

Counter Flow of Cross-country Audiovisual Products and Cross-border Ethnic Identity in the China-Myanmar Border Region

Based on a Disseminating Anthropological Study of Hula Street in Zhefang Town, Mangshi City*

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Abstract—The transmission of audiovisual products on the border between China and Myanmar has shown a kind of back-propagation. This back-propagation reflects the lack of supply of language programs in ethnic minorities in China and also reflects the continuous enhancement of cross-border ethnic identity such as Jingpo.

Keywords—audiovisual products; back-propagation; cross-border ethnic identity

I. INTRODUCTION

In the international communication, the spread of media products reflects a country's cultural production capacity and cultural sovereignty. With the acceleration of globalization and the process of regionalization, leaders of various countries realized that the production and dissemination of media products have an important impact on a country's politics and culture, and actively change the order of information production in the world today. However, numerous studies, such as Noam (1993), Waterman (2005), Wildman & Siwek (1998), and Li Wei (2014), show that the production and dissemination of cultural products in the world today still show a kind of one-way spread, "information flowing from developed countries to developing countries is at least 100 times more than it is in the reverse flow" (1984), that is, information flows from countries with a high degree of economic development to those with a low level of economic development.

In the Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture of Dehong, Yunnan Province on the Sino-Burmese border, the author discovered in the field investigation that there are a large number of audio-visual products from overseas, mainly in Myanmar, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries. As a

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media product, the audiovisual products in the China-Burma border have also shown a one-way transmission. However, this direction of communication is contrary to the flow of media products in international communication, forming a kind of reverse propagation: that is, a large number of audiovisual products from Myanmar, Thailand and other countries spread to the China-Burma border. Why does the reverse propagation of audiovisual products form on the China-Burma border? What are the effects of audiovisual products as media products bearing certain values and ideologies on the ethnic identity of local nationalities, especially those of transnational minorities? This article attempts to answer these questions by conducting anthropological surveys in the Zhefang Town of Mangshi City, Dehong Prefecture on the China-Burma border.

II. COUNTER FLOW OF AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS IN HULA MARKET

Located in the western part of Mangshi, the capital city of Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Zhefang Town is 45 kilometers away from the urban area and has an area of 437 square kilometers. The population of Hula is 50,400 (2006), of which Ethnic minorities such as Dai, Jingpo and De'ang accounted for 80% of the total. There are 13 administrative villages including the Jiedao, Hula, Humen, Hunong, Nongxi, Gongling, and Bangda. Hula is located next to the main line of traffic from Mangshi to Ruili so the transportation is very convenient. People go to the market once every five days, attracting villagers including other villages such as Xishan Township, and becoming a relatively large-scale bazaar.

There are a lot of people in Hula bazaar and there are many domestic and foreign products on the market, ranging from vegetables, fruits, Jingpo snacks, and Dai snacks to national costumes, handicrafts and even cosmetics, medicines, and audio-visual products in Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Thailand. There are five booths selling audiovisual products in the entire market. Three of the booths belong to Chinese and the other two are Burmese, while their

audiovisual products are also varied. The author finds that the audiovisual products in the China-Myanmar border region exhibit backward propagation characteristics in terms of content, direction, and audience when sells the audiovisual products with the owners as well as the communication with them.

In terms of the content, the audiovisual products on Hula bazaar can be roughly divided into Jingpo and Dai ethnic songs and dances, Burmese pop songs, Burmese film and television dramas, Thai TV dramas, Christian music, Kachin regional videos, and domestic hit play drama and so on. Among these categories, ethnic songs and dances sell best. For example, the audiovisual products at the Munao dancing Festival have versions in different regions and different years. For example, the audiovisual products of Dehong International Munao dancing Festival have versions from 2012 to 2015 while the year of 2012 has the largest scale. In addition to the audiovisual products of Munao dancing Festival, there are also video products for the beauty contest, one of the activities of the Munao dancing Festival, which has attracted many consumers to purchase. In terms of regions, there are products of Longchuan International Munao dancing Festival in 2006, 2013 and 2015, Ruili in 2006, Yingjiang in 2009 and Xishan Township as well as various years and regions in Myitkyina, Myanmar. The audiovisual products of Munao dancing Festival sell best. According to an audio-visual booth owner, he can sell 40 to 50 audio-visual products of the Munao dancing Festival a time. According to the author's observation and statistics of the bazaar on July 27 at Hula Street, during the period between 9 and 11 o'clock, the video products of the Munao dancing Festival were sold 32 pieces, of which 19 pieces of video products were the 2012 Dehong International Munao dancing Festival. Ethnic songs and dances are mainly albums including Jingpo famous singers or bands, such as Dashan password, Liu Yongjiang, Tang Murui, and Yue Muguo. The Dai singers sing mainly new Dai songs and folk songs, and they recommend some singers: Zai Hanliang, Zaixiang Zhuangfa, Lang Hannong, Zaixiang Zhuangmao, Saichang, Lang Yinghuan, and many other Art Performance CD of Burmese artists in Dehong State.

There are also many popular Burmese and Thai songs and TV dramas in the China-Myanmar border areas, especially at the stalls where the two bosses are Burmese. This kind of audiovisual products are basically produced directly in Burma and Thailand, which is called "little disc" of Burma and Thailand by local people. In Hula bazaar, you can see the albums of Kachin Goddess Sengra, Kachin singer Lisa, Burmese popular singers Saisai, PhyuPhyuKyawThein, Rebecca Win and others. TV dramas such as *My Hometown*, *Sign of Love*, *Pan Nu Thway*, *Hlyo-hwat-thaw-hni*, *Return to Burma*, *True Love*, etc. and Thai TV dramas such as *Holy swan*, *KaewLomPetch*, *PlerngTorrangong*, *Princess Rosebud* and *Kiss me*, etc., are involved Thai palace dramas and modern urban romance dramas. Foreign pop songs and television dramas are popular on the China-Burma border. Through interviews and observations, the author finds such video products can be sold for more than 30 pieces at a stall at the market each time, and the sales volume of two stalls in Myanmar will be even higher.

In addition to Burmese and Thai popular songs and film and television dramas, there are some video products that reflect the conditions in the Kachin region at Hula bazaar. While the contents were affected by the events of the previous year, such as videos of Kachin Christmas and the military parade of Kachin Independence Army. Due to the battle between the Burmese government and the Kachin Army in 2011, there are many videos of live war scenes, Kachin people fled homes, and lived in difficult refugee camps on the market. These videos, made the Chinese Jingpo people know current situation in Kachin, Myanmar and enabled the Jingpo people in China to see the true living conditions of the foreign compatriots more vividly. In addition, there are some anti-drug videos announced by Kachin, such as "TsawMyitHpang Ai Shara", "Nwai Pan PuNgaDingsa" and others.

The domestic hits are mainly TV dramas and some popular cartoons on TV stations such as Hunan Satellite TV and Jiangsu Satellite TV. Well, during the investigation, the drama *The Journey of Flower* premieres on Hunan Satellite TV, so the CD is produced and sold on the market almost simultaneously. Other popular dramas such as *Destined to Love You* and *The Double Life of Veronique* are mainly bought by young people and teenagers; Animated cartoons such as *Boonie Bears*, *Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf* and *Ultraman* can be sold for more than 10 copies each time during summer holiday. There is a certain market for the hit TV dramas in Hula bazaar shows that the cultural consumption of the cross-border ethnic groups on the China-Burma border has the same diversity characteristics as other regions in the country, but at the same time, we should see that the Burmese and Thai audiovisual products are rich in types and sell good in the China-Myanmar border region, so the cultural products consumption of China's cross-border ethnic groups are more likely to be affected by the two countries.

From the perspective of audiences, the people who purchase overseas audio-visual products are mainly the cross-border peoples living in Dehong Prefecture, such as Jingpo and Dai. Due to language and culture, there are not many Burmese consumers who purchase hot broadcasts in China. Audio-visual product stall owner XS said: "Burmese people rarely buy domestic CD-ROMs because of language barriers, at most Jackie Chan's, they can look at the wonderful moves." In terms of flow, the audio products in Hula bazaar basically come from Myanmar. The protection of intellectual property rights in Myanmar is not strict so Jingpo, Qiang and other ethnic songs and dances, Burmese pop songs, Burmese film and television dramas, Thai television dramas, Christian music, and Kachin situation video basically come from Burma. Even the domestic hit dramas are also pirated in Myanmar and then spread to the border areas of China.

III. THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE REVERSE PROPAGATION OF AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTS IN CHINA-BURMA BORDER AREA

The main reason for the reverse propagation of audiovisual products in the border areas of China and Myanmar is related to the collective memory of the cross-border ethnic groups in the region. In the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, except for Lianghe County, all other cities and counties are located on the China-Burma border. The territory

is home to ethnic groups such as Dai, Jingpo, Achang, Lisu, and De'ang. As far as the Jingpo ethnic group is concerned, the Jingpo nationality in China and Kachin people in Myanmar have common national cultural origins. Historically, they belonged to the same ethnic group. Although they were divided into different countries by border lines, they had common collective memories in historical occasions and real communication. The common collective memory continues in kinship, language, cultural traditions and religious beliefs, and it becomes the internal basis and driving force behind the reverse propagation of cultural products such as audio-visual products in the region.

The Jingpo ethnic group is accustomed to intermarrying with Kachin people of the same origin. Many families of Jingpo ethnic group have relatives in Burma. For the Jingpo ethnic group, the national border is just a geographical concept, while the Kachin people are compatriots who are connected with their own blood. Because of the same language, there are nearly half of the cross-border marriages between Chinese and Burmese villages in Yingpan Village, Xishan Township, and the villagers are highly receptive to cross-border marriages. They said: "The Burmese women are easy to marry, they work hard, honor the elderly, help the elderly to take a bath and communicate easily." The most typical cultural tradition in Jingpo is Munao's dancing. The "line map" of this large-scale folk activity vividly reflects the "Historical Memory" of the Jingpo people moving from the Tibetan plateau to the south along the Irrawaddy River. In a cohesive manner, it continuously states to the participants the history and trajectory of the nation" (Jiang Dong, 2012). The long journey of migration and the hardships of migrating left a deep memory in the life of the Jingpo people. This memory was written on the Munao Showroom, lingered in the mouth of Zhaiwa and flowed in the ethnic dance. Although Jingpo and Kachin are now in different political structures and political environments, the homologous nationalities on both sides of the national border have a common collective memory. It is a strong link to maintain common national emotions, and become a motivation for large number of cultural products such as audio-visual products spreading from Myanmar to the border areas of our country.

Secondly, the reverse propagation of audiovisual products in the border areas is related to the lack of supply of the cultural programs of Jingpo language in China, which cannot meet the growing cultural needs of the Jingpo people. Take the movie as an example, Since the founding of the People's Republic, there have only been four films reflecting the Jingpo ethnic group: "Skirmishes on the border", "Jingpo Girl", "Echo", and "Huang huo." The first two were shot in the 1950s and 1960s, and the other two films were shot in the 1980s. They are unable to objectively reflect the living conditions of the contemporary Jingpo ethnic group and they cannot meet their spiritual life needs. Take another example of TV shows, Dehong TV Station has a folk-language channel and a national language and television translation center. The program is mainly based on news and CCTV dramas and rarely reflects the spiritual outlook of the contemporary Jingpo people, and the folk-language channel isn't covered in the villages. In Yingpan village, Xishan Township, villagers

receive TV programs through Extending Radio and TV Broadcasting Coverage to Every Village Project and the opening of the national language channel requires extra money, so almost no one applies for the service in the village. In contrast, the film and television programs shot by Kachin from Burma are even more advancing with the times. The works are rich in content and close to life, and truly reflect the living conditions of the Jingpo people living in Burma as well as the many real problems that occurred in the overseas Jingpo community, making the Jingpo people living in China very intimidated.

IV. THE REVERSE PROPAGATION OF AUDIO AND VISUAL PRODUCTS STRENGTHENS CROSS-BORDER ETHNIC IDENTITY

Audiovisual products have objectively strengthened the ethnic identity of cross-border ethnic groups from the Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar to the border areas of China. Audiovisual products, like all media products, have the function of cultural inheritance. In Hula bazaar, products about Munao dancing festival account most and rich in contents. They have audiovisual products about the International Munao dancing festival held Dehong Jingpo in 1998 to 2015, Longchuan international Munao dancing festival the dancing Festival in Myitungya, Myanmar, dancing Festival held in Mang City and in Xishan Township. In the process of communication, the media will participate in collective memory by highlighting a series of strong cultural symbols. In 2012, Dehong Jingpo International Munao dancing Festival was held first, and the scene was grand and once applied for Guinness Records. In the related audio-visual products, we can see these strong cultural symbols, such as the "line map" that depicts the hard migration of the Jingpo ethnic group, Jingpo's national costumes—the women's blouse is embellished with silver vesicles, and they are dressed in red and black barrel skirts, with leggings and men wearing Jingpo long knives. The mountain shape on the top of the Munao Showroom symbolizes the birthplace of the Jingpo ancestors, Lambang in Mudu Province. According to the legend, this place is a perennial snow-covered plateau. Due to the bad natural environment, the Jingpo ethnic groups continued to move south to today's settlements. The swirling patterns, wave patterns, and spiral patterns on the Munao Showroom tell the hardships of migration. Through these symbols with a strong cultural connotation, the Jingpo Munao dancing festival actually reviewed their history, myths and legends. The migration experience is the source of the collective memory of the Jingpo people and this collective memory makes them aware of their difference from other ethnic groups, and thus they gain a sense of identity of the self-ethnic group.

On the other hand, ethnic individuals will strengthen their ethnic identity by participating in collective ceremonies. Through the creation of an "on-the-spot" atmosphere, Munao audiovisual products reinforce collective memory and allow individuals to maintain their ethnic emotional and psychological identity. The dance steps of Munao festival are simple and easy to master, so that everyone can participate in this ritual activity and strongly feel the power from the group and the individual's presence in the group. Even if they did not participate in a specific festival, through the audiovisual

products, individuals would feel like they were on the scene. In Hula bazaar, audio-visual products booth owners often play CD about the festival, so people often stop and watch, and even wave their bodies following the rhythm. It is the unique charm of this cultural symbol that attracts people to participate in festivals. It gives people a thorough baptism of mind and body, and strengthens the national identity.

Audiovisual products strengthened ethnic identity by participating in the construction of ethnic identity. This is also reflected in the sympathy and help of compatriots when Jingpo learned about the difficult survival of Kachin homologous through overseas audiovisual products. Since 2011, Burma's government forces have waged war with the Kachin Independence Army. Many people in Kachin become refugees. The audio-visual products that reflect the living conditions of overseas compatriots have infuriated the Jingpo people. In 2013, the government of the Burmese army and the Kachin Independence Army fought tightly. At that time, many Jingpo came to Nabang Town, Yingjiang County, Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province. They demanded that the two sides stop the fire in Myanmar and prepared to send 130 teams to support the Kachin people in Burma (Shi Lang, 2013), which fully reflects that the national identity of Jingpo ethnic groups on two side is increasingly strengthened.

V. CONCLUSION

The audiovisual products on the China-Burma border areas didn't flow from China where the economic and social development level is comparatively advanced to Burma, instead, it presents a backward communication, that is, they flow from Myanmar, which is relatively backward in terms of economic and social development, to relatively developed China. This kind of reverse propagation reflects the lack of supply of language programs in ethnic minorities in China and that the continuous enhancement of cross-border ethnic identity such as Jingpo. Through continuous enhancement of collective memory, cultural products have also strengthened the ethnic identity of cross-border people.

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