

## The Movie *Minari* Seen Through Coaching Psychology

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### ABSTRACT:

The movie *Minari*, written and directed by Lee Isaac Chung, has received international, critical acclaim since its release at the Sundance Film Festival on 26 January, 2020. Some praise it as a typical American film. Chung, born in Denver, Colorado, is an American citizen, raised by Korean immigrants in rural Arkansas; and all but two of the actors are American citizens. Others understand *Minari* as yet another example of *Hallyu*, or the “Korean Wave,” which is a reference to the many ways South Korean pop culture has been exported across the world. In this paper, we use the academic framework of Coaching Psychology to interpret *Minari* as a harbinger of consolation and hope for the world – a message that transcends culture and country. This message is of particular importance during a moment defined by the challenges of a global pandemic and when Asian Americans are experiencing a disturbing rise in hate crimes.

**Key words:** American, Coaching Psychology, immigrant, Jacob, Korea, *Minari*, movie, *Soonja*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Minari* is a critically-acclaimed movie written and directed by Lee Isaac Chung. It was originally released in January of 2020 at the Sundance Film Festival. Chung, born in 1978 in Denver, Colorado to South Korean immigrant parents, uses the film to give a semi-autobiographical account of his childhood. In the 1980s, Chung's family moved to rural Arkansas, so his father could start a business growing and selling Korean crops. By retelling the story of this transition and the multi-faceted challenges it created, Chung captures a variety of experiential tropes: the pursuit of the American dream; the economic, racial, and cultural challenges of an immigrant family in rural America; the will of a family struggling to survive together; the coming of age of a child making sense of this complex world; and the resilience of the human spirit, captured symbolically in the Korean plant, or "weed," called *minari*. But like any classic, *Minari*'s impact is not limited to the particular story it tells. It achieves a kind of universal recognizability through its specificity. By telling his own story, that of a Korean American boy in an immigrant family, Chung connects with many, and his message becomes universal in scope.

In this brief analysis of *Minari*, we will use Coaching Psychology as an interpretive framework. Our goal will be to analyze the various ways *Minari* captures the complexity of immigrant life in America, even challenging the very idea of an "American dream." We will begin with a summary of Coaching Psychology and of the weed *minari* which runs as a symbolic trope throughout the film. We will then highlight three aspects of *minari* that demonstrate the unique human spirit celebrated in the film: namely, its adaptability, vitality, and redemptive qualities. Our analysis will then turn to a consideration of the film's reception. The

strikingly wide array of interpretations, including whether the film is considered "American," "Korean," or something entirely different demonstrate the complex moment Chung attempted to capture. He and his family live in a "third culture" where the traditions of their country of origin continue in the new life they attempt to build in rural Arkansas. Our conclusion will be that *Minari* provides a timely message of hope in a world that desperately needs it.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT: COACHING PSYCHOLOGY AND *MINARI*

Coaching Psychology is a professional, theoretical psychology designed to help individuals achieve a specific purpose. It accentuates the positive aspects of the individual and/or group, as it ushers them toward the achievement of a goal (Redmark, 2018). In this study, we argue that both Coaching Psychology and the film *Minari* serve the same purpose in providing comfort, encouragement, and direction of life to those in crisis. We are, of course, not claiming that Chung purposefully used Coaching Psychology to tell his story. The connections between the movie and the framework are incidental. However, like a Coaching Psychologist, Chung provides a sense of consolation and courage during a particularly challenging time. Confronted by the challenges of COVID-19, the citizens of our global society are in need of hope. Chung provides that hope, thus offering a kind of mental healing to the world and playing the role of coach (Rolo and Gould, 2007).

To situate our analysis of the film, let us focus on the title: *Minari*. In South Korea, *minari* is ubiquitous. It can be found along rivers, in valleys, and in rice fields. It is cheap and thus consumed by essentially all Koreans, regardless of their wealth. *Minari* is a weed-like vegetable. When people eat it,

they are fascinated by its subtle aroma and taste. It is used throughout the year, but “winter *minari*” is most popular. Its stems are softest from December to March and is especially delicious when eaten in duck soup (Misominam, 2020).

In this paper, we will use three characteristics of the weed *minari* to highlight three aspects of the film: adaptability, vitality, and benefit. First, *minari* adapts quickly to multiple environments and can grow well so long as it has access to moisture. If one hopes to grow *minari*, simply sow the seeds or transplant roots to a moist place. We can therefore say that *minari* contains a “pioneering spirit.” It is adaptable and can survive in multiple settings. Second, *minari* has a unique strength, a vitality that allows it to survive in both cold winters and hot summers. It maintains its green color year round and has the reputation of surviving anywhere. Third, we can say that *minari* displays a spirit of restoration and reconciliation. It restores ecosystems and purifies contaminated water and the surrounding land. It helps with health and wellbeing, as it releases heavy metals and toxins from the body. Thus, taking some license in our personification of this hardy weed, we can say that *minari* can serve as a symbol of hope. Now, let us analyze these three qualities in terms of Coaching Psychology.

### **MINARI AS PIONEERING SPIRIT**

In the late eighteenth century, many Americans migrated west. Many of these pioneers were immigrants. They turned to the west in pursuit of new opportunities in farming, agriculture, and business. But this pursuit of the ‘American dream’ was not comfortable. The west was called “The Wild West,” and appropriately so. The land required significant work to produce crops. Robbery was rampant. And each day was

marked by a struggle to survive. The famous American historian Jackson Turner (1861-1932) defined this migration as follows:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the great West . . . In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization . . . The most significant thing about the American frontier is that it lies at the hither edge of free land (Turner, 1893).

Turner interprets the American pioneering spirit as the work of people seeking a land of freedom to transform barbarism into civilization. The west was infinite and wide. It had enormous resources and land; but it was also a land of indulgence and ferocity. We could call it “barbaric,” a term that connotes slaughter, arson, and rape. It was a socio-political landscape marked by disorder, lacking moral and legal arrangements, and requiring an impersonal ruthlessness for survival. Those who moved west into this barbaric land had the duty and privilege to build an orderly civilization. They were the pioneers of the western United States.

The movie *Minari* can be treated as a work that movingly depicts the pioneering spirit. It shows the struggles of Chung’s parents – depicted in the film as Jacob and Monica – and their two children, as they moved to rural America to pursue their own

version of the American dream. Prior to their move, Jacob and Monica worked as chick identifiers at a chicken farm in California. But, they were not satisfied. They saw the move to rural Arkansas as a way of accomplishing their dreams. Jacob could grow Korean vegetables and sell them to Korean Americans. Upon arrival in Arkansas, Jacob announces to his family that he will create a large garden. He digs the fertile dirt from the ground by hand and shows it to his wife. He boasts that this is “the best soil in America.” The visual dynamism helps viewers feel refreshed, as they observe the endless green space unfolding under the bright sunlight. Especially during a time when viewers have been trapped at home during COVID-19, this appearance is a vivid reminder of the natural beauty in the world and provides a welcome respite, even if for a while.

*Minari* captures the pioneering American spirit, even though its protagonists are Korean Americans. Compared to the stereotypical western American film, this is new, as is the location when Jacob lives. His house, a mobile home, is complete with wheels and is prefabricated. It is a trailer. But this does not imply that Jacob and his family are poor. Unlike most portrayals of individuals in trailer homes, Jacob and his family are not losers, and the whites featured in *Minari* are not his rulers or competitors. Some are alcoholics and religious fanatics, portrayed as strangers themselves in American society. Jacob and his family embody the image of American pioneers who pursue a more sincere, healthier life than the whites of the film. They are preparing for a better future. Further, Jacob’s farming management portrays a new kind of ingenuity. Many Korean immigrants in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles started their businesses through convenience stores and laundries. *Minari* rejects this clichéd portrayal. Jacob emerges as a

talented farmer employing whites, showing that he – as an Asian in America – is pursuing the American dream.

But the best laid plans often go awry. The idyllic environment of his farm devolves into difficulty. Life gets harder and harder. Trials follow one after another. His wife Monica is anxious about their son’s heart disease and asks Jacob repeatedly to move closer to a metropolitan area, so they can have access to a hospital. But Jacob is focused obsessively on his word. He works alone, excluding Monica from his business decisions, and thus creates extreme discord. His two faces – the indomitable will to succeed and the pathetic ignorance of his family’s struggles – bring his family to the brink of ruin, creating a unique dialectical tension. The young couple eventually brings Monica’s mother, Soonja, from South Korea to the United States so she can care for their two children. Now, the audience watches the process of three immigrant generations struggling together, supporting one another while living on a wide farm far from society. In this way, *Minari* depicts the multiple difficulties of American pioneers. On the surface, Jacob and his family have at their disposal the many improvements that have been made in American society because of the original pioneering spirit. But challenges still abound. He has to create his opportunities from scratch. He must overcome numerous adversities through sacrifice and dedication, while keeping his dependents healthy. First and second generation Korean Americans will especially feel a connection with his family’s challenges. But more will as well. Especially in a time when hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise, it is vital to see the multiple challenges Jacob and his family overcame. Film critic Yoo-jeong Kang says that *Minari* has a unique American character but a universal message: “It has secured an emotional consensus,

providing warm comfort and healing in an era when the world is experiencing the COVID-19 crisis” (Kang, 2021b).

### **MINARI AS VITALITY**

Bookending the story of Jacob’s challenges are scenes of *minari*. Towards the beginning of the movie *Soonja*, Jacob’s mother-in-law and a symbol of Korean national culture, takes her young grandson to a swamp on the farm and sows *minari* seeds. She says to him, “*Minari* is just growing like weeds, so anyone can pick them up and eat them. The rich and the poor can eat *minari* and be healthy. We put it in kimchi and eat it in stew, and when we get sick, it can be medicine. [So] *minari* is wonderful.” Those who are familiar with Korean culture will understand *Soonja*’s words. Koreans have lived like weeds in their long history, surviving like a phoenix no matter what kinds of trials and adversities they face (Kang, et al., 2021a). They have suffered at the intersection of great wars between global powers China, Russia, and Japan (Palais, 1991). Korea is a small country on the outskirts of Asia. One would think it could be easily ruined by outside invaders, but it yet survives. It consistently resurrects from each challenge with renewed power and strength, overcoming aggressive forces of powerful neighboring countries (Chung, 1995). Likewise, the *minari* weed can be trampled by people, neglected, even burned; but it finds a deep will to live, a vitality for survival and can be “born again.” When *Soonja* sows her *minari* seeds, she educates her grandchildren about the rich vitality of this resilient plant. From the standpoint of Coaching Psychology, she is a great coach and mentor for this Korean American pioneering family. She helps them patiently despite the difficult circumstances of her own culture shock and the experience of being a strange old woman to her grandchildren. When David says to her, “My

grandmother does not look like a real grandmother,” she laughs and with a mild smile responds to David: “What’s like your grandmother?” She does not try to train David with her grandmother’s authority. She does not expose his mistakes. Instead, she accepts him with gentle love, and the feelings of hostility David feels toward her slowly dissolve.

Additionally, *Soonja* instills in David a strong sense of confidence. David suffers from heart disease and is often portrayed as depressed throughout the movie. Due to his mother’s overprotective tendencies, David feels he has no confidence of survival. But *Soonja* provides a different perspective. She says to him, “You are the strongest child I have ever seen.” She encourages David, instilling in him the same vitality one can see in the *minari* she planted by the swamp. She helps him cultivate a hope of recovery. In a scene that is especially noteworthy for those familiar with Korean culture, *Soonja* plays the game of *Hwatu* with her grandchildren. *Hwatu* is a game played during a special season of gathering for Koreans. Because the game includes gambling, there is a certain edge of competitiveness that it can foster. But the purpose is fellowship, so the victor typically gives their winnings away to a child. We can further explore *Soonja*’s role as a life coach for the family. Upon arriving at her children’s trailer home in Arkansas, the first thing she does is hug Monica tightly without saying many words. And she says to her worrisome grandson, “You do not die. This grandmother will protect you.” She then hugs her grandson, gently pats his back, and sleeps on the floor next to his bed. Through her gestures of encouragement and her wordless actions, *Soonja* provides a deep sense of comfort, stability, and encouragement to this struggling family. Sometimes, when someone is in a difficult situation, it is easy give advice. Coaching

Psychologists know that this method often brings negative side effects. On the other hand, patiently and carefully listening to those in need or being together without saying anything is a more effective counseling strategy. In this respect, Soonja is a very good counselor and psychological coach. The task of integrating into the United States – culturally, economically, socially – is incredibly challenging. It requires a deep will to survive and a constant effort to do what is needed. During this incredibly difficult journey, a little encouragement and help can become the driving force that empowers them to get up when they are down and to finish the task of building a life for their families. These families can especially benefit from the wise and patient presence of a mature family member such as Soonja, whose care is symbolized in her provision of *minari*. She plays the role of a medium who transmits the vitality of *minari* to all members of the family. For the immigrant families who watch the movie, her presence will create a warm memory of their loved ones – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles – who likewise helped them survive the challenges of immigration.

### **MINARI AS RECONCILIATION**

In the 1980s, South Korea was experiencing a relatively stable time economically. It was not necessary to immigrate to foreign countries to succeed. But David was driven, and he had dreams of success as a businessman. His blind ambition exacerbated the typical challenges of an immigrant family. His dreams reach fruition, while Monica's inner dissatisfaction continues to fester, and her anxiety is increased by her son David's heart disease. With the entrance of Soonja into the picture, the family begins to enter a new phase of life. Soonja brought South Korea with her in her travel bag. She packed red pepper

powder, anchovies, herbal medicine, *minari* seeds, and *Hwatu*. Koreans enjoy eating a bit of red pepper powder every day, as it is known to increase the body's immunity. Anchovies and herbal medicine are likewise important as they have recognized nutritional value. And the *Hwatu* game and *minari* seeds help keep the family together. Here, we can especially see Soonja's giving heart. She tries to overcome cultural and generational gaps through the playing of this game, and we have already seen the role of *minari* in the film. As we will eventually see, that role is not merely symbolic.

In the climax of the film, Soonja – in a depressed state – accidentally sets fire to the farmhouse where Jacob is storing the crops he has worked so hard to grow. Things in the family had gone from bad to worse, as Monica was considering divorcing Jacob. He had become engrossed in his work, showing little to no interest in his wife who is depressed and anxious, his son who is fighting heart problems, or his aging mother-in-law who had recently suffered a stroke. He seems to have no concern with anything other than farm work, so Monica plans to return to California. But all of these problems disappear with the fire. Energized by the emergency it creates, Monica and David work together to put out the fire and are ultimately reunited. Monica must have realized that leaving her husband, who has experienced a terrible tragedy in the fire, means the dissolution of the family. For Jacob, the pain of watching his life's work go up in flames would indeed be unbearable, and the pain of losing his family would merely serve to worsen the situation. He could not bear it, but he accepts that fact that Monica will leave him, showing just how challenging it is to achieve the American Dream while also keeping one's family together. It can appear heartless, but in this respect *Minari* provides a genuine portrait of a sublime family (Oh, 2021).

At the conclusion of the movie, Soonja – moved by the guilt of carelessly starting the fire – attempts to depart from the family. But as she is leaving, her grandchildren run to her and beg her to live with them, taking Soonja back into their house. Her granddaughter Anne attends to Soonja's needs, while her grandson David runs around the farm, symbolizing the healing Soonja has brought him. In the background are the ashes of the burned farmhouse, but the audience does not see failure. Jacob takes his son to the field of *minari* planted by Soonja and the sense of tragedy yields to hope, as Jacob and his son look on a field full of this adaptable, vital, and redemptive plant.

#### AN IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL LESSON

One could make the claim that the most enduring educational lesson of *Minari* is a new interpretation of the elderly. Soonja acts as a kind of savior in the film. She works to unite all members of the family in the midst of multiple crises. She risked traveling to the United States so that she could care for her daughter and two grandchildren. She wanted them to thrive in a challenging and hostile environment. In so doing, Soonja bucked a Korean cultural trend. It is not common in traditional Korean culture for elderly parents to provide full-time care for their grandchildren. But Soonja loves her daughter and understands her challenges more fully than anyone else. She embraces Monica's family and their ambitious father, giving meaning and hope to the family as a whole.

The role of Soonja represents a shift in the way the elderly are treated in Korean culture. We live currently in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Our lives are dominated by such phenomena as the Internet of Things (IOT), Cyber Physical Systems, big data, artificial intelligence, and

robots. Our social structures are governed by practicality, and human communication is governed by efficiency above all else. The systems of artificiality and machinery dominate the whole of life, often causing a break with traditional histories. But this moment likewise creates an opportunity, in which a culture of creativity can generate new interactions with the elderly. Globally, older individuals are often treated as useless, disposable, and many are experiencing loneliness at the end of their lives. Historically, Korea has celebrated a beautiful tradition of caring for the elderly and including them in a nuclear family of children and grandchildren. But as more and more young people have moved away from home, elderly parents and grandparents are left on their own. They live apart from their children, as those children pursue their own lives apart from their parents. *Minari* helps us see the wisdom of living with elderly parents. They can enrich our lives, even if we do not have the opportunity to live together. Sharing our lives with them, even for a few months during the year, can transcend generational gaps and make our lives more meaningful and fruitful.

#### RECEPTION: IS IT AMERICAN OR KOREAN?

The cultural complexity that *Minari* helps disclose can be demonstrated in the controversy surrounding its identity as either an "American" or "foreign" film. On 28 February, 2021, *Minari* received the award for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globes, but this identification is anything but clear. CNN Anchor Schoichet stated it this way:

In recent months, controversy erupted over the Golden Globes' rules, which made "Minari" eligible for best foreign-language film but not best picture because more than

50% of the movie is not in English. That's raised serious questions about racism in Hollywood and calls for the Hollywood Foreign Press Association to reexamine its language requirements. "It feels personal. ... It feels like the 'where are you from?' question that Asian Americans always get," says Nancy Wang Yuen, a sociologist and author of "Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism" told CNN. "The assumption is that if you have an Asian face, you must not be from here." The United States has no official language. And more than 20% of the US population age 5 and over speaks a language other than English at home, according to census data. "More than 350 languages are spoken in American homes today. So what does 'foreign' language mean?" said Charlene Jimenez, director of entertainment partnerships and advocacy for the nonprofit Define American. Jimenez argues it's long past time for the association to reevaluate the criteria it uses for its prestigious prizes. "It's a really important time for us as an American society to be investigating our own prejudice about films like this, about stories like this, about immigrant stories -- what does and does not resonate as 'American' to people." Minari's director says language in 'Minari' goes beyond any 'American' or 'foreign' label . . . "I just want to say that 'Minari' is about a family," Chung said, accepting the award with his daughter's arms around his neck. "It's a family trying to learn how to speak a language of its own. it goes deeper than any American language and any foreign language. It's a

language of the heart. And I'm trying to learn it myself and pass it on. And I hope we'll all learn how to speak this language of love to each other, especially this year." Chung recently told CNN he doesn't feel like competing in the best foreign-language film category dishonored his work, but he understands the frustration many have expressed. "I understand it in the context of being Asian American and having felt at times there are situations in which you feel as though you're being treated as a foreigner, and that includes when you're speaking Korean or a different language and, you know, you hear comments," he said. But Chung sees another side to it, too. "My grandmother, if she were still alive, she'd be very proud that I held through and did a film in Korean and didn't compromise and then start using that foreign language of English," he said (Shoichet, 2021).

The majority of the individuals who helped make *Minari* are Korean American. Director Isaac Chung, actor Steven Yeun, and the child actors who play Jacob's children are all Korean American. Only Yeo-jung Yoon and Ye-ri Han are Korean nationals. At the same time, many do not consider *Minari* a mainstream American film, since over fifty percent of the script is in English (Chow, 2021). The controversy is multi-faceted. One observation, made by Hyun-sik Kim, is that the hesitancy to consider it an American film reveals a lurking conservatism and rejection of what is different. Since the script is primarily in Korean, and since the actors portray Korean-speaking immigrants, many assume it is a foreign film. But the story *Minari* tells is quintessentially American: a family pursues the American

dream by leaving their home country and doing the impossibly hard task of creating a new life in a foreign land. They do so in a kind of third cultural moment, living among Americans but speaking the language of their country of origin and continuing many of its traditions. This pivot, between old and new, is further symbolized in the family's names. Jacob, Monica, Anne, and David all take American names, complete with Jewish-Christian undertones, while the grandmother Soonja keeps her Korean name. The complexities are likewise visible in Korea itself. Many Korean people do not view the film as Korean. It is not about their country. It is about an American family facing challenges unique to those in America. But simultaneously, many Koreans praise *Minari* because it captures experiences unique to their cultural and national identities. The popularity of the movie has encouraged such enthusiasm. Korean media celebrate it as an international representation of Korean identity, showing off the indomitable spirit of the Korean people and their will to survive. Some have highlighted the fact that the craze surrounding *Minari* in Korea demonstrates the nationalistic atmosphere at play today in South Korea (Oh, 2021).

#### POPULAR RESPONSES TO *MINARI*

*Minari* was initially released at the Sundance Film Festival on January 26, 2020, but it was not fully accessible until February and March 2021, when it was screened more broadly in both the United States and Korea. We will look at the evaluation it has received and trace its influence. An American has praised the film in this way:

Like the *minari*, Jacob and Monica Yi and their two children . . . are transplants . . . “*Minari*” is partly the story of [Jacob’s] struggle to get

the business off the ground. The film’s moods and rhythms--the gentle intensity of the scenes, the way the plot emerges from hard work, careful attention and the mysterious operations of the natural world--feel rooted in agrarian life . . . The chronicle of an immigrant family, often told through the eyes of a child, is a staple of American literature and popular culture. But every family — every family member, for that matter — has a distinct set of experiences and memories, and the fidelity to those is what makes “*Minari*,” in its circumspect, gentle way, moving and downright revelatory . . . There is certainly plenty of emotion here; Jacob, who has some trouble with his well, could irrigate his crops with the audience’s tears . . . . “*Minari*” is modest, specific and thrifty, like the lives it surveys. There’s nothing small about it, though, because it operates at the true scale of life (Scott, 2021).

Another American critic has responded:

On one hand, *Minari* is the story of a partnership in peril. Yeun plays Jacob's optimism and persistence with a sense of foolhardiness. This arid land holds the promise of an American dream; the cost is the isolation Monica feels. To abate that loneliness, Monica's mother Soonja (Yuh-Jung Yoon)—mostly referred to on screen as Grandma—arrives from Korea baring a bag full of spices, anchovies, and a remedy that could potential cure David of his heart defect . . . [Director] Chung has named his film after these bitter weeds, used in Korean cooking,

which grow rampantly in the right climate. . . Minari is laden with the iconography of rural America, but Chung's vision unlike any that came before it. It's a culture defined by Christianity . . . It's indicative of the daring leaps Chung takes, crafting an immigrant story that is deeply personal and moving, yet unafraid of complications (Zuckerman, 2021).

The reception by non-Americans is noteworthy and demonstrates the unique way *Minari* captures the struggle of many on the margins of American society and the incredible challenges of American immigrants trying to make a life for themselves in America. By capturing the tragedy of the struggle, *Minari* challenges traditional ways the American dream has been portrayed. For example, Stephanie Zacharek writes, "Minari is a gentle, lovely picture, one that acknowledges there really is no 'immigrant experience,' beyond the pure human experience of finding yourself adjusting to a new environment" (Zacharek, 2021). A Haitian commentator demonstrates a deep connection to the characters in the film by writing, "I cry and laugh when the child [David] says, 'My grandmother smells Korean.' I am not a Korean, I am an Haitian, but I do not know how much I miss the smell. That line has a huge meaning to me" (Sty, 2021). Similarly, from an African American perspective: "I'm proud to see stories of other people of color being shown in cinemas. I am glad to read the subtitles [of *Minari*]" (Illmoneyin, 2021). A Russian critic concludes that "Minari, a family drama that warms the heart with a humorous digression about the American pursuit, is likely to attract everyone's interest. It is a movie that should be taken in the Oscar unconditionally" (Bangguseok, 2021). Jeanmarie Tan from Singapore says, "Slow-burning instead of hard-hitting, poignant

rather than provocative, Minari stays with you in a completely different way (Tan, 2021). A critic from Spain notes the challenge portrayed by the film when she writes, "Maybe the American dream is just that," merely a dream (Crespo, 2021). And another Spanish critic writes of it, "A tender and powerful story that portrays the struggles of a hard-working immigrant family in search of the so-called American dream" (Sanchez, 2021).

Some reviews from a Korean perspective demonstrate the positive reception of the film: The good thing about "Minari" is that "it is not an immigrant's success story, but a true picture of a family living in reality. . . I want to say that living each day is a success. . . It is a great movie to feel the calming emotions" (Sydney, 2021). Another Korean has expressed: "This film, written and directed by the second-generation American immigrant director Isaac Chung based on his autobiographical experience, is a warm and plain story of a Korean family who moved to southern Arkansas following after the American dream of the 1980s" (Choi, 2021).

## INTERPRETING *MINARI* THROUGH COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

*Minari* ends with the healing of the whole family through a fire, concluding the movie with a note of hope in the midst of tragedy. In reality, the future happiness of Jacob and Monica is not guaranteed. If the two continue to farm in rural Arkansas, separated from mainstream society, their feelings of alienation will continue, and the education of their children will be stymied. Humans are social animals, and a family cannot exist alone. Jacob's family must work to establish a deep and strong connection with their surrounding community and receive help when they are in trouble (Adams, 2016). They can likewise enhance such connections through the

church. Family members are described as Christians, and they attempt to attend a local church. Creating a strong connection with the church community would provide a healthy solution to their isolation. When Jesus, the founder of Christianity, met a sick person who was mentally and physically ill, he healed first then sent the man to his hometown, encouraging the man to meet the leaders of his community to confirm that he was healed (Matt. 8:4, Mk. 1:44, Lk. 5:14). The leaders of the social community confirmed his healing, enabling the man to live without fear of discrimination by other members of society. Likewise, Jacob and his family could receive counseling from the pastor of the local church when a difficult problem arises and various types of help from members of the congregation. When Monica's relationship with her husband was deteriorated to the point of contemplating divorce, the local church did not help. If Monica felt that she belonged to the church, perhaps she would have reached out for assistance from the pastor or fellow church members. Happiness may not be fully achieved in the home. But when that happiness is enhanced through connections in the community, a sense of belonging that transcends the home will create renewed zest for life (Kim, et al., 2021).

Religion plays a large role in South Korea. Women who have grown up in South Korean culture will often turn to religion to address their struggles. A woman with a lump in her chest may call a shaman to perform *Kut* (shamanistic rituals) and thus solve her problems (Lee, 1995), while many Christians in South Korea consult their pastors for advice on their problems. If it was difficult to speak to her pastor, Monica could attend her church's early morning prayer hours and address her own problems by calling to God for help or by silent prayer (Go, 2021). Unfortunately, these religious channels are not sufficiently open in *Minari*.

If the religious community cannot solve her problems, another alternative would be to find surrounding Korean-American communities which would provide an opportunity to solve her problems. It is regretful that the movie *Minari* does not treat this issue in depth before its conclusion (Seok, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

In order to evaluate *Minari* from the standpoint of Coaching Psychology, it is necessary to first analyze it in connection with our historical situation. Movies, novels, and other works of art are products of a particular historical period and represent particular moments in those periods. The peaceful scenery of nature, calm music, and warm sunlight portrayed in *Minari* remind us that there is ample space for our troubled human society to breathe and live. In this space, Jacob's family encounters several unstable events, but by addressing their problems one by one, they provide a positive message. We can live like them. In this respect, *Minari* demonstrates the vitality of the human spirit in the midst of unprecedented pain in the global health crisis caused by COVID-19. Like the plant *minari*, the movie *Minari* is a demonstration of adaptability, vitality, and redemption even in multiple crises. In particular, Soonja demonstrates dignity even among the "weak" and shows an indomitable will to survive. Coaching Psychology focuses on overcoming rather than surrendering to human weakness, and the *Minari* captures a similar path. *Minari* contains sentiments that are simultaneously Korean and American. Nonetheless, these sentiments should not be interpreted as competing nationalistic impulses. The core story of *Minari* is a family, which is a building block of human society, regardless of nationality. *Minari* celebrates humanity and provides a sense of

encouragement and hope. It is a movie that transcends nationality and provides a classic portrayal of the human spirit that can speak to anyone with an open heart.

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