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HOMOSOCIAL DESIRE: RECONFIGURED MALE FRIENDSHIP IN KIM EUN SOOK'S *DOKEBI: THE LONELY AND GREAT GOD*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the representation of bromance in a South Korean drama, *Dokebi: The Lonely and Great God*, by Kim Eun Sook, a screenwriter as well as a playwright. Under a society constructed by patriarchal values, people, especially men, in South Korea develop an idiosyncrasy to internalize the psychic pressure, both socially and mentally, from the dominant ideology. The internalization of such masculinity, however, undergoes a series of transformation through the popularity of media. In Korean drama, men can freely express their feelings and even show intimate friendships with other straight men. The emotional bonding generated from homosocial desire between two men is known as brother romance or bromance. Thus, this paper will disclose male intimacy beyond heterosexual relations as well as present the effect surfacing in Korean society.

Keywords: Korean Drama, Bromance, *Dokebi*, Masculinity, Homosocial Desire.

Introduction

Mostly influenced by Confucianism, Korean socio-political life, such as ways of thinking, philosophy and lifestyles, has been constructed on a family-patriarchal and conservative basis. Any non-normative discourse not only generates physical violence against people, who do not follow the standardized social norm, but also leads to other forms of social alienation, imperatively imposed on those who fail to conform. In Korea, the family value, mainly composed of a series of heteronormative discourses, relates closely to social harmony since its ethical norm tends to focus on "filial piety¹." Therefore, maintaining social recognition and cultural assimilation into the mainstream society based on heterosexual marriage has become the core in Korean Confucian society. Korean culture, built on the aspect of Confucianism, views

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¹ Filial piety is the criterion on which ethical moral status within the family system of affection, emotion, and tradition is judged. Within the patriarchal family, filial piety is an integrating and stabilizing influence to ensure the reproduction of values across generations. See Young-Gwan Kim and Sook-Ja Hahn (2006). Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea. *Culture, Health and Sexuality* Volume. 8, Issue 1, pp. 59-65.



homosexuality as an enemy to sabotage family tradition, which causes the discontinuity of family breed. With the emphasis on patriarchal virtue, male figures in Korea sustain the pressure to carry on the family lineage. Man-Gap Kim once referred Korean families to have been “eager to have sons who are supposed to be successors of the family, take care of their elderly parents, and have responsibility for ancestor worship” (Kim, 1982, 174). Kim’s perspective explains a phallogocentric social norm that supports the significance of heterosexuality, and sexual conduct, governed by a conservative evangelical law, can only become legitimate through monogamous heterosexual marriage. The consequence results in the exclusion of other forms of sexuality, or relationships, as well as a denial of their existence. Even if evangelical churches consider heteronormativity the fundamental unit of family sustainability, sexuality, deriving from all kinds of human interactions and relations, is reconfigured and redefined with the popularity of media broadcasting.

With the development of media broadcasting and the sufficient knowledge of sexuality, contemporary Korean’s acceptance of intimate relationship between the same sex has slightly improved in spite of the on-going resistance of homosexuality. In Korea, since 2006, movies and TV drama have adopted a new depiction to construct masculinity through the interactions between two male characters. Such intimacy created by two men, of course, is not considered a homosexual act in terms of sexuality, especially under a conservative Korean society, but a brand new interpretation called homosocial relationship. In fact, younger generation in Korea tends to maintain an even more open attitude toward such intimacy because “there are many opportunities for Korean men and women to have social and non-sexual physical contact with members of the same-sex both in their school days and afterwards” (Kim and Hahn, 2006, 62-63). In this regard, the same-sex intimacy or interaction is lifted off the social taboo, premised on family-oriented definitions of gender and sexual identities. Rather, the general public, enjoying close emotional or even physical touch with members of their own sex, interpret such relationship as bromance. Unlike homosexuality, intimate friendships between straight men offer the new generation in Korea a platform for emotional expression beyond traditional heterosexual interpretation. Elizabeth J. Chen argues that “[b]romance notably provides a space for male intimacy, in sharp contrast to the general types of friendship that society permits men to have. They recognized intimacy without sex, in contrast with general conceptions of intimacy” (Chen, 2012, 248-49). Chen helps to clarify the tendency of committing homosexual behaviors between two men. People of the same sex, of course, can enjoy intimate and emotional friendships without violating traditional heterosexual perception. The original interpretation of masculinity assumed by the majority of society undergoes a reconstruction to comply with the surface of male bonding.

Homosociality

What makes homosocial desire, generating the bromance discourse, different from homosexual relationship deserves an explicit explanation. Masculinity discourse appears in many forms, which have dominated the world for a long period of time. Scott Fabius Kiesling argues that “[c]ultural discourse of masculinity thus refer to the ways that men are assumed by the majority of society to act, take and feel . . . these cultural discourses of masculinity include gender difference, heterosexism, dominance, and male solidarity” (Kiesling, 2005, 696). Among these four social discourses, male solidarity can be fully refer to bromance, in which, as Kiesling explains, men desire to do things with groups of other men, not women. Homosocial desire is generated through social indirectness rather than through reflecting their carnal desire to the object they interact with. The meaning of desire can be broadly explained; however, the desire constructed around the relationship of the same sex corresponds to that which people lack but want. In other words, homosocial desire reveals a psychological status to transgress what is socially prohibited or absent so that it portrays a picture of the dislocation of possible homosexual desire in an indirect way. Bromance, a homosocial narrative, thus, becomes a relationship that can channel out homosexual desire and still stands as a normative social discourse. Besides, Judith Butler argued “that the relations among patrilineal clans are based in homosocial desire, a repressed and, hence, disparaged sexuality, a relationship between men which is, finally, about the bonds of men, but which takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women” (Butler, 1999, 52). The power and dominance created through the interaction of men helps shape the understanding of masculinity. Male friendships resonating with the discourse in a homosocial world are no longer considered an act of committing homosexuality.

When it comes to the concept of homosociality, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick respectively provides a refined and dynamic view on it in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Other than simply defining homosociality as a study on male friendship or male bonding, Sedgwick further elaborates its social dynamic in view of homosocial desire. She asserts that the concept of homosociality analyzes



various social bonds and power relations, which generates different kinds of desires and intimate relationships between men. How to justify desires and intimate relationships between men to comply with the continuity and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity becomes crucial and polemical. Though homosocial desire mainly refers to social bonds between people of the same sex, it, as Sedgwick argues, is “a kind of oxymoron” because “it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with ‘homosexual’ and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from ‘homosexual’” (Sedgwick, 1985, 1). It appears critical to draw a line to dichotomize these two social discourses as they share some similarities. Literally, both discourses have the same object and project their feeling toward it. One, however, shows libido intuitive while the other centers on strengthening fraternal bonding. In addition, Sedgwick suggests that “[t]o draw the ‘homosocial’ back into the orbit of ‘desire,’ of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual— a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted” (Sedgwick, 1985, 1-2). This short statement indicates that it is hard to ignore the influence of homosexuality on homosociality, but what makes homosociality idiosyncratic is its intention to normalize the structure of male intimate relationship. In a society where men and women are defined in terms of the access to acquire power, male bonding, if interpreted explicitly, can comply with the structure of obligatory heterosexuality.

Homosociality, despite an oxymoron synonym to homosexuality, maintains a strong connection with heterosexuality. The appearance of homosexuality offends the legitimacy of heterosexuality, which is mainly built on a male-dominated kinship system. The surge of male intimate relationship, potentially leading to homosexuality, endangers the continuity of patriarchy. However, there is no denying that male bonding is as common and normative as it has been existing since classical Greek. In order to maintain the balance of the structure of heterosexuality, homophobia is an inevitable consequence of reaching patriarchy. Judith Butler’s idea of heterosexuality also portrays the formation of homosociality. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that a man “who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved another man, and hence never lost another man” (Butler, 1997, 139). Masculinity, then, is constructed through the alienation of Otherness of homosexuality, which leads to the formation of homophobia. Butler refers heterosexuality to a melancholic incorporation of the male intimate relationship considered social taboo. In this regard, homophobia can be said to attribute to the birth of homosociality. Nils Hammaren and Tomas Johansson also explain that “the concept of homosociality is often defined as a mechanism and social dynamic that explains the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, situating gender relations within a reasonably stable power structure” (Hammaren and Johansson, 2014, 2). As a result, it is not hard to see that male bonding focuses on creating more sensitive and intimate masculinity, which can be concluded as homosocial desire. The continuum of homosocial desire between men is gradually and widely accepted as bromance.

The concept of bromance centers on intimate nonsexual and homosocial relationships between two men. Though it appears to be a new term in the 21st century, bromance has been commonly used as a narrative in media portrayals in movies, dramas, and music industry. As a narrative reflecting different values, bromance emphasizes how men interact with each other to generate enjoyable friendships. In Korea, as mentioned earlier, the society is under the influence of a strict dogmatic and conservative social rule, which views same sex relationships as a violation of social order. Bromance, therefore, acts as a relationship that slips the boundary created to define sexual and nonsexual behavior. It explains that straight men can also share complicated love and affection, asexual and homosocial relationships. Driven by homophobia, bromance helps preserve the completeness of heteronormativity. In this way, the intimate relationship between men will not be considered a taboo, but “boys and men will be free to express emotional intimacy and physical expressions of that relationship with one another. Accordingly, this culture permits an even greater expansion of acceptable heteromale behaviors, which result in a further blurring of masculine and feminine behaviors and terrains” (Anderson, 2009, 97). Based on the definition of bromance, the resistance to male-male intimacy in Korea is loosening up. Due to its undermining of conventional aspect of gender order, bromance, ultimately, becomes an element adopted to describe male relationship in Korean dramas.

Dokebi and Grim Reaper

Drawing the attention after its premiere in 2016, Eun-Sook Kim’s *Dokebi, The Lonely and Great God* provides the audience with an opportunity to examine the relationship between two male characters. Despite the fact that the story line is mainly based on the love scenes between the male and female



protagonists, what makes the audience excited is to see the interactions occurring between two male characters, Dokebi and Grim Reaper. Their history can be dated back to Goryeo Dynasty. As a military general, Kim Shin, becoming Dokebi after his death, is framed by a cunning and manipulative official, Park Joong-heo, and executed as a traitor by the young king, Wang Yeo, who becomes Grim Reaper after committing suicide. Kim Shin's persistence to protect the young king and the country comes from his promise to the diseased old king, Wang Yeo's older brother. However, the young king, Wang Yeo, married Kim Shin's sister as planned, is blinded by Park Joong-heo, who eventually persuades the young king to kill Kim Shin. Then, Kim Shin becomes Dokebi as a punishment for his massive kills in wars by the almighty. He stays immortal and must endure the pain of seeing his loved ones live and die repeatedly. As for Wang Yeo, his memories are erased and take the job as a Grim Reaper to guide diseased souls to the underworld. Their intricate relationship interweaves even if the misunderstanding happens in their previous life. Dokebi and Grim Reaper begin to overtly interact after they end up living under the same roof by destiny.

For many years, Dokebi has been living on his own and needs to leave temporarily for a while, not only for stopping people from recognizing his never-aging appearance but also looking for the incarnation of his sister in this life or the life to come. His immortality does not bring him happiness but sorrow because he suffers from seeing his loved ones born, aging and diseased. This is mercy as well as torture arranged by the almighty. Until one day, his suffering has seemed to come to an end. It is the day when Dokebi runs into Grim Reaper: "Walking on the street, a strange wall appears in front of Kim Shin, Dokebi, or Goblin. A wall leading to a tea house but neglected by mortals catches his attention. Inside the wall is another man, who could not help but looks at Dokebi. Murmuring intentionally to himself, he is Grim Reaper" (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 23). Their first encounter discloses the continuity of their unresolved and complicated relationship that can be traced back from the previous life. Despite the fact that neither of them recognize each other's real identities, the gaze weaves the shattered string that used to tie them up as a unity. As the military general and the king in their previous life, both of them fail to see that fate has quietly brought them together once again right here and right now. What makes their reunion so special is that they share the same excruciating memory, of which one cannot forget and the other cannot recall. Dokebi needs to endure the pain of being betrayed by his king whereas Grim Reaper suffers from the loss of identity. Even though the tea house becomes a final destination of the mortals, it is also the beginning of releasing agony and finding peace for both of them. This time, they might end up differently through a series of intimate interactions.

What makes Dokebi and Grim Reaper's relationship so extraordinary can be contributed to fate that brings them to live under the same roof. Dokebi's nephew, Yoo Deok-Hwa, leases the house to Grim Reaper after knowing his uncle needs to leave again. Deok-Hwa, who, at the end, is known as a representative of the almighty, acts as the catalyst, which aims to correct the mistake that has happened to their previous life. Living under the same roof as well as being part of each other is the almighty's way to lift hatred and sadness off these two men. After the first encounter in the tea house, Dokebi's house is the venue where both of them are about to go on the journey to hate, to need, and to forgive each other. The transition from the tea house to Dokebi's house signifies the formation of male bonding: "[w]alking into his house thinking of what just happened, Dokebi sees a man in black standing there, It is his 'old friend,' Grim Reaper. At the same time, Grim Reaper feels surprised to see Dokebi" (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 57). Although Dokebi ostensibly appears to reject any intruder into his lonely life by playing some tricks to chase Grim Reaper away, using "old friend" to describe Grim Reaper implies that he can finally have someone to accompany him in his immortal life. At the same time, Grim Reaper has no intention to leave Dokebi's house even if he finds Dokebi hard to please. However, he still plans to live with him and starts his move-in life with Dokebi. Here, we can see that their determination to live together forms male solidarity and, according to Kiesling, "[m]ale solidarity is a discourse that takes as given a bond among other men; men are understood normatively to want (and need) to do things with groups of other men" (Kiesling 2005, 696). As time passes, both of them get used to each other and cherish the time to be together. Thus, the house strengthens the male bonding that used to set these two men apart because of power struggle. This fraternity-like male bonding happening between them creates homosociality that enables their friendship to develop based on heterosexual desire.

Bromance

As heterosexual desire helps to form homosociality, Dokebi and Grim Reaper's interactions forge their nonsexual male bonding. Their behaviors generated from living together creates not only shoulder-to-shoulder friendship but also non-physical love affairs. Dokebi considers Grim Reaper a trustworthy man to



consult with after running into some problem: “[s]ummoned by Ji Eun-Tak in his pajama, Dokebi has a new trouble. Feeling uneasy, Dokebi knocks on Grim Reaper’s door for consultation. Though arguing all the time, as immortals, Dokebi and Grim Reaper find each other the best ‘friend’ to talk to (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 92). Once again, “friend” is the term used to describe their relationship, which cannot be imagined before they meet again in this life, or given that they died because of misunderstanding and could not find peace in Goryeo Dynasty. In addition, Kim also confirms that “[t]he existence of Grim Reaper means significantly to Dokebi” (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 24). Accordingly, when Dokebi feels anxious about meeting his bride, the first man he can think of and ask for help is Grim Reaper. He needs Grim Reaper to make sure he looks good. At the same time, Grim Reaper patiently gives him some suggestions to ease his anxiety. Their interaction is full of sparkles and love. Such an interaction makes no difference for a real couple, but it does bring them one step closer to each other in reference to fraternal love. Bromance interaction becomes an explicit heterosexual romance through the appearance of Dokebi’s bride, Ji Eun-Tak, who is supposed to pull out the sword stuck in Dokebi’s body. Maria Hebert argues that “[t]he women’s presence, however, encourages a strengthened bond between the two men, and perhaps enables the friendship to remain indefinable” (Herbert, 2002, 138). As mentioned earlier, even though this drama centers on the love story, the development of male bonding between Dokebi and Grim Reaper cannot be ignored. The presence of Ji Eun-Tak only helps to manifest the formation of homosocial dynamic forged through the interaction between these two male characters.

Living under the same roof strengthens Dokebi and Grim Reaper’s relationship, and such relationship eventually develops into bromance with homosocial desire. Homosocial desire goes beyond what is socially prohibited and absent. The desire creates no similarity with homosexual desire, which describes more of physical intimacy between the same sex. However, homosocial desire results in togetherness to form an alliance where two men unconditionally accept each other to create dynamic power. In *Reading Sedgwick*, Judith Butler argues that “[t]he man’s desire for the woman is at once his desire for the man, and the two desires, while not the same, nevertheless coexist in a strange simultaneity, the one functioning partially as the conduit for the other, but not, for that reason, having its own desirability reduced to a merely instrumental status” (Butler, 2002, 117). In spite of the identities of military general and king in their previous life, the hierarchical status disappears when Dokebi and Grim Reaper joins as a union, where one always follows and cares about the other. What Butler emphasizes “desire for the woman” can be seen when Dokebi and Grim Reaper rescue Ji Eun Tak from a kidnapping. On the TV scene, both of them make a grand entrance similar to two models walking down a catwalk side by side with the fraternal dynamic power to save Ji Eun Tak from the loan shark. Their togetherness shows male solidarity to fulfill one task, which is saving a woman, whom is loved by Dokebi and has been wanted by Grim Reaper since she was nine. The woman becomes an object that helps them to construct their male bonding as Ji Eun Tak complains that “[a]nd you come with Grim Reaper? I don’t want to die yet. why do you come with Grim Reaper?” (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 113). Apparently, Ji Eun Tak also notices that Dokebi and Grim Reaper maintain shoulder-to-shoulder friendship. Even if she is afraid of being taken away by Grim Reaper, she still needs to accept the fact that their masculinity is manifested through exclusive friendship. Interestingly, the scene is even adopted to be a major clip for its TV trailer. Most of the audience, thus, are impressed by the homosocial bonding created between these two men. Homosocial desire addresses the denial of homosexuality considered a taboo in Korea society while it redefines the intimate relationship created by two men. In this way, the audience can use a new perspective to examine the interaction between Dokebi and Grim Reaper.

Since male bonding narrative is adopted to depict these two characters, fate or the almighty’s plan has been drawing Dokebi and Grim Reaper a bit closer each day both physically and emotionally. Based on the history, they used to stand on the opposite poles where each of them protected different beliefs. Male territory and power blocs hindered the development of their friendship even if Dokebi’s sister married Grim Reaper. As a result, death was the only option left to them. Now, subordinated and marginalized masculinity is annihilated with the disappearance of hegemonic masculinity to create alternative masculinity. The hegemonic masculinity norm acquires a new interpretation. Dokebi and Grim Reaper no longer act as the military general and the king, but happen to be friends, roommates and comrades, who care and worry about each other. Thus, compared to their previous life, their heterosexual desire is transformed into homoerotic impulse to establish homosociality so as to undermine the traditional gender order. In other words, their intimate interaction is no more than absent homosexuality, which “refer[s] to close and intimate nonsexual and homosocial relationships between two . . . men or women” (Hammaren and Johansson, 2014,



6). Although Dokebi needs to leave once in a while, he finds him attached to and enjoys the accompany with Grim Reaper this time. He acknowledges that he finally has the reason to stay and hopes Grim Reaper feels the same. One of their interactions demonstrates their inseparable bonding.

“When are you leaving?” asked Grim Reaper. “The day after tomorrow. Happy now?” replied Dokebi. Grim Reaper says no more after hearing the answer. Feeling a bit down, he is just silently putting all the checked grocery items into the shopping bag. It is no denying that an extraordinary bonding is formed between them. Though they do not say it, they know how each of them feels (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 125).

Even if Grim Reaper constantly urges Dokebi to leave, when it is time for their separation, sudden sorrow visits him. Without responding upon hearing Dokebi’s answer, it depicts his refusal to watch his friend departing. The description also confirms that “an extraordinary bonding is formed between them,” which delineates that homosocial dynamic becomes the mechanism supporting these two characters to forgive each other for the past misunderstanding. On the night before Dokebi’s departure, both of them feel sad, and Grim Reaper even admits that he “literally does not want Dokebi to leave” (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 136). Now, given that Grim Reaper jokes about claiming the house to his own all the time, those quarrels and arguments only indicate a move to accumulate intimate relationship, like a real couple. None of them can really give up the friendship which has been lost long ago and is retrieved with obstacles now.

In addition, the appearance of Ji Eun Tak only encourages the development of bromance between Dokebi and Grim Reaper. Grim Reaper has been looking for Ji Eun Tak to take her to the underworld since she was nine years old. In fact, Ji Eun Tak always has ways to run away from the capture. When Ji Eun Tak knows that Dokebi and Grim Reaper live together, she feels worried, not to mentioned that Grim Reaper involves in her rescue mission, which annoys her. She confronts Dokebi by saying “why is Grim Reaper here? Are you two living together?” (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 137). What makes the incident so dramatic and interesting is that Ji Eun Tak acts like the real wife finding the “love affair” between Dokebi and Grim Reaper, and is challenging them right on the spot. The reaction from Grim Reaper appears to be even intriguing: “[f]eeling angry and jealous, Grim Reaper tells them to face the problem as a married couple, and then goes into the house” (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 137-38). Obviously, Grim Reaper knows that there might be a series of questions and confrontations that Dokebi needs to deal with, so he should not get involved at the moment. Grim Reaper’s receding into the house with anger and jealousy indicates that he is aware of the intrusion of heterosexuality, which arbitrarily presents the world with a dichotomy of only men and women’s relationship, into the homosocial world constructed between Dokebi and himself. After returning home, Dokebi finds consultation from Grim Reaper as usual. He admits that the appearance of Ji Eun Tak indeed has changed his life, which he has never experienced. Dokebi even reveals that if Ji Eun Tak is the right woman who can pull the sword off his chest, he can end his pain, which he has been desiring for but is feeling hesitated now. The reason Dokebi feels hesitated is that not only does he fall in love with Ji Eun Tak but also he does not want to end his bromance with Grim Reaper. Wandering the world without anyone for comfort, Dokebi loves the feeling of having someone around him and of talking to someone when he feels troubled. Grim Reaper, of course, becomes another reason holding Dokebi’s decision to leave and perish once and for all.

The function of Dokebi’s house symbolizes a shelter for Dokebi to find comfort. The house used to be a curse, like the sword in his chest, which forces him to leave. The meaning of house is never complete with regard to the death of her sister, all his relatives and himself by the king. House only makes him suffer and remember his painful memories. However, the house serves as a totally different function to Dokebi now after Grim Reaper moves in. Only in the house can Dokebi reveals his thought to Grim Reaper. Brigitte Boudreau argues that “for ‘homosocial’ bond between males to occur, an isolated environment or delineated space is require, where there is often a conscious and deliberate exclusion of women” (Boudreau, 2011, 43). Dokebi’s house plays an essential role to lift off his worries. Whenever he runs into trouble or needs someone to give him some advice, the first person he can think of is always is his friend, brother, and roommate, Grim Reaper. The house offers both of them the space to be open to each other as well as reveals their feelings to care for each other. Jin Eun Tak is excluded from the house and from the involvement in these two men. Dokebi has been bothered because of the presence of Dokebi’s bride, who can end his life for good. On the one hand, Grim Reaper jokes about taking Ji Eun Tak to the underworld to help Dokebi from



disappearing: "Grim Reaper humorously says that he can 'take away' Ji Eun Tak as Dokebi wishes, and Dokebi almost agrees with the proposal" (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 142). On the other, by saying taking away Ji Eun Tak only shows Grim Reaper's way to stand on Dokebi's side for he also does not want to see him dead. The interaction between them helps to reaffirm the construction of homosocial desire, which guides them to go on the journey of forgiveness. This sets a completely opposite result from what used to happen to them in the past. This time, there is no complaints, no misunderstanding, and no regret. What accompanies them are compassion and care. As they become more inseparable, the interaction between them goes from brotherhood to bromance. There is another time Dokebi asks Grim Reaper for help because of Ji Eun Tak. The answer from Grim Reaper indicates a heterosexual version of romance: "Really? For the sake of our friendship, I will take Ji Eun Tak to the underworld this time since you feel so bothered. By the way, how dare she kisses you on the lips!" (Kim, Vol 1, 民 107, 247). Taking away Ji Eun Tak, as repeated for many times, infers the idea of women exclusion, which fulfills the continuum of homosocial desire. The male bonding between Dokebi and Grim Reaper accelerates with the appearance of Ji Eun Tak as well as the rejection of a woman figure set between them. This surely exemplifies how Brigitte Boudreau defines homosocial bond.

Homosocial desire explains an alternative masculinity to challenge the tradition heterosexual norm. When the relationship between two men goes beyond the acceptance of heterosexuality, homophobia is generated to protect the hegemonic discourse. However, not every same sex interaction contributes to homosexuality. No doubt, if the same sex interaction involves in physical touch, homosexuality is the term to apply to this relationship. Male-male intimacy can also show bromance, which is not premised on carnal desire but on homosocial desire, used to eradicate homophobia. As a continuum of desire, homosocial desire becomes a mechanism for Dokebi and Grim Reaper to reconcile their misunderstanding. Both of them project the feeling of "loving" each other, which almost violates the heterosexual norm. The longer they live together, the deeper their affection for each other becomes. Grim Reaper admits that "I don't want to see you die. That's it. If you turn into dust, I will feel a little bored" (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 351). Even if he uses "bored" to describe his feeling of losing Dokebi, Grim Reaper truly expresses an inseparable and attached emotion, which describes the necessary alliance built through their homosocial relationship. In return, Dokebi does not fight against the fraternal love from Grim Reaper; however, he considers it a tunnel for the homosocial desire to express. He appears calm, but only "feels lost and looks at Grim Reaper, who shows his extreme concerns. He and Grim Reaper truly indeed becomes friends" (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 352). The reason Dokebi feels lost is that Grim Reaper, besides Ji Eun Tak, is also the person, whom he cannot really abandon. Similar to the situation in Goryeo Dynasty, Kim Shin could not break the promise to the diseased king of taking care of the young king. He could have abandoned him but he chose not to, and it led to his death at the end. Staying with the one he loves indicates Dokebi's desirability to be responsible for people he cares about as he did. Although he died once because of his insistence to stay, Dokebi never runs away from the problem, not away from Ji Eun Tak, nor away from Grim Reaper.

The nonsexual love affair created between Dokebi and Grim Reaper continues to thrive and simultaneously transgresses the concept of straight panic. Homosocial desire shown by them signifies a transgression of rigid gender displacement in a heterosexual world. Despite the fact that Dokebi undergoes the turbulence after he knows that Grim Reaper is Wang Yeo, it does not change his decision to maintain their bromance. The truth is revealed by the cunning man, Park Joong-heo, who becomes a ghost wandering in the human world. He tells Dokebi that "[d]o you know who that Grim Reaper really is? He was the man bestowing the sword upon you, and then commanding you to die with the sword. He was Wang Yeo" (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 469). The truth might become the moment to let Dokebi and Grim Reaper end up miserably like before. However, this time, Dokebi still chooses to protect "his king," so "he does not force Grim Reaper to move out, but instead, he himself moves back to his old house. Even though he knows the truth that Grim Reaper was Wang Yeo, Dokebi still takes care of him till the very end" (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 476). Knowing Grim Reaper is Wang Yeo does not exterminate the fraternal love that has been constructed since Grim Reaper moved in; instead, it rather strengthens their homosocial bond. Dokebi chooses not to chase Grim Reaper away because he knows that Grim Reaper has accompanied him through many difficulties after they meet. Moreover, what happened to them belongs to the past and he has been waiting to tell Grim Reaper that "[y]our deceased brother asks me to tell you that not giving you much attention is a kind of care for you. He also wants me to let you know that he himself, my sister, your queen and I, the guardian of Goryeo, all



love you very much" (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 492). Apparently, not chasing Grim Reaper away and telling love and care to him suggests that Dokebi is not ready to give up on their relationship yet. As mentioned, the almighty plays a joke on them; He tore them apart but, now, He has them united. The almighty erases everyone's memory, but He has Grim Reaper keep his. Therefore, death is not an end, but it has both of them cherish each other. Dokebi finds "Grim Reaper still remembers him, which makes [him] overjoyed" after he is re-summoned from the nihility (Kim, Vol 2, 民 107, 492). The homosocial bond between them was terminated because of a cunning man. However, Ji Eun Tak helps to connect the thread, not only assisting them to disclose the misunderstanding but also strengthening the fraternal love.

Conclusion

As heteronormative norm used to be a mere sexual code dominates in the traditional Korean society, people deserve the right to become more open-minded to accept different forms of relationships while the concept of sexuality is changing. People have been trapped in a dichotomized world where sexuality is limited, and particularly, in favor of heterosexual version of romance. The definition of love abducted by hegemonic masculinity becomes polemical. With the development of society as well as the rising awareness of sexuality, people no long believe in rigid binary oppositions where hetero narrative collides with homo narrative. The on-going confrontations generate homosociality, in which the fear of homophobia is de-escalating. In this regard, homosocial desire revealing from the interactions between Dokebi and Grim Reaper suggests that a homophobic Korean society also needs the mechanism to explain the excessive heterosexuality so as to embrace a new form of relationship. Male-male bond is no longer considered a taboo, which transgresses social norm set up to confine people's behavior. The beauty of male intimate interactions, mentally not physically, can also be appreciated and praised in a heterosexually dominated world in Korea. We see two men, who used to stand on the opposite poles due to some misunderstanding in Goryeo Dynasty, reconcile through the revelation of their genuine love to each other in the present times. The unity generated through homosocial dynamic finally helps them vanquish the wandering ghost, Park Joong-heo. In a patriarchy country, like Korea, male attachment has suffered a polemic criticism for its violation of hegemonic masculinity. However, male intimacy should not be considered mere homosexuality; instead, this homosexual-like behavior represents an exaltation of homosocial behavior, which deconstructs homophobia. Edith Hamilton once suggested

For a long time, certainly throughout the happy Golden Age, only men were upon the earth; there were not women. Zeus created these later, in his anger at Prometheus for caring so much for men. Prometheus had not only stolen fire for men; he had also arranged that they should get the best part of any animal sacrificed and the gods the worst (Hamilton, 1999, 72).

Prometheus runs the risk of being punished by Zeus, but he still chooses to offer his love to men without asking for any return. Obviously, he transgresses the law enforced by Zeus, a representation of hegemonic masculinity. Even if he acknowledges the consequence, Prometheus still and all manages to justify his indecent form of male attachment. Thus, humans can finally enjoy all the privileges bestowed upon them. The story resonates the acceptance of male love that consummates the challenge of compulsory heterosexuality in social relations. In this regard, what really leads to the reconciliation between Dokebi and Grim Reaper results in the homosocial desire that has been obliterated in Goryeo Dynasty, but rediscovered through a series of fraternal-love-like interactions between them. In *Dokebi, The Lonely and Great God*, Kim Eun Sook redefines the meaning of sexuality, in which friendship, or bromance, can always transgress arbitrary sexual orientation. Once, the sexual code was merely based on heteronormativity; however, with the transformation of modern world, a more dynamic view on male-male bond expunges the rigid boundary between pure friendship and romantic relationship.



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