

THE IMPACTS OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER'S ACTIONS IN THE KOREAN DRAMA *ITAEWON CLASS* SEEN THROUGH LIBERAL FEMINISM

Inge Shafa Sekarningrum¹, Teguh Kasprabowo²

Program Studi Sastra Inggris Fakultas Hukum dan Bahasa Universitas Stikubank

E-mail: ingeshafa@gmail.com¹, teguhkas@edu.unisbank.ac.id²

Abstract

This research examines liberal feminism of *Itaewon Class* Korean drama. The study aims to analyze Jo Yi-seo's struggles portrayed in liberal feminism and the challenges she has to face to reach her dreams. The data derived from *Itaewon Class* Korean drama were analyzed qualitatively. *Itaewon Class* (2020) is talking about a young girl named Jo Yi-seo who wants to become a DanBam bar-restaurant manager and make DanBam has customers. However, many people disbelief her values, and she proves to them that she has the potential to make DanBam become popular and has many franchises. The analysis results show how Jo Yi-seo struggles to face the stereotype of being a woman, fight that a woman is not a man's game, deal with her mother's expectations, and deal with people who have power. It also shows that Jo Yi-seo is not only independent and brave, but she dares to fight inequity in the social sphere and law. She proves it by her fearlessness when she sees her friend get bullied by a powerful gang girl and when she is being pushed over people's dominion. Her persistence makes her succeed in reaching what she wants.

Keywords: Liberal Feminism, Korean Drama, Motivation, Itaewon Class

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses about how a woman struggles to be independent and can reach her dreams. Liberal feminism theory focuses on how women cannot live their dream, which wants to be more than a wife or a mother. Women have the equality as men and can be independent, reach her dreams, and speak their voices, especially in public sphere. Liberal feminism also gives an understanding of freedom for women to have similar opportunity as men do.

Liberal feminism occurs in one of the popular Korean drama entitled *Itaewon Class*. This drama tells about *Itaewon Class*' female character named Jo Yi-seo, who struggles a lot to reach her dreams. Jo Yi-seo is an independent young girl that lives around people who believe that women should think sane since she has a bold ambition to become independent. People around Jo Yi-seo think becoming an independent woman is crazy, and it would be difficult if women had a higher career than men. Not only concerning careers, but they also believe that if women never let their lives depend on men, it will be hard to find a perfect partner and get

married. On the other hand, Jo Yi-seo thinks and acts otherwise. She proves that she is not only a young girl but more than that. She has values and is competent. She can manage and make a mini bar-restaurant from having no customers to having customers and earning income.

People's actions toward Jo Yi-seo prove that people still think women are not intelligent and competent. People expected women as weak humans who lived under men's control and could not participate in economics, especially in business. They marked women as creatures that will never succeed in building a business or in any other thing and it shows how gender discrimination is extant. However, Jo Yi-seo shows that women have the ability to build a business. She wants to show the people that if women have the ambition to take part in everything, they would be more than their perceptions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aim of the liberal feminism theory is to show a woman can do anything without a man and can still do anything when she is in a relationship with a man. A woman also can be a leader and highly educated. Moreover, a woman can become a manager and runs the company's business. Jo Yi-seo shows us she can do what men can and cannot do, she can choose what she wants in her life, and she shows us being an independent woman is not about being selfish or ignorant but also to help each other.

This study uses the theory from Betty Friedan (1963). Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* tells that women are taught to be unfeminine and catch men at a young age and marry early. Some women in their forties and fifties still remember painfully giving up those dreams (Friedan, 1963). It can be known that some women believe that they are useless and all they can do is being a wife and mother. Friedan also stated that they learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence, and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminist fight for. She also said that they were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who want to be poets, physicists, or president (Friedan, 1963). It is also supported by the article written by Susan M. Cruea entitled *Changing Ideals of Womanhood during the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement*. She argues, "Women were forced, for a variety of reasons, to be independent upon their husbands for financial support." (Cruea, 2005).

In addition, liberal feminism gives an understanding of freedom for women to have similar opportunity as men do. Therefore, this theory suits for this research because the research talks about the liberation of women. Thus, this theory assists the researcher to explain the problem formulation with the liberal feminism perspective.

METHODOLOGY

This research applied the liberal feminism approach to deal with the main character Jo Yi-seo that she can face the struggles and challenges as a woman to be independent. Even though she is a woman, Jo Yi-seo can achieve her goals and fulfill her dreams. This approach is truly suitable for this research because the focus of this research and it discusses about liberal feminism portrayed in *Itaewon Class* Korean drama.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the researcher discusses the result of the study to answer the problem formulations. There are two parts. In the first part, the researcher focuses on Jo Yi-seo's struggles to be independent, as portrayed in liberal feminism. The second part analyzes the main character's challenges in reaching her goals.

Struggles that Jo Yi-seo has to Face to be Independent Portrayed in Liberal Feminism

Jo Yi-seo is an independent young girl that lives around people who believe that women should think sane since she has a bold ambition to become independent. People around Jo Yi-seo think becoming an independent woman is crazy, and it would be difficult if women had a higher career than men. Not only concerning careers, but they also believe that if women never let their lives depend on men, it will be hard to find a perfect partner and get married.

On the other hand, Jo Yi-seo thinks and acts otherwise. To answer her struggles to be independent as portrayed in liberal feminism, the researcher uses the liberal feminism theory by Betty Friedan. She stated, "Women cannot live their dream, which wants to be more than a wife or a mother. Unfortunately, women have to give up those dreams. She also said they were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who want to be poets, physicists, or president." (Friedan, 1963, p. 15-16). Her statement about liberal feminism helps the researcher to analyze and answer the question. The researcher also uses the character of characterization theory by Boggs and Petrie. There are eight points, but the researcher only uses several points to analyze the characters in this drama.

Struggle to Face the Stereotype of Women

People's actions toward Jo Yi-seo prove that people still think women are not intelligent and competent. People expected women as weak humans who lived under men's control and could not participate in economics, especially in business. They marked women as creatures that will never succeed in building a business or in any other thing and it shows how gender discrimination is extant. However, Jo Yi-seo shows that women have the ability to build a business. She wants to show the people that if women have the ambition to take part in everything, they would be more than their perceptions.

The dramatization shows how Jo Yi-seo struggles to prove that she can manage and make a mini bar-restaurant from having no customers to having customers and earning income. She proves that she is not only a young girl but more than that. She has values and is competent. Mainly when she met a man named Park Sae Ro-yi. He owns a shabby mini bar-restaurant named DanBam, and his life was such a mess, not even close to great. Mainly when people see the bar's atmosphere, which looks abandoned in the middle of the crowded Itaewon area. Yi-seo once thought, in this bustling area, why the bar had no customers, and when she took a gander at it, she had the answer. It turned out that the appearance of the bar was awful, from the marketing side was likewise not working out in a good way, and the food varieties they served were not matched with people's appetite. After seeing those issues, Yi-seo has ambitions to work there and manage the bar until it becomes famous and surpasses the most popular bar in the Itaewon area, Jangga. She even desires to have DanBam franchises that will spread throughout the city of Seoul and even across the country. Once when she figures out that the owner of Jangga wants to destroy DanBam, Yi-seo finally dares to offer herself to

help DanBam aim the success. She will increase customers' awareness through her social media and changes DanBam's marketing system, including its appearance and foods.

Unfortunately, the owner of DanBam refused her offer. Park Sae Ro-yi thinks that Yi-seo is only a young girl who does not know about marketing and how to escalate customers' awareness. Yi-seo disliked his assumption. Seeing his refusal, she shows him and his two employees the problem they face. At first, she asked them to bring their essential item on the menu to show why they needed Yi-seo. When one of DanBam's staff, Choi Seung Kwon, brings the soup to her, Yi-seo shows them that there is something wrong with what he did to their customer. It was his hand. A filthy hand, which could have been used to wipe or pick something, should not be touching the inside of the pot. Yi-seo shows them primary rule number one when serving food. Their hands must be placed on the outside. She also suggests they have a specialty menu and decorate the bar. When they served their famous menu, a Chicken Gizzards, Yi-seo said it looked so unappetizing. There is nothing special about it, and it does not even look nice. She said the customers would not eat at DanBam even if they live nearby since there are many restaurants in Itaewon serving good foods. Yi-seo also teaches them to move some pieces of stuff so the bar will have space and looks wider.

Those actions of Jo Yi-seo make Park Sae Ro-yi considers hiring her, especially when she says that she is a competent girl in the dialogues below.

JO YI-SEO: Think wisely.

SAE RO-YI: What?

JO YI-SEO: I'm like Zhuge Liang. I'm Merlin and Rayleigh. Someone you absolutely need. You didn't need to lift a finger to hire me. I came here voluntarily. "I'm doing a good enough job. She's just a 20-year-old kid who knows nothing." If you still feel that you don't need me, then that's fine. I wouldn't want to work with such an idiot anyway. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps.5, 00:09:29-00:11:30)

After hearing what Yi-seo said, he gives her a chance to be a manager of DanBam. He knows that Yi-seo has the potential to make DanBam live, and it shows from their income on the first day of promoting and changing the marketing system. Since she gives the idea to revise the menu and decoration, many customers come to DanBam and upload it on their social media accounts. Yi-seo as a manager usually uploads the situation of DanBam, so the audience on social media will be curious about it and come to the bar-restaurant.

Even though Jo Yi-seo has finally become a manager and people concede her abilities, some moments show how people still doubt what Yi-seo did. It was seen when bar-restaurant building was evicted. Yi-seo as a manager, firmly decided, but DanBam's owner doubted her decision.

PARK SAE RO-YI: You don't deserve to be the manager here.

JO YI-SEO: How long will you let sympathy stand in your way? You're always at the mercy of everyone. Franchise? Leadership in the foodservice industry? How are you going to make it happen? Forget about Jangga Co. If you run your business like this, you're no match for Jangga Co. So you don't want to lose anyone. Because DanBam is like a family. Will you please wake up to the reality?

JO YI-SEO: I'm the manager here. No matter how idealistic you're being, we will eventually get kicked out of here. And we can't be sure the same thing won't happen again. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 8, 0:39:56-0:42:55).

Jo Yi-seo's action reflects that women can be unequivocal. She has the responsibility as a manager to decide the best way to maintain the pub and give advice to the owner. She also shows that women should have the courage to voice their opinions. When DanBam bar-restaurant is evicted and moved to a new place, they lose customers. Then Yi-seo was responsible as a manager for doing intensive promotions. Whether offline or online promotion, she gives her best to re-establish DanBam.

Jo Yi-seo's abilities affected DanBam's competitor, Jangga Co, with Jang Dae-hee as the owner. He found out that there are a few interesting things from her marketing strategy. She opened a live channel and posted the entire process, from looking for a storage space to the renovations and the inspections, making those very popular among small business owners and young customers. Especially when she came to the seminar held by Jangga, she bravely spoke and asked the Jangga owner, Jang Dae-hee. It makes Jang Dae-hee amazed with Yi-seo. He admits her skills, and he proudly offers her to join Jangga. Dae-hee gives an offer to her because he feels that woman is only a woman who does not have a firm stand. He brings her out to have some food, his strategy to make Yi-seo falter. However, Jo Yi-seo shows the opposite.

JANG DAE-HEE: I'm not good at beating around the bush. Why don't you join Jangga? I'll treat you well.

JO YI-SEO: Thank you for the offer, but I'm afraid I must decline.

JANG DAE-HEE: May I ask why?

JO YI-SEO: Because of my boss.

JANG DAE-HEE: I know young people these days value friendship a great deal, but it hasn't even been a year. It's only a shallow friendship.

JO YI-SEO: Like you said, I shouldn't decline your offer merely because of friendship. But aren't you making this offer because of my boss?

JANG DAE-HEE: So?

JO YI-SEO: I'm confident that I can grow DanBam. (*Itaewon Class*, Eps. 9, 0:07:58-0:08:17)

As we can see from her struggles to face the stereotype of people about women, she bravely shows the people who disbelieve that women have the same abilities as men and that women can be even more than that. She represents that women should be confident, brave, and have a stance. It reflects liberal feminism that mentions women have the freedom to propel value initiatives in legitimate, political, and social spheres. Betty Friedan asserted in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique*, that it was only after we broke through the feminine mystique and said women are people, no more no less, and therefore demanded our human right to participate in the mainstream of society, to equal opportunity to earn and be trained and have our own voice in the big decisions of our destiny (Friedan, 1963). Friedan believes that women should be brave in the social spheres because they have the same ability as men. It is also supported by

Rosemarie Tong's book entitled *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* that women can do anything men can do (Tong, 2009, p. 18). Thus, being a woman does not mean cannot achieve her dreams or goals.

Struggle to Deal with Her Mother's Expectations

Jo Yi-seo is known as a bold, independent character in the drama. She never lets anyone brings her down and is worthless. She significantly impacts people around her and those who follow her blog and social media accounts. It started when she was in senior high school. She is a social media star with 760,000 followers and an influential blogger. She transferred from an international school in New York. She is athletic and gets good grades. Generally, she is multitalented. Good at everything. A genius girl with an IQ of 162. Her close friend once thought that if angels existed, they had looked like her. Despite her angelic face and personality, Yi-seo is also quite evil since she is a sociopath. She also struggles with herself because her childhood memories usually come, and her mother pushes her to become a perfect human. Her mother consistently tells her that if Yi-seo's life is as hard as her mother's, it would be difficult to live in this kind of environment where people with power win at everything.

Yi-seo's struggles with her mother's expectations are seen in her internal and external actions and her reaction to other characters. Boggs and Petrie stated, "To reveal the character's action, we can analyze by the clue of the movie. It can be seen from their move, expressive face, and character's mind." (Boggs & Petrie, 2008). When Yi-seo is alone, she thinks about her past life, especially when she was in elementary school. The depiction of Yi-seo pushing her friend at the school race event seems clear and haunts her until she turns into senior high school. It has haunted her mind for years because people at her school said terrible things to her. Even her teacher said she is a sociopath and suggested her mother take her daughter to a counselor. However, her mother did not take Yi-seo to go to the counselor. On the contrary, she praised her daughter for becoming herself.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: Did you want to win that badly? Sweetheart, you're unbelievably. Versatile. You're even good at sports. What aren't you good at?

JO YI-SEO: Are you complimenting me for having won the race?

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: Right.

JO YI-SEO: This is so wrong, Mom. I bet it comes from your trauma. You're using me to make up for your average life.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: My goodness, look at how you talk. You're so smart. I'm not going to scold you for something so petty. I don't want you to end up living an average life like me. People have their own ways of making judgments. So the line between good and bad can be very vague. But when you're exceptional, people know it for sure. Because it shows with a number. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 3, 0:30:25-0:32:25).

This conversation has her a significant impact. Her mother indoctrinated Yi-seo to become "the perfect one" because her mother experienced a regrettable past. Her marriage failed and lasted only seven years. Yi-seo's father has no power, money, or brain. He is just a poor

man and unemployed in this big city. It leads her to push Yi-seo to become perfect so she will get an equal boyfriend or husband.

JO YI-SEO: Like what you did, what if I fall in love with a mediocre man and I— (cut off)

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: Don't. Don't ruin your life for something trifle like love. You're too good for that. My sweet daughter, you won't make me sad, will you?

JO YI-SEO: Mom, you're so selfish.

JO YI-SEO: *I know what she meant. And I know how much my mom loves me. I understood it all. I'm an ordinary person. But I was born smart and pretty. Entering a prestigious university, getting a job at big firm, and living a successful life. People try hard, but not everyone gets to achieve them. But I know I will. I'm hungry to succeed, and I work hard to get what I want. I work so damn hard. I bet I'll be exhausted my entire life. So why can't the earth just explode so this can all end?* (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 3, 0:32:43-0:33:21)

Her expression and action also support her thoughts. She dances at the bar, trying to give her best smile to the world and forget what her mother said. From the researcher's perspective, seen by Yi-seo's action, women study hard to get into a good university. They must work hard when they are older to meet a nice guy and get married. All the efforts that they have to make will disappear. Yi-seo fights with her mind. Should she follow her mother's ambition or achieve her dream until she met a man named Park Sae Ro-yi, an owner of DanBam. He is inspiring, but he also has a terrible life with his nasty mini bar-restaurant—DanBam. Yi-seo wants to help him develop his bar-restaurant, but when she gives her mother a signal to do it, her mother does not allow it. One day, Yi-seo's mother finds out that her daughter works as a manager in a mini bar-restaurant, making her mad.

MOM: I called the admissions office. They told me you didn't complete your enrollment. Why are you working part-time instead of completing your enrollment?

JO YI-SEO: Mom...

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: What are you thinking? Are you trying to apply for Harvard again?

JO YI-SEO: I'm a manager there.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: What?

JO YI-SEO: I got hired as a manager.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: THAT'S WHAT I DON'T GET!!! (really mad)

JO YI-SEO: (take a deep breathe)

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: Why would you work there instead of going to the university? WHY? By any chance, is this regarding of what you mentioned last time? Do you like someone? Does he work there?

JO YI-SEO: Yes. (*Itaewon Class*, Eps. 6, 00:24:09-00:24:39)

Yi-seo's mother thinks that if her daughter studies at a top university, she will also meet an extraordinary man from a decent family. According to her mother's opinions, a man with a

promising career can guarantee a good marriage too. She would be the happiest wife, and her life would never be as hard as her mother's. Her mother reflected people's perceptions in the 19th century. Women are expected to live in their house, do domestic work, and wait for a rich man from a decent family to marry them. Betty Friedan stated in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* that women are taught to be unfeminine and catch men at a young age and marry early. Some women in their forties and fifties still remember painfully giving up those dreams (Friedan, 1963). Susan M. Crucea also supports it in her article entitled *Changing Ideals of Womanhood during the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement*, "Women were forced, for a variety of reasons, to be independent upon their husbands for financial support." (Crucea, 2005). It is logical if Yi-seo's mother wants her daughter to marry a good man who values loyalty since she experienced a failed marriage, her environment's perception, and married a poor man. On the contrary, Yi-seo said that she does not depend on her dream on someone else's dream, and instead of following her mother's expectations, she chooses to live her way.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: I know. You already made a choice, so I know I can't make you change your mind. I packed your stuff. I want you out of there.

JO YI-SEO: Mom.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: I only wanted you to hear and see good things. But, I was born poor, and I have nothing to give you. So I did everything I could to raise you well.

JO YI-SEO: Mom.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: But—you were so clever and extremely smart, so I figured you'd never end up like me. Of all the traits you could take after, why does it have to be this one? Don't you know what I had to go through?

JO YI-SEO: I'm not like you.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: What?

JO YI-SEO: I'm smart and clever. I can achieve both love and success.

JO YI-SEO'S MOTHER: So your goal is to help that owner with his business? Then what? Will you become a pub owner's wife?

JO YI-SEO: That's not how I was raised. I'm not depending on someone else's dream. And I'm not going to live your dream either. I'm going to live for myself. It's my life. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 6, 0:25:04-0:26:34)

From the dialogue above, Yi-seo decided to live her own life and achieve her goals. She refuses to live the way her mother wanted and wants her mother to wait a little longer because she believes she will make it happen. Yi-seo also believes that her choice is right because she knows her values and how competent she is in raising a mini bar-restaurant. Her action reveals her principles that she wants to reach her dream and live her life. This part reflects liberal feminism in which a woman is not only can be independent but also can live her dreams.

Struggle to fight that a Woman is not A Man's Game

In Jo Yi-seo's society, men still think women are easy to handle and conquer. It means that having a woman by their side is as easy as turning the palm of a hand. Women quickly fall to their knees when they see a handsome, good-looking, and wealthy man. They do not even

have to ask, and women will come to them themselves. That is what most men think about women, and it shows in this drama where a man came to Jo Yi-seo out of nowhere.

Jo Yi-seo was just casually having her food and drink, sitting with her friends on the weekend at the restaurant until a man with his friends came to Jo Yi-seo. They ask to join, and they would like to treat them, but Yi-seo knows precisely what those men want, which annoys her. Her expression says it all.

Jo Yi-seo judged those men one by one. Based on what Yi-seo sees, there is a man desperate for attention, a man who wants to sleep with one of Yi-seo's friends, and one of them is thoughtless. They want to fulfill their loneliness, desire to have sex, or boredom. Yi-seo does not want to satisfy man's desires, and she does not need anything from those guys. However, when Yi-seo left the restaurant, one of those guys followed her and gave an offer to take her home, but Yi-seo refused his offer. Unfortunately, that man was confused about what Yi-seo did.

MAN: Don't you like me?

JO YI-SEO: No, I don't.

MAN: What don't you like about me?

JO YI-SEO: Your face, the way you talk, your voice, your pupils, teeth, eyelashes... (Laughed) I don't like anything about you. Bye, then. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 4, 0:29:39-0:30:04)

Even though Jo Yi-seo boldly said she did not like him, that man still pushed her by grabbing her hand and not leaving him alone. He does not believe in what Yi-seo said to him, yet he does not accept the rejection.

MAN: What a fucking joke. Are you crazy? Then why did you drink with us? Do you know how much I spent on you?

JO YI-SEO: You must feel like you wasted your money since you spent your entire fortune trying to score tonight. [Giving him money] You can keep the change.

MAN: [slap Yi-seo's cheek] Why? What's wrong? You got on my nerves, so it serves you right. Who do you think is going to help you now?

JO YI-SEO: Myself.

MAN: Gosh. You messed with the wrong person. You think you're pretty enough to look down on me? Let me touch you a lesson. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 4, 0:29:37-0:31:07)

From those scenes above, Jo Yi-seo's rebellion shows that she hates what that man did toward her. Moreover, his viewpoint about women that women would easily fall for a man make her mad. Her actions prove it. She bravely punched him to protect herself and refused his offer.

Betty Friedan explains in *The Feminine Mystique* book about an environment that still considers women as objects of lust. As happened in America where women are considered as creatures for the satisfaction of lust and high cases of sexual harassment against women. It becomes a serious case as she stated, "While some media, ads, and movies may still try to define women only or mainly as sex objects, it's no longer considered chic or even acceptable by much

of America. Far from being unspeakable and invisible, sexual abuse of women and less overt forms of sexual harassment are now considered serious enough crimes to bring down a senator or Supreme Court justice or even a president.” (Friedan, 1963).

Struggle to Deal with People Who Have Power

In Yi-seo’s social sphere, people with power will always win against others. Most of them will oppress and treat others arbitrarily. They are also not afraid to go against the law because it complies with those with power. Even for women, easy to negotiate because they consider women weak creatures. Yi-seo has faced this several times. She has to deal with people’s power and does not want to be controlled by others, so she must have a solid and courageous stance.

The moment when Yi-seo faces those people proves that she is not afraid to fight against them even though she is a young girl. It can be seen from when she was in senior high school. One of the famous girl gangs in her school assaults and bullies her classmate, who is poor and has no power. Yi-seo knows that the bully, Bok-Hui, will not be punished, records her actions, and uploads them on social media. It becomes popular on social media, and they get social sanctions because the law is to comply with their parents who have power. Many people on social media regret the actions of those who like to bully and proud of what Yi-seo did.

Since Yi-seo makes Bok-Hui gone viral on social media, it leads to Bok-Hui’s mother comes to Yi-seo.

BOK-HUI’S MOTHER: Did you post this?

JO YI-SEO: Yes, that was me.

BOK-HUI’S MOTHER: [slapped Yi-seo] Do you know who I am? How dare you slander my daughter?

JO YI-SEO: I did not slander her. What I posted is a fact.

BOK-HUI’S MOTHER: Did she do it to you? It’s none of your business!

JO YI-SEO: That’s not true. She bullies classmates for no reason and extorts money from them. Also, she just took my pen and used it for bullying. I wasn’t going to post anything else, but my cheek hurts a little. This is why parents must teach their kids well.

BOK-HUI’S MOTHER: Look at this crazy rude bitch. What did you say? Say that again!

JO YI-SEO: That video clip... when she enters college, I’ll post it on the school’s website. Then, when she gets a job, I’ll send it to the company as well. I’ll even send it to her in-laws when she’s getting married. Whose fault do you think it is? (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 3, 0:06:35-0:08:15)

The conversation above boldly shows how Yi-seo thinking about people’s power and how she deals with it. This is also shown by her reaction when the teacher called her to meet him. Bringing up the latest problem and questioning her to apologize and delete the video. However, Yi-seo rejected the order. She thinks if law cannot punish people with power, then she will show otherwise.

TEACHER: Hey, do you know who she is?

JO YI-SEO: Right. So because she's an adult and her husband is the borough chief, I should've just let her hit me and sucked it up?

TEACHER: What?

JO YI-SEO: Right. It'll be a hassle to deal with him asking you to do something about it. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 3, 0:10:49-0:11:16)

Yi-seo's struggle to face the oligarch is not only when she was in senior high school, but she faces it again when she becomes a manager of DanBam. Director of Jangga comes to her and gives an offer to join them. This has happened before, but it was Jang Dae-hee's son named Jang Geun-won who offered her. Jang Geun-won gave her a management proposal, which made her think because Yi-seo had her strategy to face his power. It leads Jang Geun-won unconsciously admit his past actions to the poor and Yi-seo records to what he said.

JO YI-SEO: I have a question. About Park Sae Ro-yi. Why is that punk trying to mess with you?

JANG GEUN-WOO: What? Something happened before.

JO YI-SEO: What happened?

JANG GEUN-WOO: It's no big deal. You don't have to know.

JO YI-SEO: Oh, right. I guess it's because of the thing you said in front of a police station. I heard Park Sae Ro-yi's dad died because of you. If that's true, you're unbelievable.

JANG GEUN-WOO: What?

JO YI-SEO: It means you're above the law. That's amazing. [Sarcasm] Oh, sorry. Did I offend you?

JANG GEUN-WOO: No. That's just how people live. The law is all about disciplining the poor. The law doesn't apply to those who rule.

JO YI-SEO: So? Would you please tell me about it in detail?

JANG GEUN-WOO: It's nothing. It was an accident. I hit his dad with a car, and he died instantly. But someone else ended up in jail. End of the story. I wonder how Sae Ro-yi found it out though. I guess he hasn't learned his lesson. He's still trying to get back at me. But what can livestock do? Don't you think so? There's nothing. What can he do?

JO YI-SEO: Enough. I want you to stop now. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 9, 0:59:44-1:02:46)

The researcher concludes that Yi-seo is not only wants to show that women have equality with men both socially and legally, but she also shows that women can express her argument, can fight inequity in the social sphere, and law. *The Feminine Mystique*'s Betty Friedan stated, "When woman was seen as a human being of limitless human potential, equal to man, anything that kept her from realizing her full potential was a problem to be solved: barriers to higher education and political participation, discrimination or prejudice in law or morality." (Friedan, 1963). It means that women can be equal to men, in law, education, political, social, and business.

Challenges that Yi-seo has to Face to Achieve her Goal

After analyzing Jo Yi-seo's struggles portrayed in liberal feminism, in this part, the researcher focuses on answering the second problem formulation, which aims to reveal the challenges that Yi-seo has to face to reach her dreams. Jo Yi-seo has a dream to make DanBam from a mini bar-restaurant to become extensive and has many franchises scattered all over the city of Seoul. Her dream is not only that. She also wants to make her mother believe that the decision that Yi-seo made was not wrong for becoming a DanBam manager at her age. In this part, it will be divided into two challenges.

Facing the Problems as a Manager of DanBam

In Jo Yi-seo's life, there are a lot of problems and challenges that she has to face. The first problem is when she has finally become a DanBam manager, she is trying to get the investor to enlarge the business until she finally gets it. An influential investor, which makes many investors want to invest in DanBam. The news spread everywhere and made DanBam more known to many people. Nevertheless, out of nowhere, that influential investor canceled the investment. It makes the other investors do the same, and it turns out that Jangga is the one who entices them to not invest in DanBam. Unfortunately, DanBam closed temporarily.

The twelfth episode shows how Jo Yi-seo takes her responsibility as a manager of DanBam and tries to call the investors after she gets the message saying that they canceled the investment. She says to DanBam's employee that she does not want to give up easily. Yi-seo wants to get their trust back, trying her best to contact them despite the refusal. She also went to one of the big investors to make them trust DanBam by showing a proposal and her sincerity. It ended successfully.

The second problem is when Jo Yi-seo faces the problems with DanBam employees. That means the employees began to hesitate to fight for DanBam and faced the problems at the bar-restaurant. Yi-seo as the manager, always encourages the employees, as she did in some episodes. In the twelfth episode, she told the employees to focus on their job when the bar-restaurant temporarily closed, and investors canceled the investment.

JO YI-SEO: I know this may sound a little brazen. But I know very well that the four of us won't give up because of something like this.

CHOI SEUNG-KWON: Of course. Who says we'll give up?

JO YI-SEO: Like always, we'll find the right answer. Let's do our best to overcome this.

MA HYEON-HI: Of course. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 12, 0:32:14-0:32:41)

Jo Yi-seo is the one who will always give her team encouragement and gives the employees some feedback to improve their skills in cooking and serving the food. She never feels that this problem should make her give up. It shows from the fifth episode, when the chef, Ma Hyeon-hi has to face the problem of her cooking. Yi-seo always gives Ma Hyeon-hi some honest feedback to improve her cooking skill.

JO YI-SEO: It's spicy but too weak. The solid ingredients don't go well with the soup.

MA HYEON-HI: I'll try it again.

JO YI-SEO: I think it's well seasoned, but the artificial flavors taste too strong. It gives an unpleasant aftertaste.

MA HYEON-HI: Okay. Let me try it one more time.

JO YI-SEO: It tastes good. It's really good. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 5, 0:55:41-0:57:29)

Even though Ma Hyeon-hi tried to cook several times, Yi-seo convinces her to keep trying until the food tastes good and has a unique flavor. She told Ma Hyeon-hi that she had the potential to become good at cooking. One day, Ma Hyeon-hi enters a cooking competition to help the bar-restaurant become popular and attract investors. However, when she competed's final round, her confidence dropped due to the onslaught of bad news about her. Yi-seo, who knows that, calls Ma Hyeon-hi to support with a sentence that resonates in her heart. "I am a rock. Go ahead and sear me. I will not budge an inch because I am a rock. Go ahead and beat me up. I am a solid rock. Go ahead and leave me in darkness. I am a rock that will shine all alone. I do not break, ash, nor decay as I go against nature's way." (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 5). And because of Yi-seo's words and her renewed courage, Ma Hyeon-hi managed to come forward and win the competition. They made DanBam more widely known and made many investors invest in them.

From Jo Yi-seo's actions, those reflect that women can be more, not only do the domestic job, but they can also manage and participate in business field. Harriet Taylor Mill's *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) argues, women should equally share with men partnership in the labors and gains, risks and remunerations (Harriet, 1851). This can also be interpreted that women can be a leader and can face the same risk as men.

Facing the Competitor

Unfortunately, the big problem came four years later, when DanBam was already famous and started to own a company, and several franchises even penetrated China. Their competitor, Jangga, who knows how great Yi-seo is as a manager, kidnaps her. One of the sons of the owner of Jangga, named Jang Geun-won, kidnapped Yi-seo because she had refused to join Jangga Co. and had recorded their conversation, making Jang Geun-won confess that he had killed his boss's father, Park Sae Ro-yi. Another reason is that Yi-seo figured out how to turn DanBam, nothing compared to Jangga, into a significant eatery that could match Jangga out of the blue.

JANG GEUN-WON: Do yo know what my last mission was when I was at Jangga Co? Bring Jo Yi-seo to Jangga Co. I had to waste four years behind bars because of that damn recording. (*Itaewon Class*, 2020, Eps. 15, 0:08:00-0:08:15)

She was held captive in a warehouse and nearly killed. However, Yi-seo ventures to run away and gets help from her boss and the local police who get a report. Those scenes show that when she is faced with the problems, Yi-seo is always brave and does not give up trying to solve her problems.

After her long and relentless efforts, Yi-seo gets what she wants. DanBam bar-restaurant, which used to be almost bankrupt becomes the number one restaurant with many

franchises in South Korea and other countries, including China. DanBam has also penetrated the market of other countries with high income and food that many people like. Jo Yi-seo is not only a young manager, but she has become one of the most crucial people in the business field. It also makes her mother believe that her daughter succeeded in reaching her dreams.

Her actions represent how liberal feminism works that woman should have the courage in the public spheres as Betty Friedan written in her book.

Women breaking through the feminine mystique to their own political and economic participation and empowerment in the mainstream of society are not becoming more like men but are expressing in the public sphere some of the values that used to be expressed or allowed only in the private nurture of the home. (Friedan, 1963).

From several scenes in *Itaewon Class* Korean drama, Jo Yi-seo has finally pass through the challenges that she has to face, especially when someone wants to make her feel helpless.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to focus on the main female character named Jo Yi-seo in the *Itaewon Class* Korean drama. Jo Yi-seo is an independent young girl who faces many things to achieve her dream. This research has two problem formulations. The first problem is to analyze the struggles that Jo Yi-seo has to face to be independent portrayed in liberal feminism. To answer the first problem, the researcher uses the liberal feminism theory by Betty Friedan. Liberal feminism in this research focuses on women that have the equality as men. Women can be independent, speak their voices, and reach their dreams.

In the first problem, the researcher discovers that Yi-seo has several struggles. Her struggle to face the stereotype of being a woman will never succeed in building and managing businesses leads her to become braver to show her values. Yi-seo succeeds in making DanBam the number one restaurant in South Korea. She also struggle to deal with her mother's expectations to push her to study in the best college because she will find a good man to marry. Besides that, Yi-seo struggles to fight over a man who thinks that woman is a competition and easy to get as long as men have money. However, she shows otherwise and is a brave woman to change a man's perspective over a woman. Jo Yi-seo is not only brave, but she dares to fight inequity in the social sphere and law. She struggles to deal with people who have power. She proves it by her fearlessness when she sees her friend get bullied by a powerful gang girl and when she is being pushed over people's dominion.

The second problem formulation focuses on the challenges Yi-seo has to face to achieve her dream. Her dream is to make DanBam the number one restaurant in South Korea and have franchises. She also wants to show her mother that her decision was correct. The first challenge is she is facing the problems as manager of DanBam, and the second challenge is she is facing the competitor. Being a manager of a mini bar-restaurant means she will face many problems. She knows it is her responsibility to manage DanBam and encourage the staff. She also gives the best solution to the problems and makes some strategies for the marketing and promotion system. Jo Yi-seo's actions prove it. She was successful can solve when DanBam temporarily closed, and they lost many influential investors. Not only that, but she also makes her mother proud of her achievements and gives impacts to the other.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. (2015). *Abrams & Harpham 2015 - A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage Learning.
- Anggreani, Devi. (2021). *Liberal Feminism as Represented in the Character of Donna Sheridan in Mamma Mia by Catherine Johnson*. https://repository.usd.ac.id/39662/2/174214058_full.pdf
- Ariffin, J. T., Abu Bakar, D. H., & Yusof, D. N. H. (2018). *Culture in Korean Drama towards Influencing Malaysian Audiences*. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Engineering & Management*, 5(1), 10–14. <https://doi.org/10.21276/ijirem.2018.5.1.3>
- Asianwiki. (2020). *Itaewon Class*. https://asianwiki.com/Itaewon_Class
- Boggs, J.M. (1978). *The Art of Watching Films*. New York: McGraw-Hill. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Art-of-Watching-Films-Boggs/a07d17116ea931c5c1dc46b94833bba1bdb3b03>
- Cruea, S. M. (2005). *Changing ideals of womanhood during the nineteenth-century woman movement*. *Atq*, 19(3), 187–204. https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/gsw_pub/1
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Legg, T. J. (2018). Recognizing Antisocial Behavior in Adults and Children. *Healthline*. <https://www.healthline.com/health/sociopath-signs>
- Longenecker, L. M., & Lee, J. (2018). *The Korean wave in America: Assessing the status of K-pop and K-drama between global and local*. *Situations*, 11(2), 105–127. <http://situations.yonsei.ac.kr/product/data/item/1538233659/detail/7318333776.pdf>
- Ramrao, T. N. (2016). *Film and Literature : An Overview Research Paper*. *Epitome*, 2(9), 149–156. http://www.epitomejournals.com/VolumeArticles/FullTextPDF/175_Research_Paper.pdf
- Tong, R. P. (2009). *Feminist Thought*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Wijayati, A. (2020). *the Character of Moana in the Disney Movie Script Moana Seen From Liberal Femisnism*. https://repository.usd.ac.id/36761/2/154214023_full.pdf
- Zachariah, S. S. (2019). *a Feminist Perspective on Korean Drama and Its Influence on the Youth in India*. 1–76. https://www.academia.edu/37769832/A_Feminist_Perspective_on_Korean_Drama_and_Its_Influence_on_the_Youth_in_India