

Research on the Media Image of Overseas Chinese in Latin American Countries based on the TV Series 'Surinam'

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ABSTRACT

As a multicultural Latin American country, Surinam holds an important position in commercial activities among overseas Chinese, but it is often marginalized in the media. The Korean drama "Surinam" showcases the multiculturalism of Surinam's overseas Chinese, but stereotypes still exist in media presentations. This study focuses on the media image of overseas Chinese and analyzes their image construction and dissemination in different cultural backgrounds. To enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, film and television works in the international communication context should face stereotypes in cross-cultural narratives and present the living conditions of different ethnic groups more realistically and comprehensively.

KEYWORDS

Latin America; Overseas Chinese; Media Image; Surinam.

1. INTRODUCTION

2024 marks the 5th anniversary of China's strategic partnership with Surinam, a Latin American country. In April, President Surinam visited China for a state visit. Overseas Chinese hold a significant position in Surinam's diverse ethnic group, with Chen Yaxian, a former Surinam president and prime minister with ancestral roots in Huiyang, Guangdong. The history of Chinese immigration to Surinam can be traced back to the mid-19th century. According to Dutch archives, contract Chinese workers in the late Qing Dynasty were recruited by the Dutch colonial government to Surinam's plantations. From 1853 to 1874, more than 3200 contract Chinese workers were recruited to Surinam (Xu Xiaodong, 2020; Li Chunhui, 1993: 638).

As a country with a unique geographical location in Latin America, Surinam is popular in Spanish and Dutch and is located at the throat of communication between North and South America. Due to its geographical location, Surinam's media presentation through newspapers, television, and movies is also very rich. From the perspective of humanistic geography, a typical "sense of place" has influenced the image construction of Surinam and other Latin American countries by the mass media (Ye Chao, Wu Peijin, 2023). For example, the South Korean TV drama "Surinam" aired in 2022 focuses on the Korean and Chinese communities living in Surinam, reflecting the complex survival situation of the Surinam Asian community by depicting multiple clashes between local Chinese and Korean communities in the process of competing for living space.

This study found that the media image of Surinam overseas Chinese under the lens is blurry and unclear, and the marginalized image of local overseas Chinese urgently needed to be changed. This phenomenon may be a common problem faced by the Latin American overseas Chinese community, including the Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking regions. For example, studies have analyzed

the situation in Argentina, Mexico, Cuba, and other Spanish-speaking countries in the Caribbean, and it is believed that the mass dissemination of Chinese TV dramas, movies, and other media works in Latin American countries is currently in its infancy, with many regions just achieving "zero breakthroughs" (Yang Bin, 2023; Liu Jie, 2021). Based on this, this study believes that analyzing the media image of overseas Chinese in Latin American countries is of great importance and urgency. Surinam, as a typical and special case, starting from it can help understand the actual situation of Chinese cultural dissemination and the image of Chinese ethnic groups in Latin American countries where Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch are mixed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Former research on overseas Chinese in Latin American countries such as Surinam has mostly focused on the fields of political science and diplomacy, such as Yang Fajin's "Preliminary Exploration of the Historical Changes and Current Situation of Overseas Chinese in Latin America" published by the Latin America Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Research on Overseas Chinese History, Issue 4, 2015). After the trend of country-specific research, there has been a gradual increase in papers and works on different Latin American countries and regions. Relevant studies have analyzed Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America such as Cuba, Mexico, and Brazil one by one (Xu Zhongbo and Wang Yuan, 2018; Shu Changsheng, 2018; Zhang Yuchen, 2023). However, Surinam, as a country with frequent contact with China in recent years, is rarely studied in the field. There are only a few articles in the CSSCI database of CNKI that focus on Surinam's democratization process, religious beliefs, multiculturalism, and Chinese immigrant issues (Xu Xiaodong, 2020; Xia Dangying and Sun Yusheng, 2018; Lloyd, 2007; Wu Deming, 1995). This study is not only a response to the research on overseas Chinese in Latin America such as Surinam, but also a further enrichment of the research on China's image and media image. Therefore, the literature review of this study mainly includes the following two aspects:

2.1. Surinam and Other Latin American Overseas Chinese Research

The Surinam Republic was the only former Dutch colonial country among post-war independent Latin American countries. It is located northeast of South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the north and French Guiana, Brazil, and Guyana (Li Chunhui, 1993: 636). As a minority Dutch-speaking country in Latin America, Surinam is also popular in Chinese, Spanish, and Portuguese due to its rich ethnic background. According to Lloyd, who has lived in China for many years and was the first embassy official in Surinam's history to study in China and work at Surinam's embassy in China, Surinam's multilingual popularity has its historical roots: in 1600, Surinam's government agencies mainly used Portuguese and Spanish; In 1650 and 1667, Surinam adopted English and Dutch as official languages respectively. However, the language barrier between the official and folk languages caused inconvenience for Surinam people. Therefore, around 1700, the Surinam language was born by grafting multiple languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch. In addition, Cantonese, Urdu, and Eastern Javanese, which originated from Asia in 1853, 1873, and 1890, were widely used by Surinam people with the arrival of Asian laborers.

As the foundation of Surinam's multilingual culture, the local population composition is also very complex. According to incomplete statistics, the total population of Surinam is about 540000, with Indian, Maronite, Creole, and Javanese (Indonesian) as the main ethnic groups. In addition, ethnic groups such as Chinese, Dutch, and Jewish are also distributed in Surinam. In ethnological research on Surinam, the overseas Chinese community is considered an "intermediary minority", used to describe the main way of livelihood for Surinam's overseas Chinese as engaging in commercial activities (Leono Bulum, Deng Li, Wu Deming, 1981; Xia Dangying, Sun Yusheng, 2018). In 1853, the first batch of contracted Chinese workers, about 18 people, were recruited by Dutch colonizers to Surinam. After the reform and opening up, the pace of overseas Chinese immigration to Surinam did

not stop. According to incomplete statistics, in 2007, Chinese people accounted for 3% of Suriname's total population, and by 2013, overseas Chinese had already accounted for one-tenth of Suriname's total population. Currently, Suriname has the largest number of overseas Chinese in the Caribbean region of Latin America (Xia Dangying and Sun Yusheng, 2018).

The history of overseas Chinese migrating to Surinam can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty: at that time, the Qing government signed the "Beijing Treaty (Continuation of the Treaty)" (1860) and the "Renewal of the Recruitment Regulations Treaty" (1866) with Britain and France, allowing Chinese workers to go abroad on a large scale. Western countries, including the Netherlands, could recruit workers in China directly or through commission, and a large number of Chinese workers came to Surinam to settle down and take root, becoming the ancestors of some Surinam overseas Chinese (Xu Xiaodong, 2020). According to a study on immigration history, laborers from countries and regions such as China, India, and Java (Indonesia) entered Surinam in batches from 1853 to the 1930s. The main purpose of recruiting these laborers was to replace slaves who had entered South American plantations before the 1850s (van Galen&Hassankhan, 2018); van Stipriaan, 1997). Around 1974, contract immigration was banned by the Qing government of China, leading to the cessation of large-scale Chinese labor immigration.

In addition, the connection and interaction with other ethnic groups in Latin American countries are also one of the main social activities of overseas Chinese communities in Surinam and other Latin American countries. In recent years, several Latin American countries have become major centers for international illegal immigration and human trafficking, and the accompanying immigration issues have also troubled many Asian countries, including China. The Korean drama "Surinam" was filmed in this historical and social context. Unlike the government-guided Japanese immigration to Brazil and the return of Latin American Japanese to Japan, since the end of the 20th century, the immigration activities of overseas Chinese and Korean ethnic groups in Latin America have mostly appeared in the form of free migration. The South Korean TV drama "Surinam" focuses on the living conditions of Asians in Surinam, and completes the narrative through clever construction of dramatic conflicts. These works indirectly reflect the dissemination strategy of platform cosmopolitanism adopted by South Korean dramas in recent years, and some of their content also reflects the social problems left by Surinam during the colonial period (Zhu Zhaoyi, 2023; Davis, 2011).

2.2. Chinese Image & Media Image

In the research on mass media such as newspapers, radio and television, and online media, media image research has always been one of the key contents. As a part of the broad image of China, the overseas Chinese community is closely related to the Chinese bloodline, and their image construction not only affects the development of their group but also influences the construction of China's image on a global scale. Previous studies on the Spanish-speaking world have shown that an important issue that needs to be addressed in the dissemination of China's image in Latin America is the lack of local people's understanding of China's "daily" and "real-time" aspects (Wang Longxing, 2024). Therefore, it can be inferred that the image construction of the overseas Chinese community in Latin America will largely be influenced by the attitude and image perception of local civil society towards China. As far as the author's previous research on the Chinese American community is concerned, the overseas Chinese community is closely related to Chinese culture, and the cultural reproduction process of overseas Chinese in the local area (including literary creation, film and television dissemination, etc.) will affect the local perception of China's image (Zhao Qian, 2023).

As a relatively unfamiliar and marginalized continent in China's foreign relations, Latin American countries often exhibit special characteristics on the issue of China and even play a special role in cross-strait relations. Therefore, how to actively influence the attitude of Latin American countries towards China and promote the development of China Latin American relations is an issue of the times before us. Previous studies have found through empirical analysis that Latin American countries

have obvious social commonalities, but their impressions of China are uneven (Hou Huiyan, Li Shoushi, 2015). Mainstream media in Latin America focus on topics such as technology and security, including Chinese enterprises, Internet technology, and mobile communications. The research has analyzed the China-related reports of the mainstream media of Uruguay, the National News, and found that the relevant media reports focused on the topics of "the Belt and Road" and "a community with a shared future for mankind" (Wan Muchun, Ren Yi, 2023).

As an important tool for mass communication, the correct use of film and television works for dissemination has a positive significance in promoting the optimization of China-Latin America relations. Previous studies have thoroughly analyzed the prospects for cooperation between China and Latin American countries in the cultural industry. In 2012, China surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest film market, second only to the United States. China's enormous potential has also attracted the attention of Latin American countries (He Shuangrong, 2015). With the continuous deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, cooperation between China and Latin American countries tends to deepen, and specific strategies are being explored to promote the development of communication networks in Latin America (Ni Jianping, 2010). In the context of the new era, further promoting cultural exchange and mutual learning, China urgently needs to use mass media and film and television works to build a positive image of China in Latin American countries (Huang Leping, Yu Qianying, Gao Mengning, 2023). In the research on Surinam, the construction of the image of Chinese people cannot be separated from the historical and cultural background of Chinese laborers entering South America. A hundred years ago, Chinese laborers entered Surinam in the form of contract labor, and these historical imprints have been amplified in later literary works and film and television dissemination. An existing social history study of Surinam after 1665 has supported this viewpoint (Xu Xiaodong, 2016:158-159; Alison, 2015).

3. THE GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINATION OF THE KOREAN TV DRAMA 'SURINAM'

With the adoption and strategic application of "platform cosmopolitanism" by international streaming companies represented by Netflix, the production, dissemination, and marketing of Korean dramas have also undergone structural changes. Especially with the entry of international streaming companies such as Netflix and Disney+ into the domestic Korean market, Korean drama works completed in cooperation with local production teams in Korea have made new attempts in values, artistic forms, and communication strategies, which largely reflect the recognition of international audiences' interests under the guidance of algorithm distribution and its impact on international platform dissemination. At the cultural policy level, South Korea revised the "Electricity and Communication Industry Implementation Order" (also known as the "Netflix Act") in 2020, and since the government of Yoon Seok Yeol took office in 2022, the development of the streaming industry has been elevated to a national strategy, both of which have adjusted and updated the international dissemination strategy of Korean drama content at the national level.

Faced with numerous changes in the environment and policies, the large-scale and systematic international dissemination activities of Korean dramas have experienced more than 20 years of ups and downs since the new century, and their artistic forms and narrative content have changed. At the same time, with the increasing influence of international streaming companies on the internationalization process of Korean dramas, some TV series focusing on Latin America have been produced and are widely known. This study conducted text analysis on the Korean drama "Surinam". The article believes that the strategic innovation of Korean dramas has eliminated the negative impact of cultural discounts, promoted the resonance and dissemination of localized content and international distribution, and improved the effectiveness of international dissemination of Korean dramas under the new situation. At the same time, the dissemination of Korean drama content to peripheral areas (such as Surinam, etc.) can help them open up new international communication ideas.

3.1. Land Sea Confrontation Theory: Geopolitical Imagination of 'Surinam'

The inherent limitations of modern geopolitics are mainly reflected in the concept of sea-land confrontation. However, with the rapid development of economic globalization, the dichotomy of the sea-land and the regional structure of neighboring countries as enemies in geopolitical theory has gradually lost their explanatory power (Liu Xuelian and Zhang Weiwei, 2011). Under the influence of geopolitical structural patterns, the imagination and construction of "foreign countries" in film and television dramas often fall into a stereotyped "geopolitical imagination", which also has obvious limitations. For example, the construction of the image of Japanese aggressors in "anti-Japanese dramas" even deviates from historical reality and common sense, falling into a position of historical nihilism (Li Yijun and Shi Bogong, 2020).

Traditional geopolitical theory often falls into tragic fatalism due to its emphasis on maritime and land confrontation, power politics, etc., such as the impact of Lee's North Korea's "big business, big neighbor" policy on South Korean US relations (Liu Meiting, 2023). In the Korean drama *Surinam*, the identity of the protagonist is mostly set to Korean or Latin American Asian ethnic groups, and each character competes for power in the geopolitical complex *Surinam* region, which has rich metaphorical effects. In the narrative construction process of film and television works, some political metaphors are hidden in the setting and dialogue of the protagonist's identity due to the desensitization of sensitive issues. For example, the South Korean film *Parasite*, which won the Best Picture Oscar in the United States, uses the wealth gap between the "Park" and "Kim" families to imply the geopolitical issues of the Korean Peninsula.

The explanation of regional and national backgrounds is related to the construction of narrative space in the work, so simulating the symbol stacking of local culture may fall into the trap of stereotypes. This phenomenon is particularly evident in literary works produced in cross-cultural contexts, such as overseas Chinese literature such as *The Joy Luck Club* and *Snow Flower Secret Fan*, which imagine "China". The Vietnamese "returnee" film *The Taste of Green Papaya* depicts the common life in Vietnam in a French studio. These works attempt to reconstruct a localized narrative space but often fall into the dilemma of symbolic standardization. *Surinam*, a Korean TV series, is also popular. In the process of portraying Latin America, *Surinam* also stands in the position of the Korean audience and depicts it as a country based on Korean imagination and cognition.

3.2. Stereotypes: From Surinam to Media Presentation in Latin American Countries

In cross-cultural contexts, stereotypes are social connections between people and their group and culture, and the image of Latin American countries portrayed in the TV drama *Surinam* contains a stereotype based on the "country ethnicity field" (Chen Sitian, 2023). The concept of stereotypes is closely related to culture, and stereotypes in the context of cross-cultural communication can be divided into national stereotypes, ethnic stereotypes, and situational stereotypes. Specifically, national stereotypes focus on blurring the image of the country, especially in communication content centered around the national image, which presents highly simplified and generalized characteristics, providing a practical and feasible path for presenting the national image; Ethnic stereotypes mainly include a holistic study of the stereotype of people in other countries. The researchers confirmed that stereotypes in the cognitive processing level show the receiver's evaluation of the value of the media information obtained, as well as the two-way effect of the evaluation of the authenticity of the information.

At the same time, stereotypes in the field mainly reflect symbolic or material cross-cultural spaces, such as stereotypes about women in virtual spaces, which continue the memory and expectations of female social roles in media works. In the Korean drama *Surinam*, the issue of media image presentation in Latin American countries deserves further attention. The film and television works highlight long-term pathways such as education, newspapers, film and television, social contact, and

social factors of some special events, which are the main factors that contribute to the creation and integration of stereotypes.

The media presentation in Latin America cannot be separated from stereotypes in cross-cultural contexts. This issue often takes the differences in political and ideological levels between two countries (or regions) as an entry point, mainly focusing on the exploration of the elements that generate stereotypes around the concept of "ethnicity". In the construction of stereotypes in Western film and television works, people from the first world have convenient communication, strong expression, and relatively high quality, while people from the third world are at a disadvantage in the distribution of morality, wealth, and health. Audiences need to be vigilant about the construction of such stereotypes, rather than blindly following them.

4. DISCUSSION: INNOVATIVE NARRATIVE METHODS OF IMAGINING OTHERS IN FILM AND TELEVISION LITERATURE WORKS

The immigration activities of overseas Chinese have both historical contingency and social inevitability, which is an indispensable and unavoidable perspective for understanding the construction of China's image in the context of globalization. It is also a tentacle for entering the global arena and exploring international space. This study places the media image of overseas Chinese in the interactive framework of "media society", and further explores the image construction and changes of Surinam under the media narrative framework from the perspective of "otherization". In this process, the image of overseas Chinese presents different aspects under the intervention of structural factors such as politics, economy, and society, which promote each other and jointly participate in the reproduction process of overseas Chinese identity (Chen Junjun, Zhai Mengdi, 2024). This study suggests that the Korean drama "Surinam" has achieved innovative narrative methods for imagining others in at least two aspects: cross-cultural and cross-cultural transformation, and has participated in the reconstruction of the image of overseas Chinese.

4.1. Cross Cultural Narrative: The Result of Artistic Delocalization

As an intermediary, the study of cross-cultural competence provides marketing planners with a new research perspective. Cross-cultural competence mainly includes respecting others, an objective and noncritical attitude, a thirst for knowledge, and cultural empathy. The innovation of the Korean drama "Surinam" in cross-cultural narrative is mainly reflected in the construction of the image of overseas Chinese, wandering in different cultural categories. In Chinese American literature and Latinx literature in the United States, overseas Chinese are often regarded as objects of gaze, suspended in the new world order and transnational labor (Chen Yishui, 2023). The diverse cultural backgrounds of Latin American countries often lead to works that use the local context as a narrative backdrop, resulting in a tendency to balance narrative and aesthetic expression.

As a result of artistic "delocalization", the cross-cultural narrative has freed itself from the constraints of language as a jurisdictional machine. Under the impetus of magical realism, the Korean drama "Surinam" uses long shots and subjective realism to create the image of "Surinam". In this narrative process, overseas Chinese serve as important narrative joints, connecting the focal points of the "minority" narrative in the context of context. From the perspective of communication studies, in the interactive experience mode, the audience transforms from bystanders to a part of the film content, integrating with the original story configuration and shaping the intertextuality of 'Surinam'.

4.2. Cultural Narration: Reasonable Use of Camera Language

Cultural transfer communication is a fundamental concept based on cross-cultural communication. In the filming process of "Surinam", long shots play a basic role in creating subjective realism and completing the authentic recording. The combination of long shots and digital special effects creates

a virtual reality sense of quasi-reality and builds an audience perspective of "immersion". The TV drama "Surinam" has formed a unique aesthetic style with long shots that run through the entire film, accompanied by tight drum beats, shuttling back and forth in a compact and dramatic conflict-filled plot. Chinatown where overseas Chinese reside serves as a narrative device, exuding exotic charm under the projection of long shots.

In the Korean drama "Surinam", the emphasis on psychological reality is reflected in the capture and response of "presence". The film uses digital technology and special photography equipment to bring the free movement and breathing of the camera to the audience, striving to create a strong sense of presence and participation. By further breaking the screen framework, 'Surinam' cleverly promotes the exploration of the boundaries of the TV drama itself, and the narrative content construction involving overseas Chinese effectively complements the relevant discussions, completing a powerful cultural transformation and dissemination.

5. CONCLUSION

Currently, the media image of overseas Chinese in Suriname is influenced by various structural factors such as politics, economy, and society, as well as cultural factors such as media narrative styles. Although overseas Chinese play important roles in local society, their image is often stereotyped and marginalized in the media. In the process of cross-cultural communication, film, and television literary works are important carriers for shaping the image of overseas Chinese. Through cross-cultural narrative and cross-cultural communication strategies, film and television literary works can present the lives of overseas Chinese while promoting communication and understanding between different cultures. This study analyzes the geopolitical imagination in the Korean drama "Surinam" and finds that the media images of overseas Chinese and Surinam's Latin American geopolitical imagination are integrated. The filmmakers use rich camera language to achieve intertextuality inside and outside the story. This article believes that in the future dissemination of the image of overseas Chinese, more attention should be paid to authenticity and objectivity in cross-cultural contexts, to avoid falling into the trap of stereotypes. At the same time, international cooperation should also be strengthened by collaborating with production teams from different countries and regions to jointly create film and television works with universal appeal and influence, promoting the dissemination and development of Korean dramas worldwide. In addition, for the reconstruction of the image of overseas Chinese, more attention should be paid to the complexity of their historical, cultural, and social backgrounds, and their true images and stories should be presented in a more comprehensive and three-dimensional way.

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