



Othering New Women: A Multimodal Approach to *The Hymn of Death*

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Abstract

This paper takes a multimodal approach to analyze both linguistic and non-linguistic resources represented in a Korean program, *The Hymn of Death* (2018), with an aim to discover how a multimodal discourse reshapes the way we perceive our society, especially women. The backdrop of this series is set in the 1920s in Korea. This period represents a transition toward modernity in which women were given the opportunity to study and work. This small group of young women were called 'new women.' With male-centered thumbnails and descriptions which are interlaced together in each episode, *The Hymn of Death* exhibits the patriarchal culture at the time when a new woman remains absent or invisible as an other.

Keywords: Othering; new women; multimodal discourse; colonial Korea; Korean Netflix series; *The Hymn of Death*



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Othering New Women: A Multimodal Approach to The Hymn of Death

Park Morgan Mok-Won

Introduction

This article takes a multimodal approach to analyze both linguistic and non-linguistic resources represented in a Korean SBS/Netflix program, *The Hymn of Death* (2018), which was directed by Su-jin Park and written by Su-jin Jo. The purpose of this study is to discover how a multimodal discourse reshapes the way we perceive our society, especially women. This series sets in the 1920s when Korea was under the Japanese colonial rule. Even though the Japanese colonization is known for its brutal oppression, ruthless exploitation and extortion, there was a time in which its colonial policy was loosened because of fierce independent protests of Korean people, namely March First Independence Movement in 1919. In this period, colonial Korea transformed from pre-modern situation toward modernity when a very small number of Korean women were allowed to study abroad. The concept of 'new women' appeared during the 1920s and succumbed in the late 1930s when Japan re-established its oppressive policy.

Japan was the first Asian country to open to Westernization, which made Tokyo a symbol of new knowledge and modern civilization (Choi, 2012: 3). The Western influence through Japan contributed to the incorporation of women into the male-dominant labor market. The term 'new women' were coined, referring to young women who bravely pursued modern education, independence, and freedom. However, these young women were treated as *others* without being into any part of the society. Two critical stances toward new women were co-present in Korea: the attitude of the old generation began with curiosity and ended with reproach, while the young generation looked at them with sexual desire (Park, 2020a: 531). They were frequently accused of being immoral and sexually free without knowing their duty of household chores (Park, 2020b:

162). Female students who studied out of Korea were always the objects of criticisms and gossips, while male students were considered well-trained intellectuals to lead the country (168).

The Hymn of Death (2018), classified as a romantic Korean TV drama in SBS and Netflix, showcases a story of a new woman challenged/othered by a patriarchal and colonized society. All three episodes with English subtitles are subjects of analysis. The first episode was released on Netflix on November 27, 2018 and the last one was aired on December 4, 2018. The storyline is based on a well-known tragic love story which has been told over 30 years in Korea with a play in 1988, film in 1991, musical from 2013 to 2017, and most recently opera and novel in 2018. In 2018, *The Hymn of Death* became a revival series on SBS at a domestic level and Netflix at a global level.

Netflix launched its service in South Korea in 2016 offering Korean-language programs with subtitles in different languages for world viewers. Netflix has categories for Korean programs under various names: K-dramas, Korean Movies & TV, Korean TV Shows, East Asian Movies & TV and Asian TV Dramas. Before the entrance of Korean programs into Netflix, Korean TV dramas had already been rapidly gaining popularity in Asia. Previous studies on Korean dramas primarily focused on East Asian viewers. The main factor behind the success of Korean melodramas in East Asia is attributable to its cultural proximity, such as shared Confucian virtues. For example, Korean dramas are particularly popular in the minds of middle-aged Japanese female audiences because they have found Korean dramas include more East Asian values than other Confucian Asian nations, which are expressed by means of intimate narratives and evoking emotional appeals (Lee & Ju, 2010). For Chinese audiences, the principal selecting factor (Kong & An, 2012) and viewing motivation (Lee & Yu, 2018) of Korean dramas lies in its subject/theme and content, e.g., love stories or family affairs. *The Hymn of Death* (2018), which belongs to a

proven genre of melodrama in East Asia, shares the common factors of success as demonstrated in the following storyline:

The program is about Sim-Deok Yun (female) and U-Jin Kim (male), who were famous during the colonial period. They were both born in 1897. In 1915, Sim-Deok entered the Tokyo Music School as a scholarship student sponsored by the Japanese Government General of Korea. In 1921, she joined the Korean cast led by U-Jin who was from a wealthy family. He was already married to a woman through an arranged marriage. Nevertheless, U-Jin and Sim-Deok fell in love. He wished to help his colonial motherland and aspired to become a playwright but came up against his father's disapproval. He was obliged to live with a woman of his parents' choice and destined to be the successor in his family's business.

Sim-Deok, born to a poor family, was the first Korean soprano and one of the early feminists in modern Korea. When her younger siblings needed financial support to study music abroad, Sim-Deok was coerced to sing for the colonial government. If she denied the offer, her family's life would be at risk. Instead, in order to earn the desperately needed money for the family and the education of her sister, she made a getaway to Japan to record popular music of the time. In Japan, she met her lover U-Jin again and the couple hopped on a ship to Korea together. In the midst of sailing in the Korean Strait, the couple committed suicide by jumping into the ocean. It was August 3, 1926. *The Hymn of Death* demonstrates a tragic life of this couple that exemplifies the fate of those who dared to challenge a long-held Confucian colonial society. The tragic death of Sim-Deok made her song popular, transforming it into a symbolic song of free love.

Othering New Women in Multimodal Discourse

The concept of *otherness* refers to social actors that are ignored or placed in the background in a discourse and, therefore, are considered as inferior or *others* (Park, 2021:177). These others are excluded or marginalized from the discourse to tailor an approach to particular interests and purposes (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 28). Spivak (2010) raised the question of taking seriously the issue of women and children of Asia treated as others by focusing on the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the muted subject of the subaltern women. It is an otherness not to question the historically unquestioned muteness of the subaltern woman; instead, we need to criticize postcolonial discourse by speaking to the "other" who has an authentic voice fully representative of its own (90-91).

In this article, the otherness of new women will be examined from a multimodal perspective; multimodality starts with a recognition of the fact that people use not just a language, but also multiple ways from what they observe (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010; Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The social semiotic theory of communication (Halliday and Matthiessenhas, 2004 & Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006) has provided the starting point for a social semiotic approach to multimodality. Social semiotics seeks to understand how people communicate by a variety of means in order to shape social relations and society itself. The sense of 'text' in linguistics as an instance of the linguistic system is being extended to other semiotic systems as in instances of 'visual semiotic systems', which are also referred to as 'multimodal texts' or 'multimodal discourse' (Halliday & Matthiessenhas, 2004: 46). Multimodal discourse has been glossed as a combination of two or more communication modes: print, image and spoken text, as in film (46).

The paradigmatic shift away from the study of language alone to the study of the integration of language with other modes accounts for the meanings arising from multiple semiotic resources

deployed in contemporary digital technologies. A multimodal analysis includes the interactions between the spoken/written language, kinetic features (including gaze, body posture, and gesture) and cinematography effects (including camera angle and frame size) (O'Halloran, 2011: 130). The present study focuses on all the above-mentioned resources by taking into consideration that both linguistic and non-linguistic modes produce images of reality which are ideological with a deeply important semantic dimension.

Most texts now involve a complex interplay of written text, images, and other graphic or sound elements, designed as coherent entities by means of layout (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 17). A revolution in the discipline of communication is also mentioned by Kress (2000: 337): “it is now no longer possible to understand language and its uses without understanding the effect of all modes of communication that are co-present in any text.” Amid the media of screens at hand, Domingo, Jewitt and Kress (2015) timely raised questions of what could actually be represented on these screens and how the affordances of a new multimodal discourse would reshape the ways of signification.

There are three theoretical assumptions of semiotic approaches to multimodality (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). First, social semiotics assumes that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, e.g., gestural, visual, spoken, gestural, written, and all of which contribute to meanings. Second, multimodality assumes that all forms of modes have been shaped within their cultural, historical, and social environments to realize particular social functions. For example, the direction and length of gaze and the spatial extent of a gesture are counted as the resources for making meaning. In other words, meaning making for specific environments has to be seen in relation to broad social, geographical, and temporal/historical conditions. The third

assumption relates to the intertwining of different modes. The meanings realized by one mode are always interlaced with the meanings made by other modes that are co-present in the communicative event.

Precedent researches, however, have mainly focused on the continuous appearance of the storyline of *The Hymn of Death* in different formats. Regardless of various genre adaptations, e.g., movie, musical, and drama, the love storyline between Sim-Deok and U-Jin remained unchanged (Yoo, 2019). Whereas the previous two movies focused on Sim-Deok's story, the 2018 version emphasized U-Jin's narrative (Chung, 2020: 53). The popularity of U-Jin and Sim-Deok's love story lies in the universality and specificity of U-Jin as a prototype of cultural contents that continued to create rumors and to provoke people's curiosity (Bak, 2021: 352).

On the other hand, the research attention that Sim-Deok received has been limited to her outward appearances. Before *The Hymn of Death* (2018), there was a movie with the same storyline under the name, *The Song of Death* (1991) directed by Howeon Kim, in which Sim-Deok's costume, make-up and hair style were exaggerated compared to the real trend of that time as to reinforce its dramatic visual effects for popular appeal (Kim & Hwang, 2005). In a similar manner, the movie of 1991 described the female character as an extravagant woman laced with luxurious costumes. In doing so, Sim-Deok was seen as a naughty woman inclined to love affairs rather than a pioneer modern woman (Yoo, 2011).

The Hymn of Death (2018) has similarities with a women-centered popular series *Cable Girls* (2017). This series is centered on young women from all over Spain, hired to be switchboard operators for the country's first and only telephone company in Madrid, a place which represents modernity and dreams in the 1920s. It reflects historical backgrounds of Spain from 1923 until 1930 when it was under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Revolution came in the shape of a

telephone, and female telephone operators were the very image of that technological revolution (Harkema, 2018). According to the traditional moral codes, individual self-realization was something very modern and unthinkable; an ideal Spanish woman meant being selfless and wholly devoted to her role as a wife and mother. *Cable Girls* was evaluated to have shed light on working women who struggled to find their rightful places and equality both at home and work (Campi, 2018: 138).

Another Netflix series that sets in the period of dictatorship and features the lives of women is *Stockholm: Lost Identity* (2017). In this Argentinian series, male steered femicides would leave a mark on female victims in the form of a number tattooed on their forearm. On the superficial level, female characters enjoy the benefits achieved by feminism as emancipated and determined professional women. However, these women in the state of Stockholm Syndrome ultimately subject themselves voluntarily to the power of an aggressor as if their sexuality belonged to him. The media power of the Stockholm Syndrome has been criticized because it provokes the vision of voluntary servitude of a woman who consents and enjoys the deprivation of liberty (Bilbija, 2018: 464). The fascination with sex in a perverse and seductive way only forms part of the vestiges of the Argentine dictatorship while the search for truth, justice, and identity is not addressed in the television series (465).

Furthermore, *House of Cards* (2013) features an ambitious wife who makes herself the President of the United States against all odds, which shows the difficulty for women to access to a position of power (Donstrup, 2019). Another women-centered Netflix hit series is *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* (2016). The story is concerned with a mother and daughter relation. It is a revival of the original TV series *Gilmore Girls*, which aired from 2000 to 2007 in the United States.

Currently, seven seasons are available, which clearly proves its fervent viewership; its nostalgic narrative was pinpointed as its success (Castellano & Meimaridis, 2018).

Research on dramas putting women at the center stage is scarce. As seen so far, most literary reviews have concentrated either on storyline or visual resources instead of reflecting on its multimodality. As digital drama series are increased on online platforms, the multimodal features of digital drama series need to be considered.

Thumbnails: First Glimpse of Othering Sim-Deok Yun

The Netflix application presents thousands of thumbnail artworks that keep changing on a regular basis. Thumbnails have the biggest influence on what people choose to watch while browsing the platform. The principal function is to catch viewers' attention and to make them watch a program. The vertical thumbnails of *The Hymn of Death* (2018) are presented in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, which feature only male character, U-Jin, hinting at the patriarchal society of that time at the cost of *othering* the female character, Sim-Deok.

The visual frame of both vertical thumbnails is a close-up of emotionally expressive face of U-Jin. A crying man with a torn apart and yet determined expression in *Figure 1* surely captures viewers' attention. His face is shown from the side at an oblique angle. The viewer is looking down the actor from a high angle and thereby the viewer in this case is detached from his world. The blackish background symbolizes an unhappy ending. U-Jin has modern short lustrous hair and wears a neat Western-style white shirt, contrasting with his devastated facial expression.

Figure 2 demonstrates a black and white close-up which suggests the historical background of the series. This black and white contrast makes him look paler, and his facial expression shows a sense

of resignation and sadness. Again, the side at an oblique angle suggests the detachment, but its close-up shot makes it less conspicuous than that of *Figure 1*. Amid the absence of the female figure in both images, only the predicament of U-Jin is heralded.



Fig 1. Vertical thumbnail of U-Jin crying



Fig 2. Vertical thumbnail of U-Jin

Likewise, the font of *Hymn of Death* is written in an eye-catching manner. *Figure 1* puts the title in the lower left side where the male protagonist looks into. In *Figure 2*, the title is located in the upper side of the thumbnail over U-Jin's fringe, above the eyes. In both cases, the position of the title draws viewer's attention to the eye expressions in U-Jin's eyes. The white font over a shadowed background helps visualize the effect of the letters. The calligraphy style with plenty of ornaments and elegant swashes, however, is paradoxical because it is used to describe 'death' in which his sight resides.

Netflix also displays horizontal thumbnails. There are four horizontal thumbnails from *Figure 3* to *Figure 6*. In *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*, only male characters are given prominence, as in the case

of vertical thumbnails. *Figure 3* is an extended version of *Figure 2*, except that the title is written at the left side in which the horizontal version leaves an extra space.

A very different version is presented in *Figure 4*. It exhibits five colleagues of U-Jin clapping their hands with big smiles on their faces. Their applaud is for Sim-Deok after she sang a song, but she is not seen in the image. U-Jin's Korean colleagues are university students studying in Japan. They are all dressed in a Western style suite composed of a white shirt, vest, jacket, and suit pants. All five men left the first button of their shirt open and three of them have their sleeves rolled up. This modern style suggests a relaxed attitude. The happy-looking environment is in the marked contrast to the title posited in the middle.



Fig 3. Horizontal thumbnail of U-Jin



Fig 4. Horizontal thumbnail of men

Unlike the previous two horizontal thumbnails, Sim-Deok appears in the following *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*. Both male and female characters are present in *Figure 5*; the horizontal frame allows the space for another figure, whereas *Figure 6* only exhibits Sim-Deok and the font of the title is bigger than that of the rest.



Fig 5. Horizontal thumbnail of two



Fig 6. Horizontal thumbnail of Sim-Deok

Figure 5 features a stage in which a dark colored curtain is draped in the background. Sim-Deok is visually obscured so that her face is barely recognizable on the left side of the image. Despite a blur effect, a beautiful woman is seen with her microphone ready to sing on the stage. On the contrary, U-Jin is depicted clearly on the right side of the rear in a medium close-up frame in which the body from the chest up is visibly shown. The usage of black and white gives even more salience to U-Jin. He is wearing a Western black vest over a modern white shirt and nicely combed hair. He is observing Sim-Deok with folded arms and in one hand is holding a play script. In the story, Sim-Deok asks U-Jin to watch her while she sings which helps her not to be nervous and do well in front of the audience. It is noticeable that the one in the spotlight in this artwork is the male character, instead of the female soprano where actual stage lighting falls.

Figure 6 showcases a medium close-up of Sim-Deok on the middle right side. Among the four horizontal thumbnails, only this image is seen from a high angle by the viewer. When the characters shown in thumbnails represented by actors do not look directly at the viewer, they are offered as "items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006: 119). The viewer in this case is detached from her world. She is seated in a dark and very humble room. Her posture is straight

which implies that she is a diligent person. Sim-Deok is simply dressed in a light purple blouse with lace decoration on the collar and sleeve which is not seen as extravagant. She is looking down a letter in her hands. The letter comes from U-Jin in Tokyo to her in Gyeongseong, Korea. Her facial expressions allude to her resignation and frustration. As observed so far, Sim-Deok is either absent or inconspicuous in both vertical and horizontal thumbnails.¹ The male-only or male-centered thumbnails clearly illustrate the masculine-dominant culture of that time in which women were othered.

Once the thumbnails capture the viewer's attention, a simple click on the given artwork leads to a short description of each episode which will be analyzed from the perspective of three linguistic systems: the system of Subject, Process, and a set of circumstantial systems. There are three definitions for the notion of Subject: (1) the concern of the message, (2) something is being predicated, and (iii) the doer of the action (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 55). Process is typically realized by verbal group (177), and Goal refers to the goal of impact or one to which the Process is extended (181). The followings are the textual overviews of the three episodes of *The Hymn of Death* (2018): During the Japanese colonial period, married playwright Kim U-Jin falls in love with soprano Yun Sim-deok, one of Korea's notable New Women.

Episode 1: While planning to stage new Korean plays in Joseon, U-Jin Kim meets a music student Sim-Deok Yun, who wonders why he'd risk doing so under Japanese rule.

Episode 2: Sim-Deok wants to know about U-Jin's dreams and decides to go with the theater troupe and to visit his family home in Mokpo, where a surprise awaits her.

Episode 3: U-Jin's family finds that he hasn't come home. Sim-Deok gets a recording contract and U-Jin resolves to live for his writing and for the woman he loves.

Right under the thumbnail, a general overview of the series can be found. It starts with giving out the circumstantial information of Japanese colonial period. The occupation of both U-Jin and Sim-Deok is stated as playwright and soprano. U-Jin appears as a Subject. Despite being married, the Process, *falls in love*, is done by the Subject. Sim-Deok is represented as a Goal and is explicitly described as a new woman in capital letters.

Episode 1 sets a historical background as in the Joseon periods with circumstantial information of *Japanese rule* in which U-Jin clearly is a Subject as the doer of the action, while Sim-Deok remains as a Goal. In *Episode 2*, even though Sim-Deok is expressed as a Subject, her Process, *decide to go and visit*, is only driven by the Subject, U-Jin. *Episode 3* starts with U-Jin's family as a Subject. For the first time, Sim-Deok is the Subject as she *gets a contract*, but her Process is not as active as that of U-Jin, who is again represented by *the resolve to live*, which corresponds to the Process. Overall, U-Jin is constantly starred as the doer of all the actions, whereas Sim-deok is repeatedly represented as a passive person.

In every sentence, both U-Jin and Sim-Deok are mentioned. U-Jin is always the Subject that does the deeds, and the Goal, Sim-Deok, implies directed act. As in the male-centered thumbnails, U-Jin is constantly foregrounded in Netflix's written descriptions as a doer. The absence of a female character in the artwork can be correlated to being a secondary person in the textual descriptions of all three episodes. Each mode is expressed in a different manner but represents the same reality in which a man is in a constant spotlight whereas a woman remains in the peripheral position as an *other*.

New Women in Confucian Colonial Society

The Hymn of Death demonstrates plenty of obstacles along the way for educated young women who studied abroad. The historical references offer a complex vision of the 1920s as a time when modernity could be both liberating and oppressive; even though women's rights of education and work were advancing, their social status was still extremely limited (Harkema, 2018: 223). Three most frequently used words in the discursive representation of new women were demoralization, vanity, and parasitism (Kim, 2009: 80). New women suffered from social reproach which considered them superficial intellects with vanity, obsession with appearance, luxurious clothing, frivolous romances, and preference for foreign products (Choi, 2012: 5).

On the other side of this disparaging view, a small and privileged group of women were icons of the modern era and became almost celebrities among exploited colonial people. The expectations for new women, who were equipped with modern education and appeared in the public sphere, were invariably high. Highly educated women with their priority in individualism and selfhood, instead of collective nationalist goals, also became a source of public reproach, which made the role of new women even more ambiguous (Choi, 2012: 11).

Such ambiguity served the ideological needs to reconfigure the Confucian gender hierarchy by inculcating morals in the minds of women to become educated wives and mothers. The colonial modernity helped educated women to participate in the public realm, but they ended up being subject to restraint again under a newly created ideal image of women (Kim, 2009). The Japanese government systematically promoted the ideology of *good wife and wise mother* as the overarching principle of women's education in colonial Korea with an aim to produce obedient imperial subjects and submissive work force for the industrialization of Japan (Choi, 2009). This is how new gender norms were shaped for a modern nation. The following conversation captures this

complex nature of that society; it takes place during a dinner of the impoverished family of Sim-Deok in a colonized Korea under the Japanese rule.

Father: Sim-Deok, it must be tough not to be able to perform. What does it matter which stage you're on? The fact that you're still able to be on one is important. The guest performer at the Japanese Government General of Korea. Why not accept the offer? You'll even be paid for your services.

Mother: If you agree to take the job, how much will they pay you? The Japanese Government General of Korea will probably pay more than others.

Brother: Mother, this is wrong. A Korean should not sing for that office.

Mother: Why? She can't earn money elsewhere because of the rumors, so why not accept this job?

Brother: Mother!

Mother: Don't you dare raise your voice. Who pays for your tuition? Who pays for the food that you're eating right now?

Brother: Sim-Deok. No matter how important singing is to you, don't ever stoop so low.

Sister: I agree with Gi-seong. Don't accept the job.

Mother: Fine, don't take it. (shouting) Starting tomorrow, we'll all starve instead!

Sim-Deok: I should pack since I'm leaving early tomorrow.

Mother: You'll accept the job before you go, right?

Brother: Mother!

Sister: Gi-Seong, that's enough.

Brother: I can't just stand by while she accepts the job.

Mother: Then bring home money for the family!

A family dinner scene has been chosen for the analysis because a family refers to "a group of people who live together in the same space, share common things, and eat together" (Ryu, 2015: 265). This scene represents a complexity of the life of a new woman othered by a Confucian colonial society and, yet, expected to be a breadwinner of the family and a nationalist of the colonized country.

At the start of the conversation, Sim-Deok's father makes only one long remark. The head of the household has a duty to make a living for the family under the patriarchal familism (Ryu, 2015: 265). The household head was male; women could not be the head of a household. The sick father is not doing the family's duty of being a breadwinner. His status as the head of the household is weakened as his daughter, a new woman, extends into the public sphere (Park, 2020b: 168). Under the patriarchal ideology, working women threaten men's status and, as a result, these men are subject to anxiety (Kang, 2020: 26). In father's utterance, the profession of Sim-Deok is utterly undermined. Nevertheless, Sim-Deok remains silent upon his remarks since she is expected to be an obedient and dutiful daughter under the patriarchal society.

The three main Subjects in this family conversation are as follows: *job* (five times), *pay* (four times), and *money* (twice). The dire poverty clearly makes the colonized family suffer from the shortage of food. The financial burden falls upon Sim-Deok who is the only family member with a job. For the older generation, what is more important is the family's survival over patriotism. The younger generation, however, does not succumb to poverty for the sake of a bigger picture as an independent country. The frequent use of modal verbs of Sim-Deok's siblings, e.g., *don't* (twice),

can't (once), and *shouldn't* (once), is to persuade their sister not to accept the job offered by the Japanese colonial government.

The only comment that Sim-Deok made is irrelevant to the conversation: '*I should pack since I'm leaving early tomorrow,*' to change or avoid the Subject. Nonetheless, her mother insists that Sim-Deok take the job and put food on the table. Mother's insistence, as in the case of the father, comes from a Korean Confucian familism which prioritizes a family over an individual member of the family (Ryu, 2015: 262).

On the contrary, her nationalistic two siblings oppose to the idea of their sister working for the colonizer. Their opposition demonstrates a paradoxical reality in which a new woman is faced with. Sim-Deok is expected to be an independent activist in her own homeland, and it is this society which then disdains her for being a new woman. Upon returning from Japan after graduating in 1923, her status as a female celebrity crumbled in an instant because of her scandal with a well-known millionaire. The rumor that she became his mistress for money was widely spread. It worsened her situation under the burden of supporting her big family. This family's conversation at the dinner table runs in parallel with the following scene *Figure 6*.



Fig 6. Family dinner

Figure 6 is a long frame shot where the entire figures are shown along with ample background. The general tone of the illumination is dark which hints at it being nighttime in the scene. The shabby doors, wallpapers, and old inharmonious furniture suggest a needy household. A handful of plates on the table also implies that their life is in economic distress. All the family members are gathered in a room to eat which is an indication of a close personal distance, but, seated according to traditional norms, separately in two tables: men in one table on the left and women in the other side. The old and young generation is differentiated by attire: mother and father wearing austere and rustic traditional clothes, whereas Sim-Deok and her siblings dressed in a modern blouse and shirt.

The women's table is given more salience than men's one. Only the face of Sim-Deok's mother is entirely visible whereas the rest is shown either from the back or to the side. The mother can be interpreted as a main Subject. She talks and looks directly to Sim-Deok, who corresponds to the Goal, to insist that she bring the money to the family. Meanwhile, the Goal looks down reflecting her desire to simply avoid the Subject of the conversation or possibly the responsibility pressed upon her conscience.

The presence of the father is unnoticeable. Seated in the left back of the room, the incompetent father, who is supposed to bring food to the table, keeps eating with a dropping head while avoiding eye contact with any member of the family. The next head in line of the household after the father is Sim-Deok's brother. Since he cannot be of any financial help, he turns his back to Sim-deok and the viewers.

As for the younger sister, her short hair highly resembles a Western fashion as opposed to mother's traditional bottom bun hair style. It can be observed that Korean modern women were

copying fashion and style imported and propelled by Japan (Kim, 2009: 79). Sim-Deok's attire is the same one as in *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*. Her hair is neatly pulled up. Sim-Deok is visually depicted as a classy woman, contrary to the stereotype of extravagant and flirting. She is seated with her back straight and head down which can be interpreted as an indication of obedience.

Instead of working for the colonial government, Sim-Deok makes a getaway to Japan to record popular music in order to send her sister abroad for further study. Both linguistic and non-linguistic resources analyzed so far indicate that *The Hymn of Death* (2018) avoids the typical image of new women as vain and careless subjects with conspicuous consumption. On the contrary, Sim-Deok is thrifty about her spending, obedient to her parents, and concerned about the well-being of her family. Furthermore, she is portrayed as a highly talented opera singer and a dedicated nationalist for the country.

However, the suppression of her personal desire or free love reaches a point of no way-out. One of the music she recorded in Japan was titled *The Hymn of Death* which became the first Korean pop song in 1926. It is an adaptation of *Waves of the Danube*, a waltz composed by Ion Ivanovici in 1880. While the original song is frequently referred to as an anniversary song with a quick rhythm, *The Hymn of Death* is adapted into a slow rhythm filled with sadness and tragedy. Also, it is the first Korean language-written song released in Japan. The following is the poem that Sim-Deok and U-Jin improvised and recited together in the series. It is also the first part of the song *The Hymn of Death*.

Life running in the vast wilderness.

Where is it that you are heading?

In this lonely world filled with cruel suffering, what are you looking for?

In this world made of tears, will my death truly be the end of it all?

Those of you in search of happiness.

Only futility awaits you.

Those smiling flowers and crying birds all share the same fate.

Pitiful life, absorbed in living, you are the one dancing on the blade.

The message of their poem is utterly bleak and hopeless: *cruel suffering, tears, futility, pitiful, etc.* The poem is a harbinger of a terrible ending with no hope for this couple. Their suicide was highly blamed in the actual Korean society of that time. To prevent the possible suicide wave of the youth in colonial Korea, unreserved criticisms about their love and death were flooded in newspapers (Lee, 2016). Although this new womanhood became pervasive internationally, the Korean society was not yet ready to overthrow the patriarchal ideal of the submissive woman or women's free love. In order to understand the Korean version of new women, it is indispensable to take into account the complicated and oppressive socio-political situation in the colonial period. They not only fought against the male authority and convention, but also had to struggle in the crossroads between colonialists and nationalists (Chung, 2012: 11-14).

Conclusion

The present study reveals multimodal manifestations of the *otherness* of new women and offers an extended explanation on historical and social contexts in *The Hymn of Death* (2018). This series set in the era in which women were daughters, wives, and mothers, but nothing else. Instead of focusing exclusively on the storyline or appearances of Sim-Deok, this paper takes the holistic perspective of how a new woman can be *othered* in a multimodal discourse. It is worth reiterating

that the online digital communication encompasses linguistic and non-linguistic modes simultaneously at play in meaning-making.

In the complexity of Confucian colonial society, an ideal woman was characterized by conformity, innocence, obedience, diligence, and self-sacrifice (Kim, 2009: 99). We can add invisibility/otherness to the list. The thumbnails which are the first impressions of the program are void of a female character, which makes her presence much less conspicuous than that of a man. The linguistic descriptions of each episode are in parallel with its visual resources. U-Jin always acts as an active Subject while Sim-Deok remains as a Goal in both linguistic and non-linguistic modes.

The family dinner conversation unveils the ironic status of a new woman. Instead of the incompetent head of the household, she is burdened to feed the family and finance the education of her siblings. However, she is not recognized as a professional neither by her own family nor by her colonized country. Despite being marginalized, a new woman still feels compassion and sacrifices herself for her family (Park, 2021: 185). Her family could not but rely on her.

However, if she had chosen to come back to Korea and work for the Japanese colonial government, her soul would have been destroyed. She is left with no choice but to disappear. New women were widely known for pursuing individual pleasure as mindless consumers and fulfilling personal ambitions. By means of drawing on the life stories of Sim-Deok, *The Hymn of Death* portrays the opposite side of the commonly known stereotype of new women. The series captures the struggles of a new woman as a talented career woman and a breadwinner in a persistent hold of Confucian patriarchy, and, at the same time, her anguish as a nationalist in a colonial Korea.

For commercial films based on women's narrative to be successful, it requires a series of devices that allow the audience to empathize with the protagonists who go through the same problems as the viewers do. At the same time, it is necessary to clearly reveal the problem and to provide alternatives (Jun, 2020: 29). In this sense, even though the focus of *The Hymn of Death* (2018) was on a man's predicament and lacks the provision of alternatives, it may still trigger the audience to rethink about women's status and help the viewers to empathize with her. Through Sim-Deok, *The Hymn of Death* summons countless othered women. The complex relationships between an individual woman and her family, as well as the society are reproduced by linking it with the concept of *otherness*.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ Actor Jong-Seok Lee who played the role of U-Jin had higher recognition and ticket power than Hye-Sun Shin who played Sim-Deok: Jong-Seok took on his first lead role in a drama in 2014 and Hye-Sun in 2017. Thumbnails starring a more well-known male actor may be a strategy to attract an audience.