

Cultural Policy and the Sustainable Development of 12-Episode Web Series in China: Monetization, Copyright, and Global Expansion

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Abstract

China's web series market has rapidly transformed entertainment, offering interactive experiences distinct from traditional film and television. Despite its rapid growth, the industry faces key challenges in monetization, copyright protection, and international distribution. This study explores how current policies shape the sustainable development of Chinese web series, supporting growth while imposing constraints. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with creators and audiences and analyzed using content analysis. A novel coding approach was used, combining traditional manual methods with advanced large language model (LLM) assistance to uncover detailed insights. Applying Tony Bennett's cultural policy theory (2001), the findings reveal that although government policies have supported market expansion, they also pose challenges—particularly for independent creators—due to limited monetization channels, insufficient copyright protection, and restrictive regulations on content. Audience feedback shows a strong willingness to pay for high-quality web series, yet free and pirated content options continue to undermine paid models. To navigate these complexities, the study recommends policy reforms that encourage market diversity, stronger copyright protection through digital technologies, and greater support for cross-cultural collaborations to expand global reach. Striking a balance between regulation and creative freedom is crucial for driving the sustainable growth of China's web series industry.

Keywords: web series, sustainability, chinese cultural policy, cross-cultural communication, Large Language Models (LLM)

1. Introduction

In recent years, the market for web series in China has witnessed substantial growth. Compared to traditional film and television dramas, web series exhibit distinct advantages in terms of interactivity (Atarama-Rojas, Guerrero-Perez, & Gerbolini, 2020). Firstly, the decentralized nature of social media has elevated the role of users. Secondly, web series are distributed via Internet platforms, which are not constrained by the time and location limitations of traditional television broadcasts. Consequently, this viewing model affords audiences greater flexibility. Users can select content based on their personal preferences and engage with other viewers through "barrage" (screen text) (Yan, Pan, & Yun, 2021). Barrage refers to real-time comments that overlay video content, enabling viewers to interact dynamically while watching. This feature has emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon on Chinese new media platforms (Pan, Kim, & Li, 2022). The social and real-time interaction facilitated by barrage significantly enhances audience engagement and the overall viewing experience.

The international dissemination of television programs plays a crucial role in enhancing a nation's soft power, and national policies often significantly influence this process (Nam, 2013). In the context of China, the government's policy support for the web series industry has laid a robust foundation for its rapid development (Zhang, 2022). Compared to the traditional film and television industry, web series production enjoys greater creative freedom, particularly in terms of subject selection and expression. The government's supportive policies for web series not only foster content innovation but also provide platforms and financial assistance, enabling more independent creators to engage in market competition. However, every policy has its dual aspects. For instance, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) issued the "Measures for Standardization of Radio, Television, and Internet

Audio-Visual Management" on September 5, 2024. This policy aims to standardize the development of China's radio, television, and online audio-visual industries, with a particular focus on web series. It emphasizes technological innovation, internationalization, and intellectual property protection to safeguard the achievements of creators.

The Chinese web series industry has experienced significant growth, driven by interactive features and supportive government policies (Yan, Pan & Yun, 2021). Despite this progress, the industry confronts several challenges that impede its development. These include difficulties in monetization, widespread piracy (Yue, 2020; China Copyright Association, 2019), and barriers to international expansion, such as profitability concerns, cultural differences, and language barriers (Zhang, 2022). While government policies have been instrumental in fostering growth, the enforcement of these policies and the stringent content standards can limit creative freedom, particularly for non-mainstream or experimental works. The combination of regulatory constraints and market pressures creates a complex environment that affects both innovation and sustainability in the industry.

To address these challenges and ensure the long-term development of the Chinese web series industry, this paper aims to provide targeted policy recommendations. These recommendations are designed to assist policymakers in creating a more supportive and sustainable ecosystem for the industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Progression of China's Web Series*

The internet's widespread use has made web series highly popular in China's entertainment industry. They're now a big deal, grabbing people's attention all over the country. This shows how much people's tastes are changing because of the internet. Wang Xiaohui (2023) points out that the platforms such as iQiyi, Youku, and We TV have become key to publishing web series, using big data analytics to cater to the preferences of different audiences. Zhan Yun (2023) argues that the competitive market has fostered innovation in content creation, resulting in a variety of genres and themes that resonate with young people. At the same time, Yalkin (2021) also pointed out that the demand for high-quality and niche content has led creators to explore unique storytelling techniques, further enriching the web series ecosystem.

Deng Zhongnan and Xie Erqi (2020) highlight the market-driven development trends of short web series. Yang Zhe (2020) examines the potential for short dramas to open up new market opportunities and the inevitable shift towards high-quality content as the dominant trend in web series. Wang Cheng and Gao Yijia (2020) provide a comprehensive analysis of the rise of short dramas and the trend towards specialized web series production, considering social, market, and audience factors. Deng Zhongnan (2020) further explores how monetized short dramas innovate in content and the aesthetic evolution they bring, from a business model perspective. The growth and popularity of web series reflect significant market trends. However, existing research often neglects the narrative structure of the content itself. Studies indicate that users are increasingly favoring concise and fast-paced storytelling formats, particularly in short dramas, which align well with contemporary fragmented viewing habits (Jiang, 2023).

In addition, China's regulatory framework plays an important role in the development of web series. The Chinese government has adopted a policy of triple network convergence or triple network integration or triple integration, i.e., the integration of telecommunications, broadcasting, and Internet networks (Wu & Leung, 2012). The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (2014) implemented supplementary policies aimed at improving content quality and intellectual property rights. These measures were foundational for the National Radio and Television Administration's (NRTA) subsequent oversight, ensuring alignment with societal norms while fostering a healthier digital content environment.

The interplay between market forces and government policies has created a unique ecosystem for Chinese web series. While market dynamics encourage creativity and audience engagement, regulatory policies ensure that content is culturally and ethically aligned. This duality requires a delicate balance that allows the industry to thrive while upholding national interests and values.

2.2 *Theoretical Framework*

Based on a broad framework of social governance and public management, Tony Bennett's (2001) theory of cultural policy. It goes beyond the traditional cultural studies perspective and focuses on analyzing the formation and implementation of cultural policy and its impact on society. Bennett argues that cultural policy is not just about funding the arts and cultural institutions, but is also a form of social governance. Specific social goals and values are achieved by influencing and shaping the cultural life of the public. The theory emphasizes the important role of cultural policies in shaping citizenship, promoting social cohesion, and fostering cultural diversity.

Bennett (2003) borrows Foucault's concept of governmentality. He explores how cultural policy can become an instrument of social governance. It manages and directs public behavior and consciousness. This perspective is suitable

for analyzing modern cultural phenomena. For example, in the case of web series, how cultural policy can guide and shape the behavior and perceptions of audiences through content control, thus having a broad impact on society.

Moreover, Bennett (2013) proposes selective support for cultural policies, noting that cultural policies tend to increase the visibility of certain cultural forms and issues while ignoring or marginalizing other cultural content. This selectivity reflects how governments shape public perceptions and behaviors through cultural products. For the study of web series, this perspective can explain how the government, through content auditing and policy support, etc. It provides a model of how policy influences the creative direction of web series and the preferences and perceptions of the audience for it.

Bennett (2016) further states that the formulation and implementation of cultural policies reflect the influence of governments and power structures in cultural production and consumption. Through means such as censorship, funding allocation, and copyright laws, governments control the production and dissemination of cultural products to a large extent. In the case of web series, this means that cultural policy plays an important regulatory role in the process of content production and dissemination. This affects the information received by the public and the transmission and acceptance of cultural values.

Bennett's theory of cultural policy (2001) provides an important framework for understanding the role of policy in monetization, copyright protection, and international dissemination of Chinese web series. Bennett (2001) underscores that cultural policy plays a key role in managing the production of cultural products and the allocation of resources. It helps to alleviate the problems of underfunding and market competition faced by the web series industry during the monetization process. Bennett and Joyce (2013) also point out that cultural policy controls cultural products through the legal system, which has a direct impact on the enforcement of copyright protection and the safeguarding of creators' rights and interests. By improving cultural policy, it can effectively combat piracy, protect the interests of creators, and promote content innovation. In terms of global communication, Bennett argues that policy support for cross-cultural exchanges and international cooperation can enhance the international competitiveness of Chinese web series. Based on these theories, Figure 1 demonstrates the theoretical framework of this study.

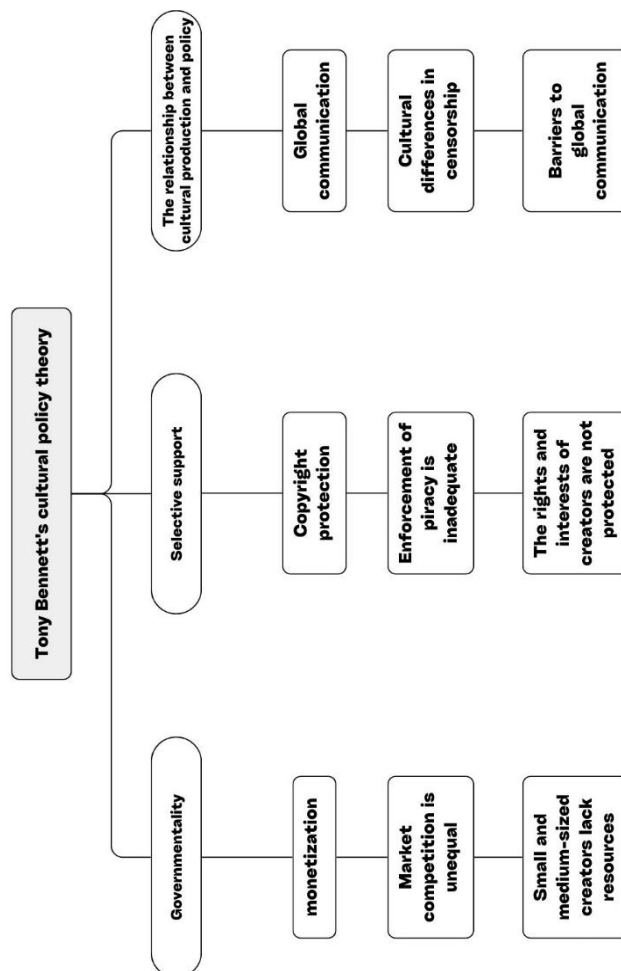


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

This paper used qualitative research methodology through interviews and content analysis. Mohajan (2018) states that the main purpose of qualitative research is to systematically explain phenomena and gain a more contextualized understanding through in-depth analysis. Qualitative research is capable of digging deeper into complex social phenomena, especially in the fast-growing web series industry, and it helps researchers understand the interactions between audiences, creators, and policymakers (Hennik & Kaiser, 2022).

Hennink and Kaiser (2022) also emphasized that qualitative research consists of three cyclical processes: design, data collection, and analysis. These steps are independent but closely interrelated. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are often synchronized, which offers the possibility of flexibility and openness in research design (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020).

This analysis is not limited to the extraction of superficial information but also focuses on policy influences and market structure issues in the web series industry. Through content analysis, this study reveals how policy intervenes in content creation, distribution, and market regulation, especially the impacts that cultural policy brings to the monetization of web series, copyright protection, and cross-cultural communication. Based on Tony Bennett's theory of cultural policy (2001,2013), the study focuses on how policy affects the economic model of the web series industry, the strength of copyright protection, and promotes or restricts the distribution and acceptance of web series in international markets.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection for this study will be conducted primarily through semi-structured interviews to ensure a comprehensive understanding of monetization, copyright protection, and international distribution issues in the Chinese web series industry. The interviews focused in part on the creators and audiences of Chinese web series, with creators including but not limited to (producers, screenwriters, actors, etc.). They were able to provide in-depth insights into the creative process, policy implications, and market operations. Audiences, on the other hand, are selected through social media platforms such as Douban and Weibo where there is a lot of discussion about web series. This ensures that participants can provide specific feedback on web series content, payment models, and cross-cultural communication.

In the selection of interview subjects, a combination of purposive sampling and quota sampling was used to focus on those users and creators who are active on social platforms and in the industry, to ensure the representativeness and richness of the data. Special attention was given to culturally vibrant eastern Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou. These cities are recognized for their active participation in culture and digital media content, making them ideal places to collect data on viewing behavior, preferences, and factors contributing to the popularity of web series.

The interviews were conducted through an online Tencent conference and each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview questions focus on the narrative and audience engagement of Chinese web series. As the interviews are semi-structured, questions related to monetization models, copyright protection mechanisms, and barriers faced in international distribution are extended.

The interviews were designed to include policy-related discussions to better understand respondents' feedback on current policies. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure data accuracy and completeness. To ensure the ethical nature of the study, all participants signed an informed consent form before the interviews and were aware that the data would be kept strictly confidential (Husband, 2020).

Table 1 shows the basic information of the sample of creators participating in this study. These creators are all from the Chinese web series industry, with occupations ranging from producers, screenwriters, directors, etc. Their age, gender, geographical distribution, and their respective occupational backgrounds provide a diverse perspective for the study. Their age, gender, geographical distribution, and their respective professional backgrounds provide a diverse perspective for the study.

Table 1. Information Sheet for Creator Interviewees Participating in Interviews

Serial number	Age	Gender	Location	Occupation
1	26	M	Shanghai	Actor and director
2	35	M	Beijing	Music producer, composer
3	36	F	Beijing	Producer
4	26	M	Beijing	Actor/producer
5	25	F	Beijing	Assistant director
6	32	F	Beijing	Screen Writer

Table 2 shows the basic information of the audience. These audiences mainly come from culturally active cities in eastern China, such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, and cover a wide range of professional backgrounds from undergraduate and graduate students to freelancers and lecturers. The diversity of this sample reflects the breadth and diversity of Chinese web series audiences. Audience feedback data are used in this study to analyse the market performance of web series, the audience's willingness to pay, and the issue of acceptance in cross-cultural communication.

Table 2. Information Sheet for Audience Interviewees Participating in Interviews

Serial number	Age	Gender	Location	Occupation
1	24	F	Guangzhou	Postgraduate (Journalism)
2	23	M	Shenzhen	Undergraduate (Accounting)
3	25	M	Guangzhou	Lecturer (Web and new media)
4	31	F	Suzhou	Freelance work
5	31	M	Shanghai	Estate researcher
6	26	M	Guangzhou	Lecturer
7	37	M	Hangzhou	Programmer
8	20	F	Nanchang	Undergraduate (Radio)
9	25	F	Guangzhou	Postgraduate (Veterinarian)
10	33	F	Shanghai	Lecturer (Education)
11	37	F	Shenzhen	Internet operation
12	33	M	Shanghai	Freelance work

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

This paper adopts a content analysis approach to categorize and interpret interview data and policy data through a coding framework. The coding framework is based on Tony Bennett's theory of cultural policy (2003), which divides the research questions into three main categories: monetization models, copyright protection mechanisms and cross-cultural communication. Each category is further broken down into subcategories that delve into specific market phenomena and policy implications (Bennett, 2003; Bennett, 2013).

During data processing, all interview data were transcribed verbatim and initially coded. These codes flagged key themes and phenomena based on the research questions and were corrected through multiple rounds of correction to ensure the accuracy and interpretive power of each coded category. During the coding process, a four-round analytic process was used: first data cleaning and transcription, then manual coding, followed by intelligent coding through Chat GPT-4 and consistency validation in conjunction with the theoretical framework.

In the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI), two approaches are commonly used to accelerate qualitative coding: Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML). (Rietz & Maedche, 2021). Large Language Models (LLMs) have become powerful tools for a wide range of tasks, including Natural Language Processing (NLP), machine learning, visual applications, and question and answer (Hadi et al., 2024). This process ensures coding accuracy and a coherent theoretical foundation.

This intelligent coding combines the accuracy of manual coding with the extensive recognition capabilities of a large language model, enabling fast analysis of large amounts of data through machine learning algorithms. The incorporation of large language models not only improves the efficiency of the coding process but also enhances the consistency of the analysis, providing a significant advantage especially when dealing with large-scale textual data. Through these methods, this study was able to comprehensively demonstrate the impact of policies on the sustainable development of China's web series industry in the dimensions of monetization, copyright protection, and international dissemination (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016).

3.4 Manual Coding and Intelligent Coding Design

The coding design and analytical approach were closely linked to Tony Bennett's cultural policy theory. Each level of the coding framework aligns with Bennett's concepts of cultural production and social governance, selective support for culture, and the operation of power, which form the theoretical basis of the study's analysis (Bennett, 2016). For example, the coding hierarchy of 'policy-encouraged directions of content creation' directly reflects Bennett's emphasis on how cultural policy influences cultural production by supporting specific cultural content, while 'issues of cultural signification and reproduction in intercultural communication' The coding hierarchy of "cultural policies in intercultural

communication” demonstrates the role of cultural policies in the transmission and reproduction of cultural symbols in the process of global communication.

By comparing traditional manual coding with Chat GPT on simulated and real datasets, Zhang et al. (2023) verified that Chat GPT not only improves the qualitative analysis process but also increases its transparency, credibility, and accessibility. Whereas manual coding was able to provide a template and basis for intelligent coding, improving the comprehensiveness of coding, Koga (2023) suggested that although LLMs demonstrated overall validity in writing codes, they sometimes output inconsistent answers. Therefore, this study's intelligent coding followed by manual proofreading could reduce the limitations of the method. Figure 2 shows the research design flow.

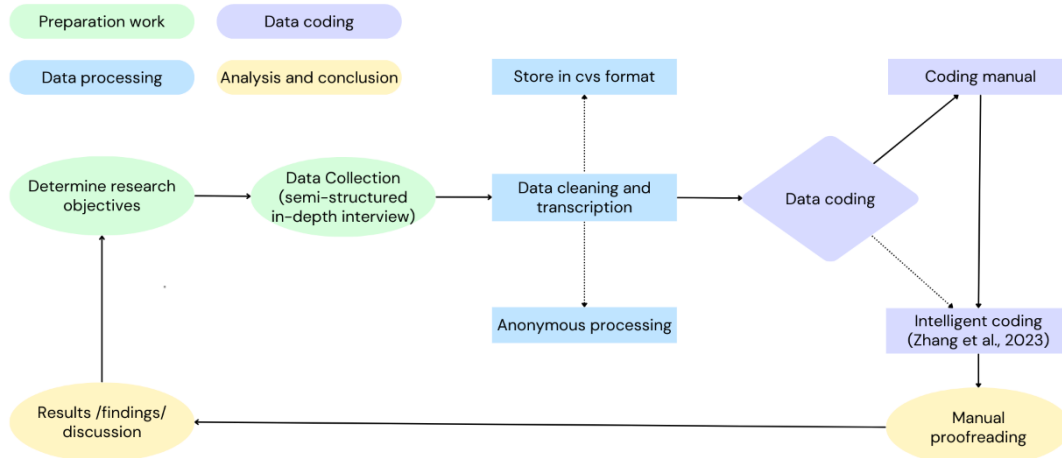


Figure 2. Research Design Flowchart

Combined with the theoretical framework, the framework of figure 3 can be derived after manually coding the two sets of data by 'theming the data categorically' (Lungu, 2022). Figure 3 shows three core themes: monetization model and challenge, copyright protection mechanism and deficiency, and Global communication. 9 secondary themes, and 25 tertiary themes. Accordingly, cue words can be derived to train the AI tool, as detailed in Appendix 1.

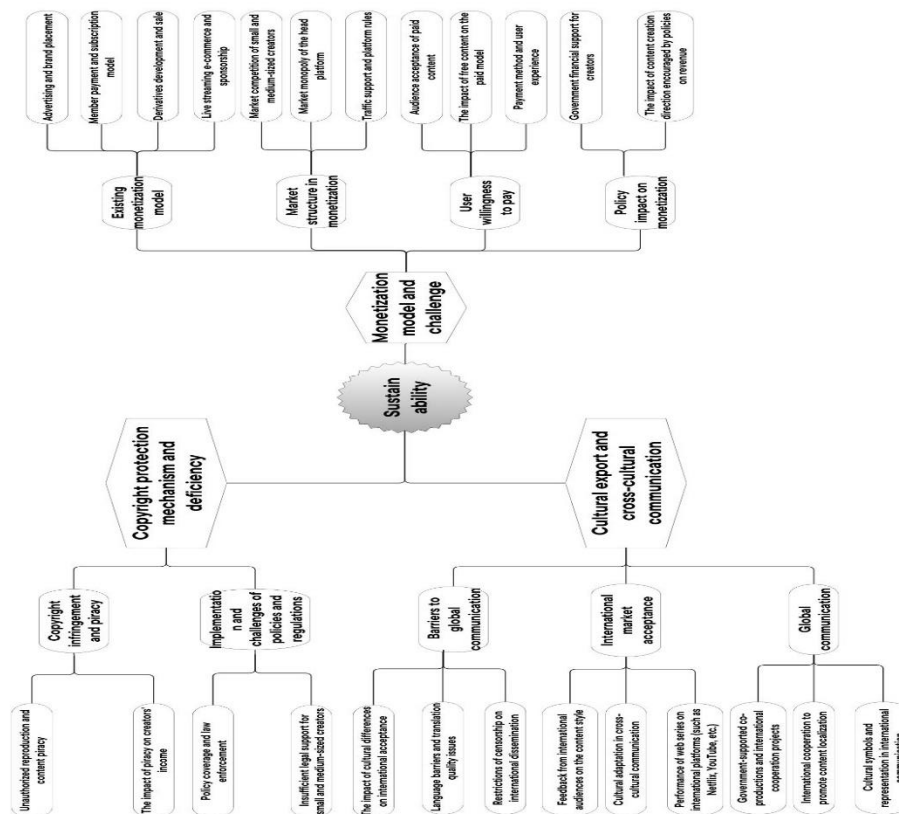


Figure 3. A content analysis framework for the sustainability of Chinese web series

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Analysis of Coding Results

Based on the coding of the data from the interviews with creators and audiences, Table 3 and Table 4 are derived respectively. By analyzing the different groups, it is possible to see the different feedback from creators and audiences in terms of monetization of web series, copyright protection, and cultural export.

First of all, in the creator data, the most frequently mentioned is "monetization models and challenges" (a total of 214 counts). Among them, "the impact of the direction of content creation encouraged by the policy on revenue" is mentioned 62 times, reflecting the huge impact of the policy on content production and its economic return. In addition, creators also highlighted "audience acceptance of paid content" (45 counts), which shows the direct impact of users' willingness to pay on creators' income. Among the existing monetization models, "market competition of small and medium-sized creators" (31 counts) and "market monopoly of head platform" (30 counts) were mentioned most, revealing the inequality of market competition.

On the other hand, in the audience data, the most frequently mentioned is "audience acceptance of paid content" (80 counts), indicating that the current audience has a high acceptance of paid content, but at the same time, many viewers say that if there is a free channel, they will still prefer free content. In addition, "the impact of free content on the paid model" was mentioned 27 times, reflecting the greater impact of free content on the paid model, while "the impact of piracy on creators' income" was only mentioned once, indicating that the audience paid less attention to piracy.

In the creator community, monetization models are widely discussed (214 counts), with the impact of policy on content creation particularly prominent. Specifically, "The impact of the direction of content creation encouraged by the policy on revenue" was mentioned 62 times, indicating that creators are very concerned about the government's role in content production. In particular, respondents pointed out that government support for theme content, red culture (cultural narratives highlighting revolutionary history and socialist values), and educational content is often accompanied by a greater tilt of funds and resources, making it easier for such content to succeed in the market (Zeng, 2023).

Creator 5 emphasized the influence of policy on content creation:

"We have to consider policy orientation in content creation, because policy support not only leads to higher resource allocation but also increases the visibility of our work on major platforms. "

This indicates the guiding role of the policy on the creation of content, as well as the creators' balance of benefits in the policy environment.

In the creator data, the market competition of small and medium-sized creators (31 counts) and the market monopoly of the head platform (30 counts) are also frequently mentioned challenges. Many small and medium-sized creators reflect that although they have unique creative ideas, the monopoly of the market makes it difficult for them to get enough exposure and promotion opportunities.

Creator 2 mentioned:

"The head platform has huge traffic resources and financial support, and small creators have little chance to get a fair chance to compete on the platform. This puts us at a very competitive disadvantage in the market."

This market structure not only intensifies the survival pressure of small and medium-sized creators, but also limits the diversity of content innovation. The concentration of traffic and resources makes platform monopoly an obstacle that cannot be ignored in the process of monetization.

In terms of copyright protection, although the creators did not discuss this issue in depth, unauthorized reprinting and content piracy only mentioned 1 count, but its impact is crucial for creators, especially small and medium-sized creators.

Creator 3 stressed:

"The piracy issue has a huge impact on our revenue, especially for small creators. We can't get a reasonable revenue share through formal channels, which affects the motivation to continue to create."

Although policies and regulations provide a framework for copyright protection, the coverage of its actual implementation is insufficient. Especially in the transnational transmission of online platforms, the problem of piracy is still difficult to control.

In addition, the restriction of censorship on international dissemination was mentioned 17 counts, indicating that the

restrictive influence of censorship on the dissemination of web series content is obvious. Respondents generally agreed that censorship has reduced the diversity and innovation of content, especially in international markets, where many potentially exciting contents cannot be shown because of censorship.

Creator 6 said:

"We often have to consider the restrictions of censorship in our creation, which prevents many ideas from landing, especially in the international market, where our content is not diverse enough,"

This shows that the strict restrictions of the censorship system have directly affected the international dissemination ability of Chinese online dramas and weakened their competitiveness in the global market.

Table 3. Table of Creator Coding Results

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme	Count
Monetization model and challenge	Existing monetization model	Advertising and brand placement	11
		Member pay and subscription model	4
		Derivatives development and sales	2
		Live streaming e-commerce and sponsorship	6
	Market structure in monetization	Market competition of small and medium-sized creators	31
		The market monopoly of the head platform	30
		Traffic support and platform rules	15
	User willingness to pay	Audience acceptance of paid content	45
		The impact of free content on the paid model	4
		Payment methods and user experience	3
	Policy impact on monetization	Government financial support for creators	1
		The impact of the direction of content creation encouraged by policies on revenue	62
Copyright protection mechanism and deficiency	Copyright infringement and piracy	Unauthorized reproduction and content piracy	1
		The impact of piracy on creators' income	1
	Implementation and challenges of policies and regulations	Policy coverage and enforcement	2
		Legal support for small and medium-sized creators is insufficient	1
Global communication	Barriers to global communication	The influence of cultural differences on international acceptance	6
		Language barrier and translation quality problem	1
		Censorship restrictions on international dissemination	17
	International market acceptance	Feedback from international audiences on the content style of Chinese web series	24
		Cultural adaptation in cross-cultural communication	5
		The performance of web series on international platforms	1
	Cross-cultural collaboration and co-production	Government-supported co-productions and international cooperation projects	1
		International cooperation to promote content localization	4
		Cultural symbol and representation in international communication	1

In the audience data, audience acceptance of paid content is mentioned in 80counts, indicating that the majority of viewers are willing to pay for premium content. However, many viewers mentioned that willingness to pay depends on the uniqueness and quality of the content.

Audience 12 says:

"I'm willing to pay for special episodes, especially those with innovative plots or genres I'm interested in. But if the quality of the free content is similar, I still prefer the free content."

This shows that while audiences are willing to pay for quality content, creators and platforms need to ensure that paid content is differentiated and attractive to truly drive users' willingness to pay.

At the same time, the impact of free content on the paid model was mentioned in 27 counts, revealing the competitive pressure of free content on the paid market. Audiences are used to getting content through free channels, resulting in the market share of paid content being hit.

Audience 7 points out:

"There are so many free channels to watch TV shows, especially pirate websites. I don't pay for content unless it's something I really like."

This shows that the wide availability of free and pirated content poses a strong challenge to the paid model, and creators and platforms need to attract more users to pay channels by adding value to content and improving the paid experience.

AD placement and brand placement are the most acceptable ways to monetize (counts = 13). Viewers mentioned that they could accept the AD placement, but only if the AD should not interfere with the viewing experience of the show.

Audience 5 said:

"Some of the shows have good AD placement, and I even think it's part of the story. But some of the ads are very blunt and ruin the atmosphere of the show."

This shows that the quality and manner of advertising placement directly affect audience acceptance. Creators and brands need to pay attention to the integration of advertising and story to ensure that advertising does not interrupt the audience's immersion experience.

When it comes to intercultural communication, cultural differences are one of the main challenges (counts = 24). Many international audiences have reflected that they have difficulty understanding certain plots and cultural symbols in Chinese web series due to differences in cultural background, living habits, and values.

Audience 4 says:

"Sometimes I can't understand the behavior of the characters in foreign TV series. Their reactions are so different from our culture that I can't empathize with them. I think the same is true for foreigners looking at our content."

Such cultural differences not only affect the acceptability of content in cross-cultural communication but also limit the promotion effect of Chinese web series in the international market.

Table 4. Table of Audience Coding Results

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme	Count
Monetization model and challenge	Existing monetization model	Advertising and brand placement	13
		Member pay and subscription model	22
		Derivatives development and sales	4
		Live streaming e-commerce and sponsorship	1
	Market structure in monetization	Market competition of small and medium-sized creators	26
		The market monopoly of the head platform	20
		Traffic support and platform rules	7
	User willingness to pay	Audience acceptance of paid content	80
		The impact of free content on the paid model	27
		Payment methods and user experience	5
	Policy impact on monetization	Government financial support for creators	1
		The impact of the direction of content creation encouraged by policies on revenue	80
Copyright protection mechanism and deficiency	Copyright infringement and piracy	Unauthorized reproduction and content piracy	7
		The impact of piracy on creators' income	1
	Implementation and challenges of policies and regulations	Policy coverage and enforcement	2
		Legal support for small and medium-sized creators is insufficient	0
Global communication	Barriers to global communication	The influence of cultural differences on international acceptance	7
		Language barrier and translation quality problem	5
		Censorship restrictions on international dissemination	23
	International market acceptance	Feedback from international audiences on the content style of Chinese web series	30
		Cultural adaptation in cross-cultural communication	2
		The performance of web series on international platforms	5
	Cross-cultural collaboration and co-production	Government-supported co-productions and international cooperation projects	0
		International cooperation to promote content localization	6
		Cultural symbol and representation in international communication	1

4.2 Findings

From the creators' perspective, it is clear from these results that there are obvious loopholes in the enforcement of existing copyright protection policies. Tony Bennett's theory (2013) suggests that cultural policies should play a key role in protecting the rights and interests of cultural products and creators. Existing policies are not sufficiently enforced in terms of copyright protection, failing to effectively curb piracy and resulting in creators' income being affected. Policies should strengthen legal enforcement of copyright protection, rigorously combat piracy, and further promote the application of digital copyright protection technologies to ensure that creators can reap the rewards they deserve from their works.

These data reflect that there is still room for improvement in cultural policy to promote the international dissemination of Chinese web series. Bennett highlights that cultural policy can promote cultural diversity through cross-cultural cooperation and cultural export. Therefore, policies can enhance the adaptability and dissemination of web series in the international market by encouraging international co-productions, providing translation and localization support, and relaxing censorship restrictions. Policy adjustments can help creators create cross-cultural content more freely and promote the globalization of Chinese web series.

Audience data reflects their direct experiences and perceptions of the monetization model, and Tony Bennett's theory of cultural policy suggests that policy can be used to promote fair competition and a diverse supply of content by regulating content platforms and market structures. The viewers' perception that there are too many advertisement insertions and a single form of membership payment suggests that the current monetization model may be overly reliant on certain single pathways. Policymakers can consider introducing more monetization methods that encourage innovation, while providing more opportunities for small and medium-sized creators to make the market more competitive and the platforms more diverse in terms of content.

Audience feedback on copyright protection mechanisms echoed the views of creators, who showed strong concerns about piracy. But this does not mean that audiences do not accept piracy; Tony Bennett's theory of cultural policy (2001, 2013) emphasizes that policies should not only support cultural production but also effectively protect the copyrights of content producers. Existing policies are inadequate in combating piracy and protecting the rights of creators, leading to widespread piracy and even affecting the viewing experience of viewers. Policymakers can enhance viewers' recognition of legitimate content by strengthening the fight against piracy, while also providing more incentives for creators to innovate.

Audience data reveal the impact of censorship and cultural adaptation issues on the international dissemination of Chinese web series, and Tony Bennett's theory of cultural policy (2001) suggests that policies should take into account cultural diversity and the needs of the international market in the process of promoting cultural exports. The audience's concern about censorship and cultural differences suggests to policymakers that relaxing censorship, encouraging international co-productions, and strengthening policy support for cultural adaptation will help increase the acceptance and competitiveness of Chinese web series in the international market.

4.3 Discussion & Recommendation

The cultural policy theory of Tony Bennett (2001) points out that cultural policy is not only the funding of cultural products but also a social governance mode to achieve specific social goals through the management of cultural production. In the process of monetizing online dramas, the impact of policies on content production and market structure is crucial. The results show that the content creation direction encouraged by the policy plays a key role in the creators' earnings (counts = 62). This is consistent with Bennett's view that the government can decide which forms of content to support and promote through the guidance of cultural policies.

In the Chinese web series industry, government policy support for specific types of content (e.g., melodrama or red culture) reflects what Bennett (2013) refers to as "selective support for cultural policy." Prioritizing policy support for such content contributes to social cohesion and the dissemination of specific values, but it also creates limits on market diversity and marginalizes other forms of content and creators. Small and medium-sized creators are disadvantaged in terms of access to policy support and market resources, reflecting the control of cultural policy in the allocation of funds and market access discussed by Bennett (2016).

Bennett (2013) points out that cultural policies play an important role in the production and dissemination of cultural products through copyright laws and other means. This is consistent with the shortcomings of copyright protection mechanisms found in the study, such as unauthorized reproduction and content piracy, count = 1. Although existing policies provide a framework for copyright protection, enforcement is insufficient, especially in the process of online platforms and international dissemination, and piracy remains a serious problem.

Bennett (2003) borrowed Foucault's concept of "governance reason" and pointed out that cultural policies not only affect domestic cultural production but also shape global cultural exchanges through the international dissemination of cultural products. The results show that censorship has produced restrictions on the international dissemination of Chinese online dramas (counts = 17), which is consistent with Bennett's (2016) view that cultural policies largely control the content and dissemination of cultural products. Such controls, while helping to preserve specific cultural values, also limit the acceptance and competitiveness of cultural products in the global marketplace. Cultural policies can promote the international spread of Chinese web series by encouraging cross-cultural cooperation and co-production, helping them overcome the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural differences. The government can introduce more policies to support international cooperation, enhance the global adaptability of online dramas, and enhance the influence of Chinese culture in the international market.

According to the concept of governance proposed by Bennett (2003), cultural policies not only affect the production of cultural products but also guide and shape public behavior and consciousness through these products. In the context of online dramas, policies directly affect audience preferences and cognitive patterns through content control and platform rules. We found that the audience acceptance of paid content (counts = 45) and the impact of free content on the paid model (counts = 27) reflect the regulatory role of policy in market structure.

Bennett's theory (2003) emphasizes that cultural policy is not only a management tool for the production of cultural products, but also affects the public's consumption habits and cultural cognition. Viewers' choice between paid and free content is influenced by market rules and cultural policies. The government can encourage more audiences to pay for quality content through policy guidance, thus enhancing the market value and sustainability of cultural products. Through policy guidance and education, we should increase the public's acceptance of the content payment model and reduce the impact of piracy on the market.

5. Conclusion

Chinese web series face three main challenges: monetization, copyright protection, and international dissemination. Government policies play a crucial role in shaping these areas, but there are both advantages and limitations.

In monetization, current models favour large platforms, limiting opportunities for smaller creators. Policy support for specific content types marginalizes diverse works. A more inclusive policy can promote market diversity and innovation. Encouraging different payment models and revenue streams could benefit creators.

For copyright protection, piracy is a serious issue that weakens creator earnings. Existing laws are not fully enforced. Strengthening anti-piracy measures and applying digital tools like blockchain could help protect creators' rights and incentivize content production.

In international dissemination, cultural and regulatory barriers limit global appeal. Strict censorship reduces content variety. Relaxing regulations and supporting content localization could help Chinese web series succeed internationally. Cross-cultural collaborations should be encouraged to improve global competitiveness.

In conclusion, the government's policies need to balance regulation with creative freedom. Addressing these issues can boost the sustainable development of the Chinese web series industry.

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Authors contributions

Shangmingzhu Zhang was primarily responsible for the study design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting. Dr. Hasrul Hashim and Dr. Nurzihan Hassim provided critical reviews and constructive feedback on the manuscript. All authors participated in the ethical review process and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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