

**GLOBAL MEDIA, AUDIENCES AND  
TRANSFORMATIVE IDENTITIES**

**FEMININITIES AND CONSUMPTION IN SOUTH KOREA**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine the complexity of young women's identities in a context where accelerated global cultural flows have become enormously influential. In particular, this research examines how the consumption of global media affects young women's identities in postcolonial South Korea. Young Korean women's identities have been constructed through specific historical experiences: colonisation under Japanese rule; the division of Korea after the Korean War; and a compressed modernity with rapidly increasing consumption of global media during the 1990s. This research demonstrates how global culture has adapted to a particular local culture. It illustrates how women as audiences are in conflict with, and have to negotiate, newly introduced values through their consumption of global mass media. The research was based on a series of group interviews, including 21 group (101 women) interviews along with data collected from magazine and newspaper articles during nine months' fieldwork in 2000. The analysis is structured around three key themes of women's cultural practice; consuming plastic surgery, the translation of romantic love and marriage, and the notion of femininity amongst married women. It provides a detailed example of postcolonial theory and argues that the global-local relationship is not monolithic but interactive; it forms part of the devolution of global media. The process of women's identity formation is therefore closely associated with the multi-layered and dynamic practice of struggling with, resisting, and negotiating with, an evolving and devolving global media, and this dominates women's contemporary cultural practice. That cultural practice needs to be contextualised and understood as part of a continuous local negotiation with global forces, as we seek to avoid an unnecessary dichotomy where women are seen as either oppressed or as subversive audiences.

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own work throughout

12<sup>th</sup> December 2007

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

One *babjip* (Korean restaurant) in Seoul is a particular source of amusement for women. The restaurant is a very stylish *babjip* with cutting-edge modern interior and trendy lounge music. An interesting fact is that the food is served by soft, delicate-looking, beautiful boys who have backgrounds as snowboarders, and are members of underground music bands. Even more interesting is that there are detailed lists of their backgrounds that you can read on the table. Now the time has come to sell sex like selling a bowl of rice topped with *Bulgoki* (traditional marinated grilled beef). You can be satisfied with your voyeuristic desire, unabashedly drinking Coke and having Sushi at the same time in the public place. It is welcome news that you don't have to wonder around brothels for sex or *Chongye-chun* (famous district for sex shops in Seoul) for sexual fantasy

(Kim, K. 2004).

The magazine article from which this quote is taken demonstrates how much a traditionally conservative South Korean society has been transformed over the past decades. The writer is a well-known editor of a Korean fashion magazine, and writes about a fashionable Korean restaurant for women, where beautiful boys are organised to serve them. Before the 1990s, Korea it was unthinkable that women could be so visibly in pursuit of their desire for an Adonis; now it is an urban phenomenon. This "global" lifestyle of women in South Korea is not just "imagined", but has become practice, even if in passing. The new information and communication technologies – such as email, or the ability to watch the same films and television programmes as those on the other side of the world – all allow young women to collapse time and space through the sheer speed and simultaneity of the transmission. As Kevin Robins argues, 'audio-visual geographies are thus becoming detached from the symbolic space of national culture, and re-aligned on the basis of the more "universal" principle of international consumer culture' (Robins 1995: 250).

This thesis examines the complexity of young women's identities, in a context in which accelerated global cultural flows have become enormously influential, and it then analyses how the consumption of global media affects the process of identity formation in postcolonial South Korea. Young Korean women's identities have been constructed through specific historical experiences: the experience of colonisation under Japanese rule, the division of Korea after the Korean War, and then both compressed industrialisation and the rapidly increased consumption of global media during the 1990s. In this new era of globalisation, international communication and media flows are more complex than ever before: 'there is more than one centre, in relation to which a whole variety of different cultural peripheries are constituted' (Morley, 2006: 40). The flows of international communication and media, and interactions between the global media and cultural practice in the local level, are both complex and multi-layered. Cultural practices can perhaps always be presented as too complex for social scientists to describe and understand. So this research asks the following question: how can we capture and analyse these complex, multiple and dynamic cultural practices? One of the more prominent theoretical approaches that offers explanations of the interactions between the global media and cultural practice—cultural imperialism – does not necessarily explain the complexity of women's identity formation. Against that, the emergence of cultural hybridity and transculturation may provide significant insights in explaining the complexity of cultural practice.

This research examines how global culture has adapted to one particular local cultural setting: South Korea. From the starting point above, another key question is central to this research; given the multidimensionality and dynamism of cultural practice in the era of globalisation, how can we analyse complex, multi-layered and dynamic women's voices in this local context? This research focuses upon how women as audiences are in conflict with, and have to negotiate, newly introduced values through their consumption of global mass media. As such, the transformation of young women's identities highlights the complex dialectics between postcolonial audiences' resistance to, and collusion with, forces of globalisation. In particular, this research aims to concretely test abstract postcolonial theory in the detail of observed local settings, which reveal that young South Korean women are neither a passive audience of globalisation nor entirely free self-determining subjects. Rather, this thesis emphasises how women are engaging with, and optimising, flows of global media influences to construct their identi-

ties, i.e. struggling and negotiating the process of subject formation in globalisation.

The research, conducted during nine months fieldwork in 2000, is based on a multi-method qualitative approach that involves a series of interviews, including 21 group interviews (with a total of 101 women). These provide the first hand experience and perspectives of young women themselves, alongside documentary data collected from magazine and newspaper articles, which examines the media representations in which they engage. The interviews emphasise the way in which the dynamics of gender, age, region, and the issue of consuming global media, all coincide in the day-to-day lives of a small group of women living in the metropolitan city of Seoul and its suburbs. The in-depth and open-structured nature of the group interviews enabled an understanding of these dynamics. It provided a rich body of material, which was then transcribed and analysed in combination with the documentary data. This methodology facilitated a detailed exploration of the ways in which the informants made sense of their experiences of cultural practice in global media consumption. In other words, the formation of young women's identities takes place within global culture, but it is dissipated in all directions in the face of globalisation. This movement not only contaminates the pure origin of their representation as global media consumers but also destabilised its fixity and makes it drift.

These key themes are crosscut by several core issues: a misconception of post-colonial experiences, based on grand narratives; Eurocentric history (for example; the misconception in academic and popular discourse that women are passive receivers); the misrepresentation of the global-local relationship as monolithic; and, finally, the question of discovering marginalised women's voices and so revealing the subject formation of women. The issue of complexity is pivotal for this thesis: it tries to understand how the phenomenon of globalisation is played out locally - how it has affected particular traditions and systems of belief. The thesis argues that they have changed dramatically under its influence.

This research will illustrate that global media studies has been slow to recognise a wealth of insights from theories of postcolonialism, which offer 'a radical re-thinking and re-formation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorised by western domination' (Parakash, 1992: 8). Postcolonial feminists point out that western feminist scholars very often produce a homogenous

image of the Third World woman as victimised, tradition bound and passive (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1993; Bhabha, 1994). The latter critical approaches have gained currency in feminist and cultural studies. In the past two decades, however, only a small amount of empirical works on media texts and audiences has seriously engaged the deconstructive project of postcolonial theory, to challenge and develop a model of culture in international and development communication research (Parameswaran, 2001; Seiter, 1990). My own modest entry into this emerging field of postcolonial audience studies seeks to raise questions regarding colonial history, compressed modernity and transformative identities, and to bring these to bear on the audience's interpretation of western popular culture in non-western settings. Based on my empirical research among young women in South Korea, I will analyse the very specific temporal cultural space of contemporary South Korea since the 1990s, through attention to the operation of western popular culture in women's everyday lives. I shall be arguing that young women selectively appropriate and contest key narratives of global media for their own purposes, and struggle/negotiate/resist in the formation of their own identities. I will also assert that the creation of such a "desiring or imagined subject" (Appadurai, 1996; Rofel, 2007) has been at the core of South Korea's contingent reconfiguration of its relationship to globalisation in the 1990s.

Despite feminist cultural studies' insightful critiques of the dominant western knowledge, women are still frequently described as a monolithic category victimised by patriarchy (Said, 1978; Liddle & Joshi, 1986; Schein, 1997). In other words, as submissive victims of patriarchy, Asian women have become indexes of their culture in terms of representing inferiority with little evidence to support this assumption. There is, therefore, an urgent need to conduct primary research in this area aimed at exploring the complexity and multi-layers of postcoloniality in the formation of women's identities, not just in South Korea, but also in a range of sites. This research will demonstrate the difficulties of categorisation of women's identities on the basis of any dominant dichotomised view, which has been associated with a repressive/subversive dichotomy. Particularly, the research focuses on processes of women's identity formation to encompass women's relationship with global cultural practice in which women are struggling, resisting and negotiating. Hence, rather than repeat the long-standing debate over whether non-western women are active or passive audiences, this research examines the relationship between media representations, local contexts, and his-

torically situated audiences' construction of their identities. I am concerned here with the construction of young women's femininities in the way of showing how gender, as a social relation must be recognised as socially constituted and historically differentiated. In particular, I will try to show how the "imagined subject" is realised, through their own cultural practice, in the specific context of South Korea.

Thus, this thesis explores the complexity of young women's identities, and how these are constructed and contested within the very specific times and spaces in South Korea. As implied at the beginning of this chapter, the 1990s prompted many young women to transform their identities, and this has resulted in new forms of social relations, which work to transform gender identities and open up new spaces for engaging with the construction and contestation of femininities.

## **1.2. Contextualising Korea: a brief historical overview**

Two extremely contrasted images of Korea pervade the West. One is the "M\*A\*S\*H" image, which represents the people as poor and devastated by the Korean War of the 1950s; the other is "one of the four dragons in Asia" representing the rapid economic success in the 1970s and 1980s, and most recently the mass hysteria in World Cup 2002. If the two images of "M\*A\*S\*H" and "one of four dragons" represent the opposite images of pre-modern and modern Korea, the scenes of Korea in the 1990s could represent the postscript of those two extremely powerful images of South Korea. With respect to women's lives, the period has observed rapid changes and revelation of women's desires in public. Women's lives have been controlled and determined by a patriarchal family system. In this historical family-centred system, women's desires had been oppressed and have called for sacrifice to family life. Although the rapid modernisation and industrialisation during the 1970s and 1980s contributed to women to moving out from within family boundaries, their lives and desires were still closely related to family life. This postscript period shows whole life stories in South Korea that are not so simple but rather are multidimensional and complex. Before discussing this interesting period, it is worth introducing a brief historical overview of South Korea in order to set the changes it represents in context.

*(1.2.1) The forced transplantation of modern institutions during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945)*

At the turn of the twentieth century, Korea was known as the “hermit kingdom of the east” by many westerners, because the government resisted foreign religious, trade, and diplomatic relationships. The kingdom was ruled by the Chosun court and Confucian literati class (*Yangban*) for nearly 500 years. However, growing western imperial power (Britain, France, Russia and US) and that from the east (reformed Japan) pressured Korea to open her borders and compete with others. After the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the Japanese imperial power sent troops into Seoul, and forced the Korean government to sign a protocol authorising any measures the Japanese considered necessary to protect the Korean king from domestic or foreign threats. In 1910, Japan formally annexed Korea (Nelson, 2000: 8). The Japanese colonial period brought not only harsh and exploitative rule – under which most people in Korea suffered immensely – but also transplanted modernised Japanese institutions such as educational, governmental and economic systems. This brutal colonial rule was a time of constant economic exploitation and cultural oppression (Cheon, K. & Byun, S. 2004). During the 35-year period of Japanese annexation, the Korean economy was transformed from an agricultural society to the perfect warehouse for maintaining the Japanese Empire. Korean farms sent rice to Japan while Koreans ate millet imported from farms in Manchuria. It has been widely acknowledged that the Japanese carried out the economic growth during this period in order to serve the economic needs of Japan rather than Korea (Mason et al, 1980: 76).

With respect to cultural changes, the first experiment in modernisation was conducted with the introduction of “modern” culture from Japan. The 1930s witnessed the emergence of a new life style and the introduction of new modes of technological practices, consumerism, and representation<sup>1</sup>. Culturally, the modernist movement centred on a small number of intellectual groups and cultural workers including actors, actresses, and waitresses in the urban setting, particu-

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<sup>1</sup> The emergence of the “new women (*Shinyeosung*)” should also be noted, or the “modern girls”, who did not follow the feudal Confucian order but who expressed their own desires (Kim, J-S. 1999).

larly in Seoul (as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 3). However, women's lives were still dominated by the traditional Confucian ideology, which stressed a rigid hierarchical order of human relationships based upon age, sex and social status. In this strict system, men were regarded as superior and women as inferior as man was linked to the heavens - superior, dominant, and strong; woman was associated with earth - inferior, submissive, and lenient (Kim, Y-C. 1977: 83-101). As noted above, the family defined women's everyday lives, particularly by the patriarchal head of family, father, husband and sons. "Women of virtue" were officially recognised in order to enhance traditional morality to people. Filial piety and fidelity were regarded as the most important elements of ethical conduct. While some women were rewarded for their "virtuous conduct", others were punished for misconduct such as adultery, jealousy, or murder. The names of such women were carefully registered so as to prevent their offspring from getting into government posts. During the brutal oppression of the colonial Japanese period and the deprived economic situation, many men emigrated for work or resistance. In this context, all the responsibility for maintaining the family fell to women (Cho, H. 2002: 170). Thus, the self-sacrifice of women for the family and community was understood as the common good for women and was the only way of being recognised by society.

Nevertheless, despite the deteriorating social situation during the colonial and post-Korean War period, women's educational opportunities were gradually increased. For instance, in 1910 the first women's college programme was established at Ewha Girl's School (*Ewha Hack-dang*). Ewha was originally founded as a women's school in 1886. Under the Japanese colonialism, female students actively took part in the March 1<sup>st</sup> Rally against Japanese rule in 1919 (Choi, C-M, 1985).<sup>2</sup> However, this educational progress remained isolated from other unchanging social circumstances for women. For example, women's engagement with social movements promoting social participation and the improvement of female status was, overall, quite limited.

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<sup>2</sup> In the nationwide resistance against the colonial rule, Yu Kwansoon, a 16 year-old junior student at Ewha Girls' School played a active role in leading the March 1<sup>st</sup> Rally in 1919. She was arrested and tortured to death by the Japanese authorities. She is still a symbol of nationalist movement against the Japanese colonialism.



Indeed, the change of cultural settings in Korea more generally was also not simply an optimistic process of progress and modernisation. In spite of the “enlightenment” with which it was associated, the process had a dark side: the cultural transformation was based on a brutally oppressive regime, which steadily demolished the cultural heritage of Korean traditions. The colonial government required Koreans to adopt Japanese names, speak only Japanese in schools, wear uniforms, declare their allegiance to the Emperor and accept strict discipline. Also the majority of the general population did not have access to the cutting-edge, emerging modern culture. Although many people were fascinated by the novel trend of modern cultural forms including film, jazz music and new fashion, at the time, it was the monopoly of a few city intellectuals and cultural workers. Furthermore, this experiment of modernisation faded away rapidly in the 1940s, ‘when the group of modern girls including cultural workers, actresses, and waitresses were forcibly dispatched to the Japanese military barracks in the frontline and factory towns in the Japanese Empire as “comfort women” and “manual workers”’ (Lee, K-Y. 2000: 198).<sup>3</sup>

In other words, for two decades, the local experimentation with modernism, which was promoted by a new flexible and “soft” colonial policy, called “cultural policy”, had merely tasted and imitated the Other’s modernity; arguably, the short-term cultural boom in colonial Korea became a failed project mainly because local Koreans attempted to mimic Japanese-introduced western culture, but the wider population could not digest or absorb it (Cheon, K. & Byun, S. 2004). Furthermore, the new trend was rapidly destructed by the Second World War and Korean War.

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<sup>3</sup> The issue of “comfort women” is still an unsolved problem between Korea and Japan. Towards the end of the colonial regime and the Second World War, the Japanese colonial regime conscripted Korean women for the cause of Imperial Japan to provide sexual relief for Japanese soldiers. It is now widely acknowledged that the process of enlisting Korean women was conducted by force without regard for women’s will. More than 200,000 women were dispatched without their will to the army barracks on the frontline of the South Asia and Pacific Islands (Choi, C-M. 1992). At the time, the issue was not raised by social activists, because the issue was regarded as a national shame by national patriarchal movements. The issue was at last revealed and raised by some feminist activists in the late 1980s. The government recognised this problem and enacted the “1994 Social Security Act for Korean military sexual slaves/ comfort women” which provides those who survived with a monthly allowance, free medical care and the right to apply for public rental housing (Chai, A-Y. 1997: 176).

*(1.2.2) The devastation of the Korean War and the subsequent dependency upon international aid (1945-1960)*

With the end of the Second World War, and Japan's surrender, Korea was liberated from the brutality of Japanese colonial power in 1945. However, after briefly tasting liberation, the Korean peninsula was divided into two parts: occupied by Soviet troops in the northern part and US troops in the southern part. For three years the US-occupied south shaped its politics through implantation of an American-style system that largely ignored local demands and organisations that is those groups which had the potential to constitute their own political system (Choi, C. 1998: 16-17). In 1948, the southern part declared independence and the Soviet occupied part established its own communist regime as a reaction. The situation worsened when the Korean War broke out in 1950. It caused devastating effects: most urban infrastructure and manufacturing capacity were destroyed; a quarter of the wealth of South Korea was eliminated, and over a million people were killed by the three-year war (Mason et al, 1980: 40). After this catastrophic war, the economy of South Korea was largely maintained by massive economic and military aid from the United States. During this period, 'the growth of national income was so slow that USAID administrators in Washington began to wonder whether South Korea would ever become independent of US support' (Mason et al, 1980: 40). Korea was categorised as one of the poorest countries in the world with 'alarmingly low rates of savings and investments and little to inspire optimism about the nation's future' (Nelson, 2000: 10). At the beginning of the 1960s, South Korea's average annual per capita income was estimated at less than \$125 (United Nations, 1962). It was categorised as one of the world's poorest countries in line with Burma, Congo, India, and Kenya. Furthermore, South Korea was far behind better-off developing countries such as El Salvador, Ecuador, the Philippines and Rhodesia.

Despite the slow progress and recovery from the destruction of the Korean War, the educational system rapidly expanded in this period. The primary school enrolment rate of corresponding age groups increased from 59.6% in 1953 to 86.2% in 1960 (Mason et al, 1980: 352). This extraordinary expansion in the educational sector is not unprecedented among low-income countries. However, in the case of Korea, the growth in enrolment was not accompanied by the fiscal strains experienced elsewhere (McGinn et al. 1980; Amsden, 1989; Mitchell, 1988; OECD,

2002). This expansion was initiated and supported by American aid, but the Confucian tradition, which regards education as one of the main priorities, also played a significant role. The deeply embodied significance of education also arose from Koreans' depressing experiences of colonial rule and wars. 'Although they lived with poverty and socio-economic instability, they firmly believed that they would secure a bright future by sending their children to school' (Cho, H. 2002: 171). Later the human resources from this expansion of education became the main resource for the rapid economic development in the 1970s (Sen, 1999: 41). At the time the growing educational sector was the only optimistic signal for a poor and deprived country.

During the colonial war and post-war periods of devastation and economic stagnation, the image and role of women was not much changed. Traditionally women's gender roles was quite strictly separated from men and the public sphere and heavily dependent upon their families. Women could only find their identities through family and maternal roles (Kendall, 1985; 1996). Small scale experiments of modernisation, such as those of the "modern girls" and "new woman (*Shinyeosung*)" were attempted, and they stimulated the national imagination. Nevertheless, the role of women in general remained unchanged: women as 'wise, hardworking, and competent' in their self-sacrificing 'care of the extended family in the context of communal living' (Cho, H. 2002: 171).

### *(1.2.3) The period of compressed modernisation and turbo capitalism (1960-1987)*

The rapid economic growth began with the civil revolution in 1960. Many civilians were dissatisfied with the economic stagnation and corruption of the government and the long-running president, Syngman Rhee, who was finally toppled from his 12-year reign as a result of nationwide protests. This civil power established a new democratic form of government, but it caused more instability and a catastrophic political situation. In 1961, a small group of army officers who were impatient with the ineffective and incompetent government took power through a *coup d'état*. Since this military coup, three general-led governments and one more coup in 1980 maintained the military regime for three decades. In the early days the military government focussed upon the reconstruction and development of the South Korean economy in order to compete with their communist counter-

parts in the northern part of Korea, which was expanding economically. Consequently, General Park's regime initiated its ambitious series of five-year plans that would ultimately result in phenomenal success in 1962. In this period, the interventionist state, which favoured large corporations called *Chaebol* (conglomerates), became the driving force in expanding economic capacity. As mentioned earlier, the average annual income per capita was \$125 in 1960, but within three decades, it reached about \$1,700 per a month (Nelson 2000: 6). This speedy development has been praised and researched by many scholars and economists (see, for example, Mason et al, 1980; Luedde-Neurath, 1986; Eckert et al, 1990; Woo, 1991; Janelli, 1993; Haggard et al. 1994).<sup>4</sup>

As noted above, through their deeply embedded concept of education, South Koreans encouraged their sons and daughters to have as much education as they could. The primary school enrolment rate reached nearly 100% by the early 1980s. With regard to women's higher education, the overall average enrolment rate in colleges in 1960 was only 6.5% (Mason et al, 1980: 352), whereas the enrolment rate was significantly improved in 1985 with rates of 21% for females (KWDI, 1998). From this improving the opportunity of getting higher education, the rate of economic participation of unmarried women who graduate from the university education had been remarkably improved from 50% in 1970 to 70% in the early 1990s (Lee & Cho, 1999; Chang, S-S. 2006).

The process of modernisation and industrialisation provided greater chance to be exposed to western culture through films and television dramas<sup>5</sup>. With the industrialisation and urbanisation, family structure was also changed from traditional extended family structure to nuclear family structure. In the process of nuclearisation of the family, the role of women shifted from "good wife, wise mother" to "beloved wife, successful husband" (Cho, H. 2002). A woman's role was regarded as the manager of the nuclear family to support her husband's hard work. As

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<sup>4</sup> Behind the successful story of South Korea, both blue and white-collar workers worked one of the world's longest working hours per week. For instance, Korean workers' average working hours was 54.2 hours per week, compared to 41.3 hours in Japan, 38.6 hours in France and Finland, and 48.2 hours in Singapore in 1988 (Kang, M-K. 1999: 23).

<sup>5</sup> During the four decades after independence in 1945, Hollywood films flourished, although the Korean government imposed an import quota on film distributions in 1959 to protect the Korean film industry. As Korean film dependence on Hollywood grew heavier, for American film producers, Korean market was regarded as a "golden duck" (Lee, K. 1992: 80).

managers, women built a highly competitive and status-conscious culture that was 'as hastily and coarsely constructed as the (South) Korean economy that made their manoeuvring possible' (Cho, H. 2002: 175). On the other hand, women's contribution to economic success was vital: female workers, who toiled long hours for low wages, were the backbone of the export-oriented textile, clothing, chemical and electronic industries. In the 1970s for example, female-dominated light manufacturing made up 70% of total exports and the number of female industrial workers increased from 360,000 in 1970 to 1,090,000 in 1978 (Kim, H-M. 2001: 58). Despite this, the contribution of women workers was not recognised, and even deprecated, by the "hyper-masculine government", which was derived from stressing "Confucian" values and the role of the authoritarian development state as the rigid and brutal General Park's military regime (Kim, H-M. 2001; Moon, S. 2005).

Under Park's dictatorship, the majority of worker's unions were government-controlled. From 1973 on, FKTU (the Federation of Korean Trade Unions) – the official union organisation – stopped collecting statistics on labour disputes and unpaid wages (KNCC, 1984: 239). While the military regime kept labour costs low and repressed organised labour to spur economic development, female workers spearheaded the 1970s labour movement (Chai, A-Y. 1997: 173). For instance, the historical YH workers' protest against a factory closure in 1979 was one of many well-known cases of the movement for democratic unionism.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the participants in the strike were young female workers and their action marked the turning point in the decline of Park's military regime. According to Hyun-Mee Kim (2001), 'the workers' cry was not just against their vicious employers but was also a reflection of the unbearable material conditions of their everyday lives as *yogong* (female factory workers)' (60). Their grassroots organisations became the

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<sup>6</sup>The YH Trade Company workers' demonstration was a historical event in the history of Korean worker's union. The company was established in 1966 and mainly produced wigs. The workers of the company established their union in 1975, but the head of the company decided to shut down the company without notice. 200 workers occupied the building of the opposition party to make an appeal for help in 9 August 1979. However, the government sent police to suppress the workers in 11 August. In the process of suppression, a union leader was killed and 172 workers and 26 members of the opposition party were arrested. Although the event had begun with the issue of workers' union, after the violent suppression, it developed as anti-government, pro-democratic movement. It was a starting point of a series of anti-government demonstration. On 26 October 1979, the dictator, President Park was assassinated by his close colleague. The YH workers' protest is regarded as a historical breakthrough for democratic movement in South Korea.

basic resources for the social movement in the 1980s that changed the whole dynamics of culture and politics in South Korea. Based on the achievements of democratic unionism, the future women's movement became organised, along with democratic movements and the national unification movements.

Before discussing this explosive change, it is worth highlighting that the role of the democratic movement was vital in the cultural and political transition in South Korea. After the assassination of President Park in 1979, another military government was formed under General Chun Doo-hwan in 1980. The day after General Chun's coup, he dispatched troops to the city of Kwangju, to repress a demonstration of students and citizens against the coup. The troops killed 500, and 960 people were reported missing. The "Kwangju massacre" was a turning point in the history of South Korea. Although Chun's government continued the oppression of people throughout the 1980s, the Kwangju massacre was regarded as a symbol of the illegitimacy of the military regime (Chai, A-Y. 1997; Standish, 1994). The 1980s witnessed the emergence of a new political consciousness among students based upon leftist ideology. As a result of economic growth, people had benefited from education and had developed a self-recognition of social problems; they became sympathetic towards social movements (Moon, S-S. 2002; 2005). In June 1987, when President Chun attempted to cancel the planned presidential election, there was a mass protest that consisted of students and citizens, particularly white-collar workers. The democratic movements forced the authoritarian regime to accept demands for a presidential election. For the first time since the military coup in 1961, people could elect the president directly. Although another general-turned-politician, Rho Tae-woo, was elected as the new president at that time, the first civilian president in thirty-two years, Kim Young-sam, was elected in 1992.

In this context, the women's movement was also a big part of the grand transition to democratisation. During the early 1980s, several women's organisations like the Korean Women for Equality and Peace (1983), the Korean Women's Hotline (1983), Another Centre (1984), and the Korean Women's Association for Democracy and Sisterhood (1987) were established, and they organised activism for the democratisation movement. Finally, along with 'more than 20 women's organisations, the Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU) was founded in February 1987, a few months prior to the civil revolution of 1987' (Chai, A-Y. 1997: 178).

#### *(1.2.4) South Korea in the 1990s*

This research deals with the period of the 1990s and the early 2000s and it is thus necessary to briefly outline the socio-economic, political and cultural shifts during that time. Since the collapse of the military regime in 1992, Korean society has experienced rapid transformation not only in political and economic realms but also in cultural and subjective senses. Whereas much discussion about Korea has focused mainly on the dramatic economic and political changes during the industrialisation of the 1960s and 1970s, the most dramatic and rapid cultural changes took place in the 1990s. If it can be said that the 1980s was the age of politics and ideology, then the 1990s would be the age of desire and consumption within a context of globalisation. During the 1970s and 1980s, the South Korean economy was mainly dependent upon exporting goods with low-waged labour. However, this pattern of a developing economy was gradually transformed, and the domestic market had been expanding since the 1980s through a booming domestic economy. In the early 1990s, the Kim Young Sam administration decided to respond to international pressure to open up the domestic market, and formally introduced the concept of “globalisation (*Segyehwa*)”, which was actually ‘a defensive embrace of international institutions in an effort to shore up competitiveness’ (Nelson, 2000: 182). This policy change was implemented in order to be able to introduce many imported goods and new cultures. The import of western media products, like films, rapidly increased with this new wave of globalisation. Since the government decided to deregulate the quota system of foreign investments in the film industry in 1988, the major American Hollywood film industries launched their own direct distribution system in South Korea. Consequently, the import rate for Hollywood movies rocketed: 26 foreign films were imported in 1984 (representing a market share of 61.5%). Within a decade, the number of foreign films had increased to 359 (a market share of 83.3%) in 1993 (Cha, 1997; Kil, 1998).

#### *A space of ambivalence*

With democratisation and the establishment of civil government, political and ideological struggles waned, and were absorbed by the conventional domains of politics: for instance, Kim Youngsam took over power from the former military generals in 1992 and Kim Daejung became the first democratically elected opposi-

tion-party president in 1998. As Abelmann points out, 'the 1990s was a decade of tremendous hope' (2003: 4). However, it would perhaps be better seen as a period both of hope and of frustration. The period can be seen as "a decade of hope", because South Korea became a member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and one of the world's top fifteen trading countries actively involved in international economic organisations during the 1990s. The South Korean economy peaked during this period, but it was an uneasy decade. As seen, Koreans experienced a long-term steady economic growth and industrialisation for over 30 years. On the other hand, the period can also be regarded as "a decade of frustration" because the economic situation in Southeast Asia deteriorated rapidly in 1997, and a huge wave of financial crisis reached South Korea. It was a sudden collapse of one of new economic tigers. The South Korean government sought international assistance and signed the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for \$57 billion in rescue loans. This was the so-called "IMF regime" which means Koreans handed in their economic sovereignty (Nelson, 2000; Cho-Han, 2000). The "hope" and "frustrations" happened at the same time and it revealed the ambivalent characteristics of people's lives in this period.

The contradictory and ambivalent characters of South Korea provide interesting pictures of everyday lives. The speed of changes seemed not to slow down and the Korean society could be observed still experiencing dramatic mobility and changes. This unprecedented success and sudden collapse demonstrated another side of the compressed modernity. This specific period of time in South Korea reveals a holistic scenario of transformation in being a dynamic landscape of communities and people networks. This dynamic landscape of the 1990s South Korea could provide a relatively clear picture of political and economical achievements, struggles, contradictions and hopes. It is also notable that the 1990s South Korea has been considered an exemplary case of "compressed temporality". According to a leading feminist in Korea, Cho-Han Haejoang (2000):

From the outset, modernity contained within itself the tragedy caused by compressed temporality. However, due to the unevenness and compressed time span of South Korea's economic growth, there is a great difference between the experiences of "us" and "them" who have pursued endogenous capitalist development. [...] There needs to be an analysis of why there are so many people in the Third World who are suffering from relative deprivation, why extremely conventional TV dramas revolving around issues like the nation, the family, and status reproduction are so popular. [...] Such phenom-



ena are closely related to the fact that modernisation has been pursued within an extremely “compressed” period of time, leaving little time for reflection and modern system building.

(Cho-Han, 2000: 53)

Generally, the history of Korean modernisation has been regarded as a “compressed”, “miracle”, or the “decline of militarised modernity” and “turbo” development (Cho, H-Y. 1997; Kim, H-G. 1998; Moon, S-S. 2005). It is assumed that the period features both compressed temporality and dynamism. The period mixes hope and disappointment with dynamism and an extremely quick tempo or lifestyle pace and is thus an extremely interesting case for examining the formation of women’s identities within such a dynamic process of change, and particularly those of young women who are likely to be most closely connected to such a process.

#### *Increasing social imagination*

As well as being the period of rapid cultural change and compressed temporality, the 1990s and early 2000s have also been a fascinating period of increasing “social imagination” while ‘we live in an increasingly globalised world, characterised by the experience of time-space compression brought about by an increase in the speed and reach of communication, under the impact of new technologies of our post modern age’ (Morley, 2006:30). The role of imagination in the formation of women’s identities has, until now, been overlooked – perhaps because the formation of women’s identities is presumed to be closely related to the prevailing political and economic situation. In particular, women’s identities in the South Korean context seem to have a tendency to be illustrated by political-economical factors (Janelli & Yim, 1993; 2002; Kim, E-S. 1985; Moon, S-S. 1994; 2005). However, recently interesting arguments that pay attention to the imagination in social practice have been put forward (Anderson, 1991 [1983]; Appadurai 1996). Arjun Appadurai famously claims that ‘the image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as social practice [...] The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order’ (1996: 31). Even the definition of nation is said to be an imagined political community (Anderson, 1991, 6). The imagination does not necessarily have to be thought to be equivalent to fantasy or escapism from reality. After the

rapid transformation there has been an opening up of new possibilities, desires and hopes that are not just economic but also social – the things it became possible to dream about expanded.

During the previous three decades, social imagination<sup>7</sup> had been largely oppressed and restricted by authoritarian regimes, which arguably forced people into a uni-directional dominant ideology – “progress” and “development”. However, despite these attempts, the repressive regime failed to entirely suppress people’s imagination and their desire to create new ideas and alternatives although the range of imagination was quite limited. With the rapid economic and political transformation in the 1970s and 1980s, new alternative imaginations and ideas emerged, displaced and replaced the old restricted paradigm. As Nancy Abelmann remarks, ‘while the social transformation is stimulated by our ever more connected, mediated, and even wired social world, it is also clear that social transformation tirelessly offers other worlds, what Appadurai calls “possible worlds”’ (Abelmann, 2003: 16).

The 1990s observed a rapid increase in people’s interest in global culture. With their unprecedented political and economic success, people were seeking alternative lifestyles and a culture that was different from the typical and restricted national boundaries of life. The alternative lifestyle was sought in a space of imagination that was mainly fed by globalised mass-media (for example, chapter 5 of this research shows how this phenomena plays out for young women in relation to romantic love). As Appadurai points out, ‘one important source of this change is the mass media, which present rich, ever-changing store of possible lives’ (Appadurai, 1996: 53). For instance, during the 1990s the Korean cinema market rapidly expanded to include both producing and exporting cultural goods. This can be seen as a symptomatic case of a flourishing cultural imagination. Furthermore, novel and alternative discourses, oppressed and lurking under an authoritarian ideology, emerged: discourses of sexuality in public, extramarital affairs, body modification and so on. Such discourses illustrate that the concept of sexuality

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, the term, “imagination” will be used to infer social imagination rather than “imagination” as often more generally meant. As the imagination cannot be seen as mere individual psychological phenomena, I would suggest that the term should be regarded as a product of social practices, not individual mental activities.

has changed profoundly since the Democratic Revolution of 1987 (Howard, 1995; Shin & Cho, 1996).

As indicated above in relation to cultural cinema related goods, the period of the 1990s and early 2000s could also be called “the age of consumerism” in South Korea and it is also for this reason that examining young women’s identity formation is particularly interesting. The authority of the existing ideology of economic growth and modernisation had been declining, and was being replaced by the desire to consume. As noted earlier, if it can be said that the 1980s was the age of politics and ideology, then the 1990s would be the age of desire and consumption. During the 1970s and 1980s, the South Korean economy was mainly dependent upon exporting goods with low-waged labour. However, this developing economy pattern was gradually transformed, and the domestic market has been expanding since the 1980s through a booming domestic economy. This growing tendency towards goods consumption and a vibrant market was quickly expanded in the 1990s.

In the early 1990s, however, the Kim Youngsam administration decided to respond to international pressure to open up the domestic market, and introduced the concept of “globalisation” in order to promote competitiveness, with a consequent massive increase in the importation of western media products, including films, as noted above. (Nelson, 2000: 182). This policy change was implemented in order to be able to introduce many imported goods and new cultures. The import of western media products, like films, rapidly increased with this new wave of globalisation. Since the government decided to deregulate the quota system of foreign investments in the film industry in 1988, the major American Hollywood film industries launched their own direct distribution system in South Korea. Consequently, import rate for Hollywood movies rocketed: 26 foreign films were imported in 1984 (representing a market share of 61.5%). Within a decade, the

number of foreign films had increased to 359 (a market share of 83.3%) in 1993 (Cha, 1997; Kil, 1998).<sup>8</sup>

Another increased global consumption practice has been foreign tourism. In 1988, when the Olympic Games were held in Seoul, the military government was concerned about giving the international community the negative impression of an isolated country. So it liberalised foreign tourism, which since then has soared. By 1991, the average South Korean traveller overseas spent more than \$ 2,000 per trip (Nelson, 2000: 102).

In the face of these situational changes, it is an undeniable fact that consumerism in South Korea rapidly increased in this period, and this tendency was caused by a series of policy changes for expanding the domestic market and allowing imported goods from foreign countries. However, although the domestic market was opened up to accept foreign goods, the market is still dominated by the major Korean industrial corporations in many spheres (including the car market as noted above). However, the consumers' desire for foreign goods and culture, which were thought to embody the western lifestyles, has rapidly increased during the last two decades. Under the surge of television, film and news from outside of South Korea, more women have begun to actively explore the possibility that they will live and work other than where they were born and living. As will be examined further during this thesis, with the expansion of the social imagination, women have built up their own space within which to fulfil dreams and lifestyles. These are seen as alternatives to conventional lifestyles, those that were socio-economically permissible, given the previously limited roles of women.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Another symptomatic example of surging consumerism is the luxury goods sector. In the early 1990s, department stores saw a surge in sales. Foreign luxury goods like Gucci, Bally, Burberry, Missoni, and Yves Saint-Laurent, began to be sold in department stores in the early 1990s. With the explosive increase of luxury foreign goods, fake goods were also introduced into the market. The increase in fake luxury goods implied that recognition of international brands prevailed among the wider population (Chang, 2004: 223).

<sup>9</sup> As described, the women's role in family and society has increased and expanded remarkably during the period of rapid industrialisation. Nevertheless, the image of modern women has been closely associated with the image of defensive/nationalistic men. As Cho-Han Hejoang claims, the sudden transformation of the so-called daughters' generation can be associated with increasing individuality which is a quite different tendency from what mothers' generation had (Cho-Han, 2002). While the mothers' generation was still staying at home and played a role in managing their informal domestic transactions, the daughters' generation was in pursuit of their own individuality (187).

As discussed in greater depth in the subsequent chapter that outlines the theoretical framework of this research, the idea of the West<sup>10</sup> is thought to be important for explaining Korean psyche and is central to understandings of globalisation in this research. As it will be shown, the concept of the West has played an important role in constituting modern identity, particularly that of women. The West has been regarded as a possible world to be achieved. Genealogically the idea of the West can be traced back to the colonial period. As noted, Korea was ruled by the Japanese colonial power, and the Japanese imperial power attempted to transplant their model of modernity through/by demolishing traditional social systems of Korea. Ironically, the colonised Koreans tended to find their alternative regime of value not in the Japanese model, which was rejected and became a subject of resistance by many Koreans, but in the unknown and unencountered West.<sup>11</sup> According to Yoo (2001), 'modernization meant an aspiration for the wealth and power of nation and was hence identified with westernization itself' (423).<sup>12</sup> This ideal of the West as an alternative regime of value has been strengthened through the rapid industrialisation and pro-American military regimes. Through experiencing the devastating Korean War and confrontation against communist northern neighbour, the ideal image of the West took its concrete form in the shape of America, which has become synonymous with globalisation, particularly in terms of media. This form of Americanised globalisation, therefore, provides the backdrop to this thesis in the sense that it has influenced not only women's consumption but their more actively constituted imagined form

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of the 'imagined West' has recently been widely discussed by many social scientists in order to show that the West is not a fixed category that lacks in the rationality of conceptual coherence. It is a mere peculiar construct (Dirlik 1999; Goldstein-Gidoni 2001; Goldstein-Gidoni & Dalio-Bul 2002; Yoshimi 2003; Fujita 2004; Sakai 2005; Wang 2007)

<sup>11</sup> This ironical situation can be found in a remark of one of the officials in the colonial administration, Sakau Moriya. He claimed that 'in spite of Japan achieving a great development in *Chosun* (Korea), Koreans have still kept a deep hatred toward Japan. Therefore, Japan should try to enlighten Korean's minds and souls, the spiritual realm of which has been taken charge of by Americans and Europeans' (Moriya, 1924: 244-249 in Yoo, S-Y. 2001: 427).

<sup>12</sup> During the colonial period, for Koreans, the West, which was often represented as America, was an ideal world to become. It seems to be an imagined possible world for them. It is an 'imagined West' partly because Korea was ruled by Japan which was not discernable at least in skin colours and lost opportunities to have full-interactions with the western culture directly. This indirect encounter with western culture stimulated Korean's social imagination, and led to the building of an idealised form of the 'Other' world.

of lifestyles, which, as this research will attempt to show, are negotiated and contested between the local context and this backdrop of globalisation.

### **1.3. Thesis Chapter Plan**

The chapter following this introduction, Chapter 2, starts by tracing some of the debates around global media, and tries to understand how women's identity formation can and should be framed. In particular it focuses upon where the global and the local are closely associated and constantly interacting in everyday lives in theory and in the specific history of South Korea. Particular attention is given to cultural imperialism and its critiques, and the emergence of the concept of hybridity in global media debates, in relation to the salient question of how to find marginalised women's voices which may reveal the formation of women's hybrid identities in each specific context. I discuss Spivak's idea of subalternity and Bhabha's key idea of hybridity and its contribution to the theoretical framework of this research, in order to provide additional help in comprehending the specific temporality and complexity of the formation of women's identities in South Korea. However, I also examine and articulate the terminology and theories they provide for the purpose of contextualising my empirical data and attempt to move towards a theoretical means of understanding of women's transformative identities which is relevant to the South Korean context

Chapter 3 explains how I conducted my fieldwork, and explores the ways in which the power relationship between the researcher and researched was negotiated. The chapter will focus on positioning the project and particularly how to integrate the subject with debates on feminist empirical research by discussing some of the problems associated with analysing data collected in this way, and the process of interpretation and writing

The next three analytical chapters deal with my empirical research findings on transformative identities of young women in relation to the following: body practice in consuming plastic surgery; the translation of romantic love and marriage; and *Missy* as transformative married femininities. In these three successive chapters I analyse the common trajectory of "transformative identities"; these are introduced in more depth.

In Chapter 4, I examine how the complexity of South Korean women's cultural practice of plastic surgery reflects the possibility that global processes, as pro-

jected through media images, may be transformed in the local context. Through South Korean women's conflictual and ambivalent identities regarding plastic surgery, I focus on the hybrid body, which shows neither a manifestation of Korean-ness, nor a complete copy of the Caucasian shape. By focusing on the dynamics of cultural hybrid contestation in this way, a more effective interrogation of the interplay of race and gender constructions in relation to cosmetic surgery can be accomplished.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how romantic love and marriage are transformed and practised in the South Korean context. Young women's fascination with the commodity of western materials (as portrayed in imported romantic films) is located in their desire to embody cosmopolitan sexuality in western romantic love whilst retaining a different position in relation to the practice of sexuality. This highlights the complex dialectic of postcolonial young women's resistance to, and collusion with, the force of global culture. I highlight the form of courtship (*Chungmae*), which contains old and new cultural concepts of marriage and romantic love. In particular, the informants I interviewed show complex and contradictory attitudes toward the issue of romantic love and marriage. Thus, in this chapter, I examine how the conjuncture of romantic love and marriage is a transformative practice in courtship, to obtain a contemporary Korean consumer lifestyle of "ordinariness".

Any analysis of South Korean women's transformative identities would not be complete without a discussion of married women's identities. In Chapter 6, I examine the contemporary figure of the "Missy". Recently, the "Missy" (married women who identify themselves in similar forms to unmarried women) has been identified particularly through secular expressions, most notably embodied within popular culture in advertising, film and television drama. In this chapter, I examine how "the Missy" has been transformed into a new feminine identity, competing with the *Adjumma* discourse, which represents an "old" identity in contemporary South Korea. In considering the reworking of the "Missy" discourse, I attempt to illustrate how we can not only celebrate the ways in which some women are able to renegotiate their femininities, but also highlight instances where they are transforming from the femininity of their mother's generation which is represented in the discourse of *Adjumma* to newly emerged form of femininity found within the discourse of the *Missy*.

These crosscutting threads are brought together in the concluding chapter, which outlines the implication of my theoretical and empirical findings. I highlight their relevance to transformative identities and survival strategies in the specific temporal context of South Korea. In addition, I assess the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach adopted and the implications of the study for future similar research.



## CHAPTER 2

# WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN TRANSITION

### 2.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss theoretical understandings of women's identity formation, in particular focussing upon where the global and the local are closely associated and constantly interacting in everyday lives. My argument is that, with regard to women's identities in transformation, it is hard to draw boundaries between the self and the other, difference and sameness, the East and the West. The complex interaction of these different elements, which inform women's identities in each specific and temporal instance, means that entire concepts are likely to be irreducibly interwoven in practice. Therefore, in this research, I am attempting what is a difficult task, that of sketching and analysing this complexity of women's identity formation. In the previous chapter, which described the context of this thesis, a description of South Korea was given revealing that the most dramatic and complicated cultural changes have taken place since the 1990s. Hence, despite the difficulty of the task, attempting an understanding of the way in which the "global" is conceived or imagined is extremely important in order to grasp the meaning of women's cultural practice in this rapidly changing local context.

In this chapter, I examine the theoretical frameworks most useful for this thesis and my attempt to grasp the complexity of women's identity formation. I start by tracing some of the debates around global media, which have been most prominent in recent years and which are most relevant to this thesis, beginning by looking at the concept of "cultural imperialism", which has been particularly significant in terms of thinking about the influence of global media. I also note the effect that such debates around global media and cultural imperialism have had upon understandings of women's identities. I then move on to indicate the major critiques of cultural imperialism theories and at the emergence of postcolonial cri-

tiques and of the notion of “hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994). Postcolonial theory has had a substantial impact on understandings of globalisation generally, and forms a particularly helpful framework for this thesis. It provides significant insights: these contribute to an understanding of the complex and temporal practices that embody colonial experiences, which are relevant to the formation of women’s identities as mentioned above. Indeed, the importance of postcolonialism lies particularly in its reference to the dynamic interactions of global and local relations, and the persistence of colonialism to the present day.

Within this relationship between the global and the local, processes of identity formation can be seen to be pivotal. As Ien Ang discusses, ‘one central issue in which recognition of the intertwining of global and local developments has particularly strong theoretical and political consequences is the issue of cultural identity’ (1996: 144). Later in this thesis, the three analytic chapters based upon the empirical research will attempt to show that women’s identities cannot be seen as homogeneous, coherent and static but are perhaps better regarded as undergoing constant transformation and not irreducible to whatever it is that fits into a simple scheme. In the case of the encounter with globalisation in South Korea, I therefore show an analysis of my empirical data that supports theories of postcolonialism and hybridity in revealing that women do not appear to be simply receivers of the one-way process of western cultural flow. Indeed, the transformative nature of women’s identities through their consumption of global mass media appears to underline the global and local cultural intertwining outlined within the concept of hybridity.

The concept of hybridity plays an important role in understanding the dynamic of cultural practice and heterogeneous identity formation in South Korea, because of its focus upon the interaction of the global and local. It confronts and problematises boundaries, and implies an unsettling of identities. In this sense, hybridity can never be a question of happy harmonious merger and fusion. Hybridity is not the “solution” to these oppositions, but it alerts us to the difficulty of living with differences. Hybridity is an ambivalent and immanent term: we need to examine *the specific temporality and complexity* with which hybridity operates in the local context.

In order to use the concept of hybridity to examine the diversity of women’s identity formation in South Korea, this chapter ends the first section by a ques-

tioning of the notion of the “West” and by suggesting that the notion of hybridity could be much further developed in current global media studies. With regard to the emergence of the concept of hybridity, the salient question addressed in a thesis such as this one, which is focussed upon women and processes of gender identity within postcolonialism, is how to find marginalised women’s voices which reveal the formation of women’s hybrid identities in each specific context.

Second, following on from the discussion of cultural imperialism and its critiques, I turn to a re-examination of Spivak’s famous question: ‘can the subaltern speak?’ I focus on the key elements of her theory, which are unarguably of significant influence upon this thesis but also question whether her theoretical framework is entirely sufficient and appropriate for understanding the complexity of women’s identities in the South Korean context, as described in chapter one.

Third, in order to provide additional help in comprehending the specific temporality and complexity of the formation of women’s identities South Korea, I describe more fully Bhabha’s key idea of hybridity and its specific contribution to the theoretical framework of this thesis. Finally, I note that in order to discuss critically the notion of hybridity and explore its conceptual limitation for my needs, my analysis will borrow Bhabha’s term selectively, and examine and articulate it for the purpose of contextualisation of my empirical data. Thus, as I explain in this final section, I use the term “transformative women’s identities”. In so doing, I reject the use of postcolonial theory as grand narrative theory and a universal term which is relevant to each context but which nevertheless provides useful elements which can be selectively used to help analysis empirical data and to move towards an understanding of women’s transformative identities in different contexts.

## **2.2. Cultural imperialism in global media studies**

Globalisation is thought to be everywhere. The widespread term of globalisation is undeniable. This ubiquitous character of globalisation has been accompanied with triumphal expansion of world capitalism since the Berlin Wall demolished. In many works on globalisation, ‘the “global” is seen either as a homogenising influence or as a neo-colonial movement of ideas and capital from west to non-west’

(Grewal & Kaplan, 2001: 663). The term is initially thought to have stemmed from the expansion of capitalism (Hobsbawm, 1975; Lechner & Boli, 2000)<sup>13</sup>.

However, the perspectives on global integration have been purely economic and others have argued that the move towards coherent and homogeneous system also shapes the cultural, social and political changes (Schiller, 1991; Ritzer, 1993; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993). This view is mainly argued by Marxist scholars who believe that the proliferation of globalisation is closely related to the expansion of the capitalist system, which permeates into non-economic fields, including the cultural domain. Arguably, in relation to the proliferation of the discourse of globalisation so-called “cultural imperialism” would provide plausible explanations on the issue of globalisation. Cultural imperialism studies emphasise the political and economic domination of American media/consumer products over the rest of world and their pervasive influence on local cultures. According to Schiller (1976), cultural imperialism is a process of promoting the dominating values and system. In particular, cultural imperialist theories have noted that, since 1960s and 1970s, American aid programmes to developing countries have been accompanied by policies of “free flows of information”. The American government has promoted these policies and the American media industry has been observed to play an important role in achieving international domination (Schiller, 1969; 1976; Budd & Entman, 1990; Curran, 1990).

The spread of dominant American values and social systems accompanies the spread of commodification. Some scholars claim that the spread of western (American) products in the world can be called “McDonaldisation” (Ritzer, 1993: 1998) and “Coca-colonisation” (Hannerz, 1992: 217). However, this process has been more clearly defined with the use of terms such as cultural imperialism, which is regarded as ‘the spread of modernity and considered as process of cultural loss’ (Tomlinson, 1991:173). Notions such as cultural imperialism or cultural colonialism (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 135) stress the inequalities between the self/other and the West/the rest. In other words, forces of globalisation tend to flow from an epicentre (the West or America) to the rest of the world. This cultural flow echoes Wallerstein’s world (economic) system analysis (1974), which

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<sup>13</sup> Some scholars claim that globalisation has been closely related to historical economic expansion and the subsequent integration of the world since sixteenth century Europe (Wallerstein, 1974).

conceptualises a world- system in which the West becomes the core of world, while others became the periphery or the semi periphery.

However, in late twenty century, the interests in cultural imperialism changed to focus on cultural domination, rather than political economy. Tomlinson (1991) asserts that the 'great majority of published discussion of cultural imperialism place the media- television film, radio, print journalism, advertising- at the centre of things' (20). Mass media are powerful in spreading the values and systems of a dominating power. Cultural domination can be indirect and subliminal, and can be more powerful than economic and political domination. In his article, *Not Yet Post-Imperialism*, Schiller (1991) argues that national media-cultural power has been largely subordinated to transnational corporate authority, so the key issue is that domination still bears a marked American input as "soft power" (18) and "shift in surface appearance" have contributed greatly to the capability of the corporate business system to maintain and expanded its global reach (27). Furthermore, as new media technology is developing, information flows are 'heavier than ever' (15). This means that this new development of delivery systems makes local people, in particular women as marginalised group, more vulnerable than ever to domination by cultural and economic influences from the West. This observed tendency of the increasing proliferation of globalisation seems to reflect its economic roots, in being connected with debates around neoliberalism. The latter phenomenon purportedly combines economic liberalisation, de-territorialization, and the inculcation of free-market principles. McChesney suggests that 'economic and cultural globalisation arguably would be impossible without global commercial media systems to promote global markets and to encourage consumer values' (2001). In this respect, neoliberalism is almost always intertwined with a deep belief in the ability of markets to use new technologies to solve social problems far better than any alternative course including government regulations and state-controlled markets. The driving force of neoliberalism is said to be consumerism, inequality and individualism which 'tend to be taken as natural and even benevolent, where political activity, civic values and anti market activities are marginalised. [...] The combination of neoliberalism and corporate media culture tends to drive a deep and profound de-politicisation' (McChesney, 2005: 167). In fact, it is asserted by many critics that voluntary choice and intention are more or less illusions that are constructed by neoliberal market mechanisms (Schiller, 2000; Lessing, 1999; 2001; Curran & Seaton, 2003). Some critics observe that a dis-

course of “choice” is central to neoliberal culture which effected entirely through a grammar of individualism. In particular, Angela McRobbie points out that the contemporary depoliticisation of women can be seen to be based in the neoliberal processes which are such a close partner to cultural imperialism (2006). Thus, critics of neoliberalism highlight the Marxist concept of individual false consciousness as a key to understanding entrepreneurial actors who are conceptualised as rational, calculating and self-regulating.

Aside from the depoliticisation of women, there is another important issue that has been raised in relation to the global proliferation of neoliberal views and market mechanism. In the area of mass-media, the boundaries of its influence are not restricted within national boundaries anymore. Rather, mass-media has become a transnational activity. If transnational media play an increasingly important role in providing people with experiences of other cultures and translating the transnational media images to territorial and local identities, then some crucial questions are raised with regard to the character of neoliberal and cultural imperial views: in particular how to analyse the multilayered or fragmented nature of women’s identity formation in the complicated relationship of global–local culture? Also, if voluntary and intentional choice could be a false discourse of free choice and individual autonomy which is influenced by neoliberal and market structures, then the conclusion would simply not be that it is unnecessary to listen to different women’s voices which could be understood to be driven from false consciousness. However, if we examine different contexts, the stakes are more complicated than those which the cultural imperialism view explains. This thesis will attempt to reveal that the contextualisation of media and cultural research offers more complex pictures of formation of women’s identities in global culture.

### *(2.2.1) Critiques of cultural imperialism: the emergence Hybridity in globalisation*

It is undeniable fact that as Morley claims, ‘neoliberalism entered the bloodstream of media and cultural studies, almost without us noticing it’ (2006: 143). However, despite of the importance of the contributions of cultural imperialist theorists, this view has been criticised by many critics. With these criticisms of cultural imperialism, the very idea of globalisation is contested and obscured by competing theories on globalisation. The cultural imperialism approach presumes

that the global system is organised into a unidirectional flow from the centre to the periphery, North to South, or West to East. However, this binary view has come under considerable attack (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Abou-El-Haj, 1991). Appadurai criticises this unilateral direction of cultural and economic flows and suggests that the global system can be characterised by 'a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order' (Appadurai, 1996: 32). As Sreberny (2006) points out, cultural imperialism has 'lost much of its critical bite and historic validity' (615) in global communication studies. She also insists that 'the bi-polar model suggest either imbalance/domination, the political-economy perspective or balance, the "global pluralist" perspective, whereas the real world reveals far greater complexity' (621). Karaidy claims (2005) that 'though cultural imperialism was the reigning thesis since the 1960s and the 1970s, numerous critics have since the 1980s alleged that it no longer reflected the complexity of intercultural relations' (4). In other words, it reduces the complexity of cultural phenomena to simplistic economic explanation.

At the centre of this controversy, the concept of "hybridity" provides a potentially important insight to explain the complexity of cultural interactions. The notion of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) has been expanded widely into the debates of cultural hybridisation, although it has been a fragmented process. The debates tend to approach hybridity in globalisation as a by-product of the 'transcultural' (Karaidy, 2002a) dynamics between tradition and modernity, which are sometimes conceptualised as the local and the global, i.e. Appadurai's notion of "disjuncture" (1996); Martin-Barbero's reformulation of the concept of "mediations" (1993), Garcia-Canclini's "cultural conversion" (1990), Robertson's "glocalisation" (1995 in Karaidy, 2002a: 320). These scholars have used the original concept extensively and invoked it as an articulation of the media and cultural nexus that opposes cultural imperialism studies.

The issue of cultural hybridity has been taken up against the cultural imperialism view which is no longer thought capable of explaining complexities of globalisation and emerges as 'increasingly hybrid and de-territorialised cultural forms' (Darling-Wolf, 2000:138). In global media studies, there are four tendencies of explaining the emergence of hybridity in critiques of cultural imperialism.

First, cultural imperialism has been criticised for its understanding of the unilateral nature of flows of the western (American) values to the rest of the world. In-

stead, the concept of “hybridity” has been useful in assertions that globalisation can be understood as a complex nature of flows in international communications, it is no longer the one way flow of Western media contents needs to include the “increasing contra flow international media” (Thussu, 2000). The contra-flow international media include, for example, the Brazilian TV show *Globo*, along with Mexican exports of *telenovelas* throughout Southern (Catholic) Europe and elsewhere; Bollywood films from India to European countries and America; and the expanding cultural power of Japan (especially Japanese animation) and South Korean media in different parts of Southeast Asia (Morley, 2006: 35). In particular, intraregional cultural flows provide good examples to challenge the unidirectional nature of globalisation. As Iwabuchi claims that by using the concept (2002), “glocalisation” from Robertson (1995), the transnational flow of Japanese popular culture such as Pokemon can reposition what is assumed to be a monolithic, unidirectional economic and cultural flow. In this sense, the concept of globalisation should be revised as “glocalisation” which can explain that the global is imbricated in the local (Robertson, 1995: 26; Featherston, 1995: 118).

Second, reference to the concept of “hybridity” is made in criticisms of the way in which the framework of cultural imperialism tends to ignore the multiple ways that audiences are active. Cultural imperialism has assumed that the media have straightforward, predictable effects on their audiences without considering their own contexts (Katz & Liebes, 1990; Wasko, Philips & Meehan, 2001). Contrary, the notion of hybridity shows that the audience often reinterprets media texts through their own local and situated positions. The problems with the framework of cultural imperialism are thought to be driven by the neglect of any empirical evidence regarding the various ways ‘meaning and viewing pleasure are generated within the local culture of specific audiences’ (Chua, 2004: 200). In considering the global cultural flows and foreign cultural influences on a particular region, cultural domination is in many cases a discursive construct rather than the reflection of the subordinate people’s actual experience. The cultural imperialism debates explicitly and implicitly see audiences as passive cultural actors who, apparently without a critical cultural lens, automatically absorb any messages and ideologies from the dominant centre. However, such a simplified view of cultural exchange has been challenged by many more recent cultural audience studies, which show that audiences actively and creatively consume media texts and cultural products (Ang, 1985; Morley, 1992; Radway, 1984). In particular, Gillespie



(2006) points out that 'for understanding social dynamic and engagement with media, we need to study media use in precise local and translocal empirical settings' (Gillespie, 2006: 907). In this respect, it is important to contextualise women's identity formation through global media in any specific context.

In addition, the framework of cultural imperialism may be in danger of romanticising and fetishising "national" culture as pure or authentic form (Chow, 1994). In other words, seeking the pure or authentic forms of national cultures could lead to the presumption that there are authentic and natural differences between the centre and the periphery. In this sense, cultural imperialism supposes to justify why the dominant culture may regard the culture of the centre as authentic and naturalises reasons why the dominant power subjugates the weaker national/cultural identities that are thought to be inferior and primitive. This view has been criticised by some scholars as being overly simplistic (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Morley & Robins, 1995). In this respect, cultural imperialism debates have lacked clarity in their interchanging of the different categories, westernisation, Americanisation and capitalism. According to Boyd-Barrett, 'localism and cultural hybridity, finally foreground representations of local identity that may obscure penetration of local structures by corporate and regulatory agencies models and values of the global economy' (2006: 22). Media products were 'read' in diverse ways and localism and hybridisation of media contents was increasing (Straubhaar, 2004). Thus, in this way too, hybridity can be helpful to comprehending the complexity of women's identities formation within globalisation.

Finally, the concept of hybridity offers much for understanding globalisation in terms of multiple modernisation (Kaya, 2004; Lee, 2006) rather than modernity equivalent to westernisation. The classical approaches to modernity, capitalism and globalisation begin in, and emanates from, Europe and the West. In other words, this view is arguably that modernity is another name for westernisation (Tomlinson, 1991). Thus, Dirlik argues that the 'former colonial subject of Euro/American projects of modernity are empowered in a postcolonial world to assert their own project of modernity (2003: 286). On the contrary, Kaya suggests that the 'assumption of modernity as equivalent to the West must be problematised by the concept of multiple modernities and that the modernisation of non-western societies cannot be viewed merely as westernisation or Europeanization' (Kaya, 2004: 50). The multiple pathways of modernisation problematise the as-

sumption of the unilateralism of modernisation/westernisation. On the contrary, it is asserted by some critics that all societies create their own modernity. Thus 'modernity is unlikely to return a singular vision of world-mastery' (Lee, 2006: 365). In order to research the women's identity formation, as this thesis attempts to do, it is possible, and perhaps essential, to raise the question that underpins these debates and that is whether 'globalisation' is simply a synonym of westernisation or whether a more intricate and multidirectional process and, thus, examine how this is particular relevant to women's subjectivities.

### *(2.2.2) Problematizing the "West"*

With respect to these debates regarding modernisation, it is also necessary to pay attention to the very concept of "the West". The term appears to be used variably. The West may refer geographically to America or to any other European society (Mouer & Sugimoto 1986: 132). This geographical idea would be a plausible description if it were the case that modernity flows from the centre to the peripheral. In this vein, it is natural to say that the West is the centre, i.e. America or European countries. However, as discussed above, if the West is not equivalent to modernity, and modernity can be seen as multidirectional processes, then the very idea of the West being equal to America or Europe can be seriously questioned. In other words, if modernisation is not equivalent to Westernisation, or if modernisation is a multiple phenomena rather than unidirectional flow, then the West would not necessarily refer to America or Europe. Rather, the "West" and the "Rest" are 'not separable entities but rather have shaped and been shaped by one another in specific ways and people would evolve their own way of using them' (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994: 14). In this sense, it is perhaps possible to argue that the West is not fixed category but instead that it lacks in the rationality of conceptual coherence. In fact, it has been asserted that the West is merely an imagined construction (Dirlik, 1999; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001; Goldstein-Gidoni & Dalio-Bul, 2002; Yoshimi, 2003; Fujita, 2004; Sakai, 2005; Wang, 2007).

In this familiar vein, the West can than be imagined, exorcised, manipulated and played with in any specific context. In other words, images of the "West" are produced and attributed with temporary meanings that can easily be altered or even replaced (Appadurai, 1991: 198). Those images are then given life through their transformation into specific contextual social practices and material goods. In-

deed, the 'West' has become an accepted form of 'alternative reality' for local people in many different contexts (Kelsky 1999: 238). According to Goldstein-Gidoni's analysis of Japanese weddings, the general concept of the 'West' is 'frequently regarded in everyday life as that is found over there (*muko*)' (Goldstein-Gidoni 1997: 142). In this imaginary place 'over there', time seems to stop and the image of the West can be fixed. In this way, according to Sakai (2005), the West is imagined to be a clear and distinct entity. Furthermore, Sakai argues that the media have established the concept of the West and "playing" the 'West' in contemporary Japan, and, like any other form of play, this play provides its participants with a sense of freedom. It is not freedom in a sense of escape however; the play affects and even generates new realities, new identities (Goldstein-Gidi & Dalot-Bul, 2002: 73). In this sense, the distinction between the West and the Rest (or the West and the East) is obscure and not clear-cut. Rather, it is perhaps possible to claim that in the globalised world, this distinction would be dissolved and the binary concept exists only in constructed and distinctive forms in the local context. This kind of view can also be found in Tomlinson's discussion (1999). According to Tomlinson, globalisation is 'a decentred process that has no necessary affinity with the interests of the West' (1999: 94) and provides a new openness to other ideas and people. In this decentred process of globalization, 'a wide range of hybrid formations can be identified in political economy within the debates of globalisation' (Pieterse, 2001: 663).

### *(2.2.3) Cultural imperialism or hybridity: the Korean Wave?*

The transnational and cross-cultural encounter has highlighted cultural differences in many parts of the globe. The binary view of global/local, centre/periphery, which is the main assumption of cultural imperialism fails to sufficiently acknowledge the complex, juxtaposed and fractured nature of cultural globalisation. This latter view is one which better fits the analysis of women's identities in this thesis as it captures the complex and localised variations which are identified within the concept of cultural hybridity. In this sense, as Roberston suggested, 'localisation is the process of hybridizing the local and global together "glocalisation"' (1995). Furthermore, the complexity of power relations between the periphery and centre are central arguments in postcolonial theory (Karaidy, 2002a; Shome & Hedge, 2002; Ang, 2003). The postcolonial approach provides

the possibility to understand the complex process of globalisation and multilayered identities. The postcolonial notion of hybrid forms of media practice may provide a useful tool to understand how people construct their identities in a specific context.

In engaging with the postcolonial notion of hybrid forms of media, the “Korean Wave” provides a clear example to help illuminate some of the complex cultural relations of the forces of globalisation. The “Korean Wave” refers to the phenomenon of popularity of Korean pop culture amongst teenagers in Japan, China, Taiwan and other countries in Southeast Asia since the late 1990s. Many scholars have examined why so many East Asians are enthusiastic about Korean cultural commodities and suggested that this popularity of South Korean pop culture could provide an alternative site of the formation of new East-Asian identities (Chua, 2004; 2006; Yin & Liew 2005; Cho-Han, 2005; Cho, 2005; Lai, 2006; Shim, 2006; Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). Shim (2006) examines “Korean Wave” as a cultural hybrid form (Shim, 2006: 25) and suggests that ‘the current commercial success of Korean media is an outgrowth of Korea’s struggle for cultural continuity when confronted by the threat of global cultural domination’ (Shim, 2006: 31). With regard to the political implications of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), the “Korean Wave” may, therefore, be taken as one example of a cultural hybrid form being constructed as resistant to imperial domination. It may have significant political implications in the sense that the native and marginal can strike back at imperial domination.

The contents of Korean pop culture (including dramas, films and music) are not expressing so-called “authentic” traditional Koreaness. Rather, they are the localised global forms of culture that are appropriate for the local context but which also appeal to audiences in East Asian countries like Japan, China and Taiwan. The cultural hybridity expressed in the “Korean Wave” can perhaps be seen as an outcome of the interactions and negotiations between global forms and local actors who use their own cultural resources and construct their own local identity. In this respect, globalisation, particularly in the realm of popular culture, ‘provides a creative form of hybridisation that works towards sustaining local identities in the global context.’ (Shim, 2006: 39). This form of hybridisation can be seen as a new cultural practice by local audiences who appropriate global goods and cultural values. In some sense, we can argue that the Korean Wave demon-

strates that there is no such a fixed entity of global culture. Had we followed the binary scheme of global/local, centre/periphery, and west/east, this formation of a regional cultural trend would not be able to be explained so easily. Arguably, the Korean wave is a new form of global culture in the East Asian region. In this vein, the binary components which have been used as the main ingredients of cultural imperialism cannot be separated and universal terms and instead, need to be contextualised and seen in terms of their complex interactions to be able to grasp a clearer picture of cultural practice.

Iwabuchi (2001) insists that this kind of regional form of popular cultural products such as the 'Korean Wave' produces 'a sense of living in the shared time and common experience of a certain (post)modernity which cannot be represented well by American popular culture' (56, in Shim, 2006: 39). As to the extent that women's audience derives similar identities from watching the same programmes, the popularity of the Korean media in Asia has produced a special environment for Asian media consumption, and significantly for Asian women's identities formation. In this vein, women's identities can be articulated in terms of an intra-regional cultural flow as well as in relation to Western cultural flows. In this map of global media, women's identity formation in South Korea can perhaps be seen as the utmost complex and dynamic movement which transcends and negotiates cultural differences.

#### *(2.2.4) Hybrid culture as a framework for examining women's experiences*

As I have attempted to reveal in the sections above, the emergence of hybridity has become a central dimension of global media studies. Global media debates have made important developments in hybrid culture through the formulation of glocalisation, transculturalism and transnational frameworks, which analyse the 'uneven, often unequal and complex relationship between women in diverse parts of world' (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000). Thus, Karaidy suggests that 'hybridity has become a master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory and criticism and one of the most widely used and criticised concepts in postcolonial theory' (2002: 316). Hybridity is perhaps now the central framework in the field of global media studies. It is possible to then argue that the concept is also useful for examining women's cultural practice and the formation of their identities in the postcolonial context and that this examination requires much greater attention

that it has, to date, received. Sreberny (2001) claims that 'the politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be increasingly transnational [...] There is no volume yet on gender and global media and globalisation, de-westernisation media studies and new technology still lack a focus on the gendered dynamics and practices involved' (61), and she raises the important question of 'what women want/what women practice with global media' (65).

In this respect, it is clear that women's practices in terms of their relationship with global media in specific contexts need to be examined in terms of the "cultural hybrid".<sup>14</sup> However, there are inherent difficulties: how can feminist media studies include and address marginalised women's practice in relation to global media? How to find the voices which express the complexity of marginalised women's experiences in globalisation? In order to answer these questions, post-colonial theory can offer, First, a useful insight to understand the complex processes of women's identity formation in globalisation; Second, the possibility of locating marginalised women's voice and Third, opportunities for examining the notion of hybridity in terms of women's identities formation and contextualising the concept in an empirical setting. Postcolonial theory offers possibilities to articulate women's identities as multiple, shifting and even self-contradictory. Therefore, the concept is greatly significant to the analysis of women's identity formation attempted in this thesis. However, I also want to question the limits of the existing theoretical frameworks and hopefully, by making a connection between the global and the postcolonial, this thesis will open up some different ways of thinking about gender and culture in global times. I employ some of the existing insightful thinking contained within postcolonial perspectives to enable to a rethink of some of the issues of the global media debates from women's point of views.

### **2.3. Postcolonial theory on women's identities**

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<sup>14</sup> The notion of "transnational" has been critically reviewed by Appadurai (1996). In particular, Grewal and Kaplan (1994) suggest transnational feminism from the view of building feminist coalitions to resist "scattered hegemonies" and to problematise a "purely locational politics" (13). Alexander and Mohanty (1996) insist on a feminism that is transnational and political.

Some of the most vigorous debates on differences of women's in contemporary culture have occurred within the field of postcolonial studies (Spivak, 1985b; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1995; Hall, 1992a; Hannerz, 1996; Webner & Modood, 1997). By deconstructing dominant Western representation, postcolonial theory makes a strong case that the margin and centre are not diametrically opposed, but are related dialectically. With regard to the issue of formations of postcolonial women's identities, particularly those in transition, postcolonial theory provides useful insights to illustrate women's everyday experiences in the postcolonial context. Although there are many other significant figures in the field of feminism postcolonial theory, Gayatri Spivak has a particularly important contribution to the field in her (1985b) assertion that white feminist views, which have been privileged within world feminism, are based on the system of Western knowledge which ignores the experience of non-white world women and that the approach has, therefore, inevitably served the dominant Western tendency to attempt to exploit the non-western world, even when these same white feminist frameworks criticise these dominant interests. Other postcolonial feminists have followed her arguments. For example, Chandra Mohanty (1988) similarly criticises Western feminist scholarship which has constructed a monolithic "third world" woman as an object of knowledge. These perspectives are central to this thesis and indeed its very motivation was as a result of these postcolonial feminist critics' raising questions about how the complexity of women's postcolonial identities in globalisation can be understood without the "epistemic violence"<sup>15</sup> of enacted by white feminists.

Spivak's theory provides a particularly useful framework for understanding complex and ambivalent women's identity formation in postcolonial situation like South Korea. There are several reasons why this thesis is paying attention to Spivak's theory. First and foremost, the position of South Korean women can be regarded as what Spivak refers to, "third world women". Spivak is one of few feminist scholars who raise the issue of the lives and struggles of third world

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<sup>15</sup> Said claims in his book, *Orientalism* (1978) that Orientalism is a manner of regularised writing, vision and study, dominated by imperative, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient. It is the image of the 'orient' expressed as an entire system of the Western thought and scholarship. It is also 'a systemised knowledge that is linked with western power as "epistemic violence", that is, the denial of the authority and validity of knowledge of the colonised. This is "epistemic violence" as the knowledge system of the Western culture.

women in the global system of division of labour (Spivak 1990). Second, it is important to note that Spivak's enormous contribution to recover the third world women's histories and voices which have been ignored and overlooked in many ways. She tries to describe the conditions that women are positioned under contemporary global capitalism without jeopardising the complexity and locality. Third, Spivak problematises white feminist views on third world women pointing out that their analyses have resulted in damaging effects on different lives of women in ways which can be called an "epistemic violence" in the sense that a purely western-centred view could justify the violence of political and colonial forces over other non-western societies.

The main contribution of postcolonial theory is the dismantling of binaries of the West/the rest, global/local and in showing that the relations between the coloniser and colonised are in fact dialectical and co-constituted (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, this main contribution of postcolonialism and, by extension, the feminist postcolonial theory expounded by Spivak and others following in the same vein is applicable to the context of South Korea as it reveals that the representation of South Korean women has to be problematised in terms of positioning historical context and complexity of women's transformation in globalisation.

As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the most prominent tendencies in postcolonial theory is the problematisation of the widely accepted idea of culture as a pure, stable and homogenous entity by providing the analytical construct of hybridity and represents a global discourse that emphasises interdependencies and dialectic interconnections. The heterogeneity and difference that emerge from postcoloniality are conflictual and contingent. Some claim that postcolonial theory itself should be regarded as an uneven and heterogeneous phenomenon (Bhabha, 1994; Ang, 2003). Indeed there is no universal definition of postcolonial theory. In this very sense, transformative, heterogeneous and contingent characters can be a useful analytical framework for understanding the shifting subject positions of women's identities formation. Furthermore, in the debates of feminism, Grewal and Kaplan (1994) suggest a transnational feminist theory which is based on the view that feminist coalitions to resist "scattered hegemonies" and to problematised "purely locational politics" (13). In transnational age, there is no "authentic native" (Chow, 1994: 129). It is important to note that traditional feminist view on the position of non-western women has typified as stable, ho-



mogeneous and monolithic. However, as many postcolonial feminists argue including most notably Spivak and Mohanty, this kind of view fails to describe the experiences and histories of women who have been historically dispossessed and exploited by colonial powers. The women's positions and identities are only described by the terms like "the colonised", "woman" or "the worker" which are merely shown to be coherent and disempowered in nature. In this sense, their positions and identities need to be described in terms of more flexible and situational frameworks and terms like "subaltern" (Spivak, 1987), "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994) and "ambivalence" (Bhabha, 1994).

### *(2.3.1) Why can't the subaltern speak?*

Gayatri Spivak has been regarded as one of the most influential scholars in the field of postcolonial studies. Spivak strongly criticises the ethnocentric limits of western theories and pays attention to the problem of representation. The question of representations is a central issue for most postcolonial writers. Spivak raises complex issues of who can speak and on whose behalf, in relation to representation. White Western women's relative ignorance of the situation of women in other countries has often been highlighted (Mohanty, 1988; Narayan, 1997; Ong, 1995). Spivak in particular has been most vocal in her call for white feminists to find out more about women in other contexts. She asserts that they should challenge their ignorance about the situation of women in other countries rather than assuming that "Third World" women are universally oppressed, uneducated and abused by husbands and male relatives (Spivak, 1990: 1993). However, she also raises the problem of representation for postcolonial writers. She problematises the notion of "speaking as", which she sees as an unrealistic attempt to generalise oneself, making oneself a representative, and distancing oneself. More specifically, her analysis is directed at the subject position of the female subaltern, whom she describes as doubly marginalised, by virtue of relative economic disadvantage and gender subordination. Indeed, on the matter of repre-

sensation, Spivak concludes that there can be no representation of real subaltern consciousness<sup>16</sup>.

However, in 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1985b), Spivak raises the question whether it is possible to recover these voices of the subaltern or oppressed subject. She claims that there is no possibility of turning the Other into a self. The Other is just other because 'the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist itself' (Spivak, 1985a: 253-254). Spivak also problematises listeners. As the subaltern cannot raise their authentic voice due to refraction and domestication, listening to their voices is also not regarded as authentic. Therefore, even when western feminists listen to the subaltern, what they hear is not what the subaltern tells, but what western feminists reconstruct. According to Spivak,

For me, the question "who should speak?" is less crucial than "who will listen?" I will speak for myself, as a Third World person is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism [...] They cover over the fact of the ignorance that they are allowed to possess, into a kind of homogenization.

(Spivak, 1990: 60)

In similar vein, Spivak raises the issue of whether western intellectuals can ever listen properly to the native voice, even if subalterns speak. In her questioning of the listener, she challenges western feminists to gain awareness of the condition of subaltern women in the Third World. In her criticism of French feminists including Julia Kristeva, Spivak points out that there are some tendencies in western feminism of being thought to speak for all women regardless of cultural differences. Furthermore and more importantly, some feminist analyses on the others have been thought to be much for the sake of the other. However, in fact, what they are concerned is constitution of their own identity. For example, when

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<sup>16</sup> The term subaltern conventionally refers to a junior ranking officer in British army. However, it was redefined by the Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, to describe groups of unorganised peasants that were economically dispossessed, and had little or no political consciousness (Gramsci, 1978). This term was extended to a group of people who were (and are) generally subordinated in Indian society (Guha, 1988). Spivak revises this term to include women's lives and histories, in order to locate and re-establish a "voice", or collective agency, in postcolonial India (Spivak, 1987).

Spivak discusses about Julia Kristeva's book *About Chinese Women* (1977), she notes that Kristeva is occasionally interested in touching the Chinese women's issues, but that her repetitive question is "obsessively self-centered" (Spivak, 1987: 137). In other words, 'if what drives the representation of Third World women is the search for a political alternative in the West, there is no other-directness' (Sanders, 2006: 80). In the process of gaining awareness, western intellectuals should be seriously listening to the Third World women's voices, she claims. Spivak insists western intellectuals need to give up their privileges, in order to listen to the native voice. This challenge can be expressed as a "project of un-learning our privilege as our loss" (Spivak, 1990: 9). In other words, the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman.

In relation to the issue of representation, Spivak suggests that (western) intellectuals must represent the subaltern from the position of "pragmatic political usefulness" (Spivak, 1990:70). To elaborate upon the term, "pragmatic political usefulness", she uses the term "strategic essentialism" (1987). In order to combine theory and political practice, on the one hand, Spivak suggests that essentialist categories of women's identity need to be criticised. On the other hand, she asserts that using this essentialist category could contribute toward making a political identity. The purpose of using the "strategic essentialism" is to make sense of social and political situations. In other words, the method can expose 'the limitations of essentialism and interrogate essentialist representations' (Dhamoon, 2006: 369). This concept is particularly useful here as, with regard to the problem of listeners of Third world women's voices, the method could reveal the presuppositions of listeners.

The strategic side of this notion needs to be highlighted here as opposed to the concept of "essentialism" and the negative connotations of that term. Indeed, Spivak's main purpose in the term "strategic" is to show the way in which such a term is in fact situation-specific and non-fixed. The emphasis on "strategic" can be helpful for understanding that 'feminism continues to revolve around alliances, coalitions and communal ties that give meaning to the idea of feminism' (Fenton, 2000: 724). Strategic essentialism is thus a form of politics that focuses on specific conditions such as temporary historical moments and attempts to establish effective remedies to the results of sexism or racism with the use of situational terms, 'built around issues not biogenetic categories' (Knowles & Mercers,

1992: 111). Hence, this term is 'most effective as a context-specific strategy but it cannot provide a long term political solution to end oppression and exploitation' (Morton, 2003: 75). Indeed in her later work, Spivak gives up elaborating the notion of strategic essentialism in response to the neglected use of the strategic dimension (Danus & Jonsson, 1993). However, as Morton exemplifies (2003: 75), Mohanty's explanation of the problem of the practice of veiling Iranian women can be a good example of the strategic use of essentialism (1988: 75). According to Mohanty, although the general conception of veiling in Islamic society has been assumed to be 'the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation' (75), during the Iranian Islamic revolution, some middle class women intentionally veiled themselves to 'indicate solidarity with their veiled working-class sisters' (75). In this respect, Mohanty problematises the assertion of the general significance of veiling in controlling women. She suggests that 'the specific meaning attached to [this veiling] practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context' (75). This strategy of exposing the context-specific practice of veiling can challenge the common essentialist assumptions that are embodied in the concept of veiling.

Similarly, this strategic uses of essentialism could have implications for analysing women's identity formation in the South Korean context. The issues relating to women's lives such as marriage, love and body modification have been regarded as categories of women's oppression by patriarchal regimes, according to universal essentialist assumptions. However, although essentialism is here to stay (whether we like them or not), and the differing contents of these concepts are being constantly transformed and rearticulated. As David Goldberg says about the concept "race" (1993), such a concept is "virtually vacuous in its own right" (210). In other words, such concepts have no intrinsic or fixed meaning and but rather contain the possibility to be rearticulated in any specific context. In this sense, the strategic use of essentialist terms (or concepts) has an implicit meaning that those categories could be resources to expose problems and transform them into serving the purpose of empowerment of women. As Spivak points out, although the strategy 'suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory' (Spivak, 1993: 4, in Morton, 2003: 75).

In this sense, Spivak' argument is partly methodological, partly political in nature (Moore-Gilbert, 2000: 453). In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak stresses the

significance of the double subordination and the silencing of colonised women, as well as the muted colonised subject. She writes that there is no space from which the subaltern can speak. And her work (1985a; 1985b) has been fundamentally concerned with the position of the “doubly oppressed native woman” who is caught ‘between the domination of a native patriarchy and foreign masculinity-imperialist ideology’ (Parry, 1995: 36). Importantly, she suggests that the representation of women has been particularly problematic in colonial and even post-colonial situations, because the colonial/imperial context imposed a hierarchical thinking in which patriarchal values find fertile soil. This idea of a rigid hierarchal system could, be extension, also be perceived within global expansion of capitalism, which only allows the disempowered to receive a limited space of forming women’s identities. In this systemic structure there are remote possibilities for women in the postcolonial context to speak for themselves.

However, from a different angle of emphasis to Spivak, Parry pays attention to Bhabha’s argument that the colonist’s text itself already ambivalently contains a native voices. This means that there are no distinctive boundaries between the coloniser and the colonised. The boundaries are always determined on the basis of interactions. Thus, the direction of influence is not one sided. Rather, it consists of mutually interactive relations. In this sense, Bhabha’s term, “hybridity” (which I examine later in this chapter) is significant in terms of its description of the ambivalent state of the coloniser and the colonised. Hybridity means that the subaltern has spoken (1995: 39-43). But what kind of an argument is it to say that the subaltern’s voice can be found in the ambivalence of the imperialist’s speech? It is an argument that ultimately makes it unnecessary to come to terms with the subaltern, since the subaltern has already spoken in discourse. The problem is then not about having a voice, but about its representation. ‘The subaltern cannot speak, not because there are not activities in which we can locate a subaltern mode of life/culture/subjectivity, but because this is indicated by the critique of thought and representation given us by Western intellectuals’ (Chow, 2003: 331). Speaking itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination. And so, perhaps, we are returned to Spivak’s emphasis upon the significance of listening. We need to put an emphasis on questioning whether western feminist are ready to listen to non western women’s voices.

Although Spivak has made a huge contribution to postcolonial theory, and this thesis is situated within the postcolonial intellectual debate, it does not, however, wholly rely upon her theoretical frameworks but rather upon some elements derived from Spivak's theoretical frameworks and some from that of Bhabha. These points of difference are focused around/on: the essentialist approach to identity, the impossibility of agency and the linear historical progress model and are outlined in the following sections.

*(2.3.2) The essentialist approach: A monolithic category of women*

For Spivak it is perhaps not always easy to find diversified, conflictual and multiple dimensions of the subaltern. It is possible to locate her interest in the implications of the processes of identity formation for the constitution of the colonised subject and for the question of (post)colonial identity. However, it is notable that in her analysis of the situations where subaltern women are located, it seems that Spivak's image of a postcolonial identity tends to be a fixed identity. The category of the subaltern woman can be seen as an identity pre-given by the colonial regime and the traditional patriarchal system. However, as other postcolonial scholars point out that identity is not pre-given (Bhabha, 1994). Identity is 'matter of becoming as well as being' (Hall, 1997 [1990]: 52). The women's subject position is not always coherent and monolithic. Rather, it is situation-specific and unstable. This understanding is applicable to the concept of subaltern. Although Spivak's whole project is committed to find and recover the situation-specific voice of the oppressed women, she suggests assuming a "pure subaltern identity" as a "theoretical fiction" (Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 88). This methodological ideal typification leads to the subaltern consciousness being seen as an empty space. According to Moore-Gilbert (1997), 'the more the subaltern is seen as wholly other [which is empty and theoretical fiction], the more Spivak seems to construct the subaltern's identity neither relationally nor differentially' (102). In this vein, the subaltern could be seen as monolithic and strategically muted thus revealing and cracking

the constitution of the First World, though the complexity and multi-layeredness of subalterns can easily be found in many places<sup>17</sup>.

This complexity and multi-layered women's subjectivities are particularly relevant to the focus of this thesis - the Korean colonial experience. The experience of complexity of multi-layeredness arguably drives the production of the subject position and is likely to be, to some extent, different from that experienced by Indian and African countries. It has a unique feature of postcoloniality, which cannot be explained by any generalised version of postcolonialism due to the diversity of colonial experiences in South Korea. As discussed in the previous chapter, Korea was colonised by her neighbour and historical rival, Japan, for 45 years. The Japanese regime can be termed "yellow" colonialism, which refers to the skin colour of the ruling empire as well as to a fantasy-laden mentality, within which Koreans admired mythical white western culture. There is a significant difference between colonial experience of Korea and that of India in that Koreans formed context-specific identities which have been called "yellow identities". The concept of "yellow colonial identity" refers to the peculiar character of Korean experiences of colonization by the Japanese (Yoo, 1997).<sup>18</sup>

In order to examine the complexity and contradictory facets of this Japanese colonial discourse which has influenced postcolonial identity formation in South Korea, it is useful to engage in a critical dialogue with cultural hybridity. Bhabha introduces theoretical terms which allow for the splitting of colonial discourse in the form of so-called "ambivalent" identities which are created in the process of colonial identity formation. These ambivalent identities are perhaps the key concept for understanding women's identities formation through global media.

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<sup>17</sup> From Spivak's point of view, the strategically homogeneous category of the "Third World" plays a significant role in analysing the new mode of global capitalism that the third world 'produces the wealth for the first world and that it similarly provides the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the First world' (Spivak, 1999: 96).

<sup>18</sup> Japanese and Koreans are not mutually distinguishable and both had desired to attain western modernity at the time. This means that both were not free from 'inferior complex of non-white and non-western status' (Yoo, 2001: 425). This peculiar situation plays a significant role in the formation of Korean (women's) identities. In this context, one symptomatic example of constituting identity was that the colonised individual 'get obsessed with exhibiting oneself and sensitised to the daily gaze of others towards themselves from the coloniser and other compatriots' (Yoo, 2001: 425).

### *(2.3.3) The impossibility of constituting agency*

Indeed, one of the most discussed issues in relation to Spivak's theory is the possibility of constituting women's agency in the postcolonial context. In particular, as seen in the previous section, which discussed the impossibility of asserting and hearing the voices of subaltern women, Spivak's position seems rather pessimistic with regards to the prospect of constituting agency. Her analysis is particularly directed at the subject position of the female subaltern who is doubly marginalised by virtue of relative economic disadvantage and gender subordination. As alluded to above, Spivak's understanding of subaltern women is based on materialist feminism<sup>19</sup> (McNay, 2000:16). Spivak explains that within the "fetish of identity", 'the economic, political and social dimensions of gender inequality are all subsumed' (Spivak, 1993: 62). The materialist feminist approach plays a significant role in exposing the systematic structure of exploitation and oppression of women under the global capitalism.

It is certainly important to show how the economic and political system infiltrates into women's everyday lives and limit women's choice. As we have seen in the previous section, under ever increasing influences of global capitalism and transnational interactions, the significance of revealing such gender inequalities should not be overlooked. According to McNay, however, 'the weakness of materialist feminism is that the emphasis placed on economic, political and social structures of exclusion can result in a deterministic analysis' (2000: 16). In such a deterministic analysis the complex processes of subject formation and agency can possibly be overly simplified and regarded as being purely determined by economic and ideological structures.

Understandings of agency, on the other hand, could conceal or reveal how these structural relations operate within women's everyday lives. According to Butler (1993), a purely systemic account of gender hierarchy disregards the fact that the individual moves between and negotiates different sets of power relations. In this sense, accounts of subjectification and agency can provide clearer picture of how

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<sup>19</sup> Materialist feminism has tended to focus on the centrality of macro-structural concepts to analyse change and diversity in gender relations (Walby, 1997: 8-12). One weakness of this work is that it often lacks a concept of agency through which to examine the effects of such macro-structural tendencies upon the lives of individuals (McNay, 2000: 79).



women in the postcolonial space are interacting and negotiating in everyday lives. In the same vein, McNay points out that 'the relationship between symbolic and material practices can begin to be understood more adequately with the shift from a determinist to a generative account of subjectification and agency' (McNay, 2000: 16). Thus, Spivak's approach on the subaltern has no room for women to have 'the possibility of changing the dominant modes of interpretation' (McLeod, 2000: 198). Spivak's account, therefore, may lack a sense of the historical and social embeddedness of subject formations and the ways in which some types of identity are more durable than others.

In Spivak's framework, as the subaltern seems unable to speak, the subject formation seems to be relatively neglected. However, 'the subaltern scholars attempt to retrieve subaltern consciousness from history' (McLeod, 2000: 194). In order to do this, Spivak suggests the strategic use of essentialism as discussed above, which has itself implications for conceptualising women's agency. Spivak also uses the term subaltern consciousness strategically, and in conjunction with the strategic use of the term essentialism, as it is 'theoretically improper to assume the existence of the sovereign or essential subaltern consciousness' (McLeod, 2000: 194). This strategic use of subaltern consciousness could have two potential effects: on one hand, as Spivak intended, the 'strategic' essentialisation of subaltern consciousness could contribute to a resistance to colonialism. On the other hand, however, this strategy could lead subaltern consciousness to be seen as a fixed and stable term that entails overlooking heterogeneous and unstable sides of the subaltern consciousness and so disallows space for agency.

With respect to the problem of the "strategic" essentialism, in spite of the inarguable significant political contribution of strategic forms of essentialism, it is possible to also argue that the strategy (or concept) cannot explain the full notion of multiple subjectivities inherent in the transformation of women's identities within globalisation. Although the strategic side is highlighted for the purpose of demonstrating situational understandings, it is still dependant upon a binary essentialist framework. Dhamoon claims that, as Spivak herself admits (1987), strategic essentialism is not defensible when it is employed by dominant groups to

exclude a subjugated identity (2006: 205). As a consequence, it could potentially reinforce essentialised binaries.<sup>20</sup>

In this respect, it could be of greater value to pay attention to Bhabha's non-essentialist view. For him, the subaltern consciousness should be seen as a relational term that is located within a conflictual and shifting process. The relationship between the coloniser and colonised is more complex, nuanced and politically ambiguous than that suggested by Spivak. Bhabha highlights 'the formation of colonial subjectivities as a process that is never fully or perfectly achieved' (Loomba, 1998: 232). As such, Bhabha provides a contemporary illustration of agency. He refers to subaltern agency as a form of "negotiation" (1994: 25) that is helpful for grasping the complexity of identities formation, and in focusing on the possibility of the agency of the colonised. Such arguments have important implications for the question of agency and resistance in local contexts (Moore-Gilbert, 2000: 457-458).<sup>21</sup>

As a result of the above understanding, it seems clear that it is also necessary to define the process by which the contexts, in which this agency is constructed, emerge and can be understood. Specifically, it is important to try to understand the multiplicity of these contexts, and thus be better placed to grasp the complexity of influences and resistance in which agency is expressed in identity formulation. Thus, the next section questions historical models that assume linearity; it examines the postcolonial perspective on history, in order to try and reach a better understanding of this multiplicity.

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<sup>20</sup> In spite of all the mixed reactions about the strategic essentialism, the possible misunderstandings and misuses become obvious concern for Spivak herself. As a result, Spivak claims in her interview with Danus and Jonsson (1993), 'the notion just simply became the union ticket for essentialism'. So she continues to say that 'as a phrase, I have given up on it' (35).

<sup>21</sup> Here, "agency" is a particularly contested theoretical term. Foucault defines agency as discursive entities that are constitutive of subject which are imbued with power and operate as regimes and rationales that structure and constrain what it is possible for the subject to know and desire (Paechter, 2001). In this sense, agency is a 'chain of signifiers' (Walkerdine, 1991). The notion of agency is a personal choice embedded in the notion of consciousness, rationality, autonomy and will-full action (Gill, 2006). Gill points out a discourse of agency that can easily resonate with the neo-liberal discourse of 'choice and individualism that are hegemony framings for understanding the self in late capitalism' (Ringrose, 2007: 267-268). To some extent, this view of agency provides a valuable criticism of an over-determined concept. However, such an approach could lead the concept of agency as limiting the dynamics of how agency negotiates the complex, contradictory discourse with regards to women's identities formation in the postcolonial context.

#### *(2.3.4) Linear historical progress model*

In order to articulate women's identities in the South Korean context, historically specific concept of identities needs to embrace the complex characteristics of "simultaneity" and "multiplicity" which cannot be based on an idea of linear historical progress. In other words, this simultaneity and multiplicity can be seen to be constructed by multiple time-pathways. These may simultaneously include the characteristics of the colonial/postcolonial and of the modern/post-modern binaries. Stuart Hall argues that 'history consists of processes with different time scale, all convened in the same conjuncture. Identity is neither continuous nor continuously interrupted but constantly framed between the simultaneous vectors of similarity, continuity and difference' (Hall in Mani & Frankenberg, 1994: 295).

One of Spivak's contributions in feminist postcolonial studies is that of deconstructing and revising the colonial historiography by shifting from a historical focus to articulating the histories and struggles of disempowered groups (initiated by a group of historians called "Subaltern Studies Group"). This new approach focuses more on recovering histories of subaltern struggles and insurgencies against colonial regimes which were thought to be overlooked and neglected by colonial administrators and educated elite social groups. Spivak and the subaltern historians are strongly influenced by Marxist political theory including Gramsci (Young, 2001; Morton, 2003). She consistently attempts to find the usefulness of classical Marxist analysis to reveal the 'economic structures of the international division of labour in the age of "micro-electronic capitalism" – as well as their "super-structural" cultural/political consequences' (More-Gilbert, 1997: 80). However, these Marxist approaches on history can be seen to be based on a linear view on history, which seems somehow to be contradictory to the postcolonial view on history, that is, the non-linearity of history.

Postcolonial theory has frequently been associated with 'eclectic inquiry, avoidance of political economy and in particular class politics, and more pointedly an implicit acceptance of global capitalism' (Slater, 1998: 655). While neo-colonialism, based within the linear model, places its emphasis on the continuity of the colonial situation, whilst the term postcolonialism may appear to suggest that there is a significant "rupture" in this situation. On the other hand, it can be argued that the term neo-colonialism overplays the power of the imperial centres

and frames the third world as passive and continually captured, while correspondingly leaving underexposed the impact of the colonial relation to the societies of the West.

Indeed the term “post” can also be problematised in terms of understandings of the process of history. Frankenberg and Mani (1993), however, discuss the implication of the term “post”, which, they assert, ‘does not signal “after” but rather spaces of ongoing contestation enabled by decolonisation struggle both globally and locally’ (294) thus fitting into a non-linear model of history which is most helpful for understanding contested and conflictual forms of agency and identity formation. As a result, postcolonialism ends up carrying a certain disparity between the teleological linear model of history and the temporal and contingent model.

Although it is arguably the main contribution of postcolonialism that it brings the temporal and divergent views of history into the field of view, some have argued that postcolonialism is based on the assumption of the linear teleological model (Shohat, 1992: 110) precisely because postcolonial discussions sometimes ignore historically and geographically various colonial experiences. In addition, there is a tendency to fit a linear historical progress model running from the colonial to the postcolonial period into the frame of reference, which imposes common experiences of European colonisation. This, however, does not fit with all experiences of colonisation. For instance, South Korea currently occupies an ambiguous position in Western representation. As mentioned above, Korea was colonised by another East Asian country, Japan and experienced exposure to Western culture only in the course of independence. ‘To most of the world and this includes other nations “of colour” in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the place of Korea as a “New World order” is often both ironic and confusing’ (Kim, E. & Choi, 1999: 3).<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is debatable if postcolonialism subscribes to a linear historical progress model, but this perspective at least illuminates the limitations, especially that such a linear model cannot explain the peculiar postcolonial context of South Korea.

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<sup>22</sup> According to Dirlik (1997), South Korean capitalism has been alluded to in the fact that capitalism has been gradually de-Westernised or de-Europeanised. He uses the term, “Confucian capitalism” (71).

Despite these debates, it is important to note that postcolonialism does not necessarily presuppose the end of colonialism. Indeed, it usually indicates a period after the colonial period, and it attempts to configure the colonial practice “beyond” a colonial binary logic. Returning once again to the focus of this thesis, in the case of the South Korean context, the modern/post-modern and the colonial/postcolonial perhaps exist side by side at the same time and in the same space. Culture is located within this differential time in which the past is reworked through the present, and the present is affected by expectations of the future. Thus, this differentially of time and space disrupt identity and disallow its fixed nature.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, multiple layers of South Korean history, such as Japanese rule, American influence after the Korean War, and compressed industrialisation, produce complex forms of the coexistence of modern/post-modern, colonial and postcolonial facets. For this reason, postcolonial history is thought to be dismantling the view of developmental or progressive history. What postcolonial history suggests is not meant to be linear change from the pre-colonial to the colonial to the postcolonial as a series of stages.

Furthermore, it is notable that with regard to the issue of women’s identity formation, the linear progress model could result in the misapprehension that the postcolonial women are to be regarded as more civilised and advanced than women in colonial period. It is a misapprehension because it could justify the necessity and positive role of the colonial regime as a driving force for progress and enlightenment. However, this thesis will attempt to reveal that women’s lives at present in South Korean context have all the factors of postcolonial/colonial/postcolonial identities. It is therefore possible to argue that, in globalisation, formation of women’s identities is perhaps on the border between old and new, end and beginning. In other words, this cultural practice provides the complexity of women’s identities formation.

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<sup>23</sup> This view on postcolonialism as beyond linear history and multi-layered situation is underpinned by Bhabha’s theory. Bhabha points out the slippery and shifting nature of the prefix “post”. Yet he insists on the necessity of “post” when thinking about the present. The “post” according to Bhabha, does not signify “after” as it relates to epochal history, but “beyond”. Thus, he indicates rethinking temporality as disruptive and differential rather than linear (1994: 5).

With regard to the problematic linear historical view of postcolonialism, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge (1993) rightly point out that 'postcolonialism [...] is not a homogeneous category either across all postcolonial societies or even within a single one. Rather it refers to atypical configuration, which is always in the process of change, never consistent with itself' (289). This remark implies that postcolonialism encompasses multi-dimensional and multi-layered practices. In other words, postcolonialism should be seen as heterogeneous and ever-changing transformation in practice.

### *(2.3.5) Postcolonialism and hybridity in contemporary globalisation*

It is perhaps the case that the local topography of research on South Korean women moves away from the binary grand narrative of the victimised, passive subaltern. If postcolonial studies are to survive in any meaningful way, they need to involve themselves far more deeply with the contemporary world, and with the local circumstances within which colonial institutions and ideas are being moulded into the disparate cultural socio-economic practices, which define our contemporary "globality".<sup>24</sup> In Elspeth Probyn's work, 'the term, "local" signifies a more particularised aspect of location - deeply connected to the articulation of a specific time - and a potentially transformative practice' (Probyn, 1990: 186 in Kaplan, 1994: 149).

In order to encompass the locality and temporality in cultural globalisation, cultural hybridisation should perhaps be located at the centre of our attention. The concept of hybridity can demonstrate a clearer picture of the relationship between the local and the global. According to Brah and Coombes, 'the concept of hybridity has become the means for reflecting upon the relationship between "the local" and "the global" and the multiple ways of globality, region and locality feature in economic, political, and cultural forms and practice' (2000: 12). However, my suggestion is that hybridity is a theoretical concept that may not be wholly applicable to every context. The idea of hybridity is the site of political theory where

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<sup>24</sup> Currently, Spivak has changed the direction of research into "lived experience" of women. She claims that the postcolonial critics must learn to honour empirical work and lays great stress on the importance of "face to face" work with the subaltern (Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 101).

alternative uses of term are as yet unarticulated and left unexamined for understanding the process contained within the multi-layered temporal context of South Korea. The question remains as to whether or not South Korean women's identity formations should, and can, be explained in relation to living in a global-local culture, in the particular context of space and time. Therefore before moving to their practical implications in the analysis of empirical data, I below give a brief review of these terms and attempt to move towards clarifying their relevance to a study of the transformative identity in the specific temporality of the South Korean context.

#### **2.4. Hybridity and transformative identity**

The formation of women's transformative identities throughout global media is the central issue concerning this thesis. Examining the cultural practice of South Korean women as postcolonial subjects through the lens of global media may contribute to providing the more complex and contextualised understandings of the notion of hybridity which seems to be required. Although the concept of hybridity is one of the most discussed concepts in global media studies and related fields and much research has addressed hybridity as new diasporic identities such as *mestizaje* (Rosa, 1996), there are still relatively few studies that consider gender as a central axis on which hybrid women's identities in globalisation are constructed and negotiated. However, in relation to an emphasis on the women's identity formation, hybridity can be helpful to analyse complexity and diversity of women's voices in globalisation.

This can be characterised as the pursuit of the possibility of capturing multi-layered, conflicting and transformative characters that are expressed in the notion of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, this thesis aims to examine the potential of finding a linkage between the constitution of identities and political implications, e.g. resistance and struggle. It is notable that hybridity is accused of complicity in contributing toward celebrating transnational capitalism under the name of cultural hybridism or ever-increasing globalisation (Ahmad, 1995). However, this thesis aims to recapture the political potential of hybridity, and to assert its transformative character, which can be used to contextualise identity formation.

#### (2.4.1) *Mimicry and the destabilisation of identity*

The main question raised by Homi Bhabha (1994) is how postcolonial subjectivities are constructed. The main contribution of Bhabha is in undermining binary oppositions such as the coloniser/colonised by his suggestion that there is no settled (fixed) binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised (Bhabha, 1994: 70-75). These concepts are not clearly distinctive, rather they are interconnected and interactive in complex ways. He highlights the agency of the colonised and the formation of colonial subjectivities as a process that is never fully or perfectly achieved. He corrects Said's emphasis on the domination of the coloniser as being subject to imperialist discourse. Bhabha insists that colonial discourses cannot "work" as smoothly as *Orientalism* (1978) might seem to suggest. Thus, for Bhabha, the process of identity formation is central to the delineation of agency within post/colonialism and is discursively constituted.

In his article, *Remembering Fanon* ([1986] 1994b) Bhabha claims that identity is 'never the affirmation of a pre-given identity' (Bhabha, 1994: 64). It is rather to be seen as continual choices, which occur repeatedly through the principle of displacement and differentiation (Bhabha, 1994b: 118). Bhabha pays attention to Fanon's suggestion of focusing on the inter-subjective level of colonial relations in order to conceive its dynamics and transformation. Thus, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Bhabha offers an opening for postcolonial agency and representation of subaltern. His interpretation of the colonial relationship provides a destabilised view of the coloniser. It is fractured and destabilised by contradictory responses to the colonised *Other*. In "Of Mimicry and Man" (1984a), Bhabha introduced one of the key concepts in his first phase of work, that of "mimicry".

Mimicry is [...] the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualises power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both "normalised" knowledge and disciplinary powers.

(Bhabha, 1994: 86)

Mimicry is a process of manifesting differences between the colonised and the colonial power. According to Bhabha, 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same*,



*but not quite*'. In other words, 'the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence' (1994: 86). In Bhabha's account, mimicry must be approached from the point of view of the subject who is mimicked (i.e, the coloniser), but also of the subject who mimics (i.e. the colonised). In the latter sense, mimicry is a complex strategy that is a "technique of camouflage" (Bhabha, 1994:89) and the colonised subject is empowered to return the coloniser's gaze. Thus, mimicry is also the name for the "strategic reversal of the process of domination" (Bhabha, 1994: 34). As the colonised attempts to imitate the coloniser's presence repeatedly, it becomes clear that the mimicking cannot correspond or resemble to the coloniser. Rather, the process of mimicry creates the third location where it is not quite the same as either the coloniser or colonised. In this sense, the 'mimicry is a key, evoking images of liminality and border crossing, in which a subaltern identity is defined as different from either of several competing identities' (Afzal-Khan & Seshadri-Crooks, 2000: 386). This concept, mimicry, offers possibility for agency of the colonised and allows for strategies of resistance that appear to resonate with observed, actual, practice, as noted in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

In Bhabha's conceptual framework, identity formation is not fixed and coherent. Identities are ongoing transformations, which are unstable and heterogeneous. Thus, they can be argued to be relational and somehow ambivalent. Hybridity has been sometimes misunderstood, as two stable forms of identities are fused and producing new mutated forms of identities. However, if no such a pure form of pre-existing form of identity or cultural element is assumed to exist, then the hybrid form of discourse or identity can only be revealed in the process of practice. It can be claimed that hybrid can only be revealed in a relational form and that then, in a sense, all of these discourses are struggling with the ways in which identities are created and how external factors influence identities in the present moment.

As I have attempted to show in the section of global media debates, hybridity has become an important concept for illustrating the nature and dynamics of cultural globalisation processes and women's cultural practices. However, it is perhaps notable that hybridity can only be understood in relation to specific contexts. Without contextualisation, it seems somewhat meaningless to celebrate the concept. The idea only deserves denomination as "postcolonial experience" when it

includes a colonial history. Garcia-Canclini suggests that 'taking the process of hybridity seriously is as productive of a field of energy and socio-cultural innovation' (2000:49). In the similar vein, Rita Felski notes that:

Metaphors of hybridity and the like not only recognise differences within the subject, fracturing and complicating holistic notions of identity, but also address connections between subjects by recognising affiliations, cross-pollinations, echoes and repetitions, thereby unseating difference from a position of absolute privilege. Instead of endorsing a drift towards ever-greater atomisation of identity, such metaphors allow us to conceive of multiple, interconnecting axes of affiliation and differentiation.

(Felski, 1997: 12)

#### (2.4.2) A "Third Space"

Bhabha highlights that identity formation in global culture is located in the third space of translation and negotiation. This always produces a counter-narrative or the 'third space to elude the politics of polarity and emerge as other of ourselves' (1994: 38). It is clear that hybridity is full of discontinuities and ruptures. However, hybridity is often examined in the intermingling of cultural components, without considering the question of how actual actors are used and in what context (Werbner, 1997). Identity formation is 'becoming more complex, as people assert local loyalties but want to share in global values and lifestyle' (Lipschutz, 1992: 390 in Pieterse, 1995: 49). In this vein, I aim to place emphasis on how the hybridity of women's cultural practice in globalisation is used in the South Korean context. Thus, the term hybridity is a platform to understand for formation of women's identities in globalisation.

Hybridity is always the product of a conjuncture and intersection. The analyses in the following chapters are of the particularity of the articulation between the local and the global in each and every situation in terms of everyday women's cultural practice in South Korean context. For understanding the complexity of women's identities, the positive feature of hybridity in particular is that it invariably acknowledges that women's identities are constructed through the constant negotiations of differences, and that the presence of ruptures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of identity failure. The concept also stresses that identity is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components; it is simultaneously defined by different forces. Hybridity consists of 'incommen-

surable cultural temporalities' and, as Bhabha says, 'something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation' (1994: 12). He suggests that 'its unity is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from the process of opening what Bhabha has called a "third space" within which other elements encounter and transform each other' (Bhabha, 1998: 208). This third space can be said to be the intervention of cultural translation.

Although hybridity has brought important insight into the debates of globalisation and culture, the question remains how to understand gendered hybridity in a specific context. If hybridity provides the third space for cultural translation, the questions of the thesis would be whether women audiences as postcolonial subjects could translate global media culture. However some argue that the debates of hybridity 'ignore significant divisions of class, gender and race and give too much credit to consumer power' (Hardt, 1998; Kellner, 2002; Mattelart, 1994 in Darling-Wolf, 2006: 182). In other words, as noted earlier in this chapter in relation to critiques of cultural imperialism, women's audience of global media can be seen merely as passive actors by global consumer culture or women's audiences can be seen to be subversive in translating globally dominant cultural forms. Therefore, research, such as this, needs to try to contextualise the notion of hybridity from women's point of view and examines how women's audiences translate globally dominant cultural forms into their own strategy of survival in terms complex experience.

As Bhabha himself remarks, 'culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational' (1994: 172):

It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement...Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement-now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of "global" media technologies-make the question of how culture signifies or what is signified by *culture*, a rather complex issue.

(Bhabha, 1994: 172)

Later, he explicitly indicates "culture as a strategy of survival" in his interview, *Surviving Theory* (2000: 377). He points out again that 'the survival means living in the ambivalent movement in between both these seemingly contradictory or incommensurate moments' (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000: 378). Bhabha suggests that 'ambivalence occurs in the contradictory enunciation of colonial discourses'

(Prakash, 1992b: 168-184). On the basis of ambivalent differences, it is suggested that identity is differential and, in theory at least, infinitely, “displaceable” (Bhabha, 1990: 298). In other words, the ambivalent temporality represented by the “cultural translation” and cultural difference lays in a potential re-conceptualisation of both inter-national and intra-national cultural relations in terms of what the *Commitment to the theory* (1988) describes as a different engagement in the politics of and around cultural domination.

#### *(2.4.3) Temporality and unevenness in globalisation*

Bhabha also understands “the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference” as the “Third Space” of enunciation<sup>25</sup>. Cultural difference leads to resituate knowledge by the perspective of the minority or the subordinated. The third space shows that the ‘sign are not fixed but can be appropriated, re-historicised, translated and there is no cultural purity, original meaning and no evolutionary development of ideas, history or culture’ (Childs & Williams, 1997: 142). For Bhabha, the postcolonial situation is always temporal and the present temporal time and space of culture is interrupted by the colonial past. This means that the past unconsciousness of colonialism reveals the trace of disavowal in the present cultural discourse, which is manifested by the cultural difference. As discussed earlier in this chapter, postcolonial theory disrupts the notion of linearity in the sense that the colonial past is repeated and echoed in the present cultural practice. In this sense, the time-space of the past interrupts the present. ‘It is temporal in so far as postcolonial repetition travels – or migrates – and is experienced mainly in the metropolis’ (Kraniauskas, 2000: 121). Moreover, according to Kraniauskas (2000), ‘this interruption recombines the past and present as a deferred reinscription’ and third space as, the time-space of culture is the moment of translation (121). This third space has postcolonial significance. ‘This kind of disjunctive temporality is of the utmost importance for the politics of difference. It creates a signifying time for the description of cultural incommensurability where difference cannot be sublated or totalised’ (Bhabha, 1994: 177). Bhabha indicates that

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<sup>25</sup> “Third space is a term used by Fredric Jameson that Bhabha discuss in his essay ‘How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation’ (1994: 217-219 in Childs and Williams, 1997: 155)

we need to rethink of temporality as disruptive and differential rather than linear. Culture is located within this differential time in which the past is reworked through the present and the present affected by expectations of the future and destiny (1994: 39). The differential quality of time disrupts identity; it is destabilised and capable of many constructions.

With regard to the third space, which is constantly changing and multi-layered, categories such as the postcolonial are more likely to open up a new understanding of the unevenness of the process of globalisation. 'Connecting the postcolonial with the global can bring into being a renewed sense of space and temporality in which a decentred, cross border rewriting of earlier nation-centred imperial narratives calls forth a rethinking of the global' (Slater, 1998: 670). In this sense, the implications of temporality can potentially play an important role in examining a postcolonial instance such as the contemporary South Korean context, in which constant translations of the meaning of globality in the local context could be seen as de-territorialisation or to some extent, re-territorialisation through the cultural hybridity. The temporality makes it possible to understand that space and time of the contexts themselves contain the contingencies of modernity/post-modernity, colonial/ postcolonial. Thus, the question of multi-temporal heterogeneity needs to be discussed further on the basis of empirical settings.

## **2.5. Women's identities as hybrid**

At this point, we can raise a question 'can these women's identities be called hybrid identities?' To some extent, the hybridity can be helpful in understanding and contextualising women's identity formation. However, it should perhaps be borne in mind that the concept is not necessarily a simple panacea for analysis of the complex and heterogeneous characters of women's identity practices in the postcolonial context. In particular, the notion can be problematic from a gender perspective. For this reason, the notion of hybridity needs to be re-examined and rearticulated not in the scope of theoretical discussion, but in the scope of women's cultural practices as observed in contextual settings.

From this perspective, the concept of hybridity faces two main criticisms. One is its conceptual ambiguity and the other is its lack of a political strategy. The first point is centred on the fact that Bhabha's hybridity is based upon textual analysis and the apparent lack of sensitivity of the material to lived experience. The sec-

ond is that the concept often ignores political implications including the unequal power relationships of globalisation. Thus, bearing in mind these two limitations of hybridity, the main issue for this thesis remains how to use the notion of hybridity critically as a contextualised term.

### *(2.5.1) Beyond conceptual ambiguity*

The criticism noted above that hybridity is ambiguous makes it difficult to confine applications of the concept since it has 'extreme openness and allows for unpredictable arbitrary and exclusionary closure' (Gomez-Peña, 1996: 12). Because of its elasticity and open-ended nature, the hybrid concept can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything. McRobbie (2005) also points out that 'one of the recurring difficulties with Bhabha's work is that his actual engagement with the realm of the inter-subjective or indeed with colonial practice, is fleeting and observational, even instinctual rather than analytical and sustained' (98). This problem of conceptual ambiguity may arguably result from the fact that Bhabha's works mainly deal with literary criticism and textual analysis. Indeed, relatively few empirical case studies in which the hybridity is scrutinised have been produced. Bhabha himself has not produced his own accounts of some verifiable social reality (McRobbie, 2005: 99). In other words, Bhabha's work has been focused on the destabilisation of textual meaning rather than on actual agency in practice. Thus, it can be argued that the notion of hybridity is a retrogressive discourse that celebrates the experience of privileged intellectuals. This view, echoed by Hutnyk, van der Veer and Yuval-Davis, claims that the notion of hybridity seems to be 'merely celebrating by the new diasporic intellectuals and not all minority voices from the margins are progressive' (Werbner, 2000: 15).

Despite their criticism of its conceptual ambiguity, the critiques necessarily emphasise 'the importance of grounding hybridity contextually and theoretically, utilising it tactically in individual projects and strategically' in postcolonial feminist theory at large (Karaidy, 2002a: 323). Thus, the contextualised notion of hybridity can be evoked in the transcultural dynamic practices of women and can be helpful to provide the conceptual tool to examine a vast array of complexity of women's identities formation in South Korean context. Emphasis on the historicised context can contribute to viewing transformative women's identities as hybridity, as involved in transcultural dynamic practices, which allows for a greater

degree of understanding complexity and temporality and in a more grounded way than the analysis of plain texts allows.

In this context, “practice” means ‘how structure is actively reproduced’ (Hall, 1985: 130). The emphasis on practice may be closely related to what critics point out the ‘moving agency from the subject as insurgent actor to textual performance’ in Bhabha’s concept of hybridity (Parry, 1994: 15). In this sense, the textual conflation of opposition between the coloniser and the colonisers leads agency to be conceived as remote from real contextual individual and collective experiences. In other words, the obscurity of the hybridity in Bhabha’s theory could not capture the dynamic and heterogeneous characters of women’s identity formation as social identity. Drawing attention to women’s identities in a specific context should be seen as interactions with various cultural flows, not with uniformed coherent cultural influence. As Appadurai claims, it is ‘not only local in itself but, even more important, for itself’ (1996: 181). The empirical research on the South Korean context can be located in this vein: by contextualising the notion of hybridity, it may hopefully be possible to illustrate women’s actual cultural practices in a way which extends the concept beyond textual analysis to the process of women’s actual cultural practice in South Korean context.

### *(2.5.2) Women’s transformative identities*

This then raises a significant question as to how the concept can be used as an analytic tool for the purpose of illustrating the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of identity formations whilst keeping intact the implications of hybridity, particularly in regard to its contribution to expansion beyond the binary scheme. Here, this highlights the need for a new term. Hence, for the purposes of this thesis, the term “transformative identities” is used to indicate women’s actual practice. This seems an appropriate term since transformation itself indicates ‘a movement, a shifting of this from here to there- whether there is imagined to be before or beyond or to inhere in certain elements within the present’ (Robinson, 2000: 286). In the course of cultural flows in the transnational settings, possibilities for transformation are produced by instabilities within the present social order including identities, as Butler points out (1990: 30 in Robinson, 2000: 286). As discussed, interactions between the coloniser and the colonised are always accompanied by ambivalence of the subject. The transformation, that is movements and changes,

refers to the states of dynamic cultural practices. Women's identity is 'constantly framed between the simultaneous vectors of similarity, continuity and difference' (Frankenberg & Mani, 1993: 293). In particular, Teresa de Lauretis writes about the so-called third world women's identity in this way:

What is emerging in feminist writings is [...] the concept of multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity [...] an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race, and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations, and that one insists on as a strategy

De Lauretis (1986: 8)

With the articulation of the concept identities and structures are dynamically linked, such that cultural practices, meanings and identities are operating within the limits of their condition and the historical context. The notion of hybridity serves to explain the dynamics, complexity and temporality of the practice of identity formation rather providing a clear causal explanation of coherent phenomenon. Jennifer Slack points out that 'the context is not something out there, within which practices occur of which influence the development of practice. Rather, identities, practice and effects generally constitute the very context with which they are practice, identities or effects' (1996: 115 in Karaidy, 2002: 333).

The problem of ambiguity of hybridity stems from Bhabha's whole project of deconstructing traditional categorisation. His position is an antithesis to fixity and to the rigidities of normative categorisations. In this sense, measuring Bhabha's work by using the rigid normative categories, might be impossible. For instance, for those who believe in rigid categories, identities could be defined in terms of few causal elements. However, if one examines women's identity formation using the term hybridity, then one finds that identity is simultaneously defined in terms of non-fulfilment and disruption, that is, it is constantly transformed. This thesis can be seen as the testing ground for how this problem of ambiguity can be unravelled in real social settings, to illustrate the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of identity formations in the South Korean context.

### *(2.5.3) The end of politics, or a new politics?*

However, applying hybridity to the analysis of "transformative gender identities" is not without other problems, particularly those associated with the de-



politicisation of women noted earlier in this chapter. An important critique of hybridity is that it is a political dead end or reactionary politics. Karaidy suggests that 'hybridity is a risky notion. It comes without guarantees' (2005: 1) and therefore it is questionable as to whether or not hybridity is political enough for an examination of gender. One of the main groundbreaking elements in Bhabha's theory is that hybridity is a concept for subversion of political cultural domination (Bhabha, 1994). However, hybridity has also been criticised with regard to its political implications, because 'it allegedly lends legitimacy to a corporate rhetoric that frames cultural mixtures as a market to be taken by capital and at the same time elides accusation of economic domination and assorted forms of imperialism' (Karaidy, 2002: 316). The notion of hybridity has been thought to be unclear about power relationships, which has been accused of ignoring inequality of globalisation in terms of class, gender and race and gives too much credit to consumer power. Pieterse raises several questions about the criticism of political implication such as 'what is the political importance of the celebration of hybridity? Is it merely another sign of perplexity turned into virtue by those grouped on the consumer end of social change?' (Pieterse, 1994: 171). Additionally, Shohat (1992) critically argue that, 'a celebration of syncretism and hybridity *per se*, if not articulated in conjunction with question of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence' (109).

To some extent, it is in agreement with these criticisms, and at the same time, it could be noted to consider whether the notion of hybridity does not really explain its political implications. However, it is noted by critics that a key question to analyse is 'what the political consequences are of moving from vertical and bipolar conception of socio-political relations to one that is *decentred* and *multidetermined*' (Garcia-Canclini, 2006: 440). Debates around neo-colonialism and late capitalism tend to return to the framework of cultural imperialism, which provides a relatively simple and obvious explanation for power relationships, in terms of global/local, dominant/dominated, rather than explaining the multi-layered power relationships of globalisation. This tradition of critical political economy, 'the cradle of the cultural imperialism debates, has historically viewed the concentration of media power as leading to cultural uniformity by way of eliminating diversity in its research for the mass audience' (Karaidy, 2002: 637).

Some would claim that hybridity is merely another name for the political indifference that is often used for criticising postmodern theories (Norris, 1990; Calinicos, 1999; Huntnyk, 1997; Webner, 2000). Nevertheless, the usefulness of hybridity in understanding the power relationship between the global and local, the dominant and the dominated, indicates a blurring, destabilisation or subversion of that cascading relationship. As Pieterse points out (1994), 'hegemony is not merely reproduced but refigured in the process of hybridisation' (173). The political implication of hybridity may be 'subversive of essentialism and homogeneity, disruptive of static spatial and political categories of centre and periphery, high and low, class and ethnos and in recognising multiple identities widen the space for critical engagement' (Pieterse, 1994: 174). Power would not function if it were exercised only on the basis of the binary assumptions. It is because, as Bhabha originally claims with regard to the concept of hybridity, everything is related and interwoven. Each component like the West and global media cannot play its part independently. Then, how can we see this complex and interwoven relationship? The answer could be found in Stuart Hall's theory of articulation, which is a combination of distinct determinations. The combination is not fixed, stable or eternally maintained but always changed and transformed. According to Hall (1986), 'a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together in a discourse, and way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures to certain political subject' (53 in Karaidy, 2002: 333). In this respect, Hall's articulation would give salient insight to developments of the notion of hybridity.

Thus, this thesis turns to the political implications in a global context for the purpose of illustrating the limits of Homi Bhabha's notion of the "hybrid" by moving beyond celebratory and static notions of different cultural experiences. As mentioned above, Bhabha's theory is based on his discursive and textual analyses, and the major concepts such as hybridity are conceived to operate only at the discursive level. If this is true, then, as Carton points out, 'critiques of the hybridity concept can remain ahistorical' (Carton, 2007: 146). In this vein, the argument upon which this thesis is based is that the notion of hybridity should be historicised and contextualised: the question of women's identities should be placed, and examined, within situational contexts that not only reclaim cultural specificity but also illuminate the differing constructions of women's identities across different classes and ages. Thus, transformative women's identities can be defined as the

situated women's cultural practices of a specific context and women's lived experience of history.

The attention in this thesis needs to be redirected from debating the political and theoretical usefulness of hybridity to analyse how "scattered hegemony" (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994) operates and constructs the formation of women's identities in the South Korean context. The hybridity in the South Korean context provides an initial conceptual platform for understanding the complexity of women's identity formation in global-local dynamics. One of important elements of transformative identities would be translation of global media from women's point of view. Transformative identity could also be considered as translational identities. Bhabha (1990: 211) makes a link between translation and hybridity whilst focusing on the importance of discourse and meanings. It thus becomes apparent that reflexivity was involved in this negotiation process of positions as women negotiated cultural differences and politics. Reflexivity is necessarily linked to translation because of the critical awareness of self and others in which women engage in the formation of identifications using these different discourses. 'Hybridity emerged in the identity repositioning, so translation as reflexivity is productive of a hybridity of the everyday' (Tate, 2005: 128). Translation is women's cultural practice throughout global media in which they are constructing subjectivities of audience simultaneously. Translation has 'a role to play in the processes of cross-cultural hybridisation that produce new and different types of identity' (Nelson, 2007: 361). My question is, therefore, how these new, hybrid forms of cultural interactions "translate" and domesticate particular women's identities formation in South Korea. What is involved in women's practice of translation, especially global media translation?

In this endeavour of transformative women's identities, I will apply the concept of hybridity in a critical way but being cautious about the generalisation of grand narrative theory. It will be helpful to theorise hybridity as an 'undecidable' which can be defined as 'that which no longer allows itself to be understood with (binary) opposition, but which...inhabits it, without ever leaving room for a solution' (Derrida, 1972: 58, in Karaidy, 2002: 332). In this thesis, hybridity is such an open concept because it is a 'simultaneously undecidable and conceptual inevitability' (Karaidy, 2002: 332). Thus it leaves the openness and elasticity that are needed to critically theorise the South Korean context. Thus, the concept of hy-

briduity as dynamic cultural practice can be used to emphasise contextualisation of South Korea and this thesis is an expression of a commitment to the critical engagement of hybridity in articulation with empirical analysis.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to search for a theoretical framework for analysing the complexity of the formation of women's identities. Given widespread globalisation, which seems to accompany the growing influence of global mass media, the field of global media studies focuses on this phenomenon, and attempts to analyse it in terms of cultural imperialism and neoliberal women's subjects. In spite of the persuasive power of the frameworks of cultural imperialism and neoliberalism, this chapter found that the contextualised view could capture the detailed, complex, and dynamic, local picture of the globalised world.

The chapter draws out postcolonial conceptual threads and discontinuity looking at the works of Spivak and Bhabha to locate possible conceptual tools for understanding the South Korean context. By deconstructing dominant western representation of the subaltern, the chapter begins with the question, "why can't the subaltern speak?" in order to recover the woman's voice in South Korea. Although Spivak rightly points out "epistemic violence" of white feminists, she generally insists on the impossibility of recovering the subaltern voice, oppressed by the repressive power of colonialism. In doing so, she herself risks oversimplifying women as subalterns – in fact women are a complex category in the Third World. Her argument could be problematic if read on the basis of constructing a monolithic collective of women, and contemporary female subalterns are equally incapable of making their voice heard, or of self-representation. Instead of a monolithic category of women, transformative, heterogeneous and contingent characters need to be analysed in the South Korean context. Thus, concepts such as "hybridity", "ambivalence" and "mimicry" may be helpful to understanding women's identity formation in South Korea.

The chapter highlights that hybridity offers a useful concept for understanding the complexities of women's identity formation: hybridity brings understanding of transcultural relations as complex, processual and dynamic space where intercultural practices are continuously negotiated in their practice. It should be noted that although the obscurity and political indifference of hybridity have been the

main subject of criticisms, the only way of showing its clarity and the political characteristics of hybridity is by narrowing down its specificity in the local context where the actual complex and transformative actions are practiced. This thesis suggests that debates should be shifted from textual analysis to real actors in the contextualisation of hybridity. In this sense, it is important to pay attention to the recent expansion of discussion about hybridity in the field of global media studies. Connecting the postcolonial with the global can provide a significant insight into the constantly renewing sense of space and temporality of South Korean women's experience, in which a decentred, cross-border rewriting of earlier cultural imperial narratives call for a rethinking of the global.

The dynamics and *complexity* of South Korean women's identity formation needs to be examined further, through the concept of hybridity. Up until now, hybridity has simply provided an initial conceptual platform for an understanding of the complexity of women's identity formation, in both its global and local media context. The thesis needs to contextualise hybridity with reference to actual women's practice. Hybridity can explain certain aspects, such as dynamics, complexity and temporality. It does not yet provide a clear explanation of the coherent phenomena that are the subjects of my empirical research. Therefore, these issues are examined in the three analytical chapters.

CHAPTER 3

**METHODOLOGY: A POSITIONING  
PROJECT**

**3.1. Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodology employed for this thesis and the methods used to collect empirical data in South Korea between 1999 and 2000, including the rationale for these methods and some of the issues which arose. During my fieldwork, I interviewed 101 women in 21 group interviews and individual interviews. I also collected data in other formats and contexts, including observation whilst socialising informally with informants. This chapter outlines the progression of decision-making for the methods, and subsequently the group interview process from designing interviews to pilot studies to main group interviews. It also highlights some problematic issues associated with the relationship between the researcher and the informants in the group interview situation and how to represent and interpret the informants' "talk".

The aim of group interviews was to approximate as far as possible women's everyday conversations about global media and to analyse how women constitute their identities through their talk. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on positioning the project, and particularly how to integrate the subject with debates on feminist empirical research by discussing some of the problems associated with analysing data collected in this way, and the process of interpretation and writing. Thus, this approach seeks to re-examine and attempt to recover the issue of marginalised women's voices and women's cultural practice, in this particular South Korean context and in relation to global media.

**3.2. Pilot studies: First sketch before fieldwork**

It is well known of course that pilot studies are extremely useful to give direction to research and the basic design of fieldwork research, which in this case is mainly based on conducting qualitative interviews. After completing a detailed outline of my research project, I visited South Korea to prepare for fieldwork between July and September 1999. My main aims in visiting the country of my birth for that summer were twofold: first, to collect secondary materials including research papers and articles in women's magazines and newspapers which sketch how young women have been influenced by the cultural flows of globalisation. Secondly, the visit provided a very good opportunity to conduct some preliminary interviews to get a first glimpse of what young South Korean women thought about themselves before the actual interviews that I would use as the source of data for this thesis. I also wanted to test out and make final decisions about the methods I would employ for collecting this data, specifically in deciding between individual and group interviews.

### *(3.2.1) Deciding between individual and group interviews*

I had a very good, and natural, opportunity to test out the viability of group interviews. As a result of my previous study and teaching experiences in the university, I had the chance to teach a course in the Sociology Department in Sogang University in Seoul during the month of September. The main subject of the class was cultural studies under the title of "An Introduction to Cultural Studies", and the class group consisted of 45 undergraduate students aged between 19 and 24 years old. As a part of curricular activities, the class was reorganised into small groups of students to have seminars in which they discussed a series of specific topics that were mainly related to cultural and media issues. I decided to conduct the groundwork for my research and use this platform to inform my fieldwork. Thus, the pilot studies were conducted in class and in casual conversations with groups after class. The students expressed great interest in my experiences abroad. They sought information on travelling and studying, and we discussed this in informal meetings in cafés or the campus canteens. My aim was to explore perceptions of cultural identities and differences in the South Korean context through a variety of means. Sometimes, I showed Hollywood films to them and we discussed clips

during the class. I drew the first sketch of what the students thought about western mass media<sup>26</sup> from this cultural studies class. During discussion inside and outside of class, students expressed what they felt and thought about western media. The students were fully informed about my research project and indeed were very interested and, after returning to my studies in London, our relationship continued. They continued to update my knowledge about their everyday lives including favourite popular films, music and fashion trends among their peers by e-mail exchanges.

In the few individual interviews I also conducted during this time, I thought that in a one-to-one setting it would be much easier for me to control the questions and to get the expected replies from the informants. I managed to have one-to-one interviews with only a few people. Very often, after making an appointment for an interview, the interviewees asked if they could bring their friends to the meeting place. Significantly, in one-to-one interviews, they seemed to pay more attention to what I thought of their answer rather than talking comfortably and freely. Intriguingly, during casual meetings after the class (in restaurants and cafés), I realised that my informants seemed to be much more comfortable to discuss issues with their peer group, rather than in one-to-one interviews with me. The group discussions provided a much more vivid picture of how informants conflicted and negotiated their thoughts with others. Moreover, formal and informal group discussions revealed spontaneous reactions to the questions and topics I raised, and offered a flourish of unexpected responses and resources for my research.

On the basis of the experiences in this first series of meetings, including group and individual encounters, my aim was not merely to decide upon the ultimate methods to be used in fieldwork but also to gather more preliminary knowledge about the kinds of issues which would eventually shape my thesis and actual data collection. I decided to conduct the rest of the pilot interviews on the basis of the group discussions, although I anticipated it would be harder to control the direction the discussion took. I had discovered that the students preferred to respond

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<sup>26</sup> At that time, there was not any distinction between American, western and global mass media in the knowledge that research known. The researcher assumes that global media would be dominated by American media.



to me as part of a group, partly because they may have been wary about the kind of questions I planned to ask, notably those about their sexuality and the pleasure they experience in consuming mass media. It may be that the more public nature of group discussions was assumed to provide a safe and comfortable space, where I might hesitate to ask intrusive and personal questions. In the context of the group discussion, they also debated issues on their own terms and demonstrated their own agreements and disagreements within the group.

In group discussions, the informants seemed to express their feelings and thoughts on various topics quite freely, including those dealing with western mass media and Korean culture. Interestingly, in the course of each discussion, the informants gradually shaped their own thoughts through conflicts with each other and by providing conclusions, which were based on their consensus, without the interviewer's intervention or intention. From this intriguing experience, I decided to reduce the planned controlled questions and minimise my role as a guide in the group interview. The main aim of the pilot interviews was shifted from getting immediate answers to my carefully controlled questions - including attitudes toward western mass media, consumer goods, films and movie stars - to observing the ambiguities and contradictions in their discourse about their identities. From a methodological point of view, this recognition also meant that I needed to acknowledge the complexity of informants' perspectives on the issues in question. I soon realised there was no "single" South Korean women's position in relation to culture and media.

### *(3.2.2) The impossibility of reconciling theory and practice*

As soon as I started sharing in young women's lives, I found it difficult to reconcile theory and practice. One of the interests of my research was to assess how young women's socio-economic backgrounds might influence their relationship to those Western representations of femininity omnipresent in the South Korean media. One important discovery in the pilot studies was the ways in which the young women negotiated their class positions through their level of consumption. Most residents of middle class communities had to work hard to maintain a level of consumption high enough to outwardly keep them in the ranks of the middle class. However, whilst such middle class identity was often perceived as most desirable, there existed a class ambiguity. In other words, it was really hard to find

the clear distinction between different classes with respect to language, accents, manners, and even patterns and tastes of consumption. Rather, the distinction between classes was obscured. Although some of the informants' class backgrounds may be said to belong to the "working class", they did not identify themselves with the "working class". This example shows that the class distinction from informants' construction is not exactly response to the concept of economic class boundaries.

Overall, therefore, in various ways, from methodological to content, the pilot study provided an outline for the subsequent fieldwork to be conducted as group interviews in which the young women who were the focus would be given freer rein than previously anticipated and in which assumptions, such as class categorisation, would be left to one side as far as possible.

### **3.3. Field work: Process and issues**

#### *(3.3.1) Group interview*

Following the pilot study and a return to London to refine my ideas, I conducted the fieldwork for 9 months, from April 2000 to December 2000. I managed to conduct interviews with just over 101 young women of different ages (21 groups) in the cosmopolitan city of Seoul and its suburban towns in Kyonggi-Do area. The informants ranged in age from 16 to 39 years and the majority of women were between 18-25 years of age (see, table 1). As discussed above, the experience of the pilot study had revealed that that the group interview would be the most effective way of observing dynamics and mutual interactions among young women informants, and really gaining an understanding of the complex way, they negotiated their identities.

According to Mayers and Macnaughten (1999), 'the great strength of group interview as a technique is in the liveliness, complexity and unpredictability of the talk, where participants can make sudden connections that confuse the researchers' coding but open up their thinking' (175). As during the pilot study, I also found similar cases during the fieldwork where the interaction between informants led to topics that I could not have predicted. One example of the complex and unpredictable nature of the group interview can be found in the unfolding of

personal secrets in the middle of conversation in the group interview. I often observed this kind of sudden and unexpected revealing of personal secrecy in the group interview. As mentioned above, the main reason I decided to conduct group interviews instead of relatively more controlled one-to-one interviews was that interviewees seemed to hesitate to talk about personal stories in the more intense environment of one-to-one interviews. This may be partly because, without having rapport and close relations, it is indeed hard to make interviewees talk about their personal stories and intimate issues. However, in the group interview, the unfolding personal and intimate stories were observed frequently. This was an unexpected phenomenon as I had thought that the group interview would be too open and public a space to expose such personal stories. However, my assumption turned out to be wrong. For instance, a group of four married young mothers who belong to the toddlers' club were discussing a film, *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995)<sup>27</sup>. The informants in the group discussed why they liked the film and questions were mainly about what the favourite scene was and why the film was so popular in Korea. In the middle of conversation, the following interaction occurred:

**Informant 1:** I was so touched by the film. I watched twice. I would not be able to resist if I met my fatal love...I would not have any power to resist such romance.

**Informant 2:** I don't know...would it happen to me...I doubt it.

**Informant 3:** Well...(hesitating with pause)...actually...once, I had that kind of experience.

(Informant 1 and Informant 2 express their surprise and turn to excitement. The informant 1 immediately goes to the door and closes the room door where we have the interview).

**Informant 1:** When did it happen? (Surprise and excited)

**Informant 2:** Where? Who is it? Tell me (very excited)

**Informant 3:** He was my school sweetheart. Last year, he called me and we begun to see each other...but, it was purely platonic.

(Informant 1 and Informant 2 are giggling and excited)

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<sup>27</sup> *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995, dir: Clint Eastwood) is a film about a brief and bittersweet love story between a married woman and a photographer. Although it is about a brief extramarital affair (based on Robert James Waller's novel), the film deals with a woman's life-long unforgettable romance. The film was very popular amongst women audiences in South Korea and became a big box office film at the time.

(Age between 34-39, Housewives from Parents group)

The original intention of the question had been about their response to the genre of the romantic Hollywood film. However, like myself, the other informants were surprised by this sudden revelation of the informant 3's personal intimate story. I did not expect this kind of revelation of a secret love story from the informants. In fact, this unfolding of stories in the middle of interviews caused confusion in some senses, but it opened up the thinking for the new discussion which followed. In this way, it can be seen that one of the benefits of conducting the group interviews was providing relatively free space for the informants. In contrast to structured one-to-one interview, informants can express their emotions and opinions freely without the interviewer's control.

In that experience, I felt stuck when my original questions were shifted and transformed by informants. However, I realised that the shifting and transformation of prepared questions could provide more a dynamic revelation of women's lived experienced and uncover their voices. It was an unexpected advantage of the group interview process and was based on a pre-existing rapport among informants. Thus, I aimed to make this pre-existing rapport a feature of the group interviews. As mentioned, the study consisted of twenty-one interview groups and included one hundred one young women's informants organised through university classes, churches, community centres, workplaces, toddler club, apartment residences, and other pre-existing groups in the area in order to make discussion as natural as possible within the group. This important condition for organising group interviews, on the basis of pre-existing groups, gave rise to the ability to grasp the unpredicted shifting and transformation, such as unfolding personal intimate stories, in the process of interviewing. As Kitzinger (1994b) notes, 'studying pre-existing groups help us explore how people might talk...within the various and overlapping grouping within which they actually operate. Flatmates, colleagues, family and friends - these are precisely the people with whom one might "naturally" discuss such topics' (105).

The size of groups in my interviews ranged from four to seven informants.<sup>28</sup> As Gillham (2005) suggests 'the natures of the group interviews are essentially unstructured internally' (61). Therefore, the interview questions are mainly unstructured and relatively open-ended. The need to remove the intimidating and intrusive nature of the interview and rely upon seemingly unstructured questions made it possible to 'observe the group process, the dynamics of attitude and opinion change' (Gaskell, 2000: 47).

Nevertheless, the lack of structure in the interviews did not obviate the research aims, although it became clear that the broad research aims would be determined in greater detail and depth by the informants themselves. The original research question was how the consumption of global media affects young women's identities in South Korea. Notably, I realised the informants wanted to talk about media in relation to their own everyday lives when I asked the prepared questions and thus the prepared questions became altered to fit with the lived experiences and representations of the women themselves. These key initial questions addressed by the research were as follows:

- How does the watching of Hollywood movies as a leisure activity fit into the social context of South Korean women's everyday lives?
- To what extent do South Korean women make sense of their own sexual identity in the process of watching global mass media?
- How do woman audiences distinguish and interpret the cultural expectations of women in South Korea when they watch women's images and narratives within global media culture?
- How does the concept of the West as a symbol of material success shape audience' perceptions of Western romance movies?
- How do women audiences use global media (film, TV drama, and magazine etc) to negotiate identity in women's lifestyle (body modification, love and marriage and motherhood)?

Of course not all of these questions could be addressed in all interviews and, as noted, the precise focus and unfolding of the interview focus depended upon the interviewees' interactions. Some group interview meetings lasted between two

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<sup>28</sup> This group interview is focusing on pre-existing groups including class mates, friends, colleagues in workplace and so on. In this sense, the size of the group is determined by the size of the pre-existing groups. The size of my group interviews is mainly between four and seven.

hours and four hours. Some discussion group members suggested meeting again, so I had two follow-up groups to ensure a maximum flow of relevant data, as incorporated by informants. Other groups invited me for dinner and I cannot say exactly how many hours these informal meetings lasted. Most group interviews took more than three hours at dinner, university classrooms, café or restaurant and visiting their home. As the fieldwork progressed, I asked fewer and fewer questions but just raised issues to talk about, then informants freely talked about their experiences and thoughts which were related to the issues I raised. The informants reframed the original direction and structure of my interviews and reconstructed group discussion in terms of their own interests and “dynamic”. The informants seemed to be waiting for somebody to listen to their stories and their discussions. I followed Morgan’s (1988) strategy of self-managed groups. In this variant of interview groups, I provide an initial introduction to the general themes and ground rules of the discussion; subsequently, the participants themselves help to facilitate the group discussion, while the researcher says very little.

Despite the advantage of the group interviews, there are the limitations of group interviews: some interviews can be difficult to manage when the problem of speech and silence occurs. Unstructured or semi-structured group interviews can also cause the problem of unbalanced participation in the conversation. Sometimes, one or two informants in a group were observed to dominate and lead the whole conversation. To prevent this kind of unbalanced participation, I had to intervene in their discussion to remind them of my research outline and give relatively silent and passive participants an opportunity to talk by asking their opinions. I recorded the whole interviews.

### *(3.3.2) Location*

As mentioned, most interviews were conducted in Seoul and its suburban towns. The city of Seoul has played an important and material role in the construction of South Korea’s modernity and its image. Seoul is a metropolitan city as well as a postcolonial space. It had a population of more than ten and a half million people in the early 1990s according to official sources. If one includes the population of the greater Seoul metropolitan area, this reaches over twenty million, which is more than one third of the entire population in South Korea (Nelson, 2003: 36). Greater Seoul is the centre of rapid modernisation and the frontline of globalisa-

tion. A space like Seoul might provide an effective place for conducting empirical research to show women's mobility and imagination in globalisation. According to Appadurai, 'The city, mobility and unforeseeable relationship between mass mediated events and migratory audiences defines the core of the link between globalisation and the modern' (Appadurai, 2000: 4).

Seoul is a postcolonial city because it is a centre both of postcolonial power and of modernisation. The city has been the capital for 600 years and it has witnessed all the elements of the modern history of Korea. Between 1910 and 1945, it was demoted to a regional centre, under Japanese colonial rule. Then, after the liberation, Seoul was ruled by another colonial power, the US Military, for three years. One of the tragic sets of events Seoul experienced was the three-year Korean War in the 1950s. Since then, Seoul has been the capital of a divided nation, and a centre for overcoming those tragic experiences. According to Nelson, the present Seoul manifests Korean society's collective determination to overcome the historical vicissitudes that have plagued the modern history of Korea (2003: 10). People are still migrating into the city, and its boundary is expanding beyond its traditional limits, consuming farmland, flood fields and pear orchards in Kyonggi-Do, the surrounding province. In the early 1990s, the Korean government decided to construct several new satellite cities to ease the problems of overcrowding in Seoul.

There are several reasons why I chose Seoul for my fieldwork. Firstly, as mentioned, Seoul and its suburban towns embody postcoloniality. The area contains the traditional and the modern; the cosmopolitan as well as the local. Secondly, Seoul is one of the most dynamic cities in the world. Once it was one of the poorest places in Korea, but within four decades it has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. Rapid changes and dynamism play a significant role in the formation of identities. It is a good place to observe liveliness and rapidly changing attitudes. Thirdly, the city was built on the ashes of the disastrous Korean War; the traditional class system was destroyed with the war. With the destruction of the class system, 'the possibility of mobility was open to people from other places. Since then, this mentality of mobility has been widespread' (Abelmann, 2004: 140-145). Consequently, the city is a dynamic space of mobility of class and rapidly spreading cultural flows at the heart of globalisation. Among the reasons and aspects noted above, the class factor is less significant for the forma-

tion of women's identities, whilst generation and age group are more important for observing different attitudes.

### *(3.3.3) Age group*

The majority of the groups (13 out of 21 groups) consisted of individuals aged between 18 and 25. The other five groups consisted of a mixed membership outside of this age range. I divided the majority 18-25 year old group by geography. I selected this age range, interviewees were between the ages of 18 to 25 because I judged this to be the time of early adulthood. It represents the age at which many young people are reaching the end of their school careers, and are faced with decisions regarding their future as adults (Walkerdine, 1997). At this age, they began to seek ways of achieving their possible dreams. In the course of seeking possibilities for their life, arguably, they begin to deploy their imagination in the practice of their everyday lives. Whilst seeking possibilities, the age group seems to experience a wide range of achievements and frustrations. With regard to cultural practice, they are very actively interacting with various cultural forms.

As well as these general reasons, I had a more specific reason for choosing this age group as informants who are particularly relevant to this thesis and its focus on the formation of young women's gender identities in this specific context. This age group embodies the rapid changes in South Korean society before getting married at the "average age, 25" (2000, National Statistics Office). Historically they have experienced rapid changes related to modernisation and industrialisation. Also, they are 'struggling with their counterparts in the older generation' (Cho-Han, 2002:177), their parents' generation. This means that their identities are adversarial and contradictory. This major age group can be described as "the daughters' generation" who were born in the 1970s and early 1980s and grew up under the strong influence of the global mass media, particularly the visual media. According to Cho, 'a majority of these girls lived in the urban setting and grew up in nuclear families. Their childhood memories are not of hunger but of piano lessons and martial arts classes. They had to struggle through an intense university examination war, more competitive for their generation than in the past, while being endlessly exposed to the enticements of consumer capitalism'



(Cho-Han, 2002: 178). This age group is the generation negotiating what are currently understood to be the collision of traditional values<sup>29</sup>. With postcolonial consumer capitalism, they are also a generation currently reaping the benefits of modernisation and global consumerism<sup>30</sup>.

One notable point concerning this age group is that they are well aware of discourses of independence and self-realisation based on the growing opportunities afforded by, and in, education. Traditional femininity continues to exert a negative influence upon the educational aspirations of girls (Cho-Han, K.W. 1990). 'Women of the mother's generation had fully supported their professional daughter's self-realisation' (Cho-Han, 2002: 179). However, while mothers wanted to see their daughters educated and become successful career women, at the same time, they also dreamed their daughters to be suitable brides for successful families. For the majority of the older generation, marriage is the ultimate goal, whether or not daughters have a professional career. 'These conflicting demands often confused their daughters when they were growing up. Once the daughters had grown up, their mothers were unwilling to provide the support they needed to sustain their careers' (Cho-Han, 2002: 179).

Therefore, as noted, I selected my informants primarily based upon an age group reflecting these interesting conflicts of identity which particularly relate to historical change and the influence of global media. There were however a variety of characteristics of these informants. The following table shows the whole list of informants' age, region and profession:

**Table 1 - Demographic data for group participants<sup>31</sup>**

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<sup>29</sup> In traditional Confucian familial ethics, women were supposed to do their filial piety as daughters, promote harmony in the family as daughter in law, be obedient to their husbands as wives and educate to their children as mothers. However, Lee argues (2000) that the Confucian tradition has been transformed by social change, and dramatically changed especially in the 1990s when globalisation accelerated.

<sup>30</sup> In Chapter 1, I explain that this age group have benefited from modernisation and global consumerism which I note to relate to the importance of period since the 1990s.

<sup>31</sup> The ordering of numbers is based on the sequence of in which the interviews were held.

Group No.	Group (number of participants)	Age	Location	Profession	Marriage status
1	Kyung-in Girl's Technical High School (5)	16	Incheon	Student (classmate)	Non-married
2	Gwanshin Technical High School (4)	17	Kyunggi-Do	Student (classmate)	Non-married
3	Karak High School (4)	15-17	Seoul	Student (film society)	Non-married
4	Hong-ik University (4)	20-21	Seoul	University Student (Department of Arts)	Non-married
5	Ehwa Women's University (4)	20-21	Seoul	University Student (Department of Music)	Non-married
6	Sook-Myung Women's University (7)	21-23	Seoul	University Student (Business Studies)	Non-married
7	Yonsei University (4)	20-23	Seoul	Student Union Women's department	Non-married
8	Sogang University (4)	22-24	Seoul	University Student (Book club member)	Non-married
9	Kyunghee University (4)	21-24	Seoul	University Student (Broadcasting society)	Non-married
10	Kyunggi University (4)	22-23	Seoul	University Student (Korean literature department)	Non-married
11	Hankyeore Cultural Centre (4)	20-21	Seoul	Adult education course	Non-married
12	Kyung-in Women's College (7)	20-21	Incheon	University Student (English department)	Non-married
13	Ogok Christian Church (7)	19-24	Kyunggi-do	Church peer group <sup>32</sup>	Non-married
14	Shingu College (5)	21-22	Sungnam city	College Student (Beauty Art De-	Non-married

<sup>32</sup> The youth club from the Christian (or Catholic) church cannot be categorised as a strict religious group. Rather in the South Korean context, it is widely regarded as a place for socialising and forming peer groups amongst many young adults.

			Kyunggi-do	partment)	
15	Seoul Fashion College (5)	22-27	Seoul	College Student	Non-married
16	Joong-ang Satellite TV Broadcast company (4)	25-27	Seoul	Office mate	Two expecting to get married
17	Shinwondang Apartment (6)	33-39	Wondang Kyunggi-do	Residence of Apartment complex	All married
18	Hansem Apartment (4)	27-33	Seoul	Residence of Apartment complex	All married
19	Parent group (4)	34-39	Seoul	Parent group of toddler	All married
20	Dong-A Apartments (6)	29-35	Ilsan, Kyunggi-do	Residence of Apartment complex	All married
21	Church group (5)	29-39	Seoul	Residence of Apartment complex	All married

*(3.3.4) Talking Melodramatic Stories: Three main themes*

In the course of the pilot interviews and main fieldwork, I noticed that informants tended to talk about media-related issues to explain their own everyday lives when I asked the prepared questions. When informants talked about their lives, it was frequently observed that they tend to talk about their lives melodramatically and there was a close relation between narratives on everyday lives and the melodramatic narratives of the media. This may have been because of the nature of the interviews in being closely related to media-related issues like films and TV dramas. Despite the original questions which I prepared for the interviews, I found that informants had a tendency to talk about their everyday experience by mobilising melodramatic narrative, images and texts of the films and television soap opera as resources. To some extent, the informant who talked about her life probably wanted to be seen as more melodramatic by her peers in the group interview. As seen in the above extract from the toddlers' club group, when an informant talked about her personal romantic encounter with her old school sweetheart, she seemed to want to connect her personal experience with the melodramatic film, *The Bridges of Madison County*. The tendency to melodramatise has also been found in other research. For instance, Nancy Abelmann's research on Korean women's experiences of social mobility observes a similar ten-

gency of women's melodramatic narration. According to Abelman (2003), there is a 'broader sense of melodrama as a narrative convention and sensibility' in women's everyday lives (23). This tendency has been pervasive in the process of informants' conversations and a 'means for their interpreting and making sense of experiences' with regard to media image and narrative (Peter Books, 1995: 205 in Abelman, 2003: 23).

In particular, in the pilot study, it could be observed that there is a common pattern of informants' melodramatic and other revelation and talk that tends to converge into a series of themes like love, marriage and body images (which, as a result, have become the foci of the empirical chapters of this thesis). The three issues could be seen to be the main general concerns for young women in contemporary South Korea, but it seemed more personal and specific as the issues seemed to what young women are facing as problems to solve in everyday lives. As a matter of fact, the interview raised various issues that women face in their everyday lives such as inequality, value conflicts between traditional and new women's roles, generation gap, and political and economic issues. However, as soon as they began to talk about those issues, I found that they were closely intermingled with the issues of love, marriage and body image. Thus, these then become the main topics to be discussed in the group interviews since it was probably easy to talk and mobilise them as examples for the informants to explain their lives. From an interviewer's point of view, the three themes were the most interesting subjects to make informants talk in the interview and also played a part as starting points for other various complex issues I wanted to discuss in the interview.

Moreover, with regard to cross-cultural practice, these three themes could be the key concepts to explain women's experience in everyday life. A mobilisation of informants' experiences, as "talk", could be seen throughout the informants' interpretation of foreign culture through global media. In this respect, women's reconstruction of their everyday life in the talk itself highlights an informant's cultural practice of global media (Abu-Lughod, 1995: 9; Ang & Stratton, 1995: 126; Dissanayake, 1993: 2; William, 1998: 53, in Abelman, 2003: 25). In a certain sense, the cultural practice of global media precisely drives transgressions in women's lives through the themes - body image, love and marriage. Informants understand and interpret global media through these three themes in their every

day practices. In addition, arguably the three themes are critically gendered as will be discussed in the later analytical chapters. These chapters based on the topics of plastic surgery, love and marriage, new motherhood, as highlighted by the informants in the process of interviews as the most common and contested realm of women's lives where globalisation is experienced. The three themes perhaps show women's interpretation and translation of different cultures; effectively, how the formation of women's identities as cultural practice conflict and negotiate in everyday lives throughout global culture.

### **3.4. Reframing power relationships**

Thus, the research process was more than just establishing an approach to the informants or collecting data. What I experienced in the complicated process of group interviews was that informants actually reframed and redirected the whole project, which has interesting implications for understanding power relationships in the interviewing process. As Kondo found, 'research participants cannot be seen as only subjects, but as active subjects, who have power to shape and control the researcher and the researched encounter' (1986: 80). I am not suggesting that I was always powerless as a researcher, or that feeling powerless correlates with being powerless in the process<sup>33</sup>. Rather, I highlight that the process of research was a mutual interchange of knowledge and power between researchers and informants. The mutual interaction between informants and researcher may suggest that research is situational, contingent, transformational and a continuously unfinished project, entangled in a specific temporality of the complexity of the field. In the sections below, I outline some of the ways in which this interchange of power and transformational process could be observed in my own research.

#### *(3.4.1) Ignoring and correcting questions by informants*

My main question in the first instance was what young Korean women think about, and how they react as an audience to, the influx of global mass media into their lives. The network of informants was widened from the initial contacts made

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<sup>33</sup> With reference to power relations, some scholars suggest that the informants generally do not have the institutional power that researchers have (see, Wolf, 1996: 22)

with people who took part in the pilot study in 1999 by asking them to introduce me to their family members and friends. In the interviews, I explained my project to the new set of interviewees, although the mediators had also already done so to some extent when they introduced me to them. At the beginning of the interview, I asked them to introduce themselves and to provide some general biographical backgrounds. I started with a general question, such as what their favourite western film was and why, to encourage interviewees to begin to talk freely. As soon as the situation settled down, I got into the main bodies of questions about their attitudes towards the images of Hollywood movies, and their cultural preferences, tastes and sexuality. I expected to have direct reply from my informants. However, my questions sometimes were redirected and reframed by informants. One clear example of this is as follows:

**Researcher:** What is your favourite Hollywood movie and why?

**Informant A:** my favourite movie is *Christmas in August*<sup>34</sup>. The film is about our everyday life and love. I felt so touched and I cried a lot. It gave me a happy memory after watching.

**Informant B:** I had started to see the Hollywood movies since my middle school for a long time and I got bored and I am not interested in that anymore in the certain period because most Hollywood stories were not pleasurable and I became fed up with the frame of a story of Hollywood. It's so typical, isn't it? From that point, I started to see the South Korean movies. I thought the Korean movies are getting better in terms of plot, story and the filming skills.

**Informant C:** Hollywood movies are not ours. That is the reason it doesn't remain in my memory. I just laughed at the movie. That's it. I was not touched by it. I forgot the movie as soon as I got out of the cinema theatre.

(Age between 20 and 21, University students)

As the extract illustrates, informant A ignored my original question, which was asking about her favourite "Hollywood" movie, and answered about her favourite Korean movie. On this and other similar occasions, I initially thought that my question had not been clear to my informants when my question was ignored. Sometime, I asked the same question twice. However, I gradually noticed that many of my informants (over half of group interviews) consistently ignored my

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<sup>34</sup> The original title is '*Palwole Christmas*' (Director: Jinho Huh, Uno Film, 1998) based on romantic love story. I will discuss this film in detail in chapter 5.

question and discussed their favourite Korean movies. In the case of awareness of the original question (informants B and C), many informants started to criticise Hollywood movies and to redirect the topic towards the popular Korean films that they were interested in. In the same vein, the following extract shows that informants ignored the question intentionally.<sup>35</sup>

**Researcher:** Who is your favourite Hollywood movie actress?

**Informant:** My favourite movie star is Shim Eun-ha. She looks really pure and graceful. I want to be like her.

(Age 20, University student)

This type of reaction was commonly found when I raised the same question in many interviews. It provoked quite different answers from those intended by my question. As will be discussed later, the majority of informants seemed to reframe my question and raised another issue: the Korean actresses they want to be identified with. Fewer informants answered the question that they want to identify with Hollywood actress. This shift of the original question is perhaps very interesting in that it reveals a certain aspect of the dynamic relationships between local audience and global media. It is possible that, to show the complex relationship between the local and the global, the informants might have reconstructed their image of western culture through the localised medium of the Korean actresses, such as Shim Eun-ha as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Thus, as these examples show, in the course of conducting interviews, I realised that my informants were reframing and reconstructing the questions. Moreover, one of the informants directly pointed out my tendency to treat the local women as passive and victimised by globalisation. This means they attempted to redirect my research orientation and emphasise the active and contingent tendencies of young women's position.

**Researcher:** What do you think about this strong influx of the western mass media in the process of globalisation after 10, 20 years?

**Informant:** Can't we have some influence on them (western country)? Look at Asian countries where our movies are huge hits, and the Japanese and the

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<sup>35</sup> However, the rest of informants (even those who were high school students) responded to this question by stating that their favourite films were the classical movies such as *The Roman Holiday* (1953), *East of Eden* (1956), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Waterloo Bridge* (1940).

Chinese are crazy about our movie stars and films. I hope we can make an impact on western culture.

(Age 21, College student)

During interviews, I often experienced the reversal of the power relationship between researcher and informants, but more particularly a pointing out of the limits of my own assumptions about knowledge and expertise.<sup>36</sup>

Knowing well that without collecting data from these “unmanageable subjects”, the research project would not work well, I reluctantly changed my plans and agreed to try and meet their demands. I discovered that this kind of contingent and spontaneous reactions from the informants generated more valuable data and redirected the research in a more positive way. As Muetzelfeldt mentioned, ‘the unplanned and unexpected plays a major part in almost all fieldwork and is often important in shaping the direction of the research and the analysis’ (Muetzelfeldt, 1989: 41). This situation of resistance from women illustrates Margery Wolf’s (1992) cautionary advice about the reversal of power relationships between fieldworkers and their informants.

Even the most arrogant neo-colonialist soon discovers that one cannot order people to reveal important thoughts about their culture... Those who carry the culture and those who desperately want to understand it may participate in a minute of unspoken negotiations that totally reverses the apparent balance of power.

(Wolf, 1992: 134)

In addition to women’s resistance to my efforts to separate them in individual interviews, as mentioned earlier, this disruptive practice suggests that relationships within interpretive communities of informants can have surprising and unanticipated implications for research practice. I subsequently avoided interrupting their rhythm and the dynamic of their discussion, as illustrated in greater depth below.

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<sup>36</sup> Before interviews, I had a strong ideas that global media is American dominant media, however, they corrected me, showing that global media can be the Korean media itself (Korean wave).



### *(3.4.2) Informants often lead the group interviews*

In the earlier stages of the research, my main aim was to gain a more adequate understanding of young women's construction of western culture in South Korea, as I discussed above. Gradually, I realised all these questions were connected, and informants answered several questions at the same time. Informants' everyday lives were inextricably bound up with the effects of mass media. Although questions were designed to address several areas that were categorised, informants kept blurring categories by reframing my questions. The interviewees questioned my questions as they told their life stories. I did not have a chance to ask further questions; the informants did not appreciate the rhythm of their own discussion being interrupted. They appeared eager to talk, tell their stories, and be listened to. I realised that "unspeakable" listener and "invisible" observer became the major role of the researcher in the group discussion. I decided to let my informants lead their discussion about the media they consumed, rather than analyse their relationship to a specific type of text. In this way, informants helped me gain knowledge of the contemporary cultural context of their peers, and shared everyday life. In order to gain insight into their backgrounds, I ate snacks and lunch at cafes with groups of women, was invited for dinner at their homes, went to cinemas, and accompanied them on shopping trips.

However, being a listener also meant that I had to constantly negotiate the delicate boundary between being a confidante and being comfortable with authority. In the role of confidante, I found myself listening to stories about secret rebellions, resentment against their mothers' generation, dreams of extra-marital affairs and tales about friends who had extramarital affairs and so on. Despite their eventual willingness to share their fears and complaints about gendered social pressures, I still wondered whether young women would have been more open about their sexuality with a westerner (outsider) who might be seen as less likely to judge them based on cultural expectations of women's behaviour in South Korean society. The well-known word "rapport", which is often used to signify acceptance and warm relationship between informants and researchers, was thus

something I could not take for granted despite being an “insider”: all I could claim was an imperfect rapport.<sup>37</sup>

My informants frequently commented to each other, disagreed and provided agreement, for example, when they discussed the “western look” for the topics of plastic surgery and sexual relationships before marriage. For many of the topics they discussed, they constructed their own final consensus. In terms of the group interviews, the informants chose to discuss subjects such as plastic surgery, romantic love and marriage and conflicting views of motherhood. When I analysed the interview materials, I could discern four main issues from their active construction of discussions: appearance/fashion, plastic surgery, love and marriage, and conflicts concerning motherhood. Thus, my informants’ interests decided the main themes for my analytic chapters, rather than by my research intention, which was women’s spectatorship of Hollywood movies. My interview questions were open questions and focused on the style of group discussion and spontaneous reactions from the interviewees.

As discussed above, in my fieldwork experiences, I often found out that informants in the group interviews raised and shifted topics, agreed and disagreed and interrupted each other. Certainly group interviews can disrupt researchers’ original assumptions and encourage research informants to explore issues, identify common problems and suggest potential solutions through sharing and comparing experiences (Johnson, 1996, Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999:18). These dynamics within group interviews can offer a useful addition to developing a new politics of knowledge (informants as a subject position in the research) by accessing incomplete knowledge and stimulating the sociological imagination in both researchers and informants.

### *(3.4.3) Repositioning*

Writing about one’s own culture from another cultural context, and in a foreign language creates many theoretical and moral conflicts. What I am writing and for whom, my position as a researcher, a so-called “non-native woman” woman lo-

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<sup>37</sup> There are much research on the issue of rapport in conducting interviews. For more information, see Oakley (1981), Devault (1990), Phoenix (1994), Luff (1999) and Berger (2001).

cated in a subordinate position within Western society. To try to define oneself intellectually and politically as a non-western feminist is not easy. It is an unsettling position, but one often feels forced into giving an account of oneself. There is nothing inherently wrong with the project of giving an account of one's specific location as a speaker and thinker; of the complex experiences and perceptions and sense of life that fuel one's concerns; of the reasons, feelings and anxieties that texture one's position on an issue; of the values that inform one's considered judgement of things. I occupy a suspect location, in which my perspectives are suspiciously tainted and problematic products of my "westernisation". When many non-western feminists criticise their own culture, they often confront the paradoxical position, which the criticisms they raised are merely one more incarnation of a colonised consciousness: the view of a privileged native woman with a white face seeking values.

On the other hand, calling myself a "South Korean feminist" is problematic only if the term is understood narrowly, to refer exclusively to a feminist living and working in South Korea, as it is sometimes understood. When following Gorelick's view, such an analysis requires that 'someone is able to step back and do analysis, or facilitate its emergence among the participants, raising again the questions of the segregation of milieus, the social biography of researchers, the researcher-participant relationship, and so on' (Gorelick, 1991: 473).

Feminist epistemology, like these other enterprises, must attempt to balance the assertion of the value of a different culture or experience against the danger of romanticising it to the extent that the limitation and oppression it confers on its subject are ignored. The study of variety and inequalities among women and full recognition for the voices and experiences of non-white, non-western women transforms the sense of categories such as "women", "gender" or "patriarchy" – not just by testing them in a global cultural setting, but by re-evaluating them in postcolonial contexts. According to de Groot, 'historical and contemporary accounts of "femininity" and gender relationships need to be shaped by an understanding of the interactions of global and colonial power, and the construction of racial and cultural difference and inequality with gender and class relations and culture within Western societies' (de Groot, 1997: 33).

A postcolonial condition that has been engendered by the blurring and shifting of geographical, cultural, political and economic boundaries has exposed the limita-

tions of our social vocabulary. As Third World feminists engage socially not only as women but as non-white women – positioned as Other in a predominantly Eurocentric society - everyday social transactions involve a multiplicity of interconnected and sometimes conflicting subjectivities. Thus, my writing and knowledge would be a situated, partial, selective, and imperfect one. The aim of the study is not representativeness to generalise about South Korean women, but rather attempts to illustrate the process whereby informants elaborate their identities in their everyday lives in the process of globalisation.

### **3.5. Analysis and Questions**

Before transcribing the recorded conversations of interviews, before recording, I took note of the background characteristics of informants such as age, occupation and period of marriage if relevant. The demographic data for group participants is shown in table 1. All interviews were transcribed. Before interviews, informants agreed that all talk could be transcribed and transcripts would be sent by e-mail in order to get their consent. After transcribing, all group interviews were sent by e-mail and got the informants' consent that the transcribed materials could be used and quoted for my research. The recorded interviews and its transcripts provide a highly detailed picture of the process of their interactions and of the construction of their ideas and opinions.

#### *(3.5.1) Interpreting Women's Talk*

If the study emphasised the process of informant construction of their opinion through the group interviews, a second set of questions were also raised: How I can sift and transmit the informant's ideas and attitudes from the interview materials, without losing the rich and dynamic conversational context? In particular, how should I represent marginalised women's voices without the researcher's customary prejudice and bias? These questions seem to be closely related to the problem of representing the interview material. And they relate to those discussed in the previous chapter: how to capture the vivid dynamic contextualised cultural practice of women's identities, without jeopardising an understanding of the complexity of their situation. It could be observed from the interviews that individual talking reveals a dispersed, not centred and coherent, discussion. In

this respect, I pay much attention to women's talking methodologically. Informants' conversation in the group interview is an integral element in the constitution of social life. In the course of talking in the group interview, informants constitute their realities with their peers. This is a process of temporal constitution of social context (Currie, 1999). More significantly, social context, which embodies public and ideological components, is constituted through talk, but also imagination is constituted through narrative. As mentioned, the main aim of this research is to examine how women construct their identities and constitute their lived experiences through talking and storytelling. As such, the research is less interested in unravelling hidden underlying reality or truth. Rather, this approach is quite opposite to the so-called realist approach; that aimed at discovering underlying truth. In my research, the 'narrative necessarily engages the imagination, thus challenging the, or a prevailing sense of the "real"' as Nancy Abelmann claims (2003:11). Thus, my analysis of the interview material is intended to ascertain what people believe and how they act on the basis of what they say.

In this sense, the transcripts which contain women's talk from the group interview can offer a practical way of eliciting complexity in the formation of identities, and analysing informant's talk shows the situated-ness of their conversation, and complexity with which people express, explore and use opinion. The transcripts as "talk" can also illustrate identity formation, which is less fixed, definite and coherent. The analysis can follow the form of 'developing critiques within social psychology and sociology; of approaches that reify social attitudes and assume that they remain fairly stable, that they determine opinion in the specific case that they are linked to other traits and they can be elicited reliably' (Myer & Macnaughten, 1999: 174)

Despite of all the advantages of the group interviews, there are problems however. How does one access informants' true beliefs and opinions? How can one believe and take informants at face value in the interview? Epistemologically, is there any 'truth' out there? Social constructionists echo these questions and insist that individuals do not have stable underlying attitudes and opinions. Rather, beliefs and truth are constructed through the process of interaction (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994 in Hollander, 2004: 612). In other words, 'conformity, groupthink, and social desirability pressures do not obscure the data. Rather, they *are* the data because they are important elements of

everyday interaction' (Hollander, 2004: 612). In this respect, as mentioned above, the focus of my research is not to find the best possible way of extracting "the true statement" from informants' interviews but rather to how to understand and analyse the multiple, complex interaction forces that lead informants to constitute their own truth and realities with others, and manufacture new versions of reality in a given context. Scott's statement is useful here to show the main methodological principle of approaching the interview materials: 'Who could be truer than a subject's own account of what she has lived through?' (Scott, 1999: 82). The informant experience is not 'individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience' (1999: 83). If an understanding of my interview materials means they become a site for analysing the collaborative construction of meaning, then concerns about "the truth" become much less problematic. As Kitzinger (1994b) argues, 'differences between interview and group data cannot be classified in terms of validity vs. invalidity or honesty vs. dishonesty' (173). Thus, I attempt to analyse the process of how informants conflict and negotiate their conversation with awareness of social context.

The issue of representation is manifest throughout the research process, from conceptualising the research question, to disseminating the findings. The transcripts cover a huge amount of pages, and the topics seem disparate, because the informant's talk shifts and transforms, as mentioned above. Thus my interpretation and representation of the interview material follows several tracks. First, I approach the interview material thematically – body modification, love, and marriage. Second, under these three themes, I focus on finding the moments of contest and commonality of informants' conversation. Third, I select particular quotes from informants – extracts that can highlight and reveal the complexity of women's identity formation, how informants conflict, and how they negotiate women's identities through global media. This is the most complicated, and the hardest part, of the research process. It was difficult for me, as a researcher, to make decisions about the selection of data. Feminist researchers have criticised the process of interpretation as itself a selective production of truth that reflects the purpose of the researcher, rather than the informants' representation of their reality (Stacey, 1991). This is no doubt the case to a certain extent but it would be difficult to avoid unless there were element of selection or interpretation whatsoever. In this way, it is hoped that the data's high level of internal validity has been maintained. The self-selecting nature of interview materials cannot be general-

ised. My research aim is not to generalise about South Korean women. I can only claim that my study may show the temporality and specificity of the informant's conversation, as it occurred when I conducted the interview. Nevertheless, I am aware of the discussion regarding how I committed myself to managing representational concerns, 'given that what we know is situated, partial, selective, and imperfect, representational issues could not be completely resolved' (Hole, 2007: 708).

### *(3.5.2) Informants' conversation, media representation and feminist views*

One of important issues with regard to the group interview is that informants very often took their resources for their discussion from the media. For example, the informant's 'dialogues are engaging melodramatic texts, narrative or moments': the dialogue includes comments like "someday, I would love to have a romantic love like a movie" (Welch, 1996: 16, Abelman, 2003: 23). In order to locate each informant's conversation in a specific social context, I also collected data on media representation and feminist views on the issues I am dealing with: women's body modification, love and marriage, and *Missjok* as a new femininity. I recognise that informants' identities are negotiated in the awareness of these media resources and they seem to have fully used the resources among these discourses (in the groups I look at how informants set up and work out roles). In this vein, women's talking should be interpreted within the larger context. Conversation and storytelling in the group interviews vividly show how they constitute their own identities in social context. However, their conversations are dispersed and decentred as described above. The specific context of each informant's conversation should be displayed.

I collected data thematically for each chapter. The films, television dramas, articles from daily newspapers, weekly magazine and women's magazines were collected before and after conducting my fieldwork in order to situate informants talk within the social context. Moreover, it is important to place the feminist views in this context as well. The thematic subjects are closely related to women's everyday lives, as so many feminists have commented on these same issues. Therefore, in particular, I collected articles that feminist scholars wrote and commented on from daily newspapers and magazines, not from academic journals or books. It is because I have observed that my informants were already well

aware of feminist's discourse on the issues and sometimes they mobilise the discourses as resources to build up their own storytelling. As I will show in the following chapters, feminist commentators (sometimes not exactly feminist scholars, but newspaper articles introduced some writers as feminist commentator) wrote short piece articles in the role of expert's opinions of newspapers or journalists usually ask their opinions and ideas about a specific phenomenon.

The combination of the three dimensions of materials can make the research more reliable. This approach enables the researcher to explore how informants are aware, and how they are using and interplaying media representation. Thus, this approach will help the researcher to untangle informants' responses and their relationship to the social contexts of process of identities formation. The combination of research in my study can allow seeing women's liveliness and complexity of identities formation as social subjects.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

The chapter provides a detailed overview of the pilot study and the semi-structured group interviews, which were conducted in South Korea between 1999 and 2000. The chapter has been divided into sections to discuss the research process and its related issues: the pilot study, the main phase of the group interview, reframing power relationship and related issues in analysis. As discussed, the pilot study was useful to shape and design the main phase of the group interview. In the fieldwork, I conducted interviews with 101 young women of different ages (21 groups) in the cosmopolitan city Seoul and its suburban towns in Kyonggi-do area. The majority of informants are aged between 18 and 25.

The semi-structured group interview explores the liveliness, complexity and unpredictability of women's talk in which informants express their own thoughts and attitudes toward media representation as well as constituting their identities. The pre-existing familiarity and rapport between informants provides a more comfortable and protected space to unfold personal intimate stories. The unstructured group interview makes it possible to observe the dynamics of attitudes, contradictions and negotiations of cultural practice throughout global media. While conducting group interviews, one of the important findings is that informants tend to talk about their own experiences by mobilising media-related issues. Also it can be observed that informants' experiences are expressed as a form of the



melodramatic narrative, image and text of the films and soap opera. This melodramatic reconstruction of their everyday lives shows the close relationship between global media and experiences. In this sense, the cultural practice of global media shows precisely how to construct women's identities throughout themes - body image, love and marriage that have been highlighted by the informants. These three themes as important marks can show women's interpretation and translation of other cultures throughout global culture.

In the discussion of reframing power relationship, I highlighted the process of research was mutual interchange of knowledge and power between researcher and informants with examples: ignoring and correcting questions by informant, and leading the group interviews by informants themselves. These dynamics serve as a useful addition to developing a new politics of knowledge (informants as subject position in the research). The recorded interviews and transcriptions provide a highly detailed picture of the process of their interactions and constructing their ideas and opinions.

In terms of the analysis of these interview materials, the transcripts as women's "talk" can be seen as an integral element in the constitution of social life and can offer a practical way of eliciting the complexities of identity formation. Women's conversation is a process of identity formation that is less fixed, definite and coherent. Despite the advantages of group interviews, questions are raised about how to access informant's true beliefs and opinions and how to believe informants' face value in the interview. In agreement with social constructionists, the research shifts focus to how to understand and analyse the multiple, complex and interactional forces, instead of this focus on discovery of "truth". Thus, the self-selecting nature of data cannot be generalised and in this research, the issue of representation is necessarily partial, constructed and situated.

In order to locate informants talk in the social context, the subsequent chapters of this thesis will each describe media representation discourse and feminist views on the themes this research is dealing with - plastic surgery, love and marriage and femininity and will attempt to untangle informants' responses and their relationship to the social contexts of in which the process of identity formation occurs.

CHAPTER 4

NEITHER WESTERN NOR KOREAN:  
CONSUMING PLASTIC SURGERY IN  
SOUTH KOREA

**4.1. Introduction**

During the 1990s, Korea experienced a rapid transformation of its cultural identities. The rapid transformation has catalysed the reconstruction of new forms of identities in the process of globalisation. Women's bodies are the site where the rapid transformation of identities is visibly manifested. In this sense the cultural practice of body modification in South Korea has significant implications. Plastic surgery has increased explosively since the last 1990s and the phenomenon is unprecedented. The issue of plastic surgery is an important topic to be explored because of its "religious cult-like"<sup>38</sup> status. In this chapter, I will explore the role of global media in proliferating this new social trend and women's interpretations of this trend. The global media has gradually constructed a consensus about plastic surgery, and has pervaded the mainstream discourse explaining why women want plastic surgery. Nearly every magazine and newspaper in South Korea has published a special issue explaining and analysing the phenomenon. Thus, this chapter is prompted by a number of questions about the formation of global media images in different local and historical contexts, which arise, from these media discourses and the topics that arose in the group interviews. Traditional norms of Korean culture, as well as the globalisation of culture, have been influential in

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<sup>38</sup> According to the Korean Integrated News Database System (Kinds), it can be found that 1,188 newspaper articles that dealt with the issue of plastic surgery, or at least contained the word, "plastic surgery" in the articles during the 1990s. However, the number of articles which contain the word "plastic surgery" has increased by 7,155 since 1 January 2000. ([www.kinds.or.kr](http://www.kinds.or.kr)).

shaping the conflicting identities of South Korean women. For example, as this chapter will illustrate, there is the contradiction between women adopting a western beauty standard, whilst opting for eyelids surgery to contextualise their new identity formation as a representation of new femininities in the South Korea.

The issue of the double subordination of Korean women in relation to plastic surgery – women victimised by Korean patriarchy and western standards of appearance – has been decidedly absent from the work of western feminists, and in global media studies, as the following discussion demonstrates. However, the global prevalence of plastic surgery has been a controversial subject in women's studies. Women's cultural practice for purely aesthetic reasons is widely regarded as making them victims of a patriarchal social system. Many feminist scholars have been critical of the practice of plastic surgery (Wolf, N. 1991; Bordo, 1993; Balsamo, 1996). According to this criticism, the practice is beauty oppression, linked to patriarchal control and the male dominated capitalist enterprise. In particular, Kathryn Morgan claims that whilst it may appear that women cultivate and control their bodies, in fact their bodies are colonised by men (Morgan, 1991). Furthermore, when attention is turned to the issue of so-called "ethnic plastic surgery" that is practised in order to reduce or remove a specific ethnic or racial marker (e.g. the Jewish nose and the oriental eye-lid) (Haiken, 1997; Kaw, 1993; Piper, 1996), then this has sometimes led to women being accused of denying their racial and ethnic heritage and their bodies being linked to racist practices of subordination and exclusion (Haiken, 1997: 189).

However, recently, some feminists changed their focus on plastic surgery to consider plastic surgery as a cultural practice and an intervention in identity (Davis, 1995; 2003; Gimlin, 2000; 2007; Fraser, 2003a; Jones, 2007). In particular, Kathy Davis points out that the critiques of ethnic cosmetic surgery need to 'open up possibilities for a feminist analysis of multiple intersecting identities and surgical reconstruction of the body' (2003: 81). Identities are negotiated in specific historical and social contexts in which cultural construction of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality; age and nationality shape how individuals perceive their bodies as well as the kinds of bodily practice that are considered desirable, acceptable or appropriate for altering the body (Davis, 2003: 84). Her argument offers a fresh insight into complex practices that have different meanings depending on the cultural and historical context. In this sense, analysing of the multiple intersection of

plastic surgery in South Korea can be one starting point for a contextualised analysis of cosmetic surgery as cultural phenomenon.

In this chapter I argue that, in the context of South Korea, the widespread practice of plastic surgery cannot simply be condemned as irredeemable oppression nor categorised as the simple empowerment of women's position. My argument is not even about the double subordination by patriarchal ideology or an envy of Caucasian appearance. Rather, it is about the process of constructing identities and far more complex processes of cultural production. In some instances, as Davis suggests, women are well aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the results of altering their appearance. However, in my analysis of media representation of the issue and the discussion of young women in the group interviews, I also found that women absorb the influence of the Western standards of feminine beauty and translate them in their own way. Consequently, I attempt to argue in this chapter that attitudes toward the practice cannot be categorised according to any predetermined criteria. Plastic surgery as a cultural practice perhaps has to be understood at the level of daily life of South Korean women. Furthermore, studying South Korean women's plastic surgery in this way may increase our understanding of the ambivalence and the dynamics of the subjectification of young South Korean women's identities in relation to global mass media.

Thus, using this example of plastic surgery, I examine two questions in this chapter. First, what can postcolonial concepts, such as "hybridity", "mimicry", "in-between", and "ambivalence", offer when trying to comprehend the specificity of Korean women's experiences in forming national, ethnic and gender identities in a global context? Second, how does the complexity of South Korean women's cultural practice of plastic surgery reflect the possibility that global processes, as projected through media images, may be transformed in the local context?

In order to address these questions, I first show how popular plastic surgery is proliferating among young South Korean women, and how the dominant discourse on plastic surgery has been represented in public commentary, including mass media, and social activist/feminist views. I explain the dominant binary discourse of western/other appearance in relation to plastic surgery and show how the consumption of global media through plastic surgery in the South Korean context blurs the boundaries of Western/Korean, Other/Self and, culture/nature. This consuming practice (of women's plastic surgery) can be exemplified in the

transformation of “new femininity”. Considering South Korea as a postcolonial context, the ongoing cultural history of plastic surgery is a history of the post-colonial period with all its contradictions and complexities. In this endeavour, I am attempting to use postcolonial theory to analyse the cultural consumption of western images in global and local contexts that challenge their status as simply “dominant”. While I do not underestimate the dominant power of global culture, its meaning only becomes real or material at the point that global culture is activated in, and among, subjects. Therefore, in this chapter, I amalgamate postcolonial theory with theories of the cultural practice of plastic surgery, in the South Korean context. The earlier sections of this chapter will demonstrate how this discourse is constructed through the mass media, whilst my empirical data will be used in subsequent sections to analyse these talks from personal perspectives.

## **4.2. Plastic surgery in South Korea and its dominant discourse**

### *(4.2.1) The phenomenon of growth of plastic surgery in Korea*

Plastic surgery is increasingly popular in contemporary South Korean society. It has developed into something of a phenomenon, with the media playing an essential role in making it acceptable for an ever-growing population. Since the late 1990s, it has increased particularly explosively. Even the current president confessed to having an injection of Botox<sup>39</sup> to reduce the wrinkles on his forehead (Chung, J-R, Chosun Daily, 10 June 2002). Some people compare this extraordinary social phenomenon with a new religious cult. Recently, the mass media has increasing paid attention to this trend. According to a daily newspaper<sup>40</sup>, ‘the rate of the general public going under the knife is currently at about 13 percent in Korea, while that in the United States is less than 3 percent. Moreover, 60 percent of

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<sup>39</sup> Botox® is one of the newer plastic surgery techniques involves injecting a small amount of the nerve poison that causes botulism into the forehead between the brows. This temporarily paralyses the corrugator muscle, the one that knits the brow together. After the botox treatment, the vertical lines between the brows disappear, no matter how vexed or perplexed a person is (Etcoff, 1999: 114).

<sup>40</sup> The validity of these findings should be regarded with caution given that this was not research published in a peer-reviewed journal but nevertheless can be taken to indicate prominent discourses.

respondents in this survey approved of plastic surgery to improve their life prospects. In particular, over 70 percent of young female respondents said they wanted to have plastic surgery. Koreans believe that if your face is beautiful, your heart also becomes beautiful' (Song, C-S, Daily Hankyoreh, 14 September 2002).

Doo-Byung Yang, a plastic surgeon and author of a series of books, including *'Where and how you can have plastic surgery'* (1998), surveyed attitudes towards plastic surgery in 1998. He collected data from interviews with one thousand unmarried women in South Korea. According to the survey, 67 percent of respondents showed an interest in having plastic surgery and 25.5 percent of respondents who have undergone plastic surgery are in their early 20s. Interestingly, 12.5 percent of respondents had surgery when they were younger than 15 years old. Furthermore, most of those respondents had eyelid surgery (79.5%), followed by rhinoplasty (25%) and lip surgery (8%).<sup>41</sup> This shows that the eyelid operation, which involves the creation of a fold on the eyelid, is the most popular procedure performed in South Korea.

The growth in plastic surgery in Korea has been dramatic enough to attract the attention of western mass media. Western media tend to sensationalise this particular topic. In the Asian edition of *Time Magazine*, the surgery trend is introduced in the following way:

Around Asia, women are nipping and tucking, sucking and suturing, injecting and implanting, all in the quest for better looks. In the past, Asia had lagged behind the West in catching the plastic surgery wave, held back by cultural hang-ups, arrested medical skills and a poorer consumer base. But cosmetic surgery is now booming throughout Asia like never before [...] In Korea, surgeons estimate that at least one in 10 adults have received some form of surgical upgrade and even tots have their eyelids done

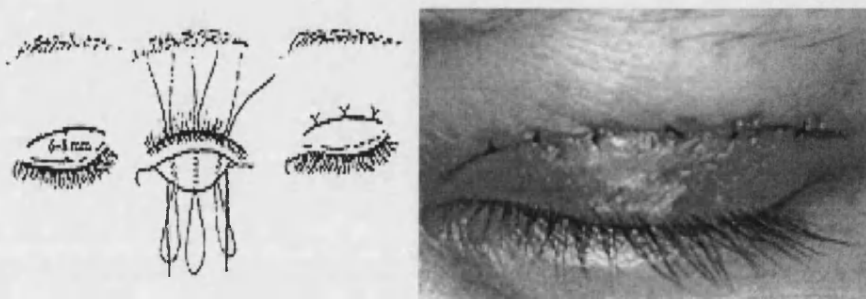
(Cullen, *Time Asia*, 4 August 2002)

My own research – based on group interviews – confirms the popularity of plastic surgery. The majority of my informants state that they want to have plastic sur-

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<sup>41</sup> This survey was conducted by a survey company, Tele-research in 1998 ([www.youth.co.kr](http://www.youth.co.kr)). Furthermore, the author, Dr Doo-Myung Yang is a plastic surgeon and regular columnist for one of the National Daily Newspaper, Daily Kynghyang Newspaper. Interestingly, he regularly wrote a series of columns on the subject of practicing plastic surgery between 1997 and 2005, which had three different column titles from 'Yang Doo-Byung's Making Beauty' (May 1997-March 1998) to 'Yang Doo-Byung's Aesthetic Columns' (March 2003-November 2003) to 'Yang Doo-Byung's Let's Live Fearlessly'. The changes of column title may reflect what people think about the practice.

gery. Most of my informants, and the surveys discussed above, indicate that the most preferred plastic surgery is eyelid surgery. In South Korea today it is taken for granted that every girl dream of having bigger eyes. Eyelid surgery is a simple operation in which a small incision or suture is made above the eye to create an artificial double lid. This surgery was initially designed to correct drooping upper eyelids and puffy bags below the eyes by removing excess fat, skin and muscle. However, in Korea this surgical method is mainly used in order to change the shape of the eye itself.



**Figure 1. The eyelid surgery process**

*This picture illustrates how the eyelids operation is conducted (left); After conducting eyelid plastic surgery, a wound still remains (right).*



**Figure 2. Examples of eyelid surgery**

*before (left) and after (right) surgery; another example, before (above) and after (below).*

#### *(4.2.2) Dominant discourses on plastic surgery in the Korean mass media*

As noted in the introduction above, magazines and newspapers in South Korea have constructed a mainstream discourse related to plastic surgery. Interestingly, the mainstream discourse driven by the mass media shows several typical patterns. In this section, I discuss four such approaches that were found in mainstream discourse of the mass media. These include the competitive job market as motivation for plastic surgery, “appearance-centrism”, the pursuit of western beauty standards, and the blurring of boundaries as reflecting young women’s conflicting identities.

##### *Tough job competition promotes plastic surgery*

One of the main reasons given in the media discussion of the new boom in plastic surgery is an economic one. Some experts assert that many women have plastic surgery as part of a survival strategy in a competitive capitalist society. Eastern Asian countries have a reputation for tough competition in the process of economic development. The job market in South Korea worsened after the financial crisis of 1997. At the same time, in the late 1990s, the discourse of plastic surgery was becoming a hot topic in the popular media. Capitalism provides the context for understanding why more women have sought plastic surgery. One plastic surgeon, Dr Oh-kyu Choi argues that, ‘it is because [women] are placing more importance on their appearance, especially after the Asian financial crisis, when it became harder to find a job’ (Gluck, BBC News, 12 July 2001).

The basic idea is that tough economic conditions make people pay attention to their looks, because they think it will help them to get a better job. This theory is also confirmed by opinion polls. A recent survey shows that 80 percent of working women and female university students believe that a good appearance can improve their career (Ku, B-K, Daily Hankyoreh, 10 February 2003). ‘Even if a female student at a vocational school has graduated at the top of her class, if she is considered unattractive, the chances of her finding a good job are slim’ (Huh, E-D, Daily Joongang, 30 March 2003). Top actresses and female singers put their artificially improved looks on display on TV, and influence many women, sending out the message that they, too, can have such success and admiration (see figures 3 and 4).



This fierce economic competition that leads people to undergo plastic surgery may also explain the growing number of teenagers having plastic surgery. Clinics are busiest during the winter holiday, when high school seniors are preparing themselves for college or for entering the workplace. As mentioned above, teenagers as young as 14 are having plastic surgery. A report in the Asian edition of *Time* magazine claims, 'South Korea is even more competitive than it is conservative. And with so many young people having themselves remade, parents are afraid their children will fall behind, not just academically but aesthetically' (Cullen, *Time Asia*, 4 August 2002). A woman's attractive appearance is a resource for her to exploit in the competition to get a job.



**Figure 3. A popular Korean singer who has had plastic surgery**

*Before (left) and after (right) surgery. Jiyoung Baek is a famous singer who was forced to retire from public life due to a scandal following the release of a videotape of a private affair*



**Figure 4. The scandal of Miss Korea Beauty Contest**

*Min-Kyung Kim, who won the Miss Korea beauty Contest, 2001, has been revealed that she was said to have had various plastic surgery including eyelid, nose and so forth. This became a huge scandal in Korea, as it was seen as cheating at that time.*

*Appearance-centrism: good appearance is a weapon for a good future life*

In the South Korean context, good appearance<sup>42</sup> is believed to represent good fortune in life. Consequently, appearance becomes an element of discrimination. In this sense, the concept of *lookism* explains the widespread belief that good appearance determines a better future in Korea. *Lookism* means, according to the Oxford Dictionary, 'prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance' (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994). The importance of good-appearance has been reinforced by the mass media, and has in turn become an ideology. This ideological belief is reflected in this example: an advertising billboard for a plastic product claimed 'She invests in her skin because a woman's beauty is a power for competition'; this advertisement was withdrawn after numerous complaints (Shin-Yun, D-W. Daily Hankyoreh, 6 May 2002).

Here, I suggest calling this tendency "appearance-centrism". "Appearance-centrism" could be considered to be a driving force behind having plastic surgery. Although many people have realised that such an appearance-obsessed tendency is discriminatory lookism, they also accept that good appearance is a good resource for ensuring a better future.<sup>43</sup> For instance, I found an interesting opinion in an online discussion group, in which many related issues are discussed, and the issue of the tendency to be obsessed with one's appearance was one of them. In the discussion group, some people take for granted appearance-based discrimination. One claims that 'appearance is ability. Various talents are gifts, so discrimination based on ability should be taken for granted. As appearance is ability, it should be also taken for granted.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> A good appearance does not indicate a beautiful figure. The word "*Hogam*" is used which means familiar, kind, sincere, trustworthy, and favourable-looking.

<sup>43</sup> If the lookism is a discriminated result from appearances, "appearance-centrism" can perhaps be seen as a resource that can result in different possible outcomes from appearances, which is the reason why I distinguish between the terms "appearance-centrism" and "lookism".

<sup>44</sup> This extract from an online discussion group was reported in Hankyoreh Daily Newspaper (Ku, B-K, 10 February 2003).

In this sense, plastic surgery is also believed to be a good path to an improved life. According to a survey given prominence in a national newspaper, more than 70 percent of high school girls and 34 percent of high school boys want plastic surgery to improve their appearance. This survey also shows that the majority of women who have undergone plastic surgery are in their twenties and the number of cosmetics used per person is the largest in the world, proving the social trend of attaching greater importance to appearances. Nearly 70 percent of South Korean women between 13-43 have a firm belief that success or failure greatly depends on their appearance, and make-up is indispensable to their lives (Yeom, T-J, Joongang Daily, 7 February 2002): many people are eager to have better looks through physical fitness, skin care, plastic surgery or dieting.

This dominant discourse is also found in the reply of one of my informant's: a 27 year old office worker of the cable T.V Company, said, 'I have been stressed by my flat nose. People treat ugly women like criminals and it's very hard to live without a good appearance. So, I cannot resist the temptation of plastic surgery as looks could control my success or failure in life in society' (Age 27, Office worker)

#### *In pursuit of western beauty standards*

One of the most prevalent arguments for plastic surgery in Korea is the desire for westernisation, i.e. people wanting to be more Caucasian looking. Many believe that it is a result of the effects of western media that Korean women have become homogenised in following the western beauty standards. The whole interpretation of the growth of plastic surgery is still based on this assumption: Korean women basically want to be western looking, so it drives them to undergo plastic surgery.

This kind of discourse around pursuing a westernised look is clearly found in descriptive comparisons of North Korean women by some journalists. It should be noted that, Korea has been divided into two countries for 50 years after the Korean War in 1950. Since then, the two governments have rarely communicated. However, the North Korean government decided to send a large group of people to join the Asian Games held in South Korea in 2002. At the time, amongst the visitors, there were many cheerleaders, and South Korean media paid attention to those girls. The media coverage described the northern women as possessing "native" beauty, whereas the southern women were described as showing "western-

ised artificial beauty” (Ahn, Y-B, Donga Daily Newspaper, 12 October 2002). This type of argument is all pervasive in mainstream discourse.

In an interview article, one of the leading feminist scholars in Korea, Oakla Cho, claims ‘the tendency [towards having plastic surgery] can be interpreted in the context of globalisation which provides a value of the aesthetic superiority of being Caucasian looking. Globalisation is so pervasive, so criteria of beauty could be seen as homogenising into the western beauty standard’ (Hwang, S-H, Weekly Chosun, 23 December 1999a). The argument that globalisation encourages women to create Caucasian looks can also be found in an article of the *Wall Street Journal*:

As the winds of globalisation sweep through this prosperous Asian nation, Korean women have increasingly lifted their noses, shaved their jaws and widened their eyes in a relentless drive to attain the western image of beauty. More recently, young women have begun targeting their thick calves, a common attribute that many Koreans find masculine and ugly, in the hope of attaining legs sported by *the world’s supermodels*.” But leg jobs are kicking up controversy even in cosmetic-surgery – *crazed South Korea* – the only country, local doctors say, where these extreme operations are regularly performed.

(Glain, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 November 1993)

This report shows how eager Korean women are to adopt the Caucasian look as a beauty standard, under global media influence. This article reported that a “crazed” South Korea uses a “unique” technology for leg surgery. However, my interviews show how the cultural practice of plastic surgery (described in latter sections of this chapter) rather than being in one direction in terms of adopting the Caucasian look, is in fact complicated and complex. As mentioned above, the complex practice of plastic surgery has different meanings depending on the cultural and historical context, but that evokes different emotional and moral responses (Davis, 2003: 100). Thus, my interviews examine this cultural practice in the specific context of South Korea. This kind of view on ethnic plastic surgery is also found in the article of *Time Asia*.

The culturally loaded issue today is the number of Asians looking to remake themselves to look more Caucasian. It’s a charge many deny, although few would argue that under that relentless bombardment of Hollywood, satellite TV, and Madison Avenue, Asia’s aesthetic ideal has changed drastically [...] Asians are increasingly asking their surgeons for wider eyes, longer noses and fuller breasts – features not typical of the race.

This shows that the dominant view about the prevalence of plastic surgery in South Korea is based on a Eurocentric view. In addition, the dominant discourse of plastic surgery is considered as the main instrument in victimising third world women – regarded as passive, inactive, silent, and mute. The quotation above from the *Time Asia magazine* is a typical representation of social affairs in non-western countries. This means that western media representations that talk about South Korean women and plastic surgery do so in ways that preserve a dichotomy between West/East, active/passive, voiced/mute and so on. It is useful to observe how the main discourses on plastic surgery reinforce the inferiority of otherness by emphasising the superiority of Caucasian looks. Moreover, these dichotomy-based discourses (Caucasian/Other including Korean women) objectify the “other” and become “hermetically sealed” (Wicke, 1994: 770) in contrast to women’s complicated desires and experiences in the postcolonial South Korean context.

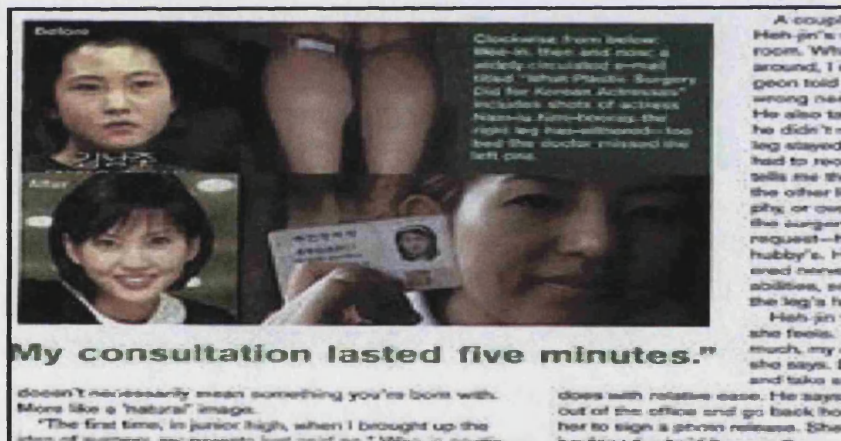


Figure 5. A picture published in an American Magazine, *Jane*.

in which one of Korean popular soap stars was introduced as a typical example of western oriented tendency of doing plastic surgery in Korea. <sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 'A Woman's ugliness cannot be forgiven' *Jane Magazine* (August, 2002)

#### *(4.2.3) Modernists meet feminists: empowering inner beauty*

The last and most interesting point here is that the main discourse of plastic surgery is based upon modernist dichotomies - authentic/western beauty, mind/body and self/other. In addition, the judgements of some commentators – including feminists – on this social phenomenon seem quite normative. Despite different ways of diagnosing the issue of plastic surgery, most conclusions suggest that women should cultivate their “inner beauty” rather than their “physical appearance”. One leading surgeon warns that plastic surgery has recently been abused, and emphasises that real beauty is not external appearance, but inner wisdom. In the same article, he goes on to say, ‘while every aspect of youth and physical beauty will decline, the real beauty of humanism will remain unfaded. In the new millennium, the real beauty of humanism and a healthy body will be more welcomed’ (Shim, H-B. *Weekly Chosun*, 23 December 1999).

Many editorials and articles come to similar conclusions, emphasising the importance of mind over body. The following article shows how this argument is based on such a dualistic view:

We know well from experiences and lessons of our ancestors that internal beauty is more important than external appearance in the long run, and the former lasts longer than the latter. External beauty is temporary, as proved by ageing. I agree that good looks are significant. But I also think a good mind and ability are eventually better. In a society of equals, looks do not matter. The current lookism in our society seriously threatens this foremost principle.

(Park, M-J, *The Korean Times*, 21 November 2002)

The common argument in assertions such as these is that inner beauty is more significant than physical appearance. Thus, women should be more concerned with, and attempt to cultivate, their inner beauty. One famous feminist poet, Jung-gran Kim, published a long opinion article in which she claims that modern society needs rigorous self-reflection and that in a perplexed modern society, our body will take over our spirit unless we nourish it (Kim, J-R. *Hankyoreh Daily*, 7 June 2001). This type of normative argument is ubiquitous in the mainstream discourse on plastic surgery. As we have seen, most interpretation is based on a moral judgement, and its prescription is quite abstract for those women who actually undergo plastic surgery.

Interestingly, this type of normative suggestion resembles some feminist arguments, although there is little or no particular empirical research and analysis of this explosive growth of plastic surgery in the South Korean context, even from a feminist perspective.<sup>46</sup> This may be partly because most comments on plastic surgery are based on a modernist feminist discourse, which is premised on a dualistic separation of mind and body. Most commentators appear to think that over-emphasising physical appearance results in a neglect of inner beauty through women's vanity. Ironically, just as the mainstream accepts the reality of a growth in plastic surgery, mainstream opinion in society enhances those feminist arguments. It is claimed that the explosive growth of plastic surgery is the fruit of the feminist movement. Most Korean feminists who discuss the issue in abstract or theoretical terms rather than relying upon empirical evidence seem to take the same position on plastic surgery as some western feminists, such as Kathryn Morgan. They argue that the pursuit of youth and beauty through surgical intervention cannot qualify as a freely adopted lifestyle. Morgan claims that plastic surgery is the public display of the male-identified woman to a hypothetical male viewer. Moreover, surgical intervention is claimed to reinforce colonisation of the body by the male dominant system (Morgan, 1991). This claim implies that plastic surgery is a process of double victimisation of the female body. A famous feminist therapist, Susie Orbach, insisted that the plastic surgery of Fijian women is the very epitome of double victimisation by the western media and by the dominant male beauty system (Orbach, 2003).

Contrary to my argument later in this chapter, it is very interesting to observe how this kind of western feminist claim is enhanced by the mainstream discourse on plastic surgery; it reinforces such inferiority of otherness through the superiority of looking Caucasian. At this meeting point, a modernist discourse meets feminist arguments and gets along very well with it. From both viewpoints, the putative answer to the question of how to deal with the growth of plastic surgery is clear: instead of focusing on physical beauty driven by western criteria, concentrate on cultivating your inner beauty and strengths.

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<sup>46</sup> I assume that Korean feminist research has focused more on the issue of women's equality in terms of economic and political issues than on women's subjectivity.

If we investigate these discourses in detail, a resemblance between the two modernist arguments can easily be found. For instance, in a public lecture, one of the leading leftist social activists, Kiwan Baek, criticised Korean women who put effort into make-up. He claimed that Korean women linger over their appearance rather than seeking a beautiful mind. In particular, he points out that Korean women mimic western women, especially American women. They waste time and money on a beautiful body and face, and this phenomenon is wrong (Huh, E-D. Daily Joongang, 30 March 2003). His basic argument is typical of many others in asserting that women's pursuit of physical beauty is not appropriate because its standard is based on western criteria. One more example is that of the writer, Kyungran Cho, who published an essay about facial beauty in which she described her experience of plastic surgery due to an accident. She concluded her essay as follows:

Now I can find an authentic character of mine out of the male dominant universal beauty standard, which was too familiar for me to realise. Everybody feels their face is like an "apple"<sup>47</sup>, and I hope they can find their unknown inner beauty as well as being satisfied with their own face.

(Cho, K-R. 2003: 345)

Reflecting the discussion above, she also suggests cultivating inner beauty and finding some kind of innate inner abilities. This modernist normative argument can also be found in the comments of leading feminists. In her book, a feminist scholar Sul-A HanSuh claims that the recent phenomenon of improving one's appearance by means that include plastic surgery and diet can be explained in terms of a female passion to be acknowledged as a woman and to be successful in a career. However, it results in creating another victim of the body industry and routinely rigorous self-censorship (HanSuh, 2000). Her solution is rather simple; in her interview, she suggests that women themselves should escape from the obsession of appearance, and find their self-respect and identity. Many commentators suggest that one way of doing this would be to promote a pluralistic education system and a culture of appreciation of different types of beauty (Kim, A-R. Daily Hankyoreh, 11 August 2002). A further example in the same vein is that of one of the most famous feminist scholars, Hyejoang Cho-Han, who remarked that

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<sup>47</sup> "Apple" means a metaphoric expression of pretty faces.



women should strengthen their power, instead of adapting to social situations by modifying their appearance (Special Report Team, Daily Joongang, 10 September 2002).

The overall argument of South Korean feminists regarding plastic surgery thus remains that of normative analysis. The solutions that are offered by these feminists are usually purely abstract and do not often offer a concrete analysis, since they remain at the level of commentary rather than employing empirical evidence. Commonly, they stress the empowerment of women's inner ability. Other than some vague suggestions about the educational system, the question remains as to how women can actually empower their inner beauty in the complicated postcolonial context. Others question whether this type of modernist feminist criticism can be meaningful any longer: it implies feminist study needs to pay attention to engage act of speaking subject as their subject.

One possible reason why the feminists, critics and surgeons still adhere to the modernist-normative argument, emphasising inner strength rather than attempting to understand the appearance-centric phenomenon, is because they seem to be positioning themselves to make their position politically distinctive and distanced from the unlimited desire of consumers. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate here and at later points in this thesis, my informants seemed to take the opposite stance – against feminist commentators and surgeons – and appeared well aware of the normative arguments, as they were familiar with a range of these commentaries. Consequently, young women are apparently already developing their own justification or “tactics of self-positioning.”<sup>48</sup> However, this does not mean that the two positions (commentators and consumers) occupy diametrically opposite positions. Rather, the respondents are blurring the boundaries whilst perhaps implying that there are still large gaps between commentators and consumers. Modernist-normative commentators might fail to grasp their initiation to lead the commoners' opinions.

In order to investigate this theme in more depth in relation to the empirical data, the next section will discuss how this “rupture” between the dominant discourse

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<sup>48</sup> The issue of the complicated tactics of self-positioning is suggested by Dr Clare Hemming.

and women's experience of plastic surgery is revealed on the basis of analysis of my own interview materials.

### **4.3. Blurring boundaries: Korean women's conflict and ambivalent identities**

As we have seen in the previous section, the dominant discourse operates not only at the grand level of a modernist discourse based on dichotomy (i.e. body/mind, native/ western, nature/artificial, normal/pathological etc.), but also at the level of feminist criticism's discussion of inner confidence. Consequently, these discourses cannot explain the highly complicated process of women's desire and experience of plastic surgery. In particular, in the context of postcolonial Korea, claiming "self-confidence" through plastic surgery shows a clearer picture of how South Korean women negotiate with themselves on the issues of plastic surgery. I will focus on Korean women's conflict and ambivalent identities regarding plastic surgery, and how their identities have been transformed with regard to contemporary conceptualisations of body and identity under the influence of western media.

#### *(4.3.1) Why women want to have plastic surgery: confidence as sense of self*

One of the most common assertions made by interviewees was that almost all informants want to have plastic surgery. The most common reason for their desire is their belief that they will gain confidence through plastic surgery, although the responses from informants did vary. Some did not want plastic surgery, due to a fear of failure, and a desire to keep those facial features inherited from their parents. However, the overwhelming majority of interviewees did want to change their appearance. The interviews also confirmed that the most popular surgery is eyelid surgery. Importantly, all informants who want to have surgery strongly expressed the idea that plastic surgery is not for men but for themselves. In explaining their choice to have plastic surgery: 'as a matter of personal confidence if you look better, you feel better about yourself'. By conceptualising cosmetic surgery, Gimlin insists that 'having the power to provide self-esteem effectively legitimises an otherwise illegitimate activity' (Gimlin, 2000: 85). The following informant's "self-confidence" is represented in terms of her own sense of self, rather than being understood as an accomplishment worthy of effort, in that it makes women

better workers, spouses, partners and more positively viewed by other people. As my informants responded:

I want to have plastic surgery right now! I have been losing my confidence because of my inferiority complex. If I can get my confidence back with the surgery, I will definitely do it. Of course, everybody is saying confidence is not from your appearance, but I think it is from appearance. I desperately want it... I can do anything after gaining my confidence.

(Age 25, Secretary)

Ironically, the dominant discourse claims, as seen in the previous section, that self-confidence is derived from the mind, not from appearance. However, according to my informants, appearance underlines inner confidence. The informant's talk described above claims that a surgically altered body is a form of deception; an inauthentic representation of the self. Interestingly, however, such a normative argument confronts a different idea here: that self-confidence is not only derived from the inner mind, but from appearance as well. This seems to disrupt the rigorous distinction between mind and body and, in this way, the majority of informants appear to support the claim that paying attention to body appearance as a means of addressing self-confidence disrupts the mind/body split.

As briefly noted above, below is another interesting example that shows that paying attention to appearance is not understood by respondents as being only for others. One of my interviewees believed that her routine habit of decorating her body, through make-up and plastic surgery, was not aimed at attracting men, but done for her own self satisfaction:

I do not think I am decorating my appearance for men. It's for my satisfaction. I want make up, even when I am at home alone. I feel good which is very important for me. Honestly, I had it done. Well, eyelid surgery.

(Age 38, Housewife)

Thus, it seems that this cultural practice becomes normalised as a part of everyday life. This respondent asserts that she is doing her make-up for her own satisfaction, and it thus becomes a routine. This process can be evidence of the internalisation of norms of self-policing that accompanies a shift from sovereignty to bio-power, a Foucauldian term (Foucault, 1972; 1979; Rabinow, 1996; Rose, 2001). Furthermore, the other informant quoted above indicates that she decided to have the surgery with the sole motive of restoring her self-confidence. This self-

confidence cannot just be understood in its own right but only in conjunction with these routine practices. Thus, both become part of internalisation of self-policing. The issue of whether or not plastic surgery may be regarded as for the benefit of others (principally men) is complicated by another informant's criticism men's double standard towards plastic surgery:

In my case...in most cases of plastic surgery, I think men like beautiful women having plastic surgery, but they don't like their own girlfriend having plastic surgery. I don't like men's way of thinking. It is such a typical double standard. I am not against plastic surgery. However, I cannot support the idea that women have surgery if their goal is to flatter men. If women want to overcome their inferiority complex by surgical process to be satisfied with their appearance, then no problem. I reject the idea of wanting to be looked at.

(Age 21, College student)

Both informants indicate that plastic surgery is not about men but their own satisfaction and self-confidence. Clearly, the frequency with which I heard such assertions points to the considerable importance women attach to having "freely" chosen plastic surgery: not to have been somehow coerced into the procedure by their lovers; or undergo it merely in order to please men. The revealing of self-confidence can be understood as something that exists beyond being attractive to the opposite sex and in relation to the internalised norms I note above. Furthermore, these assertions make sense in light of the women's own accounts of their surgery. The question is whether plastic surgery is an opportunity for South Korean women to negotiate the typical tension of the dichotomised discourses on feminine embodiment or whether its effects are disempowering. The concept of plastic surgery is clearly inconsistent with an image of acts forced upon them by others – particularly others who might actually benefit more from the procedures than do the women themselves. The discourse of this informant shows "resistance to the male gaze" whereby she rejects the idea of 'wanting to be looked at'. Thus, in this way appearance is central to self-confidence – not to the oppression of male gaze<sup>49</sup>.

The central point here is that this visual sensibility drives both women and men to understand appearance (including what to wear) as central to self-confidence

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<sup>49</sup> Recently, male plastic surgery has also been increasing dramatically.

but not necessarily in relation to being attractive to the opposite sex. It is worth noting that the “visual sensibility” of appearance plays a role as a mechanism of distinction.<sup>50</sup> This specific mechanism of distinction could produce the cultural capital necessary to distinguish one from the other. So it is not only a resistance to the male gaze, but it can also be read as a reinvention of the self for the purposes of social mobility.

According to the informants, they claim to be reflectively aware of plastic surgery as a cultural practice. In their discourse, they reveal these confidences:

In my case, whether I can get the plastic surgery or not, I wonder for whom is the plastic surgery? If plastic surgery is really good for me, I will do it. However, if it is to be looked at, favourable for marriage etc, I don't want to get plastic surgery at all for those reasons.

(Age 17, High school student)

Accounts such as the one above not only justify cosmetic surgery, but also attempt to convert it into an expression of putative identity, as Gimlin (2000) points out. ‘Plastic surgery becomes for [women] not an act of deception but an effort to align body with self’ (89). The informants I interviewed claimed the goal of plastic surgery is neither to become beautiful nor to be beautiful for their husbands, boyfriends nor to be looked at by men. Indeed, these women insisted that they altered their body for their own satisfaction, in effect utilising such procedures to create what they conceptualise as a “normal appearance” - an appearance that reflects a normal self. In this normalisation of appearance, what needs to be explored, as Mercer (1994) argues, is what happens in the space between textual beauty images and representations, and the reader’s own subjectivities. ‘This space is a phantasmatic space itself created through the multiple historical experiences that make up the social space in which we exist as subjects’ (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001: 167).

With regard to the normal self, the concept of normality is changeable and re-definable. Attitudes towards plastic surgery show how concepts of the normal and the pathological change by the moment. In fact, decorating and altering appear-

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<sup>50</sup> In using the term ‘distinction’, this does not in any way imply an attempt to echo Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984). My perspective lies in very different social and cultural contexts, as well as diverse theoretical approaches.

ance is becoming more and more of an acceptable norm in Korean society. In this sense, an undecorated and unaltered appearance may become regarded as pathological or marginal, rather than normal or natural. Some respondents claim that they feel uncomfortable when they go out without make-up.

I feel terrible without make up in public. I cannot have a good day without make up. I hate myself when I do not wear make up. In the morning, I put on make up and then I can start the day very well and I feel better and clean. (Yes, I agree, I feel confident) Without make-up, when I meet somebody for the first time...I feel regret for going out without it...

(Age 20-21, University students)

Make-up is not for special occasions but for everyday life in South Korea. This practice shows the shifting momentum by which the normal becomes pathological, while pathological practice becomes normal.

**M:** If I do not make-up, I look very strange...

**J:** My friend asked me, "are you ill?" when I did not make-up my face.

**M:** people told me that women are irresponsible about their faces if they do not make-up when they are getting old. Make-up is part of one's responsibility for living in society. It has become very important in our society

**H:** Yes, I agree, people think an unmade-up woman is lazy and doesn't have a self-management mind.

(Age 28-30, Housewives, Hansam apartment)

In this sense, the natural body is not a normal, but a *normalised* cultural body. This cultural practice (make-up) modifies our common-sense understanding of how bodies work (Featherstone, 2000: 2). This imagery changes the horizons of what a body can be. It also points to a fascination with the artificial, where existing scientific and medical technologies seek or claim to clarify our perception of the "normal" body.<sup>51</sup> Often in public, unmade-up women (who usually use make-up) are seen as ill. Without make-up on, informants were asked "are you ill today?" Without make-up, women are not normal, – at least not healthy – which means they are seen as unaccomplished, unmanaged, lazy and irresponsible.

This phenomenon of the "unhealthy" nature of an unmade-up appearance plays into the "makeovers" and "shape-overs", (dieting, exercise, cosmetic and fashion

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<sup>51</sup> I will explain normal in relation to "natural body" in the next section.

regimes) which are celebrated in the media and which are the rhetoric of personal transformation. According to Susan Bordo (1990), the body is now understood as having a potential for limitless change, “undetermined by history, social location or even individual biography” (1990: 657). Plastic surgery also plays a part in this rhetoric of transformation. While ‘the women adamantly insisted that they altered their bodies for their own satisfaction, in effect utilising such procedures to create what they conceptualise as a norm appearance- an appearance that reflects a normal self’ (Gimlin, 2000: 89). One of my respondents informed the group that:

Recently, plastic surgery has become so popular amongst girls. The reason why more people get more plastic surgery is because so many people are beautiful after the plastic surgery. It’s a kind of competition. People are very insecure about their looks compared to people who have had plastic surgery. A few years ago, people kept their plastic surgery secret. But now people talk in public about what they have got done and how much they paid for it. Actually they exchange information about surgeons and prices. Plastic surgery is so popular nowadays and eyelid surgery has become a basic item for girls.

(Age 24, College student)

The above informant indicates that the broader trend of plastic surgery is becoming a mass phenomenon. Young women feel under competitive pressure from this social phenomenon. Plastic surgery is located in an open public discourse. Thus, in the South Korean context, plastic surgery has emerged as an acceptable means for altering or improving the appearance of the body. With this phenomenon, the concept of unaltered and undecorated appearance is displaced by the growing idea of body modification. This means a once normal concept becomes marginal and possibly pathological and personal transformation becomes normalised.

A question can be posed at this point: can women’s pursuit of their own self-confidence ever really qualify as a freely chosen lifestyle? Is she in fact not making her own choice, but being forced to adapt herself to male-dominated norms? In fact, this is a controversial issue. Is altering the body reinforcing the dominant norms, or is it entirely motivated by women’s self-confidence which is conceptualised in individual terms rather than relational to male approval and attraction? Kathy Davis claims and defends the latter view. According to Davis (1995), ‘cosmetic surgery is not simply imposed; it is fervently desired by its recipients. Women having cosmetic surgery are knowledgeable and responsible agents, no more duped by the feminine beauty-system than women who do not see cosmetic

surgery as a remedy to their problems with their appearance' (Davis, 1995: 164). This means that women are not ignorant cultural dopes, but rather knowledgeable and adept cultural actors. This point seems valid since it is clear that women are often aware of the contradiction between the oppressive nature of the beauty system, while at the same time trying to operate with that system to gain some advantage for themselves. For example, during interviews, the informants are well aware of all the discourse on plastic surgery including South Korean feminist criticisms and reflexively interplay in this conflicting discourse. They create arenas with plastic surgery for 'experimenting with the project of the self' as Thompson asserted (Thompson, 1995: 233). This offers new possibilities for self-formation – extending space, full of experimental ways of being, acting and playing.

The above is exemplified in the observation that respondents can redefine and translate the decorated and altered body. One of my informants equates the cultural practice of haircuts with that of plastic surgery. Women's accounts of their plastic surgery were striking by the fact that all of them claimed - quite adamantly in fact - to benefit from their participation in an activity that has garnered widespread and hostile criticism from feminists and non-feminists alike. Key to this talk was the contention by women that the circumstances, to which plastic surgery was a response, were distressing and that they could only be remedied by plastic surgery. Without the surgery they felt themselves to be socially unacceptable, whilst as a result of the procedures, women perceive themselves to be more socially acceptable, more normal and in several cases, more outgoing:

**Q:** Why did you get it?

**YU:** I had finished the exam for entering university. After the surgery, I was so satisfied with myself. I would not like to have many more changes by plastic surgery, and it's a strange thing to do. I think it's all right to get plastic surgery for a few changes for your own confidence. I really want to recommend it if somebody has any anxiety about appearance. It's very recommendable to say just get the surgery and be confident. Most people say, if you get it, you are cheating on your men with your appearance. I do not agree with the majority of people's comments: for example, somebody has a square shape of face and they want to get their hair cut in order to overcome their shape of face. On this point, people think everybody gets a haircut and it's OK. In the case of plastic surgery, the matter of using a surgical knife is a different form of hair cut. Why don't we get surgery when we feel dissatisfied with our appearance? I think it's better to have it done.

(Age 21, University student)



It is not easy to decide how my informants' remarks should be interpreted. Informants may well say or think they make their own choices for their confidence, whereas in fact they are only doing what the sexist, visualised beauty system requires them to do. The notion of the above informant expressing her own choice in bounded circumstances is not very satisfactory because choices are always made with less than complete information, under conditions not wholly of the agent's own making. One way or another, then, women must be blameable to some extent. How could anyone choose to partake in a blameable practice, without herself incurring any blame? However, the informant understands that the choice of plastic surgery is a 'performative enactment of self, evoking the category of selfhood or the potential of individual selfhood, in temporality of interpretation and agentic choice (or searching for self-knowledge)' (Cronin, 2000:279). In this case, acts can be considered to flow from some combination of knowledge, values, beliefs and desires. But of course one can always push the inquiry one step further back, and ask where these beliefs and desires come from. Ultimately, they will be caused by something of which the person is not in control. If being the ultimate cause of one's actions were a necessary condition for agency, nobody would ever be an agent. Similarly, as Wijsbek suggests, 'agency is compatible with people being subject to all the laws that govern the rest of nature' (Wijsbek, 2000: 457). Our freedom would not be diminished if we were always compelled to have true beliefs. According to Wolf (1990), we want 'a freedom *within* the world, not a freedom *from* it' (93). My informants do indeed seem to have all the characteristics of knowledgeable and responsible agents. But who can tell what is the *proper* amount of attention to your appearance that should be paid? To take up a specific lifestyle is to forsake other lifestyles that are equally worthy of being chosen. According to Davis (1995), women who have plastic surgery do so in order not to be constantly looked at, or made the object of offensive remarks, whether well meant or not: and they want to feel at ease in their own bodies. Both the ordinary and the beautiful are respectable, and it is hardly blameworthy to strive for either value – it is hard work. Why then should we have to accept our appearance as given? Paradoxically, the informants can be addressed through plastic surgery discourses, which promote the ideal that women can engage in a process of self-transformation through undoing plastic surgery.

#### **4.4. Neither western nor Korean**

Thus, as discussed above, informants seem to see their interplay with plastic surgery as a choice for their own survival strategy. Within this survival strategy, they also appear to interplay with the complexities and contradictions of plastic surgery between the West and gender. This involves continuous movement across boundaries and the threshold between the real and imagined. Informants with their own historical identities negotiate their own wanted/unwanted interventions through plastic surgery. These explanations reflect the dominant discourse, as I discussed in the early section, which explains that Korean women undergo plastic surgery in pursuit of a western Caucasian look they take as a standard – hence reducing the physical markers of Korean authentic ethnicity and that many Korean feminists regard the present phenomenon of plastic surgery as an oppressive and unnecessary pressure on women.

However, my research shows how informants explore their conflicts regarding, and negotiations of, plastic surgery while claiming “self-confidence” as motivation throughout. Similarly, throughout the interviews, unlike the current dominant discourse, the informants assert that they want to look neither ‘just western’ nor ‘just Korean’. And some consider those who have undergone plastic surgery as having a natural beauty, which is also regarded as very Korean looking, in the same way as someone who was born beautiful in a natural Korean way. My interviewees are aware of the dominant discourse and of the conflict between their own desires and beliefs and this discourse. They both transform themselves as well as the discourse through plastic surgery. The informants showed their desire for plastic surgery by identifying neither a Korean native look, nor a thoroughly western one whilst demonstrating this awareness of the dominant discourse related to accusations of pursuing a western appearance.

**E:** Well, when we were growing up, we thought westernisation means modernisation...well, we want to emphasise that our traditional thing is good but I think our tradition is always falling behind other countries. I don't know why...I feel like I want to resemble people in the First world. So, the standard appearance is westernised looking. We think a beautiful person is one who has big eyes, big nose, and an egg-shaped face. But, I think beauty standards have been changed in certain periods. For instance, if it is a trend that fat people are beautiful, we would think that fat is beautiful.

**JU:** Nowadays, western women are more beautiful, so then that is our standard idea.

**H:** Maybe, it is...this is the reason why people want to get plastic surgery. Think about a high nose. That is a western nose, not Korean one. Yeah! We are following western looks. However, I think we create the Koreanised foreigner look.

**Q:** For example?

**H:** I really do mind the absolute westernised look. I don't like it. It is not suitable for Koreans. Oh! No! Not too many sharp noses.

**HE:** I am afraid of too much white skin as well. It looks weird.

**HY:** For instance, we like to have big eyes, but people don't like eyes that are too big eyes. I think she looks like she has a very bad destiny.<sup>52</sup>

(Age 20-21, University students)

Traditionally in Korea, physiognomy underpinned judgements of a person's destiny through reading a face. This extract shows how South Korean women's identities conflict: as an ambivalent position, between looking western and being a native Korean, while denying both ideal types. Both denials are part of the process of negotiation to create new forms of identity, which can be understood by the term "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994), new identities that may have a more transnational and translational character – trans-national because of its originality and authenticity, which becomes unsustainable and divergent.

#### *(4.4.1) Native looking is not fashionable*

In relation to this process of negotiation, exploring the different forms of hybrid body produced through differences in resources and power thus turns our attention to a different distinction strategy – in other words a strategy designed to distinguish oneself from another. One of the interviewees shows that her understanding of a native appearance makes it seem unfashionable, with connotations of the countryside and being old fashioned.

I do not like a countryside look. The small eyes, often without eyelids, have a countryside look. Even if they have eyelids, I do not like *binty* (old fashioned) looking. However, I do not like looking artificial either.

(Age 23, College student)

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<sup>52</sup> They desire bigger eyes but do not want to attain the "hollowed out eyelid look", which is natural to famous western movie stars such as Greta Garbo and Gina Davis.

In her conversation, this informant further described her avoidance of a countryside look, which is not a modernised look and how she wants to achieve the modern fashionable look through eyelid surgery. Obviously the informant attempts to distinguish the undesirable look, so-called “countryside look” from their desirable ideal. In this sense, the countryside look, which could be read as the rural/rustic working class or peasant look, is a counterpart to the modern ideal. However, like the modern ideal, the countryside look remains undefined when informants refer to it. In other words, it does not rely upon any specific category like class or regional or professional background. The look that represents “old-fashioned Korean-ness” can then perhaps be seen to be imaginary. The “countryside look” can be described as slanted eyes, splendid nose and darker skin but it is more understood in the sense of being an obscured counterpart image to a modern ideal look. More importantly, it should be noted that undesirable features of appearance cannot necessarily be defined, but seemingly can only be figured out when actors in everyday lives describe different images. This may be because the boundary between modern and rural looking is continuously transformed by the practice of informants. In this sense, the next extract demonstrates what the ideal modern ‘look’ is for this particular informant at the time of the interview:

**Q:** What kind of image do you want to have when you wear make-up?

**K:** *Bboshasha*!!!<sup>53</sup> I want to make my skin milky and natural looking. If skin is dark, the look is like a countryside bitch (Oh No!) (Laughing). Anyway, I want to show that my skin is radiant and milky to people.

(Age 21, University student)

A feature such as milky, brighter skin is seen by this informant to be urban and fashionable and symbolises her “pure” and “undefined” or innocent character. However, above and beyond describing specific features, it is not only referring to a specific condition of skin, but also referring to a characteristic of the person that is not readily apparent in the physical appearance. As the informant exclaimed as an immediate response, the mimesis of appearance, “*bboshasha*”, should be discussed in greater depth. This is not just a class judgement or fashion statement but is enmeshed with a judgement on character (hence the term “bitch” in relation to “countryside” in the abstract above). The preferred features described

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<sup>53</sup> *Bboshasha* is a mimesis of appearance. The skin complexion is vital, radiant and white.

above refer to a fresh, pure and innocent *character*, not just the appearance. Interestingly, in their interviews, what many informants want to achieve is not just a change in their external appearance, but a transformed whole character, through plastic surgery. Thus, this conversation shows that they believe their appearance can express their character, and even their fate or destiny, as noted earlier. Consequently, the informant wants to have an imagined desirable look, such as “tender looking” or an undefined look that gives a good “impression”. Here it is not body modification for the purpose of correcting or removing a specific marker. The modification is rather conducted and desired to achieve a hidden and imagined ideal feminine character that is kinder and gentle:

I want to have eyelid surgery. Without the eyelid surgery, I don't look very gentle. As well as the shape of my eyes, I prefer an Asian graceful figure.

(Age 21, University student)

The relationship between appearance, character and desirability is also expressed. In this sense, “desirable looking” is undefined and does not refer solely to sexual desirability to men, but also desirability in many senses (e.g. character and their fate or destiny). Hence, it is an obscure image that is not just derived from a specific look. Some informants refer to how small eyes without eyelids, for instance, can symbolise an undesirable body, as well as stubborn characteristic features.

**O:** I want to get eyelid and higher nose surgery. I have slanted eyes. And people have told me that their first impression of me is not friendly. So many people have said to me that was their impression of me on first sight. I hated it. I hated it.

(Age 17, High school student)

Another respondent also said she wanted to get a tender and soft character with eyelid surgery. However, despite feeling the desire to have eyelid surgery, she is satisfied to stay with her oriental look since keeping this look is believed to signify grace and calm.

**UN:** I read some advice about beautiful faces from magazines. I think the round pointed nose is not modern, fashionable looking. So I want to do something for the tip of my nose. And I want to clear up my several eyelids and I want to have redefined eyelids.

(Age 21, University student)

Along similar lines, several informants believe that their appearance expresses their whole character:

I have high cheekbones, so I want to have surgery to lower my cheekbone. High cheekbones give a bad impression at first sight. In addition, I want to have a smaller, round face and more round eyes.

(Age 38, Housewife at Sinwondang)

In the above extract, the informant reveals her belief that Korean looks such as slanted eyes are regarded as demonstrating an outdated and undesirable appearance. Furthermore, it becomes clear through these extracts that the informant's interpretation of the body is always as body and mind combined together. In other words, a natural body becomes cultural in their category: they believe in achieving a physical appearance that reflects their inner character; the relationship between the natural and the cultural is always mediated through a stereotypical relationship between physical body and personal characters. The reading of this transnational/translational eyelid, brighter skin and higher nose is a characteristic of the construction of a new femininity which reflects not only the superficial appearance, but which links inner characteristics to outer appearance. The above informants express that what they want to achieve through plastic surgery is not just a change in the external appearance, but a transformed personal character. Thus, the informants refuse the dichotomised idea between mind/body and inner/external beauty.

#### *(4.4.2) Not sexy looking: the western look is sexy and vulgar*

Despite the interrelationship of inner and outer, and different states of desirability as noted above, it is interesting to note that interviewees distinguish between beauty, femininity, and sexiness in their opinions. In western society, Gill (2007a) indicates that 'the central femininity in today's media is possession of a "sexy body" that is presented as women's key source of identity' (255). However, while Wolf (1991) contends that beauty is always accompanied by "sexiness", my informants claim that they seek to avoid a sexy impression. Commonly, my informants claimed that the westernised look is not beautiful, but sexy. More importantly, they think that it is not a feminine look; although the "western" look itself is an imaginary one. The construction of the western look can be viewed as part of the

process of an imagined other<sup>54</sup>. In other words, the “Western media of the reception are not taken directly from any existing western look but a construct of present, despite its abstract nature”(Goldstein-Gidoni, 2001:33). Here is a series of remarks from my informants:

**H:** I don't like western movie stars. I know we are westernised. However, I don't like the westernised look such as thick eyelids, big and sharp nose. I don't think the westernised look is beautiful. It may be sexy, however, it's not beautiful. It's not a feminine look either.

**W:** I *don't like a sexy look*. If somebody looks very sexy, it means they have no brain. I do not think men like the sexy look. I want to be *calm and feminine*.

(Age 21-23, College students)

**HEA:** I don't like everything about Hollywood movies, because they expose too much sexual freedom. I think western countries are open to sexual freedom... there is so much '*Donguh*' (living together) in the movies without any self-awareness. I feel we are different... such as Confucianism, isn't it? ... We don't condone sexual relationships before marriage. They are different from our country. They have more sexual freedom compared to us.

**YE:** I don't think it's a good thing to follow. It's their weakness.

(Age 19-20, University students)

**Q:** Have you tried to imitate western fashion styles or hairstyles?

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<sup>54</sup> The real meaning of “western society” should be noted in this context. As mentioned in Chapter 2, generally speaking, the concept of “western” is an imagined one. It could be referring to American society, or general western societies including European countries, although South Korea has been hugely influenced by American culture since the liberation from the Japanese colonial rule. The concept of western is a vague one that is derived from an imagination which is mainly influenced by the global flows of symbolic materials including the Hollywood film. However, it cannot be said that “western” is only referring to American culture. Rather, it is a multi-layered concept. The European culture is firmly embodied in the Korean mentality as one of the components of the Western concept. For instance, the French Cultural Centre in Seoul was one of the most popular places, seen as representing high art and elegance. This impression is also derived from films during the 1980s and 1990s, which denote the typical imagination of European culture. Also, European films have been some of the most favourite films for Koreans, although Hollywood films have a wider distribution network. In 1989, the number of the imported Hollywood films was 105, whereas 61 European films were imported. In 1995, 73 films were imported from European countries (202 Hollywood films) (Cha, D-O, 1997: 77). From the statistics, although the influence of the Hollywood film has been enormous, it is clear that, in fact, they have failed to establish a monopoly. Still, there are strong demands for European films in South Korea. This is symptomatic of the images of the Western in the South Korean context. In this vein, I argue that the concept of Western is based on imagination rather than referring to a specific culture. Thus, it is a discursive device for distinction between the native culture and other cultures (Narayan, 1997).

**A:** The fashion style itself is very different from ours. Real itself... Korea is slow to catch up with fashion trends. I feel we have a different style... they expose their body in public. They expose their breasts too much. I don't like it.

(Age 21, College student)

Why do informants think sexy-looking is vulgar? And what is the genealogy of this belief given that 'female sexuality is no longer dominated by Confucian concepts of fidelity and chastity in contemporary Korea' (Howard, 1995; Shin & Cho, 1996)? This idea may be constructed by western media images, such as Hollywood movies and soap operas. However, generally, informants' interpretation of heroines is that they are too sexually exposed and dissipated.<sup>55</sup> Informants claim that sexiness cannot be categorised under the concept of beauty. Thus, their category of femininity is not interrogating sexiness: sex appeal is eliminated from their idea of femininity. In this sense, they want to be seen as very feminine, not sexy. They have a femininity that society prefers and that is how women voluntarily choose to be. Thus, in effect, the above extracts show how informants negotiate and create new femininity.

This may also explain why breast enlargement surgery is not so popular among Korean women. The concept of femininity is utilised as a measurement of the proper size of breasts, even though some informants wanted to have breast enlargement surgery. One of the interviewees responded that she wanted to have surgery to make her breasts smaller. She felt her breasts were too big and this looks deformed in the eyes of Korean society:

**Q:** Would you like to have plastic surgery?

**YEO:** I want to, but I cannot tell you.

**Q:** Why? Is it secret?

**YEO:** Yes (she was really hesitating to answer)... this is my physical secret. I want to have plastic surgery to reduce my breast size. I feel I have too big breasts.

**Q:** Don't you like it?

**YEO:** I feel very uncomfortable with my breasts in our society. When I walk on the street, I feel tense not to be brushed amongst by other people. I don't like exposing my physical parts.

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<sup>55</sup> I already discussed informants' preference for Grace Kelly over Marilyn Monroe.



(Age 21, University student)

Certainly, the informant above is aware of the extent of attractiveness which society could accept. Similarly, another informant indicates her expected and proper size as the size appropriate for a sleeveless dress.

**J:** Basically I like a body with sex appeal (laughing).

**Q:** What kind of body are you talking about? Can you explain in detail?

**J:** Well, nothing like women's bodies in Playboy magazine, I do not think that kind of body is very attractive. However, I have a very thin upper part of my body. So I have too small breasts. I would love to wear a sleeveless one-piece dress. I don't feel very pretty wearing it now without breast volume. I feel I can have a better look with more volume on my chest.

(Age 22, Office worker)

The quote above is exemplary of those expressed by many informants, who seem to have a basic view of what is a sexy look: seemingly one which is rather "unintellectual" and unfeminine. This kind of belief reflects the common-sense understanding of the "beauty/brains" split, against which women are evaluated. In being associated with the beauty side of this dichotomy, this informant felt that they are constantly battling to prove their intellectual and professional capabilities.

#### *(4.4.3) Blurred boundary of the natural and the artificial*

Paradoxically many respondents want to have a natural look by means of artificial intervention. At this moment, the boundaries between the natural and the artificial are blurred by the informants' interpretation of achieving a natural body through plastic surgery – an artificial method. Those informants do not realise that their remarks appear paradoxical. However, it can perhaps be asserted that the situation is not truly paradoxical. As Featherstone (2001: 2) claims, the celebration of the make-overs and shape-overs results in the development of a further inner-cyborg<sup>56</sup> situation, which helps to modify our everyday common-sense understanding of how bodies work. Cyborg imagery modifies the horizons of what a

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<sup>56</sup> This "visibility" of body suggests that the lines between nature and culture are inherently blurred and this helps us to appreciate Judith Butler's (1990: 7) observation that nature turned out to be culture all along.

body can be, and points to a fascination with artificial and techno-scientific claims, which may clarify our perception of the “natural” body.

Returning to my informants, this modified imagery of the “natural” body is clearly shown in conversation. In fact, their ultimate desire to get plastic surgery is to achieve the “natural look”. One of the informants says:

**Z:** I want to be a *naturally beautiful* person. I would love to have a *natural hairstyle*. Honestly, I don’t think we can look similar to the western movie stars. I don’t want to resemble any western movie stars. Their look is so different from us. I don’t want to look like any icon movie star of Hollywood.

(Age 21, University student)

As can be seen, among young South Korean women, eyelid surgery may be sanctioned as an appropriate preparation for moving on to the next stage of one’s life, within a culture whose highly codified markers of appearance correspond to a specific age and gender status. As noted earlier, it is common practice among South Korean adolescents to take advantage of the customary extended school winter vacation to undergo surgical treatment. The desired effect is to appear “*natural looking*”, and *not to mimic a “Western look”*:

**A:** I think appearance is very important for myself. Honestly, I have had plastic surgery...Eyelid.

**BO:** It looks really natural. I did not know you have had it done.

(Everybody confessed not to notice her eyelids, and commented on her eyelids that they looked very natural and beautiful in the middle of the interview)

**SU:** I think the *thick eyelids like western people are very vulgar*. If I have a chance to have it, I will have very *natural ones*.

(Age 23-24, University students)

To have “natural looking” eyes is clearly not synonymous with “western looking” eyes, and there seems to be a specific preference for surgical interventions on the eyelid. Indeed this “natural body” is sometimes said to be characterised by a holistic way of thinking that does not follow the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body (Gilman, 1998: 53). In addition, the interplay of power relations affecting the meaning of the racialised eyelid is seen when we compare cultural purpose and practice in movements across borders. This should be regarded as the translation of “western” culture as an agent, rather than as a passive recipient. It is also interesting to observe that – as a consequence of historical power dynamics –

other Asian countries have the same pattern of translating their neighbouring cultures. The contemporary export of South Korean pop-culture to China and South-east Asian countries is an example. According to a plastic surgeon in Taiwan, there is a huge fashion for having plastic surgery to resemble Korean actresses. It is because recently South Korean TV drama has become so popular in Taiwan. He says, 'the most popular facial shape is the one of South Korean actresses, Lee Young-ae, who is similar to the face of Brigitte Lin<sup>57</sup>' (Ha, S-B, Daily Hankyoreh, 21 August 2001). This example looks like another case of imitating a westernised image in Southeast Asia. However, if one studies the conversation carefully, there is a process of active translation for naturalising a self-image in a specific context. It seems from this that Taiwanese girls do not necessarily follow the typical media image of South Korean actresses.<sup>58</sup> Instead, they actively translate and selectively take a specific image. This negotiation process can be matched with their own naturalised image, which is represented by the image of Brigitte Lin (see figure 6).



**Figure 6. Pictures of Actresses.**

*Chinese film star Brigitte Lin (left) and Korean film star Young-ae Lee (right)*

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<sup>57</sup> Brigitte Lin (Lin Chin-hsia) is one of the most popular actresses in Hong Kong and China. She appears in *Chunking Express* (director: Won Kar-wai, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note that due to the recent Korean Wave in South-East Asian countries, Korean actresses like Lee Young-ae, Song Hae-Gyo, Kim Hee-Sun and Jeon Ji-hyun are very popular in this region. They have a big impact on consumer culture including food, fashion, make-up and even plastic surgery. In particular, according to Doobo Shim (2006) 'it has been reported that their wanna-be fans in Taiwan and China request their facial features when going for cosmetic surgery' (29).

The above is contextualised in relation to a specific, temporal cultural view of those issues raised regarding eyelid surgery. In other words, the concept of “beauty” is highly contextualised. Even some plastic surgeons insisted that altering their appearance is not to resemble a Western look, but to be “pretty”. Their assertions of a distinction between the Western look and being “pretty” do not necessarily connote a universalised concept of beauty but rather one that is relevant to the Korean context. This kind of argument is also often found in some statements of plastic surgeons from other contexts such as Fukuoka, Japan and Los Angeles. They claimed that ‘the objective of the eyelid operation was not “caucasianisation of the Oriental eye” but, rather [...] trying to look more attractive with the current aesthetic norms of their own culture’ (Haiken, 1997: 208). In these cases, their “own culture” may be a displaced one (particularly in relation to Los Angeles) and, furthermore, the current “aesthetic norms” of this culture may be unstable and constantly reinvented and imagined.

Overall, as I have attempted to show in the extracts above, interviewees expressed their preferred criteria of the “natural” look. What they think is “natural looking” is something not too Korean, and not too westernised. Above all informants want to create something in between Korean and western looking features. According to Bhabha, ‘this “in-between” creates a sense of the new, as an insurgent act of cultural translation; it renews that past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhabha, 1994: 7). In the case of the youth of South Korea, the idea of not being “too Korean” means that features such as slanted eyes and a flat nose are perceived as being undesirable. By the same token, large eyes with wide eyelids<sup>59</sup> and an upward pointed nose are also disliked. The key politics of appearance remain linked to the ability to “pass” as not too Western and not too Korean either. Korean women wish to preserve markers of their status that visually distinguish them from western people whose eyes are really “rounder”. They want to create a “natural” eyelid along the lines accepted by their own society.

The surgically transformed eyelid is thus a far more complex cultural production than a simply imitative media-driven practice that reasserts western, white patriarchy as a remnant of cultural or political colonisation. Cultural aesthetic of

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<sup>59</sup> Wide eyelids are, broadly speaking, considered very vulgar.

boundaries can be maintained within the seeming embrace of western discourses of beauty, just as the cultural boundaries of otherness are maintained in the display and promotion of western commodities in Korean department stores as separate adjuncts to existing Korean commodities. Korean women's surgery is motivated not just by the desire to simulate Caucasian appearance, but also as a response to the value of the "new feminine identity." It is interesting to look at those surgeries in the light of a disavowal of not simply race, but also the traditionally limited options of a specific culture's gender-coded relationships. It can thus be seen as an attempt to secure an aspect of male privilege within forms of femininity.

In this context, Homi Bhabha's theory may be useful to explain the cultural practice of plastic surgery in Korea. The desire of experiencing the same, being the same, is the motor of mimicry. However, this experience stays within that ambiguous frame of mimicry; as Bhabha remarks, 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1986; 1994: 199). For Homi Bhabha, the other is always invested with ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994; 1996a). Bhabha breaks down the simple binary coloniser/colonised and opens a space for the theorisation of ambivalence, contradictions and hidden feelings. The above examples show how my informants make huge efforts in their everyday life to look more modernised and westernised. In reality, the desire to modernise is not mere mimicry of the West. Rather, they struggle to find an identity that is *not quite western, but not quite Korean either or may be both*. In this sense, it is not an amalgamation of the two cultural strands: it is a creation of newness in the practice of plastic surgery, which draws upon, but transforms, both cultural strands. Thus, Korean women's plastic surgery plays a key role in constructing and defining the contesting and reconstituting Korean national, ethnic, and cultural identities.

#### **4.5. Korean female actresses as mediator: the calm and graceful as a Korean femininity**

The idea of young South Korean women's identities as a historical matrix offers a yet more substantive account of agency. The conceptualisation of gender identity as durable but not immutable has prompted thinking about agency in terms of the inherent instability of Korean women's gender norm and the consequent possibilities, for resistance, subversion and the emancipatory remodelling of identity. As noted in my methodology chapter, my original question was 'whom do you

identify with amongst Hollywood movie stars?'. And I had certain assumptions that my informants would have clear favourites to identify with among Hollywood movie stars. However, interestingly, most informants ignored my original question, and instead, they talked about their favourite Korean female actresses. I doubted I had put the question to my informants clearly when it was ignored. However, eventually I realised they were not actually interested in my original question. Instead, they answered with famous Korean actresses as role models. More importantly, the reasons were quite simple: they want to identify not just with their look, but with their whole characters, as they have been represented in movies, for example, "calm", "grace" and "purity and simplicity". In the conversation, my interviewees commonly claimed that whole characters could be said to be feminine looking:

**O:** I feel the appearance of western actresses is so different from our appearance. For example, we thought a Korean actress had long legs, but Korean actress's legs are shorter if you compare to western actresses (laughing). We have to a certain extent accepted some limitations in changing our body shape...it makes me feel depressed.

**Q:** Who is your favourite Hollywood movie star whom you want to identify with?

**P:** I like Eun-Ha Shim<sup>60</sup>.

**Q:** Why do you like her?

**P:** Her appearance! I would like to be born like her just for a day (laughing) for a day! I would like to be born beautiful. She looks so like the ideal of female virtue. Her image is so pure and graceful. She seems to be kind-hearted, benevolent. She looks so pure, soft and tender.

(Age 20-23, University students)

The ignoring of my original question and the identification with Korean female actresses helps in understanding the dynamics of subjectification of young Korean women's ambivalent identity under the global media influences. The extract shows an understanding of how South Korean women's identities work through at the level of subject formation and agency. In addition, this kind of agency makes it possible to understand how their identities operate at the level of daily life.

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<sup>60</sup> She is one of the most famous actresses in South Korea.



**Figure 7. Two famous Korean actresses.**

*Two famous Korean actresses that many young women want to identify with: Eun-ha Shim (left) a currently emerging young actress, Hye-Kyo Song (right) – many young women consider her as a symbol of purity and typical beauty of Korean woman.*

As shown in Figure above, some famous actresses are regarded as having an ideal beauty that young women try to identify with. Interestingly, informants responded that their identification is not only with how the actresses' look but also with actresses' persona such as "chaste, loving, and caring image". The interviewees wanted to mimic "pure", "graceful" and "benevolent" character by means of plastic surgery. They recognised their appearance cannot be the same as that of western movie stars, even though they have fantasies of being like them. Instead, they show their negotiation of this type of appearance with their discussion of the appearance of Korean female actresses.

**E:** I have lots of complaints about my appearance. However, I cannot have plastic surgery because I am afraid of an unsuccessful consequence. I can borrow the money. But I worry about the result, just in case. Anyway, I want to have bigger eyes, brighter skin and a smaller face. I love the Korean feminine look such as Eun-ha Shim. I want to be looking very feminine.

**Y:** I always think that I am eager to look like Young-ae Lee. She looks really beautiful to me. The western movie stars look very sexy. It's great, but I never want to get that kind of look.

(Age 21-22, Church group)

In relation to young Korean women's identities in the social context, plastic surgery becomes a means of defining the flexibility of identity and a form of the alteration of identity without alteration of the body. The relationship between symbolic and material practice can begin to be understood more adequately with the

shift from the binary discourse, self/other, coloniser/colonised, and western/other to a generative account of global mass media. Such an account creates a greater understanding of a sense of the historical and social-embodied-ness of subject formation.

As I have tried to show above, South Korean women may not only be trying to become Caucasian. Through plastic surgery, they seem to actively make sense of themselves vis-à-vis their own bodies. South Korean women's plastic surgery can be regarded as situated in contemporary South Korean culture rather than statically determined by white, western, heterosexual femininity. As I have discussed, South Korean women's identities need to be explored as a negotiated process, rather than as a set of prescriptions, a process whereby the individual actively and creatively draws upon cultural resources for making sense of who she is, who she was, and who she might become. The main reasons overtly given by my informants for having plastic surgery is to increase their self-confidence, although the discussions I have analysed above can be seen to represent a more complex process.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the construction of diverse femininities in terms of the practice of plastic surgery and how women are conflicting and negotiating their identities with the consumption of plastic surgery in the South Korean context. First, I illustrated the ever-growing phenomenon of plastic surgery in South Korea since the 1990s. The cultural practice of plastic surgery has been accused of causing the double subordination of Korean women who are victimised by Korean patriarchy and western standard of appearance. However, this chapter suggests that the cultural practice of plastic surgery in the South Korean context can make more sense when seen as an "intervention in the identity formation" in cultural and historical context.

Second, I examined how there is a "rupture" between the dominant discourse and women's desire and experience of plastic surgery on the basis of analysis of my interviews. The informants claimed the goal of plastic surgery is neither to become beautiful nor to be beautiful for their husbands or boyfriends. Rather, informants insisted that altering their body is for their own satisfaction and for the creation of "normal appearance." Intriguingly, the informants show their desire



for plastic surgery by identifying neither a South Korean native look nor a westernised one. Both denials are part of the process of negotiation to create new formation of identities. Bhabha's suggestion is helpful in explaining South Korean women's identities as "conflicted," "ambivalent" and "in-between" identities. However, it is not an amalgamation of the two cultural strands but rather is a creation of new formation of identities through the cultural practice of plastic surgery as the process of complexity.

Third, I found that the relationship between appearance, character and desirability is also expressed by the interviews. The majority want to achieve not just a change in the external appearance, but a transformed inner character, through plastic surgery. The informants refuse the dichotomised idea between mind/body and inner/external beauty by pursuing whole character of feminine look such as "pure," "graceful" and "benevolent" character by means of plastic surgery. Importantly, I have found that the informants recognised their appearance cannot be the same as that of western movie stars, instead, they show their negotiation with the appearance of Korean female actresses. The body in a postcolonial context relies on active process of self-formation, as "agency of representation"- in the case of Korean female actresses as an example of postcolonial embodiment in the formation of women's identities.

Finally, the surgically transformative practice is a far more complex cultural production than simply an imitative media-instructed practice that reasserts western white patriarchy as a remnant of cultural or political colonisation. Korean women's surgery is motivated not just by the desire to simulate Caucasian appearance, but rather it is a response to the value of the "new feminine identity." Korean women's plastic surgery plays a key role in constructing and defining the contesting and reconstituting Korean national, ethnic, and cultural identities.

Plastic surgery represents a simultaneous transgression and identification/compliance with dominant discourses. This chapter has not suggested that Korean women's plastic surgery is an entirely optimistic resolution, nor is it free of residual and simultaneous complication that can co-opt and covertly re-secure hegemony. Yet anchoring instances of their seemingly offhanded or diffident resistance within a shifting history of colonisation and colonising can potentially expose ways in which Korean women contest the gender, sexual and racial constraints of the colonial overlay while actively negotiating them.

By focusing on the dynamics of cultural hybrid contestation in this way, a more effective interrogation of the interplay of race, and gender constructions in relation to plastic surgery can perhaps be accomplished. I therefore suggest plastic surgery should be understood as a transformative practice to allow insights into its iconic status. This replaces its being regarded as solely a biological entity, with a consciousness of its operation as a signifier of power relations that shift within historical and national/geographical contexts, related to the interplay of gender and race construction.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSLATION OF ROMANTIC LOVE AND  
MARRIAGE

**5.1. Introduction**

In chapter 4, I discussed how plastic surgery as transformative practice seems to be a far more complex cultural practice than simply a mimicking media-instructed practice that reasserts western white patriarchy as a remnant of cultural or political colonisation. Using my empirical interview data, I attempted to show how Korean women's surgery is motivated not just by the desire to simulate Caucasian appearance, but rather it is a response to the value of the "new femininity." This chapter builds upon this focus on "new feminine identity" and, in particular, reflects my interests and those of my informants in the centrality of transformative identities in their ongoing practice of romantic love and marriage. I particularly aim to show here how my informants interplay their conflicts of love and marriage in order to settle on an "ordinary" lifestyle. The marriage system has been generally regarded as the most significant institution for maintaining society but is not a static institution. Rather, it is always evolving and being transformed into new forms. For the majority of Koreans, getting married is taken for granted and plays a pivotal role in terms of a step to complete in one's life. However, in the process of modernisation, the meaning of marriage has been transformed rapidly and, indeed, with institutional change, the very concept of marriage is being reinterpreted.

This chapter demonstrates how meanings of romantic love and marriage are translated and practised in the South Korean context. It also addresses how young women's cultural practice with the commodity of western material culture as portrayed in imported Hollywood romantic films can be located in their desire to identify themselves as global media consumers. The contradictory character of

women's interpretation of sexuality in Hollywood romantic love highlights the complex dialectic of postcolonial audiences' resistance to, and collusion with, the hegemony of global culture (Parameswaran, 2002). I will focus on modes of marriage and romance as well as the ways in which the translated meaning of Hollywood romance, and their interpretation into their own the courtship practices of marriage, are shaped as part of contemporary Korean culture. I will also show hybrid forms of courtship, which contain old and new cultural concepts of marriage and romantic love and which are based on complex and contradictory formations of identity in my informants' discussion.

This chapter takes as its starting point the current media hype in South Korea about the display of diversity in women's lifestyles and conflicting discourses on marriage and expectations as a bride in general. Essential to the formation of femininity is romantic love and marriage, both newly central issues for South Korean young women. Through conflicting desire between romantic love (new desire) and marriage (old desire), the notion of varieties of femininity as fractured, complex and contradictory selves appear, as do processes through which women negotiate them.

My questions are: why do women want to get married? When do they become aware of all the possibilities of alternative lifestyles, such as single life and unmarried partnership? And why do they believe marriage is ordinary life, even if they are searching for alternative pathways? In order to investigate how women struggle and negotiate their identities between romantic love and the marriage discourse. First, I explore how young women negotiate between old and new desires of romantic love, and how they translate and reconstruct their desire in courtship in contemporary South Korean society. Second, I examine the conflicting/selective talk of women audiences in the process of transition concerning romantic love as a western sensibility in Hollywood films in the postcolonial context of South Korea. In other words, I consider how South Korean women as audiences translate romantic ideas, and how this affects the formation of South Korean women's identity in their own exercise of marriage. Finally, I discuss why young women are still practising a form of marriage, *Chungmae* (arranged marriage) and what this practice purports to achieve.

## **5.2. Overview of transforming marriage**

### *(5.2.1) The traditional arranged marriage*

The marriage system is generally regarded as the most significant institution for maintaining South Korean society (Cho, H. 1991; Kim, E-S. 1993; Kendall, 1996). However, the marriage system is not a static institution. Instead, it is constantly evolving and transformed into new forms. As Nancy Abelmann remarks, South Korean society has experienced quite rapid change, and its transformation can be called a “compressed modernity” (2003). And this compressed modernity, the hard-core social institution of the marriage system, has changed its form, content and meaning during the last five decades. For Koreans, marriage has been considered as one of the most important and necessary pathways to the normal life. In the 1950s, an American ethnographer, Cornelius Osgood, correctly pointed out the meaning of marriage for Koreans saying, ‘marriage under the old Korean system was almost as certain as death’ (Osgood, 1951: 103).<sup>61</sup> Most young women in Korea have the same experience of greetings from their relatives and neighbours such as “why don’t you get married? You ought to be married!” This kind of greeting is equivalent to “how are you?” for the young women. When a Korean feminist scholar, Eun-Shil Kim, conducted her research on the marriage system in Korea, she noted that ‘when I asked women why they got married, they laughed at my absurd question and said that they wanted to live a “normal life”’ (Kim, E-S. 1993:12). However, despite the pivotal role of marriage in living a proper life, during the process of modernisation its meaning has been rapidly transformed. With institutional change, the very concept of marriage is reinterpreted as noted above and as I will attempt to show during this chapter.

As in other Asian societies, such as China and Japan, marriage is a business conducted between the two different families. Because of the family-centred social order, matrimony plays a role in recruiting another member of the family (in most cases, also an addition to the active labour-force). The basic marriage process was arranged and decided by the head of the family. This old traditional form

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<sup>61</sup> This tendency seems to be universal in other countries in Asia and western societies. During the twenties century the compulsory marriage system can be observed to have collapsed and transformed into other forms. However, it is notable that this research is not aiming at arguing common and universal characters of marriage system. Rather, this research seeks to reveal the localised and contextualised marriage system as a part of transformative cultural practice.

of matrimony is called “*Chungmae*” (arranged marriage).<sup>62</sup> In this process, the role of the main characters in marriage, the bride and groom, were quite minimal and often absent. Even, under the traditional matrimonial system, brides and grooms would go to their weddings in ignorance of each other’s face.

This type of traditional matrimony was practised in conservative rural *yangban* (traditional noble ruling class in traditional Korean society) community and they adamantly resisted love marriages up to the second half of the twentieth century (Dix, 1977). Of course, the old traditional regime was already showing itself to be in decline when new western ideas were introduced during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). In the second decade of the twentieth century just after the ruthless repression of the peaceful independent movement in 1919 (the 3.1 Movement), the Japanese rulers reformed their policy on Korean people from military oppression to relaxed civil governance, which was called the “cultural policy”. In the colonial period, new enlightenment of western ideas and attitudes were introduced and prevailed amongst the urban intelligentsia. Many young Koreans went to the higher education system in the colonial city of Seoul. Through their education and modernisation under the colonial rule, a new form of marriage was introduced. The new idea was based upon free choice and love. In this changed situation, young intellectuals began to advocate marriage on the basis of their personal choice and mutual understanding in the name of individualism and free will (Kendall, 1996: 101). In particular, a new kind of modernised women emerged, called “new women” (*Sinyosung*)<sup>63</sup>. As the novel idea began to prevail, many educated men left behind their wives who had already been chosen by their family. Instead, they were in pursuit of romantic love with the new women who were educated and stylish. At the same time, the colonial rule announced liberal

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<sup>62</sup> The *Chungmae* marriage (arranged marriage) is a quite interesting concept. The usage of the term varies in different locations and situations. In general, the term refers to the general form of arranged marriage. However, sometimes the meaning of the term is used differently. As I will discuss later, different forms of arranged meetings have evolved to be included in the category. Those forms of meetings can be categorised as sub-concepts of the *Chungmae*.

<sup>63</sup> The term appeared in Japan during the 1900s, and it was introduced in colonial Korea during the 1920s. As soon as it introduced in Korea, it became the main term to represent the specific period of the 1920s. According to Kwon, the definition of “new women” is women who are educated to the level of the middle school. Furthermore, with respect to their appearance, new women were represented as having western hairstyles, wearing heels, carrying parasols, and wearing strong perfume (Kwon, B. 2003: 65-66).

divorce laws and this facilitated many men to cast off their arranged wives (Katsue, 2003: 162) and this phenomenon of divorce and matrimony in the name of free choice and love provoked intense disapproval and profound anguish among kin.

### *(5.2.2) Modernity and romantic love*

Under the name of modernisation and enlightenment, the idea of romantic love pervaded people's lifestyle. For Koreans under the colonial rule, modernisation meant an aspiration to the wealth and power of nationhood. For this reason, people gradually accepted the new way of life and ideas that originated from what was seen to be the authentic origin of modernity, the West. The marriage system was directly influenced by this enormous wave of modernisation. Romantic love and matrimony on the basis of free will began to undermine the solid foundation of the old traditional arranged marriage system. As noted above, romantic love became a central topic particularly amongst middle class intellectuals during the 1920s. However, it might be asked: without any direct contact and interaction, how did Korean intellectuals acquire the idea of romantic love and romantic love marriage, which were seen to be the backbones of western modernism? As many scholars have discussed, the main way of picking up the idea was through novels and writings (Choi, H.S. 2000; Kwon, B. 2003). For instance, a famous early novelist during the colonial period, Lee Kwang-Soo, produced a colossal work, *Mujeong* (Heartless). The novel shows new types of trends and struggle and a new confusion, which were related to love and marriage in the late 1910s.

However, the strongest medium for romantic love may also have been visual materials. The "New World image" with its modern sense of entertainment from the West became widely available to colonised Koreans in the early 1930s. The influence of western-American movies<sup>64</sup> (mainly Hollywood films) was very strong and they became widely accepted as a "textbook of modernity" (Park, Y-H. 1978: 83). Consequently, the western movie was a "window on the world". When the

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<sup>64</sup>The western films (American movies over 90%) occupied 60-70 % of the whole market in Korea (Yoo, S-Y. 2005: 9). It is noted that Japanese film was not attracted the Korean Audiences at that time.

first western genre was introduced, the audiences were mostly teenage secondary school pupils, but by the late 1920s, they were mostly adult intellectuals. Those moviegoers were seen to be, and indeed called, “advanced modern people”. For them, (especially American) movies were generally something more than mere entertainment. Western movies encouraged people to follow and mimic what actors and actresses were wearing and doing in films. New fashion items swept through the streets of Seoul like Chaplin’s moustache, Gary Cooper’s coat, Robert Montgomery’s tie, William Powell’s trousers and so on (Kim, J-S. 1999: 174). During the colonial period (1910-1945), young people became emotionally attached to film heroes and heroines such as ‘John Gilbert, Ronald Coleman, Ramon Navarro, Lillian Gish, Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo, often mentioning those stars and body parts in describing the physical shape of their friends and lovers in terms of similarities’ (Kim, J-S. 1999:155). According to Yoo Sun-young, ‘The desired change was to create a new world that included, on the individual level, copying and mimicking new modern bodily gestures, forms of speech, facial expressions, language and outlooks’ (Yoo, S-Y. 2001: 420).

One of the cultural institutions strongly influenced by the pervasive western culture through movies was marriage culture<sup>65</sup>. During the 1920s and 1930s, so-called modernised couples would avoid a traditional marriage ceremony and instead go to church for *YesooKyo-sik* (Christian style) marriage, dressed in western suits and white dresses. The term “*YesooKyo-sik*” marriage came into usage in the 1920s to designate modern-style marriage. A newspaper at the time even showed how such marriage translated into everyday events on the street in Seoul:

In American movies, there is a scene in which a couple asked a priest on the street to be an officiator and had a wedding on the street instantly. In *Chosun* (an old name of Korea), there was a guy who stopped a girl and proposed on the street [...] in 1930, there was a man proposing to a passer-by. In 1931, there could be someone having a wedding ceremony on the street.

(*Chosun Ilbo*, 25 November 1930 in Shin, M-J, 2003: 141)

### (5.2.3) *Romantic love as a failed project in the colonial climate*

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<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, this phenomenon of the American movies can be argued as a form of resistance to Japanese colony and American culture for audiences may have been an imagined place to escape from the colonial oppression (Yoo, S-Y. 2005).



However, romantic love did not always provide rosy prospects. In particular during the colonial period (1910-1945), many intellectuals and so-called new women (*Sinyosung*) practised romantic love and got married without the consent of their families. This pioneering behaviour sometimes met with strong resistance and disapproval from their family and, consequently, scandalous rumours were circulated in society.

These rumours included many mythical stories of failed romance. There are two famous cases of failed romance: the first story was about a pioneering female painter and writer, Na Hye-sok (1896-1948). She had attended higher education in Japan and Europe, and enjoyed high social visibility and reputation. She broke new ground in western oil painting as the first Korean professional female painter. However, her turbulent love affairs with three men and her marriage became a source of gossip and scandal. When she divorced her diplomat husband, Kim Woo-young, she published an article criticising the conservative social view on marriage and inequality between men and women (Na, 1934). However, after her divorce many blamed her for corrupting social morals. Hence, her family disowned her and she tragically died homeless in 1948 (Kim, Y-H. 2002). Another example can be found in the case of the love affair between a famous opera singer of the 1920s, Yoon Sim-duk, and a writer, Kim Jin-woo. Yoon was educated in Tokyo and became a soprano singer in Korea, and she fell in love with Kim Jin-woo. However, he already had a wife who had been chosen by his family. Thus, they decided to commit suicide and they threw themselves off the ferry between Japan and Korea in 1926 (Kwon, B. 2003). These two tragic love stories are still the symbol of the results of pure romantic love, and the mass media still revives these stories in the form of drama and documentaries.

Thus, from this early modernist experiment, the project of romantic modern love has been regarded as a difficult task to achieve by mass media although the main idea has permeated deeply and prevailed in South Korean society. At the deeper level of mentality, the experimental experience offered an idea that romantic love itself is accompanied with fear of failure. The anxiety of romantic love is re-circulated as tragic ends to contemporary films and melodramas, reworking the mythical scandalous stories of Na Hyesok and Yoon Sim-duk. Even recently, it can be claimed that these tragic ends of romantic love showed the huge gap between the modern romantic love and traditional conservative social conditions. In

other words, the experiment of romantic love in the colonial period was, essentially, a failed project.

#### (5.2.4) *The emergence of novel forms of marriage*

Nevertheless, the import of modernity and romantic love also brought a degree of optimism to Koreans. This tendency was maintained after the liberation from the colonial rule despite the tragic and brutal Korean War (1950-1953). With the development of modernisation in Korea, the optimistic view on changing the matrimonial form towards free choice on the basis of romantic love was argued by many intellectuals. One Korean writer claimed that 'the trend now is toward a greater freedom of choice in selection of a lifetime mate, and a companionship approaching the relationship of husband and wife in the Western world is developing throughout Korea' (Kim, H-T. 1957: 103, in Kendall, 1996: 90). This view stemmed from the teleological view that development and enlightenment are equivalent to achieving the western model of life style. However, such perspectives never materialised in practice. As Kendall points out effectively by using the argument of Rey Chow (Chow, 1991), modernisation 'may be oblivious to the actual conditions and premises of women's lives in the new' (Kendall, 1996: 90).

In real life practice, a kind of compromised form of matrimony has evolved. This new trend can be described as marriage by personal choice with the approval of the family. In an ideal world, the romantic love marriage can be seen as an antithesis to the old traditional arranged marriage. However, in the real world, the compromised form of marriage has gradually been accepted widely. The preference for personal choice on the basis of romantic love (love marriage, *Yonae gyulhon*) is an absolute choice of the majority in the post-Korean War period. However, they still have to secure their family approval. During the first three decades after the devastating 1950-1953 Korean War, the new negotiated form of marriage was practiced. Although many of the conservative old generation initially resisted proliferation of the new idea of personal choice and love, the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation probably made them accept the reality of practising new forms of marriage. Nevertheless, many people still practiced the namely old form of marriage, *Chungmae*. It is notable that during the period of rapid industrialisation (roughly between the mid 1960s and the 1970s), although people called the form of marriage *Chungmae*, the actual content began to be

filled with new form of marriage, i.e. personal choice of spouse and romantic love. With respect to more recent expectations, the absolute majority is committed to the love marriage. According to a survey done by the Korean Women's Development Institute in 1985, 77.7 % of respondents replied that marriage is a matter of individual choice sanctified by parental consent whereas only 1.5% of people expressed a willingness to merely "follow" a parent's choice (KWDI, 1985: 59, in Kendall 1996: 94).

This interesting change towards the compromised form of marriage showed the gap between ideal form of love marriage and real practice of marriage. People have realised that, although they all expect to get married on the basis of romantic love, it is merely an ideal and really hard to achieve/realise such options. In the same survey, which has been regularly conducted since 1959 (KWDI, 1985: 59, in Kendall 1996: 94), the general tendency of endorsing a view of love marriage with family approval has demonstrated a steady rise. However, interestingly, the number of people advocating marriage solely on the basis of personal choice decreased, from 10.9% to 3.2%, during 1980-1990 (KWDI, 1985: 59, in Kendall 1996: 94).

We can then perhaps ask: if the majority view on marriage is neither the sole romantic love-based marriage nor traditional arranged marriage, what kind of institutional frame can support this newly constituted idea of marriage? Interestingly, there is no such an alternative institutional form of matrimonial process to underpin the compromised form and view of marriage. Instead, I found in my research that informants actively translate the old form of marriage system and modern romantic love together into novel meanings. In the course of this translation, modern romance becomes a necessary condition for marriage. The question is how the traditional marriage form and modern romantic love are combined together. As seen, the two concepts were understood as disparate elements in Korean society. However, with the modernisation process, each element cannot be completed alone. Therefore, in the next section, I will show the two elements are represented in mass media in contemporary Korean society.

### **5.3. The media representation of love and marriage**

South Koreans have observed dynamic cultural change during and after the 1990s, which has been particularly reflected in the media. With regard to mar-

riage and love, various novel concepts and alternative ideas were flourishing in this period. The pre-existing idea of marriage and romantic love was significantly revisited and represented differently. In general, there have been the specific changes in the media representation of marriage and love. The discourse of premarital cohabitation has emerged in public. A heterosexual couple living together without getting married was not morally accepted in Korean tradition, except when the couple could not afford to have a wedding ceremony. In this exceptional case, the relationship was recognised as a regular marriage. However, if they lived together in order to try out their relationship, or as a partnership, this would be the subject of criticism. The situation dramatically changed during the 1990s. Apart from the actual practice of cohabitation, the concept has been gradually permeating into the new generation's consciousness. In other words, the meaning of two elements, i.e. marriage and romantic love, are significantly revised. This is not a one-sided revision or transformation. Rather it is double transformation of the two elements. According to a recent survey, the young generation (20-35 year-old) shows an acceptance of premarital cohabitation. 56.9% of the younger generation appreciate that they do not mind the premarital cohabitation, whereas a positive reaction to premarital cohabitation from the older generation (36-45 year-old) is only 42.2% (Lee & Son, Joongang Daily Newspaper, 5 October 2004). The discourse has finally been absorbed by interaction between the representation of media and women's audience in the 2000s.

In 2003, premarital cohabitation became a subject of a television drama. *The Cat of the Rooftop Room* (*Oktapbang Goyang-y*, Producer: In-Young Kim, MBC, 2003) confronted the issue directly. Although it was a comedy, the drama shows what happens when a couple meet and live together and the development of the relationship and premarital cohabitation. Confronting an area of taboo in the media, *The Cat of the Rooftop Room* became the most popular drama of the season. Also, the hidden discourse of premarital cohabitation entered the public domain. Before the drama was aired, premarital cohabitation was generally described as the dark side of relationships, equated to other negative aspects such as betrayal and revenge. However, this drama deals with cohabitation as an issue to do with partners wishing to get to know each other before marriage, as the writer of the drama, Yoori Kim says (Pi, S-H., 2004). This bold move by the media seems to offer an alternative to the current marriage system. Nevertheless, it reveals the limitations of the current discourse, which whilst they seem to show different op-

tions of marriage, the discourse of premarital cohabitation is not seen necessary as an independent alternative to the current one of rigid conventional marriage. Rather, as the writer of the drama remarks, cohabitation is living together first, and marriage later. Premarital cohabitation implies that the final goal of cohabitation is to get married. In other words, cohabitation is regarded as just a provisional and transitional period for marriage. This wary approach to the issue of premarital cohabitation means that there remains a huge barrier and struggle in social consensus.

However, the results of a survey show the other side of the prevalent discourse on premarital cohabitation. Although nearly 70% of people accepted the concept of cohabitation, as the survey result noted above shows, 51.5% of respondents to the question, 'would you get married if your lover had experience of cohabitation?' said 'no' (Kwon, O. Hankyoreh Daily Newspaper, 15 July 2003). With respect to the meaning of this contradictory result, a close relationship between cohabitation and marriage can be found in an interview conducted to monitor the audiences' reactions to the drama. One of the interviewees remarks 'If I found a right partner for cohabitation, why wouldn't I get married? I would rather get married. Cohabitation is still scandalous in workplaces' (Lee, J-W. 2003).

This conflictual discourse can be found in another popular melodrama in Korea, such as one called *Terms of Endearment*<sup>66</sup> (*Aejeong-eui-Jogun*, producer: Jong-Chang Kim, KBS, 2004) in 2004. During the 6 months of the "reign" of this drama, it reached the top-viewing rate (average 40%) and caused huge controversy, around the issue of premarital cohabitation. Compared to the *Cat in the Rooftop Room*, the approach of this drama was quite different; it displays a more conservative view of premarital cohabitation. In the drama, one of the heroines, Eun-pa, has a secret past of cohabitation with her ex-boy friend and a miscarriage, when she falls in love. When she gets married, the hidden past is revealed and the drama shows her struggle and emotional turmoil. Although the drama ends up with a happy ending, at one point Eun-pa attempts to commit suicide because of her past. Even the actress, Gain Han, remarks in an interview that if she were in the same situation, she would refuse to live together before marriage say-

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<sup>66</sup> The translated title is the same as the Hollywood film (director: James L. Brooks, 1983), however, the story of the Korean drama is completely different from the Hollywood film

ing that 'although I may be in love, when put in the situation of cohabitation, I would get married first'. She also claims 'the idea of premarital cohabitation is not a bad idea, but I am really afraid to commit' (Bak, M-J. 18 March, 2004).

There are also quite contradictory public opinions on premarital cohabitation, compared to the survey results above. One women's Internet site, *XY in Love*, has surveyed women's attitudes to premarital cohabitation and women's past sexual/cohabiting experience, showing that 47% of female respondents replied that one should not declare/mention one's past experience at all (xyinlove.co.kr, 2004). However, one of the feminist organisations in Korea, Korean Women's Link (*Yosong Minwoohoe*) criticises this conservative view and relates it to the drama mentioned above. A director of the media movement in the Korean Women's Link, Heran Kang, claims 'this drama encourages anti-social and past-oriented old fashioned views on premarital cohabitation without reflecting new acceptance. If the drama described the problem of a man who has various sexual experiences and a desire to get married to a pure woman and revealed the hypocrisy of men, then it would be possible to argue about new sexual attitudes. But *Terms of Endearment* tries to blame women's past' (Pi, S-H. 2004). On the other hand, the producer of this drama, Jong-chang Kim, who won the Gender Equality Prize from the Ministry of Gender Equality for his contribution in the women's issues to raising the issue of abolishing the headship of household, replies to this criticism saying 'this programme is merely reflecting current Korean society. In reality, Korean society is more patriarchal and conservative than what we have described in this drama. 'I know that the content of this drama is too conventional and somehow silly, but I have tried to describe the realities of women's lives. It is a pity not to offer any alternative, but I hope people realise the limitations of current social views and how Korea is a male-centred society and media when you watch this drama' (Pi, S-H. 2004).

The other significant change in media representation can be found in the related issues of career and marriage. As industrialisation progresses, many women have committed to their careers. Thanks to this prolonged participation by women in the labour market, the number of unmarried women amongst those aged between 25 and 29 has grown from 10% in the 1970s to 40% in the 2000s. Furthermore, the number of unmarried women amongst the 30-34 years age group has reached 11% (Park, S-H. Hankook Economy Daily, 18 June 2004). This growing tendency

of increasing marriage age can be explained in two ways. First, it may reflect that fact that, for women, it is hard to balance career and marriage and they choose to sacrifice either marriage or career. In South Korea, once women get married, they have tended to retreat from their career as there has been social pressure and a company culture during rapid industrialisation to encourage this, although this culture has been changing more recently in favour of pursuing women's careers alongside marriage. Second, there is the issue of rearing children. Compressed industrialisation causes a problem with the lack of a social welfare system. When women who have their own career have children, there is no other choice but staying at home to take care of their children if there is no help from their relatives.

The difficulties of combining marriage and career are described in the drama *Women want to get married* (*Gylhon hago sipeun Yoja*, director: In-young Kim, MBC, 2004) in 2004. This drama reached an audience of around 30% amongst the age group of 30s in 2004. This drama depicts the lives of three women aged 32 and their desires for a career and marriage. The main character of this drama, Sin-young is a journalist and has experienced being dumped by her ex-boyfriend because she is focusing too much on her career. One of her friends, Soon-ae has just been sacked and has broken up with her cheating boyfriend. Meanwhile, another friend, Seungri was married to a rich playboy and lived in the States, but she divorced and came back to South Korea. The common desire of these three main characters is all about marriage. They are all seeking the right person to marry. However, when they do actually find someone who may be the right person, the drama shows their reluctance and hesitation to commit because of the pursuit of their careers.

One of the strengths of this drama is that its depiction of women's desires and dilemmas is quite honest. According to the media review magazine published by the media workers' union of MBC, the broadcasting company that produced the drama, this drama breaks the "Cinderella" formula of women. In the review article, the main difference between past dramas and *Women want to get married* is the attitude to marriage which is more female-centred. In previous dramas, men always have the power of decision regarding marriage, whereas in this drama, it is women who are seeking their partners and making their own decisions to get married. Furthermore, the drama describes the reality of women's desire for a

career. Lastly, instead of concealing and isolating the discourse of divorce as shame, the drama demonstrates that the divorcee can actually reconstruct her life by having her own career. As mentioned above, a growing number of women want to have their own career. Already in the 1980s over 70% of female college students showed their desire to get a job after graduation (Cho, H. 2002). Thus, the struggle and tension between marriage and career has become a real issue in South Korean society whilst, perhaps paradoxically, romantic love has become an increasingly significant theme in media and society.

### *(5.3.1) Tragic narratives of romantic love*

One of the intriguing tendencies in the media representation of love and marriage is the revival and re-use of the tragic narratives of romantic love<sup>67</sup>. This tendency can easily be found in media representations in contemporary Korean society. In addition to various popular Korean romantic films of the past, there are several hugely popular films that illustrate romantic relationships without the approval of one's family. However, one common theme of these popular romantic movies is that the ending of the films is tragic. For instance, *Christmas in August* (director: Jinho Huh, 1998) shows the desire for, and fear of, pure romantic love. The narrative is simple: a female traffic warden falls in love with the owner of a camera shop at first sight. However, this love is not expressed explicitly. Furthermore, no passion is described in the film at all. The film only describes emotional sensitivity and exchanges between the two main characters and the film ends with the death of the male character. The film was extremely popular in 1998 with 44,000 people watching it within a few weeks of release.

It could perhaps be argued that the film demonstrates that romantic love is imperfect on its own. One of the film critics in the Cannes Film Festival even commented 'this film is beautiful with an oriental view on death' (*Cine 21*, 1999).

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<sup>67</sup> In the debates on the history of the melodramatic imagination, Peter Brooks (1976) explores the rise of melodrama through dramatic convention (Grimstead, 1968), literary work (Radway, 1984), film (De Lauretis, 1984; Gledhill, 1987; Modleski, 1982). According to Abelmann (2003) melodramatic sensibility is pronounced in South Korea's various media and in popular women's narratives of everyday lives. In particular, Christine Gledhill (1987) describes how melodrama replaced the "tragic hero fixed in social hierarchy" with the "individual" of the "democratic bourgeois family".



Around the same time there were several epic films such as *Love* (director: Jang-soo Lee, 1999) and *Letter* (*Pyunji*, director: Jungkook Lee, 1997) which illustrated the same theme of romantic love and all ended with the death of the main characters.



**Figure 8. Christmas in August (director: Jinho Huh, Uno Film, 1998).**

This romantic melodrama tendency can also be found in TV drama. In 2002 there was a hugely popular melodrama called *Winter Love Song* (Producer: Sokho Yoon, KBS, 2002). It became an addiction for many viewers and when it reached the end, many viewers sent letters and messages asking the writer not to kill off the main character. The story line was revised to show a happy ending within tragic circumstances (the male character became blind but met his love in the end) due to pressure from the audience (Cho, J-W., 2002). This romantic melodramatic tendency in the late 1990s and early 2000s can be interpreted in two ways: First, the discourse of romantic love is unrealistic and idealistic, which is why the narrative ends up with tragic death and sad separation. As mentioned, the melodramatic romance is thought to be synonymous with a tragic end generally, but also it is notable that, at the local level, the long standing tradition of mythical stories of romantic love without family approval ending with tragic death has been inscribed in Korean mentality, as discussed in the above section. Second, however, the pure form of romantic love offers an ideal type for relationships in contemporary South Korean society. Although it is a highly idealised

form, romantic love is one of the goals to be achieving in marriage (or in a relationship). In this vein, there are intriguing audience reactions to this genre; showing approval of the type of man shown to be ideal in these tragic romantic love stories – a type of man that is quite different from the real image of South Korean patriarchal men. For instance, the melodrama *Winter Love Song* produced an ideal image of contemporary manhood that is attractive to many women, particularly married women. The image is tender, gentleman-like, and well mannered, openly expressive of his love<sup>68</sup>.



**Figure 9. Winter Love Song (director: Sokho Yoon, KBS, 2002)**

As the above discussion shows, new discourses around the topics of marriage and love are growing in media representation. This could be a positive trend for women in general. In other words, it could reflect women's pursuit of their own career and that they are opting for an alternative way of living. However, there is one considerable problem with this recent discourse since it is still oriented towards marriage. For instance, the positive and open views on premarital cohabitation are not an alternative to the conventional marriage and those discourses never really offer an alternative view. Rather, they are closely related to marriage in that premarital cohabitation is regarded as a pathway to marriage itself. Without marriage, premarital cohabitation on the basis of love is unimaginable. This

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<sup>68</sup> The main male character of the drama, Yongjoon Bae became an icon of romanticism and a favourite image of lover. The drama was even exported to Japan, and it drew an audience of more than 20% of Japanese households, compared with 5% for ER (Wiseman, USA Today, 2004; BBC News, 25 November 2004).

marriage-dominated discourse can also be found in the discourse of work and marriage. Although many women commit to their career, as shown in the case of *Women want to get Married*, being married is still one of the most important issues in the life of women. Marriage is still a pillar of their life. Therefore, confusing and contradictory discourses prevail. In the next part of this chapter, I will develop further upon this discussion in addressing more precisely the relationship between romantic love and marriage in the context of South Korea. In particular, I will consider how, like the institution of marriage, the concept of romantic love has been evolving, and how it has been translated to a necessary premise of marriage in the South Korean context.

#### **5.4. Translation of romantic love: Romantic love as a pathway to marriage**

In the previous section, I considered the media representation of recent changes of the view of romantic love and marriage, and how the popular discourse on premarital cohabitation and women's careers is perceived and ambivalently displayed in dramas. It should be noted that from those media representations of love and marriage, two factors cannot be separated from women's lifestyles in South Korea: romantic love and marriage are always amalgamated as two sides of a coin.

##### *(5.4.1) The modern romance as a standard: women are still mimicking it*

Nevertheless, despite the continued focus on marriage, romantic love becomes the main necessary component of the relationship between a man and a woman. The translated sensibility of romantic love remains an interesting ongoing process that frames the relationship between romantic love and marriage in the postcolonial context. In other words, while the romantic idea in South Korea does not imply an immediate experience of the body, culture operates as a frame within which emotional experience is organised, labelled, classified and interpreted. In particular, the contradictory character of women's interpretations of sexuality in the western romantic media (particularly the Hollywood films) highlights the complex dialectic between the postcolonial audience's resistance to, and complicity with, the global culture. The interplay between the romantic media culture and social context provides the space for conflict and negotiation of women's feminin-

ity in contemporary South Korea. In order to adequately reveal this interplay, I turn from discussion of media products to my informants' discussion of their media derived understandings of romantic love in this section.

As mentioned in the previous section about the colonial period, the Hollywood film is still the most important impetus for creating romantic sensibilities. Under globalisation, the influx of romantic sensibility has been accelerated and proliferated. This kind of tendency is remarked by Ann Snitow, who states that 'the attraction of (sexual) difference has appeared in exaggerated and intensified forms within the influence of mass market capitalism and the proliferation of a cultural capitalism and the proliferation of a cultural production of romance narratives in film' (Snitow, 1983: 260). However, Stacey suggests that the spectator's fantasies and desires are formed differently within a specific context (Stacey, 1994:79).

Romantic movies are certainly beyond the boundary of art and have become a reference point for dating in courtship, how to wear (fashions), and a "map of customs" through their influence over cultural life in general. For example, my informants keep up-to-date with romantic ideas from a wide range of Hollywood movies such as *Waterloo Bridge* (director: Mervyn LeRoy, 1940), *Casablanca* (director: Michael Curtiz, 1942), *Romeo and Juliet* (director: Baz Luhrmann, 1996), *Titanic* (director: James Cameron, 1997), and so on. Interestingly, one of the informants, a young generation moviegoer, remarked that her favourite movie is *Waterloo Bridge*. The age differences among informants did not seem to produce different preferences in terms of romantic movies. Their choice of favourite film depends on who the informant can identify with easily in the romantic narrative: for example, an informant who is a 37 year-old full time housewife has an impressive memory of the heroine of the film, *The Bridges of Madison County* (director: Clint Eastwood, 1995):

I could not remember the title of the movie. Do you know the love between a married man and married woman? I cannot remember... well, which Bridge? Ah! *The Bridges of the Madison County*, Yes! I was so impressed. They love each other deeply. I realised that they can be falling in love, even after marriage. And then they could return to their position in the family. After the death of the heroine, her children found their mother's love; they seemed understanding about their mother's life. That's a really impressive point.

(Age37, Full time wife)

Hence, even high school girls still remember *Waterloo Bridge*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Casablanca* and *Roman Holiday* (1953) etc. The respondents argue that getting information about romantic love corresponds to their own pleasure and dreams of practising romantic love. From their point of view, the Hollywood films provide the essential form of romantic love. With this ideal type of romantic love, the informants want to experience love as the films describe it, as asserted by this informant'

*"I learned from [a] film what real love is"*

Thus, she claims that her concept and understanding of "real love" was entirely what she learnt from the movie and she is still expecting this kind of romantic love in her own future. This learning and identification process is one example of mimicking the romantic culture from Hollywood movies.<sup>69</sup> The informant below illustrates how Hollywood movies like *Aesoo* (*Waterloo Bridge*) provide examples for creating a romantic sensibility in her broader discussion around the above statement:

In my case, my favourite film is 'AeSoo'<sup>70</sup> (*Waterloo Bridge*). I still remember the scene where the heroine ran into the truck on the bridge because she loved him so much. I learned from this film what real love is. I saw it when I was in the secondary school and I thought I would be falling in love like that one day.

(Age 23, University student)

The following interview extract also illustrates the fantasy of western romantic love, which the informant enjoys, and here makes the connection noted above between romantic love and marriage. On the conscious level, the informant connected her own desire for romantic love and marriage with discussion between her peers:

Don't you think those films like '*Romeo and Juliet*' and '*Titanic*' explore emotional impetus? They seem to be falling in love at first sight. I envied that

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<sup>69</sup> Roughly two thirds of informants avoided this question of favourite Hollywood movies, however, the rest of the informants answered about their favourite movies including Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese etc.

<sup>70</sup> *AeSoo* means welcoming love. Very often the translation of western film titles has been changed from the original meaning.

kind of passion and love when I was a teenager. It's so romantic... I thought a lot about that...I wished I would have that kind of love ... I want to be a heroine in the movies. I would love a great guy like that hero in the movies. Wouldn't it be great to have those handsome and great guys around me? I was really enjoying my imagination when I was in high school. I hoped I would be in the position of romantic stories. We (she and her friends) were talking all the time about romantic love and we had planned to get married as soon as we could.

(Age 25, Dermatologist)

There are strong tendencies towards mimicry of the western romantic idea, which relate to modernisation and westernisation. As I mentioned before, the desired romantic love invokes mimicry of romantic bodily gestures, for instance, and forms of speech, language and outlook. The idea of romantic love, which, as discussed, is obtained through western movies, is still a standard reference to the so-call "real love".

*"We imitate how men propose to women in such a romantic way"*

Another interesting feature is that women expect romantic gestures from their partners like those being represented in Hollywood movies. They seem to think that what actors do in the movie represents real life, and that their romantic gestures and remarks are realistically romantic. For this reason, women are not only imagining and mimicking the lifestyle that is represented in the films, but they also expecting men to behave like the actors in the movie. For instance, to be proposed to is thought to be a typical romantic gesture and, indeed, appears to be expected by women.

I can see western people's everyday life in the movie...well; usually nobody is interested in or tries to imitate a Korean's everyday life. However, we try hard to follow (mimic) every detail of Americans' behaviour and everyday life such as detailed gestures like in a movie. For instance, we imitate tremendously how men propose to women in such a romantic way.

(Age 21, College student)

We would not think of Korean men giving a woman flowers or driving a luxurious car and drinking wine on his date without having watched the romantic movies.

(Age 18, High school student)

As will be discussed in greater depth below, this extract seems to suggest not only that the practice of romantic love is imitative but also that material consumption and sexuality are linked in a standard semiotic of romantic pleasure. Furthermore, Western films are transporting audiences into a “realistic” fantasy-world of love and courtship that is still embedded within marriage structures. Indeed, some informants stated that men’s marriage proposals in the Korean language are inappropriate for a romantic relationship. Instead, she thinks that the English words “I love you” are more romantic than *Saranghanda* (the Korean equivalent to “I love you”).

Well, I feel their way of proposing is so much more romantic than the Korean way. For example, a Korean man told me *Saranghanda, Kyulhonhaja* (I love you, I want to marry you) (laughing). It’s inappropriate to speak in Korean. (laughing). If an American guy says, “I love you”, it will feel more romantic.

(Age 21-22, University students)

The informant’s opinion is that the English statement itself (I love you) is more romantic than the Korean utterance. This in itself may show that romantic love is a western hegemonic idea. On the one hand, American culture continuously provides, albeit fragmented, a way to visualise the modern - gestures, expressions, movements, poises and accents - as well as how to express with new terms, forms of relationship and values. On this point, private desire and interest in romantic love is shaping many of the values and morals of the individual who creates negotiated self-identities in global media processes.

*“I wish I could wear those costumes”*

On the other hand, in order to achieve romantic sensibility (emotion and embodiment), informants’ practices must realise the practice in consumption as alluded to above. The following informant understands that romantic love is constructed by the luxurious and beautiful costumes. The importance of commodity consumption to female spectatorship emerges from a pivotal memory of goods and fashion of the Hollywood. In this way, Campbell points out ‘romantic doctrine provided a new set of motivations and justifications for consuming cultural products, ones which emphasised the value of the subjectively apprehended experience of consumption itself’ (1983: 289).

**Q:** In your opinion, what is the most romantic scenery?

In the film *Titanic*, have you seen the scene in which Leonardo Dicaprio tries to lift Kate Winslet in the ship? I wish I would be her with Dicaprio. I wish I could wear those costumes.

(Age 17, High school student)

Thus informant seems to be saying that she could achieve romantic sensuality if she wore those costumes. In terms of romantic practice in consumption, another example of romantic love and the romantic mood is a trench coat from Burberrys, the latter having been transformed into a general noun to indicate a style of trench coat. This is because of the popularity of movies such as the romantic films *Casablanca* and *Waterloo Bridge*.

Do you remember the last scene of the *Casablanca*? It is an unforgettable scene, when Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman were separated wearing Burberry coats and beautiful hats, the scene makes me so sad and the clothes they wore and the black and white scene were fantastically suitable for the romantic situation. I cried a lot. I love that! It is so romantic...

(Age 27, Full-time housewife)

The heroes and heroines, Humphrey Bogart, Robert Taylor, Vivian Leigh and Ingrid Bergman enchant the informants with their narrative of romantic love. In particular, the scene in which Robert Taylor recalls his love memories while smoking on *Waterloo Bridge* is the best popular romantic moment for Korean women and men according to a survey by a magazine (Kim, H-K., 2002). Even today, people wear a trench coat (called a "Burberry") as a symbol of romantic love. 'Sales of the trench coat in Korea constitute 10 percent of all Burberry sales. In Korea, the Burberry label is the most popular among all foreign brands. Seventy-eight percent of people have this style of trench coat in Korea (in Japan 68%). This consumer practice also provides the idea of romantic love in everyday life' (Kim, H-K., 2002). Thus the Burberry has been transformed into a cultural product. Campbell is insistent that it is important 'to conceive of these cultural products as providing the material for day-dreams rather than as being day-dreams' (Campbell, 1987: 93). The activity of the consumer is crucial. Aspiring to reach out to the women's audience with its earning and purchasing power, advertisements of Korean luxury products are regularly inserted into films, including advertisements for cosmetics, lingerie, tennis shoes, deodorants, soaps and perfumes. Thus, the informants read these films not just for sex and romance but



also for their production of various meanings in terms of a glimpse of modernity and how to live and enjoy life.

#### (5.4.2) *The translation of romantic love*

However, it is important to note that romantic meanings and messages are not simply “transmitted” by Hollywood romantic films, they are always translated. This means that the romantic idea is not homogeneous, although it maybe widespread through the increasing prevalence of Hollywood romantic films. As mentioned earlier, in the South Korean context, there is a dominant discourse that pure romantic love without family approval is the way to a tragic ending<sup>71</sup>. This seems to have constructed the myth that romantic love on its own cannot be complete without a proper marriage. This kind of tendency can be found in popular media representations. Despite the strong formation of romantic ideas, one of the interesting findings from the series of interviews is that informants comprehend romance in movies *selectively* using their own cultural values from the local context. For example, while most informants seem to think that they desire western women’s egalitarian status, they also recognise the problem of sexual freedom and violence. The following group discussion is about romantic ideas. This discourse is a clear example of how a local audience can translate a western idea into their own meanings, within social norms in South Korea:

**EW:** I don’t like everything about Hollywood movies because they show sexual freedom too much. I think western countries are open countries in terms of sexual freedom... there are so many ‘*Dongeo*’ (premarital cohabitations) in the films without any self-awareness. I feel we are different... such as Confucianism, isn’t it? We avoid sexual relationships before marriage. They are different from our country. They have more sexual freedom compared to us.

**YH:** I don’t think it’s a good thing to follow. It’s their weakness.

(Age between 20-21, College students)

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<sup>71</sup> The narratives of Korean romantic stories usually construct love as courtship, with marriage as the final goal of a romantic relationship. Interestingly, the popular narrative of South Korean romantic films involves the deletion of sexual relationships and seeking “pure” and “extreme” emotional relationships.

Thus, despite the mimicry of the western culture illustrated above, they hesitate about sexual relationships before marriage and they very often separate their romantic and sexual relationships. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the informants tend to distinguish an instant sexual relationship from romantic love. From the western representations of romantic love, the informant seems to think that a sexual relationship is instant and transient while ideal romantic love should be permanent and pure. In this sense, the informant attempts to separate the instant sexual relationship from the whole idea of romantic love. Hollywood films and imagined western hedonism – it is imagined, simply because it is not based on experience, but on representations of films and fictions – are means of self-justification for the informant's ideas. They remove sexual practice from the process of romantic love, while in western society; romantic love is seen as inextricably entangled with sexual passion.

**Q:** when you watch the American film, do you think the lifestyle of American women is different from here?

**H:** Of course, there are lots of differences. From greetings...in Korea, we are just greeting like saying something and bowing something like that. However, they are hugging each other without feeling shame. When they meet men, in the simple movie, the scene of sexual relationship is just appearing. In our country, that kind of thing is not allowed. That kind of scenes are easily found in films as well as channel two<sup>72</sup> when I change the TV channel, I accidentally encounter that kind of thing on channel two. I think America...is a foreign country that is very open to such things.

**Q:** Do you think it is a good thing?

**H:** Not quite.

**Q:** Why not?

**H:** This is my own personal view...but I don't think I am so open to such things. Even I can see people around me also quite so...they are not open. Whenever I see those things, I feel uncomfortable...it's my personal thought that I don't like it.

(Age 17, High school student)

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<sup>72</sup> The channel 2 is called AFKN (American Force Korea Network) which is an American TV channel for the American Army in Korea. The network has aired since 1957 and has 15 local networks in South Korea but was allocated to channel 2. The American Army in Korea returned the channel to Korea in 1996, and has moved to UHF 34 since then. This was usually the only direct encounter with American culture on TV during the military regime (between 1961 and 1992).

The tales of romantic courtship are also, albeit in a different way, cautionary tales, but they were much more varied in narrative. The informant's decoding shows her distinct position of sexual relationship and awareness of her own context. Her answers using terms such as "not quite" and "uncomfortable" instead of saying "no" are perhaps expressions of an ambivalent position. The informant is equivocal on the question of "sexual relationship" in American films, neither approving nor entirely disapproving of it.

**Q:** What kind of Western things don't you like to follow, please expand on your previous point about points you want to follow in western women's equality and freedom?

**AN:** I do not think they have only good things. They seem unusually inattentive to their family. I don't like this point. It seems like not a good way to follow.

**Q:** Do you mean a family should be the first priority?

**AN:** Yes, because a family is the basis of society. In the west, the relationship is too casual and instant. It is so simple. It is too easy to fall in love and get married in western society.

(Age 26, Librarian)

Thus, female audiences seem to have a "double consciousness" of western culture, between fear/yearning and mimicry/rejecting. As mentioned, informants tend to separate sexual relations from romantic love in order to justify their denial of sexual passion before marriage. According to many feminists, the ideals of romantic love and its intense emotional qualities tend to extend women's pleasure in sex (Jackson, 1993; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993). In other words, sexual desire is thought to be one of the integrated parts of romantic love (especially in relation to intensive emotional involvement). However, in the group interviews, the experience of seeing such images in western films did not demonstrate this tendency.

Instead, informants' remarks show their ambivalence towards the characteristics of romantic love and sexual desire. On the one hand, their conversation showed their yearning for, and mimicking of, the ideal of romantic love. Through mass media and fiction young girls absorb the ideal form of western romantic love, regardless of its real existence. On the other hand, there is a tendency to fear and reject it particularly because of its sexualised connotations. This conflict brings them to a position of ambivalence. The informant's rejection of romantic film in

this sense does not explain her inner realms of imagination and desire as successfully interpolated only by Western popular culture. Paradoxically, the following informant describes how informants are both desiring and rejecting a sexual relationship and how they are in conflict with and negotiating an ambivalent position 'tactically' as a choice not to choose. In other words, informants' understandings of sexual relationships before marriage seem to depend on individual choice. With regard to tactical choice, de Certeau provides a useful insight to explain this behaviour. Here, tactics such as choice not to choose is 'a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus' (de Certeau, 1984: 37).

#### (5.4.3) "Tactics" for not having a sexual relationship

It can be asserted that the practices of daily life are largely *tactical* transgressions of the rules and structures by which such life is ordinarily held to be ordered. At this point, the tactical choice of not having sexual relationships can be potential transgressions, in the form of strategies of transformation of women's identities. In the same vein, informants are well aware of that western romantic love with sexual pleasure is not yet applicable in their society. This ambivalent realisation of informants provides the space for tactics.

The following group discussion shows how informants interplay between taking risks and freedom of choice. The extract illustrates how informants calculate a choice of sexual relationship within a social context and how they play with a terrain imposed in society. Their "tactical choice of not having sexual relationships" can perhaps be seen as a transgressive action in the journey of finding a proper locus.

**A:** There are kinds of people who understand that having a sexual relation is an instant game. I don't think it's bad if they love each other and choose their sexual relationship.

**B:** But I don't think I should marry the man I gave my body though.

**C:** Ya, I think so.

**A:** The idea is too old to keep.

**C:** I don't believe in the virtue of virginity

**B:** If they use contraception then they don't necessarily need to consider marriage just because they have sex.

**D:** I have a different opinion.

**B:** I am not going to marry if I have a sexual relationship. Nevertheless, I do not want to have a sexual relationship easily, whether the boyfriend and I use contraception or not.

**A:** No, she doesn't mean a casual sexual relationship. Maybe, looking forward marriage...

**B:** What I meant was I needed to be sure about marriage before a sexual relationship.

**C:** Do you mean an engagement?

**D:** I need a confirmation of the relationship. Without it, I cannot... I don't mean I cannot do it, I don't mean that. I think sex is a sin.

**Q:** Do you mean in terms of your religion?

**D:** Just, sex is unpardonable for me...

**B:** So do I. I can allow other people to have a sexual relationship but not myself. I think I have a double standard. There is a different standard in the gaze I have for myself and for other people.

**C:** Sinner?

**B:** I don't want to say to a friend "Don't sleep with a guy". I don't want to blame her. I want to have sex with one person on the first night of my honeymoon. Virginity is one of the biggest and best presents for my husband.

**D:** Yes, great idea! Great!

**B:** This idea is exactly what I think

**E:** What a fantastic idea!

**B:** I don't care what other people are doing about sex and I don't want to correct their behaviour. However, I know what I want to do with sex.

(Age 21-26, Former classmates)

The above informants' open and closed language concerning sexual identity may relate to their discomfort in discussing sexuality in the public context of the group interviews. Informants' statements feature a wide range of implications about premarital sexual relations. On the one hand, they are afraid of the real practice, but pretend that it is based on private choice. On the other hand, although they may already have engaged in sexual practice before marriage, they need to pretend not to have had experiences. In the middle of the discussion, informant D rejected the path of the conversation and she argued against the previous interviewee who complained of the old idea on sexual relationships. She made the point that informant A did not mean a casual sexual relationship and changed her opinion as presumably those who have sexual relationships can be expected to marry their sexual partners. Moreover, informant D strongly suggested that she

needed some kind of confirmation to have sex only with her future husband. D expressed ambivalence, hesitation, and a sense of vulnerability in the future, if she experienced a sexual relationship without the promise of marriage. Thus she seems to imply that, potentially, certainty of a happy marriage will bring her a greater chance of achieving her ordinary life style.

This discussion on premarital sexual experience shows how individual opinions were quite open in the beginning and ended up in line with conventional social values. The validation of informants' sexual pleasure failed to be encoded in the performance/representation of femininities. It shows a "rupture" between women as representation (women as cultural image) and women as experience (real women as agents of change). This rupture works as a choice not to choose and this is part of the process of integrity of their "unfinished femininities". From the informants' remarks, it can be argued that the tactical choice not to choose embodies a discursive gap between premarital sexual relations and marriage. Informants are not simply revealing ambivalence and contradictory identities unconsciously. Rather, they tactically defer and delay their sexual relationship before marriage. In the case of the informants C and A, they object to the virtue of virginity, as an old idea, although they avoid or delay sexual relationship before marriage. This intentional delay shows sexuality as a paradoxical space that is neither the autonomous position of social norms nor complete acceptance of sexual pleasure. The informant actively engages with the dominant media discourse of sexual relationship within those fractures through which intentional delaying is tactical, operating at the level of women's everyday life. This intentional delay can be crucial to such a vision of future femininities and a space for cultural translation. Nevertheless, owing to the pervasiveness of the modern idea of romantic love and sexual freedom, women tend to present it as a deliberate and tactically chosen action on the basis of the individual choice. Thus, the implication is quite opposite to what I have shown above.<sup>73</sup> From the above group discussion, young women are still located in conflicting, oscillating and ambivalent situations. Under those circumstances, they are constructing self-identity with tactical deferral of sexual relationship. It is not determined solely by traditional and normative

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<sup>73</sup> I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Rosalind Gill for her comment on this possible different interpretation.

requirements. It can be understood as a mere survival strategy, which can be one of temporal and contingent action in transition. This means a transformation of this cultural practice is continually emerging and contextualising.

#### (5.4.4) *I identify more easily with Korean romantic movies*

Although informants very often watch western movies, they appeared to think of South Korean romantic movies as their favourites. During the 1990s, there was a growing tendency to prefer Korean romantic movies because informants can easily identify themselves with the South Korean romantic film, representing romantic love in which the instant sexual relationships are little described, but also representing their double consciousness of western popular culture.

**Q:** Well, what is your favourite Hollywood film?

**HY:** I enjoy watching Korean films primarily because actors and actresses are similar to our...they are oriental. For to that reason, many people watch Japanese films<sup>74</sup>. We think they are similar. Japanese emotions have something in common to share with Korean's. Once we viewed their movies to be simple and predictable, but we feel the same emotions from the films.

**Q:** Then, there are people who like Korean films but do you have any memorable western movie recently? Any film which is so influential to your life?

**YO:** Well, I don't know...I am not a movie maniac...(Laugh)

**Q:** It's all right to tell me about a recent film you really enjoyed.

**EU:** Recently, I quite enjoyed the *Zoo next to the Gallery (Misoolkwan yup Dongmulwon)*<sup>75</sup>. So I even bought the videotape of the film. The main reason why I like the film is the main characters are comfortable to watch. I like such a film in which the main characters are falling in love and having a bit of ding-dong about something...I like that.

**Q:** Is there any other thing you like from the movie?

**EU:** A house I wish to live in? Yes, after watching the film, the *Letter*<sup>76</sup> (*Pyonji*).

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<sup>74</sup> It is notable that the Korean market opened up to Japanese film in 2000. Before the opening up of the market, Japanese films were circulated in the black market. Since the government decided to open the market for Japanese film in 1998, there has been a huge controversy about the potential impact of Japanese cultural goods including film, music and TV drama. However, the impact of the opening up of the market was thought to be not so great.

<sup>75</sup> The South Korean film, *Zoo next to the Gallery* (director: Jeong-Hyang Lee, 1998) is another romantic movie released at the same time as *Christmas in August* which I discussed above.

<sup>76</sup> The South Korean film, *Letter* (director: Jeong-kook Lee, 1997) is a tragic melodrama.

**HY:** Yes it is.

**EU:** The house in the film is so beautiful. The heroine is living in the *Soo-mokwon* garden in Kwangreung. When I watched the film, I wish I lived in such a peaceful place. Detached from the madding crowd, I wish I lived with someone I loved and had a beautiful love with him.

**Q:** Like the main female character?

**E:** Yes.

**Q:** Having an impressive love?

**E:** No. I want to have beautiful love.

**YO:** If you watch films like *Titanic* and *Romeo and Juliet*, love in those films is so instant. They are falling in love at first sight. When I was a little girl, I had that kind of fantasy to have an instant love...but after graduating from high school, I realised that it is meaningless.

**Q:** When you watch western films, what do you feel in general?

**YO:** They are too bonk-happy...I am afraid of that kind of thing.

(Age 21-22, University students)

Interestingly, in the long conversation of the informants, they claim to prefer Korean romantic movies. This tendency is probably closely related to the double consciousness of western romantic love. With this realisation of their desire and fear of western romantic film, their preference is gradually shifting to Koreanised romantic films, which are more plausible and emotionally shareable. They point out unambiguously that western romantic films depict love as instant/immediate, an idea/representation to which they are resistant. This is closely related to the tendency of western films to seem sexually over-exposed to my informants, a tendency my informants resisted. Furthermore, interestingly, my intention of asking questions about film had been to see their reaction to western films. But as soon as I asked the question, they switched their discourse to Korean romantic films in most cases. This type of conversation is also likely to demonstrate their shifting and unsettling identities in relation to romantic love.

Informants also suggested that western material culture speaks to transnational fantasies linked to consumerism, but they did not indicate that purely western narratives constituted their identities. What kind of socially possible fantasies could informants imagine there to be in South Korea? One issue is that of marriage and sexual intimacy. Sexual intimacy has to be morally legitimised by marriage as an institution that promises women social status and class mobility. Challenging or violating their assigned roles could result in exile, emotional pain and a



loss of family support. From the women's discussion noted above, the informants promote socially possible fantasies of romance and sex legitimised by marriage. These informants as audiences thus enjoy South Korean films more that allow them to apply, and stretch, the social boundaries of respectable imagined lifestyles from the movies, in their own cultural context. In this sense, young South Korean female audiences show that they are aware of self through the articulation of 'positional superiority over the west' (Nader, 1989: 326).

This "positional superiority" and the ambivalence of sexual relationships outside of marriage bring women back to the inseparability of romantic love and marriage in the contemporary Korean climate, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In this context, if marriage were the terminal point of romantic love with little space for expressions of sexuality before it is achieved or at least promised, a kind of compromised form of matrimony that contains translated romantic love and approved marriage is evolved. As mentioned earlier, this new trend can be described as "marriage by personal choice with the approval of the family". Ideally, romantic love marriage can be seen an antithesis to the old traditional arranged marriage. However, in the real world, the compromised form of marriage has gradually been accepted widely. The preference for personal choice on the basis of romantic love (love marriage, *Yonae gyulhon*) is the absolute choice of the majority in the post-Korean War period. However, they have to secure their family approval. With respect to their expectations, the absolute majority is committed to love marriage as shown in the previous section with a result of survey by Korean Women's Development Institute. From the media representations, informants' translations and historical experiences, marriage and romantic love are inseparable element. Also, there is no such alternative institutional form of matrimonial process to underpin the compromised form of the view of marriage. Instead, I have found that people have altered and manipulated the contemporary form of matrimonial process to fit their own point of view. That is, a modified form of matchmaking, the arranged meeting (*Sogae-ting*).

In this section, I have explained how romantic love cannot be separated from the ultimate goal of marriage and how sexual relationships occupy an ambivalent position within this continuum. Thus, informants interplay their translation of romantic love within courtship to achieve "ordinary life" as I will discuss in this next section in the chapter. I will particularly focus upon how forms of arranged mar-

riage, *Chungmae*, have been transformed and how this marriage form has a long genealogy as an evolving marriage practice. In this regard, the contemporary formulation of *Chungmae* can perhaps be understood as a technique to amalgamate romantic love, in terms of new expressions of desire, and arranged marriage as an old expression of a different form of desire.

### **5.5. *Chungmae* as a conjuncture of romantic love and marriage**

As mentioned before, during the last five decades of “modernisation”, forms of marriage have been transformed as the interpretation of romantic love has changed. There are also growing opportunities for women to be educated and to pursue their careers. This opens up potential spaces for women to fall in love with someone in the workplace or met through other social networks. Nevertheless, despite growing opportunities for romance and love marriage, “matchmaking” is still practised by many people. Matchmaking is one of the functional elements of the old traditional arranged marriage and these arranged meetings are still regarded as a functioning as a “casual” meeting, which serves as the basis for starting a new relationship.

This raises the question of why, despite increased freedoms and opportunities, are people still engaging in these arranged meeting and furthermore interpreting them as a part of the process of romantic love? According to a survey by the Korean Institute for Health and Social Affairs in 1991, seven out of ten married Korean women met their husbands through a matchmaker’s introduction (*News Review*, 23 March 1991: 11, in Kendall, 1996: 130). However, people believe that the informal and casual process of the arranged meeting is not to be regarded as another form of the *Chungmae*. Instead, it is a secure path to achieve romantic love and love marriage. This means that the core content of arranged meeting (matchmaking) is transformed and reduced. Although the form and content has remained essentially the same as in the *Chungmae*, instead of being seen as part of an old institution, the practice has been maintained and seen as a casualised informal event. It therefore becomes a part of “romantic love”, the implications of which are imposed on this casualised form of the arranged meeting. Thus, the western engendered romantic love and the traditional arranged marriage have become inseparable and are merging in their real practice. Though people are still practising the traditional form of matrimony, which has been negotiated and

modified, the traditional factors have become almost invisible in the current form of matrimony, as the subsequent discussion will illuminate further.

#### *(5.5.1) Practising Chungmae in courtship*

Recent trends demonstrate that, as individual choice is developing throughout South Korea, many people choose their lifetime mate on the basis of greater freedom of choice and companionship, approaching the relationship of husband and wife in terms of romantic love. In relation to reading the meanings of marriage in the East, western scholars have been criticised for ethnocentrism. Rey Chow (1991) suggests that progressive ideologies, even when they criticise women's lot under the old society, may be oblivious to the actual conditions and premises of women's lives in more recent societies. These issues therefore need to re-examined, in order to re-evaluate some of the most cherished western ideals of liberty and progress.

One of these issues deserving of re-examination is the *Chungmae*. Discussions of informants about new forms of *Chungmae* as the transformation of arranged marriage can be understood as overt and explicit statements of desirability; as such they inform the perceptions of women and men of each other, whether and how they find their partners; through arranged meetings or by romantic serendipity. Among the interviewees in this research, the most important factor considered in terms of desirability seemed to be men's economic ability when they get married, not romantic love –thus there is perhaps a gap between romantic love and marriage life as a real life. Whilst they clearly desire romantic love, there is a gap between romantic fantasy and the realities of marital life. However, they desire to fill the gap between romantic love as a fantasy and achieving ordinary life as a reality through the *Chungmae* marital practice.

#### *(5.5.2) Chungmae: arranged marriage or romantic process?*

Most informants state that marriage through an arranged meeting is more rational behaviour than simply falling in love because the candidates for romance and matrimony have already been carefully scrutinised by parents and a match-maker (mediator). In a survey about marriage between married women and un-

married women, 77.8 % of the unmarried women answered that they think that couples would be happy to marry someone who shares a similar background, and 87.5% of housewives held the same opinion. In addition, 38% of unmarried women agree that *Chungmae* marriage is better while 52.4% of married women think marriage through *Chungmae* is better (Lee, J-W, Weekly Donga, 30 July 2003). This is illustrated in the following account from another young female who has a professional job as a TV producer.

**Q:** What do you think about *Chungmae*?

*Chungmae* in the modern millennium has all new and improved parameters. In the courtship, parents allow a boy and girl to get to know each other. They pursue a light friendship over dates, unravel tastes and tolerance for each other, contemplate compatibility and finally nod their ascent.

(Age 28, TV producer)

The above observation on *Chungmae* suggests that it is already a modern form of practice for courtship. It has been improved as the rational integral form of having a chance at romantic love, on the one side, and satisfaction of family, on the other. *Chungmae* has been innovated with resistance and negotiation over several decades and, as observed by Kendall, its newer forms are not just common in Seoul but are also the standard practice throughout the country (Kendall, 1996: 103). In contemporary society, the *Chungmae* is a kind of secure practice to get married for women and men who are “over-age” for marriage and is a way for women have been coming to resolutions of their ambivalent position between old and new practices of courtship by entering into the “ordinariness” of a “traditional” lifestyle based on freedom of choice. Similarly, as I attempt to show at other points in this section and in other sections of this chapter, most of my interviewees answered that they want marriage to be part of their “ordinary” life and demonstrate why they think it is necessary.

Thus, *Chungmae* is still a popular practice for marriage to achieve an “ordinary” life style in a transforming context. *Chungmae* has moved from its traditional completely arranged form with control by the parents and with minimal, control by the young couple over the choice of partner to the situation today in which Korean marriage includes numerous possible formats; and is usually a “love match”. Most marriages in the 1990s fall into the second category - parents, relatives or parents’ friends provide a “suitable” introduction and the couple is then left to decide whether they find each other compatible or not (Cho, H. 2002: 170). The

young man and woman make the final decision about marriage between themselves, although they seek the advice and approval of their parents and their go between. *Chungmae* therefore becomes a casualised cultural practice and as a courtship process, reduces the “insecurity” and “uncertainty” of marriage.

Indeed, as noted above, some Koreans feel that romantic love is not the most important factor in a successful marriage and this “in between” form of marriage may reflect this emphasis. At times, the informants in this research omit or deny the practice of *Chungmae* in order to pretend and emphasise romantic love as a priority after marriage. It seems, therefore, that two conceptual systems, i.e. marriage and romantic love, are understood to stand at opposite poles. When people perceive the benefits of entering the marriage system, they tend to highlight the side of marriage-related institutions such as *Chungmae* or arranged meeting, while if they recognise the significance of romantic side of marriage life, they tend to ignore these stricter features of marriage. In other words, the marriage system and romantic love seem to cause constant conflicts and ambivalence in the contemporary South Korean context. This kind of tendency to omit and deny their experience of the arranged meeting can easily be found in many interview discussions. For instance, this particular extract illustrates how *Chungmae* has been casualised and, as such, sometimes becomes invisible in the informants’ discourse:

**Q:** How did you get married?

**K:** Actually, my father had known him first and my mother liked him. So, my father introduces him to me. One day, my father suggests that he was a good guy although he was six years older than I was. For the first sight, he was all right. I had several meeting without any feeling.

**Q:** Do you mean you get *Chungmae*?

**K:** No, no, it was love marriage. As we met more and more, we liked each other more. Finally we got married.

(36, Fulltime housewife)

In this conversation, *Chungmae* practice becomes too casualised to be acknowledged as the same recognisable process. And the informant seems to want to avoid the fact that their initial meeting was arranged, which can be interpreted as a typical *Chungmae* practice. Although her father’s role was not as an authorised mediator – in the casual arranged meeting the mediator’s role is not so authoritative compared to the old-fashioned matchmakers in the arranged marriage – but

was that of arranging the meeting and acquainting each other to see their initial reactions. The meeting seemed to be successful, and they got married in the end. However, instead of wanting to say mention that she met her husband from *Chungmae* practice, the informant emphasised that her marriage was the result of yearlong dating and romantic love. In other words, the initial arranged meeting (some kind of *Sogaeting*), which her father arranged, was not regarded as significant in their marriage, which is on one level a rather baffling position. However, if one reads the *Chungmae* as a romantic process, this position can be more easily understood. It can be argued that the arranged meeting is a part of a gradual process of getting to know each other and experiencing romantic love, albeit in a different form than in western contexts.

Thus, the current definition of *Chungmae* in postcolonial cultural practice is one that is wider, more inclusive, ambiguous and ambivalent. From the informants' discussion above, it becomes clear that *Chungmae* can perhaps now best be defined as an arranged meeting which is 'in-between'<sup>77</sup> arranged marriage/romantic love and the old/new ideas of courtship for marriage.

In other words, with the constant inflow of the ideas of romantic love and the new forms of marriage, which surged during the modernisation its real meaning has been transformed although it retains the same name. As a broader category, the *Chungmae* is now the intervention of a matchmaker, who might be a friend, relative or professional and the arranged marriage has been reduced in formality to be this casualised arranged meeting, although different forms and levels of formality still exist. The term is now broadly used to both refer to an arranged meeting such as *Matson* (which takes place with the presence of the parent) in its formal form and *Sogaeting* (without the parent at the meeting) in its informal form.

Due to its transformative formation, the definition of the *Chungmae* itself is very difficult to clarify. However, its very lack of clarity perhaps suggests that the *Chungmae* has been transformed as an in-between cultural practice because the meaning has been, and continues to be, constantly transformed. *Chungmae* may be constituted through an ongoing process of transformation of its meaning. Furthermore, *Chungmae* is an in-between term: First, the term does not quite refer

to the marriage system because it has lost its core content of the family-centred marriage. It has become more of a reference to a casual meeting between two people, who may look to begin a relationship, and one which is expected to feature elements of romantic love. Second, the term merges the boundaries of romantic love and arranged marriage, and is flexible and casualised.

In this sense, the dominant dichotomy discourse of arranged marriage and love marriage might be seen as a Euro-centralised discourse that cannot be adopted in a non-western cultural context. According to Homi Bhabha,

An encounter with newness that is not part of the continuum of past and present not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent, it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The “past - present” becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living.

(Bhabha, 1994:7)

As seen in the informant’s extract above, and in the broader series of the group interviews, the majority of informants attempt to integrate their views on love, sex and marriage together. Therefore, *Chungmae* can perhaps now be characterised as expressing an element of women’s agency in terms of their active practice in courtship (as will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent section) and as a matter of individual choice rather than a passive way of participating in marriage. In South Korea, the arranged meeting is often described as a blending of traditional wisdom (marriage is too important to be left to the young) and progressive ideals (marriage should be a matter of individual choice made on the basis of mutual attraction). Thus, the merging and reformulation of East and West in marriage offer the over arching generalisation that “Asian” societies have come to acknowledge “the judgement of young people” in marriage choice as an adaptive response that may yet preserve “traditional family values” against the assault of ‘Western dissolution, even as Asian societies have found it necessary to discard the most oppressive attributes of traditional patriarchy’ (Mace, 1959: 159). In the same vein, *Chungmae* as the real practice of courtship for South Korean women shows their ability to challenge as they articulate the signs of cultural difference.

Thus, it can be seen that my informants articulate *Chungmae* practice as the sign of cultural difference between western romantic love and traditional arranged marriage. Furthermore, this transforming courtship practice in South Korea provides an excellent example of the ambivalence of notions of progress, of an

enlightened “now” versus a repressive “then” and of the disadvantages versus advantages for women in new forms of matrimonial negotiations, be they *Chungmae* or “romantic love”. The ambivalence of this matrimonial form produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses articulate the signs of cultural difference as Bhabha remarks (Bhabha, 1985: 153).

### (5.5.3) *Chungmae as the qualified love match*

*Chungmae* remains a vital option in Korean matrimony for women, albeit in the form of this transforming and culturally ambivalent practice, similar forms of which have also appeared in Japan, China and India (Roy, 1972: 76-82). As many as 80 percent of cultures outside the western sphere employ arranged marriage practices, although relatively, few of these cultures rely exclusively on arranged marriages (Small, 1993). It is perhaps believed that the arranged meeting allows for the development of romantic love but is the minimal device of security in that the arranged meeting is thought to be better than just meeting an unknown stranger. In the case of South Korea, informants suggest that *Chungmae* is a reasonable, safe and positive kind of qualified love match. The most important role of the modern form of *Chungmae* is legitimacy and qualification. This informant describes the common features of current practices of *Chungmae*:

*Chungmae* is a marriage arranged by the individuals involved. In an unqualified love marriage, the couple get to know each without introduction from a third party such as go-betweens, friends or their parents' friends, although an introduction by a common friend which later leads to marriage can still be considered as a (qualified) love match. Unlike in an arranged marriage, a *Chungmae* includes a dating and courtship period that precedes the proposal. During their dating period, if their affections grow the man and the woman invite each other to their homes and introduce their date to their parents an exact opposite of the arranged marriage introduction where the parents introduce the girl to the man.

(Age 23, Secretary)

Although unlike the other informant discussed above, this informant does not hide the *Chungmae*, she does attempt to distinguish its current form from the traditional arranged marriage. She similarly emphasises that the *Chungmae* process includes romantic courtship and women and men introduce themselves to each other's family after their affection grows, rather than their meeting being



occupied by two parts of family interests. In other words, as briefly alluded to above, her emphasis is on her personal choice and this can be seen as a pivotal discursive agency, as seen yet more clearly in this extract:

*Chungmae* are egalitarian in power in that they yield to the sharing of responsibilities between the husbands and wives and a general disdain of chivalrous etiquette. A *Chungmae* can be a pure love match or a qualified love match. All *Chungmae* in this spectrum have the positive social implication of a pure love match. It is likely that this man or woman will benefit from the love match.

(Age 22, University Student)

Whilst addressing the deeper tactical agenda of the *Chungmae*, the university student speaks about the ultimate shared responsibility of the couple. The degree of personal choice in such marriages, however, varies, broadly ranging from very little (family selection of the spouse) to almost total self-determination with the family simply supplying prospective dates. Indeed, this informant defines the *Chungmae* as qualified love match to get into an “ordinary life” as I mentioned in the previous section.

As noted above in relation to security, the following interviewee describes the *Chungmae* as a safety tactic through which one may avoid the uncertainty and insecurity of both extreme forms of romantic love and old arranged marriage:

*Chungmae* is a contract between families, but not only between individuals. The man and woman’s parents investigate each other’s family background before initiating the talk between the prospective couple. Their preference is that the family has a similar background, a comparable financial situation, a good reputation among the class elders, and no hereditary diseases. I think this is a very safe way of meeting somebody who is going to be my future husband.

(Age 35, Part time bookseller)

Seemingly, this inspection of family background and similar economic background diminish her anxiety about future insecurity. Reflecting this general trend of *Chungmae*, another informant also explained:

*Chungmae* happens only after a lot of research from both sides. The chances of making a wrong choice are small. Love before marriage is only lust and attraction, whereas *Chungmae* brings affection and longing after marriage. Last but not least marriages become successful only if both parties appreciate each other and have a give and take policy leaving their control and egos behind.

(Age 26, TV Producer)

Her remarks show the ambivalent characteristics of love and marriage and also reveal the anxiety involved in, and desire in, making a right choice concerning her spouse. For her in order to fulfil her desire for having romantic love in marriage, she finds the *Chungmae* to be an idealised form of contemporary matrimony that encapsulates a form in-between romantic love and traditional arranged marriage values. Thus, this cultural practice is a self-conscious choice to fulfil her desirable conditions for marriage and it seems that women believe that the *Chungmae* is reducing the risk of ordinary life and expanding freedom of choice of their own. In the next section, I will show how the informants interplay the discourse of “freedom of choice” in order to achieve ordinary life and how ordinary life style is shaped by the “choice” before finalising the chapter by attempting to show how this relates to how women construct their identities as revealed within the informants’ talk of an “ordinary life style”.

#### **5.6. Ordinary life style (*Pyungbyummhan saenghwal*)**

As noted, marriage remains a critically necessary step in the life course for the majority of South Korean women, achieved in terms of fulfilling romantic love and reducing risks of marriage through *Chungmae*. The element of risk has been discussed above in relation to finding a known, appropriate partner (rather than a stranger). However, on the other side of the coin, risks can also be related to the anxiety of the insecurity and unpredictability of women’s “alternative” lives outside of marriage. ‘While risks primarily associated with anxiety, it injects as element of unpredictability into the routines of the everyday’ (McDonald, 2003: 108). Thus, marriage can be a paradoxical place, because although it may provide a safe haven of ordinariness from this alternative world, there is another uncertainty and insecurity around the views of marriage, that is, the uncertainty and unpredictability of marriage itself. For women, the idea of getting married is always accompanied with an unpredictable and risky future. In this sense, marriage and the fulfilling of romantic love are quite a risky business for women, reflecting the dissonance of belief and practice around the marriage system. It is notable that marriage as a pathway for “ordinary life” marks the transition from a “way of life” to a “life style” in informants’ discussion. Tensions appear in decision making as they deeply feel desire for individual freedoms and pleasures; While they are

fully aware that there is tremendous potential for conflict, insecurity and ambivalence inside and outside of marriage. The following section attempts to further illuminate these tensions and relate them particularly to the concept of an “ordinary life”.

*(5.6.1) In pursuit of ordinary life (Pyungbyumhan saenghwal)*

In the analysis of my data, it was interesting to note that the majority of informants’ discussion converged on seeking an “ordinary life style” (*Pyungbyumhan saenghwal*), which they believe equates with the most safe, comfortable and happy life. In order to achieve this ordinary life, they think getting married is a necessary thing to do. Here, the question is why do so many people believe that marriage is a secure pathway for “ordinary life”? Moreover, why is it particularly so important for young women in contemporary South Korea? In consumer society, some scholars argue that the discourse of ordinary life is closely related to middle class lifestyle and it can be identified as the ‘post-modern fraction of the middle class’ (Taylor 2005; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst 2001). However, here, ordinariness is defined as a mode of experience that belongs to everyone’s everyday life: ‘it is not just the authentic preserve of particular social group based on gender or working class’ (Taylor, 2005:115). If you look at the specific situation in South Korea, the contextualised view of “ordinary life” connotes a quite obscure and flexible meaning, which is not based on a particular social group. As I shall hopefully reveal in this section, it seems to be a flexible and temporal boundary with which women construct and identify. Therefore, the concept would perhaps be better seen as a subjective position that can be used to justify individuals’ choice of an ordinary life achieved through a process of their own negotiation and struggle.

The following interview demonstrates how informants themselves define ordinary life and what the relationship between marriage and romantic love is for them, as part of the process of achieving an ordinary life. The following informant, a married woman in her late thirties shows her relief and feeling of comfort after getting married and comments on the pressures from society she experienced before getting married. In her interview, she claims that ordinariness can refer to feeling relaxed and relieved from social pressure:

**O:** How did you meet and get married to your husband?

**M:** I married when I was 36 years old. I was very anxious about marriage when I was working as a civil servant. I felt so pressured by family. I was so irritated to hear “why don’t you get married?” all the time. I had lots of *Sogaeting* (arranged meetings) by friends and relatives. Finally, I found a guy. I was so desperate... I thought, if I could marry, I would feel so relieved and comfortable.

**Q:** Why? Why did you think so?

**M:** I wanted to be free from other people’s gaze on me. I felt I could have the same life as all other people with marriage. It’s such a relief. So, my sister introduced my husband to me. I don’t have... I thought there would not be a special person for me at such an old age<sup>78</sup> if I wanted to marry. I thought he was acceptable rather than striking. I hated people looking at me. I felt I was defective... people asked me very often “why don’t you marry?” I found it really intolerable whenever I had to answer that question.

**Q:** Did you feel better after marriage?

**M:** Yes, I felt much more relaxed after the marriage. I felt comfortable at work after marriage, free from other people’s gaze. I did not need to pay attention to anything and nobody got on my nerves.

(Age 39, Full time housewife)

The informant’s observations about the pressure she felt from her family and society (people’s gaze on her) and her relief when she got married refers to the fact that in South Korean society older unmarried women still tend to be rather conspicuous and stand out. There is considerable tension for, and a burden placed on, unmarried older women. After marriage, this informant seems to acquire conformity and she feels she has fulfilled her obligatory social role as a woman. The generation in the late thirties age group seemingly understands marriage as a “pressured choice” and a means to escape from social pressure. Another informant who is single shows her strong intention to get married in order to have an ordinary life and reflects the fact that having a family is seen as an important element of the ordinariness in the family-centred South Korean society.

**Q:** Are you necessarily going to marry?

**A:** Yes, of course, no doubt! I want to live an ordinary life (*Pyungbyumhan Saenghwal*). It means to me that I will marry and give birth and will see

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<sup>78</sup> A 35-year old woman is considered very unlikely to get married and such a person is *Nocheoyeo* which means old virgin or spinster. At this age, they would be considered the second choice and more likely to marry somebody who is already experienced in marriage and has children.

grandchildren. So, I want to marry in order to live an ordinary life (*Pyung-byumhan Saenghwal*).

**Q:** Would you like to have a job after marriage?

**A:** I want to devote my life to my family first, and then I will look for a job when my family doesn't need my hand.

(Age 36, Video librarian)

It is interesting to see that this informant in her late thirties remarks spontaneously about her strong will to get married without any hesitation. In her response, she claims that marriage is a pathway to an ordinary life and defines this ordinary life as becoming a mother and having a family. As also seen above and also discussed briefly later in this chapter, this age group of informants (late thirties) does seem to be trying to combine pursuing a career and marriage together, although it should be noted a spectrum could be observed in terms of degrees of commitment to their jobs.

There are several layers of cultural and theoretical clues that may help us to sketch out and further understand what this ordinary life may be for these informants. We can find the first clue from the social psychological work on collectivism and self-formation in Asian culture. Many social psychologists have paid attention to the tendency for the subject position to be less related to individual happiness, salience or uniqueness in East Asian cultures, as compared to Western counterparts. Instead, as perhaps can be seen in the above extracts (particularly that of the older unmarried woman) maintaining harmonious relationships with others is more valued and strongly expected (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Heine, Lehman, Markus & Kitayama, 1999). In this cultural area including Japan, Korea and China, being ordinary is valued and is perceived to be safe and beneficial for people's psychological well-being (Ohashi & Yamaguchi, 2004). This psychological tendency of being ordinary rather than unique or conspicuous can provide an important clue to understanding the discourse of ordinary life in South Korea and, as has been seen above, is clearly reflected in the informant's observations about their own lives.

Second, understandings of ordinariness cannot be reduced to one or two determined elements. Rather it can be performative cultural practices that define boundaries of identities. To understand this and how the informants' discussion reflects these performative cultural practices, it is worthwhile briefly introducing

the notion of “articulation” by Stuart Hall (Hall, 1982; 1985). Hall rightly points out that society is necessarily constructed of complex structured totalities with different levels of determination.<sup>79</sup> From his insights on determination, it can be argued that this multi-layered determination of social phenomenon includes political, ideological, economical, class, cultural and even the “imaginative” factor of romantic love. From this perspective, the core notion of “articulation” refers to the fact that the determination of social reality is never given, but rather achieved from inside a process of forging connections between different levels of social formation (Gibson, 2000: 259).

This principle of articulation is extremely useful here for understanding the informant’s articulation of “ordinariness” as it helps to explain this concept in terms of multi-layered instances. In other words, ordinariness is a performative cultural practice across these multi-layered factors, which helps achieve a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it is perhaps also possible to argue that the appeal of “ordinary life” (*Pyungbyumhan Saenghwal*) helps to explain the conflictual nature of women’s identity in the courtship of marriage, as noted above in relation to insecurity and risk within and outside marriage. It seems logical to assume that marriage could be a strategy to achieve ordinariness and an acceptable life, and lifestyle, in society as a result of the articulation of multiple determinants of social reality. An ‘ordinarisation strategy constructs a discourse of achievability and accessibility’ (Moseley, 2000 in Taylor, 2005:114). In this case, if women perceive the ordinary life as a mere expression of responding to social pressures and marriage obligation, then the explanation would have been rather simple. However, as the informants’ discussion is associated with achievability and accessibility of women’s goals and challenges, then a more complex approach is needed and the concept of articulation seems to provide one such approach.

Below is an example of how this articulation may be played out in a remark on integration of romantic love and marriage by one informant and her belief in the achievability and accessibility of ordinary life through marriage:

**Q:** What do you think about marriage? Is it absolutely necessary do you think?

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<sup>79</sup> Hall’s model of determination followed from Althusser’s social formation insists on a principle of “non-necessary correspondence” (Hall 1985, 94).

**HG:** What I was thinking when I went to the middle school was that I would get married when I was 25 years old. Now I am 25 years old. It seems not possible though now... I think that marriage is the necessary thing to do.

**Q:** Why do you think you should get married?

**HG:** I will be really happy with my lover. I will feel so good if I can live with whom I love. Sometimes, I am afraid of the worst case of marriage life though... but I think I am going to marry. I am going to try... I have never thought that I won't get married. The reason is I want to have an *ordinary life* (*Pyungbyunhan saenghwal*). An *ordinary life* is the best life for human beings' happiness. I feel a single life will make me feel lonely. If I can have a family, I can rely on them when I am ill and the family will protect me. I want to have my own family.

(Age 21, University student, emphasis of informant)

Her reflections show how marriage and romantic love are integrated into an “ordinary” out of an “ordinary life”. However, interestingly, she also reveals that she has been thinking about the choice of a single life. For her, marriage is just one of her options, not an obligatory pathway. Nevertheless, in the end, she provides a plausible account of why she comes back to the option of getting married - she does not want to be lonely without her own family. Here, marriage means having her own family and a protective system for her that will bring her security.<sup>80</sup> Thus, this interview illustrates that the relationship between marriage and ordinary life is more directly related on a personal level as the best choice for her possible expected happiness. She can achieve her happiness through choosing a married life and having a family that can provide protection when she is old. However, the informant is also aware that marriage can be a risk and a paradoxical choice as she shows her fear of the worst-case scenario of marriage. After her calculation of all factors, she concludes marriage is her best possible choice to achieve within the term “ordinary life”. Therefore, in this case, the concept of ordinary life can be located firmly in this context, as it does not represent hazy im-

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<sup>80</sup> As I will attempt to show, many informants repeatedly talk about the possibility of loneliness and insecurity without family protection. This is important to note that South Korean does not have strong social welfare network to support people when they retire from work such as the national health system. It has become a big social policy issue but still many people tend to prepare for their post-retired life by themselves. Also, there is a strong conviction that people are going to dependant upon family including their children after retirement. Due to the lack of national welfare system, the family support system plays a role in providing security and protection for members of their family (Kong, 1990; Kim, H-J. 1993). The converging talk about insecurity and loneliness when they get old should be understood in this context.

ages of her future life. Rather, it is a boundary to be drawn in terms of various variables like protection, comfort, reducing risks, not being lonely, and romantic love relationship in relation to achievable and accessible options.

Marriage is central to the informants' sense of self-identity, through which people seem to recognise, albeit somehow grudgingly on occasion, that ordinary life exists out there. Informants explain lifestyle and freedom of choice, yet women's own ambivalence is often linked to an awareness of the existence of fear of alienation from society and family pressure. In other words, non-ordinary life could mean single women's lives, or those in sexual relationships without marriage, and divorced women's lives, which imply that belonging to the society and women's own identities may become insecure.

In addition, this ordinary life is rather an imagined and abstract lifestyle as performative cultural practice. At this point, women are aware of risk and fear when they choose marriage, which gives them economic and psychological insecurity. However, it is not necessary possible to say that this ordinariness is simply based on the issue of class, or material capacity. For women, it can be interpreted as achieving imagined abstract identities associated with a sense of belonging. An ordinary life can be defined as an abstract and imagined life, although one thing is clear, that most informants think that marriage is not an obligation anymore. Rather it is conceived as one of options to choose - although perhaps still the most acceptable to the majority in order to "belong", the ways in which it is achieved increasingly involve components of individual choice and thus also imply that its achievement - or not - also involves choice. So the ordinary life can be seen in how ambivalent references to women's identities are, and should further be understood as a rhetorical attempt to establish a secure boundary.

#### *(5.6.2) Marriage: from way of life to lifestyle*

This individualised identity, expressed as choice, articulates an awareness of social constraints (in this case, marriage). This "self-expressive choice" can perhaps be argued as an installation of "compulsory individuality" whereby one has 'no choice but to choose if we are to express ourselves as individuals' (Cronine, 2000: 279). It is also argued that 'Individuals now avidly self-monitor and that there appear to be greater capacity on the part of individuals to plan "a life of one's



own” (McRobbie, 2004:260). So, ‘women are encouraged to continually reconstitute themselves in projects of selfhood via discursive practice of self-actualisation, self-transformation, and choice’ (Bhaskaran, 2004:62). From these arguments, marriage as a choice re-regulates young women by means of language of personal choice. However, informant’s choice of marriage cannot be reducible into one directional explanation whether these actions are autonomously arrived at, or are results of structural forces in South Korean context. In addition, a culture of individualisation, which is thought to be related to romantic marriage, has not yet displaced arranged marriage and rather it exists alongside marriage recognition in South Korea. Here, ordinary life can be constructed as a collective women’s struggle to achieve where interdependence of self desire and social constraint is served.

Marriage is still relevant to determining women’s identity. It is a resource, a device with which to construct their identities in the context:

I think I should get married because I will be really lonely when I am getting old and I will not have any relative around me when I am getting old. I don’t think that marriage is necessary if I can be guaranteed that I will not be lonely in my old age. However, I will have a job when I get married. I heard lots of the contemporary children don’t like their mum to stay home without a job. It’s not really respectable for a mother. The new generation has become more individualised. So, I want to have a job. Husband? I think I would like somebody who can be respected by me and tender and caring etc...

(Age 21, Nurse Trainee)

Marriage is still an inextricable part of women’s identities in South Korea in that, as indicated in the quote above and in earlier extracts in this chapter. It is one of the key sites where the habitual and mundane, yet resistant, conflicting place and private practices of daily life connect the familiar, safe spaces of family strategies of “ordinarisation”. The informant above understands that marriage is not a necessity but the choice as a safe option and the informant would not necessarily choose marriage if there were something else to guarantee her safety. The concept of marriage thus becomes a one of their options, not an obligatory passage, as some of older informants (in their late thirties) take for granted.

As can be clearly seen above, the desire for an ordinary life is closely related to the concept of the safe boundary that could protect women from illness and being lonely precisely as the informants remarked. In this sense, marriage can be re-

garded as social insurance to secure the routine of everyday life without risk. Intriguingly, there are some symptomatic phenomena that show the marriage is not regarded as an obligatory passage for women and large numbers of women are now delaying marriage, as also revealed by the survey cited earlier in this chapter. It may be that a large number of these women will refuse marriage indefinitely. Furthermore, survey results in 1998 and 2002 from the social statistics surveys of the National Statistical Office asked questions about attitudes towards marriage (KWDI, 2004) and, during this period, the response that “people must get married” reduced from 30.5% of women to 21.9%. However, interestingly, the percentage of respondents who stated “it is better to get married” increased from 37.4% to 39.4%. These data show that women’s attitude towards marriage have changed from a “must-do-thing” to a “better-to-do-thing” and perhaps implies that for women marriage is not the only way of life any more. Rather it becomes a choice of lifestyle, as the interview extract below indicates:

I was romanticised by the idea of marriage before entering the university. I don’t like to think about the way in which marriage is necessary. I would like to be falling in love though... However, I will say “no”(to getting married) if the spouse asks me to give up my job. I wish my husband could respect me as I do. We can support each other’s weakness.

(Age 20, University student)

Interestingly, the above informant states that she would choose the job over marriage if there were to be pressure for her to give up the job, thus prioritising the latter. However, the informant still wants to combine romantic love and her career with marriage. The following discussion of informants also explains that marriage is regarded as a lifestyle and is only one of the options from which they might choose.

**Q:** What kind of lifestyle do you think you will have in 10-20 years?

**EW:** I would be a married woman and a mother... uhm, an ordinary life style as well as having a job.

**HR:** I am the same as Ew. I would like to get married and have a family...I would like to have a secure life and comfortable life...I want to have a sheltered and restful life...

**HS:** I want to get married. After the children grow up, I would love to travel abroad with my husband. I think my life is as important as my children’s. So, I would love to travel if I have a financial reserve at that time.

**YH:** What I want to achieve most is a happy family. I want to have an *ordinary life*.

(Age 16-18, classmates of a high school)

From the above women's discussion, the shift is experienced through marriage from the decline of a traditional, communal "way of life" to the rise of new life styles. This cultural and social shift from "way of life" to "lifestyle" has important consequences for the construction of subjectivities. In this way, claiming lifestyle as a new social form becomes a primary identity marker. People make serious investments in using cultural forms as a means to actively express their identity and differentiate themselves from others. Given that, the concept of the "ordinary" as a secure and comfortable life remains amorphous. The ordinary life is not material by-product of capitalism. All my interviewees chose to play up their ordinariness. In a broader sense, however, the ordinariness is compatible with choice and identity construction, since invoking ordinariness is a strategy that people can draw on to try to evade social fixing. In other words, there is no such distinction that can draw a boundary between classes, because the ordinariness is widespread across, and blurs, all the class boundaries. Thus, the discourse of ordinariness can be seen as the choice to achieve social conformity.

To sum up, the content of ordinary life can be viewed in temporal terms, i.e. which can be changed. The practice of the strategy to obtain ordinariness as an achievable and accessible choice has been transformed with acts of negotiation and subversion of marriage. The ordinary life can be understood as a negotiated boundary imposed by the informants; it situates the individual women in an imagined desire for romantic love that spans historical time. It cannot, therefore be seen to be opposed to transcendence, but rather is perhaps the means of transcending one's historically limited existence. The transformative identities of informants fuel their insistence on the importance of creating oneself anew at each moment. The ordinary life is one of the ways in which informants organise the world, make sense of their own identities and negotiate women's desire for romantic love. Thus, an ordinary life is a key factor in the 'formation of gender identities as a social and intersubjective process' (Felski, 2000:21) through global media. For the informants, marriage may help to safeguard a sense of personal autonomy and dignity or to preserve the distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life.

Moreover, the informants' talk of marriage to achieve ordinary life can probably be seen as a sign of subordination by social constraint such as patriarchal system.

As Ruth Barcan argues (2000) “ordinariness” is ‘a powerful ideology, a regulatory fiction that functions to confirm people in their lifestyle, values and culture’ (146). In this sense, the ordinariness that women want to settle down with marriage could be an illusory choice that disguised by the more refined late capitalist patriarchal system. However, at the same time, in any given circumstances, women are making boundaries of their identities under the name of ordinariness. In other words, marriage to achieve an ordinary life cannot simply be seen as a sign of women’s subordination to social constraint but also one of the ways in which individuals engage with and respond to their environment. The boundary of ordinariness may be flexible and transformable by women’s cultural practice. The ordinariness can signal resistant as well as a place of enslavement for informants. Thus women’s acts of negotiation and resistance are not opposed to, but rather made possible by, this ordinariness. The idea of ordinary life is complex and temporally fluid: any woman’s life story will contain different and changing visions of ordinary life. Thus, it is possible to say that informants have performative boundaries of ordinary life, which are socially constructed as well as constructed in their own imagination through globalisation.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the ongoing transformation of the relationship between marriage and romantic love. The marriage system has played a significant role as one of the backbones of the social system in South Korea. However, the marriage system itself has been changing through the introduction of modern forms of marriage and the concept of romantic love. The influence of the latter particularly has been enormous, and a driving force in modernising the social formation of South Korea. Although the early modernist project of romantic love was regarded to have failed, the concept of romantic love spread rapidly. During the last five decades, the marriage system has also absorbed the element of romantic love. Romantic love in the media is a historically situated cultural experience and has been translated into the formation of femininities in everyday culture. Female audiences have a “double consciousness” of western culture, between fear/yearning and mimicry/rejecting. As mentioned, informants tend to separate sexual relations from romantic love in order to justify their denial of sexual passion before marriage. This translated form of romantic love plays a role in the formation of new feminine identities, as confirmed by informants’ remarks.

*Chungmae* is a good example of how the translation of romantic love has been situated historically and integrated into the experience of everyday life. *Chungmae* originated from the traditional arranged marriage, and the form of *Chungmae* has been transformed and casualised in contemporary society. *Chungmae* can be defined as an arranged meeting, in-between arranged marriage/romantic love and the old/new ideas of courtship for marriage. One unique formation of *Chungmae* is that people are still practising it because it is regarded as a secure way of achieving “ordinary life” (*Pyungbyumhan saenghwal*). It is notable that marriage as the pathway to the ordinary life marks a transition from a “way of life” to *lifestyle* in the informants’ discussion. An ordinary life can be a performative cultural practice to achieve a sense of belonging across age, gender, class and region. This performative cultural practice reveals the ambivalent and complex formation of femininities. Informants are constantly oscillating between the two discursive formations, i.e. romantic love and marriage. The ordinary life can be seen in how ambivalent references to women’s identities are, and should further be understood as a rhetorical attempt to establish a secure boundary. Thus, the complexity of understanding of gender identity through ordinary life opens the space how and which particular structures of interacting with informants’ decisions in the context.

Furthermore, the content of ordinary life can be understood in temporal terms, which can be changed. The practice of strategies of ordinarisation as an achievable and accessible option has been transformed with acts of negotiation and subversion of marriage. The idea of an ordinary life is complex and temporally fluid: any woman’s life story will contain different and changing visions of ordinary life. Thus, as noted above, we can conclude that informants have performative boundaries of ordinary life that are socially constructed as well as constructed in their imagination through globalisation.

## CHAPTER 6

# IS “THE MISSY” A NEW FEMININITY?

### 6.1. Introduction

Any analysis of South Korean women’s identities would not be complete without a discussion of the new femininity of young married women. This chapter explores how South Korean women’s experiences are related to the formation of their identities as wives and mothers in the postcolonial context of contemporary South Korea.

There is a growing tendency among many young married women to refer to themselves as “*Missy*”. Married women have begun to identify themselves with the term instead of the traditional title, “*Adjumma*” because they do not want to take on the traditionally associated images and lifestyle implied by this title. The novel term *Missy* originated from a small advertising campaign to promote a department store in the early 1990s. It rapidly became widespread in different components of the Korean media and has been re-defined to refer to young and attractive married women who want to be look like unmarried women and share their lifestyle and attitudes. This causes huge controversy amongst social commentators and feminist scholars, who argue about how to understand this explosive concept. During this research, I found that *Missy* identities are often shaped by conflicting discourses, which can be found in media representations and women’s discussions. On the basis of these findings, I aim to investigate here if the *Missy* can be understood to ‘re-enact the specular image of consumer desire or [...] assume agency and autonomy in the context of her own wishes’ (Brunsdon 1997: 94 in Jackson, 2006:480)

The emergence of the *Missy* in the media can perhaps be regarded as an important source of the rhetoric of individuality, freedom and enjoyment of life. The media may provide an initial space of imagination for women to think about their

own positions. I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that this is an imaginative space because the images and informants' talk is not actually fixed nor do they correspond to something real in terms of the formation of identities. When women describe what they really desire and want to be as a married woman, one interesting aspect to note is that their identification as a *Missy* is not coherent, precisely because it is not consistent with the set of typical images of the older generation, *Adjumma*. As I discuss later, women do not want to identify with the typical fixed images of married women, which are usually represented as *Adjumma*, but rather prefer to identify with unfixed images of unmarried women under the name of the *Missy*. Therefore, this means the ways in which we might identify the *Missy* cannot be formulated as if it is a static and substantial entity. Rather, it should be seen as a contingent, tactical and temporal practice.

Moreover, it is important to note that the *Missy*, as the cultural practice of married femininity, can create an alternative imagination by negotiating motherhood and desires, which Bhabha (1990) has usefully termed, "the third space". As I will attempt to show in this chapter, women are seen to follow the set of images and codes of practice which has been regarded as both a "westernised" as well as a consumerism-driven way of life through media representations. However, although women's identity practice is derived from their desire to mimic and approximate images that are seen as liberated, their identity practice actually forms a strategic and tactical performance. The informants do not follow those given images blindly. In fact, women are struggling to translate the images that are only temporarily materialised from given resources. In this sense, *Missy* as married femininity can be seen as space of possibility and as a way for young women to negotiate the particularities of contemporary South Korea. Women have ambivalent positions which are probably contested and conflicted to adjust their practice and thus to construct their identities in such given circumstances. Thus *Missy* might be understood to be a complex phenomenon, caught in the contradictory tangle.

In order to examine whether *Missy* can indeed be understood as a form of new femininity, I will first describe here how the image of *Adjumma*<sup>81</sup> has been

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<sup>81</sup> The original meaning of *Adjumma* is aunty, however, historically the concept and meaning of *Adjumma* has been changed.

changed historically and how this image plays a significant role in the emergence of the new image, *Missy*, using evidence from my own empirical data. Second, I will outline where the origins of the emergence and prevalence of the concept, *Missy*, in the media and how this rapid spread of the concept became a subject of controversy amongst social scientists, including feminist scholars in South Korea. Third, I will discuss the media representations of married women's images; in particular the interesting way in which the media has depicted married women's ignored and overlooked self-awareness and desire since the early 1990s and how new identities of married women began to emerge in the public discourse by media representation. Finally, I will return to my own empirical interview data to discuss precisely how the informants really construct their femininities using the concept of the *Missy* derived from the media and adapted to their own experiences and preferences.

## **6.2. Changing the meaning of the term "Adjumma"**

As noted above, the conventional category used to refer to housewives in South Korea is "*Adjumma*". Literally, *Adjumma* means a distant female relative, usually older and married. It is, however, used in a more general fashion as a convenient title for any older female, usually past her thirties and presumed to be married with children. However, this general meaning referring to married and old women has changed significantly in recent years. In particular, through the industrialisation process since 1960s, the meaning of the term gradually shifted from being a positive and general term to one that is negative and derogatory.

Traditionally, Korean society has maintained a rigid patriarchal system where women have men's children, and women's identity has been pursued only through their children. According to this patriarchal tradition, in which blood line and family have been emphasised, women have been recognised only through the role of being a mother, and mothering has been the only channel through which they could hold a good position and exercise power in the family (Cho, H. 2002: 172-178). Women's role and image has always been dependant upon with whom they have a relationship. In this sense, the ideal images of married women have



been summed up as “a wise mother and good wife”<sup>82</sup> (Cho, H. 1988). In the relationship with a man, the ideal image of a woman – “a good wife” – is represented as soft, passive, obedient and dependent. When it comes to her relationship with her children, the image of “the wise mother” has traditionally been similarly represented as the ideal form of motherhood. Even though industrialisation since the 1960s has rapidly restructured the family system, the gendered division of labour, men’s roles as breadwinners and women’s as housekeepers, has largely remained fixed.

Indeed, during the process of modernisation, while men devoted themselves to work outside the home as “pillars” of industrialisation, women’s role in the private sphere arguably became more important. Because this gendered division of labour tended to make the responsibility for childcare fall completely on women, their involvement in their children’s upbringing was further emphasised. Moreover, ‘the rapid industrialisation of Korea began to allow an active upward mobility in the class system, and one’s academic career and standard of positions’ (Yoon, T-L. 1998). In these social circumstances, child rearing and the education of children were generally accentuated as the most important duty that mothers must accomplish – children’s academic achievement and social success were often seen as the sole measures of a mother’s ability, not just simply as a responsibility towards their children. This often led to extravagant expenditure on the private education of children and huge investment in extracurricular activities. ‘It has also led to the phenomenon described by the phrase “swish of a skirt” (*Chima Baram*<sup>83</sup>) in Korea, which refers to the influence of women in general, but in particular to their influence in education, satirising a mother’s excessive intervention in schooling’ (Cho, H. 2002: 168).

Thus, her position in the family and society and her feminine identity have often been determined by the individual’s position as a mother, not by her identity as a woman in her own right. As such, the sexualised feminine character of younger women can be seen to be neutralised and, instead, arguably, this kind of passive

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<sup>82</sup> A Korean, “*Hyunmo yangcheo*” can be translated into “a wise mother and good wife”. This is traditional jargon and people still use this dominant discourse in contemporary Korean society.

<sup>83</sup>The *Chima Baram* refers to the over-controlling behaviour of mothers who put all their energy into their own children’s education: for example, making her children’s teacher’s a lunch box and giving money to a teacher in return for more individual attention during schooling for her children.

femininity is replaced, particularly more recently (as described below) with a rough, assertive, and somewhat “masculinised” character in the defence of her family’s interests in the concept of the *Adjumma* in the context of these expanded responsibilities for her children’s achievements.



**Figure 10. *Adjumma* by Hyung-Geun Oh (Lee, H-J, 1999)**

Also, in the context of this increasing responsibility during the industrialisation of the 1960s/1970s, these housewives sometimes began to take part in the labour market in order to support their families. This general tendency has been represented in the changing meaning of the term, *Adjumma*. As mentioned earlier, initially, the *Adjumma* referred to a married woman or a distant female relative. However, the original meaning of the term has more recently been replaced with a new meaning. The term “*Adjumma*” now often connotes “audacious”, “unconsidered”, “unashamed”, and “ignorant” femininities (see footnote 81). Even their appearances can be seen to be typified as such, often represented with their short, permed hair; tattooed eyebrows; and clown-like makeup. The *Adjumma*’s image was well represented by a photographer, Hyung-Geun Oh’s work on “*Adjumma*” (see Lee, H-J. 1999). His exhibition on the *Adjumma* attracted public attention in 1999. The image of *Adjumma*, in his photographs attempted to portray the dominant discourse of *Adjumma*. According to the introductory comment on the exhi-

bition, the original idea of the exhibition was to show the way of representation, which the *Adjumma* tries to distinguish herself from other categories such as *Agassi*<sup>84</sup>. The photographer comments on the exhibition that he tries to show how the *Adjumma* express their identities through the way of wearing cloths, accessories, make-ups, hairstyles and so on (Lee, Y-J. 1999).<sup>85</sup> Similarly, above and beyond the aesthetic, the images of *Adjumma* depicted in the dominant discourse in mass media as ones which typify their behaviour as aggressive and audacious, for example. 'squeezing themselves into any gap on a subway bench and elbowing their way to the front of any queue' (Mai, 2001: 11). Thus both their behaviour and appearance are ones that are (perhaps) "unfeminine". With respect to their sexuality, the *Adjumma* can be seen to be sexually neutralised, perhaps representing the common perception in South Korea that after getting married, women are not sexually attractive any more. This is reflected in the comment of an art critic, Ji-Sook Baik, who states that 'as compared with the *Agassi*, the *Adjumma* do not suffer any tension when they face the world. In particular they lack aesthetic tensions, and they are in the state of absolutely drooping. They are not aware of getting old and lacking repentance of their past young age and jealous of others' youth. So they are not ashamed of their appearance and boldly omitting their self-awareness' (Baik, 1999).

It can be easily observed in everyday South Korean life that this has changed, less passive and obedient and more aggressive image and meaning of the *Adjumma* have generally been regarded as negative and obnoxious in society. The term is regarded as insulting as I will explain later in subsequent sections with reference to interview extracts. When a woman is called "*Adjumma*", it is thought to be a kind of insult, precisely because, as mentioned above, the term is taken to mean to be aggressive, assertive and sexually unattractive for young women. It is likely that it is for these reasons that many women are now seeking an alternative word to distinguish themselves from such conventional negative implications. The

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<sup>84</sup> The *Agassi* refers to a single woman. The term has been used as the opposite concept to the *Adjumma* with respect to age.

<sup>85</sup> However, whilst the exhibition was praised for the photography's aesthetic representation of the typical image of *Adjumma* as "audacious", "unconsidered", "unashamed" and "ignorant", at the same time, it was criticised for merely showing typified images of *Adjumma*, which can reinforce the negative image of *Adjumma* (Jin, D-S. 2004).

rapid prevalence of the *Missy*, which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, should, therefore, be understood in this context.

### **6.3. A negative view of *Adjumma***

It seems logical that the question of how and what young women think about the image of *Adjumma* as 'married femininity' is central to this research: in particular how alternative femininities can arise in reaction to this image both through media representation and through women's negotiation of images of married women, their own lives and traditional concepts. In my interviews, my original question to the informants was about their future and how they feel about being called *Adjumma*. In the case of informants who are not married the young generation insisted repeatedly that they would not live the *Adjumma*'s lives, and they showed a strong negative view on the *Adjumma*. Indeed, the majority of informants who are married also expressed strong negative feelings about being called *Adjumma*, which ranged from insulted, sad and irritated.

In order to examine how women think about the images of *Adjumma*, I raised the issue with two groups of women divided on the basis of marital status - young, unmarried informants aged between late 10s and early 20s and married informants aged between late 20s and late 30s. The informants well understand the symbolic significance of the *Adjumma*, and this understanding is embodied in their expression of strong negative views. Most informants, regardless of their marital status, understand *Adjumma* in terms of certain symbolic semiotics, as is also discussed below. For example, most informants think that *Adjumma* are outdated in terms of fashion and style, and they are critical of their lack of investment in themselves. One of the informants clearly stated her negative view:

#### **(6.3.1) 'I hate the appearance of the *Adjumma*'**

I have the image of the *Adjumma* who has a permed hairstyle, wearing *Mombae* (inexpensive jeans), and usually fat. Well, *Adjumma* like to wear bright colours and flower prints on their clothes. Their manner is very rustic. *Adjumma* is unfashionably dressed. I hate the appearance of the *Adjumma*.

(Age 24, Beauty therapist)

I cannot imagine being an *Adjumma* when I get married. I hate the image of *Adjumma*. *Adjumma* throw their bag to reserve their own seat on the bus and becomes *pung-pazim* (careless appearance). I hate a typical appearance of *Adjumma*

(Age 17, High school student)

Thus, in comments such as these and also evidenced in further comments below the younger informants reveal their antagonism towards the *Adjumma*'s symbols such as permed hairstyle<sup>86</sup> and shabby and outdated fashion styles, and their negative feelings towards the image which appears in the dominant discourse on the *Adjumma*. Young women's clearly expressed strong dislike shows why young women may not want to identify with what they imagine to be the identities of the *Adjumma*. This description of the sign – as a symbol such as dress code and body code - is conveniently analogous to the language informants use to designate the *Adjumma*'s identities and shows how young women imagine what *Adjumma* is can also be found in their depictions and attitudes toward the concept.

The next interview extracts shows how the married women informants feel to be called *Adjumma*. Again, anxiety and fear of being *Adjumma* are commonly revealed in the informants' discussion. Informants overwhelmingly express their feelings towards being called *Adjumma* as "bad, sad, terrible and irritated, uncomfortable and hate". Notably, the following extract is from a group of married aged between 30-39 years old who all have children and who are relatively old compared to other interview groups who can be categorised as young women. The following informants describe the images they have of the *Adjumma*, which result to be not much different from those described in young married women's talk, particularly in that their attitudes express a similar negative view on being called *Adjumma*. Although these informants are of an age that can typically be regarded as the *Adjumma*, they strongly challenge being viewed as the *Adjumma*.

(6.3.2) *'I feel terrible to be called Adjumma whose name indicates the most lowly status in the world'*

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<sup>86</sup> The permed hairstyle is representative the *Adjumma*'s hairstyle because the *Adjumma* want to save the money usually spent in the beauty salon. They ask hairdressers for a long lasting permed hair treatment rather than considering a fashionable hairstyle or a style that may suit them.

**Q:** How do you feel to be called 'Adjumma' on the street?

I feel terrible to be called [Adjumma] (all together).

**Q:** Why do you feel so bad to be called Adjumma?

**SB:** I think Adjumma has permed hair, is unmade up, and has careless fashion style. Their smell is awful like Kimchi (traditional vegetable pickle). Of course, Adjumma is ignorant and not sexually attractive.

**IK:** I feel terrible to be so called. The name of Adjumma is *the lowliest status in the world*. In one of the special programmes of SBS (Seoul Broadcast System) broadcast about Adjumma they are described as "audacious", "unconsidered", "unashamed" and "ignorant". Maybe the Adjumma is the centre of corruption that is widespread in our country. For example, "swish of a skirt" (*Chima Baram*), with which they offer a bribe to teachers to get more attention to their child in the class. Squeezing themselves into any gap on a subway bench and elbowing their way to the front of any queue (laughing). The Adjumma might provide the origin of corruption.

**DY:** I really really hate to be so called. Once, in the public bathroom, a kid called me 'Adjumma'. I know women's naked looks are supposed to be more and less same. So, my body to the kid would be the same as anybody else in the public bath. Well, I was extremely angry with the kid. So, I almost shouted at the girl. "Don't call me Adjumma - call me Onni<sup>87</sup> (*Agassi*) instead of Adjumma. I am an Onni!" I don't want to be identified with Adjumma.

(Full time house wives, age between 30-39)

One intriguing aspect to be noted from above interview is that the concept of Adjumma as identified in everyday usage can be recognised by visual/bodily difference. All informants in this group understand Adjumma with reference to such visual and bodily signs including as dress and body codes, as noted above. These visual signs can perhaps be understood to transcend their necessary imagination and manifestation and rather than being simple criticisms of appearance imply that women who possess such visual signs are to be regarded as "audacious," "unconsidered", "unashamed" and "ignorant" behaviour, as noted earlier.

Thus, in this case, visibility plays as important role distinguishing (social) status. Indeed, visual sensibility in the postcolonial South Korean context can perhaps be taken to mean that the distinction of social status can be made almost entirely through appearance. This is perhaps the reason why the informant above was an-

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<sup>87</sup> The original meaning of *onni* is sister. However, in this context, the informant means unmarried women (as another name of *Aggasi*)

gry with the kid calling her, *Adjumma*. In her state of undress, and thus without any visual signs, the small kid mistakenly called her *Adjumma*. The informant was embarrassed by the connotation of being called *Adjumma* and actively corrected the child asking her to call her instead *Onni* (unmarried young women). It is perhaps pertinent to note that this particular informant is in her early 30s whilst the other two women in the particular discussion quoted above are in their late 30s. Although all age groups express negative views on the *Adjumma*, the interviews reveal that it is the younger informants who express stronger views in comparison the older age group of women and it is they who are actively looking for an alternative femininity, as can be noted by this informant's desire to actively correct the child. However, it is also notable that another slightly older informant indicates that the *Adjumma's* image can be regarded as one of the problematic figures of society particularly being seen as a source of corruption in education and she similarly points out the social antagonism toward *Adjumma*.

Arguably, there is a dynamic to these negative views implicated in the informants' discussion of this theme. The negative attitudes toward *Adjumma* are arguably not simply feelings of "hatred." Rather, the antagonism expressed by the informants could be seen to be a driving force for resisting the images of traditional women, expressed as *Adjumma*, and for creating a space for building up new images from the denial of the old and traditional images of married women. Bhabha's remark on "resistance" might be a clue to understanding this transformation as he claims that 'antagonism was continually to produce supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation' (Bhabha, 1995: 84).

In the case of negative attitudes of young women toward the *Adjumma*, at first glance, as noted above, young women hate the symbolic semiotics of the *Adjumma*, such as the *Adjumma's* careless appearance, rudeness and obnoxious behaviour. If you look closely, however, the essence of this negative attitude stems from young women's views of their own mothers' sacrificed lives, which have been oppressed by institutionalised family centred patriarchy. This negative attitude toward *Adjumma* is a starting point for the transformation of young women's identities through resisting pre-existing images of femininity. As mentioned, the original connotations of *Adjumma* consisted of positive expectations in family life. In other words, the image has been closely related to the family-centred role of women. However, the term has more recently been transformed

into a negative and trivial connotation. I would argue here that the likely reasons for the negative view of that young women informants articulate vis-à-vis *Adjumma* and the possibilities contained in this new attitude could related to the image's transformative nature which in itself allows for the possibility of new femininities.

However, this possibility is not uniformly articulated. As briefly observed above, the differences between the meaning of *Adjumma* for the younger generation and for the older one can be observed. If the visual sign of *Adjumma* provides the boundary of the ways in which people can distinguish these younger women as of lowly, abhorrent status, then the connotation of *Adjumma* can also be extended to the question of their mother's generation. This is particularly the case for the younger informants. Some of these informants explain their identification of *Adjumma* in relation to being a sad (unhappy) figure that gives up her life for the family, thus suggesting negative attitudes toward the life of their mother's generation. In particular, the following informant states clearly that she does not want to repeat the life of their mother's generation:

(6.3.3) *'I hate my mother's sacrificial life and my life is mine'*

My mum like any other mother carried out domestic work painstakingly. I don't want to be *Adjumma* who scarifies for her family...well, losing her own life...I want to have a job... and have my own life...

(Age 21, University student)

Therefore, it seems that the *Adjumma*, who are despised by young women, are usually thought of as being part of their own mothers' generation. Another informant also attempts to separate her own life from her mother's sacrificial life, and declares she does not want to sacrifice her life for anybody, including her future child.

**Q:** What do you think about your mum's married life?

For everyone, a satisfactory life is important for living. However, my mum gains satisfaction in her life from other things, not just from herself. As the wife of a man, she feels worthwhile if the dad is successful. As a mum, she feels happy when her child manages school life well. But for me, though I would like to get married and have a baby, *my life is mine* and my husband's life is his, and to some extent, we compromise and help each other, but *the priority is mine* and my husband's life is his, and to some extent, we com-



promise and help each other, but the *priority* is mine. In that respect, I think I am different from mum. *My mum's way of life is self-sacrificial*, but I don't think I can sacrifice myself for family. *Not like my mum's life, I will do minimal duty for family. I don't think I can sacrifice for my child.*

**Q:** That means you don't want to sacrifice yourself for your family?

Yes, to some extent, there will be sacrifice, but if there is something that I really want to do, I will do it. For instance, if my husband got a job in another city far from my place, and says I should follow him and support him, I don't think I would do that.

**Q:** You don't want to do that?

No, I don't. That is exactly what my mum did. But I am not like that.

(Age 17, High school girl)

The informant who is a young high school girl shows a sympathetic view to what she terms her mother's "sacrificial life". She is well aware of how her mother's identities as a woman faded to devote herself to her family and children. Although the informant demonstrates her thoughtful and engaged response as a daughter, she also expresses her desire not to have the same sacrificial life that her mother has lived. Instead, she tries to draw her boundaries of life and states that she would like to pay more attention to her career and own life. Therefore, it is perhaps possible to conclude that she shows an active desire to seek alternative femininities that can fulfil her desires.

Indeed all the young women informants indicate that they are eager to achieve freedom and an independent life style in a different way from their mother's generation, although marriage still seems to be a social necessity as discussed in Chapter 5. Reflecting other areas of identity formation highlighted throughout this thesis, a woman's journey in search of alternative identities, as a married woman, is also to be found in an ongoing process of contestation and the conflict between self-sacrifice for her family and her own self-awareness. Above all, these reluctant feelings for the *Adjumma* expressed as "meddling, interfering, interrupting and interpolating" can perhaps be seen to be established through repetition and may represent displacement of their desire for new identities, as shown below in terms of the hope of changing the image and meaning of *Adjumma*.

(6.3.4) *I hope the meaning of Adjumma will change when I am Adjumma'*

**Q:** Finally, can you imagine your future in 10 or 20 years from now? What kind of life style do you want to have?

**AE:** I cannot imagine being an *Adjumma*. I don't like the image of *Adjumma* nowadays. *Adjumma* throw their bag to reserve their own seat and they sit down next to people and they don't consider other people. I feel that is an *Adjumma* when I observe that kind of thing in the tube. Perhaps, I will have the name of *Adjumma* in the future. Of course, they manage their domestic life very well financially and *Adjumma* lead the economy of our country. However, I don't want to be like an *Adjumma*. I don't want to change and become like them. I don't want to be a typical *Adjumma* (laughing). Maybe, the concept of *Adjumma* of our generation will change. I hope...

**CH:** I cannot imagine myself in the future in 10, 20 years. Don't you know the image of "*Adjumma*"? I have a fear of becoming *Adjumma*, myself. I don't want to behave like an *Adjumma* after getting married. I want to grow old beautifully and gracefully. In a way, I understand why *Adjumma* behave as if they are overly anxious to get rich and are engrossed in money making because they want to improve their family life. However, I cannot follow the typical style of *Adjumma*. It seems to me the image of *Adjumma* is represented and repeated in Korea. I do not want to be an *Adjumma*. I hope the image has changed when we are to be *Adjumma*.

(Age between 21 and 24, University students)

The interview above was conducted with young unmarried women who have clear hopes of challenging the image of *Adjumma*. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, their conversation shows clearly that rather than the original image of the *Adjumma* as the modern, omnipotent image of motherhood to be praised, it has become a hated figure, no longer one to be pursued by these young informants. However, rather than rejecting the image entirely, they too wish for it to be changed as it has done in the past. Young women are trying to find an alternative image to this outdated way of living for women reflecting the fear and anxiety of being *Adjumma*, which itself can be seen as a "contingent conditionality" (Mitchell, 1995: 80). In other words, an image which constantly shifts over time that is troubling. However, at the same time as they hope to make new identities possible, the informants also hope the image has changed when they are *Adjumma*. Young women hope not to be a woman like *Adjumma*, that is, a woman who could have been regarded and praised as a modern image of motherhood twenty years ago but which is now again outdated as perhaps was the image of *Adjumma* previous to that one.

From informants' talk, seemingly, there is no longer a place for either of these "ideal" models of motherhood. One of the informants, in particular, shows

awareness of *Adjumma's* contributions to maintaining the family and to the development of nation. As the informant describes, there are still residual images of *Adjumma* as a good house manager and the driving force of developing country. However, these kind of positive images of *Adjumma* have all but faded away and transformed into negative characters. In this sense, the negative attitude toward the *Adjumma* is, as noted above, based on contingent conditions, which have changed over time and which are constantly changing; from *Adjummuny* (benevolent Aunty) to positive *Adjumma* (well-managed and self-sacrificed driving force of development) to negative *Adjumma* (aggressive modern wives, backstage manages of hustling industrialisation) and there may yet possibly be another transformation of *Adjumma* to fulfil women's desires and roles in contemporary society. In this context, young women in South Korea are well aware of the process of transformation of the image of *Adjumma* and they hope that the image will change further in the future, as can be seen in informants' remarks above. Furthermore, there can perhaps two aspects noted in young women's desire for changing *Adjumma*: one may be antagonistic towards the circulation of the typical image of *Adjumma* without social recognition of mother's generation' efforts. The other may be fear and anxiety of repeating their mother's generation, which they regard as typifying a sacrificed life for their family. Thus, whilst they recognise the value of their mother's lives (as expressed clearly in one excerpt above), young informants desperately want to construct new identities to fulfil their desires and aims of lives as an alternative to their mother's generation.

If fear, anxiety and negative views towards being *Adjumma* invoke negotiation in the way described above, the new term, *Missy* may be an alternative femininity for married women that express the need for change in the image of *Adjumma*. The interview excerpt below shows the necessity of transforming the meaning of *Adjumma* and reveals that the informants are well aware of the actual changes in the meaning to date and in process. As can be seen here, the informant seems to be content that married women are both desire and seek identities under construction.

I think the image of *Adjumma* has been changed. You know married women around me are actually investing their time and energy for their own self-cultivation. They are self-cultivating and enjoy their pleasure... different from the *Adjumma* when I thought. Well, *they might be Missy*.

(Age 38, Full time housewife)

Notably, in the remarks of informants such as the one example above, there seems to be an expressed desire to invest in self-cultivation and the pursuit of personal pleasure. Interestingly, this particular informant also enunciates the *Missy* as an alternative image to *Adjumma*. Here, the content and meaning of the latter could be so radically transformed as to take another form under a different name, i.e. that of the *Missy*. The informant's statement that it "might be *Missy*" perhaps indicates that the content and meaning of identities are not fixed and are unsettled without certainty. Rather, the *Missy* could be articulated temporally and spatially and in a mediated way.

It is important to note that this articulation of the *Missy* as an alternative to the *Adjumma*, albeit in a temporal and mediated form, is not without context and, in particular, a media context. An awareness of the media representation of the *Missy* is useful for understanding how informants of the mass media generation are beginning to transcend new femininity in the South Korean context as described above. The young women who constitute these informants represent the younger generations who are more educated (as I mentioned in Chapter 1) and who have been exposed to western culture through media texts such as Hollywood movies and television drama. South Korean media has also been adapting to the increasing influence of Western culture through such media texts and the emergence of the *Missy* from within the media in many ways represents this influence.

#### **6.4. Emergence of the *Missy***

##### *(6.4.1) Emergence of the *Missy**

In 1994, a small-scale advertising campaign of one of the major department stores in Seoul made a great cultural impact in South Korea. In the advertisement, copywriters invented a novel term, *Missy* ("*Missyjok*", "*jok*" means tribe or group). It is a combined term, which means "single-women-like-married-women". In the advertisement, the main motto was "I am a *Missy*, the *Missy* is different". The term literally means a group of women who are married but whose appearance is that of a single woman. It has been widely used and rapidly come to represent an alternative lifestyle for women. Even the copywriter was surprised at the speed with which this term took on a social meaning and the way in which it

has come to evoke a specific image of women and femininity (Lee, S-H. 2002: 149).



**Figure 11. Ji-Young Park**

With gaining explosive popularity, the main model of the advertisement, the female actress, Ji-Young Park, became an icon of the *Missy*. At the time she was appearing in a soap opera, called “*When I miss you*” (*Dang-sini grewo-jil-tae*, producer: Lee Young-Hee, KBS, 1993) in which she played the role of a “single woman-like married young woman”. As such, she was seen to represent someone who can stand up for her own opinions in front of her husband and mother-in-law differently from older generations. Conveniently, the image of the role in the soap opera matched with the image of the advertisement.

From the advertising campaign, people began to construct their own images of the *Missy*. As Kim Hoo-Ran (1996) described, the typical *Missy* is ‘a woman walking through a shopping mall in a tight leather miniskirt and long boots and with her short hair flipped’. As can be seen from this image of *Missy*, the image is centred on appearance, i.e. visual categorisation. However, in addition to this initial criterion of appearance, other images are added to the concept: Firstly, the image

of *Missy* is closely related to a career-oriented image.<sup>88</sup> It is perhaps particularly interesting to observe that people have built the image of the *Missy* as well-educated women and this may be partly because the concept reflects a reaction to the young women's mother's generation who have stayed in the domestic sphere and have sacrificed their lives for their family and children as discussed in the previous section. In other words, the image of *Missy* is closely associated with the counter-images of the *Adjumma*. Secondly, the *Missy* is imagined to be anxious to live active and independent lives, perhaps derived from western images of independent women. Thus, they tend to take part in various social programmes and activities ranging from local educational programmes to life long learning education. This particular aspect reveals that *Missy* images are closely related to investing more time and energy on self-improvement, i.e. investing more on herself, rather than on her family. The active and independent images are also related to an additional image that the *Missy* is thought to have a strong desire to have her own career. Third, there is a clear consumer element clearly reflecting the fact that, with the general improvement in the economic situation of South Korea since the late 1970s, alongside the globalised consumer culture, women can afford to invest money not only for their family members but also for themselves. In particular, as discussed further below, women of the 30s to 40s age group became the centre of the consumer group in the 1990s. Indeed, they are regarded by many to be the most powerful and influential consumer group in Korea (Yoon, H-S. 2004: 16).

It was therefore, in this context, that a copywriter invented an image that represented 'a young housewife who is somewhat independent, reasonable and who knows how to make herself look like a single girl, not a married woman' (Cho, H. 2002: 186). This explosive concept was not only the product of a marketing campaign but was also related to the general conditions underpinning the emergence of a new concept of femininity, influenced by globalised images of femininity and by changing economic conditions. As noted earlier in this chapter, in South Ko-

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<sup>88</sup> The image of a good educational background could be argued to be closely related to class background probably negotiated through issues of generation and education. However, since this thesis deals with a specific group of urban young women and there are a vast variety of complex historical processes relevant to the issue of class which are no doubt of great significance but which are not central to this thesis and which it does not have the space to cover; the issue of class is not given attention here.

rea, the concept of married femininity has changed as the number of working women increased with industrialisation during the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, there was a general tendency for women to have more opportunity to undertake higher education and pursue their own career. The *Missy* refers to young married women who were born in the 1960s, and grew up in the 1970s under a development dictatorship. Because of industrialisation and huge labour migration from rural areas to big cities like Seoul, most of them lived in urban settings and grew up in nuclear families. This generation received from 10.37 years (women) to 11.78 years (men) of education on average (Kang, I-S. 1996: 594). When this generation became the young adult group in the 1980s, many of them supported and became involved in the democratic movement against the military regime. From this experience, the whole generation tended to be somehow more socially sensitive and active than any other generation in the South Korean history (Moon, S. 2005:102-103).

According to Cho Haejoang (2002), for women of this generation, the image of independent and self-sufficient women was propagated widely, both reflecting and influencing this trend. They began to talk about “self-realisation”, asserting that they wanted to be defined not by familial relations but as individuals. In particular, since 1990, South Korea became a genuine consumer society where the force of advertisements in the mass media accelerated. The *Missy* generation (women ranging from their late 20s to their early 40s) became the biggest consumer group: for instance, they are the main monitoring group for department stores and the fashion industry. For this reason, the advertising industry has focused on identifying the specific cultural code of this group of women, which is quite distinguishable from other generations. The *Missy* emerged in this specific social setting, and the term was accepted successfully not only in a commercial sense, but also as a system of social classification.

#### (6.4.2) *Media Representations of the Missy*

As noted above, the initial response from society to the advertising campaign which invented the term *Missy* was very enthusiastic. Consumers, in particular young housewives, accepted the concept and identified themselves with the term. The prevailing image of the *Missy* was immediately absorbed by the mass media, as much as it had been promoted and influenced by media in the first place. The

widespread popularity of the new image in media representation in the 1990s accelerated in film and television drama. The genres of western melodrama and romantic films were being recycled and translated into the South Korean cultural context, with the *Missy* as one key translated image from western images of femininity (as linking femininity to desire and to romantic love, as described in Chapter 5). According to Morris, this phenomena of recycling and translation ‘also allows us to reflect historically on transnational industrial, as well as aesthetic, imaginings, which do not solely derive from the west and which “flow” as it were, towards and through Western cinemas as well as around the region itself (2004:182). At the same time, the soap opera in which the model figure of the *Missy*, Ji-Young Park, appeared became very popular. Soon after the *Missy* became popular, a film called, *Mommy has a lover* (director: Dong-Bin Kim, 1995) was released in May 1995. It describes the extramarital love affairs of two *Missies*. Although it belonged to the category of comedy, it was practically the first film to deal with extramarital affairs positively from the women’s point of view. The main advertising copy for the film deals with the sexual desire of young Korean wives stating, ‘One o’clock in the afternoon, why isn’t she at home? What is stronger than the late wind is the spring wind, what is stronger than the spring wind is the *Missy* wind (*baram*)’<sup>89</sup>. The film was reasonably successful at the time, viewed by 100,000 people during the first two weeks of screening in Seoul.



**Figure 12. Mommy has a lover (director: Dong-Bin Kim, 1995)**

<sup>89</sup> In the Korean language, the wind and having a secret affair are homonyms. It is pronounced as “*baram*”.



The film describes the main features of the *Missy*. In the film, the main character was described as having a luxurious apartment, good and professionally successful husband, and a daughter. This has been the typical image of the *Missy*. Furthermore, the film deals with the issue of an extramarital love affair openly and in a way that is consistent with the image shown here. Previously and until now, it has been common to portray women's reluctance and shame when they have a lover outside of marriage (Lee, S-H. 2002: 150). However, this film ignored the traditional attitude to sexual conduct, but rather showed one influenced by more liberal western attitudes, albeit translated to the Korean context. Instead, the *Missy* housewife actively searches for her sexual pleasure. Indeed, within this kind of portrait, having a secret lover (or at least a boyfriend) is regarded as the essential condition for being a *Missy*.

It is worth noting the ideal image of the "secret lover" of the *Missy*. In many media representations, the boy friend is represented mainly as caring, tender, revealing emotions openly, weeping and raging and confessing love. This kind of description is quite different from typical Korean image of men; cold, workaholic, and concealing emotions. The most typical character of this boy friend image is the main character in a popular melodrama, *Winter Love Song* (director: Sokho Yoon, KBS, 2002), Yongjoon Bae. His character became so popular in Korean and Japan after the drama has been exported to Japan. The popularity of the drama is explosive and his figure became the most popular male actor in Japan (USA Today, 9 December 2004; BBC News, 25 November 2004).<sup>90</sup>

The image of the *Missy* became more popular and a subject of controversy when a television drama, *The Lover (Aein)*, (director: Changsoon Lee, MBC, 1996), was broadcast in September 1996. It was about an extramarital love story of two successful professionals in their mid-thirties. The drama had an enormous impact on society. The audience rating reached 36.3% in October 1996 (Kim, H-R. 1996). Compared with film, television has a greater impact because it is a more popular medium and has a wider audience range. Thousands of husbands made enquiries in the telephone office to check their wives' call list (Lee, J-H. 2003). The actress

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<sup>90</sup> Many women expect and dream to have this romantic boy friend, as I will show in the next section.

who had the role of the heroine in the drama, Sin-Hye Hwang, became another icon of the *Missy*. In addition, the motto of the drama, “beautiful immorality” became a very popular phrase at the time.

The drama caused a huge controversy in the conservative South Korean context of 1996. The social implications of the drama were even discussed in parliamentary session. The extramarital affair is a very popular and familiar theme in western films and dramas. However, as a feminist scholar, Lee So-Hee notes, in the Korean cultural context, extramarital affairs have usually been labelled as immoral and a wife’s extramarital affair is seen as damaging to the family (Lee, S-H. 2002: 155). Nevertheless, all of a sudden, the immorality of the extramarital affair was being regarded as beautiful and fashionable by many of the younger generation as embodied in the term “beautiful immorality” mentioned above. Many people of the older generation complained about the story line of the drama. They thought that this type of drama would destroy traditional family values, particularly as the genre of drama is a cornerstone of cultural history in South Korea. They were disturbed by the fact that the extramarital affair was not represented as immoral or shameful from the woman’s point of view. Indeed, in the place of such a traditional conservative view, the sexual discourse of housewives and middle-aged women was being discussed openly, and, with this drama, was brought into the domain of public discourse. As the director of *The Lover*, Chang-Soon Lee claimed his intention was to expose the contemporary moment as the Age of Hypocrisy. He said, ‘it is high time we formulated a new morality through a social consensus arrived at through diverse kinds of discussion’ (Lee, C-S. 1996).

Since *The Lover* first raised the issue of the extramarital affair, many films and dramas have flourished. The difference between *The Lover* and the post-*Lover* films and dramas is perhaps that the sexual relations and discourses are yet more openly implicated and described in later projects. In fact, the director of *The Lover* made the extramarital affair a romantic fantasy, which means the relationship in the drama was described as pure love. In this context of emphasis on a romantic fantasy, the main strategy was the absence of sexual relations. However, the post-*Lover* films and dramas put the sexual relationship at the centre. Furthermore, the *Missy* is always located in the central stage of the extramarital affair and, as such, liberal sexual attitudes have become the main property of the *Missy*. Lee So-Hee pointed out that the story of the extramarital affair has ex-

perimented with the possibility of recognising a new morality governing middle-aged wives' subjective sexuality and individuality.

In 1998, a film called *An Affair (Jeongsa)*, director: Jae-Yong Lee, 1998) deals with a love story between a housewife and her sister's future husband. In this film, the heroine of the film, Seo-hyun, is a married and happy full-time housewife with a son. When she prepares her sister's wedding with her sisters' future husband, he wakes her forgotten emotion of love, which disappeared with her marriage. Eventually, she falls in love with him. Thus, this film deals with a taboo subject in Korea, i.e. the love story between a married woman and her sister's future husband, and breaks the chains of traditional morality and customs located within family-centred values of the region. In the film, Seo-hyun initially hesitated and was reluctant to have a relationship with the sister's future husband, but when she eventually encounters a new sexual relationship with Woo-in, she begins to search for an alternative life with him. At the end of the film, the heroine, Seo-hyun gets divorced and the relationship with the sister's future husband is broken. However, the film ends with a scene showing her taking a flight to travel abroad as she has always dreamed of doing. Hence, the film does not follow the typical formula of punishment and a tragic end to the extramarital affair. Illustrating what is different from the contemporary films that deal with the extramarital affairs, the film instead follows the heroine's desires and dreams rather than showing her as being victimised and morally judged.

Therefore, this story line can be said to represent the emerging process of the *Missy*. As she searches for a new life, the *Missy* provides a new framework to fulfil new identities of young married women who want to distinguish themselves from the conventional role and image of sexually neutralised femininity. The social discourse around these kinds of films and drama show that female sexuality in modern Korea conflicts with the Confucian ideas of fidelity and chastity (Lee, S-H, 2002: 157-158). In this context of media representation, it is easy to see how the concept of the *Missy* has replaced the old concept of the wives, or *Adjumma*, as the one with which married women identify themselves.



**Figure 13. An Affair (Jeong-Sa, director: Jae-Yong Lee, 1998)**

Other films have further built upon this tendency to increasingly provide spaces for women's desires and characters and scenarios with which they can identify themselves as the new concept of *Missy* and arguably as reflecting certain aspects of globalised images of femininity. For example, since '*Mom has a lover*' (*Ummayegae aeiny sangkyussyuyo*), the common and remarkable point of difference from past media representations of extra-marital love affairs is that the woman's perspective is given. The film describes the awakening of woman's desire which comes to light in the process of having an affair. It is arguably the first time film that a Korean film deals with extra-marital love affairs positively. Women having an extramarital affair (or love affair) used to end up being tragically killed or committing suicide. Moreover, the woman who is seeking her sexual desire was described as a kind of hybrid of monster. For example, in her analysis of a famous Korean director in the 1960s, Ki-Young Kim, So-young Kim points out that the female character in one of his films; the *Housemaid* (*Hanyo*, director: Ki-Young Kim, 1960) is represented as a hybrid monster born out of the repression of feminine sexuality and class mobility (Kim, S-Y, 1998). However, as So Young Kim, the feminist film critic describes, in the post-*Aein* period, the image of women has radically shifted and the mass media attempt to represent women's voices. The common theme of those films and dramas is that they are beginning to show female sexual desires, more confident and self-awareness.



**Figure 14. A Good Lawyer's Wife (Baramnan Gajok, director: Sang-Soo Im, 2003)**

The establishment of this novel identity of sexual desire and self-awareness in media representation culminated when a film, *A Good Lawyer's Wife* (*Baramnan Gajok*, director: Sang-Soo Im, 2003) and a drama, *Women next door* (*Abzip Yoja*, producer: Seok-Jang Kwon, 2003) were both issued in 2003 and once again caused controversy in society. However, through the process of the controversy, the concept of the *Missy* was consolidated and became yet more popular entrenched in society, becoming a now accepted word referring to the group of women who are married and in pursuit of independence and their own desires, as represented in these two media products. Both the film and the drama were released at the same time and both dealt with extramarital affairs very directly. In the first week of its release, *A Good Lawyer's Wife* had an audience of 440,000 in Seoul, of which the majority were middle-aged housewives (Baik, E-H. 2003). The film portrayed the main female character, a professional dancer, who is dissatisfied with her sexual life and for whom her life is boring. Her husband is a good lawyer, but when she finds he is seeing another woman, she reacts by having an affair with a young man.

The drama, *Women Next Door* has a similar story line in that it is about a woman's extramarital affair and the process of searching for her identity. It also attracted a large audience. The drama reached the top rate (21%) within two weeks of broadcasting. The main character, Miyeon, is a typical full-time house-

wife. Initially, her image can be identified with the typical *Adjumma* who is supportive of her husband and a good manager of her family. However, after having an affair she divorces her husband and separates from her lover. The most significant aspect is that she becomes an independent owner of a sandwich shop revealing her possibilities and abilities to pursue success and a life in her own right. In other words, by the end of the film, Miyeon has changed her identity from an *Adjumma* to a *Missy*.<sup>91</sup>

The *Missy* representations in these films and TV drama contribute to the popularity of *Missy* as an alternative lifestyle for women. The connotations of these film and drama images are that heroines are self-confident, career oriented and desirable lovers. Young women have taken up these images and used them in the process of constructing their own alternative identities, coming to refer to themselves as *Missy*, reworking and replacing the image of *Adjumma*. Given the increasing significance of this image, it is, therefore, perhaps opportune to examine the process of its emergence, as I attempt to do below.

## **6.5. Controversy over the *Missy*: By-product or genuine?**

### *(6.5.1) The Missy as a pseudo-reality of commercialism*

Since its emergence as a novel concept, the *Missy* has been a subject of debate amongst social scientists and feminists in South Korea reflecting varying opinions regarding the many pros and cons of the real – or otherwise - entity of the specific group of women - *Missy*. As I will discuss in this section, many comment that the concept of the *Missy* is an illusory entity only driven by the dominant force of consumerism since it was invented and promoted solely for the purpose of commercial advertising. Hence, critics of the *Missy* claim that it is a fabricated con-

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<sup>91</sup> The open discourse of sexual desire, and women's search for a new identity, are both reflected in a survey carried out by a polling company just after the release of *A Good Lawyer's Wife* in 2003. The sample of 3,857 married men and women (men: 2,175 and women: 1,682), were questioned about their attitudes towards sexual behaviour and desire. The results showed that 49.4% of women showed their desire to have extramarital sexual relationships. Thus, it showed that it has become a common phenomenon for women to have a boyfriend apart from their husbands. Many even thought that an extramarital lover can almost be regarded as "another member of family" (Park & Kim, 2003).

cept, which creates more powerful images of “superwomen”: progressive and modern characters, rejecting old and traditional conservative ideas, and influenced both by a changing Korean social context and by global media images and consumerism. However, these critics argue that, although the image was not necessarily a reality prior to the advertising campaign, the dissemination of this pseudo-progressive and active image has led women to imagine that the *Missy* really existed in society, rather than being invented by consumerism. This critical position can be found in the argument of a leading feminist in South Korea, Young-Ja Lee. In her analysis of the phenomenon of the *Missy*, she argues that the *Missy* is an illusory and pseudo reality, which was encouraged and underpinned by the mass media (Lee, Y-J. 2000). Women are exposed repeatedly to the concept through advertisements and mass media representations (such as the dramas and films described above). According to her analysis, ‘at the moment of the advertised image turning into real character, nobody can make sense of whether the *Missy* is a commercial by-product or voluntarily constituted genuine entity’ (Lee, Y-J. 2000: 60).

This type of criticism is reminiscent of similar arguments around the construction of new femininity in western contexts. There exists the notion that new femininity is emphasising on self-surveillance, monitoring, and discipline. Moreover, criticism of new femininity is not only focusing on individualism, choice, and empowerment, but also emphasising consumerism and the commodification of difference (McRobbie, 2006; Gill & Aurther, 2006). This important contribution from the West reveals how and where feminism are attempting to understand consumption and new femininity within the processes of global capitalism and is similar to how the *Missy* has been understood as new femininity in the South Korean context of globalisation. In particular, understandings and criticisms of the concept of the *Missy* by feminists have centred on this aspect of consumerism and commoditisation of difference, rather than an actual assessment of the restrictions facing married women in South Korea. Lee’s critical assessment reflects many feminists’ point of view in Korea claiming that the *Missy* has several problems: the original advertisement which “invented” the concept of the *Missy* implies that marriage is no longer a restriction. However, Lee claims that this is just illusion and that the false image of superwomen contained in the *Missy* is not possible to achieve. Furthermore, this false consciousness and illusion leads

women to be trapped in consumerism instead of realising their discontent and resistance towards the system of marriage (Lee, Y-J. 2000: 65-66).

However, this critical view of the *Missy* is perhaps only based on two dimensional feminist ideas, in which young women as mass consumers are seen to be simply duped or victims of consumerism with functional needs and no self desires. As such, such views ignore the process of the active transformation of women. From this perspective, the *Missy* is not thought to be seeking and constructing her identity actively. Indeed, if one followed this type of critical analysis, the women's subject position would probably disappear. Instead, the subject formation seems only to be regarded as an object oppressed by commercialism and patriarchal system and this contributes to the phenomenon that Spivak (1988) points out - that women's subject formation in global capitalism is often overlooked.

The relationship between global capitalism...and nation-state alliance is so macrological that it cannot account for the micrological texture of power. To move toward such an accounting one must toward theories of ideology-of subject formations that micrologically and often erratically operates the interests that congeal the macrologics

(Spivak, 1988:279, 306 in Ramamurthy, 2003:542)

In this chapter (and indeed in this thesis), the study of cultural practice requires studying "macrological alliances and the "micrologies" of women's subject positions in order to understand that this position can be actively transformed, rather than being merely an object of oppression of consumer forces. The practice as *Missy* can perhaps best be seen as a meeting point where multiple factors (e.g. antagonism to *Adjumma*, anxiety of mother's generation and women's own desire driven by consumerism) constitutes the subject- cultural practice and their inherent temporalities. Of course, the *Missy* was originally formulated and encouraged by the support of consumerism and mass media. In addition, it is perhaps valid to state that the image of the career-oriented and "unmarried-look-a-like" housewives was just an illusion in the first place. However, if we entirely accept South Korean feminists' criticisms (Lee, Y-J. 2000: Cho, H. 2002) and the western feminists criticism (McRobbie, 2006; Gill & Aurthor) of women's position within global capitalism, then there would be no possibility of the actor committing to, or participating in, her own transformation of identity. In practice, the images of the *Missy* portrayed by commercialism and mass media may open up women's imagination to the possibilities of building a new identity that expresses their de-



sires and self-realisation. According to Kaplan (1995), 'it would be difficult to find subjects not interpellated in the world making activity of consumption...[we need] studies of corporate practices, site of consumption and subject formation... without account for agency, resistance, subjectivity... without constructing narratives of oppositional binaries' (1995:61). Similarly, I would argue that the cultural practice of *Missy* are perhaps constituted culturally and mediated by their own active social relations. As I will attempt to show later in this chapter, through examples of women's performativity, and constructions of their identity within my informant's statements, it seems clear that the women are well aware of situations in which they are positioned and are choosing their identity based on self-realisation as well as cooperating with consumerism.

Therefore, it seems that thus far feminist analysis of the phenomenon of the *Missy* has resulted in overlooking the possibility of women's subject formation in constructing their identities, as I have sought to show in this section. With the deficiencies of these main competing critiques of the *Missy* discussed above, it would be helpful therefore at this point to return to my empirical data and the revelations of young women themselves to discover if a more convincing explanation can be found in their own voices. Indeed, in my interviews, the informants discuss the theme with a certain clarity, which shows how they understand the issue with regard to constituting their identities. Hence, in the next section, which is based on my interview data, I will show how the informants are struggling and negotiating with their identity in this way.

## 6.6. Is *Missy* a new femininity?

In my interviews, I raised the issue of the *Missy* in several lines of questioning relating to who the *Missy* is, what the definition of *Missy* is, and how informants identify themselves with *Missy*. Most married women who I interviewed clearly expressed their desire to be *Missy*. One of the informant's remarks, "I would love to be a *Missy* and I would love to be seen as a *Missy*." Indeed, the following extract from my interview is a common response;

**Q:** Do you think you are a *Missy*?

**H:** I think I am a *Missy*. You know, I am a married woman but my colleagues told me that I don't look like an *Adjumma*. Rather, I look like *Agassi* (unmarried woman) on the street.

(Age 34, Assistant editor of children's book)

As has been noted earlier in this chapter, the central definition of *Missy* refers to married women who want to be look like unmarried women (*Agassi*). Although their marital status is that of married women who expect to achieve all the duties to be conducted inside and outside of their house, in a sense, they still want to be considered as unmarried women. In other words, *Missy* transcends across the marital status boundary from married to unmarried women, as this informant clearly considers herself to do as a *Missy*.

At a glance, the *Missy* can be a technique of visual knowledge as identified as dress and body codes. The visual technique is perhaps the best way of masquerading a woman as unmarried. As such, the *Missy* can be regarded visually as 'unmarried women' by adopting or assuming their style. On this point, the visual technique of their appearance seems to demonstrate how masquerading as *Missy* brings into play contingent, complex and negative identification to *Adjumma*, as revealed in the informant's revelation above, Similarly, the following extract shows how *Missy* is constructed as visual appearance.

**Q:** What makes you is a *Missy*?

**AJ:** I am following the trendy styles such as fashion and hairstyle, decorating my appearance and using make-up

**Q:** Do you think *Missy* is about appearance?

**BY:** Appearance is one of strong factors of being a *Missy* because, at first glance, we can recognise *Missy* visually.

(Age 32-39, Full housewives)

The visibility of *Missy* enables her to practice bodily differences between *Adjumma* and *Missy*. Thus, the *Missy* becomes reconstructed through techniques that serve to approximate an image of *Agassi*. *Missy* seems, therefore, to take place in the assumption of an image: dress code, body code and visual code (signifier) of unmarried women (*Agassi*). The active transformation of the informant then takes place in the assumption of an image of unmarried women (*Agassi*) she portrays. Here, the *Missy* is more of a process or a 'becoming' than a state of being, where one simply 'is' (Butler, 1993). In other words, revealing that the activity implied in this process makes it difficult to view the concept as a passive imposition of identity by global capitalism and consumerism.

If the *Missy* is an identity that contains desires to disguise as unmarried women (*Agassi*), why is it that marital disguising is a significant desire for young women

in the contemporary South Korean context? It may be because, as I have discussed, young women reject the traditional image of the “wise mother and good wife”, which has been represented as an *Adjumma*. “*Adjumma*” had become the universalised concept used to refer to married women as the signifier. However, the concept, *Adjumma*, has been taken for granted with a long list of expected codes of conduct, which are only accomplished by sacrificing herself in favour of her family. Thus, as noted earlier, the image has become unreliable for embracing women’s desires and pursuit of self-realisation. In the contemporary context which incorporates influences from a changing consumer society and from a globalised media context, the image of married women that they now wish to portray of themselves is one, which encompasses their desire to prolong self-realisation and development as they did before marriage. The informants in the previous section have expressed a negative view to *Adjumma* and, for them. The newly created concept of the *Missy* for women in the late 20s and 30s age group may be similar to the *Agassi* (unmarried young women) who could have more freedom and power to control their own lives.

Therefore, if the *Missy* can be seen as rebellious to the *Adjumma* discourse, it also perhaps makes visible the fractured identities of old femininities. This can be seen in the way the *Missy* identity is actively occupied by, and in, the subject when she assumes an image in contrast to these old images of femininities, as can be seen in the extract below:

**Q:** What is the *Missy*?

**HJ:** Unlike the *Adjumma* who has terrible style. *Bbogeul bbgeul* (badly managed curly) permed hair style... a terrible colour match between top and trousers/skirts, *Adjumma* has no style.

**JB:** *Missy*’s appearance is absolutely like *Agassi* (unmarried women).

**HJ:** If *Missy* would not carry her child, people would never recognise the *Missy* woman as married women.

**JN:** *Missy* would be coming out of the rebellion to *Adjumma*...

(Age 29-35, Fulltime wives)

From the interview above, the difference between *Missy* and *Adjumma* becomes a matter of visual style such as hairstyle and dress code that the *Missy* can put on and take off. Therefore, appearance is a strong factor for the *Missy*. The *Missy* image creates a particular image of stylish women who have a good fashion taste. This image is perpetuated in the mass media and exemplified by contemporaries.

The desire of being “gazed” upon as attractive women in the same way as unmarried stylish women can be seen to be driven by the antagonism to the outdated loose physical image of married women, *Adjumma*, as well as the antagonism to the content of the latter image as discussed earlier in this chapter. In this sense, the *Missy* could be understood as the imagined identities of false illusions, overly concerned with women’s appearance, and which invoke consumerism and that the essential condition of being a *Missy* is a preoccupation with appearance. South Korea has become a genuine consumer society where the force of advertisements in the mass media has accelerated (Cho, 2002: 182). In addition, advertising and women’s magazines have reproduced the image of the *Missy*. Similar to the critiques discussed above, some feminists insist that the *Missy* is a form of discrimination. The women’s identity formations are limited by what Lazar called the “aestheticisation of their physical appearances”, which is directly associated with consumerism’ (Lazar 2006; Scott, 2005). Young housewives, whose main playground is the department store, have been particularly vulnerable to the carefully orchestrated consumer system, and have been trapped by the desire it creates.

On the other hand, if this “ordinary” form of consumption act as an expression of identities (Gonow & Warde, 2001), young women are not only subordinated to the consumer world, but also reinventing themselves, according to their own pleasure and desire (Kendall, 1996), as revealed in the clear subject positions expressed in the interview extracts above which show that it is rather a competing and ongoing process of building up their identities. In other words, the *Missy* as a concept of renegotiation/struggling with incomplete identity demonstrates the way of fragmented women’s new identities are constituted by competing discourses. Thus, the *Missy* can be seen as a space of conflict and struggle between confined self-image by consumerism and the self-image of being a new, active young women with agency and a strong sense of self (Aapola, Gonick & Harris 2005; Kelly, 2005; Henry, 2004).

As this chapter has attempted to show, the meaning of *Missy* is contained in the meanings the informants attach to the practices involved. On the basis of these meanings expressed by the young women, and as an unresolved identity of competing femininities, the *Missy* refers to imagined identities compounded with uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. Thus, the discussions of *Missy* observed in the

informants' conversation are competing means by which it can be seen that new femininities have not yet arrived and have not been fully realised but rather still connotes a competing and conflicting image. As can be easily seen, when most informants talk about the *Missy*, their descriptions sketch the abstract visual images of the *Missy* (fashion, appearance, style and age) which perhaps reflect, and are reflected by, consumer and media images, then move to describing the image of *Adjumma*, and finally retuning to the *Missy* to define it as a counterpart of, and rebellious concept to, *Adjumma*.

Indeed, thus, the *Missy-jok* (group) has been presented as embodying confidence and, noted earlier in this chapter, as putting their energy into self-cultivation/ their appearance/ improvement of their own life. The following interview shows clearly what informants think about the *Missy*;

**HE:** I think I am a *Missy* because I am investing a lot of energy for my inner and external development to have my own satisfaction. For *Missy*, her weight of life is more centred on herself rather than husband or children.

**Q:** What is difference between the *Adjumma* and *Missy*?

**HE:** I think the *Adjumma* is someone who is loose and careless about her life, only thinking about her husband and child. Unlike *Adjumma*, the *Missy* is keeping up tensions in everyday life.

**Q:** What does it mean, tension?

**HE:** Well...tension, I think, is the motivation to develop my life.

(Age 34, Full-time housewife)

As can be seen, the informant points out what the *Missy* means from her point of view which, as shown earlier, includes one of the main definitions that the *Missy* is more focussed on their own development rather than family affairs or rearing children. However, with regard to the definition of the *Missy*, despite the prevalence of the image in the media and in consumer society, it seems not possible to define without comparison with the concept of *Adjumma*. From the extract, it is noticeable that there is a precise difference between the *Missy* and *Adjumma*, namely tensions in everyday life. The informant thinks that the *Adjumma* is careless and not interested in taking care of herself, whereas the *Missy* is always maintaining her consciousness in terms of motivating her life. Thus, if the *Missy* can be seen as opposed or rebellious to the *Adjumma* discourse, it is in the process of making visible the fractured identities of old femininities.

On contrary, the informant in the following interview is usually identified as a *Missy* but sometimes she identifies herself with *Adjumma* when she behaves “wrongly”;

**S:** I never had been called *Adjumma* till that moment; people usually called me a *Missy* even when I had my second son, Joonyoung. One day, I was stuck in a terrible traffic jam on my way back home. So I tried to change my direction, and drove my car into a private car park although I was aware that I should not. At that moment, one guy shouted at me “*Adjumma!* You should not park your car here.” I was thinking at the moment, yes, that’s right, I am *Adjumma*.

(Age 37, Full time housewife)

The appearance of this informant may be that of a *Missy*, as she identifies herself, but her identity can shift between *Adjumma* and *Missy* in different instances. The informant allowed the man to call her *Adjumma* when she noticed that she broke a rule in the parking lot. Therefore, in her construction, the *Adjumma* image seems to be closely related to negative behaviour not just a negative appearance, while the *Missy* image is associated with the positive and active side of her everyday life. This can read in the same way as other historical examples of “passing” - as the forming of identity marked by permeable boundaries; i.e. the anxiety of being ‘mis-read’ or ‘correctly read’. The informant above does not want to be an *Adjumma*. However, although the images can be seen as oppositional, in the real practice, both identities are intermingled and coexisted, showing that the two concepts are situation dependent. As an unresolved identity of competing femininities, the *Missy* refers to imagined identities compounded with uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. Thus, the *Missy* identities are competing means by which it can be seen that new femininities have not yet arrived and have not been fully realised but rather are represented in a competing and conflicting image. When most informants talk about the *Missy*, their descriptions sketch the abstract visual images of the *Missy*, the move to describing the images of *Adjumma*, and finally return to the *Missy* to define it as a counterpart of *Adjumma*.

One common aspect I observed in various interviews was that most women start to talk about *Adjumma* images to formulate the new image they want to describe. In the following interview, one informant is desperately looking for a word to locate her feminine identity but does not find one implying that there is no correspondent content with the *Missy* concept. The majority of informants all

agreed that the *Adjumma* image cannot be a vessel to carry their desires and expected images. This fear and anxiety of being *Adjumma* is the starting point for describing the *Missy*. However, this process of enunciation further shows that the *Missy* is not a uniformed and fixed image but rather, is still competing and struggling with old images. In the following extract, the informant shows her struggle to define the *Missy*, and explains this by using old images;

**Q:** Who is the *Missy*?

**J:** A *Missy* is an *Adjumma*, but, it's like an *Agassi*-like *Adjumma*...how can I say... (Mumbling and looking for the word). Without her child, we would never recognise the *Missy* as a married woman. *Missy* absolutely looks like *Agassi*!

(Age 32, Fulltime housewife)

The informant J is mumbling her words and takes time to explain her understanding of the *Missy*. As she indicates, the *Missy* is traversing the notion of the two, *Adjumma* and *Missy*. The split seconds of hesitation and mumbling are the point of showing its ambivalence. In fact, the informant cannot provide a clear picture of the image of the *Missy*. Instead, she mobilises the pre-existing resources of *Adjumma* and *Agassi* to explain the new images. It seems that she puts herself in a contradictory position; the *Missy* is in fact quite different from conventional images of married women, rather looking like an “unmarried-looking” married women. Thus these images can be summed up with in the conclusion that the *Missy* is an “*Agassi*-like *Adjumma*”. However, this contradiction and struggling is perhaps part of the process of creating a new space for building identities.

In fact, the whole process of struggling to define new identities starts with the crisis of the old images of married women. As discussed, the old images of married women cannot fulfil what women desire and accomplish. The existing concept and images of married women with *Adjumma* have been too uniform and fixed to offer a solution to the crisis. At this point, the action they take is mimicking the unmarried women who is categorised as *Agassi* and masquerading as unmarried. Indeed, in this instance, what women appear to want is to be gazed by the other in an ‘intentional misrecognition’ between married and unmarried women.

#### (6.6.1) *Missy as an imagined space*

As I have attempted to show both through the media representation and my informant's discussions, the *Missy* can be established through repetition and displacement of their desire for new identities. Therefore, *Missy* may perhaps be best understood as the possibility to open spaces for transformation into new femininities. Furthermore, it could be argued that the *Missy* is creating an "imagined space" that is never settled and is only defined by images that are constantly added to, and/or, replaced. For women who want to construct new identities to embrace their desires and hopes, the old image of married women, *Adjumma*, could be regarded as containing less possibilities to include newly recovered identities and may be considered to have been all but discarded. In other words, existing concepts like *Adjumma* serve to reinforce depersonalised and desexualised images of married women. It was clear, as has been shown, that many informants are reluctant to commit to the *Adjumma*, as they do not want to sacrifice themselves and conceal their desires. This means that there is a gap between an image that is already assumed and an image that is yet to be assumed. The way of filling this gap seems to be by creating an imagined space for building new identities. Thus, it becomes clear that the imagination plays a significant role in the formation of identity. This is partly because the newly formed images of *Missy* are not uniformly fixed and arranged like the images of *Adjumma*, rather the *Missy* is located in-between the *Adjumma* and *Agassi*. In other words, the *Missy* can be said to be not quite *Adjumma*, nor *Agassi*. This "not-quite-ness" can be found in informants' hesitation, struggling, and reluctance in their discussion. Nevertheless, despite this struggle and hesitation this untidy, incomplete identity provides a positive space for building up a new formation of identities.

One good example of this shifting space is this ambivalent attitude towards having a "lover". Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that the *Missy* TV dramas and films have been popular with women deliberately engaging in a translation of themselves as desiring, free and self-realising in the realm of fantasy and imagination. Ensuring that their previously lost sense of self can be truly worthy of care and attention in the consumption of romance drama may perhaps be considered a form of "self-justifying individualism" (Jhally & Lewis, 1998: 57). Thus, their reflexive self emerges in this yearning for freedom and in the search for an individual sense of who they are. This individual sense of self is not just constructed in the public realm of media, and the fantasy of romantic drama in particular, consumption and externally visual appearance as has been discussed in preceding



sections of this chapter. Crucially, women's imaginative negotiation and reconstruction of the private sphere is also bound up with a transitional phenomenon of intimacy. This reconstructive attempt of the private sphere can also be located within the pervading discourse of paying attention to the individual self. Indeed, one of the informants in the group of married women suggests that the *Missy* provides a space for dreaming of a lover outside of her marriages:

I have watched the film, *Jeongsa* (love affair). I have seen it twice. It is so touching. I cannot avoid that kind love if it happens to me. If I have that kind of feeling...I am dreaming of a lover.

(Age 32, Full time housewife)

As noted earlier in this chapter, it was previously common in Korean public discourse to portray women's reluctance and shame when they had a lover outside of marriage. However, for the *Missy*, the sexual double standards in contemporary South Korean society seem to be progressively ignored, as represented in the film and drama discussed earlier in this chapter and as translated by this informant to young women's own lives. Here it almost sounds as if having a lover is the essential condition for being a *Missy*. The informants who identify themselves with the *Missy* reply that they are also dreaming a lover outside of marriage. When I met this informant who was pregnant, she talked about her dream of having a lover:

I dream of having a lover. I don't have any problem with my husband though. He's all right. One day, when I was pregnant with my third child, a bookseller visited me at home. He was not a particularly attractive man. He just seemed OK to me. I desperately wanted to ask him to go out... (Laughing) not for anything special. I just wanted to take a walk and chat and have a cup of coffee. However, I didn't...oh no. Thinking about my pregnant belly. I just dreamt.

(Age 37, Full time housewife)

Here, the informant was dreaming of an intimate relationship. Her emotional feelings show her imagined self who could have a lover for an emotionally fulfilling relationship outside of marriage. The imagined identity seems to be a false one, but for her it is a dream that could come true. "This imagined identity takes the form of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility' (Appadurai, 1993: 274). This imagination is closely intertwined with desire, which is precisely a desire for "freedom", perhaps related to the growing

awareness of dissatisfaction with the lives of their mother's generation and to women's freedom portrayed in the media.

For example, the next informant shows how this dissatisfaction experienced by women leads them to search for a new alternative practice. In particular, with regard to dreaming of a lover, some informants are seeking to find a way of escaping from their frustrations and dissatisfactions with their married life.

**H:** You know? He is so attractive<sup>92</sup>. I am dreaming that he holds me tight. Actually, it is so tempting! I might sleep (with him). Sometimes I lose my focus at work when he is around. Sometimes I feel very confused. My husband is OK. My relationship with my husband is based on "*Cheong*"<sup>93</sup>. But I think it is natural for every human being to have a dream true love. I am always dreaming of a lover. I don't feel guilty. It is very natural thing, isn't it?

**Q:** Do you have any plan for this relationship?

**H:** I am not sure... I want to keep this relationship as a friend. I don't want to break anything. Our friendship could be forever.

(Age 34, Full-time assistant editor of children's book)

As seen in the previous section, this particular informant claims that she is identifiable with the *Missy*. After a long conversation, she reveals her story of an affair with her colleague. In her conversation, she distinguishes her current relationship with her husband from her relationship with her lover (boy friend). Love is absent in her relationship with her husband as expressed in her assertion that it is based on "*Cheong*", which refers to a routine face-to-face relationship. She claims she wants to have more emotional comfort, which is beyond the routine relationship. Interestingly, in her remarks we can find the same desire of having an intimate relationship as the 38 year-old pregnant woman's remarks. Although this informant does have a lover outside of marriage in practice it also has some of the dreaming aspects to this practice, which seem to derive from her reluctance and

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<sup>92</sup> The media described above represent an image of the boyfriend who is caring, soft and younger. Similarly, my informants often describe their desire for a boy friend who is more caring and tender than their husbands who have a patriarchal character.

<sup>93</sup> "*Cheong (情)*" is an expression of affectionate and attached relationships between people closely related to one another. According to Choi, '*Cheong* is a state of mind that develops from togetherness through a long period of being together or contact, from sharing of human heartedness such as warmth, comfort, caring, unconditional acceptance and trust of the other person, and from accumulated shared experiences' (Choi, 2001: 119). The relationship is located within small boundary of face-to-face based relationship (Alford, 1999: 56-60).

hesitation of commitment to the relationship. She is reluctant partly because she is still concerned about workplace matters (her professional life) and also because she wants to keep her marriage life intact. The relationship has been already begun and is practised between the informant and her caring boyfriend, but she is still expecting something that is not a sexual relationship, but which is more obscure and reliant upon imagination. In other words, she is still actually dreaming of a lover in much the same way the 37 year-old housewife whose conversation was discussed above. Thus, it seems that her *Missy* identity is an imaginary one and unsettling.

Another of the informants also does actually have a lover who gives her what she sees as enough “emotional” satisfaction. For her, the relationship with a man, outside of marriage, seems to be central to her happiness and she confesses that she feels born again.

I feel I am held in greater regard by my boyfriend than by my husband. He is nice to me and treats me really well. I feel a much more fulfilled woman myself when I am with him. I feel I was born again. Sometimes, I spent money on expenses for our dates out of our living expenses. However, I don't feel it's a waste...it's worth it.

(Age 36, Full time housewife)

It is interesting to note that, with growing access to the Internet, there is a widely prevailing tendency for many housewives to meet a lover via Internet chat rooms. Cyberspace<sup>94</sup> provides a place of intimacy to allow isolated housewives to communicate outside of marriage boundaries, as this informant describes:

One day, I chatted with one guy who seemed really knowledgeable. I saw his review of *The Bridge of the Madison County* with the explanation ‘it is an excellent film for when wives are alone in a rainy day’. It moved me to see it. So, I started to exchange e-mails and his e-mails were my only window to communicate while I have two boys for conversation and my husband was busy sleeping when he got back home. I was fulfilled in happiness to communicate about the films with him. Gradually, we also talked about each other's married life.

(Age 34, Full time housewife)

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<sup>94</sup> ‘A typical development of cyber-love is as follows: public discourse, private emails or private chatting, sending picture, telephoning and arranging face-to-face meetings’ (Ben-ze'ev, 2004:155).

It is interesting to note that the informant likes the Hollywood film, *The Bridges of Madison County* and that her online encounter began in relation to this film. For Korean women, western cinema can often be seen as the centre of gravity of the imagination, the “living, social mediation” (Martin-Barbero, 1993: 166) that constitutes new cultural experience and identities (as described in Chapter 6). The presence of the other, western woman – in Korean eyes – offers another possibility for the construction of their identities. Thus, the reason for the desire to have a lover may stem from the feeling there is no other way out of their own married life, which does not equate with the romance that they see in western films, and from hating and resenting married life. Thus, they start rethinking their own happiness in terms of having a lover, something that would have previously been inconceivable for married women in Korea.

However, most informants want to keep their family boundaries as much as they want to keep their lovers, although the fact that some women have boyfriend could be seen as derailed behaviour from the traditional point of view. For them, lovers may be seen as another family but they want to keep both their formal families and their lovers. For example, the following interview shows how the boundaries of having a lover is separated from the boundaries of the family to which the women belong and is perhaps another example that the act of having a lover (or boyfriend), which is closely associated with the new identity of *Missy*, is reflects the struggling and ambivalent nature of the identity.

I do not want to give up my children and my family. I am cool. I share my heart with my lover only 20 percent. I do not give my lover everything that I have. I do not feel guilty. Why should I feel? I am not harming anybody; I am not damaging my family.

(Age 32, Secretary)

For this informant, then, having a lover or boyfriend does not seem to equate with giving up her family boundaries. Here, family boundary and her personal boundary appear to be separated in the informant’s remarks without feeling shame or guilty. As discussed, previously women’s boundaries in South Korea have always been closely associated with family boundaries and mainly determined by patriarchal system. However, as seen in the series of interviews from which I quote above, this uniform boundary, which has previously been a space for constructing women’s identities has begun to rupture. In other words, women in South Korea begin to conduct a series of practices to construct their personal boundaries

which is seems to be detached from the conventional family boundary. At the same time, it also shows the struggle and ambivalence of this rupture. In order to construct their boundaries and identities, they are constantly changed and transformed, i.e. they are not fixed and settled boundaries. The remarks that they want to keep their family and boyfriend (or lover) separately seems to mean that they are not able to commit themselves to one location or another. Thus, informants are perhaps best understood to be located within and without these boundaries in the process of constructing their own identities.

### **6.7. The in-and-out-ness of the *Missy***

Thus, my analysis, as outlined above, suggests that the informants' desire was not necessarily a product of mass media in the first place, but in fact emerged from their own negotiation with their position as well as with the media in their own specific context. However, there is no simple reading of *Missy*, which seems to be associated with the different precise locations of informants. In fact, women appear to utilise "the imagined identity" to get what they want and to change new ways of life into the *Missy*. Thus, this *Missy* can be seen as a yearning to achieve or with which to identify. How then can we understand the *Missy* in terms of their engagement with struggle and negotiation of their own identity as a process as ongoing transformation within the conditions of the postcolonial context of South Korea?

As I have discussed, the *Missy* identity is not settled or fixed uniformly, although there are seemingly some patterns in terms of desire of a lover, self presentation of appearance, and marriage states that mark the boundaries of the *Missy*, as represented both in the informant's discussion of the image and in media representations. In other words, although there is not necessarily any correspondent content to the *Missy* concept, we can trace boundaries that are constantly shaping through certain tendencies such as rebellion against their mother's generation and the images of *Adjumma*. Thus, the image of "*Missy*" is probably open-ended imagined spaces to reshape their own contents of the identity formation. This symptomatic practice can be found in their contingent usage of resources, which are sometimes mobilised from negative views toward the *Adjumma*, but also from given images in mass media, which already constitutes the whole package of the *Missy*. The images of the *Missy* have been provided through a consumerism and

mass media that can be translated as a “new woman” in pursuit of a western life style, i.e. sexually-liberated, and self-centred. Yet in cultural practice, women are struggling, and reluctant just to mimic those given images exactly. I will finish this chapter by discussing this in relation to the empirical evidence gained from my informants. Sometimes my informants endorse the concept, and sometimes they hesitate to accept this image of *Missy*. In this sense, the *Missy* can perhaps be seen as a creative tinkering process.

One intriguing point I found to emerge in my interviews is that although informants retain the name of the *Missy* to express their identities, the actual identity formation is not exactly what many social scientists have described nor precisely that portrayed by the media. Rather, they are constructing the formation itself by approximating the given package of the *Missy* and withdrawing from it. This in-and-out-ness of the *Missy* identity shows the complexity with which the informants are struggling and contesting with married femininities in contemporary society. Furthermore, it should be noted that this in-and-out-ness seems to be totally based on locally contingent contexts. There is no simple informants’ reading of *Missy* representation in media and the informants tactically use the resources including given packages of the *Missy* and *Adjumma* images in order to constitute their identities.

For example, the following interview observes that informants endorse, hesitate and refuse some factors of the *Missy*. Some informants throw several factors out of the *Missy* and contextualise her within their own perspective. It seems easy to recognise that the *Missy* is not really entirely conferring a positive meaning on discourse in South Korean society. Rather, it is important to note that, alongside the elements of self-fulfilment and freedom, media representations of the *Missy* also provide a selfish and vain image of femininity that this informant then tries to tone down and interplay within her imagination by revealing a circulated representation of *Missy*.

I don’t want to be the *Adjumma*. *Missy* is coming out from antagonism to *Adjumma*, but I wonder why the media provides *Missy* and people just follow the trend in the media. *Missy* would be a trendy follower. They are not graceful looking. I like to be graceful.

(Age 39, Full time housewife)

The informant is well aware of the feminist criticism such as that of Young-Ja Lee (Lee, Y-J. 2000:60) that the *Missy* as a trend follower is a commercial by-product. The informant claims that the *Missy* is an illusory and pseudo-reality, which was encouraged and underpinned by the mass media. She criticises the commercialised *Missy* as well as taking precautions about becoming the victim of consumerism herself. So her position is distant from popular media images of *Missy* and what she wants to construct is a “graceful” image of *Missy*. In this instance, this represents a process of transforming from the widely prevailed image of the *Missy*, i.e. *Agassi*-like looking and appearance-focused images, into the characterised image of the *Missy* as a graceful character<sup>95</sup>. Similarly, in the following interview, informants do not accept the *Missy* as new femininity; since these are not totally voluntarily endorsed images and some women simply cannot make these choices. Indeed, there are also different costs implied for those who are able, in some way or another, to do so:

**IK:** I don't think I am a *Missy*

**Q:** Why do you think you are not?

**IK:** I am not following that trendy way

**Q:** You don't follow...?

**IK:** I am not interested in decorating my appearance.

**Q:** Do you think the *Missy* is all about appearance?

**IK:** Yes, probably, about appearance. I don't like to stay home looking humble without any make-up. I really want to wear make-up when I am home and go to the supermarket. I never wear humble clothes.

**Q:** You mean you think you are the *Missy*, don't you?

**IK:** I think that when I am working...maybe having a lover (laughing)

**Q:** Do you think it is better to be the *Missy*?

**DY:** Yes, I think I should decorate myself very well when I go out.

**Q:** What do you think?

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<sup>95</sup> Intriguingly, this transformative process is reminiscent of what women characterised to be idealised beauty in Chapter 4. When they discuss about plastic surgery and ideal beauty, informants show their desire of having the imagined characteristics such as being graceful, pure and benevolent by means of plastic surgery, which could only alter their physical appearances. The remarks from the informant show a similar process of transformation from the *Missy* as the media represents such images to the characterisation of *Missy* as a graceful image.

**SB:** I never decorate myself. Those who are trendy are progressive like that although I am so far from interested in being the *Missy*.

(Ages 27-33, Full time housewives)

The interview above shows interesting reactions to the concept of *Missy* from each informant: the informant IK is clearly shows her ambivalent attitude toward the concept, although she is consciously mocking it. She is cautious and hesitating to commit to the *Missy* concept fully because she is aware of the consumerism-driven character of the *Missy*. However, her ambivalence towards the image is also revealed: she is stepping in and out of the boundary of the *Missy* by remarking that she does not like to be seen as following the trendy way but actually she expresses her desire to have a good appearance. On the contrary, informant DY reinscribes the *Missy* as being about appearance. Furthermore, the informant SB does not identify herself at all as *Missy*. The informants' discussion as to whether or not they identify with the *Missy* is competing. They do not want to accept the given image of *Missy* in terms of being purely about appearance. The informants seem aware of criticisms of the *Missy* as a consumer dope. From the interview, it is interesting to see that the *Missy* does not seem to provide a clear negotiation point for the formation of identities. In fact, the characteristic of appearance is probably not providing a negotiation point. This may be partly because people are consciously aware of the origin of the concept, which was, has been, and still is closely associated with consumerism. However, as informant IK and SB unveiled cautiously, they have still desires to resurface their self-identities and desires, which are still latent and are only reluctantly exposed, if at all, in the interview. In that sense, the *Missy* does not represent a safe and settled boundary. Rather, it is what they want to be, without having any safe harbour.

Without a safe harbour, the discourse of the *Missy* reaches an ambivalent position. The informants interact within the *Missy* discourse. According to the informants, the contents of the *Missy* are "self-cultivating" and "keeping tight." The *Missy* has a self-centred lifestyle, rather than staying a victim of self-sacrifice, and she invests in her own development. The following extract shows how the informants can put on and take off the *Missy*, each reinventing the concept from their own point of view, and contextualising it from their own position.

**Q:** Do you think you are *Missy*? Or are you identifiable with *Missy*? Do you think people recognise you as a *Missy*? With regard to your previous discussion, you don't seem to want to be called *Missy*.



**DW:** I would love to be called the *Missy*. Sometimes, I am suspicious about the concept of *Missy*. I can imagine *Missy's* house would be messy and untidy. She is focusing on herself only, while she is not doing proper domestic work. The domestic work may not her priority. She could escape from all domestic obligations. She is only taking care of her appearance and her improvement. Selfish woman!

(Age 39, Fulltime housewife)

The informant above clearly also has ambivalent feelings about *Missy*. She likes to be called *Missy*, but she shows her anxiety and prioritises the domestic work as her obligation. She therefore seems to be struggling and oscillating between a self-sacrificed character as old identity and a selfish woman as new identity. For her, the *Missy* image is inscribed as only taking care of herself and neglecting her domestic work. What the informant imagines being the *Missy* image may be too selfish for her to identify with. In her remarks, the boundaries between her personal and family boundaries are separated and the separation seems to cause some struggle and hesitations. In this sense, she is still stepping in and out of boundaries. Thus, all forms of the *Missy* identification may need to be seen as a 'mode of differentiation realised as multiple, cross-cutting determination, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific calculation of their effects' (Bhabha, 1990:67), as this informant illustrates:

I am dreaming of a lover, it's not about sexual desire, not as an *Adjumma*, I want to meet a man. I am dreaming of sharing an interesting conversation. Simply I want to have good communication. My dream is not about sexual desire... it is dirty to think that. I heard that a man usually wants to sleep with you at the end of a meeting though. I don't want to have that kind of relationship.

(Age 38, Full time housewife)

In this context, the *Missy* discourse raises several interesting points. The boundary of the *Missy* looks quite volatile and unsettled. As the informant above and preceding extract showed, both these informants have a strong desire to construct their personal boundaries (i.e. identities), but both of them commonly show their hesitations and anxiety to commit them to what they see to be a volatile concept. Although they are using the concept of *Missy* to construct their identities, the *Missy* seems not to providing safe and fixed ground. In a similar vein, their talk shows a specific tendency of fantasising boundaries. In the preceding informant talk, her anxieties of *Missy's* neglect of domestic work and struggle to commit her

priorities are stemmed from the ungrounded fantasies (or imagined spaces) of the *Missy*. The informant speculates that the *Missy's* house might be untidy and messy because she thinks that the *Missy* does not have enough time to pay attention to her family life. Even the informant above shows her imagination in terms of accusing *Adjumma* of having sexual desire to convince herself that her own desire of having a lover is distinctive and special. This tendency could also be found in the discussion in the previous section in which one of the informants imagines that although she criticises *Adjumma's* behaviours, at the same time she imagines that 'they manage their domestic life well'. This remark shows that the informant is still struggling and ambivalent. This ambivalent nature of the *Missy* is clearly shown in this instance. Furthermore, it again becomes clear that the concept of *Missy* is not solely standing on its own ground. Rather, it is constantly interacting with the existing concepts, *Adjumma* and *Agassi* and does not constitute in of itself a replaceable concept for either of these. In fact, the boundaries between those concepts always seem to be transforming and interacting each other, as has been previously noted.

Therefore the concept of the *Missy* seems to be performative in one particularly strong sense: the transformation and interaction of boundaries does not simply imply or describe a pre-existing world, but rather helps create an imagined space and creative practice which may be ambivalent in relation to the existing images and concepts. This creative practice does not typically follow set rules of method: it is 'particular courses of action with materials at hand, which are finite and heterogeneous' (Lynch, 1985:5, MacKenzie 2003: 834). In similar vein, Sreberny (2006) also called this process the post-modern "bricolage"(620). She points out that 'the complex (re) negotiation of identity (ies) vis-à-vis the "dominant" and the "foreign cultures" both shift in focus depending on the specific locale of the actor' (619). The *Missy* is, therefore, usefully conceptualised as a kind of "tinkering" or "patchwork" process to find a solution by modifying pre-existing assumptions and using others. In other words, this possible identity formation is shaped by reworking existing sets of rules and norms. It is a creative tinkering process with "whatever is at hand", that is to say, with a set of resources that are always finite, and are always heterogeneous. This perhaps explains why my informants show their struggle, hesitation, and reluctance to use the term. It can also be said that the *Missy* identity seems to be based on contingency and the imaginary within very particular contexts. If they would accept the whole given package of

the *Missy* image, it could be said that the correspondent contents of the *Missy* could be easily traced. However, in this case, this would be to accuse them of being trapped in consumerism and just copying the western images, as many social scientists including leading Korean feminists have claimed (Lee, Y-J. 2000; Cho, H. 2000; Choi, B-E. 2001) but which clearly does not seem to be substantiated in the informant's discussion of the theme.

Thus, the *Missy* is here the fantasy of ability - or a technique to become without adopting or taking on signifiers of the subordinated other – *Missy* therefore becomes a mechanism for reconstituting or reproducing the other as the “not-*Adjumma*” from within, rather than beyond, the structure of the “*Adjumma*”. If *Missy* is coming out antagonisms to *Adjumma*, we can then possibly regard the emergence of the concept, “*Missy*” as not an entirely alternative concept to pre-existing terms that refer to feminine identities in South Korea, although many women attempt to identify themselves with the *Missy* category. However, on the other hand, the image of *Missy* is not firmly harboured to any existing categories like *Adjumma* or *Agassi*, meaning that it is not possible to find any secure ground to explain the new identity formation such as economic class or political preference. *Missy* could, therefore, be a product of consumerism, of transformation of *Adjumma* or a representation of new femininity. None of these are clear. However, what is clear is that for informants that *Missy* is an imagined, unsettled, and unfixed term and under construction and not one which is simply imposed as a ready made package by the media and consumerism.

## 6.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined a newly emerged term, the “*Missy*” and its implication for transformed femininities in the South Korean context. In the 1990s, the new term, “*Missy*” was fabricated by a small group of advertising agents. Since then it has become a popular term referring to young married women who want to avoid the image and experience of *Adjumma*, which has traditionally been used to refer to married women. I have described how and why the pre-existing term, *Adjumma* changed from a positive term to an abhorrent one in contemporary South Korean society showing how, in the course of industrialisation, the role of mother was significant and the *Adjumma* represented the “good housewife” who sacrifices herself on behalf of her family. In the wider context, the *Adjumma* was

regarded as a driving force of modernisation because of their role in managing their husband's income and orchestrating their children's education in relation to economic growth and rapid urbanisation. However, as I have shown in a series of informants' remarks, young women, both married and unmarried, currently express a strong negative view of *Adjumma* who signifies for them a character that is aggressive, assertive and sexually unattractive. In particular, the term, *Adjumma* is not formulated to encompass the new desires of married women in the contemporary South Korea. It is these new desires of women that lead them to seek new formations of identity.

Instead of *Adjumma*, the "Missy" emerged in the media, influenced by the new femininity of the western media and translated into the local context of South Korea. With the early 1990s advertising campaign, the image of the *Missy* became centred around married women dressing and acting like unmarried women (Lee S-H. 2002:150). *Missy* has since evolved to become a very popular term for those who want to find the right identity to represent their new desires and self-development. Most informants in my interviews show their desire to be *Missy*, revealing their desire to traverse across the marital status boundary. *Missy* is gradually assuming connotations of positive and liberating characters of married women's femininity than those images previously available.

The clear difference between the two competing discourses is that the "Missy" is more focussed on self-development, while the *Adjumma* implies a sacrificial motherhood. *Adjumma* has thus become an unreliable image, which does not embrace women's desires and wishes to pursue self-realisation. Thus, First, *Missy* has been defined it as a counterpart of *Adjumma*, as noted by one informant mentioned, "Missy would be coming out the rebellion of *Adjumma*". In this sense, *Missy* represents a concept of renegotiation and struggling with an incomplete identity that demonstrates that the fragmented nature of women's identities and the competing and conflictual nature of the available images to express these identities. Second, at first glance, the *Missy* is a technique of visual knowledge such as dress and body code. The *Missy* here becomes reconstructed through a technique that serves to approximate an image of *Agassi*. Third, transformation is read as a newly emerged sign of marital status, which threatens to undermine the strong traditional boundaries of married women's status as a mother and wife. In this realm it becomes yet clearer that *Missy* is not a uniform and fixed image but

rather, informants seem to describe *Missy* as an *Adjumma*, but in terms of being an *Agassi*-like *Adjumma*. Fourth, *Missy* can be seen to be creating an “imagined space” that is never settled and defined by the image already assumed.

Therefore, I suggest that within the multitude and shifting images and imagined spaces described here it has become clear that the informants’ desire was not in the first place merely the product of western mass media, but in fact emerged from their own negotiation with their positions in their own context. In fact, women seem to have utilised “the imagined identity” to get what they want, to change their new ways of life into the *Missy*. Finally, this in-and-out-ness of the *Missy* identity shows the complexity of how the informants are struggling and contesting with married femininities in South Korea. This can most clearly be seen in the way the interview data reveals that informants endorse, hesitate and refuse some factors of the *Missy*. Furthermore, as shown, the open discourse of their newly expressed desires is accompanied by their negotiation of marital life. This desire is still undecided, is maybe never going to be decided, and is based on their imagination. It can be said that it is a “space of dream” or “paradoxical space” – never settled or defined. In other words, the *Missy* could be best understood to be a conjuncture of conflicting desire and new femininity, continually in the process of transformation.

## CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION: WOMEN'S VOICES AND TRANSFORMATIVE IDENTITIES

This research has examined the complexity of young women's identities in a South Korean context, where accelerated global cultural flows have become enormously influential, particularly since the 1990s. It has attempted to demonstrate how global culture is used and appropriated in women's everyday life, within this specific historical and cultural context. Furthermore, it has aimed to illustrate how women - as audiences - both conflict and negotiate with newly introduced values through consuming global mass media and their everyday experiences. The question driving this thesis was, therefore, whether "globalisation" is simply a synonym of westernisation or, as I ultimately found, a more intricate and multidirectional process. By highlighting the answer to this question, I thus aimed to examine how this process was particularly relevant to women's identity formation; how new hybrid forms of cultural interactions were translated and reconstituted into particular women's identities formation in South Korea. In other words, on the basis of answering this question, the transformative nature of young women's identities came to be revealed through the conflict and negotiation which could be observed, so highlighting the complex dialectics between postcolonial audiences' resistance to, and collusion with, the force of globalisation.

Within the specific historical experiences of South Korea, which can be defined as a postcolonial context, postcolonial theory offers possibilities to articulate women's identities as multiple, shifting and even self-contradictory. Here, I have questioned the limits of the existing theoretical framework. I have re-examined Bhabha's concept of hybridity, and selectively borrowed from his conceptual framework for the purpose of contextualising my empirical data, and to provide

additional help in comprehending the specific temporality and complexity of the formation of women's identities in South Korea. However, this thesis also aimed to open up some different ways of thinking about gender and culture in global times by hopefully making a connection between the global and the postcolonial. In particular, abstract postcolonial theory has been tested in detailed local settings. Connecting the postcolonial with the global can perhaps bring into being a renewed sense of the space and temporality of South Korean women's experience, in which a decentred, cross-border rewriting of earlier nation-centred imperial narratives has "re-thought" the global. This renewed perception of postcolonial people clearly reflects South Korean women's conflicting identities, and their negotiation of them, their own cultural survival strategy. This was revealed through an analysis of the empirical data in this work.

This research has also, explicitly and implicitly, paid attention to the issue of giving up the privileged position of the western feminist point of view, as suggested by Spivak (1985). As discussed in the theoretical chapter, Spivak problematises the western feminist view on Third World women, pointing out that their analyses have resulted in damaging effects on the different lives of women, in ways which can be called "epistemic violence". As both Spivak and Mohanty (1984) claim, without giving up the privileged position of Western feminist view, Third World women have very often found themselves bound up with images of passive and obedient, victims of patriarchy and imperial power. The analysis of the data here has attempted not to be trapped by this stance of the epistemic violence, and has thus paid explicit attention to the situation of women's identity position in one of the postcolonial contexts, South Korea; a context where women can be seen to be situated in-between the local and the global.

### **7.1. The practice of representation**

Indeed, my theoretical consideration started from this point: by deconstructing dominant white feminist knowledge which ignores the experience of non-white women, questioning how to avoid researching my informants as an object of knowledge, and how to give up the privileged position as a researcher in order to capture the dynamic scenes of young women's cultural practice. I paid attention to postcolonial theory hoping that it would offer a way of analysing non-western women's lives without "epistemic violence". Thus, with regard to the issue of re-

covering women's voices and their agentic capacities (which some feminists have thought to be unrecoverable and hardly traceable because of the double subordinations in addition to the new emerging force of global consumerism). I tried to put into practice Spivak's significant contribution to postcolonial theory in terms of problematising the representation of third world women. However - as noted above - I also found that Bhabha's concept of hybridity to be a useful analytic concept, specifically for illuminating the struggle, dynamism and temporality of women's cultural practice of identities formation, in the era of globalisation.

In practice, I realised that the task was highly difficult to achieve without compromise. From the empirical study, it can be observed that the approach which might have been expected to lead to the privileged view of a researcher was not always effective in practice. Instead, the most effective way of capturing the vivid, temporal, dynamic transformation of women's identity practice is based upon the interactions with my informants, where my privileged position as researcher, analyst and feminist was positively undermined and reconstituted by processes of learning and interaction. It seemed to be one way of giving up my privileged position, but also a way to gain credibility and authority from my informants. In the course of the group interviews, three important themes were raised by informants, all of whom closely associate themselves with young women's lives in contemporary South Korea: the three themes were body image, love and marriage. These themes showed themselves to play a significant part in forming their identities, and most conversations in the group interviews converged into discussing the decisive moments and issues in their lives, and these themes provided a common thread. For this reason, I focused on these three issues in my analysis, and have attempted to show how young women in South Korea are facing struggles that are related to these three important issues, and how they struggle to adjust their way of solutions through which their identities might be constituted and reconstituted.

It was therefore the identification of significant themes by the informants themselves which guided the focus and structure of this thesis, hopefully further recovering voice of the informants rather to my own presumptions. However, there are still limitations of representation of data and interpretation in this research. In the process, I realised that my position as a researcher inevitably authorised to select and analyse data, although I tried to recover and articulate the informants'



dynamic voices. Thus, I had been in and out position of “epistemic violence” as Spivak problematised the western feminist researcher in terms of the notion of “speaking as” (1990). In addition, more is yet to be learnt about the processes of cultural accommodation and articulation of global media in the different localities such as mother’s generation.

## **7.2. Body image, love and marriage**

As noted above, the three themes of body image, love and marriage showed themselves to be of particular significance to this research. Through these themes, on thread of interest can be observed: the consumption practices of global cultures, which have been reconstructed in this research, were expected to provide good examples of the transformation and construction of “new imagined femininities”. Significantly, it was observed that informants justified their cultural practice by translating global media in ways they imagined to be relevant to their own lives and experiences. Thus, these imagined femininities could be understood as transitional/translational forms. These shifting forms within historical and geographical contexts are related to the interplay of identity construction. Considering the South Korean context as a postcolonial present, young women’s interpretations of global cultural flows are determined by ‘their position between social structures of power and the lived realities of everyday life’ (Grossberg, 1989:416). I have argued here that empirical studies of young women could play a key role in effectively revealing these relationships between social and historical contexts, and culture practice, in everyday life. South Korean women’s cultural practice seems to render the hybrid cultural practice that emerges from the relationships as “ordinary” (for example, a normalised reconstructed version of *Chungmae* could be located as something in-between traditional matrimonial forms and romantic love, and the plastic surgery could be seen as a cultural practice to reconstitute the hybrid body image). Therefore, in the three analytic chapters, I have attempted to illustrate the cultural practice in the terms of “in-between”, “third space” and “hybrid identity”. It also shows how they relate to informant’s ordinary lives. These three thematic studies of body image, romantic love and marriage offered unique opportunities for understanding this formation of transformative femininities amongst South Korean women based upon this cultural practice and my analytic chapters were thus framed around these thematic studies.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated how young women's consumption of the cultural practice of global media through plastic surgery in the South Korean context blurs the boundaries of global and the local, the Other and the Self, and culture versus nature. I discussed the construction of diverse femininities in terms of the consumption of plastic surgery in South Korean and how young women are conflicted with, and negotiating, their identities through their consumption of plastic surgery. Thus the cultural practice of plastic surgery has become "normalised" as part of everyday life. The informants I interviewed claimed that the goal of plastic surgery was neither to become beautiful, nor to be beautiful for their husbands and boyfriends. Indeed, they insisted that altering their body images for their own satisfaction, using the concept of creating "normal appearance". This cultural practice of plastic surgery directly and indirectly helps to modify our everyday common-sense understanding of how bodies work, as Featherstone suggested (Featherstone, 2000: 2). In addition, my informants showed their desire for plastic surgery by identifying neither a South Korean native look nor a westernised one. In particular, cultural practice of plastic surgery such as eyelids, brighter skin and a higher nose could probably be read as characteristics of the construction of a new femininity. It became clear that, whilst South Korean women desired to recreate their body images, they also seemed to wish to preserve the markers of their status that visually distinguish them from "western" look. Bhabha's suggestion is helpful here in explaining South Korean women's identities as "conflicted", "ambivalent" and "in-between" identities, that is, identities characterised by "not-quite-western" features, but "not-quite-South Korean" features either. By focusing on the dynamics of cultural hybrid contestation in this way, a more effective interrogation of the interplay of race and gender construction in relation to plastic surgery could be accomplished. I have argued that plastic surgery, as a surgically transformative practice, is a far more complex cultural production than simply an imitative media-instructed practice, one that reasserts western white patriarchy as a remnant of cultural or political colonisation. As shown, the practice of body modification can be regarded not only as altering one's biological appearance, but also as changing a signifier of power relations within the transformation of historical, national and geographical contexts.

In Chapter 5, I examined the centrality of ongoing identification with, and translation of, romantic love, as mainly expressed through Hollywood and South Korean romantic films. I demonstrated how romantic love has been translated, and

how *Chungmae* (arranged marriages) are practised in the South Korean context. I have argued that, through the conflicting desires of romantic love (new desire) and the traditional arranged marriage (old desire), informants play out their conflicts in order to settle on married life as an “ordinary life style”. Romantic meanings and messages are not simply “transmitted” by the western romance film; they are always translated. As mentioned above, there is a prevalent general conception that pure romantic love without approval will always result in a tragic ending. This seems to have generated the myth that romantic love cannot be completed on its own without a legitimised marriage. In the contemporary South Korean context, if marriage is the terminal point of romantic love, then it should be evolve into a kind of compromised form of matrimony that contains the translated romantic love, as has indeed happened in the South Korean context. I demonstrated the hybrid form of courtship (*Chungmae*) contains old and new cultural concepts; occupies a place between traditional arranged marriage and romantic love; and is based on a complex and contradictory formation of identity among the informants. From traditional arranged marriage to casualised arranged meeting, *Chungmae* becomes an outcome of a transformation – as an evolving form of marriage practice. Here, ideas of “western” imagined romantic love, and the traditional arranged marriage, are inseparable, and indistinguishable in their practices the informants relate of their own lives. Though some people still practise the traditional form of matrimony, which has been negotiated and modified, the traditional factors have effectively become invisible in the current form of matrimony. The informants’ desire for romantic love, and they try to fill the gap, between romantic love as fantasy and the realisation of “ordinary life” as a reality through the *Chungmae* practice of marriage. Thus, this courtship practice in South Korea provides a good example of the ambivalence of notions of progress, of an enlightened “now” versus a repressive “then”, and of the disadvantages and advantages for women in new forms of matrimonial negotiations. *Chungmae* remains a vital option for the informants to reduce risks of “insecurity” and “uncertainty” of marriage for ordinary life in South Korea.

The conjuncture of romantic love and marriage can be seen as a transformative practice in courtship, aimed to achieving an “ordinary” lifestyle. *Chungmae* is that some informants are still practising it, because it is regarded as a secure way of achieving “ordinary life”. The importance of this “ordinary life” can be seen in how ambivalent references to women’s identities are, and should perhaps be fur-

ther understood as a rhetorical attempt to establish a secure boundary. These boundaries of ordinary life are socially constructed in informants' performative cultural practices and their individual imagination, through globalisation. These are transformative cultural practice unfolding in South Korea's postcolonial present.

In Chapter 6, the analysis of South Korean women's identities is extended to look at the new femininities of married women. I examine how the experiences of young South Korean women are related to the formation of their identities as wives and mothers in the new globally influenced and locally translated context. One question posed to the informants was about their future. Overwhelmingly, they answered the question about their future in relation to their married life, probably indicating that this is the compulsory basis for this discussion when they do not have an alternative system to create a similar sense of place and belonging to society, as discussed in the chapter. However, the informants insisted repeatedly that they would not live their mothers, and they showed a strong antagonism towards the *Adjumma* as a figure of their mother's generation. At first glance, they seemed to hate the image of *Adjumma* and fear becoming her, as embodied in aspects such as *Adjumma's* careless appearance, rudeness and obnoxious behaviour. If one looks closer, however, the essence of this antagonism stems from their view of their own mothers' lives of sacrifice, which, as detailed in this chapter, have been oppressed by institutional and family patriarchy.

In this chapter, I argue that the reasons expressed vis-à-vis *Adjumma*, and the possibility contained in their negative view, can actually be transformed to create new femininities as influenced by global media. Above all, the negative view towards the *Adjumma* as "meddling, interfering, interrupting and interpolating" is established through repetition, and can be seen as a displacement of their desire for new identities as filtered through the influences of global media discussed in the previous chapters. Instead of *Adjumma*, the emergence of the *Missy*, first in the advertising genre and then as filtered through into western influenced Korean film dealing with women's new desires, represents contextualised new femininities. Indeed, *Missy* has become a very popular term for those who want to find the identity to represent their new desires and pursuit of self-development. The main definition of *Missy* centres on married women who want to look like and be seen as unmarried women. The clear difference between past and contemporary

images of married women is that *Missy* is more focussed on self-development, while the *Adjumma* implies a self-sacrificing and caring motherhood.

*Missy* can be seen as a concept of renegotiating/struggling incomplete identity, which demonstrates that these fragmented women's identities are competing and conflicting images in relation to their desire for ordinariness and the wish to absorb their new desires, as represented and influenced by the media representation of the *Missy*. Transformation is read as a sign which threatens to undermine the strong traditional boundaries of married women's status as a mother and wife. *Missy* is not a uniform and fixed image. Instead, it has been said that *Missy* is a form of *Adjumma*, but it's an *Aggassi*-like form of *Adjumma*. In fact the informants utilise this "imagined identity", the *Missy*, as a representation of their new ways of life. However, the interviews also show us that informants often simultaneously endorse, hesitate and refuse some factors of the *Missy*. Thus *Missy* can be said to be a "space of dream" or paradoxical space" – never settled or defined.

### **7.3. Cultural practice, global media and women's everyday lives**

Thus, from the empirical studies in this research, several important points unfold: Firstly, cultural practice is closely related to the ever-growing power of globalisation and expanding consumerism. It cannot be denied that the force of global consumerism, particularly in the field of mass media that has been regarded as the most effective medium for the proliferation of global consumerism, is a constant and crucial influence on women's cultural practice.

Secondly, the relationship between global media and women's everyday lives, practices, and beliefs, in South Korea, does not presuppose a one-way relationship or unidirectional mode of influence. In particular, the formations of women's identities are not seen as homogenous, coherent and static, but are better regarded as undergoing constant transformation. For example, plastic surgery, as surgically transformative practice, is a far more complex cultural practice than simply an imitative media-instructed one that reasserts western white patriarchy as remnant of cultural or political colonisation. In this research the informants claimed that the westernised look is not beautiful, but sexy and vulgar which are represented in the western media. There seems to be struggle and negotiation for surgical interventions on the eyelid as neither Korean nor western look. The informants also claim to have "natural looking" eyelid through this process is

clearly not synonymous with “western looking” eyes. Therefore, the cultural practice of plastic surgery cannot be regarded as uni-directional mode of influence of global media

Thirdly, young women in South Korea seem to be well aware of the potentially damaging problems caused by global consumerism. They know and express their concern about their way of life, which they recognise, could be determined and enforced by dominant global consumerism. However, instead of entirely following the big flux of globalisation, the informants attempt to reinterpret and reconstitute the representation of global media for the purpose of optimising their own ways of life. As discussed in the Chapter 6, there is no simple understanding of the informants’ reading of *Missy* representation in media, and the informants tactically use the resources, including given images of the *Missy* and the *Adjumma* image, in order to constitute their identities. The *Missy* as a cultural practice of married femininities could be seen to follow the set of image and codes of practice which have been regarded as both a “westernised” as well as a consumerism-driven way of life through media representation. However, what I found was that the informants were not following those given images blindly. Young women negotiate the particularities of cotemporary South Korea, starting from the fear and anxiety of being *Adjumma*. Young women’s new desire for self-awareness has perhaps been an inevitable consequence of the growing dissatisfaction with the lives of their mothers—their self-scarifcing for the welfare of their family, as exemplified by the *Adjumma*. In particular, the informants were well aware of the feminist criticism that *Missy*, as a trend to be followed, was a commercial by-product. So, some informant’s position was distant from popular media images of *Missy*, and yet they still desired to reflect on their self-identities. *Missy* became a tinkering process for contesting and reconstituting new femininity, as the “not-*Adjumma*” form, within rather than beyond, the structure of the “*Adjumma*”.

Fourthly, in the process of readjusting and optimising their cultural practice, women are establishing their boundaries within which their identities are constructed and transformed in different instances. These boundaries seem not to be fixed and stable spaces, but rather are constantly expanded and shrunk on the basis of different situations and constraints. South Korean young women’s identity construction in the process of cultural practice therefore not only closely associated with global cultural consumption, but also reflects both local reinterpret-

tation and optimisation. This reveals that the influences on their identities are not always uni-directional. In Chapter 5, it was observed that most informants state that marriage through arranged meetings is a more rational behaviour than simply falling in love, because the candidates for romance and matrimony have already been carefully scrutinised by parents and a match maker. *Chungmae* (arranged marriage) practices can have casualised, and are now defined as an arranged meeting that falls inbetween notions of arranged marriage or romantic love, as new ideas about courtship and marriage. The term does not completely encapsulate the marriage system because it has lost its core the ideal of a family-centred marriage, and it has come to include a casual meeting between two people, who may look to begin a relationship that is expected to feature elements of romantic love. The term merges the boundaries of romantic love and arranged marriage, and is flexible and casualised. Indeed, *Chungmae* may be constituted through on ongoing process of transformation of its meaning. In this vein, *Chungmae* - as the real practice of courtship for South Korean women - shows their ability to make challenges while they articulate the sign of cultural difference. This cultural practice is a self-conscious choice, to fullfil self-determined desirable conditions for marriage as well as achieves the romantic love they see represented in western media, and it seems that women believe that the *Chungmae* is reducing the risk of ordinary life, and expanding their own freedom of choice.

#### **7.4. Transformative identities**

This transformative woman's identities, discussed in the theory chapter of this thesis, needs to be clarified further. The articulation of transformative identities between local and global dimension was to demonstrate through media representation and women's cultural practices that theories of localisation and globalisation need to be self-reflexive and more inclusive of local perspectives of women who can be localised as well as globalised.

In this vein, the concept of transformative identities, discussed in the theory chapter of this thesis, perhaps needs to be reclarified. Most important is that the transformative identity should be seen as ubiquitous. The everyday life-related concept of identity formation within this context should be expressly analysed, rather than overlooked and taken for granted. In addition, transformative identity

may also be viewed as reflecting the agentic capacities of women in the postcolonial context. Although it is perhaps absurd and unnecessary to make the basis of an argument rest on a consideration of whether or not women's agentic capacities exist in the postcolonial context, the question can be reformulated to ask how the agentic capacities of women interact with, and are constrained by, forces of global consumerism. In the course of describing these interactions, reinterpretations, constraints of women's cultural practice, the vivid ethnoscape of agentic capacities may be drawn. It can then more easily be revealed how transformative identity is more inclined to the unstable and temporal nature of identity practice, and how identity formation cannot be seen in terms of fixed and stable characteristics. Rather, as observed in this thesis, identities are more related to practice than to rigid formation, and is a process of constituting and reconstituting subjectivities which contain the possibility of change in different contexts. In this sense, it is clear that transformative identity is temporal and unpredictable. The articulation of transformative identities suggests that it can be more useful approach to focus on women's struggling and negotiating in the local and global dialectics than emphasising on cultural homogenisation of global media.

#### **7.5. Questions, limitations and future directions**

To conclude this research, I raise the question of whether it is possible to shift the concept of women's transformative identities into potential politics. In fact, the answer to this is that women's transformative identities are already to be found in the realm of politics since their formation themselves may not have been made possible just because of the historical success of neoliberal capitalism, which could perhaps convince us that no other dream exists or is worth having but rather they represent a struggle between the success of neo-liberal capitalism on the one hand and, on the other, local agency and assertion of a transformed, negotiated identity. It is undeniable that global capitalism and neoliberalism impact powerfully on the identity formation of women in this local context – and is part of this context in which women's cultural practice, particularly, their practice of cultural consumption take place. Nevertheless, this research has suggested that the coherent totality of global capitalism and neoliberalism probably fails to offer an entirely useful framework for capturing the complex process of women's identity formation, which is intermingled, with characteristics of struggle, contestation and negotiation. Through the local prism of cultural practice, the constraints



of global forces in conjunction with the agentic capacities of local women can be captured more clearly without the eliminations of local dynamics and interactions that are keys to the process of identity formation. In this sense, this research has shown how theories of globalisation need to be self-reflexive and more inclusive of “local perspectives” of how women can be localised as well as globalised, and hopefully points out that the global-local relationship is not a monolithic formation. In many cases, the latter has been equated with the process of global hegemonic culture, which has been seen to proceed at the expense of a loss of local culture and identity among young people. This monolithic formation often erases the existence of multiple expressions of local identities.

However, this research has attempted to examine the specific role that global media plays in the circulation and interpretation of meaning in the South Korean context alongside the existence of these multiple expressions of local identities. In order to focus on the complexity of young women’s identities formation in global media, this research is perhaps limited in its tendency to bracket off the issue of class and may have seemed to overlook the issue. The reason for bracketing off class as a concept was that I have more focused on the process of women’s identity formation in the relation to consumption of global media. In other words, I aimed to pay more attention to women’s cultural practices which are closely associated with their femininities. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that class identities may play a role in cultural practice. I realise that class mobility and identities were constantly shifting and changing in South Korea. So class identity formation could offer a different angle on this research and one which requires a much more focussed attention than this thesis could, and would like, to give. It would no doubt be an interesting angle to pursue and the question of class could be one future project which would extend this research to look at how women’s class identities would be constituted and transformed under neoliberal economic influences in their cultural practice. This future research might also focus on how to construct women’s class identities in relation to their femininities and would also be helpful in further explaining the hybrid culture in the postcolonial context.

It is necessary to conclude by saying that, as noted above, despite having attempted to give up the privileged position as a researcher, I have realised through this research that it would not be possible to eliminate a privileged view on my informants. I remain with methodological problems of analysis, interpretation and

representation of the interview material. I could not escape from the position of having authorised voice as a researcher in analysing and selecting materials. Thus, this research is always open to be criticised, 'given that what we know is situated, partial, selective and imperfect, reprehensions issue could not be completely resolved' (Haraway, 1991). Nevertheless, I hope this kind of approach helps to reformulate new questions about the global-local interactions, and it will open up new space in which to rethink the different ways women in various contexts negotiate their localities, identities and cultural context, as they all three intersect with global forces. I hope that future research can avoid a dichotomised position, where women are only seen as repressive or as subversive audiences.

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