



Digital Platforms as Mediators through the Lens of Critical Cultural Industries Studies Framework

Cultural Production of Hallyu in the Digital Platform Era: Industry Perspectives.
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The term “platform” has been a buzzword in the field of media and cultural studies since the 2010s. From hopeful envisioning to critical analysis, the term “platform” has been overused and attached to other signifiers such as “platform imperialism,” “platform nihilism,” and “platform Hallyu.” Dal Yong Jin’s *Cultural Production of Hallyu in the Digital Platform Era: Industry Perspectives* is a definitive addition to the study of platform culture, utilizing a critical political economy approach to analyze how the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has been fundamentally reshaped and reconstructed by global and local platforms.

While the author’s previous book, *Digital Platforms, Imperialism and Political Culture*, offers a comprehensive discussion of the construction of “platform imperialism” (Jin 2015, 11) using the growing evidence of platforms around the world and the theoretical applications of three interconnected domains, computational domains, cultural domains, and communicational and commercial domains, the book under review not only expands the author’s previous conception of “platform imperialism” but also refines the theoretical approach to the “platformization of Korea’s cultural production” (Jin 2025, 4) using the so-called “critical cultural

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industries studies” (Jin 2025, 21). This book is also an extended version of “Platformization of the Korean Wave: A Critical Perspective,” coauthored with Kyong Yoon and Benjamin Han (2023), with updated case studies and a refined theoretical approach.

The concept of the platformization of Hallyu introduces a critical political economy approach for analyzing how the Korean cultural industry has transitioned into a platform-driven phase. As the author introduces in the “Preface,” this book explores the complex process of digital platformization of Korean media and culture, focusing on “industries, texts, and audiences” (p. xii), which were previously analyzed in detail in the aforementioned article “Platformization of the Korean Wave,” as the three pillars of digital platformization. Industries subordinated global capital and algorithmic data, hybrid narratives were tailored for non-Western streaming, and transnational fans acted as digital producers.

One of the book’s most outstanding contributions is its theorization of an applicable research method: “critical cultural industries studies.” Reflecting useful models from critical political economy, cultural industries, production studies, and critical media industry studies, the author formulates “critical cultural industries studies” as a meso-level theory for analyzing cultural products in the age of digital platforms by focusing on power dynamics and relations.

The second part of chapter 2 details an interesting tendency emerging in the field of Hallyu studies. The largest number of studies of Hallyu have examined audience and fandom (p. 23). K-drama or K-pop audiences were the most studied subjects, whereas industry subjects such as production, cultural policy, or labor issues are rarely examined (p. 22). Unlike audience reception studies or fandom studies that focus primarily on why fans love K-pop or K-drama, *Cultural Production of Hallyu in the Digital Platform Era* fills a critical lacuna by analyzing the industrial and structural conditions in which Hallyu media is financed, distributed, and regulated under contemporary digital capitalism. The book’s strategic value lies in the author’s pioneering efforts to develop critical cultural industry studies.

The main reason the author focuses on the power dynamics of cultural

industries is that he considers digital platforms not as “intermediaries” but “mediators” that “control, manage, and manipulate the entire process of cultural production” (p. 9). As Hutchinson (2017) exemplifies in his *Cultural Intermediaries: Audience Participation in Media Organizations*, cultural intermediaries are primarily social media users such as social media producers, community managers, change agents, and micro influencers (pp. 5–6), who actively engage in producing social media content. The term “intermediaries,” however, conveys a neutral nuance of cultural creation on digital platforms. What the author wishes to emphasize by referring to digital platforms as “mediators” is the asymmetric power relations and power dynamics playing out among technology sectors, local media producers, governmental cultural policy, creative laborers, and global audiences. The use of the term “mediator” rather than “intermediaries” has been valorized throughout the book, since digital platforms, as mediators, have reshaped and reconstructed the entire system of media production, circulation, and consumption. As discussed in the book’s “Introduction,” OTT (over-the-top) service platforms such as Netflix act as “mediators” (p. 11), controlling and manipulating the media system through monopolistic power. The author continually contrasts this controlling aspect of the mediator with the neutral conveying and delivering role of the intermediaries. Owing something to media scholar José van Dijck’s theorization of the platform in *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Jin situates digital platforms as mediators in the age of OTT imperialism. Both van Dijck’s and Jin’s theorization of platforms as mediators follows actor-network theory, which shifts the analytical focus from analyzing the meaning of media texts or the intentions of human creators to seeing media as a complex assemblage of human and non-human actors. While van Dijck sees platforms as mediators shaping, rather than facilitating, the performance of social acts (van Dijck 2013, 29), Jin further conceptualizes platforms as mediators that control the media ecosystem. This kind of theoretical development seems timely, given the recent platformization of most media production and consumption.

The book navigates from foundational theoretical frameworks to

specific industry case studies across key chapters. The second chapter establishes a new theoretical framework, “critical cultural industries studies,” by documenting previous theoretical frameworks in critical political economy, cultural industry studies, production studies, and critical media industry studies. This foundational chapter is a core part of the book, offering an applicable theoretical framework for analyzing Hallyu as a digital platform.

Chapter 3 historicizes Korean cultural industries, focusing on how they have expanded and diversified their roles in cultural production over the last few decades. The author illuminates the importance of cultural industries’ roles by historicizing the national cultural industries from the “Pre-Hallyu Era” to “Cultural Industries 1.0,” “Cultural Industries 2.0,” and “Cultural Industries 3.0.” Cultural Industries 3.0 is characterized by digital platforms and the adoption of key technologies, such as OTT platforms, which emerged in 2017.

The following chapter discusses cultural politics by analyzing the main nexus and doctrines in the development of Korean cultural policy. The author differentiates between cultural policies and cultural industry policies to explain how the South Korean government has redirected its policy direction regarding Hallyu content. According to the author, the Korean government shifted its policy direction from cultural policy to cultural industry policy, adopting neoliberalism as a local cultural policy. One distinctive feature of Korean cultural industry policy is how the Korean government has pursued both developmentalism and neoliberalism (p. 77).

Chapters 5 and 6 are case studies of K-drama and K-pop, analyzing how global and local platforms reshaped the production, circulation, and consumption of Korean popular culture products. Compared with previous chapters, these two chapters demonstrate specific analyses of pop culture genres using the suggested theoretical framework. For instance, chapter 5, “Netflix’s Effect on the Local Cultural Industries,” analyzes how OTT streaming giants like Netflix have invested heavily in local original content and have subdued and appropriated the Korean broadcasting industry through licensing. The author illustrates how Netflix invested in original

Korean-originated content while licensing many existing cultural products. Chapter 6, “Local Fan Music Platforms, Global YouTube, and K-pop,” discusses how local fandom infrastructure intersects with dominant international platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram to bypass traditional Western gatekeepers while introducing new dependencies.

In sum, *Cultural Production of Hallyu in the Digital Platform Era* provides critical readers with valuable theoretical frameworks and exemplary case studies for the research of transnational cultural flows, particularly the Hallyu phenomenon in the age of digital platforms. Dal Yong Jin’s work is an essential addition to so-called Hallyu studies, Korean pop culture studies, and contemporary Korean cultural studies. This book can benefit not only scholars across various interdisciplinary fields of Korean studies but also aspiring graduate and undergraduate students who want to conduct research on Hallyu. In particular, chapter 2, “Critical Cultural Industries Studies: A New Approach,” will provide insights for many media and cultural studies scholars, and the case studies in chapters 5 and 6 can be used in an upper-division undergraduate-level Korean studies course dealing with Korean media and culture.

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