

## Original Paper

# An Analysis of the Aestheticization of Daily Life through Korean Dramas

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### **Abstract**

*In the current society with rapid economic development, the aestheticization of daily life is playing an increasingly prominent role. The popularity of Korean dramas in recent years is one manifestation of the aestheticization of daily life. Aspects such as the plot, characters, and the love portrayed in Korean dramas have caused a strong response among audiences, bringing higher aesthetic demands and psychological satisfaction. Some details often overlooked by audiences in daily life are artistically expressed in Korean dramas, enabling audiences to discover the “truth, goodness, and beauty” in life, prompting them to seek and cherish the present real life.*

### **Keywords**

*Korean dramas, aestheticization of daily life, plot, characters, love*

### **1. Introduction**

The aestheticization of daily life mainly focuses on the relationship between daily life and art. Scholars from Adorno, Benjamin to Baudrillard and Jameson have discussed and analyzed the concept of “the aestheticization of daily life”. This concept was first proposed as an aesthetic proposition from multiple perspectives such as communication, sociology, and literary theory by Mike Featherstone. In his 1990 book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, he elaborated on this proposition in detail and clearly defined “the aestheticization of daily life” as “a cultural phenomenon in which aesthetic activities go beyond the traditional aesthetic fields such as art and literature and gradually penetrate into daily life”. According to the current aesthetic characteristics in society, he further divided this concept into the aestheticization of daily life and the aestheticization of everyday life, and held a positive attitude towards both aspects, believing that it is beneficial for expanding the audience of art and promoting the

development of popular literature and art.

In the relevant research on aesthetics, Simmel believed that art should maintain its purity and independence, and the aesthetic art is separated from the ideology of daily life. Adorno believed that art is a negation of real things and adhered to the self-sufficiency of aesthetics. Kant put forward the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness, believing that beauty is a pure realm without any commodity form. However, in post-modernist theory, the boundary between art and life disappears, and aesthetic perception of art enters people's daily life. After the 1960s, Baudrillard believed that Western capitalism had entered a consumer society, where the production-oriented society would be dominated by consumption, with the main feature being symbolic consumption. People's consumption concept no longer focused on the use value of commodities but paid more attention to their symbolic value. At present, visual information has become the medium on the Internet, and art has entered people's daily life in a common way, further blurring the boundary between art and life. As a medium language, images make all art forms "visual" and turn them into visual symbols in our daily life. The themes of Korean dramas are derived from trivial details and small things in daily life, which are artistic expressions of daily life. Therefore, some plots of Korean dramas can always touch and inspire us, making our emotions fluctuate with the fates of the characters. They not only satisfy our psychological needs but also enable us to discover the beautiful things in life and learn to love and cherish everything in life.

## 2. Characters

Korean dramas are highly successful in shaping characters. Many protagonists in Korean dramas are ordinary people in daily life. They encounter numerous difficulties and setbacks, but instead of being devastated, they face life optimistically. Their passion for life and courage in love, as well as qualities like enthusiasm, bravery, kindness, and optimism, are often overlooked in real life. The perfect personalities of the characters in Korean dramas meet the psychological needs of the audience. The protagonists are always positive. In *The Heirs*, Cha Eun-sang played by Park Shin-hye is a workaholic. She lives with her mother and is a poor heir. However, she doesn't give up and faces life optimistically while working to support her family. In *Live*, the police officer Yeom Sang-soo played by Lee Kwang-soo has only his mother at home. He has to shoulder the family burden himself while his brother escapes to work abroad. He struggles desperately to get a stable job and finally becomes a police officer. He believes that no matter how hard life is, it doesn't matter. He just hopes to be assigned cases that can help him get promoted and achieve something. In *Half of It*, Han Seo-woo played by Chae Soo-bin is a classical sound engineer. After her parents died in a fire accident, her life and work were in an unstable state, but she still faces life optimistically and is proactive. These characters are impressive because they come from real life but are also idealized.

Moreover, in the portrayal of characters, the male and female protagonists in Korean dramas often have high-level looks. The male protagonists include Lee Dong-wook, Lee Joon-gi, Lee Jong-suk, Hyun Bin, Yeo Jin-goo etc., and the female protagonists include IU (Lee Ji-eun), Son Ye-jin, Song Hye-kyo, Jang Na-ra etc. The male protagonists are handsome, and the female protagonists are beautiful, which conforms to the common saying that “everyone has a love for beauty”. Therefore, most male-female protagonist combinations in current Korean dramas have good looks. These good-looking characters have become important symbols in Korean dramas. Capital constructs people’s demands and consumption desires by building symbolic values. For example, people are willing to buy star-same clothes because of the symbolic images of beauty and status created in the advertisements.

### 3. Plot

The plot is an important element in novels and also in film and television works. The plot settings in Korean dramas are closer to daily life, presenting the themes in a gentle and unhurried way. Reply 1988 centers around family affection, friendship, and love. It tells the story of five families living in Ssangmundong, Dobong-gu, Seoul. Each family has a child born in 1971. Deok-sun, Sun-woo, Dong-ryong, Choi Taek, and Jung-hwan are good friends who grew up together. In 1988, they were 18 years old, sharing common interests, idols, and ambiguous feelings. In that innocent era, they created many beautiful memories. In this drama, the roles of the characters are balanced, and no one is the absolute protagonist. The emotions are also evenly distributed, and no one is the absolute winner in life. There are no extreme emotions, no ups-and-downs in the fates of the characters, and no strong plot twists. However, it deeply touches many audiences. The ordinary daily life events in the drama are filled with emotions, allowing the audience to truly feel the warmth and kindness from their relatives. The classic plot devices such as the unchanging relationship of the parents and the guessing game of the ideal husband, the bleating-like voice, the classic “confessing love” kiss scene, and the classic lines in each episode have left a deep impression on the audience. Moreover, this drama incorporates Korean cultural elements such as food, folk customs, clothing, and music into ordinary life details, bringing a sense of cultural novelty to the audience. The popularity of Korean dramas has enabled Korean food, clothing, cosmetics etc. to gradually open up the market in China through the medium of Korean dramas, thus affecting our daily life. As a result, there are many so-called Korean-drama-same food stores and beauty stores.

### 4. Love

Love is the eternal theme of Korean dramas. The love portrayed in Korean dramas endows the love in our daily life with a more beautiful and pure meaning. Many Korean dramas present love tragedies. In Death’s Hymn, Kim Woo-jin played by Lee Jong-suk is a talented playwright in Korea, who loves to express his thoughts through words. Yoon Shim-deok played by Shin Hye-sun is Korea’s first soprano

singer. The two met and fell in love while studying in Japan because of their common patriotic aspirations. However, after returning to Korea, their family and social relationships prevented them from being together. Despite their deep love for each other, they couldn't let go, and finally chose to commit suicide by jumping into the sea together. In *Memories of the Alhambra*, Yoo Jin-woo played by Hyun Bin travels to Granada, Spain, to experience an AR game themed around the city's historical customs. For investment purposes, he gets to know the sister of the game designer, Jung Se-joo, that is, Jung Hee-joo played by Park Shin-hye. What Yoo Jin-woo didn't expect is that during the process of experiencing the game, the real world and the game world became intertwined. His former friends died strangely in the game battles and even became NPCs in the game, repeatedly appearing as enemies or allies. In the end, his life-and-death situation in the game world remains unknown, and the ending with only Hyun Bin's back is completely tragic.

In addition to tragedies, there are also happy endings in Korean dramas where lovers finally get married. In *Flower of Evil*, Do Hyun-soo played by Lee Joon-gi was wrongly regarded as a murderer. He changed his identity and went on the hunt for the real culprit. To find the real murderer of the case many years ago and protect himself, he even married the female protagonist who is a police officer. When the truth was about to come to light, the female protagonist gradually discovered his identity. Eventually, the real murderer was caught, the old case was reopened, and Do Hyun-soo cleared his name. He also found that he had already fallen in love with the female protagonist, and they got back together. The family of three continued to live a happy life. In *九尾狐传* (*The Tale of the Nine-Tailed*), Lee Yeon played by Lee Dong-wook is a thousand-year-old nine-tailed fox. In order to bring his first love back to life, he voluntarily gave up his status as a mountain god and worked at the Bureau of the Dead, subduing demons and monsters in the human world. His first love was reborn as a TV producer, Nam Ji-a played by Bae Bo-ryeong. The two still met and were connected. In the end, the male protagonist chose to sacrifice himself to protect the female protagonist and fight against the 螭 (a mythical creature). His younger brother even stabbed him with a sword, and the male protagonist and the 螭 jumped into the Samdoo River together. However, the younger brother sacrificed his remaining lifespan to bring the male protagonist back, and the male and female protagonists finally got together. But the tragedy of the younger brother still makes people feel regretful. The extraordinary people obtain ordinary love. The courage shown in the portrayal of love in Korean dramas, compared with real-life love, satisfies the audience's aesthetic needs at the psychological level.

People's lives have entered the mobile and scene-based digital-intelligence era. In the face of changes in the media environment, art has also developed new forms of existence. Art enters people's daily life in the form of images, bringing about the expansion and dailyization of aesthetic activities. The wide spread of Korean dramas is just one manifestation of the aestheticization of daily life. At the same time, it must be pointed out that we need to be cautious about the generalization of art and its risks brought about by the "aestheticization of daily life".

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