

# K-POP STRATEGY SEEN FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND THE TRADITION OF THE *GWANGDAE*

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## Abstract

Hallyu (the Korean wave) is an intriguing phenomenon originating from Korea and refers to the current impact of products of South Korean popular culture (especially for music, K-pop). K-pop, a representative product of the Korean Wave, is a multi-layered formation that is composed of hybrid cultural practices and a diverse range of lived experiences. Nowadays, much social and academic attention is being paid to the reason for the success of K-pop. This study deals with how the Korean traditional *gwangdae* (*scaramouche* or clown) culture has been passed down to develop into K-pop. For this, diachronic perspectives are applied to analyze the formation and development of *gwangdae* culture and K-pop; and the cultural hybridity theories are used in explaining the succession of *gwangdae* spirit to K-pop culture. As a result, this study examines how and what kinds of changes and innovations Korean *gwangdae* culture has gone through to accumulate, pass down and develop the *gwangdae's* artistic and cultural capabilities, living up to the demands of the times, since earlier times. Thus, this study tries to understand the meaning through traditional interpretation and reflections on K-pop and also makes specific policy recommendations to accompany the analysis. In particular, we tried to present the direction of the new K-pop strategy based on the *gwangdae* spirit.

## Keywords

Cultural Hybridity, Diachronic, *Gwangdae* Spirit, Hallyu, K-pop, New K-pop *Gwangdae* Strategy

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hallyu (Korean wave) is an intriguing phenomenon originating from Korea and refers to the current impact of products specific to South Korean popular culture (especially for music, K-pop). K-pop, the representative product of the Korean Wave, has recently gained popularity around the world, while a great deal of social and academic attention has been paid to the reason for the success of K-pop as part of Hallyu. Some studies claim that “cultural proximity” is the main reason for the success of Hallyu in Asia (Straubharr). There is another analysis based on cultural heritage theory: that since the Korean people, who traditionally, or more aptly, inherently, enjoy drinking, singing and dancing and celebrating in high spirits easily, possess a distinctive cultural and artistic DNA, and this cultural gene has long been passed down and revealed, thus leading to the global success of K-pop today (SM. Lee; P. Kim).<sup>1</sup> Some other studies based on the cultural hybridity theory analyze Hallyu contents as the result of globalization (Iwabuchi; D. Shim) or understand this phenomenon as a glocal process or glocalization (Oh and Park).

Different from other studies trying to analyze and understand the reason for the success of Hallyu or K-pop, our study is focused on showing the connectivity from traditional *gwangdae*<sup>2</sup> culture to K-pop by going all the way back to the pre-modern society of Korea. In other words, this study tries to find the common particularities between K-pop and traditional *gwangdae* culture that have existed since the Goryeo Dynasty<sup>3</sup> and argues that the tradition or spirit of *gwangdae* remains in K-pop culture. Then we analyze how this *gwangdae* culture has been connected to the culture of K-pop. In addition, we examine what kinds of innovations and changes Korea’s modern and contemporary music and popular performance culture have gone through and how they have developed in society as a whole. Furthermore, this study deals with the future strategy and direction of K-pop based on the new *gwangdae* spirit.

## 2. THE DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE OF K-POP

This research aims to take a diachronic look at the intrinsic Korean *gwangdae* spirit, which has continued to be traced to K-pop. However, many scholars involved in the K-pop studies have argued with suggestion that K-pop is inherent in the Korea which we are presenting. Among the criticisms of K-pop, the most persuasive evaluations to date are those of scholars based on the theory of hybridity.

**1. Cultural hybridity and K-pop**

Marwan M. Kraidy, a cultural scholar, defines the hybridity as “the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities . . . which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries” (5). Considering globalization as the process of hybridization, J. N. Pieterse defined hybridization as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices” (49).<sup>4</sup> Most of the scholars who study K-pop based on hybridity theory see K-pop to be the result of a mix of global music elements, that is, the result of hybridization. In other words, K-pop is not Korean music but global music because cannot locate its own “Koreanness” (Lie 360).

American sociologist, John Lie, who retraces the process of development of Korean music, argues that “as a matter of traditional culture, there is almost nothing ‘Korean’ about K-pop. K-pop, however identified as part of Brand of (South) Korea, is a globally competitive product without encumbrance of traditional Korea” (360). Japanese scholar Iwabuchi, who studied the cultural exchange phenomenon in Asia, said that the local culture accepts a global element of culture, and erases its color and creates a product called an “odorless culture.” He implied that the global success of Korean cultural contents is also based on “statelessness.” Shim Doo-bo (27) accepted Krady’s definition of cultural hybridity as “communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by, sociopolitical and economic arrangement” and emphasized that K-pop is a new mixed music genre of global music in Korea’s new political, economic and cultural environment. Another Hallyu scholar, Oh, also emphasized how Hallyu includes K-pop as “[n]ot the globalization of Korean culture, but the Koreanization of world culture” (132).

**Table 1: Cultural Contents Acceptance Model of Edward H. Spicer**

Cultural Contents	Meaning
Incorporative integration	Incorporated into the request of inmates, is carried out the formation of a new integration
Assimilative integration	Traditional culture integrated with foreign culture and assimilated into the new culture
Isolated integration	Two cultures forming integration with each culture isolated
Fusional integration	Two cultures integrated into an ideal third form

While humbly accepting scholarly opinions that K-pop is a global music of a new nature born in the flow of transnational culture, this research is a response to the already extant doubt that K-pop was formed in the physical place of Korea, and that Korean elements remain in it. Edward H. Spicer, an anthropologist, describes the process of accepting cultural contents that a domestic culture integrates with other cultures as a stage of incorporation, assimilation, isolation, and fusion. The acceptance process here can be understood as a pre-fusion process in which the two cultures are integrated into the ideal third form. Cultural convergence goes through the process of examining the possibility of unity with the existing culture through the stage of acceptance of culture, and identifies the possibility of another fusing in this process.

The theories of Spicer show that the acceptance and integration of culture take place in the mutual exchange of two cultures. And it shows that the process of integration with tradition must also go through the process. In other words, during cultural integration, or during cultural hybridity, traditional elements will not disappear but will mature in an idealized form. Tradition is not something made stale or worn over time, but matures during the years.

While acknowledging the academic views of K-pop as a hybrid culture without Koreanness, these views are generally addressed to the modern era, and therefore, lack a diachronic perspective. From this, we try to approach K-pop with a slightly more macro perspective. In this process, we try to examine the influence of Korean taste and tradition in K-pop.

## 2. Diachronic perspective: from tradition of *gwangdae* to K-pop

This study considers Korea's original *gwangdae* tradition as a special phenomenon peculiar to Korea, and looks at the characteristics of K-pop from the diachronic perspective of connecting *gwangdae* culture with K-pop.

The first feature of K-pop linked to *gwangdae* culture is the expert cultivation system. Although many K-pop researchers criticize the factory-produced idol group system of large-scale entertainment companies in Korea, it is undeniable that Korean K-pop promoters have an extraordinary ability in training experts at dancing and singing. This is evidenced by the fact that the foreign music market is benchmarking Korean management strategies, and that more and more volunteers (even foreign participants) are auditioning in Korean companies. This is connected to the internal arts and crafts training system that the traditional *gwangdae* group had. The traditional *gwangdaes*, who have a shared interest in artistic activity, form

a group among themselves, and then the cultural and artistic talent transfer is made within the group, and in this process, the commonly known family tradition and heritage are completed. A closer look at the development of Korean *gwangdae* culture based on the diachronic viewpoint reveals that the *gwangdae* groups were maintained and descended under cultural or ideological factors based on the customs and values within the *gwangdae* organization. These customs and values of *gwangdae* culture, which can be called “credible commitment” (Oh et al. 100), allowed the formation of an environment in which the *gwangdaes’* talents and capabilities could be more specialized and upgraded. Oh’s work mentions that the producers and managers of the company are doing their best to find trainees, to educate them, and to produce music. The trainees have devoted themselves to the practice of dancing and singing. This “credible commitment” occurred easily in Korea, which explains how K-pop successfully developed.

The opportunity to grow performers through competition can be regarded as the second commonality between the *gwangdae* culture and K-pop. K-pop performers have already experienced intense competition in the process of learning and practicing dancing, singing, and foreign language from the trainee days. In this environment, they have the opportunity for self-development, and furthermore, it also affects their skill improvement. Thus, Japanese consumers who used to criticize K-pop idols as nothing more than a just variation of J-pop idols now admit that K-pop idols’ singing and dancing skills are superior to those of Japan (G. Lee, 180-181). With regard to the traditional *gwangdae*, as since 18<sup>th</sup> century the number of *gwangdae* has increased and the *gwangdae* class system was maintained for 500 years in the Joseon Dynasty, Joseon Korea had a very large number of *gwangdae*. But these *gwangdae* did not have any choice to take another job and had to cultivate only entertaining skills as a *gwangdae* in this strict hierarchical order in which social status was passed on from parent to child. Over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as the *gwangdae* culture and its contents became popular culture, the competition between *gwangdae* families or between *gwangdae* groups heightened, and they tried to demonstrate a higher level of artistic skills than others (Seo 167). In this circumstance, the *gwangdaes’* personal performance or their groups’ abilities progressed. The second feature of K-pop linked to clown culture is found in the inherent characteristic of expert system mentioned earlier.

The third common feature is *pungja* and *haehak* which are roughly equivalent to western satire and humor (refer to part 3 for a more exact explanation about these terms). Some researchers claim that K-pop embodies the beauty of *pungja* and *haehak*, two particularities embedded in the *gwangdae* culture. According to them, the lyrics of some K-pop music portray Korea’s particular social environment from a critical angle, adopting satirical aesthetics (SW. Lee). Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” which caused enormous repercussions in the world, can be cited as a typical example



showing this. Just as the traditional *gwangdae* solved criticism and complaints about the class society with *pungja* and *haehak*, K-pop performers also expressed criticism of society with silly lyrics and comical gestures (Adamson 46).

The fourth common feature that connects *gwangdae* with K-pop is simply the Korean language. Culture critic Russell says that K-pop's Korean lyrics is the most revealing part of Korean culture. According to him, "Korean is a snappy, popping language, full of densely packed, tight syllables" and "in many ways, it is already halfway to hip-hop." He explains that using the melody in Korean means making a song that reflects the characteristics of Korean, so the song, K-pop, can only be implanted in Korean (23). Gyu-tag Lee, a scholar specialized in K-pop, explain also that how "Korean lyrics" give a strong sense of Koreanness (99).

### 3. GWANGDAE AND THE GWANGDAE SPIRIT

What is a *gwangdae*, the core concept of this study, and what is the *gwangdae* spirit? According to various studies on *gwangdae* culture, *gwangdae* groups formed after the middle of the Goryeo Dynasty (Son and Lee 177-79; Seo 62). From the mid-Goryeo Dynasty to the Joseon Dynasty, the *gwangdae* refers to individual performers and even professional players who were commissioned by the court to officially perform a play (Chung 143-145; Yoon 573-575). In other words, the *gwangdae*, in the hereditary status system, was a concept that encompasses an official artist group that participated in the events of the court while contributing to developing sophisticated folk show skills, and a popular artist group that cultivated folk shows which could be enjoyed together with the general public, like a shaman or an itinerant performers troupe. This means that the *gwangdae* refers to a wide spectrum of artist-performers (Sim and Kim 125).

To better understand the meaning of Korean *gwangdae* more clearly, it can be compared with the concept of the "fool" or the "clown," which had a similar social role and status to the *gwangdae*. For example, the fool, who would frequently appear in Shakespeare's plays, came from the "jester," a popular cultural form in the Middle Ages. These jesters were performers of various dances, songs, acrobatics, and obscenity in various parts of the town hall, which was held in the town square. Many jesters at that time were physically handicapped people, and they would use their physical disability as a factor to create humor (Wiles). After some time, these jesters became personal entertainers, or fools, who lived in the royal palace and provided pleasure and laughter to their masters, a King or an aristocrat. Though these fools were low in status, they had the privilege to speak and act freely and were free to seek freedom from punishment or regulation. That is, they had the right to

satirize their employers, the King and nobility, or to make criticisms directly or indirectly (Campbelle and Goldsmiths 6). On the other hand, “clown” is a term that began to be used in the Elizabethan period to refer to a professional entertainer. If the term fool refers to those who improvise naturally, without finesse, clown is a concept that refers to a trained actor with professional acting skills, mainly on stage (Gurr). These clowns reproduced satire of the social aspects of class with ridiculous or stupid words. Korea’s *gwangdae* is also said to have been in the lowest caste segment in terms of social status and has a common point with the fool or the clown in terms of providing comfort to the King, nobility, and the people. But it is said that the *gwangdae* in fact demands more expertise in the art compared with the fool or the clown. That is, the fool and the clown have the strong aspects of a player with humor, while the *gwangdae* has a strong aspect of a performer, presenting various shows with different professional and technical skills.

The folk shows performed by these *gwangdaes* needed very specialized artistic skills which were not easy to be imitated or passed down by ordinary people. This involved singing, performing *pansori* (epic storytelling through song), dancing, *taltchum* (performing mask dances), playing instruments, *pungmul* (folk percussion band music), puppet plays, *gokye* (acrobatics), *jultagi* (performance on a tightrope) and engaging in witty humorous chattering (YG. Lee 370). Considering that performance culture and popular play culture had absolutely relied only on the artistic expertise of these *gwangdae* groups especially since the Joseon Dynasty after the Goryeo Dynasty, it is not too much to say that important parts of Korean traditional folk shows have been mostly invented, handed down, and developed by the *gwangdae* groups.

The *gwangdae* groups usually maintained their organization and culture in the national system involving a hereditary status structure until the mid-Joseon Dynasty. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, they started to show a relatively big change in their size and activities: as the increased agricultural productivity of Joseon society since the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to commercial and market development and the court official events, *Narye*, were no longer held after Jeongjo of Joseon (1752-1800), the 22nd ruler of the Joseon Dynasty,<sup>5</sup> the activities of the *gwangdae* groups developed in more various ways (Chung 111-151). With the advancement of marketplaces and seasonal fish markets at the port, the *gwangdae* groups often performed folk shows in such open spaces in which many ordinary people gathered. Supported and bolstered by the public’s empathy with and preference for folk shows, these *gwangdaes*’ activities quantitatively flourished to form a kind of popular performance culture in Joseon society (Yoon 705-710). Since then, the *gwangdae* groups attempted to develop a new system so that they could create and sell their own unique entertainment in this competitive market system. Thus, the popular *gwangdae* system (which was born spontaneously beyond the hereditary



status system) had a great ripple effect not only on the public but on society and cultural arts. A major example of the successful popular *gwangdae* system is a male troupe of itinerant entertainers, called *namsadang*, who appeared in the late Joseon Dynasty. It was a *gwangdae* troupe that was active in the important transition period in which the *gwangdae* system changed from being nation-centered to public-centered (Chung 145-151).

The Korean *gwangdae* culture system, which underwent a change with the abolition of the hereditary status system at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evolved in the course of various cultural phenomena related to the Enlightenment, the Japanese colonial period, the US military government period, and the period following the establishment of the Republic of Korea. As a result, modern styles of theatrical performance emerged; groups of musicians were formed by record companies; and music performance culture flourished centering on the musical troupes of the eighth US military units stationed in Korea. The traditional *gwangdae* were absorbed by these modern entertainment groups. Indeed, the *gwangdae* groups and their culture went through numerous changes in such situations and it is still believed that the *gwangdae* spirit remains and has its influence in harmony with foreign culture. From the 1960s to the 1980s, many new features were introduced into Korean popular music, including a fusion of overseas pop music and Korean traditional melodies, and the acceptance of overseas pop music into Korean popular music. The 1990s was a time when the Korean *gwangdae* spirit underwent innovative changes in form and content. A new generation of *gwangdae* with a new sense of the times was beginning to emerge. With the advent of “SeoTaiji and Boys,” who displayed new kind of song and dance skills, various musical genres were combined such as hip-hop and a unique yet popular type of music was performed. This was an epoch-making event that alerted many people to the importance of management in the popular music-producing market. Since then, the entertainment agencies have developed a comprehensive management specific to Korea that manages a wide range of items including record planning and production, entertainer management, star marketing and even music distribution. Furthermore, these comprehensive entertainment companies came to establish even a system to discover and train competitive new *gwangdae*. Under the steady and systematic management of these companies, Korean popular music with its cultural code has achieved constant changes and innovations, thus developing as K-pop, a successful form of cultural content (JH. Yang 138).

In fact, the passing down of the Korean *gwangdae* culture and spirit to today’s K-pop after a long development process is closely connected to the Korean people’s cultural tendency of enjoying music and dancing. In other words, it can be interpreted that the Korean people’s cultural particularity, which can be characterized by *heung* and *sinmyeong* or *pungja* and *haehak*, constantly stimulated and developed the

Korean *gwangdaes'* temperament and capability, thus contributing to cultivating and enhancing Korean music and performance skills (Joo et al.; M. Kim et al.).<sup>6</sup> *Heung* refers to an "elevated and positive emotional state such as impression and pleasure," and leads to singing and dancing as the degree of excitement becomes higher. *Sinmyeong* means entering a powerful ecstatic state and immersion while feeling intense joy and enthusiasm, which releases conflicts and contradictions between humans and then uplifts the emotional mood (S Lee 215-218). *Pungja* and *haehak* are not different in caricaturing targets to cause laughter. However, *pungja* induces a cold, cynical smile for the purpose of criticizing and exposing the hypocrisy of the targets, while *haehak* evokes a soft empathetic laughter out of compassion for the targets (SW. Lee 205). In particular, Korean *pungja* and *haehak* not only produce laughter by lampooning targets, but also embrace them and bring harmony. In this regard, they are different from Western satire and humor, which are sharp and direct (K. Shin 190-191). This study suggests that such a traditional *gwangdae* spirit remains in modern K-pop. Another important factor related to the passing down of the deeply embedded *gwangdae* spirit to K-pop is that the succession and development of cultural arts through the *gwangdae* have taken place at a diachronic level. In other words, the cultural and artistic capabilities of Korean *gwangdae* groups were constantly accumulated and strengthened under the influence of institutional elements and several foreign cultures. This study applies the diachronic perspectives in analyzing the *gwangdae* system and cultural hybridity theory is used in observing the transmission of the *gwangdae* spirit.

#### 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GWANGDAE SPIRIT AND THE SUCCESSION TO K-POP

In this part, based on the diachronic viewpoint suggested above, the development of the *gwangdae* culture and system will be closely examined, in order to understand how Korea's *gwangdae* particularities have been handed down to today's K-pop.

##### 1. The Development of the *Gwangdae* System in the Joseon Dynasty

*Gwangdae*, as already stated above, refers to a group of professional entertainers who had engaged only in entertaining and performing activities since the Goryeo Dynasty, based on a hereditary social status system. They pursued popularity and artistry at the same time while singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, performing puppet plays, doing *gokye* (acrobatics), *jultagi* (performance on a tightrope) and engaging in witty and humorous banter (Hee-chul Sim and Hun-shik

Kim 208). In the Joseon Dynasty, performers from hereditary shaman groups, *gisaengs* who are female entertainer-courtesans, *jaeseung*, talented monks who engaged in performing activities (J. Park 152-53) and itinerant performance troupes such as *sadang* were working as *gwangdaes*. In the late Joseon period, especially the itinerant *gwangdae* troupes were engaged in active and diverse entertaining activities. During this period, the *gwangdae* culture was extended to the middle class and even the common people, and female performers also became involved in such activities (Chung 139-149; Yoon 705-710). The *gwangdae* groups, who used to be mobilized for official government events, travelled to flourishing commercial areas such as marketplaces to act as private performance troupes because in this period official government events were no longer held. They devised perfect performance while regularly performing folk shows in villages and markets, which were different from one-time ceremonial events. As their performances unfolded at private banquets, held not by the government offices but by individuals, the witty, humorous banter evolved into *pansori*, a kind of folk play. Indeed, the energetic activities and various compositions of private performance troupes and their large size enabled music and dance and even folk plays to develop and evolve. Another itinerant *gwangdae* groups known as *namsadang* was formed by farmers with a high level of entertaining skills who had lost farmland due to famine or natural disasters, and this kind of group was characterized by spontaneous formation among common people (W. Shim 25).

## 2. The Succession of *Gwangdae* Culture in Modern and Contemporary Times

In the modern era, the hereditary social status system was abolished along with the Kabo Reform of 1894. Under the influence of enlightenment thinking, modern-style theaters appeared. As for the traditional music performances, such as *pansori*, miscellaneous songs or folk songs, and *gwangdae* shows which were held in villages and marketplaces, the stage for them was moved to modern theaters. Indeed, the composite art performances composed of court and popular music and dance were put on the stage, which contributed to the widened range of classes who enjoyed popular culture by breaking down the boundary between high culture and low culture. In addition, as foreign culture was introduced and accompanying interest in entertainment and play culture increased, new types of performances developed in a way to accommodate foreign elements. Along with the introduction of foreign music, domestic music also went through various changes of genre. At this time, *gisaengs* displayed outstanding talent in the field of music as singers. At the beginning of the 20th century, these *gisaengs* formed a union, a so-called *gisaeng johap*, as a base of their activities, and thereafter, many other singers and musicians partook in various musical exchanges and carried out many performances centering

around this union. This *gisaeng johap*, which would be entitled *gwonbon* soon by the Japanese government, was a kind of expert cultivation center where *giseangs* learned and polished music and dance skills (Hwang 12-13). These *gisaengs* acted not only as singers of popular songs but also as main players of a new theatrical performance genre, further growing as artists and stage performers. As *gisaengs* who were good at traditional performance and had well developed entertaining skills embraced both traditional song styles and diverse foreign music styles, a mix of music styles coexisted. The record companies and the music industry which appeared at the same time led popular music, mixed with existing traditional songs, such as *pansori* or *minyo* (folk songs), Japanese song today referred to as *enka*<sup>7</sup> and Western music that was introduced in modern times, to become the axis of culture.

As *akgeuk*, a form of musical drama that combined drama with music, was developed from the 1940s, numerous musical drama troupes, called *akgeukdan*, were formed. Since the 1950s when the US army was stationed in South Korea, the singers belonging to these troupes visited the US military bases to perform musical shows. After the mid-1950s, *akgeuk* was transformed into variety shows and *akgeukdan* became *showdan*, or a troupe of show. These *showdans* at first performed musical activities such as performances for the US army, and then gradually extended the scope of activities to the “general stage” for Korean audiences.<sup>8</sup> After the mid-1960s, it became common for Korean musicians to perform musical shows on the general stage as well as on the “show stage” for the eighth US army. They played American jazz, blues, and pop, but they also even made and sang American-style Korean songs for Korean fans. In this way, the Korean *gwangdaes* at that time continued their activities based on a kind of cultural system, rooted in stage performance, following the theater performance of the Japanese imperialism era. In this stage system, singers and musicians of *showdan* formed a kind of training union and polished their music and performance skill as they competed with many other groups. In the 1970s, these musicians who had originally performed for the US army were at the center of the domestic music industry, thanks to the record industry as well as radio and television, which had been developed since the 1960s, and the British and American music that they introduced to Korea had an effect on the formation of Korea’s distinctive pop culture (H. Shin 135-142).<sup>9</sup> However, as the authoritarian government of 1960s-70s tightened the regulation on the cultural sphere (SW. Lee 82), including the musical environment, musicians of this period tended to perform and train their musical skill underground. In the 1980s, actively led by talented Korean musicians, a variety of foreign musical genres, such as folk, rock, soul, ballad, dance music, and *trot* (Japanese-style popular music), were combined with Korean traditional music, contributing to the establishment of the Korean popular song style (G. Lee 76). The efforts and activities of talented Korean *gwangdaes* led to the formation of contemporary popular music with a Korean identity (Jang and Seo 264-288, 320-338). In this period, the activities and culture of

these Korean musicians grew and developed in a solid bond with the broadcasting system, especially through the television system, and musicians began to compete with their colleagues to appear more in the television stage.

### 3. The Development of the K-Pop *Gwangdae* System

It is no exaggeration to say that the development of K-pop, which started in the late 1990s,<sup>10</sup> is a cultural phenomenon generated by the power of popular songs in the 1990s, especially the accumulation and propagation of the *gwangdae* spirit and capabilities of “SeoTaiji and Boys.” In 1992, “SeoTaiji and Boys” came to sudden prominence in the Korean popular music industry by performing creative and experimental songs that combined rap, traditional Korean music and dance music with rock. The group gained explosive popularity and support from many teenagers with their new innovative songs in combination with hip-hop and dance, and thus clearly showed the possibility of successfully commercializing idol groups based on dance in the then music market. Indeed, the group’s appearance was followed by the idol group-oriented commercialization phenomenon in the Korean popular music industry. Since the mid-1990s, idol groups including the H.O.T. and Sechskies who were first generation of K-pop, have been competitively formed.

Moreover, the advent of “SeoTaiji and Boys” shook the Korean popular music market in another way. Until the 1980s, popular music singers belonged to record companies. They engaged in entertainment activities that included releasing record albums under an exclusive contract with record companies. However, SeoTaiji quickly broke with the custom of the existing popular music market by producing and recording an album as well as writing and composing songs on his own. He also even engaged in casting, training, and marketing all alone (SW. Lee 165). Under the influence of the example of “SeoTaiji and Boys,” album producing and entertainment management started to become separated in the 1990s. A full-scale corporate management agency was introduced in Korea’s popular music industry with the establishment of SM Entertainment (SM). Modeled after “Motown,” the US record company, and “Johnny’s,” Japan’s large entertainment agency, SM adopted a “total management” strategy in which it would not only produce, promote, distribute and market music, but also operate a “system to produce idol singers” by picking a small number of would-be singers, training them for a long time and helping them make their debut. In this way, the expert cultivation tradition turned up again in Korean society. Following SM, other entertainment agencies, such as YG or JYP (which became a large company), also adopted this total management strategy, transforming it to fit Korea’s social and cultural context (G. Lee 120-124).



These large management agencies, which are leading K-pop at the forefront of global popular culture, have produced a new type of K-pop performers through this elaborate and keen competitive system, referred to as the “idol training system,” including the trainee system.<sup>11</sup> The *gwangdae* groups in the traditional era developed and inherited their capacity as *gwangdae* within their group. And the *gwangdaes* after the modern age, although they were also based on several modern cultural and industrial institutions such as the stage system, record system, and broadcast system, mostly achieved the accumulation, strengthening, and transmission of their talents and capabilities within their group itself. And we can find this competitive expert cultivation system which is Korean *gwangdae*'s culture, in these entertainment agencies' training system. Now, the *gwangdae* training system is institutionalized, and through this elaborate system, the artistic values and temperament of *gwangdaes* was systematically accumulated and transmitted. The establishment of this system contributed greatly to today's rising global boom of K-pop.

Then, how has the content of K-pop, led by a *gwangdae* system that has been changed into a competitive institution operated by large entertainment agencies, inherited the traditional *gwangdae* spirit? In recent years, there have been studies scientifically demonstrating that K-pop has inherited musical or aesthetic elements of Korean traditional music. Some researchers pay attention to the “hook song,” one of the main musical characteristics of K-pop. Emphasizing that the fast and repetitive tempo is related to the dance-inducing *heung*, they maintain that K-pop has inherited the characteristic of folk songs that repeats a simple musical structure emphasizing rhythm (SW. Lee 136). Other researchers claim that K-pop embodies the beauty of *pungja* and *haehak*, which works off the frustration that is rooted in various forms of social oppression. According to them, the lyrics of some K-pop music, such as the songs of H.O.T. or Sechskies or Psy, portray Korea's social environment from a critical angle, adopting satirical aesthetics. In other words, *gwangdaes* are more clown or jester-like: “they don't have to be sexy idols to be popular. Their songs are either very humorous, or can sound serious, but with silly lyrics” (Adamson 46). The original *gwangdae* were given a certain amount of license to critique the aristocracy, offering up satirical commentary on society through their dance, music, and repartee. This idea supposes a place for Psy in the cultural history of the Korean people by showing a precedent in which the jester, standing outside and powerless himself, might speak truth to power by means of sarcastic jokes and parody. We can insist that a tradition from pre-modern times such as this were still active in modern Korea like the case of Psy (Adamson 46).

The following table outlines the Hybridity process of the Korean *gwangdae* culture into the K-pop system.



**Table 2: Long-term Hybridity Process: from *Gwangdae* culture to K-pop**

	<b>Development of <i>Gwangdae</i>'s Expert System</b>	<b>Diffusion of Modernization</b>	<b>New Process of Hypermodernity</b>
<b>Pre-modern Times</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of the skill and artistry in singing <i>pansori</i>, dancing, <i>taltchum</i>, playing instruments, <i>pungmul</i>, puppet plays, <i>gokye</i>, <i>jultagi</i> and witty humorous chattering, etc</li> <li>(After the Mid Joseon Dynasty Period)</li> <li>- Social expansion of the <i>gwangdaes</i>' sphere of activity</li> <li>- The skills of <i>gwangdae</i> were developed through the competition system between <i>gwangdae</i> groups</li> <li>- More popular and creative performances were created, focusing in particular on itinerant <i>gwangdae</i> groups with great popularity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The growing popularity of <i>gwangdae</i> performances</li> <li>- Spread of folk performances to the public</li> <li>- Social spread of troupes of itinerant male entertainers, called <i>namsadang</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(After the Mid Joseon Dynasty Period)</li> <li>- There were increasing original performances including <i>pungja</i> and <i>haehak</i> targeting the general public.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Modern to Contemporary Times</b></p>	<p><i>Gwangdae</i> culture remains within a sociocultural system instead of a national system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Japanese Colonial Period: E.g. <i>Gwonbon</i> (which was originally <i>Gisaeng Johab</i>)</li> <li>- 1950s -1980s: Capabilities as <i>gwangdae</i> were exchanged and strengthened under the cultural system including the US army's show stages, the music listening room as the source of youth culture and TV showcases.</li> <li>- 1990s: Broadcast system, record industry system, management system</li> </ul> <p>“SeoTaiji and Boys” became a model for Korea’s systematic idol training system centering on dance and singing.</p>	<p>Social spread of Korean pop music combined with British and American styles by musicians from US army stages and youth culture</p>	<p>1950s to 1980s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergence of performance group with a new sensation, consisting of musicians from the eighth US army stage and youth culture, inspired by British and American music.</li> <li>- Through the remarkable activities of these musicians and the next generation of musicians who were influenced by them, various musical genres were combined to create Korean pop music.</li> </ul> <p>After the late 1980s: - A lot of dance music and singers appeared.</p> <p>1990s: - The appearance of “SeoTaiji and Boys” contributed greatly to the strengthening and development of capabilities and talents of Korean entertainers.</p>
<p><b>Since the 2000s</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The establishment of the total management system and “idol training system,” centering on large entertainment agencies.</li> <li>- Through the “trainee system” within large entertainment agencies, the skills and capacity of young Korean entertainers for dance and singing have been strengthened.</li> </ul>	<p>The global spread of K-pop culture through SNS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The <i>heung / sinmyeong</i> and <i>pungja / haehak</i>, referred to as <i>gwangdae</i> culture element, remain in K-pop music and dance.</li> </ul>

## 5. K-POP STRATEGIES BASED ON THE *GWANGDAE* SPIRIT

As seen above, Korean traditional K-pop, as the inheritor of a long-extant traditional practice, developed into current K-pop by going through various changes and innovations to meet the demands of the times and the market. In this section, the ways to sustain and enhance the competitiveness of K-pop are explored in terms of the study's theoretical perspectives, and further the examination of the culture hybridity theory of K-pop. The direction of a *gwangdae* strategy will also be examined.

### 1. From *Gwangdae* to K-pop: between Tradition and Cultural Hybridity

The K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* spirit can be summarized as outlined below, based on the viewpoint of the study's theories laid out above.

First, in deriving the K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* spirit, the approach needs to be addressed from a diachronic angle. Today's K-pop has been handed down from the traditional *gwangdae* culture through family tradition, private educational relationships, and the socio-cultural environment. In this paper, the characteristics of K-pop are considered on a chronological basis based on the characteristics of the *gwangdae* spirit. Moreover, special genre-based contents such as the expert training system, introduction of a competitive system through audition and self-growth opportunities, and the combination of satire against the class culture and masks, are most conspicuous. Moreover, the tradition of a dynamic culture based on the characteristics of cultural language called "Korean" is related on the diachronic level.

Second, it is necessary to fully consider the feature of cultural hybridity in order to understand the K-pop phenomenon. A closer look at the cultural hybridity factors as a K-pop new *gwangdae* strategy reveals that a popular trend can be expanded and reproduced by establishing and spreading a star system from the outside. Spatially, it is possible to know that related main functions concentrate in specific areas where cultural exchanges with overseas countries are active. Trends propagate in a relatively short time through broadcasting mechanisms; under circumstances where mass culture has been centralized in Seoul, the center of the economy and culture, and the three major broadcasters and relevant entertainment management systems have been concentrated in Yeouido, Seoul. This can be defined as a mass-production strategy from the cultural industry tradition from the west for the new K-pop system that has combined with the advanced and diversified IT environment

such as social media, connected to the image-making and promotional strategy of stars, which then combines to make everything about stars a trend.

Third, considering an industrial brand strategy that takes advantage of the *gwangdae* system and spirit according to the trends and changes of the times. According to the strategy of industrial change and brand, the *gwangdaes* and the *gwangdae* system have been established as differentiated cultural characteristics by going through various innovations and cultivations to be inherited and developed as today's new *gwangdae* brand. The *gwangdae* capabilities of individuals and of the times are seen not only as forms of excellence of the times but have the potential to be inherited and developed by the next generation as acquired individual, cultural and social characteristics such as epigenetic inheritance. Excellent cultural and artistic talents form a family tradition and heritage and lead to the reproduction and development of a musical temperament through repetitive training and performance. This is well explained in the *gwangdae* system, the star quality of the *gwangdae*, the franchise strategy of star contents, and the trans-media strategy. Therefore, the brand building of stars and contents formed by *gwangdaes* and the *gwangdae* system over a long time can be defined as the new industrial brand strategy, meaning that the capacity of an acquired new *gwangdae* culture gene continues to be expanded and creates new added-values.

The difference between the K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* spirit and existing or traditional one is that the former emphasizes the institutionalization of the training system and the transmission of the capabilities accumulated through such a system. In other words, the K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* spirit regards the role of the training system as important and demands that the training-related functions led by educational institutions and the entertainment agencies are further strengthened in terms of system. Thus, K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* system aims to build a system that is participated in by government departments, educational institutions, and field staff. In educational institutions, knowledge and capabilities necessary for the K-pop scene can be cultivated; national policy can be aimed at the example of the US "triple-helix" system, where policies needed by educational institutions and management companies are mapped out and supported.

## 2. K-pop Strategy Orientation based on the *Gwangdae* Spirit

Based on the previous argument, the direction of a K-pop strategy related to the *gwangdae* is summarized into a model as follows. The following model shows the direction for reference by various stakeholders in formulating strategy based on the understanding of the *gwangdae* spirit.

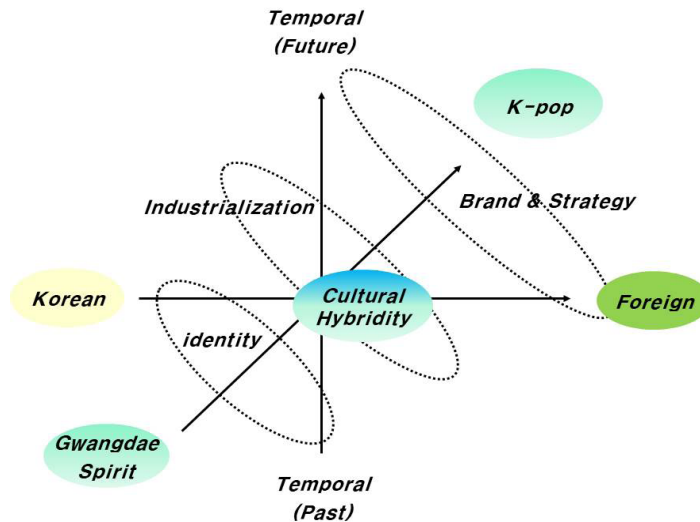


Fig. 1: The contemporary K-pop *gwangdae* strategy orientation (model)

First of all, from a temporal point of view, diachronic factors are considered related to tradition along the flow of time from the past to the future. In this way, considering the flow of time is an attempt to confirm that the *gwangdae* spirit is meaningful from a time-based point of view. The institution and spirit of *gwangdae* do not remain as a simple historical relic, but its traces are still extant in K-pop through changes and applications to various content. In terms of cultural hybridity, traditional Korean elements show the possibility of developing into new cultures, making contact with foreign cultures.

This trend reflects the spatial characteristics and is based on the fact that K-pop reflects the characteristics of a super-national culture. But, as mentioned earlier, for it was formed in the specific, physical location of South Korea, the characteristics from Korean traditional elements can encounter foreign cultures and develop evolutionarily. Step by step, these features will be able to recognize even to the

stage of strategy development where the identity of one country develops into a cultural industry and develops into a representative some kind of brand. A brand culture approach offers perspectives on how brand actors co-create, circulate, and re-configure existing meanings of brands and cultures, and how traditional brands become vehicles for meaning co-creation across national boundaries (Schroeder, Borgerson and Wu). Some Chinese cases showed how the selective definition of historical and traditional cultural resources, in conjunction with global systems, had the potential to transform a local and regional brand into a global brand (Zhiyan, Borgerson and Schroeder).

Through these stages, it is judged that the cultural value of the Korean *gwangdae* can be generated by the universal phenomenon called K-pop.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The recent rise of K-pop has led to greater social and academic attention regarding the origins and history of K-pop. Accordingly, this study, focusing on the connection between the *gwangdae* culture and K-pop, examined what kinds of changes and innovation Korean popular culture has undergone, living up to the demands of the times, from ancient times to contemporary times.

This research viewed the modernization of the traditional *gwangdae* system as a continuous stream of creation from a macroscopic viewpoint, and assumed that creative energy based on the musical competitiveness of traditional music of previous periods could be the starting point of the Korean pop music legacy in the 21st century's K-pop period to establish a "Korean style" cultural identity. As mentioned above, tradition is not something made stale or worn over time, but matured during the years without losing its original meaning

The context in which the *gwangdae* culture developed to K-pop and the process of hybridization from traditional *gwangdae* culture to contemporary K-pop were addressed through a diachronic perspective. Through this analysis, it can be concluded that traditional *gwangdae* culture has been established as Korean-style cultural contents while going through various innovations and changes to meet the demands of the market based on periodical changes, cultural needs, and the public preferences. The upgrading of entertaining skills through transformation and recreation and the accumulation of capabilities of *gwangdae* culture through the spread and reproduction of popular culture eventually may be leading to the rise of today's K-pop culture. Through these arguments, some current cases of K-pop and K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* system were discussed. In other words, the



new *gwangdae* spirit and system are linked to the success factors of contemporary K-pop. Of course, in this process, the influence of foreign cultures has had a lot of influence when considered through the theoretical lens of cultural hybridity. Now, Korea needs a more strategic and elaborate policy for the K-pop industry and the new *gwangdaes'* role in the cultural phenomenon that is meaningful to understanding the idea and role of cultural hybridity. Surely, we believe that further discussion will follow this paper. Through the discussion of this paper, we are looking at the strategic implications that subsequent research should consider in relation to K-pop in the future. Beyond the current K-pop system, in order to develop future K-pop strategies based on the *gwangdae* system, it is necessary to pursue a strategy of creativity, propagation, transmission, and accumulation through the understanding of the international cultural exchange system, the old tradition and heritages preserved by the government and corporations, the advancement and innovation of the system of K-pop entertainment agencies, and the K-pop digital convergence strategy.

This study suggests that the *gwangdae* spirit should influence the viewpoints of the government, state, corporations and management, universities and educational institutions. Of course, many discussions and further research are necessary for this suggestion and to ensure the legitimacy of tradition and K-pop's relationships internationally. More effort and research are required for analyzing and measuring the actual, real-world manifestations of this paper's theoretical models. Accordingly, future research should match the support system from the perspective of collaboration between industry, academia, and other institutions because it will require a huge budget and many human resources. This is important in that the study can lead to national policy-oriented innovation related to a new economic model and realization of educational value, rather than contributing only to cultural and artistic traditions. Above all, K-pop based on tradition and philosophy can bolster the arguments of cultural hybridity and understanding professionals such as the *gwangdae*. In that sense, it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive and continuous study with the collaboration of industry, academia, and other institutions based on the coexistence of various academic viewpoints, instead of a partial study based on a narrow range of experiences.

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## Notes

1. This branch of research is being led mostly by the Advanced Center for Korean Studies. Notably, scholars who consider K-pop as a trans-national phenomenon have taken a very critical attitude towards this perspective (see G. Lee 159-161).
2. As we consider that *gwangdaes*, Korean traditional entertainers-performers, have unique characteristics that differ from those of the fool or clown in the European tradition, we have retained this Korean word without translating it.
3. Although *gwangdae* can be traced back to even before the Goryeo Dynasty period, this paper found its origin in the Goryeo Dynasty period, considering that *gwangdae* refers to a group socially defined by the caste system, part of the national system, and a folk art group formally mobilized for official events. Many scholars mention that the term “*gwangdae*” began to appear in the literature since Goryeo Dynasty and thus, they judge groups of *gwangdae* to have been established since that period (Chung 143-145; Seo & Kim 201-202; Yoon 573-582). However, as the entertainers who played the role of *gwangdae* existed before the Goryeo Dynasty and some scholars consider that *gwangdae* groups have originated in performers migrating from China or Manchuria in Silla period before the Goryeo Dynasty, the origin of *gwangdae* may be discussed from various angles and viewpoints.
4. Originally this definition is from Rowe and Schelling’s literature, *Memory and Modernity: Popular culture in Latin America*.
5. *Narye*, court official events, was abolished in 1634 under Injo of Joseon (1595-1649), the 16<sup>th</sup> ruler of the Joseon dynasty, and after Sukjong (1661-1720), the 19<sup>th</sup> ruler, it began again but was held intermittently. Then it disappeared officially in Jeongjo (Chung 111-112).
6. This study attempts to partially accept the cultural genetic theory already stated in the introduction. The *heung* and *sinmyeong*, and *pungja* and *haehak* are referred to as Korea’s distinctive *gwangdae* spirit in this study, on the basis of the surveys related to Koreans’ cultural genes, carried out by the Advanced Center for Korean Studies in 2012 and 2013, and the studies based on them. According to the 2012 survey by the Advanced Center for Korean Studies, the 10 selected Korean cultural genes were harmony/concordance, *heung/sinmyeong*, courtesy, composure, dynamics, naturalness, community, *han* (a deep-rooted melancholic pain), fermentation, and patience/tenacity. In the “2013 survey of Korean cultural genes

by generation and age,” in addition, harmony/concordance, *heung/sinmyeong*, emotional bond/love, passion/challenging spirit, and community culture were selected as the essential elements of the Korean cultural genes that have lasted for more than 50 years (Joo et al.; Kim et al.). Researchers in this field, while they have acknowledged that the Korean cultural genes have had significant effects on the global success of the Korean wave and K-pop, stress that more academic studies and scientific analysis are needed to raise the persuasive power of the theory because it is not yet complete (C. Park 30-33). More recently, the Korean cultural genetic theory is laying a more solid foundation as there are studies emerging that scientifically demonstrate the claim that K-pop has inherited the musical and aesthetic elements of Korean traditional music such as *heung* and *haehak* (refer to SW. Lee).

7. *Enka* were Japanese appropriations of Western harmony (Young-mee Lee 7).
8. Most of scholars or experts on Korean popular music says the eighth US military's show stages played a huge role in deep connection between Korean popular music and Western pop (refer to H. Shin, Y. Lee and SW. Lee).
9. Korean pop music researchers emphasize the great effect of the “music listening room” on the spread of British and American pop in Korea at that time. Since the end of the 1960s, foreign pop songs had been spread and consumed around cultural spaces such as the “music listening room.” As such public spaces became part of the cultural institution within Korean society, they contributed to producing new young musicians who made and sang the songs in which Korean lyrics were combined with “American-style” genres including soul, rock and folk. Soon, known as singers from “youth culture,” they came to acquire the status of pop stars, with their performances broadcast in showcase programs on TV, the major mass media of the day, along with the singers from the US army performance stage (H. Shin 142-159).
10. Most popular music critics and researchers believe that a K-pop boom originated in the late 1990s, when the first-generation idols, particularly H.O.T., began to actively engage in overseas activities (SW. Lee 59; H. Shin 45; JY. Yang 23).
11. The trainee system operated by large entertainment agencies is one of the key elements in the system used by the current agencies to churn out teenage idols, which sets Korean management agencies far apart from the foreign ones mentioned above in terms of their system. The trainee system in Korea has so many unique factors that it is even nicknamed the “Korean-style idol training system.” In particular, the trainees, mostly as teenagers, have to go through years of intensive training in dance and singing, be regularly assessed by their agency in terms of their capabilities and skills, and undergo thorough privacy management and control for image-making (G. Lee 120-124).

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