

Beyond the Archipelago: The Spread of Filipino Musical Sentimentality to Other Asian Music and Media Cultures

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The transnational circulation of Original Pilipino Music (OPM) has expanded significantly over the past two decades. However, scholars have paid limited attention to how *kilig*, a culturally specific Filipino affect associated with romantic excitement, extended its audience outside the Philippines. This paper argues that *kilig* functions as a form of musical sentimentality that enables the transnational dissemination of OPM through the semiotic alignment of vocal style, visual persona, and lyrical content.

This study uses qualitative methods, which include semi-structured interviews with balladeer Christian Bautista, composer Vehnee Saturno, and Bautista's former talent manager Carlo Orosa, complemented by textual and audiovisual analyses of songs, music videos, lyric visualizers, and archival materials. It traces the evolution of OPM transnationalism from the song-centric exports of Jose Mari Chan and Vehnee Saturno during the 1980s and 1990s to Bautista's regional success in the 2000s that focused on his stardom. This reflected the platform-driven globalization of Filipino contemporary artists such as SB19, BINI, and Maki.

This demonstrates that Bautista's sustained popularity in Indonesia resulted not only from his musical repertoire but also from the alignment of multinational record labels, talent management, visual branding, localized repertoire, and vocal performability. Songs such as *Sa'yo Lamang* and *Bersamamu* further illustrate a shift from one-way cultural exportation toward reciprocal cultural exchange. The study shows that *kilig* has evolved into a shared affective language circulating across Asian music industries, demonstrating how affect, media institutions, and performer branding collectively facilitate the transnational mobility of Filipino popular music in the digital era.

Introduction

In this age of digital media, the transnationalism of Original Pilipino Music, or OPM, has increased over the past twenty years. This is evidenced by the appearances of P-Pop groups SB19 and BINI at Lollapalooza and Coachella music festivals, respectively (Roxas, 2026). At the same time, singer-songwriter Maki had been scheduled to do a series of concerts in Singapore and Indonesia in June 2026 (GMA Integrated News, 2026). All these events signify how Filipino pop has reached more international audiences through social media platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok. However, few have examined how *kilig*-driven affect shapes transnational reception in other Asian contexts.

The transnationalism of OPM includes songs with varied themes, including *kilig*. Idiomatically expressed as feeling the “butterflies in the stomach,” it is a culturally specific affect in the Philippines characterized by embodied excitement from watching a romantic comedy movie or

seeing an attractive person. *Kilig* was the recurring affect in the songs exported to foreign Asian countries, particularly Hong Kong and Indonesia. While the melodies of songwriter Vehnee Saturno's songs were exported to Hong Kong with Cantonese texts, balladeers Jose Mari Chan and Christian Bautista became known in Indonesia through their hit songs.

In terms of the media aspect, it was Bautista who reached the level of stardom that today's Filipino musical groups and solo acts experience. The success of his transnational branding is shaped by an amalgamation of his past and present management teams (Carlo Orosa's STAGES and later, NYMA, which he co-owns with wife Kat Bautista), exposure in Filipino and Indonesian legacy media, affiliation with multinational record labels, and a persona aligned with East Asian visual norms. Moreover, he exemplifies how *kilig*, through vocal performability, enables the appeal of the OPM genre outside of the Philippines. This paper argues that *kilig* functions as an affective form of musical sentimentality, enabling the transnational dissemination of OPM through semiotic alignment in media, or the coherence of these elements: vocal style, visual persona, and textual content.

From Kundiman to Kilig-Ligaw: Genre and Affect

While most Filipino ballads commonly express romantic melodrama, *kilig-ligaw* songs are ballads that express positive affirmations towards women, with the intent of proposing to spend a lifetime with the woman he desires. At present, *kilig-ligaw* performances rendered by Bautista and later on, Maki, have three main features: a sensitive and intimate singing style, singing directly to a female audience, and texts focusing on adoring women. While these elements are associated with the *harana* or a serenade, it was rooted in the *kundiman* performance practices. Christi-Anne Castro (2011; pp. 30-34, pp. 167-192) explained that *kundiman* performances during the Spanish colonial period were initially feudal, as men who intended to court the woman they desired had to endure challenging situations, such as conquering bad weather and walking through towns apart. While the singing style has long been rooted in the Spanish colonial practices, the textual content at the time was more characterized by these challenges encountered in the past. This also included not only the early *kundiman* musician Francisco Santiago's works but also revolutionary anthems.¹ Moreover, today's *kilig-ligaw* performance practice that bridges the text focusing on woman worship and the Hispanic *kundiman* singing style set into the conventions of popular music, particularly those by American boy bands like NSYNC and Taiwanese groups like the F4.

Music as an Affective Experience

To concretize the importance of affect in the audience's listening and viewing experiences, this will be integrated with Desai-Stephens and Reissnour's (2020) approach to musical feelings and affective politics. They defined musical affect as an auditory experience that enables audiences to be moved by the music they hear, particularly songs (Desai-Stephen & Reissnour, 2020; pp. 99-111). With this experience, audiences experience intense emotions, such as feeling overjoyed and *kilig*. Moreover, Bautista's performances enable the audiences to experience musical affect through the following: his performative *kilig-ligaw* singing style dealing with intimacy and textual content focusing on woman adulation, thus eventually establishing a parasocial relationship with his audiences, not only in onsite performances like mall shows and concerts, but also those

¹ Francisco Santiago's compositions heavily focus on love as a melodramatic concept through songs like "Pakiusap" (Please). But then, Bonifacio Abdon's "Kundiman" speaks more about one's love for the Philippines, which was likened to a deity or *diwata*.

who watch him on television, particularly in musical variety shows like *ASAP* and later, *All-Out Sundays*.

These performances are considered presentational events. As defined by Turino (2008; pp. 61-65), presentational events, such as mall shows, concerts, and live performances in musical variety shows, bring people together intimately through interactive engagement with these performances. Apart from onsite performances, fans interact with each other virtually through events like streaming parties using the Stationhead app and TikTok livestreams. People watch these performances to see the artists they have heard on the radio and in recordings, seeking connections with fellow listeners who were also moved by their music. At the same time, audiences desire to connect directly with the artists, whether the fans see their authentic selves or only their constructed public personas. Furthermore, this also explains how Bautista and his management team gained more advantage in making his singing career transnational. Although Chan's "Beautiful Girl" became a hit song in Indonesia, Bautista managed to sustain his transnational career as a celebrity singer through successive live shows and television appearances. At the same time, he also benefited from attracting audiences through his charisma, which deals with his physical appearance and non-verbal gestures, such as showing V signs, winking, blowing kisses, and accepting self-portrait photographs or "selfies" with audiences during his performances, thus increasing his audience impact both in the Philippines and Indonesia.

As the audiences watch these musical performances, they eventually identify themselves with the singing stars. As explained by Stephen Loy, et. al. (2018; p. 7)², this is a significant aspect in the process of star consumption and reception. Apart from the live musical performances, the process of star consumption and reception also includes music videos, which are visual narratives of the songs. Thus, the song's meaning melds with the individual's identification with the star's public persona, which strengthens the parasocial connection between the star and the audience. Furthermore, Bautista's audiences establish a parasocial relationship with him as they watch his music videos, reflecting his branding as a balladeer singing mostly *kilig* love songs. This is manifested in the aural and visual aspects of his music videos.

Methodology

In analyzing the media aspects of how Bautista has achieved transnational status as a celebrity singer, this study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 and 2024. An interview with Bautista was conducted via Viber in 2023, while a follow-up interview with his former manager, Carlo Orosa of STAGES Talents, was conducted via Zoom in 2024 to examine further the administrative, managerial, and multimedia dimensions of his career as a transnational star in both the Philippines and Indonesia. These interviews serve as primary historical data, providing insight into the institutional and media mechanisms that facilitated Bautista's transnational circulation. They also contextualize the present career trajectories of acts such as SB19, BINI, and Maki as succeeding generations of transnational Filipino popular musical performers.

To expound further on the historical aspect of the way Filipino pop songs are disseminated into languages other than English and Tagalog, an interview with prolific composer Vehnee Saturno was also conducted via Zoom in 2024. His songs, "Sana Kahit Minsan" (Hopefully, For Once), originally recorded by Filipino balladeer Ariel Rivera, and "Till My Heartaches End," originally recorded by soul singer Ella May Saison, were exported to Hong Kong with Cantonese texts. These cases illustrate the initial manifestations of OPM transnationalism, thus demonstrating how Filipino melodies are disseminated across linguistic and national boundaries. This was long before

² Loy, et. al., 2018. 7.

Bautista and Bunga Citra Lestari recorded a Bahasa version of Chan’s “Please Be Careful With My Heart,” as well as SB19’s Bahasa version of their song “MAPA” (*“MAPA” is a portmanteau of “Mama” and “Papa”*).

1980s and 1990s: Song-centric OPM Transnationalism

During the 1980s and 1990s, the transnationalism of Filipino singers and musical groups was not yet a common practice. In 1989, Jose Mari Chan released his album, “Constant Change,” under Universal Records. It included his hit song, “Beautiful Girl,” which talks about seeing an attractive lady from a distance yet never getting a chance to meet her (Abunda, 2003). It was released in the Philippines with an accompanying music video, which had scenes where he serenaded the most popular actresses at the time, such as Sharon Cuneta, Vilma Santos, and Cherie Gil, among others.³ The last frame in the music video included a photograph of him and his wife, Mary Ann Ansaldo. Due to the song’s success in the Philippines, *Eat Bulaga*, a daily noontime variety show in the Philippines, held a beauty pageant called “Beautiful Girl” in 1990, where Chan’s “Beautiful Girl” became the segment’s theme song.⁴ It became a radio hit, not only in the Philippines but also in Indonesia (Orosa, 2024; interview). This is due to the song’s affective aspect of *kilig*, focusing on men adoring women.

However, visual commodification was the least of Chan’s priorities in his career as a singer-songwriter. He is a businessman by profession, particularly the Chief Executive Officer and president of Binalbagan-Isabela Sugar Company based in Negros Occidental (Aguila, 2023). As the album’s cover design was only a photograph of an open window overlooking the garden, the Indonesian audiences were not aware of Chan’s physical appearance. According to Orosa, the record executives in Indonesia were surprised to see Chan wearing a business suit, which was a mismatch between his visual persona and the textual content of his song, like “Beautiful Girl” that focused on woman adulation. Furthermore, Chan’s transnationalism was limited to his song’s success, also due to the radio-centric dissemination of his song, given the semiotic gap between the song (Beautiful Girl) and the songwriter-artist (Chan).

During the 1990s, the export of OPM remained limited to song dissemination. This was manifested in the export of songwriter Vehnee Saturno’s melodies to Hong Kong, through BMG, a multinational recording company. “Sana Kahit Minsan” (Hopefully For Once), his song recorded by Filipino balladeer Ariel Rivera in 1991, was under the license of BMG Records Pilipinas. The song’s text focuses on the man’s persuasion to gain the woman’s attention and eventually fall in love with her.⁵

ORIGINAL TEXT	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Sana kahit minsan ay mapansin ako.	Hopefully, I get noticed, for once.
Malaman mong ika’y mahal at yan ay totoo.	To let you know that I love you and that’s true.
Huwag mong iisiping nagbibiro ako.	Don’t think that I’m joking around.
Tunay ang pag-ibig na alay sa’yo.	The love I offer you is true.

Table 1. Original text of Saturno’s “Sana Kahit Minsan,” with English translation made by the author.

3 Music video of Chan’s “Beautiful Girl” (1989), posted by Universal Records’s YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTP1KtTbMSU>
4 “Beautiful Girl” pageant in *Eat Bulaga*, as shared by former contestant Jenn Umali: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckwc_yAk_qo
5 Text extracted from the lyric video of Rivera’s “Sana Kahit Minsan:” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuM-sjf9FUEk&list=RDDuMsjf9FUEk&start_radio=1

“Hindi ako aware that the song was given to an artist sa BMG Hong Kong” (I was not aware that the song was given to an artist signed under BMG Hong Kong), Saturno explained. Moreover, during one of his visits to Hong Kong, Saturno heard a Cantonese version of *“Sana Kahit Minsan,”* released as *“Zǒng yǒu yītiān děngdào nǐ”* (I Will Wait For You One Day), which was recorded by Hong Kong balladeer Jacky Cheung in 1993. Cheung was one of the most sought-after balladeers at the time, according to Saturno.

As Cantonese listeners were familiar with the melody of *“Sana Kahit Minsan,”* it enabled Cheung to sell 500,000 copies of his album, which included his Cantonese version of *“Sana Kahit Minsan”* (Saturno, 2024; interview). Although Saturno’s melodies managed to reach the Hong Kong market, it was another case of a song-centric transnationalism of OPM. While Chan managed to gain a brief success in Indonesia, it was not the case for Rivera, as only Saturno’s melody was exported to Hong Kong. Nevertheless, Chan’s *“Beautiful Girl”* and the Cantonese translation of Saturno’s *“Sana Kahit Minsan”* share the same affective text focusing on seeking the woman’s attention and gaining her love. These cases demonstrate song-centric transnationalism, where the circulation of OPM across national contexts relied primarily on melody and lyrical affect, rather than on the mobility or visibility of the performing artist. This is in contrast with the later developments during the 2000s, when transnational success increasingly depended on the circulation of the star persona, as seen in Bautista’s career.

The Semiotic Alignment of the Songs and the Star

While the dissemination of OPM was song-centric during the 1980s and 1990s, the 2000s saw a major shift to star visibility. This was seen in the singing career of Christian Bautista, a Filipino balladeer who became popular in the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as in other Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore (Versoza, 2007).⁶ Known as the *“Asia’s Romantic Balladeer,”* Bautista first emerged in the Philippine entertainment industry when he joined *“Star In A Million,”* a televised singing competition on ABS-CBN, where he finished fourth place to Erik Santos (Dizon, 2023). He became popular in 2004 when his first single, *“The Way You Look at Me,”* which was part of his self-titled album, became a major hit in the Philippines. This was the time when Bautista was signed as one of the recording artists of Warner Music Philippines,⁷ another multinational record label similar to BMG. Some of the other songs included in his self-titled album were his version of *“Hands To Heaven,”*⁸ *“Colour Everywhere,”* and three songs in the Tagalog language, including *“Kailan Pa Ma’y Ikaw”* (You Forevermore).

Written by Keith Follesé and Andrew Fromm, *“The Way You Look at Me”* talks about the non-verbal aspect of how a person falls in love: through a long gaze.⁹

*‘Cause there’s something in the way you look at me.
It’s as if my heart knows you’re the missing piece.
You make me believe that there’s nothing in this world I can’t be.
I’ll never know what you see, but there’s something in the way you look at me.*

“What’s so special about ‘The Way You Look at Me’ was that may culture pala sa Indonesia na ganoon: falling in love with another person by merely looking another person’s eyes” (What’s so special about *‘The Way You Look at Me’* was that there was an existing culture in Indonesia that

⁶ Versoza, “Christian Joseph Bautista,” 184-189.

⁷ (n.a.), “Warner signs up talent search finalist,” C4.

⁸ Originally recorded by the 1980s band Breathe in 1987.

⁹ Text extracted from Bautista’s performance of *“The Way You Look at Me”* in MYX: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgQasGXk2c4&list=RDLgQasGXk2c4&start_radio=1

deals with falling in love with another person by simply looking at him/her), Orosa explained. This was also shown in Bautista's music video of "The Way You Look at Me," thus amplifying the song's storyline and the audience's parasocial relationship with him.¹⁰



Figure 1. An excerpt from Christian Bautista's music video of his hit single, "The Way You Look at Me," where he gazed at the female lead actress while singing the song. (Screenshot taken from the YouTube video posted by Warner Music Philippines).

In connection with Orosa's explanation, looking at a person's eye is one of the most important non-verbal gestures in Indonesian culture. As explained by Gunawan (2001, p.3), making eye contact with another person involves intimacy. Moreover, the song's universal *kilig* theme contributes to its transnational success, as emphasized in the music video.

Given the song's success in the Indonesian radio charts and the huge sales of Bautista's self-titled album, it led to Bautista's first performance in Indonesia, which was held in an all-girls school event. "*Ang magandang nangyari, nung na-connect ng mga girls yung mukha ni Christian [Bautista] tsaka yung hit song, siyempre nagwala yung mga girls*" (The best thing that happened was when the ladies were able to correlate Christian [Bautista]'s face with his hit song, it made the girls scream), Orosa explained. While Chan's visual branding as a businessman did not match the textual content of "Beautiful Girl," Bautista's visual attributes complemented the *kilig-driven* nature of the songs he recorded. As explained by cultural scholar Rolando Tolentino (2013), Bautista shares the same physical attributes as Taiwanese and Korean lead actors, such as being tall.¹¹ Thus, the audience was able to align his looks with the song's *kilig* textual content that deals with falling in love without saying anything. Moreover, such event managed to connect the audiences' perception towards the song, as well as the individual artist, in connection with Bennett, Loy, and Rickwood's (2018; pp. 1-20)¹² discussion on the process of star reception and consumption, due to Bautista's visual branding that is the epitome of the quintessential leading man, as well as his musical branding focusing on romance-heavy textual content and soft singing style.

¹⁰ Screenshot on this page captured at timestamp 1:18.

¹¹ Tolentino, "Niche Globality: Philippine Media Texts to the World," 164-165.

¹² Bennett, Loy, & Rickwood, "Popular Music, Stars, and Stardom: Definitions, Discourses, Interpretations," 1-20.

While Bautista's first album resonated more with the Filipino audiences, it was a different case for his second album, "Completely," which was released in 2005. "The 'Completely' album had songs written and arranged by Indonesian producers/songwriters, so that it will connect more to the Indonesian audience," he explained. Furthermore, two of the songs from the album were composed by Magenta Orchestra conductor Andi Rianto, particularly "Since I Found You" and "For Everything I Am."

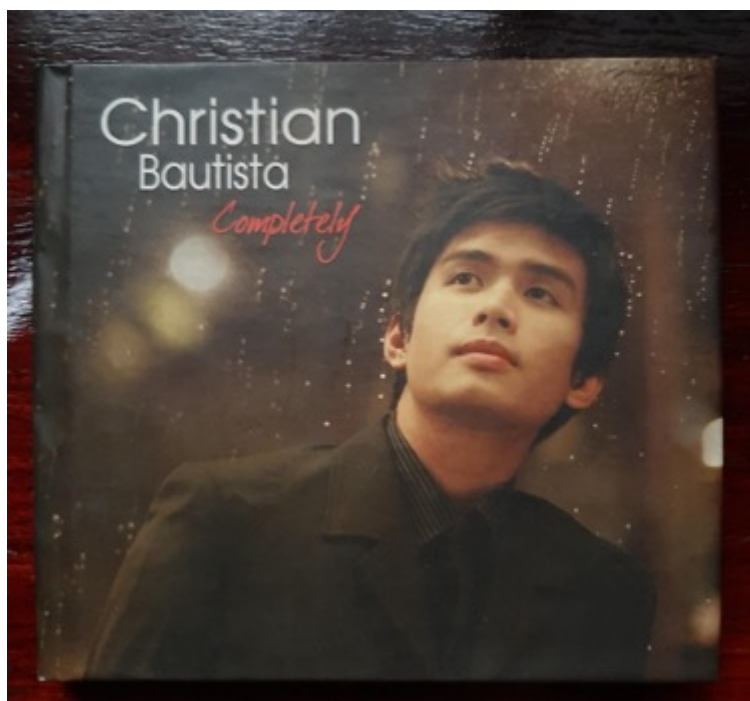


Figure 2. "Completely" album cover, scanned from personal copy. Christian Bautista (Warner Music Philippines, 2005).

While Follesé and Fromm's "The Way You Look at Me" approached love in a non-verbal communicative manner, Rianto's "Since I Found You" was rather declarative.¹³

*Since I found you, my world seems so brand new.
You've shown me the love I never knew.
Your presence has sparked my whole life through.
Since I found you, my life begins anew.
Now who needs a dream when there is you, for all of my dreams came true.
Since I found you.*

Compared to "The Way You Look at Me," the music video of "Since I Found You," directed by Agung Sentausa, had more intimate scenes between Bautista and another lead actress, thus amplifying his branding as a *kilig-ligaw* balladeer.¹⁴

¹³ Text extracted from the album inlay of the author's copy of Bautista's "Completely."

¹⁴ Screenshot on the next page captured at timestamp 0:51.



Figure 3. An excerpt from Bautista's music video of "Since I Found You". (Screenshot taken from the YouTube video posted by Sentausa in his YouTube Channel).

While "The Way You Look at Me" was a hit song in both the Philippines and Indonesia, this was not the case for "Since I Found You," which was only popular in Indonesia. Apart from the song lineup, the Indonesian producers also had greater control over his second album, particularly in terms of the visual aspect, focusing on exquisiteness (Orosa, 2024; interview). This was also reflected in Rianto's orchestra-heavy arrangement of "Since I Found You." In comparison with Marquez's original arrangement of "The Way You Look at Me," which featured piano and string synthesizers as the main instruments, "Since I Found You" focuses on the grander musical arrangement style, which is a common practice among composers and arrangers for orchestras like Rianto's style. The arrangement style of Rianto's "Since I Found You" is due to the popularity of orchestrated ballads played in Indonesian radio stations at the time (Bautista, 2023; interview). Moreover, despite the similarities in Filipino and Indonesian *kilig* affects in terms of textual content, Filipinos and Indonesians differ in terms of musical production style. While Filipinos are more melody-driven, Indonesians also include grandiose elements in the songs being released, including pop songs.

The Transition from One-way Exports to Cultural Exchanges

Bautista's stardom in both the Philippines and Indonesia was not limited to his media exposures and song exports. Rather, it also involved the circulation and reinterpretation of existing repertoire across transnational contexts. While Chan and Regine Velasquez-Alcasid recorded "Please Be Careful With My Heart" as part of the "Constant Change" album in 1989, the song's popularity in Indonesia amplified in 2009 when Bautista and Indonesian singer Bunga Citra Lestari recorded "Tetaplah Di Hatiku" (Stay In My Heart), a Bahasa Indonesian translation of Chan's "Please Be Careful With My Heart."¹⁵ Apart from his pan-Asian looks and soft singing style, Bautista's duet with Lestari helped strengthen his superstar status in Indonesia, both due to Chan's popularity and the song's localisation.

¹⁵ Released by Aquarius Musikindo, under license of Universal Records Philippines. Bautista was under Universal Records Philippines at the time of the song's release.

NYMA, a talent management company co-owned by Bautista with his wife, Kat Ramnani, leveraged this exchange further, together with Sony Music, another multinational record label where he has been part of since 2025. In February 2026, he recorded “Sa’yo Lamang” (Only For You), a Tagalog version of “Bersamamu” (With You), composed by Abraham Edo, Belanegara Abe, and Kaleb J.¹⁶ Originally sung by Bruneian singer Jaz, Bautista recorded his version of “Bersamamu” a month after.

ORIGINAL TEXT	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Sa’yo lamang ako nakaramdam nang ganito.	Only with you I have felt this way.
Kung kailangan, ibibigay lahat-lahat sa’yo.	If needed, I’ll give everything to you.
Sa ‘king piling, ‘di ka na mag-iisa.	With me, you’ll never be alone.
Huwag nang matakot, oh, ako ay para lang sa’yo.	Don’t be afraid, oh, I am only yours.

Table 2. Chorus section of Bautista’s “Sa’yo Lamang,” with translations made by the author.

Both “Sa’yo Lamang” and “Bersamamu” talk about eternal love. However, when translated into English, “Bersamamu” has a more receptive meaning from the persona’s perspective.

ORIGINAL TEXT	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Bersamamu ku akan dicintai dengan tulus.	With you, I will be loved sincerely.
Tanpa ragu ku akan memberikan cintaku.	I will give my love without hesitation.
Bersamaku kamu tak akan sendu.	With me, you will never be sad.
Yakinkan kamu aku yang terbaik untukmu.	I assure you that I am the best for you.

Table 3. Chorus section of Jaz’s “Bersamamu” with translations made via Google Translate.

As both “Sa’yo Lamang” and “Bersamamu” were released at the time when Bautista was married to Ramnani, the music videos and the lyric videos did not have female lead actresses. Instead, “Bersamamu” included video footage of him singing the song solo while looking directly at the camera or sideways, thus simulating a live performance.¹⁷

On the other hand, the lyric video of “Sa’yo Lamang” simulated karaoke culture in the Philippines, as it had texts changing colors from white to blue as the song progressed.¹⁸ While the music video of “Sa’yo Lamang” included scenes of Bautista grooving to the song as he performed it on the karaoke, the lyric video included scenes of him doing non-verbal gestures, such as flying kisses and finger hearts that defined his branding as a balladeer singing *kilig-ligaw* songs. As I have observed during Bautista’s live performance during the Asian TV Awards at the Aliw Theater in 2022, he showed a finger heart while singing “The Way You Look at Me,” which made the female audience scream.

“I definitely had to unlearn some things and learn a lot of things – to learn how to open up, how to connect properly to people, to an audience,” he said.¹⁹ Despite being a self-confessed introvert, Bautista eventually managed to connect with his audiences, thus producing the *kilig* affect, both through his singing style and non-verbal gestures shown in the lyric video of “Sa’yo Lamang.” Moreover, the non-verbal gestures that he regularly used in his live performances and in these lyric videos were part of his learning process in his two-decade singing career.²⁰

16 As listed in the song’s Spotify metadata.

17 Bautista (2026), timestamp 3:11.

18 Bautista (2026), timestamp 1:51.

19 (Bautista,2023; interview.)

20 Bautista (2026), timestamp 3:18.

While “Tetaplah Di Hatiku” amplified the version of Chan’s “Please Be Careful With My Heart” through localisation, “Bersamamu” and “Sa’yo Lamang” were a case of cultural exchange. Bautista’s recording of “Sa’yo Lamang” was launched a month before the release of his cover of Jaz’s “Bersamamu.” In contrast with “Tetaplah Di Hatiku,” “Sa’yo Lamang” was a case of bidirectional adaptation, as he released both the Tagalog translation and a cover of the original. With this, *kilig* is not just exported. It is a shared affective language across national industries.

In terms of the media aspect, the lyric video of “Sa’yo Lamang” was also an export, in terms of the cultural aspect. Apart from Bautista’s transnational status, the lyric video also exported Filipino karaoke culture as an interactive activity, which produces participatory affect. This is in contrast to the music videos that are more considered as presentational events defined by Turino (2008; pp. 61-65).

Conclusion

The transnationalism of Original Pilipino Music (OPM) over the past four decades illustrates a fundamental transformation in how musical affect is packaged, circulated, and consumed across Asian borders. As this paper has argued, *kilig* functions as an affective form of musical sentimentality, enabling the transnational dissemination of OPM through semiotic alignment in media. While Jose Mari Chan’s “Beautiful Girl” provided early evidence that Filipino melodic sentimentality possessed regional appeal, the mismatch between his romance-oriented lyrics and his public identity as a corporate executive created a semiotic misalignment. This gap hindered the formation of a cohesive star-brand, confining the transnational reach of his music to the radio airwaves rather than the popular imagination. Saturno’s case was also a case of song-centricism, although the dissemination was more melody-centric, focusing on text localisation.

The transition to Bautista’s era, and subsequently the 2026 P-Pop wave, signifies a profound modernization of the *harana* tradition. Affirming Castro’s (2011) framework, it was shown that modern *kilig-ligaw* performances do not abandon their Hispanic-influenced *kundiman* roots; rather, they adapt the “feudal” endurance of the suitor into a contemporary, media-congruent format. The physical challenges of the colonial suitor are replaced by the digital labor of maintaining Turino’s (2008) “presentational events” primarily through music videos. Bautista facilitates an intimate, interactive engagement that transcends the screen, thus producing affect that helps his audiences establish a parasocial relationship with him. This was shown by the close-up shots of Bautista and the lead actresses in his music videos and non-verbal gestures, such as winks and “finger hearts” in his 2026 lyric visualizer videos.

As defined by Desai-Stephens and Reisnour (2020), these performances function as “affective politics,” where the auditory experience of a ballad is transformed into an intense, embodied emotion—*kilig*—that establishes a lasting parasocial relationship between the star and the foreign fan. This semiotic alignment—the perfect calibration of the artist’s visual persona, vocal style, and lyrical content—ensures that the “gap” identified in Chan’s era is permanently bridged.

Looking at the current landscape of the Philippine pop scene in 2026, the global ascendancy of acts like SB19 and BINI, alongside the regional success of Maki, suggests that this template has been successfully scaled for the digital age. These artists no longer rely solely on legacy media. Instead, they harness the decentralized power of platforms like TikTok and YouTube to maintain a constant presence. The movement toward artist-led management under NYMA and bidirectional cultural exchanges, such as Bautista’s Tagalog adaptation of Jaz’s “Bersamamu,” signals a future where Filipino performers can establish their own transnational affective capital. At the same time, the dissemination of Original Pilipino Music at present is no longer limited to ballads.

Ultimately, the spread of Filipino musical sentimentality across Asia is a testament to the power of semiotic alignment. When the song, the star, and the visual affect align, OPM transcends its origin within the archipelago, evolving into a shared cultural currency. By cultivating an intimacy that feels personal yet reaches millions, *kilig* remains a potent force in the shifting terrain of Southeast Asian media.

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