

Analyzing the Differences in the Concepts of Love Between Korean and American Women Using the Female Characters in *Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982* and *The Sun Also Rises* as Examples

Xiaoyi Yang*

Department of English Language and Literature, Dongguk University, Seoul 04620, Korea

*Corresponding author: Xiaoyi Yang, YangSo-il@outlook.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: This paper scrutinizes the differences in the conceptualization of love between Korean and American women. Grounded in an analysis of literary figures, Brett and Kim Ji-young, the study unravels the intricate interplay of cultural, historical, and societal forces shaping these perspectives. The contrasting landscapes of the United States, driven by ideals of freedom and individualism, and Korea, entrenched in Confucian values and collectivism, serve as crucibles for forming women's roles, self-perception, and societal expectations. The examination extends to communication styles, illuminating the directness of American expression versus Korea's reliance on formalism. Through this exploration, the paper illustrates the profound impact of cultural contexts on the intricate tapestry of love, offering a nuanced understanding of divergent viewpoints within a global context.

Keywords: Love; Cultural differences; Women; Society; Individualism

Online publication: February 25, 2024

1. Introduction

While reading and searching for previous literature on the subject, it was found that the differences in the concepts of love between Korean and American women are due to cultural differences, historical differences, and social structure. As society continues to evolve, both countries' demographics and social division of labor have changed differently. The United States, with its development centered on the idea of freedom and equality among people, has the idea that women can take on different social roles, even such as lumberjacks, which was considered a more suitable job for men in the very early days of traditional thinking ^[1]. In Korea, however, due to the strong influence of culture and traditional beliefs, women are more inclined to do easier jobs that require less effort and ensure that they have enough time to take care of their families. Besides the traditional culture, the job opportunities, social acceptance, and the demands of the society on themselves are essential influences when women form their ideas about love.

2. Differences in the concepts of love between Korean and American women

In the two novels, Brett in the United States and Kim Ji-young in Korea are two very different female characters; Brett, after getting married to her first husband and receiving a title, does not let this constrain her life and she is a very accessible and respected person in front of other people. The title that her husband gave her was just a ticket to a higher class, not something that tied the person down for life or turned the woman into an accessory to a confident man ^[2]. After the end of her marriage, Brett was still able to go boldly after the love of her heart, whether it was being outspoken about her needs when confronted by Jack or choosing to date Romero without fear of age and class differences, her pursuit of the relationship she craved did not cause others to think poorly of her, nor did it influence her in her own mind ^[3]. Both the social tolerance ^[3] and her self-acceptance are excellent. On the other hand, Kim Ji-young, who grew up in South Korea, is the complete opposite. She seems to have lived her whole life in the eyes of others, and even from her childhood, both at home and at school, society and her family, teachers, and friends have tacitly accepted that women, to a certain extent, should give in to men's interests ^[4]. When a woman goes to her mother-in-law's house, she is supposed to help her mother-in-law; and if she does not, she is afraid that she is not enough to fulfill the East Asian requirement of filial piety for women. Kim Ji-young is not only not fully accepting of herself, but she is also being suppressed by society, and Korean culture at the time of the protagonist's life was helping men to take advantage of women. If anything, American women's view of love is one of freedom, confidence, and bravery to go after what their hearts desire. A large portion of Korean women's idea of love is one of dedication, sacrifice, and being good at holding back from expressing their views and desires ^[5].

Many cultural differences between Korea and the United States relate to various aspects such as social structure, values, manners, and traditional customs. Firstly, the United States was colonized and went through many wars of independence. After adopting the Declaration of Independence at the founding of the United States, one of the most popular phrases was, "All men are created equal and have inalienable rights" ^[6]. This idea profoundly impacted the formation of the American value system. It highlighted the rights and equality of individuals, which, after the complex challenges experienced by the American colonies in the early years of the value, led to a greater emphasis on the individual's independence and the spirit of innovation.

In modern Korea, many women work day and night to earn a meager salary, most of which is used to pay tuition fees for their older or younger brothers, as it was believed that sons should be responsible for the attendance of the entire family, and daughters were happy to sacrifice themselves to support their brothers ^[7].

Women, on the other hand, were not expected to take on essential roles from a young age, meaning that they were not recognized as contributing to society and supporting the men in the family with their paychecks, and it was not uncommon to see more than 40% of female class presidents in elementary schools ^[8].

In Korea, women have not been able to work independently until the modern era, when a survey conducted by a job-search information network on large companies showed that women's acceptance rate was only 29.6%. In another survey, 44% of the respondents said that they would prefer men, while none of them answered that they would prefer women ^[9].

This has resulted in Korean actresses being even more unable to survive independently from men and thus more dependent on their concept of love. On the contrary, coupled with the fact that the United States is made up of a variety of cultures and isms, this diversity of the country must have contributed to the existence of a society that does not overemphasize the interests of specific groups but focuses more on individual equality and independence, and that people tend to get along as equals rather than emphasizing social status. Korea's ancient marriage and social institutions are rooted in Confucian values and traditional customs, which have profoundly influenced Koreans' concepts of love and interpersonal relationships up to the present day. Before the genesis

of new ideas, conventional marriages in Korea were usually arranged marriages that emphasized compatibility between individuals and families. This compatibility with the family still exists in modern society, as well as the recognition of the family and the community's expectations that play a crucial role in interpersonal relationships. Confucianism emphasizes filial piety, and the idea that children must respect and have a sense of responsibility for their mothers and fathers influences Koreans' attitudes toward love and marriage and to think more about how romantic and marital relationships can be consistent with family expectations.

In addition, compared to Korea's collectivist society, which emphasizes the interests of the group over the interests of the individual, the United States is a more individualistic society, emphasizing the individual's rights and freedoms and valuing the individual's independence and personal achievement.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that their Creator endows them with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—That to secure these rights" (United States Declaration of Independence).

This explains why Kim Ji-young is constantly worried about whether others will judge her or whether she will be a bad influence on her husband, parents, or sister. On the other hand, Brett does not seem to think so much about what she wants to do and what she wants to get when she makes choices about her life.

Additionally, Korea, due to its heritage of ancient East Asian Confucianism as the central guide, focuses more on the class relationship between parents and children, as well as between husbands and wives and between kings and ministers. Korea has a head-of-household system, and most heads of household are men^[10]. This ideology emphasizes that children are to be respected by their parents, women are to be respected by men, and subjects are to be appreciated by the monarch as the bond that maintains the rule, as well as the cultural inheritance and social development. The methods of communication, as well as the systems established on this basis, would then better serve a society that wanted to continue this system of etiquette. Following formal etiquette and procedures is also essential for building relationships, and even non-verbal communication and facial expressions play a vital role in the activities of Korean society. Adding to the fact that women, especially in gender relations, are in a weaker position in Korean culture, more pressure is put on women to learn how to use their skills to get something for themselves without violating social conventions. Our emotional life is essential in the maintenance of an authentic sense of the self and can only be experienced as natural^[11]. In the United States, which experienced the Civil War, the War of Independence, and the experience of immigration and colonization, communication was more direct and open. Since there was no rigid hierarchy governing people's behavior, people could express themselves more quickly without relying on non-verbal communication or formalism. Both men and women can express their needs and advocate for themselves.

In Korea, love and family are closely related and complement each other. In traditional culture, the relationship between husband and wife is a blend of love and affection, and the heir is essential in maintaining the couple's relationship. Under the traditional marriage system, the marriage relationship established based on the order of parents and the words of matchmakers is often based on the development of love based on kinship, and after the child's birth, to raise the child together as the basic to maintain the relationship. Love and family in the West, represented by the United States, is a gradual process, extending from love to family, with the family serving more as a gathering of love between the two parties than as a bondage between them. Children also play an important role in love as a symbol of the crystallization of love. Children are born and raised together out of love, not for the sake of reproduction, and the foundation of the relationship is maintained more by the two partners in love than by other factors such as the family or the children.

In Korea, marriage is traditionally a two-family affair, and parents are often heavily involved in forming a new family, comparing the conditions of both parties, materially and spiritually. Religious concepts influence American love, advocating freedom entirely based on love, regardless of family, birth, age, social status, etc.

These differences result in the advantages and disadvantages of different concepts of love^[12].

The advantages of Korean traditional love are stability and prudence. Korean classic love emphasizes the importance of growing old together. In the event of a disagreement, both parties will think more about how to solve their problems rather than how to end their relationship. The Korean traditional concept of love is gentle, and all love is based on a lifelong companionship, with a solid attachment to the integrity of the family.

Traditional Korean parents emphasize not only the importance of a good match but also the rituals of marriage^[13]. Though absolute family status may lead to class solidification, relative family status can keep the couple's thoughts and opinions at a relatively consistent level, making it less likely for conflicts to erupt due to differences in outlook. The sense of ceremony in marriage can test the man's sincerity and can also be considered some protection. However, the shortcomings are also undeniable, love often begins to cultivate after marriage and the two sides do not know each other enough; there is an ancient Korean traditional proverb, "marry the chicken follows the chicken, and the dog follows the dog," which is easy to lead to inequality between the two sides in the marriage, one side needs to keep forbearing, and so on.

The American concept of love also has advantages: the probability of true love is higher. The Western idea of love is like a blazing fire that ignites everyone and everything that touches it. Love is recognized in many ways that the world does not recognize, and status differences are not an issue. Marriage is often based on love, and both partners have equal rights to make their own choices.

However, the American concept of love has its obvious drawbacks: it is more prone to instant love, and the divorce rate is much higher than the traditional Korean concept of love. The formation and separation of families are more random, and the influence on the next generation is more prominent. Koreans also know the importance of love, but they understand that love should not be limited to the physical but should be combined with morality and etiquette. Koreans used to agree on marriage by parents' order and matchmakers' words; although they had never met, they knew that the other person would be their lifelong partner. They will still attempt to figure each other out and inquire about each other, and their hearts will inevitably produce feelings of lovesickness and pure love. However, they do not have a concrete object as the West does; the image of the other person created in their imagination will be more beautiful and pure. It can be said that Western love is an emotional need, while Eastern love is the need of life. The different concepts of love between the East and the West are produced by the two sides' diverse cultural backgrounds, religious backgrounds, and social backgrounds. Still, now, with the rise of the Internet and cultural exchanges, the concepts of marriage between the East and the West are constantly evolving with the times and changing to varying degrees, as more and more young people in South Korea also advocate free love and the supremacy of true love.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, exploring the differing concepts of love between Korean and American women unveils a rich tapestry woven with threads of culture, history, and societal structure^[14]. The United States, steeped in ideals of freedom and individualism, fosters a climate where women can navigate diverse social roles, embodying self-acceptance and bold pursuit of love, as exemplified by Brett's character. In contrast, Korean women, deeply influenced by cultural traditions, grapple with societal expectations that often suppress individual desires and promote conformity, as reflected in the character of Kim Ji-young.

Cultural disparities, evident in social structures, values, and communication styles, underscore the profound impact of historical legacies on the formation of love ideals. The United States, shaped by a history of independence and cultural diversity, champions individual rights and direct communication. Conversely, Korea's Confucian heritage emphasizes collectivism, hierarchy, and the intertwining of family and societal

expectations, shaping a more reserved approach to love.

The relationship between love and family further distinguishes these cultural perspectives. Korean traditions emphasize stability and prudence, viewing marriage as a union of two families. In contrast, the Western notion of love prioritizes individual choice and may lead to a higher prevalence of instant love and divorces.

As the paper navigates the complexities of love in these cultural contexts, it becomes evident that the concepts of love are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and societal foundations. However, it is crucial to recognize the dynamic nature of these ideals, as cultural exchanges and the influence of the Internet continue to reshape perspectives on love and marriage. The evolving narratives in both Eastern and Western cultures underscore the importance of understanding and appreciating the diversity of love concepts in our interconnected global society.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Wolfe MT, Patel PC, 2019, Labor of Love? The Influence of Work-Conditions Among Self-Employed and Work Stress. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 2019(11): e00118.
- [2] Ganesh G, 2015, The Origins of Misogyny: How History Held Women Back, *FEM Magazine*, viewed January 24, 2024, <https://femmagazine.com/the-origins-of-misogyny-how-history-held-women-back/>
- [3] O’Sullivan S, 1988, Love and Friendship/Man and Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*. *Arizona Quarterly*, 44(2): 76–97.
- [4] Abbas ALFM, 2011, The Concept of Love and Marriage in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, 22(3): 606–627.
- [5] Kito M, 2005, Self-Disclosure in Romantic Relationships and Friendships Among American and Japanese College Students. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 145(2): 127–140.
- [6] Choi M, 2015, Current Situations and Tasks of Policy for Supporting Women on Career Breaks. *Health and Social Welfare*, 2015(63).
- [7] Park J, 2015, *Statistical Family*, Mati Books, Seoul.
- [8] Cho NJ, 2017, Kim Ji Young, Minumsa, Korea.
- [9] Dong AI, 2005, Job Market Viewed Through Keywords, viewed January 24, 2024, <https://naver.me/xw6IyIVJ>
- [10] Cain WE, 2016, Going Nowhere: Desire and Love in *The Sun Also Rises*. *South Carolina Review*, 48(2): 1–23.
- [11] Mir M, 2013, Love, Arranged and In-Between: Narratives of Marriage in South Asian American Couples, thesis, New York University.
- [12] Yulia SK, 2021, Expression of Love as Lingvocultural and Gender Linguistic Concept and its Reflection in Different Cultures. *Current Research Journal of Philological Sciences*, 2(5): 48–54.
- [13] Uchang K, 1999, Extravagance and Authenticity: Romantic Love and the Self in Early Modern Korean Literature. *Korea Journal*, 39(4): 61–89.
- [14] *The Economist*, 2016, The Best—and Worst—Places to be a Working Woman, viewed January 24, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/business/2018/02/17/the-best-and-worst-places-to-be-a-working-woman>

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.