Introduction:

Through South Korea's past experiences of colonial modernization, the image of strong and self-sacrificing mothers produced expectations that invincible women should have boundless fortitude in the face of men's shortcomings. The struggle for women to find their own spaces amid the frustrations of modern history brought about generations of ideals, resulting in conflicting roles of women and images against which women measured themselves. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the transition of postcolonial South Korea from traditional patriarchy to modern patriarchy and the rise of consumer society transformed Korean women's vision and subjectivity. These circumstances made women's subjective experiences ambivalent and conflicting. As such, I draw upon popular culture, from television series, specifically Dear My Friends (2016), to explore Korean women's concepts of femininity as they are linked to the profound social transformations of Korean society.

In South Korea, Dear My Friends has had steady amount of viewers tuning in to watch the golden cast, who are in their 60s and 70s.

- Each episode has an average rating of 4%, which is a respectable figure for a cable network program that often do not exceed the 1% mark.
- Viewers of all ages tuned in—from those in their 30s to 60s.
- While for some, the show is an antidote to the deluge of rose-tinted romances featuring youthful actors and actresses, for others, this series is no anomaly as other types of shows (such as reality TV) starring elderly actors was also popular.

Methodology:

In addition to using Dear My Friends as a primary source, secondary sources that vary in disciplines—Korean studies, anthropology, sociology, popular culture, and history—have been studied to examine how class, family, and generational differences inscribe the ways in which women experience femininity and modernity in a specifically South Korean context.

On the Series:

- Through the meta-narration of this series by the female protagonist, who is a “writer” and of a different generation from her mother and “aunts”, it becomes clear that this story is about women within South Korea’s modernity (despite the intermittent, but meaningful, portrayals of circumstances not having changed very much).

Textual Sources:

- Close viewing and the readings of sources illustrate how South Korea’s “aborted modernity” made it “difficult” for patriarchs to maintain flexibility and a sense of reality, turning toward women to compensate for loss.
- Despite the claim of agency of women through newly emphasized roles, such as “strong mother” and “smart wife”, representations of women in media make ambivalent such gender discourses in South Korea.

Hence, further research will demonstrate how concepts regarding women, class, and family are understood.

References:

2. Ibid. 11
3. Ibid. 12

Acknowledgments:

I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Michelle Cho, for giving me the opportunity to work on this project, the Arts Internship Office for their guidance, and Ms. Jane C. Blackwell for her contribution. Thank you.