

Dear Hongrang star Lee Jae Wook reveals if romance with aespa's Karina impacted his work

Lee Jae Wook opens up about his new Hanbok hero role, comments on his past relationship with aespa's Karina during Dear Hongrang promotions.

Lee Jae Wook and actor Jo Bo Ah recently starred in the new K-drama Dear Hongrang. The show, which is streaming on Netflix, received a decent response, though slightly lower compared to Alchemy of Souls. The cast appeared for an interview in Samcheong-dong, Seoul, to discuss the success of the historical melodrama, right after the initial viewership numbers released. But fans' sentiment towards the lead actor, Lee Jae Wook, instantly shifted after he referenced his romance with K-pop idol aespa's Karina, which made headlines back in 2024.

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For Lee Jae Wook, Dear Hongrang marks his second outing in a historical story, following the release of Alchemy of Souls Part 2. In the show, he plays the role of the long-lost son of the Joseon era's wealthiest merchant guild family, who disappeared at the age of 12 and then returned 10 years later as a sword-wielding hero with a hidden motive. Speaking about the role and the character's physical demands, Lee said, "This was the most challenging action work I've done so far," he said. "With close combat scenes, there's always the risk of injury, so I focused intensely on safety."

Lee also shared how his fans posted multiple leaked photographs from the sets on social media platforms, with him styled in hanbok. "Screenshots of my expressions online, even the exaggerated ones. I'm glad they enjoyed it. I think hanbok actually suits me better than I expected," he said. However, the conversation soon shifted towards the fans' reception, which somehow changed after the sudden revelation of his relationship with aespa's Karina, after Dispatch posted photos confirming the romance.

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During the interview, the host asked Lee Jae Wook about his brief relationship. When pressed on how the news impacted his work, he said, "The dating revelation didn't affect my focus on the project." He added, "I'd rather not go into personal matters. I hope we can focus on the character and the story of Dear Hongrang," according to South Korean news outlet, Star News. Fans of Karina were disappointed about how the topic was brought up out of the blue. And given how rare it is for Korean actors or idols to speak about their relationships, Lee's statement caused a stir among fans.

Karina and Lee Jae Wook's relationship made global headlines after the K-pop idol issued an apology letter following the leak of her personal photographs with the actor. Just five weeks after this, the couple called it quits. Lee's agency C-Jes released a statement saying, "Actor Lee Jae Wook decided to end the relationship in order to focus on his work that he is currently filming. The two will remain good colleagues and support one another." However, at the same time, a report by Tenasia claimed the real reason behind the split was the 'excess mental strain' caused by the hate comments. The two reportedly grew close after attending a fashion show in Milan earlier the same year and continued meeting in Seoul.