



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Thinking the Korean Wave Diasporically

**Abstract** Despite increasing scholarly and media attention to the global circulation of Korean media and popular culture (the Korean Wave or Hallyu), the diasporic population has remained a grey area in the literature. As early adopters and cultural translators, diasporic Korean youth have played a pivotal role in the recent rise of the Korean Wave. Furthermore, this cultural wave can be considered metaphorically diasporic as it contributes to the exposure of global audiences to the mediated experiences of migration and hybridity, whereby the boundaries of the nation-state are questioned. As diaspora is a way of imagining borders, groups, and individuals that deal with cultural difference, the conceptual lens of diaspora can advance audience studies of Hallyu.

**Keywords** The Korean Wave (Hallyu) · Diasporic Hallyu · Diasporic youth · Hallyu in Canada · Diaspora · Soft power

The Korean Wave (or Hallyu), which refers to the global circulation of Korean media and popular culture, seems more visible than ever, despite almost two decades of doubt, skepticism, and disapproval about its continuation. In particular, the rapid surge of K-pop (Korean idol pop music) in the global mediascape, led by several idol groups and their dedicated overseas fans since the mid-2010s, reveals an unprecedented media phenomenon spotlighting a non-Western, once-peripheral

cultural location and signaling a challenge to the Western-centric mediascape. This continued rise of Hallyu was not particularly predicted even among its longtime, overseas fans. Indeed, some of this book's early interview participants were not certain about the continuation of Korean pop culture recognition in North America. In a 2015 interview, 25-year-old interviewee Luke in Toronto ascribed the Korean Wave to the enhanced accessibility of digital media (including illegal streaming sites) and thus described it as an exaggeration.

The Korean Wave that people in Korea try to understand is a bit over-exaggerated. Because of globalization, people are more acquainted with other cultures and fanatic about Korean stuff. So, yes, people are more exposed to Korean cultures, norms, and food, and of course K-pop. But, is that because Korean culture is suddenly more competitive and superior to other cultures and media? I don't think so. I think it's more of, because of the Internet, for example, YouTube.

Luke considered the Korean Wave as an Internet-driven fad that may disappear or be replaced with another fad sooner or later. While more interviewees were relatively optimistic about the continued rise of Hallyu in Canada, there were still a few interview participants like Luke who were uncertain. At least until the mid-2010s, the world seemed skeptical about (if not indifferent to) the destiny of the Korean Wave. In an international survey conducted by a Korean government-sponsored organization in 2012, over 60% of the survey respondents predicted that the Korean Wave would fade out within 4 years (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange 2012).<sup>1</sup>

In stark contrast to this gloomy forecast, the Korean Wave has survived for a decade since the survey. Several months after the survey, Psy's

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this survey revealed that even Asian respondents were not necessarily more optimistic than Western respondents about the future of the Wave. These results may be explained partly by the emerging anti-Korean Wave sentiments in several Asian countries that had led the early boom of Korean drama and music since the late 1990s (Ahn and Yoon 2020; H. Lee 2017; Sakamoto and Allen 2007). For example, Japan is known for its large number of consumers of Korean music and drama but is also known for rigorous anti-Korea and anti-Korean Wave campaigns (H. Lee 2017). This tendency illustrates that, due to historical tensions (e.g., colonial memories between Korea and Japan), intra-Asian cultural flows such as the Korean Wave have often encountered backlashes, while generating favorable audiences drawing on cultural proximities.

“Gangnam Style” smashed the global mediascape, whereas many K-pop songs, Korean dramas (known as K-drama), and Korean films have increasingly been circulated beyond Korean or Asian borders throughout the 2010s. The Korean Wave has continued through the 2010s and now the 2020s. Its scope is not local or regional but certainly global. The continued wave has been supported by the Korean government’s initiatives and investments in cultural industries (Jin 2016 and 2018), and thus, Hallyu has been branded as “soft power” of Korea—referring to the attractive power of the country’s culture (Nye and Kim 2013). More importantly, technology-equipped fans have led the Wave as a cultural trend of grassroots transnationalism. Digital technology has not only increased the global availability of and access to Korean cultural texts but also allowed global audiences to translate and participate in the transcultural flows (Jin et al. 2021; S. Y. Kim 2018).

The global circulation of cultural products from a non-Western country may not be unique to the Korean Wave as there have been other examples for decades. However, prior to the Korean Wave, those examples tended to fade out after a short term of success or circulate primarily intra-regionally (e.g., Hong Kong films); otherwise, those examples tended to be represented by a specific genre (e.g., Japanese anime), rather than involving multiple and transmedia genres. In comparison, the Korean Wave may include a wider range of genres and texts (Jin et al. 2021). K-pop, K-drama, and other media genres have synergistically attracted overseas fan audiences through transmedia storytelling accelerated by digital media convergence.

The Korean Wave phenomenon suggests new questions about the processes, directions, effects, and meanings of transnational cultural flows. Above all, while transnational cultural flows have until recently been observed and analyzed in terms of the diffusion of the (Western) center and norms, the Korean Wave reveals alternative routes in transnational cultural circulation. Moreover, from a political economy perspective, the Wave questions how local cultural content and industries expand to be integrated into global cultural markets and mediascape (Jin 2016). Furthermore, from an audience studies perspective, Hallyu also proposes the question of how transnational and transcultural affinities between the overseas audiences and Korean cultural content emerge (Han 2017).

Like other transnational cultural phenomena, the Korean Wave phenomenon may have emerged and evolved through complicated

processes rather than having a clear cut, lineal history. Despite the complicated ebbs and flows of transnational Korean media and popular culture, scholarly and media discourses have attempted to identify the origin and history of Hallyu in a linear, evolutionary narrative. For example, the Wave is defined in different, yet lineal phases, such as Hallyu 1.0 (the period during which Korean media was extensively diffused in Asia) and Hallyu 2.0 (the period during which Korean media circulates not only in Asia but also in non-Asian locations especially via social and digital media) (Jin et al. 2021; Lee and Nornes 2015). The linear discourse of the Korean Wave has often traced the origin of this cultural trend by examining the terminology of the Korean Wave or Hallyu. The term Korean Wave, which was first popularized by Asian news media and then by the Korean cultural industries and government, has been used widely since the late 1990s—first in Asia and then globally (Yoon and Kang 2017). As implied in its name, the Korean Wave has been perceived as ebbs and flows with a clear national origin—Korea.

Despite debates about the nature and histories of Hallyu, it is undeniable that the Korean Wave has captured continued global media attention, and Korean media products have been popular especially among young people (Jin et al. 2021). After its initial popularity among groups of young people via social media and online media, Hallyu has increasingly been integrated into mainstream media platforms. Especially in the US, K-pop and K-dramas have frequently been reported on through influential news media outlets, including *The New York Times* and *Forbes*. Undeniably, some made-in-Korea pop culture items have obtained remarkable cultural recognition, especially since the 2010s. If Psy's "Gangnam Style" was an unexpected, viral phenomenon, a newer cultural wave represented by such names as BTS, Blackpink, *Parasite* (film), *Kingdom* (Netflix original series), and *The Masked Singer* (TV show franchise) has revealed the possibility of sustainable growth for Hallyu. Owing to the growth of its audience bases and mainstream media coverage, Korean popular culture has been integrated into the global mediascape. Many overseas audiences are familiar with such terms as K-pop, K-drama, *meokbang* (or spelled as *mukbang*; livestreamed eating shows), and other Korean pop culture terminologies. Seoul has earned the reputation of a global pop culture hub (Y. Oh 2018).

To capture and analyze the important transnational moments of Hallyu, an increasing number of monographs and anthologies have been published (e.g., Choi and Maliangkay 2015; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008;

Jin 2016; Jin et al. 2021; G. Kim 2018; S. Y. Kim 2018; Y. Kim 2013; Kuwahara 2014; Lee and Nornes 2015). In particular, audience studies have increasingly examined how cultural differences are translated and cultural affinities are explored between K-pop and its fans who are linguistically and culturally distant from K-pop (Jin et al. 2021). As Jenkins et al. (2013) have suggested, transnational media flows tend to be facilitated by either (a) “diasporas” (or “immigrants”) who disseminate media of their origin (homelands or ancestral homelands) in the country of resettlement and operate as proselytizers or (b) “cosmopolitans” who consume media produced outside of their own geocultural contexts.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the literature on the Korean Wave has paid increasing attention to the “cosmopolitan” audiences (e.g., overseas fans of K-pop), particular groups of overseas fans—such as diasporic audiences—remain relatively under-researched.

To address a gap in studies about the Korean Wave, this book explores a research area that has insufficiently been examined—the diasporic dimensions of the Korean Wave. It claims that Hallyu is diasporic in interwoven ways. First, Hallyu explicitly involves diasporic cultural flows. Korean migrants and their cultural experiences are deeply integrated into the ongoing circulation of this cultural wave. In particular, diasporic Korean youth engage with, and contribute to, the emergence of Hallyu through their bicultural literacy and in-between-ness. Second, Hallyu is metaphorically diasporic in that this cultural wave reveals that not only Korean migrants but also other global media audiences are becoming diasporic through mediated and embodied experiences. Hallyu may remind us that, in a broad sense, “we are all migrants” (Feldman 2015), as the foreign cultural content might lead its audiences to question their own sense of belonging to the nation-state they inhabit. Among

<sup>2</sup> While Jenkins et al.’s (2013) categorization may present useful ideal types for understanding transnational media flows and audiences, the naming of and binary oppositions between “cosmopolitans” and “immigrants” seem problematic. In this binary model, “cosmopolitans” are signified relatively positively (implying more forward looking) compared to “diasporas/immigrants” who seem to be signified as backward looking and attached to their ancestral past. However, in reality, the “cosmopolitans” may include settler residents who are interested in foreign media only through niche foreign media and have very limited transnational mobilities. Moreover, realities are not captured by this binary framework because, for example, children of immigrants are equipped with highly multicultural literacy and thus have many opportunities to access different cultures, even compared to conventional “cosmopolitans” (e.g., White Canadians who are born and raised in Canada).

these two diasporic dimensions, this book focuses on the former—diasporic Korean audiences’ engagement with Hallyu—throughout its empirical chapters (Chapters 2–4), while the latter—metaphorical diasporas among Hallyu audiences—will be addressed as a future research agenda, especially in this first chapter and the concluding chapter.

## HALLYU THROUGH A DIASPORIC LENS

This book examines an under-researched audience group—diasporic youth—in the process of Hallyu. Diaspora in this book refers to people of migrant backgrounds (1.5 or second generation, as discussed later in this chapter). In doing so, a particular area of transnational popular cultural flows—the diasporic dimensions of pop cultural flows—will be explored. Despite ongoing debates about its definition, the concept of diaspora is considered to offer several advantages (compared to other similar concepts such as immigration). Most of all, diaspora “provides an alternative to a nation-statist understanding of immigration and assimilation” (Brubaker 2005, p. 13). Transnational ties and new social formations facilitated by diaspora challenge the boundaries of the nation. Diaspora as a scattered group of people and culture can engage with “both syncretic cultural formation and re-enforced ethnic and nationalist ties” (Kalra et al. 2005, p. 33). For example, diasporic Koreans may have their long-distance nationalism (Anderson 1998) through which they seek ties with their (ancestral) homeland or may develop a sense of belonging to the nation-state in which they currently reside. However, diaspora may not necessarily seek identity of either/or but rather explore a new sense of belonging. Diaspora can create “new identities which have no affiliation to the nation-state form” (Kalra et al. 2005, p. 33). As Brah (1996, p. 194) suggested, the concept of diaspora questions the discourse of fixed origins while giving attention to “a homing desire”—realized through “feeling at home” in multi-places rather than “declaring a place as home.” In so doing, diaspora allows us to think through borders and reflexively engage with cultural differences. Diaspora is a way of imagining borders, groups, and individuals “dealing with cultural difference on a daily basis, in the communities where they live and work, intermarrying, mixing cultures and races, growing up bilingual and trilingual and resisting (or succumbing to) pressures to become (or to pretend to become) monolingual” (Robinson 1997, p. 29).

### *Diaspora and Hallyu*

Given the conceptual merits of diaspora, a close examination of diasporic Korean audiences' engagement with Hallyu may contribute to moving beyond the nation-statist understanding of Hallyu (as an export of Korea and its penetration into imagined global markets). However, despite flourishing interest in Hallyu, existing studies have not articulated diaspora as a research area. Media and cultural studies have increasingly produced academic publications on Hallyu—from political economy analysis of the Korean government's policies behind Hallyu (e.g., Jin 2018) to ethnographic analysis of overseas K-pop fans (e.g., S. Y. Kim 2018). However, the flourishing analyses of this phenomenon appear to focus primarily on the “K” component of this phenomenon—whether in a celebratory or critical tone. That is, scholars seem to be intrigued by the global diffusion of cultural products made in Korea—a country that used to be in a marginal or peripheral status in global cultural industries. The rise of this cultural trend originating in a non-Western context and diffused across a wide range of different locations has attracted academic attention and has been analyzed as an example of cultural heterogenization or cultural hybridization (Jin 2016; Ryoo 2009). The existing research (especially English language literature) has largely addressed the ways in which Hallyu is intensified and widespread by examining government policies, industries' strategies, and audience reception. More specifically, audience studies of Hallyu have addressed overseas fans of K-pop or K-drama. An increasing number of studies of K-pop fans have been published along with the exceptional popularity of a few K-pop artists, such as BTS, and thus have contributed to fandom studies. Such contributions are noteworthy, given that transnational fandom studies are still nascent (Chin and Morimoto 2013; Han 2017).

The existing audience studies of Hallyu and their focus on overseas fans of Korean media and pop culture tend to pay limited attention to diasporas, while focusing on particularly dedicated audience members such as overseas fans who do not have any diasporic ties to Korea—or “pop cosmopolitans” to use Jenkins et al.'s (2013) term. Overall, overseas young people of ethnic Korean backgrounds have been relatively under-researched, with a few exceptions (D. C. Oh 2015; J. S. Park 2013). Perhaps diasporic Koreans may have been taken for granted in studies of Hallyu, as they are familiar with the language and culture

and have already been consuming Korean media through their transnational connections and in ethnic communities even before the emergence of Hallyu. However, diasporic youth of Korean backgrounds who have some familiarity with Korean culture and language do not inherently identify with Hallyu. Their engagement with the Hallyu media often involves complicated processes and identifications. For example, the Korean Canadian diasporic youth discussed in this book do not explicitly belong to the Korean mediascape, while being marginally situated in the Canadian mediascape. They navigate different media environments across different languages and cultures. Depending on their familiarity with Korean cultural heritage, diasporic youth have to translate and relocalize Hallyu media from their own socio-cultural positions.

The diasporic youth's engagement with Hallyu reveals how popular cultural forms flow beyond cultural boundaries of nationality or ethnicity. However, diasporic youth are not entirely free of the nationalizing or ethnicizing forces inscribed in Hallyu media and discourse (Koh and Baek 2020). The top-down discourse of Hallyu often engages with the rhetoric of "soft power" that associates this cultural trend with national pride and power in competition with other countries (Walsh 2014). Despite the nationalistic discourse of Hallyu, Korean media and popular culture have rapidly been hybridized in form and content. As clearly shown in the K-pop genre, the Hallyu industries and creators have rigorously experimented with different formats, styles, and narratives. In particular, the cultural wave of Hallyu has extensively deployed digital media technologies as well as human talents (e.g., K-pop idols) (Liew 2021) through its unique "in-house systems" where global talents collaborate under the umbrella of K-brands (e.g., K-pop). For example, K-pop has incorporated foreign languages (English in particular) and invited foreign talents into its production processes to a large extent, while thus refusing to be pigeonholed as a set of cultural products from Korea.

### *Diasporic Youth in Hallyu*

Due to their cultural and linguistic literacy, diasporic Korean youth have played a pivotal role in the recent rise of Hallyu as early adopters, "proselytizers," and/or cultural brokers. In particular, it is probable that some diasporic audience members, partly due to their cultural knowledge and early adopter position, play a role as proselytizers in spreading their ethnic culture transnationally (Jenkins et al. 2013). Diasporic Korean youth have



contributed to the production of paratexts (e.g., fan-created subtitles) and construction of overseas Hallyu infrastructure (e.g., venture companies specializing in K-drama streaming services) (Hu 2010; J. S. Park 2013). For example, as further discussed in Chapter 3, the popular K-drama streaming site Viki was co-founded by three young entrepreneurs, two of whom are Korean Americans, and diasporic Korean audiences have also generated content (such as translations) in the global circulation of K-dramas. Diasporic young people may serve as cultural translators (i.e., those who offer linguistic translation and/or offer cultural knowledge in various online audience forums) and thus potentially play a role in brokering or gatekeeping the overseas content in the Canadian mediascape. K. Yoon (2020) defined diasporic Korean youth as linguistic and cultural translators, as they contributed to the rise of Hallyu through their participation in digital media-driven translation processes. He claimed that diasporic youth “translate Hallyu literally by producing subtitles for a larger audience and re-localize Korean media culturally in a transnational context” (p. 153).

Diasporic Korean youth are not simply early adopters and consumers but also contribute to the production of Hallyu media. For example, an increasing number of overseas youth of Korean backgrounds have participated in K-pop industries. In particular, the involvement of young Korean Canadians and Korean Americans in the K-pop scenes has reinforced trans-Pacific connections and genre hybridizations by introducing American pop music and hip-hop to K-pop industries and vice versa (J. S. Park 2013). Addressing North American youth culture, J. S. Park (2013) argued that Korean Americans have left a footprint in Korean popular culture, claiming that they are among the key creators of transnational Hallyu. The diasporic audiences’ contributions to and engagement with Hallyu may reveal how cultures are recontextualized and hybridized. The diasporic dimensions of Hallyu remind us that transnational Korean media is a highly hybrid cultural form (Jin 2016), and its diasporic audiences are hyphenated, hybrid subjects who negotiate different mediascapes.

A diasporic lens is not simply to magnify the romanticized notion of hybridity and difference. Rather, studies of diasporic audiences may offer an antidote to celebratory discourses about the frequent genre/style mixes that are observed in recent Korean media. Hallyu industries’ extensive style blending has been criticized for their highly commodified production systems and lack of counter-hegemonic forces—what Bhabha

(1994) called “the third space” (Jin 2016; G. Kim 2018). The celebratory discourse of hybridity may conceal existing power relations, such as gender/race relations, while removing the contexts and histories behind the hybridization of different cultural forms. Critics argue that the inflated discourse of (postmodern) hybridity may serve to flatten the social issues of injustice and power hierarchies and to interpellate us as consumers in global capitalism (García Canclini 2000). In this regard, the diasporic lens offers an antidote to both the nation-statist understanding of culture and the post-national (and de-politicized) imagination of hybrid cultures.

As examined throughout this book, Korean Canadian youth’s understanding of and participation in the transnational wave of Korean popular culture are different from those of native Korean youth on the one hand and those of Canadian youth of various backgrounds (i.e., non-Korean backgrounds) on the other hand. By closely engaging with young Korean Canadians, this book addresses an under-researched and underrepresented group of audiences of transnational Korean media and popular culture—diasporic youth as a significant audience group in understanding and exploring the transnational meanings of Hallyu.

## STUDYING DIASPORIC YOUTH

Despite increasing transnational mobilities, diasporic youth have attracted relatively limited academic attention. They are situated to negotiate different cultural identities. They are subject to multiple modes of belonging and thus carry “hyphenated identity” (Colombo 2014; Kalra et al. 2005). Their bilingual and bicultural capacities may allow them to appropriate different cultural resources more easily than their peers of the dominant ethno-racial group (e.g., White people in North American contexts). However, multiple cultural belonging may also involve uncertainty in self-identification (Colombo and Rebughini 2012). In this respect, it is increasingly important to understand how diasporic youth access different media and explore their sense of belonging in the process of global migration and mobility. In particular, diasporic young people engage with media from their *ancestral* homeland in relation to the media of their *current* homeland. Given that different media may offer different means of identity work and identification, diasporic young people whose sense of belonging is multifaceted may negotiate their bicultural or multicultural affiliations through various media. As Gigi Durham (2004, p. 140) aptly pointed out, young people’s “struggles with identity

can be compared with the identity questions experienced by transnational immigrants: in the liminal spaces between childhood and adulthood, or between one geopolitical state and another, the ‘Who am I?’ question becomes imperative.” However, the literature has insufficiently addressed how diasporic youth engage with different media forms and content in the process of renegotiating their identities.

This book focuses on Korean Canadian youth in relation to their engagement with transnational Korean media and popular culture. While Korean Canadian youth can refer to a wide range of young people of Korean cultural backgrounds living in Canada, this book will focus on 1.5 and second generation youth—those who were born in Korea and migrated to Canada during their childhood (i.e., 1.5 generation, or 1.5-ers) and those who were born into Korean immigrant families and raised in Canada (i.e., second generation). According to the sociological literature, the 1.5 generation refers to foreign-born people who immigrated before the age of 12–13 (before entrance to secondary schools) and are children of first generation immigrants (Danico 2004; Rumbaut 2012). Of course, even within the 1.5 generation category, diasporic young peoples’ experiences may vary depending on when their migration occurred (e.g., early childhood, middle childhood, or adolescence); thus, 1.5 generation could mean more specifically those who arrive in the “host” country at the ages of 6–12 and thus are relatively likely to “adapt flexibly between two worlds and to become fluent bilinguals” (Rumbaut 2012, p. 983). The second generation—those who were born and raised in Canada—also have diverse experiences especially in relation to their ancestral homeland and sense of ethnic identity.

### *Research Locations*

The interview data analyzed in this book were drawn from a series of face-to-face interviews (May 2015–August 2019), along with additional online interviews conducted during the pandemic period (March–June 2021). The participants were young Canadians of ethnic Korean backgrounds. They were children of Korean immigrant families and were aged between 16 and 30. The participants were recruited through advertisements and snowballing, in which participants introduced their peer Korean Canadians to the research study. The data were collected in three Canadian locations—the Greater Toronto area, the Greater Vancouver area, and the

City of Kelowna. These locations were purposefully chosen for comparison—two Asian-populated metropolitan areas (Toronto and Vancouver) and a relatively White-dominant medium-sized city (Kelowna). Toronto and Vancouver are known as popular destinations for Asian immigrants and accordingly are known for their multiethnic populations. According to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada 2019), the White population in Toronto and Vancouver respectively constituted 50.2% and 49.3% of the city's entire population and is anticipated to be smaller in the future. The proportions may be contrasted with that in Kelowna (86.2%), known for its White-dominant population.

### *Research Participants*

In the 3 locations, a total of 40 young people participated in individual interviews conducted in English, which was a more comfortable language than Korean for all participants. When interview accounts are cited throughout this book, the participants' English pseudonyms are used. During the consent processes, some participants used their Korean name, but more participants used their English name. It was decided by the researcher that all participants would be named by their English pseudonyms for consistency.<sup>3</sup> Categorically speaking, the participants were 1.5 generation or second generation. While only 6 participants of the sample were born in Canada, more than half of the entire sample migrated to Canada in their early childhood (under the age of 8) and thus have limited affiliation with and memories of their country of birth.

<sup>3</sup> The choice between Korean and English names may be related to the ways in which the young Korean Canadians identify themselves. It is not surprising that more interview participants preferred to use their English name (regardless of their legal name) as they may prefer to be referred to that way among peers and in social settings. They might have learned to not use their Korean name to avoid potential racialization in certain circumstances because "racist incidents and microaggressions" may condition Korean Canadians to hide their Korean name (Hwang 2021). In her recent article "My Korean name is Ki Sun, and I'm choosing not to be ashamed of it anymore," the 30-year-old Korean Canadian reporter Hwang stated, "it took 30 years, but I am now ready to reclaim this part of my Korean Canadian identity." Such reclaiming of Korean names has recently been observed in media representation of diasporic Koreans. For example, in the Netflix miniseries *The Chair* (2021), the Korean American professor and chairperson title role (played by Sandra Oh) uses, and is only referred to by, her Korean name "Ji-Yoon Kim" throughout the entire series.

According to the interviewees' anecdotal accounts, young Korean Canadian experiences share certain similarities, such as racialization (which will be addressed throughout this book). However, their experiences vary depending on their context of migration and settlement (such as the age of migration and the type of family upbringing). Moreover, while diasporic Korean youth could include a wide range of young people on the move, this book only focuses on those who had (permanently) migrated to, or were otherwise born and live in, Canada. Consequently, those who are in a relatively transient or temporary state of migration have been excluded—for example international students and children of transnational Korean families, who are often referred to as *goose families* (in which the child, along with the mother, live in Canada for study while the father works in Korea to financially support the family in Canada).

The main aim of the recruitment process was to look for and interview young people of Korean backgrounds who regularly or frequently access transnational Korean media. The participants included a range of audience members—from highly dedicated K-pop fans to regular K-drama viewers. However, those who did not access Korean media were excluded. This excluded group includes those individuals that the interview participants referred to somewhat disapprovingly as “bananas” (i.e., people who look “yellow” but are internally “Whitewashed”), as they are relatively assimilated to the dominant White culture and thus appear to be disinterested in K-pop, K-drama, or any other made-in-Korea cultural content. The interview participants' engagement with transnational Korean media also varied depending on many factors. Some were dedicated fans while others were regular audience participants. By recruiting a range of “fan audiences,” the study avoided the dichotomy between “passive audiences” and “active fans” and considered that various audience forms exist on a continuum (Jenkins et al. 2015).

In terms of their exposure to and engagement with Hallyu media, the participants show several different patterns. Overall, the interview participants were relatively familiar with Korean media and popular culture. As examined throughout the book, most of the young Korean Canadians in the study became familiar with Korean media during their upbringing in Korean immigrant families, but they did not necessarily continue their interest in Korean media. Given the interviewees' accounts, three types of young Korean Canadian audiences can be identified in terms of childhood

exposure to Korean media. First, there are those who were significantly exposed to Korean media during childhood (the pre- or early Hallyu period) and later developed further their own interest in Hallyu media, such as K-pop. Second, there are those who were more or less exposed to Korean media during childhood yet lost their interest in it for a while before later developing their own interest in Hallyu as a result of motivational factors. Third, there are those who had limited exposure to pre-Hallyu Korean media and remained indifferent to Hallyu media. These different childhood experiences with Korean media (during the pre- or early Hallyu period) later evolved into different cultural tastes for more recent forms of Korean media (such as idol group-driven K-pop).

### *Researcher*

When studying young Korean Canadians, the author's positionality as a first generation immigrant, male, middle-aged researcher may offer some limitations. There might be a clear power imbalance between the researcher who is an older Korean academic and the young people, most of whom were university students. Research into children and young people inherently involves power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched. Thus, it may be more strategic to "understand the 'between-ness' and relationality, co-dependence and constitutive force (via a nexus of power relations)" (Holland et al. 2010, p. 363). As a way of understanding the relationality between the researcher and the participants, the project involved several Korean Canadian undergraduate assistants, who supported the qualitative interviews with the young participants and provided feedback to the researcher. Despite such an effort, the researcher's positionality as a first generation immigrant may have obstructed an immersed understanding of diasporic young people's everyday lives. However, there were still common interests—Korean media and popular culture—between the researcher and the participants. The dramatic increase in Korean cultural content offered an intriguing topic to discuss together in relation to experiences of racialization in Canada. Admittedly, this book might be a set of snapshots of the interviewees' experiences and thoughts in a particular moment of their life stages while interacting with the researcher.

## CONTEXTUALIZING KOREAN DIASPORA AND HALLYU IN CANADA

### *Hallyu in Canada*

While there have been increasing studies of various overseas reception points of Korean media, the majority address the US. It may be worth examining how Hallyu is located and localized in Canada, especially as differentiated from its southern neighbor the US, which has undeniably played a central role in leading Western media discourses about the Korean Wave (Jin et al. 2021). That is, apart from the Korean media that has been producing a large amount of (often celebratory) reports around Hallyu, the US mainstream media, as well as social media platforms, has played a significant role in gatekeeping Hallyu discourses for other overseas media and audiences. K-pop group rankings on the Billboard Hot 100 chart have often been considered as a litmus paper of their “global” recognition and success. In comparison with the US, Canada is a relatively smaller and less vibrant market for Korean media products. For example, major K-pop musicians’ rankings on Canadian music charts have been typically lower than on American charts. As of September 2021, BTS’s single “Butter,” which was ranked #1 for 10 weeks on the American Billboard Hot 100 chart, was never ranked #1 on the Canadian Billboard Hot 100 chart (merely ranked #2 in its first week only).

Among other factors, the smaller diasporic Korean community and subsequent lack of presence of Korean culture in public discourses and media might be a factor that has restricted Hallyu’s rapid flows in Canada. Indeed, the young Korean Canadians interviewed for this book commonly noted that Canada was somewhat behind the US in the introduction of Korean pop culture. While more and more K-pop concerts have been held in Toronto and Vancouver since the 2010s (except for the COVID-19 period), the young Korean Canadians in this book, especially those who were K-pop fans, lamented the limited opportunities and resources for accessing K-pop concerts and merchandise in Canada. In contrast, a significant number of major K-pop concerts, including K-CON, are held in the US, and a few interviewees made trips to the US to see their favorite idols perform. While there are limited data to estimate the impact of Hallyu in Canada, news media have reported that Korean language courses at universities are increasingly popular and often have long waitlists owing to the popular rise of K-pop among young people (Shahzad 2017).

*Korean Canadians in Multiethnic Canada*

To better understand young Korean Canadians and their engagement with Hallyu media in this book, it may be important to know the context of where they grew up and how their family immigrated. Canada is the most multiethnic country among the G8 (highly industrialized countries), with a foreign-born population representing 21.9% of the total Canadian population as of 2016 (Statistics Canada 2019). The foreign-born population percentage is particularly higher in Toronto and Vancouver where immigrants respectively constitute 47% and 42.5% of the total population (Statistics Canada 2019). Toronto and Vancouver have been the two most popular destinations for Korean immigrants, many of whom engage with “chain migration” (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964). Given that Korean Canadian immigrants have been involved in the ethnic economy, such as small businesses, it is not surprising that the Greater Toronto and Vancouver areas where Korean ethnic networks developed relatively early have been preferred destinations for Korean immigrants. As of 2016, more than half of ethnic Koreans in Canada live in two metropolitan areas—Vancouver (27%) and Toronto (35%) (Statistics Canada 2019). These two areas are popular destinations not only for Korean immigrants but also for other immigrants of color.

According to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada 2019), people of Korean ethnic origin constitute 0.54% of the total Canadian population (188,710 out of 34,460,065). The Korean ethnic group is much smaller than its Chinese (1,577,060) or Filipino (780,125) counterparts, while being bigger than the Japanese population (92,920). Korean Canadians constitute a comparatively newer diasporic community, as its size has more than doubled between 1996 and 2006 (J. Park 2012). Thus, Korean communities in Canada are relatively younger especially compared to the general population. In comparison with the general Canadian population, the ethnic Korean population has been considered a “relatively young, strongly family-based, and highly educated” group (J. Park 2012, p. 34). Korean Canadians also constitute a relatively younger demographic than their counterparts in the US, where the history of Korean immigration is significantly longer. For example, Vancouver’s Koreatown, located in the city’s outskirts, was established in the early 2000s (Baker and DeVries 2010), which is much later than Los Angeles’ Koreatown, which has substantially developed since the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Park and Kim 2008). Despite the different histories, Korean immigrants’ patterns



of integration into the receiving country appear to be similar in both the US and Canada. For example, studies have observed Korean immigrants' high rate of self-employment in the ethnic economy and reliance on the ethnic community in both countries (see Min and Noh 2014).

According to Kim et al. (2012), Korean immigration in Canada can be identified by several chronological waves. First, while a small number of Korean immigrants arrived in Canada after 1963 when diplomatic relations were initiated between Korea and Canada, the number remained insignificant until 1973 when the Canadian embassy was established in Korea (Kim et al. 2012). This first major wave of Korean immigration in Canada, which peaked in 1975 with 4,331 immigrants, declined due to several factors such as the Korean government's restriction of emigration of wealthy Koreans and Canada's economic recession. Another visible wave of Korean immigration was observed between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s, which was characterized by a significant inflow of business-class immigrants equipped with financial viability as entrepreneurs or in self-employment (Kim et al. 2012). According to Kim et al. (2012), the wave of Korean immigrants since 2004 is referred to as "regionalization and transnational." This new wave involves "regionalization" as province-specific immigration programs for business-class applicants have increased. Moreover, it involves "transnational" migration that includes transnational families whose members are separated for their children's overseas education in Canada and Korean international students in Canada (Jeong and Bélanger 2012).<sup>4</sup>

The young Korean Canadians interviewed for this book were either born in or moved to Canada between the late 1990s and the early 2010s. Thus, their migration trajectories cover the two recent waves of Korean immigration in Canada. The period since the late 1990s involves significant social transformation of Korea, beginning with the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The crisis swept away the economic fruits that Koreans had enjoyed for the previous decade and devalued the Korean currency. The crisis not only damaged Korea's national economy but also resulted in emotional shocks among Koreans, which motivated an increasing number

<sup>4</sup> The Korean transnational family usually refers to a family with a "parachute" child who studies abroad under the supervision of a legal guardian without their parents and the *kirogi gajok*, or "wild geese family," in which one parent remains in Korea while the other parent accompanies the child's study abroad (Kim et al. 2012, p. 13).

of migrants, especially from the “professional class,” to land in more economically stable Western countries (Kim et al. 2012, p. 11).

First generation Korean Canadians tend to be self-employed or employed in the ethnic economy, including convenience stores, ethnic restaurants, and gas stations (Chan and Fong 2012).<sup>5</sup> According to the 2006 Census, Korean Canadians were more self-employed compared to the general population; it is estimated that one in every four Koreans in Toronto and Vancouver are self-employed (Chan and Fong 2012). Overall, first generation Korean Canadians are more educated than the general population yet earn less than the average Canadian and experience difficulties in career mobility. Such barriers may lead first generation Korean Canadians to become entrepreneurs in the ethnic economy rather than wage earners in the general economy; in comparison, the second generations are more likely to be salary earners than to be self-employed. According to the 2006 Census, 97% of self-employed Koreans are foreign born, whereas Canadian-born Koreans are primarily wage earners (Chan and Fong 2012, p. 121).

### *Korean Canadian Family Experiences*

The accounts of the young people interviewed for this book confirmed the first generation immigrants’ under-employment and self-employment in response to difficulties with career transition in Canada. Many interviewees’ families ran or worked in small businesses at the time of the interviews. Only a few interviewees’ parents were professional salary earners and continued the career they had in Korea. Most of the young people recalled that their parents’ migration decision had been driven by a few major reasons—most importantly, their children’s education opportunities in Canada as an English-speaking, advanced country (*seonjingu*) and better life opportunities for their families. This response resonates with H. Yoon’s (2016) survey conducted in Winnipeg, Canada, in which Korean immigrants identified that children’s education (44%) was the

<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that a majority of convenience stores were owned and run by Korean immigrants in Toronto and Vancouver. For example, in Vancouver, approximately 250 convenience stores were owned by Koreans in the early 2000s; however, the number is decreasing (an estimated 150 stores in 2018). Due to the expansion of large store chains, convenience stores are no longer popular small businesses for Korean immigrants in Canada, while sushi restaurants have recently become more popular (Ju 2018).

most important reason for immigration, followed by other reasons such as better quality of life (15%) and economic purposes (8%).

First generation Korean immigrants are motivated by their “Canadian dream,” which could be a Canadian equivalent to the “American dream.” Indeed, the US and Canada have been the two most popular destinations of Korean emigrants. For example, in 2018, when 6,330 Koreans migrated to another country, the US was the top destination (3,223 emigrants), followed by Canada (1,092 emigrants); the two countries were followed by Australia (547) and New Zealand (255) (e-narajipyo 2021). Koreans’ pursuit of the Canadian dream has been examined in a few studies, such as K. Yoon’s (2014) study, in which young Koreans considered Canada an ideal “global” location to live. Canada has been a globally popular destination and has received a substantial number of immigrants each year. In 2016, Canada had 296,379 new permanent residents and was ranked fourth in terms of annual intake, behind the US (1,183,505), Germany (1,051,014), and the United Kingdom (350,085) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2020).

Recent migration from Korea to Canada especially after the 1990s has been triggered by motivations for education and lifestyle (H. Yoon 2016). H. Yoon (2016) has claimed that neoliberal global economy concerns are both pull and push factors for Koreans’ immigration in Canada. In particular, Korean immigrants seek to avoid the highly neoliberalized, competitive Korean society by moving to an advanced Western country, such as Canada, which represents seemingly better lifestyles and educational infrastructure. As many Korean immigrants in Canada are involved in the ethnic economy, comprised of Korean restaurants, grocery and convenience stores, and other small businesses, ethnic enclaves have developed in the downtown or outskirts of large Canadian cities (such as Toronto and Vancouver), which are often referred to as Koreatown. These areas have contributed to the dissemination of Korean popular culture and media to some extent. In particular, Korean restaurants often play K-pop as background music or have K-pop music videos on TV, and thus immerse Canadian customers in Hallyu. Moreover, Korean entrepreneurs contribute to, or organize, Hallyu-related events (J. Kim 2018).

The histories and geographies of Koreans’ immigration in Canada may influence the upbringing of the children of Korean immigrants. The young people grow up in families primarily involved in small businesses and the ethnic economy rather than those integrated into the general economy. The relatively short history and small size of the

Korean community in Canada, as well as its detachment from the general economy, affect the ways in which younger generations think about their ethnic identity as they engage with K-pop, Korean TV and films, and other Hallyu media while growing up in Canada.

## SIGNIFICANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

### *Why Diasporic Hallyu?*

Diasporic flows of media from the homeland may not be a new phenomenon. Many diasporic communities and individuals seek to access media and cultural forms from their left-behind (ancestral) homeland (Georgiou 2006). However, while diasporic media consumption has typically been led by first generation immigrants, who prefer media forms from their homeland or ethnic language media (Georgiou 2006), the recent social media-driven flows of the Korean Wave have reached out beyond national or ethnic boundaries.

Despite increasing audience studies on the reception of Korean pop culture in Asia and elsewhere, the diasporic populations involved in the production, circulation, and consumption of this new cultural flow have remained a grey area. As has been observed in recent books on the Korean Wave (Y. Kim 2013; Lee and Nornes 2015; Yoon and Jin 2017), researchers of audience studies may have been intrigued primarily by “pop cosmopolitans” (Jenkins 2004; Jenkins et al. 2013), rather than diasporic audiences. While Hallyu extends beyond the ethnic audiences’ consumption of their homeland media, its increasing penetration into non-Korean populations may not be fully examined without exploring the role of Korean diasporic communities in facilitating the Korean Wave. Given the importance of diasporic Korean audiences of the Korean Wave—those who have not been sufficiently examined in the existing studies—this book analyzes how they engage with the transnational flows of the Korean Wave. This book’s unique focus on and in-depth study of diasporic Korean audiences addresses a lacuna in the existing studies of the Korean Wave—that is, the role of the Korean diaspora in the transnational flows of Korean media and popular culture. Drawing on extensive audience studies and empirical analyses, the book proposes a critical understanding of diasporic audiences who reorient the dominant mediascape by consuming transnational media forms of non-Western origin in between “here” (location of residence) and “there” (ethnic homeland). This evidence-based,

in-depth analysis of diasporic audiences' media practices expands the scope of existing studies of the Korean Wave and furthermore suggests a new perspective on audience research.

Since diaspora is a way of imagining borders, groups, and individuals dealing with cultural difference, the analytical framework of diaspora can contribute to advancing Hallyu audience studies. Moreover, the diasporic lens utilized in this book can be further applied to analyze a wide range of contemporary young people and their engagement with transnational media. The diasporic framework helps to explore how young people engage with the multiple cultural identifications that are available for them in the midst of transnational cultural flows. This book expands the scope of transnational audience studies, which has insufficiently examined diasporic media practices among people in between two or more cultural contexts. The book also advances Korean Wave studies, which still primarily address transactions between culture, technology, and people from a nation-statistic perspective.

### *Organization of the Book*

This book consists of theoretical and empirical chapters. This chapter and Chapter 5 offer the theoretical frameworks and contexts for the research, and Chapters 2–4 engage with the findings of qualitative interviews with young Korean Canadians.

This chapter provides the context and framework for the book. By acknowledging that the diasporic population has remained an under-researched area in Korean Wave studies, the chapter addresses why diasporic youth are important for understanding the Korean Wave beyond a nation-statist perspective. The chapter offers an overview of the recent circulation of transnational Korean media and delineates the book's research contexts by describing the research participants and a brief history of Korean Canadian communities.

Chapter 2 addresses how diasporic Korean youth in Canada grow up with an understanding of their cultural differences. In particular, young Korean Canadians often feel that they are subject to (and have to be validated by) the dominant cultural norms of White Anglo groups at least for a period in their childhood, while later developing more positive ethnic identification. In their transition to adulthood, during which they try to negotiate their available ethnic options and explore what it means to be

Korean *and* Canadian, Hallyu media seems to offer cultural resources for exploring who they are.

Chapter 3 focuses on young Korean Canadians' viewing of and engagement with narrative Korean media genres (Korean TV dramas, entertainment shows, and vlogs). Their diasporic viewing of Korean TV reveals how the Korean Wave is integrated into viewers' everyday contexts. In the midst of White-dominant media representation, the increasing global popularity of Korean TV may provide the diasporic youth with meaningful momentum for exploring how they can critically navigate between different cultural texts and contexts.

Drawing on the diasporic young people's consumption and understanding of K-pop, Chapter 4 examines the particular meanings that are generated as these youth engage with K-pop in the process of growing up. In particular, the chapter examines how K-pop is interpreted not only as an ethnic cultural text but also as a global cultural text. Moreover, it addresses how K-pop is appropriated by diasporic youth as a cultural resource for challenging the White-dominant cultural frame.

In wrapping up the themes of the book, Chapter 5 suggests that Hallyu media itself may not be inherently counter-hegemonic, but diasporic audiences' critical engagement with the cultural wave may enhance its potential to challenge the dominant Western-centric mediascape. The chapter also claims that diasporic youth learn and negotiate different identity positions, associated with here *and* there, through Hallyu media.

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