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From *Hanok* to *Hanbok*: Traditional iconography in Korean hip hop music videos

ABSTRACT

Popular culture texts not only entertain us, they shape our understanding of the world and our place in it. This article explores the contradictions and effects of the use of imagined and real Korean settings and traditional iconography in recent videos from Korean hip hop artists with a particularly close reading of the rapper Beenzino's mid-2016 offering 'January', additionally informed by Drunken Tiger's 'Mantra', MC Mong's 'Fame' and Agust D's 'Daechwita'. The videos each utilize settings that signify Koreanness and feature significant symbols of Korea. I investigate what symbols and icons are used to take a foreign genre and imbue it with Koreanness within the music video frame. I find that these videos circulate and re-circulate a limited number of icons of Korea, because the images are meant not to portray pre-modern Korea in its complexity, but traditional Korea both as a symbol of national pride and as a (domestic and international) tourist destination wherein the palace is a backdrop and you wear a hanbok *to create a visually striking Instagram post. Operating as the king of the music video's world, the hip hop artist maintains his artistic independence through challenging tradition with juxtaposed elements of the present day.*

KEYWORDS:
locality
hip hop
idol rap
Korean popular music
traditional iconography
Koreanness

VIGNETTE

The music video for Beenzino's 'January' begins with the familiar, all-encompassing sound of midsummer, the cicadas that blanket Korea in a droning hum. While the cicadas are the only gesture towards a Korean soundscape, 'January' vibrates with visual Koreanness. Korean locality is celebrated in almost every frame. As the video starts, Beenzino sways his long, lanky body as he raps in a pine forest. The *sonamu* (Korean red pine or *pinus densiflora*) is widely known as Korea's national tree – it blankets the mountains and surrounds Buddhist temples and historic sites. Subsequent scenes show the only woman in the video, Stefanie Michova, galloping on a horse through Korean farm fields. She arrives at a generic court building. Further scenes are shot in a throne room and two hallways of the building, and on the roof and in the courtyard of what almost appears to be a Buddhist temple.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea) is a physically small country with most commercial musical activity concentrated in the capital, Seoul (Song 2019a: 68; Farooqi 2020). In this article, I discuss conspicuous incorporation of Korean elements within the hip hop music video frame. Although when talking about Korean popular music (K-pop) I follow convention and differentiate between 'idol' K-pop, the music performed by beautiful young people under contract to major agencies (that often assume artistic control of the music) and music produced by artists with more independence, many artists straddle the line between these categories. In addition, hip hop has transformed 'Korean soundscapes as a staple ingredient of mainstream K-pop' (Kim and Lee 2020: 197), and a large number of idol releases foreground hip hop elements. The difference between a successful idol with a large fan base and a hip hop artist may largely be a matter of strategically deployed semantics. For example, in Im Jae-hyun's linguistic analysis of an interview with Zico, the former Block B member articulates that being able to act independently is the most important characteristic of being a rapper and not an idol (2020: 178). Agency control over idols, however, weakens through their career, and the term is deployed less the longer the career and the more established the artist. Therefore in this article I do not call any of the four artists I focus on 'idols'. Considering K-pop as an umbrella term for popular music from Korea and not a genre, however, I consider all four K-pop artists who make hip hop.

Korean artists with more creative independence are more nimble and able to initiate trends, which then have an impact on mainstream idol K-pop. In this article I discuss one such trend: the incorporation of conspicuous iconography, shooting locations and aural elements that explicitly represent Korea, such as the entire setting of Beenzino's video. I am focusing on imagery – specifically the way iconography allows Korea to function as a character within the music video frame. Because Korean music is increasingly consumed as a visual and aural art form, often by international audiences who do not understand Korean, this music has become a 'visualized music' often based on 're-elaborated' western elements, and visual analysis is essential for understanding it (Lee 2007: 136). The high-quality music videos produced in Korea have made Korean music ocularcentric (Choi and Maliangkay 2015: 3) and they serve as the systematic distillation of the perfect commercial product. What then is the meaning behind incorporating items that can be specifically read as representing Korea within the video frame?

As a scholar of the display of Korean heritage I have noted a dramatic uptick in the frequency of inclusion of visual icons of tradition which suggests that Korea is becoming rapidly more conspicuous as a character in these videos. In identifying this as a trend I do not deny the history of popular artists incorporating Korean traditional sounds – Seo Taiji and Boys 'Hayeoga' is a notable early example[1] – but from 'Hayeoga' in 1993 until approximately 2016 the rate of high profile releases using Korean traditional imagery or sounds rarely exceeded three per year, and most of those showed just a few seconds of eye-catching *sangmo* dancers or *samgomu* drummers. Even lower profile artists avoided identifiably Korean street scenes. Now we can observe scenes explicitly set in Korea ranging from street markets to *hanok* (*hanok* is the general term for Korean traditional buildings) that have supplanted the box sets and scenes of generically worldwide urban modernity common in previous years – an ubiquitous tactic in idol videos as it keeps the focus on the star(s) instead of on other visual elements.

In 1994, the Korean government under President Kim Youngsam began, tentatively at first, to promote the international consumption of popular culture products. Since then, various strategic choices have been made, many new initiatives and exciting developments have emerged, and funds have flowed from government coffers into the popular culture industries to promote the national branding of Korea.[2] Although concentrated efforts by a country to establish a specific brand image are generally ineffective, the international popularity of Korean music, movies, TV programmes and games has produced more positive awareness of Korea than have other government-sponsored activities (Elfving-Hwang 2013). Through popular culture international observers shift their focus from trade disputes and a nuclearized North Korea to shiningly attractive stars.

As the government has become invested in popular culture as part of Korea's cultural diplomacy, it has created general funding instruments and initiatives to promote Korea, often through the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) and the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), both overseen by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism. The most obvious and direct spending and support has been reserved for top *hallyu*, or Korean Wave, stars who appear in commercial films or print advertisements that encourage the foreign viewer to visit Korea.

This article contends that a new trend of explicit Koreanness in videos emerges, not from these *hallyu* stars but from Korean hip hop. In her seminal work on hip hop, ethnomusicologist Cheryl Keyes found that American hip hop artists would practice 'cultural reversioning' or foregrounding a connection between their music and cultural elements and customs connected to Africa and the Black Atlantic (2002: 21). I assert that Korean artists are now practicing a similar cultural reversioning as they replace elements that reflect American culture and locality and a stereotyped image of hip hop culture with spaces and icons that speak to Korean identity.

In this article, I examine the ways that artists, even those not tapped by the government to represent the country, explicitly incorporate elements into their music that read as Korean. I investigate what symbols and icons are used to visually represent Korea and assert that the shallow engagement may indicate that Korea is being incorporated as a perhaps not yet fully realized character that operates alongside the musical stars in their videos. Beenzino's 'January' is the first music video to be set within a traditional or pre-modern context *without also depicting a traditional story* as was the case with Kim Gunmo's

1. Here I specifically mention Seo Taiji and Boys as they are widely considered the first K-pop group in the contemporary style. The track 'Hayeoga' features the legendary percussionist Kim Duksoo. Yi Eunju (2003) tracked use of tradition in early K-pop, finding thirteen such tracks between 1989 and 2002.
2. See Elfving-Hwang (2013) for a discussion of nation branding through popular culture and Lee Hye-kyung (2013) for an overview of the government's policies vis-à-vis popular culture. Shim Doobo (2008) also provides a more historical picture, although focusing primarily on film and TV.

'Swallow' (2003) and Lizzy's 'Not an Easy Girl' (2015).[3] I followed the themes in Beenzino's video in comparison with the visuals in three more recent hip hop music videos. Although the music video is not a common site of analysis for Korean hip hop,[4] their level of sophistication, their extensive viewership (judging by YouTube metrics)[5] and the general internet-facilitated shift towards music as a visualized medium demonstrate the need for visual analysis.

FINDING KOREANNESS IN KOREAN HIP HOP

For more than a decade scholars of Korean popular culture have been explaining that what makes Korean music Korean is not some essentialized Korean elements, but the distinctive way in which Koreans have adapted, adjusted and appropriated international musical conventions (Lee 2007; Joo 2011). Music is produced, packaged and promoted in ways that are distinct to Korea, even while the instruments or genres may not be. Korean popular music was developed over the course of the twentieth century in a time where modernization meant westernization, and the highest selling music in Korea from 1930 onwards was no longer Korean 'traditional' music (Maliangkay 2007: 59). In fact, post-war American music outsold Korean music in Korea until the later 1980s (Hwang 2006). In this time period many industry veterans got their start by performing for the US Military – covering American hits in English (Maliangkay 2006, 2011; Kim and Saeji 2020). Unaware of the cultural and economic power that shaped Korean popular music, some still criticize it for the lack of obvious Korean elements (beyond language). It is true that as popular music was adapted and performed in Korea, it often preserved a fascination with the origin culture. Furthermore, because the most readily encountered idol videos conform to 'aesthetic rules characteristic of mainstream genres that use a corpus of signs and sounds easily acceptable by an international mainstream audience' (Fuhr 2015: 165), it may be hard for some viewers to recognize the Koreanness within the cultural products.

Yet, as a postcolonial country, Korean society is keenly aware of what is Korean and what is foreign. Despite performing genres that originated beyond Korea, Kim Pilho explains 'cultural nationalism is present at almost every turn of the history of Korean popular music. It appears in a number of different ways – most obviously in lyrics, but also using traditional musical elements as familiar symbols of national culture' (2016: 239). Adding Koreanness to western musical genres through using Korean traditional instruments (which are acoustic and constructed for a very different scale) can be difficult without explicit training in traditional music (and sampling is also hard since Korean traditional music is built off irregular and compound meters).[6] The reterritorialization of pop music to Korea has only rarely been accomplished through conspicuously incorporated elements of traditional Korean music, or *gugak*. Through the years artists have included some Korean traditional musical elements in their music; however, these cases are uncommon. Yi Eunju, a scholar of Korean music education, identified only thirteen well-known tracks between 1989 and 2002 (2003). Adding in visual nods to Korea, however, is relatively easy, particularly in the music video format – a format often referred to as a bricolage – because the creators are using and recombining elements that seem meaningful to create something new (Levi Strauss 1966). Such sampling of visuals fits well with the ethos of hip hop. As ethnomusicologist Um Haekyung explains, hip hop is 'postmodern music for which the creative process is to "cut and mix" different musical styles and cultural references,

3. Kim Gunmo and Lizzy's songs tell two Korean traditional stories, part of 'Heungboga' and 'Chunhyangga'.

4. The only previous publications that centre Korean hip hop videos in the analysis are a book chapter I published in 2016, and a journal article by Kim Suk-Young from 2020 – both focus on race, albeit in different ways.

5. As of 30 January 2021, the views on the four videos examined here were 'January' with 611,000 through Stone Music (https://youtu.be/YuNKWy7nA6Q) and 1.7 million through Illionaire (https://youtu.be/rNnePxt7K-U), 'Mantra' with 675,000 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCpawXf4HD8), 'Fame' with 4 million (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHbSzXM1e_s) and 'Daechwita' with 188 million (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGjAWJ2zWWI).

6. Incorporating *gugak* musical instruments and conventions is relatively difficult, as most musicians and producers in Korea are not familiar enough with *gugak* to comfortably fuse pop and *gugak*. As a voracious music consumer who has taught in this area for several years, even with the help of my former doctoral student Son Jeongeun I was only able to identify twenty pop or hip hop songs released between 2010 and 2017 in Korea that used traditional instruments or vocalizations, including relatively unknown songs released by independent artists.

allowing for a continuous process of hybridization and syncretism' (2013: 52). It is inherent to the cultural form to bring together different elements. This musical stitching together is an essential quality of hip hop music that has merely been extended to the visual framework.

Of course Korean hip hop shares many characteristics with the African American hip hop that inspired it.[7] Just as American MCs wrote and rapped about what was *real*, the things they had experienced, Korean MCs understand that Koreanness in hip hop can be interpreted as meaning authentic hip hop *to a Korean*. That Koreanness begins with the language, because due to linguistic differences between English and Korean, there are substantial ways in which hip hop had to change as it was performed in Korean. This has been detailed by Song Myoung-sun (2019a), but more specifically Jinny Park examines the ways that rapping in Korean changes rap at a syllable by syllable level (2020). In an interview, MC Meta, one of Korea's hip hop pioneers, explained 'the originality in Korean hip hop will rest on each artist's individual choice. For me, it's in the language' (Song 2019b: 22). The use of Korean (excluding loan words) in rap has been seen by some in the Korean scene as 'deeply connected with the performance of "real" hip hop' (Park 2020: 150). As Park explains, this attitude can be generalized to the entire hip hop scene in Korea:

> Korean MCs – native Korean speakers or not – are expected to proficiently rap only in Korean to be considered skilled and authentic. Because Korean rhyming techniques were developed in Korean hip hop as a practice of 'keepin' it real', proficiency in Korean rhyming techniques became the core identity of authentic Korean MCs.
>
> (2020: 146)

Some ethnic Korean rappers from overseas struggled to do so, but adapted. Expressing their own identity, artists such as Beenzino and Tiger JK who are fluent in English, will fold English lyrics into their work. Others such as MC Meta maintain an all-Korean language policy. For these artists, Korea is re-imagined in a way that serves to ground once-foreign culture – a process that has been carried out wherever hip hop culture has taken root (Solomon 2005: 17; Mitchell 2015: 247; Pennycook 2007). Hip hop artists are not alone in this. In Korea even punk rock incorporates themes and topics of Koreanness in lyrical content and in using explicit symbols of the nation, such as depicting the famous Admiral Yi Sunsin on an album cover (Dunbar 2020: 173) or naming an album *Our Nation* (Epstein 2000: 20, 26–27). Stephen Epstein has tracked how punk artists regularly write songs that tie them to the *minjung*, both in the sense of those who protest government injustice and in the sense of ordinary, working class Koreans (2000: 25). Punk artists''consciousness of and desire to proclaim a specific Korean identity' (2000: 25) demonstrates how important Koreanness is to even the most outwardly rebellious. After all, it was Crying Nut, one of the best known punk groups, that brought us the 2002 World Cup anthem 'Pilseung Korea' ('Victory Korea'). Idol groups, partially due to a focus on international audiences, have not always so explicitly foregrounded Korea. Many second- and third-generation idol groups with an emphasis on hip hop have sought to convey an authentic connection to hip hop through recruiting songwriters, choreographers and back-up dancers who give them the appearance of conformity to authentic American hip hop culture (Saeji 2016). Others aim for the same result without hiring foreign experts. Although these artists may be deeply entranced with hip hop culture,

7. The *Journal of World Popular Music* 2020, issue 2, focuses on the linkages between African American music and Korean hip hop (Kim and Saeji 2020), and Crystal Anderson's new book *Soul in Seoul* (2020) goes into detail about linkages between Korean and American hip hop, focusing mainly on idol hip hop and R&B artists.

the result has often been videos that come under fire for cultural appropriation from garden-variety stylistic choices for clothing and hair to outright perpetuation of negative stereotypes.[8] While idol stars are being blasted for appropriation, Korean hip hop artists with a deeper understanding of the culture have claimed and are celebrating Koreanness, partially through setting their videos in Korea.[9]

BEENZINO'S 'JANUARY' IN CONTEXT

Beenzino (Im Seongbin), a Korean rapper born in 1987, is signed to Illionaire, one of the most successful hip hop labels in Korea. Although less well known than idol stars, Beenzino is inarguably part of the same industry, performing guest tracks alongside established idols – such as Lee Hyori ('Love Radar', 2013), Epik High ('Born Hater', 2014) and BoA ('No Matter What', 2016). 'January', the fifth track on the eleven-song album *12*, was uploaded by both Illionaire and CJENMUSIC (now Stone Music on YouTube, this is a distributor and also an investor in Illionaire with a controlling stake). 'January' was Beenzino's first foray into using traditional iconography in his music videos and a vivid visual departure from his previous body of work.

I am reading 'January' alongside three important and highly visible contributions to this trend, 'Mantra' by Drunken Tiger from 2018, 'Fame' by MC Mong (featuring Song Ga-in and Chancellor) from 2019, and 'Daechwita' by Agust D from 2020. I chose to include 'Mantra' because it was released by one of the most influential artists in Korean hip hop. Drunken Tiger is a hip hop group that debuted in 1999; DJ Shine and Tiger JK (Seo Jeong-gwon, b. 1974) were the principle members, but after DJ Shine left in 2005, Drunken Tiger became essentially a vehicle for Tiger JK and his close collaborators. These label mates, especially Bizzy and Tiger JK's wife Yoonmirae, began releasing music with Tiger JK under the name MFBTY (My Fans are Better Than Yours) in 2015. Following son Jordan's stated objection to using the name 'Drunken' after Tiger JK quit consuming alcohol, in 2018 Tiger JK, with appearances by Yoonmirae and Bizzy, released the last album as Drunken Tiger. MC Mong (legally Sin Donghyeon, b. 1979) was one of the most commercially successful hip hop artists in Korea when in 2010 he was accused of trying to avoid mandatory military service by removing perfectly healthy teeth, provoking nationalist anger. Although ultimately the courts proved that he was not guilty of medically unnecessary dental procedures, the accusation of trying to avoid service nearly destroyed his career. In 2014 (post-service) he returned to the scene, pointedly singing 'Did You Miss Me or Did You Diss Me?' Although the 2019 track 'Fame' is from his third post-controversy album, *Channel 8*, it represents his real return to the scene.[10] MC Mong has long operated well within the comfort of the Korean mainstream music industry, and is now part of Million Market, an SM Entertainment offshoot. In Korea's small music industry there are always interconnections, even between adamant outsiders (such as the hip hop duo XXX) and insiders (Kim and Lee 2020: 203–05). Agust D (legally Min Yun-gi, b. 1993) is active within the idol world as a member of BTS, but maintains the alter-ego Agust D to strongly separate his identity performing idol pop (as Suga, one of BTS's rappers) from his identity as a solo hip hop artist. Within Korean hip hop discourse the line between idol and rapper is drawn based on 'exercising free will' as opposed to idols who are 'passive' (Im 2020: 178–79). 'Daechwita', co-written and co-produced by Agust D with El Capitxn, is the lead single off Agust D's second solo mixtape, *D-2*,

8. For one example among many see an article in *Teen Vogue* by Sandra Song, available at https://www.teenvogue.com/story/k-pop-idols-accountable-for-racist-actions. Accessed 23 January 2018.

9. This is not to say these artists have never been accused of appropriation, I am focused here on their use of Korean tradition.

10. After release in October 2019 the song achieved an 'all kill' on the Korean charts (simultaneously topping Melon, Soribada, Bugs and Genie), making MC Mong one of only five artists in 2019 that managed to achieve this feat. The other all-kills were by BTS, Bol4, AKMU and two were by IU, see https://www.sbs.com.au/popasia/blog/2019/11/04/only-2019-songs-perfect-all-kills. Accessed 23 January 2020.

which was distributed *for free* online. Making music and giving it away is the opposite of the idol business model, making it clear that Agust D is choosing his own path.

Korean music videos typically use western music video conventions in a sort of pastiche, while being neither 'an outright imitation, homage, nor parody' (Unger 2015: 27). This 'K-pop pastiche' (2015: 27), as Michael Unger calls it, includes a mix of western elements reinterpreted through a Korean lens. This often means that videos are rife with Christian symbols, although these should generally be seen as a placeholder for the West and western culture in general, without a need for explicit Christian belief on the part of the production company or singers involved.[11] The incorporation of western-coded bric-a-brac by the bricoleur (the maker of the bricolage) is no different from the incorporation of an English phrase (Benson 2013) or a foreign dancing body (Saeji 2016), in that its central purpose is to be hip to Koreans and to interact with and incorporate non-Korean fans by providing moments of familiarity and glimpses of the self within the music video. In other words, what these elements denote in the West is irrelevant, beyond their clear westernness. However, in this article I discuss four hip hop videos that create a new pastiche with Korean visual elements.

HOW DO YOU *SHOW* KOREANNESS IN A MUSIC VIDEO?

As sociologist Robert Hamilton explains, 'K-rap has reached a strange interlude marked by an express desire to find Koreanness in and through rap music' (2020: 137); Koreanness can be *found* in locality, iconography, sound and lyrical content, as I will explain below.

Locality

Locality is an 'organizing concept delineating a vast range of imaginary or actual social practices' that can be explicitly referenced in lyrics (Forman 2002: 3), or shown to the viewer in music video. According to Koreanist Stephen Epstein 'whereas idol K-pop rarely features actual Korean rural landscapes or urban backgrounds in its attempts to maintain a readily transferable global appeal, indie bands proclaim local allegiances frequently' (2015: 12–13). Now it seems that hip hop is also taking on the mantle of the representative national subject, or as Epstein interprets it, demonstrating a 'more vividly felt sense of place' (2015: 13). Location is important – hip hop authenticity is often expressed as pride of place within music that celebrates the local in lyrics or conforms to a given regional 'sound' or style. In fact, locality or spatiality is a 'central organizing principle of value, meaning and practice within hip hop culture' (Forman 2000: 66). In the discussion of music and place in Korea the entire peninsula is often treated as one, a country with the Seoul district of Hongdae as its capital. However, as Koreanist Amos Farooqi shows, independent hip hop scenes located outside Seoul also strive to assert their distinctiveness (2020), and media scholar Song Myoung-sun recounts multiple instances of rappers telling their own story that highlights Korean places beyond Seoul within their verses (2019a: 80–81). While some artists are strongly attached to a musical identity that foregrounds their Korean roots, others may see branding their music 'Korean' to be an unnecessary limitation. Song observed that some hip hop artists actively position their music as Korean by calling it Han-guk hip hop,[12] while other seek to be seen as just hip hop (2019a: 30).[13] Beyond what they may say in an interview, however, the explicit introduction

11. Despite the vigorous evangelical presence in Korea, Christianity has not increased its hold on the populace, with the 2015 census revealing a percentage of Christians almost equivalent to that of 1995. According to this data, only 19.7 per cent of citizens of the ROK adhere to Protestantism (a further 7.9 per cent are Roman Catholic, and 56.9 per cent claim they have no organized religion).

12. Han-guk can mean the country Korea or the adjective Korean.

13. This mirrors the argument of some K-pop fans who argue the idol group BTS should no longer be called K-pop. For a somewhat academic discussion of BTS as K-pop (or not), see the author and five others' online debate in the BTS journal *Rhizomatic Revolution Review*, https://ther3journal.com/issue-1/roundtable-kpop/. Accessed 21 January 2021 (see also @alapadma2 et al. 2020).

of localities and icons signifying Koreanness in recent videos foregrounds the nation and Korean culture. As mentioned, Beenzino's video can be seen as initiating a trend of setting (wholly or in part) Korean videos in a fantasy of the Korean past.

There are different ways to call out a setting – musicologist Ian Condry found Japanese hip hoppers including samurai imagery in Japan (2006: 49, 51–52), but historically Korean idols have avoided showing Korea within their videos, which are generally shot on sets (Khiun 2013: 171). Unger explains this is because the 'artificiality of the sets allows the performers to wield authority over the space by breathing life into the space through their physical presence and dance' (2015: 37). Similarly, popular music scholar Michael Fuhr has asserted that place, in this case Korea, is 'imaginary, closely tied to desire, fantasy, and imagination, and activates specific modes of musical processing and interpretation' (2015: 163). Fuhr's research has documented the tendency to avoid visual localization in videos – but neither have the videos been distinctively foreign.

Despite not explicitly showing Korea, Lee Hee-eun found music videos from the 1990s were 'laden with meanings that both construct *and* deconstruct national identities' (2006: 136, original emphasis). In the 1990s, videos set abroad became Korean as the 'collective memory of Koreans' nostalgic past replaces any visible symbols of non-Koreanness' (2006: 139). In the 2010s, major idol groups continued to shoot videos with recognizable outdoor locations like Hong Kong (Got7's 'You Are'), Los Angeles (Winner's 'Really Really' and Seventeen's 'I Don't Want to Cry'[14]), New York (Seventeen's 'Lilili Yababy') and Vancouver (Twice's 'Likey'; all released in 2017). Even when a scene is shot in an identifiable place, it is often sanitized and controlled – making the foreign city subordinate to the idols. In this way, the videos show geographic mobility (and court foreign fans), but culturally they remain Korean as they mediate the global and local for the audience. What recent hip hop videos have done is to make visual Koreanness more explicit – if animating a foreign landscape with a Korean body was good, then maybe animating a Korean landscape is better.

The vividly felt sense of place in Beenzino's 'January' manifests from the cicadas to the final montage of swirling images. Among the video's elements designed as layered intertextual references to Koreanness one of the most obvious is the Korean style buildings, or *hanok*. The buildings are grand and distinctive, many with painted beams and rafters, topped by tile roofs arranged around a central courtyard. YDG, the guest rapper in the music video, straddles the peak of a tile roof and this immediately evokes the acclaimed hit film *Chihwaseon*. It is telling that the references to tradition in 'January' intertextually nod at other mediatizations of tradition. In the award-winning 2002 film by Im Kwon-taek, the painter at the centre of the story sometimes retreats to the roof to drink from a ceramic flask, just as YDG does in 'January'.[15] And just as 'January' refers to earlier Korean media, later videos may have been inspired or influenced by 'January', as each shares common elements (see Table 1).[16] Alternatively the iconography used could just be so common and widespread as to become unremarkable. For example, *dancheong*, or rafter and beam paintings, decorate the *hanok* buildings in 'January', 'Mantra' and 'Daechwita'. *Dancheong* in the familiar Korean *obangsaek* (colours of the five directions) has an entire vocabulary, and depending on the colours and designs used the viewer can ascertain something about the building – for example, in 'January' as Beenzino dances in an interior hallway the painting

14. Fans of Seventeen actually tracked down each location in the video and posted them on Twitter, https://twitter.com/pledis17swager/status/866654533883011072. Accessed 20 January 2018.

15. I unearthed a news article by Yu Byeongcheol of Wow! Han-geuk Gyeongjae TV that also noted the same reference, available at http://www.wowtv.co.kr/newscenter/news/view.asp?artid=A201607290064. Accessed 28 May 2017. A YouTube comment by user Jeon Hyeontae that stated 'Joseon Emperor Beenzino and Chihwaseon YDG. Just this makes it an all kill!!!' is visible on the Illionaire upload of the 'January'.

16. Intertextuality in Korean music videos is always densely layered, see Saeji (2021) for more explanation.

Table 1: Overview of traditional elements.

	Beenzino	Drunken Tiger	MC Mong	Agust D
Hanok and dancheong	x	x		x
Hanbok/minbok clothing	x	x	x	x
Gat or other traditional hats		x	x	x
Ilwolobongdo painting	x	x	x	x
Fan	x		x	
Masked dancers	x	x	x	
Korean cow			x	x
Shamanic ritual elements	x		x	
Giant barrel drum		x	x	x
Customs of punishment			x	x

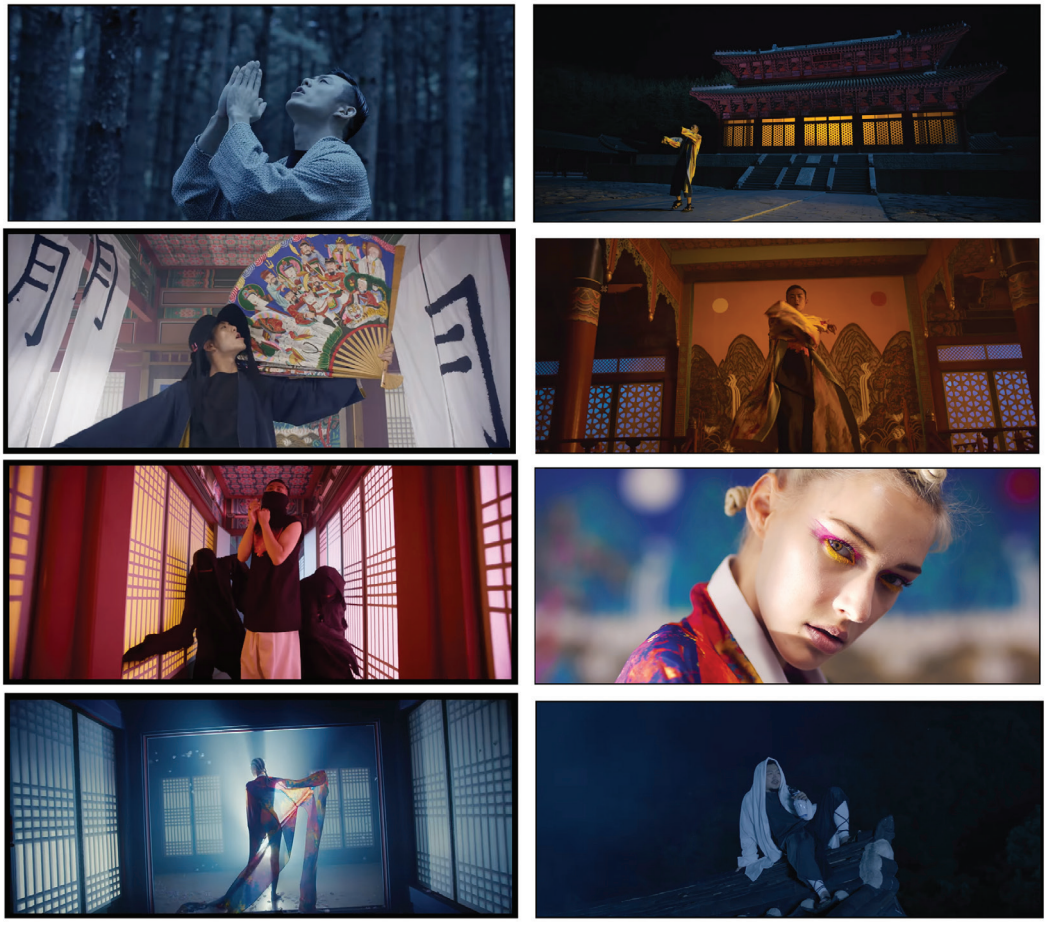

Figure 1: Beenzino's 'January' (2016). Screenshots from the video.

on the roof tells us the hallway was on the route of the king – this is not a hidden corner of the palace – but for the average audience member it is simply a colourful decoration.

Iconography from Korean tradition

Within 'January' we can see some items that are explicitly religiously coded: most notably, the fan and what appears to be the temple setting for YDG. The fan wielded by both Stefanie and Beenzino in the video is a very large representation of the Ten Guardian Deities. This type of fan would only be used by a shaman, as part of a shamanic ceremony. When traditional Korean culture is referenced in music videos, it is almost never religiously coded, which makes Beenzino's use of shamanic and Buddhist visual elements even more remarkable (although Beenzino's video was released a year after Deep Flow's shamanic-iconography-laced 'Jakdu' from 2015). In the modern era, shamanism has been both discounted as 'folk belief' rather than 'religion'[17] and also elevated to the status of carrying the nationalistic imprint of Korean distinctiveness, as part of resistance to Japanese assimilation efforts (Janelli 1986; Kendall 2009: 18–19). The way that Beenzino appears in 'January' both as the ruler and as the shaman, wielding Korean symbolism as a cloak of national distinctiveness and belonging rather than as a political or religious statement, adds another layer of intertextual dissonance, which unlike his choice to wear a t-shirt in a palace will only be perceived by knowledgeable (Korean) audiences.

Similarly, in 'Fame' MC Mong has set up an altar; this could be read in two ways. It could be a shamanic *gosa* altar table, because in traditional performance conventions, before a show the artists would perform *gosa*, bowing in front of a table offered to the spirits – just as MC Mong appears to be bowing to the table in the video. The banners on each side (a *gosa* element) read 'boom shakalaka' and 'e-he-ra-di-ya' (a vocable line common to Gyeonggi folk songs). Traditional performers held *gosa* to appease the spirits, then sent those spirits on their way at the end of the performance, often by burning masks and other props – at the end of MC Mong's video a bonfire rages in front of the assembled performers. However, the table could also be interpreted as arranged for a traditional wedding with trappings in blue and red, a sprig of bamboo and wood ducks. In another scene for a moment it seems we seen a palanquin traditionally used to bring the bride to a wedding. The traditional wedding, or *jeontong hollye*, is a ceremony with both shamanic and Confucian elements, perhaps most commonly performed today as a tourist attraction. Footage of MC Mong at the wedding/altar table is interspersed with him surrounded by floral displays decorated with congratulatory messages and well wishes – although the messages do not clarify why he should be congratulated.

The most common icon of Korean tradition in the videos is a type of painting. In fact, in 'January' there are two – behind the fan-wielder and at an elevated location that I read as the throne (although absent a seat). This type of painting is called 日月五峯圖 (*ilwolobongdo*), after the stylized landscape with five mountain peaks and the sun and moon above the mountains. It was a type of longevity painting that was displayed behind the throne – in fact, 'wherever a king went, a screen of this iconography followed and was set behind his chair or throne' in the throne room the painting would be constructed as part of the room (Kim Han 2013: 20). Originally exclusively

17. The census, which does not offer the choice of multi-religiosity, also does not offer the option of shamanism (called *musok sinang* or *syam-eo-ni-jeum* in Korean).

Figure 2: Drunken Tiger's 'Mantra' (2018). Screenshots from the video.

for palace use: 'The sun on the right and the moon on the left symbolized the kings' constant good governance. Such paintings not only symbolize the royal presence, but also represent a promise from heaven of ancestral blessing on his descendants' (Yoon 2006: 127). The second painting visible behind the fan-wielding dancers is also a five peaks painting, but is smaller and brighter. The same *ilwolobongdo* imagery appears in all four videos, in each placed behind the rapper. Both Tiger JK and Agust D sit upon a throne, making the reading of them as the king particularly clear. MC Mong sits at a desk posing as an educated *yangban* (the Joseon Dynasty elite), holding a fan, a book on the table in front of him and an *ilwolobongdo* on the folding screen behind him.

Perhaps he is the king, at solitary study, or perhaps a relative with eyes on the throne.

Another common element is that of masked dancers – in both 'January' and 'Mantra' the faces of dancers are wrapped, while they wield long *hansam* sleeve extensions to make their motions more dynamic. *Hansam* were used by mask dance traditions from Gyeonggi and Hwanghae Province, while MC Mong uses the distinctive wooden mask of the *yangban* from the Hahoe Byeolsin'gut Talnoli mask dance drama located in Gyeongsang Province. In 'Daechwita' there are people with their heads covered, who shake their heads to the beat.

All four of the music videos play fast and loose with *hanbok*, or Korean traditional clothing. In 'January' the only truly traditional clothing element appears to be Stefanie's dress. When Stefanie's image is cropped to feature her face, the viewer assumes she is wearing *hanbok*, but as the camera does a longer take, we see the dress reveal her body to the viewer, and only the collar seems *hanbok*-esque.[18] What, in particular, should we make of Stefanie? Although Stefanie is Beenzino's real-life girlfriend and Beenzino is not an idol star, she is a blonde German woman with her hair in both Bantu knots and cornrows.[19] In short, Stefanie does not fit in with the traditional elements in the video. She does, however, play an important role. Stefanie is in the video to provide atmosphere (Saeji 2016), a hint that non-Korean fans are welcome within the world of Korean popular music (and within Korean tradition). Her status as a model, a celebrity and a person who enjoys Korea and Korean things transforms the boring and traditional into the fascinating and exotic tourist destination – another Korean product to be transformed into prosperity. Although Beenzino never wears hanbok, at one point he dances in a yellow unlined silk robe, hanging open and printed with an image of giant ginseng roots. Although some viewer comments questioned if a Korean king could wear yellow,[20] this imagery of the classic Korean souvenir felt like another connection between the video and commodification of Korea – in this case through the well-known health product.

Tiger JK's clothing hints at the quilted *hanbok* coat worn in winter, and strips hanging down from it echo the long hanging ribbon of the *hanbok goreum*. His pants are loose, and atop his head is perched what appears to be a tattered top hat. During the Joseon Dynasty gentlemen wore a large brimmed black horsehair mesh hat called a *gat*, but at the end of the nineteenth century the traditional shape of the *gat* shifted, the top got larger while the brim became narrower, so Tiger JK's top hat also seems to reference Korean traditional attire. The only other characters who join Tiger JK on the traditional set are dancers who wear what appears to be *minbok* (peasant *hanbok*) but instead of undyed white cotton their clothing is all red.

MC Mong's video has perhaps the widest range of costuming. He is dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, a suit, as a *yangban* gentleman in *hanbok* with wide-brimmed *gat*, in *minbok* alternately leading and riding a cow through a barren landscape, and in another scene in white traditional peasant clothes he is being punished, trapped in wooden stocks and then forced to drink poison. The most fantastical dance scene is backed by a giant representation of a *jing* (traditional metal gong) with the *hanja* (Sinitic character) for dream (Mong means dream) painted on it. He is surrounded by women in *hanbok* (one in proper *hanbok*, others in very short *hanbok*, in some cases missing the top entirely). On one side of the set is a swing, such as women would swing on at the Dano holiday, on the other is a mechanical bull which a hanbok clad woman rides in wild abandon.

18. Adjusting western clothing to meet Korean standards of fashion and expressiveness is nothing new, and the ways hip hop styles are compromised to suit the aesthetics in Korea have been remarked in previous publications (Um 2013: 55–56; Hare and Baker 2017). Since the 1990s, it has been a trend in Korea to adjust the traditional *hanbok* to suit modern tastes as well.

19. Both of these hairstyles are considered cultural markers of African and African American communities, and Korean rappers sporting these hairstyles have long been criticized. For example, the YouTube user 'Shut up I'm pretty' commented, 'If you gonna let Stefanie appropriate culture can you just let her do yours instead of others? Thanks. Bantu knots is literally African culture'. The comment earned 51 replies, with the profanity-laced discussion ranging from cultural appropriation to other non-Black performers who at one time sported either Bantu knots or cornrows. The comment is on the CJENMUSIC upload of Beenzino's January, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuNKWy7nA6Q. Accessed 28 May 2017.

20. The policing of reality in the case of these videos would be an interesting side project. Does the colour of Beenzino's robe matter when in other scenes he is wearing a t-shirt? Or does it matter if Agust D has a scar and a king could not, when in other scenes he is wearing army surplus and jeans? Clearly the videos are not meant to be faithful

All types of traditional headgear appear in Agust D's 'Daechwita', along with intertextual nods such as a cameo by fellow BTS members Jungkook and Jin, and two butchers in a twisted headband and long hair, a seeming reference to the memorable butcher in Rain's 2014 'La Song'. Characters in the background wear *minbok*. Agust D switches between his Agust D persona in contemporary dress, and his king persona in silken *hanbok* pieces in black, a very un-kingly colour.

Sonic engagement with Koreanness

Of the four tracks, 'Fame', 'Mantra' and 'Daechwita' engage sonically with tradition through incorporation of traditional musical elements. Beenzino's 'January', however, limits aural incorporation of tradition to lyrical content.

The lyrics and visuals in 'January' are not as mismatched as they appear at first – just as the iconography celebrates Koreanness, the lyrics celebrate Koreanness as Beenzino fills his shopping cart with all the items needed to make the traditional soup eaten on the first day of the lunar year, or in the words of Song Myoung-sun, Beenzino's music is Han-guk hip hop because it is telling a Korean story (2019a: 37). The eye-catching visuals seem to have provoked a feeling of pride in being Korean, in seeing Korea represented well for the foreign eye (which is shown even within the video frame with Stefanie's presence). At the same time, viewers who understand the lyrics may feel as though they are privy to an inside joke, a dose of realism in the reminder that in fact we all poop, as YDG raps:

I'm too big to smear shit on the walls like a child/busy cleaning up my shit	치기 철없는 아이처럼 벽에 똥칠 하고 다니기엔 어울리지 않는 덩치 내가 싼 똥 치우기 바빠 근데
They should clean up their own/ my son's shit, my daughter's shit	개가 싼 똥 치워야 할 텐데 아들내미 싼 똥, 딸내미 싼 똥
I'm rolling around in a field of shit, but I like this life	똥밭에 굴러도 이승이 좋아
My mom and my grandma cleaned shit, too/is life about cleaning up shit?[21]	엄마도 할머니 똥 치우다 보낸 세월 인생은 똥 치우다 가는 것인가

Reading the online reactions, Beenzino's goofy, earnest delivery and YDG's realism seems to have struck a chord with Korean viewers. The song, like 'Mantra', is expressing something personal to the listener. 'Mantra', primarily illustrates Tiger JK's journey from his own past to the present.[22] 'Mantra' also brings the aerophone *taepyeongso* (a double reed similar to an oboe) into the aural mixture at 1:21, as the video enters the chapter incorporating tradition.

MC Mong's use of traditional sounds is more explicit – both song and video sonically connect to the genre called *teuroteu* (trot). Trot began to emerge in Korea in the 1930s and is now thought of by many Koreans as a type of traditional music, albeit with a shorter history (Son 2006). MC Mong, wearing a sequin-bedecked costume stereotypical of a trot singer, sings 'life is more a trot than a hip hop'. The track features new trot star Song Ga-in who has a traditional musical background through her mother, a noted performer of the shamanic heritage art *Jindo Ssitgimgut* (a shamanic ceremony from Jindo

reproductions of history.

21. Translation of lyrics from https://klyrics.net/beenzino-january-feat-ydg-lyrics-hangul-romanization/. Accessed 1 April 2018.

22. In the world of the video Yoonmirae and Bizzy send a flying Cadillac that works as a time machine back to 1999 – in fact, the car has a vanity plate with tabs for 1999 reading 'Year of the Tiger' (the name of a Drunken Tiger album from 1999). With the help of the car we can reference Tiger JK's early days in LA through signs ('PCH', 'Venice' and 'Beverly Hills'), a mid-1990s boombox, American style parking metres and the alarmist end-of-the-world scenarios surrounding the end of the millennium and Y2K. We can also see Tiger JK's early days in Korea through the music sales display with cassettes and posters for his early work, footage from Drunken Tiger releases in 1999 and an inscribed date on the footage informing us it is shot in 1999. At the same time the video connects to the (2018) present, through a wild ride in the Cadillac and another date on the footage informing us we are now in 2018. A large sign for Feel Ghood Music, founded in 2013, is displayed prominently on the wall. Tiger JK is inviting us in.

Figure 3: MC Mong's 'Fame' (2019). Screenshots from the video.

23. Korean construction of national identity in the 1960s and 1970s under president Park Chunghee was closely connected to a project to preserve heritage arts, like Jindo Island's *ssitgimgut*, as well as *pansori*. Korea is not the only country to construct national identity through reference to traditional performing

Island).[23] Song Ga-in was formerly a student of *pansori* traditional epic song, but through the *Miss Trot* singing contest she has become a crossover sensation, as she belts out 'e-he-ra-di-ya' and 'aigo' in 'Fame' the vocal quality demonstrates the aesthetic connections between *pansori* and trot. At the same time, MC Mong shows Koreanness in a different way – through intertextual references to his own earlier scandal.

Sociologists such as Seong Yeonju and Kim Hongjung (2015) have found that Korean hip hop artists produce very different responses to themes in hip hop than American artists – they found in particular that Korean hip hop used the 'diss' in lyrics not as a type of play, but as a way to assert moral stances. A moral stance that is foregrounded here is voiced by MC Mong as he addresses

youth and also TOP, a member of Big Bang, about the dangers of fame – MC Mong reminds us it is as transitory as beer foam. In 2010 TOP released a video 'Turn It Up' which expressly referred to MC Mong's teeth, in 'Fame' MC Mong is responding with a line that seems to call out TOP's positive drug test for marijuana, 'Hey dude, I don't do drugs, so go sell to someone else'. The connection to TOP is cemented by MC Mong's use of 'boom shakalaka' (a line delivered by TOP in quintet Big Bang's 2012 hit-song 'Fantastic Baby') as the chorus of his song. Even MC Mong associating himself with the nationalist imagery of tradition seems aimed at the past scandal – although an executioner threatens to cut off his head, at the end of the video he dances with a bevy of beauties in *hanbok* mini-skirts – he has survived.

arts, as explored by Griffith Rollefson in the context of Irish hip hop artist's incorporation of traditional music (2020).

However, of the four tracks, it is 'Daechwita' that has the thickest engagement with aural tradition. The track begins with a sample from a 1984 recording by the musicians of the National Gugak Center of 'Daechwita' a type of marching music used for royal processions and the military. The sample, however, lasts just twenty seconds, while *taepyeongso*, the low throbbing drone of a *jing* (a large gong) and *gwaenggwari* (a small metal gong), continue

Figure 4: Agust D's 'Daechwita' (2020). Screenshots from the video.

to be heard weaving throughout the piece. In an interview uploaded to the BangtanTV YouTube channel Agust D explained his long affection for historical dramas, his explicit intention to create strong contrasts with the mix of traditional and contemporary elements in the video, and also reminded the viewer that he has previously layered traditional elements into his music.[24]

DISCUSSION: LOCALITY, NATIONALISM AND PRESERVING AUTHORITY AS AN ARTIST

These videos are not ideotainment, 'the repackaging of propagandistic – often nationalistic – content in popular cultural formats' as Sheng Zou explores in the case of Chinese hip hop (2019: 179). Although Agust D (as Suga of BTS) has been tapped by the government as a de facto ambassador for the country in the past, there is no incentive for Beenzino, Tiger JK and MC Mong, along with other independent, alternative and lesser-known performers to include clearly Korean places and cultural items in their music videos.[25] As underground and independent hip hop generally works with a very limited budget, it is not surprising that the further the video is from the idol world, the less common the use of individually constructed, professionally lit sets. Shooting at Buan Cine Theme Park (which is also a tourist destination for fans of dramas shot there),[26] as Beenzino did, is not free, but it is cheaper than construction of elaborate sets for one time use in a hangar building, which is still the standard practice for idol videos.[27]

However, I see this aesthetic shift as much more than finding an affordable place to shoot a video. Popular culture texts are not just entertaining us, they are also shaping our understanding of the world and our place in it. These videos use visual engagement with Koreanness, through incorporation of landscape elements, and items that evoke traditional Korea such as Korean *hanok,* street markets, *han-geul* (Korean script) signage and iconography like the *hanbok*, the *ilwolobongdo* painting or even the native Korean species of cow (which appears in both 'Fame' and 'Daechwita'). Of course, Koreanness is also demonstrated by rapping in Korean, and through the incorporation of traditional instruments and singing styles, and messages that relate to Korean culture, history and contemporary concerns.

The imagery in these videos, taken as a whole, can be read as part of 're-territorializing' Korean popular music (Um 2013). From the early 1960s, the Park Chunghee regime leveraged folk culture to appeal to nationalism and cloak the government in a mantle of Koreanness, and by the 1970s the pro-democracy protestors responded by re-appropriating folk tradition from the government. They became intimately involved with folk culture and used performing arts, principally mask dance dramas, drumming ensembles (such as the sonic undercurrent in 'Daechwita') and shamanic ritual in protest against the government.[28] In a parallel move, today's independent artists may be pushing back, asserting their own definition of a *Korean* artist through appropriation of the same traditional elements for their performances. In addition to responding to hip hop's call to localize the art forms, Beenzino, Tiger JK, MC Mong and Agust D 'draw inspiration from their regional affiliations' and visually foreground that in their 'construction of spatial imagery' (Forman 2002: xvii). In his book Murray Forman theorized that hip hop used 'extreme locality' because it focused on location at a level even of streets and neighbourhoods (2002: xvii); in these four videos the location presented is an imaginary pre-modern Korean place. It is unnamed because it is not meant

24. See the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLw8gLqfobE. Accessed 29 January 2021.

25. In 2019 MFBTY released a video, 'Dream Catcher' that began with a frame proclaiming support from the Ministry of Culture Sports and Tourism and KOCCA; however, a conversation with MFBTY's social media manager, Michelle Eun, revealed that the sponsorship in 'Dream Catcher' was to highlight award winning young Korean fashion designers sponsored by KOCCA, who supplied clothing for 'Dream Catcher'.

26. Thank you to Lee Yeonghwa for uncovering the filming location. You can see it here: http://www.buanpark.kr/. Accessed 28 January 2018.

27. I found videos from a large number of artists who do not have the budget of Beenzino who shot videos on the street with *hanok* in the background, walked through traditional markets while filming or conspicuously showed signage in *han-geul* in their videos.

28. For more see Timothy Tangherlini (1998) and Lee Namhee (2003).

to be a real place – or it is meant to be discoverable wherever the audience goes – whether that is a drama filming set or one of Seoul's reconstructed palaces. The artists themselves become the equivalent of the tourist in rented *hanbok* wandering the palace with a selfie stick, incongruous tennis shoes peeking from beneath her skirts. We can all play with tradition they say to their Korean and foreign audience. Tradition is a playground and a backdrop, not where we live.

Korean audiences reacted positively, even nationalistically, as the rappers bring tradition to life. Korean viewers' response to 'January' was generally positive on YouTube and blogs.[29]

> It seems like Beenzino's 'January' music video shows Eastern coolness and beauty. Beenzino, YDG, Stefanie, only these three appear, but it doesn't feel lacking. And although each appeared differently, there wasn't a sense of emptiness. Ah, really awesome!
>
> (Blogger 'Brosu')[30]

> Like a regular hip hop music video, sparkling gold necklace and gold watch […]. I've seen many like that, but a hip hop video shot with Korean items in a Korean style place, I couldn't even imagine that. kkkk. I'm shook.
>
> (YouTube user rladudtj02)

> After seeing Instagram I watched the video, damn cool! Beenzino's lyrics match it well, and discussing poop with that background was really funny.
>
> (YouTube user Gimchokotan)

> Wow damn flippin'. Among the music videos I have seen in the past few years, this was definitely the coolest […] the Korean traditional things and modern music combined in a music video is something I have wished to see once, and the feeling was freaking awesome! I can't even express how very cool this is. Truly cool. Beenzino's the best.
>
> (YouTube user Ra Jinho)

The majority of YouTube viewer comments in English on all four of these videos also praised the aesthetics.[31]

Through hip hop, these performers are establishing the boundaries of their community and constructing their own hybrid local identity as Korean or diasporic Korean subjects (Lee 2011). A substantial number of the Korean hip hop performers including Beenzino and Tiger JK have lived outside Korea. A turn towards pride in Korean roots can be part of their concern, as former residents in the diaspora, with search for identity, belonging and community. All four artists may be aware that today's youth are 'systematically alienated from the sights and sounds that previous generations intimately adhered to' so that they have become 'tourists on their own soil' (Park 2003: 4). The four videos examined here could be conscious efforts to appeal to the youth audience and show them that Korean tradition and hip hop are not incompatible. Traditional artists have tried to reach out to K-pop audiences in a variety of ways (Yates-Lu 2019; Finchum-Sung 2009); similarly these videos seem to extend a hand across the aisle from hip hop towards tradition, bringing their audiences along with them.

29. All translations by the author.

30. This blog is available at http://blog.brosu.com/entry/빈지노-January-Feat-양동근-뮤직비디오. Accessed 6 March 2017.

31. The only exception is the large number of comments either positive or negative, related to Stefanie's presence in Beenzino's video.

'January', 'Mantra', 'Fame' and 'Daechwita' also increase the Korean viewers' interest by offering something beyond the visuals from a historical drama. The surprising cultural juxtapositions provide something 'foreign' for Korean and non-Korean viewers alike, and the apparent contradictions may be appealing as long as the video is still evaluated as visually compelling and aurally pleasing. The mix of Korean and non-Korean elements preserve Beenzino, Tiger JK, MC Mong and Agust D's status as hip hop artists who are architects of their own world, rather than devotees of tradition or the tools of a nationalist agenda. In other words, Korean elements create visual distinctiveness while non-Korean elements preserve artistic credibility.

In all four videos Korean tradition is exciting and eye-catching. It provides new visuals, unlike those that the audience is accustomed to seeing paired with hip hop. However, none of the videos have a solid reason to incorporate tradition – the lyrics only very tangentially relate to the past ('I'm a king/I'm a boss!' asserts Agust D), and the stories that are shown within the videos, while intentional and well-produced, are not a recreation of the stories in the sung verses. Further, through the videos, the visual representation of Korean tradition is distilled down to a few icons that represent Koreanness. What Korea is being represented? Is it actually Korea, or is it Korea as a new signifier for 'cool' (Fedorenko 2017: 504)? In the K-Dramaland (Schulze 2013) setting of 'January' Beenzino is juxtaposing the Confucian monarch's throne room with the Buddhist temple and the shamanic fan. This shows Beenzino may be attempting to thwart, as much as project, an imagination of a cultural tradition with an anarchic anti-authoritarian reconfiguration of the rules.[32] The nativist aesthetic of the video references the now trite aesthetic of film director Im Kwontaek through placing YDG on the tile roof, but is then redeemed and repositioned in reference to global fandom through the addition of the pan-Asian elements and Stefanie.[33] 'Mantra', 'Fame' and 'Daechwita' achieve the same goal of maintaining artistic control of the video space, but avoid viewer confusion through juxtaposing traditional elements with contemporary westernized things.

However, there is still pride and nationalism being invoked or provoked through the videos. Similar to the case examined in Kazakhstan by ethnomusicologist Megan Rancier, even when youth know little about tradition, these symbols can carry significant emotional power (2009: 388). This power is connected to nationalism, as demonstrated by many recent hip hop videos, where, if just for a brief moment, a Korean flag appears in the frame. If one overlooks the flags – rarely lasting half a second of screen time – this could be labelled a new fascination with self-orientalization or exoticization through the use of specifically Korean or more broadly Asian elements in songs and music videos. Some could even argue that in an era where Korean traditional culture has been stripped of meaning and repurposed as generically Korean for tourism purposes, the icons, even the flags, are just as placeless as anonymous western-looking sets. However, I see a blatant refusal to whitewash the aesthetics of a video to conform to a western pop image, an assertion of pride in Korea. Waving Korea's flag (literally), these artists brand themselves as the true representatives of Korea, holding their heads high. To apply Forman one last time, the flag, the *hanok*, the *hanbok* – these visual symbols 'maintain connections' as these artists are 'rapping about situations' of Korea today, they are showing the 'scenes and sites that comprise' an easily identifiable Korea (2002: 180).

Through foregrounding Korean iconography within the video frame these hip hop artists are clearly demonstrating their music is Korean hip hop, not

32. Thanks to Park Sunyoung for the wording of this observation.

33. The pan-Asian elements in 'January' did not work well for some audiences who became confused. Foreign viewers recognizing something as Chinese or Japanese were then sometimes unable to see the abundant Korean elements as Korean. Teaching an entire semester long course on K-pop I assigned analysis of Beenzino's video as part of the final exam and even some of my own students wrote about 'Japanese-styled architecture, art, landscape, and even clothing', 'Asian elements feel Chinese inspired', 'YDG holds a china cup drinking and sitting on the temple roof seems like an ancient Chinese knight' and 'The video's background appeared to be of Chinese traditional scene with Chinese palace, Chinese traditional dressing and the forest that would be typically be seen in Chinese martial arts movies'. All of these exam excerpts from students enrolled in 'Korean Popular Music in Context' in fall of 2016.

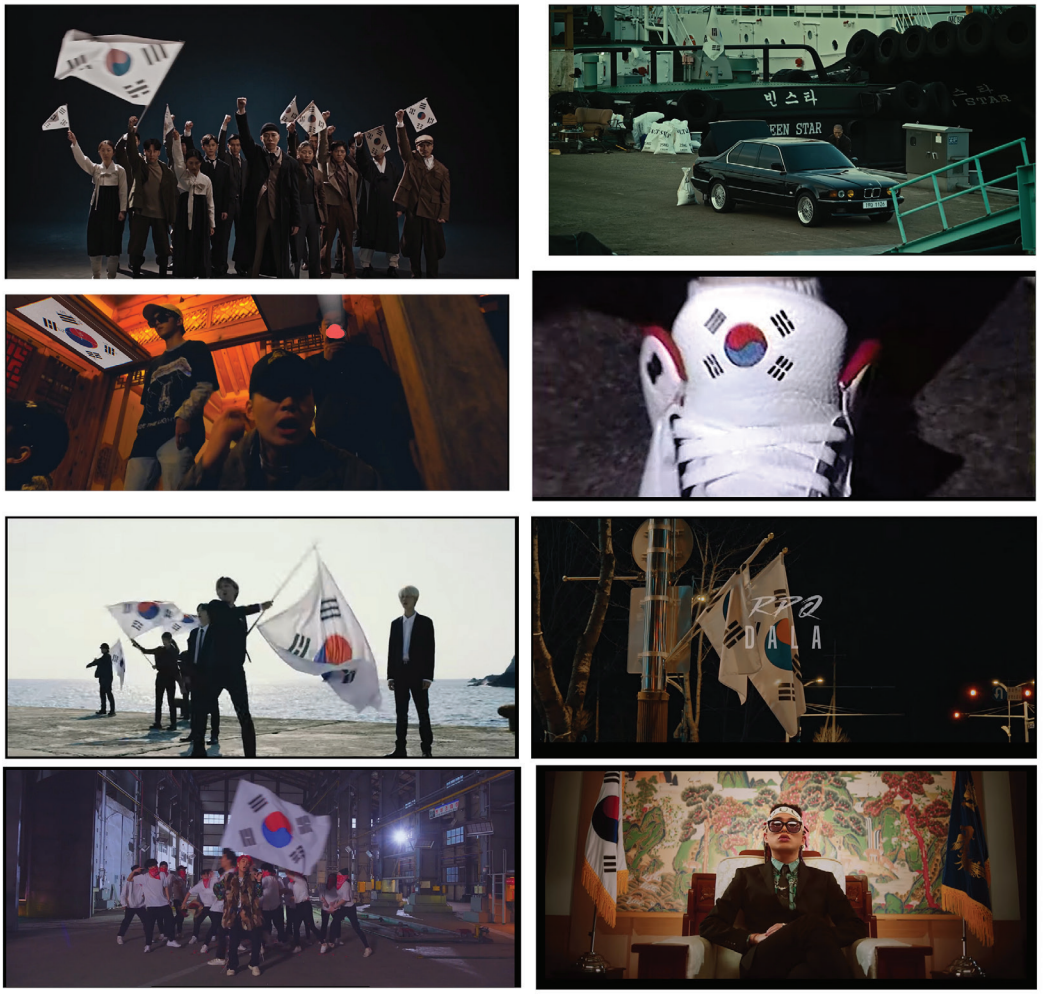

Figure 5: Flag spotting. Screen captures from the videos. Row 1: Behwy 'My Land' (2019), Dynamic Duo 'MSG' (2019); Row 2: 'Eung Freestyle' (2015), and Jay Park feat. 2Chainz 'Soju' (2018); Row 3: MONT 'Daehanmin'guk Manse' (2019), RPQ 'Dala' (2017); and Row 4: SanE 'Wannabe Rapper' (2018) and Woodie Gochild 'Let's Get It' (2017).

as an imitation of a New York City or Los Angeles African American hip hop aesthetic achieved through imitation or hiring the right staff. Following after the growing success of independent artists celebrating Koreanness, idols have also embraced a celebration of the nation visible through their videos, generally shot on a set, that incorporate Korean iconography and even Korean sounds. This is clear in recent costuming and backdrops for major idol groups such as Blackpink, BTS, VIXX, Stray Kids, Oneus and ACE. It seems that artists and decision makers have realized that Korean audiences still respond favourably to Korean things, while international audiences may find visual Koreanness attractive, fascinating and perhaps even exotic.[34] By the time not

34. Curiously, in other areas beyond music videos, nationalistic assertions of Korean cultural uniqueness and superiority are common. Major agencies' confidence that avoiding Koreanness would improve the success of K-pop abroad clearly set a strong precedent.

just Korean iconography but the Korean flag, the *taeggukgi*, appears in the videos, the intent is clear. Near the start of 'Eung Freestyle', a viral hit video, DPR Live raps: 'Reppin' South Korea that's where we fuckin' be'. Korea, finally, is brought front and centre.

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