

Korean Popular Culture and the Chinese Young Men's Body Aesthetics in the Context of Consumer Identities in Contemporary Urban China

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This research focuses on the impact of Korean popular culture outside South Korea, particularly focusing on how Chinese young men perceive and consume these aesthetics and fashions, and appropriate what they see as markedly Korean beauty ideals to their everyday aesthetic repertoire. *Hallyu*, which pertains to the popularity of Korean culture products outside Korea and K-pop and K-dramas in particular, has emerged as a recognizable male aesthetic globally. In China, this influence is particularly pronounced as young men increasingly embrace Korean-inspired fashion, skincare routines, makeup, and hairstyles, showcasing the diverse and context-specific ways in which *Hallyu* aesthetics have been appropriated in local contexts (Dator & Seo, 2004). The influence of 'hallyu cultures' has also permeated aspects of Chinese youth culture, fostering what has been perceived a 'softer' masculinity aesthetic while also sparking debates in media, particularly through news reports, and policy-making circles, involving strategies like "reticent/Han Xu politics". The term "Xu" refers to a strategy of invisibilization and marginalization, evident in the Chinese government's preventative approach to policies and regulations toward male homosexuality. In contrast, "Han" denotes a suppressive measure aimed at rectifying the perceived effeminization of men and the so-called "danmei" (boys love) culture (Hu et al., 2023). Employing a social constructivist research paradigm grounded in masculinity studies, this research employs semi-structured interviews to examine how *hallyu* aesthetic intertwines with young men's everyday self-presentation and experiences of engaging with beauty and grooming cultures. This study aims to examine how Chinese young men interpret and interact with the 'Koreanness' evident in the visual-aesthetic aspects of this cultural wave. This study provides a lens to of Chinese masculinities in consider a globalized context, offering insights into the transnational flows and appropriation of Korean pop culture in the lived experiences of young Chinese men. Consequently, this research not only contributes to understanding the cultural idea circulation from Korea to China but also broadens the discourse in the study of Asian masculinities.