

“Diasporic Hallyu: the Korean Wave in Korean Canadian Youth Culture. By Kyong Yoon. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. Pp. 161.”

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In light of the recent surge in the popularity of the Hallyu wave, commonly known as the Korean Wave, there has been a notable increase in academic interest devoted to studying this cultural phenomenon. The Hallyu wave, which originated in the 1990s, refers to the global popularity and interest in South Korean culture and entertainment, spanning music, TV series, movies, and various other forms of media. In his book, Kyong Yoon meticulously explores the Korean wave as a diasporic cultural phenomenon, emphasizing the interactions between audiences and Korean media. His primary focus centres on the diasporic Korean Canadian youth, encompassing both 1.5 and 2nd generations¹, examining how their engagement with the Korean Wave influences their identities and sense of belonging.

Yoon’s work amalgamates ethnographic research with a nuanced consideration of historical, cultural, and social contexts. This multifaceted approach offers a comprehensive perspective, one that Yoon believes has been under-researched and often overlooked in audience and Korean media studies. Notably, Yoon highlights that existing Hallyu literature tends to emphasize the global audience, neglecting specific groups such as Korean diasporic youth and fans.

Yoon initiates his study by establishing a robust foundation through extensive interviews conducted over several years, underscoring the imperative for a diasporic perspective on the Hallyu wave phenomenon. He delves into the concept of transnational Korean media as a hybrid cultural form, a thematic exploration further advanced by Dal Yong Jin in *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media* (2016). In the second chapter, Yoon addresses the hyphenated identity of the youth, initiating a critical discourse on the lived experiences of Korean Canadian youth, their heightened awareness of cultural differences and ethnic identification under the gaze of their white peers. The third and fourth chapters deepen the exploration into the impact of the Hallyu wave on the identities of Korean Canadian youth. Yoon scrutinizes

1 As it is explained in the book, 1.5 generation (or 1.5-ers) refers to the youth who were born in Korea and migrated to Canada in their childhood. 2nd generation refers to those, who were born into Korean immigrant families and were raised in Canada. (p.11)

their consumption patterns of Korean TV and the transformative influence of K-pop, particularly its global ascent. In the final chapter, Yoon proposes the potential counter-hegemonic role of the Hallyu wave, challenging Western-centric discourse. The metaphorical characterization of Hallyu as diasporic prompts critical reflection on the audience's sense of belonging within their nation-state and their figurative migration as fans. Yoon adeptly references Kalra et al.'s *Diaspora and Hybridity* (2005) to expound on the transnational cultural flow of Hallyu and its role in identity formation.

Yoon presents several compelling ideas. He posits that Korean diasporic youth often do not inherently identify with the Hallyu wave, primarily due to the mainstream culture in which they are raised, namely Canadian culture. Consequently, Yoon suggests that these youth must reconstruct their relationship with Hallyu media within their own socio-cultural context.

Through a series of interviews with young Korean Canadian youth, Yoon discerns that despite Canada's multiculturalism, many interviewees have experienced racialization and often concealed their cultural identity. Yoon proposes that the global popularity of Hallyu has helped Korean diasporic youth become more comfortable with and prouder of their ethnic background and ancestral homeland. These youth, growing up with an awareness of their cultural differences and internalising the Western gaze of them as the "other," find in Hallyu a counter perspective to the Euro-American mainstream media.

Yoon underscores the rapid ascent of K-pop as an unprecedented phenomenon, one that challenges the Western-centric mediascape. Hallyu, as a non-Western powerhouse, has sustained its influence for over two decades, making it a significant force to be reckoned with. This can be noticed in the growing interest of the mainstream media in the Hallyu wave and Korean media in general. The Western media is not only attempting to make profit of this surge of fame, but it is also trying to convert it into a Western sub-genre by trying to include themes and topics seen in mainstream media.

Yoon also introduces the notion that Hallyu can be metaphorically seen as diasporic. It prompts its audience to question their sense of belonging within the nation-state they reside in, effectively by turning fans into figurative migrants. In this process, diaspora forges new identities that are not necessarily tied to their nation-state and reaffirms a longing for a "homeland."

The author praises Hallyu for its positive impact on the diasporic Korean Canadian youth, particularly in easing the tension between their "home" culture and the "outside" culture. The Hallyu wave enables these youth to navigate the gaze between Canada (here) and South Korea (there) and reconcile their dual cultural identities more harmoniously.

Crucially, Yoon contends that the Hallyu wave challenges the notion of a white-centric discourse (white-is-the-norm), thus offering a more inclusive narrative. Korean media, encompassing TV, online platforms, and music, provides diasporic youth with a means to engage with non-Western storytelling and representation without feeling marginalized.

Yoon clarifies that the Hallyu wave and media themselves are not inherently counter-hegemonic, but rather, it is the engagement of the diasporic audience that possesses the potential to challenge the dominant Western-ethnic representation and mediascape. This engagement allows diasporic youth to negotiate diverse identity positions between 'here' Canada and 'there' South Korea through the Hallyu wave. Yoon sounds very optimistic about the effect of Hallyu on the young Korean Canadians and their identification with and embrace of their cultural-ethnic identities.

One aspect that could benefit from improvement is Yoon's choice of K-pop representation. While Yoon extensively mentions the BTS group and occasionally references other bands like BlackPink and EXO, it is important to acknowledge that the global success of these groups was built upon the foundation laid by K-pop idols, such as Super Junior (nicknamed Kings of Hallyu), Big Bang, Girls Generation, CnBLUE and 2NE1, spanning the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generations. Yoon acknowledges that Hallyu has a longer history than the last few years and that there is a renewed global interest in K-pop and K-drama. However, the way it was phrased makes it seem as if BTS single-handedly propelled K-pop and the Hallyu wave to a global stage, which diminishes the effort and impact of the other bands that were global before BTS and the newer generations of K-pop groups. Yoon categorizes the audience into three groups based on the time and level of their Hallyu consumption, but he does not analyse the dynamics behind their patterns, which leaves the reader with no explanation of why some lose interest in Hallyu while others rekindle their love and support for it. Yoon also appears to overlook the trend of K-pop and K-drama becoming more Western-themed causing them to lose their uniqueness and attraction factor to a certain degree.

Kyong Yoon's book represents a vital contribution to the understanding of the impact of the Hallyu wave on diasporic Korean Canadian youth and their sense of identity and belonging. Additionally, it sheds light on the broader effects of the Hallyu wave on the global audience. The book is written in a clear and concise manner, and is supported by substantial data, making it accessible and valuable to both academics and non-academics alike. It stands as a noteworthy addition to various disciplines, including audience-studies, transnational and youth cultural studies, and Korean Diaspora studies, among others.