

The Perfect Man: The Ideal Imaginary Beauty of K-pop Idols for Chilean Fans*

Wonjung MIN

This paper aims to determine why Chilean fans of K-pop enjoy the incompatible aesthetics of K-pop idols. It will analyze the variation of the ideal of beauty according to socioeconomic level in Chile and fans' perception of the beauty canons of K-pop. Hypothesizing that the relationship between race (rather skin color) and class in Chile affects K-pop consumption, this study will delve into why the canon of beauty attracts Chilean fans, despite the contrast that exists with the Chilean canon of male beauty. Latin American culture is constituted by sexual roles marked and determined by gender (Cristián Valenzuela 2015); these roles perpetuate male superiority based on the figure of the male. Specifically, the hegemonic masculinity present in the region stands out for having such characteristics as strength, rationality, seriousness, domination, heterosexuality, and sexual activity. Asians are often called *Chino*, and K-pop fans are considered strange. Though Chileans tend to conflate all Asian pop cultures, they are particularly suspicious of the sexual identity of K-pop fans. Based on a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with sixteen upper-class and twenty middle-lower-class Chileans, this paper investigates how Chilean K-pop fans consume and negotiate with the aesthetics of K-pop in a conservative, European-oriented, oligarchic society.

Keywords: Chilean K-pop fandom, K-pop idols' masculinity, shy confession, class distinctions, flower boys, Latin America, beauty canon, cultural products consumption

*Publication of this article was made possible by a 2020 Kyujanggak fellowship grant. An earlier draft of this paper was presented on January 21, 2021 at the *112th Kyujanggak Colloquium*, held at the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University. I would like to thank the participants at this event for their valuable feedback and also the journal editors and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this article.

Wonjung Min (wjhelena@snu.ac.kr) is a professor in the Department of History and Executive Committee Member of the Asian Studies Center at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, and a Kyujanggak fellow

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 34, no. 1 (June 2021): 159–194.

© 2021 Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies