

"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"

Panel 4: Media Changing Identities: Focus on Gender and Generation

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„Idols of Development: The Queer Convergence of New Media and Korean Dance Performance in Thailand“

Abstract

The Internet has facilitated the development of queer subcultures throughout Asia. Previous scholarship has focused on the globalization or localization of Western gay subjectivities and norms. It is clear, however, that new media also provides increasing opportunities for the restyling of localized gender/sexual norms using non-Western sources. In Thailand, new media is a tool for enacting queer identities that are coded as modern and “Asian,” where Japan and Korea come to represent aspirations for a different future. The Internet, social media, and other technologies arrived concomitantly with the Korean Wave, or the popularity of Korean entertainment media, thus contributing to an explosion in representations of queerness in Thai media. In this paper, I describe how new media flows enable the social phenomenon of Thai K-pop cover dance.

Cover dance is the copying of choreographed movements, gestures and timing to replicate a star's music video or concert performance. These cover routines require video sharing sites for their circulation, both as a model for representation and as a documentation of live dance in social spaces. In Thailand, K-pop cover dance has become a popular activity among sissies (young effeminate gay men) and is organized into an extensive international contest circuit. Thai sissies who cover Korean girl groups are among the most prolific “prosumers” of K-pop; in addition to watching videos of K-pop girl bands, they also reproduce these videos in their own YouTube video responses. For example, cover dance groups such as the Wonder Gay have achieved national celebrity and caused a gender panic through their viral videos. In this paper, I examine the interrelationship between K-pop online and its reproduction in the social practice of Thai cover dance. I argue that Thai K-pop cover dance enables new modes of gender/sexual expression associated with East Asian developmental aspirations by providing a venue for Thai males to access and perform Korean cross-gender identifications. A close examination of K-pop cover dance in Thailand highlights recent shifts in inter-Asian pop-culture flows, uses of new media technology, and transgressive gender performance. In particular, it demonstrates the convergence of entertainment media with everyday recreational activity and novel ways of expressing gender/sexual identities.