

“Cruel Temptation”:

A Case Study of a Korean Drama and its Reception in the Singaporean Community

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Introduction

Ever since my first visit to Singapore at the age of five, the Singaporean nation and culture interested me because it was historically and continually influenced and changed by outside forces and cultures. Singapore was a captivating fusion of Chinese, Malaysian and Indian cultures, since these are representative of the most populous ethnic groups in Singapore. I could also see how Singapore was heavily influenced by British and American culture, since English is the binding language between all Singaporeans, no matter to which diverse ethnic group they belong. I came to expect the diversified Singaporean culture to which I had grown accustomed whenever I sporadically visited.

However, my last visit to Singapore revealed to me a recent phenomenon that seemed out of place in the Singapore with which I was familiar. The very day I had arrived in Singapore, I went to my grandparents' flat, and it was there my grandmother greeted me heartily before ushering me to the sofa. She excitedly told me that I was just in time to watch her favorite show. I expected that she would show me a Chinese drama, since I knew that she enjoyed those greatly. However, I noticed that even though the show was dubbed in Chinese, the actors and setting were most definitely Korean. Her newest obsession, "Cruel Temptation", was not Chinese at all, but a Korean family melodrama spanning more than one hundred episodes.

I was surprised to find that a Korean drama was so popular with my grandmother, and even more surprised to find that it was playing on the largest Chinese channel in Singapore at a prime hour. In addition, the newspaper we received had numerous blurbs on the Korean dramas and music stars with which Singaporeans had fallen in love. When I walked through shopping malls, I could often hear Korean music blare from trendy

clothing stores. When I went to music or video stores, Korean products took up a significant portion of the stores' shelves, and were often the first thing I would see the moment I walked in.

Before my last visit, I had never seen so many Korean products in Singapore that were prevalent and obvious in daily popular culture. Even though Singapore is a diverse nation whose popular cultural products are influenced from numerous nations and ethnic cultures, Korea is a relative latecomer to this diverse set of popular cultural imports in Singapore. Why, then, are Korean popular cultural products currently doing so well in Singapore of all places, wherein Korean influence was historically never very strong? In response, this thesis is an attempt to deconstruct why Korean popular cultural products, particularly dramas, are doing so well in Singapore today by looking at a specific drama and its reception in Singapore. I will then do a case study of one forum's opinions and discussions about this drama, and analyze how its reception in the Singaporean forum can help reveal what makes the drama so attractive.

First, this thesis looks at the political and economic background between South Korean and Singaporean media strategy and relations. Specifically, I will be discussing how the Korean Wave spread throughout Asia and how Singapore came to receive these products, both in the television and underground market. I will then watch and analyze how people responded to the drama, "Cruel Temptation" (아내의 유혹), the same one my grandmother had made me watch my first day in Singapore. "Cruel Temptation" is a drama that has finished airing in Singapore, but did extremely well throughout its run. It played at a prime time at 7:00PM from Monday to Friday on the popular cable channel, Channel U, and in terms of ratings, had consistently beat a locally produced show that

aired at the same time. I also want to look at the Singaporean online community at CozyCot Forums as a small but potentially significant portion of the Singaporean audience that watched this particular drama. I asked the question: why did these forum users watch Korean dramas like “Cruel Temptation”? What was the appeal of these types of Korean dramas in Singapore, and how did it become so deeply entrenched in Singaporean popular culture and fascination?

I know that my data is limited, given the online community's size and the uncertainty and subjectivity of the topic in question. This Korean drama represents only one type of genre: the melodrama, which is comprised of lengthy dramas focusing on romantic and family entanglements. These types of dramas are important to look at because they have seen a lot of success both in Korea and Singapore. Melodramas continue to dominate the Singaporean prime airing hours. Likewise, the forum community that I will analyze does not represent the entire Singaporean audience, nor even the entire Singaporean forum community. However, the forum community is a relevant text to look at not only because its thread lasted throughout the duration of the show's run, but also because its users and their discussions raise insight into why these users emotionally related to the series as well as how language affected the way users viewed “Cruel Temptation” as being relevant to their lives.

I argue that these forum users, given their cultural context, watch dramas like “Cruel Temptation” and participate in online forums because they do not feel disconnected by language or cultural barriers. They re-appropriate their cultural background to make informed decisions and opinions about characters and how they act throughout the storyline. Audience members are also able to actively discuss areas and

characters that concern them, and the forum serves as a safe and comfortable space where members are part of a uniquely Singaporean community that is not separated or defined by age and ethnicity.

The Korean Wave in East Asia and Singapore

This section looks at how Korea and Singapore's economic policies, political influence and other relevant background information affected the production and purchase of Korean dramas in other Asian countries like Singapore. The spread of Korean popular cultural products in Singapore is part of a larger dissemination of Korean popular media products to the world, especially in East and Southeast Asia. Since the 1980s, numerous popular cultural products have been exchanged and crossed the national borders of the East Asian nations. These nations include Singapore since there is such a significant Chinese population. This part of the Asian culture of consumption defines a large part of everyday pop culture life of the region's population (Huat 202).

Specifically, this section will discuss the importance of Singapore's diverse population and locale, the history of other foreign presence in Singapore, how Korean and Singaporean media policies affected the Korean Wave in Singapore, and how the Chinese language helped to cement Korean dramas' and their success in Singapore.

Singapore as a Diverse and Ideal Importing Nation

The media industry in Singapore is regulated by the government's Media Development Authority. Most of Singapore's broadcasting is produced by radio and television companies that are owned by the Media Corporation of Singapore, also known

as MediaCorp, and the Radio Corporation of Singapore. Broadcasts produced by these corporations are primarily in Chinese and English, but also in Malay and Tamil (Cima & DeGloppé). This is due to the diversity of Singapore's population. Singapore's population in 2010 numbered around 5.07 million people, out of which 3.77 million were Singaporean residents (“Time...”). The makeup of the population reveals a large majority of ethnic Chinese in Singapore. The 2000 census noted that the Chinese make up 76.8% of the population, while the remainder of Singapore's population is Malay (13.9%), Indian (mostly Tamil; 7.9%), and other (1.4%). However, simply dividing the population into these three ethnic groups still does not fully reveal the heterogeneity of the nation. For example, there are five main communities within the Chinese population, and the largest of which consists of the descendants of Hokkien-speaking migrants from the southern Fujian province in China (Warwick 237).

Therefore, a space like Singapore receives all sorts of popular cultural products from all parts of Asia, including the East, South and Southeast. At the same time, Singapore also involves its media with joint ventures and engagements with other Asian artists for their local productions. In this way, they can expand their own local and international market (Huat 203). In general, Singapore is a very limited domestic market. Singapore has no real film or music industries, and a relatively new television industry. This is due to the fact that Singapore has always espoused material and social welfare and success as necessities while arts were never seen as such. Only recently has Singapore begun to promote local arts production, and Singapore not only imports completed cultural products like dramas, but also imports talents and artists from other nations to help create local productions (Ardhana 47).

Furthermore, Singapore is extremely important as a central location for Southeast Asia and the Muslim community. The Republic of Singapore is a Southeast Asian city-state located on an island situated between Malaysia and Indonesia at the narrowest point in the Strait of Malacca. The island has historically hosted a strategic seaport in the route connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea (Ardhana 32). Since Singapore is such a diverse nation, it serves as an important nexus for the popularity of Korean popular cultural products to extend from Singapore to other Southeast Asian nations like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Foreign Countries and Their Historical Presences in Singapore

Historically, the Korean presence in Singapore and Southeast Asia was not as significant as and was generally overshadowed by the Japanese, Chinese and English presence. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles first established the trading post of “Singapore” in 1819 and opened the port to free trade. London eventually acquired full sovereignty over the land and in 1867, Singapore became a colony. Over the years after Singapore's colonization, Singapore prospered as financial institutions, transportation, communications and government infrastructure expanded rapidly to support the booming trade and industry of the British Empire. Today, the British legacy is still evident in Singapore. British music and television claims a popular cultural niche in Singapore, and Singaporeans are taught in British-style schools and Singaporeans from all ethnic groups are unified linguistically by British English (Leitch LePoer).

During the brief period of the Japanese occupation, starting from 1942 and ending in 1945, Koreans were often only associated with the Japanese military auxiliaries. After

that, the Korean presence was minimal until Chaebols, large Korean conglomerates and companies, were established in Singapore in the 1970s to assist in the construction of Singapore's physical infrastructure. Therefore, at that time, Koreans were typically associated with male construction workers and engineers. In the 1980s, the Singaporean perception of Korean did not necessarily improve, because Singaporeans mostly saw Korea only as a separate entity in the news, and Koreans and Korea did not appear extremely relevant to their lives (Fu & Liew 11).

After WWII and fears of a communist takeover in Malaya, the largely Chinese PAP (People's Action Party) headed by Lee Kuan Yew took over in 1953. Singapore gained independence from Britain's colonization in August of 1963, and later gained independence from Malaysia in 1965. The PAP has historically implemented paternalistic and at times authoritarian governmental practices, as well as enforced one-party dominance. Despite these controversial practices, the PAP continues to be accepted as a popular and acceptable form of government by maintaining economic success and growth (Leitch LePoer). The PAP also worked closely with the Japanese government for economic purposes, which strengthened both Chinese and Japanese influence and further solidified their presence in Singaporean daily life and popular culture.

The Korean and Singaporean Media Strategy

However, in the early 2000s, the Korean government focused on exporting Korean popular cultural products throughout Asia as a new economic initiative after the 1997 Asian regional financial crisis and after the media liberalization movement that swept across Asia in the 1990s (Shim 31). The Korean popular culture industry was

heavily influenced by the standards of Japanese popular culture production. For example, Korean dramas borrowed themes that were prevalent in Japanese 'trendy' dramas. At the same time, the production of Japanese dramas slowed, and exports did as well by the late 1990s, leaving a space that needed to be filled by another type of drama.

Therefore, the media space in Singapore that had been previously taken by dramas like the Japanese 'trendy' drama was filled by Korean imports. This dissemination and rapidly growing popularity of Korean popular cultural products outside of Korea are reflected in the term coined for this phenomenon: hanliu (韓流) / 한류 (hallyu), meaning 'Korean wave, trend, or wind'. Products that have gained popularity throughout Asia include television dramas, movies, popular music, fashion, food and any associated celebrities (Sung 3). This is evidenced by recent Singaporean economic figures. In 2010, the country's free and open multilateral trading system produced a GDP was about US\$182 billion, and has seen significant growth throughout the past decades. Singapore's imports totaled around US\$210.7 billion in 2005 ("Latest..."), and South Korea is one of Singapore's major import partnerships. Currently, South Korean imports make up 4.3% of the total imports to Singapore, which is a significant percentage for the reasons mentioned above ("Country..." 10).

At the same time in 1999, the Mandarin channel, Channel U, under the newly-launched Mediawork, took away a significant portion of the audience population from an already established state-owned station. Channel U did this by broadcasting a combination of Korean drama series and local variety shows that were similar to variety shows in Taiwan, which were, in turn, influenced by Japanese variety shows. Korean products were cheaper in comparison to Japanese and Hong Kong products at the time.

According to a Strait Times article published on the 8th of April, 2003, Korean television dramas were a quarter of the price of Japanese ones, and a tenth of the price of Hong Kong television dramas as of 2000 (Lee). Channel U also acknowledges the strategies implemented to promote the Korean drama. Jeslyn Low, the head of branding and promotions at Channel U, noted that Channel U had consciously working to cultivate a desire for Singaporean audiences to consume Korean dramas, even in the prime viewing hour of 7pm on weekdays (Sung 4).

In May 2001, the first Korean drama “Invitation” was aired on Channel U (Wan). This drama as well as other Korean dramas were at first shown at 10pm so that they did not have to compete against local series, which aired earlier in the evening. Later in the year, the first real successful Korean drama “Autumn Tale” was screened in Singapore and was so well received that Channel U was inundated with calls and e-mails requesting a re-run. “Winter Sonata” the following year caused an even greater stir and even higher viewer ratings, and since then the Korean drama has been a fixture on Singaporean television (Fu & Liew 11). Soon after Channel U's success, MediaCorp also imported Korean drama series and the popularity of Korean dramas on Singaporean television continued to increase. By late 2003, there is at least one Korean drama series airing on Singaporean television stations every night at a prime hour, after the daily news. These drama series have thus become a site for local media competition, because they not only air on television but their influence extends to the print media. Particularly in Mandarin publications, Korean dramas and artists are often discussed and introduced to Chinese audiences (Huat 207).

Language and the Underground Market

An extremely important facet of the Korean Wave is the underground market and its role in promoting Korean popular culture. Singapore followed the Korean Wave partly because of the trends in China and Taiwan. When Korean dramas first became popular, and even before then, retailers imported Korean drama box-sets from China and Taiwan to sell in Singapore. These VCDs had Chinese dubs and subtitles, which made them easily accessible to the Chinese Singaporean populations (Fu & Liew 11). Without the VCD and its cheap and easy distribution, Singaporeans initially may not have been as inclined to watch and follow these dramas. The VCD is a popular medium of television drama watching because they're much cheaper than DVDs. For example, a set of a 20-part drama series on VCD could be sold for less than \$40 on average in local stores. With the cheap VCD box series, Singaporean audiences could not only easily access the dramas, but could watch them quickly without having to wait (Shim 2007). A newspaper journalist interviewed the managing director of Poh Kim Video, one of the biggest video chains in Singapore, who revealed that Korean dramas are some of the most popular purchases, accounting for approximately 1/3rd of all sales. Considering, once again, how few Koreans there are in Singapore compared to the other populations, this fraction is much larger than one would initially expect of Singaporean sales (Lee).

Furthermore, it is important to note that these VCD box-sets that helped make Korean dramas popular were originally imported from Taiwan and China. They had their own Chinese titles and synopses, and were not only subtitled but the dialogue was dubbed over in Mandarin. Therefore, the consumption of these dramas were not based on the ability to speak Korean or even in any interest in Korea, but based on the ability to speak or read Mandarin. Korean dramas also were screened on Chinese-language

channels like Channel U and MediaCorp and were often dubbed over in Mandarin. This reinforced the notion that Korean dramas were relevant to and of interest to the ethnic Chinese majority (Fu & Liew 11). My grandmother, for example, could not tell me what the name of the drama's characters were in Korean, and only knew the Chinese translation of every important detail of the drama. The Korean language was completely irrelevant to her viewing experience.

Since 2000 however, there have been several shifts with respect to language. The recent popularity of Korean dramas amongst non-Chinese Singaporeans and the recognition of that popularity, as well as the popularity of Korean dramas in Malaysia resulted in a belated import of Korean dramas with English, Mandarin and Malay subtitles. The increase in subtitle choices has therefore made Korean dramas more accessible and available to more non-ethnic Chinese consumers, particularly the ethnic Malay and Tamil Singaporeans. The popularity of Korean dramas has also spurred a greater desire for authentic viewing experiences. Viewers now have the option of watching dual-sound versions with both the Korean and Chinese soundtracks because they increasingly want to watch the drama with the original Korean vocalization. Television stations like Channel U and MediaCorp currently provide options for viewers to choose which language they want for subtitles as well as which language's soundtrack to which they want to listen. VCDs and DVDs also are increasingly providing similar options, however they are generally more expensive. However, many viewers are beginning to be more willing to pay for this viewing experience, even though the Chinese-dubbed versions exported from China are universally cheaper (Fu & Liew 11).

In essence, there is a time lag between consumers wanting to watch the dramas in

their native language versus wanting to watch them in a foreign language. At first, the Korean dramas are taken in with Chinese dubbing and subtitling. When even the names of all the characters and the title of the drama itself is translated into Chinese, an essential marker that the drama was Korean is removed. Therefore, these dramas were not fully culturally marked as Korean. However, the fact that more and more people now want to watch the drama with the Korean soundtrack and see what the Korean names are for the characters and actors reflects a changing attitude and acceptance toward Korean popular culture in the audience's daily media consumption.

Cruel Temptation in Singapore

The past section looked at how historical economic and political media policies and strategies affected how Singaporeans came to know Korean popular culture, specifically discussing how Korean dramas developed a stronghold on Singaporean television. This section, then, will focus on a textual analysis of both the drama and the online forum, Cozycot. The plot of the story is so convoluted and so detailed that it would not be helpful to lay it out here in chronological order. Instead, this paper will mention relevant parts of the plot throughout so that the reader will be able to understand the context that the forum users are talking about is not lost. Furthermore, this paper will address the characters by their Chinese names, because the majority of the forum's users referred to the characters by their Chinese names instead of by their original Korean names.

Discussing “Cruel Temptation” necessitates a short introduction to the drama and its success both in Korea and Singapore. “Cruel Temptation” is the story of three families

whose members' lives are intertwined and all affect one another. In short, is the tale of a sweet and beautiful woman, Encai, who seeks revenge against her ex-husband, Qiaobin, and his new wife, the seductive Aili. Though this theme of revenge is not a deeply entrenched trope in Korean television media, the lengthy melodrama style format in which the drama is filmed is an example of the type of Korean drama that had previously had large recognition and success not only in Korea, but also in Singapore and other nations that had been affected by the Hallyu. In Korea, this drama did extremely well when it first aired in November of 2008, and it continued to grow increasingly successful as the storyline continued, reaching fairly consistent episode viewership ratings over 30% throughout and despite the show's lengthy run (“Temptation...”).

In Singapore, “Cruel Temptation” also did well and was an important fixture on prime time Singaporean television. The drama was ranked 5th among the Korean serial hits on Channel U since 2005, and MediaCorp figures indicate that the show had an average of 354,000 viewers per night. This show is also the first Korean serial to beat a local production airing in the same time slot on Channel 8. For comparison's sake, *The Little Nyonya*, a local series about a Peranakan family had about 934,000 viewers while a popular Hong Kong show had about 380,000 viewers per night. For a Korean drama to be one of the top contenders for viewership alongside shows with clear connections to Singaporean society is noteworthy (Chan). The Singapore version of the show aired 120 episodes, which meant 9 episodes were cut out of the storyline or edited for the television screening. Even though 9 episodes were removed, the plot remained largely the same and audiences did not miss out on large and necessary aspects of the plot.

Specifically, this section will go through the forum's thread in the general

chronological order of the discussion, bringing up key observations and issues that revealed insight into how Singaporean audiences took in the drama and how it was relevant to their lives. First, this paper will introduce the forum and look at how the forum users' focus on physicality and attractiveness affected their opinions of characters. The paper will then look at how ideas about gender roles have been influenced by Chinese immigration and political history, as well as discuss how the users gave gendered analyses about both female and male characters and their motivations. After that, the paper will discuss how Singlish works to unify the CozyCot community, and lastly, the paper looks into the viewers' actual watching process, since many chose not to watch the drama in its entirety.

Introduction to the Forum: The CozyCot

This particular forum is not necessarily representative of all Singaporean viewers for a number of reasons, but a case study of CozyCot is still extremely relevant for three main reasons: it targets females, it is unclear what ethnicity users are, and it was open for the duration of the show's airing in Singapore.

Firstly, CozyCot acknowledges that it is a Singaporean forum specifically targeting Singaporean females. One look at the layout reveals an extremely pink and sparkly background with numerous advertisements for skincare and other beauty and fashion products. There is a Chinese version of the website and an English version, and the website's "about us" section declares:

CozyCot is women's best loved online beauty, fashion, lifestyle, forums, reviews and shopping, catering to women and their insatiable needs. Featuring over 28,000 forum threads and more than 2 million posts to date...The site's interactive features include thousands of message boards and a wide variety of social

networking tools, allowing women around the world to connect, share ideas, and seek advice and support about everything from teens to a mom. CozyCot is dedicated to connecting women at every stage of their lives” (CozyCot).

The Korean Wave in general has also been geared toward female audiences. Shim argues that the majority of those who follow the Korean Wave are women from the ages of 6 to 80. She also cites examples of the large female crowds that often greet Korean actors of television dramas in public spaces, indicating that television audiences who follow these Korean dramas are largely female (Shim 2007). In addition, the official Korean tourism site also acknowledges that the target audience for dramas like “Cruel Temptation” is the female population. It states:

If you are a woman, whether or not you are happy with your current lot in life, you always dream of how your life could have been had you traveled down a different path. However, by indulging yourself in movies or dramas, you can vicariously live out your own dreams of a life and love that 'could have been'. 'Temptation of Wife' is a drama that indulges such romantic fantasies (visitkorea).

This description of the drama's appeal for foreigners, albeit slightly condescending, reveals the intentionality behind targeting a female audience. However, as the CozyCot thread will reveal later, the drama is much more than a site for fantasy. By discussing characters' motivations and in depth opinions about the plot and how the drama progressed, the Singaporean audience actually engages with the drama much more than the Korean tourist website would suggest.

Secondly, the fact that users' ethnic identities are generally anonymous does not necessarily negatively affect this study because, like Singapore, CozyCot's English speaking forum invites a diverse group of individuals from numerous ethnic groups and of varying ages. Furthermore, the lack of discussion about ethnic identity levels the playing field for these particular Singaporean forum users, because discussions of the

drama are not constrained by racial factors. Discussions are not even hindered by Chinese-language factors, because the forum users discuss characters both with their Chinese and Korean names, sometimes interchangeably. Instead, as mentioned later, the language of Singlish, a hybrid language that is understood by all users, serves as a unifying factor for these forum users that takes place of any ethnic discussion and relevance.

Lastly, I chose to look closely at this particular forum because it lasted throughout the duration of the drama's run on Singaporean television, and reveals the attitudes and perceptions of many females interested in the drama. On the English forum, the thread dedicated to "Cruel Temptation" and its entries spanned 24 pages. Discussions started the day before it was set to air on Channel U and ended a couple days after the last episode aired on television.

Therefore, CozyCot members are an important demographic for the Singaporean female audience. Though largely female, the CozyCot member population is comprised of online users of many ethnicities and varying ages. These members not only watch the drama, but their comments, questions and concerns about the drama raise insight as to why these Singaporeans would want to watch in the first place, how the Singaporean female audience took information in and how they connected to the drama's characters, and how the online forum serves as a space where Singaporeans can be comfortable with each other and re-appropriate the drama's plot and characters to make sense in their own lives.

Initial Thoughts and Discussions of Physicality

At first, conversations and entries were limited to declarations of excitement and initial rants about the characters' personalities and physical traits. User *atasprincess*¹ began the conversation by exclaiming that the storyline sounded really interesting and others agreed. Many mentioned that they would not normally enjoy family dramas but this particular plot interested them. However, there were also many users who admitted to looking forward to another well-received Korean drama.

Interestingly, the same people who immediately proclaimed their interest in the plot also quickly latched onto people they could hate. User *LippyNBlush* described three characters as follows: “the MIL (mother in law) is so irritating it makes me wanna switch the tv off! The hubby very loser & I find the way Aili always grabbed & kissed SUPER aggressive.”² Her rage was expressed in this rant, and there were many others who agreed and similarly picked out the people they detested. Rants like the one above indicated the beginning of a lengthy discussion later on in the forum’s thread about of ideal personalities and character traits for both men and women. A number of these early rants were in response to characters who acted in what the forum users believed to be socially unacceptable ways. User *tiggercheeze*’s comment provides a useful combination of all three phenomena mentioned above: “i dont watch korean dramas at all except for da chang jing & boys over flowers. But this plot has attracted me to start watching. oh yes, the MIL is so noisy & irritating! just makes me wanna slap her! Lol~.”³

The initial designation of hatred continued as characters spiraled further and further in the sordid tale of “Cruel Temptation”. Many users got extremely frustrated by

¹ *atasprincess* (20-11-2009 10:32 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation.html#post2159591>

² *LippyNBlush* (26-11-2009 10:45 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation.html#post2171017>

³ *tiggercheeze* (20-11-2009 11:52 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation.html#post2160681>

the characters and their actions, as well as felt like they could make judgment calls about why the characters would do certain things. Therefore, it appeared that these forum users came to watch this particular drama because they wanted to see how characters would navigate the revenge plot line, choosing to like various characters based on where they stood and how they acted in this storyline.

In fact, throughout the entire thread, the concept of physicality and personality being intertwined came up often. CozyCot members often sporadically noted an opinion about a character's hairstyle or other physical traits, which spurred discussions about whether other members agreed and approved with the original comment. While some were random opinions, many of these observations about appearances also supplemented the users' reasoning for liking or disliking certain characters because of their physical appearance. Furthermore, sometimes the characters appeared to be more attractive to members when their personalities seemed nicer. For example, Ninuo, the son of Aili, was portrayed as an innocent boy who was tugged left and right by his familial situation. Yet some users argued that Ninuo's physical features and actions were a result of his evil mother and made him appear worse to the audience. For example, *bikegal81* claimed: "Ninuo is cute but anyone notice sometimes the way he smile kind of cunning machiam his mummy, the wide smile, like hiding behind a knife in the smile."⁴

In addition, people did not seem to understand why two women were fighting over a male character who appeared to be not only unattractive in terms of personality but also in terms of physicality. For example, user *Shandy Ho* noted simply: "The hubby ain't good looking at all, but the 2 women simply want to be with him."⁵ It made no sense to

⁴ bikegal81 (10-12-2009 11:32 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-4.html#post2194259>

⁵ Shandy Ho (01-12-2009 05:39 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-2.html#post2178057>

these users that Encai, the beautiful woman who was taking revenge, would want a man who had cheated on her with Aili. For example, *coolbugz*⁶ argued that it would have been more convincing to see the husband, Qiaobin, played by an attractive actor, because then it would have made more sense for two pretty women to want him.

Other users acknowledged that these three intertwined characters were cast well, considering how they were meant to act out their roles. *Ethereal26* commented: "...they have chosen the right wife and mistress to act in it, as the wife look so timid and the mistress look so bitchy and seductive."⁷ These opinions also reflected the underlying belief that better characters deserved to be better looking while evil characters needed to possess negative physical traits according to their gender. Encai and Aili were decent-looking, but Encai's looks were seen in a positive light while Aili's physical traits were seen very negatively. On the other hand, there were some users who believed the characters were cast well not because of their roles, but because the physical appearance should not have been important in a story that portrayed couples broken by infidelity and backstabbing a little more realistically. *birkinluv* noted: "Though this show doesn't have famous beautiful actresses and actors, but its very interesting to watch. It reflects on the real life of men betraying their wives, looking for mistresses out there having fun"⁸.

Interestingly, in the middle of discussing characters physical traits in relation to their personalities, members admitted and acknowledged that the physical appearance of the characters could have been a large part in their opinions of the characters.

bloomingmusk argued: " If they have found a more handsome actor to act qiaobin role,

⁶ *coolbugz* (08-02-2010 02:44 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-15.html#post2356370>

⁷ *Ethereal26* (08-12-2009 07:41 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-3.html#post2191036>

⁸ *birkinluv* (29-11-2009 04:03 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-2.html#post2174563>

would we even bash him? perhaps we would think it's ok since the husband is handsome, understandable that both women give in so much to be with him yet his character suck but still understandable because he looks cute”,⁹ to which *Applebear* responded by comparing Qiaobin to another attractive male character, Jianyou: “just imagine if they got jianyou to play qiaobin's role and qiaobin play jianyou?I won't have the heart to bash him up if jianyou was the one playing the bad husband.”¹⁰

Lastly, it is important to note that the forum itself focuses heavily on makeup and beauty tips. At the very top of every thread page, there is an advertisement for skincare products or dieting fads. Therefore, it could just be that this forum's particular group of users was already extremely interested in looks or at least primed to be so. Either way, the actors' physical traits and appearances appeared to often be a key factor in how CozyCot members viewed the characters' personalities. Physical appearances were directly tied into personalities, and often the characters' appearance would color the way CozyCot members looked at the characters and how they acted throughout the storyline. Likewise, forum users expected good characters to look a certain way and bad characters to look another. This is especially true of the female characters of Encai and Aili, who were supposed to both look pretty, but Encai was seen by CozyCot members as being more sweet-looking while Aili was seen more as looking more like a scandalous temptress. The following sections will look more closely at how gender representations in this drama were interpreted by the CozyCot members by first looking at how Singapore has been influenced by Chinese immigration, and then by seeing how these influences affected the forum users' interpretations of the characters and their genders.

⁹ bloomingmusk (08-02-2010 11:09 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-15.html#post2357431>

¹⁰ AppleBear (10-02-2010 06:46 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-15.html#post2365014>

The Singaporean Audience: Identity and Chinese Influence

Singapore is as a nation comprised of multiple ethnicities and cultures, complicating the idea of a Singaporean identity. The Singaporean identity is, in part, constructed. In 2002, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong urged Singaporeans to develop a common national identity that espoused the diversity of the nation and the histories of these different cultures on one island as a basis for a national identity. Loong argued: “The shared trials and tribulations of nationhood, plus the common experiences living in integrated communities, studying in national schools, and serving National Service side-by-side, will enlarge and strengthen the common ground of our people” (Xinhua 2002). Singaporeans recognize that their nation is made up of various people groups, languages and traditions, and a common national identity can only be the sum of all these disparate and foreign parts (Ardhana 49). Therefore, the Singaporean identity and the ways Singaporeans think and act have been continually shifting and influenced by external cultures and factors.

One of these important external factors is the fact that the influx of Chinese migrants over the decades influenced the ways Singaporean society functioned, and naturally, influenced those of Chinese descent, the most. In 1827, Chinese became the most numerous of Singapore's various ethnic groups, and it is still the majority today. The rapid immigration of Chinese workers and families as well as workers from Malaysia and India make up the diversity of the population (Library of Congress). Therefore, it is important to look at how Chinese schools of thought like Confucianism affected Singaporean society and thought as a whole.

When Chinese migrants first came to Singapore, they attempted to recreate their Chinese identity by remembering and enforcing certain “Chinese values.” These included Confucian social and moral values and practices, and they were integrated into everyday life. The Confucian values of filial piety, loyalty to the family, virtues and harmony, respect of ones’ elders, educational achievement, and more were an expectation to live up to for many Chinese people and families. By remembering these beliefs, Chinese migrants were able to establish a sense of solidarity amongst themselves. Therefore, at the communal level, Confucian values were socialized as a general moral and social ethos that the Chinese have always ascribed to (Englehart).

However, Confucianism has also been heavily promoted by the PAP state, and has been used as an ideological tool for economic development and modernization. Confucianism embodied a set of common values that the PAP believed would further its policies, and could gain the people’s support (Kuah 374-5). The PAP thus, with Confucianism as their platform, argued that Confucian paternalism allows for the PAP to make decisions because of their superior position of authority. They argue that those in the PAP are intellectually and morally superior, and therefore worthy of being in positions of power. At election time, they advertise their candidates’ school grades, exam scores, along with other academic accomplishments. This level of paternalism as supported by Confucian values is argued as normal for Asians, and that Asians want to be ruled by academic and moral elites as advertised in the PAP. The PAP had to claim that Singaporeans had always practiced Confucian principles even if they didn't define it as such (Englehart 554).

The PAP has also historically promoted Confucian Values to define what the

woman's role in the family and society should be. In general, women should submit to the men in their lives, and their main objective should be to take care of the home. For example, in 1984, Lee Kuan Yew declared that college women should marry because these women would produce genetically superior and better-educated children. Ultimately, women are meant to produce offspring and care for their children, while ensuring their children get superior educations (Douglas 1984). Furthermore, in 1994, Lee Kuan Yew contradicted his earlier decree by stating that women should not have gotten equal opportunities for educations and jobs. He stated: “the Asian male does not like to have a wife who is seen to be his equal at work who may be earning as much if not more than he does. He is not wearing the pants. That is an enormous loss of face.” Both these incidents stirred a lot of controversy for Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP, but they reflect the ways the PAP view women and evidence how Singaporeans are asked to think and talk about them. This does not mean that Singaporeans, especially Singaporean women, ascribe to these opinions, but they do have to deal with the aftermath of these reflections of “Confucian beliefs” (Branigin 1994). They are also influenced just as much by Western representations and discussions and concepts of womanhood and femininity.

Singapore is by no means a Confucian nation. Furthermore, Confucianism's role in Singaporean society and as an ideological tool for the PAP indicates the challenges presented with discussing Confucianism in Singapore. The assumption behind the Confucian Campaign was that Confucianism is part of the foundational culture of daily life of Chinese Singaporeans. However, it is also clear that Confucianism was, in part, a modern implementation by the PAP to further its own agenda (Huat 202). Despite

this governmental implementation, these values are still relevant because they not only influenced in part people's experiences as they grew up in Singapore and re-appropriated these values as their own, but they are also remnants of a Chinese heritage that influenced the way many family's viewed the household as well as the style in which parents raised their children.

Gender in “Cruel Temptation” and How CozyCot Members Responded

These state-led articulations of the Singaporean gendered identity within the community and family are evidenced in the ways forum users responded to various characters in “Cruel Temptation”. Furthermore, though there are no definitive figures, a large part of the television audience is generally female, which necessitates a gendered discussion of the drama. CozyCot is also geared toward female forum users and viewers, and their opinions about the drama were influenced and were often directed toward discussions about gender. The portrayal of gender roles and family thus plays a crucial factor in how the users at CozyCot viewed the characters and plot.

Often, users responded to behaviors mostly if they believed them to be inappropriate. For example, many users commented that the way the mother in law and Aili treated Encai was unacceptable, and they were not portrayed as respectable female characters that audience members would want to be like. The mother in law also was hardly an exemplary wife according to many people's standards. She went behind her husband's back constantly to indulge her vices, and did not respect her husband's decisions or orders at all. She also appeared to solely be married to him for his wallet. User *EnnaEnna* raged: “MIL is soooooooooooooo 'qian bian'. So materialistic. No need

DNA & thinks Aili's son is her grandson. Foolish simple-minded old woman.”¹¹ Aili, though a successful business woman, was also not respected by CozyCot audiences because of the way she broke a preexisting relationship in order to satisfy her own seemingly selfish needs. The same user also ranted: “Aili is a incorrigible woman man!!! Grr, She wanna married into rich family that's all!”¹² Users like *EnnaEnna* had trouble sympathizing with characters like the mother-in-law and Aili because of their over-the-top, unacceptable behaviors that were unbecoming how women are supposed to act.

On the other hand, female characters who were portrayed in a positive way garnered respect from the CozyCot audience. For example, Hena, Qiaobin's aunt, was praised as a character CozyCot members liked because of the way she acted and responded to situations. *superfudgechunk* noted: “i like how she talks back to the family members, funny and sometimes right to the point.” Encai was also often discussed in a very positive light because CozyCot members tended to view her as a victim in this whole series, reacting to the situation in the only way she could. After all, Encai had started out submissive and often deferred to her husband. The only times she refused to submit to him was when their marriage was on the line, and she was pregnant with his child. For the sake of their unborn child, she refused to agree to his demands for divorce. Only after she had lost her second baby because of Qiaobin and his family did she become vengeful and do anything in her power to ruin Aili and Qiaobin's marriage. For example, user *coolbugz* argued:

i think encai is not evil so to speak. she has simply become vengeful due to circumstances. circumstances have made her behave this way. i do agree it all started with Qiaobin. If not for him, encai would not

¹¹ EnnaEnna (14-12-2009 02:01 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-5.html#post2204176>

¹² EnnaEnna (21-11-2009 01:21 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation.html#post2160805>

have been raped and forced to marry him. she would not have been raped and forced to marry him. she would not have suffered under her MIL, would not have suffered in silence, would not have been betrayed by her own friend whom she trusted so much, she would not have been 'murdered' by qiaobin and aili, guess when someone is being cornered to the wall, he/she can really change drastically into another person to fight for survival.¹³

In addition, *bloomingmusk* described the difference between a good and bad wife with one statement, briefly reflecting Confucian teachings about wifeness: “Encai is a very good wife, timid and submissive, Aili is a very shrewd and cunning women, who think more to her benefit”.¹⁴ Throughout the forum, forum users discussed in depth what the characters should have done as befitting their gendered statuses. After users had compared Aili with Encai, the closest thing to an ideal woman in this series was a beautiful woman who, though deferential to her husband and family, could also fight back for what she has lost, even at the expense of others. Even though Encai had ruined Aili and her son's life, she had done it only in response to the wrongs committed against her, which, while not making it right, at least make her actions understandable to the forum users in the audience.

Male characters were also not exempt from Cozycot members and their scrutiny and rage, since members also discussed the male characters and discussed them in terms of masculine properties. Throughout the series, Qiaobin had a sense of entitlement and believed he deserved whatever he wanted. He cheated on his wife without qualms because he did not love her and felt no reason to even pretend otherwise. He did not really care about what Encai went through, and was portrayed as extremely selfish

¹³ coolbugz (04-02-2010 02:39 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-14.html#post2344410>

¹⁴ bloomingmusk (04-02-2010 02:17 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-14.html#post2344397>

throughout the entire drama. CozyCot members disapproved heavily of this character.

User *bloomingmusk* argued:

I think [Encai] should do more on Qiaobin isn't it? He is a womanizer and doesn't even care for the wife if she is dead or not when he has his mind set on other women. In fact, i think all the problem start from Qiaobin. If he didn't get so tempted by Aili's advances in the beginning and also try to take advantage of Encai before marrying her, then i think all the problem wouldn't have started.¹⁵

Therefore, many were overjoyed when Encai's character began to exact her revenge, partly because they supported the woman's struggles, and partly because they wanted to see how this revenge would play out against Aili and Qiaobin. LingNing noted: “[Encai] has matured after so much has happened to her and her unfaithful hubby. This kind of man really deserve to die rather than have the pleasure of being with two women at the same time. enjoying herself tremendously.” Even though Qiaobin was the husband and should have been respected, he was seen as a vile character because he should have known better than to treat his wife the way he did. Therefore, forum users actually wanted to see Qiaobin suffer for the ways he made Encai suffer.

Many users realized their emotional attachment to the drama, and particularly to Encai's character and plight. Often, they discussed the intense feelings they were left with after scenes with particular characters. *LippyNBlush* noted: “This drama really make me angry & heart pain. I always find myself walking away cos the MIL is soooo irritating & the husband is so loser to keep on apologizing but then go back to Aili.”¹⁶ In fact, people became so emotionally invested in the show, that some actually had to stop watching. *Janetty* said: “LOLS! i stopped watching this show. is like to stop my own

¹⁵ *bloomingmusk* (03-02-2010 02:32 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-14.html#post2341804>

¹⁶ *LippyNBlush* (10-12-2009 05:33 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-4.html#post2195121>

blood from boiling”.¹⁷

Gender is an extremely important aspect of the forum users' viewing of the drama, because their interpretations of gender and how gender roles should be acted out not only affected their opinions of the plot and characterization, but also revealed how the Singaporean collective perspective on gender roles has been influenced by Confucian teaching and politically implemented strategy. Singaporean women also deal with family issues and have to navigate ideas about gender roles that commonly expect women to submit to their husbands and listen to him. Without these perceptions of gender and how men and women should act, forum users would not feel so emotionally connected to characters and their plights.

In addition, forum users re-interpreted what the state had intended women to believe about relationships within the family. CozyCot members understood and believed in the idea of women deferring to their husbands and father figures. However, they drew the line once the man has repeatedly and unfairly wronged her. Likewise, CozyCot members could not understand Qiaobin's motivations because they were completely unfair to both Aili and Encai, who had to deal with the aftermath of his poor decisions. Forum users appropriated the Confucian context of gendered family relations and used that background to understand why the characters acted and believed the way they did, but they responded further by disagreeing completely with the Confucian concept of submitting to the husband and to the family once it became too much for the woman to handle.

¹⁷ janetty (14-12-2009 02:59 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-5.html#post2204251>

Singlish as Unifier

As the show continued to run on television and people watched more and more of the drama, people on the thread began to talk more in depth about what was going on in the actual drama, and not just what characters they did not like. They began to discuss summaries in detail and began to feel more comfortable in asking other users for details and information. Mostly, people exchanged clarification questions and answers because the plot was so convoluted. Then, people began to actually to talk about the characters in detail. Four months after the thread's birth and airing of the drama in Singapore, *bloomingmusk* started a discussion about Jian You, another male character. What is interesting about the following quote is not the content necessarily, but how *bloomingmusk* writes the comment. The user argued:

Actually i don't like jian you. I don't think he is a good child to the adopted mum, xiao xi mum. As they both are brother n sister in name, though not related but they fall in love then mum object and xiao xi went to commit suicide and then when encai became xiaoxi, he fall in love again with his so called sister, why does he always must get involved romantically within his family member? Even not blood related also cannot like that. Once a lesson and losing someone he like still not enough but must go through it again the second time but i'm happy that encai is with him in the end, although the real xiaoxi never die. Abit too much to ask for in the situation but love is blind i suppose.¹⁸

This is not the first example of Singlish written out in comments, and like most of the other forum users, this CozyCot member uses Singlish to raise some important points about what it means to disregard a parent's objections and briefly touches on the idea that there may be subconscious and psychological reasons why the orphaned Jianyou continues to fall in love with his 'sister' figure. Comments like these go beyond a simple

¹⁸ *bloomingmusk* (28-01-2010 03:46 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-13.html#post2323474>

observation into analysis of various characters, yet they are done so in Singlish. Singlish is a style of speech that mixes English and largely, but not exclusively, Hokkien, the historically dominant Chinese dialect in Singapore. It also mixes Malayan and Indian words and grammar into this hybrid layman's language (Huat 25). Singlish not only mixes various grammar and lexical patterns, but most of the English is actually directly translated from Chinese. This is why for the quote above, a number of the phrases are not connected the way they would be in English, because the Chinese language does not have the same type of connecting phrases and words. Another tangible example is the translation of “can”. When the Chinese say they can do something, they say one word: 可以 (keyi), which means “can”. Therefore, in Singlish, when Singaporeans want to indicate that they are able to do something, all they say is “can”, and the rest of the sentence, “do something,” is implied.

This is significant because the majority of Singaporeans speak at least two languages and they are primed to speak the languages separately in formal settings such as in educational and working institutions. Malay is the national language in Singapore and one of the four official languages, along with Chinese, Tamil and English. The majority of Singaporeans speak Chinese since 76% of the population is of Chinese descent (“Country...” 06), however this encompasses a number of dialects for various Chinese ethnic groups. The post-independence generation along with most Chinese migrants spoke a number of southern Chinese dialects, but in 1979, the PAP government began enforcing fluency in Mandarin Chinese and promoting Mandarin as the main Chinese dialect. Therefore, those of Chinese descent who migrated recently or who went through schooling before Mandarin was enforced may not be able to speak Mandarin

(Warwick 247). Other languages, in order of primary use, are Malay (about 15%), English (about 9%) and Tamil (4%) (“Country...” 06). English is used as the language of commerce and higher education.

However, in small businesses and in private spheres where Chinese, Malays and Indians only need to negotiate in their own languages, so they speak in the 'pidgin' language of Singlish (Warwick 248). They navigate their daily lives with a mixture of the languages they know along with Singlish. Therefore, the fact that the forum users use Singlish with one another is significant. Singlish has always been used as a way of expressing informality between two parties, and to speak formally in a single language implies distance (Huat 26). The extensive usage of Singlish indicates a shared culture that is specific to Singaporeans. This hybrid language demarcates the community and shared online space the forum users are in. Singlish unifies the users, regardless of age and ethnicity because it and allows users to signify that they feel comfortable with each other as a member of the same community and culture.

Watching, or Not Watching the Show

Another thing that is important to note about the Cozycot forum members was that many members skipped over certain scenes and episodes. They either ignored parts they thought were boring or annoying, which indicates that entirety of the plot was not important to these viewers. They did not feel the need to know every detail and every thought process behind the characters and their motivation. Instead, they were very selective about what they wanted to connect to and take in. For example, *Bewygirl* stated: “channel U only at 40+ episode. caught a glimpse yday. that Min Xiaoxi very

noisy..always screaming..I fast fwd when it is her scene.”¹⁹ Even if these viewers skipped around and did not watch every episode and scene, they still felt like they are getting the full experience.

Ironically, the forum became a place people could go to so that they wouldn't have to watch certain episodes, and could skip various parts. One person, *AppleBear* summarized much of the drama, and she even admitted: “will tell you as much as i could by summarizing the juicy details from various episodes when i got time okay. I will leave out those irritating screaming and shouting parts from the evil mother-in-law, xiao xi and aili. These few people screamed the most in the show.”²⁰ The forum, in these instances, became a way for people to complain about and skim through the show without having to fully watch it, just so they could know what happened to the characters in the end. There was also a number of members who admitted outright that they did not actually necessarily enjoy the plot, but were just watching because now that they had started, they just wanted to know how it ended. *vitaminised* complained: “the show is soooo draggy but sooo addictive as well... i kept wanting to give up watching but still want to know like what's gonna to happen... spent 1 whole week watching and i'm finally done with it”²¹ For viewers like these as they watched more and more of the show, watching and actually finishing the show seemed to be more like a chore than for enjoyment.

It appears that many users did not necessarily watch “Cruel Temptation” because of the storyline itself. While people wanted to know what is going to happen, they do not

¹⁹ Bewygirl (21-01-2010 10:22 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-9.html#post2297690>

²⁰ AppleBear (23-01-2010 12:54 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-11.html#post2303194>

²¹ vitaminised (14-12-2009 05:33 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-5.html#post2204463>

necessarily feel compelled to watch all the episodes to do so. Not only were there people on the forum who were willing to fill in any blanks a user had questions about, users also felt that the plot in general was overall extremely over-the-top and unbelievable to most viewers. For example, *la diva* noted: “The characters in this show are getting on my nerves. They are just 2 dimensional to be true and what's with the perpetual shouting and striking???? Good plot turned sour by overacting.”²² CozyCot members even noticed the small details that made the show that much more unbelievable. For example, *sprouts* noted: “in the show, they can always barge into one another's house. very weird.”²³

Comments like these continued until the very end of the thread, where users discussed the last episode aired in Singapore. These comments indicated that even though these forum users came into the thread because of their interest in “Cruel Temptation”, many could not actually watch the entire drama. They felt completely justified to skip around and follow certain subplots over others. The plot was so over the top and overly convoluted that for many of the users, it was nothing like the 'fantasy' that Korea's tourism website had made it out to be. This caused many users to become frustrated with the plot and to skip the irrelevant parts so that they could just know what happened to the revenge scheme in the end.

Conclusion

This paper looked at the economic policies and media strategies that worked to spread Korean popular cultural products to Asia. Singapore is just one out of many Asian nations that has been affected by Korea's media policies that promoted the cheap

²² *la diva* (14-13-2010 07:10 PM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-21.html#post2435387>

²³ *Sprouts* (17-03-2010 09:13 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-21.html#post2441891>

production and distribution of cultural materials to other Asian nations. Singapore acts as a significant central locale where products are both exported to and imported from all over Asia. Though Korea has not held a particular historical stronghold in Singapore, Korea was able to provide cheap dramas that Singaporean television stations could broadcast in place of more expensive Japanese and Taiwanese dramas. Singapore's underground VCD market traded with Taiwan, providing even cheaper and easy access for Singaporeans to watch Korean dramas in Chinese. The familiarity of the language removed enough of the foreignness of the material for Singaporeans to grow to enjoy and love Korean dramas.

So why, then, did the CozyCot members want to watch this particular drama, and why did they like it if they did? Despite the fact that the show appeared to be overly dramatic and therefore unbelievable to many viewers, the show did extremely well in Singapore. User green_tea noted: "i must say this is one of the most controversial drama that is getting Singaporeans hooked."²⁴ Forum users acknowledged that while the plot sounded intriguing at first, the drama was so overly dramatic and plot so convoluted that it was difficult to sit through the entirety of the series. It was not the foreign female viewer's fantasy that Korea's tourism website indicated it would be, and comments that stated so revealed a deeper engagement with the characters and plot than the producers and Korean tourism board may have anticipated.

CozyCot members first discussed gender in terms of physicality as it relates to personalities. They generally placed large emphasis on how the characters looked, and expected certain characters to look certain ways based on how they acted throughout the

²⁴ green_tea (24-01-2010 01:12 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel-temptation-11.html#post2306993>

drama. Comments about physical appearances revealed an underlying connection forum users saw between physical and personal traits that varied for both the men and women.

Though the viewers at the CozyCot forum varied in their opinions of the drama, ultimately many of them felt emotionally attached to the struggle of one woman who had been wronged by her husband to actually fight back. As females who were familiar with submission to the Confucian male hierarchy, forum users noted that even if they did not like the plot, they skipped to the parts that would tell them how things ended for her and if she succeeded in getting her revenge. Many forum users commented on how they expected the female and male characters to act, and these comments revealed how the state-led and historically Confucian institution of values affected these users' expectations. At the same time, forum users challenged these expectations up to a certain point, where they believed it was necessary that the female character Encai fight for what she had lost.

Forum users also used the forum as a space where they could interact with other people who were similarly invested. They could bounce ideas off each other about the motivations and character development in the plot. By using Singlish, forum users were able to more informally engage, creating an even more comfortable space and community. People did not have to censor themselves and use formal languages, because the uniquely Singaporean forum allowed these forum users to be comfortable speaking like they normally would.

Interestingly, one of the last posts on the forum before the thread closed illustrated a sense of what Singaporeans could take from this particular drama. *missbluey* stated: "finally, the show had ended...hope the next 7pm Korean show will be nice!"²⁵ Only a

²⁵ missbluey (31-03-2010 11:56 AM): <http://forums.cozycot.com/celeb-and-entertainment/45580-cruel->

couple days after the show had finished airing in Singapore, users stopped posting on the thread. The show had been quickly forgotten and users had moved onto other topics and other shows. Ultimately, to the users in this forum, this show was just another Korean drama. This implies that though the CozyCot members were deeply engaged with the drama while they were watching, they quickly moved on to other dramas that they could newly engage and perhaps could stimulate them in similar ways.

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