

Nagy, Judit; Bánhegyi, Mátyás

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# Korean Diasporic Perceptions of Canada in the Light of the CBC TV Series *Kim's Convenience*

La perception de la diaspora coréenne du Canada à la lumière de la série télévisée de la CBC *Kim's Convenience*

**Judit Nagy and Mátyás Bánhegyi**

## Abstract

Based on the Korean-Canadian playwright Ins Choi's play *Kim's Convenience*, the TV series of the same name (which started airing on CBC in the fall of 2016 and is now in its third season) centers around the Kim family, who immigrated from Korea in the 1980s and run a convenience store in present-day Toronto. The series abounds in references to the Kim family's observations of their environment, and their typical first- and second-generation Korean Canadian responses to it. However, while the play tends to gravitate towards diasporic issues, the series can be seen as a transnational variation of the play presented through the Korean diasporic lens. Accordingly, the article will analyze the episodes of the first season of the TV series with two aims in mind. Firstly, it will attempt to shed light on the differences between the first- and the second-generation Korean immigrants' perception of Canada. Secondly, it will estimate how the Kim family's interaction with their environment is representative of a new transnational culture.

**Keywords:** CBC TV series, convenience store, first- and second-generation Korean immigrants, *Kim's Convenience*, Korean diaspora, transnationalism

## Résumé

Inspirée par la pièce de théâtre *Kim's Convenience* de l'auteur dramatique coréen-canadien Ins Choi, la série télévisée du même nom diffusée à la CBC à l'automne 2016 est actuellement en sa troisième saison. Elle se concentre sur la famille Kim qui a immigré de la Corée de sud dans les années 1980 et qui gère un dépanneur à Toronto. La série regorge de références aux observations de la famille Kim sur leur environnement, ainsi qu'à leurs réponses typiques à la première et à la deuxième génération. Cependant, alors que la pièce a tendance à graviter autour de thèmes liés à la diaspora, la série peut être considérée comme une variation transnationale de la pièce présentée sous l'angle de la diaspora coréenne. En conséquence, l'article analysera les épisodes de la première saison de la série télévisée. Premièrement, il s'occupera des différences entre la perception du Canada des immigrants coréens de la première et de la deuxième génération. Deuxièmement, il évaluera comment l'interaction de la famille Kim avec son environnement est représentative d'une nouvelle culture transnationale.

**Mots-clés:** séries télévisées de CBC, dépanneur, immigrants coréens de première et deuxième générations, *Kim's Convenience*, diaspora coréenne, transnationalisme



## Introduction

The popular Canadian TV series *Kim's Convenience*, now in its third season, focuses on the Kim family, who immigrated to Canada from Korea and operate a convenience store in Toronto's Regent Park. To date, the show has earned six Canadian Screen Awards.<sup>1</sup> What makes *Kim's Convenience* unique is that it is the first Canadian TV comedy series to portray Korean Canadian immigrants and to “star a primarily Asian Canadian cast” (Zarum, 2019). Moreover, the employment of in-depth Asian characters is an important merit contributing to the success of the series: “But looking past its formulaic sitcom structure, *Kim's Convenience* also offers something else: well-rounded Asian characters who have depth” (Westernman, 2019). Or, as Paul Sun-Hyung Lee, the lead actor playing Appa puts it, “[t]hey are three-dimensional characters with wants, with hopes, with needs, with fears. And that's what's so exciting about playing them as an actor of color, because we've been so cut off from playing real people” (qtd. in Westernman, 2019).

The present article aims at analyzing the episodes of the first season of the CBC-produced TV series from two aspects. While the first part of the paper intends to explore the differences between the first- and the second-generation Korean immigrants' perception of Canada and the potential conflicts these differences generate, the second part will focus on how the Kims' interaction with their environment is representative of a new transnational culture. Given the limitations of space, for the argumentation of this paper only a small number of examples will be furnished regarding the two outlined broader themes.

## 1. Generational differences

In the TV series, the first generation of Korean immigrants is represented by Appa and Umma, a couple in their late fifties. In accordance with the traditional Korean patriarchal approach to roles within the family, Umma is a backgrounded figure, and therefore Appa dominates the discourse on their experience of Canadian society.<sup>2</sup>

For Appa and Umma, the ways of their Canadian reality seem puzzling at times, and their home cultural approach to problems is constantly challenged by their children. The points below consider a few situations in which the resulting tensions surface.

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1) Best Performance by an Actor in a Continuing Leading Comedic Role (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee), 2017; Best Performance by an Actor in a Featured Supporting Role or Guest Role in a Comedic Series (Andrew Phung), 2017; Best Picture Editing in a Comedy Program or Series (Kye Meechan), 2017; Best Supporting or Guest Actor, Comedy (Andrew Phung), 2018; Best Lead Actor, Comedy (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee), 2018; Best Comedy Series, 2018.

2) In the play, the “domination” is even more marked.

## 1.1 Marrying early and within the community vs. marrying later and having free choice of marriage

Worried that twenty-some-year-old Janet remains single, and wanting to marry her off to a young Christian man from the Korean Church community, Umma secretly posts a marriage advertisement at church one Sunday. When Umma's plan is revealed by someone coming to the family-run store responding to the advertisement, Janet is scandalized. In her reading, which is based on her generation's Canadian context, Umma is trying to "ruin her life" (KC: Episode 1)<sup>3</sup> by acting as a matchmaker, whereas Umma perceives the same deed as performing an act of motherly duty: "You don't even trying. If you don't mingle, you stay single. You don't know yet, but Umma doing you big favor" (KC: Episode 1).

Defied by Janet, Umma runs to her son, Jung, and deems Janet's refusal to get married, to have babies and to listen to her sound advice a family emergency. "She is going to die – alone" (KC: Episode 1), she says, dramatically. Jung tells her that with such behaviour, she is only "pushing [Janet] away" (KC: Episode 1). What is implied here is that the dictates of Umma's Korean upbringing and values will fail in the Canadian context of Janet's love life.

## 1.2 Appa's criticism of Canadian education – Janet's art program at Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD)

Appa does not approve of Janet's majoring in photography. When it turns out that her project earned her top marks in her class, all Appa says is, "We celebrate. By you taking out garbage. [...] You work hard, I work hard, we all work hard by taking out garbage" (KC: Episode 2). In Appa's judgement, which relies on the Korean work ethic, jobs such as managing the store constitute hard work, whereas the art school Janet is attending is associated with a self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking, hedonistic approach to life: "In art school everything is just talking, drinking \$5 coffee, and making art for yourself" (KC: Episode 2). In this respect, Appa's way of thinking echoes Confucian philosophy.<sup>4</sup> He holds that whatever one does should be done for the benefit of the

3) In this paper, all references to the TV series *Kim's Convenience* Season One appear in this format, i.e., (KC: X) where X denotes the episode number where the quotations appear in the transcript displayed at [https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/episode\\_scripts.php?tv-show=kims-convenience-2016](https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/episode_scripts.php?tv-show=kims-convenience-2016)

4) Affecting Appa's generation, Korean Confucianism upholds five core values: family, status, hierarchy, conformity, in-group/out-group (Shim et al. 2008). Conformity in the Confucian sense also entails that "I has a meaning because others exist" (Shim et al. 2008:55), thus everything a person does has to serve the community the 'I' forms an organic part of. Therefore behavior aiming at self-realization is interpreted as a deviation from the person's communal focus and, as such, is frowned upon.



person's closer or wider community rather than being merely a self-indulgent activity. For Appa, "individuals' 'selfish' desires are not as important as what is good for the group as a whole" (Shim et al 2008: 27).

Also, at first, Appa does not appreciate Janet's pictures of old shoes or those of a telephone pole. "[I]n real world, people like to see picture of a beautiful thing" (KC: Episode 2), he says, as he believes that art is essentially defined by the aesthetic quality he associates with his Korean standards. However, when, upon a customer's interest in a photo of a manhole, Appa discovers that Janet's art photos sell well, he suddenly becomes proud of her. This is the point when he realizes that, in the Canadian cultural context, his concept of what constitutes beautiful may be invalid. In addition, as success in business is also highly valued in his culture, he can now find a familiar term and ground to understand his daughter's art. But when Appa greets Janet with the news that he has managed to sell some of her pictures, she becomes frustrated: "This is my work! Appa, you can't just go and ..." (KC: Episode 2). Given his Korean generation's focus on the importance of education – another Confucian remnant<sup>5</sup> – Appa rebukes her by relating that his support of his daughter's education is in fact an investment, and he reveals that he would have been more appreciative in this situation if his father had given him the same chance:

You is my work. Me and Umma is struggle to make whole life for you. And what you do? Take picture. And now it's time for you to pay back to me all that I invest to you and what you say "Don't touch my stuff" [...] Do you think my father even look at my picture? You think my father send me to school for "art degree"? Sometimes I think how lucky I would be to have me as my father. I would look up at me and say, "Thank you, me, for allowing me to become such a great you" (KC: Episode 2).

Similarly, Umma approaches Janet's choice of career from a Korean mother's point of view. She finds her major attractive as it gives her a university degree and, at the same time, it is practical:<sup>6</sup> good education combined with practical skills is what makes Janet attractive for a respectable young man from the Korean church community.

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5) In fact, the social prestige of education is present both in traditional Korean Confucianism and in Korean Confucianism-Capitalism. In the traditional sense, it is the notion of status which is linked with 'scholarly pursuit,' whereas in Korean Confucianism-Capitalism, it is linked with prestige-consciousness (Shim et al. 2008: 54–55).

6) It is interesting to note that in the drama, in both cases, both parents agree on worrying about Janet's marrying late and about photography as a profession being a waste of time for Janet.

### 1.3 Who owes who and what? Janet's allowance

When Janet would like to go to a concert, and Appa declines her request for \$200 based on his Korean smart-business-driven argument that she can buy the album by the same band for one tenth of that price, she voices her resentment of Appa not supporting her financially to an extent which would be proportionate to the work she is doing in the family business. She sees herself as a non-paid domestic worker taken advantage of by a father, whereas Appa is surprised that her daughter does not find it self-evident to help out as much as she can in accordance with his Korean generation's approach to one's family. Moreover, he thinks he has contributed more than enough towards Janet's fancies:

Janet: Actually I need \$200.

Appa: For what?

Janet: There's this concert

Appa: \$200 for concert? Too much. Take \$20 and buy album.

Janet: Why do I always have to beg you for money? I've earned it.

Appa: What?

Janet: You owe me.

Appa: What you talking?

Janet: I've been working here for over 10 years and you've never paid me a dime.

Appa: I pay you rent and food. That's million dimes.

Janet: I can't buy concert tickets with rent and food.

Appa: Not just rent and food. Piano lesson. \$20 every lesson once a week, every week. Five year, I pay. Golf lessons, \$500

Janet: Fine. But...

Appa: Summer art camp. Church winter camp.

Janet: So you paid for tuition.

Appa: Camera. Phone. Perm. Haircut to fix perm.

Janet: Ugh. (CK: Episode 10)

In Appa's thinking, Janet violates the Confucian principle of 'unhae,' according to which children "owe an unpayable debt to their parents" (Shim et al 2008: 27),<sup>7</sup> therefore helping their parents wherever and whenever they can is not a matter of choice but an obligation. 'Unhae' being reciprocal, parents should also "protect and

7) It is the Confucian doctrine of The Five Relationships – with 'Uri' (togetherness) at the center, which determines the guidelines for human behaviour: interdependence is emphasized by "(1) stressing particular values such as prudence, civility, (2) promoting harmony, (3) establishing order within society, (4) having a thorough understanding of the context in which to engage in *unhae* [...] revolv[ing] around the concept of interdependence and reciprocity" (Shin et al, 2008: 27).



teach their children” (Clark 2000: 31); however, Janet and Appa do not agree on what should constitute parental contribution in this case. For example, Janet understands her participation in the summer art camp and the church winter camp as an expense related to her education – a basic need Appa is supposed to cater for – whereas Appa thinks of these camps as extra benefits. By approaching the concept of reciprocity in this manner, Janet forces Appa into a Western-flavored, materialistic argument.

#### 1.4 “What will the people at church think?”

When, on the occasion of a gathering at church, Jung is sent to fetch some extra chairs, he is accidentally locked into a room where one of the female church members is drinking from a flask. Shortly afterwards, Jung is found with the same flask, reeking of alcohol. Given his blemished past, Umma is worried that the church community will see this incident as a reconfirmation of his deviant tendencies while Jung is utterly frustrated with Umma’s conformist behaviour and her being so concerned with their family’s reputation. This may be illustrated with the following conversation:

Umma: Mrs. Park has been waiting for me to make a mistake ever since I was in the 7th grade.

Jung: Maybe she’s not the only one.

Umma: Sorry, Jung.

Jung: Umma, I don’t care what church people think. They’re gonna think what they’re gonna think. But I do care what you think.

Umma: I think you is a good boy. But you should care little bit about what church people think.

Jung: And you shouldn’t care so much about what church people think. (KC: Episode 9)

Conformism is an important feature of Umma’s Korean generation, which, in the Western reading, may reflect the person’s “inability to stick by one’s own perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs” (Kim 2002: 95). However, within Umma’s own home cultural context, it can “signify a willingness to be responsive to others and to adjust one’s own demands and desires to maintain the ever-important relationship” (96) with the given community. Similarly, for Umma, trying to save the face of the Kims is not an act inspired by her concern for herself. Rather, it is her endeavour to maintain “relational harmony” (Kim 2002: 117) both within her family and the church community to which she belongs.<sup>8</sup>

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8) Conformism and the desire for “relational harmony” are also traces of Korean Confucianism resulting from the core values of Conformity and Status – Hierarchy, respectively.

## 1.5 Nayoung's clothes

When a Korean relative, Nayoung, is about to visit the Kim family, Umma is outraged by her manner of dressing. Wanting to describe her impressions of Nayoung's clothing style based on what she has seen of her on Facebook, she calls her a "slut" (KC: Episode 4), unaware of the negative connotations of the word. Janet finds the term highly offensive and is shocked: "Did you just call Nayoung a slut?" (KC: Episode 4) Obviously, Umma's Korean generation's idea of associating girls wearing short skirts and high heels with prostitution does not hold with Janet. Her response mirrors the North American education she has been given: "Umma, do you listen to yourself? [...] Nayoung should be able to dress however she chooses and not be judged" (KC: Episode 4). In the Canadian context, Janet's sees fashion as the individual's opportunity for self-expression, which, as such, should be void of the normative comments Umma makes.

## 1.6 Parade

Last, it is also interesting to see Appa's response to the gay pride parade taking place near his store. As the organizers approach him hoping to put up their poster in his shop window, Appa declines their request on aesthetic grounds, "It's, uh, messy poster. Who make? Get refund" (KC: Episode 1). This may be interpreted as a lame excuse at first glance; however, the Korean concern with form considered as important as content makes the apology sound more credible, which does not mean that Appa holds nothing against the parade. But again, his argument – worded from the point of view of a shop owner – has a practical rather than an ideological basis: "Traffic, garbage, noise" (KC: Episode 1), he lists his concerns. Yet, "noise" may lend his argument an ideological touch: "[i]f you is the gay, why can't you be quiet, respectful gay, huh? Like Anderson Cooper, you know? Neil Patrick Harris, you know? They is all the gay, but they don't yelling to me they is the gay. [...] some people don't like Korean, but we don't make big parade yelling at people, 'We is Korean, we is Korean!'" (KC: Episode 1) And then again, in conversation with Mr. Chin, a fellow shop-owner, Appa comes to the conclusion that the parade can also yield rewards: "gays are good for business" (KC: Episode 1). These views and observations, however strange some may sound in the Canadian context, are characteristic of Appa's Korean generation. In drawing a parallel between Koreans and homosexuals, Appa identifies LGBT as another minority. Also, he interprets gayness in the context of his own business: traffic, noise, garbage on the one hand, and more customers attracted through the discount on the other. In addition, he negotiates the challenges of political correctness with tact. For





instance, when a young Afro-Canadian customer mentions to him that favouring the gay individual is an anti-straight act violating the principle of equal opportunities, he offers the person the idea of a Black History Month discount:

Customer: Me just want to know if the 15% discount be true?

Appa: Yeah, it's true but only for the gay.

Customer: What? That's illegal. Anti-straight [...] [w]hen's me get me discount then?

Appa: Uh, February. Black History Discount Month. (KC: Episode 1).

However, it would be difficult to see Appa as a genuine advocate for political correctness cherishing the concept to the same extent as his children's Westernized generation – he is driven more by his interdependent motif of maintaining harmony with customers and by his desire to achieve success in business.

## 2. Transnational features

The second part of the analysis will focus on the transnational features of the Kim family's interaction with their environment. Before proceeding to the discussion, let us define what we will mean by the term 'transnational.' In a narrower sense, the concept denotes "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 2005:7). Or, as Williams (2015) puts it, the term refers to "the diffusion and extension of social, political, economic processes in between and beyond the sovereign jurisdictional boundaries of nation-states." In a broader term, however, transnational can also be interpreted as something "extending or operating across national boundaries" (*English Oxford Living Dictionaries*), "involving several nations" (*Cambridge English Dictionary*). Connecting to this, the associations 'international', 'global' and 'universal' come to mind.

In the discussion below, we will consider some of those examples from the TV series that satisfy the conditions of the term interpreted in the narrower, sociological-economic sense (cf. Schiller, Basch and Blanc, Williams). In addition, at the end of the analysis, a brief reference will also be made to instances that exemplify the broader sense of the term. The subsections below highlight examples of the transnational features of the Kim family's interactions and address diverse instances of this interaction.

## 2.1 Insam Energy Beverage

At one point in the series, Appa is trying to sell Insam Energy Beverage, a Korean energy drink made of ginseng roots, to a customer:

Customer: Hi. Just this please.

Appa: You want something drink? Eh, you look like you can use it. Insam Energy Beverage.

Customer: Sorry, what?

Appa: It's Insam Energy Beverage. New one, very good, from Korea. Give to you energy.

This is one example illustrative of Korean foods and drinks entering the transnational trade between Korea and Canada. In Korea, the use of energy drinks has been widespread since the 1990s, enabling Korean workers to efficiently cope with the immense workload at their workplaces. Through the Korean Businessmen's Association, energy drinks as well as other Korean products of alimentation are exported to Canada and are sold at the convenience stores retail-serviced by the association. As Ins Choi reveals in the foreword to his play, *Kim's Convenience*, “[i]n 1973, the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association (OKBA)<sup>9</sup> was established. The organization offered group purchasing to small businesses through its wholesale outlet, and serviced many Korean convenience store owners. With [...] the OKBA established, Koreans could come to Toronto, make friends, gain support, purchase a store, fill the store with products, and make a pretty good living without ever having to learn English. Korean convenience stores spread all over Toronto” (Choi 2012: 2). Choi's words highlight the role of the OKBA in facilitating the establishment of Korean transnational businesses in Canada.

## 2.2 Korean restaurants

Korean restaurants constitute another prevalent example for alimentation-related transnationalism. In Episode 4, Janet's cousin Nayoung, visiting from Korea, is taking Janet and her friend to a Korean restaurant, which is “one of the best in the city” (KC: Episode 4). The eatery is furnished in Korean style, the waiters speak accentless, fluent Korean, the dishes are “very authentic” (KC: Episode 4). At the same time, they are “same, but also different” (KC: Episode 4), Nayoung observes. What this implies is that certain ingredients are replaced with the canned or bottled version of the given vegetable or fruit, or with Canadian ingredients, and some adjustments may also be made regarding spices in an attempt to satisfy local taste. Yet, the dishes served

9) Both the play and the TV series mention the organization.



remain Korean in essence, with a ‘transnational twist,’ and Korean beverages such as makgeolli or soju are often provided through transnational trade.

### 2.3 Hapkido

East Asian martial arts also surface in the series as a transnational example. When Janet and her fellow-student Gerald announce to Appa that they will take advantage of the school discount to learn Hapkido, Appa feels insulted for two reasons. First, in his view, Hapkido is a male sport, so females should not learn it, whether in Korea or in Canada:

Appa: I will teach to you Hapkido.

Janet: I’ve asked you, like, 100 times about Hapkido and you always said no because I was a girl. (KC: Episode 7)

Second, Hapkido can only be taught by a Korean professional, and anybody claiming differently is “pimping Korea,” that is, selling a non-Korean service or product as Korean:

Appa: Who is you Hapkido teacher?

Janet: His name is – I think he’s like an art teacher.

Appa: You art teacher pimping Korea? – Uh – No, no, no, can’t having like that. Only Korean can teach a Korean Hapkido. (KC: Episode 7)

However, when Appa pays a visit to the Hapkido club, he is given evidence of the high-level professionalism there, and he also realises that the Hapkido taught there in its transnational manifestation is ‘the real thing.’

### 2.4 Nayoung vs the Kims

Episode 4 contrasts Nayoung, Janet’s cousin visiting from Korea, with the protagonists of the Kims, a diasporic family living in Toronto. Nayoung is representative of the Korean late-teen, early-twenties generation wearing the latest fashion intended for young people in Korea, whose dressing style is perceived by Janet’s mother as provocative and sexually too explicit, as we have mentioned above. Also, Nayoung’s manner of behaviour seems very childish and sometimes immature as compared to that of Janet. At the same time, Janet’s Korean is rusty and faulty.

Neither does she know what to do with the raw egg served with her dish at the Korean restaurant. Observed from Nayoung's vantage point, the Kim family is 'same but different' as is often the case with transnational communities.

## 2.5 Korean karaoke bars

In episode 5, on a night out, Mr. Chin and the Kims go to a karaoke bar with a Russian hairstylist and her friend. In Korea, 'noraebangs' (karaoke bars) represent a form of typical, nationwide entertainment not only for young people on a date, or friends from school, but also for business people, stressed-out co-workers or the elderly. In fact, Toronto's Koreatown has numerous karaoke bars as well as restaurants with karaoke facilities, so the reference to such a form of entertainment, which is located at the root of Korean culture, can also be seen as a transnational example in the TV series.

## 2.6 Korean-Japanese relations

An entertaining example of transnationalism is Appa's hatred towards the Japanese, which manifests in his refusal to buy Japanese-manufactured products such as Honda cars or Sony cameras, and which is rooted in his generation of Koreans' anti-Japanese sentiment triggered by the Japanese colonial rule in Korea between 1910 and 1945.<sup>10</sup> Even though Appa is a diasporic Korean living in Canada now, he still behaves like a resistance fighter<sup>11</sup> targeting anything or anyone Japanese:

Appa: Call police.

Janet: What happened?

Appa: Car is no-parking zone. Talk to police.

Janet: Let me guess. It's a Honda?

Appa: No.

Janet: Mitsubishi?

Appa: No. Okay, it's a Toyota, but still, no-parking zone!

Janet: How many times do I have to tell you, Appa? Japanese people aren't the only ones driving Japanese cars.

Appa: Janet, 1910, Japan attack Korea. You buy Japanese, you is guilty by associationship.  
(KC: Episode 3)

10) For historical details, see MacDonald (1996: 36–41).

11) See references to various forms of organized resistance against the Japanese: the Provisional Government, the March 1st Movement (1919), the Independence Army (1920) (The Association of Korean History Teachers 2010: 243)



The above conversation demonstrates the differing viewpoints of father and his daughter well: Appa is against anything that is of Japanese origin, and has preserved the traditional Korean hostility towards Japan (Macdonald 1996: 39), while Janet no longer shares such a way of thinking, and is at first surprised, then annoyed and makes fun of her father's obsession and partiality against the Japanese.

## 2.7 Korean church

In the scope of this paper, the last example of transnationalism in the TV series in the narrower sense of the term is the Korean church, the importance of which in the life of the Korean community is stressed by script writer Ins Choi himself. He relates: "Korean convenience stores spread all over Toronto as did the Korean churches. In 1980, there were 20,000 Koreans in Canada, and in 2011, that number rose to 200,000. I've always considered the church and the store to be the *Umma* and *Appa* of Korean communities in Canada" (Choi 2012: 2). Similarly to Choi, The Korean Canadian Women's Anthology Collective also mentions the importance the church has played in the life of the Korean Canadian community: "Newly arrived immigrants [have been] able to get support from more established community members, particularly in urban areas, as the Church provides a locus around which people congregate, meet, and develop community" (2007: 4).

Resounding with the quotation by The Korean Canadian Women's Anthology Collective, the series also confirms that the Korean church is an important place not just for Christian worship and prayer but also for socializing, networking, making connections, doing business – and even arranging marriage between young Korean people, to which we have seen Janet's reaction above, in Point 1.1. As *Umma* explains, "[y]ou know, church is not only for worship the Jesus. Lots of side benefit too" (KC: Episode 1). What this half jocular, half serious remark also implies is that the Korean Church plays an important role also in accommodating transnational Korean migrants.

## 2.8 The transnational in a general sense

Finally, let us mention a few examples of the realization of the transnational in the series, understood in the sense of the broader definition, i.e., global issues. Appa's "steal or no steal" theory observing tendencies of shoplifting of various minorities; Shannon's handling of Jung and Kimchi's game of *ddongjeem* to

“increase [the office co-workers’] sensitivity of different cultures and traditions”<sup>12</sup>; the multicultural jokes the characters crack;<sup>13</sup> Pastor Nina Gomez taking over the Korean Church Mrs. Kim attends; Frank the mechanic, whose attention is focused on his reminiscences rather than his work;<sup>14</sup> or the issue of IT literacy<sup>15</sup> all belong to this category. In fact, critics suggest that the success of the series may lie in “the universality of its spirit” (Lee 2016), which manifests itself in scenes involving the transnational in the broader sense. Indeed, the series does “[go] beyond the Korean heritage” (Lee 2016) so emphatically present in the play. At the same time, the presence of the Korean diasporic lens is an inherent feature of all *Kim’s Convenience* episodes.

## Conclusion

As discussed in the first part of this paper, the first season of the CBC series, *Kim’s Convenience* reflects the differences in the way of thinking between first- and second-generation Korean-Canadians well, just as it is illustrative of the potential conflicts arising from these differences. The examples mentioned drew on marriage,

- 12) Shannon: I think we’ve all noticed a little bit of tension around the office lately, so I just wanted to get the gang together and nip this in the bud.  
 Terence: Sorry, what is this about?  
 Shannon: Well, I like to think of us as a family and, Terence, two of your siblings are having a little bit of a misunderstanding.  
 Terence: Oh, I just thought this was a lovers’ quarrel.  
 Kimchee and Jung: We’re not a couple.  
 Terence: You’re. You’re not?  
 Kimchee and Jung: No. Okay, it’s just a ddongjeem. It’s a Korean thing.  
 Shannon: And this is an excellent opportunity for us to increase our sensitivity of different cultures and traditions. For example, in my family we play this game where we pass an orange around the room using only our necks... That may seem sexual to some people in different cultures.  
 Jung: Why are you looking at me?  
 Shannon: There are only five people here. I have to look at someone. The point is, we need to be sensitive to each other racially, and sexually, and culturally, and sexually. And if you two can just make amends, we can all move on (KC: Episode 3).
- 13) So this is very nice fabric.  
 I bet you it’s made in China.  
 Don’t take bet.  
 Nowadays, the only thing not made in China is baby.  
 That’s not true. Baby is made in Va-China.  
 (LAUGHING) Va-China! It’s funny.  
 I had no idea Koreans were so funny.  
 I had no idea vodka was so delicious (KC: Episode 5).
- 14) “He can’t fix anything. Too busy talking.” (KC: 31)
- 15) Appa and Gerald fighting over the photos and Appa fooling around with Gerald’s password risking that Gerald will be locked out of his own notebook. (KC: Episode 5).



education, perceptions of parents' and children's rights and responsibilities, conformism versus individualism, choice of clothing and homosexuality.

The second part of the paper identified some of the transnational features of the series, where the term “transnational” was interpreted both in a narrower and in a more general sense. The narrower (sociological-economic) sense was illustrated through examples such as food (Insam Energy Drink, Korean restaurant), Korean martial arts (Hapkido), Koreans versus diaspora Koreans, karaoke entertainment, the Korean distrust of the Japanese rooted in Korea's colonial period, and, most importantly, the Korean church as a transnational institution. The paper considered the wider sense of the term “transnational” only through brief references to relevant examples, mainly to demonstrate the TV series has a touch of the universal.

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**JUDIT NAGY** / is an Associate Professor and Director of the Canada Center and Vice-Dean for International Affairs at the Faculty of Humanities of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary in Budapest. Her research focuses on East Asian Canadians and teaching material development.

Contact: [nagy.judit@kre.hu](mailto:nagy.judit@kre.hu)

**MÁTYÁS BÁNHEGYI** / is an Associate Professor at Budapest Business School University of Applied Sciences. He offers applied linguistics and ESP classes. He has authored several teaching resource packs in Canadian studies. Apart from Canadian Studies, his research areas include ESP, methodology, translation studies and cultural studies.

Contact: [banhegyi.matyas@uni-bge.hu](mailto:banhegyi.matyas@uni-bge.hu)



