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Parasitic or Symbiotic?: The Rise of the K-pop Adjacent Industries

Abstract. Korean popular music (K-pop) is a musical industry centered on artistic products of idol stars, but the K-pop industry is now supporting and supported by a multitude of lime-light eschewing and lime-light seeking people who are making a living through various K-pop dependent activities--a secondary yet autonomous industry. They teach K-pop dance, manage reaction and commentary channels, and provide K-pop related education and experiences. Beyond the entertainment agencies and singers, in tandem with K-pop's success an entire industry has arisen that parasitically feeds off K-pop while also symbiotically amplifying it. The very public-ness of their activities gestures not at a subculture but at a side culture, spawning a fascinating and contradictory transcultural practice and dialogue. These new participants in these adjacent/dependent industry support K-pop fandom, and may become secondary stars nurtured by enthusiastic fandom. In this paper I explore the specific issue of the K-pop adjacent industries that are dependent on the same sources of finances—fans and the Korean government—that the industry relies on. I see them as primarily in two camps: performers and educators. Performers' desire to be noticed collectively encourages creativity—the chief weakness of the hegemonic K-pop insiders, while educators deepen fan engagement with K-pop through dance classes, tourism experiences, and educational programs. In this paper I argue that the shadow cultures that spawned these industries have become an integral part of interacting with and understanding K-pop today, introducing and enabling personal encounters with K-pop even as the industry has grown.

CedarBough T. Saeji has an MA in Korean Studies from Yonsei University and a Ph.D. in Culture and Performance from UCLA. Saeji has taught Korean Studies at University of British Columbia, Korea University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies and is now a Visiting Assistant Professor at Indiana University, Bloomington. Publications have appeared in edited volumes on women in traditional performing arts, Korean screen cultures, theatre in Asia, and intangible cultural heritage and journals including *Journal of Korean Studies*, *Korea Journal*, *Acta Koreana*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Asia Theatre Journal*, and *Asia Pacific Journal*. Saeji is currently co-organizing a conference and journal special issue on Korean hip-hop, co-editing a volume on Korean tradition, and just began using Twitter @TheKpopProf.