

From Victim to Victor: A Chick Literature Reading of the Female Protagonist in *Marry My Husband*

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the digital transformation of chick fiction, a genre that reflects women's agency, emotion, and resiliency. The chick lit tale of self-discovery taken for this study is the Korean webtoon *Marry My Husband* written by Sungsojak and showed by LICO production. It is within an ethical and visual framework shaped by justice and revenge. The work showcases how the text shifts the genre's traditional focus on romance and career, to one of moral restoration and empowerment. The research discusses how the female protagonist, Kang Ji-won, emerges from being passive and vulnerable, towards self-realisation. The narrative and visual elements of the webtoon enhance the emotional and creative dimensions of chick lit and show how digital storytelling allows female empowerment to manifest through imagery, memory, and metamorphosis. The study concludes that *Marry My Husband* redefines chick literature for new internet readers, by linking popular romance with moral justice of life.

Keywords: Chick Literature, Postfeminism, Korean Webtoon, Female Empowerment, Digital Narrative.

## Introduction

The progress of women's fiction has often symbolised how women's identities have changed within the shifting social, cultural, and technical contexts (Jin 112). Among such stories, chick literature also known as 'chick lit' continues to be one of the most important genres in portraying the voice, emotions, and daily challenges of women. Chick literature first emerged as a celebration of female subjectivity in contemporary literature. It focuses on personal growth, romance, self-definition, and humor. It provides women with a strong personality to negotiate their self-rule, motivations, and defects. The genre has since evolved to incorporate new media that reflect the digital era, beyond the printed novel. In this sense, the Korean webtoon *Marry My Husband* is highly representative of how chick fiction has evolved into a moral and visual narrative that deals not only with romance, but also with issues of identity, justice, and empowerment. Webtoons, as digital narrative format, have opened a path for female representation. In contrast to the traditional novels, webtoons create a hybrid medium where readers engage both textually and visually with the protagonist's journey, by blending visual art, episodic storytelling, and emotional closeness. The *Marry My Husband* webtoon depicts a story about a lady Kang Ji-won, who after being betrayed by her husband and best friend, gets another chance to change her life. The story of her journey from powerlessness to power, and from silence to agency represents the ultimate spirit of the modern chick literature's self-realization through struggle and transformation. Through combination of enthusiasm and revenge with moral enlightenment, and the emotional tone of women's fiction, the webtoon offers a new digital engagement to female empowerment.

Classic chick literature mainly focuses on romantic fulfillment and personal battles. But digital stories such as *Marry My Husband* change these issues within a greater socio-cultural and ethical framework. The protagonist's second life becomes the representative of justice and emotional freedom. Through this, the self-reclamation of moral courage, along with love and career success, results in women's empowerment. In this sense, the process of 'rewriting' her life is parallel to the genre's own

evolution from light-hearted love fiction to morals and resilience. From beginning to end of the webtoon, the digital medium shows emotions and feelings through color, panel design, and visual imagery. The study uses Angela McRobbie's context of postfeminism to recognize this revolution. Postfeminism discovers how self-surveillance, freedom, and empowerment coincide within media and consumer culture. Ji-won's journey signifies a postfeminist tale of self-awareness and ability from this theoretical viewpoint. The importance of her remaking, recovering power, and reworking her destiny within the moral boundaries of contemporary Korean culture is studied. This approach consents to analyse the connection between the structural independence of postfeminist discourse and the affective understanding of chick lit. This study will identify *Marry My Husband* within the global and digital development of chick fiction.

Chick lit presents a global category that represents both local and universal realisms of womenfolk, as it connects to new cultural circumstances (Gill 162). This is mainly important in Korean webtoons, which use international ideas of gendered equality and liberation, while reframing female images in standings of the cultural values of determination, sacrifice, and community. Ji-won's tale turns from a personal story of revenge to a cultural one of justice. *Marry My Husband* is in one way, a wader up of chick fiction for a moral-depth and visual culture-sensitive generation of readers. Integrating digital aesthetics, ethical transformation, and emotional depth, it challenges the constrictive forces of traditional feminine storytelling. The webtoon shows how active this genre continues to be in changing and reflecting complex realities of contemporary women, through the representation of a woman who takes back her life with courage and intellect. The growth of women's social and emotional identities has long been replicated in the growth of chick literature. The genre, which represents the challenges of modern women manipulating love, career, and self-definition, first appeared in the late 20th century as a popular kind of writing. Scholars contend that chick lit is a friendly style of feminist narrative that questions the restraints imposed by exchange and patriarchy, while celebrating female uniqueness.

## Literature Review

Dal Yong Jin (2016) has discussed the globalisation of chick literature in *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*. Jin declares that global feminist ideas are limited within Korean moral and artistic conventions in Korean popular media, particularly webtoons which have become a site of cultural negotiation. His viewpoint is critical for understanding the emergence of webtoons such as *Marry My Husband*, which mix inimitably Korean cultural and emotional expressions, with global women's stories (Jin 112).

Sun Jung (2012) comments in *K-pop Idol Aesthetics* that the Korean cultural industry redefines femininity by highlighting beauty, resilience, and emotional balance, through simplified representations of empowerment. Because webtoons by women usually feature heroines who achieve empowerment through personal transformation instead of insurgence, this combination of media aesthetics and gender discourse helps to explain why (Jung 58-60).

As Angela McRobbie (2009), points out in her book, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, postfeminism is a cultural condition wherein the media's representation of feminist ideas of empowerment and independence are connected into the mainstream culture. She claims that while postfeminism calls out self-surveillance and compliance with beauty and behavioral norms, it concurrently raises a sense of personal agency. McRobbie would argue that postfeminism re-imagines feminism as a personal and not a collectivist movement, without altogether rejecting feminism (McRobbie 13-20). This argument is quite suitable for *Marry My Husband*, in which the protagonist, Kang Ji-won, represents postfeminist characteristics such as resilience, emotional intelligence, and self-governance. Her sense of empowerment is harnessed through moral and emotional restoration, rather than external validation.

Rosalind Gill (2007) identifies in her article "Postfeminist Media Culture" that current media representations of women's empowerment are usually linked to the enrichment of oneself, through personal styling. This statement finds logic with Ji-won's transformation. Through her self-confident support, businesswoman identity, and held-up head, she functions with regained agency. In presenting

empowerment that balances outer beauty with inner strength, the digital medium supports postfeminist beliefs (Gill 149-65). With the application of these perspectives, postfeminism and chick literature unite in presenting *Marry My Husband* as an advisory tale of women's freedom and independence.

The protagonist's journey from victim to survivor personifies the double-faced nature of postfeminist identity and reinvention of the self-form. Punishment and freedom are moral and emotional justification of Kang Ji-won in this webtoon. Despite its growing academic interest, few works have examined how webtoons created by Koreans employ in postfeminist theory.

This work examines *Marry My Husband* as a digital reimagining of the genre of chick literature that exploits postfeminism in its imagining of empowerment, justice, and change. Through the protagonist Kang Ji-won's journey from victim to empowered, *Marry My Husband* offers an attractive retelling of chick literature. This story is not only about the comeback of Kang Ji-won, but also about the themes of emotional development and self-realisation that are indispensable to chick fiction.

## **Discussion**

The story, episodic on Naver production webtoon, tells the story of Kang Ji-won, a terminally ill lady who has been cheated on by her best friend and spouse. She dies but wakes up ten years earlier with the chance to start over her life. Her second life turns into a metaphorical rebirth procedure, highlighting the issues of justice, self-awareness, and revenge, while upholding the emotional tone and echo of chick fiction (Jung 58). Kang Ji-won at first embodies the characteristics common to chick lit protagonists: emotional understanding, self-doubt, and a longing for stability. But her conditions are much more dreadful. Instead of romantic adversity, her life is noticeable by abuse and betrayal (Gill 150).

She is established in the story as a victim of emotional and domestic abuse. The story reverses opportunities for the chick lit by changing romantic hopelessness with moral determination, when she dies and wakes up years earlier. Her second chance is enclosed not as an opportunity to find love but as an opportunity to rewrite her destiny. This transposal has enticingly transformed the tone to common

chick lit, from self-improvement over romance, to self-liberation over moral and emotive agency. The protagonist's revenge is a logical quest for justice and emotional balance. Kang Ji-won becomes the typical demanding woman due to her self-esteem, strategic awareness, and kindness. Self-mastery, a postfeminist excellence that highlights inward discipline and emotional intelligence, is exactly the source of her asset. She becomes a chick lit heroine of the digital age who regains independence within, rather than outside of social pacts to this alteration. She redefines love and femininity through self-respect and ethical consciousness (Jin 120).

One of the most noticeable topographies of *Marry My Husband* is the use of visual aesthetics to bring out psychological wisdom. Color slopes, panel composition, and character design are used extensively in webtoons to display interiority. When Kang Ji-won is first seen in her previous life, the color scheme is cowed: blue and grey tones prevail, indicating impossibility and a feeling of being suffocated. The pieces' slimness and imprisonment show the close-fitting emotional environment she lives in. But the art changes with her restoration. With her returning to life, brighter tones crop up to illustrate an indication of energy and a thrilled wisdom of commitment (Jung 60).

The psychological development of her is imitated also in the panel structure. As she gains confidence, panels expand level and employ diagonal lines to suggest strength and motion. Her powerlessness turned into confidence is reflected in the webtoon's graphic rhythm. By means of these visual changes, *Marry My Husband* develops the internal monologue of chick lit into a visual language of resilience. Figurative imagery also enriches emotional storytelling. Throughout the series, the windows, mirrors, and reflections are used as symbols for both contemplation and self-perception. Ji-won, in her previous life, avoids mirrors as a sign of humiliation and lack of self-awareness. In her second life, mirrored shells frame her face during decision-making times, highlighting self-awareness. Also, scenes of hands reach, hold, or pull away, portraying both attachment and separation. Such frequent symbols create a visual representation of psychological development, that a wide online audience can easily access (Gill 155).

In the analysis of Ji-won's agency, Angela McRobbie's postfeminist theory becomes particularly relevant. Rather than collective involvement, the emphasis of postfeminism is individual empowerment within a culture of responsibility (McRobbie 19). Ji-won accepts responsibility for her life and holds onto some neocon values such as moral judgment, loyalty, and sensitivity, making her blindingly postfeminist. She negotiates social expectations using self-transformation, rather than revolt. Rather than violence, Ji-won's power is symbolised by emotional maturity, patience, and reason. Ji-won's actions are driven by detection of justice, not by hatred. She ruins the lives of her users to reclaim her dignity, not as a means of controlling them. Ji-won shows that women's power can be shown with empathy and principles, when they decide to act unwaveringly with truth (McRobbie 20).

As McRobbie highlights, the postfeminist subject adopts discipline and applies pleasure in self-governance. This is in line with Ji-won's transformation. To retain her cool, she intentionally keeps an eye on her feelings, and emotions. Her style and beauty also serve as tools of empowerment. While her first life conveyed exhaustion and abandonment, her second life exudes confidence. This visual development, where beauty becomes a means of creativity and personal agency, rather than representation, resonates with postfeminist values (Jin 125). This webtoon also contests fixed social ladders in class and gender. Ji-won's first sycophancy reflects the ranked structure of family life in male-controlled societies, in which the labor and emotional support of women are underestimated. The effective abuse of women's care and trust becomes exposed when the husband and friend betray her. Upgrading her life delivers Ji-won with an occasion to challenge this outline. She flips the power with her psychological mastery and proficient achievement (Gill 160).

In the Korean cultural background, *Marry My Husband* connects to the story's specific moral and emotional boundaries. The protagonist's detection is portrayed slightly as an effort to repair moral order in her social settings, rather than as a personal revenge. This is a replication of Korean society's Confucian-influenced importance on duty and morality. Therefore, Ji-won's transformation carries a double meaning: one, an authorisation of the moral order of society, two, a sign of personal

empowerment. Her discipline and self-control reflect the Confucian theme of supreme self-control. Living up to common ideals of refinement under pressure, she selects discreet revenge rather than open revolution. Such delicate empowerment conforms to how controlled chick fiction undertakes more of a moral tone than an individualistic one in Korea. At the conclusion of the series, her success is slow in terms of emotional balance and fearlessness, rather than romantic reunion or monetary gain (Jin 130).

Additional applicable aspect is the visual depiction of cultural space. The city landscape, the office, and cores of homes serve as emblematic settings that chart Ji-won's expansion. The open zones and natural light of her second reality differ sharply with the confined quarters and mysterious corners of her first life. This shift from control to honesty visually represents freedom. The feminist consideration of *Marry My Husband* is based on its consecutive structure. The story literally endorses the idea of rewriting one's history, a theme common in chick literature, by permitting Ji-won to recall her history. In addition, Ji-won's second life highlights revising identity through wisdom and choice, unlike old-style story curves that conclude with marriage or the success of love. Time becomes a symbol for personal agency: she takes control of her own story by handling her second chance.

This idea of story regulator is highlighted by digital medium and concludes with the reader directing Ji-won's journey by scrolling—a replacement for movement through time and space. With every scroll down, transformation is shown, highlighting development and endurance. As with the main character, so too is the reader contributing in the formation of meaning again. It is here that such a beginning of active authorship becomes most different from the standing motif storytelling. The reader's own agency in crossing the text is consequently resonant with Ji-won's empowerment. This structure represents the combination of authorship in postfeminist viewpoints. In keeping with McRobbie's idea that women today must 'write themselves' into reality through self-fashioning and performance, Ji-won takes on the roles of both the character and the narrator of her fate. Her peaceful description,

meditative tone, and self-confident appearance suggest that empowerment comes from telling slightly than responding (Gill 162).

Emphasis on the story of Ji-won's alteration is placed on her mastery over demonstrative effort. Her revenge structure depends upon emotive intellect that involves preserving her self-control, decoding other people's motivations, and hiding her own. This aligns with postfeminist images of women using emotional intelligence as a weapon to convert male-controlled structures. Revenge is presented more as a moral lesson in the story, than sentimentalised. Ji-won achieves stability in meting out punishment: justice with sympathy, forgiveness with strength. This moral difficulty is comprehended in the way she approaches her husband and her old associate. Instead of being destroyed by tendency, she allows their own choices to bring about their downfall. That self-control turns her from a victim to a moral expert. The ethical suggestion of the story removes it from being simply an overemotional revenge story and contextualises it in a postfeminist era that highlights normal self-control. Ji-won's revenge becomes an uplifting act of self-esteem.

This emotional change needs challenging pain and guilt. Commonly, Ji-won revisits painful involvements from the past, not to stay on them, but to reframe their meaning. Her tears become signs of strength and empathy. This emotional expansion serves as the fundamental goal of chick literature in showing self-awareness as the final victory. The inference of the webtoon supports a grand vision of empowerment which includes ethics, emotion, and intelligence. Ji-won originates her success from peace of mind and self-respect, not the approval of others. Her story re-imagines empowerment as a continuing process of self-reformation, rather than a defined victory. This message is reinforced with the digital format that allows readers to observe a slow growth throughout episodes, reflecting growth parallel to real life.

The webtoon questions the belief that pleasure can be achieved only by complete male validation. As a matter of fact, equality and inner satisfaction are distinguished as imprints of success for women. At last, Ji-won standing in sunlight with a peaceful expression at the visual end of the series

captures this conversion. Once a symbol of defenselessness, Ji-won represents clarity and fulfilment with the light bright around her. This visual metaphor underscores the message of the webtoon, which is that enablement is lighting, which helps seeing oneself clearly after darkness.

*Marry My Husband* stretches the topic boundaries of chick literature by its advanced combination of postfeminist theory and visual description. The genre's reliance on romantic determination is troubled by the ability of the protagonist, Kang Ji-won, to become both victim and victor, adding also a moral constituent to enablement. At the end, empowerment is portrayed in the novel as the reclaiming of selfhood within patriarchy, rather than as an obstruction to it. *Marry My Husband* is a perfect example of a new genre of digital chick literature where self-definition and justice peacefully happen with empathy, combining universal feminist realisation, together with Korean moral values. The story shows that, in the digital age, women's stories need not end with romance for their closure to be sustaining. Instead, they can end with moral victory, simplicity, and courage. Webtoon investigation, like that of *Marry My Husband*, demonstrates that digital chick literature has moved beyond its conservative themes of romance and self-doubt.

Another outcome underlines how *Marry My Husband* establishes postfeminist empowerment in an individually digital manner. Self-representation, considered decision-making, and emotional limit form the foundation of her new life. Each of these qualities is prepared in the webtoon to enact agency as a moral and aesthetic choice. Rather than catalogues of compliance, Ji-won's physical features, professional attitude, and emotional discipline become tools of personal agency. Digital media further reinforces postfeminist expression. Webtoon stories make readers to scroll and be visually connected, with the intent of creating a close relationship between the protagonist and audience. Readers visualise Ji-won's transformation as they predict her character. This is a participative collaboration, showing how digital media redefines description understanding and common authorisation.

The vital detection signifies how the global chick literary background is changed by cultural milieu. *Marry My Husband* differs from the Western chick lit that it repeatedly parties over liberation and

self-determination. The moral assembly of Korean society, which holds self-expression with other potentials like dignity, responsibility, and ceiling, is replicated in the story. Ji-won's retribution defending justice is consistent with the Confucian concept of harmony. This mixture of Eastern ethics and Western postfeminism produces a hybrid narrative of empowerment that cuts across borders. The victory of the protagonist implies a renovation of self-esteem and respect from society rather than authority or revolution. The webtoon demonstrates how culturally suitable symbols of resolve, empathy, and fair play can be applied in the restricted variation of chick literature as a means to voice feminist views (Jin 135).

Another important decision is the reassessment of "happily ever after." Orthodoxly, victory in chick lit has been recognised by pecuniary fulfillment or romantic determination. In dissimilarity, *Marry My Husband* uses emotive stability and moral termination. Rather than reaching happiness through other people's support, the protagonist pedestals her happiness on self-respect, peace, and clarity. The webtoon challenges the romantic dependence fixed in previous descriptions by Ji-won's quiet acceptance of life. It shows that moral stability and clarity, and not romantic fulfillment, are the keys to empowerment. This reinterpretation, in proving that digital heroines can embody wisdom and veracity without forgoing femininity or sympathy, contributes to the development of chick fiction.

## **Conclusion**

These outcomes composed show how *Marry My Husband* both upholds and changes the inheritance of chick literature. The webtoon signifies a multifaceted description of a woman who can transmute misery into meaning and trauma through postfeminist declamation. Besides attractive narrative involvement, the digital format itself represents another important side of how contemporary feminist storytelling is available for readers of countless linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This combination of academic knowledge, emotional validity, and visual aesthetics is changing the global insight of chick literature. From its original legacy of carefree love literature, today the sort functions as

a classy form of cultural and moral appearance, demonstrative of women in the twenty-first century. In conclusion, *Marry My Husband* is a representation of a self-realised and ethically leading protagonist, and an instance of how the category of chick literature has been rewritten for the digital age (Gill 155). It wires readers to rethink enablement as a hidden progress of self rather than an exterior triumph. The revolution of the protagonist herself is her determination to bounce back in her story with sympathy and acceptance, not by violence and overpowering (Jin 140).

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