

Crash Landing on Abnormality: Thought Fragments About "Crash Landing on You"

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Crash landing on you is a South Korean cable television drama that depicts the love story between a North Korean Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok and the Conglomerate heiress Yoon Se-ri, who crashed in North Korea due to a paragliding accident. In this article, I explored and followed abnormalities, using Canguilhem and Foucault's concepts, in the life of Yoon Se-ri in North Korea and in the life of Ri Jeong-hyeok and his subordinates in South Korea. I also analyzed characters in this soap opera through the perspective of three types of abnormalities inspired by Foucault's concept of abnormality.

Keywords: Canguilhem, Foucault, Abnormality, Norms, Crash Landing on You, North Korea

Introduction

Crash Landing on You is a South Korean drama that depicts the love story between the Korean People's Army (KPA) Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok, North Korean with a hectic past, and the Conglomerate heiress Yoon Se-ri, South Korean who crashed on North Korean soil due to a paragliding accident that was caused by a sudden tornado.

As the drama describes North Korea's customs and diverseness, and because of its geographic proximity and socio-cultural differences, it arouses curiosity about North Korea among South Koreans.

In this article, I explored and followed what Canguilhem and Foucault called *abnormalities* in the life of the heroine Yoon Se-ri in North Korea and the life of Ri Jeong-hyeok and his subordinates in South Korea. I also analyzed characters in the drama in accordance with three types of Foucault's concept of abnormality.

In his book *The Normal and The Pathological* (1966/2018), Canguilhem said that, if social norms are accepted as norms of an organism, then humans who do not fit within these norms will be treated as crazy/abnormal. The categories of acting normal weren't created based on objective scientific concepts, but by intertwined biology and medicine with political, cultural, and economic concepts (Canguilhem, 1966/2018). Thus, people who don't follow these norms are "crazy."

In episode 8, Gu Seung-jun, a British businessman wanted by the South Korean authority for embezzling a large amount of public money in business, escaped to North Korea where the South Korean law doesn't reach.

He had been engaged to Yoon Se-ri but broke up with her in South Korea, later met her again in North Korea. He told her that "love in this abnormal situation, falling in love with Ri Jeong-hyeok, a KPA Captain who helps her hide within his territory, is not real and therefore she is sad, lonely, and needs a person whom she can emotionally rely on" (Park & Lee, 2020).

What are the normality and the abnormality in love? Normality is the normative concept. Therefore, in order to understand the normality within the minds of human beings, the consideration and analysis of social customs and norms are essential.

To know more about abnormalities of love, first I analyzed three concerns (social customs, social norms, and abnormalities) about North Korea, through the experience of the fictional character, Yoon Se-ri who started her dramatic adventure there. Afterward, I analyzed the same three aforementioned concerns about South Korea through Ri Jeong-hyeok and his subordinates.

Abnormalities in North Korea Through Yoon Se-ri

Yoon Se-ri survived an accident and landed in the northern vicinity of the DMZ (demilitarized zone) there was no internet for communication, no Interpol for protection, and even no smartphone reception. It is a place that can be called abnormal.

Since the early episodes, the viewers can observe abnormal situations that take place in North Korea. For instance, home inspections, which are normal practices in North Korea. In episode 2, an abrupt civic-led inspection of residential units of villagers was presented, it is something not normal in the eyes of any South Korean. But it is a regular practice in North Korea, to put all its people under a comprehensive surveillance system led by the dominant Party, military, and civil authority altogether.

This drama also presents the difference in women's beauty standards between South and North Korea. For instance, in episode 3, Ri Jeong-hyeok told Yoon Se-ri to tie her long hair with a handkerchief. He told her that women who did not tie their long hair were considered foreigners or socially maladjusted women. However, in South Korea, it's unpopular for women to tie their long hair as many women do not like it. This seems to be a difference in social norms; in this case – fashion standard.

Moreover, in episode 4, more differences in social norms are presented to the viewers.

For instance, when Seo Dan, Ri's fiancée returned from Russia, her mother worried that Dan lost weight and told her that she should gain weight to look rich and beautiful. This depicts a different beauty standard in North Korea and South Korea. In South Korea to look rich and beautiful, women should be slender. Standards of beauty indeed differ from country to country, and from culture to culture.

There are also differences in economic and consumer practices in two Koreas.

In episode 5, Yoon Se-ri pawned the watch at the pawn shop. However, her luxurious watch was cheaper than the leather belt at a North Korean pawn shop. The reason for that is the fact that in North Korea the price of the goods doesn't depend on the brand but on their weight.

This difference between South Korea and North Korea can be explained by the fact that the free market economy was introduced at a different moment in history.

More examples of socio-cultural differences/abnormalities are as follows.

In episode 6, Yoon Se-ri and Gu Seung-jun met in Pyeongyang by chance, they walked together on a street when the police approached a girl and asked her, "why is your skirt so short? why is your hair so long?" This was exactly like the situation in South Korea in the 70s during the military-dominant political era. In South Korea now, the fashionable expression through clothes is very free, and depending on the fashion trends, people wear short skirts and have long hair.

In episode 7, there is a scene when Seo Dan went to look for her new house with her mother in the neighborhood where Ri Jeong-hyeok lived. However, what she saw was even strange for North Koreans from Pyeongyang. In the apartment, books were in the freezer, and clothes were arranged in the refrigerator. Also, goats were raised in the bathtub and chickens were pacing on the veranda. The fact that clothes and books are arranged in the refrigerator means that in North Korea the refrigerator cannot be used well due to the power supply problems. Also, raising goats in the bathtub seems to be space utilization due to the lack of usable water.

Now from episode 1 to episode 9, I, as a person raised in South Korea, personally noticed strange norms and customs that differ from the South Korean lifestyle. It's visible in Yoon Se-ri's life in North Korea.

In episode 5, a blackout occurred in the train when Yoon Se-ri took a train to Pyongyang with Ri Jeong-hyeok. In North Korea, electricity is very unstable so the trains stop quite often. This is an odd situation for South Koreans.

Lastly, the drama shows that North Koreans like South Korean TV dramas, pop idols such as BTS, and cosmetics, all of that is being sold in jangmadang (informal market). Moreover, they seem to hate US imperialism but do learn the English language. This is quite different from what we as South Koreans or people of the "free world" know about North Korea. In this way, this drama seems to help South Koreans learn more about North Korean social customs and norms.

Abnormalities in South Korea Through Ri's Subordinates

Now, from episode 10 to the last episode 16, I will follow abnormalities of the South, visible to Ri Jeong-hyeok and his subordinates, who came to South Korea.

The first place where Ri Jeong-hyeok's subordinates went after arriving in South Korea was a convenience store. They were amazed by many packages of instant noodles and pre-cooked rice. They thought that the rice was scarced and South Koreans eat wheat-based instant noodles instead. This suggests that the image of South Korea that is promoted in the North is false and manipulated.

In episode 10, they noticed that there was no blackout in the South, so they thought that South Koreans knew that they were from North Korea and South Koreans did everything to prevent blackouts in their country. They thought that it was some sort of propaganda.

When they think of this as propaganda, it means that there are doubts about a large amount of electricity in South Korea and that there are times when North Korea temporarily increases the amount of electricity in the form of propaganda.

In later episodes more differences/abnormalities of South Korean life were palpable for North Koreans.

For instance, in episode 11, there is a jjimjilbang (Korean sauna) scene. They did not know the procedures of how to use and enjoy it. Also, in episode 12, a PC room (Korean style internet cafe) scene was presented. Ri Jeong-hyeok's subordinates went there to watch the drama and play computer games just for fun.

The jjimjilbang (Korean sauna) and PC room are unique places for foreigners as much as for people from North Korea. Up to this point, they showed different places, unknown for North Koreans. As these places don't exist in North Korea, it is something that can be called abnormal to them.

Another example is presented in episode 12 when Ri Jeong-hyeok's subordinates went to Yoon's company to meet her, they went there to request the payment. Because of their behavior, Yoon's employees misunderstood Ri Jeong-hyeok's subordinates as stalkers. This misunderstanding was caused by the difference in consumer practices and the treatment of employees between the two Koreas.

In episode 13, there is a story about torn jeans seen in a clothing store. One of Ri's subordinates, Pyo Chi Su said that South Koreans seemed to live well, but when he went to the market and saw displayed torn jeans, he thought that South Koreans must be poor, that's why they wear torn jeans. In North Korea, only the poor wear torn clothes, as clothes represent the status of a person, not the fashion style. This shows another example of different social and fashion norms.

In addition, coffee machines, warm water, no blackouts, warm rooms, fingerprint door locks, cleaners, credit cards, vending machines, and the Internet seemed abnormal to people from North Korea.

The heroine is the successor of the conglomerate, showing the splendid side of South Korea. But the TV drama presents also the gap between the rich and the poor in North Korea, which is visible in the difference in the houses of Ri Jeong-hyeok, the son of the general politician, and the daughter of North Korean businesswoman – Seo Dan. From the North Korean side, they might criticize the drama for emphasizing South Korea's wealth.

In addition, the compassion of people in the neighborhood where Ri Jeong-hyeok lived and the heart-warming thoughts expressed by his subordinates are in contrast to the coldness of Yoon Se-ri's family members. Thus, this TV drama doesn't portray North Koreans only from a negative side.



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Crash Landing on Abnormality

In this part, following Foucault's concept, the three types of abnormalities will be presented. And then I will describe the transition to abnormality visible in the drama.

Foucault described the history of abnormality in his book *Abnormal*, starting with King Kong (Foucault, 1975/2003). It showed the transition from monster to abnormal.

The first aspect of the problem of abnormality is the human monster. The monster falls under what in general terms could be called the framework of politico-judicial powers. Its features will take shapes and be transformed, at the end of the eighteenth century, in accordance with these politico-judicial powers transformation.

The second is the individual who must be corrected. The figure of the incorrigible will be defined, transformed, and developed along with the reorganization of the functions of the family and the development of disciplinary techniques (Foucault, 1975/2003).

And the third is about sexual activity. This leads to psychiatry. In this type of abnormality, the deviant emerges and takes a shape within a redistribution of the powers that surround the individual's body (Foucault, 1975/2003).

Here, I will track the transition to abnormality in this TV drama, based on Foucault's concept.

Ri Jeong-hyeok, the hero of this drama, is a person who protects Yoon Se-ri. Thus, he portrays King Kong. King Kong (Captain Ri) comes to South Korea to protect the woman in danger, after breaking the law of North Korea, to send her safely to South Korea. He is a “human monster” who survived alone against numerous gangsters and was shot instead of Yoon Se-ri.

The frame of reference of the human monster is the law. Its existence and form is not only a violation of the law of society but also a violation of the law of nature (Foucault, 1975/2003).

Captain Ri violated the law to protect Yoon Se-ri. Meanwhile, his subordinates are close to the idea of individuals that need to be corrected.

For instance, Pyo Chi Su drinks alcohol during working hours, Kim Ju Muk enjoys watching South Korean TV dramas during working hours, and Geum Eun Dong, reads his mother’s letter from his hometown and thinks about her during working hours. They don’t perform their duties or follow the rules. These are individuals who need to be corrected according to the North Korean social norms.

The British citizen and businessman Gu Seung-jun, who came to North Korea after committing fraud in South Korea, was also an individual to be corrected. Furthermore, Seo Dan drank too much alcohol and was perhaps an abnormal individual herself.

Moreover, when Yoon Se-ri was young, she had been abandoned by her stepmother. Here we can see that an abnormality crashed on Yoon Se-ri, who once tried to commit suicide in Switzerland and she had to get help from psychiatry.

And I see the proverbial “crash landing” with the power of love.

In the report of the NIS (National Intelligence Service), which analyzed Ri’s psychological state about Yoon Se-ri, they realized that Ri’s loves her, “more than 90% of the upper body is centered on her, unconsciously following her actions, and blocking the movement in advance when strangers approach her. This is the quintessential behavior of men in love” (Park & Lee, 2020).

Ri’s behavior shifted from a conscious desire to an unconscious act.

Ri Jeong-hyeok was not only a monster but also an aberrant individual, who must be corrected, and an abnormal person in love. He violated the law of North Korea to protect Yoon Se-ri, deviated from his duty as a soldier, and fell in love with her.

Yoon Se-ri and Ri Jeong-hyeok were in trouble. “Crash on love” despite the abnormal situation of them. Love and abnormality crash at the same time. Both of them crash landing on the abnormal love in an abnormal situation. They met under unusual circumstances, saw and felt unusual customs from each other’s side respectively in North Korea and South Korea, and fell in love at the risk of their lives.

Love began in the abnormal place, the DMZ (demilitarized zone), and they said *au revoir* as Ri Jeong-hyeok crossed the forbidden military demarcation line. Later they met occasionally in Switzerland and continued their love.

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