

## **Media Framing in South Korean Drama “Crash Landing on You” towards North Korea**

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### **Abstract**

The Korean Wave or well known as Hallyu has become more popular overtime. It is proven when the entertainment industry could reach overseas audience, such as K-Drama called “Crash Landing on You”. This K-Drama received a lot of reaction not only from South Korea, but also from around the world. This K-Drama is perceived as a controversial but entertaining TV series because it is a romance series but the setting is taken in South and North Korea. With limited knowledge about North Korea, this K-Drama dares to give a lot of information about the closed and restricted country. Many people agree with the description, but few people disagree. This essay aims to explain and describe how a K-Drama through “Crash Landing on You” depicts the condition and situation of North Korea. By using the theory of Goffman and Entman, the writers draw some explanation about what kind of framing that is implemented in this drama. The result of this study is how the media, especially in South Korea portrays or describes North Korea as a restricted country.

**Keywords:** *Crash Landing on you, K-Drama, Media Framing, North Korea, South Korea.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

South Korea is one of the most developed countries that are well known for their technology, economy, futuristic architecture, and entertainment industry (Kim, 2018). The entertainment industry from Korea mostly known as Korean Wave or “*Hallyu*” that includes several products such as television programs, pop music, films, online games, fashions and smartphones. This term was originally coined by the Chinese press due to the unexpected popularity and success of the K-Drama in 1998-1999 that made K-Drama is very popular in other countries, outside South Korea and outside Asia such as North America, European and Latin countries (Ju, 2018). The history of Korean Drama began in 1910-1945 when they started to create dramas through broadcasting on radio (Hae, 2012). After that, Korea established their national television in 1956 called HLKZ-TV that became Korean Broadcasting System or known as KBS in 1960 and during 1960s there were two broadcasting networks called TBC (Tong Yang Television Company) and MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Company). The first drama that aired in 1960 has become the government tool in order to spread awareness about the anti-communisms and continued in 1970 that in this era, soap operas began to overtake movies as a platform for

video entertainment. However, the storyline became different and it mostly talks about the everyday life without forgetting the political agenda. In 1980 the drama that the broadcasting network became more diverse in plot and genres which also continued to develop in 1990 with various plots that can be seen in MBC's drama called "Jealously". This drama mostly tells about the romantic life between the main actors through urban life. From 2000 until now, with the globalization and the technology that is more advanced, the K-Drama is still developing until now with more various genres such as romantic dramas, action- adventures, palace life and many more (Korean Culture and Information Service Ministry of Culture; Sports and Tourism).

K-Drama does not only gain the popularity from inside the country, but it also has million viewers outside South Korea. This phenomenon occurs as the result of globalization that happened during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997- 1998 that made economic downturn across Asia that also affected Korea. This led to the government action to maximize the utilization of cultural industry and made the television stations, broadcasting associations, and telecommunication industries. The government also tried to create the proactive commercial conditions for home-produced media content in order to capitalize the domestic and foreign markets (Ju, 2018). Until now, the hype of this phenomenon still continue and getting more attentions from many audiences. For K-Drama enthusiast, they can stream their favorites drama from video streaming sites such as Hulu and Netflix. Through these sites, the drama could reach bigger audience (Bacon, 2019). Since the drama is available in video streaming sites that many people love it, the attractiveness of the drama also comes from the component of the drama itself. Bacon also added that several things that increase the appetite of watching this drama are the casts or the actors, the culture, the fashion, and how the drama promote their food as one of their points of promotion as a culture, and also various plots that the dramas could offer their audiences and many more. There are a lot of dramas that catch the audience attentions, such as *Vagabonds* (2019), *Crash Landing on You* (2019), *Memories of The Alhambra* (2018), *Strong Girl- Bong Soon* (2017), *Signal* (2016), *Cheese in The Trap* (2016), and those dramas can be watched in Netflix (Komonibo & Roberts, 2020). However, some of the dramas are not available in video streaming. People have to watch it in cable TV or have to download it from other sites. K-Drama is like any other films. They are popular because they offer a lot of dramas with various genres such as romance, romantic comedy, melodrama, satire, workplace drama, action, sci-fi, thriller, mystery, and many more. It does not only offer a lot of genres, it also offers various themes and plots which talk about daily life, family, workplace, schools or university life, medical, marriage life, and even politics which involves other countries just like on "*Crash Landing on You*" (Kao, 2018).

As previously mentioned, there are several K-Drama that catch the audience attention in several years. The recent K-Drama "*Crash Landing on You*" that aired in Netflix and tvN tells about a woman named Yoon Se-Ri who will inherit her father's big and wealthy company in South Korea. Se- Ri who is played by Son Ye-Jin has to make an emergency landing in North Korea because of strong wind that blows her away while doing paragliding. After succeeding to do the landing, she met Ri Jeong- Hyeok who is played by Hyun- Bin, who is a North Korean army officer. While trying to protect her, Ri Jeong-Hyeok falls in love with Yoon Se-Ri. This drama has 16 episodes and caught the audience attention from Seoul as well as nationwide. This is proved by the first episode that aired on December 14, 2019 who has great rating in Seoul with 6.5% and in nationwide with 6.07%. This rating increased until the end of the episode in February 16<sup>th</sup> 2020 with 23.2% rating in Seoul and 21.6% in nationwide (Asian Wiki). Considering the high popularity in South Korea, this drama reached its fame around the world.

Despite the popularity, this drama also has criticism because this drama tells about South Korean citizen and North Korean army officer. This drama also received comments from North Korea media. “Recently, South Korean authorities and film producers are releasing anti-republic films and TV dramas that are deceptive, fabricated, absurd and impure, putting all their efforts on making strategic propaganda” (Mi, 2020). Critics continues with several comments from North Korean, as well as South Korean that said this drama glamorizing North Korea’s reclusive neighbor as peaceful and also as a live-able place. The criticism did not stop there, it continued with some responses such as this drama is picturing North Korean as an underdeveloped country and this drama turns the tragic situation into sources of entertainment (Kang & Twigg, 2020). However, the response is different when it comes to North Korean’s defector. Kang Na-Ra as one of the North Korean’s defector gave a comment that the drama is 60 percent accurate when it comes to portraying North Korea (Choon, 2020).

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

Through the explanation that has been explained previously, the authors come up with the question about How South Korea did a media framing in K-Drama “Crash Landing on You” towards the North Korean and what are the implied messages resulted from media framing towards North Korea.

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to analyze the case of media framing in drama “Crash Landing on You” towards North Korea that receives the different reaction from South Korea and North Korea, the authors use Framing Theory from Goffman and Entman. According to Goffman, framing theory has a meaning of how the choice of people and the process of information are influenced by something that is presented to them (Mass Communication Theory, 2011). In this case, the director of serial drama “Crash Landing on You” presents a story that influence the audience about what North Korea is really about. The framing theory was coined by Erving Goffman. This theory based on his perspective about the framing theory as an interpretation and he called it as a primary framework because it is not depending on the original interpretation, but more focus on how a meaningless aspect of a scene turns into meaningful aspect. In other words, there are lots of scenes that seem meaningless—but in contrary, they contain meaningful message behind them. Moreover in Goffman’s theory, primary framework can appear without having apparent articulated shape, providing a lot of understanding and an approach and perspective that allow the user or audience to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its term (Liotta, n.d.) Other perspective on framing theory comes from Robert M. Entman. He stated that frames are difficult to be determined reliably if the narratives are not compared (Entman, 1991). This theory explains that it is hard to determine whether the narrative being presented is accurate or not, unless there is comparison. Therefore, authors will provide some information from both sides, the North Korean and South Korean. Entman explained about the benefits of a consistent concept framing, the first one is audience autonomy. This concept provides an operational definition about polysemy and how audience independence in decoding text that consists of problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretation with the probability of being noticed, processed and accepted by the most people. The second benefit is about the journalistic objectivity. This benefits talk about how journalists

may follow the rules in order to do ‘objective’ reporting and convey dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members in order to making a balanced assessment of the situation. However, there is a bit of disadvantage because there is a possibility to have a lack of common understanding of framing and with this situation, the journalists allow the most skillful media manipulators to impose their dominant frames on the news and also through this situation where require more active and sophisticated role for reporter to have more balanced reporting than choosing sides in producing the news. The next benefit is about the content analysis. This benefit is about the major task that determines the textual meaning that should identify and describe frames. This content analysis would avoid treating the negative and or positive terms that has an equally stand out and influential that led to conclude the messages on that moment based on their judgment whether it is positive or negative and make the conclusion about the dominant meanings. This also has a disadvantage which is they neglect to measure what point stands out in the text and fail to have a relation between the message, and from this situation it can lead to another problem that might occur, which is the misrepresent of the media messages from the audience that receive the messages. The last benefit is public opinion and normative democratic. This benefit of framing can appear as a central power in the democratic process, especially in politic elites that can control the framing of the issues on that moment. Through this benefit, the framing can influence the public opinion and it can be seen in political events when the government do a voting, the role of framing can be seen in the way of public chooses the option of the candidate (Entman, 1993).

## METHODS

To help the writers analyzing and answering the research questions about South Korea doing some media framing towards North Korea, the writers use qualitative methods through content analysis. For analyzing content, the writers watch the drama “Crash Landing on You” and analyze the characters and the plot. The writers also use secondary data such as news and articles from the internet. To support the writers’ statement about the media framing, writers use the theory from Goffman and Entman. First step of the research, the writers watched all 16 episodes of this drama, identify them and explain the plot and scenes that describe the framing towards North Korea. The writers also selected several scenes that show the framing that South Korea does in this drama. After that, the writers insert the preview of the scene in order to explain what happened on that scene. Writers also relate the scenes with the theory of Goffman and Entman.

## DISCUSSION

The main characters of this serial drama are Hyun-Bin as Captain Ri Jeong Hyeok, Son Ye-Jin as Yoon Se-Ri, Seo Ji- Hye as Seo Dan and Kim Jung-Hyun as Gu Seung-Joon.



Figure 1: The Main Cast for Crash Landing on You. (Asian Wiki)

This drama is about a rich woman from South Korea, Yoon Se-Ri, who is also the heir to a big and wealthy company. When Se-Ri is doing a paragliding sport, a big tornado appears and blows her away to the North Korea portion of the DMZ or (Demilitarized Zone). This makes all of the family and her brother fight for the position of the empty heir. On the place, Ri Jeong-Hyeok, who is also the captain in North Korean army, is patrolling around the border area and suddenly finds Se-Ri and saves her from the accident. The drama continues as captain Ri wants to take Se-Ri back to South Korea. However, his plan is prevented by other North Korean army who wants to expose him to higher chief. Realizing the hard situation, captain Ri decided to hide her from another North Korean army and keeps her in North Korea until it is possible to send her back to South Korea. As the time goes by, they fall in love and decide to make the escape plan for her together. At the end, Se-Ri succeeds to get out of North Korea and live his normal life. Throughout this series, there are some scenes that the director portrays about North Korea. The first example is about law. There is a scene when North Korean army, led by Captain Ri encounters their people being captive to South Korean army in the DMZ. An army captain from South Korea tells captain Ri that those north Korean trespass the border and search for cultural artifacts illegally. The situation becomes more intense as both group hold and point guns to each other. Captain Ri then tells South Korean army to lower the gun and give those captives to him or the North Korean army. He also adds that South Korean army does not have to worry about punishing those people as the law enforcement in North Korea is better and stricter compared to law enforcement in South Korea.



Figure 2: intense scene of North and South army



Figure 3: Captain Ri pointing a gun to South army

From the scene above, it clearly shows that the director wants to deliver a message that the law enforcement in North Korea is stricter than in South Korea. Using Goffman's theory which says something presented can influence the choice of audience, this clearly shows that the director wants to tell the audience that whether North Korean law enforcement is better, stricter, or sadistic, considering death penalty does exist there. This explanation is also supported by Entman, because compared to law enforcement in South Korea, North Korea indeed is stricter and even cruel. The director also wants to show how intense the diplomatic situation in both countries. It can be seen from the scene where both sides are pointing their guns to each other and making a heart-stopping negotiation.

In the next scene, the writers explain about the condition of North Korea based on how the drama shows the settlement. This drama focuses on one of many villages where captain Ri lives. It is shown in the drama that the village is underdeveloped. The people still use brisquets for lights and cooking. Limited of electricity also causes the village to have a blackout for unpredictable time. There is no internet connection in almost entire country, and phones are only available for some people like captain Ri. People in North Korea really value the goods from

South Korea. The goods are actually illegal because they are contrabands or confiscated goods from South Korea.



Figure 4: the village is out of electricity



figure 5: using briskets for cooking

Considering the most restricted and closed country, North Korea in this drama is shown as a country as a place where there are still many people do the smuggling, goods or people, in and out the country. This is contradict to the statement that North Korea is very strict and closed. This contradiction is also supported by Captain Ri's action where he decided to keep Se-Ri alive. A real North Korean army would never compromise people who trespass their territory, especially those who are from South Korea since they are enemies (Lee, 2019). Many people around the world know that North Korea is famous for its communism ideology and dictatorship leader. The leader will punish people who abandon the job and break the law. It is believed that if there is someone, especially people from military break the rule, they will be punished.

When the main character, Se-Ri arrives in the village, she thinks that she is in South Korea. She is confused by the village which is dark and so quite. After observing for quite some time, she realizes that the people use different accent. She also notices that the village looks different compared to the village in her place. The drama gives a vivid description about how North Korean looks like and how the people do their daily activity. Kids march and sing while going to their school. Some wives and women make kimchi, a traditional Korean cuisine, in a traditional and different way. It is also mentioned that in other villages, they still use dried leaves and weed to lit fire. Cars are very rare coming to the village. There are lots of homeless kids who steal food to eat every day. It shows how hard the life of people in that country. However, despite the poor and lack of technology, the sense of warm neighborhood covers up all the flaws of this village. People are so nice to each other, they are happy with their condition. Sometimes in the morning, there is even a music comes from the loudspeaker to tell that it is the time to do some gymnastic. This drama series is only an entertainment show; however, according to the director, this drama is inspired from a real event where a South Korean actress and her three friends accidentally strayed into disputed waters between the two countries when doing a boat trip in 2008. It is even said that they talked to North Korean fisherman. There are a lot of interpretations about the movie that display the description of North Korea. How the media, in this case a drama series portray the description of North Korea is still debatable. According to Min Joo Kim, a reporter for The Washington Post, there are some similarities and differences about the North Korean shown in the drama. Kim interviewed some people both North Korean and South Korean who lives near the border. In her article, she wrote:

*Kang, who now lives near South Korea's border with the North, recently watched the show with her husband. Her husband kept asking her about what he was seeing on TV, she said. "He couldn't believe that was the life I lived before meeting him, but*

*yeah, I also made kimchi out of seawater and showered in a makeshift steam bath under plastic sheets,” she said, noting scenes from the series.*

*Kang said she used to avoid watching South Korean films and dramas that involved North Korea, because the North was depicted as “so dark.”*

*“My life in North Korea had hardships, but it was not just suffering,” she said. “There are real people living in the country, and all kinds of things happen there. What I liked about this series is that it showed different kinds of people living in North Korea” (Kim & Denyer 2020).*

Related to Entman’s theory that is mentioned above in the theoretical framework, which says that the narratives should be compared first in order to get a reliably frames, a clear description can be drawn clearly because there is a comparison between what is said in the drama and the real informant who used to live in North Korea. Kang agrees for a part where people in North Korea make kimchi traditionally, and take a shower with a makeshift steam, as shown in the drama. However, when it comes to the suffrage, she tends to disagree. It is shown when Kang says that she rarely watches South Korean drama about the North Korea because it is usually “dark”. She also adds that even though it is hard to live in North Korea, she is not suffering, compared to what is depicted in the movies that many kids are homeless and steal for food because of have nothing to eat for three days. The writers assume that what is usually depicted in the drama is not always the same with the reality. Many scenes are made only for entertaining.

Min Joo Kim in her article also interviewed a North Korean army named Jung Ha-Neul that had a job exactly like captain Ri. The interview says:

*“The border guard unit I experienced was much more rigid and hierarchical,” he said, adding he has “hardly any happy memories” of the 15 months he spent in the army.*

*Jung sneaked across the heavily mined front line in 2013, when a typhoon knocked out some of the electric fences — just as a typhoon does in the TV drama — but he said he never would have risked his life to run away if the army had been as warm as it is portrayed.*

*But in one respect, he says, the show is accurate. “When the soldiers first come to Seoul in the show, the sense of surprise and marvel they feel is real,” he said. “The burgers I tasted for the first time in Seoul were amazing” (Kim, 2020).*

This testimony above shows the support to the movie. It can be seen from the interview when Ha-Neul says the show is accurate. A lot of speculation about North Korea spreads among people around the world. However, it is hard to determine its accuracy unless we live there and witness ourselves. Many people accept it outright what is shown in the drama, but many disagree too. It is related to what Goffman’s theory which says what is presented can influence the choice of people. Entman’s theory says that the narratives should be compared to gain the true information.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through the media of K-Drama, South Korea wants to show the audience about the description of North Korea. The media sometimes gives some framing that North Korea is a

strict, underdeveloped, and not so livable country. Through “Crash Landing on You”, all the framings can be seen from the scenes that have been mentioned in discussion above. Media framing is made for some reasons. The media framing on K-Drama “Crash Landing on You” shows that the armies are nice people because they save and help people from South Korea, which is not true in real life. This framing shows that the North Korean armies are not that tough when it comes to law, integrity, and punishment. However, people in North Korea can live peacefully despite the hardship that they go through. In contrast, people in South Korea are fighting over money and position just like Se-Ri families do. Media framing in this drama brings the audiences’ attention that North Korean and South Korean are good people. Even though North Korean armies are famous for their discipline and strict law enforcement, they help a woman from South Korea. Nevertheless, it is the audience part whether to believe what is presented or do more research. Some comparisons of evidences were presented to show whether the drama is accurate or not and it is up to the audience to decide how to react towards the media framing that delivered on the K-Drama “Crash Landing on You.” .

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