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Commodifying Asian-ness: Entrepreneurship and the Making of East Asian Popular Culture

This study examines the linkage between entrepreneurship and the making of popular culture in East Asia. The central argument presented is that the notion of entrepreneurship is central for understanding and conceptualizing the process of constructing trans-national markets for popular culture and for building new circles of “Asian” recognition. In other words, entrepreneurial vision is not only transforming the local cultural markets by underpinning a region-wide cultural production system but also un-intentionally spurring feelings of “Asian” sameness.

The presentation itself will focus on three cases of entrepreneurship which exemplify the driving forces and the intended and unintended consequences of entrepreneurship: the exploration of markets in East Asia by Japanese media companies which brought to a wide-scale transformation and emulation of Japanese cultural production formats, illegal operations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea involving the copying and marketing of pirated music albums, animation, and TV programs, and music companies in Hong Kong and Singapore which attempt to create a new musical genre depicted as ‘Asian music,’ in order to reduce production cost and break into new markets. Finally, I will outline the wider theoretical and methodological implications for concept of entrepreneurship and define the relations between structural determinism and human agency in popular culture.