REPRESENTATION OF ALPHA FEMALE CHARACTER IN THE KOREAN DRAMA QUEEN OF TEARS

Marcella Vyskarrin Hanumuty[1], Triyono Lukmantoro[2],

[123]Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Study, Diponegoro University

Email:marcellavyskarrin @gmail.com

International Undergraduate Program of Communication Science Study, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Diponegoro University

Jl. Prof Soedarto, SH Tembalang Semarang, Post Box 1269, Telephone (024) 7465407,

Facsimile (024)7467405, Page: https://fisip.undip.ac.id, Email: fisip@undip.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of alpha female characters in the Korean drama Queen of Tears, focusing on how the drama challenges or reinforces traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society. Using John Fiske's semiotics approach and the critical social science paradigm, this research analyzes selected scenes to uncover symbolic portrayals of female leadership, independence, and power dynamics. The findings reveal that Queen of Tears portrays its female protagonist as a strong, confident leader who defies societal expectations while also facing resistance from male characters and traditional family structures. This depiction highlights the ongoing negotiation between modern feminist ideals and deeply rooted patriarchal values. The study explains that while the drama offers a progressive representation of women, it still reflects cultural compromises that align with Korean and Asian gender norms. The implications of this research extend to media studies and gender discourse, emphasizing the role of media in shaping perceptions of female empowerment. This study provides value by contributing to feminist media studies and offering insights into the evolving portrayal of women in contemporary Asian media, particularly in the globalized context of K-dramas.

Keywords: *Alpha Female, Korean Drama, Gender Representation, Semiotics, Partriarchy*

ABSTRAKSI

Penelitian ini meneliti representasi karakter perempuan alfa dalam drama Korea Queen of Tears, dengan fokus pada bagaimana drama ini menantang atau memperkuat peran gender tradisional dalam masyarakat patriarki. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotika John Fiske dan paradigma ilmu sosial kritis, penelitian ini menganalisis beberapa adegan terpilih untuk mengungkap gambaran simbolis dari kepemimpinan perempuan, kemandirian, dan dinamika kekuasaan. Temuan-temuannya mengungkapkan bahwa Queen of Tears menggambarkan tokoh utama perempuannya sebagai pemimpin yang kuat dan percaya diri yang menentang ekspektasi masyarakat sekaligus menghadapi perlawanan dari karakter laki-laki dan struktur keluarga tradisional. Penggambaran ini menyoroti negosiasi yang sedang berlangsung antara cita-cita feminis modern dan nilai-nilai patriarki yang telah mengakar kuat. Penelitian ini menjelaskan bahwa meskipun drama ini menawarkan representasi perempuan yang progresif, drama ini masih mencerminkan kompromi budaya yang selaras dengan norma-norma gender Korea dan Asia. Implikasi dari penelitian ini meluas ke studi media dan wacana gender, yang menekankan peran media dalam membentuk persepsi pemberdayaan perempuan. Penelitian ini memberikan nilai dengan memberikan kontribusi pada studi media feminis dan menawarkan wawasan tentang penggambaran perempuan yang terus berkembang di media kontemporer Asia, khususnya dalam konteks globalisasi K-drama.

Kata kunci: *Perempuan Alfa, Drama Korea, Representasi Gender, Semiotika, Partriarki*

INTRODUCTION

Background

The representation of women in media has undergone significant transformations over the years, particularly in the portrayal of female leadership and independence. The increasing visibility of "alpha female" characters in popular culture challenges conventional gender roles, especially in traditionally patriarchal societies. This study explores the representation of alpha female characters in the Korean drama Queen of Tears and its implications on gender discourse within Asian media.

Korean dramas (K-dramas) have gained global popularity and have significantly influenced cultural trends in countries like Indonesia, where they shape perceptions of relationships, gender roles, and societal norms (Saputra, 2024). Historically, female characters in K-dramas have often been depicted as passive, submissive, or dependent on male counterparts. These portrayals have reinforced patriarchal values that suggest women should prioritize domestic roles over professional aspirations. However, Queen of Tears presents a departure from these stereotypes by portraying its female protagonist, Hong Hae-in, as a confident, assertive leader who navigates personal and professional challenges in a male-dominated environment.

This shift in representation aligns with broader societal changes where women are increasingly occupying leadership roles in business and politics. However, this portrayal is not without resistance. Female characters who exhibit dominance and independence often face scrutiny, both within fictional narratives and in real-world cultural discourses. This study examines how Queen of Tears negotiates these tensions, simultaneously challenging and conforming to existing patriarchal structures in South Korea and beyond. Furthermore, it evaluates how these media portrayals resonate with Indonesian audiences, considering the nation's own deeply rooted gender norms.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on gender and media representation by analyzing the depiction of alpha female characters in Queen of Tears. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Queen of Tears construct the identity of an alpha female character within the framework of traditional Korean gender norms?

2. Does the drama challenge or reinforce patriarchal structures through its representation of female leadership?

3. How do Indonesian audiences interpret and engage with the alpha female portrayal in Queen of Tears in relation to their own cultural and social contexts?

By examining selected scenes from Queen of Tears, this study aims to provide insights into the evolving portrayal of female empowerment in media and its implications for gender discourse in Asian societies. It also seeks to explore how the intersection of

global and local cultural influences shapes audience perceptions of gender roles.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research is rooted in Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, which posits that media constructs meaning rather than simply reflecting reality (Hall, 1997). Representation is an active process where meanings are shaped by cultural and historical contexts, making media a powerful tool for influencing societal norms. By applying Hall's framework, this study examines how Queen of Tears encodes and decodes messages about female authority and power.

Additionally, the study applies a postcolonial feminist perspective to analyze how cultural and historical contexts shape the depiction of female empowerment in Queen of Tears (Tong, 2017). Postcolonial feminism challenges Western-centric feminist discourses by emphasizing the unique struggles faced by women in formerly colonized nations, where traditional gender roles remain deeply embedded within cultural and religious structures. This perspective is particularly relevant for analyzing Asian media, as it allows for an understanding of how gender portrayals are influenced by both indigenous cultural values and global feminist movements.

By employing John Fiske's semiotics approach, this research deciphers how visual symbols, dialogues, and narrative structures contribute to the representation of alpha female characters (Fiske, 2011). Fiske's approach categorizes meaning into three levels:
1. Reality Level – How the character's dress, speech, and behavior reflect real-life gender dynamics.
2. Representation Level – How cinematic techniques (such as camera angles, lighting, and framing) influence the portrayal of the alpha female character.
3. Ideological Level – The deeper social messages embedded in the narrative, which may reinforce or challenge existing power structures.

Indonesia provides a unique cultural setting to analyze gender representation in media due to its diverse ethnic traditions and deep-rooted patriarchal values. While religious teachings and societal norms often reinforce traditional gender roles, globalization and digital media have introduced alternative models of femininity that challenge these conventions (Bahlieda,

2015; World Health Organization, 2019). This study situates the discussion within the Indonesian context by exploring how audiences interpret the alpha female archetype in Queen of Tears and its potential impact on local gender norms.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using John Fiske's semiotic analysis to examine selected scenes from Queen of Tears. By analyzing signs, symbols, and dialogues within the drama, the study seeks to uncover how alpha female characters are represented and how they interact with prevailing gender ideologies. The research also incorporates critical social science methods to assess the broader societal implications of these portrayals. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive analysis of media representation and its influence on gender perceptions in contemporary Asian societies.

The research process consists of the following steps:
1. Scene Selection and Data Collection – Specific scenes that prominently feature the alpha female character will be selected based on their relevance to the research questions. The selection process will consider moments where the protagonist demonstrates leadership, faces resistance, or challenges gender norms.

2. Semiotic Analysis – Using Fiske's semiotic framework, the selected scenes will be analyzed at the reality, representation, and ideological levels. This will involve examining cinematographic techniques, dialogue, character interactions, and visual symbols.

3. Audience Interpretation – The study will include a discussion of how Indonesian audiences, through online discussions and academic literature, perceive the alpha female character. This component will provide insight into how local cultural contexts shape media reception.

4. Comparative Analysis – The findings will be compared to previous studies on gender representation in media to assess whether Queen of Tears aligns with or deviates from broader trends in feminist media studies.

This methodological approach ensures a nuanced understanding of how Queen of Tears contributes to the discourse on gender representation in media. It also highlights the dynamic interplay between cultural values, media narratives, and audience reception, providing valuable insights for scholars in media studies, gender studies, and cultural studies.

RESULTS

Gender Inequality in Leadership

The study demonstrates that Queen of Tears critiques the gender disparities that exist in both corporate and familial settings. Hong Hae-in, as the CEO of Queen's Department Store, navigates a male-dominated business environment where her authority is frequently questioned. She faces challenges from board members attempting to undermine her leadership and from male counterparts who dismiss her competence. This reflects broader societal trends in South Korea, where women in executive roles often encounter resistance and are subject to higher expectations than their male peers.

Alpha Female Leadership

Hong Hae-in's portrayal as a powerful and independent female leader disrupts traditional media stereotypes of women as passive or subordinate. She exhibits confidence, decisiveness, and resilience, characteristics typically associated with male leadership. However, her leadership is not solely defined by dominance; she also demonstrates empathy and responsibility toward her employees. This duality underscores the evolving representation of female leaders in media, moving beyond rigid dichotomies of strength versus compassion.

Challenges to Female Authority

Despite her competence and authority, Hong Hae-in faces continuous efforts to diminish her power. From corporate rivalries to familial pressures, she must navigate a landscape where women in leadership roles are often viewed as expendable. The study finds that her struggles align with the "glass cliff" phenomenon, wherein women are placed in high-risk leadership positions during crises, making them more susceptible to failure (Ryan, 2005). Additionally, her mother's disapproval and the betrayal by those closest to her illustrate the deeply embedded patriarchal structures that restrict female autonomy.

The Vulnerability of an Alpha Female

While Hong Hae-in is portrayed as confident and self-sufficient, the drama also presents her vulnerabilities, adding depth to her character. Her moments of emotional distress, particularly when dealing with her illness and personal struggles, reveal the psychological burden that comes with defying societal norms. This humanization of an alpha female character challenges the notion that strong women must suppress their

emotions, offering a more complex and realistic portrayal of female leadership.

CONCLUSION

The results indicate that Queen of Tears contributes to the discourse on gender and media representation by presenting a multifaceted depiction of an alpha female character. While the drama challenges patriarchal norms by showcasing a powerful female protagonist, it also reflects the societal constraints that continue to limit women's opportunities for leadership. The study underscores the role of media in shaping perceptions of gender roles and highlights the importance of nuanced storytelling in redefining female empowerment. Future research could further explore audience reception and cross-cultural interpretations of alpha female characters in media.

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