

Father-children relationship in the Korean and Romanian rural societies of the early 20th century

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*The aim of the current paper is to study the family relations in two cultures, situated continents apart, i.e. the Korean and the Romanian ones, in an attempt to bring to the surface specific cultural and social aspects related to family relations, with a focus on the father-children power relationship. The data employed are two novels, representative of each culture: Marin Preda's (1964) *Moromeţii* (volume I) and Kyung-Sook Shin's (2023) *I Went to My Father*. The theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the excerpts from the two sources is Hofstede's (1994), cultural dimensions theory, according to which the culture of a particular society may impact the values and behaviours of its members, and Foucault's (1982) theory of power.*

The findings of the analysis indicate that the way in which power is exerted in the two families and the driving force in each of them differ considerably.

Keywords: *father-children relationship, Romania, Korea, power distance, collectivism*

1. Introduction

The term *family* is defined by the Online Etymological Dictionary as “the collective body of persons who form one household under one head and domestic government, including parents, children, and servants” (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=family>), while the *Mic Dicţionar Enciclopedic* (“Small Encyclopaedic Dictionary”) (1972, 353) defines it as the “elementary social nucleus, based on marriage, which includes the parents and their children, who are united by close biological, economic and spiritual relations”. The inquiry into the topic of family relations is at the crossroads of various disciplines, such as cultural anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy or psychology. Berger (1998) considers the family as a group personality whose

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general harmony impacts the well being of each member, where there are many ways and different strategies in which parents relate to their children, which, in the long run, may have specific educational effects and may shape the children's personality. The parent-children relationship is not determined only by culture, but also by the socio-historical background in which families lived. An important influence on the parent-children relationship is that of religion/ideology. Confucianism, a popular philosophical value system in many Asian countries, Korea included, preached male superiority in the patrilineal family and the elders' dominance over young. Christianity, in its Orthodox version, also highlights the importance of children being polite and respectful to their parents, but this value is less cultivated in the Romanian than in the Korean culture.

The traditional (patriarchal) family, characteristic of both countries under consideration at the beginning of the 20th century, was based on unwritten, strict rules, according to which spouses were devoted to each other, while the children were submissive to their parents. This translates into a power relationship between parents and children. In the modern family, there is a tendency of the members to move away from the traditional norms, to gain independence, which may result in conflicts between generations.

The family, as a social construct, has been a prevalent topic both in the Romanian and the Korean literature, the novelists of the two countries depicting the family in various historical periods, highlighting the relationship between family members, as well as various mentalities. In the Romanian literature of the previous two centuries, a couple of novels having the *family* as a theme stand out. Ioan Slavici's (1881) *Moara cu noroc* ("The Lucky Mill") tackles patriarchy with its dire consequences. In another novel bearing the name of its main character, *Mara*, Slavici (1894) depicts a petty-bourgeois family from a Transylvanian village at the end of the 19th century, highlighting the unfortunate consequences of the absence of a father figure. Ion Creangă's (1879) in his *Amintiri din copilărie* ("Memories of My Childhood") presents life in a Moldovan village in which the family constitutes a loving and protective shell. The father figure is quite conservative, but also very protective of his brood of seven, encouraging them to study and to become honest and reliable persons. The atmosphere in the family is very pleasant, based on mutual respect and love, each child being treated fairly and all of them being loved equally.

Of interest for the current paper is Marin Preda's *Morometii*, in particular the first volume of the novel (1964), which showcases the peasants' life in a village in the southern part of Romania in the first part of the 20th century. The Moromete family is made up of 8 persons: Ilie Moromete, an authoritarian father, his second

wife, Catrina, who is very submissive and religious, and their six children. The image of this family is built on the basis of three important conflicts: that between Ilie and his wife, triggered by the fact that he did not keep his promise to Catrina to include her as co-owner of the house in the documents; the one between the father and his youngest son, Niculae caused by the different perceptions on education; and the conflict between Ilie and his first three sons, determined by the different views on work and village life, the latter choosing to abandon this kind of life and move to the capital city, Bucharest. In the analytical part of the paper, I shall analyse these relations within the framework of two of Hofstede's (1994) dimensions of culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) combined with Foucault's theory on power (1982).

The Korean literature also explored family relations throughout the development of the country from the times when it was still a kingdom, to the post-Korean War period (1950-1953) and modern times. Kyung-Sook Shin's (2012) *Please Look after Mom* tells the story of a Mother of five children, who, suffering from Alzheimer's, gets lost on the subway platform at Seoul Station. Relying on her long-term memory, she recalls and searches for the places where her children had once lived in the capital city, each of these places reminding her of the roles she played in her life time: of a wife, mother, sister-in-law, friend, and neighbour.

Helie Lee, a Korean-American writer, presents the story of her grandmother, Hongyong, born in 1912, in the novel titled *Still Life with Rice* (1997), in which the family and family relations hold a central position. Hongyong, the authoress' maternal grandmother's life was a rollercoaster of happy and tragic events unfolding against the backdrop of the socio-political situation of Korea of the beginning of the 20th century. The relations between the spouses, as well as those between the parents and their children are always warm and sincere, even in the dire situation in which they decide to let their baby daughter die after being trampled on and severely injured when the family was forced to flee from China to North Korea.

Another beautiful Korean novel, whose plot is set in the same period as Lee's (i.e. the period before the Japanese colonization of the peninsula) and which explores family relations, is Eugenia Kim's (2018) *The Calligrapher's Daughter*. The main figure of the novel is Najin, the calligrapher's daughter, who was not even given a name by her father, as it would have been expected, probably because of his disappointment when he saw that his first-born was a daughter – "he could find no meaningful name to mark her on this earth" (Kim 2018, 27). This disappointment is also the reason why he wants to marry his daughter off at the young age of 12 and opposes her desire to study, to become a doctor.

In the current paper, I am employing one of Shin's recent masterpieces, *I Went to See My Father* (2023), which is a family portrait built like a puzzle, from letters exchanged between the Father and his eldest son, from memories of his writer daughter, from stories told by his second and third sons, as well as on stories told by Father's old friend. The fate of this family overlaps with that of the peninsular country after the Korean War (1950-1953).

The paper is structured as follows: section two delves into the frameworks chosen for the comparison of the family relations in the two cultures, i.e. Hofstede's (1994) cultural dimensions combined Foucault's (1982) theory related to power. Section 3 covers the research methodology. The largest and most important part of the paper is contained in section 4 – the analysis of the father-children relationship in the two novels under consideration, i.e. the Romanian *Moromeții* (The Moromete Family) and the Korean *I Went to See My Father*, while the last part concludes the paper and provides answers to the research questions.

2. Theoretical framework: Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Foucault's theory of power

In the 1980s, Hofstede carried out an extensive project into the national cultural differences in the subsidiaries of the IBM company from a large number of countries all over the world, which helped him identify a five dimensions that illustrate which values are deeply embedded in people of different cultures (Hofstede, 1994). For him, these dimensions were an indicator of how people with various cultural backgrounds would act/behave in a work related context, named "organization". But these dimensions are equally helpful in explaining the different mentalities, attitudes or behaviours of people in the basic elements of society, such as the family, the school, and the community, which Hofstede called "institutions". From this it follows that the scholar made a difference between *organizational culture*, which "is based on the practices carried out within the organization" and *natural culture* that covers "the values of a collective group of people (...) often based on their past experiences, as well as family and historical experiences"². For Hofstede the *dimension* was "an aspect of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (1994, 14). Originally, the social anthropologist identified four dimensions, namely *power distance*, *masculinity*, *collectivism*, and *uncertainty avoidance*. Later on, in his attempt to provide an account of the cultural differences between the East and the West, he extended both the geographical and the social

² <https://news.theculturefactor.com/news/national-culture-and-organisational-culture-how-are-they-different>

areas of investigation (he included in his study students and commercial air pilots, not only IBM employees) and suggested two other dimensions, namely *time orientation* and *indulgence/restraint*.

For reasons of space and also because only two of these dimensions, i.e. *power distance* and *collectivism* are relevant for my analysis, I will briefly present them below from the perspective of natural culture. The first dimension, *power distance* (PD) measures the inequalities in power, status, and wealth in society. Power is defined as “the potential an individual has for compelling another person to act in ways contrary to his desires” (Hoffman 1960, 129). If in some societies these inequalities are accepted as something natural, in others they are frowned upon. The relations of power and dominance in a society can be of various types: coercive power based on violence, power based on money, and power based on knowledge and authority (van Dijk 2001, 355). The second dimension, *collectivism* (C) focuses on the type of social relations connecting individuals in society. In some societies there is a preference for loose ties with the family (individualistic societies), people caring only for themselves and their children (the nuclear family), in others there is a tightly knit social network, in which members are born in extended families and remain loyal to them for as long as they live (collectivistic societies). Collectivistic societies support the family and the community, not the individual.

Along the two dimensions described above, Romania and (South) Korea seem to have close scores (PD: Romania 90, South Korea 60, C/I: Romania 46, South Korea 58)³. The reason behind the selection of these particular two dimensions is that collectivism is characterized by “legitimacy of hierarchy” (Kuznets 2006, 96), hierarchy being defined by power distance, and that the exertion of power can take various forms.

The second framework I have employed is Foucault’s (1982) theory of power. According to the French philosopher, power relationship can be noticed only by focussing on carefully defined institutions, and the family, as stated above, is an institution. Moreover, Foucault is of the opinion that power relations appear in asymmetrical relations, such as the one between men and women, between psychiatrist and the mentally ill, between parents and children, or between the state and its people and that all these relations share some common characteristics: they are not limited to one country, they are form of resistance to power, and they affect “the immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual (...) (Foucault 1982, 781). The scholar also emphasized the fact that in order to understand the effects of power, one needs to also look for its causes and also for the means to escape it.

³ <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=romania%2Csouth+korea>

3. Research methodology

This section of the paper is dedicated to the presentation of the research hypothesis, the research questions derived from it and to the presentation of the data selected for illustrating the relationships that existed between fathers and children in the rural societies of Romania and Korea at the beginning of the previous century.

3.1. Research hypothesis and research questions

The hypothesis that guided the analysis in this paper is that family relations are affected by the general historical social changes in each country, as well as the by the religious or ideological beliefs entertained by people. The research questions the analysis will attempt to provide answers to are as follows:

- a) How does power distance and collectivism affect the father-children relations in the two cultures?
- b) Which is the driving force in the two families under investigation?
- c) What role does religion play in them?
- d) What similarities and differences are there in the family relations under investigation in the Korean & Romanian cultures?

3.2. The data

As mentioned in the introductory part, I have chosen two novels to investigate the discourse across cultures: *Morometii (The Moromete Family)*, a novel authored by Marin Preda and published in 1964 and Kyung-sook Shin's *I Went to See My Father*, published in 2021 in English and in 2023 in Romanian⁴. Though the period of time that forms the background of the two novels is not exactly the same, the plots being about two decades apart, I am confident that the comparison of the family relations emerging from them would yield interesting findings.

From Preda's novel I have focused solely on Ilie Moromete's family, though other families, such as those of Tudor Bălosu (Moromete's neighbours) or of Vasile Boțochină, also play an important part in the unfolding of the plot and the depiction of the village life in the interwar period, when the family relations were challenged by the economic hardships.

⁴ I had access to the Romanian translation of the book, published in 2023. Thus, all the fragments extracted from it, as well as the excerpts from Marin Preda's *Moromeții (The Moromete Family)* were translated into English by me.

The Romanian and the Korean families are, to a certain extent, similar, in that in each there are 6 children (four sons and two daughters), but also different, in that in the Romanian family, both spouses had been widowed: Ilie's first wife died as a result of complications from child-birth, whereas his second wife, Catrina, was a war widow. Moromete has three sons from his first marriage, a son and daughter from his marriage to Catrina and he was also raising Catrina's daughter from her first marriage. The first three children in the Korean family are also boys (Seung-yop, Hong, the third-born, whose name is not mentioned), followed by two daughters (Heon, a writer, who tells the story of the family and Ibi), the family brood being completed by the sixth child, another son. Another common element is the figure of the sister of the head of the family – Ga Marie, nicknamed Guica, Ilie Moromete's older sister and Father's⁵ older sister, each of them having an important impact on the family relations. From the two novels I have extracted the most relevant fragments focusing on the father-children relationship. These excerpts were analysed through the lens of the framework employed (Hofstede's PD & C and Foucault's theory of power). Table 1 below captures the structure of the two families under investigation.

Table 1. Structure of the Romanian and Korean families in the two books

The Romanian family (Moromete)		The Korean family (no name provided)
Father	= Ilie Moromete	Father (no name provided)
Achim	= Ilie's sons from his first marriage	First-born son = Seung-yop
Paraschiv		Second-born son = Hong
Nilă		Third-born son = (no name provided)
Catrina	= Ilie's second wife	Daughter = Heon (writer/narrator)
Tita	= Catrina's daughter	Daughter = Ibi (pharmacist)
Ilinca	= Ilie and Catrina's daughter	Last-born son = (no name provided)
Niculaie	= Ilie and Catrina's son	

⁵ In the Korean culture, people are not usually called by their first names, but rather by their roles (Father, Mother, Aunt). The children are referred to in the order of their birth: "the first-born", "the second-born", a.s.o.

4. Father-children relations in the Romanian and Korean rural cultures of the previous century

Although in the two novels under consideration the relationship between the patriarchs and their elder sisters, as well as those between the spouses are extremely important for the unfolding of the plot and for the impact they have on the father-children relationship, for reasons of space, in my analysis I shall focus only on the latter.

In power distance cultures, such as the Romanian and the Korean ones, the relationship between parents and children is a rather rigid one, in which parents teach children to be obedient and children have to show respect to their parents. In the Korean society, in particular, filial piety is a basic virtue, which lasts throughout adulthood. Very often, parental authority in such societies may continue even when the children are adults. Thus, I expected an unequal relationship between the fathers⁶ and their children in the two novels. I will start the analysis with Moromete and his children.

4.1. Ilie Moromete – an authoritarian father

Ilie Moromete's three sons from his first marriage, Paraschiv, Achim, and Nilă, though young adults, are still living with their parents in a small house (as it was customary in collectivistic cultures), where they are the subjects of their father's power, which takes two forms: "power based on authority" and "power based on force" (van Dijk 2001, 355). Initially, Ilie exercises his power by control⁷, by attributing various tasks to all his children, but especially to the sons. One day, as he saw that his children were still lazing around, Ilie started shouting at them:

- (1) *Ilinca, why don't you start sweeping the yard right now? Niculaie, how come that you have not already left with the sheep? What's got into you all? You, Achim, when are you going to release these horses? They will gnaw the manger until you get ready... And you, Paraschiv, why are you staring, like a dog? Nobody has cleaned the stable since Easter. And you, Nilă, where are you getting ready to leave?* (Preda 1964, 92)

⁶ As women are submissive to their husbands, they do not exert so much power over their children, at least not in the novels under investigation; consequently, I have focused on the father-children relationships only.

⁷ Power by control is "the capacity to get people to do what one wants when they are not persuaded of or are uninterested in the validity of the desired act" (Turner 2001, 7).

From this fragment we see that each of the children has specific tasks in the household: the youngest daughter to sweep, the youngest son to look after the family sheep, Achim is supposed to groom the horses, while Paraschiv is in charge of the cleaning the stable. Ilie Moromete's authoritative voice transpires not only from the tone and high volume he uses in addressing his brood, but also from the way he ridicules especially the boys. In the fragment above, he compares his son Paraschiv to a dog, on the grounds that his canine teeth are quite protruding, like the fangs of a dog, a characteristic that brought him the nickname *colțosul* ("fangy").

None of the sons escapes Ilie's ridicule. When Ilie Moromete decides to cut the acacia tree in the garden, he asks Nilă, the third-born child, to help him. His son is amazed at his father's decision to perform this activity during the night, without prior notice and asks:

- (2) – *Do you mean **this** acacia tree? Why should we cut it? How are we going to cut it? Why?*
- *Just because, replied Moromete. We cut it just because, Nilă, do you get it? So that stupid people should wonder. (...) Do you want to know in what way stupid people may wonder?, Moromete asked Nilă. Just by looking and wondering until they get sick of it! (Preda 1964, 82-83) (emphasis in the original).*

Moromete also abuses his power over the family by using direct forms of address that show disrespect, like *bă, mă* (for his sons) and *fă* (for his wife), the English equivalent being "you" in the vocative case. "**You** (Catrina), what is he saying?" (Preda 1964, 521); "**You**, Nilă, mind you, if you happen to see a furrow in the field, ask it to help you gather these ears of corn" (Preda 1964, 343-344). This shows that elements pertaining to language can have "certain consequences in the realm of power" (Foucault 1982, 786).

As Foucault (1982) and Guerrero et al. (2018) pointed out, to understand power relations, we should also have a look at forms of insubordination, of resistance. Ilie's oldest sons seemed to have enough of his father ordering them around, so that one day, when he tried to get their help, they refused to comply with his request. Moreover, the language used by them was not appropriate for their lower status. "Paraschiv (addressing his father): Listen here, **you**! Why do you keep entering and getting out of the room? Can't you grasp that we are not

coming? Why don't you go on your own?!" (Preda 1964, 536). Thus, after witnessing their insubordination and insulting words, Ilie Moromete employed power based on force, to discipline them.

Moromete was taken aback by his son's directness; yet, he continued talking to Paraschiv with a trembling voice, hoping that he would persuade him eventually to help him fill the sacks with corn and accompany him to the mill, to grind the corn, but this did nothing but to enrage the son even more. Then, without any notice, Ilie Moromete applied blows, first to Paraschiv and then to Nilă.

- (3) *Without haste, Moromete lifted the club in the air and took a swing. Paraschiv saw his father's action, but could not grasp what it was about; he looked in disbelief at the raised club and when he received the blow on the head, he lifted his arms, too late to protect himself. He collapsed from the chair and lay on the ground, his face showing great astonishment. (...) [Moromete] turned to Paraschiv and applied him blows slowly, but strongly, not caring which part of his body he hit. The father's blows made him come to reason: he tried to get up, to resist, but the club would paralyse his arms, shins, and hipbones. He moaned and crawled, his adult body jerking in a weird manner.* (Preda 1964, 536-537)

Nilă, in his turn, also experienced the rage of his father on his own skin, only that unlike his brother, he received the blows on his back. The two sons were too eager to express their independence, but Moromete was not equally prepared to relinquish his authority, being aware that his children were not yet wise enough to take good decisions (they wanted to run away from home and with the little money the family had and join their eldest brother, Achim, in Bucharest). The fragment above is what Foucault defined as exercises of power through "action upon an action". Moromete exercised his power as a result of his son's action of insubordination. According to Foucault, "[i]n itself, the exercise of power is not violence; (...) it consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (1982, 789). But, apparently, for Moromete this was the only way in which he could correct his son's behavior on this particular occasion.

Despite the incident presented above, Moromete did care for his children. One autumn, being short of money, he decides to sell some of his corn supplies farther away from home, where he would get a higher price for his products.

- (4) (...) *as the horses put on weight, he loaded his cart with corn and left to the mountain villages; he had obligations towards his children, to earn money and to buy them clothes, cause they were almost naked.* (Preda 1964, 68)

Also thinking of the wellbeing of his children, he does not want to sell any piece of the land he owns, knowing that this is the most precious thing he could leave to them. But land is of no importance for the young boys, who want to enjoy life in the capital city, not to toil in the field all day long. The father does not have the capacity to understand that there can be another kind of life, while the sons cannot understand that for their parent land is like gold, and by keeping it he wants to make sure that after his passing away, they will not remain destitute.

- (5) *I worked and toiled and saved the land from the landholder so that you could live better! For years I have been struggling not to sell it, to pay the taxes without selling the land, so you can have it all, you blind and savage fools! And I always paid, I didn't sell a furrow and now you attack me and the others in the family on grounds I stole your work?! The outcome of your hard work is the fact that the **land is all yours**, Paraschiv, you fool!* (Preda 1964, 538-539) (my emphasis)

This excerpt is also an illustration of power as resource based (Guerrero *et al.* 2018, 481). Moromete's power represents a struggle over resources, which were rather scarce in those times. The more scarce and valued resources are, the more intense and protracted the power struggle between Moromete and his older sons. The scarcity hypothesis indicates that people have the most power when the resources they possess are hard to come by.

4.1.1. Moromete's attitude to education and to his youngest son

The only child who escapes Ilie Moromete's physical power is the youngest son of the family, Niculaie. As he is a sickly child (he suffers from shivering), he doesn't have his siblings' strength to do farming activities, so he takes refuge in reading, being the only one in the family who wants to go to school. His father, who needs all the help he can get, does not let Niculaie go to school everyday, but the latter pleads with his mother, Catrina, to talk his father into allowing him to attend school more often. When Catrina asked her husband to let Niculaie go to school, Moromete replied:

- (6) *'Well, let him go, why doesn't he go?', he said irritated. 'And why does he want to go, after all? Because he will not pass the class anyway! Then why? Just to kill time?!'* (Preda 1964, 208)

Moromete is not clearly against schooling, as he is aware that education can enlighten people; the problem for him was that he did not want to spend the little money the family had on something he did not consider absolutely necessary. But his attitude started changing when his youngest son, despite the inappropriate conditions in which he studied, came out first in his class.

On the day of the end-of-school festivity, Ilie, who knew that Niculaie was rehearsing reciting a poem with his mother for the occasion, tried to find a reason to get out of the house and go to the village school, to see his son. When the schoolteacher announced the prizes, the mentioning of his son's name drew Ilie's attention.

- (7) *'First prize for the boy's group – Moromete Niculaie', shouted out loud teacher Teodorescu, pushing the child in front of the platform. Moromete had no doubts, as he recognized his large hat on his son's head. Overcome with emotion, the father shouted from the corner where he was sitting: 'Hey, don't you hear me? Take the hat off'.* (Preda 1964, 331)

Although he did not want to show it, Ilie Moromete was extremely touched by his youngest child's achievement. On this occasion, he realized that he had not even taught the child that at festivities you are supposed to remove your hat. His affection for Niculaie transpired from the way he handled his son's medical condition after the school festivity. Niculaie was seized with shivering and was not able to walk home. Moromete, confronted with a situation he was not familiar with, had no other choice but to carry the boy home in his arms, making sure not to leave in the street the books and the flower crown Niculaie had been offered as a prize. When they reached the gate of his yard, Ilie called onto his daughters to help him with Niculaie.

- (8) *Ilinca, the youngest daughter, came out of the kitchen where she was cooking and when she saw her father with Niculaie in his arms, she was shocked and asked what had happened. Instead of telling her that the boy was seized with shivering, Moromete turned his head in the opposite direction and said that the boy got the first prize.* (Preda 1964, 332)

The fact that Moromete turned his head away from his daughter in the short exchange they had may be explained by the fact that both the outstanding results at school and Nicolae's frail health might have moved the tough man to tears, which he did not want Ilinca to see.

- (9) *He had not forgotten the happening with the prize and the shivering. The disturbance that gripped him that day left a mark on him that did not want to be erased. There was something incomprehensible here. For the first time, Moromete could not escape a feeling of guilt that reared its head every time he looked and saw the big and burning eyes and the yellow-black face of the boy.* (Preda 1964, 353-354)

Eventually, Moromete agrees to let his youngest son go to Cîmpulung (a small town situated in the outlying hills of the Southern Carpathian mountains) to further his education and even accompanies him on the day the boy had to take an entrance examination. He even takes his son's side, when Catrina, his wife, reproached the boy that because of the taxes the family has to pay for his education, they will have to suffer.

- (10) *'Why because of him?', Moromete flinched with furious bewilderment. 'Did that church blow your mind, or what is wrong with you? Now you found fault with Niculai with no reason, may death take you with the priest in your arms!'* (Preda 1964, 483)

4.1.2. The older sons' insubordination

Achim, Paraschiv, and Nilă, Ilie Moromete's sons from his first marriage hate their father because he controls their lives and makes them work for the family. Thus, together with their aunt, they plan to impoverish him: Achim, would take the herd of sheep to Bucharest, to sell them, while Paraschiv and Nilă would follow him a while later, taking with them the horses of the family, so that Ilie would not be able to harvest the crop in autumn. From among the three, Paraschiv is the most rebellious, blaming his father for all his failures: in finding a girl to marry and in leading a better life. Thus, his greatest desire is to take revenge on his father.

- (11) *By running away from home with the sheep and the horses, Paraschiv thought he would get rid of the obstacle that prevented him from taking advantage of the loan, namely to get rid of the consumer family and of his*

father who had no idea of doing business and who, moreover, had the foolish idea to send Niculaie to school. But the revenge? (...) Someone had to pay for all the useless work he has done years in a row for them. (Preda 1964, 482)

His hatred for Ilie increases to such an extent that Paraschiv wants his father to become the laughing stock of the whole village, to be marginalized and remain destitute. Despite all the evil things he has done, the son was certain that “the father would not dare get revenge, because since everyone ran away from home, people would believe (...) that Moromete’s sons were “kicked out” because of the step mother and of her children who want to take hold of Ilie’s fortune (Preda 1964, 484).

While Paraschiv was trying to find various ways to take revenge on their father, “something that would leave deep and unforgettable traces” (Preda 1964, 513), the eldest son, Achim, who was sent to sell the sheep on condition to bring home the money, decided to stay in Bucharest and simply ignored the promise he made to his father. A neighbour informed Ilie Moromete that Achim was partying with women in pubs. One can imagine the pain in the father’s heart, his turmoil at the thought that he would not be able to pay back the loan, that his family will not be provided for, and that he will have to humiliate himself in front of the

Even if Ilie Moromete comes out as an authoritarian, at times despotic, parent, even if his sons hate him, there is a drop of love and kindness for his children in his heart. Let us turn now to the Korean Father⁸.

4.2. The Korean Father – a lenient, loving parent

Unlike in the Romanian novel, in Shin’s story about the Korean Father we see a different relation between the male parental figure and his children, i.e. one based on mutual love and respect, expressed not necessarily through words, but rather through a variety of kind gestures. Guerrero et al. (2018, 492) contend that “[t]raditionally, power and persuasion have been thought of as verbal activities. But in reality, communication that is powerful and persuasive consists of a combination of verbal and nonverbal cues”. Unlike Moromete, who considered that the best thing to do for his children is to buy land, Father had the conviction that education is more important than anything else and, thus, encouraged and did his best to support all his children in this endeavour. For him, as for many Koreans, education is a gate to social acceptance. He is determined that all his six children should have

⁸ Since no name is mentioned in the novel, I chose to spell the term with a capital letter.

the education that he had missed, as he was an orphan from the age of 14, and as the oldest son, he became the head of his family and had to provide for it by ploughing and sowing the land. The little education he had received at home from his father⁹, but he was not able to read and write properly. Heon, the author of the story and the fourth child in the family recalls “how Father had sworn to himself that he would send all of us to school, angry with his own father for not having allowed him to go to school” (Shin 2023, 153).

Once Father got married and his family grew larger and larger, ending up with six children, he made sure that all his children should have the basics of life, from food, to clothes, to money for education. Father’s love for his children emerges from various pieces of the novel, which look like a puzzle and which, put together, outline a father figure many people would like to have.

As a first puzzle piece, we have the memories of Heon, the first daughter and fourth child, who after an absence of 5 years, returns to her childhood village to look after her old and almost senile father, while her mother undergoes treatment for cancer in the capital city. Various objects in the parental house remind Heon of the happy childhood she and her siblings enjoyed, their Father contributing to a great extent to the pleasant atmosphere in the family. Very often, Father would cook for the entire family, a task that in the Korean society is strictly associated with women.

(12) *Father would often cook when we were kids. He would prepare noodles with soy sauce and marinated pork steak. We would all gather at the table, and sometimes, when we didn’t have any pickles or side dishes, Mother would ask Father to prepare bibimbap*¹⁰. (Shin 2023, 149)

Very often, especially in winter, when Father came home from work or from a drink with his friends, Mother would leave a bowl of hot rice for him. But when he was on the point of eating his food, his children would come close to him, attracted by the smell of food. “Father would wrap a spoonful of rice in a seaweed sheet and would stick it into our mouths in turn. When Mother scolded us that we do not let him eat, he answered that he had already eaten.” (Shin 2023, 151) This shows that rather than filling his stomach, he was very content to know that his children could have an additional portion of food.

⁹ As the family had lost a number of children, Father was not sent to school for fear that he might also catch a disease and die, and the lineage would be lost.

¹⁰ *Bibimbap* is a traditional Korean dish in which cooked rice is mixed with vegetables and pieces of meat. Sometimes a fried egg is put on the top of the dish.

Besides taking care that his children are properly fed, Father also made sure that they were also properly dressed. From the message sent by Hong (the second-born son) to Heon, we find out that the youngest children could not recall the period when the family was destitute. Even in dire financial conditions, Father would make sure that all his children had warm clothes for winter.

- (13) *Do you remember the first thing dad did at the beginning of winter? He came by bicycle, loaded with wool-lined boots and thick underwear, according to everyone's size, and unloaded the packages on the porch. He would put a pair of boots and a set of underwear for each of us, and we would pick them up ourselves from the porch. It was not a small task. There were times when some children only fed themselves with tap water, because they had nothing to take to school, but we marched all winter long in our wool-lined boots and in new clothes.* (Shin 2023, 195-96).

Apart from that, rather than making his children do house chores, like Ilie Moromete, he would spare them from any effort, only to concentrate on studying. Thus, in winter, when it snowed hard, Father took it upon himself to remove the snow from the porch, creating paths to the gate, the storage room, and the latrine.

As Heon, now and adult, spends more time with her father, she comes across a book he often read and discovers inside it an envelope in which he held a sheet of paper with all his children's names and additional information about the birth of each of them.

- (14) *On that sheet were written the names of all the children, in order, from the oldest to the youngest, and the date of birth of each one. (...) The eldest brother was born in the evening, the second at lunch, the third in the afternoon, I, the fourth, was born at dawn, in the middle of winter, my younger sister was born at the beginning of April, around the celebration for the birth of Buddha, also at dawn. Finally, I noticed the youngest child's name. Then I realized that the syllable **Ik** in his name was written with the Chinese character that means "gain, growth".* (Shin 2023, 271)

In my opinion, it takes a lot of love for a parent to have written and preserved these important dates. For Father, the birth of each child was a blessing, despite the poverty the family lived in, so he didn't want to forget any detail related to these important events.

The other pieces of the puzzle that create the Father figure are the memories of his children. They remember in turn some special things Father has done for them. **Heon**, the writer, felt special, because “Father would call me by my name, not “the fourth” (Shin 2023, 111), as it was common in the Korean culture. She also knew how much her father loved her, because when she finished primary school in the village and had to continue her education in a nearby town, Father cried for the first time. “He was upset because he let me go so soon, when I was still a little girl” (Shin 2023, 11).

While Heon was still in primary school, thinking that if she could ride a bike it would be easier for the girl to reach school, Father asked his second-born son to teach his sister to ride the bike. The boy protested on the grounds that Heon was a girl and was wearing a skirt, which is an indecent garment for riding bikes. But Father would not give up. All the girl’s attempts to ride the bike under her brother’s supervision failed. Then, one day, Father had first a short conversation with his daughter, explaining to her the advantages of being able to ride a bike and also some techniques which she might make use of in order to prevent her from getting injured.

- (15) *Father told me to keep only one foot on the pedal and the other one lifted a bit from the ground, so that when I felt I lost balance, I could put my foot down before falling. (...) Father held the bike and in this way I could ride around the yard.* (Shin 2023, 176)

He assured her that he would be behind her all the time. And when Heon managed to keep her balance and ride the bike without any help, Father ran in parallel with her, to assure her that he would prevent any mishaps.

Heon also recalls how Father would come to wait for her at school, when she stayed later for various extra-curricular activities, as she was afraid of the dark. “He smelled of cooked rice and sweat, as he had to hurry to reach the school immediately after finishing the work in the field” (Shin 2023, 307). But one day he was extremely late and the girl, assuming that he would not come, started walking home alone. On her way he met her father, who was running towards school since someone had stolen his bike, and when she laid eyes on him, she collapsed sobbing. For her, the mere presence of her father was enough to dispel any fear.

Heon also remembers the moment when she left the village to go to school in the city. She went to catch the bus, which was to take her to the city and before leaving, she wanted to take leave from her father, who was in his shop, very close

to the bus stop. Reaching the shop, Heon shouted: “Father, Father!”, hoping that he would come out, but as the bus was on the point of leaving, she jumped in, without being able to embrace her father. On the bus, she looked behind, to see if her father came out of the shop, and indeed he did:

- (16) *He had run out of the shop, with a flip-flop on one foot and a rubber slipper on the other, and had stood on the road staring helplessly at the back of the bus, unable to make any gesture or even say a word.* (Shin 2023, 13)

The lack of any gesture on behalf of Father on his daughter’s departure indicates that the pain at the idea that his little girl is leaving home has petrified him. Later on in the novel we find out that the reason why he came late out of the shop was that he did not want his daughter to see that he had cried.

As Heon becomes a famous writer, Father takes great pride in her professional achievement. He would bring his old friend, Pak Mureung, a comrade-in-arms, all his daughter’s books as soon as they got out, but he (Father) would never read them. From this friend, Heon finds out that “one day, Father had taken out of his pocket a folded newspaper page. He unfolded it and told me that his daughter appeared in the newspaper” (Shin 2023, 226).

Despite this, from a letter sent to her by her eldest brother, Heon finds out that Father had asked him some time ago to help him get to the bookstore in Seoul, where she launched one of her novels. He stood there, hidden behind the bookshelves, watching his daughter giving autographs to those who bought her book. “Father had tears in his eyes. After the autograph session was over (...), Father bought all the copies but one on the shelf and took them with him to J.”. (Shin 2023, 305)

Father, now suffering from Alzheimer’s, has the habit of disappearing from his room and Heon, who is taking care of him, panics every time she finds the room empty. On one of such occasions, she discovers her father in another room of the house. “Father was lying on the floor, along the bookshelves. On his chest he was holding an essay I had written about him, cut out and framed” (Shin 2023, 56). All these gestures show that the Korean Father encouraged, supported his daughter in becoming a writer, and took pride in her achievements.

The Korean Father’s love for the eldest son, **Seung-yop** emerges from the letters they exchanged while the latter, an adult with a family of his own, is sent to work for a branch of a Korean company in Lybia. In one of the letters Father writes to his child, he confesses how happy he was to find him wearing the high-school

uniform on his return from Seoul, after a longish period of absence. In another letter he writes:

- (17) *You are hardworking. I'm your dad but I'm not of much use to you, on the contrary, I am a burden on your shoulders. (...) I knew you were hardworking. I am happy that you continue to be hardworking, well behaved, and honest.* (Shin 2023, 134)

These positive features of Seung-yop, which Father praises and takes pride in, are actually the outcome of the education the son received at home, of the values instilled in him by his male parent.

Out of love for his son and the desire not to burden him with boring and ill-written letters, Father enrolls in an evening school, to learn to write properly. And so, his letters to his son become longer and longer.

As with Heon, there is mutual love and respect between Sueng-yop and Father. All the letters the first-born son sent father from his business trip to Lybia start with the formula *To our beloved Father*. In one of them he writes to his parent that “[a]ll I want is that you should not worry about me, even if I am away from home. (...) I will work hard and as long as I know that my parents are healthy, like before, I do not wish for anything else” (Shin 2023, 132). In another letter, he recalls how Father returned after the harvesting period with a bag of foreign sweets that the children had never seen before. Seung-yop also urges Father “not to shoulder the problems on his own” (Shin 2023, 142). In another letter he sends from Lybia, the eldest son shows his gratitude to his Father for everything he has done for him. He writes that he “could achieve all this only because I have you” (Shin 2023, 145).

From Heon's recollections it emerges that there was a special bond between Father and his eldest son, the one who in the Korean culture carries on the lineage. This relationship goes against one principle of Confucianism related to the rapport between father and son, i.e. that a parent should never treat his children as a friend, as an equal.

- (18) *Whatever one might say, of all of us, Father relied the most on his eldest son. We all knew that. When he called him, he didn't seem to be calling one of his children. There was a kind of friendship between them, as if Father had called a friend to him. The words he said to Seung-yop most often were: "I'm sorry. Next time I'll take care of it myself."* (Shin 2023, 111)

The second-born son, **Hong**, feels he is neglected in favour of the first son in the family, but is grateful to Father for having saved his life when a baby. When Hong was one month old, he got the chicken pox. In order to prevent the oldest son from getting the disease, Auntie took the baby [i.e. Hong] and isolated him in a cold room of the house and stood guard there. On his return home, Father found the baby with high fever. Outraged by his sister's decision, Father took the child in his arms and left for the hospital, covering the entire distance on foot.

- (19) *Every time I think of Father, the first thought that comes to my mind is what could have happened to me if he hadn't come home that day. It's my first memory I have in connection with Father, reconstructed from Auntie's and Mother's stories.* (Shin 2023, 188).

Another event in which the second son felt the love of his father was when after failing his entrance examination at the Naval Academy, which was a blow to the face of the family, he decided to go on a trip by bike. Despite the fact that Father disapproved of this trip, he, nevertheless, inserted a small envelope in the child's pocket. The envelope contained a small sum of money and a note saying: "Don't starve". But the second son's trip ended quite badly, as he was accused of being a spy and taken to the police station. He is rescued again by Father, who came to the police station and pleaded with the officers to release his child:

- (20) *He's a good and well-behaved child. He grew up and carried his little sister on his back when his mother had a hard time. He is always between his oldest brother and the younger siblings and always tries to please them. He didn't want to burden us with the tuition fee and enrolled in the Naval Academy but the entrance examination. And being upset about his failure, he left on a trip by bike. That's all. How can he be a spy?* (Shin 2023, 200)

Despite his lack of education, Father is a very wise and modern man, advising his children to live the way they want, not the way they are supposed to live according to the Korean social rules. He didn't take his son failure too tragically, as other Korean parents might have done, and tried to ease his child inner turmoil. When the second-born son turned an adult and became a graduate of the Military Academy, the only thing Father asked of him was to help him get to the ancestral graves, as he did not have the strength to go on his own, but the son would always

find a reason to postpone this activity. In this respect, Hong showed insubordination to Father's wishes, something he will regret later on.

The only instance in Shin's novel in which Father made use of power based on force was when his **third son** (whose name is not specified) failed the high-school entrance examination and, out of shame, he ran away from home. Father looked desperately for him everywhere, until he eventually found the child and brought him back home. After forcing his son to eat his dinner, Father asked him to follow him to the deserted house. As Heon recounts, "Father, who had never raised his voice at us, the children, and never hit us, would break the stick on my brother's back" (Shin 2023, 173). But despite this trashing, Father encourages his rebellious son to take the exam again. And on the day of the examination¹¹, as it had snowed heavily the night before, Father made sure to enable him to get to school in time and to be dressed warmly:

- (21) *Father had woken up even earlier than other times to shovel the snow from the yard and from the narrow street that led to the main road. Then, he gave my brother (i.e. the third son) to put on the boots he had previously warmed on the hearth, wrapped a woollen scarf around his neck, and gave him gloves. Almost whispering, Father told him that there was no problem if he failed the exam again, as he could take it again the following year, so he should come home as soon as he finished.* (Shin 2023,162)

4.3. The end of the two novels

Interesting is the similarity in which both books under consideration end, namely with a confession made by both fathers to their children, in which they sum up what they have done or haven't done for their children. These confessions also differ, as in Moromete's case we see the disappointment in his sons and the bitterness that all his efforts to leave them some land, which, for him, was the most important legacy, were not appreciated, but turned the boys against the father. As for the Korean Father, he expressed his gratitude and happiness for the accomplishments of his children, for having made him proud of all of them, despite some minor mistakes. He dictates his will to Heon, the fourth child and the writer of the story, in which he specifies what he leaves for each and every member of the family once he is gone. But more important than that is the regret he hasn't been

¹¹ The school year in Korea starts at the beginning of March, so the examination takes place at the end of November.

able to do more for them and is grateful for the loving memories he takes with him from each child. As he confesses at the very end of the novel: "I have lived. I have lived thanks to you all" (Shin 2023, 323).

Ilie Moromete (Preda 1964)	Korean Father (Shin 2023)
What did I do to you and what did I not give you, Paraschiv and Nilă? Haven't we all worked together and shared everything in the house? What more can I give you if that's all we have? Do you want to skin me? Year after year I struggled not to let the tax collector enter the house. Year after year I tried not to sell the land! We all lived barefooted and naked, no one had more than the other! What do you, bastards, want from me? To go out in the street and rob? (539) I did everything I had to do, Moromete resumed with an effort, I gave everything I had to everyone, to each and every of you what you wanted... What else could I have done and didn't do? (511)	To the first son: "I regret that you had to play my role over your siblings. What a burden that must have been for your! I should have tried harder. You have done half my job. I gained strength with a son like you." (321) To the second son: "You made me feel wonderful by saying that you like what I like." To the third son: "I want to leave something for you in gratitude for having obediently followed the eldest brother, even if I know that you are a bit reckless" To Heon: "Remember I will always sit on your left shoulder when you have to walk at night. Do not worry about anything" (321) To Ibi: I am very lucky to have a pharmacist daughter and that's why I am still alive. (322) To the youngest son: Gratitude for having finished his university studies despite Father's health issues during that period.

What emerges from these fragments is that the power Ilie Moromete exercised upon his children stemmed from his desire to own land, to be free of any taxes, without realizing that his children had other dreams. In the case of the Korean Father, one can speak of the "power of love": he gave free rein to his children to follow their dreams; he only guided them in their endeavor and supported them

the best he could, being aware that his best was not good enough. While Ilie Moromete considered himself all-knowledgeable, always trying to impose his point of view, the Korean Father considered his children to be smarter than him, taking over tasks that he was supposed to carry out.

5. Discussion and conclusions

As shown by the analysis of the excerpts from the two novels, there are some similarities, but more differences with respect to the father-children relations in the two cultures I have focused on. One common characteristic is that both belong to collectivistic cultures (children live with their parents even when they become adults), characterised power distance (the patriarch is the most powerful person in the family). But, much to my surprise, the Korean Father does not seem to use his power in the same way as Moromete or as other Korean men I came across in my readings and as also Heon, the writer daughter confesses: “I have never felt the pressure of the patriarchy that defines, by default, fathers” (Shin 2023, 152).

The Korean Father is the embodiment of positive forms of power, which motivated and energized his children, without diminishing or subjugating them (Guerrero et al. 2018). He is an influential person in his children’s life, though he does not overtly use powerful behaviour, like Ilie Moromete. He showed that a person of humble means, without exercising control, managed to wield power over his brood, as he stood for something that his children believed in, i.e. a model of honesty, courage, and perseverance, a pillar the children could rely on whenever they were in dire situations. The Korean Father is lenient/permissive; the only thing he demands from his children is to study. He is also nondirective, giving his children the liberty to choose what to do with their lives. He very seldom punishes them (see the thrashing administered to his third-born son, when he ran away from home after his failure to pass the high-school entrance examination). He supports and encourages all his children in whatever activity they want to participate in (dance classes, learning to ride a bike, etc.). In many situations, especially after the children have turned adults, he is more like a friend to them than a father, especially to his eldest son, with whom he shared for a while the task of raising the youngest members of the family.

Ilie Moromete, on the other hand, is the person who employed negative forms of power (hard power), such as ridicule, coercion, and even physical violence. He is an authoritarian father, who demands obedience from his children, very often

being nonresponsive to their demands and wishes. He expects his children to obey him without questioning his decisions. Additionally, he does not consider that he should explain to them the reasons for his decisions related to them, as he considers that his word is the “law”. It is only at the end of the first volume that he explains to his sons his decision not to sell the land.

If the father-children relationship in the Romanian family is based on unequal power, in the Korean family it is marked by mutual respect, friendship, and cooperation (when Father becomes weaker and delirious, his children take turns to visit and spend some time with him).

Whereas for Moromete the family was “an extended economic unit of production in the rural society” (Chambers and Garcia 2022, 82) he lived in, for the Korean Father, it was more the “existential context for children’s development of human personality” (Parsons and Bales, 1956, quoted in Chambers and Garcia 2022, 84).

Despite the close scores on the two dimensions, Romania and Korea differ with respect to how the parents and children behave due to one important aspect: ideology/religion. In the Korean culture, Confucianism in its more modern version, neo-Confucianism, reflects the historic pattern of patriarchy and imposes a number of dominance relationships, among which that between husband and wife, between father and son, and between older and younger (Clark 2000). And while the father is responsible for the well-being of his children, for nourishing, protecting them and helping them become good human beings, the children, in their turn, have to show parents their indebtedness for their efforts by filial piety, which Koreans accept as part of their lives and which is a pattern for all the other relationships outside the family. As Clark (2000, 92) contends, filial obligations “determine the disciplines and duties of children going to school and doing their best to excel at school-work and to be helpful and obedient around the house and later in the day”. This accounts for the Father’s six children all having graduated from universities and also for the way they try to repay their parent for all his sacrifices during their childhood. This is also one of the reasons for the close-knit relations between the children, despite the fact that the eldest son might have seemed privileged. We cannot see the same kind of relationships in the Romanian family, which is marked by lack of communication, the relations between the father and his children being rather tense.

At the end of this study, one may wonder if the father-children relationships in the two families are typical of the two cultures or whether they are exceptional cases. To provide an answer to this question one needs to investigate a larger number of sources.

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