

A PORTRAIT OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLE IN MIN JIN LEE'S *PACHINKO*

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Abstract. The study entitled A Portrait of Traditional Gender Role in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* discusses traditional gender roles in the novel which is reflected in the life of Sunja, the main character in the novel. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data. The analysis shows that there are three forms of traditional gender roles in Korea, i.e. obedience of women to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the son in old age; women as a homemaker and the last are women and suffering. The traditional gender roles lead to gender stereotypes. There are two gender stereotypes related to women's roles that can be found in the novel i.e. gender stereotypes of obedient women and gender stereotypes of women's work. The analysis also finds out that the main character reacts to the traditional gender roles in two ways namely acceptance & rejection.

Keywords: *traditional gender role, gender stereotype*

INTRODUCTION

According to Bem (1981), gender role orientation in explaining feminine and masculine can be seen from traditional and non-traditional models. In the traditional view, feminine and masculine are a dichotomy. It means feminine and masculine are two opposing groups. Based on Oxford Language, traditional means existing in or as part of a tradition. The story in this novel uses the years 1910-1989 as the setting time of the story and uses Korean people as the characters. Even the setting time in this novel is the end of the year the Joseon dynasty, 1910, through the Korean war in 1950-1953, until the 24th Olympic games, Seoul in 1988. In those years, Korean society was very traditional in many ways.

Gender roles that have been set since childhood from one generation to

the next can create gender stereotypes that develop in society. Although gender roles will continue to change from year to year or generation to generation, this change is not easy. According to *Improving Gender Balance Scotland's Gender Stereotypes: an introduction for practitioners in school and early learning centers* (2017) it is stated that gender stereotypes originate from local culture and traditions. This is why gender roles that are brought from childhood are always in the form of gender stereotypes. Boy and girl learned about their behavior from family, friends, relatives, and the environment.

Some women accept their gender roles without problems, usually, they are women from a strong traditional background. The rest still have problems and questions about their gender roles, especially when they

are faced with gender stereotypes. They will show a rejection reaction and do not follow the assigned gender role. Some initially accept, but then reject and violate their gender roles.

Two cultures exist in South Korea, material culture and behavioral culture. While material culture gets modernization from the west, behavioral culture. While material culture gets modernization from the west, behavioral culture still maintains Confucian traditions and it is difficult to change. This is reflected in the inequality in the role of women (Palley, 1990). When it comes to behavioral issues, this can not be separated from gender roles, because gender is a matter of behavior. According to the Korean Women's Development Institute, *Status of Women in the Republic of Korea (Seoul, 1985)* in Palley, (1990), "In traditional Korean society, women have long been in a disadvantaged position." Which can be interpreted that women will find difficult to get an advantage in their life. Their life will always suffer. Besides, as claimed by Palley, (1990), there is one of the Confucian principles about women concerning the three obediences of women: to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the son in old age. In this case, it means that women can not be free from the male figure in their family.

As said by Vanessa Phillips from Georgetown University in her article

entitled *Femininity and Identity in Korea*, under Neo-Confucianism (Joseon Era) women are expected to behave according to what is expected by men or their partners later. Women are also expected to be able to take care of their household later with their beauty and delicateness. Although now Korea is not in the Joseon era anymore there must be a feeling of need to maintain certain behavior as a woman. As has become a habit, this indicates that gender roles in women are difficult to eliminate even though the era has changed. Korean culture is so important that it is one of the causes of traditional gender roles for women in Korea.

The gender roles that a person gets since they can learn something will relate to gender stereotypes. Related to Eagly (1987) gender roles are closely related to gender stereotypes. This relationship occurs considering that gender stereotypes come from a culture and values that have been embedded and followed by society (Institute of Physics, 2017). People believe what their parents have taught them from one generation to the next.

To find out how the main female character reacts to traditional gender roles as reflected in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, this study uses Bem's gender scheme theory. Gender scheme theory makes active children who have learned about the culture, values, norms, and habits of the people in their environment have a gender scheme

that can form the gender roles they will follow (Bem, 1983). This theory will become a reference for children to live their lives. Like social learning, individuals learn and adapt to their gender roles through many social communities. From parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, to other media. In the gender scheme, individuals will be directed to adjust themselves to follow gender stereotypes according to the socio-cultural that has existed in their social environment since childhood (Bem, 1983). They will learn how gender roles are applied in social life.

The problem related to gender roles is also illustrated in the novel entitled *Pachinko*. Gender roles are repeatedly depicted in *Pachinko* novels, the author describes how traditional gender role plays a role in the lives of the characters in the novels. For the main female character, Sunja, the author describes that from a young age she was taught by her mother that part of being a woman is suffering. Since childhood, Sunja's mother has always given her advice on how women should behave. Gender stereotypes are also included in the advice given by Sunja's mother, relatives, and neighbors. However, there are times when Sunja can not stand still in the face of gender stereotypes.

This research focuses on how traditional gender roles are portrayed in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, what gender stereotypes are created by traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*,

and how the main female character reacts to traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*.

METHOD

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data. The qualitative descriptive method is a research method using qualitative data that are described descriptively. This method is a combination of descriptive research and qualitative research. The purpose of using this method is to produce a comprehensive analysis summary (Lambert, 2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the analysis and the research finding. Presented the analysis are divided into three sub-sections. The first sub-sections discuss traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, the second sub-sections discusses gender stereotypes in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, and the last sub-sections Sunja's reaction toward traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*.

Traditional Gender Role in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*

Pachinko is set in Japan, but the story tells about the life of a Korean immigrant family. One of the main characters in the novel is Sunja. Although the characters are living in Japan, they still practice Korean culture. Traditional gender role in the novel is reflected in the life of Sunja. The first

traditional gender role depicted in the novel is the involvement of a father, husband, and son in a woman's life. Throughout Sunja's life, she has never been free from the male figure, including her father, her husband, or her son. This is related to the Confucian principle held by most Koreans about the three forms of obedience of women to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the son in old age. The second traditional gender role depicted in the novel is a prohibition of women to work outside the home. The last is an illustration of how the female characters in the novel as Korean women who follow Confucian principles or Korean traditions express their lives who always experience suffering.

1. Obedience of Women to the Father when Young

Sunja, is described as a figure who loves her father, although, in the end, she could not see her father alive for long. Her father's death has even changed her personality, as can be seen in the following quotation of the novel. In the novel, the author does not tell much about the interactions that occur between Sunja and her father. It is only told how Sunja's parents initially struggle to keep their children alive before Sunja was finally born safely. But the form of Sunja's affection for her father can still be seen from the narrative quotation below.

Her father, Hoonie, had doted on her from birth, and even as a small child, Sunja had seen it as

her first duty to make him happy. As soon as she learned to walk, she'd tagged behind him like loyal pet, and though she admired her mother, when her father died, Sunja changed from a joyful girl to a thoughtful young woman (Lee, 2017, p. 28).

In the quotation above, it can be seen that Sunja is a child who loves her father. She wants to make her father happy so that she follows him wherever he goes. Since childhood, Sunja has realized that she is the only child her parents have. She has also seen how her imperfect father takes care of her by working hard to provide for her family. In Confucian thought, a father is in charge of leading his family and must be obeyed and respected by all family members. Here the author describes the form of a daughter's obedience to her father by showing the affection of a daughter towards her father.

2. Obedience of Women to the Husband when Married

The second form of obedience of a woman after the father is to the husband. After Sunja gets married, the leader of her family is no longer her father but has changed into her husband. Apart from her father, Sunja has learned that being obedient to her husband is also a must. That is what Yangjin, Sunja's mother said as shown below:

"..... Take good care of your husband. Otherwise, another woman will. Treat your

husband's family with reverence. Obey them. If you make mistakes, they'll curse our family. Think of your kind father, who always did his best for us." Yangjin tried to think of anything else she was supposed to tell her (Lee, 2017, p. 93)

Traditionally, older people are people who must be respected, both within the family and others outside the family. In marriage usually, men are older than women, this is an example of what it means to respect and obey elders including husbands.

3. Obedience of Women to the Son in Old Age

As if to complete Confucian principles, after marriage, Sunja was blessed with two sons with a difference of 6 years. Min Jin Lee described Sunja as always doing anything so that her two children grow up well. Three obediences of women: to sons in old age are when the husband has died or there is no longer a husband in the family. Because, if there is still a husband, this principle can not be followed. It turns out that this is also experienced by Sunja. Three years after giving birth to her second child, Sunja's husband died of illness. Now, all that is left are her two sons. That is why Sunja should do her best so that she can raise her two children even without her husband. As the Yangjin had told her:

"Try not to sell these unless you have to. You should have something in case you need money. You're thrifty girl, but raising a child requires money.

There will be things you can't expect, like doctor's visits. If it's a boy, you'll need fees for school.... A woman should always have something to put by." (Lee, 2017, p. 93)

Yangjin indirectly said that if Sunja's child is a boy, then she must go to school. Although she does not mention girls, Sunja must send her sons to school. The author describes Sunja's form as an obedient woman to her child in a simple way such as sending her child to school and fulfilling their needs. As a mother, this is still natural because every child has the right to receive an education. Not only Sunja obedient to her two sons, but Sunja's two sons are good children to their mother. They will make sure that even though they grow up without a father, they can succeed on their path with the blessing of their mother.

4. Women as Homemaker

Another form of traditional gender roles in *Pachinko* is the form of inequality in the roles of women, women who are always at a disadvantage, and women who always suffer. Korean women's role in traditional Korean society is only limited to the house. They are forbidden to do any work other than housework. Being a housewife is the goal of traditional women's roles in Korea because they are prepared since childhood to be a wife and also a mother. If they want to work, men or husbands will forbid it. Because they think that the husband has the right to

work outside the home to earn money, and women's duties at home are to take care of the children, look after the house, and prepare food for the family. This can be shown by the way Yoseb forbade the women in his house, Kyunghee, his wife, and Sunja, his sister-in-law to work.

Yoseb disapproved of her working for money. He liked coming home to rested and pretty housewife who had his supper ready—an ideal reason for a man to work hard, he believed. Each day, Kyunghee and Sunja made three meals: a hot, traditional breakfast with soup; a packed lunch for the men to take work; and a hot dinner. (Lee, 2017, p. 120)

The quotation from the novel above shows that Yoseb, as the head of the family, does not agree if his wife and his sister-in-law work to earn money. When in fact, Kyunghee, Yoseb's wife has a desire to open a kimchi shop as her own business. However, this can not be done because she knows that her husband disapproved of her idea.

5. Women and Suffering

In traditional Korean society, women have long been in a disadvantaged position. Under Neo-Confucianism (Joseon Era, 1392-1910) women are expected to be ideal housewives for their husbands and children. Even though that era has passed, the values and norms are still there. Women are expected to maintain their attitude and behavior

like their role as Korean women. This is not always easy for women to do. They will go through various kinds of suffering and struggle to achieve that expectations. This is also what the author wants to show the reader, that the role of women is not easy. The author shows how Korean women express their suffering. It can be seen by the quotation below:

“..... Sunja-ya, a woman’s life is endless work and suffering. There is suffering and then more suffering. It’s better to expect it, you know. You’re becoming a woman now, so you should be told this..... –but no matter what, always expect suffering, and just keep working hard. No one will take care of a poor woman-just ourselves.” (Lee, 2017, p. 32)

The statement above comes from Mrs. Jun, one of the sellers at the market who Sunja visits every day to buy her boardinghouse needs. She told this to Sunja after asking how Sunja's mother is. Yangjin, a widow who is busy running her boardinghouse without a husband and only accompanied by Sunja, her only daughter and two girls as workers. It makes Mrs. Jun advise a fellow woman. She wants Sunja to understand that life as a woman is not easy. A woman’s life is endless work and suffering.

Gender Stereotypes in Min Jin Lee’s *Pachinko*

Gender stereotypes that are formed in *Pachinko* are gender

stereotypes that are created from the traditional gender roles depicted in this novel. Gender stereotypes that exist in novels are gender stereotypes that are usually encountered in real life. Some of the stereotypical gender images in the novel may already be seen from the first sub-sections, traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. For this second sub-sections, the writer explains about gender stereotypes depicted in *Pachinko* that people can hear and encounter in everyday life.

1. Gender Stereotype of Obedient Women

The first discovery of traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* is about a woman who has to obey three men in her life, father, husband, and son. These statements can create gender stereotypes against women, especially the three forms of obedience of women: to the husband when married. For example "Women are natural nurturers; Men are natural leaders". Stereotypes like this usually appear when someone has become an adult. With this stereotype, women will assume that the man in the family is a leader who must be obeyed. In addition, this is due to the stereotype that reads "Girls should be well behaved; Boys are expected to act out". This stereotype is usually encountered during Youth. Since before marriage, Sunja has been given a lot of advice on how to behave like a woman who will become a wife and also a mother.

Including how she must obey her husband.

2. Gender Stereotype of Women's Work

The next gender stereotype created from traditional gender roles is about women not being allowed to work. "Women are natural nurturers; Men are natural leaders" What is meant by women being natural nurturers is when they take care of their children at home, while men are tasked with work. Another gender stereotype that describes women don't have to work and are better off at home is "Women are too emotional to undertake certain kinds of work, especially while pregnant", "Women should take time off to care for children or elders", and "Women with children are less devoted to their jobs". The stereotype about the prohibition of women from working outside is usually accompanied by the reason that women have to take care of the children at home, it is enough for men to work for their families. In real life, it can be done if the needs of the family can be met if the only husband works. But, if the family needs are not sufficient, it is impossible for only men to work, because wives or women can also help.

Sunja's reaction toward Traditional Gender Role in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*

In the novel, it can be seen that Sunja gives two reactions, acceptance or rejection of the traditional gender

roles that she has accepted in her lifetime. In these sub-sections, the writer is going to divide Sunja's reaction into acceptance or rejection of the traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*.

1. Acceptance

Sunja is taught by her parents from a young age how she should behave as a woman. Basic things such as appearance, attitude, and behavior. After that, Sunja was taught how to behave as a daughter to her father, as a wife to her husband, as a mother to her children, and how she should behave towards others as a woman.

It is known how Sunja reacts as a daughter who must obey her father in the first sub-sections in the form of traditional gender roles in the novel. As seen in the following quotation.

Her father, Hoonie, had doted on her from birth, and even as a small child, Sunja had seen it as her first duty to make him happy. As soon as she learned to walk, she'd tagged behind him like loyal pet, and though she admired her mother, when her father died, Sunja changed from a joyful girl to a thoughtful young woman (Lee, 2017, p. 28).

Sunja do not react in the form of words but gave a reaction in the form of actions. It can be concluded that Sunja happily accepts her role as a daughter who must obey her father and give good treatment towards her father, because she feels that making

her father happy is her duty as a daughter.

The next reaction is about how Sunja is expected to be able to take care of their household later. This discussion includes how Sunja's reaction to her role as a woman who must obey her husband when she gets married.

Sunja has decided that she will do her best as a good wife and a good mother to her husband and her children. Sunja make this statement when she was proposed by Isak, the man who would become her husband. She feels that being a good wife can repay the kindness her husband has given her.

2. Rejection

Besides, there are things that Sunja can accept, there are things that Sunja rejects about her role as a woman. Her cognitive mind refuses to do something that she feels unable to do. One of them is about the prohibition for women to work outside the home.

After her husband stopped working and go to jail, the first thing on Sunja's mind was how to work so that she could earn money to fulfill her daily needs. She even thought of becoming a peddler, selling anything she can make. It can not be accepted by Yoseb easily. He still can not allow Sunja to work. Even though Yoseb forbade it, she was still determined to sell something at the station.

Her first day of selling took place one week after Isak was

jailed. After Sunja dropped off Isak's food at the jail, she wheeled a wooden cart holding a large clay jar of kimchi to the market. The open-air market in Ikaino was a patchwork of modest retail shops selling housewares, cloth, tatami mats, and electric goods, (Lee, 2017, p. 152)

This is a form of reaction given by Sunja to her role as a woman. Sunja's rejection of the prohibition to work. Because Sunja can judge that the prohibition for women to work outdoor is something that should never exist. There is nothing wrong if women can also help earn money for family needs.

CONCLUSION

The first discussion found that Korean culture applies Confucian principles in carrying out their gender roles. There are three forms of obedience of women. Three obediences of women: to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the son in old age. The next is that women are born to do domestic work as a homemaker. The last is that women are born to suffer.

The second discussion is about gender stereotypes created by traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*. Gender stereotypes of obedient women created gender stereotypes such as "Women are natural nurturers; Men are natural leaders" and "Girls should be well behaved; Boys are expected to act out". While gender stereotypes of women's

work such as "Women are too emotional to undertake certain kinds of work, especially while pregnant", "Women should take time off to care for children or elders", and "Women with children are less devoted to their jobs".

The analysis of traditional gender roles in Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* finds out that Traditional gender roles that come from the traditions and culture of Sunja's hometown are not easy to avoid. To carry out her role as a traditional woman, Sunja lives an uneasy life. She must follow her role as a Korean woman who must obey her father, husband, and son. She also has to face the various gender stereotypes that exist in her social environment.

However, as a human being who has cognitive abilities and social learning, Sunja can give a reaction or response to the role that is attached to the woman. Sunja can accept or reject the role assigned to her. In this case, Sunja accepts her role as a woman who must obey her father, husband, and sons. Sunja accept her role because she thought that it is her duty as a woman to do so. Instead, Sunja chose to reject to follow her role as a homemaker. She feels that this role does not bring much benefit to her. On the contrary, she feels that she can help the family's economy when she rejects her role as a homemaker.

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