

Metal Brain 109: Searching for a manhwa, starting
from France to Korea

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Course: Independent Writing Study

Date: 17 May 2019

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I. Preface

In early 2018, I lived in Paris, France for 4 months working at an internship. My lodgings at the time had no internet access, so my entertainment was home media (downloaded content) and books. Specifically, I would read comic books. While I had brought some manga myself (Masamune Shirow's *Appleseed*), I needed a different way to find things to read. Luckily, France still has many bookstores, and around me there were several used bookstores: two, specifically, were manga stores.

Most of these stores had a sell-back policy, so I would buy a book, and then, once I finished, would be able to turn it back in for some money back. So, my days were spent buying and selling comics I would read during my off-time. While most of them never made it back to the US with me, one trilogy of books did, Kim Jun Bum's *Metal Brain 109*. I picked up the first volume of these books by happenstance due to their aesthetic resemblance to some of my manga all-time favorites, such as *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. What I read was something very strange, but intriguing and engaging. I had to go back the next day and buy the other books immediately to finish the trilogy.

When I finished, I was pleasantly surprised with how engaging the story was presented, and how competent, and even beautiful, the art was as well. Naturally, I looked in the book for other work by the artist, or team¹ in the back of the book, only to discover that this appeared to be the only trilogy ever published by Kim Jun Bum. While I found this disappointing, it was not unheard of for manga authors, or manhwa in this case², to only have one series or a single one-

¹ See: **V. Who is Kim Jun Bum?**

² Term defined in: **II. The Context.**

off volume to be published internationally³. However, I started to notice a serious lack of information as soon as I tried to look up the author and title on the internet.

A standard google search brought a few French reviews of the books. They were the standard fare: quality reviews, art reviews, etc., but they never mentioned any other work by the artist or author, nor any biographical information on the supposed “Kim Jun Bum.” Websites like MyAnimeList, a massive database for Asian produced anime and comics, and GoodReads, one of the largest book databases online, provided no information on the books or author. A little deeper digging revealed that the trilogy I held was published once by Tokebi⁴ in 2004 and never published again before the company dissolved. More importantly, it seemed to have never published in any other country *except* France (and, presumably, Korea).

My final desperation was looking through sites like Ebay and Amazon, hoping to find any other copies of the books and seeing if, in the listing, there was any information at all about the author or any other books. I hit my last roadblock here. All the books I had found were the French editions, and not a single listing explained anything about whoever could have created these accidental enigmas that I bought in a used manga store.

I was then confronted with my final questions: what is *Metal Brain 109*? Who is, or who are, Kim Jun Bum? Where did this manhwa come from? And finally, why can’t I get it out of my head?

³ For example: Hong Seock-seo, author and artist of *Dragon Hunter* (another Tokebi-published manhwa) only had this specific work of his published in French. *Dragoon Hunter* was also one of the manhwa titles that made it to North America with TokyoPop. If he has other work, it was not published outside of Korea.

⁴ Discussed in, **III. Tokebi.**

II. The Context

Manga and anime are, entertainment-wise, some of the most well-known exports coming out of Japan. While they are exclusively Japanese, anime and manga are simply Japanese produced animation and comics respectively. Previously, all animation produced in Asia fell under these terms, but now more separation is being made as more accessibility is being offered to countries like China and South Korea. For China, donghua and manhua are used respectively, and in Korea, they are aeni and manhwa.

Mamoru Oishii's film, *Ghost in the Shell* was (and still is) considered a landmark film that explored humanism and the concept of technology. In this film, the audience follows Major Kusanagi as she navigates the world in a body that can be interchanged with robotic parts and how that affects her perception of human life. While this film created a melancholy atmosphere of introspection, its manga has an entirely different way of conveying these themes. *Ghost in the Shell* adapts the manga of the same name into a more weighted and philosophical script, and by consequence loses some of the charm of the work by Masamune Shirow. A hallmark of Shirow's work is his incorporation of heavy philosophical exploration (a constant theme is war and technology) with action and lighter moments. The loss of these, while not inherently destroying all residue of his work, does end up effectively separating the two *Ghost in the Shells* as Oishii's and Shirow's.

Why would one need to make these distinctions between two different media properties that are essentially the same story? It needs to be stated because Oishii's *Ghost in the Shell* impacted the anime industry and Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* impacted the manga industry. Oishii not only revolutionized the view of anime in the west, but also created a new standard for all anime films

pertaining to similar themes afterward, and the same could be said for Shirow towards the manga industry as well. Shirow's iconic way of melding humor with deep philosophical themes created a boom in such stories appearing on the shelves of manga and comic stores. Stories like Headgears's *Patlabor* and a later works like Tsutomu Nihei's *Blame!* were shot to the forefront because they explored themes such as the ones presented in Shirow's work.

All these titles were published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and during that time there was a massive amount of manga of the genre being produced and licensed to all parts of the world. While America had a large demand for manga at the time, France (and Belgium) had an easier time selling original manga thanks to how steeped comics are in Franco-Belgian culture⁵. In this big licensing boom, France had begun to license manhwa as well in the late 1990s to mid to late 2000s under several different publications.

As mentioned before, manhwa are Korean comics exclusively. There are two primary forms of publishing seen with manhwa, the "classic" manga style (i.e. published in volumes like manga) or vertically, which is seen almost exclusively online (with notable exceptions being physically published manhwa that kept the vertical formatting on pages)⁶. *Metal Brain 109* would squarely fall into the former of these two, as before being published in France, it was not digitized or published digitally.

Manhwa has been published as long as manga (its more well-known counterpart), but it was not specifically known as a Korean manhwa by average readers up until very recently in America. Tokyopop was one of the leading publishers who brought manhwa to the United States

⁵ Schofield, Hugh.

⁶ Notable online Sites that use the vertical format include: *Webtoons*, *Tapas*, *Toomics*, *Lezhin Comics*, and *Tappy Toons*.

and, at the height of their publishing, had licensed 85 Korean titles⁷. Plus, Korean manhwa was considered easier to publish because it was less “explicit” than many Japanese manga due to a variety of reasons, most notably censorship laws in South Korea⁸. However, in America, manhwa was simply being published alongside manga and Chinese manhua without specifying the differences between the three⁹. This is important because, in France, there had already been a booming industry of manhwa-specific publishing starting at the turn of the century.

France had already begun establishing themselves as a comic powerhouse, so they could afford to take chances on little known international properties such as *Metal brain 109*. So, instead of worrying about ease-of-publication, they could just translate the work, and put it out to the mass market. With the fact that *Metal Brain 109* was a trilogy as well, it would have had ease of publication as a finished work. Something which is much more appealing than a still-ongoing work¹⁰.

Its themes as aesthetic are heavily reminiscent of work such as *Ghost in the Shell* (both the film and the manga) and *Appleseed*, so a publisher could count on people being aware of those texts to pick up and try this work. When saying these works affected the industry, they affected it in such a way that the masses were trying to find the next version of these works. *Metal Brain 109*’s plot is about a family trying to navigate trauma and loss while surrounded by robots in a dystopian world where such robots are treated as second-class citizens. The main characters are confronted by the military, death, and rebellion setbacks throughout the course of the trilogy, and by the end, there is no clear solution or ending.

⁷ Sunyoung, Lee.

⁸ Sunyoung, Lee.

⁹ Sunyoung, Lee. (Notable American publishers are: Tokyopop, Viz Media, and Net Comics.)

¹⁰ Many complications can come up in publishing work that is still ongoing. For example: Keiko Tobe died of mesothelioma while she was still working on her manga, *With the Light*, leaving the manga permanently unfinished.

While the appeal of *Metal Brain 109* is clear, it was never brought to the United States, so it was never given the chance to appeal to that market. The market it was dropped into in France, however, was perfect for the manhwa.

III. *Tokebi*

France and Belgium have had notable comics industry since the early 1900s with some of their most well-known comics being *Tin-Tin*, *Asterix and Obelix*, and *The Smurfs*¹¹. Often the two country's works are lumped together because there were overlaps in working and publishing in both countries, often being referred to as "Franco-Belgian." So, for the sake of simplification, French comics will be considered Franco-Belgian, rather than exclusively French.

In any case, the Franco-Belgian industry had been booming unhalting for the most part for a century, whereas North America had been plagued by obstacles such as the Comic Codes Authority and general censorship in the mid-century¹². So, the natural progressing step was that France would have access to foreign comics and manga before the United States would.

Which brings the reader to *Société d'édition et d'exploitation de BD* (SEEBD)¹³, a French Korean manhwa publisher led by Christophe Lemaire¹⁴. This is a comic, manga, and manhwa publisher which emerged in 2000 in France that had several genre-specific subsidiary publishers. Two of such subsidiaries were *Tokebi* (2003), a publisher that specialized in manhwa aimed at boys and men (sonyung), and *Saphira* (2004), a publisher that aimed their manhwa towards girls and women (sunjeong). These distinctions exist in manga publishing as well (shounen and

¹¹ Schofield, Hugh.

¹² Weldon, Glen.

¹³ Translation: *Publishing and operating comics society*.

¹⁴ "SEEBD - Éditeur."

shoujo respectively), but it is important to note that these titles were not policed on these specifics. A better way to describe the comics would have been “dark” fantasy, sci-fi, subject matter, and “light” fantasy, sci-fi, subject matter.

So, it makes complete sense that *Metal Brain 109* would be published by the Sonyung title. *Tokebi* would put forth as many manhwas as they could that could appeal to the mass French market¹⁵. As stated before, trilogies are easier to publish, so to start off a burgeoning publishing house with a complete series appeals well to readers and the market. Lemaire, the collection director of *Tokebi*, even stated himself that they had to first appeal to a mass market before diving into the wide options provided by the Korean manhwa market¹⁶. *Tokebi* also published several collection magazines¹⁷ showcasing teasers of the manhwa they were publishing, so the advertising was stronger for this particular subsidiary¹⁸.

Tokebi also wanted to introduce the concept of manhwa to the French market. As stated before: while manhwa has existed in the market as works themselves since about 1995, they had never existed as *Korean manhwa*; they existed as *manga* or *manga-like*¹⁹. So, a manhwa such as *Metal brain 109*, which had such a good reputation in Korea²⁰, was a good introduction to manhwa without steeping too deeply into Korean-specific themes, so as not to push away manga-purists in France²¹. However, it was also steeped just enough into the culture to where it

¹⁵ Trent.

¹⁶ Trent.

¹⁷ *Tokebi Magazine* started in 2003 and published 6 issues before later being renamed to *Génération Tokebi*, which ran for 26 issues until 2006.

¹⁸ “SEEBD - Éditeur.”

¹⁹ Trent.

²⁰ Both, **IV. The Birth of Metal Warrior 109** and **VI. The publication life of *Metal Brain 109*** talk about the reasons for why this manhwa was so well received among the Korean public.

²¹ Trent.

could also inform the readers on the specifics of Korean culture, which was something Lemaire wanted²².

Thus, *Metal Brain 109* was published in 2004 at the beginning of *Tokebi*'s short life, and never published again. SEEBD closed its doors in 2008, and along with it, *Tokebi*. While some of its series continued on in Rene Park's *Samji* publications, *Metal Brain 109* was not one of them²³.

Tokebi's initial run was the last time *Metal brain 109* was published internationally, but it was not the last time it was ever published. However, to get there, one must learn where *Metal Brain 109*'s publication started, and how it ended.

IV. The Birth of *Metal Warrior 109*

The history of Manhwa existed almost exclusively as a politically motivated genre from its conception²⁴. The first known incarnation of what would eventually become modern manhwa was at the turn of 20th century when Japan still occupied Korea²⁵. They were essentially politically charged comics criticizing abuse of authority and politics up until the coup-d'état of 1961, which halted a part of the political motivation for creating manhwa²⁶. For the sake of simplicity, from this point on North Korea will not be included in umbrella mentions of the political climate in Korea. Its politics since independence from South Korea have varied too radically from South Korea to be historically tracked in the same way.

²² Trent.

²³ "SEEBD - Éditeur."

²⁴ Cain, Geoffrey.

²⁵ Cain, Geoffrey.

²⁶ Cain, Geoffrey.

The coup put a gag on any anti-government sentiments, but not on manhwa in general. Manhwa, from this point on, became a lighter resource for giving people entertainment during the time that Park Chung-hee (the president-dictator and leader of the coup) was in power. There was a noted depression on an emotional level in Korea at the time; so, the appeal of manhwa was not only because of entertainment, but also escapism²⁷. However, the government noticed this increase in activity and decided to use the popularity of manhwa in their favor. Thus, the politically charged manhwa started to resurface, but from the mouths of the government. Myongnang Manhwa, literally translated to “happy comics,” was a genre popular during the time for escapism because of its inherently pleasant nature²⁸. Upon seeing the appeal, the regime implemented the widespread circulation of the comics to distract the people from the state of the dictatorship while also promoting themes such as nationalistic pride and dissent of misbehaving, unpatriotic citizens²⁹. These manhwas were almost always targeted primarily to children, with appeal to families³⁰.

With the decline in popularity for the regime and the increase in young people’s criticisms of it, Myongnang Manhwa saw a noted decline in the 1970s³¹. This era starts the first callback to the sentiments expressed by the first incarnations of manhwa in the early 1900s. By this time, Japanese manga had begun being imported (illegally), and young Koreans were becoming dissatisfied with the state of South Korea³². Manhwa saw a steady shift from happy escapism to gritty realism, with several manhwa portraying stories more oriented towards young adults as

²⁷ Cain, Geoffrey. Qui, Shelley.

²⁸ Qui, Shelley.

²⁹ Cain, Geoffrey.

³⁰ Qui, Shelley.

³¹ Qui, Shelley.

³² Cain, Geoffrey.

opposed to children and general audiences. Myongnang Manhwa, by the 1980s, had almost entirely disappeared³³.

With the equally criticized regime of Chun Doo Hwan, manhwa saw an exceptional rise in the popularity of grittier, darker realizations of manhwa. During the decline, manhwa, while still pertaining to taboo subjects, did not directly criticize the government. This all changed in the 1980s where manhwa that depicted an underclass or oppressed group (or person) rising up became extremely popular³⁴. These manhwas also started the trend of having a protagonist succeed against all odds stacked against them, with one notable author being Hyun-Se Lee.

Lee pretty much set the stage for all proceeding manhwa. With his gritty style and relatable protagonists, most manhwa authors and artists were heavily inspired by his work. This is very apparent in *Metal Brain 109*, where not only is it possible that the artist and author read Lee's stories (it is in fact highly likely), but the art style is also heavily reminiscent of Lee's work. The trend that Lee pioneered started in 1983 with the publication of his work, *A Dauntless Team*, about a baseball player who stands up to authority and becomes a star³⁵.

The subject of rising against authority is very apparent in *Metal Brain 109*. One of the protagonist's character arcs consists of becoming a second-class citizen and then rising up against authority through a revolution intent on changing her society³⁶. While the story is carried by science fiction elements, it is reflective of notable Korean events such as the Gwangju Massacre student uprisings and several other pockets of students protests³⁷. These protests

³³ Cain, Geoffrey. Qui, Shelley

³⁴ Cain, Geoffrey.

³⁵ Manhwa art example in Appendix I, p.28.

³⁶ See the full plot summary in: **VII.What makes *Metal Brain 109* so important?**

³⁷ Park, Sunyoung (page 249).

directly paralleled those that the protagonists participated with in *Metal Brain 109*, albeit, exaggerated to amplify the action.

Another thing that rapidly becomes apparent is that this story has major thematic relations to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, which came out in 1993 in South Korea³⁸. The parallels between the two is so apparent that *Metal Brain 109* directly homages *Blade Runner* in the manhwa³⁹. *Blade Runner* is about a detective who hunts down replicants (artificial humans) but who is heavily implied to be a replicant himself. The film also contains themes of the oppressive government, but more so than not, it has to deal with the question of what it means to be a human and what defines humanity verses artificial life. This similar conflict comes up with one of the protagonists who is a robot, as she must discover what it means for her to be human versus a cyborg.

What remains apparent, however, is that Kim Jun Bum took careful consideration into crafting their world around real-life events surrounding the manhwa industry at the time. However, another thing that remains apparent is that Kim Jun Bum is an author-artist who is very difficult to track himself.

V. Who is Kim Jun Bum?

When first researching the author of *Metal Brain 109*, several roadblocks surfaced: the first being the lack of information in English, a detriment that was expected, the second being the possibility that "Kim Jun Bum" was an alias. Pen names are common across all literature. For various reasons throughout history, people have used pen names attached to works they have

³⁸ Park, Sunyoung (Page 248).

³⁹ Kim, Jun-Bum (Page 21) The names of several buildings in this city are similar names to the ones in *Blade Runner*.

published: a notable example being Joanne Rowling who published both under the pen name J.K. Rowling and Robert Galbraith. This creates complications for researching, as it becomes difficult to trace bodies of work, or people, unless they are attached to that pen name. However, a saving grace of this is usually that the author's picture or social medias are attached to said pen name. In Kim Jun Bum's case, none of these were apparent at first glance.

Another option would be that this could be a duo or team that is published under one name. This is not as common as a singular pen name, but is still seen in some publishing circles. An example in the manhwa industry itself would be *Demon's Diary* by Kara. Kara was the duo artist team, Kim Yoon-gyeong and Jeong Eun-sook. The volumes were also written by different authors, with volume one being written by Lee Jeehyung, and every subsequent volume being written by Lee Yun-hee. Even though these names are known, the work is still casually referred to as *Kara's* work and not as any of the other names attached to it.

The final roadblock would be the lack of hangul related to the name. Hangul are the Korean alphabet characters (much like how "kanji" are the Japanese characters). This lack of a Hangul written form makes it difficult to track on Korean websites, as well any other websites that would only have the hangul spelling.

The only option became to search for the translated title of *Metal Brain 109* online and hope that through one of the searches the author would come up *and* that it would be recognizable⁴⁰. Luckily, that was the case almost immediately. In several results, not only was the hangul spelling found rather easily, but a photo of Kim Jun Bum was found as well⁴¹. Kim

⁴⁰ *Metal Brain 109* was published under both this title and as *Machine Warrior 109* in Korea. Neither is used more than the other, so it is imperative to look up both hangul spellings (□□□□□ 109 and □□□□ 109 respectively) to access the most results.

⁴¹ Said photo found in Appendix II, p. 28.

Jun Bum seemed to be the only name attached to *Metal Brain 109*, until the name Noh Jin Soo came up more often than could be considered a coincidence⁴². For the sake of clarity, *Metal Brain 109* will be referred to as Kim Jun Bum's work rather than a dual work with No Jin Soo⁴³.

Kim Jun Bum was 20 years when he created *Metal Brain 109* for IQ Jump magazine in 1989⁴⁴. This was his debut work and was a marketed success and is to this day the work he is most known by. Once he finished working on *Metal Brain 109*, he found lesser success with his works *Brothers Separately* (1991)⁴⁵ and *Play with Me* (1998)⁴⁶. Reportedly, he was swept up in the large influx of imported manga in Korea during the 1990s, and his work disappeared from the public eye⁴⁷. Such was a normal occurrence in Korea at the time. When he decided to take a break from publishing, he put all of his focus into the study of Astrology and Buddhism⁴⁸, putting most of his studies into his website, Cosmos road⁴⁹. From here, he compiled his work into his last major printed work, *Why did the square become a garden?* (2013)⁵⁰. This work primarily dealt with his studies on Buddhism through small minimalist cartoons dealing with philosophical questions. Interestingly, this work could be described as a Myongnang Manhwa.

Finally, his last reported comic work is *Proto 109* (2017) a prequel to *Metal Brain 109* detailing the beginning of the cyborg rebellion. It was initially published on *Toomics* in 2017 and

⁴² Hong Ji Min.

⁴³ I made this choice because the work, as it is known now, is attributed almost exclusively to Kim Jun Bum. Noh Jin Soh is a prolific writer none the less and has worked on several films like *Asphalt Man* (1991). He is difficult to find information on, but none the less I felt it important to mention him because of the possible connections to this work.

⁴⁴ See, **VI. The publication life of *Metal Brain 109*** for more information on IQ Jump.

⁴⁵ Korean Hangul: □□ □□ □□ / Covers in Appendix III, p. 29.

⁴⁶ Korean Hangul: □□□ □□ / Covers in Appendix IV, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Hong Ji Min.

⁴⁸ Hong Ji Min.

⁴⁹ http://blog.daum.net/_blog/BlogTypeMain.do?blogid=0AVia

⁵⁰ Korean Hangul: □□□ □□□□ □ □□□? /Cover in Appendix V, p. 30.

ended after 62 episodes (chapters) in 2018⁵¹. This is the only other work he has done that has any relation to *Metal Brain 109*, and it does not star any of the characters from the manhwa.

With most of the puzzle coming together, finally, a general timeline for the publication history of *Metal Brain 109* can be pieced together.

VI. The publication life of *Metal Brain 109*

From 1989-1991, *IQ Jump Comics* published the first edition of *Metal Warrior 109*⁵². The manhwa was an instant hit as cyberpunk media that criticized oppressive governments (i.e. *Blade Runner*) and was later compiled into 4 volumes in 1993⁵³. It was met to critical acclaim and was (and still is) highly regarded among Korean manhwa fans⁵⁴. The final, printed Korean volumes were published in 2002, under a new name, *Metal Brain 109*. This was a boxed set of the three printed volumes of the story and one special edition booklet⁵⁵.

In 2004, the only known foreign edition of *Metal Brain 109* was published in France by *Tokebi*, a label that exclusively published sonyung⁵⁶ manhwa. It was only published once in three volumes without the special edition booklet and not as a boxed set⁵⁷. There was only one run of this manhwa, and it was never published again outside of Korea.

In 2008, the last known publication of *Metal Brain 109* surfaces on the Korean website, Naver, a website that focuses on online Korean webtoons in a scrolling format⁵⁸. This version

⁵¹ <https://toomics.com/en/webtoon/episode/toon/4641> The English translation is still ongoing.

⁵² Namu.

⁵³ First edition covers in Appendix VI, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Yang Joo, Seung/ Hong Ji Min.

⁵⁵ Korean Boxed Set Covers and Booklet photo in Appendix VII, p. 31.

⁵⁶ Term explained in: **II. The Context.**

⁵⁷ French Cover editions in appendix VIII, p. 31.

⁵⁸ Scrolling Webtoons are essentially manhwa but formatted vertically for online viewing. This format is optimized for mobile viewing in most cases.

was reformatted into a scrolling version and was digitally colorized⁵⁹. This last incarnation of *Metal Brain 109* no longer exists on the website and was reportedly taken down per request of the author in 2016⁶⁰.

In 2015, a national Korean Manga Museum in Bucheon ran an exhibition that showcased notable Korean manhwa that had had robots in it from the years 1970 to 2015⁶¹. *Metal Brain 109* was shown as the notable work for the year 1989, further solidifying its place as a culturally important work from the Korean manhwa industry.

Finally, *Proto 109* began publication as a scrolling webtoon on *Toomics* in 2017 and finished its run in 2018. It still remains online and is the only work relating to *Metal Brain 109* that is still easily and legally accessible online. It is also the only one of the many publications that has an official English translation.

VII. What is *Metal Brain 109*?

Metal Brain 109 is about the lives of Cher, her husband, MX-16, and their son, Gun, as they navigate a world inhabited by humans and cyborgs. A cyborg rebel group known as Metal Brain has been attacking populated human cities to try and liberate cyborgs trapped by a society that treats them as second-class citizens. When they attack a popular amusement park, Cher is killed in the crossfire. When Gun becomes ill from grief, MX-16 is forced to take an offer to rebuild his wife as a cyborg that is virtually identical to her in every way.

Cher must then navigate a world that treats her as a second-class citizen, despite her not feeling any differently than before when she was a human. MX-16 treats her coldly and

⁵⁹ Full manhwa can no longer be found online, but a compilation of colorized panels can be found in Appendix IX, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Namu.

⁶¹ Yang Joo, Seung.

violently, multiple times hitting and abusing her because she is just a cyborg. Along the way, she meets the leader of Metal Brain, Damos, and during a confrontation, she convinces him to spare her husband— something that only makes MX-16 abuse her more. However, when Gun develops an allergy towards Cher, MX-16 sends her away, and she is forced to try to return on her own to find Gun.

While the other two books in the trilogy complete the story with many more characters showing up, the major themes of the story are already apparent in the first volume. For this reason, the first volume will be the focus of this analysis.

Metal Brain 109 is a story at its core about love and revolution, and what it means to be human. The family of protagonists is a normal middle-class family, blissfully ignorant to the plight of robots around them. Something that draws distinction with this is that by all accounts most of the humans in *Metal Brain 109* don't treat robots badly out of malice, but mostly out of convenience. The only characters in the novel that treat them badly on purpose are the military police and MX-16. The things these characters have in common with each other is that they're authority figures. As mentioned before, this is a criticism of authority, so it's normal for the abusers of said authority to be the most malicious people. However, it is very unusual in media like this to have the other people be complicit with this kind of behavior, but it's very true to reality. There are several cases in history where people are complicit with regimes that blatantly treat others differently, and to showcase this in *Metal Brain 109* was a great way to give multidimensionality to this world.

These are especially poignant with Cher and Gun; both were used to living in a world where robots could simply be used as they see fit without much care to the robot's feelings. However, when confronted with the reality that Cher was a robot, they both had to rapidly change

themselves. For Gun, his character arc is much more spread out over the course of the books, but in the first volume, his naivete works to his favor. He struggles briefly with the knowledge that Cher was a robot, but he quickly realizes that she is also his mother despite this and accepts her for who she is. He even feels remorse when he asks her an emotionally damaging question about her humanity⁶².

Cher also has larger development over the course of the trilogy, but her first important arc is probably in the first volume. When she is turned into a cyborg, she must grapple with no longer having equal rights to her husband and son, and with her own place in society. Her husband often beats her and belittles her, and there are multiple instances where she's not allowed in certain areas or outside alone⁶³. Throughout all of this though, she tries to have a positive outlook on her life; she enjoys spending time with her son and wants to spend time with him no matter what. But she still is nervous among other robots; she views herself as different from them because she feels different from them, only slightly showing moments where she wonders whether or not the way she feels is the same as other robots⁶⁴. It is important to have Cher as a flawed character because it makes her more rounded and allows for more sympathy by the reader. If she immediately became a revolutionary, Cher would not be as interesting of a character. However, seeing her repeatedly struggle and be brought down allows for more connection between the reader and the character.

While the characters have well written arcs, that same thing cannot be said for general plot points. This work reads like a debut work in that there are several loose plot threads and plot holes to deal with when reading it. One of the more egregious examples would be the reason why

⁶² Kim Jun Bum (page 148).

⁶³ Kim Jun Bum (page 79).

⁶⁴ Kim Jun Bum (page 69).

MX-16 is forced to make a cyborg clone of his wife. The reason he gets convinced is because his son grows ill from sadness, and the police chief explains it is because MX-16 needs a mother to help raise a son⁶⁵. This seems like a very non-threatening reason to do something as life changing as making a clone. Not only is this reason steeped in sexism (whereas the rest of the series is not), but it simply doesn't make any sense. It is as if there just needed to be a reason for Cher to exist and for MX-16 to hate her.

Another strange writing quirk is tone shifts, this manhwa was aimed for young people, so it naturally has many humoristic moments. However, often times the moments directly interrupt very serious moments or do not make any sense tonally during the story. GG, a friend of Gun's, is mostly present in the story for comic relief, and when she shows up it usually brings the story to halt⁶⁶. There are only a few times where her presence helps advance the plot, but her character is almost only comic relief.

In the vein, MX-16 is presented as a conflicted man who is sacrificing his principles for his son and wife. However, in reading the plot he seems like a cartoonish villain. He treats Cher badly because he does not see her as his wife and only as a robot pretending to be her. His character could've been ripe with emotional conflict, but instead he seems to be cartoonish, over-the-top, cruel, and mean. While he has several moments where it's clear he mostly just loves his (human) wife and son, it is very difficult to see a loving man also be as cruel as he is despite all of the moments where (cyborg) Cher has risked her life for him⁶⁷. There are moments where he calms down in this volume and in further volumes, but he is so distracting cruel that it makes it hard to empathize with him.

⁶⁵ Kim Jun Bum (page 33).

⁶⁶ Kim Jun Bum (Page 72) There are many other instances of GG's comic relief, but this one I found to be the most egregious example.

⁶⁷ Kim Jun Bum (page 112).

Another odd moment is the introduction of other storylines. It's pretty common in any media to cut away from the main story plot to showcase side plots, but midway through *Metal brain 109*, the story shifts completely with no real indication to several completely new characters⁶⁸. The reader is introduced to an important cyborg in prison, along with a cast of side characters. There's a television head cyborg that's martyred and a prison uprising, along with a moment where Damos comes to liberate the cyborgs in prison and kill the prison guard. This plot comes out of nowhere and breaks up Cher's plot to much smaller chunks. The stories appear to be acting as thematically similar, but in reality, they clash with each other rather fiercely and make it hard to get attached to anyone in the prison subplot in the volume. On their own, they are solid stories with a thematic similarity to those presented in other moments in the volume and series, but together they interrupt and cause plot whiplash with the reader.

Overall, however, *Metal Brain 109* reads entertainingly enough to overlook these upon first reading. The thematic present is very strong, and it's able to hold its own despite the lackluster writing in certain moments in the story. It is also a very good story to show to young people; it has endearing plot and characters and an aesthetically nice art style to appeal to anyone. It is a great series that is culturally important to its country, so it is a shame that *Metal Brain 109* is so difficult to find.

VIII. In conclusion, what makes *Metal Brain 109* so important?

The search to find *Metal Brain 109* was a top to bottom search starting from its last print publication in France. I never realized that an interesting series I found in a used manga store in France would have ever led me to a critically acclaimed Korean manhwa, but I'm glad it did.

⁶⁸ Kim Jun Bum (page 128).

Metal Brain 109 is so much more than just a *Blade Runner*-inspired manhwa series; it is a testament to the power of the people and an important work in the history of manhwa in Korea.

Metal Brain 109 is everything that makes manhwa great: it is culturally significant to where it's from, it has a unique and interesting art style, and it has very strong themes that make it an interesting read for people of any age. I was excited to find it simply because I'm fond of robots and sci-fi, but I was even more excited when I began my research to find the author and learned about the history of this manhwa and the history of Kim Jun Bum. Learning about the culturally significant periods in Korean history and manhwa history along the way created a pool of information that I now had access to.

The only thing I lamented was the lack of information on this series in English. The only source I was able to find was Sunyoung Park's *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, a collection that only had one section where it mentioned *Metal Brain 109* in detail that wouldn't be published until May 31st 2019. There are minimal French sources on it as well, as it was not entirely well received critically in France at the time of publication (only garnering an "average" grade over most of the reviews I've seen). No one else in Europe or America from what I can tell has issued a publication on *Metal Brain 109*, and the manhwa itself is very hard to find in Korea as well (as it is out of print and unavailable online).

So, I decided to partially translate the first volume of the manhwa myself for the sake of anyone who reads this research and wants to read some of the writing in *Metal Brain 109*⁶⁹. I would hope that I have presented the manhwa in an appealing way and shown that despite its faults, it is an important work to study and an entertaining work to read. *Metal Brain 109*

⁶⁹ While I haven't been able to incorporate my translation into the actual panels of the manhwa, there's an example of what that would look like in Appendix XI, p. 33.

deserved the chance to be presented to everyone, and it saddens me to see that it only made it outside of Korea once, and that it is out of print *inside* Korea as well. My hope is to one day translate the entire series to allow for the most people to read it. I do not believe that *Metal Brain 109* is the best thing I have ever read, but I do believe it is one of the most rewarding things I have ever had the pleasure of researching and reading. My hope is that any others who find my translation will think the same and will give *Metal Brain 109* the chance it deserved 15 years ago.

IX. Annotated bibliography

Cain, Geoffrey. “Will Korean Manhwa Replace Manga?” *Public Radio International*, Agence French-Presse, 28 Nov. 2009, www.pri.org/stories/2009-11-28/will-korean-manhwa-replace-manga?page=0%2C0.

This article gives a short, succinct history of Korean manhwa while giving its political and cultural context. This article, while being succinct, is rich with specific details about authors and manhwa throughout history, even adding in quotes to illustrate points in Manhwa’s history. This source is very important to me, as it is my go-to timeline for notable events in Korean manhwa history, and it’s often referenced in other potential sources I’ve seen, which adds to its credibility.

Daum. “□□□□ 109.” *Blog.daum.net*, http://blog.daum.net/_blog/BlogTypeView.do?blogid=0rmaR&articleno=161&_bloghome_menu=recenttext.

This source consists of a blog post showing the original covers of volumes 1 and 3 of *Metal Brain 109*, along with details of publication pages, illustrations, and manhwa pages. The author is likely just someone who’s purchased or found these books. I find this source fascinating because the photos are detailed photos of the first edition volumes, which are important not only for dates, but also for specific publishers. These are also just generally well shot photos of these volumes, and I use them in the appendix.

Hong Ji Min (홍지민). ““기계 전사 109’의 김준범, 힐링 만화로 돌아오다.” *Seoul Newspaper*, Seoul, 22 Apr. 2013, www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20130423500013.

This article is about Kim Jun Bum’s return to published manhwa with his self-reflective book, *Why Did the Square Become a Garden?* It’s a book on Buddhism and astrology that follows a monk as he explores the world. This article is important because it was the first article on Kim Jun Bum in about 20 years. It talks not only about the new manhwa he’s publishing, but also about his life after the publication of *Metal Brain 109*. It’s also one of the few sources that mentions Noh Jin Soh as co-writer.

Kim, Jun-Bum. *Metal Brain 109*. Translated by Kette Amoruso, vol. 1, Tokebi, 2004.

Metal Brain 109 is a series about a cyborg revolution and how it intersects with the lives of three members in one family. Only the first volume is cited in the paper; however, there are a total of three volumes that were published in the French editions. This is the book that started the whole research project, and it's talked about in detail in the full paper.

Namu. “기계 전사 109.” *Namu Wiki*, Wiki, 30 Sept. 2018,

<http://namu.wiki/w/기계 전사%20109>.

This is a database that holds everything one would need to know about *Metal Brain 109*. This appears to be a Wiki article; however, it is also the only source that has detail on the plot of the manhwa, trivia, and details about the timeline of publication with exact yearly dates. I wanted to include this because, as it is a database entry, it essentially covers all of the known information about *Metal Brain 109*, including some information that I haven't been able to find anywhere else.

Park, Sunyoung. “Reciprocal Assets Science Fiction and Democratization in 1980s South Korea.” *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, University of Michigan Press, 2019, pp. 247–268.

This is a series of essays on the culturally significant aspects of South Korean society in the 1980s. This book hasn't been released yet, but this section is one of several that is present in the Google Books preview online, and the information I needed was in the pages I could preview. I've only referenced the one essay in this book, as it's the only one that deals with *Metal Brain 109*. This is the only English publication I've been able to find that talks about *Metal Brain 109* specifically as a culturally significant work, so it was very important for me to include it in this paper.

“SEEBD - Éditeur.” *Manga-News*, Manga-News, www.manga-news.com/index.php/editeur/SEEBD.

This is an article that has a timeline of events-like structure detailing the history of SEEBD. It gives me a simple timeline with dates, names, and notable events that happened in SEEBD's history, and is my database for years relating to the life of SEEBD and *Tokebi*. This is the only article I've found online that has all of this information together in an

understandable way, and Manga-News is a well-known reputable French manga/manhwa/manhua database.

Qui, Shelley. "Myongnang Manhwa." *Professor LatinX*, 2015,

www.professorlatinx.com/comics/myongnang-manhwa/.

This source details specifically what is "Myongnang Manhwa" and how it is relevant to Korean political and manhwa history. This article is essentially a succinct history of solely Myongnang Manhwa and gave detailed history of its publication, use, and significance. I like this article because of its specificity and because it gives a specific example of a Myongnang Manhwa, *Gobau*, that still manages to persist today. Considering how hard it is to search for Korean manhwa online that isn't translated, this was very helpful for me.

Schofield, Hugh. "France Takes Its Comics Very Seriously." BBC News, BBC, 16 Feb. 2008,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7246634.stm.

This article is about the upcoming Angouleme Comics festival primarily and details the history of comics in France and Belgium. This article does a good job depicting not only the history of famous comics in France (such as *The Smurfs*), but also the prevalence of comics and manga in French culture. I wanted to include this article because it mentions the international comics festival, and it shows how important comics are in France and Belgium, which shows why they might have published relatively unknown manhwa.

Sunyoung, Lee. "The Koreans Are Coming: Manhwa in America." *PublishersWeekly.com*, PW

Comics Week, 2 Jan. 2007, www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/comics/article/11971-the-koreans-are-coming-manhwa-in-america.html.

This article is about all the methods and means through which Manhwa has been able to make it to North American markets. Specific companies, years and methods of marketing are laid out in detail in this article. I wanted to include this article because of said specificity, and I find it easy to refer back to in case I need to find more North American manhwa publishers.

Trent. "Interview Christophe Lemaire Des Ditions Tokebi." *Critique, News, Avis Et Images Sur Le Manga, Manhwa Et Anim*, MangaGate, 25 June 2004. Accessed 15 May 15, 2019.
www.mangagate.com/interview/editeur/tokebi/christophe-lemaire-2004-06-25-22.html.

This is a transcription of an interview with the head of SEEBD and *Tokebi* at the Japan-Expo convention in Paris. It is an early interview where MangaGate asks Lemaire several business and logistical questions, like how he acquires titles and why he made the company. This interview is very useful because it's a direct transcript of what Lemaire does as head of *Tokebi*. I often refer to this one when I work through possibilities for why *Tokebi* might have taken certain publishing and business decisions.

Weldon, Glen. "Censors and Sensibility: RIP, Comics Code Authority Seal of Approval, 1954 - 2011." *NPR*, NPR, 27 Jan. 2011, www.npr.org/2011/01/27/133253953/censors-and-sensibility-rip-comics-code-authority-seal-of-approval-1954-2011.

This article details the creation and end of the Comics Code Authority in North America. It goes into specifics, with dates and names of not only those involved with the creation of the CCA, but also the major players and publishers involved during its use and tenure. I like this article not only because of its in-depth information, but also because of the fun way Weldon conveys this information through his writing style.

Yang Joo, Seung (양주승 기자). "인간보다 더 인간적인 '로봇 비 휴먼'展." *Bucheon Times*, Bucheontimes, 15 Dec. 2015,
www.bucheontimes.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=29512.

This article is about the gallery opening in the Korean Manga Museum in Bucheon, "ROBOT be HUMAN", that details important Korean manhwa that star robots of some sort. The timeline starts in the 70s and ends in present day (2015) with several talks by authors and artists alike. I think this is an important source because it not only shows how prevalent robots were in Korean manhwa, but also that *Metal Brain 109* is considered the most important robot work of 1989 and important enough in Korean culture to be shown in a national manhwa gallery.

X. Appendix

- I. Hyun-Se, Lee, *A Dauntless Team*, Manhwa Panel art example.

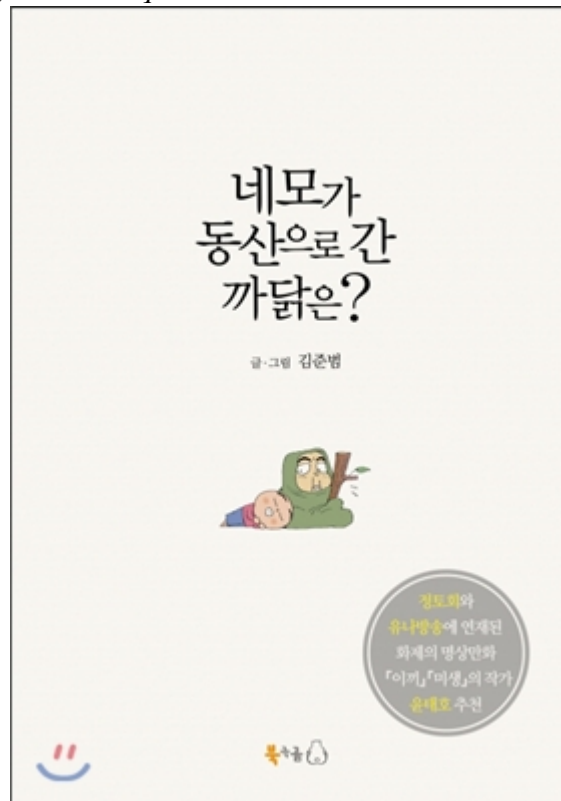


- II. Kim Jun Bum posing with a copy of *Why Did the Square Become a Garden?*



III. Volumes 4 and 1 of *Brothers Separately*.IV. All 4 volumes of *Play with Me!*

V. Korean cover of *Why Did the Square Become a Garden?*



VI. First Edition Covers of *Metal Brain 109* published by IQ Jump Comics from 1989 to 1993. 4 Volumes.





VII. Boxed set edition, and special edition booklet for *Metal Brain 109* published by INK Agency in 2002.



VIII. French Editions of *Metal Brain 109* published by Tokebi and translated by Kette Amoruso in 2004. 3 Volumes.



IX. Colorized examples of the online publication of *Metal Brain 109* published on Naver webtoons from 2008 to 2016.



- X. Panel examples from *Proto 109*, published from 2017 to 2018 by Toomics. English translation is still ongoing.



- XI. Mockup example of incorporating translation into the actual panels of *Metal Brain 109*, panels taken from p. 77 in volume 3.

