Whither Transnationality?
Some Theoretical Challenges in Korean Wave Studies

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In studies on the Korean Wave, the notion of transnationality has been instrumental in underscoring the hybrid, transgressive, and intersectional character of the Korean Wave. However, its analytical legitimacy has been increasingly questioned, and its application necessitates a more nuanced viewpoint when investigating the global circulation and consumption of the Korean Wave. In this essay, I critically examine the theoretical issues arising from key debates on the transnationality of the Korean Wave in the fields of communications, media, and cultural studies. I attempt to present an analytical framework by reconstructing the issues of transnationality with particular references to trans-urban, trans-local, and trans-media. As a result, I wish to prove the theoretical imperatives of transnational approaches to Korean Wave studies in the post-Hallyu 2.0 era.

Keywords: Korean Wave studies, Hallyu, media culture, transnationality, globalization, cosmopolitanism, decolonization

Over the last two decades, the Korean Wave, or Hallyu, has reached a global audience, from the Middle East to South America, and its corresponding commercial successes, cultural influence, and long-term sustainability have been widely discussed with particular reference to transnationality. Within the study of globalization, "transnationalism" generally refers to "a condition in which capital, people, institutions, commodities, information and media images flow across national boundaries, and cross-border activities and connections are engendered" (Iwabuchi, 2020, p. 34). In studies on the Korean Wave, the notion of "transnationality" has played an instrumental role in underscoring the hybrid, transgressive, and intersectional traits of the Korean Wave. However, it has also increasingly become a vague metaphorical concept. Between 1997 and 2007, Korean cultural productions, including TV dramas and films, were exported throughout East Asia with a focus on consumers in their 30s and 40s; this phenomenon was known as Hallyu 1.0. Since 2008, Hallyu 2.0's primary cultural exports have been K-pop, online games, and animations to consumers in their teens and 20s from Europe and North and South America; these consumers have easier access to global creative content through digital technologies such as social media and

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smartphones (Jin, 2016, p. 5). The shift from Hallyu 1.0 to 2.0 underlines the intensifying complexities of global cultural flows and reordered audience spectra, the expansion of regional markets, and the reconfigured media environments brought about by various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Cultural products that have recently become popular (e.g., webtoons, mobile games, sci-fi dramas produced and distributed via global streaming services like Netflix) have marked the start of Hallyu 3.0 in the age of "mediatization"—an age in which "the higher-order processes of transformation and change across society result from mediation going on at every level of interaction" (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 35). Despite the significant contributions of transnationalism in comprehending the globalization of the Korean Wave, its analytical application necessitates a more nuanced viewpoint for investigating post-Hallyu 2.0. Thus, important concerns arise in the context of its multifaceted, multidirectional cultural currents, which have intensified since the apex of Hallyu 2.0: Is the concept of transnationality still conceptually viable in an age of hyper-mediatization? Or, in the age of hyper-globalization, how can we construct "transnational Korean Wave studies"? In this essay, I critically examine the theoretical issues arising from key debates on the transnationality of the Korean Wave within the fields of communications, media, and cultural studies. I attempt to present an analytical framework by reconstructing the issues of transnationality with particular reference to the trans-urban, trans-local, and trans-media. As a result, I wish to prove the theoretical imperatives of the transnational approach toward Korean Wave studies in the third Hallyu era.

Theoretical Challenges in the Studies of Hallyu 1.0 and 2.0

Many transnational approaches in Korean Wave studies stem from a perspective that is critical of the flaws of traditional area studies, which are heavily reliant on methodological nationalism (i.e., a nation-territorial approach). Area studies have been largely criticized as the political outcome of the Cold War in the aftermath of World War II (Miyoshi & Harootunian, 2002). In the wake of rapid globalization, they increasingly appear to be "essentially disjointed" and "no more than multidisciplinary in character at their best" (Kuijper, 2008, p. 205). Area studies tend to locate the nation-state as the obvious starting point from which to analyze cultural and media currents abroad. However, no sooner had Korean Wave studies been conceived as an exploration of Koreanness than it faced a major theoretical challenge. The unexpected popularity of Korean dramas within East Asia in the late 1990s and early 2000s uncovered an intrinsic problem of the territorial approach: cultural essentialism. The intra-Asian phenomenon of Hallyu 1.0 had aptly called into question the perspective that conceived of "Korean" culture as that of a local, authentic, and unique manifestation. In consequence, a more innovative analytical framework beyond methodological nationalism became necessary. Conventional area studies scholars have been known "neither for their theoretical astuteness nor self-reflectivity in their knowledge production," and the decline of area studies has been accelerated by its "indifference to the theoretical concerns of the discipline" and "hostility toward cultural studies and postcolonial studies" (Naoki, 2010, p. 273). The prefix "trans" refers to the idea of "becoming," prompting a crucial question as to "what extent the prefix 'trans' transcends existing boundaries in relation to nation, ethnicity, race, gender, etc." (Lim, 2007, p. 39). As implied by the prefix "trans"—meaning "across" or "beyond"—the transnational approach to Korean Wave studies has emerged as a viable alternative to area studies. The transnational approach aims to "interrupt the practices of separation sanctioned by nationality, ethnicity, gender, social class, or civilization," by going beyond the confines of methodological nationalism (Naoki, 2010, p. 273.2).

        The transnational approach in Korean Wave studies is employed through the critical appraisal of the cultural imperialism theory (Huang, 2009). Advocated by Herbert Schiller (1992, 1995), the cultural imperialism theory overtly stresses that Western nations, by means of dominating power over transnational communications corporations, impose their views and ways of life on the developing world and consequently destroy local, traditional, and national cultures. It is not entirely surprising that the popularity of Hallyu 1.0 has precipitated a critical assessment of the United States' declining cultural hegemony in East Asia. In an East Asian cultural context, American mass culture has served as the dominant popular cultural form that was localized, regionalized, or dissolved as "desire and violence" during the Cold War era (Yoshimi, 2003). The cultural imperialism theory posits that the popularity of the Korean Wave in East Asia is merely the unilateral flow of a semi-imperialist cultural power to audiences in developing nations. A crucial limitation in the arguments of cultural imperialism lies in the latter's proposition that "culture is totally and completely reducible to the economy—the logic of capital" (Ang, 2001). Such analyses of cultural flows bound to cultural imperialism overestimate the cultural homogenization engendered by the dominant Western power, neglecting the reciprocal process in which reception and appropriation are negotiated. Because of the global scale of cultural flows and transformations, Western culture, be it European or American, has been "disjunctive," dislocated, and displaced, and has been made to stop serving as the culture of reference (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296). That is to say, Europe, as a prototypical form of the West, has been "provincialized" (Chakrabarty, 2007, p. 3). The wide reception of Korean dramas in East Asia—not only in China but also, more importantly, in Japan, a nation that holds more economic and cultural power than Korea—suggests that the circulation and consumption of media content are neither unilaterally imposed by a dominating power nor passively imported and received by domestic audiences. Products of Korean pop culture move in and out, backward and forward, in conjunction with the history and politics of regions and areas, and between "varieties of formations of subjectivities" (Erni & Chua, 2004, p. 9). The multidirectional interplay between Korean cultural products and varying local contexts concomitantly manifests the polymorphic aspects of modernity in a similar manner to heteroglossic, coeval, creole, and vernacular modernities.

        The transnational approach questions the linear direction of the cultural imperialist perspective and highlights the multicultural, multifarious dimensions of the cultural flows of the Korean Wave. The multiple flows of Hallyu 1.0 across Asia are particularly in line with the theory of cultural proximity. In an attempt to move beyond the shortcomings of the cultural imperialist perspective, Straubhaar used the notion of cultural proximity in his analysis of asymmetrical interdependence and the role of audiences in search of cultural goods in Latin America (Straubhaar, 1991, 2015). The underlying logic of the popular reception of Korean dramas in Asian regions is conceived as the articulation of cultural proximity—that is, "the trans-local reckoning of moral ideas and practical decision making in terms of syncretic Asian modernity" like, most notably, Confucian ethics (e.g., harmony, community, strong morality, respect for family ties; Erni & Chua, 2004, p. 7). Through transnational circulation and the consumption of televisual images during the Hallyu 1.0 period, the shared structure of feelings can be seen as serving as the strong foundation for an "affective form of imagining alliances" (Erni & Chua, 2004, p. 7) as well as the establishment of cultural regionalization—an example of which is "the East Asian pop culture" (Chua, 2004, p. 202). By examining "polymorphic vernacular modernities," Iwabuchi (2005) attributes the structural logic of intraregional cultural flows in East Asia to "discrepant intimacy"—that is, ambivalent, unevenly shared nostalgic feelings among groups of Hallyu 1.0 audiences (p. 19). The notion of cultural

proximity signifies the growing possibility for the construction of an imagined Asian community facilitated by the shared Korean Wave. Despite its analytical relevance in the formation of pan-Asian pop culture, the boundaries and structures of cultural proximity have far exceeded the territorial boundaries of the Asian region. It is alarming to see that an overemphasis on the affective level of "Asianness" is implicitly linked to cultural isomorphism. The transnational approach that is driven by cultural proximity is deeply rooted in the naïve proposition of assumed Asian singularities. As such, it tends to ignore the historical complexities and long-term patterns of global interconnectedness that have reciprocally formed both Asia and non-Asia, respectively (Dirlik, 2011; Hui, 2007; Khiabany & Sreberny, 2014). The transnationality of Hallyu 1.0 displays its own varying forms of sensibility or intimacy (i.e., of affective communication that is created, shared, and constantly reformulated by both a relatively homogeneous East Asian audience and by a broader global audience). However, the reimagination of Asia as a whole is nevertheless rooted in the bipolar representation of globality (Asia and the West). It is possible to reproduce a conventional misconception of the linear, centripetal homogenization of the Korean Wave while disguising another form of centrism, namely Asian-centrism.

Although the expansion of Hallyu 1.0 was hailed as an expression of the imagined Asian community that is rooted in the relatively homogeneous cultural milieu of East Asia, the reception of Hallyu 2.0 beyond Asia has prompted debate about its heterogeneous character and its interaction with indigenous cultural contexts. Korean Wave studies have elaborated on a transnational approach to Hallyu 2.0 by engaging more actively with postcolonial themes, such as cultural globalization, hybridity, third spaces, and so on. Against Orientalizing Western perceptions of the Other, postcolonial cultural and media studies have long explored the fundamental disjunctures and differences between economy, culture, and politics in the age of globalization, which have led to deterritorialization and displacement (Appadurai, 1990). From a postcolonial perspective, globalization and hybridity are not separate from but are interwoven with one another. In this vein, the dual layers of Hallyu 2.0's globalization and localization are conceived as forming a "third space"—a sort of interstitial space emerging "on the boundaries in-between forms of difference, in the intersection and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, [and] location" (Bhabha, 1996, pp. 55–58). The subcultural potentials embodied in Hallyu 2.0 are more positively underscored as the creation of an alternative third space that "displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority [and] new political initiatives" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). The transnational cultural flow of Hallyu 2.0 is regarded as "the becoming" of the third space (in the third sense of the prefix "trans"), "a unique space which displaces the hegemonic narratives of dominant culture" (Jin, 2016, p. 15). In the context of the continued dominance of Western theories, the postcolonial approach to transnationality becomes further instrumentalized as the prospect of non-Western hegemony and new non-Western theoretical viewpoints (Jin, 2016, p. 10). As a result, the demand for new non-Western theoretical perspectives facilitates the development of Asian perspectives. The Korean Wave is increasingly conceived of as an "ongoing process of transnationalization of East Asian popular culture" or a "new paradigm running through an East Asian sphere with the emphasis on the perspectives of rich Asian history" (Jin, 2021, p. 156).

At this juncture, it is imperative to see that a sort of de-Westernizing strategy still plays an underlying role in the effort to formulate an Asian perspective on the Korean Wave. Coupled with varying theories of communication studies, such as internationalization, de-Eurocentricization, and

decolonization, the de-Westernizing strategy has initiated postcolonial approaches to the material conditions of knowledge, hence making a significant contribution to unraveling the hegemonic Western process of globalization (Curran & Park, 1999). Nevertheless, scholars who attempt to develop an unmitigated Asian perspective risk creating a theoretical nativism by contending that the theory and methods of media studies offer nothing of use outside of their original birthplace (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2014). Consequently, local contexts (whether national or regional) are overtly reessentialized as determinant objects, thus reintensifying the conceptual danger of regionalism. The Asianization of Korean Wave studies could become restricted to the "growing reaction against the self-absorption and 'parochialization' of much Western media theory" (Sabry, 2009, p. 203). In the following sections, by critically reappropriating the theoretical challenges in the studies of Hallyu 1.0 and 2.0, I propose an analytical framework for the transnational study of the post-Hallyu 2.0 era.

Trans-Urban as City-Connectivity

A critical assessment of the limitations of the Asia-oriented transnational approach needs to be attentive toward the urban milieus of transnationality. The trans-urban viewpoint is a theoretical framework for understanding global cultural flows that are entwined with the indigenization of metropolitan cultural experiences. The "trans" in transnational is first and foremost a spatial marker; its key function is "to destabilize the notion of place" (Lim, 2007, p. 42). In Asia-oriented transnational approaches, there is still the problem of overemphasizing the sense of place, understanding the latter as authentically rooted in history and possessing a singular and essential kind of identity. Place becomes articulated as "a transformative cultural, political and economic process marked by outside flows and connections, openness, permeability, and constant interactions" (Y. Oh, 2017, pp. 180–181). In the age of hyper-globalization, where "the emergence of a specific set of values and beliefs are largely shared around the planet" (Castells, 2009, p. 117), it is less a nation than a city that mainly serves as "an interface" between diverse forms of local culture (de Waal, 2014). The transnationality of the Korean Wave is "inescapably national" but at the same time, is "inadvertently nation-less" (Lim, 2019, p. 2). In becoming a non–nation-based new cultural wave, the transnationality of the Korean Wave has expressed a distinctive mode of urban materiality and sensibility. The semantic textuality of the Korean Wave is less akin to "Koreanness" as a long-imagined place than to the symptomatic indexicality of the metropolitan culture associated with the mega-city, Seoul, the capital of South Korea, and home to nearly 25 million residents. The media spectacle of Seoul performs as the dominant image of the Korean Wave, while Seoul as the mega-city itself acts as the essential node of the Korean Wave's transnational flows. The growth of city-connectivity has been discussed in association with particular urban and communications studies' concepts of the global city and the informational city.

Sassen's (1991) important work, *The Global City*, examines how some cities became "global cities" by forming "strategic transnational networks" of finance, planning, and design (p. xxi). Sassen's study of the decentralized non–nation-based networks of global cities demonstrates how patterns of economic trade and institutional organizations changed markedly between the 1970s and 1980s. Sassen (2009) has recently conducted an examination of urban geography and the new forms of centrality established in digitally generated areas, reflecting the expansion of the global information economy. According to Sassen, a trans-territorial center such as a central business district (CBD) is formed as a grid of nodes through strong economic transactions in global cities' networks. Despite her significant contributions to the understanding

of city networks, Sassen's perception of global cities is overly focused on the financial and service sectors, failing to pay enough attention to other rapidly emerging sectors since the 1990s, such as the transnational cultural and creative industries. These emerging sectors have facilitated the global expansion of "media capitals," to use Curtin's (2003) terminology (p. 205). Since most areas of urban life are articulated around digital technologies, the media and the city are becoming increasingly interwoven. Indeed, as Georgiou (2013) notes:

> the media need the city to feed their industry with talent, powerful representations, and consumers for their media products and technologies. The city needs the media to help brand its global appeal but also to manage its diversity and communication landscape. (p. 3)

Contrary to Sassen's (1991) emphasis on the economic and financial networks of global cities, Castells' (2009) earlier idea of global cities covers the notion of the information city in the age of the network society. Castells' (2009) major work, *The Rise of the Network Society* focuses on the particular way in which the advancement of electronic communications has resulted in the information city as a new urban form characterized by "a growing disassociation between spatial proximity and the performance of everyday functions (e.g., work, entertainment, education, governance)" (Castells, 2009, p. 424). In contrast to futurologists' predictions of the city's death, Castells rightly argues that urbanization and global connectivity between cities have advanced dramatically in recent decades.

The essence of the information society is founded upon the immaterial form of knowledge and is organized around networks. Thus, Castells (2009) stresses that city-connectivity is continuously reinforced throughout the globe (p. 429). More recently, he has proposed that the earlier forms of the information city have been substantially integrated into the network society—a society made up of a "specific configuration of global, national, and local networks in a multidimensional space of social interaction," whose main components are "(informational) value, communication, and culture" (Castells, 2013, pp. 18, 26). The major organizational transformation of media has facilitated the expansions of transnational networks of global multimedia businesses, generating the new urban space of the digitally connected city—or "the virtual embodiment of the global city"—in which transnational currents of culture mainly operate (Laguerre, 2005, p. 163).

Echoing Castells's emphasis on the expansions of transnational multimedia networks, Khanna's urban connectography stresses that the developing infrastructures of communication technologies have profoundly enhanced the transition of global connectivity from nations to the urban nodes of mega-cities (Khanna, 2016). The mega-city networks generated by digital infrastructures have reciprocally facilitated a wider spread of urban agglomeration, giving rise to the megalopolis that has provided the material and technological conditions for intercultural permeability. It is significant that the deterritorialization of culture has been intensified not only by developing media connectivity but also by urban expansion, or, as aptly characterized by Canclini (1995), "the circulatory of the communicational and the urban" (p. 212). The transnationalization of symbolic goods and migration has prompted a shift from the public sphere to "teleparticipation" and from mass culture to "technoculture" (Canclini, 1995, p. 212). In this vein, Appadurai's pioneering and enduringly relevant analytical framework of global cultural flow is still highly

relevant. Appadurai (1990) contends that the fundamental disjunctures in the global cultural economy can be grasped only by the combination of multiple dimensions: "ethnoscapes" of immigrants or migration workers; the "ideoscape" of ideology; "financescapes" of flows of capital; "technoscapes" of communication technologies; and "mediascapes" of media content. Take screen technology as an example of the multiscape. For Erni (2000), screens as meta-media play a role in "creating, displaying, and even shaping multi-textuality, hybrid subjectivity, the cultural interface between art, commerce, politics, and so on" (p. 226). Indeed, how the transnational Korean Wave has been constructed, distributed, and appropriated through remediation and hybridization, interplaying between various forms of screens, can precisely be seen through the lens of a screen—ranging from the small screens of smartphones to the big screens in public spaces like LED media façades. By analyzing city-connectivity via screens, the media spectacle of the Korean Wave is perceived as a multidimensional complexity, which involves "an urban phenomenon in public culture," "a textual interface capable of animating art and culture," and "a metaphorical approximation of projected desires in relation to spatiality" (Erni, 2000, p. 226).

As such, digital technologies enhance trans-urban networks and play a constructive role both in promoting the growth of metropolitan audiences, users, and consumers, as well as in localizing non–nation-specific cultures. Active pop culture networks among the global youth have emerged around the world. These digitally savvy youth consumers, fans, and users, located in various metropolises and networked by cutting-edge communication technologies, share "speedy, instantaneous, [and] momentary" pop culture, and thus create "hybridized in-between third spaces" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58), or "digital mediascapes" (Yoon, 2019, p. 45). The cultural pattern of "networked individualism" manifests as a new sociability articulated by transnational multimedia connections, as Castells (2013) has identified:

> In the age of the Internet, individuals do not withdraw into the isolation of virtual reality. On the contrary, they expand their sociability by using the wealth of communication networks at their disposal, but they do so selectively, constructing their cultural world in terms of their preferences and projects, and modifying it according to the evolution of their personal interests and values. (p. 120)

The question of transnationality should be reformulated in terms of how the Korean Wave's trans-urban connection is rendered disjunctive and displaced via global communication networks, and to what extent global audiences living within the distinct conditions of each metropolitan environment reappropriate and rearticulate it. The role of global audiences is further examined below in the trans-media section.

Trans-Local as Culture-Continuum

The second dimension of transnationality is trans-local—which primarily connotes a cultural continuum. While the trans-urban dimension focuses on horizontal, coeval, and spatial connectivity, the trans-local dimension underscores vertical, genealogical dimensions of temporal continuation. The creation, appropriation, and articulation of collective signification and cultural meaning are deeply rooted in enduring forms of affective communication, such as the practice of collective memory. Trans-local processes are largely engaged with "cultural thickening," which entails contesting practices of the articulation of social, political, and cultural meaning (Hepp & Couldry, 2009). In contrast to the territorialized signification usually

linked to cultural essentialism or national identity, the locality of this sensibility does not necessarily coincide with nation-bound memories or histories in the age of medialization. As Appadurai (1996) notes, "local knowledge is not only local in itself but, even more important, for itself" (p. 181). Global metropolitan texts and local historical contexts are mutually constitutive of the transnational circulation and consumption of the Korean Wave. In this way, the trans-local, as a cultural continuum, serves as a "new comparative semantic" to genealogically explore not only a shared form of local history or tradition but also, more crucially, a distinctive form of the imaginary that underlies globally shared memories and sensibilities (Hepp & Couldry, 2009, p. 40). If this is the case, how can researchers conduct comparative semantic studies on the transnational Korean Wave? One key example can be found in the critical practices conducted by the field of Inter-Asian Cultural Studies.

Over the last two decades, Inter-Asian Cultural Studies have made several important contributions to the decolonization of Asian media and cultural studies and, consequently, the postcolonial understanding of Hallyu 2.0. Aiming to move beyond the boundaries of academia, its members identify their cultural activity as a political movement motivated by "a call for regional integration and solidarity" (Chen, 2010, p. 213). The movement combines three key critiques in establishing its theoretical pillars: "Marxist media and cultural critique, the historical critique of 'Asia as a problematic nodal point for various intellectual disciplines,' and local decolonization of social movement across subnational Asia" (Erni & Chua, 2004, p. 3). At the center of the methodological propositions of this movement lies "Asia as method," an approach initially advocated by Takeuchi Yoshimi to transform Japanese subjectivity in connection to modernity. This postcolonial strategy engages with the threefold problems of decolonization, deimperialization, and an anti-Cold War approach, to overcome the colonized conditions of knowledge production and to provide a reciprocal understanding of other Asian modernities. This methodological strategy was largely elucidated by Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), who conceived of Asia as "an imaginary anchoring point of reference" to grasp the transformation of the self and the construction of subjectivity (p. 212). More specifically, it methodically conducts interreferencing—a practice of cultural relativization achieved by "multiplying frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview" (Chen, 2010, p. 223). In doing so, the practice of Inter-Asian Cultural Studies aims to "dilute the anxiety over the West and to move productive critical work forward" (Chen, 2010, p. 223). The West, which has served as the reference point in the past, becomes closely integrated into local contexts:

> The local formation of modernity carries important elements of the West, but it is not fully enveloped by it. Once recognizing the West as fragments internal to the local, we no longer consider it as an opposing entity but rather as one cultural resource among many others. (Chen, 2010, p. 223)

Furthermore, Chen's advocacy of interreferencing is elaborated in conjunction with the debates on the transnational circulation and consumption of Asian pop cultures. Iwabuchi's proposal of inter-Asian referencing involves more specific Asian contexts of transnationality. From the outset, Iwabuchi's suggestion is derived from the de-Westernizing practice of knowledge production through reconceptualizing and theorizing Western terms into "local terminologies and concepts" (e.g., in Korea, "transnational" should be referenced as무국적, *mugukjeok*, Korean for "statelessness"; Iwabuchi, 2014, p. 48).

As a "mundane practice," Inter-Asian referencing aims to "advance innovative knowledge production through reciprocal learning from other Asian experiences" and "to theorize East Asian sensibilities" (Iwabuchi, 2014, p. 51). It also functions as a sort of comparative analysis that focuses on the "East Asian experience of hybridization in negotiation with American cultural hegemony" (Iwabuchi, 2013, p. 46). Seen from the perspective of inter-Asian referencing, the reception and appropriation of the Korean Wave serve to prompt trans-local cultural hybridization. The analysis of the transnational Korean Wave, according to Iwabuchi, should involve a "cross-border dialogue," which provides "spatiotemporal similarities to, differences from, and interrelation with other East Asian media cultures" (Iwabuchi, 2013, pp. 45–46). In this vein, the inter-Asian referencing practice should serve to perform a self-analysis through a process of constant interreferencing.

However, there is still a substantial theoretical concern. The strategy of multiplying references tends to contain dynamic cultural flows only within prescribed Asian connections and neglects the multidirectional inter-contextuality between centripetal and centrifugal cultural flows beyond Asian boundaries. Despite its substantial contributions, some of its key doctrines seem barely sustainable within hyper-medialization unless profound theoretical revisions of inter-Asian referencing are undertaken. It may foster another mode of cultural relativism by privileging an assumed locality. Inter-Asian Cultural Studies' emphasis on international localism may overtly glorify "local cultural hybridity as resistance" (Kraidy, 2005, p. 154). Wary of the dangers of cultural relativism, a postcolonial practice of critical trans-culturalism has arisen to tackle the dichotomy of the global versus the local, the West versus Asia. For Kraidy (2005), locality needs to be conceived of as "trans-locality," (i.e., "local-to-local links" connecting several local social spaces). Without identifying specific locations and positions of reference, the multiplication of localities could merely yield a manifold cultural analysis separated from "supralocal relations" and "exogenous and endogenous circuits of power" (p. 155). The analysis of cultural hybridity in tandem with power can be captured by the term "intercontextuality" (Appadurai, 1996), which allows us to understand the text and context to be mutually constitutive. Kraidy (2005) argues thus:

> a trans-local perspective calls for an analysis of how these different nations' hybrid cultures are shaped by their mutual interaction, in addition to their links with the West. While there is a risk of overemphasizing these local-to-local connections, lapsing into another romanticization of the local that would obscure supralocal power plays, a trans-local perspective, at least analytically, allows us to remove the West from the center of intercultural relations. International communication research would benefit greatly from more emphasis on local-to-local, "East-to-East," or "South-to-South" interactions and exchanges. (p. 155)

Here, the context of locality is not "something out there within which practices occur or which influences the development of practices" but the multiple compositions of "identities, practices, and effects" (Kraidy, 2005, p. 156). In this way, the interaction of the global and the local can be apprehended as "the hybridization of hybrid cultures" (Pieterse, 1994, p. 180). Whereas the trans-urban dimension without locality is empty globalization, the trans-local dimension without the metropolis is blind nativism.

Trans-Media as Communication-Convergence

The third dimension of transnationality is trans-media, which uses the technological and material conditions for intertextual storytelling and participatory fan networks. Trans-media normally refers to the relationship "between" different forms of media but is increasingly used to denote the remediation processes or practices that engage with the cross-hybridization of media content generated by specific digital technologies, such as the World Wide Web, virtual reality, or computer graphics. The possibility of new media forms harnessed by trans-media processes has already been highlighted by the perceptive media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1994):

> The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses. (p. 55)

The multimedia hybrid that McLuhan points to stresses how closely integrated cultural hybridization is with media hybridization—that is, the hybrid features of multiculture are supported by the convergence of communication. Convergence culture has been employed by Henry Jenkins (2006), who explored how old and new media collide in the distribution of media content across various intersections between media, industries, and audiences. Echoing McLuhan's initial conception of hybrid media, Bolter and Grusin (2000) emphasize that the remediation process reinforces the way in which all media—old or new—constantly borrows from and refashions other media. In the remediation process intensified by digital technologies, old media content (e.g., novels, fables, fantasy, anime) is more actively adopted and appropriated as a creative resource for new storytelling. Communication convergence is less a collision of old and new media than a remediation process propped up by digital technologies involving ubiquity, location awareness, mobility, and real-time feedback (McQuire, 2016). The dynamics of creating value and meaning in storytelling are further fortified by the "spreadability" of social media and streaming platforms in a networked culture (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). The communicational convergence of trans-media practices blurs not only functional boundaries between various forms of media but also borders between genres, such as fiction and nonfiction, or narrative and nonnarrative, leading to the emergence of new genres.

Cross-media storytelling or OSMU (one source, multiuse) storytelling is more involved with the adaptation or modification of the original text. Conversely, trans-media storytelling serves to create intertextual narratives and multifaceted characters by "expanding stories beyond one particular medium to diverse media platforms," which is known as trans-mediality (Evans, 2011, p. 1). For instance, it is notable that trans-mediality has been actively used by Korean media industries in their recent output of web-based genres (e.g., webcomics or web novels), which has further expanded the scope and degree of Korean Wave industries. The global popularity of Korean webtoons in the new media ecosystem is driven specifically by "the growth of smartphone penetration" and "the emergence of a paid service model" (Jeong, 2020, p. 93). The transnational cultural production, circulation, and consumption of the Korean Wave have been increasingly bound up in technological platforms. In particular, the exponential "platformization" of the

Webtoon industries indicates how trans-media storytelling has been restructuring the cultural and creative industries in South Korea, rebuilding its link with global multimedia networks.

As a particular Korean type of digital comic usually designed to read on smartphones, webtoons were first popular among teenagers but swiftly grew in popularity among readers in their twenties and thirties (Jang & Song, 2017). Webtoons' market value has risen as a result of major web portals like NAVER and Daum providing platforms for their distribution and consumption via smartphones (Kim & Yu, 2019). Exporting Webtoons to the global market is considered part of a new transnational Korean Wave (Jang & Song, 2017). The webtoon, as a key resource for trans-media storytelling in a new media environment, plays a key role in a new form of pop culture resembling snack culture (i.e., "the habit of consuming information and cultural resources quickly rather than engaging at a deeper level"; Jin, 2019, p. 2094). Communication convergence supported by trans-media storytelling has facilitated the emergence of an "immediate, fragmentary, and personalized" snack culture and integrated it onto various screens in the Korean media ecosystem, ranging from big screens (e.g., cinema) to OTT streaming services (e.g., Netflix; Jin, 2019, p. 2095). *Hellbound* (Yeon, 2021), a Korean dark fantasy series based on the original webtoon of the same name, debuted on the big screen for the first time in 2021 at the Toronto International Film Festival. On November 19, 2021, the day following its premiere on Netflix, it surpassed *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021)—another top-rated Korean survival drama watched by more than 142 million viewers across 94 countries—as the most-watched Netflix series in the world. As these two cases demonstrate, it is critical to investigate how big Korean creative and cultural industries use trans-media storytelling and collaboration with transnational media networks to attract a new sort of audience and consumer through.

The transnationality of the Korean Wave has been enhanced by trans-media storytelling practices, such as "the mixing and mingling of spreadable cultural materials" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 263). The functional capacities of trans-media that converge media boundaries serve as the technological basis for the formation of new transnational fan groups, who are equipped with digital skills such as shaping, reframing, remixing, mashing-up, and redistributing content. The changing dynamics of participatory culture have brought about a distinctive way of articulating a new model of fandom that crosses borders. Jenkins and colleagues (2013) underline the "uneven nature of the flow of mass media and niche media content" in two ways (p. 259). Unlike the transnational media content distributed through the front door by commercial interests seeking to expand markets, those distributed through the back door are "shaped by the efforts of pirates seeking to profit from media produced by others, by immigrants seeking to maintain contact with cultures they have left behind, and by audiences seeking to expand their access to the world's cultural diversity" (Jenkins et al., 2013, pp. 259–260). In an informative manner, Jenkins and colleagues (2013) show how participatory cultural practices transform transnational media flows, yet he pays little attention to the changing conditions of media access and performativity. In particular, various social media platforms serve not as merely technological tools but also as technological environments in which a new form of fandom culture has been born. The Korean Wave's materials, idols, and stars have been able to communicate directly with global fan groups because of the rapid growth of social media. Many Korean Wave fandom studies have emphasized the importance of those trans-media behaviors linked to social media in the creation of global fanbase communities. There have been several studies on the transnational

fandoms of the Korean Wave across the globe.[2] These studies commonly show how transnational Korean Wave fandoms, despite their different locations and cultural contexts, actively engage with digital media environments. In this new media ecosystem, transnational fandoms play a decisive role as cultural translators in negotiating cultural distances and stereotypes. They generate a constant articulation of the global fan networks and engage in a particular sense of belonging through the Korean Wave.[3] Of course, technology does not produce fandoms on its own. In fact, there is a reciprocal relationship between trans-media practices and the formation of fandoms.

With the advent of social media, a new sort of transnational fanbase began to deterritorialize the Korean Wave's cultural material. At the same time, global fanbases have been dehierarchizing the hegemony of global media industries and networks. Furthermore, the trans-media environment has developed distinct characteristics from the subversive fanbase communities thanks to the transnational circulation and consumption of the Korean Wave. The interplay between global fandoms and affective identities plays a role in articulating an alternative fan community (McLaren & Jin, 2020). For instance, it is indicative that the Western female fandom's consumption of male dancing bodies in K-pop culture provides a unique subversive space for queering female desire against normative white masculinity (C. Oh, 2020). The subversive performativity of the Korean Wave fan communities demonstrates that the empowerment of fan networks emerges from this trans-media environment that involves spreadable media, social networks, and streaming platforms all actively acting against multinational corporate platforms and the hegemonic power of entertainment industries. One of the most evident examples of a transnational fandom would be the ARMY of BTS and their trans-media practices, such as the *Armypedia*. The politicization of fandoms also manifested in ARMY's active support for the Black Lives Matter movement and their virtual acts of sabotage following the most recent American presidential election. The relationship between BTS and ARMY entails, as Chang and Park (2019) have demonstrated, multiple facets of emerging fandom-like "digital intimacy, non-social sociality, transnational locality, and organizing without an organization" (p. 260). In a nutshell, the BTS sensation could be encapsulated through the combination of "the digital networks, the K-pop industry, and fandom," thus establishing BTS and ARMY as "a counter-hegemonic cultural formation from the periphery within the network society" (Kim, 2021, p. 1).

Conclusion: Toward Theorizing the Transnational Korean Wave

In this essay, I have sought to offer an analytical framework that includes three topical areas (the trans-urban, trans-local, and trans-media) by critically evaluating and reconstructing key theoretical debates about the tenability of the notion of transnationality in the field of Korean Wave studies. By integrating the intersection of three primary areas (city-connectivity, culture-continuum, and communication-

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[2] For the transnational fandom studies on particular areas and region, see: Israel and Palestine (Otmazgin & Lyan, 2014); Austria (Sung, 2014); Canada (Yoon, 2017); and Indonesia (Jung & Shim, 2014).

[3] The transnational fandom of the Korean Wave has been further investigated with a focus on identity formation: ethnic meanings of Korean popular culture in the United States (Ju & Lee, 2015); cross-gender performance and queer fans (Shin, 2018); negotiating identity and power in transnational consumption among Korean American youth (Park, 2013); and transnational cultural consumption in New York City (Kim, 2018).

convergence), this tripartite framework could help to examine the increasingly complicated global circulation and consumption of the Korean Wave in a more systematic manner (Figure 1).[4]
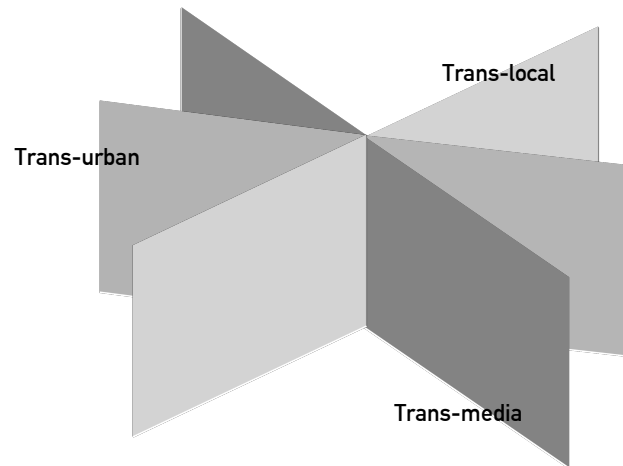

Figure 1. Three Areas of the Transnational Korean Wave.

Indeed, over the last few years, the Korean Wave's various media output and entertainment forms have notably succeeded in global markets, ranging from film (see *Parasite*'s [Bong, 2019] Academy Award for Best Picture) to drama (O Yeong-su's Golden Globes Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Squid Game*; Hwang, 2021)—not to mention BTS's three American Music Awards, including the top award, Artist of the Year, 2021. These triumphs could mark the start of Hallyu 3.0 in a meaningful way. The tripartite framework would be especially useful when delving deeper into these cases. More specifically, it would help to link *Parasite*'s (Bong, 2019) global appeal to the widespread issue of class inequality in most metropolitan areas. It would also help to analyze how the global networks of Netflix's streaming services could have boosted the popularity of *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) and *Hellbound* (Yeon, 2021). Yet, this would also lead to an examination of how specific local characteristics rooted in Korean culture in the survival genre drama are shared by global audiences in an inter-contextual way. The current confrontation between HYBE, BTS's agency, and ARMY, can be analyzed from the trans-media viewpoint. On November 4, 2021, HYBE made two major announcements: First, as of January 2022, it would be releasing a webtoon and a web novel featuring BTS. Second, it would enter the nonfungible token (NFT) market in collaboration with Dunamu, Korea's largest cryptocurrency operator, to allow BTS fans to own digital content and merchandise related to the band's singers. Soon after the commercial concept was revealed, ARMY members expressed their displeasure and outrage by calling for a boycott and denouncing the agency's hyper-commercialism. As such, the tripartite framework could help to reveal the multidimensional intersectionality of the transnational flows of the Korean Wave. In so doing, it could help to avoid some of the limitations associated with Korean

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[4] I would like to thank Jung-won Shin for her assistance with the figure design.

Wave studies in which the concept of transnationality is deployed in a hazy—sometimes metaphorical—fashion without a clear analytical context.

        In a similar vein, the uncritical cosmopolitanism underpinning the normative claims for the construction of the Korean Wave's imagined community is one of the field's most serious issues. Referring to "the process through which urban subjects are constantly exposed to difference through mediated and interpersonal communication," the idea of cosmopolitanism serves to build a mediated cosmopolis (Georgiou, 2013, p. 3). However, the global development of the Korean Wave fandom is too easily and optimistically regarded as a manifestation of the growing potential of cosmopolitanism. As Mignolo (2011) warns, "the geopolitical imaginary, nourished by the terms and processes of globalization, lays claim to the homogeneity of the planet from above—economically, politically, and culturally" (p. 254). Whereas globalism designates "the neo-liberal project," cosmopolitanism as such could indicate "the honest liberal project" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 254). True. Hallyu 2.0 has noticeably become a national campaign or corporate-state project that is meticulously managed, promoted, and controlled by "a handful of entrepreneurs, mainstream media, state bureaucrats, and professional consultants" (Choi, 2015, p. 45). The notion of transnationality cannot be employed as a purely prescriptive concept to assign to the world citizen euphonic features of globalism, "free from local, provincial, or national prejudices" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 254). All border-crossing, hybridized, cultural activities are necessarily intertwined with issues of political hierarchy, capitalist exploitation, and social conflict. Critical Korean Wave studies need to address the systematic exploitation of K-pop artists and the exploitation of free fan labor, disguised as a "mode of volunteering" (Kim, 2021, p. 10). The transnationalization of the Korean Wave does not necessarily bring about cosmopolitanism, but it does not mean that cosmopolitanism should be discharged. Cosmopolitanism needs to be stripped of its illusions, as suggested by Homi Bhabha (1996, 2004), who distinguishes between two forms of cosmopolitanism, namely global and vernacular. Global cosmopolitanism is "a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neoliberal forms of governance" and has "faith in the virtually boundless powers of technological innovation and global communication" (Bhabha, 1996, 2004, p. xiv). On the contrary, vernacular cosmopolitanism actively facilitates "moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language" (Bhabha, 1996, 2004, p. xiii). The confrontation between HYBE and ARMY exemplifies the clash between these two modes of cosmopolitanism. Which cosmopolitanism will the transnational Korean Wave be associated with? It is a question that critical Korean Wave studies should address.

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