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Cultural Proximity and The Type of Korean Television Programs in Asian Market

Mi-kyung Kim*, Chungwoon University, Korea

The emerging Asian market of Korean broadcasting programs is pushing forward a new phase of cultural marketing. The Korean trend in Asia brought issues such as cultural proximity, and the issues have been analyzed by structural analysis. This article suggests which kind of program Asians adopted as the favorites based on the factors of cultural frame in the aspect of performance. The results of analysis shows that Korean programs satisfy Asian emotional needs as being easy to assimilate to similar life styles, cultural proximity and expressiveness. The preference of Korean programs shows that Asians express sympathy for Asian culture frames including family morals, high morality, love and sacrifice. Additionally, as a case study this paper analyzes the characteristics of the most favorite Korean programs in Asia using five categories: harmony, tension, compromise, participation and agreement. The result of the case study showed that Asian people have a similar culture frame and like stories dealing with love, harmony oriented stories, stories with tension in daily life, low participation and the agreement and reinforcement with their traditional values.

Introduction

In the Asian television program market a current issue is the Korean culture trend. This phenomenon is worthy of notice in actuality because Korean television programs are exported within the limits of the Asian territory (especially, Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia). Korea has built up new markets in the other countries by the export of Korean pictures and culture under the

* mkqueen@mail.chungwoon.ac.kr

condition that Hollywood pictures globally dominate the world television program market. Some scholars have suggested that television distribution pattern in world markets is related to the domination system of economic order. Media products of a small number of advanced countries such as U.S., U.K. and France flow one-sidedly into the third world. As a result, the global impact of American culture was disseminated (Schiller, 1969). Another scholar has suggested that the cultural imperialism phenomenon that the American culture power had in South America in 1960's stemmed from the first stage of the local television market but some scholars, emphasizing media imperialism, have the wrong idea of this phenomenon as a permanent idea (Tunstall, J. 1977). Even though one scholar has suggested media imperialism and another scholar has argued a different conclusion, the current development of new media such as satellite broadcasting, cable TV and internet broadcasting accelerates the cultural domination by the advanced countries. However, with the spread of television and the development of broadcasting industry, new conductors of broadcasting industry substitute homemade programming for Hollywood programming. Especially in the case of television programming, the audience is familiar with programs that have a familiar background, story and actors. This is called 'cultural discount'.

Actually, the 'Korean trend' happened only in Asia. The Korean trend is one that has been created by the similarities of culture, beliefs, practices, and similar practical social code-based on forms of etiquette, laws, and rituals. The phenomenon that is currently happening in Asia requires consideration to proximity.

Proximity is divided into three parts (The National Academy of Sciences, 1999). Firstly, organizational proximity can take several forms, including membership in joint project teams or the placement of employees in one another's facilities.

Secondly, cultural proximity, which typically evolves over time, can be achieved through the adoption of common business practices, jargon, ethical standards, and languages. Cultural proximity is especially important for doing business with customers from different countries and cultures. The dividends of cultural proximity can include repeated business, loyalty, and assistance in problem solving during times of crisis.

Thirdly, geographic proximity may involve locating supplier facilities adjacent to OEM operations. For example, long-term relations between beverage producers and container manufacturers led container suppliers to locate their fabrication plants adjacent to breweries.

As one of the major elements for the trade of television programs, cultural proximity encourages the foreign trade of television programs. This article introduces the factors of cultural proximity through the close-to-reality communication process, examines the present state of trade of Korean broadcasting programs with Asian countries, and lastly investigates the factors relating to

cultural proximity and analyzes the characteristics of the programs Korea exported to Asian countries as a case study.

The Close-to-Reality Communication Process

In May-June 1991, the Harvard Business Review published the results of a survey conducted among 12,000 managers from 25 countries (Kanter, 1991). The author found that cultural proximity is a major factor in shaping a manager's views. Even in the aspect of marketing, cultural proximity is an important factor in sustaining the royalty of products.

The indices of cultural proximity may be summarized as the similarities of language, the state of trade, telecommunication among countries and emigration or immigration (Chon, 2002). These indices are to express cultural mix and diffusion by interaction in the networking society. The structure of regional cultural product consumption is significantly related to telecommunication, trade and language similarity. However, though this result suggested the relationship between indices of proximity and cultural product consumption in the aspect of the structure of a trading bloc market, it overlooked the specific characteristics of cultural products and the consumer act in the aspect of performance. So this paper examines which types of programs Asians like based on cultural proximity.

The adoption of foreign programs depends on cultural frame. In the communication process, the sender formulates the message in terms of a cultural frame. The receiver interprets the message in light of another cultural frame and then creates feedback based on that frame. The original sender then interprets that feedback from within his or her frame. The process is complex and full of cultural static. Interference and a consequent loss of meaning grows when we add other possible noisemakers. These noisemakers or common communication barriers increase the possibility of distortion and misunderstanding (Brake, M. Walker, T. Walker, 1995). The source of interference and the loss of meaning stem from the difference of cultural orientation. If people stayed in the same culture bloc, they can understand and feedback well. Therefore, the variables of cultural orientation are important for the investigation of a culture bloc.

<Table 1> 10 variables of cultural orientation

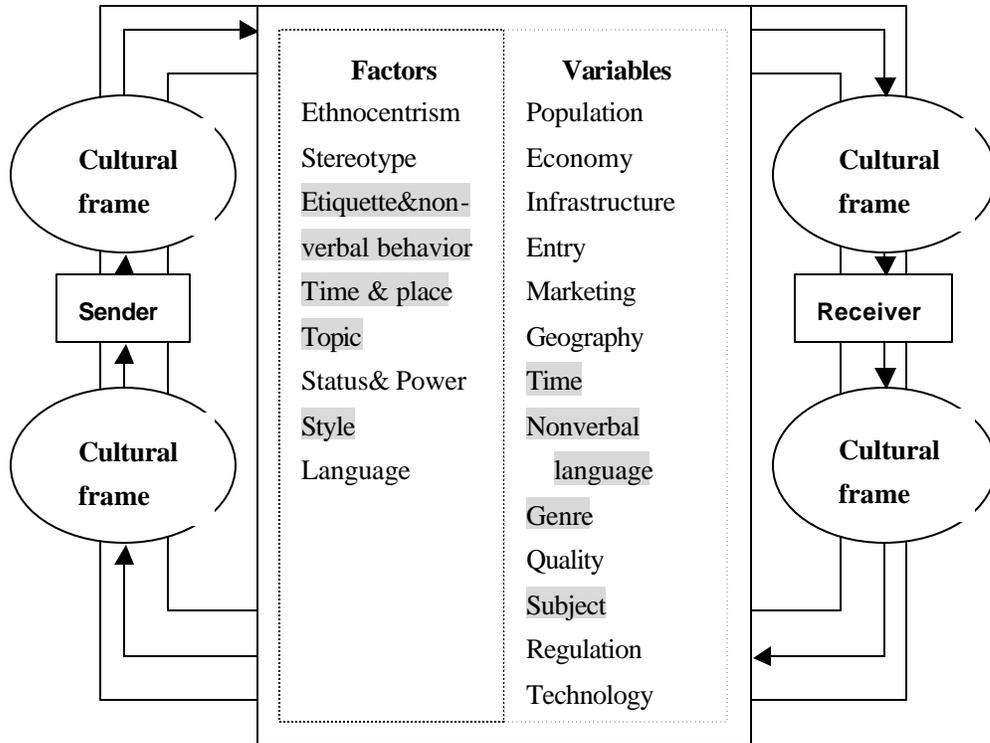
Variables	Different value orientations toward variables	Scholar
Environment	Control, Harmony, Constraint	F. Kluckhohn & F.L. Strodtbeck.ⁱ Edward T. Hall.
Time	Single-Focus, Multi-Focus, Fixed, Fluid, Past, Present, Future	
Action	Doing, Being	
Communication	High context, Low context, Direct, Indirect, Expressive, Instrumental, Formal, Informal	Edward T. Hall.ⁱⁱ
Space	Private, Public	Greet Hofstede.ⁱⁱⁱ
Power	Hierarchy, Equality	

Individualism	Individualism, Collectivist Universalistic, Particularistic	Charles Hampden-Turner & Alfons Trompenaars.^v
Competitiveness	Competitive, Cooperative	
Structure	Order, Flexibility	
Thinking	Inductive, Deductive, Linear, Systematic	Edward C. Stewart & Milton J. Benett.^v Stephen H. Rhinesmith.^{vi}

Reorganized from Brake, M. Walker and T. Walker (1995), pp.28-70

As seen in <table 1>, there are 10 variables provided by cultural paradigm. In addition, individuals orient different values toward variables. The 10 variables and the associated value orientations have been treated as clusters though they are separate and distinct from one another. These clusters are composed of the level of regional and national culture. However, an individual's cultural orientation is influenced by many factors. These factors include family, region, neighborhood, education, corporate culture, religion, profession, social class, race, and generation (Brake, M. Walker, T. Walker, 1995, p.72), and so the communication process based on the reality between sender and receiver is complicated, that is, the sender formulates the message in terms of a cultural frame and the receiver interprets the message in light of another cultural frame and then creates feedback based on that frame (Brake, M Walker, T. Walker, 1995, p.167)

The close-to-reality communication process is based on a cultural paradigm. As seen in <figure 1>, a cultural frame is made up of 8 factors: ethnocentrism, stereotypes, etiquette & nonverbal behavior, time & place, topics, status & power, styles and language. For the international distribution of programs there are 13 variables: population, economy, infrastructure, entry, marketing, geography, time, nonverbal language, genre, quality, subject, regulations and technology. Actually, the factors of the close-to-reality communication process are deeply related to variables of television program distribution. It is important for sender and receiver or exporter and importer to pay attention to cultural frame for communication and distribution. Overall, putting these factors of cultural frames and variables of international distribution together, characteristics common to all are nonverbal, time & place, topic and style. In case of cultural marketing, the relationship of culture and marketing may increase according to how much the exporters have access to the importing country's culture in the aspect of nonverbal, time & place, topic and style. This phenomenon is proved in the factors of preference of Korean programs in Asia countries, as this paper presented in <table 3>.



<Figure 1> the close-to-reality communication process and variables of international distribution of programs

The Present State of Korean Program Trade

The history of exporting of Korean broadcasting programs is not more than six or seven years old. Korea is much indebted for its export to China and Southeast Asia and the rate of net exchange earning from exports grows larger every year. According to statistics as seen in <table 2>, it shows 8.3% in 1996, 38.7% in 1997, 20.4% in 1998, 27.1% in 1999, 2.9% in 2000, 44.3% in 2001 and 52.3% in 2002. In the case of importing programs, there was a continuous increase until 1996. However, as the Korean government lost national prestige in the financial market crash in 1998(IMF case), the

amount decreased. Currently, the rate of export has increased.

The exporting countries are, for the most part, in the Asia territory. In 2000, the order of importing nations of Korean programs, Japan was first 41.1%, China second with 13.5% and lastly Taiwan with 8.4%. However, these outcomes changed in 2001: 20.2% in Taiwan, 20.1% in China and 9.7% in Japan. Since 2001, the main importing countries have shifted into southeast countries (Ministry of Culture & Tourism Republic of Korea, 2003. 3)

In addition to the state of the Asian market, the distribution to Taiwan from Korea proceeded through a distributing agency such as Coogidream Company, Community and Inslier which deal with Korean broadcasting. Currently, the amount of distributing agencies has been increasing (Song, 2002, p.74) In the case of Singapore, Korean programs are directly imported from Korean networks such as KBS, MBC and SBS. Singapore is also doing business with an intermediary that holds the copyrights to Korean programs. Finally, they are being imported from Taiwan. Singapore has shown preference for the programs of the top-rated Korean TV programs within the Chinese language area (Song, 2002, p.116). Malaysia is telecasting Korean programs because of its proximity to Singapore.

Judging from the reasons of preference for Korean programs in Asia countries, it is due to dramas with beautiful settings, original sound tracks and storylines, and the Confucian culture of the unfair treatment of women that Asian women endured. (See Table 3)

<Table 2> the trade of broadcasting program in Korea

(Unit: 1,000\$)

		Network		Program Provider, Independent producer		Total amount	
		Total revenue	A rate of increase	Total revenue	A rate of increase	Total revenue	A rate of increase
E X P O R T	' 96	5,384	? 1.6%	612	827.2%	5,996	8.3%
	' 97	6,967	29.4%	1,351	120.7%	8,318	38.7%
	' 98	7,756	11.3%	2,261	67.4%	10,017	20.4%
	' 99	10,836	39.7%	1,900	? 16.0%	12,736	27.1%
	' 00	11,664	7.6%	1,447	? 23.8%	13,111	2.9%
	' 01	17,147	47.0%	1,773	22.5%	18,920	44.3%
	' 02	26,187	52.7%	2,626	48.1%	28,813	52.3%
	Total	85,941		11,970		97,911	
I M P O R T	' 96	34,267	31.5%	29,637	76.6%	63,904	49.3%
	' 97	38,893	13.5%	18,385	? 37.9%	57,278	? 10.4%
	' 98	15,386	? 60.4%	11,650	? 36.6%	27,036	? 52.8%
	' 99	20,094	30.6%	8,639	? 25.8%	28,733	6.2%
	' 00	26,743	33%	2,350	? 72.8%	29,093	1.3%
	' 01	18,032	? 32.5%	2,410	2.6%	20,442	? 29.7%
	' 02	18,768	4.1%	6,343	163.2%	25,111	22.8%

Total	172,183	79,414	251,597
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Source: Ministry of Culture & Tourism Republic of Korea, March 2003.

<Table 3> the factors of preference of Korean programs in Asia countries

Component	Subject (love story)	Emotion	Romantic
	Story line		Humorous, comic
	Reality		Funny, entertaining
	Pace		Heart-warming, tickling, sweet
	Twist		Impressive
	Character		Soothing, relaxing
	Plot		
	Original sound track		
	Beautiful scenes		
Player	Favorite actor & actress	Culture	Cultural proximity
	Beauty		Cultural uniqueness
	Talent		Morals, family values

Adopted from Song, 2002, p. 253

Cultural Proximity and The Type of Program Trade

Analysis showed that Korean programs satisfy Asian emotional needs by being easy to assimilate to a similar life style, cultural proximity and expressiveness. The preference of Korean programs showed that Asians express sympathy for Asian cultural frames including family morals, highly morality and love & sacrifice.

As seen in <table 1>, the Asian culture bloc is based on the same Confucian values. The characteristics of the Asian culture market based on different value orientations toward variables are summarized as follows.

First, the Asian territory orients ‘harmony’ which is adaptable to new environments though it has strict morals. That is, Asian society is a harmony oriented society as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism give emphasis in that one defines the other within social relationships.

Second, industrialized countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Korea orient single-focus time solving the agenda and issues positively. In the aspect of action, these countries orient ‘being’s which means a fondness for cooperation, compensation in the future, the life in organization and environment.

Third, the Asian culture is focused on public space. This is closely connected with relationship. Also, it places a high value on order, has a higher tolerance for hierarchy and deductive-oriented

cultures that emphasize abstract thinking and the reality of ideas, moral values, theories, and principles.

The story line that is derived from the characteristics of Asian culture anticipates programs that continue to offer more harmonized endings than antagonism and friction. Even the story line that presents competitiveness might be mixed with cooperation in the ending. This trait is to put stress on 'being' that Asians adopt not the story line that places the triumph in sharp conflicts but the story line that reinforces Asian values through dynamic turns of a story. Also, Asians have a preference for calmly watching the development of the situation without involving positively in the situation so they prefer to watch love stories rather than political stories. Actually, the favorite programs are love story dramas.

The categories for the analysis of favorite story lines in Asia are as follows.

- Harmony: this category measures the degree and methods of the clearing up of conflict in the stream of story.
- Tense: this category measures the degree to which the conflict of a story is not one affair but a core affair in the stream of a story.
- Compromise: this category measures the degree to which the conflict is settled through mutual concession.
- Low participation: this category measures the degree to which the audience is driven by empathy.
- Agreement: this category measures the degree to which the audience reinforces traditional values.

Case Study

This paper analyzes the favorite Korean dramas in Taiwan, China, Singapore and Malaysia focusing on the favorite story lines. Program samples presented here are drawn from the schedule of Network and cable TV in Asia countries, and are the top-rated TV programs.

<Table 4> the popular program in Asian countries

Taiwan	China	Singapore	Malaysia
Fireworks	Fireworks	Autumn in my heart	Hotelier
Hotelier	Autumn in my heart	Invitation	All about Eve
All about Eve	Winter sonata	Fireworks	The greatest Lover
Autumn in my heart		All about Eve	When I looked upon the Stars
Winter sonata		Tomato	Winter sonata

The most popular Korean dramas in Asian countries are <Fireworks>, <All about Eve>, <Autumn in my heart> and <Winter sonata>. This case study was analyzed by watching VOD services of Networks such as KBS, MBC and SBS. The story line of these programs is about love, sexual discrimination and traditional Asian family values. To find the relationship with cultural proximity, this case study uses categories such as harmony, tension, compromise, participation and agreement that Asians might have in the aspect of cultural frame.

<Table 5> The Analysis of story line of most favorite drama in Asia

	Fireworks	Autumn in My Heart	All about Eve	Winter Sonata
Subject	Love affair: Love triangle	Love affair: Love triangle	Love affair Love triangle	Love affair Love triangle
Ending	Harmony	Harmony	Morality	Harmony
Tension	Tensions between wife and mother-in-law	Tensions between half-brothers	Tensions between anchor women	Tensions between ex-partner and new partner
Compromise	High	High	High	High
Participation	Low	Low	Low	Low
Agreement	High	High	High	High

As seen in <Table 3>, most of the programs describe love affairs, especially, love triangles. The endings of most programs orient the harmony that two persons of antagonistic relationships settle peacefully. In the aspect of tension, most programs included conflicted affairs, so the appropriate tension is more important to appeal to Asians. Especially, it meticulously presented the conflicted affair that happens in daily life, so this has an advantage over American programs that express sophisticatedly and simply. ‘Participation’ is showed that these programs have some progressive ideas that display an urbane life style and city life so far as Asians can adopt. By watching Korean programs Asians reinforce traditional values such as family relationships, the spirit of filial piety, respect for the old, sacrifice and a warm-hearted touch, so the agreement of value will be high and Asians don’t heterogeneously adopt Korean programs.

Conclusion

Under the notion of cultural proximity, this paper proposed the close-to reality communication that depicts the role of 8 factors constructing cultural frame and the relationship between sender and receiver based on these 8 factors. Additionally, there are 13 variables for international distribution of programs. As we can see in the 13 variables, the factors for cultural frame that help us communicate closely are related to 13 variables for marketing. Especially, for the cultural marketing the common factors-etiquette & nonverbal behavior, time & place, topic and style- let exporters promote the international distribution of programs. Currently, Korean programs had good sales in the Asian territory. It comes from dramas with beautiful scenes for settings, original sound track, romantic storylines and Confucian culture. If we find the connection between cultural frames and preference, it might be etiquette & nonverbal behavior, place, topic and style.

This paper examined the types of Korean programs that Asian people prefer based on Asian cultural characteristics. Asian cultural orientation is presented as harmony-oriented, single-focused time and relationship. Under these orientations, this paper defined the tools of analysis as harmony, tension, compromise, participation and agreement.

As a result of analysis of the favorite Korean dramas in Taiwan, China, Singapore and Malaysia by VOD services on internet, the reasons that Asian people like the Korean programs stems from having harmonized ending, a tense atmosphere, compromise, low participation and agreement to Asian traditional value. These characteristics differ from Hollywood pictures that have expressed sophisticatedly and simply things from the daily life. These characteristics improve the consumption of Korean programs in the Asia cultural market.

Finally, to improve the spread of Korean programs in the Asian market, Korean programs are anticipated not to have conflict but harmony, a cooperative as well as competitive story structure and present life stories as well as the future achievement stories. It is also expected that the story not be contrary to traditional values and order and agrees with Confucian culture. In the aspect of cultural marketing, besides taking a notice of Asian preferences in programming, Korean exporters need to focus on cultural marketing strategies to access the Asian market based on cross-cultural success.

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ⁱ In Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's view, culture is seen as an interlocking networking of dominant (most preferred) value orientations. While they identified common human problems and value orientations and they are not without controversy in academia, they give a useful platform on which to build a practical and very business-oriented approach to thinking about culture (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961).

ⁱ Edward T. Hall determined the implicit messages of difficult cultural orientations to time, space, material possessions, friendship, and agreements. Differences in these matters present us with unspoken cultural languages that affect relationships (Edward T. Hall, 1960).

ⁱⁱⁱ Geert Hofstede defined culture as collective programming of the mind. He identified four major cultural dimensions (among the middle classes) across 66 countries between 1967 and 1973. The four cultural dimensions he identified are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity (Greet Hofstede, 1980).

^{iv} Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars agree that “a deep structure of beliefs is the invisible hand that regulates economic activity.” According to them, the economic success of a culture will depend on an ability to balance these values in tension. They also show how difficult cultures emphasize one value over another (Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, 1980).

^v Stewart and Bennett draw distinctions between American and other patterns of thinking by linking the different styles to a continuum. At the one end of the continuum, the focus is on the sensory aspect of perception, which favors thinking based on concrete description. At the other end, stress is placed on symbolic systems that favor theoretical thinking (Edward C. Stewart and Milton J. Bennett, 1991).

^{vi} Stephen Rhinesmith draw attention to what is known as holistic, big picture, integrative, synthetic, or systems thinking (we will refer to it as systemic thinking). Cultures that value systemic thinking pay attention to integrated wholes, not just the parts. Systemic thinking places value on the text, not just the data; without understanding the context we have no real understanding of what the data means (Stephen H. Rhinesmith, 1993).