

A Mix of Western Genres in Korean Popular Music: The Cultural Hybrid and Discourses

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Abstract

This article studies a mix of Western genres in Korean popular music as well as the related discourses. A mix or transformation of Western genres has been common since the beginning of the history of Western music in Korea. Especially in contemporary Korean popular music, it is common to see singers or songs that blend Western genres. This is because each musical genre is taken out of its original context and only its musical sound is utilized. Such hybridity triggers discussions on the authenticity and identity of the music. These discussions are not limited to contemporary popular music but also extend to local or national music. So-called discourses on Korean national music follow the three distinct phases of the post-colonial theory that Fanon suggested. The popular music scene in Korea also shared the discourses. While these discourses have maintained a post-colonial perspective, so-called K-Pop globally has represented the Korean Wave. The discourses are no longer appropriate for describing current Korean popular music. Therefore, it is time to go beyond the post-colonial theory to describe current Korean popular music. There is no such thing as purity in culture; the hybridity found in Korean popular music is not only a local phenomenon, but it has already become a well-established factor. Rather than focusing on hybridity as a process or a local feature, the study of Korean popular music should be approached in the same way that Western musicologists deal with Western popular music.

이 글은 한국 대중음악에서 나타나는 서양음악장르의 혼합과 이를 둘러싼 담론을 다룬다. 서양음악장르의 혼합 또는 변형은 한국의 양악사 초기부터 혼한 현상이었다. 특히 현대의 한국 대중음악에서는 서양의 여러 음악장르가 혼합된 모습을 쉽게 찾아볼 수 있다. 이는 각 서양음악장르가 지닌 사회적, 문화적 배경이 제거되고 오로지 음악의 소리만 이용되었기 때문이다. 이와 같은 장르의 혼합현상은 음악의 정격성과 정체성에 대한 논의를 불러온다. 이러한 논의는 한국의 현대 대중음악에만 국한된 것이 아니라 지역, 혹은 민족음악을 다루는 담론과 함께한다. 지금까지 제시된 이른바 한국의 민족음악론은 파농이 제시한 탈식민지 이론의 세 단계를 따르고 있다. 이러한 담론은 탈식민지 연구의 관점에 머물러 있으며 세계적 현상이 된 한국의 현대 대중음악을 설명하기엔 더 이상 적합하지 않다. 따라서 현재 한국의 대중음악을 설명하기 위해서는 탈식민주의 이론을 벗어난 관점이 필요하다. 문화의 순수성이란 환상과 같은 개념이며 한국 대중음악의 장르 혼합현상은 특별한 지역적 현상이 아닌 당연한 사실로 전제되어야 한다. 따라서 한국 대중음악을 혼합성에 초점을 맞춰 이를 지역적 특성으로 연구하기보다 서양의 음악학자들이 서양의 대중음악을 다루는 것과 같은 방식으로 접근하고 연구할 것을 제안한다.

Key Word

Korean popular music, Cultural hybrid, identity discourses, Post-colonial studies, Hybrid K-Pop

Introduction

In this article, I am going to research a mix of Western genres in Korean popular music as well as the related discourses. This research starts from my musical experience as a native Korean. First, I enjoy listening to various Western musical genres, but I don't necessarily pay much attention to their historical or cultural background. For instance, I appreciate country and western or bluegrass music primarily for its acoustic sound, harmonic progressions, and melodies. However, I previously researched bluegrass music for a class project in an ethnomusicology course during my undergraduate studies. Through this research, I discovered the strong connection between bluegrass music and white laborers in rural areas. Given this understanding, how can I reconcile my previous statement? Is it right for me to simply appreciate the acoustic sound of the genre on the surface without delving into its historical and cultural background? Second, hip-hop suddenly became popular in the 2010s in Korea partly because of a TV show named *Show Me the Money*.¹ Almost every auditionee is not interested in the cultural and historical background of hip-hop. Instead, they focus solely on the rap battle even though they identify themselves as hip-hop musicians.²

Western musical genres do not hold the same symbolic meaning for Korean musical consumers. The genres have been lifted from their historical/cultural contexts, resituated and indigenized into Korean culture. In this process, these Western popular genres have been emptied of some of the extramusical associations. Instead, this music has been transformed and new musical associations created. Consequently, many discussions have followed on this topic. When considering hybridity, if it is understood as a framework that examines the tendency of various cultural elements to mix and transform into something new, it provides a valid perspective for understanding Korean popular music.

Before I start my article, I have to define its key terms first. Largely, there are two terms that indicate Korean popular music: K-pop and *Gayo* (가요). Nowadays, the term K-pop is widely employed in the pop music scene. The term K-pop, derived from J-pop, became popular in the 2000s. Traditionally, Korean pop music was called *Gayo*. This term was derived from the Chinese character 歌謠. 歌 means sing or song, and 謠 means a song.³ From the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, all Western-style songs were largely called *Chang-ga* (창가) in Korea. It began to divide into three genres in the 1930s: children's songs, lied, and *Gayo*.⁴ Recently, the term K-pop is rapidly replacing *Gayo*, which seems outdated to a degree for contemporary K-pop fans. However, I

am going to deal with not only current K-pop but also Gayo in this article. For this reason, I will use the term Korean popular music, which includes both current K-pop and traditional Gayo.

Western Genres and Their Roots, Background, and Contexts

Before I deal with the hybridity in Korean popular music, I first have to mention that the mixing of different genres can be problematic for Western listeners as Western musical genres are closely related to racial, regional, social, and cultural identity. Contrastingly, hybridity in Korean popular music can be easily achieved through the genres being lifted from their historical/cultural contexts. Researching the relationships between each Western genre and its historical/cultural context and why mixing such genres is difficult to be achieved in the West will be endless. Therefore, let me briefly introduce a few cases as examples here before moving on to the oppositional case of Korean popular music.

Rap music has a strong relationship with American black culture including African-American and Afro-Caribbean. According to *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, “Hip-hop, also called hip-hop culture, is creative expression, aesthetic, and sensibility that developed in African American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latino communities of the Bronx and Harlem, New York City, by the mid-1970s.”⁵ Rap music, the most popularized manifestation of hip-hop, is rooted in cultural and verbal traditions from the Caribbean as well as the United States. Norfleet says: “It is an African American popular musical expression that emphasizes stylized verbal delivery of rhymed couplets.”⁶ Not only its musical methods but also its contents are linked to black society as Rose argues that “rap music is fundamentally linked to larger social constructions of Black culture as an internal threat to dominant American culture and social order.”⁷ In short, hip-hop is inseparable from American black culture and society. Norfleet mentions:

Socioeconomic conditions in the Bronx and Harlem in the 1960s and 1970s profoundly shaped the aesthetics and activities of hip-hop culture. [...] Despite the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, Bronx youths developed and/or popularized a wealth of diverse creative expressions that eventually came to be associated with hip-hop culture. [...] Hip-hop became a powerful cultural symbol of urban youth that within a few years spread beyond the immediate environs of the Bronx.⁸

In addition to hip-hop and rap music, other genres commonly referred to as black music, such as reggae and R&B, are also closely connected to black culture: reggae originated from Jamaica⁹, and R&B is a term coined to describe music marketed primarily to African-Americans.¹⁰

While hip-hop is linked to the American black culture of urban youth, bluegrass music is related to white laborers in the countryside. The Bluegrass

genre was created by Bill Monroe, and his group, the Blue Grass Boys¹¹, and the famous bluegrass musicians are mostly from the rural American South. Rosenberg argues: “Bluegrass music in its earliest years was the focus for regional and class identity, an extension of the vernacular music of the rural upland South. The strong religious component reflected another identity, with close ties to class and region.”¹² Its tunes often take the form of narratives on the everyday lives in Appalachia and other rural areas, and its dance and frolic music are identified with rural community life.¹³

As each Western musical genre has its contexts related to racial, regional, social, and cultural identity, mixing different genres or having a musician representing one genre switch to another could potentially cause issues for Western listeners. Bob Dylan at The Newport Folk Festival in 1965 is one of the striking examples; his set included electric instruments, which was a departure from his usual acoustic sound. It was a betrayal for folk music fans who believed that electric instruments were too commercial and lacked the authenticity of folk music. Of course, not every mix/change of musical genres is unacceptable. Bob Dylan’s revolution opened the folk-rock genre; it marked a turning point in Dylan’s career and helped to popularize electric instruments in folk and rock music. The Bee Gees can be another example. The band successfully ranged over pop, disco, and rock. They started out in the 1960s as a harmony-based pop group, heavily influenced by The Beatles and other British Invasion bands of the era. In the 1970s, the Bee Gees began experimenting with disco music, which ultimately became their most successful era. Despite their success in the disco genre, the Bee Gees also continued to explore other styles, including rock and ballads in the 1980s and 1990s. Usually, however, such changes might lead to pros and cons for Western listeners since each musical genre is strongly related to its historical and social context.

Hybrid, the Essence of the History of Western Music in Korea

A mix of Western genres is so common in Korean popular music contrary to Western cases. Such a mix or transformation of Western genres was prevalent even in the earliest stage of the history of Western music in Korea.

The history of Western music in Korea spans approximately 130 years. It is often said that there are five ways Korean accepted Western music. Of these, three focus solely on music theory, while the other two are closely related to musical practice: American missionaries and hymns and military bands for Western music.¹⁴ On one hand, Korea established a military band for Western music in 1900, and Franz Eckert, a German musician, trained them. However, it was broken up in 1907 by Japan.¹⁵ On the other hand, many missionaries began to come to Korea after Korea opened a port to foreign countries in 1876. They taught Western vocal

music, especially hymns, in mission schools.¹⁶ In late nineteenth to early twentieth-century Korea, the hymn was not only church music but applied to many areas. For instance, with contrafactum, many hymns were employed as military songs of the Korean Liberation Army. There are lots of other examples that Western music was extracted from its original historical and cultural contexts and integrated into Korean culture; “Auld Lang Syne”, a Scottish folksong, was employed as a national anthem with contrafactum. A British folk-dance tune changed into *sin minyo* (신민요, neo-folk song or new folk song)¹⁷ or popular music named *Hui-mang-ga* (희망가, Song of Hope). *Marching Through Georgia*, a military song during the Civil War was used as a hymn, *sin minyo*, military song, and cheering song in Korea.

In a sense, those cases were inevitable because there was no native Korean composer able to compose Western music in the earliest stage of the history of Western music in Korea. However, such cases were still common even after Kim Insik (김인식), the first Western-music composer in Korea, appeared in 1905.¹⁸ In this process, Western music was emptied of the extramusical associations. Instead, it has been transformed and new musical associations created. In other words, Koreans separated the tunes from their contexts and brought them to Korea. Researching this topic, focused on the earliest stage of the history of Western music in Korea, would be interesting. However, it goes outside the bounds of this article. Thus, I am going to deal with cases of Korean popular music.

A History of Hybrid in Korean Popular Music

From the 1960s to the 1980s, adapted songs were popular in Korea; they were from foreign countries, mainly the United States. Some of them maintained their original genres and lyrics. For example, Cho Youngnam (조영남) adapted Tom Jones’ *Delilah* (1968), and Kim Sehwan (김세환) remade Bee Gees’ *Don’t Forget to Remember Me*. (1971) In these cases, their original genres and lyrics were largely preserved. However, there were many cases in which the genres and lyrics transformed.¹⁹ For instance, Twin Folio (트윈폴리오) remade Connie Francis’ *Wedding Cake* (1970). The title is the same as the original one, but the lyrics are totally different; the cover version’s lyrics sing a sad love story. Furthermore, the acoustic sound of Twin Folio’s version emphasizes the folksong’s aspects more because the song is accompanied by only the two members’ guitars. Bang Mi (방미) adapted Neil Sedaka’s *One Way Ticket* (1980). The original lyrics sing of separation between lovers, but the adapted version sings, “Come see me when you are lonely.”

Such cases of adapted songs can be found in other countries besides Korea. Creedence Clearwater Revival, an American rock band, can be a good example. Including *Suzie Q*, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, and *Before You Accuse Me*, many of their hit songs are originally from

other musicians but covered by CCR. However, there are some distinct points in adapted songs from the 1960s to 1980s Korea. First, there were only a few who noticed they were remade songs from foreign countries. The musicians did not intentionally hide the information on the original song, but they did not clearly notice it as well. Moreover, most Korean listeners never care whether they remade songs or not.²⁰ Second, the musicians themselves considered the remade songs as their works. There were no copyright issues at that time; no musician paid the original singers for their copyright.

In the 1990s, a new phenomenon appeared. As the genres of Korean popular music became wider, a mix of Western genres became so common in Korean popular music. Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae argue that Korean popular music had limited genres such as trot and ballad until the early 1990s, but it diversified to more Western styles, including rap, reggae, R&B, and hip-hop.²¹ Of course, there were various genres such as folk, rock, or disco, even in the 1970s and 1980s, but they could be considered minor. However, the musical genres in Korean popular music have diversified since the 1990s. It was attributed to two reasons; first, Korean popular music was censored by the government, and the military regime, during the 1960s to 1980s. The government promoted so-called *Geonjeon gayo* (건강가요, healthy songs) but oppressed many genres such as rock and metal music. Many songs were banned from broadcasting simply because the singing methods were regarded as coarse and lowbrow.²² After Korea was finally democratized in the 1990s, however, such censorship by the government was abolished.²³ Second, the Korean music industry changed fundamentally. Promotion and marketing through mainstream media became heavier compared to those in the 1960s-1980s, and they quickly appropriated the international music trends as Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae pointed out.²⁴ Furthermore, the “Japanese-originated idol star system of the 1980s also settled into the Korean popular music industry.”²⁵ In summary, Korean popular music experienced unprecedented development in music genres in the 1990s.

The Cases of Hybridity in Korean Popular Music

As I mentioned above, a mix of musical genres might lead to both pros and cons for Western listeners whereas it is quite common in Korean popular music. Largely there are three ways Western genres mix in Korean popular music. First, musicians can easily change/try genres when they release a new album. Second, genres can be juxtaposed within an album. Third, genres can be overlaid within one song. I am going to briefly introduce the first two cases and provide a detailed analysis of the third case.

Cho Yongpil (조용필) is a legendary singer in Korea; he was a big star in the 1980s and won the Grand Prize 12 times at the annual music

award by broadcasting systems. His nickname *Gawang* (가왕), which means the king of singers, well represents how he is crucial in the history of Korean popular music. He started his musical career with Country and Western, but his debut was rock music in 1971. His first big hit song was a trot, *Dorawayo Busanhange* (돌아와요 부산항에, Come Back to Busan Port) in 1975 but he did disco in the 1980s. Until now, he ranges over various genres, including rock, pop, disco, trot, blues, funky, and even Korean traditional folksong, and he has big hit songs in each genre. For example, his *Monalisa* (모나리자, 1988) is rock, *Gochujamjari* (고추잠자리, Red Dragonfly, 1981) is disco, and *Hanobaengnyeon* (한오백년, 500 Hundred Years, 1980) comes from Korean traditional folksong. The point is that the listeners do not blame his wide musical genres but compliment them. People think his wide range of genres proves how he continuously studies music.²⁶

Seo Taiji and Boys (서태지와 아이들) is another example of this case. They were well known as rap music in the 1990s as Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae argue: “The first and foremost historical event was the appearance of Seo Taiji and Boys who introduced *Nan Arayo* (난 알아요, I Know, 1992), which was one of the first rap tracks to use the Korean language.”²⁷ In the first two albums (1992, 1993), they focused on rap music and dance music such as *Nan Arayo*, *Hwansangsogui Geudae* (환상속의 그대, You in My Fantasy, 1992), and *Hayeoga* (하여가, Anyhow, 1993). However, they emphasized rock music in the third album (1994) and highlighted gangster-style rap and hip-hop in the fourth album (1995) as *Gyosiridea* (교실이데아, The Idea of Classroom, 1994) and *Come Back Home* (컴백홈, 1995) well represented respectively. People compliment the changes rather than blaming it for that they always try new musical styles.²⁸

The case that genres are juxtaposed within an album is also common in Korean popular music. The second album of Solid, one of the famous groups in the 1990s, is a striking example. They designated a genre for each song on their album in 1995. They argue that the wide range of genres included a cappella, Latin house, R&B ballad, hip-hop, techno, funky, house, and P-funk.

Ta-In (타인, The Other) of Young Turks Club, a famous dance group in the 1990s, shows how genres can be overlaid within one song. In a large sense, it is dance music. In detail, however, dance, rap music, R&B, bossa nova, and trot are incorporated into that song. In its music video and their performance, they bring the fashion and images of hip-hop such as oversized clothes, half-naked black men, snapback caps, and cool-shaped sunglasses.

At the same time, they also show a retro style with 70s-style jackets. The tune recalls the 1970s style, as it sounds like trot, which was the primary genre in Korean popular music during the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, some critics pointed out that the tune itself without the



Figure 1. The second album of Solid. The genres of each track are written in parentheses

accompaniment was a trot tune.²⁹ This trot-like tune is sung by an R&B-like singing method of a male singer. Nevertheless, the song alternates the trot-like tune by a male singer and rap by female singers, so that makes a strong contrast. Furthermore, rap sets the tone in the intro and carries the background rhythm throughout the song. Meanwhile, the rhythm pattern is bossa nova. Last but not least, the lyrics sing disappointed love of a man. The male singer sings: “Please hug me just once, it is the last night (of us). Please ease my mind that (you’ve) messed up. Please hug me just once, it is my last request. If you (or thou) leave me this way, I can’t see you anymore.” These are typical lyrics of the 1960s-1970s trot rather than hip-hop.³⁰

To put it mildly, it mixes many aspects from the different genres and achieves a balance. To put it brutally, however, it is a patchwork or fusion in a bad sense because it includes many genres, but there is no authentic one; the various genres in this song are stripped of their authentic identities. The half-naked black men in the music video serve as mere props, reinforcing the image of black masculinity as either gangsters or representing SWAG (to use today’s term).

It is easy to find examples of a mix of Western genres within a single track in current Korean popular music, also known as K-pop. For instance, *Ddu-du ddu-du* (뚜두뚜두, 2018) by Blackpink (블랙핑크) combines elements of trap music, hip-hop, and EDM. It features rap



Figure 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Scenes from the music video of *Ta-In* by Young Turks Club

verses, catchy hooks, and a hard-hitting beat. *Palette* (팔레트, 2017) by IU (아이유) fuses pop, ballad, and hip-hop influences. *Michyeo* (미쳐, Crazy, 2015) incorporates elements of EDM, hip-hop, and pop. *Hype Boy* (하입보이, 2022) by NewJeans blends pop, R&B, and hip-hop.

Such hybridity did not cause any problems for Korean listeners, and most listeners did not offer criticism. One obvious aspect of this phenomenon is that each musical genre was taken out of its original context and only its musical sound was utilized. Therefore, hybrid music that combines elements of various genres has the potential to be composed and become popular in Korea.



Figure 7. A scene from the music video of *Ta-In* by Young Turks Club

The Discourse

Such a hybrid can lead to pros and cons. On one hand, hybridity generated new creative cultures, which led to globalization. Especially focusing on English mixing in lyrics, Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae argue that hybridity in Korean popular music led to the Korean Wave, so-called *Hallyu*:

The introduction of neoliberal globalization, adopting the liberalization of the market alongside loosening censorship beginning in the mid-1990s, has expedited the swift adoption of Western music genres and English lyrics in K-Pop. Arming themselves with dance abilities and language skills, new idol singers and groups are purposely utilizing English lyrics to target both domestic and foreign audiences. Hybrid K-Pop in both lyrics and genres has achieved huge success.³¹

Indeed, at a local level, such hybridity helps marketing; it keeps the album from becoming boring, musicians can get a wider range of fans, and they can extend their musical span by changing/enlarging their genres. At a global level, as mentioned above, it can target foreign audiences.

On the other hand, such hybridity triggers discussions on authenticity and identity. These discussions are not limited to contemporary popular music but also extend to local or national music. Since a mix or transformation



Figure 8, 9, and 10. Kim Kwan, Hong Nanpa, and Park Yong-Gu

of Western genres was common even at the beginning of the history of Western music in Korea, the discourses on Korean nationality in music have a long history as well. Although they were mainly discussed in the Art music scene, they affected popular music too. Thus, I am going to briefly introduce them here.

So-called discourse on Korean national music³² began in the 1930s. It was Kim Kwan (김관), a music critic, who first argued it. He attributed the state of music in Korea at that time to a lack of development and argued that Korean must first study Western music extensively in order to advance their own music as Western music was more advanced than Korean music.³³ In 1936, Hong Nanpa (홍난파), one of the leading composers at that time, argued *Sin joseon eumak* (신 조선음악, New Korean Music). He believed that Korean should mix the advantages of Western music and Korean music which led to New Korean Music. However, in this argument, he regarded Western music as progressive and developed but Korean music as conservative and undeveloped.³⁴

In the 1940s, this discourse became more active because Korea was independent of Japan in 1945. Park Yong-Gu (박용구), Yim Donghyuk (임동혁), Kim Soohyang (김수향), and many other music critics and composers argued their own thought on (new) Korean national music. Nevertheless, they all failed to achieve it.³⁵ During the 1950s to 1970s, this discourse was a kind of taboo because of the ideological conflict, which led to Korean War. The term *Minjok* (민족)—race, ethnic group, or people—was used in both North and South Korea. Therefore, this term was taboo in South Korea at that time because it could imply North Korea and communism. Also, Korean musicians mainly concentrated on studying Western music. In the 1980s, Lee Kangsook (이강숙) shed light on the discourse again. For him, neither Western nor Korean traditional music was able to be Korean national music or Korean native musical language. It is because Western music is not from Korea but imported although it is currently predominant in Korea, and Korean traditional music is not predominant but minor nowadays.³⁶ He and his followers tried to invent a Korean native musical language. However, it has not fruited yet.



Figure 11. Lee Kangsook

The popular music scene in Korea also partly shared the discourse in the 1980s.³⁷ Some rock bands developed a new singing method, arguing that it was an attempt to revive Korean traditional music and blend it with Western music. That singing method was similar to something between recitative and rap music. They believed that was from *Pansori* (판소리), Korean traditional solo opera. For instance, Hong Seobum (홍서범) is regarded as one of the first rap musicians to use the Korean language before Seo Taiji and Boys because of his recitative and rap-like singing method.³⁸ However, it failed to gain wide popularity and support. Even today, to a certain extent, this discourse is still prevalent in both Korean art and the popular music scene. Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae argue: “It is certainly a blend of West and East; however, it ignores the themes of Korea and the unequal exchanges that are implicit in the process of hybridity. [. . .] what we have to understand is that the future of hybrid K-Pop needs to develop a balance between the local and global forces to develop the third space for the continuous growth of the local popular culture.” This argument implies that Korean still should hold/seek something Korean, local, or national (ethnic) in music.

Interestingly, the discourse follows the three distinct phases of the post-colonial theory that Fanon suggested. The first is the assimilationist phase. At this phase, the cultural products of the natives bear a resemblance to those of the colonizing country.³⁹ The second phase is the cultural nationalist phase, in which the native intellectual remembers their authentic identity and kicks against attempts to assimilate them. However, the attempts to retrieve their authentic identity are based on the aesthetics of the colonizing country. The third is a nationalist phase, referred to as the ‘combat stage’ by Fanon. In this phase, nationalists attempt to awaken the people and find a way to express themselves. Fanon mentions: “This is the revolutionary and nationalist phase in the literature of colonized in which the exposure of more natives to the realities of colonialist oppression also contributes to a democratization of the drive for literary expression.”⁴⁰

The earliest history of Western music in Korea can be regarded as the first phase of the post-colonial theory that Fanon suggested. At that time, Korea was accepting Western music. In this process, Korean traditional music was rapidly ousted from the center. The discourse by Kim Kwan, Hong Nanpa, and others in the 1930s-1940s belongs to the second phase suggested by Fanon. It is because they regarded Western music as more developed and progressive than Korean music. They did not mention formalism, but their standards were obviously based on it. The third phase corresponds with the discourse from the 1980s to the 1990s. The musicologists of this period, such as Lee Kangsook, and Korean composers, such as Lee Youngjo, Kang Jun Il, and Lee Geonyong seeking to establish a distinct Korean identity, no longer cling to Western aesthetics and standards. Moreover, they no longer romanticize the past. Instead, they aim to challenge and inspire the people. Even today, in popular music, Jin Dal Yong argues that Korean still should hold/seek something Korean, local, or national (ethnic) in music as mentioned above. Musicians ranging from Seo Taiji and Boys to BTS attempted to incorporate certain elements from Korean traditional music as evident in songs like *Hayeoga* (하여가, Anyhow, 1993) and *Daechwita* (대취타, Military Band Music).

While these discourses have maintained a post-colonial perspective, so-called K-Pop globally has represented the Korean Wave. Maybe, therefore, it is time to go beyond the post-colonial theory to describe current Korean popular music. Sutton asks: “Is there any cultural practice that is not the result of “fusion” in some sense?”⁴¹ It is right. There is no such thing as purity in culture. He points out: “The notion of cultural purity is demonstrably a myth, as any careful historical analysis of cultural expression anywhere in the world can reveal multiple origins, blends, syncretisms, hybridities that are the inevitable result of human contact.”⁴² I mentioned the historical and cultural background of hip-hop and bluegrass above. However, they are also a kind of hybrid. Hip-hop is a mix of African roots and Modern American urban youth culture. Bluegrass was affected by religious aspects. Then, should we still focus on hybridity when we discuss Korean popular music? Is it the exclusive character of Korean popular music?

Conclusion

This article has examined a mix of Western genres in Korean popular music. A mix or transformation of Western genres has been common since the beginning of the history of Western music in Korea. Especially in Korean popular music, it is common to see singers or songs that blend Western genres. On the one hand, this often results in a combination of musical elements like melodies, rhythms, and acoustic sounds. On the other hand, this blending of genres can also cause a loss of their cultural context and historical background.

I am not arguing that Korean popular music should solely focus on establishing a Korean identity, nor am I making a value judgment on whether such a hybrid of genres is good or bad. My research focuses on exploring the reasons why such a blending of genres has become so prevalent in Korean music, tracing its history from the introduction of Western music in Korea to today's popular music, and examining the discourse surrounding this trend. The creation of hybrid music is made possible by lifting Western genres from their historical and cultural context and then indigenizing them into Korean culture. As a result, the discourses on hybridity and Korean identity followed. These discourses have been mainly under post-colonial studies. Therefore, I suggest that further studies beyond the scope of post-colonial studies are needed to understand the current Korean popular music. We could potentially label this new field of study as "post-post-colonial studies," a term that I suggest. For example, suppose the hybridity found in Korean popular music is not only a local phenomenon, but it has already become a well-established factor. Rather than focusing on hybridity as a process or a local feature, the study of Korean popular music should be approached in the same way that Western musicologists analyze Western popular music. Examining Korean popular music in this manner can lead to enriching discussions. In this case, a postmodern perspective that challenges the traditional distinctions between the center and periphery should be employed instead of a post-colonial one.

Notes

1. A rap competition TV show that airs on Mnet since 2012. Based on the discussion of Dick Hebdige, Kim Taeryong and Kim Kiduk analyze *Show Me the Money* 5. As a result, they argue that the current underground hip-hop has become a part of the mainstream culture. See Kim Taeryong and Kim Kiduk, “The Present and Future Task of Korean Underground Hip-Hop from a Perspective of <Show Me the Money>,” *The Journal of the Humanities for Unification* 71 (2017): 141-151.
2. Lee Chaemin and Kim Jaibeom, “An Exploratory Study on Authenticity of Hip-hop in Korea: A Case of Show Me the Money 3,” *Journal of Korea Culture Industry* 15, no. 2 (2015): 128-130.
3. Historically, Chinese characters played a role as Latin in Western for a long time in East-north Asia. Therefore, many terminologies were originally derived from Chinese characters although they are written in Korean alphabet.
4. Lee Kangsook et. Al., *100 Years History of Western Music in Korea* (Seoul: Hyunum Press, 2001), 103-116.
5. Dawn M. Norfleet, “Hip-Hop and Rap,” *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 3: The United States and Canada*, 723.
6. Ibid.
7. Tricia Rose, “Fear of a Black Planet: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990s,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 3 (1991): 289.
8. Norfleet, “Hip-Hop and Rap,” 723.
9. Stephen Davis, “Reggae,” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 9, 2023, <https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.23065>.
10. Howard Rye, “Rhythm-and-blues,” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.J676400>.
11. Neil V. Rosenberg, “Bluegrass Music,” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2240240>.
12. Rosenberg, “Bluegrass,” *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 3: The United States and Canada*, 198.
13. Ibid.
14. Lee, *100 Years History of Western Music in Korea*, 103-116.
15. Ibid., 46-52.
16. Ibid., 22-34.
17. *Sin minyo* means songs composed in the folk song style, which was composed in Korea from the late 19th to early 20th centuries.
18. His *Hakdoga* (학도가) is known as the first song composed in Western style in Korea. However, Byeon Gyewon argues that its tune came from a Japanese song. See Byeon Gyewon, “*Ch’angjak kugak*: Writing New Music for Korean Traditional Instruments,” (Ph. D. degree dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2001), 41-42.
19. Jin Dal Yong simply mentions: “the early history of Korean popular music began with the translation of Japanese or Western popular songs.” See Jin Dal Yong and Ryoo Woongjae, “Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop: The Global-Local

Paradigm of English Mixing in Lyrics,” *Popular Music & Society* 37, no. 4 (2014): 116. However, actually, it is adaptation rather than translation.

20. Kwon Chung-Goo, “The Change of Adapted Song Since Music Copyright,” *Korean Journal of Popular Music* 17 (2016): 11.

21. Jin, “Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop”, 117-118.

22. The Law on Records and Videos (음반및비디오물에관한법률) changed in 1996. The government conducted preliminary review before 1996.

23. Each broadcasting system still has their own standard and censorship, but it is not controlled by the government anymore.

24. Jin, “Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop”, 117.

25. Ibid.

26. A columnist writes: “his musical ability, ranging over many genres such as Pansori (판소리, Korean traditional solo opera), trot, rock, pop, classic, is amazing. His wide range of musical capacity comes from his diligent studying; he practices music for more than two hours everyday, combining hard work with his musical talent.” Kwon Myung-Kwan, “A Message to IT Industry from Cho Yongpil’s Comeback,” *IT Dong-A*, Web, May 23, 2013, accessed May 9, 2023, <https://it.donga.com/14557>.

27. Jin, “Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop”, 118.

28. Bae Soontak, “Top 100 Albums in Korean Popular Music: 30th, Seo Taiji and Boys II,” *The Kynghyang Shinmun*, Web, December 6, 2007, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.khan.co.kr/article/200712060950441>,

29. In an interview, Yun Ilsang, the composer of this song, also agreed with it. Lee Heyrin, “Who is Yun Ilsang?: The producer of Yu Seungjoon and Park Jiyeon,” *Segye Ilbo*, Web, May 20, 2006, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://segye.com/view/20060520000100>.

30. Especially, this type of lyrics can be easily found in female singer’s trot. Contrastingly, in this song, the rap of female singers tells “forget me, forget my everything. [. . .] Don’t love me, don’t recall me, don’t see me again even if it is a coincidence. [. . .] Trust my love so far, but no more, no more this way. Rather, choose the pain of being alone.” These female-like image of the male singer but masculine image of the female singers can lead to another discussion.

31. Jin, “Critical Interpretation of Hybrid K-Pop”, 128.

32. It is very hard to be translated into English. In Korea, it is called *Minjock Eumakron* (민족음악론). *Minjok* (민족) means race, ethnic group, or people. It does not mean Korean traditional music here because Korean traditional music has not been predominant since Western music arrived in Korea. Meanwhile, Western music is not native Korean but a kind of imported thing. Therefore, this discourse deals with how Korean can establish Korean’s new native musical language.

33. Kim Kwan, “Digesting Foreign Music and Creating Chosun (Korean) Music,” *Chosun Ilbo*, July 27, 1933, accessed May 9, 2023. https://newslibrary.chosun.com/view/article_view.html?id=436119330728e1031&set_date=19330728&page_no=3.

34. Lee, *100 Years History of Western Music in Korea*, 198.

35. Ibid., 220-230.

36. Lee Kangsook, “Creation of New Cultural Atmosphere,” *Gaeksuk*, March, 2010, 135.

37. Until 1950s, popular music and art music were not clearly divided in Korea.

38. His song “Kim Satgat (김삿갓, 1989)” is regarded as one of the first rap music in Korea. Kang Ilkwon, “Hong Seobum’s ‘Kim Satkat,’ preceding Seo Taiji: For the Honor of Korean First Rap,” *Kukinews*, Web, April 23, 2011, accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.kukinews.com/newsView/kuk201104230026>.

39. Chidi Amuta, “Fanon, Cabral and Ngugi on National Liberation,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 158.

40. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 178-179. Quoted from *Ibid.*, 159.

41. Anderson R. Sutton, ““Fusion” and Questions of Korean Cultural Identity in Music,” *Korean Studies* 35 (2011): 4-5.

42. *Ibid.*, 5.

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