

아주 옛날 (Once Upon a Time): Koreanovelas and the Galleon Trade of the Digital Age

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Abstract

The evident proliferation of Korean television programs in the Philippines manifests a modern form of trade between the two countries. Though there are latent negativities, this trade brings forth a lot of positive effects between the nations involved, specifically in the modern television industry of the latter.

Through the three-step copycat-piggyback-leapfrog innovation, export-quality Koreanovelas facilitate product creativity that can increase not only the quantity, but more importantly the quality, of locally-produced television goods. The presence and proliferation of Koreanovelas also challenges the local industry as it promotes competition for patronization in limited television timeslots. This competition works side-by-side with creativity. Scarce resources with desirable incentives push television stations to offer only programs that are good enough to be consumed in another country, products that are most likely of superior quality.

Finally, Koreanovelas improve employment especially in the Philippine-end of the barter. The drive to produce better programs brought about by heightened creativity and competition will increase production. This, in turn, will cause television stations to employ more and better workers, improving workers and the television industry as a whole.

Keywords: Koreanovelas, Philippine soap operas, Philippine primetime television

The Story Behind the Story

In *Philippine Studies*' "Two and a Half Centuries of the Galleon Trade," Benito Legarda Jr. narrated the beginnings of the said trade in the Philippines. During the early years of Spanish occupation, hints of barter with neighboring countries were manifested in foreign products in local towns. Citing Edward Gaylord Bourne's 1907 *Discovery, Conquest and Early History of the Philippine Islands*, Legarda also discussed on what the article presents as "the apogee of the trade." Suggested to be thirty years after the Philippines started trading with the Spanish and Chinese, it was said to be the time when "the galleon trade had attained its height and the city was seeing its most glorious days (1955)."

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines the galleon as a "heavy square-rigged sailing ship used for war or commerce by the Spanish." The galleon trade, though presented with both its positive and negative implications, can easily be a successful bout of commerce, its profits even described in the same article as "fantastic."

Legarda also cited William Lytle Schurz's 1939 *The Manila Galleon* in describing the desirable effects of the trade to both parties involved. Directly quoted by Legarda from Schurz, the first part of the article—a specific section at least—closes saying "If the Manileños lived dangerously in the midst of so many perils, they also lived luxuriously and recklessly, and it was the bountiful returns from the annual voyage of the Manila Galleon that provided the means for their lavish way of life." Indeed, it might not be the Manila Filipinos that are greatly benefiting per se. However, the desirable outcomes of the trade are still shared by both parties involved in the barter.

It is in this way that this paper aims to make use of the galleon trade. The focus is not on the details of one or a number of specific voyages or on any particular instance, but is on the way the Filipinos—the local television industry, most especially—can reap benefits from a phenomenal form of digital trade.

The Main Characters

In a November 12, 2013 write-up of Nickie Wang for Manila Standard Today, ABS-CBN Channel 2 and GMA Channel 7 were shown to have the highest television show ratings in the country. Values do vary per time slot and area of data collection. However, the groups of data procured from separate research groups AGB Nielsen and Kantar Research show that it is indeed these two stations that most Filipinos tune-in to. Though these may not end the battle for the top television station spot, the numbers do give us an idea that television goods from these two stations are the ones that a good number of Filipinos patronize.

GMA Channel 7 collectively calls their prime time offerings *GMA Telebabad*. The term, most likely from the Filipino words for telephone and soak, initially describes the prolonged usage of the telephone throughout the day. Following the same idea, it was used by the station to refer to the act of staying in front of an open television for a long period of time. Using data collected on March 19, of the five programs that the station's prime time viewers can "soak in," one is a Korean series. Billed as *A Hundred-Year Legacy* or *A Hundred Years' Inheritance*, it is a Filipino-dubbed drama whose final episode aired in the country last May 15. Two months after the said time, during the second data collection on May 20, *The Master's Sun* took the timeslot of the said series. As of July 19, during the third data gathering, the slot was for a series called *Secret* or *Secret Love*. Again indicated in the website Viki, the last two shows are also Korean in origin.

ABS-CBN Channel 2, on the other hand, calls their most-consumed—most-watched—program block *Primetime Bida*. The second part of the term is a Filipino translation of the word protagonist. Of the four programs included in this block, none is a Korean series. However, the station, who fondly calls its viewers *kapamilya* or family, did offer—at least during the period inclusive of March 19—a re-run of *My Girlfriend is a Gumih*o in their pre-primetime *Kapamilya Gold*. As of July 19, a show called the *The Heirs* secured a slot in the same program

block. Similar to *A Hundred-Year Legacy*, *The Master's Sun* and *Secret Love*, these two series originated from Korea.

The Setting: Time

Information about their daily shows can be seen in the program guide page of GMA Channel 7's online website, gmanetwork.com. Scheduled from 10:15 to 11:00 in the evening, *A Hundred-Year Legacy* constituted 45 units of the 1172-minute cumulative air time of the station in a day. This was approximately 3.84 percent of the total program-run from 4:58 to 12:30 in the morning. *The Master's Sun*, meanwhile, is—during the period inclusive of May 20—scheduled from 10:10 to 10:55 p.m. This is still 3.84 percent of the total time per day. For *Secret Love* who, as of July 19, is in the same 10 p.m. slot, the values are not much different.

Data about ABS-CBN Channel 2's offerings are also available in their online website abs-cbn.com, this time under the Schedules tab. *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho* ran from 5:20 to 5:50 in the afternoon, taking up 30 units of the 1205-minute total program-run. This covered 2.49 percent of the station's run from 5:00 in the morning to 1:05 a.m. the next day. Looking at the site's data on July 19, *The Heirs* covers thrice as much airtime—7.47 percent—during its 4:20 to 5:50 in the afternoon run.

In line with this is a fairly recent legislative proposal. Just this March, former Manila City mayor and *Buhay* Partylist representative Cong. Jose "Lito" Atienza Jr. filed House Bill No. 3839, described by Louis Bacani of *The Philippine Star* as a bill "prohibiting the broadcast of foreign television series, also known as teleseryes, during primetime" (2014). Primetime, the period where most viewers watch television shows, was defined by information and measurement website The Nielsen Company as the time between 8:00 and 11:00 in weekday evenings. However, for the Philippine context, the same journalist suggested that the "peak time slot of television broadcasts" is from 6:00 to 10:00 pm. As stated in the last portion of the news

article, this bill has been forwarded to the House Committee on Public Information for further review.

Looking at the programming schedules above, it would be easy to understand Cong. Atienza Jr. He has a point when he said that foreign television series, most notable of which are Korean ones, do “eat into the primetime schedules” and lessen the time available for locally-made shows. Even if majority of the Korean series mentioned run for only less than an hour, this is still enough airing time for one or two typical-length local television program.

The Setting: Place

As seen in the same Manila Bulletin source, the lawmaker said that foreign series push local goods into “unfavorable timeslots.” This, then, supposedly discourages local producers from making productions.

It is not difficult to see the point of this statement. Again, the first part of the relevant information below was acquired from gmanetwork.com’s program guide and abs-cbn.com’s show schedule page last March 19.

Of the five programs that GMA Channel 7 offered in their pre-primetime *GMA Afternoon Prime*, one, *Villa Quintana*, is a remake of what the website described as a “phenomenal hit series from the mid-90’s.” Another slot was for the station’s *Sinebadad*, a show whose name most likely came from the Filipino word for cinema and the term *Telebadad*. The 45-minute program from 5:05 to 5:50 in the afternoon featured a wide variety of movies produced in the past.

ABS-CBN Channel 2 had its own version of the *Sinebadad*. As part of its *Kapamilya Gold* block, the station gives its viewers a chance to watch movies in their *Kapamilya Blockbusters*. Almost three times more than that of GMA Channel 7’s, this movie-showing program ran from 2:50 to 4:20 in the afternoon, a total of 1 hour and 30 minutes. Another pre-primetime program, *Annaliza*, was a remake. In the station’s *Primetime Bida*, one,

titled *Dyesebel*, is also a remake of a program that has been shown in the past.

Using data taken from the websites last May 20, it is observable that *Kapamilya Blockbusters*, *Annaliza* and *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho* were replaced with another set of programs. One of this is a re-run of *Meteor Garden*, shown from 4:30 to 5:50 in the late afternoon. As of July 19, it was *The Heirs* that took over this slot.

On the other hand, *Sinebadad* was replaced by *Mischievous Kiss: Love in Tokyo* and *My Love from the Star*. The former is Japanese in origin and was an adaptation of a Japanese graphic novel—which was also the basis of the Korean series *Playful Kiss*—while *My Love from the Star*, or *My Love from Another Star*, is from Korea. Ending on May 23, *Mischievous Kiss* was replaced by a re-run of *Jewel in the Palace*. During the second data gathering on May 20, the series was being promoted in a GMA Channel 7 television commercial as “the one that started the Korean wave in the Philippines.” As of the third set of data taken, Korean *Return of the Wife* or *Wife Returns* is being shown at 10:30 in the late morning. However, *Jewel in the Palace* is the only non-local program in the pre-primetime block.

These things can serve as proof to the effects of foreign series in the local television industry. The fact that stations often resort to producing remakes or even showing pre-produced movies and re-runs exhibits the impacts of certain series produced outside the country, including those that originated from Korea. Though it cannot be said that one does cause the other, the proliferation of programs produced elsewhere—Korean television series in particular—during the recent years did happen before a notable change in how local stations produce their shows in the country.

The Plot: Rising Action

Reporting on why the lawmaker thinks House Bill No. 3839 is necessary, Bacani’s March 17 article in the *Philippine Star* reads “Atienza said the State should protect the local entertainment

industry and promote creativity needed to spur production and increase employment” (2014).

Even if it not directly stated, the bill aims to ban foreign series in primetime since doing so will promote the needed creativity in the said industry. However, a better way of seeing foreign series, of which Korean ones can be said to be the leader, is to look at its benefits as a digital form of trade. This way, it would be more evident how shows produced in foreign countries help the local television scene, thus showing how the Philippines benefits from this exchange.

The presence of Korean series—foreign, in general—“raises,” or promotes, creativity and action in the television industry. This could be seen in one of the negative effects that foreign series are said to cause in the television market: pushing local products to “unfavorable time slots.”

For one, there are also a lot of other internal television-market factors that affect this push, some of which might be purely subjective. Determined by people knowledgeable enough in their fields, timeslot assignment lies upon the decision of television station heads, depending on the evaluation of relevant data gathered. Information on program ratings, for example, partly dictates which particular show gets aired on a particular time. Looking at data on program ratings available in the internet, it is indeed likely that television goods with high ratings appear in the primetime block. These show that a push to certain time slots cannot be solely caused by the place or country where a competition program was produced.

However, if the proliferation of foreign series—foreign products—do tend take the sought-after primetime slots away from locally-produced goods, then these local producers should strive to create shows that would be as good as their foreign counterparts.

Stations will tend to place foreign series in “favorable timeslots” if they see these as superior to other program options.

Local shows can “claim back” sought-after slots if they would equal, if not surpass, the quality of these foreign series. One way of raising creativity to produce better shows is by utilizing the fact that foreign programs continue to proliferate in the industry. It could be done through innovation.

In one Ateneo de Manila University Loyola Schools Science and Society plenary lecture during the first semester of school year 2013-2014, Matthew Cua of the Ateneo Innovation Center discussed the center’s take on the three steps of innovation. The first step makes use of the image of a copy-cat, where an innovator first imitates whoever is superior in a particular field. This promotes creativity as it enables an innovator to step into the shoes of whoever is leading and see in a different point of view. The local industry has been doing this for a couple of years now. GMA Channel 7’s remake of the Korean show *Coffee Prince* is one good example. As observed in each episode, the show is notably as close as possible to the original.

The second step involves a piggyback, which can be seen in an innovator “riding” on the good qualities of the superior entity. This promotes creativity as it goes a step further from mere imitation, focusing more on what certain qualities have proven itself effective based on past instances. This has also been evident in the country’s television industry. An example is GMA Channel 7’s version of *Temptation of Wife*, which, in its aim to fit better in the local setting, is notable for doing a number of drastic plot changes while still staying true to the original Korean themes. These changes involved a lot of creativity from the production team, resulting to a storyline that could possibly be seen as something better than the original.

The last step is related to leapfrog, and is about going leaps further from where the leading entity is. Of the three, this is where one can easily see how the presence of foreign shows brings forth positive effects to the television industry. After being a mere imitator and after utilizing good qualities observed, an innovator can change the game by being the entity on top. By making use of the fact that foreign series in the industry promote

creativity, local producers will be motivated to produce programs that are as good as those produced in foreign countries. When done well, locally-made programs can become better than the foreign shows that viewers prefer to patronize. The proliferation of foreign series promotes creativity; creativity allows producers to create works that are superior. When local shows are of superior quality, they can “reclaim the favorable slots” that were taken away from them.

When done at the right pace, creativity brought about by the presence of foreign series will result to prime time blocks dominated by local shows. This creativity improves not only the industry, but the over-all quality of the local program production as well.

The Plot: Climax

“Foreign teleseryes have been eating into the prime time schedules of television companies, and thereby push the Philippine-produced shows to unfavorable time slots.”

The above is again a direct quote from the lawmaker, as seen in the same Philippine Star article. If their proliferation does negatively affects local program time slot-allotment, then foreign television series should indeed be banned during prime time. This is very similar to imported products that, when proven to significantly “kill” local industries, are banned from entering the market. However, aside from creativity, this proliferation also promotes a desirable economic idea. Foreign series promotes “heightened conflict,” or competition, in the television market.

In the first chapter of his book *Principles of Economics*, economist Gregory Mankiw discusses how time is a scarce yet valuable resource. The efficient management of scarce resources, of which time is an example, is what economics aims to promote. Shows that reduce the time available for another type of show exhibit how prime time slots are limited resources, resources that producers need to compete for. Given both the scarcity and amount of possible viewers that they have, local producers need

to vastly improve the quality of their works to acquire these prime time slots.

The opportunity to acquire the scarce reward, which in this case is a time slot with a good number of viewers or “buyers,” serves as an incentive for competing parties to improve performances. Banning an external force that contributes to this scarcity will lessen this incentive.

To an extent, it might be questioned if there is indeed a competition between local and foreign programs. This is because the latter have already been fully produced and shown in their source country before they are shown locally. This is true, but this can also pave way to competition in a new market that involves the export of television series. If foreign shows are good enough to be shown outside its origin, then their presence in the country brings forth a much greater benefit. Not only will it promote desirable competition inside the country, it could even extend to more extensive international television markets.

Competition, similar to how creativity works for the industry, shows the benefits of Korean and other foreign series to local television. Because of the concept of competition, foreign television shows drive local producers to improve the quality of their works. Improvements should be made so these productions will be able to “conquer” the prime time slots, so they will be able to compete with series that are worthy of being “shipped out” and shown outside their source country. Again this could result to television companies that offer superior quality goods.

The Plot: Falling Action

Since markets aim to liken the television industry to a modern galleon trade, another economic principle might be applied to the latter. The proliferation of foreign shows in the country is a cumulative result of numerous instances of trade between local and foreign television markets. The acquisition of rights to air foreign shows in exchange for a fee is an instance of trade, and there are benefits in trade. As seen in Mankiw’s discussion on

what is considered as the ten principles of economics, “Trade Can Make Everyone Better-Off” (Mankiw, 2012, 10).

The point of this paper is to show how the proliferation of Korean series in local television is similar to the galleon trade of the Spanish era, focusing on the positive effects of this trade on the local end. Another one of these is its more direct effect on the television industry. The presence of foreign series promotes trade—the correspondence of a rise for every “fall”—and trade has positive effects in the television industry.

In an October 19, 2013 news article from Philippine Daily Inquirer, journalist Marlon Ramos reported on Philippine President Benigno Aquino III’s then recent visit to South Korea. In one of her welcome speeches, South Korean President Park Geun-hye mentioned how foreign series play a role in the relationship of the two countries.

The article features the part where Geun-hye’s said that “Filipinos today share similar emotional experiences with their Korean counterparts through Koreanovela.” “Koreanovela” is a term that refers to a *telenovela* or television series that was produced in Korea. It seems that this sharing of emotional experiences positively affects tourism. After the above quotation, the article proceeds to narrate President Geun-hye’s note on the one million Korean tourists that visited the Philippines the previous year.

As Ramos puts it, “Even the [then] newly elected leader of this rising economic superpower acknowledges how Filipinos’ affection for Koreanovelas ... have helped bridge the two cultures” (2013).

Still from Mankiw’s Principles of Economics, “Trade between two countries makes each better off.” (2012, 10) Trade greatly affects the relationship of the parties involved. It also promotes product efficiency, as seen in the positive relationship between quality and trade. It also facilitates a latent exchange of knowledge, traditions and cultures. The proliferation of foreign

series in the local television industry is brought about by trade. Therefore, the television market benefits from these series as it paves way to trade, including all positive effects that come with it.

Again using The Philippine Star's Bacani in his March 17 report, we see how "Atienza said the State should protect the local entertainment industry and promote creativity needed to spur production and increase employment" (2014).

As discussed above, a promotion of creativity that spurs production is brought about by the fact that foreign series are aired in local television companies. Even a desirable increase in employment is brought about by their presence, very much like the galleon trade and the local workers producing majority of the goods.

Productions that focus on exact remakes of foreign series, of which GMA Channel 7's *Coffee Prince* is an example, employ almost the same amount of workers that a pure locally-made program needs. Though the story will be exactly the same as the original, writers are still needed for a script that will fit the new context. In fact, employees might be more in number since there are new tasks that need to be done. Translators—who go the extra mile by translating not only the words but the character in every line of dialogue—get employed. For innovative programs that go beyond the leap-frog stage, one of which is the same station's *Temptation of Wife*, the numbers might be even higher.

Even in the case of programs that manifest the decline in local production, the one where ABS-CBN Channel 2's *Kapamilya Blockbusters* was used, employment is still not that gravely affected since, again, translators and voice actors are needed. This is also true for Filipino-dubbed foreign television series themselves.

However, how the presence of foreign products makes every economic worker better-off should go beyond all of these. In promoting creativity and competition, it is desired that these

programs improve the over-all quality of local television series. Foreign shows make producers aim for higher quality. This, in turn, should increase production. Higher productivity caused by these programs will increase employment in the television industry, further exhibiting the positive effects of this galleon trade.

The “Ever After”

A bill that seeks to ban foreign television series during prime time has been filed in the Philippine congress. Though not limited to Korean ones, this bill is one excellent tool in looking more closely at how foreign series affect the country’s television industry. Given the number of shows and the extent of their influence, the foreign series referred to in the bill could actually be almost synonymous to Korean series.

The presence and proliferation of Korean series in the Philippines is a digital form of the galleon trade simply because it involves the import of a foreign product in exchange for a local item. This item might be reduced to simply the fees needed to acquire the rights to air a show. However, the part where it might be better to exert greater focus is the positive effects of these on the country’s television industry. Indeed, this paper fails to discuss and elaborate on the negative effects of this trade on the Philippines or how these affects the other end of the barter. However, the timeliness of a legislative bill influenced this paper to focus on its positive effects.

Through the three-step copycat-piggyback-leapfrog innovation, export-quality Korean series facilitate product creativity that can increase not only the quantity, but more importantly the quality, of locally-produced television goods. The presence and proliferation of Korean series also challenges the local industry as it promotes competition for patronization in limited television time slots. This competition works side-by-side with creativity. Scarce resources with desirable incentives push television stations to offer only programs that are good enough to

be consumed in another country, products that are expected to be of superior quality.

Finally, Korean novels improve employment especially in the Philippine-end of the barter. The drive to produce better programs brought about by heightened creativity and competition will increase production. This, in turn, will cause television stations to employ more and better workers, improving workers and the television industry as a whole.

It is recognized that the discussions are limited to series in primetime and pre-primetime slots. A better analysis could also be done when one focuses on Korean programs alone. Some of what has been discussed might be seen as subjective claims as well. However, all available research materials were used in order to see the issue as critically as possible. Thus, from the related research gathered, it can be concluded that the presence and proliferation of Korean series in the television industry is a digital form of the galleon trade. Through creativity, competition and other principles of basic trade, Korean television programs facilitate a trade that contributes to the betterment of the television industry of the Philippines.

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