

Demythologization of Female Smokers in Korean Films

Yoojin Chung

Abstract—Compare to western cultures, women who smoke in Korea are not tolerated. Korean people are prejudiced against women smoking. In spite of the relative prevalence of sexual equality in South Korea, women too often feel obliged to confine their smoking to only a few public spaces, such as designated smoking rooms, coffee shops or pubs. Korean Confucianism classifies people according to gender and social status. According to Confucian culture, cigarettes convey clear social meanings as well as reinforcing status, age and gender, beyond personal preferences. For these reasons, the significant of people smoking in Korea varies according to their gender. This study will determine reasons for the ongoing sexual discrimination against female Korean smokers thorough analyzing Korean films. Since film is a medium reflects social phenomenon. Roland Barthes' Mythology Theory will be used to analyze films.

Keywords—Korean films, Mythology, Sexual discrimination, Women Smoking

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background & Objects

ACCORDING to the data released by National Statistical Office in the first half of 2011, the smoking rate of men was 39.0% and that of women was 1.8%. The research focuses on that the women smoke less than the men by about 21.7 times, and also that there lies a gender discriminative phenomenon in the Korean society in that the society is not generous about the women smoking in a public place.

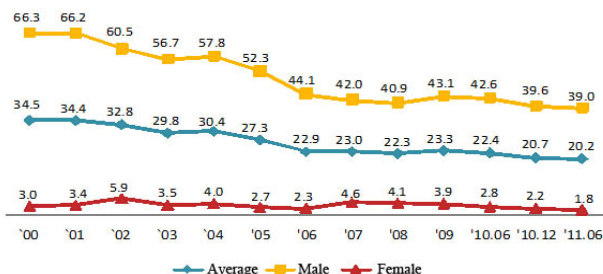


Fig. 1 Smoking rates of adults in Korea, National statistical office, Korea, 2011.06 [1]

According to a few precedent researches on a Korean society which is sexually discriminating smoking of the women, Korean women who are not allowed to smoke freely in the public place do not have anywhere to go to smoke. Even in a rest room in a building the smoking is banned so they would have to go outside to smoke. However, it seems that the society is not ready yet to see the women smoking in public. [2] Until 1970s, the women are generally forbidden to smoke.

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Some women who were involved in a few special occupations were exceptionally excused to smoke but still, there were not regular women smokers. [3] Such a discriminatory situation has not improved even 2000s. The following two newspaper articles show that there are still negative social perceptions about female smokers in 2004. When Korean women choose to smoke, they should be prepared to pay cruel price, due to Smoking is allowed only for the elderly women and barmaids. [4]

Discrimination and oppression is more covert and sophisticated. Female smokers reconcile themselves to the oppression and then make themselves to be tamed. For the Korean women, smoking is another shackles and unfading scarlet letter even in the 21st century. [5]

The smoking definitely has a negative influence on health and it is not right to smoke in the public in consideration of side-effects of the passive smoking and also, its violation of non-smoker's right. Even so, it is obvious gender discrimination of the Korean society in that it is generous about the men smokers, while it is criticizing the women smokers. As a result, this research aims at finding out reasons for why the society is obsessed with the smoking discrimination by gender in this era of the gender equality. Means to analyze the causes for the sexual discrimination are vary. Amongst all, the researcher has decided to apply film analyzing in the research, which has never been attempted in Korea. The research is mainly carried out by applying the film to the reality due to a film is one of the most appropriate medium to reflect a real world and convey social aspects. A film is not able to exist apart from the phase of the time. According to Andre Bazin, no other art genre except for film can reenact the physical world so realistically and objectively. No art form can be as realistic as film in the most basic sense of the world. [6]

After thinking about the social position of the women in the present Korea in 2012, Film *Sympathy For Lady Vengeance* (2005), *Come Rain, Come Shine* (2011) and *Open City* (2008) were selected as research subjects in consideration of how well the films have reflected the reality and also, how much the films have excluded a sexual discriminative prejudice against the women and male-dominated point of view.

B. Research Method: Mythologies

A hypothesis of this research is that the Confucian culture which is ruling over the Korean society and the androcentric ideology based on the patriarchy have led the society to take a critical stance on the women smokers has been formulated. To verify the hypothesis, a research method to analyze a correlation between an ideology and a social phenomenon is necessary. According to Roland Barthes, A myth is the most appropriate means to deliver the ideological inversion so called in our nature of society. It is a reality that a myth provided to the world. The myth gives back inartificial images of reality to the world. And the myth with the historical proper is accomplished by gradually disappeared. A reality is reversed by the magic trick of the myth, history disappears and the natures come and

sit down. As a result, the function of a myth is to make a reality disappears. This is a literally outflow, hemorrhage and evaporation. In short, it is a detectable absence. [7] A myth is the one and only prerogative place where the ideology of the ruling party could survive. Consequentially, in order to justify and absolutize the ideology of the ruling party, the myth leads the whole society to 'the world of self-pride' by cleverly manipulated political program. [8]

The mythology by Roland Barthes which has been deducting a myth through a semiotic analysis on the signifier and the signified, and analyzing the ideology hidden in the name of the myth is believed to be proper as a research method for this research. Barthes said that "In myth, we can find again the tri-dimensional pattern: the signifier, the signified and the sign."

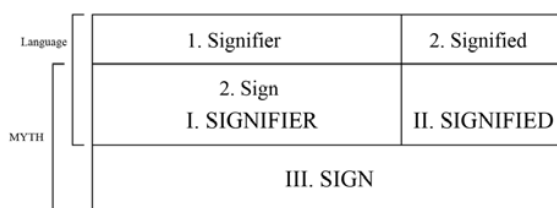


Fig. 2 two semiological system by Roland Barthes: Language and Myth [9]

It can be seen that in myth there are two semiological system, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the language-object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system, and myth itself, which I shall call meta language, because it is a second language, in which one speaks about the first. [10]

The myth is an inverted image. Myth makes nature and history, reality and dreams, cars and shoes, poverty and affluence, phenomenon and exists constantly confused. Hence, the reason why this myth means trouble for Barthes is that by means of its dual image, the myth marginalizes the world more by planting a huge abyss. [11]

If a myth is a inverted image in the words of Barthes, understanding of its substance and the origin is necessary. So that, understanding and reflecting about the existing mythologies of genders which accuse sexual discriminations are certainly required.

This study will determine reasons for the ongoing sexual discrimination against female Korean smokers thorough analyzing Korean films. Since film is a medium reflects social phenomenon. Roland Barthes' Mythology Theory will be used to analyze films and 3 steps are utilized to research.

The steps are as follows

1. Analyzing the particular semiotic meaning of women smoking in Korean films
2. Investigating the mythology, female smokers shatter, by analyzing the semiotic meanings discovered in the proceeding step

3. Evaluating the hidden ideologies, which the mythology tries to conceal and suppress to the benefits of the elite classes

II. SOCIAL MEANING OF SMOKING IN KOREA

A. Confucianism as a basis of discriminations

The contemporary culture in Korea has been formed based on the Confucian principle of Joseon Dynasty Era. It has been still dominating Koreans' way of thinking still now is that the five moral disciplines in human relations, which is called Oryun. Mencius, a representative Confucian philosopher taught people Oryun to be distriacted from animals. The meaning of each disciplines are as follow.

TABLE I
THE MEANINGS OF ORYUN IN A CONTEMPORARY SENSE [12]

Oryun (five moral disciplines in human relations)	Meaning
Bujayuchin (there must be closeness between a father and a son)	Benevolence: Parents and children should love each other intimately, and parents should take care of their children hale children should serve their parents
Gunsinyueui (there must be justice between a ruler and a subject)	Just ice: National leaders and citizens, employers and employees, or society leaders and members should stabilize the country by treating and sharing with each other fairly instead of seeking selfish benefits only
Bubuyubyeol (there must be distriction between a husband and a wife)	Propriety: Men and women should distinguish themselves and keep a distance from each other in order to understand and respect each other, and they should consider and respect each other's areas and positions
Jangyuyuseo (there must be order between a senior and a junior)	Wisdom: Seniors and juniors or the old and the young should consider and yield to each other by keeping order according to age
Bungyuyusin (there must be trust between friends)	Trust : Friends or colleagues should keep faith with each other, and t react each other with sincerity and responsibility, and the more exemplary person should set an example of faith in order to maintain their relation peacefully

Among the five moral disciplines, Bubuyubyeol became a basis to justify sexual discrimination against women. The original meaning of Bubuyubyeol is classifying men and women. Hence the meaning has been distorted as time pass on. The idea accuses a sexist idea Namjon-Yeobi which means men is superior and women is inerior. It is similar to male Chauvinism. Not only male Chauvinism but phallocracy (androcentric ideology), Phallocentric and patriarchy are justified under the name Bubuyubyl.

To sum up with, based on the Oryun, Koreans build a relationship in a vertical manner rather than in a horizontal manner and categorizing other people by Social status, gender and ages, which has rarely been found in the western countries.

B. Social meaning of smoking in Korea

The smoking culture is formed on such Confucian culture. In the beginning of the 17th century, the smoking was first

introduced to Korea and it rapidly became an item of personal preference regardless of age, rank and age. As time passed, Koreans created a peculiar smoking culture by themselves, making discriminative smoking regulations by rank, age and gender. The length of a tobacco pipe was a mean to represent a social rank of an individual, and the ordinary people were not allowed to smoke in front of noblemen and the elderly. For gender, the women were prohibited to smoke in front of men. It is assumed that the custom at that time did not consider the smoking to be negative but rather, it is an evidence to show how the women were ranked in the society of Confucianism. [13]



Fig. 2 Secret Sunshine (2007)

In a Director Chang-dong Lee's film, *Secret Sunshine* (2007), a man stopped smoking when he saw a religious leader (a priest) is coming toward him. He lowered his body, dropped the cigarette and crushed it out. From this scene, a way of Confucian thinking is appeared which a member of a group should not smoke in front of a leader. The lowered body of Song, Kang-ho signifies a Confucian manner that he has recognized the authority of the priest with respect for him.



Fig. 3 Take Care of My Cat (2001)

In a Director Jae-eun Jeong's film, *Take Care of My Cat* (2001), two women in their 20s, wearing a uniform, were smoking on the stairs. When they saw middle aged women coming out, they stopped smoking and stood up. The young women who have been educated with an idea that the young should not smoke in front of the elderly automatically stubbed the cigarette out. The scene was a signifier for the age indication.

As described so far, in Korean society where the Confucian ideology is dominating, it is believed that the smoking signifies respect, authority, rank, age and gender.

III. FILM ANALYSIS

A. Sympathy For Lady Vengeance (2005)

Sympathy For Lady Vengeance (2005) is a work by Director Chan-wook Park. The film achieved 10 wins and 9 nomination in international film Festivals as well as won the Cinem -Avvenire Award in Venice Film Festival in 2005. Geum-ja is furious at the fact that she was set up as a child's murderer and

that her daughter was kidnapped to be adopted overseas. She finally decides for revenge and succeeds in it by killing her husband in an extremely brutal way.

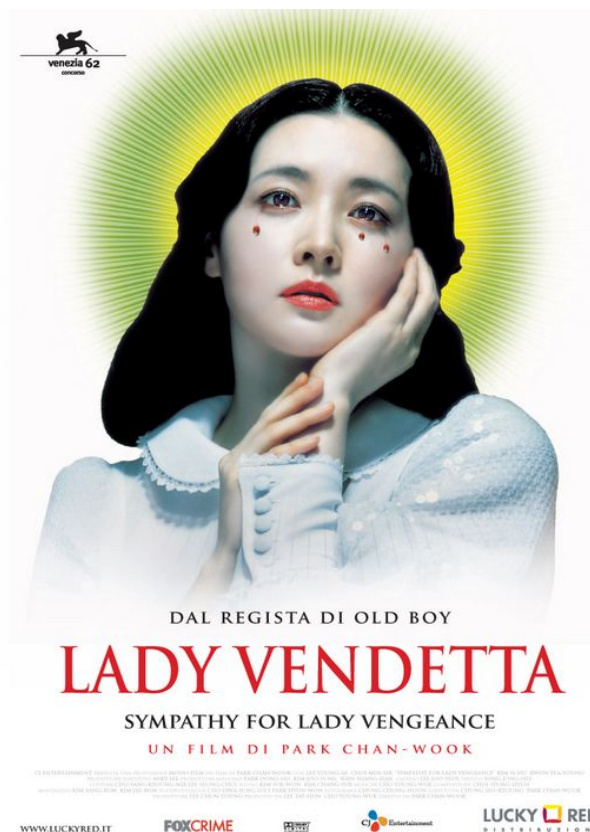


Fig. 4 Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005)



Fig. 5 Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005)

TABLE II
SIGNIFIERS, SIGNIFIEDS AND CONNOTATIONS OF A WOMAN AND A WALL

1st Step of the signification		2nd Step of the signification
Signifier	Denotation	Connotation
woman	a smoking woman	abandoning naivetés turning to a evil women
wall	a Laughing woman a Red wall tiger patterns	evil, vice anger, blood, murder strong, beastly

As she settles down on preparing for murdering her husband, she starts to smoke. The rotating camera catches a red wall with stripes of a tiger printed, and the wall seems alive. Geum-ja thinks of her revenge and bursts into laugh laying her body backward. The stripes of a tiger signify not only her husband's blood that she would see during the murder but also her

blood-boiling revenge, anger and brutality. The wall also indicates that inside Geum-ja lies an animal instinct of a savage beast to prey on a vulnerable animal. The cigarette that she holds is a signifier of hers who has abandoned purity love and beauty which she once had when she fell in love with her husband as a high school student but also who has filled her heart with evilness, brutality and rage.

TABLE III
THE MYTHS SHATTERING BY WOMAN AND THE HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN THE MYTHS

The Myths shattering by women smoking	The hidden ideologies in the myths
A weak woman an obedient wife	male chauvinism patriarchy, phallocracy (androcentric ideology)
feminine mystique (perfect wife)	phallocentrism

By showing brutal and masculine sides of hers, Geum-ja breaks a myth of a weak woman and feminine mystique. Feminine mystique is the myth that a real feminine woman is childlike, sexy and foolish. And she is satisfied with her both daily life and sexual life through doing Chores and taking care of her husband and kids. [14] She also breaks a myth of an obedient wife as she takes revenge on the husband.

According to Roland Barthes' Mythology, the ruling class try to conceal and distort ideology under the name of myth to defend their inherit hegemony. Analyzing these myths by Mythology, male chauvinism is hidden, in a myth of a weak woman. The myth makes the male chauvinism, man is superior and woman is inferior, for granted. An obedient wife myth is a by-product of patriarchy, phallocracy (androcentric ideology). To keep patriarchy and a male-dominated society, women's obedience has been indispensable.



Fig. 6 Sympathy For Lady Vengeance (2005)

TABLE IV
SIGNIFIERS, SIGNIFIED AND CONNOTATIONS OF A WOMAN, A MAN AND A CIGARETTE

	1st Step of the signification	2nd Step of the signification
Signifier man	Denotation a Naked man a man who gives an ashtray to a woman a Man in a blanket covering a man who staring at a woman	Connotation after intercourse, submissive, subsidiary, a lower status than a woman weak, childlike, blood, dependent the intercourse with the woman is meaningful to him
woman	a woman who sitting on the bed a woman who are not staring at a man	masculine act, indifferent, unconcerned
cigarette	a Cigarette smoked by women	higher status

After the intercourse with a younger man, Geum-ja smokes sitting on the bed. While the idea of predominance of men over women which is a remain of the Confucianism secures the upper rank of a man subordinating a woman to him, from this scene, it is clearly indicated that the woman is higher than the man. First of all, a cigarette that the woman smokes means that she is older and more powerful. In Korea, when a person from a higher rank starts smoking, another person from a relatively lower rank brings him an ashtray. The scene which the man brings Geum-ja an ashtray tells that the man is subordinated to the woman. While the man is looking at Geum-ja in a blanket she never cast an eye at him.

According to Mencius's writing 「Yogyolgeogajang」 (要訣居家章), it is the logic of nature that a husband (man) is robust and a wife (woman) is weak.

Nevertheless, in this film, the man is the one who is weak and Subsidiary. He thinks the sexual relationship with the woman is meaningful to him while the woman does not even care. As Geum-ja takes over the superiority in the relationship making the man belonged to her.

TABLE V
THE MYTHS SHATTERING BY WOMAN AND THE HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN THE MYTHS

The Myths shattering by women smoking	The hidden ideologies in the myths
an independent man and a dependent woman	male chauvinism, patriarchy
a dominated man and an obedient woman	patriarchy, phallocracy

She destroys myths of an obedient woman, a subordinated woman, a dominating man and a powerful man, justifying patriarchy, phallocracy. In addition to, she dashes an independent man and a dependent woman myth formed by male Chauvinism, patriarchy.

As described the above, the smoking of Geum-ja has been used as a signifier to show that she is not possessed by the man, that she is independent and is not obedient to her husband.

B. Come Rain Come Shine (2011)

Come Rain Come Shine (2011) is produced by Director Yoon-ki Lee. This film is a story of a married couple before a divorce. The wife is not afraid of asking her husband for a divorce over another man, and this is a completely opposite image of a wife which the traditional Confucian society has been demanding.

The smoking of the wife in the film has been used to show that the couple is extremely different in characteristics and lifestyles. By using a cigarette, a common object, the director shows that how the two people are different. Books on the shelves behind the woman are arranged a little irregularly, Fallen cigarette ashes and a can containing cigarette mean that a wife (woman) is far from a stereo type of housewife. Through this, the woman is proved that she is not the kind of a housewife who is always worried about perfectly organized arrangement and cleaning.



Fig. 7 Come Rain Come Shine (2011)



Fig. 8 Come Rain Come Shine (2011)

TABLE VI
SIGNIFIERS, SIGNIFIEDS AND CONNOTATIONS OF A WOMAN, A CAN, ASH AND BOOKS

1st Step of the signification		2nd Step of the signification
Signifier woman	Denotation a woman who is Smoking in a room	Connotation differ from her husband, do not follow Confucian sex-roles
can	a can containing butts	far from stereo type of wife uncleaned, casual, far from a stereo type of wife
ash	fallen cigarette ashes	uncleaned, casual, far from a stereo type wife
book	books arranged irregularly	uncleaned, casual, far from a stereo type of wife

That a woman first asks her husband for a divorce and that a woman falls in love with another man are completely against the teachings of Confucianism. By establishing a rule, the distinction of the married, Confucianism has regulated duties of a husband and a wife.

The wife is only demanded to be devoted and obedient to the husband as scarifying herself. In Confucianism, the husband is given a right to abandon the wife. However, anywhere in the

teachings of Confucianism is not mentioned that the wife is able to ask the husband for a divorce.

TABLE VII
THE MYTHS SHATTERING BY WOMAN AND THE HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN THE MYTHS

The Myths shattering by women smoking	The hidden ideologies in the myths
a perfect housewife (feminine mystique) an obedient wife	patriarchy, patriarchy, phallocracy

A wife who is far from a stereo type of a wife shatters a myth of a perfect housewife. A wife is always supposed to be a perfect housewife required in Patriarchy due to support her husband as a subordinate person. The myth is similar to feminine mystique that the myth of women are considered people who to satisfied with their daily life and sexual life through doing chores perfectly. A person on the throne in the patriarchal system is a father or a husband (man). As a result, in a family of the patriarchal system, only the man with the authority is allowed to smoke. The wife's smoking at home in front of the husband goes against Patriarchy based on the Confucian culture which has regulated the husband to be higher than the wife and a myth of an obedient wife.

C. Open City (2008)

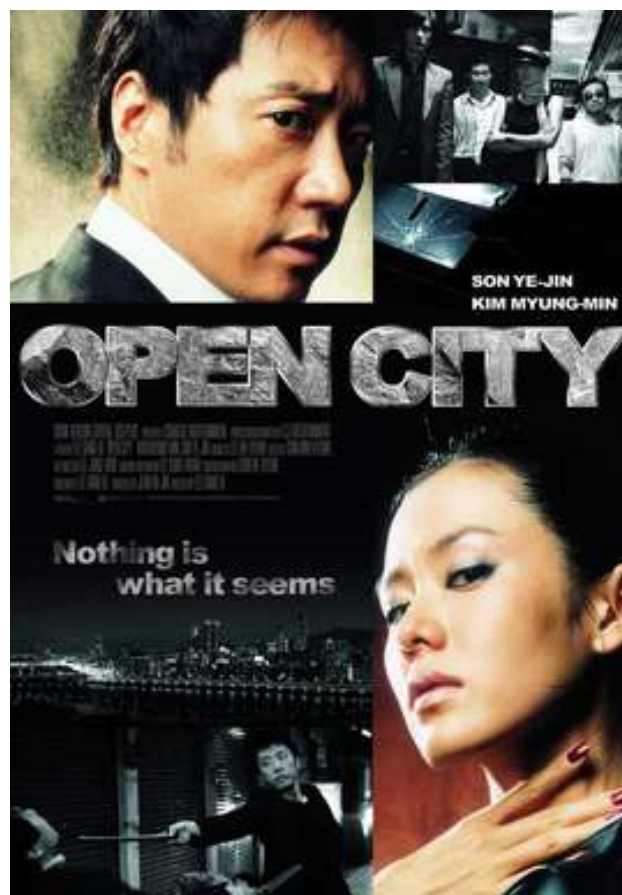


Fig. 9 Open City (2008)

Open City is a work of director Sang-ki Lee. This film is about a woman who is leading a criminal organization as a boss of an international pickpocket organization.



Fig. 10 Open City (2008)

TABLE VIII
SIGNIFIERS, SIGNIFIEDS AND CONNOTATIONS OF A WOMAN AND A MAN

1st Step of the signification		2nd Step of the signification
Signifier	Denotation	Connotation,
man	a man who bend his back	follower, obedient
	a man who is reaching toward a	adulatory, flatterer
woman	a woman who turned her head	sardonic, peremptory
	a smoking woman	authority, a higher rank, dominated

That a man lowers his body and goes quickly to where Jang-mi (a female boss) is sitting indicates that he has submitted himself to her authority. Jang-mi is a woman who is more powerful than men. She has authority to rule over the wild men in the criminal organization. After she suppresses a man who has been refusing to obey her because she is a woman, she smokes. In this scene, the smoking is a signifier for her power, authority and superiority.

TABLE IX
THE MYTHS SHATTERING BY WOMAN AND THE HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN THE MYTHS

The Myths shattering by women smoking	The hidden ideologies in the myths
a dominated man and an obedient woman	phallocracy, patriarchy
a weak woman and a powerful man	phallocracy, male chauvinism

As Jang-mi dominates the man with her strong charisma and smokes a cigarette, the symbol of authority, she is destroying two myths of a dominated man and an obedient woman and a weak woman and a powerful man made from the ideology of male chauvinism, patriarchy and phallocracy.



Fig. 11 Open City (2008)

TABLE X
SIGNIFIERS, SIGNIFIEDS AND CONNOTATIONS OF A WOMAN AND A MAN

1st Step of the signification		2nd Step of the signification
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Signifier	Denotation	Connotation,
Man	a man who bowed his head	follower, obedient
	a man who is standing	follower, obedient
woman	a woman who is frowning	angry
	a woman who is push out a man	intense character, authority, a higher rank, dominated
	a woman who raises her legs on a table	authority, a higher rank, dominated
	a smoking woman	authority, a higher rank, dominated

A boss of criminal syndicate, Jang-mi gets angry with her subordinate due to her male subordinate treat her as a girl not a boss. To demonstrate her authority, she pushes out him strongly and warns with an emphatic tone. She raises her legs on a table and smokes to prove her authority and power. In Confucian culture, raising on a table is not allowed to women.

TABLE XI
THE MYTHS SHATTERING BY WOMAN AND THE HIDDEN IDEOLOGIES IN THE MYTHS

The Myths shattering by women smoking	The hidden ideologies in the myths
a dominated man and an obedient woman	phallocracy, patriarchy
a weak woman and a powerful man	phallocracy, male chauvinism

Jang-mi smokes to show her authority and power in the scene above. Same as previous scene, she is she is destroying two myths of a dominated man and an obedient woman and a weak woman and a powerful man made from the ideology of male chauvinism, patriarchy and phallocracy.

IV. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

To be summarized the results of the films analysis, The smoking women in the films above shatter many long-standing myths, such as a weak woman, an obedient wife, feminine mystique, a perfect housewife, An independent man and a dependent woman, a dominated man and an obedient woman, a weak woman and a powerful man. These myths- products of male chauvinism, patriarchy, phallocracy. Women's demythologization raises objections to male privileges because it is perceived as shattering male domination. Geum-ja, in Sympathy For Lady Vengeance (2005) is definitely breaking the myths of a weak woman, an obedient woman(wife), a dominating man, feminine mystique and an independent man and a dependent woman and a dominated man and an obedient woman. These myths have been hiding an ideology of the male chauvinism, patriarchy, phallocracy and phallocentrism in the name of myths. As a result, her smoking is a sign to fight against the male centered ideologies such as male chauvinism, patriarchy, phallocracy and phallocentrism. In the second film, Come Rain Come Shine (2011), while the husband is a non-smoker, the wife regularly smokes at home. The husband even tries to throw away a can of coke filled with the wife's cigarette butts. The two myths, an obedient wife and a perfect housewife (feminine mystique) that she is breaking have been created based on patriarchy, phallocracy which are saying that a woman is supposed to be a perfect housewife and subordinate

to men. As a consequence, the wife's smoking is performing a demythologization effect on Confucianism which has regulated sex-roles of a man and a woman and on the patriarchal system which has made a man an authority in a family. In the third film, *Open city* (2008), Jang-mi's smoking destroys two myths of dominated man-an obedient woman and a weak woman-a powerful man. She is an opposite female character to male chauvinism, phallocracy and patriarchy. As a result, to Koreans who are familiar with the patriarchal system, this woman in the film is denying a myth that 'the husband is the best authority at home'. To them, she is a mere character who is not only breaking a myth of 'a perfect housewife' but also violating the existing order.

V.CONCLUSION

Films are a medium reflecting reality, it conveys social phenomenon, culture and ideologies of the era. Through results of the film analysis, it is possible to figure out meanings of female smoking in Korean society. In above 3 films, scenes of female smoking are used as an expression tool to convey women's atypical characters; far from a perfect wife, obedient woman and weakness woman. Those women's characters show that sex-roles and a fixed idea of gender are changing gradually in Korea. Nonetheless, sexual discrimination still exists for smoking. Female smoking still has meanings of demythologies against long standing myth and ideologies of privileges- men. Two answers of the research question that the reason why there is sexual discrimination in Korea, are produced. First, smoking is considered the exclusive prerogative of male hegemony in Confucian culture. On the basis of how smoking is perceived in Korean society; a typology of classifying social class, age and social status, Confucian social customs preclude younger people from smoking in front of their elders, just as people of lower status are not allowed to smoke in front of their superiors. Among *Oryun*, *Bubuyubyeol* accrued a sexist idea *Namjon-Yeobi* which is similar to male chauvinism, so a woman is considered lower status than a man. A woman is not permitted to smoke in front of a man. Finally, men feel very uncomfortable and even abhor women smoking because the demythologizations by Smoking women shatters venerable androcentric ideology and enshrined male privileges raised by Confucianism. Women in these films deliberately smoke to manifest and demonstrate their independence and power and/or perhaps to antagonize or get revenge on their husbands (men). In the point of view, smoking women are regarded as antagonists who raise objections to male privileges. For these reasons, sexual discrimination on women smoking is existed in Korea. The smoking in public space is definitely has a negative influence on health and it is not right in consideration of side-effects of the passive smoking and also, its violation of non-smoker's right. Hence, the Korean social phenomenon that while only male is given a right to smoke in public space, female is not allowed is a definitely sexual discrimination. Smoking is considered as a tool of oppression against women. Smoking should be argued in gender equality perspective. If a cigarette loses its status to classify social status and male dominated ideology becomes no longer social dominant ideology, a female smoker will be no longer a threat to

male-centered ideology and myth. Also female smoking will be no longer *demythology*,

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