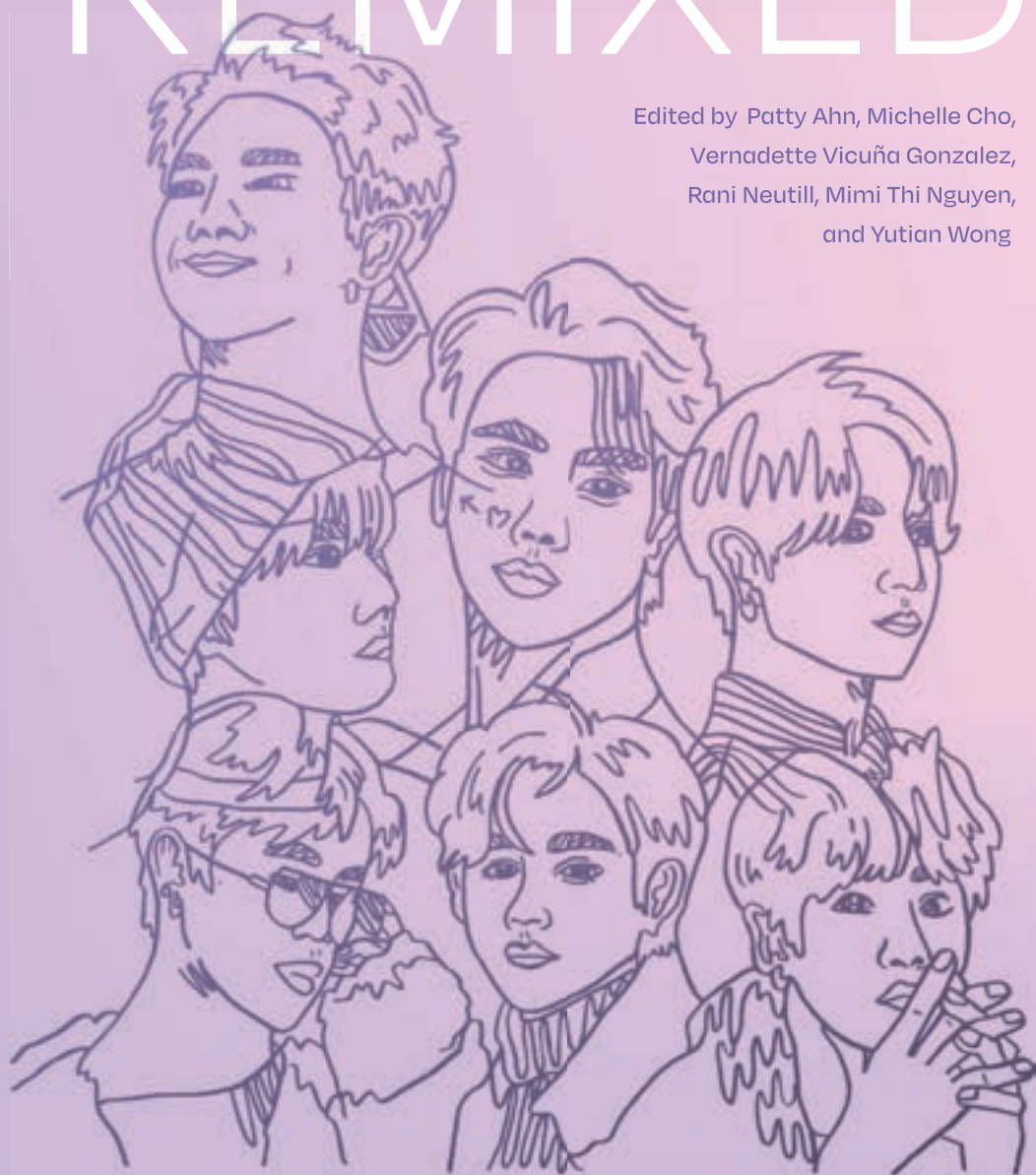


bangtan REMIXED

Edited by Patty Ahn, Michelle Cho,
Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez,
Rani Neutill, Mimi Thi Nguyen,
and Yutian Wong



A CRITICAL BTS READER

bangtan
REMIXED

BUY

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A Critical BTS Reader

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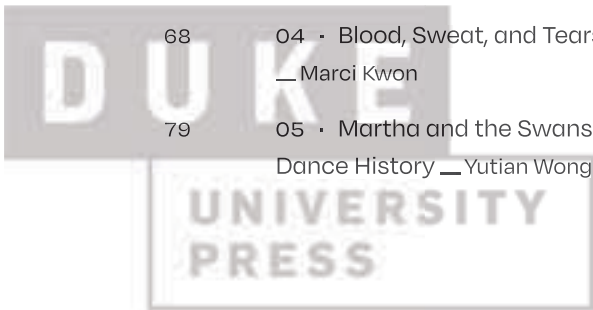
for the lonely whales
and outcast planets

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"Not Today"

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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND ROMANIZATION

Throughout the book, “BTS” is treated as both a singular and plural noun, as is common in fan and media discourse of the phenomenon (e.g., “BTS is a South Korean band”; “BTS’s songs reflect *their* exploration of a wide range of topics”).

ARMY refers to both a singular fan and the collective fandom. Where pluralized as a group of individuals, the use of ARMYs may be preferred by individual authors.

Hangeul words have been romanized in multiple ways. Proper nouns such as names follow no standard romanization system and are presented in the ways they have been spelled on albums or other published work that circulate in print and online (e.g., Seo Taiji, Shin Joong-hyun, Kim Namjoon). In other cases, the Revised Romanization system has been chosen over the McCune-Reischauer Romanization system for the former’s ease of use and jettisoning of typographically complicated diacritical marks. In some cases, authors have chosen to include Hangeul text in lieu of romanization.

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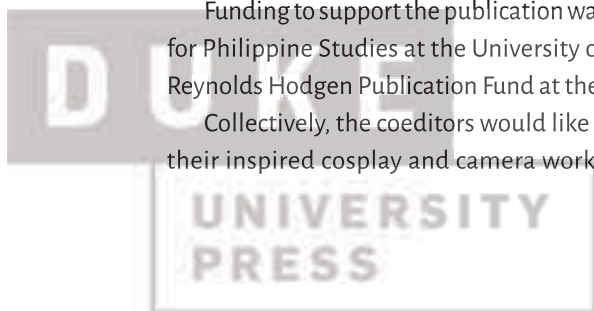
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INTRO · On *Bangtan* *Remixed: A Critical BTS* *Reader*

— Patty Ahn, Michelle Cho, Vernadette Vicuña
Gonzalez, Rani Neutill, Mimi Thi Nguyen, and Yutian Wong

“Hey, do you know BTS?” Before they were too famous to travel anonymously, Jin, the oldest member of the world’s biggest band, would often pose the question as a greeting to strangers—on the sidewalk, at a cashier’s register, during an airport screening, or on the red carpet. While his fellow members were in turn amused, embarrassed, or annoyed after one too many “Hey, do you . . .,” Jin continued undaunted, though what he truly meant each time is unclear. Was it invitation, self-promotion, or sly commentary on their commodity-image, or all these at once? At the peak of their fame, the query became a running gag for BTS and its fandom, even as “Do you know BTS?” lingers as a question that each member confronts—as idols, artists, citizens, celebrities, ambassadors, humans. For us, “Do you know BTS?” is less about who they are and more what BTS illuminates about ourselves and the world around us.

Conceived in 2010, BTS is a South Korean pop group consisting of seven members: Jin (Kim Seokjin), SUGA (Min Yoongi), j-hope (Jung Hoseok), RM (Kim Namjoon), Jimin (Park Jimin), V (Kim Taehyung), and Jung Kook (Jeon Jungkook).¹ BTS is an acronym for the group’s Korean name, “Bangtan Sonyeondan,” which roughly translates as “Bulletproof Boy Scouts.” The name is somewhat of a bait and switch, regarding the group’s complex and self-reflexive relationship to genre or style, as it was often a source of ridicule in their early days. Since their debut, BTS, like other K-Pop groups, has adopted (and just as quickly discarded) a multitude of concepts and personae on stage and screen. They have been bad boys in hip-hop-inspired athletic gear and thick chains or leather jackets and combat boots, but also boys-next-door in

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preppy sweaters, schoolboy shorts, or overalls. BTS have also graced the stage adorned in pearls, pussy bows, sequins, embroidered robes, and slim-cut suits, while their hair has traveled through all the colors of the rainbow and multiple perms. And though each member's skin appears uniformly flawless in photoshoots, we see their bare faces and personal style (most often sweats or tracksuits) in more casual livestreams and social media posts.

Part of the induction into BTS's fandom, ARMY (Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth), is becoming familiar with the group through the cataloging of each member's specific strengths as rappers, singers, and dancers and their quirks as celebrities and reality television stars. In BTS's Rap Line (the dedicated rappers in an idol group), j-hope is the energetically cheerful (and seemingly boneless) street dancer, SUGA is the lethal "genius" composer and producer, and RM is the group leader and resident intellectual, whose deft and often philosophical lyrics are matched only by his reputation for clumsy destruction. The Vocal Line (the dedicated singers in an idol group) includes the team's official Visual (or most conventionally beautiful) and unofficial prankster, "silver-voiced" Jin; the conservatory-trained modern dancer and countertenor, Jimin; the occasional oddball and baritone crooner, V; and the so-called Golden Maknae (also spelled *mangnae*, or the youngest member of an idol group or line of siblings), Jung Kook, whose perfect pitch and athletic versatility endear him to his *hyeongs* (male elders) and ARMY alike. But there is so much more to track; BTS members constantly slip between using their stage names, nicknames, and birth names and proliferate as personae across media platforms and merchandising.² They appear as animated personalities (TinyTANs), intergalactic beings (BT21), and fictional characters in a transmedia narrative (Bangtan Universe), which is all to say that BTS is only seven, but also a multitude.

As performers, BTS members alternate between puppylike playfulness and rockstar intensity. Their musical repertoire includes genres from pop and rock to R&B and hip hop and at times incorporates traditional Korean folk rhythms or instrumentation. They draw from urban dance to borrow elements of popping, locking, breaking, and freestyle and from concert dance vocabularies sometimes fused with vernacular and folk-dance forms. In their live concerts, BTS cycles through a series of costume changes, large-scale set designs, and video projections that propel a musical and visual narrative forward. Each show begins with theatrical spectacle, whether in the form of giant inflatable gold leopards or a Jumbotron close-up of V slowly taking a paperclip out of his mouth to unlock his handcuffs before thirty backup dancers crawl over a jail cell erected on stage. In euphoric call-and-response, ARMY

punctuate the music with fan chants that thread through the voices of each member, hugging every chord and beat.³ And while each evening might begin with BTS adorned in sequins or rhinestones strutting down eye-popping sets, it always ends with the members on a bare stage dressed in concert merch (tees, hoodies, hats, and cross-body bags). In these final moments, BTS conducts ARMY-time, in which fans and their homemade signs and flags are illuminated by light sticks known as ARMY Bombs, held by tens of thousands of fans and synchronized to the music in chromatic waves or made to spell out “BTS” and “ARMY.” When it is all over, throngs of people exit the stadium, and the excitement of having just seen BTS lingers in the air while ARMY continues to sing their music.

Since their 2013 debut with Big Hit Entertainment, a small label outside of the “Big Three” management companies of the K-Pop idol industry, BTS has become the most popular music act on the planet, with a passionate and unprecedented fandom.⁴ Their list of accolades is by now familiar, from sold-out stadium tours, astronomical YouTube views, Grammy nominations, Billboard hits, and enviable album sales, to South Korean Orders of Cultural Merit, United Nations speeches, and a meeting with US president Joe Biden to talk about anti-Asian hate. BTS’s Korean-language tracks address generational economic precarity, emotional risk, and historical injustice, while their 2020 and 2021 English-language pop hits (“Dynamite,” “Butter,” and “Permission to Dance”) offer playful, universal messages catered to the American market. Mapped across their catalog, the beats of their underdog story manifest as a triumphant bildungsroman, unfolding from an idiosyncratic debut to proving their much-heralded artistic chops as songwriters, composers, and producers. “Hard work,” “suffering,” and “self-sacrifice” are common themes in just about every idol group’s origin story. However, these principles are core values given pride of place in BTS’s journey of self-development, transforming all of the group’s achievements into hard-won victories that signify their commitment to gifting ARMY the best versions of themselves and their talent. BTS and their label BIGHIT MUSIC generate, edit, and release hundreds of hours of behind-the-scenes footage of hard work and camaraderie, ordinary moments, and milestones. In dance practice videos, photoshoot and music video sketches, and documentaries like *Burn the Stage: The Movie* (2018), we see BTS members at work in the studio, collapsed backstage from exhaustion, or bitterly disappointed in themselves on tour. These scenes underwrite claims of authenticity and sacrifice as part of their nearly constant idol performance and their own acknowledgments (in lyrics and interviews) about its tensions.⁵

It is daunting to reckon with BTS. Instead of authoritative pronouncements on what BTS is, *Bangtan Remixed* looks at what BTS makes possible or perceivable, using BTS as a lens for the study of history, aesthetics, economics, culture, sociality, and geopolitics. How do we theorize through BTS to better understand the workings of affect, genre, soft power, masculinity, performance, fandom, language, the global music industry, or a throwaway gesture (a raised eyebrow, a flying kiss, or a wink)? The manifold nature of BTS—as corporate brand, fandom, marketing strategy, industry standard, genre wrecker, global icon, cultural mediator, technological compendium, paradigm, or fantasy—yields necessarily contradictory but also generative tensions. As Michelle Cho observes, their oeuvre comprises a kind of compositional genius that marks the group as extraordinary, even if their work traffics in pop culture cliché.⁶ In this way, BTS is a remarkably rich intertextual sensation, one that is so often invoked to explain other phenomena, including how we might grasp the nature of how, as RM puts it, “you be a human.”⁷ *Bangtan Remixed* takes BTS as a case study that animates many accounts of our contemporary social and political cosmos. These accounts lie in the melancholic affirmations of “Life Goes On,” found on their pandemic-era album *BE*, or American music critics’ incredulous descriptions of their spectacular success wrapped in racism, or fans’ wistful musings on a glance or a caress between members. As a pop band and as a global sensation, BTS produces and provokes expressive works that tell us stories about the present moment and the world.

“Come Back Home”: BTS, South Korean Youth Culture, and the Roots of K-Pop

To fully understand BTS’s impact on global music cultures, we must situate the group’s unprecedented crossover success as an outgrowth of the K-Pop idol system and the powerful youth market it helped to shape in South Korea. BTS, too, despite the compelling narrative of being outsiders to the idol system, are produced in the network media, management, and talent apparatuses that make up the vertically integrated structure of the K-Pop industry. In other words, idols are not born, they are made. From the initial talent audition to intensive, yearslong in-house instruction in dancing, singing, acting, and communication, “trainees,” as they are called in English (*yeonseup-saeng* in Korean), compete for selection into a group, with very few enduring until they can debut.⁸ Once launched, the ability for a group to survive and

achieve commercial success depends on their ability to appeal to the broadest audience *and* carve out a unique identity through the virtuosity of their dancing and singing, and the charms of their individual personas and group dynamics.

While fans and observers might debate whether BTS has outgrown the K-Pop genre, there is no question that the norms of South Korean culture and its media industries have shaped BTS's body of work—the aesthetic codes, performance styles, distribution patterns, and transmedia integration that characterize their creative and marketing concepts. At the same time, BTS redefined many well-established industry conventions, amplifying the group's cultural brand into a *cri de coeur* of a generation of youth shaped by global forces, including financial crises and the rise of social media platforms and informatized daily life. Moreover, BTS demonstrated that a narrative (and performance) of authenticity and self-reflection resonates more powerfully with international audiences than the sheen of perfection and infallible public images.

When they first entered the arena of commercial pop in 2013, BTS distinguished themselves amid a crowded field of idol hopefuls by underlining their debts to earlier groups. Their first single, “No More Dream,” opens with a bass line reminiscent of the song “Warrior’s Descendant” (전사의 후예, 1997) by the mega-popular, first-generation idol group H.O.T., or High Five of Teenagers. This first generation of idols emerged in the late 1990s to 2000s, defined by the musical merger of Korean pop with American popular music and urban dance choreography. H.O.T.’s fervent fandom across East Asia led Chinese journalists to coin the term *Hallyu*, or the Korean Wave, likening the powerful pull of Korean teen idols on young fans in Beijing to an ocean tide. They also popularized usage of the term *K-Pop* to refer to the international fan base emerging specifically around South Korea’s newest genre of pop music.⁹ BTS are preeminent representatives of K-Pop’s third generation (which also includes EXO, BLACKPINK, GOT7, Red Velvet, and TWICE), and their call for refusal on the track “N.O.,” from their second EP, titled *O!RUL8,2?* (*Oh! Are you late, too?*) released in 2013, paraphrased Korean idol pop progenitors Seo Taiji and Boys’s infamous screed against the national education system in “교실 이데아/Cyosil (Classroom) Idea.” With their nod to K-hip-hop pioneer Epik High’s 2007 hit “Fly” on their second full-length album, *WINGS*, in 2016, BTS took their lyrical inspirations straight from their *seonbae* (or seniors) to build their name, as they declare in “Attack of Bangtan” (“선배들 등을 밟지 / *stepping on the backs of our seonbae*”).¹⁰ And, in 2017, coming off their historic win for Best Social Artist at the Billboard Music Awards, BTS marked the approach of the fourth anniversary

of their debut with the release of a new single, “Come Back Home.” This track, a remake of a 1990s hip-hop song by Seo Taiji and Boys, commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Seo Taiji’s debut. “Come Back Home” also cannily pointed to BTS’s own triumphant homecoming after more than six months of nonstop touring and twelve remarkable months of chart-topping, record-breaking ascendance to heights previously not reached abroad by a Korean pop music act. (And, in a boomerang effect, their accolades abroad grew their fan base at home.) Their remake highlighted the group’s hybrid hip-hop roots and elevated BTS as the second coming of Seo Taiji—Korean pop’s vanguard.

This talent for remixing—for reinvention through repetition—and this mode of intertextuality laced with self-reference, homage, appropriation, and critique is a practice of worlding that continues to characterize the South Korean pop culture landscape as much now as it did at the turn of the millennium. The strong influence of American pop culture is evident throughout the K-Pop genre. Seo Taiji’s original “Come Back Home” borrowed heavily from Cypress Hill’s 1993 hit “Insane in the Brain.” BTS, like Seo Taiji, H.O.T., and other 1990s hitmakers Sechs Kies and Shinhwa, follow from figures like Cho Yong-pil, the Pearl Sisters, and Shin Joong-hyun, South Korean stars of earlier postwar decades who began their careers performing for American troops on US military bases in South Korea, where they also learned to adapt American musical forms for local Korean audiences. These bases hosted large numbers of US service members as part of the US-ROK (Republic of Korea or South Korea) Joint Security Alliance that formed in 1953 and resulted in the continuous deployment of tens of thousands of US military personnel on bases throughout South Korea to deter North Korean (and increasingly in the last decade, Chinese) incursion. As a result, much of South Korean popular music in the postwar era has been heavily influenced by American rock, jazz, folk, country, and, in later decades, hip hop and R&B.¹¹ Due to the power differential built into the US and ROK’s uneven partnership, with the US “defending” a far weaker South Korea, American culture has long been viewed as the epitome of global culture in South Korea. American cultural hegemony shores up American military hegemony, which persists in large part because the Korean War is not yet over. An armistice agreement was signed by North Korean, Chinese, and American military leaders in 1953 (South Korean signatories are notably absent), which put the war on pause until an official peace accord could be negotiated. However, no such settlement has taken place; the conflict remains ongoing, which is why South Korean males are subject to mandatory conscription into the ROK military, and why BTS’s group activities went on hiatus in 2022 so that the members could complete their military service.

While some K-Pop fans and commentators claim that South Korean youth culture was born in the 1990s, this isn't quite the case.¹² Young South Koreans were drawn to American pop culture, especially music, through the Armed Forces Korea Network (AFKN)—the US military's broadcast radio and television network—and in the illicit spaces of dimly lit dance halls, live music clubs, and record lounges (*eumak gamsangsil*) where DJs would play requests pulled from massive LP collections.¹³ In the '60s and early '70s, domestic acts like Shin Joong-hyun and the Add4 and the Pearl Sisters adapted the sounds of psychedelic rock, as did later groups like Sanullim and numerous other campus bands.¹⁴ But given the domestic and geopolitical conflicts that heavily shaped Cold War-era youth, namely, the Korean and Vietnam wars and the youth-driven protests against authoritarianism from the 1960s through the 1980s, youth-oriented music cultures were generally viewed with suspicion and often suppressed in the decades following the Korean War. After declaring martial law and rewriting the constitution in 1972, the president and former military general Park Chung Hee viewed the influence of American counterculture on politicized youth as a threat to his regime. Throughout the '70s, he targeted rock musicians like Shin Joong-hyun and folk artists like Song ChangSik of Twin Folio and Kim Min-ki, whose song "Morning Dew" became an unofficial anthem in the decade's antiauthoritarian protest culture.¹⁵ (The crackdown effectively halted their careers until their revival in the 1990s, after the country transitioned to democratic elections.)¹⁶ The '80s, under the violent regime of another military general, Chun Doo Hwan, were a syncretic decade in terms of musical influences. Bands like Songgolmae fused the sounds of funk, disco, and rock, and the latter half of the decade saw the rise of hard rock groups like Boohwal and Sinawe, although the latter's hair metal wasn't exactly considered *daejung eumak*, or mainstream music. More successfully, pop artists like Lee Sun-hee serenaded the public with melodramatic ballads that could be enjoyed across generational lines. This aspiration to mass appeal by popular musicians would continue to dominate the commercial music industry until the media market was reshaped by an array of new consumer trends, not least of which was the youth-targeted sound of '90s idol pop.

After nearly four decades of authoritarian rule that followed the Korean War—a civil war between the socialist North Korean state (under Soviet stewardship following the end of thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule in 1945) and the US-led South Korean state—South Korea underwent massive social reorganization from the late 1980s through the 1990s, embracing democratic reform, self-determination, and consumer choice, lauded as core tenets of a uniquely American brand of liberalism. In 1993, South Korean policymakers

launched a national globalization project that would change the way that the state and the public understood the diplomatic and economic role of popular culture, giving rise not only to the K-Pop genre, but also to high profile art and culture events such as the Busan International Film Festival and the Gwangju Biennale. In the meantime, the media labeled '90s youth 신세대/*Sinsedae*, or the “New Generation,” characterized by their rebellious attitudes and enthusiasm for technological and consumer trends. Members of the *Sinsedae*, with their seemingly limitless adaptability, were the unruly offspring of South Korea’s consumer modernity. Uninflected by the political tumult of student- and worker-led antigovernment activism of previous decades, '90s South Korean youth culture was explicitly commercialized, successfully commodified, and subsequently exported. It was in this moment that the rest of the world began to know Korean idol pop as K-Pop.

Idol Pop between Empires

While the form and global consumerist logic of K-Pop grew directly out of the postwar influence of American military, political, economic, and cultural forces in South Korea, the organizational structure of the idol system itself can be traced to a broader imperial triangulation between the US and Japan.¹⁷ As the region’s largest economic player that rebuilt its postwar economy most quickly with American aid, Japan maintained a regional hegemony across Asia, shaping many norms and conventions of business, cultural production, and social life. South Korea and Japan “normalized” diplomatic relations in 1965, under strong US pressure, after which the South Korean government and industry welcomed the transfer of Japanese industrial knowledge.

The assumption that K-Pop is merely American music, and specifically Black American music, repackaged for Korean and regional Asian audiences, sidesteps other critical regional influences and matrices of power that have impacted K-Pop’s development. The roots of the idol system go back to the Japanese uptake of American media and cultural influence amid Japan’s postwar redevelopment. According to anthropologist Hiroshi Aoyagi, commodified adolescence emerged as a societal ideal and popular music and entertainment genre in late-1960s Japan.¹⁸ For Aoyagi, the youthful performer of the *aidoru* (idol) industry was a direct analog for the American teen idol of earlier eras, like the young Frank Sinatra or midcentury Mouseketeers Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon.¹⁹ The teen idol phenomenon has thus been an important marketing tool for an aspirational ideal of wholesome,

optimistic adolescence for mainstream national audiences in both the US and Japan, the world's two largest and most crowded pop music markets. Idol pop's emergence as a commercial genre in Japan is said to have been inspired by the local popularity of an obscure 1963 French teen caper film, *Cherchez L'idole*, featuring cameos by French pop stars performing their hits within the fictional narrative.²⁰ This led to the formation of a new genre of popular entertainment, in which the blurring boundary between pop star, actor, celebrity persona, and “lifestyle model” catapulted adolescent stars onto the national stage. This form of youth celebrity flourished in the 1980s, Japan's peak years of high growth economics and capitalist optimism.

Japan's idol industry also produced pop music with tie-ins to broadcast media, especially radio and television; indeed, the term *aidoru*, a Japanese transliteration of the word *idol*, comes from the commercial media culture of postwar Japan, where musical entertainers began to be recruited, trained, and promoted for the purpose of cultivating a dedicated fan following.²¹ From the early days of the Japanese idol industry, teen idols were promoted as television acts. For example, 1971, the year that scholars of Japanese pop culture designate “the first year of the idol era,” saw the first televised idol talent competition show, *Birth of a Star*, thirty years prior to US television's paradigm-shifting *American Idol*. Dominating music charts, television screens, magazine covers, and advertising campaigns, young idol performers were multiplatform artists within a Japanese marketing system that magnetized fans' attachments to celebrities through tie-ins across media franchises and physical merchandise. Korean idol management companies adapted this “media mix” strategy in the late 1990s.²² In particular, SM Entertainment, led by Lee Soo Man, adopted many of the practices and features of Japanese *jimusho* (performer management companies), inspired by the monopolistic success of Johnny's and Associates, the Japanese company that has dominated the arena of male idol groups since 1967. This is the highly centralized industry that BTS was up against as outsider idols, signed to the upstart management company Big Hit Entertainment.

Japan's industrialized idol production system has greatly impacted the development of the K-Pop industry, particularly in the following areas: the transmedia formats and domains for idol performers and their promotion; the centralized management and systematized training, production, and promotion model of the entertainment agency as a highly technical business enterprise, replete with trade secrets; and, finally, in the combination of familiarity through localization and novelty—often judged as facility with Western musical forms, choreography, fashion, and attitude or “swag.” This

emphasis on novelty would push to the reaches of posthuman, gender- and genre-bending fluidity and hybridization in the digital age, with initiatives to integrate AI, virtual avatars, and game practices as K-Pop's newest frontiers, which Dal Yong Jin details in this collection.²³

We contextualize BTS's emergence and ascendance to mainstream visibility in the United States and Japan in this broader postwar history to show the entanglements between geopolitics, culture, and everyday life. BTS offers a lens that makes visible the continuities and possible disruptions in this history, despite the impression that they give of being utterly unprecedented and *sui generis*. Their popularity and fandom are consistent with new inter- and intra-regional dynamics, especially in the shift to two-way traffic between American mass culture and media and what have formerly been understood as peripheral and culture-bound media industries.

K-Pop's Consolidation and Diversification

Changing global media flows and *Hallyu's* presence outside of the Asian region offer a larger backdrop for BTS's success, but a more detailed overview of the development and transformation of the Korean popular music industry as a sector of the Korean wave brings BTS's contributions into sharper relief. Following on the commercialization and transnationalization of South Korean youth culture as a market in the 1990s, K-Pop developed as a formal industry by incorporating elements of Japanese and US music production modes. South Korean record producers adapted this image-driven model of idol production for the local market, codifying a "trainee system," in which idols are recruited and developed by elite management companies to garner a commercially loyal fanbase.

K-Pop's largest companies prior to BIGHIT's 2021 reorganization as HYBE—SM Entertainment (SME), YG Entertainment (YGE), and JYP Entertainment (JYPE)—became known as Korea's Big Three and led the development of this system. Each devised a trainee system organized around a specific market niche, narrowing the range of styles and artists each produced in order to hone their formula. SME cultivated a reputation for its "polished" image and Euro-pop sound, putting potential idols through a grueling seven- to ten-year training period to ensure "perfect" execution. Meanwhile, YGE and JYPE established themselves as rap- and R&B-focused labels, respectively. YGE, which aimed to project an image of rebellion and creative freedom, implemented a trainee system that allowed time for the development of its artists. Unlike

in the US, where “authenticity” and “individualism” are prized artistic values, Korean entertainment houses explicitly promote their carefully orchestrated systems as key selling points.²⁴ While American media criticize K-Pop for being overly “manufactured,” K-Pop’s founding fathers have claimed that this controlled approach allowed them to edge out far more resourced Western competitors from taking hold of South Korea’s media market while establishing a regional media empire in Asia.

This centralized business model drew from Japanese *jimusho*, but conformed to the vertically integrated organizational structure of *chaebol*, family-owned conglomerates in South Korea that drove the nation’s post-Korean War economic “miracle.”²⁵ *Chaebol* use the disciplinary ideology of Confucian familism—with the corporate head as the metaphorical father—to develop strategic export industries.²⁶ Korean entertainment houses have mobilized a similar rhetoric and familial structure through their trainee system in which idol hopefuls submit to an excruciating disciplinary process as a matter of indebtedness and patronage. This structure has even become a key feature of idol celebrity texts, emphasized in the narrative tropes of idol origin stories, particularly in television formats like the idol competition shows through which many groups are constituted and promoted. In this manner, neoliberal values underwrite a centralized corporate management structure that continues to thrive on the precariousness and exploitation of its labor force, especially its idol hopefuls.

SME, YGE, and JYPE consolidated their power in part by cultivating long-standing business partnerships with local television networks. Throughout its history, South Korean commercial pop has been uniquely beholden to those networks, for publicity and informal distribution. State investment in the growth of local television outlets and production studios yielded a multichannel landscape where variety shows and music programs reigned supreme, acting as the country’s main music charting system until the Gaon Music Chart was launched by the Korea Music Content Association under the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in 2010.²⁷ Most music television consisted of live performance shows, a tradition that still prevails today in the local broadcast industry; no less than five weekly live music performance shows air each week, on which commercial pop artists are expected to tirelessly promote each new single and album release. These live television stages provide a crucial platform within a tightly integrated apparatus.²⁸ Every idol debut or comeback release is accompanied by an aggressive cycle of media appearances and performances on nationally televised networks, which not only increases the visibility of artists in a densely saturated music market, but makes

their fights for chart position an important site of investment and debate for fans and the news cycle.

While K-Pop relies on a predictable and systematized formula, the industry has only grown and survived through relentless experimentation and the diversification of concepts and revenue streams across multiple platforms and markets. Since the early 2000s, the industry has pivoted toward an international-facing business model. SM Entertainment began globalizing its trainee system after its first idol group, H.O.T., saw unexpected success in the Chinese-language market in the late 1990s. The company soon after debuted a female R&B singer named BoA in both Japan and Korea, marking the first time a Korean idol was recruited and trained with the intention of reaching local *and* overseas audiences. SME integrated this approach into its idol group formula when it debuted Dong Bang Shin Ki (DBSK, also known as TVXQ! or Tohoshinki), originally a five-member boy band featuring South Korean members who performed and recorded albums in both Korean and Japanese. SME not only developed a strategy for breaking into Japan, which remains K-Pop's most important secondary market, but also effectively created the blueprint for how Korean entertainment companies could expand their global influence.

Idol concepts are now almost always devised with an eye toward reaching multiple markets, especially outside of Asia. Group acts have been key to this strategic shift. SME again pioneered strategies like the formation of megagroups that could be broken into subunits tailored for specific national markets, and the inclusion of non-Korean members to broaden their appeal. As a result, the size of K-Pop groups has grown considerably across the board, not only expanding their potential for drawing transnational fans but also heightening the visual spectacle of live and on-screen performance. By 2011, the industry had fully integrated YouTube as a centerpiece of its globalization plan, including inroads in North America. By 2012, the fateful meeting of K-Pop and YouTube resulted in the biggest viral video hit to date, "Gangnam Style," by the comedic pop music performer Psy, then represented by YGE. Large-scale synchronized dance routines became a key ingredient for creating spreadable media and K-Pop's larger promotion strategy. This shift to a social media-driven strategy was the result of a strategic partnership forged with K-Pop's Big Three by Silicon Valley, which saw South Korea's web-driven media culture as a major piece of their expansion plans. Google and YouTube led the charge when it began pursuing SME in 2008. Twitter followed by launching a localized version of its platform in Korea in 2011 that allowed Korean users to type in Korean script or Hangeul. Although it took several years for Korean

entertainment companies to build a comprehensive social media strategy, their eventual integration of US-based platforms dramatically globalized fan engagement with artists and each other. Whereas SME had long been the vanguard of K-Pop's technological savvy, BTS's innovative use of Twitter, in particular, made Big Hit Entertainment a new player within the industry's oligopoly.

From the late 2000s into the 2010s, when BTS debuted, the K-Pop industry was a crowded field of competing groups racing to initiate novel configurations of multimember, single-sex music and performance groups (we know them in the West as boy bands and girl groups). The figure of the “beast idol” (*jimseungdol*) emerged in the 2010s as an image that played with the way that young male performers' status as visual spectacle was inherently gender-bending—feminizing the performer while also acknowledging the androgyny of male adolescence (see S. Heijin Lee's contribution in this volume, chapter 22). This gender fluidity already characterized idealized masculinity in various domains of East Asian media targeting a young female audience, namely “girls” comics (*shōjo manga* in Japan; *sunjeong manhwa* in Korea). The primary visual characteristic of the beast idol was the dualism of youthful, androgynous facial features and hypermasculine, “hard” musculature. In this field of male idol group concepts, BTS's hip-hop image mediated regional tastes, appealing at first more to non-Asian fans, in contrast to Asian audiences, whose preferences at the time were met by fellow third generation, modular, multilingual group EXO (split into subunits EXO-K [Korean] and EXO-M [Mandarin]) managed by SME.²⁹ A growing emphasis on rap in idol-pop, which had functioned previously to offer sonic variety and verse interludes for less vocally adept group members, distinguished BTS in their early years as an iconoclastic hip-hop idol group.³⁰

BTS is often cited by fans and critics as a much-needed antidote to K-Pop's highly “manufactured” system. Their image as super-earnest acolytes of hip-hop history and aesthetics, coming from a scrappy, small company on the verge of bankruptcy, both confirmed and departed from the industry by the time of the group's debut. While moving across the industry's genre and gender landscapes, BTS nonetheless displayed a fierce commitment to a youth cultural ethos beyond commercial motives. Along with their embrace of social critique, BTS and Big Hit Entertainment built on fan-artist communication modes that had previously been tightly managed and orchestrated by company-run and moderated fancaves (proprietary web forums) and official fan meetings. While their social media strategy was borne out of the need for free promotion, their choice to open up fan-artist engagement on

transnational and multilingual platforms like Twitter and YouTube proved prescient, as the K-Pop industry took their cues from BTS's practices. To take just one example, their @bts_twt Twitter account was established in 2012, before the group's debut, while their rivals in the industry EXO, managed by then industry leader SME, lacked a Twitter presence until 2017. This five-year lag—an eternity by the standards of social media trends and the digital news cycle—shows how little regard the K-Pop establishment had for BTS until they were legitimized in North America with their Billboard Music Awards, and how thoroughly the group pushed the industry away from the sedimented practices of limited and company-controlled fan engagement.

Race and K-Pop: Diaspora and Localization

BTS's group concept and unifying message are rooted in their interpretation of hip hop. In their early years, BTS endured resistance and even ridicule in some quarters of Korean pop criticism and the independent music arena, since hip hop's antiestablishment ethos and idol pop's commercial mandates seemed mutually exclusive. But, in anchoring their work as homage to pathbreaking popular artists from earlier eras, BTS also underlined the debt that South Korean popular music has to Black American musical forms, as Nykeah Parham and Jheanelle Brown detail in their chapters for this collection (chapters 2 and 11, respectively).³¹ While K-Pop's influences have diversified over the last two decades beyond the initial transposition of R&B, rap, and new jack swing, the influence of Black American music on the industry's forerunners like Seo Taiji and Boys, H.O.T., Sechs Kies, g.o.d., S.E.S., Fin.K.L., 1TYM, and Shinhwa is unmistakable. In the case of BTS, their studious references to their musical roots in American hip hop accord with the genre's history as a cultural idiom of social critique from below. These elements make up the core of BTS's star text, which encompasses a classic, coming-of-age narrative that runs through their body of work.³²

BTS's engagement with Black American popular music also brought them criticism from some fans and observers for what are perceived to be acts of cultural theft. In the context of North American K-Pop fandoms, fans have been the first ones to call out K-Pop artists who don cornrows or dreadlocks, or perform in blackface while claiming ignorance of the racist connotations of such gestures. Often, fans direct their ire at the management companies, whose styling and marketing decisions result in these distressing images. Fans then become industry monitors, protecting the performers who are

thought to be innocent of negative intent and merely in need of education, and calling for changes in the industry's top-down structures.³³ However, it is important not to conflate Korean and American pop culture industries and fan-industry relations. Instead, we should return to the history of race and racism in South Korea and in Korean American communities, which do confirm the global scope of anti-Blackness, but which are also a result of complex power dynamics and influences, among them American pop-cultural hegemony and the colonialism of the English language.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modernizing East Asia directly adapted concepts of race from Euro-American scientific racism, which, combined with Korean Confucianism's existing colorist and caste hierarchies, resulted in South Korea's dominant ideology of ethnonationalism.³⁴ Nadia Y. Kim explains that this notion of hierarchized hereditary traits was reinforced by Korean immigrants' experiences in the United States, where they were targets of anti-Asian racism, while also students of the anti-Blackness of American society.³⁵ While Korean society at large and many Korean Americans have internalized anti-Black racism, the history of these beliefs is refracted through a painful and violent experience of colonization, first by the Japanese—who were thought to be “closer” to white Europeans in the global racial hierarchy because they were also colonizers—and then through American military occupation. The United States incorporated South Korea into the Cold War as a strategic ally and protectorate, and many South Koreans still associate modernity with American ideas and cultural influence. Persisting alongside a self-denigrating notion of South Korea's belated (and still incomplete) modernity is also a defensive ethnonationalist chauvinism that developed under Japanese colonial occupation, when every domain of Korea's culture, language, and identity was threatened by official assimilation policies intended to transform Koreans into ideal colonial subjects. South Korean ethnonationalism, in other words, the “pure blood” claim that Korea is a monoculture, already reflects the transnational impacts of scientific racism and eugenic thought.

Thus, the function of race in South Korea is both traditional and foreign. Racism and racialization in Asia are multilayered, with social Darwinist concepts of ethnoracial hierarchy affirming racist judgments of winners and losers in a regional contest of national development.³⁶ Given this unique conjuncture of relational and intersectional forms of race-thinking, K-Pop artists who seek to adopt the sonic and visual styles of Black American popular culture primarily relate to the Americanness of these cultural forms and the artists who developed them. As Kim explains, “Much of Korean society . . . is

simultaneously and begrudgingly attuned to Black Americans' significant power over Koreans as agents of the American occupational forces."³⁷ In this way, the pursuit of access to the eyes and ears of American fans by a group like BTS still plays as an underdog story, compared to Black American musical artists and celebrities who are more often idolized by Korean artists, especially those who engage with musical forms like hip hop and R&B.

BTS's approach to Black culture often contrasts, however, with common attitudes found in the Korean American diaspora and the South Korean public, which has historically looked to white America for cues on how to be successfully modern and capitalist, including the anti-Blackness of the model minority stereotype held among whites and Asians alike. However, in K-Pop celebrity cultures, groups like BTS have made concerted efforts to center Black American culture as American culture writ large. Criticisms of the K-Pop industry on the part of fans are generally warranted, and are a way for fans to register both their agency and their investments in their favorite groups. Yet when cultural appropriation debates turn to arguments about how K-Pop or Korea aren't "ready" for the global spotlight, or sufficiently modernized to be consumed in North America, what gets reactivated are theories of progressive development rooted in colonial perspectives and hierarchies of civilization. As K-Pop travels more widely, this history helps us avoid reductive claims about racism in K-Pop and better understand how BTS and K-Pop's popularity are transforming conventional ideas about race and culture.

ARMY: The Adorable and Representative Eighth Member of BTS

The first major media tour in the United States for BTS took place after they won the Billboard Music Award for Best Social Artist in 2017. During their guest spot on daytime television host Ellen Degeneres's eponymous show, Degeneres commented on the large crowd of ARMYs who greeted BTS on arrival at LAX, and teased them about "hooking up" with fans (she assumed that the members would understand American slang). BTS, however, refused to pathologize their fandom as crazed fangirls or to sexualize them as manipulable groupies. ARMY's love for BTS—repeatedly noted in English-language media stories focused on the mystifying enthusiasm of their American fans—was often compared to Beatlemania, a signal case for moral panics over the vital energies of fans subsequently characterized as feminine hysteria. But

the idol system out of which BTS emerged displays a careful deference toward fans—prioritizing fans’ responses and affective investment in their favorite groups—that is absent from most American fan cultures. In the face of US media’s misogyny toward boy band fandom, BTS’s attitude was both refreshing *and* indicative of their status as cultural outsiders.

The deference to fans, common in the sphere of Asian idol pop, became much more visible with the changed context of BTS’s popularity and reception in the American pop music and media market. Although the group is conventional in many ways—assembled using a trainee system and developed using a transmedia strategy incorporating a core metanarrative of underdog status—BTS targeted worldwide audiences by foregrounding their singularity in a global media landscape. With the odds stacked against them in the face of the Big Three’s dominance, and as themselves youth facing down the demands for conformity and institutionalized hierarchy in schools, workplaces, and neoliberal Korean society at large, BTS’s struggle resonated translocally, radiating far beyond the customary sites of K-Pop reception. Further, the group deviated from the most conservative aspects of the Korean idol pop industry, unleashing social media’s forces of digital intimacy (instantaneous connection, liveness, and fan-networking), and linking their own experiences of precarity in the idol industry to those of their fans and generational peers. The group’s success despite their refusal to accept the industry status quo, particularly the collusion between the Big Three and the domestic broadcast apparatus, led to increased scrutiny of the industry by fans across the globe and resignified K-Pop fan culture as a site of participatory intervention with progressive political stakes.

These currents were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the K-Pop industry quickly pivoted from large-scale, global tours to remote live performances facilitated by mass digital streaming technologies. As South Korea gained praise as a model state for its virus-containment measures, its government initiated an industrial development campaign to limit human contact yet boost service sectors. The awkward name for this technological sector is *untact*, a gesture toward the paradox of intimacy without physical contact, as in telehealth, online shopping, or robot baristas.³⁸ Untact became the K-Pop industry’s key assignment during pandemic lockdown, and BTS and Big Hit Entertainment (which restructured and rebranded as HYBE during the pandemic, in March 2021) were no exception. The group held two remote concerts that each drew hundreds of thousands of fans for a fully produced online event, captured for a livestreaming platform.

While falling short of the in-person concert experience, these remote concerts made possible the temporal convergence of a truly global fandom (with the caveat that uneven internet infrastructure maintains digital divides in many regions).³⁹

In contrast to the technocapitalist priorities of untact initiatives, ARMY's activities during the pandemic era took an unanticipated turn toward collective action, often bringing fandom into the domains of either mutual aid or political organizing. Just as BTS have exceeded the genre conventions and expected influence of commercial idol pop in Asia, ARMY around the world have channeled their fandom energies beyond the limited sphere of ardent consumption, embracing new roles in antiracist activism, democratic political organizing, and other forms of collective action in the name of both progressive politics and ARMY affinity as described in the chapters by Karlina Octaviani, Alptekin Keskin and Mutlu Binark, and Allison Anne Gray Atis, Noel Sajid I. Murad, and Hannah Ruth L. Sison.

In June 2022, on the ninth anniversary of BTS's debut on the global stage, all seven members gathered around a table to enjoy a "family" dinner on VLIVE, a livestreaming app launched and operated by South Korean internet giant NAVER. RM, the team's leader, bemoaned how much the group's meteoric rise had taken a toll on their physical and mental well-being. The group, which had expected to take a hiatus after their 2020 *Map of the Soul* tour, instead encountered a period of unprecedented fame during the pandemic, catalyzed largely by the release of three chart-topping English-language singles and the innovative use of web platforms that facilitated social connection during a time of prolonged isolation. Staying with their critical take on the crushing pressures of the K-Pop industry for young artists, RM and other members remarked on how much they had lost a sense of self under such duress. They proceeded to make a formal announcement that they would be taking a break from group activities in order to focus on their personal growth and pursue solo projects, to ask who they are beyond BTS.

While ARMYs took to Twitter and Instagram to mourn the end of the group's historic run, many also began to reflect on their own participation in a system that had seemingly broken the hearts and spirits of seven boys who had come to feel like family. We, as ARMY and coeditors, see this as precisely the moment to reflect on what BTS has meant to us personally and for global culture broadly. We see this reader as a necessary pause, a long, deep breath with which we might ask, "What is K-Pop, and who are ARMY, without BTS?"

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"Love Maze": Overview

This book is indebted to the work of Jiyoung Lee's *BTS, Art Revolution*, JeeHeng Lee's *BTS and ARMY Culture*, and Youngdae Kim's *BTS: The Review; A Comprehensive Look at the Music of BTS*. Following Gilles Deleuze, philosopher Jiyoung Lee theorizes the relationship between BTS and ARMY as well as BTS's work itself as a rhizome to characterize the necessity of decentered methodologies for interrogating BTS as a cultural phenomenon. Cultural studies scholar Jee-Heng Lee documents the multiplicity of ARMY culture and ethnomusicologist and music critic Youngdae Kim details the contexts and aesthetics of BTS's extensive discography. Together, these works have opened up space for an interdisciplinary reader focused on critical perspectives on BTS in relation to art, geopolitics, and community.⁴⁰

Bangtan Remixed takes its cue from the practice of separating the component parts of an original composition and adapting, altering, and rearranging those materials into a new object, whether a track, a poem, a painting, or a video. In other words, a remix comprises a singular and specific event from which we might observe or gauge movement or change from an original. BTS remixes all the time, repackaging whole albums with previously unheard B-sides or Japanese-language vocals, staging and re-creating canonical European artworks for the "Blood Sweat & Tears" music video, adapting Murray Stein's *Jung's Map of the Soul* to riff on psychoanalytic concepts of persona, shadow, and ego, and releasing seasonal remixes of their English-language hits "Butter" or "Dynamite." Fans also remix multiple media to create new works, including GIFs, video edits, bootleg DVD rips, fan cams, stickers, song covers, and prints featuring lyrics or original art based on photographs or performance stills. Such acts often allow fan-creators to establish both a principle or foundation for an original composition, while also facilitating its further transmission. Our reader unfolds in a similar fashion, as each individual chapter remixes and riffs on a lyric, a music video, a concept, or a fleeting moment, to provide insight into what BTS constellates through their multitudinous product and presence.

The study of BTS is necessarily interdisciplinary because the band itself emerges from histories that require grappling with a myriad of aesthetic genres, institutional practices, cultural geographies, and domains of knowledge. Our authors are artists, scholars, journalists, activists, and fans (and some combination of these all at once), working from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, methodological approaches, and personal commitments.

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Despite the important presence of contributors from other parts of the world, we note that this volume comprises works entirely composed in English, and is skewed toward North American perspectives, which reflects the continuing asymmetries that exist in structures of academia and fandom. Indeed, BTS's initial struggle to be taken seriously in Western markets mirrors some of the obstacles and biases (around language or industry connections) that have likewise created absences in this reader. We hope that these shortcomings are taken as provocations and invitations for others to add to the existing body of work about BTS.

For our part, this collection is driven by questions about how BTS as a band and as a phenomenon address certain norms about “success,” gender, labor, and desire, among other things, that shape their trajectory. Many of our contributors examine how the multiple texts and media platforms that BTS uses shift personal and collective sensoria; in their chapters and art, they consider how BTS is a multisited phenomenon, situated simultaneously within South Korea and global flows of culture and capital.⁴¹

The second half of BTS's nearly forty-minute performance at the 2019 Melon Music Awards (MMA), which begins with a lone figure onstage draped in a Greek tunic blowing a large, curved horn, is a case study of BTS as master remixer.⁴² In turns, each member of BTS is featured in a solo dance performance before RM walks downstage to the prelude of “Dionysus,” where he grabs and drives Dionysus's thyrsus into the ground. Two giant inflatable leopards flank the stage as a line of female attendants strew flowers on the floor and a regiment of soldiers and horses form a procession to the theater of Dionysus where BTS—embodying the Greek gods and goddesses—hold court. The act comes to a climax as BTS members repeat the chorus of the song, while dancing faster and faster until returning to their seats, this time on top of a table, to look out onto an ocean of light illuminating a euphoric crowd.

Invoking the ecstasy of losing oneself in music and dance, BTS's references to rituals, rites, and mysteries are hard to miss. This stage performance calls forth the Greek god of theater who represents not just chaos, rebirth, and debauchery, but the artifice and duality inherent to the actor's body. SUGA's line, “Born as an idol, then reborn as an artist,” signals how this duality lies at the heart of performance. This staging of BTS as both subject and object of Dionysiac rituals places the members at the imagined historical moment in which rites and rituals are transformed into institutionally recognized forms of music, dance, and theater. If ritual is that which is culturally valued as the originary practice of authenticity, and the classical is aesthetically valued as the originary practice of sanctioned authenticity, the “popular” encompasses

too many categories—the folk, the masses, the resistive, and the appealing. At the 2019 MMA award show, they return to the center of Western art, theater, music, and dance history, which has long been assigned as the point of reference dictating all hierarchies of cultural production, and reframe this troubling legacy on their own terms. In this modern-day incarnation of a Greek amphitheater (a stadium) and ritual competition (MMA), BTS would go on to sweep all four *daesangs* (grand prizes) of the night, in perhaps the biggest art flex on the planet. Holding Dionysus's thyrsus, RM stands center stage with BTS as the embodiment of the ritual, the popular, and the classical brought together without concern for aesthetic hierarchies between these references and their rearrangements.

We linger on this singular performance as exemplary of BTS's own practice of remixing aesthetic genres and incorporating distinctive genealogies of performance. Along with "Blood Sweat & Tears" and "Black Swan," "Dionysus" is part of a triptych of songs, music videos, and live performances that places BTS at the center of theater, art, and dance histories. Part 1, "'You Can Call Me Artist, You Can Call Me IDOL!,'" considers the place of BTS's work within the aesthetics and genealogies of performance. The chapters in this section map the interrelationships between the aesthetic vocabularies from which BTS's music, choreography, and scenography draw sense and sensation.

Part 2, "'Mikrokosmos,'" turns to the wider universe of BTS and the multiple transmedia platforms that HYBE, BIGHIT MUSIC, BTS, and ARMY create and share together. The chapters in this section highlight the technologies of intimacy and parasociality spurred by BTS. From music videos, reality television shows, video games, graphic novels, brand endorsements, fan fictions, fan edits, memes, GIFs, and so much more, BTS generates "seven billion different worlds / shining with seven billion lights."⁴³ These "seven billion lights" are scattered widely, and to that end, part 3, "'Not Today,'" explores the geopolitical landscape of BTS as a planetary phenomenon traversing both well-worn and new paths for migrants, militaries, and monies. As performers, tourists, ambassadors, and "seven normal boys," BTS illuminates circuits of capital and campaigns of care, each enfolding global histories of race and gender in changing constellations.

In the interlude, "'Magic Shop,'" we include fanart (included in the plates section) that engages the multidimensional nature of BTS's presence—as commodity, muse, or something else—in the lives of ARMY. Navigating what it means to love a commodity-image, fans stretch their imaginative powers and transform these original materials through their labors. Without ARMY, as BTS says, who would they be? Consequently, part 4, "'You Never Walk Alone,'"

further considers the fruits of their star performances found in proliferate fan labors and personal reflections. The chapters in this section illuminate how BTS—or attachments to BTS—facilitate sites of love, desire, friendship, safety, lust, communion, and hope.

Ultimately, our focus is less on BTS as a singular phenomenon than on the encounter with and the desire for what BTS might be said to stand for or against. We might click an aspirational “follow” on the luxury brands modeled by the members; compose feverish fan fiction to explore our deepest longings; fill our social media feeds with art and nature to solicit reflection, what ARMY dubs “Namjooning”;⁴⁴ offer love and support to strangers, which might readily be translated as mutual aid, as we imagine BTS does or seems to do; or rest in a time of uncertainty and build social forms that allow life to go on. *Come here, I'm your paradise, hello, my alien, we are each other's mystery, at that moment the tuna asked me, Hey, what is your dream? A good house, a good car, will these things bring happiness? Why are they killing us before we can even try? I'm now in front of the door to the world, I know what I am, I know what I want, set everything on fire, bow wow wow.*⁴⁵

Notes

- 1 BTS members' stage names are listed from oldest to youngest, with birth names in parentheses.
- 2 Some BTS members also have separate monikers for their solo projects: SUGA has produced work as Agust D, and RM is an evolution of Rap Monster and Rap Mon.
- 3 Fanchants are a regular feature of live K-Pop performances. See the glossary.
- 4 The Big Three consist of SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, companies that, until BTS's rise, dominated the field of Korean idol pop, which has been defined by its integrated corporate production model of talent scouting, training, in-house content production and distribution, live performance schedule, new release cycles with broadcast-centered promotion, and ancillary merchandise sales. While BTS's management company, HYBE, has risen to the status of industry leader, the historical importance and industry influence of the Big Three remain discursively and materially significant.
- 5 Jin has spoken frankly about how the performance of access is still a performance, commenting during a VLIVE—a livestream that purports to offer a slice of life window into the members' daily routines—“I don't need to be honest here, actually.”

- 6 Cho, "Nostalgia for Nostalgia."
 7 RM, "Yun," featuring Erykah Badu, *Indigo* (2022).
 8 Shin and Kim, "Organizing K-Pop."
 9 See Jung-Min Mina Lee, "Finding the K in K-Pop," on the term *K-Pop* originating outside of Korea.
 10 BTS's later album *MAP OF THE SOUL*: 7 references not only Carl Jung but also Epik High's 2003 album *Map of the Human Soul*.
 11 Shin and Kim, "Birth, Death, and Resurrection."
 12 Noah Yoo's review of Seo Taiji and Boys' self-titled 1992 album erroneously claims that Seo's work constituted "Korea's first homegrown youth music." As influential as Seo Taiji and Boys were to the development of the idol pop industry, there was youth culture in Korea before the 1990s. Noah Yoo, review of *Seo Taiji and Boys*, July 5, 2020, *Pitchfork*, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/seo-taiji-and-boys-seo-taiji-and-boys/>.
 13 Shin and Kim, "Birth, Death, and Resurrection," 279.
 14 See Shin and Kim, "Birth, Death, and Resurrection," 287–93, for an account of the rise of campus bands, and A. Park, "Modern Folksong," for a fuller account of the role that the genre of *p'ok'eusong* (the Korean transliteration of "folksong") played in 1970s South Korean youth counterculture movements.
 15 See "Song Chang-sik: A Life Immersed in Music," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, February 22, 2015, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2015/02/22/etc/Song-Changsik-A-life-immersed-in-music/3001101.html>. See also Hwang, "Kim Min-ki."
 16 Kim and Shin, "The Birth of 'Rok.'"
 17 The end of the Japanese empire in 1945 reorganized, yet also preserved, existing power structures in the region. As Lisa Yoneyama explains, with Japan's war defeat in 1945, "nations that formerly were subjected to Japanese domination in the subsequent cold war fell under the economic and military aegis of the United States." Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 7.
 18 Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*.
 19 Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*, 4.
 20 Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*, 5.
 21 Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*. See also Galbraith, "'Idols' in Japan, Asia and the World."
 22 For information about the history and industry context of "media mix," see Steinberg's *Anime's Media Mix*.
 23 Since the late-twentieth-century golden age of national idols, Japan has seen the development of an extensive idol subculture linked to content industries like manga and anime. A controversial twenty-first-century outgrowth of the convergence of media forms is the "virtual idol," or humanoid, animated figure voiced by vocaloid processing software, the most famous of which is Hatsune Miku. In K-Pop, the convergence

of digital and live idol performance is a recent phenomenon, targeting audiences among gamers and VR enthusiasts through the virtual K-Pop group K/DA's performance at the World Competition of League of Legends in 2018—a promotion strategy for the K/DA skins introduced to the game. SME's group aespa has tried to further the mainstreaming of virtual idols with its core concept as a group consisting of live members and their AI avatars.

- 24 The respective founders of Korea's Big Three are perhaps the biggest stars produced out of these systems. G. Park, "Manufacturing Creativity."
- 25 Shin and Kim, "Organizing K-Pop." *Chaebol* are a localized form of Japanese family-owned conglomerates or *zaibatsu*, which dominated the Japanese economy until the *zaibatsu* system was broken up during the Allied occupation of Japan after World War II.
- 26 Moon, "Begetting the Nation."
- 27 The Gaon Chart has been renamed the Circle Chart: <https://circlechart.kr>.
- 28 For an extended overview of the codependency between K-Pop and the television industry, see S. Kim, *K-Pop Live*, and Jung-yup Lee, "Broadcasting, Media, and Popular Music."
- 29 A subunit is a smaller group formed of members in a larger group. Subunits allow for members to explore other genres, languages, and concepts than in the larger group.
- 30 Groups like Block B, whose central concept and most popular members were rappers with existing reputations in the underground hip-hop scene, offered BTS an example to emulate. Arguably not an idol group, MFBTY, the collaboration between K-hip-hop artists Yoon Mirae, Tiger JK, and Bizzy, also debuted in the same year as BTS, offering a bridge between idol pop and the language of hip hop's social critique. At the same time, however, hip hop was being incorporated into the Korean commercial media landscape of televised competition programs with the premiere of the cable music station Mnet's rap competition show, *Show Me the Money*, in 2012.
- 31 For an informative account of this history, see Anderson, *Soul in Seoul*.
- 32 BTS is especially prolific, with five Korean and four Japanese studio albums, six EPs, four world tours, six reality TV series—three broadcasts on Korean cable outlets Mnet (*Rookie King*, *American Hustle Life*) and JTBC (*IN THE SOOP*), and three web series produced and distributed by NAVER VLIVE, a now defunct celebrity livestreaming app recently acquired by HYBE and merged with its proprietary fan-artist chat platform Weverse (*BTS Gayo*, *Run BTS!*, and *BTS BON VOYAGE* seasons 1–4), and thousands of short video clips, vlogs, and social media posts on their BANGTANTV YouTube channel, Twitter, TikTok, and Weverse.
- 33 Fan debates that have arisen since the resurgence of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism and antiracist, police abolition protests after the murder

of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 have directly linked the anti-Blackness of global K-Pop fandoms with the anti-Blackness of US franchise fandoms, including Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. For further discussion of fan debates about BTS's relationship to Black American culture and issues of anti-Blackness in K-Pop fandom, see Cho, "BTS for BLM."

- 34 Tikhonov, "Discourses of Race and Racism in Modern Korea."
- 35 See N. Kim, *Imperial Citizens*.
- 36 Writing on similar remappings of race and colonialism in Thailand under the influence of contemporary inter-Asian media flows, anthropologist Dredge Byungch'u Kang-Nguyễn explains that the desirability of racialized features like light skin reflect not a desire to look Caucasian but, rather, a desire to pass as "white Asian," Kang-Nguyễn's term for a "new racialization of Asianness associated with light skin, economic development, and modern lifestyles." Kang-Nguyễn, "The Softening of Butches," 20.
- 37 N. Kim, "The United States Arrives," 275.
- 38 The World Economic Forum reported on "untact" in 2020: Rosamond Hutt, "'Untact': South Korea's Plan for a Contact-Free Society," World Economic Forum, August 11, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/south-korea-contactless-coronavirus-economy>.
- 39 "BTS: 100 Million Fans Watch Virtual *Map of the Soul ON:E* Concert," BBC, October 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/54497760>. Ikran Dahir reports in BuzzFeed News, "'I have no religion,' RM said, 'but I thank God that we live in 2020. I'm so glad we have this technology.'" Dahir, "BTS's Virtual Concerts Connected People on a Global Scale Not Seen before the Pandemic," October 15, 2020, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ikrd/bts-map-of-the-soul-one-concert-experience>.
- 40 Jiyoung Lee, *BTS, Art Revolution*; JeeHeng Lee, *BTS and ARMY Culture*; Y. Kim, *BTS: The Review*.
- 41 See Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.
- 42 BTS, "PERSONA+Boy In Luv+Boy With Luv+Mikrokosmos+Dionysus," November 30, 2019, YouTube video, 34:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVQLzxNMTXM>; BTS, "Full Performance (view from 4th flr) / Kath Parungao," November 30, 2019, YouTube video, 38:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x6rITXDans>; BTS, "Intro: Persona (Boy In Luv)+(Boy with Luv)+Dionysus @2019 MMA," December 25, 2019, YouTube video, 12:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-ov1fNVdas>; "[BANGTAN BOMB], 'Dionysus' Special Stage (BTS focus) @ 2019 MMA," November 30, 2019, YouTube video, 7:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQswxVHD08U>.
- 43 Lyrics from "Mikrokosmos," from the 2019 album *MAP OF THE SOUL: PERSONA*, translated by Genius English Translations, April 12, 2019, <https://>

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- genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-mikrokosmos-english
-translation-lyrics.
- 44 RM coined “Namjooning” to describe his activities while on vacation in 2019. Sandy Lyons, “BTS’s RM Explains ‘Namjooning,’ Here’s How the Word Came to Be,” March 30, 2021, Koreaboo, <https://www.koreaboo.com/news/bts-rm-namjooning-definition-history-origin/>.
- 45 Lyrics from the BTS catalog, including “Pied Piper,” “Friends,” “Super Tuna,” “No More Dream,” “N.O,” “Dope,” “Dionysus,” “IDOL,” and “Fire.”

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