

***Embracing Difference:
A Case Study of BoA in Japanese-Korean Pop Music Album Cover Design***

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Abstract

BoA is a South Korean musician, who has a high reputation as an art performer in Asia, especially in Japan and South Korea from 2000 to 2019. She was the very first Korean entertainer who launched a million records in Japan with her album “LISTEN TO MY HEART” in 2003. In her career, she revealed the cross-cultural possibilities of art performance, and won the “Most Influential Artist Award” and “Favorite Artist Korea”. This research focused on the art and graphic design of BoA’s album covers released in Japan and Korea. Also, the design aspects and the cultural differences of Pop Music in East Asia were investigated. We employed a case study approach, to analyze various design elements, with an emphasis on color and visual style. According to the aggregation of results, the color tone was mostly harmonious in Japan. On the other hand, the color chosen in Korea was a contrast combination. As a designer, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of intercultural design when we are facing into a generation of globalization.

Keywords: Album Cover Design, BoA, Pop Music

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Introduction

BoA is a well-known pop music singer in South Korea. The purpose of the study was to examine the art and graphic design of BoA's album covers. Specifically, we examined six albums with the same title but with different album cover designs released in Japan and South Korea. The elements of a typical album cover design include the name of the album and the name of the singer. Other information such as publishers, price, singer biography, etc., are optional. It includes a design component and a content component.

Image, no matter figurative or abstract, can blend in with tradition and reality. The scope of graphic design is wide, as it covers art, design thinking, psychological research, communication, and marketing.

Layout design elements include culture, simplicity, identity, and effectiveness (Sun & Wang, 2020). Here is a description of each of the elements:

Culture: By combining tradition, culture and contemporary society, the image conveys the meaning of language, and also contains the value of culture.

Simplicity: Extract the essences of an image in order to recreate another visual representation.

Identity: Graphic design relies on the form of images to convey ideas, so the design needs to have an identity to be accepted by the public.

Effectiveness: It is the ultimate display of meaning for the design, which can clearly express the unique function or meaning of the individual works.

Color matching in album design includes two aspects (Lungteng, 2015). Similar Harmony is when the effects of similar blending is stable and soft, but sometimes it has the disadvantages of being plain and dull. Contrast blending refers to matching colors with contrasting hues, lightness, and saturation. It usually creates a dynamic and lively sense, and is easy to attract attention.

Research Method

In this study, we conducted semi-structured in-person interview with an album cover designer who mostly work with digital singles in agency company and music industry. The interview was carried out by one-to-one interview, with the aim of understanding the interviewee's view on album cover design by asking open-ended questions in different situations and to guide the interviewee to express their ideas in more depth (Guan et al., 2015).

This research interviewed album cover designer who mostly work with digital singles in agency company and music industry.

The section below includes the interview questions as well as the responses:

1. What are the elements of a cover design?

When publishing physical albums, the elements include: posters, lyrics, CD package

design elements, albums, disc appearance, labels/ stickers/ stamp design on the front and back cover, and the booklet inside the package.

2. What are the requests between the director and customers?

In the designer's perspective, customer comes first. Meaning, the requests from the customers are the priority. However, the album is mainly planned by the music agency or the singer her/himself.

3. What is the procedure of designing an album cover?

1. Production of the digital single cover image

2. Shooting for artistic image photo and photos for use in posters and other visual printings.

3. At the same time, video recording of the music video.

4. Adjustment and editing

4. How to set the portrait photography on album cover?

The presentation of visual style and formation is usually decided by the company, which began by reaching an agreement with the photographer and designer on color tone, topic and style setting. In order to make sure the company is taking responsibility and control, experimenting different positions and lightings are required and at least 2 to 3 sets of photo shots are handed in in a proposal.

5. Did you discussed with artist when you design?



Singers hardly participate, the image setting was mainly decided by the investor and agency. Most artists focused on music.

Case study

BoA had her first album at the age of 13 right after she completed her trainee session in 2000. At the same time, she received attention in Japan. After a year, she was completely immersed into her career in Japan.

A front shoulder level close-up portrait shot was the appearance of South Korea's cover and the harmony brownish tone of the album is used as the overall setting. The following year, the same-listed song was released in Japan. The 14-year-old BoA officially debuted in Japan. The album reflects the tender feelings, the color pink was selected to make a contrast from the white background.(See Table 1)

Table 1 *ID Peace;B Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*



2001.05.30 Japan	2000.08.25 S.Korea
	

BoA released her second album in Korea in April 2002.. The European pop dance music performance, and a side shot of a half body sitting down and turning back with her hair swinging in the breeze gives a hint of a fashionable, young atmosphere in the

album. The picture is presented with deep navy blue at the background, making a contrast to the lightness on her outfit.

In the same year in September, the same album was released in Japan. The album cover was presented with a frame of a broken eggshell, so as to reveal the new style of her music, symbolizing the newborn life and hope. The light yellow and the cold tone white illustrates the softness and tenderness of femininity and the beauty of confidence and energy. (See Table 2)

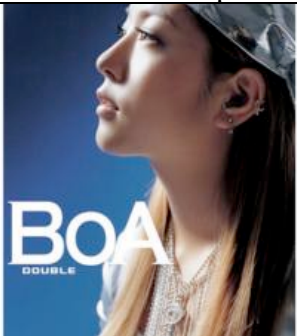

Table 2 *NO.1 Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*

2002.09.19 Japan	2002.04.01 S.Korea
	

Double album was first released in Japan, and the choice of color was mainly based on blue . The blue gradient tone, creates a feeling of calmness and refreshment. The lighting in this image brightens up the face which contrasts BoA’s facial contours. The silver accessories also show the elegant neckline and the feeling of confidence.

In October 2003, the same album released in South Korea. Yellow was the background color, presenting a distinctive impression, which brought out the power and energy of visual impact. Also, the three overlapping postures with transparent image conveys the different aspects and characteristics of BoA in this album. (See Table 3)



Table 3 *Double Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*

2003.01.22 Japan	2003.10.23 S.Korea
	

This Japanese album was released on the day after the South Korean album. However, the album was presented in an opposite way. It highlights the maturity and the glamor of a young woman. The overall color tone is black, with some shadowy colors. The lighting from the top left brings out the brightness, which allows the audience to focus on her facial expression. The braided hairstyle gives the sense of firmness and fierce. At the end of 2003, the release of “Rock with you” album led to a new music trend in

South Korea. It emphasized the style of hip-hop. The apparel in this album focused on presenting rebellious and youthfulness. In addition, the posture of jumping shows the movement and dynamic expression of the image. The charming and chic feeling from the matching color of purple and pink used in the bold font enhanced the weight and space. (See Table 4)



Table 4 *Rock With You Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*

2003.12.04 Japan	2003.12.03 S.Korea
	

In 2003, BoA just successfully held a solo concert. then named this album “Shine we are” representing the concept of shining yourself. The use colorful gradient on the bold font text has bring out the beauty and vivid of the music content. The application of transparency on the text also refers to the penetration of dance music with lively rhythm and fast beat. Then an elegant side half-body shot was taken as the background image.

At the end of 2003, BoA has reached her active period of time.The album design in South Korean version has tried out the visual impact on black-white style, the contrast has shown a hint of retro and handsome qualities. The photograph was taken from the bottom with high angle shot which helps representing her belief of being a singer and her personality. (See Table 5)


Table 5 *Shine We Are Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*

2003.05.14 Japan	2003.12.04 S.Korea
	

In the summer of 2006, BoA released “Key of Heart” that meets the atmosphere of summer and holiday vocation theme. The blue sky, swimming pool, yellowish sunshades, and orange juice were used as the elements to symbolize the sunny weather in August. In addition, the text performance was designed to emphasize the enlargement of size and the lightness of appearance. Transparency was created by the hollow between the lines. The next month, the South Korean version of “Key of Heart” was released with a relatively different look. The image of the album was

presented with white background showing pureness, honesty and softness. Also, the san-serif text font was light and clean, which symbolizes the imagery of pursuing of perfection. (See Table 6)

Table 6 *Key of Heart Album Cover Design in Japan and South Korea*

2006.08.09 Japan	2006.09.21 S.Korea
 <p>The Japanese album cover for BoA's 'Key of Heart' features a vibrant, tropical scene. BoA is shown from the waist up, wearing a blue patterned crop top and matching shorts. She is holding a glass of orange juice and smiling. The background includes a swimming pool, a yellow umbrella, and a building. The text 'BoA' is in large, stylized blue letters, and 'KEY OF HEART' is in smaller blue letters below it.</p>	 <p>The South Korean album cover for BoA's 'Key of Heart' features a minimalist, clean design. BoA is shown from the chest up, wearing a white sleeveless top. She has a soft, serene expression. The background is a plain, light color. The text 'BoA' is in large, light gray letters, and 'KEY OF HEART' is in smaller, light gray letters below it. The words 'LIMITED EDITION' are visible in very small text at the bottom.</p>

Conclusion

The results of the study suggest that albums would released in different color tones according to different regions. Also, the album design represented BoA's image in different period of times and the album design reflects the differences in performance between Japan and South Korea. Change of seasons also influence the choice of color in album design.

The limitations of the study is that we only examined a single singer in two different regions. This study provides implications for understanding how albums with the same title differ in cover design elements in Japan and South Korea. Future research should investigate not only one singer, but also to compare different singers in multiple regions in order to promote the reliability of the results.

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