

New Romance from Japanese Drama

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For many years, dramas have been an essential feature on television around the world. In Malaysia, Japanese romantic drama has become one of the major sources of entertainment for the local college girls. The growing popularity of that genre in Japanese drama has impacted college girls' standards towards their future partners. With this trend, this paper attempts to analyze the influence of Japanese romantic drama towards the raising expectations of the female college student's towards their future love interest.

After graduating from high school, Pei Yi Choo became a chemistry major at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Her exposure to Japanese dramas started when her friends introduced her to *Hana Yori Dango*, also known as *Boys Over Flowers*. The drama is a nine-episode series about a girl, Makino Tsukushi, from a working-class family who attends an elite school and ends up falling in love with the most handsome and wealthiest boy, Tsukasa Domyoji. The drama captured Pei Yi's interest in Japanese shows because of the idealistic appearance and behaviors of Tsukasa Domyoji towards the female protagonist. This Japanese drama alters her standards towards her future partner to be on par with her idolized character.

Surprisingly, Pei Yi Choo is not alone in this unique growing trend. Back in Malaysia, local college girls also exhibit the same perception of having a partner as Tsukasa Domyoji. Due to the favor of Japanese romantic drama, there is an informal checklist in terms of looks, attitude and wealth that a male must follow in order to attract college girls. Thus, the courting culture in Malaysia has transformed because of the popularity of *Boys Over Flowers*. Also, the drama has caused more pressure on male college students to meet the females' expectations to be noticed by them.

Among the effects of *Boys Over Flowers* on the target audience, the transformation of Malaysia's courtship culture was unexpected. This phenomenon is known as externalities. McChesney stresses that externalities are social repercussions that do not factor in the business market. Clearly, the media industry's goal is to make profits by selling an appealing plot to a diverse audience. The industry aims to let the female audience enjoy the drama's plot and increase their profits, but the changed courting culture in Malaysia is the side effect that was unplanned for.

The success of *Boys Over Flowers* that swooped across the East Asian television industry became the stepping-stone for other upcoming dramas. The following dramas such as *Kimi Wa Petto* and *Hana Kimi* were introduced. The Japanese media industry niche markets are teenage girls, using similar plot settings and good-looking actors as their strategies. Therefore, as the college girls watch a lot of Japanese dramas, the viewers will be more likely to believe that the drama reflects the real world. This is an example of the Cultivation Theory. Baran explains that the theory is a heavy exposure to media, namely television, creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media conjured version of reality than that of actual reality (2014). The large consumption of dramas similar to *Boys Over Flowers* has reinforced the audience's perception that the media mirrors the society around them. Thus, the drama created an illusion for college girls from the working class to connect with the female protagonist. Cultivation theory can be seen in this area where the college girls receive heavy consumptions of Japanese romantic dramas that are consistent to their attitudes and beliefs in their ideal dating lives.

Reizer and Hetsroni support that cultivation theory explains the relationship between the college girls' heavy exposure of media and their ideal standards for future romantic interests. Based on cultivation theory, romantic dramas routinely internalize a set of norms, beliefs and

evaluation of relationship rules needed by every couple (2014). Television drama serves as an important source of information on the nature of romantic relationship. Therefore the consumption of media by college girls is high. Also, selective attention also coexists alongside cultivation (Hetsroni & Reizer; Lippman; Seabrook & Ward, 2014). Selective attention is the practice where people bring themselves to be exposed to a certain media that convey messages that are congruent with their beliefs (Baran, 2014). College girls were intrigued by Boys Over Flowers' storyline and endorsed themselves with more Japanese romantic dramas to reaffirm their beliefs and standards for their future love partner.

The culture of courtship has changed when Japanese drama was introduced to Malaysia. This growing culture leads college girls to be conscious of having high standards for their future romantic partners. The theory of Objectification by Fredrickson and Roberts is a process when an individual incorporates the perspective of the outsiders on themselves, also known as self-objectification (Jaworski, Ramsey & Zurbriggen, 2011). College girls self-objectify themselves as the female protagonist in the drama in that they are strong and independent for not falling in love with men easily. Aside from self-objectification, partner-objectification explains how females present themselves to impress males. So, the emphasis on character and physical attraction in romantic relationships increased. In Zurbriggen, Ramsey and Jawaorski studies, self-objectification and partner-objectification have a positive correlation. Higher levels of partner-objectification were associated with higher levels of self-objectification (2011). When a college girl is more stressed about her presentation of herself to others, her expectations of her future partner become higher.

All of these dramas have affected college girls to be conscious of their well-beings through their romantic partners' appearances and mistaking reality as the drama. Hence, it is

important for college girls to be media literate in order to maintain a realistic standard in romantic relationships. Media literacy is “the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and utilize mass communication” (Baran, 2014). Hence, college girls should not focus on the partners’ physical appearances, which could deter their needs and desires. Study has shown that females who express concerns on their partners’ attraction will be dissatisfied with their relationships (Jaworski, Ramsey & Zurbiggen, 2011). Furthermore, in the common plot of Japanese romantic dramas, the conflicts are often humoristic and regularly have happy endings (Hetsroni & Reizer, 2014). In order to be media literate, college girls can learn to think critically and view dramas as products of the media industry, which tries to sell to a diverse nation. If the college girls are able to pinpoint the recipe of the industrial storyline, then they will be able to make predictions along the way and will not be emotionally devastated over the male protagonist. Empathy can be another way to be media literate. Male college students are the victims in this growing trend since they have to submit to the females’ standards in order to be noticed. Females should learn to be more empathetic towards the males’ situations so that their romantic relationships can be based on mutual honesty and trust.

In conclusion, the demands and acceptance of Japanese romantic drama have remodeled the Malaysian college students’ dating culture. The media consumption by college girls has taken a toll on their dating experience. These various factors have changed the culture in Malaysia dating, as television dramas have always been part and parcel of Malaysian entertainment.

## References

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