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The Globalization of K-pop: Korea's Place in the Global Music Industry

*Ingyu Oh**

K-Pop is a new buzz word in the global music industry. Korean pop singers such as TVQX, SNSD, Wonder Girls, and Psy currently attract unprecedented followers in Asia, Europe, and North America. The dominant explanation behind this unique cultural phenomenon rests on the concept of cultural hybridity or Pop Asianism (i.e., continuation and expansion of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian subcultures in the global cultural market). I argue that the globalization of K-Pop involves a much more complicated process of globalizing-localizing-globalizing musical content that originates from Europe than what hybridity or Pop Asianism arguments suggest. Specifically, the rise of K-Pop in the global music industry involves a new technique of locating new musical content in Europe or elsewhere, modifying it into Korean content, and then redistributing it on a global scale. Furthermore, K-Pop represents an effort to network global talent pools and social capital in the formerly disconnected music industry rather than an effort to emulate and slightly modify

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Japanese pop culture. As such, within the global music industry, Korea occupies a structural hole that exists between Western and East Asian music industries.

Key Words: K-Pop, Music Industry, Globalization, Structural Hole

I. Introduction

As the trendy magazine *Monocle* put it recently: “The Korean Wave movement is the biggest soft power success story of the region, acquiring global — and still growing — adulation over the past decade, with the fevered export of South Korea’s pop culture, from music to drama to anime to computer games” (*Monocle* 49, Dec. 2011-Jan. 2012: 48). Particularly, the rise of K-pop or Korean popular music in the global music scene came as a *coup de main* to many music fans, commentators, and business people in Asia. The Anglo-American or European domination of the global music industry has rarely faced challenging competitors from Asia prior to the sudden K-pop epidemic. Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” for example, ranked number one in the world in terms of YouTube click counts, reaching more than 1.7 billion hits as of July 21, 2013. The second most hits recorded in YouTube history by Justin Bieber comes in at just 0.9 billion.

Before Psy’s ascendance as a global pop star, other boy and girl bands from Korea have enthralled a massive number of young Asian and European fans who rushed to quickly sold outlive concerts and/or YouTube for instant and free access to music videos. In countries like China, where YouTube is banned, young fans relied on alternative social networking service (SNS) sites for free music videos from Korea. Girls’ Generation, Wonder Girls, TVXQ, Big Bang, 2PM, 2NE1, and Rain are particularly popular among a diverse and long list of young entertainers from Korea who currently dominate the Asian music industry (see *inter alia*, Ho, 2012; Lee, 2012; Lie, 2012; Oh and Park, 2012; Hübinette, 2012; Hirata, Forthcoming; Iwabuchi, Forthcoming).

Against this backdrop, many scholars of popular culture and mass media have tried to theorize K-pop’s sudden and global popularity using various perspectives from cultural studies, mass media theories, and other social science disciplines. The dominant explanation of the global K-pop phenomenon is the “hybridity” view that advances a liberal argument about Chinese, Japanese, and Indian cultures as a grand Asian Culture (AC) that may countervail the dominant Western Culture (WC) as a whole (Chua, 2004, 2012; Iwabuchi, 2004, Forthcoming). These authors conclude that the rise of K-pop therefore is only natural, given the expanding forces of AC *vis-à-vis* WC. In this sense, K-pop is not a new cultural force in the global cultural system as long as it originates from Japan and/or China (i.e., hybrid), both of which have already hybridized their pop culture with the mix of WC since the 19th century (Iwabuchi, 2004, Forthcoming; Park, 2006; Hirata, 2008; Ryoo, 2009; Shim, 2011).

On the opposite side of this theoretical spectrum is a grounded view of K-pop as Korea’s new export industry that “denuded and destroyed whatever exists of received (South) Korean culture and tradition” (Lie, 2012: 361). K-pop has nothing that can be considered “Korean,” as it is a timely, commercial combination of: (1) the global liberalization of music markets in Asia and the rest of the world; and (2) the rapid advancement of digital technologies like YouTube which prefers to select and feature perfectly photogenic performers from all over the world, including Korean girl and boy bands. According to Lie (2012), no other J-Pop groups and their producers could have imagined this new export opportunity partly due to the lack of economic need or the lack of technological advancement. Perhaps even now, J-Pop singers or bands may not be able to imagine matching Koreans’ success simply because of the lack of photogenic appeal that Koreans have demonstrated in their music videos and on concert stages. In this sense, K-pop is not Japanese or Chinese, even though it is Asian. Rather, K-pop is global and more Western than ever.

Despite this enlightening explanation of K-pop’s global success, Lie’s analysis lacks insight into the anatomy of the whole production process of the export business (i.e., the K-pop industry). To provide an

example, Japanese cars have dominated the global car market due to several externally crucial and timely factors. However, exogenous factors are just as important as endogenous ones. If global factors are significant for an export industry like automobiles, there is also a need to understand why automakers such as Toyota created the Just-in-Time System (JIS) and *Kanban*. As Lie (2012) succinctly puts it, if SM Entertainment is “the single most important” factor behind the global success of K-pop, a meaningful analysis demands an understanding of the inside organizational dynamics of an industry dominated by firms like SM.

SM Entertainment’s core business competence was bifurcated within the organization into: (1) creativity management; and (2) export management. In one of the extant studies, Oh and Park (2012) focused on export management, characterized by SM’s business focus shifting from B (business) to C (customers) to B (SM) to B (YouTube). This transformation of SM’s international strategy necessitated competent international managers like Youngmin Kim, SM’s CEO, who was pivotal in successfully introducing BoA and TVXQ in Japan. Hailing from Japan himself, Kim spent his primary, middle, and high school years in Japan before coming to Korea University for undergraduate studies. While Soo Man Lee, SM founder and Chairman, has managed just the creativity management side, Kim has had full freedom and power to brandish his sword in export matters. The connection between YouTube and SM, something that Japanese and Chinese entertainment managers have not sought to utilize, was first mapped out by Kim, who accidentally discovered the YouTube icon as it was permanently pre-installed on a Japanese iPhone first released in 2008.

The story of creativity and export management from SM’s perspective therefore adds richness and flesh to the theoretical skeleton presented by Lie (2012). In this paper, I continue to present aspects of creativity management with an emphasis on successful linkages with export management. I first discuss existing studies of the global music industry to draw an understanding of the whole business system from K-pop’s viewpoint. Through a case study on SM’s creativity management, I suggest that the recent rise of the global music industry offers

many structural holes that can be occupied by linking Asian and Western networks. However, either the *tertiusiugens* or the *tertiusgaudens* in the music industry must be able to identify audience preferences in each music genre and geographical segment.

II. Theorizing the Global Music Industry

The plural usage of “music industries” reflects the diverse nature of the industry in producing and delivering a variety of different goods and services to music consumers. For example, the classical music industry, a representative case of “high culture” in Bourdieu’s (1984) term, has a widely different throughput system from that of the K-pop industry, an exemplary case of “low culture.” While the classical music industry has prestigious national and international schools that officially train musical geniuses, the K-pop industry has no such privilege except for private training camps often labeled as “slave camps” by antagonistic journalists. Whereas opera is delivered in luxurious nationally or imperially founded opera houses, K-pop concerts are performed in sports stadiums or open air stages constructed overnight.

The sociological understanding of the popular music industry has often assumed the above class line and elaborated on the process of top-down control of “low culture” contents using institutions, organizations, and technologies (Hirsch, 1971; Peterson and Di Maggio, 1975). According to these cultural classifications, K-pop belongs to the “Third World” low culture category emanating from a country unheard of in usual mainstream cultural (both high and low) discourses in developed countries. Although Hirsch (1971) correctly predicted the structural nexus between mass media technologies and new popular music genres, as evidenced in the case of radios after the massive success of TVs and the birth of rock and roll music. However, like other sociological studies of popular music, he couldn’t predict that the birth of YouTube and digital music would usher in a new popular music genre of K-pop. In the dominant sociological study, artists and

recording companies in the core countries only would invent, develop, produce, and disseminate popular music.

The picture has changed dramatically since the birth of the global music industry. The rise of the new Caribbean music genre is one example, while the spread of J-pop all over Asia was another. Traditional and national music industries have relied on discs and magnetic tapes (SPs, LPs, tapes, CDs, MDs, LDs, DVDs, etc.), which were played on playing devices (e.g. audio components). These discs and tapes carried price tags, although they were easily pirated all over the world for cheap dissemination. Unless countries enforced strict copyright rules, singers and recording companies found it very difficult to garner any substantial profit out of their music. Free music also existed through the broadcasting model of music dissemination (Fox and Wrenn, 2001). Music was aired on radios or television music channels without fees to the audiences, as long as they listened to or watched program sponsors' commercials. In many countries where piracy was rampant, appearance on TV programs was one of the important income sources for artists who had no other option but to appear on night club shows or take a national concert tour with less secure income guarantees than that of TV programs.

The ascendance of the global music industry has destroyed this structure. No longer are music audiences required to purchase music released by recording companies (or labelers), as they have full access to free music on the internet, especially YouTube. Concerts are still organized by production managers (who either have or do not have recording facilities), although more and more regular fans prefer to watch them online for free. Today, the global music industry allows music producers and distributors to make their fortunes through posting free music on the Internet without going to radio stations or begging recording companies to produce and distribute records (Hilderbrand, 2007; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Elberse, 2010; Oh and Park, 2012). Whereas recording companies owned and managed copyrights of music they sold, music producers in the global music industry recruit, train, and own artists in addition to the copyright of the music sold online.

The establishment of the global music industry has also destroyed the thick line between "high" and "low" culture on the one hand, and "developed" and "developing" country cultures on the other. As the case of Psy illustrates, virtually anyone can post music content on YouTube and enjoy instant fame overnight. Unlike what the Birmingham School used to preach, people do not have to resist mainstream culture by deliberately enjoying subculture music (Hall and Jefferson, 1993). Subculture music from all over the world is easily searchable and watchable through streaming technology on YouTube. It is therefore not uncommon now to find K-pop and other popular music artists from the developing countries who have previously pursued classical music careers, because their chance of making fortune in the popular music industry has tripled and quadrupled due to the internet.

The success of subculture music on YouTube, or the new global music industry, depends on the nature of the organizational ecology created by a specific home country's music industry. K-pop has an industrial ecology that favors a very high level of individual and group participation in YouTube-based music production and dissemination based on a new model of popular music venture capitalism. The three major music venture capitalists (SM, YG, JYP) in Korea actively recruit and train future K-pop talent on a continuing basis in order to create an organizational ecology characterized by a large supply of musical inputs (composers, lyricists, singers, session bands, etc.) and a small number of producers (SM, YG, JYP) and distributors (YouTube). In this syphoning type of industry, producers, for their capital investment in young individuals and groups from their early ages, and distributors, for their monopolistic position, take the largest cut in the form of profits, whereas the input elements (e.g. singers) gross relatively smaller share (Oh and Park, 2012).

The question, then, is what makes these producers *qua* venture capitalists legitimate in the whole value chain, where YouTube is the only powerful distributor in the new free digital music industry? The answer lies in the fact that these big three K-pop producers have not chosen to rely on a local pool of talents in Korea for creativity management, but have extended production networks (or musical/cultural

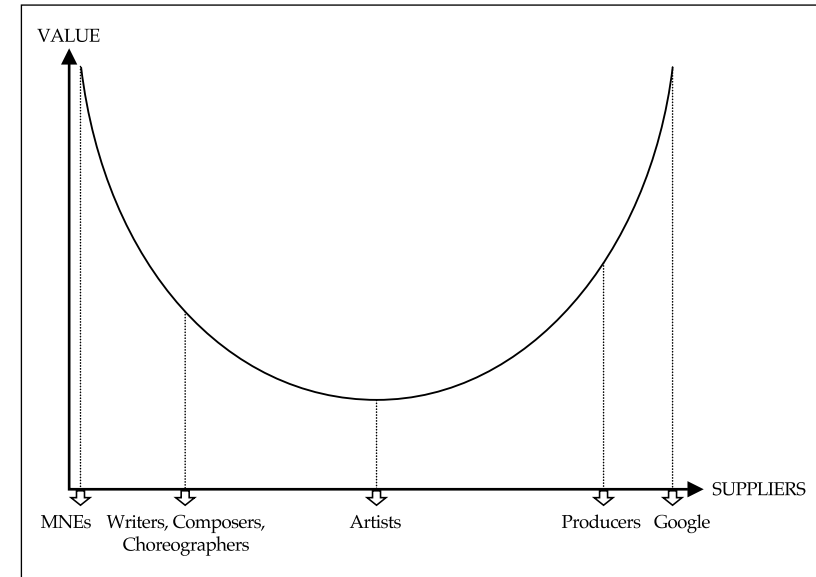
Table 1. K-pop's Globalization Drive

MNEs	Producers	Composers	Choreographers	Distributor
	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	
SM Entertainment	Teddy Riley/ Girls Generation Polow da Don/ Girls Generation	Busbee/ Girls Generation Alex James/ Girls Generation KalleEngstrom/ Girls Generation Oslo Recordings/ Super Junior Jeff Hoeppepner/ f(x) Thomas Troelsen/ f(x) WellemLaseros/ f(x) NaoKanata/ BoA RyojiSonoda/ BoA, TVXQ Thomas Troelsen/ SHINee	Nick Bass/ Super Junior, SHINee Misha Gabriel/ BoA, SHINee	Youtube
YG Entertainment	Will.i.am/ 2NE1 Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins/SE7EN	Daishi Dance/ BigBang Nagao Dai/ SE7EN		
JYP Entertainment	Nick Cannon/ WonderGirls	Claude Kelly/ WonderGirls	Jonte/ WonderGirls	

capital) to global cultural centers in Hollywood and Europe (especially Sweden and the U.K.). As Table 1 shows, the K-pop music industry represents a global business project encompassing local components to regional and global inputs and outputs.

Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that these global music suppliers occupy the middle point between multinational enterprises (MNEs), which provide funds to K-pop production by buying advertising time, and Korean producers who buy some of the K-pop music originally coming from Sweden (melody), England (melody, lyrics, percussions), and the U.S. (beats, lyrics). Performers (mostly Koreans with some

Figure 1. K-pop Value Chain



Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian, and other talents) occupy the lowest value bracket on the value chain, whereas MNEs, producers, and distributors (YouTube) take the largest cut in the global music industry. As exemplified from this value chain, Korean music producers have adopted a new globalization strategy that can be referred to as a "G-L-G" strategy, to which this paper now turns.

III. G-L-G': K-pop's Globalization Strategy

Globalization in the music industry can mean several things. First and foremost, it can refer to a situation where center music can dominate the peripheral music markets (music imperialism) (Black, 1994; During, 1997; Fine, 1997; McChesney, 2001). Second, it can mean cosmopolitanism, where a diverse type of center, peripheral, and semi-peripheral music is sold in the market with sizable groups of fans and "buffs" for each subculture market (Cho-Han et al., 2003;

Iwabuchi, 2004, Forthcoming; Baek, 2005; Hirata, 2005; Chang, 2006). This is close to an ideal-typical multicultural music market. Third, it can allude to a possibility that there is a new global division of labor in music production and dissemination. In the past, for example, Japan exported vinyl LPs that contained American popular music back to the U.S. for their high quality and cheap prices. In another case, European singers and artists went to New York and Hollywood to record and release their albums due to the sheer size of the pop music market in the U.S. In a new global division of music production, the music products sold in each subculture market are produced by a new system of global division of labor that involves European, Asian, and American music talents, venture capital firms, and distributors (Oh and Park, 2012).

K-pop belongs to the third type of globalization. By definition, K-pop entails the export of music “made in Korea” to global consumers, because the domestic music market is drastically hampered by its trifling size and rampant, albeit diminishing, piracy. However, before the current K-pop export boom, the Western network of music producers and distributors did not spot or recruit Korean musical talents into their production and distribution systems, although a couple of anecdotal stories exist.¹ Korean popular music was simply not Western at all, as the traditional trot or kayo songs with pentatonic scales had dominated East Asian popular music (Lie, 2012). The export of Korean music on a global scale has begun since the 21st century, mainly due to: (1) Korea’s economic ascendance to semi-periphery in the world system; (2) massive immigration of Koreans into center countries (Japan, the U.S., Western Europe, etc.); (3) active participation in global cultural industries by the Korean and overseas Korean population; and (4) most importantly, participation in the global divi-

sion of labor in music manufacturing and distribution.

Like in other global divisions of labor in manufacturing and distribution, Korean corporations purchase or outsource raw materials that will be processed in their own factories in Korea. Finished goods will then be exported to center markets in the world system, usually with help from center buyers or distributors. In the 1960s and 1970s, Korean corporations sold textiles, wigs, and footwear in massive quantities to the U.S. and Europe. In the 1980s and 1990s, these corporations began producing cars, ships, steel plates, and electronic goods to be consumed by center customers. In the 2000s and 2010s, these same firms are now exporting IT-related communication hardware and devices, such as smart phones and smart pads, while newly-established entertainment companies are exporting popular cultural content called Hallyu products all over the world.

Despite stark differences in manufacturing and distribution processes, these industries share a similar structure in the global division of labor. Korean firms in the semi-periphery of the world system have to import or outsource raw materials, advanced technologies, and financial resources from the periphery or the center. Even raw materials are often controlled by, and therefore have to be purchased from, the center capitalists. Like the famous Korean electronics and automobile industries, K-pop companies must outsource original music scores to Western (notably Swedish, American, and British) composers. In a similar vein, the finished K-pop CDs, DVDs, music videos, and MP3 music files must be distributed by center companies (e.g. iTunes, YouTube, vevo, SONY Music, Universal, EMI, avex, etc.).

Participation in the global division of music production and distribution (see Table 1) does not necessarily guarantee the global success of K-pop. From the outset, participation itself is extremely difficult to begin with, given the domination of European, North American, Central and South American, and Japanese music producers and distributors. Equally challenging is sustaining popularity in the global music market. This is why the entire process of Global (G) → Local (L) → Global’ (G’) is untenable if the “L” component of the global division of labor is not creative or unique (i.e., product differentiation) enough

1. In 1963 Louis Armstrong performed with an unknown Korean girl singer, Bok-Hee Yoon, at Walker Hill Hotel, Seoul, in 1963, and later she was featured in the Ed Sullivan Show (Yoon, 1997). Also, Kim Sisters, three daughters of a legendary Korean female singer Nan-Yeong Yi, went to Las Vegas with their American manager, Tom Ball, and eventually appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show several times (*Hankooki.com*, July 10, 2008).

to attract producers and distributors, not to mention global fan groups.

K-pop's differentiation strategy to make the "L" process attractive to a global audience is roughly threefold: (1) numbers; (2) physique; and (3) voice-dance coordination. Every artistic expression has archetypes found in either its own traditional art form or foreign legends (Barthes, 1972; Jung and Hull, 1980). While the debate about the Korean archetype of K-pop seems futile, three candidates stand out, namely, Japanese or Chinese archetypes (i.e., Chinese culture, J-Pop), Korean horse dancers (i.e., Psy's Gangnam Style mirroring an ancient Korean horse dance), and Western origin (i.e., K-pop came from Michael Jackson). Pop Asianism under the theoretical guidance of cultural hybridity has proposed circular arguments that K-pop came from Chinese and/or Japanese popular culture that has had significant impact on the global pop culture (Iwabuchi, 2004, Forthcoming; Jung, 2011; Shim, 2011). The argument is circular because it cannot explain why Taiwanese popular music is not globally popular as much as K-pop is. Nor can it predict when and how Taiwanese popular music will be globally popular just like K-pop. The circular argument does not explain the reason why K-pop is successful because it wrongfully assumes that K-pop is similar to Chinese or Japanese pop music.

Korean cultural pundits have also advanced similar functionalist arguments that Psy's mega hit, "Gangnam Style," came from the traditional horse dance found on the murals from the ancient Shilla dynasty or that Americans enjoy Psy's song because they are "cowboys" who apparently love horses (Kwon, 2012a, 2012b; Ye, 2012; Kim, 2012; Park, 2012). Furthermore, some Americans have argued that K-pop, epitomized by male musicians dancing and singing simultaneously in groups, came from Michael Jackson's own singing and choreographic styles (Kim, 2010). All these arguments are also circular because their logic is based on the absurdity of: (1) Koreans are born horse dancers and (2) if anyone emulates cowboy dance or Michael Jackson, he/she will be a global idol. If Koreans are born horse dancers, why didn't American cowboys create the horse dance, too? If Michael Jackson was the key to K-pop's global stardom, why didn't Taiwanese singers

mimic Jackson's music/dance and become world stars, too?

This paper is not concerned with musical archetypes for popular music in general and K-pop in particular. Instead, this paper centers on a K-pop producer's point of view by focusing on their efforts at differentiating K-pop from other musical genres. Producers are concerned with singers becoming global stars and eventually generating high cash returns on initial investments in those would-be stars over a five- to ten-year period (i.e., K-pop venture capitalism). At first glance, K-pop's product differentiation lies in the number of singers staged at one time. Unlike Chinese popular singers, J-Pop bands, or Michael Jackson, K-pop's success initially came from the very large number of singers and dancers singing and dancing simultaneously on stage. TVXQ, Girls' Generation, Big Bang, Super Junior, 2PM, Shinee, Beast, and others constitute archetypal success cases for the K-pop globalization drive through an attractive "L." The localization process therefore includes a special (or Korean) staging formation for boy and girl bands previously unheard of in other countries. Peculiar only in K-pop, K-pop music features singer-dancers on stage who maintain changing dancing formations that quickly change with strict or perfect synchronization. From the beginning to the end of a song, singer-dancers take turn in occupying the spotlighted center stage one by one, as if there were no lead vocal for the band. Everyone in the band maintains the same vocal and dancing talent in a synchronized movement, as in the Irish river dance, although the river dancers don't sing at all.

The "number" factor alone, however, is not sufficient. Japan's top girl bands, AKB48, SKE48, and HKT48, feature 48 singers and dancers at the same time, making them constantly visible on the Oricon chart. However, they have not had any global success much akin to that of K-pop girl bands, such as Girls' Generation, which features only nine members. K-pop's "physique" factor therefore must be taken into consideration in its differentiation strategy. In other words, Girls' Generation and Wonder Girls are at least 10 inches taller than AKB48 or HKT48 members, let alone the fact that the Korean singers show off much sexier and sophisticated looks and bodies than their Japanese counterparts. Japan's top male idol group, Arashi, which features five

members, also pale in comparison with the physique of their male K-pop counterparts. TVXQ, originally featuring five members, and Shinee, also featuring five members, are at least 10 inches taller than Arashi members. As a result, K-pop music videos and concerts are much more visually appealing than those of other Asian (especially, Japanese or Chinese) counterparts. The emphasis on the physique side of performers simultaneously implies that K-pop idol groups have different sources of global attraction from those of African or African-American music artists. Targeting Asian and Western female fans mostly, K-pop emphasizes thin, tall, and feminine looks with adolescent or sometimes very cute facial expressions, regardless of whether they're male or female singers. On the contrary, Caribbean and African American singers highlight their colonial-style male attractions with body looks that are not manicured, cosmeticized, or thoroughly shaved.

Even though Western Caucasian and other ethnic boy and girl bands may want to choose to rely on the physique factor for their immediate rise to stardom, they often fall short of fans' expectation in terms of dance-singing coordination in large groups. This is the third feature predominant in globally popular K-pop idols. The "L" process within the K-pop industry involves a high level of specific in-house investments provided by entertainment companies themselves that act like venture capital firms. The learning process of mastering how to sing and dance is crucial in the Korean "L" process of the entire global division of labor, as similar learning processes in the training of Korean archery and golf players are also pivotal. Particularly, the length of learning period is noticeably long often ranging from five to ten years. The three major K-pop managing firms, or K-pop venture capitalist firms, select potential idols through internal auditions and/or their K-pop cram schools. Trainees go through vocal, dancing, language, and theatrical acting lessons for at least five hours a day in the evening after school. They have to carry out regular physical fitness trainings as well as take skin and other beauty therapies. The entire program resembles that of a total institution, as trainees are sometimes banned from using cell phones during training (Ho, 2012).

Table 2. K-pop's G-L-G' Process

	Global	Local	Global'
Input Process	European, American, Japanese composers	Competing local composers	Competing non-European, non-American, non-Japanese composers
Manufacturing Process	Competing European, American, Japanese entertainment co.'s & choreographers	Education & Training Choreograph Musical variation Refining	Competing Chinese, Latin American, Middle Eastern, African, Southeast Asian entertainment co.'s
Distribution Process	Competing regional distributors	Competing local distributors	Japanese, European, American distributors

This is why some critics call the learning process very abusive of the trainees, although K-pop managers defend their programs by arguing that the K-pop cram school is no different from college prep schools, exam cram schools, golf school, and other similar institutions. K-pop managers emphasize the fact that they pay for all the K-pop education and training, unlike other cram schools in Korea.² After the entire period of training, K-pop idols possess very different skills of singing, dancing, speaking foreign languages, and acting from their competing singers from China or Japan. They also look much sexier and trimmed than their competitors from other countries.

With finished products in the form of global concert tours, CDs, DVDs, and music videos downloaded or streamlined on the internet, K-pop companies go abroad to market finished goods through global distributors. Since CDs and DVDs must be protected by copyright, all K-pop companies rely on Japanese distributors for Japanese and other Asian markets. For concert tours, K-pop companies rely on local concert organizers who are also label sellers in the specific market. However, income from these finished goods is not big compared to royalty income from YouTube and other social media sites (SMS). YouTube is a revolutionary SMS that has provided unexpected opportunities to

2. Based on the interviews with the CEO Youngmin Kim and the A&R Manger Chris Lee at SM Entertainment on Nov. 13, 2012 and Dec. 20, 2012, respectively.

K-pop producers, while J-pop Asia and vevo are latecomer competitors to YouTube in the global music industry.

IV. K-pop's Place in the Global Music Industry

K-pop's global ascendance is not a result of its cultural hybridity that Korea imported from China or Japan. Korean culture, be that Confucian or hybrid, has never been popular in Asia, let alone the world. Back in the 1990s, Japanese or Chinese viewers did not tune in to watch Korean TV dramas or films, listen to Korean music or attend Korean singers' concerts in Seoul, eat out in a Korean restaurant or cook Korean food at home, or drink Korean rice wine or *soju* (i.e., cheap local alcohol brewed and distilled from sweet potatoes).

The global success of K-pop in the 21st century represents a unique historical and geographical meaning in the present world system. First and foremost, Korean singers have obtained a distinctive physique, either through a long process of evolution or mutation (or simply through cosmetic surgeries), which was unimaginable among Koreans up until the 20th century. Second, the political democratization of Korea has lifted censorship or bans on both Korean and Western types of popular music, including the free importation of Japanese popular culture in Korea. Korean popular cultural content has therefore been far more diverse and creative compared to its history under dictatorship, and is now easily exported to the Japanese market that has opened up its market to Korean content at the same time Korea did for Japanese cultural content. Third, technological advancement in the 21st century has allowed for a primitive form of cosmopolitanism at least in the virtual world, where fans from all over the world can enjoy global content from various different countries, including Korea. Without this new digital technology (or real time streaming and the new social media), the rise of K-pop as it is recognized today would not have been possible. Fourth, the advancement of the global capitalist economy that has successfully opened up Chinese, Indian, Latin American, and the vast Southeast Asian markets, has

allowed for less biased investments and inputs in the Asian music industry than before from Western music producers and distributors.

All these factors, however, do not suggest that either Asian or Korean (or both) cultural content enjoys the same or similar status in the global popular culture market. The K-pop phenomenon simply reinforces the world system view where the global economy, including the cultural market, is more based on the global division of labor than ever and that K-pop represents a new cultural content that provides unexpected windfall to Western and Japanese music producers and distributors by outsourcing manufacturing of the popular music to Korea. Unless Korea obtains technologies, capital, and social capital in the global music industry, it will continue to maintain its semi-peripheral role of export manufacturing, similar to how Hyundai and Samsung rest their corporate survival on the continuous export of finished cars and electronic gadgets to the center markets.

V. Conclusion

K-pop in the 2010s has rekindled global scholarly attention on Hallyu, which at one point has been considered a declining popular cultural industry. Korean pop singers such as TVQX, SNSD, Wonder Girls, and Psy are popular among a large number of consumers in Asia, Europe, and North America. The dominant explanation behind this unique cultural phenomenon has rested on the concept of cultural hybridity or Pop Asianism (i.e., continuation and expansion of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian subcultures in the global cultural market). In this paper, however, I argued that the globalization of K-pop involves a much more complicated process of globalizing-localizing-globalizing musical content that originated from Europe compared to what the hybridity or Pop Asianism arguments suggest. Korea's place in the global music industry represents a new technique of locating already common and popular musical content in Europe or elsewhere, modifying it into Korean content, and then redistributing it to the global music market. K-pop is an effort to network global talent pools and

social capital in the formerly disconnected music industry, rather than an effort to emulate and slightly modify Japanese pop culture. As such, in the global music industry, Korea occupies a structural hole between Western and East Asian music industries.

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