

# The Proximity of Korean and Filipino Culture from Selected Korean Dramas

## (Ang Proksimidad ng Kulturang Koreano at Pilipino mula sa mga Piling Korean Drama)

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### Abstract

In the Philippines, like any other country experiencing hallyu, the warm reception of Korean Drama or KDrama productions and their influence on people's values is phenomenal. Though ideally, the preservation of indigenous traditions is aspired, the Filipino curriculum in Grade 9 emphasizes the study of some cultures in the neighboring East Asian countries. Because of this, it is necessary to match the needs with the realities facing the field of education. That is why the research aims to determine the proximity of Filipino culture to the cultures depicted in selected KDramas titled Mr. Queen, Itaewon Class, and 100 Days My Prince concerning values, culture, and visual with the help of textual analysis of the episodes selected and analyzed by experts.

Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory, and Mondal's Sociology of Culture provided a good foundation for this research. This research has proven that the explored KDramas rich in Korean culture, are close to Filipino culture. Therefore, Grade 9 will have rich material that can be used to develop the competency stated in the Filipino language, "sa pag-aaral ng ilang kultura sa Silangang Asya", which in English means "to study some cultures in East Asia".

Key words: Cultural proximity, Korean Drama, Learning Material, Popular Culture, Hallyu

### 1. Introduction

It cannot be denied that Korean Drama or KDrama is one of the most popular and most-watched foreign productions today, and this hallyu is overwhelming [9]. And in these television series, Korean cultures inevitably surface. While some teachers believe in the importance of maintaining indigenous culture, opposing the influence of foreign culture is in fact, challenging. More so, the Department of Education emphasizes the study of some cultures in East Asia as stated in the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC) especially in Grade 9 for the Filipino Subject. In this regard, it is good to correlate the needs and responses and do this through the right choice of learning materials. And here, one can see the need to determine the proximity or closeness of Korean and Filipino culture based on the watched KDrama to help identify suitable visual material in the form of video for the cultivation of competence emphasized in the

Department of Education's (DepEd) MELC.

To lay the foundation of the research, Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory, and Mondal's Sociology of Culture serve as inspiration based on the belief that societies have similarities with others, mainly on the belief, tradition, and social system. These further explain the interpretations of social events and elements in the context of culture and the cultural analysis of social issues. In line with this, culture is significant because it encompasses all ideas, attitudes, or behavior. Therefore, culture plays a vital role in the development, shaping, and learning of the child.

### 1.1 Theoretical Background

Joe Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity theory is about understanding the cultural proximity of countries. It describes the international context to explain the influential local and foreign media. Cultural Proximity theory is mainly based on language but also emphasizes the importance of other aspects that have similarities based on cultural elements: clothing, ethnic groups, body movements, comedy, the idea of the story, music, and their relationship with other people [2]. For Treptee (2003), this theory has to do with analyzing the similarity of cultures from their country or even from another region. Straubhaar (2003) further defined that Cultural Proximity theory focuses on people's attraction to media products that show similar cultures [10].

The Cultural Proximity theory is based on four elements, language, visual, values, and cultural. Meanwhile, the analysis emphasizes the visual, value, and cultural elements that have surfaced in related studies.

Visual or visual proximity refers to the similarity that the audience sees as just images, for example, the appearance and style of actors and actresses. Kristine's (2011) research shows viewers are usually more attracted to the visual locations from the watched Korean drama. One of the effective marketing techniques of Korean Drama is the element of visualization. In addition to that, their makeup technique is also more attractive to the audience [10].

Value proximity refers to the sharing of foreign cultures with local cultures. Based on Aminah's research, which is about Korean Waves, it was found that Korean Drama often dramatizes various customs such as having respect for others, having a happy and full family, complete loyalty to friends, honesty, and romance [10].

Straubhaar interprets that cultural or Cultural Proximity as an element confirms the same belief, tradition, and social system of the society. It also explains the elements of Cultural Proximity theory. Based on Trepte's research, Korean Dramas, movies, and television programs depict Korean cultures and traditions [2].

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System theory [17] [21] the child is surrounded and influenced by ecological systems and two of these systems are macrosystems that focus on the important role of culture in developing, shaping and learning, and influencing the child's beliefs and the exosystems that include the mass media, health services, social services, parents, family, friends, and neighbors.

As for Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory, the macrosystem that includes what is outside the child's system also influences his beliefs and perspectives. Also, it can be said that there were structures that did not originally belong to the child but still affected him because they affected one of his microsystems. It is

clear that this theory shows some shortcomings, so it is strongly cautioned in relation to the generalizations of the characteristics of individuals [5].

The basis on which the Department of Education sets the stated competency defined by the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC) for the Filipino subject in Grade 9 also provided motivation to the researchers. Here, the competency clearly supported the study as stated “*napaghahambing ang kultura ng ilang bansa sa Silangang Asya batay sa napanood na bahagi ng teleserye o pelikula*” which means “to be able to compare culture of some countries in East Asia based on the part depicted in the teleseries or movie”. The “Adaptation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 in light of the COVID - 19 Public Health Emergency” is timely and significant under the authority of DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 or which allows the adoption of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC's) [3].

To clarify the concept of culture, the Pressbook article was used to explain culture as a part of society that includes the symbols, language, beliefs, and values of the people. Symbols are things that have deep meaning either in the form of non-verbal communication or in material things. Language is used to communicate and is one of the essential elements of culture. Language is learned from their environment and other aspects of culture. Belief refers to the concepts or things that people believe. Appreciation is the judgment of right or wrong and what one wants or doesn't want to do [5].

Comparative analysis is used in studies and research to compare different macro-level units such as system, culture and other sub-elements. It is also used to explain the differences and similarities between other and things that are related to the cultural context. In addition, comparative analysis helps explain a society by analyzing the similarities and differences of other systems, comparing with other cultures, and understanding people in a society [4].

It is stated in the study of Hamdan and Ismail (2018), that drama is part of the entertainment system which has led to the shaping of human behavior and social culture. Additionally, drama can be used as a tool or medium in learning and teaching. They added that most of the viewers are young people. According to Khariah, young people are more easily influenced by change through the opportunities seen around them. With the continuous development of technology, young people no longer rely on books as material for their learning [10]. Undoubtedly, the studies of McGregor, 1976 taught by Ustundag (1997), Wagner (1989), and (Somers, 2013) point to drama as a powerful tool in the cultivation of creative and critical skills [13] .

Students of East and Southeast Asia also believe that cultural proximity is one of the reasons for the success and popularity of hallyu or Korean wave. Ryoo (2007) emphasized that hallyu became popular in South Korea's neighboring countries because the themes and issues that dominate the productions and entertainment perfectly fit the tastes of Asian cultures [16].

Muda's (2010) explanation emphasized that most television viewers are young people because most television shows are popular cultures focused on young people. Therefore, they are often influenced by their surroundings, it is easier to keep up with the popular culture shown on television [10]. Berg [2] also pointed out that individuals tend to patronize certain products because of their modernity but not necessarily losing their cultural context. The study of Posadas, Vargas & Alejandro (2021) reports that Korean Drama is appealing to its audience, the young generation because of its inspiring theme which is relatable to them [19].

Based on the results of Kwoon's research, almost all of his respondents agreed that Filipinos are obsessed with watching Korean dramas which has become a phenomenon. Aspects such as the spectacular production, the anticipated dance, clothing, and the cultural aspect such as the family relationship between the elder and the younger and so on are enjoyed by Filipinos. The emphasis in this study is on the cultural aspect which is considered to be the reason for the fascination of Filipinos [15].

On the comparison [14] between Korean films and Filipino films, similarities can be observed. They compared the Korean movie titled *200 Pounds Beauty*, *My Boyfriend is Type B* and *Marathon* while the Filipino movie *Anak*, *And I Love You So*, and *Working Girls*. From the films that have been compared, some cultures can be noticed or shown such as loving family, and respecting the elderly and other people. Additionally, the culture of feminism and the practice of surgeries for the facial and body parts are also noted in the compared Korean and Filipino films.

Filipinos are known for the cultures and customs that have been passed down from ancient generations to the present generation. In the explanation [21], one of the cultures of Filipinos is the so-called hierarchy. The concept of hierarchy corresponds to age and social status. Filipino youth are being taught the importance of hierarchy. The actions, correct use of words and communication style depend on who and the position of the person being spoken to, such as a younger person calling an older person "sister" as well as a man who is expected to be called "brother". Filipinos love to make friends and warmly welcome acquaintances and guests. In addition to that, greetings and respect for the elderly. Filipinos have a custom of waving as a sign of respect for elders.

According to the article [6] about the Korean culture of greeting. One of their customs is bowing their heads as a sign of their respect for others, especially the elders. Respect is considered to be more senior. Additionally, is the valuing of family relationships and the existence of family hierarchy. The father is the one who has the greatest authority of all who is the leader in guiding and protecting his children as well as his wife.

Education is also an important part of Korean culture. The attainment of higher education is one of the things that is believed to have a great contribution to the country's economy. It is also a way to fulfill their dreams and be successful in life. In addition to that is the appreciation of women. Usually the housework belongs to women, however in modern times women have been given opportunities to work outside the home [1].

In the study [8] it was analyzed that it is in the culture of Koreans to give high respect or respect to the elderly where Koreans bow when they meet an elderly person. The study of a KDrama titled *"Endless Love: Autumn in my Heart"* also analyzed the value of family relationships. This show emphasized the importance of good and healthy relationships with each member of the family. In the shows, the family is valued by respecting the elders, listening to advice, spending time with the family, and each family member being open to their problems with each other and discussing them properly and calm way.

Further, the Koreans' passion for fashion is also liked by Filipino audiences. It has been shown that they notice the contours of clothes, sleeves of clothes, wearing skinny pants, dyeing hair, and other trends in the TV series being analyzed [8].

In another study [11] they revealed that Filipinos and Koreans also show some similarities. First is the give importance to celebrations in the form of parties, eating, and merry-making. Filipinos are like Koreans who share one bowl with everyone. Second is the appreciation of family ties. For example, children with families, grandchildren, and other family members still live under one roof. Third is respect for elders. Filipinos are used to showing respect by waving while Koreans show their respect by bowing. Fourth is chasing the dream. Just like Filipinos, Koreans have aspirations and believe in achieving their dreams.

In those specified [15], [14], and [11] it can be said that the similarity between Filipinos and Koreans in their culture is their value of family where children with families, grandchildren, and other family members are still living under one roof; respect for elders and other people such as bowing and waving; valuing partying at meals such as sharing a bowl for everyone; culture of feminism; cosmetic surgery; and persistence in life to achieve aspirations and dreams in life. Overall, the described elements are included in value proximity, visual proximity, and cultural proximity.

Therefore, the research aims to determine the closeness or proximity of Korean and Filipino culture based on viewed Korean Drama to help identify appropriate visual material in the form of video for the development of competency emphasized in MELC. Specifically, the focus is on establishing the proximity between Korean and Filipino Culture from the selected episodes of the Korean Dramas titled *Mr. Queen*, *Itaewon Class*, and *100 Days My Prince* in relation to values, cultural and visual. And the experts' suggestions will also determine how Korean Drama can help as a teaching tool to make a lesson meaningful.

## **2. Methodology**

This research used qualitative and comparative research to describe the proximity of Korean and Filipino culture and emphasize its elements. This research also used qualitative textual analysis to describe the social context, particularly the cultural context that the researchers emphasized that are contained in the viewed episodes of the chosen Korean Drama.

There were three expert-validators, two of the expert-validators are teachers who graduated with a master's degree in teaching Filipino and currently teach the subject of Filipino in high school, and the other one has a degree in post-graduate studies and a diploma in cultural education. They are avid followers of Korean Dramas.

The instruments of this research are the checklist for the respondent expert-validators and the three (3) selected Korean Dramas watched or patronized with the highest ratings in the year 2018–2021. The selection of the shows is based on the following criteria: first, the shows are in the top 20 ratings of the two review institutions Preview [22] and The Review Geek [23]; second, its suitability to the audience especially Grade 9 students; third, in accordance with Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) guidelines of which these Kdramas are rated PG13; and fourth, these are Kdramas that embody Korean values and culture.

## **3. Discussion of Findings**

In the initial stage, the researchers selected the Kdramas and specific episodes that contain Korean culture closely associated with Filipino cultures. Then, the validation by experts followed. They declared that there is

a proximity in the values, cultural and visual elements of Korean culture with Filipino culture based on what can be viewed in selected episodes of KDramas namely Mr. Queen, Itaewon Class, and 100 Days My Prince.

How are these shown? Below is the discussion of the specific evidence:

As regards Value Proximity, shown in the aforementioned episodes are respect for elders like a man bowing to his master or people bowing to the queen, a son's respect for his father, and greeting as a sign of respect for those in senior office. In the aforementioned scenes, it can be said that bowing as a sign of respect predominates in these. It can also be said that the experts are not confined to the understanding that respect is only for elders but respect can also be seen for those in high positions. Scroope [20] described this as a recognition of "hierarchy" among Filipinos.

Song's study looks into the perspective of family culture specifically on the similarity of Korean and Filipino cultures. While the study is able to derive an understanding on the Korean family structure with an emphasis on a patriarchal society that implies respect for elders in the society and older members of the family, it is also able to comprehend the Filipino's counterpart value that revolves around family's central role in the society. It can be said that both cultures highlight the value of family but while the Koreans are still patriarchal, Filipinos are slowly evolving into a shared family responsibility [25].

The closeness of the family, stability and cooperation of each clan is shown in Mr. Queen in the scene when a royal consort was elected, eating breakfast together, and closeness of the family members; the son consulting his father about his problems is seen in Itaewon Class; while both the father's concern for the child's pregnancy and the king's concern for the queen are presented in 100 Days My Prince.

In the scenes mentioned, the value of close family ties that is said to be similar to the Filipino culture really predominates. Although there is a difference in the method of presentation, the KDramas still convey the value of close family ties, which is noteworthy in Filipino values.

In the selected episodes of the aforementioned KDramas, women's stability is indicated, such as the courage shown by the queen and her firm stand. There was also a scene showing the queen's unique ability to handle a knife and the cooks' confidence in the queen's cooking ability.

The aforementioned scenes prove the two countries' similarities based on the examined customs. Even though Filipino women have not been known for the skill of literally handling knives as a culinary skill, on the other hand, Filipinas are known to be good cooks. Filipinas exhibit creativity, resourcefulness, and daring when trying out new dishes [20].

That's why researchers and experts have said that the two countries are comparable and this goes with the idea [8] that stories usually revolve around women overcoming many trials in life.

The determination to achieve the dream as shown in the scenes of Mr. Queen such as choosing a royal consort, studying archery, fighting with a sword, and vying for the royal seal, as well as in the scenes of Itaewon Class like searching for a brother, trying to build a business, continuing to dream despite imprisonment, and self-control is close to the Filipino culture. The scenarios are unique to Korean culture but the values of persistence and determination are likewise apparent in Filipinos.

On the other hand, a deviation from the usual view of the determination shown in a scene was noted by an expert-validator. The scene in episode 13 of the 100 Days My Prince portrays two men's conspiracy to conceal a woman's true identity just to be able to get an unsuspecting entry to the palace. Both men helped the woman because they also had their own agenda. They strategized ways to be able to slip to the palace without causing trouble and luckily, they succeeded. The word "conspiracy" that the expert actually used has a negative connotation, it often refers to an agreement to do something terrible. However, they see the similarity of customs because the two societies all have a lively political scenario or "political presence" according to the expert. The value of determination, therefore, indicates the two countries' strong political presence, which shows that collusion has become the way to achieve power.

Cultural Proximity as an element based on the Cultural Proximity Theory of Straubhaar talks about beliefs, traditions, and social systems. As an important tradition, holding parties and festivities are very prominent in the different scenes of the selected episodes of the three KDramas. Be it portrayed in ways such as a banquet or feast with various officials and royalties, a small family party, a dinner ceremony, or a celebration of the newly established business, one thing is certain, Koreans love to feast.

The portrayal resembles the Filipino culture of holding festivities. The expert-validators themselves noticed this similarity. In fact, Filipinos are known for their fiesta celebration in honor of a patron saint. On the other hand, another form of a portrayal of a celebration in the political context wherein it is customary for Koreans to have a party such as during a gathering of kings and officials. Significant events in the Philippine political arena involve feasting as well, especially post-election celebrations of the winning officials.

Visual Proximity includes the consideration of physical appearance, especially the face and body. Scenes portraying to an old character giving advice to improve the face are shown. There was a scene where the queen was delighted to see her face and hair covered with powder. Applying toner; the maids arranging the queen's clothes, and choosing appropriate clothing on special occasions are just a few of the scenes depicting Korean culture and its emphasis on appearance and beauty.

This study confirmed the analysis conducted [8] in three KDramas that Korean women are fond of using whitening and beauty products such as make-up, lipstick, eyeshadow, false eyelashes and facemask while Filipinas on the other hand are portrayed as beautiful and pleasing to the eyes of others. The use of beauty products is simply the influence of another race or country. But Filipinos have a different way of appreciating their physical appearance, especially in the face and body, such as bathing every day, fixing their hair and wearing clothes that are pleasing to the eye. All in all, both Koreans and Filipinos value appearance, especially the face and body in different ways and styles.

The expert's analysis of the different elements of cultural proximity extracted from the selected KDramas has provided enough information to claim that there is a proximity of cultures. From there, the experts have suggested using KDramas to enrich teaching through role-play, connecting events in the story, and differentiated instruction. Experts also identified specific parts of the lesson that could use the selected episodes such as motivation; discussion of Korean literature topics; grammar; analysis of the appropriateness of the KDrama lesson; and appreciation or values integration or translation to real life of some essential values discussed in the story.

Although experts in the teaching of Filipino subjects see the importance of the suggested shows for teaching Filipino and developing the competencies mentioned in the MELC, the expert-validator in the field



of cultural education strongly opposed the promotion of the shows mentioned for fear that the Filipino culture will be neglected and eventually be removed from the minds of the students. It is obvious that Filipino teenagers are attracted to KDramas despite the language barrier because of its phenomenal patronage by the masses. Berg notes Iwabuchi citing Taiwan's tendency to select Japanese products over Chinese is due to its aspiration for modernity but not necessarily losing its Asian context [2]. Instead, they advocate that the school find ways so that the youth will appreciate the love for Filipino culture.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Indeed, hallyu is real and its influence is inevitable. However, this research has proven that a lot can be done about this phenomenon. The studied Korean Dramas are rich in Korean culture that have proximity to the Filipino culture based on the elements of value, cultural and visual. Respect for elders, giving importance to family members, close family ties, acknowledging hierarchy, love for feasting and eating, women's courage and resilience, determination to achieve dreams, emphasis on physical appearance, and unique abilities dominate among the analyzed elements in KDrama.

It can be said that KDramas appeal to the interest of Filipino youth and the knowledge of the proximity of Korean and Filipino culture that is the product of analysis can guide the selection of teaching materials. It is also a way that Filipino values can be taught without being old-fashioned or traditional. Further, it is very important to have a thorough selection of episodes of KDramas to be used in class and develop the competency emphasized in the Filipino curriculum in Grade 9.

Lastly, the study encourages the use of the analyzed episodes as a teaching tool in accordance with the competency of MELC for Grade 9 in the Filipino subject translated in English as "to be able to compare the culture of some East Asian countries based on the television series or movie being watched"; integration of Korean Drama in appreciation, motivation, and analysis parts of lessons in the Filipino subject in Grade 9; use of KDramas for the enrichment of other classroom activities through role-plays, connecting events in the story, and differentiated instruction; and encouraging collaboration to promote ways in making the Filipino subjects more appealing and relatable to the young learners.

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