

## Call for Papers

### *K-Pop Politics: Digital Mediation and Global Fandom*

The K-pop frenzy is anything but ordinary. On May 1 this year, some 300 French fans holding Korean national flags gathered in front of the Louvre Museum, calling for additional K-pop concerts to be held in Paris. Similar rallies ensued in London's Trafalgar Square, Poland's Warsaw, and Columbia's Bolívar Square.

Though on a continuum with Hallyu (the Korean Wave), K-Pop departs from the earlier waves of Korean popular culture in its media specificity, geographic scope and generational focus. Preceding currents of Korean popular culture had centered on the cult of Korean television dramas distributed through conventional mass media (terrestrial, satellite, and cable televisions) to neighboring countries such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, etc. The K-pop craze, however, is beyond "Asian" bounds. This year alone, K-pop concerts were held in L.A., New York, Paris, London, Sydney, Tokyo, etc., and K-Pop flash mobs continue to take place in such metropolises as Singapore, Lima, Sao Paulo, Toronto, Jakarta, Vancouver, Dublin, Bergen, and Rome.

The global K-pop rage is concurrent with and indebted to the rise of portable devices and what are known as social media. The effect is noticeable in the increased focus on visual aspects of K-pop. For example, South Korean singer Psy's comic music video "Gangnam Style" has gone viral since it was released on July 15. The video surpassed 100 million hits on YouTube as of Sept 4, 2012, marking it the most-viewed video in such a short period of time — it has since been viewed another 250 million times. Social media, or social networking services (SNS), play a critical role in this. Songs shared through SNS strengthen online camaraderie, empower those who upload or distribute them, all the while bringing visual and musical experiences on individuated media to a new level.

Catalyzed by Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and online fan club sites, K-pop has emerged as an unambiguous instance of global digital youth culture: a social media-friendly, fan/user-steered, and participation-conducive anthropological occurrence. A unique amalgamation of dance, storytelling, persona, costume play, music, and fashion show, K-pop epitomizes a meta-genre performance in its own right. Accordingly, the cultural ownership or origin/ality of K-pop becomes a moot question, as it consciously espouses a hybridized mode of production. A bold concoction of styles, tunes, and languages borrowed from Europe, America and Japan, K-pop has spawned abundance of derivative local cultures: cover dance competitions, club parties, and fan club conventions.

Despite the transnational thrust, a dominant mode of production in K-pop remains "Korean." A legion of similar idol bands has cropped up in less than ten years, and they are invariably manufactured and merchandised by a few Korean entertainment agencies. It is often claimed that the omnipotence of those management giants smothers artistic agency with what is known as a "slave contract," which has sparked major controversies over labor and human right issues of K-pop performers. Fans do chime in and "meddle" with the mis/management of the stars they root for, as attested by the passionate support for JYJ's debut, a group that broke out of TVXQ. Keenly

aware of the growing clout of global fans, the leading management moguls (SM, YG, and JYP) make desperate efforts to stay on good terms with the K-pop devotees.

Aside from the tension between producers and consumers, K-pop has enjoyed a long, unperturbed honeymoon with capital and state power. Since the late 1990s, when entertainment business as a whole was designated as a strategic industry for South Korea, the K-pop enterprise has been a faithful ally to the reign of capital, commodity, fame and nationalist ideology. More often than not, K-pop industry would act as a cheerleader for various state and market affairs in exchange for policy support from various state bureaus and lavish underwritings from conglomerates like Samsung and LG, IT behemoths seeking to cash in on the soaring value of the nation's cultural capital. Complicit with this state-corporate joint maneuver are ordinary citizens, intellectuals, artists, and mainstream media, whose postcolonial aspiration to see the nation exit from cultural obscurity hazardously awakens nationalist urges intrinsic to the state and capital-led Hallyu/K-pop campaign.

All of the instances necessitate a rigorous politicization of the seemingly innocuous popular music vogue. Hence, the proposed volume asks: what political desire and historical impetus do we find from the unruly diffusion of K-pop; what cultural risks and social stakes do fans in Europe, North America, Latin America, and South East Asia have in espousing the popular culture from a cultural periphery; how is this related to the global disenfranchisement of the youth under the sway of neoliberalism, how does the rise of K-pop respond to global racism and/or cosmopolitanism in culture, and how does it help boost the visibility of ethnic/cultural minorities at large; in what ways does the instance of K-pop inform or contest the conceptual underpinnings of cultural imperialism, cultural globalization, hybridity, transnationalism and traveling culture; what forms of cultural interaction and alliance do social media galvanize through the viral dissemination of K-pop, and what types of cultural authority and social institutions do they play havoc with; what types of business connection does the K-pop industry have with ethno-cultural and artistic communities in other parts of the world; what cultural effects does K-pop wreak on other popular cultures as well as on other music genres, domestically and internationally; what correlations or affinities are there between the composite esthetics of K-pop and new forms of communication afforded by social network services; and how does the mediated experience of K-pop facilitate transnational or local cultural practices in such fields as language acquisition, tourism, commodity consumption, plastic surgery, concert-going, friend-making, and so forth?

With these questions in mind, the volume seeks to bring together academic and professional writings on the following areas.

1. Cultural/Political Frameworks: hallyu (Korean wave) and cultural nationalism/transnationalism; European crises; cultural de-westernization; cultural empowerment and global south, etc.

2. Political Economy: state/corporate sponsorship; soft power; nation branding; cultural diplomacy; popular culture as a strategic industry; transnationalism in cultural production, etc.
3. History and Stylistics: history of idol bands; esthetic genealogy of K-pop; group performance and collective identity; linguistic miscegenation; body/gender/sexuality; genre mix; kinship with J-pop or hip hop, etc.
4. Media and Mediation: specific workings and functions of You Tube, Twitter, and Facebook vis-à-vis broadcast mass media; distinct routes/patterns of distribution; specific meaning of “social” media in K-pop; digital mobility and transferability; viral communication and cultural synchronicity, etc.
5. Audience and Fandom: the power of fan clubs/blogs/sites; fan as expert/critic/quasi-manager; metropolitan subculture and the role of minorities/diasporas/sojourners; collectivity and peer culture; cultural capital and race/ethnicity; the meaning of entertainment in generational/youth culture; Japanophile and K-pop; anti-Korean wave movements; K-pop and consumption chains including, but not limited to, fashion, cosmetics, food, and tourism, etc.

The volume will be co-edited by JungBong Choi (NYU) & Roald Maliangkay (Australian National University). In order to be considered, please send your abstract (500~750 words) to JungBong Choi ([jbc7@nyu.edu](mailto:jbc7@nyu.edu)) by Friday, November 2, 2012. Your abstract must include working title, bibliography, and author's bio (100 words).