

Cross-Cultural Integration and Development of Popular Culture: An Example of the Spread of Korean Wave in China

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Abstract. With the globalisation continues, the phenomenon of cross-cultural exchange between popular cultures is significant. Existing studies have mainly focused on cross-cultural exchanges at a macro level, but with the constant updating of cultures and the iteration of communication modes mainly through new media, additional studies on the development of popular cultures in China are necessary. The study aims to explore the impact of the Korean Wave on local Chinese pop culture by analysing the initiatives of cross-cultural integration of Korean pop culture in China, and to discuss how Chinese pop culture can achieve its own further development under the trend of cultural integration. This research adopts the research methods of in-depth interview and questionnaire survey. Based on the research samples, the results indicate that Korean Wave Promotes cross-cultural communication through a variety of means, and has brought a positive guiding role and a certain degree of negative impact on Chinese popular culture. Based on this, this paper provides three suggestions on how to continue the development of Chinese popular culture, namely, reducing cultural discounts, increasing policy support and replacing "cultural output" with "cultural reciprocity". In general, this study is a supplement to the previous studies on the cross-cultural development of popular culture, and can also put forward suggestions for the development of Chinese popular culture.

Keywords: Korean Wave; cross-cultural integration; popular culture; Chinese popular culture.

1. Introduction

Recent years, with the development of new media and the rising trend of globalisation, pop culture has been spreading cross-culturally, gradually forming a trend of mutual integration. Korean Wave, as a highly influential culture in East Asia, is also gradually moving out of the country and influencing the world. K-POP is a representative manifestation of Korean Wave, which has spread rapidly across the globe based on online platforms (Douyin), achieving wide dissemination among specific groups.

Wang Xiaoling points out that the cross-cultural communication of the Korean Wave has benefited from the support of the government and enterprises, while Sun Jiasan emphasises the key role of new media in the development of the Korean Wave [1,2]. As forms of communication continue to evolve, new research on the Korean Wave is necessary and valuable based on new features such as the current popularity of new media such as Douyin and the increased mobility of fans in communication.

Based on the shortcomings of existing studies, this paper takes the K-POP idol communication on the DouYin platform as an object of study, explores its hidden logic through the example of 'Challenge video', and analyzes how this communication contributes to the widespread influence of Korean Wave culture. The study utilised a combination of literature research, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires.

This study clarifies the impact of the Korean Wave on local pop culture through K-POP, explores how the Korean Wave's cross-cultural influence should be sustainable in the context of globalisation, and offers suggestions on how local cultures can counteract the risks and develop sustainably. These discussions will contribute greatly to the cross-cultural study of the Korean Wave in China.



The paper first concerns with the methodology used for this study, than gives an overview of the result of the questionnaires, including the concrete data of the spread in K-POP among Chinese youth groups and an analysis of the results; The second chapter is about specific initiatives for cultural integration by K-POP; And the third chapter will discuss the development stage of Korean wave in China and how China can learn from the Korean experience to carry out the cross-cultural communication of popular culture.

2. Research Methods and Results

2.1. Research Methods

The Korean Wave culture covers a rich and wide range of content, including K-POP music, film and television dramas, variety shows, and other entertainment forms, as well as multiple fashion, beauty, and other fields. To gain a more precise understanding of its cross-cultural communication in China, this study chooses to focus on K-POP idol culture. K-POP idols are not only performers, but also comprehensive cultural symbols. They have built a strong cross-cultural influence through music, global tours, and other means. Researching K-POP idols can help deepen our understanding of the cross-cultural development of popular culture.

To obtain first-hand data on the influence of K-POP idols in China, this study adopted in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys.

Firstly, according to the research objectives, the interviewees were identified, including 15-year-old high school students who love K-POP idols, 19-year-old college students, 27-year-old office workers, and 45-year-old economically independent individuals. The different types of interviewees can help further ensure the diversity and scientificity of the viewpoints. In terms of the interview outline design, this study conducted semi-structured interviews around the degree of understanding of K-POP, opinions on popular idol challenge videos, and whether K-POP, as a representative of the Korean Wave culture, affects daily life. The interview was conducted through an online video format, and the interview content was promptly organized after the interview. The content analysis method was used to code and categorize the interview data to extract key themes and viewpoints.

Based on the doubts found in the in-depth interviews, this study conducted a targeted online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire includes single-choice questions, multiple-choice questions, and blank-filling questions, to ensure that the information required can be collected comprehensively and accurately. Questions such as "Will you become more interested in Korean culture after watching K-POP challenge videos?" are used to understand the attitudes of the respondents in this regard. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 157 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective response rate of 98.1%. After conducting descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis on the questionnaire data using statistical software, the following key conclusions were drawn:

2.2. Research Findings

Research data shows that K-POP culture has a wide range of influence. 90.45% of respondents stated that they had been exposed to K-POP, and young people rely more on online video platforms for their exposure to K-POP. Meanwhile, among the 19-25 age group, nearly 80% believe that social media is also the main channel for the spread of Korean culture, and 73.28% believe that fan-driven promotion is equally important. In addition, watching K-POP popular challenge videos is positively correlated with interest in Korean culture, with 93.75% of respondents who have watched such videos indicating a strong interest in Korean culture.

The above results show that K-POP culture has a significant influence in China. Therefore, this study will delve into the measures taken by the Korean Wave culture to achieve cross-cultural development, providing experiences and insights for the dissemination of Chinese popular culture.

3. Cross-Cultural Integration Measures

3.1. Government Support and Strategic Guidance

The period after the 1997 financial crisis was an important one for the development of Korean culture. The government proposed the strategy of "building a nation on culture" and issued a series of guiding regulations, which greatly promoted the development of Korean culture. Since 1998, the government has begun to promote the opening of overseas culture. This openness includes allowing Korean popular culture to absorb elements of Japanese popular culture and create hybrid cultural products. At the same time, Korean pop culture has also spread in Japan [3]. In 2009, the Korea Creative Content Agency was established, which invests millions of dollars annually to support the creation and global promotion of cultural products such as K-POP and Korean dramas. The Korean government has also established several special funds to operate cultural industries, such as the Arts Promotion Fund, the Cultural Industry Promotion Fund, and the Film Promotion Fund. In addition, the Korean government encourages cooperation with local cultural enterprises and overseas institutions such as Netflix to promote the cross-border production and distribution of cultural products. To promote the integration of Korean popular culture with other cultures, the government actively supports Korean artists to perform overseas and establish overseas cultural centers.

Although the content and goals of previous Korean Wave policies were different, they all regarded the cultural industry as a driving force for economic growth [4]. The government's strong institutional and financial support has made the development of the Korean cultural industry smoother. These supports have not only promoted innovation of cultural products, but also provided solid material support for Korea to shape its national brand. Nowadays, K-POP is not only a music style, but also an important part of the country's image and a crucial tool for the Korean government's diplomacy.

3.2. Support for Cultural Globalization Background

In general, globalization is defined as the process of international integration that occurs because of the exchange of worldviews, products, ideologies, and various other aspects of culture [5]. Under the promotion of the government, Korean entertainment companies adopted an active market development strategy to bring the Korean Wave into China.

However, globalization is not a one-way dissemination, it is a new cultural pattern that adapts to local culture [6]. In the context of globalization, the spread of Korean culture is also influenced by the acceptance of the markets of various countries and the local culture. The Korean Wave has made localized adjustments in idol cultivation, lyric writing, social media operation, and other aspects to enter and expand the Chinese market. In terms of idol cultivation, outstanding Chinese trainees are selected to debut to attract Chinese fans and enhance market recognition. A group of Chinese idol groups is launched, with China as the main market for these groups. In terms of lyric writing, some K-POP songs will be released in Chinese versions, such as "Roses Blossom Chinese Ver. " and "The Meaning of Meeting". The lyrics of some songs will also incorporate Chinese culture, such as the lyrics "Bruce Lee" in the song "Kick it," which pays tribute to Bruce Lee. In terms of social media, Korean idols have joined Chinese social media platforms to strengthen their interaction with Chinese fans and release videos specifically for Chinese audiences, such as speaking Chinese and popular Chinese memes, to increase fan stickiness.

Korean entertainment companies have made strategic adjustments and integrated local cultural factors for the Chinese market, striving for a balance between globalization and localization, expanding the influence of Korean Wave culture in the Chinese market, which reflects K-POP's efforts in cultural integration and its flexibility and adaptability in the context of globalization. Korean Wave culture frequently uses traditional Chinese costumes and cultural elements in visual presentation nowadays, which enhances the sense of identity of Chinese audiences. However, some of them do not understand and respect the cultural meaning of these elements, sparking controversy over cultural appropriation.

3.3. Multi-Dimensional Driving Force for Cultural Integration

3.3.1. Promotion of short video platforms

According to CNNIC statistics, as of 2024, the number of Chinese netizens has reached 1.108 billion, and the number of short video users has reached 1.04 billion, accounting for 93.8% of the total number of netizens [7]. By 2023, the market size of short video has reached 292.83 billion yuan, with an average daily usage time of nearly 3 hours per person, making it the leading Internet application driving consumption [8]. With the rise of short video platforms such as TikTok, the dissemination model of the Korean Wave has shifted from traditional television and physical albums. To the fragmented viral dissemination of short videos. The so-called viral dissemination means taking the sharing network as the promotional platform, which can quickly catch the attention of the audience in a short time, primarily relying on the sharing and forwarding of many Internet users as the main means of communication, with rapid and extensive characteristics [9]. The meticulously choreographed dances of K-POP idols and the increasing number of "brainwashing" songs produced in recent years are highly consistent with the content format of short video platforms. K-POP idols have seized this opportunity and widely spread through viral dissemination in the form of short challenge videos. The dissemination threshold of short videos is low; fans often attract more people to pay attention to Korean Wave culture through forms such as dance cover, shooting the same challenge videos as their idols, and editing clips of their idols.

3.3.2. Emotional identification of fan groups

The success of the Korean Wave not only stems from the appeal of its content itself, but also depends on the strong emotional resonance of the fan base. K-POP fans tend to have a stronger sense of collective identity. They are not only consumers of the Korean Wave, but also re-creators. K-POP companies carefully shape their idols' personalities and create labels, these personalities and experience which are often seen as fans' idealized versions of themselves, friends, and family-like existences, developing a deep emotional dependence.

The need for personal belonging or dependence on a group is a manifestation of human sociality. By participating in fan group activities, fans can gain a sense of belonging to the group [10]. These group activities include fan crowdsourcing for advertising, hosting birthday cafes, and organizing well-coordinated support slogans in concerts. Moreover, the content integrated with local culture posted by K-POP idols on social platforms has established a more special emotional connection with local fans, driving fan consumption and fan economy.

4. Discussion

The above describes the cross-cultural development measures of Korean pop culture represented by K-pop, and then this article will discuss the impact of Korean wave on the macro level, including the impact of the Korean wave on Chinese local culture, and how Chinese local culture can learn from the experience of cross-cultural development of the Korean wave, enhance its cultural self-confidence, and realise its own cross-cultural 'Going Out'.

4.1. The Influence of Korean Wave on Chinese Native Pop Culture

First, there is no doubt that the Korean Wave has had an extremely positive impact on Chinese local pop culture, not only in the basic production of film and television, but also in the development of the cultural industry and the promotion of cultural dissemination. Zhao Yuezhi et al. (2020) briefly summarised the influence of the Korean Wave in China into three periods: namely the "turn of the century" (1990s-2000s), "honeymoon period" (2010s-2015), and "post Sade era" (2016 -present) [11].

Korean entertainment forms rooted in East Asian culture were more acceptable to Chinese audiences than those of the European and American entertainment industries, and differentiated themselves from Chinese popular culture at the beginning, bringing a "romantic" experience to society. At "the

turn of the century", Korean pop culture had initially expanded the vision of domestic pop culture, which can provide effective reference for the development of Chinese local culture.

However, in the early stage of the development of "Korean wave", due to the uneven domestic economic development, the main consumer groups of "Korean wave" were concentrated in the middle class of big cities, and the audience range was relatively narrow. But with the arrival of the "honeymoon period", Korean pop culture had become "popular" in the public sense. In the 2010s, the official signing of the Sino-Korean film co-production agreement established that Sino-Korean co-production films enjoyed the same treatment as domestic films [12]. Since then, the "Korean wave" has completely swept the Chinese mainland. In China, the film and television industry has produced many Chinese and Korean co-productions such as "Bad Guys Always Die" and "Bounty Hunters", providing a new sample for the film industry. South Korea launched many idol groups with Chinese members. The Chinese people's participation made the Korean wave enter the Chinese market more quickly. At the same time, the mature business model of Korean wave culture, such as the cultivation and operation of idol groups and the development of peripheral products, provided an example for China's cultural industry. Domestic companies had imitated the Korean idol industry chain and launched a series of idol groups. Although their influence was less than that of Korean idols, it was also a successful attempt by the Chinese idol industry. In recent years, due to the development of new media, the new era Korean wave has occupied a place on the Internet, which has a subtle impact on the youth's music preference, aesthetics, and many other aspects.

It is true that the "Korean wave" has brought new forms of entertainment to China, but it also inevitably has a certain negative impact. Firstly, Korean pop culture has impacted domestic pop culture to a certain extent. Take pop music as an example, with the increasing popularity of Korean pop music in the country, it is possible to discourage the local pop music and lead the local pop style to be more like the Korean pop style, which is not conducive to the development of national music characteristics. Secondly, at the level of cultural communication, taking Korean dramas as an example, "Korean wave" has also brought great influence to China. Korean dramas are mostly real-life subjects that truly reflect the lives of Korean people. In that way, Korean dramas pay great attention to embedding or infiltrating their customs and habits into the dramas in a 'silent' way when they are scripted and filmed on the spot [13]. Korean culture, represented by Korean dramas, always seeks to subtly integrate its own culture into the culture of the dissemination place through covert means, hoping that this new integrated culture can serve as a representative of its own culture. However, this process may be accompanied by cultural appropriation, which is not conducive to enhancing audiences' identification with their own culture.

4.2. Sustainable Development in Chinese Pop Culture

In this section, the paper will discuss how local Chinese pop culture can learn from the Korean wave cross-cultural development experience, achieve its sustainable development, and enhance cultural confidence.

In the questionnaire mentioned in the above research method, 52.82% believed that the audience of local culture was reduced, while 47.18% believed that the development of the local entertainment industry was hindered. This shows that people are worried about the potential threats to the development of local culture and industry, especially among young audiences, and the development of cultural localization is facing challenges. Therefore, it is inevitable to explore the 'way out' of Chinese popular culture.

First and foremost, reducing cultural discounts is conducive to the cross-cultural communication of Chinese popular culture. Colin Hoskins and R. Mirus first proposed the concept of cultural discount. Cultural discount refers to the fact that cultural products, because of their origin in a specific culture, are more attractive to audiences familiar with that culture, but less attractive to those who are not. Due to cultural differences and different cognitive levels, the audience's interest and understanding ability will be affected when they are exposed to unfamiliar cultural products. Factors such as

language, cultural background, and historical traditions may lead to cultural discounts [14]. The difference in cultural structure is the main reason for the phenomenon of "cultural discount". For China, Chinese popular culture can learn from the experience of the Korean wave, try to reduce the cultural discount in the subsequent transmission process, and promote the spread of culture outside Asia by reducing the differences in cultural structure. For example, China's domestic dramas or variety shows can carry out cross-cultural cooperation, or appropriately add European and American cultural elements to the background, to form a larger level of cross-cultural communication through ways more familiar to consumers in these regions.

Secondly, in terms of policy, the State should be more supportive of cultural endeavours. The South Korean government has established the strategy of "building the country through culture", and rapidly occupied the cultural market and consumer groups of other countries, including China, with elements such as film and television, music, language, diet, clothing, and so on as the carrier. China can learn from South Korea's experience, such as increasing policy support for the cultural industry and formulating policies to promote the development of the cultural industry, to provide a favourable policy environment for the development of the cultural industry. Besides, China's cultural industry can also focus on creating its cultural IP, and through the promotion of a specific 'focus point', Chinese pop culture will appear in the global vision.

Furthermore, Chinese pop culture can consider replacing "cultural output" with "cultural reciprocity". Zhang Lei and Hu Yanan believe that culture has always been a two-way communication, informational, rather than material [15]. Therefore, in the context of globalization, culture should reject "private ownership". Chinese popular culture is at a critical point of vigorous development, and should actively accept other countries' popular culture for mutual benefits. On the one hand, local culture should learn from the successes of foreign cultures, such as the Korean Wave, for example, the delicate portrayal of human nature in their films and TV shows, to make Chinese stories more appealing to the people. On the other hand, China's unique and rich traditional culture, such as martial arts and opera, can also go global and take root in other countries through innovative forms. Cultural festivals and joint creative projects can be used as carriers to build bridges of exchange, so that different cultures can nourish each other in the collision.

5. Conclusion

Based on previous research, this article takes the cross-cultural dissemination of Korean Wave culture in China as an example to explore the cross-cultural integration measures in the dissemination of Korean Wave culture, including the government's support and guidance, localized adjustments in the context of globalization, reliance on short video platforms and the role of fan groups; Additionally, this study examined the Korean Wave culture has both positive and negative impacts on local culture. If Chinese popular culture wants to better achieve cross-cultural dissemination, it is necessary to learn from the experience of Korean Wave dissemination, strengthen its own popular culture, and enhance cultural confidence.

Authors Contribution

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

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