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Book Review:
When there is No K-pop Expert in Academia

Made in Korea: Studies in Popular Music, edited by Hyunjoon Shin and Seung-Ah Lee, Routledge, 2017, 247 pages, 978-1-138-79303-3, \$145.00.

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Made in Korea provides nineteen chapters of Korean popular music from the 19th century to the present K-pop boom, filled with historical sagas and theoretical analyses on the formation, development, and globalization of modern Korean pop music. Including the introduction and afterword chapters, the remaining seventeen chapters discuss a wide range of historical and current development of Korean popular music starting from *shin minyo* (new folk songs) *yuhaenga* (popular music), and *ppongchak* (trot version of pop music) to even K-pop and Korean style hip hop. The benefit of this book is to make it available in English to interested Western readers a variety of music genres, artists, and issues within Korean popular music, compactly compressed together in nineteen chapters by twenty different authors. It is not always clear, however, why young Western readers who are mostly K-pop fans of BTS, SNSD, or G Dragon would be willing to read about the history of Korean pop music; nor is it transparent as to how the two editors of this book selected these chapters. However, one thing is clear to most pundits in the field from the outset: the book, due to its very compactness, is dispensed with no detailed literature review, theoretical discussions, or in-depth or thick descriptions of ethnographic data freshly obtained from new research. Most chapters are mere repetitions and overlaps of the previous studies written in Korean or remain at best personal essays filled with no adequate references or facts gathered from fresh field research. Overall, the book is full of unsubstantiated judgments, unscientific assertions, ideological tenets, personal thoughts, and even untrue arguments.

To many K-pop fans around the world or scholars interested in studying K-pop, some of the burning questions that await answers are: how unique is Korean pop music history vis-à-vis its Asian and Western counterparts? Are there any industrial or structural impact on Korean music that distinguished it from other local, regional, and global music forms? Why has K-pop been escalated into a global favorite, whereas Chinese, Thai, Taiwanese, Japanese, or Indonesian music could not, despite the colossal efforts by their governments and industries? None of these questions were answered in the book.

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Instead, the book asks a theoretical link between technology and musical genres, socioeconomic and sometimes political theories of popular music, and purely cultural linkages between Korean culture and its pop music. In social sciences and musicology, it has well been documented on the relationship between technologies, including devices and distribution methods, and music genres (see *inter alia* Hirsch 1971; Peterson and Berger 1971; Lopes 1992; Scott 1999; Funk 2007), and lush depictions of ethnic music genres and artists exist (Wald 2004; Chang 2007; Fernandes 2011; Lautebach 2011). Technological advancements along with the development of new instruments, coupled with the changing modes of broadcasting and other dissemination methods, created new music genres tailored to malleable market demands in different global localities. For example, a classical case explains how local radio stations ushered in a new era of rock music in the U.S., whereas the dismantling of the industrial concentration in the music industry in the country created a boom in African American music. In a similar vein, it is unassailable to witness the rise of K-pop due to smart phone devices and YouTube, because a new form of manufacturing creativity through a global division of labor is now possible (Oh 2013; Park 2013). None of these extant studies have been discussed at length in this book, while no new theory or perspective has been offered by any in the volume to fill the theoretical vacuum. Furthermore, in the discussion of Korean hip hop or black music, the chapter simply fails to provide any in-depth discussion of why Korean hip forsakes political messages, a question that appears central to other writers of hip hop's localization (e.g., Fernandes 2011).

The overall presentation of each chapter is trivial in its research and theoretical understanding, as most chapters dawdle over a simple topic without delving into a wider scope of the problem. Chapter 2, for example, meaninglessly elongates the discussion of Korean stage or live music without telling us how other modes of dissemination had impacted genre progressions in Korea under colonialism, political dictatorship, and the current political democratization and globalization. How the live music scene was related to or devastated by the rising domination of radios and TVs during the 1960s and the 1970s, not to mention the approach of music videos in the 1980s and the 1990s, has not been considered, while the chapter simply ruminates past glories of live music scenes in Seoul. Unlike in other major music markets in the world, Korean TV broadcasting channels have been a dominating industrial force in music business, as some of the authors in the book also mention. However, they unanimously fail to explain the reason for it: the lack of intellectual property protection amid lush music piracy and no concert tour market (due to live performance censorship during dictatorial periods). Chapter 4 discusses K-pop and SNS platforms and digital devices without presenting anything new other than I have already analyzed in detail with tangible empirical data (Oh 2013).

The book then moves onto discussing pop music genres losing its initial grip on the relationship between technology/devices and music genres. No author in the genre part seems to appreciate the theoretical nexus between the two, as Chapter 6 on Korean rock music groundlessly emphasizes the hybridity between Western and Korean rock. Is this the book about cultural hybridity after all?

Lack of analytical understandings is apparent in most of their narrative structures that bluntly distort facts to ascertain statements that intend to confuse the readers. For example, Park in Ch. 7 asserts that the “Korean folksong was greatly influenced by modern Western music, its musical styles and its ‘status’ within Korean music culture were developed completely differently from other genres, which were also influenced by Modern Western music.” What does this statement mean exactly? In Chapter 8, Yang also makes similarly confounding comments: “Whether it is the real black music or the black music influenced kayo, the influence of African American music has been enormous in the history of Korean popular music...Korean popular music has been connected to black music.” This begs our question: how? Furthermore, in Chapter 14 Lee argues that: “idols are a signifier that represents K-pop. This signifier does not just represent Korean popular music in name but has emerged as a powerful symbol that actually dominates Korean popular music.” This overstatement is only partially true, because idols are paid the least among major players within the K-pop industry under the infamous label of “slavery contract” (Oh 2013). The most problematic of all, however, is the editors’ introduction, where they mention “Oh and Park” without any references: “This kind of view is...against some Korean scholars’ point (for instance, Oh and Park), which praises transnational consumption of K-pop unconditionally.” If Oh and Park refers to our article written in 2012, we have never unconditionally praised K-pop for its obvious reliance on multinational corporations and YouTube for free K-pop dissemination to fans, all of which resulted in the exploitation of K-pop artists (Oh and Park 2012).

Koreans have been good learners of foreign music including Western classical music. Why have they been smart in music learning? How and why have they propagated foreign music in Korea, while experimenting with their own local renditions? These have been always lingering issues to many Koreans and outside experts on Korean music. This book certainly is not a good source to consult for answers. The overall contribution of the book to the field is minimal and might serve some K-pop fans and laypeople who want to know Korean music history beyond Wikipedia.

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