

Dialogue Between Tradition and Modernity: Reading Ethics in the Digital Age Through Reader Comments on the Webtoon *Princess Bari*

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Abstract This study examines contemporary reader engagement with classical literature by analyzing audience responses to the webtoon *Princess Bari*, a modern reinterpretation of the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi*. It investigates how traditional narrative frameworks, when reimaged through digital media, elicit resonance among present-day audiences and mediate a dialogue between cultural heritage and modern ethical sensibilities. Employing a hybrid methodology that integrates computational text analysis with qualitative interpretation, this research analyzes user-generated comments posted on *Princess Bari*. Particular emphasis is placed on highly interactive responses—those accruing significant numbers of likes and replies—as a means of accessing the emotional and interpretive contours of reader reception. The findings reveal a dynamic spectrum of reader engagement, ranging from critiques of patriarchal ideologies embedded in the source myth to more nuanced reflections on marginalization, desire, and social justice. Notably, reader responses evolve over time—from initial skepticism to empathetic alignment with the narrative’s underlying humanistic impulse. This study contends that classical texts, when transposed into contemporary forms of storytelling, retain their capacity to provoke ethical reflection and emotional investment. *Princess Bari*, in this light, emerges as a compelling case study in how digital adaptations can revitalize traditional narratives, enabling them to speak meaningfully to the ethical imagination of the digital age.

Keywords *Princess Bari*; *Baridaegi*; Korean classical literature; webtoon; reader reception; digital humanities

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1. Introduction

In the digital media era, how is classical literature reimaged, received, and rendered meaningful once more? Literature has long served as an artistic medium through which existential questions are explored—not through abstraction, but through form, narrative, and image. This capacity to evoke empathy and provoke reflection persists across time, even as the modes of literary production and consumption evolve. Yet in contemporary contexts, classical literature often suffers from pedagogical alienation: it is taught, but not truly read—producing passive learners rather than engaged readers who experience the work with interpretive depth. Linguistic archaism and divergent value systems further widen the gap between classical texts and modern readers, positioning the former as relics of the past rather than living sources of meaning.

Against this backdrop, the rising presence of classical narratives in digital media—particularly in webtoons and web novels—signals a shift in how traditional literature is accessed and appreciated. While these adaptations rarely maintain strict fidelity to their source texts, their widespread popularity suggests a renewed cultural function: they transform classical motifs into participatory experiences that resonate with contemporary ethical concerns. The global expansion of the webtoon industry exemplifies this shift. According to the 2023 Webtoon Industry Survey by the Korea Creative Content Agency, the Korean webtoon market alone generated 1.829 trillion KRW in 2022, and the global market, valued at USD 16.4 billion, is projected to reach USD 21 billion by 2027 (Oh-Hyunsukdara et al. 5–6). As intellectual property (IP) derived from webtoons increasingly feeds into other media—such as television dramas, animations, and games—the adaptation of classical literature into digital formats becomes both an artistic and industrial practice.

Within this dynamic landscape, the webtoon *Princess Bari*, serialized on

Kakao Webtoon, presents a compelling case study in how classical storytelling is recontextualized through participatory media. The present study investigates how contemporary readers engage with the reimaged shamanic myth of Baridaegi, not only as a narrative but also as a site of ethical discourse. In particular, it focuses on reader comments—digital traces of interpretation, judgment, and emotion—left in response to serialized episodes. Webtoons are inherently structured around interactivity: readers respond in real time, engage in dialogue with one another, and form interpretive communities through shared reactions. This phenomenon turns solitary reading into a distributed experience, wherein meaning is co-constructed and negotiated through commentary.

Recent scholarship has begun to address the politico-aesthetic implications of such practices, likening them to premodern collective reading cultures in which emotional collectivities fostered community cohesion (Kim Gun-hyung 119–130). Reader comments, particularly when responding to adaptations of classical literature, often illuminate tensions between past and present—between inherited cultural norms and modern ethical sensibilities. As Choi Ki-sook suggests, when classical works are recast in modern contexts, they engage in a dialogic relationship with their origins, enabling both critique and revalorization (303). This study extends that insight by applying both quantitative and qualitative methods—including statistical analysis and text mining—to reader responses, seeking to illuminate the ways in which classical literature becomes ethically resonant in the digital age.

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the reception of classical literature in digital environments, focusing specifically on reader comments associated with the webtoon *Princess Bari*. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, the research integrates computational text analysis with interpretive close reading to illuminate how ethical reflection and cultural dialogue emerge in participatory digital contexts.

Data collection was conducted using reader comments from Kakao Webtoon, the original platform of serialization. A total of 11,160 comments were extracted from episodes of *Princess Bari*. Among these, 8,601 comments that received at least three “likes” were selected as the final dataset, ensuring a focus on reader responses with measurable engagement. This selection criterion ensured the inclusion of comments that generated measurable engagement while excluding formulaic or promotional content that typically lacked substantive interpretation. Replies to these

comments were also included, allowing for the mapping of discursive interaction among readers.

To examine large-scale patterns in reader response, Word2Vec embedding and unsupervised clustering were applied to the comment corpus. This allowed for the identification of latent thematic clusters corresponding to emotional, ethical, and narrative categories. These quantitative findings were then triangulated with qualitative analysis to explore how specific episodes prompted commentary that negotiated tensions between tradition and modernity, particularly in relation to gender roles, mythic structure, and moral agency.

Informed by digital humanities methodologies, this approach treats online reader comments not as peripheral paratexts but as critical artifacts of interpretive labor. Through this lens, the study conceptualizes comment threads as sites of “distributed reading”—where interpretive authority is dispersed across a participatory public—and analyzes them as forms of vernacular criticism that reframe classical texts within contemporary ethical frameworks.

3. Quantifying Reader Response on the Webtoon *Princess Bari*

Kim Na-im’s *Princess Bari* consists of a total of 319 episodes, beginning with the upload of a trailer on Daum Webtoon on December 8, 2017, and concluding on October 29, 2024. The work is primarily based on the adaptation of the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi* and takes the form of an omnibus by embellishing and integrating other shamanistic epics and folktales. The shamanistic epic *Baridaegi* is a narrative chant performed during Rituals for Sending the Dead to a Good Place (Mangja Cheondo Gut). In Korean shamanism, Princess Bari is known as a deity who guides the deceased to the afterlife. For the dead to reach the underworld, they must be led by Princess Bari. To fulfill this, shamans recite the life story of Princess Bari during the ritual to provide a narrative justification for her appearance.

Although there are regional variations in the composition of episodes, the narrative structure of the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi* generally follows these stages (Hong tae-han 1-304):

- 1) King Ogu and Lady Gil-dae marry.
- 2) Lady Gil-dae gives birth to several daughters in succession.
- 3) She gives birth to a princess as the seventh child.
- 4) Princess Bari is abandoned by her parents solely because she is a daughter.
- 5) The king and queen fall ill.
- 6) They discover that the cure for their illness is sacred water (yaksu).
- 7) The king and queen search for and reunite with Princess Bari.

8) They ask their six daughters to retrieve the sacred water, but all of them make excuses and refuse.

9) Eventually, Princess Bari embarks on a journey to the underworld to obtain the sacred water.

10) Princess Bari encounters Mujangseung guarding the sacred water.

11) To obtain the sacred water, Princess Bari must fulfill certain conditions—such as performing household labor or bearing children through marriage with the Mujangseung.

12) Princess Bari returns, revives the king and queen, and is recognized for her achievements. Eventually, she becomes enshrined as the ancestral deity of shamans.

Princess Bari borrows characters and settings from the original tale but introduces significant changes to its narrative. While the main characters remain Princess Bari and her husband Mujangseung, the webtoon focuses on events that take place after Bari has already become the the ancestral deity of shamans(Mujo-shin). For an unspecified reason, Princess Bari is reincarnated during the Joseon Dynasty as a young lady from a noble family. The Grandmother Samsin (Samsin Halmeoni) erases all of Bari's memories upon her rebirth. As a result, Mujangseung stays by her side as a mentor, helping her recover her memories as his wife. Meanwhile, Bari, as a novice shaman, gradually approaches people in need and comes to realize her past and her true identity as Mujo-shin. Throughout this journey, additional supporting characters appear, including the goblin Kim Seonbi and the the nine-tailed fox-turned-woman, Lady Daebang.

The stories of the people Princess Bari encounters unfold as independent episodes, most of which are adaptations of traditional folktales or Korean classical novels. A total of 67 individual episodes are presented throughout the series. Stories such as *Janghwa Hongryeon*, *The Ugly Chunhyang*, *The Devoted Daughter Sim Cheong*, and *Heungbu and Nolbu* are adapted from classical novels. Episodes like *Dorangseonbi and Cheongjeong Gaksi*, *Jeoseung Halmang(Goddess of Death)*, and *Tamna Yeonggam* originate from other shamanistic epics. Additionally, many other episodes draw from legends and folktales, including *The Legend of Arang*, *The Sun and the Moon*, *The Fairy and the Woodcutter*, *Kongjiwi and Patjiwi*, *The Fox Sister*, *The Well Bride*, and *The Serpent*. The use of these familiar narratives lowers the psychological barrier for readers to engage with the work, making it easier for them to connect with classical literature. At the same time, the subversion and reinterpretation of these well-known stories provide a sense of novelty and intrigue.

Princess Bari is available for viewing on two platforms: Kakao Webtoon and Kakao Page. Both platforms are operated by Kakao Entertainment. Kakao Webtoon

is a specialized webtoon platform that evolved from Daum's portal service, Manhwa Sok-sesang ("The World of Comics"), while Kakao Page is a platform that offers various forms of digital media narratives, including webtoons and web novels. Kakao Webtoon allows users to post comments on each episode and reply to other comments. Additionally, even without directly writing comments, readers can express their opinions indirectly by clicking the "Like" or "Dislike" buttons on other users' comments. Although both platforms support commenting features, this study specifically focuses on comments from Kakao Webtoon, where *Princess Bari* was first serialized in 2017.

The time-series trend of comments effectively reflects the general pattern of webtoon consumption. A large number of comments are posted during the early stages of serialization, while the number of comments gradually decreases as the series progresses.

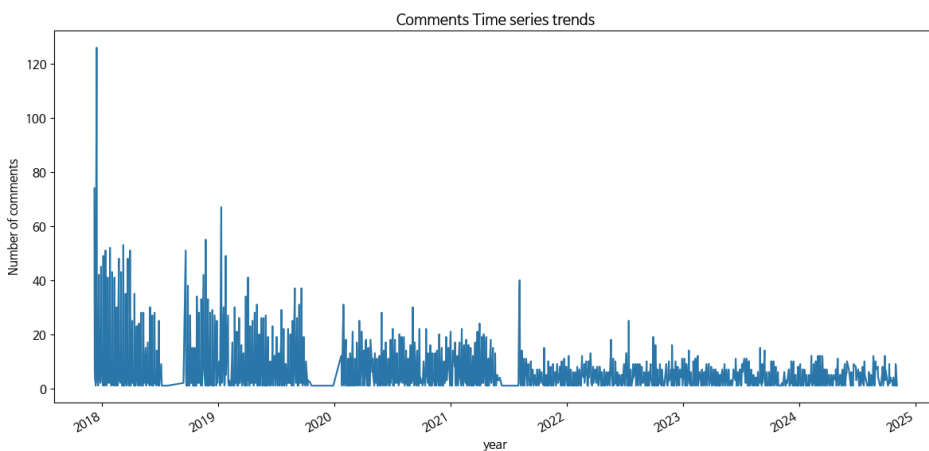


Figure 1 Comments Time Series trends

This trend occurs because comments tend to accumulate on earlier episodes as new readers join. Naturally, not all readers continue with the series until its conclusion, making the decline in comments during later episodes an expected phenomenon. Notably, there were significant drops in comment activity during mid-to-late 2018, late 2019, and mid-2021, which directly coincide with the series' hiatus periods. Webtoons generally follow a consistent release schedule, ranging from weekly to daily updates. Accordingly, platforms are designed to display newly updated webtoons by day, allowing readers to easily check for updates. Additionally, platforms adjust the exposure ranking of works based on click counts, positioning the most popular series at the top of the interface. When a webtoon author takes a

short- or long-term hiatus for personal reasons or to recharge, updates are paused. This leads to a decrease in reader clicks, causing the series to be pushed lower on the platform's display. As a result, the influx of new readers diminishes, and the number of comments accordingly decreases.

This pattern is also evident in the activity of readers who have left a high number of comments. The following graph illustrates the activity trends of the seven readers who posted the most comments, based on their user IDs, excluding readers who were not logged in.

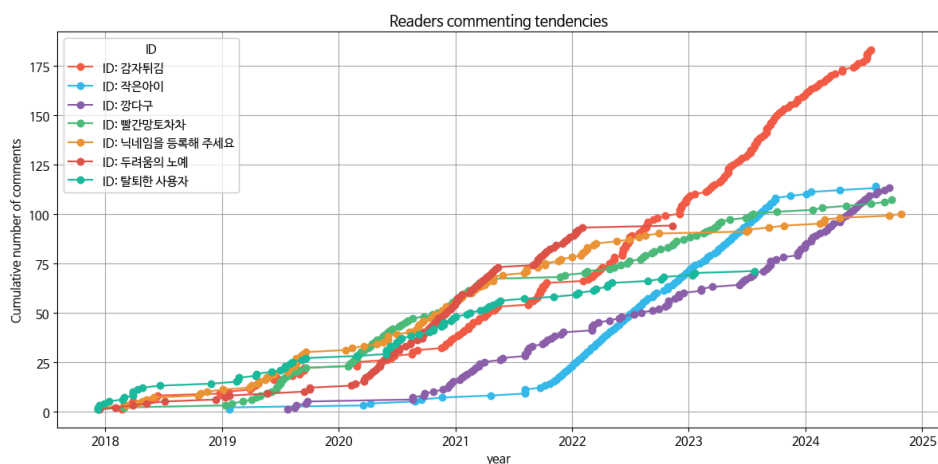


Figure 2 Readers commenting Tendencies

Some readers consistently leave comments on nearly every episode, while others can be seen abandoning the series midway. The fact that certain readers continuously post comments suggests the formation of a type of fandom around the work. However, it is difficult to assume that all readers actively participate in the comment sections. Some readers may not engage with comments at all, while others may refer to comments to deepen their understanding of the work without expressing their own opinions. Additionally, it is common to see simple impressionistic comments that lack substantial content. Nevertheless, a significant number of readers actively attempt a form of “critique” of the work. They respond critically to aspects such as the narrative’s coherence, the quality of the artwork, and the author’s debut process. These readers leave comments based on their own aesthetic and ethical judgments and recommend other comments that logically express similar opinions (Gu Ja-jun 562).

The analysis of comment types regarding how readers of *Princess Bari*

respond to the work aligns closely with these observations. According to Choi Ki-sook, when categorizing comments on certain episodes, reflections and critiques on characters and the narrative account for the largest portion. This is followed by expressions of emotion, brief overall impressions such as favorable opinions of the author or recommendations of the work, insights and reflections on the content, and lastly, commentary on other comments (319-320).

This distribution closely mirrors the results of clustering the entire set of comments using a Word2Vec-based analysis (<https://code.google.com/archive/p/word2vec>).

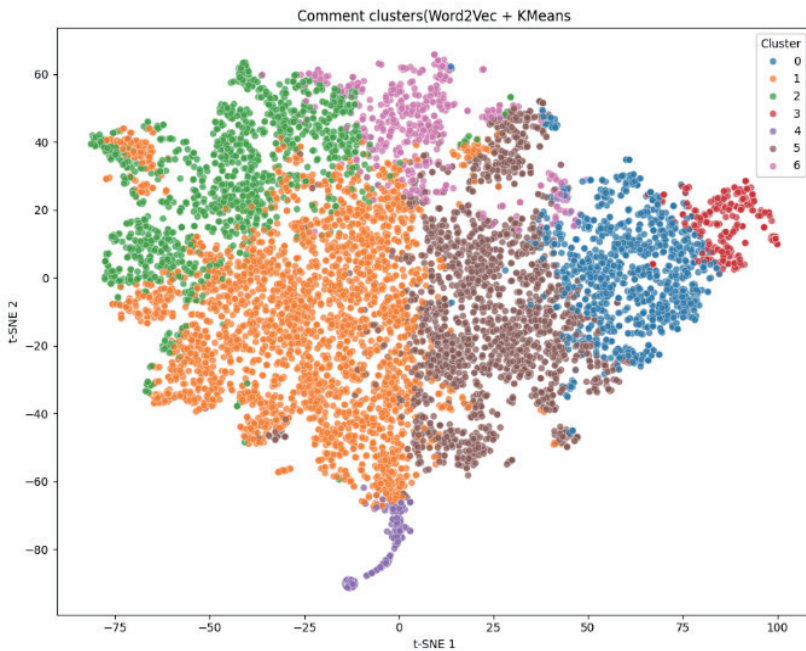


Figure 3 Comments Clusters

Cluster 0: see, author, good, next, story, webtoon, work, this, time, bari, princess, wait

Cluster 1: person, same, no, see, live, die, go, think, know, human

Cluster 2: child, son, kill, die, mom, kid, live, give birth, person, parent

Cluster 3: Author, funny, wait, webcomic, best, thanks, next, recommended, work, payment

Cluster 4: Chest, take, same, past, wonder, wonder, put, get, get off, play, feel

Cluster 5: See, armored, bari, good, ghost, come out, like, writer, story, know

Cluster 6: Tear, heart, hurts, me, mom, cry, love, sad, child, see

It was confirmed that the comment clusters formed around several key themes: anticipation and praise for the author and the work itself; reflections on the bond between parents and children within the narrative; discussions about frequently appearing characters such as Princess Bari, Mujangseung, and various spirits; contemplations on humanity through themes of life and death; and expressions of emotions such as tears, love, and sorrow. In particular, Cluster 0 and Cluster 3 contain multiple mentions of the author, with the majority of these comments expressing positive reactions such as “It’s good,” “I’m looking forward to it,” and “It’s interesting.” This prevalence of positive feedback, alongside the previously noted consistent activity of certain readers, further substantiates the existence of a dedicated fandom for the work.

Let us now delve into the content of the work itself. Which episodes did readers primarily show interest in? This can be identified by examining the episodes with the highest number of comments and their content. A high volume of comments suggests that readers were actively engaging in the reinterpretation and re-meaning of the work.

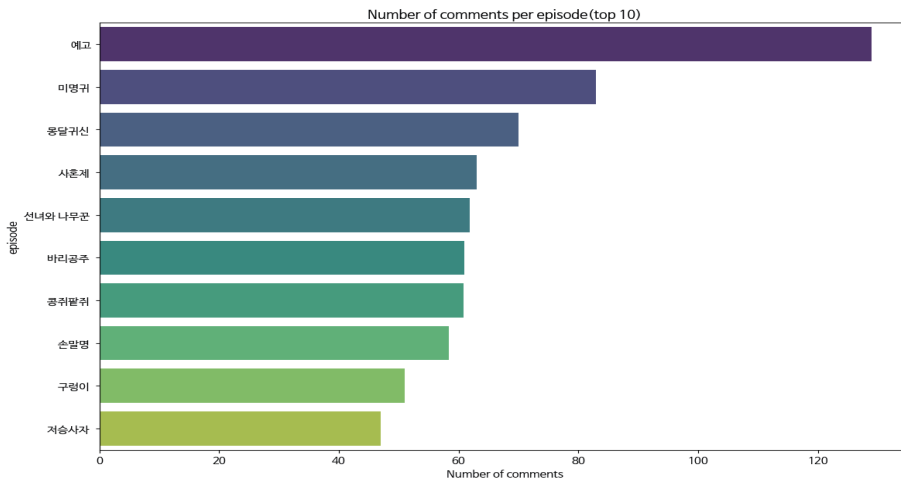


Figure 4 Number of Comments per Episode(top10)

The graph represents the average number of comments per episode within multi-part story arcs. As previously explained, the trailer has the highest number of comments. Excluding the trailer, the first episode, *Mimyeongwi*, along with familiar Korean folktales such as *The Fairy and the Woodcutter* and *Kongjwi and Patjwi*, ranks among the top episodes in comment activity. Adaptations of familiar stories inherently offer entertainment and make it easier for readers to engage in discussions about narrative alterations, as they are already well-acquainted with the

original content. This trend is further supported by the number of “Likes,” “Dislikes,” and “Replies” on comments.

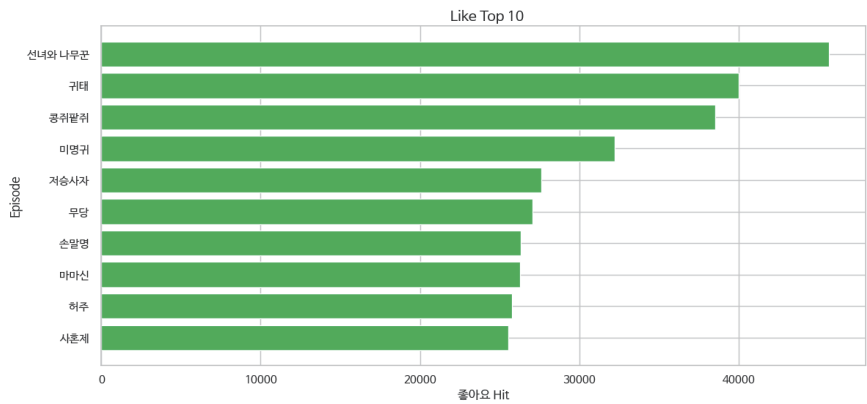


Figure 5 number of “Likes” on comments.

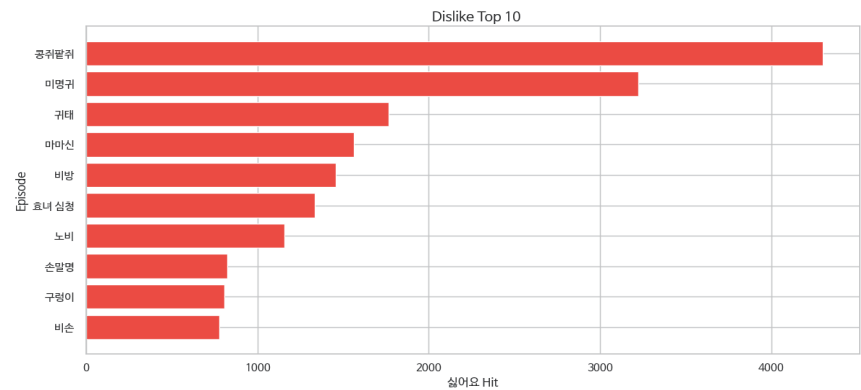


Figure 6 number of “Dislikes,” on comments.

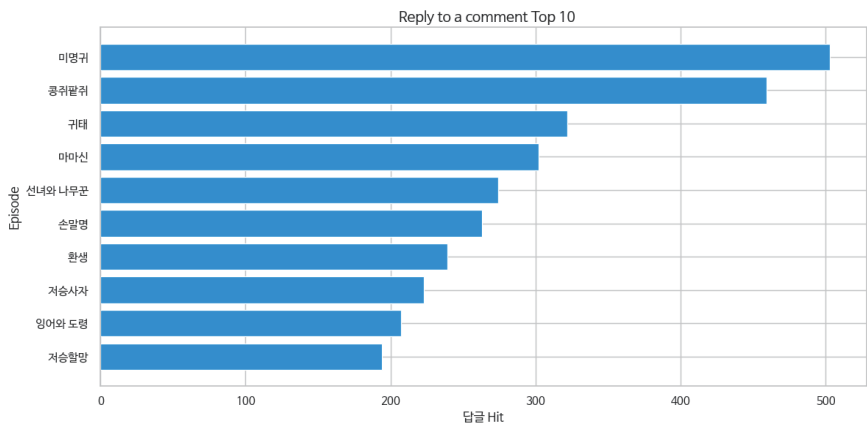


Figure 7 number of “Replies” on comments.

The episodes ranked at the top demonstrate relatively more contentious discussions compared to others. This becomes even clearer when considering that the episodes with the highest numbers of “Likes,” “Dislikes,” and “Replies” largely overlap. For example, *The Fairy and the Woodcutter* is an extremely well-known story that almost everyone raised in Korea has heard at least once. This episode garnered 310 comments and 274 replies. Many of these comments involve interpretations and debates about the original story, such as “In the original story, the deer was definitely at fault” and “If you slightly shift your perspective, all Korean folktales become horrifying stories.”

In contrast, episodes based on unfamiliar stories tend to have fewer comments, as understanding the plot alone requires more time and energy. Additionally, comments on these episodes are generally less argumentative in nature.

4. Modern Readers’ Reception of Classical Literature Through Comment Analysis

Let us now examine how readers have received the themes and intentions the author aimed to convey through the adaptation of the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi* in *Princess Bari*. The episodes of *Princess Bari* can be categorized based on their narrative structure and thematic direction. The protagonists in these episodes are often individuals traditionally positioned as subaltern within hierarchical structures, such as women, daughters-in-law, children, servants, and animals. As previously mentioned, Princess Bari serves as the deity responsible for guiding the dead to the afterlife, acting as the mother of all shamans and fulfilling the role of the ancestral deity of shamans). Consequently, most of the spirits that Princess Bari encounters are those who have suffered and been victimized by dominant figures—men, patriarchs, elders, aristocrats, and humans in general—and are thus marked by deep-seated resentment and unresolved injustice. Princess Bari and Mujangseung listen to the grievances of these spirits and confront those responsible for their suffering, awakening them to the harm they have caused. Therefore, the first category of episodes can be defined as stories that give a voice to the “voiceless,” allowing them to express their grievances and find resolution.

The second category consists of stories that transform the transcendent beings and supernatural events of the original tales into realistic characters and situations. For example, the story of the woodcutter who marries a fairy descending from the heavens is reframed as a man who coerces a noblewoman into marriage through intimidation. Similarly, the story of a baby general born with wings under his arms—who is killed by his foolish parents out of fear that he would later lead a rebellion—is adapted into a narrative about talented young scholars who, despite

being praised for their abilities, repeatedly attempt the state civil service exams only to face continual failure. These adaptations remind readers that the fantastical elements of the original stories do not exist as literal phenomena but serve as symbolic devices to reveal underlying societal issues in the real world.

The third category centers on the stories of shamans. As ancestral deity of shamans, Princess Bari is regarded as the mother figure of all shamans. Within the narrative, episodes are included where Bari guides and enlightens shamans who have gone astray or committed wrongdoings.

The gods themselves cannot descend to this world, so they sent children imbued with divine energy in their place. To soothe the restless hearts of people. To comfort the hidden pains that cannot be revealed. To deliver the words of the gods to those in need of something to lean on—Yet, despite knowing the terrifying consequences of divine punishment, why do shamans who exploit human hearts continue to emerge without end... (Episode 283, Dorangseonbi and Cheongjeong Gaksi)

Shamans serve the role of comforting the living who are in need of support and consoling the dead who carry sorrow and resentment. However, shamans sometimes exploit the desperate emotions of such people to satisfy their own greed by extorting wealth. *Princess Bari* highlights examples of these corrupt shamans and the divine punishments they face, ultimately illustrating what it means to follow the righteous path of a true shaman.

In other words, while *Princess Bari* may initially appear to be a fantasy work, it ultimately tells the stories of various people living in reality—their joy, sorrow, desires, and frustrations. Through Bari, the shaman, the narrative uncovers meaning in these lives and offers comfort. This thematic direction closely aligns with that of the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi*. A widely accepted interpretation of *Baridaegi* views the journey to the Western Heaven (Seocheon Seoyeok) to obtain sacred water as an act of filial piety carried out through physical hardship, as well as a process of self-discovery and self-actualization. Another interpretation suggests that Bari's solitary journey to the distant Western Heaven to save her father, her marriage to Mujangseung, the birth and raising of seven sons, and the countless labors she endured were paths of loneliness and suffering. However, these struggles themselves embodied the very essence of human life, and through enduring this journey, Bari's divinity was fully realized (Shin Dong-heun 133). Bari's journey, in this sense, becomes a source of strength for people to endure the hardships of life. This is

the central theme the author of *Princess Bari* repeatedly conveys through various episodes.

Then, how did modern readers interpret and receive *Princess Bari*? Let us examine a few episodes as examples. The original story of *The Fairy and the Woodcutter* is as follows: A woodcutter once hid a deer being chased by a hunter. In gratitude, the deer revealed to the widowed woodcutter how he could marry a fairy. The method was to hide the fairy's feathered robe (wings) and not return it until after they had three children. The woodcutter followed this advice, married the fairy, and had two children with her. One day, the fairy earnestly begged for her robe to be returned. When the woodcutter gave it back, she wore it and flew back to the heavens. Longing for his lost wife, the woodcutter gazed at the sky every dawn and eventually turned into a rooster that cries at daybreak. This story is also a myth that has been adapted into a folktale.

In *Princess Bari*, the author removes the mythological and supernatural elements of the original tale and replaces them with a story centered on human desire. The fairy is reimagined as the daughter of a noble family who is deceived by a servant and ends up staying at the woodcutter's house. The woodcutter lies to her, claiming that her family was destroyed due to treason, and prevents her from ever leaving the house. In this version, the deer that repays the woodcutter's kindness is replaced by an evil servant, and the fairy becomes a naïve woman unfamiliar with the ways of the world. This reinterpretation prompts invites ethical reflection on the nature of human desire and how excessive ambition can ultimately harm both oneself and others. However, many readers appear to have engaged more directly with the folktale itself, rather than the adaptation's intended reinterpretation.



Figure 8 WordCloud on *The Fairy and the Woodcutter*

While readers express admiration for the creative twist on the traditional story of *The Fairy and the Woodcutter*, they do not seem to deeply reflect on the thematic message the author intended to convey. Instead, they tend to focus on criticizing the original folktale by using highly provocative terms such as “a traditional tale filled with crimes like voyeurism, theft, confinement, rape, and stalking.”

However, some comments do capture the dilemma presented by the author and respond thoughtfully. In the original story, the fairy ascends to the heavens with her two children, but in *Princess Bari*, the nobleman’s daughter cannot do the same. Although she realizes she was deceived by the woodcutter and grows to hate him, the children are still her own. She cannot abandon them, nor can she separate them from their father. What torments her even more is recognizing the face of the man she despises in her beloved children. In the end, she chooses to end her life. Comments such as “I feel so sorry for the young lady, who must have been in unbearable pain after learning the truth. I can’t imagine how she felt standing at the edge of that cliff, unable to return to her mother and unable to continue living as the mother of children who resemble the man she hates,” and “The truth is sometimes cruel,” reflect readers’ deep contemplation of this emotional conflict.

Additionally, Readers consistently draw parallels between traditional narratives and contemporary social realities. In the comments on the previously mentioned *Baby General* episode, readers make comparisons such as “This is like the Joseon-era version of SKY Castle- A drama about South Korea’s hellish college admissions process. Whether in the past or now, achieving success through high exam scores is a grueling task” and “This is similar to modern civil exam villages”, reflecting on how people become emotionally and physically drained by dedicating themselves solely to studying.

Meanwhile, contemporary social conflicts also emerge in the process of engaging with classical works. *Mimyeongwi*, the first episode of *Princess Bari*, features the ghost of a daughter-in-law who was wrongfully killed by her mother-in-law. Due to the realistic and vivid depiction of the ghost, many readers expressed fear, and numerous comments criticized the mother-in-law and husband. This episode also incorporates the narrative from the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi*, where Princess Bari and Mujangseung become husband and wife, which sparked intense debate. One comment subtly criticizes Mujangseung’s patriarchal attitude: “Why do you think the wife left... he made her work for nine years and kept her until she gave birth to seven sons...” This comment received 58 replies, ranging from agreeing with the criticism to defending Mujangseung. Some readers argued against applying modern value judgments to ancient myths, as reflected in comments like: “Oh, please... this is an ancient folktale. Of course, there’s symbolic meaning, and

this webtoon must be interpreting it in its own way.”

Interestingly, feminist discourse becomes intertwined with this debate. Comments questioning Mujangseung’s marriage to Bari, such as “It’s only a romance to him. Do you think it’s a romance for Princess Bari, who was forced into marriage?” and remarks using the derogatory term “Hannam” (a term criticizing Korean men), like “He doesn’t even know why she left... of course, men like Mujangseung wouldn’t understand, so these comments are naturally uncomfortable for Hannams”, further fueled the controversy. This is in line with the “feminist reboot” movement in Korea since 2015.

This phenomenon is also evident in the prologue, which focuses on the external narrative of Princess Bari and Mujangseung themselves. Let us first examine the word cloud on the left.



Figure 9 WordCloud on Trailers



Figure 10 WordCloud on Princess Bari

After it was confirmed in the prologue that this work is based on the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi*, many comments appeared discussing *Baridaegi* and other traditional folktales. This indicates that readers were validating their own knowledge. However, it also reveals a significant number of negative reactions toward the original story. Keywords such as “woman”, “give birth”, and “curse” clearly reflect this sentiment, as seen in comments like the following:

Baridegi has always been the most pitiful, seriously. Her so-called father abandons her and then comes back begging her to save him. And that guy who asked her to work for nine years suddenly demands she give birth to seven sons just because she's a woman. How absurd must that have been...

Wow, so this is what Princess Bari was about. Seriously, girls shouldn't be allowed to read folktales like this... it's harmful.

However, opposing views also emerge in response to these negative perspectives. Comments such as "Please, just accept folktales as they are" and "When reading myths, you need to view them through the cultural lens of the time they were created. If you interpret them as actual human affairs, it becomes difficult to understand their content" argue against judging the work through an excessively modern perspective. This tension reflects a primary reaction of modern readers toward myths that embody the values and social order of the past.

Then, was the central theme of *Princess Bari*—"comfort for all those in need in this world"—not received by readers? This does not appear to be the case. As the series approached its conclusion, readers' opinions generally converged in a more positive direction. The word cloud on the right was generated based on comments from the final episode, which depicts the conclusion of the story and the new beginning of Princess Bari and Mujangseung. In these comments, readers used many positive emotional words such as "thank you", "good", and "happiness" to celebrate the ending. Comments like "The saying that classics are eternal must be true. I thought every episode was just an old story, but it delivers deeply moving messages to many people living in the present" show a completely different reception compared to the early comments during the series' serialization, which often criticized the work by applying modern standards to this cultural legacy.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how modern readers engage with classical literature, a legacy of the past, through the analysis of comments on the webtoon *Princess Bari*. In an effort to enhance the quality of her work, author Kim Na-im pursued graduate studies in folklore during the series' hiatus. While she adapted the shamanistic epic *Baridaegi*, Kim created a new myth—both a narrative of Bari's growth and a story that offers comfort to all people in the world.

In a society where shamans are often looked down upon with scorn and prejudice... I, too, once shared that perspective. However, as I casually began

reading the story of Princess Bari, I came to realize that their deep devotion to the gods is ultimately centered on caring for people, offering comfort, and showing love. Reflecting on their resilience and warmth, enduring despite contempt, quietly brought tears to my eyes.

Journeying with Princess Bari made me pay attention to trivial objects, plants by the roadside, and small animals. I naturally began to feel gratitude and cherish even minor events and relationships. Thank you for the many beautiful and precious stories of Princess Bari that moved and warmed my heart. This work gave me the courage to live well, seeing the world through kind thoughts and eyes that appreciate beautiful things.

These are some of the comments posted on the final episode of *Princess Bari*. Although the author's intended themes were at times hindered by modern value judgments and occasionally entangled in social controversies, ultimately resonated with a segment of the readership.

These results demonstrate that Princess Bari successfully engaged in meaningful communication with readers through its modern reinterpretation of classical narratives. Although the work elicited diverse reactions due to contemporary value judgments and societal debates, it ultimately conveyed comfort and empathy to readers, reaffirming the capacity of classical texts to generate renewed ethical meaning in the digital age. This suggests that traditional narratives can still be meaningfully reimagined and consumed in contemporary society, offering a lens through which to reflect on the ethical consciousness of our time.

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