

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

Korean drama, or more popularly known as K-drama, is a television series in Korean language. Far before Korean Drama became something popular globally, it had a long history which contributed to the birth of the Korean Wave. According to KOCIS, an official government website of Korean culture, Korean dramas have been around since 1950. *The Gates of Heavens* was the first ever Korean drama released in 1956, published by Korea's first TV station, HLKZ-TV broadcast. (KOCIS, 2020). In December 1961 as KBS TV began to operate, it aired the *The Friday Stage Series* and *I Want to Be Human (Nado Ingani Doeryeonda)*. As more households had televisions in their house in 1970, more K- dramas were produced highlighting the difficulties of everyday life in contemporary society or during the historical period of Japanese rule in the Korean war. In 1980, the themes of Korean drama became more diverse alongside the color added to the television. However, K-drama started to pave the way for the Korean wave in the 1990. (KOCIS, 2020). In the 1990s the Korean broadcasting industry adapted new developments in satellite technology and interactive cable systems that led to the increasing investment for Korean drama. The rapidly growing development of Korean drama created a term called Hallyu in the mid-1990 or we might know as The Korean Wave (KCCUK, 2008). Hallyu, is a term which describes the increasing international spread of South Korean cultural products, which includes television programs, fashion, pop music, smartphones, and even online games. China was among the first countries to contribute to the birth of the Korean Wave phenomenon, followed by the Japanese audiences who were watching *What Is Love (1997)* and *Winter Sonata (2002)*. Though these two countries were the first two which contributed to the birth of Hallyu, other Southeast Asian nations have also increased imports of K-drama due to its regional popularity and the demand of local audiences. (Ju, 2018). The most hit drama during the era was MBC's 1994 *Jealousy*, starring Choi-Sujong and Choi- Jin Sil. The popularity of K-drama has led many Asian viewers to deeply relate to the feeling of enjoying Korean ways of life, style of living, values, and appearances. (Ju, 2018). Currently, Korean dramas are getting more exposure and popularity in the global market through streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, Viu, and many more. Since 2018, Korean television programs, including Korean dramas, variety shows, and animation have been sold for remake as well by foreign broadcasters. The major buyer for

Korea TV format these days are Chinese broadcasting companies. In addition, Hollywood production companies have also contributed as buyers of several K-drama formats in the thriller and medical genre, such as *The Good Doctor*, *Nine*, *God's Gift: 14 days*, and *My Love from Another Star*. (Ju, 2018) The long history and wide spreading popularity of Korean drama and its rising popularity highlights the developing quality in the content and storyline which were formed by the culture, making it something worth analyzing.

Korean dramas present various genres from romance, comedy, melodrama, thriller, and many more. However, during 2015 until 2023, romance, comedy, and drama was dominating the production of Korean Drama (Sulianta, 2024). During those years as well, Korean dramas which received a hit drama label were romance comedy dramas. For instance, *Descendants of The Sun* (2016) with 8.2/10 rating on IMDb and 21 award wins, *Strong Woman Do Bong Soon* (2017) with 8.2/10 rating on IMDb and 4 award wins, *Crash Landing on You* (2019) with 8.7/10 rating on IMDb and 4 award wins, and many more. In 2024, *Queen of Tears*, a Romantic comedy drama with 5 award wins, became the most watched romance drama in 2024 with 40 million views and 653.9 million hours of watch time. The drama itself received a point between 8-10/10 in several websites such as IMDb and My Drama List, even 4.5/5 in Google reviews. Taking the answers from the question "Why do you watch Korean dramas?" on Quora, people mentioned about the emotional feels, the story telling, and the visuals. However, they also mentioned the acting skills of the cast. IMDb, an International Movie Database under the Amazon company, has also recorded the popularity of *Queen of Tears*. Taking the information from IMDb, *Queen of Tears* is written, produced, and played by people who were reputable in the South Korean film industry. Firstly, *Queen of Tears* is written by Park Ji Eun, a screenwriter who is popular for writing romantic comedies in Korean dramas. According to Drama Wiki, She received several recognitions and awards since 2009 such as, MBC Drama Award, KBS Drama Writer Award, The Best Screenwriter in the 5th Korean Drama Awards 2012, and many more. Not only receiving various awards, Park Ji Eun is also famous for writing powerful female main characters. Such as Yoon Se-ri from *Crash Landing on You*, and Cheon Song- Yi from *My Love from The Stars*. Moreover, *Queen of Tears* was produced by CJ ENM's Studio Dragon, an entertainment and media company. Their official website of Studio dragon also stated that they produced other high ranked and watched Korean dramas, such as *Crash Landing on You*, *It's Okay to Not be Okay*, *Lovely Runner*, and *Vincenzo*. Additionally, top global korean movies such as *The Parasite* and *Past Lives* were also produced by CJ ENM.

The popularity of a Korean drama is not only due to the popularity of the genre only, but also the characteristics of its actress and actors as well. Sukendi (2023) mentioned that there is a link between the credibility of the actor or actress portraying a K-drama and the viewers' happiness with the show. The attractive visual appearance, good personality, skills and expertise of the actor or actress when playing the role contributed to the satisfaction in watching a K-drama (p. 17). The main cast of *Queen of Tears*, Kim Soo Hyun and Kim Ji Won, were also one of the highly reputable actors in South Korea. According to VNExpress online newspaper and IMDb, Kim Soo Hyun is one of the highly paid actors in South Korea, with a rate of \$165.000 USD per episode and \$117 million USD of net worth. He had received 23 awards and 16 nominations. Before starring in *Queen of Tears*, he was also a cast member of numerous popular dramas such as *It's Okay to Not be Okay*, *My Love from Another Star*, and *Dream High*. Meanwhile Kim Ji Won, who played as the main female lead, Hong Hae In, in *Queen of Tears*, has also starred in several popular Korean dramas such as, *Descendants of the sun*, *The Heirs*, and *My Liberation Diary*. According to *Lifestyle Asia Article*, she reportedly earns between \$17.000 - \$84.000 per episode. Kim Ji Won also received 5 awards and 4 nominations in her career. Both of these actors have received great reviews for their acting throughout their career. Especially in *Queen of tears*, many people gave a 5 star in google reviews and describe both actors acting as "versatile" and "remarkable."

The story of *Queen of Tears* began with Baek Hyun Woo and Hong Hae In being interviewed separately by the media and told them about the story of their love life. Baek Hyun Woo and Hong Hae In relationship started when Hong Hae In applied as an intern in her father's company, Queens group. Their relationship developed into a romantic relationship which led to Baek Hyun Woo proposing to Hong Hae In, whose in this story had a higher position in terms of wealth. However, after walking their married life and living with Hae In's family, Hyun Woo felt the pressure of living in a conglomerate family where he often received degradation and having his wife and in-laws as his boss. Baek Hyun Woo struggled to face his wife who has a higher position in terms of work and wealth. This leads to lack of communication and eventually strain in their marriage after Hong Hae In experiences a miscarriage. However, the story took a turn when Hong Hae In had a chronic brain tumor, and her family got fraud, leading them to lose their wealth. Hong Hae In who once worked as the director of the Queens Group, temporarily lived with her in-laws and helped her cook in the kitchen as well as wait for her husband to come home. Baek Hyun Woo and Hong Hae In faced the trials to turn her family condition back and at last fixed their strained marriage. The drama indeed ends with a happy ending where Hae In's

illness is cured and their marriage is reconciled, but it also implicitly mentions the issues of gender roles between male and female.

The main character's type of relationship is not very typical in Korean culture. According to a study by Clark W. Sorensen, it is stated that "fathers tend to work long hours and are often absent from the home, but mothers most often remain at home. Mothers' role involves domestic labor, rearing of children, and frequently home-based income-earning activities as well" (1994, p. 26). However, in the story both Hong Hae In and Baek Hyun Woo work under The Queens Group where Hong Hae In and her family are the directors. In the drama, Hong Hae In is in a higher position in the corporate world than Baek Hyun Woo, which was unlikely to be the expected gender roles in Korea. Moreover, Baek Hyun Woo is one of Hong Hae In's and his in-laws' employees from the law team of Queens Group. Their life outside of work was also mostly dependable on several home assistants to cook and clean the house while both of them were busy doing their work.

Gender role is what people "do" when they attribute a circumscribed meaning to male and female (Goktan, 2021). It is how an individual identifies himself or herself socially. This identity is a social construct and is based on how the individual views his or her role in the society. Korean society is deeply rooted in Confucianism values where it promotes patriarchal family structure where there are different gender roles between male and female (Goktan, 2021). Individuals with masculine values that enable them to differentiate gender roles for male and female are more acceptable in Korean culture (Goktan, 2021).

Thus, it was noticeable how the two main characters do not meet the standards of the expected Korean gender roles. This raises questions about the influence and relevance of the Korean gender roles. Moreover, the topic of Korean gender roles is also a real-life issue of gender inequality experienced by Korean society. Many women in Korea experienced challenges of navigating multiple roles where they had to enter the working environment due to modernization and the responsibility to provide for their lives yet still being expected to shoulder childcare and house duties (Jimin, 2024). Jimin also stated that, "South Korea ranks poorly on global gender equality scales, as incidents of violence against women – including domestic violence, sexual harassment at work, rape, and murder – have become increasingly common" (p. 22). Therefore, analyzing the expected gender roles in the Korean drama *Queen of Tears* will enable us to be aware of the norms that exist and put on a certain gender in the Korean society and how people have the decision to conform to the expected gender norms or to not conform.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

In this research, I aim to investigate what specific social expectations of Korean gender roles that the main characters face are, as well as, how they respond to those expectations.

1.3 Purpose of The Study

Through this research, I want to reveal the specific social expectations of Korean gender roles that the main characters face, as well as, to show the way they respond to those expectations.

1.4 Significance of The Study

The analysis of social expectations of gender roles the main characters of *Queen of Tears* face, as well as the way they respond to the social expectations is an important topic to delve deeper since Korean culture is heavily affected by traditional gender roles. Not to mention, the issues regarding pressure of gender roles are also real-life issues faced by Korean society that manifested in gender inequalities for women. By analyzing the expectations these characters face and their choices to conform or nonconform offers insight about the influence of traditional gender roles into the modern society of Korea.

This study also addresses a significant gap as existing studies about *Queen of Tears* mainly focus on female representation and intercultural communication. Identifying how Baek Hyun Woo and Hong Hae In response to the social expectations serves how individuals have the choice to fulfill or to refuse the social expectations. Thus, this study provides an essential contribution to understanding the gender portrayals in popular culture.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

In this study, I will be using the theory of gender roles to analyze both the social expectations of gender roles in the *Queen of Tears*, as well as the main characters' response towards the expectations. To analyze the social expectation of roles in the *Queen of Tears*, it is important to understand how gender roles have been operating within the society. This conceptual framework will provide ideas on how social expectations of gender roles shape self identity.

Gender Roles in Korea

Gender and sex is a different concept. While sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics which define a human male and female, gender is a social construct of roles,

behaviors, expressions, that are developed through the process of socialization. Gender influences how people perceive themselves and others as well as how they behave.

Gender posits roles, expectations, and hierarchies within them. A role is defined as the behavior that is expected within an individual in a given social position. For those identified as male at birth, society often expected a set of characteristics of masculinity. Conversely, for individuals identified as females at birth, society expects femininity characteristics. Traditionally, it often establishes hierarchical structures where one gender, male, holds more power status and expectations. Thus, gender roles are the social and cultural expectations, behaviors, and attributes that a society associates with being male or female.

In Korean society, the traditional concept of gender roles still operates within the society. This happened due to how Koreans adopt Chinese Confucian beliefs that promote patriarchal structures in the family. Santos & Harrell (2017) mentioned that “Chinese classic patriarchal structures contain two major axes of both prestige and power in domestic relations: a generational axis and a gender axis. In terms of prestige, on the generational axis, elders had prestige over juniors, and on the gender axis, males had prestige over females” (p. 11). Furthermore, they mentioned that, “Confucian maxims held that a woman should always be subordinate to a man—to her father when young, to her husband when adult, and to her son when old—and at the same time that the primary obligations of a son were to both his parents” (2017, p. 11). Thus, these traditional values of gender roles are adopted by the Korean and operate within the Korean society.

The traditional gender roles, as mentioned previously, shows a distinct role between man and woman. According to Yoo, “traditional gender roles suggest distinct roles of men and women, such as the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the homemaker” (2021, p. 2). In order to understand further about gender roles, here are the breakdown explanation of male and female gender roles:

1. Female Gender Roles in Korea

A Woman's role is to be able to submit to the husband, be the mother of his children, and manage the household. The traditional value suggests that women only played a role in continuing their husbands' families and clans, joining her husband's family, and her domestic duties included serving him and his parents (Chung, 2015). This shows that being an ideal Korean woman means that they should be passive, chaste, an obedient daughter-in-law, dedicated mother, and devoted wife.

The idea of women to submit to her husband is believed to be the ones that uphold the family's harmony as mentioned by Jimin (2024), "and women are thus required to subsume their personal interests for the sake of maintaining familial harmony and upholding the family's social standing." Moreover, in the *Analects for Women* by Song Ruo Zhao, an influential Scholar that discusses the roles of a traditional woman, mentions about the ways a woman should obey her husband. Song mentioned, "Listen carefully to and obey whatever your husband tells you," furthermore she says, "Don't imitate those shrewish wives who love to clash head on with their husbands all the time." This highlights how a woman is required to submit to her husband.

A woman's role is also to be a mother who raises the children. They are expected to be the primary caregivers for children, the elderly, and other family members. Moreover, the responsibility to teach the children is also put upon women as mothers. The passages by Song mentioned, "Most all families have sons and daughters. As they grow and develop, there should be a definite sequence and order in their education. But the authority/responsibility to instruct them rests solely with the mother" furthermore she writes, "Mothers who fail to raise their children correctly as if they had raised pigs and rats!"

Besides being inferior by submission, women are often in charge of house duties. This idea is mentioned by Lee & Hsiang, "A woman, confined to the realm of *nei* (inside), is essentially a functional vessel for household management." Moreover, the passages in the *Analects for Women* by Song Ruo Zhao gives clear instructions on how a woman should manage the house. Song mentioned, "To be a woman one must learn to make it a regular practice, at the fifth watch when the cock crows, to rise and dress. After cleaning your face and teeth, fix your hair and makeup simply. Then go to the kitchen, light the fire, and start the morning meal. Scrub the pots and wash the pans; boil the tea water and cook the gruel. Plan your meals according to the resources of the family and the seasons of the year, making sure that they are fragrant and tasty, served in the appropriate dishes and in the proper manner at the table." Thus, this idea shaped the expectation of women to be the homemaker whose responsibilities lie in being a mother and taking care of the household duties.

2. Male Gender Roles in Korea

The notion of an ideal Korean woman juxtaposes the gender roles expected from Korean men. While Korean women are demanded to be passive and obedient, Korean men are expected to play a more active role by providing and leading the family. These roles make the existence of being a breadwinner and head of the family lies to men or husband.

The traditional gender roles values suggest that the role of man is to provide for the family. It includes tasks such as, protecting his family and making it prosper, and the women's role is to take care of her husband and educate her children (Midha et al., 2008). This requires man to be the breadwinner as stated by Zheng, "a man should work outside of the house, gain resources for the family to live on, and make a difference in the society" (2014. p. 5)

Besides being the breadwinner that provides for the family, the role of man is to be the decision maker as the head of the family for a man is expected to have a superior position in the family. This is again mentioned by Zheng where he says, "only if a woman and a man stay in their own place (within or outside), the family can function well. It also requires women to be obedient, docile and inferior to men, and men to be superior, leading and in power" (2014, p. 36). Song also mentions that "the husband is the master of the household. The husband is to be firm, the wife soft." This further suggests how the husband, as the head of the family, must be able to firmly decide on family matters.

However, changing social and cultural factors shift the traditional gender roles ideas. Korean values have experienced rapid changes due to modernization and globalization that happened. South Korea was starting to implement several reform measures which were under the influence of global western ideas. This led to a more individualised behavior which was criticised for "neglecting traditional moral values." The decrease of the traditional value also can be seen from the data of women in the working field. 54% of the women in South Korea are now part of the working population. Seeing the contribution of women in the workforce, it can be seen that the traditional gender roles are starting to be changed with the egalitarian gender roles, where both men and women contribute equally to family income and household duties, including childcare. This is mentioned by Yoo (2021) in which he writes, "nontraditional gender roles refer to egalitarian roles whereby both men and women contribute equally to family income and household duties, including childcare" (p. 2).

Even though Korean gender roles of women have changed, the expectations of a woman to do the household duties and childcare remains strong. This is supported by Yoon (2023), who conducted a survey upon dual earners families in Korea. Based on her study, she writes that a

relatively high proportion of respondents agree with the traditional gender specific roles of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. Moreover, the young population still identifies and appreciates that the traditional value of gender roles has been able to adapt to a large extent to the modern world, proving that until this day traditional gender roles still influences individuals in modern society (Szymczak et al., 2022).

In summary, gender roles is a social construction that shapes how an individual perceives themselves and others. Gender roles also influence how Korean society still operates within the traditional gender roles where it promotes a patriarchal structure where man as a breadwinner and woman as a subordinate role who is in charge of house duties and child rearing. Thus, using this conceptual framework will provide a thorough analysis of the gender roles expectations in *Queen of Tears'* main characters.

1.6 Organization of The Study

This research is organized into several sections to provide a comprehensive analysis of social expectation of Korean gender roles and possible responses towards the expectation. The study will be sectioned into three chapters. Chapter one will provide a background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of study, and the theoretical framework. In addition, chapter two will provide a thorough analysis of Baek Hyun Woo and Hong Hae In regarding their social expectations of gender roles and their responses towards the expectation. Chapter three will provide a conclusion of the study as well as references.