

Reckoning with the World: Infrastructural Imaginaries of Cuba in Contemporary Korean Television

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Since the 2000s, there has been a growing visibility of Cuba in South Korean television programs, such as *2 Days & 1 Night* (KBS, 2007–present), *Encounter* (tvN, 2018–2019), and *Traveler* (JTBC, 2019–2020). While these TV shows employ the tropes of travel and tourism to introduce Cuba as an alluring geographical region, they also illustrate how television formulates and exploits a monolithic imaginary of the Caribbean and Latin America for the audience. This article examines how television's infrastructural imaginaries of Cuba not only illuminate the intertwinement between modernity and interculturality but also contribute to Korea's reckoning with the world in which it comes to understand the self in new ways through different forms of encounters with Cuba, including its peoples, spaces, and infrastructures. I analyze the travel documentary *Traveler* to explore how popular television's imaginary of Cuba operates as a discursive space in which the production of knowledge about the island is mediated through the lens of modernity. More specifically, the infrastructural imaginaries of Cuba call forth the lens of peripheral modernity that renders the island both as primitive and anachronistic. While Korea's participation in the reckoning process offers an illusory, pretentious, and staged engagement with the Caribbean and Latin America, it is also incomplete and problematic as it continues to exploit the region as the Other despite its vast historical and cultural heterogeneity.

Keywords: Television, infrastructure, Latin America, Korean Wave, modernity

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