

AUTHOR BIO

Sung-Ae Lee is a Lecturer in the Department of International Studies at Macquarie University. Her major research focus is on fiction, film and television drama of East Asia, especially of Korea. Her research centres on relationships between cultural ideologies in Asian societies and representational strategies. Her interests include cognitive approaches to adaptation studies, Asian cinema, and fiction and multimedia which reflect Korea's traumatic history.

Place-Branding and (Constructed) Intangible Heritage: The Manufacture of Ostensible and Virtual Korean Micronations in Naminara and *Hotel Del Luna*

Sung-Ae Lee

ABSTRACT

Most micronations located in South Korea have only a virtual existence and little, if any, public recognition. The exception is Nami Island, which branded itself as the Naminara Republic in 2006, and is a popular and financially successful tourist resort. This article considers aspects of place-branding applied to Nami Island and draws comparisons with the eponymous setting of the acclaimed television series *Hotel Del Luna* (2018). The physical island and the virtual hotel share many components of a micronation schema, although the hotel is not a self-declared micronation. Both are embedded within, but culturally separate from, the surrounding state. Each has evolved an origin myth and a sustaining mythic narrative developed from contemporary Korean media-lore: Nami Island markets itself as a fairy tale space and exploits images from the popular TV drama *Winter Sonata*, which lures many of its visitors, while *Hotel Del Luna* draws upon and adds to media-lore about ghosts and the supernatural. Commercial enterprises which playfully assert their cultural separation from South Korea, these micronations self-consciously model a utopianism markedly absent in the country which surrounds them.

KEYWORDS

micronation schema, media-lore, origin myth, ghost-lore, fictive reality, *Winter Sonata*

Of the various micronations that have purported to exist within the territorial boundaries of South Korea, the only one inhabiting an actual physical space is the Republic of Naminara, a tourist resort situated on Nami Island, 63 kilometres from Seoul in the Bukhan (North Han) River (Fig. 1). Other self-declared micronations exist as “virtual nations,” that is, as social media spaces, rather than occupying any physical space, even though they may lay notional claim to a specific location. The Jusun Republic (established in January 2018) has the imaginary city of Jusun as its capital, while its territories are the homes of each of its citizens (of which there were 64 in 2020). One of the more substantially articulated examples is Minuiju City State (founded in April 2017), which appropriated an abandoned film set as the notional site for its nation. The site, apparently originally intended as a setting for historical drama, has enriched the potential for self-reflexive humour that often pervades the self-descriptions of such micronations: a photograph of their parliament building appears on their MicroWiki page, which shows a dilapidating building in a desolate setting overgrown with vegetation. Such humour also characterises the consistent playfulness of the Japanese Republic of Hashima page, where the encroachment of undergrowth upon deserted crumbling buildings is reinterpreted as “extensive land reclamation has increased, and [a] greening policy has covered the densely populated island with tropical flora, parks and gardens.” The playfulness is part of the game of nation building engaged in by the so-called citizens of a micronation, a game which many readers will recognise shares elements with building games such as the *SimCity* series or *Age of Empires*. Nami Island also cultivates a humorous perspective of itself, but it is different because instead of an invented virtual space it is a living ecology that has been sculpted for over 50 years and has evolved some strong enabling cultural myths and incorporated these into a process of place-branding.

Nevertheless, like most tourist resorts and micronations, Nami Island is a heterotopia, in Michel Foucault’s sense of a place outside society’s space and time, at once isolated and accessible. It resembles spaces in which we live but is a simultaneously mythic and real representation of space, as is found in the secondary worlds of fantasy or the imbricated disasters of television romantic melodramas. In comparison, the main setting of the television drama *Hotel Del Luna* (2019) is an undeclared micronation, a hotel where uneasy ghosts may spend some time between death and the journey to the afterlife. The drama series does not assert that the hotel is a republic, but its setting exhibits many characteristics of a micronation schema: it is in the centre of Seoul, but cut off from its surroundings, with a clear rationale for its separateness (Fig. 1); it is heterotopic, in that the inside is much larger than the outside and incorporates various incompatible spaces, especially a garden, an amusement park, a wedding hall, and even a beach; it has its own rules; and the manager, the only living human who works in the hotel, is a kind of ambassador who interfaces between the world of humans and the world of ghosts. In different ways, both Nami Island and *Hotel Del Luna* may be classified as “heterotopias of deviation,” to modify a category suggested by Foucault (25): spaces where a part of the social becomes alternatively ordered and which are thus occupied by people whose behaviour is deviant in relation to a commonly held norm. Such deviance is characteristic of micronations. Tourists to Nami Island are enjoying time out from everydayness and, with few exceptions, visitors may not enter *Hotel Del Luna* unless they are dead. Both spaces encompass a

juxtaposition of heterogeneous sites which occupants and visitors freely move amongst. The hotel also embodies elements of the absurdity which Philip Hayward attributes to “the identification and promotion of highly local socio-political entities as micronations” (“Secessionism” 161) through what is a fictive/artistic practice.

Unlike other Korean micronations, Nami Island had a forty-year continuous historical development before it was strategically rebadged as The Naminara Republic in 2006. Over that period, the island has honed the processes of place-branding to the extent that it is a model of how a micronation might be sustainable. Place-branding refers to “the creation of value in space by reinforcing and representing the assets of the place in a cohesive manner” (Grenni et al. 1355). Blending soft power, constructed intangible heritage, business acumen, and corporate social responsibility, Nami Island markets itself as a fairy tale space, while a core element of its marketing strategy is the assertion that because of its unique social ecology it has seceded *culturally* from South Korea (but does not claim political independence). Its playful claim to cultural difference is marked by a schema instantiated by most other micronations: the invention of its own flag, anthem, stamps, currency and written language. It issues Naminara Republic Passports (annual passes to visit the resort).

Fig. 1 Korean micronations.
Top: Approaching Nami Island by zip wire (still from *Hi Bye, Mama!*, 2020). Bottom: Hotel Del Luna, an invisible, fairytale turreted castle rising high above the cityscape of Seoul (still from *Hotel Del Luna*, 2019).



The core elements of Naminara place-branding are evident in the general descriptions of the island in brochures and government tourist information such as *Imagine Your Korea*:

The Naminara Republic, which declared its cultural independence from the Republic of Korea, has its own diplomatic and cultural policies. Naminara celebrates the imagination and shares its beautiful fairy tales and songs with guests from all over the world. Designed with the concept of “Storybook Land, Song Island,” the island aims to promote

dreams and hopes in children, and love and memories in couples. Cultural events, concerts, and exhibitions are hosted all year round. The main cultural facilities include a Song Museum, a Picture Book Playground, an Art Shop, and UNICEF Hall. Guests can travel the island in comfort by riding on the UNICEF Train, or the Story Tour Bus. Restaurants offer various cuisine, and overnight accommodation is available. [1]

[1] https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=264244. Accessed 8/11/2020.

Place-branding goes beyond this description, however, and involves the invention of a Naminaran culture from an eclectic mixture of fanciful transformations of local myths and history, a bricolage of motifs borrowed from international sources, and *ad hoc* marketing ideas. A commercial enterprise has thus evolved a cultural mythology which offers visitors multiple possibilities of engagement.

The Invention of Creation Myths

Although the myths and fairy stories of Nami Island are mostly grounded in modern popular culture, they include a creation story and stories of mythic events which are isomorphic with elements of existing myth cycles. The creation of the island in 1944 when rising water in the Bukhan River separated a half-moon shaped piece of land from the mainland is isomorphic with an almost universal creation motif, that is, creation by division as earth and water become distinguished, or land is pulled up from a watery abyss. Creation is followed by the bringing of order from disorder, as when in 1965 Min Byeong-Do (1916–2006) purchased the island and began a process of forestation followed by construction of tourist facilities. [2] The parallel here is with the Korean myth of Hwan-Ung, a younger son of the Lord of Heaven, who descended with 3000 followers to Baekdu Mountain where he introduced civilized society to Korea. Nami Island (in Korean *Namiseom*: *seom* means 'island') also has its own eponymous tutelary deity, General Nam I (1441–1468), a historical figure who, accused of treason and torn apart by horses, was deified and worshipped in the shamanistic faith of the central regions. He seems to be isomorphic with other dismembered gods of East Asia, such as Pan Ku (China) and Ogetsuno (Japan), that is, with mythical beings whose dismembered bodies become the fabric of landscape features, and of animal and plant life. The process of killing, dismembering, and dispersing the “mundane” giant primordial being has been widely interpreted as a kind of primeval sacrifice or self-sacrifice (Rappenglück 325). These animistic myths envisage a natural world permeated by the sacred. It seems possible that, given his passion for Korean heritage, when Min Byeong-Do erected a monument in honour of Nam I in 1965, he was conscious of the fertility components of shamanistic rituals commemorating Nam I and, given his plan to create a tourist site, he imagined that Nam I might constitute a founding myth of local identity.

[2] Following World War 2 and the liberation of Korea from Japanese rule, Min Byeong-Do served as Governor of the Bank of Korea until 1965. He used part of his severance pay to purchase Nami Island, at that time a waste land prone to flooding. There he set out to create a habitat which could also become a tourist venue and which might encourage foreign employees to spend money in Korea rather than holidaying abroad. His motto for tree planting was, “Green gardens and clear rivers are our fortune, and we should hand these down to our descendants.” He was also active in supporting culture and the arts, and aspired to help restore Korea’s cultural heritage, language, writing scripts, and personal names that had been suppressed under Japanese rule. He simultaneously founded a publishing company and the Association for Joseon Children’s Literature (AJCL). He was especially concerned to promote children’s culture and both published picture books and established a weekly children’s magazine.

Hotel Del Luna also develops its own creation myth as a component of its resourceful media-lore. Media-lore is a process whereby films and drama series inventively refashion cultural knowledge from oral folklore sources (Hayward, *Making a Splash* 18). Shared scripts and schemas that have evolved in the 21st century constitute intertextual linkages amongst the supernatural dramas,

especially in the modifications of and additions to Korean folklore about supernatural beings with which audiences can be assumed to have some familiarity. A piece of folklore which comes from a little-known element of ancient Korean cosmogony is the myth of *Magohalmi* (Grandmother Mago): Magohalmi was a giant goddess who played a part in the creation of mountains, islands, rivers, rocks, and other natural formations, partly from her own body, but over time she lost recognition, along with other female deities, and became a folklore figure (*Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Literature*, 27–28). The Hong sisters (Hong Jung-Eun and Hong Mi-Ran), screenwriters of the series, have recreated Mago as a family of identical female deities, five of whom appear in the series. The eldest Mago, often referred to as “Granny,” is said to have created the Guest House of the Moon in its original form and bound the female protagonist, Jang Man-Wol (Lee Ji-Eun), to it in two ways. First, Man-Wol has been removed from the flow of time, so that in the narrative present she has inhabited the hotel for 1300 years; second, her being has been divided and half of it embedded in a zelkova tree, referred to as the Moon Tree, upon which the existence of the hotel depends. The tree is related to the global tree of life mytheme, especially in its interdependence with the continued existence and social order of the Hotel Del Luna. When, after more than a millenium, the seemingly dead tree produces leaves and flowers, Man-Wol and her hotel will re-enter the stream of time and Man-Wol will finally pass to the afterlife. This elaborate back story brands Hotel Del Luna as a discrete and unique place.

Myth and Cultural Narratives

Myth-making around Nami Island is more overt, however, in the form of cultural myth-making in the marketing of the island as a land of fairy tales, as in the appropriations of the image of Hans Christian Andersen and his tales, especially in attempts to produce comparable local fairy tales. A waterside statue of the “Namimaid,” Naminara’s adaptation of the concept of the Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen and throughout South Korea, is the most visible example. [3] Cultural myth-making rapidly developed in other directions after 2001, when early episodes of the television drama *Winter Sonata* were shot on Nami Island. Widely considered the catalyst for the Korean Wave (*hallyu*), the international popularity of Korean popular culture, *Winter Sonata* was screened across East Asia and brought film tourists flocking to visit sites where the series had been screened, including Nami Island, where the number of tourists tripled almost immediately after the drama was broadcast. This surge in tourism coincided with a move to project the island as a culture island.

While Nami Island is not a *Winter Sonata* theme park, unlike the *Daejanggeum Theme Park* (2004–2014), which was built specifically as a filming location for historical themed dramas, the island’s place-branding does extensively exploit the sentimental affection tourists have for *Winter Sonata* by enabling them not only to view the locations of the series (signposted by poster stills) but also to place themselves within the series. A set of iconic images serves to transform the kernel script from which the series is developed into a mythic cultural narrative. In the complete kernel script two young people fall in love but are separated (and the man is incorrectly reported to be dead); some years later they meet, but the man has forgotten the past; eventually they are reconciled.

[3] For the abundance of mermaid statues in South Korea see Lee and Keith (2018), “Legend of the Blue Sea: Mermaids in South Korean Folklore and Popular Culture.”

The Nami myth is created from the first phase of the script as it was represented in Episodes 1 and 2. An idea or narrative event becomes mythicised by simplifying its events and relationships to their kernel script, by the combined affective impact upon them of memory and imagination, by repetition by many people over a period of time, and by some combination of reality and fiction (see Braden 116). Fig. 2 reproduces the core images from which the Nami *Winter Sonata* myth is forged.

Fig. 2 Core images of the *Winter Sonata* myth. Top row, Episode 1 (in school uniform); bottom row, Episode 2.



These sites and the actions of these images are reconstructed on several platforms: in online advertisements by tourism agencies and companies; in video advertisements posted on YouTube; in trip memorabilia uploaded online by tourists, either as blogs or as video records of their visit; and repeatedly in post 2002 films and television dramas which have used Nami Island as a location for some scenes and built-in allusions to *Winter Sonata*. In addition to the thousands of visitors each year for whom these images are refreshed or to whom they are introduced, the diverse online platforms demonstrate the various ways memory and imagination have combined to imbue the images with deep emotion, a kind of reality through experiencing the fictive as real, and hence a kind of permanence. Visitors can see the bicycle which the couple shared, and they can photograph themselves re-enacting their own first kiss, imbued with the mythic resonance of the *Winter Sonata* first kiss. In other words, the unique event, here the kiss shared by Yu-Jin (Choe Ji-U) and Jun-Sang (Bae Yong-Jun), is also a *type* of event which is transposed into mythic repetition and mythic time. One rather bemused American tourist, who had never heard of the television series, observed that he was unable to film the “first kiss” location because of the large crowd of people gathered there. [4] The first kiss in Korean culture, and especially in its appearances in television drama, is invested with great social significance: it is often a long-delayed event, and because it is tinged with an aura of taboo, especially if it happens in public, the kiss is often marked by furtiveness, surprise, or embarrassment (Lee, “Fairy-Tale Scripts” 278). *Winter Sonata* tempers the moment with a comic touch as Yu-Jin’s eyes become crossed because of her astonishment.

[4] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=occKZCafeT0>

The effect of the place-branding settings has a key function in shaping the significance of the myth: the feeling that here is an almost untouched ecological paradise suffuses the unfolding love between Yu-Jin and Jun-Sang with an almost profound innocence. The effect is strengthened by Yu-Jin’s girlish playfulness, whether it involves kicking at fallen ginkgo leaves, balancing on a log, where Jun-Sang held her hand for the first time, or throwing snowballs. One of the promotional videos on YouTube aimed at mature couples cites the image of two people walking between rows of ginkgo trees

[5] Imagine Your Fairy Tale
 Island: Nami Island:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0Vb--wO57o>

and then the camera cuts to the woman's shoes as her footsteps disturb the golden leaves that have fallen to the ground. [5] In such a case the allusion to a moment in *Winter Sonata* when Yu-Jin is beginning to fall in love proposes that a visit to Nami Island offers a still moment in time that affirms the strength of the visiting couple's relationship. The notion of heterotopic space promises that beginnings – the first time Yu-Jin had been on a bicycle, the first kiss – are outside time and thus eternal. Inspired by the *Winter Sonata* lovers' second visit, the figures of snowmen scattered throughout the island, and even a snowman warming himself at an open fire, play with this paradox of transience and permanence.

As a mythic cultural narrative, the fraught affective relationships of *Winter Sonata* purported to tell a generation what love could be like. The qualities that attracted audiences permeate subsequent dramas, especially in the genres of romance and romantic melodrama. These qualities are: the oblique portrayal of love relationships; an aesthetic developed from beautiful settings, an atmospheric musical soundtrack, and a leisurely pace; lead characters who prompted a strong audience alignment; and a depiction of strong emotional connections that viewers felt were missing from their own lives (Hanaki et al. 2007). These characteristics are sustained in subsequent dramas, and they are still evident today in *Hotel Del Luna* along with the cultural myths deployed in the series. Nami Island has functioned as an icon for this myth, appearing recurrently in TV dramas and films as a romantic site. Just as tourists may stroll along the tree-lined paths and pause to take couple selfies in places identified with *Winter Sonata*'s lead characters or be photographed imitating a pose captured by a statue of the two, dramas send their characters to the island to enter into dialogue with this mythic setting, as in Episode 1 of *Rosy Lovers* (2014–2015). In this episode, Park Cha-Dol (Lee Jang-U) and Baek Jang-Mi (Han Seon-Hwa) go to Nami Island to celebrate the hundredth day of their relationship. In an allusion to the *Winter Sonata* myth, the episode picks up their visit as night is falling and they rest on a bench with a bicycle leaning against it. Jang-Mi recalls their disastrous first kiss, when her teeth split open Cha-Dol's lower lip. The implication is that the Nami Island setting can resignify that incident by absorbing linear historical time into mythic cyclicity. However, this is Episode 1 of a highly melodramatic 52 episode series, so the resignification is immediately deferred and does not formally happen until the processes of separation and reuniting culminate in the marriage of the couple in Episode 52. A brief flashback (less than one second) during the wedding ceremony shows images of the couple on a bicycle at Nami Island, in a setting and posture which embed the marriage in mythic time by replicating images from *Winter Sonata*. A second brief flashback illustrates how the Nami myth might be used to re-nuance kernel scripts: the segment in which Yu-Jin and Jun-Sang play together in the snow is alluded to in a scene in which Jang-Mi plays in a snowy field with Cho-Rong (Lee Go-Eun), the little daughter she had with Cha-Dol, abandoned at birth, and is later reunited with. The lost-and-found child script is isomorphic with the lost-and-found lover script, woven together here in a way perhaps only romantic melodrama will do. Cha-Dol is already an adopted abandoned child and when he turns out to be a "prince" – the heir of a powerful and wealthy family – viewers may recall that this is also an ancient cultural myth. A last quasi-Nami allusion occurs near the end of the final episode amidst a flurry of happy endings. On a tree-lined pathway in a riverside setting evocative of Nami Island, Jeong Shi-Nae (Lee Mi-Suk) and

Lee Yeong-Guk (Park Sang-Won) chance to meet while riding bicycles: on her death bed, Cha-Dol's birth mother had asked Jeong Shi-Nae, Cha-Dol's adoptive mother, to look out for both Cha-Dol and her husband, Yeong-Guk, who had legally adopted Cha-Dol into their family. Romantically inclined viewers will quickly conclude the two will now become a couple, as Nami Island works its magic. Such brief allusions attribute great power to the Nami Island myth. [6]

[6] Imagine Your Fairy Tale
Island: Nami Island:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0Vb--wO57o>

The power of that myth to step outside time and redeem it is most fully narrativised in the final scene (Episode 16) of *When My Love Blooms/The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* (2020). This series is grounded on the same kernel script as *Winter Sonata* – love between a couple, separation and loss, and ultimate recuperation – but the melodramatic existents of plot and character are quite unlike. After the central couple, Han Jae-Hyeon (Yu Ji-Tae and, when young, Park Ji-Yeong) and Yun Ji-Su (Lee Bo-Yeong and, when young, Jeon So-Ni), have found their way back together in early middle age they go to Nami Island. In contrast to *Winter Sonata*, the Nami experience occurs at the third stage of the script, not the first, and thereby affirms the cyclical structure of the myth. At this point, melodramatic realism enters the cycle of mythic time and the couple encounter their younger selves. Shot-reverse shot techniques are used during a linear conversation to interchange younger and older forms and then both pairs are simultaneously present. The segment concludes with both couples walking toward the camera along Metasequoia Lane (one of the most familiar components of Nami place-branding) as they complete the cycle of the Nami love myth (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 *When My Love Blooms*, Episode 16: On Metasequoia Lane, Han Jae-Hyeon and Yun Ji-Su meet the younger selves who first fell in love.



Not all television dramas that include a scene located on Nami Island tie symbolic use of the setting to the *Winter Sonata* myth. For example, in Episode 25 of *Mother of Mine (My Prettiest Daughter in the World)* (2019) a lead “mother” character, Park Seon-Ja (Kim Hae-Suk), brings a group of mostly middle-aged female friends to the island on a day trip. They picnic in an often-filmed location, and then assemble in Metasequoia Lane where they sing and dance Kim Yeon-Ja’s early but enduring K-pop hit *Amor Fati* (2013), reproducing the movements of a live performance (see Fig. 4). Derived from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the lyrics of the song advocate a mindset that can embrace and celebrate all of life’s experiences, whether good or bad, wise or foolish.

The segment demonstrates that the mythic resonances which accrue to Nami Island can be applied creatively to other facets of being in all their diversity.

Fig. 4 *Mother of Mine* (2019). Park Seon-Ja and friends perform Kim Yeon-Ja's *Amor Fati* (2013) in Metasequoia Lane.



Setting, Myth and Media-lore

The imbrication of setting and myth is also at the core of *Hotel Del Luna* but brings together a site in Seoul and a confluence of traditional Korean folk beliefs about ghosts and the afterlife and the modifications they have undergone in twenty-first century media-lore and popular culture, particularly television drama series and to a lesser extent film. The supernatural micronation of Hotel Del Luna makes no claims to political or other independence from the Korean state but like Naminara embodies a cultural distinctiveness. The hotel is rarely seen by living people and if any chance to find it the receptionist, Ji Hyeon-Jung (Pyo Ji-Hun), shows them an exorbitant price list and suggests they will get a better deal at a near-by five-star hotel. When the ghost of the previous hotel manager is seeking to encourage protagonist Gu Chan-Seong (Yeo Jin-Gu) to take over his position, he assures him that, “Through your job you’ll discover a secret world that no one knows about” (Episode 2, 00:55:06). The obvious similarity between Hotel Del Luna and Nami Island is that they exist primarily for the benefit of their visitors. Jang Man-Wol, as owner of the hotel, explains to Chan-Seong that their function is to give solace to their guests. Just as Nami Island seeks to promote “dreams and hopes in children, and love and memories in couples,” the Hotel Del Luna gives ghosts an opportunity to complete unfinished business, fill gaps in their life experience, or unburden themselves of grudges which are preventing them from moving on to the afterlife. Viewers are often reminded that the hotel is a special entity: for example, when, in Episode 8, Chan-Seong’s close friend Sanchez (Jo Hyeon-Cheol) advises him to find a job that fits his abilities, rather than working at “a no-name hotel that can’t even give him a proper business card,” he replies, “Our guests are unimaginably unique people ... If [the hotel] has one drawback, it’s that I can’t show it off” (00:34:15). This oblique gesture at place-branding is dismissed by Sanchez’s retort that Chan-Seong’s real motive is that he is in love with Man-Wol, but the point has been made.

Man-Wol refers to the hotel's unique guests by the generic name *gwishin* ('ghosts') but also distinguishes many different types of *gwishin*. The broad typology of ghost culture is widely represented among the guests who pass through Hotel Del Luna and who illustrate the often paradoxical nature of that culture, in that it constitutes a society that is both distinct from living humans and created by human desires and fears. Chan-Seong's ignorance of ghost culture and often naïve attempts to meet the guests' needs are useful narrative ploys to emphasize distinctions between ghosts and humans, to inform audiences of the rules that apply in ghost culture, and to create audience satisfaction at knowing more than the protagonist. An example of the last point occurs in Episode 4, when the hotel staff realise that Chan-Seong's presence is the reason the Moon Tree is growing leaves and resolve to be rid of him by sending him into Room 13, which is inhabited by a "virgin ghost" (*cheonyeo gwishin*). This is the most terrifying ghost in Korean ghost lore, a young woman who has died a virgin in a society which still determines a woman's social value by biological reproduction, childcare and home management. She is thus unable to pass on into the afterlife and mounts random and vindictive attacks upon the living, especially young men or people enjoying the institutions of marriage and family denied to her in life. She inspires fear because she embodies extreme disruption of social (Confucian) order. The audience will immediately identify her as such, although she is later shown to be a ghost full of "vengeful resentment," the worst type in the *Hotel Del Luna* ghost culture. Other ghost types that appear include the *Jibak Ryeong*, a ghost who haunts a house or building in which he or she died, and who is attached to objects, places, and events that caused the death; amnesiac ghosts, who are unable to recall their life as a human nor the circumstances of their death; and incognizant ghosts, who do not know that they have died and cannot understand why everybody seems to be ignoring them. Such representations reflect an existential anxiety in everyday society so that the discrete community of *Hotel Del Luna* becomes a model for the inclusion of social groups that have been excluded from well-being.

Hotel Del Luna is unusual among supernatural TV series because the space and its capacity to draw ghosts to it is central to the narrative. Further, ghosts do not use the hotel as a base from which they come and go but normally stay in the building until ready to move on to the afterlife. When the time comes, hotel staff and a *Jeoseung Saja* accompany them to the boundary between worlds and send them off. In a very unusual move, the reach of the hotel's community includes this *Jeoseung Saja* as a familiar acquaintance. In Korean mythology the *Jeoseung Saja* (often just *Saja* 'messenger' in TV dramas) is a psychopomp who escorts all souls – good or evil – from the world of the living to the entrance of the underworld. He is traditionally a bureaucrat who performs his task mechanically and without emotion. In the second decade of the 21st century, the *Saja* has developed new roles as part of media-lore. The figure was first popularised in TV drama in *Arang and the Magistrate* (2012), where his role is to hunt the world for ghosts who have managed to avoid going to their assigned place in (the Buddhist) Hell. The audience often feels sympathy for the hunted ghosts, which paved the way for a further, perhaps permanent, modification in *Dokkaebi: The Lonely and Great God* (2016–2017), in which the *Saja* is endearing and vulnerable and much loved by audiences (Lee, "Supernatural serials" 70). The *Saja* in *Hotel Del Luna* is a dour, secondary character less well-

developed than in the earlier series, but intertextual links assure that audiences expect him to be a comedic character inviting a warm response.

In contrast to the isolation of Hotel Del Luna, Nami Island has a strong cultural outreach policy: its Arts and Education unit hosts over 600 performances, exhibitions and festivals annually. These events may include elements of traditional culture but are predominantly modern or contemporary in focus. Cultural elements in *Hotel Del Luna* function more as culture conservation or are a media-lore blend of traditional and modern. The following three stories, among many others embedded in the series, illustrate these tendencies: “The Last Tiger of Mount Baekdu” (Episode 2), the Ghost Wedding (Episode 5), and the Rehabilitation of Kim Shi-Ik (Episode 16).

“The Last Tiger of Mount Baekdu” affirms the superior cultural insight of Hotel Del Luna. The incident tells of a company chairman who visited North Korea and received two gifts, a tiger and a valuable heritage painting of the summit of Mount Baekdu. Baekdu is a volcanic mountain (it last erupted in 1702 CE) considered to be the spiritual home of all Koreans. Central to the Korean creation myth as the birthplace of Dangun, the founder of the first Korean kingdom, it continues to play an important mythological and cultural role in both Korean states. It is also the possible habitat of Korea’s last Amur tigers (in Korea called Mount Baekdu tigers), the largest cats in the world, which once ranged over the whole Korean peninsula and appear in many folktales. Tigers were the alpha predator and consequently regarded as mystical creatures, spiritual lords of their habitat. The spiritual theme was encapsulated in a key intertext for this sequence, Park Hun-Jeong’s film *Daebo* (*Big Tiger*) (2015), which further linked it with traditional ecological knowledge: an epistemology that incorporates understanding of ecological relationships of the animal and plant life of the local habitat; the application of accumulated knowledge; and moral and spiritual values that make up a community’s worldview (Reo and Whyte 15). Wrenched from its habitat and transported to Seoul, the “last tiger” refused to mate with zoo tigers and had recently died; its ghost began haunting the chairman, entering his dreams and inducing a debilitating illness. [7] Man-Wol explains to the chairman that the tiger saw “no need to leave anything meaningful here. Anything that is meaningful to him lies in a place he can’t go back to” (Episode 2, 00:48:00), and she designates the painting as the penalty the chairman must pay. Even though her intention is to sell the painting on to support her hedonistic lifestyle, she begins by completing an informed spiritual act which is morally superior to behaviour in the alternative world of the living where spirituality has been displaced by material desire. Back at Hotel Del Luna, she farewells the tiger ghost as he enters the painting: the painting parallels the hotel as a comfort zone on the way to the afterlife. As is also the case with Nami Island, an economic venture by a micronation can have a utopian effect that contrasts with the surrounding dystopian society.

[7] Amur tigers do not readily reproduce in captivity. In 2018, a litter of four cubs was born at Seoul Grand Park Zoo, the first cubs born there since 2013 (*The Korea Herald* 12/10/2018). Nevertheless, the number of Amur tigers in zoos around the world is about the same as the number in the wild (+/- 500).

A model of cultural insight is also apparent in the “Ghost Wedding” sequence (Episode 5), which challenges the gender bias and self-regardingness of Korean society. A ghost wedding is a rite performed for a person who died unmarried; the spouse is usually another dead person but may also be living. A key intertext is an earlier drama series written by the Hong sisters, *The Master’s Sun* (2013), which delineates the grounding script and conventions of

[8] In *The Master's Sun* the practice is marked as Chinese. Ghost marriage has been practiced in China for 3000 years and persists in some rural areas as an element of a “tenacious persistence of folk religions” (Tan et al. 149) where, in an intensely patriarchal society, it most commonly centres on unmarried males.

representation in Episode 5. [8] The main female character, Tae Gong-Shil (Gong Hyo-Jin), who is able to see and communicate with ghosts, comes to the attention of Madam Go (Lee Yong-Nyeo), a Chinese shaman who works as a ghost wedding matchmaker for wealthy families and is seeking a bride for the unquiet grandson of a wealthy woman. Madam Go hopes that Gong-Shil, who “already has one foot in the world of the dead,” will prove suitable, and so lures her to the family mansion, asks her to dress in a Chinese red wedding gown, and locks her in the young man’s room. The scheme fails because Gong-Shil’s ghost seer ability enables her to talk with the ghost and overthrow the script by solving the matter in accord with the ghost’s real need, to meet and farewell a local girl he had grown fond of. The sequence does not indicate what the consequence of such a marriage would have been for Gong-Shil, but in Korean tradition it would entail a vow of lifelong celibacy. The later depiction in *Hotel Del Luna* varies the ghost wedding script by critiquing its basis in son preference and nuancing it with altruistic behaviour, a continuing theme of the series. The script is further varied by a new component which increases narrative tension: a living person who marries a ghost will die at the end of the ritual. An elderly couple has paid a shaman to find a husband amongst the living for Su-Min (Kim Mi-Eun), who they claim is their dead daughter but who in fact was their son’s fiancée. They fear the ghost will draw their son with her into the afterlife and, in a demonstration of Korean obsession with “precious sons,” they will sacrifice anybody to prevent this outcome. After several convoluted events, Su-Min gains the opportunity to marry her fiancé, but just prior to the ceremony she is visited by the third Mago (weaver of destinies), who presents her with a pair of sewing scissors as a gift. Mago tells her, “You need a stronger will to let go than to hold on,” and Su-Min cuts the thread that binds her fiancé to her.

Unwillingness to privilege another’s need above one’s own desire is often represented in Korean drama as a character failing and a problem for society in general. The frequent acts of altruism performed by Chan-Seong initially puzzle Man-Wol and hence attention is drawn to them. They are one of the ways through which a Korean micronation may distinguish itself from its neighbours. Likewise, Nami Island exercises soft power and corporate social responsibility through numerous altruistic cultural events, such as a children’s book fair, and by investment in charitable and environmental projects: donations to UNICEF, support for immigrant unmarried mothers, and an overtly eco-friendly environment, among others.

In conclusion, the third story from *Hotel Del Luna* deals with the malleability of cultural tradition and the claims of a micronation both to conserve culture and to promote cultural innovation. The hotel’s longest serving employee, bartender Kim Seon-Bi (Shin Jeong-Geun), had taken refuge in the hotel 500 years earlier to hide from disgrace. Originally a scholar named Kim Shi-Ik, he had been stripped of rank and position and driven to suicide for writing stories about the lives of common people. His crime was considered twofold: first, he had written using the common alphabet (*Hangeul*) rather than the Chinese characters used by aristocrats to exclude lower classes from knowledge; second, his stories were declared to be obscene because they challenged conventions of social order by, for example, valuing virtue above social rank. When the ghost of a novelist recently arrived at the hotel revealed that his final, still unpublished novel was a loosely historical fiction titled *Kim Shi-Ik, the*

Salacious Scholar, Kim Seon-Bi fears his undeserved notoriety will be magnified forever. Chan-Seong and Man-Wol visit the publisher and manage to buy the only copy of the manuscript. After they return and ask Kim Seon-Bi to tell them about his life, they discover that he is the author of Korea's most revered and most retold folktales, especially *Shim Cheong*, *Chun Hyang*, and *Heungbu and Nolbu* – or, as Chan-Seong puts it, he is the Shakespeare of the Joseon era. [9] Working with literary ghosts in the hotel, including the author, they revise the novel, return it to the publisher, and it becomes a best-seller. Just as Nami Island strives to preserve Korean heritage and add to its store of folktale, so too, it is here asserted, does Hotel Del Luna. However, the appeal to audiences of the principal characters of the drama also lies in a script of alienation grounded in the various ways ghosts have lost their identity. The quest for a displaced identity has been a recurrent theme in South Korean TV drama since at least *Winter Sonata* and Jun-Sang's lost identity, and answers to a wider concern in society and culture about the purpose of life in a seemingly hostile world. While place-branding works very differently on Nami Island and in *Hotel Del Luna*, the two offer versions of subjective wholeness through the connection of self to a rich cultural context, which is an outcome a micronation might ideally hope to achieve. Commercial enterprises which playfully assert their separation from South Korea, Nami Island and Hotel Del Luna each, like many micronations, self-consciously models a utopianism markedly absent in the country which surrounds it.

[9] The stories identified are universally known in Korea. They took shape in their present form at some time between 1700 and 1830, but the attributed age of 500 years is not improbable. The story of *Shim Cheong* tells of a young woman who throws herself into the sea as a sacrifice so that her blind father can regain his eyesight. Because of her filial piety, she is resurrected and becomes an empress, and her father's blindness is cured. The tale of *Chun Hyang* is a love story involving an upper-class scholar and the daughter of a lower-class entertainer. It exemplifies key Confucian values of loyalty, virtue, and filial piety. It has been adapted many times, including more than 20 film versions. The story of Heungbu and Nolbu is an international folktale type involving two brothers. The elder, Nolbu, is greedy and drives away and impoverishes Heungbu and his family. After helping an injured bird, Heungbu is rewarded with a magical gift and becomes wealthy. Nolbu sets out to reproduce the action but driven by greed rather than compassion he is instead punished and reduced to poverty. The story is of great significance because it interrogates the common Korean cultural value that the eldest son is the most important child of the family. It is widely told as a children's story.

Works Cited

- Braden, Waldo W. "Myths in a Rhetorical Context." *Southern Journal of Communication* 40.2 (1975): 113–126.
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces" (trans. Jay Miskowiec). *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22–27.
- Hanaki, Toru; Singhal, Arvind; Han, Min Wha; Kim, Do Kyun; and Chitnis, Ketan. "Hanryu Sweeps East Asia: How *Winter Sonata* is Gripping Japan." *The International Communication Gazette* 69.3 (2007): 281–294.
- Hayward, Philip. "Secessionism, Submergence and Site-Responsive Art." *Shima* 12.1 (2018): 160–171.
- . *Making a Splash: Mermaids (and Mermen) in 20th and 21st Century Audiovisual Media*. Eastleigh: John Libbey and Co/University of Indiana Press, 2018.
- Lee, Sung-Ae. "Supernatural Serials as Social Critique in Recent South Korean Television." *Series: International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 5.2 (2019): 59–70.
- . "Fairy-Tale Scripts and Intercultural Conceptual Blending in Modern Korean Film and Television Drama." Chapter 14 in *Grimms' Tales Around the Globe: The Dynamics of Their International Reception*, eds. Vanessa Joosen and Gillian Lathey. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014: 275–293.

Lee, Sung-Ae and Keith, Sarah. "Legend of the Blue Sea: Mermaids in South Korean Folklore and Popular Culture." Chapter 4 in *Scaled for Success: The Internationalisation of the Mermaid*, ed. Philip Hayward. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018: 69–88.

Rappenglück, Michael A. "The World as a Living Entity: Essentials of a Cosmic Metaphor." *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 18.4 (2018): 323–331.

Reo, Nicholas James and Whyte, Kyle Powys. "Hunting and Morality as Elements of Traditional Ecological Knowledge." *Human Ecology* 40.1 (2012): 15–27.

Tan, Chris K. K., Wang, Xin, and Chen, Shasha. "Corpse Brides: Yinhun and the Macabre Agency of Cadavers in Contemporary Chinese Ghost Marriages." *Asian Studies Review* 43.1 (2019): 148–163.

Imagine Your Fairy Tale Island [child focused]:
https://namisum.com/en/events/video_1905/

Imagine Your Fairy Tale Island: Nami Island [couple focused]:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0Vb--wO57o>