Study on the International Communication Strategy of Chinese Film and Television

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ABSTRACT

China has undoubtedly risen as a world power in recent decades, mainly by its constantly increasing economic strength and diplomatic importance worldwide. However, in terms of soft power, China has been lagging. Among all types of soft power apparatuses, the film and television (TV) industry in China is doing the worst on the world stage. In this paper, comprehensive research will be conducted around the problematic exportation of China's film and television works. Furthermore, there will be a strategic study of suitable communication tactics that would help the film and TV industry in China to better globalize its figure and impact, with careful reviews of excellent pre-existing examples from South Korea and Japan. After the research, researchers found that Chinese film and television industry is at a disadvantage compared to Japan and South Korea in terms of foreign exports due to the unique policies set by the Chinese government. To solve this problem, the industry needs to address the issues of limited distribution channels and lack of understanding of marketing localization to promote the spread of Chinese film and TV culture overseas.

Keywords: Chinese film and television, international communication, strategy study.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of soft power was first developed by Joseph Nye, which he summarized as a country's ability to attract others through ideas, values and ideologies. He also defined sources of soft power as "cultural and ideological attraction as well as the rules and institutions of international regimes" [1]. Political, cultural, and educational power, as well as diplomatic influence, constitute soft power. The quality of individuals working in the cultural industry, the media power, television, movies, books, newspapers, journals, and their effect on the world stage are all examples of cultural soft power [2]. According to Street, popular culture, particularly films and television series, may be utilized as a strong political instrument because of its capacity to describe sentiments that help people construct their identities, including political thinking and action [3]. The development of Chinese films and TV series for export can be roughly divided into three stages. Prior to the 1980s, mainland China hardly exported any films or television series abroad; in contrast, Hong Kong films and TV series of the same period were among the most important

exporters in the international market. From the 1980s to the 2000s, mainland Chinese films began to borrow content and filming methods from Hong Kong films. The decade from 1986 to 1996 was the golden age of the export of Chinese films and television series to foreign countries. The most famous example is films led by Zhang Yimou, like the "Red Sorghum", which became famous overseas and made the West aware of China's cultural soft power. After the 21st century, mainland China's central television recording channel has become an extremely important window for China's cultural exports, providing an authoritative platform for the world to understand Chinese cultures. The breadth and depth of distribution of Chinese films and television shows in the international market is a key indicator measuring China's soft power. Although China's film and television industry is now relatively mature, its recognition and acceptance in Western countries is still not high. This article aims to conduct surveys to find out the underlying reasons and provide relevant strategies for improvement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been numerous literature compositions working on all aspects of China's will to spread its film and TV culture in order to generate a worldwide effect. These literature works are generally divided into a few distinct groups. The first group of journals focus on the path of transmission, methodology, and outcome. In "The 'new' path of International communication of Chinese film and television in the context of new media", the article talks about the way in which Chinese films get propagated by the form of "new media", which includes video-clip platforms like TikTok [4]. In "Translation and International Dissemination of Domestic Film and Television Works", the journal introduces in detail the effort that state-led organizations have devoted to the translation of Chinese film and TV works [5]. It also demonstrates China's accomplishments in establishing cooperative relationships with other countries [5]. As Chen elaborated on her research, the dissemination of Chinese film and TV products have also grown to play an increasingly pillar role in supporting the spread of Chinese culture and value [6]. The second group includes research work that concentrates on the sources of Chinese soft power. Alan Hunter, in his journal, "Soft Power: China on the global stage", initiated a question on where soft power comes from [7]. There are two alternative explanations provided: a product consciously generated by the Chinese government or a natural outcome of the artistic activities taking place in China. As for the third group of literature, it mainly pays attention to the problem during the exporting process. In Baker's discussion of "The Great Wall", he pointed out that the huge cooperative commercial production only made a "modest profit" worldwide while failing to attract the world to Chinese culture in an effective way [8].

Apart from literature works that concentrate on the circumstance of China's soft power, there are plenty of sources evaluating the already successful Korean Wave and Japanese "Animation, Comics, and Games" (ACG) as the most representative cultural exportations of the two strong states in East Asia. For the soft power products of Korea, previous works mainly talk about the reason for formation, the purpose of diplomacy, and the global impact. Jang and Paik provide a detailed analysis of the Korean Wave as a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy [9]. The journal includes detailed content on all three aspects mentioned earlier, while expanding on the specific effects that Korean pop culture poses on the "political position and diplomatic leverage" of South Korea. For Japanese ACG, Rich used his research to demonstrate that fandom to Japanese ACG culture could have a transformational impact on US young adults in terms of social and national identities, partly due to the popular circulation of Japanese pop culture [10].

Nevertheless, existing literature pieces have not been able to sufficiently address a series of issues regarding the global transmission of Chinese films and TV series. For instance, there is an apparent absence of the film rating system within China's film industry [11]. Not only do imported movies receive no proper rating or label from the relevant government agency in China, but also do domestic productions. Quality discussions are also in a shortage around the overflowing behavior of undermining copyright both inside and outside the industry [12]. Furthermore, the exported Chinese film and TV works have only targeted a limited class of audience, which predominantly consists of Chinese people living overseas and an audience with a Chinese origin across generations [13]. Lastly, there is a lack of meaningful implications drawn from the special political atmosphere of China [14].

3. METHODOLOGY

The design of the study was informed by previous research into China's export of films and television series and its soft power [15]. Most of these studies have used quantitative research methods to collect and analyze large amounts of data. No existing research could be found to examine the state of contemporary Chinese film and TV series exports. Those investigations that explore the profile of Chinese film and television output, such as Chen's study of the main means of cultural exports in China, place the investigation on the general public [6]. Despite the broad scope of her investigation, her findings remain relatively outdated and inadequate today due to time constraints and resource limitations. Following previous research into the export of China's film and TV shows, this research also takes a quantitative stance. This method was preferred because it is able to provide a large amount of analytical data for our findings. Therefore, we decided to conduct surveys and questionnaires in this research to gain an updated understanding of China's cultural exports.

The target population of this survey is mainly college students aged 20 to 30 years old, mainly because they are the recipients of today's cultural exports from different countries, and they have newer views and opinions on the research topic than the underage or older generation. The questionnaire contains 12 questions, including single and multiple-choice questions, which ask respondents about the average number of hours they watch Chinese films and TV shows per week, their favorite genres of Chinese films and TV shows, whether they are satisfied with modern Chinese films and TV shows and the reasons for this, and their evaluation of the current status of the distribution of Chinese films and TV shows abroad (especially in Western countries). The total sample size of this questionnaire is 100, and the respondents are college students from mainland China, of which the majority (88%) is undergraduates and the majority (73%) is women. The survey was conducted in the form of an electronic questionnaire to investigate the viewing and

evaluation of Chinese university students on Chinese films and TV productions, as well as their evaluation of the effectiveness of Chinese films and TV productions in international dissemination. Before completing the online survey, participants were given a consent form and informed of the reason for the survey and the use of the data. Participants completed the questionnaire anonymously throughout, in order to protect their privacy and make them feel more comfortable to express their opinions.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. How satisfied are the respondents with Chinese films and TV series as a whole?
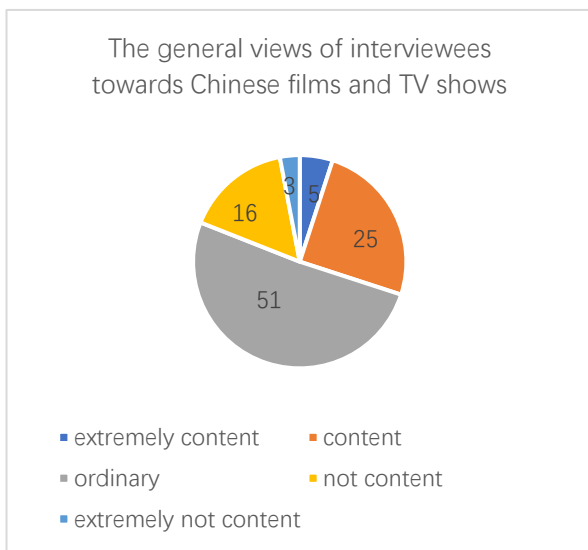

Figure 1. The general views of interviewees towards Chinese films and TV shows

As shown in figure1, the total number of people who are very satisfied (5%) and satisfied (25%) with current Chinese films and TV productions is about 30% of the total, more than half of the subjects rate current Chinese films and TV productions as average (51%), and nearly one-fifth of the subjects are dissatisfied (16%) or very dissatisfied (3%) with current Chinese films and TV productions.

Among those who expressed dissatisfaction with Chinese films and television series, 77.14% believed that these productions are overly commercial and the film industry is impetuous. And 65.71% of the participants think that the theme of Chinese films and TV works is empty and single, and they have obvious educational and propaganda overtones. 60% of the subjects thought the actors' acting skills were poor; 52.86% of the participants attribute the reason to the uninteresting story narration style. The rest of the participants considered that the low level of staff involved in the production of the film and TV productions was the reason for their dissatisfaction with the current productions.

Simultaneously, of the 30 participants who expressed satisfaction with Chinese films and TV productions, 76.7% thought the storytelling of Chinese films and TV productions was attractive, 70% thought they reflected social reality and had profound themes, and while only a small number thought the actors or directors in the films and TV productions were of a high standard.

Overall, the results of the questionnaire show that the Chinese university students are still dissatisfied with the current Chinese films and TV productions and they attribute most of their dissatisfaction to the fact that Chinese TV dramas are too commercially oriented. This is also a reflection of a common problem of the Chinese film and TV industry, which is that Chinese films and TV shows are more a product of commercialization than creativity.

4.2. How effective is the international dissemination of Chinese film and television?

Figure 2. Interviewees' attitudes about the global spread of Chinese films and TVs

From Figure 2, we can see that only a small number of subjects consider Chinese films and TV shows "very successful" (2%) or "successful" (8%) in international communication; the majority of subjects are neutral (61%); a small number of subjects consider Chinese films and TV shows "unsuccessful" (24%) or "very unsuccessful" (5%) in international communication. Overall, the Chinese college student group's evaluation of the influence of international dissemination of Chinese film and TV works is not optimistic.

Of all the participants, 90 considered the current international dissemination of Chinese films and TV works "very unsuccessful", "unsuccessful" or "average", while only 10 considered the current international dissemination of Chinese films and TV works "very successful" or "successful" in general. Among these 10

subjects, 6 of them believed Chinese films and TV works succeeded to reflect Chinese contemporary and traditional cultures well. Another three attributed the reasons to the actors and directors being highly skilled or having personal charisma. The rest of the participants thought that the content and manner of narration of Chinese films and dramas were wonderful and oriental in character.

In addition, among the 90 subjects who thought that the export of Chinese films and TV works was "very unsuccessful", "unsuccessful" or "average", most of them thought their themes are too homogeneous and have an obvious educational or propaganda overtone (58.89%); some of them believed that the storytelling is not appealing and they do not reflect Chinese contemporary and traditional culture well enough to interest Westerners (54.44%) and others blame the lack of success in exporting Chinese films and TV dramas on poor actors or directors or other international political factors.

Such findings have also led us to re-examine the content of Chinese film and television dramas. Due to the Chinese State Administration of Radio's strict censorship of the topics and contents of Chinese films and TV dramas, many creative topics and contents cannot be broadcast. As a result, the audience can only see a thousand educational or propaganda films and TV shows, such as the movie "War Wolf", which promotes patriotism.

4.3. How should Chinese films and TV series improve their spreading power and influence?
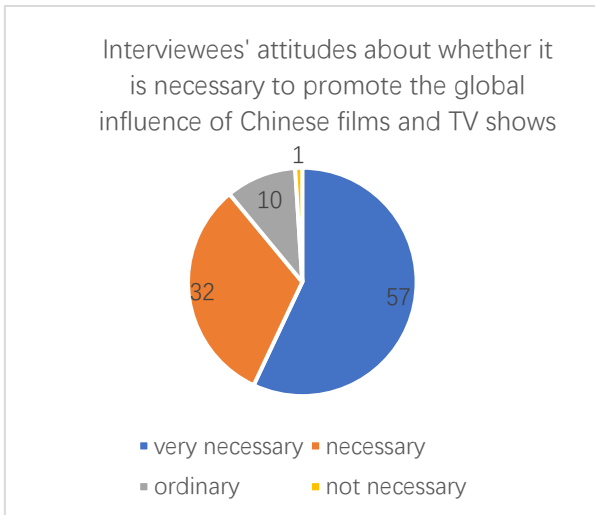
Figure 3. Interviewees' attitudes about whether it is necessary to promote the global influence of Chinese films and TV shows

As shown in figure3, the vast majority of subjects believe that it is very necessary (57%) or necessary (32%) to enhance the influence of Chinese film and television in international communication, while only 11% of subjects

are neutral (10%) or negative (1%). Among their responses to the question "how to promote the influence of Chinese films and TV works in international communication", "improve the diversity of the themes of the works" scored 5.41, ranking first; "change the narrative style to avoid too much educational/propaganda overtones" (4.89), "reflecting the real Chinese 'modern and contemporary' culture to a greater extent" (3.81), "reflecting the real Chinese 'traditional' culture to a greater extent" (3.81), and "reflecting the real Chinese 'traditional' culture to a greater extent" (2.95) ranked 2-4 respectively; the bottom four were "improve the overall quality of actors" (2.89), "improve the overall quality of directors (2.89), "improve the overall quality of actors" (1.92), "improve the overall quality of directors" (1.51) and "shorten the duration of TV dramas" (0.29).

This shows that, in the minds of Chinese university student groups, improving the thematic diversity of Chinese film and television works, changing their narratives, and avoiding too many educational or propaganda overtones are the most crucial factors for improving the international export of Chinese film and television.

Given the progress made by the Chinese film and television industry so far and the current global trend for cultural communication, the relevant actors in China would have to work on three major fields in order to improve the overall performance of disseminating film and television productions. Firstly, Chinese films and TV products need to work on improving their disseminating channels to the global market. Instead of merely sending a relatively tiny number of movies to cinema overseas [13]. Producers and agencies in China should increase cooperative productions or broadcasting with popular streaming providers in western countries, especially Netflix. Taking Korean TV series as an example, by deeply collaborating with Netflix and streaming on Amazon Prime at the same time, Korean pop culture has attracted a large pool of rising audiences in India [16]. Indian audiences not only love the romantic plots, but also the exotic cuisine and outfit fashion. The Korean Wave, with the Korean lifestyle, has successfully penetrated the Indian market with the help of Netflix [16]. Secondly, Chinese counterparts will have to improve their marketing techniques. Chinese content distributors have been lacking the ability to hit the audience in other countries, even in East Asia [14]. It's mainly due to the fact there is a significant number of Chinese audiences living across the globe. Therefore, publishers in China only work to reach this particular group of audiences in foreign countries since this is the easiest way to ostensibly complete the target of broadcasting globally. Under this condition, the communication outwards neglects the importance of localization, resulting in a scenario that the films which are exported become the joy of a minority [14]. Thirdly, Chinese film and television works are in great need of content that is sharper and

more characteristic on a national level. Korean televisions have a clear orientation – romance. They have exploited this feature and made it a phenomena label of Korea's popular civil culture, getting recognized and endorsed by global viewers [17]. China, by contrast, is either poorly mimicking the romance of Korean drama or outputting historical dramas that are exquisitely made but too difficult for a foreign audience to cognize because of the episode length and high cultural barrier [13]. The filming team has to take foreign markets into account at the beginning of plot designing, in order to receive endorsement from the audience on certain commonalities of pop culture while drawing foreigners to become interested in the featured elements of Chinese traditions. However, all these ideal improvements can only be realized under a looser environment for artistic expressions and an effective film rating system that places different age groups into corresponding audience categories. Only in this way could the "corners" of Chinese film and TV works avoid the fate of being rounded by political pressure.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper completes the goal of researching communication efficacy and the influential power of Chinese film and TV works in western countries. The research has led to the concluding statement that Chinese artistic productions are in a disadvantageous position compared to those from Korea and Japan in the competitive global market of soft power. The industry is constrained in both content choice and exporting channels due to unique political obstacles established by the Chinese government. In order to promote the circulation of Chinese films and TV series worldwide, practitioners in the industry are required to solve problems of limited disseminating channels, ignorance of marketing localization, and finally the weak, ineffective content for spreading culture.

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