



Postmodern Feminism in the Movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025)

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Abstract. *The South Korean entertainment industry, propelled by the global Hallyu wave, continues to thrive internationally. However, it remains influenced by deeply rooted patriarchal norms, especially in the portrayal of women in popular media. This study explores the representation of women in the film K-Pop Demon Hunters (2025) through the lens of Luce Irigaray's postmodern feminist theory (1985). Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the research investigates the film's visual, narrative, and symbolic dimensions to examine how female characters are depicted. Unlike the traditional portrayal of passive femininity prevalent in Korean popular culture, K-Pop Demon Hunters presents its female protagonists as active, autonomous, and empowered individuals. These characters express their identities through bodily performance, voice, dance, and emotion—an embodiment of écriture féminine, or feminine writing. The film introduces a symbolic language that allows women to speak from their own experiences, disrupting the male-dominated narrative structures often seen in mainstream media. Additionally, the film challenges patriarchal conventions by offering subversive and multifaceted representations of women's bodies, relationships, and agency. Rather than reinforcing objectifying tropes, it constructs a space where feminine identity is fluid, expressive, and resistant to hegemonic definitions. This approach not only redefines the role of women within the cinematic narrative but also opens possibilities for alternative gender discourses in Korean media. In doing so, K-Pop Demon Hunters exemplifies how popular media can serve as both a mirror and a critique of societal gender norms. This article contributes to the discourse on media and gender by highlighting the capacity of film to foster critical engagement and support autonomous female expression in the digital cultural era.*

Keywords: Irigaray, K-Pop Demon Hunters, K-Pop, Postmodern Feminism, South Korean

1. INTRODUCTION

The South Korean entertainment industry has become a highly influential global phenomenon, particularly through the cultural wave known as Hallyu or the Korean Wave (Boman, 2022). Even if it is quite popular, the strong patriarchal social structure still affects how women's roles are shown in social culture. However, in modern times women are starting to break through the paradoxes of patriarchy by refusing to play the passive roles that the media has long given them (Wang, 2025). Women are becoming more and more seen as active agents of change, going against conventional ideas of femininity and conservative standards.

As Lu (2023) said, in this modern era, many people are promoting feminism through music and movies in Korea. For example, girl groups with the concept of “girl crush” no longer portray stereotypes of women. In addition, movies are also a popular medium for conveying feminist messages. Although movies are considered a literary genre, they not only have the ability to entertain people, but also to provide new information, such as culture and values (Ratminingsih & Sari, 2025). Movies frequently influence social norms and female roles, representing how these norms influence societal perspectives on gender identity by depicting masculine and feminine characteristics (Sirait, et al, 2025).

Adler and Famer (2023) also said that there are many Korean dramas discuss work, love, and family, as well as gender equality. Dhanesh and Marschlich (2025) say that different studies show that even though gender stereotypes are still common in the South Korean entertainment industry, women are becoming more aware of and resistant to commercial ideas of femininity. This is making room for more diverse and powerful representations in social culture. Nevertheless, recent developments suggest a shift toward more empowered and complex representations of women, particularly in contemporary Korean cinema and drama, where women begin to appear as active agents within their own narratives (Seon, 2020).

The difference between how women are romanticized and how they really live in South Korea was a big gap to be analyzed. Despite advancements in gender equality, South Korean women still face substantial challenges, including low representation in politics and professional sectors, as well as persistent wage and promotion discrimination (Ding, 2024). In this context, popular media functions as both a mirror and a creator of social norms—either reinforcing or challenging patriarchy. Therefore, critical research into the representation of women in Korean entertainment media is essential to explore the media's potential as a tool for empowerment.

The movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025) emerges as a distinctive work offering a renewed portrayal of women in South Korea's entertainment landscape. Combining elements of action, the supernatural, and K-Pop culture, the movie presents women as active and empowered subjects, rather than passive objects conforming to societal expectations. The lead character, Rumi, as the leader of the group Huntrix, symbolize female empowerment and resists traditional stereotypes. Lee (2023) asserts, "Active and empowered representations of women in popular media can serve as critical tools for breaking patriarchal norms and opening space for more inclusive narratives."

A further innovation offered by *K-Pop Demon Hunters* lies in its use of K-Pop culture—which has long been tightly controlled commercially to convey critical and liberatory messages. Park (2022) states, "K-Pop as a cultural phenomenon holds immense potential as a platform for empowerment, especially when it integrates narratives critical of existing social structures." This demonstrates that Korean entertainment media can evolve beyond mere commercial products into platforms for social and political reflection in support of gender equality.

This study aims to analyze the representation of women in *K-Pop Demon Hunters* as a critique of patriarchal culture within South Korea's entertainment industry. Focusing on the character Rumi and the dynamics of the group Huntrix, the research seeks to uncover how the

movie portrays women as self-empowered agents challenging traditional norms. As Choi (2021) contends, “Women in media must be granted space to act as agents of change, rather than mere aesthetic objects or narrative supplements.” It is hoped that this research will contribute to the discourse on media and gender, and open new avenues for examining the portrayal of women in Korean popular culture.

Thus, this study not only addresses a gap in gender representation research within Korean entertainment media but also underscores the importance of media as a vehicle for social transformation. Through an analysis of *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, this research highlights the necessity of critical and liberated representations of women as part of broader cultural change. Jung (2020) affirms, “Progressive media representations can trigger social change by challenging entrenched gender norms.” Accordingly, this research is crucial for understanding how media can reshape perceptions and gender norms both in South Korean society and globally.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Postmodern feminism represents a strand of feminist thought that rejects universalist views of women’s experiences, instead emphasizing plural identities and difference. Irigaray critiques the dominance of patriarchal language that has historically shaped perceptions of women. She argues that women cannot achieve full liberation while they continue to define themselves through the masculine and phallogocentric language of men.

Irigaray proposes that patriarchal language not only represents the world from a male perspective but also suppresses women’s voices and existence. She thus calls for the creation of a feminine language that allows women to express themselves autonomously and authentically, beyond masculine domination. In this regard, language becomes a battleground for women’s liberation from oppressive social structures. Irigaray’s critique of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis forms a foundational aspect of her postmodern feminism. She rejects Freud’s notion of women as “incomplete men” due to the absence of the phallus, arguing instead that female identity has long been constructed through notions of lack. She asserts that women must be understood as distinct and autonomous subjects, not as deficient within patriarchal systems. In cultural and linguistic terms, Irigaray insists on the need for a new culture that values sexual difference and equal recognition. She challenges traditional feminist ambitions that demand equality with men, as such equality still refers to male standards. Instead, women must develop a language and culture that reflect their unique identities and lived experiences. The notion of women’s “Otherness”—once seen as a form of oppression—

is embraced within postmodern feminism as a source of strength and diversity. Irigaray stresses that acknowledging difference and plurality is vital, not as a hindrance, but as a resource in the struggle for women's rights. In analyzing *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025), Irigaray's approach can be used to assess how female characters are expressed through visual language and narrative, and whether they are portrayed merely as objects or as autonomous subjects articulating their own identities.

Irigaray also draws on Karl Marx's theory of capital and commodity, arguing that women are often exchanged in social relations as commodities possessed by men. This is relevant to analysing how female characters in K-pop are often positioned as aesthetic objects or cultural commodities consumed by male audiences. From a postfeminist standpoint, Irigaray rejects the notion of equality that requires women to conform to male-defined standards. Instead, she advocates for women's empowerment through the recognition of sexual difference and the creation of a unique language and culture. Postmodern feminism, according to Irigaray, rejects the universality of female oppression and focuses on women's search for meaning and identity.

This approach can be applied in analyzing *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025) to explore how the movie portrays women not only as victims or objects, but as subjects with agency and voice within the narrative, in line with Irigaray's postfeminist principles. Irigaray also warns against gender-neutral language, which can obscure sexual difference and sustain patriarchal bias. In movie, this can be analysed through dialogue, symbolism, and visual elements that either reinforce or challenge dominant gender norms. Moreover, Irigaray emphasises the body as a source of pride and identity, not as an object of sexualisation or a site constrained by patriarchal norms. The representation of the female body in the movie can thus be examined to determine whether the movie reproduces stereotypes or offers space for the body as an autonomous subject.

Previous studies have employed Irigaray's postmodern feminism to critique female representations in media, especially movie, where women are often silenced as victims or sexualised objects. This framework opens up critical perspectives on how women are portrayed and how they might reclaim their voices and identities. Key quotes from Irigaray include: "Women must become subjects in their own right, not defined by the phallogocentric language that has historically silenced them" (Tong, 1998); "Language does not shape the world of the speaker but shapes a particular subject's view of the world" (Irigaray, 1985); "Difference, not equality, should be the foundation of feminist politics" (Brooks, 2021); and her rejection of "phallic logic" in favour of "a feminine language that allows women to express their own

subjectivity”. Ultimately, Irigaray’s approach allows us to view women not merely as victims or objects, but as active and creative agents in shaping their own cultures and languages especially relevant in analyzing *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025), which explores female subjectivity in the realms of pop culture and fantasy.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This article employed a qualitative content analysis method to interpret the meanings embedded in the movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025). Data was gathered through in-depth observation of various cinematic elements such as visual composition, character dialogues, and narrative structure. This approach enables a detailed and contextual exploration of how the movie represents female characters and themes related to gender and identity. Moreover, the analysis is guided by the postmodern feminist theory developed by Irigaray. This theoretical framework is used to examine how the movie depicts women, language, and patriarchal culture through its narrative and visual language. Secondary sources including movie reviews, media articles, and relevant academic journals were also utilized to provide a solid theoretical and contextual foundation that supports the interpretation and conclusions of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section of this article discussed how the movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters* (2025) represented postmodern feminism through its characters, narrative, and visuals. The analysis focused on how the movie portrayed the diversity of female identities, solidarity, and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles in popular culture. The main findings showed that the movie not only presented women as active subjects, but also challenged the boundaries of conventional feminism with a more inclusive and fluid approach.

Data 1 (00:00:55 - 00:01:05)

Celine: “The world will know you as pop stars, but **you will be much more than that. You will be Hunters.**”

Celine's statement at the beginning of the movie created the framework for a storyline that raised the female characters above the stereotypical image of pop stars, portraying them as strong agents of change and universal defenders. By saying, "You will be much more than that." "You will be Hunters," Celine reframed the trio's identity, giving them agency and purpose that male heroes have historically had in popular culture. The use of their voices and music as sources of strength, capable of pushing back darkness and forming a shield, directly opposed patriarchal clichés that sometime reduced women to passive or decorative positions.

Instead, these young women were portrayed as inheritors of a tradition of courage and leadership, with their unique skills and emotional resonance described as critical to their community's future. This narrative shift was consistent with Irigaray's postmodern feminist philosophy, which advocated for the development of new symbols and languages that enabled women to identify themselves as subjects rather than objects.

Data 2 (00:15:30 - 00:15:47)



Picture 1. Rumi seeing herself in the mirror

Rumi's moment in front of the mirror, when she showed the patterns that marked her as both human and demon, was a strong visual metaphor for how complex and layered women's subjectivity is. Her mixed heritage was not shown as something to be ashamed of or something that caused problems inside her, but as something that made her strong and unique. In this scene, the movie fought against the patriarchal urge to put women into one simple, easy-to-define identity. Instead, Rumi's mirror became a place where she could recognize and accept herself, showing Irigaray's point that women's identities were inherently plural and hard to define. The mirror itself was a symbol of self-exploration because it let Rumi—and by extension, the audience—see how different selves could live together in one body, each with its own history, wants, and powers.

Rumi's interactions with other characters, especially when her demon lineage made her relationships more complicated and richer, made this acceptance of duality even more clear. Rumi didn't have to choose between her human and demon sides; instead, she used both sides of her identity to get around the world, which gave her a wider range of experiences and strengths. This story choice was in line with Irigaray's postmodern feminist critique of binary thinking, which often limited women to simple roles like "good" or "evil," "pure" or "corrupted." The movie pushed for a view of femininity that was dynamic, fluid, and able to change by showing Rumi's complexity as a source of power instead of alienation. In doing so, it made people think about the limits of traditional gender categories and the strength that comes from accepting the many different ways that women can feel and think.

Data 3 (00:21:15 – 00:21:30)

Zoey: Oh, right. "We are Hunters. Voices strong. Your faults and fears must never be seen."

Postmodern feminism by Irigaray tried to solve the problem of how to balance women's need to be perfect with the need for society to be more empowered as a whole. Zoey's words were a way of claiming back control and personality, making female figures active agents. This fitted with Irigaray's call for women to make and live in their own symbolic order, where women's opinions were important to building meaning and identity. But being told "your faults and fears must never be seen" showed how male standards still affected people, even in places where they seemed to be empowered. The conversation showed how hard it was for feminist places to fully achieve a new symbolic economy where women's differences, feelings, and flaws were respected as ways to connect and create power.

Data 4 (01:02:05 – 01:02:55)

Mira : "I know our faults and fears must never be seen, but, look, I'm kind of a difficult person.

Overly blunt, short-fused, highly aggressive. My whole life, those things were a liability.

But somehow, with you guys, they're okay."

Zoey : "I feel the same way. Before I joined Huntrix, I felt like my thoughts and my lyrics and all my notebooks were just useless and weird. **But with the two of you, they mean something. I mean something."**

Rumi : "**I'm afraid of losing you guys too. And** that's why we have to finish this. All these fears, it's the demons talking. But tomorrow, we can win this war. And when the Honmoon is sealed, we will be free of these demons. Free of these fears forever. And then we can take a hiatus. Maybe go to the bathhouse?"

According to Irigaray's postmodern feminism, Mira, Zoey, and Rumi's brave conversations showed a strong bond that went against male norms by seeing women's flaws and weaknesses as sources of strength instead of shame. Irigaray pushed for a symbolic order where women could define themselves beyond male-imposed categories and fixed identities. These exchanges supported that vision by recognizing that each main character's unique traits—Mira's bluntness, Zoey's creativity, and Rumi's fears—were important to their group identity. They accepted each other, which made a place where feelings and flaws that are usually looked down upon were not only accepted but also praised. This embodied Irigaray's call for women to recover power through relationships and shared subjectivity.

This support "disrupted" the male need to hide flaws and fears, instead "fostering" a sense of community strength that "resisted" limiting women as either perfect or flawed. The dialogue's focus on recognizing each other and being honest about how they feel was in line with Irigaray's criticism of binary thinking. It showed how female subjectivity was naturally diverse and fluid. By telling each other how much they were worth, the characters created a feminist symbolic economy in which differences and weaknesses were seen as sources of connection and power. This showed a new way of seeing femininity that was dynamic, open to everyone, and able to fight oppressive structures as a group.

Data 5 (01:12:53 – 01:14:58)

Rumi : "I thought I could fix it all. Fix me. But I ran out of time. They saw. They know. There's

no denying it now. This is what I am."

Celine : "I can't. When we lost your mother, I swore to protect all that was left of her, but I never

thought that that would be a child like you. Everything I was taught told me you were wrong, but I made a promise. So, I did my best to accept you and help you."

Rumi : "Accept me? You told me to cover up, to hide!"

Celine : "Yes, until we can fix everything. And we still can. We can cover those up and put everything right again. I'll tell Mira and Zoey that it was all a lie, an illusion by Gwi-Ma to break us apart."

Rumi : "No. No more hiding. No more lies!"

Celine : "Rumi, we can still fix this."

Rumi : "Don't you get it? This is what I am. Look at me. Why can't you look at me?! Why couldn't

you love me?!"

Celine : "I do!"

Rumi : "ALL OF ME!!"

Celine : "This is why we have to hide it. Our faults and fears must never be seen. It's the only way

to protect the Honmoon."

Rumi : "If this is the Honmoon I'm supposed to protect, I'm glad to see it destroyed"

Rumi's struggle with self-acceptance was a central theme in the movie, as explored through Irigaray's postmodern feminist framework. Rumi's confession of her imperfections and fears challenged the patriarchal norms that required women to conceal imperfection for

acceptance or protection. Celine's response reflected the internalization of patriarchal norms, symbolizing the Honmoon as a protective barrier. Rumi's refusal to hide her flaws and her desire to preserve a constructed ideal of femininity exposed the painful compromises women often made within patriarchal systems. However, Rumi's defiant declaration of "No more hiding, no more lies!" aligned with Irigaray's vision of a new feminine subjectivity that embraced multiplicity, difference, and emotional complexity. This challenge to the existing order suggested the need to dismantle oppressive symbolic systems, such as the Honmoon, that demanded concealment and fragmentation of the female self. The movie dramatized the struggle for authentic female agency and the creation of new languages and spaces where women could exist fully and unapologetically.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis results, the movie *K-Pop Demon Hunters (2025)* successfully represented the principles of Irigaray's postmodern feminism through its portrayal of complex female characters, narratives that challenged traditional gender stereotypes, and visual symbolism that reinforced female autonomy and solidarity. The movie not only depicted women as active subjects with agency and power but also portrayed female identity as plural, fluid, and transcending patriarchal dichotomies such as good/evil or pure/corrupt. The solidarity and emotional support among the Huntrix members formed a crucial foundation for building an autonomous and empowering female community, while simultaneously critiquing patriarchal pressures that demanded women hide their imperfections and vulnerabilities. Rumi's internal conflict and rejection of the demand to conceal her true self emphasized the necessity of dismantling oppressive symbolic systems so that women could express themselves fully and authentically. Overall, *K-Pop Demon Hunters (2025)* appeared not just as an action or entertainment movie but as a strong cinematic statement about postmodern feminism. The movie consciously chose to represent women in empowering, complex, and multidimensional ways, aligning with Irigaray's vision of creating spaces where women could exist and flourish in autonomy and authenticity.

This study suggested that additional research could be conducted to investigate the potential of popular media, particularly K-pop music and movies, to serve as effective mediums for the dissemination of postmodern feminist concepts and the expansion of more inclusive and diverse representations of women. Subsequent research could deepen the analysis of audience responses and the sociocultural impact of such representations, particularly within strongly patriarchal contexts like South Korea. The limitation of this study lay in its focus on narrative

and symbolism without thoroughly examining aspects of media production and consumption. Therefore, it was suggested that future research adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining media production analysis, audience studies, and sociocultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of media in contemporary gender transformation and feminism.

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