



South Korea's Capitalist Industry: Why Does Christianity Always Get the Spotlight in Drama?

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Abstract- The South Korean cultural industry has become a significant global force through products such as K-pop, Korean dramas and films. However, there is a phenomenon that attracts attention, which is the frequent advertisement or prominence of the Church in these cultural products. In the two examples of the films *The Glory* and *Start-Up* this study aims to analyze the motives, strategies and effects of the representation of Christianity in the South Korean cultural industry. By using a qualitative approach and utilizing Semiotic Theory. The research examines various popular media such as films and dramas to understand how Christianity is used as a cultural symbol, moral value or marketing tool. It also examines its relationship with South Korea's modern history, where Christianity has played an important role in modernization and social dynamics.

The results show that the Church is not only a reflection of South Korea's significant population, advertising marketing, a symbol of contradiction and revenge but also part of a cultural strategy to build a moral image and universal values that can be accepted globally. This research provides new insights into the relationship between religion, popular culture and capitalism in the context of the modern culture industry.

Keywords: Cultural Industry, K-Drama, South Korea, Church and Christianity.

I. Introduction

Korean dramas have become a well-established form of entertainment for a considerable proportion of the global population. Since the 1990s, the Korean Wave, otherwise referred to as Hallyu, has referred to the global spread of South Korean popular culture, including music (K-pop), television dramas (K-drama), film, cuisine, fashion, and the Korean language and lifestyle. This cultural phenomenon has gained significant popularity on a global scale. The economic impact of the growing interest in Korean dramas has been substantial, leading to significant economic growth in South Korea. The release of a popular drama often results in a surge of interest, with viewers eager to explore the culinary delights depicted, including authentic Korean food. The filming locations of these dramas often become popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors eager to witness the locations featured on screen. The themes portrayed in Korean dramas are highly diverse, encompassing romance, perseverance, unity, and family values. These dramas often convey a rich array of moral messages, offering insights into the cultural and social values of South Korea. The rapid economic growth of South Korea, which has been accompanied by the global popularity of K-dramas and K-pop, has led to a significant increase in tourism. Furthermore, the integration of foreign products and advertisements within these dramas has been observed, serving as a means of enhancing exposure for these products. This phenomenon has led to fans of these dramas often purchasing or trying the products featured in the advertisements, further reinforcing the cultural influence of K-dramas.

A notable phenomenon is the recurrent depiction of churches in Korean dramas, with almost all productions featuring scenes of character worship in a church. This raises questions regarding the audience's awareness of this religious element. This study aims to address the following research



questions: why is the church so prevalent in Korean dramas, and can this be considered a form of covert advertising or an implicit message intended by the drama's writers and directors?

II. Literature review/Study site

Researchers get literature that becomes the reference, namely about Eric Yohanis Tatap, Pr. (2020). *Fenomena Iklan Terhadap Kaum Muda*. Forum Filsafat dan Teologi. Vol. 49 No.2, 23-35. Retrived December 31, 2024, from <http://ejournal.stftws.ac.id/index.php/forum/article/view/456/232>.

III. Materials and Methods/ Methodology

This research method uses a qualitative method with Semiotics Theory by Roland Bathes in which researchers will analyse the signs, symbols, and meanings in the drama. Researchers will also describe the visual and narrative elements conveyed in the K-drama.

IV. Results and Discussion

Advertising has been around since ancient times, but its delivery is different along with the development of increasingly sophisticated technology. Technology is now an extension tool to facilitate the owners of ideas in leading the public to a certain goal. In Korean dramas, we are often presented with interesting visuals and beautiful locations. One form of advertising that often appears in Korean dramas is the promotion of religion, especially through church worship scenes. Almost every Korean drama features a church worship scene, either as part of the story or just a background. Examples of dramas that feature church scenes are *The Glory* and *Start-Up*. In these kinds of adverts, the duration of the scene also varies, ranging from long, short, to just a setting.

Christianity is one of the majority religions in South Korea. However, according to 2015 data from Statistics Korea, more than 56 per cent of the South Korean population has no religion. Protestantism ranks first, followed by Buddhism at 35 per cent. The remaining 2 per cent are followers of other religions such as Confucianism, Won Buddhism, Jeungsangyo, Cheondogyo, Daejonggyo, and Islam. So, has South Korea turned into a Christian country after hundreds of years dominated by Confucianism and Buddhism?

Official government statistics record that in 2012 there were around 77,000 Protestant churches in South Korea, which is more than three times the number of convenience stores in the country. The church to population ratio in Korea is 1 church for every 660 people. Protestantism, which was only introduced in Korea about 130 years ago, is now the second most popular religion after Buddhism. Protestant churches offer a sense of belonging, peace, and a place to escape loneliness for city dwellers isolated by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. This led to the establishment of many churches during Korea's period of rapid growth, between the 1960s and 1995. In fact, with a population of around 50 million, South Korea is now the country with the second largest number of Christian missionaries in the world, after the United States (Chung, 2015).

In Barthles' theory of semiotics about signs, it does not only look at the denotation meaning but also looks at the connotation meaning, which is a deeper meaning. Barthles also emphasises the myths hidden in the signs (Griffin 2016). According to Barthles, a sign consists of a signifier, which is connotative, and a sign, which is denotative. The sign of many churches has a denotative meaning, namely so that many residents can feel peace in praying. The connotative meaning is the massive spread of religion for missionary missions. In this case, it is necessary to introduce more deeply that the Church is the bearer of hope for young people. That hope is seen in the person of Jesus Christ because He is the 'advertisement' that is worthy of being used as a means and expression of faith for young people today.



V. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the presence of the church in two Korean dramas, *Start-Up* and *The Glory*, is characterised by distinct semiotic meanings, both denotative and connotative, yet both offer robust moral messages. In the context of the drama *Start-Up*, the church scene is depicted as a setting for the practice of worship, representing a cultural element of Korean tradition. The church assumes the role of a symbol, representing a place of prayer and guidance in the face of life's challenges. Connotatively, the church assumes a pivotal role in underscoring the importance of divine intervention in personal decision-making, particularly in the pursuit of one's aspirations. The drama accentuates the inspirational aspect of faith in God as a spiritual catalyst for success.

In *The Glory*, the church is depicted as a place of serene and spiritual contemplation. However, the church is also used to reveal the irony and hypocrisy of the characters, such as the bully who appears religious but still commits immoral acts. The church thus becomes a symbol of moral punishment, where the falsity and sins of the bullies are ultimately exposed, in accordance with the principle of karma or moral justice. Through semiotic theory, both dramas use the symbol of the church to convey different but complementary moral messages. In *Start-Up*, the church serves as a symbol of hope, prayer, and faith in God, representing the fulfillment of dreams. Conversely, in *The Glory*, the church becomes an ironic symbol, denoting hypocrisy, justice, and retribution for wrongdoings. These two representations underscore the notion that religion and spirituality are not merely components of culture, but also conduits for conveying universal values concerning justice, karma, and belief in God.

The implicit message of these two plays is a reminder that every action, good or bad, will have consequences, reflecting the universal principles of justice and moral responsibility.

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Author's biography

Meldi Latifah Saraswati obtained her bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences at the Islamic State University of Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She then pursued her master's degree at the University of Kocaeli in Kocaeli, Turkey, also in Communication Sciences.

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