

Creative Writing

Original Monologue

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The cultural appropriation and appreciation in K-contents

With the rise of Korean culture in popular media, a heavy question has been posed by those who want to be able to enjoy it: what does it mean to be respectful of a culture? As groups like BTS gain acclaim or Squid Game becomes a common popular content for what you should watch on Netflix, an alarming misunderstanding of what counts as cultural appreciation and what counts as cultural appropriation has become fairly obvious.

So you may be wondering what exactly is cultural appropriation? To start things off, culture is defined as: "a particular group of people's traditions, religion, ethnicity, or social customs" and appropriation is the action of unrightfully taking possession of "a term used to describe the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another". Therefore, simply put, cultural appropriation is [theft]. This is a term used to describe the taking over of a creative or artistic form. So you're probably thinking, what does cultural appropriation look like then? Well, "taking one aspect of a culture that is not [one's own]" and using it "only for personal interest, and to make money, gain popularity, or simply because they like the other one's look.

One such example of this is Mr. Beast. With over 94 million subscribers, he's definitely one of the biggest names on YouTube. After the popularization of the Korean drama, Squid Game, he released a video of his own which invited people from the LA area to compete in the same competitions for 456 thousand dollars. Although he is not the only Youtuber or online personality who have done the action of doing this, he is one of the most noted as bandwagoning onto the success of the Korean drama for personal benefit. While at the same time disregarding the core message of national and the economic gap in Korea, he also failed to recognize the cultural elements of the original such as the exclusion of the iconic "*Mugunghwa kkoci pieot seumnida*" and the titular "Squid Game" in favor of musical chairs.

A lesser known but significantly more criticized example is another Youtuber named Oli London who made a fake identity using excessive plastic surgery on himself so that he may look more like BTS' member, Jimin. In fact, he has used over \$100,000 in his efforts to look like a famous idol! He has gone so far as to say he is obsessed with trying to achieve this look and will not be stopping anytime soon. He is so consumed by this goal, that outside of his plastic surgeries he has also started to make some drastic lifestyle changes. He has spent tons of money to look like Jimin by buying clothes similar to what Jimin has worn in music videos and in concerts. An example of such is buying a \$7,000 coat similar to one worn by Jimin in the music video "*Fake Love*". Oli London sparks major controversy as a self-proclaimed Koreaboo, or someone who is obsessed with Korean culture, and his efforts

to “become Korean” himself. He identifies as a trans-racial Korean man and claims to be transitioning from white to Asian.

These two examples highlight both the passive and active sides of cultural appropriation because they both crossed the line of appropriating rather than appreciating the cultural specialty of Korea. By not recognizing the cultural aspects that they are taking from, both are unknowingly idealizing or overemphasizing what is significant to Korean heritage for their own personal purpose.

The easiest solution that I can offer to you all, for those who are wanting to avoid appropriating themselves, is to ask yourself a simple question. *Why?* Do you enjoy it just because of its success? Do you enjoy it because that’s what everyone else is talking about? Do you care to understand more about the culture that you are experiencing? By asking these simple, natural questions, you can start to navigate for yourselves whether or not your appreciation is truly that, appreciation. Although my examples today were centered on Korea, I request you all to carry this sentiment to all content that you consume and to be mindful of all the beautiful cultures that our world has to offer.

Thank you.