

## Representation of Cultural Elements in the Film *Panggil Aku Ayah* and the Korean Film *Pawn*: A Comparative Literature Study

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### ABSTRACT

The film *Panggil Aku Ayah* (2025) is an Indonesian adaptation of the South Korean film *Pawn* (2020), which goes beyond mere narrative transfer by engaging in a process of transcreation to align the story with the socio-cultural context of Indonesian audiences. Rather than simply reproducing the original plot, the adaptation reinterprets cultural meanings, values, and social relations to ensure cultural relevance and emotional resonance within a different national setting. This research aims to compare the representation of cultural elements in *Panggil Aku Ayah* and *Pawn* using a comparative literature approach. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method, drawing on C. Kluckhohn's theory of seven universal cultural categories as an analytical framework. The findings reveal significant transformations in five key cultural elements: the language system, which adapts dialogue and expressions to local linguistic norms; the livelihood system, which reflects differences in economic activities and social class structures; the religious system, which incorporates local beliefs and practices; the knowledge system, which reshapes moral education and life values; and social organization, which highlights distinct family structures and community relations. The study concludes that cross-cultural film adaptation functions as a creative strategy to embed local cultural identity, enabling global narratives to remain meaningful, accessible, and relevant to Indonesian audiences while preserving the emotional core of the original work.

**Keywords:** Comparative literature, film, culture, transcreation

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### INTRODUCTION

Literary works are produced by writers in various parts of the world. The peculiarity of each work is an aspect that cannot be imitated by any other writer (Damrosch, 2019; Moretti, 2020). However, it is undeniable that writers read and respond to others' works as references or inspiration (Bassnett, 2020; Venuti, 2018). This inspiration often leads to similarities between one work and another (Liu, 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2019). Thus, comparative literary studies emerged to examine literary works through a comparative approach across cultures, languages, and mediums (Spivak, 2021; Apter, 2022). Comparative literature is simply an attempt to compare two or more literary works from one country with those of another (Guillen, 2020; Kadir, 2018).

Comparative literature is also referred to as *cross-cultural text*. A comparative literature study requires intertextual relationships that go beyond mere essence (Kholodniak, 2023; Yan & Xiaolu, 2025; ZELENIKA & Klamarova, 2025). According to Zepetnek, the problem of comparing is not only to describe the differences between two texts or works but to explain why and how the differences occur and what their backgrounds are. In comparative literature, the object of study is not limited to literary works in textual form, such as novels, but includes various other narrative forms that represent human experience and culture—aspects that certainly lend themselves to comparison.

Film is one medium that can be studied through the lens of comparative literature (Klinger, 2021; Stam, 2020). As a moving image equipped with audiovisual elements and based on a story or script, film has long been linked to literary works (Elsaesser, 2020; Lale, 2019). Film is also known as cinematographie, which derives from the word cinema meaning "motion" and *phos* meaning "light" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019; Cavell, 2019). Thus, film can also mean painting motion by utilizing light (Mast, 2018; Ray, 2021). Beyond entertainment, film functions as a medium of communication and social reflection (Friedman, 2021; Doane, 2020). Therefore, it becomes a relevant object in comparative literary studies, especially when related to other works through adaptation (Hutcheon, 2020; Naremore, 2021).

Adaptation can take forms such as *adaptation* (transferring a story from novel to film), *novelization* (transforming a film into a textual work), or a *remake* of a film with certain adjustments. This adaptation process is interesting to study because it not only expands the audience but also involves updates, changes, and reductions influenced by various aspects. Adaptations also reintroduce renowned works or serve as stepping stones for creators.

In Indonesia, adapting works is not new, as many forms of adaptation exist. For example, the film *A Business Proposal* directed by Rako Prijanto adapts the 2022 South Korean drama series of the same name; *My Annoying Brother* (2024), directed by Dinna Jasanti, adapts the 2016 South Korean film of the same title; *Seperti Denda, Rindu Harus Dibayar Tuntas* (2021) adapts Eka Kurniawan's novel; and *Light Copyist* (2021) is a novelization—along with various other adaptations. These not only retell existing stories but also adjust for the audience and socio-cultural context of production.

The year 2025 marked increased audience enthusiasm for national films across genres in Indonesia. In this context, the film *Panggil Aku Ayah* stole attention by winning the Best Male Lead award and four other nominations at the 2025 Indonesian Film Festival. This achievement shows that the film was not only commercially successful but also deemed high quality in the Indonesian film landscape.

*Panggil Aku Ayah* adapts the South Korean film *Pawn* (2020), where *pawn* means "guarantee" or collateral in English. The story follows a debt collector who takes a borrower's child as collateral when the mother cannot repay the loan. When the mother is deported, the debt collector must care for the child until adulthood.

This adaptation is compelling because the cultures of South Korea and Indonesia differ markedly. Additionally, the films' production backgrounds warrant scrutiny. Variations in social contexts, value systems, and interpretations of family and emotional relationships between the two countries can transform meanings in the adaptation. Thus, *Panggil Aku Ayah* merits academic study within comparative literature to examine how cultural representations evolve through adaptation.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative literature approach. The method described, interpreted, and compared the representation of cultural elements manifested in two films from different cultural backgrounds: *Pawn* (South Korea, 2020) and *Panggil Aku Ayah* (Indonesia, 2025). The comparative literary approach enabled researchers to identify similarities and differences in narrative structure, themes, and cultural values, particularly in the context of cross-cultural adaptation. The objects of this research were

the films *Pawn* (2020) and *Panggil Aku Ayah* (2025). The analysis focused on the seven elements of universal culture proposed by C. Kluckhohn.

Data collection involved documentation studies, specifically careful and repeated viewing of the two films. Data analysis proceeded through three steps. First, structural analysis identified narrative elements such as themes, characters, conflicts, and settings in each film. Second, comparative analysis examined the representation of cultural elements in *Pawn* and *Panggil Aku Ayah* using C. Kluckhohn's universal cultural framework.

Third, contextual interpretation related the findings to the socio-cultural backgrounds of South Korea (a developed country) and Indonesia (a developing country). Through this method, the research revealed how the adaptation process not only transferred stories across media and cultures but also reflected social issues within their respective cultural contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The film *Pawn* (2020) was adapted by director Benni Setiawan with the title *Panggil Aku Ayah* in 2025. As a director, Benni Setiawan has reinterpreted *Pawn* to produce a transcreation. Through the results of identification, the author found several interesting things that represent Indonesian culture displayed by Benni in the film *Panggil Aku Ayah*. The following is a discussion of the universal cultural elements contained in the films *Pawn* and also *Panggil Aku Ayah*.

### Language System

#### 1. Pawn Movies

The film *Pawn* is a moving image work that comes from the country of ginseng, namely South Korea. Overall, *Pawn* uses Korean as the main language of communication which is a representation of the cultural elements highlighted by director Kang Dae-gyu. The use of language in the film *Pawn* is informal or in Korean terms often referred to as *banmal* (반말). This language is a language that is often used in socializing for peers or younger people. This is reflected in the dialogues spoken between Doo-seok and Deok-hwa. Doo-seok is a more senior figure so when talking to Deok-hwa, he will use informal language. The presence of this informal language also indicates the intimate closeness that exists between the interlocutor.

Meanwhile, instead of using the *hyung* or male greeting for the older man, Deok-hwa calls his senior using the term *bujang-nim* (부장님) or a designation for the head of the division. Even though the two live together, Deok-hwa still respects Doo-seok as his senior at the debt collector's office. In addition to the informal variety, the language system highlighted in the film *Pawn* also uses dialects to emphasize the movement from one place to another.



**Figure 1. Seung-yi Departure to Busan**

In figure 1., the scene that takes place at 44:24 minutes, shows a bus departing from Incheon to Busan. Busan is also known for its distinctive dialect so that *Pawn* enrich their culture by showing the dialect. More than that, the language used in the film *Pawn* represents how the Korean language functions as a cultural element that represents the values of respect, hierarchy, and emotional closeness in the family.

## 2. The Movie *Panggil Aku Ayah*

In *Panggil Aku Ayah*, the director, Benni Setiawan chose Sundanese as the dominant language used besides Indonesian. The use of the typical West Java regional language is related to the director's ability to build a dialogue that has light nuances and full of humor. Benni's background from the Sundanese region, namely Tasikmalaya, also influenced his sensitivity in processing dialogue naturally and in accordance with the context.

In addition to the director's background, data compiled by Indonesia Baik (Nurrahim, 2023), shows that the Sundanese tribe is in second place with the largest population in Indonesia, which is 15.5%. This condition has implications for the wide reach of Sundanese speakers so that the use of Sundanese language not only represents local cultural identity, but also has strong affordability potential for national audiences.

The choice of Sundanese also represents a balance between respect and familiarity. This choice of variety shows the representation of the figure of Mang Dedi, the name for the character Doo-seok in *Panggil Aku Ayah*, who is not authoritarian, but is present as a caregiver who is emotionally close to the child and reflects Sundanese cultural values that emphasize the harmony of relationships and warmth in the family.

The language differences shown in these two films certainly show how the director represents his distinctive culture. If *Pawn* uses the Busan dialect as one of its language variations, then *Panggil Aku Ayah* consistently uses Sundanese as the main language of communication. This consistency is strengthened by the setting of the place built by the director, namely Bojongsoang, which clearly represents the Sundanese cultural space. This difference shows how each director uses the language system as a means of distinctive cultural representation, as well as a medium for forming social relations in the film's narrative.

## **Livelihood System**

### **1. *Pawn* Movie**

In *Pawn*, Seung-yi's job as an adult was as a Chinese translator for high-level meetings between the top brass in South Korea and China.



**Figure 2. Seung-yi When Becoming a Translator**

The film opens by showing Seung-yi's state as an adult. The scene in picture 2, takes place at 2:09 minutes, which explains Seung-yi's work as the best Chinese translator in South Korea. This ability does not come suddenly, but can be read as a result of Seung-yi's social experiences since childhood. His mother's background as an illegal immigrant from China who works in the Incheon area, certainly makes Seung-yi mature and has the desire to grow up with his multilingualism.

### **2. The Movie *Panggil Aku Ayah***

In *Panggil Aku Ayah*, Intan's character (Seung-yi's character in *Pawn*), works as a doctor when he grows up. This has been evident since the film began.



**Figure 3. Intan as a Doctor**

Instead of following the South Korean version, Benni interprets the livelihood system following the cultural representations that exist in Indonesia. Work as a doctor is still very much needed in Indonesia with a very high level of difficulty and interest. This profession can also be stated as a symbol of the success of education with high social prestige in Indonesia. Although it is not explained explicitly, this profession as a doctor also accompanies the role of Intan who always wants to take care of life, like Mang Dedi who also takes care of her.

The difference in the livelihood system between *Pawn* and *Panggil Aku Ayah* shows that there is an adjustment of cultural symbols in the adaptation process. The profession as a doctor was chosen because it has a stronger social resonance in the context of Indonesian culture as a symbol of success, devotion, and social mobility, so that the message of sacrifice that Benni wants to convey, can be received more effectively by the audience.

## **Religious System**

### **1. *Pawn* Movie**

The religious system in South Korea is plural, which means that no one religion is completely ideologically dominant. In *Pawn*, this religiosity can be judged from the scene when Doo-seok gives sweet food to Seung-yi who believes that if he eats it, he will pass the test.



**Figure 4. Seung-yi with the Sweet Food Doo-seok Gave**

At 1:17:51, Seung-yi was given the food. This practice shows that the language of the religious system of South Korean society is not always manifested through formal religious rituals, but can be present in the form of daily beliefs that are symbolic. These beliefs also reflect the incorporation of traditional values, popular beliefs, and spiritual expectations in daily activities.

### **2. The Movie *Panggil Aku Ayah***

As a country that frees its people to embrace religion, *Panggil Aku Ayah* also represents a similar thing.



**Figure 5. Intan Leads the Meal Prayer**

Figure 5 at 34:09 minutes, shows a snippet of the scene when Intan, Mang Dedi, and Mang Dadang had dinner together. In the scene, Intan proposed asking Mang Dedi to lead the

prayer. However, Mang Dedi and Mang Dadang could not say the dinner prayer in Islam correctly, so Intan had to correct it.

The existence of prayer before meals indicates the existence of an integrated habit in the family's daily activities. Intan's role in correcting the prayer reading shows the process of inheritance and learning religious values in the domestic space. The scene shows that the religious system adopted refers to the majority of Indonesian people who embrace Islam.

In addition to this scene, a representation of the religious system is also seen in figure 6 at 1:12:17, the scene when Intan asks Mang Dedi and Mang Dadang to perform prayers. The request shows that the practice of worship is placed as part of the moral responsibility of the individual, as well as a form of reminder in family relationships.



**Figure 6. Joint Prayer Scene**

Thus, the religious system in *Panggil Aku Ayah* is represented through simple and daily worship practices, which reflect the religious culture of Indonesian society without displaying religious symbols excessively.

## **Knowledge Systems**

### **1. Pawn Movie**

In Koentjaraningrat (1985), the knowledge system includes society's understanding of the characteristics and behaviors of fellow humans. In the Pawn movie, this element is reflected through the character of the father (Doo-seok) who has a strict disposition, and tends to be incapable of verbalizing his emotions to Deok-hwa and Seung-yi. This behavior is not a form of indifference, but rather a manifestation of the Korean cultural knowledge system of unspoken affection.

Doo-seok's affection is rooted in the concept of *jeong*, which is a deep feeling of inner attachment that develops through collectivity (Chung & Oh, 2022 in Sholihah, et al. 2025). Doo-seok demonstrates this "knowledge" through action-oriented, as Doo-seok shows at 46:56 The feeling of anxiety and worry can only be read through facial expressions and body language, without the need for verbal validation.



**Figure 7. Doo-seok calls Uncle**

In addition, Doo-seok's rigid nature is also influenced by South Korea's social organization system that requires the military for every Korean man. Military culture instills a knowledge system of discipline, hierarchy, and assertiveness. This is seen at 04:39 where Deok-hwa has to be submissive and obedient to the older Doo-seok and seniority. This internalization of militaristic values shapes Doo-seok's basic personality into a stiff Dad rather than putting out a gentle expression.



**Figure 8. Deok-hwa Treated Militaristically by Doo-seok**

## 2. The Movie *Panggil Aku Ayah*

In contrast to the Korean version, the character of the father (Mang Dadang) in the film *Panggil Aku Ayah* shows a much more expressive and gentle knowledge system (compassion). This represents the local cultural value system of Indonesia, especially Sundanese culture. Mang Dadang's character reflects the local knowledge of the Sundanese people who uphold the philosophy of "Silih Asih, Silih Asah, Silih Asuh" (Loving each other, teaching, and guiding). In this system of knowledge, affection is seen as something that must be felt and shown warmly in order to create harmony. This can be seen at 32:21 Mang Dadang always softens his expression and speech when talking to Intan.



**Figure 9. A Man Who is Fast Approaching Persuading Diamonds to Eat**

Meanwhile, Mang Dadang's nature of speaking more subtly and kindly shows the capital personality of the Indonesian people who tend to prioritize Some cultural values, namely friendliness, politeness, hospitality and doing good to known or unknown people. This can be seen from the minute 15:39 Mang Dadang entertained Teh Rosa politely and still wanted to take care of Intan even though he knew that what Teh Rosa did make it difficult for him both at work and suddenly became Intan's foster parent.



**Figure 10. Mang Dedi Hosts Mrs. Rosa**

## **Social Organization**

### **1. Pawn Movies**

Within the framework of social organization there is a system of layering that regulates the position of individuals in society. The conflict in the film *Pawn* stems from Mrs. Seung-yi's inability to pay off a loan of money, which is exacerbated by her status as an illegal immigrant of Chinese origin who settles in South Korea. The illegal status puts Mrs. Seung-yi and Seung-yi in a vulnerable social position by not having access to legal protection, decent work, and social security. This condition continues with another structural problem, Seung-yi is unable to access formal education due to not having legal citizenship status as a Korean citizen. This condition reflects the social layering system in developed countries that tends not to place poverty as a fundamental issue directly.

Poverty in this film is represented through the status of illegal immigrants who are outside the official social system of the country shown at 22:10. The representation emphasized that South Korea, as a developed country, is present as a strong state institution, but is exclusive because it only provides full protection and social access to citizens who are recognized as legitimate citizens.



**Figure 11. Seung-yi's Mother Arrested and Deported from South Korea**

## 2. The Movie *Panggil Aku Ayah*

The social layering in the film *Panggil Aku Ayah* focuses more on Intan's mother and Intan who cannot pay off the debt and encourages her to go to Jakarta alone to plead her fate. Unlike *Pawn*, the problems faced by Ibu Intan or Teh Rosa dan Intan are not related to legal status or citizenship, but rather limited economic access, decent work, and income stability in their home areas that place them at the bottom of society. This was shown at 20:35 Teh Rosa who left Intan to go to Jakarta to find a decent job.



**Figure 12. Ibu Intan Goes to Jakarta**

Ibu Intan's migration is domestic and reflects the reality of low-class people in developing countries who rely on the national economic center. This condition represents a system of social layering in developing countries that focuses more on fundamental issues, namely structural poverty and economic inequality, without being mediated by formal legality issues. The state in this context exists not as an exclusive institution, but as a space with limited social protection

capacity, so that individuals are forced to rely on family relationships and personal sacrifice as a survival mechanism.

### **The Form of Transcreation Found in *Panggil Aku Ayah***

An adapted work will certainly produce an update of the original work to show the existence of a transcreation. In *Panggil Aku Ayah.*, there are several important things that become a transcreation as follows.

#### **1. Title Adaptation**

The form of change that occurred can be seen from the adaptation of the title *Pawn* which in Korean means *collateral* or *pawn*, to *Panggil Aku Ayah*.

In the context of the title, *the film Pawn* builds a strong and firm narrative that the film will tell about something that is a guarantee. However, Benni adapted it with a much different title than the original work. This happened to show the implicit message that Benni wanted to convey as the director. That is, being a father does not have to be on the same biological basis, but can be intertwined from the closeness and figure of the father figure created from others. Mang Dedi in *Panggil Aku Ayah* has become a father figure for Intan during his lifetime, so towards the end of the film, Intan finally calls Mang Dedi as his father, even taking him to the wedding as his parents.

Culturally, Indonesian people have a tendency to more easily connect with family narratives. By choosing the title *Panggil Aku Ayah*, the adaptation process emphasizes the transformation of relationships from "guarantee" to "family", so that the meaning of the film is more resonant with the local values of Indonesian society.

In addition, if you look at it from the perspective of distribution strategy, the title *Call My Father* serves as a more communicative and emotional marketing tool for Indonesian audiences. The title directly provokes a sense of empathy and curiosity, while also hinting at the film's main theme without requiring an understanding of a foreign linguistic context. This is in contrast to *the title Pawn* which tends to be abstract and distant for non-Korean audiences.

#### **2. Social Background Adaptation**

In *Pawn*, Myung-ja (Seung-yi's mother) is told as an illegal immigrant from China who works in Incheon. This setting is important because it relates to the social context of South Korea, especially in the Incheon region as an international port city. The existence of illegal immigrants in the film reflects the social reality of Korean society which is faced with issues of migration, marginalization, and legal inequality. This setting also serves to reinforce Seung-yi's position as a vulnerable subject, as well as explain the transactional relationship that emerges at the beginning of the story.

Meanwhile, in *Panggil Aku Ayah*, the mother is told that she went to Jakarta to work. This reflects the reality of the lives of Indonesian people who migrate to find work in the big city, namely Jakarta. In addition to working in Jakarta, Rossalinda also had time to become a TKW. The setting does not happen suddenly, but is close to the life of the local community. In recent years, many Indonesians have become a migrant worker to get a decent job and basic income. This adaptation became a common social narrative so that it was easier to accept and understand by the audience.

## CONCLUSION

Comparative literature, as a cross-cultural approach, examines similarities in works like the Indonesian film *Panggil Aku Ayah* (a transcreation of the South Korean film *Pawn*) arising from adaptation beyond mere translation. The study reveals how *Panggil Aku Ayah* adapts *Pawn* to Indonesian culture via Kluckhohn's universal elements: Korean language, translation profession, legal immigrant status, and militaristic hierarchy in *Pawn* shift to Sundanese language, medical profession (symbolizing prestige), Islamic practices, and warm family ties in *Panggil Aku Ayah*. Creators thus infuse local peculiarities, highlighting cultural representation in cross-cultural works. Future studies could extend this analysis by applying digital humanities tools (e.g., sentiment analysis or network visualization) to quantify cultural shifts in adaptations, or compare additional Southeast Asian remakes of Korean films to trace broader regional adaptation patterns.

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