

Research on the Cross-Border Spread of China's Beauty Influence- -Inspiration for the Development of Korean Beauty Communication in China

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of global changes in the beauty industry, the issue of cross-border dissemination of Chinese beauty has received widespread attention, but there is still a lack of systematic research on its cultural dissemination mechanism and technological barriers. This article analyzes the dissemination mechanism of Korean beauty in China and its implications for Chinese brands entering overseas markets. Research has found that South Korean beauty products have achieved market penetration and premium through a dual track penetration mechanism of "social media+cultural symbols", relying on cultural proximity and localized micro innovation to elevate their products to a "Korean lifestyle". Although Chinese brands have made breakthroughs by leveraging Eastern aesthetics and channel advantages, they are constrained by the hollowing out of technology and the suspension of symbols. Based on this, this article proposes to construct a strategic framework of "culture as the soul, innovation as the core", integrate universal values of Eastern aesthetic narrative, break through core technological barriers, optimize omnichannel localization operation, and promote the transition of Chinese beauty from "cost-effectiveness competition" to "value leadership".

Keywords: South Korean beauty cross-border dissemination; cultural soft power; Chinese beauty brand.

1. Introduction

Driven by the wave of globalization, Chinese beauty brands are accelerating their overseas expansion through cultural integration, product innovation, and localization strategies. This global layout is not an isolated case. As early as 2003, the South Korean beauty industry achieved a leapfrog development in the Chinese market through the export of Korean drama culture, innovation of popular products, and the construction of aesthetic standards. South Korean brands once set a myth of an average annual growth rate of 47% [1,2].

In the global transformation of the beauty industry, South Korea's beauty industry has achieved a turning point, overtaking with the "K-Beauty" strategy. By developing differentiated "micro innovation" products, combined with visually impactful fashion packaging and precise pricing strategies, Korean brands have successfully shaped a global image that combines trendiness and cost-effectiveness. More importantly, the global penetration of Korean Wave culture has formed a strong cultural momentum, transforming beauty products into accessible symbols of the 'Korean way of life' through celebrity endorsements, film and television installations, IP collaborations, and other means [3]. The synergistic effect of cultural soft power and commercial innovation has made South Korea the first country in the world to achieve "culturalization of the beauty industry".

Nowadays, Chinese beauty companies are standing on a more mature industrial foundation, relying on the dividends of cross-border e-commerce and flexible supply chain advantages, repeating the logic of "culture+product" going global: brands such as Perfect Diary and Huaxizi are reconstructing their product narratives with Eastern aesthetics, leveraging digital marketing to accurately reach overseas segmented markets, breaking the monopoly of international brands, and completing a qualitative change from "manufacturing output" to "brand premium". It is worth noting that, unlike

South Korea's strategy of relying on cultural homogeneity, Chinese beauty is opening up a more inclusive development path in the global market through differentiated cultural expression and high cost-effectiveness advantages. This upgrade not only conforms to the trend of global industrial chain reconstruction, but also marks the deep migration of the value center of the beauty industry. However, existing research mostly focuses on marketing strategy analysis, but lacks a systematic deconstruction of its dissemination mechanism in China and promotion strategies in the localization process. Especially in the context of the rise of domestic brands and consumer upgrading in China, it is of urgent practical significance to re-examine the penetration mode of Korean beauty.

Therefore, this article takes the research on the development experience of South Korea's beauty industry as the starting point, and deeply explores the path for cross-border development of the beauty industry. On a practical level, this study analyzes the advanced path of companies such as AmorePacific from initial product improvement to later cultural integration, providing a new idea of "cultural leverage" for Chinese brands to go global. On a theoretical level, this study breaks through traditional frameworks and reveals how cultural proximity can be transformed into specific competitive advantages. Against the backdrop of the reconstruction of the outbound path caused by the trade friction between China and the United States, this study can provide an international paradigm driven by both culture and business for emerging market brands.

2. The Current Situation and Problems of Cross-Border Dissemination of Chinese Beauty Influence

2.1. Current Status of Cross-Border Communication

The cross-border dissemination of Chinese cosmetics has shifted from early experimentation to strategic deepening, and cultural adaptability and geographical advantages are becoming the core levers to leverage the Asian market. According to customs data, the total export value of beauty cosmetics and toiletries in China in the first three quarters of 2023 was 34.861 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 26.6%, confirming the continuous deepening of local brand globalization layout.

2.1.1. Cultural symbol output drives brand recognition

Chinese cosmetics brands began planning to expand overseas as early as 2008 when Baicaoji leveraged Sephora to enter Europe. After 2020, emerging brands such as Huaxizi focused on the Asian market, and their underlying logic remained clear: to avoid competition in the European and American Red Sea, relying on cultural affinity and geographical radiation, and building a "Oriental Beauty" discourse power in markets such as Southeast Asia, Japan, and South Korea. This differentiation path based on cultural resonance not only explains the growth resilience of export data, but also reveals the key to future global competition - how to transform local aesthetic systems into sustainable brand assets while exporting products.

The systematic output of cultural symbols is reconstructing the value of domestic beauty brands, achieving an advancement from product identity to cultural identity through "collectible cultural consumption symbols". For example, domestic beauty products represented by Huaxizi and Huazhizhi blend traditional Chinese aesthetic elements such as carved flowers, birds bowing to the phoenix, and cloud shoulders to create differentiated products, forming a cultural label of "Chinese makeup" [4]. Huaxizi's "Tongxin Lock" lipstick is very popular in the Southeast Asian and Japanese markets, and overseas consumers even consider it a cultural collectible. The views of "Chinese makeup" related videos on TikTok have exceeded 650 million, becoming a new trend after Japanese and Korean makeup.

2.1.2. Significant market expansion results

In the Southeast Asian market, the export value of Chinese cosmetics to Southeast Asia will reach 6.3 billion yuan in 2023, accounting for 16.1% of the total export value. Perfect Diary has topped the cosmetics sales chart in countries such as Vietnam and Singapore through the Shopee platform; In

the Japanese and Korean markets, the export value of Chinese cosmetics to South Korea increased by 190% year-on-year, and Juduo and Huaxizi entered the high-end department store market in Japan through offline counters; In terms of the European and American markets, Huaxizi has settled in the Paris department store Shamali Dan, and the Perfect Diary "Little Black Diamond" series has become a popular item in North America through TikTok marketing. From emerging markets in Southeast Asia to mature markets in Japan and South Korea, and to high-end consumer circles in Europe and America, the multi-level market layout strategy of Chinese beauty brands has shown structured results.

2.1.3. Innovation in channels and marketing models

Cross-border e-commerce (Shopee, Lazada), social media (TikTok, Instagram), and independent websites constitute the main channels for domestic cosmetics brands to go global. For example, Juduo achieved the top sales of beauty and care products on Shopee Indonesia in 2024 through localized marketing, Kelaqi achieved the top category through TikTok Vietnam Challenge, and Zise teamed up with the British Museum to launch a joint product to increase cultural premium. The policy dividends of RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) have driven export growth, with China's cosmetics exports to RCEP countries surging by 53.8% year-on-year in 2023.

2.2. Core Issues and Challenges

However, the cross-border development of Chinese beauty brands still faces obstacles. The globalization of Chinese beauty brands is facing a systemic four-dimensional dilemma: technological shortcomings constrain the driving force of industrial upgrading, the dual track market squeezes and reconstructs the competitive landscape, cultural identity gaps dilute brand value, and channel constraints limit strategic depth. Specifically, the combination of R&D hollowing out and supply chain vulnerability causes brands to be caught between "technological breakthroughs" and "market expansion"; The floating output of cultural symbols and excessive dependence on channels lead to a deep disconnect between "traffic prosperity" and "value precipitation". This complex challenge system is forcing the industry to shift from one-way scale expansion to the coordinated breakthrough of technology culture supply chain, and its breakthrough path may profoundly affect the position transition of Chinese beauty in the global value chain.

2.2.1. Technological barriers need to be overcome

Data shows that since 2024, more than 10 domestic beauty brands have launched "self-developed ingredients" or new ingredients. However, attention should still be paid to the problems of insufficient R&D investment, dependence on imported raw materials, and serious product homogenization in most domestic brands. This will lead to a lack of core technological competitiveness in domestic products: research and development shortcomings exacerbate the risk of dependence on raw material imports, homogeneous competition continues to weaken brand premium ability, and short-term marketing heat cannot conceal the dilemma of core technology hollowing out, which may long-term restrict domestic beauty products from breaking through to the high-end links of the industry chain. So it can already be seen that the current "pseudo innovation" dilemma of local beauty companies - local breakthroughs in self-developed ingredients are difficult to offset systemic technological shortcomings. Only by crossing the gap between raw material research and basic research can it truly achieve the industrial transformation of China's beauty brands from "marketing driven" to "technology empowered" [5].

2.2.2. The pressure of international market competition is intensifying

In terms of the European and American markets, mature international brands dominate the high-end market, while the affordable market faces pressure from local brands. Chinese brands need to deal with thresholds such as environmental certification and cultural differences; There are also localization challenges in the Southeast Asian region: adaptation to religious culture (such as halal certification), climate demand (high moisturizing formula), and some brands have withdrawn from the market due to insufficient localization. Chinese beauty brands are facing a dual-track squeezing

situation of global competition - they need to break through the high-end monopoly and structural barriers in the market, as well as the localization adaptation threshold in emerging markets. Therefore, the ability to break through multiple dimensions has become a key proposition for Chinese beauty brands to survive in the international market.

2.2.3. Cultural identity bottleneck

Overseas consumers still view Chinese beauty as a 'cheap alternative', and the export of cultural symbols has not yet formed a systematic value system. For example, although Huaxizi attracts attention through Eastern aesthetics, its user repurchase rate is significantly lower than that of international brands [6].

The fragmented output of cultural symbols is pushing Chinese beauty into a consumption trap - the short-term traffic frenzy caused by surface aesthetic stimulation is difficult to transform into sustainable brand development space; The continuous lack of emotional resonance among consumers not only makes it difficult to cultivate user loyalty, but also forces brands into a vicious cycle of sacrificing price for sales volume; And deeper cultural value gaps may dissolve the subjectivity of local culture, ultimately forming a narrative backlash of 'the more emphasis on Eastern identity, the harder it is to gain global recognition'. So the current cultural output in China is not practical enough. Only by shifting from cultural curiosity to value empathy, constructing an aesthetic system with universal values, and engaging in dialogue with international consumers on an equal footing, can it break through the communication paradox of "high attention, low identification".

2.2.4. Channel and supply chain risks

The concentration of channels and the infrastructure gap have formed a dual constraint for domestic beauty brands: the profit squeeze of cross-border e-commerce platforms and the overlapping logistics bottlenecks in emerging markets have forced domestic beauty brands to make difficult choices between channel autonomy and market coverage breadth [7]. Due to the excessive reliance of domestic beauty products on cross-border e-commerce platforms such as Amazon and Shopee, profits have been compressed, resulting in high construction costs for independent websites [8]. At the same time, some emerging markets (such as Africa and Latin America) have weak logistics infrastructure, which greatly restricts market penetration. These issues further highlight that building supply chain resilience has become the key to breaking through the globalization of domestic beauty products.

3. Research Methods and Analysis of the Dissemination Mechanism of Korean Beauty Products in the Chinese Market

This study uses in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys to focus on the dissemination mechanism of Korean beauty in China. Firstly, explore the subjective motivations behind consumer behavior, and then quantify the correlation between cultural influence and market performance. Through the complementary design of these two methods, it aims to overcome the limitations of a single approach and make up for the shortcomings of previous studies, such as insufficient sample representativeness and single-factor analysis. The goal is to systematically deconstruct the dissemination mechanism and market performance of Korean beauty products in the Chinese market, and provide a cross-cultural communication strategy framework that balances theoretical rigor and practical reference for Chinese beauty exports.

3.1. Communication Mechanism: Dual Track Penetration and Cultural Symbol Transformation

Research has found that the dissemination of Korean beauty in China follows a dual track path of "social media driven+cultural symbol transformation".

The first is to use social media to expand communication channels: the platform matrix with microblog and TikTok as the core, awaken content to reach consumers through KOL/KOC demand, and innovate the communication mode of social media. The data shows that 72.6% of respondents'

first exposure to Korean makeup information came from social media, and the conversion rate of KOL recommendations was 3.2 times higher than traditional advertising.

Then cleverly use cultural symbols to transform beauty products into symbols of the "Korean way of life" through the use of Korean dramas and K-pop [9]. For example, using online tools such as movies and TV series to promote hidden products can significantly increase the sales of cooperative products during the peak season of the series. For example, interviewee B mentioned, "Buying the same product makes me feel closer to my idol, it's an emotional connection

3.2. Market Mechanism

Resonance between Cultural Potential and Localization Adaptation. The success of the Korean beauty market stems from the synergistic effect of cultural potential and localization strategy. Data shows that consumers who pay attention to K-pop have a 67% higher probability of purchasing Korean makeup, and the premium rate for co-branded products reaches 30% -50%. According to a survey, 42.7% of consumers believe that Korean Wave culture has enhanced brand appeal. This represents that cultural momentum can create a powerful force that empowers brand premiums. Meanwhile, Korean makeup also has the advantage of cultural proximity: China and South Korea share the Confucian cultural foundation and aesthetic preferences, reducing cognitive barriers to cultural dissemination.

Korean brands are adept at transforming cultural commonalities into differentiated selling points through "micro innovation". So they reduce cultural discounts through differentiated innovation and cultural integration, and strengthen market competitiveness through localization adaptation. For example, a certain brand of skincare products saw a 123% year-on-year increase in sales in 2024 due to their adaptation to the preferences of Chinese consumers [10].

This bidirectional interaction mechanism of "high potential cultural output" and "low threshold cultural adaptation" ultimately forms a resonance effect of cross-cultural communication, enabling Korean cosmetics to achieve a strategic balance between premium ability and market penetration, providing a classic example of "cultural leverage to leverage commercial value" for Chinese beauty brands to go global.

4. Inspiration

The dissemination mechanism of Korean beauty is essentially a two-way empowerment of "cultural soft power+commercial hard power", and its success provides a paradigm reference for Chinese brands to go global with "content seeding emotional binding omnichannel harvesting". Based on the successful experience of South Korean beauty in the Chinese market and the current situation and challenges of the Chinese beauty industry, this study proposes the following strategic recommendations to promote Chinese beauty brands to achieve more competitive cross-border influence.

4.1. Deepen the Output of Cultural Soft Power and Construct Systematic Cultural Symbols

The first step is to strengthen the integration of traditional culture and modern aesthetics, integrate traditional cultural elements into product design and packaging, and create a cultural label of "Chinese makeup". Spread Eastern aesthetics through short video platforms and film, and television IPs, and shape recognizable cultural symbols. Secondly, leveraging global popular culture carriers. Following the deep integration of Korean brands with Korean dramas and K-pop, it will promote the joint branding of Chinese brands with domestic film and television, animation, and gaming IPs (such as "Black Myth Wukong" and "Nezha"), and expand the cultural radiation range. Ultimately, in the context of globalization, a meta-narrative system of "Chinese beauty" will be created, providing both perceptible cultural heterogeneity and anchoring the common value base of humanity, achieving an elevation from cultural curiosity to value resonance.

4.2. Driving Product Differentiation through Innovation and Breaking through Technological Barriers

The essence of technological breakthrough is to build a dual track driving ecosystem of "hard core innovation+flexible adaptation", which not only breaks the adverse constraints of raw material import dependence through basic research and development, but also reconstructs the product value chain with market-oriented, minimally invasive innovation. Cultivate irreplaceability in the technology niche and ultimately achieve a transformation from a technology follower to a rule maker. Firstly, it needs to increase research and development investment and core technology breakthroughs, establish special funds to support raw material research and development, and reduce dependence on imported active ingredients. Referring to South Korea's "micro innovation" strategy, develop differentiated products to meet the needs of segmented markets. Secondly, green technology empowers high-end development, drawing on the recyclable packaging and biotechnology of the RE: P series in South Korea, launching an environmentally friendly product line, and enhancing brand premium capabilities [11]. At the same time, it will strengthen cooperation with international research institutions, enhance technological endorsement, and improve consumer trust [12].

4.3. Optimize Omnichannel Marketing and Localized Operations

OMO (online offline integration) strategy can be implemented to achieve precise online reach and enhance brand stickiness through offline experience. On the one hand, using platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, targeted advertising is targeted through big data analysis, combined with brand promotion content such as Chinese-style makeup tutorials and product evaluations, to attract target consumers. On the other hand, it can learn from the "online ordering offline trial makeup" model of Lanzhi and try to open brand experience stores in core cities overseas (such as providing Hanfu trial makeup and DIY customization services), enhance immersive experience, and enter high-end department stores to enhance brand style; There is also deep localization adaptation: adjusting strategies for different markets, such as launching halal certified and high moisturizing formula products for the Southeast Asian market, and strengthening environmental certification and inclusive aesthetics for the European and American markets.

In addition, reference can be made to the fan economy strategy of Korean brands, inviting domestic celebrities with international influence to serve as global spokespersons, and strengthening emotional resonance through social media interactions such as live broadcasts and fan meetings.

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the construction of the cross-border influence of Chinese beauty brands, and by analyzing the dissemination mechanism of the South Korean beauty industry in China, reveals the globalization path of "culture business" collaborative empowerment. Research has found that South Korean beauty products have successfully upgraded to "lifestyle symbols" through a dual track penetration mechanism of "social media driven+cultural symbol transformation", relying on the potential of Korean Wave culture and localized micro innovation strategies, achieving a dual breakthrough in market penetration and brand premium. On the other hand, Chinese beauty brands have made significant progress based on the export of Eastern aesthetics and the dividends of cross-border e-commerce, but still face systemic challenges such as technological hollowing out, cultural identity gaps, and supply chain dependence.

Based on this, this study proposes that Chinese beauty brands need to build a global strategy of "culture as the soul, innovation as the core, and data as the pulse". Only by achieving a coordinated breakthrough in cultural expression, technological barriers, and market adaptation can Chinese beauty surpass "cost-effectiveness competition", replicate South Korea's overtaking path in the global value chain, and ultimately lead the new paradigm of "globalization of Eastern aesthetics".

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