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Fashioning Seoul: Everyday Practices of Dress in the Korean Wave

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Emma Weiss Holyst

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2018

For YuKyung, thank you for a friendship I will never forget

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Introduction

At the 2017 American Music Awards, BTS[1] became the first South Korean[2] popular music group to appear on American live television. In this debut performance, the introductory announcement was almost entirely drowned out by fans screaming the BTS "fan chant," repeating each of the seven members' names in Korean in rhythmic unison. Even before BTS took the stage, American fans who self-identify as the BTS "Army" shouted with a fervor that disrupted the conventional order of the awards show. Videos of this performance circulated widely through social media platforms, and the "Army" continued to post memes of the performance and the group's red carpet appearance for weeks following the event. The song the group performed, "DNA," ranked 67th on the Billboard Hot 100 entry that Fall, and their latest release "MIC Drop" ranked 28th (Trust 2017). BTS is the first K-pop group to make this list, showing their popularity among American consumers. Although this was their first American television appearance, BTS had already stolen the hearts of countless screaming fans before ever taking the stage.

Figure 1: BTS's latest music video "MIC Drop," image found on a K-pop fan site (BTS in "MIC Drop" Music Video, 2017)

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[1] BTS stands for *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (방탄소년단) which translates to "bulletproof boy scouts." In English, BTS

[2] This project focuses on the Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea, which I will refer to as Korea throughout.

Korean media is "conquering the world through pop culture" in a phenomenon named the Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* in Korean (Hong 2014). *Hallyu* (한류) combines the words for "Korea," the nation, *hanguk* (한국), with the Korean word "tide," *joryu* (조류). The increasing popularity of Korean cultural products in global markets has made *Hallyu* the subject of several recent academic publications. In the past four years, four academic books have been published with almost identical titles about this phenomenon: *Hallyu 2.0*; *The Korean Wave: Korean Popular Culture in Global Context*; *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*; and *New Korean Wave.* Authors cite that "*Hallyu*" was first coined in 1998 by Chinese newspapers and implies specifically the effects of Korean media on cultures *outside* of South Korea (Kuwahara 2014; Kim 2013; Jin 2016; Lee and Nornes 2015).

Because of the "wave" metaphor, references to water persist in the literature about *Hallyu.* Authors write about "riding the wave"; "currents"; and "flows" of Korean media's influence, which coincides with Appadurai's metaphor of globalization (Appadurai 1996; Molen 2014; Jung 2015). Scholarship focuses simultaneously on *Hallyu* as a government produced media while using metaphors of implying a natural phenomenon. Remaining predominantly popular in Asia, communities around the world, in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East, are said to have "caught the wave" of *Hallyu.* The Korean Wave phenomenon disrupts conceptions that globalization is unidirectional, moving from America or Europe to elsewhere. Instead, *Hallyu* is a "multi-directional flow," or a "contraflow," that shows a successful dissemination of a non-Western culture to Western countries (Jin 2016; Kuwahara 2014; Kim 2013). Beginning with Korean television dramas (K-dramas), *Hallyu* has expanded to include mediums of technology (Samsung, LG, and Kia), popular music (K-pop), beauty products (K-

beauty), and fashion (K-fashion). Each category is marked with a prefix of "K-" to denote their "Koreanness" for consumption in places that are not Korea.

Hallyu has arrived on the global stage in waves: each new media propelling the next forward. This process is typically divided into two distinct periods: the first was marked by the dissemination of Korean dramas in the 1990s and 2000s through television broadcast, and the second began in the digital age with the increasing popularity of Korean music circulating through the internet. Current research falls into the second wave of *Hallyu*, also called the Korean Digital Wave (Jin 2016) or *Hallyu* 2.0 (Jin 2016; Lee and Nornes 2015; Kuwahara 2014). In this second wave of *Hallyu's* influence, due to an increasing global digital culture, I propose the metaphor of the wave extends from a physical, natural phenomenon to an elusive, invisible sound wave. With the advent of social media and online fan communities, the full reaches of the sound wave are rendered undetectable. The first wave of *Hallyu* traveled through water, across the sea onto television screens in Asia, while the sound wave travels through air, transmitting K-entertainment into a myriad of digital files that appear on computer screens on every continent. The reverberations of *Hallyu's* "soft power" enter the American ear when BTS performed at the AMA's and the audience erupted into a rehearsed and foreign chant[3] although the group was making its "debut" performance on television for the public eye. The Korean Wave has gained momentum in the digital age, moving further and faster than a physical wave could reach.

Fashion from Korea is inherently globalized within other mediums of *Hallyu*: in music videos of K-pop groups, on the bodies of actors in famous dramas, and through paparazzi photographs of Korean idols. The photo above shows BTS in one of seven costume changes

[3] Each "fan chant" is specific to the group and the song performed, including "parts" sung by the fans in unison with the song as well as chanting each performer's name. To learn a "fan chant," fans go to YouTube, see this link for the BTS "DNA" chant: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILY14qpUDCM

from the recent music video "MIC Drop," showing forty-nine[4] examples of professionally styled streetwear outfits in a video lasting under five minutes. However, *Hallyu* scholarship has yet to focus on the medium of fashion itself, although it is essential to the character of all K-entertainment. This may be because K-fashion has not reached the success of K-pop or K-dramas as a commodity on the market. There has yet to be a Korean designer who has made a significant global breakthrough. However, images of Korean streetwear aesthetics, of casual fashion,[5] have become globally popular through street style photography. Featuring photos that aim to capture the 'everyday,' street style photography showcase fashionably dressed youth on the streets of Seoul. Due to its lack of success as a formal commodity of *Hallyu* and the advent of personal blogging in the digital age, young people have the ability to directly influence K-fashion. Unlike most mediums of *Hallyu,* which are produced by the state, Korean street fashion exists outside of full state control. Through consuming fashion pieces, styling outfits, and dressing for the public, Korean youth actively create the aesthetic of K-fashion in which they are participating.

Scholarship about the Korean Wave focuses primarily on three categories: the production of *Hallyu* by the government, the consumption of *Hallyu* abroad, and the hybridized content of K-entertainment, primarily in music, film, and television dramas (Kim 2013, Jin 2016, Lee and Nornes 2015, Kuwahara 2014, Chua and Iwabuchi 2008, Kim and Kim 2011, Marinescu 2014). Through my own ethnographic research conducted in Seoul, I focus in this project not only on the spread of *Hallyu* outside of Korea, but how university-age students exist within a Korean mediascape which they know to be global (Appadurai 1996). This project interjects two-fold into the current research of the Korean Wave by focusing on the *intra*national consumption of *Hallyu*

[4] Seven outfits each in the seven-member group equates to forty-nine styled outfits. Video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTlv5_Bs8aw
[5] "Casual" was by far the most used word to self-described one's fashion by young Korean people at Fashion Week and at Kyung Hee.

and the formation of K-fashion aesthetics among Korean consumers. Rather than focusing on government produced mediums, I focus on Korean youth who have a uniquely influential role in contributing to the lexicon of the K-fashion, Korean street wear, and Seoul street style aesthetic identity.[6]

Although not a focus of academic scholarship, fashion in South Korea is a topic of interest for news articles in fashion magazines and street wear blogs around the globe. Targeting an American audience, several articles about Korean street fashion begin by comparing Seoul to Tokyo: "South Korea is fashion's new Japan" (Sullivan 2011, 399); "Seoul's attempt to charge past Tokyo as Asia's bonafide fashion capital shouldn't really be all that surprising" (Dhillon 2017); "Move Over, Harajuku, Now There's Hongdae" (Hurt 2013).[7] These sources compare South Korean fashion to the only other Asian fashion market that "made it" to the West. Although Seoul is not currently receiving global industry attention, considered a "fledgling," (Amarca 2017) "that could all be about to change" (Dhillon 2017) because the South Korean fashion industry is decidedly "going somewhere" (Sullivan 2011, 399). K-fashion is also compared to the successes of other *Hallyu* media, as Monica Kim from Vogue says, "It began with K-pop, moved into K-beauty and now K-fashion is the next logical move" (cited in Amarca 2017). Although Korean fashion has not yet reached the global success of Japanese fashion, or other Korean media, articles claim that it will soon.

In American media, Seoul fashion is described as "colorful"; "youth-driven"; "trend-driven"; "genderless" (Dhillon 2017); and having a "glittering street style" (Amarca 2017). South Korean fashion is able to transcend time and be at once "futuristic," and yet "truly of the now" (Dhillon 2017). Consumers are young and are not as interested in high fashion luxury

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[6] I use all three terms here because these are the three main phrases used on the Internet to denote "Korean fashion" in popular culture. I will use them interchangeably throughout this project.
[7] I read this article by Hurt before going to Seoul, and then ended up working with Hurt at Seoul Fashion Week.

brands but instead are "more so into affordable streetwear that is influenced by K-pop stars and K-entertainment" (Amarca 2017). With an emphasis on streetwear and youth, Seoul has a "new-found status as a global influencer of 'cool'" (Dhillon 2017). South Korean fashion has "an out-and-proud love for youth culture" (Dhillon 2017) and is considered a "Ground Zero of style trends for all of Asia" (Hurt 2017). Youth in Korea are integral to what makes Korean fashion cool, as consumers are viewed as the "drivers" of the Korean style that has major influence of fashion trends in Asia.

Seoul fashion is especially unique because it's "universal and agile… remixing ubiquitous Western trends with the distinct styling details that are rife in the streets of Seoul" (Dhillon 2017). This requires balancing a tradition of "Confucian ideology" within the hypermodern aesthetic of Seoul (Dhillon 2017). Youth consumers "take greater fashion risks" while remaining entrenched in global streetwear trends (Amarca 2017). Seoul is a city that embodies "a collision of old and new, permanent and fleeting" (Halpern 2017). Although the tradition of Confucianism focuses on "group culture," today, "young Koreans are thinking more for themselves" in terms of their fashion choices (Sullivan 2011, 400). Fashion in Seoul is seen as being "still tempered by the reservedness found in Korean public culture and the concern that most folk still have about the approval and disapproval of others" (Hurt 2017). Fashion in Korea is inherently in conversation with the "fashion world," and thus part of Korea's success in fashion is striking balance between the "essential" and the "universal," i.e. influence from global streetwear brands with Korea's "distinct" and "eccentric" style (Dhillon 2017).

When I arrived in Seoul with the aim of studying South Korean fashion, I was well versed in these perspectives from popular news articles. I was curious as to what made fashion in Seoul "cool," what the "future" would look like through fashion, and how Korean society

balanced uniqueness and universalism, tradition and futurity. Integral to these articles is an imagining of a youthful, new aesthetic that emanates from the streets of Seoul. After observing students at Kyung Hee University, where I attended school through an exchange program, I realized that the perception of Korean fashion I had consumed through *Hallyu* media did not correlate to how people in Korea interact with fashion on an everyday basis. Far from finding a "genderless" utopic "future" of fashion styles, at school I saw a strict gendered delineation of dress and appearance from my peers. These students are not representative of all youth in Korea, for in the hip-hop neighborhood of Hongdae and at Seoul Fashion Week youth do dress in a similar way to *Hallyu* street fashion aesthetics. Through my own ethnographic research conducted in Seoul, this project will investigate the disjunctures between the experience of everyday Korean youth and the media representations of Korea that are globally circulated.

This project intervenes in *Hallyu* research by focusing on the ways Korean people interact with "K-" media that is intended to be consumed by a global audience. I focus on fashion as a medium which Korean youth use to outwardly express their relationship with the Korean Wave and to situate themselves within the broader "fashion world." Everyday practices of dress are intrinsically connected to popular culture, conventions of beauty, gender performativity and presentation, imagining a public, and embodying a presentation of self. My project considers fashion as a ripple of *Hallyu* that flows both outwards, to the international consumers, and inwards, to Korean youth like my friends at Kyung Hee. Korean youth are necessary contributors to the production of a "young" and "cool" image of Korean fashion that then becomes consumed internationally via professional and personal fashion blogs. Korean youth are thus consumers of their nation's branded fashions as well as producers, commodities, and ambassadors of the nation's branded image.

Studying "fashion" implies both studying clothing as commodities of *Hallyu,* but also encompasses the daily practice of *getting dressed*. In the book *The Language of Fashion,* Roland Barthes considers how fashion exists in relation to publics, discussing how fashion is a socially agreed upon system of *value* (2013, 7). Drawing on Saussurean semiotics, Barthes describes fashion "as a structure whose individual elements never have any value and which are signifiers only in as much as they are linked by a group of collective norms" (2013, 7). Fashion always acts as a public presentation, which determines the meaning of individual garments and creates these "collective norms" (Barthes 2013, 7). Of interest in this project is the distinction Barthes makes between the system of fashion's meaning, the *fashion system*, and its use:

> In correspondence to Saussure's *langue*, we propose to call *dress.* And then to distinguish this from a second, individual reality, the very act of 'getting dressed', in which the individual actualizes on their body the general inscription of dress, and which, corresponding to Saussure's *parole*, we will call *dressing*. Dress and dressing form then a generic whole, for which we propose to retain the word *clothing* (this is *language* for Saussure). (2013, 8-9)

Creating the language of fashion requires both *dress*, the conventions surrounding the objects of clothing which act as signifiers, as well as the process of composing these signifiers by the individual, *getting dressed*. Throughout this project, I look at the multiple systems of *dress,* fashion systems of value, that exist in Korea: one of a national culture and the other of a branded culture corporation. In addition, I focus in particular on the practice of *getting dressed* within these oppositional frameworks of meaning.

The word "fashion" has a dual meaning: the noun, "fashion" as well as the verb "to fashion." The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb "fashion" accordingly: "To give fashion or shape to; to form, mould, shape (either a material or immaterial object)." The definition continues to include the noun "fashion," meaning "the mode of dress, etiquette, furniture, style of speech, etc., adopted in society for the time being." The noun "fashion"

denotes the conventions and style "of the now," and socially connotes clothing as the objects and commodities of fashion. *Fashioning Seoul* utilizes these definitions to address two distinct questions: how is Seoul and "Korean fashion," *fashioned* and produced through media in the Korean Wave? And, concurrently, how does *Hallyu* relate to the individual, everyday practices of dress among youth in Seoul? *Fashioning Seoul* addresses how people in Seoul *use* fashion, as well as how images of Seoul are fashioned through government-funded processes of *Hallyu*. In this project I am interested in fashion as a medium of self-expression and, simultaneously, an expression of Korea the 'cool' nation.

In studying fashion in Korea, I found that the use of clothing to adorn the body is inseparable from how young people relate to other bodily appearances, i.e. hair, skin, body, and facial features. Studying "fashion" thus led to studying how young people in Korea view their bodies and their appearance more generally in terms of societal expectations. Fashion as a medium is uniquely reliant on the body. Unlike other mediums of communication that act as extensions of the body, as McLuhan has argued that radio extends the reaches of the voice, photography the eye, "clothing is an extension of the skin... a more direct extension of the outer surface of the body" (McLuhan 1964, 119-120). Fashion is thus an extension of self that must be attached to a body. This project focuses not only on Korean fashion as clothing objects and commodities, but also how people in Korea *embody* fashion objects as part of their presentation of self.

The metaphor of the body extends to a further question of study: how is Korea branding "Korean culture" through Korean bodies, and how does fashion act as an embodied expression of *Hallyu?* As many of my Korean friends informed me, while some youth listen to subversive hip-hop music in the privacy of their own headphones, others perform hip-hop physically through

their bodily appearance. The embodiment of fashion in this context must adhere to two distinct cultural conventions: one produced by *Hallyu,* which I will call "Korea, Inc."[8] to denote how the nation has become a brand, and another from Korea's history as a conservative society, as many Korean friends repeatedly reminded me. The embodiment of style is thus constantly adhering to a public eye of both Korea and "Korea, Inc."

This project takes special interest into how images of South Korean fashion are disseminated. Seoul street fashion, as mentioned above, is globally recognized not for its high-end designer brands, but rather through a codified Seoul street style that is digitally circulated through photographic images. These photos include images of Korean idols in the airport, young *paepi* (패피, "fashion people")[9] on the streets of Seoul, as well as Seoul Fashion Week street style on the ramp and sidewalk in front of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. In this way, the street and the photograph become interlinked mediums of K-fashion, and are integral to its formation. Fashion could not exist without photographic images, and these images rely on the Internet in *Hallyu 2.0* to become globally circulated. This project takes special interest in asking how people living in Korea interact with images of *Hallyu* media, asking how does *Hallyu* inform, and contradict, the everyday lives of young Korean people? How does the global movement of *Hallyu* outwards make its way inwards, to Korean people consuming *Hallyu* media within their own culture? And, how do Korean youth, through practices of consumption, become self-reflexive producers of K-fashion aesthetics?

[8] Using the Comaroff's understanding of the nation as a corporation in *Ethnicity Inc.* (2010)
[9] *Paepi* is a Konglish term (Korean-English) that combines the English words "fashion" and "people" using Korean pronunciation. *Paepi* is a self-defined category, and usually consist of high school and college aged, trend-following "fashionistas." Many are amateur bloggers who photograph and document their outfits online.

Doing Ethnography in Seoul

My fellow students at Kyung Hee University in the Dongdaemun-gu district of Seoul guided my questions of inquiry for this project. As an exchange student in spring of 2017, I was immersed in my field site every day for four months, constantly taking field notes. I knew I wanted to focus on fashion as an emerging medium of *Hallyu*, but the input from friends throughout my stay informed exactly what studying "fashion" in Korea meant. I relied on countless hours of small talk with Korean students and foreigners living in Korea to situate my short stay within a larger context. Through Kyung Hee, I was fortunate to be connected immediately to the International Friendship and Culture Club (IFCC). I was assigned a 'buddy,'[10] and Christina and I became fast friends during my stay. Christina and the IFCC students wished to practice English with foreign students and were engaged with the exchange students from the first day of our arrival. As I only speak English, I spent most of my time hanging out with IFCC students who spoke English comfortably, as a requirement for joining the club. Many IFCC students had spent time abroad, and their perspective on Korean culture is thus informed by experience living among youth in other countries. As my paper focuses on Korean fashion culture as both a local and global phenomenon, speaking with Korean students who had also lived abroad was especially helpful.

After my first month living in Seoul, my Professor at Kyung Hee University Jennifer Flinn graciously connected me to Professor Michael Hurt, granting me access to Seoul Fashion Week. I was fortunate to work as a photographer for the official press of Seoul Fashion Week, under the publication The Industry News (TIN). Michael Hurt has been photographing Seoul Fashion Week for over a decade, and is known for starting Korea's first street fashion blog. I

[10] "Buddies" is the term used by IFCC to refer to the Korean members of the club that are assigned to an exchange student for the semester. The exchange students were referred to as "foreign friends."

assisted Michael Hurt in documenting street fashion at the Fall/Winter 2017 Seoul Fashion Week for five days, from March 28th to April 1st 2017. With a press pass from TIN, a DSLR[11] camera borrowed from me roommate, and an audio recorder, coupled with being white, I was assumed to be a foreign journalist. Throughout the week, I conducted short interviews with twenty people outside of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza where street fashion photos are taken. Typically after asking to photograph someone and taking a few photographs with my camera, I would ask to record a short conversation about what the individual was wearing. Due to the nature of the event, interviews and photographs were expected, and I was only ever rejected in my offer if someone was not comfortable with English. I tended to talk with people between the ages of 18 and 25, both Korean and foreign, as I knew this generation of Korean people typically had strong English and because they were my peers. Interviews were conducted casually and in public space and were sometimes interrupted and distorted by the surrounding noise. I observed Michael as he worked, informally talked with people he photographed, and observed the street fashion "runway" on the ramp of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza for the duration of the event. After Seoul Fashion Week ended, I also met Michael at a local restaurant and interviewed him over a meal about his experience working at Seoul Fashion Week for the past decade.

With fellow exchange students and IFCC members, I frequently attended nightclubs in the neighborhood Hongdae, the home of the Seoul hip-hop scene. I was fascinated by the American hip-hop aesthetic and the over-the-top street fashion I saw every time I went there. I decided to interview workers at vintage stores labeled 'Foreign' in Hongdae, as these stores were prevalent in the area and sold clothing in a 'hip-hop' aesthetic from all over the world. After talking with a few store workers in these vintage shops, I was refused interviews because of the

[11] DSLR meaning digital single-lens reflex camera, or colloquially, a camera that has a large, removable lens piece and automatically focuses. Prior to this event, I had no experience in photography, but Michael was generous in his time teaching me to use my roommate's camera.

language barrier. I thus applied for the anthropology department's award, and paid my friend Lytha, an Indonesian-Chinese student who moved to Seoul three years prior, to be my translator. Lytha has a strong grasp of both Korean and English, as she takes classes equally in both classes.[12] We conducted interviews for around twenty-five minutes in each of these vintage shops during the middle of the day, when business was slow. Lytha translated a list of questions I wrote before the interviews, and then translated any further questions I had on the spot. Observing activity in Hongdae both through nightclubs and shopping during the day, as well as these interviews with shop workers built another area of research for this project as to how foreign symbols are included into the Seoul street style aesthetic.

Through my friendship with Christina, activities run by the IFCC club, as well as my classes, I developed a network of Korean friends at Kyung Hee University. I decided in the last month of my stay that it would benefit my project to interview students, as I had spent the most time observing and participating in university life in Korea. Their experiences of interacting with fashion in the setting of everyday life proved to be central to this project. As fashion from Seoul is especially concerned with 'street fashion,' youth always already constitute Korean street fashion by getting dressed. My friendships with IFCC students also helped deepen these interviews, as I had spent time in class, sharing meals, and going on field trips with students for the three months prior to interviews. Questions were customized to fit what I knew of each student, as well as my relationship to them. These interviews were typically over an hour, and were primarily free-flowing conversation. Many were conducted at local coffee shops, where many students do homework, and some were conducted in the library or the Humanities buildings at Kyung Hee. I also interviewed my Indonesian friend, Lytha, and my Vietnamese

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[12] At this time, Lytha had just had her phone stolen, so the unexpected income was especially useful for her.

friend, Bo-young, in my dorm room, as both students at Kyung Hee had been exposed to Korean media growing up in Southeast Asia.

Interest in the Korean hip-hop world led me to interview students participating in the Bounce "Black" Music Club at Kyung Hee, a club for amateur MCs. I was introduced to the leading member of Bounce, who then introduced me to two other MCs involved with Bounce. I also joined Kyung Hee's hip-hop dance crew ParGwang and went on a few field trips through this club to hip-hop dance competitions in Seoul. Although not directly cited in this project, these interviews and experiences provide insight into Korean youth who participate in hip-hop culture as part of their creative lives.

Being white, I stood out in Korea immediately as a foreigner. Coming from America, which is associated with social prestige in Korea, frequently inspired conversations of politics and cultural conventions between Korea and the US.[13] My friends at Kyung Hee would frequently express to me that America was full of freedoms unlike Korea's strict social conventions. This may have been influenced by my overall appearance, for I also had bright blue hair while living in Seoul. Students at Kyung Hee were fascinated with my hair, my "tomboy" style, and that I never wore makeup to school. While I tried vaguely to fit-in, consciously trying to dress more "feminine," I was repeatedly told my style was "like a boy." By conventions explained to me by Korean friends, my appearance as a woman would be considered completely "wrong" on a Korean person. My ethnographic research also lead me to participate in Seoul Fashion Week, Hongdae club culture, as well as joining the ParGwang dance club at school. By

[13] Politics and cultural conventions especially came up in conversation because of the political climate in the spring of 2017. In this time, President Trump took office and launched "twitter-attacks" at both North and South Korean governments. South Korea also enacted the county's first presidential impeachment during my stay after months of protesting with record high numbers of participants.

participating in these spaces, I acquired some of the associated "cool" of these activities, and was considered as a cool foreigner instead of rejected on the basis of my unconventional appearance.

Ethnography in Circulation

In the 20th century, both Japanese and United States military government systems occupied Korea, each bringing cultural ideologies into the nation. Historian Michael Robinson notes that the Japanese colonization from 1910 to 1945 sought to "efface Korean culture, even its language" (2007, 36). In part due to the two nations proximity, and because of the intent to colonize not only government but culture as well, there was an unprecedented amount of Japanese people allocated to Korea as compared to other colonial regimes (37). Robinson notes that the "poisonous memory of this experience continues to plague Japanese-Korean relations more than half a century after liberation" (36). Following the defeat of Japan in World War II, the US established the United States Army Military Government in South Korea (USMAGK) to assist the process of rebuilding an independent democratic state. However, in effect, "establishing a military authority denied Korea the very political independence they assumed was now theirs to organize" (Robinson 2007, 107). USMAGK reinstated Japanese and Korean officials that had been removed by the Korean people's committee after the Japanese colonial period. From 1945 to 1948, the US military regime brought American cultural products and media to South Korea, which has had a lasting influence (Anderson 2016, 291). I mention these two recent periods of Korea's occupation to indicate the foreign media and culture that has been brought into South Korean culture throughout the 20th century.

In understanding the global aesthetics that become incorporated into "Korean fashion," this project engages with theories of global cultural movements. The Korean Wave is frequently described as a "flow," scholars using Appadurai's theory as a framework for studying this

phenomenon (Appadurai 1996; Molen 2014; Jung 2015). Instead of looking at the process of movement as a flow, my project will investigate how cultures are constructed through circulation (Lee and LiPuma 2002; Novak 2013). In my choice to use the term circulation, I focus on the ways in which global fashion aesthetics not only *move* but *travel and return.* I became interested in how foreign genres like hip-hop become reinterpreted in Korea, as well as the way Korean youth are consuming *Hallyu* media. I use circulation to look at *Hallyu* as a global culture that flows back into its country of origin, picking up foreign symbology and transmitting images of Korea to be consumed *elsewhere* that are also consumed *here*.

Photographs of fashion act as a medium by which Korean fashion becomes globally disseminated and thus produced as an aesthetic identity. By producing and commodifying cultural products, the Korean government constructs Korea as a corporation, which I will call "Korea, Inc." drawing upon the concept from the Comaroffs' book *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2010). The Comaroffs' concept of the "ethno-commodity" relies exclusively on objects with an aura of ethnic identity, but in Korea, the brand Korea relies on bodies of Korean idols themselves. Fashion is connected to these ethnically imagined beautiful Korean bodies, for the body must always be styled in the latest trend, appearing 'cool.' The body is a central aspect in the styling of K-fashion, as Korean fashion always exist on a Korean body, or a racially East-Asian body that can "pass." Korean commodities are essentially linked to the Korean body, and both are imbued with a favorable cultural "fragrance" (Iwabuchi 2004) or a "gross national cool" of association with *Hallyu* (McGray 2002). I will use the concept of "fragrance" and "gross national cool" to think about the ways Korean cultural products carry an auratic presence, and subsequently what is associated with this presence of Koreanness.

By thinking about ethnography in circulation, I will investigate *Hallyu* as a process of branding Korean culture primarily through the lens of photographic images of Korean bodies in fashion, incorporating both Korean idols and everyday individuals. I will use theories of global circulation to understand how Korea has become "Korea, Inc." in the first place, creating a corporation out of a national cultural. This process inevitably is connected to the branding and commodification of Korean bodies, which become circulated images through *Hallyu*.

Fashion as Performance, Fashion as Self-Animation

This project will frame fashion practice in terms of performativity theory. As I engaged with Korean students every day during my semester abroad, I include the idea of performativity and self-animation to explore how youth in Korea engage with *Hallyu* in terms of their individual practices of dress. As fashion in this paper is understood as a uniquely embodied medium, I have chosen to understand how Korea's globalized cultural products of *Hallyu* make their way into the performance of self. In studying performance, I noticed that Korean people participating in fashion are not always performing an idea of self, but sometimes a fashionable character that is reflexively *not* one's self. I call this instead self-animation, drawing on Terri Silvio's theory (2010), to understand how youth in Korea self-animate characters of *Hallyu* themselves at Seoul Fashion Week and in the neighborhood of Hongdae, area's where perhaps fashion is performed that does not always reflect one's conception of self.

In speaking with Korean students at Kyung Hee University, I became interested in the ways in which fashion was a part of how individuals perform identity. I use the performance theory of Judith Butler to discuss the gendered expectations Korean students feel obligated to perform in terms of appearance. I will also use Erving Goffman's theory of performance to analyze how students balance performance through multiple systems of expectations. Korean

students are integrated into a society that is at once globalized and branded, "Korea, Inc." as well as traditional and conservative, as students informed me. I will consider these oppositional views of fashion in Korea as oppositional *fashion systems* of meaning, as theorized by Barthes. Thus, both sides of Korean society influence an individual's choice of fashion. Performing one's identity in Korea is often met with multiple systems of meaning, brought onto the individual, from peers, family, gendered expectations, as well as an imagining of Korean societal expectations.

Self-animation, or wearing clothes that do not relate to one's construction of self in everyday life, is my way of understanding the process of Korean people as they are active participants in constructing "Korea, Inc." At Seoul Fashion Week, because of the excessive use of fashion outside of everyday conventions, instead of viewing fashion as a performance I will use the framework of animation (Silvio 2010). Outfits during Seoul Fashion Week are constructed specifically to be outside of the conventions of the everyday, therefore one's presentation is not of the "self" but a character of *Hallyu*. I will compare this animation of fashion to Silvio's writing about COSplay, or costume play (Silvio 2006). Practice of fashion is not always related to one's performance of self, but instead one can animate a self-aware character constructed for a global audience, contributing to the global lexicon of Korean street fashion.

In the process of translation from global aesthetics into Korean popular culture, K-fashion is produced through re-fashioning, or styling. As global influences enter Korea, they become rearranged by Korean people and captured in an image, which then become circulated into the global imagining of K-fashion through online platforms. Combining these two overarching theoretical frames of fashion, performance and circulation, I will use Dick

Hebdige's book *Subcultures* analysis of *bricolage,* a term borrowed by Levi-Strauss, to understand how foreign symbols are compiled together into outfits representative of a Korean street style. *Bricolage* in the context of Korea can thus be seen as an embodied performance of global circulation. By styling together clothing from a variety of foreign influences, youth participate in the Korean Wave's circulation through styling outfits on their body.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter of this project investigates how the Korean nation has become a global brand through media in the Korean Wave. Using the Comaroffs' book *Ethnicity, Inc.*, I explore how *Hallyu* has constructed the nation as a corporation, selling "Korean culture" to global audiences. However, "culture" in *Hallyu* is not reliant solely on Korean tradition,[14] but also on the embodied mediums of popular music and television dramas. I argue that the commodification of Korea is thus uniquely reliant on the commodification of the Korean body through idols that act as "cultural ambassadors" of the state. In addition to looking at *Hallyu* through the idea of a corporation, I will also investigate how Korean bodies carry an aura of "cultural fragrance" or "gross national cool" that extends from Korean idols into the global imagining of a beautiful Korean ethnicity. Looking at "cultural fragrance" and "gross national cool" expands the commodification of *Hallyu* into commodities that are not necessarily Korean, but simply have a "whiff" of Korean cool attached to them.

The second chapter focuses on fashion practice as a performance of self at Kyung Hee University. Using Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* to look at the performance of gender, as well as Erving Goffman's performance theory to understand how students in Korea are always balancing multiple personas between the branded *Hallyu* and conservative Korean society, I investigate the systems of meaning surrounding fashion and appearance in Korea. University is

[14] I use Korean tradition to mean culture that is thought to be uniquely Korean historically.

the first time student's do not wear a uniform, and this transition into the public world of dress is met with newfound awareness of one's appearance in relation to their peers. Students become aware that fashioning one's body is not optional in society, but one must perform "enough" fashion to be accepted among one's peers, as Liechty notices in Nepal's burgeoning middle class (Liechty 2003). This chapter focuses in particular on the *use* of fashion among my peers at Kyung Hee, what Barthes calls *getting dressed* drawing from Saussure's *parole*, investigating how this individual practice of dress relates to the consumption of *Hallyu*.

The third body chapter focuses on Seoul Fashion Week as a physical place from which the circulated images of Seoul street fashion are produced. The event encourages young Koreans to engage in a highly performative display of fashion, enacting and representing K-fashion. This presentation of fashion is not a presentation of self, but instead an intentional presentation of a fashionable caricature that is constructed for the event. I use Terri Silvio's theory of animation to investigate how the body at Seoul Fashion Week is self-animated in the aesthetic of Seoul streetwear. Popular photography at the event enables everyday Korean participants to represent the "streets" of Seoul to the "fashion world." This chapter asks, how does photography shape Korean fashion, who creates these images, and who becomes the 'face' of Korean fashion through this event?

The fourth chapter focuses on the interaction between Korean fashion and global streetwear aesthetics as present in the neighborhood of Hongdae in Seoul, described by Michael Hurt as "where the cool kids hang out in Asia" (2013). I consider how foreign sounds of hip-hop music influence this neighborhood's unique system of dress that subverts the Korean fashion system my friends at Kyung Hee described. Foreign vintage shops in Hongdae sell clothing from places that are *not* Korea to be recombined into, what is interpreted as, a uniquely Korean hip-

hop style. Using Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures,* I analyze these vintage shops as the source of Hongdae's aesthetic *bricolage,* one that recontextualizes the meaning of fashion objects through these combinations. This chapter will also focus on the concept of circulation from Lee and LiPuma to investigate how hip-hop's movement around the globe is an active form of cultural production, changing the meaning of the genre. Foreign hip-hop aesthetics enter the Korean mediascape through music at clubs, images of foreign celebrities, as well as through American vintage clothing pieces; conversely, Korean streetwear aesthetics and Korean hip-hop music influence global hip-hop trends.

Chapter 1: Branding the Nation, Branding the Body

Bae Yong-joon, the leading male actor from the popular drama *Winter Sonata,* stole the hearts of Japanese middle-aged women[15] in April of 2003 upon the show's broadcast on Japanese television (Jung 2011, 35). In 2004, on a trip to meet fans in Tokyo, Bae Yong-joon was greeted at Narita Airport by over 5,000 adoring fans. After the initial chaos, over 1,000 fans continued to follow the star to his hotel. On that day, 10 women were treated for injuries after throwing themselves at Bae Yong-joon's car (Chung 2015, 195). Favorably calling him Yon-sama—*sama* being a term of endearment in Japanese meaning "Prince Yong"—Japanese fans were said to be afflicted with "the Yon-sama syndrome" to describe the seemingly hysteric reaction to Bae Yong-joon's presence. Viewership rates reached record highs, and encouraged the twenty-episode season to be re-aired four times in the next two years (Jung 2011, 36). Through tourism and merchandise sales, *Winter Sonata* is estimated to have generated an unfathomable 3 billion USD in profits (Chung 2015, 195-6).

The Yon-sama "craze" in Japan is considered one of *Hallyu's* most startling successes, as a former colony began to dominate the colonizer through media. Korea was ruled by an authoritarian Japanese military occupation from 1910 until the end of World War II, which oppressed the freedoms of speech, culture, and economic autonomy of Korean people. In modern Korea, anger still resides toward Japan, historian Michael J. Seth notes, "In few former colonies has there been such lingering hatred" (2010, 79). After the countries co-hosted the 2002 FIFA World Cup, a new symbolic understanding was reached between Japan and South Korea. This influenced the removal of media bans between the countries, allowing for the popular Korean drama *Winter Sonata* to be aired in Japan in 2003 (Mori 2008, 129). The unexpected success of

[15] This Korean drama appealed to a Japanese demographic of viewers which Japanese dramas often excluded (Mori 2008). The love story in *Winter Sonata* is especially sweet and innocent, appealing to an older audience through its non-offensive, non-sexualized content.

this K-drama marked the beginning of the Korean Wave's popularity more broadly in Asia and later the globe.

As the first man who ignited an interest in Korean media in Japan, Bae Yong-joon's presence on televisions in Japanese homes acts as an unexpected "diplomatic representative" of Korea. In this chapter I will explore how images of *Hallyu* come to represent the Korean nation to the world. I will begin by asking how Yon-sama is utilized as a representative symbol of Korea as a modern nation, continuing to detail how the Korean government has consciously constructed an image of Seoul as "global" using *Hallyu*. I will then examine the commodities of the *Hallyu*, arguing that the bodies of Korean idols situate even non-traditional commodities as 'Korean.' A guiding theme of this chapter is the duality of Korea's identity: simultaneously emplaced while remaining globally appealing.

Images of Korea: Yon-sama as a Metonym for the Nation

The obsessive love for Yon-sama caused a generation of Japanese people to be newly interested in Korean culture. In the article, "Winter Sonata and Cultural Practices of Active Fans in Japan," author Yoshitaka Mori argues, "it was the mega hit of *Winter Sonata* and the subsequent Yon-sama phenomenon that changed a stereotypical image of Korean people and culture in Japan in an unprecedented way" (Mori 2008, 131). Through various interviews with Japanese fans of the drama, Mori finds that Japanese women did not know about modern Korean society previous to their viewing of this show, noting that the history of Japan's colonization of Korea was not taught in schools. Mori contends, "for many, Korea was a 'close but far' *chikaku te toi* country, a conventional Japanese description of Korea" (Mori 2008, 137). Being "close but far" perpetuated many stereotypes of Korean people, history, and culture. By representing modern Korean life, this drama asserts that Korean society was not "behind Japan," and was

actually very similar to the fan's lives (Mori 2008, 138). The depiction of modern life in Korea and the rapid consumption of the drama catalyzed a correction of misconceptions that the Japanese populace still held from the end of the Korean War about their neighbor.

This newfound interest in Korea led fans to explore Korean culture outside of the drama itself. Fans took initiative to travel to Korea on *Winter Sonata* sponsored tours, educate themselves about Korean culture in the modern day, and even learn some Korean language (Mori 2008, 131). Through these images in a popular television drama, "the Yon-sama syndrome" created a new infatuation with Korean culture that overcame firm pre existing stereotypes of a "scary" Korean male, and, in turn, made many Japanese women believe Korean men were more attractive than Japanese (Jung 2011). This love for Yon-sama encouraged an increased interest in Japanese-Korean matchmaking services (Chung 2015, 196). In this way, Bae Yong-joon became the most successful "ambassador" for postcolonial understanding between Japanese people and the modern nation-state of Korea.

Karen Strassler's discussion of the photographic image is helpful for understanding how the Korean nation becomes "graspable" through Bae Yong-joon and his image. Strassler discusses how a photographic image acts to simultaneously represent and reproduce the idea of a coherent nation in contemporary Indonesia in her book *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java*. Strassler writes: "It is through the reflexive production and circulation of images that 'imagined' social entities like nations become visible and graspable, that they come to seem to exist prior to and independent of those images" (2010, 4). Photographs help make tangible representations of imagined national identities both for individuals within the nation and for outsiders looking in. Through Yon-sama, the idea of the Korean nation no longer occupies the abstract imagination, but instead becomes grounded in photographic depictions of

Korean life circulated by *Winter Sonata.* Strassler notes: "Through popular photographic practices the nation is not only 'materialized' but also *personalized*...At the same time, popular photographs entangle the work of forging selves, social relationships, and personal memories with broader projects of collective imagining" (2010, 5). Strassler discusses "popular photography" of individuals in Indonesia as they relate the building of a nation's image to be personalized. Through the photograph, the "personal" is mediated to be part of constructing a "collective imagining" of the nation: images of individuals come to represent the nation as a whole. Bae Yong-joon's image, although through a television drama, acts in a similar way to personalize the image of Korea.

Bae Yong-joon's image is used by the Korean government to encourage tourism into the country, codifying and commodifying Yon-sama as a representative of Korea. On the official tourist page of South Korea, tour maps are specifically created to guide foreigners to the shooting locations of famous scenes from *Winter Sonata*. Images of Bae Yong-joon's face surround maps of physical locations, showing a representation of when Bae Yong-joon *was there* (visitkorea.or.kr). By personalizing images of Korea through one celebrity, Japanese women, in particular, drastically reimagined Korea the nation: falling in love with Yon-sama encouraged women to fall in love with Korean culture.

Figure 2: Scan of a flyer found by the author while living in Seoul.

In the streets of Seoul, images of contemporary Korean idols adorn a variety of objects from phone cases, to *ramyeon*[16] cups, to T-money subway cards.[17] When I was living in Korea, the most popular drama was *The Goblin* starring Goo Yong and Kim Min-jae as wealthy,

[16] I use the spelling *ramyeon* throughout this project as it is a transliteration to the Korean word “라면" in place of the Japanese transliteration *ramen*.

[17] T-money is the transportation card for the Korean subway system.

fashionable young men living in Seoul.[18] Every day on my walk to school in Seoul, I passed a life-sized image of Goo Yong holding skin care products in the front window of The Body Shop. The photo above shows a pizza shop advertisement featuring Kim Min-jae in a flyer that I found on the floor outside of my apartment. Both of these stars from the hottest drama of 2017 had images of their bodies utilized as advertisements within Korea, making idol faces part of the everyday experience of living in Seoul. *The Goblin* is also used by the "Visit Korea" website in exactly the same fashion as *Winter Sonata* (visitkorea.or.kr, 2017). Goo Yong and Kim Min-jae simultaneously advertise products within Korea as well as advertising 'Korea' to an international audience through these tours. In this way, Korean idols are still acting as the subjects of personal photography that Karen Strassler discusses. The Korean idol is an anchor that symbolically represents and reiterates an image of Korea the nation, both within Korea and for international fans.

The Backdrop of Korea's Image: Seoul the Global City

Along with *Hallyu* media, the city of Seoul has been a site of great investment by the Korean government. Re-branding the city's physical architecture as well as its mediated images through *Hallyu*, the Seoul Metropolitan government has worked to transform the image of Korea from a struggling country into one of progress and desire. This new "brand" image of Korea relies on representation via metonyms: idols like Bae Yong-joon symbolizing the modern Korean man, and the city of Seoul symbolizing Korea's entry into modernity after the destruction of the Korean War. To do this, Seoul must be constructed as both "Korean" and "Global": both situated (original) and placeless (able to be recontextualized). In this section I will explore how Seoul is

[18] These two characters represent two different mythological creatures, the Grim Reaper (Kim Min-jae) and the Goblin, or Angel, (Goo Yong). The clothing styles from these two opposing characters influenced both a more proper Korean street fashion of turtlenecks and blazers from Goo Yong, as well as darker colored streetwear looks from Kim Min-jae.

constructed in the image of a "placeless place" by the Korean government as part of creating a "branded" image for the nation.

The Korean government's branding of Seoul as a "placeless place" is in part to attract foreign tourism, and this strategy is a common feature of any nation seeking to commodify their culture. As Jean and John Comaroff write in *Ethnicity, Inc.* the nation in its earliest conceptions has always "been a brand-under-construction, always immanently, imminently corporate. But it is becoming ever more explicitly, affirmatively, assertively so as the idiom of ethnonationalism interpellates itself onto the existential core of civic being" (2010, 125). The Comaroffs write that the conception of the modern nation has always been about branding, but this relationship between nation and business is beginning to infiltrate even further into how citizens relate to their own nation. Naming this phenomenon "Nationality, Inc.", the authors write that branding the nation is based in capitalizing on a nation's difference, in "roots" and something "essential" about the nation's identity. This branding requires balancing between "the cosmopolitan and the exotic" (2010, 123).

In much of the literature about Seoul, analysts from Korea use the term "global city" to refer to Seoul's development strategy (Lee 2014; Hwang 2014; Yun 2013). The term "global city" was initially theorized by Saskia Sassen to refer to centers of the global marketplace, emphasizing the global finance centers of New York, London, and Tokyo (2001, 6). Seoul may be more aptly described as a "global *cultural* city," for unlike other "global cities," Seoul's development has not been focused in the financial sector. Instead, it has been driven by government sponsored *Hallyu* media and promotion of unique Korean cultural experiences. While the Comaroffs' book focuses on the commodification of traditional cultural products with attention to fitting in tradition with modernity and globalism, in Korea, cultural commodities are

both traditional elements of Korean culture as well as the inherently modern elements of *Hallyu* commodities. The commodities of *Hallyu* (dramas, pop music, fashion, and beauty) are not Korean commodities because of their historic roots, but because of language, aesthetics, and the Korean bodies present in these mediums. In Korea, we must ask what "culture" is being described in the construction of a "global *cultural* city."

The Korean government has ambitiously invested in the branding of Seoul to support the nation as a global tourist destination. Hyunjoo Lee writes an in-depth analysis of the development strategy of Seoul under Mayor Oh (2006-2011). In 2008, former President Lee (2008-2013) began the "Global Korea" foreign policy strategy that explicitly connected the South Korean federal government to the development of the country's global image, working closely with Mayor Oh of Seoul to specifically promote Seoul through this program (Lee 2014, 6). To appeal to tourists, these leaders worked to create the image of Seoul as a "culture" city, as opposed to an "industrial" city, by establishing a city marketing department (Lee 2014, 3). This government department focuses on creating "culture events" Lee citing that 1988 Summer Olympics, and the 2002 FIFA World Cup co-hosted with Tokyo as two examples. Seoul Fashion Week and the Dongdaemun Design Plaza, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, are also part of this Seoul Metropolitan Government project. In addition to culture events, Mayor Oh "tried to connect Seoul directly to the Korean Wave by turning to internationally renowned singer [and actor] Rain to represent Seoul as a goodwill ambassador for the city" (Lee 2014, 7). As noted in the example of *Winter Sonata* and *The Goblin* tourism, Lee specifically names this phenomenon "Hallyu tourism" (2014, 6). Through Lee's analysis, it seems as if Seoul is branded more so through modern cultural products like *Hallyu* and the Olympics rather than on a re-branding of Korean historic tradition.

Visions of Korea in *Running Man*

The game show *Running Man* introduces viewers across Asia to elements of Korea's traditional culture through fast-paced challenge games, repackaging tradition into a modern setting. By using a cast of six young comedians and one featured Korean idol guest, this show combines *Hallyu* idol culture with 'essential' Korean cultural experience to construct a branded image of Korea as a placeless place. Challenges in *Running Man* take uniquely Korean experiences like *hansik* (한식, "Korean food")[19] and *jimjilbang* (찜질방, "sauna room") into the fast-paced speed of modernity through *running*. *Running Man* is a game-show, but also a reality TV show, where the actors are presented with a challenge and seemingly react live and unscripted to the task at hand. Traditional objects of Korean culture are reimagined as elements of games on the show, making Korean tradition also foreign to the actors who experience familiar objects in unfamiliar ways. *Running Man* exemplifies a "balance" between the extremes of "the cosmopolitan and the exotic." This show advertises Korean culture with attention to attracting both an international as well as a modern Korean audience.

The Comaroffs write specifically about the commercialization of a nation as practiced in part to appeal to tourists, as a nation "recognizes itself and fixes its place in the world" creating a "here" to attract tourists from a multitude of "elsewheres" (2010,123). "Nationality, Inc." implies that "the identity at issue here is founded, quite expressly, on hetero-nationhood, on a recognition of irreducible difference within" (Comaroffs 2010, 123). In order to "brand" the nation, differences are recognized and emphasized. "In this semantic economy," write the Comaroffs, "difference adds value. But it cannot diverge too far from palatable prototypes" (124-5). The

[19] *Hansik* combines "*hanguk*" meaning Korea the nation, with "*umsik"* meaning food, and denotes traditional Korean dishes.

comedy and fast pace of *Running Man* as well as the young actors construct a “palatable” view of Korean culture while emphasizing the “differences” of Korea.

The Comaroffs assert that in our current neoliberal economy economists would assume that as a cultural product becomes a commodified “thing” suitable for the market, it would lose its initial distinguishing difference and thus lose its original value. The authors find that the opposite logic occurs in the global circulation of the “ethno-commodity” (2010, 19). Echoing Marx in their statement that “the ethno-commodity is a very strange thing indeed,” the Comaroffs discuss that commodities based in an ethnic identity can circumvent traditional economic ideals of commodities (20). The Comaroffs write that the ethno-commodity’s “‘raw material’ is not depleted by mass circulation. To the contrary, mass circulation reaffirms ethnicity—in general and in all its particularity—and, with it, the status of the embodied ethnic subject as a source and means of identity...The aura may reside as much in the duplication of these objects as in their uniqueness” (Comaroffs 2010, 20). The Comaroffs use the concept of the ethno-commodity to challenge Benjamin’s idea of the aura depleting in circulation in *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.* An ethno-commodity uniquely can become globally circulated while remaining emplaced, resisting the logic of the aura depleting, surprisingly “reaffirming ethnicity” through duplication. An ethno-commodity becomes distinct precisely through the process of mass circulation. *Running Man* at once “reaffirms” the uniqueness of *jimjilbang* and *hansik* as Korean experiences while circulating globally through television broadcast in Asia.

My friend Lytha, an international student at Kyung Hee University[20], told me *Running Man* introduced her to Korea’s “unique” cultural products. Lytha is ethnically half Indonesian and half Chinese and was raised in Jakarta, Indonesia, consuming Korean television, music, and

[20] “International” denotes a student who will complete a degree start to finish in a country that is not their home-land or nationality, as opposed to an “exchange” student who stays for the semester or one year.

other media of *Hallyu.* For Lytha, the experience of *jimjilbang* ("sauna room") and the dishes *jajangmyeon* (짜장면, "black noodles"), *bibimbap* (비빔밥, "mixed rice"), and *naengmyeon* (냉면, "cold noodles") represent an "essential" culture that cannot be reproduced outside Korea. *Running Man* is an example of how Korea remains "situated" in a unique culture while also blending this "advertisement" with a comical, fast-paced challenge game.

One day in our dorm building, Lytha tells me casually about the K-pop fans, "K-poppers" as she calls them, in her high school growing up in Indonesia. Through talking, I realized how ingrained Korean cultural products were in Lytha's life before moving to Korea. I asked Lytha if I could interview her for my thesis project, she accepted, and we sat in the tiny floor of my shared bedroom and chatted about her experience with *Hallyu.* When talking about her perception about Korea before moving to Seoul, Lytha primarily talked about the uniqueness and beauty of Korean food:

> The unique thing is Korean culture itself. Like the one thing that [makes] it different with Western. Western make it easy for food culture, like burger and pizza, it's easy to make! But Korean culture, they make like really nice look, good looking *bibimbap* or *naengmyeon*, we just like "Oh we never [tasted] it!"[21]

In Indonesia, Lytha and her friends were interested in Korean food because they had never seen anything like the "good looking" food they had seen in *Running Man*. In Indonesia, her friends were inspired to eat *jajangmyeon* ("black noodles") after viewing it on the show. Her friends would say, "I saw *Running Man*! And Gary, or Kwang Soo, or Song Ji-hyo eating it [*jajangmyeon*]! We should eat it too!" While Lytha starts with telling me the "unique" quality of *hansik* makes her interested in eating it, later she tells me that her friends want to eat

[21] All interviews for this project were conducted in English with English as a second language speakers (with the exception of Michael Hurt in Chapter 3). While acknowledging that this may make reading quotes challenging for English speakers, I use direct quotes in this project to allow my friends' voices to share their own experience. I have used brackets "[]" to signify my intervention into quotes in order to clarify what is being said and correct tenses.

jajangmyeon because they see Korean actors eating it, and they want to "eat it too." Gary, Kwang Soo, and Song Ji-hyo become "ambassadors" of *hansik,* in traditional Korean food, by nature of their status as admired actors. Images from *Running Man* inspire Indonesian teenagers to frequent Korean restaurants that have been becoming increasingly popular in Jakarta. *Jajangmyeon* and other Korean dishes represent commodities that maintain a "placeless-place" dichotomy: Lytha and her friends view these foods as essentially "Korean" as they eat them in Jakarta, view them on their televisions, and dream about traveling to Korea to taste these foods in the footsteps of their favorite idols.

Later in our conversation, Lytha articulates that Korean media acts both as entertainment but also as an advertisement of Korean culture. When I asked Lytha why she likes watching *Running Man*, she responded:

> I love the challenge game...The one thing that make me impressed with *Running Man* and Korea is, they are so smart to package their advertisement not like advertisement. It was like [an] indirect introduction [to] their culture and their food stuff...For example, they make a TV show [that is] just for challenging game, but actually inside the challenging game, they introduce Korean culture. And then they advertise some restaurant then, and that restaurant has like [a sign stating] "*Running Man* has ever come here!" So all the Indonesian who go for tourist here, they try to find that kind of restaurant.

Just like previous generations of *Winter Sonata* fans, Indonesian *Hallyu* fans wish to follow in the footsteps of their favorite idols. Images of *Running Man* idols appear on businesses' signs in Seoul, adding a lexicon of *Hallyu* images to the landscape of the city. In Lytha's words, *Running Man* has cultivated through "advertisement not like advertisement" an "indirect introduction" of Korean culture alongside a comical television program. Lytha admires the program specifically because it can be both fun and informative.

In the middle of our discussion of *Running Man*, my roommate Bo-young[22] walks into our shared room having just come from a shopping trip. Upon hearing our conversation, Bo-young interjects. Raised in Vietnam, Bo-young has watched all 350 (and counting) episodes of *Running Man*, and she can't help but add in that the show also capitalizes off other Korean idols. She adds:

> Yeah, I think one more reason why it became popular is because every episode there will be guests, and these guests will be like famous like actors and actresses from the trending dramas, or K-pop groups. And then, through the games they, the fans get to see like, they're [the idol is] embarrassed, like they're[the idol is] doing funny stuff on the show... I think that's why it's popular too, among like the K-pop fans…[seeing an idol] more like in real life kind of.

Getting to see one's favorite idol participate in a game-show is exciting to K-pop fans as it personalizes the idol's image, which is otherwise static.[23] By also including a guest idol on every show, *Running Man* further incentivizes *Hallyu* fans to watch idols running and eating their way across Seoul. *Running Man* successfully combines elements of idol culture, humor, and Korean foods into a show so popular it is an important shared cultural phenomenon for youth across Asia, from Indonesia to Vietnam.

One of my first weeks living in Korea, a group of exchange students and I went to the same *jimjilbang* (찜질방, "sauna room") that was featured *Running Man*. In a group of students from China, Vietnam, and Singapore, I was the only one who had never seen *Running Man*. Just as they saw the actors, my friends folded towel wraps for our heads, forming two buns on either side of our heads. They explained that it is a tradition to eat smoked eggs and sweet rice drink in *jimjilbang*, laughing as they cracked the eggs on our heads like the game *Running Man* played.[24]

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[22] While my friend is Vietnamese and raised in Vietnam, she chose a Korean name to be her pseudonym. Interestingly, most Korean participants chose English sounding names.
[23] I claim idols appear "static" in advertisement images or in music performances because they are not showing personality but instead a performance.
[24] To see the game, watch here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuDnUZLTxgI

In the show, each actor had to crack eggs on their head from a tray containing twenty smoked (and boiled) eggs and one raw egg, the point of which was that one actor would get crack a raw egg onto their face. Eating smoked eggs and rice drink is part of *jimjilbang*'s culture before *Running Man*, but now smashing eggs on one's head become "tradition" because Kwang soo did it on a television program.

In Seoul, there is a small *jimjilbang* in every neighborhood. These "sauna-rooms"[25] are open 24 hours, and are commonly used as cheap places to sleep and bathe, or to relax for the day, as the entrance fee covers a stay of up to twelve hours. In any *jimjilbang* there is a common space with a floor and pillows where one can rest, dining services, unisex sauna where one dresses in a provided uniform, and a Men's and Women's separate bathing room in which everyone is walking around nude. The *jimjilbang* featured on *Running Man* has the same features as the local spots, but is also seven stories high, and includes a swimming pool, multiple restaurants, an arcade, and over ten different styles of sauna in the common space. Inside this massive *jimjilbang*, the legacy of *Running Man* continues through large, poster-sized photos of the stars in their scrubs and towel bun-wraps. Throughout the complex, there were multiple televisions screening the episode in an infinite loop. This *jimjilbang* is specifically marked by its relation to *Running Man* through these screens, and is also already a more expansive version of the traditional Korean spa.

Lytha told me a that one of her friends traveled all the way from Indonesia to Seoul to go to this exact *jimjilbang* because she had seen this experience on *Running Man.* Similar to the "Yon-sama syndrome" mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Lytha said that her friend is experiencing a "fan hysteria" when she is trying to crack the eggs on her head. Lytha later told

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[25] In Korean, *bang* (방) meaning "room" and is added to many words to denote a business that provides "a place to do…" For example, karaoke is called *noraebang* which translates to "singing room."

me that this episode also impacted behaviors in Indonesia, where girls in her high school locker room used their towels in the "Korean style" after exercising. *Jimjilbang* for Lytha and her friend represented an "interesting" aspect of Korean culture that incorporate itself into the daily life in other places, by wearing the towel head wraps in Jakarta*,* while also uniquely Korean, requiring her friend to travel to Korea to experience *jimjilbang* firsthand*.* The ethno-commodities of Korean food and sauna that one must go to Korea to experience indicate the nation's mastery in creating a branded national identity, a "Nationality, Inc."

In this example, the dissemination of *Running Man* advertises traditional Korean cultural products, *hansik* and *jimjilbang,* while simultaneously producing a change in how that product is consumed*.* Tourists are not concerned only with the "ethno-commodities," in the Comaroffs' sense, of Korean culture. Instead, many travel to Korea with the intentions of imitating *Hallyu*: mimicking what they have seen Korean idols do on their television screens at home. The televised image is then brought into the *jimjilbang*, inscribing modernity into a traditional space. By advertising the "branded" version of *jimjilbang* within Korea, *Hallyu* changes Korean tradition itself. Through the branding of "ethno-commodities" in *Running Man*, the commodity is already altered not to represent tradition, but instead to represent the modern Korean idol.

Branding Korean Faces

Lytha and Bo-young show how Korean idols have successfully encouraged people to come to Korea to have unique cultural experiences of *hansik* and *jimjilbang,* literally teaching tourists where to go and what to do in Korea. In these examples, food and the sauna are ethno-commodities that idols and the show *Running Man* advertise. However, *Hallyu* media do not always represent "traditional" objects of Korean culture; instead, they feature Korean idols singing pop and hip-hop, or actors in K-dramas eating at a convenience stores. *Hallyu* culture

portrays cosmopolitan youth as the "culture" commodified in "Korea, Inc." When Kim Min-jae's face appears on an advertisement for pizza in the beginning of this chapter, can these objects be seen as ethno-commodities in the same way as *hansik*? *Hallyu* commodities use images of beautiful Korean idols to advertise products and experiences that are not from Korean traditional culture. Instead, the face of the Korean idol can transform anything, including a pizza, into a Korean cultural item through the international presence of *Hallyu* fans.

On the cover of *Ethnicity, Inc.* the Comaroffs show an image of an advertisement for the "Zulu tribe" featuring a Zulu woman, describing this image as a depiction of the woman as "at once global fashion model and nubile native" (2010, 12). The Comaroffs acknowledge that her body is the "interpellation of the erotic into the exotic" commodifying the "Zulu ethnicity" (12). This poster utilizes a beautiful woman to advertise the "Zulu Kingdom" cultural experience, a recreation of Zulu traditions in a "culture park" (24). In contrast, *Hallyu* implies the commodification of an essentially modern Korean culture that only began in the early 2000's. I argue that uniquely, the Korean face can be placed on a non-traditional Korean product, like the pizza advertisement, to create an ethno-commodity that is reliant on the body present in the image and not from the commodity itself.

Through talking with Lytha, I came to understand that images of Korean idols can transform any object into an ethno-commodity of *Hallyu.* Lytha explained to me how instant *ramyeon*, an originally Japanese food item, could become a desirable object for K-pop fans abroad. Lytha said that her friends in Indonesia purchased convenience store *ramyeon* noodle from Korea because of the handsome idol faces that adorn the cup:

> So there is like the *ramyeon* (라면) cup with just the K-pop band face. And the K-pop band followers [in Indonesia] they buy it from Instagram, you know for how much? You buy it in Korea just 5,000 or 4,000 [₩] They pay it for like four times, and they should pay for the transportation fee. Just for looking at the

> cup *ramyeon*! They didn't eat it, you know? They keep it at their rooms… (*we laugh together*) And in Korea, they just eat it and throw it! They just eat it, eat the *ramyeon*, not looking at the face!

Part of the appeal of K-pop music, Lytha told me, is how "handsome and beautiful" she found the "faces" of the idols. While people in Korea interact with the *ramyeon* cup as a food item, fans in Indonesia and around the world purchase the *ramyeon* cup in adoration of the beautiful Korean idol face regardless of its more utilitarian function as food. The cup is brought into the bedroom and kept as an untouched keepsake, a trophy of one's devotion as a fan. *Ramyeon* noodles are not purchased in Indonesia because fans believe them to be a Korean traditional cultural product: the commodity's origins are irrelevant to the international fan, who collects this item for the beauty of the face adorned onto the object. On a mass-produced object, the image of a Korean face on the *ramyeon* cup bestows an aura of "Korean-ness" into the commodity object, transforming a Japanese originated food item into an ethno-commodity of *Hallyu* through a Korean face.

What are the qualities of the idol's face that can transform a product of utility into an ethno-commodity, extending further the reaches of the Korean Wave? In Dorine Kondo's book *About Face*, "face" is used as an overarching theme for discussing race and gender in the fashion and theater of Japanese and Asian Americans. Kondo writes that face "evokes the fashion world, beauty, and cosmetics, and thus the socially constructed persona...Face is our primary external, bodily locus of identity" (1997, 26). Face, Kondo writes, is interrelated with beauty, cosmetics, and the fashion world, which will be investigated later chapters of this project. As the "bodily locus of identity", the face is always seen by an "external" public. In the following section, I will explain what the idea of "Koreanness" implies, and how the face of the idol and Korean idol fan

culture translates to an imagining of the Korean identity itself as having a similar auratic appeal, examining how the Korean identity can create “craze.”

“Gross National Cool”

In the beginning of this chapter, I examined “the Yon-sama syndrome” which is regarded as the genesis of the *Hallyu* phenomenon’s entry into global awareness. This event is especially significant for *Hallyu* because Japanese media used to be the “global” media of Asia, and Japan’s adoration of Yon-sama reversed the trend in media flows. I asked Lytha one day if people at her school had a Japanese-media-clique, and she responded, “Yeah! Before Korea attack Japan, I mean like, before Korean attack Japan trend in Indonesia. These days Japan is not that trend anymore.” Lytha uses the word “attack” twice to identify how Korean media became the “trend,” describing *Hallyu* in terms of overthrowing Japan’s colonization of media in Asia. As Japan’s media presence in Asia has been historically longer than Korea’s, I will use scholarship about Japan to assist in my analysis of the proliferation of *Hallyu*. This use of analytical articles is not intended to imply that the phenomenon of Korean and Japanese media globalization are identical. On the contrary, I use scholarship about Japanese media to illuminate how these two nations have mastered creating a brand image, but will contemplate how *Hallyu* uniquely relies on a commodification of the Korean body in this process. Unlike the “ethno-commodity,” but similar to *Hallyu,* Japan commodifies “modern” cultural products (animated characters, technology, etc.). In a process similar to the ethno-commodity, products of *Hallyu* and the Japanese character retain a cultural aura in mass circulation. Instead of relying on traditional cultural elements to create commodities of the nation, Japan and Korean products rely on this cultural aura to create a kind of ethno-commodity from any commodity regardless of origin.

As the idol face adorns a cup of *ramyeon* noodles, creating a Korean product, Anne Allison writes about cute animated characters becoming the "millennial product" of Japan. Allison notes that while Japan's economy has suffered a recession since the 1980's, the characters and cultural exports from Japan, from Pokémon to Tamagotchi, have pervaded the global children's toy market. Allison writes how these "cute" characters are ubiquitous in Japan:

> Certainly, the images of cute characters are omnipresent in the landscape of urban, millennial Japan. Iconized onto commercial goods, they appear on T-shirts, book bags, lunch boxes, pencils, hair ribbons, hand towels, rice bowls, bath soap, cooking pans, calendars, and erasers. Characters also embellish posters for public events or neighborhood fairs, show up on government notices or service announcements, and are stamped onto computers, copy machines, and even bulldozers. (2004, 40)

As Allison describes animated characters' relation to Japanese products, Korean *idols* adorn products as pervasively as Allison describes above. Associated with cuteness, but more specifically with "beauty" and "handsomeness," the "millennial product" of *Hallyu* is the face of the Korean idol. The idol's face, adorned onto products like the *ramyeon* cup, can act similarly to the Japanese "cute" character, however, the idol's face is far more "placed" as both "Korean" and as "Asian" than the animated character. For example, while Pikachu exists in a fantasy landscape, boyband and girlband idols can only be imagined in Seoul, as a K-pop members, and as part of the uniquely beautiful "Korean" people. Korea's "millennial product" is not a character from a fantasyland but instead an embodied caricature of one's self, the idol (Allison 2004, 40).

The Korean idol is not only beautiful and cute, but also imagined as "cool," as Douglas McGray writes about Japanese products in the article "Japan's Gross National Cool." McGray notes, "It is impossible to measure national cool...National cool is an idea, a reminder that commercial trends and products, and a country's knack for spawning them, can serve political and economic ends," (2002, 11). This *idea* of "Japan's Gross National Cool" allows Japan to

utilize the "soft power" of the Japanese brand to sell cultural products. McGray writes, "From pop music to consumer electronics, architecture to fashion, and animation to cuisine, Japan looks more like a cultural superpower today than it did in the 1980s, when it was an economic one" (2002, 1). As Japan's economy wanes in power, instead of discussing the Gross National *Product*, McGray is interested in more illusive, incalculable Gross National *Cool* of Japan. In contrast, Korea's economy today has developed far past the nation immediately after the Korean War, from a developing country in the 1960s to a top economy in Asia today (Lie 1992, 286). Without concern for Korea's status as a "developing" nation, scholars now look towards the products that make Korea a "cool" nation: the products of *Hallyu*. As mentioned earlier, Korea can be a *cultural* superpower, apart from its status as an economic one.

McGray notes that the authenticity of a Japanese product is not relevant to its circulation in the global market, but instead, "what matters is the whiff of Japanese cool" (2002, 2). In *Hallyu*, the "ethno-commodity" does contain not just a whiff of Korean cool, as mediums of *Hallyu* are an unavoidable, embodied representation of Korea. Also using the metaphor of scent, Koichi Iwabuchi writes about this "odor" of Japanese-ness in products. Iwabuchi defines two types of cultural scents: "cultural odor," meaning an unappealing cultural identity that ought to be concealed, and "cultural fragrance," that which adds appeal that "does not derive primarily from the inherent quality of a product; it has more to do with the image of the country of origin" (2004, 57). In the case of the *ramyeon* cup, the K-pop idol face creates an "imprint" of Korean-ness into the cup, adding a "cultural fragrance" and thus value to the product. Korea, imagined as a "cool" nation from depictions in *Hallyu*, has "cultural fragrance" that extends its presence into the image of the idol's face, the face itself containing the "*idea* of cool" mentioned by McGray.

Unlike ethno-commodities from Japan, with which Allison is preoccupied, Korean ethno-commodities of *Hallyu* are uniquely embodied, reliant on a commodification of ethnicity. This ascribes "gross national cool" specifically to the Korean idol body, giving ethnicity itself a favorable "cultural fragrance." The explicit commodification of the Korean idol's body constructs an idealized, imagined "beauty" for Korean people en masse. As Korea is considered an ethnically homogeneous country, and as it is considered both a nation and an ethnicity, perhaps Korean bodies become imbued with the "gross national cool" of *Hallyu.* As fashion trends from Korea are typically presented on ethnically Korean bodies of idols, my friend Lytha told me that she believes Korean trends only "suit" Korean people:

> Lytha: They [Korean people] have kind of style that just match with Korean. For example, if Japanese do the hairstyle blue, it feels, it's seems not suits with them. But for Koreans, it's like "Oh! That's the G-Dragon dress"[26] so if Korean dress like him, it is match. I don't know, that kind of perception.
> Emma: Can you explain it again?
> Lytha: There is like style and fashion, that just, we [Indonesian people] think it just suits with Korean. So, if Indonesian do the blue hair, totally blue hair like for example...it's like "Oh, you're strange." And if Japanese do like blue hair, we imagine that "No it's Korean style, not Japanese style." It becomes a brand for Korean, like no, it's become a unique style for Koreans. It's just for Koreans.

For Lytha, there is something specific about Korean trends that are associated only with people that appear to be ethnically Korea. The face itself is of central importance to Lytha's idea of who can and who cannot participate in "Korean style." Paleness and a racialized idea of beauty in Korea is also embedded in Lytha's idea of an ideal face type. I ask Lytha why she thinks her friends and herself believe Korean trends look "weird" on Indonesian people and Japanese people. She says, "because you are not Korean, it's not so weird! It's not suit with

[26] G-Dragon is perhaps the most popular K-pop music idol worldwide and amongst Korean people. He has been the front member of the group BigBang for over ten years, in addition to having a successful solo career. In other words, G-Dragon could be considered *the* idol of *Hallyu*.

your...aw...this one! (*pointing to her skin*)" I inquire further, as many Japanese people have pale skin, why can't Korean trends work on them? Lytha responds: "But I don't know why, Korean [style, they] just think like it suits with Korean, because of the face, the shape of the face too, and the face itself. Japan and Korea [is] different." The Korean face itself contains the incalculable "cool" and "cultural fragrance" of *Hallyu.* Although Lytha told me that Korean trends like blue hair do not "suit" people who are not Korean, she also said that "K-poppers" in Indonesia faithfully follow trends they see from *Hallyu* idols. Lytha herself followed the trend of side bangs that many Korean girl groups donned when she was in high school. Although Lytha told me that Korean trends may not "suit" bodies that are not ethnically Korea, she also demonstrates how Korean fashion and beauty trends are still widely popular in Asia.

In this chapter, I have examined exactly how Korean trends become desirable for people like Lytha and her friends in Jakarta. By producing a global image of Seoul as a placeless-place, and advertising Korean culture through shows like *Running Man,* Korea becomes a globally imagined place. In the Comaroffs' view of the ethno-commodity, *Hallyu* comes to replace "tradition" as the desired "differences" of Korean culture. *Hallyu* is modern, and contains with it an imagined "cool" that recodes products that do not necessarily originate in Korea. Within *Hallyu* imagery, on the body of Korean idols, ideas of fashionable clothing and beauty trends become globally circlated. In the next chapter, I will investigate how Korean people living in Seoul fashion their bodies, influenced by both a "traditional" view of Korean culture as well as a self-reflexive consumption of *Hallyu* media that are intended to flow outwards.

Chapter 2: Everyday Practices of Dress at Kyung Hee University

At Kyung Hee University, I became interested in how my fellow classmates dressed for school; I noticed students were far more presentable in their daily appearance than what I had seen as a student at Bard College. Unlike students in America, Korean students at Kyung Hee rarely, if ever, wore leggings or sweatpants to school. Kyung Hee students typically covered themselves modestly, not wearing crop-tops, revealing cleavage, or showing shoulders in tank tops. Instead, most female students wore make-up every day, and even donned skin-tone pantyhose when wearing short pants and skirts. In the Women's bathrooms at Kyung Hee, as with most restrooms I saw in Seoul, women at all hours of the day stood by a large vanity mirror re-applying foundation, touching up lipstick, and fixing hair with curlers. When going out for lunch each week, my buddy Christina brought her lipstick and cushion foundation, a compact mirror with a foundation sponge and applicator, to re-apply her makeup after we finished our meal at the table. From noticing these subtle behaviors, I became interested in how the everyday fashion practices in Seoul construct a system of conventions as they are related to *Hallyu* media that the students consume.

I came to Korea with ideas of Korea only from *Hallyu* media, having seen videos of K-pop stars from the cutesy IU to the 'bad girl' CL, street fashion photographs of outrageously colorful styles at Seoul Fashion Week, and Korean fashion design brands who push the boundaries of streetwear into the realm of high fashion. I thought perhaps Korea *used* to be conservative, but in the fashion images I saw, there was nothing shy about the design, styling, and colors of K-fashion. When I started interviewing Korean university students about their practices of everyday dress, I was confronted with tales of Korea as a 'conservative' place that strictly defined what college students felt they were able to wear. This chapter will first explain

the specific context of the Korean university as students' first experience getting dressed for the public, contextualizing these experiences within performance theories of Butler and Goffman. It will then continue to focus specifically on the stories of students from Kyung Hee, who told me about *Hallyu* idols setting trends, and strict limitations on what one *can* wear in Korea. Students' voices speak to personal experiences of fashioning their bodies in Korea, marking a distinction between the Korean society they find themselves in from the branded "Korea, Inc." that is broadcast for foreign consumption and also consumed by Korean youth. This chapter will contextualize how fashion acts in the University setting as it is both informed by and antithetical to *Hallyu* fashion.

Performing in Public: University Life in Seoul

In Korea, university marks the beginning of a student's participation in fashion, as strict dress codes control students' appearances in nearly every middle and high school, both public and private. In the article, "Do School Uniforms Lead to Uniform Minds?" Judy Park connects the ubiquitous presence of school uniforms in Korea to a lack of creativity among Korean youth. Judy Park notes that Korean students on average wear uniforms for 13 hours a day because of the popular after-school programs, known as *hagwon* (학원) or "cram schools" (2016, 163). Beyond clothes, Korean school dress codes also regulate personal appearance: "Most middle schools and high schools do not allow students to grow their hair past a certain length, perm or color their hair, or wear any hair products such as hairspray, gel, or wax" (Park 2016, 161). The transition into university thus signifies the end of oppressive regulations of appearance, Park writes, "Korean university freshmen often have exaggerated or awkward, strange styles for they only start to experiment with fashion in a creative way in college" (175). Most university students, as I observed in Seoul, continue to live at home throughout university, and must establish their

personal style under the watchful eye of their family. Entering into public view, Korean university students experience new freedoms of expression while becoming aware of the expectations family, career, peers, and Korean society require of personal appearance.

In many of the interviews I conducted, Korean university students mentioned that keeping up with fashion and makeup trends is a necessary part of university life. In the ethnography *Suitably Modern*, Mark Liechty discusses how the construction of a middle class identity in Kathmandu requires participation in “doing fashion” (2003, 121). Liechty writes that through “fashioning selves and bodies in dialogue with their class others--the middle class constructs a new ‘outside,’ or public, domain and claims this new public space and publicness as its own” (121). Entering the public space of university in Korea, many students discuss the transition from high school to college as a time when they didn’t *choose* to participate in fashion, but were *required* to present a fashionable and beautiful self. Liechty writes about the necessity of participating in fashion in modern Kathmandu, writing:

> Unlike a few who might be said to, in this woman’s words, “do *real* fashion,” most people in Kathmandu, rather grudgingly and with various degrees of anger and anxiety, try to maintain cultural parity with their friends. In this sense, fashion practice—as a communicative mode—is class practice; it is a new performative medium through which people attempt to synchronize their lives with those of others. (139)

Among middle-class women in Kathmandu, “doing fashion” is necessary for maintaining one’s status as middle-class. “Doing fashion” implies, in Liechty’s work, not necessarily “doing *real* fashion” but doing enough fashion to participate in the middle class. For Korean youth entering the public of a university, there is an unspoken expectation to perform in a way so as to suggest the wearer’s middle-class status. Although not addressed explicitly by my friends at Kyung Hee, fashion practice inherently denotes fashioning one’s body to show one can afford to keep up with the current trends.

In addition to economic class practice, fashion in the university is also a performance of gendered roles, as seen in the case of makeup application in the bathrooms at Kyung Hee. In Judith Butler's theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble,* gender is understood as a constructed identity that is "instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (1990, 140). Just as Liechty notes that the middle-class in Kathmandu performs fashion in public, Butler notes that gender is performed in an "exterior space": the "public character" of these performative acts of gender "[are] not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is affected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame" (140). The presence of gendered behaviors in public constructs the binary frame of gender, for subjects also view others in public performing these *stylized acts*. Butler writes, "gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations" (138). In Korea, students are practicing gender through fashion choices, imitating peers who they directly see, as well as idols who portray ideal images of Korean beauty: the *public* of gender representation in Korea is constructed both through individuals and through branded images of Korean bodies in *Hallyu*.

Butler's theory on gender performativity, I contend, builds on Erving Goffman's foundational book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where Goffman writes that every social interaction is a performance of one's identity. Butler and Goffman both view the self not as fixed, but as a continued performance. Goffman writes, "A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing...it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated" (1959, 75). Goffman's theory of performance allows for all aspects of identity to be investigated as they are constructed through social interactions. "Koreanness" is constructed

through repetitive acts of stylizing the body through fashion, constituting the category of "Korean fashion" through everyday practices of dress and its imitations.

Goffman, interested in social interaction, argues that one's performance as a social character is constructed with a goal of attaining a "working consensus," an approval or validation from the audience that coheres with one's presentation of self (1959, 10). Goffman explores the difference in identity between the verbal self one *gives,* a manipulatable self, and the presentational self one *gives off,* one's uncontrollable set of expressions. As this presentation of self is manipulatable to a degree, Goffman's performer can achieve this "working consensus" with more than one group of people, a *team,* and under more than one characterization of one's self (10). A person capable of occupying multiple characters within multiple "teams" is termed a "go-between" (Goffman 1959, 149). Goffman writes that when confronted with a situation where the "go-between" must be viewed by both "teams" at once, he must balance multiple presentations simultaneously:

> When a go-between operates in the actual presence of the two teams of which he is a member, we obtain a wonderful display, not unlike a man desperately trying to play tennis with himself. Again we are forced to see that the individual is not the natural unit for our consideration but rather the team and its members. As an individual, the go-between's activity is bizarre, untenable, and undignified, vacillating as it does from one set of appearances and loyalties to another. (149)

In the performance I discuss in this chapter, my friends at Kyung Hee University inform me that they, too, are always presenting a version of themselves for an "audience" that was invisible to myself, as a foreigner, of a conservative Korean society. My friends at Kyung Hee also told me the ways *Hallyu* media influenced fashion trends in Korea, but that many of the styles present in K-entertainment are incongruous with the Korea my friends described. In this way, my Korean friends expressed to me a performance of self much like Goffman's theory of the "go-between"

as they must perform fashion in the likeness of *Hallyu* stars, while acknowledging that another audience of Korea's conservative society watching over them (Goffman 1959, 149). University students in Seoul must always fashion their bodies to appeal to two contradictory audiences.

In the next sections of this chapter, I allow the voices of the people I interviewed in Korea to speak to the *fashion systems* of meaning they interact with in their everyday lives. As most of the Korean students I spoke to had either studied or lived abroad, they provided a unique perspective into Korea's fashion system. The next sections are divided into three: beginning with examples of *Hallyu* systems of dress entering the realm of the everyday; continuing to discuss students' expressed restrictions of appearance in Korea; and finally describing the expectations students feel they must uphold to participate fully in university life in Seoul.

Trends in Circulation: K-Pop to Kyung Hee

Fashion trends among youth gain significant popularity through appearance on celebrities. Liechty notes that Indian and American media has impacted fashion styles in Nepal, writing, "to generate demand fashion goods require auras of meaning that transcend their mere functionality, and the media are crucial channels for this modern consumer signification" (2003, 130). Leichty connects the consumption of foreign media in Nepal to how individuals interact with fashion. Unlike Liechty's study in Nepal, Korean youth consume media representations of their own nation that were consciously constructed to be consumed *elsewhere*. I borrow the term "circulation" from Lee and LiPuma in this section to describe the consumption of K-entertainment within Korea, an externally directed media wave that flows back into the nation of origin (2002). As described in the previous chapter, foreigners travel to Korea seeking to go where Bae Yong-joon and *Running Man* went; youth living in Korea seek to wear clothing they see on the bodies of Korean idols.

Figure 3: G-Dragon on *Radio Star*, image found online (soompi.com, 2016)

One of my classmates at Kyung Hee, Rick[27], told me how trends have circulated from Korean idols into his wardrobe. Rick is a Korean member of the IFCC[28] club at Kyung Hee, and spent several years in his childhood living in Germany where he was first introduced to American hip-hop music. I sat next to Rick in class, and learned that he had a significant interest in global streetwear aesthetics primarily from noticing his daily outfit choices. Meeting up in a coffee shop, Rick impressed me with his knowledge of Kanye West's fashion endeavors. He conveyed that the three biggest influencers in Korean men's fashion are American musicians Kanye West and A$AP Rocky, and K-pop idol G-Dragon. Rick said that his interest in fashion is related to media images he consumes of both Korean and international celebrities, specifically musicians.

Rick explained to me how G-Dragon started the trend of an oversized blue and white vertical striped button down shirt, as pictured above. In the talk show *Radio Star*, G-Dragon

[27] My friend wanted his pseudonym to be Rick Sanchez from the cartoon *Rick and Morty*
[28] International Friendship and Culture Club, explained in the Introduction.

wore this shirt during an interview with the group BigBang, of which he is a leading member. Rick told me that the designer Xander Zhou created this shirt, originally worth 1,200 USD, for the brand Vetements, a prestigious French street fashion brand. However, from popular demand of Korean fans, the Korean brand 8-seconds came out with a similar shirt, Rick told me, for "a much cheaper price, of 45 to 50 USD." Consequentially, G-Dragon is *the* brand representative for 8-seconds: his face is so associated with this brand that it is viewed as the "G-Dragon label." G-Dragon is thus immediately responsible for producing the images of a trend item of clothing, on *Radio Star*, and the production of a replica version of the item.

Rick told me about his own participation in this trend through the replica version of the Vetements shirt:

> I personally bought that shirt from 8-seconds, yeah, but I consider it a well labeled replica, actually, it's basically the same design, the same kind of concept, same kind of vibe, only launched by a brand with huge financial backgrounds instead of like minor designers or minor replica producers.

Because of the associated prestige with G-Dragon's brand 8-seconds, the knock-off striped shirt is considered, to Rick, a "well labeled replica" instead of a counterfeit product. The concept of the knock-off will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 3, but in this example the idea of media prestige from G-Dragon's presence, or aura, is a significant factor for the circulation of this shirt. G-Dragon's appearance in clothing becomes available to Rick from multiple media sources: music videos, paparazzi photos, television appearances, as well as modeling for the 8-seconds brand. These encounters with G-Dragon's auratic imprint in clothing items imbue commodities with an incalculable value. In the case of the striped shirt, G-Dragon adds value both to the brand producing the replicas and to the original shirt.

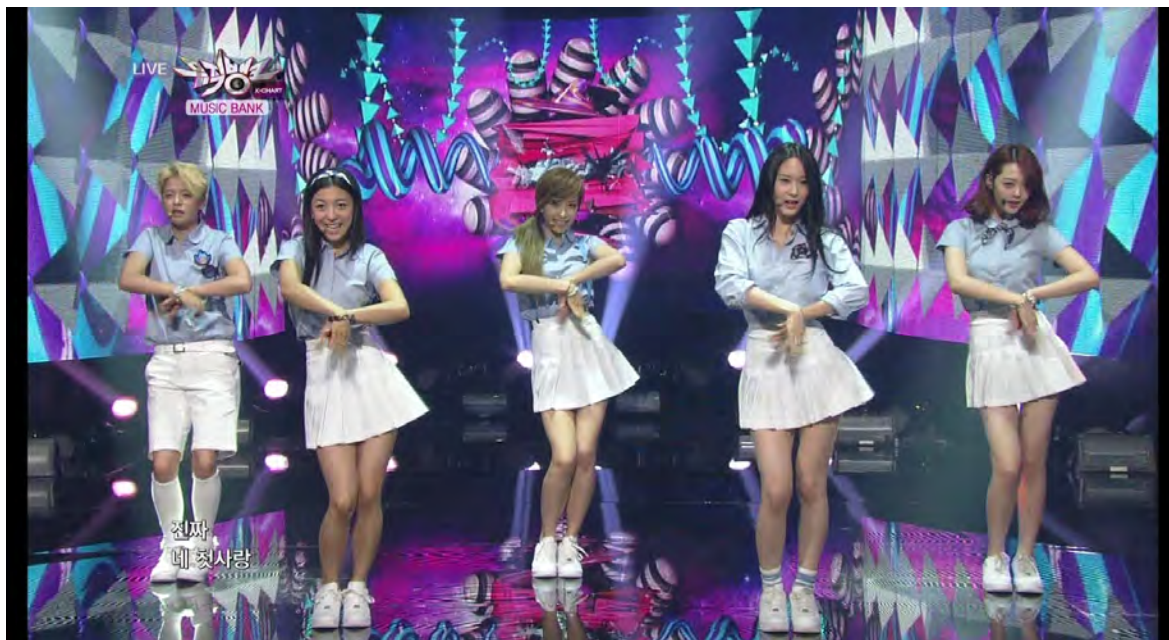

Figure 4: f(x) Performance on *Music Bank,* image found online (One Hallyu, 2014)

In another instance of K-pop culture transcending the *Hallyu* sphere and entering the everyday lives of Korean university students, my friend Joy tells me that the pleated mini skirt, known as the tennis skirt, became popular from the Korean girl group f(x). Joy, also a member of IFCC, lived in Tennessee for one semester on exchange, and had just come back to Kyung Hee the semester I lived there. Joy notes that the trend of the tennis skirt started "a few years ago" due to f(x)'s appearance on *Music Bank,* a weekly live music program where idol groups perform in front of an audience. Joy noted that even if students didn't watch the show, images and videos of the performance appear on Facebook, remediated onto social media platforms. Joy said that this performance directly and quickly affected the availability of tennis skirts in major stores: "After that, a lot of shopping [malls] sell them. And when I go to Gangnam[29], [I see] a lot of tennis [skirts]. But I feel ashamed to wear tennis skirt sometimes, because everybody [wears] them, when I wear pink tennis [skirt], I see another tennis skirt ten times a day." Joy told me that K-pop idols influence what people her age wear so significantly that it causes a phenomenon

[29] Gangnam is an area of Seoul considered to be the most upscale, wealthy. Popularized in the song "Gangnam Style," the artist Psy is mocking the opulence and excessive wealth of Gangnam through this song.

where many people dress similarly. For Joy, although she participates in fashion trends such as the tennis skirt, she does not like the feeling of "everybody" wearing the same thing.

The tennis skirt at Kyung Hee is still an extremely popular fashion piece that can be seen on women "ten times a day," in my experience as well. Stores all over Seoul, not just in the department store brands of Gangnam, sell tennis skirts for as little as 15,000₩ (14USD). The affordable price of the tennis skirt adds to the style's lasting ubiquity in fashion style in Korea. The tennis skirt represents for Joy an incident when a K-pop group directly influenced what she noticed her peers wearing, what she sees being sold in stores, and even more intimately what she purchases for her closet and fashioning her body.

The tennis skirt, as shown in Figure 4, also alludes to the school uniform that originally represented for Joy a restriction of students' freedoms in fashion. After mentioning, "Youth are especially highly influenced by the media in Korea," Judy Park continues to write, "School uniforms portrayed in television drama series are often considered trendy, either in the designs themselves or the way they are coordinated with accessories, and young people follow the school uniform styles worn by their favorites stars on television" (2013, 165). From high school K-dramas, as well as K-pop stars like f(x), students in Korea are exposed to uniforms considered fashionable. The uniform thus becomes an item of trend in fashion, expelling its direct connotations with the school uniform and now reappropriated into the lexicon of fashion styles popular among university students.

Many Korean students believe that their personal fashion choices are inspired by *Hallyu* media, however, many times student expressed a disconnect between what they see Korean idols wearing and what they are *allowed* to wear. My assigned buddy from IFCC, Christina, said to me during one of our interviews in the school cafe, "So I think we cannot wear that clothes [that

idol's wear], that fashion in daily life...because it's Korean culture, [it's] a little conservative." Christina is aware of what idols are able to wear; she told me that she discusses idol fashion culture with her friends, follows idols on blogs, and sees advertisements that feature idol models in shopping malls. Surrounded by "foreign friends," Christina heard often about the international students' love of K-pop idols and K-beauty trends, and watched as we were able to stay out all night without worrying about our parents' judgments of our actions. Perhaps she wanted to remind me that Korea is a conservative place that, unlike the images I had consumed of Korean youth in *Hallyu* media, held a high standard for the appearances of youth, which restricts her freedom to dress in the style of idols.

What Not to Wear: Restrictions of Appearance

Expectations of appearance influence the way in which everyday people pursue their professional goals. In Korea, it is a common convention to require an ID photo to be included on a resume, meaning your employer is able to make hiring decisions influenced by appearances. Jun, who wishes to become a television broadcast reporter, intimated that he must maintain a professional appearance to pursue his career goals. Jun and I frequently talk about his love of hip-hop, and he sent me music videos to help me learn about Korean hip-hop throughout the year. As I observed, Jun typically dressed in a business casual style: button down shirts, khaki pants or tailored jeans, and dress shoes. Having already completed his mandatory military service, Jun was one of the older students at Kyung Hee, and dressed like he was ready for a professional career at any moment. When I knew Jun, he was applying for a summer research grant from LG, one of Korea's top companies, in the hopes of later finding employment at the company. Jun tells me that he could never pursue his career as a broadcast reporter with a tattoo, saying, "When the people [are] watching the news, when the people see me doing tattoo on the

news, *laughs,* not good, bad, worse." The very idea of a tattoo in this field was comical to him, never mind that most newscasters wear conservative clothing that could hide most tattoos: a newscaster having a tattoo simply doesn't work in Jun's conception of this profession.

Knowing Jun's love of hip-hop music, in our interview I ask Jun if he ever dresses in a hip-hop style. Jun responds, "No never!" He continued to tell me that a buzz cut is a marker of hip-hop style in Korea, but he would never consider getting the haircut:

> Cuz they think [of a] buzz cut as a defiance, cuz when you see the strikes of labor union, or any communities strike...To protest this...they did buzz cut! Always, so, I am fan of hip-hop but I can't say that real hip-hop fans, cuz you know in Itaewon or Hongdae you can see many people who wear like hip-hop musicians they think they are real hip-hop fans...In comparison to them, am I a real fan? I like hip-hop music, but I didn't do, didn't wear…cuz I don't have confidence to do that. Cuz conservative society makes me never do that.

Jun mentions one of many signifiers a "buzzcut" carries in Korea: a demonstration of political protest. Jun then tells me about his ideas of what makes a hip-hop fan "real" and explains his own inability to participate in hip-hop through his style in terms of Korea's conservative society. Jun notes that "conservative society *makes* me never do that." Whether thinking about his future career or Korean society at large, Jun acknowledges that he is *required* to dress appropriately by Korea's history as a conservative country.

Of the friends I interviewed, I believe Ken provided the most insight into to how Korea as a Confucian, conservative society affects his daily life. I initially interviewed Ken because he was writing a paper for our Anthropology class about skateboard culture and fashion in Seoul, but throughout the interview we ended up talking more about his own relationship to fashion living in Korean society. Ken told me:

> This atmosphere of society, Confucianism society, uh, restricts each [individual] to act as what they want to do. Every people have to care about what other people think about for him or her, so they have to follow the society's rule. I feel so tired of that, and I believe many Koreans think like this too.

For Ken, Confucianism in Korea is not necessarily related to the religion. Instead saying Korea is Confuscian means, to Ken, that an individual must be concerned with what other people think. Ken sees that a lot of his peers are tired of caring so much about their appearance to others, but this aspect of society seems to be unavoidably strict. For example, Ken mentions that he wishes he could have full tattoo sleeves on his arms, but he knows this will not be acceptable because his parents wouldn't approve. Worrying about what *other* people will think of his appearance, Ken does not plan to get the large, colorful tattoos of his dreams.

My friends mention to me both broadly and specifically that Korea's conservative society has impeded their ability to dress freely. For Christina, Korean society as a whole is the impediment. For Jun, his future career goals and ideas of what a successful person can look like in Korean society impact his freedom of expression. For Ken, he was afraid of his family's judgments. Throughout our conversations, students told me about the expectations of one's fashion in Seoul. The next section presents many fashion "rules" as expressed to me by students, and how these perceived guidelines of appearance may contribute to the feelings of frustration with Korean society discussed previously.

Expectations of Appearance

As I have mentioned before, watching women re-apply their makeup in school restrooms, subway cars, and restaurant tables in Seoul was a catalyst for my interest in the everyday fashion culture in Korea. When I ask Joy about her use of makeup, she tells me that when she came to university she felt the need to wear makeup more regularly. When I asked Joy why she started wearing makeup regularly only in university, Joy told me:

> Um, because I went to girls high school. And I don't have to put on make-up to be pretty that much, and also I have to focus on my [studies] more before go to university, that's the reason. After I [turned] twenty, and I go to university, there

> are a lot of mans, and I want to be pretty (*giggling*) and also, everybody put on makeup and I feel uncomfortable to not to put on makeup.

As Joy has expressed, the feeling that "everybody" is wearing makeup encourages many university-age women to participate in the daily application of makeup. Joy feels pressure from fellow female students to do her makeup, as well as a pressure to present herself as "pretty" or attractive for men. Joy mentioned that in high school she would wear makeup sometimes, but since coming to Kyung Hee she has become, due to her time in this environment, "uncomfortable" without it. Similar to Ken's description of "Confucianism," Joy mentions that the university is a space where others are always judging one's appearance. As Goffman theorizes, an individual's continuous performance of self is always aware of the audience one must perform for, shaping the performance to reach approval, consensus, from that audience. In order to gain that approval, Joy feels like she must perform her gendered self through the repetitive practice of makeup application.

As Joy is one of many women at Kyung Hee who use makeup daily, I asked her about the women I see reapplying foundation in the bathrooms between classes. As Joy spent one semester in a school in Tennessee, she compares makeup practices in Korea to America:

> Oh yeah! I never see American girls put on, I think they focus more on eye or lips but Korean culture we care about the skin more, but my skin is terrible now because I don't put makeup on for five or six hours.

Joy mentions that in Korea, beauty and makeup practices are focused on the goal of perfectly clear skin. Joy details to me the different uses of makeup in her daily life, telling me she uses a heavier foundation in the morning, and then carries a cushion foundation and lip-product to touch up her face throughout the day. I ask Joy how often she would want to put on makeup, and she told me every three hours is typical for her. A made-up face is a nearly ubiquitous convention of appearance for female university students in Korea, and being made up relies on a

continued ritual of applying and reapplying makeup every few hours at vanity mirrors stationed in nearly every restroom in the city. The infrastructure of the university bathroom enables women to continually inspect their faces throughout the day.

Joy notes that the convention of talking 'about the face' among Korean youth may be the reason why South Korea has the highest rate of plastic surgery in the world (Lee 2016, 3).[30] Comparing her experience at Kyung Hee to her time in Tennessee, Joy is aware that the culture of openly critiquing one's appearance in Korea is not acceptable amongst American young people. Joy continued to tell me about the conventions of plastic surgery she has noticed amongst her peers:

> There is a culture of plastic surgery after the SAT, after college entrance exam. Korean high school students only think about how to get [to] college, before, they think "Oh if I go to university I will be very pretty" or "I would enjoy my life" because before that they have to suppress that and just [bide] their time. So after entrance exam, they want to get [a]gift or something. And I think plastic surgery is one of that [a gift]. So, this, is very common (*pointing to her eyes*)[31], and this is second (*pointing to her cheeks*), but I didn't see a lot of people do the nose, but I saw a lot of people do the (*points to her eyes again*).

Joy points out that this culture of talking about beauty frequently influences youth in Korea to receive plastic surgery as a high school graduation gift. Joy views the transition between high school and college as the time when plastic surgery is most prevalent, again alluding to the pressure to perform an acceptable appearance once one reaches university age. Plastic surgery or the imagining of a pretty face is treated as a gift for students who push through the excruciating work of taking the college entrance exam in Korea. The "standards of beauty" in Korea are more

[30] For scholarship about plastic surgery culture in Asia and amongst Asian Americans: (Kaw 199; Lee 2016).

[31] Double eyelid surgery is the colloquial term for a blepharoplasty, a cosmetic surgery procedure that creates a crease in the center of the eyelid through a small incision.

fixed, Joy believes, to appreciate double eyelids, noses with high bridges, and thin faces: features of the face that are only available through plastic surgery.[32]

Similarly to Joy, when Lytha moved from Jakarta to Seoul to attend university, she began wearing makeup daily. Lytha told me that she was immediately struck by the fact that every woman she saw wore makeup:

> And then the one that make me shock, every girl is [wearing] makeup...I think everyone was sick, like every girl was sick, because they wear a mask on their face. And I am asking my friend, they said, "No they didn't do makeup so that's why." Just like, "shit"

Lytha brings up that makeup in Korea was "shocking" for her to see. Of equal shock, Lytha was at first confused to see so many people wearing surgical-style facemasks to class. There are many reasons one would wear these facemasks: for the "hip-hop" style connotations[33], to protect one from the "yellow dust" season (the springtime pollution that is supposedly carried by wind from China), or because someone wasn't wearing makeup or otherwise didn't feel beautiful enough to be out. I was told the latter many times in Seoul by women wearing masks, but when I asked Lytha why men at our university would wear face masks, as men wouldn't necessarily wear makeup daily, she said it may be due to their fear of the sun darkening their skin. In a long list of beauty standards in Korea, paleness is a high priority for Korean youth seeking to be beautiful. Skincare stores all carry "whitening" and "lightening" products, every makeup product has SPF included, and most foundation makeup is sold in only a few extremely pale shades. The face mask in Korea acts as a shield: at once protecting one's bare face from exposure to criticism from one's peers as well as damaging rays from the sun.

With the high rate of turnover of fashion trends in Seoul, the definition of "pretty" is always in flux. Those in the pursuit of being "pretty" are forced to constantly follow trends in

[32] For further discussions on plastic surgery among Korean and Asian Americans: (Kaw 1993; Lee 2016)
[33] More about the facemask as a hip-hop style piece in Chapter 4

fashion and beauty, consuming and presenting the latest product trends on their bodies. When I was trying to make sure I understood Lytha's definition of traits that make a "pretty" girl in Korea, Lytha stopped me when I said "girly clothes" and corrected me:

> Not girly only, but trendy. If you wear the old style, they [your friends] will feel embarrassed themselves [to be seen with you]. I can see, like my friends say that, and her clothes is really fine, she say like, "Awww, no, it's the old one I should buy new one." It's like, "Are you crazy? Just keep it for next next next next next year and use it, it will become trend again. Who knows?"

One time when I went out for a drink with Christina, she was wearing a dress I had never seen her in before, made of denim. The dress was a tailored sheath dress, not quite fitted but still flattering the body, with fringe on the hems. That same night I saw someone else wearing an almost identical dress, but when I pointed and compared the dresses, complimenting the cute style, Christina told me "It's from last year," looking down shyly. From this interaction, I inferred the reason she doesn't wear it to school is because it was an outdated trend. Beauty is also associated with keeping up with trends, so while one's fashion may be beautiful, if it is not current it can be a source of embarrassment for oneself or one's friends.

Knowing of the pressure to be beautiful for both social and career reasons, many young women in Korea participate in "fashion diagnostic" tests. After an extensive body shape and complexion examination is completed, an expert provides recommendations for makeup as well as clothing cut, colors, and brands that one should purchase to develop a fashion style that is suited to the individual. My friend Christina shared with me her "test results," talking to me about the importance of such a document for her. These "diagnostics" of fashion are not cheap: Christina told me she paid over 100 USD for her test. This test, she told me, will be used in her personal style development for the rest of her life:

> I think in Korea, I think Korean culture the woman has real big interest in appearance and looking and fashion and clothes, a little serious, I wanna go

> abroad because of this reason. So stressed out because of this culture, this mind, I wanna develop my looking and appearance and fashion continuously. When I stop at this step I will be lower than the other girls…[I must] continuously develop and develop myself. This is one way to develop me, I think it's so important. Because my fitting fashion and fitting color, I can use this until older, older me. I wanna know exact information about me, and I can use it continuously.

For Christina, Korean culture requires women to continuously develop their personal fashion, a culture that is more "serious" about appearance than countries abroad. Hanging out with Christina several times a week, she intimately knew that I did *not* take my appearance "seriously," going to school without make-up on for example.

Christina is frustrated with Korean society taking appearance so seriously, but knows she must participate in this "development" of appearance in order to participate in society at large. Christina views this development to be a linear progression, and although she is only a sophomore in college at the time of this interview, she is worried about "stepping lower" than her peers, i.e. falling behind others' "development" of personal appearance. Christina continued to tell me why tests like these are popular in Korea:

> Fashion is so important part of the looking, I think so important...But I wanna go abroad, I wanna leave here. It's so stressful, when I see the foreigner friends I really envy them. Because so free. I think Korea is so *so* serious, woman is so important to make their style and looking well

Although Christina is a serious student of economics, and spends the majority of her time studying in the library, she must also be aware of her appearance to "do enough fashion" to be a part of her peer group as Liechty notes in Nepal's middle-class. Christina's interest in fashion transcends the circulation of "trend" and is instead an investment in her personal style, however, both trend and style have significant importance in students' sentiments toward fashioning their bodies. Christina also specifically addresses the fact that women's bodies are under particular

scrutiny in Korea, like most of the world. For Christina, this fashion diagnostic test is serious, as it is a direct investment in her future.

Feelings of Freedom

Throughout this chapter, I have addressed the ways Korean people feel their appearance is informed by both *Hallyu* media, which is constructed to be consumed abroad as discussed in Chapter 1, and conversely by a conservative Korean culture that foreigners, even those living in Seoul, cannot see. My friend Ken tells me about the difference between listening to music to *feel* freedom, and the ability to *act* freely:

> This 2NE1 (*a K-pop girl band*) things make us feel more free, to not to care about other people. To give those Korean fans to behave more like what they want to do, it's allowing them to, giving chance to them to act more freely.

For Ken, Korean society is one that affects his awareness of others, making him follow society's rules because of the perception that people are watching him. 2NE1, a famous K-pop girl band that are known as the 'bad girls' of K-pop, represents freedom from the constraints of Korean societal expectations. 2NE1's edgy clothing aesthetic, sexually suggestive lyrics, and music videos showing the women "smashing glass,"[34] as Ken tells me later on, elicits a feeling of freedom from Korean viewers. Ken enjoys this music because it gives him a "chance" to "feel more free." Later, however, when I interrogated further into the difference between "acting" and "feeling" free, Ken confides that while the music of 2NE1 makes him *feel* freedom from these artists, it is impossible for him to *follow* the freedoms expressed in K-pop music.

Unlike in daily life, when one can *feel* freedoms of *Hallyu* but not *act* in this way, the next chapter of this project will focus on the event of Seoul Fashion Week where youth are able to dress more so in the style of a K-pop idols like 2NE1. Seoul Fashion Week is a space where the everyday performance of fashion, as depicted in this chapter, is temporarily suspended, and a

[34] To see 2NE1 "smashing glass" see attached music video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7_lSP8Vc3o

new system of fashion takes over. At this event, Korean youth, similar to my friends at Kyung Hee, style exaggerated outfits inspired by *Hallyu* idols and foreign celebrities. These outfits actively participate in the construction of K-fashion aesthetics when captured through photographs and circulated online.

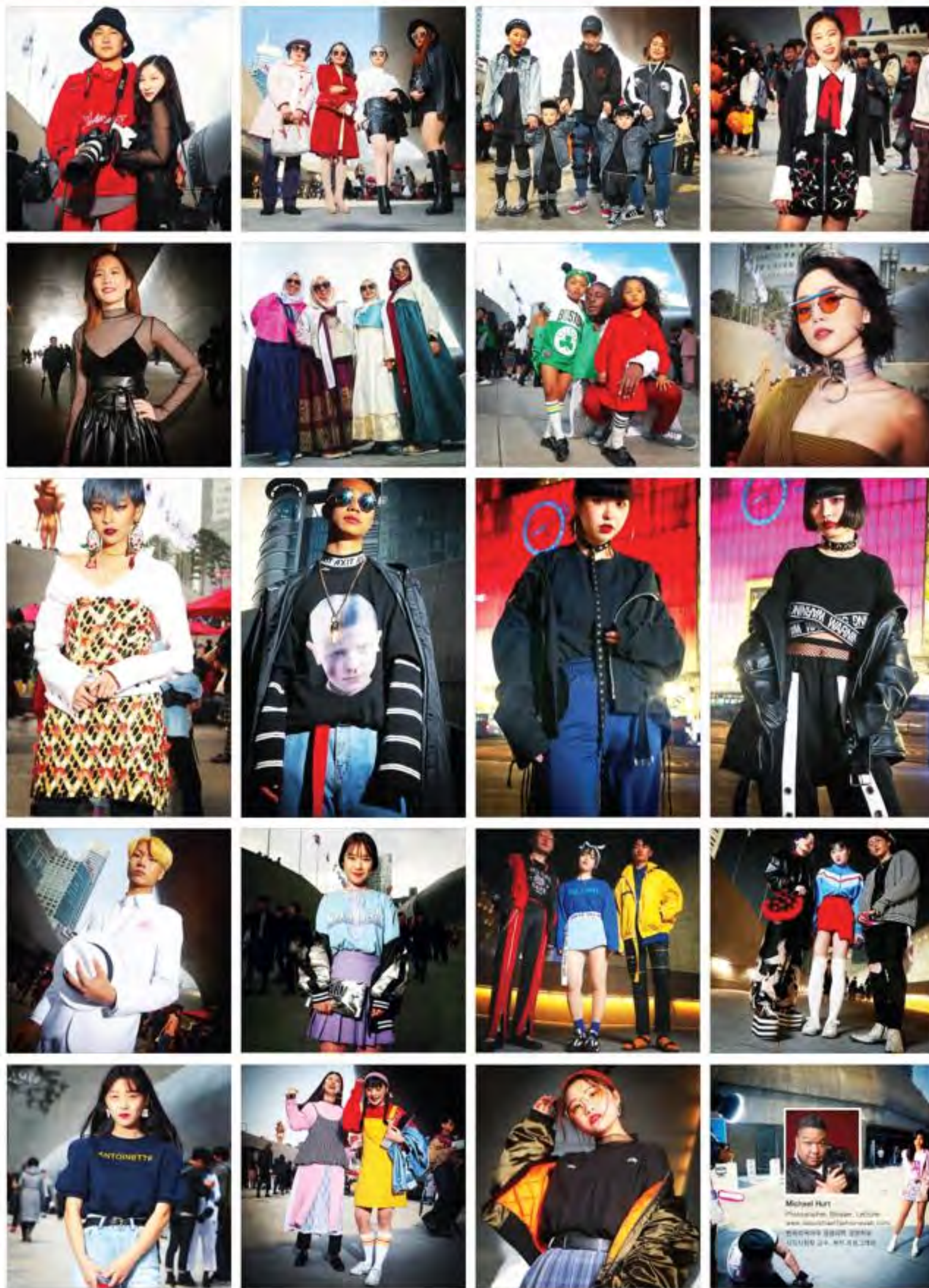
16 Street Fashion TIN뉴스

Figure 5: Photo's taken by Michael Hurt and published in TIN newspaper, reprinted with permission

Chapter 3: Capturing Seoul Fashion Week

Having just run from class at Kyung Hee, I just made the subway to Dongdaemun-gu to make it to Seoul Fashion Week by 2pm. My roommate's camera is shoved into my backpack, I am wearing a black faux-leather moto jacket, and apply a dark plum lipstick using a small handheld mirror while on the subway. Even though it's the middle of the afternoon on a weekday, I struggle to find Michael Hurt on the ramp in the massive crowds. Looking for Michael, I walk up and down the ramp leading into the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. Without my camera and press pass in hand, a man confuses my place in the event and asks for a photo. I kindly agree, and shyly pose for his photo. After a second, the moment is over. My photo has been taken by a stranger who walked away, my image has been captured and stored, and now has the potential to become digitized, shared, and inscribed into an album of "Seoul Fashion Week" photographs somewhere on the web.

I bring this incident up because it was a simple moment where I, a photographer, was reinscribed, momentarily, as a model of Seoul street fashion. In the space of Seoul Fashion Week, images like this one come to represent Korean fashion to a global audience. The space of this photo, the ramp, will be the focus of this chapter. While consciously constructed to be out of the ordinary, "street" fashion photography of Seoul Fashion Week claims to be an authentic depiction of youth culture. K-fashion at the current moment is most represented not by design houses, but instead by bloggers and street fashion photography, which both seek to emulate an authentic Korean fashion sensibility that represents the youthful "street fashion" culture of Seoul. Without a camera in hand, I was a youthful face at the event, becoming a part of "street fashion" in Seoul simply by standing on the ramp.[35]

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[35] I noticed this phenomenon that anyone can be a model many times: just by the nature of me taking a photo of a person, others would follow suit.

Unlike daily life, Seoul Fashion Week is a time when one not only *can* embody styles seen in *Hallyu* media, but one *must* in order to fully participate. This chapter will investigate Seoul Fashion Week as a source of images of K-fashion, paying specific attention to the young people participating in street fashion who come to represent the event. The "street" of Seoul Fashion Week is the most popular image production of the K-fashion aesthetic (outside of Korean idol medias) but I argue that this display of fashion is more similar to COSplay (costume play) or animating a caricature of oneself rather than the performance of fashion discussed in Chapter 2. This space does not represent a lawless fashioned utopia, on the contrary, one must be in-the-know of trends in Seoul in order to draw attention from photographers. This chapter begins with an analysis of how the event itself is structured to value the fashion of youth. It then considers how youthful voices are heard in this space. Later, it will look specifically at how fashion is "animated" specifically for the event, how young people are not simply performing "self" for the event but animating a fashionable self for the ramp. And finally, I investigate how photography frames the event: recording, capturing, disseminating, and distorting reality.

Seoul Fashion Week: Event Background

Figure 6: Model at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza, *photo taken by author*

Figure 7: Capturing the photographers at Seoul Fashion Week, *photo taken by author*

Seoul Fashion Week is hosted at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza, located in the center Seoul, on the north side of the Han River that cuts directly through the city. As *Koreana* magazine writes, the area of Dongdaemun-gu is known as “the Mecca for Korean ‘fast fashion,’” meaning fashion that is produced quickly and cheaply to capture the trend of the moment (*Koreana*, 10). An historic shopping area, Dongdaemun has been operating as both a site of production and commercial sales for over a century, making it the birthplace of a vertically integrated fast-fashion industry (*Koreana*, 10). Dongdaemun-gu is most famous today for having shopping available 24 hours a day, drawing hoards of international tourists.

The Dongdaemun Design Plaza was constructed by internationally acclaimed architect Zaha Hadid. Incorporating parametricism into the design of this building, the Plaza utilizes a conflation of boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces; the fluid lines of the building seemingly encapsulate the entire city block. As described by Michael Hurt on his blog, “Seoul Street Fashion Week,” the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) architecturally looks like a spaceship that landed in the middle of the sweatshop, industrial fashion district (Hurt 2017). During Fashion Week, Korean designers host shows inside the building, and only those with tickets or press passes can enter. However, the indoor/outdoor space created by the roof and ramp of the building allow street fashion photo shoots to happen on ground open to the public throughout the week, shown in Figures 6 and 7.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government sponsors and organizes the event of Seoul Fashion Week, although investments into the program have not provided the anticipated success of Korean fashion (Kim 2015, 896). Seoul Fashion Week began in 2000 and was hosted by multiple disparate organizations. In 2012, the Seoul Metropolitan Government established the Seoul Design Foundation and the Council of Fashion Designers in Korea to centralize the event’s

organization team, and in 2014 the event found permanent home at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (Kim 2015, 897-9).This history of the Seoul Fashion Week has restricted the event from forming a strong, unified identity until recent years. Only after the move in 2014 to Dongdaemun Design Plaza, in the heart of Seoul's fashion district, could Seoul Fashion Week become recognized through the images of models on a consistently striking backdrop of the Plaza building.

Korean development scholars, like Hyun-joo Kim and Hye Eun Kim, have strategized through texts how to increase Seoul Fashion Week's global appeal by writing development plans for the event. The goal of these texts is for Seoul to achieve the coveted fifth position behind the current top four fashion weeks: Milan, London, New York, and Paris. Kim writes that the Seoul Metropolitan Government's near-full funding of the event may be preventing its success: "While many [fashion week] events have government funding from the municipal government, many are subsidized heavily by private companies, while Seoul's government covers all but 8% of the events expenses" (2015, 896). More importantly, in other cities, the event is organized by non-profit organizations; Seoul Fashion Week is directly organized by government-established councils. Kim notes that it would contradict this goal of promoting Seoul fashion and "the domestic industry" if the event had "a big multinational company as a main sponsor" would (2015, 897). However, both Kim and Kim argue that the event still lacks centralized organization and the government's involvement may be limiting the event's growth.

Unlike other Fashion Week events around the world, Seoul Fashion Week is largely open to the public and attracts comparatively large crowds to other major fashion weeks. Kim writes, "In 2015 SS [Spring Summer Season], the number of visitors to SFW was 55,558, whilst the visitors to LFW [London Fashion Week] were 5,000, that is, almost ten times less" (2015, 898).

These crowds are made up of "press, buyers, VIPs, celebrities, students, etc." not just fashion industry representatives. In my experience at Seoul Fashion Week, university and high school students make up large portions of the crowds on the street. This, Kim writes, is due to the intention for the event, "fashion collections in Seoul have been regarded as a way of presenting designers' work rather than selling it" (2015, 903). Fashion students and young people filling the seats at fashion shows may be "unthinkable in other Fashion Weeks," but high numbers of attendants increases the exposure of these brands directly to young consumers (Kim 2015, 903). Kim and Kim argue that having students and "the public" at the event detracts from international business, as the crowds cause a general commotion. The Seoul Metropolitan Government spends 30% of the event's funds to accommodate international buyers in Seoul, and this investment is left with little economic return (Kim 2015, 896). In order to draw attention from international buyers, these proposals claim, Seoul Fashion Week must concentrate efforts on business, following the standards of the top four shows in the West and restricting public access. However, Seoul Fashion Week must also continue broadcasting a unique, youthful image of Seoul fashion that will attract these buyers in the first place.

As Seoul Fashion Week is structured to support publicity, street fashion photographs come to represent "Korean street fashion" more successfully than the designer showcases. Without tickets to the runway shows inside, many seek only to participate in what photographer Michael Hurt calls, in his blog by the same name, "Seoul Street Fashion Week" (Hurt 2017). Street fashion photographs from this event circulate with more fervor than photographs of the designers' shows on the runway. A quick search in Google Images shows that New York, London, Milan, or Paris Fashion Week result in images primarily of fashion on the runway, while "Seoul Fashion Week" results with only street fashion images with the incredible backdrop

of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza. The prevalence of young, well dressed youth attending Seoul Fashion Week, as well as the relatively unknown Korean fashion designers in foreign markets, produce a global fascination with the exciting street fashion photographs as these photos seem to depict an 'authentic' Korean street fashion.

Covering Seoul Fashion Week, *Mutzine* magazine, the first Korean fashion magazine published in English, portrays the not as a "powerhouse" but as an "innovator" (Reinstiein 2017, 18). Journalist Joie Reinstein interviews David Yi, former editor of Elle Magazine, saying, "Seoul Fashion Week is still in its infancy when compared to powerhouse cities like Paris, New York, and Milan. That being said, Seoul is the epicenter of culture in Asia, a central fashion city regionally. It's where trends are coming from in the East" (2017, 18). *Mutzine* emphasizes Seoul's importance to fashion among youth in Asia: although it has not fully reached the "powerhouse" success of Western fashion capitals, it is still a trend capital. Seoul's presence in the "fashion world" constructs a pan-Asian territory of influence. Outside of purely monetary success, Seoul Fashion Week has power in cultural impact.

Matthew Mazur, stylist of a top Korean idol, CL, tells Reinstein, "I think Seoul Fashion Week has established itself within the fashion world as a cooler, more conceptual moment...In fashion, I feel like we always look for something untouched and pure and innovative and Seoul is slowly doing that" (2017, 18). For Seoul Fashion Week to become a successful event, it must first gain approval from and "establish itself within the fashion world" by commodifying a unique perspective onto the establishment of fashion (Reinstein 2017, 18). In this article, it becomes apparent that the word "fashion" signifies a medium that is uniquely global, one that can only exist in relationship to the "fashion world" which currently is dominated by Western fashion perspectives. Seoul Fashion Week is a brief moment in which the "fashion world" is

brought to Seoul to view “K-fashion,” and these images of youth come to represent Seoul Fashion Week as “untouched,” “pure,” and “innovative,” and centrally focused on the street style among Seoul’s youth (Reinstein 2017, 18).

Finding Seoul Street Fashion Week

Through a professor at Kyung Hee University, I was introduced to Professor Michael Hurt, who received his doctorate from UC Berkeley in Comparative Ethnic Studies, and has been photographing Seoul Fashion Week since 2007. While I had not intended to work photographing the event, and had no prior photography experience, Hurt agreed to teach me about photography on site and I agreed to help him carry equipment and find models. I knew nothing about the event but am very grateful I was able to have the opportunity to attend Seoul Fashion Week and shadow an expert. I spent the five days of Seoul Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2017 as Hurt’s assistant, learning from his approach of “fashion sociology” as well as conducting my own interviews, photography, and observations. Unlike other seasons of Fashion Week, Hurt decided that this season he would avoid the runway all together to focus his energies on capturing only “Seoul Street Fashion Week” as he calls it. Because of this agenda, photography became my ethnographic “in” for talking to young people about fashion for five days in a row.

Coming from Ohio in 2002 through Fulbright, Hurt has been practicing, as he names, “street photography and street documentary” as a methodological framing for cultural studies. Hurt’s academic pursuits inspired his interest in documenting gender performativity through photographing and interviewing women in Korea. As Michael says, “Korean women perform gender like no one else.” Hurt believes that photography of everyday people on the street is the only way to fully represent this performativity of femininity in Korea.[36] Hurt told me that in in

[36] As mentioned in Chapter 2, astonishingly high numbers of women participate in plastic surgery and make-up, as well as “fashion diagnostic” tests, so everyday style is especially elevated for women in Korea.

the early 2000s when he was taking photos of people on the street, no one understood what he meant by street fashion photographer. He said, “In 2006 people didn’t know what I was talking about, they would say, ‘I’m not a celebrity, I’m not famous, these clothes aren’t expensive, I’m just normal,’” because their conception of photography was that of the paparazzi following celebrities. In 2009, when street fashion blogs like *The Sartorialist* by Scott Schuman starting bringing the popularity of street fashion into public knowledge in Korea, Hurt published South Korea’s first street style photo book, titled, "The Seoul Fashion Report,” a project which was later continued electronically on a blog. Michael has documented a change in how Korean people think about their fashion in terms of photography; now the populace is well versed in the idea that their everyday style could be considered worthy of documentation.

My role as Michael Hurt’s intern was to assist him in carrying his outdoor studio equipment, including a large flash with multiple batteries, a softbox umbrella and stand, and multiple large camera bags with lens and extra batteries. This set-up made our crew stand out on the ramp: we were the only photographers using studio flashes outdoors. Studio flashes typically have to be plugged in, but the relatively new technology Michael used had battery packs that lasted for several hours. Michael’s method involved setting up in a location, and then asking models to come to him to be photographed. Most photographers did not follow this procedure, as using only hand-held cameras and flash allowed for their mobility. Michael called many people “guerilla” photographers, as they would crowd around any model posing on the ramp to get a good shot, instead of asking permission. As fashion needs a photograph in order for it to circulate outside of the physical space, the number of photographers only increases the exposure of the event. Everyone who attends Seoul Fashion Week expects to be photographed, and even casual observers dress extravagantly for this purpose.

Once set up for the day, I assisted Michael in finding the models to be photographed. While I was never given specific instructions on the requirements for models, after a few days it became clearer for me what kind of aesthetic Michael wanted. First, Michael typically wanted Korean models, and only pointed towards phenotypically East Asian people to be photographed. This accidentally had us interact with several Vietnamese celebrities, a famous Chinese Blogger, and a Japanese brand representative for Metro City, although these photo shoots were also incorporated into his project for TIN news. Because Michael's work is focused on Korean street fashion, his focus was not on capturing the event as a whole but specifically Korean *paepi* ("fashion people") culture. Michael was interested in people who are a balance of flashy and *real*, as he would constantly remind me that he wasn't interested in "peacocks" of fashion.[37] He wanted to document *real* people in *real* clothes, not sponsored representatives or models. Michael had an interest in particularly young people, simultaneously telling me to look for trends that "kept coming up" on the collective masses on the street, while also asking me to look for people "just being themselves." So while the brand representatives and models wear *all* the trends at once, they couldn't represent an *authentic* street fashion to Michael. This process of picking models for Michael was part of learning how Michael Hurt viewed an "authentic" Korean style to be captured in photographs.

***Ahjussi* At Seoul Street Fashion Week**

While Korean society has a history of being age hierarchical, at Seoul Fashion Week youth become the "experts" of fashion. The more unique and young the perspective, the more credibility it is given in the realm of street fashion. In Korea, the dynamics of age hierarchy are

[37] He would sometimes settle for "peacocks," those with visibly flamboyant styles of dress, as these people helped make the collection of photos look better, in his opinion. He was hired by TIN news to produce a photo collection, so these flashier images supported his job with TIN while the images of "real" Korean fashion supported his "fashion sociology" project and independent work that he has been conducting for a decade.

most clearly expressed on public transportation, where two sections of each train car are reserved for the elderly. In the subway and streets of Seoul, elderly Korean people, referred to as *ahjussis* and *ahjummas* (아저씨, 아줌마, a familial and polite way of saying elderly man and woman) frequently yell at noisy youth, walk directly into people without apology or explanation, and fearlessly claim seats and space as their own. While this culture is waning in some ways, as young people can be seen frequently ignoring the elderly while on their smartphones, this culture of hierarchy and filial piety is still part of Korean society.[38]

At Seoul Fashion Week, I observed an incident where age hierarchy directly confronted the youthful enterprise that is fashion. With his goal of capturing Korean authenticity in mind, Michael spotted a group of middle school girls still in uniform from their day at school and asked me to ask them for a photo. As these girls were walking onto the scene from their everyday lives, sharing a large cotton candy together joyfully, they provided an interesting juxtaposition to the manicured "fashion people" we typically photographed at fashion week. Also within this desire to document young women in uniform, I infer, is the desire to showcase Korean school uniforms that are prevalent in high school K-dramas. Perhaps from a fascination with authenticity and perhaps with an eye for the types of images of Korea that are typically globalized, that of youth in school uniforms, Michael photographed at least two groups of students in uniform at Seoul Fashion Week.

Under his instruction, I went over to the group and asked the girls if they wanted to be photographed. Of the five young girls, four were plainly dressed in their uniforms and one was dressed in an all-black outfit, with a stylish moto jacket, colored contacts, and makeup on her face. They very shyly covered their faces and laughed at my request, and two of the girls even

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[38]Age hierarchy is also continually reinscribed in the structure of the Korean language. Korean language requires an individual to understand their age relative to other people, and so hierarchies of age are habitual and essential to communication, operating below the threshold of awareness.

tried to run away from me. One girl spoke for the group, pulling down her face mask to expose her braces. She pointed to the only girl not in uniform and said, "She's a model!" humbly suggesting that the girl in makeup is the only one worth photographing. The rest of the girls teased the "model" friend, perhaps because she had obviously put together her outfit with an eye for getting attention from photographers or simply just to be "a part" of the Fashion Week bustle. Their reaction could have been purely out of excitement, but regardless, I asked all of the girls to be photographed in a group and they agreed, following me to Michael's set-up.

Figure 8: Michael photographing middle school girls in uniform, *photo taken by author*

After the girls had already come in front of Michael's equipment to begin testing the lighting, two *ahjussis* carrying large cameras came over and grabbed one of the girls by the arm, asking to take a photo of the group. The *ahjussis* had been taking photos of young female models all day near Michael's set-up, but bared no press-passes on their chest. Michael told me later they probably were hobbyist interested in photography and, in Michael's words, in "hogging pretty

girls." The two men raised their voices at Michael and quickly the situation escalated to a screaming match between Michael, the high school girls, and the *ahjussis.* The situation became so heated that a security guard came over and asked the young girls to explain what was happening. I watched as the shortest middle school girl held out her hands, silencing the *ahjussis,* Michael, and the security guard, in order to explain her side of the story. Eventually the girls returned to Michael's set-up to be photographed.

After they had left, Michael explained to me angrily that the *ahjussis* claimed they had wanted to photograph these girls first, accusing Michael of trying to steal their models. The shortest girl of the group had apparently told the security guards that the *ahjussis* had lied, and that they wanted Michael to photograph them. After completing the photo shoot, Michael explained his look book project to the girls in Korean. He gave the shortest girl his business card, and she bowed, exclaiming in English that being a fashion model was her dream.

In the time-space of Seoul Fashion Week, temporarily the cultural rights of elders in space are not respected in the same way as, for example, the subway. Suspending practices of respect for one's elders, the middle school girls at Seoul Fashion Week were able to speak out against the *ahjussis* photographers "guerilla" style attack. In Michael's opinion, the frustration in this argument between the *ahjussis* and himself was fueled by this inverted illusion of power in this space. Michael suggested that because the *ahjussis* did not feel respected it intensified the argument unnecessarily. Michael's appearance as a foreigner may also have contributed to the *ahjussi*'s frustration and the middle school girls' respect for Michael as a professional photographer.

Animating Fashion: Style "Just For This Day"

When I arrived at Seoul Fashion Week, I was overwhelmed by the sight of so many people crowding the ramp at the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP). A few weeks earlier I had gone to Dongdaemun to go shopping, and this same building stood as a stoic monument of modernity, ignored by shoppers who crowded around the many shopping malls across the street, uninterested in the gigantic silver, egg shaped event space. On the first day of fashion week, however, the DDP was full of people in colorful, artfully arranged outfits incorporating the latest trends I had noticed in Seoul. Seeing the sea of fashionable people, I thought to myself, *this is Korean fashion, I found it!* I started taking note of trends at fashion week, and decided these patterns of trends must be the signifiers of Korea's unique fashion culture.

When Michael had other assistants from his university, I would leave the studio set-up to conduct my own photo-shoots and informal interviews in a similar fashion to Michael's. Watching him work, I observed that at Fashion Week people *want* to be photographed and people and are very willing to talk about their outfits. Michael also asserted to me many times that my foreigner status, especially as a white foreigner, gave me special privileges as the event seeks to appear global. My credibility as a "reporter" and researcher in this space were bolstered by my appearance as a white foreigner. After taking a few photos, a way of breaking the ice, I would ask to record a short interview for my research about Seoul Fashion. The people I interviewed were primarily university students, as I was more comfortable talking to people around my age.

While at Fashion Week, I was interested in gaining understanding from multiple perspectives of the event. I interviewed foreigners, Korean people, boys dressed very femininely, women dressed very masculine, as well as couples in matching couple outfits, and all of these

eye and attention at Seoul Fashion Week. Many of the people I interviewed were not able to see the shows, as only a very small number of people on the ramp even had tickets. Many people were simply young people interested in breaking into the fashion world.

Through these short interviews, I learned that people at Seoul Fashion Week feel the need to assert both a unique style as well as an accepted "fashionable" outfit. Fashion requires an understanding of what others view as fashionable, as a Korean couple told me, "We wanna see the look of fashion people and we wanna join them." This short sentiment indicates that fashion is essentially about group participation in what the "fashion people" consider to be in style. Participants openly admitted their clothing for fashion week was "because of this day" or "because it was a special day." People do not wear everyday clothing to Seoul Fashion Week, for this event requires a performance of fashion beyond one's regular everyday attire. Seoul Fashion Week provides space for individuals to dress in an exaggerated way, to join the "fashion people" and assert one's "unique" and globally influenced style. In order to create an aesthetic image of "Seoul street fashion," fashion *must* be performed beyond the realm of the everyday. The event is sponsored by the Seoul Metropolitan Government to create an image of "Seoul street fashion."

In the last chapter, I used performativity theory to frame the experience of *getting dressed,* or using fashion, as my friends at Kyung Hee described to me, but in the case of Seoul Fashion Week, as the fashion is specially constructed "for this day," I propose instead to use the frame of animation. As the 'self' one portrays at Fashion Week is knowingly *not* one's everyday 'self' we can see fashion at Seoul Fashion Week to be comparable to COSplay (costume play) rather than performing clothing. In her article, "Animation: the New Performance?" Silvio proposes the term animation to be added to performance theory. Citing Hastings and Manning, Silvio writes "the concept of performance has become so tied to the expression of the self-

identity that has tended to deflect scholarly attention from the fact that many speech acts are, in fact, 'acts of alterity'" (2010, 423). Silvio writes about COSplay as: "embodied performances as self-animation" (2010, 433). I propose this comparison because nearly everyone I spoke with at Fashion Week acknowledged that their outfits were outside of their everyday self, and that these performances are only acceptable in this space. Getting dressed for Seoul Fashion Week implies embodying a "fashionable person" rather than of one's own identity.

When I started talking to people at the event, I was told repeatedly that these styles were *not* inspired by Korea: I was told that people were inspired by fashion in *other* countries. Korean participants told me their outfits were inspired by Harlem, Dr. Dre and Tupac, the West Coast (California), "the English band the 1975," and international fashion designers like Gucci, Chanel, Raf Simons, Vetements, and Craig Green. Participants categorized their style into genres of vintage, classic, sporty, hip-hop style, androgynous, punk, girlish, boyish, "the street," "street style" and often prescribed multiple categories to their outfits, discussing a preference for a "mix match" of style genres. Korean style or Seoul were never mentioned in these descriptions of personal style. In fact, Korean participants expressed varying levels of dissent towards Korean street fashion, saying, "Korean fashion week is too small"; "Seoul street style, is uh, not bad"; and, "I think Korean fashion is very low, because Korea copy famous people so I don't like." Participants asserted that they were dressing in a "unique" way, either that they didn't know what the trends were, or that their style was different from others in Korea.

While Korean participants expressed dissatisfaction with Korean fashion and Seoul Fashion Week, foreign participants frequently expressed admiration for Seoul street fashion. Participants from Sweden and Japan both told me in comparison to their home countries, Seoul fashion was more colorful, fun, playful, and cool. Coco, an "Instagrammer" from Japan, told me

Seoul fashion "looks like freedom." This was also expressed by a group of students from Hong Kong, who told me he always wants to dress with "complete freedom, so I just wanna dress like freely without anyone judging what I like." When I asked if that was possible in Hong Kong, he replied, "In Hong Kong, people will judge you so fucking much. If I wear some shit like that, all the people, young people, they will be like, 'What the fuck are you wearing,' but in here I feel like really open, that's why I came to Seoul, for Fashion Week." There is an expectation from participants that Seoul Fashion Week allows for freedom of dress, and this extends to the imagining of the city as a whole as well. Korean participants didn't necessarily think Korea has a unique style, but foreign visitors easily identified what they thought was a "Korean" style of dress.

Although Korean participants may not identify themselves as performing "Seoul," the foreigners I interviewed show that a unified image of "Seoul fashion" exists within the global audience. Instead of Seoul Street Fashion being defined entirely through abjection of global symbols, this category comes into being precisely through its use of foreign, globally recognized "street fashion" items. In understanding how words, signs, have meaning within a language system, Saussure concludes that signs are constructed through a process of alterity and difference, and not innate qualities of the sign itself. Referring to a language sign/word language unit "There is nothing underlying their existence other than *their difference,* or differences of whatever kind that the mind manages to attach to *the* fundamental *difference* (however, each one's entire existence depends on reciprocal difference)" (Saussure 2006, 42). Unlike other systems of signs that work based in alterity, fashion, especially in Seoul, is based in a system of *bricolage,* of combining symbols and aesthetics from all over the world to create a look that some consider "Korean fashion" but many Korean people see as a relatively undefined category.

Korean people at fashion week are operating within multiple binaries and categories of performativity. Gender at fashion week is also being performed, as participants told me they dressed in "girlish," "boyish," and "androgynous" styles specifically for this event. Fashion week allows for and requires performing identities which are conventionally subversive, like a boy dressed in woman's clothes or the inverse. People at fashion week are also performing youth, which is equated with expertise of trend and "cool." Young people utilize styles such as bright blush and faux, painted on freckles to reference a child-like style, while also indexing a courageous style only a young person could pull off. The Korean people I interviewed are also performing cosmopolitanism by referencing designers, musicians, and locations from across the world as the inspiration for their outfits. Regardless of one's intentions, and regardless of other performative qualities, it is the intention of the event to create an image of "Korean street fashion." By attending the event, Korean youth act as "models" of the nation, contributing to and constituting Korean street fashion.

Circulation: Virtual/Real Space

Seoul Fashion Week exists in a feedback loop between the virtual space of media coverage and the real-space of the events happening. Photography now exists on blogs and online magazines and can be updated in real time from the event to a global audience. At Seoul Fashion Week, I observed this process through a group of students from Hong Kong that gained a significant amount of press for their appearance at the event, although they were not formally invited to the event. I talked to this group for several days as they were fluent in English, and became friends with them on Facebook, tracking their media of Seoul Fashion Week. I noticed a week later that two of the boys in the group had been featured in several online sources highlighting Fashion Week. All college age students, these four friends aspire to be in the

fashion industry professionally one day, but are currently full time students making outfits for their blog on a budget. They have their own YouTube channel and Facebook page, under the brand name Goldfish TV, where they post about fashion events and style. One member also hosts a somewhat popular Instagram blog, highlighting her everyday fashion choices, while the others photograph her outfits.

The group came to Seoul Fashion Week in the middle of their university semester, without any affiliation with the formal event, in order to gain "exposure," as they told me directly. Most surprisingly, this goal was actually achieved. One of the members was featured in Vogue UK's collection of "Seoul Fashion Week Street Style," while other members of the group were featured in nssmag.com online magazine, highsnobiety.com, and Arirang News, a major national Korean news source. Though these participants have a significant interest in fashion week, they are not professionally involved in Seoul Fashion Week. Although none of them are ethnically or nationally Korean, and perhaps because of their perceived foreignness, this group representative faces of Korean street style through the circulation of digital media.

Figure 9: Group of Hong Kong students at Seoul Fashion Week, *photo taken by author*

At the event, I observed this group receiving some attention for their fashion styles, which I learned were comprised primarily of counterfeit and thrifted pieces. Counterfeit fashion goods fill the street markets in Dongdaemun across the busy highway from the Dongdaemun Design Plaza: everyday on the way to fashion week I would walk past vendors with counterfeit Nike sneakers, North Face jackets, Adidas socks, and Supreme *everything*. These knock-off pieces are affordable ways of accessing the street fashion look for young fashionable people unable to afford high costs. The man in the right of Figure 8 even made his own counterfeit version of Vetements xReebok sneakers, doodling on a pair of thrift store shoes to acquire the look of Vetements without the price tag of 750 USD. From a distance, from the lens of photography and social media, these shoes and thrift store purchases look authentic enough to acquire media attention. Although the group seemed only to be casually chatting and informally

taking photographs, the media coverage of the event transformed their somewhat unrecognized position at the real-space event into a significant presence in the circulated online event.

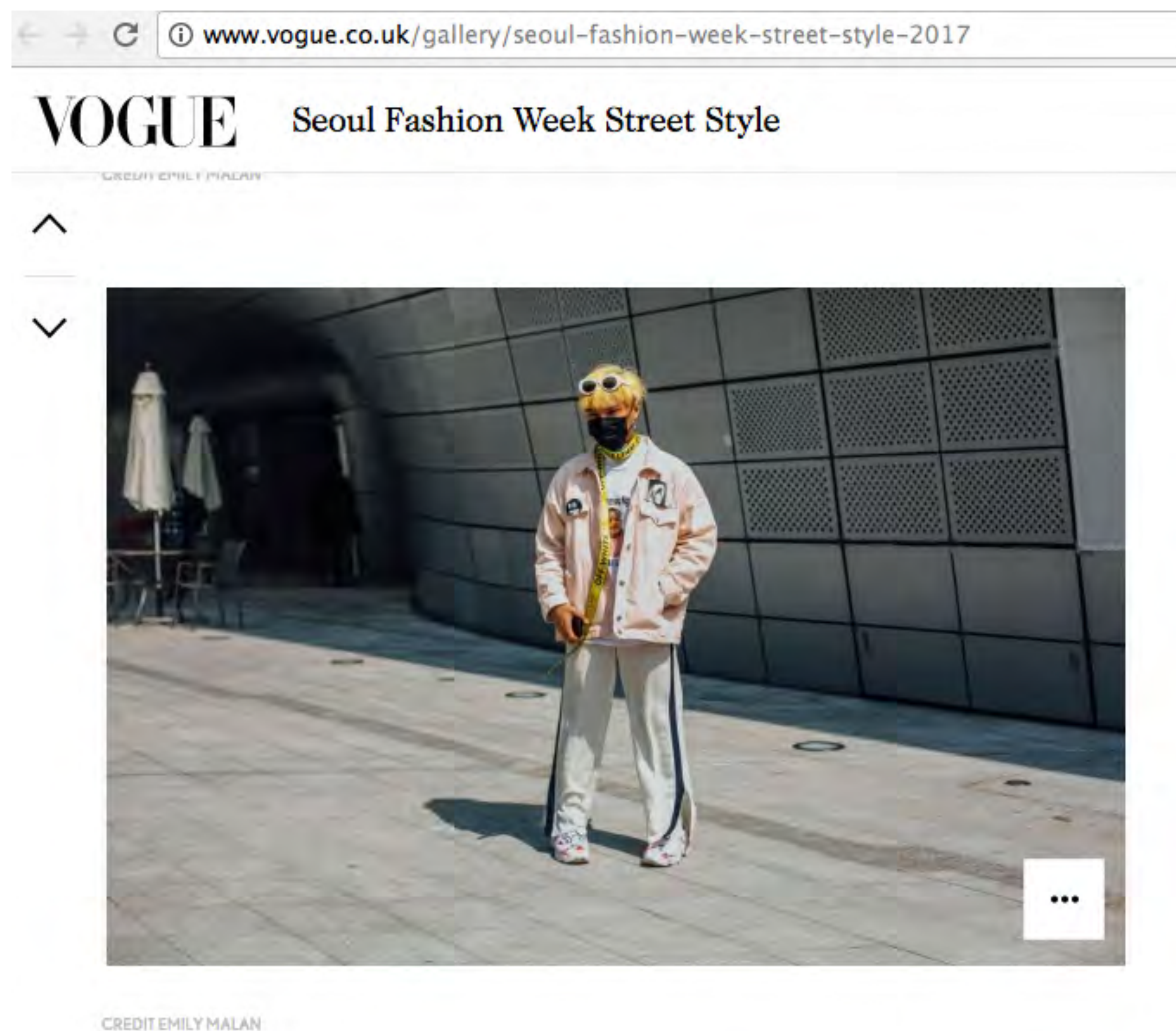

Figure 10: Screenshot from Vogue website

These Vetements xReebok sneakers are not the only counterfeit he is wearing: his Off-White belt worn as a necklace is a knockoff as well. In Seoul, the Off-White Industrial Belt knock-off is sold for between 10,000-15,000₩ (9-14USD) in many street-side shops. These knock-offs feature an identical brand pattern to the street-wear original, making the distinction between fake and real inconsequential when photographed. This belt is an essential marker of street-wear style in Seoul and abroad, but at a retail value of over 200 USD, the young streetwear

fan most likely can only afford the counterfeit version. In the article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin discusses that photography and film through their infinite reproduction change the meaning of art. Core to Benjamin's essay is the idea of the aura, a quality of art that includes "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin 2013, 220). This aura can only be found in an original work of art and is lost in photographs when an image is mechanically reproduced, as the authentic moment of original presence is lost in the creation of the copy. In mechanically reproduced art, the original is no longer relevant as each version is the same: "From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for authentic print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed" (Benjamin 2013, 224). Counterfeit goods change the meaning of fashion and the brand by allowing a wider audience to participate in streetwear.

The loss of the aura creates a change in arts function in society, which Benjamin believes will remove the "cult value" and "exhibition value" from art's importance, allowing art to portray political content and be consumed by the masses (Benjamin 2013, 224). In street fashion, the obscene prices of authentic streetwear brands, like Vetements and Off-White, creates a cult value around these objects. Signifying luxury, streetwear brand clothing, in its concept, is only available to a select audience. To show-off that one owns the authentic Off-White belt or Vetements xReebok shoes creates its exhibition value. Both the original and counterfeit products in this instance are mechanically reproduced products, and are circulated through photographs, the original material Benjamin is exploring in the article. Because the original street-wear brand items are produced through mechanical reproduction, it could be argued that the aura is similarly

absent in mass-produced originals as in the counterfeits. However, an experienced eye can distinguish between the fake and the true brand items, even when the fakes are produced from the same fabrics, logos, and hardware as the originals. While the cult value and exhibition value is depreciated in the counterfeits amongst the elite streetwear expert, the photograph blurs this distinction for the global audience. The photograph allows counterfeits to become circulated as originals, democratizing the accessibility of street fashion to young *paepi* and average university students, allowing a wider range of participation in the creation of street fashion culture in Seoul.

Photography's Role at Seoul Fashion Week

Photographs seem to record a happening, but this seemingly neutral medium is an actively producing the image captured for the viewer. In the case street fashion photographs, this creates a national image of Korean cool that acts to boost the nation's credibility in the fashion world. Karen Strassler discusses the relationship between photography and nation building in contemporary Indonesia in the book *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java.* Strassler notes that individuals may or may not knowingly produce national images: "In adopting a pose, people conform themselves (both consciously and unconsciously, willingly and unwillingly) to a set of available models of appearance. This bodily molding anticipates being seen by others" (2010, 26). Korean participants may not wish to be part of the Korean nation building and rebranding enterprise, however, "grafting personal sentiments and memories onto public iconographies, popular photographic practices bind individual people to the broader historical trajectories and narratives of national modernity" (Strasler 2010, 28). Street fashion in Korea is inherently part of a national image rebranding process that situates images of individuals within the context of *Hallyu*. Through these street fashion photographs, Seoul

Fashion Week provides images of “Korea” the nation through individuals who perform fluency in global street fashion aesthetics.

In another analysis of the pose, Terri Silvio writes that in COSplay as fan’s only act as the characters when embodying a pose for a photo. Silvio writes, “At conventions, the majority of fans do not make any special effort to hold their bodies ‘in character’ except when they are in front of a camera. As one fan put it, ‘The most important thing’s the POSE,’” (2006, 212). Transforming “the body [into] a life-sized puppet,” COSplayers do not act the entire time they are in character, but only when they are aware their performance is being documented (Silvio 2006, 214). As Strassler writes above, once in front of a camera the individual poses being aware of an audience. Silvio writes, “Virtually every COSer I interviewed claimed that COSplay would be meaningless without photography and that their greatest sense of achievement came from having many people photographing them, thus acknowledging that they had captured the essence of the character” (2006, 213). Just as the Hong Kong group told me they were there for “Exposure” and were happy to be photographed by myself, the costume play at Seoul Fashion Week is can only exist in the “fashion world” through photography.

Street fashion marks a new era of desired fashion, for it “has regularly drawn on subcultural style, youth culture and the reality of the street. Ostensibly an image of a commodity, the image long ago became a commodity itself” (de Perthuis 2016, 527). Street fashion photography signifies a seeming “reality” of *dress* while remaining a commodity of fashion. The signifiers and signifieds of the fashion system has changed with the popularity of street fashion photography, however the structures of meaning and commodification of clothing objects remain. Street style photographs are casual, and thus visually approachable, which increases their ability to be commercially recognized by an average consumer. de Perthuis writes, “Aided by the

rhetoric of 'the everyday' and the chance that 'it could be me,'" the products illustrated are advertised in a way that the consumer can have realistic desires for the objects commoditized in the "everyday" photo (530). However, these photographs are also purporting a "staged quality of reality" (de Perthuis 2016, 525). While claiming to represent the fashion of the masses, with the increase in popularity and industry recognition, street style has become another more effective means of commodifying fashion.

As discussed early, Seoul Fashion Week does not seek only to commodify fashion, but to commodify "Korean fashion" in theory and "Korean street fashion" in practice. Street fashion photographs suite the construction of Korea the nation through capturing the "everyday" Korean person. In *The Fashion System*, Barthes briefly mentions the fashion photograph, writing, "In Fashion photograph, the world is usually photographed as a decor, a background or a scene, in short, a theater" (2009, 301). In the context of Seoul Fashion Week, the "background" of the Dongdaemun Design Plaza provides an image of Seoul as modern alongside the models present. While Barthes considers this information as simply "decor," in street fashion photography the background highlights Seoul's architecture, displaying an image of a city that matches the futurism and "cool" of its inhabitants. As described in Chapter 1, the city of Seoul itself is already manicured to appeal to aesthetics of a global city.

In this chapter, I have aimed to show how images of Seoul street fashion in particular is constructed at Seoul Fashion Week by a combination of students and young people *animating* fashionable caricatures onto their body and embodying the aesthetics of *Hallyu* for this event. The photographer has a key role in framing this event, creating images that come to signify Seoul's fashion style. As Seoul Fashion Week seeks to "establish itself" into the global fashion world, youth and innovators are the headline event, and street fashion in particular. As de

Perthius shows, even the “street” is always already a mediated, perfected image of reality. Seoul Fashion Week and images of Seoul street fashion are uniquely reliant on youth participation in global streetwear aesthetics, allowing the counterfeit Off-White belt and Vetements xReebok shoes to become inscribed into the definition of “K-fashion” through the event.

Chapter 4: Hongdae, Seoul's Hip-Hop Neighborhood

The neighborhood of Hongdae in Seoul is the year-round home to youth participating in Korean street fashion culture. Hongdae's specific street fashion aesthetic constitutes the majority of K-fashion representations in global media and is greatly influenced by the neighborhoods hip-hop music scene. This style is both subcultural, because as shown previously, many students in Korea find that society restricts one from participating in a Korean hip-hop style, while also remaining mainstream, as Hongdae is a prominent commercial district in Seoul. Even without explicitly participating in hip-hop culture most young people in Seoul have a clear idea of a different set of conventions that operate in the Hongdae uniform. The hip-hop aesthetic is so strongly defined that, as my friend Rick told me, it can seem that everyone is wearing the same thing:

> They're basically dressed like the same person, all of them. I mean, now if you go to Hongdae, in five minutes if you stand in a very popular street in Hongdae, you'll see a guy wearing a bucket hat, all the way down so you can't see his eyes. That guy will be wearing a black [face] mask. And maybe a BAPE Shark hoodie, zip-up hoodie with a shark on the hood… Or he might be wearing a hoodie from Off White, or a jacket from Off White, which has diagonal stripes in the back. Or, if he doesn't wear that he'll be wearing some, some very oversized hoodie or shirt or sweatshirts from Vetements… And he'll be wearing some Yeezy or some Jordan 1's, Jordan 11's, Jordan 4's [sneakers]. But the thing is that, more than half...I should say 70%, 75% are replicas, for sure. And I can see that because I personally [have] some of the pieces [myself], and [when] I see that, then I know because I have the same thing back home. But, there is a huge lack of personal characteristic. Everyone is dressing like the same person. To be honest, if I see this guy and then five minutes later another guy walks by, I wouldn't know which one was which guy.

When I first went to Hongdae-dong to go clubbing with my friends, I was amazed at the accuracy of Rick's description. Rick defines Hongdae style as an assemblage of a face mask pulled down to cover the face, a bucket hat, and oversized jackets and pants, and throughout my visits to Hongdae I began noticing this character, as Rick said, every 'five minutes.' The face

mask resurfaces in Hongdae not only as a utilitarian item, to protect from sun or smog, but appears *inside* hip-hop music clubs, thus being an object of aesthetic purpose. Just as the COSplayer hides the medium of one's body to embody another character, as Silvio writes (2006) the face mask hides one's true face and creates a character of Korean hip-hop style.

While fashion in Korea is celebrated for it's youthful, innovative style, Rick notes that Hongdae actually creates its own hegemony, which I will call the Hongdae uniform. This uniform is informed by replica pieces from foreign streetwear brands, note that none of the brands Rick mentions are Korean brands, and only one is based in Asia, BAPE in Japan. Later in our conversation, which I describe in more depth in Chapter 2, Rick tells me that the three most influential style icons in Korean fashion are African American celebrities A$AP Rocky and Kanye West, as well as Korean idol G-Dragon. The look of Hongdae that becomes globalized through *paepi* and street fashion bloggers, who publicize the neighborhood as the center of Korea's "Gross National Cool." This neighborhood represents a unique Korean streetwear style in global media, but, as my friend Rick acknowledges, this style is constructed primarily through foreign brands and inspiration from African American hip-hop artists.

As Rick's quote shows, the look of Hongdae is not constituted through a singular fashion item or brand, but rather by a conscious effort of *styling* pieces together. In *Mutzine,* an English language Korean fashion magazine, a journalist writes that the combination of clothing items, or the styling, is central to the identity of Korean fashion. Korean fashion, Reinstein argues, "has the unique quality of not focusing just on the design itself, but also how it's worn" (2017, 17). Talking to Chantal Hughes, a fashion forecaster[39] working with global brands, Reinstein quotes, "When I think of K-Fashion, often the styling elements are stronger in my mind than the fabrics

[39] Fashion forecasting professionals predict future trends in fashion (styles, colors, fabrics, etc.) as part of a brand's design team.

and design. The designs are great and often creative spins on well-worn classic, but K-Fashion really seems to come alive through the styling choices" (2017, 17). The use of fashion by youth styling their own bodies becomes centrally important to the imagined aesthetic of "K-fashion" that these fashion experts hold.

The importance placed on styling in the creation of K-fashion is similar to how Dick Hebdige describes subcultures in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Observing British youth in the 1970s, Hebdige writes that subcultures co-opt style symbols in order to subvert their meaning. Hebdige calls this effect *bricolage* borrowing Levi-Strauss' term: "Through style, [that] the subculture at once reveals its 'secret' identity and communicates its forbidden meanings. It is basically the way in which commodities are *used* in subculture which mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations" (1979, 103). *Bricolage* implies that clothing is *used* by subcultures in a subversive manner, not that these items are subversive in themselves. Hebdige writes, "By repositioning and recontextualizing commodities, by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones, the subcultural stylist…opens up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings" (101). In Hongdae, youth reappropriate symbols of hip-hop and global streetwear through "repositioning" or styling pieces together, creating a new system of meaning for global fashion commodities. Korean street fashion constructs a sense of "Korean-ness," a unique place in the "fashion world," through the styling of global symbols.

This chapter will investigate the use of foreign hip-hop symbols in the formation of Korean streetwear as an imagined aesthetic entity. I investigate hip-hop in Korea not in terms of music production or the validity of Korean people in their participation in African American hip-hop music and culture, but instead I choose to explore the aesthetics of hip-hop music as they

inspire the way Korean youth *use* fashion, influencing how youth are *getting dressed.* This chapter begins by evaluating how hip-hop is understood as a global genre of music, and how this aesthetic is enacted at Seoul Fashion Week. I introduce the idea that the movement of culture in globalization actively constructs meaning through circulation itself (Lee and LiPuma 2002). The remainder of the chapter focuses on the neighborhood of Hongdae as a space where hip-hop symbols from America are *styled* to create a Korean hip-hop scene. I first describe Hongdae as a commercial neighborhood, then the hip-hop nightclubs, and finally the popular foreign vintage shops in the neighborhood. In these spaces, I examine how the 'look' of Hongdae is constituted by drawing inspiration from the global fashion mediascape, creating K-fashion through a *bricolage* of global hip-hop and streetwear fashion trends.

Global Hip-hop

Although originating in African American communities, hip-hop music is prevalent in countries across the globe, making it a uniquely globalized genre of music. Scholarship on the globalization of hip hop tends to focus on the political aspects of hip-hop music itself, examining the ways song lyrics relate and differentiate from the original politics of African American rap music. Author Ward Keeler points out the surprising lack politics or profanity in Burmese rap communities, contextualizing Burmese hip-hop in their culture of strict censorship of art intended for public display (2008, 4). In America, Celia Cutler writes about White rappers who acquire African Vernacular English to create "realness" in their music, staking their claim to "authenticity" by their choice of language in hip-hop lyrics (2003). Other scholars focus on the use of foreign languages in the rhyme and flow of American-English based hip-hop styles. This includes the difficulties of rhyming in Korean (Park 2016) and translating Burmese, a tonal language, into the flow of rap music (Keeler 2008). Scholarship focuses on the ways hip-hop

music has become globalized, but rarely focuses on the ways hip-hop style aesthetics have become globalized alongside music.

Crystal S. Anderson writes directly about the use of African American aesthetics in Korean hip-hop music in the article "Hybrid Hallyu: The African American Music Tradition in K-Pop. " Anderson focuses on whether or not Korean rap and R&B music can be deemed authentic. Anderson writes, "As K-pop artists, Psy and Big Mama's engagement with the aesthetics of black musical traditions reflects the transnational and hybridized nature of K-pop, a musical culture that invites us to revise our definitions of authenticity" (2016, 291). Korean rap and R&B can be viewed as authentic, in Anderson's argument because international fans recognize the aesthetics as authentic. The hybridized nature of K-pop can be traced to the United States military occupation of South Korea after World War II, which brought US media into Korea in the 1940s. Korean culture has absorbed American media brought into the country under occupation, and now more recently, the work of Psy has been exported back into the US. Anderson writes, "K-pop is both the result of circulating cultures and is itself a musical culture that circulates. That circulation invariably brings up questions regarding its relationship to the African American musical cultures that inform it" (Anderson 2016, 291). Because K-pop is the result of transnational cultures, and then becomes one in through the Korean Wave of media exportation, Anderson argues that authenticity finds a new meaning in a system of global flows. However, for this project, I will not engage in an argument of the authenticity of hip-hop music styles in Korea. Instead, I seek to describe how hip-hop is already integrated into youth culture in Seoul, and how 'authenticity' is constructed for Korean hip-hop fans as an imagined ideal.

Focusing especially on music, these articles include brief references to the appearance of foreign rappers associating themselves with African American rappers, but primarily study the

tone, style, and content of the music. I argue that hip-hop as an identity outside of musical style, in fashion and lifestyle, is of equal importance when studying the global hip-hop phenomenon. In Hongdae, influence from global hip-hop music not only influences music production but also how everyday people shop for clothing and dress themselves within the image of Hongdae's hip-hop style. This paper interjects in global hip-hop literature by focusing on how Korean hip-hop music influences the style choices of everyday Korean youth who occupy the streets of Hongdae.

Hip-hop Style at Seoul Fashion Week

Hip-hop fashion aesthetics are not restricted only to Hongdae, as hip-hop also influences the streetwear style of Seoul. On the ramp at Seoul Fashion Week, I spoke with one couple at fashion week who participated in the hip-hop music scene in Korea. I initially went up to the couple interested in their coordinated jumpsuits, one blue and the other red, with bandanas around their head and Timberland boots, all markers of hip-hop style. I asked them about the inspiration for this "couple outfit," and they said it was the *taeguki* (태극기, "Korean flag") referring to the blue and red colors of the jumpsuits. This answer caught me by surprise, as I assumed their jumpsuits and Timberlands signified American hip-hop culture in the 1990s. I followed up, and asked if they listened to American Hip-hop music, and they answered excitedly, "Yes, yes! West Coast, Tupac, yeah." They told me that their outfit was inspired by Tupac, making these matching outfits both inspired by a national symbol of South Korea, the flag, as well as one of the most iconic American hip-hop artists, Tupac. As an outfitted *bricolage*, this couple's outfit transforms and subverts the meaning of the Korean flag by dressing like Tupac in these national colors. The outfit also subverts the meaning of hip-hop music fashion by dressing like the Korean flag, repositioning hip-hop into the nation's culture.

I continued to ask if they liked Korean hip-hop, and the woman responded adamantly that she did not, she only liked West Coast (American) hip-hop. I asked if they watched *Show Me the Money,* a popular Korean television series where young Korean rappers compete for prize money and fame. The man shyly laughed a little, and told me he had competed as a rapper in the show's most recent season. In fact, he told me, many people at fashion week recognized him and asked to take his photo. Although his girlfriend adamantly said she didn't like Korean hip-hop music, this man was a semi-prominent figure in the Korean hip-hop music scene. This couple was so informed by global hip-hop aesthetics that they dressed their bodies in the style of "Tupac" and claimed not support Korean hip-hop music, even though the man was a Korean rapper himself.

Seoul Fashion Week reproduces an image of Koreanness inspired by global images circulated into Korea, and I propose that this makes the event an example of what Lee and LiPuma call, "*cultures of circulation*" (2002, 192). This concept challenges the idea that divides performativity, as a producer of cultural meaning, from circulation, as merely transmission. Lee and LiPuma argue that the act of circulation in itself is a cultural phenomenon that creates cultures. Lee and LiPuma write, "What is interesting about performatives is that they go beyond reference and description—indeed, they seem to create the very speech act they refer to...they allow for language to 'objectify' its own praxis. Produced by their self-reflexive objectification, performative acts can thus be seen to be a presupposition for the very cultures of circulation of which they are a constitutive part" (2002, 193). For the Korean couple in Tupac outfits, the circulation of hip-hop has directly influenced their fashion as well as the man's career. Global circulation thus creates new models for fashion, such as a Korean hip-hop aesthetic, that can only occur through media sharing.

David Novak uses Lee and LiPuma's idea of circulation in his ethnography *Japanoise*, about the Noise music scene in Japan and in the United States. Novak writes, “Japanoise, I argue, could only have been produced through this mediated feedback between Japan and North America” (2013, 16). By traveling between these countries several times between the 1980’s and 90’s, Novak traces the circulation of Noise as existing in a feedback loop. In the US, Noise music is thought of as originating in Japan, and thus the US calls Noise music “Japanoise” and imagines a flourishing Japanese Noise music scene. In Japan, Noise music was only peripherally popular, but the scene stayed active due to the excitement of imagining the foreign US fan base. Novak writes, “As overseas feedback looped back to Japan, local musicians and listeners again shaped their cultural boundaries around a foreign Noise,” meaning the buzz of Noise music’s popularity in the United States (2013, 15). Just as circulation reinforces the credibility of Japanoise in both the US and Japan, Seoul street fashion is constituted by globally circulated imagery both from and into the country. Dave Novak’s work illuminates how a music genre’s prestige or cultural capital can rely on circulation and a perceived “foreignness,” similar to the “cultural fragrance” discussed in the first chapter. In the digital age, style of music genre and fashion is shaped by the patterns of circulation it undergoes: K-fashion shapes hip-hop as American hip-hop shapes K-fashion.

Using the concept of circulation, this chapter will continue to focus on the neighborhood of Hongdae as evidence of hip-hop culture’s circulation through Seoul. The neighborhood embodies a new interpretation of Korean-ness in *Hallyu* through combining globally sourced aesthetics. Hip-hop travels into Seoul and becomes transforms and *styled* in this neighborhood into a new commodity that then becomes globalized once again through *Hallyu*.

Hongdae the Neighborhood

The neighborhood of Hongdae exists in stark visual contrast to the rest of the city. Hongdae is one of many commercial districts in Seoul with a lively street culture full of street food vendors, large crowds of shoppers, and clothing vendors leaking into the walkways. Unlike similar areas like Myeong-dong, Ewha, and Sinchon, Hongdae bears a uniquely “hip-hop” aesthetic found in street performers, clothing shops, and in the fashion of people walking in the street. University students from the art school Hongik University busk in the streets day and night, performing hip-hop dance numbers, rapping to famous Korean and American songs, as well as freestyle rapping, which contributes to the neighborhoods reputation. Businesses provide for this hip-hop aesthetic, providing vintage foreign clothing, counterfeit street wear brands, and “new” versions of vintage clothing. Because Hongdae is known for its “hip-hop” aesthetic, youth come to the district dressing to fit in with this style.

Hongdae also hosts the majority of Seoul’s hip-hop music clubs, some owned by Korean hip-hop stars. Walking around on a Friday or Saturday night, young people in hip-hop styled outfits flood the lines of popular clubs on the main strip and shuffle through winding alleys to more secretive, basement clubs. The streets are loud and boisterous, as club bouncers announce free drinks to beautiful women, hip-hop music blaring from the inside of clubs leaks into the street, and vendors shout food orders to drunken young people. Walking through Hongdae in the morning, one can see discarded bottles *soju* (소주, “Korean rice liquor”), cigarette butts, and food containers littering the streets. Walking among the trash, Korean people with dreadlocks, cornrows, Supreme T-Shirts, and various other streetwear brand clothing head home from long nights of clubbing. The next day, this same street would be clean and ready for shoppers. While

celebrities in Korea regularly use African American culture in their music and fashion styles, in Hongdae everyday people practice this culture from *Hallyu*.

My friend from Kyung Hee, Christina, explained to me that she must dress in a different style for clubs in Hongdae. Christina wore denim overalls, a turtleneck or t-shirt, and sneakers to clubs in Hongdae, but she would never do that in Itaewon, a foreigner club district with EDM dance music clubs, where she would wear a skirt or dress and heeled sandals. This sentiment was expressed to me numerous times by my Korean friends who frequented clubs in these two districts, distinguishing outfits that were appropriate for each district. Going to Hongdae requires youth to dress to fit into the hip-hop aesthetic of the neighborhood. For Christina, an Economics major who prefers techno music clubs, hip-hop in Korea is mainstream enough that she understands what is appropriate to wear to a hip-hop club. Even though she does not identify with hip-hop culture, Christina can imagine an image of Hongdae and picture what a suitable outfit is for this area, and she will choose her outfit based on the music style and location of the club she will attend.

Clubbing Culture: "Black" and "Urban" Music Venues in Hongdae

Figure 11: Club Slow sign, *photo taken by author*

Figure 12: Club In2Deep Sign, *photo taken by author*

During my time in Seoul, I frequented two clubs in Hongdae, one called Slow, an "All Black Music Club," and In2Deep, an "Urban Music Club." As shown by the signs above, these clubs advertise the fact that they play hip-hop music exclusively by using terms like "Urban" and "Black Music." The decor of these clubs aims to symbolize a hip-hop culture as well. Club Slows interior features exposed brick walls, a DJ station with vintage turntables, and seating made from bleachers. The interior decoration also includes tables and seating made from wooden crates, with plywood planks balancing on these crates to make tables. The most prominent beverage at the club is a glass bottle of Budweiser, instead of the many Korean beers frequently sold in Seoul. Slow also has a bookcase in the entrance to the basement club full of CD's by African American artists. These decorations are used in Club Slow to connect Korea's hip-hop community with African American hip-hop as well as an "urban" toughness present with the crate and bleacher furniture.

Figure 13: Club wall in Hongdae, *photo taken by author* Figure 14: Bookcase in Hongdae club, *photo taken by author*

As made clear by the "Black Music Clubs" in Hongdae, and the many paintings of Black musicians found inside many clubs, the hip-hop community of Hongdae idolizes specifically African American hip-hop artists. The photo above shows the entrance to Club In2Deep, which features a collage of African American hip-hop artists. Unlike the use of Korean idol faces discussed in Chapter 1, in Hongdae clubs use images of the faces of African American hip-hop artists to associate their clubs with foreign hip-hop culture. The interior walls of In2Deep feature posters and more spray painted images of African American artists, and throughout my time in Seoul I did not once see a portrait of a Korean rapper painted in a bar in this way. While I saw many Korean rappers and DJ's perform in Seoul, on a regular night at a club without a featured artist, American hip-hop was almost exclusively played. Kendrick Lamar, Biggie Smalls, OutKast, and Soulja Boy were played at every hip-hop club I went to: clubs that were primarily filled with Korean people. Although Hongdae is the center of the Seoul hip-hop community, in

bars and nightclubs, African American hip-hop aesthetics, artists, and music is more prevalent than Korean hip-hop.

In these clubs, I noticed almost every person wore an iconically "American" piece of vintage clothing. People wore sports jerseys from American teams, primarily basketball jerseys, oversize pants, and even silver grills in their teeth. I saw a plethora of bucket hats, Timberlands, brightly colored windbreaker jackets, white t-shirts and gold chains, as well as African American hairstyles on Korean people. One man came up to me in Slow wearing oversized camo pants, gold chains on his neck, timberland boots, and a black bucket hat. He opened his mouth to speak to me, exposing silver grills on his lower teeth, and said to me, "I'm a fank-ster, a fake gangster." While stylistically, people in these clubs strongly adhere to a hip-hop aesthetic, using symbols from African American hip-hop in the 1990s to create their outfits, the look comprised from these pieces, in this case, is sometimes self-referred to as being "fake." This man confessing to be a fake to me signifies an awareness that hip-hop culture in Korea does not perfectly equate to hip-hop culture in the US. Instead, style in Hongdae borrows and combines pieces from Black American culture to create an aesthetic of Korean hip-hop.

In Hongdae, although Korean hip-hop is popular for buskers and Korean performing artists, American music still dominates the club culture. Eun-Young Jun writes about the value of American-ness in the Korean hip-hop scene, noting that rapper Tiger JK succeeded as a rapper in Korea in part because of his identity as a Korean American. As a Korean rapper in Los Angeles underground scene, Tiger JK "was unable to get a career break in a genre strongly racialized there [the United States] as black" (Jung 2014, 60). Hip-hop in Korea is also racialized as "Black Music" as found in the names of clubs, as well in vernacular, but is also imagined as being an "American" musical genre. Jung writes, "Coming from America was an advantage in Korea;

being racially Korean in America was not…his American-ness had helped launch and sustain his career in Korea" (2014, 60-1). As a rapper, his "American-ness is an important, legitimizing aspect of his identity" (Jung 2014, 62). Using his American-ness to his advantage, Tiger JK was able to become one of the most famous Korean rappers. Tiger JK believed his time in the American hip-hop scene gave his rap music authenticity, as shown in his song "Do You Know Hip-Hop?" calling out other Korean artists as "fake" (Jung 2014, 60). The associated prestige with American hip-hop in Korea allows Tiger JK to claim his hip-hop is more real than other Korean rap music.

Selling Foreignness: Vintage Shops in Hongdae

In Hongdae, I talked with workers at three vintage shops and frequently visited five vintage clothing shops in the area. Compared to other independent boutique clothing stores in Seoul, these vintage clothing stores occupied much larger spaces, and all but one were in basements rather than street level store-fronts. Because of these stores relatively hidden positions from the main street, each store had a street level display of colorful clothing leading people down into the basement stores. One "American Vintage" shop had astro-turf green carpeting on the stairs, with a vintage US license plate on each step for the customer to see. The interior of this had exposed pipes for clothing racks, plywood boards on the walls, and played Kendrick Lamar's DNA on my first visit. Another "American Vintage" shop had vintage signs on the walls, with old suitcases and buttons filling the store to look like a cluttered, second-hand store. In a "Japanese and European" shop, Japanese *sukajan* jackets, silk embroidered bomber jackets, filled a clothing rack in the center of the shop and were hung on the walls as decoration. These stores use clothing and vintage accessories to decorate the interior to create an atmosphere that matches the aesthetic of the foreign products. Unlike in other clothing boutiques in Seoul, where

typically a shop worker follows customers to help them and make clothing suggestions, in these vintage shops, shoppers were left on their own. In one vintage shop, the store clerk was buzzing his hair in front of a mirror and only stopped momentarily to greet me in Korean. Hongdae vintage shops operate under a separate system of customer service decorum, distinct from other shopping spaces in Seoul.

Vintage fashion in Hongdae carries an associated prestige as evident by its relatively high prices compared to other clothing in Seoul. Because of the vertical integration in the fashion industry in Dongdaemun factories, Korean made clothing is available for incredibly low prices. Tennis skirts, t-shirts, and button up shirts in the latest styles can be purchased for 10-20,000₩ (9-18USD), and these pieces are staples in the wardrobe of most college age women in Korea. Dongdaemun clothing factories also provide many cheap replica fashion pieces, copying directly from the designs, fabrics, and logos of major streetwear brands. In the vintage shops of Hongdae, even a simple t-shirt with a Ralph Lauren brand is minimum 30,000₩ (27USD) and sometimes as much as 60,000₩ (55USD). The sizable price difference shows that there is some incentive for people to believe that these clothes are especially "cool," especially stylish, or otherwise worth purchasing. In Hongdae street vendors and small boutiques sell clothes cheaply that are designed to *look* like vintage t-shirts with washed out American band logos. The prevalent number of vintage shops as well as "replica" vintage clothing led me to question why vintage fashion is so desirable for youth in Hongdae, keeping five stores in business on the city block.

In the chapter, "The Invention of Vintage Clothing," Jennifer Le Zotte explores how "vintage" to describe clothing came into common vernacular, analyzing how vintage clothing became a category of prestige. Originally used to describe wine, the word "vintage" only came to describe fashion in the 1950's, when middle-class women sought to buy luxurious clothing

without the full costs. In this time, the word "vintage" prescribed a unique, specialty quality to second hand purchases (Le Zotte 2017, 139). Vintage clothing became a more popular concept in the 1970's, with the rise of the bohemian and rock n' roll aesthetics that relied on combining different eclectic styles. As Le Zotte writes, "Secondhand styles nearly always signaled dissatisfaction from the middle class, with its connotations of conformity, plasticity, and consumer democracy" (2017, 125). Vintage in England in the 60's and 70's a marker of rebellion that eventually became a popular "retro" style in the mainstream. Not only was the interest in authentic vintage increasing, but new clothes were inspired by the resurgence of vintage. While vintage clothes originally signified sophistication, elitism, and exclusivity, vintage clothing has also been an important part of rebellious groups, and a general attitude of dissatisfaction with capitalism.

The Hongdae hip-hop community's interest in vintage clothes is associated with hip-hop music from the 90s in America, using both connotations of vintage, prestige and rebellion, to authenticate their clothing. The vintage clothing shop workers I interviewed all expressed that vintage fashion is special because each piece they sell is unique[40]. One informant noted that while in the rest of Korea, people might buy things only because they are famous or trendy, in Hongdae they don't follow trends and instead wear clothes that represent their individual identity. While skinny jeans may be popular everywhere else, they aren't popular in Hongdae, big pants are popular here, she told me. My three informants believed that because no piece of vintage clothing is exactly the same as any other piece, no two vintage outfits could ever be the same. In the beginning of this chapter, recall that Rick expressed the exact opposite view, giving me a list of the Hongdae "uniform" and claiming this style had no personality. The vintage shop owners repeatedly told me that vintage style was not like the *rest* of Seoul's homogeneous style,

[40] This is most likely false, as clothing from the 1980s and 90s was widely mass-produced.

but in this subculture neighborhood Rick, and myself, notice that the range of fashion styles exists in its own homogeneity. By wearing vintage, Hongdae people feel a sense of autonomy and rebellion from normative society, while also denoting their superiority by having the most authentic streetwear brands from the greatest era of hip-hop music in America.

One informant, a manager at a vintage-shop in Hongdae, told me, “Not that many people think, ‘I like Vintage’ but they think, ‘I like hip-hop’” when choosing to come to Hongdae’s vintage shops, directly relating the use of vintage clothing to create the hip-hop aesthetic. One shop worker, when asked about Hongdae style explained that “Hongdae style is more old school America, baggy pants, and old-school hip hop is most wanted in Korea. And we like, this one, America, America style. This one is Korean, look, Korea’s vogue is American old school.” Vintage clothing seem to collapse time in the hip-hop community in Korea, for as this interlocutor told me, America’s “old-school” style is today Korea’s vogue. He says directly that “this one is Korean” referring to the Korean hip-hop style, demarcating it from American hip-hop aesthetics. However, this phrase simultaneously enforces that the Korean style is inspired by American hip-hop from the past. Korean hip-hop not only draws influence from current streetwear trends, but also across time, conflating “old school America” with Korea’s modernity.

The hip-hop aesthetic is visible in Hongdae, however, in Seoul, hip-hop style is still a subcultural style. The increasing popularity of shows like *Show Me the Money* and *Un-Pretty Rap Star* have exposed the previously underground Korean hip-hop aesthetic, providing an immediate example for how to dress hip-hop to the masses of Korean people. Hip-hop music is popular in the mainstream, and everyone in Seoul can imagine what a hip-hop style of dress may be, but actually dressing in a hip-hop style is relatively rare. Hongdae is a neighborhood that commoditizes this subcultures style through vintage clothing shops. In *Subculture: the Meaning*

of Style, Dick Hebdige writes that a subculture's style inevitably is created through the use of commodities, and eventually will become commodified and marketed to the mainstream in a watered down form. "As the subculture begins to strike its own eminently marketable pose, as its vocabulary (both visual and verbal) becomes more and more familiar, so the referential context to which it can be most conveniently assigned is made increasingly apparent" (1979, 93-4). As a subculture's style becomes more recognized, it becomes marketable. Hongdae in some ways is a center of the commodification of hip-hop style in Korea, selling the clothing, music, and venues in the hip-hop style favorable for youth consumers. Removed of some of its subversiveness, becoming more familiar, the style of Hongdae transforms into a neighborhood wide homogeneity.

As a subculture becomes mainstream, Hebdige writes that the subversive power of the subculture wanes. However, in Hongdae, this subculture of hip-hop style has continued to be subversive in comparison to the lives of students at Kyung Hee while also being publicly recognized. Hebdige writes, "Each new subculture established new trends, generates new looks and sounds which feed back into the appropriate industries" (Hebdige 1979, 95). In Hongdae, one of the "appropriate industries" responding to the prevalence of hip-hop style are the thrift stores selling foreign vintage clothing. Hebdige believes that this response by industry is the inherent telos of any subculture style: "Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones" (Hebdige 1979, 96). In Hebdige's study of punks in Britain, and in Hongdae's hip-hop community, rejuvenating old industries has a literal meaning of reusing clothing from previous generations to create a new style, in this case,

using vintage pieces from African American hip-hop culture to construct a Korean hip-hop aesthetic.

***Bricolage*: Co-opting Symbols, Changing Meaning**

At one vintage shop, labeled "American Vintage" on the sign outdoors, I interviewed the store manager, a young and fashionable young woman. When we talked, she was wearing an oversized Hawaiian print shirt, so large that the short sleeves almost reached her elbows, belted around her waist with matching black oversized pants. She had on silver rings on almost every finger and a chunky silver vintage necklace. When my friend Lytha[41] asked her about her personal style, the manager responded that she was influenced by Japanese style and was currently interested in style of *yukata*, a lightweight, cotton *kimono*. This worker at an American vintage shop was able to create a *yukata* style by using American vintage pieces. Using American vintage pieces she was able to create a look that she considered entirely inspired by Japanese fashion.

Korean hip-hop is constructed through clothing imported from Japan, Europe, and the United States. These symbols are taken out of their original context and given a new meaning in the streets of Hongdae. The hip-hop aesthetic must acquire new symbolic meaning in South Korea because of the vastly different population. South Korea has a highly educated (over half the population receive higher-education) ethnically homogenous population (only 3% of the population are foreign). Therefore the significance of hip-hop style, which came from a politically oppressed racial-minority group in America, implies an entirely different rebelliousness among Korean youth. This style in Korea is a *bricolage* of international hip-hop symbols into a Hongdae version of this style.

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[41] Lytha was interpreting these interviews between Korean and English.

Maliangkay writes about Seo Taiji & The Boys, a group known for begining Korea's rap scene by combining "a mixture of rap, hip-hop, and R&B elements" (2014, 297). Talking about when the group became banned for wearing their hair in dreadlocks, Maliangkay writes, "Since Seo took the various elements out of context and mixed them with others, most Koreans would have judged Seo's act on what it represented in Korea, as opposed to what the specific elements connoted in their country of origin" (2014, 301). In the Korean context, dreadlocks signify resistance to Korean societal norms more generally: "The sounds, clothing accessories, and hairstyles Seo popularized may have been associated with Los Angeles's gang culture in the United States, but it was the fact that the look was generally associated with a strong nonconformism in Korea that led to the partial censorship of Seo's act" (Maliangkay 2014, 301). Removed from the cultural context, hip-hop trend in Korea signify more generally a rebellion from society.

The aesthetic of Hongdae and of Korean hip-hop is built through combining American vintage fashion, Japanese vintage fashion, and knock-off vintage and designer pieces, available on the streets of Hongdae. The vintage shops of Hongdae house the foreign clothing that influences and composes this aesthetic, creating a subcultural yet homogenous style in the district. By utilizing *bricolage,* the hip-hop subculture of Seoul reinterprets the meaning of vintage clothing into "authentic" hip-hop outfits. The shops themselves play music that switches from American old school hip-hop, top 100 pop songs in English and Korean, as well as the underground Korean artists who come into these shops. The stores use music and interior decorating, as well as the prestige of their vintage foreign clothing, to reinscribe the globalized identity of the Hongdae hip-hop community.

The Asian Face Mask in U.S. Hip-hop

One night in Hongdae at a hip-hop club I heard the song “Rolex” by young rapper duo Ayo and Teo blaring on the cramped dance floor. As soon as the song came on, the room erupted in cheers of excitement. I walked through the club, and noticed groups of young Korean people copying the signature dance from the video: swirling their heads when the singers say “I just wanna rollie rollie rollie” and moving their arms into a dab with the line “and a dab of ranch.”[42] Ayo and Teo’s breakout song only came out the year I was in Seoul, 2017, and immediately following its release, Korean youth were dancing in the club knowing the exact moves from these American rappers.

Figure 15: Ayo and Teo in facemasks (Wete June 2018)

[42] A dab is a dance move involving ducking one’s head into an elbow, and sticking the opposite arm straight up and out from the body. To see Ayo and Teo’s video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwk5OUII9Vc&list=RDlwk5OUII9Vc

The music video for “Rollex,” published to Youtube on May 26th 2017, featured Ayo and Teo wearing face masks from Japanese street wear brand A Bathing Ape (BAPE). In Billboard magazine, author Brad Wete writes that Ayo and Teo’s video started “the season's newest (and oddest) it-item: surgical masks” (Wete June 2017). Wete notes that the rappers’ face masks were inspired by “Asian ‘smog couture’ where pedestrians in congested cities don them to avoid inhaling toxins and spreading airborne viruses” (Wete July 2017). This article even goes as far to write that Park Jimin from K-pop group BTS has “adopted the look” of the facemask, implying that Ayo and Teo brought the facemask to K-pop. In Wete’s coverage of the facemask trend in America, he acknowledges that the trend is a foreign, Asian, symbol, however, the facemask is not acknowledged as already a symbol of hip-hop culture amongst youth in Asia and in K-pop fashion style.

Figure 16: Kanye West and A$AP Rocky
(Wete July 2018)

In the year after the “Rollex” video, the facemask has become integrated into hip-hop culture and high fashion in the U.S. and Europe. Virgil of Abloh has incorporated facemasks into his line OFF-White, saying, “It's the brand's philosophy to be both global and local at the same time, not just one brand to all people,” referencing the facemasks’ status as a ‘foreign’ symbol (Wete, June 2017).[43] In a trend report from the 2018 Fall/Winter season in Milan, Paris, and London, Joanna Fu writes that the facemask was an “in-your-face trend” that “stood out on the runways with fierce insurgence” (Fu 2018). The picture above shows Kanye West and A$AP Rocky wearing facemasks, the same rappers Rick mentioned in the beginning of the chapter as major fashion icons in Korea. Kanye and A$AP’s participation in the facemask trend demonstrates the full circulation of this fashion object, as fashion and hip-hop culture of Asia and Korea become incorporated into the aesthetic of hip-hop in the U.S.

[43] OFF-White is favored by countless American hip-hop celebrities including Drake, Jay-Z, Kanye West, A$AP Rocky, and Cardi B.

Figure 17: Young boys in hip-hop fashion at Seoul Fashion Week, *photo taken by author*

Figure 18: Kissing couple in facemasks, *photo taken by author* Figure 19: Facemask at Fashion Week, *photo taken by author*

In Hongdae, at Kyung Hee University, and at Seoul Fashion Week, I saw countless young people wearing facemasks. This trend is not only in circulation by Korean hip-hop stars, but also is embodied by youth at Seoul Fashion Week and in Hongdae, using the surgical mask as a decorative fashion statement onto their outfits.[44] While seen as still an avante garde fashion item by rappers in the U.S., in Seoul this trend has become a regular part of both the university and hip-hop *fashion systems*. Aesthetics of hip-hop music are cool in Korea because of their foreignness, and, concurrently, the style of the facemask has become reappropriated by U.S. hip-hop artists acknowledging that the facemask is a foreign symbol, appropriated from Asia. Far from trying to argue precisely where the trend of the face mask started, I bring up this symbol to emphasize how the circulation of hip-hop music in the globe has shaped a new culture altogether. Global circulation of hip-hop allows the way young people are *using* fashion in Korea, and Asia more generally, to connect to hip-hop culture abroad, becoming inscribed into the use of the facemask in the Rollex video. The facemask, as it becomes incorporated into the US hip-hop culture, maintains a whiff of "Korean cool" that is interpreted in Teo and Ayo's performance.

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[44] As I mention in Chapter 2, the facemask is also used to cover one's face from sun light, used when one is not wearing make-up, and because of other anxieties of one's appearance. This is why I mention the University as well as a space that the facemask is worn.

Figure 20: Fashion student, *photo taken by author*

Figure 21: Posing at Seoul Fashion Week, *photo taken by author*

Figure 22: Scan from magazine ("Style Scanner" 2017)

Figure 23: Scan from magazine ("Style Scanner" 2017)

Figure 24: Scan from magazine ("Style Scanner" 2017)

Conclusion: "Welcoming Party" Please Wear Red and Black

On my first night in Seoul, the International Friendship and Culture Club (IFCC) buddies picked up a group of exchange students from the bus which had brought us from Incheon International Airport to campus. My buddy Christina met me at 10pm after I had traveled for over 24 hours, greeting me with a warm hug and visible excitement for our upcoming semester. After helping me carry my bags into my apartment, Christina and a group of IFCC students asked if I was hungry, to which I replied, "Sure!" Christina took me to a *tteokbokki* (떡볶이, "stir-fried rice cakes")[45] place on the street corner that was open late at night. After ordering and paying for the meal, as I didn't have Korean won yet, Christina and I shared a plate huddled around a heater in a small standing tent next to the food stand. Christina laughed at me as I cried while eating the spicy rice cakes, buying a Sprite for us to share to ease the burn. This was the first aspect of Korean culture I was exposed to: the kindness of my buddy Christina and spicy Korean food sold from a street vendor late at night.

My first weekend in Seoul, the IFCC club held a "Welcoming Party" for the exchange students. The IFCC tabled all week in the school, selling tickets to the party for 15,000₩ (14USD) that read, "Two Free Drinks" and provided a map to a bar in Sinchon on the back, showing the international students exactly how to walk from the subway station to the location. The theme of the Welcoming Party was "Red and Black," which provided a dress code for the event as well, our buddies encouraging us to wear the colors. Dressed in the appropriate colors, the international students followed the small map and met our buddies at the club. IFCC members acted as the bouncers that night, taking our tickets, stamping our hands, and checking our coats. The buddies each had face paint on, one red and black line on their faces, identifying

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[45] *Tteokbokki* is a sold as street food throughout Seoul, and consists of spicy red pepper sauce (*gochujang*), fish cake, and chewy rice cakes that are shaped like sausages.

themselves as IFCC members. Within the Korean club members, there was a competition to see who could take selfies with the most international students. Inside the club, there was also a space for taking large group photos in front of a backdrop. IFCC had made signs for this area, reading "Buddies"; "IFCC"; and "Friendship" that we held during these photos. Christina was a photographer for the club, one of many in the group, and was tasked with taking photos throughout the night, documenting our fun.

The party was held at BarFly, whose sign read, "A Fly Party" playing "EDM, Hip-hop, Latin, and K-pop" music. Even at a bar in Seoul, the music was still referred to as "K-pop" on the sign. This event was also the only time I heard K-pop played at a nightclub in Seoul. BarFly attempts to be a "global club," hosting numerous "Welcoming Parties" for international exchange students, which perhaps is why the club includes K-pop music into their mix unlike most clubs in Korea that cater primarily to Korean students. Even it its country of origin, K-pop must be referred to as "K-" and is performed only in "global" music setting in Seoul. That night, the club was also filled with an eclectic group of students: a mix of Korean full-time and foreign exchange students from every continent. The music mix elicited reactions from different groups of students throughout the night. When the group Twice's song "TT" came on, the Korean students and international K-pop fans erupted in excitement, putting there hands in the "TT" formation and dancing along to the song.[46] When a Beyoncé song was played, another population of the room became excited, as well as Luis Fonsi's hit song "Despacito." The music mix of the night successfully accommodated students from a variety of backgrounds, creating a party that was incredibly fun for everyone.

[46] This dance mimics the look of crying in the "ㅠ" hangul symbol, which is used in texting to represent a crying face. To see the dance, see minute 1:40 in the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePpPVE-GGJw

Unlike a most nights of drinking in Seoul, which happens at restaurants with food and several bottles of *soju* (소주, "rice liquor") and *maekju* (맥주, "beer") mixed together with a chopstick or spoon to make *somaek* (소맥), at BarFly we drank rum and cokes or Budweisers with our drink coupons. After several hours of dancing, when most students had already consumed their two free drinks, IFCC member Rick got up on the stage in the middle of the club with a microphone and led several drinking games. To congratulate winners of the speed drinking, pole dancing, and limbo contests, IFCC gave away large bottles of Jagermeister, Finlandia, and Jack Daniels. In the middle of the chaos of the party, Christina and I ran off the a convenience store on the street, drinking water and eating some Korean snack foods, a ritual part of every night out in the crowded clubs of Seoul I would later learn.

This was my "Welcoming" to Seoul: our buddies renting a club, encouraging us to get drunk, wearing cute matching outfits in red and black, and dancing to a mix of Korean, American, and Latin music. From the photos and video taken at the party, a video was made to capture the party, as was done for every IFCC event. The president of IFCC, a fellow student, posted the video with "P.s. Hope you recover from the hangover lol" as part of the caption. The video was posted on a private group for members of the club and exchange students, but even so, evidence of our drunken dancing and participation in the drinking games are now accessible on the Internet.

IFCC presented a packaged version of Seoul nightlife for the exchange students to experience first hand what 'Korean cool' entailed. With familiar and unfamiliar music bumping through our ears, we got a taste of the city's ability to be a placeless-place. Looking back, my friends who attended this party that was reeking with 'cool' were also the people to remind me during interviews that Korean culture is Confucian, conservative, and restrictive of individual

freedoms. This introduction to Seoul was young, cool, and cosmopolitan, portraying a version of Korea for the foreigners that did not represent the "Confucian values" friends would later tell me underlie life in Korea.

This project addresses fashion in Seoul both as clothing items and how the image of Seoul is produced, or *fashioned*. My introduction to Seoul combined these two realms of "fashion," as the party itself *fashioned* a global, exuberant party for us, and also prescribed a dress code for students to follow. All wearing red and black, students attending the party were easily identifiable as one group, although the structure of IFCC always had a distinction between "buddies," Korean students and the "Foreign friends," or exchange students. Subsequently, red and black were popular colors worn by youth on the ramp of Seoul Fashion Week that season (see Figure 20 and 21), and appeared as a trend for countless collections on the professional designer runways (see Figure 22-4). This party, and the photos taken, were part of the "trend" colors of that season in fashion, even if only subconsciously. IFCC's dress code instructed all students to wear colors that were on trend, fashioning our bodies into the appropriate fashion moment before taking posed photographs and selfies together.

This "Welcoming Party," acted as a *bricoler* of cultural symbols in order to appeal to international students from Europe, North and South America, East and Southeast Asia. Everyone knew some of the songs played, everyone could participate in silly drinking games or limbo, and everyone was included in the buddies' selfie game of "getting points" by taking photos with international students and posting them to Facebook. The videos and selfies may not become widely circulated on the Internet, but through everyone's social network online, these images of Korea will reach a wide range of viewers throughout the globe. The documentation of the party through photos and videos acted both to include international students into the Korean

university setting, but also to give IFCC students an opportunity to show off their "global" friends. Being a "buddy" of an international student, and going to the "Welcoming Party," taking selfies with international students, and being included in the video were highly valued opportunities at Kyung Hee, as the IFCC club quite competitive to join.

In conclusion, I have brought this story back to the very beginning to show how the university and IFCC crafted my experience from the first day to portray Seoul as a placeless-place, that most importantly is 'cool' and 'young.' This party was a performance of Korean nightlife, as my Korean friends would later confess to me that they had to lie to their parents to go out clubbing with the foreign students. Many never went to clubs except with the foreign buddies. This university club held parties like this one throughout the year for the exchange students. IFCC produced its a branded image of Seoul as Korean, *tteokbokki*, and global, with the club music and foreign alcohol. My experience in Seoul was through the lens of the IFCC, of a branding of Seoul already, and my Korean friends and the University wanted exchange students to fall in love with the city, and we did.

In this project I have explored how Korean culture becomes circulated around the globe and then flows back into Korea. I have examined both how images of Korean fashion become consumed outside of Korea, as well as the practices of dress within Korea. Fashion in Korea is constructed on individual bodies with an awareness of Korean societal expectations of appearance and influence from media in K-entertainment and foreign celebrities. The first two chapters focus on the relationship between the Korean body and the branding of the nation through *Hallyu* media asking how does the Korean body extend into a tool of branding the state? How do young Koreans relate to their own bodies while consuming branded images of their nation? In the latter two chapters, I explored more specifically how images of Korean street wear

are simultaneously produced and consumed in the space of Seoul Fashion Week and Hongdae. Instead of performing one's self, in these spaces one is required to animate a fashioned character that fits within the aesthetic of Korean street fashion. Through the final two chapters, I aim to understand how the individual living in Korea contributes to *Hallyu* media through their body, using fashion styles to participate in the wave of Korean culture taking over the world. Fashion in Korea is not seen as a designer-brand-label lead industry, but instead an imagining of *all* Korean youth to be participating in streetwear trends with fervor. And while some enjoy this fast paced trend game, many of my friends in Korea felt pressure to keep up with the tides of fashion trend that flowed through their own University, came up in casual conversations, and required their bodies to fix one's self within a standard of appearance.

This project opens discussion for studying *Hallyu* not only as a wave that moves outward, drawing in foreign audiences with enticing K-pop beats and beautiful Korean idols, but also as a tide that makes its way *back* to the shore of Korea, influencing how Korean youth view their own culture through the branded entity of "Korea, Inc." By studying fashion as a medium, I wish to promote research into how *Hallyu* becomes an embodied experience, a way in which individuals relate to a larger governmental schema of branding the nation's culture. While *Hallyu* 2.0 travels through air as a sound wave, it becomes anchored to the individual through fashion practices, physically aligning one's body with one's media consumption. Through this project, I hope to illuminate how fashion as a medium uniquely incorporates one's experience of media consumption into a physical, public presentation, and this embodied practice thus becomes a producer of the very culture of its wearer's consumption. I propose that studying everyday practices of dress can be a way of studying a new relationship between media consumption and production, as a physical marker of cultures of circulation and personal presentation of self.

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