

From Screen To Stream: Platform Transition, Cultural Proximity, And The Reception Of Chinese Variety Shows Among Malaysian Audiences

Yi Wang¹ and Manual Selvarai Bexci²

¹*School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Petaling Jaya, No.47301, Selangor, Malaysia*

¹*15538883337@163.com

²*School of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Petaling Jaya, No.47301, Selangor, Malaysia*

Abstract

With the strategic expansion of Chinese streaming platforms in Southeast Asia, the cross-border distribution path of Chinese variety shows is undergoing a profound transformation from traditional TV broadcasting to online streaming platforms. As the earliest Southeast Asian market where iQIYI has landed, Malaysia, with its unique background of Chinese communities, multicultural coexistence, and highly digital media consumption, constitutes a typical field for exploring the mechanism of overseas dissemination of Chinese variety shows. This study takes Cultural Proximity Theory as the main theoretical framework, integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory and Global Media Flow Theory, and employs a mixed research method combining questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Using a mixed-method approach, the study examines Malaysian audiences' exposure to Chinese variety shows, their preferences and cultural identity responses. The study aims to clarify how platform transformation reconfigures audience reach pathways and how cultural proximity variables (language, ethnicity, values) modulate audience acceptance of content. The theoretical contribution of this paper is to introduce the theory of cultural proximity into the streaming media platform context and empirically test the mechanism of Chinese-language content dissemination in non-Chinese dominated societies, providing new analytical perspectives for understanding South-South media flows within Asia.

Keywords: variety show; cross-communication; cultural proximity; streaming platform; Malaysia; audience reception

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the second decade of the 21st century, the global media landscape has undergone profound structural changes. The rapid rise of Western streaming platforms, represented by Netflix and Amazon Prime, has reshaped the logic of content production, distribution and consumption (Straubhaar et al., 2021). At the same time, media products from non-Western countries are circulating across national borders on an unprecedented scale, creating what Thussu (1998) calls a 'contra-flow' that profoundly challenges the long-standing Western-dominated narrative of media imperialism. Against this macro background, the internationalisation of Chinese media products has become a cutting-edge issue in global communication research.

As an important part of China's audiovisual industry, the overseas dissemination of Chinese variety programmes has shown a significant acceleration in recent years. Unlike the more systematic route of C-drama, the cross-border distribution of variety programmes has long relied on informal channels, and the strategic deployment of Chinese streaming platforms such as iQIYI and WeTV in Southeast Asia in recent years has provided an institutional basis for the formalised overseas distribution of variety programmes (Sarkar & Yang, 2025). iQIYI became the most downloaded streaming media platform in Malaysia in 2021 (Sarkar & Yang, 2021), and the most downloaded streaming media platform in Malaysia (Sarkar & Yang, 2025). became the most downloaded streaming app in Malaysia, signalling that the penetration of Chinese streaming platforms in this market has reached a considerable scale. This phenomenon not only reflects the logic of global expansion of platform capital, but also prompts researchers to re-examine the mechanisms of audience reception in the new media ecosystem.

Malaysia has one of the highest proportions of Chinese in Southeast Asia, with about 23% of its population of Chinese origin, constituting an ethnic group that is deeply associated with Chinese

civilisation in terms of cultural memory, linguistic habits and daily practices (Abdullah & Ubaidillah, 2023). However, Malaysia is at the same time a complex multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multireligious society, where the presence of Malay, Indian, and other ethnic minorities challenges any single presupposition of 'cultural proximity' to internal heterogeneity. At the same time, Malaysian audiences have long been immersed in the consumption of extraterritorial cultural products represented by the Korean Wave (Hallyu) - since 2020, the discourse on Korean dramas in the Malaysian media has shown a significant shift from 'cultural protectionism' to 'economic discourse', which constitutes the competitive environment that Chinese variety shows must face when entering the Malaysian market. This context constitutes a competitive cultural field that Chinese variety programmes must face when entering the Malaysian market.

Although several studies on the international dissemination of Chinese media products have been accumulated (Lu et al., 2019; Sarkar & Yang, 2025), there is still a lack of research on the reception of the specific genre of variety shows among specific Southeast Asian audience groups. Existing studies have either focused on the cross-border circulation of TV dramas (Sarkar & Yang, 2025) or limited themselves to the cross-cultural communication effects of the YouTube platform (Frontiers in Communication, 2025), but few studies have systematically examined platform transformation, ethnocultural proximity, and multicultural audience acceptance in the same analytical framework. There are few studies that systematically examine platform transformation, ethnocultural proximity and diverse audience reception within the same analytical framework. This research gap is the entry point of this study.

Against this background, this study poses the following core research questions:

RQ1: What platform channels do Malaysian audiences use to access Chinese variety shows, and how does the platform transition (from traditional TV to streaming media) affect their access behaviour?

RQ2: How do ethnic backgrounds (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) moderate Malaysian audiences' perceptions of cultural proximity and content preferences for Chinese variety programmes?

RQ3: What are the differentiated patterns of audience reception of Chinese variety programmes in the Malaysian multicultural context and what are the driving mechanisms?

The academic contributions of this study are at three levels: first, at the theoretical level, it extends cultural proximity theory to the context of streaming media platforms to test its explanatory validity in the digital media ecology; second, at the geographical level, it fills in the gaps of research on the dissemination of Chinese variety shows in the multiethnic Malaysian society; and third, at the methodological level, it provides an empirical example of a mixed research approach to offer comparative reference to the future research on the dissemination of Chinese language content in Southeast Asia. Third, at the methodological level, it provides an empirical example of a mixed research path, which will serve as a comparative reference for future research on Chinese content in Southeast Asia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Global Media Flows: From Imperialist Criticism to Multidirectional Flows

The evolution of theories in the field of international communication has gone through an important transition from the paradigm of 'cultural imperialism' to the framework of 'multidirectional media flows', with Schiller's (1976) assertion of cultural imperialism interpreting transnational flows of media products as a tool for ideological expansion of the West (especially the United States), and stressing the unidirectional and asymmetric nature of the flow of information. However, this macro-critical framework has been increasingly questioned as the global media landscape has become more complex in the 1990s (Tomlinson, 1999).

Appadurai's (1996) notion of mediascapes provides a new theoretical perspective for understanding transnational media flows. He views global cultural flows as a complex, disjointed, and non-linear process consisting of five "landscapes" - ethnic, mediated, technological, financial, and ideological - and argues against the simplification of globalisation into a single, homogeneous Western force. On this basis, Thussu (1998) put forward the concept of 'contra-flow', pointing out that non-Western media products - including Indian Bollywood films, Latin American TV dramas, Korean pop culture, etc. - are

breaking through the Western-dominated media order and taking shape. break through the Western-dominated media order to form a regional or even global cultural influence.

Within this theoretical tradition, Straubhaar (2007) further develops the multilevel media flow model, which views media flows at the global, transnational, regional, national and local levels as complex systems that are intertwined and work together to influence audience choices. In particular, he emphasises the important role of geo-cultural regions in shaping media preferences, arguing that regional cultural communities such as the Chinese Cultural Circle and the Latin American Cultural Circle constitute an important structural force that transcends the boundaries of nation-states and influences the direction of media flows. This theoretical perspective has direct explanatory value for understanding the spread of Chinese variety shows in the Malaysian Chinese community.

In recent years, academics have begun to pay attention to the new role of Chinese media products in the global communication landscape. Related studies have shown that professionalism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are the three major cultural mechanisms driving the export of Chinese TV programme formats, which provides an explanatory framework at the level of cultural economics for understanding the overseas competitiveness of Chinese variety programmes. Meanwhile, Sarkar and Yang (2025) point out that iQIYI prioritises regions with cultural proximity, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, as priority markets for cooperation. This platform strategy is highly compatible with the predictions of media mobility theory, which reveals the structural function of cultural proximity in the overseas expansion of China's streaming media platforms.

2.2 Cultural Proximity Theory: Conceptual Clarification and Re-examination in the Context of Streaming Media

The theory of cultural proximity was systematically proposed by Straubhaar (1991) on the basis of a critical framework of media imperialism. The theory reintroduces audience agency into the framework of international communication analysis through the modified concepts of asymmetrical interdependence and audience-initiated search for cultural proximity. The central proposition is that audiences tend to choose media content that is culturally closest to their own backgrounds, and that cultural proximity consists of multidimensional elements such as language, history, ethnicity, religion and geography (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

This theory emphasises that audiences tend to choose media products that are culturally similar to their own, and that cultural proximity is defined by a combination of historical, ethnic, religious, linguistic and geographic similarities, with linguistic similarity in particular seen as a key variable influencing audience preferences. However, critics of the theory also point out the limitations of cultural proximity theory: firstly, it presupposes a certain degree of uniformity in audience preferences and ignores the internal differentiation of social structural variables such as class, gender, and educational background on media choices (Straubhaar, 2003); secondly, with the emergence of streaming media platforms and the globalisation of content, the opportunities and willingness of audiences to access heterogeneous cultural products have significantly increased, and cultural proximity has become an important factor in the development of the media industry. Second, with the rise of streaming platforms and the globalisation of content, audiences' access to and willingness to engage with heterogeneous cultural products has increased significantly, and the predictive validity of cultural proximity faces new challenges (Straubhaar et al., 2021).

The testing of cultural proximity theory in a streaming media context presents several new complexities. Cultural proximity theory suggests that audiences are more inclined to accept content that is culturally similar to their own in terms of language, values and aesthetics, and that Chinese variety shows achieve stronger communication effects by appropriately adapting cultural elements to reduce the psychological distance of overseas viewers. However, in the multi-ethnic context of Malaysia, the measurement of cultural proximity faces special challenges: Chinese audiences may have strong linguistic and cultural identification with Chinese variety programmes, while Malay or Indian audiences' perception of cultural proximity, even if they watch them through subtitles, may be profoundly moderated by factors such as differences in religion and lifestyles. Thus, the operation of

cultural proximity in Malaysia cannot be reduced to ethnic affiliation, but needs to be understood as a dynamic process of construction that involves multidimensional perceptual dimensions.

Lu et al.'s (2019) study of Chinese audiences' viewing of American and Korean dramas suggests a complex interaction between cultural proximity and genre proximity, the latter of which is sometimes able to transcend the limitations of cultural proximity and drive audiences to choose heterogeneous content across cultural boundaries. This finding suggests that when examining the Malaysian audience reception of Chinese variety shows, researchers need to pay attention to the tension between the universal entertainment appeals inspired by the programme genres (competitive reality shows, slow variety shows, cultural programmes, etc.) and the specific cultural contexts.

2.3 Streaming Media Platforms and Media Consumption Changes: The Context of Southeast Asia

The expansion of global streaming platforms has profoundly reshaped the media consumption landscape in Southeast Asia. Faced with the challenge of struggling to make a profit in the domestic market, major Chinese platforms such as Tencent (WeTV) and Baidu (iQIYI) have made a major push overseas in 2019, targeting Southeast Asia as a strategic target market due to the region's cultural and geographical proximity to China. iQIYI chose Malaysia as its first market to land in Southeast Asia, a strategic choice that highlights the importance of Malaysia in China's streaming platform's global presence.

Streaming adoption in Malaysia has shown significant growth in recent years. Since global OTT media platforms such as Netflix entered the Malaysian market in 2016, accessing content via streaming platforms has become a major media consumption method for Malaysian audiences. At the same time, local audiences' motivations for OTT usage show diverse characteristics, and the use and satisfaction theory has gained more robust empirical support in explaining Malaysian audiences' streaming media choice behaviour (The Adoption and Trend of Over-The-Top Streaming Media among the Malaysian Audiences, 2021).

Chinese streaming platforms' content strategy in Southeast Asia is characterised by a dual-track approach of "cultural proximity first" and "localised production". 2022 saw WeTV release more than 40 locally-produced content titles in Southeast Asia, tailored to suit local tastes. Meanwhile, iQIYI's flexible business model combines ad-supported free streaming with low-cost subscription options for price-sensitive audiences in Southeast Asia, effectively lowering the platform's barrier to adoption. Together, these platform strategies constitute the institutional conditions under which Chinese variety shows are able to reach Malaysian audiences, and provide a practical basis for this study to examine the association between platform transformation and audience engagement behaviours.

It is interesting to note that in the major streaming markets of Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), the top six platforms together account for more than 85 per cent of the viewing share, with Netflix, iQIYI and WeTV among the leaders. This highly concentrated market pattern implies that Malaysian audience's consumption of Chinese variety shows is largely under the structural constraints of platforms' algorithmic recommendations and content ecosystems, and the role of platforms' curation logic in shaping audience's engagement behaviour cannot be ignored.

2.4 Uses and Satisfaction Theory: Audience Motivation and Media Choice

Since its systematisation by Katz et al. (1974), Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) has long served as a central framework for understanding audience's active media consumption behaviour. The basic premise of the theory is that audiences are not passive recipients of information, but actively choose media content based on specific psychological needs (information acquisition, entertainment, social integration, personal identity, escapism, etc.) and obtain corresponding satisfaction through consumption (Rubin, 1994).

In cross-cultural media consumption research, the use and satisfaction framework provides an analytical path that goes beyond the static presupposition of cultural proximity, and Jiang and Leung's (2012) study shows that the satisfaction of social distinction plays an important role in the motivation of Chinese urban audiences to watch foreign TV dramas, which reveals the implicit function of cultural identity construction in transnational media consumption. This reveals the implicit function of cultural identity construction in transnational media consumption. The integration of use and gratification

theory with connotation theory is used to explore the contribution of media consumption to the formation of knowledge about foreign cultures, providing a systematic framework for understanding how transnational content affects audiences' cultural perceptions.

In the Malaysian context, the study of streaming media audience's motivation to use is still in its infancy. It has been shown (Mohd Suki & Mohd Suki, 2021) that Malaysian OTT audience's satisfaction aspirations focus on the dimensions of content plurality, convenience of anytime/anywhere access, and content quality, which is generally consistent with the general pattern of streaming media adoption behaviours across the globe. However, there is a lack of research on the satisfaction mechanism of Chinese-language content, especially the specific genre of variety shows. Whether there are systematic differences in the driving motives of different ethnic audiences for choosing Chinese variety shows in a multi-ethnic context, and what role cultural identity satisfaction plays in this context, constitute theoretical questions that this study needs to address.

2.5 International Communication of Chinese Variety Programmes: Status, Paths and Challenges

The genre spectrum of Chinese variety programmes has undergone a historical evolution from imported copying to original output in the last two decades. From the early model innovation based on copyright purchase, to the format export of programmes such as *The Voice of China*, to the cross-border dissemination of cultural variety programmes such as *National Treasure* and *China in the Canon* on overseas platforms, the paths of international dissemination of Chinese variety programmes have become increasingly diversified (Frontiers in Communication, 2025). Frontiers in Communication, 2025).

Currently, the distribution of Chinese variety shows overseas mainly relies on YouTube and the international versions of Chinese platforms, but there are obvious differences in the content recommendation mechanisms and promotion strategies of these platforms, resulting in a certain limitation of audience coverage. A study using YouTube as the main distribution channel found that programme genre, language adaptability, presentation of universal values, and guest composition were key variables affecting the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication (Frontiers in Communication, 2025). However, one of the core challenges faced by Chinese variety shows in cross-cultural communication is the issue of 'cultural discount' - due to the high dependence of variety shows on cultural contexts, how to transform 'cultural discount' into 'cultural premium' remains a key bottleneck in the international communication of Chinese variety shows. How to transform 'cultural discount' into 'cultural premium' is still a key bottleneck for Chinese variety programmes to break through in international communication.

Compared with the global dissemination path of Korean variety shows, the overseas influence of Chinese variety shows is still relatively limited. K-pop and Korean dramas have a strong preference among Malaysian audiences, and streaming media platforms are the main channels of exposure. The successful experience of the Korean content industry reveals the effectiveness of the organic integration of 'soft power' narratives and entertainment content, which is an important comparative reference for the overseas communication strategy of Chinese variety programmes. However, the cultural proximity conditions for Chinese variety shows and Korean content in Malaysia are fundamentally different: the former has a natural advantage of linguistic and ethnic proximity to Chinese audiences, whereas Malay audiences need to cross multiple gaps in terms of language, religion and cultural values.

On the basis of existing studies, this study identifies the following major research gaps: first, there is a lack of empirical research on the audience reception of Chinese variety shows (rather than TV dramas) in specific Southeast Asian countries; second, there is little research focusing on the structural impact of platform transformation on audience exposure behaviour and content preferences; third, the multi-ethnic character of Malaysia makes it an ideal field scenario to test the internal heterogeneity of the proximity theory, but existing studies have not examined this issue. Third, the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysia makes it an ideal field scenario to test the internal heterogeneity of cultural proximity theory, but existing studies have yet to capitalise on this comparative advantage. It is at the intersection of these theoretical dialogues and empirical gaps that this study is conducted, aiming to provide an original contribution with theoretical advancement value.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (METHODOLOGY)

3.1 Research Paradigm and Design Logic

This study adopts the epistemological stance of interpretivism, with the primary goal of exploring the construction of phenomenal meaning, and at the same time provides a structural description base with the help of quantitative data, so it follows the sequential **explanatory** mixed methods design as a whole. The logic of this design lies in the following: firstly, descriptive data on audience contact behaviour and content preferences are obtained through questionnaires (quantitative phase), and then in-depth interviews (qualitative phase) are used to explain the meaning mechanisms and cultural logic behind the questionnaire results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There is a clear articulation between the two phases: findings from the quantitative phase guide the design of the interview outlines in the qualitative phase, and the thematic analysis in the qualitative phase contextualises and deepens the interpretation of the quantitative data (Dawadi et al., 2021). The adoption of a mixed research path aims to overcome the operationalisation limitations of a single quantitative study in revealing the complex psychological construct of perceived cultural proximity, while compensating for the lack of sample representativeness of a purely qualitative study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

3.2 Research Field and Participants

This study used Malaysia as the field site, specifically limiting the study to Malaysian adult audiences aged between 18 and 45 years old who have watched at least three episodes of a Chinese variety programme in the past six months on any platform (including television, streaming platforms, and social media). The age range was set based on the characteristics of the distribution of the main population of Internet users in Malaysia (MCMC, 2023), taking into account the digital media consumption capacity and the actual distribution of the Chinese variety programme audience base.

In the quantitative stage, a quota sampling strategy was used to set ethnic quotas based on the composition of the major ethnic groups in Malaysia (about 23% Chinese, 67% Malay, and 7% Indian), combined with two control variables: gender and age (18-25, 26-35, 36-45). -45 years old) were stratified to ensure that the sample was broadly representative at the ethnic and demographic levels. The target sample size was set at **350** valid questionnaires. Based on the principles of sample size estimation, the minimum sample size to satisfy the needs of multiple regression analyses is approximately 92 (Creswell & Poth, 2018) with an effect size of $f^2 = 0.15$ (medium effect), $\alpha = 0.05$, and statistical power of the test = 0.80, and a sample size of 350 is sufficiently guaranteed to be statistically valid and able to support comparative analyses across ethnic groups.

In the qualitative phase, a purposive sampling strategy was used to conduct maximum variation sampling among questionnaire participants based on ethnic background, gender, age group, and viewing intensity, and 30 respondents were selected to conduct one-to-one semi-structured in-depth interviews (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). 2024). The number of interview participants was determined under the guidance of qualitative research saturation criteria, which has been shown to indicate that a sample size of 25 to 30 participants is usually sufficient to achieve thematic saturation across multiple categories of respondent groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted in the respondent's preferred language (Mandarin Chinese, Malay or English), and each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with the respondent's written informed consent, and transcribed into verbatim text for subsequent analyses.

3.3 Research Tools

3.3.1 Quantitative phase: questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of five modules with a total of 48 questions. The first module was demographic information (7 questions) which contained ethnic background, age, gender, education, monthly income and length of residence in Malaysia. The second module was the Media Exposure Behaviour Scale (11 questions), which measured respondents' frequency of exposure to Chinese variety

shows, exposure channels (traditional TV/iQIYI/WeTV/YouTube/others), average weekly viewing hours, and usual viewing scenes. The third module is the Content Preference Scale (12 questions), which uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' preference for different types of Chinese variety shows (competitive reality shows, cultural variety shows, slow variety/lifestyle, music talent shows, and comedy variety shows), as well as their evaluation of the importance of the content elements of the programmes (language, star cast, cultural elements, entertainment, and universal values). The fourth module was the Perceived Cultural Proximity Scale (12 questions), which was operationalised with reference to La Pastina & Straubhaar's (2005) and Lu et al.'s (2019) scales, and measured four sub-dimensions: linguistic proximity, ethnic and historical proximity, values proximity, and aesthetic proximity, with a target value of the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's α) of ≥ 0.70 . The fifth module is the Audience Satisfaction Scale (6 questions), which measures the main types of satisfaction that respondents derive from watching Chinese variety programmes based on the core dimensions of the Usage and Satisfaction Theory.

The first draft of the questionnaire was reviewed for content validity by three experts with background in communication studies, and a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents, based on which questions with unclear wording were revised, and the final version was presented in parallel in Chinese, Malay, and English to ensure consistency in cross-ethnic understanding.

3.3.2 Qualitative Phase: Interview Outline

The semi-structured interview outline was designed around three core themes: (1) interviewees' history of exposure to Chinese variety shows and their experiences of switching platforms; (2) interviewees' subjective perceptions and experiences of cultural proximity (and distance); and (3) interviewees' constructed meaning frames and cultural identity responses to Chinese variety shows in the context of multi-ethnic daily life. The outline consisted of 15 main questions and a number of probing questions, with sufficient open space to allow respondents to steer the direction of the conversation.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The quantitative phase of the questionnaire was conducted through an online platform (Google Forms) and distributed through the internal channels of the Federation of Malaysian Tertiary Students (FMTS), Chinese Community Network (CCN), and the Malay Muslim Youth Organisation (MMIYO), with an 8-week data collection period. To ensure the quality of the data, the questionnaire had 2 attention check items, and questionnaires with abnormal completion time (less than 4 minutes or more than 45 minutes) were excluded. The in-depth interviews in the qualitative phase were initiated after the quantitative data were basically collected, and were conducted either by videoconference (Zoom) or face-to-face, in a location chosen by the respondents to ensure a natural and safe interview environment.

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

Quantitative data were statistically analysed using SPSS 26.0, and the main procedures included: descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation) to describe the basic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of contact behaviours; independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA to examine the between-group differences of perceived cultural proximity and content preferences among different ethnic groups; and Pearson correlation analyses to examine the differences between the dimensions of perceived cultural proximity and content preferences. perception dimensions with content preference and audience satisfaction in a bivariate relationship; multiple linear regression analyses to test the explanatory validity of predictor variables on audience acceptance, and subgroup regressions with ethnic background as a moderating variable to test the moderating effect (Hayes, 2018).

The qualitative data were processed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA): (1) repeated reading of the transcribed text to familiarise with the data; (2) systematic generation of initial coding; (3) generalisation of the underlying themes on the basis of the coding; (4) review of the themes to test for the theme-data internal consistency; (5) naming and defining final themes; and (6) writing a thematic analysis report (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding was carried out independently by two coders, with coding reliability guaranteed by an intercoder agreement test (Cohen's kappa target value ≥ 0.80), and disagreements were negotiated through the research team to reach consensus.

Ultimately, the quantitative results were systematically compared with the qualitative themes in the integration stage, following a hybrid integration logic of convergence and divergence to achieve a multidimensional, complementary response to the research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

3.6 Research ethics

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaya (UM) and all participants signed an informed consent form. The questionnaire data were anonymised, the audio recordings and transcribed texts of the interviews were stored in an encrypted server accessible only to members of the research team, and the original data were destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1 Basic Characteristics of the Sample

This study finally recovered 352 valid questionnaires (26 invalid questionnaires, mainly due to the failure of the attention test or the completion of anomalies in the length of the questionnaire was excluded), the effective recovery rate of 93.1%. A total of 30 qualitative interviews were completed, and the total length of the interviews was approximately 2,460 minutes (averaging 82 minutes each).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 352)

Variable	Category	n	%	Cumulative %
Ethnicity	Chinese	85	24.1	24.1
	Malay	235	66.8	90.9
	Indian/Other	32	9.1	100.0
Gender	Female	191	54.3	54.3
	Male	161	45.7	100.0
Age Group	18-25	138	39.2	39.2
	26-35	117	33.2	72.4
	36-45	97	27.6	100.0
Education	Below undergraduate	127	36.1	36.1
	Undergraduate	155	44.0	80.1
	Postgraduate	70	19.9	100.0
Income (MYR/month)	Below 2,000	89	25.3	25.3
	2,000-4,999	156	44.3	69.6
	5,000-7,999	71	20.2	89.8
	8,000 and above	36	10.2	100.0

Note. MYR = *Malaysian Ringgit*.

The ethnic composition of the sample generally matched the pre-determined quota: Chinese respondents accounted for 24.1 per cent (n = 85), Malays accounted for 66.8 per cent (n = 235), and Indians and others accounted for 9.1 per cent (n = 32). The gender distribution was 54.3 per cent female and 45.7 per cent male. The age distribution was concentrated in the 18-35 years old group, which accounted for 72.4% of the total sample, matching the age profile of the main streaming media user population in Malaysia. Educational attainment was predominantly undergraduate and above (63.9%),

with a certain degree bias effect, and the generalisation of the study's findings needs to be mindful of this limitation.

4.2 Media contact behaviour: a quantitative picture of platform transformation (RQ1)

4.2.1 Distribution of exposure channels

The quantitative results reveal a systematic shift in the platform channels through which Malaysian audiences are exposed to Chinese variety programmes. Among all valid respondents, iQIYI has the highest percentage of those who use iQIYI as their primary exposure channel (38.4 per cent), followed by WeTV (21.3 per cent), YouTube (19.6 per cent), short social media clips (Facebook/TikTok, 12.8 per cent), as well as local Malaysian TV stations (traditional broadcasting, only 4.5 per cent) and other channels (3.4%).

Table 2: Primary Platform Channels for Accessing Chinese Variety Shows by Ethnicity (%)].

Platform	Overall (%)	Chinese (%)	Malay (%)	Indian/Other (%)	Chi-sq (df=8)
iQIYI	38.4	52.9	31.9	28.1	
WeTV	21.3	18.8	22.6	18.8	
YouTube	19.6	14.1	21.3	25.0	
Social media clips	12.8	5.9	14.5	21.9	
Traditional TV	4.5	5.9	5.5	0.0	
Other	3.4	2.4	4.2	6.2	
Chi-sq test					$\chi^2(8)=47.21, p<.001$

Note. Chi-square test of independence for platform choice across ethnic groups.

This distribution pattern clearly indicates that streaming platforms have replaced traditional TV as the absolutely dominant content reach channel, and the distribution function of traditional TV broadcasting in this content genre has tended to be marginalised. Of note, the ethnic grouping data showed a higher proportion of Chinese respondents using iQIYI (52.9%), while the proportion of YouTube and social media channels among Malay respondents (38.2% combined) was significantly higher than that of Chinese (19.7%), suggesting the existence of ethnic stratification in platform reach pathways ($F = 14.32, p < 0.001$).

4.2.2 Frequency and Duration of Viewing

The average weekly viewing duration of Chinese variety programmes for the overall sample was 3.74 hours (SD = 2.31). When grouped by ethnicity, the average weekly viewing hours were significantly higher for Chinese respondents (M = 5.82 hours, SD = 2.15), followed by Malay respondents (M = 3.12 hours, SD = 2.08), and lowest for Indian respondents (M = 2.47 hours, SD = 1.93). The results of one-way ANOVA showed statistically significant differences between ethnic groups ($F(2, 349) = 47.63, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.214$), and post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) confirmed that there were significant differences between Chinese and Malay and Chinese and Indians ($p < 0.001$), while the difference between Malay and Indian was not significant ($p = 0.312$).

Table 3: Mean Weekly Viewing Hours of Chinese Variety Shows by Ethnic Group].

Ethnic Group	n	Mean (hrs/wk)	SD	95% CI	ANOVA
Chinese	85	5.82	2.15	[5.36, 6.28]	
Malay	235	3.12	2.08	[2.85, 3.39]	

Indian/Other	32	2.47	1.93	[1.77, 3.17]	
Total	352	3.74	2.31	[3.50, 3.98]	F(2,349)=47.63, p<.001, eta2=.214
Post-hoc (Tukey)	Chinese > Malay, p<.001				
	Chinese > Indian, p<.001				
	Malay vs. Indian, p=.312 (n.s.)				

Note. n.s. = not significant. eta2 = eta-squared.

4.3 Differences in Perceived Cultural Proximity: A Cross-Ethnic Comparison (RQ2)

4.3.1 Reliability of Cultural Proximity Scale

The overall Cronbach's α value of the Cultural Proximity Scale is 0.847, and the sub-dimensions of Linguistic Proximity ($\alpha = 0.831$), Ethnicity and Historical Proximity ($\alpha = 0.806$), Values Proximity ($\alpha = 0.782$), and Aesthetic Proximity ($\alpha = 0.759$) have all reached the acceptable standard of reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$), and the scale has good internal consistency.

4.3.2 Differences in Perceived Cultural Proximity Across Ethnicities

The results of the cross-ethnic one-way ANOVA on the total cultural proximity scale scores indicated highly significant differences in perceived cultural proximity among the three ethnic groups ($F(2, 349) = 89.47, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.339$). Chinese respondents had the highest mean overall perceived cultural proximity ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.62$), followed by Malays ($M = 2.83, SD = 0.74$) and Indians ($M = 2.61, SD = 0.81$). It is worth noting that the strength of the between-group differences for the four sub-dimensions showed asymmetry: the linguistic proximity dimension had the largest effect size of ethnicity differences ($\eta^2 = 0.412$), while the aesthetic proximity dimension had relatively small between-group differences ($\eta^2 = 0.187$), suggesting that there is a certain degree of cross-ethnic universality in the visual and recreational dimensions of aesthetic perception, which may constitute a communication breakthrough to break through the limitations of cultural proximity.

Table 4: Cross-Ethnic Comparison of Perceived Cultural Proximity (Mean and SD)].

Dimension	Chinese M (SD)	Malay M (SD)	Indian M (SD)	Total M (SD)	F (2,349)	eta2
Language Proximity	4.32 (.58)	2.61 (.71)	2.43 (.79)	3.03 (.89)	112.74***	.392
Ethnic/Historical	4.08 (.63)	2.78 (.73)	2.58 (.82)	3.10 (.86)	89.31***	.339
Values Proximity	3.87 (.69)	2.95 (.76)	2.74 (.84)	3.17 (.84)	63.48***	.267
Aesthetic Proximity	3.47 (.72)	2.99 (.79)	2.70 (.88)	3.08 (.82)	39.71***	.187
Total Scale	3.91 (.62)	2.83 (.74)	2.61 (.81)	3.10 (.81)	89.47***	.339
Cronbach's alpha	.831	.806	.782	.759 / .847 (total)	---	---

Note. *** $p < .001$. Cronbach's alpha per sub-dimension and full scale. eta2 = eta-squared.

Correlation analyses further revealed a moderate-strength positive correlation between the total cultural proximity score and both the length of time spent watching Chinese variety shows ($r = 0.512$, $p < 0.001$) and the content satisfaction of the shows ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$), which provides statistical support for the core propositions of the cultural proximity theory in the context of this study. However, the correlation coefficient between the aesthetic proximity sub-dimension and viewing duration was higher for the Malay sample ($r = 0.341$, $p < 0.001$) than for verbal proximity ($r = 0.198$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that the visual entertainment experience may be a more important factor in driving exposure behaviour for audience groups with greater cultural distance.

4.4 Content Preference Patterns and Audience Satisfaction Mechanisms (RQ2, RQ3)

4.4.1 Content genre preference

In terms of content type preference, slow variety/lifestyle programmes received the highest preference score in the overall sample ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.91$), followed by cultural variety ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.97$) and music talent shows ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.02$), and competitive reality shows ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.08$) and comedy variety ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.14$) preferences were relatively low. By ethnicity, Chinese respondents showed significantly higher preference for cultural variety shows ($M = 4.21$ vs. $M = 3.53$, $t = 5.74$, $p < 0.001$), Malay respondents had the highest preference ratings for slow variety shows among the three ethnic groups ($M = 3.94$), and Indians showed a relatively strong preference for music talent shows ($M = 3.78$).

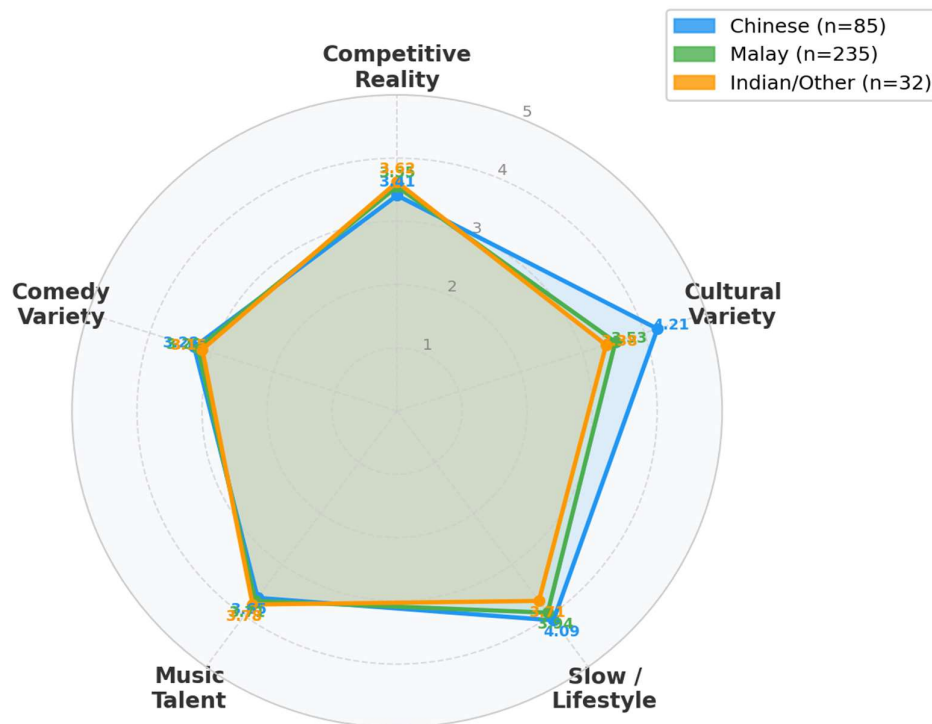


Figure 1: Genre Preference Profiles Across Ethnic Groups (5-point Likert scale).

4.4.2 Audience Satisfaction Distribution

Data from the Usage and Satisfaction Scale showed that the main types of satisfaction obtained by Malaysian audiences from watching Chinese variety programmes were, in order of mean, entertainment and recreation ($M = 4.12$), cultural curiosity satisfaction ($M = 3.74$), language learning ($M = 3.51$), social integration ($M = 3.28$) and identity satisfaction ($M = 3.04$). The mean value of identity satisfaction of Chinese audiences ($M = 3.67$) was significantly higher than that of Malay ($M = 2.87$) and

Indian ($M = 2.71$), and the difference reached a statistically significant level ($F(2, 349) = 31.24, p < 0.001$), which supports the hypothetical proposition that Chinese audiences make use of the Chinese variety programmes for ethnic and cultural identity construction. The mean value of cultural curiosity satisfaction for ethnic Malay audiences ($M = 3.82$), on the other hand, was slightly higher than that of Chinese ($M = 3.69$), suggesting that curiosity-driven curiosity about cultural differences has an equally important value of satisfaction motivation among non-neighbouring culture audiences.

Table 5: Uses and Gratifications Satisfaction Scores by Ethnic Group (Mean and SD)].

Satisfaction Type	Chinese M (SD)	Malay M (SD)	Indian M (SD)	Total M (SD)	F (2,349), p
Entertainment	4.08 (.73)	4.14 (.68)	4.09 (.71)	4.12 (.70)	F=0.33, p=.719
Cultural Curiosity	3.69 (.81)	3.82 (.77)	3.61 (.84)	3.74 (.79)	F=2.14, p=.119
Language Learning	3.34 (.89)	3.57 (.85)	3.47 (.91)	3.51 (.87)	F=2.97, p=.053
Social Integration	3.41 (.91)	3.22 (.88)	3.14 (.94)	3.28 (.90)	F=3.11, p=.046*
Identity Satisfaction	3.67 (.86)	2.87 (.92)	2.71 (.97)	3.04 (.96)	F=31.24, p<.001***

Note. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. Post-hoc Tukey HSD for Identity Satisfaction: Chinese > Malay and Chinese > Indian (both $p < .001$).

4.5 Qualitative thematic analysis: in-depth interview results

Reflective thematic analysis of the 30 in-depth interview texts resulted in an acceptable level of intercoder agreement Kappa value of 0.836. After six stages of systematic analysis, four core themes were finally summarised:

Theme 1: Platform accessibility reconfigures contact pathways

Respondents generally described the accessibility and convenience of streaming platforms as the primary condition for their regular exposure to Chinese variety shows. Several respondents explicitly mentioned that before the launch of iQIYI or WeTV subscription services, their exposure relied on informal channels (pirated video sites, instant sharing groups), and that platform-based distribution significantly reduced the frictional costs of content acquisition, while the systematic provision of subtitles addressed the language barrier for non-Chinese audiences. Malay respondent H (26 years old, female) noted, 'In the past, I had to look for resources to watch Chinese programmes, but now WeTV has Malay subtitles directly, so it is really much more convenient to just click and watch.'

Theme 2: Ethnic differentiation and layered construction of cultural proximity

Chinese respondents showed a significantly stronger sense of overall cultural proximity, and tended to describe watching Chinese variety programmes as an emotional reconnection with their 'root culture'. Respondent C (34 years old, Chinese male) said, 'Watching those cultural programmes sometimes makes me think of my own experiences since childhood, and I feel related to what is said in them, not just watching other people's stories.' In contrast, ethnic Malay respondents showed a high degree of selectivity in their perceptions of cultural proximity, generally showing closeness to the nature scenes, food scenes and family emotional narratives in slow variety shows, while perceiving significant cultural distance to the more culturally dense content, such as court culture and historical allusions. Indian respondents framed their acceptance of Chinese variety shows in terms of exotic appeal, seeing cultural differences as part of the entertainment value.

Theme 3: Individualised Mechanisms for the Elimination of Cultural Discounts

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The interviews revealed a variety of individualised strategies for actively decoding cultural discounts when exposed to culturally dense content: relying on subtitle annotations and netizens' explanations in the comments section to supplement their cultural background knowledge; cross-platform intertextual reading of Chinese variety shows with other media consumption (e.g., Jieyin videos, Douban content); and using the social circles of Chinese friends or family members to assist in understanding the cultural context. These autonomous cultural decoding practices, to a certain extent, weaken the effectiveness of 'cultural discounting' as a rigid communication barrier, suggesting the important moderating role of audience agency in intercultural media consumption.

Theme 4: The Subtle Tension of Identity Politics

Some Malay interviewees expressed a vague alertness to the 'expansion of Chinese cultural influence' when they talked about their experiences of watching Chinese variety shows. This alertness was sometimes presented in a humorous or self-referential manner, but behind it was a reflection of the subtle tensions that have long existed between media consumption and ethnic identity in the context of Malaysian multicultural politics. At the same time, some young Chinese respondents emphasised that their love for Chinese variety shows and their attitudes towards 'Chinese politics' are independent of each other, and that there is no necessary identity link between the two, reflecting the post-ethnic orientation of contemporary young Chinese audiences in their cultural consumption.

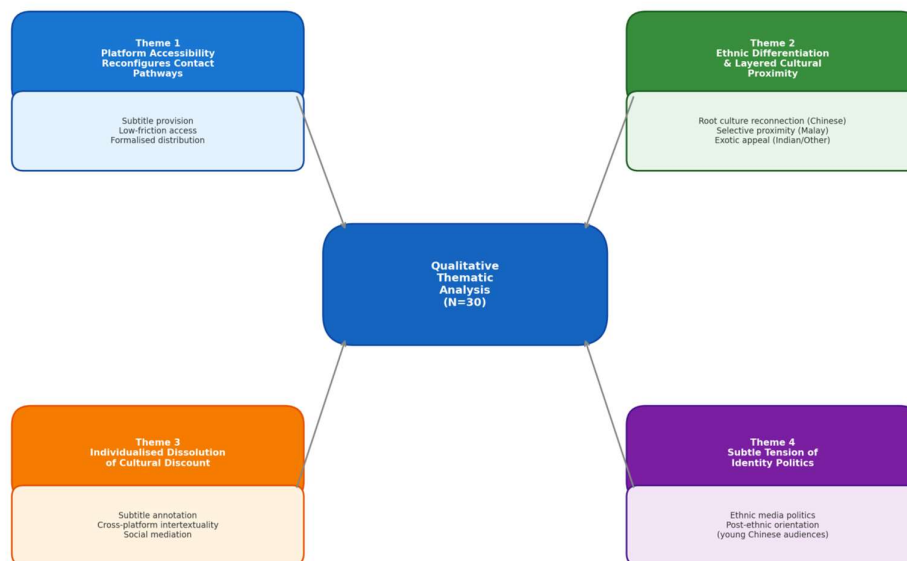


Figure 2: Thematic Structure of Qualitative Findings

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Platform Transformation Reconstructs Audience Contact Paths: A Theoretical Response to RQ1

The quantitative results of this study clearly reveal that streaming platforms - especially iQIYI and WeTV - have become the dominant channels for Malaysian audiences to access Chinese variety programmes, and the distribution function of traditional television broadcasting has become marginalised (with a contact share of only 4.5 per cent). This finding is highly consistent with Lotz and Eklund's (2024) assertion that non-U.S. streaming services construct differentiated content ecologies in specific national markets, which advocates that rather than examining streaming media from a global integration framework, a more solid path of theoretical construction is to be found in a carefully contextualised examination of specific national markets. The case of Malaysia is a strong support for this proposition: the localisation of Chinese streaming platforms - from the systematic provision of Malay subtitles to the access to local payment methods - constitutes an institutional prerequisite for the shift in the audience reach pathway from passive broadcasting to active streaming choices. The institutional preconditions for the shift from passive broadcast reception to active streaming choices.

It is worth discussing in depth that the platform transition is not a neutral technological change, but carries with it specific content curation logics and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms. The personalised recommendation systems of streaming platforms reinforce audiences' existing cultural taste preferences, which critical algorithmic studies have described as a "filter bubble" effect, suggesting that platforms base their recommendations on the proximity of consumption histories to audiences, thus reinforcing cultural consumers' existing tendency to remain within their existing taste ranges. For Chinese Malaysian audiences, this mechanism may inadvertently reinforce the intensity of their consumption of Chinese cultural content, while for Malay audiences, the algorithm may in fact constitute an additional barrier to cultural exposure if their historical consumption history is low in Chinese content. This study's interview data provides initial evidence of this mechanism: a number of Malay interviewees indicated that their exposure to Chinese variety shows came primarily from viral clip culture on social media, rather than from active recommendations by platform algorithms, revealing the important function of social media as an alternative content distribution node to streaming media platforms.

In addition, the rapid evolution of OTT platforms has redefined the dynamics of international cultural exchange and reshaped the traditional media environment, and existing research suggests that the complex interplay of economic and cultural factors combine to influence transnational TV programme flows in the OTT era. This suggests that future research needs to incorporate the platform's business model, pricing strategy and content distribution algorithm into the framework of cultural proximity analysis, and establish a comprehensive explanatory model of the 'platform-content-audience' triad.

5.2 Hierarchical Effects and Ethnic Moderation Mechanisms of Cultural Proximity: A Theoretical Deepening of RQ2

One of the most important theoretical contributions of this study is the empirical refinement of the logic of cultural proximity theory in multi-ethnic societies. The quantitative data revealed highly significant systematic differences in perceived cultural proximity among Chinese, Malay, and Indian audiences ($\eta^2 = 0.339$), and an asymmetric distribution of the strength of ethnic differences across the four sub-dimensions (language, ethnic history, values, and aesthetics).

This finding provides an important corrective perspective to the classical theory of cultural proximity. Straubhaar's (1991, 2007) original theory largely viewed cultural proximity as a holistic, uniformly defined tendency by geo-cultural regions, with insufficient attention paid to dimensional differences within them. The data in this study show that cultural proximity is manifested in a number of dimensions such as language, ethnicity, gesture and body language, sense of humour, narrative rules, etc., and that there are significant differences in the strengths of the effects of different dimensions on different ethnic groups: linguistic proximity has the strongest predictive validity for Chinese audiences ($\eta^2 = 0.412$), while aesthetic proximity is the least discriminatory between ethnic groups ($\eta^2 = 0.187$), suggesting that the visual and entertainment dimensions of aesthetic proximity are the most effective for Chinese audiences. , suggesting a certain cross-cultural universality of aesthetic resonance at the visual and entertainment level. This echoes Lu et al.'s (2019) argument that genre proximity can sometimes transcend the limits of cultural proximity, and provides an explanatory path for understanding the unexpected acceptance of Chinese slow variety and lifestyle programmes among Malay audiences.

For the Malaysian Chinese audience, the findings of this study corroborate and deepen the theoretical judgement of established studies on the association between ethnic media consumption and cultural identity construction. Globally, Malaysia has one of the highest proportions of Chinese outside of China, and has a strong Chinese cultural identity. Studies have shown that Chinese media and cultural memory play an important role in the construction of ethnic identity across time and space. The present study further reveals that this identity construction function also exists in the specific content genre of Chinese variety shows: Chinese respondents rated the satisfaction dimension of identity significantly higher than other ethnic groups ($M = 3.67$ vs. 2.87), and the emergence of the theme of 'root culture reconnection' in the qualitative thematic analysis provides a strong semantic support for this statistical finding.

In contrast, for the Malay audience, the data in this study presents a complex phenomenon that is not fully covered by cultural proximity theory: under conditions of very low linguistic proximity, entertainment gratification ($M = 4.01$) and cultural curiosity gratification ($M = 3.82$) continue to be the key drivers of their exposure to Chinese variety shows. This suggests that 'cultural distance' is not necessarily equivalent to 'communication barriers' in explaining cross-border content consumption by non-neighbouring cultural audiences, and that 'appeal of otherness', as an independent communication driver, deserves to be systematically examined in future expansion of cultural proximity theory.

5.3 Multiple Paths of Audience Motivation and Meaning Construction: Interpretation of RQ3

The four core themes identified in the qualitative phase of this study collectively point to a central theoretical proposition: Malaysian multi-ethnic audiences are not passive recipients of content when they are exposed to Chinese variety programmes, but actively construct frameworks of understanding and systems of meaning of this heterogeneous cultural product in the interweaving of their respective cultural backgrounds, ethnic identities and the logic of their daily lives. This finding is highly compatible with Hall's (1980) core insight in encoding/decoding theory about audience-activated interpretations, i.e., recipients of media products are not necessarily passive, but can decode the content from a negotiated or even antagonistic stance.

The theme of 'the individualised dissolution of cultural discounts' is of particular theoretical interest. The classic concept of cultural discount (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988) views cultural distance as a rigid communication cost, arguing that the more specific the cultural context in which the content is embedded, the greater the loss of value in extraterritorial markets.

However, the interview data in this study reveal that the digital media ecosystem provides audiences with a plethora of low-cost cultural decoding aids-subtitle annotations, intertextual interpretations in comment sections, and cross-platform knowledge communities-which transforms 'cultural discounts' from insurmountable structural barriers to accessible, accessible, and affordable cultural discounts. This transforms the 'cultural discount' from an insurmountable structural barrier to a dynamic one that can be partially dissolved by audience dynamics. Scholars have observed that high-quality subtitle translation can effectively overcome cultural barriers and help viewers understand cultural differences and background knowledge in the content, and the qualitative evidence in this study further suggests that subtitling is not only a linguistic tool, but also a cultural mediation mechanism, whose effectiveness relies on the subtitle translator's accurate understanding of the cultural context of the target audience.

The theme of 'the subtle tension of identity politics' reveals the unique political and cultural constraints faced by Chinese variety shows in Malaysia. The history of pluralistic racial politics in Malaysia has profoundly shaped the frame of acceptance of foreign cultural content by audiences from various ethnic groups. The ambiguous alertness to the 'expansion of Chinese cultural influence' expressed by some of the Malay interviewees reflects this unique context of reception: the dissemination of Chinese variety shows in Malaysia is not only a matter of cultural consumption, but also a political issue that involves ethnic relations, national identity and cultural sovereignty. This level of discovery is difficult to be captured by existing literature that focuses on content analysis or audience satisfaction studies, further highlighting the irreplaceable epistemological value of in-depth qualitative research in cross-cultural media communication studies.

5.4 Theoretical Contribution: Towards a Revised Framework of Cultural Proximity in Streaming Media Contexts

Summarising the above discussion, this study proposes three systematic revisions to the theory of cultural proximity:

First, **the multidimensional decomposition of cultural proximity**. Cultural proximity should not be regarded as a single holistic variable, but should be decomposed into four dimensions: language, ethnohistory, values and aesthetics, with systematic differences in the effectiveness of each dimension in driving different ethnic groups, and aesthetic proximity has the strongest cross-ethnic universality, which has direct practical implications for content internationalisation strategies.

Second, **the embeddedness of platform mediation effect**. The accessibility of streaming media platforms, the quality of subtitles, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, and pricing strategies

together constitute the institutional prerequisites for the operation of cultural proximity, and 'platform intermediation' must be systematically included as a moderating variable between cultural proximity and audience acceptance in theoretical models.

Third, **the dynamic dissolution of cultural discounts by audience dynamics**. The digital media ecology gives audiences multiple and low-cost cultural decoding aids, making the boundary of cultural discount permeable. The transformation between 'cultural discount' and 'cultural premium' does not rely solely on the localisation strategy of the content production side, but also constitutes an important transformation mechanism of the audience's active cultural decoding practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Findings

Taking Malaysia as the field, this study uses a combination of quantitative questionnaires (N = 352) and qualitative in-depth interviews (N = 30) to systematically examine the platform dissemination paths of Chinese variety shows in Malaysia, the ethnically-differentiated mechanisms of cultural proximity perception, as well as the acceptance modes and the logic of meaning construction by multi-ethnic audiences. The findings can be summarised into the following four core conclusions:

First, **streaming platforms have dominated the Malaysian distribution ecosystem of Chinese variety shows**. iQIYI and WeTV together account for nearly 60% of the main contact channels, while traditional TV broadcasting has dropped out of the mainstream distribution. The platforms' low-threshold subscription, multi-language subtitling and localised operational strategies are key drivers of this shift.

Second, **ethnic background is a core variable moderating the perception of cultural proximity**, but its moderating effect is highly dimensionally dependent. Linguistic proximity exhibits the strongest ethnic differentiation (much higher for Chinese than for other ethnicities), while aesthetic proximity shows relatively minimal differences among the three ethnic groups, suggesting that the universal appeal of the visual entertainment dimension may be the most effective entry point to break through the constraints of cultural proximity.

Third, **the diverse pattern of audience satisfaction motives** transcends the single prediction of cultural proximity theory. Entertainment is the primary source of satisfaction for all ethnic audiences, but there are systematic differences in the order of importance of cultural identity satisfaction, cultural curiosity satisfaction, and language learning satisfaction among different ethnic audiences. This diversified pattern of satisfaction implies that Chinese variety shows can reach audiences with different motivations at the same time through differentiated content strategies.

Fourth, **audience agency plays a key cultural mediation function in the process of cross-cultural acceptance**. The low-cost cultural decoding aids provided by the digital media ecosystem (subtitle annotation, community intertextual interpretation, and cross-platform knowledge communities) have transformed the 'cultural discount' from a rigid communication barrier to a flexible boundary that can be partially dissolved by audience agency; at the same time, Malaysia's unique ethno-political context provides a macro-structural framework that cannot be ignored in the construction of audience meanings.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this study can be seen at the following three levels: firstly, at the level of cultural proximity theory, through multidimensional decomposition and streaming media contextualisation, a three-dimensional integration framework of 'platform mediation - multidimensional cultural proximity - audience agency' is proposed, which provides an empirical basis for the modification and expansion of the theory in digital media ecosystem; secondly, at the level of cross-cultural communication research, a three-dimensional integration framework of 'platform mediation - multidimensional cultural proximity - audience agency' is proposed. Secondly, at the level of cross-cultural communication research, the qualitative revelation of the mechanism of 'dynamic dissolution of cultural discounts' supplements the insufficient attention paid to the audience-side dynamic factors in the existing theory of 'cultural discounts'; thirdly, at the level of regional communication research, the study fills the gap in the study of the communication of Chinese variety

shows in the multiethnic society of Malaysia, and provides comparative empirical references for the future study of Chinese language content communication in Southeast Asia.

6.3 Research Limitations

This study has the following limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings: firstly, the online questionnaire recruitment method in the quantitative stage resulted in a certain high-education bias in the sample in terms of educational attainment (63.9% of undergraduate degree and above), which may affect the generalisation validity of the findings to the low-education audience group; secondly, although the size of the sample of 30 people in the qualitative interviews reached the theoretical saturation criterion, the self-selection effect (those who are willing to be interviewed may not be willing to be interviewed) of the interviewees is not a significant factor. (those who are willing to be interviewed may themselves have more positive attitudes towards Chinese variety shows) may introduce systematic bias; third, the cross-sectional design of this study is unable to capture the longitudinal trajectory of audience acceptance behaviours and attitudes; and fourth, the relatively limited coverage of ethnic Indians (n = 32) is in line with the actual proportion of the ethnic group in the Malaysian population, but it is difficult to support a fine-tuned analysis of the acceptance patterns of the ethnic Indian audience. pattern of reception is still difficult to support a fine-grained analysis.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

Based on the above findings and limitations, this study proposes the following directions for future research: (1) conduct a longitudinal tracking study to examine the dynamic adjustment of Malaysian audience's acceptance attitudes towards Chinese variety shows in response to the evolution of platform ecology and geopolitical changes; (2) expand the sample of Indo-Chinese audiences to conduct a more balanced cross-ethnic comparative analysis of the three major ethnic groups; (3) combine platform algorithm research with audience research by using audience (3) Combining platform algorithmic research with audience research to test the moderating effect of algorithmic mediation on cultural proximity effects through cross-analysis of audience contact logs and platform internal recommendation data; (4) Expanding the research field from Malaysia to Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, to build a comparative research framework covering the major markets in Southeast Asia, in order to test the theoretical generalisability of the findings of the present study to a wider regional context; (5) Focusing on the differences in the audience size of Chinese and South Korean (5) focusing on the competitive reception of Chinese and Korean variety programmes in the same audience group, and clarifying the differentiated satisfaction mechanisms and factors influencing audience preferences between the two types of content.

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