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Just a Matter of Screaming?

A Study of K-pop and Fanchants

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Abstract

Today, K-pop is a worldwide cultural phenomenon that receives attention from both media and academia. However, K-pop fanchants, which consist of encouragement calls toward performers, tend to be dismissed as screaming. This thesis examines the complex social interactions and meanings associated with practicing these fanchants. Discourse analysis, music analysis, and interviews with fans are used to study K-pop and fanchants.

This thesis consists largely of two parts; first, a discussion on K-pop addressing cultural identity and gender identity; and examining how fanchants are created, practiced, and used to build identity. Cultural identities around K-pop have been constructed by 1) cultural 'odourless' (Iwabuchi 2002) which involves erasing Korean-ness and incorporating Nordic producers and 'cultural odour' to appeal to Western music markets. 2) Developing devoted fandomhoods through fandom activities during the 'comeback' period before and after releasing new songs or albums. And 3) a discourse of the Korean training system, which gives K-pop legitimacy as an 'authentic' performance, constructed by both artists and the fandoms.

Second, how gender is performed and perceived by K-pop and its consumers is discussed. For masculinity, soft masculinity, which combines feminine figures and is promoted by concepts of Chinese *wen* masculinity and Japanese *bishonen* masculinity (S. Jung 2011a), is constructed by influences from both western media's orientalist views and fandom's emphases of subcultural practices to subvert stigmatizations of K-pop. Concepts of femininity, such as *ssen-unni* (strong sister), where artists emphasise female empowerment resonated with third wave feminism. However, practices labelled as 'marketable feminism', which is mixed feminist-friendly attitudes as an onstage performance and hyper-sexualised figures designed by male producers, convey contradicting messages. On the other hand, because performers emphasise feminist issues, fans feel encouraged and satisfied by the *ssen-unni* presentation despite understanding the commercial strategy employed.

Finally, fanchants are examined by taking BTS's song *IDOL* (2018) as a case study. This thesis proposes that K-pop fanchants can be classified into largely two types, name chants, which express the fandom's love towards the idols through calling the names of the idols and band; and music fanchants, which involve interacting with the song. Analyses of *IDOL* fanchants reveal that fanchants are intertwined artfully with the song's cultural references such as *chuimsae* (audiences' encourage calls) in *pansori* (traditional Korean narrative music), resulting in successfully incorporating multicultural audiences in practicing traditional Korean *chuimsae*. In addition, through interviews with members of the fandom, the fandom also recognises fanchants as an integral part of the song and make efforts to memorise fanchants deliberately or through passive daily music consumption. This thesis argues that fanchants works as a communication tool for fans to convey love to artists and build identity and community within the fandom.

Key Words

K-pop, BTS, Musicology, Cultural studies, Gender studies, Feminism, Fan studies

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List of Acronyms

K-pop	Korean popular music
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
MV	Music videos
J-pop	Japanese popular music
KPM	Korean Popular Music
SNS	Social networking systems
CGs	Computer graphics
MMA	Melon Music Awards

1 The Introduction

Korean popular music (K-pop) has become a worldwide cultural phenomenon.[1] In an increasingly global movement, the large numbers of fans' singing along in K-pop concerts despite language barriers cannot be dismissed. However, fans' chanting in K-pop concerts tends to be dismissed as extremely enthusiastic fangirls' screaming. This attitude is demonstrated in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) article on one of the biggest K-pop boy bands, BTS' world tour 2019 in Wembley stadium, when fans were depicted as follows: 'They [fans] sang at the top of their voices, even during the Korean sections […]. Oh, and they screamed. They screamed at the dancing. They screamed at the fireworks. […] They screamed at every, single smouldering look to the camera' (Savage 2019). While the fans screamed, is it really just 'screaming'? Or something more?

Singing along in music concerts creates a shared experience between the audience and performers – this connection is one of the most exciting moments of attending concerts. Such moments are sometimes promoted as dramatic stories in the media. For example, music media Loudwire, which covers hard rock and heavy metal, introduces iconic singalong moments in concerts as 'the audience can truly become part of the show' (Hartmann 2016). In Queen's biographical film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018), the audience singing along with Freddie Mercury's iconic voice is portrayed as the climax of the two hour long film. However, fanchants in K-pop concerts, which includes exuberant exclamations from audiences, is described differently; these narrations excessively portray fanchants as an uncontrolled emotional outburst—screaming.

Dismissing the audience's enthusiasm and behaviour as that of fanatic fangirls is not only present in K-pop. In the 1960s, Beatlemania, the Beatles' fandom, was described as 'mass hysteria' and used in the high/low (art/pop) culture discourse to criticise the Beatles' pop aspect as musically inferior (Collins 2020, 404–7). More recently, Beatlemania has been interpreted through the lens of feminism and portrayed as a prototype of girls power and an example of women's empowerment (Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1997; in Kimsey 2007,

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[1] Korean popular cultural products such as TV drama, films, music (K-pop), and online games has been spread all over the world since the late 1990s (Youna Kim 2013). This global phenomenon, called *Hallyu* (한류[Korean wave]), had more than $9 billion in exports in 2018 (J. Park 2019a). K-pop accounted for 4% ($430 million) of the entire export of Korean cultural contents (J. Park 2019a). K-pop's global popularity is also demonstrated by the numerous Guinness world records achieved; (e.g., most viewed YouTube video in 24 hours) (Punt 2020).

126). This example illustrates a trend where practices of female fan groups tend to be reduced to fanatic acts of uncontrollable emotional outbursts.

Behind these prejudices, several discourses are embedded. A disdain for female consumers based on gender dichotomies facilitates the assumption that the Beatlemania or K-pop fandoms, which are mainly female, cannot understand the value of music. In addition, the discourse of rock in which rock written by performers is considered superior to pop mass produced in a music factory by others prompts the assumption that fanchants in rock concerts are inherently more valuable than in K-pop concerts. These assumptions obscure comprehending what exactly happens when fanchants are conducted in K-pop concerts.

The reason I decided to study K-pop's fanchants is because these portrayals of fanchants as screaming seemed dismissive and contrary to my first experiences watching videos of K-pop concerts on YouTube. I was surprised that fans not only sang along with artists, but they also chanted complicated phrases and engaged with the performers during the song. These observations do not support the popular image of a hysterically 'screaming' K-pop fandom. What is actually happening with these 'screams'? Is it possible to analyse fanchants from a musicology perspective? When the fanchants travel globally, how are they conducted by the diverse cultural backgrounds of the expanding fandom? Questions such as these and the recent global expansion of K-pop, including its fandom culture, formed the basis of this thesis. Through answering these questions, I hope to contest the assumption that fanchants are 'hysteric screaming' and explain the details of these intricate practices.

To analyse fanchants, a basic understanding of K-pop itself is required. The term K-pop is usually used for indicating music made and performed by people in the Korean music industry. However, a close look at K-pop song credits reveal many producers are from Nordic countries. Moreover, the contribution of the Nordic music producers has been prominent since the initial establishment K-pop. This is because K-pop industries buy music from song writing camps, where producers and musicians gather, exchange ideas, and create songs. Here questions arise, what is 'K-pop' anyway? What exactly is included in K-pop's cultural identity? By considering the globalisation of K-pop through examining the contributions of the Nordic countries, I discuss how K-pop's cultural identity is constructed.

In addition to the globalization of K-pop and K-pop's cultural identity, I also discuss K-pop and how gender is perceived and performed. Academics and media point out that many

common K-pop boy band practices; such as wearing makeup, using colourful hair dye, and wearing female clothes, is regarded as a counter to western-based toxic masculinity norms, which emphasises toughness and is often associated with homophobia and misogyny. For example, BTS is praised as a boyband challenging gender norms by western media (e.g., *BBC News* 2018). However, I argue that such a perception also includes the Orientalist (Said 1978) view in which the East is regarded as feminine. Turning to female groups in K-pop, they encounter a contradiction of feminine body and subjectivity. Recently, lyrics of female groups tend to emphasise strength and independence, and female groups are supported by female fans. Although these performances promote self-empowerment in feminism, at the same time, they still promote objectification of their bodies by promoting the male gaze. I discuss how femininity in K-pop is constructed by both performers and the fandom.

After discussing K-pop itself, I conduct a fanchants analysis. Although there are many interesting fanchants in K-pop scenes, I conduct a case study for BTS and its fandom, called ARMY – which is the largest fanbase in the world. The global success of BTS and the charity endeavours of ARMY attracts much attention both from scholars and the media. BTS and ARMY's fanchants are an excellent topic to conduct a case study, as not only are they commercially successful but also ARMY's strong loyalty to BTS is an excellent exemplar of the relationship between a band and its fanbase. Taking their song, *IDOL* (2018), which has adapted various traditional music elements as an example, I conduct a close reading of the song and analyse its fanchants. Additionally, I also discuss why unique fanchants emerge in the K-pop scene by tracing its relationships to Korean traditional music and society.

Furthermore, to understand fanchants from a more inside level, I conduct semi-structured interviews with members of the fandom who have conducted fanchants in concerts. Through the interviews, I analyse how fandoms interpret fanchants and what kind of meanings emerge through conducting fanchants. I present the argument that conducting fanchants is a part of the process to construct a fandom's identity and establish a sense of belonging to the fandom.

I discuss fanchants as a part of the music using the same approaches as other music discourse. Drawing on Small's (1998) notion that music is a process, fanchanting can be considered one of the processes constructing music, which includes the K-pop concert and K-pop fandom. In Korea, there is a proverb, 작은 고추가 더 맵다. (*the smallest pepper is the spiciest*), used for warning not to underestimate something by judging it superficially. I believe that fanchanting is a small pepper that is hardly visible or audible outside of the K-pop fandom, and thus

easily dismissed as screaming; while fanchanting is actually one of the most important elements to K-pop. Through analysing fanchants from both a musical and performance (fandom) perspective in this thesis, I suggest that fanchants in K-pop play a significant role in constructing K-pop identity and a fandom's identity.

2 Existing research and theoretical framework

Before analysing the data, I will review the existing research related to the topics of this thesis and describe the theoretical framework. Regarding K-pop and globalization, I summarize discourse on popular music studies which apply to K-pop. To analyse gender in K-pop, I refer to gender theory. Although there are many studies on K-pop, there is little research into fanchants in K-pop and therefore leverage fandom studies, which examine fan activity – a closely related field as fanchants are conducted by fandoms.

2.1 K-pop studies and Popular music studies

First, I need to define the term K-pop. K-pop is an abbreviation for 'Korean popular music'. The first use of the word 'K-pop' was in 1995 by Hong Kong media to refer to Korean music videos (MV) in which the idol group performed by dancing and singing (S.-Y. Kim 2018, 8). The term is fashioned from J-pop, which refers to Japanese popular music, which was widely established in the 1990s. However, K-pop does not simply refer to Korean popular music; it is used to refer to so-called *idols*, which are well-trained popstar artists who sing, dance, and create commodities such as music CDs, MVs, and live concerts. Although K-pop embraces a myriad of music genres, such as indie rock, hip-hop, and traditional ballads, when people say 'K-pop', it primarily refers to music performed by idols and excludes other Korean popular music genres. In this thesis, I use 'K-pop' to refer to music performed by well-trained idol groups. When I mention other types of Korean popular music, I use their specific terms such as *trot* or *shinminyo*, or collectively as KPM[2].

Regarding music in Korea, there are many studies from an ethnomusicological perspective using ethnography such as participant observation. For example, studies of *pansori*, which is Korean traditional narrative music (Um 2013), and *pungmul*, which is Korean folk music, band, and dance (Kamino 2019). KPM, especially in the pre-K-pop era, has also been studied from a musicological approach that considers KPM within its sociohistorical context. I reference two particularly influential edited collections, *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave* (Howard 2006) and *Made in Korea: Studies in Popular Music* (H. Shin and Lee 2017). These collections contain studies ranging from KPM history during the Japanese occupation of Korea (Y. M. Lee 2006); *shinminyo,* which helped construct Korean identity in the 1930s

[2] While both the acronym K-pop and KPM mean 'Korean popular music' and are easy to confuse, both of these terms are established in the academic literature and I am following precedence and relying on the acronyms K-pop and KPM to ensure clarity.

(Hilary 2006); and *trot,* which is an old-style Korean popular ballad (Y. Chang 2017). When the discourse turns to K-pop, there is significant research on gender representation in media studies (e.g.; Oh 2015; Ainslie 2017; J. Lee and Yi 2020; S. Jung 2009; 2011a; Laforgia and Howard 2017), the focus tends to be on the global expansion of K-pop (e.g., S. Jung 2017; D.-Y. Lee 2017; Koo and Sung 2017), fandom practices (e.g., S. Jung 2011b; Min, Jin, and Han 2019) and their influence on tourism (H. Kwak et al. 2019); however, there is not so much musicological research on K-pop (e.g., Fuhr 2016; Lie 2015). Of course, K-pop should be considered from various aspects because it is embedded in multiple contexts, such as Asian culture within an Anglocentric music industry, a unique business model that depends on fandoms, and the pursuit of visual aspects of performance by using the latest technology and the internet. Although some existing research neglects the musical aspect of K-pop in its concentration on different disciplines, K-pop is *music*. Therefore, I involve the musical aspects such as the description of songs, MVs, and concerts created by both performers and audiences in the following chapters. This stance is the same when I consider fandoms in K-pop, and for this reason I focus on fanchants in K-pop.

To study musical aspects in K-pop, I present conventional methods of popular music studies in musicology, criticisms of these methods, and introduce the mixed-methods analytical framework used for this thesis. Musicological approaches to studying popular music, which also apply to K-pop, has been discussed broadly and problems with conventional methods identified and specific methods developed (e.g., Middleton 1990, 103–6; 2000; Moore 2001; 2003; 2012; Hawkins 2002). Middleton (2000, 4) identified several criticisms to these conventional methods and analyses: inappropriate terminology for popular music; biased ways of analysing, such as an excessive focus on pitch, structures, and harmony; overemphasis on the score; and abstractionism and monologic listening. Although addressing the pop and rock context, Moore (2012) suggests appropriate methodologies for popular songs, such as by focusing on texture, timber, and the lyrics. This suggestion also applies to K-pop studies as K-pop was influenced by U.S. popular music which initially descends from rock'n'roll. Hawkins (2002) stresses the assessment of the music alongside the social and cultural context. As K-pop is not designed to be experienced merely as a score and consists of recorded productions and live performances embedded into complicated socio-cultural and global contexts, the conventional 'notational centric' approach, which considers music as an object, is not sufficient to study K-pop performances. Thus, a more holistic framework using multiple methods to study fanchants and K-pop as many popular music scholars did for

popular music studies so far. Examples of such studies include Walser's (1993) use of discourse analysis to study heavy metal; and Fuhr's (2016) study of K-pop by discursive and performative analyses.

To discuss music from a more holistic perspective, I consider music as a process following Small's (1998) notion of 'musicking', in which music analysis should consider the whole process of music, rather than considering music purely as an object. Therefore, by considering K-pop as not simply as a music production but a process constructed by performers, listeners, industries, and other socio-cultural factors, I attempt to explain K-pop's musical and cultural complexity. Regarding an approach to consider cultural complexity, I apply discourse analysis to seek various K-pop discourse in the process of constructing identity in K-pop. Although I use music notation to depict how the song and fanchants are constructed by explaining simple rhythm and melody, this approach is not to presume canon, but to attempt to answer the musicological question, 'why did the music sound like it did?' (Moore 2003, 6). At the same time, I also attempt to explain sound texture, dance movement, and cultural discourse of K-pop by using not only sonic materials such as songs, but also MVs, stage performance videos, and interviews with fans.

2.1.1 Issue of identity in K-pop

Before the discussion of K-pop song and fanchants, I consider cultural identity in K-pop through exploring K-pop music, performers, industries, and fandom practices as an introduction of K-pop. First, I clarify the discourse about the issue of identity. Follow the anti-essentialist conception that identity is not fixed and universal but a discursive construction (e.g., Foucault 1981; Hall 1990). I consider K-pop's identity as not a 'state of being, but [a] process of becoming', as in Hall's understanding of cultural identity (Hall 1990). Therefore, K-pop's identity is articulated by multiple and varied discursive positions. In this thesis, I discuss K-pop's identity from two aspects: cultural identity and gender identity.

One of the factors constructing cultural identity, which is a discursive and performative construction, is a sense of cultural belonging – such as Korean-ness. Cultural identity is also a discursive matter closely related to national identity, which is constructed not only by specific nation-states as a political concept but also by diverse social groups including ethnic groups (e.g., B. Anderson 1983; Bhabha 1990; in Baker and Jane 2016, 302–3). Academic research

often discusses K-pop as nation-*less* or Korean-ness-*less* by focusing on globalization. Through observing K-pop's global expansion and reviewing KPM's international cultural historically, Lie (2012) argues that Korean cultural identity in K-pop is a nearly empty signifier, so people outside of Korea can easily accept and consume K-pop as a brand. Jin (2020) discusses K-pop's hybridity in globalization by comparing K-pop and J-pop, which influenced K-pop but has not had the global success enjoyed by K-pop. According to Jin, which is based on Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity, K-pop culture is created by Korean artists combining hip-hop's rap flow with Korean lyrics for expressing their opinions based on their own experiences in Korean society, the amalgamation of which has created a culture that has become a third space where a new power balance has emerged. However, these studies have not examined the practices of fandoms. Therefore, to consider the K-pop identity, I examine both performers: the creators (including producers and idols) and the fandoms (which conduct the fanchants).

In examining the global expansion of K-pop, especially into the U.S. market, I use orientalism (Said 1978) and self-orientalism (Tobin 1992, 30). Orientalism is a method of discursive construction that fetishizes and commodifies non-Western culture as a way of maintaining Western hegemony (Said 1978). In the case of K-pop, however, there is also an aspect where the K-pop industry consciously self-orientalises Korean culture in K-pop for commercial success. Using these orientalist and self-orientalist perspectives allows for critical analysis of how culture is presented and consumed in a global music market. This perspective is particularly applicable to K-pop, as K-pop has consciously adapted cultural representation of Korean-ness in its works to expanded into, and then thrive in, Western music markets as a foreign cultural commodity being produced and consumed for a global market. Concepts of exoticism, otherness, and consumption mix together to form an environment where concepts of orientalism are uniquely useful for analysing the changes in cultural emphasis in K-pop on the global stage.

Like cultural identity, gender identity is also a discursive construction. To discuss how masculinity and femininity are performed and accepted through exploring practices in the K-pop scene by both artists and fandoms, I leverage Judith Butler's (1993; 1999) discussions on gender where gender is conceptualized as being produced by being repeatedly performed. Butler argues that gender identity does not exist behind its expression but is 'performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 1999, 33). Gender

is not about 'being' but 'doing'. Therefore, Butler argues that gender is a particular type of process that is 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame' (43). As there is a script defined within this regulatory frame, we cannot choose masculinity or femininity freely. Butler refers to this masculinity or femininity as '[a] forcible citation of norm' (Butler 1999, 232).

Regarding masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt's study on masculinity is also useful; leveraging Butler's anti-essentialist perspective, they also define masculinity as 'not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals' but rather a configuration of practices which are accomplished within a social setting (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Also, they argue that masculinity should be plural 'masculinities' because of varying times and places; within this variety of masculinities, 'hegemonic masculinity' is 'understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue'(Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). The masculinity performed in the K-pop scene differs from hegemonic masculinity, which is discussed in section *3.2 K-pop and gender representation*. Hegemonic masculinity can be described as an understanding that the dominant masculine perceptions of cultural commodities are the most influential and act as a gate-keeping agent to acceptance to society as a whole. In this sense the reputation and societal acceptance of popular culture is primarily judged by the people holding hegemonic masculinity. While these influences cannot be dismissed, it is particularly interesting that K-pop tends to behave counter to the established norms set by hegemonic masculinity.

In K-pop studies, several scholars have been interested in the androgynous figures of male idols, the so-called 'flower boys' (e.g., S. Jung 2009; 2011a; J. Chang 2020). On the other hand, female idols are examined through feminist theory by referring to the third wave of feminism, in which they are recently the opposite of conservative weak femininity and instead are strong women who negotiate their sexuality by their will rather than being sex objects subject to the male gaze (J. Chang 2020; J. Lee and Yi 2020). Especially focusing on fans' practices, such as producing dance cover videos and writing fanfiction, some discuss queer performance (e.g., L. Shin 2018; Oh 2015). Those studies examine idols' gender representation based on the post-modernistic notion that gender is fluid and constructed through society, an idea that is particularly cogent to studying gender expressions of idol groups in K-pop on the global stage. Also to the gender performance, I note that the music is

gendered in various aspects such as genre (e.g., Frith and McRobbie 1990; Leonard 2007) and music experience (e.g., Wald 2002; Hill 2016; Overell 2014). Through scrutiny of several discourses on K-pop, in which K-pop itself is generally regarded as feminine, I discuss how the fandoms, which are dominantly female, perceives, interprets, and negotiates gender through fandom practices as much as performers do.

2.2 Fan studies

To consider fanchants, which are conducted by fandoms, I refer to fan studies discussed in media and cultural studies broadly. In a study on TV drama fandom (Jenkins 1992), Jenkins describes fandom's practices such as writing fanfiction or creating fan-videos as participatory culture and argues that fans create meaning through those practices – in contrast to the popular notion that fans are passive consumers. Hills adjusts this notion of active consumers by noting that not all fans participate in this creative process; and continues to note that some fans exhibit anti-commercial ideologies as a form of resistance to consumer culture in co-existence with 'commodity-completist practices' (Hills 2002). Fandoms can be considered 'as an active process and complex phenomenon related to the formation of social identity' (Shuker 2014, 166). Following this notion, I consider fandoms as producers who contribute to making meanings and constructing identities, not merely as passive consumers. Therefore, K-pop fandoms in concert are not only an audience but also performers who contribute to making music through fanchants.

The border between fandom studies and popular music studies is blurry and sometimes overlaps. Although both studies include examination of music listeners and audience, popular music studies focusing on music audiences tend to study specific music genres such as punk in a subculture that is categorized through youth cultural paradigms (Duffett 2014). In this case, scholars tend to perceive the audience as generalized listeners, and the main discussion is about how particular music influences the cognition and emotion of the listeners, not the practices of fans (7). As Duffett notes, the focus point of fandom studies is not much on why people become fans, but on 'how they operate as agents in a moral and political community' (5).

Fandom discourses often use digital media to create and transmit discourses on K-pop (Fuhr 2016, 23). This digital environment is particularly suited to being studied by the fandom studies' approach. This method focuses on analysing fans' practices and collecting data from relevant nexus on the Internet where fans gather and construct meaning. Specifically for

studying K-pop, these nexuses of data collection include the following: K-pop news portal websites such as Allkpop, Koreaboo, Soompi, Seoulbeats, Naver, and Daum; Korean news portal websites such as The Korea Times and The Korea Herald; fans forums including social network services such as Daum fancafe, Vlive, Weverse, YouTube, and Twitter. Using this fan studies approach provides insight on how fandoms practice and conduct fanchants during performances from an insider perspective – which popular music studies tend to overlook or dismiss.

Although there is no research specifically focusing on K-pop fanchants, Schoonderwoerd (2011) examines fanchants in football matches with music analysis. In this study, Schoonderwoerd considers club teams' fanchants from historical, musicological, and identity construction views. He mentions the cultural functions of fanchants, that fanchants provide 'a cohesive point (model, even) for support at entertainment and sporting events, being heard at concerts, theatre shows, cricket tournaments as well as rugby and football games, among others' (122). I apply this cultural function of fanchants to consider the meaning of fanchants through interview analysis.

In this section I summarised fan studies that consider the meaning of fandom activities by focusing on fandom practices. Using these fandom studies methods that examine fandom practices, I consider the meaning embedding in those practices by establishing the research questions in the following section.

2.3 Research questions

In this thesis, I attempt to depict how K-pop fanchants are constructed by discussing them within musical discourse. This thesis is composed of two large sections. First, it considers what constructs K-pop by addressing two perspectives: cultural identity and gender performances. To consider cultural identity, the following three questions are critical: How has K-pop been established so far? What is K-pop's identity? And how is it constructed? To answer these questions, I will first summarise the brief history of the emergence of K-pop and consider the kinds of discourses embedded in it. Regarding gender performances, I set the following questions; How do K-pop groups express and perform gender? And, how do fandoms interpret K-pop's performed genders? To answer these questions, I examine both boys groups and girls groups music, activities, and fandom practices from both the West and East.

After the discussion of K-pop identity, I focus more on musical aspects of K-pop and discuss K-pop and fandoms by focusing on a specific fandom musical practice, fanchants. To comprehend fanchants, I set the following two questions: How are the fanchants constructed? And, what kinds of meanings emerge through fanchants? These questions will be answered by the following three processes. First, through the scrutiny of various fanchants, I discuss their cultural roots from traditional and contemporary Korean society. Second, I take the song, *IDOL* (2018), by the boys' group BTS as a case study to evaluate and analyse the role fanchants play in music. Third, by conducting interviews with fandom members who have experience with fanchants, I will examine how the meaning of fanchants is constructed by the fandom.

2.4 Ethnographic reflexivity

This section is an explanation of the ethnographic method being used and how it relates to this research. As I collected and analysed data, I unintentionally included my own subconscious biases – requiring a detailed explanation of the methods and my biases.

Reflexivity is a crucial standpoint from which to conduct sociological and ethnographic research. Since many scholars have criticised past ethnographic studies for not considering the reflexivity of the authors (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Geertz 1988; in O'Reilly 2009), it is necessary to not only acknowledge the impact of the reflexivity of the researcher, myself, but also clearly identify my background and relationships with the subject matter as they cannot help but to have influenced this research.

This thesis is written based on information collected from my personal experience as a female Japanese musicology student who grew up in Japan, the country to which the most K-pop has been exported (Seo 2021).[3] In Japan, K-pop has permeated the musical sphere, TV programmes, and advertisements on the street to the extent that it is ubiquitous. However, I am not a 100% K-pop fan because only quite recently have I deliberately started to listen to K-pop. Also, I have never been to a K-pop concert or conducted fanchants. In this sense, my position is closer to that of an outsider to the K-pop fandom. However, because I spent my teenage years as a rock band fangirl, I have experienced the emotions when fangirls

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[3] According to the *Hallyu* White Paper 2020, published by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, the most K-pop is exported to Japan (65.1%), followed by China (19.8%), Southeast Asia (12.3%), North America (1.3%) and Europe (1.2%) (Seo 2021).

encounter their favourite idols through the media and concerts. In this sense, I know the feelings associated with music fandom to a certain extent.

Any researcher's status as insider or outsider is not stable; rather, it is changeable and sometimes it overlaps (Rabe 2003). My status is also located in both positions. As an initial outsider to K-pop, I conducted in-depth interviews with cultural insiders to obtain insiders' perspectives. The status of a cultural outsider makes asking simple questions easier and leads to finding information that the insiders take for granted. As an insider of music fandom and *Hallyu* consumer, I already know where fans gather on the internet and at what kind of moments they are the most active, and therefore I was able to conduct online ethnographic observations to scrutinize fans' internet activity.

To get information about K-pop, I have needed to go into many situations that required knowledge of the Korean language. While the lyrics are written in both Korean and simple English, K-pop idols talk to audiences in Korean at concerts. To get up-to-date information about tickets, merchandising and schedules, I needed to visit Korean websites. Having studied Korean and the linguistic historical connections between my native Japanese and Korean has allowed me to engage with the Korean-language materials.

Language similarities between Korean and Japanese may contribute to my Korean capabilities. There are several hypotheses regarding whether or not Korean and Japanese are in the same language family (e.g. Logie 2013); these discussions are based on the similarities between them, such as grammatical structure (subject-object-verb) and many words originating from Chinese. Another point of convergence of vocabulary includes the influences of the cultural assimilation policies during the Japanese colonisation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 CE, in which the Korean language was forbidden and Koreans were forced to use Japanese (Caprio 2009).

While the Korean written system is different from Japanese, the Korean alphabet, *Hangul*, is easy for me to read because it is designed to indicate phonetic features systematically. I have studied Korean by using the Korean language module provided by the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Although my Korean language skills rely largely on the similarity of Korean to Japanese, the most significant motivation for developing my Korean language skills was my love of Korean TV dramas. To truly enjoy Korean dramas—not only watching the dramas but also communicating with other fans and the actors/actresses—studying the

Korean language was not only necessary, but enjoyable for me. Therefore, while my Korean language skills are not great, I can understand simple Korean and communicate with Korean-language communities on websites and forum posts.

2.5 Romanisation of Korean and Japanese

This thesis uses the revised romanisation of the Korean system used officially in Korea since 2000. However, there are some words already commonly used or some names who already have been published by alternate romanisations. For example, 쎈언니 is romanised as *ssen-unni* (*ssen-eonni* in the revised romanisation system), and 박지민 is romanised as Park Jimin (Bak Jimin in the revised romanization system). In such cases, this thesis follows alternate romanisations as an exception. Japanese is also romanised by following the Hepburn system.

Regarding transcription of Korean names, this thesis follows the Korean native forms, in which the family name comes first followed by the personal name, for example, Kim Namjoon. When the thesis mentions a European name, it follows the Western form, for example, Harry Styles.

3 Identity of K-pop in globalisation

Due to K-pop's increasing presence on the world stage, I will do an in-depth exploration of identity and globalisation for K-pop. K-pop cannot be simply defined as music produced and played by Koreans. As Fuhr (2016, 13) states, K-pop should not be seen 'as the music of a particular ethnic or subcultural group, but rather as a cross-cultural phenomenon'. This chapter considers what constructs K-pop identity through exploring K-pop music, performers, industries, and fandom practices before an in-depth discussion on fanchants in the following chapter. The first half of this chapter explores cultural identity in K-pop in terms of K-pop's globalisation and the contributions of the Nordic music producers. The second half analyses and discusses how gender is performed and perceived in K-pop is increasingly globalised.

3.1 How is the identity of K-pop constructed?

To consider K-pop's cultural identity, I discuss what constructs K-pop by addressing three key aspects around K-pop; music and cultural identity in global expansion, fandom practices by transnational fandoms, and the Korean system of training.

3.1.1 Music and cultural identity

Nowadays, K-pop is broadly categorised as dance-pop performed by Korean artists. It involves catchy melodies, rap sections, up-tempo beats, vibrant sounds, four or eight beats, 3–5-minute songs, and digital recording technology (Fuhr 2016, 81).

Before K-pop emerged in the early 1990s, there were two important and popular Korean music genres that constructed discourses on Korean cultural identity—*shinminyo* and *trot* (D. Kwon 2017). *Shinminyo*, meaning 'new folk songs', was popular under Japanese imperialism in the 1930s (Hilary 2006). Musically, *shinminyo* is composed using 'the Korean pentatonic mode[4] together with western functional harmony' (D. Kwon 2017, 128). Lyrically, *shinminyo* is sung with sentimental lyrics in the Korean language. These lyrics offered people the means to escape from the harsh reality of the colonial period (Hilary 2006, 13). This included the sentiments of lamenting the colonial situation as whole (15-16). At the time, although *yuhaengga* (유행가 [fashionable song]) – later called *trot* – was also popular. In contrast to *shinminyo* which was associated with patriotic sentiment, *yuhaengga* were Korean lyrics

[4] The Korean mode scale is, for example, e-g-a-c-d. It is a pentatonic scale without semitones.

translated from Japanese, or just completely imported Japanese songs (Lie 2015, 23). Therefore, *yuhaengga* was not recognised as indigenous because it was associated with Japanese imperialism and westernisation in contrast to *shinminyo* (D. Kwon 2017, 124). After the end of the colonialization era, *yuhaengga* was criticised due to its Japanese related songs (ibid.). However, although the popularity of *shinminyo* gradually decreased with liberation (Hilary 2006, 18), its music identity as Korean was constructed with patriotic emotion, especially through the language used in the music.

Similar to *shinminyo*, patriotic sentiment contributed to constructing Korean identity through *trot* (트로트). *Trot* is a popular genre of music characterised by mid-tempo and exaggerated emotional vocalisation (Fuhr 2016; Pak 2006). Although *trot* had been popular since the 1930s, it gained widespread popularity during difficult periods in Korea, such as post-colonialization, the Korean War, and the military dictatorship (Y. Chang 2017). Although *trot* is largely composed in the 2/2 metric and uses the Japanese pentatonic scale—the so-called *yonanuki* scale[5], which is also related to the *menarijo* scale from the eastern Korean seaboard (Pak 2006, 64)—over the course of its long history, the characteristics of its music has changed from written in minor keys and sentimental lyrics to major keys and less sentimental lyrics after 1945, at the end of World War II and the beginning of the Korean liberation (Y. Chang 2017). This new form of *trot*, which involved light, pop, and bright music, is called '*trot go-go*' (ibid.). In the 1980s, a controversy regarding *trot*, called the *ppongjjak* (뽕짝) debate, was discussed in newspapers by scholars, critics, and journalists (Pak 2006). In this debate, people doubted whether *trot* was 'pure' Korean music because of the assumption that it was derived from *enka* – a genre of Japanese popular music (Pak 2006). However, the debate resulted in no conclusions because it is impossible for any music to be 'pure'; *trot* is related to both Korean and Japanese music culture through the history of colonialization, cultural assimilation and influences of Western music such as Western function harmony. However, the desire to find Korean-ness through the debate makes *trot* inherently Korean because the practice of searching Korean-ness is the process of constructing cultural identity. Later, the popularity of this genre gradually disappeared by the 1990s.[6]

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[5] The minor pentatonic scale lacking the 4th and 7th note such as, for example, c-d-e-g-a.
[6] Although the popularity of *trot* had decreased, it regained interest from younger generations because some K-pop idols, such as After School and Taesong (from Big Bang), reintroduced it to the domestic market in the 2000s (Y. Chang 2017).

In addition to *shinminyo* and *trot* in the pre-K-pop era, *ppong* (뽕) or *ppongjjak* –which is a discursive marker used when people mention Korean-ness in Korean music–cannot be ignored. It originated from *trot*'s 2/2 beat metre, and later it indicated the musical atmosphere. Therefore, the term *ppongjjak* is sometimes used to indicate the music genre of *trot*. For example, the *ppongjjak* debate, mentioned in the above paragraph, is synonymous with the *trot* debate. Moreover, Fuhr described *ppong* as a 'feeling or atmosphere that Korean listeners are attracted to' and one that 'creates a "Korean flavour"' (Fuhr 2016, 102). More specifically, *ppong* refers to either a song's 'melodic-harmonic structure' or 'vocal delivery' (Fuhr 2016, 102–7). Melodic-harmonic structure means that its melody is similar to *trot*, which is characterised by a wide range of melodies and pitches based on the melodic-harmonic chord progression influenced by 19th century European classic music. Meanwhile, vocal delivery means that it appears in the vocal technique or inflexions, such as the exaggeration of the vibrato and stressing the sound by attacking each syllable to emphasise emotion. However, because *ppong* is strongly connected to the image of *trot* due to its origin, it is regarded as old and uncool by the younger generation (H. Shin and Lee 2017, 60). Therefore, K-pop has developed by avoiding *ppong* to attract both the younger generation and the global market.

While *shinminyo* and *trot* have subtle Korean cultural elements that are connected to Korean identity, K-pop has largely abandoned musical 'Korean-ness'. In the early 1990s, a new generation called '*shinsedae*' emerged of people who grew up consuming American pop culture. Seo Taiji and Boys (서태지와 아이들 [*Seo Teji wa aideul*]), the first hip-hop group in Korea, was supported by *shinsedae*. Musically, Seo adapted heavy metal guitar sounds and hip-hop into their music and utilised them to express the youth's rebellion against the strict Korean education system (E.-Y. Jung 2006). Thus, they acquired the status of the youth's cultural icons for music, fashion, and dance (Fuhr 2016). This success gave the music industry the idea that 'rap-based dance pop' had the potential for commercial success.

After Seo Taiji and Boys, H.O.T. (Highfive of Teenage) debuted as the first systematically trained idol group in 1996 – more details on the training system are provided later in this chapter. These artists, who built the foundation for K-pop, are considered the first generation. However, the music industry needed to target audiences outside of the country because the domestic market had receded. Thus, the strategic expansion of K-pop toward the Asian youth market was undertaken. In this context, K-pop first targeted the Chinese market because of its

overwhelming population. However, here the language barrier became a problem. Even though Korean language has been strongly influenced by Chinese, it is difficult to relate without knowledge of both languages. Consequently, K-pop strategically changed its music compositional styles. Until then, popular music in Korea had been in a melodic ballad style that was highly dependent on the lyrics. However, they changed it from lyrics-centred 'melody-based songwriting' for domestic listeners to 'rhythm- and dance-based songwriting' for global listeners, as it is challenging to create lyrics in a foreign language as well as melodies that move foreign consumers. As a result, the visual aspects, such as signature dances in music videos or spectacular concerts, became crucial for K-pop (Fuhr 2016, 110). Thus, K-pop developed by erasing the Korean aspects from popular music and aiming for universality for commercial reasons. Therefore, the cultural-national identity in K-pop became a 'nearly empty signifier' (Lie 2012, 361).

In the process of expanding to the global market, the K-pop industry needed creators who could write dance tunes for their performance-centric style. In this context, K-pop entertainment companies realised that the top hit dance tunes in the U.S.—which has the biggest music industry and was a target for K-pop—were made in Sweden. Thus, they ordered songs from the Nordic production teams similar to how American pop stars did (Lindvall 2011). Thus, a relationship between the Korean and Nordic-pop music industries was formed. According to Fuhr (2016), most contributions by Nordic pop music producers are of three types: the K-pop industry uses existing pop songs as cover songs (e.g., *Like a Fool* by Nylon Beat, a Finnish group); they buy songs that have already been made and use Korean lyrics instead; or companies ask producers to write songs for their artists. Sometimes, agencies also visit songwriting camps, which are music fairs for creators to network and search for music producers and collaborators (Fuhr 2016). Thus, from the beginning of the establishment of K-pop, Nordic-pop music industries and K-pop industries have created a mutually beneficial relationship through making music.

Next, I study the relationship between K-pop and Nordic-pop music.[7] The types of discourses and meanings embedded within Nordic-pop are explored through a brief history of Nordic-pop music.

The Swedish band ABBA's global success in the 1970s is a starting point in creating the discourse of Nordic sonic excellence. After ABBA's success, their legacy, which is 'pop melodies with catchy hook', was inherited by other artists such as Roxette, Ace of Base, The Cardigans, Robyn, and the like (Bossius 2017). More specifically, Swedish pop's global success from the 1990s to the 2000s is described as the 'Swedish Music Miracle' (Fleischer 2017). However, this public recognition of the phenomenon was based on the artists' nationality and does not mean that this music was composed using specific traditional folk music elements, such as parallel-fifth or traditional instruments. Instead, people utilised Sweden as a marketing label or brand, despite the music not being nationality based. However, such utilisation is not new, as can be seen from at least the middle of the nineteenth century with, for instance, Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind's U.S. tour (Michelsen 2017). In this context, using the name of the nationality became an easy way to recognise identity, especially abroad. Indeed, the NME's article pointed out that label artists such as ABBA, Mø, Robyn, or Zara Larson as 'Scandi-pop' despite their varying musical styles, and argued that music should stop being viewed based on artists' nationality (Greenwood 2018).

However, at the same time, the Nordic music industry itself utilised its Nordic identity as an empty signifier—for instance, Nordik Beat in Swedish EDM. In 1988, record rebel SweMix released a compilation album titled, *The Sound of SweMix—The Real Nordic Beat* (Bossius 2017). Although Swedish DJs and producers established the Nordik Beat as 'the new dance sound of Scandinavia', it also does not mean they used unique Swedish resources, but instead they remixed popular songs, such as Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean* (ibid.). In addition, Export Music Sweden, an artist union founded in 1993, also contributed to this self-identification as 'Nordic-ness'. They promoted Nordik Beat to the global market under the slogan 'Cool Sweden' at MIDEM, a music fair in Paris (Bossius 2017). Consequently, the public identified their music by using the tags 'Nordic' or 'cool' both from the inside and outside of the

[7] Recently, the term 'Scandi-pop' is used to refer to popular music created for and performed by Nordic musicians. Although I could not find academic research on the term 'Scandi-pop', music media seems to use it as a general term referring to popular music with a catchy melody made and performed by Nordic musicians (e.g., Trousse 2012; Richards 2015; Greenwood 2018). In this thesis, I use the term 'Nordic-pop because to include music that was made and performed before the birth of the term 'Scandi-pop'.

region, and these concepts circulated and were used to construct Nordic popular music. Fjeldsøe and Groth point out that identification as Nordic is dependent on people's recognition so that 'if people stop doing it, it will disappear' (Fjeldsøe and Groth 2019, 3). In this sense, through the 1990s and 2000s, the music industry emphasised Nordic-ness from both inside and outside of Nordic pop music.

In the 1990s, Cheiron Studio in Stockholm became known for making pop hits on the Billboard charts, as Denniz Pop and Max Martin, from the SweMix crews, created many hit songs such as *I Want It That Way* by Backstreet Boys and *Baby One More Tim*e by Britney Spears (Raab 2021). They soon became the most influential producers on U.S. charts. Later, K-pop companies understood the flow of this process and copied it. Thus, Sweden became famous as a hit music producing factory, and Swedish pop started to have new meaning—well-composed pop songs. According to Seabrook (2016), the Swedish songwriting style in Cheiron is 'the track and hook style', in which a producer makes tracks, including chord progression and beats by using computers at first, after which they divide the songwriting processes between songwriters in Cheiron Studio as follows: hook, top-line, or chorus writing. The lyrics are put in the song in the final process ('How a Swedish Hit Factory Took Over Your Playlist' 2016). Fortunately, this track-and-hook songwriting style is very well suited to the making of K-pop because the way of including lyrics in the final process is suitable for Korean lyrics.

While Swedish pop is generally acclaimed as well-composed catchy pop songs, there has been some criticism. Taking Swedish producer Max Martin as an example, Michelsen (2017) pointed out that the U.K. and the U.S. music journalists perceive the huge impact of Nordic producers behind pop charts as an invasion because they see it as the trend of pop music being controlled from somewhere else—in this case from the North. Thus, for the Anglo-American music industry, music by Nordic-pop music producers is a threat from the outside. Further, journalists argue that performing music made by others—in this case, Nordic pop music producers—is inauthentic based on the discourse of authenticity in rock, which assumes that performers expressing feelings in songs made by themselves is an 'authentic' music practice (ibid.). In this context, the following question has to be asked: when such Nordic-pop music is integrated into K-pop, what type of reactions occur and how does it affect identity construction? This question is answered by the following two perspectives, cultural flow and reaction from media and consumers.

First, the collaboration of K-pop industries and Nordic-pop music producers creating music establishes new cultural flows. The K-pop companies first order music from Nordic music producers, after which their production teams create and deliver the song. Finally, the K-pop industry sells music by packaging it as K-pop by including visual-centric MVs to both domestic and global markets. This is a hybrid cultural flow, which is not merely unidirectional from West to East but a mutually influential relationship. However, Western cultural hegemony is simultaneously reinforced while it is reconfigured from this process of hybridisation (Pieterse 1995, 57; in Baker and Jane 2016, 193). In this case, K-pop made by Nordic producers can be considered a means to gain legitimacy for a global audience by following the Western norm of what music should sound like by collaborating with European producers ('The Korean Wave' n.d.).[8]

Second, the negative reaction toward Nordic-pop music producers—in which the track-and-hook songwriting style is called too mechanical for the music to be 'authentic'. More specifically, K-pop is considered as lacking authenticity because the artists just perform songs made in Nordic pop music factories under the agency's complete commercial control (e.g., Gabrielle 2013). Both industries are affected by the negative 'authenticity as self-expression' belief as the songs created by Scandinavian producers are performed by other artists (Michelsen 2017).

Through the global expansion collaborating with Nordic producers resulting in generating a hybrid cultural flow, Korean-ness was diluted. S. Jung and Hirata (2012) point out that the initial expansion strategy of K-pop in the Japanese market was driven by '*mukokuseki* (non-nationality)' or 'culturally odourless'. This strategy of erasing national 'odour' had been successfully practiced in Japanese productions such as games and anime so they can cross cultural borders and access multiple markets more easily (Iwabuchi 2002) – providing an already tested model for the K-pop industry. The deliberate practice of removing culture-specific aspects from Korean music was a deliberate and successful strategy employed by the burgeoning K-pop industry.

However, after the success in Asia and the expansion into the U.S. market in the 2010s, the K-pop industry began to reemphasise Korean-ness. This phenomenon is demonstrated in the

[8] Although the web article 'The Korean Wave' has no author and date, I consider it a reliable resource because of references, the academic writing style, and familiarity with the subject-matter.

following two examples: *Niliria* (2013), a song by G-Dragon from Big Bang featuring Missy Eliot, is a hip-hop track using the same title of the Korean folk song (닐리리야[*nirririya*]) as musical motif (Frederick 2013). Another prominent example is when Psy, well known for his international hit, *Gangnam Style* (2012), released *Hangover* (2014) – featuring Snoop Dogg. *Hangover* not only featured traditional Korean percussion sounds, but also emphasised Korean traditional drinking culture in the MV (Young jin Kim and Lee 2014). Examples such as these demonstrate a pattern of K-pop initially removing aspects of Korean cultural identity from their music to gain access to international Anglo-centric music markets, and once becoming established, collaborating with renowned U.S. artists and prominently emphasising Korean cultural sound signatures and cultural activities to emphasise an exotic non-western identity.

This phenomenon can be explained as self-orientalising[9] which 'occurs when Asians "consciously or unconsciously make themselves into, or see themselves as, the objects of Western desire and imaginations"' (Tobin 1992, 30; in Fuhr 2016, 169). This self-orientalising expresses itself as K-pop artists reemphasising 'oriental' cultural aspects into their music – after having deliberately removed them to gain access into the Western Anglo-centric music market. The reason to reemphasise Korean cultural identity is to appeal to Western interest and expectations of 'oriental' exoticism to commercially survive in these markets. In this way of both knowingly removing Korean cultural aspects from their music to gain access to Anglo-centric music markets and then re-emphasising Korean-ness once established to appeal to Western concepts of exoticism, the K-pop industry is demonstrating self-orientalism.

This practice of both identifying and practicing a cultural identity in reference to a more dominant culture is also relevant with feminist cinema studies. De Lauretis's (1987, 8–10) notion of 'double vision' on feminist cinema and fiction states that females must have 'double vision' – knowledge of identity of both dominant masculinity and subordinate femininity – to survive in the society where masculinity is privileged. The practice of both removing and then re-emphasising Korean-ness in relation to a more dominant Anglo-centric

[9] Discussed in section *2.1.1 Issue of identity in K-pop.*

music market demonstrates how K-pop uses a similar 'double vision' to survive in the Anglo centric music industry.

After examining the establishment of K-pop through the history of deemphasising and then reemphasising aspects of Korean cultural identity to expand globally. Next, I examine fandom culture in Korea, how it has been exported and adopted globally, and constructs K-pop identity.

3.1.2 Fandom

The majority of K-pop fandom practices are conducted on the internet. As Gibson, Römmele, and Ward (2004; in S. Jung 2011b, [5.1]) pointed out, the internet in the Web 2.0 format contributes to 'fandom's participation in decision making'. Consequently, the K-pop fandom is a powerful force for artists through online activities. In the domestic arena, an internet forum called *Penkape* (팬카페 [fancafe]) is officially operated by K-pop idol groups' management companies on the Korean web portal, *Daum* (다음). This forum acts as a base for fandom communication activities such as sharing opinions on music and music videos and making comments to and receiving responses from artists.[10]

It is also interesting to note that some fandom acts are seen as if they are a part of the management companies' activities (Hills 2010, 58). For instance, the fandoms voluntarily raise money to put advertisements on public transportation to promote their favourite idols and support artists who try to leave their management company due to unfair contracts (S. Jung 2011b). In addition, it is also common for fandoms to donate to charity using the fandom's name to celebrate an idol's birthday (e.g., Lim 2016). In this context, although fandoms cannot give money to their favourite idols directly, donating using the fandom's name is an indirect way to celebrate the idol's birthday. Behind this practice is the fandom's self-consciousness that 'their behaviour reflects back onto the stars', so they try to create a 'mature image' through philanthropy (W. Jang and Song 2017). However, raising money for philanthropy by artists and fandoms is not seen only in the K-pop scene. For example, Lady Gaga and her fandom have previously donated to LGBTQ support groups (Assunção 2018). However, as S. Jung (2011b) pointed out, a significant difference between such Western and

[10] Due to global expansion, communication on the web between fans and artists has recently been moved to new platforms such as Vlive or Weverse, which support English for international fans. However, Korean *Penkape* is still significant for fans in terms of receiving exclusive information immediately.

K-pop fandoms is that the latter takes the initiative to choose the kinds of charity they support by themselves, while the former is usually directed by the star.

Although such philanthropic acts by fandoms catch both the media and scholars' attention, they are a sub-section of their activities. The main activities for the K-pop fandoms take place when artists release their new songs. The period from an announcement of the schedule of a new song to the performance in the media for sales promotion after the releasing the song is called the 'comeback' (컴백[*keombek*]).[11] After the management company announces the comeback schedule – which is usually several weeks before the release of a new song – it gradually releases contents relating to a new song, such as concept photos and teaser videos.

Because the company puts many clues of the new song's concept in the contents, the fandom tries to solve the clues and share their theories on the internet. Through such practices, the fandom's expectations for a new song reaches its peak. Further, after the new song is released, artists perform new songs on music TV programs almost every day on the six different music TV programs broadcast in Korea (Sugawara 2020). Each music TV program has its own hit song chart ranking, similar to the Billboard ranking. To get their favourite artist a higher rank in those charts, the fandom strategically plans how they will stream music by following the different calculation rules for each hit chart ranking to get their idols to number one ranking. Through this process, in which the fandom communicates among themselves and aims for the same goal, they build a feeling of solidarity.

When the artists are successful in being ranked number one on any music TV program, they make a speech to thank their fandom by referring to the name of fandom—a K-pop tradition by which each fandom has their own name related to the idol group's name (for example, the idol group Blackpink's fandom name is BLINK, a combination of BLack and pINK). Furthermore, some music TV programs allow an audience to attend idols' performances for pre-recordings called *sanok* (사녹), and fans cheer for them by conducting fanchants. The volume of fanchanting is a parameter for artists' popularity, in which the louder the fanchants, the bigger the fandom. Therefore, fans memorise new song fanchants perfectly to show the power of the fandom, even if the song was released the day before the TV show

[11] Comeback in K-pop does not mean a reunion of previously disbanded artists. It means that artists' frequent activity will be 'coming back'. The origin is from Seo Taiji and Boys. Before releasing the new album, they limited their media exposure due to them making music. Once the album was released, their media exposure increased (Tanaka 2021).

recording. These interactions between the audience and performers are not a recent addition to Korean musical tradition.

In Korea, the audiences' encouragement in the form of chants towards performers can be seen during several traditional art performances—for instance, *pansori* (판소리), traditional narrative music, and *pungmul* (풍물), folk music and dance (National Gugak Center 2002; Chie Kamino, email to author, 2021). Thus, I argue that K-pop fanchants have a connection with this part of traditional Korean culture[12].

In addition to these fanchants, fandoms have symbolic colours and use or wear items such as raincoats with that colour to distinguish themselves from other idol groups' fandoms. Nowadays, fandoms use lightsticks, which are handy LED sticks instead of raincoats. This tradition originated from Club H.O.T., which was the first enthusiastic fandom of the K-pop male idol group, H.O.T. (Oreumchacha 2019). Moreover, many similarities can be seen between fandom activities during the comeback period and those in sports. For example, football fandoms also wear club team uniforms and send wishes and encourage their favourite team's wins in tournaments through fanchanting. Likewise, the K-pop fandom wears the idols' images and colours as uniforms, wish for their favourite artist to get the best ranking, and cheers them on through fanchants. Both practices contribute to creating a feeling of communion among the fandoms. However, because fandoms tend to organize by gender, K-pop fandoms, which are majority females, tend to be disdained.

When these traditionally based fandom practices are expanded to the global arena, these customs are integrated into the local context. First, the fandom's philanthropic acts are based on the local context. For example, the Indonesian K-pop fandom made donations for victims of the Indonesian earthquake and tsunami (*The Jakarta Post* 2018), while U.S. fans raised money to support Black Lives Matter (*BBC News* 2020a). In addition, purchasing advertising spaces in public areas has been replicated by international fandoms. For instance, the U.S. fandoms purchased digital billboard ads promoting their favourite groups at Times Square in New York (Herman 2017). International fans also participate in the Korean comeback events. Although fans often cannot attend as the audience members in Korean music TV programs, international fans contribute by streaming music and helping the idols to move up their

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[12] This relationship is discussed in greater detail in section *4.3 Fanchants: The view from the fandom*.

countries' hit charts. For example, the American fandom contributed to BTS' success in the U.S. by pushing them to number one in the Billboard Hot 100 charts in the first week of September 2020.

Such fandom practices generate a sense of belonging and a feeling of communion among the fandom (e.g., Shim, Doo-Bo and Noh, Kwang Woo 2012; Min, Jin, and Han 2019). For example, the comeback period, when fans conduct fanchants and strategic music streaming to make artists get number one, gives fandom opportunities to share memories and construct fandomhood. In addition, fandoms given a specific name related to their favourite artists support building an identify as a recognizable community. Fandoms can recognise themselves through artists' speeches, in which artists refer to the fandom name to thank their supports at music TV shows during the comeback period. Fandom also uses the name of fandom when they express their feeling that they are proud of themselves as the fandom and re-emphasise the community where they belong.[13]

The fandomhood constructed through fandom practices is an important factor to unify K-pop's transnational fandoms. By sharing the same goal such as making artists get to number one in hit charts, fandoms contribute to constructing the discourse of K-pop and create an imagined community, akin to Anderson's (1983) notion of a nation. A significant example of fandom's contributions to K-pop discourse is the Korean training system.

3.1.3 Korean training system

Generally speaking, language is also an important factor to construct identity. Korean language can be observed on several occasions in global fandom practices. For example, fanchants are usually conducted in Korean at any K-pop concert around the world. In addition, Korean is used regardless of individual mother tongues in conversations among fandom members as well as in fanchanting.[14] However, it is not sufficient to reduce K-pop identity to use of the language. Although Korean lyrics in K-pop are the only part that

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[13] For example, a member of Blackpink's fandom, Blink, celebrated the fifth anniversary of Blackpink with the following comment: 'HAPPY FIVE YEARS TO MY NUMBER 1S. IM A PROUD BLINK'(@electric_ten 2021).

[14] When a fan comments to another fan who drew fan art, they sometimes use their name with Korean honorifics to show their respect. For instance, Mr Smith becomes 'Smith Nim (님)' in Korean.

slightly retains Korean-ness, they are usually combined with Korean and simple English.[15] Furthermore, through the localizing strategy for expanding the global market, K-pop songs are sometimes completely localized. For example, in Japan which one of the main marketing targets, K-pop artists release a Japanese version of a song with Korean lyrics translated into Japanese. In addition, K-pop also releases full English songs such as *Nobody* (2010) by Wonder Girl or *Dynamite* (2020) by BTS for the global market but especially for the U.S. However, people still recognise these non-Korean lyrics songs as K-pop. Considering all of these global influences begs the following question – what makes K-pop Korean? – becomes important. I argue that the Korean training system is a significant factor to distinguish K-pop.

K-pop is well known for its strict training system in which artists are trained in dance, singing, and language for several years under the full control of the management company before their debut (e.g., Fuhr 2016; Seabrook 2016). After passing the high competitive audition, idol trainees live together in the dorm provided by the company and practice performances the whole day (Yim 2019). Although there are very problematic aspects in the training system such as forcing an unhealthy diet for pursuing a 'perfect' figure (Cao 2021), the K-pop training system guarantees artists' high-quality performances. Therefore 'K-pop's fundamental identity lies in the specialized training and production system' (Y. Kwak 2020).

What is interesting is that the strict training system criticised because of intense practices is simultaneously a significant factor to construct K-pop discourses narrated by both artists and fandoms as an emotional story. K-pop artists sometimes talk about how hard a time they spent as trainees (e.g., Suh 2020; M. Kim 2021).[16] Because the contents in which artists talk about their trainee experience is controlled by the management company, the companies contribute to distributing these narratives. The story of the trainee is spread by the media and is accepted with full of sympathy by the fandom.[17] Although idols talks about their own trainee memories, there is a common theme throughout these stories; 'efforts make dreams

[15] For example, 'Queen of K-pop' BoA's song titled *No.1*(2009) is a typical K-pop love song verse composed with simple English and Korean; 'You are still my No.1. 날 찾지 말아줘 나의 슬픔 가려줘. 저 구름 뒤에 너를 숨겨 빛을 닫아줘. 그를 아는 이 길이 내 눈물 모르게.'

[16] For example, in Blackpink's documentary film *Blackpink: Light Up the Sky* (2020) each member cries while talking about their harsh trainee period, in which they were severely criticised every time they practiced performances (Suh 2020). When BTS talked about their trainee period on a variety show, they talked about their experiences such as practicing until late night without sleeping and how much they were struggling with loneliness because they could not meet their family (M. Kim 2021).

[17] In the articles about BTS' trainee stories, fans credit BTS' perfect performances due to their sacrifices in the trainee period (Hong 2021).

come true' – a story that only after overcoming hard training can an idol succeed to make a debut and perform in front of fans. Here, the training system is transformed into an emotional story that can be embraced by the fans. This narrative also provides fandoms with legitimization to support their idols, as their amazing performance is guaranteed by high-level skills based on practicing for several years. This theme of leveraging musicians' personal narratives (e.g. working class upbringing) is also seen is an important factor to convince audiences the performance is 'authentic' in the rock genre (e.g., Moore 2001; Atton 2019). For K-pop, the narrative of the harsh trainee experiences works similarly to the logic of rock authenticity.

The narrative of trainee experiences supports the Korean way of training system as a meaningful system to make K-pop's perfect performances, and it also contributes to constructing the identity of K-pop. In this way, the fandom takes agency in constructing K-pop identity.

3.2 K-pop and gender representation

K-pop acts as a catalyst for cultural discussion and realm of discussing and navigating gender and gender expression on the global stage. This section explores how different masculinities and femininities are represented in K-pop and compare masculine perceptions to Western ones and feminine perceptions via feminism. To study these issues in detail, first, I consider boy bands' gender representations from both Eastern and Western perspectives. Second, taking BTS as an example of a new-generation boy band, I will examine how masculinities are constructed by both the artists and audiences. When it comes to femininity in K-pop I will consider how strong femininity is constructed by both performers and the fandom through the lens of third wave of feminism.

3.2.1 Masculinities in K-pop

As masculinities are not fixed but a cultural and social construction (e.g., Butler 1993), K-pop's masculinities has also changed over time. Regarding the change in masculinities in the K-pop scene, Chang (2020) examined it through the history of K-pop and divided it into three generations. The first generation, in the 1990s, performed 'strong masculinity', following the stereotypical male/female dichotomy and attracted female fans. In the 2000s, the second generation presented a new type of masculinity that integrated traditional masculinity with 'feminine' qualities such as make-up and silky hair and doing *aegyo* (애교), which refers to

posing with cute expressions without hesitation (Oh 2015, 70). This new type of masculinity seen in *Hallyu* contents such as Korean TV dramas and K-pop is described as 'liminal masculinity' (Oh 2015), 'multiple masculinities' (C. S. Anderson 2014), 'pan East-Asian soft masculinity' (S. Jung 2009), 'East-Asian soft masculinity' (Ainslie 2017) or just 'soft masculinity' (L. Shin 2018; J. Chang 2020; S. Jung 2011a). Here, each term of masculinity refers to a hybrid combination of stereotypical masculinity and femininity. In this thesis, I use the term 'soft masculinity' to refer to the masculinities performed by the second and third generation idol groups. Moreover, although the third generation, since the 2010s, also inherited the second generation's soft masculinity in addition to their hybrid looks, they started to express their vulnerability without hesitation in their music. They also began pursuing 'individual happiness in everyday life', for which it is necessary to admit their weaknesses, imperfections, and struggles. Thus, compared to the second generation's soft masculinity, which was mainly seen in their looks, the third generation's is much more internal (J. Chang 2020).

Regarding the soft masculinity that has been performed since the 2000s, being 'pretty looking' and having 'smooth fair skin, silky hair, and a feminine manner' is described as *khonminam* (꽃미남), which means 'flower boy' (S. Jung 2011a, 58). This concept originated from a 1990s Korean TV drama that attracted many female fans in pan-Asian countries, which is the so-called '*khonminam* syndrome'(ibid). Although the main example in her article is Bae Yong-Joon—a Korean actor who is credited with causing *khonminam* syndrome—Jung observed that the soft masculinity seen in *khonminam* is constructed by both Confucian *wen* masculinity, which aims to have strong inner will and politeness, and *bishonen* (美少年 [beautiful boy]) masculinity, which can be seen in Japanese *shojo* (少女 [girls]) manga that is written for teenage girls in particular about romantic relationships with *bishonen* boyfriends (S. Jung 2011a). Therefore, although soft masculinity seems to look feminine to the West and is considered a counter to gender norms (e.g., *BBC News* 2018; Morin 2020; Rapp 2020), it does not intend to challenge or subvert gender norms in the Asian context. Rather, it is constructed by following conservative ideas based on the dichotomy of males/females under heterosexual normativity.

On the other hand, Western context of boy bands' masculinity, Wald (2002) examined their masculinities in by taking the Backstreet Boys as an example. According to him, boy bands are generally required to perform a 'girlish masculinity', in which they are 'primarily visible

as spectacularized bodies' with the image of 'cute and accessible boys' (ibid.). Here, I argue that this girlish masculinity—which emerges through the relationship between boybands and fans to attract girls based on heteronormativity—is similar to *bishonen* masculinity, which creates ideal boyfriends through girls' desires in manga. However, because these masculinities address girl's desires, girlish masculinity is disdained, so boybands' music also received unfair criticism (Wald 2002). On the other hand, non-normative performances deviating from masculinity norms – for example, like David Bowie or Prince – is still respected as it retains broad public appeal from straight male consumers who maintain hegemonic power (ibid.).

However, this does not mean that boy band members are never respected by the public. By getting rid of girlish masculinity, which means quitting the boy band, they can remain secure and gain respect from straight males despite their non-normative masculinity. Taking Zayn Malik, an ex-member of One Direction, as an example, Hansen (2019) argues that members' post-boyband appearances—in which they simultaneously perform as stereotypical figures of virility but with atypically manly attitudes[18] —is considered hybrid masculinity. More specifically, it is the 'selective incorporation of identity elements typically associated with various marginalised and subordinated masculinities or femininities into privileged men's gendered performances and identities' (Bridges and Pascoe 2018, 256; in Hansen 2019). Such hybrid masculinity tends to be accepted positively in the media as a counter to toxic masculinity. For example, the article titled 'How Harry Styles is defying toxic masculinity' describes his fashion style wearing a dress as a fearless attitude of pushing gender norm boundaries (Shah 2020).

Back to masculinities in K-pop, it is interesting to note that particularly in recent boy band discourse, people have started to recognise their soft masculinity as being the same as the hybrid masculinity despite them embracing *bishonen* masculinity, which is based on female desire. Here, people perceive soft masculinity in a very progressive way, as if K-pop is the key to countering toxic masculinity. For example, focusing on men's beauty in Korea and K-pop's feminine-like masculinity, some articles noted that the increasing presence of K-pop in

[18] Zayn Malik started his solo career as a singer after he left the band. He also joined the music-making process by writing lyrics and succeeded in getting subjectivity. In his first MV *Pillowtalk* (2016), he performs typical masculinity in a heteronormative relationship. However, at the same time, he opened up on his vulnerabilities by talking about his eating disorder and also transcended male norms by wearing female clothes (Hansen 2019).

hit charts may help break norms in terms of what men should or should not do (Yi 2020; 2021). The attitude that recognises K-pop's soft masculinity as a medicine to cure toxic masculinity includes the orientalism gaze (Morin 2020). This is a type of orientalist desire by which the Western media recognises K-pop's soft masculine figures as exotic, foreign, feminine, and something other. As Said argues that the West sees East as an exotic other, and defines East in terms that the West wants to see (Said 1978), media defining K-pop as exotic soft masculinity may heal Western toxic masculinity 'because' it is different from the West.

Although to a certain degree, the influence of K-pop's soft masculinity contributing to new Asian masculinities, there is also the danger of these representations becoming a new stereotype of Asian-ness—similar to the old stereotypes, such as martial-arts prowess due to the influence of kung-fu masters like Bruce Lee. Under the stereotyped gaze, the many layers of a culture are ignored, despite the fact that Asian culture is diverse and complex. The influence of K-pop representations of gender challenging gender norms seems to be spreading. For example, in Kazakhstan, Ninety One, which is a boy band inspired and modelled off of K-pop, has initiated conversations on toxic masculinity amongst conservative Kazakhstani society (Tan 2021).[19]

In these discourses, it is interesting that the positive aspects of K-pop masculinity are frequently mentioned on the Internet. Here, I argue that the reception of K-pop's soft masculinity as challenging the norm is especially emphasised by audiences' practices rather than artists' performances. More specifically, the K-pop fandom contributes to constructing soft masculinity in a positive way that is acceptable by straight males. However, before discussing this topic, K-pop fandom activities need to be understood.

The K-pop fandom is defined by the close relationship between artists and the fandom (S. Jung 2011b). Moreover, participatory fan activities, such as donating to institutions related to idols and raising money for idols, are important aspects in K-pop (ibid.). Furthermore, the fandom communicates with the artists on the internet, and there are platforms specifically developed for them, such as the Daum fancafe, V-live, and Weverse. Through such Social Networking Systems (SNS) platforms, fans frequently leave comments on music and dance

[19] Ninety One also promotes Kazakh culture by singing songs in the Kazakh language. This promotes their language in a society where the majority uses Russian due to them being a part of the Soviet Union for 70 years (Tan 2021).

performances. However, these comments include not only praise for their favourite artists but also criticism.

Taking BTS as an example of change in perspectives on gender, I will now examine how fans' active practice contributed to discourses on masculinities. While BTS has recently had positive acceptance for their performance of masculinity, they have previously sung songs in which the lyrics describe heteronormalized romance and include misogynistic expressions influenced by toxic masculinity. For example, a song that infuses pop and hip-hop sounds, *War of Hormone* (2014), includes the line, '여자는 최고의 선물이야' (women are the best gifts), and the fandom criticised it as objectifying women (Son 2016). Especially, this line was used repeatedly in the hook (1:19-1:23, 2:57-3:02, 3:40-3:45), which is the most memorable part and highlight in the entire song. Additionally, *Miss Right* (2014) and a BTS member RM's solo song *농담 (Joke)* (2015) are seen as having misogynistic lyrics[20]. This is due to their adoption of the concept of hip-hop idols that caused their music to be based on the hip-hop attitude, which includes machismo and misogyny. Especially as the members of BTS are known to be actively involved in the music-making process by writing lyrics and composing sounds, the fandom criticised BTS for releasing such lyrics and requested that BTS provide an explanation by using the hashtag #BTS 피드백을원합니다 (#WeNeedFeedbackFromBTS) (Jun 2016). After the controversy, BTS officially apologised for their biased lyrics about the role of women and noted that the sense of value from a man's perspective was wrong (Son 2016). Thus, the fandom became active consumers who negotiated their will through consumption, and in this case criticising lyrics, which made BTS change their perspectives through K-pop's participatory culture. Additionally, later, BTS began to be increasingly conscious of gender issues and changed their attitudes. When

[20] For example, in *Miss Right*, they sing that a girl who wears casual style clothes is better than one wearing luxury brands. This is based on the idea of the 'stupid' *doejangnyeo* (된장녀 [bean paste soup girl]). In Korea, the term *doejangnyeo* mocks women who buy the cheapest food, which is bean paste soup, to buy expensive lattés in Starbucks (Song 2014). It embraces the misogynistic idea that women who spend money on luxury goods are stupid despite the fact that everyone should use their money for whatever they want regardless of gender. In *농담(Joke)*, in which RM's incredible rap skills can be heard set to hip-hop duo, Run the Jewels' *Oh My Darling Don't Cry* (2014) (Bangtan 2015), the lyrics are as follows: '그래 넌 최고의 여자, 갑질 So 존나게 잘해 갑질. 아 근데 생각해보니 갑이었던 적 없네 갑 떼고 임이라 부를게. 임질' (Yeah, you are the best woman, having the best vagina. So, you're so good at doing power harassment, oh but you have never had any power though. Instead of a boss, I'll call you gonorrhoea) (Muish 2016). Because BTS has many fans who are teenagers and in their early twenties, they were criticised for these lyrics that are considered irresponsible.

they released the remix of Jason Derulo and Jawsh 685's *Savage Love* (2020), they changed the original lyrics to be gender neutral (Kelly 2020, 202).

Another fan activity, which involves identifying idols' clothes, also contributes to the discourse on soft masculinity. When the fandom discovered that BTS was wearing female clothes, it was shared with a reference to gender fluidity (Lu 2021). These incidents were recounted as anecdotes by the fandom themselves on SNS and shared all over the world. This sharing of such anecdotes related to the progressive aspects of soft masculinity gathered media attention and resulted in articles (e.g., Pasinringi 2020). Furthermore, when the fandom found articles with positive descriptions of their idol, they shared them and re-emphasised the rebellious aspect when citing the article, so that the anecdotes on challenging gender norms became more widespread.

Behind this fandom practice, I argue that fandoms follow popular music mythology based on the artist/idol dichotomy, in which artists are superior to idols associated with a high/low cultural hierarchal discourse where art is high versus low mass production. However, this assumption makes K-pop culturally inferior. Further, because fandoms know how their favourite idols and music are regularly mocked, looked down upon, and devalued by the public, they try to elevate the idols and their music to gain a higher status, which is that of artists. However, as Wald (2002) noted, the value of music is defined by whether the majority of straight males accept it. In this context, as many counter-culture genres, such as free jazz, folk music, rock, and hip-hop, are widely well-received as valuable and meaningful, the fandom makes the discourse on soft masculinity being acceptable for straight males by emphasising its similarity with aspects of counter-culture that challenge norms as well as diluting masculinities that addresses female desires.

This logic is similar to that of the problem faced before musicology was embraced, in which musicians tried to emphasise the 'rational' aspect of music by claiming objectivity and excluding female participation to deny the idea that music is a feminine realm throughout Western history (McClary 1991, 17). However, this is a contradiction for female-based fandoms because they need to reject their own femininity to gain a good reputation. However, even so, the fandom defends K-pop by separating it from the aspects of female desire and positioning its soft masculinity as a rebellion against the norms. As such, although the origin of soft masculinity was constructed through the lens of female desire, the fandom's emphasis is on the 'meaningful' aspects of soft masculinity, and they reproduce the previously

mentioned high (artists) /low (idols) music discourse by saying the following about their favourite group: ‘they are no longer idols, they are artists!’[21].

3.2.2 Femininity in K-pop

Generally, female artists face many difficulties, such as unfair judgement by reported only how they look without mentioning their music performance compared to male artists, being sexually objectified, and unequal power relationships within industries regardless of music genre.[22] Thus, here, I will discuss how girl bands in K-pop perform their femininity and how they challenge gender norms in the patriarchal heteronormative K-pop scene.

Gender representation by girl bands is largely divided into two time periods: before and after the emergence of the ‘girl crush’ concept of idols, in which they perform as strong and independent female figures to attract female rather than male fans. Before the appearance of this concept, girl groups aimed to be loved (usually by men) as cute, submissive, and innocent but sexy figures created through the male gaze. For example, Girls’ Generation (소녀시대 [*sonyeosidae*]) was composed of eight women who wore short pants, highlighted their long legs by dancing, and became popular in Korea, Japan, and China. One of the most popular songs, *Gee* (2009), is about the feelings of a shy girl falling in love, and the crab leg dance in the MV became an iconic dance for the group. Throughout the performance, they had an innocent, beloved, and girly image. It is natural that fantasy girly images were established because K-pop (and music) industries are composed almost exclusively of male producers and creator teams. Further, because male fans were set as a target for female idols for commercial success, they pursued ‘the satisfaction of men’s sexual fantasies’ by creating submissive beloved girls (J. Chang 2020, 73). However, when it came to overseas promotion, such as in the U.S., the sexually objectified portrayals of female idols were much more exaggerated than in the domestic market (E.-Y. Jung 2013). As Said (1978) pointed out, as Western culture depicts Oriental women as sexual fantasies through art, novels, cinema, and

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[21] For example, we can find thousands of ‘no longer idol but artist’ tweets on Twitter (e.g., ‘No longer just idols but worldwide artists!@BTS_twt’ (@heartOT7 2018)). The media also describes BTS as artists who are beyond K-pop culture, such as BTS ‘moves from being musicians and performers to international artists who not only make art, but curate, and make other art forms which are not traditionally accessible, freely available to a whole new generation’ (Giggins 2020).

[22] Female idols are easy to target body shaming. For example, one reporter who wrote an article about a member of Blackpink becoming fat was criticised by netizens (Ha 2021). In this controversy, idols’ musical performance was never mentioned. Female idols tend to be judged by how they look without any mention of their musical ability.

music – Korean management companies strategically used this context to gain popularity in the U.S. market. To this end, they reproduced the stereotypes of Asian women as sexual objects, reflecting Western racial and sexual views towards Asian women (ibid.).

However, the appearance of idol groups embodying the girl crush concept has gradually changed this situation. 'Girl crush' referred to as '*ssen-unni*' (쎈언니), which means strong (*ssen*) sister (*unni*) in Korean, is the concept of performing strong femininity through music, MVs, and stage performances (J. Chang 2020; J. Lee and Yi 2020). In the Korean language, people use family titles depending on who they are talking to. Here, '*unni*' is used by women to refer to their elder sisters or women who are older than them. However, when men do the same, they say '*nuna*'. Therefore, the term '*ssen-unni*' is used for and by women. Additionally, this phenomenon is related to the change in the fandom's gender composition. Previously, the fandoms of girl idol groups were composed of males, and female fans were considered lesbians (J. Chang 2020). By performing as strong women or representing girl power, girl crush idols succeeded in gaining female fandoms who empathise with having autonomy rather than pursuing male admiration. For example, the energetic EDM song, *I am the Best* (2011) by 2NE1 is a pioneer of the 'girl crush' concept and can be seen as a statement of women's empowerment and freedom from the male gaze because of the song singing 'my value is decided by only myself, no one can judge me'. The change is obvious when we compare this to the non-'girl crush' group Wonder Girls' hit song, *Nobody* (2009), which sought to gain men's attention through the lyric, 'I want nobody but you'. Recently, the term '*unni*' has also been used in the Korean feminist movement. More specifically, *unni* became the name of a Korean feminist group, making it a 'cultural signifier for conveying […] sisterhood' (J. Lee and Yi 2020, 21).

As an example of *ssen-unni* idol groups in recent times, Blackpink —which has the Guinness World Record for the most-viewed MV within the first 24 hours of release—represents a new generation of girl crush idols influenced by hip-hop's feminist attitude. Their songs describe strong women and talk about sisterhood. For example, in *DDU-DU DDU-DU* (2018), which is a song infusing pop and trap[23], they sing 'we are pretty and savage (우린 예쁘장한 savage)'. This song became a turning point for Blackpink by cementing them as bossy female

[23] Trap is a subgenre of hip-hop. The sound is characterised as a light high hat with complex rhythm and decayed bass (Raymer 2012).

figures. In their other trap based song, *Pretty Savage* (2020), they emphasise their fame, dominating popularity, and pride in themselves through their aggressive language. However, these attitudes are opposite of Confucianism's ideal femininity, based on the idea that women are possessions for their husbands; more specifically, the ideal feminine virtues as per this ideology are quietness, modesty, passivity, and obedience (Gao 2003). Further, Confucianism still strongly influences daily life in Korean society (e.g., U. Cho 2013), and K-pop is no exception. Additionally, it is interesting to note that Blackpink depicts themselves as strong, independent female figures who are against this Confucian patriarchal society by using their hip-hop attitudes. In *How You Like That* (2020), the bridge has the line, 'Bring out the boss bitch' (2:32-), which can be seen as a call to sisterhood to female fans. This is similar to the songs about female solidarity and empowerment by many other feminist musicians, such as in the Riot grrrl movement, which is a punk movement against sexism associated with third wave of feminism in the 1990s to the early 2000s, who have done the same. Furthermore, the word 'bitch' can also be heard in other songs (e.g., *Pretty Savage* (2000)). Thus, their attitude is the same as hip-hop female artists who use the word 'bitch' or 'hoe' for themselves to reclaim their sexual subjectivity, which was once used in the context of misogyny by male artists in the hip-hop scene (Emerson 2002; Caraan 2021).

Moreover, as J. Lee and Yi (2020, 20) point out, this *ssen-unni* (girl crush) phenomenon is similar to the third wave of feminism, which is especially associated with young feminists who oppose the second wave of feminism's negative reactions towards feminine sexual terms such as pussy, slut, and bitch (Baker and Jane 2016, 344). Indeed, as noted above, 2NE1 and Blackpink encourage women and declare their empowerment through their songs, and it seems to reflect their feminism. However, it is important to note that the *ssen-unni* concept in the music industry was not first propagated outside of Korea. For instance, the Rebel Girls led the Riot grrrl feminist punk movement under the third wave of feminism, and before this, Girlschool opened a new field as the first all-female band in the heavy metal scene, which is hyper patriarchal. Therefore, the widespread acceptance of *ssen-unni* idol groups, such as Blackpink, in the global market is understandable.

However, it has to be mentioned that *ssen-unni* idol groups are created by male producers and creator teams. For example, both 2NE1 and Blackpink are managed by one of the biggest K-pop agencies, YG Entertainment. Their main producer is Teddy Park, the in-house male producer. In this context, some cultural critics have pointed out that the girl crush

phenomenon can be called ‘marketable feminism’, through which the music industry produces feminism-oriented music and idols because the main target consumers are young women concerned about the feminism movement (J. Park 2019b). In this sense, their feminist-friendly attitudes are just onstage performances. Indeed, *ssen-unni* idols such as those in 2NE1 or Blackpink are all alike—self-confident and independent girls who expose their perfect bodies by wearing sexualised clothes. For example, in Blackpink’s MV, *Lovesick Girls* (2020), the scene in which one of the members was wearing a hyper-sexualised nurse outfit was deleted after attracting controversy because The Health and Medical Workers’ Union of Korea accused the MV of overly sexually objectifying and misrepresenting nurses with the unnecessary micro mini skirt and red heels (N. Kim 2020).

Thus on the one hand, the idols express female empowerment through their performance, while on the other, they emphasise their sexually objectified bodies in the same way as idols before the *ssen-unni* trend. In this sense, a feminist-friendly attitude works as an excuse for the reproduction of the sexual objectification of females. Lee and Yi analysed this contradiction: idols keep cooperating with being objectified and sexualised figures because of the ‘fear of losing male fans’, while also sending a message of female empowerment to female fans (J. Lee and Yi 2020, 23). In this context, by using late 1990s’ advertisements as an example, Gill (2008, 437) conducted a critical reading of femininity in advertisements that are portrayed ‘as not seeking men’s approval but as pleasing themselves, and in so doing, they just happen to win men’s admiration’. This mechanism is also used by the *ssen-unni* idols. Although they perform while wearing micro-mini skirts and dance to sexualised choreographies that emphasise their bodies, their lyrics and expressions indicate that they are not pursuing being loved by men but are focused on pleasing themselves, and they just happen to win men’s admiration as well as female agreement. After all, under this structure, their hyper-sexualised femininity is reduced to individual choice because they sing about liberation from the male gaze.

However, this does not mean that the *ssen-unni* attitude is completely fake or meaningless. As many scholars have mentioned the importance of considering music as a process, including the context in which music is embedded (e.g., Small 1998), the *ssen-unni* concept cannot be discussed without considering the perceivers—the fandom. Here, it is important to note how the audience receives *ssen-unni* music as a message of the solidarity of sisterhood. For instance, the hip-hop-pop tune *Wannabe* (2020) by ITZY, which is a *ssen-unni* concept

idol group composed of five women, is about self-empowerment, and the MV received more than 350 million views (ITZY 2020). Similar to Blackpink, ITZY also uses hip-hop's bossy female attitude to show female empowerment. In *Wannabe*, they sing that they go their own way without listening to any nagging from others because everyone is unique with the lyrics: 'I don't wanna be somebody. Just wanna be me, be me / I'ma do my thang, just do your thang 'cause I'm the one and only'. Some representative YouTube comments on this song are shown below.

> I know some people are getting tired of their "I don't care / self confidence concepts" but it really does lift people up when they are going through a rough time (ID: reynaldo reyes)
>
> This is why I became a Midzy[24] 😭✨ their songs were pushed me everytime I got myself in a bad mood and unconfident [sic] (ID: Ara Hyo J)
>
> This is song made me feel comfortable in my own clothes bc I am called to [sic] "Skinny" Gain weight (ID: skinny_legend)

As expected, YouTube users, Ara Hyo J and skinny_legend directly understood the message of the lyrics as encouraging females' self-confidence. However, here it is interesting to note reynaldo reyes' comment that received 4.6K likes. Comments such as reynaldo reyes' indicate that fans have already understood that many *ssen-unni* idols are using a commercial strategy; yet simultaneously, it still encourages female fans and gives them self-confidence.

Moreover, the *ssen-unni* idols encourage female fans not only in their music but also in their speeches on stage. For example, there is a famous video of the *ssen-unni* concept girl group, Mamamoo, which was shared and translated into several languages by fans, and women empathised with it worldwide. While live on stage, one of the members, Hwa-sa, talked about her pain and recovery from body shaming. According to her, an executive at an audition told her that she was fat and ugly, although she has good singing skills. Subsequently, she cried the whole night while watching a live Beyoncé video, and then decided that if she does not fit into this generation's beauty standards, she will set her own standards (MINTBOX 2019, 1:55-3:10). Although the video was recorded illegally, it was shared and received more than five million views, and encouragement – especially from women who struggle with body shaming in their daily lives. Thus, because the performers themselves are female, they more or less empathise with the feminist issues that the *ssen-unni* concept represents. Therefore,

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[24] Midzzy is a name of ITZY fandom.

their performances are also influenced by their own experiences beyond the simple commercial model. It leads to *ssen-unni* performances that seem very convincing for audiences. Further, as Chang (2020) noted by referring to Robert's (1990) work on female rock musicians' MVs, performers who create an atmosphere through their music by facial expressions and dancing body movement are considered authors who influence their fans' consciousness in the same way as those who write songs. In this sense, performers who represent the girl crush concept are also at the centre of circulating feminist music, and the audience resonates with its manifesto. Therefore, the *ssen-unni* attitude is not fake and meaningless, but on the contrary, for fans, it functions as a real experience of feminism beyond the manufactured 'marketable feminism'.

Unfortunately, while *ssen-unni* idols encourage female fans, they reveal Korean society's backlash on feminism. When Irene, a member of the girls group Red Velvet, shared a picture of a feminist novel on SNS, she was accused by male fans of 'suddenly being associated with feminists' (C. Lee 2018). Thus, a strong aversion to feminism still in large part remains in Korean society (J. Kwon 2019). Furthermore, the female idols are still supported by male fandom. Therefore, Irene's 'feminist attitude', although all she did was read a book, was criticised by many of her male fans. This incident reflects Korean society, where people think that what is required of women is not reading books and gaining knowledge, but just being obedient and entertaining to men.

The portrayal and performance of gender for both male and female K-pop groups demonstrate the multi-influential aspect of K-pop and gender in general. The contrasting nature of boy-bands performing 'soft' masculinity with toxic masculinity – which emphasises toughness and is often associated with homophobia and misogyny by Western media also demonstrates the international effect on a global level (e.g., *BBC News* 2018; Morin 2020; Rapp 2020). However, the consideration of K-pop as soft masculinity by Western media already includes an orientalist bias, and due to the history of Asian men being demasculinised through the Western gaze, these perceptions cannot be simplified as counters to toxic masculinity. Regarding female representation, some academic studies have already scrutinised female groups or a specific person in a girl group and found that the trend in girl groups has recently shifted to the performance of strong and independent female figures that attracts female fans based on the concept of 'girl crushes' (e.g., Laforgia and Howard 2017; J.

Lee and Yi 2020). Both of these example demonstrate the role of K-pop as a realm where concepts of gender are explored and tested.

4 Fanchants (case study)

Fanchants, which are audiences' encouragement calls towards performers, can be widely heard in music concerts of many genres. Fanchants in the K-pop scene are unique due to the widespread use of Korean and intricate phrases compared to other popular music concerts. However, fanchants in K-pop are often described negatively, such as fanatic fangirls' screaming. To examine these fanchants clearly and concretely, I conduct a case study for K-pop group BTS, which has a huge influence on the K-pop globalization, and its fandom called ARMY, which is the largest fanbase in the world.

First, I summarize the general information on K-pop fanchants and consider their cultural roots from Korean traditional music and the recent K-pop scene. Second, taking fanchants in the song titled *IDOL* (2018) by BTS as a case study, I consider how the fanchants are constructed and what meanings emerged through fanchants by conducting a close reading of the song, analysing the MV and stage performance, and interviews with members of the fandom, ARMY.

4.1 K-pop fanchants and their background

As mentioned in chapter *3.1.2 Fandom*, although K-pop has various unique fandom activities, fanchants are conducted during the most important event for both artists and fans, the comeback period and concerts. In this section, after introducing the basic information on fanchants, I examine the components of fanchants and consider the roots of fanchants in Korean culture and how they have developed.

In English, the term 'fanchant' is used to describe audiences' encouragement calls towards artists. In Korean, fanchants are called '응원' (*eungwon* [cheering]). According to Kang, K-pop fanchants are 'words that are chanted by the fans in the audience during a performance or a particular song to express their support and love. It is mostly the names of the singers and is usually shouted during the part where the singers are not singing' (Kang 2016, 65). Although this description captures general information on fanchants in the K-pop scene, I supplement this description by further categorizing fanchants into 2 types; name chants and music chants.

K-pop fanchants can be classified into largely two types; one is calling the band and members' names, and the other consists of chanting parts of the song. The chant calling the band and member names (hereafter referred to as 'name chants'), is generally conducted during instrumental parts of the song, for example, the intro, breakdance (interlude), or outro

in songs released as a lead single. Fans sing each members name and the band name in time with the down beat of the song, visible in figure 1 below. For example, club H.O.T., the fandom of the first generation K-pop idol group H.O.T., conducted their name chant in the intro of a song titled *I Yah!* (1999), which is with sampling Mozart's Symphony No. 25 in G minor and Beethoven's Piano *sonata* No.14 (Moonlight), as follows; 'Moon Hee-joon, Jang Woo-hyuk, Ahn Seung-ho, Ahn Chil-hyun, Lee Jae-wo, H.O.T.'. [25]

(5x's)
Intro
Fanchant
H. O. T.
H. O. T.
Em
Moon Hee-joon,
Jang Woo-hyuk,
Ahn Seung-ho,
(1st verse starts)
Ahn Chil-hyun,
Lee Jae-wo,
H. O. T.

Figure 1. Name chant in the intro of I Yah! *(0:00-0:54). The upper staff is the simplified intro and the bottom staff is the fanchant.*

In the name chants, fandoms usually use idols' real names instead of stage names. For instance, fans call 'Ahn Seung-ho' in the name chant instead of his stage name, 'Tony Ahn'. In addition, because age is an important factor in Korean society, the name in fanchant is usually called in order of age, from older to younger[26]. This name chant is a unique aspect of K-pop, therefore, it is sometimes used synonymously with the term fanchant in K-pop. There are also cases where the fanchant includes chanting the member's name and the band name as

[25] HOT. 2019. '[VIDEO] H.O.T. 아이야 (I yah!) #문희준 장우혁 안승호 안칠현 이재원 HOT.' 이것이 노래다 [This is the song]. Jul 19, 2019. Music TV show, 4:34. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bC4Sr2U-VnQ.
[26] There are also some exceptions. BTS fanchants call the name of the band leader, who is the third oldest member, first. This is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2.2.

if it is a small dram fill. Figure 2 illustrates an example for a part of rhythmical name chant in the girls group Mamamo's song titled *gogobebe* (2019).[27]

Figure 2. Name chant in the intro of gogobebe *(0:38-0:42) (the upper staff is vocal melody, the bottom staff is fanchant)*

Name chants are not limited to the names of the band and members, there are many types of name chants. For example, additional words related to the group can be inserted into name chants. Figure 3 shows the girls group, Twice's name chant in *TT* (2016); 'Im Nayeon, Yoo Jeongyeon, Momo jjang, Sana jjang, Park Jihyo, Mina jjang, Kim Dahyun, Son Chaeyoung, Chou Tzuyu, One in a million! *Se-sang-e tan ha-na-bbun-in, Teu-wa-i-seu!* (세상에 단 하나뿐인 트와이스 [the only in the world, Twice])'.[28] Between each member's name (from 'Im Nayeon-yoo (이나연)' to 'Chou Tzuyu (주쯔위)') and band name (Teu-wa-i-seu), the fandom sings 'One in a million', which is a sentence that Twice uses when they introduce themselves at events such as music shows in TV programs or concerts – for example, 'Hello, one in a million, we are Twice' (A Once 2016,0:00-0:06).

Figure 3. Name chant in the intro of TT (0:42-0:56).

Besides words related to groups, a song title can be used as a part of name chant. Figure 4 offers an example where the girls group Red Velvet's name chant in the song *Russian Roulette* (2016) is as follows; 'Bae Joohyoeon, Kang Seulgi, Son Seungwan, Park Suyoung, KimYerim, Red Velvet, Russian Roulette!'.[29] This name chant is composed of each

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[27] MAMAMOO. 2019. '[MAMAMOO - gogobebe] Comeback Stage | M COUNTDOWN 190314 EP.610.' Mnet K-POP. Mar 14, 2019. Music TV show, 3:56. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_dt7kULil7k.
[28] TWICE. 2016. 'TWICE(트와이스) "TT intro cheering guide" from JI-MI-DA-CHAE.' Oct 29, 2016. 1:16. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWcxIpaEK4U.
[29] Red Velvet. 2016. '《Comeback Special》Red Velvet (레드벨벳) - Russian Roulette (러시안 룰렛) @인기가요 Inkigayo 20160911.' 스브스케이팝 / SBS KPOP. Sep 11, 2016. Music TV show, 3:33. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNfsmNyH1gE.

member's name (from 'Bae Joonyoeon (배주현)' to 'Kim Yerim (김예림)'), the group name, (Red Velvet), and song title, (Russian Roulette).

Figure 4. Name chant in the outro of Russian Roulette *(3:00-3:07).*

There is also a phenomenon where the song title and names are mixed in the name chant. In the song titled *I am the best (2014)* by 2NE1, the iconic hook lyric '*Naega jeil jalnaga* (내가 제일 잘나가 [I am the best])' is arranged to follow each name in the chant (figure 5); 'CL *jeil jalnaga* (CL is the best), Park bom *jeil jalnaga* (Park bom is the best), Dara *jeil jalnaga* (Dara is the best), Minji *jeil jalnaga* (Minji is the best)'.[30]

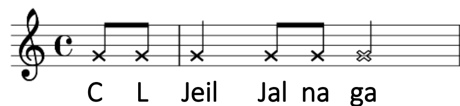

Figure 5. Name chant in the intro of I am the best *(0:17-0:31).*

Yet another type of name chant consists only of the band name and song title without each member's name. For example, figure 6 shows the song, *Mr Simple* (2011) by the boys band Super Junior; 'Super Junior! Mr. Simple!'.[31]

Figure 6. Name chant in the intro of Mr. Simple *(0:07-0:17).*

Bands do not limit their name chants to only one type and can use multiple styles of name chants according to songs. For example, H.O.T. uses another name chant that emphasises the fandom's emotion. In a song titled *Outside Castle* (2000), the fans call their love in the name chant as follows in figure 7; 'H.O.T.! H.O.T.! Moon Hee-joon (문희준), H.O.T.! Jang Woo-hyuk, H.O.T.! Ahn Seung-ho, H.O.T.! Ahn Chil-hyun, H.O.T.! Lee Jae-wo, H.O.T.! Forever,

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[30] 2NE1. 2011.'2NE1_0626 _SBS Popular Music _ I AM THE BEST (내가 제일 잘나가).' Jun 26, 2011. Music TV show, 3:39. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7epNrIkjBv8.
[31] Super Junior. 2012. 'Super Junior - Mr.Simple, 슈퍼주니어 - 미스터심플, Music 20110813.' MBCkpop. Jan 16, 2012. Music TV show, 4:00. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKJykl7ez9A.

H.O.T.! *Sarangheyo* (사랑해요)[I love you]), H.O.T.! *Sa*, *rang*, *he*, *yo* (사,랑,해,요 [I, LOVE, YOU])!'.[32]

Figure 7. Name chant in the intro of Outside Castle (1:12-1:53).

The word '*saranghae* (사랑해 [love you])' is frequently used in name chant, for example, Twice, and TVQX[33]. In addition, sometimes the words reaffirming unity are also used, for example figure 8 shows 'We are one!' in boys group EXO's name chant in the song *Love Shot* (2016).[34]

Figure 8. Name chant in the intro of Love Shot (0:14-0:18).

Name chants are composed with a very simple rhythm, usually using just crotchet and/or quaver, to recognise easily. What is important about name chants is that the fandom conducts name chants during parts of the song where the artists are not singing. Chanting during lulls in singing allows fanchants to reach artists directly as a message from the fandom. Through name chants, fandoms express their love towards their favourite artists. In this sense, name chants are a form of verbal communication rather than nonverbal ones such as screaming – contrary to the usual description of fanchants.

Generally, fanchants are published on Daum fancafe, the internet communication forum in Korea mentioned in section *3.1.2 Fandom*. Although most K-pop bands have official fanchants published by the management company, some bands do not have official fanchants. In this case, the fandom makes fanchants by themselves and shares them on the internet. Although the initial information on fanchants is written in Korean, the international fandom translates and share them through major platforms such as YouTube. The translated

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[32] H.O.T. 2012. 'H.O.T - 아웃사이드 캐슬(Outside castle) Music Camp 20001028.' MBCkpop. Apr 18, 2012. Music TV show, 5:35. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8_1SHPbY2E.
[33] In boys band TVXQ 's song *Hug* (2004), after each member's name, 'Saranghaeyo (사랑해요 [love you]), hamkkehaeyo (함께해요[(we are) together]), Dong. Bang. Shin. Ki (동방신기[TVXQ])'. (dwie90june 2012)
[34]EXO. 2018. '181214 뮤직뱅크 - EXO(Love Shot) ㅣ KBS 방송.' KBS 한국방송. Dec 14, 2018. Music TV show, 3:35. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijGtxGHm5WI.

information on chants is supported by a motivated fandom and demonstrate that the fandom is actively involved with creating and/or spreading fanchants.

These types of interactions between audience and performers has historical Korean context. Although it is hard to trace the background and development precisely, the roots of the audience's encouragement call towards performers in Korea can be found in the eighteenth century. *Chuimsae* (추임새) is encouragement calls (or shouts) towards performers in *pansori* (판소리), which is a Korean traditional narrative music consisting of a performer including narrating and singing, and a drummer (Um 2012; D. L. Kwon 2012; Y. Jang 2014). In *pansori*, *chuimsae* is chanted by the audience with a drum accompanist and encourages the main singer. For example, '*eolssigu*!' (hurrah!), '*jotta*!' (whoopee!), or '*kurochi*!' (that's right!) is shouted during the performance (Y. Jang 2014). This *chuimsae* can be heard not only in *pansori* but also in other Korean traditional performing arts, for example, *pungmul*, which is a traditional folk music band. The audience's active participation in musical culture, especially the audience's encouragement calls, had already been prevalent in Korea prior to the establishment of K-pop.[35] *Chuimsae* is a crucial part of conducting *pansori*, and requires high-level skills and knowledge to conduct precisely because the conductor has to know the exact timing when to shout (Um 2013, 16). The knowledge of the song required to shout appropriately is similar as K-pop's fanchants. In the K-pop scene, a fan can get information on fanchants in advance via several websites and SNS, so the fandom can learn the fanchants by heart in advance so that they can conduct fanchants at the proper timing. K-pop fanchants can be seen as a modern version of *chuimsae*.

This preparation for participation for the audience makes K-pop fanchants unique amongst pop music around the globe. Although chanting in concerts is not unique to K-pop, the differentiation between K-pop and other concerts in the popular music scene is that the fandom completely comprehends fanchants and conducts them with perfect timing.

Although the cultural root of fanchants can be traced in *chuimsae*, recent K-pop fanchants were established in the 1990s. The K-pop first-generation boys band H.O.T.'s fandom, Club H.O.T. can be considered a pioneer of current fanchant customs. They began name chants

[35] Audiences' participation is not only in Korea. As similar examples, Jang mentioned k*akegoe*, which is audiences' shouting in Japanese traditional theatrical play k*abuki*, and Northern Indian's singing performance in folk epic *pabuji*, in which expected audience participation (Y. Jang 2014, 42(24)). Interestingly, although the etymology is uncertain, K-pop's fanchants are called *kakegoe* in Japanese.

and associated successful and enthusiastic fanchants as a barometer of the fandom's 'power' or 'greatness'. During this time, each idol group's fandom competed with other fandoms by conducting fanchants with a louder voice than rival groups' in pre-recordings for music TV shows during the comeback period (S. Jung and Hirata 2012). This allowed fanchants as not only a way to express their love towards their idols but also a way to compete with rival fandoms. As mentioned in *3.1.2 Fandom*, fandoms are concerned with how their fandom is seen because their reputation reflects that of their idols. Therefore conducting fanchants properly and enthusiastically is a serious concern for a fandom to show how they are more dedicated to their idols than a rival idol group's fandom.

The development of fanchant culture by first generation K-pop groups was also inadvertently supported through acts of censorship. When H.O.T was performing in the late 90s, because of censorship some lyrics which were regarded as having a negative influence on the youth, such as containing sexual or violent references, were banned and could not be sung. Instead of H.O.T., Club H.O.T. sang the banned lyrics (Oreumchacha 2019). I suspect that this censorship, requiring the audience to contribute the lyrics, helped develop the culture and importance of fanchants.

In the next section, I examine an interesting case that uses the *chuimsae* motif in both a song and fanchant to create new cultural meaning.

4.2 Case study *IDOL*

To more closely examine the aspects of fanchants and associated cultures, I take BTS's song *IDOL* (2018) as a case study demonstrating the relationship between performers and audience and leveraging musical cultural in new ways.[36] To clarify the contexts within which fanchants are located, first I have conducted a close reading of the song *IDOL* and MV. There are two versions of this song, the BTS original version and the version featuring the U.S. rapper Nicki Minaj. Although this paper considers primarily the original version, it also mentions the MV of Nicki Minaj version in the discussion on the MVs.

4.2.1 *IDOL*: song analysis

[36] 'IDOL,' Spotify, track 15 on BTS, *Love yourself 結'Answer'*, Big Hit Music / HYBE, 2018.

To conduct a close reading of the song *IDOL*, I discuss this song's music character in a K-pop context and the representation of the song through MVs after briefly introducing information related to the song. *IDOL* was released in 2018 as the lead single in their third compilation album 'Love Yourself: 結 Answer' which is the finale of 'love yourself' trilogy albums (Rolli 2018). This album concept is connected with their partnership with UNICEF's anti-violence campaign 'Love Myself' in 2017 ('UNICEF Korea and BTS for #ENDviolence' 2020). According to band leader, Kim Namjoon's comments on the song, the base of the song was mainly composed by BTS's chief producer and creator, Kang Hyo-won 'Pdogg' and Shin Dong-hyuk 'Supreme Boi' (BTS 2018). Kim Namjoon wrote lyrics and proposed his idea of using Korean traditional musical performance *pansori* (ibid.). The lyrics are written in both English and Korean and conveys their sentiment as both idol and artist.

Despite the distinction between the K-pop idol and hip-hop genres being weaker than before, friction between artists and fans of each genre are still prevalent. BTS's status as an idol group was sometimes criticised by the Korean hip-hop community as traitorous because of some member's experience in the underground hip-hop scene (McLaren and Jin 2020). Therefore, the lyrics 'you can call me artist / you can call me idol / 아님 어떤 다른 뭐라 해도 (whatever people say), I don't care / I'm proud of myself' can be interpreted as a response to these criticisms. In addition, the chorus 'You can't stop me lovin' myself' repeatedly refers to the trilogy album concept of 'Love Yourself'.

Regarding the musical aspect of K-pop, Fuhr argues that the sonic markers that compose K-pop generally are dance beats, hooks, rap flow, and *ppong* – which is the discursive sonic marker in K-pop and works as seismograph for globalization such as 'the more *ppong*, the less global a song is' (Fuhr 2016, 93–108). After I explain the dance beat, rap flow, *ppong*, and hook, I focus on unique cultural references in this song, the traditional Korean narrative music, *pansori*, and international influences.

Although there is no particular rhythm identifying K-pop, K-pop had been developed by adopting the latest U.S. and European pop music (Fuhr 2016, 93). Because of the performance-centric style, the addictive dance beat is a key factor for K-pop.[37] *IDOL* adopts

[37] Based on Moore's (2001) rock analysis theory, Fuhr explains 'addictive dance beat' by taking Brown Eyed Girls' song called *Abracadabra* (2009) as an example. According to him, the 'forward-driven groove' in the song is interwoven with a simple 'rhythm layer' produced by a drum machine and a 'low register melody layer' composed with a synthesizer loop (Fuhr 2016, 95–96).

gqom, a South African dance beat, which started was gaining mainstream notice when *IDOL* was created in 2018. *Gqom* will be discussed later.

Generally, K-pop music tends to consist of both rapping and singing. Referring from Krims' (2000, 50) three categories of rap flows; sung flow, percussion-effusive flow, and speech-effusive flow, Fuhr explains that the sung flow, 'rhythms and rhymes equivalent (or parallel) to those of much sung pop or rock musics (Krims 2000, 50)' is widely seen in K-pop (Fuhr 2016, 99). The verse of *IDOL* also uses a sung flow style delivered by rappers in BTS. Because the chorus and the bridge are singing parts, IDOL can also be seen typical K-pop song combining a rap part and sing part.

As mentioned in section *3.1.1 Music and cultural identity*, *ppong* is an acoustic and discursive marker, and it is not a specific sound or structure, but a feeling or atmosphere that Korean listeners are attracted to that creates a 'Korean Flavour' (Fuhr 2016, 102). *Ppong* refers to a song's either 'melodic-harmonic structure' or 'vocal delivery'(Fuhr 2016, 102–7). Such old-style sonic markers have diminished through the globalization strategy of K-pop (ibid.). *IDOL* also does not embrace a clear *ppong* sound.[38] Therefore, *IDOL* can be seen a typical K-pop song for aiming at the global market as Fuhr explains, 'the more ppong, the less global a song is' (108).

Hooks are catchy melodies or ear-warming refrains used in diverse structure level to get listeners' attention (Fuhr 2016, 96). Catchy hooks can be heard in most popular music, especially in K-pop where it appears several times persistently throughout the song and it can be a stem for all structural elements (ibid.). Through the globalization strategy of K-pop, the catchy hook is vital to reach global listeners who cannot understand Korean.

In *IDOL*, the hook is the most exciting singalong moment and can be seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Hook for IDOL (e.g., 1:16-).

[38] Personally, in the bridge part of this song, one of BTS member Jimin's vocalisation is sounds like choking or squeezing voices before uttering the lyrics sounds, for me as a foreigner, like '*ppongjjakk*' in Korean. However, like other K-pop songs, there is not a clear and obvious *ppong* flavor in *IDOL*.

This hook motif appears several times with different instrumentals throughout the entire song. Figure 10 demonstrates a melodic variation of this hook motif can be heard in the intro.

Figure 10. Intro section demonstrating repeated hook motif for IDOL (0:00-0:15).

Table 1 below is a song structure table where red stars indicate parts where hook motifs are used. The hook motif has been repeated a total of ten times throughout the song. This persistent repeating works as a subliminal effect, making ARMYs chanting 'oh-oh-oh-oh' the most exciting moment of the song. Such repetition combined with interactions with the audience helps listeners from around the globe identify and engage with the song. In addition to this hook representing K-pop-ness, another music reference represents Korean-ness.

Formal function	Intro	Verse	Pre-chorus	Chorus	Hook	Verse	Pre-chorus	Chorus	Hook
Number of bars	8 bars (*)	16 bars	8 bars	8 bars (*)	8 bars (*)	16 bars (*)	8 bars	8 bars (*)	8 bars (*)
Timeline	0:00-0:15	0:16-0:45	0:46-1:01	1:01-1:16	1:17-1:31	1:32-2:02	2:03-2:17	2:18-2:32	2:33-2:47

Bridge	Pre-chorus	Hook	Outro
8 bars (*)	8 bars (*)	8 bars (*)	2 bars (+♩) (*)
2:48-3:02	3:03-3:18	3:19-3:33	3:34-3:41

(*)… using hook motif

Table 1. Song structure of IDOL identifying sections where the hook motif is repeated.

The most significant Korean cultural reference in *IDOL* is *pansori*, which is a Korean traditional form of narrative music. *Pansori* consists of singers, drums, and *chuimsae* – the encouragement calls by the drums and audience. For example, *jihwaja* (지화자) in the chorus and *eolssu* (얼쑤) in the hook. These words are a kind of exclamation, like 'hurrah' and 'whoopee' to compliment the singer's skills. In addition, we can also hear *kueum* (구음)

which is a barrel drum's rhythmical onomatope for oral transmission. For example, *deonggideok kungdeoreoreo* (덩기덕 쿵더러러) in the hook is *kueum*.

Pansori was initially conducted in an outdoor field as a form of folk entertainment. From the 18th century to the early 20th century, the upper classes started to show interest in *pansori*, and *pansori* performances moved inside chambers, concert halls, and theatres. Nowadays, this cultural heritage is again performed in open informal stages similar to its origin. Musicology scholar, Um, describes these changes as acts to 're-claim its authenticity' (Um 2012, 78). 'The ultimate aesthetic goal of pansori is to serve the masses' as traditional *pansori* did in 18th century Korea'(ibid). And now in the 21st century, including *pansori* into BTS' performances of *IDOL* in front of massive audiences at stadium concerts can be considered as an act to 're-claim authenticity' as Um mentions. BTS adapted the *pansori* aesthetic by performing for it in its initial style and continuing this traditional musical legacy into the future.

Emphasising traditional cultural elements that evoke Korean-ness goes counter to K-pop's trend of de-traditionalizing or de-localizing music to appeal to and expand to the global market[39] (Fuhr 2016; Yongdae Kim 2019). However, *IDOL* does not follow that trend. Rather, *IDOL* is shaped by several such identifiably Korean musical elements. By emphasising traditional Korean music elements, BTS attempts to highlight their Korean identity to the global audience (Yongdae Kim 2019). It is as if BTS is trying to reemphasise traditional Korean culture which had steadily been diminished in K-pop's turn towards the global market. While BTS is emphasising traditional Korean culture, *IDOL* can also be considered an exception to the norm. Although K-pop was expanded by strategical 'cultural odourless', only the few artists that have succeeded in the U.S., such as G-dragon and Psy, have the leeway to perform music emphasising Korean-ness. In BTS' case, around 2018 they started to gain worldwide recognition, culminating in winning the Billboard Music Awards (Lipshutz 2017). In this sense, the emphasis of Korean cultural aspects displayed in *IDOL* can be attributed to BTS' success in the U.S.

In addition to Korean cultural sonic markers, the base rhythm track of this song uses *gqom*, which is a South African deep house beat (Muggs 2016). *Gqom* emerged in the early 2010s,

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[39] See section *3.1.1 Music and cultural identity* for a fuller discussion on this topic.

and its peculiar sounds consist of echoed dram syncopation and bass drone which is heavily compressed sounds instead of basic four beat bass (Muggs 2016). Although *gqom's* origin is in Durban, South Africa in the 2010s, recently major American artists such as Kendrick Lamar and Beyoncé use *gqom* for expressing African heritage.[40] By integrating *gqom*, *IDOL* mixes the different local music elements that have a common ideology of reclaiming or expressing pride in their roots.

An analysis of the MV, similar to sonic composition, visual components also exhibit and celebrate local cultural heritages. The *IDOL* MV[41] was created by Lumpens, a Korean production company known for producing K-pop MVs, was filmed over three days and released the same day as the song, August 24th 2018 (BTS 2018). In three minutes and fifty-one second's, the MV shows multicultural images with vivid colour computer graphics (CGs) behind BTS singing and dancing performance.

Similar to the Korean sonic marker mentioned earlier, several Korean visual symbols and pride in their roots can be seen in the MV. BTS represents many obvious Korean cultural elements by their clothes, the background, and their dance moves in addition to sonically. Generally in K-pop MVs, artists change clothes several times for visual effects, a theme repeated in the *IDOL* MV, where members change clothes four times. Figure 11 below shows the members wearing *hanbok* [42](한복) designed by modern hanbok designer Baek Oak-soo (백옥수) during the pre-chorus section (e.g., 1:10-1:20)(S. Park 2018). Behind BTS dancing while wearing *hanbok*, there is a yellow coloured pavilion consisting of an East Asian style roof (Yongdae Kim 2019). On the top of the East Asian style roof, the Chinese character 囍, which means double happiness, is prominently displayed (figure 12). In the middle of the MV (3:07-3:09), a picture of a white tiger appears (figure 13). Tigers are a symbol of Korea due to several myths and the shape of Korean peninsula which looks like a tiger and is known as the 'land of tigers' (M. Kwon 2018; Aw 2019). In addition, Korean culture is integrated into

[40] For example, the song titled 'Redemption (with Babes Wodumo)' by Zacari and Babes Wodumo, which is in the album titled *Black Panther the Album: Music From and Inspired By* (2018) produced by Kendrick Lamar. Another example is a song titled 'MY POWER' by Nija, Beyoncé, Busiswa, Yemi Alade, Tierra Whack and Moonchild Sanelly., which is in Beyoncé's album *The Lion King: The Gift* (2019) (Pareles 2018).

[41] HYBE LABELS. 2018. 'BTS (방탄소년단) "IDOL" Official MV.' Directed by YongSeok Choi (Lumpens). Aug 24, 2018. Music video, 3:51. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBuZEGYXA6E.

[42] The *hanbok* is traditional Korean clothes. Nowadays, there are various modern designed *hanbok*. One of modern designed *hanbok* which BTS member wore started a trend that crashed the website selling the *hanbok* (Koreaboo 2019b).

their dance. In the pre chorus section (1:19-1:21, 2:36-2:38), figure 14 shows their dance move looks like the head-spinning dance that can be seen in traditional folk music and dance *pungmul* (풍물) (DKDKTV 2018, 9:03).

Figure 11. IDOL MV with BTS wearing hanbok.

Figure 12. IDOL MV showing traditional eastern Asian roof.

Figure 13. IDOL MV showing tiger representing Korea.

Figure 14. IDOL MV showing the Head spinning dance.

Their representation of Korean culture had started before releasing the song and the MV. As mentioned in section *3.1.2 fandom*, a teaser of the MV was released before officially releasing the MV. The 42 second long official *IDOL* MV teaser was released two days before the song was released.[43] The teaser uses the *gugak* (국악) virtual sounds instruments, which Seoul University developed based on traditional small gong *kkwaenggwari* (꽹과리) (Yongdae Kim 2019; Center for Arts & Technologies at Seoul National University 2018). In addition, Korean cultural elements mentioned above such as a symbol of tiger and *hanbok* are packed in the short teaser. They intended to convey *IDOL's* Korean representation before the song release, a message received by the fandom which expected song to be Korean.

[43] HYBE LABELS. 2018. 'BTS (방탄소년단) 'IDOL' Official Teaser.' Aug 22, 2018. Music video teaser, 0:41. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd0UqlRf1eE.

Apart from Korean traditional elements, BTS visually shows African culture in the MV to represent the use of the south African beat *gqom*. The MV starts with an African safari image including giraffes in a vast savannah as a background (figure 15). Their costumes of vivid coloured suits appearing in the first shot evokes the image of the sapeur fashion in Congo[44] (Ou 2018). In the chorus (2:41-2:45, 3:28-3:31), BTS integrates a dance move called *gwara gwrara*, which originated in South Africa (Monique 2018) (figure 16). However, these African references have problematic aspects. For example, depicting safari images to represent African culture is a cultural misconception criticised in the fashion industry (Menkes 2009; in Ou 2018). South African DJ, DJ Bongz, who invented the *gwara garwa*, claims that American rapper Childish Gambino used his choreography without permission or payment (Zeeman 2018). There is no information whether BTS contacted DJ Bongz for permission or payment. However, for one of the best-selling artists like BTS, cultural references may stray over the line into cultural appropriation[45]. On one hand, the integration of African culture seems a portrayal of multiculturism, on the other hand, it also can be a cultural misconception and appropriation.

Figure 15. BTS wearing sapeur-like suits.

Figure 16. BTS dancing gwara gwara.

Along with many cultural elements, BTS attempts to show the message in the lyrics that their pride of both idols and artists through the MV. As mentioned earlier, this song consists of their response to criticism from the hip-hop community that an idol cannot be a hip-hop artist. The attitude that they are proud of themselves as both idols and artists which is developed from the album concept 'love yourself' is emphasised by subtitles in the MV. For example, when BTS sings 'you can call me artist, you can call me idol' (0:24-26), huge words 'idol' and 'artist' appears behind them (figures 17 and 18 respectively). Thus, song messages are

[44] Sapeur is a subcultural fashion wearing vividly coloured tailored suites (e.g., *BBC News* 2020b).
[45] Cultural appropriation is the taking and adapting foreign cultural practices or aesthetic without understanding or respecting them. Usually, it becomes controversial when mainstream cultures take from minority communities. For example, when a French fashion designer copied Mexican indigenous clothing patterns (Nast 2015).

highlight by MV's visual effects. These messages celebrating themselves are highlighted throughout the MV embracing the atmosphere of celebration.

Figure 17. IDOL MV showing the word 'Artist'.

Figure 18. IDOL MV showing the word 'Idol'.

In the last part of the MV (3:11-), there is a scene in which BTS members and a group of back dancers dance together. Through the spectacular last dance scene filmed using a birds-eye camera angle, the MV provides an image of a festival where they celebrate themselves for overcoming the contradiction between being artists and idols by loving themselves as both artists and idols (figures 19 and 20).

This festive scene can be seen as a celebration of reconciling the two contexts; the ability to finally declare themselves as both an idol and an artist by overcoming criticism and self-contradiction between artists and idols; the other is a celebration of their cultural roots in K-pop's legacy that *IDOL* can finally present Korean culture after the suppression of Korean-ness for international success. Both contexts correspond to the main theme of the album's main theme, 'love yourself'. However, in such a climactic scene as a carnival, there are no women. Furthermore, women are absent throughout the entire MV.

Although addressing a heavy metal context, Walser identified the 'exscription' strategy for heavy metal band MVs where an imaginary world is portrayed where only males exist and females are completely absent to emphasise male bonds and show patriarchal space (Walser 1993). Within the K-pop context, this highlight scene consisted only of male performers is a common sight because generally, K-pop MVs priorities are to 'stress the dance character of a song and to display the idols' body' (Fuhr 2016, 113). Therefore, many MVs consist only of group members. In this case, performers in MVs consist of either all male or all female casts are common due to Idol groups being segregated into boys groups or girls groups. Other BTS MVs, such as *Fire* (2016) and *Not Today* (2017), are also composed of all male dancers.[46]

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[46] Recently, BTS performed with back dancers including female in the MV of *Permission to Dance* (2021).

Thus while BTS may not intend to present a patriarchal space using exscription, having only male back dancers is not an appropriate way to express a celebration of a victory for self-love, which is the main theme of entire trilogy albums. From the female absence carnival scene, unconscious expressions of patriarchal normativity can be seen.

Figure 19.IDOL MC showing carnival-like scene. *Figure 20. IDOL MV showing the all-male background dancers.*

However, this MV has another version, featuring Nicki Minaj (hereafter NM version).[47] In the MV of the NM version, she appears after the bridge (3:13-3:43) and performs her rap. The *Hangul* projected behind her are the lyrics translated into Korean. In her performance, she shows off her rap skills and is presented the same as the BTS performers in the MV – she is presented as an artist, not an objectified female.

After the end of the song, the fan-made dance video starts (4:31-). This is a part of the SNS strategy called #IDOLCHALLENGE, which worked as a part of the promotion strategy involving fans. Fans posted videos where they danced to the song on Twitter using hashtag (#IDOLCHALLENGE). Later, BTS used fan-made #idolchallnge videos at the end of the MV (4:30-).(Acierda 2018) (Figure 21). The fandom-based section shows images of a diverse fandom dancing to *IDOL*. For example, a woman in a wheelchair, babies, elders, and fans from a diverse cultural background are seen. Through official music videos, this dance challenge movement even includes fans who were once excluded from participating in the dancing. By inserting the #IDOLCHALLENGE dance videos, the MV represents a celebration of loving themselves at a more diverse level. As a result, the NM version embodies a more including and holistic carnival of 'love yourself' in contrast to the original's man's world.

[47]HYBE LABELS. 2018. 'BTS (방탄소년단) "IDOL (Feat. Nicki Minaj)" Official MV.' Directed by YongSeok Choi (Lumpens). Sep 6, 2018. Music video, 4:54. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1scjjbfNsk.

In addition, when BTS repeats 'you can't stop me lovein' myself' and sings *kueum* in the pre chorus section, the Chinese character 愛 (love [*ai*]) and *Hangul* 사랑 (love [*sarang*]) pop up behind BTS in only the NM version (1:17 and 2:57 respectively) (figure 22). By visual effects, the atmosphere of the carnival of 'love yourself' are further highlighted in the NV version.

Figure 21. IDOL MV showing fans in the #IdolChallenge.

Figure 22. IDOL MV showing sarang.

4.2.2 *IDOL*: fanchants analysis

So far, I have established music references and the significance of *IDOL*. Now, I consider the ways fanchants are used in *IDOL* by taking the 2018 performance at the Melon Music Awards (MMA) as a case study.[48]

The following text is a transcript of the songs lyric and fanchants from the 1st verse to 1st hook ('"IDOL" 응원법 안내 ["IDOL" How to Fanchant Guide]' 2018). Because this song is a lead single from the album, the information of fanchants including a name chant is officially published. The parts where the fans are expected to chant is in red, and brackets, [ ], surround the English translation.

김남준 [Kim Namjoon]! 김석진[Kim Seokjin]! 민윤기[Min Yoongi]! 정호석[Jung Hoseok]! 박지민[Park Jimin]! 김태형[Kim Taehyung]! 전정국[Jeon Jungkook]! BTS! *2 times

You can call me artist (artist)
You can call me idol (idol)
아님 어떤 다른 뭐라 해도 [whoever says something] I don't care
I'm proud of it (I'm proud of it) 난 자유롭네 (난 자유롭네) [I am free]
No more irony (irony) 나는 항상 나였기에 [I am always who I am]
손가락질 해, 나는 전혀 신경쓰지 않네 [I don't care if someone makes fun of me]
나를 욕하는 너의 그 이유가 뭐든 간에 [whatever you say about me,]

[48] BTS. 2018. '[BANGTAN BOMB] "IDOL" Special Stage (BTS Focus) @2018 MMA – BTS (방탄소년단).' BANGTANTV. Dec 10, 2018. Stage performance, 6:28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayGl-igrwy8.

I know what I am (I know what I am)

I know what I want (I know what I want)

I never gonna change (I never gonna change)

I never gonna trade (Trade off)

뭘 어쩌고 저쩌고 떠들어대셔[What are you complaining?] (talk it, talk it, talk it)

I do what I do, 그니까 넌 너나 잘하셔 [you do just your own business]

You can't stop me lovin myself 얼쑤 좋다 [Eolssu Good]

You can't stop me lovin myself 지화자 좋다 [Jihwaja Good]

You can't stop me lovin myself

Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh

덩기덕 쿵더러러 얼쑤 [Deonggideok kungdeoreoreo Eolssu]

Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh

덩기덕 쿵더러러 얼쑤 [Deonggideok kungdeoreoreo Eolssu]

This transcript demonstrates that fanchants are conducted throughout an entire song. As mentioned in section *4.1 K-pop fanchants and their background*, fanchants can be classified into largely two types; name chants, which are separated from the lyrics; and music fanchants which are part of the song. First, during the intro, fans conducts a name chant (from 김남준 [Kim Namjoon] to BTS). BTS's name chant consists of basic name chant style, the members' names and the band's name.[49] After the name chant, three different types of fanchants are integrated into the songs.

In the first verse, after BTS sings "You call me IDOL", fans chant "IDOL" (3:02-3:05). I classify this chant as the 'call and response' fanchant because it is similar to call and response in gospel choirs. It is expressed by performers calling (singing) specific phrases and audiences answer back. This call and response type can be seen in the concert scene widely, therefore it is not unique to K-pop's fanchants. Freddie Mercury's a cappella improvisation with the audience at Live aid in 1985 is a famous example of a call and response fanchant.

During the chorus to hook (3:33-4:17), both BTS and the audience's voice can be heard singing the same lyric or melody at the same time. I call this the 'sing-along' fanchant – where the audience and performers are singing in tandem. The difference between the 'sing-

[49] As an exception, there is a name chant created by fandom for member's solo song (Koreaboo 2019a). In one of their song titled *Euphoria* (2018), a fan-made name chant is conducted during the interlude. BTS realized the fan-made chants and responded on SNS. Here, sometimes fanchants turn into communication between BTS and fandom ARMY.

along' and 'call and response' types is that a sing-along is sung by performers and audience simultaneously, and the audience only sings after the performer for the call and response. The sing along type is also seen in various types of concerts and can be one of the most exciting moments for both artists and the audience. One excellent example is the audience's chorus of *Someone like you* at Adele's concert at Royal albert hall in 2011 – which brought Adele to tears (Maher 2011). In *IDOL*, 'talk it, talk it, talk it' (3:37-3:40), 얼쑤 좋다 (*eolssu johda*) (3:51-3:52), 지화자 좋다 (*jihwaja johda*) (3:58-3:59), 'Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh' (4:05-4:09, 4:11-4:16), and 얼쑤 (*eolssu*) (4:10-4:11, 4:18-4:19) are sing-along fanchants. Generally, in popular music concerts, not only can the fans chant with the lyrics, but also a guitar riff. For example, sing along fanchants with the riff of *Fear of the Dark* by Iron Maiden can be heard in their concert performances.

However, especially in the K-pop scene, the sing-along fanchant can be further divided into two parts, the main sing-along and sub sing-along.

In *IDOL,* the hook, 'Oh-oh-oh-oh Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh', is the main melody. I call this melodical sing along fanchant the 'main sing-along' fanchant. This fanchant is singing the specific *main* melody with singers at the same time.

On the other hand, 'talk it, talk it, talk it', 얼쑤 좋다 (*eolssu johda*), 지화자 좋다 (*jihwaja johda*), and 얼쑤 (*eolssu*) are different from the main melody line. I call these fanchants where the audience sings along with a specific subpart 'sub sing-along' fanchants, This subpart can be a fill, counter melody, or obbligato. This is neither the main part of a melody nor a well-known guitar riff. Rather, it is an ornament or response as a counter to the main melody as visible in figure 23. To conduct the sub sing-along fanchant, the fandom is required to wholly comprehend the entire song because they need to know song structures including not only the main melody but also other ornaments for highlighting the main melody. What is important here is that fans study how to chant in advance to participate in the performance via the Internet as mentioned in section *3.1.2 Fandom*.

By using these non-trivial fanchants, BTS manages to successfully incorporate thousands of fans into the performance. The historical legacy of *chuimsae* from *pansori* and early K-pop

fandoms learning the songs to sing the censored lyrics these has morphed into todays integrated mass-participation concerts.

Figure 23. Main and sub sing-along fanchants in IDOL.

Table 2 is the list of fanchants types and when they are performed in *IDOL*. Fanchants are conducted throughout the song, which is simply one of many songs – and their associated fanchants – conducted throughout a concert lasting 2-3 hours. Thus fans not only need to know all of the songs, but also keep singing throughout concert with the BTS performers – in this sense, ARMY is also a performer. Ironically, however, this complicated, dedicated, and demanding practice is often dismissed as mere hysteric shouting by passive audiences.

Hereafter, a name chant, which is categorized fanchant A in table 2 is indicated by the term 'name chant', and a fanchant that is part of the music, which is categorized B, C-1, and C-2 is indicated by the term 'music chant'.

Formal function	Intro	Verse	Pre-chorus	Chorus	Hook	Verse	Pre-chorus	Chorus	Hook
Time (MMA performance)	2:55-3:01	3:02-3:32	3:33-3:47	3:48-4:03	4:04-4:17	4:18-4:48	4:49-5:03	5:04-5:18	5:19-5:35
Fanchants type	A	B	C-1	C-1	C-1, C-2	B, C-1	C-1	C-1	C-1, C-2

Bridge	Pre-chorus	Hook	Outro
5:36-5:50	5:51-6:04	6:05-6:20	6:21-6:28
-	C-1	C-1,C-2	-

Type A = Name chant,

Type B = Call and response,

Type C-1 = Main sing-along,

Type C-2 = Sub sing-along

Table 2. Fanchants types and when they are performed in IDOL.

The peak of the song is particularly interesting. The hook parts include the most complicated fanchant styles. In addition, I argue that 얼쑤 (*eolssu*), 지화자 (*jihwaja*), which are categorized as sing-along chants, embrace one more important meaning.

In *pansori*, *chuimsae*, *eolssu* or *jihwaja*, is an encouragement call from the audience towards the performer. This is the same structure of fanchant in *IDOL*. Here, we can say that fans are practicing Korean traditional culture subconsciously. In addition, this *pansori* fanchant can be heard in K-pop concerts located outside of Korea, for example, at the 2019 World Tour Love Yourself: Speak Yourself at Rose Bowl stadium in the U.S.[50] P*ansori* chants work as traditional Korean communication between ARMY and BTS.

Furthermore, many scholars have referred to the importance of *chuimsae* in *pansori* (Um 2012; 2013; Y. Jang 2014; C. Cho 2012; 'The Pansori Epic Chants' 2020). For example, there is a historical notion that if a performer cannot receive sufficient *chuimsae* from the audience, the performance has failed (Y. Jang 2014). Here, *chuimsae* works as one of the criteria for judging whether the *pansori* is good or not. In other words, *pansori* is only complete when the audience calls *chuimsae* to the performer. In this sense, *IDOL* is also only complete when ARMY exclaims these fanchants – the song can only be completed with audience participation. Drawing on the notion of musicking as discussed in section *2.1 K-pop studies and Popular music studies*, fanchants using *chuimsae* can play a significant role in the whole process of musicking. By successfully practicing *pansori* methods internationally through fanchants, *IDOL* promotes and influences global music culture with traditional Korean music culture, and incorporates ARMY's diverse cultural background by including *gqom*.

So far, I have explored how fanchants in *IDOL* are composed. Next, taking the BTS performance of *IDOL* on the MMA stage in 2018 as an example, I examine fanchants through the stage performance and consider how fanchants are conducted. BTS's six minutes long performance of *IDOL* at MMA is a remarkable stage because of the iconic dances integrated with traditional Korean theatrical dance before they start to sing (-2:45). The dance section is composed based on three different types of Korean traditional dance; *samgomu* (삼고무), which is a creative dance with three drums based on traditional Buddhism dance *seungmu*

[50] CandeeBop. 2019. '[FANCAM] IDOL - BTS Speak Yourself World Tour Rose Bowl Day 1.' May 6, 2019. Concert video, 5:04. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kH0txHp7dqw.

(승무) (figure 24); *buchaechum* (부채춤), which is a creative dance using traditional fans (figure 25); and *talcum* (탈춤), which is masked folk dance seen in music, dance, and play (figure 26) (H. Kwak et al. 2019; Korean Culture and Information Service 2014). After the BTS members' dance, traditional folk *pungmul* is performed as if replaying the carnival-like last sequence in the MV mentioned in the previous section (figure 27). According to Kwak, this show resulted in increased sales for Korean tourism and Korean culture goods in the U.S. (H. Kwak et al. 2019).

Figure 24. MMA performance showing samgomu.

Figure 25. MMA performance showing buchaechum

Figure 26. MMA performance showing talcum.

Figure 27. MMA performance showing pungmul.

The song starts after the dance performance (2:49-), followed by the name chant (Kim Namjoon, Kim Seokjin, …, BTS!) can be heard in the intro of the song. However, the audience's volume at the beginning of the name chant is lower than at the end of the name chant. This volume differential suggests that the audience may have had initial hesitation because the intro of the song was different from usual due to the special stage for MMA.

After the name chant, the fandom conducted fanchants according to the fanchant guide published by the management company. A call and response fanchant, 'IDOL!' and 'Artist!' in the verse (3:03). Later, the *chuimsae* fanchants of '*eolssu*' and '*jihwaja-joda*' can be also heard clearly (e.g., 3:51-3:52). As mentioned earlier, *chuimsae* fanchants are a final piece to complete a *pansori* song like *IDOL*. In this sense, the audience's calling *chuimsae* is an important factor of not only presenting Korean culture at this show, but completing the

performance. The BTS's MMA stage exemplifies how Korean-ness is constructed by both BTS and the audience through *chuimsae*.

Apart from fanchats, the audiences' screams and cries of jubilation also can be heard in the video. These emotional expressions sound like they emerge randomly, however, these expressions only occur when they are not engaged in fanchants. For example, screaming can be heard at the beginning of the chorus (3:49, and 5:06); because there are no fanchants until the *chuimsae* fanchants in the chorus, the fandom is allowed to scream at the beginning of the chorus. When one member of BTS starts to sing his solo in the bridge, the fandom's cheering approaches screaming (e.g. 3:36-) – this section also does not include any fanchants. Thus, although fans' cheering are spontaneous expressions, at the same time they are controlled depending on whether they are performing fanchants or not. The loudest calls can be heard at the dance period and the end of the performance. The end of the performance especially evokes cheering and applause for BTS' performance. However, even these parts are non-fanchant sections, and fans are free to express their emotion.

4.3 Fanchants: The view from the fandom

So far, through a close reading of the music, I have examined how fanchant is constructed as a part of the song. As mentioned in Chapter 2, music needs to be studied from various perspectives, not only focusing on the music itself but also including other factors such as performers' perspective and the socio-cultural perspective; a study of fanchant should also include information from performers' narratives, which means fandoms' experiences. What I have attempted here is to reveal a fandom practice from a more inside level and how fanchants are constructed through the informants' stories. Therefore, I conducted qualitative interviews with four BTS fans who have conducted fanchants. Two of the interviews were conducted in person, including video chats, and two were conducted via text messaging. The interviews focused on the following questions: How does a fandom get information about fanchants? How does a fandom interpret fanchants? How does the audience do a fanchant in the concert? What is the meaning of fanchants for a fandom? The interviews were conducted in English or Japanese (only for Japanese informants). The Japanese interviews were translated into English by me during the process of transcribing.

4.3.1 Fanchants as a part of the music

First, I asked all informants how they get information about fanchants. They use social media for getting information about fanchants.

> I got information on [the fanchants] from Twitter and the official fan club website. (M)

> I keep watching several K-pop videos on YouTube. There are a lot of videos—such as not only official MVs, but also fan-made videos, concert videos—so I just get information naturally. (O)

> As I remember my concert experience, it comes naturally because everyone just knows them [fanchants] because we watch videos on YouTube. The videos that they post are from previous concerts because it's the same tour done in different countries, so we can know which parts to sing to. (Ma)

What is interesting here is that two informants do not get the information on the fanchants deliberately, in contrast to one informant (M) who gets fanchant information intentionally. They know how to do fanchants as a result of watching many videos. For them, fanchants are already a part of the songs from the beginning. Many videos, such as BTS's performances at concerts and music TV programmes, already include the audience's fanchants. MVs can thus be considered an exception because they do not include fanchants. Although there are some fan-made videos that show how to chant the fanchants by showing subtitles, the informants usually watch concert performance videos rather than guided fanchant videos. In this sense, a fandom's recognition of K-pop songs already includes the sounds of the fanchants.

For informant O, the fanchant is almost part of the lyrics.

> So, fanchants is just catching the rhythm with everything, so it didn't take much. If you keep listening to the music, you get used to it. (O)

From her description of doing fanchants, we can see that in the process of playing fanchants, uttering the words in the beat is like rap flow. Because she naturally gets information about the fanchant as a part of songs through music consumption in daily life, such as watching YouTube videos, she recognises the fanchants as part of the music's lyrics.

These differences in the way information on fanchants is accessed, on purpose or passively, affects how the fanchants are conducted in the concert. Some informants describe the

moment of conducting fanchants as ‘fanchants naturally come when we are in the concert’. For example, informant Ma, who experienced a concert in Thailand, and informant N, who attended a concert in Japan, looked back at the audiences’ actions in the concert and talked about how the fanchants happened.

> Actually, I can’t just explain it, but it [fanchants] just comes naturally. It’s not just me but everyone was in sync. There were some ARMYs shouting because they were very excited—actually, I shouted too—but during the fanchants, it just really comes naturally. You could just go there and be in sync. […] it was my first time, and I went to the concert with my mom. […] She did know the fanchant. But she was about to know the [name chant] during the concert because we do it for every chorus, every songs. (Ma)

> But I think almost all people conducted fanchants and cheered simultaneously when they [BTS] started to perform. (N)

This is like what was said by informant O, who attended K-con, an event for K-pop fans’ cover dance and performances organized by local event companies and the Korean embassy in Bangladesh:[51]

> Most people who are in the group [participants in K-con], they already know [fanchants], so it is just so spontaneous. When I do that, no one asked me to start, it just happens. So that is how just people start [to chant fanchants]. People are standing together, talking together. Meanwhile, fanchants start, and everyone does the same thing. It was so fantastic. Actually, the performances we had—it’s a lot of people there—it actually sounds like a concert happens. (O)

These fans’ comment in which doing fanchants without consciousness shows how they interpret fanchants. They do not consider the fanchants and songs separately. Because they get fanchants information through daily music consumption, such as watching YouTube

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[51] K-con is a K-pop convention, an annual K-pop fans’ event organized by local event companies and the Korean embassy. Although big K-pop conventions held in countries that have economic power such as the U.S. or Europe can invite idols for a concert, many other countries cannot invite idols. At the convention, participants can enjoy not only K-pop, but also Korean drama, Korean food, and ‘all things *Hallyu* [Korean Wave]’ (S.-Y. Kim 2018, 180). Jang and Song describe in their case study of the K-pop convention in the Philippines that K-Con works as ‘a cultural mediator’ for introducing Korean culture to local people (W. Jang and Song 2017).

videos, their recognition of fanchants is already a part of the songs. Therefore, the fans can say that fanchants 'come naturally when the music starts' because fanchants are a part of songs which they listen to in their daily life.

On the other hand, informant M, who deliberately gets fanchant information, mentions the difficulty of conducting fanchants.

> I did not get a good seat in Japan, or maybe it was because of the Japanese culture, I never experienced anything like 'literally every single ARMYs fanchanted'. In Japan, conducting fanchants other than name chants needs some courage [for conducting] because some people listened to music quietly. (M)

Because informant M gets information about fanchants as written information, not through listening to music, she thinks that fanchanting needs courage; this is different from the other informants, who start to fanchant as soon as the music starts.

In addition, another Japanese informant also mentions the quiet audiences.

> I think the volume of fanchants in Japan is lower than in other countries. I think Japanese fanchants are inferior to others [other countries]. But I think almost all people conducted [name] fanchants and cheered simultaneously when they [BTS] started to perform. Of course, some people did not [conduct] fanchants at all, but that is also a person's way of cheering, so I think it is okay even if someone does not conduct fanchants. (N)

Although the point that fanchants emerge spontaneously with BTS's performance is the same as the natural phenomenon of fanchants in other concerts, the audiences in Japan are relatively quiet. Informant N went to a concert several times only in Japan, and informant M has experienced concerts in both Japan and Korea. Therefore, although informant N's comment that Japanese fanchants are quieter than others is her subjective opinion, at the same time, informant M's comment that to conduct music fanchants requires some courage supports the assumption that Japanese audiences tend to be quieter. Not only K-pop concerts, but generally speaking, the Japanese audience is quieter than other countries (e.g., O'Neill 2016). Therefore, the cultural background may affect this quiet situation a bit.

Also, another hypothesis affecting quieter fanchanting is insecurity in language. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is common for K-pop artists to release a Japanese version of a song with Korean lyrics translated into Japanese. Although the name chant is conducted in Korean, when artists sing Japanese versions of the song in concert, the audiences also conduct music fanchants in Japanese, and when they sing in Korean, Japanese audiences conduct music fanchants in Korean. Information about the Japanese version of fanchants is published on the official Japan fan club web page ('BTS Japan Official Fanclub' 2021). According to informant M, the audiences do not know which language version will be performed until the concert starts. Therefore, especially on the first day of the tour, the music fanchants' volume tends to be unclear and vague because of insecurity in language. However, Japan is a rare case in which music fanchants can be conducted in the local language. Thus, the influence of language insecurity for quieter fanchants can be considered not so large.

Although concerts in Japan tend to be quiet, concerts everywhere can have silent audiences. Informant Ma, who went to a concert in Thailand, also met a silent fan.

> We were all excited, but the person beside me was completely silent. […] We had a break during the concert, so during that time I asked her, […] 'Are you stunned, or are you not feeling well?' and she said, 'No, this is just too surreal for me.' This makes sense because BTS is everywhere, and people are also all over. She was completely silent for half of the concert. She was not shouting but just staring at them. Of course, that is okay because different people have different feelings. (Ma)

Generally speaking, and in common recognition among the fandom, fanchants are conducted by all members of ARMY. However, not every single fan conducts fanchants and there is respect for each fan's own style of enjoying the concert because the way to feel and the way to cheer idols on is different for each person, as informant N and Ma mentioned.

Informant N's comment, 'I think Japanese fanchants are inferior to others' also indicates the criterion of fanchant value, in which loud fanchants are considered superior to quiet fanchants. This criterion was also seen in Korea during the era of the first generation of idols (as mentioned in *4.1 K-pop fanchants and their background*). The original role of fanchants in Korea was to cheer the idol groups on to defeat rival groups by conducting louder fanchants than those of the rival groups' fandom (see *4.1 K-pop fanchants and their background*). These fun 'fights' between different fandoms were seen, especially when idol

groups recorded their performances for music TV programmes, because the audiences' voices were also recorded. In Japanese, K-pop fanchants are called 掛け声 (*kakegoe*), which refers to a cheerful voice for encouraging someone, and it is close to the original meaning in Korean, 응원 (*oeungwon*), which means to cheer on. Thus, behind informant M's comment, fanchants connote the meaning of cheering on. In a solo concert in the global arena, where rival groups and rival fandoms are absent, fanchants no longer play the original competitive role, and only the role of cheering on remains.

A language barrier is common for international members of ARMY. Everyone admits, more or less, that there is a certain language barrier between audiences and performers. For example, although BTS has many hip-hop tracks, including rap in Korean, informant Ma notes that during the hip-hop songs at the concert in Thailand,

> Rap is super hard, so we don't fanchant the rap, we just shout. (Ma)

On the other hand, in Korea, where no language barrier exists, informant M talked about her experience in Seoul as the most memorable moment. She realised the difference in the audience's excitement levels:

> In Seoul, […] the rap line's songs [songs performed by rappers RM, SUGA, and j-hope], which I think there are no official fanchants for, though, were the exciting moments. We just screamed and rapped them simultaneously. For example, Cypher pt. 1, Cypher pt. 2, Cypher pt. 3 … etc. (M)

However, the name chant can break this barrier. For example, although Japanese audiences conduct fewer fanchants, the name chant is the one that everyone can participate in.

> The name chant is universal, common in the whole world, so that it is easy to memorize. So I think everyone conducts this fanchant. (M)

The universality of the name chant is also mentioned by another informant.

> But the fanchants that everyone needs to know are the name chants. That is the general fanchants for every song. (Ma)

The name chant is considered a fundamental to the other types of fanchants. This seems common to all informants.

Also, the name chant is also used during the time of waiting for the encore.

> During that time [of waiting for the encore], we were yelling name chants, we were all in sync, everyone was literally in sync. We were doing the fanchant till BTS came on the stage. It was a really amazing experience because just everyone was in sync. It lasted a long time, around 30 minutes. (Ma)

In the previous section, we saw that a name chant is the way to convey the fandom's love for the performer. Here, we can see that the name chant is also used to demand an encore. Especially for fandoms with diverse backgrounds, like ARMY, the name chant, which is considered fundamental by the informants, works almost as a common language to convey their emotion.

4.3.2 Fanchants as constructing K-pop concerts and K-pop fandom identity

Because fanchants are comprehended as a part of the music, they are a crucial part of concerts the same as music is necessary for concerts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BTS shifted from physical to online concerts. Informant Ma has also experienced joining an online concert.

> I watched by myself at home. [author: Did you conduct fanchants?] Yes [I did], I even had my ARMY bomb [LED light stick] glowing, and with my [room's] lights off, it really re-creates the whole concert with it. (Ma)

From her comments about re-creating the concert, we can see what the important elements of a K-pop concert are: visual aspects such as LED light sticks, digital media technology projecting the idol's figure on the screen and fanchants. Indeed, the peculiarity of K-pop live concerts is that they highly depend on audio-visual effects by making full use of the latest digital technology (S.-Y. Kim 2018). In the physical concert, fans can see themselves in the images of the crowds waving LED light sticks projected on the big screen where the idol's face is mainly projected (175). This system works as a mirror effect, in which the fans can feel a 'seamlessness' between the stage and the audience (ibid.). According to the informant, the online concert also had a time when the faces of ARMYs that came through their laptop cameras were projected. Online concerts are designed to be like physical concerts; thus, participants can experience almost the same experience as in the physical concerts. Therefore,

for Ma, who conducted fanchants spontaneously in the physical concert, conducting fanchants in the online concert was also natural.

To utilise fanchants for changing a virtual concert experience to an authentic concert experience in its own right is not only a phenomenon of recent online concerts. When idol groups pre-record for TV music programmes during the comeback period, they pretend to perform by lip-syncing and dancing in front of fans, their fandoms conduct actual fanchants and TV shows use fanchant voices to create a 'live' space (S.-Y. Kim 2018, 69–72).

The importance of fanchants in live space can also be seen in K-con, where participants perform cover dances of their favourite K-pop groups and the audiences enjoy seeing them perform in place of the real idol groups, who are absent.

> At K-con, whenever the performance starts or whenever BTS songs begin, everyone starts to do the fanchants together. We usually do that. (O)

In her monograph focusing on K-pop live concerts, Kim defines 'live' music as having a double meaning, 'live performance' and 'feeling of aliveness', which 'references spatial and emotional rapport', such as shared experience among the community in the same place with the same purpose (S.-Y. Kim 2018, 175). Regarding the 'aliveness' aspect of live K-pop concerts, she notes that it 'reinforces the notion of music as a synesthetic total performance that stimulates all five senses' (176). The stimuli come from even the audience space, such as the behaviour of fans near you, touching each other's arms while waving light sticks, smelling other fans' body odours, and your own sweat and tears (ibid.). Although the monograph does not mention fanchants much, from the informants' comments on re-creating concerts, fanchants are definitely one of the elements that construct 'aliveness'.

Similar to the importance of fanchants for constructing aliveness in concert, fanchants also contribute to constructing a fandom identity, which is 'a sense of shared identity' (Baym 2007) developed by a group (collectives of individuals). Because a fandom is both a personal and collective (Duffett 2014, 7), fandom identity can be considered as a common personal identity within the fandom – the conglomeration of personal identities within the fandom forms a collective fandom identity. At the same time, because both personal and collective identity is discursive construction, the way that constructing fandom identity differs depending on cases (8). In the case of K-pop fandoms, each member's ability to conduct

fanchants become a common identity as a member of that fandom because fanchants are secret codes that only insiders can recognise.

Generally, fanchants can be recognised only by members of the fandom who are deeply involved with that particular K-pop group. Music available to casual K-pop listeners—for example, songs on streaming platforms and official music videos on YouTube—does not include fanchants, so only members of the fandoms are familiar with them. Also, fanchants used by music shows aired on TV for creating a 'live' atmosphere are just background sounds for casual listeners. In this sense, fanchants work like secret codes that only insiders can recognise. Therefore, the ability to conduct fanchants can be proof of belonging to a fandom. For example, there is a case in which fans were required to sing fanchants to show that they were genuine fans to get limited merchandise related to their favourite idol group (@kynotyka 2021). Conducting fanchants is a main activity in fandom practices.

How strong an impact fanchants have on a fandom's memory of concert experience can be seen in the comments on singing along at the concerts. Informant N mentioned the moment when the sing-along occurred spontaneously as the most memorable moment in the concert.

> The most memorable moment for me is that we sang *For You* as the encore call at the 2015 Tokyo Dome concert. Hundreds and thousands of people sang the song, but we were in sync and beautiful voice. I was really moved at that time. (N)

Informant Ma also mentioned the moment when thousands of voices synchronised into the fanchants as a 'magical experience'.

> I think to do fanchants is the way to get into the show and feel the show. To do fanchants is hundreds and thousands of ARMYs all around you acting in sync. That is a really magical experience because people you never met before were in sync. And, like, most of the people are from literally different nations and different languages, and we are still in sync and still singing lyrics and they are still shouting at the exact same time. So, it's like a really magical experience. Because of the pandemic right now, BTS does online concerts, and you see that those who are ARMYs still do fanchants even they are sitting at home still. It [to do fanchants] is just to feel connected, feeling like [we are] in there, to be in front of them, it's, like, a really magical feeling. (Ma)

Both comments show the fanchanting with other ARMY members remains vivid in the informants' memories of the concert. Through fanchanting, fans create a connection among themselves. This feeling of connection can be seen in the way they talk about their concert experience.

When the informants describe their concert experiences, they frequently use first-person plural pronouns such as 'we', 'our' and 'us' even though the experience belongs to each person as individual memory. For example, when informant O described the atmosphere of K-con, she said, '*We* usually do that [fanchant]'. When informant Ma explained the LED light stick called the 'ARMY bomb', she said '*our* ARMY bomb'. Through the concert experience, in which the memory of conducting fanchants along with other fans, the sense of belongings was constructed in their minds.[52] As Schoonderwoerd mentions fanchants' cultural function in research on fanchants in a football match, fanchants works as 'a cohesive point' for support at the stadium, in K-pop's case, in the concert hall as well (Schoonderwoerd 2011). This function especially works among diverse fandom. Fanchants help to generate a sense of connection not only between artists and fandoms but also between the fans themselves.

Although fandoms experience a communal sense in the concert, they are a collective of individuals having a variety of identities related to gender, nationality, ethnicity, and the like. In the interview, I also asked informants about their relationship with BTS before starting the topic on fanchants and informants answered their own experiences. At the same time, all of the informants have a common narrative of how BTS gave positive effects on their life and how they are happy as an ARMY. A sense of mutual community within ARMY is not the only appealing factor, there is also a sense of comfort from the themes BTS sings about:

> Before K-pop, I listened to pop and rock usually. Their lyrics are more or less all about love songs […] But for BTS, […] I would say around 85% of their songs are about loving yourself, getting more confident about yourself, and anti-bullying. All of

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[52] In addition to fanchants, another K-pop fandom culture contributes to creating a sense of belongings among fans in the concert: *seonmul* (선물 [gift]) exchanging. *Seonmul* is to exchange small gifts such as snacks or cookies between fans. Fans in the fandom exchanges *seonmul* with other fans they know each other on the internet and/or people sitting near them, even strangers. Some people make laminated cards or key chains of BTS, which are actually in the grey zone legally. (The management company just pretends to ignore this ritual to obtain fans' loyalty towards artists). According to informant Ma, she met an ARMY fan from Vietnam through this *seonmul* ritual, and they are still keeping in touch after two years.

> them are really sweet in value and really touch my heart. That is why BTS is the only band staying with me for so long a time. Still a very huge part of my life. (Ma)

> I got a lot of motivation from BTS because we are almost the same age. If I were not a BTS fan, I would have never travelled to outside of my city, Osaka to Seoul. It would have been much too late to go to the outside world. (M)

Fans seem to resonate with BTS's messages such as 'love yourself' mentioned in *4.2.1 IDOL: song analysis*. The experience of interpreting BTS's messages and improving self-esteem generates a value of being a member of ARMY. Although the specific influences of these messages differs depending on the individual, the common narrative of 'BTS (more or less) changed my life' among the fandom connects to an attitude of pride in themselves as a member of ARMY. This is also one of the aspects of constructing fandom identity. As mentioned in *3.1.2. Fandom*, K-pop fandom can recognise themselves by being given a specific name and called the name by artists. According to fans, BTS frequently called 'ARMY' toward the audience during the concert, and the audience responded to them by screaming, waving LED lightsticks, and fanchanting. This concert experience also allows the fandom an opportunity of self-recognition as a member of ARMY – with fanchants being the method of mediation between BTS and the fandom.

Conducting fanchants is a critical component of constructing fandom identity, providing evidence of belonging to ARMY, connecting diverse individuals as a member of ARMY by generating feelings of belonging and community, and expressing their identity as ARMY towards BTS.

5 Conclusion

This thesis began by challenging the assumption that fanchants are just screaming by fanatical girls, I examined how K-pop's identity and fanchants are constructed by answering the following questions: How has K-pop been established so far? What is K-pop's identity and how is it constructed? How are the fanchants constructed? And what kinds of meaning emerge through fanchants? In exploring these questions, additional themes of importance became prominent – issues of cultural and gender representation and identity. These themes are important for both their domestic and international marketability, and K-pop acts as a field of discourse and negotiating these themes in both the Korean and global spheres.

I began by introducing the literature and history of K-pop – which leverages the globally successful Nordic music industry to create K-pops appealing dance music – before establishing a theoretical and methodological framework emphasising theories on cultural and gender identities. Finally taking the song, *IDOL* (2018) by BTS as a case study for K-pops role in negotiation and discourse of cultural and gender identity and representation, and explore the complicated and intricate fanchants that have spread globally with K-pop.

I considered K-pop's cultural identity based on three categories: music (a sense of national culture-ness), fandom (fan activities), and industry (the Korean training system). As many scholars pointed out that K-pop's lack of specific cultural identity, the 'K' in K-pop is a nearly empty signifier due to erasing Korean-ness for global expansion in contrast to other Korean popular music such as *shinminyo* and *trot*. This lack of Korean-ness in K-pop can be understood through its history and global-minded strategy.

K-pop is not only created in Korea, but also has a long and mutually influential relationship with Nordic music producers who have been deeply ingrained in the compositional process from the very beginning of K-pop. Using a song writing style called 'the track and hook style', in which composing several parts of a song by several producers and then recombining them like LEGO bricks, proved well suited for K-pop. By combining aspects of two different musical cultures, a hybrid cultural flow between both East and West emerged.

Using the Nordic producers' music creation process opened K-pop to criticism along the lines of the authenticity discourse in rock. According to these criticisms, the track and hook song writing style is called too mechanical for the music to be 'authentic', as 'authentic' music should be composed by the performers themselves to express their own emotions based on

romantic authenticity (Michelsen 2017). According to these critics, since the K-pop groups do not create their own music, it is therefore not authentic or legitimate music and is dismissed as an inferior or illegitimate.

While this relationship between K-pop and the Nordic music producers was mutually beneficial, the Western hegemonic structure, in which Scandinavian producers provide musical cultural legitimacy to K-pop for global audiences, is reinforced. This process involves K-pop to remove aspects of identifiably Korean culture from its music to gain access to the Anglo-centric Western music market. Korean-ness in K-pop was diluted, and 'culturally odourless-ness' K-pop music was established. Especially in the beginning of globalization, this cultural odourless-ness was one of the key pillars constructing K-pop. In this way, the Western cultural hegemony over the music market was reinforced by K-pop's adoption of Nordic music making style.

However, after the initial global expansion and experiencing success, the 'cultural odour' was reintroduced in K-pop, demonstrating a sense of self-orientalising of Korean cultural to appeal to orientalist Western perceptions of an 'exotic' other. This self-orientalising can also be explained as a type of K-pop 'double vision' (De Lauretis 1987) in which K-pop demonstrated knowledge of Korean identity and cultural representation of self through both the dominant (Western) and subordinate (Korean) identities.

When it comes to identifying what 'K-pop' is, the Korean training system is a crucial component. This system involves strict training in which young trainees train in singing, dancing, and languages for several years while living away from their family under the influence of the management company. On one hand, this system guarantees a high quality of performance, on the other hand, it also forces trainees to sacrifice private time with their family and friends. However, this system is coveted and narrated by the K-pop companies, idols, and fandom as a success story of success after overcoming hardship. Through the discourse, the training system gives K-pop authenticity by convincing the audience of high-quality performances and the fandoms become an agent in constructing K-pop identity.

The K-pop fandom is deeply involved with discourses on and constructing K-pop identity. K-pop fans are known as active consumers and 'part-time collaborators and marketers' due to their activities promoting their favourite artists. During the 'comeback' – when artists are actively engaged with promoting their new songs or albums through a packed schedule of

performances and appearances – fandoms organize to stream music and purchase albums to increase their favourite artists' music chart ranking as high as possible. These fandom cultures are exported to the global arena and adopted internationally. Unique fandom practices give fandoms opportunities to share experiences and construct a feeling of an 'imagined community' and an identity specific to a K-pop idol's fandom.

K-pop and the behaviours of the idol groups is also involved with gender discourses and is a realm for negotiating and discussing gender representation.

Boy bands performed masculinities differ from both the hegemonic versions in both Western and Eastern perspectives. Generally speaking, K-pop boys bands use traditionally feminine practices, such as wearing make-up, emphasising silky hair, and posing with cute expressions. This 'soft masculinity', which is a hybrid of stereotypical masculinity and femininity seen in K-pop idol groups, is often the focus of Western media.

However, this perspective also reflects a biased orientalism view. Soft masculinity originates from the concept of *khonminam* (flower boy), which is a combination of Confucian *wen* masculinity and *bishonen* (beautiful boy) masculinity from Japanese manga. These masculinities are based on conservative notions constructed within the gender dichotomy under heterosexual normativity and do not intend to subvert existing gender norms as the media claims. *Bishonen* masculinity, especially, is based on female desires of girlish masculinity and thus boys bands and their music are disdained by normative music critics.

These negative views on soft masculinity are actively countered by the fandoms, which emphasise soft masculinity as a counter to toxic masculinity. These narratives, created by the fandoms, emphasise rebellious aspects such as challenging gender norms. Through these efforts by the fandoms, interpretations of soft masculinity have shifted to something accepted and meaningful by society as a whole, and illustrate the close relationship between fandoms and idols and the efforts fans go through to promote their favourite idols.

This process of negotiating gender expressions is also seen through self-contradiction for female-based idol groups to obtain a good reputation. Historically, the first generation of girl groups expressed femininity through the lens of a male gaze – emphasising cuteness, submissiveness, and innocent sexiness. However, more recent girl groups perform femininity through portraying themselves as independent feminine figures and attract more female fans than males by emphasising the concept of the girl crush, or *ssen-unni* (strong sister).

This *ssen-unni* phenomenon can be seen as similar to the third wave of feminism by resonating with young feminists who aim to reclaim sexual terms for liberatory.

However, *ssen-unni* idols exhibit a type of 'marketable feminism' that presents a feminist-friendly performance to target feminist consumers. A majority of producers in the K-pop industry are male and on one hand, girls groups sing female empowerment, but on the other hand they present overly sexualized bodies and reproduce sexual objectification of women. Under this structure, girls groups' hyper-sexualised femininity is justified as individual choices of the artists. From comments on YouTube, fans are aware that *ssen-unni* idols present a strategic feminism for marketing reasons, but also take messages of feminine empowerment from these portrayals. One aspect of this market feminism is a backlash against this 'feminist attitude' in Korea from many men.

Concepts and portrayals of both masculinities and femininities are explored and negotiated between fans and artists in K-pop. These discourses are possible as K-pop fandoms are closely integrated and have a sense of ownership and belonging to the K-pop community as a whole. Many of these senses of belonging are performed and reinforced through fanchants.

By taking the song *IDOL* by the band BTS as a case study, I analysed K-pop fanchants from their historical roots in Korea originating from *chuimsae* calls to performers performing traditional narrative music *pansori*. In both *pansori* and modern K-pop, the proper use of *chuimsae*, or fanchants, requires the audience to know the songs, music, culture, and fanchants themselves to properly conduct them. Not only does the audience participate in the performance with fanchants, but music that has been designed with fanchants in mind may be considered incomplete or failed without the audience's participation in the performance.

The importance of these fanchants was started in the 1990s by the fandom of boys band H.O.T. called club H.O.T.. Fanchants developed from both traditional *chuimsae* and the functional aspect of fanchants substituting censored lyrics into a barometer of measuring a band and their associated fandom's power or greatness.

Through analysis of these fanchants, I have classified fanchants into largely two types: Name chants, which express fandom's love towards idols through calling idols names and group's names; and music fanchants, which is designed into the song as a distinct part of the song.

Although name chants are composed of calling the names of the idols and the band, there are a variety of name chants depending on the specific songs and the groups. Some name chants include direct messages from the fandom to idols, while others include insider references to the idols and fandom. Because these name chants are conducted during lulls where idols do not sing, such as the intro, interlude, or outro, idols can hear name chants as messages from the fandom. Therefore, name chants work as a form of direct message from fans to idols.

Music chants, as a part of the song themselves, require fans to memorise the exact fanchant and timing for when to conduct the fanchants in advance. Broadly speaking there are 3 types of music chants, the main sing-along, sub sing-along, and call and response. These types of music chants are classified by whether the fans are singing a specific main melody or lyric with the singers (main sing-along), a specific ornament or counter to the melody (sub sing-along), or response to a call from the singers (call and response). The effort required to participate in fanchanting is non-trivial and demonstrates the complicated cultural relationship and mutual dependence of the artists and their fandoms. While some fanchants are designed into the songs by the K-pop companies themselves, others are designed and implemented completely independently of the bands by the fans. These fan-made fanchants can even be adopted and acknowledged as official fanchants by the idols themselves. As these fanchants are so integral to K-pop performances, I argue fanchants should be considered as a complicated audience-inclusive identity constructive cultural practice, and not dismissed as fanatical uncontrolled streaming.

These themes, Korean identity in both domestic and international spheres, performed masculinities and femininity, and fanchants are complicated and intricate discourses negotiated through K-pop performances. I explain how these themes are practiced through an analysis of BTS's song *IDOL* as a case study as it includes all of the types of fanchants and is actively negotiating cultural and gender identity through K-pop.

In examining the *IDOL* music video (MV), the song can be interpreted as a celebration of loving yourself and of BTS resolving conflicting identities, culminating in a carnival-like celebration of self. However, women are completely absent from the entire the MV via a phenomenon that Walser (1993) labels 'exscription'. This phenomenon reemphasises patriarchal spaces by creating an idealized fantasy worlds where women are absent. Although BTS may not intend to present the idea of men in a men's world because K-pop MVs showing only one gender are common, unconscious expressions and reproduction of male

normativity can be seen by showing the absence of women in a celebration scene representing all humanity.

IDOL is composed of several traditional Korean musical signifiers. The *kueum*'s barrel drum's rhythmical onomatope is prominent in the hook, while *chuimsae* fanchants are used in both the chorus and the hook. Visual components in both the MV and performance at the Melon Music Awards (MMA) in 2018 also exhibit Korean cultural identifiers, such as traditional clothes called *hanbok*, architecture, folk-dance movement in *pungmul*, and displaying a tiger as a symbol of Korea. For the MMA performance, iconic traditional Korean theatrical dances such as *samgomu*, *buchaechum*, and *talcum* are performed and emphasised for several minutes before the name chant is performed. In a specific reference to Korean traditional dances, the specific *chuimsae* fanchants used in *pansori,* '*eolssu*' and '*jihwaja-joda*' are choreographed into the MMA performance. By explicitly incorporating c*huimsae* fanchants to complete a *pansori,* BTS's MMA stage performance reemphasises a return to celebrating their Korean identity in K-pop.

The imagery of reclaiming identity is also more explicitly stated in *IDOL* as the theme of the album is titled 'love yourself'. This theme is extended into a celebration in the MV and symbolically emphasise BTS reconciling two conflicts of identity: they can finally declare themselves as both idols and artists by overcoming criticism and contradiction between artists and idols; the other is a celebration of Korean cultural roots and identity in that *IDOL* can finally represent Korean culture internationally.

This ability to emphasise Korean cultural identity is particularly meaningful as *chuimsae* lyrics are explicitly used as sub sing-along chants, fans practice Korean traditional culture subconsciously through conducting these fanchants. When considering musicking, fanchants using *chuimsae* play a significant role in the process of musicking. As *pansori* is only complete when the audience calls *chuimsae* to the performer, *IDOL* is also only complete when the audience exclaims these *chiumsae*, thereby incorporating thousands of fans into the performance while continuing the legacy of a traditional musical culture.

By using these Korean elements, BTS are reemphasising traditional Korean culture which had steadily been diminished in K-pop's efforts to appeal to the global market. While *IDOL* emphasises Korean-ness, it is also an exception in K-pop to emphasising cultural identity – as

only a few artists who have managed to find success in the U.S., have been able to perform music emphasising Korean-ness.

The MV not only features traditional Korean elements, it also uses images associated with African culture to represent the use of the South African beat, *gqom*. For example, an African safari image including giraffes in a vast savannah, vividly coloured suits which BTS wears like sapeurs in Congo, and a dance move called the *gwara gwrara* originating in South Africa are featured. However on one hand, the integration of African culture seems a portrayal of multiculturism, on the other hand, it also can be a cultural misconception and appropriation.

IDOL's fanchants at the MMA performance is particularly remarkable as all the types of fanchants are incorporated. The name chant in the intro, the call and response in the verse, the main sing-along from the pre-chorus to chorus and hook, and the sub sing-along in the hook. Of particular note is that incorporating thousands of non-professionals into a highly choreographed live performance successfully throughout numerous specific fanchants requires a dedicated and highly knowledgeable fanbase.

Aside from the fanchants, the audience's screams and exclamations can also be heard in the performance. Those expressions sound like they are emerging randomly, however, they only occur when fanchants are not planned. Thus, although the fandom's cheering sounds are spontaneous expressions, at the same time they are tightly controlled by the fandom itself depending on the timing of the fanchants. The control and timing of these 'random' exclamations also reinforce the highly intricate nature of fanchants and knowledge required by the fandom to actively join the performance and become a co-performer.

Through conducting interviews with fans who have conducted fanchants I was able to learn about how fanchants are perceived, and the fanchant acculturation process. Some informants recognise fanchants as a part of a song through getting fanchant information from concert videos that already include fanchants. Because they get fanchants information from daily consumption, they described the action of fanchanting as 'fanchants naturally come when we are in the concert'. These comments show how these fans consider fanchants as part of the songs, and not separately.

On the other hand, fans who learned fanchants from studying the fanchants in written format perceive fanchants differently. For them, to contribute to fanchants requires courage. The different cultural and language backgrounds probably contribute to this perception. However,

fans identified that not all fanchants are performed the same. The name chant is recognised as more ubiquitous than the other types of fanchants by all informants. Especially for non-Korean fandoms, the name chant plays a significant role as a common language to convey their emotion and reaffirm their identity in the fandom.

Fanchants help to generate energy in concerts and a sense of connection not only between artists and fandoms but amongst the fans. Fanchants are so strongly associated with the 'live' atmosphere in K-pop performances that when concerts were moved online due to COVID-19, and for K-con, the sounds of fanchants are used to create a 'live' atmosphere. Fanchants, which can be generally recognised only by members of the fandom who are into that particular K-pop group, work like secret codes that only insiders recognise. Therefore, the ability to conduct fanchants functions as a proof of belonging to the fandom and building the fandom identity. Through concert experience in which conducting fanchants reinforces self-identity as a member of ARMY, fandoms forge a shared memory and develop a shared identity.

Through this study, new questions have arisen; how does the audience's cultural background affect their ability to conduct of fanchants? Especially when comparing audiences in Korea and other countries, it is not clear how the differences in fanchants are due to a lack of knowledge of Korean, or cultural differences. Additionally, the question of who conceptualized and developed K-pop fanchants to their current state is an open question and could influence further understandings on how fanchants and fandoms are constructed. Further empirical study is necessary to answer these questions.

Through the interviews, these fans shared their fanchant experiences and portrayed them as the most precious moments in the concerts. The emotional way that they discussed fanchanting by describing how they felt when their favourite idols responded to the fanchants, and how they felt a sense of kinship with other fans through fanchanting exemplifies the strong senses of identity and community created through fanchanting. With these stories and perceptions in mind, this thesis explored how cultural and gender identities are negotiated and expressed through K-pop; and the intricate processes of creating and performing fanchants establishes a form of communication between performers and fans. Fanchanting builds senses of identity and belonging and requires significant preparation and knowledge of the songs, community, and band to perform correctly – answering the question posed by the title of this thesis by stating that, no, fanchants are not 'merely screaming'.

Discography

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ARMY?"...and Yeah, of course ...I did it!! Kim Namjoon! [マックにランチに行ったら紙袋の在庫はほぼ残ってないのでエクストラであげてないよと言われた。ところが会計の時に店長らしき方が出てきて残りをあげるけどアーミーだと確認したいから BTS のチャントをしてくれるって聞かれまして...そりゃもちろんやるよね...えぇやりましたとも！！キムナムジュン！]'. Twitter. Tweet by S (@kynotyka). 48 May 2021. https://twitter.com/kinotyka/status/1398743126555070464.

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