

Interview

INTERVIEW WITH DAL YONG JIN: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND SOUTH KOREA

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As concisely expressed in the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte by Marx dated 1852: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past". Considering the global rise of right-wing populist politics, authoritarian demagogue politicians, racism and xenophobia (especially fear of refugees and hostility), and Islamophobia, what are the ways to overcome the new inequalities and great political regression produced by new

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communication technologies in the context of automated and algorithmic inequalities? What does this concise expression of Marx tell us in terms of the struggle against new inequalities?

New communication technologies in the 21st century have expanded the existing gap, both technologically and economically, between Western countries and non-Western countries. In the era of digital platforms such as social media (e.g., Facebook and YouTube), smartphone technologies (e.g., iPhones and operating systems), and search engines (e.g., Google), the gap between Western countries as owners of these technologies and other remaining countries as platform users has exponentially increased. In the global search engine markets, for example, Google alone accounts for 90% of the market share, and Facebook has become the most significant social media in many countries. Android and iOS,--two U.S.-created operating systems—also consist of more than 96% of the global markets. This kind of massive dominance by one particular Western country has never been observed in our history. As these technologies heavily rely on user data that these platform companies manipulate and monopolize through algorithms, the new inequalities will continue. These new communication technologies have also been utilized by right-wing populists who develop fake news and use private information for their own political purposes.

This trend, however, is predicted because the growth of new technology has heavily relied on the past, which means that many non-Western countries are not able to develop new communication technologies because they do not have their own original technologies. In particular, in the 21st century when intellectual properties play a key role, non-Western countries cannot secure necessary technologies and have to buy intellectual property rights, which deters the growth of new communication technologies in their own territories.

This does not mean that we live in the era of technological determinism. Instead, what I am arguing is that the milieu surrounding digital/platform technologies cannot be easily changed due to several key issues such as capital, skills, know-how, and IP rights. Although we don't use what Marx talked about more than one hundred years ago because of the shifting environment, ironically, his assertion works in understanding our new media technologies in the 21st century. As Marx clearly argued, inequalities based on big data, and therefore algorithms in recent years between a few Western countries and the majority of non-Western countries have intensified.

Therefore, we have to think about the ways in which we resolve inequalities embedded in these platform technologies. The two most significant means are as follows. On the one hand, the expansion of digital commons where people use original sources with no payments should be actualized. As tech companies and developers in non-Western countries cannot advance their own technologies mainly due to intellectual property rights, it is crucial to open the sources of these technologies to everyone who wants to use them so that tech designers and developers as well as tech companies are able to advance new communication technologies. For example, Android as an open source provides a lot of opportunities to Samsung, LG, HTC, and Huawei. Without it, these smartphone makers cannot make their own gadgets, which are crucial for the national economy in some Asian countries.

On the other hand, social media and/or platform firms must pay back to people and society as they make profits based on people's use of their digital technologies. Facebook, YouTube, and Google garner an ample amount of revenue from other countries; however, they do not properly pay taxes and fees to those countries in Europe and Asia. They develop delicate algorithms to enhance their business performances, and the bottom line is the increasing number of users. No doubt about it. Therefore, these social media and search engine companies have to pay proper taxes while developing their corporate policies to help the global users, even indirectly, through initiating some programs to reduce a global digital divide.

One of the ways in which neoliberalism tries to overcome its crisis has been through investment in creative content industries and practices. For instance, the governments in South-East Asia countries support the creative industry fields by adopting the Korean model one after the other. It seems to me that the Korean model presents an economic model rather than a political one. What kind of a political attitude is possible for the Global South against this rather economy dominated discourse and practice?

The Korean model is not only an economic model but also a political model. It seems to be an economic model as it focuses on economic imperatives; however, the Korean government has actually initiated the growth of the cultural industries. In the early 1990s, the Korean cultural industry was very small, and the government planned to develop it by providing legal and financial supports. For example, when the market share of domestic films was recorded at 15.9% in 1993, the government asked several of

the country's largest conglomerates, including Samsung and Lotte to invest in the film industry, in particular the production sector by providing tax benefits. What the government pursued was economic growth through the development of cultural industries because the cultural industries were not small anymore.

The consequences are mixed. On the one hand, Korea has rapidly advanced its cultural industries, including film, broadcasting, gaming, and popular music, and the cultural industries have become some of the most significant and largest segments of the national economy. On the other hand, since then, the Korean cultural industries have focused on economic growth rather than cultural identity and serenity. Cultural producers have rapidly commercialized and commodified popular culture, resulting in the Korean Wave phenomenon—the rapid growth of domestic cultural industries and the export of cultural products in the Asian market, and later into the global markets.

What is interesting is that the Korean government has tried to support the cultural sector in the midst of neoliberal globalization. The government has liberalized and deregulated the cultural industries; however, it has never reduced its role as a major agent in advancing the cultural industries. This implies that the Korean model is the outcome of the convergence of political and economic components.

As the Korean model is successful, many Asian countries, from East Asian to South East Asian countries, have followed this model, emphasizing the economic side. For these countries, however, it is critical to understand the significant role of the government in developing their cultural sectors. For the small cultural industries with no man power, capital, and know-how, supports from the government, in terms of financial and legal supports, are crucial. In the neoliberal globalization era, the role of the government cannot be eliminated, nor significantly reduced in the realm of popular culture. Neoliberalism is indeed a political philosophy as well as an economic philosophy.

What the governments in Asia also understand is the ways in which they make a balance between economic imperatives and cultural identities. This means that the role of the government should not be limited to the growth of cultural industries for the national economy, but expanded to the advancement of local culture.

In your books on the Korean Wave (2016, 2017), you claim that the content of the Korean Wave is hybrid. However, some theorists argue that the hybrid content doesn't articulate the local element in it. According to these theorists, hybridity

presents an asymmetrical and apolitical production model. In this regard, in what ways does the hybridity of the Korean model contribute to global narratives?

One of the major characteristics of the Korean Wave is certainly hybridization, as the local cultural industries converge some Western, in particular U.S., and non-Western, Korean in this case, elements. The Korean cultural industries have certainly developed a hybrid culture through the mix of two elements, again Western and non-Western. In other words, Korea has appropriated the Western culture and utilized it in creating several different cultural products, including television programs, films, digital games, and popular music, through the hybridization process.

The hybridization process is very different from other countries. As we understand well, what is significant is whether hybrid cultural content does articulate the local element in it or not. Some scholars (e.g., Iwabuchi and Lu) claimed with the case of Japanese popular culture that in a globalized world, for a non-Western cultural product to become successful, it must lose much of its original cultural odor so as to be promoted in the global market as a neutralized product to gain wider audience reception. Here, the idea of odorless cultural products is considered as popular culture's de-politicized globalization, which is one of the primary reasons for the success of local culture in the global markets.

Unlike Japanese culture focusing on odorless hybridity, however, the Korean Wave has successfully politicized its culture. This means that Korea has developed its unique culture through hybridization. The Korean Wave does not entirely eliminate local cultural identities, but develops hybrid culture by preserving local specificities. As BTS exemplifies, the reason for its global fandom is not because it loses its local characteristics but because it encompasses Korea's local identities in music. Hybridization in the Korean Wave is strategically embedded in cultural politics because it not only aims for the mix of text, image, and sound to neutralize cultural products, but it is also related to cultural policy, the division of cultural labor, and history.

In fact, it is clear that the hybridization process in Hallyu is strongly based on the politicization of culture,--the portrayal of local components alongside global components—because cultural creators strategically weigh political considerations. More specifically, Korean popular culture is culturally political because local popular culture represents some significant Korean mentalities, such as friendship, collectivism, togetherness, and love, which are also partially universal values.

Of course, the Korean Wave certainly proves that the asymmetrical power relationship between Western and non-Western nations still remains mainly because some productions are still controlled by Western standards, such as producers and capital. In other words, although Korea has developed its politicized hybrid culture, reflecting local identities, the negotiation process between the global and the local forces in the hybridization process is not even between different forces and cultures. In the Korean Wave production process, Western producers appropriate hybridization as one of their major strategies to attract local audiences and consumers, and their major cultural characteristics emphasize Western values, such as capitalism, individualism, universalism, and heroism which are still embedded in their cultural products. Although Korea has increased its exports to Western countries based on hybrid nature, this does not mean that transnational cultural power is significantly changing, and so global asymmetry has not been cured yet.

It is claimed that there is an emphasis of “being Asian” in the contents of the Korean Wave, especially in Korean movies, Korean dramas and even in digital games. Do you think there can be a uniform Asia? Isn’t the emphasis of being Asian already based on a different colonial discourse which was previously seen or experienced in the history?

It is crucial to reflect its own or regional cultural identities in local cultural production. Korean movies, television programs, and digital games have certainly developed Korean and/or Asian characteristics. However, at the same time, the Korean cultural industries have tried to advance hybrid culture, as discussed above, which means that contemporary local culture encompasses both local/regional and global cultural features. In recent years, Korean culture has involved combinations of local and global elements at multiple levels. Due to this particular reason, people claim that the Korean Wave may not be Korean or authentic Asian, while some argue that Korean popular culture still includes local cultural specificities.

On the one hand, several Korean films and television dramas have reflected non-Korean or non-Asian values after hybridization. In other words, some cultural producers develop elsewhere-ness or exteriority during the hybridization process. However, it is ironically some of the central characteristics to the Korean Wave that global audiences enjoy. On the other hand, Korean cultural industries have kept Koreanness and/or Asianness, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, family, and friendship.

Several Korean movies and television dramas certainly advance these Asian values, even after hybridization.

Of course, these values cannot suggest a uniform Asia. In other words, we cannot claim that these Asian values embedded in Korean popular culture are always identical with other Asian countries' values, because Asian countries have developed their local values as well. For example, Japanese dramas have focused on trendy dramas reflecting young people's love in an urban setting, while Korean dramas have focused on family and friendship. Regardless of their emphasis on Asianness, we cannot generalize them easily as a uniformed Asian value, as there are some delicate differences between Asian countries. We also cannot claim that Korean popular culture reflects Asianness as some of these cultural contents certainly portray Western values as well.

Is it possible to say that the content consumed on a global scale within the Korean Wave is a new derivative of cultural imperialism? Especially considering the aggressive cultural diplomatic policies of the last two governments (Lee and Park administration) of Korea, the mission attributed to content worked as part of soft power. What could be the contribution of the Korean Wave to cross-cultural communication, interaction and cultural diversity in this context?

Cultural imperialism indicates the cultural flow from the West to the East, and in particular from the U.S. to the rest of the world. This means that two key elements should be considered in our cultural imperialism discourse. One is the direction, and the other is the major player. When the cultural imperialism theory was formed in the 1970s and the 1980s, there were no particular cultural powers other than a few Western countries, including the U.S., and therefore, popular culture, such as film, music, and television programs, flew from these countries to non-Western countries. Starting in the early 1990s, however, several countries have developed their own unique popular cultures and exported them to neighboring countries, and later to the Western countries. Telenovelas from Brazil and Mexico, Bollywood movies from India, and animation from Japan are certainly exemplary cases that show the arrival of plural actors.

The Korean Wave starting in the late 1990s has joined this movement. What is interesting is that unlike other countries' cultures, focusing on one particular culture (e.g., Bollywood movies and Latin Telenovelas), Korea has developed both popular culture including television programs, film, K-pop, and animation, and digital technologies, such as smartphones and online games, and penetrated the global cultural

markets. In doing so, Korea has certainly contributed to cross-cultural communication and cultural diversity. In particular, as these popular cultures and digital technologies go not only to the Asian region, but also to the Western markets, as several K-pop idols, including BTS—a seven-boy-member idol group—have become popular around the world, Korea certainly shows its potential to develop a counter-cultural flow—a cultural flow from non-Western to Western countries,—which is very important.

However, we need to be very careful to determine whether the Korean Wave has become a new derivative of cultural imperialism, mainly because the flow was still limited to Asia until very recent years. While K-pop is globally popular, Japan alone consists of more than 85% of the global export market for K-pop. China is the largest game market for Korean digital games, and only a few films are screened in the U.S. market. Therefore, the Korean Wave was mainly an intra-cultural phenomenon, again, until very recent years.

Based on the increasing role of Korean popular culture in the Asian region, some might argue that Korea might be a new derivative of cultural imperialism; however, it is not a proper term, because the relationship between Korea and other Asian countries is not like the power relationship between the U.S. and the rest of the world. The boom of the Korean Wave in many countries has not been forced, and people in these countries voluntarily enjoy Korean music, television programs, and film. Although some Asian countries are concerned about the significant increase of Korean culture in their countries, it cannot be justified both theoretically and practically. Again, theoretically, cultural imperialism is the notion that explains the cultural invasion by a few Western countries into the rest of the world. Practically, the Korean Wave should be treated as a new example of the growth of local culture to diversify the flow of global culture instead of as a form of another superpower controlling and dominating the global cultural markets. Such things have not occurred thus far.

What are the main cultural, political and economic differences that you realize when you compare the creative content industry policies of China and Japan with that of Korea which is designed and supported by the state from above?

There are some similarities and differences. What we have to understand, though, is that China, Japan, and Korea all emphasize state-led developmentalism with some variances. Due to soft power policy initiated by the Korean government in the 2000s, some people might think that the Korean cultural industries have developed mainly because of governmental supports, while China and Japan have not made the Korea-

level progress due to the lack of governmental supports. However, as cool Japan policy and Chinese soft power policy in the 2010s show, the Japanese government and Chinese government also vehemently support the cultural industries.

Of course, there are certainly some differences in cultural policies and major directions taken. It is true to say that the Korean government has technically initiated the growth of the cultural industries. The Korean government started to support the film industry in 1994 and 1995, which led to the growth of the entire cultural industries. In particular, the two conservative administrations under Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013-2017) strongly supported the cultural industries due to their potentials as soft power, meaning they planned to enhance national images while advancing the national economy with popular culture. In that sense, it is not dicey to argue that the Korean Wave is partially the outcome of the state-led developmentalism amidst neoliberal globalization emphasizing the small government.

Compared to this, the role of the Japanese government in the cultural industries was limited because the private sectors, including a private broadcasting company and an advertising company initiated the growth of Japanese cultural industries, and therefore their exports. Until Japan developed its cool Japan policy in the early 2010s, the Japanese government was mainly taking a hands-off approach to the cultural industries.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government did not focus on the cultural industries until very recent years. However, once it learned the importance of culture for the national economy and the national image, the Chinese government has strongly initiated the advancement of the national cultural industries.

Again, China and Japan have jumped onto the bandwagon and supported their domestic cultural industry in the 2010s. Therefore, these East Asian countries similarly develop the cultural industries through the nexus of the private and public sectors. These countries' policy measures should not be the same; however, they commonly try to advance their own cultural industries because they now believe that they must support the cultural industries for the national economy, while enhancing national images.

What is your reaction to criticisms stating that the creative content production policy of the Korean government performed with various agencies standardizes the variety in cultural production and that it paves the way for excessive commercialization in

the context of creative economy? In your opinion, what are the problems of designing cultural industries and relevant policies by the state?

The commercialization and commodification of popular culture have been a long-standing criticism since Adorno and Horkheimer criticized the nature of cultural industries. The Korean cultural industries are not much different in that the government and relevant agencies, including Korean Creative Content Agency and Korean Film Council commercialize popular culture. The level of commercialization is higher than with other countries' cases as Korea has developed the Korean Wave phenomenon systematically for the national economy.

K-pop is a distinctive example as several entertainment houses train their trainees for many years before their debuts. The training system, known-as a star-making system, is rigorous and tiring, and only less than 1% of trainees become stars. Korean cinema has also experienced a similar trend. In the 1970s and 1980s, Korean cinema focused on melodramas portraying general people's struggles and agonies; however, starting in the mid-1990s, Korean cinema has fundamentally changed its focuses and created films portraying Hollywood style actions, comedies, and horror films. With high production budgets, local filmmakers mainly commercialize big screen culture. Consequently, cultural specificities embedded in Korean society, history, and people are not well protected, nor preserved.

The governments starting in the mid-1990s have developed cultural industries with diverse cultural policies; however, the majority of them focus on the ways in which the cultural industries are able to make money, and therefore, boost the national economy instead of enhancing cultural identity. This means that several administrations starting in the mid-1990s have redesigned the cultural industries which previously focused on cultural identity, and therefore, the growth of cultural uniqueness to the creative industries, emphasizing economic imperatives. While it is not avoidable, the government and cultural industries have to make a balance between the advancement of national culture and the commercialization of popular culture.

The cultural industries in peripheral countries need government supports; however, it does not mean that the government controls and commercializes them for the national economy. Instead, the government provides necessary means, including financial supports but leave them to advance popular culture with embedded local specificities. Overall, the government needs to develop popular culture reflecting local specificities instead of making commercial culture only by providing necessary

supports to small and independent cultural actors (e.g., independent movie directors) so that these cultural creators eventually make unique products but appeal to global audiences.

The 'remake phenomenon' has become an increasing trend in cultural industries around the world. What possibilities does that 'remake phenomenon' have for cultural diversity and are there any opportunities against (new) colonial discursive practices?

Remake or format has been common in the cultural industries. From films to television programs, both Western and non-Western countries have developed cultural products based on remake or format instead of buying packaged cultural products. There are two different observations in conjunction with the remake or format phenomenon.

On the one hand, remake or format based on non-Western culture has certainly advanced cultural diversity in many areas as non-Western countries have developed their own programs, which are adapted by Western countries as well as non-Western countries. For example, Hollywood has remade several Japanese horror films, including *Ring*. *The Departed*, which is a 2006 American crime drama film, is a remake of the 2002 Hong Kong film *Infernal Affairs*. Hollywood has also remade several Korean movies, including *My Sassy Girl* and *Miss Granny*. This tendency continues to grow.

Meanwhile, several non-Western television dramas have been exported to the U.S. as a format. For example, *The Good Doctor*—an American medical drama series in 2017-2018—is based on the 2013 Korean series of the same name. These trends certainly are good examples of the growth of local culture in the Western markets, and they help cultural diversity in the global cultural markets. Several Korean dramas and films are also remade and formatted in Asia as well, which means that remake and format are booming and eventually help cultural diversity.

On the one hand, remake or format is another form of cultural imperialism because the majority of remake or format programs are originally made by a few Western countries. Several Western countries, including the U.S., the U.K., and France not only sell pre-packaged cultural materials, but also sell remake or format to non-Western countries. Although these non-Western countries are able to modify the originals to accommodate their own cultural features, they are still Western-based popular culture reflecting Western values. In this sense, remake or format is another form of cultural imperialism, which hurts cultural diversity.

Therefore, what we have to keep in mind is that the majority of remake or format products are distributed by the U.S. to the rest of the world as only a few successful films and television dramas in non-Western countries are remade or formatted in the U.S. Regardless of its opportunities, this cannot change the direction of cultural flows much. The global cultural markets have rapidly increased, and therefore, the cultural flow between Western and non-Western regions has grown, including a counter-cultural flow from non-Western to Western with several new forms of cultural flow, including remake and format. However, as the markets grow, the proportion controlled by a few Western countries has also expanded.

Social media applications facilitate audience participation, which, the creative industries seek ways to turn into surplus value. How can the audiences' practices contribute to cultural convergence? Considering the dominance of Euro-American centered narrative creation in communication practices, what alternatives can the Global South offer in terms of user generated content?

Social media has changed people's cultural consumption habits. Previously, people consumed popular culture through either buying cultural content in the form of cassette tapes, CDs, or DVDs or going to theaters to enjoy films. However, with the rapid growth of social media, people, in particular global youth, do not possess these cultural materials as they consume cultural content on social media, including user-generated content platforms such as YouTube.

They also become key players in shifting major platforms in cultural consumption, which means that they consume popular culture not through traditional media but through new media, including mobile technologies. These changing habits demand content providers and tech companies to redesign their business models, which lead media convergence.

Most of all, global audiences participate in the cultural industries as prosumers, which means that they are not only consuming popular culture but also producing cultural contents. As the global use of YouTube proves, people produce their own video clips and parody videos and upload them on YouTube. They also translate foreign popular culture into their own languages so that they work as producers. For example, whenever new games arrive in the markets, they translate them into their own languages, which facilitate the spread of digital games in the global markets.

What is significant is that social media provides opportunities to the Global South because cultural producers in this region are able to penetrate the Global North.

In fact, Korean Psy's *Gangnam Style* became a global sensation based on its initial popularity on social media. BTS has also achieved a global stardom mainly through social media in recent years. As such, cultural producers in the Global South certainly develop their cultural products and appeal to global youth. The Global South had not been a major player in the global cultural markets over the past several decades, not only because they have no power to develop cultural products compared to Western cultures but also because they have no distribution channels. However, user generated content social media like YouTube provide platforms for them to produce and distribute their unique local culture.

Of course, people in the Global South also consume popular culture from the Global North, and people in South East Asia and Latin America consume Western culture through social media provided by the U.S. (e.g., Facebook and YouTube). In this regard, it is not dicey to argue that social media has great potential for the Global South; however, as U.S.-based social media has garnered capital from the Global South, the asymmetrical relationship in terms of cultural production and consumption between the Global North and the Global South in the era of social media still remains and even intensifies.