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Disability in Lee Han's Social Integration Films

Dasom Han

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Disability in Lee Han's Social Integration Films

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The thesis examines four films by Lee Han—*Wandeugi* (2011), *Thread of Lies* (2013), *A Melody to Remember* (2016) and *Innocent Witness* (2019)—that highlight disability problems in contemporary South Korea. While exposing the prejudice against and misunderstanding of people with disabilities embedded in society, these motion pictures promote social integration through development of trusted relationships and effective communication within familial structures. The representations of disability indicate that the cinematic images of exclusion can reinforce disabled character's marginalized identity and promote inclusive efforts among the viewer at the same time. Through textual, cultural, theoretical analysis, it is argued that the films progressively decrease discriminative description of disability and gradually empower isolated individuals, making *Innocent Witness* an exemplary disability rights film.

Keywords: Korean cinema, Lee Han, disability, social integration

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I. Introduction

South Korean filmmaker Lee Han had been known for romantic comedies that delicately portray pure love between men and women before his conversion to different genres that deal with conflicts between individuals and their environment. Since 2011, Lee has turned to the type of social problem films¹ that illustrate different kinds of social integration typical of contemporary Korean culture. Lee's later films present characters who confront social problems with the help and support of trusted familial structures. In addition, these works demonstrate how caring relationships and effective communication in the lives of marginalized people are expanded and strengthened by key characters outside the family. These so-called "social integration" films—*완득이* (*Wandeugi*) [2011], *우아한 거짓말* (*Thread of Lies*) [2013], *오빠생각* (*A Melody to Remember*) [2016], and *증인* (*Innocent Witness*) [2019]—all feature a main character with a disability who directly experiences exclusion but is eventually integrated into the community. Due to problem films' didactic nature, it is necessary to closely investigate if the representations of disability in these motion pictures align with their empowering message for disabled people's rights.

To set a clear framework for the study, the topic must be understood in the context of the history of disability studies. The term "disability" has been dichotomously used with the word "impairment" in the social model of disability. The latter designates disease, illness, or deformity and the former denotes a social construct that oppresses people with impairments. The social model has weaknesses in that it rules out personal experiences of pain and limitation

¹ According to MacCann, the (social) problem film is "a film concerned with contemporary human situations as they are affected by sociological or technological change" which refers to the problems caused by man-made environment rather than geographical, biological, or psychological elements (52). About its structure, Gans explains that the typical problem film shows the cause and consequence of the problems and ends with the protagonist solving the problem, at least for them, by taking appropriate action that involves a morally difficult choice (327).

(Shakespeare 200) and that it fails to draw a clear line “between the impact of impairment and the impact of social barriers” (201). In this thesis, however, disability refers to both a range of physical, emotional, sensory, and cognitive conditions and the physiological, psychological, social, and cultural experiences of impairments. Although this broad definition allows us to see disability as a universal and multi-sided experience of humanity (203), it does not pin down what is problematic either. While clinical medicine can help identify disabilities located in the body, disability experiences, such as prejudices against and misunderstanding of people with disabilities, are largely unnoticed without a critical eye. This thesis attempts to recognize the manifestation of isolation as intelligible evidence of disabling oppression.²

This thesis is a cultural studies investigation, the objective of which is to examine exactly how these filmic integration experiences in Lee’s later cinematic world might promote the social integration of persons with disabilities. Addressing this aspect of the films, this study explores how issues of exclusion and discrimination are cinematically depicted and how disabled characters play a central role in constructing and reconstructing familial structures. This exploration includes not only an investigation of the story content of Lee’s films but also an analysis of relevant cinematic elements, and linkages between the stories and various theories of disability. Besides expanding the scholarship of disability in Korean cinema, this thesis

² Martin F. Norden explains the necessity to focus on isolation in reading disabilities in films by quoting Philosopher John McDermott, who said, “It is important to notice that the most severe difficulty encountered by a human being is that of isolation from the flow of events. This isolation prevents the making of relations and prevents recoveries and consequently growth. ...The historical isolation of the handicapped from the flow of events resulted in precisely this devolutionary situation, wherein the actual handicap became a minor and subsidiary problem in comparison to being cut off from the avenues and possibilities of future experience” (*Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986, p. 215) (2).

endeavors to foster a meaningful conversation about Lee Han's films, which have received little attention from the academy.³

II. The Integration of the Marginalized in *Wandeugi*

Lee's *Wandeugi* (2011, retitled *Punch* for the English-subtitled DVD) is a film adaptation of Kim Ryeo-Ryeong's bildungsroman (2008) of the same title. The film emphasizes the issue of disability in Korean society epitomized by the eponymous hero Wan-Deuk's family. To illustrate, Wan-Deuk's father has kyphosis, a spinal disease. His disability profoundly affects his family as the family shares the same economic and social position. The family's experience of poverty and discrimination reveals disability is not purely a personal matter. The film suggests that the restoration of the protagonist's family and their formation of close relationships with neighbors can resolve the exclusion of people with disabilities through a traditional sense of community.

The film is about 17-year-old Doh Wan-Deuk who comes from an indigent family. Wan-Deuk lives in a rooftop room in a poor hillside area in Seoul with his hunchback father Jung-Bok and Uncle Min-Gu who has a developmental disability. In school, he is known as a troublemaker whose grades are at the bottom and he has no friends. Yet, what makes school irritating to him is his homeroom teacher Dong-Ju who happens to live next door. Because Dong-Ju exposes his family circumstances to his classmates and extorts from him free food the government distributes to him, Wan-Deuk goes to church to pray to God to kill Dong-Ju. Wan-Deuk's hostility toward Dong-Ju's overblown concern goes away as Dong-Ju supports him in reuniting with his Filipina

³ There is no comprehensive study of Lee Han's films in either Korean or English. See Chae for a brief but insightful analysis of *Innocent Witness*.

mother Sook-Hee, dating Yun-Ha, and taking up kickboxing. He eventually understands Dong-Ju's care for him and pursues his newly-discovered passions.

Breaking off the Isolated Family

Since the family is the basic and fundamental unit of society, the film places Wan-Deuk's family at the center of its discourse of creating an integrative community, although Dong-Ju also plays a significant role. Each family member's experience of isolation is depicted cinematographically and narratively. The careful analysis of these characters shows that disability is a decisive part of their identity and that their performance in society is negatively influenced by prejudices against disability.

The film establishes that stereotypes against disability separate Wan-Deuk's father Jung-Bok from his family emotionally and physically. It recalls Wan-Deuk's earliest memory of his father in the opening scene (Chung 260) in order to show their detachment. The opening shots begin with the diegetic sound of a man's footsteps in the midst of silence. We then see his back as he ploddingly walks toward the stage, which establishes a subjective view of Wan-Deuk's memory and creates suspense through a shaky image with low-key lighting. The next shot shows a young boy watching the man while crouching down in the hallway, indicating the association between the two characters. Yet, the balustrade around the stage that separates the boy from the man alludes to their disconnection. Then, we hear the high schooler Wan-Deuk's voice-over which reveals the man as his father, diminishing the suspense. However, the mystery remains as the camera never shows the whole body of Jung-Bok in one frame during the entire opening scene. The camera switches perspectives between his feet and his upper body above the knee multiple times. It could be simply because of the employment of a stand-in dancer, but the

fragmentary display of the character, highlighting the medical model view, infers the “deficit” in Jung-Bok’s body.

Another cinematographic strategy that imposes a demeaning look upon Jung-Bok’s impaired body is the use of tilting. Looking at somebody up and down is commonly viewed as objectification. The vertical camera movement scans Jung-Bok’s body from his head to toe several times in the same sequence. Since his relatively short body is small enough to fit into one frame, this camera shift is somewhat derogatory and emphasizes the incongruence of his dancing skills and impaired body. Furthermore, it dwells longer on his face as if his tap dance is secondary to his performance. Even when Jung-Bok dances with customers offstage, which is not synchronous with tap dance but inserted to show his different responsibilities at the cabaret, only his upper body above the chest is shot to accentuate having a shorter body than his female partner. This ableist “gaze,” representing the cabaret audience’s perspective, identifies his “freak” body only as a spectacle and heightens its difference (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 61).

An atmosphere of effective bigotry bolsters the fragmentary and objectifying views of disability by limiting alternative perspectives. The film vividly shows this process of reinforcing isolation by the dominant ideas in the same sequence. When Wan-Deuk and Uncle Min-Gu imitate Jung-Bok’s rhythmical dance moves from afar, a fight breaks out among the customers. Immediately a female worker at the cabaret covers Wan-Deuk’s eyes and takes him away. On the other side, two waiters drag Min-Gu out of the audience. Contrary to expectations, the film does not show the two fighting customers being taken out. This irony metaphorically manifests the control of disability through consensus. Whereas the cabaret audience views Jung-Bok with stereotypes, Wan-Deuk and Min-Gu look at him with deference. The removal of Wan-Deuk and

Min-Gu from the audience symbolizes the silencing of minority voices. Although what should be removed is the discriminating violence, the system of violence is maintained through biopolitical ostracization. Its unfairness is hardly resolved because people are prone to go with the flow of the dominant view. Like the cabaret saxophonist with sunglasses continues to play music despite the commotion, those who do not recognize the problem also subscribe to established prejudices.

The film further elaborates the negative impacts of the biased view against people with disabilities in Jung-Bok's clown-like makeup, which is repeatedly followed by his isolation from his family. In the opening sequence, Jung-Bok is dressed up as a clown, wearing flamboyant footwear on his feet and rouge on the tip of his nose. A clown traditionally functions as a caricature of the ruling and powerful people, like a jester who voices criticisms of the king. Due to their special role, they are bestowed dominance and liberty on the stage, equivalent to the political power they imitate. Likewise, Jung-Bok is unrivaled in presence as he dances on the stage by himself in a single shot. His final pose with stretched arms and wide-open hands indicates his absolute control. However, the reality is that he is unable to stop Wan-Deuk and Min-Gu from being separated from him. In this ironic situation, the film reveals the disabling power of discrimination, which makes Jung-Bok's paternal authority appear only illusionary.

Jung-Bok is involuntarily given the clown role because of his physical traits. His personality does not match with such a role since he is the least humorous character in this comedy film. However, after his layoff, he voluntarily chooses to keep the clown makeup on. This can be read as an internalized stigma that Jung-Bok absorbs stigmatizing assumptions and applies them to himself. The clown mask reappears when Jung-Bok sells sundries at an *ouiljang* (five-day interval village market). This time, Jung-Bok paints a teardrop on his face, which exaggerates his humiliation when he discovers his family visiting him. When he finds Wan-Deuk

and Wan-Deuk's mother Sook-Hee, he stands still and mute like the sad clown Pierrot. Again, the clown makeup marks the juxtaposition of his predominant presence on the stage and his incapability as a father. Right after this scene, Sook-Hee and Jung-Bok have a heated argument. She condemns Jung-Bok for his poor parenting, asking if he is aware Wan-Deuk does not have a friend at school. Makeup is usually applied to hide the true nature, but it reveals the true character of Jung-Bok. In both instances of dance performance, the clown makeup symbolizes a (self) stigma that Jung-Bok has. The stigma challenges his performance as a father and detaches his family physically and emotionally. Overall, the description of Jung-Bok's appearance alludes to the perception of disability as inadequacy.

As the wife of an inadequate husband, Sook-Hee is also marginalized in society. Her passivity is over-emphasized in many scenes. For example, "she is constantly positioned in the background, framed within low-angle compositions, and sutured through the eyes of the spectator as exercised by the POV device" (Yu 593). Another example is when Wan-Deuk buys shoes for her. When he first meets with Sook-Hee, he notices her decrepit shoes. Worn in the feet, the shoes signify the lower state of being. Unlike the hat, the shoes are worn out easily and associated with manual labor and the lower class. Moreover, her use of the honorific form of speech to her own son exhibits her sense of inferiority. Her subservient images correspond to the portrait of a handmaiden. When Wan-Deuk asks Jung-Bok why he let Sook-Hee leave, Jung-Bok says, "I didn't like my colleagues treating her like a maidservant sold to me." Without the nightclub workers' mistreatment, she still acts a maidservant to Wan-Deuk because of her guilt. However, her submissive attitude is exaggerated and reinforces the abnormality of the family.

Sook-Hee does not seem to be superficially affected by her husband's disability because she has lived separately from him for more than fifteen years. However, disability counts for a

significant part in her identity because her social position is determined by her husband's class in a country that is not her native home. Although her experience of discrimination can be attributed to her otherness as a woman and a foreigner, Jung-Bok's disability is not irrelevant to her marginalization because of the strong bond of their matrimony. The film addresses the complicated issue of marriage among the people with disabilities in contemporary Korea via Jung-Bok and Sook-Hee.

It is common for Korean males to use a brokerage firm to marry females from Southeastern Asian countries such as Vietnam, Philippines, and Thailand. This practice is not different from bride-buying, in that virginity is considered the most valuable trait in this business (Joo par. 6). Most of the clients are divorced middle aged men from the countryside or people with disabilities (par. 8). This abnormal matchmaking is often considered as the only way that males with disabilities can marry (par. 5). However, allowing them to purchase a bride does not protect but violate their human rights as well as devaluing marriage. The film does not raise the question of immorality that might exist in the marriage of Wan-Deuk's parents nor blame the characters in order to focus on the central message of social integration. Like the misinformation about Jung-Bok could have been given to Sook-Hee by the broker, the problem might lie in the social institution, not the individuals. This view resonates with the social model of disability which finds the source of disability in systemic barriers. The film attempts to remove discriminatory remarks but the underlying assumption that a non-disabled female would not want to marry a disabled male is still present in Wan-Deuk's question. He simply asks, "Did you know my dad had a disability?" Then, Sook-Hee answers, "No, but that is not important. What is important is the heart." Although this line tells the importance of mutual feelings in marriage, it embellishes illegal transnational marriage that debases people with disabilities.

As the son of a man with disability, Wan-Deuk shares his father's humiliation with marginalization and struggles to find a home in society. As the word "marginalization" denotes, his isolation is geographically conveyed in his space. In the scene where Wan-Deuk runs away from home for a few hours, the first place he goes to is a baseball practice field. He furiously hits the ball over and over again with the bat. The fact that he rarely misses indicates that he must practice frequently. After he comes back home, the camera shows his desk where he has left a note that he left home. Next to the desk, there is a baseball box on the bookshelf and medals above it. This allusion to baseball appears towards the end again when Yun-Ha suggests Wan-Deuk eat roasted garlic because Choo Shin-Soo, who is playing in the MLB, also eats them. This alludes to the fact that Wan-Deuk has played competitive baseball. In the game of baseball, a team gets points when the batter comes back to home. Therefore, the metaphor for baseball foreshadows Wan-Deuk would come back home eventually, although the home gives him shame and loneliness.

Furthermore, there is a clear connection between where Wan-Deuk is spatially and how he progresses in the film. Wan-Deuk sits the farthest from Dong-Ju at school but the closest in the neighborhood. Their relationship is contingent on their distance from each other. In the classroom, Wan-Deuk sits in the back without a deskmate, which manifests his emotional distance from Dong-Ju and his marginalized state. The disparity between Dong-Ju and Wan-Deuk is seen in the *mise-en-abyme* in the early stage of the film where a student records Dong-Ju beating Wan-Deuk with a cane. These two identical images show how Dong-Ju's care for Wan-Deuk can be interpreted differently. In the student's camera, beating is proof of school violence. Contrarily, in the larger frame, physical discipline is an educational strategy. Because of the

much space between the two characters, Dong-Ju's expressions of care are often distorted and crowd out Wan-Deuk.

Wan-Deuk is on the edge physically, emotionally, and socially but gradually obtains stability. After Jung-Bok and Min-Gu go to business, Wan-Deuk spends his alone time at the rooftop, lamenting his misfortune. In the last sequence, however, Wan-Deuk shouts yahoo on the roof as if he has climbed a mountain. The shift of mood results from his changed perception of his location. Before, Wan-Deuk's view is horizontal and focuses on who lives next door. His neighbors are as poor as his family, which reminds him of his unpleasant circumstances. Later his outlook changes to vertical, which liberates him from meaningless comparison and helps him to recognize his personal growth.

Moving from the Margin to the Center

Although Wan-Deuk's family is characterized with many pejorative images, the transformations they undergo eventually empower them. The separation of the family at the dance in the opening scene is juxtaposed with the reunion of the family toward the ending where Wan-Deuk dances with his parents and neighbors at a dinner. The meal, traditionally associated with the family, symbolizes inclusion in the film. The connection between food and family is established earlier when Wan-Deuk stops walking on the street and enviously looks at a family eating in a restaurant over the window outside. The family has what Wan-Deuk lacks: parents and food. His loneliness and despair is dramatized as the empty underground alley in the next shot. In the previous sequence to the dinner scene, Wan-Deuk's classmate Hyuk-Ju suggests eating ramen together after school. Wan-Deuk used to decline his invitation, thinking they are not close enough to eat ramen together. However, this time Wan-Deuk willingly agrees to get

ramen with Hyuk-Ju, opening himself up. He understands the invitation to eat together to be a conciliatory gesture and uses the same method to express his welcoming of his mother as his first word to her was, “Would you like to have ramen?” In brief, Jung-Bok’s inviting his neighbors for dinner is a gesture of acceptance. Therefore, the dinner with families and friends means the extension of relationship with others and implies the broader concept of the family which is viewed as the solution to the social issues the film addresses.

The food provided at the dinner, *pyedak* (spent hen), has a significant meaning as well. This kind of chicken, which no longer lays eggs, is cheaper than others. Jung-Bok likes it not because it is inexpensive but because he likes the chewy texture. For this reason, Jung-Bok is literally and metaphorically associated with *pyedak*. The word *pyedak* etymologically denotes disability. The Sino-Korean character for the letter *pye* means trash and worthlessness. The character was also used when referring to disabled people as in *pyejilja*, which is not spoken anymore and replaced with the term *jangaein*. The word *pyejilja* was replaced because it was based on an anthropogenic and ableist idea that disability is something to eradicate just as chickens that are unable to lay eggs are believed to be useless. Not as tender as young chicken, *pyedak* has to be cook for a long time. It symbolizes the long time and much effort people take to recognize the value of *pyedak*. In spite of the fact that some people think a spent hen is unsuitable, there are others who like it. Therefore, the hen is not yet spent nor useless. Likewise, disability is never something nugatory either.

The dance at the finale of the dinner is strategically placed to represent integration in important ways. First of all, filmed with a handheld camera, it gives a feeling as if the audience is part of the dance. The characters are shown intimately in short and close-up shots. The close distance between the camera and the audience effectively resonates with the closer relationships

among the characters. Along the dance, *arirang*, a Korean folk song that is often performed to bring unity among Korean people, is played in an upbeat. The chaotic climax where everybody is mixed up and dance individually accentuate the film's subversive message for social changes:

Compared to his dismal family background, the entire work is rich in "comic" elements in the atmosphere. And the driving force behind such a humorous atmosphere is Bakhtin's Carnival Theory. Addressing race, social class, and gender liberation, the theory creates a venue for festivals, whose moods are usually represented by curses, vulgar words, excretion, maximization of the lower body, and food. Those elements are transformed in *Wandeugi*. The "carnival-like" characteristics that mature a festive atmosphere are altered, whose cases include curses and vulgar words in the talks between Wandeugi and his homeroom teacher, the foods made by his mother who left home on her return, his "sweat" when he was committed to boxing, and his midget father and stuttering Nam Min-Gu absorbed in "dance." (M. Kim 79)

One of the effects of this carnivalesque structure is to deconstruct the hegemony of ableism that discriminates against characters with disabilities. In the unlikely and reversed setting, the viewer gets to stand stereotypes on its head. The church's cinematic function is important to read this carnivalesque message present throughout the film. First of all, the religious place is reduced to the source of comedic laughter. Like the market where Jung-Bok and Min-Gu sell shoddy materials, the church is a double-sided space where the gender is mixed. At the church Wan-Deuk attends, Hassan calls Wan-Deuk "sister" and Dong-Ju calls Wan-Deuk and Yun-Ha "brothers." Furthermore, Hassan is from India where Christianity is only a minority group. Besides the transcendences of common sense, the church is not used for worshipping but mainly for helping illegal immigrants. Purchased by Dong-Ju, the church is eventually transformed into

a multicultural community center and does not function as a place of prayer. This change is foreseen from the fact Wan-Deuk no longer needs to pray to God to kill Dong-Ju. In summary, the carnivalesque elements in the film denote the discrepancy between ideals and reality and urge immediate actions for changes.

As highlighting the importance of the family and dance, the film gives a larger role to Jung-Bok and empowers him. For example, his capability as a head of household is accentuated at various scenes. For instance, Sook-Hee goes to a village market with Wan-Deuk where Jung-Bok works as an itinerant dancer and vendor after being laid off from the cabaret. This displays Wan-Deuk's father as a hard-working breadwinner. Additionally, after their first talk, Jung-Bok visits Sook-Hee's restaurant to persuade her to come back. Both in the market and the restaurant, Jung-Bok is not afraid to go outside despite the prevalent discrimination against people with disabilities. Society's unwelcoming attitude toward Jung-Bok is manifested in the stare and speech of the owner of the restaurant, who says to Sook-Hee, "There are still hunchbacks nowadays." The camera repeatedly puts him in the middle of the shot in which his prominent presence directly points out the ignorance in the restaurant owner's remark.

The empowering tone is maintained in the depiction of Min-Gu as well. One example is shown in the flashback where Min-Gu dances jitterbug alone on the stage and receives acclaim from the audience. Though Min-Gu takes little part in the film, his capacity to communicate with people around him makes his character crucial. When Wan-Deuk says hurtful words to Jung-Bok when they are arguing, Min-Gu pokes at Wan-Deuk's face without saying anything as if fondling a baby. Wan-Deuk feels Min-Gu's love for him in the kind chastisement. Since Min-Gu has a developmental disability, he is treated like a child by others with stereotypes. However, the aforementioned scene shows Min-Gu successfully performing his role as an uncle to Wan-Deuk

and communicating with him in a loving and mature way. In other words, the film depicts Min-Gu as qualified to be a caregiver.

Although the mise-en-scene unfairly spotlights Sook-Hee's vulnerability, she is also endowed with abilities as Jung-Bok and Min-Gu. Her role as a mother and source of love inherently has great influence on others. For example, her writing letters are perceived as an example of loving expression and imitated successively by other characters. To be specific, Wan-Deuk expresses his feelings for Yun-Ha through letters. Advised by Yun-Ha, Dong-Ju also confesses his love for Ho-Jeong. Through the expansion of intimate expressions, the film empowers Sook-Hee's motherly influence and suggests ways to a more integrated society.

The family's relatively bigger role does not necessarily reduce Dong-Ju's role of teacher. The film differentiates Dong-Ju from other characters by using the eyeglasses, common but symbolic props. As a prosthetic device, glasses symbolize more precise vision and wisdom. In the movie, Dong-Ju is the only adult who wears glasses. Although Wan-Deuk sits in the back in the classroom to avoid attention from the teacher, Dong-Ju is able to see his student's situation through his better vision metaphorically. His corrected vision also recognizes the ability within Jung-Bok and suggests that they do business together. When Wan-Deuk accidentally breaks Dong-Ju's rib, Dong-Ju loses his glasses during the accident. Wan-Deuk temporarily keeps the glasses for him and he sees the world differently with the help of the glasses. He realizes how he admires and likes his teacher as he prays to God that he "did not want Dong-Ju to die like this." He also learns why Dong-Ju helps illegal immigrants when overhearing the conversation between Dong-Ju and his father at the hospital. After returning the glasses to Dong-Ju, Wan-Deuk's perspective also changes back and he rebels against his teacher again. Thus, the metaphor demonstrates that those who do not wear glasses yet, who do not understand others are the real

cause of discrimination and isolation. In conclusion, the glasses mean the correct perspective and inclusive attitude we all should have to create a more inclusive society.

Additionally, Dong-Ju empowers other characters as he restores and gives names to them. The film inserts a montage where Dong-Ju repetitively calls him “yamma (Hey buster!)” in front of his name. Wan-Deuk considers the two-syllable word *yamma* as his nickname as every great man had one in the past. In the shots of the aforementioned montage, he gives examples of Baekbum Kim Ku and Do-San An Chang-Ho. His identification with these independent activists indicates that Wan-Deuk does not receive this patronizing nickname only in the negative sense. Name is significantly an act of inclusion, that gives one an identity. Although Wan-Deuk does not perceive the nickname as a good thing in the beginning, the film shows that he gives it enough meaning to care about it. Dong-Ju also finds Wan-Deuk’s mother’s name and brings her into Wan-Deuk’s life. When Wan-Deuk just hears his mother’s name for the first time, he is unable to utter her name completely, which signifies the unfamiliarity and strangeness of the existence of his mother. Therefore, calling and giving names functions as a sign of affection and intimacy.

Whereas the foods in the film function as the medium of affection, wine is often employed by Dong-Ju as an educational method that changes others’ minds. When Dong-Ju persuades Jung-Bok to allow Wan-Deuk to do kickboxing, drinking leads the characters to make changes. Dong-Ju resolves a misunderstanding about Ho-Jeong when they drink together. A significant use of the symbolic meaning of drinking happens on the day when Wan-Deuk runs away from school after hearing about his mother. Dong-Ju visits Wan-Deuk that night bringing Wan-Deuk’s backpack with him. He also brings a bottle of soju in the bag. He teaches Wan-Deuk how to drink alcohol, which is traditionally perceived as the role of the father in Korea. He

persuades Wan-Deuk to meet with his mother. Ending up yelling at each other, they do not seem to reach an agreement, but Wan-Deuk shows his change of mind in the next sequence. The unexpected use of wine as a teaching tool matches with Dong-Gu's unconventional involvement and exceptional interest in Wan-Deuk's life.

The mutual support among the members of the extended families is a crucial force to create a more integrated society. The film summarizes this theme in the last sequence through family photos. Photos are the symbol of belonging in that they include memories to remember and are moments of union. Min-Gu notices in Dong-Ju's room a photo he took with his foreigner friends at the community center. Having a rough relationship with his own father, the foreigners at church are like his family. It is also applicable to Wan-Deuk's family. Wan-Deuk puts Sook-Hee's ID picture with his photo with Jung-Bok and Min-Gu. The previous shots show a photo of young Wan-Deuk and Jung-Bok and a photo of Sook-Hee's family from the Philippines. The order of the footage implies the perfection of the family with the mother's return. The last photo features Wan-Deuk, Min-Gu, and Jung-Bok with their new car. Although Dong-Ju is not in the last photo with Sook-Hee, it is easy to tell that the person who has taken the photo is Dong-Ju. His invisible but considerable effort for Wan-Deuk's family is symbolically shown in Sook-Hee's return.

Although Dong-Ju plays positive roles in Wan-Deuk's life, his violent character renders his qualification as a teacher doubtful. Earlier in the story, Wan-Deuk's father and Dong-Ju use physical discipline to teach Wan-Deuk. Similarly, Wan-Deuk uses violence against his neighbor Du-Sik when he calls his father and uncle *byeongsin* (sick body), a derogatory term for people with disabilities. The film underscores this different use of physical communication with kickboxing. Kickboxing is used in the film as a sign of Wan-Deuk's growth. It is not clear if

Wan-Deuk seriously wants to become a professional kickboxer, but this decision makes an important mark in his life. Kickboxing appears in the second half of the film after Wan-Deuk grows up through the relationship with his family, thus becoming the symbol of maturity. Kickboxing is a stand-up combat sport based on kicking and punching, similar to boxing. For Wan-Deuk, the fact that players use both punches and kicks seems to mean they can do whatever they want to in the ring, but he is soon corrected that fight and sport are different. Whenever there is a montage of Wan-Deuk exercising and practicing kickboxing, a shot where Wan-Deuk shares his rice with Dong-Ju is inserted in the middle. It puts the physical and mental growth in parallel. To summarize, kickboxing signifies Wan-Deuk's mastery of how to use the body to communicate more peacefully.

Leaving No Margin for Disability

The film undoubtedly attempts to empower characters with disabilities. However, some of the representations are not fairly applied. To illustrate, the film avoids generalizing the different disabilities to exhibit their uniqueness but carelessly classifies them according to Marxist productivity. In the second sequence, Wan-Deuk finds the cabaret where Jung-Bok used to work has gone out of business. He sees two of the former employees playing balls in the closed building. One of them has dwarfism and the other does not have a visible disability. These two people are juxtaposed with Jung-Bok and Min-Gu and the contrast shows the diligence and responsibility the latter two have. The advocacy for economic power is also shown in Dong-Ju's words. Dong-Ju often tells his students that they should be able to earn money using their talents. For instance, after disclosing Wan-Deuk's father has become an itinerant businessman selling chopping knives, he adds that he (referring to Wan-Deuk's father) is much better than those who

have a normal body and yet loaf their time away in the house. His remarks are liable to lead to misunderstanding in that they suggest only productive bodies are appreciated in society.

Indeed, the value in productivity of the body has a lot to do with Marxism Dong-Ju teaches in his class. When the police come to school to arrest him, he teaches Marx and Weber's theories of social stratification. This explicitly shows the film's interest in addressing the inequality in Korean society. The discussion on Marx and Weber manifests important points of dispute. The major difference between Marx's view of social stratification than Weber's is that Marx emphasized that the major cause of social stratification is due to different class groups in the society, especially the two major groups, namely Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. Wan-Deuk seems to be more in favor of Marx's idea. Wan-Deuk is upset with Dong-Ju after knowing he is from a rich family and asks Dong-Ju, "Is it funny? You probably enjoy my misery. You might think 'how can there be such a perfect misfortune?'" The perfect misfortune refers to having a foreigner mother, a disabled father and being poor. If all of these obstacles have different causes, the solution must be different. However, the film suggests they can be solved by the restoration of relationships. That is, the problem is not private wealth as Marx said, but lack of compassion.

Marxist theory may see the disabled body as a completely new class of subject, particularly if that body cannot participate in production. If the disabled body is neither a member of the proletariat class nor of the bourgeois, then their position in society is questionable. Jung-Bok, in this case, clearly belongs to the worker class because he is able to earn money as Dong-Ju points out. However, the film does not provide an answer to the questions what if he cannot provide for his family and it is insufficient to draw a direct connection between the film's and Marx's stances on disability. According to Karl Marx, physical disability is closely associated with the effects of capitalism:

Marx drew a relationship between physical disability and capitalism, pointing for example to “the victims of industry, whose number increases with the growth of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc. But disability is more generally present in Marx as a trope, a metaphor for the effects of capitalism, particularly of the division of labor. Manufacture “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations.” (Brown 186)

Clearly shown in Marx’s words is that disability is a convenient metaphor to explain the cruelty of capitalism. The film asks for authentic change when Wan-Deuk learns that Dong-Ju’s father is a rich entrepreneur. Pretension, the target of his criticism, is a prominent theme because Dong-Ju teaches his students to be sincere in class. In one scene, his writing on the blackboard reads “Do not pretend to study.” He also makes fun of Hyuk-Ju when he pretends to listen and tells him to openly sleep like Wan-Deuk. Pretension is denounced because it is insulting and an obstacle to building a true relationship. Specifically, Dong-Ju’s father is a wheelchair user but does not need a wheelchair. He walks out from the room without the help of a wheelchair or even his driver. The wheelchair is a symbol of money, not disability. In other words, instrumentalizing disability is discriminating and obscures the problems that need our attention.

Although the film significantly enables the characters with disabilities, the emphasis on family relationships conversely prevents them from being completely independent in the story. This type of dependence can be explained with the concept of cure by proxy. Eunjung Kim defines in her book *Curative Violence* (2017) that cure by proxy happens when “a disabled person’s cure [is] determined by the actions of their family” (83). In the film, Wan-Deuk vicariously realizes Jung-Bok’s dream of becoming a master of martial arts by learning

kickboxing—a metaphorical cure of Jung-Bok’s kyphosis. Here, Wan-Deuk performs the role of proxy, a family member who has to do something to cure a disabled person. A proxy often feels societal expectations imposed upon them to sacrifice themselves for a collective goal as well as their own desire to support. Wan-Deuk’s interest in kickboxing is closely related to Jung-Bok’s unfulfilled desire. Their relation is reinforced in the next scene where Wan-Deuk takes Jung-Bok home by piggybacking him. Jung-Bok totters from tipsiness and Wan-Deuk gives his arm to him while they walk on the dark street home. Because of the backlighting, Jung-Bok’s short body and hunchback stand out. As they walk up a hill in front of their house, Jung-Bok tries to walk by himself. Seeing his father unable to walk straight, Wan-Deuk carries him on his back. Again, the backlighting combines the two silhouettes, making them into one unified image. While emphasizing the close bond between Wan-Deuk and his father, this visually represents Wan-Deuk’s carrying of the responsibility for cure.

As seen in Wan-Deuk piggybacking Jung-Bok, the family-oriented tradition does not always work positively in the relationship between people with disabilities and their caregivers. The binding of bodies within a family paradoxically creates the disabled family. In other words, disability becomes a family matter. Whenever people humiliate his father, Wan-Deuk becomes aggressive and violent against them. Another example of the sharing of stigma is seen in the scene where Jung-Bok drinks with Dong-Ju after arguing with Wan-Deuk about attending a kickboxing gym. Getting intoxicated, Jung-Bok shares his inner thoughts to Dong-Ju, “Mr. Yi, I very much hate my body too. This problem does not end in me but also impacts my son who is without any defect. ...When I worked at a cabaret, I saw many thugs, most of whom sloppily learned sports and have become gangsters. That is my concern.” Here, the stigma of disability is shared within the family. This is problematic because the assumptions that disabled persons

become burdens to their families “undergirds ableist ideologies that justify the refusal to provide necessary resources to all as a social entitlement” (E. Kim, *Curative Violence* 84). Similarly, the story shows the family’s poverty is resolved through the generosity of quasi-family member Dong-Ju at the end of the film when Dong-Ju opens a dance studio on his private property.

In conclusion, *Wandeugi* advocates the empowerment of people with disabilities through emphasizing the abilities of disabled characters and criticizes the stereotypes against them which are prevalent in society. The film also addresses the various issues in regard to the welfare of people with disabilities. Despite some weaknesses that might mislead or reinforce prejudices, its effective use of cinematographic metaphors visualizes the problems behind the marginalization of those who have less access to society and promotes the consolidation of family structures through the reunification of the protagonist’s family and the inclusion of other characters to the family. These alternative and expanded family relationships will ensure the care and support to be provided to those who are excluded from society because of discrimination.

III. Destigmatizing Disability in *Thread of Lies*

Lee’s *Thread of Lies* (2013) is an adaptation of Kim Ryeo-Ryeong’s novel *Graceful Lies* (2009). Focusing on extremely controversial topics, bullying and suicide, the film looks into the violence behind the stigmatization of mental and physical disabilities, especially depression. It also demonstrates how a disabling society creates discursive norms for emotional and bodily differences. This narrative of diagnosis ostracizes individuals from the “community of the normal,” which is a constant occurrence because nobody is normal. The prevalence of isolation threatens the existence of society. Pointing out that the termination of the exclusive violence is

possible through forgiveness, the film proposes the extension of familial care to others as another solution for social integration.

The film concerns a middle school student named Cheon-Ji who commits suicide. Questioning why Cheon-Ji did not leave a will, Man-Ji, her older sister, tries to find the reason for Cheon-Ji's death. As discovering the yarn balls in which Cheon-Ji has hidden her letters, Man-Ji comes to know that Cheon-Ji has been going through an abusive friendship with Hwa-Yeon and bullying by her classmates. After Cheon-Ji dies, Hwa-Yeon becomes a new target of bullying at the instigation of Mi-Ra who used to be sympathetic with Cheon-Ji. Hwa-Yeon feels extremely lonely and begins to do abnormal behaviors such as spreading bad rumors about her parents' restaurant and stealing their plates in order to get their attention. Realizing Hwa-Yeon can be another victim of bullying, Man-Ji decides to forgive Hwa-Yeon and others who were involved with Cheon-Ji's suicide.

The Landscape of Affectiphobic Society

Through Man-Ji's investigation, it is revealed that Hwa-Yeon is not the only perpetrator. Almost everyone in school, including Man-Ji, seems to be implicated in Cheon-Ji's death. In addition, the discovery of Cheon-Ji's depression makes it difficult to clarify where the responsibility lies. Depression is usually classified as a mental health condition, though it is now treated in the field of Mad Studies,⁴ which is allied to disability studies. The film explores how depression becomes a disability in a monolithic and competitive society and how this society had provoked Cheon-Ji to commit suicide.

⁴ Mad Studies is a scholarship, theory, and movement derived from Disability Studies and includes research on the social construction of mental illness.

Suicidal thoughts and behavior are common among people with depression, but not every depression ends in suicide. Problematically, when Cheon-Ji's death is assumed to be caused by depression, nobody calls other factors into question. The viewer learns about Cheon-Ji's potential depression when she borrows books about depression from the library. Aside from this, there are many circumstances where Cheon-Ji expresses her feelings of sadness. For example, she scribbles on her notebook, "Why isn't there a heart purifier although there is an air purifier?" Also, she desperately cries in front of her mother, "I will die because of *jjajangmyeon* (black-bean-sauce noodles)." However, the reason why Cheon-Ji believes she has depression, instead of just being unhappy, is revealed in one flashback where her friend Hwa-Yeon spreads a rumor that Cheon-Ji is always melancholy because her father committed suicide. Her father's early death could have had a great impact on Cheon-Ji, but connecting that to her gloomy look is a post hoc fallacy. Hwa-Yeon purposefully ignoring the correlation between her bullying and Cheon-Ji's despair is more persuasive. Although Mi-Ra later tells her classmates that Cheon-Ji's father did not commit suicide, Hwa-Yeon has effectively framed Cheon-Ji as a gloomy girl who is difficult to approach. At this point, Cheon-Ji's purported depression is made to justify excluding her from other students.

In this circumstance, the way that the classmates behave toward Cheon-Ji depends upon the language Hwa-Yeon uses to describe Cheon-Ji's emotional status, regardless of the fact. Hwa-Yeon's diagnosis of depression effectually makes Cheon-Ji's destiny to suicide a fait accompli. This is similar to the modern medical practice where a diagnosis predetermines a patient's treatment and sick role. In their book *Embodied Rhetorics*, James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson expound, "Disability provides one of the best examples of how the language of institutional discourse systems determines material practices in ways that can work

to the advantage—and disadvantage—of the disabled person. For example, diagnostic labels both predict and determine outcomes by denying or providing medical treatments or educational services” (11). Cheon-Ji’s case follows the same pattern. If the diagnosis says that she, having depression, is not capable of socializing with others, then she is denied the opportunity to make friends. Therefore, the outcasting of Cheon-Ji from the class is tightly linked to the pathologization that ostracizes people with disabilities from society.

An affectophobic society draws arbitrary lines to pathologize certain emotions in a similar way that a racist society does for particular races. Put differently, affectophobia conveniently simplifies individual and complex experiences of feeling “bad” in the same way ableism disregards the complexity of physical differences. In this normative atmosphere, depression—an umbrella term conveniently encompassing almost every negative feeling from anxiety, apathy, and anger to discontent, guilt, and sadness—is a “cultural and social phenomenon rather than a medical disease” (Cvetkovich 2). Cvetkovich attributes this ideology to the current neoliberal demands for productivity. Under this condition, it is believed depression must be removed since depressive feelings are infectious and depressed people are inefficient. On the stigmatization of depression, Lennard Davis explains, “the current diagnostic categories of major depressive disorder and major depressive episode [a]re swallowing up a significant part of the human phenomenological experience, medicalizing a portion of the common emotional range” (Flexer 341-2). The controversy over the medicalization of certain mental and psychological spectrums is a long-running one. The current diagnostic categories, exemplified by the widely used Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), have been criticized for their oversimplification of the vast continuum of human behavior and the possibility of stigmatization.

In the film, affectiphobic society requires people to always be happy by putting everyone in panoptic surveillance where they become each other's watcher. The enforcement of happiness is well described in Hyun-Sook's customer service training at her work. In the training, she has to smile and is asked to be kind with customers. Her laughter is especially loud and exaggerated among her colleagues. Her unnatural facial and body expressions redound to her grief inside. In another instance, Hyun-Sook pretends to be cheerful in front of Man-Ji and puts pressure on herself to live a better life in lieu of the deceased daughter. Her contrived smile is the resonance of Cheon-Ji who also pretends to be okay in front of others. The societal pressure to be happy is rarely recognized as violence because happiness is a common goal of humanity. However, when forced to and discriminating against those who are depressed, the request for happiness becomes violent.

The little tolerance for depression in the film could be because of the overarching society and its values. In this environment, disability is eliminated and deviance is corrected to maintain uniformity among the members. Because the homogenous society is less likely to embrace new ideas, the strict rules of customs function as standards of behavior. The landlord in the first sequence embodies this traditional view. The audience is aware that Hyun-Sook has deliberately chosen to move to Chowon Apartment in order to make Hwa-Yeon and her family feel guilty, but they are also informed that the original reason she had to move was the previous landlord's discrimination. The landlord kicks the family out from the apartment because Cheon-Ji's suicide is considered to be ominous and portentous. Hyun-Sook resents the fact that the landlord regards Cheon-Ji as an evil spirit. Obsessed with folk beliefs, the lady stands outside until the moving truck departs so that they do not leave behind any trash in the complex that might be

contaminated by the evil spirit. The demonization of Cheon-Ji is extremely pejorative and yet so commonly practiced in the tradition where disability is viewed as a divine curse.

The cinematography of the film also demonstrates how the monolithic environment advocates the normal and easy to conform. For example, the very first shot is indicative of homogeneity. The establishing shot shows the scenery of the apartment complex where a green bus stops in front of the building. The apartment has the same shape of rooms within and the green buses are of the same color, which visually shows Korea as a highly uniformed society. In the peaceful scene, the sunlight cuts through the frame in an oblique line as if foreshadowing there would be an event that causes irregularity to the unquestioned order. In addition, the film describes the people caught by the oppression of mannerism in rectangular images. For example, after the funeral of Cheon-Ji, Hyun-Sook sits on the threshold of the veranda. There she waters the plants with no flowers and the windows are closed, which signifies the fixedness of the public eye and the absence of the possibility of change or improvement. Her body is tightly framed by the threshold and the door. The visuals indicate that she is controlling her emotions by keeping them in that imaginary box.

An extreme society where members are expected to be identical is prone to enforce independence onto them. This environment severely stigmatizes those who cannot be independent like some with disabilities. Although society idealizes that a full personhood should be a “discrete and autonomous” subject (Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies” 1580), the reality is that to be a person is always to be in some way dependent on other people. Due to the societal demand to be independent, Cheon-Ji is left without help. When she asks her sister Man-Ji what she should do if her only friend is someone who stabs her in the back, Man-Ji carelessly says that she can be alone. If she recognized that all people are interdependent, she

could have been more accepting of disability in Cheon-Ji. Then Cheon-Ji does not have to fear needing others.

The lack of the concept of human interdependence affects both the victim and offender of bullying in the film. Interestingly, Cheon-Ji, Hwa-Yeon, and Mi-Ra all have experienced lack of love from family. For example, Hwa-Yeon's parents are always busy and they often abuse their daughter verbally and physically. She wants to be loved by others so she spends money to earn their hearts. She treats her friends to snacks, takes them to karaoke, and buys popcorn at the theater. To Cheon-Ji, however, her desire for attention and recognition is expressed violently. She backbites her friends and spreads rumors, taking advantage of their closeness. On the other hand, Mi-Ra's squandering father beats his wife and she dies leaving her two daughters behind. Mi-Ra hates Cheon-Ji, believing Hyun-Sook is the cause of her mother's death. When Cheon-Ji says she supports her mother's dating without knowing Hyun-Sook's boyfriend is Mi-Ra's father, Mi-Ra betrays Cheon-Ji and replies with a flood of injurious words. Their sense of loss does not justify their violence but shows that lack of love and understanding are prevalent in society and that emotional disability is the real problem behind bullying.

Thread of Lies features psychological interactions among characters and the subtlety of violence, thereby exposing the sensitivity and the underlying cultural context of serious social problems. Like Cheon-Ji's friends who do not recognize the violent nature of their actions, stereotypes of people with disabilities are hardly considered as violence although it is as physically effective as other types of violence. The film represents its subtlety in predominantly-female communication, sophisticated use of symbolic imagery, and the deep investigation of the mentality of the characters who are involved in school violence. They all show the real cause of Cheon-Ji's suicide and, in a broad scope, of disability.

The reality of silent violence is proven in the label tagged to Cheon-Ji. Both Mi-Ra and Hwa-Yeon confirm in their lines that Cheon-Ji is *eundda* (the abbreviation of *eungunhi wangdda*) meaning “the stealthily bullied.” At Hwa-Yeon’s birthday party, the girls utilize a code word by referring to Cheon-Ji as “my sister” so that she does not recognize they are talking about her. The exclusion is aurally clear that everyone but Cheon-Ji texts on the group chat and the room is filled with the sound of a ringtone. They are physically together but emotionally separated in different realms. Indeed, social media and technology have brought bullying to a new level through cyberbullying. The fact that Hwa-Yeon threatens her classmates to disclose the group chat and calls them accomplices implies she understands playing a joke on Cheon-Ji in cyberspace is hurting. However, the onlookers try to put the blame wholly on Hwa-Yeon by ignoring her.

The collective avoidance of responsibility by the onlookers is an actual problem just as the stereotypical mindset is violence that is not externalized yet. When Sang-Bak runs away from mice, argues with the janitor over the waste fee and beats up Man-Ho, the children in the neighborhood spectate him and Man-Ji’s family. The kids do not have context but are entertained by the spectacles. Likewise, it seems like people do not know each other’s life very well and are not interested to know them. To some of them, the suffering of others are just tidbits of gossip. Paying attention to others requires a lot of effort. To be specific, Mr. Dumpling, who distributes samples of dumplings next to Hyun-Sook, suffers from hair loss. Hyun-Sook did not know about it, although they have worked together for a long time. Some disabilities are invisible just as nobody knew about Cheon-Ji’s depression and Mr. Dumpling’s hair loss.

The inherent subtlety of female communication is partly attributed to silent violence. For this reason, Man-Ji has difficulty in fulfilling her detective role in the film. When Man-Ji and

Cheon-Ji enter the *tteokbokki* place, the camera captures the sisters and Hwa-Yeon, focusing on them so that the viewer can see all of them. But a shallow depth of view is utilized on the sisters, making Hwa-Yeon blurry in the background, which symbolizes that Man-Ji does not see and judge Hwa-Yeon correctly. To Cheon-Ji's question "what do you think about Hwa-Yeon," Man-Ji casually answers, "She seems cute." Man-Ji is ignorant of what Hwa-Yeon does outside where the camera is unfocused and yet what Cheon-Ji suffers from all happens in blind spots.

Due to the invisibility of violence, the film uses the strikingly visible color of red to represent Cheon-Ji's pain as well as other character's pain. For example, Hwa-Yeon has a bloody nose when confronting the class about her charge of bullying. In this case, blood symbolizes her stress, anxiety, and guilt. When Man-Ho has a bloody nose, that means shame. The viewer immediately recognizes the outcome of violence in the red blood from these characters. Then, they can easily associate the color with Cheon-Ji's yarn ball and consequently her emotional wound. Another use of the color red is related to Mi-Ra. Cheon-Ji and Mi-Ra have a shared hideout in school, which the red thread they unwind has taken them to. The place is surrounded by bushes behind a building whose greens make a strong contrast with the red thread. Like the thin red line and the potato chips they eat at their hideout, the friendship between Cheon-Ji and Mi-Ra is also breakable. In short, the understated use of symbols displays the imperceptible existence of apparent violence.

The Parallels between Mental and Physical Disabilities

Although the focus of the story revolves around Cheon-Ji's family and friends, the stranger Choo Sang-Bak plays a significant role in that Cheon-Ji shares her innermost feelings only with him. Thus, the film carefully characterizes Sang-Bak to put him in parallel to Cheon-Ji

and replaces her voice after her passing. Similar to Cheon-Ji, Sang-Bak was bullied in school because of his scar which he received because of a fire. He was called a “monster” by his schoolmates. The scar covers his neck and back and there is no hair around the burned area, so he grows his hair long. Throughout the film, Cheon-Ji’s short height provides others a reason to look down on her like Sang-Bak’s bodily deformation was the cause of his teasing. Because of the similar experiences, Sang-Bak is empathetic to Cheon-Ji. The emotional attachment makes him a more persuasive spokesman for Cheon-Ji. When Man-Ji asks him why people have to hide their depression from their friends, Sang-Bak replies, “People who have no problem with making friends do not understand. At Cheon-Ji’s age, friends are everything in their life.” It becomes obvious that Man-Ji did not know Cheon-Ji’s situation well through her conversation with Sang-Bak.

Because even her sister is unaware of the circumstances, the film spends quite a lot of time depicting Cheon-Ji in the opening sequence. There, Cheon-Ji irons her school uniform from which her love of orderliness and cleanliness is manifested. She is also sensitive to other’s emotions. Hyun-Sook leaves the house first with Man-Ji and asks Cheon-Ji to clean the table before going to school. The film displays the kitchen is clean with an empty table to show Cheon-Ji completed what her mother asked her to do even before she dies. Sang-Bak has the similar obsession with exactness in that he parts his hair exactly in the middle. The film does not blame their personality for their being hurt from bullying. Instead, it claims that Sang-Bak can better understand Cheon-Ji because their personalities are similar.

Another similarity between Cheon-Ji and Sang-Bak is that they are both associated with a scarf. Cheon-Ji hangs herself using her red knit scarf and Sang-Bak always wears a scarf to cover his scar. The thin and long cloth has symbolic meanings. Cheon-Ji could have use other methods

to commit suicide, but she chooses hanging. Hanging is a common way because it does not require much money to buy pills or other fatal tools. Also, it does not draw much attention as drowning and jumping do. Aside from these practical reasons, the film deliberately chooses hanging to suggest its metaphor for a fragile connection. Hanging visually shows the vulnerability Cheon-Ji had felt. In the beginning, Cheon-Ji knits a big rectangle with red thread. It does not have a specific usage and size. She just keeps knitting until she is satisfied and undoes it. However, before she dies, she knits a scarf instead of a rectangle, probably planning to use it for suicide. She has desperately relied on a thin thread of hope until the day she died. She might have saved the red scarf if her mother had agreed to knit a hat for her. Therefore, the scarf symbolizes the weak relationships Cheon-Ji has with others and the suffocating pain from the violence. Similarly, the scarf which Sang-Bak wears also stands for his lack of connections with the outside world and is a manifestation of existing violence. He covers his scar using his scarf to avoid people's attention. It enables him to hide his stigma and vulnerability and to act like the non-disabled. The relationships he has with others can be changed without the scarf.

Structurally, Sang-Bak's role is to speak for Cheon-Ji. However, thematically, he plays an indispensable role to reveal impediments to social integration. Through him, the film demonstrates the common challenges people with disabilities experience in society. For example, when the plates from the restaurant that Hwa-Yeon's parents run continue to disappear, the deliverer suspects Sang-Bak. To Sang-Bak's question "Why would I need the plates?," the deliverer responds that people use them as saucers for plants without telling why he assumes Sang-Bak would grow plants. People with disabilities are often suspected as a potential aggressor because of the baseless myth that people with disabilities are inclined to violence. This is not unrelated to Man-Ji's suspicion that Cheon-Ji might have been sexually assaulted by Sang-Bak

because it was Hwa-Yeon's slander hiding her fault. The film criticizes the stereotype against disability by revealing its illogicality through Sang-Bak's voice.

Another challenge that people with disabilities might face is unemployment. The film implies the difficulty of entering the workforce through Sang-Bak's preparation for employment. Sang-Bak is an unmarried man in his twenties. The audience has no clue if he was employed previously or not. Like many young people who prepare for the civil service exam, he must have a part-time job or be provided for by his family. Because the government is one of the few equal opportunity employers, this career path seems more reasonable to someone like Sang-Bak who is a high-school dropout and has a disability. Since ineffective policies give rise to the unemployment of people with disabilities,⁵ entering public service could be the only option. In conclusion, the film points to few employment opportunities for people with disabilities through Sang-Bak's characterization.

What is noteworthy in the depiction of Sang-Bak is his monstrosity or femininity. In Garland-Thomson's book *Extraordinary Bodies* (2017), the word "monstrosity" encapsulates Aristotle's discourse of the normal and the abnormal (20). He defines the female as the deviant of the male; therefore, they become monsters created against natural law—the definitive norm. Because of the long-standing association between femaleness and disability, Sang-Bak's disability is manifested outwardly through his effeminate looks. At his first appearance, Man-Ji and her mother are confused with his gender because of his long hair. Whereas Man-Ji calls him "uncle" immediately, Hyun-Sook does not believe he is a man even after exchanging a few

⁵ According to the Act on the Employment Promotion and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, the law enforces public and private corporations to hire people with disabilities whose number should take up 3.4% (public) or 3.1% (private) of the entire employees as of 2021 (Korea Employment Agency for Persons with Disabilities 2021). Unfortunately, many companies would rather pay the penalty (Nam 2).

words. She is finally convinced Sang-Bak is a male when she sees his Adam's apple. When Man-Ho encounters him, he is again questioned of his sex. When Man-Ho calls him a bitch, Sang-Bak corrects him, saying that he is a jerk. Both terms dehumanize him, but he does not care much as long as the gender is correct. Regardless of his efforts, his femaleness is intensified by the admiration he receives from Mr. Dumpling whose manly beard is visually contrasted with Sang-Bak's long hair.

The gender role that the sexist society holds is also the norm from which Sang-Bak strays. For example, he fails to catch mice in Man-Ji's apartment even though Man-Ji expects a male adult like him should be able to do so. Furthermore, Sang-Bak tries to help Hyun-Sook when Man-Ho comes to see her at her workplace but is beaten by him instead. On the other hand, he can make dumplings from scratch and Mr. Dumpling is impressed by his cooking skill. His masculinity is almost reclaimed when he knocks down Man-Ho, but soon he suffers from his counterattack, and Man-Ji suppresses the disturbance on behalf of him. Because Sang-Bak does not follow the traditional gender roles, the other characters have difficulty trusting him. However, what makes him a "monster" is not his deviance but the discursive norm. Likewise, the source of discrimination against disability is the concept of able-bodiedness.

Because of his confusing identity, the characters surrounding him struggle to have a good communication with him, which exposes another example of discrimination. After the fight with Man-Ho, Sang-Bak is invited to Man-Ji's apartment to drink coffee. He carelessly asks Man-Ji's mother why she dated such a guy, which makes the conversation awkward. To break the ice, Man-Ji's mother changes the topic and suggests if she can help him cut his hair. When she tries to tie his hair, he avoids her touch and leaves the apartment hurriedly. This scene indicates that

even a well-intended action of kindness can be violent. Again, the film emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships to achieve a better integrated society.

Forgiving but not Forgetting

The repetition of bullying in the classroom resonates with a survival game where participants kill each other. Although the game is set in a lawless world, bullying has a repeating pattern: the offender becomes the next victim. After Cheon-Ji dies, Hwa-Yeon becomes the target of bullying by Mi-Ra. Mi-Ra is less likely to be removed because she has her endearing sister, but she will be bullied after Hwa-Yeon is out of the game. On this cycle, the last ones to survive are onlookers. They enjoy the spectacle but do not directly participate. If nobody plays the offender, they will make someone their puppet to continue the game. The film maintains that someone should stop the game and that the solution is forgiveness.

Although Cheon-Ji cannot stop the violence when she is alive, she tries to give conditional forgiveness to her offenders. She leaves five balls of red thread with the note hidden or sealed inside to those whom she wants to forgive. Those individuals obtain Cheon-Ji's pardon only when they find the message inside the yarn. Red threads symbolize relationships in Asian culture like in Makoto Shinkai's film *Your Name* (2017). In other words, the red yarn that characters entangle and untie symbolizes the human relationships people forge and break off. Also similar to the blood vein, it visualizes the interconnectedness between people. Both blood and relationship are vital in human existence. Indeed, humans cannot live alone. Just as Man-Ji feels redeemed after finding the red yarn, Cheon-Ji's forgiveness becomes a lifeline to those who suffer from their own mistakes.

Food is another solution for disintegration. Man-Ji's mother works at a supermarket where people come to buy groceries. She distributes samples of organic tofu. Being the source of good food, she symbolizes the nourishment of the soul from a loving mother. When Man-Ho leaves after a commotion, she invites them to her place worrying he might beat them out of anger. She feeds them and resolves misunderstandings with Mi-Ra who has insulted Hyun-Sook before. Instead of condemning her, Hyun-Sook offers a home meal like their own mother. Although they do not become one family through remarriage, the two sisters are integrated into Man-Ji's family. This is contrasted with Hwa-Yeon's mother who runs a Chinese-Korean restaurant. She serves in the hall, thus being less associated with food. She is rather the source of money than the food. Unlike the supermarket where people with similar pain heal each other, her restaurant is a place of contention where Hyun-Sook reminds her of her responsibility in Cheon-Ji's death. In the same manner, forgiveness does not work out well with Hwa-Yeon's mother as she does not give Hwa-Yeon the MP3 that Hyun-Sook has bought for her but throws it away in the trash can.

Other characters practice forgiveness as well; some successfully, others unsuccessfully. Man-Ji follows her mother's example for forgiveness. Mi-Ran rebukes her sister for participating in bullying but protects her when Man-Ji denounces her sister after reading Cheon-Ji's note left for Mi-Ra. Mi-Ran keeps crying in class feeling guilty, so Man-Ji leaves a handkerchief on her desk and leaves the classroom. Man-Ji forgives Hwa-Yeon as well. When Man-Ji hands Cheon-Ji's note to Hwa-Yeon, the camera closes up their hands and does not show their face. It focuses on the hands and the note connected together so that it delivers the message of integration. Cheon-Ji's homeroom teacher, however, shows the opposite of forgiveness. When Soo-Kyung comes to return Cheon-Ji's gym clothes, she emotionally reacts to Soo-Kyung's excuses and

induces more violence. The teacher is famous for her meddling in conflicts between students. She asks Mi-Ra to be friends with others and for students to hug each other to reconcile. Compared to her enthusiasm to create harmony in school, she is not so observant and her intentional involvement is not helpful. She does not even look at Cheon-Ji when she gives a presentation. Furthermore, she does not stop Hwa-Yeon and others from making noises during her presentation. In a similar way, the school is indifferent to Cheon-Ji's suicide and the work to find the truths is wholly put on Man-Ji's shoulder.

After forgiving those who exclude Cheon-Ji, Man-Ji still has a duty to watch for those who fall victim to bullying. Preventing violence can be a heavy task. The film again advocates the family for that job. When Hyun-Sook finds out Mr. Dumpling's nephew is being bullied by his classmates, she gives fifty dollars to her coworker's nephew and asks him to tell everything to his mother. Using Hyun-Sook's lines, the film indirectly criticizes the government's policy to prevent school violence which is to install more surveillance cameras. Society needs more human interactions rather than machine control. Although there were witnesses, nobody was unable to stop the bully. The real solution is communication. The film highlights this theme toward the end in the scene where Hwa-Yeon leans on Man-Ji's shoulder in the subway on their way back home. It visually shows that Hwa-Yeon is dependent on Man-Ji in getting over bullying and being bullied. After this scene, Hyun-Sook and Man-Ji walk down the hill together crossing their arms. The obvious physical contacts between the characters symbolizes more intimate interaction between them.

In conclusion, depression is medically pathologized as abnormality in affectiphobic society. Like the physical deformity of Sang-Bak, depression is stigmatized and isolated. How exactly the violence affects the bodies might not be so obvious compared to its severity because

of its subtlety. But for this reason, more careful and inclusive manners are required. The film exquisitely demonstrates the complexity through symbolic images and delicate characterization. To prevent the exclusion that is tragically expressed in the film, we need to stop the violence by forgiving and caring for others as Man-Ji and Hyun-Sook do.

IV. Disability as Marks of the Traumatic War in *A Melody to Remember*

Based on the Navy Children's Choir that performed at military camps and field hospitals around the country during the Korean War, *A Melody to Remember* (2016) presents the choir of orphans as an alternative family that heals war wounds through mutual support. Externally, the choir comforts those who are in the battlefield including the soldiers. Internally, the kids and adults are unified and function like a family supporting each other. The familial harmony of the choir is a metaphor for reconciliation, which theme recurrently appears in Lee's films.

Lieutenant Han Sang-Ryeol, the protagonist of the film, studied music in college before being drafted. He is transferred from the front line to Busan to supervise an orphanage organized by the United Nations. Sang-Ryeol decides to start a children's choir to protect war orphans from the terrors of the war. Dong-Gu and Soon-Yi, brother and sister, join the choir together although Soon-Yi has stopped singing after her father's death. Chun-Sik, whose brother has become a human shield on the battlefield due to the libel by Dong-Gu's father, is also in the choir. Dong-Gu and Chun-Sik fight like cats and dogs at first, but they are reconciled through singing together. Before long, Sang-Ryeol decides to dissolve the choir when the colonel plans to send them to a combat area to boost soldiers' morale. However, the children in the choir insist on proceeding with the choir. During one of the tours in the combat area, Dong-Gu is shot by North Korean soldiers hiding in the woods. Soon-Yi, who has refused to sing, finally sings for her

dying brother. After the truce, the choir, where Soon-Yi sings a solo now, goes around the country to comfort the people.

As Eunjung Kim maintains, “metaphors of war are often used to structure experiences with illness and disability” (*Curative Violence* 14) and vice versa. Like many post-war movies, disability manifests the destructive power of military violence in this film. The three male adults—Sang-Ryeol, Sergeant Jo, and Hook—all have an injury received from the war. However, the film does not instrumentalize disability as a national trope like in the 1960s. Instead, physical and mental impairments become an individual experience that needs a collective treatment. In other words, impairment equally influences each of the characters, but they have different responses to it and benefit from trusted relationships in dissimilar ways. By depicting a multifaceted and complex aspect of impairment, the film demonstrates how disability works in reality after the traumatic event of Korean War.

Questioning the Masculinity of Military Veterans

Sergeant Jo develops a limp after he was shot in the battle where Sang-Ryeol saved his life by risking his own. He was a military policeman when they reunite in Busan. He explains why he joined the military police in a self-mocking voice, “Because I am a *byeonsin* with this leg, I can’t do much in the outside world anyway. Here I get respect for war experience too.” This line exhibits the disadvantages imposed upon people with disabilities. There are of course many jobs Sergeant Jo could take outside the army because he has mobility albeit limited. On the contrary, it is common sense that the army prefers a “healthy” body that could fight effectively and that his body would face more limitations in the battle. What Sergeant Jo negatively mentions about the outside world is not about employment opportunities but discrimination

against his impairment. Outside the military, impairment means lack of ability. However, in the military, disability is something to be respected and honored as the mark of war experience. In his new post, Sergeant Jo still fights in a leadership position in the war and keeps his promise to return Sang-Ryeol's favor, which displays his capability to contribute to the country. His rehabilitation is tied to national growth and development (E. Kim, *Curative Violence* 35).

Although the film positively depicts Sergeant Jo's capable body, he is not always accepted as a fully capable human being. Like other movies set during the Korean War, war wounds mean loss of masculinity for Sergeant Jo's disability. Kyung-Hyun Kim lays out the history of the cinematic use of the Korean War in his book *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*:

The films produced during the Golden Age of Korean cinema in the 1960s desperately sought to reconstruct Korea's masculinity that was devitalized when Korea's military sovereignty (along with cultural subjectivity) was relinquished to the United States upon the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. In the early 1990s, the Korean War became one of the most popular settings of Korean cinema, but there was one crucial change that distinguished the New Korean Cinema from that of the Golden Age. The stylistic insistence on realism in the New Korean Cinema ended up proliferating representations of men who had lost their virility and authority during the war. (79)

In the 2010s, the gender meaning of the Korean War in Korean cinema is not so different from the previous eras. Sergeant Jo's decision to stay in the army might connote his desire to regain militarized masculinity. As Eunjung Kim notes, "Casting the masculine effort as patriotic duty, serving the nation imagined as an extended patriarchal family, redeems male citizens through their humanitarianism" (*Curative Violence* 112). For this reason, Sergeant Jo's fatherly role in

the orphanage and his service in the military are viewed as a necessary process to “be a man.” However, this defines masculinity as if it is a singular trait and strengthens the belief that disability is emasculating. Countering this claim, Gagen says that disabled men can embrace new conceptions of the self by negotiating with their altered corporeal state, thus indicating dynamic and flexible notion of masculinities (525). From this perspective, Sergeant Jo’s return to the army is less empowering. However, the relationship between his initial embodiment of the emasculated man and his restoration of masculinity can still empower the character when there is no suggestion for alternative masculinity.

Regarding the relationship between disability and sexuality, Longmore explains, “Stigma and discrimination are still especially powerful regarding sexuality and romance. In a sexually supercharged culture that places almost obsessive emphasis on attractiveness, people with various disabilities are often perceived as sexually deviant and even dangerous, asexual, or sexually incapacitated either physically or emotionally” (141). The doubt on sexuality of disabled individuals is also applicable to the description of Sergeant Jo’s conscious pursuit of romance in the film. However, it enables Sergeant Jo with his aptitude for courtship. His ability is drastically compared to romantically challenged Sang-Ryeol, who is awkward with the headmaster Ju-Mi. On their first encounter, Sang-Ryeol reluctantly shakes hands with Ju-Mi. His eyes dart back and forth between her hand and her face, and Ju-Mi pulls her hand back uncomfortably. Sergeant Jo gives the eye to stop Sang-Ryeol when Sang-Ryeol rebukes smiling Ju-Mi for her being happy even in the war time. Whereas Sang-Ryeol cannot look at Ju-Mi’s eyes, Sergeant Jo exchanges looks with the nanny So-Dam in the orphanage, which is dramatically emphasized when they look at each other as they open the curtains to the opposite side. His romantic relationship with So-Dam is significant with regard to his impairment, not

because So-Dam is a non-disabled woman but because Sergeant Jo is abnormally depicted with heterosexual desire.

On the day when Sang-Ryeol comes to Busan, Sergeant Jo takes him to a bar which is decorated with sensational posters. The bar is full of American soldiers who freely court and drink foreign liquors. The admiration for the foreign, especially western, is not so strange considering the time. Especially, American forces suggest masculine and imperialist power compared to “the feminized national identity placed on Korea” (E. Kim, *Curative Violence* 21). However, the images of western women on the poster are connected to the pornographic magazine that Sergeant Jo reads. In the book *The problem body*, Eunjung Kim explains, “Cinematic representation of disabled men’s sexuality often aims to externalize their humanity by pursuing that heterosexual male desire is universal” (133). One of the ableist stereotypes against wounded veterans is their lack of masculinity and sexual appeal. The film never alludes to such biases but touches on the complex issue of sexuality of people with disabilities. Kim further explains, “Overwhelmed by the presence of disability, forwarding the value of heterosexuality is reconfigured as a curing intervention to the “damaged,” “emasculated” other. Simultaneously, the imagined need for the heterosexualization of disabled men reinforces the belief that disability naturally desexualizes the body” (152). Likewise, the film’s emphasis on Sergeant Jo’s indulgence in western women reinforces his deviance from the normal. His erotic fantasy is fixed when he dates a local woman whose nativeness is highlighted by her thick dialect.

Captain Hook and Stigma

Disability often becomes the icon of villains in disabling society. Longmore contends, “Among the most persistent is the association of disability with malevolence. Deformity of body symbolizes deformity of soul. Physical handicaps are made the emblems of evil” (133). This type of representation is problematic because it “reflects and reinforces...three common prejudices against handicapped people: disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their “fate”; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them” (134). Unfortunately, Hook, the character with a prosthetic arm in the film, proves what Longmore defines with his villain role. However, as a round and layered character, Hook challenges the stereotypical role by exhibiting complex, multifaceted personalities.

Despite his significant role, Hook’s real name is unknown but he is named after the hook replacing his hand. Different from Sergeant Jo, Hook is exceptionally stigmatized with his impaired hand. When one of the children in the orphanage comes to Sang-Ryeol to report on Hook’s deeds, the boy refers to Hook as “the guy without a hand.” This is degrading since his impaired hand functions as the single stigmatic trait that identifies him. It is prejudiced but common for a person with an impairment to become known only by their impairment. As disability studies scholars have discovered, “people with disabilities can be reduced to the physical evidence of their bodily difference” (Snyder & Mitchell, *Narrative Prosthesis* 123). However, Hook is more than his hook, so his impaired hand should not be considered as the whole of his identity.

The absence of his name and his relationships with children connect him with Captain Hook in Scottish novelist and playwright James Matthew Barrie’s *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904). He plays a typical sinister villain which is one of the only two

traditional roles given to characters with disabilities in Western culture. The other role is supercrip which Sergeant Jo is assigned to play. The main antagonist Captain Hook is a vengeful pirate and captain of the ship Jolly Roger in Neverland who lives to kill Peter Pan, the leader of the Lost Boys. Similarly, Hook holds a grudge that he has lost his hand in the battle and feels animosity against Sang-Ryeol who leads the orphans he used to guide. Like Captain Hook thinks Peter Pan is too cocky, Hook regards Sang-Ryeol to be prideful, feeling jealous of him at the same time. Captain Hook is afraid of a crocodile who swallowed his hand and clock. Clock is an important motif in the film as well. Hook gives a watch to Sang-Ryeol for a bribery so that he would look past the stealing of gasoline. Also, Hook takes a watch off from Young Master after he beats him up. As the symbol for money, a watch is the object of Hook's fear and desire. Thus, there are clear parallels between Captain Hook and Hook.

Hook also resembles Captain Hook for taking advantage of children and having an inferiority complex. He allows Dong-Gu to join the choir only to make him steal gasoline from the base. He successfully does this forcing Dong-Gu's against his will by threatening him that he would sell away his sister. He is conscious about his impairment all the time. When Sang-Ryeol visits his house to take Dong-Gu and Soon-Yi to the orphanage, Hook stops him by saying, while making a rattling sound with his hook, "Do you take me for a chump because I'm a cripple? Do you have no pity for me? I'm doing this for my survival too!" The self-pity in this line might have something to do with the scene shown right before where he pretends to shoot with a gun at the mirror reflecting his face. The gun, used in the battle, symbolizes the war experience where he lost his arm. Therefore, his playing with the gun in front of the mirror is a ceremony to redeem himself for the loss.

Hook's sense of inferiority and disability might come from his relationship with the pro-Japanese Young Master. Therefore, his impairment can be read in a colonial context as well. In fact, Young Master's attitude toward Hook is similar to the colonial violence by the Japanese Imperial soldiers. Some scholars believe discrimination against disability is a modern convention introduced from Japan. Jeong contends that pre-colonial Korea had an advanced welfare system for people with disabilities and their isolation from community recently emerged from colonization (16-17). The evidence is that the word *bulguja*, "literally meaning 'a person who is not fully equipped or whose bodily part has lost its function'" is a borrowed term from Japanese (Choi 435). That word was first used after the opening of a port to Japan and replaced traditional words for different diseases and injuries (Jeong 145). That is, the advent of the term *bulguja* changed Korean conception of disability from something added to the body to something missing in the body. Jeong also argues that under the Japanese occupation the lives of the disabled became limited in the course of modernization and industrialization, and yet necessary welfare policies were abolished (8).

During the Japanese colonial period, the theoretical ground for colonial and ableist violence was eugenics. Eugenics was widely used by the Japanese Empire to claim their superiority over non-Japanese Asians (Robertson 436). Against the argument that eugenics is not a Japanese invention, Robertson's explanation can be useful that "eugenics as a set of ideological positions and practices continue[d] to be pursued in various ways, perhaps more overtly in Japan than elsewhere (442). Young Master's harassment of Hook, therefore, can be allegorically read as the suppression of Korean people by Japanese imperialism. The use of metaphor for disablement was often used to convey the colonized situation. For example, in the mid-phase of the Japanese colonial period people witnessed "the appearance of a sizable body of writings on

disability” (Choi 435). Likewise, the cinematic adoption of disability in the character Hook can be a self-reflection of colonialism.

The colonial and disabling oppression is well manifested in Hook’s character flaws. Hook has lost his left arm in the battle. He was originally one of the colonel’s men. He becomes sensitive when people call him “*byeongsin*.” The pro-Japanese guy whom Hook calls “Young Master” uses this term to demoralize him. For example, Young Master orders Hook to steal gasoline from the base and Hook refuses but eventually agrees to give it a try. Then, Young Master says, “Those who don’t even try are the real cripples.” One of Young Master’s men laughs at it, understanding Young Master is implying Hook’s impaired hand though Young Master says, “I didn’t say that because of your hand.” Instead of standing up against Young Master, Hook beats up the guy who laughed at him to near death. Warning the guy, Hook says, “Do you know what this hand means? I traded my hand for this country!” Through this line, Hook emphasizes his impairment is not something that could be ridiculed. This representation is similar to those in war narratives where disablement carries propagandic messages. Contrary to its purpose, the glorifying of war wounds makes their current disabilities stand out in comparison with what they could do for the nation in the past.

However, the pride and patriotism in the wound of honor is incongruous with his actions to help pro-Japanese people to earn money. Rather, it makes the viewer wonder about his motivation to work as Young Master’s pawn and what his impairment means. His impaired arm might be used as a figurative device to explain Hook’s villainy. Taking the supervillain into account, Hook’s impairment can be interpreted as more than a visual manifestation of his crooked personality. He first appears in the darkness as he wears a prosthetic hand. The next scene shows children scream at him and run away as he approaches. The negative implications of

his character are further reinforced in his smacking the bag thieves with a rod and Ju-Mi's disgusted attitude toward him. His arm, which appears prominently in aggressive motions, is key to understanding his character. However, his impairment is not limited to symbolizing his nature.

Although Hook is violent and abusive, he is not comparable to Young Master. Young Master is a son from a wealthy pro-Japanese family. He used connection to skip a draft and lives on the coast of Busan so that he can escape to Japan when the battle breaks out nearby. Furthermore, Young Master is a pedophile, who constantly attracts young girls with chocolate and money and caresses them. The absolute evil exploits Hook for "mutual" benefit. What Hook does for him—intermediary exploitation—is exactly the same as the pro-Japanese did for Imperial Japan during the colonial era. After the liberation, the pro-Japanese still had dominance over the colonized people using their wealth, becoming the new colonizer. In this situation, Hook is both a colonizer and colonized. It is obvious how Hook became a colonizer. However, it is dubious how Hook's body is synonymous with the suffering body under colonialism. James I. Charlton explains, "people with disabilities have much in common with others who also have internalized their own oppression" (27). His oppressed side is manifested when he voluntarily becomes a laughing stock for the colonel by mimicking President Lee Seung-Man's way of speaking.

The main difference between Captain Hook and Hook is that Hook is a round character who is not defined by his disability. His character significantly develops as the film goes. In an interview, the director said, "Hook might have the same childhood as the children under his protection. He perceives it is natural for them to have such a life because his upbringing was like that" (Yun, par. 20). That is why he ridicules the idea of a children's choir when Sang-Ryeol suggests it. However, he changes his mind after listening to their performance. The camera

captures his ambiguous facial expression at the choir performance, which is probably because he could not comprehend what he feels himself. His change in mind takes place in the chapel which is a symbolic place of conversion and purification. The film shows the impact of the choir on Hook by showing him attending a performance again after the war. He is still separated from others and covers his impaired hand with a glove but in white suits. Another moment of change happens when Hook eventually stops bearing Young Master's abuse. As Young Master calls him *byeonsin* again, he beats him up to near death. His punches are shown in a slow-motion implying the change inside his heart. The children around them start to cry and Hook yells at them, "Did I do anything wrong?". He must have felt guilty after the fight with Sang-Ryeol and realized beating Young Master does not solve the problem but the children's sympathy can.

The film argues that a fight should result in a meaningful outcome like singing different notes makes harmony in chorus. The violent fight between Sang-Ryeol and Hook might be unnecessary but the film wants to show the "meaningful" result coming out of the conflicts as it symbolizes the Korean War. The brawl between Hook and Sang-Ryeol takes on an aspect of a surrogate war; Hook fights for Young Master and Sang-Ryeol for the children, just as the Korean War was an ideological proxy war (E. Kim, *Curative Violence* 143). After a violent fight, Sang-Ryeol succeeds in throwing Hook into the water but soon saves him again from the water because Hook cannot swim. After recovering from drowning, Hook leaves the scene saying to Sang-Ryeol "Such a *byeonsin*." Here the word *byeonsin* denotes a sense of fellowship, different from the humiliating insult given to Hook. The film does not show if Hook becomes supportive of the choir or not. However, based on the scene where he comes to the choir's performance after the war ends, he must have maintained a close relationship with the choir. The violent way of

communication is not usually justified in the other films, but fights make an effective metaphor for the war. The difference is the actual war was a consumptive one without meaningful results.

Traumatic Representation of Korean War

Whereas Sergeant Jo and Hook embody the physical and visible impact of war on the body, Sang-Ryeol's trauma demonstrates the war's destructive but subtle impact on the human mind. Defined as an emotional response to a terrible event, trauma itself is not a disability. Disability studies have argued that disability is not inherently traumatic or traumatizing (Morrison, par. 3). However, when trauma continues on and uncontrollably restricts a person's physical, social, and emotional functions, it can be a disability. Furthermore, completely disregarding trauma is also precarious since "a crisp refusal to see disability as tragedy, as traumatic, can be just as restricting on our politics and our theories as the ableist insistence that disability is always and only tragic" (Kafer 6). As "trauma studies interested in the larger social forces that produce 'trauma', that damage bodies, and that continue to shape what the traumatized body read as 'disabled' can be and do" (Morrison, par. 40), trauma can be a key concept in disability studies (Siebers 103). Thus, the intersection between disability and trauma offers a broader perspective to look at Sang-Ryeol's trauma in the film.

Sang-Ryeol is depicted as a superhero in the film, but he also has an impairment. He is not disabled because of the support from those around him. The film depicts his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a repetitive flashback to his past and his sleepless nights. In the opening sequence, the camera projects Sang-Ryeol in extreme terror after a North Korean soldier points his gun at him. He is luckily saved by his comrade but witnesses the enemy is shot in the head and falls on his body. The handheld camera shows Sang-Ryeol desperately trying to escape

with a shaking movement. His facial expression is full of panic and he pounds his chest as if he is unable to breathe. Two shots later, Sang-Ryeol stands and looks at the combat plane flying over his head while his eyes lose focus. The camera is also out of focus and becomes gradually clear to represent his traumatic experience. After the release of bombs, he walks along the foxhole which is shown out of focus as well. The film shows his insanity in his unsteady gait and panicked face.

After the battle, Sang-Ryeol's troop is stationed in Dong-Gu's village. When Dong-Gu's father is beaten to death by the villagers for being a communist, Dong-Gu pleads to Sang-Ryeol to save his father. Sang-Ryeol cannot move or say anything although his mouth moves to utter something. His shocked face is the same as the one he has shown at the end of the battle. The flashback tells why he is unable to react to Dong-Gu's plea. He had a sister in a similar age with the young soldier who aimed at him and Dong-Gu. He begged for his family's life in front of soldiers pointing their guns at him and hid at the bottom of the well. However, the soldiers discovered and shot at them. Sang-Ryeol saved his life but his sister died from the massacre. Dong-Gu's plea reminds him of the day when he knelt down before the enemy to save his family.

Because of his trauma, whenever he experiences the violence of war he cannot sleep or have horrific dreams. One occasion is when he sees Dong-Gu's friend Il-Hwan is killed in the explosion caused by a dud. Il-Hwan pounds on the unexploded bomb to get copper inside. Another situation is when POWs trying to revolt are shot by the firing squad. That night, Sang-Ryeol has a nightmare and wakes up crying. The children and Ju-Mi give him hugs to comfort him. They gather around Sang-Ryeol to give him a hug but they are hugged by each other. This tear-jerking scene emphasizes the importance of community care. The collective treatment is

significant because the choir functions like a family with the male chorister as the father and the female accompanist as the mother to the children. Thus, the recurrent theme of familial love is also found in this film.

The film promotes the restoration of the family to reconstruct humanity and a war-stricken country. The importance of the choir as an alternative family is shown in Dong-Gu's moving remarks. When Sang-Ryeol tries to dissolve the choir to protect the children from going to the war area, Dong-Gu opposes his idea saying, "Do you know what's scarier than war and dying? Being abandoned, being all alone. We all love the choir. It feels like we found a family." Although what exactly causes Sang-Ryeol's trauma is not shown in the film because of its intensity, the fact that he is still affected by the experience is shown in his guilt for Dong-Gu. Sang-Ryeol feels guilt from being unable to save his family and friends and surviving alone. Therefore, he feels sorry for Dong-Gu that he could not save him in the end. The guilt makes him so anguished that he even wants to sacrifice his own life for him. When Dong-Gu dies at the frontline, Sang-Ryeol becomes a brother to Soon-Yi. After Dong-Gu's death, the film shows Soon-Yi playing the song which Sang-Ryeol played for his late sister. Likewise, the orphans' lost families are replaced with those who survive and their loss is healed within the alternative family. With that protection, the traumatic war will not permanently disable the individuals and the country.

In conclusion, *A Melody to Remember* presents different types of disablement in wartime. In an environment where hatred is highly accentuated, the children's choir provides a safe place where impairments can be treated without stereotypes. As the choir becomes an alternative family to each of the characters, society can create a more integrated and safer place for bodily and mental differences through building familial and trusted relationships among the members.

The depiction of war within the context of national history tends to emphasize the experiences of the entire nation and its people, common or universal experience, but the disabilities of the characters are rather individual and personal. Aligned with the two previous films, the intimate bond among people is the fundamental prevention for violence. The violence during wartime is effectively replaced with familial love in the orphanage. The rebuilding of the destroyed landscape is repeatedly alluded to in the song “The Spring Season in My Hometown” and “Missing My Brother” sung by the children.

V. Establishing Social Justice of Equality in *Innocent Witness*

Lee’s most recent film *Innocent Witness* (2019) outspokenly promotes the enhancement of human rights of people with disabilities by using a person with autism spectrum disorder as its protagonist. Although the film does not employ a disabled actor for a disabled character as many people think a disability film should (Cumberbatch & Negrine 115), it has made significant improvements in depicting a disabled role without discriminative images. Nevertheless, the film inevitably contains the dual representation of disability that can either reinforce or resist stereotypes. In order to better understand the meaning of disability in the film, the representation should be interpreted with regard to their function in the narrative.

The story begins with the death of a wealthy old man in the suburbs. His housekeeper, Mi-Ran, is found at the scene of accident and charged with the murder. Mi-Ran's court-appointed attorney, Soon-Ho, is confident in winning the case upon learning the only witness to the crime is Ji-Woo, a teenage girl with autism spectrum disorder with Asperger syndrome. Soon-Ho tries to persuade Ji-Woo to stand as a witness at the court hoping to end the trial easily by nullifying her witness. Although Prosecutor Hee-Jung disagrees with interrogating Ji-Woo, the judge

decides that her testimony is crucial since it was the only evidence they have to convict Mi-Ran. Soon-Ho strongly believes Mi-Ran is innocent at first and tries to be friendly to Ji-Woo in order to make her witness in the court. However, after the first verdict, Soon-Ho learns the truth behind the murder and supports Ji-Woo to stand for truth. The two, who have not seemed to be able to understand each other, successfully communicate in the trial and contribute to arresting the real culprit together.

Thinking outside the Box

The film is conscious of its intermediary role to deliver impartial descriptions of disability and its mass influence on the viewer's comprehension of disability (Petrovic 35). Therefore, it explicitly denounces stereotypes against people with autism through characters' lines and intentionally invites the audience to understand disability for themselves by taking them into the story. The director said, "Before the shooting, I visited one of the most prestigious doctors in autism cure. When I asked him to explain autism, he answered it cannot be explained in one way. Like everyone is different, the symptoms of autism are different from person to person. The only commonality is that they are people who are caught in themselves" (Jang, par. 7). That is, people with autism are wrapped up in their own world and cannot be forced to come out. Accordingly, the film encourages the viewer to enter Ji-Woo's world instead by thinking outside the box. Along with firsthand experience, their indirect communication with Ji-Woo through Soon-Ho displays unacknowledged stereotypes against disability and the possibility of change for a more integrated society.

Innocent Witness avoids negative images of autism that are prevalent in Korean cinema. Kim Jung-Eun's recent study illustrates that the attitude of the non-disabled characters toward

mental disability in Korean films is distinctively discriminative. They presume mental disability should be physically secluded and medically cured and hardly express the necessity of care or social justice (J. Kim 196). What is interesting is that Kim includes autism spectrum disorders as part of mental illness although they are a cognitive or developmental impairment. Kim's study is still relevant to the stereotypical projection of autism in the media, but it reveals how autism is misunderstood even by the academy. According to Kim's study, the common reaction of filmic characters toward a person with autism is that s/he is puerile and infantile (194). To be specific, they think the autistic person causes laughter through senseless behaviors and deserves to hear disdainful and figurative language (187), viewing a person with autism as a sort of subhuman.

Such stereotypes, held by the employees of the law firm, are sharply criticized in the film. Soon-Ho's secretary says, "Who would believe her words?" as soon as she hears the witness Ji-Woo has autism. Soon-Ho also doubts how her testimony can be valid when the protagonist acts like a five-year-old. Moreover, their boss Byeong-Woo bluntly belittles Ji-Woo at the court. The book he refers to during the trial to annul her testimony is titled *Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder*, which ironically does not help the lawyer to understand Ji-Woo at all. He pieces together the parts from the book that explain the difficulties with communication and social interactions among people with autism spectrum disorder. When Ji-Woo and the prosecutor give unfavorable testimonies, he simply repeats the quotes and reminds the jury that Ji-Woo is immature. His contemptuous attitude toward Ji-Woo clearly shows he did not understand the gist of the book that "deviance and abnormality do not mean inferiority" as Soon-Ho comments against him. Byeong-Woo's discriminatory remarks are shamed when he acts like a child who cannot control his emotions in court and is dragged out by security. Likewise, the film demonstrates the bias against disability is infantile, not people with disabilities.

The film also exhibits the danger of stereotypes of disability in its narrative structure. It is formed in a legal drama with many court scenes in order to suggest social justice is essential for well-being. However, its main interest is not legal practices but the commonality between finding the truth and building a true relationship. Spending over 40 minutes out of 120-minute running time in the trials (Jang, par. 8), it depicts the court of law as the miniature of society. During trial, the facts of a case are presented to a jury, and they decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty of the charge offered. The judge in charge decides what evidence can be shown to the jury. The process of building a human relationship is similar to this. People collect facts about another person, both positive and negative. They judge whether the information is relevant, if the person is good or bad, and whether they can be a friend or not. Just as the judge in the trial is not always impartial, people can misjudge because of their stereotypes. The film points out this axiom through interweaving two plots, one involving Soon-Ho searching for the truth behind Eun-Taek's death and the other concerning him becoming a real friend of Ji-Woo.

Lastly, the film challenges the traditional representation of autism by avoiding the narrative of supercrip. A supercrip is an individual with a disability who performs a "compulsory" role of hero for inspiration. The narrative of supercrip is "intrinsically bound" to the rhetoric of overcoming, "the idea that one can take sole responsibility for conquering one's disability and its attendant challenges" (Chrisman 173). Although Ji-Woo inspires Soon-Ho and the viewer through her example of courage and justice in the film, she does not possess a "superpower" that overcomes her disability. There exist myths about autism that people with autism have extraordinary abilities in doing math or solving puzzles. Therefore, they are often described as a savant or a math genius in the media. In this film, Ji-Woo likes puzzles, but the film depicts it as her disposition, not a compensation for her disability. Her passion for puzzles

has an indirect relationship with her achievement as a witness, but it plays a crucial part in developing rapport with Soon-Ho.

The film helps the viewer to understand disability for themselves and defamiliarizes the embedded stereotypes of people with autism by alienating the audience from the film (Chae 34). The effect reminds the audience of the artificiality of the filmic performance and allows them to think critically of reality so that they are transformed from passive spectator to active participant. For example, the inserted YouTube video, entitled “How a Person with Autism Sees the World,” offers the audience a chance to see the surroundings like Ji-Woo. The video, played for eighteen second in full frame, depicts how an autistic person perceives things in the cafe. The distracted and unfocused image consists of views that fixate intensely on one thing at a time—extreme close-ups of customers, coffee beans being ground in the machine, and a spilt drink—and sharp sounds constantly heard in the background. Soon-Ho feels dizzy after watching the video and blinks and rubs his eyes. The audience who watches this video together with Soon-Ho also feels discomfort from the virtual experience of how autistic people look at things. The visual stimulation provokes among the audience critical perspectives on reality, especially how they perceive disability.

Another example of alienation is the point of view shots presented when Ji-Woo enters the court building to stand as a witness for the first trial. The scene begins with an extremely high angle shot of Ji-Woo walking into the building with her mother, in which Ji-Woo’s small size demonstrates her vulnerability and powerlessness. The following shots display incoherent images of an automatic door opening, a turnstile with beeping sound, passerbys’ gaze, a person opening a coke can, his throat, stilettos, another person’s mouth, etc. From these objects, the audience can infer that people with autism are intensely sensitive to sound. They could notice it

from Ji-Woo's covering her ears but the vicarious experience of Ji-Woo's perspective makes it more real. It is not just about looking at and listening like her that adds a sense of reality. Borrowing her lens makes the emotional distance between Ji-Woo and the audience more intimate.

The audience also realizes how easily their senses are deceived in the manipulation of the camera. At Soon-Ho's first interview with Mi-Ran, the shot-reverse-shot between Soon-Ho and Mi-Ran employs a few extreme close-ups when Soon-Ho requests Mi-Ran to tell only the truth. Her affirmation of her honesty sounds so sincere that Soon-Ho believes Mi-Ran is innocent (Chae 32). On the other hand, the dialogue between Ji-Woo and Soon-Ho uses the same extreme close-ups, but Ji-Woo's question to Soon-Ho, "Are you a good person?", is not so convincing of her intention, partly because of her ambiguous facial expression and unique intonation. Therefore, it is difficult for the viewer to create the same intimacy as with Mi-Ran (Chae 32). Soon-Ho's confused reaction to Ji-Woo is also shot in extreme close-up. He views the camera directly and does not answer for a few seconds. Identifying themselves with Soon-Ho through the closeness the camera creates, the audience take Ji-Woo's question as if it applied to them (Chae 32). Answering the question for themselves, the audience reflects on their attitude toward Ji-Woo.

In all of the instances analyzed above, the film creates distance from the audience and the gap allows room for self-reflection. The viewer questions what is deemed to be natural and looks at what is taken for granted in a new way. It is ironic that what the audience perceives to be artificial is actually closer to reality for people with autism. Similarly, the audience is more likely to identify themselves with Ji-Woo when the images on the screen are difficult to absorb. Just as many Hollywood social problem films elaborate the tension between the conventional formula

and a radical vision to address controversial matters with discretion (Roffman & Prudy 7), *Innocent Witness* also calls attention to disability subversively through a new venture in cinematography.

The film raises the long-running question on whether special-needs students should receive a formal education with non-disabled students, but from a new viewpoint. To this question, Ji-Woo's mother Hyun-Jeong, Soon-Ho, and Ji-Woo all have different opinions. Hyun-Jeong represents the idea of mainstreaming whereas Soon-Ho is more an exclusivist. After Sin-Ae bullies Ji-Woo, Soon-Ho suggests Hyun-Jeong to transfer Ji-Woo to the school for special education. She makes no answer but tells Soon-Ho stories about Ji-Woo's infancy. The first words Ji-Woo uttered when she was just one-year old was "please change my diaper" in a full, complete sentence. When she was two, she could read the newspaper. Hyun-Jeong was so surprised with her baby's intelligence but disheartened when she found out about autism. Listening to this, Soon-Ho replies, "It would be all good if there were no autism." To this, Hyun-Jeong says, "That is not who Ji-Woo is. I have never imagined if there were no autism." Here, Soon-Ho perceives autism as an obstacle or something negative that should be gotten rid of. However, Hyun-Jeong believes that autism is part of Ji-Woo's identity and what brings Ji-Woo special skills.

Hyun-Jeong does not expect Ji-Woo's disability to be eradicated and yet cannot give up hope in Ji-Woo's genius. This must have given Ji-Woo some pressure. After Hyun-Jeong turns down Hee-Jung who has come to persuade her to allow Ji-Woo to stand as a witness one more time, Ji-Woo tells her mother, "You said I talk and read well? But I won't probably be a lawyer because I have autism. But couldn't I at least become a witness?" She knows that her autism will be an obstacle to becoming a lawyer despite her abilities. However, she only partially denies her

potential for the career because of her mother's affirmation and encouragement. Hyun-Jeong probably does not want to restrict Ji-Woo's potential but her decision to send Ji-Woo to a regular school is still disputable.

Hyun-Jeong eventually transfers Ji-Woo to a special education school. When Soon-Ho asks Ji-Woo about it, Ji-Woo responds that she likes her new school because she does not have to pretend to be "normal." This conclusion can be controversial because sending Ji-Woo to a special-education school can be seen to be exclusivistic. Ji-Woo should be able to attend a non-special-education school and interact with non-disabled students. However, the film shows it is impossible because of the prevalent and uncontrolled violence against Ji-Woo. Some of the boys on the field follow and bully Ji-Woo on her way home from school. Additionally, Ji-Woo sits alone in the classroom during the break. Also, her classmates ridicule her when the teacher asks her to read the textbook. Furthermore, Ji-Woo does not have a social worker who helps with commuting and Sin-Ae takes the job unwillingly. All these mistreatments are ignored by or hidden from Hyun-Jeong. Based on her commitment to having Ji-Woo attend a regular school could be the idea that disabled people should be incorporated just like everybody else into "regular" society but that society is not ready to integrate disability.

The film does not suggest whether a special-education school is exclusivistic or accommodative. What it tries to do is inquire about whether society pays enough attention to the voice of people with disabilities, which is often ignored in the controversy. Answering its own question, the film takes note of Ji-Woo's position. Her stance might be different from others with disabilities, but each individual's voice should be counted. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein supports this idea asserting that, in neoliberalism, "inclusion is now believed to consist in the opportunity for one to obtain those skills of participation and communication that are required in

order to operate in the community of entrepreneurs; that one is able to choose or construct an identity to invest in oneself and others to choose what is fitting to one's own individual needs" (217). Therefore, the society's responsibility is not choosing between inclusion or exclusion but embracing flexibility and adhocacy in the education system (225). Indeed, the problem is the exclusion of people with disabilities in decision making.

Trust of Communication

Lee adheres to his position that social integration is based on trusted relationships and effective communication in the familial support system. Accordingly, *Innocent Witness* stresses their importance symbolically in the use of distinctive symbols—Gwanghwamun and blue jelly—which represent communication and trust respectively. It presents the home as the school where humanism is effectively educated as seen in Soon-Ho's relationship with his father. Finally, through prosecutor Hee-Jung's examples, the film indirectly teaches the audience how to deal with autism.

The aesthetic use of cultural and individual symbols in *Innocent Witness* effectively clarifies its inclusive message. First, Gwanghwamun, one of the shooting locations, displays the significance of communication. The very first scene of the film is situated in Gwanghwamun which is the emblem of political communication where many protests take place in Korea today. The place where public opinion is exchanged most actively. It is also significant in presenting the theme of communication because of its iconic monuments. One is the statue of *haetae*, a legendary animal, standing in front of the Gwanghwa Gate. Purportedly, when *haetae* sees people fighting, it discerns between truth and wrong, punishing the bad ones. In a similar manner, the landmark animal symbolizes interpersonal human interactions. Another monument

is the billboards along Gwanghwamun street. Like the Gwanghwamun plaza, it represents the exchange of opinions and news.

Soon-Ho's law firm is located on the Gwanghwamun street, which mirrors many different groups and the interests they speak for. Like in the protests, fights, and trials, different opinions and ideas can lead to conflicts if communicated inadequately. Soon-Ho demonstrates this in the two decisive conversations. During the opening shots, Soon-Ho appears on the crowded street arguing with his father over the phone. The one-way conversation fails to reach an agreement as Soon-Ho is upset that his father does not understand his problems and refuses to hire a housekeeper. Their dialogue ends as Soon-Ho's father hangs up on Soon-Ho. Conversely, Soon-Ho's other conversation toward the end of the story, which takes place on the same street, appears to be successful. This time, Soon-Ho is not walking in the crowd but standing by himself. He calls Hee-Jung, probably to confess his mistakes and ask for Hee-Jung's cooperation as Hee-Jung visits Ji-Woo's house to persuade Ji-Woo to stand as a witness again in the very next scene. Contrary to the previous occasion, Soon-Ho acts based on his conscience, not for convenience. He is not swayed by others but decides for himself. In the contrast of the two conversations, the film shows what effective communication is.

On the other hand, blue jelly symbolizes trust that is essential to meaningful communication. Ji-Woo only eats blue jelly, so she refuses to give one to Soon-Ho saying "I can trust blue jellies." Her line sounds astute because she has not been trusting Soon-Ho. Soon-Ho eats a yellow jelly instead and finds it too sour. The blue jelly reappears when Soon-Ho gives a bottle of blue jelly for Ji-Woo's birthday in the final sequence. Thus, they become a token of mutual trust gradually developed between the two characters.

The blue color of jelly is also significant in reading the trustworthiness of Ji-Woo's character in the film. Whenever she comes to the court to witness, she wears blue. In her first attendance to the court, she wears a blue dress with a black ribbon. On her next visit, she wears a darker blue dress, which emphasizes the reliability of her testimony. As Soon-Ho understands Ji-Woo better after he knows the meaning of blue jelly, the viewer can believe in Ji-Woo's ability by understanding her performance as a witness. To summarize, the film visually characterizes Ji-Woo with the symbolic use of the color blue and consistently demonstrates how she is "innocent" and honest.

Although the film mainly focuses on Ji-Woo's autism, Soon-Ho's father also has a disability. The film elaborates on Soon-Ho's relationship with his father provides a foundation on which he can form an intimate relationship with other people with disabilities. Soon-Ho's father plays a major role in setting an example of honesty and love; thereby changing Soon-Ho's mind. Soon-Ho's father, whose name is unknown in the film, has Parkinson's disease, which can cause difficulty in urination and motion. He first appears when he disguises as a ghost and frightens Soon-Ho. Because he held back from using the bathroom in order to hide in the dark room for a long time, he wets his pants. Soon-Ho does not rebuke his father although he has to handwash the clothes. Soon-Ho's father does not feel embarrassed with the accident either. To them, disability is just something that's a little inconvenient.

The close father-son relationship could be attributed to the fact that Soon-Ho's father is open-minded and embraces Soon-Ho the way he is. While he insists that Soon-Ho should get married, he says he is okay even for Soon-Ho to marry a guy. It is unlikely with a typical Confucian father role. His remark sounds like a joke, but he really supports Soon-Ho in doing whatever he likes. For instance, when Soon-Ho says he is happy that he will soon make more

money, Soon-Ho's father says if he says good, it is good. His accommodating attitude makes the audience wonder if he is the same person whom Soon-Ho was arguing with in the opening scene. The film shows their apartment is well-kept even when Soon-Ho is busy with work. From this, it can be conjectured that Soon-Ho has suggested hiring a housekeeper out of concern for his father. Although they sometimes have conflicts, it is undeniable that there is strong faith between them.

The way Soon-Ho's father influences his son is indirect. When Soon-Ho comes back home late after drinking with his boss, his father is reading Park Kyeong-Ri's *The Land*. The novel mirrors what he would want to tell his son. It is about the turbulence at the turn of the 20th century when the Korean people were struggling against Japanese imperialism and has hundreds of characters from across the Korean peninsula; following them from the late 19th century to the early 20th century through Japan's colonial rule till the division of the peninsula. The main protagonists of the novel, like those in the author's other novels, struggle to save their own dignity in the most turbulent period of Korean history. They secretly and publicly support the independent movement. Once the richest family in the area, the couple sacrifices their wealth for a good cause. The fictional characters' deed is in stark contrast with that of Soon-Ho. In this manner, Soon-Ho's pursuit of financial benefit is criticized softly.

Another example of indirect parental counsel appears toward the end. Lee uses the letter as a metaphor for familial affection again as in the other films. On Soon-Ho's birthday, Soon-Ho's father leaves a letter for his son who comes home too late to celebrate a special occasion. The father cannot write well because of his Parkinson's disease. His stiff hands move slowly and shakily. Nevertheless, he writes down each letter one by one carefully. As the handwriting on the letter clearly shows, it was a difficult job for Soon-Ho's father. He writes in the letter that there is

no one who does not make mistakes. Brought to reason, Soon-Ho decides to change and stand for the truth with Ji-Woo. Just as Soon-Ho's father could fulfill a fatherly role with a disability, Ji-Woo strives to perform her duty despite her disability.

As well as Soon-Ho's father, Hee-Jung becomes a good advisor who teaches Soon-Ho how to deal with disability. At first, Soon-Ho is uncertain how to talk to Ji-Woo so asks the prosecutor Hee-Jung who has an autistic brother. Hee-Jung is suspicious of Soon-Ho and tells him that he undoubtedly believes Ji-Woo tells the truths because people with autism cannot lie. He advises Soon-Ho to enter Ji-Woo's world to understand her like people have to keep the pace of a person with mobility difficulty to walk with them. This allegory is significant because the film repeatedly focuses on Ji-Woo's walking into the courthouse. Even when others refuse to come into her world, Ji-Woo strives to come into the court. This shows the non-disabled people are the ones who should change.

The film shows different approaches to establish legal justice in the court. At first, Soon-Ho thinks a jury trial is fairer than a regular trial, which expands the participation of the citizens in the legal process. However, he learns that true fairness is achieved by accommodating Ji-Woo through Hee-Jung's examples. For example, the staff in the courtroom take away the clock at Hee-Jung's request because the ticking sound is too loud for Ji-Woo. Soon-Ho also learns from an autism expert that Hee-Jung's investigation of Ji-Woo is safe and exemplary enough to be used as a textbook. Like Hee-Jung, in the second trial, Soon-Ho asks the judge to wait until five p.m. to make Ji-Woo feel comfortable since she calls Soon-Ho at five o'clock in the afternoon. These examples show that the establishment of social justice requires accommodation according to individuals' needs.

Agents for Social Change

As heretofore shown, the characters in the film grow as time goes by. However, their growth is not easily obtained. Since those who achieve progress are ordinary people with flaws and faults, the film's urge for social change sounds more hopeful. Specifically, Soon-Ho is an average Korean man who is neither good nor evil, just acting depending on the situation. He used to work for Lawyers for Democratic Society, which mainly defends civil rights cases. He also protested by himself in front of the government office to demolish the anti-communist laws. However, he now works for a law firm notorious for its corruption and his main motivation is money. When Soon-Ho's friend Soo-Yin sends his old photo, he deletes it out of the shame that he deserted his cause. Many in the audience can relate to him since they all have weaknesses and feel like they live far off their ideal. The film gives them the comfort that if he can change, they can too.

At the second defense that Ji-Woo attended for the first time, Soon-Ho makes a mistake in calling Ji-Woo "a person with mental illness." Instantly recognizing his fault, he tries to rephrase it as "a person with a special disability" but cannot finish the sentence. He feels bad and visits Ji-Woo's house to apologize. However, Ji-Woo's mother Hyun-Jeong does not let him in, telling him Ji-Woo has asked her if she has a mental illness all day. Even after Soon-Ho betrays Ji-Woo's trust, Ji-Woo wants to stand as a witness. The film shows the mutual interaction to create a more integrated society through Ji-Woo's decision to come out even though she has been put in an intense stereotype. For example, the real estate dealer refers to her as "The girl who is mentally...." On another occasion, Sin-Ae refers to puzzles as "what autism likes" instead of "what people with autism like." To sum up, the objectivizing descriptions of Ji-Woo reveals that people use derogatory remarks on disability without realizing it.

The prevalence of verbal abuse against people with disabilities is criticized in the scenes where Ji-Woo interacts with the dog, which shows the failure of communication between Soon-Ho and Ji-Woo (Chae 29). For Ji-Woo, Soon-Ho's insistence that Mi-Ran is innocent is like the dog's barking that is unpleasant and scary to the ear. In the first sequence, Soon-Ho asks "Ji-Woo, the lady tried to save the grandpa not attack him, so can you help her?" after Ji-Woo has run away from the barking dog. The second instance shows her running away from the dog in an extreme long shot expressing the long distance between Soon-Ho and Ji-Woo. The third example shows Soon-Ho trying to teach Ji-Woo that the dog barks and wags its tail because it likes her. However, his words are like the barking: miscommunicated and misdirected. The dog lives in the newspaper distributing station. The station is covered with lots of signs that indicate many different newspapers around the country. This visualizes a variety of opinions about the truth which confuse our judgment. His heartfelt advice to Soo-Yin is not well received either.

The film uses the image of the window to present different perspectives. For example, Soon-ho sees Ji-Woo's house from the broken window in Eun-Taek's room that is shattered at the murder. Being broken, the window represents a jaundiced view with stereotypes that only a part is visible (Chae 27). However, when he meets with Mi-Ran for the first time, the interview room is transparent and nothing can hinder his view. Mi-Ran tells Soon-Ho that Eun-Taek used to say he will follow his dead wife and even went to the hospital. There are multiple stereotypes in operation. Therefore, Soon-Ho is more open to her and is prone to believe her words assuming she cannot hide the truth from him. On another occasion, Soon-Ho is prevented from Ji-Woo by the door and window, which visually shows the absence of communication between them (Chae 27). When he visits Ji-Woo's house for the first time, Ji-Woo lets him know her presence by repeating after Hyun-Jeong on the door phone but does not come out. Soon-Ho looks at Ji-Woo

behind the opaque window that her contour is shown unclearly. Likewise, Soon-Ho's view on Ji-Woo is biased and unclear like the broken and opaque windows.

The gate is also an important symbol which represents the changing relationship between Ji-Woo and Soon-Ho. Soon-Ho is not let into her house until the day she is bullied by Sin-Ae and taken to the hospital. Only after he earns Ji-Woo's trust, he can pass the gate. Before this incident, the film shows three times that the gate is closed in front of Soon-Ho. Ji-Woo does not come out the gate either, so Soon-Ho must enter through the gate. In the final sequence, Soon-Ho appears to be already inside Ji-Woo's house for her birthday party, which manifests their strengthened relationship. Because Ji-Woo is occupied with her friends and video, there still exists distance, having a threshold between them. However, Soon-Ho refuses the offer from Ji-Woo's mother to bring Ji-Woo to him so that they can talk. Soon-Ho says he can come to Ji-Woo instead. His open attitude is reciprocated when Ji-Woo runs toward Soon-Ho passing the gate to give him a hug. This signifies she has finally opened her heart to him (Chae 28).

Like Soon-Ho, Ji-Woo becomes mature as the story goes on. However, unlike Soon-Ho, she does not appear with moral flaws. Rather, she encourages Soon-Ho to choose the right. She is similar to Soo-Yin in that their fights for justice are epitomized as a force for good. When Soon-Ho hesitates to call Soo-Yin, he receives a call from Ji-Woo, which marks the replacement of Soon-Ho's moral support. While Soo-Yin refuses to meet with Soon-Ho because of his betrayal, Ji-Woo stays next to him. When the case with Ji-Woo is over, though, he returns to Soo-Yin. In this manner, Soon-Ho is able to maintain his sense of justice. This empowers Ji-Woo by challenging the stereotype that a person with a disability has defective morality.

Although Ji-Woo is already a positive character, she displays growth as she interacts with Soon-Ho. She used to hang up calls after she finished what she needed to say. However, when

Soon-Ho taught her that she should ask if her interlocutor has finished before putting down the telephone, Ji-Woo does exactly what Soon-Ho has told her to do. It is noticeable that even though they have made many calls before, Soon-Ho does not correct Ji-Woo until they have developed a strong relationship. Due to his consideration, his didactic attitude is pardoned.

The film shows Ji-Woo's progress through the juxtaposition of the initial and final scenes of Ji-Woo. In the opening sequence, Ji-Woo appears in the classroom as she reads out loud Yoon Dong-Ju's poem "The Snow." The poem reads:

Last night

snow fell abundantly:

on the rooftops,

on the paths, on the farms.

Perhaps it is a blanket

that keeps us from the cold.

That's why

It falls only in the chill of the winter. (Translated by Chae-Pyong Song and Anne Rashid)

After reading out loud the poem, Ji-Woo expresses her opinion saying, "It is a lie that snow is a blanket. Snow is cold." The last scene of Ji-Woo is also related to the snow as she opens the window and watches the snow coming. This represents her emotional growth in understanding that snow can be warm as well. Touching the snow is the first step to understand it and represents the first step she took to the outside. She learns one by one similar to Soon-Ho teaching her not to hang up a call before he finishes speaking.

To conclude, *Innocent Witness* offers noble and participatory views on disability through its deliberate liberation of disabled characters and from stereotypical images. To promote social integration through individual efforts, it presents multiple instances of personal progress in understanding disability. Soon-Ho and Ji-Woo's growing relationship becomes an example of this. Beneath their successful interaction lies the strong bond of family. Although it takes a lot of effort to bring change, the film asserts what matters is the willingness to accommodate each other.

VI. Conclusion

Lee Han's later films feature the process of how persons with disabilities are integrated into society through trusted relationships and effective communication. They are an extended response to contemporary social issues and initiate new discussions on the issue of treating disability. There are still mounting challenges to eliminate intolerance against disability in Korean society. However, the production of films that positively depict impairments and suggest social justice for people with disabilities is a meaningful step toward a better society where disabled and non-disabled individuals can live harmoniously. As heretofore shown, Lee's films are not perfectly absent of negative images, but they show meaningful progress with gradual decreases of stereotypical representations of disability.

This thesis argues that a critical reading of disability in Korean films in the lens of disability studies will help to promote disability-friendly media. It leaves a limitation that the study does not include the voice of civil rights activities in Korea regarding this issue, partly due to lack of resources and detailed investigation. However, further studies will activate the discussion on disability in Korean cinema.

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