

ഇശൽ  
വൈദ്യകം  
ത്രൈമാസിക ലക്കം: 40

Ishal Paithrkam

Online issue 25    print issue 40    December 2024



**Mahakavi Moyinkutty Vaidyar**  
**Mappila Kala Akademi**  
Department of Cultural Affairs  
Government of Kerala-India  
December 2024

**ഇശൽ പൈത്യകം**

ത്രൈമാസിക

ലക്കം: 40

2024 ഡിസംബർ

പകർപ്പാവകാശം: പ്രസാധകർക്ക്

**ചീഫ് എഡിറ്റർ**

ഡോ. ഹുസൈൻ രണ്ടത്താണി

**എഡിറ്റർ**

ഡോ. ഷംഷാദ് ഹുസൈൻ. കെ.ടി.

**അസോസിയേറ്റ് എഡിറ്റർ**

ഡോ. അനീസ് ആലങ്ങാടൻ

**എഡിറ്റോറിയൽ ബോർഡ്**

ബഷീർ ചുങ്കത്തറ

ഡോ. പി.പി അബ്ദുൽ റസാഖ്

എം.എൻ. കാരശ്ശേരി

സൈദലവി ചീരങ്ങോട്ട്

**Ishal Paithrkam**

**ISSN: 2582-550X**

Peer-Reviewed

UGC CARE indexed

Quarterly

Bilingual

Issue: 40

Online issue: 25

December: 2024

all rights reserved

Individual Price : Rs.600/-

**Editor**

Dr. Shamshad hussain. KT

Printed @

LIPI Offset

Malappuram

**Publisher**

Mahakavi Moyinkutty

Vaidyar

Mappila Kala Akademi

Kondotty, 673638

Ph: 0483-2711432

**പ്രസാധകർ**

മഹാകവി മോയിൻകുട്ടി വൈദ്യർ

മാപ്പിള കലാ അക്കാദമി

കൊണ്ടോട്ടി: 673 638

ഫോൺ: 0483 2711432

[www.mappilakalaacademy.org](http://www.mappilakalaacademy.org)

[www.ishalpaithrkam.info](http://www.ishalpaithrkam.info)

ഇശൽ പൈത്യകത്തിൽ പ്രസിദ്ധീകരിക്കുന്ന രചനകളിലെ ആശയങ്ങൾ മാപ്പിളകലാ അക്കാദമിയുടേതോ, സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാരിന്റേതോ, സാംസ്കാരിക വകുപ്പിന്റേതോ ആയിരിക്കണമെന്നില്ല. - എഡിറ്റർ

copyright rests with the publisher. the authors are responsible for the contents and views expressed.

## **Beyond Urban Legends: Exploring Alterity in Fantasy through *Tale of the Nine Tailed* and *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938***

**Kairali K K**

Alterity, which refers to the state or quality of being different or other, is a philosophical and anthropological concept that explores the perception of “otherness” or the recognition of the difference between oneself and others. When applied to fantasy literature, alterity not only plays a crucial role in shaping the narratives, characters, and themes but also challenges stereotypes and prejudices by subverting traditional narratives. This paper explores the realm of fantasy through an in-depth exploration of alterity in the popular television series *Tale of the Nine Tailed* and *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938*, moving beyond conventional urban legends. Alterity, the representation of otherness and difference, serves as a central thematic element in both series, offering a composite portrayal of mythical creatures and supernatural beings. Both series transcend traditional narratives by depicting alterity in complex and multifaceted ways, challenging societal norms, and fostering a deeper understanding of diverse identities. Through a comprehensive analysis of characters, bestiary, plotlines, and cultural contexts, the paper intends to shed light on the intricate interplay between fantasy, alterity, and contemporary storytelling. The paper also intends to provide insights into the evolving landscape of visual storytelling and its capacity to shape societal perceptions as both the series employ a range of visual elements to convey the nuances of otherness and difference, which in turn encourages viewers to reflect on their perceptions of identity and difference.

**Key Words:** Alterity, Fantasy, Myth, Television Series, Cultural Studies

The *Tale of the Nine-Tailed* saga, originally titled *Gumihodyeon*, comprises *Tale of the Nine Tailed*, which aired from October 7 to December 3, 2020 and *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938*, which aired from May 6 to June 11, 2023, both on TVN, the South Korean pay television network. . Notably, the series' popularity is not confined by geographical boundaries, as it is globally accessible through streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime TV. *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938*, directed by Kang Shin-hyo and Jo Nam-hyung and written by Han Woo-ri, was produced by Studio Dragon and House Pictures. This installment gained global distribution through the Prime Video platform. The television program achieved a position within the top ten rankings of Prime Video's most-viewed TV shows in nineteen nations, underscoring the influence of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms over traditional terrestrial distribution channels. The surge in ratings can be attributed to the series' remarkable ability to transport viewers into an imaginative world filled with mythical creatures, magical powers, and extraordinary adventures. Netflix has categorized it as urban dark fantasy owing to its resemblance to werewolves and vampires in the Western Lore.

Both dramas incorporate elements of folklore and mythology particularly centred around the mythical creature known as the nine-tailed fox. The series touches upon themes of otherness and the exploration of identities that exist outside of societal norms. Through the depiction of otherworldly beings and their experiences, both the series explore the complexities of otherness. They offer a rich narrative landscape for exploring the concept of alterity. Viewers are introduced to mythical creatures from Korean folklore, primarily *gumiho/kumiho* (nine-tailed foxes), who possess the ability to shape-shift into human form. This paper aims to critically explore the concept of alterity in the selected series, examining how diverse characters are portrayed and the impact of these representations on audience perception. By delving into the narrative strategies, cultural influences, and societal implications, this paper seeks to unravel the layers of alterity within the chosen series, shedding light on the broader discourse of representation and diversity in the realm of popular culture.

Engaging with alterity in fantasy works opens a door to understanding the intricacies of identity and acceptance in fantastical realms. In these imaginative stories, we encounter a diverse array of characters—different races, species, otherworldly beings/ creatures, and cultures. Through the creative lenses of authors and creators, these characters invite us as the viewer/reader to reconsider our conventional ideas about what it means to be ‘us’ and ‘them’ Fantasy literature can be a powerful tool for exploring and challenging our understanding of otherness. The representation of alterity in fantasy literature is often complex and heterogenous and writers often use allegory and symbolism to explore the nature of otherness. They may also use humour, satire, or tragedy to explore the implications of otherness. In the context of fantasy works, alterity can refer to the representation of non-human or supernatural beings, as well as the representation of marginalized or oppressed groups. By delving into worlds that are different from our own, one sees that alterity can be both positive and negative. On the one hand, fantasy can be used to promote understanding and tolerance of others while on the other hand, it can also be used to reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. Fantasy works such as the *Nine Tailed* series often feature characters who experience multiple layers of otherness, such as marginalization and also belonging to a non-normative identity. Analysing the intersectionality of these identities within the context of the legend of the nine-tailed fox and other legends that occur in both the series allows us to see how different forms of alterity intersect and influence one another.

The legend of the nine-tailed fox is a fascinating and enduring one in Southeast Asian literature, art, and folklore. The legend is thought to have originated in China. In Chinese mythology, the fox is one of five spiritual animal species and had been venerated at household shrines throughout China for many centuries till the practice of fox worship was suppressed by the Chinese government in the 19th century. The ‘huli jing’, a fox spirit is mentioned in many ancient texts, including the *Book of Shanhaijing*, the *Zuozhuan*, and the *Records of the Grand Historian*. The nine-tailed fox in Chinese mythology is known as ‘Jiuwei Hu’ and is considered a powerful creature that can

shapeshift into a human. The Jiuwei Hu is often associated with good luck and fortune, but it can also be a dangerous creature if it is not properly controlled. In Japanese folklore, the fox was called ‘Kitsune’ and was either malevolent or benevolent in nature. With the introduction of the Shinto religion into Japan, Zenko and Myobu the benevolent foxes came to be seen as the servants and messengers of Inari, the deity of rice. These are playful but pure white fox spirits who protect humans and ward off evil. Yako and nogitsune are two types of kitsune that are often seen as being evil. It is believed that some malevolent foxes feed off the life force of human beings. Though they have an evil nature, these kitsune keep their word, honour friendships, and repay debts. Vietnamese mythology speaks about Ha Tinh a nine tailed fox, who lived on a mountain in Hanoi. The fox is said to have lured people out of their villages through deception and then devoured them.

There are many different versions of the legend of the nine-tailed fox in Korean mythology, but they all share some common elements. The fox is always a female, and she is always beautiful and seductive. She uses her charms to lure men into her trap, and then she devours them. Like its Chinese and Japanese counterparts, Korean mythology talks about a gumiho/kumiho(fox) that has lived to 1,000 years old. While the Chinese and Japanese mythologies of them can portray them as morally ambiguous, the Korean nine-tailed fox is almost entirely seen as evil and violent. After reaching 1,000 years old, the fox is blessed with shapeshifting powers, often depicted as a beautiful woman with fox-like characteristics. In ancient Korean legends, the gumiho usually uses the human form to seduce men in order to feast on their flesh, their hearts, or their livers, depending on the story. It is theorized that the reason the Korean version of this myth is so dark and violent is because of the occupation of Korea by Japan and China historically. The fox for the captors was a spirit that was of benevolence and probably seemed evil and dark to the ones subjected to occupation. While in traditional Korean folklore, gumihoes are often depicted as cunning and malevolent fox spirits who transform into beautiful women to seduce and consume the hearts or livers of humans, the Nine-Tailed series, humanizes the gumihoes showing a wide range of

emotions, complexities, and moral dilemmas. They are portrayed as individuals with their desires, friendships, and struggles, which adds depth to their characters beyond the typical mythical archetype. It is important to understand the cultural and social context in which both the dramas were produced and aired and analyze how this context influences the representation of alterity.

The rise of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, refers to the global popularity and spread of South Korean culture, including music, television dramas, films, fashion, beauty products, and cuisine. The phenomenon began in the late 1990s and gained significant momentum in the 2000s and 2010s, turning South Korea into a major cultural exporter. Several factors contributed to the rise of Hallyu culture: K-pop, or Korean pop music, played a pivotal role in the global spread of Hallyu. Boy bands like BTS, EXO, and girl groups like Blackpink and Twice gained massive international followings, reaching fans across the world through social media and streaming platforms. K-dramas/ Korean television dramas became immensely popular, captivating audiences with their compelling storylines, talented actors, and diverse genres, and emotional depth. Beyond mere entertainment, these dramas often delve into complex societal issues, offering viewers a glimpse into different aspects of human experiences. The advent of social media and online platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, allowed fans to easily access and share Korean web series, K-pop music videos, drama clips, and celebrity updates. This online presence helped Hallyu culture reach a wider audience beyond South Korea's borders. The availability of Korean dramas and films on international streaming platforms like Netflix and Viki made it easier for viewers worldwide to access subtitled content.

Korean entertainment products are often praised for their high production quality, engaging narratives, and relatable characters. Additionally, the fusion of traditional Korean culture with modern themes in various media forms made them appealing to global audiences. For example, historical dramas, known as *sageuk* in Korean, often merge traditional costumes, settings, and cultural practices with modern storytelling techniques. The incorporation of traditional practices and folklore, adds depth and authenticity to the narratives.

The *Nine Tailed* series incorporates historical events and both traditional and modern cultural practices. It delves into shamanism and folklore, blending traditional beliefs with a modern story of love, brotherhood, and friendship. The blend of folklore and modernity amplifies the idea of alterity, emphasizing the coexistence and interaction between different worlds, perspectives, and identities. By seamlessly integrating traditional Korean mythology into a contemporary setting and, conversely, by placing contemporary characters into old-world settings, the series explores the complexities of alterity in various ways.

In folklore, *gumiho* are seen strictly as supernatural beings without the capacity for genuine human emotions or romantic relationships. Their interactions with humans are solely based on deception and consumption. The *gumiho*s in the series embody alterity through their dual nature as supernatural creatures and beings capable of human transformation. This duality creates a sense of otherness, challenging the conventional boundaries of identity. The struggle of *gumiho* characters to reconcile their animalistic instincts with their human experiences emphasizes alterity, exploring the complexities of self and the acceptance of their unique identity by the viewer.

In episode one, Lee Yeon, a *gumiho*, is depicted as arrogant, defiant, and stoic. He holds a position in Afterlife Border Control (40:03), and the office setting resembles an ancient and sturdy church surrounded by scenic beauty. However, just before entering, Yeon sighs, perhaps reminiscing the countless times he visited the place with the same petition. The door bears a slogan, “crackdown period against illegal spirits,” slowly revealing the nature of his vocation. The church-like building unveils an entirely different and almost uncanny interior, much like Yeon himself, who harbors a secret or another life (39:22).

The tall window behind Taluipa, the disrobing lady, appears to stretch beyond the actual height of the building when viewed from outside, possibly implying it is an extension of heaven itself (39:15). further delving into the alterity discourse by suggesting a celestial dimension within the earthly setting. The stacks of rolls reaching towards the heavens symbolize records of life and death, reinforcing



the mystical and otherworldly aspects embedded in the alterity discourse.

Yeon's characterization begins in a shady light, leading to misunderstandings on the part of humans. His resigned look and stooping shoulders after every bounty hunting relay reflect the resentment, he carries forward emphasizing the challenges of navigating alterity in both the human and supernatural realms. This blend of earthly and transcendent elements contributes to the alterity discourse, exploring the complexities of coexistence between different worlds within the narrative.

Nam Ji-A, the female protagonist in the story, is a journalist working for a TVC station as a Production designer specializing in supernatural and paranormal documentaries. Her character exudes enigma and is shrouded in mysteries; she transitions from being the hunted to the hunter. In contrast to Yeon, Ji-A's character maintains consistency in its delineation. She is portrayed as a resilient woman determined to uncover the truth behind her family's misfortune, demonstrating a readiness to face any danger in her quest for answers.

Ji-A holds a belief in the existence of another world beyond the real, stating, "This world may be full of creatures we are oblivious to," and suggests that these creatures might coexist among us, perhaps identified by the countless urban legends (59:41). Despite her inclination towards empirical knowledge, Ji-A faces incredulity from her superiors and colleagues, as they seem to live in a different world, emphasizing a clash in perspectives and an exploration of alterity.

When approached by Lee-Rang, Lyon's half-brother in disguise, Ji-A sees through the façade, showcasing her perceptiveness. Her bus accident in episode one is averted by the intervention of a one-eyed tree deity, highlighting the supernatural elements intertwined with her life (24:20). Her act of kindness is repaid by the deity, reinforcing the theme of repayment of kindness and debt prevalent throughout *Tale of the Nine-Tailed* and *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938*. Taluipa references the concept, asking, "Didn't you say foxes repay kindness no matter what?" (37:46), extending the idea beyond foxes to encompass deities and other supernatural beings fuelled by the

same principle. Sinju characterizes them as “favor-returning machines” in episode two(52:38), highlighting the intricate web of fate and reciprocity. The antagonists, Ki Yuri and Lee Rang derive enjoyment from others’ misfortunes, driven by their traumatic past experiences of being abandoned and abused in childhood. Lee Rang resorts to twisted methods to fulfill the wishes of strange men. The narrative subtly portrays non-human beings as morally superior to humans, further contributing to the exploration of alterity within the story.

The mechanism of the after-life border control challenges conventional modalities of the soul’s passage in Western mythology. In a departure from established norms, the husband of Taluipa is observed delivering briefings to deceased souls through a PowerPoint presentation in Season One, episode two(49:12/20:15 to21:11). Furthermore, there is a discourse on the reconfiguration of workdays, providing viewers with insights that encourage identification and validation of the underlying belief system.

Supernatural beings in the series, such as Snail Bride (a snail operating a traditional restaurant in the first series and a boutique shop in the second) and Koo Sin Ju (a character with the ability to communicate with animals, practicing as a veterinary doctor), engage with economic, and political matters. They actively seek to integrate into the human world rather than exploit their power to dominate the anthropocene. This dynamic showcases how fantasy serves as a tool for fostering not only understanding but also sustainable living. The fantasy realm becomes an intersectional juncture for understanding diverse identities, whether it be a deity bound to a tree(ep2,57:10) or a human serving as a vessel for a demon (Ji ah). This exploration becomes a gateway to the alterity discourse within the series.

When examining antagonists like Bulgasari (the legendary creature that feeds on nightmares, portrayed as a minor demon following orders), Lee Rang, or the fortune teller, Imugi, the serpent, their subjugation and hostility are evident. However, the dichotomy between good and evil blurs when these antagonists are portrayed in their vulnerable states. Lee Rang’s anger, rooted in a sense of abandonment, undergoes transformation as he transcends apathy,

ultimately sacrificing his life for the sake of his brother. This intricate portrayal adds depth to the alterity discourse, inviting viewers to reconsider traditional notions of villainy and explore the complexities of character motivations within the series. When considered the potential and drive for evil humans surpass the supernatural as seen in the series. The abduction of Jiah's parents in Season One was identified as a human's doing. In episode 6, the magistrate informs Jiah and Yeon that the man who sought help to arrange the accident "smelled human" with a faint imprint of mukhyeong, the tattoo that marks criminals on his forehead (33:58). A more disturbing echo of brutality of the human world is unveiled in the story of Saetani in Season two, episode three which mentions of Yeommae ritual performed by humans to practice divination by starving a child (30:35).

Alterity discourse examines the perception of "otherness" and the acknowledgment of differences between oneself and others. This concept, intertwined with the portrayal of otherness and divergence, plays a significant role in both series, crafting a multifaceted depiction of mythical creatures and supernatural entities. It speaks to the harmonious interdependence of both worlds. In episode 6, Yeon and Ji-ah engage in a conversation about summer. Yeon expresses his love for summer, citing the freedom from the need to check on everyone. He highlights the simplicity and steadiness with which every tree and flower receives sunlight, rain, and wind in his forest as the mountain God (59:59). However, this balance is disrupted when he falls for a human, abandoning his duty in pursuit of her reincarnated life. The theme of equity is emphasized in the animal kingdom, contrasting with Ji-ah's observation of the cityscape, governed by survival capacity. She notes, "It is impossible to get a fair share of sunlight in the city. The amount of sunlight you get differs depending on your housing situation. For both people and plants, those who get more sunlight will always grow taller" (59:31). This prompts contemplation on whether she refers to sunlight and plant growth or if she alludes to how one's purchasing capacity dictates individual or collective growth. The series underlines the grim reality of a small fraction of powerful elite corporates controlling the masses, portraying economic imbalance as both a ground reality and a thematic concern

in the life of a journalist. The stark disparity between the unbalanced human world and the harmonious non-human world serves as an interesting contrast, inviting viewers to reflect on societal structures and power dynamics within the narrative.

In the second series, we see Lee Yeon catapulted back in time to 1938, where he crosses paths again with Ryu Hong Joo who was formerly a guardian spirit of the western mountain. She is now the owner of a high-end restaurant in the capital city of Gyeongseong. During this journey, he encounters his younger brother, Lee Rang, and another former guardian spirit and once-friend, Cheon Moo Young who has now turned hostile to Lee Yeon. The alterity elements in this narrative involve a temporal and spatial shift, introducing a clash between different time periods and the challenges faced by the characters: The act of the Masked Man escaping through a door that transports him to 1938 introduces an alterity element related to time. The sudden jump from the present time to the historical context of 1938 creates a contrast between different eras, showcasing a temporal alterity that adds complexity to the storyline. Lee Yeon's situation, where he has a mere sixteen hours to locate the crystal and return to the present time, adds a sense of urgency and tension to the narrative. The time constraint creates a unique set of challenges for the characters, emphasizing the alterity between the past and present. The characters must navigate a different temporal reality with its own rules and obstacles. The quest to locate the crystal in the past serves as a central plot point. The crystal likely holds significance or power, and the characters must navigate a historical setting unfamiliar to them. The pursuit of this mystical object adds a layer of alterity as characters interact with the past in their quest for a solution. The use of a door as a portal to transport characters across time underscores the alterity between different dimensions or spaces. The door becomes a symbolic bridge connecting disparate periods, highlighting the fantastical elements and the coexistence of different realities within the narrative.

The Japanese colonizers played a significant role in shaping the narrative of *Tale of the Nine-Tailed 1938*. This historical context adds layers of complexity to the storyline as characters navigate the

challenges imposed by colonial rule. Within this oppressive backdrop, a myriad of demons and deities come to life, each contributing to the intricate web of supernatural elements in the series. These beings, drawn from East Asian folklore, bring their powers, motives, and conflicts into the tumultuous historical setting, creating a rich and engaging narrative that blends fantasy with the harsh realities of the past.

The alterity elements are enhanced with the arrival of “Shinigami Mercenaries” and their orders to capture “Joseon demons”. This introduces a distinct separation between different supernatural beings. The use of terms like “Shinigami” (death gods) and “Joseon demons” highlights a diverse array of entities with unique characteristics, reflecting the alterity between these mystical beings. The indigenous gods protesting at Myoyeonggak in Season two episode eight further adds to the alterity discourse (18:13). These gods represent another facet of the supernatural realm, and their protests suggest a divergence in perspectives or conflicts within the non-human entities. The presence of indigenous gods challenges the conventional understanding of divine beings in the series. These gods, associated with everyday objects like wells, pots, and pans, defy the stereotypical grandeur often attributed to divine beings. This challenges viewers to broaden their understanding of what constitutes the notion of “divine”.

The gambling event in episode eight where the bet is on lifespan instead of money introduces a unique element of alterity (45:05). This concept transcends typical human concerns and delves into the supernatural, emphasizing a different set of values and stakes for these beings. The alteration of currency from money to lifespan underscores the distinct nature of their existence. Lee Rang’s changing expression during the gambling event indicates a shift in emotional dynamics. This personal transformation aligns with the alterity theme as it reflects the complex inner lives and experiences of supernatural beings. It suggests that these entities, despite their fantastical nature, undergo emotional and existential struggles.

With the host of indigenous gods present in the second series, one gets introduced to the alterity element between the ancient, nature-

bound deities and the rapidly evolving modern world. The clash reflects the struggle of ancient beings to fit into contemporary society. The god of wood stoves represents a traditional deity unable to adapt to the changing times. The God of wood stoves embodies a deity associated with the hearth and home, representing a connection to ancient traditions and domestic rituals. Wood stoves historically played a crucial role in households for heating and cooking, and this deity's domain was rooted in providing warmth and sustenance. The God's resistance to change might be a metaphor for the preservation of cultural heritage. In resisting adaptation, the deity could be seen as guarding the traditional ways of life and rituals, emphasizing the importance of holding onto cultural roots even in the face of societal transformations. In episode two, Season two, Lee Yeon tells her that, "Times have changed and will continue to do so. You must make a choice too. Learn to live in harmony or just disappear" (1:06:47).

The concept of "otherness" is evident in the portrayal of the indigenous gods. The indigenous gods, representing wells, pots, pans, and various elements of daily life in Joseon, embody a cultural otherness. Their existence and significance may be unfamiliar or underappreciated by modern society, emphasizing a cultural gap between traditional supernatural entities and contemporary perspectives. Taluipa's refusal to aid the indigenous gods suggests a conflict between the traditional deities and the changing times. The gods, rooted in ancient cultural practices, face the challenge of adapting to a world that may no longer value or understand their roles. This cultural otherness becomes a source of tension and struggle for survival. The summoning of Shinigami demons from Japan introduces an external otherness, representing a foreign and potentially hostile force. The arrival of these demons disrupts the established order of the indigenous gods, emphasizing the vulnerability of traditional entities in the face of external influences. The arrival of Shinigami introduces a geopolitical dimension to the narrative. It emphasizes the presence of external forces, marking a distinction between Joseon and its neighboring country. This geopolitical otherness adds layers of tension and conflict, contributing to the series' exploration of alterity in a broader historical context. The Shinigami demons, originate from Japanese folklore and

therefore bring with them a cultural otherness. Their presence challenges the cultural and spiritual landscape of Joseon, introducing elements that may be unfamiliar and potentially threatening to the indigenous gods and the established order. This cultural clash amplifies the alterity discourse by highlighting differences in belief systems and mythologies. In episode nine, the Shingami enter room number 404 as their allotted room. Viewers would be aware that in web development and internet culture, “404” is commonly associated with the HTTP 404 error, indicating that the requested webpage is not found. This association could symbolize a hidden or elusive nature of the Shinigami, residing in a space that is not easily accessible or known to others. Much like encountering a 404 error on the internet signifies the unavailability or invisibility of a webpage, the Shinigami may exist in a realm or space not easily accessible or known to ordinary beings. This inaccessibility aligns with the concept of alterity, emphasizing the distinctiveness and separation of the Shinigami from the known world.

Yeon, as a former mountain god, represents a bridge between the human and supernatural realms. His intervention in the conflict reflects an attempt to mediate between the otherness of the indigenous gods and the challenges posed by external threats. Yeon’s actions highlight the complex dynamics between different supernatural entities. The indigenous gods symbolize not only aspects of daily life but also the intangible cultural heritage of Joseon. Their plight and the external threats they face symbolize the broader challenges of preserving cultural identity in the face of otherness, whether from within or outside their cultural context. The indigenous gods’ fear of extinction adds a poignant layer to the alterity discourse. Their struggle for survival, both against changing times and external threats, highlights the vulnerability and impermanence of divine beings. This challenges conventional narratives where gods are often portrayed as eternal and invincible.

In conclusion, the exploration of alterity in the fantasy realms of *Tale of the Nine Tailed* and its historical counterpart *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938* transcends conventional narratives, delving into the rich tapestry of cultural, supernatural, and temporal otherness. The seamless interweaving of mythical creatures, deities, and human

characters creates a complex and eclectic portrayal of diverse identities and forces viewers to confront the boundaries between the known and the unknown. Both series offer a profound commentary on the harmonious interdependence of different worlds, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between the supernatural and human realms. The gumiho's presence in the narrative reflects cultural otherness, as they are situated within a rich tapestry of East Asian mythology. This cultural specificity adds depth to the alterity discourse, inviting viewers to appreciate the diversity of beliefs and folklore that may differ from Western mythological traditions.

Both series blurs the lines between good and evil concerning the gumiho characters. By depicting gumiho such as Lee Yeon and Lee Rang with complex motivations and vulnerabilities, the narratives challenge simplistic notions of morality. This portrayal underscores the multifaceted nature of alterity, urging viewers to question preconceived notions about mythical creatures. Through the lens of alterity, the narratives challenge traditional dichotomies of good versus evil, portraying antagonists in their vulnerable states and blurring the lines between morality and personal history. The characters, from Lee Yeon's journey of self-discovery to Nam Ji-A's resilience in the face of the non-real, serve as conduits for viewers to navigate the intricate landscapes of alterity. The character arcs of individuals in the series often involve transformation and transcendence. Lee Rang's journey, for instance, exemplifies how a character can evolve beyond initial portrayals of mischief or malevolence, challenging stereotypes and offering a comprehensive perspective on alterity. The indigenous gods in *Tale of the Nine Tailed 1938* further highlight the challenges of cultural otherness, presenting a commentary on the clash between tradition and modernity. The fantastical elements, such as the supernatural beings engaging in economic, political, and existential concerns, underscore the potential for fantasy to serve as a tool for fostering understanding of other worlds and otherness. The series acts as an intersectional juncture, allowing for the exploration of alterity discourse within the context of diverse identities, whether embodied in a deity bound to a woodstove or a human utilized as a demon's vessel. As the characters navigate a world filled with oppressive



Japanese colonizers, myriad demons, and indigenous gods struggling for survival, the alterity discourse becomes a lens through which viewers can reflect on societal dynamics, cultural shifts, and the timeless struggle between tradition and progress. Through alterity, these series illuminate the threads connecting diverse worlds. It challenges preconceptions and beckons viewers to embark on a journey beyond the mundane into the realms of imagination and introspection.

## References

- Fisher, M. (2022, June 27). *The Fox Within the Woman: Legends of the Nine Tailed Fox*. Martini Fisher. <https://martinifisher.com/2022/06/27/legends-of-the-nine-tailed-fox/>
- Frass, C. (2014, October 16). *Wanderlust*. <https://sites.psu.edu/frassrcrlblog/2014/10/16/eastern-folklore-and-the-nine-tailed-fox/>
- Gillis, A. S. (2022, March 8). *404 error*. WhatIs.com.
- M. (2021, October 21). *Korean Wave (Hallyu) - Rise of Korea's Cultural Economy & Pop Culture*. Martin Roll. <https://martinroll.com/resources/articles/asia/korean-wave-hallyu-the-rise-of-koreas-cultural-economy-pop-culture/>
- Monster of the week: Kitsune. (2016, August 10). The Supernatural Fox Sisters. <https://thesupernaturalfoxsisters.com/2015/01/10/monster-of-the-week-kitsune/>
- Shin-hyo, K., & Nam-hyung, J. (Directors). (2020). Tale of the Nine Tailed [Television series]. Netflix.
- Shin-hyo, K., & Nam-hyung, J. (Directors). (2023). Tale of the Nine Tailed [Television series]. Amazon Prime Video.
- Soompi Forums. (2021, November 1). <https://forums.soompi.com/topic/467955-drama->

**Kairali K.K**

Part time Research Scholar & Assistant Professor

Department of English

Sree Sankara College Kalady

Pin: 683574

Email: [kairalisureshssc@gmail.com](mailto:kairalisureshssc@gmail.com)

Ph: +91 9495229746

ORCID: 0009-0003-1307-7963