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Changelings and Cinderellas: Class In/equality, Gendered Social Im/mobility, and Post-Developmentalism in Contemporary South Korean Television Dramas

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Many South Koreans have called their country the “Republic of Drama” (*Dürama konghwaguk*) for their enduring and avid love of television dramas. Since the very beginning of the country’s television history in the 1960s, TV dramas have consistently placed two themes at the center of their representations of South Korea: the rich and the poor side by side and changing sexual and romantic mores. However, the substance and content of these intersecting issues of class and gender have evolved vastly, nearly beyond recognition, since the dawning of the age of television dramas (Kim 2012; Kim 2013).¹ This chapter explores the interconnections among three issues as formulated by contemporary TV dramas: class inequality, the gendering of social mobility or immobility (*hetaeater im/mobility*), and post-developmentalism as a phantasmagoric and yet tangible ideological impetus and effect in contemporary South Korea.

To begin the chapter, I will briefly contextualize the contemporary historical moment by tracing the intimate relations between class equality and

development, first to the beginning of the colonial period (the 1900s and 1910s), and then to the period of accelerated industrialization (the 1970s and 1980s) in South Korea. Then, I will turn to the main topic of this chapter, the ways in which one of the most influential cultural forms, television drama, has engaged with the issue of class in its intersectionality with gender in the last ten years or so, between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s.

In the heart of the chapter, I will argue that contemporary South Korean television dramas’ treatment of class-gender in/equality and social im/mobility is implicitly premised upon what I redefine as post-developmentalism, as a historically and culturally specific ideological force that has emerged from developmentalism as one of the most naturalized ideologies to have propelled South Korea forward in the last century. I will argue that television dramas not only represent South Korea’s postindustrial and post-developmental condition but also serve to produce post-developmentalism as an ideology. By “representation” I mean that television dramas as a mass medium and cultural products go beyond the hard and fast distinction between “reality” and “fiction.” They reflect and refract the very real forces present in South Korean society at all levels, from economic changes, government policies (and the ideologies underpinning them), and cultural elites who produce dramas, to everyday consumers, while simultaneously and conversely (re)shaping the political unconscious and consciousness of the South Korean public. The first two sections of this part of the chapter link the contemporary South Korean versions of two archetypal plots, those of “changelings” and Cinderellas, and the ways in which they deal with the hardening of the class divide and diminishing social mobility in postindustrial contemporary South Korea. Whereas the Cinderella plot (“I will find myself a rich man!”) deals with the issues of class via gender and gender via class, the changeling, or switched-at-birth, plot deals with the issue of class (“I will find myself a rich parent!”) within each respective gender, again with implications for the intersection of gender and class. The last section explores the genre’s representation and use of space in relation to post-developmentalism as a national and global strategy for South Korea. I end the chapter with a conclusion discussing class struggle and the future of South Korean television dramas.

Class, Equality, and Developmentalism in the Colonial and Industrializing Eras

Through the transition from the Patriotic Enlightenment Period (1905–1910) to the first decade after the annexation of Korea as a Japanese colony (1910–1919), the most powerful ideologies imported from the West via Japan were liberalism and its attendant concepts of capitalist economy, development,

¹ The two most popular topics for television dramas in the earlier decades were the class gap and male infidelity. The stories of infidelity eventually became narratives of divorce in the 1990s and later. Kim Han Sang (2013) argues that the work of one of the most successful and popular TV drama authors, Kim Su-hyon (who was vastly influential and progressive in terms of gender and sexuality issues), has been excluded from the larger scholarly efforts in rethinking gender, patriarchy, and women because feminist scholars have not taken the genre of television dramas seriously.

and industrialization. They were also necessarily entwined with the prevailing ideologies of imperialism and Social Darwinism, whose logic was implicitly and sometimes explicitly accepted by colonial intellectuals. The largely unquestioned notions of capitalist economy and development were also linked to the more fundamental liberal politico-philosophical notions of the individual and equality. In this period, "*yangban*-ism" came under attack: *yangban*-ism is a neologism from the early colonial period, designed to critique the premodern status system (Schmid 2002).² Socioeconomic equality, somewhat vaguely conceived after the fashion of original European liberal thought, came to be designated as a means to survive as an ethnonational collective in the Social Darwinist world by realizing the potential economic value of each member for capitalization. Socioeconomic equality was considered a prerequisite for economic development yet also for the eventual independence of Korea.

In post-liberation South Korea since 1945, when the collective dream of developing economically as an independent nation-state became a reality, political opinions divided as to how to conceive of the relation between class equality on the one hand and development and modernization on the other. Throughout the rapid industrialization from the mid-1960s through the late 1980s, the successive authoritarian regimes operated on the premise that economic equality and economic development were mutually exclusive: economic equality had to be sacrificed to achieve modernization for the nation as a whole. However, leftist nationalist dissidents mounted their activism and social movements on the premise that economic equality and justice not only are a possible goal alongside developmental progress but in fact must be mandated by economic development. The leftist nationalist camp did not question developmentalism per se, but rather they promoted the equitable distribution of wealth and class equality through the gains of economic development.

Since coming out of the International Monetary Fund crisis of the late 1990s, South Korea, I would argue, has been rapidly moving toward a postindustrial economy under the state's concerted efforts from the 2000s to the mid-2010s. With rather visible success in such sectors as cellular phone and other information-technology industries, cosmetics, fashion, tourism, and pop culture, in addition to maintaining the market share in heavy industries such as automobile, shipbuilding, and chemicals, the South Korean economy overall is continuing to expand its presence across the globe. Developmentalism, therefore, as a foundational state ideology and an ongoing economic policy that orchestrates the national economy as a whole, is very much alive and well. What I am calling *post-developmental*

in contemporary South Korea has two dimensions that may seem somewhat contradictory but are in fact complementary (Rahnema 1997; Esteva 2010). First, being thoroughly and historically rooted in developmentalism, South Korean post-developmentalism is a set of practices, policies, and ideologies that push for further economic growth and domination. In other words, post-developmentalism is an ever-renewing, revitalized, and readjusted version of developmentalism. Second, post-developmentalism, I argue, is a particular set of mentalities and their underlying ideologies, a belief in economic equality as a fait accompli coupled with a disavowal of class polarity. South Korean leftist elites (progressive media, activists, and scholars) agree that the entrenched right-wing governing establishment and its neoliberal capitalism have only deepened the class division rather than "curing" inequality, as some have claimed, in contemporary South Korea. This worsening economic inequality is easily demonstrated with the statistical data that show the contradictions of the ever-growing wealth of the super elites, the shrinking middle class, and the swelling underclass. I situate my argument about the linkage between television dramas and contemporary South Korean post-developmentalism in this specific context, examining the dramas produced from the mid-to-late 2000s, when the conservative government of Lee Myung-bak took over from his predecessor Roh Moo-hyun's progressive but ineffectual administration, to the present, 2018, one year after the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, a daughter of the military dictator Park Chung Hee, the father of South Korean development.

Post-Developmentalism and Contemporary South Korean Television Dramas

During the era of authoritarian developmentalism under Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo-hwan, television dramas were a key element in the larger cultural sphere, often supporting and promoting the regimes by entertaining and indoctrinating their audiences wittingly, unwittingly, or begrudgingly. Some of the dramas of the era also, just as often, incited the crowds in their living rooms into progressive and transgressive emotions, of which the state clearly did not approve. State censorship began targeting dramas that featured these story lines, behaviors, and emotions, which exposed marital infidelities, anti-Confucian sexual mores, lack of filial bonds, conspicuous consumption, and other subject matter that "created tensions between classes" (Kim 2012). The master narrative for the authoritarian state, which forged an exclusive relation to the ongoing "success" of economic development, was, naturally, the rags-to-riches story. The myth of

² *Yangban* refers to the aristocracy of premodern Chosŏn Korea.

developmentalism depended, at least partially, on the popular cultural creation of these myths of personal economic rise.

Although the television dramas of the authoritarian era were almost exclusively domestically consumed, since the early 2000s South Korea television dramas, along with popular music, have become a major export item. Koreans today widely and proudly accept the fact that South Korea exports cultural products, since it represents another mark of the country's development. In explaining this phenomenal and completely surprising overseas demand for Korean pop-cultural products, some scholars have theorized that developing countries in Asia and elsewhere have embraced South Korea as a model of successful development, imagining, projecting, and living their futures through South Korean popular culture (Abelmann and Shin 2012). The exportability of television dramas has long been a structuring element of their production in multiple ways such as the casting of actors and the choices of locations, characters, plots, and so forth. The implied overseas audiences in the developing regions and their invisible co-authorship in the production of the genre relationally establishes South Korea as a post-developmental culture, economy, and nation-state. In this way, South Korean TV dramas have become a silent but very powerful crusader for development worldwide.³

In the rest of the chapter, I argue that South Korean popular culture—in particular, television dramas—performs a particular ideological labor in influencing South Koreans to disavow the reality of class polarity while promoting the myth of a post-class, post-development society. This pop-culture genre operates largely as a national allegory in the postnational and globalized network of production and consumption. TV drama is arguably one of the few forums in which the issue of class difference is squarely faced and constantly addressed. However, this confrontation with class is necessarily and always sublated and overcome, most frequently by means of three mechanisms: (1) the switched-at-birth plot, which phantasmagorically portrays the blood relations of working-class protagonists to plutocratic elite families; (2) the Cinderella plot, which displaces the issue of class polarity onto the heterosexual romance and its attendant nexus of affect, gender/sexuality, and family/kinship relations in cross-class marriages;

³ In other words, it is the "post-ness" of post-developmentalism that the audiences in the developing world find attractive as their representations of the future. While I am making the specific connection in the South Korean context between this historical shift from developmentalism to post-developmentalism on the one hand and the cultural shift from the production and consumption of the rags-to-riches stories to those of the changelings and Cinderella plots on the other, to some extent the changeling and Cinderella motifs are, of course, universal and enduring archetypes. And as such, they do well abroad, along with many other types of storylines of South Korean TV dramas.

and (3) the uses and representations of space as an integral and interpellatory part of the narrative and multimedial dimensions of television dramas.

In the next two sections I discuss two popular plots, "switched-at-birth" and Cinderella, and how the contemporary South Korean versions of these archetypal stories relate to the country's post-developmentalism. Aside from star power, plot is probably the most important aspect of the TV drama medium, in contrast to other genres, such as the novel, in which characters and narrators become embodiments of social and ideological discourses, as Bakhtin theorized. In TV dramas, the plot drives the narrative forward and characters become functions of the plot, each playing a relational role in the larger overall scheme of the narrative. In contrast to the novel, a dialogic site of contending ideologies in which fully developed characters embody various conflicting and opposing ideological positions, in TV dramas the plot functions as an exteriorized version of socially constructed desires, wishes, and fantasies: it embodies social relations and ultimately ideology. Unlike the novel, the TV drama genre resolves conflicts, an illustration of the genre's ideological monologism (Brooks 1992; Bakhtin 1983).

Plotting "We-Have-All-Been-Switched-at-Birth"

The unofficial slogan of the drama production team for KBS, South Korea's government-affiliated and largest TV network, during the industrializing era, was to "tell only success stories, protagonists' victorious successes" (Kim 2012). Audiences did not tire of these stories of a poor young man's rise to fortune and power, and the prevalence of the "self-made man" plot continued throughout the 1990s and even up to the mid-2000s, when South Korea was still able to dream together for a more affluent future. The 1990s was an era of gradual transition from a military dictatorship and developing economy into a liberal democracy with a more self-assured sense of its status as a newly industrialized nation. It is not surprising that the 1990s saw an explosion of these narratives of self-made men, because it was only then that audiences could look back on the past with collective nostalgia and pride and look forward to the future with hope (Kim 2012).⁴ This master plot began to fade away in the mid-to-late 2000s.

⁴ The representative TV dramas from the 1980s and the 1990s with the self-made man plot are as follows: *Sarang kka yunjang* (Love and ambition, 1987), *Pulse* (Fire bird, 1987), *Yunjang* (The twenty-fifth hour of ambition, 1983), *Asip alt il Sanni* (Men of the asphalt, 1995), *Chidmunt il yungil* (A young man's place in the sun, 1995), *Ch'i sarang* (First love, 1997), *Chibgechi un il il* (Snare of young love, 1999), and *Seoul il lai* (The moon over Seoul, 1994). Some of these dramas are indeed critical of the conglomerates, whereas others are more celebratory of their CEOs, who serve as models for the male protagonists to different degrees. All of them feature working-class boys or brothers who make good, with the subplot of their

Against the backdrop of the self-made man as the quintessential developmental plot, the "changeling" or switched-at-birth plot emerges in the post-developmental era. This mythical transposability of babies and birth identities ironically points to the fixity of socioeconomic positions in contemporary South Korea. The proliferation of the switched-at-birth fables in postindustrial, neoliberal South Korea translates the reality of shrinking social mobility into the fantasy of higher-status births, thus exposing the liberal, democratic, capitalist notions of equality of opportunity and social mobility through education, merit, and hard work as officially defunct, if they ever were working premises or realities for South Koreans. The plot surreptitiously brings the audience back to the era of inherited status, although, at the same time, the switched-at-birth plot places the quintessential modernity of "class," that is, socioeconomic changeability, at tension with the primordial and universal accidentalness/fatefulness of birth.

The switched-at-birth plot is a contemporary Korean variation of the folktale motif of changelings.⁵ Perhaps one of the best-known versions of the folk motif is Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper*, among innumerable variations of the essentially same core narrative composition. I base my arguments about the switched-at-birth plot on seven TV dramas produced during the last several years. In order of their broadcast, they are *Eden ji tongjok* (East of Eden, 2008), *T'aeyang ui yôja* (Women of the sun, 2008), *Sindelella maen* (Cinderella man, 2009),⁶ *Puja tti t'anseng* (Birth of a rich man, 2010), *Panjjak panjjak pitumun* (Twinkle, twinkle, 2011), *Noran poksuchi'o* (Ice Adonis, 2012), and *Kim nuwara ttukttuk!* (I summon you, Gold!, 2013). Two of them, *East of Eden* and *Birth of a Rich Man*, feature male protagonists. *Women of the Sun*, *Twinkle*, *Ice Adonis*, and *I Summon You, Gold!* center on female changelings. *East of Eden*⁷ and *Twinkle*, *Twinkle* tell the stories of two babies literally switched at birth in

romantic triangles with rich girls, daughters of industrial families, and working-class sweethearts. These stories gradually dwindle as we move into the 2000s, but they do not disappear completely. The last notable drama featuring this storyline appears as late as 2005, *Yongung sidie* (The age of heroes). This story pits two male protagonists who are modeled after Yi Pyông-ch'ôl, the founder of Samsung, and Chông Chu-yông, the founder of Hyundai. The real-life stories of these historical industrial giants of South Korea are indeed classic rags-to-riches tales. Toward the end of the 1990s, we also begin to see a few female versions of this plot, i.e., stories of self-made women CEOs.

⁵ I would like to thank Stephanie Jed for informing me about the changeling tales in the European folktale tradition. These changelings stories were often allegories that try to deal with births of disabled babies.

⁶ *Cinderella Man* is closer to *The Prince and the Pauper* than the switched-at-birth plot, but, as I said, they are versions of each other.

⁷ *East of Eden*, a throwback to the 1990s, is something of an exception to the contemporary post-developmental pattern of the other six dramas. The contrast between *East of Eden* and

the hospital, whereas *Women of the Sun* and *Ice Adonis* pit two protagonists who are sisters (adoptive sisters and stepsisters, respectively) against each other. In *I Summon You, Gold!*, one twin sister is adopted into a very wealthy family, and the other one, into a working-class family. *Birth of a Rich Man* tells the story of a boy, born out of wedlock, in search of his long-lost chaebol father while contending with his doppelganger, a romantic and business rival, who may or may not be his half brother. There are many more contemporary TV dramas that appropriate, adapt, and draw on the changeling theme either as the main plotline or as one of the subplots. We also encounter various permutations of the more archetypal changeling plot. We may call them "quasi-changeling" plots, and they can be very easily inserted into other kinds of plots in which two male or female doppelganger protagonists are at odds with each other, locked in a struggle for power and love. I chose these seven dramas as the most well-known and popular examples that generally adhere closely to the archetypal version of the switched-at-birth story line. We can summarize the basic issue at stake as a confrontation of two individuals in which one occupies the position of power and privilege while the other does not, due to an unjust usurpation or an accidental transposition of the doppelganger protagonists. As I will discuss, this adversarial relation between the "twin" protagonists most often pivots around their respective assumption of moral good and evil and concludes with the eventual triumph of good over evil.

As Abelnmann has noted (2003), the melodramatic genre, beyond the notions of the individual, interiority, and psychology, embodies the social coding of the issues of class and gender. In postindustrial South Korea, as the self-made man plot has all but disappeared, leaving no "heroic" male protagonists for male audiences to identify with, the audiences for the genre became even more feminized than before. The only type of TV drama that still draws male audiences is the historical drama set in premodern Korea, which features larger-than-life historical figures, such as kings, generals, and founders of dynasties. The self-made man, functioning as a national allegory, now lives only in the remote mythic premodern past, rather than in the recent mythic modern memory as it did in the 1980s and 1990s. In short, the past notions of class, that is, upwardly mobile working-class men who allegorized the nation—did not survive beyond the developmentalist era in the TV drama genre. In the post-developmental era, TV dramas conceptualize men and the male gender only as the (always already) economic elites of the nation, most often as third-generation chaebol men, excluding working-class men from the frame altogether. Therefore, in the

the text speaks to the transition from the 1990s, with its vestiges of the developmental era, to the post-developmental mid-2000s.

contemporary changeling plot, the class division is conceived largely within the female gender as a matter of female "twins" who have crossed the class border by being "switched" and will have crossed over to the other side again by the end of the story. Put another way, the feminine allegorizes the working class.

This particular narrative of social climbing takes place as a Manichaean struggle in which the complex social and economic realities of class division have been translated into a moral dichotomy, and the good "twin" will eventually reclaim her (or less often, his) rightful place of privilege and wealth from the evil "twin."⁸ The plot repeatedly places the good twin (born rich but raised poor) in the position of being conspired against or of being falsely accused of wrongdoings, often by the evil twin (born poor but raised rich). And this moral struggle between the poor (good) twin and the rich (evil) twin takes on the semblances of class struggle. The good/poor twin's ordeal, often taking the form of a "revenge" drama within the plot against those who have maligned him or her, allegorizes the socioeconomic odds that are stacked against the underclass. The good twin's social climbing as "rebirth" is an ambivalent and problematic allegory of an economically stratified society in which hard work and merit are rewarded and yet simultaneously discounted and disavowed by the very deserving hero's or heroine's "return" to his or her family of birth. This class-revenge drama does register and thus politicize the existing class polarity while simultaneously obfuscating it via the fantasy of the working class's blood ties to the elite class. The "moralization" of political economy and social division and the attendant displacement of politics with ethics is unique to neither this plot nor the TV drama genre, and one might argue that this displacement is in fact the very essence of the popular cultural narrative as a genre. The switched-at-birth plot as a crystallized form of this tendency to simultaneously moralize and depoliticize speaks for its post-developmentalism.

Because having the lost protagonist find her birth family of privilege and wealth is a foregone conclusion of the switched-at-birth plot, the narrative necessarily begs the question of "heredity versus environment." That is, does this archetypal plot associate moral goodness and merit with birth (endorsing biological essentialism) or with environment (favoring social constructivism)? Most often, the poor protagonists (born rich) almost always embody good, whereas the rich protagonists (born poor) embody evil.

⁸ What constitutes moral "good" combines personality traits and traditional virtues, such as kindness, self-sacrificing altruism, perseverance, work ethic, and filial piety, along with a sense of justice. Most often, despite some narrative twists, this role is given to the "poor twin," born rich, while the "evil twin," marked by unkind behavior, selfishness, and a lack of work ethic and filial piety and/or ruthless greed for money and power, is the one born poor but raised rich.

or at least the morally problematic. Among the seven dramas I mentioned, six of them (*East of Eden*, *Women of the Sun*, *Ice Adonis*, *I Summon You, Gold!*, *Cinderella Man*, *Birth of a Rich Man*) have this structure. The only exception, *Twinkle, Twinkle*, is also essentially a version of this formula, since the "bad" twin (born rich but raised poor) has been all along an extremely good twin until she discovers that her position has been usurped. The switched-at-birth narrative necessarily affirms the essentialist linkage between "moral good" and "good blood," and yet at the same time it also asserts the forces of the environment as positive influences, such as overcoming hardship and poverty, which strengthen the protagonist as a person, and the love and goodness of the adoptive working-class parents who raised her. Even if the plot ends up upholding a version of a status system, "class by heritage," by restoring the protagonist to her "rightful" origin, thus disavowing the working class as a political collective, the plot must affirm working-class people and "their" work ethic via this narrative formula that combines the contradictory ideas of social im/mobility and inherited birth. This fantasy of the working class's rich birth parents does acknowledge the working class's actual existence, their material presence, and their lived reality in contemporary South Korea. Poverty, always paired with work ethic, is defined dynamically and relationally as an ethical good that is deserving. It is a temporary virtue, practiced by the poor changeling, that is not yet recognized as such until the appearance of the rich birth parents. Likewise, the state of poverty is an evil that must be escaped from, just as wealth as the end goal represents a moral good as the upshot of the Manichaean struggle. Poverty as a general state or a class reality in a socioeconomic structure is not to be annihilated, but is a position to be occupied, ultimately, by those who are undeserving, that is, the unethical. Conversely, the changeling plot asserts that wealth, shaped through this narrative movement, is an ethical good. So, the narrative rehearses this "false" and yet "real" movement of the poor twin (born rich) to her "origin," a position of wealth. It is a false movement because this protagonist is destined to move up the ladder via biological ties and yet it is real social climbing in the sense that she (raised poor) has to work hard to "earn" her inheritance. This narrative at once reflects the reality of impossibility of social climbing in postindustrial, post-developmental Korea while giving us the experience of fantastic mobility through the continual narrative reenactment of our unconscious wish that we have all been switched at birth, that is, the fateful contingency, and the contingent fatefulness, of our birth.

Post-Developmental Cinderellas

In the South Korean television drama genre, arguably the most common and popular plot is the "Cinderella" plot. It is not an exaggeration to say

that almost all of the dramas are some version of the Cinderella story or contain elements of it. The Cinderella plot is so popular that it has generated various offshoot versions, such as "Jummarella" stories and male Cinderella narratives.⁹ The term "Jummarella" combines "Jumma," from the word *ajumma*, with its pejorative connotation for middle-aged housewives, and "rella" from "Cinderella." The Jummarella plot deals with a newly divorced middle-aged heroine who soon finds a career and a new prince. Although the Cinderella plot is truly a universal heterosexual romantic archetypal narrative of gendered social climbing, and South Korean popular culture is no exception in subscribing to it, I would argue that this archetypal plot has mutated into a historically specific narrative-dramatic form in the last decade or so, reflecting, articulating, and being shaped by the recent social and economic changes in contemporary Korea. I base my argument on six examples, all of them mega hits, some more wildly popular than others. In chronological order of their broadcast, they are *Nae irin ün Kim Sansun* (My lovely Sansun, 2005), *K'op'i p'irinsü che 1-no chön* (Coffee Prince, 2007), *Kkot poda namja* (Boys over flowers, 2009), *Sik ürit kañin* (Secret garden, 2010), *Sangsojiañil* (The heirs, 2013), and *P'ungmun üro thiröisso* (Heard it through the grapevine, 2015).

In order to understand the contemporary South Korean Cinderella plot properly, we have to go back to the days of accelerated industrialization made possible by an unholy alliance between the authoritarian regimes and the growing number of chaebols. The growth of chaebols can be traced back to the post-Korean War era under Syngman Rhee's dictatorship, but most of them came of age during the 1970s and 1980s under the military rule of Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo-hwan. It has been decades since South Korean conglomerates claimed the national economy as their very own, and the nation's economic growth and the expansion of chaebols became inextricably linked. The private lives of their associated families always provided fodder for popular culture, especially for the television drama genre. In more recent years, as their third- and fourth-generation descendants have inherited the ownership and management of these large multinational companies, the further entrenchment of the rule of these economic oligarchical clans has become obvious, sparking ongoing critique and debate about the conglomerates and their relationship to the national economy as well as their role in the larger governing structure of South Korea.

⁹ To name a few popular Cinderella stories, we have, in the order of their broadcasts, the following dramas: *Nae saengae mujinuk sik'andol* (The last scandal of my life, 2008), *Sarang ün amma hana* (Love is not for everyone, 2009), *Sinderella man* (Cinderella man, 2009), *Yöghñai jöwang* (Queen of reversals, 2010), *Pulgiñil üi mujöñiri* (Indomitable daughter-in-law, 2011), and *Ko Pong-shil ajumma kühagi* (Saving Mrs. Go Bong-shil, 2011).

In the summer of 2015, the biggest national news of South Korea was that of the power struggle between two brothers for the control of the fifth largest conglomerate of South Korea, the Lotte Group. The progressive media pointed to the anomaly of the family-run South Korean conglomerates' management style that dispensed with professional CEOs, the consequent managerial ineffectiveness and corruption, and the ill effects of such organization on the economy and the nation's overall well-being. The media implicitly related this uniquely Korean feature of the economy to the nation's rising economic inequity. The daily report on the Lotte Group's succession story reminded the Korean public of the verisimilitude of the conglomerate real-life family struggle to the fictional representations of the conglomerate clans in television dramas. One of the weekly news magazines published a flowchart of the familial relations by marriage among the top fifty South Korean conglomerates and prominent political families, simultaneously validating and refuting the fictional representations of the conglomerate clans and their kinship relations (So 2015). In both the mainstream media and the tabloids, it has been a while since the term *chaebol samse* (third-generation chaebol) has gained currency.¹⁰ Over and beyond the realm of business, finance, and capital, this appellation conveys how entrenched the power of these economic elite clans has become and implies their persistent domination in the foreseeable future of South Korean society and culture.

In the Cinderella plot, the third-generation chaebol man is a fixture without whom our heroine could not exist. There are varying types of *chaebol samse* characters, but the most important distinction of this generation of male protagonists is the fact that they inherited wealth and definitely did not create it, as had the previous generations of male protagonists in the industrializing eras. And as such, in the Cinderella plot these male characters are often portrayed as undergoing the usual kind of personal development. First presented as lacking a work ethic, cynical, heartless, selfish, and insecure, the *chaebol samse* character is often a womanizing playboy. He is uninterested in business and thus incompetent, and then, through his encounter with and pursuit of the working-class heroine, he becomes hardworking, capable, and even sympathetic to ordinary people. So, the Cinderella plot relies on this particular new elite male character, which speaks to, on the one hand, a certain kind of economic stability

¹⁰ A recent film, *Bet errang* (Veteran, 2015), directed by Ryoo Seung-wan, one of the highest grossing films in South Korean history, deals with a criminal investigation of a powerful conglomerate and its family owners. The portrayal of a third-generation chaebol male, played by Yoo Ah-in, as infinitely entitled economically and all-but-omnipotent in his collusive connections with the government, seems to have helped to reflect, and find an outlet for (albeit in the cultural sphere), the growing resentment felt by the South Korean public about the oligarchical and plutocratic nature of South Korea's mode of governance.

and national pride that is linked to the conglomerates and their success in the global economy, which the character conveys through not only his super-affluent lifestyle but also his confidence and the aura attached to the length of his family's enterprise and wealth, that is, the aura of the "old" new money of South Korea. On the other hand, this new elite male protagonist and his arrogance, and the ambience of the Cinderella plot (the fabulousness of his wealth and the magical-ness of his existence), reproduced for the audience's consumption, are precisely the very index of how entrenched the conglomerates' economic privilege and economic dictatorship have become in South Korea. The more real the TV drama's portrayal of a third-generation heir to a conglomerate fortune is, the more unreal the Cinderella plot is. Put another way, the more fantastic the Cinderella plot is in contemporary South Korea, the more delicious and precious it is. The more despair in the economic reality, the more seductive is the Cinderella plot.

I argue that the "poor girl eventually marries a rich boy" plot advances what I am calling post-developmentalism. This plot begins by posing the class division, with a poor girl meeting a rich boy, and ends with them closing the gap by their marriage. Given this set narrative development, the portrayal of working-class poverty in the genre from the very beginning has always been mythical, as the audience is already firmly and prospectively cognizant and convinced of the eventual overcoming of poverty. In this sense, each drama with such a plot embodies this developmental trajectory and, therefore, the genre embodies post-developmentalism. Post-developmentalism relies singularly on the particular intersecting of gender and class (i.e., working-class women and elite men as protagonists) via their romantic relations. The genre reformulates the class system and socioeconomic mobility exclusively and in mythic perpetuity as a matter of heterosexual marriage-kinship relations.

In this scenario of a working-class heroine's upward mobility, she simultaneously performs the role of a fabulated trans-class subject. The heroine possesses nothing, no capital of any kind, little education, and no family background to speak of, but she has good looks, spunkiness and smarts, an indefatigable attitude, and an unbeatable work ethic. Somehow all of her personal traits, her material privation, and her economic disfranchisement come together as her inexplicable and mysterious charisma to the male protagonist, who is, quite invariably, a third-generation heir to one of South Korea's unnamed conglomerates. What these working-class heroines represent to female viewers is the sheer power of their romantic and sexual desirability. The generic and mythological trans-class "woman" in this context is an archetype who was once stripped of social status, economic power, and cultural and educational capital and then "regains" all of it and

more through her class-crossing. It is this magical power of the feminine that these heroines exercise over their male protagonists, rendering the most powerful men completely powerless, left wondering to themselves what came over them. In the popular 2010 drama *Secret Garden*, the male protagonist is astounded by such a working-class heroine, dumbfounded by his own feelings for her: "Why is it that every moment with this woman is a fairy tale? Who on earth is this woman [Yi yöjaga nugu igillae]?" The male protagonist's social status and economic power are pitted against his sexual desire and romantic love for the heroine and against his ability to eventually commit himself to marriage. The purity and absoluteness of his love for her must override and overcome everything else—his family's objections, her lack of social and economic standing, and, most importantly, her total lack of interest in him. In this emplotment, the heterosexual masculine gender stands in for the socioeconomic power structure and the state of post-development, and the feminine gender allegorizes the working class, who will have undergone development and experienced social mobility by the end of the narrative. The happy ending—the consummation of the romantic relationship through a marriage—embodies multiple resolutions and processes at the same time, that is, fictional class mobility (and yet imagined, thus lived as real), instant development through time travel via the dramatic time, and emotional closure and happiness.

During the era of South Korea's accelerated industrialization, this gender-class crossing as a representational framework was often reversed: working-class male protagonists would marry elite female characters for money and power, abandoning their working-class sweethearts. In those dramas, the masculine gender allegorized the nation's subordinate position: the categories of (male) gender, (working) class, and (androcentric) nation coincided. The working-class male protagonist's economic success through hard work and merit and his social climbing through marriage represented the nation's developmental trajectory. In a contemporary mutation of the genre, in which elite male protagonists are metaphors for South Korea's post-development and female characters are allegories for the underclass, the (feminine) gender performs the ideological labor of creating the illusion of post-developmental classlessness through the developmentalist narrative embedded in working-class women's socioeconomic upward mobility. The category of (masculine and feminine) gender, defined narrowly as heterosexual romantic love and marriage, functions to obfuscate class polarization by way of allegorizing class: gender becomes class. Through this allegorizing of the feminine gender as class, the working class necessarily achieves the phantasmagoria of elite privilege. The trans-class and supra-class (compulsorily heterosexual) women's magical "empowerment" to cause romantic and sexual omnipotence in men

serves not women, but the causes of the nation defined as elite, male, and post-developmental.

One of the most recent examples of the Cinderella plot, *Heard It through the Grapevine*, both very popular and critically acclaimed, is probably the most subversive one to date, an anti-Cinderella narrative. A high school boy, *chaebol samse*, falls in love with a girl from a lower-middle-class background. He accidentally impregnates her, and she gives birth to a baby boy. Despite her humble background, the chaebol family quickly grasps that her intelligence holds an enormous potential for success. They welcome her and her family and try to interpellate her into their order, the world of South Korea's governing economic and political elites. The story concludes with the young couple's rejection of this option: they voluntarily disinherit themselves from the boy's family's fortune and power. Clearly this plotline is a throwback to the 1980s student movement in which the ultimate political (and politically correct) act was for those who were privileged to give up their privilege and join the struggle of the masses. Interestingly, South Korean viewers of the mid-2000s seem to have rejected this harkening back to the 1980s as just that: a past irrelevant to the present. A newspaper article reports how the audiences, "netizens," negatively reacted to, and specifically expressed their "hatred" of, one of the supporting characters with ties to the 1980s student-labor movement (Ch'ŏng 2015).¹¹ While I sympathize with the reporter's shock at and condemnation of the South Korean viewing public's inability to recognize themselves in their true image (the proud history of struggle in the 1980s and their persistent working-class status), we could read this "conservative" reaction precisely as their acute assessment of the reality of contemporary South Korea and as an expression of their agency that puts more stock in the reality of the fantasy. We have a more critical look at the all-but-vanished class mobility in a recent film, titled *Alice in the Land of Hard Work* (Sŏngshilhan nara ūi aelisū, directed by Ahn Gooc-jin), released in 2015. It darkly and comedically portrays the ironclad social and economic strictures that (re)produce poverty, no matter how hard "Alice" works to climb the ladder. The allusion to *Alice in Wonderland* in the title works in the film to represent the invisible, unknowable yet powerful, palpable forces of the socioeconomic order in the mode of even darker magical realism. The two seemingly opposing perspectives, the "cruel optimism" of the television dramas, to borrow Lauren Berlant's notion, on the one hand, and the tragic critical pessimism of *Alice in the Land of Hard Work*, on the other hand, in fact mirror, complement, and dovetail with each other.

¹¹ I would like to thank Hae Yeon Choo for referring me to this article.

Dramatic Spaces and Post-Developmentalism

Since the mid-1970s, when South Korea began to feel the effects of industrialization and economic development, TV dramas have become probably the most important public cultural space in which the spectacles of the emergent consumer and leisure culture of the growing middle and upper classes could be showcased and shared with the rest of the population. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the authoritarian government censorship consistently targeted the extravagant lifestyles of the rich being displayed in television dramas as "creating class tensions" (Kim 2012). In the post-authoritarian era, the material manifestations of the lives of the rich and powerful continues to be an essential ingredient of all successful TV dramas. With much less government censorship as well as a much larger percentage of the population feeling confident in their middle-class-ness, I believe, conspicuous consumption and super-wealth causes fewer problems and more enjoyment as a requisite backdrop for the making of an effectual fantasy. In this section, I focus on the representation of spaces, as an overarching and key factor, in the production of post-developmental television dramas.

Whereas space, or more broadly mise-en-scène, as an element of storytelling looms large in any theatrical or cinematic context, I argue that space in contemporary South Korean television dramas functions as an instrument of trans-temporality and post-historicity, that is, as a post-developmental ideological apparatus. I will briefly discuss two types of spaces, private and public, that are central to the genre.

The intended effect of the genre's incorporation of various public spaces, especially those that are spectacular and luxurious, into its narratives are not difficult to imagine. Beautiful natural landscapes and luxury resorts and hotels in such locations as settings of TV dramas have brought significant tourist revenue to the South Korean economy. TV dramas, the vast majority of which are set in the South Korean capital, Seoul, also feature various kinds of public spaces, the usual points of attraction, such as ancient palaces, iconic architecture, monuments old and new, museums, and amusement parks. Another type of public space that appears in all narratives is the commercial space of cafes, restaurants, and department stores. These public spaces of conspicuous consumption are most often, if not always, swanky, posh, and luxurious, suggesting silently, and yet loudly, the super-modern-ness or hyper-modern-ness of contemporary South Korea. These spectacular spaces of luxury and hyper-modernity function as a conscious and subliminal means of attracting viewers, enhancing their pleasure and ultimately having them experience and occupy the stories.

Another kind of space routinely featured in the genre that is even more wondrously spectacular is the "private" space of the homes of super-rich (often male) protagonists. Among numerous examples of museum-like, hyper-modern interior spaces of male protagonists' mansions, we could consider, for example, *Secret Garden*, for our purpose. The "private" domestic space in the genre is of course a "public" space to which viewers have virtual access via television as a mass medium giving them an "illusion" of entry into the world of the nation's global economic super-elite. And these spaces become consumable, suturable, and thus "wearable" (Hansen 2006), as audiences move through the private, domestic spaces of the homes. In the context of contemporary regional globalization in Asia, the hyper-modernity of these public and private spaces functions as a post-developmental ideological apparatus, interpellating South Koreans into the myth of the post-development of South Korea, separating South Korea from less-developed parts of Asia and disciplining the yet-to-be-mobilized workforce where the TV dramas are exported, consumed, experienced, and lived.

Conclusion

Class Struggle as Personal Revenge: Affect, Emotional Porn, and the Structure of Ideological Labor

I have argued that two types of plot in recent television dramas articulate a particular socioeconomic contradiction of South Korea's post-developmental status, that is, decreased social mobility and increased emotional need for the fantasy of mobility. The switched-at-birth and Cinderella plots embody this particular contradiction proportionally and correlationally; the more impossible social mobility is in reality, the more extravagant the fantasy has to be. In conclusion, I would like to consider another dimension of the contemporary dramas, which both manifests the post-developmentalism of South Korea and functions to produce post-developmentalism as an ideology. If we consider both the switched-at-birth and Cinderella plots as narratives of class struggle, the narrative resolution of these plots might be summed up as class-struggle-turned-personal-revenge. The TV drama genre individualizes and personalizes (and does not collectivize and politicize) class conflicts as stories of protagonists' victory (either by finding their rich birth parents or by marrying a rich man) over their working-class background; simultaneously, these dramas must be read, as Nancy Abelman argues in *The Melodrama of Mobility* (2003), as pervading and influential narratives of social codes and ideological engineering.

By "class revenge," I mean the way in which these instances of social mobility within the plots and by extension within the genre itself are

articulated in terms of personal revenge, and yet this very personal nature of revenge must be read as an expression of a collective class predicament. In every TV drama's conclusion, the audience is called upon to witness the punishment of evil characters and thus the victory of good over evil. These spectacles of punishment, retribution, and restoration of justice—often accompanied by set phrases such as "If you make someone shed tears, your own eyes will shed bloody tears [Nan ūi nun esō nummulhage hanyōon ne nun esōnūn p'inumul nanda]" or "You have underestimated the power of truth [Chinsil ūi him ūl yatjaba poda]"—perform their ideological function precisely by emptying out content. The spectacles are what I call a "mechanism of de-ideologization." If class conflicts are the most urgent issue that contemporary South Korean TV dramas deal with, then the most significant emotion that these narratives manufacture is pleasure derived from revenge. This particular de-ideologized emotion, revenge-derived pleasure, is what I am calling a narrative money shot in the emotional pornography that is the melodramatic genre. The genre panders to the affective-ideological needs of its audiences by offering de-ideologization of the social contexts of emotions. This de-ideologizing dimension of the spectacles of class-struggle-turned-personal revenge works because the affective structures of television dramas are asemanitic. By "asemanitic," I mean that the genre's simplicity of plot, its reductive and superficial character portraits, and its seriality that draws in the audience, enabling long-standing identification, operate together precisely to empty out the social and material meanings and realities. The audience's identification with the "good" characters is asemanitic in the sense that the social and material meanings must be stripped away in order for the audience to achieve emotional identification. The narrative development and various characters function as experiential entry points that audiences can plug themselves into for emotional identification, made possible precisely because the narrative has removed the material conditions of the production of those emotions. The affective effect is the most important part of the narrative, and this affect is pure affect, affect without meaning. This is the ideological labor that television dramas perform for the state and capital in South Korea.

This "emptiment of revenge" is also an ideological re-structuring of temporality that further assists in affirming the de-politicized representation of the polarized class reality. Because of the built-in dramatic irony for the audience that comes from the inevitability of righteous revenge to take place at the end of the narrative, we might define "future" in these television dramas as a past revealed and made sense of in the present (of the narrative) or a corrective time to a past time. Therefore, the revenge plot functions as an ideological engineering of temporality first defining

the future as predetermined through revenge in the popular cultural fictive sphere and, second, permanently and "cruelly" deferring the class mobility in the socioeconomic material sphere.

The Future of Television Dramas: Multieethnic and Multicultural?

The continuing labor migration into South Korea from developing countries also testifies to South Korea's post-developmental status. Marriage migrants and some labor migrants are featured on TV in different kinds of documentary programs, but they are almost completely excluded from TV dramas. If TV drama as a genre necessarily articulates the family-nation continuum, then this particular exclusion is indeed a sign that mainstream Korea is not ready to embrace nonethnic Korean immigrants and biracial Koreans as part of the national community. I do believe that one day—maybe later than sooner, given the nature of entrenched racism—multieethnic Koreans will have to be included in the national narratives of television dramas. It would be interesting to see how this medium and the genre will be revised in order to mediate gender, class, nation, race, and globality.

The nuclear family continues to be a fundamental economic unit that in turn constitutes the national economy despite some ongoing shift toward a more individualistic turn. In this nexus of family, class, and nation, the genre of television drama becomes an interpellatory medium through which the emotion of the national populace is disciplined, instilling South Koreans with a cultural imaginary that reproduces this particular ideological narrative arrangement of class, gender, family (romantic love and marriage/kinship), and nation. The enchantment and mythology of romantic love has functioned often in other contexts as a coercive force that disguises and mystifies the relations of power (Sakai 2010). TV dramas thus offer two kinds of truth to their audiences: first, the truth of wish fulfillment and fantasy and, second, the truth of the impossibility of wish fulfillment, the ironic truth. For either kind of truth, truth is still, nonetheless, always about fairness, reciprocity, distribution, and justice.

One of the ideological effects of post-developmentalism, I would argue, is the production of abstract equality, which comes in many forms. For example, there is the equality of culture consumerism on the Internet, as the accessibility of popular culture is quite unlimited (especially in South Korea) and its physical reaches are quite totalitarian. The presumption of homogeneity among the viewing population produces a sense of affective equality among the viewers. The supra-class female audience imagined in the romantic TV melodrama genre would be another example. These equalities, similar to the kind of access offered to the masses through contemporary postmodern architectural styles dominated by the transparency of glass doors, windows, and walls, are falsely and illusorily available to those outside.

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THREE

Shrewd Entrepreneurs or Immoral Speculators? Desires, Speculation, and Middle-Class Housewives in South Korea, 1978–1996

MYUNGJI YANG

Ms. Ahn, a sixty-four-year-old retired elementary school teacher, owns an old, 45-*p'yŏng* apartment in the Gangnam district.¹ As a solid member of the middle class, her life is quite stable and comfortable: about three million won (about 2,265 US dollars) of pension and allowance from her daughters every month ensure her financial security.² Above all, her apartment, her only major asset, is now valued at almost two billion won. The prime location and the possibility of reconstruction in two years have made her apartment more valuable, and she believes that the price will go up to 2.3 billion won right before the reconstruction project begins.³ Although she often feels behind economically compared with her rich neighbors, who own multiple apartments or other properties, many of her friends and former colleagues are jealous of her. She is the only one of her group of college friends who has settled in Gangnam. Those who own homes elsewhere

¹ *P'yŏng* is a unit of measurement commonly used in Korea. One *p'yŏng* is about 3.3 square meters and 35.58 square feet. Apartments in Korea are the same as condominiums in the United States. But in Korea, the term "condominium" generally is used to refer to properties at resorts. Thus, I use the term "apartments."

² Won is the currency of South Korea. One U.S. dollar equals about 1,100 won (as of 2017).
³ Since the mid-1990s, reconstruction has become common. Reconstruction (*chaegŏnch'uk*) is often differentiated from redevelopment of standard buildings (*chaegŏnch'uk*). Targeting previously constructed mid- or high-rise apartment complexes, reconstruction projects transform them into higher-density complexes (Shin and Kim 2016). Major conglomerates with construction businesses such as Hyundai, Samsung, and LG often take over the reconstruction firms, and these high-profile brand names keep up the property values.