



# Grandma Detectives in Korea: Older Women Against the Crime of the “Silver Market”

*June Oh*

**Abstract.** This essay investigates the characterization of “grandma detectives” in K’im Ch’ae-hŭi’s *Grandma Detective Trio* (*Halmasi T’amjŏng T’ŭrio*, 2022) and these characters’ particular setting to show how their marginal position as older women with disabilities allows them to perform and negotiate the tropes of Korean detective fiction.

Setting older adults as the main characters is a not strange phenomenon in contemporary Korea. From a 76-year-old YouTuber with 1.2 million subscribers to a TV series that featured “grandpas” traveling through Europe, Korea has seen a groundbreaking presence of older adults in popular media. Despite often two-dimensional representation,<sup>1</sup> there remains an enduring public fascination with the experience of old age. Catering to this trend with a familiar detective fiction formula, K’im Ch’ae-hŭi, the recipient of the 2012 Best Detective Fiction award in Korea, introduces a cast of unconventional characters in *Grandma Detective Trio* (*Halmasi T’amjŏng T’ŭrio*, hereafter *Grandma*) (2022).<sup>2</sup>

The grandma detective trio lives in a “silver town,” an assisted living community for older adults. They have varying levels of various disabilities ranging from coping with the side effects of cerebral infarction and facing immobility due to degenerative arthritis to being on the verge of an Alzheimer’s disease diagnosis. With walking sticks and quick wit, they embark on a wild journey of investigations within and beyond the silver town. Whether delving into the case of a 90-year-old woman’s cherished but modestly valued missing plate or uncovering systemic ageism in a capitalist society, the trio quickly assumes the position of detective and gains recognition for their dogged persistence.

This essay examines the meaning of old age and gender in contemporary Korean

*June Oh* is an assistant professor of English and digital studies at the University of Texas at Tyler. Her research focuses on the intersections between Korean culture and British literature with a special interest in age/disability studies and digital humanities.