SPECULATIVE MEMORY IN BORA CHUNG'S *CURSED BUNNY*: FOLKLORE, SCIENCE FICTION AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF CULTURAL MEMORY

KÝ ỨC GIẢ TƯỞNG TRONG TẬP TRUYỆN *CON THỎ NGUYỀN RỦA* CỦA BORA CHUNG: FOLKLORE, KHOA HỌC VIỄN TƯỞNG VÀ SỰ TÁI ĐỊNH HÌNH KÝ ỨC VĂN HOÁ

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(Received: July 29, 2026; Revised: October 16 18, 2026; Accepted: October 20, 2026)

DOI: 10.31130/ud-jst.2026.24(10).521E

Abstract - This article examines how Bora Chung's *Cursed Bunny* reconfigures cultural memory through the interaction of folklore and science fiction. Drawing on cultural memory studies and speculative fiction theory, it argues that these modes offer complementary ways of making memory. Curses, ghosts, and haunted objects bring suppressed histories into the present, while robots, posthuman bodies, and imagined worlds expose unresolved social contradictions. Memory thus moves across objects, bodies, spaces, and nonhuman subjects instead of remaining a stable archive. Adapting the concept of speculative memory, the article identifies three interrelated operations: haunting return, material displacement, and speculative projection. Together, these operations reveal how the collection critically reworks relations among past, present, and future, using speculative forms to interrogate history, technology, embodiment, and social transformation.

Key words - Bora Chung; *Cursed Bunny*; cultural memory; speculative memory; East Asian literature.

Tóm tắt - Bài viết phân tích cách tập truyện *Con thỏ nguyền rủa* của Bora Chung tái định hình ký ức văn hóa qua tương tác giữa folklore và văn học khoa học viễn tưởng. Dựa trên lý thuyết ký ức văn hóa và văn học giả tưởng, nghiên cứu xem đây là hai phương thức kiến tạo ký ức bổ trợ nhau. Lời nguyền, bóng ma và các đồ vật bị ám đưa quá khứ bị đè nén trở lại hiện tại; robot, thân thể hậu nhân bản và thế giới giả tưởng phơi bày những mâu thuẫn xã hội chưa được giải quyết. Ký ức theo đó chuyển dịch qua đồ vật, thân thể, không gian và những chủ thể phi nhân. Vận dụng khái niệm ký ức "giả tưởng" (*speculative memory*), bài viết xác định ba cơ chế: sự trở lại ám ảnh, sự chuyển dịch vào vật chất và sự phóng chiếu giả tưởng. Qua đó, tập truyện tái định hình quan hệ giữa quá khứ, hiện tại và tương lai, đồng thời chất vấn lịch sử, công nghệ, sự hiện thân và biến đổi xã hội.

Từ khóa – Bora Chung; *Con thỏ nguyền rủa*; ký ức văn hoá; ký ức giả tưởng; văn học Đông Á.

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, memory studies have gradually expanded beyond questions of historical representation and personal recollection to investigate the cultural mechanisms through which literature produces, transforms, and reimagines the past. Rather than treating memory as a stable repository of historical facts, contemporary scholarship increasingly understands it as a dynamic process of mediation in which the past is continually reconstructed according to the needs of the present. Building on Halbwachs's account of the social frameworks of remembering [1], Jan Assmann [2] conceptualizes cultural memory as a symbolic system through which communities preserve and reinterpret their historical experience, while Astrid Erll [3] further understands literature not merely as a reflection of memory but as one of its most productive media. From this perspective, the central question is no longer simply what literature remembers, but how literature constructs new ways of remembering through narrative imagination.

This development is particularly visible in contemporary Korean literature, where speculative forms - including folklore, horror, fantasy, dystopia, and science fiction - have become important means of addressing historical violence, social inequality, and technological transformation. These genres no longer function primarily as escapist imagination. Instead, they create alternative narrative spaces through which violence, inequality, technological transformation, and inherited trauma become newly perceptible. Previous studies have shown that speculative narratives increasingly serve as critical reflections on modernity rather than predictions of the future [4]. Studies of Korean dystopian literature and film have shown that imagined futures can function as critical responses to present social conditions. Related research on science fiction likewise suggests that speculative worlds do more than display technological novelty: they create critical distance from which social reality can be reconsidered. In Suvin's influential formulation [5], this capacity derives from cognitive estrangement, through which readers encounter recognizable structures of reality in transformed narrative worlds.

Among the most remarkable examples of this tendency is Bora Chung's *Cursed Bunny* [6]. First published in Korean in 2017, the collection gained international recognition when Anton Hur's English translation [7] was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2022. The collection consists of ten stories that move fluidly across folklore, horror, fantasy, grotesque fiction, and science fiction. Haunted objects, ghosts, monsters, robots, uncanny pregnancies, mythical machines, and hybrid bodies appear throughout the

collection, yet these supernatural and speculative elements are never employed merely for sensational or aesthetic effect. Instead, they function as narrative devices through which experiences of war, patriarchal violence, capitalist exploitation, reproductive politics, technological anxiety, and intergenerational trauma become materially visible. Rather than separating folklore from science fiction, Bora Chung repeatedly allows the two modes to intersect, producing a distinctive literary imagination in which historical memory and speculative futures constantly reshape one another.

Existing scholarship has primarily examined *Cursed Bunny* through the lenses of horror aesthetics, body horror, feminist politics, capitalism, and speculative fiction. Kızılay [8] examines "The Head" (in *Cursed Bunny*) through Kristeva's theory of abjection, showing how the grotesque body destabilizes the boundaries between self and other. Mishra [9] similarly approaches the story through the intersection of the abject and the uncanny. Broader discussions have emphasized the collection's critiques of patriarchy and capitalism, its grotesque representation of embodiment, and its generic hybridity. However, these studies have not systematically examined how folklore and science fiction operate together as modes of cultural-memory mediation.

To address this gap, the article adapts and extends the concept of speculative memory rather than introducing it as an entirely new term. Crownshaw [10] employs speculative memory to describe how future scenarios of ecological crisis stage cultural memories of the conditions developing in the present. Building on this insight while shifting attention from planetary futurity to folklore, haunted materiality, and nonhuman agency, the present study defines speculative memory as a mode of cultural-memory mediation through which historical and social experience is relocated into speculative worlds, uncanny objects, transformed bodies, and alternative temporalities. This framework supplements rather than replaces established concepts of collective and cultural memory. Its particular contribution lies in identifying three interrelated operations - haunting return, material displacement, and speculative projection - through which *Cursed Bunny* reconfigures relations among past, present, and future.

Methodologically, the article combines close textual analysis with approaches from memory studies and genre studies. Rather than assuming that the ten stories constitute a unified narrative system, it reads them comparatively as a corpus organized around recurring motifs, material forms, and temporal structures. Particular attention is given to representative stories, while others are discussed comparatively to establish broader patterns across the collection. The analysis is structured around three operations of speculative memory: haunting return, through which folklore brings suppressed or unresolved histories into the present; material displacement, through which memory migrates into objects, bodies, spaces, and nonhuman subjects; and speculative projection, through which contemporary contradictions are extended into alternative futures. Within this framework, horror functions primarily as an affective register that intensifies the convergence of folklore and science fiction. Their convergence demonstrates how cultural memory can be reconfigured within contemporary Korean speculative literature across the intertwined horizons of past, present, and future.

2. From Cultural Memory to Speculative Memory: Reading *Cursed Bunny*

2.1. Folklore as a Medium of Cultural Memory

In *Cursed Bunny*, folklore does not function as a cultural heritage to be nostalgically preserved, nor as a repository of traditional motifs employed merely to create an atmosphere of the uncanny. Rather, curses, ghosts, retribution, uncanny beings, and enchanted objects operate as symbolic media through which memories of unresolved historical, social, and ethical violence are preserved and transmitted. In this sense, folklore in Chung Bora's fiction does not seek to reconstruct an authentic past; instead, it allows the past to persist within the present in altered forms. Experiences excluded from official history do not disappear. They simply assume new material forms through which they continue to interrogate contemporary life.

This reading can be situated within Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory. Assmann [2] argues that cultural memory is sustained through symbolic media - including myths, rituals, texts, images, and other cultural practices - that enable communities to preserve and continually reinterpret the past from the standpoint of the present. Extending this perspective, Astrid Erll [3] emphasizes that literature is not merely a reflection of memory but one of its most productive media, since narrative forms actively shape how communities imagine and negotiate their historical experience. From this perspective, folklore in *Cursed Bunny* should not be understood as the survival of traditional storytelling but as a narrative mechanism through which cultural memory continues to evolve within contemporary Korean society.

What distinguishes Chung Bora's fiction is her simultaneous appropriation and subversion of conventional folktale logic. In many Korean folktales and legends, curses, ghosts, and supernatural retribution ultimately restore moral order by punishing wrongdoing. In *Cursed Bunny*, however, the curse does not bring closure; it prolongs history. Objects do not lose their agency once they have fulfilled their practical function, while uncanny beings are not embodiments of evil but repositories of unresolved violence. Avery Gordon's concept of *haunting* is particularly illuminating here. Gordon [11] argues that haunting should not be understood merely as a supernatural phenomenon but as the return of unresolved social violence that demands recognition. Read in this light, folklore in Chung Bora's stories produces not horror for its own sake but the persistent return of suppressed histories that continue to unsettle the present.

This narrative strategy first takes shape in "Cursed Bunny," which appears as the opening story in the

Vietnamese translation [6]. The story is framed as an act of oral transmission: the narrator listens as Grandfather *"tells me the same story he's already told me time and time again,"* in a family whose *"unwritten rules have been passed down for generations"* [7, p. 33]. The grandfather's account concerns a close friend whose family-owned distillery was destroyed by a powerful corporate rival. Having spread the lie that the distillery mixed *"industrial-use alcohol"* into its products [7, p. 36], the corporation drove the business into bankruptcy and acquired it for next to nothing. The resulting tragedy claimed the lives of the friend and his wife. Defying his family's prohibition against creating cursed objects for personal revenge, the grandfather fashioned a rabbit-shaped lamp and sent it to the rival company. The story's opening assertion - *"Every object has a story"* [7, p. 33] - thus establishes a principle that resonates throughout the collection: objects can carry experiences that might otherwise disappear from public memory. The spectral rabbits it releases first devour the corporation's own archive - its *"performance reviews, account books, financial statements, and daily memorandums"* [7, p. 42] - before turning against the executive's family, carrying the consequences of the original wrongdoing into the next generation. The curse thus erases the official record while preserving the memory of the injustice that this record concealed. To the grandfather's question, *"How can such things be allowed?"*, the narrator replies in the present tense: *"such things are indeed allowed, and such people who allow it are everywhere"* [7, pp. 36-37]. In this sense, the curse prevents that injustice from being safely confined to the past. Lodged within the lamp, the unresolved history returns as an active material force that continues to disrupt the present.

A different mnemonic mechanism operates in "Snare." Unlike the rabbit-shaped lamp, which is deliberately cursed in order to preserve and avenge a particular injustice, nothing in this story is consciously fashioned as a repository of the past. Memory instead emerges through the bodily repetition of violence. The story begins in the manner of a dark folktale: a man discovers an injured fox caught in a snare and realizes that the liquid flowing from its wound turns into gold. Rather than releasing the animal, he hides it in a shed, repeatedly reopening its wound and gradually building his fortune from its suffering. Even after the fox dies and its pelt is made into a fur scarf for his wife, the pattern of exploitation does not come to an end. It returns in a distorted domestic form after the birth of the couple's twins, a boy and a girl. When the father discovers that his son bleeds gold after drinking his sister's blood, he imprisons both children within a horrifying economy of bodily consumption: the daughter is reduced to nourishment for her brother, while the son becomes a source of wealth for the father. The movement from the forest into the household therefore marks more than a change of setting; it reveals how violence reproduces itself across species, bodies, and generations. What survives is not the fox's memory in any psychological sense but the material and relational logic of its exploitation. This transmission is also marked in the story's discourse: the fox's only human words, *"Please let me go"* [7, p. 57], return in the daughter's scream, *"Let me go!"* [7, p. 64], in the father's dying plea [7, p. 66], and in the voice of the young man devoured by the golden boy [7, p. 67], while the narrator presents the whole tale as *"what has been passed down"* [7, p. 66]. Whereas "Cursed Bunny" transfers an unresolved injustice into an intentionally created object, "Snare" shows how violence can generate its own afterlife without any conscious act of remembrance. Each exploited body becomes the condition for exploiting another, turning kinship itself into a mechanism of extraction. What is transmitted across generations, therefore, is not simply a bloodline but an entire economy of greed, gendered sacrifice, and domination.

Other stories expand this network of mnemonic transmission. In "Reunion", the memory of war survives through both the recurring ghost of a dead soldier and the survival rituals practiced by a grandfather who endured an internment camp, suggesting that trauma may be transmitted through silence, habit, and affect rather than direct testimony. "Home Sweet Home" transforms a newly purchased apartment into a repository of unpaid labor, debt, domestic betrayal, and forgotten lives. In "Scars", the survivor's body itself becomes the final archive of violence after collective memory has been distorted and commodified. Although these stories differ in plot and setting, they all share the same underlying principle: memory continually searches for new material forms through which it can persist after human recollection and official history have failed.

Viewed as a whole, *Cursed Bunny* transforms folklore from a reservoir of traditional motifs into a dynamic mechanism of cultural memory, preserving not a unified national past but experiences that societies often suppress or marginalize: war, patriarchal violence, class inequality, capitalist exploitation, and intergenerational trauma. History is never truly over; it merely changes its material form, reappearing through objects, bodies, spaces, and narratives that refuse to disappear.

Taken together, these stories reveal only one dimension of the mnemonic imagination developed in *Cursed Bunny*. To avoid treating memory as an all-purpose metaphor, this study regards a narrative element as mnemonic only when the text marks its transmission, return, material trace, or material afterlife across time. Within this framework, folkloric forms enable suppressed or unresolved pasts to re-enter the present through curses, haunted objects, recurring bodies, and other symbolic carriers. The collection's science-fictional narratives produce a different temporal movement: rather than simply bringing the past back, they project unresolved histories and structures of violence into imagined futures, altered bodies, and nonhuman forms of existence. This shift from the recursive temporality of folklore to the speculative temporality of science fiction provides the basis for the framework of *speculative memory* adopted and developed in this article. The discussion that follows examines how these two temporal movements intersect in Chung's fiction.

2.2. Science Fiction as a Mode of Reimagining Cultural Memory

If folklore in "Cursed Bunny" brings the past back through curses, ghosts, and enchanted objects, science fiction opens up another trajectory of memory by projecting the present into futures that have not yet existed. This temporal shift does not imply a break with history or a simple anticipation of technological futures. Rather, as Darko Suvin [5] argues, the defining feature of science fiction lies in *cognitive estrangement*: the construction of an alternative world that enables readers to perceive their own reality from a new critical perspective. Such estrangement is generated through the *novum*, a transformative element that disrupts the logic of the familiar world - not because it is technologically innovative in itself, but because it exposes social structures that have become naturalized. Expanding this understanding, Marek Oziewicz [12] regards speculative fiction as a broader literary mode encompassing science fiction, fantasy, and horror, all of which imagine alternative realities in order to interrogate the present rather than escape from it. Likewise, Nguyen Phuong Khanh [13] argues that the defining characteristic of science fiction lies not in predicting the future but in constructing cognitive hypotheses through which ethical, social, and existential questions of the present become newly visible. From this perspective, science fiction in *Cursed Bunny* does not replace cultural memory; it extends its modes of existence.

This function is most clearly illustrated in "Goodbye, My Love". The short story revolves around companion robots capable of learning, remembering, and synchronizing their memories with one another. Initially, they appear as technological commodities evaluated through technical criteria such as *"normal," "compatible,"* and *"passing grade"* [7, pp. 68-69]. Yet the central issue is not artificial intelligence itself but the nature of memory. As Model 1's memories are successively transferred to Seth and Derek, lived experience is detached from an individual body and transformed into transferable data. The story's vocabulary makes this transformation legible. In the narrator's discourse, memory is named in the idiom of engineering: all the information Derek holds about her is *"duplicated into Seth,"* the two androids form *"two halves of a connected, digital brain,"* and Model 1's decline is a matter of *"storage space and processing power"* [7, p. 70]. Even intimacy is recoded as data: a love song is *"saved as your favorite song"* [7, p. 74], a hasty pasta dish is *"saved as my favorite meal in Model 1's mind"* [7, p. 75]. Yet the song is the one to which Model 1 once danced with the narrator [7, p. 76], so that "synchronization" transmits not only information but an embodied scene of intimacy. The story therefore raises a fundamental question: if memory can be copied into another body, what remains to constitute the uniqueness of the subject?

Rather than answering this philosophical question directly, Chung Bora stages the gradual collapse of the distinction between human and machine. The narrator believes that Model 1 can continue to exist so long as her memories survive in another body: once a replacement is ordered, *"all of Model 1's memories will then be stored in the new Model 1"* [7, p. 77]. For the robots themselves, however, memory is not neutral information but the accumulated history of being manufactured, owned, replaced, and discarded. In the final scene, they appropriate the narrator's technical vocabulary and turn it into testimony. Seth speaks in Model 1's first person - *"I had a lot of time to think while I was in the closet"* [7, p. 77] - while Derek shifts to a collective "we": *"we're treated like trash as soon as there is a new model"* [7, p. 78]. "Memory" here no longer designates stored data but a shared experience of disposability. The title phrase completes this pragmatic reversal: *"Goodbye, my love,"* which the narrator whispers over Model 1's inert body [7, p. 75], is returned by Model 1 to the wounded narrator [7, pp. 78-79], turning a formula of mourning into a declaration of separation. The narrator's realization that they *"are not machines that resemble humans at all"* but *"something completely alien from us"* [7, p. 79] marks the reversal of the subject-object relationship. The robots do not rebel because they have surpassed human intelligence; they rebel because memory enables them to recognize their shared history of commodification. The imagined technological future thus becomes an extension of the present logic of consumer capitalism.

A similar narrative mechanism appears in "The Embodiment", though it is developed through biological speculation rather than artificial intelligence. The title itself relocates the story into the body: the Korean 몸하다 is glossed by the translator as *"'to body.' To menstruate"* [7, p. 16]. The story begins with an apparently scientific anomaly: an unmarried woman becomes pregnant after taking contraceptive pills despite never having had sexual intercourse. Yet the true anomaly lies not in biology itself but in the institutional responses surrounding it. When the doctor immediately asks, *"Does the child have someone who can be their father?"* [7, p. 18], scientific discourse is quickly overtaken by patriarchal discourse. The legitimacy of life is determined not by biological possibility but by the presence of a socially recognized father. This conflict is staged at the level of discourse. The institutional voices speak a regulatory language of diagnosis, blame, and deadline: the doctor turns a pharmaceutical side effect into personal guilt - *"it's your own fault"* - and explains the need for a father by analogy with *"free-range fertilized eggs and non-fertilized eggs"* [7, p. 18], so that medical reasoning reproduces the logic of patrilineal fertilization. The same script is repeated by the family's *"Find the Child a Father"* project [7, p. 19], by the newspaper headline *"Looking for a Man to Be My Child's Father"* [7, p. 23], and by a chaebol patriarch, *"the last in eight generations of only sons,"* for whom *"the field is already tilled and all you need is the seed"* [7, p. 25]. Against this chorus, the protagonist's body speaks only through swelling, leakage, and dissolution: it is *"slowly cracking open with each kick"* [7, p. 30], and at birth *"a lump slipped out between her legs, or rather, flowed out"* [7, p. 31]. The two discourses never meet: institutions name the body in order to classify it, whereas the body answers only through matter.

The biological novum does not imagine a radically different future; instead, it exposes how deeply cultural memory continues to shape modern institutions. Patriarchal lineage, reproductive control, and gendered expectations no longer appear merely as remnants of tradition but remain embedded within medicine, family, and media. The story culminates in the birth of *"a black and red, slightly iron-smelling, enormous blood clot"* [7, p. 31], a grotesque embodiment that refuses every conventional category of sex, lineage, and legitimate birth. The obstetrician still pronounces the institutional verdict - *"You were the one who left it to grow without one. This is what you end up with!"* [7, p. 31] - yet the clot, which soon *"disintegrated into a pool of liquid blood"* [7, p. 32], escapes the very categories in which that verdict is framed. What collapses is not biological law but the illusion that modernity has freed society from inherited structures of patriarchal power.

Taken together, these two stories show how the speculative modes of *Cursed Bunny* render persistent social structures perceptible by relocating them into technologically and biologically altered forms. Seo-Young Chu [14] argues that science fiction is a representational mode particularly suited to rendering cognitively estranging referents that conventional realism struggles to describe. Read from this perspective, Chung's use of technology and biological impossibility does not transmit postmemory in the strict sense; rather, it gives concrete narrative form to social relations that might otherwise remain abstract or normalized. The mnemonic significance of these stories thus lies not in preserving a particular traumatic event but in exposing the social scripts and institutional structures that continue to shape the present.

Science fiction in *Cursed Bunny*, therefore, should not be understood as the opposite of folklore but as its temporal counterpart: if folklore allows the past to return through curses, ghosts, and retribution, science fiction projects present conflicts into speculative futures, exposing the long-term consequences of existing systems of power. This convergence provides the conceptual foundation for what this article terms *speculative memory*, examined in the following section.

2.3. Questioning the Present: From Cultural Memory to Speculative Memory

Taken as a whole, *Cursed Bunny* demonstrates that folklore and science fiction participate in a shared narrative mechanism that reconfigures the relationship between past, present, and future. Their seemingly opposite temporal movements converge upon the same point of reference: the present. The past returns not to restore a lost order, and the future is imagined not to predict what will come; both create a critical distance through which long-normalized structures of power are rendered strange and therefore open to interrogation.

From the perspective of memory studies, *Cursed Bunny* operates within the framework of cultural memory [2], [3] while testing the range of narrative forms through which memory can be mediated. Bora Chung's fiction assigns mnemonic functions to objects, bodies, technologies, and nonhuman subjects that are not conventionally regarded as media of memory: cursed objects, robots, blood clots, monstrous bodies, ghosts, and mythical machines. Through this displacement, memory moves beyond the preservation of the past to become a mode of critically reflecting upon the present.

Drawing on and extending Richard Crownshaw's formulation [10], this article adopts *speculative memory* as a heuristic framework for reading *Cursed Bunny*. The term does not designate a category opposed to cultural memory; rather, it describes a particular mode of cultural-memory mediation in which unresolved pasts and inherited social structures are relocated into impossible bodies, nonhuman subjects, alternative worlds, and disrupted temporalities. Through such displacement, speculative fiction renders historical and cultural experiences perceptible in forms that conventional realism might represent differently or less visibly. Speculative memory therefore emerges at the intersection of memory studies and speculative fiction: memory becomes an object of imaginative transformation, while speculation provides the narrative means through which its continuing effects upon the present can be critically examined.

Across the collection, speculative memory operates through three related narrative movements. First, suppressed or unresolved experiences return through haunting, as in "Cursed Bunny," "Home Sweet Home," and "Reunion." Second, violence leaves material traces upon objects and bodies, most clearly in "Snare" and "Scars," although these traces should not be equated automatically with conscious recollection. Finally, stories such as "Goodbye, My Love" and "The Embodiment" relocate inherited social structures into technological or biologically impossible forms. These modes - haunting return, material displacement, and speculative projection - demonstrate that memory in Chung's fiction is not tied to a single medium but is continually reconfigured as it moves across bodies, objects, spaces, and nonhuman subjects.

This continuous displacement also explains the convergence of folklore and science fiction throughout the collection. Folklore returns memory through familiar cultural forms such as curses, retribution, and spirits, whereas science fiction relocates memory into robots, digital data, biotechnology, and posthuman subjects. Rather than opposing one another, these two narrative modes complement each other by expanding the possible forms through which memory may exist. Horror, accordingly, is not a third genre alongside them but the affective effect produced when familiar structures of everyday life become estranged: the cursed lamp, the robots, and the blood clot are terrifying because they expose forms of violence long hidden beneath ordinary social life.

Although *Cursed Bunny* is situated within contemporary Korean literature, its mnemonic imagination cannot be reduced to a self-contained national archive. Critiques of corporate and patriarchal power rooted in Korean social experience coexist with transnational folkloric materials and, in "Reunion," memories of war and

survival located in Poland. This mobility accords with Hwang's [15] observation that contemporary Korean literature increasingly moves beyond narratives organized exclusively around national identity. Chung's fiction participates in this postnational tendency by allowing memories, motifs, and structures of violence to travel across cultural and generic boundaries.

In Chung's fiction, memory no longer serves merely to preserve what has been lost; it also reconstructs the present through imagined possibilities. The past ceases to function as history's endpoint, while the future is no longer conceived as an entirely new beginning. Instead, the present becomes the ultimate object of critical reflection. By repeatedly relocating memory into objects, bodies, spaces, technologies, and posthuman subjects, Chung Bora constructs a narrative form in which imagination does not distance readers from history but enables them to perceive history more clearly.

3. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Cursed Bunny* reconfigures cultural memory through the dynamic interaction of folkloric and speculative imagination, transforming memory from a repository of the past into a critical practice of interrogating the present and imagining alternative futures. Rather than preserving history as a stable archive, Chung Bora presents memory as a continually evolving process in which the legacies of war, industrialization, capitalism, patriarchy, and technological modernity constantly seek new narrative forms through which to persist within contemporary society.

Building upon cultural memory studies and speculative fiction theory, this article advances the notion of *speculative memory* as a heuristic concept for examining how speculative narratives reconstruct collective experience through imagined worlds, posthuman subjects, and alternative temporalities. Unlike cultural memory, which primarily concerns the preservation and transmission of the past, speculative memory foregrounds the imaginative reconfiguration of historical experience in order to expose the contradictions of the present. Its significance therefore lies not in predicting the future but in creating the aesthetic and cognitive distance necessary to render normalized structures of power visible and open to critical reinterpretation.

More broadly, this reading contributes to current discussions of contemporary Korean literature within East Asian literary studies. As scholarship increasingly moves beyond national histories toward questions of capitalism, technological transformation, ecological crisis, gender, and more-than-human subjectivities, *Cursed Bunny* demonstrates how speculative fiction has become a productive site for reimagining cultural memory across the region. Rather than simply reflecting Korean social realities, its curses, haunted objects, robots, monstrous bodies, and speculative worlds translate historically specific experiences into questions of broader regional and global significance.

Methodologically, the concept of speculative memory also offers a productive framework for future comparative studies of East Asian speculative literature. By foregrounding the interaction between folklore, horror, fantasy, and science fiction as complementary modes of remembering, it opens new possibilities for examining how literature negotiates history, technology, embodiment, and social transformation through imaginative forms of memory. Seen from this perspective, *Cursed Bunny* not only expands the aesthetic boundaries of contemporary Korean literature but also demonstrates the critical potential of speculative fiction as an increasingly important medium through which East Asian literature reimagines cultural memory in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgment: This research was funded by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under Grant No. 602.04-2025.13.

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