



# The Representation of South Korean Culture and History in the Moon Lovers: Scarlet Heart Ryeo TV Series

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## Abstract

This research explores the film's portrayal of South Korea. This research focuses on the scene in Moon Lovers that depicts South Korean history and culture. The qualitative approach is used to analyze the data in this study. The dataset was taken from the scenes on Moon Lovers, korea.net, and any other journal articles. The theories applied include Mise en Scene approach, Stuart Hall's representation theory and cultural theory. As a result, the outcome of this study reveals a detailed and recognized picture of South Korean history and culture.

**Keywords:** culture; film; representation

## Introduction

Producing a film is a multi-stage process that entails pre-production, production, and post-production. Films are made with a specific objective: to entertain while also being visually pleasing. Film is an audiovisual mass communication tool that communicates messages to viewers to facilitate message exchange. Mass communication enables simultaneous communication among many people (Febriyanti et al., 2020).

According to Manon de Reeper (2016), cinema language is the medium through which a film "speaks" to its viewers. The individuals who create films (the massive collaboration of directors, producers, editors, and so on) desire to tell a specific tale or convey a specific idea. Even if they seek to entertain, their film almost likely will have some meaning, as the audience can construct meaning even when they are not present. Decoding is the term used to describe this process. The meaning of a narrative is "decoded" in the same way that spoken language or written texts are interpreted. We bring all our prior experiences and knowledge to a film and apply them instinctively to what we observe — we interpret the picture according to our preconceived expectations.

The film's social structure is employed to communicate messages on human relationships, communication, and culture. Films are intrinsically linked to or based on human emotions and realities, which connects them to their audience, piques their attention and influences them (Jogezal, Faryal, 2020). On the one hand, the film reflects our attitudes toward specific topics (political, social, economic, and so forth), but it also affects our attitudes toward those subjects. (Manon Reeper, 2016).

Korean drama, or K-drama, is a term that refers to televised dramas in the Korean language produced in South Korea, typically in the form of miniseries, with distinguishing characteristics that set it different from conventional Western television series or soap operas. Korean dramas can be set in present times or historical periods; the latter is called *sageuk* in Korean. These two categories encompass a variety of genres, ranging from romantic comedies and action shows to fusion science fiction dramas. South Korea began broadcasting television series in the 1960s; the current mini-drama format of 12–24 episodes began in the 1990s, altering traditional historical series and introducing the concept of "fusion sageuks." Korean dramas are typically shot on a tight timeline, frequently just hours before broadcast, and their screenplays are adaptable. They may change during production in response to public criticism, putting performers in an awkward position. Production firms sometimes encounter financial difficulties. Korean dramas are popular globally due to the expansion of the Korean wave and the availability of multilingual subtitles through streaming sites ([www.definitions.net](http://www.definitions.net)).

In this study, the author is interested in analyzing South Korean culture represented in the Moon Lovers Korean drama. Koentjaraningrat (Eva, 2016) defines culture as "the full system of ideas, deeds, and consequences of human labor in communal life that are evolved into human beings via learning." Additionally, culture is classified into three categories: (1) culture as a collection of ideas, values, norms, and rules; (2) culture as a collection of ideas, values, norms, and rules; and (3) culture as a collection of ideas, values, norms, and rules. (2) The concept of culture as a collection of structured human behavior activities inside a community, and (3) the concept of culture as human-created objects. The human spirit

encompasses all of society's standards and aspirations in a broad sense. Ideology, spirituality, art, and all human knowledge are all included, as is technology.

Moon Lovers: Scarlet Heart Ryeo portrays twenty-five-year-old Go Ha-Jin (IU) as she is transferred to the Goryeo Dynasty. She then awakens in Lady Hae Soo's body and finds herself among the Wang Family's reigning princes. However, Hae Soo develops romantic feelings for several princes and becomes enmeshed in a web of politics and the prince's struggle for the throne.

Scarlet Heart Ryeo excels in establishing the palace as a place fraught with peril, betrayal, and murder. It was designed to be where you Hae Soo would have to flee if she wished to survive. However, it was a place where survival required either killing or being slain for the Princes. As the episodes progress, we will see several Princes ascend to the throne and how there is always someone willing to do whatever it takes to usurp their kingdom. We gradually observe their ascension to the throne and their final demise.

Regrettably, Scarlet Heart Ryeo's narrative was not fully smooth. Indeed, there were far too many story twists. These leaps occur off-screen, leaving us completely perplexed as we attempt to piece together the puzzle pieces. A nice example is when Yo fails to seize the throne and we see the Queen wholly covered in grey hair (Nisha, 2019).

In order to help the author doing the analysis, *Mise En Scene* approach and theory of representation and culture from Stuart Hall are used in this study.

*Mise En Scene* is the approach that the author used to analyze the Moon Lovers TV series. According to Manon de Reeper (2016), everything in a film or television show is crafted to fit on the screen. The creators carefully consider every element presented in the scene; nothing is a coincidence. The author exercises control over the audience's cognition by deciding what is shown within the constraints of that screen. The *Mise En Scène* is the director's vision for the scene and the film. *Mise en Scene* can be used just as successfully as dialogue and story to convey meaning to the viewer. It is crucial for media and film studies analysis because it elucidates how to find relevant visual codes and how some may have used them to construct meaning (The Media Insider, 2020).

According to Manon (2016), we must analyze who and what is present in a scene, as well as their relative locations — we must also consider make-up, expressions, costume, setting, appearance, props, sounds, and lighting. There are several aspects to consider when analyzing the picture. First, editing. Editing is a process that compresses time and space into a logical series of shots. It is, in general, seamless. It requires cutting and reassembling segments (shots) of recorded film to preserve the film's continuity and connectivity. Shots are typically manipulated to reflect a realistic sequence of events. Second, camera. The camera is a critical factor to consider while analyzing a film. This section discusses several shot styles and camera angles. A single take constitutes a shot. It can be used to establish the scene

or mood and locate the viewer within it. Meanwhile, camera angles can dramatically affect the tone of a film and virtually always convey a message. Lighting is the final step. Lighting has a crucial role in establishing a film's tone or setting. Although the spotlight is often utilized in the theater to emphasize a specific group member, it is occasionally employed more subtly in cinema foreshadowing. Full-facial lighting attracts emphasis to a person's face and can convey an air of candor and truthfulness. Shadow and low contrast are typically connected with negative emotions such as fear, rage, and distrust (Reeper, 2016). These factors may aid the author in doing the analysis. Additionally, according to *The Media Insider* (2017), there are additional methods to read cinematography. Among them is to give the shot meaning. Applying meaning to a shot involves determining how the film attempts to communicate a concept, a message, or a meaning through the lens.

Culture is a term that refers to the human knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, legislation, customs, and other habits. (1) Language, (2) knowledge system, (3) social structure, (4) living equipment and technology, (5) living livelihood system, (6) religious system, and (7) art, as defined in (Hasibuan, 2019). Based on some of these findings, it concludes that culture is valuable and intrinsically tied to the character. As a result, the folklore understudy may represent a system of people's beliefs, morality, laws, and behaviors.

Many elements contribute to the formation of culture, one of which is representation. In representation, identity, cultural control, communication, and production are constants. The term representation means 'to represent' something that has occurred, mediate it, and reproduce it (Anwar et al., 2018).

Stuart Hall defines representation as "the process of creating a meaning by incorporating language into developing the intended meaning." This is inextricably tied to the ideology that provides meaning; thus, discourse analysis and the study of ideology and representation are interwoven. To put it another way, the meaning derived from the depiction of a particular thing exists as a result of the meaning's ideology. Stuart asserts that conceptions are developed and created through representations, with events occurring not only verbally but also visually. Not only do individual concepts exist in the representation system, but also ways for organizing, adding, and grouping ideas or concepts, as well as varying levels of relationship intricacy. According to Stuart Hall, two things become the primary focus of representation research: the representative and the represented (Hall, 1997), as stated by (Supandi, 2017).

## **Method**

This research analyzed the representation of South Korean historical culture in *Moon Lovers* TV series. *Mise En Scene* approach from Manon de Reeper and theory of representation and culture were used for this study. To figure out how the

Moon Lovers represents the portrait of the South Korean history, the author did several steps in this research.

First, the author analyzed the Nightcrawler film using the film elements, Mise En Scene. The author analyzed the scenes, angles, and editing on the movie. The author selected scenes that symbolize South Korean cultural values or history.

Second, the author connected the movie elements with the interpretation supported by the representation and culture theory from Stuart Hall.

The last, the author concluded the whole observation as the representation of South Korean history.

## **Results**

### ***This is the Way You Write the Subheadings***

In order to fully understand the result of this research, firstly, the author observed the elements of the movie in the Moon Lovers scenes, angles, shots, lighting, editing, etc.

First, to see how this Korean drama, Moon Lovers represents South Korean history and culture, I started my observation from scene on minutes 04:14 (Figure 1).



In this scene, we could see a house surrounded by green trees in the middle of the lake. In front of the house, we could also see a person with a black outfit. The camera is taken far away so that the focus is on the lake. As a result, the house looks tiny.

In a closer context, the lake that is shown in Moon Lovers TV series is Cheonjuho lake. Cheonjuho Lake is a lake in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province. It is located at 234 Artvalley-ro, Giji Village, Sinbyuk-myeon, Pocheon. This location was once utilized as a granite quarry before being abandoned for several years. Then, it was converted into an art, culture, and recreation place in October 2009 (Times, I. D. N., & Suryaningtyas, F, 2022).

The next observation is taken from scene on minutes 14:40.



In this scene, (Figure 2), we could see a lot of people standing, sitting, and chatting each other. They are actually at public bathing (jjimjilbang) in Songak.

In a closer context, nowadays, Jjimjilbang is Korean baths appeal to everyone, from children to elderly. There are some ground rules for those who are making first visit to the jjimjilbang. Sensitize ourselves like a local. The jjimjilbang is frequently utilized as a meeting spot for a group of friends on Friday nights known as spa dates, which is unsurprising given the admittance fee of roughly 9,000-13,000 won (INDOZONE.ID). Thus, in this scene, it could be interpreted that the scene attempts to show a cultural place of South Korea in form of TV series.

The next observation goes to the scene on minutes 14:59, (Figure 3).



In this scene (Figure 3), we could see a historical building with some knights in front of this empire. This empire is called Goryeo. Cited in Khan Academy, the Goryeo

dynasty (918–1392) was characterized by a high level of religious zeal. Its inhabitants, from their emperors to their lowest subjects, were devout Buddhists.

Historically, by the late eighth century, Silla had been weakened by the nobility's internal fight for power; by the tenth century, leaders of powerful local factions such as Gyeon Hwon and Gungye had created their administrations. Gyeon Hwon formed the Later Baekje Kingdom in 892, with Wansanju as its capital, and took control of modern-day Jeolla and Chungcheong-do (korea.net).

Gungye, a member of the Silla royal line, created Later Goguryeo in Songak (modern-day Gaeseong) in 901, establishing sovereignty over modern-day Gangwon-do and Gyeonggi-do. He increased the territory, restructured the government, and transferred the capital to Cheorwon. Furthermore, he altered the country's name to Taebong. Gungye squandered his people's support while consolidating his hold on local leaders and bolstering his claim to the throne. He was chased out in 918 by Wang Geon, a Songak tribal leader. Wang Geon renamed the country Goryeo, declared that the country would inherit Goryeo, and relocated the capital to Songak. Goryeo maintained his hostility toward Later Baekje while advocating for an engagement policy with Silla. Goryeo peacefully absorbed Unified Silla in 935. Gyeon Hwon surrendered to Wang Geon following a power struggle between Later Baekje's leaders. Later that year, Goryeo conquered Baekje. Wang Geon thereby united the Korean Peninsula's Later Three Kingdoms (korea.net). Thus, I see that this scene attempts to represent the history of dynasty Goryeo in form of Moon Lovers TV series.

The next supporting analysis is taken from the scene on minutes 36:19 (Figure 4).



In this scene (Figure 4), we could see the empire shot from far angle. It is still as same as the previous building which is Goryeo. Historically, Goryeo adopted

Confucianism as its political ideology and built an effective education system by establishing the Gukjagam (a national university) and several hyanggyo (local private schools). Additionally, Buddhism had a considerable impact on Goryeo civilization as a whole. The Kingdom took a more tolerant stance toward accepting other religions, as evidenced by the rites known as Yeondeunghoe (Lotus Lantern Festival) and Palgwanhoe (Festival of the Eight Vows), during which prayers for blessing were offered based on a syncretic mixture of folk religions and Buddhism (korea.net).

Goryeo maintained a prosperous commercial relationship with several countries, notably the Song dynasty. Numerous traders from Song, Central Asia, Arabia, Southeast Asia, and Japan travelled to Byeongnando, which served as an entrance to Gaeseong's capital. Song merchants traded in satin, silk, and medicinal herbs, whereas Goryeo merchants traded in hemp cloth and ginseng. Imported gems from Arabia included ivory, crystal, and amber. Finally, during this period, the name Korea evolved from Goryeo.

The Goryeo dynasty established a magnificent civilization. Specifically, the Goryeo celadon created by the inlaying technique attests to the unmatched creativity of the period. The Tripitaka Koreana, or Palman Daejanggyeong, is a compilation of Buddhist scriptures in Korean. It is the essence of Buddhist culture and the peak of Goryeo era wooden printing block technology, having been carved onto 81,258 wooden printing blocks. The Goryeo period also saw the invention of the world's first metal printing types. According to historical sources, the Goryeo people devised metal printing types more than 200 years before Johannes Gutenberg did in Europe. Jikji (Anthology of Great Buddhist Priests' Zen Teachings) was printed using metal printing in 1377, 78 years before its European counterpart was printed in 1455. Jikji is housed at France's National Library and was designated a Memory of the World in 2001 (korea.net).

The last observation is the scene on minutes 54:27 (Figure 5).





In this scene, we could see a lot of people who lived in Goryeo dynasty standing and praying. They were requesting the rain to overcome the drought. This ritual is called Giuje (기우제).

In a closer context, Giuje (기우제) is classified into two types. The first is officiated by government officials and is referred to as Gukhaenggiuje. The second is performed by civilians and is referred to as Mingangiuje that officiate the ceremony (korea.net).

Gukhaenggiuje rain rituals were categorized into 12 types during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). Among these twelve categories, the eleventh comprises three distinct types of ritual. The first is a Confucian ceremony performed in the Confucian royal shrine of Jongmyo (종묘) with the intention of honouring the ancestors. The second took place in the well of Changgyeonggung Palace's Chundangdae Pavilion (춘당 대) and in the pond encircling Gyeonghoeru (경회루) in Gyeongbokgung Palace. This was designed to request rain in natural locations like as mountains, rivers, or areas considered to be home to a heavenly dragon, such as wooded areas and sources of water. The third is Seokcheokdongjagiu, a rain request ceremony associated with a toddler playing with a lizard. This ceremony may be considered magic, as the lizard represents a dragon, and it was believed that suffering it in the sun would persuade the celestial dragon to provide rain (korea.net).

On the other side, the Mingangiuje rite emphasized a distinction in gender roles, which can seem unusual in modern times. Men performed the rite on the mountain, discreetly excavating the buried graves, lighting a fire to create smoke, and saying

prayers, while women gathered in groups, stripped naked, and collectively urinated. It was believed that women's Giuje was more effective than men's (korea.net). In my point of view, I see that this rain practices shown in this TV series represents the rain ritual that is usually done by Korean people during the drought.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, some scenes in Moon Lovers TV series represent South Korean history and culture. The places in this Korean drama are portrayed vividly. Besides that, this TV series also attempts to introduce the history of Goryeo dynasty which was characterized by a high level of religious zeal. The researcher views that this TV series do not only contain interesting storyline but also represent some iconic places and historical building of South Korea. Thus, Korean films and television series strive to combine cultural features to introduce their culture to the entire globe. Moon Lovers, in particular, attempts to explain Korea's history at a specific point in time so that the viewer gains an indirect understanding of Korean history. However, film's cultural and historical representations can also be utilized to deconstruct actual history. It means that all types of cultural and historical representation are the product of filmmakers' imaginations and cannot be taken as historical facts without intensive historical research.

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