Faraway, So Close:

Produce 48 and the Cultural-Industrial Collaboration between K-Pop and J-Pop

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This study aims to critically examine the possibility and limits of constructing a better relationship by cultural-industrial collaborations
between Korea and Japan having political and historical confrontations. In the field of popular music, two countries have actively interacted with each other, *Produce 101*, a Korean survival music audition program, is a recent case of the cultural exchange. While it was highly influenced by Japanese girl band AKB48, the program has become internationally successful and in 2018 it officially worked together with the very original format that it referred with the name *Produce 48*. There were some meaningful achievements from the collaboration, However, there have been conflicts and controversies mostly originated from political, economic and historical tensions between two countries. While the cultural-industrial collaboration between K-Pop and J-Pop such as *Produce 48* can contribute to the improvement of relations between two countries, still nationalism plays an important role in the collaboration that continuously tends to make this transnational project re-nationalized.

Keywords: Produce 101, Produce 48, K-Pop, J-Pop, IZ*ONE, Popular music, Hallyu, Idol, Collaboration, Nationalism

1. *Produce 101* and *Produce 48*

*Produce 101* is a Korean survival audition program which began its first season in 2016. It is created by Korean cable music channel Mnet owned by CJ E&M, one of the biggest media conglomerates in South Korea. This program is to form a project K-pop male or female band each season.\(^1\) Competitors for this program are mostly trainees who have not made their

\(^1\) In the 1\(^{st}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) season it formed female bands (*I.O.I.* and *IZ*ONE) while in the 2\(^{nd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) season it formed boy bands (*Wanna One* and *X1*).
debut yet; however, some of them are active musicians (usually called ‘idols’ in K-Pop) who made their debut already but have not been successful enough to let their names known to the wider audience. It starts with 101 competitors from diverse entertainment agencies and narrows down to 11 finalists who will debut as members of a project group managed by CJ E&M within a preset period. Different from typical talent competition programs such as American Idol and Britain’s Got Talent, the format of Produce 101 is noted for having no judges and depending only upon audience participation (vote) to make decisions. In the procedure, instead of judges, there are ‘mentors’ giving assessments and advises on competitor’s performance. Through the first season of the show, a K-pop girl band I.O.I. made their debut in 2016 and was active until the end of January 2017. And for the second season, a K-pop boy band Wanna One was formed in August 2017 and officially disbanded at the end of December 2018. Both two bands were very popular among global K-Pop fans as well as their domestic fans mostly due to the attention they got through the program.

Regardless of the popularity and attention from the audience, ‘Big 3’ K-Pop agencies (SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment) have adopted a lukewarm attitude towards Produce 101 since they have enough numbers of their own trainees waiting for their debut.

2) Those mentors are famous producers, musicians, and other K-Pop industry insiders,
3) However, they had their final concert in January 2018 with allowance from the agency.
4) Only JYP participated in the first season and since the second season none of Big 3 agencies have participated in the show. Also, other big agencies such as Cube Entertainment and Woolim Entertainment are reluctant to let their trainees and/or idols to participate in the show though a few trainees from those agencies participated in the survival audition,
In fact, they have their own systems and timetables for training and evaluating their trainees, choosing talented ones for forming a new group, and making their debut. Also, they can promote their new bands more efficiently than other small and mid-level agencies because they have closer relationship with Korean media industries as well as with better financial power (Lee, 2016). However, small and mid-level agencies that desperately need more attention from the media and the audience but do not have enough chances consider *Produce 101* as a great opportunity; therefore, they are eager to encourage their trainees/idols to be competitors of the show. 5) Often this show has been considered to be a ‘fairer competition’ than the real world dominated by the power of big agencies.

The third season of *Produce 101* aired in 2018, however, changed its format. When I.O.I. performed on the stage of 2017 ‘Mnet Asian Music Awards (MAMA)’ in Yokohama, Japan, Japanese female band AKB48 suddenly joined their stage and sang *Pick Me* (the title song of *Produce 101*’s first season) together. And right after their performance Mnet suggested that the following season might have something to do with AKB48. Finally, in April 2018 Mnet announced that the third season of *Produce 101* would be titled *Produce 48* and the network would collaborate with AKB48. The collaboration meant not only trainees/idols from Korean entertainment agencies but also those Japanese professional idols of AKB48 would participate in the competition. According to Mnet, *Produce 48* would bring 96 girls together both from Korean agencies and AKB48, but would be voted only by Korean viewers and not by global fans including Japanese audience.

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5) 46 entertainment agencies participated in the first season of the show, and for the second season 54 agencies let their trainees/idols to participate in the show.
And the 12 finalists selected regardless of nationality would be promoted as a project group for two and a half years, which would be active longer than two project groups from previous seasons.

Focusing on *Produce 101* and mostly *Produce 48*, this study explores how the case shows mutual influences and cultural exchanges between K-Pop and J-Pop idol industry. Thanks to *Hallyu* (Korean Wave), K-Pop influenced by global popular music is now influencing it vice versa. In this procedure, there are conflicts as well as the increase of interactions between them. Through the collaboration *Produce 48*, K-Pop industry shows its willingness to be transnational across the border. And yet, it still cannot be free from a strong nationalism dominant in Korea. This ambivalence is mostly based on its unavoidable aspects that K-Pop will encounter when a non-Western and non-English-based music goes global.

### 2. Globalization of K-Pop

Since K-Pop is a part of wider globalization of culture, it is necessary to consider two important theories of globalization culture – homogenization and hybridization – before discussing globalization of popular music and the national identity construction through popular music.

#### 2.1. Globalization as homogenization and hybridization

When discussing globalization of culture, the homogenization theory was the most widely held belief, especially before the 1990s. It does not only mean a convergence toward a common set of cultural traits and practices
(including cultural products themselves), but also refers to a homogenization of world cultures and communication systems such as cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976; Hamelink, 1983, Herman and McChesney, 1997). According to cultural homogenization, the cultures of less developed countries would be affected by cultures from more developed countries and finally they may lose their own cultural identities or just become another form of commodity without local aspects (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). Mostly those influential countries are America and other Western European countries therefore homogenization has been described as ‘Westernization’ or even ‘Americanization’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). However, it is not only those ‘Western’ countries but also other countries politically, economically, and thus culturally more powerful than their neighboring countries have influenced them; moreover, sometimes it is a political economically and culturally dominant group of people who homogenizes others even within a country (Iwabuchi, 2001; Chen, 2003).

For Korea, there were always serious concerns about such ‘Japanisation (usually described as ‘inundation of Wae-Saek [Japanese style] culture’)’ of Korea even after the independence of Korean peninsula from Japanese colonialism along with worries about Americanization (Appadurai, 2000; Kim, 2017). And because of its colonial experience by Japan, its official resistance towards the flood of Wae-Saek has been stronger than the penetration of US (and Western) culture though Korea has been highly influenced by Japan in fact.

However, the homogenization theory has been criticized based on its limitations. As Varan (1998) points out, the homogenization theory often exaggerates the strength of global media products while neglects the
resourcefulness of each cultural system. Morris (2002) also argues that based on the ability of cultures to assimilate new influences, the dominant global culture (mostly from the West) cannot easily wipe out identities.

Thus, some cultural studies approaches tend to see globalization of culture as ‘hybridization’. They suggest the way how different cultures have been mixed and blended to create cultures with different styles rather than a universal sameness under the influence of globalization while homogenization theory tends to assume a negative impact of global (Western) cultural products (Pieterse, 1995; Hall, 1998; Bhabha, 2004). The hybridization theory stresses the creative and active uses and appropriations of Western culture by local audiences (Hannerz, 1992; Thompson, 1995; Pieterse, 1995, Hall, 1998). For example, a well-known study of Liebes and Katz (1993) about the global reception of American TV series *Dallas* showed different reactions and interpretations from different countries according to their own social and cultural context.

Moreover, the hybridization theory does not only include the ‘active audience’ in periphery, but also includes multi-dimensional cultural exchange among the center, semi-periphery, and periphery. In other words, cultural products and aspects do not always flow from the center to periphery, but sometimes in reverse. Nochimson’s study on gangster movies (2007) shows several Hong Kong gangster films of which their origins might refer to old American gangster movies are exported to recent Hollywood productions. The case of *telenovela* and K-Pop influenced by other dominant cultures in terms of business models and formats but has become successful among global audience also shows this multi-dimensional cultural exchange.

And yet, while homogenization theory cannot explain active interpretations
and appropriations of dominant cultures by local audience, hybridization theory does not fully account for the inequality in cultural exchanges between the center and periphery. Wittrock (2000) argues that though local cultural identities might not disappear, in the process of globalization of culture, Western culture and its values diffused across the globe as ideals or references that local cultures should adapt to. Havens (2006) also notes this inequality that in global cultural markets, it is still Western executives’ and audiences’ opinions and practices that more highly respected among others.

Therefore, most scholars exploring globalization of culture tend to see that the two theories are not just contradictory; rather, it is interdependent (Pieterse, 1995; Hannerz, 1998; Archer et al., 2009). Tomlinson (1999) argues that while globalization of culture may weaken local cultural identities, it still offers a new understanding of global culture that can be the basis of new creation.

2.2. Globalization of popular music and national identity

Among different cultural fields, popular music has been a particularly good area for exploring globalization of culture because the interdependence of homogenization and hybridization is clearly shown in globalization of popular music. Especially, modern and contemporary popular music from different parts of the world clearly shows the evidence of hybridization.

It is easy to see that Western popular musical genres (mostly from US) have homogenized local music that now people usually produce and listen to rock, hip hop, jazz, electronic dance music, etc. rather than their domestic forms of music. However, it is also easy to find that those genres are not
exactly the same with their origins. Moreover, they are different from each other as well. Mexican rock is different from that of US, and K-pop is different from J-Pop based on how those referential musical genres have been accepted and interpreted, then hybridized, by local audience (Zolov, 1999; Han, 2011). Even some scholars argue that the aesthetics of modern popular music is the aesthetics of hybrid that much of global popular musical genres is the result of African diaspora, and local communities and their intervention have played important roles in the globalization of music (Frith, 1996; Hall, 1998; Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000, Ho, 2003; Taylor, 2007).

And yet, it is interesting to see global popular music has been appropriated by local people in quite the opposite way, which is also an important aspect of hybridization. In some cases local people used Western music’s globality to distance themselves from national traditional culture, and as a counter cultural means to struggle against authoritarianism based on nationalism from dominant groups – such as rock and roll in Mexico, tropicália in Brazil, and hip hop in South Africa (Zolov, 1999; Duun, 2001; Veloso, 2002; Magubane, 2006). However, in other cases, a certain genre has become a national cultural brand of the country though it did not fully originate from the local tradition. Samba music in Brazil might be a good example that though it has been praised as ‘authentic Brazilian music’ both by local Brazilian and global audience, in fact the notion of samba’s authenticity as national Brazilian music was not naturally constructed by the audience but itself invented and even cultivated despite its hybridity (Vianna, 1999; see also Hertzman, 2013). In this procedure, samba has played an important role to construct national identity of Brazil regardless of its origin (McCann, 2004).

K-Pop has also been considered a representative ‘hybrid music’ that “the
hybridization of Korean, Japanese, and Western musics has generated a new form of K-Pop, which is not just a mixture of these elements” (Chu, 2017: 14; see also Kim, 2015). However, it is still strongly tied to Korean cultural identity. First, musically it is sung mostly in Korean language, which differentiate it from any other global popular music mostly sung in English or other local music in their own languages. Second, it is produced under the very ‘Koreanised’ system such as ‘several years of hard training from the early teens to become an idol’, ‘trainees and idols totally managed and controlled by the agency’, ‘having sincerity and assiduousness – most important (and quite neo-liberal) values to be successful K-Pop idol’, etc. (Kim and Park, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2013; Lee, 2016; Bang and Oh, 2018; Hong and Jung, 2018).

K-Pop has such an ambivalence that regardless of its hybridity based on local and global music aspects successful globalization, it is still Korean national culture with pride with the emphasis on its nationality ‘K’ and has been used to construct Korean national branding (Shim, 2008; Jin, 2014).

2.3. Being culturally odorless vs. fragrant

Different from Anglo-American popular music which has dominated the global music industry in terms of business and musical forms, non-Western and non-English-based music can be unfamiliar and therefore too strange for global audience despite of its hybridity with Anglo-American (and Western) and local musical elements. In this situation, there can be two different strategies for them to appeal to the global audience – to make it more general to be easily accepted or maintain and even emphasize its ‘exoticism’ to
differentiate from typical global popular music.

When discussing Japanese culture in international markets, Iwabuchi (2001) notes that the international success of some Japanese culture products such as music, TV series, and animation is mostly due to their ‘cultural odorless’ rather than distinct Japan-ness. He argues that when aiming at global markets Japanese media industry chose a strategy of ‘eliminating Japanese fragrance’ because different from American products to which positive global values have always been attached, it would be better for Japanese ones to hide or not directly show its nationality to be easily received by global audience (ibid.). His argument mostly depends upon cultural discount theory that when the cultural products are consumed, with culturally proximate goods experiencing less cultural discount while products from a quite different cultures may get more discounted (Park, 2004). Therefore, when showing their generality rather than difference, the value of Japanese cultural products might not be seriously discounted by international audience. Among others, Iwabuchi (2001) argues that J-Pop is one of the successful products along with animation since popular music is the field where the loss of value is less serious than any other cultural industries when going global. English albums released for international markets by famous J-Pop singers such as Seiko Matsuda (松田聖子), Toshinobu Kubota (久保田利伸), and Hikaru Utada (宇多田ヒカル) might be practical examples of ‘making it odorless’ strategy.

However, it is not always true that since non-Western culture in global markets usually have been appealed to the niche market that seeks for alternatives or ‘something different’ from general global culture (Havens, 2006). While O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2000) argue that it is more
of a nation’s reputation rather than its identity, still it is exoticism that draws attention from global audience towards non-Western culture. Therefore, this tendency indicates that even a cultural discount occurs at different levels according to the origin of a certain cultural product (Park, 2004). For example, world music as a musical genre from non-Western countries has been promoted as something fresh, new, exciting, and more importantly, exotic, which helped anchor it as an independent genre in the global music industry (Taylor, 1997). For non-Western music aiming at global success, it is important to turn their successful local products into national brands and not to sound too Western because Western listeners expect ‘Others’ to produce hybrid music – “taking on a touch, but not too much, of the West” (Taylor, 2007: 144).

In this regard, K-Pop as hybrid music going global also has been moving back and forth between ‘culturally odorless’ and ‘culture with fragrance’. Most of K-Pop bands’ names are English, and there lots of English words and phrases in their lyrics. Also, there have been efforts to make K-Pop more ‘odorless’ with the help of international producers and composers such as the case of Girl’s Generation’s single “The Boys” produced by American producers and with full English lyrics. However, still K-Pop bands are showing their Korean-ness in terms of their ethnicity, languages, visual images and its unique business model. For instance, BTS can successfully bring their Korean-ness (and therefore being fragrant and even exotic) to the forefront by using traditional cultural elements in Korean lyrics and music video images of the single “Idol” though there are a number of hybridized images of Korean, Chinese, American, and other Western cultural elements.
3. From ‘Being Influenced’ to ‘Influencing’

3.1. K-Pop Influenced by J-Pop

When discussing Produce 101, it is necessary to mention AKB48. When Mnet firstly launched Produce 101 in 2016, they were soon harshly criticized by the audience and media alike that the show seemed to audaciously plagiarize AKB48, especially its most important annual event ‘general election (総選挙 [sousenkyo]).’ AKB48 includes more than 120 members as of January 2019,6 but not every member can participate in the release of singles/albums or get media exposure. Through the general election fans can vote for their favorite members into the representative line up for one of their annual singles and TV promotion activities. Top 16 members voted more than others are mainly promoted as ‘All Star (選抜 [senbatsu], originally meaning ‘being selected’),’ and one of the members is selected as the ‘Center’ – the representative member among others. Therefore, it was no wonder that quite a number of viewers could find the fan vote system of Produce 101 was almost the same as AKB48’s general election. Moreover, several detailed events depicted in episodes of Produce 101 such as reactions from contestants when getting flu vaccinations or candid camera on some participants had already been depicted in NHK BS’s AKB Show before.7) Regarding the suspicion of plagiarism, Mnet insisted two systems are quite different.8)

Fortunately for Mnet, these issues simply faded away after the successful first season of *Produce 101*. However, even if *Produce 101* has now become a very K-Pop-esque show, it cannot be denied that at least AKB48 was its most influential reference in the beginning.

Besides the show *Produce 101*, in fact, the essence of K-Pop industry itself – the idol and agency system – has been highly influenced by the Japanese idol music industry. Musically, K-Pop is considered as global hybrid music since it has mostly refers to American contemporary R’n’B and hip hop and Europe-based electronic dance music (usually called EDM recently) though there are distinctive Korean sentiments such as Korean lyrics (with a hint of English words) and unique melodies. However, its fundamental business model has mainly originated from Japan (Kim, 2013; Hwang, 2016; Lee, 2016).

First, the meaning and usage of the term ‘idol’ is closer to Japanese usage of idol (アイドル in Japanese) rather than that of Western cultural industries (Han, 2011). In Korean and Japanese cultural contexts, the term idol usually indicates musicians recruited, trained, and managed by big and small entertainment agencies rather than typical recording companies. In contrast to Western cultural industries’ ‘teen pop idols’, Korean and Japanese idol is not usually applied to other entertainment fields or music styles. This was firstly used in the early 1980s by the Japanese media and music industry when they tried to define some new type of musicians such as Seiko Matsuda and Shounentai (少年隊), and the entertainment agency which produced and managed them such as Johnny’s (ジャニーズ).

Second, the total management business strategy which the K-Pop industry has been depending upon also originated from the Japanese music industry.
This strategy aims to combine all sorts of music and entertainment business aspects—such as training musicians, marketing and promoting their music, creating and producing songs, music engineering, choreographing group dances, coordinating fashion and costumes—under the same management system. In fact, it resembles Star System of early Hollywood studios between 1920s and 1950s (Christopherson & Storper, 1989) and Fordism—‘factory-like system’ that characterized the postwar manufacturing industry—of Motown in 1960s (Smith, 2001; George, 2007). However, Lee (2011) argues that the Japanese music industry established its own business model in its social and cultural context. In the mid and late 1990s, then the Korean music industry referred to Japanese idol and agency system led by currently the largest K-Pop entertainment agency SM.

There were three primary aspects that SM and other entertainment agencies that they mostly referred to. First, every part in the agency has a discrete role to develop an idol from the ‘raw material’. Second, individual idols are ‘assembled’ into one idol group according to a highly standardized process. And third, the standardized idol group is mass-consumed by the audience through the mass distribution and consumption system that has capitalized on technological development. Trainee system that the agency recruits many prospects and trains and educates them into idols, and imposes strict regulations on them is a representative example of the total management strategy successfully operated by the J-Pop idol music industry followed by Korean.

In the early days of K-Pop idol-agency system— influenced mostly by J-Pop but also by US and other global music industry— was only considered as another form of typical ‘localized music’ that lacked competitiveness in
global market (Shin, 2002). Even after K-Pop had successfully penetrated into East Asian international market, it was still criticized as being neither indigenized local music nor universal global pop music that might systematically and even musically inferior to its references (ibid.). Especially, the excessive dependence (and suspected plagiarism) upon J-Pop has been K-Pop’s weak point among others as well as J-Pop’s sense of superiority on K-Pop (Aso, 2013; Kim, 2013; Kim, 2017).

3.2. K-Pop Surpassing J-pop Idol Music

Then what makes the most famous J-Pop idol band AKB48 swallow its pride as ‘the original’ and decide to work together with the K-Pop industry? First of all, for Mnet it can be a good chance to promote the program in Japan since Japanese music market has been the biggest international market for K-Pop and Korean cultural industries in general (KOCCA, 2018). However, the collaboration might be more advantageous for AKB48 than Mnet. Since AKB48 and its founder and producer Yasushi Akimoto have recently been striving for regaining its popularity, for them it is a great opportunity to draw attention from their domestic and global audience when collaborating with K-Pop.9) During early and mid-2010s, AKB48 was the most popular female band in the J-Pop industry and even the influential figure in other cultural industries as well. Japanese idol bands and their music, produced and managed by entertainment agencies under the total management strategy, were in its heyday for two decades between the mid-1980s and the

early 2000s. However, they began to suffer from the downturn in sales and popularity after the most popular female idol group in the 2000s Morning Musume (モーニング娘) began to lose its popularity since the late 2000s (Hwang, 2016). In that period, only a small number of aficionados continuously supported idols but general audiences lost their interests in idol bands and their music. However, when AKB48 became commercially successful in 2010,¹⁰ it did revive its flagging industry. The group made several hit songs,¹¹ and suggested a new way for the J-pop idol industry such as the general election event,¹² rock-paper-scissor event, hand shaking event, etc. All of these strategies were based on constructing ‘intimacy’ between idols and fans that the agency transferred a way of ‘producing artists’ to the fandom – ‘idol created by fans’ (Kim and Choi, 2014). Moreover, its sister groups based on the same concept and managed by the same producer Akimoto such as Nogizaka46 (乃木坂46), Keyakizaka46 (欅坂46), HKT48, JKT48, and SNH48 enjoyed their popularity not only in its domestic market but also in other Asian countries including China, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Therefore, it was not strange that AKB48 has been described as a social phenomenon, not just a popular idol band (Aso, 2013; Hwang, 2016).

However, AKB48’s popularity has been in decline since the mid-2010s.

¹⁰ AKB48 officially made its debut in 2005.
¹¹ Singles such as Beginner, Heavy Rotation (ヘビーローテーション), and Teacher Teacher topped on Oricon weekly single chart, and from 2010 to 2016 AKB’s singles have occupied the top four or five spots of Oricon Yearly Singles Chart. They even set a record for ‘the most singles sold in Japan by a female group’ that more than 36 million copies of singles have been sold so far. See https://www.oricon.co.jp/news/2063584/full/ (Retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019) for detailed information.
¹² Annual general election events have been conveyed by major TV networks by major TV networks since the early 2010s.
Especially since 2016, media exposures of its members such as appearances on TV shows and commercials and even the ratings for general election have significantly decreased. Also, their singles have sold much less than before and the number of audiences for their concerts, the major source of its revenue and profits, has rapidly decreased as well.\(^{13}\) In fact, regardless of AKB48’s success in the early 2010s, the general decline of the J-Pop idol industry since the late 2000s has been under way not only in terms of its domestic and global popularity but also of the general quality of musical performance including musicianship, stage performance such as dancing, sense of fashion style, etc. (Hwang, 2016).

Recently even in Japan it is generally regarded that K-Pop has already overtaken J-Pop both musically and commercially, especially in the field of the idol industry (Aso, 2013). One of the significant characteristics of K-Pop idols is that they can do both singing and dancing at a high level on the stage, the main reason that K-Pop has been so successful globally to satisfy different audiences from different parts of the world. Several K-Pop singles have been on Billboard and other global single charts and some albums have been even critically praised by music critics globally.\(^{14}\) Moreover, in terms of dancing, their choreography (group dance) often has a higher level of difficulty even compared to that global dance pop musicians. However, even Japanese media and fans alike think that their idols are not skilled enough

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\(^{13}\) For example, a single You are Melody (君はメロディー) was only no. 218 in 2016 yearly Japan iTunes chart.

\(^{14}\) For example, a female band f(x)’s album 〈4 Walls〉 or a male band BTS’s album 〈Love Yourself: Answer〉 received positive reviews from well-known online music magazines such as Pitchfork (https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21285-4-walls/) and Allmusic (https://www.allmusic.com/album/love-yourself-answer-mw0003196371), retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019.
to appeal to the wider audience besides domestic fans. According to Han (2011), Korean audiences, media, and cultural industries generally expect idols to have competence in musical activities (not just limited to musicianship, but also including dancing or rapping) more than their counterparts in Japan. While Japanese idols are expected to become general entertainers and celebrities rather than serious musicians, Korean idols mainly should be musicians who often do some other works such as acting; however, they at least should be prepared to sing and dance maintaining a moderate level.15)

This different expectation on idols from two countries was dramatically shown in early episodes of *Produce 48*. Most of AKB48 participants of the show were harshly criticized by Korean mentors that generally Japanese idols were severely lack of competence in singing and dancing compared to Korean competitor. Moreover, while most of Korean participants were trainees and not professional idols yet, many Japanese competitors have been on Japanese idol music scene for several years and some of them had been even voted as members of AKB48 All Star. As a result, in assessment sessions they got the lowest grades D or F from mentors.16) It may be a sort of cultural difference between K-Pop and J-Pop in terms of the concept of idol – Japanese audiences do not want them to be ‘serious artists’.17) However,

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15) See also Cha and Choi (2011) and Hwang (2016).
16) Even one of mentors were surprised that how those Japanese participants could be professional idols in their domestic market without any significant ability in their performance. See https://news.joins.com/article/22780851 (Retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019) for details.
17) Actually, Japanese musicians not from idol-agency system are called ‘artist (アーティスト)’ and the distinction between idol and artist is quite clear in Japan (Han, 2011).
AKB48 still needs a new breakthrough to overcome their crisis by collaborating with the K-Pop industry regardless of cultural and industrial differences.

3.3. K-Pop as Reference for Global Success

It should be noted that the collaboration effort between AKB48 and Produce 101 shows the J-Pop idol industry has now turned its eyes towards K-Pop for their global success. When Japanese cultural products were popular among East Asian audience in 1990s especially before Hallyu took over, they did not have much interest in East Asian market because it was not profitable enough for the Japanese industry to actively endeavor to penetrate. Rather, as mentioned earlier, they have been interested in the global success mostly in the West with their ‘odorless culture’ erasing Japan-ness as much as possible (Iwabuchi, 2001). Also, Japan has always had a sort of pride that it has gotten ahead of other East Asian countries in the field of culture and considered itself as a (superior) cultural ‘giver’ and not a (inferior) ‘receiver’ (ibid.). This tendency might explain why Japan is the only one country in East Asia that has been unwillingly to enjoy K-Pop regardless of its international success.18) However, when they found the international success of the Korean media industry beginning in East Asian region then going global more broadly, they could not help but modifying their strategy.

‘Cool Japan (クールジャパン)’, the cultural policy for globalization of

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18) Though there had been some Korean musicians achieving commercial success in Japan, it was only after the early 2010s when some K-Pop bands such as Kara and Girl’s Generation became successful as ‘K-Pop musicians’ among wider audiences including younger generations (see Lee, 2016, p. 173-181 for details).
Japanese culture push forward by its Government since the early 2010s, shows its shift clearly. Cool Japan aims at developing national brand depending upon its ‘soft power’ (Valaskivi, 2013). In other words, the concept of Cool Japan is based on the belief that the success of Japanese culture including Japanese media products, manga and anime, music, design, and fashion would create a new image for Japan, which will have a positive impact on the nation’s economy (McGray, 2002; KOCCA, 2016). It is quite contrary to Japanese former strategy for globalization of culture – making odorless culture – that Cool Japan attempts to show its cultural fragrance obviously, and not only towards Western but also East Asian market as well (Koizumi, 2006; KOCCA, 2016). It has been noted, however, that one of the important reasons for the shift from odorless culture towards Cool Japan was Hallyu (Park, 2015; Kang, 2018).\(^{19}\) Korean culture has been successfully globalized by using Korean-ness as its uniqueness, not making it too much universal. K-Pop is a good example that its training system, music, stage performance, Korean lyrics, and even marketing strategy such as digital distribution with overlooking copyright issues in the cyber space as a means of promotion and providing great music videos on YouTube have differentiated it from J-Pop as well as other typical global pop music (Aso, 2013). Now Japan considers Korea not as a follower behind them but as a competitive rival which has already preceded Japan in global cultural market therefore is model to imitate and to overcome ultimately.\(^{20}\)

Therefore, for Japanese participants in *Produce 48*, to survive in the show

\(^{19}\) See also http://news.kmib.co.kr/article/view.asp?arcid=0924023444&cnode=11141700&cp=nc (Retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019)
provides them a way towards global fame as well as proving their competence in musical performance. Often their lack of musical competitiveness compared to K-Pop trainees and idols can be explicitly disclosed towards Korean and other global audience as well as their domestic fans, and it may hurt their personal (and maybe national) pride. And yet, they can get more advantages than the disadvantage that besides the chance for global exposure through the show, some of them think it is an opportunity to learn K-Pop for their own development. Sakura Miyawaki (宮脇咲良), a Japanese competitor of Produce 48 and was one of the most popular AKB48 members even before her participation in the show, confessed:

I felt uncomfortable and shame that while K-Pop idols have been globally popular and recognized as great artists not just idols even in Japan, Japanese idols are underappreciated when they go outside their home country. But I am acknowledging that K-Pop idols are far better than us… I also want to be the best artist like global K-Pop idols.

And some of Japanese participants who failed to survive in the competition decided to leave AKB48 and transfer to K-Pop agencies after Produce 48 ended. Now J-Pop idols are coming to the K-Pop industry to learn the

21) For instance, a Japanese competitor Hitomi Honda was described by her hometown local newspaper as 'World-Wide Debut' when she was chosen as one of 12 finalists. See https://dvdprime.com/g2//bbs/board.php?bo_table=comm&wr_id=18676177 (Retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019)
22) Miyawaki took 3rd place in AKB48’s general election in 2018.
24) Participants such as Juri Takahashi and Miyu Takeuchi signed contracts with K-Pop entertainment agencies in the early 2019.
advanced K-Pop culture. It is a quite the opposite situation compared to the early days of the K-Pop idol industry – The student has now become the teacher.

4. Between Nationalism and Transnationalism

4.1. IZ*ONE as Transnational Band

The most significant concern regarding *Produce 48* was the expected hostility towards Japanese culture from Korean audience. Though the entire lifting of Japanese cultural exports to South Korea was acted in 2004, Japanese popular culture (especially J-Pop) has not been welcomed by the media that mainstream radio and television networks are still hesitating to play Japanese songs by reason of ‘negative national sentiment’ for Japan. Therefore, it is natural to wonder whether the audience would enjoy the competition between Korean and Japanese participants without any bias based on nationalism. Moreover, since fan votes of *Produce 48* are only allowed for Korean domestic audience, some worried that Korean audience might only support Korean competitors and exclude Japanese ones based on the nationalism.25)

However, the result was quite decent. Among 96 participants of *Produce 48*, 57 competitors were from Korean entertainment agencies while the other 39 were from AKB48 and its sister groups. And when it ended on the last day of August with the 8th vote for decision of 12 finalists,26) three Japanese

and nine Korean competitors were selected by the audience. It was not evenly divided, but not as one-sided as many people worried. Those 12 finalists have formed a project band IZ*ONE supported by Mnet, Korean entertainment agencies and AKB48, and would be active by the early 2021.

During the competition period, many Japanese competitors were actively supported by Korean viewers that for example, in the 7th vote (right before the final vote) six Japanese contestants were selected along with six Koreans. Moreover, Produce 48 was a sensation especially among the on-line audience that it was highly mentioned through social media and other influential on-line communities during its broadcast. Mnet also expressed their satisfaction that it was a meaningful result because younger audience between 15 and 34 years old, their targeted audience among others, showed more interests than other generations. Additionally, they found it was successful even in Japan. They aired Produce 48 both in two countries at the same time as live and it drew positive interests from Japanese audience. Mnet noted that this time they are focusing more on the possibility of new co-work producing system between Korea and Japan as well as expansion of market in Japan rather than the viewer ratings, but it was quite successful in both ways.

26) Produce 48 showed standings by fan votes at the end of each episode except for episode 4, 6, 7, and 10.
27) Sakura Miyawaki (2nd place), Nako Yabuki (矢吹奈子, 6th), and Hitomi Honda (本田仁美, 9th) were selected Japanese members among them.
28) Pronounced as [aɪzwʌn].
30) In Japan, it was broadcasted by one of Japanese satellite networks BS Scapa as well as Mnet Japan and Mnet Smart.
It is true that *Produce 48* was a new sort of the cultural-industrial collaboration between Korean and Japanese music industry. Though there have been efforts to collaborate between companies and companies and/or musicians and musicians from both countries, practically it is the first time to form a group supported by such big major entertainment companies from both countries. Though there have been several Japanese members in K-Pop bands, all of them were produced by the K-Pop industry. They were scouted and trained by K-Pop agencies in very K-Pop-esque ways and made their debut as a part of K-Pop bands – in short, those Japanese members identified themselves as K-Pop idol. And yet, IZ*ONE stands somewhere between K-Pop and J-Pop because they are closely affiliated with both Korean and Japanese systems. Miyawaki is still a member of AKB48 though she may take a temporary leave of absence to concentrate on IZ*ONE during the contract years. Also, they release K-Pop style singles and albums with Korean lyrics produced and managed by Korean agencies in Korea while separately release J-Pop style ones with Japanese lyrics by Japanese agencies in Japan. Therefore, IZ*ONE can be easily defined neither as K-pop nor J-pop band; rather, they are transnational based on the hybridization of K-Pop and J-Pop in terms of music and industry.

4.2. Re-Nationalization of Transnationality

And yet, even with their transnationality, they are not free from their own nationality. There have always been political issues between Korea and Japan.

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32) For instance in TWICE, one of the most popular female K-Pop bands currently, there are three Japanese and one Taiwanese among nine members.
based on their historical conflicts which cannot be easily solved in a short period of time. And those issues can be also found in transnational Produce 48 and IZ*ONE.

First, some people argued that Produce 48 was not quite but only moderate successful compared to previous two seasons of Produce 101 mostly due to the lack of understanding different cultures. Though it was popular among the younger audience especially in the beginning, the overall ratings were not as high as those of previous seasons. The criticism on Produce 48 from Korean audience was mostly from the general misunderstanding of J-Pop idol cultures. Though Produce 48 was a meaningful collaborate work, the show was criticized for not being significantly different from previous Produce 101 seasons that Japanese competitors judged by K-Pop criteria got some disadvantages, considered to be unfair.

However, the more serious issue regarding the show were a couple of controversies based on the historical conflicts between two countries. Though several Japanese competitors were continuously supported by Korean audience, some of them were eventually involved in the nationalistic hostility of Koreans towards Japan, one of the expected issues before the show began.

Among others, a controversy over a Japanese contestant Miu Shitao (下尾みう) clearly shows how their history and nationalism has been playing an important role in the cultural-industrial collaboration between Korea and Japan. During the show, some viewers denounced her that she had appeared

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33) http://sports.khan.co.kr/sports/sk_index.html?art_id=201807260925003&sec_id=540101 (Retrieved Nov. 3rd, 2019)
on the commercial of a Japanese company Ube Industries, officially labeled by Korean Government as a ‘war criminal company’ of World War II and supporting Japanese colonialism on Korean peninsula.\(^{36}\) Moreover, it was found that Shitao once had uploaded her profile photo with the background of Hirobumi Ito (伊藤博文) on her social media page, which made the controversy more serious than before. Ito was a controversial politician for Korea and Japan both. While in Japan he has been held in respect as one of the ‘Founding Fathers’ of modern Japan during the Meiji Restoration, in Korea he has been considered to be the main culprit behind the colonization of Korean peninsula, which made him a target of the assassination by Korean-independence activist Jung-Geun An (안중근) in 1909. Hence it became a fierce controversy among Korean audience when Shitao was found to have officially expressed her respect for Ito as a national hero a couple of years ago. It is true that Shitao had continuously shown her respect towards him officially and even personally. However, it was not actually based on her nationalism or political stance as Japanese right-wing. Rather, she only respected him mostly because she and Ito were from the same prefecture Yamaguchi-ken (山口県).\(^{37}\) However, because of the controversy she could not be included in the final-12 even though she had been one of the leading competitors in fan votes during the show.\(^{38}\)

Also, when a Korean competitor Yuri Cho (조유리)\(^{39}\) wore a campaign

\(^{36}\) https://entertain.v.daum.net/v/201604111230103964 (Retrieved Nov. 3\(^{rd}\), 2019)

\(^{37}\) https://news.joins.com/article/22932746 (Retrieved Nov. 3\(^{rd}\), 2019)

\(^{38}\) Shitao placed 6\(^{th}\) place in the 6\(^{th}\) vote and 10\(^{th}\) in the 7\(^{th}\) vote, but eventually dropped to 18\(^{th}\) in the final 8\(^{th}\) vote and was not selected to join Iz One as a result.

\(^{39}\) Cho placed 3\(^{rd}\) place in the last 8\(^{th}\) vote to become a member of Iz One.
button to show support for ‘comfort women’ in some episodes of the show, she was both criticized and supported by Korean audience. While some audience pointed out that she lacked consideration for Japanese contestants by touching the sensitive historical issue, others argued that it was her own convictions to show her patriotism having nothing to do with Japanese participants. Among others, below are some examples of different fan reactions towards Cho from one of the largest internet communities talking about Produce 48.40)

When Koreans appear on Japanese TV shows, Japanese usually avoid mentioning a sensitive issue between two countries. It is a basic decency not to touch that.

(id: ci****)

I love this. From now on I will only vote for Yuri. You supporting Japanese are all traitors!

(id: na*******)

Pro-Japanese sucks!

(id: an*******)

It is not good both for Yuri and Produce 48... It is better to avoid nationalistic controversies here even if we Koreans have a legitimate reason to criticize Japan.

(id: ye*******)

Two different controversies over Shitao and Cho based on the strained relationship between two neighboring countries show that the historical enmity
and current diplomatic and political tensions caused by that still can be a significant obstacle to expand cultural-industrial collaborations.

These cases show while collaboration projects between Korea and Japan such as _Produce 48_ basically aim at the establishment of transnational culture beyond local national culture, the audience as well as players cannot be fully free from the nationalist perspective – the re-nationalization of transnational cultural flow.

5. Conclusion

It has been more than twenty years since _Hallyu_ became prevalent in East Asia and now it may not be an overstatement to say that Korean media products are not just Korean but generally considered as East Asian including K-Pop, K-Drama, Korean variety shows, games, etc. Since the possible market for Korean media products is not only their domestic market but also East Asian region, recently Korean cultural industries are (and even must be) always considering the taste of East Asian audience. Therefore, Korean cultural products such as K-Pop and K-Drama are not only reflecting the taste of Korean. Rather, it should contain a certain East Asian preference.

Though in 2019 the fourth season of _Produce 101_ has been under police investigation on suspicion of manipulating total number of votes\(^{41}\), still _Produce 101_ or the K-Pop industry in general, influenced by Japan and now

\(^{41}\) http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2019/07/29/2019072900022.html (retrieved Nov, 3\(^{rd}\), 2019). Korean National Police have announced that even other seasons including _Produce 48_ can also be investigated if needed. See https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201909021231720057 (retrieved Nov, 3\(^{rd}\), 2019).
influencing them on the contrary, shows some possibilities of constructing transnational East Asian culture through *Hallyu* and K-Pop. In the procedure there have been suspected plagiarisms, exchanges of human resources, business models and capital, and active participation of global fans, all of which may lead them to construct transnational culture across the border. During the procedure, K-Pop and J-Pop has resembled each other closely. But it does not mean that they are being homogenized into either Korean or Japanese – for instance, we cannot describe IZ*ONE as neither K-Pop nor J-Pop band. Rather, they are becoming something different both from K-Pop and J-Pop – a hybridized culture based on their similarities as well as differences. Therefore, it can be said that they have been becoming similar as well as diversified.

However, there are certain issues that cannot be overcome easily. Political and economic conflicts as well as historic enmities between Korea and Japan should not be overlooked in cultural-industrial collaborations moving toward transnational culture, because they have been the actual strong barrier. Culture can contribute to defuse conflicts and promote a better understanding each other; however, since it is still nearly impossible to escape from nationalist ideology and deep-rooted regional hostile sentiments supported by the nationalism, it is always a difficult question to answer whether cultural-industrial collaborations between Korea and Japan can really ‘do something’ in this region or not.
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본 논문은 한국과 일본 사이의 문화-산업 합작을 통해 이루어지는 두 나라 사이의 관계 개선 가능성 및 한계에 대한 비판적인 논의이다. 대중음악산업을 통해 두 나라라는 지금까지 활발한 교류를 진행해왔다. 특히 최근에는 TV 음악 오디션 프로그램인 <프로듀스 101>를 통해 두 나라간의 교류가 본격적으로 이루어졌다. 2016년 첫 시즌을 시작하여 한국은 물론 국내적으로도 널리 알려진 이 프로그램은 일본의 아이돌 그룹 AKB48의 운영방식으로부터 큰 영향을 받았는데, 2018년에는 <프로듀스 48>이라는 이름하에 아예 AKB48과 프로그램 제작사인 엠넷 (MNet) 간의 공식적인 합작이 이루어졌다. 이 프로젝트를 통해 양국의 음악산업 간에는 실질적이고 의미있는 문화-산업 합작이 이루어졌으며, 이는 두 나라 사이의 이해 증진 및 각자의 음악 산업 발전에 큰 기여를 했다고 할 수 있다. 그러나 프로그램 전후로 나타났던 여러 가지 갈등과 논란은 대부분 한일 간의 역사, 정치, 문화적 간격 관계로 인한 것이었으며, 이는 양국 간의 문화-산업 합작에 여전히 민족주의가 크게 작용하고 있음을 드러낸다. 즉 <프로듀스 101>를 통한 한일 간의 합작에서 드러나는 다양한 양상은 기본적으로 국가성을 지향하는 케이팝이 그 속에 내재한 민족주의적 성향으로 인해 끊임없이 국가성으로 회귀하는 것을 보여주는 사례라고 할 수 있다.
핵심어: 프로듀스101, 프로듀스48, 케이팝, 제이팝, 합작, 대중음악, 한류, 아이즈원

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