

K-Pop: The Soundtrack of Korea's Globalization

K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea,
by John Lie. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015. 241 pp.

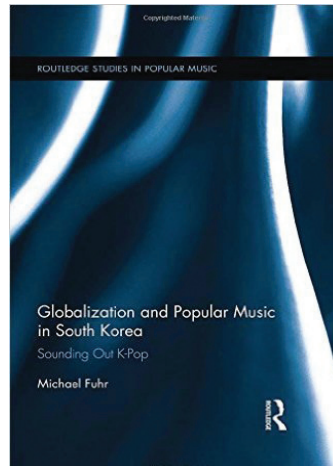
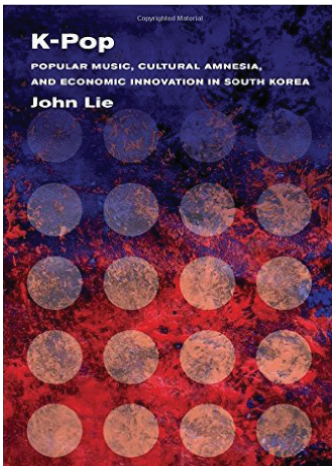
and

Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-Pop,
by Michael Fuhr. New York and London: Routledge, 2016. 256 pp.

LEE Keewoong

The Rise of International K-Pop Scholarship

In July 2012, I was in Taipei attending the biennial Inter-Asia Popular Music Studies Conference (IAPMS). The weather was scorching hot but the fever inside the auditorium felt even hotter. The heat I am speaking about emanated from the enthusiastic participants from all over Asia who were buzzing with new-found joy



Lee Keewoong is a research professor at the Institute for East Asian Studies at Sungkonghoe University. He holds a PhD in sociology from the London School of Economics. His research interests include the cultural industry, popular music, and urban change. His latest publication is “Gentrification effects: The flow of cultural refugees and place making in the vicinities of Hongdae” (City Studies, 2015).

about K-Pop. The official theme of the event was, “Ways of Listening: How Do We Listen to Pop Music in/from Asia, and How Can We Talk about It?” Though the conference intended to cover the music of Asia in general, the star of the show was, without a doubt, K-Pop. Thirteen of the sixty-four papers presented at the conference were devoted to K-Pop or its related topics, and there were a number of other papers which covered non-K-Pop Korean popular music such as rock and trot. It was a dramatic change from the previous conference, held two years before, where the sum total of papers on the Korean Wave, not specifically K-Pop, was three. Personally, I remember the 2012 IAPMS Conference as the moment when international K-Pop scholarship exploded.

K-Pop is now a staple in the international conference circuit, particularly in the disciplines of Popular Music Studies and Korean Studies. In fact, we may even go so far as to claim K-Pop scholarship as a crowded field, inundated as it is with literature covering the many dimensions of the topic. Specifically, there have been studies on gender (Jung 2011; Maliangkay and Song 2015), race (Liew 2013) national identity (Jung 2015; Khoo 2015), language (Lee 2004; Jin and Ryoo 2014), the music industry (Epstein 2015; Kang 2015; Kim 2015), media (Oh and Park 2012; Ono and Kwon 2013), and fan culture (Siriyuvasak and Shin 2007; Khiun 2013; Sung 2013; Choi and Maliangkay 2015), to list but a few in English. Increasingly diverse topics are being covered and debated. This makes K-Pop a tricky subject as it is becoming increasingly difficult to say something that has not already been said. This is the first hurdle any new K-Pop literature needs to clear. Despite the great interest in the topic, it is still true that international K-Pop scholarship remains in its infancy, as the dearth in English-language book-length expositions on the topic testifies. Until very recently, *K-Pop: Roots and Blossoming of Korean Popular Music* (2012) by Kim Changnam was the only authoritative and systematic account of K-Pop apart from popular guidebooks (e.g. Russell 2014) and edited volumes (e.g. Choi and Maliangkay 2015).

In this circumstance, John Lie’s *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (shortened to *K-Pop* in this article) and Michael Fuhr’s *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-Pop* (shortened to *Sounding Out*), the two books reviewed here, are welcome additions to the hitherto scant K-Pop bibliography. Both Lie and Fuhr are of Korean descent. The former is a Korean-American scholar of sociology who grew up in Korea, Japan, and Hawaii, whereas the latter is a German ethnomusicologist with a Korean mother and was brought up in Germany. The authors’ dual identities render them ideally positioned to play the role of cultural translators, as they are acquainted with the cultures concerned.

To an extent, that is indeed the role they perform with their books—transferring what is considered an aspect of Korean culture to a target audience of Anglophone, presumably non-Korean, academics and intellectuals. Both authors appear competent in the job. They are at once knowledgeable of Korean history and culture, and have a sense of the demands of their target audiences. While Korean authors sometimes find it difficult to engage foreign readers since they tend to be too fixated on local interests and agenda, Lie's and Fuhr's keen understanding of their readership is certainly beneficial for initiating a new dialogue on the subject.

However, the work of cultural translation is far from straightforward. In the cases of *K-Pop* and *Sounding Out*, there are two concerns. First, both authors expose themselves as non-experts on Korean popular music. Popular music is very difficult to study for newcomers because of its ephemerality. It is music of here and now always subject to oblivion. This means the field of popular music is rife with misinformation, wrong memories, and ungrounded rumors. Furthermore, popular music feeds on myths. The past is constantly reconstructed and re-remembered. Without a certain amount of expertise, it is very difficult to distinguish reliable sources from those that are not. In this respect, it is not surprising to find so many errors in their accounts of Korean popular music, particularly in the historical details. Second, the in-between position of our two authors does not mean neutrality. They have their own issues to tackle and agenda to pursue with regard to their identities. To an extent, these issues and agenda dictate the contents of the books. For example, Fuhr's discussion on mixed ethnicity in Korean pop music (Fuhr 2016, 199-202) is off-topic since this has not been an issue thus far in what is normally called K-Pop. Fuhr's discussion is more an outcome of the author's desire to talk about it than it is relevant to the theme.

As two books handling the same subject matter, *K-Pop* and *Sounding Out* cannot be more different. *K-Pop* is a highly opinionated and at times insightful essay-style offering centered in theoretical speculation. It locates K-Pop in Korea explaining it in terms of the country's history and internal dynamics, and focuses on K-pop as a cultural text, painstakingly debating its artistic merits and values. In contrast, *Sounding Out* is more a textbook account of K-Pop, an empirical analysis rooted in extensive and rigorous fieldwork as it is based on the author's doctoral thesis. It conceptualizes K-Pop as a flowing cultural form, an outcome of transnational mobility and cooperation, and attempts to draw a larger picture of K-Pop as a global cultural phenomenon by analyzing the multiple layers of its construction. In these respects, these two books can be seen as complementary to each other, shedding light on different aspects of the phenomenon. With some reservations, which I will go into in the remaining parts of this review, both

books can serve as good starting points for in-depth understanding of K-Pop. In fact, there are few alternatives at the moment for the English readership. In the following sections, I will discuss each book's handling of K-Pop in more detail.

Subverting the Aesthetic Hierarchy

Frankly, the first impression of Lie's *K-Pop* is not very positive. Despite its title, first of all, there is only one chapter that discusses K-Pop, and the length of the chapter is sixty-six pages, just one-fourth of the entire volume. Long preceding chapters on the history of Korean popular music and Korea makes it feel as though two-thirds of the book is introduction. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, these chapters are replete with errors. I gave up counting inaccurate facts and misjudgments after just first twenty pages. Lie claims, for example, after the marijuana scandal in 1975, that "until the mid-1980s, rock music was silenced in the South Korean soundscape" (Lie 2015, 46). He obviously ignored *Sanullim's* sensational debut in 1977, *Sarangghwa Pyeonghwa's* the next year, and the explosion of campus group sounds from 1977 to 1980. Contrary to his claim, the late 1970s was a heyday for rock music in Korea. Lie's error-strewn lecture on the history of Korean popular music goes on and produces some unintentionally hilarious examples: "Kim Hyön-sik distinguished himself with songs of his own composition" (Lie 2015, 52); "Shinchon Blues were a *minjung kayo* outfit" (Lie 2015, 53); "repression of rock music made young people listen to rock music on short-wave radio" (Lie 2015, 54); "For an ear attuned to the post-Sō (*Seo Taiji*) period, Yi Sön-hüi or Yi Mun-se might as well have been trot singers" (Lie 2015, 59). He also speaks of Hyeuni as Hye and as a trot singer (Lie 2015, 50), when Hye is not her surname and she is not a trot singer.

Lie is said to have grown up in Japan and it shows as he relies heavily on Japanese sources for this book. Perhaps he might feel more comfortable with the Japanese language than Korean. In my view, however, it was a fatal mistake since most of his erroneous claims came from Japanese sources. Furthermore, I find his use of Japanese nomenclature for Korean persons and song titles deeply disturbing. He refers to Cho Yong-pil's hit song, "Dol-awayo Pusanhang-e" (Come back to Pusan Harbor) as "Fuzanko e Kaere," its Japanese title (Lie 2015, 43); idol group *Dong Bang Shin Gi* as Tōhō Shinki (Lie 2015, 105); and composer and saxophonist Gil Ok Yun by his autonym Ch'oe Chi-jōng (which he spells incorrectly, Ch'oe Chi-Sōng is correct) and by his Japanese name Yoshiya Jun (Lie 2015, 44). In the last case, it is his stage

name—Gil Ok Yun—by which he is known in Korea, but Lie does not mention that a single time. Although I understand and am willing to ignore faults and errors in historical details, mistakes of this kind are difficult to turn a blind eye to. These are not just oversights but a matter of scholarly integrity. Unless this book was written for Japanese readers, which it does not appear to be, the author should have done a basic check. It is incredible that Lie thought it was fine to address Korean people by their Japanese names, particularly when those names are not used outside Japan. Even if the book contained great ideas and insights, grave negligence like this tarnishes its reputation and leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of readers.

Thankfully, the chapter on K-Pop shows a significantly lower error rate. This time, however, the chapter is marred by poor organization. The chapter titled “Seoul Calling” is divided into seven sections. The length of each section is uneven and some longer sections are crammed with too many topics. In the section called “Internal and external transformation” (Lie 2015, 130-136), for example, the author charts changes in Korean culture during the last thirty years to explain the global rise of K-Pop. He touches on everything from the *noraebang* or karaoke craze, Confucian ideology, competitive and meritocratic schooling, and plastic surgery to copyright protection, the spread of Western musical conventions, globalization and consumerism, and the Korean Wave—all in six pages! Inevitably, the account is superficial and unfocused, revealing that the author does not have much to say about K-Pop in detail. There is also a vague thematic relationship between sections in that they do not seem coherently linked but arbitrarily placed. It is difficult to understand why some sections are there, such as one on Japan and J-Pop (Lie 2015, 136-140). Even though I tried, I still do not know the function of this section with regard to the thesis of the book. It only serves to distract the reader’s attention.

With my complaints out of the way, which I realize are many, I will now concentrate on assessing the book’s accounts and key arguments. It is instructive to start with recapitulating Lie’s encounter with K-Pop, which he notes at the beginning of the book. What we see here is a typical reaction from a Western-educated culture-rich Korean male intellectual towards what is supposedly populist, lowest-common-denominator music. Initially, he was not interested in K-Pop, and failed to find its artistic merit. Lie’s world turned upside down when K-Pop became a global sensation not just in Asia but also in Western Europe, North America, and Japan. The implication of cultural discrimination aside, Lie appears genuinely unsettled by the fanatical reactions from people in “advanced” countries towards the music he once despised. This book is a sustained effort for him to come to terms with this unsettling

experience and the cultural shifts K-Pop instigated around the world.

Lie handles the issue by mobilizing various theoretical resources and reassessing K-Pop, and mainstream popular music in general, as legitimate music. It seems that one of the main purposes of the book is to persuade readers as well as himself that it is okay to like K-Pop. This topic is intensively discussed in the final two sections, namely “The aesthetics, branding, and character of K-Pop” (Lie 2015, 140-155) and “The legibility and legitimacy of popular music” (Lie 2015, 148-155). These two sections count as unqualified high points of the book and the two redeeming features of an otherwise very problematic work. As Lie saved the best for the last, I would like to outline the author’s thought process and how he eventually reaches his conclusion.

The main argument of *K-Pop* is summed up in its subtitle *Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea*. Lie sees K-Pop as an outcome of the combination of cultural amnesia and economic innovation. Cultural amnesia denotes two-fold severance from tradition: one is from the traditional musical form of *Kugak*, and the other from the dominant culture of Confucianism. Throughout the book, Lie repeatedly emphasizes that K-Pop has nothing to do with Korea’s cultural tradition. Presumably it is his reaction to the influential essentialist discourses of the Korean Wave that relates the global success of Korean popular culture to the supposed superiority of the country’s national culture (e.g. Im 2013; Yun 2014; see Cho 2005 for a critical assessment). Against this, Lie argues that it is ruthless Westernization or Americanization rather than Korea’s cultural tradition that was the key to the worldwide triumph of K-Pop. Lie’s praise of *Seo Taiji*—“*Seo Taiji wa Aideul* invented K-Pop” (Lie 2015, 99)—is in the same logical vein. In his view, Seo’s greatness lies in his being able to narrow the gap between Korean and American popular music culture (Lie 2015, 58). He contends that K-Pop is post-*Seo Taiji* Korean dance pop that is contemporary to American or global pop music, and that it is thanks to the breakthrough achievement of Seo that K-Pop has been possible. While this contention is entirely agreeable, questions still remain. If K-Pop is Americanized contemporary pop music, does that mean it is indistinguishable from the latter? Does K-Pop have distinctiveness? If so, in what ways?

Lie answers these questions by referring to the second factor, economic innovation. Economic innovation here signifies the entrepreneurial spirit of the Korean entertainment industry whose invention of K-Pop was conditioned by dire financial crises and driven by the “export imperative” of the Korean economy (Lie 2015, 109). Thanks to the sudden collapse of the record industry, and the disastrous Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s, the Korean music industry was forced to

embark on a series of innovations. Among them, the most successful and enduring was the invention of the K-Pop formula. Lie enumerates a number of elements that he characterizes as distinctive features of K-Pop: first, the group structure that is flexible, efficient, and has reach; second: the performer self who is polite and professional; and third, almost complete eschewal of the independent musician-artist. The last one is closely related to other peculiarities such as the embrace of the studio system to develop talent, and an extreme division of labor in the creation of songs and videos (Lie 2015, 123-124). Lie considers these traits as purely commercial characteristics of K-Pop. From his point of view, K-Pop is an archetypal commercial enterprise completely devoid of artistic concerns such as authenticity, originality, and autonomy. In this respect, Lie sarcastically poses, “The ‘K’ in K-Pop has more to do with *Das Kapital* than with Korean culture or tradition” (Lie 2015, 130).

On paper, this kind of inauthentic, calculated, and formulaic music cannot be good. This is the kind of music that should be loathed and ridiculed forever. In reality, however, worldwide K-Pop fans are not dopes or dupes manipulated by evil “captains of consciousness” (Ewen 1976), but people who genuinely love K-Pop music and acts, and actively engage in various fan activities purely for pleasure. How is that possible? How can so many people the world over wholeheartedly embrace what is essentially cynical commercial products? This is the challenge Lie takes up. Here, he adopts an anti-Adornian position (see Adorno 1941) and takes the trouble to question the dominant aesthetic dogmas of romanticism. He claims, “if we can liberate our senses from romantic ideology [...], then it may become possible for us to appreciate K-Pop’s interesting and innovative features” (Lie 2015, 145). After criticizing romantic ideals of creative genius, originality and authenticity, Lie goes on to reevaluate what have been deemed negative aspects of K-Pop such as the “hook” and “formula,” and underrated elements such as lyrics, song craft, choreography, and music videos (Lie 2015, 146-148). Lie sees artistic achievements and innovation in all of these areas. In the end, Lie argues that popular music is different from classical music. The former is about everyday beauty, not sublimity (Lie 2015, 147). Being conventional, repetitive, and formulaic is not vice but virtue as popular music should be legible and comprehensible (Lie 2015, 155). It is undeniable that popular music provides joy, pleasure, and even a moral compass to millions of people every day (Lie 2015, 154), and there is nothing inauthentic about the tears and laughter it brings to the listener. Like popular music in general, Lie argues, K-Pop marks the beautiful in ordinary life: a promise of happiness, the

anticipation of bliss (Lie 2015, 155).

Reassembling K-Pop

Michael Fuhr's *Sounding Out* is K-Pop scholarship *tour de force*. It is often the case that a doctoral thesis is a scholar's most ambitious work. Fuhr's book certainly fits this statement. Here, he attempts to disassemble and reassemble the whole phenomenon of K-Pop. Virtually all the elements are taken apart and thoroughly analyzed, and then put back together again to produce a comprehensive picture. This research strategy is reflected in the organization of chapters. Seven chapters are grouped into two parts corresponding to the processes of disassembling and reassembling, respectively. In his analysis, Fuhr draws on his specialties in anthropology and ethnomusicology producing an exemplary interdisciplinary study. The main purpose of the book is to demonstrate the complex and dynamic relationship between the concepts of global imaginary and national identity in the transnational cultural flow of K-Pop. The author explains this with the concepts of three asymmetries—temporal asymmetry, spatial asymmetry, and asymmetries of mobility—which I will go into later.

Unlike *K-Pop*, the first impression of *Sounding Out* is positive. It looks well organized and substantial, and has a much wider scope. Whereas Lie's sights are fixed in Korea, Fuhr takes into account the more complex dynamics of K-Pop such as the global flow of the talent, songs and technologies of its own creation. By doing this, the scale of the research extends to the global. He approaches K-Pop as an arena, cultural traffic and networks. It operates well beyond the boundaries of Korea. This conceptualization of K-Pop allows Fuhr to go further than Lie's take on it as Westernized or Americanized Korean pop or a tamed/commercialized version of American pop. Fuhr refuses to take this stance and tries to make sense of it as a source and result of an ongoing process of cultural globalization. For him, K-Pop is "a thoroughly hybridized product, a unique coalescence of music, visuals, lyrics, dance, and fashion, a postmodern product of pastiche and parody, a carnivalesque celebration of difference, a shiny world of escapism, and a highly participatory cultural practice enacted through digital media" (Fuhr 2016, 10). It means K-Pop is not just cultural text but a whole universe of production and consumption. Adopting this view, Fuhr is able to specify the innovative aspects of K-Pop better than Lie does. Another virtue of this book is its extensive analysis of fieldwork data. It provides readers with the joy of new discoveries and interesting facts. Although it lacks the impact of Lie's last two

sections, Fuhr's is a very solid and informative work on K-Pop.

Part I of the book is made up of two chapters: one on the history of K-Pop and the other on its production. Chapter 2 traces the history of Korean popular music from 1885 to the present. This is the weakest chapter of the whole volume. Although considerably less serious than Lie's, it is another error-strewn discussion all the same. It is regrettable to find claims like "hip-hop and R&B act 015B," (Fuhr 2016, 83) (015B was a pop/rock outfit) and "[g]roups such as the Add4, the Key Boys, *the K'okkiri Brothers*, and He6 initiated the new sound era" (Fuhr 2016, 46) (He6 were latecomers debuted in the 1970s). Mercifully, Fuhr made a wise decision in keeping the chapter short, thus minimizing the damage. The next chapter, "Producing the global imaginary: a K-Pop tropology," is the longest and most ambitious. Here, Fuhr engages in full-blown analyses of various aspects of K-Pop production: terminology, artist names, lyrics, fansubbing, the industry, idol nurturing and training, musical text and convention, group dance, and music video. You would be hard-pressed to find a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of K-Pop.

The results are impressive. Here, I can only list a few highlights from Fuhr's observations. Near the beginning of the book he discusses the mixing of English codes in lyrics, claiming the practice as not a shallow attempt to copy American pop, but rather as a way to provide both a *lingua franca* for international fans and a sense of modernity to the young Korean audience (Fuhr 2016, 64-66). Fuhr also dissects K-Pop artists' common use of enigmatic initials, acronyms, and numbers, rather than their real names (unlike their American counterparts), asserting it as fulfilling the double function of ensuring accessibility for non-Korean audiences and conveying the image of globality to Korean audiences (Fuhr 2016, 62). Fuhr's next topic is the performance-centered aspects of K-Pop songwriting, i.e. the way the songwriting itself is rhythm and dance-based and takes into account dance choreography from the beginning (Fuhr 2016, 82).

He then delves into song hooks, which he claims are strategically composed over a maximum duration of thirty to forty seconds in order to fit the length of ringtones and ringback tones. And unlike Western mainstream pop songs, Fuhr says, K-Pop songs often have fragmentary structures and moods, and show unexpected changes, e.g. Nu ABO by f(x). (Fuhr 2016, 92). He also touches on the signature moves in K-Pop choreography and the ways they elicit active participation from the audience through their kinesthetic qualities (Fuhr 2016, 112). His discussion of K-Pop music videos as heterotopic sites—in the way each opens up a new space or a non-place removed of locality—and his assertion of K-Pop music videos as visual representations of the

globalization strategy pursued by Korean entertainment companies (Fuhr 2016, 118), are compelling.

Though his findings are generally informative, there are a few questionable claims in the chapter too. First of all, Fuhr's "flexible" categorization of K-Pop is confusing. When analyzing K-Pop's rap flow, he takes LeeSsang as an example (Fuhr 2016, 99-102). It is dubious whether LeeSsang could be classified as a K-Pop band. In later chapters, he presents YB (Fuhr 2016, 174-179) and Skull (Fuhr 2016, 179-183) as other examples of K-Pop's entering the American market. At this point, you start wondering whether Fuhr's K-Pop is synonymous with Korean popular music. Next, Fuhr engages in a lengthy discussion on the "*ppong*" factor (Fuhr 2016, 102-108), which he considers a unique characteristic of Korean popular music. In fact, he argues that the *ppong* factor makes the K-Pop sound uniquely Korean. Perhaps it must have been an exciting discovery for him during his research. However, he appears to oversell it. *Ppong* is deemed a necessary evil. Music businesspeople are in favor of it because they believe using it is commercially beneficial. Musicians hate it because it represents quintessential uncoolness. To put it simply, *ppong* is good for making money, but bad for style. Some K-Pop songs might contain *ppong* elements here and there, whether intentionally or not, but it is far from being embraced or deployed as a marker of "Koreanness."

While Part I focuses on microscopic analyses of K-Pop's elements such as text, performance, and management, Part II presents macro-level analyses of K-Pop's dynamics. In particular, Fuhr's concern is asymmetries in the global flow of K-Pop, which he breaks down into the three categories of temporal asymmetries, spatial asymmetries, and asymmetries of mobility. The first is temporal asymmetries. Here, the author touches on the question of temporality, coevality, and cultural lag. Drawing on Iwabuchi (2008), Fuhr discusses different temporalities in the consumption of cultural artifacts. For example, while Taiwanese reception of Japanese TV dramas rested on a sense of coevality, Japanese consumption of imported Asian TV dramas was based on its denial (Fuhr 2016, 151). In the same way, Japanese audiences received Korean TV dramas with nostalgia as if they were transferred from the past. With the advent of K-Pop, however, the temporal gap between the two countries vanished and a sense of coevality replaced the nostalgia. This time, however, Fuhr observes that Koreans show a denial of coevality against less well-off Asian countries. The Asia Song Festival is symbolic of this attitude, which places Korea at center stage and musical acts from other Asian countries as foils. He warns that this could create "bumps and blocks" (like the backlashes against the Korean Wave in Japan, China,

and Taiwan) that impede cultural flow and exchange.

The next chapter is on spatial asymmetries. Here, Fuhr tries to show that the transnational flow of K-Pop is “a complex, multi-layered and at times contradictory phenomenon entangled in multiple strategies, contingencies, and attempts to reference and construct places through musical and visual imaginaries” (Fuhr 2016, 162). For doing this, he analyses the different strategies four artists—BoA, Wonder Girls, YB, and Skull—adopted in entering the American music market. Despite different strategies, a sense of spatial asymmetry was crucial in shaping their respective approaches to the market and produced transformations in their sounds and appearances. BoA conformed to the stereotypical image of the American female pop star; Wonder Girls employed mild *ppong* melodies to distinguish themselves; YB used *kugak* to highlight “Koreanness”; and Skull completely erased his Koreanness and presented himself simply as a reggae artists without a national affiliation. Whatever the method, the sense of spatial asymmetry was forceful in Korean artists’ attempts to make inroads into the American market, Fuhr says, expressed in the belief that Korean pop music will never make it in its original form in the United States. Unfortunately, the book was written just before Psy’s 2012 global smash, “Gangnam Style,” which was never intended for release in the American market. Psy’s success all but brought to an end all those elaborate strategies and costly operations by proving those are not necessary in the age of YouTube and Facebook. It also exposed that spatial asymmetry was a form of ungrounded fear of pop music’s biggest stage rather than a material reality. In this respect, it was interesting to see the way K-Pop’s attempts to “conquer” the U.S. market dramatically subsided after “Gangnam Style.”

Finally, asymmetries of mobility indicate the flow of talent. K-Pop is a paradoxical construct. The “K” in K-Pop signifies Korea but the scale of its operation is global. While “deterritorialization is central to the K-Pop phenomenon” (Fuhr 2016, 18), Korea’s status as K-Pop’s symbolic and material home is indisputable. To put simply, K-Pop is simultaneously flowing and fixed, which produces contradictory sentiments, namely global aspiration and nationalist/patriotic fervor. This is an inflammable contradiction that can develop into full-blown conflict at any time. Although K-Pop has kept an apolitical image, it could always potentially become intensely political due to this contradiction. In this chapter, Fuhr charts the conflicts and negotiations in K-Pop as global mobility. K-Pop recruits talents from all over the world, but the recruited must come to Korea and transform him/herself into a Korean entertainer. The process inevitably involves cultural clashes. In this book, Fuhr examines a few cases including those of Park Jaebeom and Yoo Seung-jun, two Korean-American singers, who caused

controversies by contradicting the nationalist sentiments of Korean people. Fuhr argues that K-Pop's contradictory demand produces a contradictory subject out of an immigrant body, the subject who embodies cosmopolitanism and self-censorship all at once. Fuhr's contention here is difficult to disagree with. However, I would like to point out his narrow sight with regard to the issue of nationalism. Korea is not the only country where K-Pop is embroiled in nationalist controversies. From the abuse of Girls' Generation's images in a Japanese far-right cartoon to the latest case of Tzuyu's forced apology for waving the Taiwanese flag, K-Pop has been a minefield of nationalist dispute for quite some time. As K-Pop's reach broadens, it is put under increasing pressure to toe the line not only to avoid offending the Korean people but also the nationalist sentiments of global people who follow K-Pop.

A Perfect Textbook?

In July 2012, I taught a popular music class at a summer school for a group of overseas students. It was the time when K-Pop's popularity was at an all-time high and had culminated in the explosive success of "Gangnam Style." Although the course title was "Understanding Korean Society through Popular Music," it was apparent that the majority of the class was only interested in learning about K-Pop. The problem was that it was very difficult to prepare for the course since academic literature on K-Pop was extremely limited. I used to consider myself lucky when I came across anything K-Pop-related that I could use in class. Thankfully, things have much improved on this front. It is not difficult to find at least a handful of journal articles on virtually every topic. However, a decent textbook is still a necessity. Between the two books reviewed here, *Sounding Out* fits the bill nicely. Yes, it is undeniably flawed: it not only makes some factual errors, but also misses out on quite a few topics such as media, fan culture, gender and so on. However, its advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. On the other hand, *K-Pop* is too awkward to be considered a textbook, but, thanks to its powerful arguments in the last chapter, it could make a decent auxiliary text as long as the first chapter is skipped.

It is an exciting time for students of K-Pop. Starting with *K-Pop* and *Sounding Out*, long awaited books on the topic are finally being released, and others will soon follow. Just when K-Pop scholarship gathers momentum, however, K-Pop appears to be entering a new phase. On the one hand, it is showing signs of decline no longer producing sheavyweights like Girls' Generation, KARA, Big Bang, and 2NE1. On the

other hand, however, its popularity is belatedly rising in the Anglo-American world having been refigured as the latest hipster music. This unexpected turn of events makes K-Pop even more interesting. Hopefully, this unpredictability fuels further enquiries and debates.

References

- Adorno, Theodor. 1941. "On popular music." *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 9: 17-48.
- Cho, Hae-joang. 2005. "Reading the 'Korean Wave as a sign of global shift." *Korea Journal* Winter: 147-182.
- Choi, Jungbong and Roald Maliangkay. 2015. "Introduction: why fandom matters to the international rise of K-pop." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 1-18. New York and London: Routledge.
- Choi, Jungbong and Roald Maliangkay eds. 2015. *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Epstein, Stephen. 2015. "Into the New World: Girls' Generation from the local to the global." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 35-50. New York and London: Routledge.
- Epstein Stephen and James Turnbull. 2014. "Girls' Generation? Gender, (dis) empowerment, and K-pop." In *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, edited by Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe, 314-336. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ewen, Stuart. 1976. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Im, Jae-hae [임재해]. 2013. "Current Phenomena of Smartphone and Pop-Culture and the Recognition of Meme" [스마트폰과 대중문화 현상의 문화유전자 인식]. *Journal of Namdo Folk Culture* [남도문화연구] 27: 213-256.
- Iwabuchi, Koichi. 2008. "Dialogue with the Korean Wave: Japan and Its Postcolonial Discontents." In *Media Consumption and Everyday Life in Asia*, edited by Y. Kim, 127-144. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jin, Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae. 2014. "Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop: The Global-Local Paradigm of English Mixing in Lyrics." *Popular Music and Society* 37 (2): 113-131.
- Jung, Eun-Young. 2013. "K-pop female idols in the West: racial imaginations and erotic fantasies." In *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, edited by Youna Kim, 106-119. New York and London: Routledge.
- _____. 2015. "Hallyu and the K-pop boom in Japan: patterns of consumption and reactionary responses." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited

- by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 116-132. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jung, Sun. 2011. *Korean Maculinites and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Old Boy, K-Pop Idols*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Kang, Inkyu. 2015. "The political economy of idols: South Korea's neoliberal restructuring and its impact on the entertainment labor force." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 51-65. New York and London: Routledge.
- Khoo, Gaik Cheng. 2015. "'We keep it local' – Malaysianising 'Gangnam Style': a question of place and identity." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 146-163. New York and London: Routledge.
- Kim, Ju Oak. 2015. "Despite not being Johnny's: the cultural impact of TVXQ in the Japanese music industry." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 88-80. New York and London: Routledge.
- Lee, Jamie Shinhee. 2004. "Linguistic hybridization in K-pop: discourse of self-assertion and resistance." *World Englishes* 23 (3): 429-450.
- Liew, Kai Khiun. 2013. "K-pop dance trackers and cover dancers: global cosmopolitanization and local spatialization." In *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, edited by Youna Kim, 165-181. New York and London: Routledge.
- Maliangkay, Roald and Geng Song. 2015. "A sound wave of effeminacy: K-pop and the male beauty ideal in China." In *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, edited by J. Choi and R. Maliangkay, 164-177. New York and London: Routledge.
- Oh, Ingyu and Gil-sung Park. 2012. "From B2C to B2B: selling Korean pop music in the age of New Social Media." *Korea Observer* 43 (3): 365-397.
- Ono, Kent A. and Jungmin Kwon. 2013. "Re-worlding culture? YouTube as a K-pop interlocutor." In *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, edited by Youna Kim, 199-214. New York and London: Routledge.
- Russell, Mark James. 2014. *K-Pop Now! The Korean Music Revolution*. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing.
- Siriyuvusak, Ubonrat and Shin Hyunjoon. 2007. "Asianizing K-pop: production, consumption and identification patterns among Thai youth." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (1): 109-136.
- Sung, Sang-yeon. 2013. "K-pop reception and participatory fan culture in Austria." *Cross-Currents* 9: 90-104. Accessed July 31, 2016. <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/e-journal/articles/sung.pdf>.
- Yun, Young-in [윤영인]. 2013. *K-pop DNA and History*. Seoul: Bookshelf [북셀프].

Special Terms

karaoke room *noraebang* 노래방

Korean traditional music *kugak* 국악 國樂
love and peace *Saranggwa Pyeonghwa* 사랑과평화
Melodies and/or Vocalism that sound sentimental and old-fashioned *ppong* 뽕
mountain echo *Sanullim* 산울림
people's song/protest song *minjung kayo* 민중가요 民衆歌謠
rising gods of the east *Dong Bang Shin Gi* 동방신기
Seo Taiji and the Boys *Seo Taiji wa Aideul* 서태지와 아이들
The Elephant Brothers *The K'okkiri Brothers* 코끼리 브라더스