

K-dramas in Brazil: how are they being studied on the other side of the world?

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Abstract. The East and Southeast fictional television series, mostly known as Dramas, started gaining international popularity in the beginning of the 21st century when the South Korean Drama “Winter Sonata” (2002) became famous in Japan. In the last decade, Korean Dramas – K-dramas for short – have expanded their popularity globally, being able to capture the interest of the Brazilian audience. Such interest can be seen through the exponential growth of Original Korean titles on Brazil’s Netflix. Therefore, this article aims to comprehend the current scenario of K-drama studies in Brazil by mapping search results in two scientific sites popular with Brazilian academics: Google Scholar and Periodico Capes. We used the keywords “K-drama”, “*Dorama*” (the Portuguese nomenclature for Drama), and, when needed, “*Coreano*” (“Korean”, in Portuguese), then used filters so only the results in Brazilian Portuguese would show. By creating tables and graphics, we observed plenty of studies about the Korean Wave, which K-dramas are a part of, but not so many with K-dramas as the study object. Additionally, we were able to identify that the most common themes within these studies were the K-drama format, its cultural aspects and topics related to fans. We concluded that, despite being mentioned often, K-dramas aren’t a frequent study object within the Brazilian academic community present on Google Scholar or Periodico Capes.

Keywords. Korean Wave, K-drama, Brazil, Google Scholar, Periodico Capes, literary review.

1. Introduction

The term “Hallyu” (한류) has been present ever since the Korean TV drama “What is Love?” (1991) became extremely successful in the end of the 20th century, airing on one of the biggest Chinese broadcasting channels (China Central Television – CCTV) in 1997. According to the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism [1], the “Hallyu” or “Korean wave” initially referred to the “global craze” for Korean culture. Since then, Korean culture, especially its music and Dramas, has spread throughout the whole globe.

Although South Korea is commonly the first country that comes to mind when we hear the word “Drama”, this form of art originated in Japan around the 1950s. Initially, it was created to rebuild the national culture that had been destroyed by World War II [2], depicting aspects of daily life such as work and romance. Most K-dramas deal with family matters and human affection, which, according to Professor Fan Hong, makes them appealing to global audiences. Alongside, they tend to be less sexual than American series, for example, as a consequence

of the traditional Confucian mindset the country is known for [3]. This also correlates to the fact that K-dramas air on the main Korean TV broadcasting stations during the night or weekend mornings, when families come together to watch. With the growth of technology, however, they also started being aired and produced by streaming platforms such as TVING, Netflix, Disney+ and Viu.

Technically speaking, these dramas often consist of 8 to 20 episodes with approximately one hour each [4]. According to Vinco *et al* [2], in Brazil especially, the K-dramas – or “*doramas*” as they’re commonly called in Portuguese – became popular thanks to the participatory culture and the relationship created within the fan community. As K-dramas’ popularity grows in the country, so does the academic need to study the genre. Therefore, this article aims to comprehend the current scenario of K-drama studies in Brazil. Is it being studied? If so, are there many works about it? What do they talk about? Do they all have the same purposes?

Utilizing an exploratory approach, we manually searched for the topic “K-drama” in two popular

academic sites in Brazil: Periodicos Capes (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) and Google Scholar, identifying certain patterns in the way this issue is studied. In the next chapters, we will discuss more about the methods and results found.

2. Research Methodology

For this article, only papers written in Brazil’s native language, Portuguese, were selected. To do so, we searched the keywords “K-drama” and “*Dorama*” on two academic sites: Google Scholar and Periodicos Capes. In Google Scholar’s case, where upon searching “*Dorama*” there were approximately 927 results, we added the word “*coreano*” (Korean, in Portuguese) to filter studies about other Asian countries. Subsequently, there were 154 results left. We read all the titles, keywords, and abstracts of those who seemed related to the issue and, if there was some kind of doubt, we proceeded to read the introduction section. When the article was proven to fit the criteria – being written in Portuguese and having K-dramas as the study object –, it was accounted for.

After this initial process, we created a table with the number of articles found in each platform and what keyword was used to locate it. In hopes of understanding what is being studied about K-dramas in Brazil, we also wrote down the themes of each article, to then create a graphic with the information, which will be presented in the next chapter.

3. Results and discussions

As pointed out before, in this section we will present the results found through this research and discuss possible meanings and explanations.

3.1 Number of studies found

Taking into consideration the extension of this article, we chose to search works available on only two academic sites that are vastly used in the country, despite Brazil having many more. Therefore, it’s important to keep in mind that the results found here are only a portion of what truly represents the country’s academic research on K-dramas. Furthermore, during the initial keyword research process, many articles had other objects of study (i.e.: K-pop, Korean film industry, Korean Wave as a whole) but still talked briefly about K-dramas for contextualization. Such articles were not accounted for since their main topic of discussion was not K-dramas.

Additionally, since K-drama studies are quite recent in Brazil, there isn’t a common ground on the nomenclature. Some researchers use K-drama or Korean Dramas, others use *Dorama* or Drama, and a few stick to simply saying Korean Shows or Series, so, even though we did search for two different forms, it’s necessary to consider that there may be

more papers that weren’t identified because of the disparity in names.

Despite that, our research produced a total of 338 results, of which 47 fit the criteria established earlier in this article. As shown in Table 1, there were more matches when searching words in Portuguese (*dorama*, *coreano*) on a broader search engine (Google Scholar). Meanwhile, Capes, which is one of the biggest scientific archives in the country [5], was able to find less than 5 articles.

Tab. 1 - Studies about K-dramas in Capes and Google Scholar.

Site	Search keyword	Nº papers found
CAPEs	Dorama	3
CAPEs	K-drama	1
Google Scholar	Dorama, coreano	31
Google Scholar	K-drama	12

A possible explanation for this could be that, since Capes is fully funded by the Government and is compromised with “high-quality scientific content” [5], it does not contain university or local scientific journals.

However, it’s still a small number of works in light of the total amount of results produced. If only 47 works fit the criteria, less than 15% of all the Brazilian papers in Google Scholar and Periodicos Capes that contain the words K-drama or *Dorama* discuss the matter. Most of those papers study the Korean Wave, briefly mentioning K-dramas as part of it.

3.2 Main topics of study

Since there was only a small amount of articles found through our research, we were able to categorize each one of them within a main theme of study, thus being able to construct a graphic as shown in Figure 1.

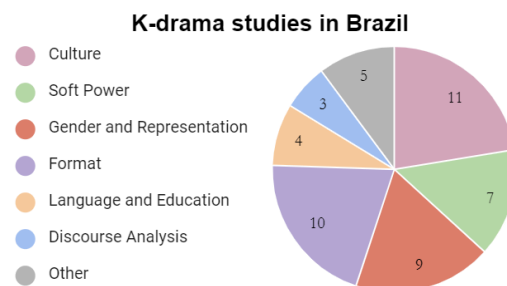


Fig. 1 - Theme and number of articles found.

As it can be seen in the graphic above, the most common topics discussed are Culture and the Format of K-dramas. Cultural aspects involve

differences in Brazilian and Korean culture depicted in dramas and fan culture – especially the building of communities and media convergence. Many studies talk about the K-drama format as a whole, as in explanations about the concept, discussions about its quality and hypotheses on why K-dramas became popular in Brazil. Another very frequent theme is Gender and Representation. Since social rules and conventions in Brazil are noticeably different from those in South Korea, how women, especially, are represented in K-dramas tends to be a frequent object of study between Brazilian academics.

Despite placing 4th as the most frequent topic for K-drama studies, we noticed Soft Power is the most common theme on the general results – which include K-pop and Korean Wave –, and that requires attention. Soft power is “the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment” [6]. This means most Brazilian papers with the keywords “K-drama” or “Dorama” focus on studying how the Korean Wave is able to influence and shape others’ opinions about Korea by appealing with cultural “tools” such as music (K-pop) and fictional shows (K-dramas).

The groups “Language and Education” and “Discourse Analysis” had a similar amount of articles found. The first one gathers studies about translation, pedagogical aspects of K-dramas and fan translation. This last one refers to the study of fans who translate and subtitle the content for other fans, generally without any cost. If we had grouped all articles with the theme “fans” in one category, it would likely occupy one of the top 3 most common themes for K-drama studies in Brazil. The Discourse Analysis seems to be a growing research method, specifically for studying the meaning behind the construction of a variety of characters.

Lastly, there were themes with only one or two papers, so we put them together in a category called “Others”. Such papers include discussions about mental health portraits in K-dramas, interactions between brands (in this case, streaming platforms) and consumers and consumption of Korean products by the influence of fanpages.

4. Conclusions

Throughout this article, we intended to generally capture the current scenario of K-drama studies in Brazil by researching keywords in two known scientific academic sites in the country. While doing so, we encountered more than a hundred results, however, most of them talked about the Korean Wave as a whole, while only 47 had K-dramas as the study object. These numbers indicate that Korean culture is being studied in Brazil and academics do know about K-dramas, but they mainly choose to study the Korean Wave phenomenon for whatever reasons.

Our results demonstrated that, within the K-drama studies, Brazilians tend to study more about the

format and culture. This shows a certain curiosity of academics in Brazil towards Korean Dramas, who hope to understand how something so different from the traditional Brazilian telenovelas is making as much, if not more, success. Also, we found out there’s an interest in comprehending the dynamics of K-drama fans which, again, are completely different from those of Brazilian TV shows, for example. Therefore, we realized that what motivates the study of K-dramas in Brazil, at least within the results of this research, is the differences between the two countries.

As presented in the past chapters, K-dramas are a theme with a wide range of possible approaches and study methods. Nevertheless, Brazilian researchers have the opportunity to explore this range in various ways for a long time, gradually building up the country’s knowledge.

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