

THE CENTRE FOR KOREAN RESEARCH PROUDLY PRESENTS

"PROMOTING THE NATION THROUGH FOREIGN BODIES: SOFT CULTURAL POWER AND K-POP COVER DANCE"

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Abstract: This study investigates the ways the South Korean government and other affiliated organizations are using the popular practice of performing choreography to Korean popular music, or K-pop cover dance, to build nationalism in Koreans and soft power for Korea overseas. Cover dance practices generally have one benefit for the groups whose work is covered -- cover dance can strengthen the perception of popularity of a song or a group. However, the benefits that accrue elsewhere are wide-ranging. Dance instructors may find eager paying students, language classes may recruit new students, and the Republic of Korea harnesses the enthusiasm of dancers to promote everything related to Korea. This study is based on a close reading of KBS television program K-pop World Festival and supplemented by my experiences, observations, interviews, and data collection. As Korea struggles with a low economic growth rate, high youth unemployment, and a host of social problems that are increasing bitterness and dissatisfaction, this KBS program and many similar cultural productions provide a different perspective. In this paper I argue that the breathless, unconvincingly astounded coverage of K-pop fans from around the world on Korean television programs essentializes foreign places and people with one singular focus: to prove the attractiveness of Korea to a Korean audience.

Bio: CedarBough T. Saeji (Ph.D. UCLA, 2012) is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia, putting the final touches on a monograph on Korean theatrical heritage. Previously at Korea University and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Saeji is a scholar of the presentation of Korean culture, whether intangible cultural heritage or resolutely modern popular music. Publications have appeared in Asian Theatre Journal, Journal of Korean Studies, Acta Koreana and edited books on women in Asian theatre, Korean screen culture, and Korean folk theatre.



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