

# The Core Elements of the Popularity of Korean Dramas in China: Dissemination Opportunities and Dissemination Elements

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**Abstract.** The issue of the reasons for the popularity of Korean dramas in the Chinese market has received widespread attention. Existing literature has analyzed it in detail from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, but it is still possible to approach it from a new research perspective for analysis. This research analyzed the interaction between the core elements of Korean drama dissemination in China, namely "dissemination opportunities" and "dissemination factors". The conclusion has been drawn that changes in communication opportunities will promote the optimization of communication elements (communication content, communication channels), and adjustments to communication elements can also reduce the negative impact of changes in communication opportunities, thereby expanding the effectiveness of communication. Based on this, this paper puts forward the following suggestions: when learning from the experience of Korean dramas, Chinese film and television dramas should take their essence. The excellent experience of learning Korean dramas through cultural adaptation to reduce cultural differences and actively cooperating with international cultural industry companies. But it should be recognized that internationalization cannot be achieved for the sake of internationalization, and it must always adhere to the cultural subjectivity of telling the story of modern China well.

**Keywords:** Dissemination opportunities; dissemination elements; Korean dramas.

## 1. Introduction

The popularity of Korean dramas as one of the cultural brands in the Chinese market has continued to attract widespread attention in recent years. Since the first introduction of Korean dramas to the Chinese market in 1993, through television, video, and social media, extensive dissemination has been achieved. Even after the rapid changes in the market, Korean dramas have shown strong appeal and adaptability, continuing to spread on international platforms and have always been one of the cultural products loved by Chinese audiences.

Now, research about the popularity of Korean dramas in the Chinese market has entered from multiple perspectives. As Chen Luming pointed out, the popularity of Korean dramas in China belongs to cross-cultural communication between countries. The reason for the successful dissemination of the cultural roots between China and South Korea, the traditional paper media and new media, and strong support from the government. By analyzing the cross-cultural communication phenomenon of Korean dramas and summarizing the experience of international cultural communication in Korea, it is of great significance for China to formulate cultural communication strategies in the new century [1]. Liu used "Descendants of the Sun" as an example to point out that the widespread dissemination of Korean dramas in China in the context of new media is driven by a series of communication strategies that cater to the characteristics of new media [2]. Li Yuanyuan and Yu Qing answered questions about the construction of Chinese elements in Korean dramas and films by analyzing 24 Korean film and television works. Currently, Korean film and television works achieve self-expression by negating Chinese elements [3].

This research suggests that there are more perspectives to explore the popularity of Korean dramas in the Chinese market. Therefore, this study focuses on the "dissemination opportunities" and

"dissemination factors" of Korean dramas in the Chinese market in the current context, and analyzes in detail the interaction between the dissemination opportunities and dissemination factors.

Specifically, the study will briefly define the definitions of "communication opportunities" and "communication elements". Based on the literature review, case analysis, and survey questionnaires are used to explore the "dissemination opportunities" and "dissemination opportunities", with a focus on exploring the interaction between the two. The research results provide a new perspective for the study of the popularity of Korean dramas in China and offer new ideas for the external dissemination of the Chinese film and television industry.

## **2. Research Fundamentals and Research Methods**

### **2.1. Research Fundamentals and Conceptual Definition**

Opportunity refers to the key and chance for the transformation of something (often in a positive direction). The dissemination opportunity in this study refers to the key time nodes and event opportunities for the dissemination of Korean dramas in China during a specific period. Korean dramas have significant timeliness, driving force, and nonreplicability in the process of dissemination in China due to changes in external environments such as market demand and technological innovation. The dissemination opportunity provides a "window of opportunity" for the dissemination elements of Korean dramas, helping them break through the bottleneck of dissemination. Opportunities often indicate updates in the dissemination trajectory, providing a basis for sorting out the phased patterns of Korean dramas' dissemination in China.

The elements of dissemination refer to the essential components that enable communication to take place. Dissemination can be divided into two types based on the presence or absence of channels (media) and their nature: channel-based communication and non-channel-based dissemination. Channel-based dissemination can be further divided into general intermediate dissemination and special intermediate communication, namely mass dissemination. For multi-channel dissemination, the elements of dissemination consist of three parts: the communicator, the information, and the audience. People generally refer to these three parts as the three elements of communication. For channel-based dissemination, another element needs to be added, which is the channel [4]. The communication elements in this study refer to some characteristics in Korean dramas that can resonate with Chinese audiences, such as communication content and channels. Specifically, the dissemination of content is defined as cultural elements (family ethics, Confucian values) and drama production (protagonist appearance, plot appeal, visual music).

### **2.2. Research Methods**

Based on the literature review, this research adopted case analysis and questionnaire survey methods for analysis.

This research selects typical Korean dramas for case analysis to explore the changes in the dissemination channels of Korean dramas in China and the interaction between "dissemination opportunities" and "dissemination factors". Case analysis presents a clearer exposition of the theoretical framework through specific analysis of different cases. This study selects two Korean dramas, "Love Landing" and "Dark Glory," as the core cases. These three Korean dramas are all phenomenal works of Korean drama dissemination in China, with representativeness and typicality. The case analysis follows three principles: stage coverage (Korean drama hot stage, market demand change stage, and technology-driven stage), element typicality, and data authenticity. This research will help to better understand the communication opportunities and factors, and reveal the interaction between communication opportunities and communication factors.

The questionnaire survey method helps to collect first-hand data from Korean drama audiences to present more intuitive questions. Therefore, this research adopts a questionnaire survey method to analyze three dimensions: audience acceptance channels (video platforms, social media, friend

recommendations), elements of Korean drama dissemination content (family ethics, protagonist appearance, production level, plot attraction), and the audience coverage of Korean dramas. This research used online random sampling and was distributed to Chinese audiences of different age groups who have watched Korean dramas. In the end, this research collected 250 valid questionnaires.

### **3. Dissemination Opportunities and Dissemination Elements**

#### **3.1. Dissemination Opportunities**

The essence of the mechanism by which Korean dramas capture opportunities for dissemination in the Chinese market is market monitoring, opportunity identification, and strategy adjustment.

In the 1900s, China was in the early stage of reform and opening up, and people's living standards improved. Local TV dramas are mostly historical dramas, with fewer urban emotional themes, providing an opportunity for Korean dramas to enter the Chinese market for the first time. In 1993, Korean dramas were introduced to the Chinese market through Chinese television stations, and the first Korean drama aired on CCTV, "Jealousy", was an urban emotional drama. But television has not yet become popular, and the distribution channels for Korean dramas are limited. At that time, the introduction of Korean dramas mainly focused on urban emotional themes, and Chinese audiences were more concerned about survival issues, so they failed to resonate widely, and the response of Korean dramas in the Chinese market was mediocre.

After 2000, China's economy developed rapidly, people's living standards significantly improved, material conditions were greatly improved, the television coverage rate exceeded 90%, and the Chinese market had a wider range of exposure to foreign cultures. Korean dramas seized this opportunity and entered a wave of dissemination in China. The TV drama work "Dae Jang Geum" about women's inspirational struggle was broadcast on Hunan TV in 2005, achieving high ratings and becoming a milestone in the dissemination of Korean dramas in China. The popularity of Korean dramas has enabled Korean food, clothing, cosmetics, etc. to gradually open up the market in China through the medium of Korean dramas [5]. This phenomenon is just like that after Dae Jang Geum was broadcast in the Chinese market, Chinese people became more interested in Korean food, and Korean restaurants also flourished in China. Many Chinese people go to restaurants to order the same dish in Da Chang Jin [6]. Afterward, Korean dramas attracted widespread attention through family ethics dramas such as "Miss Mermaid" and "The People of the Bathhouse Owner's Family".

After 2010, China's Internet economy broke out, video platforms rose, and Korean dramas shifted to video platforms. Idol dramas such as "You Who Came from the Stars" and "The Heirs" respond to young audiences' pursuit of a better life by starring with high looks and romantic love. Since 2016, with the continuous development of China's film and television industry, the preferences and attention of Chinese audiences have been constantly changing. The dissemination of Korean dramas in China has been somewhat impacted, with fewer opportunities for release compared to before, and even experiencing a "cold winter" in the Chinese market at one point. In response, Korean dramas have changed their previous strategy of being broadcast on Chinese television stations and instead have been indirectly spread through international streaming and social media platforms. The advancement of communication technology has enabled Korean dramas to overcome difficulties and attract more young audiences. Korean dramas such as 'Love Landing' and 'Dark Glory' have still achieved excellent results in the Chinese market.

#### **3.2. Dissemination Elements**

The dissemination elements in the study specifically refer to the dissemination content (cultural elements, drama production) and dissemination channels. To verify whether some elements in Korean dramas can resonate with Chinese audiences, a questionnaire survey research method was used in this section.

### 3.2.1. Dissemination content

Family ethics, as a cultural element often portrayed in Korean dramas, establishes emotional connections with Chinese audiences through Confucian values. The questionnaire asked respondents about their preferences for specific scenes in Korean dramas. Data shows that family gatherings and interactions between elders and children (family ethics) are the most important elements for the audience, with 82.79% of respondents choosing this scene. Through the analysis of demographic information, the audience aged 26-35 tends to be more inclined towards depicting family ethics compared to the younger audience aged 18-25. In the "Please Answer" series of Korean dramas, family stories are used as the narrative core to depict the ethical relationships, blood ties, and deep sibling relationships between characters in families, as well as the complex forms and emotional relationships between father and son, modern marriage, and love [7]. This series of Korean dramas has resonated with audiences in the Chinese market precisely because of the Confucian elements with Chinese symbols in the dramas.

Based on cultural value resonance, Korean dramas form visual attraction with high protagonist appearance and plot tension. Especially in line with the aesthetic preferences and emotional needs of female audiences. The questionnaire shows that "idol appearance" and "delicate portrayal of love or friendship (plot attraction)" are scenes that audiences prefer, apart from family ethics, with 70%. 08% and 45.59% of respondents choosing them, respectively. Through analysis of demographic information, female audiences place greater emphasis on the portrayal of the protagonist's appearance than male audiences.

### 3.2.2. Dissemination channels

The communication channels of Korean dramas in China have gone through three stages: television stations, video platforms, and social media. A survey shows that social media has become the main platform for Chinese audiences to interact with Korean dramas. The questionnaire asked the respondents what channels they first came into contact with Korean dramas through (video platform recommendations, social media clips, friend recommendations). Among them, 57.79% of people choose social media clips, 56.15% choose video platform recommendations, and only 29.1%. People choose friend recommendations. It can be seen that social media plays an important role in the dissemination of Korean dramas at the current stage.

After 2022, Korean dramas entered a new stage of "globalization of themes". Taking the Netflix joint production "Dark Glory" as an example, the example achieved dissemination in China through two paths: the topic side and the content side. Campus violence has always been a hot topic on Weibo, and the narrative core of "Dark Glory" is "campus violence", which indirectly drives the discussion and attention of the series. The topic "Dark Glory" on TikTok has been played 7.3 billion times so far, with 124000 people participating. TikTok bloggers launched a second creation with nonplot content such as "migrant workers", "Dark Glory Wild Performance Awards", and again received a large number of popularity and rate of flow.

Social media breaks the current dissemination restrictions faced by Korean dramas with fragmented content, transforming them from "viewing objects" to "social participatory texts".

## 3.3. The Interaction between Dissemination Opportunities and Dissemination Elements

The role of communication opportunities in communication elements is that when communication opportunities change, communication elements will be adjusted to better adapt to the new environment. This also promotes the optimization of communication content and channels. After 2016, the dissemination of Korean dramas was influenced by market changes, policy adjustments, and updated audience preferences, and the channels and content of dissemination were readjusted. The dissemination channels of Korean dramas have shifted from television platforms to international streaming media platforms, South Korea has become the second-largest content provider for Netflix [8]. In the past three years (2022-2024), a total of 88 Korean dramas (including self-produced original

works and synchronous broadcasting) have been launched on Netflix. According to their themes, in addition to urban emotional dramas (26, accounting for 29.5%) and professional dramas (12, accounting for 13.6%) that are highly related to daily life, science fiction and fantasy dramas (16, accounting for 18.2%), crime dramas (14, accounting for 15.9%), and horror dramas (10, accounting for 11.4%) are all relatively high genres, while costume dramas, rural dramas, youth campus dramas, and historical war dramas are all less than 4, accounting for a relatively low proportion [9]. In addition to the urban emotional themes of Korean dramas in the past, suspense, science fiction, fantasy, and other themes are less influenced by the local culture of the dissemination area and are more easily accepted by the audience. This also reflects that market conditions and other communication opportunities provide path guarantees for the diversified dissemination of communication elements.

The change in dissemination opportunities has forced the optimization of Korean drama content, while the adjustment of dissemination elements has also, to some extent, reduced the negative impact of changes in dissemination opportunities and expanded the effectiveness of Korean drama dissemination. Taking the Korean drama "Love Landing" as an example, it was broadcast in China through unofficial channels in 2020. Despite many restrictions, the drama still achieved good results in the Chinese market and became a phenomenon-level Korean drama. And this is mainly achieved by increasing the display of Chinese cultural elements. Chinese songs, cuisine, and other elements appeared in the drama, bringing the audience closer to China. For example, the female lead hummed the Chinese song "Sweet Honey" while in North Korea, which resonated with Chinese audiences. The repeated appearance of Chinese characters, couplets, lanterns, Chinese commercial companies and other symbols in the drama, as well as the specially designed dialogue between Korean overseas Chinese and the female protagonist in Chinese for the plot, have laid a cultural foundation for the dissemination of the drama among Chinese audiences [10]. Moreover, it strategically prioritizes the romantic narrative between the male and female protagonists as its central thematic focus. The male lead in the drama is portrayed as a North Korean soldier with flesh and blood, emotions, and righteousness, which has won the favor of Chinese audiences. This indicates that adjusting cultural elements and other communication factors can reduce the negative impact of changes in communication opportunities and expand communication effectiveness.

#### **4. Discussion**

As one of the popular cultural brands in South Korea, Korean dramas have always been highly regarded and loved by people in Asia and even the world. Its sustained popularity has great reference significance for Chinese film and television dramas to go abroad and spread to the world. The development of Korean dramas is a dynamic process, and timely measures are taken to respond to changes in the market, policies, and audience preferences in different periods, keeping pace with the times. The interaction between the core elements of "dissemination opportunities" and "dissemination factors" in the popularity of Korean dramas in China, studied in this article, aims to provide ideas for the outward dissemination of Chinese film and television dramas.

In terms of cultural content creation, South Korea has integrated its food culture, fashion culture, and traditional Confucianism into its film and television works, which has invisibly promoted the world's understanding of Korean culture and, to some extent, enhanced its soft power. China should also integrate its traditional cultural brands, such as martial arts, opera, traditional Chinese medicine, etc., with modern popular culture to create cultural brands with its characteristics and in line with modern aesthetics. The film and television industry needs to integrate these cultural brands into dramas and expand their influence.

When the external environment of Korean dramas changes (such as intensified competition, changes in audience preferences, and changes in market conditions) and communication channels are obstructed, they maintain competitiveness by cooperating with international platforms, transforming production models, and optimizing the selection of globally influential topics in the content of the dramas. The key lies in reducing cultural discounts through cultural adaptation. Chinese film and

television can draw on this logic when targeting overseas markets, and tailor it to specific situations. Chinese film and television can also rely on their profound cultural heritage and institutional advantages to explore higher-dimensional "cultural value-added" paths. When promoting in Europe and America, science fiction films and TV shows should be the main focus to reduce the cultural discount caused by the large dissemination space. It is worth noting that when Chinese film and television are disseminated to the outside world, they should avoid the mindset of benchmarking Korean or American dramas. In the current process of global dissemination, Korean dramas have problems such as excessive dependence and a lack of subjectivity. The international dissemination of Chinese film and television should avoid internationalization for the sake of internationalization, always adhere to cultural confidence, and never forget the subjectivity of telling modern Chinese stories well.

## 5. Conclusion

This research used literature review, questionnaire survey, and case analysis to explore the interaction between communication opportunities and communication factors. The conclusion is that changes in communication opportunities will promote the optimization of communication elements (communication content, communication channels), and the optimization of communication elements can also reduce the negative impact of changes in communication opportunities and expand the effectiveness of communication. Provided new ideas for the external dissemination of Chinese film and television dramas. However, this study also has certain limitations. For example, due to time and resource limitations, questionnaire surveys may not have a wide sample coverage and a small sample size (250), making it difficult to fully represent the Chinese audience. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research can focus on the deconstruction and reshaping of communication chains by emerging technologies such as AI; Analyze the dissemination strategies and bottlenecks of Chinese film and television dramas in non Asian markets.

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