



South Korean Entertainment Industry's Marketing Management on Chinese Market

Michelle Zhou^(✉)

School of Social Science, Tsinghua University, Beijing 100080, China
zhou-jj20@mails.tsinghua.edu.cn

Abstract. In today's international trading environment, developing the foreign market according to different political contexts became extremely important for each country. Shortly after the established formal diplomatic relations between Seoul and Beijing in the 1990s, South Korean industries opened up the uncultivated Chinese market. From the 1990s to 2016, the South Korean Entertainment Industry (SKEI) experienced a checkered journey—from mushroom growth to sudden descent. In figuring out the political and marketing factors responsible for this fluctuation, this article is to explore the marketing management strategies that SKEI applied to the Chinese market during different political relation stages between China and South Korea. The relationship between marketing management adjustment and political changes was revealed by the chronological analysis from the 1990s to 2010s of SKEI in China, enhancing the academic completeness in the fields of Chinese foreign trade policies and validating marketing skills that employed to make profits while expanding culture values. The research was done by reviewing published academic journals on Google Scholar which also contributes to the convenience of gathering information and references for further research on the topic of political and marketing management. In specific, the progress of SKEI marketing in China is divided into four stages according to the changes in regulations of the Chinese entertainment market, accompanied by the corresponding marketing strategies that SKEI utilized: cultural affinity, price advantage, and overflow effects in the starting phase; online platforms exploitation, joint production and fandom expansion of the raising and challenging stage; attracting and collaborating with Chinese investors during the climax phase; and expansion towards the South Asian markets for stagnation. This chronological analysis unveiled the core methodology for SKEI marketing strategies-- creating demands and catering to consumer preferences. The conclusions from this study, therefore, held practice value as an exemplar for global countries to manage and develop their exportation of the entertainment industry.

Keywords: South Korean entertainment industry · Chinese foreign trade · marketing management strategies · China- Korea relationship

1 Introduction

The entertainment industry in South Korea is mainly composed of film, dramas, TV shows and music industry, etc. [1]. The export volume of South Korea's Entertainment

products was growing steadily every year. As early as 2010, China became the second-largest importer of Korean cultural products, with a market share of 580 million USD, which was about 24% of the total scale of SKEI [1]. The continuous of this expanding market volume, nonetheless, suddenly halted in 2016 when the Chinese government announced a ban on cultural products exported from South Korea due to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) [2]. From the 1990s to 2016, SKEI experienced rapid growth and decline in around two decades. The marketing management skills that SKEI utilized under the change of Chinese political marketing policy will be broken up into different phases by the review of 70 articles around the topic of SKEI marketing in the Chinese market.

During the process of analysis, it is found that of around 70 published literature about SKEI in china, only 36 of them specifically introduced marketing strategies that SKEI applied in the Chinese market. The majority of them, however, are analyzed from sociological or political perspectives. In this case, articles that demonstrate the relations between political factors and business management are relatively rare. It is also noticeable that most of the authors were of Asian origins, Korean and Chinese especially. According to the review, possible reasons that responsible for the lack of systematically organized marketing analysis about SKEI in the Chinese market were a) the entertainment industry is a relatively new topic in the economic field, which ends up in less academic materials compared with that of in social studies fields; b) international scholars' focus on SKCI in the Chinese market is still on the uncultivated stage; c) studies that aimed at determining the relationship between politics and marketing management demands academic attentions.

To fulfill these shortages, this review article took the research on SKEI in China as a forerunner of exigencies for political and economic management research on cross-culture trades. The study would first divide the developmental phases of SKEI in China (from the 1990s to the 2010s) into four periods given the overall political context changes that affect SKEI. Then, the corresponding marketing strategies that SKEI applied under each political change would be organized accordingly. By doing this, the political decisions that China used to protect domestic entertainment industries and the marketing skills SKEI applied to expand were illustrated directly.

2 Chronological Analysis for SKEI Marketing Management in China

The purpose of this review is to sort out the different marketing strategies that SKEI used in the Chinese market under the changes in the market policies of SKEI in China. By doing research through Google Scholar, there are approximately 900 published papers containing the key works of "South Korean entertainment (drama, Kpop, film, TV shows)", which around 70 of them contain keywords such as "Chinese market" or "China". Among these articles, xx of them specifically demonstrate different marketing management strategies that SKEI utilized in the Chinese consumer market according to the change in Chinese marketing policies. These strategies will be organized in SKEI's developing phases in China's market under the four stages of starting, raising, climax, and declining (See Table 1.). Significant marketing regulations in the Chinese market

Table 1. Analysis of 36 Articles Illustrate SKEI's Marketing Strategies During the SKEI's Developmental Phases in China's Market

No. of paper	Developmental Phases of SKEI China	Chinese Political Contexts That Relate to SKEI	Marketing Strategies SKEI Began to Apply Accordingly	References
15	Starting Phase (1990s - 2005)	Reopened Economy with the trade Investment agreement between South Korea and China	Appealing to consumer's cultural affinity Keeping the price low Exploiting on the overflow effect of Korean dramas.	[3–17]
13	Raising and Challenging Phase (2006 - 2012)	Establishing limitations on foreign entertainment products. 2. Conflicts between the South Koreans and Chinese caused the Anti-Korean Sentiment.	Spreading through online video platforms. 2. Joint production 3. Expanding fandom to Chinese youths.	[3, 8, 16–26]
9	Climax Phase (2012 - 2016)	Establishing the strategic cooperation partnership. New limitations on foreign imported entertainment products.	Attracting Chinese Capital Collaborating with Chinese investors	[9, 16, 27–33]
10	Stagnation Phase (2016 - Now)	1. THAAD	1. Exploiting the South Asian Markets	[9, 25, 34–40]

that are responsible for the shifting market management for SKEI will be also displayed in the following review section.

2.1 Starting Phase: Cultural Affinity, Price Advantage and Overflow Effects in the Reopening Phase of Chinese Economy

In the late 1970s, China gradually reopened its economy to the global market. The wishes to establish stable diplomatic relations with surrounding countries and developed countries are the essential goals of the Chinese government [3]. Japanese and Western entertainment products showed up in mainland China at first through Gangtai entertainment,

entertainment media from Hongkong and Taiwan, in Guangdong and Fujian provinces [4]. Foreign entertainment products, such as film, television, and popular music soon became the “locus of transnational projection” for Chinese consumers to get in touch with the modern lifestyles of developed countries [3]. After Washington improved US-China relations, South Korea, the allied nation of the US, also expanded its businesses with China [5]. In 1992, China and South Korea achieved formal diplomatic relations by signing a trade and investment agreement, which promoted economic cooperation between the two nations [6].

From 1997 to 1998, China Central Television Station (CCTV), aired a Korean television drama “What Is Love All About?” (*Sarang-i Mwo-gillae*). This TV drama reached an average viewership of 4.2%, which is the recorded second-highest rating in the history of CCTV [5]. “A Wish Upon a Star” (*Byeoreun Nea Gaseume*), which is another Korean drama that broadcast in 1998 on Phoenix TV, also gained popularity from Chinese audience [6]. The success of these two dramas encouraged Chinese TV broadcasting firms to import more Korean dramas. The number of Korean dramas imported tripled from around 50ish in 2002 to 150 in 2005, and the total export revenue of Korean dramas in China increased from 3.6 to 10.9 million USD [5, 6]. The popularity of Korean drama reached its temporary peak in 2005 when *Dea Jang Geum* aired and received an average rating of 15.3% with over 164 million views [7].

During the period of trade and investment agreement between South Korea and China, SKEI mainly exploited two marketing skills to improve the demand for Korean dramas. The first means was to appeal to consumers’ cultural affinity. By September 2000, most of the imported Korean dramas that were broadcast on Chinese television were centered around stories about romance, career building, and family lives [8]. This emphasis on family and career in Korean drama resonated with prevalent cultural sentiments in China [9]. Plots and central themes in these dramas also arouse a sense of nostalgia for Confucian traditions, such as filial piety [10]. Compared with other Western dramas, these Korean exported shows presented the ideas of westernized and commercialized modern culture to Chinese audiences with Chinese-related cultural elements, which are more acceptable [11].

The other marketing skill that turned out so successful is the relatively lower price these Korean companies set for the Chinese market. In the era when China was at its beginning stage of the open economy as well as the Asian economy just experienced a crisis, the lower price of Korean drama significantly contributed to its inflow into Chinese TV [12]. To be more specific, Korean TV dramas, at that time, were a quarter of the price of Japanese dramas, and even a tenth of the price of Hong Kong TV dramas [13]. This lower price marketing decision made South Korean television programming export revenue skyrocketed from \$12.7 million in 1999 to \$37.5 million in 2003 [14].

Despite TV dramas, Korean pop music (K-pop) also got its chance to flourish in the Chinese market under the overflow effect of Korean dramas. K-pop is first introduced to the Chinese market via music magazines. *Light Music*, *Modern Music Field*, and *Music Space* are music magazines that focused on Japanese and Korean music, which enable K-pop to gain a small range of teen fans [15]. Once the Chinese audience became familiar with Korean dramas, SKEI advertised the theme songs of these TV shows through radio programs [16]. In 1996, a Beijing FM station played K-pop “Seoul Music Hall”, which

promoted the station's listening rate by attracting a lot of K-pop fans. The success of this FM station, encourage numerous radio stations in China to cover K-pop music in their programs: under the proposal of Yoon-Ho Kim, the founder of Ujeon Soft, which is the first South Korean company that introduced K-pop to China, the China National Radio even started an hour-long program, "Listen to Korea", in 2001 [16]. K-pop soon attracted more and more Chinese teenagers, who were willing to purchase tens of thousands of copies of the Korean boy band H.O.T in 1998 [17].

In the starting phase, SKEI decided to appeal to Chinese consumers by selecting products with cultural affinity, while offering its consumers cost-effective prices to expand the Korean drama market. Once the Korean drama gained popularity, K-pop took the advantage of Korean drama's overflow effect, which accelerated the growth of K-pop fandom in the Chinese market. This raising of SKEI in China, nonetheless, soon faced its first big challenge since a large portion of the Chinese entertainment market was taken away by those foreign entertainment products.

2.2 Raising and Challenging Phase: Online Platform Exploitation, Joint Production and Fandom Expansion During the Uprising of Anti-Korean Sentiment

As the popularity of Korean dramas culminated at the beginning of 21 century, there were emerging voices that started to criticize the unbalanced influx of Korean TV shows compared with the slow growth rate of Chinese TV programs. *China Youth Daily* and other mainstream Chinese media started to describe the SKEI as a form of cultural invasion [18]. The demands for banning the import of Korean entertainment products caused the step of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT) in 2005. The SAPPRFT imposed a series of strict limits on the programming of foreign TV shows, which asked Chinese TV stations to broadcast Korean dramas for no more than 20 h a year [19]. This anti-Korean sentiment enlarged through several social issues: in 2007, though not exported to China's market, the three Korean dramas, *Jumong*, *Yeon Gaesomun*, and *Dae Jo Young* elicited Chinese press for the distortion of Chinese history in their plots; in 2008, without authorization, one of the leading South Korean broadcaster, Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), filmed the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony rehearsal; in the same year for the time of the Olympics game, violent conflicts occurred between Korean activists and Chinese residents during the Seoul leg of the torch relay [20]. In 2010, China and Russia refused to support the investigation of the sinking of the South Korean navy warship, and China's support to North Korea for the artillery bombardment of Yeopyeong Island further deteriorated the China-South Korean relationship [21]. In 2012, SAPPRFT enforced a more limited regulation that announced that foreign TV programs must not take up more than 15% of the total programming time every day, and also be banned between 7 p.m to 10 p.m on TV [22].

As the result of SAPPRFT's regulations in 2005, the total export revenue of Korean drama decreased for the first time since 2000, from 101.6 million USD to 85.9 million USD [23]. The establishment of new regulations and the anti-Korean sentiment, however, did not cool down the demand for Korean entertainment products in the Chinese market thanks to the stickiness of fans and the expansion of the Internet. In 2000, merely 1.7% of

the Chinese population are Internet users, while this number rose to 36% a decade later [3]. Within this decade, online video platforms in China mushroomed (such as iQiyi, Youku, Mongo TV, Tudou, etc.), which challenged the impact of cable televisions on the younger generations, who were both the Internet users and potential consumers for SKEI.

In this raising and challenging phase, SKEI decided to extend the Chinese market through online platforms, joint productions, and fandom. Given the new regulations by SAPPRT, since streaming of overseas entertainment products online was exempt, SKEI diverted many of its China business from traditional TV stations to online platforms [9]. Same as cable TV stations, to stream foreign dramas, these online video platforms need to purchase distribution licenses. To expand China's business through the online platform, SKEI offered subtle contracts to appeal to these online video platforms: the SBS, for example, signed a contract for strategic cooperation with Youku for selling the copyrights of more than 200 Korean dramas [8]. The competition between these platforms further encouraged them to cooperate with SKEI for attracting new users and audience ratings. The Korean drama, *Temptation of Wife*, reached 206 million views on the Youku website in 2011 when Taiwanese drama had 154 million views and 120,000 hits for American drama [8]. The popularity of Korean TV shows led many of those online video platforms to start to establish the "Korean drama" menu on their homepages.

Under the new regulations of SAPPRT, the SKEI chose joint production as an alternative way to gain permission of airing during prime time. Under these strategies, co-productions got their chances to be released on the Chinese market. For some of these co-productions, "My Husband's Woman" (*Nampyeonui Yeoja*) for example, the Korean companies may provide original work, from the name of the products to directors, actors, and even personnel; for others, "Anarchists" for an instant, Chinese company only hired Korean director and actors for the core characters, while leaving the rest to the Chinese sides [16]. By doing so, even though these products were co-produced, they still were registered as Chinese products and would not be affected by the SAPPRT's limitations [16].

SKEI's central fan base in China also enlarged from middle-aged women to the Chinese youth generation given the expansion of K-pop, Korean comics, and Korean TV shows through the Internet [24]. These Korean entertainment products, such as K-pop, that were provided on Chinese video platforms soon attracted many young Chinese fans through their unprecedented visual styles [3]. To appeal to more Chinese audiences and enhance the fandom, Korean entertainment companies, like SM Entertainment decided to produce recordings sung in Mandarin while endorsing deals with Chinese brands [25]. Korean stars caused significant impacts on consumers' choice of their fans in the fields of foods, fashion, cosmetic, and even plastic surgery [26]. Yearning to narrow the distance between themselves and their idols, the demand for learning the Korean language and traveling to South Korea surged during this period [26].

2.3 Climax Phase: Attracting and Collaborating with Chinese Investors Under the Strategic Cooperation Partnership

The international tension between China and South Korea gradually relaxed in the next few years of the 2010s. During President Park Geun-Hye's administration, Seoul adopted

a foreign policy that put Beijing as a priority to expand the China-South Korean relations by developing a strategic cooperation partnership [27]. In 2012, around 26% of Korean students enrolled in Chinese Universities while the number of Chinese students who studied in South Korean Universities increased as well [28]. This improvement in the relationship between China and South Korea, however, suddenly ceased after the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea [29].

Before the establishment of THAAD, nonetheless, the SKEI reached its temporary climax between 2012 to 2016. Attracting Chinese Capital and collaborating with Chinese investors were the incoming marketing strategies applied by the SKEI around this slot. At the same time, the Korean drama, *My Love from the Star*, garnered unprecedented success in the Chinese market by gaining a record of 5 billion hits on authorized Chinese video platforms [30]. This drama became so popular that the tickets for the fan meeting of Kim Soo-Hyun, the main actor of *My Love from the Star*, were sold as high as 3,300 USD. On the contrary, when more and more high-scored Korean dramas were introduced to the Chinese market by media companies, Chinese domestic dramas lack competitiveness [31]. Chinese media companies were willing to utilize these Korean stars given their popularity [16]. In this case, one of the common ways for Korean entertainment management agencies to cooperate with Chinese media industries was to introduce Korean stars to Chinese dramas. For instance, “Jae-Wook Ahn in ‘Apartment’ (*Bailinggongyu*), In-Pyo Cha in ‘The Four’ (*Sidamingbu*), Na-ra Jang in ‘My Bratty Princess’ (*Diaomangongzhu*), and most recently, Seo-hee Jang in ‘Chef Lin in Seoul’ (*Linshifu zai Shouer*) are some of the most successful cases” [16].

The high viewing rate of *My Love from the Star* earned around 100 million USD in revenue for iQiyi, one of the Chinese online media and video platforms, paying 600,000 USD for the license of the 21 episodes of it [16]. The success of iQiyi not only encouraged other Chinese online video platforms to purchase South Korean cinematographic and television works but also motivated more and more corporations in China to invest in the SKEI. In specific, DMG Entertainment in China became the largest shareholder of Chorokbam Media and Kim Jong Hak Production, the two major production companies of the SKEI [9]. Sohu, on the other hand, invested around 15 million USD to obtain a 6% of KeyEast Co., Ltd, a South Korean management agency company, for acquiring the distribution rights of Korean dramas while employing popular Korean stars on the TV show it invested in [9].

The SAPPRFT soon announced a new regulation for foreign TV shows in September 2014 when Korean entertainment products were on their way to becoming popular all over the country. According to this new regulation, all imported entertainment shows on Chinese online streaming platforms are required to be submitted for approval before they could be aired. Since many the Chinese audiences would choose to watch Korean TV shows on unauthorized websites, instead of waiting for months for them to gain the SAPPRFT’s approvals, the price of licensed rights for Korean dramas dropped dramatically: the bid price for *Hyde, Jekyll, Me* decreased 300,000 USD months after the establishment of the new limitation [9]. To deal with this sudden depreciation of the SKEI investment, Chinese stakeholders and the SKEI, together, came up with a plan to display each episode of Korean drama simultaneously in Korea and China [32]. In

this case, Korean broadcasters could still sell the licenses at a stable high price, which benefited both the Chinese investors and the SKEI.

The success of *Descendants of the Sun* laid upon the collaboration between Chinese investors and the SKEI. This Korean drama received a rating of 38.8% in Korea and a viewership exceeded 2.6 billion on iQiyi in 2016 [33]. The outdid the performance of *My Love from the Star* and even attracted concerns of the Ministry of Public Security in China [9].

2.4 Stagnation Phase: Expansion in South ASia's Market for the Post-THAAD Era

In response to the ballistic missile in North Korea, United States Forces Korea (USFK) proposed the deployment of THAAD as early as 2011 [34]. On January 6, 2016, after North Korea has done its fourth nuclear test, South Korea finally employed THAAD, which received strong opposition from its neighboring countries [35]. The Chinese government claimed that the US's aim in utilizing THAAD is to spy on Chinese ballistic missile activities rather than defense against North Korean missiles, given the fact that the THAAD radar can track around 1,000 km while the distance between Pyongyang and Seoul is less than 200 km [36]. For this reason, China views Korea's utilization of THAAD as a betrayal decision [37].

The THAAD led the Chinese government to an unofficial sanction to strike Korea in trade, which included South Korean entertainment export. Same year October, Korean celebrities were disappear from Chinese TV: for instance, Korean singers Psy and Hwang Chi-Yeol were edited out from the Chinese TV shows; Korean celebrities' names were replaced with Chinese names; Korean actress Yoo In-Na was replaced by Taiwanese actress Guo Xue Fu even after the filming was complete [9]. The SAPPRFT stated that the South Korean entertainment products were meaningless but destroyed the morals of Chinese society [38]. Under new regulations, Korean entertainment was also blocked on streaming platforms, and South Korean media companies were not allowed to operate in China [38]. Around the second half of 2017, the limitations brought by THAAD on other Korean industries started to mitigate, while the restrictions on TV for airing Korean shows remain solid, to avoid competitiveness of foreign industries as well as invasion of cultures [9].

Starting from 2016, SKEI in China entered its stagnation period. Under the limitations of Korean entertainment, expansion in South Asia was the new marketing management decision SKEI depended on. The SKEI entered Indonesia in the early 2000s, but entertainment events were not wildly held until the THAAD ban in China: data shows that from October 2015 to November 2016, there were only 10 concerts and fan meetings in Jakarta, while the number of these events doubled in the post-THAAD period [39]. In this case, the surge in the number of entertainment events was partly responsible for the increase in investments from Korean entertainment agencies. Before THAAD, most of those events in Indonesia were held by the Top Ten of the SKEI, while more and more minor companies, such as Blossom Entertainment, BG Entertainment, and YMC Entertainment entered the nation's market after the ban in China [39]. The same phenomenon happened in Thailand as well: the number of entertainment events and agencies gushed in the Thai market after China's blockade [39]. Despite the South Asian countries, SM

Entertainment, one of the leading companies in the SKEI, proposed to exploit the global market as well. In specific, Lee Soo-man, the founder of SM Entertainment, launched “SMTOWN: New Culture Technology”, a project that aimed to produce global Korean entertainment products by cooperating with local artists, companies, and governments [39].

Gradually shifting focus from Chinese to South Asian countries’ markets did not completely eradicate all the impression of the SKEI in China. The Korean fandom that was established in the past decades continued in China via chart beating, fan clubs, and data teams [25]. Purchasing digital Korean entertainment products and supporting their Korean idols through creating hashtags, online fan clubs, and data teams were common among Chinese fans to comment and update news about their favorite Korean stars and shows [40]. The shrinking of SKEI market share in China, however, was inevitable under the anti-Korean sentiments and regulations given the deployment of THAAD.

3 Conclusion

The chronological analysis demonstrated the different marketing tools that SKEI applied in response to the changes in the Chinese political context towards foreign trades and China-Korea relations. The nine the marketing strategies can be concluded in two types of core methodologies: appealing to cultural affinity, keeping prices low, exploiting the overflow effect of K-dramas, and expanding fandom to youth were designed to create demands; spreading through online platforms, joint production, attracting and collaborating with Chinese capitals and exploiting the South Asian markets were decided to cater the changes in consumer and market preferences. While understanding these economic mechanisms advances the future marketing management and consumer psychology research, the international cultural market also can take SKEI as an exemplar to flourish the nations’ entertainment industry and promote economics.

This article laid a foundation for further academic research in political and economical management fields by providing a whole developmental picture of an entertainment industry marketing in a foreign country. The entertainment industry of a country is always the carrier of the nation’s culture. The progress in managing the entertainment industry is still a novel field, nevertheless, more marketing analysis should be done to unveil the new global business models that accomplish the goal of sustainable cultural and economic ecology.

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