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Introduction:

new perspectives on popular music in Asia

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For more than a decade, academics have developed an increasing fascination for Asian popular music as a subject for research. This has arisen during a time when popular music studies has gained momentum as a fruitful field of scholarly enquiry, and also coincides with a firm shift away from the privileging of Anglophone-centric popular music from North America or the United Kingdom as the popular music norm. The growth in interest has been supported by a number of key publications on popular music forms coming out of Asia. These range from broad surveys, including the 'Asia and Oceania' volume for the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (2005); to edited collections on Asian popular music, such as Allen Chun, Ned Rossiter and Brian Shoesmith's *Refashioning Pop Music in Asia: Cosmopolitan Flows, Political Tempos and Aesthetic Industries* (2004); and also country-specific monographs, such as Dale A. Olsen's *Popular Music of Vietnam* (2008). Academic journals have also played a part by publishing articles concerning popular music in Asia on a somewhat regular basis, most notably in *Ethnomusicology*, *Asian Music*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Popular Music and Society*, *Popular Music* and *Perfect Beat*. All of these publications have contributed to a body of knowledge on the many and varied genres and scenes existing within Asia, and the historical, political and cultural contexts from which they have emerged.

This special issue on popular music in Asia—the second in a two-issue *Perfect Beat* series for 2011 on music in Asia—was prompted by a need to acknowledge

this increase in interest, and contribute to the literature by presenting new research in a journal that is proudly associated with the Asia Pacific region. It is one of only a few English-language special issues dedicated to popular music in Asia, following the lead set by editor Jennifer Milioto Matsue in her well-considered 'Popular Music in Changing Asia' special issue for *Asian Music* (39[1] 2008), and later Hyunjoon Shin's edited issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (10[4] 2009).

This *Perfect Beat* special issue is also a timely contribution, along with other forthcoming publications on this subject area. It will, for example, complement an upcoming special issue on East Asian popular music guest edited by Hyunjoon Shin, Tunghung Ho and Yoshitaka Mori for *Popular Music* (forthcoming 2012), and a state-of-the-field report on popular music in Asia that Matsue is, at present, preparing for *Asian Music* (forthcoming 2012). At a broader level, it sits alongside the upcoming series Routledge is producing in conjunction with the International Association of Popular Music (IASPM) on popular musics from around the world, with an edited book on Japanese popular music, for example, already underway. In short, the 2010s is an exciting time, with research on popular music in Asia flourishing, and the resulting publications will serve to document the changes in social frameworks, cultural contexts, and musical forms from this region.

It should be noted that the authors in this issue come from a range of Asian and non-Asian cultural backgrounds. As such, the voices here present varied perspectives, with several being seen as insiders, writing with an Asian 'voice', and in English: a second language. Ideally, more submissions would have come from within Asia, and it is anticipated that this gap will be filled with the future publication of the Routledge/IASPM collaborative series, which will have an emphasis on writing from local voices about local popular music.

When compiling a special issue on 'Asia', one is faced with the challenging task of providing a definition for this term. Clearly, Asia is a geographical area of considerable size that has fluid boundaries and distinct cultural and musical practices in the many regions within this space. However, the purpose of this special issue is not to provide an exhaustive account of all popular musics from Asia, or its diasporas, but instead to present perspectives on selected cultural areas. In this way, the issue is concerned with highlighting new work on topic areas within Asia, but it is also governed by the breadth of writing that was submitted for consideration, with the four resulting cultural areas selected and accepted for the issue being Indonesia, China, Korea and Singapore. The exclusion of some cultural areas, and inclusion of others, may inadvertently confirm an existing perception of what Asia is (and is not), and perhaps this draws attention to a need for a larger issue, or series of issues in the future, to encourage breadth and foster further investigation.

Like 'Asia', the term 'popular music' has potential for a variety of mixed definitions within this context (cf. Frith 2004; Shuker 2002; Holt 2007). Rather than indicating a finite list of musical genres or a concrete description of the term, the understanding of 'popular music' adopted here has been generally shaped by the shared understandings of the authors. These included contemporary musical forms, practices and scenes that are hybrid in nature, with a mix of local and western influences resulting from global flows, migrating music, and musicians. Whereas some popular musics in this issue are considered mass produced and consumed by the masses (ultimately with a commercial imperative in mind), others hail from small independent scenes and appeal to discrete social groups. Even so, all were considered by the authors to be music that is understood to be 'popular' by those involved with the music in question.

While the overarching theme of 'Popular Music in Asia' unites these articles, the cultural areas, issues of concern, and theoretical frameworks naturally differ according to each author's perspective. Indeed, these are multidisciplinary approaches to popular music topics, with methodologies ranging from ethnography, to televisual textual analysis, and historical surveying. Rather than focusing on the differences, or, indeed, a few noteworthy similarities between these articles, it is useful to instead point to the common themes of globalization, locality, identity, ethnicity and nationalism. Many of these articles also examine how changes in politics, culture and society have impacted the development of the music industry, and the music itself. The first article does this via the important relationship between popular music and television. Indeed, a key theme in Lauren Gorfinkel's study is how popular music is used to construct a sense of unified national identity in what is essentially a culturally diverse China, during the 2000s. In her discussion of the state-controlled television programme, *The Same Song* (*Tongyi shouge*), Gorfinkel considers the specific socio-political contexts in which selected song performances occur, and how lyrics, music and visual aspects of televised performance work to create identity.

The second article considers the role of popular music in constructing the past in the present, through the lens of popular music revivals. Emma Baulch looks at the resurgence in interest in 1970s local rock and pop genres in contemporary Indonesia, and focuses on the comeback of the band God Bless. Her study provides a unique perspective of the converging social and political conditions, alongside the deregulation of the culture industries, which have provided a space for popular music nostalgia to blossom. As such, this research not only presents a perspective that complements existing scholarship on nostalgia, but also provides a critical examination of Indonesian popular music history.

The connections between politics, social change and popular music are also subjects of the third article. In this study, Hyunjoon Shin fills a gap in the current

English literature on Korean popular music by providing a descriptive historical account on the indie/independent music scenes that emerged during the 1990s in Korea. His survey of the bands, venues and record labels associated with the regions of Gwanak and Hongdae in Seoul provide an insider's view of a self-sufficient, student-led industry at the time—one that is often overlooked in recent research that is often dominated by discussions of K-pop and commercial music realms.

The final article in this special issue addresses issues of globalization and nationalism in a case study of the Singaporean death metal group, Rudra. Here, Eugene Dairianathan explores the many levels of cultural and ethnic identity expressed by the individual band members, and how this relates to their collective Indian/Vedic philosophy. In doing so, he adopts the theoretical framework of Appadurai's 'scapes' for this study, and explores Rudra's connections with the local Malay community, the global Anglophone extreme metal scene, and the band's place within the South Indian community in Singapore.

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