

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH TELEVISION EXPORTS: ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CHINESE AND SOUTH KOREAN PERIOD DRAMAS ON YOUTH IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the impact of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, considering this format as one of the instruments of cultural diplomacy. The primary goal of the research is to determine how these media contents shape the cultural values and attitudes of the target population. Additionally, the paper analyses the development, characteristics, and mutual relationships between Chinese and South Korean TV productions. The research was conducted in two phases, employing a comparative-historical method and thematic analysis of data collected through focus group interviews with sinology students at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. The results indicate that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas have no significant impact on young people in BiH, with the absence of their influence representing an epiphenomenon of Western cultural hegemony. In this context, the findings contribute to the understanding of the soft power dynamics and cultural interactions in BiH, as well as the challenges faced by alternative cultural contents in a globalised society.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
4.12.2024
Revised:
10.4.2025
Accepted:
7.5.2025

KEYWORDS

Cultural diplomacy;
Chinese and South
Korean TV
production; historical
TV drama; youth;
Bosnia and
Herzegovina.

Cite this article as: Savić, Dalibor, and Ljiljana Stević. 2025. Cultural Diplomacy through Television Exports: Analysing the Impact of Chinese and South Korean Period Dramas on Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *The Review of International Affairs* LXXVI (1194): 293–313. https://doi.org/10.18485/iipe_ria.2025.76.1194.6

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, South Korean and Chinese TV production have experienced significant growth, establishing themselves as one of the key players on the global media stage. This rise is not merely the result of regional success but also of the strategic use of mechanisms aimed at internationalisation. In this context, it is noticeable that these productions have employed various mechanisms to differing extents and in different ways, such as collaboration with international partners, content localisation for the global market, leveraging the potential of streaming platforms, and investing in high-quality production (Keane, Fung and Moran 2007; Rawnsley and Rawnsley 2015).

The South Korean TV industry, particularly, has stood out for its ability to adapt and innovate. It has primarily focused on high production values and the quality of its content. Moreover, South Korean producers actively collaborate with international partners to adapt content for diverse markets and cultures. They utilise various strategies, including promoting South Korean celebrity culture, tailoring the length and plot of content, and providing high-quality translations. In this context, many researchers have noted that the international success of South Korean TV production is largely linked to its openness to American popular culture and streaming platforms such as Netflix (Lee 2023).

On the other hand, the Chinese TV industry has also seen exceptional growth, driven by its vast domestic market and increasing interest from foreign viewers. However, the Chinese strategy for media internationalisation typically focuses on creating content with global appeal while maintaining an authentic Chinese identity. Chinese producers often use large budgets and spectacular productions to capture the attention of international audiences. Additionally, the Chinese TV industry increasingly relies on its streaming platforms, such as iQIYI, Tencent Video, and Youku, to distribute content beyond national borders (Yan and Li 2018).

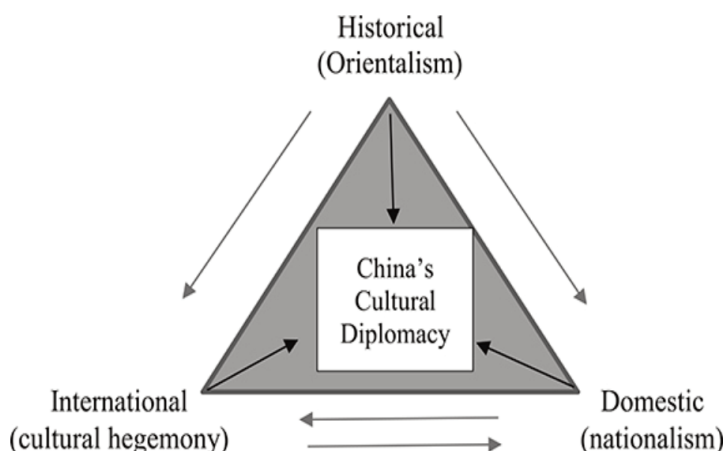
Undoubtedly, these TV productions represent an integral part of the global influence of these countries, serving as a form of cultural diplomacy. From this perspective, this paper aims to analyse the cultural-political impact of Chinese and South Korean TV production on young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Given the lack of similar research in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider Southeast European region, the authors decided that the study would be exploratory in nature, focusing on the historical drama TV genre. The research was conducted in two successive phases. The first phase was based on a historical-comparative analysis of the development and mutual influences of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas and their cultural-political impact in the global context. The second phase was conducted through a thematic analysis of data collected via focus group interviews with students of

Sinology at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. In the following sections, the authors will present the theoretical and methodological framework of the research in greater detail, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results.

The Chinese Cultural Diplomacy Evaluation Framework as a Theoretical and Methodological Tool

In a narrow sense, cultural diplomacy carries a pronounced instrumental connotation and can be understood as the “active, planned use of cultural, educational and informational programming to create a desired result that is directly related to a government’s foreign policy objectives” (McClellan 2004, 23). In a broader sense, it provides a foundation for enhancing intercultural communication, serving as the basis for “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding” (Cummings 2009, 1). British cultural scholar Xin Liu (2020, 42-43) has used the dynamic tension between these connotations of cultural diplomacy to develop a theoretical model for analysing contemporary Chinese cultural diplomacy. This model is based on the assumptions of Foucault’s theory of power, highlighting the complex dynamics of power relations between historical, domestic, and international factors.

Figure 1: Chinese cultural diplomacy Evaluation Framework



Source: Liu 2020, 43.

We believe that this model, in addition to the positioning of Chinese cultural diplomacy globally (in relation to Western cultural hegemony), can also be applied to the global positioning of South Korean cultural diplomacy, particularly in understanding their mutual relations and their culture-power dynamics with other nations, i.e., in the context of international relations. Its heuristic potential is particularly evident due to the pronounced historical dimension, offering the possibility to examine the influence of Chinese and/or South Korean cultural diplomacy not only synchronically but also diachronically. Given that the scope of this research is narrower in comparison to the aforementioned model—internationalisation of popular culture being just one of the instruments of cultural diplomacy—we have decided to employ it as a heuristic framework for a historical-comparative analysis of the development and mutual influences of Chinese and South Korean TV dramas.

The results of this historical-comparative analysis provided us with a conceptual foundation for planning and conducting an exploratory study on the influence of Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study continues our ongoing interest in analysing the impact of Chinese soft power and cultural diplomacy in the country (Stević 2022; Savić, Stević, and Janković 2024). Previous studies have revealed that the Confucius Institutes in Sarajevo and Banja Luka play a significant role in projecting Chinese soft power in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stević 2022, 117-119; Savić, Stević, and Janković 2024, 36). These institutes are closely linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, as they serve as important cultural tools to strengthen China's economic and political influence in Bosnia and Hercegovina and the broader Southeast European region. The influence of the mentioned institutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly evident through the organisation of Chinese language courses, mostly attended by young participants, as well as through the organisation of public events that promote traditional Chinese culture (Cai 2022). In contrast to these earlier findings, this research focuses on cultural content within popular culture, specifically TV production. We aimed to examine the influence of cultural content that does not have direct institutional support within the recipient country, lacks targeted promotion, and is informal in nature but still promotes an authentic Chinese identity. The genre of historical dramas naturally emerged as the ideal choice for this type of analysis. In addition to Chinese dramas, we chose to examine the influence of South Korean historical TV dramas for three primary reasons:

1. The cultural and production similarities with Chinese historical TV dramas;
2. Their global popularity;
3. As a basis for comparison how the target audience perceives Chinese historical TV dramas.

Given the results of the initial study, where participants in Chinese language courses at Confucius Institutes demonstrated a higher interest in Chinese popular culture compared to other target populations (Stević 2022, 117), we decided to conduct this exploratory research with students of Sinology at the Faculty of Philology, University of Banja Luka. We based this decision on the assumption that their interest, or lack thereof, in Chinese and South Korean historical dramas would serve as an indicator for assessing the impact of these contents on the cultural attitudes and values of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and as an indicator of the feasibility of conducting a more extensive study among this population group. Data collection was carried out through a focus group interview involving 10 first-year undergraduate students (class of 2023/2024) originating from various regions across Bosnia and Herzegovina. First-year undergraduate students were selected because their knowledge of the Chinese language and culture is relatively limited compared to students in higher years, making them more representative of the typical young person in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus group interview took place in April 2024.

Chinese and South Korean TV Drama Production: A Historical Perspective

In this section, we will reflect on the historical development, mutual influences, and the current production and cultural specificities of Chinese and South Korean (historical) TV dramas. Additionally, we will highlight certain (non-)diplomatic aspects of cultural exchange between these two countries. This review will be framed by the cultural diplomacy model developed by Xin Liu (2020), focusing on the intertwined dynamics of cultural diplomacy and power relations within historical, national, and international contexts.

According to Australian cultural theorist Michael Keane, the development of Chinese TV drama production can be understood in three distinct phases. The first phase, the Industrial period (1958–1989), was characterised by a strong propagandistic function. TV dramas were used to promote positive role models in line with the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This era saw a high level of political control and a low level of professionalisation in TV production. The second phase, the Market-orientated period (1990–2002), marked a shift towards a more market-orientated approach, where TV production moved away from a purely standardised supply model. During this period, there was an attempt to balance commercialisation, driven by audience expectations, with socially desirable norms endorsed by the CCP. Western production practices, such as contemporary themes, soap operas, sitcoms, and product placement, began to be adopted. The third phase, the Interpersonal period (2003–present), has focused on targeting specific market segments, with

international influences adapted to suit local production needs. One notable trend during this time was the rise of historical dramas, which became the dominant TV form as they allowed for the exploration of topics that were less politically sensitive and subject to the CCP's censorship. (Keane 2005, 85-89). A slightly different account of the development of Chinese TV drama is provided by Chinese communications scholar Shanshan Zhang, who emphasises its global spread and identifies four key phases in this process. The Budding Era (1980–1991) marked the beginning of Chinese historical TV drama exports, primarily to other Asian countries, as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Iconic series such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* played a central role during this time. This period was followed by the Growth Era (1992–1999), characterised by efforts to enhance profitability in South Asian markets, with historical dramas continuing to dominate the export landscape—well-known examples include *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Princess Pearl*. The next phase, the Challenge Period (2000–2012), brought a significant decline in the export of Chinese dramas to Asian countries, largely due to the growing popularity and influence of South Korean TV productions. Finally, the Platformisation Era (2013–present) has been defined by strong governmental support and the increasing availability of Chinese dramas on local, regional, and global streaming platforms, making Chinese TV content more accessible to international audiences than ever (Zhang 2022, 70–71).

To understand the role of Chinese historical dramas in the context of cultural diplomacy, it is essential to consider the categorisation and specificities of different dramatic forms that characterise Chinese TV production. In this regard, Keane distinguishes three categories of dramatic content:

1. Historical/political dramas, which include subgenres such as kungfu (wǔdǎ piàn 武打片), reworked legends (chuánqí 传奇), biopics of great leaders, statesmen, and patriots, as well as tales of power and passion from the dynastic past, often referred to as Royal Court “costume” dramas (gǔzhuāng 古装);
2. Reform dramas (zhǔxuánlǜ 主旋律) aimed at glorifying the norms and ideals of socialist realism;
3. Contemporary popular dramas that focus on narratives of interpersonal relationships in modern society (Keane 2005, 84).

Although Chinese TV drama production has evolved “from national preoccupation to overseas aspiration” (Keane 2008), it remains caught between “propaganda and marketisation” (Wang and Klein 2022). In other words, the CCP continues to exert significant economic and political influence on Chinese TV production (e.g., through regulatory legislation, financial incentives, censorship, supervision, and sanctions). For instance, in 2012, the Chinese government enacted the “Advertising Order”, prohibiting TV stations from airing

commercials during dramas and films longer than 45 minutes. Additionally, in 2015, the “one drama and two stars” measure was introduced, limiting the airing of a series to two TV stations. That led to a steep rise in the prices of episodes of the most popular TV dramas, prompting further restrictive measures in 2018, such as capping actors’ fees per episode at 1 million yuan and setting a maximum price of 9 million yuan per episode (Yan and Li 2018, 840–841). At the same time, political pressures on Chinese TV production are primarily aimed at promoting national interests, particularly those of the CCP (e.g., promoting “positive values” and Chinese identity/nationalism). The significance of Chinese TV production in promoting national interests within the context of international relations is strictly regulated. Media regulators, such as the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA), oversee the radio/television and print media sectors, respectively, while the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) oversees online content (Wang 2022, 5). These regulations ensure that media content aligns with China’s foreign policy goals, thereby shaping global perceptions of China and its strategic interests.

In this context, historical TV dramas have become an exceptionally popular genre, often receiving direct support from Chinese authorities, particularly when exported to Western markets, as they promote Chinese history and customs. As such, they can be perceived as a tool of cultural diplomacy, serving as the “forefront of articulating political and legal principles based on the Confucian-influenced traditional Chinese culture” and playing a significant role in the “support of the state’s propagandist purposes” (Dawei Guo 2015, 374). However, although there is a prevailing belief in Western markets that these are the most popular forms of Chinese TV drama, recent studies suggest that contemporary dramas, especially on online platforms like YouTube and Rakuten Viki, are actually more popular:

Table 1: Top 10 C-dramas on YouTube based on the average view counts

English title	Chinese title	Total VC	Number of EPs	Average VC	Category
1 Boss & Me (2014)	杉杉来了	3.183 b	33	96.5 m	Cp
2 Eternal Love (2017)	三生三世十里桃花	5.368 b	58	92.6 m	Cos
3 A Love So Beautiful (2017)	致我们单纯的小美好	2.024 b	24	84.3 m	Cp
4 Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019)	致我们暖暖的小时光	1.959 b	24	81.6 m	Cp
5 Princess Agents (2017)	楚乔传	4.497 b	58	77.5 m	Cos
6 Falling into Your Smile (2021)	你微笑时很美	1.850 b	31	59.7 m	Cp
7 Sweet Combat (2018)	甜蜜暴击	1.826 b	37	49.4 m	Cp
8 Go Go Squid! (2019)	亲爱的热爱的	1.906 b	41	42.4 m	Cp
9 The Brightest Star in The Sky (2019)	夜空中最闪亮的星	1.853 b	44	42.1 m	Cp
10 Empresses in the Palace (2011)	甄嬛传	3.149 b	76	41.4 m	Cos
1. In Table 1, VC stands for view counts, EPs for episodes; b for billion, m for million.					
2. In Tables 1 and 2, the last column lists the category of the dramas, Cp for contemporary drama, Cos for costume drama.					

Source: Chen and Chang 2024, 3.

Table 2: Top 10 C-dramas on Viki based on the number of ratings

English title	Chinese title	Number of ratings	Rating	Category
1 Go Go Squid! (2019)	亲爱的热爱的	193,631	9.6	Cp
2 Falling into Your Smile (2021)	你微笑时很美	185,057	9.6	Cp
3 You Are My Destiny (2020)	你是我的命中注定	163,684	9.4	Cp
4 My Little Happiness (2021)	我的小确幸	127,489	9.6	Cp
5 Go Ahead (2020)	以家人之名	126,955	9.6	Cp
6 My Unicorn Girl (2020)	穿盔甲的少女	111,931	9.6	Cp
7 Love O2O (2016)	微微一笑很倾城	97,454	9.5	Cp
8 A Love So Beautiful (2017)	致我们单纯的小美好	91,843	9.4	Cp
9 Put Your Head on My Shoulder (2019)	致我们暖暖的小时光	87,331	9.6	Cp
10 You Are My Hero (2021)	你是我的城池营垒	74,454	9.5	Cp

Source: Chen and Chang 2024, 3.

Research conducted by Li suggests that the reasons for the relatively lower popularity of historical TV dramas among Western audiences can be attributed to their temporal, spatial, and, in many cases, cultural distances, which require additional cognitive resources to process. This complexity can be off-putting for a segment of viewers. Li argues that these dramas often face criticism regarding the length of their storylines, which are frequently perceived as repetitive, boring, and lacking dynamism, leading to lower viewing rates. On the other hand, most viewers appreciate the visual effects, such as the sets, costumes, and makeup. However, Li's research indicates that the storyline remains the central focus of audience interest (Li 2022). Due to these factors, Chinese historical dramas are often adapted for Western markets by reducing the original number of episodes. For example, in the case of the historical drama *Empresses in the Palace*, the series was shortened from 76 episodes to just six (TMTPOST 2019).

From the late 1990s to today, there has been enormous global interest in South Korean pop culture (music, films, TV dramas, etc.), first in East and Southeast Asia and later worldwide. This phenomenon, known as the "Korean Wave" or Hallyu, owes much of its success to the South Korean government, which acted as both a promoter and sponsor, recognising the economic

potential of the “cultural industry” or “content industry”. One significant factor in the success of the Korean Wave was South Korea’s adherence to neoliberal principles and its readiness to adopt and adapt cultural content from the West (Mustafha and Razak 2020, 3-4). Cai (2011) has pointed out that “the Korean Wave is the combination of Confucianism and Western industrial culture” and that “Korean pop culture has borrowed the best of Western popular culture and recreated it according to Korean tastes”. Reflecting on this, Ryoo argued that Korean pop culture acted as a cultural mediator, reinterpreting Western popular culture and making it more accessible to Asian audiences (Ryoo 2009). At the same time, the South Korean government actively used this cultural phenomenon as a tool of cultural and public diplomacy to improve its national image and brand. Agencies like the Korea Creative Content Agency, the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, the Korea Foundation, and the Presidential Council on Nation Branding played essential roles in this effort (Mirshahi 2021, 53-54; Jang and Paik 2012, 196).

South Korean TV dramas, including those in the historical genre, have been instrumental in the spread of the Korean Wave. Their success was partly due to being more affordable than competing productions and their promotion of Korea’s celebrity culture (Mustafha and Razak 2020, 3). However, the expansion of South Korean dramas into Asian markets encountered both positive reception and resistance. That was particularly evident in China, which transitioned from being one of the largest consumers of South Korean dramas to outright banning them. In that context, Park, Lee, and Seo identify four distinct periods in the relationship between Chinese authorities or other actors (e.g., investors) and South Korean dramas:

1. Early period (1997–2005): The flourishing of Korean dramas

This period culminated in 2005 with the broadcast of the historical drama *Jewel in the Palace* (Dae Jang Geum). Due to cultural similarities (Confucianism) and less national resistance compared to other foreign series (particularly Japanese), South Korean dramas filled a significant part of China’s growing TV market. However, the success of these dramas was interpreted by some in China as a symbol of cultural invasion and trade deficit, leading to strict limitations on the airing of South Korean dramas (TV stations were allowed only 20 hours of South Korean TV dramas per year).

2. Second period (2006–2012): Korean dramas stagnated on TV but flourished online

In 2007, part of the Chinese public reacted against South Korean historical dramas like *Jumong*, *Yeon Gaesomun*, and *Dae Jo Young*, citing alleged distortions of Chinese history, which led to even stricter regulations on

broadcasting South Korean dramas. Despite this, these series gained popularity due to the increasing effects of platformisation.

3. Third period (2013–2016): The inflow of Chinese capital

The success of the South Korean series *My Love from the Star* (2013–2014) encouraged Chinese investors to invest in South Korean dramas and hire South Korean professionals in the production of Chinese dramas. Despite new restrictions imposed by Chinese authorities, this collaboration produced the series *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), which became highly popular throughout Asia.

4. Fourth period (2016–present): Blockade of Korean dramas

The political conflict over the deployment of the American THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) system on the Korean Peninsula served as an excuse for China to impose even stricter measures or a complete ban on South Korean dramas and other pop culture content on domestic TV stations. This move has both economic and political dimensions aimed at curbing the influence of South Korean cultural diplomacy on Chinese citizens (Park, Lee, and Seo 2018, 6–14).

Having outlined the development, characteristics, and mutual relationships between Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas in a global context, the following section will focus on analysing their impact among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Influence of Chinese and South Korean Historical TV Dramas on Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina

When asked whether they regularly watch South Korean and Chinese historical TV dramas, most students responded negatively, and all agreed that their acquaintances do not watch them at all. Only female students S1 and S3 stated that they regularly follow these media contents, and they made the following comments:

I believe that we are increasingly encountering Chinese and Korean pop culture, both in the world and in our regions. It is especially interesting because they are quite different from our culture. I think this is why people are interested in them, myself included, especially since we have not had any points of contact with these cultures...We can see a lot of fascinating historical details, costumes, the layout of the imperial court, relationships between dynasties... (S1)

These series are watched by people who are in some way already connected to Asian cultures, meaning they have had some contact with them. Take us as an example. We study Chinese culture and language, so we are familiar with this content, but it is not that present here... I had watched them before, and for this focus group, I watched some more. Previously, I watched

Hwarang and, more recently, *Under the Queen's Umbrella* and *Alchemy of Souls*. (S3)

In contrast, the views of the majority of students regarding Chinese and South Korean historical dramas are reflected in the statements made by students S4 and S6. In this context, student S4 refers exclusively to personal interests, while student S6 speaks more about the attitudes of their peers towards different Asian pop cultures:

I have never been particularly interested in them. I have watched some movies, but they focus on general themes and are closer to our time. In my opinion, there is nothing that requires prior knowledge of historical events... I have always been interested in Asia and China—in history, geography... ways of life, business, and politics—but I mostly approached those subjects through books and documentaries. (S4)

I think that among the younger population here, Asian culture is not that popular. The only popular things are anime and manga, but these are Japanese. Asian series and music are not as popular. The only Asian series I have watched is *Squid Game*. I do not think historical TV dramas from those regions are popular among our peers. (S6)

Almost all students stated that they had watched the mentioned historical TV dramas exclusively on online platforms (most often Netflix and YouTube). Only two female students mentioned having the opportunity to watch them as part of domestic TV station programming.

During the focus group, students mainly referred to two subgenres of historical TV dramas: “royal court” and “reworked legends”. In this context, we have compiled the titles of the TV dramas they mentioned and linked them to the corresponding production, subgenre, and year of production:

Table 3: Historical TV dramas mentioned during the focus group interview

English title	TV Production	Subgenre	Year of production
1 Hwarang	South Korean	Reworked legends	2016-2017
2 Under the Queen's Umbrella	South Korean	Royal court	2022
3 Legends	Chinese	Reworked legends	2019
4 Alchemy of Souls	South Korean	Reworked legends	2022
5 Scent of Time	Chinese	Royal court	2023

Source: Authors.

Based on the table presented, it is evident that students have primarily had the opportunity to follow more recent TV dramas, which likely corresponds to the already mentioned awakening of their interest in Asian cultures. In a few instances, students also mentioned other historical dramas but could not recall their titles. That is why we could not include them in the table presented. Regarding the core values and narratives characteristic of the mentioned dramas, most students emphasised the context of love. However, they also pointed to the existence of themes such as political relationships and intrigues, questions of social status, respect for elders, self-sacrifice, and others.

I did not watch the series to the end, but the context of romantic relationships was dominant in it as well. The girl was a street performer, and she began to dance at the court... there she fell in love with a nobleman... the plot revolved around that. (S6)

I also watched the series *Under the Queen's Umbrella*, and the theme of love was woven throughout, but it was not the main theme. In my opinion, the main theme in that series is the issue of supremacy and political problems. That narrative of love is constantly present, but it does not mean it is the focus of every series. (S4)

For example, there is also an emphasis on the social status of the characters. The guy was an emperor, and she was a concubine, and they were forbidden to be together. (S9)

At the same time, students noted similarities and differences between the values and patterns of behaviour depicted in these series and those specific to their own culture. They highlighted the differences between “Eastern” and “Western” mentalities. For example, students S1 and S4 particularly emphasised that in Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas, there is a pronounced authoritarian mentality, as well as familism and gerontocracy:

There is a strong emphasis on those hierarchically above you, on authority, and on the elderly; family is highly valued and placed above all else. (S4)

The “cult of ancestors” is often mentioned... the theme of what some great-grandmother or great-grandfather said will always come up, and this hierarchy of relationships is genuinely nurtured, with greater respect given to the elderly than to the young. (S1)

Building on the previous thoughts, student S3 emphasises that the mentioned traits of “Eastern” mentality are part of their tradition and that they hold a special status in historical TV dramas:

This is still present among them today, so it is to be expected that they emphasise it in their dramas, striving to showcase it as a sign of respect for their own tradition. I believe they insist on making it as authentic as possible,

even if the storylines are not entirely historically accurate or involve some fiction. (S3)

In a similar context, some students referred to the depiction of the concept of “guānxi”, with student S3 stating that “it is highly valued there” and “it is not seen as something negative”. Student S4 noted how they like to highlight favouritism in terms of social connections, providing the example of the queen mother from the series *Under the Queen’s Umbrella* (who openly favours one of the concubines over the current queen), while student S6 mentioned the character of a mother who publicly praises only one son.

An interesting discussion about the similarities between the cultural patterns depicted in TV dramas and those in Bosnia and Herzegovina was initiated by student S6:

Our people have certain principles they adhere to, which often coincide with those over there... At first glance, they may not seem similar, but when you delve deeper into the analyses, you can notice some similarities. For instance, courage and respect for family, parents, and, to some extent, authority... as a form of collectivism. This is also expressed in our culture, although not to the same extent, but there are similarities. Then there is perhaps hospitality... that kind of warmth among people. I would not compare us to the West; that is really a completely different extreme. (S6)

Student S3 disagreed with the assertion about the prevalence of collectivism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stating that she believes individualism is more pronounced in the country. In response, student S6 remarked that she thinks the opposite, suggesting that we are at least somewhere in the middle between the East and the West. Student S7 joined the discussion, pointing out that we have also had a “cult of personality” in this region. However, he is still fascinated by how the relationship with authority is portrayed in those series:

What is surprising is how much they believe in their authorities and rulers, and they do not publicly speak out against them to the same extent. In contrast, people here feel the need to express whether they are for or against the ruling party or anything else. (S7)

Building on that observation, student S3 described a scene from the drama *Under the Queen’s Umbrella* where a concubine scolds her son for gossiping and causing a fight:

It shows that they do not emphasise public slandering of authority that much... The concubine told her son something like, “If you cannot say it to her face, then do not talk about it publicly...” I think that is quite different compared to us, where people here do not really care who they say what to. (S3)

A similar observation was made by student S6, who pointed out that people in Bosnia and Herzegovina “talk more than they act”, noting that “it is different for them, even for the characters in the series... if they say something, they will try to follow through, while we are more relaxed about it”.

Regarding production differences between Chinese/Korean and Western series, students mainly referenced aspects like the slowness and repetitiveness of the plot, as well as the different portrayals of love and violence scenes.

But that slow pace is, in a general sense, a characteristic of Chinese and Korean series... They have series that have thirty episodes, each lasting about an hour... It does not matter whether they are historical or contemporary... and I do not think they plan to change that. (S3)

I do not have a completely negative opinion, but I also find that slowness is noticeable in some scenes... At one moment I am interested, and in the next, I am not. (S10)

For example, there are not many scenes of violence... Rarely will you see that concept of violence or any aggressive scenes. Everything is somewhat milder and calmer. (S3)

They are not that explosive. They are more passively aggressive... they send messages. They do not go directly; rather, everything is somehow implied, and situations are resolved that way. On the other hand, with us, it is much more explosive. (S6)

I find it interesting how all these themes are actually more controversial in the East than in the West... As my colleagues mentioned, the plot is slow, but that is more valued there. For example, with a Western series, you might see a romantic couple and something happening in the first episode, while in Asia, everything is more childish and innocent... those themes are still taboo there. (S4)

At the same time, most students noted that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas are extremely visually appealing. In this regard, we would particularly highlight the thoughts of student S3, who expresses admiration for this aspect of production but simultaneously questions it in the context of historical authenticity:

They really strive to make it aesthetically pleasing so that it is enjoyable to watch. I say this from my perspective, as it is one of the reasons why I was drawn to Asian cultures... Everything they create related to history aims to showcase their culture, attire, architecture, and customs in the most beautiful way possible.

They make maximum effort in that promotion to ensure everything looks nice, elegant, calm, and composed. I think this emphasis on beauty is typical for them, regardless of whether it is about the past or the present. (S3)

However, I believe it is not entirely realistic... those were times when makeup was not as developed, and it was impossible for them to look that beautiful. (S3)

Most students believe that Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas have a limited contribution to cultural promotion and influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of them felt that this influence could be much more pronounced. However, that would require significant changes in their production or a greater need for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be more familiar with their cultural and historical context.

We are used to watching Western series, and that format typically allows us to relax and not think too much about the content, as it is mostly entertainment. In contrast, Eastern historical dramas require prior knowledge of those cultures... They should speed up the pacing to adapt to Western audiences... Sometimes, it is quite tedious to watch those series because of their slowness. (S6)

I think Asian cultures are quite foreign to people here, especially their historical development... If these contents were promoted more, people here could learn more about their history. (S3)

These reflections are further supported by the views of students regarding the content of Chinese and South Korean pop culture dedicated to contemporary themes. In this regard, most students emphasise that their interest in Asian cultures is a result of the “Korean Wave”, primarily K-pop music. Some of them also point out specific characteristics of this cultural phenomenon:

“Korean Wave” is linked to South Korea’s pronounced capitalist environment, where public figures are presented as consumer products, resulting in a massive influence and a loyal fan base. This phenomenon fosters parasocial relationships, where fans feel a personal connection to these celebrities, leading to high consumption of content associated with them, from albums to various merchandise. Thus, it becomes one of their main sources of revenue (S4).

In the case of Korea, there is a notable influence from Western culture, which is quite significant. When comparing Chinese and Korean series, it seems that Chinese series promote Chinese culture more, while the influence of the West on Korean series is strongly pronounced. For example, *Squid Game* has an English dub that makes it feel like an American series, even though it was made by Koreans. This series does not promote Korean culture and includes representatives of other ethnic groups, not just Koreans (S5).

Some students pointed out that alongside the Korean influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, attention should also be paid to the Japanese cultural impact, suggesting that it might even precede the Chinese cultural influence:

I believe that we all started with anime or K-pop, and there are many more influences from those cultures than from China. Those contents are much more present in public. Similarly, content about Japan or South Korea is played more often than that about China. Everything I learnt about Chinese culture, series, and celebrities is connected to watching Korean and Japanese content, and then Chinese content started popping up, which piqued my interest. (S3)

Chinese pop culture is nowhere near Japanese or South Korean. I even think that if we had Korean studies or Japanology here in Banja Luka, no one would sign up for Sinology. I believe that young people here are far more connected to those cultural influences. (S7)

Student S4 attempted to link the mentioned context of the under-representation of Chinese popular culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the preservation of Western cultural hegemony:

It has a lot to do with Western propaganda, particularly American... This is how Chinese media are actually blocked... That is why content from South Korea and Japan is more accessible to us. (S4)

The results of the analysis and interpretation of the collected data presented in this chapter can be summarised as follows:

- Students and their acquaintances generally do not watch Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas, and if they do, they watch them through online platforms;
- Students mostly had the opportunity to view the “royal court” and “reworked legends” subgenres of historical TV dramas;
- Students generally understand the core values and narratives of these series but believe that adequate following necessarily requires a significant level of historical and cultural knowledge;
- Students notice certain similarities and differences between the cultural patterns depicted in these series and those in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Students observe production differences between Chinese and South Korean series compared to Western (primarily American) TV dramas and relate these to cultural differences between the “East” and the “West”;
- Most students believe that historical dramas have limited potential to promote South Korean and Chinese culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Students prefer content related to contemporary themes, and they mostly follow South Korean and/or Japanese pop culture.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted exploratory research indicate that the genre of historical TV drama does not serve as an effective tool of cultural diplomacy for the People's Republic of China and South Korea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is particularly evident in the case of Chinese historical TV dramas, which, despite the existence of institutional channels for promoting Chinese culture and language (in the form of Confucius Institutes and sinology studies), still do not capture the attention of most young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this sense, their influence on the formation of cultural attitudes and values is only somewhat present among those individuals within this demographic who are interested in Asian cultures.

However, even in such cases, young people are more interested in media content related to contemporary social processes. In this context, the research findings suggest that young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more interested in and familiar with Asian pop cultures that model themselves on Western TV production, particularly South Korean and Japanese pop culture. In other words, young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina prefer media content from Asian pop cultures that are integrated within the framework of Western cultural hegemony. From this perspective, Chinese and South Korean historical TV dramas can be interpreted as alternative media content that, due to typical genre conventions, fail to bridge the cultural and temporal gap with young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consequently, their role in promoting Chinese and South Korean (traditional) culture and values, as well as in undermining Western cultural hegemony in Bosnia and Herzegovina, remains extremely limited.

We believe this exploratory research has fulfilled its purpose for two primary reasons. The first reason pertains to the justification for conducting similar research on a larger sample of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The presented results indicate that this would not be justified; rather, the available research resources and capacities would be far better directed towards the issues raised by this research than towards verifying the findings achieved. That brings us to the second reason regarding the heuristic potential of the conducted research. In this regard, and given the previous observation that similar projects have not been realised, it is evident that there is a scientific justification for conducting research focused on examining the impact of various aspects of the Korean Wave on young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same applies to the influence of contemporary Japanese pop culture.

Additionally, there is an evident scientific justification for a more comprehensive comparative study that would more thoroughly address the reasons why young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina prefer certain Asian pop

cultures, as well as the specific mechanisms of cultural production and diplomacy that characterise them.

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**KULTURNA DIPLOMATIJA KROZ TELEVIZIJSKI IZVOZ:
ANALIZA UTICAJA ISTORIJSKIH KINESKIH I KOREJSKIH DRAMA
NA OMLADINU U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI**

Apstrakt: U radu analiziramo uticaj kineske i južno korejske istorijske TV drame na mlade u Bosni i Hercegovini, uzimajući u obzir ovaj format kao jedan od instrumenata kulturne diplomatije. Primarni cilj istraživanja je da se odredi do koje mere sadržaji ovog medija oblikuju kulturne vrednosti i stavove ciljne grupe. Pored toga, rad analizira razvoj, karakteristike i međusobni odnos između kineske i korejske TV produkcije. Istraživanje je rađeno u dve faze, koristeći komparativno istorijski metod i tematsku analizu podataka koje su prikupljeni na fokus grupama sa studentima sinologije Filološkog fakulteta, Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci. Rezultati pokazuju da kineska i južnokorejska istorijska drama nema značajan uticaj na mlade ljude u BiH, te da odsustvo uticaja ovog tipa drame predstavlja epifenomen zapadne kulturne hegemonije. U ovom kontekstu rezultati doprinose razumevanju dinamike meke moći i kulturne interakcije u BiH kao i izazova za alternativne kulturne sadržaje u globalizovanom društvu.

Ključne reči: kulturna diplomatija; kineska i južno korejska TV produkcija; istorijska TV drama; omladina; Bosna i Hercegovina.