

The History of Chinese TV Series Online Distribution in Malaysia

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Abstract: Chinese TV dramas have a long history of distribution in Malaysia and are loved by Malaysian audiences, with channels ranging from free Chinese TV stations in the early days to private pay-TV stations, all of which have experienced success. With the advent of the rise of online platforms such as Youtube, the distribution of Chinese TV dramas in Malaysia has entered a new era.

1. Introduction

Malaysia was officially connected to the global Internet in 1992 (Sureswaran et al., 2012) and is currently growing at a phenomenal rate. “From 1998 to the present, Malaysia has been one of the top twenty countries in the world in terms of the number of people using the Internet for seven consecutive years” (data from the Internet). Internet development has facilitated the development of film and television drama distribution on the Internet.

2. Different Periods of Chinese TV Series Distribution on Malasian Networks

The first stage was uploading films and series by individual users on YouTube when the number of films and series was small and mainly consisted of video clips. The second stage is the birth of free movie and TV websites; most of these websites share movies and TV shows without copyright, such as the Qooxi website, Maple Stage website, icdrama website, etc.

The development of the Internet is an important reason to promote the distribution and development of movies and TV shows on the Internet. In Malaysia, around 2008, there were already “free sharing” websites, where each member shared and uploaded his or her favourite movies, thus creating a “movie library” (Mazda et al., 2018). In the beginning, these “movie libraries” were just places where users who had access to “movie library” download accounts could download movies to their computers; because of the poor network quality and slow transmission speed at that time, they could not be watched online and could only be downloaded. However, from 2012, many websites specialized in watching movies and series appeared in Malaysia. Most of these websites share movies

and series without copyright, such as the Qooxi website, Maple Stage website, icdrama website, etc... These sites are rich in resources, from movies to TV series, from European movies to Asian movies users can watch and download online for free.

2.1 The Initial Period of Chinese TV Series Distribution on Malaysian Networks (2010-2011)

Before 2010, Chinese TV series on Malaysian TV stations were all broadcast in China after the complete TV series were broadcast, and Malaysian TV stations bought the rights and then broadcast them to local viewers. The most crucial feature of TV stations broadcasting series is linear transmission, making the broadcast mode of series strictly follow linear transmission. Take the Chinese TV series “Step by Step” as an example, “Step by Step” premiered on Hunan TV in China on September 10, 2011, but was not broadcast in Malaysia until May 18, 2014, on Astro 308 TV (data from the Internet). However, starting in 2010, TV series' distribution on the Internet opened up a non-linear distribution method. The Internet enables viewers to see the latest series at any time with the advantage of fast updates and flexible viewing times.

From 2010 to 2011, this advantage was not so obvious, and although the update time was significantly reduced, it took several days to update an episode. By 2012, the speed at which Chinese series were updated on online drama sites had changed significantly. At that time, the “Legend of Donnie Yen” TV series was a hit in China, and there were thousands and thousands of information about the series on all the major social media sites in Malaysia. The Malaysian audience was as enthusiastic about the series as the domestic audience, so in response to the audience's demand, all the major TV series online sites updated every episode as fast as they could, and tonight it was shown in China, and tomorrow afternoon it was available online in Malaysian and English subtitles. Thus, there was a significant breakthrough in the number of viewers watching TV series online, and the Internet has become the main channel for most Malaysian teenagers to watch TV series.

The earliest appearance of Chinese TV series on the Malaysian web was in 2010. Several Chinese TV series appeared on the Malaysian YouTube website. Still, they were all fragmented clips (about ten to fifteen minutes in length each) cut from the TV series, none of them was complete, such as a clip (ten minutes in length) from the tenth episode of “The Prequel of Pauline's Lamp” uploaded on YouTube on July 14, 2010, and a clip (nine minutes in length) from the twelfth episode of “Legend of the Immortal Sword”. A clip from the twelfth episode of The Legend of the Immortal Swordsman 1 (9 minutes in length) was uploaded on YouTube on October 24, 2010, and a clip from the twelfth episode of Bubble Summer (12 minutes in length) was uploaded on YouTube on December 16, 201, etc. Most of the small clips of these series were recorded by some people when they were broadcast on Malaysian TV, edited into small clips and then uploaded on YouTube (the most prominent video site in Malaysia at that time). Hence, the video quality is not good. Because it was recorded by individuals who liked it and shared it with others, they only recorded the highlights or their favourite clips; therefore, there was no complete episode, much less a complete one. According to the author's search statistics, it was not until 2011 that full Chinese TV series episodes appeared on YouTube sites, only in small numbers.

Although YouTube was the most prominent video site in Malaysia, with a wide variety of videos and videos, the site was only suitable for watching small clips and videos and was not the best choice for viewers who wanted to watch Chinese series. It was not the best choice for viewers who wanted to watch Chinese series because it was not easy to watch a complete drama on YouTube. Besides the copyright issue that did not allow individuals to upload uncopyrighted series on YouTube, there was another problem that many people were sharing the same drama, and the format of the videos was different (from small clips to full episodes), which made it difficult for viewers to choose the channel

to watch the drama. Also, YouTube is not a website dedicated to watching TV series but a comprehensive video site, so each series is scattered, and there is no dedicated TV series section.

Today, due to technological advancement, young people can easily watch any TV series. Rahim (2005) found that 100% of young people in Malaysia watch television programs, 59% watch satellite television and 91% have a personal computer with an Internet connection. Due to technological advances over the years, most TV series can be watched via the Internet, and most viewers, especially young people, tend to watch TV series online in addition to using their television sets. According to a national survey by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2012), in 2009, about 73% of young people were exposed to the Internet, a significant increase from 55% in 2006. The survey revealed by the digital media company Defies Media that viewers between the ages of 13 and 24, considered youth as suggested by Arnett (2002), spend 12.1 hours per week on YouTube, social media and other free online resources, and 8.8 hours per week on Netflix and other subscription videos available on the Internet services (Spangler, 2016).

2.2 The Boom Period of Chinese TV Series Distribution in Malaysia Online (2012 to Present)

The demand for online consumption has increased dramatically in recent years. For example, a recent report by Kemp (2016) shows about a study conducted on digital usage in 2016, which gives fascinating statistics. This data shows that the number of active Internet users to date is 20.62 million out of a population of about 30.54 million in Malaysia, of which 77% use the Internet daily. In addition, the average time spent online using a personal computer or tablet is more than 4 hours per day. This is more than twice the average time spent watching TV, which is roughly 2 hours per day, and also exceeds the average time spent using cell phones, which is 3½ hours per day. In terms of e-commerce, the report also found that about 59% of Internet users have searched online to purchase products and services, while 45% have visited online retail stores, 44% have made online purchases via PC laptops, and 31% have done so via mobile devices (Kemp, 2016).

Undeniably, the growing popularity of TV series in China should be attributed to the emergence of this interesting digital media technology, Internet TV, which enables viewers to access TV episodes via the Internet. According to Arango (2009), Internet TV is rapidly growing, offering free online TV programs. Nowadays, many websites are offering online streaming services with subtitles. For example, in Dimsum, Chinese TV series are available with subtitles in Chinese, Malay and English simultaneously, which greatly facilitates the viewing of Chinese TV for different ethnic groups of Malaysian teenager viewers. Also, many video sites have forums and message boards that allow the Malaysian online community to discuss Chinese pop culture. For example, Dramafever is one of the sites that allow viewers to watch Chinese TV series for free, and viewers can also write reviews and rate their favourite series on the site. Other websites, such as Dramacool, Dramacrazy, Mysoju, KimchiDrama, etc. (Akeem et al., 2018).

Table 1 1 Famous Malaysian Film and Television Drama Websites

No.	Web site name	Web site address
1	Dimsum	http://www.dimsum.my
2	Dramafever	http://www.dramafever.com
3	Dramacool	http://www3.dramacool.ae
4	Dramacrazy	http://www.dramacrazy.net
5	Mysoju	http://www.mysoju.com/
6	KimchiDrama	http://www.kimchiseries.ne
7	Qooxi	http://www.qooxi.net/
8	Maple Stage	http://maplestage.com/
9	Icdrama.se	http://icdrama.se/
10	iQiYi	https://www.iq.com/

11	Woaikanxi.net	http://woaikanxi.net/
12	Love TV Show	https://lovetvshow.cc/
13	Azdrama City	http://azdrama.site/
14	azmdb	http://azmdb.com/
15	kazeebo	http://www.kazeebo.com/about-2
16	dramawall	http://www.dramawall.com
17	Dramafever	http://www.dramafever.com

3. Dissemination of Chinese TV Series by Facebook Group Community

Facebook groups are social group products launched by Facebook. Facebook groups can aggregate friends with the same hobbies or the same tags and gather all the topics corresponding to them in the group, making it easier for like-minded friends to participate and communicate with each other. The popularity of Facebook suggests that its use is remarkably increasing among young people. According to the latest research report on global digital Internet usage, including Southeast Asia (latest edition, January 2019) released by research and survey company WeAreSocial, the number of Facebook users has reached 24million in Malaysia, with 38% of them aged 18 to 24 years old, respectively (WeAreSocial, 2019). This makes Malaysia the 17th most significant concentration of Facebook users in the world.

Facebook groups are a social group product launched by Facebook. Facebook groups can aggregate friends with the same hobbies or the same tags and gather all the topics corresponding to them in the group, making it easier for like-minded friends to participate and communicate with each other. Here viewers can find partners or people who share their hobbies and discuss the topics they are interested in. “TV series audiences are divided by different needs, and at the same time, they gather into niche groups for the same needs. They call on fans who share their hobbies on the Internet to form a group with common needs in the form of forums and postings. In this group, they can chat about their favourite TV series with like-minded bar friends and express their own opinions and views, thus satisfying their individual needs for TV series” (Zhang et al., 2013).

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On Facebook, besides Chinese TV series groups, many Chinese celebrity fan groups also contribute significantly to the spread of Chinese TV online in Malaysia. Not only do they share and discuss TV series that are on the air, but these groups also actively promote new series and save good series for viewers, as well as provide all the information about Chinese TV series. Because of the herd mentality of viewers, if the group leader or some of its members write reviews and feelings about an inevitable drama, other group members will follow. Therefore, Facebook groups have a significant impact on the dissemination of Chinese TV series.

Another phenomenon on Facebook now is that every popular Chinese TV series has at least one group. Viewers have created not one but multiple groups because they like a particular TV show, and the groups are used to share all the information about the show. It is safe to say that all Chinese series have groups on Facebook.

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