



Stare and Gaze: Nonverbal Signs of Courtship in *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*

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Abstract

This study examines the use of nonverbal signs in courtship behavior portrayed in two Asian romance dramas, The White Olive Tree (2025) and Descendants of the Sun (2016). The study aims to identify the courtship phases in which nonverbal courtship signs appear and to analyze the forms of nonverbal signs represented through facial expressions and gestures in both dramas. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The data consist of selected scenes from the two dramas that depict nonverbal interactions between the main characters, particularly scenes showing emotional closeness and romantic attraction. Data were collected by observing selected episodes and scenes from official streaming sources on iQIYI and were systematically categorized into a coding sheet. The data were analyzed using Spradley's (1980) four stages of analysis: domain, taxonomy, componential analysis, and cultural themes, with Givens' (1978) theory of nonverbal courtship behavior as the main analytical framework. The findings show that both dramas portray five courtship phases: the attention phase, recognition phase, interaction phase, sexual arousal phase, and resolution phase. The nonverbal signs include eye contact, facial expressions, smiles, gaze aversion, body movements, self-grooming, hand-holding, touching, and embracing. These signs function to express attraction, affection, emotional support, and intimacy. The study concludes that nonverbal communication plays an important role in developing emotional closeness and romantic relationships and that Givens' theory can be applied to analyze courtship behavior in visual media.

Keyword: Nonverbal Sign, Courtship, *The White Olive Tree*, *Descendants of the Sun*

1. Introduction

Nonverbal signs are essential in today's society for expressing emotions, particularly when it comes to romantic interest. Among other nonverbal signs, eye contact, which is demonstrated by staring and gazing, serves as a ritualistic social interaction technique that influences romantic relationships in addition to being a sign of interest (Givens, 1978). The importance of Facial Expression Recognition (FER) that recognizes face expressions is one of the exciting and effective jobs in public interaction since facial expressions are important in nonverbal interaction (Prakash 2023). These nonverbal signs are purposefully emphasized in visual media like dramas and movies to create tension, intimacy, and emotional resonance. This is especially true in high-context countries like Asia, where indirect communication is a part of the culture (Hall, 1976).

Two well-known Asian dramas that highlight the complex significance of nonverbal signs in forming love connections against the backdrop of military conflict are *The White Olive Tree* (2025) and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016). *The White Olive Tree* (2025) tells the story of Song Ran, a reporter from Liang City Satellite TV who faces danger while on assignment in war zones, and Li Zan, a Chinese explosive engineer volunteering in the East Country, who saves her life. Likewise, *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) tells about Yoo Si-Jin, a soldier serving in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, and Kang Mu-Yeon, a surgeon who works with him in the conflict area for several weeks. Because verbal communication becomes secondary in life-threatening situations, Li Zan and Song Ran's emotional exchanges, as well as those between Yoo Si-Jin and Kang Mu-Yeon, rely mainly on nonverbal signs. Studies that discuss how nonverbal signs in Asian dramas, especially in military settings, are still limited, even though research on visual media has been growing.

Nonverbal signs can play an important role in a romantic relationship. As mentioned by Kamal and Afandi (2025), nonverbal signs provide emotional expression, build closeness, trust, and reliability, and serve as a conflict

resolution. Furthermore, they also point out that nonverbal signs can cause misunderstandings that may lead to distance and conflict in relationships.

By examining how nonverbal signs, specifically facial expressions and gestures, are crafted to convey romantic desire in the stories of *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*, this study seeks to close this gap. The study will address the following inquiries: (1) What courtship phases do the nonverbal courtship signs appear in the *White Olive Tree* and *Descendant of the Sun* (2) What nonverbal courtship signs are found in *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendant of the Sun*.

This study examines how nonverbal signs function in Asian visual storytelling as narrative devices that convey psychological and emotional subtext in addition to being gestures of attraction, using Givens' (1978) theory on nonverbal courtship behavior and Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic framework.

Understanding interpersonal dynamics, especially in romantic and courtship scenarios, has long relied heavily on nonverbal signs. Darwin (1872) proposed that verbal intonations, body movements, and facial expressions are evolutionary mechanisms intended to serve as instruments for both sexual selection and emotional expression. This was further developed by Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1971), who recognized that common behavioral patterns in courtship phases, like quick eye contact, shy grins, and open body postures, are human instincts that cut across cultural barriers.

From a psychological standpoint, Rusu (2018) emphasized that love and romantic relationships are deeply embedded in classical sociological thought, providing conceptual tools to understand the ways nonverbal signs become symbolic communicative acts of acceptance, rejection, or interest. Furthermore, Goffman (1959, 1967) explained that people either intentionally or inadvertently control how they present themselves through nonverbal signs in daily interactions, where small movements, such as shifting posture or toying with hair, can convey desire.

This idea was supported by Hodgins and Zuckerman (1990), who found that nonverbal signs play a crucial role in shaping the quality of social interaction, highlighting how implicit gestures such as posture, gaze, or subtle expressions may build attraction more authentically than words. Certain actions, such as glances and physical proximity, have been highlighted by Givens (1977, 1978) as crucial indicators in the beginning of courtship and flirtation. The evolution of instincts into sophisticated adult nonverbal signs in love relationships was another topic covered in his study.

Literature Review

1) Verbal and Nonverbal Communication in Romantic Relationships

In studies of romantic relationships, communication is recognized as a fundamental foundation for building and maintaining the relationship. In general, communication is divided into two categories: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication uses spoken or written language to convey meaning, while nonverbal communication involves elements without words, such as facial expressions, eye contact, body movements, and touch (Kotlyar & Ariely, 2013).

In the context of romantic relationships, verbal communication functions as a means of expressing feelings, clarifying intentions, and strengthening emotional closeness through conversation. However, many studies have found that nonverbal communication is often more effective in expressing emotions and romantic attraction. This is because nonverbal messages tend to occur spontaneously, making them more difficult to manipulate (Romaniuk, 2022).

One important nonverbal aspect in romantic interaction is eye contact. Eye contact reflects attention, interest, and openness toward a partner. A study by Croes, Antheunis, and Schouten (2018) suggests that intense eye contact can increase perceived attraction and help accelerate the formation of interpersonal bonds in the early stages of a relationship.

In addition, other nonverbal elements such as smiling, touch, and body language also play a significant role in building emotional closeness. These behaviors act as signals of affection that help individuals interpret their partner's intentions and feelings more accurately within the relationship (Bakar & Ibrahim, 2025).

2) Courtship Phases in Romantic Interaction

Courtship can be understood as a social process in which two individuals begin to develop romantic attraction that may evolve into a more intimate relationship. From the perspective of communication and social psychology, this process is viewed as a series of interaction stages involving both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Givens (1978) explains that romantic attraction develops through patterns of nonverbal behavior that unfold across several courtship phases, namely:

a) Attention Phase

In this phase, individuals attempt to attract others' attention through nonverbal signals such as brief eye contact, smiling, or adjusting their appearance. These signals function as initial indicators of attraction (Givens, 1978).

b) Recognition Phase

This phase is marked by the emergence of mutual awareness of attraction. Eye contact becomes more intense, accompanied by facial expressions or gestures that indicate openness to continue the interaction. Studies show that gaze and facial expressions are important indicators in identifying attraction at an early stage (Hoffmann et al., 2024).

c) Interaction Phase

In this phase, communication becomes more active and reciprocal. Individuals begin to engage in deeper conversations and display more varied nonverbal expressions. Body movement synchronization, the use of humor, and attentiveness to the other person play important roles in building emotional closeness (Hall & Xing, 2015).

d) Sexual Arousal Phase

An increase in emotional and physical closeness characterizes this stage. Physical contact, such as touch, begins to emerge as a form of more intense attraction (Pfaus, Safron, & Zakreski, 2023).

e) Resolution Phase

In the final phase, the relationship reaches a higher level of emotional stability. Interaction is no longer dominated by flirtatious behavior but instead focuses on comfort, trust, and commitment within the relationship (Givens, 1978).

3) Love Language in the Courtship Phase

In romantic relationships, expressions of affection can be understood through the concept of love language, which refers to the ways individuals express and receive love. This concept emphasizes that communication, both verbal and nonverbal, serves as the primary medium for conveying affection.

Several studies show that expressions of love are often manifested through communicative behaviors such as attention, emotional support, and physical touch. For example, simple actions like holding hands, giving full attention, or showing empathy can reflect affection in romantic relationships (Kamal & Afandi, 2025).

In the context of courtship, these expressions emerge gradually as the relationship develops. In the early stages, affection tends to be expressed through subtle nonverbal signals, such as gaze or smiling. As emotional closeness increases, the forms of expression become more explicit, including physical touch, more intense attention, and open verbal communication (Romaniuk, 2022).

Therefore, the concept of love language helps explain how different forms of communication are used to express affection at each stage of romantic relationship development.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to analyze and discover how facial expressions and gestures function as nonverbal signs in courtship behavior in two Asian romance dramas, *The White Olive Tree* (2025) and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016).

Data for this study were collected from scenes showing facial expressions and gestures between the main characters from two Asian romance dramas, *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*. These dramas were chosen because they represent popular representations of romantic relationships in Asian drama and contain rich examples of nonverbal courtship signs. The visual data were taken from official streaming sources on iQIYI, focusing on scenes that showed moments of facial expressions and gestures between the main characters, which reflected emotional closeness and attraction.

Data collection was carried out by watching episodes and scenes from both dramas that were selected purposely, which met the criteria for nonverbal signs in courtship behavior. The data analyzed were in visual form and were then described in the form of notes and systematically categorized into a coding sheet for further analysis.

The data analyzed were visual in the form of scenes containing nonverbal signs. The analysis technique used refers to Spradley (1980), which consists of four stages of analysis: domain, taxonomy, components, and cultural themes.

In the domain stage, Givens' (1978) theory of nonverbal signs in courtship behavior was used. There are several important stages in the courtship process, including the Attention Phase (AP), Recognition Phase (RP), Interaction Phase (IP), Sexual Arousal Phase (SAP), and Resolution Phase (RP). The purpose of this phase was to categorize facial expressions and gestures according to their role in each stage of the courtship process.

In the taxonomy analysis, each category was examined in more detail to identify sub-types of nonverbal behaviors, including Facial Expression (FE) and Gesture (G). This stage focused on the characteristics and contexts of nonverbal communication. For example, in the attention phase, during the first encounter between the two characters, the male character gazes at the female character for an extended moment as a sign of being captivated by her appearance.

The componential analysis was then conducted to explore the relationship between the courtship phases and the type of nonverbal sign. A systematic coding table was used to map how each behavior corresponded to the interaction between characters, represented as Protagonist–Protagonist (P–P). This process allowed for a clear understanding of how visual elements supported or contrasted with the development of romantic tension and attraction.

In the componential analysis, the coherence between types of nonverbal signs and their corresponding courtship phases was examined through a systematic coding table. The aim is to categorize facial expressions and gestures according to their role in the courtship process.

In the taxonomy analysis, the types of nonverbal signs in courtship are studied by looking at how they arise, their form, and their context. For example, a glance at the beginning of a meeting has a different meaning than a long gaze when the relationship has become close. In the componential analysis, the types of nonverbal signs were connected to their coherence with the phases of courtship behavior through a systematic coding table.

Table 1. Nonverbal Signs in Courtship Phases of *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*

Drama Title	AP		RPc		IP		SAP		RPv	
	FE	G	FE	G	FE	G	FE	G	FE	G
The White Olive Tree	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
Descendants of the Sun	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V

Note: AP = Attention Phase; RPc = Recognition Phase; IP = Interaction Phase; SAP = Sexual Arousal Phase; RPv = Resolution Phase; FE = Facial Expression; G = Gesture.

The table above examines *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*, focusing on visual nonverbal signs such as facial expressions and gestures that appear in various stages of courtship phases. The gaze used by the male character in the Attention Phase (AP) is classified as an initial attraction sign, representing the first nonverbal sign of interest during the early encounter. In this scene, the male character gazes at the female character for an extended period, which functions as a visual sign of admiration and emotional captivation. This prolonged gaze

directly shapes the atmosphere of intimacy and curiosity in the interaction. The use of gaze as a dominant sign reflects attentional focus and desire to establish a connection, making it a coherent nonverbal characteristic that consistently reinforces the theme of romantic interest and mutual awareness throughout the narrative.

A deeper analysis through taxonomy reveals that this gaze belongs to the category of expressive nonverbal signs of attraction, functioning not only as a stylistic visual element but as a symbolic expression of emotional involvement. The taxonomy indicates that such a gaze serves as an identity marker for affection, signaling sincerity and emotional depth between the characters. Without this nonverbal sign, the emotional connection between the main characters would appear weaker, and the progression of intimacy might remain abstract rather than visually expressed. In contrast, incorporating prolonged eye contact as a key nonverbal sign effectively integrates visual, emotional, and cultural dimensions, creating a coherent and expressive portrayal of romantic courtship.

Finally, the cultural theme analysis connects these findings to broader cultural and ideological meanings of love expression in Asian media, where nonverbal signs, such as facial expressions and gestures, often serve as socially acceptable ways to convey affection. From the taxonomy, a cultural finding emerges that sustained gentle expressions and eye contact are not only indicators of attraction but also reflect cultural values emphasizing emotional restraint, politeness, and sincerity in romantic interactions.

3. Findings and Discussion

Attention Phase

According to Givens 1978), the attention phase is aspects marked by short gazes at facial expressions, soft smiles, and light eye contact could serve as approach cues. The act of grooming and wearing attractive makeup can be considered as a nonverbal display of attractiveness. In this phase, a person attracts the attention of a potential partner through nonverbal behavior that shows their interest.



Picture 1: Attention Phase in the drama *The White Olive Tree* (Episode 3, minute 02.10-04.00, iQIYI)

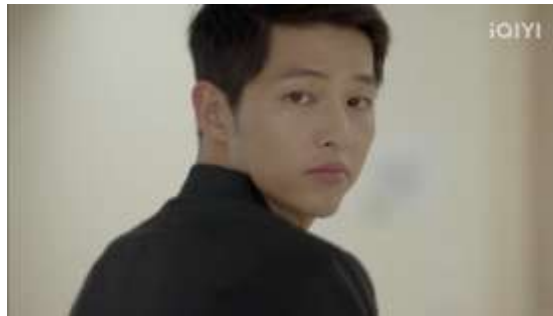
In this scene, when analyzed using Given's theory (1978), which refers to "the initial stage of interaction when a person begins to show interest in another person through verbal behavior," it can be classified as the attention phase. In this context, both gestures and facial expressions play an important role in indirectly conveying emotional meaning.

Li Zan's gesture of tilting his umbrella toward Song Ran is a representation of attention and concern. This movement is not just a gesture to protect from the rain, but also has a symbolic meaning that shows a desire to create physical and emotional closeness. In Givens' theory (1978), such gestures are included in the category of affiliative behavior, which is nonverbal behavior that shows liking or interest in other people.

The facial expressions in the eye contact between Li Zan and Song Ran show the emotional intensity and curiosity that come up when starting a relationship. The eye contact that happens in those few seconds shows mutual attention, where they're both watching each other and want to get to know each other better. That gaze shows that the two characters have started to build a connection or emotional feeling without having to use words or talk.

The narrative context also strengthens this analysis, as they have just reunited after being separated from the military area, and the actual starting point of their introduction was under an umbrella, as seen in the scene.

Therefore, the combination of gestures and facial expressions marks the beginning of the attention phase according to Givens, where interpersonal attraction begins to form through soft but still relevant nonverbal communication.



Picture 2. Attention Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 1, minute 23:08-23:20, iQIYI)

Yoo Si-Jin's behavior in this attention phase shows early signs of interest, as described in Givens' theory (1978). In this scene, Yoo Si-Jin turns his head and directs his gaze toward Kang Mu-Yeon. Yoo Si-Jin's calm and relaxed facial expression, accompanied by a soft and focused gaze at Kang Mu-Yeon, depicts a subtle form of interest known as a mild interest gaze. This gaze is a nonverbal action that signifies awareness and curiosity towards another person. His controlled confidence is emphasized by the absence of a broad smile or exaggerated expressions, in line with Yoo Si-Jin's character as a disciplined but interested soldier.

However, the soft eye contact and slight turn of the head also function as approach cues or nonverbal signs that attract attention and invite a response from the other party. At this stage, visual exchange gives rise to emotional recognition, which is the beginning of the courtship process, even though the interaction is still taking place without words. This is in line with Givens' theory that the attention phase is the first stage in the approach process, where attraction is communicated through visual signals and subtle behavior, not through verbal expressions



Picture 3. Attention Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 1, minute 52:35-52:47, iQIYI)

Kang Mu-Yeon's nonverbal behaviour when dressing in front of the mirror can be categorized as a self-grooming gesture aimed at attracting Yoo Si-Jin's attention during the attention phase mentioned above. According to Givens' theory (1978), the act of adjusting one's appearance is a form of early nonverbal communication in the courtship process. This form of communication indicates self-awareness of personal attractiveness and readiness to be noticed by others.

Kang Mu-Yeon's gentle and focused gestures while dressing reflect an effort to build an appealing self-image without involving direct interaction. In this context, the expressions and movements become symbols of social and psychological readiness to be noticed. Thus, this serves as a sign of the attention phase in the dynamics of the relationship with Yoo Si-Jin.

Recognition Phase

In the context of the recognition phase as described by Givens (1978), nonverbal interaction plays an important role in signaling initial attraction between two individuals. This phase happens when both of them realize that they have mutual attraction. They will “recognize” each other and orient their bodies toward each other (body orientation). The intensity of facial expressions and body language is increasingly enhanced in this phase.



Picture 4: Recognition Phase in the drama *The White Olive Tree* (Episode 3, minute 37:00-37:38, iQIYI)

The scene in which Song Ran interviews Li Zan in the drama *The White Olive Tree* clearly represents this phase. When Li Zan looks at Song Ran, there is a nonverbal response indicating nervousness and attraction from Song Ran, which is evident through downward eye aversion and awkward movements that cause her to drop items. According to Givens, such behavior is included in submissive cues, which are signals indicating interest accompanied by non-dominant behavior. Furthermore, Li Zan's small smile becomes a form of mutual recognition of the emotional tension that arises. This scene shows that the recognition phase is a combination of eye contact, downward gaze, and subtle smile expressions that serve as a non-verbal communication tool marking the emergence of attraction.

According to Givens (1978), the recognition phase is a stage when one person realizes the other's interest and initiates to react. At this stage, individuals may display a variety of very small and secretive nonverbal communication, such as smiling, looking, and tilting of the head or shoulder movements, all of which serve to signal openness and show a certain degree of submission. The characters use these indications to attract the other for further interaction and thus show their availability and non-involvement.



Picture 5. Recognition Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 5, minute 39:20-39:39.31, iQIYI)

Here, Kang Mo-yeon looks at Yoo Si-jin and laughs shyly after thinking that he is teasing her. The sign on her face comprising soft smiling and blushing can be considered as a recognized form of love that she conveys to him. By her face, she communicates that she is aware of his attention and responds positively but modestly.

This instance corresponds to Givens' (1978) proposal when he says that the recognition stage is illustrated by smiling and looking down with the face expressing surrender and readiness to be engaged further. Kang Mo-yeon's timid chuckle and soft-smile could be interpreted as very faint indications of her consent, which implies that she

acknowledges Yoo Si-jin's love even though she doesn't verbalize it. Such an answer is evidencing the core of mutual identification and emotional connection between the two of them.

As Givens (1978) noted, in the recognition phase, people start to show nonverbal signs of approachability and emotional readiness. Nonverbal signs of submissiveness and increased distance soften the social distance. Self-clasping, face-touching, head-tilting, and gaze aversion suggest the possibility of submissiveness and approachability. These signs show a person as socially available and ready to get recognition from a different side.



Picture 6. Recognition Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 5, minute 27.55-28.00, iQIYI)

Here, through the gentle strokes on the back, Yoo Si-jin was trying to calm down the upset Kang Mo-yeon after they had a mishap and fell off the cliff into the water. This gesture served as a nonverbal expression of empathy and an effort to calm. According to Givens (1978), self-clasping, head-tilting, and shoulder-raising are described as provocatively submissive. In this scene, tension and anxious concern might ease the interaction. The warm gentle pat and emotional support of Yoo Si-jin is an effort of attention to Kang Mu-yeon's emotional tension in restoring her to a safe and protected feeling after her fear.

This moment aligns with Givens' (1978) explanation that during the recognition phase, nonverbal actions may appear as "signs of meekness" performed to reduce tension in stressful situations (p. 351). Yoo Si-jin's gesture can therefore be interpreted as a comforting act that not only expresses empathy but also strengthens emotional closeness between the two characters at this early stage of their relationship.

Interaction Phase

According to Givens (1978), nonverbal contact during the interaction phase does not only serve to establish physical closeness, but also involves emotional tension mixed with nervousness and happiness when a person begins to open up to another person. These mixed feelings often arise in intimate moments although captions are still present.



Picture 7: Interaction Phase in the drama *The White Olive Tree* (Episode 9, minute 39:22-39:55, iQIYI)

In the context of the interaction phase, the scene shows Li Zan extending his hand to invite Song Ran to dance, and Song Ran accepts with a gentle smile. This scene represents the interaction phase as explained by Givens (1978) in his article. In this phase, two individuals who have recognized their mutual attraction begin to establish direct contact through nonverbal behaviors that demonstrate emotional intimacy. Li Zan's inviting gesture and

Song Ran's positive response reflect mutual synchrony and affiliative behavior, which are key characteristics of this phase. In this scene, their dance is not merely physical movement, but a symbol of nonverbal communication. They "read" each other through expressions, movements, and rhythm, as explained by Givens (1978), where in the interaction phase, the bodies of both individuals seem to "dance to each other's rhythm" as a manifestation of the intimacy that is beginning to develop.

According to Givens (1978) the interaction phase is the bright point of the drama, where the people intermingle their verbal and nonverbal side of the behavior to achieve emotional involvement and mutual responsiveness. The communication gets animated, but the figures are still portrayed as kind and submissive, which indicates that they are aware of each other's reactions.



Picture 8. Interaction Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 5, minute 37.20-37.34, iQIYI)

In this section, Kang Mu-Yeon basically uses the adorable and playful gesture just to mock Yoo Si-Jin. Nevertheless, it is obvious from Yoo Si-Jin's faint smile and focused expression that he feels something inside even though Kang Mu-Yeon's action makes people laugh and is not a confrontation of emotions. This corresponds to the Givens (1978) argument where the behaviors in the interaction stage are "very lively and submissive" and, besides that, mutual responsiveness and sustained attention are also there.

By playing a jest gesture, the couple shows how humor and expressiveness can become emotional bridges in their interpersonal communication. Kang Mo-Yeon's over-the-top gesture and Yoo Si-Jin's focus on her demonstrate body synchrony and shared awareness, thus, lighthearted interactions can still lead to deeper emotional connection within the interaction phase.

Givens (1978) explains the interaction phase as the period when the exchange of nonverbal and verbal signals becomes more active and balanced. Both individuals show from now on prolonged gaze contact, increased responsibility, and body synchrony, thus communication being transferred from one-sided attention to reciprocal involvement. Givens explains that this instance is not only marked by the usage of signs and facial expressions which are gentle and submissive but also by the fact that these indications have become an intimate, interactive communication of a kind.



Picture 9. Interaction Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 5, minute 16.47-16.53, iQIYI)

After all, Kang Mo-yeon reaches out to Yoo Si-jin's hand and stops him from getting up from the bed, saying that he is still injured. Yoo Si-jin's response, quietly looking into her eyes and hearing, reflects that they both know each other and have the same level of acknowledgment with her being full of genuine concern and love. Their

conversation is a flawless instance of what Givens (1978) refers to by “sustained periods of gaze contact” and “close synchrony in body movements”, thus both partners tuning in to each other’s timing and emotional state.

The moment here is a clear example of how nonverbal communication during the interaction phase can be used to intimacy and trust. The unison of gestures and gaze between Kang Mo-yeon and Yoo Si-jin is an indication that they have moved from mere recognition to a deep emotional bond, which is at the core of the interaction phase according to Givens (1978).

Sexual Arousal Phase

According to Givens (1978), the sexual arousal phase in the facial expression aspect is seen from intense, close eye contact and en face gaze, which shows affection, not lust. Givens (1978) also added that in this phase, physical distance begins to fade and nurturing behavior, such as hugging, kissing, or caressing, appears.



Picture 10: Sexual Arousal Phase in the drama *The White Olive Tree* (Episode 17, minute ke 12:40–14:25, iQIYI)

In this scene the nonverbal sign between Li Zan and Song Ran reflects the sexual arousal phase in Givens' (1978) theory. This phase is characterized by increased emotional and physical closeness between two mutually attracted individuals. In this scene, the interaction begins with an intense gaze that lasts quite long, indicating a sense of mutual possession and strong emotional attraction.

After the moment of gazing at each other, Li Zan slowly approached and gently held Song Ran's head before finally kissing her forehead. This gesture conveys warmth, affection, and emotional comfort between them. The scene then progresses to the kissing moment, marking the peak of intimacy between them. Through this series of nonverbal sign, it is evident that their relationship has evolved from the initial phase of attraction to a deeper and more intimate closeness. Thus, this scene depicts the realization of the sexual arousal phase according to Givens, where nonverbal communication serves as the main means of expressing feelings and emotional connection between the characters.



Picture 11. Sexual Arousal Phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 12, minute 43:05-43:38, iQIYI)

According to Givens (1978), the sexual arousal phase in the facial expression aspect is seen from intense, close eye contact and en face gaze, which shows affection, not lust. In the drama *Descendants of the Sun*, in episode 12,

minutes 41:03-42:08, Kang Mu-Yeon stares at Yoo Si-Jin and asks him to tell her everything he is going to do. Because he is a soldier, the actions he often takes are often dangerous. Kang Mu-Yeon's unbroken gaze shows concern and worry.

Givens (1978) also added that in this phase, physical distance begins to fade and nurturing behavior, such as hugging, kissing, or caressing, appears. In the drama *Descendants of the Sun*, this phase is seen in episode 12, minutes 43:05-43:38, where Yoo Si-Jin gently pulls Kang Mu-Yeon's hand, hugs her, and strokes her hair. Kang Mu-Yeon is worried that she will lose Yoo Si-Jin in the future when he carries out a dangerous task. Therefore, Yoo Si-Jin provides attention through nonverbal signs in the form of hugs and caresses to calm her down. This action shows a form of nurturing behavior that reflects providing a sense of security and comfort.

Resolution Phase

Givens (1978) states in this stage, the relationship between two individuals has reached a stable emotional closeness, characterized by a sense of calm, affection, and mature commitment. No longer focused on physical tension or passion, this phase displays a form of relationship filled with acceptance and deep emotional intimacy. In this phase, couples tend to exhibit a more stable and calmer attitude, as their relationship has moved toward stability, no longer in the courtship phase. Flirtatious activities begin to decrease and are replaced by a comfortable and accepting attitude toward each other.



Picture 12: Resolution Phase in the drama *The White Olive Tree* (Episode 38, minutes 36:00–36:15, iQIYI)

This scene shows Li Zan and Song Ran registering their marriage. This is indicated by the use of white clothing and a red background, which in Chinese culture symbolizes happiness and good fortune in marriage. Their expressions appear calm and gentle, reflecting a stable emotional state after going through various conflicts and traumatic experiences experienced by Li Zan. Although their smiles are not very wide, Li Zan's gentle gesture of tidying Song Ran's hair and the way they look at each other show genuine affection and care. Thus, this scene represents the resolution phase in Givens' theory, where the relationship between the characters reaches a point of emotional closeness and deep commitment.



Picture 13. Resolution phase in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* (Episode 16, minute 50:11-50:21, iQIYI)

Givens (1978) states that the resolution phase occurs when nonverbal interactions begin to decline. In this phase, couples tend to exhibit a more stable and calmer, as their relationship has moved toward stability, no longer in the courtship phase. Flirtatious activities begin to decrease and are replaced by a comfortable and accepting attitude toward others. In the drama *Descendants of the Sun*, this phase is seen in episode 12, minutes 50:11-50:21, where Yoo Si-Jin and Kang Mu-Yeon return to the beach they had visited before. While chatting, Kang Mu-Yeon follows Yoo Si-Jin's pose by putting both of her hands in her pants pockets. They don't stare at each other intensely; Kang Mu-Yeon just looks gently while smiling at Yoo Si-Jin when he talks. They seem relaxed and don't show any explicit romantic gestures. Her facial expressions and gestures show that they are already comfortable with each other.

4. Conclusion

This research aims to identify the forms of nonverbal signs in the courtship process portrayed in the dramas *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun* by applying the courtship approach theory proposed by Givens (1978). Based on the analysis, it was found that both dramas, *The White Olive Tree* and *Descendants of the Sun*, depict the five phases of courtship as proposed by David B. Givens (1978), namely the attention phase, the acquaintance phase, the interaction phase, the sexual arousal phase, and the resolution phase. Each phase is characterized by various forms of nonverbal communication, including eye contact (gaze), facial expressions, body movements, and physical touch, which serve as significant nonverbal communicative cues in expressing emotional bonds and romantic attraction among the characters. The study confirms that subtle nonverbal cues such as gaze, shy smiles, blushing, intense eye contact, as well as gestures like tilting an umbrella, back touches, hair grooming, hand-holding, and embracing are vital in building emotional intimacy between romantic partners. The visual narrative format allows close, frame-by-frame observation of these behaviors, revealing how characters negotiate personal space and unspoken attraction. These findings reinforce Givens' theory that universal courtship patterns remain clearly identifiable even within the fictionalized realm of television dramas. Furthermore, this study contributes by extending the application of Givens's (1978) theory which has previously been widely used to analyze face-to-face interactions in real life to the study of visual media such as drama. This demonstrates that dramatic works can serve as an effective medium for observing various forms of social behavior. In other words, drama can serve as an observational space that helps researchers understand how interpersonal relationships and interactions are depicted through nonverbal cues. The findings of this study can also serve as a reference and foundation for future research in the fields of cross-cultural communication and media analysis, particularly in understanding how nonverbal communication behaviors are used to express romance and build emotional intimacy across various cultural contexts and narratives.

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