

Transnational Proximity and Universality in Korean Culture: Analysis of *Squid Game* and BTS

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By utilizing transnational proximity as a primary theoretical framework, I analyze the reasons why global audiences beyond Asia prefer contemporary Korean popular culture to other cultural products. I investigate several distinctive cultural programs and Korean screen spheres—BTS and *Squid Game* (2021) in particular—as well as fan communities. I mainly discuss whether “transnational proximity” based on similar socio-cultural experiences, including social inequality and social injustice, which are rampant in late capitalist society, works as a new theoretical frame in comprehending the global success of Hallyu. Finally, I discuss whether transnational proximity plays a pivotal role in determining the growth of local popular culture in the global cultural sphere.

Keywords: Korean Wave, *Squid Game*, transnational proximity, K-pop, Netflix, OTT platforms, COVID-19

Introduction

Over the past several years, COVID-19 has greatly influenced all parts of our daily lives. COVID-19 has demanded people change their traditional norms in cultural production, which encompasses three major areas, including production, distribution, and consumption. During this particular era, cultural production firms cannot produce enough new cultural content due to COVID-19-related restraints, while general audiences have to limit cultural activities because they cannot enjoy public cultural events, meaning they cannot go to theaters or

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