Panel 3.4: Facilitating Cultural Flows and Exchanges

Consumption, Expectation, and Rejection of K-pop Idols in Japan’s Idol-scape

This presentation traces the rise of K-pop in Japan and the integration of K-pop idols into the contemporary Japanese idol-scape. The flow of Korean pop culture into Japan since 2003 has produced a strong fan base among the Japanese, but has also triggered anti-Korean sentiments to flare anew. K-pop’s presence in Japan has been engineered by collaborations between Korean and Japanese production companies who "repackaged" K-pop idols for the Japanese market. Essential to this process is the use of Japanese language, from song lyrics to the advanced speaking skills of most K-pop idols. By catering to Japanese tastes and expectations in sound, movement, looks, and public behavior, K-pop idols have built on the very formula that underlies Japan's own well-established idol-scape, producing basically the same style. As Korea has used this formula to become an important cultural powerhouse in the transnational marketplace, the long-standing "close-but-distant” relationship between Japan and Korea is now playing out in the pop culture realm.