

# Readers' Response to a Korean Diaspora's Webtoon: The Case of the *Dailylifetoon Murrz*

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## Abstract

A *dailylifetoon* is a genre of webtoon that is getting more attention since it reflects the author's life and readers can easily identify with the storyline. At the same time, it is quickly spreading on social media platforms, thus becoming more accessible. Korean diaspora's *dailylifetoon* artists portray their own lifestyles, which is seen as a blend of two cultures. This paper examines the webtoon *Murrz* which depicts the daily life of a Korean-American webtoon artist and her family. Through narrative analysis, we can learn that the author, the main character of the webtoon, adheres to an American way of living, but knows Korean culture and traditions thanks to her parents who migrated to the US as young adults. Her parents are, in the eyes of the webtoon author, "the others", and therefore she ascribes certain of their behaviours as universal to Koreans.

In this regard, the reader's role becomes important. Readers' reactions are shown in the comments section of every episode. Most of the readers will relate to the story and share their own experiences in this section. However, some readers will challenge the author's opinion while commenting that certain situations, which in the author's view are distinctly Korean or Asian, occur in other cultures too.

In this article, we investigate how the Korean diaspora is portrayed in the webtoon *Murrz* and how the artist presents herself and her parents. Further, we discuss the role of the readers of this Korean diaspora webtoon and the impact of the comments section.

**Keywords:** Webtoon, readers' response, online comments, *dailylifetoon*, Korean diaspora

## Odziv bralstva na spletni strip o korejski diaspori: primer stripa *Murrz*

### Izvleček

*Spletni strip o vsakdanu* je žanr spletnega stripa, ki dobiva vse več pozornosti, saj izraža avtorjevo oziroma avtoričino vsakdanje življenje, zato se bralke in bralci zlahka poistovetijo z zgodbo. Ta vrsta stripov se hitro širi na platformah družbenih medijev in postaja dostopnejša. Tudi v korejski diaspori najdemo ustvarjalke in ustvarjalce omenjenih spletnih stripov, ki prikazujejo svoj življenjski slog, prepreden z elementi dveh kultur.

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Ta članek proučuje spletni strip *Murrz*, ki prikazuje vsakdanje življenje umetnice korejsko-ameriških korenin in njene družine. S pripovedno analizo ugotovimo, da je avtorici, glavni junakinji tega stripa, bližje ameriški način življenja, kljub temu pa pozna korejsko kulturo in tradicijo po zaslugu svojih staršev, ki so se v mladih letih preselili v ZDA. Avtoričini starši so v njenih očeh »drugi«, zato jim pripisuje določena vedenja, ki bi jih sicer imeli za univerzalna.

V članku raziskujemo, kako je korejska diaspora prikazana v spletnem stripu *Murrz* ter kako umetnica predstavlja sebe in svoje starše. Nadalje razpravljamo o vlogi bralk in bralcev spletnega stripa in njihovem odzivu, ki je prikazan v razdelku s komentarji pod vsako epizodo. Večina bralcev in bralk se poistoveti z zgodbo in deli svoje izkušnje. Nekatere pa opozarjajo, da se določene situacije, ki so po avtoričinem mnenju korejske ali azijske, dogajajo tudi v drugih kulturah in so univerzalne.

**Ključne besede:** spletni strip, odziv bralstva, spletni komentarji, korejska diaspora

## Introduction

“Webtoon” (*weptun 웹툰*) is a Korean English compound word, made from the words “website” and “cartoon”, and means cartoons or comics published online. Jin (2023, 30) claims that the term “webtoon” was used in written form for the first time in the newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo* on June 22, 1999, specifying “newly created manhwas [the general Korean term for comics and print cartoons] for the web” (Chung 1999, cited in Jin 2023, 30). The early 2000s are therefore considered the beginning of the webtoon era.

Webtoons emerged for several reasons. For one thing, the South Korean cultural industry began to expand in the 1990s, and as the government supported the export of cultural products, the market for Korean comic books was developing, but also had to compete with the market for Japanese comics (Bak 2018, 2–3). At the same time, digital technology systems developed and this influenced the expectations of comic book (*manhwa 만화*) readers. They followed the new technological inventions and wanted to read *manhwa* on a computer (*ibid.*, 4). Therefore, the need to change paper books into digital products emerged. Artists started to scan their works and upload them to their personal websites. In 2003, the portal site Daum (*daeum 다음*) opened a corner in their “News Section” called *The World of Comics* (*Manhwasoksesang 만화속세상*). This is today seen as the most important step in the development of webtoons, since it facilitated certain technological advances in their production, such as the scroll function which made the reading of webtoons on a computer (or later mobile phone) more interesting and convenient (*ibid.*, 10). Two years later, in 2005, the website Naver (*neibeo 네이버*) also provided a similar service for webtoon artists, and they began to rise in popularity. Due

to rapid production, the quantity of published webtoons increased and various genres began to emerge based on the content of the storyline (romance, action, fantasy, horror, etc.). Website also started to analyse the attitudes and preferences of readers, and so developed in such a way that made it easier for the readers to access their favourite webtoons (based on the reader's gender, age, preferred content, and even preferred drawing style) which, in turn, also helped the artists to develop strategies for making more appealing webtoons.

Despite their short history, webtoons have already managed to cross the borders of South Korea. In 2014, Line Webtoon (the name later changed to WEBTOON) launched its English platform to expand the culture of webtoons to other parts of the world (Jang 2014). It offered several translations of well-known Korean webtoons and allowed foreign artists to join the community and publish their own works on the site. Today, WEBTOON supports authors creating in different languages, such as English, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, French, and Thai. Moreover, there is a "Canvas corner", which gives new artists the opportunity to upload their webtoons and present their work to a large audience.

The number of webtoons keeps growing, and artists are getting more and more subscribers with each passing day. In 2022, Naver Webtoon announced that it had grown into a global platform with 180 million monthly active users (MAU) around the world, which includes readers of Naver webtoons and Naver web novels (Bak 2022). The number of users increased dramatically from the year 2020 to 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the specific features of webtoons is that artists can create their work anonymously. They do not need to publish their work in print, so they can create a webtoon account under a nickname and publish it online. Many popular artists are unknown and are not willing to show their faces, and it is sometimes impossible to find information on the nationality, age, or gender of the artist, especially if they create webtoons in English, as is common for the Korean diaspora. Therefore, the research on Korean diaspora webtoon creators is challenging, especially since prior research is scarce.

However, there is a genre of webtoon that developed based on the artist's personal experiences and daily life, called *dailylifetoon*<sup>1</sup> (*ilsangtun* 일상툰), and this is popular with Korean diaspora webtoon creators. These artists create webtoons closely

1 There are different terms used for this genre of webtoon in Korean, such as *ilsangtun* (일상툰), *saenghwaltun* (생활툰), *deillitun* (데일리툰), *daieoritun* (다이어리툰), *eseitun* (에세이툰), *gamsseongtun* (감성툰), *gamjeongtun* (감정툰) etc. The English translation of *ilsangtun* on the portal WEBTOON is *slice of life*. The better term for this genre would be the compound word *dailylifetoon* (which can already be seen as a hashtag on social networking platforms), because it reflects the content of this webtoon genre (which deals with the daily life of the author) and it keeps the last syllable of the word *cartoon*.

related to their lives, which are a mixture of Korean culture and the culture of the country where they are living.

In this article, our intention is to research the content of one Korean diaspora webtoon and its reception. We will focus on the webtoon *Murrz* by Mary Park, who was born in the US to Korean immigrant parents. *Murrz* is a *dailylifetoon*, an autobiographical webtoon based on her life. In this, *Murrz* portrays herself and the people around her. Since she is the daughter of Korean immigrants, she grew up between both cultures. Her lifestyle is closer to the American one, but due to her family background she knows the Korean lifestyle as well.

*Murrz* is published online, and every episode has a corner where readers can comment, exchange opinions, and communicate with others. The comments section is an important part of every webtoon. With their comments, readers can react and express their thoughts or feelings, and authors can then take these into account and adapt their work, if wanted. Other readers can also learn things if they read the comments, and thus each episode's comments section can be seen as a part of the whole webtoon story.

The research questions are as follows:

- (1) How is the Korean diaspora portrayed in the webtoon *Murrz*? How does the artist present herself, and how does she portray her parents?
- (2) What is the role of the readers of this Korean diaspora webtoon? What is the impact of the comments section below each episode?

In this article, we will first analyse the *dailylifetoon* genre since it is relevant for the research on Korean diaspora webtoons due to the prevalence of autobiographical stories. After this, we will analyse the webtoon *Murrz*, focusing on the episodes which show the author's family life and her family members (specifically her father). Narrative analysis will be used for this, as through it we can learn about the feelings and lifestyle of the Korean diaspora in the US. Narrative analysis will also be applied to the study of the readers' reactions. Lastly, we will analyse the comments published in the comments section of the three episodes which show *Murrz* and/or her father. Through the analysis of the comments, the role of the readers can be determined.

## Autobiographical Webtoons

There is no clear definition of the webtoon genres and their categorization, and every author chooses the category they want to publish their work under. In

“Canvas corner” of the site WEBTOON, which provides guidelines for new artists, they suggest six steps to publish the webtoon. The second step reads: “STEP 2 Select a Genre: Pick up to two genres that match your series well” (WEBTOON CANVAS n.d.). We can see that there is no clear guidance on how to choose the genre, and every author can choose two for the same webtoon.

For this research on Korean diaspora webtoon artists, we will investigate a specific genre called *dailylifetoon*, which has recently become more visible on webtoon and social media platforms, such as Instagram. *Dailylifetoon* is a genre that is mainly based on the author’s own daily life, where the author portrays themselves through the main character (Kim Keon-Hyung 2018, 123).

*Dailylifetoon*’s characters usually have a very simple appearance, drawn in a few of lines. The authors portray their lives and different situations which happen to them during the day. That is why the *dailylifetoon* storylines are closely connected with the author’s workplace and family. Often, however, the main characters are not portrayed as human beings but as animals (e.g., dogs, cats, bears, rabbits), which gives the webtoon a humorous note. The background of the *dailylifetoon* is not always specified. If a webtoon is published in English, it is hard to even know the nationality of the author, if they do not choose to reveal it.

There is usually no running story in a *dailylifetoon*. Every episode shows one situation, from the beginning to the end, and only rarely the stories continue in a following episode. This type of webtoon permits the reader to start following artists at any point in time, as they do not need to catch up in the story. However, the characters and background are usually the same.

*Dailylifetoon* creators are notably dependent on their readers. If the readers do not react through the comments section or through a *like* button, the artists might ask the readers for support. Some authors even try to communicate with their readers by replying to their comments. This gives readers another motivation to support their favourite artists in an active way.

Recently, *dailylifetoon* have been spreading on social media platforms, especially on Instagram, which is becoming more popular among webtoon readers. The Korea Creative Content Agency ran a survey among webtoon readers between July 2022 and May 2023 which showed that Instagram ranked fifth among the most-used platforms used to read webtoons (Lee 2023). The most common webtoon genre present on Instagram is actually *dailylifetoon*, which are, due to the platform’s name, also called an *instatoon* (in Korean *inseutatun* 인스타툰). However, several artists who publish their creations on Instagram also publish the same content on the Naver Webtoon platform, which is why *instatoon*

might not be the most appropriate term to use in our research of the webtoon genre.

There are several reasons for the appearance of *dailylifetoon* rather than other genres on Instagram. First, Instagram has a limitation on the size of the uploaded picture, so webtoon artists who like to draw detailed characters and backgrounds and use more colours in their drawings (which is common for other webtoon genres) will not post their creations on Instagram, but *dailylifetoon* artists will. Second, Instagram determines which posts will appear in its user's feed according to that user's activity (posts the user liked or commented on in the past), which means that a long-form continuous webtoon story (common for genres such as *action* and *fantasy*), where the reader needs to know what happened in the previous episode, would be inconvenient for readers since they might not see certain episodes when published. Third, webtoons on Instagram are free and available to read at any time. Fourth, readers on Instagram are more exposed (by their profile photo and biography on their Instagram profile), which creates a stronger sense of community among the readers.

## Dailytoon *Murrz*—Narrative Analysis

The webtoon *Murrz* is a *dailylifetoon* created by Mary Park, a Korean-American designer based in Los Angeles. As she explains in her face reveal video on YouTube (WEBTOON 2018), *Murrz* is also her nickname. *Murrz* was published on the platform WEBTOON in June 2017, and the episodes were continuously posted till February 2022. She published 606 episodes and a final Q&A episode where she answered questions asked by her readers. She also published the webtoon *Murrz* on Facebook and Instagram, where she is still posting new episodes. The Instagram and Facebook episodes are shorter, normally created in four cuts, while the ones posted on WEBTOON are longer and adapted to the scroll function.

*Murrz* is an autobiographical *dailylifetoon*—its female protagonist being *Murrz* herself—and is, as Mary Park says in YouTube titled “Face Reveal: *Murrz*” (WEBTOON 2018), “loosely based on my life with my cats and my boyfriend, stupid relationship things that happen or just day-to-day funny things”. In an interview with *HuffPost Deutschland* (2017), she explained: “*Murrz* and her boyfriend are goofy and easy-going, because that's really how we are in real life [...] We're just two big kids who are trying to 'adult' together!”

In the narrative analysis, we will focus on the main character and her father. Focussing on the two characters will allow us to analyse the diasporic aspects of the webtoon.

As we will see, Murrz and her father represent two generations of the Korean diaspora who differ in many respects, especially in how they live. Murrz's lifestyle is close to the American one, while her father came to the United States as an immigrant, so his lifestyle is closer to the Korean one. Under each episode there is a comments section in which certain aspects of the episode are discussed. To understand the readers' reactions, we must first understand how the characters are portrayed.

### *The Main Character (Murrz)*

Murrz is the main character of the webtoon, and she is drawn in a simple way, not revealing any physical features of the author. When *Murrz* was first published on WEBTOON and Instagram, the identity of the main character and the author were not revealed. Even with the background, which shows Murrz, her boyfriend and cats at their home, it was impossible to guess her identity. The first time readers on WEBTOON could find out more about her identity was in the 46th episode (published on April 10, 2018, see Muritz 2018a), when Murrz's father spoke Korean (he says: “*Jahl-haes-sub*” 잘했어, meaning *you did well, good job*), which revealed his ethnicity. In the reader comments section, we can read such comments as “Ohhh you're Korean” or “Wait Murrz is Korean?” which emphasizes the fact that, until that moment, the webtoon was drawn in a way the readers could not know the identity of the main character at all.

On June 15, 2018, the author was invited to a “Face Reveal” YouTube show where she introduced herself with her real name. Later, in one of the episodes, Murrz also presents herself as a “first generation Korean American” (the episode was published on Instagram on July 23, 2021, see Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2021a).

In episodes 503, 504 and 505 on WEBTOON, Murrz shares her personal story about her family. Her parents moved to the States when they were young—her father attended college in the US—and she and her older sister were both born there. Therefore, her parents are first generation Korean-American immigrants, and even though Murrz was born in the US, she identifies as Korean-American.

Referring to Barth (1981, 202), a person's identity is formed according to two categories: self-categorization and categorization by others, particularly by the dominant group. In Murrz's webtoon, we rarely see how society views Murrz. The two episodes that show this were published on WEBTOON and Instagram at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. They portray her fear of being insulted or discriminated against due to her Asian appearance. Most stories are told from her own perspective; therefore, we can only grasp how Murrz sees herself and how she sees others (mostly other members of her family).

Murrz places significant emphasis on the use of language and the ability to speak Korean, which is commonly seen in children of immigrants. Such children quickly become fluent in the language of their environment, which, in Murrz's case, is English. From a very young age the children of immigrants play a pseudo-parental role in the family, as they help their parents adapt to a new lifestyle through communication with English speakers (Yoo and Kim 2014, 2). They thus work as language brokers, and translate, interpret, and even write legal letters and contracts on behalf of their parents (*ibid.*, 6). Even though they perceive these situations as "normal" and something that must be done (*ibid.*, 31), language brokering plays a significant role in the lives of immigrant families because it fosters mutual dependence between parents and children (Dorner, Faulstich Orellana and Jiménez 2008, 533). The role of Murrz as a language broker in her family is seen in a few episodes, such as number 495, where Murrz is applying for her dad's health insurance by phone, and 428, where Murrz is calling the bank on behalf of her mother.

However, language is not just a tool of communication but is also closely connected to its speaker's identity. As Baker (2006, 51) says: "Sometimes identity is via dress, religious beliefs, rituals, but language is almost always present in identity formation and identity display. Language is an index, symbol and marker of identity." Especially for members of a diaspora, language is an important factor in the formation of identity and serves as an indicator of cultural differences (Kasinitis, Waters and Mollenkopf 2009, 243). Children of immigrants in the English-speaking environment become fluent in English at a young age, and in many cases, it becomes their dominant language (Park and Sarkar 2007). That is also the reason why children of Korean immigrants struggle with their identity formation. Since they are more fluent in English than Korean, they are often judged and criticized for their lack of language ability by other Korean immigrants who are fluent in the language (for example by their peers who spent half of their lives in Korea and moved to the US when they were teenagers or young adults) (Yoo and Kim 2014, 75).

When Murrz announced that she was Korean-American, the story, published on Instagram, July 23, 2021 (Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2021a), was specifically about language. She is proud because she can speak, read, and write Korean (which is, as she says, her "second language"), however, she feels overwhelmed when she needs to speak Korean with native Koreans and cannot understand everything the other person is saying. In such cases she can feel her "American side shine bright like a diamond". We can deduce that even though she can speak Korean, she perceives herself as more American than Korean because she faces some difficulties when communicating with native Korean speakers. It is also interesting that, in this episode, she portrays her interlocutor as an older Korean man, probably a similar in age to her father.

Considering Murrz's overall lifestyle, it seems that she is more connected to American culture than the Korean one. She enjoys American traditions through celebrations of American holidays—such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Christmas. She mentions problematic events that happened in the US—for example, mass shootings, racism and racially motivated hate crime (e.g., the killing of Ahmaud Arbery), social inequality, high education fees which make students take big loans, and so on. She also mentions some daily life events which happen in the US, like being called to jury duty. America is not her “hostland”, it is her homeland, and readers are reminded of her Korean identity only in the episodes that feature her parents.

### *The Other Character (Murrz's Father)*

Murrz's father represents a different generation of Korean immigrants, and his lifestyle is closer to that of a Korean, rather than an American. First, the most obvious divergence is the language. He came to the States as an adult and attended college there, but he is not a native speaker of English. He uses a mix of Korean and English when talking to his daughters and has difficulties with the pronunciation of some English words, especially ones which contain the consonants (f) and (z), for example, he pronounces the word “zero” as “jero”, and “five” as “paibe” (as depicted in an Instagram post published on December 22, 2020, see Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2020).

He also cannot sense all the nuances of English. In an Instagram post published on September 1, 2023 (Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2023b), Murrz's father is seen trying to open a bank account and he needs to provide his email address, which was made for him by his elder daughter (Murrz's sister) in the late 1990s. His email account is *fatboy@email.com*. When the bank assistant asks him to provide his email address, he does not seem embarrassed. However, the person sitting next to him in the bank (most probably his elder daughter, who chose this address) and the bank assistant feel embarrassed—his daughter freezes and would like to disappear, the bank assistant just smiles awkwardly. The father probably knows the meaning of “fat boy” but is not aware of the inappropriateness of providing this kind of email address in an official situation, such as opening a bank account.

Murrz portrays her parents as “others” through the use of language. Language as a tool for portraying others is observed in other Korean diaspora literature, for example, in Chang-rae Lee's novel *Native Speaker*. For the main character of the novel, Henry, language is like a mirror through which he can see himself and portray others depending on how well they use English (Kang 2022, 144). Murrz also

portrays herself and others through language—her English is perfect, as opposed to that of her father. In this regard, her father becomes “the other”.

Second, Murrz's father is portrayed as someone who makes sacrifices for his family (shown in an Instagram episode, published on July 6, 2022, Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2022). As a first-generation Korean immigrant in the US, he is the provider for the whole family, and he wishes for his daughters to have a better life than himself. When it comes to clothing, he provides nice and expensive clothes for his daughters, while wearing the cheapest or even free clothes himself.

Third, Murrz's father is portrayed as strict. He had a lot of problems with the elder daughter when she was young because she was rebellious. He did not allow her to talk to her male friends, he did not allow her to stay outside the house after 8 pm, and he did not allow her to pierce her ears (depicted in an Instagram post published on August 1, 2021, see Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2021b). When the daughters would not obey or would talk back to him and their mother, he would use a stick (*mongdungi* 봉등이) and spank them (Episode 161, published on WEBTOON, see Murrz 2019).

Fourth, he is old-fashioned. When Murrz's baby tooth was wiggly, he used an old method of removing the tooth—by tying it to a door. The artist titled this episode “Korean Tooth Removal”, as if this method was unique to Korea, because it was used by her father who is Korean (Episode 113, published on WEBTOON, see Murrz 2018b).

Fifth, her father follows Korean cultural norms and etiquette. The episode about “Korean Dads Go Out to Dinner”, published on Instagram on August 16, 2023 (Murrz 2023), shows Murrz's father having dinner with his Korean friend in a Korean restaurant. When they finish their meal they both want to pay for it and fight over the bill. The episode was published on Instagram in collaboration with the Korean Cultural Center New York in order to promote Korean culture and etiquette.

Murrz portrays her father as “other” not only through the use of language but also through his character and lifestyle. In the last three mentioned stories (the one about spanking children with a *mongdungi*, the episode about removing a tooth and the one where her father and his friend fight over the bill in a restaurant), she specifically mentions her father's Korean (or Asian) background with “growing up in an Asian household”, “Korean tooth removal”, and “when Korean dads go out to dinner”, which emphasizes the “otherness” as if these kinds of stories are impossible to find in the American society which is better known to her.

The reason for seeing her father as “the other” lies in the acculturation gap between him and the author. Her father was born in Korea and moved to the US

when he was already an adult. On the other hand, the author was born in the US and exposed to American culture since childhood. Children born in the US to immigrant parents are more likely to have undergone greater acculturation into American society compared to their foreign-born parents (Harris and Chen 2023, 1751). Since the author's parents were immigrants, she could grasp the differences in cultural values and practices from an early age, noticing those at home and the ones she experienced outside her home (at school, at the playground, at her friend's home, etc.). These differences led her to feel her father is different from her and also different from the adults she met in the US. He is not different from her only because of the age gap but also because he was raised in a different cultural environment. That is why the author connects her father's behaviour with Korean or Asian culture.

## Readers' Reactions

Since the comments section is an important part of a webtoon, we will investigate the readers' reactions. Reading is not just an individual act but can also be a social one (Rehberg Sedo 2011, 2). With the development of new technologies, social reading, where readers interact with each other, has moved to the online space. Webtoon readers can interact and exchange their ideas in the comments section under each episode.

A reader can also become an important part of the whole process. Kim Joohee (2018, 24–32) analysed the readers' comments section of the webtoon *Navillera* and summarized them into six kinds:

- comments which share knowledge and are educational,
- comments sharing personal experiences of the readers,
- comments proving the immersion of the reader in the story (readers express their feelings toward the characters in the story),
- comments in which readers suggest creating a TV drama or movie based on the webtoon,
- comments expressing the reader's motivation for self-development after reading the webtoon,
- comments sharing the reader's indirect experiences.

Through their comments readers interact with each other, exchange ideas and, in numerous cases, influence other readers, as well as the author who further develops the storyline based on this feedback. There are also cases of indirect influences where readers' comments encourage production companies to turn a successful

webtoon into a movie or TV drama. Therefore, these reader responses should not be ignored.

Reader response theory developed at the end of the 1960s, as a reaction to the New Criticism, which neglected the role of the reader (Lee 2001, 64). The reader response theorists suggested that the text is not complete without the reader, and that every work has two poles—the artistic pole (created by the author) and the aesthetic pole (reader's realization) which complement each other (Iser 1978, 21). The reader and their interpretation of the text are a part of the work's creation. The reader reads the text and interprets it according to their "horizon of expectation" (Jauss 1982, 23), in other words, according to their previous knowledge—the books they have read before, the knowledge they acquired about literature during their schooling and from the society in which they grew up. Each reader has their own interpretation and each interpretation (even when made by the same reader) can be different and change with time. That is why some works that are not successful when first published can find success years later.

The first generation of reader response theorists (Jauss 1982; Iser 1978; Eco, 1979) mainly focussed on abstract terms and constructions which could not be tested or measured (Pianzola, Rebora, and Lauer 2020, 2). However, with online comments sections readers' responses can now be researched. They allow us to see the immediate audience reaction to each episode or chapter separately, not only to the work as a whole. Readers' comments can be seen as a part that completes the work, which is why we are interested in the comments section of *Murrz*.

### *Selection of Webtoon Episodes*

For the analysis, we will focus on the last three above-mentioned episodes, those that portray Murrz's father.<sup>2</sup> The main criterion for this choice was the use of the words "Korean" and "Asian", with which the author emphasized the fact that in her view the situations described are unique to Korean or Asian culture.

The first example is episode 161, titled "Mong Doong Ee", published on WEBTOON on January 8, 2019. In this episode, Murrz explains about "Asian household upbringing". She portrays herself and her sister as young children. If they misbehaved, they were beaten with any objects their parents would be able

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2 Episodes are available on the following pages: Episode 161 "Mong Doong Ee": [https://www.webtoons.com/en/slice-of-life/murrz/ep-161-mong-doong-ee/viewer?title\\_no=1281&episode\\_no=161](https://www.webtoons.com/en/slice-of-life/murrz/ep-161-mong-doong-ee/viewer?title_no=1281&episode_no=161) (see Murrz 2019); Episode 113 "Korean Tooth Removal": [https://www.webtoons.com/en/slice-of-life/murrz/ep-113-korean-tooth-removal/viewer?title\\_no=1281&episode\\_no=113](https://www.webtoons.com/en/slice-of-life/murrz/ep-113-korean-tooth-removal/viewer?title_no=1281&episode_no=113) (see Murrz 2018b); Episode about "Korean Dads": <https://www.instagram.com/p/CwBKtaxO0M6/> (see Murrz 2023).

to find in their surroundings, but mostly they were beaten with a stick called a *mong doong ee*. The episode has 1,182 comments and 46,328 likes.

The second example is episode 113, titled “Korean Tooth Removal”, published on WEBTOON on April 15, 2018. It portrays a younger Murrz with the typical bowl hairstyle. Her tooth is wiggling. Her father removes the tooth by tying it to a door. The episode has 1,911 comments and 52,436 likes.

The third, unnumbered episode was published on Instagram on August 16, 2023 (Murrz (@murrzstudio) 2023a). It portrays Murrz’s father having dinner with his Korean friend in a Korean restaurant. When it comes time to pay the two men fight over the bill. The episode has 22,844 likes and 91 comments. The episode was published in collaboration with the Korean Cultural Center, New York. The caption under the episode is “The honorable check duel: Korean Version!” Its hashtags are: #맏형, #koreanetiquette #koreanculture.

Since the last episode chosen for the analysis was published on a different platform than the first two, it is relevant to point out the differences between the platforms and clarify why the episode was selected despite being on a different platform. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, allow readers to comment, share their experiences, and tag their friends to involve them in conversations. Tagging friends creates a sense of community among the users of social media platforms (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015, 246), but this is not possible on WEBTOON.

The second difference between the platforms is that readers are more exposed on social media platforms, since their profiles might include their real name and profile picture. Therefore, webtoons published on Instagram have fewer comments than those on WEBTOON, where users can be completely anonymous.

In the case of *Murrz*, the number of comments on webtoons published on Instagram is significantly lower than the number of comments on WEBTOON. However, the content of the comments on the selected episodes is similar across both platforms. The author herself created a community by replying to the comments on Instagram (since there are fewer comments to reply to) and replying to the readers on WEBTOON through special Q&A episodes and appreciation posts. We can conclude that *Murrz*’s readers on Instagram and WEBTOON might not be the same, but the content of their comments is similar and thus suitable for analysis in this article.

### *Comments Analysis*

Based on the content of the comments from the three mentioned episodes, we can categorize them into the following three groups:

- (1) Comments where readers relate to the story and share their own experiences,
- (2) Comments where readers correct the author's perspective,
- (3) Comments where readers criticize the author.

#### *Readers Relate to the Story and Share Their Own Experiences*

For all three episodes, we can find comments where readers relate to the story.

For the episode "Mong Doong Ee", many readers remember their childhoods. Some specify that they were also raised in an Asian household and the story is very familiar to them. Other readers sympathize with Murrz's older sister who got all the beatings.

Very similar reactions of the readers can be seen in the comments section of the episode "Korean Tooth Removal". Readers share their experiences of when they had their teeth removed as children. Some of them explain in detail how their parents would remove their teeth; others simply said that they could relate to the story. Readers also sympathise with Murrz and remember the pain.

The comments under the episode "Korean Dads" similarly reveal Readers' personal experiences where they encounter Koreans who want to pay for the meals of others (either for their colleagues, friends, or their family members).

Table 1: Readers' Experience Sharing

"Mong Doong Ee"	Relate to the story	velvetcakeu: ours in the Philippines, the most powerful weapon is the broom 😂  Lhasa Apso: I am also an Asian. I am an Indian. I can understand it in my bones 😂 😂 😂  Nicole Caswell: so I'm halve Korean and I also had a beating stick called a "meh meh stick" it was one of those sticks that u paint the walls with but 2 times thicker. Sometimes I still get hit with it. XD  cartoon-ish: Being an Asian, I 100% painfully relate. :") flip flops are a good weapon too. Lol
	Sympathizing with Murrz's sister	ComiK_ch@n: I, the eldest sibling of my asian house, relates to this episode on a godly level  tired_abys: Asian, the older sibling with a younger sister, and used to get hit on the arse with either a belt, a metal stick (ihdk where it came from or what it was for but it was there) and the absolute bane of my life, my grandparents' whip.  Vampishly: omg i was the older sister 😂 😂 😂  Anna Frackiewicz: poor older sister 😂
"Korean Tooth Removal"	Sharing similar experiences	webtoon is for life: based on literal experience. when I was a kid, my mom accidentally took out my tooth when she was wiping my face with a towel after I took a bath  Akari_Maya_Koyuki_10: My Dad did that to all my younger siblings still waiting for the youngest one though.  mizuzu21 Aa: my dad did something similar, only instead of a door knob he tied it to the dogs collar then threw a ball. the dog was a great dane.  Dino nuggies for all: Same thing happened with me as a child but my dad just pulled it out with his hands
	Remembering the pain	James Feww: The trauma is real.  Engagedtobefree: My dad's friend pulled my one loose tooth out with a tool (pliers I think) and I remember it hurt really bad. No idea why adults do stuff like this 😒  JuicyBuns 😂: ahh yes... the very first trauma everyone goes through  Lily_~: reading this I re-experience the pain when my grandma pull out my first tooth, at first it was fine then seconds later ow,ow.....OWWWWWWWWW!!!!

"Korean Dads"	Sharing similar experiences	<p>hereticalkemyst 22w: While I was stationed in Korea, we had a Mr. Kim who worked at the battalion command team's driver/translator/general fixer. He's super cool and nice, and he'd pull this crap every time we'd be out 😂 If you don't see him, he's 100% getting the check!</p> <p>thederpdaneel 22w: I remember seeing this from my dad as a kid, I swear even tho I didnt rlly notice at the time I could just feel auras emmitting from my dad and the other dad right before the bill came out 😂</p> <p>kitsune_yokai5 22w: My husband is Korean and he always did this when we went out eating with my parents. So they'd really surprised how he could be so fast and sneaky in paying 😂 now they know, when he says he wanna use the bathroom my mom says no 😂</p> <p>xoxo_avallure 22w: 😂 😂 working at a comfy Pocha in the city, I've been in the middle of this so many times! 😂</p>
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### *Readers Correct the Author's Perspective*

Since Murrz mentions the word "Korean" in the episodes "Korean Tooth Removal" and "Korean Dads" and the word "Asian" in the episode "Mong Doong Ee", some readers comment about it. Readers either expose their nationality and say that the same situation happens in their own country, or they simply comment that the three situations are not exclusively Korean or Asian.

Table 2: Readers' Corrections

"Korean Tooth Removal"	<p>Evena Paul: that method is universal</p> <p>RonsFury: basically all asians, all of em</p> <p>Farin Vienna: It's not only Korean style, I think this happens in the whole world. .....</p> <p>GEASS LORD: I'm from India and I can say it's the same method here. the pain murzz , the pain 😂</p> <p>Milijan66408683: lol same in Serbia</p> <p>daysofdead: Ohh my god. Every Asian Dad ever 😂 😂 😂 😂 😂</p> <p>theskintylegend: Literally my Hispanic dad</p> <p>♡Strawberry_peach♡: that's not just a Korean thing my dad did that to me, and I'm american</p> <p>Kitty1601: Everybody do this, I'm black and my mama did tht 🙏 😂 most terrifying thing in my life</p>
"Mong Doong Ee"	<p>Tiramisu Espresso: yeah, switches were a thing in 'murican culture until a few decades ago, thankfully I'm too young, for me it was a wooden spoon and occasionally a plastic vacuum cleaner attachment</p> <p>nuggets(ㆁㆁㆁ): oof I can relate but my mom is Mexican so she has the MONG DONG EE or THE SLIPPER the slipper hurts more</p> <p>Vhaemera 🎯: In a lot of black households we call them a switch, and whoever was gonna whoop us with the switch made us go and pick our own. 😂</p> <p>LoafOfBread 📜: In Texas we call that a switch. My brother got them a lot. He was always in trouble and picking on me eventually when I would tell on him I'd say "momma want me to get a switch?!" 😂 😂</p> <p>CindyreallyCinderely: I'm not Asian but I can relate in a Hispanic household.</p> <p>Mayamad: I'm African but I can relate sooo much</p> <p>mimi_eubi: I'm positive every culture has a "whooping stick". Mine was called "the switch"</p> <p>jwwia: here in Portugal, atleast where I live we have the famous "Colher de Pau" which means Wooden Spoon</p> <p>Allie: i was born in russian family but we had the same stuff 😂</p>

<b>"Korean Dads"</b>	<p>zilajevsky 22w: Austrian people are the same, gosh. I've witness so many fights over bills over the years </p> <p>t.nilk 22w: LOL all Asian culture! I'm Thai, in my family all the women fight for the bill. </p> <p>scociro_ 22w: @veronicagiallongo la Corea in realtà è la Sicilia</p> <p>sahill_is_a_genius_12 22w: This is the case with Indian parents too </p> <p>brownieenextdoor 22w: Asian version*.. even in Pakistan, its such a great battle  n when out with adults, we younger ones actually enjoy it..</p> <p>beauty.of.speed 22w: Haha, my childhood (but with Swiss dads)</p> <p>katieyossarian 21w: My mum (white British) used to do this, too. I remember my ex-bf getting so frustrated he left money for my mum in a book in her house, she found it and snuck it back to him </p>
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### *Readers Criticize the Author*

Comments that criticised the webtoon were rare. However, in the comments section below the episode "Mong Doong Ee", which portrays Murrz and her sister being beaten by their parents when they misbehaved, some readers commented that this is child abuse and should not be portrayed as comedy. Readers also expressed that the webtoon made them uncomfortable because they had suffered child abuse.

Table 3: Readers' Criticism

<b>"Mong Doong Ee"</b>	<p>happyturtle5: omg that's not funny that's child abuse!</p> <p>myshi: i don't understand how this is considered "comedy" this is straight up child abuse. the fact that you're making light of it is disturbing. You're basically telling all your young viewers "your parents beat you? not only is that completely normal, but you should be fine with it!" just because you turned out "normal" (which, btw, you didn't see as you think it's funny to beat kids with a stick) doesn't mean that doing this shit is okay. i was hit as a kid and i turned out pretty messed up.</p> <p>Azifri: Sorry Murrz, but jokes about child abuse are not even close to my definition of funny.</p> <p>ottocea: as an Korean-American who suffered abuse like this --- this comic is awfully condoning this abusive parental behavior. the fact that it's being portrayed as something of a joke is even worse.</p>
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## Discussion

In the comments section of all three episodes, most readers related to the story. They either shared their own experiences or they simply commented: “Relatable”.

In the first episode (“Mong Doong Ee”), readers shared their own stories from their childhood and mentioned how they got the beatings from their parents or grandparents if they did not obey or if they did some mischief. Most comments specify the tool with which they were beaten—a stick, flip flops or sandals, a hanger, belt, or any other object that the parents could find around them. Readers also shared that they had to pick the stick outside and bring it to their parents. Most readers found the webtoon funny and wrote that beatings were part of the upbringing that made them behave better and therefore allowed them to become better people. The readers under this episode also mentioned the relationship between the older and younger sister. One of the three top comments opened a debate about how the older sister always got all the beatings. Comments showed that readers sympathized with the older sister.

In the comments section of the episode “Korean Tooth Removal”, readers share their experiences. They either comment about their own fathers who also tricked them and said it would not hurt when he removed a baby tooth, or they describe the method of removing the tooth in more detail. Readers remember the pain and share their own feelings. Some readers comment that they still have trauma because of the pain they experienced when their teeth were removed.

The readers of the episode “Korean Dads” also share their personal experiences. Some readers remember their Korean relatives or co-workers using the excuse of going to the bathroom and then secretly paying for everyone’s meal. Other readers could understand the situation due to their experience working in Korean restaurants.

Readers of all three episodes offer a new perspective and try to correct the point of view of the author. In all three episodes, the author mentions the words “Korean” or “Asian”. In all three episodes the author portrays her father. Since she sees her father as someone who is different from her, because he is a Korean immigrant and did not grow up in the US, she ascribes all three situations to Koreans or to Korean culture. However, reading the comments we can see that while readers relate to the story, in many cases they share their own nationality and let the author know that the same situation happens in their country as well. Through the comments section, we can learn that the use of *mong doong ee* is common not only for Asian households but can also be found in the US where the stick is called a “switch”. It also exists in Portugal where they use a wooden spoon (“Colher de

Pau”), as well as in Hispanic households. According to the comments, the “Korean” tooth removal method also happens in Malaysia, Serbia, India, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other places. Through the comments for the third episode, about “Korean” dads, we learn that paying for the meal of a friend and fighting over this is common not only in Korea but also in China, Japan, India, Vietnam, Italy (Sicily is singled out), Greece, Great Britain, France, Portugal, and Austria. This means that readers can relate to the story, but at the same time they correct the point of view of the author. The authors of the comments share their nationalities and let the author know that the same can happen in other corners of the world, and that these situations are not uniquely Korean but universal.

There are very few comments criticizing the mentioned episodes of the webtoon *Murrz*. However, the episode “Mong Doong Ee” did get some critical comments in which readers express their feelings about beating children. Overall, there are ten comments that touch on the topic of child abuse. Five readers comment that portraying child abuse as comedy is not funny and that beating children can cause trauma. One reader says that the episode is condoning abusive parental behaviour, which is uncomfortable because they themselves suffered from such abuse. Two readers comment that it is interesting that child abuse is normalized in Asian society, while two other readers say that the situation portrayed in the episode is not abusive but part of disciplining children. Seven of the critical comments got a few replies, but they did not initiate any further debate, which means the topic of child abuse was not one that many readers wanted to engage with.

## Conclusion

This article focussed on an autobiographical webtoon called *Murrz*, created by the Korean-American artist Mary Park, and tried to investigate the characteristics of the Korean-American diaspora and the depiction of the author and her family members by using the narrative analysis approach. This article discussed examples taken from the webtoon where the artist presents herself as someone who was born in the US, and thus familiar with the American lifestyle, in contrast to her father who is portrayed as someone very different from the author because he was born in Korea. In addition to this there is a significant generation gap. This makes the father the “other” in the author’s Americanized eyes. Furthermore, the results of an investigation into the role of the reader were discussed, with respect to Korean diaspora webtoon artists and based on reception theory. This article found that the comments section is a very important aspect of webtoons as it provides a space for interactions among the readers and between the readers and

the artist, with both sides important for this new medium. The readers encourage the author to produce more creative content, and they also relate to the story, as well as criticize and, sometimes, correct the artist for their vague representation of a (certain) culture or character. This article concluded that “correction” is the most important feature of the comments in the case of the analysed webtoon. The artist placed her father as “the other” and his behaviour as typical of a Korean or Asian parent. However, the readers responded to this by mentioning that the same situations also happen in their (non-Korean) countries. They thus corrected the artist by asserting that the cultural phenomenon that the artist showed in her webtoons is not only a Korean one but can be observed in other cultures as well. Finally, this makes the comments section relevant for the interaction between the reader and the artist, where both the artist and the reader can share their opinions.

## Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Seed Program for Korean Studies of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2022-INC-2250001).

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