

Synergistic Mechanisms of Cultural Communication and Iconic Economy from the Perspective of International Marketing

Mengru Wang^{1,*} and Yong Huang²

¹Department of Art & Social Science, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

²Business School, Jiangxi Morden Polytechnic College, Nanchang City, China

Email: mengruwang83@gmail.com (M.R.W.); yong08250017@163.com (Y.H.)

*Corresponding author

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Abstract—Chinese singer Zhang Yixing’s 2024 cultural idol variety show ‘Show It All’ explores the synergistic path between globalization and localization in international marketing of cultural products through girl group dance videos, cultural symbol fusion and social media matrix. This study takes the show as a case study, combining content analysis and market data to explore how it empowers the internationalization of local cultural brands through the idol economy, and achieves precise reach in the cross-cultural market. Findings: 1. The programmed effectively enhances the attractiveness of local culture through the star effect and the promotion of cultural and travel songs that integrate elements such as dialects and ethnic musical instruments. After the programmed was aired, the songs gained high daily activity, and the global publicity of Hunan’s cultural tourism was significantly enhanced; 2. The programmed activated the fan economy by launching a new female group. Album purchases, high airplay of music videos (MVs), and the girl group’s trips to South Korean music programmed to promote Chinese songs not only created economic value but also became an effective vehicle for spreading Chinese culture and achieving cultural output; 3. The three-way linkage of government-celebrities-fans (the G2C2F model) resulted in a sustainable marketing ecology. This study provides a framework for the integration of government-star-fan in the international marketing practice of cultural industries.

Keywords—cultural communication, idol economy, soft power, glocalization

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, cultural soft power has become a strategic tool for countries to shape international perceptions and develop cross-cultural affinity. Cultural soft power is the ability to influence global audiences through cultural products, values and narratives (Haneş & Andrei, 2015). In 2007, China made culture part of the country’s soft power, an increasingly important factor in the competition for comprehensive national power, and it is entering the realm of global popular culture (Nye, 2012). The number of foreign students travelling to China has increased dramatically over the past 20 years, and with the introduction of the 144-hour visa-free transit policy in 2024, there has been an explosion of foreign visitors, including an increase in English-language signage in China’s top-tier cities (“Research on Tourism Strategies in China Based on Planning Models,” 2024). However, despite these efforts, the international dissemination of Chinese culture faces persistent challenges: homogenization of content strategies (e.g. over-reliance on

historical themes), limited adaptability to diverse markets, and entrenched stereotypes of Chinese modernity (Fei, 2015). There are more than 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, but the content of their programmed is mainly based on traditional calligraphy, tea ceremony and martial arts, and lacks the exploration of contemporary Chinese science and technology, youth culture and other topics. And this content creates a disconnect with the real Chinese society (Liu, 2019). And Chinese singer Lay Zhang’s 2024 cultural idol variety show ‘Show It All’ explores the synergistic paths of globalization and Glocalization of ‘new’ cultural products in international marketing through transnational girl group cooperation, cultural symbol fusion and social media matrix. The synergistic path between globalization and localization of ‘new’ cultural products in international marketing

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Soft Power Theory

According to academic opinion, a country’s comprehensive national power can be categorized into two basic types. Hard Power refers to the ability to influence others through coercive or purchasing methods such as military force and economic means. In contrast, Soft Power is a very different kind of influence, which is mainly based on cultural attraction, political values, and the legitimacy and moral appeal of foreign policy to gain the recognition and adherence of other countries, and is centered on shaping a positive image of the country as a peaceful and open country, so as to win the favor and support of the public abroad (Lee, 2009).

B. Idol Economy and Cultural Diffusion

Thus, the intrinsic link between soft power and cultural communication is obvious. For example, South Korea, with its highly sophisticated pop music system, has successfully triggered the Hallyu phenomenon that has swept the world through the stage performances of idol groups. This is not only a powerful export of Korean pop culture, but also a classic case of how a country utilizes cultural products as a carrier to effectively enhance its international soft power and global image (Wang, 2022).

C. Government-Celebrity-Fandom Model

Against the backdrop of China’s emphasis on social

cohesion, the state often uses various activities to strengthen national education and recognition of traditional culture. In this process, an innovative cultural communication path has been developed, namely the “Government-celebrity-fandom” model (G2C2F). This model integrates the guiding power of the government, the influence of celebrities, and the engagement of the fan base, creating a new type of partnership aimed at promoting a specific cultural agenda (Xu & Yang, 2021).

III. METHODS

The research in this paper involves existing primary and secondary literature, as well as relevant comments in accounts accessed from online publications, information portals and blogs (e.g. TikTok, YouTube, Douyin (chinese TikTok) and Bilibili) in both Chinese and English Analyses of the idol cultural variety show ‘Show It All’, which aired in 2024, to explore its performance in terms of cultural communication and marketing strategies.

Content analysis is a qualitative analytical method that can be used to identify programme content themes, communication strategies and viewer feedback and will be analysed on data from several video websites. To ensure that the analysis is systematic and scientific, this study will focus on the following two core dimensions of content analysis:

1. Cultural soft power: The programme effectively enhanced the attractiveness of the regional culture through celebrity effects (e.g. LAY ZHANG as Hunan’s cultural tourism ambassador) and the promotion of cultural tourism songs that incorporate elements of dialect and ethnic musical instruments. After the programme was aired, the songs gained high daily activity and the global publicity of Hunan’s cultural tourism increased significantly, proving its effective transformation of cultural soft power.
2. Idol economy drives cultural dissemination: The programme activated the fan economy by launching a new girl group. Album purchases, high airplay of Music Videos (MV), and the girl group’s trips to South Korean music programmes to promote Chinese songs not only created economic value but also became an effective vehicle for the dissemination of Chinese culture and achieved cultural exportation
3. Government-media-business tripartite linkage: deconstructing the tripartite linkage mechanism between the government (cultural and tourism policy support), the media (social media), and businesses (content production companies). Evaluate the sustainability of the model in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of cultural communication and economic benefits

IV. FINDINGS

A. Cultural Soft Power

In the ‘Show It All’, Lay Zhang became an ambassador for Hunan’s cultural tourism (Fig. 1) through the programme and composed a collaborative song (Hunan Yao Ding Ke) with a Chinese girl group for Hunan. In the dimension of cultural capital transformation, the programme achieves double empowerment through the ‘idol spokesperson’ system: on the

one hand, Zhang Yixing’s star capital is transformed into cultural communication kinetic energy, with his social media matrix (49.21 million Weibo followers and 11 million Instagram followers) forming the leverage for dissemination; on the other hand, through the symbolic production of the music products of Hunan Yao Ding Ke, the programme creatively transforms the Hunan dialect (the lyrics of the song) into the Hunan dialect. On the other hand, through the symbolic production of the music product ‘Hunan Yao Ding Ke’, it creatively transforms the Xiang dialect (Xiang expression, chilli, 23 visual symbols) and expresses cultural genes such as ‘people speaking Xiang welcome us with hospitality (Fig. 2) and dietary symbols (chili pepper elements are visualised) in the song. Data shows that the single’s official YouTube music video has been played 46k times, creating a fission effect of cultural dissemination. Soft power needs an attractive narrator, which leads to the use of celebrities as a vehicle to achieve personality-based communication (Fig. 3), and secondly, the key to soft power is ‘acceptance’, as many overseas viewers are first attracted by the music and visuals, and then subconsciously encounter and understand the cultural connotations behind them. This is a kind of ‘cultural Trojan horse’ strategy: wrapping the core of culture with the shell of popularity makes it easier to be digested and loved. In this case, a charismatic global icon creates a trendy cultural product that cleverly piques the curiosity of a global audience, allowing them to be entertained, learn about and possibly eventually love the culture.



Fig. 1. Lay Zhang has become an ambassador for Hunan’s cultural tourism.



Fig. 2. Lyrics from the song.

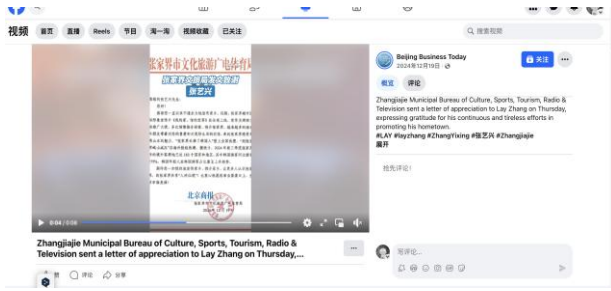


Fig. 3. Hunan culture and tourism would like to thank Lay Zhang.

B. Idol Economy Drives Cultural Dissemination

As well as Lay Zhang through ‘Show It All’ to launching the new Chinese girls’ group “Red. Era. Diva” (R.E.D) (Fig. 4). Before, the Chinese idol industry was previously associated with the Korean idol industry and the Japanese idol industry. And South Korea brought about two changes in the idol industry, from the development of East Asian Korean pop culture in the 1990s to Hallyu 2.0, fuelled by digital, messaging, mobile and internet communications and social media. The second wave of the Korean Wave was based on the recognition of the significance of the Korean Wave economy and the strategic financial investment of Korean policies (Li, 2024; Jia & Winseck, 2018).



Fig. 4. 【ENG SUB|FULL】 Happy Graduation From R.E.D | Show It All EP15-2 | MangoTV.

With the development of pop culture industry, such as South Korea’s idol culture into the opening ceremony performance of the Winter Olympics, so that the world can see the idol culture of South Korea (Li, 2024), Therefore, it can be seen that the stage performance of idol groups can spread the national culture more vividly

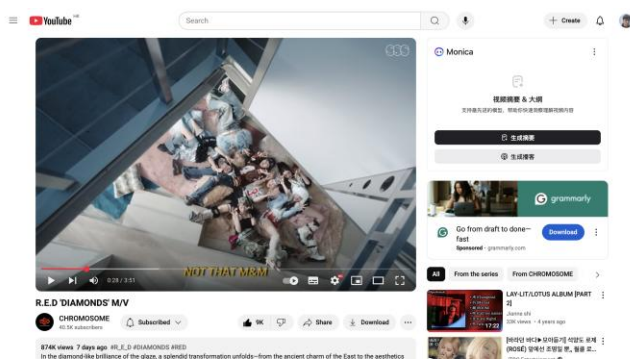


Fig. 5. R.E.D “Diamonds” MV in YouTube.

And on the 9th of May 2025 released a brand-new M-Pop music album ‘Diamonds’ (Chinese name glaze) and in the Chinese meaning ‘glaze’ represents the porcelain embryo

through polishing, quenching, honing, growing into exquisite and beautiful porcelain. And it’s also brought a lot of attention on YouTube and TikTok, with YouTube plays like Diamonds having reached 874k views (Fig. 5), as well as the TikTok dance challenge bringing in 176k views (Fig. 6).

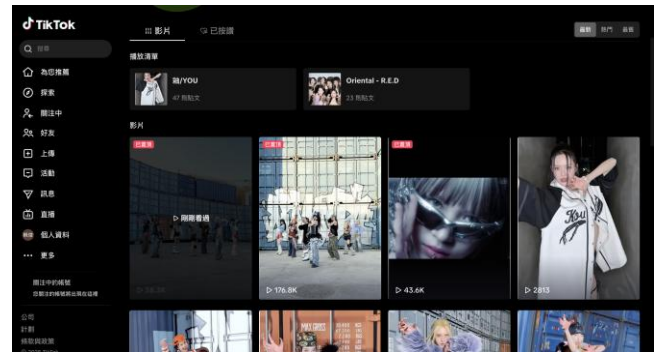


Fig. 6. R.E.D “Diamonds” MV in TikTok.

On Chinese social media Bilibili, it has already generated 1.298 million views (Fig. 7), and in the comments section, some people have commented that it not only shows feminism, but also traditional Chinese culture, which has brought a lot of influence to the cultural market in China and the world (Fig. 8).

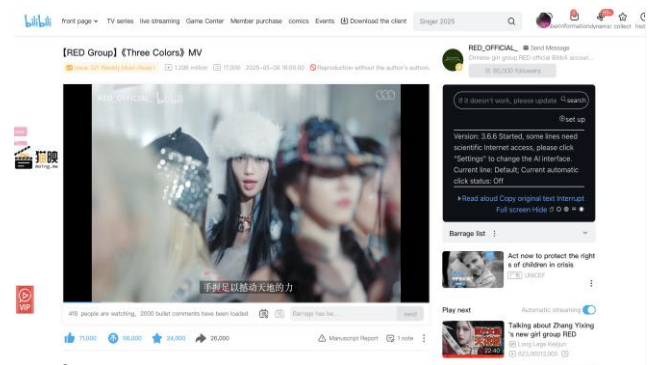


Fig. 7. R.E. D “Diamonds” MV in Bilibili.

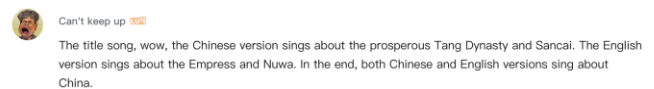


Fig. 8. Common of MV ‘Diamonds’ in Bilibili.

The direct spending of fans (5 million album sales) (Fig. 9) provides the funding for the continued creation and global promotion of cultural products. Helping R.E.D. to ‘break through’ into the global public eye.



Fig. 9. Physical album sales exceeded 5 million.

In this process, R.E.D. and their music (e.g. ‘Diamonds’) are like a ship full of Chinese cultural symbols (toughness, craftsmanship) and modern values (female power). The powerful fan economy is the engine that drives this ship to ride the waves and sail around the world. Fans are not only the passengers on the boat, but also the sailors who work hard to row the oars, and together they complete this powerful cultural voyage.

C. Government-Celebrity-Fandom

The tripartite linkage of Government-Celebrity-Fandom is made up of the whole chain of ‘content production - platform distribution-market response-policy empowerment’. Firstly, through the content production of album music, we produced the Chinese girl group’s music album ‘Diamonds’ as well as music video, which brought innovative content products through the cyberpunk video style and Chinese symbols, as well as M-Pop’s fusion of Chinese and English language features; and these are distributed through Zhang Yixing’s company ‘Chromosome’ as well as R.E.D’s social media accounts (TikTok, YouTube, Douyin (Chinese TikTok), Bilibili, etc.) for the platform, thus bringing a great deal of attention to the market. Feedback and netizens call it ‘the first girl group of internal entertainment’, ‘China’s orthodox girl group’(Fig. 10), etc.

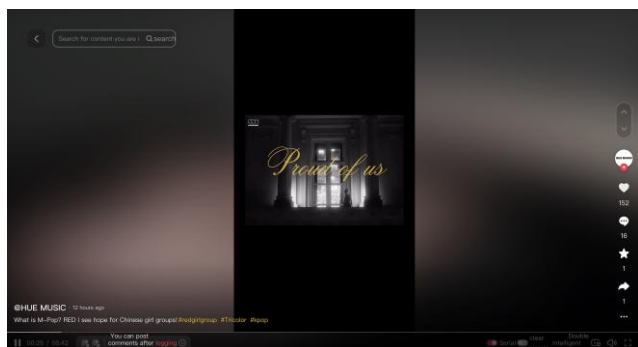


Fig. 10. Netizen’s second creation in Douyin about R.E.D.



Fig. 11. R.E.D join music festival about China government culture promote.

South Korean idol groups on some of China’s cultural replication above, so that China’s idol culture industry has been seriously hampered, so there has been no representative of the Chinese culture of the female groups. And R.E.D’s appearance brought development to Chinese fans’ nationalism, like previous netizens’ comments, the English version sings about the Queen and Nuwa to express female power, while in the Chinese version it sings about the Tang Dynasty and the Three Colours, and the Sheng Shi Zhong Hua, which brings an extremely strong sense of national pride (Jia & Winseck, 2018). Local governments and cultural

tours have also seen R.E.D’s legitimacy as a Chinese girl group and have started to invite them to music festivals (Fig. 11) and use ‘Diamonds’ as the historical and cultural short video BGM for local cultural tours to promote them (Figs. 12 and 13).



Fig. 12. Xiangyang culture and tourism account use R.E. D’s music.



Fig. 13. Putian Culture and Tourism Account use R.E. D’s music.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate an efficient modern mechanism of cultural dissemination in which the G2C2F model seems to overcome long-standing challenges in China’s soft power strategy. The seamless combination of celebrity capital, marketable cultural products, and government support does provide a powerful paradigm for achieving significant short-term impact and economic returns. However, a critical discussion of the model must go beyond its apparent success and delve deeper into the inherent tensions and potential vulnerabilities inherent in its structure.

A. Limitation

First, the model’s reliance on the idol economy introduces a fundamental instability. An icon’s career can be tipped over in an instant by personal scandal or a change in public taste, making any national soft power strategy tied to a particular celebrity inherently risky in terms of long-term national image building; Second, the mobilization of fan nationalism reveals a central paradox. The study notes that R.E. D’s success has ignited a strong sense of national pride among Chinese fans, positioning the group as a cultural icon against the foreign idol industry. While this nationalist sentiment can consolidate the Chinese market and ensure high engagement on platforms such as Bilibili, it can be counterproductive on the international stage. Finally, the G2C2F model walks a fine line between soft power and propaganda. While the explicit involvement of government agencies provides legitimacy and resources, it also carries the risk of compromising the perceived authenticity of cultural products. For international audiences wary of state-driven narratives,

the “G” (government) in G2C2F can transform a cultural invitation into a political broadcast, undermining the organic appeal that is the cornerstone of true soft power. The efficiency of the model stems from its centralized structure, which may also be its greatest weakness in the global marketplace of ideas (Ki *et al.*, 2024).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study documents the rise of a powerful contemporary model of cultural internationalization, as evidenced by the case of 100% Produced. The G2C2F framework synergizes the influence of celebrity spokespersons, the market viability of the icon economy, and the strategic backing of a government entity, to propose an innovative solution to the challenge of making Chinese culture both globally appealing and commercially successful. It effectively transforms cultural symbols into quantifiable economic and ratings metrics, providing a seemingly replicable blueprint for cultural diplomacy in the digital age. However, the deeper contribution of this analysis is that it reveals the central paradox embedded in this state-led, market-driven soft power path. The model’s main strength—its efficient integration structure—is also the source of its most significant vulnerability. Its reliance on an unstable idol economy poses a risk to its long-term strategic stability, while its exploitation of fan nationalism creates a potential conflict between domestic cohesion and international appeal (Liao *et al.*, 2022).

Ultimately, this study concludes that while the G2C2F model is a powerful engine for cultural export, its success as a tool for cultural influence is variable and controversial. It proves China’s ability to create globally competitive cultural products, but it also highlights the enormous challenge of balancing strategic intent with the perceived authenticity required to achieve true cross-cultural appeal. The case of 100% Productions is therefore not only a success story, but also a key warning. The future of such projects will depend on their ability to successfully navigate the treacherous line between authentic cultural appeal and strategic national narratives.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mengru Wang worked on conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, wrote original draft, review & edited; Yong Huang worked on supervision, project administration, reviewed & edited; both authors have approved the final version of the manuscript.

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