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K-pop Female Idols as Cultural Genre of Patriarchal Neoliberalism: A Gendered Nature of Developmentalism and the Structure of Feeling/Experience in Contemporary Korea

Gooyong Kim

As a critical reconsideration of the recent growth of South Korean popular music, also known as K-pop, this paper explores historical continuities and breaks in this musical genre through an examination of its female idols. Given that the recording industry both creates a new culture and is influenced by the broader social environment in which its creation takes place,[1] the status of K-pop female idols as a dominant cultural genre in contemporary Korea warrants further scholarly interrogation. As a revival of the girl groups popular in both the United States and Korea during the 1950s and 60s, K-pop idols have occupied the center stage of mainstream commercial culture in Korea since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. While impeccable appearances, the latest fashions, and synchronized choreography are celebrated as K-pop's idiosyncratic features, this style is not new but instead renovates Motown Records' previously successful strategies for marketing girl groups, as well as those of its earlier Korean counterparts. Beginning with the premise that the "very concept of genre promises to transform historical specificity into formal universality,"[2] I investigate how and why K-pop female idols have been successful since 1997, while Western girl groups like the Spice Girls resurfaced only briefly in the early 1990s. This paper regards the proliferation of K-pop idols as a formal universality that commodifies sexualized female bodies within a neoliberal, patriarchal Korean society that functions as historical specificity.

1. Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
2. Jane Elliott and Gillian Harkins, "Introduction: Genres of Neoliberalism," *Social Text* 31 (2013): 1.

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As Suk-Kyoung Kim observes, the aesthetic of K-pop does not have a firm reference point but instead "flexibly associates itself with old and new, local and global, while interweaving both retrospective and anticipatory vectors" to produce a competitive commodity.[3] Following this insight, I will investigate how the industry succeeds in its spatio-temporal specificity within Korea's developmental trajectories. Recalling that Motown's girl groups established a tradition of "black public taste that was taken seriously as an expression of a general aesthetic,"[4] I contend that the K-pop industry has also manufactured and legitimated a popular ideal of female subjectivity in post-IMF Korea. Just as American girl groups influenced teenage girls' perceptions and behaviors on various issues,[5] the dominant representation of K-pop female idols provides a useful optic for understanding hegemonic femininity at the present moment in Korea.

There is a growing body of scholarly research focused on understanding how K-pop and Korean popular culture in general, also known as *Hallyu*, have become globally popular in recent years. However the existing literature tends to explain this phenomenon from industrial and technical perspectives, attributing its success to the Korean culture industry's business innovations. For Doobo Shim and Woongjae Ryoo, hybridity allows audiences to relate their cultural sentiments to K-pop;[6] for Koichi Iwabuchi, K-pop's cultural proximity makes it palatable to its audience's diverse cultural tastes;[7] for Gil-Sung Park, its popularity is the result of its high and innovative production values, such as seamless choreography, catchy songs, fashionable outfits, and slick music videos;[8] for

3. Suk-Young Kim, "The Many Faces of K-pop Music Videos: Revues, Motown, and Broadway in 'Twinkle,'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 1 (2016): 137.

4. Gerald Early, *One Nation under a Groove: Motown and American Culture* (Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1995).

5. Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994); Will Stos, "Bouffants, Beehives, and Breaking Gender Norms: Rethinking 'Girl Group' Music of the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 2 (2012): 117–54.

6. Doobo Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," *Media, Culture & Society* 28 (2006): 25–44; Woongjae Ryoo, "Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the Korean Wave," *Asian Journal of Communication* 19, no. 2 (2009): 137–51.

7. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Becoming 'Culturally Proximate': The A/scent of Japanese Idol Dramas in Taiwan," in *Asian Media Productions*, ed. Brian Moeran (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), pp. 54–74.

8. Gil-Sung Park, "From Fragile Cosmopolitanism to Sustainable Multicultural Vigor," *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (2013): 5–13.

Solee Shin and Lanu Kim, its success is due to the strategic manufacturing and business planning of K-pop's industry leaders;[9] and others have argued that Internet technologies like YouTube have been a major factor in extending K-pop's global reach.[10] Though there have been a few attempts to analyze the cultural phenomenon as the result of the Korean government's policies,[11] there remains a paucity of critical research investigating how K-pop has been conditioned by Korea's preexisting socio-cultural and politico-economic backgrounds. Moreover, there has been no critical investigation into how these backgrounds have shaped the recent proliferation of K-pop female idols.

More recent literature tends to focus on how fandom—i.e., the consumption side of the musical genre—has been the main engine for K-pop's global popularity. While JungBong Choi and Roald Maliangkay maintain that their anthology investigates the conditions and factors that transformed a periphery nation's popular music into a transnational phenomenon,[12] it still confines itself to describing how K-pop has changed the ways that audiences make use of the musical genre and other related artifacts within the dominant framework of neoliberalism, rather than examining what contributed to K-pop's sudden rise and success. Though they acknowledge the state's foundational role in providing the industry with subsidies and tax breaks, they are not interested in the larger, structural conditions of K-pop production as much as in its circulation and consumption. Contrary to the claim that their volume "aspires to be more than a compilation of reports on the ripple" that K-pop has created,[13] it remains descriptive and fails to pay due attention to K-pop's structural conditions of possibility,

9. Solee Shin and Lanu Kim, "Organizing K-pop: Emergence and Market Making of Large Korean Entertainment Houses, 1980–2010," *East Asia* 30, no. 4 (2013): 255–72.

10. Sun Jung and Doobo Shim, "Social Distribution: K-pop Fan Practices in Indonesia and the 'Gangnam Style' Phenomenon," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 5 (2014): 485–501; Inkyu Oh and Hyo-Jung Lee, "Mass Media Technologies and Popular Music" *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (2013): 34–58; Ingyu Oh and Gil-Sung Park, "From B2C to B2B: Selling Korean Pop Music in the Age of New Social Media," *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (2012): 365–97.

11. Dal Yong Jin, "Reinterpretation of Cultural Imperialism: Emerging Domestic Market vs Continuing US Dominance," *Media, Culture & Society* 29, no. 5 (2007): 753–71; Dal Yong Jin, "The Power of the Nation-State Amid Neo-Liberal Reform: Shifting Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 1 (2014): 71–92.

12. JungBong Choi and Roald Maliangkay, eds., *K-pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

13. Ibid., p. 1.

that is, the forces and elements behind its production, as they relate to the nation's place in global cultural, economic, historical, and political configurations.

In order to redress this academic myopia, I reconsider the continuities between K-pop female idols and girl groups from the 1960s by examining production processes, visual and sonic characteristics, and business models. Taking into account the political economy of Korea's rapid industrialization and post-IMF neoliberalization, I argue that K-pop discloses Korea's immanent and present cultural-economic formations in its diagnostic relationship to society. While the American girl groups of the 1960s articulated that decade's zeitgeist of egalitarian hope and social progress,[14] K-pop female idols today are an *episteme* of neoliberalism that endeavors to transform the entire society into a grand marketplace. Since the "singer is the image of the spirit of a people," and popular songs embody its belief system,[15] examining the idols helps us better understand the society as a whole. Keeping in mind Raymond Williams's notion of genre as the "practical and variable combination and even fusion of what are, in abstraction, different levels of the social material process,"[16] I analyze how the success of K-pop female idols has been an integral part of Korea's complex neoliberal transformation by a dynamic interaction with the nation's preexisting cultural, industrial, and political traditions, such as centuries-long patriarchy and compelling developmentalism (or developmental dictatorship) that effectively led to the Miracle on the Han River, which indicates a breakneck industrial development from the 1960s to 1980s. By examining how K-pop female idols have become a dominant force in Korea's economic, cultural, and social domains, I will demonstrate the K-pop industry's constant re-territorialization of the private and the public, the emerging and the entrenched, the welcoming and the hierarchical, personal identification investment and collective emotional structure, and the marginalized and the mainstream as they relate to women's place in society.

14. Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Popular Music* (London: Jawbone Press, 2012); Aida Pavletich, *Sirens of Song: The Popular Female Vocalist in America* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980).

15. Pavletich, *Sirens of Song*, p. 4.

16. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 185.

The Heyday of K-pop Idols

On September 3, 2014, EunB, a twenty-one-year-old female idol from the K-pop group Ladies' Code, died in a car accident, while other members were injured, including RiSe, who fell into a coma for four days and passed away after a series of surgeries on September 7. The accident, which occurred early on a rainy morning while the group was in transit back to Seoul after a performance in Daegu, resulted from the agency's over-booking practice, which forced idols to stage performances around the clock without a break or adequate rest. Given that female idols already confront extreme professional demands, including frequent coercion to provide sexual services as bribery or a rite of passage to stardom,[17] this accident demonstrates how the current working conditions of K-pop idols are no better than those of female workers in sweatshop factories during Korea's rapid industrialization period from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Since TVXQ's debut in 2004, the Korean soundscape has been dominated by K-pop idols. As a response to socio-cultural imperatives mandated by the state, K-pop has historically emulated short-lived American idols and their Japanese counterparts, and is mainly produced and/or played for the purpose of exportation.[18] Against the background of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the Korean economy's subsequent IMF bailout, K-pop can be understood as an allegory of Korea's increasing reliance on exports for its development and maintenance. Ever since that time, K-pop, branded as new, trendy, and a fashionable benchmark for Western music, has ruled over Korea's soundscape in terms of content, form, and production, resulting in the oligopoly of SM Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, and YG Entertainment.

According to statistics on Melon, Korea's biggest music chart, a total of 244 K-pop idol groups (130 all-boy groups, 103 all-girl groups, and 11 mixed) came and went between 2005 and 2013.[19] Since the debut of Girls' Generation (SNSD) and Wonder Girls in 2007, the number of all-girl groups has been growing, with at least ten new groups each year.

17. National Human Rights Commission of Korea, *A Field Research on Human Right Infringements of Female Celebrities*, 2010, http://www.humanrights.go.kr.

18. Oh and Park, "From B2C to B2B"; Gil-Sung Park, "Manufacturing Creativity: Production, Performance, and Dissemination of K-pop," *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (2013): 14–33.

19. "244 Idol Groups Debuted in the Last 9 Years?! How Many Can You Name?," *KpopStarz*, September 18, 2013, http://www.kpopstarz.com/articles/41923/20130918/244-idol-groups-debuted-last-nine-years.htm.

These figures do not include those not ranked on the chart but still working behind the scenes, and the figures would be even higher if we considered the total number of K-pop trainees and wannabes. According to a recent study, there are about a million employees in more than a thousand talent agencies in the industry.[20] In short, K-pop has become one of the most dominant fields of development and growth in Korea.

As Shin and Kim have shown, K-pop is "strategically produced and commercially tailored" through rigorous market research.[21] As a hegemonic model that produces quickly profitable, homogenized, disposable commodities from a highly concentrated and hierarchal production system, the industry has vertically integrated "the process of artist selection, musical and performance training, image making, song writing, management, contracting, and album production and growing into large domineering entertainment empires,"[22] thereby replicating the business strategies of Korea's manufacturing industry conglomerates from the 1960s to the 1980s. However, K-pop idols require a high initial investment, costing about $5,000 a month per trainee, with multiple years of training in foreign languages, dance, singing, and acting.[23] For example, it cost a total of $2.6 million to scout, train, and debut a member of SNSD. K-pop idols are thus immediately treated as cash cows and deployed in multiple commercial activities, such as television dramas, movies, and product endorsements.[24] In order to recover its initial investments and increase its profit margins, the K-pop industry exploits minors' creative labor by beginning the star-manufacturing process as early as five years old and then rigorously training the idols for seven years under "slave contracts," which last up to seventeen years and combine trainee and post-debut periods.[25]

20. Seul-gi Chang, "New Human Relations According to K-pop Idols' Labor," *Media Today*, May 30, 2018, http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/?mod=news&act=articleView&idxno=142930.

21. Shin and Kim, "Organizing K-pop," p. 256.

22. Ibid.,p. 260.

23. KpopStarz, "244 Idol Groups Debuted in the Last 9 Years?!"

24. Gooyong Kim, "K-pop Female Idols: Culture Industry, Neoliberal Social Policy, and Governmentality in Korea," in *Routledge Companion to Global Cultural Policy*, ed. Victoria Durrer, Toby Miller, and Dave O'Brien (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 520–37.

25. Lucy Williamson, "The Dark Side of South Korean Pop Music," *BBC News*, June 14, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-13760064.

The Dominant Genre of Korea's Patriarchal Neoliberalism

As an interpretative allegory of a "deeper, underlying, and more 'fundamental' narrative, of a hidden master narrative,"[26] K-pop female idols are the dominant genre of Korea's patriarchal neoliberalism. As a socio-cultural text, they perform the "function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions," which in this case is Korea's daunting post-IMF economy.[27] As a synecdoche of the gendered nature of Korea's development, their proliferation represents a neoliberal replacement of the labor-intensive manufacturing industry by the service economy, that is, a feminized sector.[28] Thus, the idols embody an *episteme* of neoliberal Korea by manifesting the "semantic raw materials of social life and language . . . the historicity of structures of feeling and perception and ultimately of bodily experience."[29] By analyzing K-pop female idols as an embodiment of neoliberal rationalities that advocate for unrestricted commodification and unfettered competition as the prerequisite of development and prosperity, I maintain that the idols promote a neoliberal value system as a fundamental aspect of the Korean people's collective thinking and behavior.

To that end, I utilize Williams's typology of cultural systems: the dominant, the residual, and the emergent. Examining a system of cultural production where "complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance" of a particular cultural genre occur,[30] I investigate how the idols are integral to the cultural process of Korea's patriarchal neoliberalism, by reconsidering Korea's political economy of gender-based developmentalism. For example, I infer that K-pop's dominant features, such as perfectly synchronized, military-style choreography, fast-beat hook sounds, and lyrics, are carefully calculated to appeal to Korean audiences already conditioned by the residual legacies of patriarchy, military dictatorship, and fast industrialization. K-pop's emergent character stemmed from the Korean culture industry's response to the shifting market conditions brought about by the IMF crisis, which updated the patriarchal gender hierarchy

26. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), p. 28.

27. Ibid., p. 79.

28. Marnina Gonick. "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia': Constituting the Neoliberal Girl Subject," *NWSA journal* 18, no. 2 (2006): 1–23.

29. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 147.

30. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 121.

of Korean culture to the growing demands of a service-sector economy. While reinterpreting the traditional code of patriarchal gender ethics and disseminating a new set of entitlements for inclusion and exclusion, K-pop still retains the strict gender stratification that keeps young women at the bottom of the hierarchy. In this respect, K-pop female idols as a dominant cultural genre of neoliberal, patriarchal Korea can better be understood within a continuum between Korea's pre-dominant legacy of patriarchy and developmentalism, which forced female workers to be a docile, disposable labor force, and the dominant modality of neoliberal, service-oriented market rationality since 1997. In this grand scheme of neoliberal hegemonic construction, the idols' young, amicable, sexualized bodies convey "the political unconscious,"[31] exemplifying what is important, what to think, and how to govern oneself.

Motown Records' Girl Groups in the 1960s: Pretext

K-pop's signature attributes—catchy hooks, simple refrains, sleek choreography, matching outfits, and middle-class respectability—are not unique but were invented and utilized by Motown Records in its marketing strategy for girl groups in the 1960s. Motown girl groups manifested conformity or uniformity through their physical appearance and sexuality, rather than their artistic ingenuity or talent, by merely enacting what male producers provided in the industry.[32] Combining the ingredients for "mass market success: fewer moving parts on stage, lots of well-crafted hooks and cute, carbonated lyrics,"[33] the Shirelles pioneered the genre of physical and visual behavioral uniformity and aural homogeneity in 1961. Instead of artistic creativity or ingenuity, girl groups and their fans distinguish themselves from others by different colors, fashion accessories, dresses, and hairstyles. Along with an assembly-line training system, Motown adopted a formulaic approach to songwriting: "never overdo the hook" and "make sure the song has a hummable melody, which means that it should be like something the public's heard before."[34] More importantly, Motown implemented a human capital management approach that trained members

31. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 142.

32. Cynthia Cyrus, "Selling an Image: Girl Groups of the 1960s," *Popular Music* 22, no. 2 (2003): 173–93.

33. Gerri Hirshey, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: The True, Tough Story of Women in Rock* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), p. 50.

34. Early, *One Nation under a Groove*, p. 56.

of girl groups to exhibit charm, finesse, glamour, taste, and grace. In Motown's "factory-type operation," the performers relearned every aspect of daily behavior, such as how to walk, talk, sit, dress, apply make-up, and smile; they had to stay "docile, malleable, amenable to being taken in hand by a paternal company, hammered into a mold calculated, yea, guaranteed to please."[35] As role models for female adolescent fans, who constituted a major purchasing power,[36] Motown girl groups were "the fairy-tale ideal" that taught teenage girls how to behave, dress, please, and succeed romantically.[37] As an invitation to consumer participation, girl groups' visual representation of sameness and belonging encouraged audiences to identify with the performers, and these images offered "affirmative messages about what it means to be female, messages about belonging, about possibilities for participation, about the possibility of success."[38]

As much as Motown changed popular culture, its girl groups were conditioned by various cultural and social contexts. Motown girl groups were conceived as the "personification of a broad and compelling black triumph, a symbol of black freedom, assertion, and achievement," alongside the various progressive social movements of the 1950s and 60s.[39] Likewise, their Korean counterparts were rendered within Korea's colonial or military hierarchies: the synchronized choreography and matching uniforms of Korean girl groups were first introduced by Japanese imperialists in the 1910s, but these groups saw new venues in American military camp towns immediately after the Korean War (1950–53). Postwar girl groups like the Kim Sisters, the Pearl Sisters and the Arirang Sisters relied on their physical appeal in fashionable outfits, such as mini-skirts, hot pants, and sleeveless tops, and they legitimated the influence and preeminence of American popular culture. However, with the authoritarian developmental policies of Park Chung-hee (1961–79) and the new military regime of Chun Doo-hwan (1980–87), female physicalities were redirected from the performance stage to factory floors to help realize the fast industrial development that was used to legitimate the illicit political regimes. As briefly

35. Aida Pavletich, *Sirens of Song: The Popular Female Vocalist in America* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), p. 105.

36. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, pp. 83–98.

37. O'Brien, *She Bop*, p. 80.

38. Cyrus, "Selling an Image," p. 190.

39. Early, *One Nation under a Groove*, p. 44.

reviewed above, girl groups in both the United States and Korea were conformist in their cultural, economic, political, and social functions.

The Residual: Nationalist Developmentalism

During her inaugural speech in February 2013, former president Park Geun-Hye declared her intention to recreate the Miracle on the Han River, which rested on the young, cheap, but well-disciplined female workforce of the labor-intensive manufacturing industry from the 1960s to the 80s. Korea's "miraculous" industrial development was made possible by incorporating "Confucian parental governance into the modernizing project," through an optimal combination of patriarchal gender hierarchy and masculine developmentalism.[40] In this regard, the Miracle has to be understood as the result of an active "incorporation of the actively residual," that is, by the "reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion"[41] of female subjects in the state's policy. I argue here that the current proliferation of K-pop female idols should be regarded as a contemporary version of developmentalism through the K-pop industry's systematic mobilization and exploitation of young, docile females.

Developmentalism or the developmental state has been an effective model for the third world's rapid economic growth since World War II,[42] and Korea is one of the most successful examples of the nation-state overseeing economic management. Designed and implemented by the state, exports are an integral part of national development and have been systematically managed by the state's comprehensive subsidies to *chaebols* (large industrial conglomerates) like Samsung. In the face of the structural adjustment program (SAP) mandated by the IMF in 1997, Korea's developmentalism was replaced by neoliberalism. However it is important to examine whether or not this transition actually happened, since the market itself is "state-constrained and state-regulated."[43] Rather, neolib-

40. Hyun Mee Kim, "Work, Nation and Hypermasculinity: The 'Woman' Question in the Economic Miracle and Crisis in South Korea," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2001): 53; Kwang-yeong Shin, "The Discourse on Women in Korea: Episodes, Continuity, and Change," *Review of Korean Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 7–27.

41. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 123.

42. Immanuel Wallerstein, "After Developmentalism and Globalization, What?" *Social Forces* 83, no. 3 (2005): 1263–78.

43. Wai-chung Yeung, "State Intervention and Neoliberalism in the Globalizing World Economy: Lessons from Singapore's Regionalization Programme," *Pacific Review* 13, no. 1 (2000): 139.

eralism is internally combined with the developmental state to the extent that a combination of neoliberalized economic management and authoritarian state emerges.[44] In reality, the state has been in charge of neoliberal reconstruction by facilitating competition, free trade, and open export market practices, and therefore neoliberalization helps enhance the "developmental states' position in international competition by developing new structures of state intervention."[45]

Korea's developmentalism relied on its labor-intensive, export-oriented industry, which was based on a constant, abundant flow of cheap, young, docile workers since the 1960s.[46] Confucianism played a major role in mobilizing female workers within Korea's patriarchal nationalism.[47] Female workers made up the vast majority of the workforce in the main engine of economic development, which was labor-intensive manufacturing industries like textile, clothing, shoes, and electronic goods.[48] Specifically, 80 percent of female workers were employed in the export-oriented sector in the 1970s, which accounted for 70 percent of total export revenue in 1975.[49] However, these women suffered from dehumanizing "super-exploitation," characterized by strict, militaristic discipline, sexual and physical abuse, long working hours, the highest rates of industrial accidents, and low minimum wages on sweatshop work floors that lacked basic humane working conditions, such as proper ventilation and lighting. Considering the wide gender gap in income (45.1% in 1972, 42.9% in 1980, 52.4% in 1989, 56.8% in 1994, 63.1% in 1999, and 64.2% in 2003), the exploitation of young, female workers is an integral part of Korea's "miraculously" rapid industrialization.[50]

44. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 380–404.

45. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), p. 72.

46. John Lie, "The Political Economy of South Korean Development," *International Sociology* 7, no. 3 (1992): 285–300.

47. Andrew Eungi Kim and Gil-sung Park, "Nationalism, Confucianism, Work Ethic and Industrialization in South Korea," *Journal of contemporary Asia* 33, no. 1 (2003): 37–49.

48. Elizabeth Monk-Turner and Charlie G. Turner, "Sex Differentials in Earnings in the South Korean Labor Market," *Feminist Economics* 7, no. 1 (2001): 63–78.

49. Uhn Cho, "Industrialization and Female Labor Absorption in Korea," *Women's Studies Forum* (Korean Women's Development Institute, 1985), p. 80.

50. Andrew Eungi Kim and Innwon Park, "Changing Trends of Work in South Korea: The Rapid Growth of Underemployment and Job Insecurity," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 3 (2006): 437–56.

At risk of losing its competitive edge on labor-intensive industry and the IMF's SAP, the state increased its intervention in neoliberal market mechanisms, and in turn it has actively promoted the economic potential of its culture industry. The state is in charge of strategic investment in the culture industry, creating a new marketplace, promoting creative content development, and marketing the culture industry overseas.[51] Updated with the neoliberal rhetoric of market autonomy, the state reconstructed its relationship with the K-pop industry by providing an infrastructure for market innovation and development, such as establishing educational institutions, holding events for local talents to debut, providing governmental venues to promote the industry domestically and globally, and offering tax benefits. While the state has implemented an industrial model of cultural policy since President Kim Dae-jung's administration (1998–2003), the right-wing, conservative administration of Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) exponentially expanded the developmentalist approach by increasing governmental budgets, reconfiguring governmental agencies, and setting national agendas. In particular, the Contents Industry Promotion Law has strategically funded the promotion of K-pop overseas, including in North America and Europe,[52] and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism has systematically overseen the industry, from planning, training, and marketing to the retention of culture industry professionals. In this context, the state revenue for its culture industry has steadily risen from 5,726 billion Korean won in 2005 to 6,900 in 2010, which is equivalent to 6.2 percent of GDP. A sizeable part of the state's fund for the 2013 Popular Music Production Support Project, which aimed to assist independent musicians, went to several K-pop idols who were trained, promoted, and marketed by major K-pop management conglomerates.[53] Among the seventeen fund recipients, seven belong to major K-pop agencies that claimed approximately $500,000 out of $888,000 total. In this respect, contrary to Lisa Lewis's argument that a poor economy threatens the prosperity of the music industry, posing "dim prospects for female

51. Young-hwa Choi, "Hallyu Policy as Corporate-State Policy of Lee Myung-Bak Administration: Structure and Strategy Analyses through Strategic Relationship Approach," *Economy and Society* 97 (2013): 252–85.

52. Jin, "The Power of the Nation-State amid Neo-Liberal Reform."

53. "Hyorin/ Girls' Day Album Received $99,000 respectively… 'Balanced Promotion of Popular Music'?" *MoneyToday*, July 10, 2014, http://news.mt.co.kr/mtview.php?no=2014071009167618223&type=1.

musicians,"[54] the beginning and success of K-pop female idols coincided with Korea's neoliberal developmentalism during its worst economic recession. Therefore, transforming itself from a direct mobilizer to a new coordinator that regulates and channels particular economic sectors,[55] the post-IMF Korean government is a "'neo-statist' developmental regime" that intervenes in market performances and implements market-friendly policies and regulations.[56]

The management and production style of the K-pop industry is almost identical to that of the labor-intensive industry, which led to the Miracle on the Han River. This style is characterized by a Fordist regime of accumulation, which operates through a "hierarchical bureaucratic form of work organization, characterized by a centralized management" and "vertical integration, driven by a desire to achieve cost efficiency in production and exchange."[57] For example, dominated by a few giant talent agencies, the K-pop industry exercises an economy of scale wherein agencies have not only fully exploited a vast pool of audition participants and trainees to formulate idol groups, but they have also separately deployed each group member according to his or her image in various commercial media events.[58] Based on the vertical integration of music production and promotion and the subsequent outcome of market concentration, the K-pop industry has produced highly homogenized, predictable commodities, female idols, whose only aim is to make viable financial profits.

Most distinctively, Gil-Sung Park's model of K-pop production,[59] "globalization-localization-globalization," which outsources songs and

54. Lisa Lewis, *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1990), p. 69.

55. Hee-Yeon Cho, "The Structure of the South Korean Developmental Regime and Its Transformation–Statist Mobilization and Authoritarian Integration in the Anticommunist Regimentation," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (2000): 408–26.

56. Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett, "Economic Crisis and Restructuring in South Korea: Beyond the Free Market-Statist Debate," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 421; Thomas Kalinowski, "Korea's Recovery since the 1997/98 Financial Crisis: The Last Stage of the Developmental State," *New Political Economy* 13, no. 4 (2008): 447–62.

57. Chris Gibson and Lily Kong, "Cultural Economy: A Critical Review," *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no. 5 (2005): 544.

58. John Lie, "What Is the K in K-pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity," *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (2012): 339–63; Hyunjoon Shin, "Have You Ever Seen the Rain? and Who'll Stop the Rain?: The Globalizing Project of Korean Pop (K‐pop)," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009): 507–23.

59. Gil-Sung Park, "Manufacturing Creativity: Production, Performance," *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (2013): 14–33.

choreography, trains local performers by local personnel, and distributes its products to foreign markets, is the exact same mechanism on which the previous developmentalism had relied. Korea's export-oriented manufacturing industry rested on foreign raw resources, technologies, and machineries that were processed by local Korean workers, and on foreign consumer markets where these processed commodities could then be sold. "Connect and development"—the mechanism of manufacturing creativity, in which "the internal process of innovation or creativity is often bypassed in favor of borrowing, buying, or outsourcing creativity and innovation to external communities"[60]—is a K-pop version of a neoliberal manufacturing business model that relies on Korea's local labor market to provide a "stable of top performers at a relatively cheaper cost."[61] Originality and creativity are thereby equalized with the financial ability to buy a song from overseas practitioners, leaving domestic artists as merely performative technicians. As such, the K-pop industry has followed in the footsteps of Korea's export-oriented manufacturing industry by importing foreign resources and then reverse-engineering them until local corporations can come up with acceptable variants to sell to the market.[62] In this respect, while Timothy Dowd, Kathleen Liddle, and Maureen Blyler contend that female American musicians benefited from decentralized production activities for musical diversity,[63] K-pop female idols by contrast are the result of an oligopolistic K-pop industry that utilizes a centralized production system to produce and market seemingly diversified musicians. Unlike Motown girl groups, which profited from the expansion of decentralized production in the United States, the success of K-pop female idols has been made possible by the K-pop industry's highly concentrated production practices.

An important socio-economic implication of the recent surge in K-pop idol girl groups comes from the generally adverse employment conditions of female workers who were "first laid off during the 1997–98

60. Ibid., p. 20.

61. Ibid., p. 25.

62. Linsu Kim, "National System of Industrial Innovation: Dynamics of Capacity Building in Korea," in *National Innovation Systems: A Comparative Analysis*, ed. Richard Nelson (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 357–83.

63. Timothy Dowd, Kathleen Liddle, and Maureen Blyler. "Charting Gender: The Success of Female Acts in the US Mainstream Recording Market, 1940–1990," in *Transformation in Cultural Industries*, ed. Candace Jones and Patricia Thornton (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2005), pp. 83–126.

crisis . . . [and] remain concentrated in smaller enterprises and 'temporary' jobs" in post-IMF Korea.[64] While Motown girl groups exemplified how the industry commercializes the most vulnerable social subjects, that is, African American teenage girls, K-pop female idols have been possible because of their precarious socio-economic status within Korea's patriarchal gender hierarchy. As part of a post-Fordist regime of production, K-pop idols have proliferated and normalized a neoliberal mode of flexible, mobile, immaterial labor in service, information, finance, and culture industries, producing a neoliberal way of life and culture.[65]

As an eventual result of the state policy that aims to revive the national economy, create new jobs, and boost the national morale to catch up with the ever-volatile neoliberal global economy,[66] K-pop is a new industrial item for Korea's national development, completely reversing Adorno's lamentation on the commodification and marketing of cultural artifacts.[67] As John Lie notes, "K-pop is merely a brand, part of Brand Korea that has been the export-oriented South Korean government."[68]

The (Pre-)Dominant: Patriarchal Gender Hierarchy

Rather than negating or overcoming Korea's patriarchal values, K-pop idol girl groups preserve traditional gender discrimination as a dominant element that exerts strict control over female bodies based on the establishment's strategic socio-cultural and politico-economic calculations.[69] Although these cultural values have somewhat diminished in society's official narratives, patriarchal gender discrimination and exploitation "have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense

64. Hart-Landsberg and Burkett, "Economic Crisis and Restructuring in South Korea," p. 423; Seung-kyung Kim and John Finch, "Confucian Patriarchy Reexamined: Korean Families and the IMF Economic Crisis," *Good Society* 11, no. 3 (2002): 43–49; Haejin Kim and Paula B. Voos, "The Korean Economic Crisis and Working Women," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 37, no. 2 (2007): 190–208.

65. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of Multitude* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).

66. Michael Scott, "Popular Music as Social Policy: Hybrid-Hierarchies and Social Inclusion through New Zealand's Pop Renaissance," *Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 3 (2012): 304–22; Michael Scott and David Craig, "The Promotional State 'after Neo-Liberalism': Ideologies of Governance and New Zealand's Pop Renaissance," *Popular Music* 31, no. 1 (2012): 143–63.

67. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," *October* 55 (1990): 49–55.

68. Lie, "What Is the K in K-pop?," p. 361.

69. Taeyon Kim, "Neo-Confucian Body Techniques: Women's Bodies in Korea's Consumer Society," *Body & Society* 9, no. 2 (2003): 97–113.

in these areas."[70] Just like during the active industrialization period, today's K-pop female idols are conditioned to be an obedient, disciplined, and sexualized labor force, directly manufactured by male corporate elites in the K-pop industry to serve the interests and needs of capital. In the "existing patriarchal relations of power and domination by securing anew the consent of women to existing social and political arrangements,"[71] K-pop trainees and idols are under complete control of the industry, resulting in slave contracts. Through an extraordinarily long trainee period, female idols have internalized and reinforced a subservient self-image that is contingent upon the patriarchal desire of imagined femininity, as demonstrated by the rampant and explicit sexualization of female idols.[72] For example, SNSD's "The Boys" was manufactured and embodied by men, from its creative procedure to the state production: SM Entertainment chairman Soo-man Lee, American choreographer and songwriter Teddy Riley, and Korean songwriter Young-jin Yoo.

Patriarchy is still integral to K-pop's business practices. As much as Motown promoted a family myth that made its talent feel like they were being adopted by a big loving family, the K-pop industry demands that its idols pledge their loyalty and obedience to their agency, which is presented as a "father, an older brother, an uncle, a coach, a teacher, a guardian, an authority figure motivated by something other than making money from his acts."[73] For example, idols from YG Entertainment proudly declare themselves, "We are YG family," and other major K-pop agencies similarly emphasize group loyalty by holding collective events under the banner of "SM Town" and "JYP Nation." This wondrous necessity of a family myth was vindicated by Korea's nationalism, which promotes society and the state as an extension of family. Going through an intensive and extensive training period, the idols have internalized and enacted the most repressive notions of gender, forcing them "into corporeal experiences of femininity that sprang form the middle-aged" male decision-makers in the industry.[74] This behavioral, bodily gender script has not only regulated the idols

70. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 123.

71. Angela McRobbie, "Young Women and Consumer Culture: An Intervention," *Cultural Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 544.

72. Stephen Epstein and James Turnbull, "Girls' Generation? Gender, (Dis)empowerment, and K-pop," in *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Kyung Hyun Kim and Youngmin Choe (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 314–36.

73. Early, *One Nation under a Groove*, 31.

74. Jacqueline Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 57.

themselves, but it has also conditioned their female audience, who are presented with standardized visual images that tell them what clothes, body shapes, physical movements, facial expressions, and emotions are required.

Themes of harmony in K-pop's signature collective choreography can be traced back to the Korean establishment's manipulation of the Confucian values of harmony, solidarity, and cooperation during the nation's period of rapid industrialization. Since dance is a corporeal means of pedagogy that "communicates symbolic gender meaning, punctuates phrases of the acquisition of gender knowledge, [and] instills discipline,"[75] K-pop female idols' hyper-synchronized dance choreography reproduces and reinforces the patriarchal expectation of female conformity. This corporeal pedagogy of dance is made more effective by K-pop's easy-to-follow choreography, which allows audiences to reenact it and, in turn, fulfills a broader governmental or biopolitical function in the population. This flawless, synchronized group movement is a well-crafted commercial version of the Confucian worldview, which emphasizes preconceived and expected role-playing within a hierarchical social structure based on gender and class.

The ubiquity of sexualized uniforms in K-pop further indicates a patriarchal demand on female bodies that is affective, obedient, and corporeal. As symbols of female workers' affective, immaterial labor and non-threatening status, the uniformed female idols homogenize themselves as an erotic spectacle. As a sartorial symbol of conformity, the idols' matching uniforms visually regulate the female performers' bodies, eliminating their individuality and personality. Since the uniform of a K-pop female idol is a major signifier of a given idol group, rather than of an individual singer or performer, any idol can be replaced while still preserving the overall image/concept of the group. With this interchangeability of K-pop idols, the subordination of individuality to the uniform not only regulates the idols but further instills conformity in audiences by offering a false sense of membership and security through purchase of the idols' merchandise and accessories. In other words, as a cultural policing activity to reinforce masculine authority, the spectacle of the idols in uniforms is a symbolic response to contain women's growing presence and influence as a result of the sudden abundance of female workers in post-IMF neoliberal Korean society.

75. Judith Lynne Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 75.

The Emergent: Neoliberal Structure of Feeling/Experience

Considering K-pop female idols as an instance of Foucauldian governmentality,[76] they should be analyzed as social consciousness that "the 'human imagination,' the 'human psyche,' the 'unconscious,' with their 'functions,'" are structured, realized, and experienced in affective and somatic ways.[77] In other words, the genre provides a "structure of experience" that constitutes "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."[78] Exploiting (male) audiences' overtly sexualized expectations of female presentation, the idols reconstruct and perpetuate a patriarchal gender hierarchy as a "practical consciousness" for both male and female subjects' "thought as felt and feeling as thought" in neoliberal Korea. What is a neoliberal emergent feature in K-pop idols comes from K-pop's affective labor, which conditions the idols to display sexuality and sensuality as imagined by the male industry leaders.

As a primary realm of neoliberal biopolitics, affects or affectionated bodies, as either topic or optic, are constantly produced, circulated, and consumed as a mode of micro-physics of power in terms of both specific content and the discursive construction of K-pop. Considering affect as an "operational set of dispositions toward the self in the world given by sensory perception, emotion, and feeling,"[79] the hyper-visual and affective nature of K-pop female idols is a cultural apparatus of neoliberalism that is an ensemble of discourse, institutions, and regulations over cultural production that encompasses "the said as much as the unsaid" on how neoliberalism works in society.[80] In this respect, with highly sexualized visuality, K-pop female idols are the latest and most effective counterexample of Adorno's insistence that the female voice "requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it."[81] While Adorno believes the female voice could never represent the female self in the gramophone era, spectacle-oriented K-pop and its music videos perfectly realize the physical

76. Kim, "K-pop Female Idols."

77. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 130.

78. Ibid., p. 132.

79. Patricia T. Clough and Jean Halley, ed., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), p. 69.

80. Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 194.

81. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," p. 54.

nature of femininity. As Roland Barthes observes, the presence of the body or a femininized, affective body is the most important aspect of music.[82] K-pop's visuality functions as an affective pedagogy that conditions audiences to learn and perceive the world through sensory stimuli: "Felt realities, sensed truths, guts that advise and hearts that remember, tears and smiles are what have begun to reconstitute social discourse along the semantic axis of affect."[83] In other words, considering that affect is a cultural logic of market capitalism, and that female bodies are commodified as sexual objects and regulated by the industry,[84] K-pop female idols are a form of cultural capital that redefines and transforms people's desire for sexy, attractive female images as a technology of sexiness in Korea's patriarchal capitalism.[85] In this respect, Yeran Kim, who coins the term "girl industries," argues that the idols are manufactured and consumed as a neoliberal brand and commodity.[86]

Jane Caputi's notion of "everyday pornography"[87] further explicates how K-pop female idols reinforce the affective dynamics of a gender-based micro-physics of power as a neoliberal structure of feeling and experience. As Caputi argues, pornography refers not only to an explicit, X-rated depiction of sexual intercourse but also, more importantly, to any representation that systematically and strategically objectifies, exploits, and degrades female bodies and subjectivities. By supporting the "sexual politics of the status quo," everyday pornography not only legitimizes patriarchal gender hierarchies but also "infuses practices of consumerism"

82. Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 504–10.

83. Dierdra Reber, "Headless Capitalism: Affect as Free-Market Episteme," *Differences* 23, no. 1 (2012): 68.

84. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, eds., *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Kristin Lieb, *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry: The Social Construction of Female Popular Music Stars* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage, 2009).

85. Liz Frost, "Theorizing the Young Woman in the Body," *Body & Society* 11, no. 1 (2005): 63–85; Rosalind Gill, "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising," *Feminism & Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2008): 35–60.

86. Yeran Kim, "Idol Republic: The Global Emergence of Girl Industries and the Commercialization of Girl Bodies," *Journal of Gender Studies* 20, no. 4 (2011): 333–45.

87. Jane Caputi, "Everyday Pornography," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, 2nd. ed., ed. Gail Dines and Jean Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), pp. 434–50.

aggression, and objectification.[88] For example, the highly synchronized choreography of K-pop idols should be understood as a socio-psychological confirmation of the stratified social hierarchy between the idols and (male) audiences. Highly synchronized choreography in the style of military mass games evokes predetermined hierarchical social positions, representing young, appealing female performers as mere objects of sexual fantasia. In this respect, SNSD's successful music DVD for their Japan debut, *New Beginning of Girls' Generation*, which sensually thematized military uniforms, suggests how the group carefully appropriates subconscious and nostalgic celebrations of militarism in Japan and Korea. It was largely successful for two reasons: Their military uniforms combined the physical and mental strength of the military and the sexual sensitivity of female bodies into a cliché of female empowerment. At the same time, the uniforms provided male audiences with sexual fantasies of subordinated femininity, which is guaranteed by the military's rank-and-file system. Alternatively, sexualized female idols in military uniforms signify that in order for them to gain power and influence, they still have to dress provocatively, even if they are in a position of authority, such as a military officer. Likewise, uniforms are one of the most popular props in male sexual fantasies, which are prevalent in pornography. In this respect, considering the historical background of Japan's total colonial exploitation for thirty-six years, SNSD's Japan debut strategy accords with how "pornography sexualizes hierarchy, not only between the sexes under male supremacy but also between socially unequal—sexually fetishized, enslaved, and colonized" peoples.[89]

The strategic deployment of cuteness by K-pop female idols further perpetuates the infantilization of women, an integral way in which pornography reinforces patriarchy: "In everyday pornography, sexually objectified women are shown in poses and clothing that suggests that they are little girls."[90] Being cute is a form of gendered biopolitics that conditions females to be weak and subordinate in relation to male desires, influences, domination, and exploitation. For example, SNSD's first major hit music video, "Gee," illustrates how female subjectivity and sexuality can only be activated and realized through the male gaze and male affection. By depicting how female mannequins become animated and act

88. Ibid., p. 435.
89. Ibid., p. 440.
90. Ibid., p. 441.

cutely in their behavior and mannerisms, the music video objectifies the image of the innocent "good girl next door" as an adult male sexual fantasy. By doing so, SNSD fetishizes a symbolic construction of childhood innocence as a mere sexual object, as its violation is regarded as a goal in the sexual politics of the patriarchal status quo. This glorified representation of submissive gender roles further normalizes the patriarchal ideology as "double blind" female audiences by objectifying and commodifying themselves.[91]

By perpetuating these appealing, cute, sexy images, K-pop female idols distract audiences from the real problems around them and, in doing so, induce a state of cultural amnesia. Just as the promotion of *Kawaii* (cuteness) helped alleviate social tension during Japan's economic depression in the 1990s, the K-pop industry deployed female idols' cutesy sexuality in the wake of the economic devastation in Korea following the IMF crisis. By offering a carefree, cheerful atmosphere of childhood nostalgia, cuteness appeals to emotionally depleted audiences who look for something that could satisfy their desire for affectionate relationships. The K-pop industry provides these affective commodities so that consumers can satisfy what they are deprived of in the neoliberal economy, which demands their affective service labors. Maintaining a sophisticated ambiguity between cute and sexy, K-pop female idols appeal to both male and female audiences by providing the former with the sexual fantasy of appealing, submissive, yet sexually active female entertainers and the latter with a model to emulate in order to successfully manage the contradictory gender expectations of patriarchy and neoliberalism. Thus, portrayed as self-determined, successful, and empowering entrepreneurial girls, K-pop female idols embody marketable, profitable human capital by "providing an image of the ideal new feminine subject demanded by neoliberalism."[92]

As an example of Williams's structure of feeling/experience, the everyday pornography of K-pop female idols has actively served to (re) produce both the predominant/residual culture of Confucian sexism and the dominant, hegemonic exploitation of female bodies as a means of economic development. Through pornographic objectification, K-pop's images of female sexual empowerment are merely an excuse for the

91. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Gender & Education*, ed. Madeleine Arnot and Mairin M.A. Ghaill (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 73–83.

92. Gonick. "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia,'" p. 11.

commodification of sexualized female bodies, based on the "myth that power is attained when one's body is on display."[93] Even if showing off one's well-toned body involves some sense of female agency, such sexual empowerment does not constitute autonomous subjectivity and agency. Without negating or renegotiating the patriarchal gender hierarchy, this message of sexual empowerment within the existing power structure deceives women by promoting "compliance masked in defiance: taking your clothes off to be heard."[94] In sum, as "inalienable elements of a social material process . . . seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced,"[95] K-pop female idols are a dominant mode of contemporary Korea's social experiences that hegemonically legitimates and (re)produces semantic categories of what is necessary, desirable, and required in the name of economic success.

Concluding Remarks: K-pop Idol Girl Groups as Episteme of Neoliberal Korea

Given that popular singers promote ideas and issues that their audiences are prepared to accept,[96] K-pop female idols have reinforced traditional conformist patriarchal gender ideals and norms, while offering a false sense of female empowerment via explicit sexualization, which in turn updates and perpetuates dominant gender stereotypes. By doing so, they articulate Korea's dominant mode of social dynamics, namely, patriarchal neoliberalism. According to Williams's notion of structure of feeling/experience, the idols are "effective formations of most actual art [that] relate to already manifest social formations [i.e., patriarchal industrial capitalism], dominant or residual, and it is primarily to emergent formations (though often in the form of modification or disturbance in older forms) that the structure of feeling, as *solution*, relates."[97] In this respect, K-pop idols are a synecdoche of patriarchal, neoliberal capitalism that embodies how "[c]apital is constantly exploiting different forms of labor force, constantly moving between the sexual division of labor in order to

93. Meredith Levande, "Women, Pop Music, and Pornography," *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 302.
94. Ibid., p. 305.
95. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 133.
96. Pavletich, *Sirens of Song*.
97. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 134.

accomplish its commodification of social life."[98] As a dominant cultural genre, K-pop idol girl groups are a popular representation of neoliberal Korea's explicit and specific social formation. It is the industry's stakeholders who rake in large profits by forcing female performers to risk their safety and lives, as with the Ladies' Code tragedy, while spreading and perpetuating ruthless competition and self-entrepreneurship as a source for personal achievement, thereby reinforcing the success and popularity of the K-pop industry. As a continuation of Korea's "miraculously" fast industrialization, the recent proliferation of K-pop idol girl groups is a concrete, strategic outcome of neoliberal, patriarchal Korean capitalism's new developmentalism.

98. Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization, and the World-system: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 130.