

The Development of South Korean Idol Culture and Its Global Influence: Take TVXQ as an example

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Abstract. This paper studies the development process of Korean idol culture taking “Tong Vfang Xien Qi” (TVXQ) as an example, aiming to reveal the reasons for the development of idol culture and its impact on the world economy. The paper further analyzes its successful models for the development of related industries in China. This study establishes the general direction of the research based on the literature of previous studies and collects relevant data to discuss about this relevant topic. It finally draws a conclusion, which includes the following research results. First, the economic value of Korean idol groups is high; Second, the support of the Korean government is strong; and last, the industrial chain of Korean idol culture is complete and radiates the world economy. The conclusion further illustrates the significance of the above conclusions for China. At the same time, the study argues that relying solely on the current situation of China’s idol culture industry is not enough to support further development and further calls to learn from the experiences of South Korea.

Keywords: Idol culture; Korean cultural policy; China; idol economy.

1. Introduction

In today’s 21st century, the rapid development of Korean wave K-pop idol groups, many surrounding areas, endorsements, concerts and so on have become hot topics on the Internet. The Korean idol culture has an important influence on the domestic economic development and the expansion of the world economy. South Korea has become recognized as a major media exporter in the world, and its new culture has penetrated into various fields and regional [1].

This paper adopts the method of literature reading and analysis to investigate and sort out the economic changes brought about by economic activities such as group endorsement to analyze the causes and results. This paper first studies the reasons why idol groups can spread globally quickly and promote economic development. Secondly, this paper analyzes its economic benefits and explores the specific embodiment of the radiation of Korean idol economy to the world economy. This study aims to summarize the successful experience of Korea and provide reference for the dissemination and development of Chinese culture.

2. The Idol Group “Tong Vfang Xien Qi”

On December 26, 2003, The Idol Group “Tong Vfang Xien Qi” (TVXQ) performed “OH, Holy Night” and “HUG” on SBS TV station together with BoA for the first time. On January 14, 2004, the first single “HUG” was released, and its official debut was made on February 6. Their second Korean song “The way U are” was released on June 22, 2004. After its debut, TVXQ held a number of concerts in South Korea, attracting domestic and foreign consumer groups and promoting economic development. In that year, the annual sales of records ranked second in South Korea. At the same time, it began to replace it to stimulate the growth of fans’ consumption and vigorously promote the economic development of South Korea [2].



On August 21, 2010, U-Know Yunho and Shim Changmin took to the stage of SMTOWN Seoul as members of TVXQ. Since 2011, TVXQ has officially launched activities with captains U-Know Yunho and Shim Changmin. On January 5, 2011, TVXQ officially returned to the music industry with its fifth Korean formal album “Keep Your Head Down”. This album won the title on the Korean music sales chart “Gaonchart”. TVXQ received a large number of endorsements during the event. As an early successful idol group, its economic driving effect is particularly obvious.

The endorsement brands often achieve great profits, such as GIA Clothing, Samsung YEEP, FILA, etc., which greatly boost the development of the domestic economy. At the same time, its sales to East Asia, Europe, and the United States were significantly high, which also promoted the world economy to some extent. For example, in 2009, TVXQ ranked third with annual sales of 6.89 billion yen [3].

3. Reasons for the Rapid Spread of South Korean Idol Culture

The rapid spread of South Korean idol culture is a multifaceted phenomenon driven by several key factors. This cultural phenomenon has not only captivated the domestic South Korean audience but has also made significant inroads into international markets, including China. This part will delve into the reasons behind the swift expansion of South Korean idol culture, shedding light on how it has evolved from a local phenomenon to a global sensation.

3.1. Government Policies and Support

One of the pivotal factors contributing to the proliferation of South Korean idol culture is the unwavering support from the South Korean government. The government recognized the cultural industry’s potential early on and implemented policies to promote its growth. A milestone in this endeavor was the enactment of the Cultural Industry Promotion Law in 1999, followed by the Cultural Industry Revitalization Law in 2000. These legislations established a national strategy with culture as the core.

The implementation of the cultural revitalization policy has achieved remarkable results. South Korea has become one of the developed countries with industrial scale, international competitiveness, and substantial cultural soft power. The policy’s effectiveness was apparent in the widespread influence of South Korean pop culture, including idol groups, which became cultural ambassadors representing the nation globally. These policies comprehensively upgraded to support the innovation and export of the cultural industry.

Moreover, the government has provided financial support to nurture and bolster the development of idol groups. The government strongly supported them, such as inviting TVXQ to sing the World Cup cheerleading song [4]. Another prominent example is Oriental XXQ. The financial support provided by the Export-Import Bank to support the Korean cultural industry to go abroad increased to 250 million US dollars in 2017, backed by the government [5]. Oriental XXQ’s international performances were a testament to the government’s commitment to promoting South Korean culture abroad, further enhancing the appeal of South Korean idol culture.

3.2. Market Strategies

South Korean idol culture’s rapid spread can also be attributed to the industry’s strategic approach to market penetration. According to the different market demands and characteristics, South Korean cultural industry has formulated differentiated development strategies. This adaptability has allowed them to effectively tap into transnational markets and tailor their content to suit various audiences.

As e-government image ambassadors, this is also a significant part of brand marketing [6]. South Korea sees TVXQ as the face of the brand, conducting extensive marketing on the international stage. TVXQ’s rapid growth aligns well with the continuous advancement of modern IT technology. Therefore, in the word-of-mouth marketing by consumers, mentioning South Korea often brings to

mind TVXQ as image ambassadors, further aiding in spreading South Korea's top IT technology to various parts of the world.

The South Korean cultural industry has demonstrated a keen understanding of the importance of global reach. In addition to nurturing talent for domestic audiences, the industry has attached great importance to the development and penetration of international markets. This forward-looking approach has played a pivotal role in South Korean idol culture's surge in popularity on the global stage.

3.3. Meeting Spiritual Needs

Another significant factor contributing to the rapid spread of South Korean idol culture is its ability to fulfill the spiritual needs of its audience, particularly in China. As China underwent a period of transition marked by rapid economic development and cultural shifts, there was a growing appetite for fresh and diverse cultural products. The rapid development of social material and culture led the Chinese market into a transition period. Its people eager to accept fresh and diversified cultural products.

Korean pop culture, or KPOP, emerged as the ideal response to this demand. Its vibrant music, captivating performances, and visually appealing music videos resonated with demands of the Chinese consumers, attracts a large number of them into the world of South Korean idol culture. This cultural phenomenon managed to strike a chord with the Chinese audience during a pivotal moment of cultural transformation.

Furthermore, the cultural foundation of East Asia and the history of cultural exchange have acted as catalysts for South Korean idol culture's rapid expansion. The cultural ties between South Korea and China, rooted in their shared history, have played a significant role in promoting cultural exchange. As a result, South Korean idol culture's development in Asia have more advantages, benefiting from a cultural backdrop that facilitated its growth [7].

4. Impact of the Korean Wave Culture and Suggestions for China

The Korean wave culture, often referred to as Hallyu, has made a profound impact on the global entertainment industry. It has evolved from K-Drama to K-Pop and beyond, captivating audiences not only in Asia but also worldwide. This cultural phenomenon has given rise to idol groups, concerts, albums, and a plethora of related products. South Korea's influence in the realm of entertainment is not only limited to South Korea; it has expanded its reach to Asia, Europe, and the United States. South Korea has successfully built an international brand around its idol economy, thereby shaping the development of the world idol economy.

As an early Korean idol group, the success of the iconic group TVXQ can be replicated, such as properly entering overseas markets and always complying with government policies. Their achievements serve as a blueprint for other aspiring idol groups. Key factors contributing to their success include a strategic entry into overseas markets and unwavering compliance with government policies. The lessons learned from TVXQ's journey can be applied to emerging idol groups looking to make their mark on the global stage.

China and South Korea share a cultural kinship as part of the East Asian cultural circle. This shared cultural similarity has paved the way for cross-cultural influences and collaborations. China, drawing inspiration from South Korea's successful idol culture, has achieved some achievements in this arena. Examples include the introduction of popular variety shows such as "Produce 101" and the creation of idol boy groups like TFBOYS. These initiatives have not only resonated with domestic audiences but have also created considerable economic income [8].

South Korean entertainment companies have embraced transnational marketing strategies to expand their presence in overseas markets. They have leveraged new media marketing, actively sought

transnational cooperation, and continuously innovated their products and distribution channels. This proactive approach has been instrumental in their global success.

However, some Chinese entertainment companies have been slow to adapt and continue to primarily focus on the local market. To effectively promote China's pop culture, particularly in the entertainment sector, there is a need for a shift in mindset. Chinese entertainment companies should fully absorb the advantages of the transnational marketing strategies of Korean pop culture, proceed from the reality, and find a way to adapt to their own development. In doing so, China's popular culture, especially the entertainment culture, can truly go to the world [9].

However, this learning process should serve as a springboard for further innovation and adaptation. The Chinese government should provide more platforms for the entertainment industry in China to show China's traditional culture. This industry should produce more products and brands in line with China's national conditions and cultural background.

5. Summary

This paper takes TVXQ as an example to study the development of Korean idol groups, its economic benefits, how to go overseas market, and the reference significance of Korean measures and success to China. After analyzing the successful process and influence of the idol group represented by TVXQ, the paper draws the following conclusions: first, the measures taken by the Korean government for the development of idol culture are very important, which promotes the development of idol culture from the root. Second, South Korean entertainment companies are actively exploring the Internet and overseas markets to find more outlets for their idol groups. Third, the activities of idol groups in overseas markets can effectively feedback the domestic market and promote the two-way development of domestic and foreign economies.

In this regard, the suggestions for China's entertainment industry are as follows: First, improve the internal industrial system to support the foundation of idol activities. Second, to improve the quality of idols and cultivate outstanding talents. Third, cooperate with related Korean companies to unite with [10]. This study analyzes the reasons for the vigorous development of Korean idol culture, and points out the paths for the development of related industries in China. The future research direction will tend to study the process of the development of the Korean Wave adapted to China's national conditions, and how to flexibly apply it to China's development.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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