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*Hegemonic Mimicry: Korean Popular Culture of the
Twenty-First Century* by Kyung Hyun Kim (review)

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treatments to foreigners from developed countries favorably, they tend to treat those from developing countries less favorably. This tendency proves that the dichotomy between the civilized and barbarians has been reproduced and is still dominant in Korean society.

On the other hand, this book leaves some questions. Bohnet elucidates that the court recategorized the Ming descendants as *hwangjojin*. Furthermore, the Chosŏn dynasty expressed loyalism to the Ming through the ritual of *Taebodan*. However, the relationship between Chosŏn and the Qing empire became relatively more cordial than in the seventeenth century. As many Korean historians point out, King Chŏngjo volunteered to dispatch emissaries to celebrate the Qianlong emperor's eightieth birthday. It indicates that the Chosŏn monarch acknowledged the Qing as the new big country. In this grand banquet, the Qianlong emperor recognized Chosŏn as the most loyal tributary system. Then how should we comprehend the gap between the ritualization of Ming loyalism and diplomacy with the Qing? Why did Chosŏn express the Ming loyalism while improving its relationship with the Qing? I would like to suggest to illustrate how Chosŏn officials accepted Chŏngjo's diplomacy with the Qing. With this improvement, this book will better contribute to understanding the ritualization of Ming loyalism in terms of diplomacy.

Despite several critiques, I believe that *Turning Toward Edification* contributes to the new comprehension of premodern Korean history. This monograph convincingly verifies that Chosŏn was a multiethnic society. Taking this argument into account, Chosŏn was not a "hermit" kingdom.

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Hegemonic Mimicry: Korean Popular Culture of the Twenty-First Century, by Kyung Hyun Kim. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021. 321 pages.

With the ever-growing global popularity of K-pop idol groups including BTS, critical acclaim for the film *Parasite*, and finally, the worldwide hit of *Squid Game*, Korean cultural content is making unprecedented inroads in the West. Accordingly, global media and academia have attempted to explain how it is gaining its outsized influence on global culture. Although it has been over 20 years since *Hallyu*, or the global reception of Korean

popular culture, has been discussed through various texts and phenomena, the new phase of Hallyu calls for new perspectives and more discussion. *Hegemonic Mimicry: Korean Popular Culture of the Twenty-First Century* by Kyung Hyun Kim is a timely book that provides an updated overview of Korean popular culture. Instead of using the term *Hallyu*, the book anatomizes Korean cultural content, thereby helping readers understand the (re) construction of *Hallyu* phenomena throughout last two decades.

Addressing the overarching question, “how did South Korea achieve so much success without necessarily developing its own unique technology, styles, and culture in the twenty-first century,” (p. x) the book explores the general geography of contemporary Korean popular culture through seven chapters. The first chapter provides a brief history of K-culture. The six subsequent chapters include interpretations of various facets of K-culture. Chapter 2 discusses how “blackness” and issues of authenticity are articulated and inflected in the Korean hip-hop music scene. Chapter 3 pays attention to the dominance of body-switch films in Korea to argue digitization and dividuation of subjectivity. Chapter 4 examines a Korean variety game show titled *Running Man* and its popularity in other Asian countries. In Chapter 5, *Extreme Job* and *Parasite*, two seemingly unrelated films, are paired to discuss the sociocultural implications of eating in contemporary Korean culture. In Chapter 6, Kim introduces the idea of ‘meme-ification’ while discussing how Samsung and the K-pop industry has innovated. The final chapter attempts to read *Muban Dojeon*, the most successful Korean TV show throughout the last decade, using fundamental cultural elements such as *han* and *hŕng*. Underlying this expansive exploration over time and between genres is the concept of “mimicry.” As implied by the question quoted above and the title of the book, Kim frames Korean popular culture using the concept of “hegemonic mimicry.” He suggests the term to indicate that Korean culture has employed mimicry as a crucial tool to build cultural power by blurring the lines between original and copy, thus offsetting the monolithic power of Western culture. Assuming various approaches and perspectives from ethnic studies, media studies, literature studies, and regional studies, the book probes the dynamics of Korean popular culture.

The juxtaposition of various phenomena, texts, and philosophical concepts is where this book receives positive points. The book links *Straight Outta Compton* with *Sopyonje*, crossing the different ethnic identities. It also traverses time by pairing Choe Sung-hui’s dance from the Japanese colonial period with Psy’s *Gangnam Style*, and breaks the boundaries between genres by discussing similarities between *Muban Dojeon* and *madangguk*. Thus, its

cross-media and transnational imagination inspire readers to put contemporary Korean popular culture content in varying contexts and to discover its sociohistorical and cultural political implications. Kim also draws on the philosophical concepts of Deleuze, Marx, Du Bois, Baudrillard, Barthes, Fanon, Lukacs, Freud, Mbembe, Benjamin, and so on to explain the phenomena of Korean popular culture. Despite some parts that require a more in-depth explanation, this attempt to theorize various facets of popular culture offers readers an insightful perspective on the media we consume every day.

Despite many virtues, this book includes some perspectives that might trigger a debate. For example, the statement that K-pop is “a governmental outfit that makes and promotes music that remains nonpolitical and uncritical of South Korea’s reigning neoliberal patriarchy and its values” (p. 51) or that K-pop was “birthed as an industry programmed for export to other countries” (p. 53) can be misleading arguments if not supported by enough data and references. Some western research and journalism that focus on industrial and governmental level of cultural flow have argued that the Korean government has played a major role in creating the wave of popularity of Korean pop culture. However, this perspective can be challenged by many audience studies and fandom studies of Hallyu that have revealed the critical implications and autonomous dynamics in the reception of Korean culture.

Also, the book raises a question of postcolonial and dewesternizing ways of studying Koreanness. While touching upon various aspects of Korean popular culture, the book regularly returns to the question of whether Korea is now “leaving behind its bruised, traumatic past as a colonial or neocolonial country trapped in its own *han*” (p. 80). Discussing Korea’s colonial status, either under Japan or the United States, and the past dictatorship as the major historical background of Korean cultural content, Kim continuously addresses the post-traumatic turn of the content. Albeit logical leaps at some points, the attempts to seek post-traumatic *jouissance* are meaningful. On the other hand, the book still draws on some concepts that might essentialize Korean culture. For example, *han* and *hŭng* are frequently employed to explain the structure of feeling of Koreans. While this book’s employment of two concepts seems adequate for some readers, other readers might look for a more nuanced approach. Another concept that is frequently used to interpret Korean culture is Confucianism. Although it has been a persuasive framework from which many variations have sprung to describe diverse aspects of Asian society, it embeds a danger of blinding the differences within Asia.

While the concept of cultural affinity or cultural discount has lost its legitimacy to explain the popularity of Korean popular culture in Hallyu Studies, the explanation that Korean variety shows are well-received in East Asia based on the shared values of Confucianism seems to be outdated. Therefore, we are still left with a question that has been lingering in Korean Studies. How can we talk about contemporary Korean culture without bringing up ideas such as *han*, *hŭng*, *sinmyŏng*, and Confucianism to distinguish it from Western culture? How can we discuss Koreanness without essentializing it? To borrow a term from Deleuzian philosophy that this book utilizes, it is an ongoing task to reveal “difference-in-itself” of Korean culture.

To fill in the gaps left behind by this book, more exploration and discussion will be needed. At a time when *Squid Game* is making history by receiving nominations and awards in America, the book successfully opens up the discussion and debate over the new turn of *Hallyu*.

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Between the Streets and the Assembly: Social Movements, Political Parties, and Democracy in Korea, by Yoonkyung Lee. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 244 pages.

Some of us, who have tasted the enthusiasm of activism, may have probably been driven to despair to see that our desire for social change gets blunted as soon as it is placed on a legislator's desk in a form of a bill. We, perhaps more of us, also wonder how activism mold and empower progressive reform agendas before they are presented to electorates. This volume peaks into what happens in between. Specifically, the author examines three different pathways through which reform agendas can be realized in politics. Overall, this book makes a crucial scholarly contribution by bridging the intellectual gap between studies on institutional politics and social movements.

Between the Streets and the Assembly largely consists of two parts. While the detailed elaborations on the three roads taken by former pro-democracy activists are at the foreground of this volume, the first two chapters successfully pave the way for that highlight by sketching the extensive historical background of Korean party politics and civil society before and