



Dynamics of Audiens Interpretation and Reception of Korean Drama Queen of Tears

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Abstract. The popularity of Korean dramas as part of the Hallyu Wave has grown significantly in Indonesia, creating a cultural phenomenon where audiences do not only consume content but also actively interpret and engage with it. One of the recent dramas, *Queen of Tears*, sparked intense fan reactions, particularly on social media, due to its emotionally rich narrative and depiction of modern marital struggles. This phenomenon raises a central research problem: how do audiences from different social backgrounds decode and interpret the messages presented in the drama? Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory and a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach, this study investigates the audience reception of *Queen of Tears* by conducting in-depth interviews with eight informants who are active fans of the drama. The findings show varied interpretations across three decoding positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional, based on the drama's three main themes: romance and sacrifice, family and social pressure, and throne and power. The majority of informants were in dominant and negotiated positions, indicating general acceptance with contextual adjustments. This study highlights that audience reception is not linear, but shaped by individual experiences, values, and socio-cultural context. It contributes to understanding how media texts like *Queen of Tears* act as spaces for meaning negotiation and emotional reflection among Indonesian viewers.

Keywords: Korean Drama, Encoding/Decoding, Queen of Tears, Audiens Interpretation

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INTRODUCTION

Korean dramas are part of the Korean Wave or Hallyu. Korean Wave is a global phenomenon that connects South Korean culture with outside audiences through media, especially Korean dramas (Erlande & Sari, 2023). Korean Wave or Hallyu describes a phenomenon of South Korean popular culture and showed a rapid increase in the 1990s. Korean Wave acts as a hub to introduce South Korean culture through music, movies, and the entertainment industry (Maharani et al., 2024). Korean Wave culture demonstrates modern values and lifestyles while maintaining traditional elements to people in various parts of the world. The success of this popular culture, especially Korean dramas, has created a rapid global cultural impact that has further strengthened the appeal of foreign audiences including Indonesia (Maulidya & Hidayat, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024). The enormous potential and impact of popular culture will ultimately shape perceptions, behaviors, and increase cross-cultural understanding of South Korea.

Korean drama is one of the Korean Wave or Hallyu cultural products that is very popular with the public. Korean dramas are fictional television series that have 16-20 episodes and tell about people's lives (Musrin et al., 2022). Korean dramas have become a very popular global phenomenon including in Indonesia. One of the Korean dramas that attracted a large audience was *Queen of Tears*, which made it into the Netflix top 10. This drama managed to become tvN's highest-rated drama in history and surpassed the previous record held by *Crash Landing on You*. The final episode reached a rating of 24.8 percent, showing tremendous success in attracting viewers' attention (CNN Indonesia, 2024). *Queen of Tears* takes on the theme of modern marriage by depicting the relationship dynamics of Baek Hyun-woo (Kim Soohyun), a successful lawyer and Hong Hae-in (Kim Jiwon) who face various conflicts in their marriage (Kusuma, 2024). The success of this drama is not only seen from the ratings, but also from how the audience responds and interprets the messages conveyed through the story. This success illustrates its broad appeal and its ability to create active discussion among the audience (Amry et al., 2024). The drama is not only entertainment, but also a medium for the audience to express their views, opinions and experiences through interactions on social media such as social media X.

Observations show a diversity of fan interpretations of the drama's content. Some fans interpreted the drama as a representation of real-life marriage relationships, while others had different views based on their social context and personal experiences. This difference in meaning shows that the process of interpreting messages by audiences is not always in line with the intended meaning of the content creator (Milatishofa & Arindawati, 2021; Faturasyiddin & Hidayati, 2023). The *Queen of Tears* phenomenon shows how a drama can shape the perception and behavior of its audience. On social media, fans are not only passive viewers, but active in interpreting messages and relating them to their social reality (Fahab & Nurhikmah, 2024). In audience reception, *Queen of Tears* fans show diverse patterns of meaning based on their social backgrounds and personal experiences. Some fans accept and identify with the values displayed in the drama, while others have different meanings based on their social context (Milatishofa & Arindawati, 2021). This phenomenon is in line with Stuart Hall's concept of audience reception, where audiences have the ability to interpret media messages actively and are not always in line with the meaning intended by content creators (Agusta & Wahyuni, 2023).

Audience reception is a study used to study media audiences by considering how readers act on works such as judging or interpreting them (Delya et al., 2022). Stuart Hall explains the encoding/decoding process, which is a contextual understanding of media use and the entire audience experience (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The purpose of this study is to find out how audiences understand and interpret message content based on their experiences and perspectives when interacting and consuming media content. The development of digital media has exposed audiences to a lot of information from various sources so that their ability to interpret messages will certainly be more diverse (Fahab & Nurhikmah, 2024). Media today is not only considered as an entity that creates text and images but is also understood as a mirror of people's lives (Qathrunnada et al., 2025). This makes

the sender of the message and the recipient of the message have differences. According to Stuart Hall, audiences decode media messages through three positions, namely:

1. The dominant position is that the reader is in line with the values and attitudes contained therein and fully accepts the meaning presented and desired by the program maker.
2. The negotiation position is that the reader is within certain limits in line with the codes or message content and basically accepts the meaning presented by the program maker but modifies it in such a way as to reflect his personal position and interests.
3. The opposition position is that the reader is not in line with the codes and content of the media and rejects the meaning or reading presented and then determines his own alternatives in interpreting the message.

Several previous studies have examined audience reception of popular media broadcasts. Research conducted by Rachmad & Bhakti (2023) entitled "Reception Analysis of Cultural Imperialism in Korean Film Series" used Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory to see how audiences interpret Korean cultural values in Korean dramas. This research shows that most informants are in a negotiation position, where they accept Korean cultural values, but still adjust them to local values. The relevance to this study lies in the theoretical approach and how the values in the drama are interpreted not in a raw way, but through a selective process based on the audience's personal values. Research by Mineri & Purnomo (2023) with the title "Hallyu Wave in Indonesia: Audience Acceptance of K-Pop Idol Brand Ambassadors in Indonesia" examines how Indonesian audiences accept K-pop idol figures as representations of Korean culture as well as product images. This research uses a qualitative approach to examine how identity, cultural values and celebrity images are constructed and interpreted by audiences. Although the focus was on advertisements and brand ambassadors, the reception dynamics found also showed variations in decoding positions similar to the findings in this study, namely dominant, negotiation, and oppositional positions.

From some of these previous studies, it can be seen that the study of audience reception of Korea has developed into various aspects ranging from culture, social relations to commercial strategies. However, there are not many studies that specifically examine the dynamics of message meaning in one complex Korean drama title such as *Queen of Tears* using encoding/decoding theory and phenomenological approaches in depth. Therefore, this study has a deeper purpose to look at the interpretation and audience reception of the Korean drama *Queen of Tears*. This study will look at how the dynamics and various interpretations of audiences interpret the values or messages in the drama *Queen of Tears*. Audiences as active audiences and act also as producers of meaning. How is the response, acceptance of the values or messages raised in the drama *Queen of Tears*. The research uses reception analysis with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding because it will focus on the audience's acceptance of information from media content.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this research is qualitative research method. Qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, for example behavior, perception, motivation, action holistically by means of description in the form of words and language in a special natural context (Fadli, 2021). This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods using Stuart Hall's reception analysis. Reception analysis of audiences understands the meaning-making process carried out by audiences when consuming media impressions (Fahab & Nurhikmah, 2024). Reception analysis provides a meaning to the understanding of media texts by understanding how the character of media texts is read by audiences. Individuals who analyze media through reception studies focus on the experiences of audiences and how meaning is created through these experiences. Audiences are divided into three positions namely dominant, negotiation and opposition. The technique of taking informants in this study is purposive sampling which is based on

certain characteristics that are considered to have a close relationship with the objectives in the study (Hardani et al., 2020). The research subjects used are informants who are selected based on certain criteria. The criteria for informants in this study are:

1. Watch the Queen of Tears drama in full more than once
2. Actively follow the development of drama through social media
3. Have different backgrounds

The object of research in this study is the messages in the drama Queen of Tears, namely romance and sacrifice, family pressure and social environment, emotional support in relationships and throne and power. The data collection technique in this study uses two data sources, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data generated from interviews with informants while secondary data is data generated from literature studies relevant to this research (Hardani et al., 2020; Fadli, 2021). Primary data collection procedures are generated from interviews where the informant or informant is the person who provides information to the person who is interviewing. The informants in this study were eight people as people who watched the Queen of Tears drama in full and actively followed the development of the drama through social media. The following is the research informant data in table 1.

Table 1
Informant Profile

Informant Code	Age	Occupation	Domicile
Informant 1	24 years	Education Counselor	Bandung City
Informant 2	25 years	Private Employee	Bandung Regency
Informant 3	24 years	Master Student	Kota Bandung
Informant 4	27 years	Master Student	Gorontalo Regency
Informant 5	22 years	Undergraduate Student	Surabaya City
Informant 6	27 years	Lecture	Bandung City
Informant 7	22 years	Undergraduate Student	Mojokerto City
Informant 8	19 years	Undergraduate Student	Bogor City

Source: *Interview Results, 2025*

The data analysis technique in this study uses the stages of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Qualitative analysis data according to Miles and Huberman consists of words or sentences collected through observations, interviews, and then processed through recording, recording, and typing (Hardani et al., 2020). Data reduction in this form is a conceptual framework that will be used as a basis for researchers to conduct interviews with informants. Data reduction in this study is in the form of transcripts or manuscripts of interview results which are attached as attachments to the research results (Murdiyanto, 2020). Data presentation (data display) is a set of information a set of information arranged in a narrative to facilitate understanding of what is happening. In this study, data display was carried out by separating the data information obtained according to each category of aspects studied. The aspect categories related to the interview framework or manuscript in the data reduction section include aspects of the three main messages, namely romance and sacrifice, family pressure and social environment and throne and power. The results of the data display in this study include the main information collected from interviews with informants. Inference drawing is the

essence or conclusion of research findings based on descriptions or statements obtained (Hardani et al., 2020). The conclusion or polarization of data in this study is taken from the same statement from several informants, the statement that is closest to the research objectives. This conclusion is the key word from the results of the data display stage which will be used as material for analysis in this study (Bungin, 2011).

RESULT

The results of the study illustrate the complexity and variation of audience reception of the drama Queen of Tears which aired on Netflix in 2024. Audience position analysis using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework shows how audiences interpret the main messages in the drama through three categories: dominant, negotiation and opposition.

Table 2
Audience Position

Number	Message	Audience Position		
		Dominant	Negotiation	Opposition
1	Romance and Sacrifice	Informant 1, Informant 2, Informant 3, Informant 4, Informant 6, Informant 7	Informant 5, Informant 8	
2	Family and social pressures	Informant 2, Informant 3, Informant 4, Informant 5	Informant 1, Informant 6, Informant 7, Informant 8	
3	Throne and power	Informant 2, Informant 3, Informant 4	Informant 1, Informant 5, Informant 6, Informant 7	Informant 8

Source: *Processed by Researcher, 2025*

The results of the study revealed diverse audience acceptance of the messages in the drama Queen of Tears aired on the Netflix platform in 2024. Based on the results of interviews with eight informants, audience positions show complex and varied interpretation dynamics. In general, the table shows the tendency in the audience position with more informants in the dominant and negotiation positions, while the opposition position has only one informant. This shows that the majority of informants tend to accept or negotiate the meaning of the messages conveyed in the drama rather than reject or provide resistance to the meaning offered. This difference in position shows the complexity of messages in the drama Queen of Tears, which raises various dimensions of human life and relationships. The messages have different levels of acceptance that are influenced by the relevance of the messages to the Indonesian socio-cultural context and the informants' personal experiences.

The message of 'romance and sacrifice' received quite varied responses among informants. This message showed a significant dominant interpretation with informants 1,2,3,4,6 and 7 accepting the message. They understood that sacrifice is an important part of a romantic relationship and accepted the values represented in the drama. This dominant acceptance also reflects the compatibility of the narrative with the values held by the community. Meanwhile, informants 5 and 8 were in the negotiation position which shows that they generally accepted the message but with some modifications based on their personal or social context.

The second message on 'family and social pressure' showed a more even variation between the dominant and negotiated positions. Informants 2,3,4 and 5 were in the dominant position, while informants 1,6,7 and 8 were in the negotiation position. This pattern indicates a high diversity in

interpreting the family expectations and social pressures depicted in the drama. Some informants had different personal experiences related to family dynamics, which influenced the way they interpreted the message. This diversity also shows that family and social pressures tend to be more contextual and subjective in people's interpretations. The third message on 'throne and power' shows an interesting pattern with one informant in an oppositional position. This suggests a rejection or resistance to the message of power dynamics presented in the drama. The majority of informants were spread between dominant and negotiated positions, indicating that power messages trigger more diverse and potentially oppositional responses. The existence of an oppositional position in the throne and power message reflects an alternative or critical view of the power structure depicted in the drama or incongruence with the informants' values or experiences. The results of the audience reception research on the three main messages in the drama *Queen of Tears* are: romance and sacrifice; family and social pressure and throne and power. The research was conducted based on the meaning of each informant who was grouped into dominant, negotiation and opposition decoding positions according to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory.

DISCUSSION

Message: Romance and Sacrifice

In the drama *Queen of Tears*, romance and sacrifice are the main foundations that build the dynamics of the relationship between the characters Baek Hyun-woo and Hong Hae-in. Their relationship does not start from an ideal love story, but rather experiences various challenges such as differences in social status, internal conflicts within a conglomerate family, obstacles in emotional communication, and a serious test in the form of a life-threatening illness. Love in this drama is portrayed as a bond that endures despite being overshadowed by wounds, emotional distance, and uncertainty. Hong Hae-in often displays an emotionally closed-off attitude, while Baek Hyun-woo feels the loss of love and support from his partner. However, as the story unfolds, the drama shows that behind the conflicts and misunderstandings, true love between the two remains present. The representation of love in *Queen of Tears* is presented realistically, not always romantic and filled with wounds, but rather as the primary source of strength that allows both of them to endure in their relationship.

The majority of informants are in the dominant decoding position, indicating that there is a match between the message conveyed by the text maker and the audience's interpretation. The audience's most dominant interpretation of this message is that *Queen of Tears* represents true love characterized by loyalty, sincerity, and emotional sacrifice. This relationship is a form of love that is not only based on feelings but also responsibility, commitment and courage to persevere in difficult situations. The sacrifices presented as a form of mature love and feeling that this situation is able to illustrate the ideal reality of a couple's relationship that survives each other. Hong Hae-in's struggle to maintain her household despite her illness became a very touching symbol of emotional sacrifice. Some informants realized that this was just a drama but admitted to being affected by the emotional intensity of the story and felt that the main character's relationship was a reflection on the importance of communication and trust. This is reflected in Informant 8's statement as follows:

“Their love is not perfect love, but love that grows through pain, through misunderstanding, through loss, and ultimately becomes love that can heal”
(Informant 8)

This statement shows that true love is understood as a long process that is formed through complex emotional experiences. Das & Rao (2022) argue that true love cannot be measured by outward appearances but is determined by sincerity and the emotional dynamics that unfold. The expression “love with wings like a blindfolded god of love” illustrates that true love often causes individuals to overlook their partner's flaws. In this context, love is not always rational or ideal, but rather full of

mistakes, vulnerabilities, and the depth of feelings that influence how individuals perceive and navigate relationships. From imperfections and wounds that arise, love can grow stronger, heal, and form deeper emotional bonds. This is further reinforced by real comments from fans who express:

“Hyunwoo is the typical guy we encounter in real life. Selfish, annoying, denial, etc. But his love for Hae-in is real. He's not perfect, but he's trying to be good for Hae-in.”
(Researcher's observation, social media X, April 2025).

This comment underscores that true love does not have to be perfect or free from flaws. Rather, imperfection and the effort to continuously improve oneself are at the core of the meaning of true love portrayed in the drama and accepted by the audience. This perception aligns with the interpretations of informants who view true love as a struggle filled with wounds and sacrifices, yet it is sustained because of sincerity and commitment. A similar interpretation was also expressed by Informant 1 as follows:

“When we feel love, I mean true love, it turns out that it requires a lot of effort, a lot of effort.” (Informant 1)

This statement illustrates that true love does not come instantly but is formed through a lengthy process requiring struggle and active involvement from both parties. The informant emphasizes the importance of “a huge effort” in building a healthy and sustainable relationship. In this context, true love requires sacrifices that are often not easy because they are essential for a relationship to continue smoothly. This aligns with the perspective of Fehr et al., (2014), who state that true love is not merely an emotional response but also involves concrete actions to alleviate the burdens and suffering of the person one loves. Adrian (2025) explains that consistent effort is necessary to create a harmonious relationship free from toxic relationship dynamics.

Effort is a crucial element in maintaining the sustainability of a relationship, encompassing not only physical or material aspects but also emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Effort can manifest through empathetic listening, providing moral support when a partner faces pressure, and being willing to change for the betterment of the relationship. In this perspective, effort is not understood as an obligation, but as a manifestation of love, care, and sincere commitment to the sustainability of the relationship (Prabandari, 2025). This view is also expressed by Informant 5, who defines true love as the determination to stay together in the face of various trials and difficulties. As stated by Informant 5:

“Baek Hyun-woo is still willing to accompany her. They are like, no matter what problems they face.” (Informant 5)

This meaning emphasizes that true love is understood as a form of loyalty and sincerity to continue supporting one's partner in various conditions, including when facing conflicts and serious issues. The informant highlights Baek Hyun-woo's presence by Hong Hae-in's side despite their relationship being far from ideal. In this perspective, true love is seen as a feeling that can endure despite pressure and difficulties. This view aligns with Adrian (2024), who states that every relationship does not always run smoothly; there will be difficult times that may trigger emotional distance, but this does not necessarily mean the relationship should end, as it often still holds value worth fighting for.

This drama clearly shows that the main factors causing increased tension in domestic relationships are miscommunication, delays in conveying honesty, and an inability to express emotions. Change began to be seen when previously closed communication began to be opened up more carefully and honestly, marking a turning point in their relationship. Most of the informants in this study provided a deep understanding of the role of communication in the drama's story. The audience recognized that

the communication dynamics depicted, ranging from holding back due to emotional pressure to engaging in emotional conversations that allowed for connection, reflected common situations in challenging relationships. This form of communication is also interpreted as an expression of love that is not always ideal but grows over time and with experience. Informant 8's statement affirms this through their criticism of miscommunication in the main characters' relationship:

“They miscommunicate so much. I mean, please communicate with each other, don't just stay silent for two years. It's a bit annoying to see their communication, like, why don't they just talk?” (Informant 8)

This statement reflects the informant's critical awareness of the importance of openness and dialogue in maintaining the sustainability of a relationship. The lack of openness between Baek Hyun-woo and Hong Hae-in is identified as the primary source of prolonged tension. Similar perspectives emerge from fan comments on social media platform X, stating that any form of communication failure can destroy a relationship and even alter one's perception of the couple.

“That's right, once communication breaks down in a relationship, no matter what form it takes, it can ruin everything. It can even change the way we view someone.” (Researcher observation, social media platform X, April 2025)

This comment highlights how communication breakdown is perceived as a tangible aspect of relationship dynamics. Other comments also emphasize the role of miscommunication in relationship failure, especially when both parties stop making an effort and let busyness overshadow existing emotions.

“Their marriage didn't work because they misunderstood each other and they probably stopped putting effort like they used to because everyone is so busy and occupied. I can't live in that house and be sane.” (Researcher observation, social media X, April 2025)

This statement illustrates that communication failure does not only stem from unspoken words but also from the loss of attention, effort, and time to understand one another. This serves as a stark reflection that relationships not maintained through active and empathetic communication are vulnerable to gradual breakdown. This aligns with Pangaribuan (2016) perspective, which emphasizes that communication plays a fundamental role in the harmony of marital relationships. The absence of effective communication can trigger relationship failure, while openness and mutual listening form the foundation for building trust and avoiding conflicts (Harususilo, 2022). In addition to verbal aspects, nonverbal communication also plays an important role in strengthening emotional closeness between partners. Therefore, communication in marriage should not be seen as an automatic process but rather one that needs to be developed through active efforts such as mutual respect, creating space for dialogue, and building mutual understanding. The lack of communication or misunderstandings often become the primary cause of relationship breakdowns (Samodra, 2024).

In this context, communication serves as the primary medium for conveying all values, hopes, and aspirations within the institution of marriage. This view is reinforced by Zhafirah (2020), who emphasizes the importance of balance and reciprocity in couple interactions, as well as by Hill & Collaborators (2025), who state that communication and trust are determining factors in achieving satisfaction and well-being in a marital relationship. External communication also plays an equally important role in strengthening their relationship, as seen in Hong Hae-in's role in managing communication with her family. As the eldest child who holds a significant position in the family structure, Hong Hae-in should be more open in defending and supporting her husband in front of her family. As stated by Informant 2:

“As the eldest child and someone who can be said to hold a fairly high position within the family, Hong Hae-in could demonstrate or tell her family and relatives to respect her husband.” (Informant 2)

Informant 2's interpretation emphasizes the importance of external communication in the relationship between Hong Hae-in and her family. As an influential figure in the family structure, Hong Hae-in is expected to exercise her rights more fully in supporting and defending Baek Hyun-woo openly in front of her family. This understanding shows that communication in relationships is not limited to interactions between partners, but must also be managed within a broader social context. Marriage not only brings together two individuals who love each other, but also unites two families with different backgrounds (Kumparan.com, 2020). Every family member should have the freedom to express themselves and voice their opinions, as well as build closeness, because this is the key to effective communication (Ali & Aziz, 2022).

Message: Family and Social Pressures

The message of family pressure and social environment is an important aspect of *Queen of Tears*, especially through the character of Baek Hyun-woo who often experiences inner conflict due to pressure from his wealthy and influential family-in-law. This message shows how power relations, social status, and family expectations can affect household dynamics. The interview results show that the audience's interpretation of this message is quite diverse. In the dominant position, informants interpreted the family pressure in the drama as something realistic and relevant to people's lives today, especially in the context of relationships between individuals involving differences in social class and economic background. Baek Hyun-woo's position as the son-in-law of a conglomerate or chaebol family reflects real social pressure, where a person is required to submit to the system and traditions of a large family. The conflicts shown are quite close to real-life situations especially in Asian cultures, where the role of family and home life is very large and can be a source of pressure.

What Baek Hyun-woo experienced in the drama reflects a social reality that is not uncommon in marital relationships in society. They see that family pressure can indeed be a source of great conflict that affects emotional health and the sustainability of the household. In the negotiation position, informants interpreted that the family conflict in the drama was intense and plausible, but did not fully believe that the pressure always had such a big impact in real life. Basically, it is us and our spouses who run the household, so if we have strong principles and beliefs then family pressure should not be a big source of conflict. This conflict in family pressure is still partly relevant but considers that the representation of the family in the drama is too extreme.

Family intervention in the drama *Queen of Tears* is depicted as excessive interference from the extended family, particularly Hong Hae-in's family, in the main character's personal life and marriage. In various scenes, it is evident how the Hong Hae-in family controls important decisions within the household, undermines Baek Hyun-woo's position as a husband, and positions their marital relationship as part of the power structure of a conglomerate or chaebol family. In this context, Baek Hyun-woo is often positioned as inferior, both symbolically and socially, which severely limits his ability to act as an equal partner.

Such a situation creates tension in personal relationships, as the marriage, which should be able to develop emotionally, is instead burdened by the external interests of the extended family and social pressure. The drama critiques unhealthy relationships between couples and families, where maintaining reputation and social status often take precedence. *Queen of Tears* clearly depicts the social reality where family pressure can disrupt a couple's emotional stability, making it one of the primary triggers for domestic conflicts portrayed in the show. They agree that family interference and social pressure are the main factors causing relationship complications, both in the drama and in real life. The informants assess that while relationships are ideally private, in reality couples often have to

adapt to the wishes of extended family. This creates a clash between personal desires and external demands, which ultimately can disrupt emotional balance and communication within the relationship. As stated by Informant 3:

“There are so many couples in real life whose relationships become complicated because of family interference or social expectations. Sometimes parents or the environment tend to interfere too much, even though a relationship is about two people who love each other.” (Informant 3)

This statement emphasizes that in a marriage, it should be the two partners involved who determine the course of the relationship, not external parties such as family or social circles. In the drama, the relationship between Baek Hyun-woo and Hong Hae-in reflects how major decisions in their lives are often influenced by social expectations and intervention from Hong Hae-in's extended family. This family interference and social pressure adds tension to their relationship, as the couple is not given the space to determine the direction of their relationship themselves.

This finding aligns with the research by Bustin et al., (2023), which states that conflicts in marriage are often exacerbated by family intervention. Family interference in a couple's life can damage the quality of the relationship and satisfaction in marriage. When families become overly involved in a couple's personal life, it can create tension that hinders the couple from growing and communicating better. A healthy relationship should be based on mutual decisions between two individuals who love each other, without being burdened by external demands that often conflict with the couple's personal needs. As stated by Maulia (2022), families, especially parents, should not interfere in their children's household affairs. If families become overly involved, for example, by feeling they have authority over their children or belittling their partners, this can disrupt household harmony. Debates about the limits of family intervention in marriage are a complex theme in family dynamics. Family involvement in the domestic life of children often becomes a source of debate (Neyla, 2025). Excessive intervention has the potential to trigger tension in relationships and disrupt the formation of strong bonds between couples. As stated by Informant 5:

“Whatever he does, it still has to be there, like the decision of his family, even to the point of living with his family.” (Informant 5)

This statement highlights how personal decisions, even those that should be the couple's right, are often influenced by the will of the extended family. In marital relationships, especially those involving a strong extended family background, couples often lack the freedom to determine the course of their relationship independently. The informants recognized that a stressful environment, whether within the family, at work, or in society, can create an unhealthy atmosphere for individuals, particularly in terms of maintaining emotional stability and relationship quality. For example, Informant 1 stated:

“Staying in the family is not good for mental health.” (Informant 1)

This statement shows an awareness that an unsupportive family environment can have a negative impact on psychological well-being. Being forced to remain in such an environment adds significant psychological pressure. In the scene where Baek Hyun-woo cooks with the Queens' daughters-in-law for a family event and cannot attend his father's birthday, indirect pressure is created that forces him to conform to family demands. In line with CNN Indonesia (2022), being a member of a chaebol family requires the daughters-in-law to attend various family events, such as weddings, funerals, or birthdays, which often add pressure on individuals within the family.

The social status pressure in the drama *Queen of Tears* is reflected through Hong Hae-in's family background as part of the Queens Group conglomerate, which creates a relational gap with Baek Hyun-woo, her husband who comes from an ordinary family in a rural area. This class difference not only creates internal conflict within their marriage but also serves as a source of external pressure from

Hong Hae-in's extended family toward Baek Hyun-woo. In this context, social status is used as a measure of worth and influence in family decision-making, illustrating how economic power shapes personal relationships. Social status serves as a symbol of dominance that indirectly shapes relationship dynamics and reinforces the boundaries between love and family interests.

“Hae-in's family, who have power and status, make Hyun-woo feel small and unimportant.” (Informant 3)

This statement reflects how social class differences create inequality in marital relationships. The Hong Hae-in family is not only economically superior but also treats Baek Hyun-woo as an unequal figure, leading to feelings of being undervalued. This illustrates that social status is not merely a background but also a source of real pressure. This aligns with Informant 4's statement that the phenomenon of domination by those with higher status is not unique but rather a common occurrence.

“People with high social status, who are in power, mostly do the same thing—interfere in the decisions of those below them.” (Informant 4)

This interpretation shows an awareness that social status often justifies someone's right to regulate or control others. In the drama, the behavior of individuals with high social status represents a common pattern in real life, namely the domination of individuals in lower social positions. Power is not only related to status or position but also creates a social distance that allows someone to feel entitled to take over or direct the life choices of others. Realistically, this shows how power is often not only symbolic but also directly influences an individual's freedom to make decisions.

“There will always be someone with a higher social status, and then the guy will be looked down upon by the girl's family. Especially someone as rich as Eun-song.” (Informant 2)

This statement interprets social status as a determining factor in the relationship between the characters. This informant sees that Baek Hyun-woo is looked down upon because he comes from a lower social class than Hong Hae-in. People like Eun-song, who have high status, are considered more suitable and more easily accepted by Hong Hae-in's family. In South Korean culture, conglomerate or chaebol families have their own rules regarding marriage. According to Pulse (2020), to preserve wealth and inheritance, they often marry off their children for business purposes. The presence of a third party like Eun-song would be accepted by Hong Hae-in's family. This interpretation shows that the informants are aware of how the social system creates inequality and discrimination in relationships, which ultimately reinforces the pressure on characters from lower classes. Social status is not only seen as background, but also as a tool to weaken those who are not considered “equal.”

“The difference between Hyun-woo and Hae-in is definitely mentioned all the time. But it's more on Eun-song's side, right?” (Informant 3)

This interpretation shows that social pressure is not only a passive obstacle, but also an active form of intervention that influences people's attitudes toward relationships between characters. Social status plays a significant role in determining who is worthy and who is not in a relationship. In line with the concept of hypergamy explained by Esteve et al., (2016), despite shifts in modern relationship dynamics toward equality, social pressure related to social status in partner selection remains strong. Hypergamy, which refers to the tendency to choose a partner with a higher status, continues to play an important role in society, creating expectations that shape relationships. The family's high expectations of Hong Hae-in's social status create tension in her marriage to Baek Hyun-woo. The inability to meet these social standards becomes a heavy burden for both of them, who continue to be influenced by external pressures.

Message: Throne and Power

The message of throne and power is one of the important layers in *Queen of Tears*, which is shown through the struggle for control within the Hong family, the Hae-in family's large company. This message highlights how power and wealth are often a source of conflict in family relationships, especially when mixed with personal ambition, manipulation, and business intrigue. In the context of audience decoding, this message was not interpreted as strongly as the previous two messages, and experienced more varied meanings and tended to be intellectual rather than emotional. In the dominant position, informants consider that this power is indeed very relevant and a reflection of the real world, especially in the family structure of conglomerates or large companies. Power competition within the Hong family illustrates how fragile family relations can be when business interests are at stake. The influence of power in shaping the identity and actions of the characters is very strong and means that many characters in the drama are controlled by a corrosive and inhumane power system. In a position of negotiation, informants interpreted this element of power struggle as part of the dramatic needs of the story, but did not find it the most interesting or relevant aspect to contemplate. The power conflict is common and does not have a big impact on his personal meaning because he already knows that this is the case if there is a power conflict in the family.

In the oppositional position, informants interpret that this power displays unfair inequality, especially related to differences in caste or social class. Power in *Queen of Tears* is portrayed as something exclusive, inaccessible to people from different social backgrounds. When someone from a middle or lower social class tries to enter the sphere of power of the elite, as experienced by Baek Hyun-woo, there will always be pressure, rejection, and imbalance that makes the relationship unequal. This informant ideologically rejects the system that limits access to power based on birth status, and therefore rejects the message contained in the drama's narrative.

Through the portrayal of powerful figures, this drama shows how the ambition to maintain power can create a hierarchy that oppresses those outside the elite circle. Hyun-woo, as a character from a different social background, becomes a victim of this ambition. He must face various challenges, from rejection to doubts about his existence and abilities as a husband and son-in-law. This is reinforced by the following informant's interpretation:

"When we are faced with people who have power and authority, it is quite difficult in real life to fight against it because those who have power and authority are everything. (Informant 1).

This statement shows that in the face of great power and high social status, individuals often find it difficult to fight back. This reflects the reality of social life where power is often seen as something that cannot be challenged or resisted. This aligns with Widiastuti (2022), who describes the upper class as a group with unquestionable power, while the lower class experiences oppression. Power, in this context, becomes a dominant structure influencing behavior, decisions, and social relationships. This is also in line with Saputri et al., (2024), who found that power and luxury are depicted as symbols of superiority that create social inequality. Individuals from the lower class are depicted as having no control over their own lives due to the dominance of established social status.

"But in the end, he was able to prove it through various issues. The problems in his company suddenly arose, and then Eun-song appeared. Well, he was able to prove all of that, and in the end, his social status was no longer considered a hindrance for Hyun-woo and his family (Informant 5).

This statement illustrates that despite Hyun-woo being in a position seemingly hindered by greater power, he ultimately succeeded in proving that his previously insignificant social status, as perceived by the Hae-in family, was not an obstacle to achieving his goals and proving his worth. The informant

emphasizes that power is indeed strong, but it is not absolute; individuals can still attain social validity through struggle and self-proving. In the research by Hafifah & Urfan (2024), it is shown that the main character in the drama *Queenmaker* is able to challenge an unfair power system by using smart communication strategies and remaining true to moral values. These findings explain that current Korean dramas tend to raise narratives about resistance to power, where characters from outside the elite group try to fight against unfair power domination. In the drama *Queen of Tears*, Baek Hyun-woo's struggle represents individuals who have the capacity to act, even though they are under pressure from an unequal social structure.

Important company decisions, such as closing many stores, are often colored by ego and unilateral policies, and ignore personal values such as trust and respect in marital relationships. In such situations, business becomes a battlefield of prestige and power, ultimately affecting personal lives. This is evident in the conflict experienced by Hyun-woo, who believes that major decisions in the company should be agreed upon collectively as a family. However, in reality, decision-making power in business is concentrated among the more powerful family members. One informant in this study, Informant 5, revealed that:

“He felt he had to close many stores, but Hyun-woo said not to close them like that because it would show his authority—I’m the one who has the right to decide everything.” (Informant 5).

This statement illustrates how differences in perspective between those who hold power in decision-making and those who are affected can create tension in relationships. This tension arises due to differing views on the role of power in business decisions that directly impact those involved, especially during financial crises or company difficulties. In line with Mokoginta et al., (2022), conflicts in the business world often involve complex dimensions of power and interpersonal relationships. Internal conflicts within family businesses also shape broader social dynamics, especially when business decisions are made without considering their personal impact. Furthermore, Informant 7’s interpretation suggests that business conflicts in *Queen of Tears* also serve as a turning point in family relationships:

"Hyun-woo's position might have been tough to maintain, especially since Hyun-woo eventually persevered despite the Queen's bankruptcy. Hyun-woo helped out, and eventually his family softened and accepted him (Informant 7)

This indicates that Hyun-woo's success in overcoming the business crisis not only improved the company's condition but also paved the way for personal reconciliation within the family. Conflicts within families with complex power structures can trigger emotional tension but also provide opportunities for relationship growth through conflict resolution. In this context, business decisions that initially created distance between the characters in the drama ultimately became a medium for the process of recovery and acceptance (Mokoginta et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The results show that audiences do not receive media messages in a linear fashion, but rather interpret and negotiate meanings based on their personal experiences, social settings and values. The three main messages in the drama; romance and sacrifice, family pressure and social environment, throne and power were interpreted differently by the informants. The strongest message received was romance and sacrifice, which touched them emotionally and was considered relevant to their personal experiences. Meanwhile, the message of throne and power was the weakest in terms of meaning because it was considered not grounded or reinforcing an unequal social system.

In terms of reception positions, it was found that informants were not in a single position, but were scattered in dominant, negotiated and oppositional categories, depending on the message theme. This

proves that audiences are active in interpreting media messages and cannot be generalized as passive recipients of messages. This research contributes to the study of media reception and audience behavior, and opens up space to understand how Korean dramas as global cultural products can create diverse interpretive spaces among Indonesian audiences. It also reinforces the relevance of qualitative approaches and reception theory in examining the relationship between media, messages and audiences in the context of contemporary popular culture.

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