

Research on the Development Path of Korean Drama Overseas Market and Its Enlightenment on the Development of Chinese Film and Television Drama

Qiaoqi Wu

School of Communication, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, Fujian, China

Keywords: Chinese Television Plays, Overseas Market, Korean Dramas, Cultural Discount, Transnational Development.

Abstract: As a visual expression of national soft power, the development of domestic plays is crucial. However, the expansion of the overseas market of domestic dramas has encountered various obstacles. This paper analyzes the development path of the overseas market of Korean dramas, uses a questionnaire to study the specific feedback of its audience in China, and explores the Enlightenment of the foreign development of domestic dramas. This paper analyzes that the "cultural discount" of overseas productions has a far-reaching impact on market acceptance. In addition, there are limitations in content homogeneity and narrative skills. Based on this, this paper proposes that China's film and television plays should upgrade the relevant industrial chain, use the short video platform to set up a "domestic drama zone" and create a strong IP to break the development dilemma of domestic plays and help the transnational development of China's film and television plays.

1 INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of globalization, the TV drama industry is inclusive, not only presenting production technology, but also undertaking cultural communication functions. Throughout the performance of Korean drama in the global market, it has mature and outstanding performance in international influence and broadcast data, the depth and breadth of cultural output, international awards and industry recognition, production and marketing. Since the new century, the acceleration of globalization has led to the cross-border integration of multiple cultures. With the wind of Korean popular culture, Korean TV series successfully promoted to the global market, especially in the Chinese market. The performance and achievements of Korean dramas in the Chinese market are not only the epitome of the globalization strategy of cultural output in the Korean film and television industry, but also provide a more appropriate successful case and multi-dimensional reference framework for the export of domestic dramas. According to statistics, in 2022 alone, Korean dramas created an outstanding performance of more than 10 billion broadcasts on China's video platform. The Ministry of Culture,

sports, and Tourism of South Korea even regards film and television export as the backbone of the country's overall economic growth (KOCIS, 2023). The cross-cultural communication mechanism of Korean TV series provides an important reference for domestic TV series to enter the overseas market. After integrating this year's research, it can be found that most of the literature focuses on digital research, preferring streaming media platforms, and the huge impact of social media in Korean drama promotion. The Trinity marketing of Korean drama "content + platform + community" has a profound influence (Liu, 2023). In addition, scholars also have sufficient research in the field of interdisciplinary integration. They combined culture, audience psychology, and other aspects to emphasize the coordinated development of multiple fields. Through the localization strategy to reduce cultural discounts, to achieve emotional resonance (Li, 2021), and more in-depth research on the development of policy support for Korean dramas at the government level, the South Korean government has systematically improved the global competitiveness and Industrial Synergy of Korean dramas through tax preferences, export subsidies and other policy tools (Wang & Zhang, 2022). But throughout the existing research, there are

few audience opinion analyses based on data.

Based on empirical research, according to the method of questionnaire survey (N=161) and literature research, this study collects the subjective feelings of Chinese audiences on Korean TV dramas, and conducts data analysis and summary. Compared with the Korean TV drama market in other countries, China's TV drama market has more potential. The audience base is large, covering different genders, ages, educational backgrounds, and regions. Its evaluation is extensive and diverse, with far-reaching reference value.

Taking the Korean drama in the Chinese market as an example, this paper systematically deconstructs the logic of the success factors and market expansion of Korean drama in China, reveals the parallel road of Korean drama and Korean culture complementing each other, studies the reference significance of Korean drama in the overseas market to domestic drama, and then puts forward targeted strategies for the internationalization of domestic TV drama. This exploration not only enriches the comprehensive comparative study of Chinese and South Korean TV dramas, but also provides theoretical support for the cross-border communication practice of the cultural industry in the context of globalization. Based on the framework of "cross-cultural communication theory" and "global localization", combined with the questionnaire survey data (N=161), this paper analyzes the current situation of Korean TV series in China's cultural communication, and summarizes the core obstacles of domestic TV series to foreign communication; The way of Korean TV series to achieve cross-cultural penetration through technology, narrative and marketing; There are three core issues for domestic TV series: how to combine their situation, learn from the experience of Korean TV series to optimize the export strategy, and win market recognition. For the development of China's film and television industry, it puts forward the methodology consistent with the trend of the times, and provides ideas and Countermeasures for the promotion of cross-cultural development of China's soft power.

2 ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC FILM AND TELEVISION DRAMA AND ITS OBSTACLES

2.1 Overall Analysis of the Current Situation of Cross-Cultural Development of Domestic Dramas

At present, China's TV drama industry has completed the transformation from the early exploratory output stage to the systematic industrial output stage, and its international communication strategy is gradually incorporated into the national cultural output strategy system. Data shows that in 2022, there was an export volume of about 500 million US dollars, and in 2024, the export volume of China's TV dramas increased by 45.6% year-on-year. With the state's attention to the industry, the policy of supporting domestic TV dramas to go to sea has been constantly improved in recent years. With the core of "government guidance + market operation", it provides comprehensive support for domestic dramas to sea through financial support, channel expansion, and international cooperation. The review system is constantly optimized, moving towards a more scientific and reasonable direction, balancing regulatory and creative vitality, and promoting the creation level and international influence of China's TV drama industry in line with the mainstream values. Script support plan, select excellent historical original scripts or adapted scripts, and give key support to projects with international communication potential. Industry cooperation bodies and alliances, the establishment of "China Film and television cultural import and export cooperation body" and "China TV drama export alliance" and other organizations, integration of small and medium-sized enterprise resources, and joint development of overseas markets. Expand international communication channels through the cooperation between streaming media and platforms, cooperate with Netflix, Amazon, and other international mainstream streaming media platforms to open a "historical drama special district", and use algorithm recommendations to reach overseas audiences accurately. For example, *Minning Town* and *A Lifelong Journey* are broadcast synchronously through Disney, Netflix, and other platforms. International exhibitions and exchange activities such as "China joint exhibition stand" were held to

promote excellent plays in batches. The implementation of the "Silk Road audiovisual project" and market research, localization, translation, and matching in many African countries. The influence of domestic TV plays in overseas markets is continuing to rise.

2.2 Obstacles Faced by Domestic Dramas

The cultural discount phenomenon in the process of domestic TV drama communication is the primary obstacle to expanding its overseas market. Although the state has gradually attached importance to overseas market research, actively docking overseas demand, and wants to improve the level of customization. However, the industrialization of the production system needs to be improved, and it is still facing the challenge of "cultural discount" and insufficient market acceptance (Zhang & Zhou, 2021). Analyzing the global coverage of domestic dramas, the core market is Southeast Asia's Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia (Li & Wang, 2023), the advantages of cultural proximity, and the huge audience of Chinese Americans in Southeast Asia, reducing the obstacles of cultural discount for the development of domestic film and television drama culture. The export volume of this region accounts for more than 60% of the total export share of domestic dramas. In the European and American markets, this obstacle is more obvious. From the perspective of audience portraits, the audiences of domestic dramas are mainly Asian groups and oriental culture. The high viewing threshold leads to the solidification of audiences in European and American markets. It can only attract groups interested in Chinese culture, and it is difficult to expand to other more diverse audiences.

Although the export of Chinese film and television culture has begun to take off by works such as *Empresses in the Palace* and *The Untamed*, there are limitations in the homogenization of themes and narrative skills. According to this survey, 20.5% of the audience thought that the domestic drama was "old-fashioned". In 2022, according to the data of the State Administration of radio and television, historical dramas and Xianxia dramas account for more than 60%, a lack of global themes such as science fiction and suspense, and excessive dependence on local cultural symbols such as palace struggle. It is difficult to attract international audiences by intensifying the "cultural discount". In

addition, 6.58% of the audience thought that its "high production quality" was the core competitiveness of the TV drama, 57.76% of the respondents raised the issue of lighting effect, and 41.61% thought that there were flaws in the ability of the drama and the director. The details, such as scene design should also reflect the "technical aesthetics" (Kim, 2021). In the process of film and television industrialization, some Chinese works were concerned about the imbalance between technical investment and artistic expression. In the communication and publicity level, Netflix and other platforms are mainly used to attract subcultural circles, but the Korean TV series represented by *Squid Game* seriously squeezed the market share of domestic TV series. The lack of recognition of domestic drama brands and the lack of international exposure led to the lag in international marketing and brand building. In the competition between China and South Korea, the audience perspective analysis is of great significance. In addition, China's IP has not yet formed a group cognition, relying on a single work to break through. It is necessary to steadily output high-quality content and establish a label of "Chinese film and television = quality assurance" in the international market (Zhang, 2025).

3 CROSS-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF KOREAN DRAMAS

3.1 Overview of the Current Situation of Korean Dramas in the Global Market

Korean dramas actively respond to the saturation of the local market and the competition in the global market. Breaking down cultural barriers by means of regional industrialized production strategy is not limited to "Asian pop culture". With the joint support of the "Korean wave strategy", streaming media platform, industrial production system and precise market strategy, its development has achieved a strong global influence. According to the Kocca report in 2022, the export value of Korean dramas accounted for more than 35% of the total content export, reaching 455million US dollars. The two-way integration of "cultural industrialization" and "industrial culture" has laid a solid foundation for the popularity of Korean dramas around the world. It is

mainly reflected in the dual improvement of production efficiency and work quality through technological innovation, such as virtual production technology; Adopt the global localization strategy of "type integration+universal theme". For example, *Reply 1988* set in Seoul in the 1980s, triggered collective memory in East Asia through "neighborhood warmth", confirming the theory of "cultural proximity". Science fiction, costume and other themes in Korean dramas arouse emotional resonance through universal issues such as family ethics and growth dilemma. Through the cross platform matrix, they go deep into the local platform of the target market, accurately reach the young groups, and well realize the transformation of fan economy and cultural practice. "Participatory culture" has spread through social media to form a "Korean wave ecosystem", which promotes fans to shift from entertainment consumption to cultural practice (Jenkins, 2006). The "Korean wave" has also formed a group cognition and successfully established the international image of Korean culture.

3.2 Zoning Strategy -- Practice of Intercultural Communication Theory

3.2.1 Asian Market Performance of Korean Dramas

The market of Korean dramas in Asia is relatively mature, mainly in Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Audiences in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and other places in Southeast Asia have high acceptance of Korean dramas due to cultural similarities. According to the data of VIU platform, South East Asian users watch 60% of the total traffic of South Korean dramas on the platform (VIU, 2023). Family ethics plays and romantic comedies are particularly prominent. In addition to its excellent cultural acceptance and vast audience, the Southeast Asian market also has strong localization potential. For example, under the upsurge of remake, the Thai version of *Full House* and the Philippine version of *Reply 1988* etc. In the Japanese market, *Crash Landing On You* broke through the barrier of Japanese audiences' preference for local dramas through Netflix, and the idol group's *Itaewon Class* also received a large number of young audiences.

The performance of Korean dramas in the Chinese market can be divided into three periods. The golden period from 2000 to 2016. The TV stations

represented by Dae Jang Geum and *Full House* have introduced dramas, setting off a Korean style craze in China. With the full penetration of Korean dramas into the Chinese market, there are also industries such as clothing, catering and tourism. From 2016 to 2022, despite the changes in the regulatory environment and the suspension of the introduction of Korean wave content on domestic mainstream platforms, private communication channels remained active. *Goblin* and *Crash Landing On You* triggered a lot of discussion. In 2020, *Penthouse* set off an upsurge of "slicing communication", making it the mainstream. Its dramatic clips are on the short video platform, with a single playback volume of more than 10 million. Korean dramas in this period immediately ushered in a recovery period in the Chinese market. Since 2021, some Korean dramas have been launched on video platforms. In 2021, *Now, We Are Breaking Up* invested by CAFA was broadcast in South Korea and then entered the Chinese market in reverse. The questionnaire data shows that the social network is the core position of the spread of Korean dramas, and more than 60% of the audience get information through social platforms. Phenomenal dramas can often trigger phenomenal communication on social platforms. For example, the social topics of *The Glory* have been exposed more than 4 billion times, and the audience's comprehensive score is nearly 9 points. The continuous high popularity among the people also shows the excellent publicity effect of Korean dramas on the Chinese platform.

The audience structure of Korean dramas is clearly differentiated. According to the questionnaire data, in the Chinese market, female audience accounts for about 85%, and the audience aged 15-30 reaches about 70%, and the core audience is post-90s and Post-00 women. With its unique narrative style or the superb acting skills of the leading actors, the head series has attracted more than half of the audience. Some works achieved a breakthrough in communication through the actors' cross-cultural influence, and the fan base of the relevant starring actors contributed significantly to the audience support for the series. Among the Chinese audiences surveyed by the questionnaire, 52.17% said they would like to learn Korean by themselves after watching Korean dramas, 59.63% would like to learn Korean because they like Korean dramas, 63.98% would like to learn Korean related history, 34.78% would be interested in other Korean popular culture, and 9.94% would travel to Korea because of Korean dramas. Korean dramas have successfully exported

Korean culture in China, and achieved the coordinated development of Korean pop culture, tourism and other industries.

3.2.2 Zoning Strategy of Korean Dramas in Europe and America

As a new growth area of Korean dramas, the North American market has a strong preference for suspense and thriller Korean dramas with strong plot and visual impact due to cultural differences. *Squid Game*, *Sweet Home* and other Korean dramas have successfully entered this part of the market. According to parrot analytics, Korean dramas accounted for 30% of the consumption of non English content in streaming media in the United States in 2022. In addition, it is using Netflix's algorithm recommendation and English dubbing to accelerate the popularity of its TV series.

4 THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF KOREAN TV SERIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF DOMESTIC TV SERIES

Domestic dramas can learn from the export strategy of Korean dramas from three aspects. First of all, domestic dramas can learn from Korean dramas to promote the cross-border integration of "film and television + science and technology + culture and tourism", and enhance the added value of the whole industrial chain. Develop a composite theme of "Chinese elements + universal value". Korean drama focuses on mining traditional cultural symbols such as traditional clothing and diet. Its *Dae Jang Geum* promotes the export of Korean cuisine and traditional clothing. *Endless Love* promotes the shooting site to become a tourist punch point. Secondly, the Korean drama "platform coordination and global channel layout" can also be used for reference.

In addition to the deep cooperation between the local platform and international streaming media to achieve the global distribution of content, the two creations of social media, such as mixed cutting and plot analysis, form a low-cost communication matrix, which also brings practical benefits for the overseas communication of TV dramas. The "China theater" special district can be opened and the recommended content can be customized. The short video platform can be used for "fragmented grass planting", and the

voice volume can be expanded through user generated content.

Finally, the Korean brokerage company adopts the industrial star making mode to form the "Korean star = fashion trend". The operation of its brand awareness is also worth learning from domestic dramas. China's film and television industry can strengthen the whole life cycle management of IP, develop derivative forms such as games, animation and peripheral goods, cultivate the brand cluster of "China's film and television", and establish the international label of "quality assurance". To achieve the needs of cultural exports, build a complete ecology of "policy guidance content innovation channel collaboration brand building".

In addition, it combines colleges and universities to cultivate talents, innovate narrative and theme strategies, expand science fiction, suspense and other low cultural discount themes and integrate characteristic elements, implement zoning strategies, take different propaganda means for different regional markets, use social media to locate overseas audiences and strengthen international co production and other initiatives are also applicable to the current domestic drama development background.

5 CONCLUSION

As a film and television presentation of national soft power, the film and television industry is a means to establish cultural confidence, and it is also a core area to enhance the international influence of national culture. Promoting the overseas communication of domestic TV plays has become the top priority in the contemporary context. Domestic TV plays should be committed to improving the recognition of Chinese cultural elements in the international market, gathering Chinese popular culture and traditional culture, deploying propaganda methods, and forming a "national style" to sweep overseas markets. In this way, it can enhance the soft power of the country, tell the story of China, spread the voice of China, and provide media contribution. In the future, the research can focus on regional market preference differences and optimize content production and communication with AI technology, to further promote the international development of China's film and television industry.

REFERENCES

- Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- Kim, S. 2021. Technical aesthetics in scene design: Enhancing cross-cultural media production. *Journal of Global Media Studies* 15(2): 45-67.
- KOCIS. 2023. 2023 Korean cultural industry white paper. Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.
- Li, M. 2021. Localization strategies and emotional resonance in transnational media. *Cross-Cultural Communication Review* 8(4): 112-129.
- Li, X., & Wang, Y. 2023. Spatial distribution and core markets of Chinese TV series exports. *Asia-Pacific Media Quarterly* 29(1): 78-95.
- Liu, Y. 2023. Trinity marketing model of "content-platform-community" in K-drama. *International Journal of Cultural Economics* 17(3): 203-219.
- VIU. 2023. 2023 Southeast Asian streaming data report. VIU International Limited.
- Wang, L., & Zhang, H. 2022. Government policy support and the globalization of K-drama: A case study of Korea's cultural industry. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 28(5): 601-619.
- Zhang, L. 2025. Building China's global media brand through quality content. *Media Industry Development Report* (12): 34-41.
- Zhang, T., & Zhou, H. 2021. Challenges in industrializing China's TV production system. *Global Media and China* 6(2): 189-207.