

# **Nonverbal Communication and Cultural Features Of Highest-Grossing Movies Among Asean Countries**

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the nonverbal communication and cultural features of the Highest-Grossing Movies Among Selected ASEAN Countries. There are two approaches used in this study. First, it sought to identify the nonverbal communication features through semiotic analysis of the most important movie scenes, and second, it determined the cultural features of the movies through a readers-oriented approach. Through the analysis of the cultural features, ASEAN nations such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand share the same values such as the strong family ties. Also, the belief in the supernatural and superstition is evident in the stories. The non-verbal communication features analysis established that all of these movies portrayed different signs or symbols that can be traced and interpreted as part of their culture or norm. Thus, culture plays a significant element among the selected highest-grossing ASEAN films.

Keywords: Nonverbal communication, Cultural features, Semiotic analysis, Readers-oriented approach, ASEAN.

## **Introduction**

Literature is frequently referred to as a "window to the world." It is a cultural product with a vast bank of information from which learners can obtain insights into the target language's history, traditions, and conventions (Sidhu & Fook, 2010). Reading literary books allows students to gain perceptive glimpses of various cultures and other important insights that can help extend one's viewpoint (Sidhu, 2003). Literature promotes awareness and respect of cultures and beliefs that differ from the learners' original culture (Armstrong, 2015; Carter & Long, 1991).

People's culture is their way of life. Moreover, belief systems and value orientations influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions (Abubaker, 2015). According to Reisinger (2015), a classic definition of culture is a complex whole that comprises knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, conventions, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Moreover, culture is the sum of a group's thoughts, experiences, and patterns of conduct and its beliefs, values, and assumptions about life that influence behavior and how those evolve with interaction with other cultures (Carter, 2007).

Nonverbal communication is communication using nonverbal messages. Nonverbal terminology is frequently used to describe any communication events outside of spoken words and writing (Ragsdale, 2006). It is possible to separate nonverbal communication and verbal communication theoretically. However, these two modes of communication in actuality are mutually interlinked, complementary in our day-to-day conversation. The Kinesik Message was clustered by Rakhmat (1994). It is a non-verbal body movement message consisting of three principal components: facial, gestural, and postural cues.

For the transmission of a given meaning, facial signals use face. Several investigations show that at least 11 clusters can be presented in the facial world: enjoyment, taste shocked, fear, rage, truce, tranquillity, critique, interest, stupidity, and resolve. The gestural communication exhibits certain extremities' motion, such as eyes and hands, to convey different senses. Postural messages are for the whole limb, which means they can be transmitted (Chapman, 2007; Khatib & Rahimi, 2012).

This study examined the nonverbal communication and cultural features of the highest-grossing movies among selected ASEAN countries. Particularly this study compared the following movies from the three highest-grossing films; Hello, Love Goodbye from the Philippines, Pee Mak From Thailand, and Munafik 2 from Malaysia. This study used two qualitative study approaches; first, it sought to identify the nonverbal communication features through semiotic analysis of the essential movie scenes and determine the cultural features of the movies through a readers-oriented approach.

Working on this type of paper can inspire educators who have been teaching ASEAN Literature—both in DepEd and in higher education—to share this information with students about ASEAN culture. Most ASEAN writers' literary works are innermost, preserving cultural history; it allows pupils to grasp their origins, exhibit concern, and internalize the magnificent legacy of their own culture.

## **Method**

Qualitative research is employed in this study. Qualitative research is concerned with examining topics, comprehending phenomena, and answering questions by evaluating and making sense of unstructured data (Creswel, 2013). To examine the non-verbal communication features in the most important scenes of the movies, a semiotic analysis developed by Peirce (2003) was employed with three components specifically: a. Facial Messages (facial expressions) b. Gestural messages (limb movements such as eyes and

hands) a. Postural Messages (concerning all limbs. Moreover, a textual analysis was used to determine the cultural features of the movies. According to Ang (2009), there are three fundamental techniques to interpreting literature<sup>1</sup>). Text-Oriented Approach, Author-Oriented Approach, and Reader-Oriented Approach. In this study, the researcher used a Readers-oriented strategy, in which the reader analyzes a work of literature by bringing a unique set of experiences and expectations in extreme form (Ang, 2009).

### **Sources of Data**

This study focuses on the three highest-grossing films in three ASEAN countries. This includes Pee Mak's films in Thailand, Hello Love, Goodbye from the Philippines, and Munafik 2 from Malaysia. All of these three films made history in their local movie industry because of their recognition and popularity. These movies are available on popular streaming websites such as netflix.com, imbd.com, and YouTube. Com. These movies were also selected due to their standard English translation.

When reading a literary text, communication between the reader and the text is constantly there. For the material to be understandable, the reader communicates it by simply evaluating and interpreting it. Understanding the content is always accompanied by appreciation. Literary appreciation includes literary criticism—the reader's perspective and understanding of the work. A literary analysis aims to thoroughly investigate and, at times, evaluate a work of literature through its part. In analysis, the subject must be broken down into its essential elements. Examining the various parts of a work of literature is not an aim in itself but rather a process that will help you appreciate and comprehend the work of literature as a whole.

Literary theories are required to assist the reader in understanding the texts when reading and analyzing literature (Montealegre, 2013). If literary criticism comprises reading, analyzing, explaining, and interpreting literary texts, literary theory should perform two things: 1.) It should provide readers with a variety of attributes for classifying literature, and knowledge of these attributes must notify crucial practice; 2.) This should help the researcher realize the methods and procedures to use in the literary criticism analysis, so that you are interrogating the text and how you read and interpret the text.

## Results and Discussions

### Non-verbal communication Features

#### Movie: Pee Mak

#### Scene:



Non-Verbal Identification		
Setting	Non-verbal Sign	Description
Inside the Buddhist temple the characters are praying.	<b>Facial:</b> Serious and anxious <b>Gestural:</b> Praying <b>Postural:</b> Sitting in a praying position	The characters are sitting in a praying position following the Buddhist tradition.
Semiotic analysis		
Sign	Object	Interpretant
Anjali Mudra is a greeting, prayer, and devotion gesture. It is done by pushing the palms of the hands together while holding the hands at the heart chakra with the thumbs lightly resting against the sternum.	<b>Candle</b>  <b>Protection cord</b>	The image portrays the strong faith of Buddhist monk praying for Buddhas protection against evil entities. The characters behind the monk are showing trust to the monk leading them in a prayer.

Thailand has the second largest Buddhist population globally, after China, with approximately 64 million Buddhists (Britanica, 2021a). Buddhism has played a significant role in Thai culture and society. It has manifested in their customs, tradition, and even in their popular movies. Pee Mak, the highest-grossing film in their history, portrayed horror, comedy, adventure, and Buddhism as their primary religion embedded in the movie.

The details above showed how religion and superstition manifest in their non-verbal communication cues. The scene above displayed the Monk leading the supporting characters in prayer to oust their evil spirits. The setting happened in the Buddhist temple where the characters went for protection against an evil spirit. It was portrayed that the supporting characters were serious and anxious about the ghost haunting them. They were

doing Anjali Mudra or a gesture of greeting, prayer, and adoration portraying their strong faith in their religion.

**Movie: Munafik 2 (The Hypocrite)**

**Scene:**



<b>Non-Verbal Identification</b>		
<b>Setting</b>	<b>Non-verbal Sign</b>	<b>Description</b>
Darkness in the forest	<b>Facial:</b> Furious <b>Gestural:</b> Casting out <b>Postural:</b> Firm stand	The Imam played by Ustaz Adam is reciting a verse to cast out demon.
<b>Semiotic analysis</b>		
<b>Sign</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
Islamic exorcism in Islam, known as Aza'im is part of a wider body of Islamic medicine called "prophetic medicine".	Taqiyah (Muslim skullcap)  Hijab	The image portrays a battle between Allah's leader of faith Imam Ustaz versus an evil spirit possessing Sakinah's body. The Imam is trying to oust the evil spirit by reciting Arabic verse and raising his hand to show control.

Malaysia is a country where Islam is the most widely practiced religion. In 2013, there were around 19.5 million Muslim adherents, accounting for 61.3 percent of the total population (Britanica, 2021b). It is indeed evident in their customs, tradition, and culture. Thus, the Islamic faith is portrayed in almost all of their movies, such as the Munafik 2.

The movie Munafik 2 (The Hypocrite) represents the conflict between the genuine Islamic faith against the false Islamic religion labeled as a hypocrite. The setting in the scene showed darkness in the jungle. It also portrayed an Islamic exorcism or Aza'im being practiced by the Imam to ousts the evil spirit possessing Sakinah's body. It demonstrated the strength of the Islamic faith against evil spirits.

**Movie: Hello, Love, Goodbye**

**Scene:**



<b>Non-Verbal Identification</b>		
<b>Setting</b>	<b>Non-verbal Sign</b>	<b>Description</b>
Airport	<b>Facial:</b> Serious <b>Gestural:</b> Waiting/looking <b>Postural:</b> Standing / walking	Joy the main character of the story is waiting for her flight to arrive.
<b>Semiotic analysis</b>		
<b>Sign</b>	<b>Object</b>	<b>Interpretant</b>
This scene is one of the most relatable scenes among Filipinos. Since a lot of Filipinos are fleeing abroad for a better life. Joy's choice to leave her love Ethan for a better future in Canada is a symbol of how Filipinos value their family.	Luggage	The scene is the first and last picture that the movie portrayed. It depicts the sad reality of the Overseas Filipino Workers fleeing the country for a better future. Even if Joy found love with Ethan in Hongkong she still chose to pursue her dreams for her family's future.

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The Philippines, formally the Republic of the Philippines, is a Southeast Asian archipelago. It is located in the western Pacific Ocean and is made up of around 7,640 islands that are divided into three major geographical divisions from north to south: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (Britanica, 2021c). The number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who worked overseas from April to September 2019 was expected to reach 2.2 million in 2019. Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs), or those with current work contracts, accounted for 96.8 percent of all OFWs during the specified period.

The movie Hello, Love, Goodbye is not just a love story. It is an authentic depiction of the struggles of the OFWs abroad sacrificing for their loved ones. The airport

is the usual spot where Filipino families welcome and send their loved ones for work abroad. As the main character Joy stands waiting for her flight, she brings luggage that contains her hope and dreams. Ever since the story began, Joy mentioned that Hongkong is just a place where people stop by, eventually leaving Hongkong. Joy struggled to work in Hongkong, barely making ends meet and saving for her departure in Canada. The movie portrayed the actual scenario of the experiences of the millions of OFWs abroad. Moreover, even though joy found real love with Ethan, she still chose to leave because it was her original plan after all.

**Table 1.** Cultural Features

<b>Movie Title</b>	<b>Norms</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Mores</b>	<b>Belief</b>
Pee Mak	Gender role/ things traditionally done by women or men -family rights and responsibilities	Value for family Value for love Love for country	Structure of family  - Father as Patriarch and leader of the family  - wife manages domestic affairs	Ghost Destiny Supernatural

The narrative takes place in mid-nineteenth-century Siam, during King Mongkut's reign and during the height of the Rattanakosin Dynasty. Mak (Mario Maurer) was conscripted to fight in a war, leaving his pregnant wife Nak behind (Davika Hoorne). Nak fought alone and terribly to give birth to the baby in Phra Khanong; she cries out for aid, but she is too weak to be heard. Mak's pals believe their friend Nak is a ghost and imprison him in a haunted mansion. Ter accuses Shin of being crazy the next day. On the other hand, Ter uncovers a body wearing the same ring as Nak while taking a crap in the jungle.

Mak rejects all of their warnings, declares that they are no longer his pals, and throws them out of their lodgings. Because Phueak craves Nak's attractiveness, his companions run from their injured friend and rescue him. Mak returns to them while fleeing on a boat, walking into the river to them but almost drowns due to cramping. Aey instantly declared himself a ghost and jumped off the boat. Nak then pulls out a dripping wet paddle and offers it to Ter, who immediately realizes that they had all been tossed overboard. Mak and the four remaining guys flee to a shrine.

They are protected by a local monk armed with holy rice and water and an enchanted 'safety ring'. Nak then appears, in her ghostly form, and attacks. Initially, the holy 'weapons' succeed in keeping her at bay, but end up being wasted due to Mak's

struggle to get back to his wife. A pale Aey reappears, revealing that he is also human; he stole the ring from a corpse behind the house to finance his gambling habit. Nak uses her powers to do chores, scare off villagers attempting to drive her away, and even run the town's 'haunted house attraction.

After looking between his legs and finding her decomposing corpse, Mak then reveals he knew she was alive all along. His friends, seeing them reuniting, tearfully reaffirm their friendship and vow never to leave each other again.

<b>Movie Title</b>	<b>Norms</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Mores</b>	<b>Belief</b>
Munafik 2	Imam as leaders of faith  Wearing of hijab For women Patriarchal	Faith Mutual sympathy Self-sufficiency Solidarity Mutual trust and help Mutual advice Justice Value for family	Imam as spiritual leaders Men plays significant role as leaders of faith	beliefs about God Belief in Prophet Muhammad other prophets, the Divine books (the Qu'ran and certain books of the Bible), revered sayings and actions of the Prophet (the Hadith and Sunnah) the Day of Judgement, the existence of angels, the importance of destiny

Two years after the previous film's events, Ustaz Adam's (Syamsul Yusof) life was restored after being disrupted by the deaths of his wife and kid. He becomes a preacher and continues his mission to assist those harmed by black magic and jins. Previous tests had taught him to make tawadhu to the Divine. But, strangely, Adam has been tormented by his previous nightmares about Maria's death. A strange woman frequently visits Adam and quizzes him about God's Faith and destiny. Meanwhile, a Sakinah (Maya Karin) and her daughter, Aina, dwell across the village.

Sakinah was obliged to care for her father, Imam Malik, suffering from an unknown disease. Sakinah's impoverished existence was tested when the devil disturbed her and her daughter numerous times. Sakinah felt what she was confronted with was the work of Abu Jar (Nasir Bilal Khan), a hypocrite and heretic in the same area. Abu Jar has a large following and is feared by the people. Abu Jar's adversary is Sakinah or anyone who still believes in Islam.

<b>Movie Title</b>	<b>Norms</b>	<b>Values</b>	<b>Mores</b>	<b>Belief</b>
Hello, Love, Goodbye	Filipinos going abroad for better life  Filipino dedication for work  Filipinos sacrifice for their family	Love for family Selflessness Resilience Compassion Hard work	Discrimination of OFWs	Belief in Destiny Belief in true love Belief in fulfilling life's dreams

Two OFWs are destined to change each other's lives forever in the busy high of crammed Hong Kong. Joy is a vivacious impoverished millennial working as a domestic servant in Hong Kong. While she succeeds at her profession and loves the company of many other empowered domestic assistants, she intends to leave the city shortly. Hong Kong is only a pit stop. Joy is determined to have a better life away from her impoverished background, and she has huge ambitions of thriving in Canada or wherever her goals may take her. Joy encounters Pinoy bartender Ethan on her quest to accomplish her dreams. Ethan is a lovely playboy who has already established a permanent residence in Hong Kong. He will formally become a resident of the city in a few years. After evading obligations his whole life, Ethan is ready to commit to a profession and a family (who also reside in Hong Kong).

Joy and Ethan quickly become friends. Against the filth and grind of Hong Kong, the two become each other's delight. So much so that when the lonely evenings arrive, they completely submit to one other's comfort. They still caution each other that this is only "for now." We are not here to stay.

Meanwhile, as they work together to solve more and more problems in Hong Kong, Joy and Ethan's love becomes stronger. They become one other's saviors, assisting one another in healing lifetime scars and realizing their dreams. In the end, Joy's fundamental issue is to choose between her love for Ethan and her ambitions for her family. Joy chose the latter, although the narrative closes on a cliffhanger, with the prospect of Joy returning to Hongkong to reconnect with Ethan.

## **Conclusion**

The highest-grossing movies played a significant role in entertainment and in portraying their countries' culture, norms, values, mores, and beliefs. These cultural features are also evident in the non-verbal communication features of the characters. Through the analysis

of the cultural features, this study discovered that ASEAN nations such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand share the same values, like strong family ties. Also, the belief in the supernatural and superstition is evident in the stories. The non-verbal communication features analysis established that all of these movies portrayed different signs or symbols that can be traced and interpreted as part of their culture or norm. Thus, culture plays a significant element among the selected highest-grossing ASEAN movies.

### **Translation Research**

The study's findings may be best transferred to various forms of communication for educational purposes; if not, a further awareness campaign may be necessary. Information platforms such as wall newspapers and one-act play, among others, may be developed for distant stakeholders, while social media and mass media (TV, newspaper, and radio) may be utilized to disseminate information.

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