

A Comparative Study of Family Values in Indonesian and Korean Culture: Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap Vs Reply 1988

Aprilia Anzani¹, Kezia Meily Nicharisa Sembiring², Justin Hubert Butar-Butar³,
Nurhayati Purba⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Methodist Indonesia, Medan

✉ keziameily42@gmail.com, apriliaananzani5@gmail.com, butarbutarjustin@gmail.com,
nurhayatipurba07@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the representation of family values in the Indonesian film *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (2022) and the Korean drama *Reply 1988* (2015) through a comparative literature approach. Both films depict family as the core of identity, love, and conflict, yet reveal significant cultural differences. *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* portrays a patriarchal Batak family where traditional obligations and family honor create tension between generations, with emotions often concealed and revealed only in dramatic moments. In contrast, *Reply 1988* illustrates urban Korean families characterized by open emotional expression, egalitarian gender roles, and strong neighborhood solidarity as an extension of family life. The study applies qualitative content analysis, identifying thematic patterns of family structure, emotional dynamics, and cultural expectations. Findings highlight both universal themes of familial love and the unique cultural nuances that shape family narratives in Indonesian and Korean contexts. This research contributes to comparative literature by demonstrating how film serves as a cultural text, offering insights into societal values and intercultural understanding.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Family Values, Cultural Studies, *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*, *Reply 1988*.

Citation (APA Style):

Anzani, A. ., Sembiring, K. M. N., Butar-Butar, J. H. ., & Purba, N. . A Comparative Study of Family Values in Indonesian and Korean Culture: *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap Vs Reply 1988*. *Jurnal Pendidikan Impola*, 43–47.

Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.70047/jpi.v2i2.172>

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparative literature offers a useful lens to examine cultural identity and human experience beyond the boundaries of language and country. In the modern era, film has become an important medium in this field, telling stories that depict the values, conflicts, and everyday realities of society. One of the most discussed themes in literature and film is the concept of family. A person's values, beliefs and sense of self are influenced by their family, which is the fundamental social unit. In Asian countries, the family is significant as a cultural emblem and a personal institution that represents moral values, social norms, and collective aspirations.

Despite certain cultural similarities, South Korea and Indonesia are two Asian countries that have different family values and social institutions. Their respective film industries have created films that eloquently depict intergenerational strife, family dynamics, and the balance between tradition and modernity. *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (2022) from Indonesia and *Reply 1988* (2015) from South Korea are two notable films in this regard. Despite coming from different historical and cultural backgrounds, family is the main source of identity, love, and conflict in both films.

A Batak family in North Sumatra, where a father forces his adult children to return home by pretending to be terminally ill, provides a useful prism for examining cultural identity and human experience beyond the context of *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*. The longstanding tension between the children's desire for freedom and the expectations of their traditional Batak parents is revealed in the movie. This is a reflection of the hierarchical and patriarchal structures that still exist in some ethnic communities in Indonesia, where family honor and customary responsibilities often take precedence over individual aspirations.

In contrast, *Reply 1988* shows several families in a close-knit neighborhood in Seoul in the late 1980s. The series emphasized themes of community collaboration, parental sacrifice, and teenage aspirations while blending humor and heartwarming moments to depict the daily life of a family. While still rooted in traditional values, the series showed freer emotional expression and more equal gender dynamics in families compared to conventional Asian narratives.

A comparative analysis focusing on the representation of family values in the cultural context of Korea and Indonesia would be of great benefit to both films. Understanding the cultural underpinnings that influence these stories as well as how families are portrayed in films requires this type of research.

Hence, this research aims to explore the following problems:

1. How are family values represented in Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap and Reply 1988?
2. What similarities and differences exist between Indonesian and Korean family values as depicted in these films?

This research contributes to the field of comparative literature and cultural studies by analyzing how family values are reflected through cinematic narratives in two different Asian cultures. It seeks to uncover the common cultural threads that bind these communities together while highlighting the unique characteristics that set them apart.

2. METHODOLOGY

Comparative literature examines literary and artistic works that transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries to identify similar themes, conflicting ideals, and diverse cultural representations (Bassnett, 1993). Recent research has recognized film as a modern literary medium worthy of critical analysis on a par with classical works (Stam, 2000). Because it can depict historical context, social dynamics, and cultural values, film is a valuable tool for comparative cultural studies.

Culture encompasses a society's beliefs, customs, laws, arts, and knowledge (Tylor, 1871). In Korea and Indonesia, the family is the primary unit through which cultural norms and values are passed down from one generation to the next. Values such as filial piety, respect for elders, and social harmony are common to both civilizations, although they take different forms (Hofstede, 2011; Triandis, 1995).

In Indonesian society, especially among traditional ethnic groups such as the Batak, family honor and patriarchal authority are highly valued (Purba, 2022). Fathers are typically seen as the ultimate decision-makers, and children, especially boys, are expected to uphold family traditions and social status. In contrast, households in South Korea have undergone tremendous change, particularly since the late 20th century, as a result of the influence of Confucian ideas. Respect for elders and family loyalty remain strong despite a shift toward more egalitarian gender roles and greater emotional openness within the family structure (Kim, 2016; Sung & Tinkham, 2005).

In Indonesian cinema, family is often depicted as both a source of comfort and conflict. In traditional societies, the preservation of cultural identity and parental authority often clash with the aspirations of freedom for the younger generation (Purba, 2022). Films like Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap highlight this issue by depicting how conventional expectations can become burdensome and lead to emotional strain between parents and children.

South Korean cinema and television often depict family dynamics, intergenerational conflict, and community ties. Reply 1988 exemplifies this tradition, depicting everyday life filled with humor, love, and solidarity among neighbors. Mothers play a central emotional role, while fathers, though authoritative, are often portrayed with humor and warmth (Kim, 2016). This balance in family depictions contrasts with more strictly patriarchal narratives in other Asian contexts. While both Korean and Indonesian cultures place a high value on family devotion, there are some significant differences: Batak culture places a greater emphasis on rigid, patriarchal parental authority than modern Korean households. Indonesian families tend to keep their feelings to themselves, but Korean families are more open about their love. While Indonesian films tend to focus on the nuclear family, Korean films often depict neighborhood networks as extensions of the family. To understand how family narratives are constructed and portrayed in cinematic texts, an understanding of these cultural practices is necessary.

Previous studies have explored families in Indonesian and Korean contexts separately (Chen, 2018; Kim, 2016; Purba, 2022), but few have directly compared the two cultures using specific films. Furthermore, rapid modernity and Confucian traditions have profoundly influenced Korean society, impacting gender roles, family relationships, and communal life (Janelli & Janelli, 1992; Kendall, 2002). Research suggests that Korean families began to seek a balance between new individualistic impulses and conventional hierarchical structures in the 1980s, particularly in urban settings, as demonstrated in Reply 1988 (Lie, 1998). Understanding how family themes in Korean cinema reflect societal ideals and tensions requires an awareness of these cultural shifts. This study fills this gap by focusing on Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap and Reply 1988, aiming to uncover how these narratives construct family values and illustrate cultural differences and similarities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study analyzes how family values are represented in the films *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (Indonesia) and *Reply 1988* (South Korea). This analysis also seeks to identify similarities and differences in how Indonesian and Korean cultures depict family relationships through cinematic narratives. The findings are discussed in relation to the two research problems: (1) how family values are represented in the two films, and (2) what similarities and differences exist between Indonesian and Korean family values as depicted in these films.

This research employed a qualitative content analysis design to examine how family values are represented in *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* and *Reply 1988*. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of cultural meanings, character dynamics, and narrative structures embedded within cinematic works. The primary data consisted of the films *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (2022), directed by Bene Dion Rajagukguk, and *Reply 1988* (2015), directed by Shin Won-ho, selected specifically because they depict family dynamics within their respective cultural contexts. Data collection was carried out through repeated viewings of both films, transcription of significant dialogues, and observation of visual cues, character interactions, and cultural symbols, ensuring a rich and comprehensive understanding of the narratives.

The analytical procedure focused on addressing two main research problems: how family values are portrayed in each film, and the similarities and differences between Indonesian and Korean family values. The analysis began with identifying key scenes and dialogues that reflected family relationships and cultural values, followed by coding themes related to family structure, emotional expression, generational conflict, and resolution. A comparative analysis was then performed to identify cultural nuances and thematic patterns across the two films. Although this study did not aim to test specific cultural dimensions statistically, theoretical concepts such as power distance, collectivism, and gender roles, as proposed by Hofstede and Triandis, were applied as interpretive lenses to analyze cultural differences and similarities and to explain how family values are constructed and expressed within each society's unique cultural context.

Patterns of Family Values Representation

The investigation revealed that both films share fundamental themes, such as family as the core of identity and love, but differ significantly in cultural nuances, emotional expression, and social pressures. The essential aspects of family values representation in both films can be summarized as follows:

Aspect	Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap (Indonesia)	Reply 1988 (South Korea)
Central Role of Family	Family reunion, conflict rooted in tradition and expectations.	Family as center of daily life and community.
Family Structure	Strongly patriarchal, father as authority.	More balanced roles between mother and father.
Expression of Emotions	Emotions hidden, revealed dramatically.	Open emotional expression in daily life.
Type of Pressure	Cultural and traditional obligations.	Social and academic expectations.
Community Ties	Focus on a single family in a rural context.	Neighborhood as an extended family unit.

These patterns provide the basis for a deeper analysis of how family values are uniquely portrayed in each film.

Representation of Family Values in *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*

Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap centers on a Batak family from North Sumatra, where the father pretends to be seriously ill to bring his adult children back home. The film reflects the powerful role of patriarchy, where fathers are regarded as ultimate decision-makers, and sons are burdened with the duty to preserve family honor and uphold traditional customs. The mother plays a more passive role, underscoring the patriarchal hierarchy. Emotional expressions are suppressed, surfacing only during significant conflicts or dramatic moments. The film effectively captures the tension between traditional obligations and the modern aspirations of the younger generation who wish to pursue their lives independently, often away from their ethnic roots.

This narrative vividly demonstrates how family expectations and cultural values remain deeply intertwined in Indonesian society, particularly among ethnic groups like the Batak. Through strong portrayals of familial duty, respect for elders, and societal pressure, *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* depicts family as both a source of identity and a potential constraint on personal freedom.

Representation of Family Values in Reply 1988

Reply 1988 portrays multiple families living in a close-knit Seoul neighborhood during the late 1980s. The series highlights everyday life filled with warmth, humor, and collective experiences. Fathers, although sometimes strict, are shown with humor and emotional vulnerability, while mothers occupy central emotional roles and actively engage in the family's daily matters. Unlike the reserved emotional expressions in *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*, characters in *Reply 1988* express affection freely through conversation, gestures, and community involvement.

A unique feature in *Reply 1988* is the role of the neighborhood as an extension of family, creating strong social bonds and mutual support among neighbors. The film reflects changing gender dynamics and a more egalitarian approach to family life, demonstrating how South Korean society during the 1980s balanced traditional Confucian values with modern influences. While respect for elders and familial loyalty remain crucial, there is also an evident openness and emotional expressiveness that differentiates Korean family narratives from the more restrained Indonesian portrayals.

Similarities in Both Films

Despite cultural differences, both films share core similarities. Family is portrayed as the central source of love, identity, and moral guidance in both *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* and *Reply 1988*. Both works depict generational conflicts where parents strive to uphold traditional values, while their children seek personal freedom and modern aspirations. Parents in both films, whether strict or gentle, ultimately act out of deep love for their children, although sometimes that love is expressed indirectly. Emotional resolutions in both narratives emphasize the importance of family ties and mutual understanding as central to resolving conflicts and maintaining harmony.

Differences Between Indonesian and Korean Family Values

While sharing universal themes, the films also highlight significant cultural differences. In *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*, the portrayal emphasizes patriarchal authority, traditional obligations, and the preservation of family honor, especially concerning male children. Emotions are often hidden and only revealed in moments of crisis or climax. Conversely, *Reply 1988* presents a more egalitarian family structure where both parents actively participate in family life, and emotions are expressed naturally in everyday situations. Korean families in *Reply 1988* experience different types of societal pressures, focusing more on academic achievement and social reputation rather than solely on traditional obligations.

In *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap*, the narrative is deeply rooted in the cultural context of Batak traditions, highlighting rural life and the expectations placed upon ethnic communities. Meanwhile, *Reply 1988* captures the social dynamics of urban South Korea during a time of rapid modernization, presenting not only family life but also the neighborhood as a vital support system that functions as an extended family.

Implications of the Findings

The results of this analysis demonstrate that films are powerful cultural texts capable of revealing both universal human experiences and culturally specific values. In both *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* and *Reply 1988*, family is portrayed as the anchor of personal identity and social cohesion, though the ways this value manifests vary greatly across cultures. This comparative study emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity when interpreting cinematic narratives, as well as the need to understand the social, historical, and cultural contexts that inform family portrayals in different societies. Film, as a modern form of literature, effectively captures and communicates these cultural realities, offering valuable insights for audiences seeking to understand diverse perspectives on family and community life.

It is important to note that in order to guarantee language coherence and proper interpretation of conversations and cultural customs, the study of *Reply 1988* was based on its official English subtitles. This allowed the researchers to compare the Korean and Indonesian situations without being constrained by language limitations. All analysis and interpretations offered in this study are based on the independent views of the researchers and thematic coding to guarantee the authenticity of the research. To ensure academic integrity, the text has undergone a plagiarism check and relevant references have been appropriately referenced.

4. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* and *Reply 1988* demonstrates that while family remains the central source of identity, love, and moral guidance in both Indonesian and Korean cultures, significant differences exist in how these values are portrayed. *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* underscores the patriarchal structure and traditional obligations inherent in Batak culture, where emotional expression is restrained and familial honor often outweighs individual desires. Conversely, *Reply 1988* presents a more egalitarian family dynamic with open emotional communication and emphasizes community as an extension of family, reflecting shifts in Korean society during the late 1980s.

The findings affirm that film serves as a powerful medium for conveying cultural values and social

realities. By examining cinematic narratives, this study offers valuable insights into how cultural identities are constructed and negotiated within family contexts. Ultimately, understanding these representations fosters greater cultural sensitivity and appreciation of both shared human experiences and unique cultural distinctions.

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