

The Dissemination Pathway and Influence of Hallyu Culture in China

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Abstract: Since the 1990s, a cultural wave of Hallyu, or the South Korean wave, has gradually arisen in China. Hallyu generally refers to the South Korean culture and lifestyle that have gained popularity domestically, primarily through the dissemination of TV dramas, music, and artists, with “Blackpink” as a representative example. Since Hallyu’s inception in China, it has remained a hot topic across major media and portal websites. Its influence touches on various aspects of Chinese cultural audiences, attributing its success to the inherent South Korean culture in Hallyu. This paper studies the pathway and influence of Hallyu culture’s dissemination in China, analyzing it from four perspectives: government, corporations, culture, and audiences, seeking reasons for the successful propagation of Hallyu culture and its enlightening implications for the Chinese cultural industry. Based on the roots of local culture with the spirit of embracing all rivers can people turn the collision of Chinese culture and foreign culture into an opportunity for cultural renewal to usher in the great historical revival of Chinese culture in the 21st century. The primary research methods employed in this study are literature analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: Hallyu, mass communication, Hall’s Encoding

1. Introduction

1.1. The Genesis of Research Inquiry

With the intensification of China’s reform and opening up and integration into global systems in the 1990s, an intriguing cultural phenomenon labelled as Hallyu, an embodiment of South Korean lifestyle and popular culture, permeated the Chinese societal fabric. This cultural influx, characterized by South Korean dramas, variety shows, gastronomy, fashion, and other facets of media and lifestyle, found significant traction in Chinese media platforms and web portals, thereby enhancing South Korea’s national image and expanding its global influence. The critical backdrop to this cultural wave was the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, which deeply impacted South Korea’s economic stability, propelling its government to reconceptualize and invest heavily in the development of the cultural industry. In 1998, a strategy to position South Korea as a “culture-based nation” was launched, envisaging cultural industries as a cornerstone for its economic rejuvenation. In light of this, a slew of legislative frameworks and strategic development plans related to the cultural industry was initiated, including the New Cultural Policy of the National Government and the Basic Law for the Revitalization of the Cultural Industry. The strategic orientation towards the cultural industry led to

a resurgence in South Korea's economy, facilitating recovery from the financial crisis. Subsequently, the government delineated ambitious targets for the cultural industry, such as claiming 5% of the global cultural trade and achieving exports worth 10 billion USD from the cultural industry by 2007 [1]. The objective was to be ranked among the top five in cultural industry around the world and emerge as a cultural powerhouse and a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century. The rise of Hallyu, therefore, can be traced back to the deliberate emphasis on national culture, strategic operational models of multinational corporations, and robust government policy support. This research endeavors to elucidate the synergistic integration of traditional culture, business models, and government support in the propagation of the Hallyu culture. This analytical exploration aims to enhance our comprehension of Hallyu and offer critical insights for the development and transformation of China's cultural industry.

1.2. Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" Theory

Hall's Encoding/Decoding paradigm foregrounds the divergent understanding that may arise between the creators and recipients of coded information during communications. In more profound terms, the ideological manufacturers, when transmitting ideology through cultural vehicles, may not achieve the intended objective. The successful transmission of the ideology, therefore, hinges upon how the cultural audience interprets the cultural vessel.

Hall employs the creation and diffusion of television discourse as an illustrative example to clarify his standpoint. He segregates the production and distribution of television discourse into three constituent phases: the initial stage involves the generation of the television discourse's meaning – encapsulated in the encoding phase. This phase witnesses the encoders of television content encoding raw materials; the subsequent stage is the culmination of the television discourse's significance. The meaning is entrenched within the television discourse and initiates the circulation phase. Hall contends that the data encoded for transmission necessitates media dissemination for completion, facilitated through various channels such as the internet, broadcast television, books, and so forth; the final stage is the decoding phase. Once the encoding stage concludes, the codes disseminate to the audience, who then engage in analysis – a process synonymous with decoding. During the audience's process of television code decoding, Hall hypothesizes the existence of three potential decoding positions within the audience: the dominant-hegemonic position, where the decoder completely aligns with the encoder's intentions; the negotiated position, where the positions of the encoder and decoder broadly concur, albeit with some contradictions; and the oppositional position, where the encoder and decoder's viewpoints are entirely antithetical. The insightful contributions of Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding theory to the dissection of Hallyu lie in its focus on the differences amongst the production, propagation, and audiences' interpretation of Hallyu. In alignment with the research objectives of this paper, the application of the Encoding/Decoding theory to the analysis of Hallyu aims to explicate the roles undertaken by governmental entities, cultural enterprises, national culture, and audiences within the context of Hallyu creation [2].

1.3. Research Methodology

Initially, the study provides an overview of Hallyu's development trajectory and elucidates its definition. The paper discusses the evolution and current state of Hallyu within China, furnishing a cursory depiction of Hallyu within the Chinese context. Subsequently, the exploration of Hallyu's fabrication process is undertaken. The explicit roles of governmental bodies, culture, and corporate entities within the manufacturing process of Hallyu are scrutinized. Attention then shifts towards the Chinese audience's decoding of Hallyu, understanding China's interpretation of Hallyu within political, economic, cultural, and societal contexts [3]. Lastly, based on the examination of the

encoding and decoding processes within Hallyu, the interactive roles of government, national culture, corporate entities, and cultural audiences in the construction of Hallyu are analyzed, shedding light on the genesis and development mechanisms of Hallyu.

2. Emergence of Hallyu in China

Hallyu, a phenomenon originating in the 1990s and centered primarily in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, is characterized by a wave of popular culture and fashion underpinned by the culture of South Korea. This wave is marked by the global cultural consumption of Korean television dramas, K-pop music, variety shows, and games, and is further reflected in the admiration and commendation of Korean celebrities. Furthermore, the acceptance and endorsement of Korean national culture and everyday lifestyle—spanning language, dietary habits, apparel, and beauty standards—constitute significant aspects of Hallyu. The genesis of Hallyu in China can be traced back to Korean television dramas [4]. In 1997, the broadcasting of the Korean television drama *What is Love* by China Central Television officially inaugurated the Korean drama era in China. In the ensuing years, Korean dramas such as *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho*, *I Can Hear Your Voice*, *Moon Embracing the Sun*, and others were sequentially aired on various major Chinese television stations, gradually monopolizing the Chinese television drama market and igniting the Hallyu craze. Now, the representative group Blackpink has steadily gained popularity throughout China. The name of the group, Blackpink, incorporates a black element to the seemingly beautiful pink, symbolizing negation, and conveys the message, “do not solely focus on my beautiful exterior, what you see is not all there is.” Blackpink has emerged as an accelerator of modern Korean culture [4].

3. The Manufacturing (Encoding) of Hallyu Culture

In Stuart Hall’s view, encoding is the assignment of symbolic meaning by the encoder. Essentially, the encoder embeds their desired message within the medium to enforce their dominance over the decoder. In the context of Hallyu, an analysis of encoding entails an examination of the manufacturers of Hallyu, the process of manufacturing, and the meaning that Hallyu encapsulates during the encoding stage. The production of Hallyu culture is underpinned by three main bodies, namely Korean cultural connotations, Korean enterprises, and the government. First, Korean national culture provides a foundation for its industrial policies. After the proposition of the culture-based nation strategy in South Korea, a path was pioneered that amalgamated Confucian culture with national economic development. Confucian culture has played a vital role in South Korea’s economic trade with other countries, diplomacy, and revitalizing national spirit. The positive ideals such as loyalty, filial piety, love, diligence, patriotism, justice, mutual assistance, and cooperation found in Confucian culture are deeply ingrained in Korean values, behaviors, and cultural enterprises, thereby promoting South Korea’s economic development and social stability. Korean national culture bestows cultural connotations upon Hallyu [4]. The manufacturers of TV dramas, variety shows, and music, Korean broadcasting and television enterprises, incorporate the essence of traditional culture, such as Confucian culture, into modern social life. Through Korean dramas and variety shows, they utilize captivating storylines and relaxed, humorous language expressions to reflect the harsh realities of society. They provide the audience with a sense of joy, catering to the audience’s entertainment needs for popular culture, and transmit the cultural spirit centered on loyalty, filial piety, honesty, trust, courtesy, righteousness, integrity, and shame to cultural audiences. Korean dramas are the most salient representation of Korean national culture in Korea, allowing the public to appreciate the preciousness of familial love, friendship, and romantic love through everyday life scenarios depicted in the plot development. This embodies the moral model of equality, love, thrift, and dedication in Confucian culture. Second, Korean enterprises are the manufacturers and disseminators of Hallyu. In

the process of manufacturing Hallyu, the enterprises infuse Korean culture into TV dramas, variety shows, and music and disseminate Hallyu to other countries through international cooperation, artist packaging, cultural product promotion, and embedded advertising. Depending on the nature of the enterprise, Korean media companies and multinational corporations play distinct roles in the manufacturing and dissemination process of Hallyu. Media companies manufacture and disseminate Hallyu. Companies such as SBS, KBS, MBC, CJ Entertainment and other broadcasting and television, media entertainment enterprises have played a significant role in creating and promoting Hallyu. They have driven South Korea's economic development through the export of Korean dramas. The export of South Korea's broadcasting and television cultural industry was 7.615 million USD in 1999, 13.11 million USD in 2000, exceeded 100 million USD in 2005, reached 170 million USD in 2008, and broke 200 million USD in 2010; just the export of Korean dramas was 800,000 USD in 2001, reached 42 million USD in 2003, and skyrocketed to 158 million USD in 2011 from 2001 in just a short span of ten years; from 2005 to 2008, the export of Korean TV programs to Asia accounted for more than 96% of the total export of Korean TV programs [5, 6]. Finally, as the most potent booster of Hallyu, the Korean government, a typical strong national state, has defining and leading influence over the market. In the manufacturing and dissemination of Hallyu, the Korean government creates development space and provides economic and technical support for Hallyu through cultural support policies and relevant legal support [7]. For example, the Korean government officially formulated the culture-based nation strategy in 1998. Subsequently, the government successively issued the New Cultural Policy of the National Government and the Basic Law for the Revitalization of the Cultural Industry, Plan for 2007 that cultural trade will account for 5% of the world market, and cultural industry exports will reach 10 billion USD, ranking among the top five in the world cultural industry, becoming a cultural superpower and a knowledge-based economic powerhouse in the 21st century [6].

Blackpink incorporates the above three factors. It fully absorbs traditional Korean culture during its development and combines it with the awakening of women's rights to create the combination meaning of "Do not just look at my appearance, look more at my inner self." It expresses breaking away from the traditional image of women, that women are not just ornaments, but an irreplaceable part of society. This is the encoding that the Blackpink group has made in cultural communication, showing the image of modern independent women and promoting it externally to seek resonance. This is also proven with the support of YG Company [4]. At the level of the Korean government, it also represents the Korean government's intention to export its ideology through the cultural propaganda of Blackpink. And in the theory of decoding, the accepting country will express three acceptance states for the propaganda of a cultural product. The first is to completely agree to accept the output culture [8]. The second is to absorb and integrate the output culture with its own culture. The third will completely oppose and resist the output cultural products and regard it as an ideological invasion. In the following text, the author will use China as an example to explore China's specific interpretation of Hallyu.

4. The Reverberations of Hallyu in China (Decoding)

Culture, as an abstract and internalized rule and behavior logic in people's minds, will be expressed in individual daily life practices, such as eating, traveling, makeup, entertainment, etc. "Korean Wave" takes Korean TV dramas, Korean music and Korean variety shows as the carrier to spread Korean food culture, makeup technology and Korean folk customs to China. With the increase of economic income, Chinese cultural audiences began to pay attention to meeting and improving their cultural consumption needs after meeting their basic survival needs. Therefore, Chinese cultural audiences are no longer satisfied with just watching TV dramas and variety shows to meet their cultural consumption needs. Instead, they gain an understanding of Korean culture by imitating the lifestyle

conveyed by Korean movies and dramas, and also understand the “Korean wave” by traveling to South Korea to enrich their daily life [4].

Hallyu, as crafted by the Korean government and corporations, serves as both an instrument of ideological transmission and a wellspring of economic gain, with its foundation deeply rooted in Korean culture. Nevertheless, upon its arrival in China, the interpretation of Hallyu by the Chinese cultural populace diverged from the expectations of its Korean governmental and corporate creators. Both the Chinese government and corporations, along with the mainstream Chinese cultural audience, have approached the interpretation of Hallyu from a standpoint of negotiation. The government capitalizes on the introduction of Hallyu to invigorate national economic dynamism, yet when the ramifications of Hallyu pose a threat to domestic economic and cultural stability, policy measures are employed to restrict its ingress [9]. Corporations exploit Hallyu for economic profit and leverage it for the expansion of overseas markets. Within the realm of the general cultural audience, a reflective understanding of Hallyu has been cultivated due to the indwelling nature of traditional Chinese culture [10].

5. Conclusions

This article embarks on an investigation into the conduits and impacts of Hallyu within China. Employing Stuart Hall’s Encoding/Decoding theory as a basis for analysis, the author conceptualizes the creation and propagation of Hallyu culture as an encoding process, with the subsequent repercussions and transformations occurring within China post-introduction serving as decoding. The manufacturing of Hallyu is dissected from three vantage points: Korean culture, corporations, and the government. The triumphant dissemination of Hallyu is conceived as a result of the conjuncture of these three factors. Upon scrutiny of Hallyu’s interpretation, it becomes evident that the Hallyu constructed by the Korean government and corporations did not yield the anticipated interpretation from Chinese cultural consumers. Irrespective of whether it’s the Chinese government, corporations, or the common cultural audience, all have adopted a negotiated stance in the interpretation of Hallyu. The government leverages the inception of Hallyu to stimulate national economic vitality, yet when the impact of Hallyu threatens to undermine domestic economic and cultural stability, it curtails its ingress via policy measures. Corporations capitalize on Hallyu for economic gain and exploit it for the proliferation of overseas markets. Among the general cultural audience, owing to the internalization of traditional Chinese culture, a reflective comprehension of Hallyu has been formed.

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