Korea vs. K-Dramaland: The Culturalization of K-Dramas by International Fans

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South Korean television dramas, K-Dramas, initiated the Korean Wave, Hallyu, in the late 1990s. Nowadays, a global viewership gathers online to stream K-Dramas live, watch them with subtitles, and discuss them on specialized blogs and message boards. However, most research still concentrates on East Asia as the main realm of K-Dramas’ diffusion, and online communities that watch K-Dramas on the Internet have rarely been considered. Furthermore, most researchers analyze K-Dramas as products inscribed by “Korean culture” or “society,” an approach that relies on an understanding of “cultures” and “societies” as discrete, homogenous, locally bounded entities. Expanding upon the nascent online audience research on K-Dramas, I propose in this article a shift of perspective by focusing on how international fans themselves account for K-Dramas (or elements thereof) as socially and culturally “Korean” or operate a rupture with such a culturalist viewpoint.
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