Transnational Migrations and YouTube Sensations: Korean Americans, Popular Music, and Social Media

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**Abstract.** This article addresses the music making of Korean Americans, focusing on their place within the emergent social media environment that has exploded in the last five years and comparing this with the very different environment of the previous decade. Biographical coverage of the careers of three Korean American musicians, two of whom have extensive social media presence, demonstrates how these media, particularly YouTube, represent a fundamental shift in the popular music profession, providing equalizing opportunities that are enabling some to circumvent racial barriers that have long existed and still persist in the major music and entertainment industries in the United States.

New media has given this generation of Asian Americans a voice. It is a space that allows for 100% creative control, and the emerging Asian American identity is vibrant, dynamic, and spans the entire spectrum of personalities from nerdy and quiet to funny and outspoken. New media has showcased Asian American talent and given opportunities rarely seen in traditional media. With millions of view counts as proof, the world is being exposed to Asian American outside of the stereotypes.

From *Uploaded: The Asian American Movement*, Julie Zhan, producer.

Social media are reshaping popular music consumption worldwide, but the profound changes they are bringing are especially game-changing for those previously excluded from the mainstream music industry. Until very recently, the main option available to Korean Americans seeking professional success as popular musicians was to relocate to Korea; but, in the last few years, skill-
ful engagement in the new social media, particularly YouTube, by some young musicians is enabling them to circumvent racial barriers, in particular, that have long existed and still persist in the major music and entertainment industries in the United States. Social media, defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content,” has brought profound changes to society, economy, and culture, including the industry practices of production, distribution, and consumption. It is highly interactive and cost-free for anyone with Internet access. As social media usage soars worldwide, and very often with musical content, it is incumbent upon ethnomusicologists to grapple with the particular relevancies of these media in shaping contemporary musical culture. This article offers one important entrée into understanding the potentials and limits of the tactical (de Certeau 1984) employment of social media by musicians marginalized by their racial identities in the United States. The potentials for exposure and access are vast, though not yet a means to mainstream media appearances.

While I devote most of my inquiry here to the career trajectories of three Korean American male musicians, the issues underlying their particular situations do not differ substantially from those of other Asian Americans—namely, persistent marginalization in the United States as “perpetual foreigners,” negative stereotyping of Asian American males as meek and sexually undesirable, and the unwillingness of major media companies to produce and promote Asian American musicians. My focus here is on Korean American musicians, in part because a more comprehensive discussion of musicians of all Asian American backgrounds would require a far lengthier study, and in part because Korean Americans, at least in the last few years, have been especially successful in using these new forms of technology to build careers as professional musicians. The key argument, however, is not one about Korean American musicians alone, or even primarily, but about the inextricable links between music, race, technology, and industry—specifically (to put these four words into an operative phrase) the potential for new technology to circumvent the entrenched race-based modus operandi of the mainstream industry with regard to popular music production and dissemination.

The identifiers, Korean American and Asian American require some clarification here. Prior to the late 1960s, Americans of Asian descent did not routinely self-identify as Asian American, but did so more specifically in reference to the country of their ancestry (as Japanese, Chinese, Korean, etc.), though those of other ancestries (European and African) did not readily make such distinctions, more often applying labels such as oriental (or more racially derogatory terms). Inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, political activists of Asian
ancestry in America formed a coalition under the new rubric, Asian American, deemphasizing cultural differences and aimed at a coordinated opposition to anti-Asian attitudes and policies in the United States (see Wei 1993; Lowe 1996; Aoki and Tanaka 2008). Some of the strongest supporters of this new politically-motivated racial/ethnic identity were artists, including jazz-based musicians, such as pianist Jon Jang, saxophonist Fred Ho, and bassist Mark Izu, among others (see Fellezs 2007, Ho 2009). For these activists and the wider population of Americans of Asian ancestry, ethnic and cultural identity has involved a context-sensitive fluidity between, for example, Korean American or Chinese American in some contexts, and Asian American in others.

Further complicating the picture are the multiple categories of identity based on place of birth, age at the time of immigration (if not born in the United States), language ability, and number of generations the family has lived in the United States. Korean American communities distinguish a first generation (born in Korea, immigrated as an adult), a “1.5” generation (born in Korea, immigrated in their teens), a second generation (born in the United States of first generation parents), a third generation, etc. Language ability distinctions are made between native speakers of Korean (knowing little or no English), native speakers of English (knowing little or no Korean), native speakers of English with strong second language abilities in Korean, and native speakers of Korean with strong second language abilities in English. Some divide their time between Korea and the United States, others have little or no experience living or traveling in Korea (see I. J. Kim 2004, N. Kim 2008).

Thus, in our focus on Korean Americans, we must keep juggling and attempt to wrap into our understanding of the fluidity of identity formation along racial, ethnic, and national lines (American, Asian, Asian American, Korean American, Korean) and fluidity of residence (America, Korea, or both). As outlined by Abelmann and Lie (1995), the Korean diaspora has been an extraordinarily complex, multi-stage process, involving people of diverse class origins, with different motivations, and with different emotional connections to the Korean homeland: “The transnational Korean diaspora alerts us to the enormous diversity of people essentialized into the easy receptacle of ‘Koreans’ or ‘Korean Americans’” (1995:ix). In writing about Korean Americans, they suggest that: “Indeed, any adequate account of Korean Americans needs to take seriously the interpenetration of South Korea and the United States. Although scholarship on Asian America must challenge the presumption of irrevocable links between Asian Americans and their ancestral homelands, it should not neglect either pre-immigration backgrounds or post-immigration networks” (1995:viii).

The individual Korean American musicians discussed below exemplify this diversity noted by Abelmann and Lie, relying to a different extent on their family’s pre-immigration backgrounds and post-immigration networks.
Technologies

The new digital technologies and social media spaces like YouTube are more than simple technical tools. They also figure with increasing centrality in everyday contemporary lifestyles and change culture at a speed we could never have imagined before. “For the millennial generation, cultural revolution is happening on Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace” (Saria 2010:51). Even though they have been purchased by media corporations (News Corporation and Google), these web spaces offer crucial opportunities for ordinary people not only to share and distribute their creations (Poster 2008:688–89), but also to build professional careers, as I will outline below. Social media developed outside the purview of the media industry, and their open-access capacity remains their defining feature, despite their subsequent incorporation into mainstream media conglomerates.

That new technologies can uproot established patterns of musical production, distribution, and consumption and superimpose or replace them with new configurations has been amply documented. In North India in the 1980s, as Manuel argued (1993), the democratizing effect of cheap cassette technology breathed new life into a broad array of genres that could not have maintained a media presence in competition with mainstream genres, such as Hindi film music. Yet it did not wind up propelling those genres into national or broader regional prominence, which would still have required the capital and networking of major media companies, who were, not surprisingly, unwilling to take the risk. Social media, by comparison, are bringing more revolutionary changes and are providing access across much of the world with almost no financial risk.

This new access is especially significant for musicians outside the mainstream media industries. Still, it is not a panacea for racial exclusion, as the primary medium for distributing music is in the form of video materials, in which the racial identity of the musicians is almost always clearly visible. The musician with an Asian face and an Asian body—raised in the United States, natively fluent in American English, a passionate consumer and performer of one or more forms of American popular music—sounds American, looks Asian. He or she is subject to the racialized judgments of social media users, but at least the choice is there on YouTube, where it rarely has been in record or CD stores, mainstream radio and TV, or on covers of music magazines (e.g., Rolling Stone, Spin, Vibe). In all these media, race and essentialist assumptions of who is privileged to represent particular musical genres often come into play, and it is the issue of race, the realities of identity-based inclusion and exclusion to which I now turn.
Race, Ethnicity, and the Invisibility of Asian Americans in American Popular Music

Although Asian American musicians have been making popular music for more than a century, they have yet to gain stardom or wide acceptance in America. Latino/Latina musicians, African American musicians, as well as white American musicians, have an established presence in the American mainstream popular music world, but Asian Americans simply do not. This is not for a lack of desire for professional success and recognition, nor for a lack of talent, on the part of Asian Americans, but rather has much to do with the complexities of racial dynamics and racial imaginings.

Media representations have long instilled stereotyped images of Asians and Asian Americans (racially Asian), sharply delineated by gender. While the Asian female is either overly docile, obedient, and subtly sexy or a woman warrior able to overpower men physically and emotionally, the Asian male is either exceedingly devious and evil, or an overly studious geek, poor at athletics, weak, shy, unappealing to women, in short—un-masculine and undesirable. Of Asian males in the media, Prasso states: “Rarely have they been depicted with traditionally masculine traits. With a few exceptions, Asian men on screen have been small, sneaky, and threatening—or spineless, emasculated wimps, or incompetents who may well be technically proficient in martial arts, but impotent when faced with white man’s superior strength or firepower. Lacking machismo, they almost never get the girl” (2005:103).

Racial stereotypes inform listening and consumption patterns in music as well, from essentialized notions of innate musicality based on race, to the racial formations surrounding particular genres of music, racialized listening, and audience bodily responses, to name a few (see especially Radano and Bohlman 2000, Wong 2004). African Americans have long been attributed a natural sense of rhythm and, along with it, a natural ability to move, to dance gracefully and often alluringly (men being hyper-masculine). Whites have listened and looked on in envy, often leading them to imitate. Because the buying public has also been predominantly white, and because popular musicians deliver not only musical sounds but also images to be desired and consumed—as fantasized mates or role models—whites have made successful inroads into almost every genre whose origins are widely considered to be African American. Latinos/Latinas are also associated in the public imagination with hot rhythm and, in the salsa and Afro-Cuban traditions, hot and sexy dancing as well. Whites have not made substantial inroads into the popular Latino music world, except via jazz, but are aware and accepting of it.

Asian Americans have little visibility in either of these, nor in the white-dominated genres, rock, metal, punk, and easy-listening/MOR, though niche
scenes exist for Asian American punksters. Americans, other than those of Asian descent, have not been inclined to consume pop music performed by Asian Americans, because the racialization of every major genre of American pop music does not (yet) have a place for anyone who looks Asian. Moreover, Asian Americans have had limited access, until recently, to the pop music efforts of Asian American musicians because the mainstream industries are reluctant to sign them. Yes, the success of the hip-hop/electro-pop group, Far East Movement (consisting of members of Japanese/Chinese, Korean, and Filipino descent), may be the exception that proves the rule, and some Asian Americans have gone far on *American Idol,* seen by scores of millions of non-Asian Americans, but the historic structure of mainstream American popular music can still be said to include no Asian American stars.

Within our racialized musical world, there has yet to develop a popular genre or style identified as Asian American. Even as he calls for scholars and activists to accept ("embrace") the notion of "Asian American music," Joseph Lam himself notes, "Still struggling to establish their distinctive styles and audiences, Asian American musicians cannot afford to have their musics categorized as Asian American" (1999:37). Nor, he adds, do the major media companies see any reason to do so.

In contrast to Lam, Deborah Wong states that she has "little interest in asserting a new category of 'Asian American music.'" She supports, instead, her focus on "Asian Americans Making Music" (the subtitle of her book), underscoring "a deliberate attempt to shift the focus from categories to processes" (Wong 2004:11). Wong's choice to focus on process is important, and of direct relevance to the cases I address in this article: Korean Americans making music, but music that most would not identify as either Korean American music or Asian American music. These are Korean Americans who, while well aware of their racial and ethnic differences from other Americans, are not intent on centralizing their identities through music but are trying to build careers around the music still associated primarily with other races, other ethnicities.

With this background, let us now turn our focus to three musicians who have employed the means available to them. The first, building his career before the advent of social media, serves as a foil, in my argument, for the sea change brought by social media, so ably exploited by the other two.

**Korean American Musicians from the 1990s:**
**The Case of Tiger JK**

We begin in the late 1990s, before the advent of social media, when a number of Korean American musicians, mostly from Los Angeles, started their professional careers in and around the city, but had to relocate to Korea in order to
develop their careers as pop music singers. Coming from America was an advantage in Korea; being racially Korean in America was not. As Korea’s pop music industry was booming, Korean hip-hop in particular, talented Korean Americans singers and dancers were welcomed by Korea’s entertainment companies.

The case of Drunken Tiger’s Tiger JK is noteworthy in many ways. Unlike the other short-lived Korean American musicians who were selected, trained, formed, debuted, and disbanded through major entertainment companies’ typical star-making process in Korea, Drunken Tiger was initially formed by LA-based Korean American rapper, Tiger JK, with his local hip-hop “fellows.” He was active performing in the LA underground hip-hop scene in the early and mid 1990s (Yang 2008) but was unable to get a career break in a genre strongly racialized there as black.

Born Seo Jeong-Kwon in Seoul in 1974, Tiger JK immigrated to the United States with his parents at age twelve and settled with them in Los Angeles (1.5 generation, bilingual), where, as a high school student, he heard and began performing hip-hop. His keen interest and obvious talent, showcased at rap contests in LA with fellow rapper Micki Eyes, did not lead to a recording contract or bookings in major venues in the United States. But, through transnational channels, South Korea’s Oasis Entertainment offered him a recording contract, leading to the release of his first album, Enter the Tiger, in 1995, and to performance opportunities in Korea. But after a short stint in Korea, he returned to his home in Los Angeles.

After teaming up with another Korean American rapper from New York, DJ Shine, in 1998, but still unable to get the career break he was hoping for in the United States, Tiger JK and DJ Shine went back to Korea and debuted as the new Drunken Tiger in 1999 with their album Year of the Tiger (see Figure 1).

As evident in the 1999 song, “Nŏhiga Hip’abŭl Anũnya?” (“Do You Know Hip-Hop?”), Drunken Tiger attempted to introduce what they believed to be “authentic” hip-hop music to a Korean audience, rapping in Korean. By criticizing as “fake” the local Korean hip-hop bands’ typical mainstream Korean pop-song-like, choreographed, group dance-oriented, rap-dance songs created by their management production teams, Drunken Tiger challenged the local hip-hop musicians and audiences with their creativity (Kim 2011). Despite their initial tension with local Korean hip-hop musicians and the industry, due to their controversial content and rebellious attitude, within a few years Drunken Tiger became the number one hip-hop group in Korea.

With their multiple wins of “best hip-hop artist” at the Seoul Music Awards (2001, 2003) and at the Korean Music Awards (2008), Drunken Tiger gained a large fan base in Korea and a growing international following that eventually led Tiger JK to collaborate with international hip-hop stars, such as Rakim and Far East Movement in 2009. Also, he was selected as the only Asian artist among
the “10 Hot International Hip-Hop Artists You Need to Know” by the American media publishing site Rollingout on October 12, 2011. In December 2011, Tiger JK’s “The Jungle Concert in L.A.,” held at the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles’s Koreatown, was covered by local news media, including the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Weekly, and celebrated by local hip-hop fans and Korean American hip-hop artists, including Dumbfoundead (discussed below) and Jay Park, who were invited by Tiger JK to the stage and briefly performed together (Brown 2011) (see Figure 2).

In his interview with the Los Angeles Times, Tiger JK recalled the difficult racial environment he had to face as one of the few racially Asians during his high school years at Beverly Hills High and within the African American-dominated local hip-hop circles in the early and mid 1990s: “It was rare to see an Asian dude rapping then, so I got a pass—when I was mediocre, they said I was a lot better than they’d thought,” said the artist, who now lives in Uijeongbu, South Korea, near Seoul. “But when I got good, they couldn’t admit it” (Brown 2011). By detouring around the American pop music industry more than a decade ago due to inaccessibility for rappers of Asian backgrounds, regardless of their skills, Tiger JK has been able to build a successful transnational career, based in Korea. Where his American-ness had helped launch and sustain his career in Korea, his Korean success enabled him to make a victorious, if not also bittersweet, return to Los Angeles for his first major concert in the United States making it the first “Korean” hip-hop concert held there. Rapping in a mix of

Figure 1. Drunken Tiger’s Year of the Tiger album cover (1999).
Korean and English, and playing to a predominantly Korean American audience, Tiger JK is a truly transnational pop musician, at once Korean and Korean American, and circumventing the still-resistant mainstream American music industry to become and remain commercially successful. But except for those Korean Americans who know of his formative years in the United States and the challenges that motivated his move to Korea in the late 1990s, he may be the most famous Korean (not Korean American) rapper. For most Korean fans, however, his American-ness is an important, legitimizing aspect of his identity. Among other (non-Korean) Americans, he is virtually unknown.

In contrast, the latest developments among some young Asian American musicians strongly suggest an amelioration (not in racial relations, but in opportunity) that points to potentially meaningful changes in American pop music history. Let us turn now to focus on the new digital media spaces and technologies, and the careers of the other Korean American artists from Los Angeles:

Figure 2. Drunken Tiger’s “The Jungle Concert in L.A.” concert poster (2011).
David Choi (second generation, native speaker of English with little Korean language ability) and Dumbfoundead (second generation, native speaker of English with some Korean language ability).

“**YouTube Generation**”:
**Korean American YouTube Celebrities 2007–2011**

The cover story of September 2010 *KoreAm* magazine was entitled “**Generation You: A Bevy of Young Artists Is Turning YouTube into a Wired Platform for Asian American Talent**,” and selected “eight of the top Asian American personalities on YouTube”10 (Eun and Ma 2010:33). YouTube is available to anyone and it is hard to imagine any other media platform that has so rapidly captured the public—from twenty million views per month in 2007 to three billion per day in May 2011 (Richmond 2011). Asian American artists seem to have taken maximum advantage of this media space in successfully building their careers to a professional level: “It all seemed self-indulgent and border-line narcissistic before 2005, uploading videos of yourself belting out pop songs or talking to an invisible audience. But YouTube made it not only acceptable, but also a cultural norm [. . .]. Asian American artists are practically omnipresent on the video-sharing website, posting clips of themselves and each other singing, dancing, playing instruments and telling jokes. Which anyone can do these days, right? But these artists actually get views” (Eun and Ma 2010:34).

It’s an entirely different story, however, on the democratized platform of YouTube, where a young generation of Asian Americans has found a voice (and millions of eager fans): “Even among the Asian-American community, we can’t name five real mainstream, say, Asian-American female actors or Asian-American male actors,” said Julie Zhan, an executive producer of the film, *Uploaded: The Asian American Movement*, which is in production. On YouTube, she added, “I can name probably 20 off the top of my head” (Considine 2011: ST6). Interestingly, among the chosen eight personalities featured in the film, all four singers are Korean Americans: David Choi, Dumbfoundead, Clara Chung, and Megan Lee.11 It is not my intention here to suggest a simplistic evaluation of Korean American solo musicians as the only Asian American musicians exploiting social media, but rather to note that these four have been remarkably successful at it;12 and, it has been the men, whose negative racial images represent special challenges.

Choi and Dumbfoundead have been particularly successful in using such newly available digital technology and social media spaces as YouTube to build the kinds of career opportunities that were unimaginable for Asian American musicians within the United States music industry only a few years ago. They went far beyond their more accessible and welcoming motherland music
markets, as we witnessed above in the case of Korean American rapper Tiger JK. Choi and Dumbfoundead both offer blunt commentary on the American media landscape and the importance of YouTube: “We’re not allowed to be on TV as much as [other] Americans are. That’s a little unfair, but that’s the reality right now” (Choi, in Eun and Ma 2010:34). “It’s opened up the game. Asians got tired of waiting to get into the mainstream. With YouTube, you don’t have to wait for somebody to sign you, or give you a budget of millions of dollars to make a film; you can just do it. We’re like, ’YouTube’s here; we’re going to smash it up with the YouTube thing’” (Dumbfoundead, in Eun and Ma 2010:34).

YouTube affords not only the opportunity for wide exposure, which may lead to performance engagements and other revenue-earning possibilities, but also the opportunity to earn revenue directly from YouTube for large numbers of views. Through the YouTube Partner Program, which is a revenue sharing program, artists like Choi and Dumbfoundead, who regularly upload original videos and consistently receive a large number of views (usually 50,000 or more), have created their own YouTube channels, from which they garner earnings. Also, through YouTube Advertising Programs, they can earn revenue by allowing advertisements to be displayed with their videos.

David Choi: The YouTube Sensation

Twenty-seven-year-old Korean American alternative rock/pop singer, songwriter, and producer David Yong Choi is the first Asian American musician to make it big on YouTube. He certainly did not imagine a dramatic career change when he posted a song he wrote entitled, “YouTube (A Love Song)” on YouTube on December 30, 2006 “just for fun.” Yet, as he recalls, after the video was featured on the YouTube homepage and seen by thousands of people all over the world, emails started flooding in asking about his music. Choi wittily praises what YouTube can offer to people like him and tells YouTube users what he can share with them. The lyrics include “You consume my life, YouTube, I can’t help, but think of you, I just love the things you do, Allow the people to post our videos, we love you YouTube [. . .]. You can comment all over me [. . .]. You can respond to my video if you’d like [. . .].” Choi’s casually yet ingeniously written love song to YouTube and its video launched him to sensational levels as millions of YouTube viewers soon discovered him. As of December 2011, over 2.7 million views had been accumulated for this song (most of them added during the first few weeks) with over 12,000 comments attached. Although he was already working as a producer and songwriter for Warner Chappell Music after winning various songwriting contests, it is YouTube that has planted him in the spotlight as a musician since 2006.

Soon after the overwhelming initial exposure on YouTube, Choi began regularly to post videos of himself singing his original songs and cover versions of mainstream American hit songs, accompanying himself on guitar. Most of Choi’s
videos are simply taken by himself using his laptop computer in his small bedroom in a relaxed manner. Both his original songs and cover version YouTube videos have been extremely popular, with a total number of views at 103,625,015 by the end of 2011, and growing. His YouTube channel subscribers were close to one million (979,510) and counting, as of December 28, 2011, placing him as the sixty-seventh most subscribed YouTube personality of all time and eighteenth most subscribed musician of all time, ratings not too far behind international superstars like Lady GaGa (1,351,801) and Eminem (1,256,699). Some examples of his YouTube video views as of December 28, 2011 include the following:

Original Songs:
- “Won’t Even Start:” 4,209,794 (posted May 2009)
- “By My Side;” 2,944,517 (posted May 2010)

Cover Versions:
- Jason Mraz’s “I’m Yours;” 4,195,547 (posted July 2008)
- Black Eyed Peas’ “I Gotta Feeling;” 2,238,129 (posted August 2009)
- Lady GaGa’s “Pokerface;” 1,229,295 (posted September 2009)

As is readily apparent from his YouTube subscription data and viewing figures, Choi has created his own empire on YouTube and has rightfully become known officially as the YouTube Sensation (Sandrasageran 2011).

What about outside the YouTube world? Where does David Choi fit in as a pop musician? With the fame YouTube was providing—something still unimaginable through the usual machinations of the mainstream music industry for a Korean American—Choi accurately saw the great potential and struck out on his own. Although he had been employed in the very industry that launched countless white and black American singers, it was still unlikely that Warner Chappell would afford him the same kinds of opportunities, despite his growing fame. Moreover, he was aware of the costliness of sharing copyrights with the label, and the compromises in image manipulation that might be demanded but which he was unwilling to undergo—and believed he did not need to undergo—in the new media environment.

As an independent singer/songwriter/producer since 2007, Choi has released three studio albums (CD and iTunes) and six singles (CD and iTunes) in addition to two cover albums (YouTube Covers, Volume 1 & 2; iTunes Exclusive) and two special Korean editions of studio albums (not in Korean language, but with a few bonus tracks added, available only in Korea) (see Figure 3). In addition to performing numerous shows at small venues and universities, Choi has regularly toured not only throughout the United States, Canada, and Korea, but also many places around the world, including Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, and Australia. His song “Something to Believe” was used for the FOX TV series “The Good Guys” (see Figure 4).
Choi did not—and did not have to—go to Korea to establish his music career, as Tiger JK did, but he was invited by various Korean venues to hold concerts with his original songs there, including sold-out shows in Korea in December 9–14, 2011. Also, his songs, including “Happily Ever After,” “My Time with You,” and “By My Side,” have been used for many Korean hit television dramas, commercials, and films. In obvious contrast to the media environment in which Tiger JK built his career, Choi has had options unavailable previously and made use of them with spectacular results. He did not—and did not have to—completely bypass the American pop music industry or struggle to obtain major record label deals. By successfully using the new digital media spaces like YouTube and actively participating in other social media tools like blog, Facebook, and Twitter to expand his online and offline networks, Choi has established his professional music career in the United States and has a rapidly growing transnational fan base, evident in his busy United States and international tour schedules.

It is clear that social media have enabled Choi to build his music career professionally, without relocating to Korea and without following the conventional models of mainstream media promotion, but it is not yet clear what his wide exposure through social media means (and will come to mean) in relation to entrenched racialized listening. Based on a variety of evidence (e.g., comments on his YouTube videos, his Facebook page, and my own observation of audiences at his concerts) the majority of his fan-base is racially Asian (Korean American, other Asian Americans, and other Asians), but those of other racial backgrounds form a significant and growing minority.

Choi’s songs do not address or even suggest his racial identity as Asian or his ethnic identity as Korean/Asian American. His musical style is based solely
on American alternative pop/rock music conventions and his simple lyrics are mostly about ordinary feelings and love (not specific to any particular race). I have played Choi’s songs (audio only) on several occasions to large classes of undergraduate students representing a broad ethnic mix. Except for the ones who were already familiar with Choi and his songs, most of my respondents—black, white, and Asian American, as well as foreign students from Asia—were surprised to find the singer was not white, but of Asian ancestry. Most of the respondents said, “he sounds so white.” What do they mean by “sounds white” or “does not sound Asian?” Choi’s choice and mastery of a mainstream popular American pop sound do not represent a willful erasure or denial of Choi’s racial/ethnic identity, as his main medium of distribution is posting his video clips on YouTube, showing him singing his songs. Yet the respondents’ racialized musical listening is revealed in the widely shared response to Choi’s songs as “sounding white” and their surprise when I show the video clips displaying Choi’s Asian face and body.

Race underscores the flood of comments on Choi’s YouTube videos—his racial identity and physical appearance as Asian are often the focus, ranging from brutally racist trash-talk to responses in his defense and raves about his cuteness and talent. Derisive comments on his Asian eyes and his short physical stature abound. Others thoughtfully articulate a concern for the marginalization of Asian American musicians. And, among the comments by those identifying
themselves as white Americans, some are bursting with praise. Yet, race is almost invariably present, as evident in the sampling I offer here:

Where r his eyes? (sookamoo 9/2010)
He Looks Sleepy (jessikakaybe 9/2012)
He looks like really short for a guy (KAILequalsSEX 9/2010)
He's asian, uh duh C (MakeupByMaggie in reply to KAILequalsSEX, 9/2010)
Why do people think david is ugly he is just short and asian (Warrior6795 9/2010)
[In response to a negative comment recently removed]: That's really sad. Not against you personally, it's just sad that most Americans would feel the same way as you. There are TONS of talented Asian American musicians like David Choi aspiring to hit mainstream, but Asian Americans are ignored. That's not an opinion, it's a fact, which is why you're shocked at hearing a talented Asian American singer. Why does William Hung get a spot on MTV and a record deal? Because he fits a stereotype for people to laugh at. Mainstream needs a shake up! (oewnaynailf in reply to Mr9Owl 9/2010)
Hey everyones saying that only Japenese or Asian people listen to Davids music but i just wanna say that im a blonde white girl and David is my favorite artist and i let (made) my friends listen to his songs too and they all love his songs too, so anyway the point of this is that All people loveee love LOVE davids songs, i guess because he can relate to all of us <3 (UGottaLoveThatRiku 1/2012)
This is a really great video, &nd he's a good singer for a asain guy(: (jtHeadphones 9/2011)

Social media exposure has provided access for and stimulated comments from those who find his voice appealing and his looks racially familiar and those who may find his musical style familiar but his Asian features still “foreign.” Let us turn now to another Korean American musician using social media to build his career, the rapper known as Dumbfoundead.

Dumbfoundead: The K-Town Superstar

If David Choi has found success composing and performing songs that “sound white,” the twenty-seven-year-old rapper and entertainer Jonathan Park (stage name Dumbfoundead, hereafter DFD) has done so in a genre racialized as “black.” DFD is considered to be Los Angeles Koreatown’s finest rapper and one of the top ten Asian American rappers of all time (Fung 2010).30 DFD grew up in Los Angeles’ Koreatown and developed his passion for rapping at age fifteen as he started regularly participating in the open-mike workshop called “Project Blowed,” located in South Central Los Angeles.31 Developing his freestyle rapping and battling skills as a member of the Project Blowed group, Thirsty Fish, comprised mostly of African Americans, and winning local freestyle rap battles, DFD gained initial respect among his peer underground hip-hop artists (see Figure 5).
Social media began to play an important role in his musical career beginning in late 2008, as he gained a strong YouTube presence, shaking up the predominantly black underground rap community in the United States. His freestyle rap battle videos posted on YouTube from some of the major rap battle leagues, including the JumpOff TV’s World Rap Championships-LA Division in 2007 and the Grind Time Now-West Coast Division in 2008 and 2009, impressed the underground rap community and led DFD to become a rising YouTube star. In particular, the YouTube video of his first Grind Time battle win against another Asian American rapper, Tantrum (from Union City, CA), on November 15, 2008, received one of the highest number of views for Grind Time battles and is still growing. Considering that the freestyle rap battle scene has primarily been dominated by African American rappers, it was a rare occasion for both Asian American rappers, battling against each other, as well as for the freestyle rap battle audiences. In this famous battle between the two skillful Asian American rappers, with the usual expectation of no-holds-barred derision, DFD and Tantrum frequently used stereotypical remarks related to Korean, Chinese, and Asian Americans, including words like Taekwondo, Starcraft, panda, Uncle Wong, the Great Wall, Mandarin Asian, making railroad, etc., which (ironically) non-Asian American rappers frequently use to attack Asian American rappers, including DFD and Tantrum themselves. The YouTube viewers’ comments on the battle indicate that they found the rappers’ stylistic differences more interesting than their word flows. Many viewers agree that DFD’s relaxed style is more appealing than Tantrum’s aggressive shouting style. For example, SuperDryToes (YouTube user ID) commented, “Dumb destroyed it effortlessly, no vein in his neck, no shouting just pure skill,
patronizing and stereotypes to the highest level,” and ArsenalSRK (YouTube user ID) said “Dumbfounded just clowns his opponents, doesn’t get angry or upset, just proceeds to dominate while smirking.”

In his other freestyle rap battle videos, DFD’s race is constantly teased and ridiculed with the words like “Jackie Chan, Margaret Cho, orange chicken, soy sauce, and taekwondo” and many other ethnic slurs. For example, in his winning battle with F.L.O. (African American rapper from Oakland, California) on May 2009, F.L.O. opened up his line with “Jackie Chan” and continued to taunt DFD with all kinds of stereotypical and random Asia-related words, including opium smokers, duck and soy sauce, Bruce Lee, Tai Chi, Karate, Taekwon, Ninja, Crouching Tiger, Dumb Asian, and many more. As DFD recalls, “Many people asked me ‘how is it like being an Asian hip-hop musician?’ At first, I was not accepted. I stepped into freestyle circles and I just start freestyling. And, all of a sudden, the next guy who freestyles after me for no reason, just come out with a Jackie Chan line or a Jet Li line. The fact that I was getting this—uh—tough love from other emcees, I think that made me stronger as an emcee and made my craft. I became a better battler, freestyler, and a better writer. I had more to prove, you know?”

Like David Choi, DFD has a wide following, not all of whom are Asian or Asian American. Based on my observations at DFD concerts in Los Angeles and San Diego, he draws substantial numbers of blacks and some, but not many, whites. As in Choi’s case, race also underscores most of the many comments on DFD’s YouTube videos, running the full range from racist invective to criticism for copying and sounding like white rapper Eminem, to flat-out raves: “does anyone notice his eyes are even more chinked after they burn? (wutsgoodnukka, 11/2011)” “pathetic... dumbfounded is an emo-rapper fake ass wanna be eminem...” (streetfightspdx, 7/2012), “I love this guy...! He should be signed!! Why the hell is he not signed?? and they say wayne knows how to rap? please, dumbfounded is the future! And im black btw!!” (chimad007, 11/2011).

And while David Choi excludes references to race or ethnicity in his songs, DFD deals with these issues frequently. One of his songs dealing explicitly with race, “Different Galaxies ft. Sam Ock” (2009), expresses the challenges of being an Asian American male and an underground rapper in his current personal relationship. The song depicts the racial and class differences between him and his (supposedly) white girlfriend and how American society views the kind of interracial and cross-class relationship as unacceptable; as he puts it, “it’s the whole world against us.” Yet, his take on such challenges is delivered in a smooth and light manner, with mellow melodies, cheerfully upbeat rhythms, and humorous phrases, making the song different from the earlier generation of Asian American rappers’ overtly aggressive approach to racial issues, such as MC Jin. Perhaps learning from MC Jin’s rocky career path and remaining faithful
to his laid-back character, DFD has successfully developed his rapping skills as relaxed, polished, clever, and witty, yet charismatic at the same time, without sounding angry and aggressive.

As DFD discovered the ever-growing power of new social media spaces like YouTube, which require almost no budget, yet provide potentially broad exposure and profitable career-building opportunities, he began to focus more on the releasing of YouTube videos than on just participating in freestyle rap battling. Indeed, the videos on YouTube of DFD's Grind Time rap battle have opened up many important career-building opportunities for him. It is through YouTube that DFD was discovered in early 2009 by his general manager Brian Lee, a Korean American entrepreneur, and was soon to become a full-time musician. Over 100 high quality HD video clips, professionally produced by Brian's team at the digital media agency, Cain Mosni, had been posted on his YouTube channel by 2010. In my interview with him in January 2010, DFD said, “It's a dream come true that I'm a full-time musician. And, now I can just focus on making music while Brian can take care of everything else, like the YouTube thing. And, it's great” (personal communication, January 29, 2010, San Diego) (see Figure 6 of DFD in concert).

Figure 6. DFD performing at “Beat's, Rhymes and Life” concert at Porter’s Pub in San Diego, January 29, 2010 (photograph by the author).
After focusing on his music for a time, DFD became more involved with video production and the business side of his career. In addition to making songs, he became more active in using YouTube to expand his reach. Through his YouTube channel, DFD discovered that Jay Park, a Korean American rapper/dancer from Seattle and former member of the popular Korean boys band, 2PM, was one of his subscribers. This discovery eventually led them to collaborate on a song/video “Clouds,” released in April 2010, with another fellow Korean American singer and rising YouTube personality, Clara Chung. Thanks to Jay Park’s international fame, the YouTube video of “Clouds” immediately hit over one million views and introduced DFD to a much broader fan base, particularly in Korea, where his career-building opportunities began to grow.

For example, DFD was invited in July 2010 to host an annual international b-boy tournament and festival, R-16 Korea, sponsored by the Korean government. And in December 2010, DFD was invited to host another b-boy and music festival, Fever Seoul Live, sponsored by the city of Seoul, and to perform his songs, “She Don’t Care” (2009) and “Clouds” (2010) with Jay Park and David Choi who were also invited to perform for this event. The festival was broadcast live through the official Facebook page of the city of Seoul and later posted on YouTube.

Furthermore, his outgoing and friendly personality, good sense of humor, and interviewing skills—abundantly evident in his YouTube videos—landed him a minor role (as the character named “Toshiba”) in the American teen comedy-horror film, Detention, directed by the renowned Grammy award-winning Korean American producer, Joseph Kahn (who has produced music videos for high-profile mainstream superstars, such as U2, Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson, Britney Spears, Eminem, and many more). The film was shot in Los Angeles over the summer of 2010 and opened worldwide in April 2012 through Sony Pictures Worldwide Acquisitions. About his new acting career, DFD said to me in October 2010 at the second annual Asian American Music Festival in Los Angeles: “I’m trying to do everything now I have these opportunities. I will also be doing standup comedy, and I will soon release new albums and songs. I will be in Seoul again in December. Lots of things happening” (personal communication, 15 October 2010, Los Angeles, see Figures 7 and 8).

Indeed, a lot of things have been happening. In January 2010, DFD had mentioned to me that he did not want to be one of those Korean American musicians who just go to Korea for easy success, nor to be involved only with Asian American hip-hop communities. With all the recent opportunities and attention, it is not surprising to see some changes in his professional aspirations. Performing in Korea has allowed him to appear right next to Korea’s most prominent hip-hop figure, Tiger JK, whom DFD considers as his Koreatown
Figure 7. DFD performing at the Asian American Music Festival at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, October 15, 2010 (photograph by the author).

Figure 8. DFD with Night Prowl Mike Gao (Chinese American DJ/Producer) at the Asian American Music Festival, October 15, 2010 (photograph by the author).
mentor/older brother. In DFD’s song, “Overseas” (released on December 2010), he proclaims the lure of Korea for him, the adoring fans—for whom his racial identity is a plus, despite his limited abilities in Korean language:

Prepare the work visas, I’m going to Seoul Korea, cause my name about to blow out there. [...] the motherland show love, as soon as I land, pouring me a shot of soju, using two hands, every time I’m out there I make new fans, they don’t understand my punch lines but still say damn, pack shows easily [...] VIP treatment when they see who [referring to Tiger JK] I came with, the fans go crazy when I rap in my native tongue, Seoul, Korea here I come. [...] 46

In the last verse, he alludes to the challenges he faced in the United States, although without explaining them as racially-based. He says, unlike other Korean Americans, who relocate to Korea for easy success and “never left,” he “just came out [from his home in Los Angeles] to play” and indicates his intention not to follow in their footsteps.47

Early on, DFD was trying to make his music career within the American hip-hop community by proving his freestyle rap battle skills against other African American rappers, and he had indicated that he was hesitant to make a quick jump into the less competitive Asian American hip-hop circles (Fung 2010) or into the welcoming hip-hop industry in his motherland Korea by “selling out.” However, as he became a more mature and accomplished professional artist, his perspective on his current career path, from underground to mainstream, now sounds firm and confident. He considered his album, DFD (released November 1, 2011), as his mainstream debut album because it signified his new creative writing and grabbed a broad range of media attention, including MTV and NBC, in addition to Korean American news media.48 The song “Are We There Yet” on the album is a compressed version of his personal and professional life stories, glimpses of which are contained in his earlier songs, including “K-town Story” (2009), “I Love Junior College” (2009), “Liquor Store Blue” (2010), “I Need a Dollar” (2010), and “Overseas” (2010). “Are We There Yet” talks about his past in three stages: youth (being a young Korean immigrant with a struggling single mother who crossed the Mexican border on foot), love (confused about his feelings), and career/passion (from a young freestyle battler to a respected musician touring internationally).49 The last verse, covering his music career, explicitly celebrates his bypassing the need for a record “deal” but ends with an answer to the question posed in the title of the song: “We aint there yet,” as he and other fellow musicians still have further to go:
At the age of fifteen I was rocking open mics
killing the L.A. scene like a scene in poltergeist
young freestyle king street battling left and right
I was quite mean yea but the kid was nice
I made it my career at the age of 17
now almost every year I travel the seven seas
respected by my peers and all of the O’G’s
got fans around the world they be cheering for me
when I wake up every morning man I wonder if its real
look at what I worked for everything I built
cuz I’m eating off my music and paying all my bills
I think I made yall I dont need a *uckin deal
what the hell am I sayin man I gotta check myself
thats forreal cuz when things are goin well I get gassed up
that when I look into the mirror and I ask
homie brother are you there yet
young brother are you there yet
tell me brother are you there yet
keep it moving we aint there yet

Over only a few years, DFD has come from being an unknown underground freestyle battle rapper to a rising YouTube star and to an accomplished hip-hop musician who is beginning to enter the mainstream music market with his own label (simply named “Dumbfoundead”). Describing himself as a “Rapper, entertainer from Koreatown, Los Angeles. Went from parking lot freestyles to rockin’ shows internationally,” DFD states: “Everything changed when I really discovered YouTube two years ago. [...] Success on YouTube isn’t only about rapping well. It’s letting viewers share your life experiences and daily routine. A lot of them have followed me on every step of my journey and feel a personal connection” (Weiss 2011).

As of December 2011, DFD had over 230,000 YouTube subscribers and over 46,000 Twitter followers. He also co-founded Knocksteady, an online music and lifestyle portal that includes the popular podcast, “Knocksteady Live,” offers various outreach programs through music in greater Los Angeles. (e.g., DJing program for high school students), and produces DFD’s and other associated musicians’ music videos. Even with his writing and performance skills, and his ambitions, without successfully using the new digital technology and social media spaces like YouTube, DFD would not likely have been able to reach this level of fame, as reported in MTV-HIVE’s cover story, “Dumbfoundead: A Rap Battle Vet Grows Up” on his DFD album release on iTunes (Aguiar 2011). The album quickly reached number eight on the worldwide iTunes hip-hop charts, topped out as number four in United States hip-hop, number one in Canada hip-
hop, number three in Australia, number four in the United Kingdom, and made the Top fifty albums overall. He has been featured on CNN, NBC Los Angeles, Fox 11, and NPR. He has also performed at and hosted various hip-hop and other music events, including an important annual US hip-hop festival called, Paid Dues Festival 2012, in addition to countless shows at clubs and colleges throughout the United States (e.g., his average guarantee as a main performer for a college event was over $2,000 in 2010), and worldwide performances in front of various audience groups (not delimited racially).

Concluding Remarks

As we begin to inscribe Korean Americans into the scholarly discourse on popular music in America, it is clear that Korean American musicians themselves are seizing the technological moment to circumvent the racist obstacles posed by the mainstream corporate music industry and are actively writing themselves into this history through their use of social media. We have seen that a confluence of accelerated transnational flows, and the explosion of social networking and low- and no-cost media have radically transformed the terrain for aspiring Korean American popular musicians, offering unprecedented possibilities for wide dissemination, professional success, and a measure of fame unimaginable only a few years ago. While even wide exposure on YouTube has not yet proven to be a guarantee of lasting success, it seems that YouTube stars David Choi and DFD are strong evidence of its potential, as they continue year after year to make big leaps to true mass exposure, selling their albums on iTunes and Amazon, touring domestically and internationally, and being covered by major popular news media.

All three of the Korean American musicians discussed above have drawn on their Korean ancestry in the process of building their careers, but to very different extents. Before social media, Tiger JK actually relocated in Korea. Choi and DFD performed in Korea to fans who accepted them differently from other performers without Korean roots. However, their extensive use of social media has expanded their reach more widely than Tiger JK and allowed them to become professional musicians, performing American-style popular music, while living and performing in the United States.

As we can see in the testimony of Choi and DFD, the new social media have been absolutely critical in determining their musical career trajectories, and they are certainly not alone. These revolutionary media, representing a fundamental shift in the popular music profession and in people’s cultural lives more generally, are constantly bringing us new musical experiences and allowing us to read and contribute to the verbal discourses that rapidly grow around the music that manages to catch our attention. The ways in which our attention manages to get
caught, however, are still somewhat elusive. YouTube and Facebook constantly confront users with suggestions and alternatives—too many for most of us to follow rigorously—but it is nevertheless the user who makes choices, and does so without having to troop out to a CD store, concert venue, or even to order an item on the internet. Where Choi and DFD have been skillful—and lucky—is in turning this free exposure into the building of a base of fans who not only wish to see more and more of them on YouTube, but will pay for downloads and concert tickets.

For musicians marginalized by their racial identity, the new possibilities afforded by social media usage, while no guarantee, are certainly opening doors that were formerly shut. The larger question is whether what has been occurring falls in the realm of (mere) tactical shift (in the sense that de Certeau uses the term), or represents a larger and more powerful strategic move. Choi and DFD both seem to have approached social media use initially almost by accident; then, saw its potential benefits, employed it tactically, and are now skillfully developing it into a powerful strategy. As they continue to work around racial barriers through social media, they are also beginning to break through these barriers, finding appreciative fans of various ethnic backgrounds, perhaps paralleling the recent rise in key roles for Asian Americans, including Korean Americans, on American network television, such as Grace Park and Daniel Dae Kim on Hawaii Five-0, Lucy Liu on Elementary, Steven Yeun on The Walking Dead, and Tim Kang on The Mentalist.

For all the optimism, however, DFD’s telling, “We ain’t there yet,” is cautionary and accurate. As evident in the comments on Choi’s YouTube videos, some non-Asian American viewers rave about the music, as others continue to post derogatory remarks on his Asian eyes and short stature. We do not yet see or hear these two on the “Grammys,” or other shows marking mainstream superstardom. Not “there yet,” or not quite?

It is clear that the story of social media is just beginning and deserves much greater attention than we have given them to date: for the equalizing opportunities they offer musicians, for the easy transnational dissemination of music and related forms of cultural expression they make possible, and for new patterns of production and consumption that are only beginning to emerge. Whether they can also contribute to a real and sustained dismantling of the racial biases so long ingrained in corporate America and mainstream audiences, however, remains to be seen.

Notes

1. Unlike first and second generations, who are clearly distinguished by their different birth places (Korea/United States), the 1.5 generation can be difficult to identify, as multiple factors—age, language ability, cultural experience/memory, place, or residence—all come into play.
2. Mainstream media industries are also now making skillful use of social media in their marketing strategies.

3. See Wang 2001 for a very useful and critically informed overview of Asian Americans active, though not widely famous, in a variety of popular music genres over the last half of the twentieth century.

4. A fair number of punk-rock bands have been based in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, including San Francisco-based bands, Neko Punch, Fujiko-chan, Infinity Funk Project, and Echo of Bullets.


6. The lyrics include "Throw away all the music that is not real music. [...] We, the authentic, return and little by little climb where you, the fake, are and will show you the real thing. [...] I will fight step by step for you and for real hip-hop" (English translation by the author.).


9. The members of Jungle's crew include his wife Tasha/Mi-Rae Yoon (Korean American hip-hop and R&B singer, and former Uptown member), popular hip-hop duo Lee Ssang, and a newly rising rapper Bizzy. See http://drunkencamp.com/.

10. Among them, Ryan Higa (a.k.a. Nigahiga), a Japanese American actor, writer, and comedian, is the second most subscribed to YouTube personality of all time (total subscribers: 4,911,795; posted videos: 105), and Kevin Wu (a.k.a. KevJumba), a Taiwanese American actor, writer, and comedian, is the tenth most subscribed to YouTube personality of all time (total subscribers: 2,220,552; posted videos: 82) as of December 2011. See more detailed figures at http://vidstatsx.com/youtube-top-100-most-subscribed-channels (accessed 4 January 2012).

11. For this article, I focus on the two male singers, David Choi and Dumbfoundead, since they have advanced to a wider fan base than the two female singers Clara Chung and Megan Lee.

12. The 2012 article, “Best of 2011: Asian American Music,” in Asia Pacific Arts, listed ten artists including four bands and six solo singers. Among them, four solo singers, including David Choi and Dumbfoundead, are Korean Americans, and two bands, Aziatix and New Heights, are Korean American member-oriented (Lim and Nguyen 2012).

13. Exact earnings ratios vary by individual negotiation.

14. See “YouTube Partnerships and Advertising Programs” http://www.youtube.com

15. See David Choi's autobiography at http://davidchoimusic.com/davidchoistory


18. The 2004 David Bowie mashup prize was selected by Bowie himself, and Choi appeared in USA Weekend magazine with the superstar Usher after winning the John Lennon award.

19. For more detailed figures, see http://vidstatsx.com/davidchoimusic/youtube-channel, and for a complete list of most subscribed musicians on YouTube, see http://www.youtube.com/members?sf=ms&t=ae&amp=1 (accessed 16 December 2011). Choi has posted 250 videos including his original songs, cover versions, and short announcement/response videos.

20. Combined figures of David Choi's channel views and Wong Fu Productions' channel views. Wong Fu Productions, also included in the eight YouTube Asian American celebrities, has produced a few music videos of David Choi's original songs. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejpQntaJ4pY&feature=fvsr and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy8jdsB5vAt0 (accessed 18 December 2011).


26. Choi's three studio albums include Only You (2008), By My Side (2010), and Forever and Ever (2011, debuted at #97 on the iTunes top album charts).


29. The latest YouTube phenomenon, Psy, is an interesting case. This male Korean pop singer signed a contract with Scooter Braun (the same scout who discovered Justin Bieber) after his music video “Gangnam Style” hit over 100 million views in less than two months and briefly appeared on the 2012 MTV Video Awards (September 6). Chubby and comical, Psy clearly does not fulfill the American ideal of sexy masculinity; instead he offers a wild, wacky entertainment with his humorous upbeat dance moves. It is unquestionably his comical image and its humorous incongruity, along with his well-articulated dancing that makes this video appealing to American viewers. (more than the quite racy portrayal of women—Korean women—in the video.) Indeed, Psy's appeal is similar to that of Hong Kong action star Jackie Chan's in the United States—skilled at moving his body, but as a “funny” Asian, not a heart-throb.

30. MC Jin topped the list, and the group Far East Movement was also included.


33. See “Grind Time Now presents: Tantrum vs Dumbfoundead Pt. 1.” As of December 2011, it had over 1,265,000 views and over 5200 comments. As DFD's fame grew further, the viewers' comments were added on daily basis.

34. All comments are available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdTVKh-tYOE&feature=relmfu (accessed 27 December 2011).


38. Brian now serves as DFD's general manager and business partner for Knocksteady, which he co-founded with DFD. The Knocksteady team now produces his music videos and other video clips. See http://www.knocksteady.com/

39. The song, “Clouds,” featuring Jay Park (who raps the second verse) and Clara Chung (a.k.a. Clara C, who sings the chorus and bridge parts) is stylistically different from DFD's other solo and collaborated rap-centered songs. It may have been necessary to make the song sentimental and
melodically pop-like, as he includes Clara C, whose musical style is based on acoustic and pop. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gmnrx25OvI (accessed 12 August 2012).


45. DFD performs monthly at the Laugh Factory as a stand-up comedian (Weiss 2011).


53. Cf. Oliver Wang’s remark, "Being a YouTube star doesn’t always translate into some form of viable career, but I suppose this generation will be the ones to explore that potential” (Wang, interviewed in Eun and Ma 2010:34).

References


