until the late 1950s that girls' comic magazines were first introduced. The births of all these magazines for girls can be mainly attributed to normative single sex education. The first girls' comics were drawn by men, and the Kôdansha's Shôjo Club was one of the first magazines to serialize girls' comics. Tagawa Suiho and Kuragane Shoshuke are the best known *manga* writers of this early period. In particular,

Kuragane's 'Anmitsu-hime' (Princess Anmitsu) was a popular early girls' comic,³⁰ although it was no more than a short comic strip of a few pages. Apparently, for *manga* writers, writing *manga* for girls' magazines was done only to please the publishers.

The developed story line that is essential in today's girls' comics was first introduced by Tezuka Osamu. His 'Ribon no Kishi' (Princess Knight) in 1953 was a big hit among Japanese girls: and it contained many ingredients that later defined the *shôjo manga*, including a love story, Western settings, large-eyed heroines, and bisexual personalities.³¹ The bisexual image of the character Sapphire in 'Ribon no Kishi' -who dresses and behaves like a beautiful boy but in fact was a girl -particularly appealed to readers of the time³²; its influence can be seen in other, later *shôjo manga* such as 'Berusaiyu no Bara' (The Rose of Versailles) and 'Orufesu no Mado' (The Window of Orpheus). Much like Sapphire in 'Ribon no Kishi,' the main characters in these stories are beautiful young girls cross-dressed as boys because of the complicated background into which they were born.

From the late 1950s onward, a few female *manga* writers such as Mizuno Hideko, Maki Miyako, and Watanabe Masako began to join male *manga* writers in the field of girls' comics.³³ Their entry into the world of comics reflects the improvement of women's status in society. During the transitional period between the 1950s and 1960s, some of the girls who were brought up reading the aforementioned girl's comics began to wonder why *manga* were only drawn by men, and they eventually became *manga* writers

³⁰ Shiokawa, Kanako, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics" In J. Lent ed., Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad and Sexy (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State Univ, 1999,) p.99.

³¹ Schodt, Manga, Manga, p.96.

³² Watanabe Tsuneo, "Seibetsu ekkyô no bôken," Yuriika, February, 1987, p.57

themselves. Initially, as women writers entered the field, they followed the conventions and aesthetics for girls' comics that male writers had established. Nevertheless, as the number of girls' comic began to increase, the readers' aesthetic tastes began to vary as well.³⁴

A growing diversity in what readers were looking for in content and style within girls' comics resulted. Furthermore, the readers' enormous support enabled female writers to develop their own styles and conventions, particularly in the latter half of the 1960s. The themes, subject matters, and settings of *manga* stories began to vary greatly. Although some people still suggest that all the comics for girls looked basically the same,³⁵ a number of distinct features of this specific art genre of the late 1960s cannot be ignored—including the incredibly big eyes which take up almost half of the characters' faces. Usually the girls with big eyes are surrounded by beautifully drawn blooming flowers that dominate background scenes. Another significant feature of the *manga* character is the ambiguous description of secondary sexual characteristics. Large bows, ribbons and lace purposely hide the heroine's breasts. Therefore, based only on the appearance of body parts, it is very difficult to tell whether the character is male or female.³⁶ The reasons for such depictions are not clearly known. However, such sexually neutral depictions of female and male characters were visible as early as the aforementioned 'Ribon no Kishi' by Tezuka Osamu.

There is a conventional idea that the word *shôjo manga* connotes an image of fragility and sensitivity which also coincides with the conventional images of the feminine.

³³ Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p.97.

³⁴ Ibid, p.97.

³⁵ Shiokawa, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," p.100.

Nevertheless, with more and more women writers' entering into the business of *manga*, the conventional image of *shôjo manga* gradually began to change, especially in terms of the heroine's personality. New female writers gradually replaced the passive, sad heroines created by the male writers in the early era with heroines characterized by active and striving personalities. Furthermore, a variety of occupations and positions for heroines was also introduced.³⁷ In particular, the image of 'the beautiful girl fighter' created during the 1960s was a big hit. In fact, it was not in *shôjo manga* but primarily in TV animations that the beautiful girl fighter image emerged; however, it greatly influenced *shôjo manga* as well.³⁸ It was very natural for Japanese schoolgirls during this period to identify with the *shôjo manga* heroines. The way heroines in the *manga* coped with their tough situations reminded girls of their own situations and gave them courage to go on with their lives.³⁹

Being raised in this kind of atmosphere, young writers such as Ikeda Riyoko, Hagio Moto, Oshima Yumiko, and Takemiya Keiko, made their debut as *manga* writers and became famous in the 1970s. As soon as they appeared in print, they quickly acquired fans who became very devoted to their *manga*.

Over the last thirty years or so, the genre has become firmly established and increased its commercial profitability. With the great success of the *shôjo manga* business, various themes and styles in both drawings and story lines emerged.⁴⁰ Most of the early girls' comics followed the same basic pattern: young girls starred as waifs or tomboys. The late

³⁶ Ibid, p.101.

³⁷ Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p.97.

³⁸ Saito Minako, *Kôitten ron*, (Tokyo: Village center, 1998), p.148.

³⁹ Shiokawa, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," p.103.

⁴⁰ Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p.97.

1960s and the early 1970s was the most active period in which women artists were trying to produce variety in their genres. This was the period when stories and characters became freer in all aspects. However, “cute” images of the characters were still maintained throughout the entire context of *shôjo manga*; the romantic format of *manga* still persisted as well. Nevertheless, the way in which the heroine’s romance developed became somewhat more diversified. In addition, there were *shôjo manga* with little or no romance element, such as the 1960s and early 70s stories based on the Japanese women’s Olympic volleyball team, ‘Sign wa V’ (The sign is victory) and ‘Attack #1.’

The heroine’s nemesis and the obstacles the heroine had to go through also varied, and fans ranged widely from young girls to older women and even men. These changes mostly occurred in the 1970s, and this decade is now considered to be the golden age of *shôjo manga*. Epic stories like Satonaka Machiko’s ‘Ashita Kagayaku’ (Tomorrow Will Shine) and Ikeda Riyoko’s ‘Berusaiyu no Bara’ (The Rose of Versailles) were also first introduced during this era. These *manga* were usually over a thousand pages in length.⁴¹

As mentioned previously, the significant development of themes and topics in terms of diversity and quality is well illustrated in these *manga*. A *manga* like ‘The Rose of Versailles,’ which includes the characters from various backgrounds and the ways in which their lives are intertwined is particularly intriguing. ‘The Rose of Versailles’ is a story that explores the love and hate relationships of the people in the French court during the period of the French Revolution. In the story, there are two main heroines with contrasting images and background: the real historical figure, Queen Marie Antoinette, and a fictional figure, Oscar, entirely created by the writer. The character of Marie

Antoinette is the typical image of femininity that can easily be seen in the classic *shôjo manga*: fragile, helpless and always ending up under the other characters' protection. On the other hand, the fictional character Oscar is gendered as masculine, despite her female body. Because of her father's strong wish for an heir (necessarily male), Oscar spends her entire life cross-dressed as a male. Oscar is a very protective and sacrificing character whose duty is to show all her loyalty to Marie Antoinette and act as her private guide and confidante. These two characters are not really in a relationship of rivalry; however, the ways in which they are linked to each other are quite complex. They compete for love as they fall in love with the same person, (Feltzen, a Swedish duke); at the same time, the affection they have for each other is inexplicably strong. Both of their lives end tragically in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

The introduction of the competitive formula was one of the notable changes in *shôjo manga* during the 1970s, and this formula was frequently used in *manga* set in the context of sports. They usually contained a great deal of action and violence, themes that for a long time had been a big hit in boy's comics. Establishing a competitive dynamic between the heroine and her rival definitely required the presence of the rival. With the presence of a rival, the heroine's strife was considerable as she sought to defeat the rival. While the rivals were not always represented as evil, they were usually depicted as less mature than the heroines.⁴²

It was also during the 1970s that some of the writers broke with the conventional notion that *shôjo manga* must star only females as heroines. From the 1970s onward, the

⁴¹ Shiokawa, "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," p.102.

⁴² Ibid, p.104.

most popular *manga* theme -- Cinderella triumphing in love-- began to lose its popularity. Many changes took place in Japanese society during the 1970s. As a result of significant economic growth, Japanese women were offered more opportunities to participate in the labor market, which consequently gave them opportunities to think about their identities. Women gradually began to speak about the inequality that they suffered in patriarchal society. Even the new *manga* theme of homosexual love between young boys that began to emerge from the 1970s can be interpreted as reflecting the achievement of the feminist movement to a certain extent. This theme allowed women – as subjects—to observe men as objects. Young boys were portrayed as attractive objects for female readers' enjoyment.⁴³

Women writers such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko wrote *manga* addressing love between young boys. *Manga* like 'Toma no Shinzo' (The Heart of Thomas) and 'Kaze to Ki no Uta' (The Song of Wind and Tree) feature settings in which women were completely excluded-- settings such as a boys' dormitory.⁴⁴ With the emergence of a new genre that depicted male homosexual love, sex scenes were frequently used by almost all *shôjo manga* writers. In today's *shôjo manga*, sex scenes are nearly always included, whereas fifteen years ago it was considered very radical to include sex scenes in *shôjo manga*. Watching young boys having sex arouses in female readers an odd sexual pleasure. As a third party, women can enjoy looking at male bodies as sexual objects.

⁴³ Suzuki, Kazuno, "Pornography or Therapy? Japanese Girls Creating the Yaoi Phenomen." In S. Innes ed., *Millenium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.) p.246-247.

⁴⁴ Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p.100.

However nowadays, the themes of today's *shôjo manga* greatly vary having gone through all the experimental processes. Therefore it is very hard to focus on only one certain theme when today's *shôjo manga* is concerned.

2.2. The case of Korean Sunjông Manwha.

The word '*sunjông*' which literally means pure love in Korean was introduced for the first time in the 1950s in Korea. During this time, *manhwas* can be categorized into mainly three genres: the first genre is called *hwalkûk*, which means dynamic drama; the second genre is called *myôngrang* which denotes *manhwa* with a bright story and comical touch; and the third is called *kajok manhwa*, meaning *manhwa* for the family.⁴⁵ It may be safely assumed that the *sunjông manhwa* originated with the third genre. In the 1950s, Korea was in a very chaotic situation, experiencing serious problems of poverty ; the Korean War and the long dictatorship of Syngman Rhee created a tragic situation for Koreans.⁴⁶ Needless to say, the sufferings of marginalized groups in society such as women and children were even more extreme.

The *sunjông manhwa* was a comic genre that emphasized humane love - in fact, humane love is what *sunjông manhwa* really means. The genre was especially popular among women and children. The first *sunjông manhwa* in Korean *manhwa* history was 'Yông won han jong' (The Eternal Bell) by Han Sung-Hak. 'The Eternal Bell' is the story of two girls who become orphans during the Korean War. Although the story itself is very tragic, it ends happily. The realistic depiction of the poor orphan girls was relevant to the situation of the people at the time and evoked feelings of great sympathy.⁴⁷ In other words, this *manhwa* was a huge success, and it also influenced the emergence of the *sunjông manhwa* genre.

⁴⁵ Park In-Ha, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* (Seoul: Salim Chulpansa, 2000) p.37.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.41.

⁴⁷ Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa, Ha*, p.293.

The emergence of *sunjông manhwa* had several very important effects on people during this time, but there are mainly two predominant roles that *sunjông manhwa* played. First of all, the stories of *sunjông manhwa* gave readers comfort by consistently telling them that being a warm hearted, kind person would help you through any difficulty, no matter how trying life may be. Most of the stories in *sunjông manhwa* shared a similar story line. At the beginning, the heroine suffers badly from her unfortunately tragic situation. Nevertheless, the fate of the warmhearted heroine is always a happy one. Secondly, by featuring characters in helpless situations, the *sunjông manhwa* reminds readers that they are not alone in suffering from the poverty and absurdity of this world. In this way, *sunjông manhwa* worked as a good reminder. A number of *sunjông manhwa* feature poor, young orphan girls who must support themselves or sometimes younger siblings as well.⁴⁸

The *sunjông manhwa* “Ulmitte sôn Bongsôn” (Bongsôn Standing under the Fence) contains all of the aforementioned elements of *sunjông manhwa*. “Bongsôn Standing under the Fence” was first published in 1960 and written by Kwon Youngsôp. This *manhwa* is about a poor young girl named Bongsôn who must support her family as well as herself. Her incompetent father left his family after he lost everything by gambling, and so his oldest child, Bongsôn is forced into the role of bread winner. Bongsôn tries very hard to support her younger siblings, and her plight is described in a sympathetic manner. In the end, when the heroine Bongsôn tragically dies, her death brings about great catharsis within readers.⁴⁹ It seems that through Bongsôn’s victimization, the author

⁴⁸ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettina?* p.45.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.46.

Kwon Youngsôp condemns the absurdity of the social structure in Korea. Most importantly of all, the situation of Bongsôn could be related to the situation of everyone else during that time.

After 'Bongsôn Standing under the Fence' became successful, Kwon Youngsôp began writing a series of 'Bongsôn' stories featuring the same heroine, but with happy endings. In fact, Kwon Youngsôp started his career as a 'Family Comic' writer who wrote stories about happy family life. However, following the popularity of the 'Bongsôn' series, he started writing *manhwa* only for girls. These *manhwa* featuring 'Bongsôn' as heroine of the story were released mostly from the 1960s to the 1970s. For the most part, the stories shared the same format. In the beginning, the warmhearted, cute Bongsôn suddenly encounters a tragic change in her life, and she struggles for some time. However, in the end, she always overcomes all of her troubles with her strong will, and everything ends happily.⁵⁰ Interestingly even during the time when *manhwa* like the 'Bongsôn' series were popular, the influence of Japanese *manga* drawing styles was absent. The drawing style used in Kwon Youngsôp's *manhwa* was usually very simple and the physical features of the characters were closer to those of real Koreans.⁵¹

Nevertheless, in order to prevent confusion, it must be noted that the genre of *sunjông manhwa* was not firmly established until the mid 1960s when, in fact women writers began borrowing drawing styles from Japanese *shôjo manga*. Moreover, from that time on, people have tended to think that Korean *sunjông manhwa* overlaps with Japanese *shôjo manga*.⁵² Beginning in the mid sixties, the names of women writers like Um Hûija,

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.49.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.48.

⁵² Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa*, Ha, p.294.

Min Annie, and Song Soon-Hûi began to appear in the bookstores. In their *manhwa*, Japanese *shôjo manga* drawing styles were introduced to readers for the first time. In fact, these women's drawings were largely influenced by Tezuka Osamu's drawing styles; in particular, his *manga* 'Ribon no Kishi' (The Knight of Ribbon) had a powerful impact on Korean women writers. These women writers' *manhwa* became incredibly popular and their fans increased enormously day by day.⁵³ This is presumed to be the time when the genre *sunjông manhwa* became firmly established in the field of *manhwa*. The story formats of early *sunjông manhwa* were not very different from those of *sunjông manhwa* in the 1950s: their main theme was still a little girl fighting against the harshness of the world, and these comics ended happily most of the time.⁵⁴

Women writers like Um Hûija started writing *manhwa* based on famous Western novels or movies that were especially popular among girls at the time. Louisa May Alcott's 'Little Women' and the musical 'The Sound of Music' were also illustrated in Um Hûija's *manhwa*. These sorts of restructured *manhwa* were quite popular.⁵⁵ However, the story quality of *manhwa* was not significantly improved since they still lacked the writer's own creative ideas.

Nevertheless, for writers this was probably the safest way to avoid censorship. Censorship of all kinds of art forms, especially during the 1960s, was so severe that artists and writers had almost no creative freedom. The restrictions that the government imposed on art were extremely strict. In the *sunjông manhwa* writers' case, characters in the *manhwa* were not even permitted to wear earrings or short skirts since these were

⁵³ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* p.58.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.49.

⁵⁵ Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa, Ha*, p.294.

considered to be too luxurious or sexy for the readers of that time.⁵⁶ As a result of harsh government censorship, most *manhwa* writers became frustrated and lost their will and motivation to go on writing *manhwa*. Toward the 1970s, censorship became less severe, but there still existed many restrictions. From the 1960s onward, the image of the heroine gradually began to change from a poor and helpless girl to an outgoing and fashionable girl.

As *manhwa* writers like Min Annie, Song Soonhûi, and Um Hûija began to engage themselves actively in the field of *sunjông manhwa*, characters with Western physical features were introduced. Almost all heroines had wavy blonde hair, small faces, and exaggerated, large sparkling eyes. Also, *manhwa* were primarily set in Western countries. The *manhwa* writer Min Annie has actually confessed that she studied Japanese *shôjo manga* from the moment she decided to be a *manhwa* writer. This is perhaps the channel through which the Japanese drawing style was indirectly borrowed. Since then and until very recently, Japanese *shôjo manga* became a standard textbook format for Korean *sunjông manhwa* writers.⁵⁷

In fact, the 1970s was in a sense the most depressing time period in Korean *manhwa*'s history. *Manhwa* writers still suffered greatly from harsh censorship; they were forced to comply to story lines that exemplified the principal of 'kwôn sôn jing ak' (promotion of virtue and reproof of vice) which had a very predictable ending. But unlike readers of the 1950s or 1960s, 1970s readers were not satisfied with the simple story format, especially

⁵⁶ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* p.56.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.57-58.

as their economic situation improved.⁵⁸ The time when the predictable happy ending *manhwa* could give people comfort was over.

As *sunjông manhwa* decreased in popularity during the mid 1970s, a number of *manhwa* writers decided to give up on writing *manhwa* and left Korea for countries like the U.S.A or Canada. When these *manhwa* writers left, the *sunjông manhwa* field became barren in their absence.⁵⁹ At this time, *shôjo manga* experienced its golden age in Japan. Almost all the canonical *manga* that are still famous were written at that time: *manga* such as Ikeda Riyoko's 'The Rose of Versailles,' 'The Window of Orpheus,' Miuchi Suzue's 'The Mask of Glass,' and Igarashi Yumiko's 'Candy, Candy.' Moreover, writers such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko began writing their works during this time.⁶⁰ Eventually, popular *shôjo manga* were translated and introduced in Korea and began to fill the empty space Korean *manhwa* writers had left behind.

When Ikeda Riyoko's 'The Rose of Versailles' was first introduced to Koreans, it was an enormous success. The organized story line, as well as the exquisite combination of real historical characters and the author's imaginary characters, evoked great excitement which Korean readers had not experienced before. Furthermore, the introduction of 'The Rose of Versailles' to Korean fans lifted the age level of fans from elementary school-aged children to teenagers.⁶¹ After Ikeda Riyoko's 'The Rose of Versailles,' another *shôjo manga*, 'Candy, Candy,'⁶² by Igarashi Yumiko, replaced it in popularity. In fact,

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.63.

⁵⁹ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* p.73.

⁶⁰ Schodt, *Manga, Manga*, p.97.

⁶¹ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* p.77.

⁶² 'Candy, Candy' is the story about waif styled orphan girl. Her striving for happiness is the main theme of the story. The story setting is in America.

Igarashi Yumiko's 'Candy, Candy' played a key role in bringing about renewed interest in the genre of *sunjông manhwa*.⁶³

It is not an exaggeration to say that during the 1970s there was practically no such thing as a distinctly Korean *sunjông manhwa* style. Almost all elements-including story format and drawing styles were copied from Japanese *shôjo manga*. This is also why the 'European Complex' has been identified in Korean *sunjông manhwa*. To go into a deeper explanation of the 'European Complex,' one must examine the situation in Japan⁶⁴ because the 'European Complex' has its origins in Japanese *shôjo manga*. Historically, prior to the Meiji period, Japanese artists usually depicted Japanese people more realistically whereas they depicted Europeans as big hairy monstrous characters with incredibly large noses. Schodt notes in his book, *Dreamland Japan*, that "with the introduction of Western art and esthetics after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 ...the Japanese ideal began to shift toward the classic Greek model, what Japanese artists call "the eight-head physique". The Japanese defeat in World War Two caused a national loss of confidence that clearly extended to Japan's self-image. The Western ideal of beauty was not only accepted, but pursued to an often ludicrous degree."⁶⁵ After all, the Japanese idea of 'being civilized' became equivalent to 'being Western.'

According to Sohn Sang-Ik, the author of '*Manhwa Tongsa*' (The History of Manhwa) *shôjo manga* such as 'The Rose of Versailles' and 'The Window of Orpheus' demonstrated the strong desire among the Japanese to be like Westerners. Most of those *manga* are set in Western countries and feature Caucasians as their main characters.

⁶³ Park, *Nuga Candyrûr mohamhaettna?* p.78.

⁶⁴ Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa, Ha*, p.298.

⁶⁵ Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, p.60- 61.

Unconditionally copying Japanese *shôjo manga* during the 1970s resulted in the generation of a “European Complex” in Korean *sunjung manhwa* as well. However, since the late 1980s, the movement called ‘*Tal Ilbon pung manhwa*’ (Japan-free comic) led by *sunjông manhwa* writers such as Hwang Mina has gradually begun to influence other *sunjung manhwa* writers as well.⁶⁶ These days Korean *manhwa* writers are developing their own narrative themes and styles, with little influence from Japanese *manga*. In the following section I will introduce three contemporary Korean writers of *sunjông manhwa*.

⁶⁶ Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa*, p.299.

Chapter Three: Sketches on *manhwa* writers in Korea.

According to many known *manhwa* theorists such as Sohn Sang-Ik, it was in the 1980s that Korean *sunjông manhwa* emerged from under the shadow of Japanese *shôjo manga* in order to establish its own identity.⁶⁷ However, the issue of the relation between Japanese *shôjo manga* and Korean *sunjông manhwa* is still very controversial in terms of whether or not the Japanese influence was a form of cultural imperialism. Although it is undeniably true that the original idea of *manga* came from Japan and until very recently, had a significant impact on *sunjông manhwa*, it is also true that the consolidation of the genre *sunjông manhwa* as a subculture is taking place now. Particularly in a genre like *sunjông manhwa*, the original idea of which is supposedly imported from Japan, the issue of *sunjông manhwa*'s cultural identity is highly controversial. Nevertheless, as *sunjông manhwa* takes its place as an established genre in the *manhwa* field, it seems that *sunjông manhwa* writers from each generation articulate different opinions of its identity as 'Korean' *sunjông manhwa*. Each *manhwa* writer's ideas of *sunjông manhwa*'s cultural identity greatly differs depending on the time period in which they were active in writing their *manhwa*.

In this chapter, the works of three *sunjông manhwa* writers will be discussed with some attention to the issue of cultural identity. Since the issue of *sunjông manhwa*'s cultural identity began to emerge in the late 1980s, only the works of those writers who began their career after the 1980s will be discussed. The *sunjông manhwa* writers that will

⁶⁷ Sohn, *Manhwa Tongsa, Ha*, p.299.

be discussed in this chapter are categorized into three groups according to the time period in which they began their career and their styles of writing *manhwa*. The writers from each group have gone through different processes of developing their own styles and have articulated different theories about their works. These writers define the identity of their *manhwa* in different ways; their ideas about the cultural identity of Korean *manhwa* also illustrate different ways of viewing the concept of 'cultural imperialism.' However, there is a general term for describing the process all *sunjông manhwa* writers went through: 'absorption-maturity- fermentation' is the term normally used.⁶⁸ The term is originally from the writer Kim Hyerin whose work is going to be discussed in the later chapter.

⁶⁸ Roh, Su-In, Hanguk Sunjông Manhwa wa Ilbon Shôjo Manga ûi Kwankyeyônku, (Seoul: Ewha Univ, 1999), p.93.

3.1 Hwang Mina and Her Works.

With the ‘*Tal Ilbon pung manhwa*’⁶⁹ (Japan-Free comic) movement which started in the 1980s, there emerged protest against cultural independence among *sunjông manhwa* writers. The 1980s is the time when Hwang Mina made her debut as a *manhwa* writer; she is considered a leading figure in opening a new chapter in the Korean *sunjông manhwa* world. Hwang Mina even has a nickname, the godmother of *sunjông manhwa*. Nowadays, her works are loved by fans of various generations. Her works are well known for their varied themes and delicate psychological descriptions of characters, which are said to be the factors that make her *manhwa* unique. Nevertheless, even Hwang Mina was influenced by Japanese *shôjo manga* in her early works. In fact, she has gone through several stages that resulted in significant changes to her *manhwa* style, and her *manhwa* are categorized into three groups according to these stages. Each stage is significant in the sense that it shows how Hwang Mina has changed the image and style of her *manhwa*. The stages reflect the periods and types of her *manhwa*. The *manhwa* that she wrote from 1980 to the mid-80s are classified as *manhwa* of the first period; her *manhwa* from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s are classified as *manhwa* of the second period; and her *manhwa* from the early 1990s until the present are categorized as *manhwa* of the third period.⁷⁰ Hwang Mina’s first work is ‘Eonia ûi purûn byôl’ (The Blue Star of Eonia) written in 1980.⁷¹ This *manhwa* is about the love and hate relationship of four

⁶⁹ Tal Ilbon Pung Manhwa is the major national movement that has started from 80s.

⁷⁰ <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page3.htm>

⁷¹ Park, *Nuga Candy rûr mohamhaettna?* p.104.

young people in an imaginary European country during the medieval period.⁷² Including 'The Blue Star of Eonia,' most of her *manhwas* written during this period are epic stories set in European countries. Some of them were very successful. However, these epic *manhwa* seem to be much influenced by the Japanese *shôjo manga* that Hwang Mina used to read as a child such as 'The Rose of Versailles' and 'The Window of Orpheus.' Her style was so similar to Japanese *shôjo manga* that some of readers even misinterpreted them as sequels to other *shôjo manga*. In addition, the characteristics of the heroes and heroines in her *manhwa* are very similar to those of Japanese *shôjo manga*. Usually the heroes appear to be very philosophical with long hair and handsome faces, whereas the heroines are a bit clumsy and very naïve but still very attractive. These characteristics remind the readers of the heroes and heroines in *manga* like 'The Rose of Versailles' or 'Candy, Candy.' Like Japanese *shôjo manga* writers, Hwang Mina used the 'Cinderella Complex' formula⁷³: the heroine begins in a miserable situation, however, she ultimately wins everybody's attention whether the ending is happy or not. Hwang Mina's *manhwa* evoked great sympathy from young readers living in the 1980s, a time of change in Korean history. Her *manhwa* featured young and attractive characters who meet with tragic fates as a result of drastic social changes.

Hwang Mina was born in 1961⁷⁴ to a devout Catholic family; she had three brothers and two sisters. In fact, one of her sisters, Hwang Sunna, is a *sunjông manhwa* writer as well, mentored by Hwang Mina. During Hwang Mina's childhood, there were no Korean *sunjông manhwa* with good quality. As a young girl who dreamt of becoming an artist,

⁷² <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page3.htm>

⁷³ Paek, Jung-Sook, "Sungin Yôsông ûi Kkumûl Cha'ja nasôn Hwang Mina," In Kwak Dae Won ed., *Hanguk Manhwa ûi Mohumkadûl* (Seoul: Yulhwadang, 1996,) p.165.

she spent most of her time reading Japanese *shôjo manga* and was a devoted fan of *manga* writers like Ikeda Riyoko and Igarashi Yumiko. However, after high school graduation, Hwang Mina chose to be a cartoonist rather than an artist due to the financial situation of her family. She made her debut at the age of nineteen. Therefore, it seems quite natural that her early works reflected the influence of Japanese *shôjo manga*. However, beginning in the mid 1980s, the second period of her *manhwa* production, Hwang Mina attempted major changes in her *manhwa* style. Her first attempt was made in the *manhwa* ‘Urinûn kil il ûn Jagûn sae rûr boatta’ or ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of the road.’ Unlike the other *manhwa* she had written during her first period, the story of ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of road’ was set in Korea during the modern period. Hwang Mina personally notes that this *manhwa* is her favorite among her works.⁷⁵ In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that she faced the turning point of her career through this *manhwa*. Unfortunately, however, the original work was destroyed because of harsh censorship. (The censorship imposed on her work will be discussed in more detail in a later part of the thesis.)

The *manhwa* ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of the road’ is about young Koreans fighting against the harshness of their lives, but it has several significant features. Firstly, the setting is modern day Korea, and the *manhwa* foregrounds estranged people in society: the main characters of the story are two young orphaned Koreans who spent their childhood as vagrants on the street. The settings and cast of the story are quite unusual and shocking in comparison to Hwang Mina’s works written from her first

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.158.

⁷⁵ <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page3.htm>

period. As mentioned earlier, most of the *manhwa* during this time addressed unrealistic love relationships between people in imaginary European countries. These *manhwa* brought readers into a fantasy world of exotic European lifestyles—a world in which the readers did not belong. Although the drawing style did not radically change, the *manhwa* ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of road’ is in many ways a totally different *manhwa*. When the ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of road’ was first published, readers who were accustomed to Mina’s *manhwa* with fancy European settings were very much disappointed. In fact, some readers even threatened to kill Hwang Mina if she did not immediately revert to her old style.⁷⁶

Hwang Mina’s realistic depictions of the miserable lifestyles of people in slum areas must have been considered very new and rebellious then: however, the story line of the *manhwa* is still very melodramatic and the incidents that happen in the story are still unnaturally tragic. To go into further discussion of the *manhwa* ‘We found the bird lost in the middle of road,’ it is necessary to examine the detailed story line of the *manhwa*. Therefore, the story and some of the scenes from the *manhwa* will be discussed in more detail.

The *manhwa* starts with two young orphans, Jinsôp and Shinae, begging on the streets of Seoul. Fortunately, they are found by a kind rich man, Mr. Kang: wandering around the street, Jinsôp and Shinae are almost run over by Mr. Kang’s car. Mr. Kang, who has no children of his own, adopts them; however, when his company goes bankrupt, the children are forced to return to life on the streets. To support themselves, Jinsôp chooses to be a boxer and quits school, while Shinae becomes the baby-sitter of her classmate’s

⁷⁶ <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page3.htm>

brother. From then on, the main chapter of their life story starts. Despite their strong wills to fight against the harshness of the world, their already tragic circumstances lead to an even more tragic situation. Their foster mother, Mrs. Kang, who was almost like a birth mother to them, dies in the middle of the story (being overworked as a housemaid), and Shinae quits school to start working at a bar for more income. The story ends with Jinsôp's miserable death: he dies during a boxing match, beaten to death by his opponent.

The general opinion is that the overly tragic story is very unnatural; moreover, compared with Hwang Mina's previous works, the story line and the depiction of characters are very rough, and the illustrations are amateurish.⁷⁷ On top of everything else, in this work Hwang Mina relies heavily on stereotypical characterizations based on emotional responses associated with particular ethnicity. The term 'ethnic emotionality' will be used to designate her characterization. In general, the author seemed to have an exaggerated sense of Korean-ness- ethnic emotionality-derived from the overly tragic portrait of young Koreans.

However the most significant point to be made about this *manhwa* is that Hwang Mina for the first time attempted to escape from the shadow of Japanese *shôjo manga*. Not influenced by Japanese *manga* writers, she was trying to articulate a distinct identity for her *manhwa*. The national focus of her *manhwa* and the reflection of her internal world are the main tools that she used to accomplish this. In fact, it has been suggested that the lifestyle of Shinae and Jinsôp reflects her own childhood in some ways.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Paek, "Sung in Yôsông ûi Kkumûl cha'ja nasôn Hwang Mina," 167pg.

⁷⁸ <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page3.htm>

Nevertheless, the sudden drastic change of Hwang Mina's style and her confusion over the idea of nationality (in another word, the nationality of *manhwa*) brought her into a slump. With the failure of 'We found the bird lost in the middle of the road' Hwang Mina fell deep into a depression. However, it helped her rethink her conception of nationality and *manhwa*: furthermore, it enabled her to overcome an ambiguous identity problem.

The problem which Hwang Mina encountered can be viewed as the issue of 'cultural imperialism.' Tomlinson says in his book, *Cultural Imperialism*, that national identity is just the representation of belonging.⁷⁹ John Tomlinson also borrows from Benedict Anderson to argue that the conception of the nation is a totally imagined one: "It is imagined because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it is to some extent true that such communion exists because of the comradeship among people.⁸¹ Comradeship is the primary power that binds people together in one community.

In some sense, Hwang Mina's attempt to create uniqueness in her work could be viewed as evidence that she was still bound to imperialistic ideas about *manhwa*. Overshadowed by Japanese *shôjo manga*, Hwang Mina was likely not confident enough to define the identity of her *manhwa* as her own. Her clinging to ethnic emotion in her *manhwa* ended up contributing to her failure.

⁷⁹ Tomlinson, John, *Cultural Imperialism*, (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p.81.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.80.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.81.

In addition to these issues, unbelievably harsh censorship from the government destroyed Hwang Mina's will to go on as well as her freedom of expression. Her strong will to depict the reality of Korean society was considered a great offence to the government. Until the late 1980s, the Korean government did not change the censorship system they had used against children's comics since the 1960s.⁸² Therefore, the restrictions the government placed on 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road' were incredibly strict. The following are a few examples of how the government restricted Mina's work: 1) No scenes of slum area were allowed. (This was because the poverty of Korea should not be known to anyone, nor was there poverty in Korea, at least not officially.) 2) No scenes that describe the dark side of Korean society were allowed. 3) No scenes of violence were allowed. (the scene in which Jinsôp punches his opponent in the boxing game is one example). 4) The family with divorced parents could not appear in the *manhwa*.

Overall, harsh government censorship confounded Hwang Mina about her overall ideas for her works. It seems almost as if she had lost her own identity living in such restricted society. Aside from the censorship, the complete indifference of readers was also a major reason for her slump. In fact, readers greatly disappointed and gradually turned indifferent.

After the dismaying period of 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road,' Hwang Mina eventually recovered her will to move on to the new stage of her *manhwa* world. Before going on to discuss the next stage, however, it is necessary to go over the characteristics of each period.

⁸² Paek, " Sung In Yôsung ûi Kkumul cha'ja nasûn Hwang Mina,", p.166.

In fact, Hwang Mina's sister, Hwang Sunna, quite well-known *manhwa* writer herself, has classified each period according to a certain type of genre. The first period is classified as the period of romanticism. Needless to say, Hwang Sunna avoids saying that the works during this period are very much influenced by Japanese *shôjo manga*. Nevertheless, it is the undeniable truth. Actually, her analysis of Hwang Mina's *manhwa* lacks an objective view in many ways: after all, she is Hwang Mina's beloved sister and used to be one of her disciples.

The second period, when Mina wrote 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road,' is classified as the period of realism. In addition to 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road,' she wrote a few other works, but they are not particularly distinctive. The next stage, the third period, is classified as the period of no genre. However, it is known that during this period, the style of Hwang Mina's *manhwa* greatly matured. The *manhwa* of her third period are well known for their great variety of theme and style.

After 'We found the bird lost in the middle or road,' Hwang Mina tried many genres that she had not tried before. She attempted various genres. The following works are the *manhwa* that were written during the third period. In 'Mu-Yông Yôkaek'⁸³(Cantonese Heroine), she tried a Hong Kong-styled action *manhwa*. Despite its action style, it was still called *sunjông manhwa*. 'Super Trio' and 'Taebaek Kwônbo' are also action *sunjông manhwa*. 'Kijuk ûi Aidul'(The Children of Miracles) and 'Kwi Yô un Dongbanja'(Cute Companion) are religious *manhwa*. 'The Children of Miracles' is about

⁸³The cartoon 'Mu-Yông Yôkaek' is the story of the woman who is trained to be a great Kungfu master by her lover. The place setting is in Hong Kong. In spite of its genre as *sunjông manhwa*, the comic is greatly dominated by action scenes.

saint Fatima and 'Kwi Yô un Dongbanja' is the sequel to 'The Children of Miracles.'⁸⁴

Hwang Mina is a very devoted Catholic and she wrote these *manhwa* for the Korean Catholic Foundation without any pecuniary compensation. Hwang Mina also tried her hand at the science fiction genre with her *manhwa* 'Paradise.'⁸⁵

However, all of these *manhwa* were considered to be part of a trial process that Hwang Mina went through. In terms of quality, none of these *manhwa* really reflect the uniqueness of Hwang Mina. In fact, her short *manhwa* in the collection 'Sangsil Shidae'(The Lost Era)- which share a very similar atmosphere with 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road' - are the works that show her very first movement toward maturity. 'Sagwa Hangae'(An Apple), 'Majimak Sônmul ûn Juji Maseyo'(Don't Give Me a Last Present) and 'Hûn Jôck'(The Mark) are the *manhwa* included in the collection 'Sangsil Shidae'.

The *manhwa* 'Don't Give Me a Last Present' is about a single mother with three children in a very bad financial situation. The single mother agonizes over whether she should give up her children for adoption. The last present (as in the title) would probably refer to the adoption. 'The Mark' is the story of a young woman who has been raped. These *manhwa* are basically about outcasts in modern Korean society. There are no heroines in these *manhwa*, only those miserable women estranged from the society. The spheres in the *manhwa* are utterly hopeless and gloomy: however, they still communicated something to readers. Unlike 'We found the bird lost in middle of road,' there are neither melodramatic love scenes nor unnatural tragic incidents in these

⁸⁴ The cartoons are about the bible figure 'Fatima'. The cartoon talks about how saint Fatima had manifestation. Hwang Mina personally notes that saint Fatima is her favorite bible figure.

⁸⁵ <http://www.hwangmina.co.kr/m2/page8.htm>

manhwa. Hwang Mina no longer appeals to the reader's emotions. In fact, these *manhwa* are rather dry. But, the story lines are much more organized. In other words, the stories flow very naturally.

In 1991, Hwang Mina began publishing her *manhwa* in the Japanese publishing company Kodansha's magazine Morning. For her first contract with Kodansha, she brought 'Tae baek kwonbôp'⁸⁶ as a sample of her work to see their reaction. However, with 'Tae baek kwonbôp,' the contract was turned down. Though the story setting was Korea and all the characters were Koreans, the work did not seem to show enough of the uniqueness of her style. 'Sangsil Shidae' was the next sample she tried and with 'Sangsil Shidae,' she successfully signed a contract.⁸⁷

'Yunhûi' is the first *manhwa* Hwang Mina published in Morning. Yunhûi is a woman of thirty who has an illegitimate child and lives in the slum area of Seoul. Each episode talks about her daily routine. Later in the story, Yunhûi is deprived of both her lover and her child. The difficult life of a Korean woman must have interested Japanese readers because after the 'Yunhûi' series was completed, she signed another new contract with Kôdansha. The *manhwa* with which she fulfilled her second contract is 'Lee ssi ne Jip Iyagi' (The Tale of the Lee Family). In fact, the *manhwa* 'The tale of the Lee Family' does not belong to any of these three categories that are aforementioned. The work is just known to be one of her most recent works.

⁸⁶ 'Tae baek Kwon bôp' is an action comic sunjông manhwa. A man living in modern days accidentally meets a woman from the ancient period, the Koryô dynasty. They gradually fall in love with each other and make a family. The story is basically about the couple and their two children trying to master traditional Koryô martial art. Despite the Korean settings, the style of the manhwa is very similar to Japanese comic action manga.

⁸⁷ Park, Nuga Candy rû mohamhaettna? p.110.

This *manhwa* is in serialized form and each episode tells the story of Lee family members. The genre of this *manhwa* is very difficult to classify: it seems to be a mixture of various genres. The *manhwa* is still called a *sunjông manhwa*, but it is at the same time very comical and contains some action scenes. The ages of the characters in 'The Tale of the Lee Family' range from the 93 year old grandmother to the 5 year old grandson. Additionally, each character is portrayed with a very unique personality. Since each episode is about a different member of the family, the style of each episode greatly varies as well. For example, when the story is about the second daughter who is a Kungfu master the genre of the story resembles action *manhwa*, whereas the story of the third son is closer to a comic *manhwa*. However despite the varying styles, the fundamental theme of the story is the kinship of family.

The story of the large Korean family, 'The Tale of the Lee Family,' is aimed at readers of various generations and also of both genders. Actually, with 'The Tale of the Lee Family,' Hwang Mina widened the range of her fans. Furthermore, she challenged the conventional idea that *sunjông manhwa* is only for young women.

'The Tale of the Lee Family' is a work that illustrates the way in which Hwang Mina improved her identity problem or identity problem of her *manhwa* vis-à-vis *manhwa* since the failure of 'We found the bird lost in the middle of road.' 'The Tale of the Lee Family' certainly reflects a Korean ethnic background, especially considering its setting: Korea is one of the increasingly few countries in the world where a large family of three generations living together can still be found.

Through the theme of strong family ties, Hwang Mina came up with the motto of kinship and to attract Japanese readers this was probably the most skillful strategy she

could use. Since 'The Tale of the Lee Family' was the only Korean *manhwa* serialized in the magazine Morning, Hwang Mina might even have been forced to include some ethnic content. However, overall, 'The Tale of the Lee Family' is a work that combines elements of both Japanese *manga* and Korean *manhwa*. Although the setting of the story is very Korean, some of the expressions used to describe each character are closer to those of Japanese *manga*. In this work, Hwang Mina openly uses the expressions that are considered Japanese compared to Hwang Mina's previous works: the *manhwa* is translated into Japanese, although it was first written in Korean. For example, the youngest son's nose bleeding every time he is sexually stimulated is very Japanese.⁸⁸ Nose bleeding is very often used in Japanese *manga* to portray sexual stimulation, whereas, to Koreans, nose bleeding does not have any special meaning. Also there were scenes in which the characters are openly making love in 'The Tale of the Lee Family.' These sex scenes were only possible in Japanese *manga* in the early 1990s. Therefore, with the exception of very recent *manhwa*, scenes dealing with sexual subject matter in all *manhwa* were depicted indirectly. The character's open mindset toward sex in general illustrates that the work is not aimed only at Korean female readers any more.

In 'The Tale of the Lee Family,' Hwang Mina tries to demonstrate that she has overcome the problems that she has previously suffered. She is not bound to express ethnicity by being overly emotional: the unnaturally tragic story line in 'We found the bird in the middle of road' is a good example. In fact, through Hwang Mina being overly emotional, her desire to free herself from the influence of Japanese *shôjo manga* can be

⁸⁸ For example, there is a scene in which the youngest son, Sejin, has a nosebleed when he sees his girlfriend in a sexy swimsuit. The scene is in second series of the book, p.192.

seen. Generally speaking, the work 'The Tale of the Lee Family' reflects Hwang Mina's real intention of creating work that can be enjoyed by readers of every age and every nation.

3.2 Kim Hyerin and Her Works.

After the godmother of *sunjông manhwa*, Hwang Mina, opened up new possibilities for Korean *sunjông manhwa*, the genre began to flourish with the emergence of other writers' creative works. Kim Hyerin is one of the writers who followed Hwang Mina in expanding the *sunjông manhwa* genre.

Kim Hyerin was born in 1962 in the southern part of Korea. As a young girl, she used to dream of becoming a writer; she was a Korean literature major at university. However, Kim Hyerin dropped out of university and became a *manhwa* writer instead. She made her first debut with 'Pukhae ûi Byôl' (The Star of a Northern Sea) in 1983.⁸⁹ Like Hwang Mina, Kim Hyerin started her career writing European epic stories. As with her first *manhwa*, 'The Star of a Northern sea', she wrote a number of *manhwa* with European settings and Caucasian characters. Because her debut year (1983) was close to Hwang Mina's debut (1980), and because she was Hwang Mina's disciple, Kim Hyerin is often compared with Hwang Mina. However, she is a very different *manhwa* writer from Hwang Mina in many ways.

Firstly, her *manhwa* style differs from that of Hwang Mina. Kim Hyerin's *manhwa* with European epic stories and settings are closer to social *manhwa*, criticizing the absurd social structure. In comparison, Hwang Mina's epic *manhwa* are mostly love stories. Throughout the society she depicts in her works, Kim Hyerin's revolutionary ideas can be detected as well. Also, the stages of changes she went through were less agonized and

⁸⁹ Park In-Ha, "Kim Hyerin, Sunjung Manwha ûi Dapsûng gwa Kyesûng Kuriko Hyukshin," In Kwak Dae Won ed, - *Hanguk Manwha eu Mohumkadûl*, (Seoul: Yulhwadang), 1996.

complicated than Hwang Mina's stages. Kim Hyerin did not experience a slump period as Hwang Mina did. It seems Kim Hyerin was not really affected by going through changes in her style.

Without any hesitation, Kim Hyerin admits that she was greatly influenced by Japanese *shôjo manga*. However, she strongly emphasizes that the present style of her *manhwa* is her own style. She also points out that the origin of *manhwa* is not really important. It is both natural and also helpful to borrow ideas and develop them into one's own style.⁹⁰ Kim Hyerin's notion of borrowing ideas is totally different from plagiarism. In fact, in this context, her theory of 'absorption- maturity-fermentation' needs to be mentioned: this is her theory of the naturalisation of one's culture in another culture. Kim Hyerin's theory of 'absorption-maturity-fermentation' can be compared with an anecdote John Tomlinson uses in his book *Cultural Imperialism* to point out the ambiguity of the term 'cultural imperialism.'

The transition is about a Japanese TV program that shows viewers how to sing the chorus parts of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy.' Tomlinson argues that the entire idea of the symphony is German, but through the performance the symphony has become naturally Japanese. There will be few Japanese viewers who would find the performance alien because of the very Japanese-ness of its cultural significance.⁹¹ This incident explains how one's culture can be naturally immersed in another culture.

Kim Hyerin is generally very indifferent toward people's opinions about the 'ethnicity of *manhwa*' as well as opinions about 'the marketability of *manhwa*.' Here lies her major

⁹⁰ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/rev9604.htm>

⁹¹ Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*, p.92-93.

difference from Hwang Mina. Kim Hyerin argues strongly that to relate 'ethnicity' to *manhwa* itself is an idea originating in colonialism and nationalism. While Hwang Mina was bound to the ethnicity of *manhwa*, Kim Hyerin strenuously refuses to relate the idea of ethnicity to her works. To Kim Hyerin, the *manhwa* is a key tool for expressing her inner world. To borrow her own words, the *manhwa* is nothing other than the reflection of her 'fight with her own self.'⁹² She also argues that she has never thought of classifying her works within a certain nationality.

After her first work, 'The Star of a Northern Sea,' Kim Hyerin attempted different styles of *manhwa*. But despite her attempts to focus on her personal opinion regarding social structure, 'The Star of a Northern Sea' still leaves the impression that the heroine of the story is appealing to the image of 'kawaii'—the woeful or the helpless-- that was frequently used in Japanese *shôjo manga*.⁹³ Although her works cannot be clearly classified, like Hwang Mina's works, the changes that Kim Hyerin went through are unique. Compared to Hwang Mina, the changes in Kim Hyerin's works are alleged to be less distinctive. However, one of the most significant points about the changes in her works is the change in the heroine's image. Along with the cultural identity issue, her changed perspective regarding the image of women is a very important issue in her works.

After Hwang Mina, Kim Hyerin became one of the most influential *manhwa* writers, especially with her work, 'Bul ûi Kôm'(The Sword of Fire). In fact, the *manhwa* 'The Sword of Fire' is the main focus in this section. Nevertheless, to go over the history of

⁹² <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/int9812.htm>

⁹³ Shiokawa, "Cute But Deadly: Women and violence in Japanese comics," p.107.

her works and also to talk about the specific changes in her work, it is necessary to mention some of her previous works. In addition to 'The Sword of Fire,' 'Bichônmu' (Sky Dance) and 'Terrmidore' are the works that are often considered to be her canonical works. Through these works, 'Sky Dance' and 'Terrmidore,' Kim Hyerin broke with the main character- centered story format. In 'Sky Dance' and 'Terrmidore,' she featured many supporting characters whose roles are as important as the main characters. In fact, a number of pages are devoted to the delicate psychological description of supporting characters as well as main characters.⁹⁴ Kim Hyerin's equal amount of attention to each character also gives the characters the opportunity to defend themselves. Therefore, it is very difficult to distinguish good characters from evil ones in her *manhwa*. In fact, Kim Hyerin is one writer who strongly refuses to create a dichotomous confrontation between bad and good in her work. 'Sky Dance' and 'Terrmidore' are also very different works in terms of temporal and geographical settings.

The *manhwa* 'Sky Dance' is set in China during the Tang dynasty. 'Sky Dance' is the tragic story of a man who falls in love with a woman from the family of the enemy. The *manhwa* is basically about the love relationship of two beautiful young people. In this respect, the story does not differ much from other earlier *sunjông manhwa*. However, there are many other characters that make this story different from her previous ones. Kim Hyerin gives equal attention to the relationships of the other characters. The ambition of the king, and the life style of the alienated group of society, the refugees from the Koryo Kingdom (present day Korea), add great interest to the story. Therefore, they

⁹⁴ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/cen9507.htm>

do not seem to be evil at all. Furthermore, Kim Hyerin gives readers the opportunity to place themselves in supporting characters' situations as well as in the situations of the main characters. Through Kim Hyerin's realistic psychological description of the characters, it enables the readers to understand the character's state of mind.

The *manhwa* 'Terremidore' takes place in France during the revolutionary period. Although the settings of place and time are very different from 'Sky Dance,' both stories share a very similar format. 'Terremidore' is again a tragic love story about a young aristocrat woman who helplessly becomes involved with a Jacobin man who killed her family. Like 'Sky Dance,' 'Terremidore' features supporting characters whose roles are as interesting as those of the main characters. The most significant point to be made about these two works is that both *manhwa* reflect Kim Hyerin improving her idea of women. She says,

I guess I am tired of the beautiful and fragile woman who gets protected by everyone.

It is enough with 'The Star of a Northern Sea.' Probably my idea about woman is changing. I want to concentrate more on what women and men independently did in history in my future works.⁹⁵

The heroines in 'Sky Dance' and 'Terremidore' are certainly different from Adelaide, the heroine of 'The Star of a Northern Sea.' They are still so beautiful that they receive attention from almost every man around them. Nevertheless, unlike Adelaide⁹⁶, the

⁹⁵ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/cen9507.htm>

⁹⁶ Adelaide, the heroine of 'The star of a Northern Sea' is a beautiful woman who was born in a very wealthy family. However, she is without any of her own will and always gets protected by the hero. She was originally in love with the hero, Euriphine. Nevertheless, she is forced by her parents to marry another man whom she does not have any feeling for. Even after the marriage, her ambiguous attitude causes troubles to many people. She keeps her fragile and weak image throughout the entire story.

heroines⁹⁷ in these two stories are independent of male power. They are not afraid of leading their own lives. They are also very decisive and resolute. Despite the tragic story line, the heroines are still described as very strong.

After the *manhwa* 'Sky Dance' and 'Terremidore,' Kim Hyerin started writing 'The Sword of Fire' which is known as her major work; it brought her great fame as a *manhwa* writer. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that after 'The Sword of Fire,' Kim Hyerin's fame as a *manhwa* writer surpassed that of Hwang Mina.

The *manhwa* 'The Sword of Fire' is a very distinctive work in many ways. The *manhwa* itself highlighted a number of issues. Feminism and cultural ethnicity are two good examples.⁹⁸ 'The Sword of Fire' is set in the ancient time period of the Bronze Age in Korea, immediately preceding the time when ancient Koreans settled down in the Korean peninsula and formed the country called 'Kojosôn.' The story takes place in the northern part of China, the place called Manchuria today. However, the names of the tribes that the writer uses in the story are totally fictional based on the writer's imagination. Therefore, the story cannot be considered historically accurate. Much of the story is based on the writer's imaginative ideas about ancient Koreans during the Bronze Age.

The story is about the people of the fictional tribes in Northern China. According to the story, one of the tribes, the Amur, is supposed to represent the ancestors of Koreans. Kim Hyerin focuses particularly on their will to survive and to save their tribe from

⁹⁷ Sulli and Allune are the heroines in 'Sky Dance' and 'Terremidore' respectively. Although they do not end up happily with their lovers just like Adelaide, they are very independent and capable of adjusting to new environments. Sulli, the heroine of 'Sky Dance' learns a martial art to protect herself and her family. Despite the hard situation she faces, she never begs anyone for help. The heroine of 'Terremidore,' Allune, is described in pretty much the same way as Sulli.

constant invasions by other tribes. The story contains a hero and a heroine. The name of the hero is Sanmaro and that of the heroine is Ara. Nevertheless, unlike other *sunjông manhwa*, the main focus is not always on the heroine and hero. Besides Sanmaro and Ara, there are several other characters whose roles are important.

The story begins with Sanmaro who has been left in the river, badly wounded. Sanmaro is one of the Amur tribe's warriors. Having never been exposed to bronze tools, the Amur tribe is consistently being attacked by the Karmaki, a tribe that uses bronze tools as their weapons. In the battle with Karmaki, the warrior Sanmaro is seriously injured and loses consciousness. However, his body is found by Ara, the main heroine of the story, and her father. With Ara and her father's great care, Sanmaro recovers but loses his memory. Sanmaro and Ara eventually fall in love with each other and decide to be married. However, their home is attacked by a Karmaki warrior, Suhai, and his servants. Suhai and his servants burn the house and kill Ara's father. Then, they take Sanmaro as their slave and Ara as Suhai's mistress. In fact, this is the point at which the major events of the story begin to unfold.

Despite Suhai's great care and affection for Ara, Ara cannot get over Sanmaro. Nevertheless, her will to survive through the harshness of the situation is so strong that she learns from Suhai how to make tools using bronze material. With Suhai's help, Ara creates a beautiful bronze sword. Ara decides to escape from Suhai (and the forced sexual relationship with him) after she receives a marriage proposal from him. She succeeds in returning to her tribe. However, the return to her tribe cannot bring her only good news.

⁹⁸ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/rev9601.htm>

Ara finally meets Sanmaro again, but Sanmaro does not remember the time he had spent with Ara.

When Ara was suffering as Suhai's mistress, Sanmaro was put under a spell by Kara, spiritual godmother of the Karmaki tribe. Under Kara's spell, Sanmaro regains his memory as a warrior but simultaneously loses all the memories of Ara. Moreover, Ara also finds that Sanmaro's social status is much higher than hers: Ara is from a very low class, the daughter of a hunter, whereas Sanmaro is from the royal family, a king's cousin. Therefore, she bitterly realizes that the great social gap between them makes it almost impossible for them to reunite. Furthermore, the most difficult part of her return is that she realizes out that she is pregnant with Suhai's baby. Since Suhai is a man from a different tribe, Ara will be branded forever in her tribe for being the mother of a mixed blood child. Even in her own tribe, she is not warmly welcomed. The story explores this complex and tragic situation.

In fact, 'The Sword of Fire' was a serialized *manhwa* which was published in various comic magazines. Due to the frequent bankruptcies of magazine companies, Kim Hyerin could not maintain consistency in publishing the work. Therefore, the serialized 'The Sword of Fire' that started in 1992 is still running. It is also known that Kim Hyerin is still receiving many suggestions from her fans about how she should end the story. Nobody, including the writer herself, really knows how the story will end.⁹⁹

As mentioned previously, when Kim Hyerin first came out with the 'The Sword of Fire' series, she was bombarded with many questions about both cultural ethnicity and feminism because of the *manhwa*'s historical settings and the characteristics of the

heroines. Nevertheless, Kim Hyerin makes it clear that she chooses not to become involved with any of those issues.

The following is part of an interview with Kim Hyerin arranged by the Ewha Women's University's magazine Ewha's Hwalbal:

Nation? That is something I am really sick of. However, I guess it is something you can not really get away from. It is something that is determined ever since you were born. Isn't it? So I guess it is very natural to reflect what is in me through my work. But, please do not call it nationalism or ethnicity. It is just part of me. You know how ridiculous those ideas can be. Those ideas can actually destroy all of entire human history.¹⁰⁰

In this interview, Kim Hyerin was questioned about the ethnic background of 'The Sword of Fire.' As she explores, she does not find anything particularly national or ethnic about the historical and geographical setting of 'The Sword of Fire.' If readers think it is very Korean, it would be a very natural phenomenon because the writer herself is Korean. Nevertheless, it should be no more than that. Kim Hyerin firmly states that she does not want to classify her works. To her, writing *manhwa* is just an opportunity to express her inner world. Sometimes she even considers it "the fight with herself."¹⁰¹ Through *manhwa*, she illustrates her ideal dreams about people. However, even in her ideal world, negative feelings such as rage, misery and sadness exist. She thinks those feeling are indispensable factors for describing 'the people' in general. Her love of 'the people' is very strong. In fact, it is the main theme of her works.

⁹⁹ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/int9701.htm>

¹⁰⁰ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/int9411.htm>

¹⁰¹ <http://galaxy.channeil.net/paraban/int9306.htm>

Kim Hyerin similarly dislikes being asked if 'The Sword of Fire' has any relation to feminism. The following is part of an interview with her that talks about her conception of feminism.

The idea of feminism itself is based on a discriminative idea against women, I personally think. If you make a big deal of my work as a feminist issue, it will only make women's presence more miserable. It will be almost the same as admitting that women always have been the hidden figure of the society. My idea of women is very equal to the one of men. I don't want to distinguish one from another.¹⁰²

In general, Kim Hyerin is against the idea of dichotomy. Whether it is men against women, evil against good or one nation against another nation, in her world there should be no such distinctions. In fact, Kim Hyerin's struggle against 'dichotomous confrontation' can be seen as post-modernist, in the sense that the characters in 'The Sword of Fire' collapse their socially fixed roles as women and as men, and as "evil" characters and "good" characters.

Readers of 'The Sword of Fire,' especially those who are used to the previous types of *sunjông manhwa*, often feel confused over whom they should identify with their hero or heroine. The fact that Kim Hyerin does not establish rigid boundaries between the hero and non-hero is the most significant point at which dichotomies are undermined in her work. The character Suhai is a very good example of this phenomenon.

In the beginning of the story, Suhai is presented as very evil: a man from a different tribe who kills Ara's father, takes Sanmaro as their slave, and kidnaps Ara as his mistress. But the readers soon discover that he himself is the child of mixed blood. In fact, he has

his own painful past which explains his behavior. His mother was originally from Amur, the tribe of Ara and Sanmaro, and his father from Karmaki. However, as a young boy, he was deprived of his mother. The king of Karmaki took her as his concubine in Suhai's father's presence.

As a result of this painful childhood experience, Suhai shows a strong obsession with the women of Amur -- especially Ara, who reminds him of his mother. In a later episode, his strong obsession with Ara turns into true feelings of love and he dies in Ara's arms. In fact, Ara is the main cause for his death: to save Ara from the malicious plan of Karmaki's spiritual godmother, Kara, he sacrifices his own life. At the same time, Sanmaro who is supposedly Ara's true love, plans to marry a lady from a noble clan to save his family name. In the later part of story, when all of these events happen, readers cannot help themselves from turning their sympathies from Sanmaro to Suhai. Readers are not sure who should be their hero any more. The following is Kim Hyerin's definition of 'hero':

There is no such a human being without any defect. You are a human being because you are defective. However, to me, a hero is someone strong knowing that he or she is defective. In fact, everyone can be a hero. No one is specially born to be a hero.¹⁰³

The situation is similar in terms of ethnicity. The people of Amur, who are supposed to be ancient Koreans, naturally receive the reader's emotional support. However, the reason for their presence is not to elicit ethnic emotions from Korean readers. The Amur people's gradual acceptance of Ara's child (who is half Karmaki) reflects Kim Hyerin's

¹⁰² <http://galaxy.net/paraban/rev9608.htm>

¹⁰³ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/int9907.htm>

wish for the harmonization of people regardless of their nationality. 'The Sword of Fire' is the work that shows Kim Hyerin's challenge to conventional ideas of structure and simplistic identity.

Although Kim Hyerin has not finished 'The Sword of Fire' series, she has started a new serialized *manhwa* called 'Kwangya' ('The Barren Field'). The historical setting of this *manhwa* is the Japanese occupation period which is a very uncommon and exceptional time period to be used in *sunjông manhwa*. Since 'The Barren Field' series has just been started, there have not been many commentaries written on the work except that the setting of the *manhwa* is very new. The following statement is how Kim Hyerin reacts to the people's conventional attitude toward *sunjông manhwa*:

I basically object to the idea of classifying whether it is *sunjông manhwa* or not. You cannot classify your life or history that way either, can you?¹⁰⁴

The statement shows how Kim Hyerin is now challenging the conventional idea of classifying whether it is *sunjông manhwa* or not.

3.3 Choi In-Sun and her works.

Choi In-Sun, born in 1970, is considered a generation X *manhwa* writer. 'Unique and incomparable' would be the best words to describe her works. She started writing *manhwa* immediately after she graduated from university. Choi In-Sun was brought up with Hwang Mina and Kim Hyerin's *sunjông manhwh*; she spent most of her childhood reading their work.¹⁰⁵ However, her work is very different from the work of previous *sunjông manhwa* writers. It is very hard to see any of those writers' influences in her works. In fact, Choi In-Sun is acquiring a reputation as a rebel of the *sunjông manhwa* world. With her strikingly new drawing styles and stories, Choi In-Sun is now trying to change the conventional concept of *sunjông manhwa*.

Choi In-Sun made her debut with the *manhwa* 'Môbius' Strip' in the *sunjung manhwa* magazine Penpen,¹⁰⁶ and this is probably the reason why her works are classified as *sunjông manhwa* despite their uniqueness. Unlike other *manhwa* writers, Choi In-Sun maintains consistency in the style of her works. Ever since she made her debut with 'Môbius Strip' she has kept the same style. Therefore, her reputation as 'the rebel' in the *sunjông manhwa* world began to develop from the time of her earliest work. Choi In-Sun has been writing only short stories so far.¹⁰⁷ After 'Môbius Strip,' she began publishing her short *manhwa* in various magazines.

¹⁰⁴ <http://galaxy.channeli.net/paraban/int9306.htm>

¹⁰⁵ Chung, Yooni, *Jashinmanûi Bittkarûr Balhanûn Jakka*, Choi In-Sun, Comic Tech 2 October-December 1997: p.49.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.48.

¹⁰⁷ Park, Suk-Hwan, *Manhwa Shibi Tang Tang Tang*, (Seoul: Chorokbaemagics, 1999), p.278.

There are mainly three elements that make Choi In-Sun's *manhwa* distinct and different from other *sunjông manhwa*. The comical tone that infuses the scenes in general is the first element. The general tone of the stories is somewhat farcical; therefore many readers who are not familiar with her style mistakenly think that her *manhwa* belong to the comedy genre. Moreover, the funny and somewhat grotesque features of her characters make it even harder for readers to decide if the story is providing any serious messages: the characters in her stories are usually depicted with very weird features, spiky hair, short legs, and big heads. However, her *manhwa* always includes a surprise ending that gives readers a serious shock. This surprising ending is the second characteristic of Choi In-Sun's style. Through the unexpected ending, Choi In-Sun shows her readers that her story was not only a joke that made them laugh. Overall, the most important point to be made is that Choi In-Sun's witty and sarcastic view of the people today is demonstrated through these two first elements, the comical touch and the surprising ending. Through her work, Choi In-Sun expresses what she feels about society and herself, and black humor is how she expresses her feelings. Sarcasm is the last and most important element in her work.

Basically all of Choi In-Sun's stories share the same story format. Most of time, the story starts with a funny looking character in a weird situation and it ends with an even stranger situation. 'Kunmangjûng' ('Forgetfulness') and 'Sib won' ('Ten cents') are two of the most representative works of Choi In-Sun.¹⁰⁸

The *manhwa* 'Forgetfulness' is Choi In-Sun's second work which she published right after 'The Band of Môbius' in the *sunjông manhwa* magazine Penpen. The story is about

a boy named Insu who thinks that he has a serious memory problem. One day, Insu forgets to take his school bag to school. As Insu hurries back to his house for his school bag, he finds his mother with a stranger. The stranger gets angry at his mother when he hears Insu. The stranger, in fact, states that he did not know that she had a son. Insu's mother begs him for forgiveness and kicks Insu out of the house. Feeling depressed, Insu heads to the stationery store instead of going back to school. At the stationery store, he finds that the goods they are selling are all of his lost belongings. Insu asks the store owner what is really going on and the store owner tells Insu the unbelievable story that Insu's mother has been selling all of his belongings to the store owner. Despite what he has seen and heard from the store owner, Insu denies that his mother would do this to him. He blames himself for his own forgetfulness. However, at the very end of the story, Insu finds himself sitting in the corner of the store waiting to be sold with a group of other unwanted children. The story is known to reflect the writer's own fear of exclusion and being so forgetful. However it is expressed in somewhat exaggerated manner.

Another story, 'Ten Cents,' is about a spoiled young boy who likes to play with a ten cent coin. The boy does very nasty things to ten cent coins (breaking them into pieces and carving new pictures on them) since he thinks the coin is worth nothing. One day, the boy finds himself standing before a tower while he is torturing the coin. The boy finds the tower somehow familiar and he decides to go inside it to explore. However, as he goes into the tower, he realizes that he is trapped in and unable to get out- forever. In the last page of the story, the entire frame is dominated by the picture of a ten cent coin with the boy inside. In fact, the tower standing before the boy was the tower carved in the ten cent

¹⁰⁸ Chung, *Jashinmanûi Bittkkarûr Balhanûn Jakka*, Choi In-Sun, p.50.

coin.¹⁰⁹ Because he tortured the coin, the boy is punished by being trapped in the coin forever. If the story 'Forgetfulness' is to express the writer's personal feeling, 'Ten cents' is the story more for the readers to teach them some kind of moral lesson.

Both stories have striking and somewhat frightening endings that communicate messages to readers. In the work "Forgetfulness," Choi In-Sun portrays her personal fear of being estranged from society by engaging the reader in a psychological world. With her story, Choi In-Sun is playing with the reader's mind. The frightful description of Insu being abandoned by his own mother reflects the readers' own fears of expulsion.

The following is part of an interview with Choi In-Sun ; throughout this interview, Choi talks about how she sometimes writes *manhwa* based on her own experience and feelings:

To find the subject matter of my *manhwa*, I avoid to think hard. It just comes out to my mind naturally. Some *manhwa* are totally based on the experiences that I had. Like the *manhwa* "Forgetfulness," I wrote it thinking about myself being so forgetful. I know it is somewhat overly exaggerated. But then, isn't it fun too? That kind of exaggeration is possible only in *manhwa*."¹¹⁰

The work "Forgetfulness" was written to express the writer's personal feeling whereas the work "Ten cents" was written with a moral sentiment that is meant to teach the

¹⁰⁹ 'Sib won' or 'Ten cents' in English translation is the smallest value in the Korean monetary system. Its worth is approximately a penny in Canadian currency. The coin 'Sib won' has a picture of the tower called 'Dabo'. The Dabo tower is one of the national treasuries which is in southern part of Korea, Kyoungju. Won is the currency in Korea.

¹¹⁰ Chung, *Jashinmanûi Bittkarûr Ballhanûn Jakka, Choi In-Sun*, p.46.

readers a lesson. This is what Choi In-Sun calls some of her works (including “Ten cent”): “the *manhwa* with a moral.”¹¹¹

Despite the fact that these two works were written with different purposes, they both contain the same type of black humor that can be found in the author’s other short stories as well.

The following is part of an article on Choi In-Sun’s works written by a journalist for the newspaper Hankyore, Oh Eun-Ha:

Choi In-Sun is a writer with plenty of guts. She doesn’t even seem to care if her work will be read by anyone. The characters in her stories are depicted with such distorted features that they are even considered to be grotesque. Then what about the story lines of her *manhwa*? The story lines of her *manhwa* are usually so twisted that it is hard to understand what is really going on. The satirical narration of the story gives the reader a chill. However, her works are still read and considered special despite all these factors. The unpredictable ending that is always beyond the reader’s imagination and the theme that inwardly appeals to the readers’ mind must be the major keys that keep her works going. Some people compare Choi In-Sun to a bank robber. The bank robber’s job is to steal money without letting people notice. In that sense, Choi In-Sun is a very skilled robber who steals people’s minds without giving them any warning.¹¹²

In terms of uniqueness of style, Choi In-Sun is currently the most well known *manhwa* writer. ‘Uniqueness’ is Choi In-Sun’s main motto when she comes up with ideas for her

¹¹¹ Park, *Nuga Candyrūr mohamhaettana?* p.291.

¹¹² <http://pluto.interpia98.net/~manakang/>

works. In contrast to the works of Hwang Mina and Kim Hyerin, it is totally out of the question to relate Choi In-Sun's works to ideas of either 'cultural imperialism' or 'cultural identity'. To Choi In-Sun, these ideas are very outdated. She finds nothing Japanese in today's '*sunjông manhwa*.'¹¹³ The genre itself does not have any special meaning to her except that it is the world where she tests the limits of her unique creative ability.

¹¹³ <http://pluto.interpia98.net/~manakang/>

Concluding remarks

As the comic market is becoming very lucrative in Korea, the issue of the origin of Korean comics, especially girls' comics or *sunjông manhwa*, has become very controversial. Because of its Japanese origin, even today's *sunjông manhwa* are often mislabeled as mere copies of Japanese *shôjo manga*. However, there have been many salient changes made in the *sunjông manhwa* world by several *sunjông manhwa* writers, mainly from the early 1980s onward. The changes illustrate that the current *sunjông manhwa* writers are trying to escape from the shadow of Japanese *shôjo manga* and develop new styles. The main purpose of this thesis is to show the specific ways in which changes have been made by several Korean writers and also how the changes gradually brought about Korean *sunjông manhwa*'s independent status as a newly established genre.

The movement to acquire a unique style of *sunjông manhwa* was first led by the *manhwa* writer Hwang Mina. From the time when Hwang Mina initially attempted change in the *sunjông manhwa* world to the present time, there have certainly been obvious improvements. In fact, there are several *manhwa* writers who made major contributions to these advancements. The main body of this thesis discusses some of these writers as well as their works and the works of these writers demonstrate how their conception of *sunjông manhwa* has improved to achieve an independent status for the *sunjông manhwa* genre.

The early 1980s, when Hwang Mina started writing *manhwa*, was a turning point in the *sunjông manhwa* world. From that time on, the movement to gain independence for Korean *sunjông manhwa* started. Nevertheless, a problem persisted: even the writer Hwang Mina was not really sure how she should establish her creativity in the beginning. The slump period she went through shows her concern about her works being no more than copies of Japanese *shôjo manga*. However, as the *manhwa* generation moved on to the writer Kim Hyerin, who started her career somewhat later than Hwang Mina, the idea of *sunjông manhwa* as a separate genre from Japanese *shôjo manga* became more prevalent and stabilized. Kim Hyerin was not bound to the “authenticity” of *manhwa* since she believes that *manhwa* is just the natural reflection of the writer’s inner world. In other words, Kim Hyerin is confident about the naturalization of one’s culture in another country. Despite its Japanese origin, she demonstrates that new styles of comic- distinct from *shôjo manga*- can be created, developing on how *manhwa* writers develop their styles. When generation X writer Choi In-sun succeeded Kim Hyerin, she started writing *manhwa* with very distinctive and unique features. In reading Choi In-Sun’s works, it is difficult to find any resemblance between Japanese and Korean comics. The works of these three writers support the previously mentioned hypothesis of ‘absorption-maturity-fermentation.’ The progression from the very early works of Hwang Mina to the works of generation-X writer Choi In-Sun shows how *sunjông manhwa* established and consolidated its place as a subculture genre in the Korean *manhwa* world.

In fact, it can be also argued that each writer represents a stage in the theory of ‘absorption- maturity-fermentation.’ The works of Hwang Mina correspond to the period of absorption in the sense that Hwang Mina opened up the new world of *sunjông manhwa*

by borrowing the style of Japanese *shôjo manga*. On the other hand, the works of Kim Hyerin demonstrate that she has reached the stage of artistic maturity. Lastly, the works of Choi In-sun are good examples of how the works of contemporary Korean writers have gradually reflected their own unique styles: the stage of fermentation.

The works of these three specific writers represent the process of ‘transculturalization’ or the aforementioned ‘cultural naturalization’: the formation of a totally new subcultural genre submerged in an ethnic background different from its place of origin. Although it is undeniable that Japanese *shôjo manga* has greatly influenced *sunjông manhwa*, the process of cultural naturalization or transculturalization makes it impossible to argue that *sunjung manhwa* is just a part of Japanese *shôjo manga*; rather, *shôjo manga* resulted in a new and totally Koreanized subculture genre. Moreover, there are also basic cultural differences between the two countries that create clear distinctions between Japanese *shôjo manga* and Korean *sunjông manhwa*.

The following quotation illustrates what Kim Hyerin feels is the most important factor in writing *manhwa*.

To talk about originality, I do not think there is anything genuinely Korean really. Even the religion that we believe in nowadays like Buddhism, where is it originally from? What is really important is how it got submerged into our lives. It is also the same with *sunjông manhwa*.¹¹⁴

In fact, Kim Hyerin’s idea can apply to almost everything in our lives, the buildings we live in and the foods we eat: it is almost impossible to find ethnic or national

¹¹⁴ Roh, *Hanguk Sunjông Manhwa wa Ilbon Shôjo Manga ûi Kwankyeyônku*, p.76.

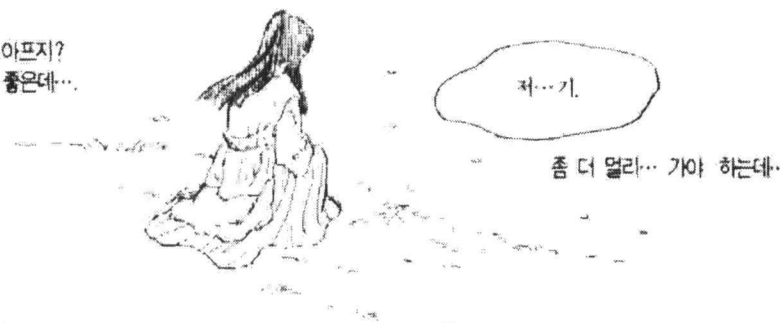
authenticity even in these aspects of our lives. Strictly speaking, we may safely conclude that there is no such thing as 'autogenesis,' especially when it comes to contemporary pop culture. How it has developed its uniqueness and also how it appeals to the people of today are the most important elements in the business of pop culture.



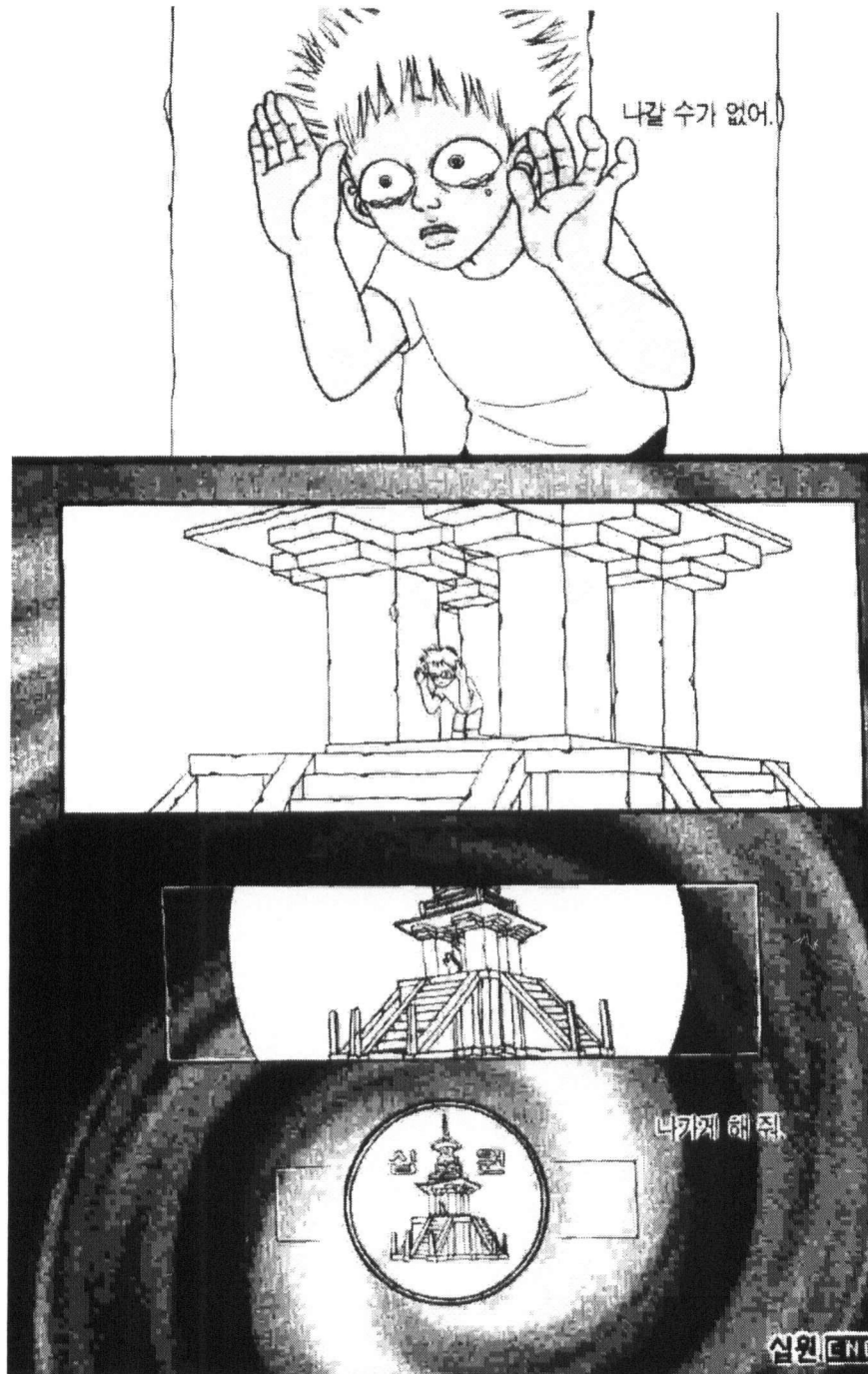
1. This is the scene from Hwang Mina's 'The Tale of the Lee Family.' The aforementioned scene where the youngest son, Sejin nosebleeds when he sees his girl friend in sexy swimsuit.



동이 왜이리 아프지?
기분은 아주 좋은데...



2. This is the scene from Kim Hyerin's 'The Sword of Fire'. In this scene, Suhai dies trying to protect Ara from Kara's attack.



3. This is the scene from Choi In-Sun's 'Ten Cents.' The part describes how the boy gets trapped in the coin forever for torturing the coin.

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