

## SOFT MASCULINITY AS REPRESENTED IN SIWON CHOI'S INSTAGRAM AND TWITTER POST

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### ABSTRACT

*The term soft masculinity began to be known as a characteristic of K-Pop since the Korean wave became global. It has three prominent characteristics, such as tender charisma, purity, and politeness. This study aims to analyze how does Siwon Choi represent the character of soft masculinity through his Instagram and Twitter posts. Social semiotic by Kress and Van Leeuwen were used to analyze the visual text and Systemic Functional Linguistic by M.A.K Halliday were used to analyze the written text. Purposeful sampling was deployed to select six photos during 2018-2020. The result of this study found in five photos from Twitter and one photo from Instagram of Siwon Choi's account represents the character of soft masculinity through the activities in his daily life. This soft masculinity character has become a part of Korean culture nowadays, shifting the traditional masculinity character that tough into the softer ones.*

*Keywords: Soft Masculinity, Instagram, Twitter, Social Semiotic, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

### INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology, it becomes easier and faster to communicate and access new information. The advancement in technology also affects the use of social media which allowed people to communicate with each other wherever they are at any time. Social media not only used as a medium of communication of the users but also as a marketing tool to display products with visual descriptions, promote something or give information (Ting et al., 2021).

There are many forms of social networks, one of which are Instagram and Twitter that have many features to attract more users. The users of Instagram and Twitter mostly come from young adults to adults with various backgrounds, including celebrities, their fans, or the general public. Celebrities from all over the world use social media as a platform to interact with their fans. As well as celebrities from South Korea, they do not only want to share their activity. But also wants to promote their culture, which is known as Korean Wave or Hallyu Wave.

The Korean Wave or Hallyu Wave is the globalization of Korean popular culture around the world. Since the mid of 1990s, the impact of the Korean Wave has become a global sensation (Jin, 2012). A few Korean dramas become popular in East and Southeast Asia in the late 1990s. Since then, Korean Wave has started to flourish with the appearance of dramas "Autumn in My Heart", "My Sassy Girl", and "Winter Sonata" in Japan, Hongkong, Thailand, and Singapore in the early 2000s. At that time, TV dramas were not the only reason that made Korean Wave more popular, but there are also artists or boy bands and girl bands who were gaining popularity in

Asian countries, such as BoA, TVXQ, Super Junior, and Big Bang (Jin & Yoon, 2016).

The spread of Korean culture does not only happen in the music and TV dramas, but also their films, reality shows, foods, fashions, etc. The Korean Wave has made a big impact in South Korea, as the host country, especially in their tourism sector and economic income. The Korean Wave has triggered a new phenomenon of "East Culture" in a personal lifestyle that also occurs in Indonesia (Mariani, 2008). It also affected social culture in South Korea, Korean culture very strongly upheld the patriarchal system in the past. In 1948, the patriarchal system began to loosen so that women in South Korea can get the right to get an education, pursue their careers, and free their opinions (Korea: Dulu & Sekarang, 2012).

In the 1980s, the concept of the new man began to emerge which refers to the characteristics of men who are more sensitive, considerate, anti-sexist, and more concerned with physical appearance and voluntarily share domestic activities that are usually attached to women (Baker & Levon, 2016). This concept appears to challenge the stereotypes of men which are commonly associated with aggressive behaviour, selfishness, and indifference (Veissiere, 2018).

At first, men in Korean pop culture were represented as fierce and rebellious young men from the 1980s to the early 1990s (Jung, 2010). However, when the economic crisis occurred in 1997, South Korea began to display the image of men who are gentle, concerned with their appearance, more fashionable, and willing to do the work that women usually do (Maliangkay, 2013). This male icon is known as *kkonminam*, which means flower and beautiful boy. It can be concluded as a man who looks attractive as a flower. In addition, Jung (2010) also argues that *kkonminam* has masculine characteristics (tall body) as well as feminine (white and smooth skin, silky soft hair, soft and romantic behaviour) that can satisfy the complexity of human desires. This *kkonminam* is related to the soft masculinity character that proposed by Sun Jung, where men have a soft yet manly character at the same time.

Masculinity in South Korea is different from other countries which are known as "Soft Masculinity" (Pratiwi, 2020). The concept of soft masculinity is culturally constructed by society through the transcultural amalgamation of South Korea's traditional 'seonbi' masculinity (intellectual, politeness and tenderness man), Japan's 'bishonen' (pretty boy), and global metrosexual masculinity (Jung, 2010) that can be accepted in several countries.

There are three prominent characteristics of soft masculinity, namely Tender Charisma (combination of a firm character of a male and a soft character of a female), Politeness (character that describes as a good man, polite, and gentle manners towards everyone), and Purity (character in the form of sincerity and innocence as a pure and innocent first love) (Jung, 2010).

Siwon Choi is one of the most prominent Korean artists on social media platforms Instagram and Twitter with more than 7-8 million followers. He uses Instagram and Twitter to upload his activities such as daily life, job activities, fashion style, or promote the humanitarian activities of UNICEF with several languages, including Korean, English, Japanese, and even Indonesian, when interacting with his fans.

Most of the previous studies have the same focus which discusses soft masculinity, the representation of new masculinity on the Instagram account, and how the magazine represented a shift in the myth of masculinity. Unlike those

previous studies, this study will be more specific to analyze the character of soft masculinity as represented through Siwon Choi's Instagram and Twitter posts.

This study aims to figure out about how does Siwon Choi represent the character of soft masculinity through the photos and captions of his Instagram and Twitter post. Also, to give more knowledge about soft masculinity. In order to reach the goal of this study, the writer would like to use social semiotic by Kress and Van Leeuwen to figure the representation of the photos and Systematic Functional Linguistic (SFL) by Halliday to analyze the captions.

#### **Social Semiotic by Kress and Van Leeuwen**

Social semiotic is use them to make meaning that carries the social and cultural value. There are three metafunctions or types of meaning in social semiotics, representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, and compositional metafunction (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Representational metafunction is about the participants such as the people, places, or objects that are represented within an image (Harrison, 2003). There are two categories of image, narrative structure and conceptual structure. Interpersonal metafunction is about the action among all the participants involved in the photo (Harrison, 2003). There are three features in interpersonal metafunction, image act and gaze; social distance and intimacy; and perspective (horizontal and vertical). Compositional metafunction is the combination of representational and interpersonal metafunction to be complete meaningful (Harrison, 2003). There are four interrelated systems within compositional metafunction, information value, salience, framing, and modality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

#### **Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) by M.A.K Halliday**

Systemic Functional Linguistic is a theoretical approach proposed by M.A.K Halliday which studies the relationship between language and its functions in social contexts. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) emphasize a dimension called metafunction, which consist of ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational metafunction refers to language's ability to interpret human experience into categories (experiential) and further configure them into a logical pattern. It mostly deals with the use of a transitivity system, which includes processes, participants, and circumstances. According to Halliday, there are six types of processes in the transitivity system, material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. Interpersonal metafunction relates to the social relation between one person and others. It can be analyzed through the use of mood and modality of the speaker's attitude. Textual metafunction is language's ability to create discourse which entails theme and rheme, and the use of cohesive devices at both lexical and grammatical levels (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

#### **Soft Masculinity**

According to Sun Jung's book *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Oldboy, K-pop idols*, masculinity in South Korea is different from other countries which are known as "Soft Masculinity" (Pratiwi, 2020). It is constructed through the transcultural amalgamation of South Korea's traditional 'seonbi' masculinity (which is heavily influenced by Chinese Confucian 'wen' masculinity), Japan's 'bishonen' (pretty boy), and global metrosexual masculinity (Jung, 2010). The characteristic of 'seonbi' masculinity emphasizes mental qualities above physical ones, such as have intellectual, politeness and tenderness (Jung, 2010). "Bishonen" is a Japanese term for a guy with characteristics

similar to a pretty boy, such as long legs and hair, a slim body, a feminine face, and a charming smile (Buckley, 2002). Global metrosexual masculinity is a Western concept that refers to metro-sexuality. Metrosexual is identical to a man who cares about his appearance (Fribadi, 2012). With the mixing of cultures, the concept of soft masculinity can be accepted in several countries.

There are three prominent characteristics of soft masculinity, namely Tender Charisma, Politeness, and Purity. The characteristic of tender charisma is a combination of a firm character of a male and a soft character of a female. Politeness is a character that describes a good man, polite, and gentle manners towards everyone. This is in stark contrast to the portrait of men in the past, where men were depicted as rude and authoritarian individuals. Purity is a character in the form of sincerity and innocence as a pure and innocent first love (Jung, 2010).

The terms soft boys, flower boys, soft masculinity, emerged because they were influenced by the process of disseminating transcultural values through the media. The idea of soft masculinity emerged along with the increasing purchasing power of women and young people, who are a group of active internet users and enjoy K-pop content presented through social media, thus opening up new business opportunities for the K-pop music industry.

Korea is a trailblazer in men's beauty culture, definitely in Asia at the moment, if not the world. The way K-pop stars play with masculinity, what it means to be a beautiful man in a heterosexual or non-heterosexual way, opens up possibilities for men on the street and eventually makes it more acceptable (Elfvig-Hwang, 2011). Jung (2011) has explained that these pop consumers are increasingly accessing popular products such as music, film, television, and other audiovisual media content through online social media. From these consumers, these channels now play a central role in global cultural circulation. With youth consumer groups as central figures, social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have recently become the fastest-growing media platforms to circulate global cultural products.

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a photo-sharing mobile application that allows users to create a profile, connect with others, take a picture, apply a filter, and share the photos on the platform itself, as well as the other platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Stec, 2015 as cited in Alhabash & Ma, 2017). It was launched as a mobile photo-sharing social media platform in October 2010 with more than 1 billion registered active users all over the world. It has many features to attract users such as IGTV, Instagram Story, Instagram Explore, Instagram Shop, Face Filters, Photos Layout, Multi-Capture, Boomerang, Gif, Hashtag, etc. Instagram is very popular with young people because there are many interesting features provided by Instagram.

### **Twitter**

Twitter is known as a micro-blogging service that allows users to post and communicate using short messages called tweets. Twitter limited each tweet to 280 characters and the users also can upload photos or short videos which provided a slight advantage for its users to use the application. The users can use Twitter to update current status, initiate conversations, promote products and even spam something (Benevenuto, Magno, Rodrigues, & Almeida, 2010). In Twitter, there are more features such as quote a tweet, native gif search, pin a tweet, create a Twitter moment, create Twitter lists, and use Twitter promote mode. Those features aim to attract more users to use Twitter.

### **Siwon Choi**

Siwon Choi is one of the most prominent Korean artists on social media platforms Instagram and Twitter with more than 7-8 million followers. He uses Instagram and Twitter to upload his activities such as daily life, job activities, fashion style, or promote the humanitarian activities of UNICEF with several languages, including Korean, English, Japanese, and even Indonesian, when interacting with his fans.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative method and descriptive interpretative methodology to analyze one photo from Siwon Choi's Instagram and five photos Twitter posts during 2018-2020. The qualitative method focuses on the explanation about the behavior of human and the descriptions of social practice (Jackson, 1995). The descriptive qualitative interpretative method is a method that uses data in the form of words or pictures (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). The qualitative and descriptive interpretative approach are applied in this research because the objective of this study is to find out about how does Siwon Choi represent the character of soft masculinity through the photos and captions of his Instagram and Twitter post. The data that are going to be used are the six photos that depict the character of soft masculinity, one photo from Instagram and five photos from Twitter. The selected data will be analyzed using the theory of social semiotic by Kress and Van Leeuwen to analyze the visuals from the photos and written text from the captions using Systemic Functional Linguistic by M.A.K Halliday to relate them with soft masculinity characteristic that proposed by Sun Jung.

This study attempts to find out how Siwon Choi represent the character of soft masculinity through his Instagram and Twitter posts. There are several steps that were done to collect the data in this research:

1. Search about soft masculinity and traditional masculinity.
2. Identify several celebrities in South Korea who shows the soft masculinity character in their Instagram and Twitter posts.
3. Determine one of the celebrities who represented soft masculinity through their Instagram and Twitter posts.
4. Identify the characteristics of soft masculinity such as tender charisma, purity, and politeness from the photo and caption that is represented by the celebrities in their Instagram and Twitter account.
5. Determine Siwon Choi as the corpus of the study based on his image and the way he shows his daily life on Instagram and Twitter.
6. Identify Siwon Choi's photos and captions in his Instagram and Twitter posts that represented soft masculinity.
7. Select the photos from Siwon Choi's Instagram and Twitter posts to be analyzed.

The technique for data analysis in this study has some steps:

1. Classify the photos and captions from Siwon Choi's Instagram and Twitter account that represents soft masculinity.
2. Analyze the characteristics of soft masculinity such as tender charisma, purity, and politeness which are represented by Siwon Choi in his Instagram and Twitter account using the social semiotic approach by Kress and Van Leeuwen that consist of Representational (Narrative and Conceptual), Interpersonal (Image Act and Gaze,

Social Distance and Intimacy, Perspective: the horizontal angle and involvement, Perspective: the vertical angle and power), and Compositional (Information Value, Saliency, Framing, Modality).

3. Analyze the photo captions using Systemic Functional Linguistic: Transitivity by M.A.K Halliday that consist of Ideational (Transitivity), Interpersonal (Mood and Modality), and Textual (Theme and Rheme).

4. Interpret the data analysis.

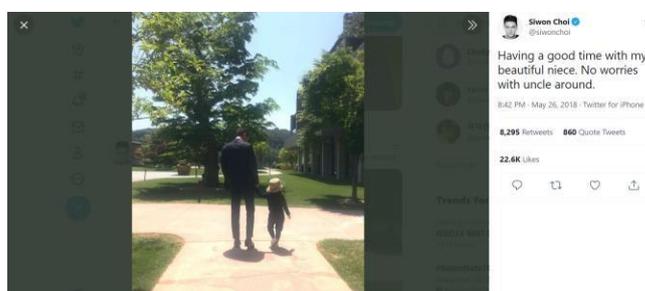
5. Draw the conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION



*Photo 1*

The visual text analysis of the first photo focuses on Siwon's gestures and facial expressions when meeting and interacting with his fans. In this photo, Siwon looks very relaxed and friendly to his fans. The way Siwon interacts with his fans is in harmony with the characters of soft masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen from his facial expression and smiling while shaking hands. He smiles to express his feelings, that happiness when meets his fans, which is in line with women's soft side. While his firm side can be seen from the look in his eyes that look directly to his fans. Purity can be seen from the gaze of his eyes that looks sincere and friendly, also his facial expression that smiling when shaking hands. Politeness can be seen from Siwon's gestures that are slightly lowered his head considering the height of his fans that lower than him, he also smiles when shaking hands showing his friendliness and courtesy. When Siwon shakes hands with his fans, it shows that he appreciates and respects his fans that have given their time to come and meet him. Moreover, the written text analysis focuses on the expression of Siwon's feelings when having a chance to meet and interact with his fans. Even though he only got a short time but he still considers the time that he got is very valuable.



*Photo 2*

The visual text analysis of the second photo focuses on Siwon's gesture toward his niece which looks very relaxed and comfortable even though he is wearing a formal suit in the hot weather. The way Siwon treat his niece and express his feelings toward his niece have depicted harmony with characters of soft masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen from Siwon's gesture by holding his niece's hand and slightly bending down to see his niece while walking. This gesture represents the soft and firm side of the soft masculinity character. When Siwon walks and holding his niece's hand can represent that he wants to protect his niece and slightly bend down to look at his niece when he walks represents that he wants to make sure that his niece is always safe while with him. Purity can be seen from Siwon's gaze at his niece which represents sincerity and affection from an uncle to his niece. This purity character shows how pure and sincere love is given to fellow human beings, be it to spouses, family members, male or female friends, children, or elderly people without any restrictions. Politeness can be seen from the attitude and behavior that Siwon gives to his niece, such as looking at her with affection and holding her hand with tenderness as if he wants to protect her. This politeness character describes a man who is full of good manners, polite, and always respects everyone including women and children without any limitations. Moreover, the written text analysis focuses on the expression of Siwon's feelings when spending time with his niece and emphasizes that he will always take care of his niece. This shows how sincerely he loves and cares for his niece without any restrictions.



*Photo 3*

The visual text analysis of the third photo focuses on the appearance, facial expression, and gesture of Siwon and his friends which also shows a bromance relationship that is related to the characters of soft masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen from the uses of make-up and accessories which relates to the soft character of women. Despite the use of make-up and accessories, they still dress in men's apparel, such as pants and shirts or suits and t-shirts. They are more pay attention to their appearance by applying make-up and accessories. Moreover, the gesture of Siwon to one of his friends shows the closeness between them as friends and the existence of a bromance relationship which is common in Korean culture to shows affection as a brother. Purity can be seen from their closeness, where physical closeness between men is not always interpreted as romantic closeness as in the relationship of opposite-sex couples, but rather shows affection between brothers. The relationship that exists between them occurs sincerely as a brotherly relationship. Moreover, the character of politeness can be seen from the way Siwon respect them as brothers rather than just friends. It shows that when Siwon feels completely comfortable in certain surroundings, he considers it to be his second home as well as

his attitude that always respects others. Moreover, the written text analysis focuses on the expression of Siwon toward the people around him. He wanted to emphasize that the people in the photo with him were friends in Osaka who he considered as brothers. He showing this implies that he respects them as brothers rather than just friends.



*Photo 4*

The visual text analysis of the fourth photo focuses on Siwon's gesture toward the little boy while participating in activities with UNICEF. In this photo, Siwon looks very relaxed and comfortable when interacting with the little boy. He also does not hesitate to kneel down in front of the little boy, to make it easier for the little boy to put the sticker on Siwon's forehead. The way Siwon interacts with the little boy is in harmony with the three characters from Soft Masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen when Siwon kneels down and close his eyes when the little boy wants to put a sticker on his forehead. He kneels down to shows his respect and practices the active listening technique to the little boy. Also, closing the eyes as if to show that he accepts whatever the little boy will do to him and he did not stop the little boy from doing something that he wanted. This gesture and the way Siwon interact with the little boy has represented the soft side of women and the firm side of men. Purity can be seen when Siwon closes his eyes which represents sincerity from within when interacting with a child. This purity character shows how pure and sincere affection for fellow human beings, despite their varied backgrounds and a big age gap. Politeness can be seen from Siwon's gesture and attitude toward the little boy. When Siwon kneels down, it has shown a sense of respect for others. Moreover, the written text analysis focuses on the expression of Siwon's feeling toward the little boy and emphasize that their interactions are completely limitless, even though they come from very different backgrounds.



*Photo 5*

The visual text analysis of the fifth photo focuses on the gesture and expression of Siwon and his drama co-stars. In this photo, they look so close and without any

awkwardness when showing their expression. This gesture and facial expression are in harmony with the characters of soft masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen when Siwon is not hesitant in showing his foolish facial expression. It shows that Siwon dares to show any facial expression, be it happy, sad, angry, or even ignorant, just like a woman who is quite expressive than men. Purity can be seen from Siwon's closeness with his drama co-stars, especially the women and a child when taking a picture. He did not hesitate to take a picture together; they also looked very closely and showed the same facial expression. It is shown that he does not discriminate his treatment of women or children, all that he did sincerely without any difference. Politeness can be seen from Siwon's expression who considers his drama co-stars as a real family for him. Siwon shows his respects to the actors and actresses who are working with him, whether they are younger, the same age as him, or more senior. Moreover, the written text analysis focuses on the expression of Siwon toward his drama co-stars which he considered as his "real family". Even though their relationship began as a working relationship, their togetherness is real just like a real family, therefore Siwon considered them as a family.



*Photo 6*

The sixth photo focuses on the gesture and facial expression of Siwon and his brother, which shows a bromance relation and it is in harmony with the character of soft masculinity. Tender charisma can be seen from Siwon's gesture when hugging and slightly cradling his brother. This gesture showing a soft character and hugging each other may refer to physical emotions, a psychological sense of well-being, and in many cases often refer to a positive emotional experience (Forsell & Åström 2012). In addition, hugging or kissing each other on the cheek is a common thing in the bromance relationship and today's Korean culture. Mostly the member of the boyband does this in front of their fans as a part of their fan service. It shows that men in South Korea have different ways of expressing their masculinity and different perspective of being masculine (Praptika & Putra, 2016). Purity can be seen from the gaze and gesture which shows a pure love between man. Physical contact between men is acceptable, although it is still considered unacceptable in the context of local culture. In the relationship between men, there is the term "bromance" which stands for "brother romance", it is a phrase used to describe a man's physical contact that is not only interpreted as romantic closeness as in a relationship of the opposite sex but

rather on affection between brothers, which in Korean culture is considered as something reasonable (Fauzi & Nugraha, 2020). Politeness can be seen from Siwon's gestures and expressions through the caption. His gesture which looks like he is hugging and somewhat cradling his brother shows their closeness as friends who are already considered like brothers. Moreover, the written text analysis shows Siwon's gratitude to his brother for the achievements that he has been obtained. From this, it can be seen that Siwon is very sensitive to the little things that happen, he also does not forget to express his gratitude as a kind of congratulation on the achievement.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion, the writer found that Siwon, as a Korean celebrity, uses social media Twitter and Instagram to share his daily activities. The six photos and captions show that Siwon represents the character of soft masculinity (tender charisma, purity, and politeness) through the activities that he does together with his fans, niece, the drama co-stars, friends or colleagues, brother and UNICEF. Through the visual text analysis, the writer found that all photos are using narrative structure because there are vectors that connect the represented participants. There are three photos that are captured in demand gaze and the rest in offer gaze to make a strong connection and engagement with the audiences in delivering the message of the photos. There are three out of six of the photos which use far personal distance and the rest two photos are used far social distance to create an intimate distance with the audiences. Half of the photos are captured in oblique angle and frontal angle to create an involvement with the photos. Most of the photos are captured at a medium angle which represents an equal power position with the audience. All of the photos are placed in the center of the frame which shows them as the main information, it also has great salience with no frame lines dividing the represented participants and has high modality which shows the photos are real. While in the written text analysis, the writer found that Siwon frequently uses relational processes and declarative mood to attract the audiences and deliver the message of the photos. In showing the character of soft masculinity, Siwon uses simple language to make the audience can understand the message easily.

After finishing the analysis of soft masculinity characters as represented in Siwon Choi's Instagram and Twitter posts, the writer hopes this study would be useful for other researchers that interest in the topic of soft masculinity. The writer also hopes that this study may be useful for those who are interested in studying the meaning behind the image in media discourse and cultural studies. Therefore, the writer suggests that in the future study it can be more analyze the comment of soft masculinity character or the development of the soft masculinity itself in the wider media.

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