

Analysis on Dissemination Channels and Implications of South Korean Film and Television Productions with Local Culture—Taking "Han" Culture as an Example

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Abstract: The global spread of hallyu, which refers to the craze over South Korean popular culture, has brought the Korean culture to the views of global audience, encouraging more people from different countries and cultural background to learn more about this country. In recent years, films and dramas tagged with the keyword "revenge" are grabbing attentions from the audience. The "han" culture embodied by these productions have demonstrated the distinct Korean culture, accessing a wider audience. This paper analyzes the expression and evolution of Korean films and dramas with "han" culture as well as the dissemination channels. It concludes that the Korean films and dramas with "han" culture have incorporated excellent foreign cultures while reflecting the most concerned social topics of the current era. As a result, when they spread internationally, they resonate with the audience, intriguing people in different cultural circles. Based on the findings, the author makes the following suggestions for the international communication of Chinese traditional culture: While promoting local Chinese culture overseas, it is important to preserve the local cultural essence, find modern channels for traditional Chinese culture, and spread it in innovative manners. Meanwhile, audiences from different ethnic cultures can be attracted by eliciting social resonance.

1. Introduction

Korean revenge-themed films and dramas, such as *The Penthouse*, *The Glory*, and *Squid Game*, have gone wildly popular. Such productions have a profound connection with the "han" culture of South Korea. Being inherent in South Korea, the "han" culture is one of the traditional cultures. "Han", a sentiment generally harbored by Koreans, is recognized as an aesthetic preference integrated with Korean culture and social attitude [1]. In the Korean dictionary, "han" is defined as the lingering sentiment that fails to dissipate due to resentment or animosity. It is used to describe the resentment that ensues misfortunes and the self-removal afterwards. The occurrence and evolution of "han" is inextricably related with the history and politics of South Korea. Hence, "han" is a particular ethnic sentiment of Koreans. According to Park Iljoon, a Korean scholar, "han" is not

a personal feelings but the "collective unconscious" of Koreans [1]. This paper illustrates the connotations and significance of Korean "han" culture, analyzes and compares the expressions of "han" in traditional culture and contemporary films and dramas, and derives implications from the globalization of Korean films and dramas.

2. Connotations and significance of "han" culture

As the influence of Korean popular culture grows, South Korea exports its culture via music, dramas, films, and other formats, reaching people from different countries. The "han" culture epitomizes life experiences and regret, fury, sorrow, and delight of their ancestors. The "han" culture endures in the mentality of Koreans and is introduced to the global audience as hallyu progresses.

2.1 Connotations and development

In the context of multiculturalism, culture of each nation differs. Therefore, each nation or country has a different interpretation towards "han". Although "han" in Chinese and Korea is the same Chinese character, the concept of "han" in the two countries is fundamentally different. In modern Chinese, "han" refers to the animosity and resentment that individuals harbor towards external objects rather than themselves. While in South Korea, "han" is used to describe the feelings of sorrow, grievance, and complaint that individuals harbor towards themselves [2].

"Han" is inseparable from the traumatic and painful history of South Korea. With most of its land covered by mountains, its proximity to oceans and its complex climate, the Korean Peninsula was at the disadvantage in the agrarian society. The ancient Korea was weak and impoverished in general. Therefore, the ancient Korea was forced to seek protection from the surrounding major countries, becoming a vassal state of China. In the early 1900s, it was annexed by Japan [3]. After national independence, the Korea Peninsula was divided into North Korea and South Korea, falling into a state of instability for a long time [3]. Therefore, the emergence and development of the "han" culture is the sorrow and self-pity of Koreans over the tortuous history, showing their anguish and dissatisfaction with social ills and worries for the nation's future.

At the political level, the class consciousness of the Joseon dynasty's ruling class deprived slaves and paupers at the bottom of the society of freedom. Witnessing the corruption of dynasties, the oppression from the ruling class, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, people developed a sense of resentment due to the pressure from life and society [4]. Productions of "han" culture are commonly seen in the lower class. "Han" is manifested in poetry, dancing, and other performing arts that reflect the life of the lower class. The sentiment of "han" and the Korean culture are deeply intertwined.

With a history of constant struggle, the sentiment of "han" became a part of national feelings developed in the dark colonial period. "Han" represents the national feelings of grief over the nation's tortuous development, the regret for failing the ambitions, the concern for the nation's future.

2.2 Innovations on expression

"Han" is manifested in various art forms. As a part of the traditional Korean culture, it exists in the traditional Korean folk music, poetry, lyrics and other literature works. From the *Gongmudoha* of ancient Korea, the *Hwangjo ka* of the Three Kingdoms period, lyrics and literature of the Goryeo dynasty, *Arirang* of the Joseon dynasty, to the popular folk songs of South Korea, "han" has become one of the core themes of Korean poetry and literature.

Since the emergence of democracy in the Republic of Korea in 1987, popular culture had gained

wider attention. South Korea officially entered the stage of commercial broadcasting for profitability. Large companies then invested their capital to the cultural sector, providing an opportunity to improve the quality of the cultural contents. However, South Korea had to adopt new approaches in the late 1990s due to the the International Monetary Fund (IMF) foreign exchange crisis. It abolished the strict film censorship system and put forward the "culture-oriented development" policy. Against such a backdrop, the Vengeance Trilogy directed by Park Chan-wook achieved global success, further developing the revenge-themed productions. Since then, diverse revenge-themed films and dramas have emerged, combining topics such as economic inequality and women's rights of global concern [5].

2.3 Significance

In virtue of the influence of hallyu, the Korean films and dramas cause quite a stir worldwide. As hallyu spreads, people learn more about the material and institutional culture of South Korea as well as the mindsets of Koreans. The rise of revenge-themed films and dramas has helped the audience comprehend the "han" sentiment carried by Koreans more clearly. Revenge-themed films and dramas convey the internal "hatred" via "sorrow", expressing the deep frustrations with society through the depressing ambience. They convey the distinct "hatred" via the "detachment", exhibiting a sense of loneliness and social isolation. "Rebellion" is the defiance when the "han" sentiment is at the edge of outburst. Ultimately, "rebirth" is achieved, turning the passive emotions into an upbeat mentality. The understanding towards "han" is dynamic and constantly evolves. With oppression from society, the senses of social isolation, inner frustration, and inner resentment grow, requiring the subject to find certain outlets to release the repressed emotions. The end of the story then brings the audience back to the reality and provoke them to contemplate social issues, fulfilling the "rebirth" of the story [6]. The audience are able to participate in the film or drama because of the open-ended story. When a drama or film is being played, the audience are subtly exposed to the spirit of the "han" culture.

In the old "han" literature, the grievance and resentment of "han" are buried deep within. Fresh and positive power generates after the negative emotions are voluntarily removed. The inner "han" is eliminated through the inward self-removal [7]. The "han", which has already dissipated, will not be presented in the form of revenge. Nevertheless, the "han" sentiment seen in contemporary films and dramas becomes outward attacks rather than the inward self-removal. Under the feudal rule of ancient dynasties, people at the bottom of the society were unable to fight back. Therefore, they chose to bury the resentment deep down and reconcile themselves to such conditions. Oppositely, in the modern social system, people seek a fair social environment. The revenge story in which the weak fight against the power becomes an emotional outlet for the audience, giving them mental satisfaction.

3. Analysis of the dissemination channels of Korean "han" culture

In addition to the traditional market of Asian and certain European countries, the global hits of *The Penthouse*, *The Glory*, and *Squid Game* opens up the market of Europe and America for Korean films and dramas, increasing the influence of Korean films and dramas. The global success of South Korea's revenge-themed films and dramas has brought its local "han" culture to the view of people in different countries. This paper analyzes the success of local South Korean culture dissemination, and obtains the following implications.

3.1 Emphasis on local inheritance and innovation

Based on the "han" sentiment, the Korean films draw on Japanese Shinpa traditions and classical Hollywood techniques to express "han", the distinct sentiment of the Korean nation [8]. The Korean film and television industry has been supporting the development of domestic films and local film market while imitating and learning from other countries. Korean films and dramas preserve the traditional culture while absorbing the ideas of contemporary Japanese and western popular culture. They cleverly combine elements that are acceptable for Western countries and maintain the distinctive local and national features at the same time. Although the European and American audience are unfamiliar with the social background in Korean films and dramas, the "school bully", "violence", "revenge" and other topics discussed in the films and dramas are universal, easily eliciting the resonance of audience from different cultural backgrounds in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the Korean films and dramas are not only popular among Asian countries in the same Confucian cultural circle, but also successfully access Western countries. They are embraced by global audiences, becoming mainstream Korean popular culture from the East. The Korean film and television industry's productions disclose the domestic social ills and expand target audience in easily accepted forms, enabling them to be successfully exported to the global market. The Korean film and television industry integrates local culture elements with the topics familiar to international audience, which has successfully contributed to the global cultural influence of Korean films and dramas.

3.2 Culture dissemination via modern channels

Revenge-themed films and dramas reflect actual events and social issues. "Han" is the culmination of sentiments throughout Korean history and people's life. As time passes, although the object of "han" has changed, "han" never disappears. Social issues in real life are heavily discussed and dramatized in films and dramas, through which the audience are able to experience in person the oppression of certain groups by society. By telling stories, critics of social injustice and corruption are expressed. Reflections of the audience on society are provoked through the thorough examination of the social background.

Nevertheless, there are limitations. The Korean film and television industry is driven by the power of capital. The profit-seeking nature of films and dramas limits the cultural export on some levels. Meanwhile, it contradicts the essence of the revenge-themed productions that are meant to reflect social issues and attract public attention.

4. Implications for China

A cultural circle embodies the mutual influence between cultures and the commonality generated during exchanges. Therefore, cultures within the same culture circle share the same nature and structure [9]. The influence of cultural circle should be considered in cultural dissemination. European and American countries are in different cultural circles from the Eastern countries. The differences in the nature and structure between the Eastern Confucian culture and Western culture lead to differences in cultural understanding. In the process of exporting culture with local characteristics, attention-grabbing topics can be included. For example, women's rights, school bullying, and other topics discussed in *The Glory* are the issues that modern society is paying attention to. By covering these topics, traditional Korean culture is brought to the notice of foreign audience. Hence, innovation in cultural dissemination should be grounded on reality. Mass media and other new channels should be leveraged to promote traditional culture, realizing innovative development.

When promoting traditional culture in foreign countries, China should cultivate the values of traditional culture, understand the application of the etiquette and ethical values as well as its distinctiveness, and creatively explain its connotations, adapting cultural traditions to the modern society. Cultural dissemination should be rooted in reality and integrated with excellent traditional culture and Western culture [10]. As society develops, there might be a mismatch between the presentation of traditional culture and social perception towards it, but the connotation and spirit of traditional culture remain the same. As eras shift, poetry, music, and dance are no longer the only ways to demonstrate culture. As the Internet age arrives, culture can be spread via films and dramas. The expression of "han" culture also shift from traditional manners to modern manners. The "han" presented in films and dramas and the "han" in traditional culture evolves with people's value in different periods, but the internal spirit of "han" never changes. In light of cultural differences, traditional culture should be integrated with excellent cultural elements that can be embraced by Western culture before being exported to other cultural circles. Regarding the international communication of films and dramas, South Korea has integrated valuable experiences from other countries and the present global social issues with its productions.

In summary, during the inheritance and development of traditional culture, it is important to preserve the essential spirit and values, and to adapt the traditional culture to the modern society. Regarding international communication, new media, such as films and dramas, should be utilized to express the spirit of the traditional culture. Meanwhile, excellent cultures of different countries can be incorporated to intrigue audiences from different cultural circles, helping them to understand the essence of the traditional culture conveyed in films and dramas.

5. Conclusion

The expression and content of "han", a local Korean culture, differs in traditional literature and contemporary films and dramas. The essence of "han" has transformed from inward self-removal to outward defiance. The integration of "han" with films and dramas has made Korean films and dramas the voice of people that express people's dissatisfaction with society. The heavier the topic, the wilder the response from the audience. This is how producers understand and respond to the traditional national sentiment of "han".

Koreans express and convey "han", the distinct sentiment of the Korean nation, to global audiences by telling stories with topics of global concern. South Korea not only spreads its culture to east Asian countries and regions within the same cultural circle, but also causes a stir in European and American countries with different cultural systems. The author is inspired from the success of South Korea that the inheritance of Chinese culture should emphasize on demonstrating ethnic characteristics, especially those of minority culture. Meanwhile, the cultural heritages of the Chinese nation over thousands of years should not be ignored due to overemphasis on the "minorities" of minority culture. The essence of Confucianism, Taoism and other Chinese cultural philosophies should be carried forward, contributing to the coexistence of the past and the present. Due to the significant cultural differences between the European and American countries and China, it is difficult for their audience to understand the essence of China's traditional cultural productions. Adaptation is required to spread the local cultural productions internationally. In order to spread the cultural spirit in a more subtle and comprehensible manner, cultural productions should be combined with topics or phenomena of global concern.

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