K-Pop Orientalism: US Cultural Imperialism in Korean Popular Music from 1954 to 2018

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Abstract

This project examines how Orientalism has impacted the U.S. and South Korea relationship in a sociocultural context, the history of Korean and Asian people in the U.S., and how these relationships affect the creation, production, and American reception of K-pop. It posits that Orientalist representations within American media produce and perpetuate problematic myths about K-Pop which impact Korean media production and do not alleviate ethnic stereotyping of Asian people and orientalist sentiments against them in the West. Orientalist discourse is found to have persisted into the modern and contemporary age thus impacting the cultural production of Korea and in particular, Korean popular music. I aim to elucidate that by including Asian-American discourse, a discourse that ruptures the binary of East-West or Orient-Occident frameworks, we can have a more transversal understanding of the creation, production, and American reception of Korean pop culture that ruptures the Orientalist logic of "difference". As this thesis poises itself to uncover orientalist representations and realities as well as highlight the role of Asian and Korean-Americans throughout the history of the sociocultural relationship between the U.S. and South Korea, the structure of this thesis attempts to articulate a history of K-Pop— starting from 1954 and ending in 2018.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my supervisor Dr. Hyuk-chan Kwon and to my Korean teachers Dr. Jooyeon Kang and Dr. Kyung-sook Kim. I am grateful beyond words to them and all the Korean instructors at the University of Alberta — for guiding and growing my genuine passion for Korean culture and language so that I could become the student and teacher I am today.

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I. Introduction

"And the Billboard Music Award goes to… BTS!"

The events of May 21, 2017, when K-pop group BTS was awarded the Top Social Award at the Billboard Music Awards (hereafter BBMAS) caused a monumental shift in Korean music history. They were the first Korean group to be recognized at the BBMAs, and the second Korean act to do so after PSY. This was considered significant amongst Korean media, as they were signed to a medium-sized label outside of the "Big 3" entertainment labels in Korea[1] — yet fared much better in the American market compared to them. It is part of the "BTS world" narrative — in terms of their lyrics, social media content, games, interview answers & other media they participate in — that they struggled to gain domestic recognition in the first few years of their career and became internationally famous at an exponential rate. They are arguably the most popular boy band in the world and allegedly contributed 4.65 billion dollars USD to the Korean economy in 2019[2] — largely in part due to the 2017 Billboard Music Awards.

Following this award show, American and Korean media began to report that BTS paved the way for K-pop in America. In particular, pop music journalist Jeff Benjamin wrote in *Rolling*

[1] The Big 3 entertainment labels in Korea are JYP Entertainment (founded in 1997 as Tae-Hong Planning Corporation and became JYP Entertainment in 2001), SM Entertainment (founded as SM Studio in 1989 then changed to current name in 1995), and YG Entertainment (founded in 1996). These three labels are historically known for producing and managing the most successful K-pop artists.

[2] William Pesek, "BTS Can't Save South Korea, Though It's 4.7 Billion GDP Boost Sounds Good" *Forbes* (October 10, 2019) https://www.forbes.com/sites/williampesek/2019/10/10/bts-cant-save-south-korea-though-its-47-billion-gdp-boost-sounds-good/#34b367b12412

Stones that "BTS write and produce socially conscious K-pop...while the K-pop scene tends to focus on singles about common topics like heartbreak and partying"[3], arguing that this is one of the reasons for their success in the United States and other Western markets. Existing research and social media discourses perpetuate the narrative that BTS's "socially conscious K-pop" set them apart in the American market from other K-pop acts, overlooking the popularity of K-Pop in the West before 2017 and its societal importance of K-Pop to young people in the Asian diaspora. Therefore, this thesis is hence an attempt to explore occluded narratives left out of this discourse by fans, media, and scholars.

Literature related to this issue found that an Orientalist discourse was inherited by the United States at the end of the 17th century, and has dictated the U.S.-Korean relationship since its official start in 1882 — a significant year for the relationship between Korea and the United States. In 1882, William Elliot Griffis published his book *Corea: the Hermit Nation* in New York, which was written during his time as a science teacher in Japan.[4] This work remained a standard work for thirty years, and was a prominent reason "Hermit Nation" became a popular way to refer to Korea in the U.S.[5] In the same year that Griffis' book was published, the United States and Korea established diplomatic relations on May 22 under the United States–Korea Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation. It was the first time Korea signed a treaty with a non-Asian nation and soon treaties with Britain, Germany, Italy and other Western powers

[3] Jeff Benjamin, "BBMA Winners BTS: 5 Things You Should Know About the K-Pop Sensations" *Rolling Stone* (May 22, 2017) https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/bbma-winners-bts-5-things-you-should-know-about-the-k-pop-sensations-119772/

[4] Keith Pratt and Richard Rutt, *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary* (Routledge, 2013), 153.

[5] The nickname Hermit Kingdom or Hermit Nation was born of the narrative that Korea had very limited contact with foreign nations and was reluctant to trade with the West.

followed. Although Korea technically ended their "Hermit Nation" status in 1882, this image of them in American scholarship and media has continued to persist for at least 30 years[6]. While the United States was expanding its territories in the 1880s, anti-Asian backlash was growing in the U.S. "intersecting significantly with immigration exclusion acts and laws against Asians in 1882"[7] and similar exclusionist policies continuing into the 20th century. As observed in 1882, the relationship between Korea and the U.S. includes and becomes more complex due to the presence of Asian-American (and more specifically, Korean-American) people. The U.S. and Joseon Korea's relationship continued until Japan's arrival on the peninsula in 1910, renewed in 1949 with only South Korea (hereafter Korea), and witnessed steadily growing American presence in Korea beginning from the Korean War.

Orientalism is Edward Said's 1978 analysis of how the "Orient" has been produced as an object of knowledge and power by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it"[8]. It is a key concept of postcolonial theory, the project to reclaim and rethink history and the agency of people subjected to various forms of imperialism. Many studies about Korea and imperialism usually focus on the relationship between Japan and Korea. However, following the emancipation of Korea from Japan, I argue that Korea became a subject of American cultural imperialism, a line of thinking I explore in greater detail in Chapter 1. Said believes that without understanding Orientalism as a discourse, "one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European

[6] In the case of North Korea, this image has persisted to the present day. North Korea is often referred to as the Hermit Kingdom or Hermit Nation in English-language scholarship and media.
[7] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.
[8] Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

culture was able to manage — and even produce — the Orient".[9] Similarly, I believe that without understanding cultural imperialism and the concept of Orientalism in how American culture managed and produced their version of the "Orient", our understanding of Korean popular culture studies is incomplete.

Said acknowledges that the American understanding of the Orient will seem less dense than the European one; however their Japanese, Korean, and Indochinese adventures "ought to be creating a more sober, more realistic "Oriental" awareness.[10] He also notes that what American Orientalism has in common with earlier forms of Orientalism, is a kind of "intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture."[11] Indeed, many scholars following Said have acknowledged how American Orientalism has diverged from Said's British and French Orientalism. American Orientalism is rooted in the attitudes of European immigrants who arrived during the 16th and 17th centuries, causing the developing United States to begin incorporating notions of "The Orient" and "Asiatics" within its social formations well before the arrival of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century.[12] Christina Klein's monograph *Cold War Orientalism* argues that "narratives of anti-conquest"[13] within middlebrow culture from 1945-1961 denied the imperial nature of U.S. expansion. These narratives brought the South Korea-U.S. alliance alive by "translating them into personal terms and imbuing them with sentiment"[14] in the everyday popular culture of their time like book club main selections,

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[9] Ibid, 3.
[10] Ibid, 2.
[11] Ibid, 19.
[12] Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2005), 7.
[13] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 13.
[14] Ibid, 8.

Academy Award winners, and Broadway record breakers[15]. Serialized texts such as *Reader's Digest*, "pledged themselves to educating the public about Asia", publishing stories on Korea during the Korean War and making Asia visible "through a process of mapping, both literal and figurative, and kept readers informed."[16] In a similar vein, Jane Naomi Iwamura argues in her monograph *Virtual Orientalism* that American Orientalism is also more covert that its British and French predecessors, using media to further embed images of the Orient "in a popular imagination that looks to the magazine page and to the big and small screen for products that are ready for immediate consumption."[17]

Morley and Robins' 1995 study of "techno-Orientalism", building on Said's formulation, shows how within the discourse between Japan and the U.S., the association of technology and Japaneseness serve to "reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world."[18] They state that the West can never see Japan directly, and that the Japanese are always destined to be seen through the fears and fantasies of Europeans and Americans[19]. Morley and Robins predict that as Japan's star starts to fade[20], other stars rise in the West's imagination of the East — the 'Four Tigers' of Asia: Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea.[21] Consequently, the stars of Korea did rise in the West's imagination of the East. Preceding K-pop and Korean dramas,

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[15] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 8.
[16] Ibid, 77.
[17] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.
[18] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169.
[19] Ibid, 172.
[20] The fading of Japan's star refers to the fading of the Japanese economic miracle in the 1990s.
[21] Ibid, 173.

Korean film was embraced by the West in the early 2000s. Sun Jung uses techno-Orientalism to discuss the Western cult fandom of Korean film *Oldboy*, in which he argues that there is an Orientalist Western longing for primitive Otherness.[22] He notes that Western viewers fetishize South Korean masculinity through their enthusiastic consumption of the representation of the main character as "machinic" or machine-like.[23] This hybrid postmodern techno-Orientalist desire demonstrates that Orientalism still exists as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"[24]. Additionally, Orientalism is not just a "representation" of the Orient but it is also a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture that creates the very reality it represents. As Jung argues, following the tragic incident at Virginia Tech in 2007; US media repeatedly showed two juxtaposed images: a photo of Cho holding a hammer and an Oldboy movie poster where Dae-Soo holds a hammer.[25] This suggested that Cho's individual frustration or the film *Oldboy* itself was responsible for the massacre rather than the conflict structure of the U.S. in particular.[26] The narrative demonstrates that the Orientalist representation of Korean culture in U.S. media has real life consequences on Korean people.

Culture and Imperialism, Said's work following *Orientalism,* argues that producers of knowledge could extricate themselves from Orientalist discourse and the power relations it constructs by acknowledging the inextricable interdependence of Westerns and Orientals, recognizing the inescapably entangled and hybrid nature of all forms of culture, and developing

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[22] Sun Jung, *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption: Yonsama, Rain, Oldboy, K-pop idols.* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 120.
[23] Ibid, 120.
[24] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
[25] *Sun Jung, Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption, 155.*
[26] Ibid, 156.

the ability to think “sympathetically about others than only about us”[27]. American identity, in particular, is “too varied to be a unitary and homogenous thing” as it is fully sensitive to the reality of historical experience.[28] Said suggests that by becoming aware of the progressive integration of East and West that imperialism set in motion, can the imperialist logic of difference be undermined.”[29] He emphasizes that narratives of emancipation in their strongest forms were narratives of integration; the “stories of people who had been excluded from the main group but who were now fighting for a place in it.[30]” I suggest that this integration can be understood by looking at Asian-American discourse narratives as “countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture”[31] as well orientalist narratives of K-Pop.

In this thesis, I argue that popular Korean music (both before and after the creation of “K-pop”) has been acknowledged as the most significant site of cultural exchange between Korea and the U.S. after the Korean War, yet there lacks a scholarly understanding of American Orientalism’s relationship with Korean music. I note that there is also a gap in the understanding of the role of Asian-Americans and Asian immigration in the creation, production, and American reception of K-pop. Moreover, there is no scholarly evidence that the presence of K-pop, or BTS in particular, in mainstream American media has any correlation to less Orientalist media narratives of Asian people in US media. In thinking through these gaps, I look towards K-pop as a way to understand the implications of American cultural imperialism both on the Korean peninsula and also within its own borders on Asian people. As Palumbo-Liu argues in

[27] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 336.
[28] Ibid, xxv.
[29] Ibid, xxiv.
[30] Ibid, xxvi.
[31] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts,* 4.

Asian/American, imaginings of modern American development in the global system are "inseparable from historical occasions of real contact between the interpenetrations of Asia and America"[32]. In further chapters, this thesis will look at how the authority of American Orientalist media impacts not only the representation of Korean popular music but the reality of it as well.

To understand how the history of Orientalist American mainstream media has impacted K-pop reception in the U.S., this thesis examines how Orientalism has impacted the U.S. and South Korea relationship in a sociocultural context, the history of Korean and Asian people in the U.S., and how these relationships affect the creation, production and reception of K-pop. I am questioning and problematizing narratives embedded in the very fabric of K-pop by appealing to occluded historical developments couched in U.S. imperialism, and how individuals navigated and interacted with them starting from the Korean War — the period in which Koreans began to be exposed to a substantial amount of American pop culture. I posit that Orientalist representations within American media produce and perpetuate problematic myths about K-Pop which impact Korean media production and do not alleviate ethnic stereotyping of Asian people and orientalist sentiments against them in the West. I argue that Orientalist discourse has persisted into the modern and contemporary age and impacted the cultural production of Korea and in particular, Korean popular music. Rather than accusing the creators of these media texts of some "nefarious Western imperialist plot to hold down the Oriental world", I aim to point out the Orientalist relationship of power, domination and cultural hegemony. I suggest that by including Asian-American discourse, a discourse that ruptures the dichotomy between East and West or

[32] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.

Orient and Occident frameworks, we can have a more *transversal* understanding of the creation, production, and American reception of Korean pop culture. The emphasis on transversal movement of cultures emphasizes narratives, discourse, and people that exist in between the East-West, Asia-America dichotomy and rupture the Orientalist logic of "difference".

In addition, as this thesis poises itself to uncover orientalist representations and realities while it also highlights the role of Asian and Korean-Americans throughout the history of the sociocultural relationship between the U.S. and South Korea, the structure of this thesis attempts to articulate a history of K-Pop— starting from 1954 and ending in 2018. Chapter I will focus on the period from 1954 to 1990, from the end of the Korean War, taking a look at early effects of American cultural imperialism and Asian immigration on Korean music. Chapter II focuses on the period from 1990 to 2010 — the creation of Korean pop music, its movement beyond Korea, and the racialization of K-pop in the U.S. The final chapter will look at the events from 2010 to 2018 — investigating the invasion (K-pop live shows in the U.S., Gangnam Style, and BTS) and the containment of K-pop (continued Orientalist treatment of Asians in American media) in the United States from 2010 to 2018. This final chapter emphasizes that the idealization or the idolization of Asian people by Americans has no correlation with the end of race-based microaggressions and oppression against Asian people in the U.S.

I. U.S. Cultural Imperialism and Orientalism on Two Korean Fronts from 1954 to 1990

In order to investigate the relationship between South Korea and the United States of America's impact on the creation and production of K-pop, this thesis starts approximately forty years before the emergence of Korean pop music, at the stalemate of the Korean War. During and immediately after the Korean War[33], cultural imperialism and orientalism were rampant at both of America's "Korean" fronts — the front on the Korean peninsula and the one in the U.S. in the face of Korean immigration.[34] On the Korean front, U.S. Orientalism was also "deployed to justify the war in and partition of Korea"[35]. On the U.S. front, there was a national identity crisis during periods of U.S. war in Asia[36] which caused American Orientalism to displace "U.S. expansionist interests in Asia onto racialized figurations of Asian workers in the U.S."[37] This refers to the production of "narratives of anti-conquest, which legitimated U.S. expansion while denying its coercive or imperial nature"[38] and the proliferation of representations of Asia in American popular culture by middlebrow intellectuals. This chapter aims to investigate American engagement on the Korean peninsula in this period and connect it to the creation of Seo Taiji & Boys in early 90's Korea and the phenomenon known as K-pop.

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[33] At the end of World War II in 1945 the Americans inaugurated an occupation until 1949 on South Korea, and in 1950 the Korean War broke out. On July 27, 1953 the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed, bringing a complete cessation of hostilities.
[34] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.
[35] Ibid, 101.
[36] U.S. war in Asia refers to American colonization of the Philippines from 1898 to 1946, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Vietnam War, and the war in and partition of Korea.
[37] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts,* 4.
[38] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 13.

a. The First Front: U.S. Military Presence in South Korea after 1954

American cultural imperialism infiltrated several aspects of Korean culture by the time the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, and Korean music was no exception. Over 326,000 troops remained in South Korea at the end of the Korean War in 1953 and for the sake of these American service people, the US Department of Defense launched a TV and radio network called Armed Forces Korea Network (AFKN) in 1959, which became a major distributor of American popular culture in Korea until quite recently.[39] Most of its television programming was a combination of programs from American channels ABC, NBC, and CBS showcasing film, popular music, and even professional sports like snowboarding and Major League Baseball.[40] AFKN-TV began as a way to propagate American pop culture to the American citizens in South Korea but over time also a method of cultural imperialism and Americanization. The network's influence and reach, however, demonstrated how the U.S. justified their use of political and economic hegemony around the world after World War II "through the spread of culture using diverse media."[41] From the introduction of AFKN-TV to South Korea, the channel and its programs have been connected to being a signifier of affluence (being able to own a TV), one of the roots of Korean "longing" for the U.S., and a reason for America's "friendly image" in Korea.[42] This was also supported by the image of "blood brother" and "saviour" following the defeat of the Japanese in World War II[43] and by the material support

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[39] Christina Klein,"The AFKN nexus: US military broadcasting and New Korean Cinema", Transnational Cinemas, 3:1, 22.
[40] Ibid, 22.
[41] Yong-Gyu Park, "Characteristics of AFKN and Its cultural influences in Korea" Journal of Communication Science 14.3 (2014): 104 DbPia
[42] Ibid, 123.
[43] Ibid, 124.

South Korea received from the U.S. in order to rebuild Korean society.[44] The public's "inclination toward the United States" eventually translated into an "unconditional preference for its culture and thus paved the way for the dissemination of its public songs."[45]

Many of the key figures in the creation of Korea's culture industry grew up in the era of AFKN and the Eighth U.S. Army Base, and their artistry was often inspired or influenced by this experience. The so-called "godfather of rock and roll" Shin Joong Hyun was deeply affected by AFKN. He is quoted saying that AFKN quenched his thirst for music, and that he was "instantly fascinated by jazz and rock 'n' roll, which brought [him] to [his] true passion and inner self."[46] He found himself performing for American servicemen, cutting his teeth as a "professional musician on the sages of the U.S. military clubs,"[47] highlighting another aspect of the U.S. military presence in South Korea that caused American music to flow into Korea. From the late 1950s on, jazz, rock, and R&B were absorbed into Korean popular music via the Korean musicians who performed at the Eighth U.S. Army Base shows — like Shin Joong Hyun. According to music critic Sung Woo-jin, "Korean singers were tested and cultivated on the stages of the US Army Bases" and these stages acted as a "live club and audition program for Korean singers."[48] Thus, only the best and most authentic-sounding troupes performing covers of U.S. popular music would be invited back to perform. The flow of American pop music into

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[44] Seong Won Park. "The Present and Future of Americanization in South Korea," *Journal of Future Studies* 14, no.1 (2009), 53.
[45] Chang-Nam Kim, *K-POP: Roots and Blossoming of Korean Popular Music* (Elizabeth: Hollym, 2012), 23.
[46] Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin. "The Birth of "Rok": Cultural Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Glocalization of Rock Music in South Korea, 1964–1975"*positions* 18, no 1 (February 2010): 200.
[47] Ibid, 200.
[48] "Rock on Korea - Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon", YouTube video, 1:00-1:24, posted by "ARIRANG CULTURE" October 7, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMUzMMEmmfA

Korea was tied to the presence of American military engagement and U.S. imperialism on the peninsula, thus planting the roots for American cultural authority in Korea.

However, the "sheer economic might of the US military ensured that South Korean musicians would eagerly perform whatever American GIs wanted to hear" as the devastating poverty caused by the Korean War meant that jobs were a precious commodity.[49] One musician from the time period recalls that while performing at Camp Casey in Dongducheon, there was so much dust that whenever they had to perform they would wrap a towel around their forehead and a scarf around their mouths — depicting the harsh conditions Korean musicians would undergo in the 1960s and 1970s in order to be paid to perform at an Eighth Army Base. He adds that "it was that cold but we were willing to go anywhere in Korea to perform,"[50] a willingness to perform not only fueled by passion for music but also fueled by the need to survive in Korea against the threat of poverty following the war. Though the Eighth Army Bases gave musicians an opportunity to perform and learn more about rock music, the experiences of these musicians suggest that there was an underlying current of imperialism beneath these opportunities which will be further explored in the following sections.

Despite this underlying imperialism and cultural hegemony that the U.S. had in Korea, to posit that the music these musicians created was a Korean copy of American music is a false representation of their artistry and a symptom of American Orientalism. One of the most popular and most famous rock groups Key Boys' guitarist Kim Hong Tak said that their first song was a

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[49] John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014), 31.
[50] "Rock on Korea - Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon," YouTube video, 9:07.

trot song[51] called “A Sailor’s Song”[52], which they then tried to turn into a rock song and successfully became the first rock band song in Korea. Music critic Sung Woo-jin adds that the singular aspect that the bands who were pioneers of rock in Korea have in common is that they made rock songs that were a mix of traditional and trot music. He also notes it was admirable that they were able to form rock bands as they didn’t have teachers and were unfamiliar with “rock music”; yet created a very Korean version of rock music.”[53] Furthermore, the significance of this rock music with such deep ties to the American cultural imperialism in Korea is best articulated by Kim Hong Tak himself, that the “practice that they got on those stages became the foundation of Korea’s first rock music and modern pop music”[54] and that the artists themselves believe that they were the “roots in the history of K-pop”[55]. Though contemporary variations of K-pop prominently features elements of Black music like hip-hop, EDM (electronic dance music) and R&B — it does have artists like Kim Hong-Tak and Shin Jung-hyeon for being the first Korean musicians to study American music and produce songs that fit the realities of Korea.

While the music that flowed into Korea via the Eighth U.S. Army and AFKN were certainly a symbol of American hegemony, at the same time it was also an incubator for the fledgling Korean youth counterculture movement that challenged authorities on their ideological national culture.[56] For the average Korean with no ties to the U.S. military, Korean rock music

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[51] Trot is a style of Japanese popular music, formed by an intermixture of the national style of traditional music with the Western tonality system which became the dominant style of popular music in the 1930s. For further details, see Kim, *K:POP: Roots and Blossoming of Korean Popular Music*, 18.
[52] “Rock on Korea - Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon,” YouTube video, 4:31.
[53] “Rock on Korea- Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon,” YouTube video, 6:58.
[54] “Rock on Korea- Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon,” YouTube video, 7:31.
[55] “Rock on Korea- Ep01C03 Shin Jung-Hyon,” YouTube video, 8:16.
[56] Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin, “The Birth of Rok”, 202.

was still unfamiliar and consequently, the Add Four (Shin Jung Hyun's band) and Key Boys initially struggled to gain recognition amongst the Korean public. The economically ascending 1960s saw the establishment of the Korea Entertainment Association (Han'guk Yŏnye Hyŏphoe) in 1961 which gave these musicians the opportunity to jump back and forth between the previously divided domestic and U.S. military markets.[57] Shin Jung Hyun was also the first to bring the music agency or label concept to the Korean domestic music industry. Music critic Sung Woo-jin notes that Shin was probably the first person who started the trend of producing music with a certain someone's sound, establishing the Shin Jung Hyun Sound label.[58] Notably, his label produced and debuted "The Pearl Sisters" in 1969, and "quickly climbed to the top by making the most of their sex appeal" which is argued to have "shattered the Confucian ideal image of 'wise mother, good wife'." Other female acts in Shin's label like Bunny Girls, Kim Ch'u-ja, Kim Chŏng-mi, and others also continued to release hit songs. In heavy metal band Baekdoosan's guitarist Kim Do Gyoon suggests that the Pearl Sisters are the origins for K-pop girl groups like Girls' Generation.

Following the 1971 presidential election, the Park Chung Hee administration ushered in an era of hard authoritarianism, in which "any deviation from the wholesome national culture was not tolerated".[59] Originally established to wipe out Japanese influence on Korean popular music, the Korean Arts and Culture Ethics Council used the power to oversee censorship of broadcast, performances, and film and audio recordings.[60] Between 1965 and 1975, 223 Korean

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[57] Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin, "The Birth of Rok", 208.
[58] "Rock on Korea - Ep01C04 Rock afford fitting background for K-pop, YouTube video, 1:33, posted by "ARIRANG CULTURE" October 7, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H37D9OMBvAk
[59] Pil Ho Kim and Hyunjoon Shin. "The Birth of Rok", 215.
[60] Ibid, 216.

songs and 261 Western songs were banned, and Shin had more songs than anybody else banned for reasons such as corrupting lyrics, defeatism, masochism, and national security.[61] The government crackdown on the genre also saw the emergence of a new culture known as youth culture, in which the young generation expressed defiance against the older generation's culture and values.[62] This culture was symbolized by "long hair, acoustic guitars, blue jeans, and the newly introduced draft beer" — notable symbols from American hippie culture in the 1970s — and the young people that identified with this new culture produced a variety of impressive music.[63]

Consequently, daytime rock shows disappeared by 1972, but young people simply retreated into the still-taboo burgeoning nightlife of disco clubs and go-go dance. This act of defiance not only broke the midnight curfew, but it also caused decadence to thrive under the radar of the authorities — a "warning sign that the heavy-handed cultural oppression would eventually backfire."[64] Additionally, the internationally famous *Saturday Night Fever* was broadcasted via AFKN-TV from 1977 and made disco popular, while Michael Jackson made breakdance into a new fad among teenagers. The emergence of dance music was partially a response to *Saturday Night Fever*, Michael Jackson, Madonna, the global dance music boom, disco clubs, video culture, and the emergence of young consumers who wanted to experience

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[61] Keith Howard, "Mapping K-pop Past and Present: Shifting the Modes of Exchange" in *The Political Economy of Business Ethics in East Asia: A Historical and Comparative Perspective,* ed. Ingyu Oh and Gil-sung Park (Cambridge: Chandos Publishing, 2017), 397-98.
[62] Chang Nam Kim, *K:POP: Roots and Blossoming of Korean Popular Music*, 24.
[63] Ibid, 36.
[64] Pil Ho Kim and Hyun Joon Shin. "The Birth of Rok", 219.

modern urban lifestyles[65]. This growing disco music dance craze also mirrored the public as they struggled to forget the destruction, poverty, and despair brought on by the Korean War[66] — a war that was partially caused by American imperialism and orientalism. Through popular culture Koreans were "offered a vision of utopia, or the United States, as an outlet for this escapist mentality"[67] via dance music.

It would be Orientalist itself to suggest that Korean people did not have the agency to perceive the negative effects of American cultural imperialism in Korea or that they lacked the agency to reject the American cultural products coming out of AFKN or the Eighth Army Base. For example, according to some of the surveys from the 1980s, the participants believed that AFKN-TV didn't have that great of an effect on themselves. In a 1984 survey, the university students expressed that although watching AFKN-TV made them view American culture more positively, it didn't make them have a negative view of Korean culture.[68] Another participant stated that AFKN-TV made some Korean people think of the US as a country they were envious of, rather than a country that they liked. A majority of participants expressed that they simply enjoyed watching things that were difficult to see in their own country.[69] This may be a result of an anti-Americanism movement that was born in 1980, after the Chun Doo-Hwan administration's military massacre in Gwangju.

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[65] Heesun, Kim. "Multiplying Femininity: Diversification of Sexualized Bodies in Korean Dance Divas in the 1980s." *Ihwaŭmangnonjip,* 19, no.1 (2018), 101.
[66] Chang Nam Kim, *K:POP: Roots and Blossoming of Korean Popular Music*, 25.
[67] Ibid, 25.
[68] Yong Gyu Park, "Characteristics of AFKN and its cultural influences in Korea", 125.
[69] Ibid, 127.

During this period, any Korean military actions were not allowed without the authorization of the American government. University students accused the U.S. of supporting the military government during the massacre. They further questioned the Reagen administration when they invited President Chun to the US and interpreted this as supporting a dictatorship.[70] Consequently, many perceived U.S involvement in Korean politics as "invasive and destructive" [71] causing university students, religious groups, and leftist-intellectuals to take part in anti-American movements. Anti-Americanism to this young generation meant Korean democracy, independence from the US, and an attempt to decolonize the current cultural landscape so thoroughly reconfigured by American culture.[72] Following the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, folk music, "imbued with the spirit of resistance and allied with a cultural movement for reform," became protest songs, university songs, or labor songs.[73] Despite this anti-Americanism movement in the 1980s and the Park Chung Hee administration's harsh censorship laws, the Korean government was eventually pressured by the US government to open their markets, including culture industries, extending the flow of American cultural products like Hollywood movies and the presence of music videos on AFKN-TV.[74]

Though the Anti-Americanism movement began in the 1980s, many South Koreans still looked up to the American way of life causing many eager young Koreans to study abroad in the States[75] and come back with further knowledge on American pop culture. Lee Soo-Man (b.

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[70] Seong Won Park, "The Present and Future of Americanization in South Korea", 56.
[71] Yong Gyu Park, "Characteristics of AFKN and its cultural influences in Korea", 113.
[72] Ibid, 56.
[73] Chang Nam Kim, K-pop: Roots, 62.
[74] Sherri Ter L Molen, "A Cultural Imperialistic Homecoming", 154.
[75] John Lie, *K-Pop*, 60.

1952), for example, founded SM Studio in 1989 after witnessing the prominence of MTV while studying at California State University following his quiet folk singer career.[76] Additionally, Shin Joong Hyun's son, Shin Dae Chul (b. 1967) continued his father's work and formed heavy metal band Sinawe in 1986. Sinawe had a revolving lineup of members including bass player Seo Taiji (b. 1972), who eventually left the band. Seo then recruited 2 dancers — Lee Juno (b. 1967) and Yang Hyun Suk (b. 1970) and together they formed the hip-hop and rock music inspired group Seo Taiji & Boys. They are widely acknowledged as the first Korean hip-hop group and the predecessor of K-pop. Both SM Entertainment and Seo Taiji & Boys will be crucial case studies for this thesis. Similarly to Seo Taiji and Lee Soo Man, major players in the K-pop industry were teenagers and young adults in the 1980s while AFKN was broadcasting in Korea. The founders of the "Big 3" entertainment labels — Lee Soo Man (SM Entertainment), Park Jin Young (JYP Entertainment), and Yang Hyun Suk (YG Entertainment), as well as Bang Shi Hyuk, the founder of BTS's label Big Hit Entertainment have all demonstrated the influence they have received from American culture through their work. Thus, we can conclude that as a result of AFKN and American imperialism within South Korea, "K-pop draws most heavily from American culture music."[77]

b. <u>The Second Front: Korean Immigration to the U.S. & Cold War Orientalism</u>

[76] Further chapters will greatly discuss the history behind the idol training system that Lee built based on his experiences in the U.S. and in Korea.This system has been adopted by several Korean entertainment companies and has become the blueprint for creating K-pop groups.
[77] Crystal S. Anderson, "Hallyu.S.A.: America's impact on the Korean Wave." in The Global Impact of South Korea Popular Culture: Hallyu Unbound. Ed. Valentina Mrinescu, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 118.

The sociology scholar John Lie argues that United States-Korea relations — including troop presence, diplomacy, depiction of American affluence within AFKN television and radio shows — naturally caused Koreans to strive to go to the U.S. for school, work, and travel.[78] I argue instead that this eruption of Korean immigration was not natural or innocent, and was in fact a direct consequence of U.S. orientalism on the Korean peninsula. This is supported by scholars like Lisa Lowe, who notes that the history of U.S. imperialism in Asia birthed the return of Asia to the "imperial center" — the U.S. itself. Orientalism as well has been proven to bear a "crucial relationship to the history of Asian immigration, exclusion, and naturalization" — tying American imperialism and Orientalism to Asian immigration to the U.S.[79] Therefore, it is no coincidence that citizens from countries deeply affected by different modes of U.S. imperialism like South Korea predominantly made up the wave of post-1965 Asian immigration.[80]

Furthermore, U.S. imperialism not only set the conditions for Asian immigration to the West but it also disappeared by branding imperialism as a "European problem that American culture has solved".[81] This supposedly European problem was "solved" in the U.S. somewhat through "Cold War Orientalism" — the proliferation of popular culture, literature and media filled with intellectual, emotional, financial exchanges between Americans and Asians throughout the U.S, as coined by Christina Klein[82]. Narratives of anti-conquest were created by middlebrow intellectuals who legitimized U.S. expansion while "denying its coercive or imperial

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[78]John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2014), 60.
[79] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 101-2.
[80] Ibid, 16.
[81] Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxiii.
[82] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

nature".[83] Texts like Reader's Digest, "pledged themselves to educating the public about Asia"[84] by publishing stories on Korea during the Korean War and making Asia visible "through a process of mapping, both literal and figurative, and kept readers informed."[85] Though the practice of "mapping" is an Orientalist practice, Reader's Digest and the Saturday Review[86], "vigorously denied the idea of American imperialism"[87] and asserted universalism.

Cold War Orientalists like American author and Korean War veteran James A. Michener published in such outlets in order to "prove to Americans that Asians are 'easy to know and love.'"[88] In doing so, he assured the reader that Asia is still accessible to an American, that exchange is still possible, and that the alienation of Asia from America is not inevitable. We see from Michener this "Orientalist construction" of culture in which Asian immigrants come from an essentially "foreign" origin which the modern American society discovers, welcomes and domesticates.[89] For example, in Michener's *The Voice of Asia*, through accounts of his experiences while touring Asia in 1950, he "delivers access to the thoughts, emotions, and personalities of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Burmese, and Indochinese people."[90] He strives to replace the old knowledge about Asia — mute, mysterious, and remote — with a new narrative that renders it familiar, articulate, and approachable."[91]Michener's essay shines light as to why the identity crisis Americans felt in the wake of their involvement in Cold War American

[83] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 13.
[84] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 63.
[85] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 64.
[86] The Saturday Review or The Saturday Review of Literature gave a weekly audience of 630,000 subscribers a mix of reviews and essays about society and culture from 1920 to 1982.
[87] Ibid, 77.
[88] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 153.
[89] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 5.
[90] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 132.
[91] Ibid,132.

imperialism could be ratified by condemning personal racial prejudice.[92] Efforts like Michener's to "cultivate a sentimental, racially tolerant subjectivity[93]" should be read as part of his explicitly written effort to keep Asia within the U.S. sphere of influence. Cold War Orientalism generated by these middlebrow intellectuals and Washington policymakers produced a "sentimental discourse of integration that imagined the forging of bonds between Asians and Americans both at home and abroad."[94]

Thus, we can understand that both American imperialism in Asia and this mode of American Orientalism within popular culture directly impacted the creation of K-pop and reception of it in the U.S. This is the root of the production and proliferation of K-pop, roots that are even older than the Korean War. In a 1992 study, Son Young-Ho notes that the early twentieth century arrival of Korean immigrants coincided with the emergence of Yellow Peril[95], the fear that Asian immigrants would inundate white American society and threaten every American institution."[96] 20th century Korean immigrants' response to Yellow Peril and search for racial accommodation in the United States was passed down to present-day Korean immigrants in the U.S.[97] Korean immigrants separated or isolated themselves from the larger society, attempted to remove dark aspects of Korean li ves by curbing undesirable activities, and aimed for rapid social and economic mobility. This response and the act of passing it down to

[92] Ibid, 134.
[93] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 135.
[94] Ibid, 12.
[95] A stereotype with roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that led to the exclusion of Asian immigrants and the U.S. colonization of Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines.
[96] Young-ho Son, "Korean Response to the "Yellow Peril" and Search for Racial Accomodation in the United States" in Korea Journal 32.2, 1992, 58.
[97] At the time of writing, the 1990s.

immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s is one basis for the emergence of the model minority stereotype.[98] Thus, yellow peril is argued by Yuko Kawai as having returned in the 1980s, resurrected alongside the emergence of the model minority.[99] This was fueled by two phenomena, the first being the economic success of Japan followed by the emergence of the so-called "Asian tigers" or "Four Small Dragons" — Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea — painting Asian Americans as "unfair" economic competitors.[100] The second phenomenon was the "successful" image of Asian Americans outdoing not only other minority groups but also White Americans which unsettled the predominance of the White race and triggered fears[101] — informing how successful Korean or Korean-American artists are later on represented in American media.

Two articles published in 1966 by mainstream American media are cited as the beginning of the model-minority stereotype, "Success Story, Japanese-American Style" in the New York Times and "Success Story of One Minoriy in U.S. within U.S. New and World Report.[102] We see this inherited tradition crop up again in the 1980s with the resurrection of the model minority, like in the 1987 TIME magazine cover story on Asian-American Whiz Kids, which featured The Ahn Trio — Korean-American musicians in their own right. Born in Seoul, the three sisters (Angella, Lucia, Maria) moved to America to study music at Julliard, and achieved recognition through the 1987 cover story.[103] The Ahn Trio went on to collaborate with both classical and pop

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[98] Young-ho Son, "Korean Response to the Yellow Peril", 69-70.
[99] Yuko Kawai, "Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril" *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 2005, 112.
[100] Ibid,116.
[101] Ibid, 116.
[102] Ibid, 113.
[103] "The Ahn Trio", The Ahn Trio, accessed April 2019, http://www.ahntrio.com/about.

musicians, performed at the White House State Dinner honoring South Korean president Lee Myung-bak in 2011, and were in a GAP ad — thus one of the most prominent Korean-American musicians to emerge from the time period of 1954 to 1990. Later successes by musicians like Kyung-wha Chung, Midori, and Yo-Yo Ma also helped "create the perception that classical music is a site where Asians and Asian Americans can achieve success and recognition on an international scale" as it is a field wherein Asian-American children are perceived to "face fewer barriers and talent can potentially be fully rewarded."[104] The "barriers" that Asian or Korean musicians face to having their talent fully rewarded are also racially charged and informed by essentialist and racist concepts like "yellow peril."

Another consequence of the model-minority stereotype from the 1980s on, is that many young Asian or young Korean people who learned classical music and wanted to perform "deviant" or "cool" forms of music like pop, hip-hop or rock often but were unable to, either because of familial pressure to follow a more secure path or because of the barriers faced due to the roles assigned to Asian people in the media. Iwamura details that the roles Asian people were allowed to perform in American media before World War II included the "inscrutable Oriental, evil Fu Manchus, Yellow Peril, heathen Chinee, and Dragon Ladies" and after WWII shifted to "more friendlier, more subservient models" such as the "faithful caregiver, the warm-hearted prostitute, the docile Lotus Blossom, the humorous sidekick, and the model minority."[105] As Iwamura notes, these characters may change, "but they play the same role, serve the same function, and tell the same story — time and time again" which is a "repetitive promise" that

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[104] Grace Wang, "Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: "Music Moms" and the Performance of Asian American Identities" in *American Quarterly*, 61:4 (2009), 898.
[105] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism*, 8-9.

virtual Orientalism relies on in order to "drive its cultural imperialist enterprise."[106] These barriers that Korean-American young people faced in the U.S. forced them to return to Korea in order to become successful musicians or performers — which is a major factor in the creation and production of K-pop.

It is argued that the initial 1966 articles that portrayed Asian Americans as the model minority were purposely published at that time to "send a distinct political message to the nascent Black Power Movement"[107] in order to produce and support a "colorblind ideology," thus attempting to divide and eliminate any possibility of solidarity between racial minority groups. The resurrection of model minority stereotype and yellow peril in the 1980s also sought to place Asian Americans in a racial triangulation as "aliens or outsiders" to White Americans and "superior" in relation to African Americans. [108] Further chapters will explore how this triangulation comes to a head in 1992 — with the L.A. riots, the emergence of Korean hip-hop and the creation of K-pop. Not only does the next chapter start with the career of Seo Taiji and Boys, it also looks at how they are first hip-hop or rap dance act (a creative culture created by African-Americans), the tensions between the racial triangulation of White-Asian-Black people, and how those tensions spill over into the production of popular music in Korea.

III. The Creation and Racialization of K-pop from 1990 to 2010

[106] Ibid, 161.
[107] Yuko Kawai, "Stereotyping Asian Americans", 114.
[108] Yuko Kawai, "Stereotyping Asian Americans", 110.

In the time period of 1990 to 2010, the authority of U.S. orientalism continued to permeate the creation of Korean popular music as well as the representation of K-pop in U.S. and Korean media. K-pop was eventually racialized as "Asian music" in the U.S., causing the media to deem the American careers of famous K-pop stars a failure. However, the potency of Korean music as ethnic music and the virality of K-pop artists and Asian-American artists on YouTube caused Korean artists to build a formidable audience in the U.S. and even sell out American venues without becoming mainstream artists. The relationship between Asian-American YouTube stars and K-pop artists and their labels forced K-pop as a genre to evolve and set the stage for the mainstream reception of K-pop from 2010 to 2018.

1992 was a monumental year for Korean America and for Korean pop music influenced by American music styles. This year brought us Seo Taiji & Boys, the L.A. Riots (or *Sa-I-Gu*[109]), and Solid — three entities that deeply impacted Korean and Korean-American music history. Seo Taiji & Boys debuted in 1992, "announcing the arrival of youth as popular music's primary audience in South Korea".[110] In the era of a more progressive, democratic government and economic enrichment plus a youth with access to disposable income, Seo Taiji & Boys and other rap dance groups were able to thrive thanks to their empowered youth audience. They are widely recognized as the introduction of hip-hop to Korea and the beginning of the generation of "rap dance", a new genre that serves as the foundation of K-pop today. Groups like Seo Taiji & Boys, Hyun Jinyoung & Wawa, and Deux's music not only gave the Korean public their first taste of

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[109] Koreans generally refer to the L.A. Riots or Los Angeles Uprising in 1992 as *Sa-I-Gu* or 4-9-2, literally April 29. This follows the Korean tradition of using a date to refer to major political and/or violent events in their history.
[110] John Lie, *K-Pop*, 58.

hip-hop, but they also narrowed the temporal gap between South Korea and American popular music.[111]

1992 was also a key year for "Korean America" and Korean hip-hop as the L.A. Riots erupted in April 1992. Before the Rodney King uprising, the Korean response to Yellow Peril was "racial separation or insulation", attempts to mitigate crime and juvenile delinquency rates within the Korean community by putting much effort into the education of their children, and rapid social and economic mobility through owning small businesses.[112] Remembered by the Korean-American community as *Sa-I-Gu*, it was an event that marked a critical moment in Korean American political identity and birthed Korean America.[113] Many Korean-Americans learned the importance of participation in politics and social processes, while political empowerment became an urgent goal for the community.[114] It also became the event in which the Korean-American became aware of the negative effects of media scapegoating and being represented in the media as an "issue or problem" rather than human beings in American society.[115] The American media-led discourse surrounding the event portrayed the conflict as a racial confrontation caused by cultural differences rather than mentioning the lack of public policy that deals with racism and poverty.[116] Due to this discourse, hip-hop in Korea at the time was

[111] Ibid, 58.
[112] Son Youngho, "Korean Response to the Yellow Peril and Search for Racial Accommodation in the United States", 65-69.
[113] Edward T Chang, "Los Angeles Riots/Sa-I-Gu" *Asian American Society: An Encyclopedia* (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2014).
[114] Kyeyoung Park, *LA Rising: Korean Relations with Blacks and Latinos After Civil Unrest*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019.) 194.
[115] Kyeyoung Park, *LA Rising*, 194.
[116] Kyeyoung Park, "Use and Abuse of Race and Culture: Black-Korean Tension in America." *American Anthropologist 98:3* (1999) 496.

understood as “music that was done by gangsters” as Korean perspectives of Black people were at their most negative.[117]

1992 was also the year when Solid, a Korean R&B trio was formed. Differing from Seo Taiji & Boys, Solid was uniquely made up of three Korean-Americans. The members Kim Johan (George Kim), Chong Jaeyoon (Jae Chong), and Lee Joon (John Lee) met in Orange County in California in 1992 then debuted in Korea in 1993. They are considered one of the biggest influences in developing American styles and sounds like R&B, rap, hip-hop, acapella, beatboxing and more into the Korean mainstream music industry. Park Jung Hyun or Lena Park, another Korean-American R&B singer who debuted in 1998 credits Solid for being the first Korean Americans to find success in the industry and influenced more Koreans from abroad to enter the Korean entertainment industry as the industry began seeking talents from abroad proactively after.[118]

The immediate influence of these three events can be seen in the 1993 Los Angeles Times article on Hyun Jin Young’s music video shoot in Los Angeles. Hyun, SM Studio[119]’s first artist, flew to Los Angeles to shoot footage for his music video and a TV documentary with local African-American youths as the background dancers. He was also a rap dance artist and contemporary of Seo Taiji & Boys, who was also well known for his R&B-style singing as well.

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[117] Myoung-son Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop: Global Rap in South Korea*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 15.
[118] “COMEBACK SOLID Into the Light 한국 R&B의 선구자! '솔리드 히스토리' @ COMEBACK SOLID 180328 EP.1”, YouTube video, 1:24, posted by “Mnet Official”, March 28, 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb47FH7fnHI
[119] Lee Soo-Man established SM Studio in 1989 and the company changed its name to SM Entertainment in 1995.

Hyun told the Los Angeles Times that he learned rap from his black friends, children of U.S. military personnel who lived in his neighborhood and was discovered four years prior by Lee Soo Man while he was dancing in a club.[120] Lee also had him record his third album in L.A. in order to familiarize him with the origins of hip-hop, despite years of singing and dancing in American style. Lee Soo Man was also hopeful that Hyun's visit to the USA could "help make a good relationship between black guys and the Korean community", showing that Lee was aware of the impact of the L.A. Riots on the Korean community. Ultimately, Hyun's most significant contribution to K-pop history was almost immediately after the album (*Int: World Beat and Hiphop of New Dance 3*) was released. Hyun was caught using marijuana and philopon thus was banned from broadcast for some time after. As a result of this scandal, Lee realized that Korean pop stars would need skills in humility, attitude, language, and more — not just skills in singing and dancing. From this realization birthed Lee Soo Man's "idol system" and "culture technology" that K-pop is well known for today and it is from this point forward that we can trace the creation of K-pop as we know it today and the route it took back and forth between the U.S. and South Korea.

The literature surrounding the early moments of K-pop focus on the spread of Korean pop music and other pop culture amongst East Asian countries. The current history of K-pop generally moves on from Seo Taiji & Boys to SM Entertainment's H.O.T.[121] (1996) who

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[120] Gordon Dillow, "Rap's Seoul Brother: Dance Transcended All Language Barriers for Korean Music Star" *Los Angeles Times* (May 9, 1993) https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-05-09-me-33452-story.html

[121] "Lee Soo-man acknowledged that the idol group was indeed created 'carefully, cold-bloodedly,' based on available research about adolescents' aspirations… Thus the idol system was born in Korea, and with it an idol fandom." Lee, "Of the Fans, by the Fans, for the Fans: The JYJ Republic" in *Hallyu 2.0 The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media,* 116.

presented a "softer, kinder, gentler rendition" of Seo Taiji's music and aesthetic while still simulating a social sensation.[122] It is worth noting that some scholars claim that they were modeled on boy bands such as Shonentai (1981) from Japan and New Kids on the Block (1984).[123] H.O.T. was arguably the first Korean boy band to become popular outside of Korea causing Beijing journalists to dub the growing popularity of Korean music and television dramas as Hanryu [lit: Korean Wave] or in Korea, "*Hallyu*" — a term still used to refer to the export and consumption of Korean culture products outside of Korea. In Japan, then the second largest music market in the world, BoA was promoted as a J-Pop idol, who just happened to be Korean[124]. Trained in singing, dancing, and Japanese by trainers from Japan — BoA released her debut Japanese album *Listen To My Heart* on March 13, 2002 and was a massive hit. The success of this localization strategy continued to work with SM Entertainment's TVXQ! (2003) who transformed into J-Pop group Tohoshinki in 2005[125]. As a result of the birth of the Hallyu Wave in the early 2000s, the popularity of K-pop and Korean dramas in East Asia during this time period has been a topic of much scholarship around Korean pop culture.[126]

Alongside this influence and spread in East Asian, there was also an undercurrent of American influence in the music being produced and performed in Korea. As discussed in Chapter 1, the presence of AFKN, the Eighth Army, and the return of Koreans from America

[122] John Lie, K-Pop, 63.
[123] John Lie, K-Pop, 99.
[124] John Lie, K-Pop, 101.
[125] John Lie, K-Pop 102.
[126] "It should be also admitted that border-crossing Korean pop culture and its transnational consumption is not an independent phenomenon but one of the components of the so-called 'trans-Asia cultural traffic' (Iwabuchi et al. 2004) or 'East Asian pop culture' (Chua 2004)." Shin, "Have you ever seen the Rain? And who'll stop the Rain?: the globalizing project of Korean pop (K-pop)" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* 507

helped introduce genres like rock and roll, jazz, R&B and hip-hop to Korea. Following the success of Solid, a solid stream of Korean Americans and students who studied in Korea returned to South Korea to become performers[127]. These Korean Americans or former international students were also recruited by labels to write and rap English verses or deliver complicated R&B riffs like Jinusean's members Sean (a Californian and former backup dancer for Seo Taiji & Kids plus Hyun Jin Young) and Louisiana native Jinu.[128] Jinusean were the first artists under the label YG Entertainment, founded in 1996 by Yang Hyun Suk and his brother Yang Min Suk. They were soon joined by 1TYM — another hip-hop and R&B focused artist. With 1TYM on hiatus after 2006, their member Teddy Park transitioned into the role of producer for other YG artists, producing several hit songs for BIGBANG, 2NE1, Lee Hi, BLACKPINK and more. The racial triangulation in the U.S. between Asian, Black, and White Americans provided an avenue for Korean Americans moving to Korea to pursue music. Song notes that "American popular music is one that is deeply tied to the notion of race" and there is no way to separate music from the history of ethnic and racial formation in the U.S.[129] For Korean rappers both in the U.S. and Korea, creating a tie to Blackness is crucial in identifying themselves as hip-hop artists. Yet, record labels in the U.S. became wary of signing them because of their lack of authenticity and marketability despite their efforts. Thus, many young Korean-Americans hoping to pursue music moved to Korea to become idol group members.

[127] John Lie, K-pop, 60.
[128] Other examples include H.O.T.'s Tony An, Shinhwa's Eric Mun and Andy Lee, Sechskies Eun Jiwon and (former) Kang Sung Hoon, 1TYM's Teddy Park and Danny Im — all prominent boy groups from the 1990s.
[129] Myoung-Sun Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop*, 44.

Not only was there American influence in the creation of K-pop music and groups, but the budding pop music industry in Korea began to gain attention in U.S. media as well. Echoing the efforts to make Asia more "known" by middlebrow publications like *Readers Digest*, 1996 saw the first *Billboard* feature on Korean music and artists. *Billboard* has informed the American public of important events in the commercial music field every week for over 50 years, and also served the purpose of predicting upcoming trends in the field. The publication's most enduring and influential creation for the industry has been its music charts[130] and this is certainly true when it comes to understanding the reception of K-Pop in the U.S. as well. Billboard's first report on South Korean music was in their April 20, 1996 issue, a front-cover story called "Seoul Music: Hot Rockin' in Korea" with the byline: The Sounds of New Generation Shake Up The South. The report talks about three key figures, Shin Joong Hyun (godfather and founder of rock'n'roll in Korea), his son Shin Dae Chul (the lead guitarist of Sinawe, a hard rock/heavy metal band active from 1986-1991), and Seo Taiji. The article discusses the three artists' hope to understand freedom and free minds of American rock stars like Jimi Hendrix in a time of government censorship concluding that "for all South Korea's new-found freedom, it is still a conservative and much-troubled country, ripe for a cultural explosion."[131] The conclusion of this article reads as relying on inherited Orientalist knowledge of the American media of the Hermit Kingdom/Hermit Nation narrative — that Korea is still deliberately isolating itself from the wider world. Occluded in this narrative was the fact that the reason strict censorship laws existed in the 1980s and 1990s was due to ongoing political instability that can be traced back to the

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[130] N Anand. "Charting the Music Business: Magazine and the Development of the Commercial Music Field" *The Business of Culture: Strategic Perspective on Entertainment and Media*. Ed. Joseph Lempel et al. 2005, 143.
[131] Fred Varcoe. "Seoul Music: Hot Rocking' In Korea" *Billboard* (April 20, 1996) https://books.google.ca/books?id=iw0EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA5&pg=PA18#v=onepage&q&f=false

Korean War. It is notable though, that during this period of heavy censorship, AKFN-TV was still able to broadcast American TV shows, films, and music videos because it was run by the US Department of Defense, and the Korean government was not in the position to dictate what the US government should do with their channel. Though this may be another reason why American rock music and the American army base in Seoul (Yongsan Garrison) was viewed as a hub for artistic freedom and creativity; it also demonstrates the imbalance of power between South Korea and the U.S. at the time.

With these roots in place in Korea, Asia, and the U.S., the K-pop industry continued to grow. 1997 saw the further creation of popular idol groups like Sechs Kies, NRG, Baby V.O.X., S.E.S., and Fin.K.L. Park Jin Young or J.Y. Park founded Tae-Hong Planning Corporation which eventually became JYP Entertainment in 2001. In December 2000, JYP Entertainment signed Jeong Ji Hoon as a trainee, who would later debut two years later as Rain — a name that became a household name in Korea and Asia. Like Rain, Korean pop stars evolved from 'Korean wave stars" to "Asian stars", and then terminology in the mid-2000s pivoted towards "global star" or "world star" for pop stars that became known outside of Asia.[132] As artists like Rain prepared to conquer the global market, news about the Korean music market began to appear in American media in the early 2000s. The prime example would be the "International" section of Billboard magazine and later on the "Asia Pacific Quarterly" column such as Steve McClure's article "Avex and Korean Label Sign Deal: Japan's Biggest Independent, Korea's SM Make Historic

[132] Hyunjoon Shin, "Have you ever seen the *Rain?* And who'll stop the *Rain*?: the globalizing project of Korean pop (K-pop)" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10.4 (2009) 508.

Pact" (November 2000)[133] or Mark Russell's article "Korean Broadcasters Pull the Plug on Music Charts" (April 2003)[134]. The two journalists, Steve McClure and Mark Russell also collaborated on articles such as "Korean Pop Seeps Into Japan" (June 2005)[135]. Steve McClure was a Tokyo-based journalist who applied his knowledge of the Japanese music industry to the Korean scene, wrote on Korea and Japan in Billboard Magazine since at least 1993, and eventually rose to become Billboard's Asia bureau chief until 2008 when he launched his own publication. Mark Russell is a writer based in Seoul who first landed in Korea in 1996, and became the first Billboard contributor to specialize in Korean culture and K-pop music. As a result of this status, he has also "given lectures about Korean pop culture in the United States, Europe and Asia and been quoted extensively in media outlets around the world."[136] Russell also published two monographs on Korea, *Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music and Internet Culture* (2008) and *K-Pop Now! The Korean Music Revolution* (2014). These two books have been cited heavily in both scholarly and journalistic articles related to K-pop.[137]

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[133] Steve McClure, "Avex and Korean Label Sign Deal: Japan's Biggest Independent, Korea's SM Make Historic Pact" *Billboard* November 18 2000, 55.
https://books.google.ca/books?id=0BAEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA8&pg=PA55#v=onepage&q&f=false

[134] Mark Russell. "Korean Broadcasters Pull The Plug On Music Charts". *Billboard* April 2003: 51.
https://books.google.ca/books?id=VQ8EAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA4&pg=PA51#v=onepage&q&f=false

[135] Steve McClure and Mark Russell. "Korean Pop Seeps Into Japan" *Billboard* June 11 2005: 17.
https://books.google.ca/books?id=fRQEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA5&pg=PA17#v=onepage&q&f=false

[136] Mark Russell, "About", Mark James Russel, accessed March 2019,
http://www.markjamesrussell.com/about/

[137] Of *Pop Goes Korea*, reviewer Emily Ashman noted that one can "sense the author's desire to report back on home on witnessing 'history in the making'" as he was living in Korea at the time of it's "hyper-modernisation of the cultural landscape" and "saw it all". The "ambitious review of South Korean popular culture" attempts to "encompass the breadth of Korean pop culture" in 220 pages without a "bibliography or references for any of the information or data provided." Ashman further notes that certain claims can be disputed by publications like the Korean Film Council and critiques the general mishandling of statistics and biased superlatives like "Top Ten Biggest Blockbusters". Ashman, book review of *Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music, and Internet Culture* in Screening the Past (2010), 7.

K-pop Now! Takes on the project of mapping "the land of K-pop" and creating a K-pop encyclopedia, another inherited tradition of mapping the East. To know the East is to conquer the East. It also doubles as a travel guide, in the chapter "the land of K-pop", Russell discusses the location of several fashion boutiques, art, makeup and hair salons, and even the location of the entertainment companies' offices. At the very back of the book, there is also a page on "Travelling in Korea". Furthermore, when explaining the creation of K-pop in the chapter "What is K-pop?" there is no mention of American military presence following the Korean War nor AFKN or the Eighth Army Base shows. What is most striking is the lack of sources for the information printed in this book, there are only sources for the direct interviews and the photos featured. It is a completely unchecked and unverified publication that relies solely on Russell's experience in Korea and the three interviews conducted with two artists and EatYourKimchi. Russell plays the role of the classic travel writer, like his predecessor William Elliot Griffis and James Michener, using his knowledge and authority to make the enormous entity of Korean popular culture "systematically, alphabetically knowable"[138]. Borrowing from the knowledge that Orientalist discourse gives him to survey contemporary Korean culture "from its origins to its prime to its decline", he does not need to cite his sources. His authority comes from essential knowledge that is effective, tested and unchanging[139] — allowing him to publish an entire monograph on the imaginative history of Korea and Korean pop culture without a references section. Despite the lack of citation and reference other than his own personal experiences and observations, Russell has been extensively cited by academic papers and media articles.

[138] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 65.
[139] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 38.

Online coverage of K-Pop began after the Wonder Girls became the first K-pop artist to chart on Billboard Hot 100 (#76) and they began to tour as an opening act for the Jonas Brothers in 2008. The Wonder Girls' advancement into the U.S. market had them leave Korea at the "height of their popularity" to focus on the tour, film a TeenNick movie, and record an English album that "never surfaced after the Akon collaboration 'Like Money' failed to chart."[140] At this time, K-Pop was still very much a subculture and contained within certain spaces both online and offline. BoA made her American debut in October 2008 with the song "Eat You Up", but remained "relatively unknown in the mainstream US pop market" perhaps because her "Asian-ness" — "physical features as well as her singing style and accent— limits her ability to appeal broadly beyond Asian and American fans."[141] Thus, scholars argued during this time that the K-Pop formula found limits in the U.S., citing the attempts to advance into the American market by BoA, Wonder Girls and Rain. Lie, for example, notes that Rain "hardly made a splash in the United States" and that although the Wonder Girls charted at number 76 on Billboard's Top 100 chart in 2009 their "initial foray into the United States fell short of resounding success." [142] Rain's first ever New York appearance in 2006 received a poor review in the New York Times because it was unoriginal ("reminded the reviewer of Michael Jackson and Justin Timberlake") and because the audience was reportedly 95% Asian or of Asian descent.[143] Due to this "very bad review"[144] in the *New York Times*, Rain's English debut album was postponed indefinitely

[140] Jeff Benjamin and Jessica Oak. "Top 10 K-Pop Girl Groups You Need to Know" *Billboard*. April 30 2014.https://www.billboard.com/articles/list/6032628/top-10-k-pop-girl-groups-korea-sistar-2NE1-girls-generation
[141] Eun-Young Jung. "Playing the Race and Sexuality Cards in the Transnational Pop Game: Korean Music Videos for the US Market." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* Volume 22, Issue 2. Page 226.
[142] John Lie, *K-Pop,* 107.
[143] Eun-Young Jung, 'Playing the Race and Sexuality Cards in the Transnational Pop Game," 232.
[144] Hyunjoon Shin, "Have you ever seen the *Rain?* And who'll stop the *Rain*?", 509.

instead of releasing in Autumn 2006. Scholars, fans, and the artists' management alike consider this first wave of K-pop reception in North America to be a "failure" as they were unable to appeal broadly beyond Asian and Asian American fans. The impact from the negative coverage of K-pop by these American news powerhouses demonstrates the Orientalist authority inherited by 'Western' writers who report on 'the East'.

Despite the dismissal by American media, the significance of this wave of K-Pop reception in the U.S. was quite large to Asian diaspora communities like Asian-Americans. Through Ju and Lee's study on analyzing the potency that transnational Korean media has as new ethnic media, it was observed that Asian-American families have been watching Asian media since at least the early 2000s[145]. Korean media content has long been specifically operated for major cities where the largest migrant Korean groups reside – namely, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York.[146] In 2003, KBS kicked off its KBS World Radio and KBS America broadcast service targeting Korean communities in LA, New York, Honolulu and even Toronto. Sangjoon Lee notes the importance of video rental stores as well, where tapes of Korean music shows like *Music Bank* or *Music Core* could be rented.[147] As K-pop star and Atlanta native Eric Nam notes, "the only access I had to people who looked like me doing music was by renting VHS tapes at the corner market...watching *Music Bank* or *Music Core* reruns."[148] Consuming media that is

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[145] Hyejung Ju and Soobum Lee. "The Korean Wave and Asian Americans: the ethnic meanings of transnational Korean pop culture in the USA" *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* Volume 29, Issue 3, 2015. 329.
[146] Ibid, 325.
[147] Sangjoon Lee, "From Diaspora TV to Social Media: Korean TV Dramas in America" in *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media,* ed. Sangjoon Lee and Mark Nornes Abe (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 178.
[148] "The Most Important Episode Ever" by Eric Nam, Spotify. November 18, 2019.

popular in their home countries helps create a connection to their culture thus facilitating the "imagination of a transnational ethnic community"[149]. Since the lives of contemporary East Asian youth are often not depicted in American mainstream media, Asian American youths enjoy Korean dramas because they are "able to find many commonalities with the similarly aged people in their culture of origin."[150] Additionally, due to experiencing orientalism-fueled racism, young Asian Americans can feel that Asian media is a mediated haven for young Asian Americans when they feel socially marginalized within the U.S. Their fascination with K-pop in particular, is self-celebratory and a "long-overdue vindication of their potency in cultural creativity."[151]

However, it is thanks to new media platforms online that Korean pop culture was able to gain an even wider audience in the U.S. Dal Yong Jin briefly discusses the role of social media in the proliferation of K-pop around the globe, especially how "internet users...use social network services to spread their love of K-pop, helping to break down traditional barriers"[152]. As it wasn't available on mainstream media networks for many people, often Asian people who had access to K-Pop as ethnic media would find ways to share the media with others online. They would even go so far as to translate lyrics and subtitle music videos and upload them online (primarily on YouTube), providing a crucial service for the spread of K-Pop to non-Korean speaking audiences. The importance of fans who volunteer to translate and subtitle Korean media to the

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[149]Hyejung Ju and Soobum Lee. "The Korean Wave and Asian Americans: the ethnic meanings of transnational Korean pop culture in the USA", 329.
[150] Ibid, 331.
[151] Jungbong Choi and Roald Maliangkay. *K-Pop — The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 10.
[152] Dal Yong Jin. *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*, University Illinois, Press, 2016, Page 121.

spread of the Hallyu wave is often overlooked, and we can look to the growth of the international Korean drama market to understand their impact.

The Korean-American founder of Dramafever, Seung Bak and Suk Park, researched the consumption patterns for Korean TV dramas in the U.S. and noted that almost 6 million unique users were watching Korean dramas on illegal video streaming websites in North America every month with no legal alternative.[153] After convincing MBC, KBS, and SBS to sign licensing agreements, they went to the fansub communities who had been subbing the illegally obtained video and brought them on as volunteer translators for DramaFever.[154] Lee cites Brian Hu's study, in which Hu discovered that fansubber communities include "students and middle aged-housewives in Southeast Asia" and "Asian American members who reside in East and West coasts in America" who do the translations.[155] Considering this community of people who subtitled Korean dramas, it is not unreasonable to argue that similar networks existed from the early 2000s to subtitle music videos and variety shows that idols appeared on. Indeed, "subbing teams" dedicated to certain K-pop idol groups and variety shows still exist to this day.

The explosive use of YouTube, social media and the smartphone between 2005 and 2010 was particularly important to making K-Pop a "pan-Asian" and global phenomenon.[156] K-Pop artists and their labels began to move away from Korean social network services such as Cyworld and me2day and created accounts on Facebook and Twitter in order to communicate

[153] Sangjoon Lee. "From Diaspora TV to Social Media", 181.
[154] Ibid, 182.
[155] Ibid, 183.
[156] John Lie, *K-pop*, 128.

with fans around the world. Other agencies began to push to export with an emphasis on global drive with the contemporary K-Pop formula thus creating more "multinational and multiethnic groups" to extend their appeal to global audiences.[157] Now, the function of Korean-Americans or other Asian diaspora K-pop group members is to not only rap or sing in English or with an American hip-hop flow, but to also function as a translator, interpreter, and a link to fans around the globe. Through this fan network in the United States and the increased effort to connect with English-speaking fans, Korean acts were able to sell out American venues despite lack of recognition in the mainstream market. The Korea Times Music Festival[158] has sold out every year since 2003 and gained the attention of non-Korean K-Pop fans throughout the years. Korea Times noted in 2008 that about 95% of the tickets sold online were purchased by non-Koreans.[159] In 2006, YG Entertainment artists went on a YG Family 10th Anniversary World Tour which included stops in Washington D.C., New York City and Los Angeles. Epik High, a Korean hip-hop trio, also performed in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, and Seattle as part of their Map the Soul USA Tour in 2009. These are just a few examples that demonstrate the potency of K-pop as ethnic music in this period.

YouTube and online communities were also significant for K-pop and Asian Americans as Asian-American singers and dancers were "clearly recognized as some of [YouTube's] most

[157] John Lie, *K-Pop*, 121.
[158] An annual event held at the Hollywood Bowl (18,000 seat capacity) in Los Angeles that has been held since 2003 and was originally held to give Korean Americans the opportunity to stay in touch with Korean culture.
[159] Sang-hee Han, "Korean Music Festival in LA Unites Races, Generations" *Korea Times* (May 18 2008) http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2019/04/178_24372.html

notable breakout stars."[160] Asian Americans were seen to have adopted the technology faster than any other racial group,[161] leading to the Asian American YouTube phenomenon. As Asian-Americans dealt with the lack of representation in American media through their fascination with K-pop, many of them also chose to support viral video and filmmakers Wong Fu Productions, hip-hop group Far East Movement, and YouTube singers like A.J. Rafael, Gabe Bondoc, and Ailee. The International Secret Agents (ISA) concert series and nonprofit organization Kollaboration were further examples of how they were able to "capitalize on a niche audiences' emotional attachment to performers ('people like me')"[162]. Showcases like ISA were both organized by and featured Wong Fu Productions, Far East Movement, YouTube celebrities plus Asian-American hip-hop dance crews like Quest Crew and Poreotics, in cities such as Seattle, New York and Los Angeles.[163] Christine Bacareza Balance notes that these Asian-American YouTube stars are one aspect within a "longer cultural history produced by the laborious acts of 'feeling Asian-American'."[164] These viral Asian-American artists went on to irrevocably change K-pop — becoming choreographers, dance teachers, role models for future Korean-American K-pop stars, and K-pop stars themselves.

Several of the dancers and choreographers from these viral Asian-American dance crews were contacted to work for K-Pop labels, and their contributions completely changed the way that K-pop choreography is produced. Filipino-American Shaun Evaristo was contacted by YG

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[160] Lori Kido Lopez, "Asian America Gone Viral" In *The Routledge Companion to Asian American Media* Ed. Lori Kido Lopez and Vincent N. Pham (Abingdon: Routledge, 13 Mar 2017),157.
[161] Ibid, 158.
[162] Christine Bacareza Balance. "How It feels To be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube Performance" *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40, No 1/2, VIRAL (SPRING/SUMMER 2012): 142.
[163] Ibid, 142.
[164] Ibid, 140.

Entertainment to choreograph "Wedding Dress" (2009) and "I Need A Girl" (2010) for Big Bang. Evaristo went on to choreograph for 2NE1, Se7en, BTS, and former Super Junior-M member Henry. He founded Movement Lifestyle, a management company for choreographers like Lyle Beniga, Ian Westwood, Keone and Mari Madrid, and more — all of whom have choreographed for several notable K-Pop artists. Movement Lifestyle is also the dance studio where BigHit Entertainment sent BTS's Jungkook to train in dance for two months before debut. As noted, Asian-American YouTube singers also became inspiration for young Korean-Americans to become singers. Soloist Sam Kim and Joshua of SEVENTEEN both cite Asian-American singers AJ Rafael and Gabe Bondoc as their role models. Furthermore, artists like Ailee, Jae of Day6 and soloist Eric Nam were directly recruited as a result of Korean entertainment labels or broadcast studios seeing their popular YouTube videos. A particularly interesting case in which K-pop, Korean hip hop and the Asian-American YouTube network converged was Jay Park's experience. Park was able to successfully make a comeback to the Korean music world after leaving JYP Entertainment's male idol group 2PM in September 2009. [165] On March 15, 2010 he posted a video on his YouTube channel 'jayparkaom' with his version of B.o.B and Bruno Mars' "Nothin' on You" which received over 2 million views in less than 24 hours. Park continued to post covers on his YouTube channel which continued to perform well, due to his fans who were simply hoping to support his next endeavors after 2PM. He also began to appear in Wong Fu Production YouTube videos and the social media of other popular Asian-American creatives. His first public appearance was a Korean-American event in New Jersey that year was with other artists like members of his Seattle b-boy crew (Art of Movement)

[165] In September 2009, Park left 2PM and returned home to Seattle after unfavorable comments towards Korea from his trainee days were found on his personal MySpace account from 2005.

and Ailee (now a K-pop singer)[166]. Park began to work with LA-based entertainment attorney Ned Sherman[167], who helped him get casted in a movie called *Hype Nation* which saw him return to South Korea in June 2010 for filming. In July 8, he signed a contract with SidusHQ to manage his Korean career and released an EP that placed #32 on Gaon's year end chart, and despite his Korean success continued to participate in Asian-American events such as the 3rd annual ISA LA concert in September 2010.[168] Park went on to found hip-hop label AOMG, which had a large part in hip-hop becoming a mainstream genre in South Korea.

The authority of orientalism influenced not only the creation of K-pop as a genre, but also how K-pop was produced from 1990 to 2010. As the Hallyu Wave spread through Asia, Korean pop stars, their labels, and the media set their aspirations towards the U.S., in order to legitimize their claims as a "global star". However, the racialization of K-pop as Asian music in the U.S. caused American media to deem their U.S. advancement as inferior. Despite this dominant narrative, the efforts of artists like BoA, Wonder Girls, and Rain still had an important role in American history. As a result of the power of Korean music as ethnic music and the virality of both K-pop stars and Asian-American YouTube stars, Korean artists were able to sell out stadiums like Hollywood Bowl without mainstream recognition. This led to further opportunities

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[166] RUKSA, "projectKOREa Performers Revealed! ***OFFICIALLY SOLD OUT***", Rutgers Korean Students Association, March 29, 2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20100617190534/http://ruksa.org/2010/03/29/project-korea-special-guest-revealed-along-with-after-party/

[167] Digital Media Wire, "Entertainment Attorney Ned Sherman Representing Jay Park on Global Entertainment Career", May 28, 2010. https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/entertainment-attorney-ned-sherman-representing-jay-park-on-global-entertainment-career-95102834.html

[168] Allkpop, "International Secret Agents Concert 2010 to feature Jay Park and more", July 28 2010. https://www.allkpop.com/article/2010/07/international-secret-agents-concert-2010-to-feature-jay-park-and-more

for both Asian-American artists and K-pop as a genre to evolve, and create the conditions for the mainstream reception of K-pop from 2010 to 2018.

IV. K-pop Invasion and Containment from 2010 to 2018

As K-pop continued to evolve and gain a larger fandom internationally, K-Pop acts widened the breadth of their world tours and international media took a further interest in the phenomenon. With the success of acts like PSY and BTS, journalists and scholars begin to rush to publish on K-pop as they debate whether or not K-pop is "authentic" or "creative" enough. This reveals a more aggressive "techno-Orientalist" logic that reduces K-pop stars to factory girls or idol robots, rejecting them from the mainstream. The group that has most successfully leveraged an "authentic" narrative is BTS who are hailed for "paving the way" for Korean culture in the West. I argue that this attempt to single out BTS as a "socially conscious K-pop group" and crediting them for the success of an industry with at least thirty years of history is a complete essentialization and erasure of an important aspect of Korean history and "a specific mode of containment"[169] with links to the model minority myth and the treatment of Asian people by the U.S. since the 1880s.

A germinal moment in 2010 for media outlets, entertainment companies, and academics alike was the SMTOWN 2010 World Tour, which visited Los Angeles, Shanghai, Tokyo, Paris, and New York City with a total of 283,000 attendees. Scholars cited "cultural hybridity" and

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[169] The "specific mode of containment" that Palumbo-Liu refers to is the model minority myth and how it neutralizes and historicizes Asian success. This will be expanded upon further in this chapter.

“globalization” to explain the possibility of such an event when K-Pop ventures into the U.S. were deemed failures at the time and yet continued to persist not only in the U.S. but in other Western markets. The subculture and fandom of K-Pop continued to peak the interest of Billboard. In 2011 and Billboard and Billboard Korea partnered to launch the K-Pop Hot 100 Chart aiming to “provide the Korean music market with what [they] believe is Korea’s most accurate and relevant song ranking” according to Billboard’s then director of charts.[170]

It was “Gangnam Style” by PSY that was instrumental in raising the profile of K-pop within the American public’s awareness. The music video for “Gangnam Style” was the first video to hit a billion views (and subsequently the first to achieve two billion views as well) on YouTube, leading PSY to appear on U.S. talk shows, a 2013 Super Bowl commercial, and even closing out the 2012 MTV Video Music Awards. The South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism recognized the singer for "increasing the world's interest in Korea" and announced its decision to award Psy with a 4th Class Order of Cultural Merit. Crystal Anderson’s chapter “HallyU.S.A.” notes that PSY’s success also points to challenges that K-pop faces in the U.S. because it is visibly Asian, coded as foreign. This makes it difficult for Korean artists to establish themselves in the U.S. due to the country’s history of exclusion and discrimination of Asian immigrant grounds, including Korean immigrants.[171] The acceptance of K-pop in America during this time period was “dependent on holding Korea as a far away place, a spectacle that is somewhat familiar but somewhat foreign as well.”[172]

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[170] “Billboard, Billboard Korea Launch K-Pop Hot 100 Chart”. *Billboard* 3 July 2011: 6. https://books.google.ca/books?id=qbr6WdsnLzQC&lpg=RA8-PA6&ots=JtT7N7BtBQ&dq=%22billboard%20korea%20launch%20k-pop%20hot%20100%20chart%22&pg=RA8-PA6#v=onepage&q&f=false
[171] Crystal S. Anderson, “HallyU.S.A.”, 131
[172] Crystal S. Anderson, “HallyU.S.A.”, 119.

2012 continued to be a monumental year for K-Pop in the United States, as KCON was founded by Koreaboo the same year, in partnership with Korean media conglomerate CJ E&M's US-based subsidiary, Mnet America and K-pop event production company, Powerhouse Live. The nightly concerts were recorded in order to be shown on Korean TV via MNet's music program M!Countdown starting in 2014, and the behind-the-scenes experiences of the artists were filmed and broadcasted on the MNet America channel. Danny Im of 1TYM[173] fame, and now a host of his own MNet America show "Danny From LA" — hosted the concerts alongside his "DFLA" co-host Korean-American hip-hop artist Dumfounded. The convention now includes an outdoor marketplace, food truck alley, mini 4DX theatre, and open stage area where panels and workshops about music, dramas, e-sports and more were held — billed "all things Hallyu". In 2014, attendance doubled from 2013 with 42,000 attending and nearly 40% of attendees were from outside of California, and less than 10% of attendees were Korean. For 2015, KCON began to be held outside of L.A. into Japan, Jeju Island, and Newark, New Jersey. As well, KCON moved into the Staples Centre and the Los Angeles Convention Centre for 2015 — hosting 58,000 fans. Domestically, Korean entertainment labels became Hallyu powerhouses combining vertical integration (in-house production of star management, album production, online contents, marketing)[174] and horizontal integration (merging with or acquiring media companies with the capability to produce and manage dramas, musicals, package tours, restaurants, etc)[175]. Known as the all-round or three-sixty business strategy, entertainment companies evolved into media conglomerates like CJ E&M and SM Entertainment — "all things

[173] YG Entertainment's first "group", referred to in Chapter I when discussing Korean-American and 1TYM member Teddy Park's role as a producer for popular YG Entertainment artists.
[174] Michael Fuhr. Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-Pop. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 70.
[175] Ibid, 71.

Hallyu" under one label and brand name. This highly diversified business structure made it possible for K-pop stars to become more visible in various Korean industries and in mainstream American media. For example, SM Entertainment's Girls' Generation dominated the music charts, were visible on every major channel in Korea, starred in dramas and musicals, and were the faces of several products like the LG Cyon Chocolate phone during this period. Stateside, they promoted the English version of their song 'The Boys' on Live! With Kelly and Late Night with David Letterman in February 2012.

With PSY's success and the further proliferation of live K-pop shows in the U.S., journalists and scholars alike begin to rush to publish on K-pop displaying, and subsequently evincing their fascination with the sensual, gifted, exotic Other. The specialists' role is to translate the "mere Oriental matter into useful substance," thus the Oriental becomes an example for the sake of the "enhancement of the authority at home".[176] The rush to publish on K-Pop by outlets like *Billboard* and also by academics came from the sudden need to answer "Why K-Pop and why Korea?" In these publications, experts scrutinised and critiqued the "authenticity of cultural creativity held by Korea".[177] We also see the practice of "holding Korea as a far away place"[178] yet a somewhat familiar spectacle in *Billboard*'s 2013 move to launch a new column entitled "K-Town". K-Town was promised to "deliver content accessible and entertaining for all readers" whether they were a "longtime K-pop fan or simply found [themselves] swept up in

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[176] Edward Said, Orientalism, 44.
[177] Jungbong Choi and Roald Maliangkay. *K-Pop — The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, 10.
[178] Crystal S. Anderson, "HallyU.S.A.", 119.

'Gangnam Style' mania".[179] The launch was punctuated by a congratulatory video from "one of K-Pop's biggest acts, Girls' Generation"[180] and the write-up on the launch of K-Town was written by Jeff Benjamin, now K-Town's main columnist and manager. The creation of the K-Town column revealed the covert tenor racism in the hyper reaction to the American reception of K-Pop.[181]

This moniker evokes the image of prominent Koreatowns in Los Angeles and New York, ethnic enclaves with Korean businesses in lower-income neighborhoods. Suh notes that Koreatown's renaissance after the Los Angeles Uprising helps to affirm the myth of meritocracy and the model minority myth — that the only barriers to upward mobility in the U.S. are skill, hard work, and determination thus the model minority has a predisposition to possess those qualities and become successful.[182] Koreatown is very much a symbol of Korean American society, politics, and culture which is not necessarily synonymous with Korean popular culture. This decision to name an American media column on K-pop "K-Town", illustrates the orientalizing of K-pop and Korean American spaces. The enclosed space of "K-Town" is the stage on which the East is confined, the stage where figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate appear on.[183]

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[179] Jeff Benjamin. "Billboard & Girl's Generation Welcome You to K-Town!" *Billboar*d 29 January 2013 https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/k-town/1535985/billboard-girls-gernation-welcome-you-to-k-town

[180] Jeff Benjamin. "Billboard & Girl's Generation Welcome You to K-Town!" *Billboar*d 29 January 2013 https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/k-town/1535985/billboard-girls-gernation-welcome-you-to-k-town

[181] Jungbong Choi and Roald Maliangkay. *K-Pop — The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, 10.

[182] Stephen Cho Suh, "Reframing the 'Riots': Locating Koreatown in Contemporary Korean American Retellings of the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising" in Koreatowns: Exploring the Economics, Politics, and Identities of Korean Spatial Formation. Eds Jinwon Kim et al., Lexington Books, 2020. 160.

[183] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 63.

For fans and media members alike from the "Cultural North (or Euro-American, Caucasian fans)" their fascination of the gifted exotic Other functions as a way to allow them to "parade their cosmopolitan propensities", "meet their need to be in sync with the emerging hot culture in an alleged era of Asia", and "share the fascination with the role reversal in the global creative industry"[184]. The experience of the "East" of such fans is an aspect of American Orientalism, in which the "Oriental" becomes the "fantasy mechanism whereby they overcome something objectionable...in order to attain some freer, more genuine form of artistic expression."[185] Weir suggests that the Orient Other of the American imagination is a source of authenticity, and not just exoticism. This search for recovering something authentic within themselves by "taking inspiration from the Far East" makes itself even more prominent within further exploration of K-pop in this time period[186].

This fixation on authenticity and whether or not K-pop was authentic or creative enough also spawned further Orientalist writing. In a 2011 address at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Lee Soo Man explained that he coined the term "Culture Technology" or "CT" to explain the creation of SM Entertainment and the idol system. Lee stated that he predicted the age of culture technology would follow the boom of the information technology age in the 1990s; and that CT would be much more complex than IT. The three phases of culture technology include the export of cultural content, foreign market expansion through

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[184] Jungbong Choi and Roald Maliangkay. *K-Pop — The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, 10.
[185] David Weir. *American Orient: Imagining the East from the Colonial Era through the Twentieth Century,* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 4.
[186] Ibid, 4.

collaboration with local companies and artists and finally, joint ventures in each market to pass on Korea's culture technology. At the end of the address, he explained that his approach to managing culture technology was also different from typical management methods and involved three elements: interest, concentration and passion. Thus, all SM Entertainment executives, staff members, and artists are encouraged to concentrate on what interests them and naturally develop their passion; eventually become a hard-working "genius" who is ready to seize the next opportunity that approaches them.

This phrase, "Culture Technology" became the focus of John Seabrook's *New Yorker* piece "Factory Girls: Cultural Technology and the making of K-pop" (2012), a work that has been cited and mobilized in English and Korean scholarship of the Korean culture industry. In the article, Seabrook refers to Girls' Generation's Sooyoung as "distant and frosty, like a figurine in a glass case" and Tiffany's smile as "a jolt of pure culture technology".[187] Phrases like "K-pop idol assembly line", "too robotic to make it in the West", "the mythical melange of East and West remained elusive", and "star factory" reveal a techno-Orientalist logic within the text.[188] In the 1990s, rapidly-developing technological progress was associated with Japaneseness, and a new techno-mythology was created in which Japan was synonymous with the technologies of the future like screens, networks, robotics, artificial intelligence, and simulation.[189] Thus, a more resentful and aggressively racist side to techno-Orientalism emerges, in which the association of technology and Japaneseness now serve to reinforce the image of a culture that is "cold,

[187]John Seabrook, "Factory Girls: cultural technology and the making of K-Pop" *The New Yorker* (October 1, 2012) https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2
[188] Ibid.
[189] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity,* 168.

impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world."[190] As Morley and Robins predict in 1995, talk of the threat posed to the West is now aimed towards its "symbolic offspring" or the Four Tigers — including South Korea. Seabrook's both fearful and fanatical analysis concludes that "there is no way that a K-pop boy group will make it big in the States...due to a yawning cultural divide between One Direction and SHINee" — reflecting the techno-Orientalist effort to "fortify and defend what it sees as its superior culture and identity."

Girls' Generation's American debut performance on *Late Show with David Letterman* also inspired academic Gooyong Kim to begin to research K-pop. He eventually published the monograph *From factory girls to K-pop idol girls: cultural politics of developmentalism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism in South Korea's popular music industry*. The decision to include "factory girls" in the title echoes the impact Seabrook's Orientalist article had on the field of K-pop and Korean studies. Kim argues that girl groups like Girls' Generation are not an example of girl power as they are merely a pawn in the Korean dream, and are limited to being an objectified, commodified subordinate class as a "strategic political-economic ploy by the state and the industry."[191] When Girls' Generation won the Video of the Year award at the Youtube Awards for the "I GOT A BOY" music video in 2013, media coverage of the win continued to hold K-Pop as a somewhat familiar yet foreign phenomenon. *The Guardian*'s Caroline Sullivan wrote "The audience at last night's awards, which were held in New York, apparently didn't quite get them either. When their name was announced, there were a few cheers, but mostly silence.

[190] Ibid, 169.
[191] Gooyong Kim, *From factory girls to K-pop idol girls : cultural politics of developmentalism, patriarchy, and neoliberalism in South Korea's popular music industry*, (Lanham: Lexington Books 2019), 25.

Partly, you infer, it was because they were competing with mega homegirls Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus (as well as Psy and the Bieber), but there was probably also a failure to grasp what Girls' Generation are about...It may just be too much for Americans, but it makes for a very different, and worthy, winner."[192] This event and the following media pieces demonstrated that although Korean idol groups are a way for Americans to express their cosmopolitan propensities as they participate in the emerging hot culture from Asia, they are also presented as too "robotic to make it in the West"[193]. This reveals that the idealization of "Orientals" is no guarantee against the degradation of Asian people in American media.[194] This tension is an inherent aspect of American Orientalism, the "admiration of Asian culture" versus the antagonism toward Asian people". The explosive multiplication of Asian presence in Western media, far from "challenging stereotypical views of Asians and Asian cultures, in many ways has further strengthened Orientalism's virtual hold."[195] Thus, the "manufactured" idols are rejected by the mainstream media as the ideal Orient Other of the American imagination is meant to be a source of authenticity.

As a result of scholars and mainstream media outlets alike proclaiming that K-pop's American advancement was a failure because it was not authentic enough, this sentiment was mimicked in Korea. *The Korea Times* wrote that "experts believe it is time Hallyu got a

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[192] Caroline Sullivan. "Girls' Generation: just who are the YouTube awards best video winners?" *The Guardian* November 4, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/nov/04/girls-generation-youtube-awards-best-video-k-pop
[193] John Seabrook, "Factory Girls: cultural technology and the making of K-Pop" *The New Yorker* (October 1, 2012) https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2
[194] David Weir, *American Orient*, 6.
[195] Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism,* 162.

makeover" by selling Korea's unique story rather than contents that aren't original and diverse, in order to "win over other countries"[196]. To counteract domestic negative perspectives on K-Pop, the industry took on several tactics to create an "authentic" story or narrative that differed from most popular idol groups to gain the attention of the American music industry. Then, labels used this attention to improve their image and brand value in Korea. One tactic was the adoption of more hip-hop elements into the music and aesthetics of idol music, including "self-producing" songs and writing lyrics. As mentioned in Chapter 1, hip-hop remained a fairly underground genre for several years — though some rappers found their way to mainstream success either through joining an entertainment label like YG Entertainment or through participating in Korean hip-hop survival series *Show Me The Money* (2012 and on), hereby SMTM. For example, Big Bang (2006) from YG Entertainment were given a level of creative freedom to write and compose their own music and were seen as unique from other idol groups as a result[197]. Only one year after their debut they were awarded "Song of the Year" at the 2007 Mnet Asian Music Awards and "Digital Record of the Year" at the 17th Seoul Music Awards for *Lies* — composed and written by Big Bang member, G-Dragon. They continued to ride this wave of success and accolades for ten years, both domestically and internationally.[198] Following their success, several

[196] Susan Se-jeong Kim, "'Hallyu,' Korean wave, will not last 5 years" *Korea Times* (May 20, 2012) http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/01/117_111309.html
[197] Daseul Min, "A Study of Idol's Identify and Image Formation Method: Focused on the Case of Big Bang" *Journal of Integrated Design Research* 16.3 (2017): 140.
[198] Following the release of *Lies*, the group launched their Japanese career and charted highly on the Oricon charts. In 2009, they began to launch their solo music and acting careers — again, earning several accolades in Korean and abroad. In 2011, they took home "Best Worldwide Act" at the MTV Europe Music Awards. In 2012, Big Bang became the first Korean act with a Korean album to chart on the Billboard 200 with "Fantastic Baby". The year also marked their first official world tour, which was held in 21 cities in 13 countries and with a total attendance of over 800,000 fans. Their next group album "MADE", released in 2015, contained some of the "biggest tracks of 2015" in South Korea, completely dominating the charts. The success of MADE translated into the group holding their second world tour. The tour saw over 1.5 million attendees, making it the largest tour by a Korean act ever and earning over $120 million.

groups now "emphasize the fact that their members write their own verses and are 'serious' about rap, which reflects the diligence that is expected and required by hip hop artists."[199] While Song determines that there is no definitive answer to what is "real" or "fake" hip-hop, there is a constant fluctuation and tension between the notions of authenticity and fakeness[200] — and this is the same for K-pop as well. For many Koreans, hip hop is about personal choice and how they act upon that choice — including doing research by learning about hip hop history and applying what they learn through their image, music, and choreography.[201]

The group that has most successfully leveraged an "authentic" narrative to gain the attention of both the American music industry and in return the Korean public is BTS. Under the relatively small label Big Hit Entertainment, BTS struggled to gain domestic attention at the beginning of their career. It was not until two years after their debut with the release of their 2015 EP *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life, Part I* that they began to see some success in Korea and the international K-pop scene. *The Most Beautiful Life Part I* and *Part II* were combined into the *Young Forever* special edition album in 2016 which became their first album to enter the U.S. Billboard 200 chart, and their next release *Wings* (September 2016) peaked at #26 on the same chart — the highest ranking for a K-pop album ever at the time. The same year, BTS and their label Big Hit Entertainment began working with American label Gramophone Media led by CEO Eshy Gazit. In Korea, the album became their first "million seller" album and the best-selling album in Gaon Album Chart history at the time. They also were the first artist not from a Big 3 company to win Artist of the Year at the 18th Mnet Asian Music Awards. Similarly to Gangnam

[199] Myoung-Sun Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop*, 54.
[200] Myoung-Sun Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop*, 54.
[201] Ibid, 44.

Style, scholars and journalists have begun to rush to publish and explain BTS's success both domestically and internationally.

Before BTS's debut in 2013, their management company had begun their strategy to create an "authentic" K-pop idol group through hip-hop but also through online media. The anticipation of the group was built consistently through their blog with sections like Video, Audio, Picture, Taste [Cooking], Writing, Log — with each member participating in the making of the blog to capture their growth as a team. Song notes that the group was able to demonstrate that they were not "puppets" and they were in charge of their careers and the group's identity.[202] From pre-debut and beyond, they used YouTube and Twitter to promote themselves online, not through typical materials announcing dates and times of events or releases, but with more "BTS" (behind-the-scenes) moments showcasing personal style, humorous photos from birthday parties, heartfelt messages after a special event, and more. Their brand of utilizing these "BTS" posts turned their online personas into something more authentic and relatable. Furthermore, they released pre-debut mixtapes which spoke on social struggles Korean youth were facing, showing their "authenticity by speaking about the realities that their peers were going through."[203] In terms of styling, their training room in which they filmed YouTube videos and music videos was deliberately decorated by their staff to visually teach them about hip hop style. A sense of authenticity is produced for the group, as humans with control over their music and that have an understanding of hip-hop culture and style.[204]

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[202] Myoung-Sun Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop,* 131.
[203] Ibid, 131.
[204] Myoung-Sun Song, *Hanguk Hip Hop*, 134.

One year after their debut, this “produced authenticity” through hip-hop and showing their “realities” continued, filming a show called *American Hustle Life* in which they were tutored on “real hip hop” in Los Angeles by various mentors including Coolio and Warren G.[205] Through this process, they encounter several aspects of hip-hop however Song finds that BTS ends up merely reproducing some of the “stereotypes in American hip hop rather than creatively reinterpreting what they have learned using their own sensibilities.”[206] This produced authenticity, however, does speak to many fans including some African-American fans. In Rebecca Thomas’s article “The Complicated Euphoria Of Being A Black Girl In BTS’ ARMY”, one of her interviewees felt that the album produced during American Hustle Life, *Dark & Wild*, as well as the members’ mentions of artists they liked including Tupac and Kanye West made her feel appreciated by BTS.[207] Thomas states that BTS’s appearance in American Hustle Life was repeatedly brought up by interviewees, and exists as a source of comfort for young Black female fans, as they “took time out of their day” to learn about [hip-hop] culture. She comes to the conclusion that BTS’s “sonic celebration of the magic that is Black music has ensured my loyalty”, explaining why fans of the American hip-hop and R&B genre gained an interest in BTS early in their career thus BTS was able to perform well on American music charts.

Jeff Benjamin, Billboard’s K-Town column manager, builds upon this authenticity-based narrative and coins the phrase that BTS is “socially conscious K-pop”. In February 2017, Benjamin states that “undoubtedly, BTS has found the major enthusiasm for their LPs thanks to

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[205] Ibid, 135.
[206] Ibid, 138.
[207] Rebecca Thomas, “The Complicated Euphoria Of Being A Black Girl in BTS’ Army” *Refinery29* (August 16, 2019) https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2019/08/240438/bts-kpop-army-black-girl-fan

the deeper social and personal topics the band discusses with past album tracks touching on bullying, mental health and the dark sides of adolescence". He continues to brand BTS as "conscious K-Pop" in his April 2017 article "Can Conscious K-Pop Cross Over? BTS & BigHit Entertainment CEO 'Hitman' Bang on Taking America". This narrative reads as Benjamin's reaction against the Factory Girls narrative that Korean pop music was born of a "factory system" creating "idol groups… seen by some as being too robotic to make it in the West."[208] The answer that Benjamin comes up with to Seabrook's question of "how do you come up with music that appeals to both the East and the West, without alienating the fans of either?" was to assert that BTS had more creative and musical freedom than other idols, "breaking free" of the factory-created, robot idol myth.

As we remember from *Cold War Orientalism*, sentimental narratives focus on and uphold human connections, emphasizing the creation of solidarity, and "how these bonds are forged across a divide of difference."[209] By painting BTS's music as "conscious K-Pop", the American music industry began to pick up on this new sentimental way to enjoy K-Pop that had not been widely considered during the conversations of factories, plastic surgery, and eerily ever-smiling pop stars. Benjamin pronounced that "although K-pop music generally steers away from controversy, Rap Monster says that remaining outspoken is 'important to [BTS]'".[210] This was in fact appropriation of RM's statement, in order to pit their "outspokenness" against other K-Pop artists — despite the fact that the very roots of K-Pop are songs that highlight issues that young

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[208] John Seabrook, Factory Girls: cultural technology and the making of K-Pop *The New Yorker* October 1, 2012. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/10/08/factory-girls-2
[209] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism,* 13.
[210] Jeff Benjamin. "Can Conscious K-Pop Cross Over? BTS & BigHit Entertainment CEO 'Hitman' Bang on Taking America" *Billboard* April 6, 2017

Koreans face. Seo Taiji & Boys' music became popular because they criticized the oppressive educational system and parental constraint. SM Entertainment's boy groups like H.O.T., TVXQ!, Super Junior and Shinhwa have all put out multiple tracks criticizing society including H.O.T.'s "We Are The Future" (1997), Shinhwa's "Yo!" (1999), TVXQ!'s "Rising Sun" (2005), Super Junior's "Don't Don" (2007), "EXO"'s MAMA (2012), and NCT Dream's "Go" (2018). This small sample of songs from just one label in the K-pop industry demonstrates that simply pointing out the false aspects of a narrative is ineffective in challenging the authority of Orientalism. Said's original argument helps us understand why this is. Orientalism is not a structure of myths or an airy Western fantasy that will simply blow away once the truth about it is told. The "sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse"[211] means that Orientalist representations of K-pop in contemporary American media continue to be propagated despite being proved to false. Furthermore, these representations impact decisions made within the Korean music industry — demonstrating one way U.S. orientalist discourse has altered the Korean mediascape.

BTS continued to gain media attention for being more authentic and different from other K-Pop groups, and soon they were awarded the fan-voted Top Social Award at the 2017 Billboard Music Awards[212]. Media outlets around the world highlighted that they beat out US favourites like Selena Gomez and Ariana Grande for the award and that they were the first Korean group to receive a BBMA. Speculation on what this meant for the future of both the

[211] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 6.

[212] The "Top Social Artist" was one of two fan-voted categories at the "2017 Billboard Music Awards." Fans could vote for their favorite nominee in two ways: by visiting the voting site or by voting on Twitter (by tweeting out a nominee's corresponding hashtag). According to CNN, BTS fans, voted for the award on Twitter and on the awards website, using the hashtag #BTSBBMAS more than 300 million times.

Korean music industry and the American music industry were published immediately. NBC wrote that the victory was also an “achievement for fans who wanted to see an act made up of Asian performers win at an American awards’ show”, highlighting social media posts by Asian Americans.[213] Huffington Post’s coverage of the win noted both the racist sentiments on Twitter after the event as well as the triumph of Asian-American fans.[214] Benjamin’s write up in particular, once again emphasizes that the “socially conscious K-pop band” had won by “their focus on social issues that are important to their audiences — namely mental health, politics and adolescent experiences” resonating so much with listeners that their “supporters have taken an interest that now rivals some of the world's biggest pop stars”.

Western media continues to proliferate the discourse that BTS is breaking barriers for Korean artists that no other K-pop idol has before. These barriers are usually explained as “punishing training, intense competition and unrelenting scrutiny” — generally referred to as the “dark side of K-pop”.[215] In a 2018 article published by CBC this textual attitude is perpetuated, calling the “K-pop factory system, a real-life *Hunger Games*” and hypothesizing it may be the reason for K-pop artist Kim Jong Hyun’s suicide. The article from CBC ended with a quote from Suga, an “outspoken member of globally successful K-pop group BTS”, that he hopes they “can create an environment where we can ask for help and say things are hard when they are hard.”

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[213] Alexis Hodoyan-Gastelum, “K-Pop Boy Group BTS Looks to Future After Billboard Music Awards Win”. *NBC News* May 26 2017.
https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/k-pop-boy-group-bts-looks-future-after-billboard-music-n764426

[214] Isabelle Khoo, “Billboard Music Awards 2017: Backlash Over BTS Win Proves How Racist People Can Be”. *Huffington Post* May 24, 2017.
https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/05/23/bts-billboard-music-awards-2017_n_16768224.html

[215] Jessica Wong, “The punishing pressures behind K-pop perfection”. *CBC News* February 24 2018.
https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/kpop-hard-life-1.4545627

Asian American studies professor Valerie Soe writes in a blog post that the beating of the Orientalist drum in Western media reporting of the dark side of the K-pop industry after Kim's death is particularly "ridiculous" yet "not surprising".[216] Indeed, Palumbo-Liu notes that there is still a "residue of old-style Orientalism" in "the notion that Asians have no concept of the sanctity of human life" shown by the discourse surrounding the Vietnam and Korean War. This discourse persists, as Korean entertainment labels are understood as pop-star factories that restrict the creative, physical and emotional freedom of their stars — causing the death of one of their own. The narrative that the K-pop industry is the reason for the death of Kim, rather than considering the implications of depression and mental health stigma, is perhaps the most cruel narrative in K-pop discourse that I have come across in my fourteen years of consuming and studying K-Pop media. Rather than a nuanced discussion on how open Kim Jong Hyun was about his depression, his attempts to seek treatment, and the stigma he faced while doing so — this aspect of his story is paved over by essentialisms that the former Hermit Kingdom, Korea is "irrational, depraved, childlike, different"[217] and that is why he died.

Though Benjamin did not write the article, he is quoted within. There may be no nefarious imperialist intent behind Benjamin's narrative; but the negative consequences are clear. Furthermore, the authority of Jeff Benjamin and the Billboard K-Town column, has moved beyond textual attitudes. He also participates in K-pop academic conferences, is a regular guest at KCON, and is even quoted and featured in Korean articles and Korean television shows on

[216] Valerie Soe, "End of day: Jonghyun's suicide and Orientalist concern trolling". *Beyond Asiaphilia* December 20 2017.
https://beyondasiaphilia.com/2017/12/20/end-of-a-day-jonghyuns-suicide-and-orientalist-concern-trolling/
[217] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* 40.

K-pop, cited as the columnist making K-pop known to the international music industry.[218] Just like the K-Pop expert and Orientalist who preceded him, Mark Russell, Benjamin is not expected to provide resources or a works cited page when it comes to his writing, providing quotes for other outlets, or speaking engagements as a K-pop "expert". He does not need to do so because he is drawing on "a system of knowledge about the Orient" that is profoundly anti-empirical and remains fixed in time and place.[219]

Partially as a result of BTS's American promotion efforts and strategy, other K-pop artists began to work with American management and began to embark on similar promotional tours for their own new releases — making appearances at morning shows, late-night talk shows, pop culture media outlets and award shows like the American Music Awards.[220] Insisting that their idols were different from the other K-pop groups gaining mainstream recognition, BTS fans began to claim that BTS paved the way for K-pop or Korean music to become popular in the West. Though BTS has had immense success, my thesis project has demonstrated that K-pop has been consumed by Americans and other fans in Western countries since at least the early 2000s. Despite this, Jeff Benjamin published an article with the headline "BTS A.R.M.Y. Reacts to the Group's 2019 Billboard Music Awards Nominations: They 'Paved the Way,'" legitimizing the fan

[218] "K-Pop Expert Jeff Benjamin Will Be On The Show [We K-Pop Teaser"], YouTube video, 0:19, posted by "KBS World" July 11, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qng2zm4HuCY
[219] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 6, 70, 108.
[220] On October 12, 2018, NCT 127 released their first full-length album *Regular-Irregular* which debuted at number 86 on the US Billboard 200. The album release was led by a performance of English version of the lead single, "Regular" and "Cherry Bomb" on Jimmy Kimmel Live! which also marked the group's first appearance on U.S. national television# — NCT 127 followed with extensive promotions in America. 2018 also saw GOT7 interview for PeopleTV, Fox New York, Access, iHeartradio, Billboard, J-14 Magazine, and more as part of their Eyes On You tour promotions in America as well as the release of their album *Present: You* and the lead single "Lullaby" — a track with a Korean, English, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish version.

rhetoric that BTS "paved the way" for K-pop to become popular in the United States. Similarly, English-speaking BTS fans online began to differentiate themselves from K-pop fans and claim that BTS was not a K-pop group[221]. These textual attitudes through fan discourses and English-language journalism create "not only knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe" further produces a discourse that isn't necessarily based in reality.[222] Additionally, this kind of discourse completely ignores the fact that many times BTS themselves have stated that they consider themselves K-pop artists and they are thankful for the work of K-pop artists before them have done in order for them to rise to where they are today.. This imagery of BTS "paving the way" evokes questions as to who and what aspects of history these writers are paving over and erasing from Korean music history. I argue that this singling out of BTS as a "socially conscious K-pop group", crediting them for the success of an industry with at least thirty years of history, and them claiming they are no longer a "K-pop" artist is a complete essentialization and erasure of an important aspect of Korean history and "a specific mode of *containment*" as noted by Palumbo-Liu.[223]

Containment was a Cold War policy originally formulated for Europe, but "hastily extended to Asia to cover the Korean War"[224] — thus Korea was the first place where containment was first applied in Asia[225]. From this event forward, containment eventually

[221] For example, one tweet that simply states "BTS is not kpop, the genre is BTS." can receive over 10,000 retweets and 36,000 likes - showing how prominent this narrative is within the BTS fandom. https://twitter.com/vantestaegi/status/1249089112478490625
[222] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 94.
[223] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 172. Emphasis in italics is mine.
[224] Richard John Piliter, The Evolution of the U.S. Containment Policy in Asia, M.A. Thesis, (University of Windsor, 1969), iii.
[225] Ibid, vii.

became the “fundamental theme of American foreign policy in Asia,” as they hastened to contain communism both at home and abroad.[226] However, the “specific mode of containment[227]” that Palumbo-Liu refers to is the model minority myth and how it neutralizes and historicizes Asian success.[228] Balance notes in her study that model minority discourse prescribes a discursive containment that “espouses notions of Asian Americans as culturally, socially, and politically homogeneous” — essentially that, all Asians are the same and all of them are part of the model minority. Further on in her study, Balance notes that a reaction to this discourse is the success of Asian-American viral media (discussed in Chapter 2). Korean American youth were quoted to “feel at home” in K-pop style and culture; “working through and against the specter of model minority as a prescriptive racial fiction.”[229] Balance in 2012, however, did not predict that K-pop would become so powerful and potent in the U.S. that it would be subject to containment as well.

Even before BTS’s arrival in the U.S., Benjamin displayed the tendency to use belligerent terms such as “invade” and “conquer” when talking about K-pop acts in the U.S, for example “Wonder Girls, Girls' Generation Invade U.S. for YouTube Concert” (May 2012) and “2NE1 Invades America: Behind the Scenes With the K-Pop Phenomenon” (August 2012). Though “invade” refers back to the British invasion of The Beatles; the political contexts are different as America was once a British colony. In this context, K-pop can be understood as a by-product of American cultural imperialism and containment in Korea. In 2018, Benjamin wrote a New York

[226] “US Enters the Korean Conflict”, U.S. National Archives, September 7, 2016. https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/korean-conflict
[227] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 172.
[228] David Palumbo-Liu, Asian/American, 206.
[229] Christine Bacareza Balance. “How It feels To be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube Performance” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 40, No 1/2, VIRAL (SPRING/SUMMER 2012): 147.

Times article entitled "BTS Conquered America. What's Next for K-Pop?" suggesting that somehow K-Pop acts will be able to enact or have already enacted cultural imperialism back onto the United States. American Orientalism, however, will not allow this to happen — as the U.S. culture must be juxtaposed with strength and exceptionalism in order for Korean culture to be allowed to exist in the U.S. sphere of influence. I argue that this Orientalist media narrative about BTS and other K-Pop groups reads as an aspect of containment. Asian-American success is contained by being coded as "success gained by subjects unfit for authentic social integration" because of flaws like a "lack of broad interests or people skills"[230]. In the context of K-pop, BTS is the only group fit for social integration into the U.S. thanks to their socially conscious music. Thus, they were awarded the Top Social Award at the BBMA's; the event that sparked a shift in the K-pop industry and creation of this project. They are an exception, rather than a sign of systemic change. In this context, the American entertainment industry contains the incoming "invasion" of K-pop and reduces all Korean artists as being too foreign to make it in the West.

The "international manifestation of the myth" has already been explored by Palumbo-Liu while looking at Japanese business ethics, which challenged the U.S. to "modify its modes of economic operation."[231] He notes that the adoption of "foreign" modes of business and production, was a threat — eliminating not only weak American business practices but also elements that had contributed to the "ideology of American exceptionalism."[232] Palumbo-Liu's analysis reminds us of techno-Orientalism, in which the alien Japanese culture becoming the model of economic and technological progress creates a growing fear of the might and power of

[230] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 3.
[231] Ibid, 172.
[232] Ibid, 173.

the Other. This fear holds Asians as "sub-human" with no feelings or emotions or humanity.[233] This attitude is still present in the contemporary age of Korea and U.S. relations, as the model minority myth means that though Asian people can become Americans, they are classified as Americans contaminated with the weaknesses and complacency from their root countries. Thus, Palumbo-Liu emphasizes that "Asian-Americans could *show America how to be great again*, but after doing so they were re-marginalized as 'Asian'."[234] These domestic and international modalities of the myth both "reinstate 'America' and contain and neutralize the model of Asian Americans and Asia."[235] Similarly, with the supposed uplifting of BTS we see a neutralization of the K-pop industry and the Asian-Americans who consumed this media first.

As demonstrated through this research project, prior to BTS's BBMA win, K-pop artists were popular entertainment acts for Korean and Asian American people. Being a fan of K-pop for them could mean a way to express resistance, or simply distance from "Euro-American cultural products — an imposed option" that were filled with Orientalist depictions of Asian people and didn't produce images that reflected their reality. It is clear, however, that despite heightened exposure of K-pop stars in American media — the "reality" of Korean culture and people matter much less to American journalists and enthusiasts. This version of "Asian representation" in American media is swiftly contained and rather than challenging the stereotypical depictions of Asian cultures, has instead strengthened Orientalism's hold. This further emphasizes that the idealization of "Orientals" has never been a guarantee against the

[233] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity,* 172.
[234] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 172. Emphasis mine.
[235] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American,* 173.

hatred, oppression, and violence against Asian peoples"[236]. Since the 1880s, the admiration of Asian culture co-existing alongside the antagonism toward Asian people has been a fact of American life.[237] For all of BTS's records and accolades, they are still subject to racist treatment by American and Western media. In a TeenVogue op-ed by Aamina Khan, Khan argues that xenophobic comments made about BTS by an Australian TV station in 2019[238] is indicative of a larger problem.

> "And yet wins like these are often littered with racist and xenophobic comments on social media, reducing the group to "these Asian f*cks" and an "Asian One Direction." Following the 2017 BBMAs, when BTS won Top Social Artist, breaking Justin Bieber's six-year streak in that category, Twitter was filled with comments claiming that no one knows who BTS is and that this one award won't make America start listening to K-pop (we have news for you). One user even protested that because American artists don't attend Korean award shows (a false claim — see: Charlie Puth at the MGAs) that Korean artists shouldn't be invited to award shows like the BBMAs."[239]

It is clear that whether or not BTS actually paved the way for K-pop, their presence in mainstream American media does not mean less Orientalist or racist media representations of Asian people in U.S. media. Since April 2020, racist incidents and hate crimes have occurred across the United States in the wake of Covid-19. As American media outlets praise BTS for

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[236] David Weir, *American Orient*, 6.
[237] Ibid, 6.
[238] Nine Network's pop culture show "20 to One" ran a countdown on global crazes. BTS -- who have broken numerous records and recently played at the UK's Wembley Stadium in London -- ranked as number 18, with the presenters describing them as "the biggest band you've never heard of." The segment included comments from British comedian Jimmy Carr, who said: "When I first heard something Korean had exploded in America, I got worried."
[239] Aamina Khan, "Criticism of BTS Is Often Just Xenophobia in Disguise", Teen Vogue, June 24, 2019. https://www.teenvogue.com/story/bts-criticism-xenophobia-in-disguise

achieving their first No.1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, they are also one of the main factors contributing to discrimination and xenophobia towards Asians and Asian Americans amid the Covid-19 outbreak in the US. Though further research will need to be done, according to the discourses analyzed in this thesis there is little to no correlation between BTS's success in the American market and the end of race-based microaggressions and oppression against Asian people in the U.S.

V. Conclusion

Culture and Imperialism, Said's work following *Orientalism,* argues that producers of knowledge could extricate themselves from Orientalist discourse and the power relations it constructs by acknowledging the inextricable interdependence of Westerns and Orientals, recognizing the inescapably entangled and hybrid nature of all forms of culture, and developing the ability to think "sympathetically about others than only about us"[240]. Said suggests that by becoming aware of the progressive integration of East and West that imperialism set in motion, can the imperialist logic of difference be undermined."[241] He emphasizes that narratives of emancipation in their strongest forms were narratives of integration; the "stories of people who had been excluded from the main group but who were now fighting for a place in it.[242]" This integration can be understood by looking at Asian-American discourse narratives as countersites to "U.S. national memory and national culture" (how American history, media, and pop culture

[240] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 336.
[241] Ibid, xxiv.
[242] Ibid, xxvi.

has been written) — as well Orientalist narratives of K-Pop. The thesis aimed to unearth the Orientalist relationship of power, domination and cultural hegemony within the cultural production of Korean popular music. It also examined the understudied yet crucial role of Asian-Americans and Korean-Americans throughout the history of U.S.-South Korean relations and the history of K-pop.

Since the 2000s, US media has tried to repave narratives surrounding K-pop, while those individuals who invest time and energy into the genre have a more nuanced and layered understanding of the enterprise. A transversal solution for future enthusiasts and scholars of K-pop is to recognize K-pop for what it is, popular Korean music. What is “popular” in Korea is not immune to the political situation, societal pressures, economic changes and technological developments happening in and around Korea. Korean music has evolved and will continue to, thus there is nothing that is timelessly true about it. The relationship between Korea and the U.S. has been transversal since its roots in 1882, and we can continue to understand the extent of this transnational relationship by continuing to track the penetration of the Asian body within the space of America — not just by tracking its lived environments or political discourses but examining the music and culture they create.

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