

Kerry Lee: A Hero that Travels Through Time (Wen)

Popular entertainment mediates between political contexts and the ways in which the individual subjectivity experiences and performs feelings and interactions such as love and romance. In Korea, since the 2000s, national securitization, industrial modernization and political democratization have been accompanied by the expansion of popular media representations of changing class, gender, and intimate relations (Jones, 2006, Kendall, 2002; Kwak, 2012; Lee, 2011; Moon, 2005). Scholars now distinguish several prominent genres, including gangster action, romantic comedy, the historical drama, and the Korean blockbuster, all of which interact with South Asian, Western, and global counterparts (Banaji, 2010; Choi, 2010; Yang, 2008). Strikingly, contemporary film also saw the emergence of a hybrid genre of the time-travel romantic melodrama. More recently, this latter genre has entered mainstream television in the form of increasingly popular 'soap opera' series, notably: *Faith*, *Queen In-hymn's Man* and *Rooftop Prince* [See Images 1,2,3]. These time-traveling series feature a character traveling through time, usually between the present and ancient times. They also have a male protagonist in a love relationship who represents a 'heroic' figure, not so much as a function of divine descent but rather someone with idealized attractive qualities of strength and reliability among others (Trepavlov, 1995:42).

What are the implications of the portrayal of heroic agency in Korean romantic time-traveling television dramas for gendered agency and liberalization in Korean society? Since the narrative idea of a character traveling in time is an established one in world literature, I would want to begin by understanding some of its dramatic devices and philosophical implications (Wittenberg 2012). However, the bulk of my work will be on interpreting the culturally-specific character dynamics in the Korean dramas themselves.

My interest is in how romance and love are represented (Galician, 2001), and especially in how far the portrayal of heroism in these time-travel dramas renews or revises traditional cultural expectations of hyper-masculinity and feminine dependency (Kim, 2006, 2012). Why does this matter? Korean media tends to be more conservative when expressing love or romance for viewers, but it is still able to present a romantic character that viewers find desirable (Banaji, 2010). We also know that self-concept and self-esteem affects gender role conflicts and depression in Korean young people (Choi et al 2010, Lee & Park, 2012). Martin-Jones (2007) argues that time-travel films of the 2000s were expressions, in reaction to the IMF crises, of a 'compressed modernity' that connected conservative gender politics with economic renewal. Is this true for the time-traveling TV series?

I come to this topic from my own Korean background and desire to better understand the ongoing cultural changes – including the important and impactful roles of romantic genre -- that are occurring in Korea and Asia more generally. This project also aligns well with my major in International Studies, and generally relevant coursework such as Psychology. Crucially, next semester I will be taking Prof. Wen's CHSE 258, Gender & Mass Media in Asia. This course should set me up very well for my proposed research working with Prof. Wen. After I graduate, I hope to move on to graduate school, in international studies with an Asian focus. The skills I will learn will through researching about the Korean media will not only help me to become a better student, but will also expand my perspective on Asia.

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1. **Drama Faith:**
Translation: People and Love meet

2.



Drama Queen In-hymn's Man



3. Drama Dr. Jin