

KYUNG HYUN KIM



HEGEMONIC MIMICRY

KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE
OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

HEGEMONIC MIMICRY

BUY

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KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE OF
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

KYUNG HYUN KIM

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Cover art: Tiger JK (*left*) and Yoon Mi-rae during a concert,
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For Yourim Lee

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PREFACE

Writing Pop Culture in the Time of Pandemic

One of the greatest lines in Korean cinema is delivered by venerable actor Song Kang-ho playing a gruff and frustrated country cop in *Memories of Murder* (dir. Bong Joon-ho, 2003), a film based on a true story and set in 1986. “You know why American FBI [agents] insists on [forensic] investigation?” Song yells. “Because they’ve got to deal with the US, where the land mass is too friggin’ big!” Implied in Song’s drunken declaration is that South Korea is much smaller than the United States and does not yet have the technological resources to allow police investigators to use DNA analysis for solving murder mysteries. Fast-forward three and a half decades, when South Korea is a global leader in many areas, including information technology (IT), participatory democracy, and popular culture. During the recent global pandemic, South Korea set an example to the rest of the world with its response to COVID-19.¹ Ironically, it was locally manufactured polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test kits (commonly known as swab test kits) based on an RNA/DNA analysis method invented by American biochemist Kary Mullis in the previous century that enabled Korea to quickly put in place systematic measures to effectively contain the virus without resorting to border closures or full-scale lockdowns. Whereas in the 1986-set *Memories of Murder* a serial killer eludes police investigation largely due to the unavailability of forensic DNA analysis test kits, in 2020 Korea has been able to suppress the COVID-19 infection curve by deploying convenient testing sites for the general population, implementing effective contact tracing, and, most important, reappropriating American scientific inventions to create a testing infrastructure on its path toward global leadership in disease prevention.

That South Korean medical technology today is largely borrowed from twentieth-century America is perhaps no surprise: the best biomedical and pharmaceutical research centers are still located in the West. However, in

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many ways, what most experts reporting on Korea's success story in controlling the spread of COVID-19 failed to recognize was that the playbook of Korea's response to the pandemic closely resembled that of the K-pop industry. By redeploying essentially American scientific innovations such as PCR, global positioning systems (GPS, developed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA]), and Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA, licensed by Qualcomm) to test, trace, and effectively quarantine COVID-19 patients as well as potentially exposed individuals, and then emphasizing the public's trust in its health experts, South Korea was perfecting a system that followed a path from mimicking and pirating the West to establishing an authority of its own. If K-pop moguls borrowed the genres and beats of the West in order to craft their own immaculate dancing idols for global consumption, Korea's COVID-19 response redeployed Western medical technology and tracing tools to effectively control the virus in such a way that would serve as a model for the rest of the world. Just as South Korea had nurtured its domestic pop talents—sans songwriting genius—before developing them into overseas export items, it had now seized on its domestic success with COVID-19 to become a major global exporter of medical devices and equipment—sans recognized scientific innovation in the field.²

In this book, I have sought to understand the blurring of boundaries between innovation and plagiarism and between hegemony and underdevelopment that has occurred over the past several decades of the postcolonial, ultracapitalist era by studying and analyzing the question, “How did South Korea achieve so much success without necessarily developing its own unique technology, styles, and culture in the twenty-first century?” I was amazed to learn that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when concerts and public events throughout the world came to a screeching halt, South Korea dominated headlines not because it was a medical technology innovator but because it was able to quickly adapt to the crisis and deploy the tools innovated elsewhere, first for local application and then for mass foreign export. South Korea is a country of only fifty million people, so for any domestic mass production to succeed, whether of refrigerators, K-pop CDs, or virus test kits, external markets must be found. While writing this book, I was constantly reminded of the words of Stuart Hall, who claimed that the logic of capital “would translate everything in the world into a kind of replica of itself.”³ South Korea continually excelled, not by repackaging its local cultures for the necessities of modern life but by surreptitiously and

implicitly referencing its own cultural impulses while reenacting American styles, music, and trends.

Most people, including academics, who still remember Korea as a backward country that suffered from dire poverty and military dictatorship throughout the twentieth century may find perplexing the fact that during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, both the most successful non-English-language film (*Parasite*) and the best-selling non-English-language pop star (BTS) in the United States have been from Korea. The year 2020, which most people will remember as one of the worst years of their lives, was ironically a noteworthy year for Korean culture, as the country's film industry was recognized for its achievements by the US Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences and its pop music industry produced three No. 1 tracks on the US Billboard Singles chart (BTS's "Dynamite," "Savage Love [Laxed-Siren Beat]," and "Life Goes On")—a feat rare for a group of foreign artists associated with neither a major studio deal nor a major US-label contract. These cultural products, however, exemplify the condition of "hegemonic mimicry" that I have termed for this book as a description of the Korean cultural condition of the past several decades, which is deeply connected with both the commercial and military ascent of the United States and the decline of a monolithic and unitary assertion of whiteness associated with Pax Americana.⁴ South Korea also experienced a good portion of what Henry Luce once referred to in *Life* magazine as the "American Century"—that is, taking part in the same political, economic, and linguistic sphere as the Americans, with the nation's elites growing up learning English for more than two generations.⁵ What the success of *Parasite* and BTS indicated was that South Koreans had come of age, which signaled both the end of the old American Century and the beginning of a new era where American-ness had to embrace, among others, Korean-ness.

Throughout this book, I make the case that Korean cultural products of the past several decades became ambivalently hegemonic through their creative praxis of mimicry, a practice that is both unique, due to its effectively opaque underscoring of traditional cultural identity, and ordinary, because on the surface it in no way differs from other cosmopolitan neo-American aesthetics and styles commonly seen on YouTube and in shopping malls around the world. When, for instance, *hallyu* actress Song Hye-gyo and K-pop idol BTS are featured on billboards and department store advertisements around the world alongside Keira Knightley, LeBron James, and Lionel Messi, this no longer comes as a surprise to most passersby. The Korean

faces are just as familiar and nondescript as those of any other famous person gracing a Louis Vuitton or Clinique advertisement. Some Korean stars today generate a much larger fan following outside Korea than at home and have themselves become hegemonic—and this has come about in the absence of the linguistic power or military dominance associated with many of the more culturally powerful nations. K-pop glitter today represents an ideal of Asian affluence and glamour that is just as commodifiable as the porcelain beauty of a British film star, the hip-hop cool of black rappers from the 'hood, or the sensuality of Latin American music icons. The authentication of K-pop is both vouchsafed from the American capitalist hegemony of the past century as well as uniquely isolated from that hegemony due to its pronounced Koreanness, which is cost-efficient, squeaky-clean, and easily disposable in this era of fast-evolving, ephemeral postmodernity.

After renegotiating the terms of originality and mimicry in this book, I stress that the new Korean subjectivity in the global era is a racialized modality, just as alternating and powerful as is blackness, which has offset whiteness as the singular American hegemonic subject (see chapter 2). Throughout the past several decades, Koreans have been racially situated somewhere between white and black. Long before the media's attention was captivated by escalating tensions between Korean business owners and African Americans during the 1992 Los Angeles uprising—and, more recently, during the post-George Floyd protests—Koreans were awkwardly caught between the white and the African American populations dating back to the civil rights era. Before Korean American businesses became a visible buffer between white and black neighborhoods in urban areas across the United States, back in Korea throughout the past half century, local proprietors who ran the clubs and shops in US military camptowns around the peninsula had often found themselves thrust into the race war between white and black clients. As explained in the introduction, it was the duty of the Korean businesses to separate entertainers and sex workers servicing white soldiers from those servicing black soldiers. For white Americans, Koreans were not black, while black Americans did not see Koreans as white.

Building from their own racialized mistreatment and survival instincts within the militarized American cultural and economic sphere of the twentieth century, Koreans re-created an American-Korean nexus in the twenty-first century, one that asserted both a classic national identity from the Cold War Pax Americana period and a new ethnic entity in the post-

Cold War space that is being remapped by the increased power of social media, the rise of East Asia as an economic power, and new standards for entertainment that move beyond the politically correct color palette that tends to feature only black and white. In this era of social media symbolized by Facebook, Twitter, Netflix, and YouTube, music and images cross linguistic frontiers with much greater efficacy and facility than during any previous era. The popularity of Korean cultural content has proven that the new kind of globalization is, in reality, more excessively American than anything else. Just as black music became emblematic of American music throughout the twentieth century, in the twenty-first century, Korean music, film, and other global ethnic cultural content are now making their mark as yet another iteration and integral form of Pan-American mass culture in the new century. K-pop of the new millennium is the latest sensation in a Pan-American pop that started with the British Invasion of the 1960s.

This book both celebrates and critiques the Korean Wave of the past twenty years, a phenomenon that may mark the first time a postcolonial Asian society has become a critical voice in the makeup of a global pop culture, as Korea has successfully breached the linguistic and cultural walls that surround a minor culture—although this success came at the cost of rendering its ethnic background opaque.⁶ This opacity of ethnicity, I argue, is precisely the reason the K-culture industry can be considered both racialized and nonracialized. It is probably not coincidental that Koreans entered the twenty-first century rich in soft power after enduring the traumas of a modern-day period of slavery during the colonial era and subsequently confronting spectacular forms of nationwide disruption and trauma during the Cold War (the Korean War, fervent anti-Communist campaigns, and military dictatorships).

These are the reasons why in this book I have attempted to analyze the roots of linguistic diversions in, for instance, rap music; genre transformations in cinema and television; and the prevalent reliance on captions in Korean variety shows. I have attempted not only to work the “surface” of many films, popular cultural texts, and even songs in order to decode the opaque racialization of Koreans therein but also to lay a foundation for a deeper understanding of the new racialized consciousness of Koreanness in the twenty-first century. The field of Korean popular culture studies has exploded in recent years, and yet serious theorizations based on historical and textual analysis have regrettably often been ignored. There are, admittedly, glaring omissions in this book. In a study that deals with Korean

popular culture, conspicuously absent are discussions about K-drama and K-games. These phenomena were largely left out, but not because I deem them insignificant; in fact, they constitute topics of central importance in a volume on Korean popular culture that I previously coedited. However, such topics are not only notoriously difficult to teach but also resist academic theorization, insofar as many popular fan and consumer ratings sites already constitute informational hubs that are far more engrossing than anything an expert opinion can offer at this point. The topics in question also require endless hours of dedicated consumerist behavior in order to adequately address them. Probing deeply into Korean games and television dramas might have jeopardized my attempt to balance my life as a father of a young child, an academic, and a writer of creative fiction. From the very beginning of my career, I have learned that it is almost always better to remain mum about subject matters when one's knowledge and expertise are no more advanced than that of one's audience. Nonetheless, I have taught Korean popular culture courses over the years that have included these topics. Korean dramas, especially the *Reply* (*Ŭngtaphara*) series, which has thus far spawned three seasons (2012, 2013, and 2016), have stimulated my students' interest in Korean history, language, and society and have in many ways constituted teaching tools just as, if not more, efficacious than literary and cinematic subjects. However, these so-called miniseries are not exactly "mini" in length, and finding time both in and outside class to view ten-plus-hour-long dramas becomes a challenge that can overwhelm their potential for productive discussion, and asking students to watch hours of television and play games can also run the risk of undergraduates getting hooked on nonacademic addictions and social gatherings that potentially yield little to no intellectual effect as academic study topics. As a former game addict who knows all too well the dangers of playing video games into the wee hours of the morning, asking my students to play on Korean gaming platforms such as Lineage in order to subsequently engage in serious questions about Korean identity would have been plainly irresponsible. Despite these cautionary warnings, theoretical explorations into why and how certain television dramas and computer games manufactured in Korea continue to attract consumers outside the peninsula must continue to be wagered.

Furthermore, since we appear to be entering a prolonged era of remote learning, I accept that game platforms of artificial intelligence and role-playing could enhance the learning experience for students who must now productively engage their screens. I completed the first draft of this book's

manuscript just as Korea was experiencing an unprecedented surge of COVID-19 cases stemming largely from the outbreak at the cult megachurch in Daegu. The manuscript's lengthy revision process coincided with the imposition of stay-at-home orders in my home state of California, the murder of George Floyd, and the rise of Black Lives Matter protests nationwide. It was disheartening—for instance—to once again hear, over and over, the name of Latasha Harlins, the fifteen-year-old black girl who was killed by a Korean business owner in Los Angeles in 1992, which led to thousands of Korean American businesses being damaged during the Rodney King uprising, but it served as a necessary reminder that Koreans are still deeply associated within the systematic racial injustices that are now truly global in scale.⁷ It is therefore my hope that *Hegemonic Mimicry* will in a small way help further the discussion of race in Asian and Asian American studies.

While working on this book, I have been plagued with various nagging injuries and illnesses, and at the moment of this writing, I, like millions of Americans, am trying to recover from lung diseases associated with COVID-19. My symptoms have fortunately been mild but are nevertheless an ongoing reminder that the virus's impact on the body's organs is real and serious. I am grateful to Courtney Berger, my editor at Duke University Press, who gave me both the courage and the time to finish this book. She also made the entire editing and vetting process painless, responding to every one of my gripes and complaints with grace and composure. Hers was precisely the kind of response I needed from my editor as I struggled with medical appointments, tests, anxiety, and pain. This is the third book project that Courtney and I have worked on together, and she—along with her assistant, Sandra Korn—has impressed me each and every time. The two anonymous readers of this manuscript also made suggestions that far exceeded their pay scale and duty. Although disagreements did arise here and there, almost every one of the issues that they raised was expressed in a true spirit of collegiality. In an academic environment that has unfortunately grown more spiteful and mean over the years, partly due to the ugly sociopolitical climate and partly as a result of the incendiary communication modes of social media, these two readers exemplified the deep value and importance of academic debate guided by care and courtesy. Carl Good and Zury Lee also read earlier drafts and provided many copyediting suggestions that were incisive and insightful and made the manuscript infinitely more presentable. One of my graduate students, Sue Kim Asokan, helped me compile the bibliography.

I wrote my first book, also published by Duke University Press, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, in my twenties; my second, *Virtual Hallyu: The Korean Cinema of the Global Era*, in my thirties; and this one in my forties. A famous Korean proverb tells the story of how “even rivers and mountains undergo change every ten years.” This has been all too true for the landscape of Korean popular culture in the United States and beyond as it grew from a negligent blip in global culture when I was a teenager adjusting to my new life in America to one of the most productive and attractive worldwide more recently. Korean studies and cultural studies disciplines in general were unable to keep up with the explosive demand by students virtually from all over the world who sought in-depth historical and theoretical analysis of Korean popular culture. Hopefully this book will ease some pressure off the academics who are anxious that some of the information compiled by students and popular internet sites simply outweigh their expert knowledge of the field of Korean popular culture. I know this all too well, since the motivation to write this book was to avoid this very shame I felt when teaching a course on Korean popular culture for the very first time. With each passing decade, I witnessed dialogue across transnational paradigms on the subject of Korean popular culture exponentially grow, but now I am wary that the impact of COVID-19 may have indefinitely foreclosed these cultural and intellectual flows. Despite the terrorizing power of this virus, hopefully soon we will be able to return to the movies, concerts, exhibits, and academic conferences where we can again fully appreciate the energy of youthful Korean popular culture.

The humanities dean’s office at the University of California, Irvine, first headed by Georges Van Den Abbeele and then by Tyrus Miller, has supported this book by offering me generous support through the Humanities Center’s publication subsidy grant. Andrzej Warminski, the associate dean, throughout the past decade also generously offered his time to respond to all my administrative queries as I crawled to the completion of this book. The Korea Foundation Field Research Fellowship also allowed me some time off from teaching to visit Korea and to concentrate on writing. Many of the staff members of the department and in the School of Humanities—including Mindy Han, Joo Hoon Shin, Erica Yun, Michelle Hu, Veronica Portal, Stephanie (W.) Wijetilleke, and Amanda Swain—helped me get through one crisis after another.

Many of my colleagues, graduate students, and staff members at UC Irvine and beyond also helped me shape, share, and publish earlier ver-

sions of this work. The past and present chairs of the East Asian Studies Department at UC Irvine—Martin Huang, Michael Fuller, and Hu Ying—shared with me the pains of having to go through caring for a small child while writing this book and sympathized with me greatly. Many of my past and present colleagues in the department—Will Bridges, Chungmoo Choi, Ted Fowler, Jim Fujii, Susan Klein, Mimi Long, Bert Scruggs, Serk-bae Suh and Elisabeth Tinsley—also provided productive conversations and feedback on a range of subjects discussed in this book. Colleagues outside the department—including Nahum Chandler, Chris Fan, Joseph Jeon, Adriana Johnson, Eleana Kim, Horacio Legras, Jerry Lee, Sei Lee, Jane Page, Jim Steintrager, and Michael Szalay—offered comfort and wisdom that I lacked while working on this book. I was blessed with intellectually sparkling graduate students who gave me opportunities over the past eight years to discuss the topics covered in the book in seminars; they are Benjamin Aaron, Sue Kim Asokan, Eun-ah Cho, Monica Cho, Jessica Conte, Zach Gottesman, Seok-kyeong Hong, Tiffany Hong, Kristina Horn, Yunjong Lee, Tian Li, Kiki Liu, Ying Liu, Adam Miller, Forest Muther, Hyunseon Park, Anat Schwartz-Meron, Eun Young Seong, and Jean Shon. Friends in academia—Jinsoo An, Chris Berry, Steven Choe, Youngmin Choe, Jinhee Choi, Karen Fang, Hoduk Hwang, Andrew Jackson, Marcia Landy, Immanuel Kim, Jisoo Kim, Suk-Young Kim, Youna Kim, Aynne Kokas, Bodurae Kwon, Young-Jun Lee, John Lie, Ingyu Oh, Se-Mi Oh, Suk Koo Rhee, Youngju Ryu, CedarBough Saeji, Haerin Shin, Ji-young Shin, Sowon Park, Young-chae Seo, Victor Shmagin, Mi-seong Woo, and Hyon Joo Yoo—invited me to discuss portions of this book in classrooms, publications, and restaurants.

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was working as a film producer at CJ Entertainment & Media (CJ E&M) in Seoul when the book was first incubated. She underwent an incredible career change to accommodate our life together in the United States while this book took shape. I cannot thank her enough for having made the changes necessary for us to be together. Her insights into Korean popular culture—from the business side to the aesthetic one—allowed me to stay current and focused. I dedicate this book to her.

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Introduction

Of Mimicry and *Miguk*

BECOMING-KOREAN: OPAQUELY RACIAL
AND AMBIVALENTLY HEGEMONIC

Imagine a dystopian world where American cities have been devastated and turned into slums after a long decade of economic repression and total war. Large numbers of young people are dead, missing, or badly wounded. Survivors—mostly women, children, and the old—are forced to pull themselves together from ruins of concrete slabs, metal scraps, and war ashes. In the midst of starvation, despair, and family loss and separation, the foreign army that has defended these American cities is asked by the humiliated leader to remain and help restore order. Let's say that the foreign army that has been asked to save these American territories comes from a country across the Pacific: Korea. They speak only Korean, eat Korean food, and socialize among themselves. Because tens of thousands of Korean lives have been sacrificed to defend American soil, once the war has ended, their rest and recreation, or R&R, is given priority by the American leader. Koreans occupy the best hotels downtown and hold auditions for local singers, musicians, dancers, and vaudeville-type magic and freak shows. Because talented young American women and men desperately need work to survive the postwar devastation, they audition before panels of Korean military officers. Because the Korean soldiers prefer to watch female singers performing on stage, American girls frantically learn the musical scores and lyrics

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of Korean folk songs on the fly. Korean traditional melodies registering in the moody minor pentatonic scale sound foreign to young American ears and are almost impossible to learn because the lyrics are in a language that sounds nothing like any of the more familiar Indo-European languages they have heard before, let alone English. Yet, because the income generated from each week of work is easily three or four times the income earned from working at any local farm, you desperately audition for the Koreans, even though you have heard horror stories about the long bus rides on unpaved roads, about the sex-deprived soldiers who will grope you onstage and later try to whisk you away to Korea. Because your performance is evaluated by Korean military officers who serve as judges, you force yourself to learn new songs by transliterating the lyrics into the English alphabet, even though the Korean words make no sense to you. You may pass the first audition, but even when you succeed in touring onstage for a couple of months, you must continue to compete against newer and younger faces who try to take your place every change of season. Each audition requires you to learn the new hit songs on the radio. Mimicking the accent and intonation of each and every Korean word is almost painful—physically because you have to use different facial muscles to pronounce iotized vowels such as *yŏ* (yeo) or *yo* and the frequent syllabic assembly of phonemes with preceding consonants of *n* or *k*—and psychologically because Korean soldiers constantly mock you for each pidgin diction you make. Just when you think you have mastered standard Korean, a new wave of hit songs with beats sung in nonstandard Korean come in vogue. The new Korean songs are recorded in a regional dialect, which is much more difficult to learn than the songs sung in standard dialect. But you never lose hope. Soon, you tell yourself that you can fulfill your dream of singing in front of real Korean audiences back in Korea on a beautiful stage in the poshest, most exclusive neighborhood—Gangnam. You must learn each and every song with a sincere and positive attitude, or else you may not pass the constant tests, get kicked off the tour, and lose your livelihood.

I begin my book with this sketch of a scene from what looks like speculative fiction because not only does this hypothetical reversal of a hierarchical, hegemonic cultural imperialism sound horrifying for Americans, but this fictive representation also pointedly decenters regimes of representation prevalent throughout the twentieth century that have heavily prioritized an American-centric axis while devaluing the peripheries of any culture, nation, or history that is non-American. Flip the Korean with American in the preceding paragraph, and you get a snapshot of what

actually took place during the postwar years in Korea before the heyday of *sho-dan* (Korean show troupes for the US Eighth Army) came to an end with the intensification of the Vietnam War by the late 1960s.¹ Most of the best-known South Korean popular music acts and composers throughout the first three decades of the postwar era, such as Korea's first diva crooner, Patti Kim, and the Godfather of Korean Rock, Shin Joong-hyun, started out their careers as *sho-dan* performers.² Although the United States of the twenty-first century now espouses more political sensitivity regarding issues of race, this was much less true of the United States of the mid-twentieth century. When the US military entered the Korean War, then remained there to defend South Korea (hereafter Korea, unless otherwise indicated) from further Communist aggression, America was still a racially segregated nation whose values, cultural identity, and historical determination to bring world peace were cultivated very much in the pallor of ideologies of white racial superiority. The treatment, in other parts of the world, of nonwhite races, along with their cultural identities and languages, as equal to that of white America was at the time unthinkable.

The elimination of racial inequality between black and white soldiers was only in the infancy of *discussion*, and still far from reality, during the Korean War (1950–53) and the subsequent decades. Although black-only platoons were phased out during the war by then president Harry Truman, racial discrimination and segregation remained entrenched in barracks, social life, and civilian life back home.³ Well until the mid-1970s, camptown clubs for US military personnel in Korea were segregated—so much so that race riots broke out in several clubs near Camp Humphreys, motivated by black soldiers upset by the *de facto* policies of segregation enacted by these clubs and their proprietors, which separated entertainers and prostitutes who serviced white soldiers from those who serviced their black counterparts.⁴ So intense and widespread were some of the racial tensions between black and white service members in Korea that during the 1970s several committees, such as Get It Together (GIT), formed by US military personnel, and Promote Equality Action Committee (PEACE), formed between military officials and Korean bar owners, had to be established in order to investigate and end racial segregation at off-base clubs.⁵ Even after more than two decades of desegregation in the American military, so real were the racial tensions and disparities in US military bases that the music played in clubs had to be policed and the Korean club owners censored. As stated by Captain A. D. Malloy, who headed the US Army GIT, “We check on the variety of music played in the clubs. They must mix it up; some soul, some

rock, some country and western. If they don't mix the music, you get . . . segregation."⁶ Koreans were often awkwardly caught between the white and black races and were the frequent targets of African American anger. A bar owner in Itaewon interviewed for a 1971 article published in *Stars and Stripes*, which probed the racial war brewing in US military bases in Korea, stated, "If a black GI comes into a place frequented by white GIs, there'll be trouble. There'll be fights or the whites will just leave and not come back. The blacks don't spend as much money as the whites do."⁷

Korean bar owners' refusal to serve African American soldiers or play the music of their preference out of fear of retribution from white soldiers did not exactly help ease the tensions in these camptowns, but at the same time it would be unethical to find Korean bar girls and proprietors culpable for the escalation of American racial tensions that were being played out in Korea at the time. US military officials could have purchased these clubs and managed them on their own. However, the American military's acquiescence in the illegal prostitution arranged in these clubs largely steered it away from taking such measures. The Korean bar owners and entertainers were thus left with a problem too hot to handle on their own, thereby turning them into victims without agency in another country's race war. Korean proprietors, like the 2,200 Korean American business owners who suffered heavily from damages incurred during the Saigu event that took place twenty years later in Los Angeles when four white officers were acquitted for beating a black man, were beginning to find themselves awkwardly caught between white establishment power and black anger.⁸

As a country, Korea held a strategic geopolitical significance for US policy makers, but the Koreans themselves were merely a native people who happened to inhabit a location that did not and could not figure into this discussion for racial equality other than as victims sandwiched between the two races.⁹ For US politicians, Korea has always had more importance as a territory serving as a bulwark against Communism than for the people who inhabit it. The Korean bars thus had very little agency beyond their reluctant control of jukeboxes that had to be played sensitively and equitably in order to reflect the musical genres that separated white and black customers. Koreans, considered sufficiently light by white Americans and simultaneously sufficiently dark by black Americans, managed to cross the strictly delineated color lines during this racially segregated era; yet sometimes this "crossing of the color lines" caused more trouble than necessary.¹⁰

By 2020, exactly seventy years after the war in Korea that desegregated black soldiers from white soldiers for the first time in American military

history while making permanent the division of the Korean peninsula along the thirty-eighth parallel, much had changed. Music, figuratively speaking, has ceased to play on the jukebox and is instead listened to via social media-driven streaming apps. And some of the very talents featured on these new online jukeboxes such as YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Music apps popular among young generations of Americans are Korean idols whose music is composed and produced by pop artists influenced by a diverse selection of 1970s American music—including country, rock, funk, soul, disco, and even Latin beats. Korean *minjok* (national ethnic) identity, which has long been situated awkwardly between the two dominant American races, often as an anxious bystander, is fast emerging as an active global leader in health, tech innovation, and manufacturing and is claiming a strong stake in global popular culture as well. It took more than several generations for Korean identity to once again become fully engaged in amusement and pleasure through a buoyant cultural revival because refiguring a new subjectivity under a tightly administered capitalist expansion—under the auspices of the American-led order—inevitably took time. Koreans are no longer meekly forced to the sidelines to cautiously push the buttons for an American playlist preselected along color lines or learn songs whose meaning and historical background are foreign to them. Although it is difficult to compare such audition programs of local talents held in Seoul during the postwar period to the public slave auctions held in the United States in the eighteenth century, what I would like to propose in this book is that South Koreans had to undergo a kind of transformation that included a process of what Achille Mbembe describes as “exclusion, brutalization, and degradation” that despised and dishonored their own indigenous form and spirit in order to be given a manifestation of cultural rebirth as a “living crypt of capital” that has become the fungible norm of the twenty-first century that expanded into the “entire planet [as] the *Becoming Black of the world*.”¹¹

What Mbembe is here specifically arguing for is, in the Deleuzian spirit, the renewal of a worldwide blackness that removes itself from a conventional link with a race-specific category into an economic and cultural alliance of twenty-first-century subjectivities sought by the underprivileged class. This two-way deracialization and broadening of blackness is also being hatched specifically in the twenty-first-century Korean cultural sensibility, which no longer participates in the American racial war from the sidelines. Korea’s expanding political, economic, and cultural responsibility now requires Koreans to participate in redefining their ethnic identity

in relation to the categories of global racial subjectivity—including Mbembe’s “becoming-Black.” This renewed sense of Korean nation-ness or “becoming-minjok” no longer speaks to the essentialized anticolonial or antiforeign kind of nationalism that was first championed by Korean intellectuals and leaders during the twentieth century, such as Sin Ch’ae-ho, Yi Kwang-su, and even former president Park Chung-hee, who idealized and defined minjok as a pure, patriotic political idea that defined the people who shared the cultural, linguistic, and geographical space of the Korean peninsula. My sense of becoming-minjok, or becoming-Korean, in the global cultural scene of the twenty-first century—an era propelled by social media, “dividual” subjectivities demanded by internet surveillance, and a renewed importance of subcultures organized around hip-hop and eating—draws on the less essentialized notion of minjok that frees Korean culture, tradition, and language from the intractable and anticolonial struggle for a pure and patriotic assemblage of ethnocentrism.

I concur with Jin-kyung Lee, who declared that “Koreanness [has] begun to be delinked from its exclusive attachment to ethnicity.”¹² But this process has taken place only after a lengthy period in the twentieth century during which Korean minjok was almost exclusively aligned with the ethnic differentiation of the Korean people under Japanese colonial rule and then over its reassertion over the subsequent decades. As Lee has also argued, “rather than [the Koreanness] that is defined by a modern *national* citizenship,” the term *han-minjok* (the term *han* is derived from both *one* and *country*, *hanguk* having been used by South Korea to name itself after 1945) has always insisted on blurring the boundary between the common blood ethnicity and the national citizenship that represents Korea.¹³ However, the continued currency of this term has been threatened by recent reconsideration of the non-ethnocentric designations that must be given to the terms of citizenship in order to include non-Korean ethnic migrant settlements and the country’s expanding transnational cultural and economic activities. It has been the productive activity of K-pop and other Korean popular culture products in cinema, food, and television that has ushered in this new sense of “becoming-minjok” or “becoming-Korean” that has loosened the link between the notion of a common ethnic bloodline and Koreanness.

As an ethnic identity of the previous era, the Korean minjok has rarely been given any kind of notice in America, with the rare exception of the ever-present North Korean threat. The earlier sketch of foreign military-sponsored auditions for local entertainers directly showcases what Michel Foucault described as biopolitics, established through “a new mecha-

nism of power” that exerted a control apparatus over a large population of local entertainers who could be replaced, dismissed, and disposed at whim.¹⁴ Here, too, I am indebted to the work of Jin-kyung Lee, who has employed Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, as well as that of Mbembe’s necropolitics, in examining the precarious and disposable labor of Korean sex workers in US camptowns throughout the postwar years. Lee focuses on three working-class labor contexts (Korean military labor in Vietnam, Korean military prostitution for the United States, and Asian migrant labor in contemporary South Korea) in what she calls the “transnational proletarianization of race,” arguing that these labors have constituted the “most disposable (labor) commodities.”¹⁵

Missing from Lee’s analysis, however, is the extensive entertainment labor produced by Korea throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. Because some of the entertainment labor devoted to the US military overlapped with employment in Korean broadcasting companies and clubs, it is difficult to estimate precisely how many sho-dan performers were needed at a given time in Korea. However, as early as the late 1950s, the demand for Korean performers in American military clubs was so high that several Korean talent agencies—each employing hundreds of singers and musicians—began operations to train for the auditions held in Yongsan.¹⁶ Trained and auditioned before American military judges, these performers would soon come to constitute the critical labor base for the entire Korean popular music industry in the years to come. Many of these talented instrumentalists and vocalists, who included many composers and singers ranging from folk singer Cho Dong-jin to rock superstar Cho Yong-pil, could copy an American song within days of it hitting the charts in America. Many of these Korean male and female artists of sho-dan were treated as disposable and forced to work under dire conditions, much like the sex workers in the military camps. However, one significant distinction has to be made between these two conspicuous service labor sectors that emerged from the US military base camp areas in Korea: unlike female sex workers, whom Lee associates with “necropolitical labor” (“the extraction of labor from those ‘condemned’ to death, whereby the fostering of life, already premised on their death or the disposability of their lives, is limited to servicing the demands of the state or empire”), some of these musical performers were able to move forward in their lives and careers, preventing their own labor from becoming disposable by seeking out musical and artistic innovations that led to them becoming the biggest names in Korean showbiz after retiring from their American sho-dan careers.¹⁷ Put another

way, what could have potentially been disposed of as simple copycat machines comprising a mere footnote in world music history emerged from these postwar ashes to sow the seeds for authentic acts on some of the most prominent stages in the world, incubating an exciting hybrid form of twenty-first-century cultural identity. The demand for Koreans to produce an endless supply chain of disposable, off-white/blackish entertainment bodies regulated by American hegemony would, throughout the latter twentieth century, become remediated, re-ethnonationalized into a new, cool Koreanness, one that would prepare itself for the transnational, cosmopolitan sense of hallyu (the “Korean Wave”) located between the essential and the disposable, between white and black, and between Korean and American. This was perhaps the entertainment version of what Joshua Neves has termed “underglobalization” to describe the “frictions and folds between an emergent China and prevailing hegemonic structures” that focus on the role of counterfeits and fakes that undergird China’s relationship to global media technologies in the twenty-first century.¹⁸

Despite the Korean traditional experience that has overvalued austere erudition of Chinese poetry stemming from *sadaejuui* (revere the great) and has simultaneously underappreciated peasant performances rooted in oral art and mask dance due to their vulgarity and unpredictability, the postwar cultural development in Korea steeped in mimicry of the foreign was possible because popular culture in traditional Korea was one that was driven by the power of *sinmyōng* (in Korean, the hallucinatory divine energy that drives up the Shamanistic spirits and excitement for communal fun and entertainment), as will be explained in chapter 7. Because *sinmyōng* can only be enacted by participatory conditions of performances where the stage is arbitrarily set and the demarcation between performers and participants constantly breaks down, unlike that between *yangban* (aristocrats) and *kisaeng* (courtesans) whose separation is critical along the lines of class, gender, and performative roles, it can be argued that Korea is among many countries, such as Ireland, Poland, and elsewhere, where its mass culture always actively engaged in a postmodern culture long before the term *postmodernism* was even coined. As Namhee Lee points out in her analysis of *madangguk* (open-air theater) in the 1970s, when *sinmyōng* had been recaptured for the purpose of transforming the traditional mask dance (*t'alch'um*) into a protest theater during the Park Chung-hee era, the “most potent aspect of folk drama was not only the breakdown of the traditional actor/spectator and self/other division, but also the transformative power of liminality, enabling the audience to move from observing a drama

to participating in a transformative event.”¹⁹ Because the entertainment industry, whether in the West or in the East, has always been centrally engineered not by people from the class of nobility but by those from the class of daubers, crooners, shamans, and clowns, who almost always resided along the margins of the society, many Koreans, as long as they adopted the language, gestures, and styles of the foreign, could swiftly purchase an agency of cultural assets or capital that could be communicated in a shared, communal environment that moves beyond an individual, private enterprise that mythologizes the artist as a hermetic romantic genius.²⁰

SHO-DAN 2.0

Through these uneven and erratic historical developments, Korean identity as a new postmodern and a new proto-ethnic enterprise is now creeping into the lives of American youth through its enormously seductive music videos and alluring television dramas, which draw enormous attention and numbers of likes in the global social media scene while dominating new culinary and fashion trends. The worldwide twentieth-century youth culture that grew up with the internet and social media and was no longer confined to the same national, mono-ethnic, or even monolingual identities found the hybrid identity retweeted from Korean YouTube channels fascinating and attractive. The previously intractable Korean identity of the twentieth century, steeped in an anticolonial, proto-ethnic minjok identity by the time it produced a new generation of post-sho-dan performers, had already undergone a huge facelift: call it a “Sho-dan 2.0” update. Many of the young talents in Korea who vied for a spot in K-pop idol groups during the early years of the twenty-first century were auditioning for management company executives who were either younger partners of original sho-dan performers (such as Lee Soo-man of SM Entertainment) or new clientele of American military R&R club culture in Korea (such as Yang Hyun-seok of YG Entertainment, who learned breakdancing by associating with young black soldiers in Itaewon and was the sidekick to Seo Taiji, who was once a bassist in the legendary heavy-metal band Sinawe led by guitarist Shin Dae-chul, the son of Shin Joong-hyun). Since the 1980s, these executives had begun to see how American soldiers and Korean entertainers had started to exchange their cultural capital and socialize in places like Itaewon without monetary compensation for their entertainment services. “Sho-dan 2.0” loosened and rendered opaque historical and ethnic specificity

of minjok from Korean identity—a necessary step that broadened the Koreanness in order for its pop music, comedies, dramas, films, and food to flow into the everyday lives of young people living outside Korea. When Korean entertainers first picked up their electronic guitars and sang into the microphones in order to sell their talent to Americans, their ethnic cultural background had to be repressed; after seventy years, in the era of social media, Koreans have naturalized this cultural condition where their ethnic identity remains compromised.

The several-decade-old pursuit of a musical *mugukjök* (nonnational) identity, or a pseudo-American one, has manufactured success that is unprecedented elsewhere in the world. K-pop is one of the most successful popular music genres in the world today, not because of its accentuation of beats, melodies, and rhythms that distinguish themselves from those of American hegemonic sounds but because of its close proximity to these sounds. The ironic effect is quite evident when Korean entertainment companies hold auditions to select their new trainees—many young singers, dancers, and talents from all over the world, including the United States, make their pilgrimage to Seoul—or when former US president Donald Trump discusses a Korean film as a foreign cultural element that unsettles the purity and wholesomeness of American culture.²¹ The young auditionees are sometimes asked to perform before their Korean judges only a few miles away from Yongsan, the very spot where the auditions were held for Koreans to entertain the occupying American military personnel. These days, despite the recent diplomatic and economic war brewing between South Korea and Japan, many young Japanese talents, some of them established stars in their own country, learn new songs in Korean to compete against the local Korean talents.²² The putatively postethnic rendering of Korean language, customs, rhythm, beats, and themes has permitted these cultural products aestheticized, performed, and enacted by Koreans in the twenty-first century to reach a quasi-global and ambivalently hegemonic status.

Despite the ubiquity and popularity of K-pop, K-cinema, and K-drama that seemingly reached every corner of the world today, this cultural hegemony is ambivalent because it is built on cultural reappropriation crafted from mimicry. My usage of “mimicry” is derived from Homi K. Bhabha’s seminal article, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” where he argues that the colonial subject is a product of a “reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*.”²³ Korea’s globalization that took place during the post–World War II years had to do with a new form of mass culture constructed under

the rubric of undeniably American identity. However, Korea's own version of its America, or *miguk* (the Korean term for the United States, which is derived from two Chinese characters—*mi*, beautiful, and *guk*, country), just like India's appropriation of Britishness, simulated and reinvented American cultural artifacts, styles, and pop products. Between the source (America) and its Korean quotation (*miguk*), a slippage and a misappropriation were undeniably interjected, despite the best efforts by Koreans to replicate the American performances. This simultaneous appropriation and misappropriation opened the door for innovation—an innovation that was fraught with an appreciation of imitation and fakery that framed the everyday life of many of the Korean artists who could not even understand the language and gestures of the American standard and model. The century-old repression of *minjok* identity—first under the colonial occupation of the Japanese empire and then under the military occupation by the United States—was lifted, but Korea's cultural renaissance during the first two decades of the twenty-first century had to satisfy the global commercial demand, on the part of a social media-driven youth culture, for a non-ethnocentric identification that evaded the continuing racial-cultural war between whiteness and blackness. In the newly negotiated cultural plenitude of the post-Pax Americana era, *miguk*-ified South Korea was the perfect “Murrica,” celebrating the new post-ethnonationalist K-pop and K-cinema and also rejecting the category of both Donald Trumpian whiteness and the intense, urban subjecthood of blackness.²⁴ The blackish or off-white Korean subjectivity that emerged in the era of social media was a perfect assemblage of codes, styles, and memes that would self-correct the potential errors and insults that could risk damaging one's reputation around the issue of race.²⁵

A new cultural post-*minjok* (or becoming-*minjok*) Korean popular sentiment was born out of these critical imitations that re-membered the foundation of the soul—of both Korean and black American. There was probably no other place in the era of Pax Americana outside the United States where the learning of the American—the aesthetics, styles, and language—was as intense and durable as it was in Korea over the past three-quarters of a century. During this time, relearning the foreign culture meant not only recalibrating the Korean soul and the wounds of being a Korean but also forgetting the origins of black resentment that were deeply rooted in many music genres, such as jazz, blues, soul, rock 'n' roll, R&B, and hip-hop. Koreans learned to enact a two-step, double gesture of mimicking and innovating—which immersed its own *miguk* in the

Korean movements, rhythm, and language. This process of *miguk-ification* both weakened and intensified the Korean emotions and soul, which for many decades ended up playing hide-and-seek with Korea's survival acts of mimicry. Thus, one can argue that South Korea has exploited a close sociopolitical alliance with the United States over the past several decades that produced a simulation of American conception of culture—one that rescrambled and rendered opaque the local Koreanness before it began circulating through global social media.

If Bhabha's postcolonial employment of the term *mimicry* sought to question the level of success of the cultural appropriation the colonial and postcolonial elites were forced to adapt by raising the impossibility of approximation in every act of simulation or imitation (he sarcastically transforms “almost the same, but not quite” into “almost the same but not white”), there are other instances of the use of mimicry that come to define the tradition of, for example, mask theater.²⁶ As will be discussed later, especially in the chapter on Korean comedies, mimicry can be a form of carnivalesque play where the hierarchical difference between adult and child, original and imitator, and the colonizer and the colonized breaks down. I am drawn not only to the postcolonial employment of the term *mimicry* but also to the theories of Roger Caillois, a postwar French theorist who has argued for the term *mimicry* as the defining tendency of human nature toward play.²⁷ In the following chapter's discussion of Korean reality comedy programs, I rely on Caillois's definition of mimicry. African American literary scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s theory on the “Signifyin(g) monkey” is also one trope that references figures of tricksters and talking animals from black folk tales and verbal games of exchanging insults such as “Dozens” in order to foreground the importance of game and play in instances of black cultural production. Here, mimicry becomes a crucial tool to offset not just one form of power but all forms of power. Gates's theories valorize parody, mask theater, and the taunting that constantly seek to deconstruct power to the extent where much of the essences of power disintegrate. Gates's observation on “Signifyin(g),” which broadly includes imitations, jokes, and even travesty as a critical practice exhibits the pleasure of liberty that is at stake within the discourse of mimicry.

This book also pays attention to how the act of mimicry passed from an initial colonial simulation of the dominant colonizer to an ambivalent and ironic one before assuming a hegemony in an ambivalent form. When I examine the controversy of “kimchi imperialism” in China in a later chapter,

I question whether this charge against Korean imperialism in China is valid. Perhaps the biggest cultural paradox of the first two decades of the twenty-first century is that South Korea, a country that once had no identity to the rest of the world other than the nation ravaged by war and the threat of Communism, has not only survived the “audition” tests administered by US military officers but within a generation and a half has graduated from these acts of simply copying American hit songs to achieving its status as one of the most successful cultural content makers in the global arena. Auditions are still popular, but in the place of foreign military advisors trying to entertain their soldiers, local businessmen who grew up themselves listening to American songs serve as judges to select young performers who will together set the new global standard in world pop today. Young Korean talents do still fear getting kicked off the “tour bus,” but even if they do get kicked off eventually, they will not face starvation and poverty. And once they are officially on the bus after years of hard training, the results may be much sweeter than sharing a stage in front of an audience of drunk soldiers.

Over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a Korean’s acceptance of Americanization and commercialization helped overcome their own deep internal contradictions between global and local, and effectively allowed them to transcribe cinematic language, music genres, and even ideology that originated in America into a powerful discourse that we now brush aside along with the coinage of *hallyu*. However, what needs to be recognized here is that this first step or act of appropriation-cum-double gesture that at least had to acknowledge and abandon its own *minjok* (ethnic nation-ness) was not just a national reenactment but a reconstitution of itself as a proto-ethnic identity within the Pan-American global order. The unraveling of the boundary between authenticity and quotation gestured through the Korean act of mimicry, in other words, proclaimed the birth of a new ethnic and national subjectivity that is both American and Korean and that is raciopolitically located somewhere between off-white (complicit) and blackish (resistant). I insist on this refusal of the essentialist bifurcation between “whiteness” as a form of complicity and “blackness” as a resistance because for a Korean throughout the days of Pax Americana to identify more with an African American than a Caucasian American would have still required one to subversively reinscribe the praxis of American hegemony. Throughout the book, I offer these two terms, *off-white* and *blackish*, as a discourse that tries to read these two colors as

metonymic references to suggest the two-headed condition of hegemony that inseparably interarticulates the Gramscian tropes of coercion and subversion.²⁸ How this new identity trapped between neocolonial subjectivity and a postcolonial one became rearticulated into a dominant wave of culture—where its new act of the day (BTS, for instance) has totally subverted the dominant hierarchy between original and copy and can now rival even several of the top American music acts, such as Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber, in terms of album downloads, YouTube views, and concert ticket sales—is what forms my theoretical frame of *hegemonic mimicry*. In other words, what my book aims at is, first, to situate Korean popular culture of the past two decades as one of the most discernible and conspicuous examples of the blurred boundary between original and copy that has rendered a catalog of postmodern cultural contents par excellence. Second, this book explores the phenomena that made this K-pop fame possible, including not only the ingenuity and persistence of Korean artists and cultural innovators who notoriously spend countless hours in training but also the global culture dominated by social media, which over the past two decades has empowered users' parody, fandom, and remakes, and these, in return, have weakened the traditional borders between nations, languages, and the originality-copy divide. Third, what I would like to also insist in this process of Korea's act of creative mimicry, or as I call it, "hegemonic mimicry," is the recognition of Korean reclamation of both the proto- and post-minjok identity that has rendered opaque its national identity, for its very survival, and which has shadowed many of the Korean performances, experiences, and cultural utterances of the modern age. This book considers race, along with national identity, as one of the most important, if not the most significant, criteria through which the K-pop and other Korean culture waves of the twenty-first century have enacted a cultural renaissance.

Though the era of colonial rule more or less came to a halt with the conclusion of World War II, the cultural Koreanness that was developed in the latter part of the twentieth century and has attained a recognizable global awareness in the twenty-first century is one case that exemplifies an idea that Stuart Hall insisted on when he stated that the "notion of a national formation, of a national economy, that could be represented through a national-cultural identity is under considerable pressure."²⁹ Hall was then discussing the untenable nature of national-cultural identity formation for the UK and the decline of unitary British culture throughout the early part of the twentieth century. But this untenable trend has become more or

less true also for Americanness, which replaced Britishness during the latter part of the twentieth century. Also valued is Hall's emphasis on the "de-centering of national-cultural identity," for this modern Koreanness is linked to an experience of opposition: colonial subjection and not subscription to major language blocs divided into English, Spanish, French, Chinese, and so forth that now signify the structure of world culture today.³⁰ The increased significance of the new "becoming-Korean" identity is less unitary and more transnational, and is the cultural consequence of the accelerated pace of expansion of American cultural imperialism of the twentieth century.

Koreans have nourished a system of popular culture that has rendered its own ethnic and nationalist flavors opaque in order for its survival in the face of global competition against American cultural content and media industries. So the ambitions of cultural power for the Koreans settle for a milder and tamer version of Koreanness that is as deeply fried as its own recipe of "yangnyeom chicken" that was once imported from the United States soon after the Korean War but, since then, has made great strides as a foreign-adopted Korean cultural product to achieve a flavor all its own. If just one short decade of severe cultural and ethnic eradication in the form of *naisen ittai* (squashing of the two national bodies, Japan and Korea, into one), ushered in during the Japanese colonial era between 1937 and 1945, produced an entire generation of Koreans who were later forced to relearn their own language and reacquire their own ethnic pride, by contrast the hallyu identity cultivated during the American military occupation, although making the ethnic identity of Koreans opaque, also clearly celebrated Korean as a unique language, thereby leading to the rise of global stars who were not necessarily fluent or even semi-fluent in English. Most BTS members, with the exception of RM, still refuse to speak any English on American television shows, and filmmaker Bong Joon-ho will not publicly appear on stage without the aid of a translator. Even after generations of close military, economic, and cultural alliance with the United States, can Koreans, who still insist on speaking a minor language that most Americans do not register as a distant cousin of English, such as Spanish or French, attain more than the status of "honorary" American partner? Can Koreans achieve the status of a "true" American friend with crossover sensibilities that diversify the very meaning of America or, in Korean terms, a *miguk*, a "beautiful country" that stretches even beyond the neoliberal idea of multiethnic diversity and a parochial sense of American exceptionalism?

After 1945, South Korea was politically and economically already well placed within the column of Pax Americana, but culturally a Korean had to chart a path forward between “two warring ideals”—the clash of these ideals being not between the Korean and the foreign but between one occupying foreign imperial power and another. Japanese music, language, and fashion had totally overwhelmed those of Korea during the era of *naisen ittai* (1937–45), and, despite the violence and the resentment that Koreans suffered during the Japanese colonial period, because of the proximity of race, geography, and shared cultural heritage between the two nations, Japanese-style songs and culture did not immediately vanish after 1945.³¹ Furthermore, some historians argue that Japanese-style songs called *enka* are rooted in Korean folk tradition, which may further complicate the use of the term *Japanese-style*.³² Ethnomusicologist Dohee Kwon writes that television and radio stations in South Korea often had to face a choice between American-style Korean pop music (AKPM) and Japanese-colored songs (JCS, which were composed in the Western-Japanese pentatonic scale), which had the fourth (Fa) and seventh (Ti) notes of the octave scale (Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-Ra-Ti-Do) missing.³³ By the 1980s, the JCS-inspired trot ballad songs had declined rapidly against the increasing popularity of AKPM songs. The most dominant band of the 1980s, Tŭlgukhwa, for example, was heavily inspired by American rock bands such as the Eagles and Styx, and the popular songs they performed for the past four decades did not pay any homage to the trot ballads that were cousins to the JCS. Cho Yong-pil, who has remained a bona fide superstar in Korea for the past several decades and is better known as an American-style rock star, started his career as a trot ballad singer. As will be discussed in chapter 1, the hallyu idol at the turn of the millennium was incubated after Korean entertainment management company heads were inspired by J-pop idols; however, K-pop has developed a genre and style that is decisively AKPM. The thudding sounds of drums and low bass lines—accompanied by powerful dance choreography—distinguish K-pop from other music genres that are popular among young teens. Influenced in part by the Swedish songwriting phenom Max Martin, who produced for the Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears simple melody-driven hit songs laid over exaggerated bass instrumentation and drum tracks, some of the top songs of K-pop, such as BTS’s recent “Icon” and EXO’s “Growl,” feature an addictive balladic chorus soaring over the distinguished bass lines and hard-hitting drum tracks. Though

trot beats and melodies still resonate deep in the soul of most Koreans today, as sensationally popular audition programs *Mister Trot* and *Miss Trot* aired in 2020–21 on *TV Chosun* have proven, K-pop has effectively erased the specter of JCS-inspired trot music from its repertoire.

The tension between JCS and AKPM resulted in perhaps the biggest cultural battle during the second half of the twentieth century in Korea—without either of the two being the decisive winner for several decades. The Godfather of Korean rock, Shin Joong-hyun, wrote not only rock tracks but also ballads inspired by both AKPM and JCS influences, respectively blues and trot, such as a 1970 song, “Nim ūn mon kot e” (Love so far away), crooned by female diva Kim Ch’u-ja. Sung in the key of E minor, “Nim” is quite possibly the most beloved song composed during the post-Korean War era.³⁴ Just like many of his other songs, such as “Mi-in,” “Nim” is composed in a pentatonic scale, which has brought the charge that it falls neatly into the trot style. The song was revived again in 2014 in a music audition program called *Trot X*. However, the minor pentatonic scale alone does not a Japanese-style song make.³⁵ Many popular guitar riffs and solos, including Led Zeppelin’s “Black Dog” and “Stairway to Heaven,” rely on guitar play that derives from the same minor pentatonic scale, and yet hardly an ounce of what Koichi Iwabuchi has called “a cultural odor” can be sniffed on these classic hard-rock songs that would carry a fragrance of “Japan.”³⁶ They rely on a minor pentatonic scale because Led Zeppelin and many rock bands during the 1970s were influenced by blues melodies that veer away from the octave scale.³⁷ Well-known rock ‘n’ roll ballads composed during the 1970s, including “Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)” by Pink Floyd, used this scale, simply because it was then fashionable for white American and British rock bands to appropriate the minor pentatonic blues scale from African American music of the South. Since both enka and blues are built on a minor pentatonic scale, as is much of folk music from various traditions, one could argue that the fact that “Nim” is sung in an E-minor pentatonic scale does not define its sound as distinctively Korean, as opposed to distinctively Western or, more specifically, American. But still the question remains, which between the two constitutes a larger influence on the song “Nim”? Is it the Japanese, and therefore East Asian, enka icon Hibari Misora, or the African American blues icon Etta James singing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”? The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. Shin Joong-hyun was influenced by both classic Korean trot structures and African American blues melodies when he composed the song; in fact, “Nim” could be sung in the style of either Hibari Misora or

Etta James. There are many versions of the song available—in blues, trot, or even disco and rap.³⁸

The battle between JCS and AKPM tilted heavily in favor of the latter as the sho-dan performers started to produce, compose, and sing for these Korean consumers who were increasingly embracing American trends and fads. Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, blackness in South Korea was both a taboo subject and a cultural fascination. The Korean War was the first war engaged in that officially ended racial segregation within the US military, which resulted in the higher visibility of African American soldiers. During the Korean War, the all-black infantry that were in existence in the US military since 1869 were disbanded, officially ending the era of segregation in the US Army.³⁹ Six hundred thousand African Americans served in the Armed Forces during the Korean War, and millions more since have served their duty in Korea after the armistice was signed in 1953. Black soldiers have consistently represented a higher share of active-duty military personnel over the past several decades than their share of the US population.⁴⁰ Though it was illegal for the US military to racially identify their personnel in the 1950s and 1960s, black soldiers continued to occupy a central place in the popular imagination of Koreans who perceived black soldiers as a visible and integral part of the US military. Much of the popular fiction that depicts the Korean War, ranging from Ahn Junghyo's novel *Silver Stallion* (1990) to the more recent film *Swing Kids* (dir. Kang Hyong-chul, 2018), centrally foreground black military personnel in the US Army.⁴¹ While the postwar Korean literary canon does not feature a writer such as Ōe Kenzaburo, who sought alliances between “Negro American Literature and Modern Japanese Literature” by creating, in the words of William H. Bridges IV, “an analogical link between his own works and black literature,” the impact of “blackness” on Korean popular culture is profound and unerasable.⁴² In a recent interview, Han Myung-sook, one of the most famous singers of her day and still known today for her megahit song “Noran shassū ūi sanai” (The man with a yellow shirt) from 1961, was one of the performers who learned her trade while singing for the US military sho-dan. She was so popular among the American troops that she led several tours of her own in Vietnam during the 1960s and performed for the US troops there. Han recalls, “Every time an audition was held, we had to pull an all-nighter. New songs were sung, especially in black pronunciation, so it was even more difficult. But we still try to copy it . . . copy it all the way. . . . We could never leave behind a tape recorder. We would always carry it with us. Because if a new hit song came

out, we had to study it on the spot.”⁴³ The act of mimicry that singer Han Myung-sook is recollecting here is a specific kind of cultural appropriation located among the full variety of Americanness. It was the black variety of Americanness that needed to be copied by the Korean in order to survive as an entertainer during postwar poverty-ridden Korea.

As testified in numerous interviews given by Korean entertainers of the 1960s and 1970s, the essence or act of putting on Americanness was, in other words, authenticated by Asian, specifically Korean, musicians and artists by emulating and reproducing black voices, black bodily movements, and black styles.⁴⁴ If English colonialism in India, to borrow the words of Bhabha, was a tongue “that is forked, not false,” the experience of American neocolonialism in Korea over the past seventy-five years was steeped in a tongue that occupied a territory definitively beyond simple dichotomies of black and white, somewhere between off-white and blackish.⁴⁵ This is true despite the fact that Koreans as subjects occupied by a dominant global-political power often constituted a position that fell lower than that of either black or white American, as reflected in both novels and films of the time. The Korean ethnic identity that was born out of a post-1945, neo-colonial experience with the United States was different from that of the postcolonial identity defined by Bhabha and Hall, whose scholarship was shaped by the English colonial experience in India and in Jamaica within the span of their or their parents’ generation’s lifetimes. The style of Bollywood filmmaking that began in postwar, postindependence India also reshaped global music, fashion, and food, and continues to impact contemporary global culture today, while the reggae and Rastafarian fads from Jamaica that took the world by storm in the 1970s have sustained their popularity and global influence well into the twenty-first century. However, these cultural phenomena initially served largely the Anglophone and global ethnic populations that motivated fandom across regions that shared common cultural heritage. Bollywood, for example, continues to enjoy popularity almost exclusively among English-speaking or Hindi and Hindustani-diasporic regions. The unique and ironic characteristic of Korean popular culture is that its cultural essence has been carved out by Korean, a minor language spoken by only seventy-five million people among a global population of seven and a half billion. This number makes Korean a minor language but certainly unique if one considers the fact that it is a language that stepped onto the global stage with its use among almost exclusively one single ethnic identity. This opaque, and yet linguistically unique, raciality that Koreans and Korean cultural production have

staked helps establish an ambivalent cultural hegemony in other countries that do not feel as threatened by this Koreanness as by American cultural domination.

We must remember that merely a few decades earlier, cultural content made by and featuring Koreans was barely known outside Korea. In reality, this content was barely known *inside* Korea. The biggest hit films, hit dramas, and most conspicuous songs blaring in the streets and cafés of Seoul were products that bore stamps of the foreign. No nationalist campaigns, no foreign film quotas, and not even outright cultural bans against particular countries could help relieve the perception of Korean cultural content as poor entertainment consumerist products. Just about the only popular cultural products made in Korea that were popular among Koreans before the turn of the millennium were television dramas broadcast in the evening hours that catered largely to female audiences and ballad songs called *kayo* that sentimentally appealed to audiences of various age groups. Before the unique and unified linguistic system of *hangul* helped relaunch K-pop and other Korean cultural content in the twenty-first century, far more popular than the local variety in the Korean soil was the music by American and British rock groups. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the Korean music industry went into a deep recession. The biggest reason was, of course, the political censorship of the time that targeted popular culture in Korea, resulting in the blacklisting, imprisonment, or exile of many great musicians. But there were other reasons as well. Kim Young, the record company head executive who led the renaissance of Korean *kayo* throughout the late 1980s representing Korean blues singers Kim Hyun-sik and Kim Hyun-cheol alongside rock bands like Tŭlgukhwa, states, “At the time [from 1978 to 1982, when Kim Young was running a small record store], Western classical and pop constituted about 80 or 90 percent of total sales of LPs. Who would buy *kayo* those days? . . . In my store, I would play music all day long. Beatles, Bee Gees, and Simon and Garfunkel, and then I would play a Korean album . . . and it was embarrassing. Professional engineering was absent in Korean albums at the time. . . . Arrangement, production, and recording technology had to all change, and be updated.”⁴⁶ South Korea’s failure to technologically keep up with the recording and cinema industry of the rest of the advanced world could not satisfy the consumers who were beginning to have more choices as Korea was opening its cultural sector market to the West.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Korean cinema also similarly slumped and could not recapture the glory days of the 1960s. Theaters were old,

subject matters anachronistic, and the production value of films not up-to-date with the standards set by Hollywood. An average Korean during the 1990s only chose to watch one film per year (compared to more than four films annually now), and chances are he or she would choose to watch a Hollywood film rather than a local one.⁴⁷ As I have written elsewhere, against the firepower of Hollywood stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, Korean cinema could throw only naked bodies of women and erotic images to compete for just a sliver of domestic market share.⁴⁸ While Hollywood blockbusters dominated the local box offices, it was also foreign films featuring Kevin Costner and Sharon Stone and television drama and action series such as *The Incredible Hulk* and *MacGyver* that constituted the talk of the town as popular entertainment's centerpiece. So popular were Hollywood series and films on television that Korean voice actors cast to provide the voices of Hollywood stars such as Al Pacino and Sharon Stone were even busier than the local Korean stars.⁴⁹ Even for the toddler and youth audiences, Japanese animations such as *Doraemon*, *Candy*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Dragon Ball*, dubbed in Korean voices, filled the airtime on daytime television.⁵⁰

So what happened? Well, leaving out miguk-ification from the equation for now, in two words, the internet. South Korea was one of the earliest adopters of internet technology. In Korea, cell phones, personal computers, and high-speed internet technology caught on very quickly—penetrating the majority of personal homes as early as the 1990s. If the military dictatorship from the 1960s to the 1990s achieved one thing in Korea, it was the protection of the *chaebol* industrial conglomerates to become competitive in the global marketplace. Electronic companies in particular grew very fast in Korea. Many electronic companies, such as SKC, Samsung, and LG, rose to international power through their manufacturing efficiency and innovations in digital technology, and the smartphone market in South Korea proved fertile testing grounds.⁵¹ Korea Telecommunication (KT) was one of the first companies in the world that allowed smartphones to leap beyond the hoops of 3G, LTE, and now 5G networks and equally fast-paced cable internet speeds. This paralleled the upward swing of Korea's youth to become power players in online games, peer-to-peer technology-based streaming video channels, and K-pop music content distribution. Both the dazzling speed through which Koreans could type because of the unique alphabet system of hangul that allows for faster typing speeds and the Korean telecommunication companies that drive each other to compete for higher internet and mobile data network speeds allowed early online forums for

young fans of K-pop and K-cinema to meet, socialize, and trade information at a clip faster than that of any other place in the world.⁵² While entertainment industries in the rest of the world remained wary about possible copyright infringement and the illegal downloads that would result from actively posting official music videos of their artists online, when YouTube caught fire in the early years of the twenty-first century, K-pop management companies saw its potential as a partner for the future and began posting their content on the video-sharing website to create an immediate connection with their fans overseas.⁵³ Needless to say, this bold move paid off, as YouTube became as sensational and viral as K-pop over the past decade and a half. It is extremely difficult to imagine the global K-pop sensations of the 2010s—“Gangnam Style” in the early part of the decade and BTS, the boy idol group from Korea, in the latter part of the decade—without the aid of YouTube and other social media platforms to galvanize fans around the world.

It is tempting to say that the internet was the sole factor that changed the game for Korean pop culture and leave it at that. But, as the term *K-pop* has become ubiquitous and has boasted perhaps the most recognizable icons around the world over the past two decades, Korea’s early adoption of “internet” culture and its quick embrace to spread K-pop content cannot alone explain the reasons behind K-pop’s success. Korean popular culture did indeed suffer during the era of the military dictatorship, and the Korean hallyu wave did benefit from the South Korean government’s policy to promote cultural content initiated by the more liberal presidents that followed the long period of military dictatorship. But again, that alone does not suffice to explain the global success of K-pop or other Korean cultural content. Neither can South Korea’s economic rise as one of the most significant financial global powers over the past half century offer on its own an adequate explanation for the rapid global success of Korean cultural content. If economic indexes were to serve as the most important criteria through which popular cultural values are set, then the United Arab Emirates and Norway, which boast two of the highest per capita GDPs in the world, should occupy a level of global dominance for their respective cultural content far beyond the level that these countries currently do. While all these factors—Korea’s utilization of the internet as a tool to spread its cultural content, the government’s active engagement to promote cultural content through its subsidy programs, and South Korea’s meteoric rise to the top of the world’s leading economies in the twentieth century—played a role in creating one of the most dynamic cultural industries in the world

today, one crucial reason has remained unprobed in most discussions held on K-pop studies.

Over the past three-quarters of a century, Koreans have learned to gain attention in global popular culture by redubbing American hegemonic music, visual culture, and drama through a process of revaluing, reauthenticating, and, perhaps most importantly, reidentifying their ethnic subjects, aesthetics, and content. As well publicized through the compulsory visits to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) by almost every sitting US president since Dwight D. Eisenhower (John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, the only two presidents of the postwar years who were unable to complete their presidential terms, are notable exceptions), the American military presence in South Korea has remained strong ever since Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945. The military presence the United States has maintained in the peninsula not only influenced the politics and economics of South Korea that provided America its bulwark against Communism; it has also had a profound impact on South Korean culture. Shin Joong-hyun, the aforementioned guitarist-composer, after being inspired by black soul music and psychedelic rock in the 1960s, learned his trade growing up near the American military base.

During the 1960s, the influence of the US 8th Army [stationed in Korea] was absolutely strong. I thought that they were not here to fight any war, but here to fight a war to defend their culture. If we were to go to war, I can't imagine that there would be any place for music. But for the Americans, it was different, it felt as if they were here [in Korea] to listen to their music. After their training hours, they would without fail come to one of the clubs to listen to music. Every base had at least three clubs—one for the officers, one for the sergeants, and one for the soldiers.⁵⁴

Among soldiers, as had been mentioned previously, clubs were also segregated along color lines.

During the first several decades of the postwar years, the foreign cool that swept South Korea originated from the United States but also elsewhere. Alain Delon, for instance, a French film star who was little known in the United States, became a household name in Korea because his films were popular in the major cities, and stories about his personal life became magazine headlines. *Plein Soleil* (*T'aeyang kadŭkhi*, dir. Rene Clemont, 1960) was one of his most sensationally successful films in Korea, and the phrase *handsome like Alain Delon* became viral in Korea several decades before messenger apps were in vogue. Very few Koreans spoke French

during the 1960s, and the war-ravaged country had no colonial vestige owed to the French, but one of the reasons attributed to the success of these European films in Korea, and other popular cultural items such as the *chansons* of Yves Montand like “Les Feuilles Mortes,” was their popularity in Japan. Despite having very little to no direct exchange between Korea and France, Koreans accessed these European cultural fads by looking to Japan to satiate their intellectual hunger.⁵⁵ European stardom and pop icons, in other words, first spread to Japan before making their way to Korea through book vendors, publishing company heads, and cultural connoisseurs who still subscribed to large volumes of Japanese books, magazines, and other cultural merchandise.

The global cultural flow, before the advent of social media, had a major transit stop between Europe and Korea, and that was Tokyo, the former metropole for Koreans during the Japanese colonial period. Much of the popularity in Korea of European movie stars, songs, and even high-brow literary books by Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Friedrich Nietzsche was owed to their popularity in Japan. Most films, magazine articles on European trends, and even literature were translated by Korean publishers and film distributors not from their original French or English but from existing Japanese subtitles or translations. In other words, even twenty or thirty years after Korea’s liberation from Japan, and despite the ban on almost all cultural products of Japan, with the sole exception of Japanese television animation, Korea was in many ways reliant on this preexisting colonial flow of information, scholarship, and popular culture. Most Koreans working in the literary and cultural establishments during the 1960s and 1970s were fluent in Japanese, for they had attended school during the colonial era, when Korean schools prioritized learning Japanese for several decades.⁵⁶ Like the black Martinican in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* who returns home from Paris, where he “can no longer understand Creole; he talks of the Opera House, which he has probably seen only from a distance,” a member of the postcolonial cultural elite in Korea only wanted to talk in his “master’s language,” but his Japanese, unlike French, English, or Spanish, became not only frowned upon but downright forbidden, even at home.⁵⁷ Fanon writes, “When I meet a German or a Russian speaking bad French I try to indicate through gestures the information he is asking for, but in doing so I am careful not to forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer back home.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately for South Koreans, it’s probably not an exaggeration to say that it would have been almost impossible to find an American officer working

in Korea around the time when Fanon was writing this first book, in the 1950s, who shared similar sympathies that Fanon had toward the German with poor French-speaking skills. A Korean with poor English-speaking skills simply had no value for an American—no matter his profession or his mastery in other languages.

The linguistic conundrum that Korean elites entered during the postliberation era was far more complex than the one that Fanon or other postcolonial intellectuals found with their own humiliating experiences involving the mastery of a European language. Unlike the experience of Fanon, who spoke and wrote French better than the French themselves and found Paris, for better or for worse, his home away from home, where he could publish and help other anticolonial efforts after World War II in other Francophone countries such as Algeria, for Koreans the value of Japanese, the former colonial master's language, simply collapsed after 1945. For a Korean intellectual, the linguistic and cultural continuity between the new metropole (Washington, DC) and the old one (Tokyo) was simply nonexistent. As such, the cultural bridge between the new metropole (Washington, DC) and the occupied capital (Seoul) had to be built from scratch, while the one between the old metropole (Tokyo) and Seoul only existed in old records and photographs that were literally locked up in family chests.⁵⁹ The old metropole, now also occupied by the Americans, was a new land of exile, humiliation, and, perhaps most importantly, forced amnesia for Koreans.⁶⁰ Koreans had to overcome symptoms of aphasia in a triplicate of languages—the present native language of Korean, which was suppressed in formal education and had to be brought back from oblivion in 1945 with the end of Japanese rule; the old colonial language of Japanese, which became obsolete with the defeat of Imperial Japan in 1945; and the new colonial language of English, which was heavily censored during the latter part of the Japanese colonial era, for it was the language of the “enemy” and had to be completely suppressed, and therefore learned from scratch by Koreans under their new, American military occupiers. Pyongyang emerged as an intriguing socialist alternative but quickly became unattractive because of the spread of Stalinist terror and the violent war that permanently split Korea. Korea's purchase of European fads during the first two decades after the Korean War was not firsthand but one that was akin to a clandestine consignment store shopping stint in the dilapidated and haunted house of old colonial glory.

By the time the 1990s came around, with the American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) generation now coming of age, a cultural shift of seismic

proportion had placed Korea totally within an American sphere of influence.⁶¹ The dominance of secondhand cultural purchase in which Japan was the conspicuous gateway to cultural imports by what Iwabuchi calls “cultural odor” or what Jinsoo An refers to as “Japanese color” (*waesaek* in Korean) waned by the 1980s and came to a close ironically when the ban on cultural goods from Japan was lifted in the late 1990s.⁶² All the major figures of the Korean entertainment industry of the first two decades of the twenty-first century—including Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook, star directors in Korean cinema; as well as Yang Hyun-seok and Bang Si-hyok, two corporate heads of K-pop management companies (YG and the Big Hit); Lee Woo-jeong, head writer of top variety shows such as *Grandpa over Flowers* and the *Reply* (*Üngtaphara*) drama series; and Na Young-seok, the producer-director of these hit television programs—are from a generation that spoke little to no Japanese and instead grew up as AFKN-generation kids in the 1970s and 1980s, when South Korea could receive images and sounds from America on television and radio.⁶³ Though they also witnessed the anti-American sentiments that swept the college campuses during the 1980s and 1990s when South Korea went through intense democratization, the act of cultural mimicry that shadowed the Korean peninsula during this pre-hallyu period was one that ironically had to embrace a cultural consent to American culture—for the concept of America, especially the black and ethnic postwar entertainment flowing from it, was fun and diverting. America was inculcated and disseminated to many Korean youth of the time as not only a manifestation of cultural-political exploitation and coercion but one that earned the unintended consent of locals when the American television stations intended to entertain only the US troops stationed in Korea ended up affecting a far larger number of local people than ever imagined, simply because AFKN content was free and much more enjoyable than the local Korean broadcast channels that were heavily censored throughout the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁴

The American influence in South Korea was not restricted to just one part of the country. Unlike Germany or Japan, where US military forces were mostly concentrated in either Frankfurt or Okinawa during the post-World War II occupation, South Korea, partly because of its small size and mountainous geography and partly because of the heavy casualties suffered in the all-out war during the early 1950s, had American military bases established throughout the entire southern half of the peninsula. The central military headquarters was located in a 620-acre garrison in Yongsan—a district in central Seoul—while a handful more were in operation in almost

every corner of South Korea. Operating a colossal-sized military base in the middle of Seoul, South Korea's capital and one of the most significant cosmopolitan cities of the past several decades, was rather unprecedented even for the American military. Yongsan and its neighboring district of Itaewon offered a visual testimony to the almost unscripted consequences of American cultural hegemony. Itaewon, which was originally known as a land of foreigners even as early as the Chosun Era (Yi-t'a-in 異他人, "people of the foreign land," after some of the Manchus and their bi-ethnic descendants had settled there in the seventeenth century and were eventually given the title "Yi-t'ae-won," which means "pavilion of the foreign land"), became rather infamous for its red-light district dubbed Hooker Hill since the relocation of the headquarters of the US Eighth Army in Yongsan in 1953, and for its clubs that offered opportunities for Koreans to mingle with Americans.⁶⁵ South Korean musicians of several postwar generations learned their trade through their consumption of radio and television and their interactions with American military personnel who needed to be entertained through live music performances. While the American television and radio stations in Germany and Japan were available to only a small segment of the local population concentrated in Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Okinawa during a similar time frame, the AFKN was ubiquitous in South Korea because it broadcast signals from eight stations (Seoul, Hwaaksan, Paju, Gunsan, Busan, Daegu, Daejeon, and Gwangju) using the all-access VHF signal for four critical decades (from 1957 to 1996).⁶⁶ Until 1996, almost all Koreans with long-range TV antennae could easily access AFKN, a phenomenon that rendered it an inadvertent yet significant influencer of Korean modern culture. Even before the days of the internet, by tuning into this American channel, Koreans could advance their English learning, watch live American sports broadcasts such as the NFL and NBA that were not aired on Korean television, and even watch Hollywood films that were banned in Korea. Many Korean children, including myself, learned the alphabet and the English count of "one, two, three" through the *Electric Company* broadcast on the AFKN channel. The network circumvented the Korean censors, and rumors floated around that sexually explicit scenes were screened on AFKN during the wee hours of the night at a time when no scenes of nudity were permitted even in Korean movie theaters.⁶⁷

This reauthentication and redialing of American culture were simultaneously unintended and yet intended for Koreans, since local Korean-language newspapers posted the daily TV guide for the AFKN right next to the listings for Korean-language channels. The American military presence

in Korea chipped away at Korean political sovereignty but also helped re-tool the Korean cultural identity in preparation for the new challenges of the twenty-first century. The competitive audition system that the US military maintained throughout the 1950s and 1960s for the locals undoubtedly helped Koreans reinvent their music, culture, and identity throughout those decades in ways beyond simply aligning them with that of the Americans. The same club district in Itaewon that had local women prostitute for the American GIs also served as the incubation lab for K-pop where local b-boys learned how to dance to black music throughout the latter part of the century. All these ironic expressions of American cultural hegemony would help cultivate a substantial local innovation platform for Koreans during the twentieth century, which then helped Koreans launch a reverberated holler back to global audiences over the past two decades, including even American audiences. This ambivalent form of American hegemonic culture that loops through the act of Korean mimicry is what I propose as the core idea behind the concept of hegemonic mimicry.

Much of the previous work on K-pop studies has focused on the national production of K-pop, critically analyzing governmental involvement and branding it as “made in Korea.” As a matter of fact, a recently published book on the subject of Korean popular music is titled *Made in Korea*.⁶⁸ In his book *K-Pop*, John Lie states, “From tax breaks to outright subsidies, the governmental policy of soft-power promotion would serve to propel the Korean Wave around the world. By 2013, the government’s budget for promoting the popular-music industry was reportedly \$300 million, roughly the same amount as total turnover in the industry a decade earlier.”⁶⁹ It is difficult to get an exact figure on how much government spending is used to promote the popular music industry, but the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism quotes a budget in 2019 of roughly US\$5.5 billion.⁷⁰ Of course, not all of this money subsidizes K-pop; much of this budget is earmarked to support national museums, arts and sports schools and academies, and promotion in tourism and national sports teams. However, through its subsidiaries, the Korea Creative Content Agency and the Korean Cultural Centers scattered around the world, along with local training programs, the Korean government’s funds and initiatives to support and expand K-pop and other cultural content such as K-dramas, games, and even food overseas quite possibly constitute much more than a subsidy package that easily can be projected to be about US\$1 billion per year. The Korean government has actively engaged in promotions of Korean cultural products overseas because it has calculated that for every \$100 in cultural goods exported, it

can generate a \$412 increase in exports of other consumer goods, including food, clothes, cosmetics, and manufacturing products such as smartphones.⁷¹ In other words, in the era of transnational capitalism, K-pop and other cultural content *made in Korea* cannot help but continue its association embedded in a form of ethnic identity despite their effective way of crossing borders as an export product that erases its national origins, just as Hyundai Motor's best-selling SUV model, the Santa Fe, is known to many people globally as a mugukjök brand in isolation from Korea, the company's nation of origin. Many consumers across the globe are clueless about the national origins of the apparel and cosmetics brands they consume, such as Zara, Uniqlo, or Estée Lauder, but it is unlikely that BTS, or any other boy or girl idol group from Korea, can be cleansed of its national origin, for music and other cultural production, no matter how commercialized and Westernized, must be rooted in the linguistic, aesthetic, and ethnic background of the performers and artists. However disposable each and every new K-pop act that emerges every two- or three-year-cycle, there is a soul embedded in every cultural product "made in Korea," even when it is appropriated from another nation, one that makes it distinct from, for example, the Samsung electronics goods that are also "made in Korea."

BEHIND THE HEGEMONIC MIMICRY

My use of the term *hegemonic mimicry* already acknowledges that the Korean popular culture that blossomed during the twenty-first century was incubated from a contested field of negotiation between two national identities—the hegemonic American culture and the local culture—and between, as discussed earlier, two racialized subjectivities, off-white and blackish. I argue that Korea continues to straddle what W. E. B. Du Bois terms *double consciousness*. Du Bois, one of the pioneering figures of African American studies, described the condition of black citizens in the United States in the earlier part of the century as "two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."⁷² Any Korean raised during the twentieth century probably knows what it would feel like being *torn asunder* between the two warring ideals in one body. The first half of the century was split between a Korean national identity and a Japanese one, replaced in the latter half by a split between a Korean identity and an American one. One could even

argue that it wasn't just the double consciousness with which Koreans were attempting to reconcile but a triple consciousness, as the vestiges of Japanese consciousness did not recede completely into oblivion the moment Japan was defeated and retreated back to its archipelago in 1945. Also, the America that Korea experienced during the postwar years was not only a white America but a mottled one that was very much both white and black. Many Koreans were exposed to Americans in the military, in business, and in everyday life, and in so doing, they encountered two types of Americans as defined by American racial subjectivities—one white and the other black.

This book focuses on blackness and hip-hop alongside black humor and Korean comedy because hip-hop in Korea was perhaps the first Western music genre that paid little to no tribute to the vestiges of culture from the Japanese colonial era.⁷³ In Korea, hip-hop is a music genre that was introduced through a direct link with Korean hip-hop artists' interactions with the US cultural influence. Rapper Seo Taiji's "Nan Arayo" (1992) and his subsequent hit "Hayeoga" (1993) are regarded as two of the most significant songs in the history of Korean pop, not because they successfully erased any trace of enka-style emotional root that formed the backbone of Korean music aesthetics throughout the twentieth century but because they were made in direct cultural exchange with American rap. Korea was arguably the first non-US nation that came into regular contact with American rap, because many of the African American soldiers stationed in Korea wanted to listen to, dance to, and even perform this innovative music genre in clubs, particularly in Itaewon, as early as the 1980s. Many of the pioneering Korean rappers, including Yang Hyun-seok, were frequent visitors to this American hip-hop scene set in Itaewon. Also, Korean American rappers, such as Tiger JK, Yoon Mi-rae, and Epik High's Tablo, all returned from the United States to dominate the Korean rap scene during the new millennium after spending their youth in the United States exploring the relationships between Korean and English rhymes (figure I.1). These artists were the first to reconceptualize the meaning of hip-hop in the Korean sense, a move that allowed for the maturity of the Korean hip-hop music genre in the 2010s through both K-pop idol and independent solo artists.

Chapter 1 historicizes the emergence of hallyu, detailing how Korea, in the postcolonial and postwar years, broke with a historical narrative centered on the US military occupation and Korea's place as a piece of bulwark in the Cold War confrontation. With the recent thawing of relations between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic



1.1 Tiger JK (right) and Yoon Mi-rae during a concert, 2019. Photo by Kyung Hyun Kim.

of Korea (DPRK), this chapter explores how music, television programs, and films channeled South Koreans' fears and anxieties into a pleasurable and fluid cultural production throughout the latter part of the twentieth century and also prepared for the peace process of the Korean peninsula in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The translation of music, for instance, that culminated into *hallyu*—an aesthetic form that both conforms to national boundaries while also resisting them—is this chapter's main consideration. The chapter also lays down the theoretical foundation of this book and engages in the discussion of how the act of mimicry passed from an initial colonial simulation of the dominant colonizer to an ambivalent and ironic one before assuming a hegemonic, and even a sub-empiric, form.

Chapter 2 analyzes the history and aesthetics of rap music in Korea from an ethnic studies perspective. If Koreans excelled in the “hegemonic mimicry” of the dominant American culture by equating it with whiteness projected in many of the girl and boy K-pop idol groups, how does the prominent placement of hip-hop in K-pop reformulate and complicate the question of race? With the rise of American hegemony in South Korea over the past seventy-five years, the centrality of blackness also becomes

pronounced in the discourse of hallyu. One of the key questions I address in my book is about race and authenticity. Korean hip-hop artists—many of whom barely speak English—are forced to grapple with, for instance, this issue when their music is brushed back by illegitimacy because it does not actively engage with authentic claims of the ghetto and the street vernacular of African American English through which rap was born. What I am interested in examining further is how this particular accentuation of “blackness” complicates the binary through which the most dominant paradigm of national boundaries (US/Korea) or racial boundaries (whites/Asians) is drawn. Beyond the question “Can Koreans rap?” are the critical interventions in African American studies such as Du Bois’s theory on race and culture, and recent hip-hop studies. This is all to perhaps creolize the hierarchies, the binary structures of sustained colonial forces, and the racialized hegemony that remain within the discourse of K-pop or hallyu.

Chapter 3 explores how digital-age surveillance, particularly pronounced in South Korea, has impacted the ways in which narratives, both film and television, are made. If the New Korean Cinema led by Lee Chang-dong and Bong Joon-ho had thematized temporality, the present age of data-ism—with its infinite capabilities of digitization and powerful algorithms—has enabled Korean cinema and television dramas to generate narratives that are no longer bound by specific metaphors and allegories. This chapter examines popular body-switch films such as *Masquerade* (Gwanghae, 2012) and *Miss Granny* (Susanghan kũ nyõ, 2014), and argues that Korea’s entry into the overwired era has allowed these body-switch films to dominate on screen. This chapter also focuses on how Korea has successfully localized European “hero” models such as *Ivanhoe* and American Hollywood body-switch stories that have been delineated from the plotline of Mark Twain’s “The Prince and the Pauper.”

Chapter 4 asks why and how a Korean variety game show such as *Running Man* has achieved a smashing global success on the internet. It explores how the game show’s “transmedia storytelling” taps into passing around a global kind of “affect.” This chapter also explores how the on-screen captions, which are pervasive in Korean television, promote a sense of non-phonocentrism, which counters the primacy of phonocentrism that Jacques Derrida had once identified as the root of the problem behind Western ethnocentrism and Saussurian formalism in order to help realize what I call “affect Confucianism.” The Chinese remakes of *Running Man* allow this chapter to foray into the transnational exchange of remakes between China and Korea. By comparing this East Asian cultural exchange to

that of France and the United States, where French critics and filmmakers, as early as the days of André Bazin, condemned Hollywood's practice of the remake as a debasement of the French "original" and a form of vulgar American commercialism, it problematizes some of the charges made in China against "kimchi imperialism."

Chapter 5 deals with two very recent films about food—one perhaps well known only in Korea (*Extreme Job*) and the other well known worldwide (*Parasite*). At first glance, these two films seem worlds apart, and yet they share their commonalities in food. In both films, the predictable melodramatic codes usually reserved for blockbuster films are switched out for comedic conventions of wordplay, con-artist schemes, and food drama. These themes not only problematize the division between real and fake and a larger subject of the tension between haves and have-nots but also allow us to look at how food has lost its social or even cultural significance and has instead assumed a perverse, negative, and almost undesirable association with gluttony and psychological depression in the era of *mukbang* (*mōkbang*; eatcast). Both *Extreme Job* and *Parasite* explore the theme of vicarious eating in South Korea. In the former film, a fried-chicken joint is used as a cover for the narcotics police squad whose mission to bust a drug lord turns sour when they find unexpected success in the rotisserie chicken business; in *Parasite*, writer-director Bong Joon-ho pays close attention to the preparation and serving of food, sickness and hysteria around fruit allergies, and the secret door in the kitchen pantry.

Chapter 6 pairs a study of Samsung with that of K-pop through the trope of what I call "meme-ification." This chapter discusses Samsung not simply because Samsung's products and K-pop are the best-known exports Korea had to offer over the past two decades but because the Korean electronics company's corporate system called chaebol in many ways reflects that of the K-pop industry. As argued throughout the book, the enactment of mimicry inscribes a hegemonic form through the everyday use of digital media and social media platforms, and nowhere is this more evident than in Samsung's "innovative" technology and products. I examine in this chapter how the ambiguity of distinction between original and counterfeit in both K-pop and Samsung is emblematic of the broader flows and tensions in the global economic and cultural structures in which Korean industrial and entertainment products have claimed a place as ironic inflections of both hegemony and mimicry.

This book's final chapter goes back in time—first to the madanggŭk tradition of the 1970s and then to Choe Sŭng-hŭi's dance piece "Eheya

Nohara” from the Japanese colonial period—in order to retrace the origins of satire in modern Korean performances and connect it to the comedy sketches and the double gestures of mimicry as well as the re-creation of global Korean phenomena in the “Muhan Sangsa” episode of *Muhan Dojeon* (*Infinite Challenge*) and “Gangnam Style” by Psy in the 2010s. This chapter returns to the basic cultural elements of *môt* (beauty), *hŭng* (joy), and *sinmyŏng* (exalting joy) and argues how they continue to reproduce the beats and souls of Korean popular culture. This chapter aims to affirm to the reemergence of the double consciousness of Koreans, even during the era of social media, via the detour of hegemonic mimicry rebuilt around the disavowal, indignation, and negativity through which Koreans have had to both accept and reject the fate of subjugation by foreign rule.

DUKE

NOTES

Preface

1. Thompson, “What’s behind South Korea’s COVID-19 Exceptionalism?”

2. Millar, “South Korea.”

3. Hall, “Local and the Global,” 180.

4. In one of the most interesting books to date about Korean popular culture, Joseph Jeon argues that the ascendance of Korean cinema coincided with the end of the American century. Jeon adopts the theory of Giovanni Arrighi, an Italian economist who theorized that the hegemonic American empire’s signal crisis (the beginning of the end) began in the 1970s, with the terminal crisis (the end of the end) occurring sometime in the early years of the twenty-first century. Korean cinema starting in this period, and more broadly even hallyu, which began after Korea had undergone an intense economic restructuring mandated by the IMF bailout in 1997, was both a marker of “a shift toward a program of free trade and liberal capital markets . . . and an economic response to the declining productivity of the industrial sector.” Jeon, *Vicious Circuits*, 19.

5. Luce, “American Century.”

6. If all the global cultural sensations born outside North America and Europe over the past seventy-five years since the conclusion of World War II, such as Jamaican reggae, New Latin American cinema, or India’s Bollywood, have proven both an innovative mix of local brands of beats, edits, and footprints combined with the dominant pop structure of rock ‘n’ roll and Hollywood films, the Korean brand of cinema, music, and television over the past twenty years, which has more recently captured global attention, stands out as falling short of innovatively integrating the local flavor of Koreanness into its cultural output. Even the most popular form of Korean culture has found success by repressing and making opaque its own national and ethnic subjectivity.

7. Zheng, “Black Lives Matter.”

Introduction

1. The year 1968 was the peak for the number of American troops deployed to Vietnam. The increased demand for entertainment for the US troops deployed in Vietnam forced some of the Korean sho-dan members to seek jobs in Vietnam—leading to the demise of the local sho-dan industry in Korea. Many Korean entertainers, including the best bands led by, for instance, Shin Joong-hyun, went to Vietnam for an extended period of time throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. They were called Wolnam ch'amjŏn migun wimun kongyŏndan (Entertainment Band for the US Military Serving in the Vietnam War).

2. I have actually extrapolated the first couple of pages in this chapter after closely reading Patti Kim's biographical account as a young performer growing up in Seoul, dreaming of performing on the big stage of Manhattan. See Cho Yŏng-nam and P. Kim, *Kŭ nyŏ, Patti Kim*.

3. In 1948 President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981, which abolished discrimination “on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin” in the United States Armed Forces. Of course, this new order hardly made a dent on eradicating racism in the US military, as Truman himself declared, “I wish to make it clear that I am not appealing for social equality of the Negro. The Negro himself knows better than that, and the highest types of Negro leaders say quite frankly, that they prefer the society of their own people. Negroes want justice, not social relations.” The Korean War was the first war that tried to phase out all-black units in the US military. However, many personnel in the military refused to desegregate the army, and the last of the all-black units in the US military was terminated in 1954—one year after the cease-fire agreement was signed in Korea. Jon Bauer, “Truman and Executive Order 9981: Idealistic, Pragmatic, or Shrewd Politician?,” Harry S. Truman Library, accessed February 3, 2020, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/lesson-plans/truman-and-executive-order-9981-idealistic-pragmatic-or-shrewd-politician>.

4. Fifty black soldiers from Camp Humphreys, in protest of segregated clubs in the nearby town of Anjong-Ni, Pyeongtaek, destroyed several bars there. The Korean National Police and the American military police were called in to break up the rioters and the Korean villagers, who were also angry because of the damages. Some Koreans were rumored to have been killed during the race riot aimed at the camptown segregation. A black American soldier was severely injured and several Koreans were reportedly stabbed—prompting the military police to use tear-gas grenades to disperse the angry Korean mob that was protesting the violence and damage of property in the camptown. Freeland and Lea, “Black GIs on Rampage.”

In a blog that reports on Korean modern history, *Gusts of Popular Feeling*, this same article from the Anjong-Ni race riot is uploaded. In the comments section, Robert Gardner, an African American who claims to have been stationed in Korea during this race riot, comments that four clubs were in operation in Anjong-ni, the camptown that served Camp Humphreys: the “T” Club, the Lower 7 Club, the Triple 7 Club,

and Duffy's. Gardner writes, "Of the four clubs[,] only the Triple 7 Club catered to the Black G.I. This was done by the type of music played and the friendliness of the club girls." It was the closing of the Triple 7 Club for renovation that had forced the black soldiers to patronize other clubs that did not play R&B and soul—the preferred music among African Americans—and the refusal of club girls to sit with them that eventually led to the escalation of the tensions. "The 1971 Anjeong-ri Race Riot, Part 2," *Gusts of Popular Feeling*, July 8, 2011, <http://populargusts.blogspot.com/2011/07/1971-anjeong-ri-race-riot-part-2.html>.

5. Katharine H. S. Moon writes, "Throughout 1971, racial tensions between black and white servicemen increased, spread through various camp areas in Korea, and exploded on the weekend of July 9, 1971, in the village of Anjongni in Pyeongtaek County, the site of Camp Humphreys. The demographics of Anjongni at the time of the July racial riots was as follows: 4,759 Korean villagers, including an estimated 970 prostitutes; 1,700 US military personnel at Camp Humphreys, including approximately 500 black servicemen." Moon, *Sex among Allies*, 71.

6. Lea and Brown, "GIT: Key to Racial Equality," 12.

7. Lea and Brown, "GIT: Key to Racial Equality," 10.

8. Constante, "25 Years after LA Riots."

9. Though prostitution was outlawed in South Korea in 1961, by 1964, 145 districts were specially designated for legal prostitution. All were in camptowns. When venereal diseases became a constant complaint made by the US military, then president Park Chung-hee initiated a five-year cleanup campaign in 1971 that "intensified and expanded existing efforts to control VD . . . and teaching club owners and hostesses how to equitably treat black and white soldiers. At each step of the way, the U.S. military prodded the Korean government into action. . . . This creates the illusion that it is primarily the Korean government that regulates prostitution and the camptowns, but in reality such regulation is demanded and orchestrated by the American military, with a weak Korean government able to do little but acquiesce." Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 26–27.

10. Korean citizens were often caught between black and white soldiers during the era of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As Ji-Yeon Yuh reports, rejection of black soldiers by Korean prostitutes was common, but Korean "club owners and camptown women countered that it was the prejudices of white soldiers that dictated camptown segregation." Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 28.

11. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 6.

12. J. Lee, *Service Economies*, 19.

13. Henry Em notes that the Japanese pronunciation of the "compound *minzoku* (K: *minjok*), understood as *ethnic nation*, began to circulate in Korea in the early 1900s." This was well after the neologism of *minzoku* began to circulate in Japan following Miyazaki Muryu's translation of "French Assemblée Nationale as *minzoku kaigi*." Em, *Great Enterprise*, 67.

14. Foucault writes, “New mechanism of power applies primarily to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces. It was a mechanism of power that made it possible to extract time and labor, rather than commodities and wealth, from bodies.” Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 35–36.

15. J. Lee, *Service Economies*, 15, 7.

16. Yi Yong-u, “Miguk k’ürop so hünryön patün taejung ümak.”

17. Lee, *Service Economies*, 6. Although I support Lee’s thesis, which stems from equating Korean service labor for the American military with disposable and necropolitical labor, I would also suggest that missing from her analysis is not only the enormous and rather conspicuous (*mi-p’äl-gun*) sho-dan (the US Eighth Army Entertainment troupe) but also the possibility that many of these forms of sex service labor resisted condemnation to death and ended up reviving and reproducing life. Some of the best-known Korean American biracial star athletes and singers, ranging from former NFL star Hines Ward to rapper Yoon Mi-rae, have African American fathers and Korean mothers who first met in US military camptowns in Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. Although it cannot be speculated that these stars’ mothers were sex workers, their difficult childhoods due to the lack of paternal support might suggest that their mothers’ lives were in some way construed as “disposable” and necropolitical. However, the successful lives not only of these stars but also of many more offspring reared between Korean mothers and American military servicemen throughout the twentieth century are testaments to a (re)productive labor on the part of Korean sex workers, which extended well beyond a condition of disposability and necropolitics in the US military throughout the twentieth century. For more on this, see chapter 2.

18. Neves, *Underglobalization*, 3.

19. N. Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 202.

20. One of the arguments that John Lie makes in his book *K-Pop* is that K-pop, while embracing a commercial music route, defies the “elements of authenticity, autonomy, and originality [which] are the essence of the Romantic ideology of the artist.” Lie, *K-Pop*, 142–43. Of course, perhaps this era in which “Romantic ideology of the artist” ruled the day may have vanished—not only in K-pop but also in the global pop music scene dominated by hip-hop and electronic dance music (EDM).

21. Cillizza, “Donald Trump’s ‘Parasite’ Critique.”

22. J. Park, “K-Pop Stardom Lures Japanese Youth.”

23. Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86.

24. I thank the anonymous reviewer who has urged me to think broadly and deeply into the distinction of two United States (“Murrica” and miguk)—one without a Korean other and another that produces the Korean mimicry—and how they seek to transform the paradigm of minjok.

25. This is not to suggest that some of the careless or unthoughtful tweets or postings by K-pop or hallyu stars were never found to be racially insensitive. Lack of cultural

understanding of American racist history has led to, for instance, blackfacing that continues to pop up on the media scene as some Korean celebrities try to explicitly and insensitively become comically black.

26. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 89.

27. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*.

28. Antonio Gramsci's concepts of "civil society" and "hegemony" are probably understood best in "State and Civil Society," 206–76.

29. Hall, "Local and the Global," 175.

30. As a matter of fact, South Korea today is often caught without alliance to its more powerful neighbors—China and Japan—despite the popularity of its cultural content in these nations. The relationship between Korea and China has significantly cooled since South Korea's deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), which propelled China to ban Korea's cultural products in 2016. As of February 2021, despite signs of diplomatic improvements between the two countries, China continues to officially ban many Korean television and film exports. In 2019, Japan began its economic retaliation against South Korea for the same year's court rulings that found Mitsubishi and several other Japanese companies liable for damage during the war and responsible for compensation.

31. One of the greatest ironies of the postwar Korean War era is that the Syngman Rhee regime was unable to block the Japanese-language radio broadcaster NHK from reaching almost the entirety of the Korean peninsula even though it had effectively banned Japanese cultural products and films throughout the 1950s. This was possible because the Voice of America (VOA) and the Voice of United Nations Command (VUNC), which were quickly mobilized after the Korean War had broken out on June 26, 1950, in order to combat the North Korean propaganda that had taken over the Korean-language broadcast stations in the South, had to rely on Japanese AM broadcasting transmitters. During the Korean War, pro–Republic of Korea (ROK) (anti-Communist) radio broadcasts were only available in shortwave radio broadcasts, while the largest AM broadcasts (Korean Broadcasting System [KBS]) in South Korea began broadcasting pro–Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (Communist) programs. The powerful transmission of Japanese radio airwaves from Tokyo and Fukuoka sent not only the US military radio channels but also NHK broadcast radio that carried news programs as well as sports and entertainment programs that many Koreans at the time understood. Yun Sang-kil, "Naengjŏnki KBS," 13.

32. Korean national identification of *yuhaengga* (trendy songs) of the twentieth century, which are frequently charged as originated from Japan, warrants further discussion. Many aesthetics of the two neighboring countries, Japan and Korea, including music, historically resemble each other. As Min-Jung Son explains in an essay, Koga Masao, a Japanese composer who helped establish the enka genre and has a museum built in honor of his achievements in Shibuya, spent his formative years in Korea (from ages seven to eighteen) from 1912 to 1923 and has acknowledged that he was "heavily influenced

by traditional Korean music and that the *enka* melodies he created originated from Korean tradition.” Son, “Young Musical Love of the 1930s,” 265.

33. Kwon, “Shin Joong Hyun’s Sonority,” 125.

34. Cho Kwan-woo’s remake of the song also became a big hit—one of the best-selling songs of all time in the 1990s—and then in 2008, it became the title song and the title for a blockbuster film about the Korean army’s dispatch to Vietnam directed by Lee Joon-ik and starring Soo Ae: *Nim ūn mǒngot e* (English title, *Sunny*).

35. Among many of Shin Joong-hyun’s classic tunes is “Arūmdaun kangsan” (Beautiful mountains and rivers), composed in 1972, which remains beloved by both North Koreans and South Koreans even after almost fifty years since its original release. Though the song is not composed in the pentatonic scale, it combines a simple rock music ballad with the stoic German marching music beats that reportedly caught the attention of North Korean music students. Singer Lee Sun-hee remade the song in 1988 and sang it during her Pyongyang concert in 2018. According to Chu Sǒng-ha, one of the *t’albukja* (North Korean defector) reporters working in South Korea, it was one of the songs that was well received by the North Korean audiences. Ironically, the song was composed in protest of Park Chung-hee’s military dictatorship after Shin had refused to write a propaganda song that praises Park’s Yushin Constitution that guaranteed him a lifetime presidency. Chu, *Pyongyang chaponchu’i Paekkwa chōnsō*, 181–82.

36. Iwabuchi argues that most of the cultural and consumer products Japan has made during the postwar years attempted to be “culturally odorless.” These odorless products include “consumer technologies (such as VCRs, karaoke, and the Walkman); comics and cartoons (animation); and computer/video games.” Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 27.

37. That Shin Joong-hyun shared the same kind of influence as did Robert Plant and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin is probably not surprising since they come from the same generation of musicians (Shin was born in 1938 and Jimmy Page in 1944) and grew up listening to black music broadcast over the American military forces radio network. “We didn’t have the same cultural exchange you had. We didn’t have Black America,” Plant stated on *Late Night with David Letterman*: “We couldn’t turn our dial and get an absolutely amazing kaleidoscope of music. (In the UK) now and then, if you were lucky, there was this American Forces Network radio coming out of Germany. If you were lucky, you could hear Muddy Waters or Little Richard coming through the waves.” Smith, “Airwaves Carry U.S. Culture.” The unintended audience in places as far removed as Western Europe and East Asia included both Page and Shin, who quite possibly ended up developing their own brand of African American music using the blues chord structure of Buddy Guy and Muddy Waters, inspired by the same radio program broadcast over the American Forces Network (AFN).

38. Jang Sa-ik, a popular *kugak* (traditional Korean music) singer, remade “Nim” in 1995. Also, it was sung by a trot singer, Na Mi-ae, in 2014; the song helped her win the *Trot X* audition program that year.

39. Throughout documentaries on the subject of the Korean War, such as PBS's *The American Experience: The Battle of Chosin* (dir. Randall MacLowry, 2016), black soldiers are seen integrated among the American military forces.

40. The 2015 data from the US Department of Defense (DOD) indicates that black soldiers made up 17 percent of the active-duty military compared to their percentage of the US population, ages eight to forty-four, which stands at only 13 percent as documented in 2015. Parker, Cilluffo, and Stepler, "6 Facts about the US Military."

41. *Swing Kids* is an extravagantly made musical drama set during the Korean War in the Geojje Prison Camp. It centers around a friendship that develops between a young North Korean prisoner and an African American officer, Jackson, who teaches him tap dancing. It was perhaps the first Korean film that featured a black character as one of its main characters, but it failed to do well at the box office.

42. Bridges, "In the Beginning," 326.

43. Kim Ŭn-kyōng, "Yuhŭi ro sŏ ui nodong," 34. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

44. Shin Joong-hyun, perhaps the most famous guitarist and composer during the entire history of Korean pop, used to peek out from backstage when he played for the sho-dan at the American military camps during the 1960s. If he saw that the majority of the crowd was black, he knew that he had to give a first-rate performance that night. Shin's father was Korean and his mother Japanese. Before 1945, he also lived in Manchuria, where he grew up listening to Chinese music. During the Korean War, his biggest musical influence was Korean traditional folk music. He admits that his diverse musical tastes—country music, black music, Japanese music, Korean music, and Chinese music—gave the foundation to cultivate his composition style, which often was the fusion of many different music genres: "Among all of the music I have listened to, I thought the Korean farming music and folk music was the best. It is because the best music is born naturally from the working people. It is because of this root I think that people insist that my music is very Korean. 'The Woman in the Rain' ['Pi sok ŭi yŏin'] from 1964 feels a little bit Western, a little bit Japanese, but inside there is a deep culture of tradition." Shin Joong-Hyun and Ki-t'ae Kim, "Majimak mutae aptun rokŭi taebu Shinjunghyŏn."

Patti Kim also found black music to be much more advanced than nonblack music. As musicians from this period, including Tommy Shim, attest, the sho-dan bands catered to the diverse musical tastes of the American military personnel—"the Beatles or the Beach Boys for the white GIs, country music for the old white NCOs, and soul music of the Temptations or James Brown at the black clubs." Hyunjoon Shin and P. Kim, "Birth, Death, and Resurrection," 277.

45. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 85.

46. Yi Jum, "Tŭlgukhwa, Kim Hyŏn-sik."

47. K. H. Kim, "Korean Cinema and Im Kwon-Taek," 25.

48. K. H. Kim, “Korean Cinema and Im Kwon-Taek,” 34.

49. Despite the fact that theatrical and video releases in Korea did not provide dubbed versions of foreign films—only subtitles—voice actors for television were in heavy demand. For instance, Park Il, born in 1949, was a big star during the days when American television series were extremely popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Park was so popular as a voice actor, he actually took on other roles, as a television variety show MC and radio DJ, during the 1980s.

50. Well before Nelson Shin and his Seoul-based company, Akom, infamously provided the tedious animation labor needed for *The Simpsons* and other American animation films and TV programs, such as *The Transformers* and *X-Men*, for the past three decades, it was Japanese animation companies that first saw the potential to engage in offshore Korean animation labor during the latter half of the 1960s, even before the ink dried on the 1965 ROK-Japan Normalization Treaty. A Korean broadcasting company founded by Samsung, TBC, set up an animation sweatshop with Japanese animation creators and helped Fuji TV produce *Golden Bat* (黄金バット *Ōgon Batto*; Korean, *Hwanggum pakjwi*) and *Humanoid Monster Bem* (妖怪人間ベム *Yōkai Ninggen Bemu*; Korean, *Yogwe ingan*) in 1966 and operated in a close collaboration effort. Such joint ventures in animation between South Koreans and Japanese gave many of these television animation programs exemption status from banned import goods from Japan before the cultural ban was lifted in the 1990s. Many Korean children grew up watching *Mazinger Z* as well as the other titles mentioned here as dubbed animation programs—not knowing that they had originated from Japan. See Kim Jong-ok, “Sanŏphwa sidae hanguk hachŏng aenimeisyŏn e taehan yŏngu.”

51. Jin, *New Korean Wave*, 151. As I elaborate further in the final chapter, these companies maintained an anti-union policy well into the twenty-first century.

52. With the combination of fourteen basic consonants and ten vowels that make up the alphabet system of hangul, Korean is very simple to use. Its simplicity has made both South and North Korea today virtually 100 percent literate countries. As an *Economist* article explains, “Advances in computing [in Korea] may also have been boosted by the ease with which Hangul can be entered into PCs and phones.” S.C.S., “How Was Hangul Invented?”

53. John Lie writes, “The South Korean entrepreneurs (of SM Entertainment, YG, and JYP)—by using new Internet-based technologies to market a new musical style, and by devising a new business model that relied more on the Internet than on pressed records—made South Korea the first country where sales of digitized music exceeded sales of music in nondigital formats.” Lie, *K-Pop*, 119.

54. Shin Joong-Hyun and Ki-t’ae Kim, “Majimak mutae aptun.”

55. From the postwar years through the late 1990s, the Japanese cultural ban prohibited Koreans from importing from Japan almost all popular culture content, including popular magazines. However, Japanese influence dominated Korean popular culture well into the 1990s. During the 1970s and 1980s, many Korean magazines, especially many

teen and children's magazines published in Korea, plagiarized their Japanese counterparts cover to cover. So widespread were the copycat magazines in Korea that, by the early 1990s, several news reports were made on this phenomenon, including one by *MBC Nightly News* under the headline “Waesae k yua chapji to ilbon chapji kũdaero pekkyõ silt'ae” [Even baby magazines copy Japanese ones—cover to cover].

56. Even one of the best-known Korean literary critics, Kim Yun-shik, who taught for many years at Seoul National University, could not be free of the charges of plagiarizing from Japanese literary critics. There are reportedly more than seven paragraphs in his book *Hanguk kũndae sosõlsa yõngu* [Study of the history of modern Korean literature], published in 1986, that were plagiarized from Karatani Kojin's original Japanese publication of *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Yi Myong-won, a young literary critic in Korea, criticized Kim Yun-shik in his research, which earned him a place on the blacklist in the literary circle in Korea in 2000. See Yi Myõng-won, *T'anũn hyõ*.

57. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 7.

58. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17. Fanon is trying to state that the lost German or Russian still fares far better than a black man. In the next paragraph, he reminds you that “there is nothing comparable when it comes to the black man. He has no culture, no civilization, no ‘long historical past.’”

59. Such was also the fate of my grandfather's old photographs from the colonial period. I once found them in the attic in the early 1970s—locked away in a chest.

60. In another work, I discuss the rampant copying of Japanese manga by Korean *manhwa* artists that “saturated the [Korean] market up to the late 1980s” as a “matter of historical record.” K. H. Kim and Choe, *Korean Popular Culture Reader*, 39.

61. Klein, “AFKN Nexus.” Christina Klein here argues through her interview with director Bong Joon-ho that he and other New Korean Cinema filmmakers of his generation may have learned genre conventions of Hollywood filmmaking through the AFKN broadcasts during the 1970s and 1980s.

62. An, *Parameters of Disavowal*, 35.

63. The popularity of AFKN probably peaked in the mid-1970s and remained strong for another decade. By the late 1980s, the dissemination of VHS machines and the liberalization of the Hollywood film market made American movies and television programs aired on AFKN less novel. Because AFKN broadcast longer hours—for children and women during the day (*Sesame Street*, *Electric Company*, and daytime soaps) in the afternoon, (American sporting events such as NCAA, MLB, NFL, professional wrestling, and NBA) and during late-nights (talk shows and movies)—it was a channel that many youth, especially those who came of age during the 1970s and 1980s, fondly remember as a source of cultural growth.

64. Yu Chae-yong, *AFKN K'idũ*.

65. Kim Chu-hũi, “Migun kijich'on,” 42.

66. Park Yong-gyu, “AFKN-TV üi tüksöng,” 108. Even after 1996, when AFKN discontinued its service through Channel 2, Koreans could access it through UHF and also the cable network. It took American media companies’ petition (not Koreans’) to the US military for AFKN not to be available for free to Korean audiences. By the dawn of the new millennium, sitcoms such as *Friends* and dramas such as the *CSI* series were popular among young audiences who also spoke some English. American television companies wanted to sell these products to Korean television for broadcasting rights. Permitting AFKN to be accessible to all Koreans with a subscription to a cable network put their sales negotiations at a disadvantage.

67. Through an interview survey conducted in 2014 of people who grew up watching AFKN, Park Yong-gyu found that several of the interviewees had commented on how they would stay up past midnight during the 1960s watching movies broadcast on AFKN because it was the only network in Korea that would broadcast past midnight and also because AFKN broadcast more “sexually explicit” content than anything available on Korean television. Music programs like *Soul Train* were popular especially among young people because you could easily be entertained by music and dance programs without comprehending a word of English. By the 1970s, newspaper columns began to appear in the Korean language to criticize the sensational content allowed on AFKN. Park Yong-gyu, “AFKN-TV üi t’üksöng,” 117–18.

68. Hyunjoon Shin and S. Lee, *Made in Korea*.

69. Lie, *K-Pop*, 119.

70. Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, “Podojaryo.”

71. John Lie criticizes the exported-oriented development strategy the Korean government has used in cultivating its brand of K-pop. But just as much as the Brazilian government cannot be faulted for its export of soccer players, finding South Korea culpable for the overseas success of its pop stars seems to me a misguided criticism. Lie, *K-pop*, 114.

72. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 7.

73. The sensational 1995 Japanese hit song “Da.Yo.Ne” by mixed-gender hip-hop group East End X Yuri seemed to have influenced mainstream Korean hip-hop groups such as Roo’Ra, which ended up being accused of plagiarizing Japanese songs in 1996. However, early Korean hip-hop scenes since the late 1990s were dominated by Korean American rappers who were more familiar with American rappers than the Japanese ones.

Chapter One. K-Pop, K-Cinema, and K-Television

1. The rise of K-pop has positively impacted the study of Korean in educational institutions around the world. Even in the United States, where almost all languages taught in higher education had shown a precipitous decline in recent years, Korean showed an impressive growth of 13.7 percent: from 12,256 students enrolled in 2013 to 13,936 in 2016. Looney and Lusin, “Enrollments in Languages Other than English.”