



**Beyond Subtitles :**  
*Through the lens of the  
film **Minari***

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# Road map

- Minari – context/synopsis
- **Language and life between and beyond Korea and America**
- Translanguaging
- Neo-Confucian values – five relations
- Inter-generational, inter-cultural, cross-cultural communication
- Verbal and non-verbal languages

# Synopsis

- In 1983, the Korean immigrant Yi family moves from California to their new plot of land in rural Arkansas, where Jacob hopes to grow Korean produce to sell to vendors in Dallas. One of his first decisions is to decline the services of a [water diviner](#) and he digs a well in a spot he finds on his own. He enlists the help of Paul, an eccentric local man and [Korean War](#) veteran. While Jacob is optimistic about the life ahead, his wife Monica is disappointed and worries about their son David's heart condition; he is frequently told not to run due to this. Jacob and Monica work [sexing chicks](#) at the nearby [hatchery](#) and argue constantly while David and his sister Anne eavesdrop....

# Minari – American Film? Korean Film? Foreign Film?

How do we define foreign?

What systems of meaning-making are at play in *Minari* and who are they for?

What elements are Korean, American, or Korean American, and what happens when they communication systems interact with each other?

The significance of this is demonstrated in the controversy surrounding *Minari's* categorisation at awards ceremonies. This is not the first time that this has happened either, and it is not isolated to Korean/Korean-American films.

where are  
you *really* from?"

Is *Minari* – Asian film or American film?

Where is the boundary between native vs.  
foreign language/culture/film?

- Shot in America, about America, by an American filmmaker, "Minari" is an authentically American story – even if the Golden Globes disagree.
- By Nancy Wang Yuen, author of "Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism"
- "I prayed, I prayed, I prayed!" squealed the young daughter of "Minari" director Lee Isaac Chung as he accepted the Golden Globe award Sunday night for best foreign language film. I too have prayed for Asian American films like "*Minari*" to receive all manner of major awards. But a best foreign language award was not what I had in mind. Like most Asian Americans, I have faced the perpetual foreigner stereotype all of my life. I frequently field questions of "where are you *really* from?" and I've been told to "go back to China." So when "*Minari*" was nominated in the foreign language category and excluded from competing for best drama, Asian Americans let out a collective groan. And when it won, what should have been a moment of collective joy felt like the award equivalent to the backhanded compliment: "Your English is so good!"

# Snobbish English – What Does She Mean?



# Oscar's Speech: Broken English or Humour through different English?

"Mr. Brad Pitt"

"My name is actually Yuh-jung Yoon [...] You are all forgiven"

"Thank you for the wonderful *Minari* family"

"I like to thanks to"

"How can I win Glen Close?" "How can I win over Glen Close"

"This is the result because mummy works hard... "

"Tonight I'm here... I just have little bit luck I think... maybe... I'm luckier than you"



Translanguaging:  
A Default For Immigrant  
families' Languages



# What is translanguaging?

- Translanguaging puts a person's set of linguistic components into a single semiotic repertoire that does not require switching between languages, **but allows individuals to choose and assemble/reassemble semiotic resources from the bodies of repertoires, , unhindered by social/ political boundaries** (Garcia and Wei, 2014)
- It's different from code-switching that it's not a conscious, exclusive use of specific socially or politically defined language in a particular situation or context

# Translanguaging space

- *translanguaging space* is a space where people with multiple linguistic and cultural repertoires feel comfortable shifting creatively between and among repertoires, asserting their full linguistic identity. Wei defines this space as, ‘a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging’. (Wei 2011).
- Translanguaging space is ‘a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging’ (Liu 2015).

# Translanguaging for immigrant family

- Living in one's home-away-home, one needs to negotiate to settle. Yet at the same time, one can't just throw away one's heritage and start again out of a blank page.
- How **solidarity** is built between people – different generation, culture and heritage –sometimes even through a simple touch.
- How one's heritage language and culture gives the 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigration family a **breathing, safe space**.
- **How language choice can cause inter-generational tension and how it is negotiated, resolved – building solidarity.**

*Hana, dul, cheese-ee not hana, dul, Kimchi*



Neo-Confucian value system in American immigrant family.

# Korean-ness in American soil

- 정(精)
- 효(孝) Filial Piety
- 화투 (Hwatu/Go-Stop)
- 회초리 (discipline stick)



# 30,000 Koreans every year in the US



Both the Neo-Confucian hierarchical system can be seen in how the daughter respectfully speaks to her father and also how their intimacy (정) is reflected in their communication.

**Ne (yes- polite). --- yo (polite ending)** Also, the patriotism and desire to live culturally as Koreans in America is in the contents of Mr. Yi's dialogue.

“I’m the eldest son!”





# Filial Piety



Behaving badly to grandma - you are punished. (**회초리***hoechori*..) - hard to think in English context

# Money



Mum- daughter - treatment of money - (wrapped up in the white paper) -- giving money as it is considered vulgar in Korea - mum - daughter - daughter feels that she should serve mum - mum thinks she should serve her daughter as a parent.

# Hwatu/Go-Stop: not just a simple card game



You're not a real grandma, you don't make cookies!



Grandma smells?



I don't want to sleep with Grandma, she smells like Korea!



She put the chestnut in her mouth, yuck!



# Hwatu - more than a card game



*Hwatu* has very negative connotation because it is often used to gamble - that's why they don't like Grandma teaching the game to David.



Grandma is often clueless to the gap



# David won't share his food



“Pretty Boy!”, I am not pretty – I am good looking



“it’s a ding dong!”



Finally grandma's 'Korean-style love' wins David over



# David speaking Korean shows the result of their bonding



David uses Korean when he wants to build solidarity with grandma.

# Intercultural Interactions with Americans & Tension

# The Awkward Welcome



Their new American employer welcomes Mr. and Mrs. Yi at the chicken sexing factory where they have been given employment. He introduces them to a room full of East Asian employees, one of whom is Korean and the others unspecified. He does so with a big round of applause, which is followed by silence and then his awkwardness.



# The Awkward Hug



David's Dad wanted to shake hands - but Paul hugged. Hugging is not so much so in the Korean semiotic repertoire, particularly between men who are not very close (e.g., family members).

# Korean for Gossip



Korean gives them breathing space as they can gossip without being noticed.

# Koreans and Americans Interacting at a Meal



# The Prayer and Mr. Yi's Irritation



*"...stupid stick..."*



Mr Yi uses the phrase “stupid stick” within an otherwise Korean sentence. One of many examples that can be observed of the Yi’s moving between English and Korean when speaking to their children.

Thank you very much-*ee minari*, wonder-*pul*!



Korean pronunciation of English words is unavoidable for Mrs. Yi's mother who has just arrived in the US.

# Reference

- Kiaer and Kim (forthcoming) *Understanding Korean Film*, Routledge.
- Kiaer, Lord and Kim (forthcoming) *Understanding K-wave on the Screen*, Routledge.