



# Black K-Pop: Racial Surplus and the Global Consumption of Korean Pop Music

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This talk provides a critical analysis of the performance of blackness in the Korean pop music (K-pop) industry. Close reading of the racial relations expressed in K-pop music videos—the most commonly used media platform to circulate K-pop globally—shows that race relations in the industry may not always hark back to the deeply troubled paradigms of racial tension in the United States. By working through theories of Afro-orientalism and sono-racialization, I propose the concept of “racial surplus” as a way to move forward from the deterministic arguments generated by proponents of Afro-pessimism. In the end, the talk unpacks the paradox that collaborations across racial boundaries often result in the erasure of black labor while Asian bodies, in the eyes of the global white audience, are cast as disciplined bodies that can process unbridled black urban culture into a digestible, safe, consumerist commodity.

Suk-Young Kim is Professor of Critical Studies in the Department of Theater at UCLA, where she also directs the Center for Performance Studies. She is the author of *Illusive Utopia: Theater, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 2010), *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship Along the Korean Border* (Columbia UP, 2014), and *K-Pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance* (Stanford UP, 2018). With Kim Yong, she also co-authored *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Labor Camp Survivor* (Columbia UP, 2009). Her research has been acknowledged by the International Federation for Theatre Research’s New Scholar’s Prize (2004), the Library of Congress Kluge Fellowship (2006-7), the Association for Asian Studies James Palais Book Prize (2013), the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Outstanding Book Prize (2015), and the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship (2014-2015). Her comments on North and South Korean cultures have been featured in major media outlets, such as NPR, CNN, *The New York Times*, and *Billboard Magazine*, among others.

**3:30-5:00 PM, Communications #226**

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