

K-DRAMAS: A WINDOW TO THE KOREAN CULTURE

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Abstract: *Real immersion into the Korean society is not that feasible for a European, given the huge cultural and spatial distance between Europe and Asia. Despite the tremendous economic and social development of Korea, this country's culture (as well as the entire Asian culture) is still very much influenced by the teachings of Confucius, the famous ancient Chinese philosopher, who preached on filial piety, respect towards elderly people, loyalty, personal morality, and courage.*

*Korean dramas (K-dramas) can help us bridge this gap by offering us, the Europeans, the chance of meeting 'the other' and, at the same time, acknowledge our own 'otherness', which often leads to comparisons that reveal differences and similarities between cultures. In the present study I am trying to offer a perspective on the Korean culture by revealing some aspects that Europeans might find very different from those in their own culture. To this aim, one recent K-drama, 'The Other Miss Oh' (2016), will be subjected to a minute analysis in terms of both verbal and nonverbal elements. The theoretical framework along which the analysis will be conducted is Hofstede's (2009) model of cultural dimensions, with a focus on **power distance**.*

Understanding these differences between the Korean and the European cultures will help us avoid any misunderstandings or tensions once we have the chance of meeting 'the other' face-to-face, and, in the long run, become better citizens of the world.

Keywords: *K-drama; cultural dimensions; power distance; cultural differences*

1. INTRODUCTION

In about 35 years since the first publication of Hofstede's (1991) study on the dimensions of national cultures, people all over the world have evolved in various directions and to various extents due to the phenomenon known as *globalization*. The question that one may think of is whether within this time span South Korea, a technically and economically developed country, whose way of life is strongly influenced by Confucianism, has complied with or resisted this phenomenon. There are a number of ways to find out the answer to this question, one of them being the analysis of the Korean culture, and especially of one of its greatest achievements that crossed the boundaries of the country, namely the K-dramas, despite the fact that

many fans of Korean dramas acknowledge that the world in these television shows are "a fantasyland which does not exist in reality" (Lin and Tong, 2008, quoted in Young, 2014:203).

The purpose of this paper is to bring to the fore

some elements that reflect one important feature of the Korean culture, namely *power distance* (Hofstede, 2010). The paper is structured as follows: the next section (section 2) contains an overview of the framework employed, i.e. Hofstede's (2010) *cultural dimensions*. This will be followed by a short presentation (section 3) of K-dramas, in general and of *The Other Miss Oh*, in particular, which constituted the main source of data for the analysis. Section 4 of the paper offers a brief description of data collection and presents the research questions that guided the analysis. Section 5 revisits the cultural dimension of *power distance* as it emerges from the dialogues of the main characters in the movie, from their non-verbal behaviour, and also from the comments made by various online viewers of the movie. The conclusions of the analysis will be presented in section 6.

2. HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

The most popular classification of cultural dimensions was proposed by Hofstede, who originally conducted a large-scale research project

among IBM employees from 40 countries. In time, Hofstede included other countries in his project, reaching a number of 85 in the 2010 edition of his book *Cultures and Organizations. The Software of the Mind* (Hofstede et al. 2010: 36). Initially four cultural dimensions were identified: *individualism/collectivism*, *power distance*, *masculinity/femininity*, *uncertainty avoidance*, to which he later added two more: *long-term orientation* and *indulgence vs. restraint*, which emerged from the investigation of the people in the East, in an attempt to account for the differences in thinking between the eastern and the western world. Hofstede (2010:31) defines the dimension as “an aspect of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures”, all the investigated cultures being characterised by a score along each of the dimensions. Among these dimensions, there is one particularly linked to the teachings of Confucianism, namely the inequality between people, which nowadays translates into *power distance*. According to Hofstede et al, (2010:61), power distance refers to “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”. Inequality may be related not only to power, but also to prestige and wealth. Members of high power distance cultures (as is the case of South Korea) agree that power should be shared unequally. This entitles people in high social positions to enjoy all kinds of privileges, which they find very natural. In contrast, in low power distance societies, inequality is less tolerated and, as such, privileges that come with high positions are not easily accepted.

For reasons of space, I will investigate only the power distance dimension as it emerges from the verbal exchanges between the actors in the K-drama *The Other Miss Oh*, as well as from their non-verbal behavioural acts and from a number of comments made by netizens of various origins, which indicate their feelings and attitudes towards this particular cultural dimension of Korea.

3. K-DRAMAS

Korean dramas (K-dramas), a dominant and popular form of Korean television, represent one of the major cultural achievements of South Korea, in general and of the local cinematography, in particular. After the Korean War ended in 1953, the film industry grew gradually and enjoyed a boom for about a decade. But the next two decades were marked by a stagnation of the film industry, due largely to the control exerted by the government (Paquet, 2009). Since the late 1980s,

however, the film sector regained some vitality, thanks mainly to a group of talented, politically and socially informed young directors who boldly discarded old stereotypes and started to explore new themes in movie making. These directors 'marked a clear break from the past and were popular with young viewers. Soon, the New Korean Cinema began to attract attention internationally, both from mainstream audiences in Asia, and from festival attendees and film enthusiasts further afield' (Paquet, 2009:3). This trend has accelerated, so that more directors started producing movies based on typical Korean stories that moved the hearts worldwide.

The *Korean Wave* ("Hallyu" in Korean), which began in the 1990s, included several export products, such as dramas, music, film, and food, but the phenomenon was initially led by K-dramas. Geographically, the impact was focused on neighbouring Asian countries, such as Japan and China. But starting with the second decade of the 21st century, Korean pop culture has begun spreading to more global audiences in Africa, the Americas, the Middle East and Europe. This spread is largely due to the Internet and the social media. “In recent years, most Korean Wave fans (...) have come into contact with and/or consumed (...) Korean dramas for the first time through the Internet” (*The Korean Wave*, 2011:39). According to the same publication, over the recent years, many websites that provide K-dramas as well as information about actors or plots have appeared. Some examples in this respect would Dramabeans.com, DramaFever.com or DramaCrazy.com, where English-speaking viewers can enjoy legally recent productions with English subtitles.

How come that dramas produced in a small nation like South Korea are transcending language and cultural barriers, attracting fans from all over the world? Many attribute the growing number of fans to the emotional power of K-dramas. Moreover, they dramatize Asian sensibilities, such as family values, which make them appealing to Asian viewers. As for the non-Asian audiences, they are attracted by the love relationships that are very tender and emotional rather than sensual. A finding worth mentioning is that K-dramas 'are popular in different countries for different reasons. Americans find Korean dramas relaxing and cheerful; Europeans find the plots uncomplicated and romantic. Asians, meanwhile, discover lifestyles and trends they wish to emulate. The subtle repression of emotions and intense romantic passion without overt sexuality resonates further with viewers in the Middle East. Muslim countries

find the dramas “safe”: they are less explicit compared to American ones, and adhere to traditions' (*The Korean Wave*, 2011: 72).

One recent K-drama that seems to have swirled the world is the 2016 production *The Other Miss Oh*, directed by Song Hyun-Wook and Lee Jong-Jae. The movie contains 18 episodes and was aired between May 2 and June 28, 2016, on tvN. It centers on a love triangle between Park Do-Kyung, a good-looking and successful sound director who develops clairvoyant abilities, and two women who have the same name, Oh Hae-Young, and who, moreover, used to be high school mates and, as adults, come to work in the same company. One of the Oh Hae-Youngs ("the better") is prettier, wealthier and more successful, and unintentionally causes the other Oh Hae-Young ("the lesser"¹) an identity crisis. Park used to date "the better" Oh, who disappeared from his life without a word on the day of their wedding. On the other hand, "the lesser" Oh is dumped by her fiancé, Han Tae Jin, one day before their wedding. When Park meets "the lesser" Oh, about whom he keeps having visions, he falls in love with her, although he knows he does not deserve her, as he was the one to ruin her wedding with Tae Jin. Other characters that appear in the movie (such as the parents, siblings, various relatives) contribute to the general hierarchical structuring of the Korean society.

The movie offers a rich source of data related to power distance both in institutions (family and society) and in organizations (the work place of both Oh Hae-Youngs and of the sound director Park), offering the viewer a picture of a culture classified with a high power distance index.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I have watched the above-mentioned K-drama on <https://www.viki.com/tv/30913c-another-oh-hae-young?locale=en>, a site which is licensed in Romania and on which viewers can make comments on various scenes in the movie while it is unfolding. What I have focused on were the scenes that reflected the behaviour of the people in higher positions in the family, in society as a whole and in the companies where the main characters worked. I recorded both the verbal and non-verbal behaviour (by print-screen shots) of the main characters, but in some situations, I also

made use of the comments made by the netizens, as I found them extremely useful in highlighting the opinions held by people who most probably belonged to other countries than Korea. I have indicated the nickname under which the viewers commented on various aspects of power distance in the movie and I have also preserved the original form of their comments (including spelling and grammar mistakes). For each of the three types of data I have indicated in the paper the exact moment when they appeared in the movie, as well as the number of the episode in which they occurred (e.g. 21:33/2 means 'at 21 minutes and 33 seconds in episode 2).

Two research questions guided my analysis, namely: a) Is power distance more prominent in organizations or in institutions? b) Are there any signs of a decrease in the power distance index as a result of Western influences on Korean culture? With these in mind, let us now turn to the analysis of the K-drama, *The Other Miss Oh*.

5. POWER DISTANCE IN *THE OTHER MISS OH*

5.1 Power distance in organizations. I will start the analytical part of the paper by focusing on the way Korean people make use of their higher positions in organizations. The movie presents the work relationship between managers and subordinates mainly in two locations: on the one hand, in the sound studio owned by Park Do-Kyung, on the other hand in the catering company which is managed by Park Do-Kyung's sister (Park Soo-Kyung) and where both Oh Hae-Youngs work. In both places there is a hierarchy of superiors (*sonbae*) and subordinates (*hubae*). Thus, the CEO of the catering company is Park Soo-Kyung², but below her there are a number of director, assistant managers, team managers, team leaders, etc, all with strict attributes, all paying due respect to those higher up. The CEO supervises her employees all the time, which attracts her nickname "Isadora"³. She is an autocratic manager and is not very popular among her employees. Though in order to diversify the range of products offered by the company she asks her employees to come up with ideas, she would not accept their opinions or, if she does, she would not acknowledge this. An illustration of this attitude is offered in episode 8, when one of the team

¹ The producers of the K-drama used these terms in order to distinguish between the two characters. (<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2016/04/22/0200000000AEN20160422006651315.html>).

² For space reasons, names and titles will be abbreviated in the excerpts from the movie.

³ "Isadora" ("i sa" = two four (24) and "dora" = "running around", meaning she is around all the time -24/7).

managers in the company informs her that due to one's employee's suggestion some progress has been recorded, Park Soo-Kyung does not seem to be impressed:

TM: "It was Assistant Manager Oh's idea to make the restaurant Korean. Everyone else was focused on Western cuisine and only Assistant Manager Oh insisted on Korean food and that's why we progressed so well." (10:01/8)

In most Western cultures, such employees would be at least congratulated, if not offered a bonus. But this is beyond the capacity of imagination of the Korean manager, who retorts:

PSK: "Don't be mistaken that just because she had the idea, she is entitled to any special privileges." (10:03/8)

Power distance in the work place also emerges in a later episode (17), when the team manager enters his boss's office to present her with the analysis of food trends for the following 6-month period. He bows deeply in front of her and presents her (by using both hands, as it is required in the Korean culture) with a folder containing the required documents (see the photo 1 below). At a first glance, she is dissatisfied with what she sees and throws the folder away, making the team manager bend down to pick it up. After she tells him to do the analysis again, she orders him to make her some coffee (11:59/7), as if he were a secretary. When the coffee is ready and the team manager returns to her, he finds the door closed, an indicator of the fact that the boss was not to be disturbed. One netizen commented on this scene:

kissorahug_16: "No wonder people are intimidated by her; in a survey people felt more secure and open around their boss when their door is open." (12:25/17)

Even if the two Oh Hae-Youngs are/become related to the manager in the same way (one used to be, the other is currently the girlfriend of Park Soo-Kyung's brother), at the work place the appropriate behaviour is required of both of them. Due to the fact that the "better" Oh almost became her boss's sister-in-law, she dares address Park Soo-Kyung as "unni"⁴, but she demands the correct form of address, "Director" (21:19/9). Not only is

Park Soo-Kyung superior to "the better" Oh in terms of position, but she is also much older (44 vs. 32). As Lee (2010:13) puts it, 'elders are always addressed with an honorific'.



Fig. 1. Team manager's absolute subservience to his boss

Respectful use of vocabulary directed to the company's manager is recommended not only when people are within the premises of the institution, but also outside the work place, as is shown in a fragment from episode 3. "The lesser" Oh Hae-Young finds out that her boss is Park Do-Kyung's sister. When she tries to tell him something about her boss, Oh realizes she has used inappropriate words and rephrases her message, fearing that even if Isadora were not present, she would sense her impolite behaviour:

"Honestly, Isadora and I... I mean, the Director and I don't get along very well." (34:00/3)

In the catering company, it is not only Park Soo-Kyung who teaches her employees that power is distributed unequally, but also another person in a relatively high position, Director Choi. When "the better" Oh Hae-Young is hired at the company, "the lesser" Oh having been working here for some time already, Director Choi advises the latter to behave properly to "the better" Oh, who has a slightly higher social position:

DC: "At our company, observing rank and positions is a priority. So, please show good manners to Team Leader Oh." (37:28/5)

Though the two girls are of the same age and have attended the same high school, due to the fact that "the better" Oh came from a slightly richer family, she is considered to be superior to "the lesser" Oh, despite the same position and title (Assistant Manager) in the company.

It is the same Director Choi who in an event organized for the company members, on seeing

⁴ "unni" is a term of address used by females to address an older sister. I am indebted to my former colleague at HUFs, professor Ohm, for the explanation of the specific terms of address for older siblings or elderly people, in general.

that both Oh Hae-Youngs wear a scarf, asks "the lesser" Oh to take hers off, so as to show her lower status in comparison with "the better" Oh. The former refuses to do that, defying the request of her superior, and shouts at "the better" Oh: "I am I and you are you" (47:00/5). Her attitude stirs the Director's rage, who reminds her that:

DC: "We have ranks and positions in this company. So how dare you screech at her (i.e. at "the better" Oh)!" (47:14/5)

The fragment points out two important things related to power distance: on the one hand, it shows that if you are considered socially and professionally lower than somebody else, you are not supposed to look better than that person. On the other hand, people higher up are entitled to order you how to behave or what to wear in order not to stand out from your peers. People from the Western cultures may find this attitude completely outrageous, as each individual is free to dress the way s/he feels appropriate for the occasions or for expressing their own personality.

In Park Do-Kyung's sound company, power distance is also present. His employees do show him due respect (and occasionally even affection), although in some situations they would rather kill him, due to the fact that he is a perfectionist and would not let his people go home until things are done properly, even if this means extremely long hours of work. On one particular occasion, "the lesser" OHY's mother prepares a lunch box for her daughter's boyfriend (Park Do-Kyung), which he takes with him on a business errand on which he is accompanied by his co-workers, including his younger brother. When the latter leans over to take the last bit of food, one of Park Do-Kyung's employees stops him by saying:

"The last bite should be for the lunchbox owner" (16:18/7)

This shows both respect to his boss, but also respect towards Korean tradition.

5.2 Power distance in the family. One particular aspect of Korean (Asian) cultural values, which is predominant in the K-drama *The Other Miss Oh*, is the emphasis on family relationships. 'Korea is believed to have preserved the Confucian heritage of strong parental ties and filial piety most strictly among Asian countries, and parents still have heavy influence over the lives of their adult children' (Young, 2014:197-198). There are lots of instances in the movie that illustrate this idea.

Though "the lesser" Oh Hae-Young, unlike "the better" Oh, has grown up in a loving and supporting family, very often she is beaten by her mother, despite the fact that she is 32 years old. She is beaten because she has cancelled her marriage with Han Tae Jin, later she gets spanked by her mother for not having told her the real reason for her marriage cancellation, and then she stirs her mother's rage for wanting to get befriended to Park Do Kyung. For a European, these would not be reasons to act violently upon one's child and are quite shocking, especially because it is not a child who is taught manners, but an adult woman. At a certain moment, even the heroine seems to have had enough of the beating and complains to her best friend:

"The lesser" OHY: "She (mom) hits me all the time. At my age!" (50:28/15)

The print screen below brings further evidence in this respect.



Fig. 2. Mother teaches "the lesser" Oh Hae-Young manners (48:45/7).

Below are the comments of two netizens:

irmar: "Because your only reaction is to yell and beat her up!" (19:16/12)

FuNyBuNny1: "When your mom is Korean and giving you a lecture, always remember to wear a helmet." (21:59/12)

The reactions of the two commentators clearly indicate that they are not familiar with the teachings of Confucius. In Confucianism, "the worst kind of person was one who did not show sufficient respect to his/her parents" (Tudor, 2014:28). For an outsider (and sometimes even for Koreans themselves), filial piety preached by Confucianism may seem exaggerated.

In the Korean tradition, the eldest son is supposed to financially help his parents. This is

also the case of Park Do-Kyung who is constantly asked for money by his mother, a gold digger, who has been married 5 times and who has also ruined her son's marriage to "the better" Oh, out of fear that once married, Park would not contribute to her lavish lifestyle anymore. Even her daughter, Park Soo-Kyung is outraged by the mother's constant demand of money from her brother, and asks:

PSK: "Are you going to empty Do-Kyung's pockets again?" (51:39/6).

The sister is also the one to reveal the reason why Mother ruined her brother's marriage:

PSK: "You wanted your son to marry one that wouldn't be able to say anything even if you stole from her husband's pockets, but Oh Hae-Young was too smart, huh?" (53:37/6).

The fact that getting money from the eldest sons is a common practice among the Korean mothers is also revealed by the comment of one of the online viewers, who seems to be of Asian origin:

jihyuuns: "This woman sound scarily like my paternal grandma.... and dad goes with it b.c. stupid asian filial duties." (53:49/6)

In a previous episode, when Mother tried again by various means to get some money from Park Do-Kyung, even if he told her that the money he had was meant for his employees salaries, she would not take no for an answer. Being driven to the limit of his filial respect, he tells her:

PDK: "You are just manipulating emotions, while making me feel dirty with guilt" (53:46/4).

One of the netizens, who sided with the good, obedient son, commented:

ultramblue: "It disgusts me what this character is doing to her son." (54:00/4)

But a mother like this would not easily give up, especially after she had lived her entire life in wealth, neglecting her family, being focused on money all the time. When Park Do-Kyung becomes ruined because of his mother recklessness, she dares throw the following in his face:

PDK's M: "Are you pushing me right now thinking that you were totally ruined because of Mom, that Mom did wrong, so she should feel it down to her bones? Is that it?" (13:23/17)

Not wanting to offend his mother in any way, the son takes all the blame on himself:

PDK: "This all happened because I did wrong. You did not do anything wrong, Mom." (13:34/17)

The son's reply is followed by two comments of viewers, who again seem to be members of another (maybe lower power distance) culture, as they express their disgust at the Mother's attitude:

dramalover14: "Why doesn't he cut her out of his life?" (13:35/17)

kissorahug_16: "reverse psychology... nice." (13:37/17)

In the Romanian culture, mothers are the exact opposite of Park Do-Kyung's: they would help their children in all respects, even financially, as long as they can and try not to be a burden for their children. The parents' intrusions on their children's lives, as revealed by the examples and comments above, seem overbearing. Despite this, in present-day Korea it is very likely that young people might have to deal with their families in exactly the same way as the two main characters, Park Do-Kyung and "the lesser" Oh Hae young. Moreover, much to the disbelief of people coming from the West, Korean youth would not defy their parents if told not to marry a certain person.

5.3 Power distance in society. When the lesser Oh Hae-Young becomes Park Do-Kyung's girlfriend, his lawyer friend (Lee Jin-Sang) wants to test whether she is faithful to him or whether she still thinks of her ex-fiancé. On finding out his mean intention, the girl starts speaking to him very blatantly, which he disliked, considering the social difference between them:

LJS: "You're beginning to speak so casually to me!" (38:48/7)

Due to the hierarchical nature of Confucianism, all human relationships came to be considered in terms of power distance, i.e. to have a higher and a lower partner: boss and employee, parent and child (son); brother and younger brother; man and woman, elderly and young people. Thus, men came to be considered superior to women, hence Lee Jin-Sang's request (or order?) addressed to Oh Hae-Young.

The superior-inferior social structure of the Korean society triggered the development of a highly refined system of etiquette among the classes, which included different levels of language meant to distinguish between individuals

and classes. "The three most important basic levels of the language are an extraordinarily polite form used when addressing superiors, an intimate or familiar form for addressing close friends or equals, and a rough form used when speaking to people on a lower social level" (de Mente, 2014: 207). Any inappropriate use of linguistic etiquette is drastically sanctioned, as we have seen above and as illustrated in episode 14, when the 44 year-old Park Soo-Kyung becomes pregnant with Lee Jin-Sang's (the lawyer) child. As her younger brother started calling the father-to-be all kinds of names, she demanded that he should treat him with respect.

PSK: "Dog Jin-Sang?! You are so much younger but you dare kick your hyung like that? You dare call your hyung 'a dog'? (...) From now on, treat Jin-Sang properly as your hyung⁵." (54:21 - 54-51/14).

Power distance between Park Soo-Kyung and "the lesser" Oh also emerges outside the work place, in episode 3, when the two women go shopping to the same convenience store. Oh Hae-Young is at the pay desk, when all of a sudden, a woman tries to grab one of her alcohol bottles. Miss Oh gets hold of the bottle, as she has already paid for it, but the woman would not let go of it. As the latter had her face covered by her loose hair (she was drunk and did not want to be recognized in this condition and embarrass herself), Oh did not recognize her boss. But when this partially revealed her face, Oh Hae-Young had no choice but let go of the bottle. Her behaviour confirms the acceptance of the status gap between herself and her boss. This example is illustrative of South Korea's cultural legacy from its Confucian past, expressed in the term *unhye*, meaning "benefits" which can be extrapolated to cover the 'social debts' that people are under a heavy moral obligation to repay.

Unhye covers the debt that people owe to their parents, (...) their employers - to anyone, in fact, from whom they have received some kind of benefit that contributes to their livelihood and life goals (de Mente, 2014: 219).

Apart from the use of appropriate language or 'paying social debts', another way of showing respect for those higher up in the Korean culture is by appropriate non-verbal behaviour, i.e. by bowing. The movie offers uncountable instances of

this gesture, both in and out of the work place. When "the lesser" Oh Hae-Young is brought home drunk by Park Do-Kyung, on his departure she bows deeply, even though she was aware that he could not see her, as he was already in his car (figure 3). Towards the end of the movie, when the two main characters start talking about marriage, Oh Hae-Young's father calls his future son-in-law, while the latter is at the office. The moment Park Do-Kyung realizes whom he is talking to, he stands up and bows in front of a fictive elderly person, showing in this way his deep respect for him (figure 4). In both photos, the characters bow very deeply. As de Mente (2014) shows, there are various degrees of bowing, depending on the rank, social position or age of the individuals involved.

Lower-ranking individuals, and those expressing especially deep or sincere thanks, execute deeper bows. People seeking favors or apologizing bow lower than normal to emphasize the point (de Mente, 2014: 295-296).



Fig. 3. "The lesser" Oh Hae-Young taking a deep bow.

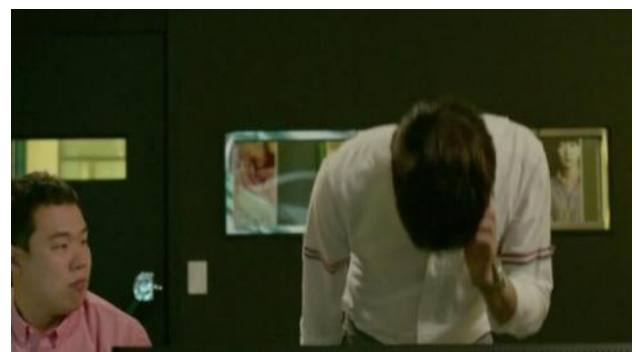


Fig. 4 Pak Do-Kyung bowing to his absent future father-in-law (44:55/12)

As Myung (2007:249) points out, in current Korea 'class consciousness and class gap is still persistent, despite denial and negation'. A beautiful illustration of this is "the lesser" Oh's confession in episode 5:

"The lesser" OHY: "Fish that live in first-level water cannot meet with fish that live in third-level water. Pretty Oh Hae-Young who lived in first-level water

⁵ "hyung" is the appropriate term to be used by a younger male when addressing his older brother. In this particular case, as the lawyer is assumed to become a family member, he should be called "hyung".

only met with men who lived in the same water. And me, third-level Oh Hae-Young, met with other men in that third level. Tae Jin, the man I was going to marry, was the only man in my life who was not third level. Perhaps he left to seek a woman at his level? The moment I found out that the woman Park Do-Kyung loved was Oh Hae-Young, I realized that he is first-level, as well. Their level, which I could never be part of...(59:00 - 1:00:00/5).

As if "the lesser" Oh Hae-Young did not know her place in the Korean society, her boyfriend's mother feels entitled to snub her and to emphasize the class difference between them, in an attempt to intimidate her and make her give up the idea of marrying Park Do-Kyung. By this, Park Do-Kyung's mother (44:16/16) hoped to benefit further from the financial support of her son.

PDK's M: "If you don't know your place and play in someone else's neighbourhood, you will get hurt."

6. CONCLUSIONS

Like most of the recent K-dramas, *The Other Miss Oh* portrays Korean culture with a traditional and old-fashioned Confucianist background, which determined a

hierarchical society divided from top to bottom into carefully prescribed ranks, with each rank having specific kinds of acceptable behavior' (de Mente, 2014:269).

These gradations/ranks determine the individual's life to an incredible degree. "The lesser" Oh Hae-Young's life is made miserable not only because "the better" Oh was more beautiful, but especially because she was also richer and had more connections due to the fact that her parents rubbed shoulders with important people. Then, she had to strictly obey her boss at the office, and also show her due respect outside the office, too. Moreover, Oh Hae-Young also needed to show respect to her parents, despite the fact that they did not always treat her gently. All these indicate that in current Korea power distance is equally present in both institutions and organizations, this finding providing the answer to research question (a).

At the end of the movie, the viewer is left with a question: will the inequality husband-wife stipulated by Confucianism be preserved after the main characters' marriage? My feeling is that women in present day Korea fight more for equality than ever before. They are more courageous in the sense that they are not simply satisfied with being supported by their parents and later by their husbands, but they

want to have jobs, to earn their own living. Moreover, they also seem to be less conservative as regards love: "the lesser" Oh dares express her feelings to Park Do-Kyung despite the fact that she is not sure they are mutual. She is also willing to fight for her love, despite her mother's (initial) refusal to accept Do-Kyung as her son-in-law. These tendencies, together with the ever-growing western (especially American) influence, may contribute to the dilution of the hierarchical social system in this Asian country, this providing the answer to research question (b). Nevertheless, the *sonbae - hubae* system of ranking people is still of vital importance in the lives of the Korean people.

Unless confronted with the Korean culture, people from the Western countries would not understand the behaviours described above, and as such, would criticize by comparing them to their own cultural standards. But as Myung (2007:269) states,

to be a citizen in a new era that increasingly requires exchanges across national, cultural, racial, and ethnic borders we have to cultivate cosmopolitan consciousness and acceptance for others with "difference".

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