

QUEER TEMPORALITY IN KIM-JHO KWANG-SOO'S *TWO WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL*¹

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between queer cinema and temporality through an analysis of Kim-Jho Kwang-soo's *Two Weddings and a Funeral* (두 번의 결혼식과 한 번의 장례식, 2012), a landmark work in Korean queer cinema. Drawing on queer temporal theory – particularly Elizabeth Freeman's concept of chrononormativity and J. Jack Halberstam's formulation of queer time – the article argues that the film articulates a mode of queer temporality shaped by South Korea's specific socio-cultural context. The narrative subverts the heteronormative temporal logic of the romantic comedy through a sham marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman, exposing the dissonance between socially mandated life timelines and queer lived experience. Incorporating Judy Han's concept of *sigisangjo* (시기상조), which frames queer existence as “premature” or “out of time”, the article demonstrates how the film renders visible strategies of concealment, improvisation, and both quiet endurance and collective resistance. Ultimately, *Two Weddings and a Funeral* aims toward a queer futurity that resists assimilation while affirming alternative modes of kinship, intimacy, and belonging.

Keywords: *Korean queer cinema, queer time, queer temporality, Korean cinema, Two Weddings and a Funeral.*

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Introduction

The relationship between queer² cinema and temporality is a critical site of inquiry in queer theory, as cinematic representations frequently challenge normative temporal structures that organize life around heterosexual milestones, such as marriage, reproduction, and inheritance. Elizabeth Freeman refers to this as *chrononormativity* and argues that queer temporality is a disruptor of chrononormativity [Freeman, 2010: 3]. In extension, queer cinema – by foregrounding characters who live outside of sanctioned timelines – exposes the pressure and exclusions embedded in the chrononormative temporal regimes.

Building on these theoretical insights and by addressing the conceptual categories of temporality and queer time, this article examines how Kim-Jho Kwang-soo's *Two Weddings and a Funeral* (두 번의 결혼식과 한 번의 장례식, 2012), a landmark of Korean Queer cinema, employs a mode of queer time that is specific to its Korean context. Rather than merely depicting queer characters within an otherwise normative narrative framework, the film uses time itself as a tool to reveal the tensions between social expectation and queer lived experience, illuminating how queer subjects navigate, manipulate, and at times resist dominant temporal structures. This article will first outline the key theoretical frameworks of temporality and queer time, also employing the Korean linguistic context. After situating *Two Weddings and a Funeral* within the history and politics of Korean queer cinema, the reading of the film serves as a demonstration of how Korean chrononormativity and queer temporal practices intersect, collide, and ultimately gesture toward alternative queer futures in the Korean context.

Temporality and queer time

Temporality is not merely a neutral measure of chronological succession but a social and political structure that organizes lives, bodies, and institutions. As Dustin Goltz defines it, temporality is “a term that speaks to questions that interrogate the functions and logics of time, opening time up for reflection, examination, and analysis” [Goltz 2002]. Concepts of temporality and time often default to a heteronormative frame of thought; it is the notion of queer time that veers away from heteronormative notions of temporality and, with it, deviates from heteronormative life course expectations.

The intimate link between heteronormativity and temporality is explored by Lee Edelman in *No Future*. Edelman examines what he perceives as “reproductive futurism”, arguing that by structuring modern political discourse in the USA

² In this article, the term “queer” denotes non-normative and non-binary approaches to identity and experience, encompassing both gender and sexuality.

(though this same line of thought can be found on a global scale) around the figure of the Child – which must be protected and prioritized – reproductive heterosexuality effectively becomes the only choice, while heteronormativity preserves its “absolute privilege” [Edelman 2004: 2–3].

Heteronormativity as such is already inseparable from general temporal structures. What might be described as “straight time” functions as the default temporal framework through which social life is organized, with linear progression through childhood, education, marriage, reproduction, childrearing, death, and even inheritance. Michel Foucault has referred to this process of biopolitics in his work *The History of Sexuality* [Foucault 1978], and Dana Luciano expanded on this notion, terming it “chronobiopolitics”. These temporal politics are embedded not only in cultural narratives but also in legal systems, labour structures, kinship models, and moral discourses. Elizabeth Freeman conceptualizes this regulatory force, a combination of Luciano’s understanding of chronobiopolitics and heteronormativity, as *chrononormativity*, which she defines as “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” within capitalism and heteropatriarchy [Freeman 2010: 3]. Chrononormativity thus naturalizes a life course oriented toward stability, futurity, and reproductive continuity.

Where the notions of temporality and time default to a heteronormative frame of thought, queer theory and its notion of *queer time* veer away from heteronormative notions of temporality, and with it, deviate from heteronormative life course expectations. Where reproductive futurism is advocated in the present, queerness is cast as an opposing force not based on sexuality alone, but also because queer timelines disrupt this temporal logic. J. Jack Halberstam defines queer time as “a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge [...] once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” [Halberstam 2005]. According to Halberstam, queer time is not simply a refusal of linearity but a lived response to conditions in which queer subjects are structurally excluded from normative life schedules. As Halberstam emphasizes, queer time arises from practices of survival, delay, improvisation, and alternative forms of intimacy that fall outside chrononormative rhythms of life [Halberstam 2005].

Elizabeth Freeman builds on this and notes that queer time “emerged from within, alongside, and beyond this heterosexually gendered double-time of stasis and progress, intimacy and genealogy” [Freeman 2010: 53]. Freeman perceives queer time as a notion that disturbs and/or disobeys the rules set out by chrononormativity. In this sense, queer time disturbs the synchronization of bodies to normative schedules, revealing time itself as a site of power.

Judy Han approaches the notion of queer time in the Korean context. “No other expression describes the dismissal and postponement of LGBTQ+ rights better than

sigisangjo,” she states. *Sigisangjo* (시기상조) is a Korean idiom that denotes prematurity of an action, or, in the words of Han, it can be interpreted as something “ahead of time” or “too early for that”. She considers *sigisangjo* as a “part of a constellation of aspirational temporalities in contemporary queer political throughlines” [Han 2025: 133]. She perceives *sigisangjo* as “an idiom of denialism”, and states that the “denialist logic of *sigisangjo* operates in three important ways: as a diagnosis of an aberration, as an assertion of chrononormativity, and as a foreclosure of futurity.” In other words, according to Han, this idiom represents that South Korea is “not yet ready” for the type of social change that would allow for the LGBTQ+ community to exist in the here and now – the LGBTQ+ community exists outside of the “right time” [Han 2025: 135].

Han notes that while “Korean heteropatriarchal nationalism and male-dominated nation time” and “queer time” (and even “feminist time”) seem to be mutually exclusive, the latter actually poses a challenge to the former and has historically proved to be more productive than “normative temporality” in challenging dominant social orders, including beyond the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights [Han, 2025: 138–139].

While Han demonstrates how queer existence in South Korea is repeatedly deferred through the chrononormative logic of *sigisangjo*, José Esteban Muñoz offers a way of thinking beyond this foreclosure by conceptualizing queer futurity as a horizon that is “not yet here” and “not yet conscious” within the present [Muñoz 2009: 1]. For Muñoz, queerness is thus oriented toward a mode of possibility that exceeds the constraints of the “here and now,” sustaining an anticipatory vision of alternative social, affective, and temporal arrangements even when queer lives are rendered premature or untimely by dominant temporal regimes [Muñoz 2009].

Cinema, itself both a subject and a tool of temporal politics, has become a particularly effective site for articulating the tension between chrononormative frameworks and queer realities; much more so in the fold of Korean cinema, where queer cinema as an industry took the front stage in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. It is within this theoretical framework that *Two Weddings and a Funeral* can be understood as staging a conflict between straight time as default time and queer temporal practices that emerge from lives lived out of sync with dominant rhythms.

Korean queer cinema

The term “queer cinema” is derived from the notion of “new queer cinema”, a term coined by B. Ruby Rich. She describes queer cinema as a new mode of filmmaking characterized by stylistic and political innovation. She emphasizes the political orientation and refusal of normative storytelling and states that queer films challenge heteronormative ideology through their style, subjects, and narrative disruptions [Rich 2013].

There are several strategies for how queer stories are presented in South Korean cinema. In one of them, looking at the visibility of queer characters as a criterion, Kim and Singer propose to divide the history of Korean queer cinema into three eras: the invisible era, the camouflage era, and the blockbuster era (post-2005) [Kim and Singer 2011]. However, when queer characters finally achieved a visible presence in the South Korean mediascape, their fantasy-driven nature clashed with the reality of the LGBTQ+ community and, as such, was not perceived as “true” LGBTQ+ cinema by the Korean LGBTQ+ community itself [Kim and Singer 2011: 127–129]. In terms of mainstream Korean cinema, despite using queerness and queer characters on an increasingly regular basis, queerness has been applied and approached with a distance from Koreanness (i.e. it has been perceived as something Western, something essentially not Korean), or at least with a distance from the Korean (LGBTQ+) reality (queer subjects treated with a distance, historical or fictitious, from what Korean LGBT+ community perceives as their own reality).

In 2006, the film that was hailed as the “first real Korean gay feature” [Bertolin 2007] was released: *No Regret* (후회하지 않아, 2006, Lee-Song Hee-il). The director was an out gay man, and the central relationship of the film is a love story between two men. Moreover, the producer of the film was Kim-jho Kwang-soo, himself an out gay film director and activist. Unlike the commercial films of this era that featured queer characters, *No Regret* did not establish a distance between Korean reality and queer characters; instead, it deliberately normalized queerness, which was a novel approach for Korean filmmakers.

Following *No Regret*, a clear division was formed, at the industry level, in terms of how queerness is approached in South Korean cinema – one is the utilization of queer aesthetics and characters in the mainstream industry, and the other is LGBTQ+-community-produced cinema: the Korean queer cinema.

In his study of another Korean queer film, *The Bacchus Lady* (죽여주는 여자, 2016, E J-yong), Ungsan Kim argues that Korean queer cinema as a whole, as an industry, challenges national, familial, and heteronormative structures that are particular to South Korea. He draws a distinction between Korean queer films of validation, or films that “center on romantic relationships between same-sex couples or express sympathetic attitudes toward the portrayal of queer characters, thus allowing for the cultural and social recognition of sexual minorities,” and films that “celebrate the radical potential of queerness.” Kim places *Two Weddings and a Funeral* (두번의결혼식과한번의장례식, 2012), directed by Kim-Jho Kwang-soo, in the former category [Kim 2018: 93].

Two Weddings and a Funeral is the first Korean gay romantic comedy-melodrama and Kim-Jho Kwang-soo’s feature debut. Even with a limited mainstream release, this film remains the most commercially successful queer film produced by the members

of the Korean LGBTQ+ community. Its use of humour, melodrama, and romance allowed it to engage a broad audience while still offering a sustained critique of Korean chrononormative expectations through the use of queer time as a tool of subversion.

Korean chrononormativity and queer time in *Two Weddings and a Funeral*

“Korean chrononormativity” in *Two Weddings and a Funeral* operates as a framework of socially mandated, linear timelines that regulate adulthood, family obligations, and societal success. These timelines are deeply informed by Confucian and Christian values, where the heteronormative family is positioned as the cornerstone of moral and social order.

In their paper on homosexuality in ancient and modern Korea, Kim Young-gwan and Hahn Sook-ja reiterate Confucianism’s importance for modern Korea’s social structures. It is the Confucianist social system that places a hetero-patriarchal family at the core, making it a “key social and ethical norm in Korea”, where family is the basic unit upon which social harmony is built and society is constructed through “heterosexual marriage and birth” [Kim and Hahn 2006: 60].

Besides Confucianism, Christianity has a profound influence on the Korean system of morals. Christianity became widespread in Korea after the end of World War II, when it was mass-imported by American troops. One of the few elements shared by Confucianism and Christianity is that homosexuality, along with other queer lifestyles, is perceived as deviant. Both systems contributed to the notion that in Korea, the queer community is something “other”, something essentially “not Korean”.

Two Weddings and a Funeral challenges both the notions of Korean chrononormativity and queerness as a “non-Korean other” head-on. At the genre level, the film is a melodrama, blended with elements of romantic comedy, where even heavy-hitting moments are juxtaposed with scenes of almost jubilant chaos.

The film starts with a wedding: the main character, Min-soo, marries Hyo-jin, a fellow doctor, and it fast becomes clear that the picture-perfect heteronormative union is really a sham marriage between a gay man and a lesbian; he wants to deflect parental and societal pressure, and she and her lover want to adopt a child, which is only possible for a heterosexual couple. To keep the ruse going, Min-soo and Hyo-jin arrange for neighbouring apartments – one where Min-soo resides alone, and the other where Hyo-jin lives with her partner. Aside from their living arrangement – with Hyo-jin’s clothes displayed in Min-soo’s apartment to keep his intrusive mother’s suspicions at bay – there are also many occasions where they have to “perform their heterosexuality” to coworkers, friends not in the know, and their own families. This

is juxtaposed with their queer relationships – especially for Min-soo, who has a tight-knit group of gay friends, and his attempts at having a stable love life while still in the proverbial closet. Given the precarious position the sham couple gets themselves into, comedy makes way for tragedy and a revelation of limits to a strategy of faux assimilation in a society that allows for structural violence.

For Min-soo, the pressures of these normative temporal expectations are intense: he must simultaneously meet the demands of filial duty, demonstrate professional stability, and maintain the illusion of heterosexual conformity. His dual existence – one on the chrononormative, linear path and one on a queer, non-linear trajectory – highlights the tension between performing societal expectations and sustaining an authentic queer life.

In effect, time becomes a resource to be manipulated: Min-soo must preserve appearances long enough to arrange for a move abroad to start a new life. At the same time, Hyo-jin must navigate legal and procedural temporalities involved with the adoption procedure for a baby boy in her care at her workplace in the hospital, which depends on performing heterosexuality.

The film illustrates this tension through the characters' sham marriage; a strategy designed to synchronize with the dominant Korean timeline and mitigate societal pressures.

Chrononormativity also plays a role in the two feeling like they exist outside of the right timeline, resorting to a sham marriage to create an illusion of being “on time” and not “outside of the right time”, which aligns with the notion of *sigisangjo* (시기상조).

By entering a socially legible marital arrangement, Min-soo and Hyo-jin temporarily align themselves with Korean chrononormativity, creating the illusion of progress along the prescribed temporal trajectory. Yet this alignment is fragile, highlighting how normative timelines are socially constructed and maintained through surveillance, expectation, and coercion.

In parallel, the film constructs spaces and practices that embody queer time, offering alternative modes of living outside dominant societal expectations. Min-soo's group of friends forms its own temporal logic: rehearsals for the G-voice choir, a private gathering at a rented swimming pool so they can freely express themselves in their own time, and nightlife spaces operate on a timetable dictated by desire, common ground, and genuine affection rather than obligation. These moments of collective queer life demonstrate Halberstam's assertion that queer time emerges once one steps outside the temporal frames of “once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” [Halberstam 2005: 2]. In this film, laughter, care, and emotional intimacy in

queer spaces and queer time contrast sharply with the pressures and constraints of chrononormative Korean society.

Queer characters like Tina, who maintain dual identities – shopkeeper by day, flamboyant performer by night – further exemplify the performative negotiation of time, revealing how queer individuals must manage both normative expectations and self-determined temporalities. This character also serves as a catalyst for the final arc of the story, enabling Min-soo to relinquish his attempts to conform to a chrononormative existence and publicly embrace his queer identity.

The film's ending crystallizes the interaction between Korean temporality and queer time. Departing from strategies of assimilation, it envisions a future beyond the constraints of *sigisangjo* (시기상조), aligning with queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz's notion of queer futurity as a temporal horizon oriented toward possibility rather than the "here and now" [Muñoz 2009: 1].

The dream-like final sequence of Min-soo's imagined future does not depict integration into heteronormative timelines; instead, it gestures toward an aspirational queer future in which emotional authenticity, chosen family, and acceptance by biological family are central. By doing so, the film emphasizes that queer temporality is not merely a deferral of normative life stages but an active mode of imagining alternative social and emotional arrangements. *Two Weddings and a Funeral* thus both critiques the rigidity of Korean chrononormativity and constructs cinematic spaces where queer temporalities can flourish, offering a vision of life organized around desire, care, and community rather than obligation and social compliance.

Conclusion

Two Weddings and a Funeral demonstrates how Korean queer cinema can both expose and creatively rework the normative timelines that structure social life in South Korea. Through its narrative of a sham heterosexual marriage, the film foregrounds the force of Korean chrononormativity that regulates adulthood through obligations to marry, reproduce, and integrate into heteronormative kinship structures. The pressures faced by Min-soo and Hyo-jin illustrate how Korean temporality, marked by the convergence of Confucian familism, Christian moral frameworks, and national-developmental expectations, produces a sense of being perpetually "outside of time". Han's notion of *sigisangjo*, the idiom that declares queer existence "too early" or "outside of the right time", becomes visible not only in the obstacles the characters face but also in the very strategies they employ to appear "on time". Their sham marriage performs compliance with normative temporality while revealing its fragility and unreality.

At the same time, *Two Weddings and a Funeral* envisions the possibilities of queer time. The spaces inhabited by Min-soo's friendship circle – gay bars, choir

practice, after-hours gatherings – constitute temporal havens that resist the forward-marching linearity of Korean heteropatriarchal society. These moments gesture toward alternative modes of belonging and existence, untethered from the chrononormative rules of existence. The film's final sequence extends this gesture into the realm of queer futurity. Its dream-like orientation resonates with Muñoz's conception of queerness as a "then and there" – a horizon of future possibility that refuses the constraints of the present. Rather than resolving the tensions between queer life and Korean chrononormativity, the ending suspends them, imagining a future in which queer existence is not deferred, denied, or made premature, but instead fully liveable. In doing so, *Two Weddings and a Funeral* serves as an example for how Korean queer cinema can critique dominant temporal regimes while offering both existing and imagined temporal alternatives, grounded in community, resistance, and hope.

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