

Manufacturing Creativity: Production, Performance, and Dissemination of K-pop*

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Abstract

The rise of K-pop (Korean pop) as a new global music genre has wrought theoretical turmoil within the field of cultural studies. This article argues that the global ascendance of K-pop can primarily be attributed to the passionate support of inter-Asian audiences. However, the actual production, performance, and dissemination of K-pop contents have little to do with the Asian pop-culture system. Although the manufacture of K-pop music and its performers depends on Korean talent and management, K-pop producers tend to rely heavily on the global music industries of North America and Europe for their creative content. The global dissemination of K-pop would not have been possible without global social network service (SNS) sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter—none of which are owned or operated by Asians. This article argues that the manufacturing of creativity in non-Western music, as illustrated by the case of Hallyu, involves three stages: globalization of creativity, localization of musical contents and performers, and global dissemination of the musical contents through social media.

Keywords: K-pop (Korean pop), Hallyu, creativity, music industry, globalization, localization, social network service (SNS) sites

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Introduction

K-pop's (Korean pop) recent explosion onto the global music scene has caused a stir among cultural studies scholars, particularly those specializing in Japanese pop culture. Scholars from Japan and elsewhere have long argued that K-pop, like other genres of Hallyu, is merely a derivative of J-pop or Japanese popular culture (see *inter alia*, Iwabuchi 2004, 2013; Chua 2004, 2012). For instance, it has been widely claimed that Psy's "Gangnam Style" and multiple hits by Girls' Generation were only able to achieve their enormous popularity—both regionally (i.e., in Asia) and globally—due to their cultural and geographical affiliation with the larger Asian (or inter-Asian) cultural system, which was established and dominated by Japan, India, and China (Iwabuchi 2004, 2013; Park 2006; Hirata 2008; Ryoo 2009; Shim 2011). These arguments seem dubious at best, given K-pop's unprecedented simultaneous success in China, India, Japan, Europe, and the United States, something never achieved by Indian, Chinese, or Japanese pop music. But all that aside, these responses reflect the confusion that the K-pop phenomenon has created within academia.

This article agrees with the cultural hybrid argument that K-pop's global ascendance has been significantly driven by the passionate support of inter-Asian audiences. However, the actual production, performance, and dissemination of K-pop contents have little to do with the so-called Asian pop-culture system, which would entail K-pop producers globally promoting their artists by actively mimicking Chinese, Japanese, or Indian popular music. Instead, after drawing upon Korean talent pools and management to generate music and performers, K-pop producers rely heavily on the global music industries of North America and Europe for creativity. The global dissemination of K-pop content would not have been possible without the global social network service (SNS), including YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, none of which are owned or operated by Asians. The manufacturing of creativity in non-Western music involves three stages: (1) globalization of creativity, (2) localization of musical contents and performers, and (3) global dissemination of musical contents through SNS.

"Pop Asianism" or cultural hybrid arguments are fundamentally

flawed in that they inherently imply that Asian popular culture is a purely mimetic system with no creativity, or at least much less creative than the European or American popular cultural systems. Viewing K-pop within the context of pop Asianism reduces the entire Korean music industry to a mimetic machine that assiduously copies Western or Japanese pop culture (Iwabuchi 2004, 2013; Jung 2011; Shim 2011). This article argues that K-pop represents a unique system of the global division of labor, geared towards the creation of a new Korea-led system of “manufacturing creativity,” which encourages and mass produces innovative music and musical performances.

Within this system of global division of labor, “manufacturing creativity” is not an oxymoron or a cliché for the exploitation of young Korean artists. Instead, manufacturing creativity signifies opening the entire global music industry to musical talents and audiences from all corners of the world, allowing them to participate in an endless interactive communication and discourse about music from both “central” and “peripheral” countries.

This article briefly documents the K-pop phenomena under a new system of manufacturing creativity, followed by a lengthy theoretical discussion of that term. The article ends with a discussion of the relationship between K-pop and the global music industry, which is actively adopting or adapting to the system of manufacturing creativity.

K-pop Phenomenon

Understanding the K-pop phenomenon requires the knowledge of K-pop’s sustainable business model that is firmly based on musical talent and creativity. K-pop, which is defined as a new Korean popular music genre for export (Oh and Park 2012), has existed as an independent pop music genre for more than two decades, as its starting point can be traced to 1992, with the debut of Seo Taiji and Boys and their new genre of hip-hop dance music (Lie 2012). The explosive popularity of the group’s “Hayeoga” in Korea motivated them to give concerts in Japan, but the endeavor

proved in the end to be unsuccessful. However, since 1998, K-pop has been massively exported to China, Japan, Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe. Of these export markets, K-pop has had the most success in Japan, which has very strict piracy laws and is thus boastfully considered to be the world's second largest popular music market (Yoo 2013). Thus far, a number of K-pop acts have found great success in Japan and China, including BoA, H.O.T., Shinhwa, S.E.S., TVXQ (or Tohoshinki in Japan), Super Junior, Babyvox, Se7en, Skull, BIGBANG, Rain, Wonder Girls, SS501, Kara, Girls' Generation, etc. (see *inter alia*, Shin 2009; Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007; Lie 2012).

In addition to this continuing success, K-pop has also produced a large number of new hit songs and singers. According to my innovation index for popular music, which multiplies the number of new songs in the top-20 every four weeks by the number of new singers or groups in the same chart, indicates that Japan has the highest innovation ratio, while the United States has the lowest score. Korea ranks in the middle between Japan and the United States.

While the innovation index does not directly correlate to the global popularity and influence of the songs and singers, it does reveal patterns in the popular music industries of various countries. For example, the United States, which represents the world's largest popular music market, tends to focus on creating songs that sell consistently and stay on the charts longer than Japanese or Korean songs. Japan, the second largest pop music market, aims for quick-selling hits with much less longevity, while Korea, a developing pop music market with strong export growth, mixes the Japanese and U.S. strategies.

Among the three markets, Japan is the most turbulent, while the United States is the most stable, indicating that the latter is dominated by large recording companies. The Korean market is also quite stable, with large entertainment companies controlling a large portion of the market. However, Korea also shows more innovation than the United States, clearly indicating that the success of a K-pop song relies on a mix of innovation and sustainability. Thus, the K-pop market seems to be striving for an ideal mix of relative stability and an average level of innovation.

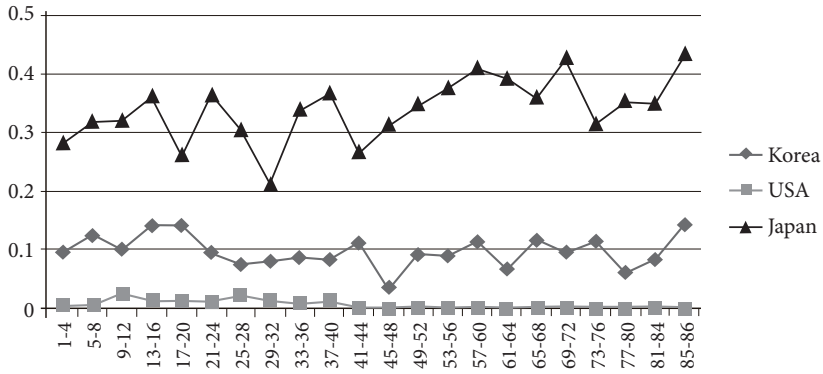


Figure 1. Innovation Index for Popular Music in Three Countries (2011–2013)

Source: Author's modification of *Billboard Charts* (September 2011– May 2013).

Note: Figures are for weeks 1 to 86 under observation.

Manufacturing Creativity

In the field of social science, research on creativity has affirmed that the “novel combinations” in “creative destruction” that mark instances of radical innovation prohibit the process of manufacturing. Since creativity cannot be divided up and reduced into constituent parts, “novel combinations” cannot be generated through a typical manufacturing division of labor (see *inter alia*, Schumpeter 1962; Nooteboom 2000; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka and Konno 2003; Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Every society, including domains or disciplinary fields, offers infinite possibilities for combinations, but only those combinations that can change the society can be labeled “novel” and “destructive” (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, 28). Changes to existing domains are typically attributed to individual geniuses (e.g., Da Vinci, Edison, Picasso, Einstein, etc.). These individuals either work alone or as part of a small team of creative researchers, which would indicate that such creativity can never be manufactured.

Thus far, studies on K-pop have yet to reach a consensus on whether K-pop is a creative domain, or if it is merely changing the domain of the

music industry or popular music. Although many non-Koreans working in the field of popular music might not consider K-pop to be as creative as American popular music or J-pop, Koreans working in the field consider the current K-pop phenomenon to be absolutely revolutionary. Never before has a Korean musical artist “rocked the world” by achieving popularity on the scale of today’s artists, such as Psy, Rain, Girls’ Generation, TVXQ, and 2PM. These pop music acts are dramatically expanding the domain of K-pop from a local and national art into a globalized music business.

As Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 25) and Crossan et al. (1999) have quite lucidly demonstrated, creativity typically involves having one’s creative ideas approved by the “external community,” through an arduous process of “interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing” creative intuition. This concept is contradictory to the above definition of creativity, which posits an internal, individualized, and therefore purely intuitive process. In K-pop, like any other popular music genre, the external community or the agents of interpretation, integration, and institutionalization are numerous, diverse, and exceptionally diligent, evaluating songs on an almost weekly basis through sales charts, fan blogs, fan activities, and concert participation.

If K-pop has dramatically expanded the domain of Korean popular music to Asia and even to the world, and it is constantly being evaluated by a large number of diverse and external stakeholders, it is necessary to ask how K-pop is manufactured, thus enabling a new concept of manufacturing creativity. As Figure 1 indicates, K-pop is much more innovative and creative than U.S. pop music in terms of musical diversity, while K-pop has more longevity on average than J-pop. By situating itself between Japan and the United States, K-pop provides its fans with the best of both worlds: creativity and longevity.

The popularity of K-pop is staggering, given the relatively small population and the low number of popular music artists, as compared to the United States or Japan. How can the K-pop industry successfully sustain itself while manufacturing creativity? The answer lies in the concept of “connect and development” (C&D), popularized by Proctor and Gamble’s

(P&G) new innovation strategy (Huston and Sakkab 2006). In C&D, unlike in research and development (R&D), the internal process of innovation or creativity is often bypassed in favor of borrowing, buying, or outsourcing creativity and innovation to external communities. Larry Huston and Nabil Sakkab, R&D directors at P&G, who work closely with the company's CEO A. G. Lafley, explain the *raison d'être* of C&D as follows:

[M]ost of P&G's best innovations had come from connecting ideas across internal businesses. And after studying the performance of a small number of products we'd acquired beyond our own labs, we knew that external connections could produce highly profitable innovations, too. Betting that these connections were the key to future growth, Lafley made it our goal to acquire 50 percent of our innovations outside the company. The strategy wasn't to replace the capabilities of our 7,500 researchers and support staff, but to better leverage them. Half of our new products, Lafley said, would come *from* our own labs, and half would come *through* them (Huston and Sakkab 2006, 3).¹

Although outsourcing creativity is now common in many international business enterprises, the practice of internally reprocessing creative ideas that have been externally generated still seems fairly new to the entertainment industry in Asia. As I will explain in the final section, this unfamiliarity means that the internal reprocessing being done by K-pop producers is even more challenging than that being done in the labs of P&G, since there is no precedence for how to apply C&D in the cultural industry. In fact, this practice is so anomalous that it requires another internal creativity process, which I call "localizing musical contents and performers." This process is a manufacturing stage that occurs after the "globalization of creativity" and before the "global dissemination of the musical contents through SNS."

Nonetheless, as Table 1 indicates, all three major entertainment companies in the K-pop industry have actively outsourced creativity and

1. Italics from the original.

reprocessed it in their own labs to generate megahits in Korea, Asia, and the rest of the world. It would seem that the K-pop industry has already mastered the art of C&D in the popular music domain, just as the process of C&D revolutionized Hallyu in general, and Korean pop music in particular. The case of SM Entertainment is particularly emblematic of how K-pop producers globalize creativity, internally localize creativity, and globally disseminate their music through SNS.

Table 1. K-pop's Globalization Drive

Company	Producer (K-pop artist)	Composer (K-pop artist)	Choreographer (K-pop artist)	Dis-tributor
SM Entertainment	Teddy Riley (Girls' Generation) Polow da Don (Girls' Generation)	Busbee (Girls' Generation) Alex James (Girls' Generation) Kalle Engstrom (Girls' Generation) Oslo Recordings (Super Junior) Jeff Hoeppepner (f(x)) Thomas Troelsen (f(x)) Wellem Laseroms (f(x)) Nao Tanaka (BoA) Ryoji Sonoda (BoA, TVXQ) Thomas Troelsen (SHINee)	Nick Bass (Super Junior, SHINee) Misha Gabriel (BoA, SHINee)	YouTube
YG Entertainment	Will.i.am (2NE1) Rodney Jerkins (Se7eN)	Daishi Dance (BIGBANG) Nagao Dai (Se7eN)		
JYP Entertainment	Nick Cannon (Wonder Girls)	Claude Kelly (Wonder Girls)	Jonte (Wonder Girls)	

Source: Oh and Park (2012, 379).

The Strategy of Creativity at SM Entertainment

SM Entertainment (hereafter, SM) founded in 1995 by Lee Soo-man, a former singer-songwriter and entertainment manager, is generally considered to be the largest entertainment management firm in Korea, with an annual revenue of \$90 million. From its onset, Lee has held the most pivotal role in the firm, taking it upon himself to direct and choreograph the entire process of recruiting and training young music talent, hiring composers, and producing and marketing music videos and albums. This type of one-man show is quite rare in the music industry, and is only possible because of the relatively small size of SM.

Over the last two decades, SM has expanded exponentially, in terms of overall size, human resources, and revenue. Thus, in May 2005, the management of the company was divided between the creative department, led by Lee Soo-man, and the business department, led by Kim Young-min. Also, creativity management is mostly conducted by a 14-member A&R (artists and repertoire) team, under Lee's direct control and supervision. The most important distinction between SM and other music companies—both domestic and international—has been the company's fierce pursuit for globalization since its earliest days. As Table 1 shows, SM globally outsources various aspects of its music production more frequently and more diversely than either YG or JYP, which typically rely on domestic music talents, including Psy, who consistently works with Yoo Gun-hyung for music composition (e.g., "Gangnam Style" and "Gentleman").

Chris Lee, a supervisor of the A&R and Production Teams at SM, confirmed that, since its establishment, SM has focused on performers who were talented at both singing and dancing.² The company's model was Michael Jackson, who regularly showcased his revolutionary combination of singing and dancing skills in various music videos on MTV. In fact, Teddy Riley, co-producer of Jackson's 1991 album *Dangerous*, worked closely with Chris Lee to compose and produce the Girls' Generation hit

2. Chris Lee, interview by the author, December 21, 2012.

song, “The Boys.” Lee recalled that “[Riley] told me last year [2011] that K-pop would be a global phenomenon, and I’m now really surprised to see it actually happening.”³ The concept of music globalization came from Lee Soo-man himself, who studied in the United States in the early 1980s and often watched Jackson’s videos on MTV. However, Lee’s globalization project was fraught with difficulties, since SM had no close contacts in the American or European music industries. They had to resort to simply writing e-mails to or leaving phone messages for major Western composers and producers. The idea of outsourcing the songwriting and composition, rather than simply mimicking Western songs in Korea, was introduced in order to preserve the originality and creativity of SM’s songs. Notably, Western composers have traditionally shied away from working in Korea, where intellectual property laws are not strictly enforced, because they usually rely on royalties for their income.

SM’s global strategy of outsourcing has nonetheless evolved through trial and error, with a stiff learning curve that was elevated by the Korean ethos of speeding up the process by skipping some of the essential learning stages. By hook or by crook, SM was eventually able to expand their international business network, thanks in large part to the Swedish music producer Pelle Lidell, who runs a music camp for the European and North American popular music industry. SM first connected with Lidell at the global music conference MIDEM, through an Australian music entrepreneur named Hayden Bell, who wrote “I Spy” for SM’s leading singer BoA. According to Chris Lee, Lidell helped SM establish the music camp Fantasia (Fantastic Asia), which spawned several songs for SM:

Fantasia Camp continued for four days and three nights without rest. Lidell invited SM representatives and 21 composers and musicians to create 21 different songs exclusively for SM. As the producer, Lidell covered all the costs. Each team included one track writer [for percussion, instrumental, and recording], one top-line writer [for melody], and one lyricist. On the first night, each of the seven teams wrote one song, and then on the next night they switched around the teams and

3. Chris Lee, interview by the author, December 21, 2012.

did it all over again. So by the end of the third night, SM had 21 new songs. It was simply amazing to witness the entire process of producing one song per night, which had been unimaginable in Korea.⁴

SM is now boastful of their strategic partnership with Lidell, who has allowed them to complete their outsourcing network. However, simply globalizing or outsourcing music composition does not always guarantee success on the global scale, as JYP and YG have learned all too well. Japanese J-pop managers have thus far avoided outsourcing composition to global sources, since their domestic music market is huge enough to support an internal music production system. Therefore, the internal processes of finishing, mastering, and assembling a song are just as important as the outsourcing. Chris Lee carefully explained how Lee Soo-man controls the entire process of finishing:

For example, take the song “Twinkle,” the first song by TaeTiSeo (TTS), which came out in early 2012. . . . In that song, Lee Soo-man told me to change the lyric “easily visible” to “instantly visible.” He definitely wants to be involved in every little detail, including the lyrics, the instruments, the title, the melody, everything. He literally produces the whole song. His process is not the norm in our business, because he’s not happy to just outsource the music to some composers and then record the songs with the artists. For him, producing involves a meticulous step-by-step process of refining, changing, and finishing the song. Sometimes the end result is completely different from the original music score.⁵

The secret of SM’s success, therefore, derives from this internal process of modifying the original creative work to make it more viral to the actual listeners, whoever and wherever they may be. This is not the same as merely copying universal trends in global popular music. Instead, SM acquires samples of universal musical content from Europe and the United States and then modifies them into a unique SM composition that is not yet globally universal, but has the potential to become the next global norm.

4. Chris Lee, interview by the author, December 21, 2012.

5. Chris Lee, interview by the author, December 21, 2012.

However, the internal modification process (or localization) requires a set of creative skills (i.e., tacit knowledge) that no one else at SM seems to have mastered yet, except for Lee Soo-man. Chris Lee considers this to be a serious problem:

For example, Yu Yeong-jin, Lee Soo-man's composer, had to train for three years before he could learn how to satisfy Lee's eyes and ears. The mass manufacturing of creativity presents a big problem. At SM, there's only one person who can manage and coordinate music videos, costumes, television broadcasting, and everything else. Therefore, we need a second Lee Soo-man. Right now, we're systematizing this process. Lee is actually having us write a manual for producing music. So now every department at SM has a manual that includes Lee's production know-how, CT (cultural technology), and creativity. The manuals let us bypass Lee in our tasks, so we're no longer totally reliant on him. But he still often intervenes in the process. Hopefully, these teams represent the foundation of the mass manufacturing [of creativity]. We need geniuses, but we also need apprentices. Lee Soo-man is developing the apprentice system here.⁶

Production requires creativity and processes created by geniuses, but the SM style of localization also demands a steady supply of high-quality performers, which is the most important factor in local production of K-pop. Manufacturing creativity in the SM fashion requires a stable of top performers at a relatively cheaper cost. Unlike popular music performers from other countries, K-pop artists must learn how to speak (or at least pronounce words correctly) in Korean, English, Japanese, and Chinese. On top of their linguistic abilities, K-pop artists must dance and sing exceptionally well, both alone and in groups, and they also often act in musicals, TV dramas, and movies. To find attractive and gifted young performers and then train them in all of these skills at a reasonable cost is extremely difficult. And in order to get a decent return on such an investment, they must be transformed into global celebrities.

6. Chris Lee, interview by the author, December 21, 2012.

Writing a manual for manufacturing creativity is very difficult, but then so is the process of artist management, which is a key function of the A&R team. SM's CEO Kim Young-min has emphasized that performance contracts with SM are not exploitive:

The cultures and languages of Korea, China, and Japan are so different from each other that you must have special training to overcome the cultural and linguistic differences. So we ask our trainees to go through many educational hurdles. They go to normal school during the day, and then receive after-school training that lasts until late at night. But this is no different than typical middle or high school kids, who go to after-school programs to cram for college entrance exams. Of course, one difference is that education at SM is free. We pay for the teachers, facilities, equipment, costumes, and virtually everything the trainees need. The contracts used to be for five years, until BoA signed a seven-year contract with Avex Entertainment in Japan. Avex demanded a seven-year contract, and after long legal consultation, we agreed to it. BoA was a huge success, so we don't regret that contract, which was unprecedented in Korea. But then Girls' Generation had to sign a ten-year contract for their deal in the United States, so now we have ten-year contracts at SM. Outsiders may think this sounds like a slave contract, but they must consider the number of years of free training that the artists get in order to become elite performers.⁷

Chris Lee, who is in charge of all the trainees at SM, concurred with Kim's argument:

We are extremely selective in choosing performers, so just to make it to our program, all SM trainees must defy the odds of 10,000 or more to one. Therefore, whether it be their own choice or the will of their parents, these young trainees are ready to devote their body and soul to perfecting their artistic skills at SM. We consider that SM's role is to fulfill the desire of the trainees. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that the A&R staff members are the slaves, not the trainees. During

7. Kim Young-min, interview by the author, July 18, 2012.

training, SM pays for every single cost incurred by the pupils. Critics often accuse us of imprisoning them until they make their debuts, but all of our trainees are free to quit any time they like. Just like teachers in regular schools, we are teaching them how to sing and dance. Just like schools, we have rules, too. For example, trainees cannot date another trainee; they cannot use their cell phone during practice. These basic rules in no way violate the human rights of these kids.⁸

SM has clearly mastered the process of outsourcing creativity, while internally supplying and training talented young artists. The most surprising aspect of SM's international strategy has been the swiftness of its success and huge profitability, which are unprecedented among other non-Western music entrepreneurs.

What is “Global” in the Global Music Industry?

The final stage of disseminating and distributing K-pop involves both local and global music distributors, including Avex in Japan and iTunes and YouTube in the United States and rest of the world. Among these, the single most important source of profit for SM is the SM Town channel on YouTube (Oh and Park 2012). In other words, SM's success hinges on an entirely new aspect of the global music industry, where distribution is becoming more and more centralized by international platforms such as iTunes and YouTube (Oh and Park 2012). This dramatic change also augurs a shift from the traditional strategy of business-to-customer (B2C) marketing (i.e., concerts and appearances) to business-to-business (B2B) distribution (i.e., music producers relying on iTunes and YouTube). Traditional record labels and companies, which were once the largest component of the global music industry, are slowly dying out, replaced by mobile or internet-based music streaming or downloading services, a process called “unbundling” (Hilderbrand 2007; Mangold and Faulds 2009; Elberse 2009; Oh and Park 2012).

8. Chris Lee, interview by the author, July 18, 2012.

Other Asian or non-European music entertainment firms have not been able to easily emulate SM, even though the company's organizational structure and business strategy are known to the public. The same could be said of Korean companies trying to compete with Samsung or LG. Both YG and JYP have tried the option of "mimetic isomorphism" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), by using the same type of Korean input (e.g., talents, resources, social capital, etc.), but thus far they have fallen far short of SM's achievements in terms of international networking and total revenue. YG's recent mega success with Psy's "Gangnam Style" and "Gentleman" was only made possible by Psy's realization of the importance of YouTube. JYP's international strategy of getting its group, the Wonder Girls, to tour with the Jonas Brothers in the United States yielded only minor results.

Some have suggested that Chinese music companies could easily emulate K-pop's success (Maliangkay 2010, 37). But singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan have thus far been unable to break through in the Japanese popular music market, unlike K-pop singers, who have received promotional assistance from Korean-Japanese entertainers and producers. For several reasons, Chinese musical artists are not likely to penetrate the Japanese music market (let alone the U.S. market) for the next 10 to 20 years. First and foremost, Chinese music producers still rely heavily on copying Korean and Japanese music without localizing it with specific Chinese color or flavor. Second, like most J-pop singers, Chinese entertainers tend to lack the physique of their Korean counterparts. Third, the choreography and training of singers in China is lackluster compared to Korea or Japan. Fourth, the most successful Western composers are unwilling to sell their music to China due to copyright issues. Finally, many Chinese singers are reluctant to sell their talents to Chinese producers, who have no access to the international cultural network, which has very different standards and values from those in China.

Then what does "global" mean in the global music industry, for Asians and non-Asians? As the SM case illustrates, the process of globalization-localization-globalization' ($G \rightarrow L \rightarrow G'$) can be very economically successful for producing popular culture in a postcolonial region. The G-L-G' cycle of manufacturing creativity incorporates C&D (composer

outsourcing); R&D (internal training and refinement); and SNS distribution of music (R&D of a new medium in the United States). In this sense, musical entertainment in postcolonial regions can prosper by outsourcing musical composition in order to formulate strong international partnerships by cultivating an advanced system for training local talent (Oh 2009) and by taking advantage of a highly developed SNS structure to globally distribute its materials.

Table 2. K-pop’s G-L-G’ Process

	Global outsourcing (G)	Local manufacturing (L)	Global distribution (G')
Input process	European, American, Japanese composers		
Manufacturing process		Education and training; choreography; musical variation; and refinement	
Distribution process			Japanese, European, American distributors

As Table 2 shows, each of these processes is challenged by competitors in the global music industry. For example, in the global manufacturing of creativity, non-American, non-European, and non-Japanese “track guys” or melody composers can produce world-class popular music, as evidenced by the huge success of Los del Rio’s “Macarena” and Psy’s “Gangnam Style.” Thus far, however, only Spanish and Korean singers have been able to generate such wide success without relying on the global “track guys,” indicating that those countries have been able to localize their music in a way that other countries cannot easily emulate. Based on this evidence, in the twenty-first century, global success in the popular music industry requires insti-

tutional connections within the production and distribution markets, as well as a concrete local foundation as a potential springboard to propel artists from postcolonial regions into the global music industry.

Conclusion

The rise of K-pop as a new global music genre has caused turmoil among cultural studies scholars, particularly those interested in Japanese pop culture, who have persistently argued that K-pop, like other elements of Hallyu, is a derivative of J-pop or Japanese popular culture. Furthermore, such critics argue that Psy's "Gangnam Style" and the hit songs of Girls' Generation have become popular throughout Asia and much of the world by benefitting from the larger inter-Asian cultural system, which was established and dominated by Japan, India, and China.

This article agrees that K-pop's global ascendance was primarily driven by the passionate support of inter-Asian audiences. However, the actual production, performance, and dissemination of K-pop contents, in fact, have little to do with the so-called Asian pop culture system. Instead, K-pop producers rely heavily on the global music industry in North America and Europe for creativity, while domestically producing performers and managers.

The global dissemination of K-pop contents would not be possible without global SNS sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, none of which originate from Asia. The manufacturing of creativity in Korean music involves three stages: globalization of creativity, localization of musical contents and performers, and the global dissemination of the musical contents through SNS. This article strongly emphasizes that the localization process has been the most important component for making K-pop a global music genre. Moreover, this process is clearly independent from Japanese or Chinese influences, as it is based on Korean methods for music adaptation, talent training, and performance management.

The K-pop industry has established a system of manufacturing creativity that involves outsourcing creativity to European and North Ameri-

can artists and producers. The process of outsourcing also reflects a Korean-style work ethic that involves a tenacious persuasion of global producers for creativity outsourcing despite apparent impossibility. Finally, the G-L-G' process is completed by the digital distribution of K-pop. This system of manufacturing creativity is new, not only in Asia, but throughout the world, and has influenced other Asian pop music producers to emulate the process. However, localization remains the most difficult hurdle for other countries to cross. Future studies of K-pop should attempt to elaborate the localization process in more detail.

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