

# ***Cross-Cultural Communication and Marketing Strategy of Korean Dramas in Chinese Market -- Taking My Love from the Star and Descendants of the Sun As Examples***

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**Abstract:** Korean dramas have been popular in China for more than 20 years. However, over the past few years, it is found that although domestic dramas are generally dominant in the market in China due to political factors, Korean dramas are still highly competitive. This paper mainly studies the cross-cultural communication and marketing strategies of Korean dramas in the Chinese market, with the purpose of guiding the international communication and marketing techniques of Chinese dramas in future attempts. The paper uses the methods of literary analysis, case analysis, 4P marketing strategy analysis, and data analysis to find out the advantages of a series of Korean dramas for reference through the research and summary of previous papers. The paper concludes that Korean dramas have unique superiority in cross-cultural communication and marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Korean Dramas, Chinese Market, Cross Cultural Communication, Marketing Strategy.

## **1. Introduction**

Most of the current research in related fields of this paper refers to the cultural communication and marketing strategies of Korean dramas, and the paper is a summary and prolongation of the previous studies. *My Love From the Star* broke through tens of millions in the first week of its launch, and within two weeks, it easily received 23 million broadcasts with four episodes, becoming the most popular Korean drama in 2013 [1]. A similar case can be found in 2016. After the first episode of *Descendants of the Sun* was broadcast, it won a score of 9.3 on Douban, and the number of premieres played on IQIYI exceeded 30 million in one day [2]. Therefore, it can be important to find the reasons for the popularity of Korean dramas in China for the improvement of Chinese domestic dramas. Applying literature analysis and case analysis, this paper summarizes various previous papers researching cultural communications and marketing strategies of Korean dramas, and analyzes the reasons for the great success of Korean dramas in the Chinese market in recent years, taking *My Love From the Star* and *Descendants of the Sun* as examples. In addition, this paper also uses 4P marketing strategy analysis and data analysis, trying to find out the advantages of the marketing strategy of Korean dramas compared with Chinese dramas. The significance of this study is to improve the cultural communication methods and the marketing strategy of Chinese dramas and to guide future research on marketing strategies of cultural communication related to dramas.

## 2. Cross-Cultural Communication of Korean Dramas

The cross-cultural communication involved in this paper refers to a process of communication between people of different nationalities, working modes, ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations. This part will discuss the characteristics of Korean dramas in cross-cultural communication from two aspects of superb audio-visual and shooting skills, and narrative integrity, multidimensional and fullness of characters (female images).

### 2.1. Superb Audio-Visual and Shooting Skills

From the perspective of audio-visual techniques of Korean dramas, almost each popular Korean drama has a theme song with a beautiful melody to match the development of the plot and the narrative tone of the drama, with professional musicians who compose the music and create new tracks for it in order to add a different feeling to the artistic conception of the screen [2].

One of the most fashionable interludes of *Descendants of the Sun* released in 2016 is called *Talk Love*. This song creates a relaxed and happy atmosphere for the daily love between the hero and the heroine through a cheerful melody and a brisk whistle interspersed both in the middle and at the end of the song, which enables the audience to recall the scenes of the drama even after their watching for several years. Besides, *My Destiny*, the theme song of *My Love from the Star* has become popular for a time after the broadcast of this drama in 2013. With a deep and mournful melody, the song interprets the profound and tortuous love between the hero and the heroine, which impressed a large number of audience at that time.

From the perspective of shooting techniques of Korean dramas, the pictures of Korean dramas are mainly esthetic and fresh with the adoption of warm colors, making pictures bright, light, warm, and harmonious. Moreover, Korean dramas frequently use medium close-up and close-up technologies when highlighting characters' emotions, and panoramas when stressing beautiful scenes [2].

In *Descendants of the Sun*, the heroine's home is small but fresh and natural. The furnishings at home not only accord with the plot setting but also resonate with the working-class audience. Furthermore, the hospital where the heroine works is also very clean and bright, giving people a comfortable and reassuring feeling, which perfectly conforms to the audience's aesthetics and expectations for the medical service environment of large hospitals. In the third episode, the hero drives the heroine to a nearby city in Urumqi to look for an available router. The views of winding roads along the mountain and exotic buildings in the town are fascinating. Later in this episode, the hero and heroine drive a speedboat and arrive at a beautiful island in the sea with the remains of a warship used in World War II. The clear sea, the pure sand, the uninhabited island, a handsome man and a beautiful woman, the picture is a feast for the eyes.

In addition, *My Love from the Star* also provides the audience with a perfect visual effect. For example, the computer graphics (CG) representing time pause in the drama apply the setting of multiple camera positions which provides rich and full lens expressiveness, thus producing a picture texture like a movie blockbuster [3]. The post-credits scenes and flashbacks also break through the conventional creative techniques of dramas and directly bring the audience into interaction with the characters through the interview with the hero interspersed at the end of each episode, which creates a magical effect.

### 2.2. Narrative Integrity, Multidimensional and Fullness of Characters (Female Images)

For the narrative integrity, multidimensionality and fullness of characters, female images are one of the most vital influencing factors. The gender perspective has enriched the content of communication research and injected new perspectives and methods into communication research.

Cultural researchers once believed that the rise and popularity of soap operas, pop music and romantic novels were the exploitation imposed on women by the capitalist culture industry of patriarchal ideology, which challenged, distorted and belittled women's autonomy [4]. However, the study of female audiences found that various media forms were meaningful to women, from which women could get the pleasure of non-gender bias, and even develop the consciousness of gender independence [4].

In the context of patriarchy and male discourse, there are usually stereotypes in the media: men are commonly strong, aggressive and heroic; while women are passive, weak and dependent [5]. The analysis of romantic novels conducted by American cultural scholar Janice Radway in the 1980s shows that quite a lot of women refuse to accept some important assumptions in patriarchal discourse, and Radway's research indicates that women strongly love male characters who combine traditional masculinity and female characteristics, for example, those men who are gentle and strong [5].

As an alien who fell in Korea 400 years ago, living alone in Seoul with his secrets, the hero has a young and handsome appearance and supernatural power which can stop time. However, he will have a fever or even faint when he comes into contact with the saliva and blood of people on earth. These settings not only give the hero powerful characteristics consistent with traditional views of men but also add women's weakness and dependence on him, which greatly meets the psychological needs of the female audience of *My Love from the Star*. Also, women prefer female characters who control their own lives while maintaining traditional female characteristics [5]. The heroine embodies the ideal self of modern women: she is independent, successful, sincere and kind. However, she grew up in a single-parent family with her mother who is greedy for money, and she easily becomes rude in drunk and unhappy times, which also increases the authenticity of the image of the heroine. Thus, the huge success of *My Love from the Star* in China is not accidental considering the large market of female viewers.

### 3. Marketing Strategy of Korean Dramas

The Marketing Theory of 4Ps is a strategy that combines various factors with the application of promoting products or services on the basis of analysis of product, price, place and promotion. This part will make an analysis of the marketing strategy of Korean dramas in detail through the above four aspects.

#### 3.1. Product: Simultaneous Broadcasting and Content Marketing

In terms of the product, *Descendants of the Sun* have adopted the strategy of simultaneous broadcasting between China and Korea. For a long time, Korean dramas have been produced at a fast pace, with the production method of synchronous screenwriting and shooting. As the National Radio and Television Administration of China issued a restriction order in 2015, which required that overseas dramas must be strictly reviewed before they can be broadcast online, *Descendants of the Sun* has become the first Korean drama to be broadcast simultaneously in China and Korea, abandoning the pattern of "broadcasting while shooting" and applying the traditional "broadcasting after shooting" mode in line with the policy changes [6]. The transformation of the mode has not only well adapted to China's policy changes but greatly stimulated the enthusiasm of Chinese audiences.

Furthermore, plot design has also played an important role in the popularity of Korean dramas in the Chinese market. In the process of handling the relationship between characters, *Descendants of the Sun* refused the previous narrative mode of "men are stronger than women" in Korean dramas and reshaped the love relationship with equal social identity [7]. Besides, there is no "unrequited

love", "abusive relationship", "interference" and other plots that often appeared in previous Korean dramas, but simple and pure love with soldiers and doctors full of social positive energy as the main characters, highlighting the consistent theme of Korean dramas: pure love and truth, goodness and beauty [7]. This relaxed, romantic and novel story with a certain degree of suspense at the end of each episode immensely boosted the audience rating.

### 3.2. Price: Reasonable Pricing Strategy

In terms of the price, Korean dramas have employed a low price strategy in accordance with the local conditions of China. In the process of occupying the whole Asian market, Korean dramas usually use a low price strategy to gain the initiative. After the formation of the monopoly effect, the price will gradually rise higher [8]. As it has been proved that when the production cost of dramas increases, the final cost borne by consumers of corresponding products is inversely proportional to the size of consumer groups, the large market scale of China is a decisive factor in Korean dramas' adoption of low price strategy. In 2008, the shooting cost of each episode of a higher-quality Korean drama was approximately 1 million RMB, and the price it sold to China was about 80,000 RMB, enabling Korean dramas to reach a strong price advantage when entering the Chinese market [8]. This "taste-before-purchase" strategy of Korean dramas can also lead to a huge rise in price once the audience rating peak occurs, which ensures the profit of the producer. Besides, in addition to the expansion of the geographical scope and expense population, Korean dramas realize the expansion of consumer groups through content diversification and multiple transmissions of the same media [9].

Moreover, as the cost of upstream channels is higher than that of downstream channels in the general circulation channel system, producers of Korean dramas are used to restricting circulation channels to earn profits. *Descendants of the Sun* was distributed exclusively in IQIYI, with one episode being updated every Wednesday and Thursday. This way of exclusive broadcasting not only protected the copyright of the drama, but greatly increased the stream of IQIYI, attracted more members, improved its capital income, and made the promotion of the platform more smooth [6]. At the same time, the producer of *Descendants of the Sun* also got an opportunity to make huge profits.

In addition, Korean drama producers are experts in creating content conforming to the changing trend of the times. Dramas are commodities that contain ideas, values and stories, and only in line with the changing trend of the times can they attract audiences [9]. Nowadays, Korean dramas related to family affection are particularly popular in societies with a soaring divorce rate, and dramas about crime also attract a lot of public attention present days when cases have been exposed more and more frequently, which brings more potential audiences for the spread of Korean dramas. Furthermore, the popularity of actors is one of the key elements in raising prices. The actors, content, and materials of dramas are all important factors that affect the price [9]. In recent years, a tremendous number of Korean dramas have been exported, and some Korean actors have gained great popularity in Southeast Asia, including Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, and China. In order to actively explore overseas markets and raise export prices, Korean dramas always choose famous actors with plenty of fans over the world.

### 3.3. Place: New Media Marketing, Cross-Platform and Multi-Circle Marketing

In terms of the place, with the continuous improvement of the Internet, users are constantly increasing and proficient in the use of Internet tools, making the marketing of new media develop rapidly. In recent years, the rise of major social networking sites such as WeChat, MicroBlog and Zhihu, has made important contributions to the wide spread of Korean dramas. The Korean drama

*My Love from the Star* launched in December 2013, has reached the highest viewing rate of 68.9% on the Korean Internet, with over 1.6 billion hits on Chinese websites [10]. These data illustrate the significance of new media in the online marketing of Korean dramas. Moreover, the marketing team of *Descendants of the Sun* is experienced in creating topics, which leads to a high volume of conversations on popular social networking sites such as MicroBlog and Wechat. After the first episode was broadcast, the drama not only achieved the highest audience rating in Korea of the premiere of the wireless mini-series in the past two years but also received a 9.3 starting score of Douban in China, with its first episode of the exclusive platform, IQIYI, exceeding 30 million views in less than 24 hours [6].

Based on the use of new media, Korean dramas also give full play to the role of cross-platform promotion and multi-circle marketing, using Douban, MicroBlog, and other social platforms. Apart from the exclusive broadcasting on IQIYI, the producer of *Descendants of the Sun* applied several techniques including the recommendation of key positions, topic preheating on SNS, and early watching on specific media, which first achieved rapid popularity, and later occupied a dominant position in WeChat Moments after the release of the drama [6]. Also, the audience can discuss through multiple interactive forms like bullet screens and bubble communities: while watching the series, advertising with links of the same products related to drama will appear on the screen, directly importing the audience flow to IQIYI Mall, the official e-commerce platform of IQIYI [6]. In the same time, with more than 600 million users and 100 million subscribers, IQIYI has also made great contributions to the spread of *Descendants of the Sun*.

### 3.4. Promotion: Public Praise and Event Marketing

In terms of promotion, Korean dramas attach great importance to public praise marketing, and as a cultural product, it often becomes a part of people's after-dinner conversation, driving the consumption and viewing rates of Korean dramas. Screenwriter Kim Eun-sook has created a positive initial reputation for *Descendants of the Sun*, whose nine works in the past decade became classics both at home and abroad with various entertainment awards in Korea, including *Lovers in Paris*, *A Gentleman's Dignity*, and *The Secret Garden* [10]. Thus, it is obvious that when consumers are making choices among the same types of Korean dramas, they will give priority to works with a better reputation, such as a perfect screenwriter.

In addition, event marketing is another common strategy in the promotion of Korean dramas, using different stages of gimmicks to attract public attention. Even in the long process of producing a complete drama, event marketing can turn the waiting period into a fun experience. Generally, a press conference will be held before the shooting starts, which discloses the main cast in the drama and releases theme songs to draw media attention, and then during the release of Korean dramas, the protagonists usually use social tools to show their daily lives, attracting the attention of the audience while indirectly promoting the new drama [10]. Finally, as Korean variety shows are popular among audiences from many countries for their innovation and novelty, the active participation of the crew in variety shows can also achieve the double effect of reducing publicity costs and improving the affinity of the main actors [10]. Hence, holding press conferences, creating hot spots and taking part in a variety shows can effectively contribute to the promotion of the new drama.

## 4. Conclusion

Using the method of literature analysis and case analysis, the paper integrated several papers in the field of cultural communication and marketing strategies of Korean dramas, and explored the reasons behind the popularity of Korean dramas in the Chinese market over the last decade with



examples of *My Love from the Star* and *Descendants of the Sun*. Furthermore, 4P marketing strategy analysis and data analysis were applied in this paper to learn the strong points of marketing strategies of Korean dramas over Chinese dramas. The main conclusion of this paper is that Korean dramas have specific advantages in cross-cultural communication and marketing strategies. There is still room for improvement in the research of cross-cultural communication. Future research can also focus on the impact of the similarities and differences between Korean and Chinese cultures on the export of Korean dramas to China.

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