



# An Analysis of Characters' Personalities and Emotions in Korean TV Series *Reply 1988*

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**Abstract.** Youth nostalgia dramas are designed to resonate with viewers by recreating youthful life with a strong sense of reality, thus striving to achieve high ratings. *Reply 1988* is the most successful of the nostalgia trilogy. It is a TV drama that reflects different emotions through the personalities of different characters, which determine that people are different when it comes to expressing their inner emotions.

**Keywords:** Youth nostalgia · Reply 1988 · Character

## 1 Introduction

*Reply 1988* is the highest-rated Korean drama in the *Reply* series with the theme of nostalgia. It is a Friday-Saturday drama co-led by the famous Korean director Shin Won-ho and screenwriter Lee Woo-jung, starring Lee Hye-ri, Park Bo-gum, Ryu Jun-yeol, and Go Kyung-pyo.

Set in a neighborhood of Ssangmun-dong, Dobong District, Seoul, South Korea during the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the drama takes the growth process of children of each family as the mainline and focuses on the neighborhood relationship among the five families, showing everyone's personality characteristics and reflecting the affection within each family as well as friendship and love among the children [7].

*Reply 1988* takes youth and nostalgia as the theme and five family members as the main characters, reflecting the common feelings they share through their various personalities, which are similar but not identical. In this drama, the characters can fall into three categories. They seem to have different personalities, but in fact, have the same hidden emotions deep inside. The play mainly revolves around the family, friendship and love between the five protagonists and their families, showing the different ways of dealing with feelings between characters with different personalities, and then reflecting the different results brought about by them. Through this play, people can realize that they need to have enough courage in addition to paying sincerity when dealing with feelings, whether it is family, friendship or love.

## 2 The Friendship, Family Affection, and Love Reflected in the Characters of Kim Jung-hwan and Choi-Taek

Starting with a flashback, *Reply 1988* keeps the audience guessing, and “who is the husband of grown-up Duk-seon” becomes a mystery for the audience to guess. The answer to the mystery appears to be one of Sun-woo and Jung-hwan at first, but as the plot progresses, it comes to Choi-taek, and then after Sun-woo is excluded, the mystery stays between Jung-hwan and Choi-taek.

On closer analysis, there are many similarities between the personalities of Jung-hwan and Choi-taek. Both usually fall into the category of not saying much, being introverted, and preferring to keep their emotions to themselves, whether it is friendship, affection, or love. Like quiet and usually love to be alone. For instance, in the drama, especially in the first half, Choi-taek’s father and Choi-taek barely speak at home, and the only thing that happens at dinner is that his father calls out, “Choi-taek, it’s time to eat.” The two sit at the table without saying anything. Similar scenes can also be found at Jung-hwan’s home. Jung-hwan’s mother asks her sons to have dinner, but Jung-hwan does not say anything until his father returns. Among Sun-woo, Choi-taek, Dong-ryong, Jung-hwan, Jung-bong and No-eul, Choi-taek and Jung-hwan belong to the category of few words.

However, there are differences in personality between the two. Choi-taek is more courageous and independent than Jung-hwan in expressing his feelings, especially when it comes to love. It is because of Choi-taek’s courage to express himself that he can finally marry Duk-seon. On the contrary, Jung-hwan misses the opportunity to express his love many times due to hesitation. Even at the last moment six years later, he is beaten to the cinema entrance by Choi-taek.

### 2.1 Family Affection

Whether they are quiet or brave and independent, they keep their affection deep inside. For instance, in one episode in which Duk-seon’s grandmother dies, Duk-seon’s father meets Choi-taek sitting in the alley on his way home from work. It should be Choi-taek who waits for him here on purpose. During the chat between the two, they talk about the death of Duk-seon’s grandmother and Choi-taek comforts Duk-seon’s father. But when Duk-seon’s father asks Choi-taek when he misses his mother most, his answer is “I miss my mother every day and every moment.” However, from the appearance point of view, it is difficult to see that he misses his mother. It can be seen that he hides the family affection of missing his mother so deeply. The same is true for his father. In the second half of the drama, when he discovers the twilight love between his father and Sun-woo’s mother, he does not react as strongly as Sun-woo does, but is understanding and supportive. And Choi-taek suggests that he hopes his father will have a confidant to take care of each other in his later years. In the whole series, it should be not difficult to feel that Choi-taek is the youngest and most childish among them in terms of age, behavior and life. However, Choi-taek is more mature and stable than anyone else in dealing with things. He hides his affection for his parents deep in his heart, known only to himself [5].

For another example, in this series, Jung-hwan finally joins the air force. A small scene in the drama shows that Jung-hwan's decision is influenced by his brother Jung-bong's wish when he was young. It is Jung-bong's wish to be an air force officer, but he was unable to achieve this wish due to some health reasons, so Jung-hwan chooses to join the air force in the end for his brother. This plot can also be known from the conversation between Jung-bong and Jung-hwan when they are watching the shooting star on the rooftop. Jung-bong hopes that Jung-hwan will not be forced into the air force for the wish he had when he was a child and that Jung-hwan will do what he likes. However, Jung-hwan's answer is, "Of course I'm doing it for myself, not for you, my brother." Jung-hwan says this to make his brother not feel guilty for himself. The irreplaceable brotherhood between the two brothers is very clearly expressed [4].

## 2.2 Friendship

In terms of friendship, Choi-taek and Jung-hwan handle their emotions almost in the same way. Although Choi-taek is more courageous than Jung-hwan in expressing inner feelings, when Jung-hwan and Choi-taek know that both of them like Duk-seon, there is a big change in their attitude towards Duk-seon, and both of them no longer stick close to Duk-seon and deliberately distance themselves from her. Choi-taek plans to come back early after winning the Go tournament to go on a movie date with Duk-seon, but just before that he finds out that Jung-hwan also likes Duk-seon, so for the first and only time, he finds an excuse to cancel his date with Duk-seon, obviously for Jung-hwan.

Jung-hwan does the same thing. When Sun-woo and Dong-ryong ask Choi-taek about his feelings for Duk-seon, Choi-taek's answer is "I like her, just like her for no reason." Everyone thinks that Choi-taek is joking, yet from Choi-taek's eyes, Jung-hwan can know that it is a confession from the heart. After that, when several of their friends agree to see Lee mon-sae's concert again, Jung-hwan firmly says that he will not go. Previously, Duk-seon asks Jung-hwan to hang out with their friends in the evening and Jung-hwan goes without hesitation, showing that it is impossible for Jung-hwan to cancel his concert date with Duk-seon. However, Jung-hwan gives up his date with Duk-seon for Choi-taek.

## 2.3 Love

When it comes to love, Jung-hwan and Choi-taek deal with it very differently. Jung-hwan always likes Duk-seon, but never confesses his love for her, and the only time he does is seen as being only for show. In the second half of the series, Sun-woo, Dong-ryong, Jung-hwan and Duk-seon meet again for dinner, sitting around the table. When Dong-ryong asks for Jung-hwan's graduation ring several times, Jung-hwan seizes the opportunity to make his only formal and show-like confession. In that scene everyone is tricked, twice in a row. From believing it at the beginning to Jung-hwan saying to Dong-ryong at the end of the confession, "That's it. I've finally finished a confession, right?" However, at that time, Duk-seon gradually puts her feelings on Choi-taek. During Jung-hwan's confession, Duk-seon's face shows more anxiety waiting for Choi-taek to appear than surprise, and the awkward and helpless expression on Jung-hwan's face at that moment is very regrettable.

Different from Jung-hwan, Choi-taek is brave enough to express his love. It's clear from many details that Choi-taek likes Duk-seon, but Duk-seon doesn't pick up on it because of her carelessness. After the Go tournament, the friends meet again at Choi-taek's house as usual, and when they arrive at the door, Choi-taek takes the initiative to give Duk-seon a big hug. Whenever he meets Duk-seon on the way back from the chess club, he will give her a hug, which in his heart is an indication of love. After the Go tournament, he invites Duk-seon to watch a movie and after winning the championship, he finally works up the nerve to let her know. And six years later, when he overhears the chess club member saying that Duk-seon is dumped, he is afraid that Duk-seon will be freezing in front of the cinema alone, so he runs to the cinema to look for Duk-seon instead of attending the tournament and so on. These are the differences between Choi-taek and Jung-hwan in the approach to love [3].

The expression of emotions is largely determined by personality. Choi-taek and Jung-hwan are so quiet that they keep a lot of things to themselves. It is Choi-taek's courageous character to confess that helps him to get love, and Jung-hwan's lack of courage and hesitation makes him lose the opportunity to confess, and finally loses love. The same goes for people in real life. In many cases, hesitation will make people lose what they should have gotten.

### **3 The Friendship, Family Affection and Love Reflected in the Characters of Duk-seon and Dong-Ryong**

In the drama, Dong-ryong is the only one who will not be mistaken for Duk-seon's husband. It seems that they have different personalities, but in fact they have many similarities, which may also be one of the reasons why they will not be misunderstood. Duk-seon is casual, thoughtless, careless and bold, but sometimes has a delicate mind, worrying about her friends and standing up for her relatives. Duk-seon can be described as a "tough girl" with current popular words. Dong-ryong is humorous, bold and arrogant, but also has the style of a military counselor and always gives ideas and suggestions to his friends. Both of them have an iron hand in a velvet glove [6].

#### **3.1 Family Affection**

The tough girl-like personality of Duk-seon makes her blind to everything else. Duk-seon happens to see her brother No-eul being bullied by his girlfriend's gang, so she starts to fight indiscriminately, all the way to the police station. Although Duk-seon often quarrels and fights with her sister Bo-ra, even to the point of being at each other's throats, when her sister Bo-ra is implicated in school protests, she worries about her in front of the friends, fearing that it will remain a blot on Bo-ra's character. She also does everything she could to rid her mother of depression during menopause. Blood is thicker than water. The affection will not be erased by a fight or a quarrel.

The plots depicting the affection of Dong-ryong are not a lot. Being raised in a dual-income family, Dong-ryong can not get enough paternal and maternal love like other children, which makes him dissatisfied with the role of a mother since childhood.

However, when his mother realizes the neglect of her son and starts to care about Dong-ryong, Dong-ryong's view immediately changes. In front of friends, he becomes proud of the fact that his mother is not a housewife. It is evident that the barriers between parents and children can be broken down by a hug, a greeting, and a call. It is a family bond that can never be broken.

### 3.2 Friendship

Duk-seon's casual and careless appearance can easily lead to the misconception that she only gets affection but gives little. But in the second half, it is clear that Duk-seon is a person who is willing to give and can even sacrifice herself for her friends. During Choi-taek's trip to China for the Go tournament, Duk-seon communicates with the receptionist in sign language despite the language barrier so that he can sleep and eat comfortably, eventually getting permission to change room for Choi-taek and then sleeping in the cold room by herself. When Duk-seon learns that Choi-taek has problems with his diet during every Go tournament, she gets up early in the morning to queue up to buy breakfast for Choi-taek, preparing a change of clothes in advance and putting them on the bedside. The emotion here is the embodiment of friendship before love begins.

Dong-ryong's friendship is not portrayed as obviously as others in this series, but he acts as a military counselor to his friends throughout the series, advising and comforting them. As Jung-hwan struggles to find the reason for his father's bad mood, Dong-ryong helps him to analyze that what his father needs is simply the children's approval of his behavior and words. When Duk-seon's sister is detained for participating in the protest, Dong-ryong comforts Duk-seon that no one's life will be smooth sailing, that everything will be fine after experiencing hardships and Bo-ra will not be affected too much. When Duk-seon cries that she is not loved, Dong-ryong enlightens Duk-seon not to just ask others to love her, but to try to express her feelings and be brave enough to show who she loves in her heart. Like this, although there are not many plots to show his friendship, Dong-ryong always plays the role of advising others, even if he is criticized by his father, he will do everything for his friends.

### 3.3 Love

Duk-seon's love is always a focus of this series. In the series, Duk-seon treats love differently from Jung-hwan, Sun-woo and Choi-taek. She will be influenced by her friends, wavering and unsure of who she likes, so that later her feelings turn to Jung-hwan instead of Sun-woo. However, Choi-taek, the only one who is not speculated by his friends, ends up becoming Duk-seon's partner. The reason why Duk-seon does not pour affection into Choi-taek like her crush on Sun-woo and Jung-hwan is that her friends always believe that Choi-taek is unlikely to like Duk-seon, so they do not encourage Duk-seon to express her feelings like the previous two times. If she had her ideas about feelings like Jung-hwan, Choi-taek or Sun-woo, there might not have been such a transfer of feelings from one to the other.

Dong-ryong is the only one who does not show his love, and because of his character and behavior, even if he is very close to Duk-seon, they are not mistaken for a couple. However, Dong-ryong's criteria for choosing a spouse are not low. From his obsession

with Joey Wong to Korean stars to his words “do you think of Duk-seon as a woman?” and the attitude he shows after meeting Duk-seon’s friends that they do not meet his criteria for a spouse, it can be judged that Dong-ryong is not not eager for love, but the mate selection standard is too high.

Looking back at the whole plot, the focus can be said to be on Duk-seon. From the Seoul Olympics to a failed crush, the death of her grandmother, a study tour and then the real lover surfaces, Duk-seon’s life is like a TV series without lags, with scenes and shots that record every moment she has experienced.

#### **4 The Friendship, Family Affection and Love Reflected in the Characters of Sun-Woo, Bo-Ra and Jung-Bong**

At the beginning of the series, it is made clear that Sun-woo is the most normal of all the characters. It is also obvious that Sun-woo is a man who is particularly assertive, resourceful and stable. Growing up in a single-parent family, Sun-woo has a sister called Jin-ju, who is much younger than him, and a mother without a regular income. It is the fatherless family environment that creates his character and requires him to take responsibility as the backbone of the family. However, when faced with his mother’s twilight love, he still can’t get rid of his childishness. He cries, gets sad, and doesn’t take things very calmly. The reason is that Sun-woo has a deep affection for his father and can not easily accept the presence of another man in his life besides his father.

To everyone, as the eldest daughter in a family of three children, Bo-ra is particularly domineering and does not know how to be humble to her younger siblings. And she often fights with her sister Duk-seon at home. Duk-seon accidentally wears Bo-ra’s clothes once, and then Bo-ra goes home to find them, and the whole family comes out to help Duk-seon return the clothes, which clearly shows that the whole family does not dare to provoke Bo-ra. But it is clear from many details that Bo-ra is a caring, delicate and considerate person who cares for her younger siblings.

In the series, Jung-bong can easily be mistaken for being different from normal people. He fails the college entrance examination seven times and is addicted to stamp collecting, collecting snack prize cards and playing games every day, not communicating with others like a normal person and seeming to have some mental health problems. However, in the end, it can be known that he is a particularly thoughtful, well-planned, independent, and knowledgeable person with the highest well-being. For instance, he can answer all the questions at home, and even if admitted to the law department, he will not force himself to study if he is not interested. It is also because he wins the first prize in philately that the family can escape poverty and lives an enviable and prosperous life at that time. He eventually gives up his studies to pursue a career in catering, and with his rich verbal skills, he also gains love and so on. It is clear from all aspects that Jung-bong is the most successful person in the series.

##### **4.1 Family Affection**

It is obvious that Sun-woo attaches great importance to family affection, and his affection for his father is so deep that he can not easily accept another “father” into his family. He

is very filial to his mother and does not agree to her going out to work, fearing that his mother will suffer. When eating bananas, he will give the largest one to his sister and then share them with his mother. The first time he shaves and breaks the skin, he lies to his mother for fear of worrying her. Many details show the affection Sun-woo has for each family member.

However, Bo-ra expresses her family affection differently from Sun-woo. Bo-ra is introverted and unaccustomed to communicating with her family, which means that she is not as good at expressing emotions as her sister Duk-seon. She wants to communicate with her father but struggles with how to do it. Even if she buys a shirt and leather shoes for her father, they are not suitable because she does not even know the size of her father. She uses the money from her part-time job to buy a dictionary for her brother and gives her sister pocket money, writing down on paper what she wishes to say to her father before she gets married. This is Bo-ra's way of expressing her family affection.

Jung-bong is always surrounded by love in the series. His parents do not have high demands on him due to health problems, but he does play an important role in the series. Jung-bong, who does not look particularly different from anybody else, also plays a very important role in his family. Jung-hwan occasionally suffers from nosebleeds, and the first thing Jung-bong does when he opens his eyes after the operation is to ask Jung-hwan, "Is your nose still bleeding?" Guessing that Jung-hwan's choice to be a soldier may be influenced by his ideal, Jung-bong takes the opportunity of chatting on the rooftop to persuade Jung-hwan to do what he likes. In addition, he has as much respect for his parents as Sun-woo. This is the simple but true family affection that Jung-bong has.

## 4.2 Friendship

The friendship shown in Bo-ra is not as obvious as that of Jung-hwan and Choi-taek. Among his friends, Sun-woo is always the most loyal, the most thoughtful, and the most like a big brother, playing the role of resolving conflicts for friends. There are few scenes that show Bo-ra's friendship, but participating in youth protests brings out her sense of justice to the fullest. Since Jung-bong does not spend a lot of time with his peers, he does not express as much as other people in terms of friendship. However, his friendship with his juniors and younger brothers and friends is still very clear in the series.

## 4.3 Love

The series ends with the love of Sun-woo and Bo-ra. Sun-woo's assertiveness and Bo-ra's steadfast character determine that they will eventually fall in love. Despite the legal constraints of that time, which keep them from being a family with the same surname, they overcome all the difficulties and celebrate a happy marriage blessed by their parents.

The love harvested by Jung-bong is the most ordinary and common. Unlike Jung-hwan, Jung-bong is not afraid to say what he thinks and is also skilled at expressing love, showing his knowledgeable and emotional side in the pursuit of his love. Despite the fact that he encounters many obstacles with his lover's father during this period, he perseveres until finally obtains his love.

Sun-woo, Bo-ra and Jung-bong's tenacity and a strong sense of self-consciousness lead to their respective loves. However, they are not good with words, so do not get many close-ups on friendship and family affection. In reality, many of us fall into this category of personality. Feelings for parents and friends will not be so obvious and will be buried in the hearts. However, when striving for their love or goals, they will do all they can and be tenacious to achieve their ideals [2].

## 5 Conclusion

This drama can leave people with unforgettable memories, mainly because it is too close to reality, and reflects many details and scenes in people's reality through TV scenarios. The reason why *Reply 1988* can achieve a rating of 19.6% is that in watching the series, people can see themselves, find characters and traits that resemble their own and integrate with the plot of the TV series, and the emotions that cannot be expressed in reality can be found through the plot of the TV series to make up for the feeling of regret in reality [1]. With its retro character reflecting the sentiments of the public, the series is able to capture the reality of the plot, successfully making people laugh or cry, taking the audience along to savor the best emotions, joys and true feelings of the human world.

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