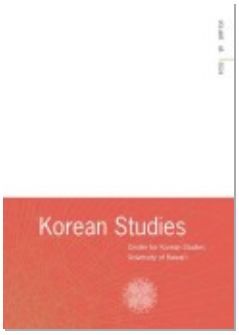
"Wise Mothers," "Mom Bugs," and Pyŏngmat (Twisted Tastes) the limits of maternal emotional expression in South Korean webtoons

Tilland, B.R.

"Wise Mothers," "Mom Bugs," and *Pyŏngmat* (Twisted Tastes): The Limits of Maternal Emotional Expression in South Korean Webtoons



Bonnie Tilland

Korean Studies, Volume 48, 2024, pp. 284-317 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/ks.2024.a931004

“Wise Mothers,” “Mom Bugs,” and *Pyŏngmat* (Twisted Tastes): The Limits of Maternal Emotional Expression in South Korean Webtoons

Bonnie Tilland

In the last decade, South Korean webtoons have joined television dramas (K-dramas) and K-pop as an important element of the Korean Wave abroad. Domestically, the South Korean public can idly browse or religiously follow thousands of free or subscription webtoons on their smartphones. Webtoon artists may dream of achieving broader success by having their works adapted transmedially, as a web drama (online TV drama) or even better, as a network, cable or Netflix series that achieves mainstream success. Two significant subgenres of webtoons are “lifestyle webtoons” (saenghwarwept’un) and “family webtoons” (kajogwept’un) and these two subgenres are combined in what I am calling “childcare webtoons” (yugawept’un). While South Korea also follows global media trends of “mom blogs” and Instagram microcelebrities or Youtubers sharing their parenting journeys (“sharenting”), “childcare webtoons” are a particularly rich space for observing changing mothering ideologies and parenting norms. This article examines “mom humor” and other stories mothers tell across the South Korean Internet, paying particular attention to what kinds of emotional expression are sanctioned and what is taboo. I analyze webtoons such as “I’m a Mom (Nanŭn ŏmmada)” and “The Birth of a Married Woman (Yubunyŏŭi t’ansaeng),” suggesting that even as the tedium of everyday motherhood

Bonnie Tilland is University Lecturer in Korean Studies in the Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) at Leiden University, The Netherlands (b.r.tilland@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

is increasingly critiqued through media, the still somewhat rigid gender roles and maternal expectations in South Korea translate into an overall more muted and subtle "mom humor" alongside the still more socially expected stories of maternal gratitude and fulfillment.

Keywords: mothering, gender, humor, emotions, webtoons, new media

Introduction

South Korean moms seem to be having a moment in the media. In 2019, the film *Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982* (*82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng*, dir. Kim Do-Young, and based on the 2016 novel of the same name by screenwriter Cho Nam-Joo) was blamed for fueling South Korea's heated "gender wars," with critics complaining that it painted all men with the same brush. In the film, "everywoman" Kim Ji-young struggles to adjust to new motherhood, finding that this transition brings up experiences of gender discrimination throughout her life—many of them previously repressed—which ultimately leads to a psychic break. Around the same time, global audiences discussed the representations of the tough working-class mother and wide-eyed, naïve upper-class mother in Bong Joon-Ho's Oscar-winning *Parasite*; in the television arena, a short series on the tvN cable channel in late 2020, *Birthcare Center* (*Sanhujoriwŏn*) deals in a more humorous way with the physical and psychological dimensions of this maternal transition. Webtoon artist Yeongshin Ma's *Moms* (*Ŏmmadŭl*), originally published in 2015, garnered global interest for its frank, humorous depictions of working-class South Korean mothers in their fifties when it was published in translation in 2020. Moms were not side characters, but front and center.

It would be a stretch to say that South Korean mothers have been previously invisible in the media, as their trials and tribulations have been highlighted to a certain extent in television dramas and sitcoms since the beginning of network television. However, focus on the transition to motherhood—a transition that is often naturalized and made mystical by invocations of unconditional "motherly love," and therefore made invisible in its messy physical and psychological reality—is new, and audiences similarly remarked on the freshness of Yeongshin Ma's *Moms* portrayal of the interior worlds of middle-aged mothers of adult children. Since audiences so often see new mothers and seasoned *ajumma* toiling on screen for their families and sacrificing for others, the representation of women at

these stages of life as individuals with their own desires is indicative of a broader sociocultural shift. It has been particularly uncommon to see mothers in the thick of care labor—those with young children through teenage children living at home—represented on screen in diverse ways. Exceptions exist in some sitcom moms, but most often women become invisible as individuals in the process of raising children.[1] This tendency is not limited to South Korean media, as shock and delight over films such as *Bad Moms* (dir. Jon Lucas and Scott Moore, 2016)—in which four suburban moms abandon housework and management of children's schedules and look out only for themselves and each other—in the US context indicate. If the outpouring of articles on emotional labor, invisible labor, and gender pay gaps and childcare on social media worldwide is any indication, feminist critique seems to be reaching even the dark corners of motherhood that have been naturalized, made invisible, or taboo in society at large.

Within the South Korean context, Elfving-Hwang has noted a particularly deep-rooted "religion of the mother"[2] across different fields of cultural production, and in analyzing literature of the 1990s, finds that the symbolic power of maternity conferred *mogwŏn* ("mother power"), but that power was directly linked to the extent to which she demonstrated sacrifice for her children. The generation of women who came of age in the 1990s wrote of the trauma inflicted by seeing their mothers treated as "property" by husbands while at the same time martyring themselves for children. Since motherhood conferred "mother power" it was not characterized as oppression, and yet the pathos of the self-sacrificing mother gathered force in the 2000s before being represented as part of structural gender oppression in the *Kim Ji-young* novel and film in the late 2010s.[3] The intergenerational trauma inflicted by patriarchy finds its release in works such as Shin Kyung-sook's *Please Look After Mom* (*Ŏmmarŭl put'ak'ae*), originally published in 2008 but translated to become a global bestseller in 2011. Abelmann and Shin analyze the novel as a demonstration of simple "motherhood sentimentalism" on the surface, but which at a deeper level embodies "educational and maternal striving" as part of South Korea's cosmopolitan trajectory.[4] A shift in maternal subjectivity is also frequently alluded to in anthropological and cultural studies literature in discussion of the "PTA mother" and her "*chimatparam*" (the wind of her skirt as she whisks into her children's school classrooms to exert her influence) as opposed to mothers in the ramped-up private after-school education (*sagyoyuk*, primarily referring to the *hagwŏn* industry) climate. So Jin Park[5] has identified this as a shift from "PTA mothers" to "manager mothers,"

with South Korean mothers in the 2000s and onwards strategizing as stage managers behind the scenes rather than marching into school with their demands.[6] This maneuvering-as-key-maternal-function was on stark display in the hit JTBC television series *SKY Castle* (2018–2019), about upper-class mothers scheming over their children's university admission preparations.

As the sacrifice of mothers is increasingly represented as oppressive in South Korean cultural productions, various types of "motherhood manifestos" have appeared in online media as well, following global trends. Like their counterparts in other countries, this South Korean "mom content" often employs humor as a strategy to manage complicated emotions, affect camaraderie, and convey the South Korean "maternal experience" to a broader audience. While I will discuss the ways that South Korean "mom content" fits into broader global "mom content" trends—particularly the "mom blogs" that gained currency in the 2010s—throughout the article, it is worth comparing briefly here with one of South Korea's closest neighbors, Japan. Japan and South Korea share not only demographic trends—a sustained low birthrate, late marriage, and rapidly aging society—but also genres of cultural production. The webtoon format for smartphone scrolling is indeed a South Korean invention, but certain subgenres of webtoons are adapted from Japanese cultural categories: *sunjŏngmanhwa*, or "pure love" comics, are the Korean answer to Japanese *shōjo manga*, or "girls' comics." Despite the official ban on Japanese cultural imports until the late 1990s, the pre-Internet South Korean *manhwa* industry was significantly shaped by the Japanese manga industry, and cultural connections only intensified after South Korea's opening to Japanese imports. In addition to ever-popular children's cartoons Pokemon and Doraemon, South Korean viewers were introduced to the manga and animated TV show "Crayon Shinchan" beginning in the 1990s (localized in Korean as JJanggu, or "JJanggu the Unstoppable," *Tchanggunŭn monmallyŏ*).[7] While the show is focused around little boy JJanggu's antics, JJanggu's long-suffering mother also has a rich inner life and her own will, demonstrating ambivalent motherhood rather than sacrificial motherhood. While South Korean webtoons increasingly address difficulties mothers face in South Korean society, Japan arrived at its low birthrate crisis at an earlier moment, in the midst of a long recession; since the 1990s manga and anime have offered a space to reflect on issues of "family collapse" and social alienation.[8] Seaman has examined the long-running manga series *Go-shussan*, in which different manga artist mothers reflect on pregnancy, childbirth and early mothering experiences. Seaman writes that "[w]hereas

literature has hidden childbirth, and television and film have dramatized it, the manga and other visual accounts of childbirth have provided it with a new narrative space, one large enough to encompass a multiplicity of voices and experiences."[9] In South Korea, webtoons have become one of the most striking narrative spaces to grapple with pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering.

This article examines "mom humor" and other stories moms tell across the South Korean internet, paying particular attention to what kinds of emotional expressions are sanctioned and what is taboo. Even as the tedium of everyday motherhood is increasingly critiqued through media, the still rigid gender roles and expectations in South Korea translate into an overall more muted and subtle "mom humor" alongside the still more socially-expected stories of maternal gratitude and fulfillment. After tracing intersections between "mom culture" and webtoons on the South Korean internet, I analyze "mom humor" and emotional expression online through several popular webtoons about pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, and becoming a mother. Some of this humor operates through a relatively new *pyŏngmat* (absurdist) code that has resonance with South Korea's precipitously sharp birthrate decline and subsequent rapidly changing meanings of motherhood. *Pyŏngmat* code highlights the sense of bewildered hopelessness and a kind of upbeat nihilism that results from feelings of statis and stagnation after "compressed modernity."[10] My aim is to show that the new media genre of webtoons provides a space of community and catharsis for mothers and would-be mothers at a time when the experiences of their own mothers seem hopelessly out-of-date for twenty-first century South Korean life. More specifically, I make the claim that the format of webtoons allow for expressions of and sympathetic responses to feelings of humiliation, alienation, and exhaustion connected to maternity and the maternal role, and that the *pyŏngmat* esthetic best reflects the everyday affective dimensions of mothering in neoliberal South Korea. In the process, I explore the contours and boundaries of maternal emotional expression in South Korea more broadly.

Methodology

Although webtoons have been a solid category within South Korean popular culture for the last decade, due to their unfamiliarity to much of the rest of the world, much of the scholarly analysis for an international audience has focused on defining the genre and describing its production

system.[11] Still others have addressed the "platformization" of webtoons and contextualized this within South Korea's neoliberal labor landscape and current directions in "cultural contents."[12] As webtoons have become more established as a field ripe for analysis in their own right, scholars have analyzed the most popular webtoons, many of which have later been adapted as films and/or television dramas, including *Secretly, Greatly*, *Along With the Gods*, and *Misaeng*.[13] This article focuses on a particular genre of webtoons I am calling *yuga webtoon*, or "childcare webtoons"; I also further differentiate them by focusing on webtoons written by mothers, as the topics and emotional tone tend to be different than those by fathers.[14] I refer to these webtoons as "mom webtoons" throughout the article. These webtoons were chosen by purposeful sampling, meaning that they were webtoons by and for mothers on the topics of pregnancy, birth and parenting that were most often recommended by webtoon readers, and which came up most frequently in online (Naver, Google) searches for webtoons of this genre. Webtoons were analyzed using a grounded theory approach for visual elements; narrative trajectories; words and phrases conveying emotion, including the onomatopoeic words so common to comics and graphic novel format (bang! Kapow!); and reader comments and discussion in the comments section. The article attempts to contextualize "mom webtoons" in a broader media ecology of "mom content" in South Korea, demonstrating its unique potential for emotional expression.

Mom webtoons represent only one tiny part of the wider webtoon field; as with other media, something exists to suit all tastes, from youth webtoons to horror webtoons to historical epic webtoons. It should also be noted that not all mom webtoons utilize a *pyŏngmat* esthetic, as some follow more conventional storytelling, for example melodrama modes. The 2017 webtoon *Myŏnŭragi (Daughter-in-Law)* has humorous moments but resonates with the injustice narrative of the *Kim Ji-young* novel and film, pointing out patriarchal structures in a largely realist mode. While mom webtoons with *pyŏngmat* elements offer freedom from norms and transgressive possibilities with their bad drawings, sometimes illogical spatiality and temporality, and jarring visuals[15], readers of *Myŏnŭragi* gain sympathy through the inner thoughts of the daughter-in-law character[16], and the webtoon creates a new kind of women's folklore for the digital age.[17] Despite these various narrative possibilities, the endurance of the popularity of *pyŏngmat* codes among mothers and would-be mothers in their late 20s and 30s suggests that young mothers find catharsis in these

"twisted tastes" and consider them a space to think through evolving motherhood without taking themselves too seriously.

Global Internet, South Korean Internet, and "Mom Content"

While the airing of grievances of mothers in manifestos is not entirely new—as witnessed by the newspaper columns and later popular humor books by US "midwestern suburban housewife" authors such as Erma Bombeck in the 1970s through 1990s—the rise of social media and blogging made possible a whole new genre of global "mom content": the "mommy blog." While mom blogs in the English-language "blogosphere" began in the 2000s with Melinda Roberts' TheMommyBlog.com (2002) and Ayelet Waldman's now-deleted controversial "Bad Mother" blog (2004), they became truly mainstream in the 2010s with the development of Twitter, the Tumblr and Wordpress personal blog platforms, Facebook and Instagram, and greater accessibility of YouTube for personal v-logs (video blogs). If early mom blogs were in a confessional mode, they further diversified in the 2010s, with irreverent, confessional yet humorous examinations of parenting becoming highly popular alongside a multitude of mom blogs on being frugal, cooking nutritious meals, and home-schooling, many with explicitly Christian content.[18] Early examples of the humorous genre of mom blogs include Bunmi Laditan's "The Honest Toddler," and Jill Smokler's "Scary Mommy." Moms produced an ever-diversifying range of textual, photographic and video content that created a sense of recognition and catharsis from other mothers struggling with mothering, often utilizing humor. "Mommy blogs" have been dominated by bloggers in North America, the UK, Oceania, South Africa and some in Europe, but with a sizeable number also in Singapore, the Philippines, and India. It is indeed not a stretch to say that "mommy blogs" and "mom communities" exist anywhere there are internet connections. Mommy blogs have in some cases been analyzed as promoting a strong sense of community,[19] and in others as a particularly effective arena for extending offline "mommy wars" over mothering choices.[20] Whereas mommy blogs were at first lauded as a liberatory space apart from the aggressively male-centric "geek blogs" (centered around gaming, comics, etc.) that dominated the blogosphere in the 2000s[21], Abetz and Moore concluded in 2018 that "the ideology of combative mothering structures most bloggers' contemplations . . . .constrain[ing] possibilities for better and less antagonistic relationships due to the neoliberal and patriarchal legacies

imbued in combative mothering."[22] Abidin contrasts "family influencers"—who produce "anchor" content such as musical performances and dancing, as well as "filler" content that is seemingly less staged and therefore more "authentic"—with dominant genres of parenting blogging. Abidin divides these dominant parenting blogging genres into (1) parenting tips, (2) networking saavy, and (3) a broad group that emphasizes "authenticity" and revealing the messy truths of parenthood (usually motherhood).[23] Even since Abidin's study, however, the line between parenting blogger, family influencer, and even reality TV stars has become increasingly blurred, as formerly textual blogs become more video-centric, minor celebrities become influencers and/or bloggers, and families formerly focused on unbranded content get brand deals.[24] The global rise of "microcelebrity" and dizzying pace of social media information flows means that personal blog content and cultural products are less differentiated, and these together advance diversifying cultural representations of mothers, even if it is within a neoliberal framework of "platformization of culture," which Cho suggests is particularly pronounced in the South Korean case.[25]

In South Korea, the internet landscape is set up somewhat differently, in part due to South Korea's early adoption of the internet and related ICTs (information and communication technologies), as well as the dominance of native software and app platforms—KakaoTalk rather than WhatsApp or LINE, Hangeul Word Processing (HWP) rather than Microsoft Word, and Naver rather than Google, among others. The early development of chatrooms, so-called "cafes" hosted on portals Naver or Daum, led to widespread use of these spaces for hobby or peer communities. While online community message boards aimed at mothers exist in other national contexts as well (BabyCenter, BabyCenter UK, Mocha Moms, various Facebook groups, etc.), these "mom cafes" took off in South Korea in a way blogs did not.[26] In fact, blogging enjoyed a brief popularity in South Korea in the late 2000s; Song analyzes baking blogs on the Naver platform between 2008 and 2012 for themes of sacrificial mothering.[27] After the growth of YouTube throughout the 2010s South Korean Youtubers began producing "mom content" as well, with many v-logs that share kid-friendly recipes, products, and places to travel with kids. If much of the "mom humor" of the global English-language internet is shared through "mommy blogs," and later v-logs, it is reasonable to ask where the "mom humor" on the South Korean internet primarily resides. "Mom cafes" are most often for information sharing, and v-logs are for showing off knowledge and experiences in an extension of reality television.[28] If

"mommy blogs" and their descendants are not as significant a part of the South Korean internet as they are elsewhere, where is the "mom humor"?

One clue lies in the wide world of webtoons, which Cho has analyzed as a genre unto its own due to its unique "style and system"—that is, its own generic conventions and system of production that separates it from Japanese *manga*, or other kinds of comics/graphic novels viewed online.[29] While plenty of South Korean humor is centered around text—writer Kim Young-ha's acerbic fiction, to take one example of many—much is also quite physical and slapstick, as evidenced by the popularity of such long-running TV programs as "Gag Concert." A relatively recent tendency toward humor that is *pyŏngmat* (literally "sick tasting" or "moron-taste" depending on the translation, meaning strange or absurd humor, and which I have translated in the title of this article as "twisted tastes")[30] combines with wittiness, wordplay and highly physical humor to define South Korean humor online today. Webtoons have been popular in South Korea for over a decade, and are gaining popularity abroad as well, with resources channeled to translating them for a global audience or supporting international artists who work in the genre. While online "mom cafes" on Naver or Daum, or apps such as Kakao, Band or IamSchool are typically where South Korean mothers go for information sharing, webtoons by and for moms are humorous outlets. Mothers with preschool or school-aged children in the late 2010s and early 2020s were largely in their teens through twenties when *pyŏngmat* became a distinct emotional code in popular culture, and this "youth subculture" had a great impact on webtoons. The "*pyŏngmat* code" represented "something absurd, abnormal, and plucked out of context . . . .unconventional and anti-establishment online content . . . widely known on popular Internet community sites such as DC Inside."[31] Youth who enjoyed *pyŏngmat* webtoons in the late 2000s and early 2010s did not lose their identity as members of the "880,000 Won Generation" (*P'alshipp'almanwŏn sedae*) or their identification with terms such as "surplus humans" (*ingyŏ in'gan*) simply due to becoming mothers. A *pyŏngmat* style, merged with emoticon influences ala Kakao Friends, characterizes many South Korean "mom webtoons."[32]

In addition to their *pyŏngmat* qualities, Dal Yong Jin analyzes webtoons as "snack culture," "the habit of consuming information and cultural resources quickly rather than engaging at a deeper level."[33] While television has long been analyzed as a medium that can be half focused-on, while doing household chores (for example), webtoons encourage an even more fleeting form of engagement. Jin suggests that while individual webtoon

episodes are "snack-like," many webtoons span several seasons and create rich and complex worlds, and this is certainly the case with many "mom webtoons." To extend the metaphor, the "snacks" of webtoons may satiate just as well as the more established "meals" of television or film—and if nourishing enough, may be better metabolized. Additionally, popular webtoons have been widely adapted through "transmedial" production as television dramas, web dramas, or films, giving the option for consumers to graze, snack, or feast at will.[34] The "platformization of culture" is relevant here, as the possibilities afforded by the webtoons platform also encompass commercialization and exploitation, at both the creator and user ends. Amidst joyful "snacking" and creative adapting, aspiring and amateur webtoon artists are exploited for free labor, and users give up their privacy and behavioral data to marketers. Cho reminds us that "[t]he platformization of culture, which essentially prioritizes the potential monetary profit from art products, is not merely associated with neoliberal governance of and approach to culture, but *instantiates* them."[35] Here we can understand webtoons as fitting into the overall media ecology of increasingly sophisticated, transmedial, and sometimes branded user-generated content; webtoons made by moms for moms about their mothering illuminate the parameters of mothering discourse within a neoliberal, commercial ecosystem. I turn next to the process of becoming a mother and performing motherhood on the South Korean internet, including an exploration of the emotions enabled (or alternatively, constrained) by the webtoon format.

Becoming a Mother on the South Korean Internet

Along with other East Asian countries, the patriarchal ideal of "good wife, wise mother" (*hyŏnmoyangch'ŏ*, imported during the Japanese colonial period as an adaptation of the analogous *ryōsai kenbo*) retains a degree of power in South Korea.[36] There is still a cultural ideal of *naejo* (wife acting as support to her husband), even if this has largely been rejected by the younger generation, who protest its sexist ideology as well as its economic impossibility. Under this family ideology, good wives support husbands, and wise mothers frugally manage husbands' earnings and children's education. At the same time, even as the South Korean labor participation rate for women is lower than the OECD average—reflecting the pressure on women to leave paid labor after giving birth, and the difficulty of returning to the workforce with young children—misogynistic discourse

online characterizes these stay-at-home mothers as "mom bugs" (*mamch'ung*), parasites who play around at home while living off their husband's paychecks. In an example of online discourse circulating offline, encounters with the term "mom bug" comprise two pivotal scenes in the novel and film *Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982 (82-nyŏnsaeng Kim Chiyŏng)*: early in the film, as Ji-young sits outside a café with a coffee, her daughter in a stroller, she overhears a young office worker say, "must be nice to be a mom bug, getting coffee with the money your husband earned." She looks hurt, but goes about her day. Later in the film she is again at a café, and her young daughter knocks the iced coffee over while Ji-Young attempts to pay the cashier, causing it to spill all over the café floor. Again she hears young office workers nearby refer to her as a "mom bug," but this time she stands up to them, an act her psychiatrist later describes as a breakthrough for her. Outside the cathartic narrative of the film, however, South Korean mothers continue to be dismissed as "mom bugs" online.[37] However, if they do not "parasitically" live off their husband's earnings but instead continue to work or return to work themselves, they are not meeting the expectations to be a modern-day "good wife and wise mother."[38] At the end of the film version of the story, Ji-Young resolves this double-bind by becoming a writer, and smiles with satisfaction as the magazine to which she contributed arrives in her mailbox. By choosing a career outside of company hours, with greater flexibility in terms of time, Ji-Young actually embodies the ideal for South Korean mothers returning to work—the part-timer or freelancer. One can easily imagine an updated version of the novel and film in which Ji-Young is a webtoon artist.

Ok points out that while South Korea in the 2010s came to have "the second highest number of bloggers after the US," this blogging was more in the style of a Facebook page or Instagram account, "closely linked with social network sites (SNS)."[39] However, these blogs—beginning with the now-defunct Cyword "*minihompy*" (mini-homepages)—were relationship-building rather than in the journalistic style of popular global "mommy blogs." Naver or Daum cafes, which include the many "mom cafes," are also focused on relationship-building (for example, through discussing the challenges of being a mom in a particular city outside of Seoul, or in a particular Seoul neighborhood, etc.) and information-sharing. Online mom cafes encourage community participation by keeping certain "rooms" of the café off-limits until users have asked enough questions of other members, or sufficiently introduced themselves and their motivations for joining. (This is humorously illustrated in a scene in the 2020 drama *Birthcare Center* (*Sanhujoriwŏn*), in which a new mother stays up half the night

furiously typing inane questions in order to view the posts of a "veteran" user). Mom cafes are so ubiquitous that it is seen as *p'ilsu* (required) to join one as a new mom—and perhaps others as new parenting questions and issues arise—but as with other sites there is the potential for bullying, doxing and mob mentality. (It should be noted that this is in no way limited to the South Korean internet, as the comment sections of "mom blogs" worldwide are prone to devolving into "mom-shaming" and heated debates on cloth vs. disposable diapering, for example). Mom cafes in South Korea exert considerable power in the area of consumer rights, with their boycotts of sanitary pads, foods, or baby diapers suspected or proven to be unsafe inflicting significant financial damage on the offending companies. Perhaps most famously, the efforts of online mom cafes throughout the 2010s led to a successful lawsuit against German company Oxy Reckitt Benckiser, which sold a humidifier sterilizer product that sickened and killed thousands, many of them women and children who were home breathing the fumes all day long. Politicians cannot ignore mom cafes, as the cafes spearhead signature campaigns on the Presidential Blue House website and affect local and national voting patterns.[40]

If mom cafes represent "official" motherhood practices online, webtoons written by and for moms provide an outlet for humorous reflections on mothering. Unlike consumption of posts on mom cafes, which are most often in a question-answer format and free-flowing, webtoons tend to be released by a webtoon artist on a certain day or days and time each week, some with a paid subscription model and some freely viewable. While portals Naver and Daum host a good number of webtoons, separate spaces devoted to webtoons also emerged, including Lezhin and Toptoon. While not an exhaustive list, four mothering-centric webtoons balance humor and other emotions: *I Guess I'm a Mom* (*Naega ŏmmarani*), *The Birth of A Married Woman* (*Yubunyŏŭi t'ansaeng*), *Raising a Kid Comic* (*Aik'iunŭn manhwa*), and *I'm a Mom* (*Nanŭn ŏmmada*).[41] *The Birth of a Married Woman* (2013–2023) by Kim Mikyung (pen name: Kim Fanta) begins with the autobiographical lead character's marriage, and proceeds through the birth of a child, everyday life caring for the child, and trying and giving up on having a second child. *I Guess I'm a Mom* (2014), is a short webtoon by Oh Haru about a first pregnancy and miscarriage and then second successful pregnancy. *Raising a Kid Comic* (2019–2020) is a follow-up to *Having a Baby Comic* (2017–2018), both by "Shosho." *I'm a Mom* (2015–2020), by "Sundubu," is a story of a mother with two sons that flashes forward and back in time to reflect on her troubles with adjustment to new motherhood, then sending children to daycare, preschool and

elementary school. Before getting into the analysis of the webtoons, I first review the literature on emotions and affect theory—both in South Korea and more broadly—to suggest that South Korean motherhood as drawn in webtoons departs from older cultural psychological notions of *han* and *chŏng*, and instead highlights ambivalence and humiliation. As webtoons have greatly diversified since their early days in which "*pyŏngmat* code" dominated, webtoons created by mothers about pregnancy and childcare since the mid to late 2010s often draw on a *pyŏngmat* esthetic of absurdity (*pujori*)[42] and randomness without fully embracing the *pyŏngmat* code of cynicism and self-deprecation. In other words, they carry over this dominant esthetic of cultural contents of their twenties in order to make legible their new role as mothers, creating a sense of solidarity between themselves and readers. Their webtoons walk the line between the absurd and the emotional, merging *pyŏngmat* and the "well-made" qualities that Japanese philosopher and cultural critic Azuma Hiroki describes for *otaku* creators in the Japanese context, who tried to create "something to appropriately emotionally move and intellectually stimulate readers/viewers for a short, set amount of time."[43] Of the most popular and influential South Korean "mom webtoons," *I Guess I'm a Mom* and *I'm a Mom* most fully capture the amateurish esthetic that came to define webtoons early on, while *The Birth of a Married Woman* visually combines a *pyŏngmat* and glossy, cartoonish Kakao Friends-esque esthetic while mixing heartfelt and absurd storylines. *Having a Baby Comic* and its successor *Raising a Kid Comic* is the most overtly *pyŏngmat* in its visual esthetic, composed of a cast of anthropomorphic animals; it also most thoroughly embraces the concept of *pujori*, critiquing patriarchal and sexist norms in its storylines.

Attachment, Humiliation, "Cruel Optimism," and "Happiness Duty"

Cultural psychology has identified Korean conceptualizations of emotions along lines of *han* and *chŏng*. *Han* can be glossed as "rancor" or ressentiment, and can be further divided into *wŏnhan* or "revenge or justice-transformation oriented" and *chŏnghan*, which "describes sorrow, distress, and unresolved sentiment, and is self-compliance oriented . . . .a *han* of passive acceptance and resignation."[44] *Chŏng* (attachment) can be divided into *miun chŏng* (hateful) and *koun chŏng* (beautiful/heartwarming). Since *chŏng*, unlike *han*, directly refers to relationships, it can be further subdivided into *mojŏng* (motherly *chŏng*) and *pujŏng* (fatherly *chŏng*), *chŏng* between siblings, *chŏng* between husbands and wives, *ujŏng* (*chŏng* between friends),

and *aejŏng* (*chŏng* between lovers). These cultural concepts are frequently picked up in popular psychology, and along with related concepts can be found in self-help books in Korean and increasingly, in English for those interested in South Korea in a global K-pop era (see, for example, Korean-American journalist Euny Hong's *The Power of Nunchi*, 2019). In research with South Korean women in their thirties through fifties, many used *han* in relation to their mothers rather than themselves, as their mothers served mothers-in-law during a time of less societal awareness of gender equality issues. They used *chŏng* much more flexibly to describe their relationships with children and other family members.[45] *Koun chŏng* (beautiful attachment) is relatively straightforward, but *miun chŏng* (hateful attachment)—the attachment to someone due to shared experiences and time together despite not enjoying their company—has resonances with anthropologist Michael Peletz's characterization of kinship and family in many times and places as profoundly ambivalent, with ambivalence meaning "the coexistence . . . of two or more powerful contradictory emotions of attitudes (as love and hatred) toward a person or thing."[46] This ambivalence is captured repeatedly in mom webtoons, with the mother in one panel overwhelmed with love for her child/children, and desperately trying to get her own space away from them in the next.

The experience of becoming a mother and continuing to mother is laden with expectations of unconditional maternal love and natural sacrifice, and the "happiness duty" Ahmed identifies certainly applies in contemporary South Korea. Ahmed's figures of the "unhappy housewife and feminist killjoy" explore "the limitations of happiness as a horizon of experience."[47] In the film *Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982*, the South Korean middle-class "everywoman" Kim Ji-young is reluctant to be a killjoy—to call out discrimination when she sees it and her own oppression when she feels it—and instead subsumes her happiness to the happiness of others; by the end of the film, however, she increasingly speaks (and writes) her mind. "Shosho," the artist behind *Having a Baby Comic* and *Raising a Kid Comic*, is a persistent feminist killjoy, questioning the sacred mother-child bond itself. This also connects to the "cruel optimism" that Berlant identifies in attachment to objects, people, and identities that one hopes will bring happiness, but are actually deeply constrained by exploitative capitalist systems. We can in fact see many young Koreans, particularly Korean women, reject the "cruel optimism" of getting married and starting a family, in this way sidestepping the "happiness duty" that particularly falls on mothers. While sociologist Kim Chan-ho does not address gender and mothering specifically, he identifies *momyŏlgam* (humiliation) as a code word

in South Korean society, arguing that South Koreans are socially conditioned to fixate on relatively small differences between themselves and others (in terms of education credentials, appearance, or income), which breeds a "winner takes all" mentality and inferiority complex (*yŏlp'aegam*). Humiliation is perpetuated between individuals, within groups, and by the very social fabric—Kim gives examples of different uniforms and policies to differentiate "part time" and contract workers from salaried workers, an obsession with customer service surveys of workers, and lay-offs conducted cruelly by a casual text message.[48] The late 2010s dubious and controversial "everywoman" Kim Ji-Young internalized gender-based humiliation and passively accepted her position in life, until a mental break made continuing passivity impossible. In contrast, the webtoons *Having a Baby/Raising a Kid Comic*—by far the most popular among the webtoons I analyze in the next section—has the mother character take on the role of feminist killjoy from the beginning, as she demands to know why everything related to children should always fall to the mother.

Kim Chan-ho cites psychologist Brene Brown in teasing apart "shame" and "humiliation"; shame is often internalized, with someone berated by a boss then muttering to themselves, "I can't do anything right," whereas humiliation is not internalized, resulting in a sense of righteous anger and resentment ("How dare she treat me that way?"). In this sense, *momyŏlgam* resonates with the older cultural psychological concept of *han*, at least in terms of its explosive potential. However, Kim identifies *momyŏlgam* /humiliation as more applicable to contemporary South Korean society, as it connects with the experiences of compressed modernity and globalization.[49] Kim also references Raymond Williams' classic schematic of "structures of feeling," "different ways of thinking vying to emerge at any one time in history."[50] To put this in terms of cultural narratives, the quintessential *han* of characters in Im Kwon-taek's films (blind *pansori* singers, painters, surrogate mothers, etc.) have yielded to the fundamental *momyŏlgam* of characters in Bong Joon Ho's films (colored also by a sense of absurdity in corruption: *pujori*). At the same time, acting explosively or violently out of a sense of humiliation is increasingly frowned upon, as evidenced by the pejorative neologisms *kaejŏssi* (*kae* [dog] + *ajŏssi* [middle-aged man]) and *kkondae* (geezer), decreasing tolerance for *kapchil* (workplace abuse), and spreading unease over aggrieved displays of nationalism (*kukppong*) on the international stage. It is apparent that the current "structure of feeling" is constituted by an uneasy balance—and at times, a clash between—justified resentment at being wronged by oppressive forces and structures in society, and a high value placed on

emotional control. In the prologue to his book, Kim notes that "Recently emotional control is seen as a leadership quality."[51] Even as the need for emotional acknowledgement is increasingly recognized, following Western psychology models, emotions are also subject to a neoliberal self-management ethos that is particularly pronounced in South Korean society.

Reconsidering mothering through the lens of emotions—including negative ones such as *momyŏlgam*—is productive in opening up the opaque concept of *mojŏng* (motherly love). Anthropologists and gender studies scholars since the 2000s have pushed understandings of family relationships and roles in new directions, generating the diverse field of "new kinship studies"; Peletz's conceptualization of ambivalence in the family is one part of this, and Ahmed's figures of the unhappy housewife and feminist killjoy represents another. To this rich field of affect theory that has been applied to family, I would propose to add in elements of the even more amorphous field of "sensory studies." Anthropology of the senses reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s, but sensory studies has recently found new life as part of the environmental humanities.[52] While the emotional aspects of the intensive period of parenting young children is sometimes connected to the unique sensory conditions of this time period—for example, in the expression "feeling touched out," referring to the overstimulation of small children's clinging, breastfeeding, etc.—more attention to the intersections of affect, emotions and the senses is warranted. In a fascinating study of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis in South Korea, Grinker and Cho find that due to the stigma of an ASD diagnosis children are more often diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). "RAD is pejoratively referred to 'a lack of love' (*aejŏng kyŏlp'ip*), a term that parallels the older U.S. concept of the 'refrigerator mother.' The DSM stipulates that a diagnosis of RAD should be made only when there is evidence of pathological caretaking. However, interviews with Korean medical professionals, especially those without training in the United States, show a strong bias toward diagnosing an attachment disorder in children demonstrating the triad of impairments associated with autism especially when the clinician believes the mother is disengaged from her child."[53] Grinker and Cho go on to write that mothers whose children have been diagnosed with RAD may seek psychiatric treatment to address their supposed failure to bond properly with their child, meaning that these mothers are effectively absorbing their child's "illness" into themselves. In a previous study, I have found that mothers strategically engage in activities involving the senses with children—

including watching television dramas and listening to K-pop music—to guard against the danger of maternal disengagement.[54] Webtoons that depict mothering highlight these sensory investments of mothers while sensorily affecting the reader through gutter spaces and other spatial arrangements on the touch screen. These mom webtoons are notable in their illustrations of the affective dimensions of mothering through a visual medium that stimulates the senses differently than television or film. A space for consideration—or interrogation—of *mojŏng* is opened in these mostly banal stories of contemporary mothering.

Embracing the "Loser" Mom

The longest-running of the webtoons analyzed here, *The Birth of a Married Woman*, consists mainly of free content, but certain "episodes" sprinkled throughout cost 100 *won* to view. The series begins with the cute female lead character with purple hair, getting married to a yellow, pointy-headed man with glasses. With episodes released each Monday and Tuesday, first it was billed as a humorous primer on how to get married with few financial resources and the world seemingly against you, and then became a "pregnancy diary," and finally a "childcare diary." The humor mainly arises from the "married woman's" self-conscious marveling at her own growing up, but the humor is evenly mixed with heartfelt reflections on motherhood, marriage, and life. In season eight, she describes a second pregnancy that ends in miscarriage, battling infertility, and finally deciding to stop at one child. Even as her child gets older, the author as "married woman" (*yubunyŏ*) centers herself and her career as a webtoon artist, and is frequently found wailing out her apartment window about how tiring childcare is and how she needs a break.

In contrast to the hundreds of episodes of *The Birth of a Married Woman*, *I Guess I'm A Mom* is a mere nineteen episodes of entirely free content, by Oh Haru. This webtoon also begins with marriage, and with a miscarriage shortly after. Most of the webtoon is devoted to chronicling her subsequent successful pregnancy, but stops with her delivery at the twelfth episode, only to be resumed by the artist's sister, taking over for the remaining special episodes in *I Guess I'm an Aunt*. The webtoon is beloved in part because of these abrupt stops and starts—halfway through the story, one "episode" is simply an exhausted-looking drawing of the author announcing that episode 11 will be delayed, saying, "I failed in managing my condition. See you tomorrow."

Fig. 1. The Birth of a Married Woman, Naver Webtoons.

Raising a Kid Comic has thirty-eight episodes, only the first five of which are free. The webtoon follows the earlier *Having a Baby Comic* and has the subheading: "Having a baby isn't the end, after birth it's another level world!" The "prologue" episode shows a loving cartoon rabbit mother with a cartoon cat husband, and their baby is a bear. After the first section, "a happy story," in which the baby declares, "Mom and dad, I love you!" the second section is just called "And," and begins with the mother bunny rocking on the floor of the room saying, "I just want to be alone. I want time to draw again." The exaggerated cartoon features of the anthropomorphic animals gives the webtoon a distinct *pyŏngmat* feeling. In the second episode, the rabbit mother learns from a birthcare center nurse that the baby has a slight fever, and so she "sets off for the pediatrician, not thinking too seriously about it." The pediatrician (a

Fig. 2. I Guess I'm a Mom, Naver Webtoons.

grandfatherly koala) declares solemnly that the baby must be admitted for observation for forty-eight hours, and the mother must stay too. He brushes off her protests that she should be resting up after delivery in the birthcare center (*choriwŏn*), and then the "explanation fairy" comes by to remind her of how uncomfortable the hospital beds are, and how if the baby is unlikely to sleep well even at home, how much worse it will be in a hospital room. The baby's fever goes down, but in the next episode the fever is back, and the *choriwŏn* nurse declares, "Moms have to know if their baby has a fever." To which the rabbit mom replies, "I only met this baby last week . . . and what am I, a thermometer?" The webtoon has much more of a feminist message than the first two, with the rabbit mother repeatedly asking, "Why do you keep giving the baby to the person who just gave birth and needs to rest? What about all the other adults in its life?"

The last webtoon to be discussed here, *I'm a Mom*, has over one hundred episodes and like *The Birth of a Married Woman*, just a few cost a nominal fee (200 *won* each). The drawing is perhaps the least sophisticated, as the mother and her two sons, husband, and others in her life are represented by simple line drawings, and often oddly misshapen and inconsistent from season to season, episode to episode, and even panel to panel. In season three's "prologue" episode, the panels show various object

Fig. 3. Having a Baby Comic, Naver Webtoons.

in the house, and the text reads: "This is a childcare webtoon . . . but there's no information about childcare . . . it's just a strange comic about an *ajumma* hanging around." The webtoon's tone is more sweet than funny, but there is humor throughout as the author-as-lead-character agonizes over preschool decisions and other childcare dilemmas.

The Birth of a Married Woman, *I Guess I'm a Mom* and *Having a Baby Comic/ Raising a Kid Comic* all delight in body humor and body shock, with scenes

Fig. 4. I'm a Mom, Daum Webtoons.

involving passing gas, leaking fluids, and uterine bleeding of various types marking the transition to motherhood. *Having a Baby Comic* takes an explicitly sex education stance, educating on what to expect during labor, and addressing issues such as postpartum sex. (The need for such feminist sex education was made glaringly apparent by the recent online controversy over a section of a Seoul City Government website on "pregnancy information" that instructed pregnant women to make sure to prepare husband's clothing and food before going to the hospital to deliver, urged her to hang pre-pregnancy clothes prominently in her closet to motivate her to lose weight faster, and reminded her that unwanted violent sex should be avoided due the risk of preterm labor—as if unwanted violent marital sex was fine at other times).[55] *The Birth of a Married Woman* most poignantly reflects on pregnancy loss, and the all-out war on infertility and simultaneous estrangement from a partner that can follow. *The Birth of a Married Woman* episodes often concluded with a clear moral message, giving the series an "educational manhwa" flavor; the webtoon stirred up less controversy than Shosho's webtoons, and commenters frequently identified themselves as fathers who sympathized with Kim Fanta's depiction of her husband ("Mango"). *The Birth of a Married Woman* was adapted as a web drama on SBS Plus in December 2016.

Both the short-running *I Guess I'm a Mom* and more extended *I'm a Mom* garnered interest and devoted readers, but few of the extended conversations or criticisms that *The Birth of a Married Woman* or *Having a Baby/Raising a Kid* did. Many of the reader comments on *I'm a Mom* were criticisms of the simple, inconsistent drawing style rather than the content itself. *Having a Baby Comic* and *Raising a Kid Comic* exploded on the webtoon scene in the late 2010s, at a time when gender-related tensions were at an all-time high; the expanding #MeToo movement and collapsing birth and marriage rate, combined with the exposure of online sex crimes and elaborate sex trafficking rings converged to create an atmosphere of tension in regards to gender. Since Shosho's comics went beyond navigating pregnancy, childcare and infertility with a partner, or explaining the IVF process, and delved into the emotional worlds of new mothers, plenty of male readers expressed indignation at the author's fundamental questioning of *mojŏngae* (motherly love), calling her selfish. *The Birth of a Married Woman* also dealt honestly with pregnancy and infertility, but presented the couple (the author and her husband) as a unified front working together, even with relationship challenges. *Having a Baby Comic* also features a supportive husband but with a less central role, and does not hold back in critiquing social norms and structural inequalities. The most

controversial plot points were Shosho's questioning of maternal sacrifice, light-hearted and pro-choice treatment of abortion (when South Korea only decriminalized abortion in 2021), criticisms of those (non-pregnant people) who use the designated "pregnancy seats" on public transportation, and questioning of how much weight women are advised to gain during pregnancy by doctors in South Korea. These issues generated thousands of comments in the comment section of the webtoon.

While much of the humor in the other three webtoons analyzed here is found in the interactions between characters, Shosho's autobiographical bunny mother character frequently looks out of the frame of the comic at the reader, making sarcastic comments about the systems that keep women down, or plaintively questioning a social norm and insisting that "I am valuable too." The exaggerated criticisms of other characters—friends, gynecologists, fertility specialists, pediatricians—also lend a *pyŏngmat* quality, as these characters deliver unreasonable expectations and demands with mouths wide open, spittle flying, and arms flailing. Kim Chan-ho, in a follow-up work to the one on *momyŏlgam*, analyzes humor cross-culturally, and cites a 2014 Global Emotions Gallup poll that puts South Korea near last place in reported "experiences of positive emotions."[56] He surmises that the decline of laughter in South Korean society is not just due to the competitive work and education environment, but also to the rise in single-person households and greater amount of time that a significant portion of the population spends alone. Shosho's webtoons, more strongly than the others, operate as social satire, and provoke cynical, bitter laughter; in its potential for catharsis, though, bitter laughter is better than no laughter at all. Shosho's comics do not glorify motherhood or push a pro-natalist message[57]—they appeal both to single people who want a sense of justification for not marrying and/or starting families, and mothers who feel alone in the world despite their new maternal status.

Conclusion

This article has shown how the relatively new webtoon genre of "mom webtoons" is both showcasing the difficulties mothers face, and contributing to a broader discussion about the meaning of motherhood and living a meaningful life as a woman of reproductive age in South Korean society. Unlike earlier *han*-laden and *chŏng*-laden cultural narratives promoting *mojŏng* and *mojŏngae*, mom webtoons embrace the *pyŏngmat* esthetic that webtoonists-turned-mothers in their late twenties through

early forties grew up with—encompassing amateurish, uncomfortable, and even grotesque styles—but combine the odd and irreverent humor of *pyŏngmat* with genuine raw and heartfelt moments of motherhood. In the space created by the webtoon format, new emotional keywords of ambivalence, humiliation, alienation and exhaustion emerge. Compared to the irreverent humor of "mommy blogs" in some other national contexts, the humor featured in South Korean mom webtoons is rather muted, and there is certainly tone policing against voicing taboos operating in the comment sections and controversies stirred up over social media. However, the difference in tone and degree of mom humor is also a feature of the everyday nature of the webtoon format—the aforementioned "snack culture." Even compared to weekly television drama broadcasts or blog posts, the "everyday" space created by the webtoon's gutters and frames—even if the webtoon episodes are released a few times a week—creates a somewhat gentler comedic impulse than seen in globally influential mom content. Ultimately, mother webtoon artists in the 2010s and beyond have reclaimed or otherwise engaged with the *pyŏngmat* esthetic that characterized a particular cultural milieu at the time of their youth, coinciding with the emergence of webtoons as a genre.[58] In their alternately carnivalesque and absurdist, then sweet and sentimental depictions of contemporary South Korean motherhood, they sketch a messy affective landscape that demands attention, one snack-sized bite at a time.

Notes

1. A beloved "sitcom mom" is Lee Hyung-kyung (played by Oh Hyung-kyung) of 2009–2010's *High Kick Through the Roof* (*Chibungttulk'o haik'ik*), who ran her household while working as a P.E. teacher at her son's high school, expressing a quirky personality without the maternal sentimentality of "typical" South Korean on-screen mothers.

2. Joanna Elfving-Hwang, *Representations of Femininity in Contemporary South Korean Women's Literature* (London: Brill, 2010). The Korean term is *mojŏng*, which can be glossed as "maternal feeling" or "maternal attachment," but since it involves the loaded cultural psychology term *chŏng*, it defies simple translation (which is not to imply, of course, that it is a uniquely Korean concept).

3. The mother character in director Bong Joon-ho's 2009 film *Mother* (the Korean title, *Madŏ*, is a play on "mother/murder") demonstrates the horrific side of maternal sacrifice (see Ji-yoon An, "The Korean Mother in Contemporary Thriller Films: A Monster or Just Modern?" *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 11, no. 2 (2019): 154–69).

4. Nancy Abelmann and Jeongsu Shin, "The New (Korean) Wave: A Global Social Mobility Story—*Please Look After Mom*," *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (2012): 400.

5. So Jin Park, "Educational Manager Mothers: South Korea's Neoliberal Transformation," *Korea Journal* 47, no. 3 (2007): 181–213.

6. Jean Mackenzie, "Teacher Suicide Exposes Parent Bullying in S Korea," *BBC News*, September 4, 2023. While mothers physically visit schools less often than in previous decades, it should be noted that the constant access to teachers that smartphone apps allow has resulted in sometimes severe stress for school teachers.

7. "Crayon Shin-chan in South Korea," Fandom.com Wiki, https://crayonshinchan.fandom.com/wiki/Crayon_Shin-chan_in_South_Korea.

8. Susan J. Napier, "From Spiritual Fathers to Tokyo Godfathers: Depictions of the Family in Japanese Animation," in *Imagined Families, Lived Families: Culture and Kinship in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Akiko Hashimoto and John W. Trapgahan (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 33–50. Grace En-Yi Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, ed. Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton (London: Routledge, 2020), 311–9.

9. Amanda C. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 112.

10. Nancy Abelmann (*The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003)) argued that the class mobility and dramatic shifts in fortunes under rapid industrialization and urbanization led to an overall "melodramatic sensibility" in South Korean society, and Kyung-sup Chang (*South Korea Under Compressed Modernity: Familial Political Economy in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2010)) further explored this with his concept of "compressed modernity." Olga Fedorenko ("South Korean Advertising as Popular Culture," in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 341–62) engages with this concept to explain why South Korean advertising is heavily "humanist" and inclined toward melodrama. Webtoons about motherhood tend to strike a balance between heartfelt melodrama and the absurdism (*pyŏngmat*) that dominates in the medium of webtoons.

11. Cho 2016; Jin 2019; Shim et al. 2020; Yecies et al. 2020; Yecies and Shim 2021.

12. Kim and Yu 2019; Cho 2021.

13. Yi 2020 on *Secretly, Greatly*, and Wall 2021 on *Along with the Gods*. South Korea cultural critics naturally wrote about webtoons for a Korean academic audience earlier than those writing for an international audience. Kim Soo-hwan (2013) wrote about the depiction of precarious labor in the webtoon *Misaeng*, which was adapted into a highly popular television drama in 2014. Kim Soo-hwan had earlier traced the emergence of the new humor aesthetic of *pyŏngmat* through webtoons (2011).

14. Webtoons by fathers about childcare include *A Childcare Webtoon Drawn by a Dad* (https://m.blog.naver.com/kidlly/222395626884) and *Dr. and Dr.*, a wildly popular webtoon drawn by a stay-at-home PhD-holding dad with a gynecologist wife (https://

comic.naver.com/webtoon/detail?titleId=732955&no=1&weekday=wed). "Gender wars" were on display in an online feud between readers of *Dr. and Dr.* and those of *Having a Baby Comic*, with the latter complaining that even as a stay-at-home dad the author of *Dr. and Dr.* could not understand the trauma of childbirth and subsequent physical and mental adjustment of new mothers (https://namu.wiki/w/%EB%8B%A5%ED%84%B0%EC%95%A4%EB%8B%A5%ED%84%B0%20%EC%9C%A1%EC%95%84%EC%9D%BC%EA%B8%B0).

15. Hyesu Park, "Joy of Ugly Feelings: Korean 'Bad Taste' Webtoons as a Case Study," *Studies in 20th and 21st Century Literature* 42, no. 1 (2017), article 5.

16. Sungjin Lee, "Wept'une tŭrŏnan kyŏrhon, ch'ulsan, yuga kŭrigo yŏsŏng: sushinji chakkaŭi *Myŏnŭragi* wa *Kon (GONE)* ŭl chungshimŭro [Study on Marriage, Childbirth, Childcare and Woman in Webtoons: Focusing on Webtoon *Myeoneulagi* and Gone]," *Tijit'oryŏngsanghaksulchi* 17 (2020): 75–91.

17. Da-hea Kong, "Wept'une nat'anan chendŏ chaehyŏn'gwa yŏsŏngminsokchŏng hamŭi Myŏnŭragi rŭl chungshimŭro" [Representation of Gender and Meaning of Women's Folkloristic in the Webtoon: Focusing on Webtoon Myeoneulagi], *Han'guk'akyŏn'gu* 69 (2019): 5–59.

18. Ann Anagnost, "Securing the Home Front: The Pursuit of 'Natural Living' Among Evangelical Christian Homemakers," *Social Politics* 20, no. 2 (2013): 274–95.

19. Lori Kido Lopez, "The Radical Act of "Mommy Blogging": Redefining Motherhood Through the Blogosphere," *New Media and Society* 11 (2009): 729–47.

20. Kate Orton-Johnson, "Mummy Blogs and Representations of Motherhood: 'Bad Mummies' and Their Readers," *Social Media + Society* April–June (2017): 1–10. Jenna Abetz and Julia Moore, "'Welcome to the Mommy Wars, Ladies': Making Sense of the Ideology of Combative Mothering in Mommy Blogs," *Communication Culture & Critique* 11 (2018): 265–81.

21. There are of course plenty of "geek blogs" on gaming, comics, etc. by bloggers that identify as female, but many of these were created as self-conscious responses to the flood of exclusively male online communities associated with the 2000s "dotcom boom" and subsequent "tech bro" online culture. One only needs to revisit the US "Gamergate" controversy of 2014, in which male defenders of "geek culture" took offense to feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian's *Tropes Vs. Women in Video Games* video series, launching a harassment campaign against she and video game developers Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu.

22. Abetz and Moore, "Welcome to the Mommy Wars," 266.

23. Crystal Abidin, "#familygoals: Family Influencers, Calibrated Amateurism, and Justifying Young Digital Labor," *Social Media + Society*, April–June (2017): 2.

24. Family influencers/vloggers in the US context who straddle humor and heartfelt authenticity include Laura Clery (Facebook videos, as well as a book and clothing merchandize), The Holderness Family (Facebook, YouTube, a podcast, and a book), Dude Dad (YouTube and merchandize, with vlog popularity leading to a Discovery TV show,

Super Dad), and Kristina Kuzmic (YouTube, book). In 2020, many top-subscribed Youtubers in South Korea also featured children and families, including Boram Tube (vlog + toy review channel) and Haegreendal (family life and traditional food preparation).

25. Heekyoung Cho, "The Platformization of Culture: Webtoon Platforms and Media Ecology in Korea and Beyond," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 1 (2021): 73–93.

26. Hyeryoung Ok, "New Media Practices in Korea," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 320–48.

27. Hojin Song, "Mothers' Baking Blogs: Negotiating Sacrificial and Postfeminist Neoliberal Motherhood in South Korea," *Feminist Media Studies* 23, no. 1 (2023): 216–31.

28. South Korean reality television has heavily featured the humorous side of parenting from a father's perspective, as seen in wildly popular and long-running show *Return of Superman* (2013–) and the earlier *Dad, Where are We Going?* (2013–2015), both classified as *yuga yenŭng* ("childcare variety programs"). According to Grace Jung ("Aspirational Paternity and the Female Gaze on Korean Reality-variety TV," *Media, Culture and Society* 42, no. 2 (2019): 191–206), these programs highlight fathers' funny yet touching interactions with children as a promotion of heteronormative coupling and child-bearing. The mothers are absent from the shows except as judges who return at the end, evaluating their husbands' parenting. While ostensibly attempting to break down rigid gender roles, the programs reify gender roles in parenting by only having dads shown performing these tasks on a temporary basis, and often in a bumbling and unskilled way. The judgmental gaze of the mother is reflected in the female narration, and projected onto viewers.

29. Heekyoung Cho, "The Webtoon: A New Form for Graphic Narrative," *The Comics Journal*, July 18, 2016. http://www.tcj.com/the-webtoon-a-new-form-for-graphic-narrative/.

30. Soo-hwan Kim, "Webtoone nat'anan sedaeŭi kamjŏnggujo: ingyŏesŏ pyŏng-matkkaji [The New Structure of Feeling in Webtoon]," *Trans-Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2011): 101–23.

31. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *South Korea's Webtooniverse and the Digital Comic Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 80.

32. Even prior to the emergence of the *pyŏngmat* aesthetic in the early 2010s, a "bizarre" style and content in popular culture was encompassed by the term *yŏpki* in the early 2000s. *Yŏpki* can be translated as "bizarre and grotesque acts," but came to be characterized as a positive kind of bizarreness, both novel and funny. Kukhee Choo ("*My Sassy Girl* (2001): The Taming of the *Yopki*," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 343–57) discusses the term in relation to the titular cute/crazy female character of the 2001 film *My Sassy Girl* (*Yŏpkijŏgin kŭnyŏ*). *Yŏpki* as an aesthetic provided a pleasurable shock and dissonance in the cozy arena of popular culture following the social shock of the late 1990s financial crisis ("IMF crisis"), and is a key component of early South Korean internet culture (see: *Yŏpkit'okki Mashimaro*, known in English as Bizarre Rabbit Mashimaro, a Flash animation that debuted in 2000).

Other early 2000s pop culture elements that come up most frequently in online searches for *yŏpki* are the vampire sitcom *Hello Francesca* and the singer PSY (of "Gangnam Style" fame), who debuted in 2001.

33. Dal Yong Jin, "Snack Culture's Dream of Big-Screen Culture: Korean Webtoons' Transmedia Storytelling," *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 2094.

34. See Cho (2016) for a discussion of "transmedia" and "transmediality," as well as Yecies and Shim (2021). Wall (2021) discusses the popular webtoon *Along With the Gods* (2010–2012); though it had a transmedia adaptation into a later hit films *Along With the Gods: Two Worlds* (2017) and *Along With the Gods: The Last 49 Days* (2018), Wall focuses on *transcoding* in the webtoon, meaning the process of "nationalizing" transnational or multicultural elements.

35. Heekyoung Cho, "The Platformization of Culture," 91.

36. Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai kenbo: The Educational Ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" in Modern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Koyama reminds us that *ryōsai kenbo*, which became *hyŏnmoyangch'ŏ* in Korea under Japanese colonization, was itself an adaptation of Western gender ideals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making invocations of "Confucianism" or "neo-Confucianism" in relate to its ideology particularly problematic. As Seungsook Moon has persuasively argued, it is more useful to connect regressive gender ideologies to patriarchal development under "militarized modernity"—first in the service of Japanese empire and then under successive authoritarian and developmentalist regimes—rather than blaming "Confucianism": Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

37. Kim and Yoo (Yi-Gyung Kim and Mi-sook Yoo, "Mamch'ung homyŏnge taehan tamnon punsŏk: kisa punsŏkŭl chungshimŭro" [Discourse Analysis on Momchoong Calling: Based on Analysis of Articles], *Global Creative Leader: Education and Learning* 9, no. 1 (2019): 43–63) show through discourse analysis of news media that "mom bug" mainly refers to mothers who are annoying others in public (and not simply all stay-at-home mothers), but Lee (Inyoung Lee, "Yumoch'abudaenŭn ŏttŏk'e mamch'ungi toeŏnna" [How did Yumochabudae Become Momchung?], *Inmunsahoe21* 14, no. 2 (2023): 3033–44) demonstrates that the progression from calling young mothers the "stroller brigade" (*Yumoch'abudae*) around the time of the Candlelight protests in 2008—in which many young mothers participated, citing concerns over consumer safety associated with mad cow disease—to calling this demographic "mom bugs" was hardly straightforward. As mothers in online communities post-2008 made posts lamenting their intensive stay-at-home mothering existence and "wishing they could join the stroller brigade," the term "stroller brigade" came to be used by media outlets more generally to refer to mothers who sat idly gossiping in cafes after sending children off to daycare. Lee effectively shows the power of media discourse to change the meaning of a word—from a political identity and community to a disparaging term. Mothers of young children who dared to appear in public with their

children were first called "the stroller brigade," and when online communities began attaching *-ch'ung* (bug) to anything they found distasteful, "mom bug" came into being.

38. Park (Chan-hyo Park, *Han'gugŭi kajokkwa yŏsŏnghyŏmo, 1950–2020* [*The Korean Family and Misogyny, 1950–2020*] (Seoul: Ch'aekgwa hamgge, 2020)) traces the figures of the female college student, "professional housewife" (*chŏnŏp chubu*), working mom, and divorced woman from the 1950s until 2020, arguing that misogyny in the 2010s and onward has been directed toward women who display their skills in society, but being a stay-at-home mother ("professional housewife") is also frowned upon due to the lack of economic contribution. Working moms brazenly showed their skills in the workplace (often competing with men), but mothers who stayed home came to be referred to as "mom bugs" or "*toenjang ajumma*" (bean paste women—here not referring to a rusticity, but an update of the term "*toenjangnyŏ*," a disparaging term for young women who consumed conspicuously in the 2000s, spending more on a Starbucks coffee than a meal of bean paste stew). Rowan and Park (Bernard Rowan and So-yeon Park, "Considering the *Chubu*: The Social Perspective of the Korean Full-Time Housewife," *Korea Observer* 41, no. 3 (2010): 351–78) examine the identity of the "professional housewife," and find significant role dissatisfaction, often stemming from these women's isolation from public life.

39. Hyeryoung Ok, "New Media Practices in Korea," 326.

40. Political changes affected by mom cafes range from the positive (like the Oxy lawsuit, focusing on consumer safety issues or environmental concerns) to reactive and xenophobic (with a recent example being the protesting against granting amnesty to Yemeni refugees on Jeju Island).

41. Another popular "mom webtoon" is the long-running *Acoustic Life* by Nanda, hosted on Kakao (https://webtoon.kakao.com/viewer/%EC%96%B4%EC%BF%A0%EC%8A%A4%ED%8B%B1-%EB%9D%BC%EC%9D%B4%ED%94%84-001/8477). While it shares some similarities with *The Birth of a Married Woman* in terms of its progression from stories of a married woman without kids to stories about mom life, it is not analyzed in this article due to the fact that only the last few seasons deal with mothering. Esthetically it is very different from *The Birth of a Married Woman*, and more similar to *I Guess I'm a Mom* in its simple, amateurish line drawings. It is also compared to *Having a Baby Comic*/*Raising a Kid Comic* due to its explicitly feminist critique in later seasons in particular.

42. Bong Joon-ho, currently arguably South Korea's best-known film director globally, has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the concept of *pujori* in understanding contemporary South Korean society. Nam Lee (*The Films of Bong Joon Ho* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020)) notes a distinction between the Korean word *pujori* and its most common English translation, "absurd" or "absurdities." "The English word does not include the concept of corruption which is the unique aspect of *pujori* that Bong deals with in his films. This sense of *pujori* is, in fact, the root cause of the absurdities of everyday life that Bong's films so adeptly depict" (p. 94). Bong also frequently

cites webtoons (and before that, *manhwa*) as an influence, and released *Parasite: A Graphic Novel in Storyboards* in 2020, after his award-winning film *Parasite* in 2019.

43. Soo-hwan Kim, "Webtoone nat'anan sedaeŭi kamjŏnggujo," 117.

44. Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams, *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos: Key Cultural Concepts and Their Appearance in Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2015), 41.

45. Bonnie Tilland, "Family is Beautiful: The Affective Weight of Mothers-in-Law in Family Talk in South Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 227.

46. Michael G. Peletz, "Ambivalence in Kinship since the 1940s," in *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, ed. Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 414.

47. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 53.

48. Chanho Kim, *Momyŏlgam: kuryokkwa chonŏmŭi kamjŏngsahoehak [Humiliation: An Emotional Sociology of Disgrace and Dignity*] (Seoul: Munhakgwa Chiseongsa, 2014), 42.

49. Moral psychologist C. Fred Alford theorized in the late 1990s that globalization represented a kind of "evil" to many South Koreans, as "it threatens to create a world in which Koreans no longer recognize themselves, in which Koreans are other to themselves" (C. Fred Alford, *Think No Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 12. While South Korea in the 2020s is an economically developed, globalized society in many respects, the specter of the *sŏnjin'guk* ("advanced countries," meaning Western democracies) still haunts cultural productions. Symbols of the United States in particular are scattered throughout Bong Joon-ho's films: the pollution caused by the US military in 2006's *The Host*, the agricultural-industrial complex in 2017's *Okja*, and the more subtle Native American costume of the rich family's youngest son in 2019's *Parasite*.

50. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100538488.

51. Kim, *Momyŏlgam*, 4–5.

52. For some examples of anthropology of the senses, see Paul Stoller's *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (1989) and C. Nadia Seremetakis's *The Senses Still* (1996). For a recent example of a sensory focus in environmental/ecological research, see the SENSOTRA project, funded by the ERC (European Research Council): https://archive.uef.fi/en/web/sensotra/home/.

53. Roy Richard Grinker and Kyungjin Cho, "Border Children: Interpreting Autism Spectrum Disorder in South Korea," *Ethos* 41, no. 1 (2013): 65.

54. Bonnie Tilland, "Save Your K-Drama for Your Mama: Mother-Daughter Bonding in between Nostalgia and Futurism," *Acta Koreana* 20, no. 2 (2017): 377–93.

55. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/11/dont-look-dishevelled-anger-over-seoul-citys-advice-to-pregnant-women.

56. Chanho Kim, *Yumŏnijŭm: usŭmgwa konggamŭi maŭmsahoehak* [*Humonism: An Emotional Sociology of Laughter and Sympathy*] (Seoul: Munhakgwa Chiseongsa, 2018), 48–49.

57. Of the four webtoons analyzed here, *I'm a Mom* (Sundubu) and *I Guess I'm a Mom* (Oh Haru) feature mothers who give up work to raise children, with *I'm a Mom*'s author particularly embracing the *chŏnŏp chubu* (professional housewife) status. In contrast, the mom characters representing Oh Haru, Shosho, and Kim Fanta stumble into motherhood, deciding with their husbands that they should have children but questioning their own maternal drive.

58. Sunyoung Yang has clearly explained various streams in South Korean internet culture, including *pyŏngmat*: Sunyoung Yang, "Networking South Korea: Internet, Nation, and New Subjects," *Media, Culture and Society* 39, no. 5 (2017): 740–9; Sunyoung Yang, "'Loser' Aesthetics: Korean Internet Freaks and Gender Politics," *Feminist Media Studies* 19, no. 6 (2019): 858–72.

Acknowledgments

Early versions of this article were presented at the Symposium on Korean Humor at Palacky University Olomouc in May 2020, and a Korea Research Collaboratory on the theme "Beyond *Han*: New Interpretations of Korean Emotions" at the Korea Research Centre (KRC) of Western Australia in February 2021. Special thanks go to the organizers of these events, Andreas Schirmer and Joanna Elfving-Hwang. This research was supported by the Core University Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2022-OLU-2250005).

References Cited

Abelmann, Nancy. *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.

Abelmann, Nancy, and Jeongsu Shin. "The New (Korean) Wave: A Global Social Mobility Story—*Please Look After Mom*." *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (2012): 399–418.

Abetz, Jenna, and Julia Moore. "'Welcome to the Mommy Wars, Ladies': Making Sense of the Ideology of Combative Mothering in Mommy Blogs." *Communication Culture & Critique* 11 (2018): 265–81.

Abidin, Crystal. "#familygoals: Family Influencers, Calibrated Amateurism, and Justifying Young Digital Labor." *Social Media + Society* April–June (2017): 1–15.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Alford, C. Fred. *Think No Evil: Korean Values in the Age of Globalization*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

An, Ji-yoon. "The Korean Mother in Contemporary Thriller Films: A Monster or Just Modern?" *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 11, no. 2 (2019): 154–69.

Anagnost, Ann. "Securing the Home Front: The Pursuit of 'Natural Living' Among Evangelical Christian Homemakers." *Social Politics* 20, no. 2 (2013): 274–95.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Chang, Kyung-Sup. *South Korea Under Compressed Modernity: Familial Political Economy in Transition*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Cho, Heekyoung. "The Webtoon: A New Form for Graphic Narrative." *The Comics Journal*, July 18, 2016. http://www.tcj.com/the-webtoon-a-new-form-for-graphic-narrative/.

———. "The Platformization of Culture: Webtoon Platforms and Media Ecology in Korea and Beyond." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 1 (2021): 73–93.

Choo, Kukhee. "*My Sassy Girl* (2001): The Taming of the Yopki." In *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, edited by Sangjoon Lee, 343–57. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019.

Elfving-Hwang, Joanna. *Representations of Femininity in Contemporary South Korean Women's Literature*. London: Brill, 2010.

Fedorenko, Olga. "South Korean Advertising as Popular Culture." In *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, edited by Kyung Hyun Kim, 341–62. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

Grinker, Roy Richard, and Kyungjin Cho. "Border Children: Interpreting Autism Spectrum Disorder in South Korea." *Ethos* 41, no. 1 (2013): 46–74.

Jin, Dal Yong. "Snack Culture's Dream of Big-Screen Culture: Korean Webtoons' Transmedia Storytelling." *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 2094–115.

Jung, Grace. "Aspirational Paternity and the Female Gaze on Korean Reality-variety TV." *Media, Culture and Society* 42, no. 2 (2019): 191–206.

Kim, Chanho. *Momyŏlgam: kuryokkwa chonŏmŭi kamjŏngsahoehak* [Humiliation: An Emotional Sociology of Disgrace and Dignity]. Seoul: Munhakgwa Chiseongsa, 2014.

———. *Yumŏnijŭm: usŭmgwa konggamŭi maŭmsahoehak* [Humonism: An Emotional Sociology of Laughter and Sympathy]. Seoul: Munhakgwa Chiseongsa, 2018.

Kim, Fanta. *Yubunyŏŏi t'ansaeng* [The Birth of a Married Woman]. 2013–2023. https://webtoon.kakao.com/content/%EC%9C%A0%EB%B6%80%EB%85%80%EC%9D%98-%ED%83%84%EC%83%9D/1078?tab=episode.

Kim, Ji-Hyeon, and Jun Yu. "Platformizing Webtoons: The Impact on Creative and Digital Labor in South Korea." *Social Media + Society* October–December (2019): 1–11.

Kim, Soo-hwan. "Webtoone nat'anan sedaeŭi kamjŏnggujo: ingyŏesŏ pyŏngmatkkaji" [The New Structure of Feeling in Webtoon]. *Trans-Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2011): 101–23.

———. "Webtoon 'Misaeng'i marhanŭn kŏtkwa marhal suinnŭn kŏttŭl: uri shidaeŭi nodong kongdongch'e kŭrigo sŏngjang" [What the Webtoon Misaeng Says and What It Can Say: Labor, Community, and Growth in our Age]. *Angwa ppak* [In/Outside: English Studies in Korea] 35 (2013): 201–31.

Kim, Yi-Gyung, and Mi-sook Yoo. "Mamch'ung homyŏnge taehan tamnon punsŏk: kisa punsŏkŭl chungshimŭro" [Discourse Analysis on Momchoong Calling: Based on Analysis of Articles]. *Global Creative Leader: Education and Learning* 9, no. 1 (2019): 43–63.

Kim Yoon, Keumsil, and Bruce Williams. *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos: Key Cultural Concepts and Their Appearance in Cinema*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2015.

Kong, Da-hea. "Wept'une nat'anan chendŏ chaehyŏn'gwa yŏsŏngminsokchŏng hamŭi *Myŏnŭragi* rŭl chungshimŭro" [Representation of Gender and Meaning of Women's Folkloristic in the Webtoon: Focusing on Webtoon *Myeoneulagi*]. *Han'guk'akyŏn'gu* 69 (2019): 5–59.

Koyama, Shizuko. *Ryōsai kenbo: The Educational Ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" in Modern Japan*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Lee, Inyoung. "Yumoch'abudaenŭn ŏttŏk'e mamch'ungi toeŏnna" [How did Yumocha-budae Become Momchung?]. *Inmunsahoe21* 14, no. 2 (2023): 3033–44.

Lee, Nam. *The Films of Bong Joon Ho*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020.

Lee, Sungjin. "Wept'une tŭrŏnan kyŏrhon, ch'ulsan, yuga kŭrigo yŏsŏng: sushinji chakkaŭi *Myŏnŭragi* wa *Kon (GONE)* ŭl chungshimŭro" [Study on Marriage, Childbirth, Childcare and Woman in Webtoons: Focusing on Webtoon *Myeoneulagi* and *Gone*]. *Tijit'ŏryŏngsanghaksulchi* 17 (2020): 75–91.

Lopez, Lori Kido. "The Radical Act of 'Mommy Blogging': Redefining Motherhood Through the Blogosphere." *New Media and Society* 11 (2009): 729–47.

Mackenzie, Jean. "Teacher Suicide Exposes Parent Bullying in S Korea." *BBC News*, September 4, 2023.

Moon, Seungsook. *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Napier, Susan J. "From Spiritual Fathers to Tokyo Godfathers: Depictions of the Family in Japanese Animation." In *Imagined Families, Lived Families: Culture and Kinship in Contemporary Japan*, edited by Akiko Hashimoto and John W. Trapgahan, 33–50. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009.

Oh, Haru. *Naega ŏmmarani* [I Guess I'm a Mom]. 2014. https://comic.naver.com/bestChallenge/list?titleId=625157&no=11.

Ok, Hyeryoung. "New Media Practices in Korea." *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 320–48.

Orton-Johnson, Kate. "Mummy Blogs and Representations of Motherhood: 'Bad Mummies' and Their Readers." *Social Media + Society* April–June (2017): 1–10.

Park, Chan-hyo. *Han'gugŭi kajokkkwa yŏsŏnghyŏmo, 1950–2020* [The Korean Family and Misogyny, 1950–2020]. Seoul: Ch'aekgwa hamgge, 2020.

Park, Hyesu. "Joy of Ugly Feelings: Korean 'Bad Taste' Webtoons as a Case Study." *Studies in 20th and 21st Century Literature* 42, no. 1 (2017), article 5.

Park, So Jin. "Educational Manager Mothers: South Korea's Neoliberal Transformation." *Korea Journal* 47, no. 3 (2007): 181–213.

Peletz, Michael G. "Ambivalence in Kinship since the 1940s." In *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, edited by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, 413–44. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Rowan, Bernard, and So-yeon Park. "Considering the Chubu: The Social Perspective of the Korean Full-Time Housewife." *Korea Observer* 41, no. 3 (2010): 351–78.

Seaman, Amanda C. *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017.

Shim, Aegyung, Brian Yecies, Xiang (Tony) Ren, and Dingkun Wang. "Cultural Intermediation and the Basis of Trust and Webtoon and Webnovel Communities." *Information, Communication and Society* 23, no. 6 (2020): 833–48.

Shosho. *Aginannŭnmanhwa* [Having a Baby Comic]. 2017–2018. https://series.naver.com/comic/detail.series?productNo=3159179&isWebtoonAgreePopUp=true.

———. *Aik'iunŭnmanhwa* [Raising a Kid Comic]. 2019–2020. https://comic.naver.com/webtoon/detail?titleId=737835&no=4&weekday=mon.

Song, Hojin. "Mothers' Baking Blogs: Negotiating Sacrificial and Postfeminist Neoliberal Motherhood in South Korea." *Feminist Media Studies* 23, no. 1 (2023): 216–31.

Sundubu. *Nanŭn ŏmmada* [I'm a Mom]. 2015–2020. http://webtoon.daum.net/webtoon/view/iammother (original page discontinued; now at Kakao: https://webtoon.kakao.com/viewer/%EB%82%98%EB%8A%94-%EC%97%84%EB%A7%88%EB%8B%A4-110/44164).

Tilland, Bonnie. "Family is Beautiful: The Affective Weight of Mothers-in-Law in Family Talk in South Korea." *Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 213–44.

———. "Save Your K-Drama for Your Mama: Mother-Daughter Bonding in between Nostalgia and Futurism." *Acta Koreana* 20, no. 2 (2017): 377–93.

Ting, Grace En-Yi. "Gender, Manga, and Anime." In *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, edited by Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, 311–9. London: Routledge, 2020.

Wall, Barbara. "Between Satire and Nationalism: The Transcoded Pantheon of Hell in the Webtoon *Sin kwa hamkke* (Along with the Gods, 2010–2012)." *Bochum Yearbook for East Asian Studies* 43 (2021): 129–55.

Yang, Sunyoung. "Networking South Korea: Internet, Nation, and New Subjects." *Media, Culture and Society* 39, no. 5 (2017): 740–9.

———. "'Loser' Aesthetics: Korean Internet Freaks and Gender Politics." *Feminist Media Studies* 19, no. 6 (2019): 858–72.

Yecies, Brian, and Ae-Gyung Shim. *South Korea's Webtooniverse and the Digital Comic Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021.

Yecies, Brian, Aekyung Shim, Jack (Jie) Yang, and Peter Yong Zhong. "Global Transcreators and the Extension of the Korean Webtoon IP-engine." *Media, Culture and Society* 42, no. 1 (2020): 40–57.

Yi, We Jung. "Redrawing the Division Lines? Surplus, Connectivity, and Remediation in the South Korean Webtoon *Secretly, Greatly*." *positions: asia critique* 28, no. 4 (2020): 701–27.