

Global Utopia and Local Anxiety on the Stage of the Korean Musical*

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■ ABSTRACT ■

The purpose of this essay is three-fold: to trace the genealogy of the Korean musical, which ever since its inception in the 1960s has been seeking to modernize Korean theater with Broadway as a constant role model; to investigate how the national and the global conflict and are conflated in the form of the Korean musical in the process of its (dis)identification with Broadway; and to examine how its intercultural translations reveal and reflect the dilemma and ambivalence posed by globalization in our era. Drawing on Richard Dyer's signature article *Entertainment and Utopia*, I analyze how the Korean musical manifests and conduits competing utopian impulses of Korean/Global audiences. I also attempt to problematize the formulaic notion of Broadway musicals the Superior Other! which implies a global hegemony that does not, in fact, exist because the boundary between the global and the local as well as the power dynamics of global culture are not fixed but constantly moving and changing.

Today's musical scene in Korea shows interesting reversals from the 1990s, when Korean producers were eager to debut on Broadway and impress American audiences. Korean producers no longer look up to Broadway as a final destination; instead they want to make Seoul a new Broadway. They import Broadway musicals and turn them into Korean shows. The glamor of Broadway is no longer the

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main attraction of musicals in Korea. What young audiences look for most is the glamor of K-pop idols and utopian feelings of abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community, which they can experience live in the musical with their favorite stars right in front of their eyes.

In conclusion, I delve into the complex dynamics of recent Korean musicals with Thomas Friedman's theory of Globalization 3.0 as reference. The binary formula of Global/America versus Local/Korea cannot be applied to the dynamic and intercultural musical scene of today. Globalization is not a uniform phenomenon but rather a twofold (multifold) process of global domination and dissemination, in which the global and the local conflict and are conflated constantly. As this study tries to illuminate, the Korean musical has evolved in a huge net of interdependences between the global and the local with a range of sources, powers and influences.

Key Words

Korean musical, Broadway musical, utopianism, local anxiety, cultural translation, Globalization 3.0

1. Broadway Musical, the Superior Other?

Hyunjung Lee, who has published several articles on Korean musicals, argues that Korean producers have been trying to emulate the Broadway musical as the superior 'Other' and internalize its features as the yardstick of Korea's cultural capacity and global achievement. The central irony in her argument consists in the fact that the ultimate goal of Korea's global aspiration is to prove the inherent value of its own national culture. The global, the mythical tool of achieving national greatness, constantly interacts and overlaps with the national(Lee 2012, 321). Lee speculates that Korean musical producers' imitation of Broadway results from the nation's lack of global presence as well as its deeply held desire to create a global identity. This might have been more accurate when Korea first became obsessed with the urge to globalize in the 1990s and 2000s, but now,

with the phenomenal success of the Korean Wave and K-pop worldwide, her analysis has become somewhat outdated. In fact, since the production of *The Last Empress*(1995) and *Nanta*(1997), the two major Broadway-style Korean productions Lee investigates, there have been no significant efforts to emulate Broadway, which itself has suffered since the beginning of America's economic crisis. Lee's rather formulaic notion of the Broadway Musical—the Superior Other—implies a stable global hegemony that does not, in fact, exist, as the boundary between the global and the local as well as the power dynamics of global culture are not fixed but constantly moving and changing.

The aim of this essay is three-fold: 1) to trace the genealogy of the Korean musical which, ever since its inception in the 1960s, has been seeking to modernize Korean theater, with Broadway as a role model, 2) to investigate how the national and the global conflict and are conflated in the form of the Korean musical in the process of its (dis)identification with Broadway, and 3) to examine how the intercultural translations in the Korean musical reveal and reflect the dilemmas and ambivalences posed by globalization in our era. Throughout the paper, drawing on Richard Dyer's signature article "Entertainment and Utopia," I will analyze how the Korean musical manifests and facilitates the competing utopian impulses of Korean/Global audiences.

2. The Musical and Utopia

In his article "Entertainment and Utopia," Richard Dyer maintains that musical genres offer audiences apparent remedies for or at least escapes from the problems that they face in life by offering "the image of something better."

Two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as "escape"

and as “wish-fulfillment,” point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism. Entertainment offers the image of something better to escape into, or something we want deeply, which our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes--these are the stuff of utopia, *the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized* (20, emphasis added).

He goes on to suggest that the utopian sensibilities inherent in musicals such as abundance (as opposed to scarcity), energy (as opposed to exhaustion), intensity (as opposed to dreariness), transparency (as opposed to manipulation) and community (as opposed to alienation) compensate for specific inadequacies in capitalist societies(26).

Dyer provides a valuable perspective that enables us to link what is often considered pure entertainment, such as a Broadway musical, with the very real contradictions of everyday life from which musicals help us to escape. He suggests that musicals can offer a utopian sensibility through style, gesture, song, and dance, which are proposed as solutions to the inadequacies and shortcomings we experience in our everyday reality. In this way, musicals, like myth, attempt to reflect/resolve contradictions via fantasy. His distinction between a treatise on utopia and a work that conveys a utopian sensibility (the way musicals convey emotive sensibilities) is especially apt: Musical do not have to become didactic documentaries in order to raise philosophical, theoretical, or sociological questions. As a modern form of myth, musicals require us to use different critical frames and procedures to speculate upon their cultural meanings. Dyer maintains:

Professional entertainment is the dominant agency for defining what entertainment is. This does not mean, however, that it *simply* reproduces and expresses patriarchal capitalism. There is the usual struggle between capital (the backers) and labor (the performers) over the control of the product ... The fact that professional entertainment has been by and large conservative in this century should not blind us to the implicit

struggle within it ... In other words, show business's relationship to the demands of patriarchal capitalism is a complex one. Just as it does not simply 'give the people what they want' (since it actually defines those wants), so it does not simply reproduce unproblematically patriarchal-capitalist ideology. Indeed, it is precisely on seeming to achieve both these often opposed functions simultaneously that its survival largely depends. (20)

Unlike Thomas More's idea of utopia, however, musicals are not concerned with the presentation of defined utopian worlds. Instead, musicals rely on the senses and emotions of their audiences. They present what utopia would "feel" like rather than what it would "look" like. The feelings of abundance, energy, transparency and community that musicals project are the exact antithesis to scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation or alienation caused by capitalism. Ironically, however, musicals heavily depend on the success of capitalism. As Dyer succinctly puts it, musicals "provide alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism"(29). Finally Dyer discusses three case studies to show that utopian forms of entertainment are not necessarily straightforward presentations of solutions to life's problems, for they contain contradictions within themselves.

Dyer's article reveals the workings of ideology within the seemingly uncomplicated, blatantly ideal theme of the musical. He not only charts how various societal inadequacies are addressed within the musical's depiction of utopia but also details the contradictions arising from the tension between conflicting utopian impulses within itself. By referencing major American musicals that place characters from minority groups at the center of attention and sympathy, Dyer highlights the important role women, Blacks, and gays have played in the development of the American musical. Yet the most fundamental subversion made by musicals are not in their narratives but in the performances themselves, which transcends the "normality" of reality/realism. Musical transcend even the fictional

reality of narrative when characters momentarily surrender themselves to the fantasy of song and dance. “Musicals rupture the fabric of traditional narrative verisimilitude by suddenly shifting from narrative to musical spectacle to song and dance that the narrative fiction is unable to naturalize”(Belton 151). Musicals, in other words, by disrupting the barrier between music and speech, body and mind, Self and Other, free the audience from the shackle of language/reason which addresses and separates them as individuals. In musicals, people are drawn together to create a new community despite existing differences. In her article “Performance, Utopia, and the Utopian Performative,” Jill Dolan quotes from Dyer at length:

My concern here is with how utopia can be imagined or *experienced affectively*, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide. As Richard Dyer says, in his chapter on entertainment and utopia, “Entertainment does not present models of Utopian worlds ... Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents ... what utopia would *feel* like rather than how it would be organized. It thus works at the level of sensibility, by which I mean an affective code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production.” These feelings and sensibilities, in performance, give rise to what I'm calling the “utopian performative” (460, emphasis added).

When analyzing performances, we need to examine not only what the performance is conveying but, more importantly, how it is being conveyed and to what effect. In the following analysis of Korean musicals, I will use Dyer's utopianism and Dolan's concept of “utopian performative” as theoretical references.

3. Translating Broadway Musicals onto the Korean Stage: Global Utopia

Broadway musicals offer Korean audiences not only “images of something better,” which their everyday reality does not provide but also “American” alternatives that compensate for perceived “inadequacies” in Korean society. But is this a mere escape into fantasy, offered hand-in-hand with blatant commercialism, or is it a legitimate mode of expression that responds to “real” needs in Korean society? What needs are being reflected in the different cultural translations of Broadway musicals in Korea? What kind of cultural meaning can we infer from the cultural dynamics that exist between Broadway and Korean musicals?

Korea's fascination with Broadway musicals dates back to the 1960s. In 1962, playwright Chi-jin Yu, who returned to Korea after observing American theater for three months, staged *Porgy and Bess*. Yu saw potential audiences for a new theater in Koreans who were rapidly assimilating to American culture, and he believed that Broadway-style musicals could lead the future of Korean theater due to their hugely popular appeal(cited in Choi 227). It is interesting, however, that he chose *Porgy and Bess*, a musical that deals with the serious themes of race, poverty, and dispersion, as the first American musical staged in Korea. Thomas M. Patterson, an American playwright and director who was living in Seoul at that time, registered his disappointment with the production in his review in *Hankook Ilbo* on September 13, 1962:

This Korean version of *Porgy and Bess* distorted the nature of the musical. The original work is neither a depiction of 'real' life of Afro-Americans nor a social critique about racism in America, but just a beautiful story, like opera. I don't understand why the Korean production treated it so heavily in such a tragic tone. What's important is not whether or not Porgy would be able to meet Bess again but his undaunted positive attitude, which culminated in the ending scene when the entire community

sees him off to New York with applause, laughter, and lots of blessings.
(Cited in Choi 228)

Patterson's interpretation fails to perceive how the tragic undertone of the original musical corresponded to the “structure of feelings” of Korean audiences in the 1960s, who identified with the Black characters in the musical. The Korean public in the 1960s, a time when the traumatic memory of the Korean war was still fresh, were not yet accustomed to spectacular song and dance spectacles and the care-free happy endings of typical Broadway shows. They would have felt much closer to the musical's tone of sorrow and despair, which is similar to Korean *han*. It is reasonable to suggest that Yu's production team was more interested in introducing this new cultural form in a way that emphasized a sentiment Korean audiences would understand and appreciate rather than simply emulating the original. So it is highly possible that the overtly “tragic tone” in the Korean version of *Porgy and Bess* was a very conscious strategy on the part of Yu and his team to properly initiate Korean audiences into the American musical. Only after finding a strong emotional connection with one of the central characters would the audience accept Porgy's “undaunted positive attitude” at the end.

Jung-ok Shin, who translated *Porgy and Bess* into Korean for another production in the 1970s, also stated in the program note that her most challenging task was to translate the characters' language of isolation and grief into a Korean vernacular. It can be inferred, then, that in the initial stage of importing American musicals, Korean theater producers gave priority to Korea's cultural particularities rather than emulating Broadway musicals as the superior Other. This can be seen in the fact that what immediately followed the production of *Porgy and Bess* was not another Broadway musical but a series of “Korean-style” musicals (<Come Softly> [살짜기 옵서예] and <Wedding Day>[시집가는 날]), produced by the Yegreen Musical Troup, a theater company established in the 1960s for the purpose

of developing native Korean musicals. Yegreen and the subsequent 88 Seoul Performing Arts Company were government-supported institutions that specialized in Korean-style musicals. But their attempts at developing a distinctively modern Korean genre of musical proved to be theatrical experiments at best, as they failed to generate substantial public interest over the long run(Yoo 12). Both companies survived for only a brief period.

In the 1970s, a variety of Broadway musicals were translated and produced mostly by a theater group named Hyundai Theater. Since Korea had not joined the international contract on the protection of intellectual property, Broadway hits such as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Sound of Music*, *West Side Story*, and *Evita* were staged locally without authorization. These musicals became very popular and heightened people's interest in musicals in general, which led to the 1980s, when the musical market in Korea burgeoned. According to Kim Woo Ok's article "Musicals: Past and Present," which includes statistics about musicals staged from the genre's initial introduction up to the early 1990s, a total of sixteen productions were staged between 1962 and 1971, thirty between 1972 and 1981, and one-hundred-and-forty-one between 1982 and 1991(Kim 289). In other words, the number of staged musicals increased almost ten-fold over three decades. One might also note the changing ratios between original Korean musicals and translated foreign works. For instance, during the ten years between the early 1960s and early 1970s, original Korean works accounted for 87 percent of the total number of musicals staged, while foreign works accounted for only 13 percent. In the 1970s, the number of foreign musicals grew to 43 percent and, in the 1980s, to 63 percent, Korean musicals making up the difference(Kim 301). These figures demonstrate conclusively that Broadway-style imports gradually succeeded in taking over the musical scene in Korea.

The fundamental reason behind the fast growth of the musical market in Korea is the economic prosperity Korea enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s

and the rise of the middle class. The public began to demand more entertainment, helping to diversify forms of theater which had previously centered on serious drama of the modernist school and appealed only to a limited audience of intellectuals and college students. At the same time the middle class wanted a sort of facade of high culture. Their thirst for “world class” culture increased dramatically after the Seoul Olympics in 1988. Broadway musicals entered this economic/social/cultural context and, figuratively speaking, killed three birds with one stone. Broadway musicals evoked visions of magnificent glamor and global success and they “had a jump start in acquiring the specific capacity and implicit charge of projecting a mainstream sense of ‘America’”(Lee 2012, 320). In short, they supplied cultural commodities that satisfied peoples’ new and complex desires.

The first real success that aroused general enthusiasm for Broadway musicals was the quintessentially New York story *Guys and Dolls* which, drawing over one million viewers, set a record with more than 1,100 performances over 10 years. The Korean premier of *Guys and Dolls* in 1983, a joint production of the Daejung, Minjung, and Gwangjang theater companies, was seen by hundreds of thousands of people over an extended run. The production of *Guys and Dolls* in 1985 (by Minjung Theater Company alone) achieved even greater success. Since then, this musical has been re-staged almost every year and has become the all-time favorite of Korean audiences.

Guys and Dolls marked a definite paradigm shift in the cultural translation of Broadway musicals in Korea. It opened a new era of popularization, spreading the “happy virus” of Broadway's utopianism. Quite contrary to the dark interpretation of *Porgy and Bess*, all Korean versions of *Guys and Dolls* are distinctive in their simpler and lighter approach to the original. In spite of its guise of being a romantic comedy, the original musical is shadowed by the historical background of the Great Depression in the 1930s, with the attending social problems of unemployment, prohibition,

and gambling. Korean productions largely ignored or diluted the original musical's social satire and instead focused on the romance between sleek guys and sexy dolls and the extravagance of song and dance(Choi 242). The musical created “feelings” of abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community and thereby helped people transcend the “inadequacies” of everyday life in 1980s Korean society. Musicals such as *42nd Street*, *Grease*, *Chorus Line*, *Sound of Music* all premiered in Korea in the 1980s and early 1990s, showcasing the utopianism Dyer delineates in his article, which offered the image of something better to escape into, “something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide.” Broadway musicals provided Korean audiences alternatives, hopes, wishes with the sense that “something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized”(Dyer 20).

As Dyer argues, musicals draw people in and create a new community that celebrates possibility. The bigger the difference between the reality and the new “virtual” community, the greater the yearning the community feels to make possibilities a reality. Korean scholars and critics, however, almost unanimously decried these musicals’ escapism and commercialism. Seung-Ok Kim criticized Korean musicals for their lack of originality and reality.

Superficially imitating Broadway musicals, Korean musicals just rehash foreign musicals rather than creating original works. Directly imported from Broadway, these musicals do not fit our communal sentiments; they are just a substitute for the real, flooded with the dreams and fantasies of foreigners ... Most of all, it is grounded in shortsighted Western commercialism. Broadway musicals present nothing other than myths of love, ambition, and success wrapped in splendid music and dance just to be made popular, flattering the taste of the young generation. (63-4)

Chiwoon Ahn's criticism was even harsher. He called Broadway-style

musicals “vulgar capitalism” and “entertainment for the masses, who cannot stand being lonely,” which are replacing “real art for a solitary minority.”

The center of Korean theater is rapidly moving towards musicals. As commercialism devours Daehak-ro and its vicinity, real theater is disappearing. Instead of dealing with class struggle and the sufferings of isolated individuals, musicals only elicit empty laughs and cheap pleasure ... Imported musicals change today's Korean theater from art to entertainment, as foreign species eat up all our native fish and get fatter ... The difference between words and melody is speed. Musical skip long pauses of words and thereby speed up the process of thinking and jump into hope. Musical promise a falsity that is dissociated from everyday reality. In musicals, the past is brief, and hope is near. In musicals, the audience embraces empty hopes without question. Our dreams and hopes flow helplessly along the wave of music and dance (371-3).

The statements of both critics are politically correct and intellectually persuasive. But if we consider their diatribe against the utopianism in musicals in the light of Dyer's speculation, the foreignness of Broadway musicals that Kim disapproves of as being unfit to “our communal sentiments” is exactly what draws people who want to envision a new kind of community. The audience's “taste” is not a moral issue for us to judge as right or wrong but an aesthetic question that requires us to examine people's emotional needs, their yearning to experience something alternative, different, new in an imaginary space like the theater. Jinsoo Jung, the translator/director of *Guys and Dolls*, argues that “Good musicals are not judged by logic or political correctness but by the passionate applause of the audience members who are completely swept up in the emotional and sensory power of the show. That moment makes all the theories disparaging musicals simply nothing, mere bubbles”(12). People's desire to experience utopia vicariously but viscerally in musicals is not a matter

of simple ignorance or laziness (as Ahn implies); it rather contains political – even subversive – impulses for “what can be imagined and maybe realized.” In that sense, laughter, pleasure, and hope in musicals, even if despised by critics, are not “empty” or “cheap” simply because “in musicals, the past is brief and hope (i.e. the future) is near.”

4. Korean-brand Musicals on the Global Market: Local Anxiety

In the early 1990s, the increasing pace of globalization further fueled musicals' popularity in Korea. Spurred by the “seggyehwa”(globalization) movement, declared in 1994 by Kim Young Sam's administration(1993-8) as a vehicle for Korea to become one of the world's advanced nations, domestic theater artists and producers sought to create Korean-brand Broadway-style musicals that would prove Korea's cultural value to the world. In spite of its emphasis on globalization, this official discourse actually called forth a deep-rooted national consciousness. Seggyehwa itself was a conflicted utopia, which on one hand encouraged Koreans to achieve status as “world citizens” but on the other hand regressed to a nostalgic view of the nation's past(Lee 2010, 56). According to the official discourse of seggyehwa:

Seggyehwa must be based on Koreanization. Koreans cannot become global citizens without a good understanding of their own culture and tradition. Seggyehwa in the proper sense of the word means that Koreans should march out into the world on the strength of their unique culture and traditional values. Only when national identity is maintained and intrinsic national spirit is upheld will Koreans be able to successfully globalize (cited in Lee 2010, 56).

Hyungjung Lee, in her three articles on the Korean musical, consistently

and persuasively delineates how *The Last Empress*, the first Korean musical to travel to Broadway, epitomized this conflicting rubric of globalization. *The Last Empress* was premiered in Korea in 1995 by Arts Communication International (A-Com International), a professional musical company founded by director Ho-jin Yoon in 1991. The tremendous impact and success of Broadway musicals in the 1980s created a strong impetus for “a Korean version of a Broadway musical,” and *The Last Empress* is the best example of this. Yoon's nationalistic ambition to demonstrate the competitive quality of a Korean cultural product led him to stage the musical in New York as well as in other Western metropolises like Los Angeles, London, and Toronto despite receiving no performance fees from the venues.

The Last Empress is about the tragic murder of Empress Myoungsung (known as Queen Min, 1851-1895) and the consequent subordination of Korea to Japan. The show, which chronicles Queen Min's years in the palace, presents her life and death as analogous to the tragic decline of the Chosun dynasty and the country's annexation by Japan. The musical opens with Queen Min's coronation and royal marriage to King Gojong in 1866, as she pledges both to serve him and to remain the faithful “Mother of the Nation.” Throughout the performance, the audience finds the queen seeking support from Russia in order to defend Chosun from Japan's gradual encroachment. Unfortunately, the Japanese assassins invade the queen's court and stab her to death. The musical ends with a grand finale that stages Queen Min's resurrection as she blesses Korea's eternal prosperity:

One step ahead, autonomy and prosperity!
 One step back, subordination and retrogression!
 Gather our strength in wisdom and courage,
 Rise against the shame of ruining our nation!
 We shall forever protect the sun rising in the East.
 Chosun is forever! Chosun shall prosper! (cited in Lee 2002, 153)

The Last Empress's New York premiere in 1997 showcased uniquely Korean connections between its yearning for globalization and inherent nationalism. As soon as it became the first Korean musical staged on Broadway, the musical's reputation soared at home. Under the discourse of *seggyehwa*, *The Last Empress* was feted as an exemplary model that would secure the nation a place in leading the trend of globalization by promoting Korean culture on an international stage. For that purpose, Broadway was considered as a test ground of international quality that would guarantee success anywhere in the world. *The Last Empress* represents how Korea attempted to construct a sense of national identity that interacted and overlapped with the rest of the world. As much as the producers of *The Last Empress* wanted to emulate the global products of Broadway, they also sought to ensure that Korea's first Broadway musical would be authentically Korean. Given the numerous foreign productions flowing into South Korea from the 1980s on, they sought to reverse that trend and thereby prove the viability of Korean culture on the global stage.

Musical critic Younghae Noh dubbed *The Last Empress* as “the people's musical” because it proved the high value of Korean culture: “the production itself proves that Korean performance has caught up with the scale of Broadway megamusicals”(62). The Korean media continued to overstate the musical's accomplishment, deploying the rhetoric of global success, as the show traveled to London, Los Angeles, and Toronto. The visual elements grew more lavish as the production was restaged, but *The Last Empress* ultimately failed to impress global audiences. Heakyung Lee argues that the musical indulged too much in narrating historical events and in glorifying the Korean Empress from the perspective of Korean people, who still lived in a spirit of feudalistic nationalism(156). Western critics saw the musical as a Broadway wannabe with a Korean facade. Rhoda Koenig opined that the music was not only lacking in imagination and uniqueness but also sounded like “a tribute to Andrew Lloyd Webber and vintage Broadway.” Michael Billington, a theater critic of *The Guardian*,

rated the show 1 out of 5 and concluded in his review:

Although the final number is a choral anthem hymning ‘independency,’ the show itself is the artistic equivalent of the process by which local Korean companies have surrendered to foreign control ... The story may come from the East but the show's rhetorical style suggests a doomed attempt to become the Korean *Les Miserables*.

These critical evaluations deserve our attention, but what they failed to recognize was the complexity of the cultural dynamic between the global and the local in *The Last Empress*. It was the “local anxiety” that drove the show to take up the mask of Broadway, the symbol of glamor and affluence of the global center. At the core of *The Last Empress* was national anxiety masquerading in the lavish global style of Broadway megamusicals. Haekyoung Lee hints at the possibility of the strategic exploitation of Orientalism(157), but what the musical truly exploited was not Orientalism that catered to Western tastes but a sentiment of nationalism that stirred the nostalgic memories of overseas Korean immigrants who, after all, comprised most of the spectators in the New York and London runs.

The global utopia projected in the production of Broadway-style megamusicals was in fact the flip side of local anxiety over Korea's national identity in the era of globalization. In this rapidly globalizing world, we are threatened by two opposite dangers: the danger of difference and the danger of sameness. People are anxious not to be left behind in this uniform race for a global economy and a global culture but, at the same time, they are afraid of losing the cultural identity that makes them unique, different, and distinctive. Walking a tight rope between the two poles of the universal(the global) and the particular(the local), we experience both excitement and anxiety over the idea of a disappearing of the self. In that sense, *The Last Empress* showcases Korea's struggle to balance the two seemingly incompatible imperatives of the global and the local. By fusing national history and global form, the musical attempted to

appropriate globalization and thereby find a way to turn the crisis into opportunity, fear into courage. In that sense, what Korean audiences may have seen in *The Last Empress* was Korea standing at the edge of surging waves of globalization, just as Chosun stood on the edge of a precipice before the encroaching world powers in the late nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, the producers' grand project of proving national competence on the global stage never resulted in more than premature enthusiasm on the part of the domestic Korean media. Such a half success was partly due to its lack of vantage point above the global and the local. *The Last Empress* was so self-absorbed in containing the global(form) in the local(content) (or the other way around) that it failed to create the requisite aesthetic distance from which to view and reflect on the dynamics between the two. History was too long and hope was too heavy. The musical never let go of the gravity of reason/narrative and so failed to soar into the realm of utopia.

The most recent and unprecedentedly successful Korean "musical" on the global market has been Psy's "Gangnam Style." Ironically, Psy's "musical" compensates for *The Last Empress's* unfulfilled dreams. Psy's music video conjures up the utopian sensibilities inherent in musicals such as abundance (as opposed to scarcity), energy (as opposed to exhaustion), intensity (as opposed to dreariness), transparency (as opposed to manipulation) and community (as opposed to alienation), which compensate for specific inadequacies in society. The *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Giddy Up! S. Korean Rapper Psy's 'Gangnam Style' is Unstoppable" proclaims that "It's not just the Olympics that brings together the citizens of the world. It's also completely insane, hilarious, high-energy music videos."

Psy publicly admits that when he created the song he did not have global listeners in mind; it was intended for local fans. Unlike the producers of *The Last Empress* and other cultural products whose main purpose was to enter the U.S. market, Psy felt no such pressure to impress Western

audiences. He invented his unique style and humor to please his local fans, which quickly became something completely novel and unexpected to global audiences. “Gangnam Style,” with hundreds of flash mobs and imitations, created a new community that celebrated “difference” and, with a buoyant energy of song and dance, transcended the shortcomings of everyday life, however fleetingly.

Yet there is one thing that makes “Gangnam Style” distinct from the utopianism of typical Broadway-style musicals: Psy's music video “plays with” the longing for *and* the impossibility of utopia. His music video expresses both the universal yearning for utopia *and* our collective failure to achieve it. The moment viewers feel the most heightened sense of community occurs when they recognize this fact and laugh *with* Psy not *at* him. In that sense, the place of Gangnam reaches beyond a narrow geographical frame to become a postmodern, late-capitalist version of Shangri-La, Arcadia, or El Dorado – an elusive utopia that means “no place.” From this point of view, Psy's “musical” can be read as a satirical commentary on wannabes, not only in the “Gangnam Style” video but in “Broadway style” Korean musicals.

5. Korean Musicals in the Era of Globalization 3.0

In the 2010s, the power dynamic that informed musicals in Korea has changed in a significant way. Broadway is still the center of world musicals but no longer the Superior Other with absolute power, as Seoul has become a rising musical mecca that draws American producers who want to make up for their losses in the flopping American market. Judy Craymer, the lead producer of *Mamma Mia!* said, “Seoul has become incredibly important in the lives of many musicals, something none of us would've said or predicted a decade ago.” A recent article titled “Musicals Couldn't Be Hotter Off Broadway (by 7,000 Miles)” in the *New York Times* reports:

Seoul has become a boomtown for American musicals, with Korean and Broadway producers tapping into an audience of young women ... Ticket sales to American and European musicals, as well as to a sprinkling of Korean originals, have grown from \$9 million in 2000 to an estimated \$300 million this year, and a frenzy of licensing deals is underway ... And best of all, it's this huge young audience. The growth potential is enormous.

The rewards have become significant for American producers, who usually receive fifteen percent of the box office gross as well as licensing and management fees in some cases. Revenues worth millions of dollars offset losses on Broadway. Yet Broadway producers are not the only beneficiaries. Mr. Do-yoon Seol, one of the lead producers of Korean musicals, said, "People are losing money in musicals, but because enough of them are making money, everyone still wants to be big in the market"(quoted in "Musicals Couldn't Be Hotter"). In the boom of American musicals in Korea, idol stars from popular K-pop bands are the key players. Producers have been increasingly hiring K-pop stars, as well as Korean soap opera actors and other celebrities. Jun-won Chang, a talent agent turned musical producer states, "Ten years ago, five years ago, ticket sales depended on a musical coming from Broadway or London or having a Tony Award, but today, *K-pop casting has become the No. 1 criteria for a lot of shows*"("Heartthrobs," emphasis added).

K-pop's dominance is leading to meaningful cultural negotiations between American musical licensing companies and Korean producers. When executives of SM Entertainment, a major talent agency that is moving into musical theater, were planning a Korean-language *Singin' in the Rain* with a K-pop star in the Gene Kelly role and K-pop choreography between scenes, they encountered resistance from Music Theater International, the New York-based licensing company that handles the rights to *Singin' in the Rain*. Chang-hwan Jeong, who oversees theater production for SM, protested, "While it'd be hard to put K-pop music and dancing into, say,

Les Misrables, *Singin' in the Rain* has a very open structure that easily lends itself to *our* style of performance ... We don't want to do any damage to the shows. But we also want these to be *Korean* shows”(“Heartthrobs,” emphasis added).

Today's musical scene in Korea shows significant reversals from the 1990s, when Korean producers were eager to debut on Broadway and impress American audiences. Korean producers no longer look up to Broadway as a final destination; instead, they want to make Seoul a new Broadway. They bring Broadway musicals and turn them into Korean shows. Some even plan on taking their shows to Japan and China by putting K-pop stars into Broadway musicals. The glamor of Broadway is no longer the main attraction of musicals in Korea. What young audiences look for most is the glamor of K-pop idols and the utopian feelings of abundance, energy, intensity, transparency and community, which they can experience live in the musical with their favorite stars right in front of their eyes.

The complex dynamics in recent Korean musicals can be explained with Thomas Friedman's theory of Globalization 3.0. Critics often cite the intercultural aspects of today's Korean theater and its hybridity as evidence of American cultural imperialism. Others see it as an opportunity for creativity and dynamic growth. But whether one regards what is happening in Korean theater as positive or negative, there is no place on Earth that is not being influenced and changed by activities taking place in other parts of the world. International travel, networked communication, the circulation of goods and technologies, curiosity about the way other people live, and fascination with novelty are everywhere, helping to produce a “global culture.” Richard Schechner sees globalization itself as performance, and in his article “Global and Intercultural Performances” presents a compelling “storyboard” for it. The proponents of globalization envision American superheroes who dissolve national, cultural, and economic boundaries as they spread free-market capitalism,

individual entrepreneurship, and democracy to every corner of the world. The opponents of globalization, on the other hand, see an increase in American power and hegemony, economically, politically, and culturally. But there is third scenario that retells globalization as a “David versus Goliath” story, in which the struggle of millions of individuals using the Internet as a global participatory forum create a new cultural power that battles against corporate conglomerates (Schechner 265-266).

Thomas Friedman defines this third scenario of globalization as Globalization 3.0. In Globalization 1.0, which lasted from 1492 until around 1800 when Columbus set sail, opening trade between the Old World and the New World, the key agent of change was how much brawn--how much muscle, horsepower, wind power, or steam power--a country had. In Globalization 2.0, lasting roughly from 1800 to 2000, the key agent of change was falling transportation and telecommunication costs, which powered multinational companies in the West. With Globalization 3.0, we have entered a whole new era. “The dynamic force in Globalization 3.0--the thing that gives it its unique character--is the newfound power for individuals to collaborate and compete globally”(Friedman 9). Friedman goes on to argue:

Globalization 3.0 not only differs from the previous eras in how it is shrinking and flattening the world and in how it is empowering individuals. It is different in that Globalization 1.0 and 2.0 were driven primarily by European and American states and business ... *Globalization 3.0 is going to be more and more driven by a much more diverse--non-Western, non-white, female--groups of individuals.* Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to plug and play. (9-10 emphasis added)

Then who is the “David” of Globalization 3.0, who creates a new cultural power to battle against the cultural hegemony of Broadway? They are Psy and his music video on YouTube, K-pop idols leading the musical

scene in Korea, young women in their 20s and early 30s who comprise 80% of the audience for musicals in Korea, and Korean producers who are making a shift from the American Wave to a Korean Wave. These are the Davids who can defeat Goliath.

And there are other Davids who have joined this battle. Since the mid-1990s, musicals have also been staged at small-size theaters. *Subway Line 1*, a Korean adaptation of the German musical *Linie 1-Musikalische Revue* is the most successful example. In 1994, determined to turn around the trend of megamusicals, composer and director Min-gi Kim opened Hakchon Theater with *Subway Line 1* as its inaugurating production. *Subway Line 1* enjoyed a fifteen-year run at the same venue, drawing more than 700,000 people to its record-breaking 4,000 performances. Since 2008, the small-size theater musical *Washing*, an original Korean musical, has successfully followed the legacy of *Subway Line 1*, in which audiences root for characters representing people who are marginalized in society.

6. Conclusion

Since 2000, the Korean musical market has grown by more than 20% almost every year, and since 2006 it has taken up more than 50% of the entire performing arts market in Korea(Park 403). Musicals produced annually already outnumber Broadway musicals. This fast growth of musicals in Korea is partly due to the lack of diverse popular entertainment suited to the changing tastes and demands of the public. Traditional highbrow arts such as opera, ballet, and classical music can be enjoyed only when audiences have a requisite amount of knowledge and training. It was the imported licensed Broadway musical that nurtured people's taste for utopianism in popular entertainment, which let audiences experience vicarious but intense feelings of community.

Even though I agree with the general concerns with regard to the lack

of original Korean musicals, “original” does not necessarily mean culturally pure and homogeneous. In the era of Globalization 3.0, even works of art cannot be entirely original, not to mention popular forms of entertainment such as musicals. Also, in the field of popular culture, competition can easily turn into intercultural collaboration. The binary formula of Global/America versus Local/Korea cannot be applied to the dynamic and intercultural musical scene of today. Globalization is not a uniform phenomenon but rather a twofold or multifold process of global domination and dissemination in which the global and the local conflict and are conflated constantly. As we have seen in this study, the Korean musical has evolved from a huge net of interdependences between the global and the local with a range of sources, powers and influences.

As Dyer asserts, the fact that musical theater is primarily commercial entertainment should not blind us to its complex relationship with patriarchal capitalism and its implicit struggle within it. Young generations who love musical theater have grown up in a thoroughly postmodern environment, moving easily among media in a culture that privileges the “no-brow.” Such flights from banality into an intense, sincere, generous romanticism point toward Dolan’s notion of “utopian performatives.” Stacy Wolf, in her article “In Defense of Pleasure: Musical Theatre History in the Liberal Arts,” proclaims the politically progressive possibilities of utopianism in musical performance, what Dyer calls “the intensity of fleeting emotional contacts ... and the exquisite pain of [their] passing”(cited in Dolan 472). In such lucid power of intersubjective understanding, feelings and emotions that transcend both cultural barriers and the banality of everyday life are the beginning of the utopian performative.

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