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# The comparison of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas

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The comparison of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas

I. Introduction

In this modern society, television is an indispensable entertainment to moderns. According to the research, sixty percent office workers like to watch television after work. And among all television programs, operas are the most popular ones, especially those from Taiwan, Korea and Japan (Zhang, 2010).

In Taiwan, owing to the enforcement of “Speaking Chinese” (國語運動), in 1940s, Taiwanese was banned in Taiwan. Students at the time lost the environment to learn Taiwanese, so they didn’t have the ability to understand the local language. It was not until in 1990, when the first Taiwanese soap opera was screened at Taiwan Television did people start to pay attention to the local sense. Now, local senses are stronger than before. Viewers are affected by local senses and they begin to spend most of their time watching Taiwanese soap operas. As the roles in Taiwanese soap operas are normally stereotyped and their plots are much closer to the real life, these soap operas are liked by audiences.

These years, Korean soap operas invade Taiwanese television system. From the first Korean soap opera “Only Stranger” (只愛陌生人) to hundreds of Korean soap operas screened, Korean soap operas have attracted a great number of people, not only teenagers, but also many housekeepers and office workers. The reasons of their popularity are not only because of the complicated plots but also the leading actors or actresses. Korean actors and actresses are usually good-looking and they normally have high educational background. Therefore, lots of people like to watch Korean soap operas, just to see their idols on the screen. The most outstanding feature of Korean soap operas is that the plots are normally condensed. Compared to Taiwanese soap operas, a play of Korean soap opera was played at most for twenty to thirty episodes, while the Taiwanese ones may go up to hundreds. The plots are so compact that the audiences want to watch them on time because they don’t want to miss the highlight.

Now, the Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas are highly competitive, but they still have their proponents respectively. Although their viewers are sometimes overlapping, the broadcast ratings for both of them are still very high. For this phenomenon, we all want to know the reason for this. Therefore, we are motivated to do the study about it. We are eager to know the secrets about these two operas and the views of people on Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas.
These two kinds of operas are so different from each other, but they both attracted their own fans. The purposes of the study are to research the origin of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas, the differences between two, the reasons for their popularity in Taiwanese society, and the influence of them on the society.

In this report, we are taking you into the world of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas, trying to find out the answers to the following questions:
1. What’s the origin of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas?
2. What’s the difference of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas?
3. What are the views of people on Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas?

II. Thesis

A. The origins

1. The Taiwanese soap operas

Taiwanese soap operas originally referred to the local operas of the village or countryside. Tea picking, rice growing or wine making are normally the background of the play.

The first Taiwanese soap opera screened on Chinese Television system on December, 11, 1990. It was called “Love” (愛). This opera has a total of 68 episodes. It was the first opera which spoke Taiwanese and had two languages (Taiwanese and Chinese). It described the story between Taiwanese and mainlanders in 1940s. Although misunderstandings and disputes occurred because of the difference of languages, the human love finally mediated the enmity. This opera can be the pioneer of Taiwanese soap operas.

However, as time went by, the background and the theme of the Taiwanese soap opera has been changed. The past Taiwanese soap operas usually described the country life. Rural and veteran village are normally the background. Further, the stories were usually adapted from classical historical stories or novels. However, the present Taiwanese soap operas are totally different. For example, there’s usually a battle between businesses and families. Although the ending is always that justice defeats the evil, the overall contents seem to convey the wrong concepts of life. In order to raise the ratings, commercial television stations usually exaggerate or trump
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up the truth. They dropped off the qualities of these operas so as to gain more ratings.

2. The Korean soap operas

Japanese soap operas influenced the early style of Korean soap operas, but Korean soap operas late developed their own distinguishing features.

The first Korean soap operas screened on Chinese Television system on September 20, 1999. It was called “Only Stranger” (只愛陌生人). This opera was about three women who are with different work and social positions had different attitudes toward love. The opera reflects the men and women in the society. This opera showed people how to face the oncoming marriage in the modern society.

The beginning of the Korean soap operas in Taiwan was not largely accepted by viewers. In the past, the names of the Korean soap operas were translated to be more dramatic. But now their names are usually translated to show their own distinguishing features, and tend to be adapted from novels and comic books. The content is mostly about the family, polygon love and daily life.

B. The difference between Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas.

1. Features of characters

The vivid personalities of the main characters have their own styles in the Taiwanese soap operas. In addition, the villains even draw more viewers’ attention. Because the Taiwanese plays are usually written by the male screenwriters, female characters are usually described as traditional from the men’s point of views even if the status of males and females are becoming equal. In the Taiwanese soap opera, you may probably see a highly educated married woman sacrificed her lucrative job for her family.

Based on our research, there are some features about the characters of Taiwanese soap operas:
1. The male characters are usually forgiven if they rectify a fault, and their mistakes all can be condone.
2. The female characters’ positions are usually lower than male characters’.
3. The villain characters are indispensable in the Taiwanese soap operas. Their
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appearance can make the protagonist prominent.

4. To cater to viewers, the villain usually becomes the good man or dies miserably.

The Korean soap operas in recent years boldly let new actors featuring in new operas. Because protagonists in the opera are beautiful, handsome in appearances and they are natural actors, they deeply impress the Taiwanese audience. This is why the Korean soap operas become so popular in Taiwan.

The followings are some features about the characters of Korean soap operas:
1. The protagonists’ role usually includes high school students, workers, historical figures or poor girls.
2. Most of the main actors are the second generation of the rich and they are handsome and smart.
3. The actresses in the plot are normally beautiful.

2. Plot

Taiwanese soap operas are closely related to our life, especially for middle-aged people and elders. Giving first place to recent social conduct, the plots are easy to understand, and there aren’t any puzzles that you need to solve. As mentioned, as the Taiwanese soap operas are usually extended or prolonged for many episodes, the audience can normally easily guess the ending of story without following it for days.

On the contrary, contents of Korean soap operas are condensed. The play can be displayed in a few months. So, the story can tightly hold audience’s heart. The cost of the production of Korean soap operas is quite high; for instance, the teleplay group of “Full House” (浪漫滿屋) built a full house (浪漫滿屋) for the show. The cost of the Full House is as much as the cost of producing a Taiwanese soap opera. Thus, it can be seen how South Korea Television Production Company emphasizes the quality of their opera.

3. Group of audience

According to our observation and research, the age of audience watching Taiwanese soap operas are from 40 to 65. However, the exaggerated plots also attract many young people whose age is between 20 and 30. On the other hand, the Korean soap operas appeal to the people aged between 18 and 35. Nevertheless, if the play is based on the history or with the historical background, more adults will be
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attracted to watch them.

C. The results of questionnaire

In order to understand the views of the public, we designed a questionnaire to investigate people’s views on soap operas. We made 200 questionnaires and below are our results.

![Figure 1 percentage of people watching Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas](image1.png)

According to figure 1, among all participants, there are about 66% of people who are used to watch Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas, and there are still about 34% of people who aren’t used to watch Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas. It can be seen there’s a great number of people who watch soap operas.

![Figure 2 The population of viewers](image2.png)

Further, among these people, we found that 57% of people preferred to watch Korean soap operas, while 43% of people preferred to watch Taiwanese soap operas. (see figure 2) It shows that Korean soap operas are somehow more popular than Taiwanese soap operas now. Because of the promotion of Korean government, they
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![Bar chart showing reasons why Taiwanese soap operas become popular](image1)

**Figure 3** The reasons why Taiwanese soap operas become popular (multiple choices)

![Bar chart showing reasons why Korean soap operas become popular](image2)

**Figure 4** The reasons why Korean soap operas become popular (multiple choices)

In our questionnaires, the second part was designed to understand why Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas are so popular. According to the Figure 3, we can see that a majority of people (80%) watch Taiwanese soap operas to kill time because they want to relax after working all day. According to the Figure 4, we find that most people (93%) watch Korean soap operas for the reason to learn Korean cultures.

In our questionnaires, the participants were asked to vote the most impressive operas. For Taiwanese soap operas, the “Night Market Life” (夜市人生) and “Parents’ Hearts” (天下父母心) are the champions. Both of them were out of show now. Many catchy Taiwanese songs become popular in Taiwan through the operas.

For Korean soap operas, the classical operas “Dae Jang Geum” (大長今) and the popular operas “He’s Beautiful” (原來是美男) are winners. At that time, when “Dae Jang Geum” (大長今) was played, the travel attractions in Korea become popular. Not only the Taiwanese tourists, but also Southeast Asian tourists visit
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Korean attractions.

After the investigation of soap operas, we understand more about the viewers’ opinion of these two operas.

III. Conclusion

In this study, Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas are discussed. Although these two types of operas are different from each other but they are all hot. Therefore, in our study we tried to investigate the difference between these two operas. According to our results, there are differences between the former and present soap operas. Further, based on our research, these two operas are also different in features of characters, plot and groups of audience. There are about 60% of participants who are used to watch operas. However, the majority of people watch Korean soap operas. To add more, killing time is the main reason for those who watch Taiwanese soap operas, while learning Korean cultures is the main reason for the other group.

In the process of doing the research, difficulties were encountered. First, there are less people watching TV, and the Internet is becoming more developed and popular. Second, when distributing questionnaire, too much time was taken and too much money was spent. Third, as the information of Taiwanese soap operas and Korean soap operas is scarce, some of the results are not that complete.

Although there are some limitations for carrying the study, we learned and earned a lot of experience from the research. We also hope that the research can provide some knowledge and information for the readers and future researchers.

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