

Korean Language and Culture Education with Television Dramas: Focusing on <Tree with Deep Roots>

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INTRODUCTION

Historical television dramas basically tell fiction by interpreting past events in a fictional fashion. Historical dramas have the attribute of reflecting on the present by acquiring information about historical facts and reinterpreting the past, which makes historical dramas wonderful training aids for foreign learners striving to learn the Korean language and culture. By watching a historical drama, they will be able to understand the past and present of Korea and thus understand it in further depth.

BACKGROUND

<*Tree with Deep Roots*>, a South Korean historical drama, depicts the Hangul invention and proclamation processes of Sejong the Great, who was the fourth king of Joseon. During this time common people underwent a lot of suffering because they had no letters to express what they thought and felt in Korean. Sejong the Great thus decided to invent an original letters system called Hangul so that everyone could learn and write easily. Hangul was invented in 1443 and proclaimed in 1446. Today it is celebrated on Hangul Proclamation Day that falls on October 9 every year.

DISCUSSION

<*Tree with Deep Roots*> introduces the characteristics of Hangul to the viewers: first, Hangul is such a "scientific" system of letters. The 14 consonants of Hangul reflect the principles of yin & yang and Five Elements, and the 10 vowels of Hangul reflect those of Samjae including Heaven, Earth, and Man. The 24 alphabets can be combined with one another in systematic ways. Once mastered, one is able to write down all

pronunciations. The scientific nature of Hangeul is linked to the convenience of learning and living. Since Hangeul has a small number of alphabets and a systematic principle of combination, everyone can learn and use the convenient alphabets with ease. <*Tree with Deep Roots*> shows the scientific nature of Hangeul by depicting its invention processes and demonstrates its convenience by portraying the ways the characters learned the alphabets easily.

Secondly, Hangeul is a system of letters with "political nature." Letters allow rulers to monopolize and control information, thus being connected to power. <*Tree with Deep Roots*> shows that Hangeul was the product of Sejong the Great's democratic ideology to distribute the power of the privileged class even to the common people. The conflicts around Hangeul in the drama are linked to the questions about the nature of nations, politics, and leaders in the South Korean society of the 21st century. The drama paints the current picture of South Korean society through the political nature of letters and Hangeul.

<*Tree with Deep Roots*> also describes the various elements of traditional Korean culture: first, there are "Jiphyeonjeon" and "Banchon" in the aspect of space. Jiphyeonjeon was a specialized academic institute that played pivotal roles in the politics, institutions, and culture of early Joseon. In the drama, the institute is reinterpreted as an organization set up by Sejong the Great to implement his ruling philosophy. Banchon was a village that supported Seonggyungwan, the National University of Joseon. The drama reinterprets it as the base of a secret society that rose against Sejong the Great.

Furthermore, there are "kings" and "butchers" in the aspect of life. In Joseon, kings enjoyed the ultimate power, but they were not completely independent. The drama reinterprets Sejong the Great as a common man with trauma, thus showing the viewers the different sides of the King. In

Joseon, butchers made the lowest rank of society, slaughtering cows and pigs and supplying the meat. In the drama, Jeong Gi-jun, a rival of Sejong the Great, disguises himself as a butcher to hide his true colors.

Finally, there are "Gyeongyeon" and "Gwageo." Gyeongyeon was a debate system in which the kings and ministers engaged in discussions based on the Confucian logic. Sejong the Great held the most Gyeongyeon events throughout Joseon, which is found in the scenes where he tried to persuade the ministers against Hangeul proclamation in the drama. Gwageo was a state examination system to recruit talents. In the drama, it is depicted as the trigger of all events. Those findings demonstrate that *<Tree with Deep Roots>* adds more dramatic fun and broadens the understanding of Korea by introducing and reinterpreting the traditional Korean culture.

CONCLUSION

Video content including television dramas have a huge advantage of motivating learners to study through dramatic fun. Historical dramas such as *<Tree with Deep Roots>* have a merit of introducing the diverse cultural elements of Korea and the values of Hangeul to learners. As foreigner learners watch interesting stories in dramas, they will broaden their understanding of Korea and enjoy greater learning effects effortlessly.

KEYWORDS

'Tree with Deep Roots', Hangeul, Korean language and culture, historical drama

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