

The Influence of K-Drama among University Students: A Case Study from City University of Macau

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Abstract: The influence of Korean entertainment, including Korean dramas, Korean music, and Korean fashion, is growing worldwide, including in mainland China and Macao. This study aims to explore the popularity of Korean dramas among college students at City University of Macau and the reasons behind them. The study was conducted using an online quantitative survey with 57 participants, and descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The results anticipate that the frequency of Korean drama consumption among college students at City University of Macau is relatively low, but there is also a small group of students who are highly enthusiastic about watching Korean dramas. To understand the reasons for this, interviews were conducted with Macao college students who watch Korean dramas and those who do not. The study identified four main anticipated factors influencing their decision to watch or not watch Korean dramas: cultural curiosity, drama attractiveness, cultural similarity, and personal preferences. These four main factors affect whether Macao college students watch or not watch Korean dramas, which also has far-reaching significance for further exploring Macao's foreign cultural industry and helping Macao promote cross-cultural exchanges.

Keywords: K-Drama, Macau University Students, Korean Culture, Macau, Korean

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, intercultural communication plays a vital role in fostering understanding and collaboration among individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. The exchange of information and ideas between cultures is an essential aspect of intercultural communication, emphasizing the recognition and respect for cultural differences [1]. The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, represents the widespread popularity and influence of Korean popular culture beyond the borders of South Korea. This cultural phenomenon encompasses various forms, including K-pop, Korean films, fashion, beauty, and most notably, Korean dramas. Korean dramas have gained certain traction in Macau, captivating audiences with their captivating storylines, unique cultural elements, and high production quality. According to Kim and Ryoo, the rise of "Hallyu" (the Korean Wave) in Asia can be attributed to their relatability without the racial or ethnic stigmatization often found in Western cultural products [2]. Despite the widespread popularity of Korean cultural products in the Asia-Pacific region, there is a research gap regarding the extent of their popularity in the Macau region. Studying Macau college students' love for Korean dramas is beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it promotes mutual understanding and cultural exchange between Macau and South Korea. Secondly,

it provides insights into local youth culture and entertainment consumption trends, guiding the development of Macau's cultural industry, marketing strategies, and cultural policymaking. This study aims to fill the research gap by analyzing Macau college students' perspectives on Korean dramas, specifically examining the influence of the Korean drama industry in Macau.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Korean Wave's Global Expansion

The Korean Wave, also known as Hallyu, refers to the global phenomenon of Korean popular culture gaining immense popularity and influence beyond the borders of South Korea [3]. The term was created in China in mid-1999 by Beijing journalists who were taken aback by the rapid growth of Korean entertainment and culture in China [4]. It encompasses various cultural forms, including K-pop (Korean popular music), Korean dramas, films, fashion, beauty, and food. The Korean Wave has been recognized as a form of soft power and an important economic asset for South Korea, generating revenue through exports and tourism [5].

The popularity of Hallyu culture in the Asia-Pacific region can be attributed to two main reasons: the Korean government's support for the Hallyu industry, and the cultural proximity of Hallyu culture itself. The government offered a helping hand from time to time in developing an exportable Korean pop culture [6]. In 1995, the Korean government created a culture industry division as part of the Ministry of Culture. The following year, the ministry began aiding the Korean music industry to expand its presence in international markets. It shows that the South Korean government has been very supportive of Korean culture and has built a platform for the promotion and popularity of Korean dramas.

2.2. The Current Study Field of Korean Dramas

Extensive research conducted in various countries has revealed the diverse impacts of the Korean Wave on the social and cultural aspects of communities, particularly among students. In Thailand, there has been a notable rise in the popularity of K-pop and Korean products among students, generating significant interest in Korean culture [7,8]. The same trend can be observed in Malaysia, where the perceptions of the Korean wave have greatly influenced students in the country [9]. At the same time, the perception and impact of the Korean wave among students at a local university in the Philippines, revealed a generally positive perception and moderate impact, highlighting the growing interest in, and understanding of Korean culture [10]. The availability of online spaces further facilitates their active engagement as consumers of pop culture [11]. Despite the widespread popularity of Korean cultural products in the Asia-Pacific region, there is a research gap regarding the extent of their popularity in the Macau region. Studying Macao college students' love for Korean dramas has the following benefits: Firstly, it enhances understanding of cultural exchanges and influences between Macao and South Korea, promoting mutual understanding and exchange. Secondly, it provides insights into local youth culture and entertainment consumption trends, guiding the development of Macao's cultural industry, marketing strategies, and cultural policymaking. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the perspectives of Macao college students on Korean pop culture products, specifically focusing on Korean dramas. By investigating the reception, consumption, and cross-cultural communication of Korean dramas in Macao, this study aims to uncover the nuances and magnitude of the influence of the Korean drama industry on the local culture in Macao. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions.

- a. What is the popularity of Korean dramas among the students City University of Macau?
- b. What are the main factors influencing their decision to watch or not watch Korean dramas?

3. Methods

3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into three parts, the objectives of this study are to explore the general preferences and habits of Macao college students in watching Korean dramas, to employ a Likert scale to assess the level of acceptance of Korean culture among Macao college students after watching Korean dramas, and to investigate the popularity of Korean dramas in Macao. This study investigated 57 college students at the City University of Macau, including 11 males and 46 females. The participants were aged between 19 and 24, with the majority being juniors, accounting for 68.42% of the total group.

3.2. Interview

Based on the statistics from the questionnaire, the main objective of the follow-up interviews is to delve into the reasons why some college students in Macau do not watch Korean dramas, as well as the motivations behind those who do watch them. The interview questions will cover a range of topics, including personal interest, cultural/media influences, specific aspects of Korean dramas that appeal to or deter viewers, and comparisons to other entertainment preferences in Macao. This study conducted interviews with two Macao college students who watch Korean dramas and two who do not. The four college students interviewed include a junior student (Student A) who watches Korean dramas several times a week and a sophomore student (Student B) who watches Korean dramas every day. The other two students (Students C and D), who rarely watch Korean dramas, are both juniors.

4. Result and Cause Analysis

4.1. Data Analysis

Through the collection and statistics of questionnaires, many respondents watch Korean dramas occasionally, while a significant portion watches them rarely. Relatively fewer respondents watch Korean dramas on a daily or weekly basis. The majority of surveyed college students do not believe that there will be an increase in platforms or opportunities to watch Korean dramas in Macao. Most surveyed college students do not believe that there will be an increase in platforms or opportunities to watch Korean dramas in Macao. Furthermore, they also do not perceive Macao to have a high level of acceptance towards Korean culture.

The main reason behind this phenomenon is Macao lacks diverse Korean drama platforms or streaming media services. For instance, the TDM-Teledifusão de Macau 2022 work report states that its key cooperation and exchange targets are TV stations in Hong Kong and mainland China [12]. The focus of their programming is primarily on Macao culture, mainland Chinese culture, and the local culture of Portugal. Macao's local TV stations have not actively pursued cooperation with South Korean dramas.

4.2. Cause Analysis

To delve deeper into the motivations of university students for watching or not watching Korean dramas, this study conducted a follow-up interview with four students who participated in the questionnaire. The purpose was to gain insights into their specific perspectives on watching Korean dramas. Through these interviews, the study identified four main motivations among college students in Macau for watching Korean dramas: cultural curiosity, drama attractiveness, cultural similarity, and personal preferences. Among them, cultural curiosity, drama attractiveness, and cultural

similarity are the factors that influence City University of Macau's college students to watch Korean dramas. Personal preference is the factor that influences them not to watch Korean dramas.

4.2.1. Cultural Curiosity

Cultural globalization refers to the transmission of ideas, meanings, and values around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations [13]. With the continuous advancement of globalization and the widespread availability of the Internet, Korean wave culture has gained global prominence. Macau college students now have access to various online streaming platforms, allowing them to explore cultures from around the world. According to the survey, 82% of respondents who watch Korean dramas utilize online streaming media platforms. During interviews with four university students from City University of Macau, Student A revealed that their interest in Korean dramas was influenced by the surrounding K-wave fans. Initially driven by curiosity, they gradually developed a fondness for Korean dramas. Similarly, Student C mentioned that although they seldom watch Korean dramas, they find themselves intrigued and inclined to watch complete series when encountering promotional videos on short video platforms. Additionally, in the interview, Student D shared that their curiosity often leads them to pay attention to Korean dramas after reading online reviews, coming across popular discussions, or receiving recommendations from fellow Korean drama viewers. Overall, it highlights the influence of curiosity plays a significant role in Macau college students' engagement with and interest in watching Korean dramas. Therefore, cultural curiosity is a factor that encourages university students to watch Korean dramas.

4.2.2. Drama Attractiveness

Korean dramas encompass a wide range of genres, including action dramas, historical dramas, school dramas, medical dramas, legal dramas, and even horror comedies. While many dramas incorporate romantic elements and explore profound emotional themes, others may delve into tragic or slice-of-life narratives. These dramas exhibit diverse styles and employ distinctive color palettes. Furthermore, Korean dramas often mirror societal issues such as wealth disparity, bullying, corruption, and more. Both Student A and Student B highlighted in the interview that, in comparison to most domestic dramas and European and American dramas, Korean dramas employ more intricate shooting methods. It includes the nuanced portrayal of character relationships, the support of the environment, background music, and other elements. It is noteworthy that Student B mentioned how Korean dramas adjust the subsequent plot development based on feedback from regular audiences, aiming to align more closely with audience expectations. Sonia also stated that the live-action shooting mode in Korean dramas has maintained its popularity as it allows the series to adapt to audience feedback in real-time [14]. This means that popular characters may receive more screen time, and writers may even modify plots to meet audience expectations. It can be seen that the attraction of drama itself also makes many Macao college students tend to choose to watch Korean dramas.

4.2.3. Cultural Similarity

The concept of cultural proximity has frequently been employed to elucidate the consumption of transnational media. This theory posits that audiences tend to gravitate towards media products that align with their cultural backgrounds [15]. Cultural proximity encompasses resemblances in historical, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and geographical aspects. Notably, shared language has frequently been emphasized as a significant factor influencing audience preferences [16]. During the interview, this study found that Macau University students believe that Korean culture shares certain similarities with Chinese culture, which contributes to their love for Korean dramas. For instance, Student B mentioned that she often finds herself able to relate to the youth love dramas with campus themes in

Korean dramas, such as the hidden romance between high school students and the setting of campus classrooms, which resemble those in mainland China. Conversely, some campus dramas in European and American TV shows may appear more daring and open, making it difficult for viewers to resonate with them. Furthermore, this study discovered that Macau University students perceive Korean as being similar to their native language, which is another significant factor influencing their preference for Korean dramas. For example, during the interview, Student A highlighted that a considerable number of University of Macau students come from Guangdong Province, Hong Kong, or Macau, where Cantonese is their mother tongue. Student A herself is one of them. When she and her classmates watch Korean dramas, they notice that many Korean words are pronounced similarly to Cantonese, making it easier for them to accept and understand the Korean language. Such as "university," "average," "music," and "personality," exhibit nearly identical pronunciations in Cantonese and Korean. The cultural similarities make many Macao college students interested in Korean dramas and choose to watch Korean dramas.

4.2.4. Personal Preferences

During the interviews, this study discovered that university students in Macau engage in various forms of entertainment and do not have a fixed preference for a single mode of entertainment. As Student B mentioned, Macau University students have access to a wide range of entertainment options, including not only Korean dramas but also dramas from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Europe, the United States, and the second dimension (referring to animated content). Consequently, many students only watch Korean dramas occasionally or choose alternative forms of entertainment. Students A and C also mentioned in the interview that their Macau friends primarily engage in daily entertainment through Mainland China communication websites. Despite the high level of cultural acceptance in Macau, Korean culture does not dominate, allowing students in Macau to subjectively choose different cultures to explore and learn from. Additionally, Student C stated, "I usually don't have the habit of following dramas because Korean dramas are typically longer than Mainland Chinese dramas, and I don't have the time to follow them. Instead, I prefer to search for commentaries on Korean dramas on short video platforms." It indicates that different students have different preferences when it comes to entertainment modes. It can be seen that Macao college students have various forms of entertainment, so their personal preferences may lead them not to pay too much attention to Korean dramas.

5. Conclusion

Korean dramas are not very popular among the group of university students at City University of Macao. Many surveyed college students at the City University of Macau watch Korean dramas occasionally or rarely. Relatively fewer students watch Korean dramas on a daily or weekly basis. The main factors influencing the students' decision to watch or not watch Korean dramas, as identified in the research are as follows. Firstly, cultural Curiosity: The influence of cultural globalization and the availability of online streaming platforms have sparked curiosity among Macau college students, leading them to explore Korean dramas and develop a fondness for them. Secondly, Korean dramas are known for their diverse genres, intricate shooting methods, and ability to adapt to audience feedback. The nuanced portrayal of character relationships, environment, background music, and other elements make Korean dramas attractive to some students at City University of Macau. What is more, Cultural Similarity: Macau University students perceive certain similarities between Korean and Chinese culture, such as shared themes in youth love dramas or similar pronunciations of words in Cantonese and Korean. These similarities contribute to their interest in watching Korean dramas. Additionally, students in Macau have access to a wide range of entertainment options, including

Korean dramas, but they also engage in other forms of entertainment. Some students may choose alternative forms of entertainment due to time constraints or personal preferences.

Further research directions can be involved in three aspects. Firstly, conduct a comparative study between Macau college students and college students from other regions or countries to examine the similarities and differences in their preferences and habits regarding Korean dramas. This could provide a broader perspective on the factors contributing to the success of Korean dramas in different cultural contexts. Secondly, conduct a qualitative study to explore the perceptions, stereotypes, and cultural biases that Macau college students may hold towards Korean culture and Korean wave media. This could involve in-depth interviews or focus group discussions to gain richer insights into the underlying factors shaping these perceptions. In addition, investigate the influence of cultural proximity and shared cultural elements on the consumption of Korean dramas among Macau college students. This could involve examining the role of language, historical, religious, or other cultural similarities in shaping their preferences and engagement with Korean wave media.

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