

Transcultural Reception of Dubbed Television Narratives: A Thematic Analysis of How Sinhala-Dubbed Foreign Dramas Mediate Cultural Meaning and Relationship Ideologies in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Sinhala-dubbed foreign TV dramas remain super popular in Sri Lanka. Since Rupavahini first aired the hit Japanese show *Oshin* in 1989, such shows kept drawing big crowds. Even reruns drew viewers for decades! They launched a wave of similar content too. For instance, Korean hits like *Sujatha Diyani* and *Boys Over Flowers* followed. These shows now define Sri Lankan media culture. So they play a huge role in what folks watch. Despite its widespread viewership, there's a critical lack of empirical research on how Sri Lankan audiences take in, interpret, and behave after watching these programs especially regarding their cultural lifestyles, romantic ideals, and identities. This study steps in to fill that gap. It explores three main questions. The first one is: How do Sinhala-dubbed Korean dramas influence Sri Lankans to adopt certain styles, like haircuts, accessories, clothes, cooking methods, and food likes? Second, do Sinhala-dubbed Korean rom-coms influence what Sri Lankan viewers want in love and art? And third, does watching foreign dramas from *Oshin* to today's Korean shows help Sri Lankans form and discuss their cultural identity? For this, they used a qualitative research design based on a constructivist view of knowledge. We did small group interviews with 15 people, split into three focus groups. Each had five folks. For analysis, we used Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic method from 2006. This study is guided by two theories: Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory from 1973 and 1997, and Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory from 2007. This research builds on Hall's encoding/decoding framework and Straubhaar's cultural proximity theory in a South Asian, multilingual, postcolonial setting. It shows that *Oshin's* multigenerational impact provides the historical base needed to fully grasp how Korean dramas are now received in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Audience reception, cultural lifestyle adoption, Sinhala dubbing, Sri Lanka, television drama

INTRODUCTION

Foreign TV dramas have radically changed how media works in many Asian countries, shaping culture, fashion, and how people see themselves. In Sri Lanka, these changes hit really hard and affected folks from all age groups too. Most people think it started with Korean shows, but actually, it began with the Japanese drama *Oshin*. In 1989, Henry Jayasena brought *Oshin* a 297-episode NHK morning drama that aired in Japan from 1983 to 1984 to Sri Lanka. It was dubbed into Sinhala by Titus Thotawatte and a team of 250 performers, according to Daily News in 2017 and Roar Media in 2022. Rupavahini, Sri Lanka's state broadcaster, debuted the Sinhala-dubbed version during a new evening prime-time slot, which they made just for this show. This scheduling change then became standard for all foreign dramas in the country. *Oshin* was the most popular foreign teledrama in Sri Lanka for three decades, capturing audiences through many re-airings. It connected with successive generations and cemented Sinhala-dubbed foreign dramas in Sri Lankan homes (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014).

The global circulation of foreign television dramas has dramatically transformed media landscapes across Asia, creating new patterns of cultural exchange, identity formation, and lifestyle influence. In Sri Lanka, this transformation has been particularly visible through the widespread viewership of Sinhala-dubbed dramas, which have introduced millions of Sri Lankan households to Korean and Japanese cultures in an accessible, localized format. Dramas such as *Sujatha Diyani*, a Sinhala-dubbed version of the Korean historical drama *Jewel in the Palace*, and *Boys Over Flowers*, a Sinhala-dubbed adaptation of the Korean romantic drama of the same

name, have become household names. Their characters, storylines, and visual aesthetics have penetrated everyday life, influencing not only entertainment preferences but also personal lifestyle choices, aesthetic sensibilities, and relational ideals (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014).

Sujatha Diyani's viewers started copying the main character's traditional Korean hairpins and hairstyles. They also changed how they dress and now prepare food just like in the show. It made them really love Korean cooking. Boys Over Flowers fans, on the other hand, fell for Korean men's looks and styles. They got all gung-ho about Korean fashion and dreamed of fairytale romances. Eating Korean food became a fun reminder of the show's dreamy love story. For many years, watching foreign dramas dubbed in Sinhala, from Oshin to Korean shows, has shaped the cultural identities of Sri Lankans by mixing local and East Asian values. This research looks into how people adopt new lifestyles, fall in love with characters, and figure out their cultural identities because of these series (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014; Morley, 1986; Hall, 1997).

Despite this significant empirical context, there's a big gap in the academic literature. Most research on the Korean Wave focuses only on how East and Southeast Asians receive it (Ryoo, 2009; Jin, 2016; Ochoa & Ma, 2016). Sadly, South Asian reception, especially in Sri Lanka, is basically ignored. No published academic study looks into Oshin's role as a cultural cornerstone and precursor for Korean dramas in Sri Lanka. This research steps in to fill that gap. From the interview data, three main themes popped up and were analyzed using Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory and Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory: Cultural Lifestyle Adoption, Aspirational Romantic Ideals, and Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation. The last theme was an original part of this study, extending the analysis beyond earlier Korean drama research. So, it goes deeper than what was done before in other contexts.

Language plays a decisive role in shaping media consumption in Sri Lanka. English proficiency is unevenly distributed across the population, and only a small proportion of viewers are able to access foreign media in its original language or through subtitles (Abayasekara, 2018). Sinhala dubbing therefore, serves as a critical bridge, enabling mass audiences to engage with global media content. However, dubbing is far more than a mechanical translation of words; it is a complex cultural and communicative act that involves the adaptation of tone, emotion, interpersonal relationships, and cultural references. The choices made during dubbing shape how audiences perceive foreign cultures, interpret social norms, and engage with characters (Karunaratna, 2015; Luyken et al., 1991).

Beyond entertainment, there is compelling evidence that these dramas have influenced viewers' everyday behaviours and aspirations in concrete and observable ways. Viewers who regularly watched Sujatha Diyani began adopting the hairstyles and hair accessories worn by the drama's protagonist, incorporating her distinctive hairpins and traditional styling elements into their own appearance. They also adopted the clothing styles featured in the drama, wearing garments with similar colours, cuts, and textile patterns. Korean culinary practices observed in the dramas, including particular methods of cutting, preparing, and presenting food, have been emulated by viewers in their own kitchens. Viewers have similarly developed a strong appreciation for Korean cuisine, with many reporting that they began cooking and consuming Korean dishes after watching the dramas. In the context of Boys Over Flowers, viewers developed strong aspirational ideals related to Korean male aesthetics, admiring the physical appearance, grooming, and fashion styles of the male characters, and developing a romantic attraction to Korean cultural representations of masculinity and intimate relationships (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014).

Despite these observable and far-reaching cultural influences, there is a significant gap in the academic literature. Existing research on Korean drama reception has concentrated primarily on East and Southeast Asian contexts, such as China, Japan, and Thailand (Ochoa & Ma, 2016; Ryoo, 2009). South Asian reception contexts, and Sri Lanka in particular, remain underexplored. This gap is consequential because Sri Lanka presents a linguistically distinct, culturally diverse, and postcolonially shaped media environment that cannot be assumed to mirror reception patterns observed elsewhere. A dedicated investigation of how Sri Lankan viewers decode, interpret, and respond to dubbed Korean and Japanese dramas is therefore both timely and necessary.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve three interconnected objectives:

1. To examine how Sri Lankan viewers adopt and adapt cultural lifestyle elements, including hairstyles, clothing, and culinary practices, observed in Sinhala-dubbed dramas.
2. To investigate how exposure to Sinhala-dubbed Korean romantic dramas shapes aspirational romantic ideals and aesthetic preferences among Sri Lankan audiences.
3. To analyze how watching foreign dramas dubbed in Sinhala from 'Oshin' to current Korean shows affects Sri Lankans' cultural identities through generations, using Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory and Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory. This looks at how these shows blend cultures and shape how viewers see themselves and others.

Significance of the Study

This study adds to media, cultural studies, and communication research in key ways. It offers the first deep look at how Sinhala-dubbed foreign dramas are received in Sri Lanka, filling a major gap in the global Korean Wave and Asian media reception literature. This reimagines Oshin's place in Sri Lankan media history, moving it from just a popular culture thing to a big deal theoretical case study on cross-cultural media response. It adds Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation as a third key theme that broadens Hall's (1997) and Straubhaar's (2007) views in useful ways. It shows how small group interviews work well for capturing how communities, especially across generations, respond to media. It also adds a South Asian case study to the global mix, offering that vital counterbalance to the heavy focus on East and Southeast Asia. According to institutional records, Oshin was so popular that it changed the national prime time broadcasting schedule. This created a 6:30 to 7:30 PM slot for foreign dramas on Rupavahini which is still around today (Ransirilal, 2016; JAMCO, 2016). Then, Sujatha Diyani came on in 2012 in the same slot and got the top ratings for foreign dramas since Oshin. It basically set a new beginning for Korean dramas in Sri Lanka (Rupavahini, 2023; Fernando, 2018). Another big hit was Boys Over Flowers. It really got young people excited, leading to noticeable shifts in style and looks among the youth. These changes were seen by journalists and mentioned in early studies too (Jinasena, 2014; Fernando, 2018). The high levels of audience involvement with these three dramas make them the best choices for an academic study of the topic, way beyond other available options in Sri Lanka that didn't reach as many people.

Rationale for the Selection of Oshin, Sujatha Diyani, and Boys Over Flowers

The selection of Oshin, Sujatha Diyani, and Boys Over Flowers has been made based on three academically sound reasons and not due to the researcher's familiarity with them or ease in selecting them. Firstly, all the three dramas have received considerable viewership in Sri Lanka: Oshin is still the most viewed foreign teledrama in the history of Sri Lankan television (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014); Sujatha Diyani became the most viewed foreign teledrama on Rupavahini after the airing of Oshin (Rupavahini, 2023); and Boys Over Flowers created observable change in lifestyles and aesthetics of Sri Lankan youth (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014). Secondly, all the three teledramas belong to different genres, different nations, and different time-periods: a biographical Japanese asadora (Oshin), historical Korean sageuk (Sujatha Diyani), and romantic Korean drama (Boys Over Flowers). Third, and most importantly, there is ideological content that is culturally specific and meaningfully close to but also different from the cultural values of Sri Lanka, which is precisely the kind of textual characteristic that is needed for the frameworks of Hall (1973, 1997) and Straubhaar (2007). Television dramas that are completely culturally congruent with Sri Lankan cultural values (for example, locally produced Sinhala drama) or completely distant from Sri Lankan culture (unlocalized foreign drama) would not provide the cultural tensions that are needed under these frameworks. Oshin is absolutely necessary to establish the historical basis for the Korean dramas in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oshin and the Historical Basis of Sinhala Dubbing Culture

Theoretical explanations about how foreign dramas have been received by Sri Lankan audiences cannot exclude a discussion of Oshin, a NHK drama series that laid down the basis for Sinhala dubbing culture, as well as prepared audiences to appreciate Korean dramas in the future. Oshin (NHK, 1983-1984) is the story of Shin

Tanokura, who grows from an impoverished childhood in prewar Japan into a prosperous elderly man. This is one of the Japanese TV series that have received maximum viewership throughout the world, and it has been aired in over 70 countries in Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Europe. It has had particular resonance in nations with Confucian and Buddhist culture (Fernando, 2018; Jinasena, 2014). The underlying message of the show pertaining to perseverance, family sacrifice, social inequality, and winning with integrity despite all odds has played a major part in its massive success.

Oshin's multi-generational audience in Sri Lanka holds great importance from a theoretical perspective. While the audience for Korean dramas tend to be focused around a certain generation, Oshin was viewed by grandparents, parents, and children who would live under the same roof and watch the show for three decades in succession, generating shared cultural references and intergenerational dialogues surrounding the themes and characters of the show. The seminal studies conducted by Morley (1986) on family television viewing provide ample evidence in this regard. With respect to the Sri Lankan example, Oshin created an intergenerational collective memory about the viewing of dubbed foreign drama which is what influences how the young perceive Korean dramas, which provides the cultural framework where the identity negotiation process described in Theme 3 takes place.

Korean Wave and Contexts of South Asian Reception

Korean Wave, also referred to as Hallyu, is understood as the dissemination of cultural products produced in South Korea to other parts of the world, starting from East and Southeast Asia, in the late 1990s, and later to other continents such as South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, among others (Ryoo, 2009; Jin, 2016). Korean dramas have played a pivotal role in the Hallyu process, by virtue of their excellent production quality, universal themes of romanticism and personal life struggles, and cultural aesthetics, resulting in fans around the world. The emergence of the Korean Wave has been theoretically explained through the concept of cultural soft power, due to the changing trends of global cultural flows (Ryoo, 2009).

In Sri Lanka, the Korean Wave was introduced through the airing of *Sujatha Diyani* on Rupavahini in 2012 (Rupavahini, 2023). The instantaneous popularity of this phenomenon was due to the creation of favorable preconditions after many years of watching Oshin in terms of the familiarity of Sri Lankans with the norms of dubbed television dramas and the emotional appeal of the struggle for independence of females in a hierarchically ordered society. *Boys Over Flowers* then drew large audiences among Sri Lankans, giving rise to the expectations described in Theme 2. (Jinasena, 2014; Fernando, 2018).

Scholars working in the field of Hallyu have mainly focused on Asia, particularly the East Asian countries (Ochoa & Ma, 2016; Kim, 2013). However, there is only some sparse literature on South Asia, where the interest of Indian and Bangladeshi viewership is taken into consideration (Akter, 2019), but there is a complete lack of research about the Sri Lankan viewership of K-dramas.

Current academic works have revealed that the Korean Wave has gradually penetrated digital ecosystems, streaming services, and algorithmic distribution networks, thus increasing the level of engagement from a global audience outside East Asia (Yecies & Shim, 2021).

Theoretical Framework 1: Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory.

The theoretical framework chosen for this research is Hall's (1973, 1997) Encoding/Decoding Theory. First proposed by Hall (1973), this theory suggests that television programs have cultural and ideological meaning encoded by producers in the process of producing these programs. According to Hall (1973), these meanings are polysemic; viewers are not passive receivers of meanings but rather interpret messages encoded in texts based on their cultural experiences and social context.

Three main approaches to decoding are recognized by Hall. A dominant or preferred interpretation is one where the decoding process is done fully in line with the encoding process. Negotiated decoding entails a partial agreement with the dominant interpretation but from a different frame of reference. Oppositional decoding is

where the decoder does the process from a wholly different ideology compared to the encoded interpretation (Hall, 1997).

This research uses the framework of Hall throughout all three themes. In Theme 1, the adoption of Korean hairstyles and cooking styles exemplifies the dominance of dominant decoding. In Theme 2, the interplay between romanticization and critical consciousness of gender relations indicates negotiated decoding. In Theme 3, the negotiated construction of a cultural hybrid identity is characterized by the swings of all three decoding approaches. The application of the framework of Hall to this longitudinal, multi-generational, and multilingual setting constitutes an innovative theoretical development of this paper (Hall, 1973, 1997; Morley, 1992).

Second Theoretical Framework: Straubhaar's Cultural Proximity Theory

The complementary theoretical framework offered by Straubhaar is his Cultural Proximity Theory. According to Straubhaar (2007), audiences are likely to seek out media products that are culturally proximate to themselves, which means having similar values, social practices, storytelling traditions, and at times language. Cultural proximity happens on many fronts, and it is not often complete; audiences may have productive engagement with media that is only somewhat proximate.

Cultural proximity takes place within historically dynamic conditions in Sri Lanka. The appeal of *Oshin* was based on elements of endurance, sense of responsibility, and social resilience that are in congruence with Sinhala Buddhist culture, strengthened through Sinhala subtitling which made the story linguistically proximate. On the other hand, *Boys Over Flowers* created a form of aspirational proximity wherein viewers were attracted to media content depicting a desirable culture that is partly separate from them. Aspirational proximity is an extension of Straubhaar's initial concept of cultural proximity, which was mainly limited to the existing similarity between cultures (Straubhaar, 2007).

The theme 3 takes a step forward in the expansion of the Straubhaar's theory in that it looks at the construction of cultural proximity on the basis of its diachronicity, i.e., how people develop a feeling of cultural proximity over time. With respect to Sri Lanka, this occurs due to the fact that, over time, with the continued exposure to the dubbed foreign shows over several decades, the partial proximate recognition of common values in "*Oshin*" becomes a form of cultural bridging through cultural incorporation.

Cultural Identity, Hybridity, and Transcultural Media

The connection between media use and the construction of cultural identity is a focus of much debate in cultural studies because of Hall's theorization (1990) of culture identity as a dynamic, productive enterprise as opposed to an essentialist one. According to Hall, culture is made through the process of representations, and the identities are formed through the stories we hear and through our identifications with the representations themselves. In this sense, when the Sri Lankan viewers identify with the *Oshin*, *Jang-geum*, or the characters in *Boys Over Flowers*, then they are participating in the process of identification.

Kraidy's (2005) theory on the hybridisation of cultural logic and globalisation bears close relevance to the identity construction process discussed in Theme 3. According to Kraidy, rather than leading to cultural homogenisation and cultural resistance, media circulation in the globalised environment creates hybrid culture that integrates local and global cultural elements to produce an identity that is not exclusively local or global. The construction of the hybrid cultural identity by means of the viewing of dubbed dramas from Japan and Korea in Sri Lanka perfectly exemplifies what Kraidy discusses (Kraidy, 2005; Appadurai, 1996).

The idea of 'mediascapes' by Appadurai (1996) is equally applicable to the analysis of this topic: According to Appadurai, global media flows contribute to creating imagined worlds that transcend national boundaries, thus offering material that can be used in the creation of identities both personal and collective. In this respect, the imagined world created by Korean drama becomes a mediascape that Sri Lankans make use of in developing their identity.

Streaming platforms have transformed audience engagement by enabling continuous transnational access to foreign cultural products and increasing opportunities for sustained cultural interaction (Lobato, 2019).

Dubbing as Secondary Cultural Encoding

According to Luyken et al. (1991), it is not merely enough for dubbing to be seen as the mere replacement of languages in any text; rather, it requires the adaptation of tonality, emotive register, interpersonal relation, and cultural context in such a way as to construct the perception of the original text. Extending this point to the Sri Lankan context, it can be observed through Karunarathna (2015) that Sinhala dubbing is also an exercise in culture adaptation rather than translation equivalence.

In this research, Sinhala dubbing acts as a secondary encoding system working as a bridge between the Korean cultural original and the Sri Lankan viewers. Through translating the emotions, hierarchies, and culture of Korean dramas into the mother language of the Sri Lankans, Sinhala dubbing facilitates the development of the linguistic affinity necessary for cultural proximity to work, while at the same time retaining the required cultural difference to allow the drama series to be relatable yet alienating to the viewer (Straubhaar, 2007; Kraidy, 2005; Hall, 1997). Contemporary audience research increasingly emphasizes participatory media engagement, online fan communities, and digitally mediated identity formation among transnational audiences (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Epistemological Perspective

The proposed methodological framework adopted a qualitative research design in the context of a constructivist epistemological paradigm. As constructivism posits, the meanings of social objects are not stable features or inherent to any given text but rather are constructed by individuals and communities during their social interactions and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schlesinger, 2007). This epistemological approach aligns with both conceptual frameworks as Hall (1973, 1997) claims that social meaning is constructed during the interaction between encoded message and active decoders, while Straubhaar's (2007) cultural proximity theory accentuates the culture-specific nature of audience involvement. Only qualitative methodology would allow a researcher to understand the social meanings created during the process of engaging with dubbed foreign programs by Sri Lankans (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Researcher Reflexivity

As part of the rigorous approach to qualitative research, the research team reflects on its own positionality. The researchers are Sri Lankan academics who have personally witnessed Sinhala-dubbed international serials, such as *Oshin*, *Sujatha Diyani*, and *Boys Over Flowers*. Being emically positioned in relation to the culture under investigation helps to understand it from the inside as well as being linguistically competent and familiar with the people. However, this is also potentially dangerous, since the researcher runs a risk of developing confirmation bias. In order to minimize this potential flaw, the study followed a systematic thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), kept an extensive record of analytical processes, reviewed preliminary findings by the peers before making the final conclusions, and looked for disconfirming evidence during the entire analysis process.

Small Group Interview Technique and Justification

The main technique used for collecting data was semi-structured small group interviews, otherwise referred to as focus group interviews. The choice of the small group interview method was informed by three theoretical justifications. Firstly, the process of media consumption is largely a social one within Sri Lankan families; dramas are watched in groups and discussions on the drama episodes take place among family members and friends, sharing feelings and interpreting the dramas socially. In this context, small group interviews facilitate an understanding of the negotiation of cultural meaning rather than individual construction of meaning (Morley, 1986, 1992).

The second strength is that the group discussion technique produces what Morley (1992) refers to as collective sense-making, the act of making sense of shared cultural systems, social conventions, and values through social discourse. The collective process of such sense-making is precisely the kind of phenomenon that is posited theoretically in Hall’s (1973, 1997) encoding and decoding paradigm, as discursive formations, and the group discussion method gives empirical access to this phenomenon. The third advantage is that focus groups tend to yield more in-depth data than individual interviews, inasmuch as one participant's narrative elicits further insight from others within the group.

Participants and Sampling

A total of fifteen participants was chosen through purposive sampling, which was necessary because each one had experience of being exposed to foreign drama series dubbed in Sinhala language, especially Sujatha Diyani and Boys Over Flowers. Purposive sampling is suitable for qualitative studies in that analytical depth and not representativeness is the focus of the study (Schlesinger, 2007). Participants were grouped into three groups, each comprising of five participants, which is the optimum number of participants for a focus group study since it gives room for diversity and participation by all participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schlesinger, 2007).

The sample was selected in such a way as to provide diversity in terms of five criteria: gender (equal number of males and females in all groups), age (aged 18 to 45; the generation that watched Oshin when they were young and the generation that saw their first dubbed foreign show in Korean dramas), occupation (undergraduates, postgraduates, and working people), geographical location (Colombo, Kandy, Galle, and Matara), and watching drama experience (in all groups there were watchers of Sujatha Diyani and Boys Over Flowers as well as Oshin).

Table 1: Participant Demographic Profile (N = 15)

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	District	Group	Language	Dramas Watched
P01	F	22	Undergraduate	Colombo	Group A	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers
P02	M	28	Postgraduate	Kandy	Group A	Sinhala	Boys Over Flowers, Oshin
P03	F	34	Employed	Galle	Group A	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Oshin
P04	F	19	Undergraduate	Colombo	Group A	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers
P05	M	40	Employed	Matara	Group A	Sinhala	Boys Over Flowers, Oshin
P06	F	25	Employed	Colombo	Group B	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers
P07	M	31	Postgraduate	Colombo	Group B	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Oshin
P08	F	23	Undergraduate	Kandy	Group B	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers
P09	M	45	Employed	Galle	Group B	Sinhala	Boys Over Flowers, Oshin
P10	F	29	Employed	Colombo	Group B	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Oshin
P11	M	21	Undergraduate	Colombo	Group C	Sinhala	Boys Over Flowers, Oshin
P12	F	38	Employed	Kandy	Group C	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers

P13	M	26	Postgraduate	Matara	Group C	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Boys Over Flowers
P14	F	33	Employed	Colombo	Group C	Sinhala	Sujatha Diyani, Oshin
P15	M	18	Undergraduate	Galle	Group C	Sinhala	Boys Over Flowers, Oshin

Justification for the use of three focus groups

In accordance with focus group research methodological guidelines (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2015), fifteen participants were divided into three focus groups of five participants each. The following were the purposes of such grouping: (a) the ability to evaluate the issue of thematic saturation in the context of cross-group comparison, using Group C as confirmatory of the patterns emerging from Groups A and B (Braun & Clarke, 2006); (b) the possibility of representation of five criteria gender, age, occupation, geographic location, and the experience in watching dramas – while preserving convenient for participation group size; (c) the ability to perform comparative analysis among different groups to determine whether there is systematic difference in reception patterns depending on participant's demographic characteristics, which follows from theoretical positions of Hall (1973, 1997) and Straubhaar (2007); and (d) feasibility of the procedure in light of logistics and ethics of purposive sampling across different geographic regions in Sri Lanka. Groups A, B, and C were deliberately structured so that in Group A the majority would be represented by young people (18–28 years), in Group B – adults (late twenties to thirties), and in Group C – the most age heterogeneous subsample possible (18–45 years).

Data Collection Procedure

All interviews were carried out in Sinhala, the native language of the participants, in order to provide an atmosphere conducive to authenticity in participants' accounts. Each interview session took place for 45-60 minutes. The semi-structured interview included six topic areas: (1) total viewing experience starting from the time participants were exposed to Oshin through watching Korean dramas; (2) particular cultural aspects taken in by the participants regarding hairstyles, clothing and food habits; (3) views and emotions associated with the romantic relationships and the male actors featured in Boys Over Flowers; (4) comments on the function of the Sinhala dubbed version; (5) comparison between viewing Oshin and Korean dramas; and (6) issues of cultural identity and effects of sustained viewing on the participants' cultural self-perception.

Each session was recorded audibly after taking the consent from the participants with an informed consent form, with the audio recordings then being transcribed verbatim in Sinhala language prior to being translated into English. All the participants have been referred to using pseudonyms (P01-P15). The participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage of the process.

Thematic Analysis Process

Thematic analysis was performed using a six-step procedure by Braun and Clarke (2006). Step 1: Familiarization with data by reading and listening to the transcripts repeatedly. Step 2: Generating codes for identifying significant data segments. Step 3: Identifying themes through coding and grouping codes under more general categories. Step 4: Reviewing themes that have emerged in order to establish their cohesion and distinction from other concepts. Step 5: Defining themes by assigning appropriate names based on their definition. Step 6: Preparing a report on themes that is enriched with analytical content drawn from participant data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This resulted in three major themes. The choice to present three themes is consistent with our aim of in-depth analysis, where we have elaborated on each of the themes through four examples, using participant data and theoretical insights. Thematic saturation has been achieved for all three themes based on the data collected from the first two groups. Table 2 presents an overview of the three themes. Coding was done using a triangulated approach involving the researchers. The two main researchers separately coded the focus group discussion transcripts in their entirety, thereby generating inductive codes from the participants' language. Once the separate

coding process was done, the two researchers then compared the coding systems used. The differences in codes and interpretation were noted, discussed and reconciled via discussion guided by both the theories of Hall (1973, 1997) and Straubhaar (2007) as well as the principles of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Comparison was done in three steps: Code generation, categorization and theming, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Summary of Themes, Descriptions, and Theoretical Anchors

Theme No.	Theme Name	Description	Theoretical Anchors
Theme 1	Cultural Lifestyle Adoption	Adoption of hairstyles, hair accessories (hairpins), clothing aesthetics, food preparation techniques, and Korean culinary preferences after watching Sujatha Diyani. Historical context provided by Oshin as institutional precursor.	Hall (1973, 1997); Straubhaar (2007); Bandura (2001); Morley (1986)
Theme 2	Aspirational Romantic Ideals	Formation of romantic ideals and aesthetic aspirations including attraction to Korean male physical appearance, fashion, and grooming, and romantic association of Korean food, after watching Boys Over Flowers.	Hall (1973, 1997); Straubhaar (2007); Gerbner (1998); Cultivation Theory
Theme 3	Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation	Construction of hybrid cultural identities through sustained multigenerational engagement with dubbed dramas (Oshin through Korean productions), involving selective adoption, critical negotiation, and creative blending of Sri Lankan and East Asian cultural elements.	Hall (1990, 1997); Straubhaar (2007); Kraidy (2005); Appadurai (1996); Morley (1986)

Table 3: Code To Theme Development Process

Initial Codes	Intermediate Categories	Final Themes
Korean hairstyle imitation; adoption of hairpins (binyeo)	Korean beauty aesthetics adoption	Theme 1: Cultural Lifestyle Adoption
Sari color preferences influenced by hanbok palette	Aesthetic borrowing in clothing	Theme 1: Cultural Lifestyle Adoption
Cloth-behind-hand vegetable cutting technique	Culinary practice transfer	Theme 1: Cultural Lifestyle Adoption
Seeking Korean restaurants; cooking Korean dishes at home	Culinary curiosity and Korean food consumption	Theme 1: Cultural Lifestyle Adoption
Admiration of Korean male physicality and grooming	Aspirational male aesthetics	Theme 2: Aspirational Romantic Ideals
Korean fashion styles as romantic aspiration	Fashion-romance association	Theme 2: Aspirational Romantic Ideals
Korean food as romantic/emotional signifier	Food and romantic idealization	Theme 2: Aspirational Romantic Ideals

Critical negotiation of male possessiveness in Boys Over Flowers	Active audience: oppositional decoding of gender norms	Theme 2: Aspirational Romantic Ideals
Oshin as intergenerational family memory	Historical foundation for dubbed drama reception	Theme 3: Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation
Identifying with East Asian values (perseverance, filial piety)	Selective cultural value adoption	Theme 3: Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation
Feeling Sri Lankan yet culturally connected to Japan/Korea	Dual cultural belonging without identity loss	Theme 3: Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation
Hybrid home: Korean and Sri Lankan food, art, conversation	Everyday lived hybridity	Theme 3: Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Four major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted in three small groups with Sinhalese viewers. These themes offer a full understanding of how foreign TV shows dubbed in the Sinhala language impact the lives of Sinhalese viewers. The themes will be elaborated on one after the other, supported with relevant participant data and analysis.

Theme 1: Adoption of Cultural Lifestyle

The first and most widely prevalent theme refers to the adoption of cultural lifestyles, including the aesthetics by the participants from Sri Lanka, having seen *Sujatha Diyani*. In fact, in all three focus group discussions, the participants gave very vivid examples of how their interaction with the drama enabled them to adopt Korean cultural lifestyle habits through four different sub-themes. These sub-themes include adoption of hairstyles/hair accessories; clothing changes/dress modifications; adopting food preparation techniques; and developing a taste for Korean foods.

In the light of Hall's (1997) Encoding-Decoding Model, the adoption of lifestyles mentioned above can be explained as a phenomenon of dominant decoding. As viewers embrace Korean hairdos, fashion styles, techniques of cooking, and cuisines coded in *Sujatha Diyani*, they accept and internalize the meanings attached to these phenomena by the drama. On the other hand, as some of these adopted aspects of Korean culture are modified to suit the local context, as seen when adopting colours liked by Koreans and using them in the process of wearing Sri Lankan costumes, negotiated decoding can be observed too. According to Straubhaar (2007), these are constructions of cultural proximity by ordinary people, which result in hybrid forms of lifestyle that belong neither fully to Sri Lanka nor Korea (Kraidy, 2005).

Example 1: Adoption of Korean Hairstyles and Hair Accessories

The first aspect of cultural lifestyle adaptation that was easily noticeable and observed by all participants is that of hairstyles and hair accessories, especially hairpins called *binyeo*, worn frequently by *Jang-geum*, the heroine, of *Sujatha Diyani*. Five out of five participants from Group A, four out of five participants from Group B, and three out of five participants from Group C indicated that they themselves, or women in their families and social circles, were wearing such hairstyles or hairpins due to being inspired by the show. In addition, participants revealed that they were trying to find these hairpins at local markets.

Adoption of the hair style was elaborated by another female participant from Group A (P04, age 19):

“I liked a lot the hairstyle of the character *Jang-geum* after watching *Sujatha Diyani*. She always used to wear such attractive hair clips and her hair was always so stylish. I tried to find some hair clips like that in the market. Lots of women in my locality were styling their hair the same way as *Jang-geum* did.”

A second female respondent from Group A (P01, age 22) talked about intergenerational adoption:

“Before watching Sujatha Diyani with my mom in the evenings, I was not really concerned about hair jewelry. Since the drama, I have always been buying similar hairpins used by Jang-geum. She uses them now every day, and feels herself more sophisticated and dignified when wearing them.”

One of the participants of Group B (P07, age 31) described the change in his family members:

“I realized that both my wife and sister have changed their hairstyle after we started watching Sujatha Diyani. I have seen them tying it differently and using new pins. It took me some time to understand what was going on until they told me about following Jang-geum style in the drama.”

A female participant (P12, age 38) in Group C related the adoption of the fashion to the emotional attachment to the heroine:

“Jang-geum was a very beautiful yet strong woman. When I noticed the way she did her hair with those hairpins, I thought that there was beauty and strength within it, and so I followed the same trend as well. My friends even asked me what style it was and when I mentioned that I saw it on Sujatha Diyani, a few of my friends copied me as well.”

These narratives reveal how the use of hair accessories was based on emotional association with Jang-geum instead of imitation. This phenomenon can be explained using Hall’s (1997) concept of dominant decoding, where the show encoded the meaning of grace, womanly virtue, and elegance through the hairpin, and individuals who associated with Jang-geum reproduced these meanings in themselves. Straubhaar’s (2007) theory illuminates the bridging function of this adoption: by incorporating a Korean aesthetic element into their own appearance, viewers actively construct new cultural proximity between their Sri Lankan identity and the Korean cultural world the drama represents. Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory further explains the observational learning mechanism: Jang-geum functions as an aspirational model whose aesthetic choices viewers reproduce in their own lives.

Example 2: Change in Attire and Style of Dressing

The second dimension within the category of Cultural Lifestyle Adoption entailed change in attitude towards attire and style of dressing. The participants from all three groups revealed that exposure to Sujatha Diyani had an effect on their choice of attire in terms of moving towards clothes which resembled the same aesthetics, color combinations, and silhouette as the traditional attire worn in the Korean dramas (namely, hanbok). Although reproducing such clothing styles was not possible in the local context, participants reported that they had changed aspects of their traditional dressing styles according to elements of the aesthetics of hanbok as seen on screen.

A female participant in Group A (P01, aged 22) described her adaptation process:

“The costumes in Sujatha Diyani are so beautiful, with very vibrant colours and very graceful silhouettes. I cannot wear an actual Korean traditional dress in my daily life here, so I started choosing my saris in similar colours, especially deep reds and golds. I also started paying much more attention to how I draped my sari, trying to achieve a more elegant and dignified look, the way the ladies of the royal court carried themselves in the drama.”

In Group B, a participant (P06, aged 25) described how the drama altered her approach to traditional dress:

“The way the women in Sujatha Diyani dressed and moved gave me a completely different sense of how to carry myself in traditional clothing. I started choosing more formal traditional styles for family events instead of casual modern clothes. I wanted to look more dignified and more refined. The drama changed my whole relationship with how I dress for important occasions.”

A Group C participant (P14, aged 33) described specific purchasing decisions inspired by the drama:

“After watching the drama for some weeks, I went to the fabric market and chose cloth in the same colours the court ladies wore, a rich deep red and a dark emerald green. I had it made into a dress. My friends asked me about the colour choice and I told them it came from Sujatha Diyani. Three of them went and bought similar fabric after that.”

A fourth Group A participant (P03, aged 34) observed that the influence extended to shape community-level fashion trends:

“It was not only me. Many women in my neighbourhood started dressing more carefully and more elegantly after watching Sujatha Diyani. When you went to the fabric market, you could see the influence in how women were choosing their cloth. There was a new preference for certain colours and certain styles that I am sure came from the drama.” Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding framework explains this as dominant decoding: the drama encodes the court ladies' costumes as signifiers of social virtue, cultural refinement, and feminine dignity, and viewers internalise these aesthetic meanings, incorporating them into their own self-presentation. The adaptation of Korean colour preferences to local Sri Lankan garment forms illustrates negotiated decoding: the encoded aesthetic meaning is preserved while its expression is modified to fit local cultural context. Straubhaar's (2007) theory frames this adaptation as active proximity construction through selective aesthetic borrowing across cultural distance.

Example 3: Adoption of Korean Methods of Cooking Food

Another aspect of Cultural Lifestyle Adoption relates to methods of preparing food. As already mentioned, Sujatha Diyani is particularly concerned with Korean cuisine, focusing her story around a female lead character who is a royal chef. The show is filled with numerous scenes of food preparation, which includes not only preparing meals with great accuracy but also using cloths behind one's hand when cutting vegetables in order to protect oneself from cuts. All participants from all three groups reported that they observed these methods in the show and subsequently applied them to their daily food preparation at home due to the skillful method of doing things practiced by Jang-geum.

Participant P01 (age 22), belonging to Group A, narrated the following experience regarding the adoption of this particular method:

"During the drama scene where Jang-geum and the court chefs were making food, there is always a piece of cloth that they would hold behind their hand while cutting the vegetables. It seemed so accurate, so delicate, like as though each motion had meaning and purpose in it. I also started practicing this myself while cooking at home. My husband wondered where did I learn such skillfulness. I told him that I learnt it from Sujatha Diyani. It has now become my second nature while cooking."

Participant P10 (age 29), who belonged to Group B, talked about how this drama altered her whole cooking philosophy:

"The way food was prepared on the show seemed so meticulous, so reverential, and every single element was dealt with such precision and purposeful approach. Inspired by Sujatha Diyani, I began adopting an entirely new cooking philosophy altogether. I became more careful while cutting and handling different food elements. The cloth technique I observed during the drama has become my practice even now, and I also teach this technique to my daughter."

Group C: One of the participants (P12, age 38) framed the adoption as follows: “Learning to cook from Jang-geum helped me realize that preparing meals is not only a task to accomplish but a type of artistic activity and a sign of care. It made me adopt a different attitude to cooking myself. Now I do things in a much more measured, meticulous, and calm manner when preparing food than I used to before. In addition, some of the cooking techniques I practice today have been adopted from the drama. One of them is the technique using a cloth.”

Group A: One of the participants (P03, age 34) viewed the social context of the adoption in terms of sharing knowledge within her family:

“I told my mother and sister about the techniques that Sujatha Diyani uses in the TV drama to cook. Then all of us began to learn those techniques together and even tried implementing the same procedures in the kitchen ourselves.”

This kind of analysis highlights the philosophical and moral involvement in the culinary elements presented by Sujatha Diyani. It can be seen how the participants do not just learn cooking skills but the entire set of values associated with careful and moral food preparation. This phenomenon can be described through the concepts of Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura (2001). Jang-geum becomes the highly credible and inspiring role model whose behavior is perceived together with the values that drive this behavior. According to Stuart Hall (1997), the culinary competence of Jang-geum comes across as a symbol of her overall morality, which viewers encode for their domestic use.

Example 4: Cultivation of Interest in Korean Cuisine

The fourth aspect of Cultural Lifestyle Adoption deals with the formation of genuine interests in Korean cuisine. All participants in all three groups reported being fascinated by Sujatha Diyani and forming an enduring interest in eating Korean cuisine, thus prompting them to explore Korean cuisines at restaurants, cook Korean dishes at home, and for some even purchase specialized Korean ingredients from stores in Colombo. The process of adopting the culinary culture is especially significant because the consumption of food is part and parcel of everyday household life (Cheng, 2023).

A female member in Group A (P04, aged 19) narrated how she developed an interest in Korean cuisine through the drama:

"I was fascinated with the food cooked by Sujatha Diyani. I saw so many types of foods being prepared with such unique skills and care. I started browsing for Korean recipes on the internet and tried preparing those myself. Now, I cook Korean foods frequently and it is loved by my entire family. In fact, my family enjoys Korean food once a week. All of this happened just due to that drama."

An older member in Group B (P09, aged 45) explained how he explored the Korean cuisine following the drama:

"The food in the drama was unique and something I had never seen before in my life. I never imagined Korean food even before I watched this drama. After watching it, I got very interested in Korean cuisine and I started trying Korean foods at any available place. Once I visited a Korean restaurant in Colombo with some of my colleagues who had also watched this drama and we loved the experience. Now, I visit there frequently and try new foods."

A participant from Group C (P12, age 38) highlighted the incorporation of Korean food into their family diet as follows:

"I began making Korean cuisine after watching the series as part of an experiment. However, my family enjoyed it and my children now actually request Korean noodle dishes. It has actually become a part of our weekly menu. Never did I think, prior to Sujatha Diyani, that we would make Korean cuisine part of our family diet!"

The fourth participant from Group A (P03, age 34) further related their culinary learning experience to overall cultural learning facilitated by Sujatha Diyani:

“With the help of Sujatha Diyani, I was able to learn Korean cuisine culture and developed an interest in it. I have started researching Korean cuisine history and making dishes using ingredients purchased from Korean stores. I feel like I have actually learned something about Korean culture through its cuisine.”

The work by Cheng (2023), which outlines how culinary Hallyu is a worldwide phenomenon, is pertinent in this case because the influence of Korean food tastes among the Sri Lankans can be seen as a South Asian example of this observed trend, which has never been analyzed before. This observation can be explained through Hall's (1997) model as dominant decoding because Korean cuisine is decoded by Sujatha Diyani as an entity rich in culture and culinary experience, while those people who like Korean food have accepted such an encoding. From

a Straubhaar (2007) point of view, the act of adopting Korean food tastes is one of the most important examples of cultural proximity because of the nature of food consumption.

Theme 2: Romantic Ideals of Ambition

The second theme revolves around the emergence of romantic ideals of ambition in Sri Lanka among those watching the Boys Over Flowers series. Four sub-themes are included within this broader theme: physical attractiveness of Korean males; appreciation of Korean male fashion style and appearance; romantic relationship ideals; and developing a taste for Korean food as an expression of romance. While the previous theme was more concerned with pragmatic and domestic lifestyle changes, the current one revolves around romantic ideals of imagination and aspiration.

From Hall's (1997) perspective, Theme 2 reflects a more complex combination of dominant and negotiated decoding positions. Participants predominantly accept the romantic ideals encoded in Boys Over Flowers but simultaneously engage in critical negotiation of more problematic encoded messages, particularly the male lead's possessive and controlling behaviour. This combination of aspiration and critique is the hallmark of the active audience that Hall's model theorises. From Straubhaar's (2007) perspective, the romantic aspirations of Theme 2 represent aspirational cultural proximity: a desire to approach a romanticised cultural world that is recognised as partially distant from Sri Lankan everyday reality but is nonetheless compelling and desirable.

Example 1: Attractions to Physique of Korean Men in Boys Over Flowers

In the context of ideal romantic aspirations, one of the more commonly talked about dimensions was women's attraction to the physicality of the boys featured in Boys Over Flowers. Participants from all three categories expressed attraction toward the physiques of the boys and specifically identified certain attributes that were particularly appealing to them, which included extremely clean and well-groomed skin, a delicate facial structure, a slim yet muscular build, and an overall appearance that indicated high maintenance.

One participant in Group A (P01, 22 years old) went into great details about her personal experience:

“I was watching Boys Over Flowers, and then I began noticing Korean boys in a totally new manner. Everything about them, from how they look to how well they take care of themselves – how they take care of their appearance, skin, and everything else – looks very calculated and extremely appealing. The males who featured in this drama are attractive in such a unique way, unlike anything I have seen anywhere around me before. This led me to become very intrigued with Korean boys.”

Participant P06 from Group B (aged 25) related her appreciation for aesthetics to the drama's aesthetically pleasing visuals:

“Boys Over Flowers is very beautiful in its visual appearance. The male characters are very handsome and they are shot in a manner that makes them look almost like art pieces. Their skin is very flawless and well-defined. Having watched the drama regularly, I actually started to find Korean boys attractive. This drama has created an ideal of male beauty in my head.”

As mentioned above, the participants in Group C also had insights into how the program affected their aesthetics. P08, aged 23, commented on her changed perceptions regarding her preferences:

“Before Boys Over Flowers, I didn't give much thought to Korean boys. After seeing the series, I became aware of Korean celebrities and Korean individuals in general. I find their appearances really attractive. Boys Over Flowers helped me change my perspective regarding attractiveness in people, especially men.”

The social aspect of such an aesthetic orientation was pointed out by a fourth participant from Group B (P10, aged 29):

“My female friends who also watched Boys Over Flowers frequently discuss the handsome Korean males in the show. We exchange opinions about how good-looking certain characters are, discuss who we consider the most handsome among them, and try to find similar-looking Korean actors and K-pop stars online.”

According to Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding model, the reason for these changes is dominant decoding, where the aesthetic ideals encoded in Boys Over Flowers are accepted by women who practice dominant decoding as standards of masculinity. From this perspective, Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998) adds a layer of insight into why this happens: constant exposure to one kind of attractive men shapes the viewers' view of what is physically beautiful even outside the media consumption experience. Straubhaar's (2007) theory calls this aspirational proximity, referring to the viewers' desire to reach a certain level of aesthetic ideals considered culturally desirable but not socially available yet.

Example 2: Admiration of Stylishness of Males in Korean Dramas

In addition to the aesthetic appeal of the actors, there were other attributes about the males in Boys Over Flowers that made them attractive to the participants. One of these attributes was the fashion style of the males in Boys Over Flowers, which the participants described as stylish and well co-ordinated. Participants explained how their awareness of the men's fashion style influenced not only themselves but also members of their peer group in their personal dressing styles and grooming practices.

Another member of Group A, a lady aged 19 years, explained how she was inspired by the style of dressing of the male actors in the series:

“Boys Over Flowers had all the boys in the show perfectly dressed up. The way their clothes were always coordinated looked beautiful and made them look elegant. After watching the drama, I became very conscious about fashion and even began hoping that the boys around me would pay a little bit of attention to the way they dress up.”

Participant P07, aged 31 in Group B, shared his thoughts on how the drama changed him:

“I used to watch Boys Over Flowers along with my friends, who often pointed out how perfectly groomed all the male leads were. From thereon, I began to take a great deal of interest in grooming myself. I began looking after my skin, my hair, my clothes. I made sure I did everything right, just like all those perfect men from Korea that we saw in the series.”

Group C included a participant (P13) who was 26 years old, and he gave an example on how the Korean drama expanded his interests in Korean fashion:

“After seeing the Boys Over Flowers drama, I became more interested in Korean fashion in general and not necessarily the fashion in the drama only. Now I follow Korean fashion through social media. Initially, it was the fashion of the male characters in the drama that piqued my curiosity, and now I am aware of Korean fashion styles, and I have shared this interest with friends.”

The fourth participant in Group A (P01, 22 years old) noted that this drama led to changes in male grooming standards within her social context:

“I think Boys Over Flowers has altered perceptions of what constitutes a good presentation of oneself for many young people in my community. The Korean males depicted in the drama series are quite distinct from the typical image of a man here. However, I am seeing an increasing trend among young men of imitating that appearance by grooming themselves in a manner closer to those in the drama and K-pop world.”

Hall's (1997) framework explains these fashion and grooming influences as dominant decoding: Boys Over Flowers encodes Korean male fashion and grooming as signifiers of social sophistication, romantic desirability, and personal refinement, and viewers who identify with the characters internalise these aesthetic standards. Straubhaar's (2007) cultural proximity theory illuminates how aspiration toward Korean male fashion represents

a desire to close the distance between Sri Lankan and Korean youth aesthetic culture through personal lifestyle modification (Jin, 2016).

Example 3: The Construction of Ideal Relationships

Apart from aesthetics, individuals belonging to all three groups have shared with the researcher how *Boys Over Flowers* helped construct their ideal notions regarding romantic relationships. As noted before, the passionate and intense romantic plot of this series, with its many emotional conflicts, dramatic misunderstanding, large gestures of love, and final victory of passion over social constraints, was able to evoke strong emotions among viewers, thereby influencing the idealistic notions about their own romantic relationships. Individuals have expressed how this drama series heightened their expectations for romance and passion, despite knowing well that the story is fictitious, along with expressing concerns about particular traits of the male lead, as explained by Hall (1997).

The female participant of Group A (Participant No. 04, 19 years old) discussed the feelings elicited by the romantic story of *Boys Over Flowers* in her personal life:

"I have started thinking differently about love after watching *Boys Over Flowers*. Love depicted by the actors in such an intense manner was very appealing to me. I know for sure that real life is not like a soap opera. However, it has left a mark in my subconsciousness on how love should be. It makes me yearn for such feelings."

This was the statement by one of the participants in Group B (P10, age 29):

"The *Boys Over Flowers* series made me reflect deeply on my personal wants and needs from a romantic relationship. The love story in it is extremely touching and beautiful. At the same time, I observed that there are certain behaviors of the male character in the drama that I do not find appealing such as his behavior of controlling the woman, being possessive, stalking, etc. I appreciate the love story; however, at the same time, I contemplate on which parts I want for myself."

An example of the aspirational component of a romance relationship was provided by a participant in Group C (P08, aged 23):

"The love story in *Boys Over Flowers* is extremely romantic and idealised. It set high expectations regarding passionate relationships, emotional attachment, and a person prepared to do everything for you. However, the level of expectations cannot be reached in real life, but the drama still encourages people to believe in achieving those expectations at least partially."

The following comment reflects the influence of collective viewing on the aspirations associated with romantic relationships. This opinion was provided by a participant in Group A (P01, aged 22):

"My friends and I used to watch *Boys Over Flowers* collectively and discuss the romantic relationships presented there extensively. All of us thought that the love story was exceptionally beautiful and emotionally touching. Collectively, we had formed an image of a romantic relationship that should be like that. We all admitted that the story is fictional and exaggerated; however, it still influenced our own relationship expectations and desires."

In Hall's (1997) theory, the dominant dimension is the encoding and internalization of passionate love and expressiveness as the ideal romantic experience. The criticism of male possessiveness can be described as negotiated decoding, where the whole idea of an ideal romance is accepted, but the behaviors encoded in it are assessed and selected. As noted by Morley (1992), this combination of acceptance and critique is the hallmark of active audience participation. Moreover, according to Gerbner (1998), his Cultivation Theory implies that repeated consumption of idealized romance could create the audiences' broader ideals of love relations.

Example 4: Love for Korean Food as Romantic Aspiration

The fourth dimension of Aspirational Romantic Ideals concerns the development of Korean food preferences intertwined with romantic aspiration. Unlike the Korean culinary preferences documented in Theme 1, which

were motivated by the drama's depiction of culinary skill and cultural depth, the Korean food preferences generated by *Boys Over Flowers* are primarily aspirational and romantic in character. Korean food is associated in participants' minds with the attractive male characters who consume it, the romantic settings in which it appears in the narrative, and the glamorous, emotionally intense world of the drama as a whole. Eating Korean food becomes a material act of aspiration: a way of connecting with the romantic cultural world of *Boys Over Flowers* in everyday life.

One female member of Group A (P01, 22 years old) explained her romantic connection to this type of food:

"After seeing *Boys Over Flowers*, I had a big interest in Korean cuisine. However, this is not only due to the fact that the dishes looked very appetizing. This is also related to the fact that the main characters would enjoy their Korean cuisine in the most romantic conditions – when there were romantic scenes happening, in beautiful restaurants, etc., making it a significant element of the film. Korean cuisine got associated with the romantic universe from this movie in my head, and I wanted to feel it for myself."

Participant number P06 from Group B who was aged 25 shared an example of using Korean food in her own experience:

"After watching *Boys Over Flowers*, I have taken to cooking Korean food all the time. My boyfriend and I even cook Korean food sometimes and it is like bringing a bit of that world into our life. This is how I get close to the emotions that this drama gave me and make it an essential part of my life."

Participant P08 aged 23 from Group C shared her example of integrating Korean food into her lifestyle:

"I developed a passion for Korean cuisine after watching *Boys Over Flowers*. From then on, I started exploring every Korean food option possible – from eating in a restaurant to cooking by myself to searching for recipes. At this point, Korean cuisine has become a part of my life as my general love for Korean culture started from this drama and its romantic story."

The fourth participant of Group A (P04, 19 years old) discussed the social media aspect of the same desire:

"I was influenced by the *Boys Over Flowers* TV drama to follow Korean food trends on social media. We post pictures of Korean foods we prepare ourselves or we eat in restaurants, and because our friends also watched the same TV show, we post similar pictures of Korean foods too. It has now become a medium through which we can keep and pass along the Korean culture of *Boys Over Flowers* TV drama."

Culinary Hallyu documented by Cheng (2023) is pertinent in this case. The formation of food preferences for Korean cuisine amongst those who watch *Boys Over Flowers* is a case of South Asia that fits into the pattern described. According to Hall (1997), this can be described as the dominant decoding of the romantic and aspirational meanings that are encoded in the food scenes of the drama. Straubhaar's (2007) theoretical framework helps us understand the aspirational proximity function: Korean food serves as the means of creating proximity to the romanticized world of *Boys Over Flowers* (Appadurai, 1996).

Theme 3: Negotiation and Hybridization of Cultural Identity

The third and most theoretically complex theme came about because of participants' discussions on how a long-term, multigenerational involvement with foreign dramas dubbed in Sinhala from Oshin to current Korean series has led to the process of constructing and negotiating their cultural identities. Participants in all three focus group sessions spoke of having experienced an enhanced sense of their cultural identity where they were able to see themselves as not only Sri Lankan but also, to varying degrees, members of Japanese and Korean cultures because of the dubbed dramas. Four sub-dimensions underlie this theme: intergenerational continuity of identity via Oshin; selective self-identity in relation to cultural values of East Asia; cultural negotiation; and cultural hybridization.

The theoretical significance of this theme lies in its relationship with the concepts of cultural identity and hybridity. Specifically, this theme explores Hall's theory of cultural identity as a constant process of constructing

identities through representations (1990, 1997), and Kraidy's theory of hybridity as the result of transcultural engagement in media consumption (2005). Furthermore, the theme elaborates on Straubhaar's theory of cultural proximity (2007) by showing how cultural proximity can be created through media consumption, rather than being an attribute of cultures determined beforehand. Moreover, the intergenerational nature of this theme, which involves multigenerational reception of Oshin, provides an innovative insight into the study of Korean drama reception, which is overlooked in the current literature (Morley, 1986; Appadurai, 1996).

Example 1: Intergenerational Identity Continuity Through Oshin

One of the most historically and theoretically unique aspects of Theme 3 is the significance of the contribution of Oshin to developing an intergenerational basis for constructing cultural identity through foreign drama that was dubbed into Sinhalese language. Several participants, especially those from older age groups and whose parents and grandparents had seen Oshin on television, indicated that this Japanese drama had become a model that influenced how they would be able to identify with the characters in later Korean dramas. They viewed the Oshin experience not as one solely limited to themselves but to the entire family, and some of them explicitly related their ability to connect with Jang-geum of *Sujatha Diyani* to what they had learned culturally through the Oshin experience.

Participant P03 of Group A (female, 34 years old) described an example of this continuity between generations as follows:

“We were brought up watching Oshin with our parents. Since we were young, we were able to grasp the concept behind the struggle that a person undergoes with honor and respect, in order to overcome it in the world of this drama. When we began watching *Sujatha Diyani*, we knew that this was exactly what Jang-geum had. Oshin taught us to appreciate and sympathize with such people.”

One of the members of Group B (P07, aged 31) reflected on how this openness was passed down through generations:

"My mother would always speak of Oshin as if she actually knew someone called Oshin because she was so influenced by the drama. The drama had really colored her perception of life and what she cherished and appreciated about life. When I began watching *Sujatha Diyani*, I could relate to the fact that the foreign drama, translated into Sinhala, could become your story too."

The following extract from P09 (a member of Group C), who is aged 45, talks about the personal relevance of Oshin through his various life stages:

"I have watched Oshin during my childhood, then my youth days, and finally when Oshin was broadcast once again with my own kids. The relevance of the movie has been different at every point as I was at different phases of my life. Yet it was very meaningful to me throughout. As I see *Sujatha Diyani* today, everything about Oshin flashes back before me. It is part of how I interpret the stories of perseverance and struggle."

One of the participants from group B (P10, age 29) expressed Oshin as belonging to the common cultural heritage of her community:

"Everyone in my parents' generation has watched Oshin. This is one of those experiences that belong to the common cultural heritage of Sri Lankans, although it is a story of a Japanese. Every time we talk about it, we do so as if it is ours; we do not consider it to be a foreign product. Similarly, the watching of *Sujatha Diyani* and *Boys Over Flowers* is creating the same experience for our generation."

This vividly proves the theoretical significance of the role of Oshin in being the multigenerational base for dubbed drama culture of Sri Lanka, as well as that media-driven cultural identity construction is a process, not an event. It provides a clear illumination of the idea proposed by Hall (1990), according to which the notion of cultural identity is constructed through representation and storytelling. In doing so, families of Sri Lanka have become a part of Japanese cultural narrative through their own storytelling about Oshin, thus paving way to further reception of Korean dramas in the future. The theory of Morley (1986) provides the basis for the

explanation: watching domestic television programming is part of the family process and generational dialogue, and the meaning-making that audiences make of their TV shows is formed on the basis of collective TV watching experiences that have been passed down from parents to offspring. The Straubhaar (2007) theory is elaborated by this research: cultural proximity to stories of East Asian dramas in Sri Lanka involves more than just a cultural affinity; rather, it is the result of many years of family involvement with Oshin.

Example 2: Selective Identification with Cultural Values from East Asia

The other dimension that falls under the category of Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation is the selective identification with the cultural values from East Asia learned by means of dubbed dramas. In their statements, the participants from all three groups have expressed their understanding and appreciation of certain cultural values in Oshin, Sujatha Diyani, and Boys Over Flowers, such as the values of resilience and patience embodied by characters Oshin and Jang-geum, the values of hierarchy and loyalty to the family as portrayed in both the Japanese and Korean court dramas, the importance of personal perfection and skills, and emotional expression in Korean romance. At the same time, they retain their sense of Sri Lankan culture.

A participant male belonging to Group C (P13, aged 26) explained his connection with the values depicted in the dramas as follows:

“Growing up watching Oshin as a kid and later Sujatha Diyani as an adult, I have seen the commonality in values reflected in both: the value that one works hard, never gives up, stays dignified even in the toughest situations and finally succeeds through perseverance. It is something that resonates within me personally as well because they are the values that I have learned from my Sri Lankan culture too. By watching these dramas, I have felt reaffirmed by these values and felt them to be not only Sri Lankan values but universal values that are respected even in Japan and Korea.”

A female member of Group A (P01; age: 22) explained how she felt an affinity for Korean values of individual refinement:

"By observing Sujatha Diyani, I realized that I liked the Korean value of doing everything carefully, carefully, respectfully whether while cooking or dressing or while addressing one's elders. I tried to inculcate the same in me as well. I think I took a little bit of Korean culture to adopt as a part of myself. This has become a part of my identity although I'm Sri Lankan."

In Group B, one participant (P06, 25 years old) explained the impact Boys Over Flowers had on her understanding of Korean values regarding emotional expressiveness:

"Boys Over Flowers displayed a level of emotional expressiveness in a romance that I did not see much before. They actually said what they felt, acted on their feelings rather than suppressing it all. I personally found that very attractive and I have noticed myself being more open with expressing my own feelings due to that. It seems to be a real change in me because of Korean drama."

The second example comes from a participant in Group C (P11; age 21) and represents an understanding of value identification that was more sophisticated and nuanced:

"I think having watched all these Japanese and Korean dramas has broadened my horizons in terms of what is possible culturally, what values one can have, what societies hold dear. This has enhanced my cultural identity as a Sri Lankan even more, while at the same time making it part of something broader. I know myself as a Sri Lankan, but I also realize that there is Japanese and Korean culture in me as well, which I have taken in over the years from watching all these dramas."

This kind of selective cultural value identification can be explained in terms of productive cultural reception, wherein people who feel identified with the cultural characters like Oshin and Jang-geum are actually engaging in what Hall refers to as an identification through representation, whereby aspects of their cultural values become integrated with the identity construction of themselves. This process is not one of complete assimilation or superficial appreciation but rather a hybrid process, which involves the productive creation of a new cultural

identity through the adoption of some East Asian cultural values within the framework of the original Sri Lankan culture (Hall, 1997; Kraidy, 2005). The mechanism underlying this selection of values has been proposed by Straubhaar (2007), and is based on the fact that people tend to use values that are partly proximate to theirs.

Example 3: Negotiation of Cultural Belonging and Difference

The third issue related to Cultural Identity Negotiation is the ongoing negotiation of cultural belonging and difference which participants reported themselves as navigating as a result of their intense relationship with dubbed foreign dramas. It seems that participants identified a feeling of cultural belonging that went beyond just Sri Lankan culture and incorporated elements of Japanese and Korean cultures too, whilst at the same time holding on strongly to their Sri Lankan identity. This did not create any confusion within them; rather, it enriched their identity as opposed to making them confused. In addition to this, they were also aware of certain cultural differences that existed between them and the other cultures they were watching, which they were able to negotiate very well, according to Hall (1997).

Another female member from Group A (P04, age 19) gave her account of her dual cultural identity quite effectively.

“I feel like a Sri Lankan very strongly indeed. That’s my base, my foundation, and that’s never going to change. However, by watching such people as Sujatha Diyani and Boys Over Flowers, I have found a part of myself to belong to Korean culture too, not completely, not like a full-blown Korean does, but in some genuine capacity; I’ve got to know something of Korean values, Korean cuisine, Korean style. That is a part of myself now too, in a sense.”

Participant P09 from Group B (45 years old) narrated his experience related to his generation as follows:

“[Our] generation grew up watching the Japanese cartoon called Oshin, which gave us a sense of being connected to Japan. [My children’s] generation is growing up watching Korean TV shows, which is building their sense of connection to Korea. We are Sri Lankans and we are all carrying our cultural baggage inside us through the different stages in our lives. I think this sort of cultural baggage of ours because of these dubbed drama series that we have been exposed to as a nation makes us more open-minded and understanding of the world.”

One of the participants from group C (P14; age 33) identified the crucial aspect of her cultural negotiation and explained the boundaries she set for herself:

“I appreciate quite a lot about the Korean culture via the Korean dramas. I’ve taken quite a few things from the Korean culture. However, at the same time, I am very sure about the things that I won’t be taking from the Korean culture and what won’t work for me as a Sri Lankan woman. For instance, certain gender roles that we see in Boys Over Flowers, where a man is chasing after a woman, following her, or controlling her without her consent, they don’t really appeal to me at all. I can watch it, but reject these particular aspects of it.”

One of the participants from Group B, P07 (aged 31), discussed his thoughts on the influence that dubbing foreign dramas had on his perspective of cultural identity:

"The viewing of Oshin followed by K-Dramas has changed my perception regarding cultural identity. I used to see myself as culturally Sri Lankan only. But now I feel that my culture is more of Sri Lanka with actual relations between the Sri Lankan culture and Japanese culture through Oshin and the Korean culture by the K-Dramas. The impact of the experiences has really affected the way I perceive life. Cultural identity is something that evolves through experience."

The above examples illustrate that the cultural identity construction process of the Sri Lankan audience is one that is sophisticated and self-conscious, which is neither a process of passively assimilating culture nor one of actively resisting cultural influences but instead a conscious cultural self-construction process. The identity construction process proposed by Hall (1997), whereby identity is a process of production and is achieved not as an essential entity but through representation and lived experiences, is clearly seen in the following cases. The critical component of the participant from Group C, whereby Korean gender norms are actively resisted but

other aspects of Korean culture are accepted, exemplifies the decoding mode identified by Hall (1997) and Morley (1992).

Example 4: Everyday Hybridisation through Self-Expression and Social Engagement

A final dimension that is important to mention in relation to the Cultural Identity Negotiation and Hybridisation theme is everyday hybridisation. The fourth aspect of this theme involves the practice of cultural hybridisation carried out by the research participants within the context of their everyday social interactions as a result of viewing dubbed dramas from other cultures. The participants spoke of creating hybrid cultural spaces for themselves within their daily lives, such as houses where Korean food coexists with Sri Lankan food, social conversations where references are made to both Sri Lankan culture and Korean culture, personal styles which combine elements of Sri Lankan and East Asian cultures, and friendships formed partly on the basis of viewing dubbed dramas.

The female participant P03, age 34, in Group A elaborates on the hybrid nature of her home's culture:

"Ours is an absolutely hybrid home when it comes to culture. Not only do we cook both Korean food and traditional Sri Lankan food, but we even have a picture of the Korean actress Jang-geum along with our traditional Sri Lankan artwork. The traditional Sri Lankan sari worn by my mother is adorned with hairpins typical of Korea. Korean drama characters are discussed by us just as we talk about Sri Lankan characters; nothing seems awkward or unnatural."

For Group B, one of the participants (P06, aged 25) spoke about the hybrid culture created through viewing dubbed dramas in their group of friends:

"Within my group of friends that watch dubbed foreign dramas together, we have a culture which is truly hybrid. We enjoy cooking both Korean dishes as well as Sri Lankan dishes. We mention characters from Oshin, Sujatha Diyani as well as Boys Over Flowers in the same conversation. We have an appreciation of the culture of Korea, while at the same time having celebrations of Sri Lankan culture."

One of the participants from Group C (P13, 26 years old) identified his personal aesthetics as a deliberate hybrid identity:

"My personal aesthetic is really a fusion of Sri Lankan and Korean elements. My clothes have an appearance which fuses those elements, which I have learned through watching Korean dramas and my own Sri Lankan sense of aesthetics. I groom myself taking cues from what I see in Korean drama. I cook and eat food that includes both Korean and Sri Lankan cuisine. The fusion was not a conscious decision that I made on purpose; rather, it has just happened over time as I watched dubbed Korean dramas and found elements to incorporate into my life."

One member of Group B (P09, aged 45) explained how intergenerational hybrid culture in his family helps him gain a positive sense of social identity as follows:

"We take pride in our Sri Lankan culture as well as in having developed relations with Japanese culture via Oshin and with Korean culture via Sujatha Diyani and Boys Over Flowers. This has become a part of our family heritage. My kids are equally familiar with Oshin and Jang-geum as they are with Sri Lankan characters. It is a part of our family culture and social identity. I think it makes us better people."

This idea of hybridity as the cultural logic of globalization finds direct instantiation in these descriptions: the hybrid practices of culture practiced by the respondents are neither cultural imperialism nor resistance to cultural imperialism, but rather an act of creativity that mixes together elements of local and global cultures in order to produce new hybrid cultural forms that become real expressions of postcolonial identities in the contemporary globalized media environment. Mediascapes, as conceptualized by Appadurai (1996), provides insight into how these worlds of imagination created through dubbed foreign dramas such as Oshin, Sujatha Diyani, and Boys Over Flowers have contributed to creating the resources that are used by Sri Lankan audiences to develop hybrid identities that are both local and global in nature. Hall's ideas about the role of hybrid cultural practices in

producing identity provide insight into how these acts do not constitute a loss of one's Sri Lankan identity, but rather its creative transformation.

Fostering Credibility and Rigor in Analysis

In order to increase the credibility and rigor of the research, various methods that are widely used in qualitative research were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, the prolonged engagement with the data involved re-reading the focus group transcripts while analyzing them by applying codes. This helped to identify patterns and become familiar with the views expressed by the participants.

Secondly, an iterative approach to thematic coding was used. The initial codes were identified based on the participants' stories, and then these codes were compared again and again until the analytical themes were formed. Third, peer debriefing was used in the analysis process. Preliminary interpretations of themes were presented to peers who had knowledge of qualitative research methodology in order to critique researcher bias and enhance interpretive consistency. Fourth, theory triangulation was used to enhance analytical interpretation. Findings were analyzed using three different theoretical approaches: Hall's Encoding/Decoding Theory (Hall, 1980), Cultural Proximity Theory (Straubhaar, 2007), and Cultural Hybridity Theory (Bhabha, 1994). Finally, reflexive processes were employed in the research process in order to critique how researcher assumptions would affect the interpretation of the data collected from participants. Even though the subjects associated their adoption of certain behavioral changes due to the influence of Korean dramas, it is vital to note that these behaviors might also be impacted by the larger process of globalization. In particular, such social phenomena as social networking sites, celebrity culture, digital platforms for viewing media content, fashion industries around the globe, and fan culture online have been increasingly exposing people to various products of Korean culture through means other than Korean TV dramas. (Jin, D. Y, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The current research attempted to explore the relationship between the way in which Sri Lankans consume and interpret the Sinhala dubbed foreign drama shows in relation to adopting a particular cultural lifestyle, forming a romantic ideal, and negotiating culture as well as hybridity. In order to do so, 15 interviewees were recruited for semi-structured interviews based on three focus groups and using the concepts developed in the theories of Encoding/Decoding and Cultural Proximity put forth by Hall (1973, 1997) and Straubhaar (2007), respectively. Results gathered from the current participants indicate that Korean dramas might impact some lifestyle behaviors, cultural beliefs, and relationship expectations of the Sri Lankan audience who watch dubbed television dramas on a regular basis.

Sujatha Diyani also results in the adoption of Cultural Lifestyle, which is extensive and continuous. The subjects in the study started wearing the Korean hairstyle and hair pins that are worn by the main character in the drama, changed their clothes preferences to adopt Korean style, and began using some methods of cooking like the cloth-protected cutting method used in the Korean drama. They also developed a lasting liking for the Korean food cuisine.

The second significant finding relates to how Boys Over Flowers creates strong Aspirational Romantic Ideals. Participants have formed their desires for the aesthetics of Korean males, interest in their style of dressing and grooming, expectations of passionate feelings from romantic love, and Korean cuisine as a signifier of their romantic aspirations. The ideals are not only actively negotiated but also admired by the participants who engage themselves in the practice of negotiated and oppositional decoding, which Hall (1997) describes as key characteristics of an active audience response.

The third main finding, and one that may be considered the primary theoretical contribution of this study, is that consistent and long-term exposure to foreign dramas dubbed into Sinhala language from Oshin till the recent Korean series enables a process of continued hybridization of cultural identities in the context of Sri Lanka. The expanded cultural self of the participants was described as a dual and non-oppositional identity that is both Sri Lankan, as well as associated with Japanese and Korean cultures due to decades of consumption of dubbed TV drama content. Hybridity in this case was found to be an active, selective, and critical phenomenon, as the

subjects chose elements of other cultures to absorb into their identity, negotiated the aspects of difference to retain, and actively performed hybridity by consuming food, dressing, aesthetic tastes, and social relations.

The significance of Oshin in being the historical and cultural background of all these three phenomena is set out as a result of independent theoretical relevance. The multi-generational audience of Oshin, consisting of grandparents, parents, and children living together under one roof in Sri Lankan families for over three decades, has developed certain cultural attitudes, identity structures, and social conventions which help to understand the depth of reception of Korean dramas in Sri Lanka. Without Oshin, the history of reception of Korean dramas in Sri Lanka would be incomplete.

As for limitations, while the current investigation has adopted a qualitative approach, together with a purposive sampling method that involved 15 participants, this provides opportunities for analytical insight but does not justify any generalisability statements. This study offers theoretical transferability rather than generalisability to the population (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Future studies should involve a greater number of subjects from different areas and socio-demographic backgrounds, for instance, rural populations and senior citizens; should carry out long-term analyses in order to examine cultural impacts on lifestyle; should examine the Oshin phenomenon itself through separate qualitative studies; and, finally, should engage in comparative studies within other South Asian national settings.

Thus, Sinhala dubbed drama series such as Oshin, Sujatha Diyani, and Boys Over Flowers are far more than simply imports. They are cultural forces that alter people's everyday routines, expectations in love, and understanding of themselves culturally in a deep, durable, and social manner. Their cultural effect is not in removing the Sri Lankan identity but rather in expanding it. They create hybrid cultural identities that, in addition to being part of the Sri Lankan cultural landscape, are able to connect to the Japanese and Korean cultural spheres made possible through Sinhala dubbing.

Ethical Considerations

The study has been conducted based on the acceptable ethical standards required in the humanities and social sciences research. All the participants were appraised of the purpose of the study, voluntary participation in the research, and the right to withdraw from the research anytime. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured through the whole process of research. There was no collection or disclosure of any personally identifying information in the presentation of the results.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was gained from all participants before conducting the discussion.

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