

5 K-Pop Dance Music Video Choreography

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In 2019, *CNN* reported that K-pop dance is the most popular social dance after hip hop.¹ K-pop is a dance-driven music genre characterized by polished idols' synchronized, sophisticated dance routines. Despite the transnational visibility of K-pop dance, such as cover dance, YouTube dance fandom, and flashmobs, research on it has been scarce. Intersecting performance studies, critical dance studies, and cultural studies, this chapter focuses on K-pop dance choreography by analyzing iconic K-pop music videos over the past decade and some of their extended versions on the concert stage.

Employing descriptive analysis, this chapter closely reads the bodily, movement, sonic, and visual elements of representative K-pop music videos by groups such as BTS, BIGBANG, Seventeen, EXO, BLACKPINK, and TWICE, which present prototypes of K-pop choreography. Movement analysis is essential to understanding dance because it directly embodies sociocultural identities, such as gender.² A thick movement analysis in conjunction with an analysis of other related performance elements, such as clothing, facial expression, and spatial setting, creates a foundation for an author's arguments. For example, a facial expression is a type of choreography that reflects the preferred aesthetics of a particular movement style, like hip hop.³ Thus, "choreography" in this chapter refers to not only a sequence of movements but also "choreographed" facial expression, along with other sonic and visual elements of performance.

This chapter first reviews popular dance scholarship and situates K-pop dance in the genealogy of social and popular dance, since it is an emerging "social-popular dance of the global youth"⁴ entrenched in the world of social media, then discusses various styles of K-pop music video choreography by focusing on iconic dance movements called "point choreography."⁵ K-pop music video choreography can be categorized into schoolgirls and schoolboys, "beast idols" and bad girls, dance-centric, experimental, and hybrid styles. While these categories are preliminary and often overlap with one another, they shed light on the stylistic diversity of K-pop music video choreography.

The first two categories reveal gendered movements dichotomized into pure and innocent versus sensual and mature dancers. The dance-centric style exemplifies K-pop's dance-driven nature, which blends traditional

and contemporary as well as classical and popular dance. The experimental style demonstrates how K-pop oscillates between manufactured homogenized and more authentic-looking aesthetics, an underground indie style that highlights artists' individuality. The hybrid style exhibits a complex layer of international collaboration, racial and ethnic identity, and ethics of cultural exchange in tourism and transnational digital dance.

K-Pop Dance: An Emerging Social and Popular Dance of the Global Youth

According to Julie Malnig, social dance refers to a local, vernacular dance tradition circulated in a community.⁶ Cha-cha in a Cuban wedding ceremony and a folk music dance festival in Texas are examples. Frequently, a social dance becomes popularized and spreads beyond local contexts, and is then called popular dance, a type that becomes a “worldwide dance phenomenon[on],” such as hip hop.⁷ Nowadays, as dance easily circulates online via social media, it seems inevitable that the line between a vernacular social dance in a local context and a transnational popular dance is blurred.

Social and popular dance have traditionally been marginalized due to the racialized elitism that prioritizes European and American concert dance as high arts.⁸ However, both social and popular dance are part of daily life and have served community members across the globe. In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen*, Melissa Blanco Borelli and others examine sociopolitical and cultural implications of popular dance, such as dance activism and the formation of racial and gender identities, through in-depth analysis of dances in television, movies, music videos, social media, and video games.⁹ Sherril Dodds's groundbreaking work also discusses sexuality, race, gender, and diaspora by theorizing various types of popular dance in pop music, burlesque, Hollywood films, and experimental art.¹⁰

K-pop dance treads a slippery line between social dance and popular dance. Although it started in South Korea as a local music and dance genre, it became transnational and is now considered a global phenomenon. As I have argued elsewhere, K-pop dance is an emerging “social-popular dance of global youth” who perform alternative racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and sexual identities through their localized adaptations of K-pop dance.¹¹ The visually stunning choreography with somewhat homogenized dance style has generated a sizable number of tutorial videos on YouTube by global fan-dancers who want to “be like” K-pop singers.¹² This chapter thus uses social and popular dance in an interchangeable way to describe the localized but transnational phenomenon of K-pop dance.

An understanding of K-pop dance must consider the main platform where the performance is staged. Whether on a television station, YouTube, Tik Tok, or Instagram, K-pop is predominantly circulated via visual media, and thus choreography is arranged for the screen. It reflects what Dodds refers to as “popular screen dance.”¹³ When dance is created for and circulated on screen, a mediated digital body replaces a live body in a theater located in a fixed time and space.¹⁴ K-pop dance predominantly emerges from music videos that highlight the visualization of music and sound. Above all, K-pop dance is a visual concept edited for the screen in the mainstream popular culture. The dancers/singers’ appearance – what they wear, how their bodies look, how they move, how they wear makeup, what characters or personae they play on stage to highlight specific concepts – is as important as the music. The sleek, flawless, mediated dancing body in K-pop edited for screen with specific effects often exceeds ordinary human bodies’ natural movement capability and visual presentation, akin to what Dodds calls “superbodies” in popular screen dance.¹⁵

Given that K-pop dance is specifically arranged for media platforms, “point choreography” becomes crucial. “Point choreography” refers to a short and iconic movement commonly placed in the chorus line.¹⁶ PSY’s horse dance in “Gangnam Style” (2012) is a prime example. A point choreography should reflect the general image, concept, and theme of the music video itself and boost the group’s unique personae and characters onstage. More importantly, it should be highly eye-catching, memorable with a clear structure, and, if possible, imitable for the fans who listen to and perform K-pop. Point choreography facilitates what Mark Franko called “democratization” of participatory dance today in social media.¹⁷

K-pop dance demonstrates a “participatory” dance culture in the twenty-first-century digital space.¹⁸ In the digital age, social media in large part replace traditional theater. Many young people around the globe who have yet to see live theater have already watched K-pop music videos and dance tutorial videos on YouTube. Some have posted K-pop cover dances on YouTube, participated in K-pop flash mobs, or posted #Kpopdancechallenge on TikTok and Instagram. As popular dance scholars have argued, pop dance has been a pivotal tool for young people to explore alternative cultural identities against the mainstream culture. The global K-pop dance fandom exemplifies how the global youth construct and physically perform alternative racial, gender, sexual, ethnic, and linguistic identities.

According to San San Kwan, contemporary dance refers to “the dance that is happening now” and includes not only concert dance but also contemporary commercial and contemporary world dance.¹⁹ “World dance” means dance styles and practices outside the colonial logic of the

“canonical” Western dance.²⁰ “‘Asia’ is yoked to ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ is yoked to ‘Western,’” Kwan writes, due to the pervasive Orientalism that perceives Asia as “historical” rather than “contemporary” – a notion predominantly held by Euro-American dance artists.²¹ What is unique about K-pop dance is that it showcases a blend of both classical and popular dance as well as traditional and contemporary dance practices, not to mention Western and Asian dance styles. K-pop dance exemplifies what Kwan refers to as the characteristics of “contemporary Asian dance” in the world dance category.²² To Kwan, contemporary Asian dance is an intercultural genre that incorporates Western contemporary dance into a local form with dancers’ “hybrid bodily intelligence” and versatile training backgrounds.²³ As dance scholars have warned, however, it is essential to remember that such intercultural adaptation happens in both Asian and Western contexts in multidirectional ways, as demonstrated by prominent Western ballet, modern, and contemporary choreographers’ and artists’ cultural appropriations of the East and Asia and their significant effects on Western dance history.²⁴

The production system of the K-pop industry suits well what Kwan calls “East-West blends” in contemporary Asian dance. The industry actively hires non-Korean musicians, dancers, and choreographers. Such transnational collaboration makes it challenging to define K-pop’s identity as solely limited to geographical boundaries. K-pop dance is produced for commercial platforms, such as mainstream television shows, music programs, and dance competitions. Trainees go through the strict and disciplined process at entertainment agencies to learn dancing, singing, and often foreign languages. Many idols are formally trained in dance, including modern dance, ballet, and Korean dance. For example, BTS’s Jimin, Cosmic Girls’s Cheng Xiao, Gugudan’s Kang Mi Na, and EXO’s Kai graduated from conservatory arts schools and formally studied dance. K-pop dance has been turned into a formal subject in the South Korean education system, as it became part of popular and commercial dance classes offered at conservatory schools. K-pop dance not only challenges the line between social and popular dance but also blurs the low (pop dance) versus high (classical dance) art dichotomy.

Types of K-Pop Music Video Dance

The Schoolgirls and Schoolboys Concept

As Judith Butler noted, gender is a “stylized repetition of action” that is necessarily involved with repetitive bodily behaviors.²⁵ K-pop groups often emphasize conventional gender roles: either innocent, cute schoolgirls and

schoolboys or seductive, sensual, and powerful figures. For the former, the choreographies commonly consist of bright smiles and light, cheerful, gestural movements to accompany happy, romantic, upbeat love songs. Cute and affectionate facial expressions and attitudes, called *aegyo* in Korean, emblemize the schoolgirls and schoolboys concept. Examples of *aegyo* can be a baby voice, a wink, or a duck face. It is also common in dance choreography, in movements such as girlish, restricted arm gestures, as if expressing shyness, and clenching fists next to the face, looking at the camera, and lightly rolling the fists, as if imitating toddlers or animals.

Space denotes gendered power dynamics. In her canonical essay “Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality,” Iris Marion Young examined how physical space itself is gendered. For example, girls are expected to take up narrower and smaller space even when they engage in physical exercise, such as throwing a ball.²⁶ In order to match their shy, innocent schoolgirl personae, K-pop girl groups often tend to limit their spatial mobility. While performing, they often waddle, step side to side attentively, move their shoulders up and down like shrugging, flip their hands upward, then face their palms down. The width of both of their shoulder and leg movements is limited to an inward, narrow space. They also occasionally hold their hands behind their back as if they feel shy or intimidated. While their steps are ravishingly decorative and sophisticated, their choreographies do not execute an explicitly intense, powerful, or sexual movement. Neither do they take up a large space on stage. Even if some members who are mostly in charge of dance can execute more intricate and challenging movements, the level of power dynamics remains moderate so that they can maintain girlish appeal with light movements.

Maintaining a moderate level of sex appeal is the key to the schoolgirl concept and choreography. In TWICE’s “Likey” (2017), between the chorus link, a member, Momo, does a solo dance to lively background music. She is clad in pink shorts and a white top. The garment reveals her body, but the color and style are bright, like clothing designed for teenage girls. She lifts and crosses her arms above her head, shakes her hips, and stylishly bends her arms near her face with multiple angles like voguing. Pushing her arms away from her body, she circles her hips backward and undulates and waves her chest, then seductively gazes at the camera, albeit briefly. When waving, she flips up her hand upward, like an animation character, pushing and facing her palm downward, lifting her fingertips upward. She does not forget to show an innocent smile so that the scene does not look dark or explicitly sexual. The backdrop is changed from an old alley with garbage bins to a colorful ice cream shop and bright yellow and pink alley. In contrast to the sensual lower body movement, her upper

body communicates otherwise. Her hands flipping upward are accompanied by a joyful and naïve smile, and the bright backdrop resonates with a typical innocent, girlish manga character, which in turn reduces the sensual appeal of her lower body movement. With the choreographed use of space setting, costume choice, smile, and gaze, the solo maintains a delicate balance between being cute, if not chaste, and sexual.

Other visual elements match the choreography. The schoolgirls and schoolboys wear colorful but casual clothes or school uniforms such as pleated skirts and white blouses or navy pants and ties. Some of their videos have cartoonish edits, such as vivid color, modified size of the dancers like miniature figures vis-à-vis the environment, and imaginative and futuristic backgrounds and props that do not exist in reality. TWICE's "TT" (2017) presents a series of Halloween-themed cosplay scenes where the group members portray various characters such as the White Queen from *Alice*, Pinocchio, Tinker Bell, the Little Mermaid, and Elsa from *Frozen*. In "Signal" (2017), TWICE communicates with an extraterrestrial being and later turn themselves into aliens.

Girls' Generation is canonical in this category due to their delicate, balletic movements expressed through long and slim bodies and cute personae, which I term "hypergirlish femininity."²⁷ As they have grown older, the group has tried a nubile femme fatale image with sassy movements and even slightly androgynous, powerful choreography. In "Catch Me If You Can" (2015), they dance in what appears to be a construction site. They wear smoky eye makeup, cargo pants, and sporty ripped tank tops with gym gloves, and later short orange jumpsuits with white stripes. Instead of a shy smile, they show a confident, seductive gaze, staring directly at the camera. The point choreography consists of a headbanging, powerful body shake, a shimmy, rapidly shifting their torsos side to side, rhythmically crossing their knees, and spinning, stepping back and forth with controlled arm gestures to a low-pitched, upbeat electronic sound.

The choreography of the schoolboy concept is as gendered as that of the schoolgirls. An iconic example is boy band SHINee's "Replay" (2008), which stages innocent-looking young boys singing a sweet and bubbly love song. They place the back of their hands upward and sharply open their forearms horizontally, while also extending and drawing a circle with one leg on the floor, like a *rond de jambe*, and bending the other leg, lightly tilting their hips on the standing leg. Stamping their feet, they nimbly and lightly twist their shoulders side to side, lifting the chin rhythmically. Their lithe, youthful bodies complement the sprightly, light-footed, agile choreography. "Replay" is a love song to *nuna*, a term used by a man younger than the woman he refers to. On the other hand, *oppa* is a term used by women to refer to older men, frequently as a nickname, like "sweetie" or

“honey.” In “Replay,” SHINee places themselves as younger boys occupying a less hierarchical position, at least in terms of age.

Pretty K-pop boys are called “flower boys” (*kkot-mi-nam* in Korean) who have androgynous, polished, sophisticated, often effeminate facial features. The flower boy syndrome signifies not only a new trend in men’s physical appearance but also a changing image of ideal masculinity called “soft masculinity” and even gendered hypergamy.²⁸ In Korea, the number of older women/younger men couples has been increasing along with the rising level of education and economic empowerment of women, who expect less traditional gender norms and embrace more youthful and attractive men.²⁹

Current examples of the bubbly schoolboy or flower boy concept include BTS’s “Boy with Luv” (feat. Halsey) (2019), where they are clad in pastel-pink skinny jeans and T-shirts, dancing to a lively love song. The point choreography starts with the members’ frisky jumping and kicking their legs in the air. Dancing to the chorus, “Oh my my my my,” they twist their front feet briskly, as in disco, jiggling and bouncing their hips, cheerfully tapping their shoulders. Their hands dexterously pat down their chests and move to their lower abdomens, rippling their upper bodies as they cavort with bright smiles. The fast-paced, effervescent point choreography highlights the vivacity of the dancers.

The Beast Idols and Bad Girls Concept

The second prevalent type of K-pop music video choreography highlights mature sexual appeal. Compared to flower boys, “beast idols” (*jim seung dol* in Korean) refers to male idols who present tall, fit, muscular bodies and tough masculinity. To enhance their masculine appeal, they draw on various elements including gangster and macho images from energetic hip hop and breakdance as well as hypersexual (heterosexual) masculinity from strip dance, sometimes tearing apart their shirts to flaunt tanned abdominal muscles or dancing around a pole on stage. Their dance style consists of powerful, arduous movements and sharp, expeditious steps with swaggering and “bestly” facial expressions. Costumes are designed to match their staged masculinity and gendered choreography, often combined with black leather jackets and a dark, rebellious fashion style. BIGBANG, MONSTA X, 2PM, BEAST, and B.A.P are some of the representative groups of this category.

Nevertheless, the flower boys and beast idols are not necessarily dichotomized. Beast idols are not afraid of performing soft and cute masculinity by wearing pink skinny jeans and eyeshadow and even cross-dressing on variety television shows, at fan club gatherings, and in concerts. BIGBANG’s rapper G-Dragon, for example, is known for his versatile

persona ranging from an androgynous, funky, rebellious drunken boy in “Crooked” (2013) to a classy modern artist in “Untitled” (2014), a point elaborated further below in the experimental style section.

There is an equivalent term for K-pop girl groups who are admired because they evoke a “girl crush.” Unlike the innocent, pure “good girl” image, those “bad girls” present a fierce, strong, sexy, independent, trendy “badass” image and have an equal amount of female fandom, if not more. 2NE1, ITZY, BLACKPINK, Red Velvet, and f(x) are known for their ferocity and individualistic characters who empower and inspire female fans across the globe. While they also stick to the conventional plaid schoolgirl skirts with a natural makeup look, the bad girls choose abrasive stylings too, such as black leather jackets, fishnet tights, smoky eye makeup, short haircuts, sports jerseys, and Doc Martens boots. ITZY, for example, is renowned for their mischievous lyrics, sassy choreography, and trendy gender-neutral outfits, such as funky faux fur coats, sweatpants with running shoes, and sports tops with mesh sleeves. Many of the girl crush groups’ performances combine hip-hop and electronic music as well as vigorous, grounded urban and street dance movements.

BLACKPINK’s record-breaking “Kill This Love” (2019) epitomizes the girl crush-type choreography. It became the fastest video to reach 100 million views on YouTube in roughly two days. The video starts with grandiose drum sounds like those of a marching band and the group’s signature phrase, “BLACKPINK in your area.” Taking a low-angle shot, the camera shows four members standing, hands on their hips, showing all their fingers in the front, a body gesture that often signifies dominance. Because of their elbows elevated to the side and lifted chins, they appear wider. They directly look at the camera like furious warriors without a smile. Combining the direct gaze, low angle, assertive gesture, and expressive music, they look dominant and authoritative.

The point choreography is featured in a gray setting that appears to be architectural ruins. Sunlight illuminates a broken white head of what resembles a Greek statue on the floor. The wall is covered with dust and ivy, and there are fallen leaves on the floor, which signifies the passage of time. The members are clad in mostly black tops, gloves, and leather boots, or fashion garters on their thighs. Combining both classy and modern appeal, they look like female secret agents or warrior goddesses. They stand facing sideways and fearlessly gaze at the camera, pointing and reaching out one arm while folding the other in front of their chests as if about to shoot a target. With the chorus lyrics, “Let’s kill this love,” they swiftly lift up and then push the front arm down, undulating and rolling their upper body backward. The movement is played in slow motion, enhancing the impact of the point choreography. There is an explosion

behind them, which further accentuates the sharp movements of the scene. They then playfully twist their hips, slightly leaning back, swaying their arms back and forth, grimacing in a sassy manner resembling a smirk rather than a smile. They twirl one arm above their heads defiantly, looking over their shoulder and facing front, while placing the other hand on their hip. When they face the front, their flattened hands move by their foreheads, which resonates with saluting. Thrusting and circling their pelvis rhythmically, they whirl their arms above their heads as if cheering.

The rising popularity of the girl crush concept is related to the shifting gender dynamics in Korea, including an increasing feminist awareness of the Me Too movement.³⁰ Gender norms directly affect the body perception through which an individual internalizes socially acceptable and “proper” gendered behavior.³¹ “Manspreading” exemplifies gendered politics in daily life, and how men have been traditionally allowed to take up a larger space in a public sphere with more power. As the body and its movements are a core site of reproducing power dynamics, they can simultaneously destabilize the norms embodied.³² Certainly, the bad girl concept choreography has a limitation, as it mostly gains its power through the script of heteronormativity. Nonetheless, when female performers take up a large space with bold and purposefully boisterous movement patterns, the dancing bodies have the potential to question the ways female bodies have been traditionally disciplined to move and appear in certain ways, and thus challenge docile femininity pervasive in society. The girl crush groups’ facial expressions are another sign suggesting a possibility of liberatory femininity. Many bad girl groups showcase boastful, intense eye contact without a sweet smile in their performance. Red Velvet is known for their smileless, cold, “haughty” faces along with “uncanny” and eerie album concepts.³³ The songs “Psycho” (2019) and “Monster” (2020) are some of the examples. The latter, for instance, features a devilish and queerish duet with member Irene and Seulgi clad in classy, extravagant, gothic garments. According to *Brunch* online magazine, Red Velvet’s music videos often resonate with “horror movies.”³⁴ Irene is particularly known as “a woman who does not smile.” She is often criticized for her disinterested face, as she often refuses to smile or show *aegyo*. As exemplified in cheerleading dance, a smile is a gendered movement commonly associated with emotional labor – caring, supportive, and submissive femininity to please the male spectators or partners.³⁵ The girl crush groups’ unsmiling facial expressions and cavalier attitudes in performance can reflect changing gender norms and power dynamics in contemporary Korea. Some female idols have been criticized for reading a feminist novel, *Kim Ji Young, Born 1982*, or participating in women’s rights activism.

Some female singers further challenge the heteronormative gender stereotypes. Amber Liu, a Taiwanese American K-pop singer in f(x), is best known for her androgynous appeal. On her solo album, *Shake That Brass* (2015), she grooves to cheerful rap music in a cartoonish setting that features a basketball court and colorful graffiti. She has a short haircut and wears medium-length sporty jersey pants. Her male backup dancers are clad in baseball apparel. The point choreography comprises Liu stomping her feet to the side while punching her right arm forward. Holding her arm, she waves her upper body to the left, clenching her left fist positioned on her left thigh, and recovers her head to the center in a robotic manner. Featured in the music video is Girls' Generation's Taeyeon, whose typical feminine beauty and high-pitched voice contrast with Amber's androgynous looks and low, husky voice. Similar to the fluid gender performance between flower boys and beast idols, girl groups also present a wide range of personae on stage. As Suk-Young Kim explained in an interview with *Billboard* in 2020, there is a "conceptual versatility" of K-pop idols who "try on all kinds of concepts, from sexy to cute and innocent," for better profitability and relatability to a broader audience.³⁶

Such fluidity in performing different characters is often restrained by gender and age. Gender fluidity seems more common in K-pop boy groups, who more freely traverse androgynous flower boys and macho beast idols, and even cross-dress. Contrarily, girl groups seem to have less choice other than presenting dark, robust, and sexy choreography as they mature, while innocent, cute, youthful concepts are mostly reserved for younger idols. For example, TWICE and Girls' Generation gradually switched their personae over time from innocent schoolgirls to more mature, seductive women. Yet it is quite common to see boy groups who debut with a strong, seductive (mature) image no matter how young they are, like 2PM and Stray Kids. Even with school uniforms, boy groups seem to have more options. In "Boy in Luv" (2014), BTS members wear school uniforms and dance in a space that appears to be a high school classroom. They present strong and rebellious characters with rigid movements accompanied by powerful braggadocio.

Surely, boy groups are not entirely free from this rubric of growing older and therefore resorting to a sexually mature image. On their first album, *Adore U* (2015), Seventeen features a jaunty dance, wearing school uniform-like white shirts and beige pants. In "Fear" (2019), they present seductive, mature masculinity, wearing tight black suits with dark makeup. The choreography contains dramatic facial expressions. A dancer gazes deeply at the camera, crossing his hands and touching his neck. Other dancers put on dreamy facial expressions and delicate hand gestures and smell their wrists as if they are mesmerized by the seductive scent. The

point choreography consists of the dancers slightly leaning back, bending and spreading their legs to the side, gently putting their hands on their upper thighs. With their off-balance leaning, they look fragile and vulnerable. They repeat loosely rolling and waving their left and then right shoulder in an erotic manner, undulating their upper body to titillate the audience while seductively gazing at the camera.

Not just school uniforms but wearing uniforms in general is a trend that never fades away. Girl's Generation's "Genie" (2010) employs a navy-uniform concept with gold tassels and white shorts that stress their elongated balletic legs and intricate steps. BTS's "Dope" (2012) features uniforms of a police officer, soldier, office worker, car racer, and doctor. Uniforms are often fetishized, as they evoke certain types of gendered power dynamics. Maid and police officer costumes reflect such gendered fetishization divided into submissiveness and authoritarianism. Uniforms in K-pop dance match the disciplinary and synchronized movement style and at the same time serve the gendered appeal and perhaps enhance the sexual fantasy of K-pop groups.

The Dance-centric Style

The dance-centric style appears in the majority of K-pop music videos. Yet some stand out with their explicitly decorative, stunning choreographies that overshadow the other narratives, characters, and visual and even sonic elements. The dance-centric style is more common in boy groups' dances, as they tend to execute more intricate, powerful, and physically demanding choreographies. This is not to say that girl groups are less trained in dance. Instead, this trend reflects a gendered aspect of K-pop choreography where girls, with the exception of a few girl crush groups, are expected to remain "hypergirlish" for the most part and thus not to feature too explicitly strong or powerful dance. Such masking with hypergirlish femininity likely serves to hide athleticism, which, in the K-pop world, is traditionally seen as male property. Hyoyeon in Girls' Generation, for example, has not been given enough opportunity to showcase her powerful dance skills due to the group's chaste stage personae. Arguably, while light, fluid, airy balletic gestures are more popular among girl groups, sharp, grounded, energetic, and rigid movements are more prevalent in boy groups.

Boy group EXO epitomizes the dance-centric style. They are known for their flawless, intricate dance routines that underline the synchronization of group dance scenes. EXO's "Love Shot" (2018), "Call Me Baby" (2015), and "Monster" (2016) all have a relatively simple storyline. With minimalistic, futuristic backgrounds and costumes, the highlight of those music videos is synchronized, masculine, and eye-catching choreographies. For example, the point choreography of "Call Me Baby" begins with jostling

with rigid and meticulous punching arm movements and stamping feet, bodies swaying horizontally. They put their feet together, stand straight facing the diagonal, and place one hand below their lower abdomen, waving and thrusting their pelvis in a sexually suggestive manner. They rhythmically shove their shoulders and step to the side, lightly moving their hips back and forth with the steps, tapping erotically the edges of their shoulders with delicately wiggling hands, gazing intensely at the camera and wearing alluring smiles, as if enticing the audiences to touch their bodies.

BTS also emblemizes the spectacular dance-driven style of K-pop music videos. Their “Fake Love” (2018) and “Blood, Sweat, & Tears” (2016) present vivid, seductive, decadent aesthetics through precise and dramatic choreographies. “‘ON’ Kinetic Manifesto Film: Come Prima” (2020), “Not Today” (2017), and “Black Swan” (2020), featured in an actual theater space, extend the spectrum of dance even further to appear nearly as conventional modern or contemporary dance films. They consist of vigorous footsteps and robust, dynamic choreographies with an agile rotation in space, nimble and effortless jumps, spectacular turns, smooth gliding, and floor movements. Further study is needed of those examples, particularly “Black Swan,” as it signals a new chapter of K-pop choreography that seamlessly integrates the Western and Asian classical and popular dance venues, aesthetics, choreographic tools, and collaborations.

The Experimental Style

The experimental style employs less common camera work and video editing techniques, often departing from conventional aesthetics. G-Dragon’s “Untitled” (2014) is an evocative piano ballad without percussion or beat. The video is set against a minimalistic backdrop with a sky that changes from poetic red to dreamy blue in between sunset and sunrise. The audience sees his silhouette in a dim light where his subtle, delicate gestures, and even stillness, become a dance. His body itself becomes a dance: his fragile neck, elongated fingers, legs moving to unpredictable and spontaneous rhythms of music, the decadent and nostalgic ambience, blurry silhouette of his movement, his disciplined but fearless voice, his face still youthful yet showing the traces of time, and his vulnerable yet centered gaze fully aware of the richness of his every move. It is a dance that does not need dance-like movements. Compared to his bubbly and childish character when BIGBANG first debuted in 2006, “Untitled,” cowritten and produced by G-Dragon himself, explicates a journey of an idol who has grown as an artist.

Another BIGBANG member, Taeyang, also features an experimental approach in his “Eyes, Nose, Lips” (2014). The song is his second single

cowritten by himself. The camerawork takes a long sequence shot. The video starts with an extreme close-up shot of the dancer's face and neck. Throughout the song, the camera gradually zooms out to show his bare chest and, eventually, his entire body and background. Everything remains the same other than the moving camera angle. The camera is so close that the audience can even see his body's slight movement. The body itself – facial wrinkles, sweaty pores, twitching muscles around the mouth, and chest that contracts and releases according to the music's tempo and tone – becomes part of the choreography.

BTS's "Save Me" (2016) appears to be a low-budget, independent-style music video. The dancers wear loose, casual T-shirts and ripped skinny black jeans with minimum makeup. They are featured in a deserted field filtered by a gloomy, bluish chromatic tone. They dance in the wind, which accentuates their powerful, airy movements. The relatively natural looks of the dancers enhance the sense of their vulnerability and the believability of the lyrics that highlight sad and desperate feelings of love. The point choreography consists of continual light kicking, stomping feet, and swirling along with endless jumping while turning. Their hair and T-shirts fly and wave with the wind flow, accentuating the choreography's free spirit. As many dance-centric choreographies highlight a nearly perfect level of synchronization and even homogeneity, from costume choices to movements, dancers often appear too artificial, like manufactured dancing machines. While "Save Me" certainly overlaps with the dance-centric style, it is distinguishable due to its indie aesthetics with more approachable characters, costumes, and background choices. This casualness might draw fans' attention even more, because the dancers seem more relatable and affable. BTS is known for their "boy-next-door" characters, especially their cordial and playful social media presence and active communication with fans.

Lee Hyori's "Seoul" (feat. Killagramz) (2017) makes a juxtaposition between Seoul and Jeju Island. The choreography has a similar movement pattern, such as her improvisational hair flipping and chest undulations, but it appears different depending on the spatial setting where the movement is presented: the highly modernized but monotonous city of Seoul at night versus the untouched, colorful nature of Jeju on a sunny day. In Seoul, a speeding car passing by resonates with her rigid, swift turn and twist of the upper body. Contrarily, a head circle and a relaxed body wave with natural hair flip in the breeze go with Jeju Island's natural scenery. In the climax, she lies down, glides, and spirals on the grass in Jeju, wearing socks without shoes. This scene appears to highlight the connection between nature and herself by physically getting closer to the earth. ZICO's "Any Song" (2020) portrays a casual house party where he gets

bored. Wearing headphones, he starts dancing when everyone falls asleep after drinking. His movement appears improvisational, quirky, and spontaneous, consisting of idiosyncratic steps and self-focused wacky, dramatic facial expressions, such as playing an air guitar in an exaggerated motion.

All these examples compose another technique that makes the singers' works appear more authentic and less manufactured. The experimental style tends to depart from the emphasis on point choreography that molds the prototype of the mainstream music videos. This experimental style can range from a highly artistic manifestation with minimalistic aesthetics to indie, amateur-looking products that possibly increase fans' feelings of familiarity, emotional intimacy, and imaginary accessibility to the artists.

The Hybrid Style: International Collaboration and Korean Folk Dance

The last category focuses on hybridity by drawing examples from international collaborations and revivals of traditional Korean themes. Many of the collaborators are notable artists in the US music industry, so the collaboration itself often carries marketability. Examples are PSY's "Hangover" (feat. Snoop Dogg) (2014), Lady Gaga and BLACKPINK's "Sour Candy" (2020), BTS's "Boy with Luv (feat. Halsey)" (2019), and J-Hope's "Chicken Noodle Soup" (feat. Becky G) (2019). In an interview on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, PSY said that he and Snoop Dogg had never met before they shot the "Hangover" music video in South Korea.³⁷ They communicated virtually until they shot the video in Seoul, and the filming took only eighteen hours. Such a brief physical encounter would work in this collaboration because instead of using synchronized point choreography that would need ongoing physical training, the "hangover" concept can be illustrated with choreography that consists of simple, pedestrian movements with bouncy, swaggering, and often witty facial expressions and gestures. From a karaoke venue to an amusement park, the two singers lurch and teeter in a staggering manner, showing off their unique charisma and personalities. In *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, Snoop Dogg said that he always wanted to be in a martial arts movie, and he felt like a karate star in a kingdom while filming the video in Korea. His comment seems to resonate with a stereotypical understanding of Asia as a site of orientalist imagination. A limited exposure to each other's culture and history would be similar to that of PSY. Although he attended college in the United States, he did not necessarily spend years learning the collaborator's works and his cultural roots face to face.

While Snoop Dogg's charismatic presence is more than enough to draw the audience, his movements often seem alienated in the highly localized sites that directly generate specific, daily life movement patterns. Many of the scenes in "Hangover" are local places with specific cultural codes and customs of middle-aged Korean men, such as a men's hair salon, karaoke venue, spa,

or drinking place. Some of Snoop Dogg's movements appear less natural and often awkward compared to PSY's, for example, in the scenes where they dance with and caress women in the karaoke bar or when they open a bottle of soju in a grilled shellfish bar. There are many different choreographed routines of opening a soju bottle among Koreans, which is considered a social skill to amuse people at a social gathering. Such site- and culture-specific actions should be familiar to PSY, who can easily embody the subtle nuances, attitudes, and even mood in it, which is not necessarily the case for Snoop Dogg. "Hangover" sheds light on how accessible an international collaboration can be in the digital era and, at the same time, how there is a danger of superficial understanding and presentation of a culture under the name of cultural exchange, without an embodied understanding of it.

The transnational circulation of and collaboration in K-pop illuminate issues of Koreanness. Scholars have often pointed out the "absence of Koreanness" in K-pop due to its hybridity, although hybridity itself is a characteristic of K-pop.³⁸ K-pop artists have hired and collaborated with international songwriters, producers, and choreographers. The ethnic and racial identities and citizenships of K-pop idols have become more diverse, including idols from the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Australia, and more. As Koichi Iwabuchi argued, cultural products can be de-ethnicized in the era of globalization, made "culturally odorless."³⁹ Global conglomerates Samsung, Sony, and Apple exemplify such transnationality. K-pop, too, as a manufactured performance, often traverses geographical, ethnic, and cultural boundaries.

As much as K-pop becomes hybridized through the increasing participation of foreign artists, it equally draws from traditional Korean aesthetics. BLACKPINK's "How You Like That" (2020) features a modernized version of *hanbok*, a traditional Korean garment. Their costumes have vivid colors and shorter open tops compared to the longer, traditional top with blouse closed with a ribbon. When BLACKPINK presented "How You Like That" on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* on June 26, 2020, they had more than 210,000 views when the show was aired. The website of Danha, the clothing company that designed the *hanbok* BLACKPINK wore, had nearly 4,000 daily customers hailing from the United States, Asia, and Europe. This mischievous, modernized version matches BLACKPINK's luscious, feisty dance movements and mystical but cheerful onstage personae quite well. In "Refresh" (2020), Zico and Kang Daniel also wear modernized *hanbok* and dance in a space featuring traditional Korean architecture. Various dance styles are presented, including b-boying, breakdancing, and folk dance. Interestingly, the video was created in collaboration with and sponsored by Pepsi, and there are a couple of scenes where performers drink Pepsi after their dance.

In “IDOL” (2018), BTS dances against a computer-generated image of a yellow pavilion that resembles traditional Korean architecture, wearing modernized *hanbok* with black silky fabric embellished with gold. The music video includes visual images that reference traditional Korean folk painting and folk dance such as the fan dance (*buchaechum*) and lion mask dance (*sajachum*). Created by Korean folk dance master Kim Baek-bong in 1954, *bu-chaechum* is a neoclassical fan dance inspired by shamanic ritual and folk dance as well as traditional court dance of the Joseon dynasty. Originating from ancient shamanic rituals, *sajachum* is a mask dance where performers are dressed as animals like lions and imitate their movements. BTS’s performance of “IDOL” at the 2018 Melon Music Awards (MMA) – a major annual music awards show in South Korea – revived traditional elements on a live stage featuring lion puppets, a mask dance, and traditional instruments. The group wore flowery turquoise traditional garments with a modern touch.

Not only *hanbok* has become more visible in K-pop. BTS’s Suga (or Agust D) recently released his solo song, “Daechwita” (2020), which adapts traditional Korean themes for the song’s title, characters, costumes, background setting, and musical instruments. In the music video, he played two roles: a violent king and a boy who rebels against the king. “Daechwita” refers to the traditional Korean wind and percussion music reserved for a palace parade. The music video was filmed in Yongin Daejanggeum Park in Gyeonggi province, an outdoor film set and tourist attraction. The park is known for its traditional palaces built and commonly used for shooting Korean historical television dramas set in the Joseon dynasty. Suga wears stylish black *hanbok* with funky, dark makeup that shows a scar on his face. The traditional scene later overlaps with a contemporary one featuring typical hip-hop “gangster” imagery, wherein Suga wears a ripped green cargo jacket with silver accessories as he raps while surrounded by a group of men sitting on a car.

The revival of traditional Korean culture further fuels K-pop fans’ interest. At MMA, Jimin performed a short solo of *buchaechum* (a neoclassical Korean fan dance), which reflects what I have theorized BTS as “Korean folk dancers.”⁴⁰ BTS’s Jimin attended the Busan High School of Arts and later graduated from the Korean Arts High School, where he learned both Western and Korean classical dances and popular dance. Although women commonly perform *buchaechum*, Jimin’s performance was composed of all-male dancers. It incorporated urban and pop dance, such as breakdance and hybrid aesthetics, with vibrant multimedia as a backdrop. The Korean Cultural Center in China posted Jimin’s fan dance video on Sina Weibo, the largest social media platform in China. Hashtagged as “#DanceKingJimin” by his fans, his video created overwhelming hype on social media. The fan dance

video ranked second in the global real-time trend on Twitter. The transnational and real-time response opens a discussion on searching for a “new authenticity” in the global tourism industry reflected in the modernized traditions in K-pop.⁴¹ Further, this example signifies the changing dynamics in dance reception and circulation in the era of social media without geographical and cultural barriers, where ordinary fans’ voices and participation matter more than ever.

Conclusion

Discussing prominent types of K-pop music video choreography and its extension to concert stages and social media provides a glimpse of the transnational K-pop dance phenomenon. Currently, K-pop is the leading force of *Hallyu* (the international spread of Korean popular culture), and is nearly a national (dance) project sponsored by conglomerate agencies and the government. Examples are KCON, an annual Korean culture convention and K-pop concert across the world organized by CJ E&M, and the international K-pop Cover Dance Festival, an annual amateur dance competition hosted by the *Seoul Shinmun Daily* and sponsored by Korean Cultural Centers. From creation to distribution, K-pop dance is not a mere hobby or a short-lived trend but rather a sustained development of a particular dance style. While virtual communication facilitates international collaboration, it could also reinforce a superficial understanding of each culture. Digitization of dance in distribution, reception, and consumption opens up room for discussing the ethics of cultural exchange in neoliberal capitalism where culture can be cut and pasted, like a collage, without in-depth, embodied learning rooted in a local cultural context. Further studies are needed on facets of K-pop choreography such as copyright issues, creation process and structure, and dance education in the digital era. Moreover, given the rapidly emerging dance fandom, an in-depth discussion of ethics in intercultural adaptation regarding K-pop fan-dancers will further advance and illuminate social dance of the global youth, Korean pop culture, and popular dance studies.

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