

KPOP DEMON HUNTERS AND GLOBALIZATION

Kpop Demon Hunters and Globalization

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Introduction

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KPop Demon Hunters[KPDH], a movie about a hunter girl group fighting against a demon boy band, became a global sensation following its release in June 2025 on Netflix. Despite its cheesy title, Kpop Demon Hunters quickly rose to fame with its addictive melodies, lovable characters, and intriguing plot. In this paper, I will analyze the contents of KPDH using the concepts of mediascapes & deterritorialization, as brought forth by Arjun Appadurai(1990) in “Disjunctures and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, as well as the concepts of Hallyu and cultural hybridity, as noted in the book titled “Transnational Hallyu: The Globalization of Korean Digital and Popular Culture” by Dal Yong Jin, Kyong Yoon, and Wonjung Min(2023). I aim to provide a fuller understanding of the global contextualization of the film.

Mediascapes and transactional Hallyu

To begin, KPDH uses mediascapes and Hallyu to define itself as a global phenomenon. Mediascapes often present a narrative exemplifying the other scapes. (Appadurai, 1990, p.299).In particular, I would like to point out the representation of ethnoscapes in KPDH’s narrative. In KPDH, Zoey, one of the girls in Huntrix, the main girl group, is Korean-American. This reflects on her personality. For example, Zoey’s style of rapping parallels American culture, focusing more on lyrics and self-expression rather than flow. Additionally, it reflects on her sense of identity. Like other immigrants, Zoey struggled with her identity. This is exemplified through the song Golden, where she sings, “I lived two lives, tried to play both sides, but I couldn't find my own place.”(HUNTR/X et al.,2025) Thus, Zoey visually represents the ethnoscapes present in Korean and American culture.

In addition, mediascape is an underlying application of imagined worlds. Imagined

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worlds are worlds which are crafted by the “historically situated imaginations”(Appadurai,1900, p.296-297) of the audiences. A lot of these imagined worlds stem from the audience’s ideologies. In terms of mediascapes, I am inclined to believe that the narratives pushed within the media are these imagined worlds. I consider KPDH an imagined realm, as the fandom has imagined the concepts into real life. For example, the idea of the honmoon has breached itself into reality. Many people online compare their voices to how they may affect the honeymoon. One commenter stated, "Sorry for breaking the honmoon guys" (Jugado,2025). Meanwhile, another commenter commented, “IT’S OKAY. IM NOT A HUNTER. IM NOT GONNA BREAK THE HONMOON" (Nanana,2025). The usage of the homnoon as a part of normal speech empathizes the globality of the film, as well as painting an image of imagined worlds. As for its application within mediascapes presented in KPDH, I believe this is drawn by the ideology of voice as power presented within the film. Throughout the film, the theme that voice is power is pushed forward. This is exemplified through Rumi’s mental breakdown after losing her voice, in which she cries out, “How am I to fix the world, fix me, when I don’t have my voice?”(Kang & Appelhans, 2025,0:19:02).Overall, imagined worlds are converged into the realm of KPDH as an application of mediascapes, empathizing its globality.

Next, Netflix leverages Hallyu’s global dominance to further globalize the film. To begin, KPDH reveals the nature of idol culture within Korea. For instance, Celine’s philosophy that “ faults and fears must never be seen”(Kang & Appelhans,2025, 0:20:33) parallels idol standards. In idol culture, fans often idolize the idols, viewing them as perfect beings. Celine recreates this idea, forcing it upon Huntrix to the point where Rumi views her own scars as shameful. Also, the Saja Boys emphasize idol standards. In Your Idol, the second song from the

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Saja Boys, Mystery sings, “Don’t let it show, keep it all inside. The pain and the shame, keep it out of sight”(Saja Boys et al., 2025a), reflecting a visible fear of showing flaws. Together, these form a main theme within KPDH.

Moreover, KPDH uses aspects of K-dramas, cementing its use of Hallyu in the film. During Rumi and Jinu’s first meeting, Rumi dramatically falls to the ground, similar to the first meeting scene between the female lead and male lead in K-dramas. To enforce the idea of K-drama even further, the video is also in slow mode. Additionally, the song they chose to play at that moment is Love, Maybe , a track written for Business Proposal, a popular K-drama on Netflix. Through this scene, KPDH incorporates Hallyu into the film. In essence, KPDH uses mediascapes in conjunction with Hallyu to contextualize itself as a global film.

Cultural Hybridity and Deterritorialization

In addition to the inclusion of mediascapes and Hallyu, KPDH also incorporates cultural hybridity as well as deterritorialization as globality. To start, KPDH includes a variety of cultures in the film, exemplifying its globality. First, it borrows from Japanese Anime with the inclusion of unnatural hair colours as differentiating elements of the main cast. Next, the demon realm and the theme of fire parallel the representations of hell in Greek Mythology and Christianity. As well, Your Idol incorporates Latin lyrics to emphasize horror and ancient themes. Finally, Zoey's rap in How It's Done references Rambo, a popular American film. Overall, KPDH has many elements of cultural hybridity within the film. The hybridity of the film not only represents the global elements but also the heterogeneity that exists within the film.

Additionally, Hallyu, specifically K-pop, has elements of hybridity through lyrics. Jin et al.(2023) identify the usage of English lyrics in Hallyu as “playful participation”(p.68), using

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English to connect with global audiences. (p.68) However, in the context of KPDH, I argue the opposite. KPDH, there is a dearth of Korean lyrics in the tracklist. In fact, a sense of playfulness is instead seen through the Korean lyrics. In particular, one line in Soda Pop states “(kor) you hit the spot”[“in one sip you hit the spot”](Saja Boys et al., 2025b). However, many non-Korean fans interpreted the lyric as “Imma come and make you hit the spot”, implying an innuendo. I believe the writers did this purposefully as “playful participation”(Jin et al, 2023, p.68). Furthermore, Jin et al.(2023) state that “Hallyu is not a cultural trend that represents something uniquely Korean”(p.67), but rather it is something that is comprised of a large mix of cultures. (p.67) Thus, the choice for mainly English lyrics may be deliberate. I believe that the choice of mainly English lyrics reflects the theme of global accessibility that KPDH wants to achieve.

However, despite these elements, the film feels overpowered by American themes. There is a sense of homogeneity prevalent within the film. Previously, I mentioned how the incorporation of Zoey rationalized the incorporation of American culture. However, some elements feel misplaced. For instance, Huntrix carb-loading before the performance contrasts with the way Korean idols diet to achieve unrealistic weight goals. However, in America, there is an emphasis on calorie consumption. For example, there are mainly trends where Americans eat 10 thousand calories in a day. Through this element, KPDH subtly Americanizes Korean idol culture. On the other hand, the appearance of American aspects is rationalized because many of the cast are a part of the Korean diaspora. Specifically, KPDH focused on the deterritorialization present within the Korean diaspora. This is visualized through the theme of shame and uncertainty present in KPDH. When most immigrants first move, they feel a sense of pressure to hide their culture. This is homogeneity at play as it enforces sameness. This is similar to how

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Rumi feels towards her patterns. However, as deterritorialization takes place, many of the deterritorialized population desire to rekindle their connection to their homeland. (Appadurai, 1990, p.302). In KPDH, the cast members likely felt this same disconnect, thus their portrayal of shame and loss of identity is quite strong. As well, this explicates the seamless integration of Korean culture within the film. Moreover, the film reflects the cast's own stories living in other countries, thus the addition of other cultures is prevalent. In this case, American and Western cultures shine through the most as a majority of the cast are also Korean-American. I believe this exemplifies the usage of cultural hybridity within the film, as the film retains a look of globality, yet also expresses Korean culture quite well..Most importantly, the themes of deterritorialization used in KPDH can be applied to ethnoscape in general, ensuring its global relatability.

Nevertheless, KPDH uses cultural hybridity and deterritorialization to establish globality.

Conclusion

Overall, KPDH grew itself as a global phenomenon through the concepts of mediascapes, Hallyu, cultural hybridity, and deter. Through these concepts, KPDH was able to further globalize Korean culture whilst maintaining global accessibility, making it an implicit way to develop understanding about other cultures. This may be noted in the formulation of future media.

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