

Traces of Compressed Modernity in the Representation of Multicultural Family: A case study of Wandeuksi by Kim Ryeoryeong

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Abstract

This research discovers the coexistence of disparate elements, namely Neo-liberalism and Neo Confucianism, caused by Compressed Modernity in the representation of multicultural family in Kim Ryeo-ryeong's Wandeuksi. To decode the representation of a family comprising of native Korean father, marriage mother, and their mixed-heritage son, characterization is employed to the study for analyzing how they are represented. The result demonstrates that multicultural family is represented as "new Korean family," a crucial micro foundation of society that each family member embraces familial role assigned by Neo-Confucianism as breadwinner father, virtuous mother, and filial son. Despite being centered around Neo-Confucianism, the study shows that driving forces of compressed modernity rebrand the moral duties to align with neoliberal expectations due to the driving force of Compressed Modernity. The breadwinner father must maximize his physical labor to generate the economic output necessary to maintain his position as a household leader who secures his family's well-being. The virtuous mother's role is transformed into that of an affective care worker, thereby reducing the neoliberal state's obligation to provide social welfare to its population. Meanwhile, the filial son maintains his status on the condition that he continuously engages in self-improvement and self-discipline to cultivate specialized skills.

Keywords

Compressed Modernity, Representation, Multicultural Family, Wandeuksi

Introduction

"Compressed Modernity" refers to a civilizational state that shortens South Korea's (hereafter Korea) transition toward a modern society into the span of a single generation, compared to centuries in Western societies. These rapid economic, political, and socio-cultural shifts result in the coexistence of historically and socially disparate elements (Chang, 2022), as ideological transitions become compressed, it gives rise to strongholds for ideologies that typically exist across different spaces and social conditions to coexist. Following this logic, the social structure becomes extremely intricate, as the coexistence of disparate ideologies are not merely in binary opposition, but hybridize with one another (Ibid), as seen in the shared perceptions and expectations Koreans hold toward multicultural family.

The increasing number of multicultural families, comprising native Korean fathers, marriage migrants (mostly from developing nations in Asia), and their mixed-heritage children (Kim, 2017), against the backdrop of low fertility rates and an aging population (Ahn, 2016), serves as the site of hybridization between ethnic homogeneity and multiculturalism. This demographic shift prompted the state to revise its rigid definition of Korean-ness based on shared bloodline and culture, resulting in the official recognition by the state that the country was transitioning into a multicultural society (Kim, 2019) and enactment of multicultural policies that highlights assimilation.

During the rise of multiculturalism, various sectors of society took a deep interest in the multicultural family to establish an episteme for managing this emerging demographic unit (Yun, 2011). This was done through the lenses constructed upon the coexistence of modern and traditional values, which shaped public perceptions and expectations toward multicultural families aligned despite their different roots. On one hand, these families are viewed as a vital force in helping the country overcome its demographic crisis; on the other hand, traditional monoethnic parameters (Shin, 2019a, 2019b) and socio-economic hierarchies (Lee, 2017) create a conditional acceptance. In other word, multicultural families are accepted into society only when each family member proves their worth for the status of "New Korean family" that satisfies both economic and social needs simultaneously. This perception has been disseminated across various cultural forms (Yi & Jung, 2015), including literature, as seen in *Wandeukki*, a novel written by Kim Ryeo-ryeong in 2008 narrating the story of a multicultural family comprising Do Jeong-bok (a native Korean father with dwarfism), a Vietnamese mother, and Do Wan-deuk, their 17-year-old mixed-heritage son.

Despite being a fictional story, *Wandeukki* utilizes socio-cultural resources, such as prevalent stereotypes, perceptions, and societal expectations (Jung, 2014), to construct its representation through the novel. In this sense, *Wandeukki* is not simply a novel about multicultural family, it actively disseminates multicultural discourse regarding the family as a "New Korean family." It relies on literary components, such as theme and characterization, to frame this family as a group of individuals striving to fulfill economic and social demands by embracing traditional values grounded in Neo-Confucianism, while their moral duties to align with neoliberal expectations.

To address the research questions, this study employs a qualitative methodology. The core concepts of compressed modernity and multiculturalism in Korea provide the theoretical background, while characterization serve as the analytical frameworks for examining how the text constructs its representations. The findings derived from the text are subsequently analyzed through the lens of compressed modernity to articulate the relationship between this literary representation and Korea's rapid societal transformation.

Although compressed modernity has been adapted globally to analyze society across various dimensions (Lan, 2014; Ma, 2012; Ochiai, 2014), research bridging this civilizational concept with literary analysis remains limited. Literature, in reality, is a unique medium capable of portraying the intricate realities of compressed modernity in a new light. For this reason, the author expects this research, expanded from my thesis entitled "Compressed Modernity in Literary Work: Representation of Urban Multicultural Children, Focusing on Wandeukki", would fill a critical research gap in knowledge about Compressed Modernity by demonstrating how Neoliberal pressures and Neo-Confucian tradition hybridize within the narrative construction.

While existing Korean-language scholarship extensively examines Wandeukki as an attempt to portray mixed-heritage children and their family beyond passive actors (Lee, 2024; Shin & Kang, 2020), this study proposes that the novel continues to represent multicultural family as passive beneficiaries. Rather than granting genuine agency, the story merely constructs a bounded developmental trajectory where the growth of each family member is conditioned upon conforming to normative state and societal expectations that arise from the hybridization between Neoliberal pressures and Neo-Confucian traditions.

Research objectives

1. To examine how multicultural family is represented in Wandeukki.
2. To examine the relationship between representation of multicultural family and compressed modernity.

Literature review

Before delving into the main corpus, the author reviewed relevant concepts and theories with the objective to identify, expand upon, and address knowledge gaps present in existing academic literature on these topics. The content of literature review is divided into three sub-sections, namely compressed modernity and multiculturalism in Korea as relevant concepts and representation as relevant theory.

Compressed Modernity: A convergence of (post)modern and traditional values

"Compressed Modernity" is a concept coined by Chang Kyung-sup, formulated to join the existing literature on modernities, such as multiple society (Eisenstadt, 2000), second modernity (cite in Sørensen, 2014), and entangled modernity (Therborn, 2003), within a post-modernist approach that conceptualizes forms of modernity not limited to the experience of societies in western hemisphere. The concept was initially developed and tested

through the case of Korea, where rapid political, economic, and socio-cultural transition to modernity resulted in the coexistence of socially and historically disparate elements, before being applied to the study of other non-Western countries (Chang, 2010), particularly in East Asia (Ochiai, 2011; Ya & Shen, 2025) where similar pattern of development occurs. Through a review of this literature, the author observes that compressed modernity functions as a civilizational state whose influence extends beyond social structures to directly shape the realities of individuals residing in such a society.

Although disparate modern and traditional elements reconstruct social structures, their interaction extends beyond competition or separation to actively hybridize, syncretize, and co-exist alongside one another (Chang, 2022). Consequently, the given social structure satisfies traditional cultural demands while simultaneously embracing (post)modern principles. Under this logic, an individual is required to embrace both sets of values and rebranding them to fulfill contemporary economic and social demands (Chang, 2010; Ochiai, 2011).

Multicultural family: A new Korean family

During the era of nation-state building, the myth of Koreans sharing a common, unbroken lineage from Tan'gun (Cawley, 2016) was mobilized to foster the social cohesion needed to overcome post-war hardship. Meanwhile, it granted the state legitimacy to demand public sacrifice for national prosperity in subsequent decades. (Shin et al., 1999). Despite driving an extraordinary economic transformation praised worldwide, the rigid definition of Korean-ness, grounded in monoethnic, monocultural, and monolingual terms (Shin, 2019b), faced significant tension at the turn of the millennium. This shift occurred as an increasing number of multicultural families, comprising native Korean fathers, marriage migrants (primarily from Southeast Asian countries), and their mixed-heritage children, entered the social fabric against the backdrop of low birth rate and a rapidly aging society (Ahn, 2016).

In response to these demographic shifts, governmental and non-governmental bodies formed a nexus to construct a assimilationist narrative around this new family type, positioning them to help the nation overcome its demographic crisis without challenging traditional norms (Oh, 2015). On the state level, a series of multicultural policies was launched to provide assistances necessary for assimilation to multicultural family members. Concurrently, Non-governmental bodies depicted these families as socioeconomically vulnerable units resulting from marriages between disadvantaged Korean men and marriage migrants from developing Asian nations, emphasizing their need of helps for assimilation (Shin, 2019a). Within this discourse, these families are framed as societal unit requiring systematic support to transform them into productive human resources needed for meeting economic demands while requiring them to adhere traditional practices as a mean to reduce socio-cultural anxieties caused by ethnic homogeneity (Watson, 2010).

Following this logic, public perceptions and expectations regarding this emerging social unit are constructed upon the coexistence of disparate elements. This dynamic yields a strategic tactic for survival in a globalized era while simultaneously guiding the traditionalist approach on the national level to secure social

cohesion. Ultimately, the presence of multicultural families is rendered essential to sustain economic competitiveness and labor supplies(Yi, 2012); however, they are accepted to society upon strict assimilation to traditional Neo-Confucian norms to fulfill both neoliberal economic and Neo-Confucian demands.

Literature: a tool for representing the nature of discourse and truth

Literature has shifted from its original positivist view, which conceptualized the text as a mirror that reflects reality exactly as it appears, toward a broader structuralist approach (Charoenporn, 2003). Under this paradigm, text is not a mirror; rather, it functions as a mode of representation in which the author relies on literary techniques, such as narrative, to meticulously select, deselect, omit, highlight, and emphasize specific elements. This process is executed to construct a particular discourse aimed at producing a specific truth. Building upon the conceptualizations of discourse and representation articulated by Michel Foucault (1984) and Stuart Hall (1997), respectively, this research considers *Wandeukki* as a form of discourse that constructs a truth regarding the multicultural family. This truth aligns with the shared perceptions and expectations surrounding this emerging demographic in Korean society as a group of socially and economically at risk whose existence in society may contribute to economic needs under the condition they adhere to traditional norms. To shed light on how the novel constructs this representation of the multicultural family, this research employs characterization, a process of developing and portraying characters in novel, as the core framework for analyzing how multicultural family is represented in *Wandeukki*.

Conceptual framework

Building upon the concept of compressed modernity as a civilizational state, where the coexistence of historically disparate elements creates an intricate social structure, this study examines how these dynamics manifest in public perceptions of the multicultural family. Later on, these shared perceptions and expectations are translated into a discursive practice as the case of *Wandeukki*, which constructs and disseminates the representation of the multicultural family through characters.

Applying characterization, this research demonstrates the conditional acceptance of the multicultural family as a "New Korean family". The multicultural family is able to achieve this status and establish a meaningful place in society only when each member performs their traditional role as father, mother, and son. Meanwhile, they are also required to rebrand these roles to align with neoliberal demands to meet economic needs, proving their successful assimilation into a society where individuals must conform to the dual norms of neoliberalism and Neo-Confucian traditionalism.

Furthermore, the story also reiterates the indispensable role of native Koreans in guiding the multicultural family's journey toward becoming a "New Korean family." Within this framework, native Koreans are encouraged to provide assistance and guide new emerging unit of society toward their proper status. This key message is

structurally reinforced through Dong-ju, a native Korean teacher as the primary helper who orchestrates the family's successful assimilation by the end of the story.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to address two central research questions: (1) How is the multicultural family represented in *Wandeukki*? and (2) What is the relationship between this literary representation and compressed modernity? The author applies the theoretical framework of compressed modernity, specifically focusing on the coexistence of disparate elements and the individual integration of seemingly conflicting values, as the primary conceptual lens for analyzing and synthesizing the characterization of *Wandeukki*.

The data utilized in this study is divided into two categories. Primary data consists of the novel itself, while secondary data encompasses academic articles, research papers, and dissertations relevant to the core concepts (compressed modernity and multiculturalism in Korea) and theoretical approaches (characterization). Both primary and secondary sources were collected from digital and physical databases.

The data collection process began with a systematic review of relevant literature to establish the framework for analysis and synthesis. This was followed by a close reading of the text, focusing specifically on how the novel constructs the representation of the family as a whole and its individual members: the father, mother, and son. Subsequently, the data was categorized to serve as the foundation for the findings. The data analysis proceeded in two phases: first, the author employed characterization through appearance, external and internal action, and reaction with other character to decode the representation of the multicultural family; second, the author examined the relationship between this representation and compressed modernity, specifically analyzing how the novel rebrands traditional familial roles to fulfill neoliberal demands, examining the hybridization of Neo-Confucian values and Neoliberal demands caused by compressed modernity. Criteria focused on instances where traditional duties (paternal protection, maternal care, and filial piety) were rebranded into Neoliberal practices such as hyper-flexible labor, privatized welfare, and self-optimization. The findings are presented through descriptive analysis. Through this coding matrix, the story elements were systematically decoded to reveal how literary choices construct the representation of the 'New Korean Family'

Research results

The author divided the research results into two sections according to the two research objectives. The first part is dedicated to answer the first research question regarding the manner under which multicultural family as a whole unit and their respective members are represented. The second part focuses on connecting the dot between representation found in the first part after applying characterization to study the story and compressed modernity.

Representation of multicultural family in *Wandeukki*

Wandeukki utilizes shared societal perceptions of multicultural families to construct their literary representation. However, certain details diverge from public perceptions. These alterations reinforce specific traits in each family member that align with moral duties grounded in Neo-Confucianism, rather than offering an entirely new mode of representation. Through this process, the novel constructs a representation of the multicultural family as a "New Korean Family", a societal micro-unit that may appear different on the outside, but internally embraces traditional Korean values. The discussion here is divided into two parts: first, the shared public perception regarding multicultural families, and second, the specific details illustrating the similarities and differences between the public perception and the novel's representation of the family.

According to shared public perceptions (Kelder, 2016), the multicultural family emerged in the 1990s when economically and culturally disadvantaged men encountered difficulties in finding partners. The primary objective for these men driven to enter the marriage market is the traditional expectations placed on sons as a person who preserves and passes on the family lineage and to provide care for aging parents, the role they expected a future wife to fulfill. To navigate these constraints, cross-border marriages facilitated by lucrative brokers became an option. This arrangement allowed native Korean grooms to fulfill their traditional filial duties, while enabling marriage migrants from developing nations to migrate to a more developed country to escape poverty and seek better living conditions.

However, public perception holds that these women often flee their marriages after moving to Korea. Their departure stems primarily from mistreatment and a stark mismatch between expectation and reality. First, they are expected to perform domestic labor on the family farm while caring for all household members (Lee et al., 2025). Second, they encounter severe cultural barriers, being required to rapidly adopt Korean norms, dress, speech, and etiquette (Kelder, 2016). Due to lacking Korean language proficiency, these mothers face significant limitations in child-rearing (Lee et al., 2025). Consequently, given paternal absence due to work and maternal language barriers, mixed-heritage children are widely perceived as prone to severe academic and social difficulties (Shin, 2019a).

In the case of Wandeukki, the depiction of the multicultural family shares both similarities and differences with this public perception. In terms of similarities, the family is portrayed as a union between an underprivileged native Korean man and a marriage migrant from a developing nation (Lee, 2018). Jeong-bok, a native Korean father, is a culturally and economically disadvantaged urban resident with dwarfism who works as a cabaret dancer. However, the portrayal of the marriage migrant slightly diverges from public stereotypes, as his Vietnamese wife is depicted as well-educated relative to her home country's standards. A second similarity lies in their meeting through a commercial marriage broker focused primarily on profit. Although Jeong-bok's dwarfism was noted in official documents, the broker deliberately concealed this fact to successfully execute the marriage. After acknowledging the truth of her future husband, the Vietnamese marriage migrant chose to stay with him even rather than fleeing away upon arrival.

Following their marriage, the story further diverges from public perception by emphasizing that Jeong-bok never mistreats his wife. He does not force her to act as a maid like his colleague who views her as a commodity

purchased for domestic labor. Additionally, the story highlights that she endured living with him despite severe hardship until Wan-deuk was born. Even though her action for fleeing family matches with the perception but the decision was made not due to poverty or her husband's disability, it is because she could not bear seeing him touch other women's bodies while working as dancer at the cabaret. The reason why she had left Wan-deuk to his native Korean father after weaning is because she thinks it would be more advantageous for him to grow up under the care of a native Korean rather than a foreign-born mother who, despite gaining citizenship through marriage, remained socially marginalized as an outsider. Another key divergence from perception is her strong command of the Korean language and her deep understanding of Korean customs as a wife and mother. She is portrayed as a mother who can communicate with her husband and son without a single sign of language barrier. She also knows how to cook a variety of Korean dishes from the main dishes to a variety of side dishes.

For a mixed-heritage son, the story initially mirrors societal perceptions by describing Wan-deuk as a troubled youth suffering from a lack of guidance due to his father's long working hours and his mother's early absence. He isolates himself from his surroundings out of fear that others will discover his non-normative family background, resorting to physical violence when his family is insulted or bullied. However, the story reveals a fundamental difference from public stereotypes by portraying Wan-deuk as a son who possesses profound filial piety. This trait is prominently displayed when he steps in to protect and assist his father and uncle when they are harassed by security guards at a metro station.

Ultimately, the representation of the multicultural family as a complete unit highlights structural similarities with shared public perceptions: they are socioeconomically and culturally disadvantaged individuals at risk, brought together by profit-driven brokers, and raising a child of mixed heritage. However, the story guides their individual trajectories differently. Jeong-bok is not a merciless husband, but a considerate man who allows his wife to leave because he cannot bear to see her suffer; his Vietnamese wife is depicted as a talent fluent in Korean language and customs whose departure was driven by personal boundaries rather than betrayal, and Wan-deuk is not born evil-minded, but a youngster whose aggression stems from a lack of structural guidance rather than malicious intent. By intentionally altering these specific traits, the story lays the foundation to represent each family member as an individual who upholds moral duties grounded in traditional values, namely breadwinner, virtuous mother, and filial son.

The integration of traditional value assigned to each familial unit

Before examining each member's unique representation, the story establishes their shared effort to fulfill traditional familial roles grounded in Neo-Confucianism: Jeong-bok as the hardworking Breadwinner, the Vietnamese wife as the Virtuous Mother, and Wan-deuk as the Filial Son. Examining this representation of family members fulfilling traditional roles alongside Chang's (2010) framework, which asserts that the family forms the essential micro-foundation of nation, suggests that a solid familial institution is viewed as a guarantor of overall national prosperity. Hence, the representation constructed in *Wandeukki* reflects a broader societal expectation that it is necessary to Koreanize the multicultural family by guiding them toward embracing these traditional roles. Within

this logic, assimilating into traditional familial frameworks becomes the designated path for multicultural families to elevate their socioeconomically vulnerable status, enabling them to contribute to the nation without posing a threat to the existing social structure.

Native Korean father as hardworking Breadwinner

Although the representation of Jeong-bok relies on shared public perceptions of native Korean fathers in multicultural families as underprivileged urbanite or individual with physical disabilities facing daily discrimination, Jeong-bok is depicted as a hardworking breadwinner, who never give up on fate. Despite enduring severe hardships and ordeals, he strives to ensure that his son can live as good a life as a family patriarch like himself can provide.

At the introduction, the story reveals that Jeong-bok worked as a dancer in a cabaret. Although he possesses a passion for dance and is highly skilled, no one in the cabaret admires and considers his performance as art. Worse, the spectators view his dancing as comical, using derogatory language to mock his physical disability. When the cabaret is converted into a nightclub, Jeong-bok was forced to leave and turned to street vendor selling goods in metro stations, where he constantly risks being chased or harassed by security guards. Following an incident in which Wan-deuk fights a guard to defend his father, Jeong-bok decides to become an itinerant vendor, traveling to markets across the country to sell goods and returning home only for a few days at a time to restock.

Through these examples, the novel portrays Jeong-bok as a conventional patriarch in Confucianism-based society whose primary duty is to secure family income. Despite hardships, Jeong-bok never abandons his engagement in economic activities. He exerts every effort as the family leader to ensure that Wan-deuk, his 17-year-old son, can focus entirely on his responsibilities as a highschooler. Jeong-bok's dedication for his son is explicitly acknowledged in Wan-deuk's reflections regarding why their family relocated to a rooftop room (옥탑방, oktapbang) on the outskirts of Seoul. His father believed that attending a high school closer to Seoul would increase Wan-deuk's chances of entering a university in the capital. The reason why he prioritizes education is same as conventional father as he believes that knowledge will improve Wan-deuk's life and prevent him from repeating a life of daily hardship like him. Driven by this devotion, Jeong-bok, believing his son possesses a special talent for writing (a misunderstanding originating from Wan-deuk's kindergarten years), attempts to create an environment where Wan-deuk can focus on reading and studying

Without acknowledging his son's passion and desires, this protective care eventually generates conflict with his son, particularly when Wan-deuk announces his desire to pursue kickboxing instead of pursuing a degree. Initially, Jeong-bok forbids this, arguing that combat sports will lead to violence and cause Wan-deuk to end up in a marginal life like his own. However, this generational tension is reconciled through the mediation of the Vietnamese mother upon her return to the family as virtuous mother.

Vietnamese marriage migrant as Virtuous Mother

Following her departure, she repeatedly attempted to reconnect with her family. Although her efforts proved unsuccessful for several years, she finally discovered the whereabouts of her long-lost son through the church network of Dong-ju, Wandeuik's homeroom teacher and neighbor. The mother's eventual reintegration into the household plays a pivotal role in the story. She fills the traditional matriarchal as the Virtuous Mother, reactivating the functional mechanics of the familial institution. Her presence immediately enhances the family's overall well-being through her dedicated care work. Importantly, the story portrays her as a highly competent subject; despite her non-Korean ethnicity, her strong command of the Korean language and deep familiarity with Korean cultural practices facilitate her reunion and render her ideally suited to fulfill this traditional maternal role.

Even though the initial encounter between her and Wan-deuk is fraught with awkwardness, she persistently seeks opportunities to rebuild their relationship. Upon learning during their first meeting that Wan-deuk survives almost exclusively on instant noodles without even basic side dishes kimchi, she begins preparing home-cooked meals and banchan (반찬) for him and her husband. As their emotional bond deepens, she transitions away from formal, polite speech after Wan-deuk asks her to speak to him more comfortably. Furthermore, despite a 17-year separation from her husband, she retains an intimate memory of his culinary preferences and dietary habits, evidenced by her adjusting the saltiness of her dishes to his taste and using aged chicken to prepare samgyetang (삼계탕) to match the specific taste he prefers. Through these actions, her return serves as a structural catalyst that fortifies the stability of the multicultural family. This domestic transformation is visually symbolized through food. Wan-deuk's diet shifts from instant noodles daily to a table plenty of fresh, varied Korean dishes, a sight he had never experienced in his life.

In this sense, food represents structural domestic stability. Access to nutritious meals sustains both the father as breadwinner and Wan-deuk as an aspiring kickboxer, safeguarding their physical well-being where instant noodles on the daily basis threatened it. This is important particularly for Jeong-bok and Wan-deuk whose performance depends on physical health. Beyond nutritional sustenance, her return also resolves the conflict between Jeong-bok and Wan-deuk regarding kickboxing. She did so by asserting that their son understands his own ambitions best, a phrase that further facilitates a mutual agreement between father and son to respect one another's pursuits.

Once the familial institution resumes its proper operation in accordance with traditional expectations, the story rewards the mother with formal recognition within the family unit. This shift portrays in a scene where Wan-deuk responds to a neighbor's question about her role in family by declaring, "She is my mother." This marks the first time Wan-deuk addresses her directly as "mother" rather than employing distant honorific pronoun of that person (그분). Moved to tears by this validation, she fully joins the family table to share a meal, leaving behind her previous state of domestic marginalization.

Regardless of happy ending, the fact that she successfully resolves the household's deficiencies specifically because of her linguistic fluency and cultural literacy carries a critical implication. Without these competencies, her seamless integration would be impossible. This serves as an attempt of story to reinforce a normative societal expectation, that marriage migrants must attain a high level of Korean cultural and linguistic proficiency to perform Neo-Confucian maternal duties effectively and ensure the flawless operation of the familial institution.

Mixed heritage child as Filial son

Beneath his front stage being a problematic youth who relies on violence as a primary mechanism for problem-solving, the story links the root cause of Wan-deuk's behavior to a lack of proper parental guidance. Deprived of a mother's presence and with a father frequently away due to the demands of his job, Wan-deuk comes to perceive and internalize violence as an effective tool to achieve his goals, a mindset shaped by early exposure to the cabaret guards. However, Wan-deuk is not inherently malicious, rather, he possesses the core qualities of a filial son. This is manifested in two key ways: first, in the conditions under which he resorts to violence, and second, through his direct expressions of filial piety. Since Wan-deuk did not undergo typical early socialization to teach him normative values, his filial devotion manifests through non-conventional means.

First, regarding his reliance on violence, Wan-deuk is portrayed as possessing impressive martial skills, as evidenced by his fights with his classmate Hyeok-joo and security guards, both of which end in Wan-deuk's victory. Despite holding such physical power, Wan-deuk never uses violence to intimidate or exploit others. Instead, he resorts to his fists strictly when opponents mock or threaten his family. This is illustrated when he breaks Hyeok-joo's finger after the latter ridicules Jeong-bok's job as a subway vendor. A similar pattern occurs during his confrontation with the subway guards when Wan-deuk witnesses them chasing and threatening his father and uncle. Although Wan-deuk enables his family to flee the scene, he is slapped by his father and admonished never to use violence again instead of receiving gratitude. While this scene demonstrates that physical aggression is socially unacceptable, for a child lacking other social capital to negotiate like Wan-deuk, violence serves as the only option available to defend his father's honor as a filial son.

Second, beyond these defensive acts of violence, Wan-deuk expresses filial piety through conventional acts of care throughout the story. For instance, he uses money earned from part-time jobs to take his mother to a market to purchase a new pair of shoes, noticing that her current footwear is worn and outdated. In another instance, Wan-deuk pretends to read and write diligently while sitting in the room where his father packages goods, fully aware that appearing studious brings his father emotional relief. When Jeong-bok initially forbids him from practicing kickboxing, Wan-deuk takes on additional part-time work at a barbecue restaurant and delivers newspapers to cover his gym membership fees independently. His capacity for filial devotion also extends to his mentor, Dong-ju. After accidentally kicking upon mistaking him for an intruder, Wan-deuk carries his injured teacher on his back to hospital as fast as possible, bursting into tears upon learning that Dong-ju is a person who consistently assists him and guides him toward a meaningful role in society., refusing to burden his father, who is already overwhelmed by his work as an itinerant vendor.

Dong-ju: a mentor guiding the smooth transition

Given Dong-ju's important role as a helper guiding the multicultural family through a smooth transition toward becoming a "New Korean family," it is worth portraying how this native Korean character enables each family member to fulfill their designated roles grounded in traditional Neo-Confucian values.

From the beginning, Dong-ju consistently assists Jeong-bok in overseeing Wan-deuk while the father is away working, an act of support that allows Jeong-bok to focus fully on his duties as a hardworking breadwinner. Beyond assisting with Wan-deuk's supervision, Dong-ju orchestrates the reunion between Wan-deuk and his long-lost mother, marking a crucial turning point in resolving the household's structural deficiencies. Despite knowing that Wan-deuk initially resists meeting her, Dong-ju provides the mother with their home address, enabling her to wait for Wan-deuk after school and initiate the process of reconciliation. For Wan-deuk, Dong-ju becomes the most influential figure in his personal development. He transforms Wan-deuk from a self-isolated outsider into an adult who recognizes the family as a powerful, supportive unit rather than a source of embarrassment or deficiency that must be hidden from society as his family always put all efforts that they have to guarantee his well-being.

At the resolution of the story, Dong-ju helps Jeong-bok reclaim his passion for dance by facilitating the opening of a dance academy in the building Dong-ju purchases. In this space, Jeong-bok is given a second chance to perform, serving as an instructor who conveys his passion for dance to students, and to secure more stable job than being itinerant vendor, while the rest of the family collaborates to assist in running the school's daily operations

Relationship between representation of multicultural family and compressed modernity

The representation of the multicultural family outlined above, where Jeong-bok, the Vietnamese mother, and Wan-deuk fulfill their respective Neo-Confucian roles as hardworking breadwinner, virtuous mother, and filial son, is closely linked to compressed modernity. Within this civilizational state, neoliberalism and Neo-Confucianism do not exist in binary opposition. Rather, it hybridizes, syncretizes, articulates, and accumulates these concepts together. As seen in *Wandeukki*, the representation of multicultural family employs Neo-Confucian duty as the main structure but rebranded it as a driving force for achieving Neo-liberal capital. In other word, the moral duties of breadwinner, virtuous mother, and filial assigned to each family member fulfil neo-liberal demand while reducing its anxieties caused by ethnic homogeneity.

The sacrificial patriarch as hyper-flexible laborer

The traditional status of father as breadwinner can only be sustained if his economic output remains sufficient to secure his child's well-being. To uphold this status, the story propels Jeong-bok into a continuous search for employment and eventually transforms him into a flexible and precarious laborer.

This flexibility is evident in how Jeong-bok repeatedly shifts occupations without regretting on the loss of his career as a cabaret dancer, a job for which he held genuine passion. He transitions his working hours from night

to day by selling merchandise in metro stations immediately despite the constant risk of confrontation with security guards, and shifts roles yet again following the violent confrontation between Wan-deuk and the guards, becoming an itinerant vendor traveling to markets nationwide. Ultimately, he becomes a dance instructor at the academy operated within Dong-ju's property.

This trajectory constructs a heroic image of Jeong-bok, particularly given that each of these labor-intensive roles is performed by an individual navigating a physical disability. Through this portrayal, the story embeds neoliberal values into Jeong-bok's traditional breadwinner role, framing him as an archetype of self-resilience, someone who neither surrenders to adversity nor demands state assistance. By doing so, this idealization simultaneously obscures intense self-exploitation, masking it under the respectable mantle of the hardworking traditional breadwinner.

Affective matriarchal care worker

The traditional role of the Virtuous Mother fulfilled by the Vietnamese mother aligns directly with neoliberal demands by reducing the state's welfare spending for vulnerable populations. By assigning domestic welfare responsibilities to the family unit, specifically designating the mother as an affective care worker tasked with overseeing the well-being of each household member, the neoliberal state offloads its social safety net duties. Since this role is performed by a mother bound to her family by emotional ties, the efficiency of this care work is presumed to be exceptionally high. Consequently, this arrangement provides ultimate cost savings for the state. Even though this representation fulfills neo-liberal demand, it places immense pressure and burden on the virtuous mother. This burden is particularly acute for a foreign-born marriage migrant who is not only expected to possess high linguistic and cultural proficiency, as demonstrated by the Vietnamese mother, but must also perform double labor as she is also engaged in full-time jobs at a restaurant while simultaneously undertaking unpaid domestic care work inside the household.

Filial piety as body optimization

The role of Wan-deuk as a filial son intersects directly with the neoliberal order by serving as a primary driving force for him to convert his physical capital into social capital. Despite his father's initial opposition to his kickboxing practice, Wan-deuk feels regret yet recognizes that he cannot become a writer as his father envisions, as writing lacks the immediate passion he discovers through kickboxing. To prove to his father that he can secure a meaningful future without following the conventional path of pursuing a degree pursued by his peers, Wan-deuk engages in rigorous self-improvement and self-discipline, all of which are core neoliberal values, through kickboxing. These practices enable him to utilize his specific physical talents to carve out a meaning place in society, fulfilling the same outcome his father considers a literary career would provide it to him. Even though Wan-deuk may deviates from the trajectory his father envisioned, the path he selects yields the same fundamental result. He fulfills a social obligation anchored in neoliberal values that mandate individuals to cultivate their specialized skills to contribute productively to society.

As a final observation, the relationship between the representation of the multicultural family and compressed modernity demonstrates that coexisting ideologies that appear contradictory do not necessarily operate in binary opposition. Instead, they undergo a process of hybridization in which Neo-Confucianism and neoliberalism mutually reinforce each other to produce a powerful representation of the multicultural family as a "New Korean Family", an entity that may appear outwardly diverse but remains inwardly Korean. As each family member fulfills their designated Neo-Confucian roles as a sacrificial breadwinner father, virtuous mother, and filial son, the story rebrands these traditional paradigms to serve neoliberal demands. At the end, this framing posits that so long as the foundation of the familial institution remains solidly grounded in traditional values, the household can overcome structural hardship and gain meaningful place in society.

Discussions and Conclusions

This research was conducted to fulfill two primary research objectives: (1) to examine how the multicultural family is represented in *Wandeukki*, and (2) to examine the relationship between this representation of the multicultural family and compressed modernity. Methodologically, this study utilizes characterization, the analysis of how character is built, as a tool to decode how the story constructs representation. The textual data gathered was then analyzed and synthesized through Chang Kyung-sup's concept of "compressed modernity," specifically focusing on two core dimensions: (1) the coexistence of historically and socially disparate elements, and (2) the simultaneous embrace of traditional and modern values as a defining condition for individuals living under compressed modernity.

The findings reveal that the representation of the multicultural family, a unit comprising an underprivileged native Korean father, a marriage migrant from developing Asian countries, and their mixed-heritage child, contains elements both identical to and distinct from prevailing public perceptions. In terms of similarities, the multicultural family is framed as a union between a disadvantaged native Korean man (Jeong-bok, who lives with dwarfism) and a Vietnamese marriage migrant. Regarding differences, the native Korean husband is depicted as merciful and considerate, his Vietnamese wife is presented as a highly capable woman fluent in Korean language and customs whose initial departure was driven by personal boundaries rather than lacking responsibility, and Wan-deuk is portrayed as an innocent child merely lacking proper guidance.

These distinct characterizations are further expanded upon to produce a family unit that performs traditional Neo-Confucian familial roles: the breadwinner father, the virtuous mother, and the filial son. Although this familial arrangement appears outwardly centered solely to traditional values, compressed modernity redirects this moral duty as a departure point for fulfilling neoliberal demands. The breadwinner must maximize his physical labor to generate the economic output necessary to maintain his position as a household leader who secures his family's well-being. The virtuous mother's role is transformed into that of an affective care worker, thereby reducing the neoliberal state's obligation to provide social welfare to its population. Meanwhile, the filial son maintains his status on the condition that he continuously engages in self-improvement and self-discipline to cultivate specialized skills, securing a meaningful place in society while fulfilling his filial duty under his parents' guidance.

Ultimately, this research yields three major critical discussions:

De-politicization of Structural Inequality: The representation of the multicultural family fails to fundamentally challenge the ongoing discrimination against people with disabilities, marriage migrants, and mixed-heritage children. While the novel exposes these prejudices, the story refrains from offering resistance or structural critiques through the characters' choices and actions, offering instead a standardized, prescriptive roadmap for assimilating into a "New Korean Family."

Gendered Reinforcement of Familial Roles: Familial duties remain strictly tied to traditional gender expectations, mandating that the male subject act as the economic provider while the female subject serves as the domestic care worker.

The Erasure of Vietnamese Cultural Context: Despite centering on a multicultural household, the novel effectively silences the mother's Vietnamese identity. The story provides minimal context regarding her background, omitting even her personal name throughout the text, even though her labor and sacrifice are essential to establishing her husband as a successful breadwinner and her son as a filial child. This rigid representation may obstruct opportunities to promote inclusion in an increasingly culturally diverse Korean society.

Suggestions

This study focuses exclusively on a single novel published during a pivotal era when societal discourses surrounding multicultural families were emerging, future research could fruitfully adopt a comparative approach to examine how the episteme regarding multicultural households in Korea has established and evolved since 2008. Furthermore, scholars could extend this comparative analysis to other media, such as television dramas, variety shows, and state policy documents, using intertextual or multimodal frameworks. Future research could adopt an intermedial approach to examine how the representation of the 'New Korean Family' was subsequently consumed, circulated, and received by broader audiences as an idealized or normative representation of the multicultural family.

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