

“For those who carry han (한) in their hearts”: The Gumiho in Korean Diaspora Fiction

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Abstract:

The Korean diaspora is significant in both size and scope, comprising approximately 7.3 million individuals across at least four continents. Ko Sang-goo, President of the World Assembly of Korean Associations (WAKA), notes that such “overseas Koreans [...] have effectively served as cultural ambassadors” of the hallyu wave. He further argues that Korea and its diaspora are “deeply connected through a shared national spirit” (Choi, 2025). The notion of a “shared national spirit” is reflected throughout Korean diaspora literature, much of which is gaining global popularity alongside “K-Literature” exports from South Korea (Hwang, 2024). This project examines two contemporary works of Korean diaspora fiction that reimagine the mythological figure of the gumiho (구미호), or nine-tailed fox: Kat Cho’s Gumiho Series (*Wicked Fox*, 2019 and *Vicious Spirits*, 2020) and Robin Ha’s *The Fox Maidens* (2024). I argue that Cho and Ha are contributing to a transnational and distinctly feminine literary canon through their engagement with the gumiho, a “monstrous woman” of Korean folklore. Further, I analyze their exploration of the gumiho through Seo-Young Chu’s conceptualization of “postmemory han,” a cultural and historical trauma carried by the Korean diaspora specifically (Chu, 2008).