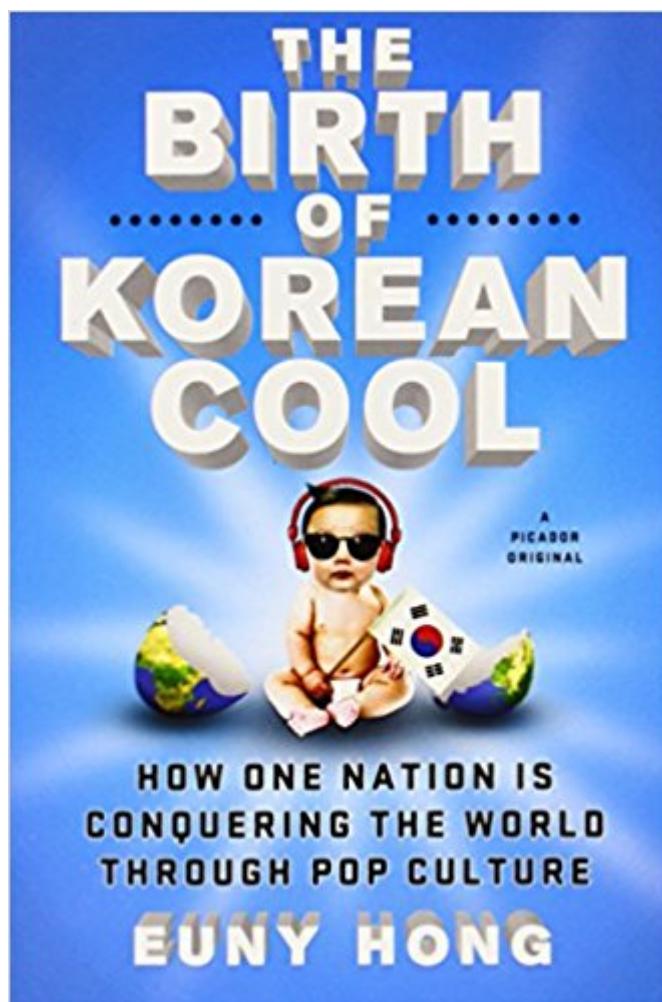


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# The Birth Of Korean Cool: How One Nation Is Conquering The World Through Pop Culture



## **Synopsis**

A FRESH, FUNNY, UP-CLOSE LOOK AT HOW SOUTH KOREA REMADE ITSELF AS THE WORLD'S POP CULTURE POWERHOUSE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURYBy now, everyone in the world knows the song "Gangnam Style" and Psy, an instantly recognizable star. But the song's international popularity is no passing fad. "Gangnam Style" is only one tool in South Korea's extraordinarily elaborate and effective strategy to become a major world superpower by first becoming the world's number one pop culture exporter. As a child, Euny Hong moved from America to the Gangnam neighbourhood in Seoul. She was a witness to the most accelerated part of South Korea's economic development, during which time it leapfrogged from third-world military dictatorship to first-world liberal democracy on the cutting edge of global technology. Euny Hong recounts how South Korea vaulted itself into the twenty-first century, becoming a global leader in business, technology, education, and pop culture. Featuring lively, in-depth reporting and numerous interviews with Koreans working in all areas of government and society, *The Birth of Korean Cool* reveals how a really uncool country became cool, and how a nation that once banned miniskirts, long hair on men, and rock 'n' roll could come to mass produce boy bands, soap operas, and the world's most important smart phone.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

An Best Book of the Month, August 2014: I always love a good immigrant story: a tale of a young person, transplanted from the "old country" and learning the ropes (and usually

teaching them to her parents) in the new. But journalist Euny Hong's *The Birth of Korean Cool* is that familiar tale's obverse: at age 12, the Chicago-born American moved with her parents back to the South Korea of their birth. And like the displaced Hong herself, the Korea of 1985 grew up fast: it became, in short order, the nation of Samsung, of newly wealthy executives, and now, Hong contends, it has become the crown prince of Asian pop culture. A kind of memoir of a culture as well as of an individual life, Hong's first nonfiction book (she previously wrote the novel *Kept: A Comedy of Sex and Manners*) mixes personal memoir with interviews and research to produce a rollicking, delightful, wise-guy story of how both she and her ancestral home became the cultural icons they are today. --Sara Nelson

“Incisive and humorous” An excellent case study of calculated entrepreneurial moxie. The New York Times Book Review “Full of facts and entertaining to boot, it’s definitely a gem.” EntertainmentWeekly.com “An insightful book.” [Hong’s] brief chapter on Korea’s han against Japan is both the best and most concise explanation I’ve read of the two countries’ complicated and ancient feud.

Bloomberg Businessweek “The rare book that’s hilariously funny and also makes you smarter about world economies.” Vulture “An incisive, colorfully written account of South Korea’s cultural ascent.” Grantland “Fabulously snarky.” Hong is perfectly positioned to understand this complex Korean psyche while retaining enough distance (and cynicism) to evaluate it.

Helen Brown, The Telegraph (UK) “Highly entertaining.” The Guardian (UK) “Hong’s breezy book is a good place to begin to understand this rising nation.” The Times (London) “A witty chronicle of how pop culture shaped South Korea’s meteoric rise from a war-torn nation to a technological giant.” The Forward “Euny Hong playfully and insightfully dissects her native culture.” There’s much more to it than just “Gangnam Style.”

Charleston City Paper “The Birth of Korean Cool is a sparkling gem that falls into the must-read category.” A satisfying and thought-provoking book by a first-rate journalist whose style is irresistible and informative all at once.

Pop Matters (Nine out of Ten Stars) “It’s Hong’s voice, a funny, smart, often conflicted and witty combination of personal essay and observational journalism, which makes the book unique.” Clayton Moore, Kirkus Reviews “Being both an outsider and an insider, Hong is the perfect guide to explain South Korean culture.”

The Toronto Star “Hong is a funny and uber-snarky observer and is as clever as

clever can be...[As] laugh-out-loud funny and as spicy and memorable as the best homemade kimchi. *Library Journal* "A pleasing mix of Margaret Cho, Sarah Vowell and a pinch of Cory Doctorow. *Kirkus Reviews* "Full of insight and shocking facts, *The Birth Of Korean Cool* is a hilarious, gutsy, eye-opening account of Korean drive and success. I couldn't put it down. Euny Hong is a force of nature. *Amy Chua, Yale Law Professor and author of *The Triple Package* and *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother** "If you're not fascinated by Korea yet, you damn well should be. The most innovative country on earth deserves a hilarious and poignant account on the order of Euny Hong's *The Birth of Korean Cool*. Her phat beats got *Gangnam Style* and then some. *Gary Shteyngart*

By internalising her own life story into this very informative introduction to modern South Korea the author succeeds in entertaining the reader while staying true to her primary sources of information. But it seems like she has been rather selective in her choice of sources with government officials dominating the list, which turns the fascinating tale into a good (investment) case for the equalling Korean with cool. She is critical of the rather strict upbringing that Korean kids experience, but I miss a critique of the extremely active governmentally pushed post-industrial development of the Korean economy. A case in point is the rather shallow treatment of the dire situation of the Korean economy after the Asian crisis in 1997, where it was almost bankrupt as a result of bad policies in the years prior to that. However, the author did win me over in the end. *Korean Cool* seems to give some good pointers to what awaits us in the future. So we better take heed and learn a thing or two about this country having undergone an extreme societal development in the last 15-20 years. As a bonus the book gives us an understanding of the relation to their closest neighbor to the north.

The book was a fast read but that is my main complaint. Too many written "soundbites", not enough background detail and makes statements without factual support.

If you are interested in an easy read that explain the sudden unexpected international popularity of Korean products and entertainment, read this book. Hint: it's not unfettered capitalism.

Brilliant really a very valuable account on why South Korea has made a global impression you will not want to put this book down it is so fascinating. After reading this book there was a incident with the daughter of the Chairman of Korean Airlines now known as 'nut rage' and very easy to

understand once you have such a clear understanding of this culture. Enjoy

I love this book and the author is quite amazing in her way of telling people about the Korean food, culture, music, I am reading another book called A Geek in Korea and its quite interesting also

Revealing, comprehensive, accessible and a great journalistic effort written with a friendly style. It's a key to know the ascent of Koreans through culture, and the struggles they're experiencing in the process of giving birth to this "korean cool".

Excellent & fun read for anyone interested in K pop/Kdramas & the inside workings of Korean popular culture. Not laugh-out-loud all the way through - but some of the early chapters in particular are very funny!

I read this book in 3 days. I couldn't put it down. I've never felt that way about a nonfiction book before. Hong is the ideal guide for westerners like myself who want to understand the country behind K-pop and K-drama. She experienced a unique culture shock moving to Seoul at age 12, and therefore saw a lot of things from an American point of view. Her tone is conversational and humorous (I actually laughed out loud several times during my reading). It felt like talking to a friend. I loved this book because it explained fundamental concepts to Korean society and culture, from han and Confucianism to conglomerates and the Korean brand. Hong tackles complex issues like politics and intense government involvement in the private sector, explaining the pros and cons without pretending to have all the answers. This is a must-read for anyone who enjoys Korean entertainment and culture, and wants to know more about the country today.

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