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The Aesthetics of Cuteness in Korean Pop Music

By

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Media and Cultural Studies

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March 2016

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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PhD Media and Cultural Studies

The Aesthetics of Cuteness in Korean Pop Music

Summary

The aesthetic of ‘cuteness’ in South Korean popular music (known as K-pop) is a pivotal concept in Korean media and culture and is frequently used to describe performances by both male and female K-pop groups. *Aegyo* is a fundamental part of this aesthetic, also called ‘K-cute’, and it refers to the behaviour of ‘acting cute’ that denotes a particular coquettish style not only in K-pop but also in South Korean society in a broader sense.

This thesis explores K-pop performance from the mid-2000s to the 2010s through an examination of K-pop artists’ training process, an analysis of K-pop music videos’ lyrical and visual codes and a study of notable live performances. The aesthetic of ‘cuteness’ in K-pop is contextualised through a historical and cultural review of South Korea and the forms through which *aegyo* has been represented. Thus, we see how *aegyo* has evolved in response to gender stereotyping in both traditional and contemporary South Korean society and how it has come to represent a unique idea of Korean-ness expressed in a cultural form that also fulfils its potential for flexibility.

Furthermore, this thesis investigates how the K-pop industry influences *aegyo* through issues of gender and sexuality, primarily examining Richard Schechner’s performance theory and Erving Goffman’s notion of self-presentation. A significant aspect of this investigation is the sexualisation of K-pop idol boy and girl groups through the deliberate adoption of the *aegyo* aesthetic, a process that forms a key part of the marketing strategy behind their ‘Korean wave’ global success.

Finally, I explore mediatised performances of *aegyo* and the possibility that remediation, as outlined by Bolter and Grusin, provides a potent vehicle for the repetition and reinforcement of ‘cuteness’ via holographic and digitalised K-pop performances.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

South Korean Popular Music and Aesthetic Categories of *Aegyo*

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the unique aesthetic of South Korean popular music (K-pop) and to define and analyze the concept of *aegyo*—the term used to describe a particular kind of coquettish or ‘cute’ style within K-pop and wider Korean society. In addition, it examines the gender stereotyping and the different types of femininity and masculinity manufactured and commodified through K-pop. An important aspect of this is the sexualisation of K-pop idols within *aegyo*. My research is based on the lyrical and visual codes of K-pop music videos, a documentary film and live performances. It takes its central methodological underpinning from Richard Schechner’s performance theory, Erving Goffman’s notion of self-presentation, Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, Victor Turner’s work on liminality and *communitas*, as well as Philip Auslander’s notion of liveness and Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation, as they relate to *aegyo*. Minor theoretical sources include Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of the ‘habitus,’ Edward Said’s orientalism, David Harvey’s analysis of neoliberalism, and Graeme Turner and Chris Rojek’s ideas on celebrity. Finally, I analyse a live performance of K-pop in London from 2013 through the lens of phenomenology.

In terms of methodology, this thesis has used video analysis to build up the vocabulary of the dance movements of *aegyo* and to collate participant observation for phenomenological analysis. I have analysed music videos of K-pop idol groups on YouTube, produced by the South Korean SM Entertainment Company. I have particularly focused on this entertainment company because it is one of three major companies in South Korea involved in the production of K-pop idol groups. There is strong justification for using the music videos of K-pop as the basis for textual analysis because the singles of K-pop idol boy and girl groups constitute my main text. My primary object is the study of the performance of *aegyo*; these performances involve sound, movement and visual image and the lyrical and visual codes contained therein.

As a promotional form marketed via the global stage, the music videos of K-pop are made up of images embedded with a unique idea of Korean-ness based on the aesthetics of ‘cuteness’. This aesthetic style is emerging in relation to a remodelling of traditional and contemporary South Korean gender stereotypes and it is increasingly spread as a cultural product via social media. Not only the narrative interpretations of song lyrics but also the individuality of each personality, and their performance characteristics manufactured for the stage image, are identifiable through the visual images of the videos. In the case of K-pop, it is in a sense, obvious, that these are the reasons why the music video provides suitable research material for the study of aesthetic ‘cuteness’.

Specifically, this thesis focuses on K-pop music videos from the mid-2000s to the 2010s, and I have selected certain songs for more detailed study that relate directly to *aegyo*, such as Girls’ Generation’s ‘Gee’ (2009) (Chapter Two), f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’ (2011) (Chapter Three), SHINee’s ‘Replay’ (2008) (Chapter Four) and Super Junior’s live performance in London (Chapter Five).

The term K-pop refers to a genre of South Korean popular music. It is also used to denote performances by K-pop groups. The members of these so-called ‘idol groups’ are typically South Korean youth who have been trained for a number of years in a variety of disciplines by the entertainment companies in South Korea. I argue in Chapter Two that this is a deliberate and highly artificial process of manufacture driven by economic and cultural factors, as opposed to a more creative process of composition that might be found in the values of individual creative expression associated in many cultures with music or dance. A K-pop idol group typically consists of young people ranging in age from teenagers to performers in their early 30s. Most groups have been made up of single-sex members since the first K-pop idol boy group H.O.T. debuted in 1996, followed by the girl group S.E.S. in 1997. The popularity of K-pop idol groups stems from their virtuoso dance and vocal performances but also their carefully constructed visual presentation or style—make-up, clothes, facial expressions, mood, physique and attitude. This aesthetic aspect is a fundamental part of *aegyo*, its popularity and its success.

Considerable research has recently been conducted on the commodification of K-pop as a phenomenon of the global market. It is typically classified by Korean scholars into the

following four aspects: the development of commercially successful cultural products¹, success factors locally and globally², the reasons K-pop appeals to fans and fandom culture within consumerism³ and how digital technologies are used in K-pop to appeal to international audiences⁴. Although the most significant element of K-pop is the aesthetic of ‘watching music’ created by its strong visual element, discourses on K-pop also focus on transnationalism, globalization and consumerism in relation to the so-called Korean wave (*hallyu* in Korean) as a tool for ‘soft power’. Further, the study of K-pop has been extended by Western scholars to include the following: contemporary South Korean history and culture; issues of identity and nationalism; the social and economic perspectives, as well as political, technological and scientific knowledge; the darker side of K-pop in relation to the so-called ‘slave contracts’ of K-pop idols during their training or manufactured process⁵; and the processes of intercultural, transnational resistance in ‘patterns of K-pop consumption’ around the world based on ‘soft power’⁶.

With regard to identity and nationalism in the context of K-pop, John Lie, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, asks ‘What is the K in K-pop?’ asserting that this ‘K’ is a part of Brand Korea, ruthlessly promoted by ‘the export-oriented South Korean government since the 1960s’ (2012: 361). He posits that K-pop is one of several examples of South Korean export success, all of which, in his opinion, is due to the denuding of Korean-ness and the fact that very little genuine Korean culture resides in these commercially successful cultural products. Lie (2012) argues that K-pop is a commodification, emptied of authentic ‘South Korean cultural-national identity’ in order to facilitate export beyond Korea. In my thesis, however, I argue that a deeper analysis of the *aegyo* aesthetic within K-pop shows that the opposite is, in fact, true. According to my research, *aegyo* is rooted in traditional South Korean culture, history and politics, and has given rise to a unique and clearly identifiable aspect of the Korean identity, exemplified by K-pop idols and their performances (here, I mean visual image, movement, vocal style and behaviour), as captured in their music videos. I explore this thoroughly in Chapters Three and Four.

¹ Shim, 2013; Liu, Park and Hwang, 2014; Lee, D. 2011; Cha, 2013

² Kim, S., 2013; Lee, S., 2012; Kim, Y., 2012; Kim, P., and Kim, J., 2013; Kim, K. and Choi, 2014

³ Oh, 2012; Son, 2011; Chae and Yoon, 2013

⁴ Kwak and Jung, 2012; Park, Y., 2014; Shin, Lee, Jang *et al.*, 2014; Cho and Shim, 2013; Moon, 2013

⁵ Williamson, 2011

⁶ Leung, 2012

In terms of gender issues, K-pop has been repeatedly criticised for its promotion of a femininity that is overtly sexualised and highly commodified through its presentation of de-humanised girl's bodies (Kim, 2011), its marketing of femininity (Willoughby, 2006), and for its presentation to American audiences of sexually passive Asian female stereotypes (Jung, 2011). In terms of gender and sexuality, the young bodies of celebrity K-pop idol groups, both boys and girls, are depicted as objects consumed by fans in fetishistic and voyeuristic ways (Kim, 2010 and 2011; Lee, 2011). Turnbull and Epstein (2014) argue that the 'cute' physical identities of K-pop idols are specifically constructed to appeal to the tastes of their target audiences, given the competition that exists in commercial environments.

In my understanding, K-pop has created a new category of aesthetic style that highlights visual aesthetics within digital media and which reveals the process of commodification of the individuals within a K-pop group. As they are mostly single-sex, K-pop idol groups emphasize the gender of its members by presenting either male or female perspectives on gender and sexuality. However, the young age of K-pop idols, media censorship and traditional Confucianist ideology in South Korea, as well as the commodification of the performers' bodies by the entertainment companies of South Korea, have brought the criticism that K-pop belongs to the realm of voyeurism, fetishistic scopophilia and paedophilia. Whether viewed positively or negatively, K-pop has contributed to the gradual change in culture and social mores in South Korea, particularly in relation to issues concerning gender and sexuality.

To discuss the development of the aesthetic of flexible 'cuteness' in the historical context of K-pop, I have classified K-pop idol groups into three generations: the first generation of K-pop idol groups spanned from the mid-1990s to the beginning of the 2000s, the second generation from the mid-2000s to the end of the decade and the third generation from the early 2010s to the mid-2010s. Each generation reflects the particular socio-cultural circumstances of South Korea and demonstrates the changing gender perspectives in South Korea from within traditional embedded East Asian social structures. In terms of the denuding of Korean-ness mentioned above, however, I am arguing in this work for greater complexity and flexibility in the Korean identity - *aegyo* allows us to see a much larger range of gender positions including feminized masculinity and 'tomboys'.

The term *aegyo* refers to the behaviour of ‘acting cute’ that is articulated in Korean popular culture. The word is derived from the joining of two Chinese characters: ‘love (*ae*)’ and ‘beautiful (*gyo*)’. For Puzar (2011), *aegyo* is usually embodied in the adoption of childlike charm and innocence as a feminine trait for the benefit of men who are engaged in the couple-related behaviours of Korean adolescents and pre-adults. On the other hand, within K-pop, *aegyo* is also performed by boys in a remodelling of traditional forms of masculinity (I will examine this in Chapter Four). The *aegyo* style presents behaviours and visual experiences that are taken up and disseminated in everyday life as meaningful signs and symbolic gestures. Both male and female K-pop groups employ this cute aesthetic to highlight the process of transformation from child-like innocence to mature sexual attractiveness. K-pop celebrities undergo rigorous physical, moral and social training, and consequently, they come to adopt the *aegyo* aesthetic, *aegyo* gradually embedding itself in their attitudes and behaviours. Such training occurs within specific regimes run by the entertainment companies. The trainee idols are thus indirectly, yet deliberately, ‘taught’ *aegyo*, through learning how to adopt specific facial expressions, hand gestures, body postures, manners and behavioural styles, and through the process of constructing their individual stage personae. Every detail of the *aegyo* style is managed and personalised for each member of the group and in this way, *aegyo* has been developed and manufactured to become one of the industry’s dominant aesthetics.

To the best of my knowledge, however, no one to date has studied *aegyo*, or ‘cuteness’, as a set of routines involving voice, visual performance and dance. One of the problems that arise in examining *aegyo* is that a precise meaning still does not exist in connection with specific behaviours. The term *aegyo* needs defining more clearly to help facilitate an understanding of its polysemy. Jung (2011: 165) suggests that *aegyo* refers to ‘cute gestures’ through facial expressions and voice; however, she does not explain how the movements have become cute gestures and what kinds of facial expressions can be deemed *aegyo*. Turnbull and Epstein (2014) refer to the term *aegyo* as a calculated performance of cuteness as a means of presenting the female as subordinate. According to Michael Fuhr’s ‘Voicing Body, Voicing Seoul’ (2013: 279), *aegyo* is literally defined as ‘behaving in a coquettish manner’ and it is frequently mentioned in fan discourses as expressing idol girls’ gestures and voices. I find, however, that this argument presents a limited aspect of *aegyo* as purely an aesthetic naturally demonstrated in the everyday

life of South Korean rather than also in the special gestures of K-pop idol girls or as an obsession among K-pop fans.

However, if we look at the performances of *aegyo* from ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ (2013) by singer Hari (female version) and by Il Hoon Jung (male version), we find a precise, detailed visual description of *aegyo* style, including hand gestures, facial expressions and costumes. I discuss this in further detail later in this chapter. I have selected these two versions of the same song because they provide the building blocks for an appreciation of the *aegyo* aesthetic and because they are part of the SM Entertainment Company’s K-pop idol portfolio of songs. In this analysis of ‘*Kiyomi Song*’, I use Goffman’s concepts of self-presentation to demonstrate the adaptability of ‘cuteness’ and I categorise ‘cute’ femininity according to five aesthetic categories of *aegyo* taken from f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’ (see Chapter Three). I also discuss ‘cute’ masculinity using four categories taken from SHINee’s ‘Replay’ (see Chapter Four). These reconstructed ‘cute’ behaviours are related to socio-historical and cultural conditions in South Korea. Based on this vocabulary of key *aegyo* signs and signals from the music videos of ‘*Kiyomi Song*,’ I then examine the gender representation for emotionally motivated behaviours of K-pop idol girl and boy groups, analysing specific gender, representation and performance issues in SM’s K-pop idol groups. To explore the aesthetic categories of *aegyo*, I have studied these music videos frame-by-frame, with and without sound, analysing subtle hand gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, dance vocabularies, costumes and fashion accessories, stage sets and lighting.

Aegyo is distinctive, and although Koreans naturally grasp *aegyo*, international audiences sharing the images of *aegyo*, for example through YouTube, are less culturally primed to understand the meaning of *aegyo* and the ways in which it differs from Japanese *kawaii* and Lolita fashion, even though *aegyo* influenced by *kawaii*. In addition, in the common vernacular, *aegyo* tends to refer exclusively to females, although its aesthetic also extends to males. In my thesis, I am therefore going to explore ‘cute’ masculinity because it is relevant to the issues of gender stereotyping, to different types of Korean masculinities, to the reconstruction of aesthetic ‘cuteness’ in terms of gender issues, and to the unique sexualisation of men ‘manufactured’ through K-pop. I also explore how *aegyo* is performed, where it originates, how it expresses

femininity and masculinity more generally in K-pop, why it has appeared and what role it plays in K-pop.

In my view, ‘cute’ has become a way of negotiating the hypersexualised world of Western pop without jeopardizing traditional South Korean values of propriety. It is ‘sexy’ without being ‘sexual’. Coquettish display arouses visions of the impossible: a tease without the possibility of consummation. Indeed, the unique manufacturing regime of entertainment companies is a powerful vehicle for disseminating *aegyo*. Examples of its success are H.O.T.’s ‘Candy’ (1996), Sechs Kies’s ‘Couple’ (1998), S.E.S.’s ‘I’m Your Girl’ (1997), Fin.K.L.’s ‘To My Boyfriend’ (1998) and Baby V.O.X.’s ‘Ya Ya Ya’ (1998) (Figure 1.1).



H.O.T.
‘Candy’ (1996)



Sechs Kies
‘Couple’ (1998)



S.E.S.
‘I’m Your Girl’ (1997)



Fin.K.L.
‘To My Boyfriend’ (1998)



Baby V.O.X.
‘Ya Ya Ya’ (1998)

Figure 1.1. Mid-1990s, commercially successful K-pop idol groups using *aegyo*

These were the first songs to use coquettish, innocent *aegyo* as a popular vehicle, leading to considerable commercial success. If we analyse this success in terms of the early K-pop phase (mid-1990s), we can identify the operation of certain traditional, culturally conservative norms in terms of gender and age. In South Korea, then, it was acceptable for young women and men aged above 20 years to present themselves as sexy or manly, whereas, in the public arena, teenagers needed to conceal their sexuality, especially in the media, due to the protection of juveniles and the operation of rigid cultural mores in relation to sexuality. *Aegyo*—an aesthetic that is flirtatious and cute, but still notionally sexually innocent—enabled these early teenage K-pop groups’ success. Notably, under Korean Law, a person is considered to be a juvenile until the age of 20. According to the Act on the Protection of Children and Juveniles from Sexual Abuse, ‘a person is a minor until January 1 of the year in which he or she will turn 19 (this is also the day on which he or she is considered 20 years old by Korean reckoning)’ (Ministry of Government Legislation, 2011).

As for why *aegyo* is worthy of academic exploration, I argue that this unique aesthetic of ‘cuteness’ might partly offer an explanation for the socio-cultural determinants of South Korean popular culture as part of a global cultural phenomenon. In order to establish a taxonomy of *aegyo*, I apply the concept of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) to K-pop idols on the stage front and in everyday life, within the context of K-pop culture’s neologisms, including issues of gender and sexuality within South Korean society.

This thesis contributes to the existing academic discussion because of its specific focus on *aegyo* in South Korean popular culture and how it has been represented in K-pop as a diasporic and global phenomenon. The concept of performance might be useful for understanding *aegyo*, which is connected to demeanour and self-presentation, as well as the idea that it constitutes a new type of virtuosity—the ‘cute’ style is skill-based after all. I analyse relevant performance theories by Schechner, Goffman and Auslander and develop a new definition of ‘performance’ specific to K-pop, relating to the manner in which forms of performance are learned, and forms of ‘cuteness’ are produced, through mechanisms of the performance process.

To collect the latest data on these groups, I have performed a content analysis of online newspapers, of blogs such as *Allkpop* and *Soompi* and of K-pop website forums and reality TV programmes for K-pop idols. Furthermore, I have conducted participant observation of the K-pop idol boy group's 'Super Junior's Super Show 5' at a live K-pop performance in London, of the K-pop idol girl group 2NE1 and of K-pop male singer Psy's 3D-Hologram concert at the Korea Brand and Entertainment Expo 2013 (KBEE 2013), also in London. These observations were completed in pursuit of a phenomenological analysis of performed sexuality and remediation in terms of the concept of 'liveness'.

Performance of *Aegyo* in Everyday Life in the South Korean Society

'Gwiyomi Song' is the new trend and getting more popular on social network sites and even on Youtube! I've seen this a lot on the Facebook pages that I have joined. Just to give you information, *Gwiyomi*, which is pronounced as *Kiyomi*, is a cute Korean song but more like an *aegyo*. *Aegyo* means cute actions. The song was sung by Hari. If you are wondering why it has that kind of actions, well, it's because it is a children's song. ... Among the people who have joined this cutie song craze besides Asians and Korean artists were popular cosplayer in the Philippines Alodia Gosiengfiao and Filipino Vice Ganda.

'Gwiyomi' / 'Kiyomi Song' (귀요미) Craze⁷

K-pop promotes 'watching music' to communicate ideas and significant affective responses to Koreans and international audiences through the ruthless use of digital technologies and social media, such as YouTube and social networking systems (SNSs). K-pop idols communicate verbal and corporeal behaviours already embedded in the socio-cultural circumstances of everyday life and the performance of these actions involves daily practice and conscious effort. Since the mid-2000s, the aesthetic of K-pop, as displayed in its group performances, has become much more explicitly sexy without being sexually explicit, due to the change in the power relationship of the

⁷'Gwiyomi'/'Kiyomi Song' (귀요미) Craze (2013) *bubblews.com* [Online] 4th April (Accessed 25th May 2013)

neoliberal regime (Kim, 2011). The relationship between entertainment companies and K-pop idols is deliberately constructed (as employer and employee), and within this relationship, groups have become commodified, that is, seen as cultural products that need to reflect the various tastes of audiences in the industrial market of popular culture.

The example of K-pop singer Hari's '*Kiyomi Song*' (2013) cited earlier, suggests that virtuoso 'cute' behaviours manufactured for the stage can be used as a basis for comparing the different inflections of individual or personal 'cuteness', seen, for example, backstage, from which an initial taxonomy of 'cuteness' can be built. The introductory part of the lyrics shows how a romantic relationship of a couple reflects the socio-cultural circumstances of the South Korean society. In fact, two versions of this song exist—a female version by Hari and a male version by K-pop idol boy group BtoB member Il Hoon Jung. Cute hand gestures and facial expressions are kept simple so that everyone can easily follow and copy them. In this manner, the actions of *aegyo* from the song can be re-experienced in ordinary life. Here is a brief synopsis of the '*Kiyomi Song*'.

The main portion of '*Kiyomi Song*' was inspired by K-pop idol boy group BtoB member Il Hoon Jung. He initially performed only a part of the song, counting numbers using his hands and fingers in a 'cute' way, and this was called '*Kiyomi (Gwiyomi) Player*' on the reality TV programme *MTV Diary* in 2012. Thereafter, Il Hoon Jung performed *Kiyomi Player* on the South Korean variety show *Weekly Idol* (2012) and *Kiyomi Player* became popular among K-pop idols as a way of deciding who best expressed the 'cute' style. This became known as the '*aegyo battle*', with the concept of 'battle' originating in street dance forms such as break dancing and freestyle. In K-pop, facial expressions, visual language and the image created through moves, not sensitive gestures or a soft voice, are crucial for competitors in an *aegyo* battle. Then K-pop female singer Hari refined a song titled '*Kiyomi Song*' in February 2013 and her own 'cute' hand gestures included those from *Kiyomi Player*. A video of Hari's '*Kiyomi Song*' was uploaded by the Korean media outlet Sports Seoul and became popular as an Internet meme⁸. Based on the female version of Hari's '*Kiyomi Song*', Il Hoon Jung

⁸ An Internet meme is a mimicry activity spread from person to person via the Internet.

then uploaded a male version as the cover video on the Internet. Some of the hand gestures from this song are as follows:

- Bobbing wrists up and down with clenched fists (Figure 1.2.1)
- Mimicking wiping away tears and the palms of the hands facing out to the viewer to imply sadness that a boyfriend is cheating (Figure 1.2.2)
- When singing the lyric ‘you’re mine’, fingers point towards the camera as if the gesture might be addressed to the audience (Figure 1.2.3)
- Putting the heels of the hands together in a flower shape under the chin and supporting the face whilst moving the shoulders up and down (Figure 1.2.4)
- Making an ‘x’ by crossing the index fingers to prohibit doing something (Figure 1.2.5)
- Interlocking little fingers and shaking them from side to side when singing ‘please, pinky promise me’ (Figure 1.2.6)
- Touching the tips of the index fingers, hands in front of the chest/heart, and then separating them repeatedly to express the sentiment ‘don’t leave me alone’ (Figure 1.2.7)
- A facial expression with eyes wide open, mouth opened a little, when singing in a childlike voice, to express innocence, purity, sweetness, prettiness, being petite and charming

Female Version by Hari



Male Version by Il Hoon Jung



Figure 1.2.1. Bobbing wrists up and down with clenched fists



Figure 1.2.2. Mimicking wiping away tears (Female ver.) vs Sit face to face with each other (Male ver.)



Figure 1.2.3. Fingers point towards the audience while singing 'you're mine'



Figure 1.2.4. Hands make a flower shape under the chin and support the face



Figure 1.2.5. Making an 'x' by crossing index fingers



Figure 1.2.6. Interlocking little fingers to show ‘pinky promise me’



Figure 1.2.7. Touching the tips of the index fingers



Figure 1.2.8. Riding a giraffe doll

Figure 1.2. ‘Kiyomi Song’ (2013)

Il Hoon Jung’s male version of ‘Kiyomi Song’ presents ‘cute’ gestures similar to those in the female version; however, one difference is that his movements are larger. In addition, he does not display a delicate sensibility of movement and adds mischievous and flirtatious actions, such as suddenly appearing from behind a tree or riding a giraffe doll (Figure 1.2.8). These childlike, mischievous movements display the ‘cute’ visual style and gestures of *Kiyomi* Player while his voice and energy are more adult and masculine.

In ‘Kiyomi Song’, the *aegyo* battle involves counting numbers using the choreographic tool of accumulation as follows (see figure 1.3): (spoken rhythmically) 1 + 1 (Figure 1.3.1) = *kiyomi* (a ‘cute’ gesture, done only once) (Figure 1.3.2); 2 + 2 (Figure 1.3.3) = *kiyomi* (a second ‘cute’ gesture, different from the first, repeated) (Figure 1.3.4); 3 + 3 = *kiyomi* (a third, also different, ‘cute’ gesture, repeated three times) (Figure 1.3.5) up to 6 + 6 = *kiyomi* (a sixth ‘cute’ gesture) (Figures 1.3.6–1.3.9). Each time, the ‘cute’ gesture changes according to the number. The numbers are counted using the fingers, and

subsequently the singers use extemporaneous gestures to convey individuality. When saying ‘ $1 + 1 = kiyomi$ ’, both index fingers open to show the number one and then the fingers point to both cheeks. I believe that this action plays on ‘*Gonji Gonji*’, a typical gesture made by babies in South Korea. Babies poke their cheeks using their fingers, and this is commonly understood to indicate prettiness and thought to come from the *Yeonji Gonji* custom. *Yeonji* refers to rouge, and *Gonji* means the red spot on a bride’s brow. The baby playing ‘*Gonji Gonji*’ thus implies being or feeling pretty, and parents customarily respond by saying, ‘a thing of beauty’ when babies poke their cheeks (Figure 1.3.2). In the song, when gesturing the number two, the singer’s second and third fingers are repeatedly bent and stretched above the head as if depicting a rabbit’s ears (Figure 1.3.4). When gesturing the number three, the thumb and forefinger make a circle and the others open and then move back and forth making large circles (Figure 1.3.5). The number four is expressed by bending the thumb and stretching the other four fingers tightly under the jaw and moving the four fingers back and forth, indicating something sparkling or glittering (Figure 1.3.6). The number five is communicated by stretching the arms and hands at shoulder level in front of the body and repeatedly opening and closing the hands (Figure 1.3.7 connected to Figure 1.3.8). These actions are reminiscent of a baby stretching and closing the hands and fingers to develop strength in the muscles; this is known as ‘*Jam Jam*’ in South Korea (Figures 1.3.7 and 1.3.8). The final number, six, is enacted with one hand by stretching the five fingers while the other hand is closed, opening only the thumb and then kissing the stretched fingers one by one before doing a ‘thumbs up’ gesture (Figure 1.3.9).



Figure 1.3.1. $1 + 1$



=

Figure 1.3.2. *kiyomi*



Figure 1.3.3. $2 + 2$



Figure 1.3.4. *kiyomi*

=



Figure 1.3.5. $3 + 3$



Figure 1.3.6. $4 + 4$



Figure 1.3.7. $5 + 5$



Figure 1.3.8. *Kiyomi*

=



Figure 1.3.9. $6 + 6 = \textit{Kiyomi}$



Figure 1.3. The *Aegyo* Battle

To return briefly to ‘cute’ gestures that parents teach babies and young children, such as ‘*Gonji Gonji*’ and ‘*Jam Jam*’, we can see how the culture of *aegyo* is, to some extent, latent, handed down from generation to generation. When children become parents themselves, they teach these ‘cute’ actions to their children, who then unconsciously rehearse and display them automatically when asked to do so by their parents. With the advent of SNSs, parents can now record their children performing these ‘cute’ actions and share them instantaneously with others via the Internet. When viewers like what they see, they can copy the idea with their own families and friends and thus create a new version, which they can then post on the Web, etc. ‘Cute’ actions of the ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ have been disseminated virally in the same way as individual creative works by both young people and adults. All these ‘cute’ actions and the *Kiyomi* Player in the ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ are examples of *aegyo*, as well as Hari’s and Il Hoon Jung’s video performances and the Internet performances described above.

If ‘cuteness’ is primarily a form of display and performance, then it is worth discussing how we can best understand performance as a cultural category. According to Richard Schechner (2002: 25), an American scholar of performance studies, the term *performance* refers not only to an observable event in the demonstration of practiced artistic actions but also to all types of phenomena occurring in everyday life, in the arts, sports, other popular entertainments, business, technology, sexual activity, in ritual—both sacred and secular—and in play. Performance can be extended to various kinds of events that include a performer, who is doing something and a spectator, who is observing something (Schechner, 2002). The concept of performance can be further extended to include diverse everyday phenomena, such as Shakespeare’s assertion that ‘all the world’s a stage’ (Bial, 2007: 59). Anthropologist Erving Goffman (1959) draws on theatrical language—show, audience and setting—to demonstrate the wide range of expressive tools that involve social status in ‘everyday life performance’. He applies the term ‘self-presentation’ to the dramaturgical ideas of the stage (actors and roles) to provide a framework for it.

With regard to concept and ontology, performance can be classified according to two aspects: first, performance is the activity of all ‘to perform’ in relation to ‘being’, ‘doing’, ‘showing doing’, and ‘explaining showing doing’ (Schechner, 2002: 22). Second, performance is a tool of representation in time and space based on the area of

media technology (Auslander, 1999). The first discourse is based on Erving Goffman (1959) and Victor Turner's (1982) understanding of performativity in social interactions and rituals in relation to the concept of performance. The second discourse can be supported by Philip Auslander's (1999) idea of liveness in performance. To explore the aesthetics of K-pop in the contexts of gender and representation, the former can be applied generally to *aegyo* as it appears in social interactions within a training system in the context of neoliberalization (see Chapter Two), to feminine 'cute' negotiated from traditional Korean and modernised forms from both Western and East Asian cultures (Chapter Three) and to 'cute' masculinity as it exists in stereotypes of Asian maleness, hierarchy and patriarchal ideology, connected to age and gender in the South Korean context (Chapter Four). The latter is relevant to the discussion of performed masculinities and femininities, to the aesthetic form of K-pop performance in terms of liveness and to re-mediation viewed from a phenomenological perspective (Chapter Five).

The performances of SM's K-pop idol groups feature two distinct types of dance sequences: in the first, the idols move in unison throughout, each member of the group staying in the same position and dancing the same steps; in the second, performers still dance in unison, but change position and formation, each having a moment alone, to highlight each member's personal characteristics, both in terms of their public figure and as an individual. I agree with Goffman (1959) when he argues that performance is part of everyday life ('backstage') and not just what happens in a performance on stage ('front stage'/'onstage'). Here 'backstage' refers to those spaces that are out of sight of explicit regulation. Accordingly, for the purposes of this thesis, K-pop dances involve a dual performance: group choreography 'front stage'/'onstage'—the performance of the professional trained in the *aegyo* aesthetic—and 'backstage' performances—the innate self-presentation of each individual within the group. In other words, I am purposefully re-imagining Goffman for my own interests and suggesting that there is a range of 'front stages,' some of which might be relatively 'back'. To explore how these two concepts of performance are learned and become embodied, I have analysed the documentary film *I AM* (2012). This film conveys the story of 32 K-pop 'wannabes', under contract to the SM Entertainment Company, and their journey to become K-pop celebrity (Chapter Two). I have transcribed excerpts from interviews with K-pop trainees, particularly focusing on any frequently used phrases and words relating to

capitalism and the South Korean neoliberal society. This examination reveals an atmosphere of excessive and intense competition and pressure (no time to relax, even during holidays), a disempowering, hierarchical relationship between the employer (SM) and employees (trainees) and very high expectations of emotional maturity (success demands that feelings of loneliness or stress, for example, must simply be overcome without any support). This is the reality of the training or ‘manufacturing’ process for K-pop idol groups in neoliberal South Korea. The documentary film comprises interviews that the entertainment company has pre-edited, rather than genuinely empirical research. The fact that I have not conducted face-to-face interviews could infer a gap in my research methodology. However, it is possible to analyse the performance of *aegyo* despite this limitation, and, in my opinion, this makes the film valuable research material. Notably, K-pop idols’ self-presentation results from a deliberate manufacturing process conducted over years of training, which is reflected in the interview content in *I AM*.

In his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) describes this notion of ‘self-presentation’ as the pre-established routines of everyday social interactions. Such routines occur in many different contexts, and these circumstantial terms show conventional structural behaviours. Goffman’s (1959) term ‘twice-behaved behaviours’ or ‘restored behaviours’ defines actions in social and personal situations. ‘Restored behaviour’ means physical actions not presented for the first time (Schechner, 2002: 22). In relation to K-pop, I argue that the aesthetic of ‘cuteness’ can be considered to be ‘restored’, ‘exaggerated’ and ‘simplified’ behaviour from ‘everyday life performance’ in the context of traditional Korean social structures. From this repository of restored behaviours, choreography can emerge. These structures are rooted in Confucianism and patriarchy and in the contemporary social circumstances of a neoliberal regime.

Goffman (1959) argues that in everyday life, individuals are constantly presenting their intention to create a good impression among others on their own prepared stage, such as an actor in a theatre, to effectively express themselves and manage the impression they make. He states that the word ‘person’ is a mask that everyone is always playing a role in all behaviours, acting, that is, literally being an actor or a performer who is defining and controlling his or her performance. Of performance elements that Goffman (1959) suggests, two can be usefully applied to my research into aesthetic ‘cuteness’ in K-pop:

front and idealization (see Chapter Two). These elements describe how circumstances of communication in everyday life can be defined and how performance is conducted in a specific situation.

In K-pop, performances of *aegyo* are created from restored behaviours, and they are not a ‘once-behaved behaviour’. However, each performance of *aegyo* differs because specific occasions influence each *aegyo*. This point is important for exploring the aesthetic categories of K-pop ‘cuteness’. K-pop idols *adapt* their presentations of *aegyo*, in other words, *aegyo* is a flexible aesthetic not only in the lyrics of romantic love stories but also in the power relationships of age, experience and gender within the patriarchal and hierarchical social circumstances of South Korea. The *aegyo* style of K-pop idols also presents us with a paradox of identity: one ‘self’ is the image, entirely manufactured for an album concept according to the latest entertainment industry trends; the other ‘self’ is more innate, reflecting unconscious perspectives and behaviours of the individual in everyday life.

To explore the flexibilities of ‘cuteness’ within K-pop, we need to understand how the performance of *aegyo* underpins its idols’ self-presentation front stage and backstage. Insights into South Korea’s cultural circumstances and their effect on power relationships will also help us grasp how and why *aegyo* has become so embedded in contemporary culture and so deliberately manufactured to become one of the music industry’s prevailing aesthetics. How then were Korean aesthetics, specifically, the *aegyo* aesthetic, established? To answer this, we must examine the ‘Korean wave’ or ‘*hallyu*’. This term refers to the phenomenon of South Korean culture that has spread worldwide and that, in my understanding, demonstrates South Korean culture’s relatively recent popularity. It is clear how commercially successful the K-pop music genre is if I examine its increased export during the neo-Korean wave, the Korean wave’s third generation. Indeed, the Korean wave’s emergence has provided a vehicle for the establishment of the aesthetic of *aegyo*; the neo-Korean wave and K-pop, in particular, serve as its vehicle. I argue, in fact, that predisposition to this ‘cute’ aesthetic or style has been latent within Korean culture for a long time.

The *hallyu* can be classified into three generations: the first generation is from 1997 to the early 2000s, the second generation is in the mid-2000s, and the third generation is

from the mid- to late-2000s. To explore why the study of Korean ‘cuteness’ in K-pop is relevant and topical, historical mapping of the *hallyu* is examined according to these three generations. The *hallyu*’s first generation (1990s) was based on Korean drama (K-drama). During this time, a journalist from Beijing coined the neologism ‘Korean wave’. The K-drama *What Is Love?* (1991) was exported to China on Chinese Central Television in 1997 and watched by a record number of viewers (16.6% of the audience share in a foreign drama series in China (Jung, 2011)). For Byun (2011), the K-drama communicated a freedom of sexuality in everyday life and a method of expression that the Chinese had not previously experienced, and it strongly impacted the population based on similarities in terms of lifestyle and cultural proximity. The image of the free, unrestricted life of South Koreans and the popularity of K-drama led to the export of K-pop, for example, the K-pop idol boy group H.O.T. to China, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Byun, 2011). Radio programmes introducing K-pop have appeared in China, and K-pop concerts have been attended by Chinese youth. The first generation of the *hallyu* thus introduced South Korean culture to a much wider audience, leading to the popularity of the next generation of the Korean wave across East, South, and Southeast Asia. At this point, however, *aegyo* had not emerged as the dominant aesthetic that it was later to become.

K-pop is usually aimed at a young audience such as teens and pre-teens, while the ideal age group for K-dramas with an *aegyo* aesthetic would be cross-generational, appealing to a broader than teenage audience. According to Jung (2011), the K-drama *Winter Sonata* (2003) appeals mostly to middle-aged Japanese women because the main character Yong Joon Bae’s soft masculinity attracts women of a particular class, according to a socio-historical analysis of Japan. Furthermore, Jung (2011: 81) posits that the K-drama *Full House* (2004) attracts a Singaporean audience of mixed ages due to the main character Rain. This main character is not only a K-pop singer, representative of the popular Americanised cultural products with Asian audiences, in particular teenagers, but also an actor who plays an ‘obnoxious, but ‘cute’ and innocent character’, which is part of this drama’s overall concept, designed to attract the broadest possible Asian audience.

The second generation of Korean wave (2000s) demonstrated the continued popularity of South Korean culture, and exports to East Asia gradually increased to include

television dramas, movies, music and video games. After the K-drama *Winter Sonata* (2002) was released on NHK, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, it peaked at 22.2%, the greatest share achieved by a Japanese drama series (Chae, 2005). According to Jung's *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption* (2011), the popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan highlighted a shift towards a different aesthetic due to the Korean wave. As mentioned, the actor Yong Joon Bae exemplifies 'soft masculinity'. With this phrase, Jung (2011) refers to a hybrid of several masculine archetypes: traditional Korean *seonbi* masculinity, influenced by Chinese Confucian *wen* masculinity and Japan's *bishonen*—this can be translated as 'pretty boy' and refers to global metrosexual masculinity (Jung, 2011: 39). The 'soft masculinity' portrayed by Yong Joon Bae created the *Yonsama* syndrome (a term combining one of the characters of his name, *yong*, and the Japanese word *sama*, denoting respect) (ibid, 2011).

Jung (2011: 45) argues that the *Yonsama* syndrome stems from Yong Joon Bae's portrayal of a man who is gentle, sensitive, pure, polite and tender, yet who has charisma and is strong and dependable, thus communicating a hybridised masculinity—one who is manly, yet also 'feminine'. The historical colonial relationship between Korea and Japan has created a fixed, negative view of the Korean male as 'dark, scary, noisy, sly, smelly, violent and aggressive' by the Japanese. The *Yonsama* syndrome, however, has transformed this Japanese stereotype into a more idealised masculine archetype, bestowed with positive socio-cultural traits (Onishi, 2004 cited in the study by Jung, 2011: 45). Soft masculinity attracts 'the postcolonial desires of Japanese female' audiences, aroused by nostalgia (Jung, 2011: 39). In fact, the *Yonsama* syndrome is part of the Korean wave related to cultural dominance and industrial capital within a capitalist framework (ibid, 2011: 41).

Since the K-drama *Winter Sonata* boomed in Japan, the K-drama *Dae Jang Geum* (2003–2004) has been released in 62 countries, including China, Hong Kong and countries in East Asia, Middle Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, thus extending the Korean wave globally (Byun, 2011). As a tale about Korean royal court cuisine and traditional medicine, *Dae Jang Geum* appeals to international audiences through the leading actress Young Ae Lee's character, portrayed as innocent, calm, sincere, emotional and sensitive (Ming, 2005). Certain aspects of *Winter Sonata* and *Dae Jang Geum*, identified as specifically South Korean, directly appeal to audiences' tastes,

particularly Yong Joon Bae's soft masculinity and Yong Ae Lee's innocent femininity because of their characters' gender perspectives and cultural links to latent Confucianism and other similar national beliefs (Ming, 2005). Positive national images from the Korean wave have led to a production explosion in the food, fashion and tourism industries. In addition, K-drama's overseas popularity has positively influenced the export of K-film, K-pop, and online gaming across China, Japan, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia (Byun, 2011). For K-pop, in particular, export rates doubled in four years, from \$130 million in 2005 to \$260 million in 2009 (Byun, 2011).

The exploding export of K-pop can be attributed to a changed target audience in response to the Korean wave, from the elderly to teenagers. K-dramas *Boys Over Flowers* (2009) and *You're Beautiful* (2009) appealed to teenagers and 20-something audiences through their 'pretty boy' characters. *Boys Over Flowers* is a contemporary Cinderella-style tale about a poor but brave girl who attracts four super-rich, handsome boys at an aristocratic high school, a story based on the Japanese *shoho manga* series. The audience is drawn to the four male characters who wear clothes with 'cute' floral prints in pastel colours. Their fashions, cosmetics and external features have a metrosexual look, representative of a contemporary South Korean male stereotype to international audiences. The trendy K-drama *You're Beautiful* involves the growth of members of a teenage idol group A.N.JELL. and is presented as a romantic musical comedy television drama series. Among the four handsome boys, one is actually a beautiful girl masquerading as a boy, the twin sister of an original member, her brother, who is absent due to a second double eyelid surgery in the United States. The K-drama *You're Beautiful*, replete with beautiful settings, emphasizes the four 'pretty' boys' looks, including the 'lovely' girl dressed in male attire.

In this second generation of Korean wave, Yong Joon Bae's soft masculinity in *Winter Sonata* and the 'pretty boy' aesthetic in *Boys Over Flowers* and *You're Beautiful* ensured that this contemporary South Korean male stereotype was repeatedly engraved in the memories of the international audience. Hybridised beautiful and soft masculinity has thus been a significant element in this global extension and is especially evident in K-pop idol groups. In the mid-2000s, K-pop idol boy group TVXQ's 'Rising Sun' (2005), 'O-Jung.Ban.Hap' (2006) and 'Mirotic' (2008); Super Junior's 'Miracle' (2006), 'Don't Don' (2007) and 'Sorry Sorry' (2009); and Big Bang's 'Lies' (2007),

‘Last Farewell’ (2007), ‘Day By Day’ (2008), ‘My Heaven’ (2009) and ‘Gara Gara Go’ (2009) achieved considerable commercial success in local and East Asian markets. Interestingly, in the second generation of Korean wave, K-pop idol boy groups extended their activities globally while the activities of girl groups stagnated. The third generation of the *hallyu*, the so-called ‘neo-Korean’ wave, promoted K-pop idols enormously, particularly the girl groups, from the late 2000s to the mid-2010s, because digital technologies and social network services have supported the promotion of K-pop idol groups. As mentioned previously, visual access to their performances encourages ‘watching music’, rather than listening to it. This is also the context in which we begin to notice commodification of gender and sexuality. According to Cho and Shim (2013: 92), if the first and second generation of the *hallyu* can be defined as an analogue wave, the neo-Korean wave can be classified as a digital Korean wave. K-pop is consumed on YouTube, iTunes, Facebook, Twitter and blogs across the United States, Europe, South America, Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. The three big entertainment companies of South Korea—SM, YG, and JYP—promote their idol groups through official channels such as YouTube. Since SM opened its own YouTube channel in 2006, the channel has been clicked 611 million times, uploaded 24,400 million times, and subscribed to 17 million times (Byun, 2011). K-pop idol groups are further promoted through live performances on weekly television music chart programmes aired in 72 countries through the KBS World network. The main consumers of K-pop range from teenagers to those in their 20s and middle-aged male and female audiences who are comfortable with technology. In the context of gender and sexuality issues, digital visual images have emphasised female bodies for commodification via social media, and women’s sexuality has been purposely constructed for the male gaze—a move from a male-dominated form to one increasingly aimed at ‘girl culture’ in K-pop.

YouTube has also enabled K-pop to flourish through its global networking. One example is K-pop cover dances,⁹ such as might be seen at the K-pop cover dance festival held in Korea since 2013. During this event, international K-pop lovers are invited to Korea and have opportunities to experience South Korean culture and meet

⁹ K-pop cover dance refers to an imitation of K-pop idols’ dance choreography. With the popularity of K-pop idol groups, international audiences imitate K-pop idol group performances such as Girls’ Generation, Super Junior and Miss A and SHINee (Billboard Korea, 2011); e.g. K-pop Cover Dance Festival (www.coverdance.seoul.co.kr).

their favourite K-pop stars. ‘Team Loko’ won the English division of the 2013 K-pop cover dance festival in London, and the six members of the group earned tickets to Korea for the final, sponsored by the *Korean Daily News Seoul Sinmun*. A second example is the flash mob:¹⁰ 300 K-pop fans converged at the Le Musée du Louvre on 1st May 2011 to perform a flash mob with the express purpose of attracting attention to their request for one more round to the SM Town Live concert in Paris (Patricia, 2011). Yet another example can be found in parodies of K-pop, such as when a four-year-old girl parodied K-pop idol girl group Wonder Girls’ ‘cute’, but explicitly sexy performance without being sexually explicit. Pavis and Mok (2012) assert that this child must have learned the performance from her parents, keen to see ‘cute’ style in their offspring’s movements.

A final example is Internet memes, that is, local and global audiences creating their own videos with *Kiyomi* Player (*aegyo* gestures) in the ‘cute’ style of ‘*Kiyomi* Song’. These K-pop-related performances reveal how the neo-Korean wave has gradually grown amongst both national and international audiences and how global digital networking has supported the rise of this cultural phenomenon. Notably, although it is the accepted appellation, the term ‘neo-Korean wave’ does not, in my view, reflect the global and hybridised entity that K-pop and South Korean culture have become at this point.

K-pop has been marketed differently to different audiences according to their cultural tastes. The South Korean government and scholars in several countries (e.g. China, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, United States, Europe and South America) have analysed the neo-Korean wave to determine specific reasons for its popularity in each country. In China, the issue of quality is significant, and marketing strategy focuses on specific celebrities, rather than on songs themselves (Kotra, 2011). According to Byun (2011), K-pop idol boy groups TVXQ, Super Junior and Big Bang and girl groups Girls’ Generation and f(x) are popular in China because, unlike Chinese music, these idols have high-quality musical and vocal skills and provide sophisticated, spectacular performances.

¹⁰ A flash mob is a group performance during which people suddenly converge in a public place.

Consequently, Chinese popular music (C-pop) idol groups in China have mimicked K-pop idols, choosing similar group names and using similar aesthetic concepts and choreography (Kotra, 2011). In contrast, the key issue is professionalism in Japan. Japanese popular music (J-pop) idol groups have shorter training programmes and begin work as amateurs, whereas K-pop idols have long and more intensive training programmes, so are fully professional by the time their careers are launched. Japanese consumers seem to respond positively to this professionalism within Korean idol groups. For Byun (2011), the Japanese music industry is classified according to the categories of artist and idol. Japanese audiences prefer artists to display talent in vocal skills, whereas their J-pop idols need to create intimacy, project enjoyment and a positive image, with an easily identifiable, ‘girl/boy-next-door’ physique and style. On the other hand, K-pop values professional artistic virtuosity in its idols, and thus entertainment companies invest in the deliberate manufacture of vocal ability, dance skills, visual style and foreign language skills. This is an intensive, highly competitive process of production, which I will examine later in relation to neoliberal politics.

According to KOCCA’s comparison¹¹ between J-pop and K-pop idol girl groups (2011), Japanese idols gradually evolve from amateurs into fully-fledged professionals, with the involvement of their public. It is as if when they begin their careers, they are still amateurs in the Japanese music industry, and audiences take them under their wings in a pseudo-maternal gesture. One example is the J-pop idol girl group AKB48. On the other hand, Korean idols, for instance, the girl group Girls’ Generation, are so sophisticated, stylishly presented and skilled that they have become idealised and are loved by their audiences—the product of a highly artificial manufacturing process. Importantly, the primary audience for Girls’ Generation typically comprises females while the J-pop idol girl group AKB48 also appeals to the male audience in Japan. If we shift the discussion to the question of aesthetics, J-pop idol girl groups have been marketed as girly ‘cute’, somewhat awkward in their movements and costumes, dressed according to ‘Lolita fashion’ - oversized ribbons, lots of lace, cupcake-shaped skirts and pink colour. This is all part of the *kawaii* aesthetic, the Japanese equivalent of Korean *aegyo*, and also refers to the vocal and movement style. Good examples of *kawaii* performances include AKB48’s ‘Baby! Baby! Baby!’ (2010), ‘Heavy Rotation’ (2011)

¹¹ KOCCA is the Korean Creative Content Agency, a South Korean government agency under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

and ‘Sugar Rush’ (2012) and Morning Musume’s ‘One Two Three’ (2012) and ‘What is LOVE?’ (2014).

In contrast, K-pop idol girl groups present an image that we might describe as ‘luxury sophistication’ or ‘cool’ after years of training and effort and the honing of new skills in the *aegyo* style. They are virtuoso performers. I will discuss this further in Chapter Two. To demonstrate the extent of K-pop girls’ popularity and the success of the ‘K-cute’ aesthetic in Japan, Girls’ Generation’s album sold over 542,054 copies in Japan, and the album was placed in fifth position on the Oricon¹² Yearly Album Chart in 2011. In addition, the group’s fashion, dance movements and make-up were copied by Japanese women, again attracted to the professional ‘cute’ image, different from the ‘Lolita’ style of J-pop idols. This phenomenon has inevitably paved the way for a new brand in the Japanese music industry.

As for the commercial success of K-pop idol groups in the neo-Korean wave, much has been said about their eclectic hybridised music style, which combines African-American and electronic pop with Korean-style music. K-pop has a strong, middle-to-low beat based on American pop, with repeated rhythms such as in a song hook, a rap or a simple melody, with the addition of English lyrics, all of it synchronised with dance performance (Shim, 2013). K-pop requires that its idols—imported from the monopolised entertainment companies in South Korea—of both Korean and international origin, collaborate with one another. Dong Yeon Lee (2011) posits that the music style of K-pop is transnational, but it has become a national brand manufactured by monopolised, capitalist entertainment companies in neoliberal South Korean society. This transnational music style is ‘adopted’ by K-pop idol groups who spend years in training to become professionals (Shim, 2013). To promote K-pop at the global stage, the entertainment companies of South Korea join with local companies, using social network services to market K-pop for consumption in live, online, forums. These processes of exporting K-pop for commercial success are defined as cultural technology (CT)—a concept invented by Soo Man Lee, the founder of SM Entertainment Company. The CT marketing strategy affects K-pop idols, who feel that they are treated

¹² Oricon is a Japanese corporate group supplying statistics and information on music, music charts and the music industry.

as factory workers or robots, because the standardised training process results in a lack of individual creativity (Seabrook, 2012).



Figure 1.4. K-Pop artists' popularity in different regions.¹³
 Red, SHINee; green, f(x); yellowish green, 2NE1;
 Purple, EXO; sky blue, Hyun-joong Kim; blue, FT Island

However, the popularity of each K-pop idol group has grown differently in different countries, where diverse national tastes of the audience focus on certain favourite K-pop stars. For instance, the CJ E&M entertainment and media content company's analysis of an online poll, conducted by MWave, on the South Korean music television programme on Mnet, *M Countdown*, established the preferences of audience in 178 countries (Figure 1.4). This survey involved the participation of approximately five million people for one year from January to December in 2013. Here are some of the key figures: the girl group f(x) was the most popular K-pop idol group in China (27.1%) and Brazil (10.0%); the K-pop idol boy group SHINee topped the ratings in Russia (22.7%), United Kingdom (15.4%), Italy (15.4%), Poland (13.4%), Hong Kong (13.0%), Mexico (12.3%), France (11.0%), Argentina (10.2%), Malaysia (9.5%), and Spain (8.6%). K-

¹³ Chung, J. (2014) K-pop artists bask in different popularity by region, *Korean Herald*. [Online] 26th January, Available from: www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140126000294 (Accessed: 5th February 2015)

pop idol girl group 2NE1 was the most popular in the Philippines (15.8%), and K-pop idol boy group EXO achieved the topmost position in Australia (13.4%), South Korea (12.4%), Canada (12.1%), the United States (11.1%), and India (11.0%). With the exception of SHINee, whose members are all Korean, these preferences can be linked to group members' own national identities or life experiences. For example, Victoria from f(x) is Chinese, Sandara of 2NE1 lived in the Philippines during her schooldays and the former Chinese member Cris, from EXO, emigrated to Canada at the age of nine and holds Canadian citizenship. Jeon Min Seo, a senior official in global operations at CJ E&M, stated that 'Foreign fans have different preferences for K-pop stars according to national characteristics and the K-pop artists' activities in their countries'.

The popularity of these Korean idol groups indicates that *aegyo* is a persuasive aesthetic commodity not only in Korea or East Asia but also internationally. However, the aesthetic aspects of K-pop have not been academically investigated, and therefore neither has *aegyo*. In general, the dominant discourse about K-pop focuses on the cultural policies of the South Korean government and their role in the Korean wave as well as on the success of K-pop in terms of fandom culture, digital and media technology, fashion, music and issues of gender. To explore the aesthetic style of 'cuteness' in K-pop, this thesis explores 'cuteness' or *aegyo* as flexible, with multiple categories and modes of expression, and its impact on issues of gender and sexuality.

I examine theories of performance, analysing their relevance to my discussion of *aegyo* within K-pop. Furthermore, I consider how David Harvey's understanding of neoliberalism might support an exploration of the process through which *aegyo* is deliberately appropriated, manufactured and commodified. In the following paragraphs, to conclude this introduction, I provide brief synopses of the remaining chapters:

Chapter Two explores professionalism in K-pop, examining why *aegyo* has appeared in K-pop idols and how and why it is embedded in their performances. Through a detailed study of f(x)'s 'Hot Summer' (2011), Chapter Three explores the intricacies of 'cuteness', alongside 'cute' femininity as well as issues of gender stereotyping and sexual exploitation. This demonstrates how 'K-cute' *aegyo* is a crucial element of K-pop and how a taxonomy of 'cuteness' can be developed in response to understanding its versatility. Chapter Three examines five online neologisms of 'cuteness' according

to various aspects of f(x)'s music video, including an exceptional example of 'cuteness' that differs from other K-pop groups, and establishes five aesthetic categories of *aegyo*: *kiyomi* or 'child-like' 'cuteness'; *bagel girl* or 'innocent' sexuality; *ulzzang* or 'Barbie doll-like' dollification; *unpa* or 'pretty' tomboyish 'cuteness'; and *byeongmat* or 'quaint' 'cuteness'.

Chapter Four discusses the concept of 'cute' masculinity as presented in SHINee's music video 'Replay' (2008) to indicate how the gendering of 'cute' develops according to age, hierarchy, experience and gender relationships in everyday Korean society. The discussion of 'cute' masculinity within Korean 'cuteness' leans on Said's *Orientalism* and investigates how Asian masculinities are presented in the media and how 'cute' masculinity in *aegyo* is expressed through music videos in the contemporary Korean society. For this exploration, I use four categories of online neologisms: *kiyomi* or 'child-like' 'cuteness'; *kkotminam* or 'cartoonish' masculinity; *kkotjimseung* or 'macho' sexuality and *byeongmat* or 'quaint' masculinity.

Chapter Five examines Auslander's (1999) concept of liveness and Bolter and Grusin's (2000) notion of remediation in the phenomenon of live K-pop performances. Super Junior's 'Super Show 5' concert in London is used as a case study to discuss how liveness in a mediated performance can enhance communication with the audience, connecting them to the commercial success of the global stage. Through phenomenological analysis of live performance, I explore how the 'cute' masculinity and femininity of K-pop idols is manufactured and performed. Finally, I consider how the aesthetic *aegyo* of K-pop is verified in terms of gender, representation and performance within the materiality of the cultural product.

Chapter 2

Cultural Technology, Training and Virtuosity

Chapter Two examines the professionalisation of K-pop idols; it also explores why *aegyo* has appeared in K-pop and how it is embedded in group performances by the unique Korean training system. This chapter further explores neoliberalisation—the context for K-pop’s training system. In the previous chapter, I explored how the popularity of K-pop idol groups is rooted in *aegyo* to demonstrate the value of research into aesthetic ‘cuteness’ and highlight how *aegyo* has become a persuasive aesthetic commodity both domestically and internationally.

I introduced the concept of performativity as a means of extending the concept of performance to everyday life, either in ‘restored behaviour’ or in ‘twice-behaved behaviour’, exaggerated and simplified for expression through movement. *Aegyo* plays a significant role in the aesthetics of K-pop, reflecting the performances embedded in everyday life in South Korean society. The term ‘performance’ can usefully be applied to *aegyo* to help us understand how it has emerged as a valuable cultural product within K-pop and how it has been so widely disseminated.

This chapter explores three aspects of professionalism in neoliberal South Korean society: the K-pop idol’s commodification as a new type of virtuoso performer, the use of a unique manufacturing and training system and virtuosity as a means of strategic commercial appropriation of K-pop trainees. Through the documentary film, *I AM* (2012) and ‘Gee’ (2009), a music video by K-pop idol group Girls’ Generation, this chapter further examines how *aegyo* has made possible a produced form within K-pop idols’ professionalisation. This form can be identified as specific to Korean culture and to its values of conscientiousness, excellence across all disciplines and collectivist philosophy.

2.1. Virtuoso and Manufactured Product

As performers, K-pop idols can be classified as both virtuoso performing artists and manufactured products. For several years, most K-pop idols go through a specific training system implemented by the South Korean entertainment companies to achieve a range of skills in performance and entertainment. Regardless of their original talent, entertainment companies make a calculated investment in young amateurs with a view to their future commodification. The power relationship between K-pop idols and entertainment companies improves the idols' skills but it does so through exploitation, emotional labour and relentless competition. K-pop idols' virtuosity, achieved through this manufacturing system, is reflected in their albums' cumulative sales and a wide variety of international and domestic audiences' consumption of derivative products, as well as views and comments on social media.

The term 'virtuoso' is rooted in European Romantic concert music; Brandstetter (2007: 180) interprets it to mean a 'warrior-like capability' (from the Latin *virtus*). During the Renaissance, the term described 'the ideal of the cultivated human being' and 'denote extraordinary ability, learnedness in all fields of knowledge and art' (Brandstetter, 2007: 180). It was first applied to performing artists during the age of manufacturing in the 18th century 'at the same time as the separation between author and interpreter came about' (ibid, 2007: 180). The term 'virtuoso' then became more complex through its use in the sciences and the arts, in which the concept was linked to a standardised theatrical subject (Brandstetter, 2007). Contemporarily, the performative practice dimension employs not only the body (voice, gestures and facial expressions) but also performance space and different types of staging. In her work 'The Labors of Michael Jackson: Virtuosity, Deindustrialization, and Dancing Work', Judith Hamera (2012) compares the virtuosity of the violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840) to that of pop star Michael Jackson (1958–2009). The classical musician Paganini's virtuosity is considered to be innate, whereas popular musician and dance artist Michael Jackson's virtuosity is considered to be learned. However, Hamera (2012: 754) identifies similarities between them by seeing virtuosity as a relational economy that embodies the public ideals of a virtuous performance task, which is then disseminated within frames more flexible than either classical concert music or popular dance. Palmer (1998: 345) views virtuosity as actually commencing with Paganini, justifying his opinion by citing Paganini's

incredible skill and distinctive, self-expressive performance style. In a similar to Paganini, however, Michael Jackson demonstrates virtuosity in his tremendous musicality and lyricism and in dance, through his mastery of a particular dance vocabulary that includes the ‘moonwalk’ or backward glide, mime, rapid ‘foot shuffle’ steps and slick jazz dance sequences.

According to Hamera (2012: 754), virtuosity in popular performance reflects an awareness of difficult movements taken from an extremely emotional and powerful repertoire. She argues that Jackson elaborates deceptively simple movements. Furthermore, his virtuosity lies in his skilful execution of the moves, not as a result of any inherent complexity in the moves themselves. This is similar to the approach of South Korean entertainment companies toward K-pop trainees, who are considered to be capable of developing virtuosity through effort and practice, rather than as a result of natural talent. Other sources confirm this notion about Jackson: Peggy Phelan (2010) considers Jackson to be a captivating dancer who uses simple dance steps; Joan Acocella (2009) considers Jackson to be a master of both detail and technique, performing even small movements, for example, with his fingers, using such precise and deft articulation that the audience’s attention is riveted. She further believes that this aspect of Jackson’s virtuosity has not been adequately explored in evaluations of his dancing. While conventional virtuoso dance performers often purposely create conspicuously difficult dance vocabularies, Jackson’s choreography tends to enhance his virtuosity by employing a relatively simple movement vocabulary but making the most of contrasting dynamics.

Similarly, in the case of K-pop performance, dance choreography has become one of the most significant elements. Historically, however, K-pop idols tended to be primarily viewed as singers, and this is still considered to be their main career. For example, the television music chart programme *MBC Show Music Score* announced in July 2014 that K-pop idols’ lip-synching would henceforth be limited, in order to reinforce their singing ability, rather than their dancing and visual presentation¹⁴. In other words, the performers actually needed to sing well, not just give powerful physical and visual performances. Before this, to reiterate their first duty as vocalists, the three television

14 http://entermedia.co.kr/news/news_view.html?idx=3574 (Accessed 15th July 2014)

music chart programmers (KBS, MBC and SBS) asked K-pop idols to sing live and not to lip-synch at all. In fact, since the mid 2000's, lip-synched performances have been almost entirely phased out. This issue has been repeatedly raised in the K-pop idol music industry since the first K-pop generation in the 1990s'. Although very much the norm during this phase, second-generation K-pop performers stopped lip-synching because of adverse public opinion and media broadcasts. Can the issue of lip-synching and live performance therefore be considered a useful basis for classifying K-pop idols as virtuosos or manufactured cultural products? This is an interesting and confusing question.

In South Korea, media broadcasts of live performances that were initially lip-synched did not reveal this information; subsequently, this changed and an onscreen lip-synch icon distinguished between live and lip-synched performances. To some academics also, the issue is not clear: in a 1983 television special *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever*, Michael Jackson, generally accepted as a virtuoso, performed a lip-synched version of 'Billie Jean' that included his iconic 'moonwalk'. Some commentators considered the lip-synched performance as good as any live performance. Whether it was live or lip-synched did not seem to make any difference (Inglis, 2006). According to Inglis (2006), audiences were widely indifferent, and Jackson's presence was sufficient validation and authority. Importantly, here, 'performance' denotes choreography as well as vocals. Jackson, however, was already a star, or well on the way to becoming one, and we need to ask whether that makes a significant difference to the situation. A similar tension exists for K-pop performers who dance at least as well as they sing, but who do not yet, and might never have a star profile like that of Jackson. Although opinion and practice on this issue are mixed, we need to establish a useful distinction so that we can understand the commodification process in K-pop performance (and therefore, in *aegyo*). Lip-synching guarantees that the product—a song and its performance—will always be identical, with the same quality, the same musicality, the same interpretation and so forth. However, this is not virtuosity in the word's truest sense.

In comparison, a K-pop idol's lip-synched performance is dealt with as a manufactured product. Under the standardised training system, K-pop idols' dance virtuosity is treated as supplementary or adjunct, a means of supporting insufficient singing skills. However,

solo singer BoA, referred to as the Queen of Korean pop, is well known for her live performances. She also performs powerful choreography, dancing and singing solo for lengthy periods with apparent ease and consummate skill. She is thus a good example of virtuosity in K-pop and, confusingly, a perfect example of the idol manufacturing process. She debuted at a very young age of 13 and was initially signed for 13 years' training. Currently, BoA is considered an artist rather than an idol because, like Michael Jackson, she displays incredible talent and expert execution, alongside creativity and individuality. This shift is significant because BoA represented a pinnacle of manufactured cultural products, becoming an icon as well as an artist. In my understanding, the distinction between such artists and regular K-pop idols depends on talent and creative self-expression. In the case of BoA, her virtuosity shows in the lyrics she writes herself and in compositions that include her own ideas and creativity as well as in dance. Unlike with BoA, most K-pop idols' stage performances are developed according to the marketing strategy of the entertainment companies that train them, and these performances typically do not allow for individual creative input. In recent years, this approach seems to be changing somewhat as companies are beginning to respect their idols' creative thinking and give them increasing opportunities to write their own lyrics or music. Undoubtedly, recent evidence has indicated that alongside the neoliberal belief, allowing for individual creativity makes greater sense financially. Thus, we see how the individual creativity approach has also become part of the marketing strategy, as companies promote idols as a group of creative artists.

Previously, K-pop idols, typically categorised within the genre of dance music, tended only to pretend to play musical instruments, using them as props. Then Super Junior member Henry actually played his violin on stage. Although Super Junior was very much a traditional idol group trained in the usual way, Henry's innate musical ability was also supported and developed during his training, insofar as his violin playing was considered to be useful for marketing. This demonstrates that increasing room for individual creative expression exists in the trainee manufacturing process. However, do I need to distinguish between the demonstration of individual skill allowed as part of 'One Source Multi-Use' (OSMU) business marketing strategy, in other words, for commodification, and the development of innate talent because it supports individual creative expression? This change reflects tension resulting from South Korea's changing socio-political context, elucidating how that context affects the cultural and

industrial infrastructure, in this case, the music industry. OSMU markets *aegyo* through its idols, creating diverse and combinable products and commodities through a range of popular entertainment—from one source.

2.1.1 Artistry versus Virtuosity in Comparable Training Systems outside South Korea

K-pop idol dance virtuosity can be compared with ballet virtuosity in the education system for dancers in Russia and Europe. The British film *Billy Elliot* (2000) exemplifies cinematic narrative about a young boy becoming a professional ballet dancer. It presents a discovery of hidden talent, showing his improvement in basic dance skills and the endeavour to enrol him in an institution that can nurture and develop virtuosity.

During the UK miners' strike (1984–85), Billy, the film's main character and the son of a coal miner, thinks of nothing but dancing. He dreams of becoming a professional ballet dancer. Believing that Billy is good enough to study at the Royal Ballet School in London, his dance teacher Mrs Wilkinson nurtures Billy's talent. At auditions, the Royal Ballet School selects only students who show the potential to become virtuosos. During the audition, Billy is required to have a physical examination to measure his height and check his spine and feet, in other words, to establish his suitability, in terms of physique and expected growth, for becoming a professional ballet dancer. Although Billy's dance technique is still immature, he gains admission to the Royal Ballet School due to his passion, perceived potential and body type. After 14 years' training, Billy performs the lead role in Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*.

Similarly, to become professional K-pop idols, candidates must show their potential in the widest sense, but most importantly, show how their physiques and facial features fit the entertainment companies' idol template. Their visual appearance is the crucial factor at this point because the training process will develop performance and entertainment skills. Just like Billy Elliot's physical assessment, if the face and body shape in K-pop (or, in ballet, the body type and size) do not reflect the *aegyo* aesthetic, the process simply ends. If the physique is less than ideal, candidates must exercise more and lose weight. If they do not have a high nose or big eyes, then they must be prepared to

undergo cosmetic surgery. In this manner, K-pop culture's concept of virtuosity includes the literal, physical manufacture of a specific image to sustain and promote the *aegyo* ideal. K-pop idols might demonstrate excellent talent and skills and even charisma, but they must also aspire to look perfect in the *aegyo* way. Thus, performers' bodies are commodified in the same way as other aspects of K-pop. Furthermore, idols are praised for their achievement, their conscientious attitude and compliant behaviour, and this—along with the underlying collectivist philosophy, symbolised here by tightly synchronised group choreography—drives both aspiring performers and the training-system machine. Narratives of K-pop idol virtuosity include gendered histories of Korean popular performance and the fluidity of neoliberal globalisation. Considering these facts, I will look later at Harvey's (2006) work critiquing neoliberalism. The relation between K-pop idol virtuosity and the developing K-pop entertainment industry cannot be understood separately from these conditions, and we might find that a new type of virtuosity is emerging in K-pop as a result of the OSMU strategy.

According to Hamera (2012: 752), however, even though K-pop idols gain experience through a process similar to ballet training, ballet soloists display 'artisanal ownership' of their performances, expressed through tremendous physicality enabling them 'to transcend gravity in defying acts of superhuman ability'. Virtuosity for the ballet dancer involves mastering technique: as a dance form, ballet is extremely technical, and this is clearly visible in its dance vocabulary and style. Ballet is considered as 'fine art' or 'high culture', having a distinct pedigree and reputation. It also involves numerous professionals—choreographers, directors, composers, if the work is contemporary, orchestras and conductors as well as lighting, scenery and costume designers. In cooperation, they produce a work of art and under the leadership of an artistic director, the dancers express this in movement. However, if we compare K-pop idols, who might be described as manufactured performers, with ballet dancers, who are considered to be artists, we again find a useful distinction in relation to creative self-expression, that is, whether the performers' creative ideas have been included or whether they have been trained purely for commercial exploitation. Although perceptions of K-pop idols might be more one-sided, the reality lies somewhere between the ideal of untarnished artistic creativity and intentional commercialisation: K-pop idols thus can be both artists and constructed cultural products.

Another reason why K-pop idols are often perceived as manufactured products, rather than artists, is that K-pop has not been recognised for its particular training method, unlike ballet. Virtuosity in ballet emerges as a result of strenuous training through systematic levels of education over a long period of time. Ballet schools teach foundational techniques, using culturally specific methods, for example, the Vaganova method from Russian dancer Agrippina Vaganova, the Cecchetti method from Italian ballet pedagogue Enrico Cecchetti and the RAD method from the UK-based examination board of The Royal Academy of Dance. In contrast, K-pop does not have specific pedagogy in music or dance, and each entertainment company has its own training process and unique approach for creating K-pop idols and performances.

Although K-pop idols' dance virtuosity does not normally include balletic movements that could be viewed as 'sublime' or 'transcending gravity', it has a particular appeal that captures attention and might even evoke comparable awe. Does this mean that ballet dancers are also manufactured? Or do K-pop training systems unwittingly create something more than manufactured cultural products? To further clarify K-pop idols' position - virtuosos or manufactured performers - it would be useful to examine the training system in more detail through a case study. I will therefore now examine one of the main players in the K-pop industry who export K-pop to the global stage—the SM Entertainment Company and its use of a policy called cultural technology (CT). The term CT was introduced by Soo Man Lee, the founder of the SM Entertainment Company, in a speech at the Stanford Graduate School of Business on 19th April 2011. Later that year, on 11th June 2011, at the Writers & Publishers Conference in the Paris Marriott Rive Gauche Hotel, he claimed that he had constructed the theory of CT in the mid-90s in order to make inroads into other Asian markets (Chung, 2011). The abstract concept of CT, however, was established as a form of content-based industry by Kwangyun Wahn, a computer scientist, in Korean academic circles in the late-90s (Park, 2001). CT was one of six 'technology initiatives' selected for support by the South Korean government, the other five being Information Technology (IT), Biotechnology (BT), Nanotechnology (NT), Environmental/Energy Technology (ET) and Space Technology (ST). The South Korean government has supported these industries through policies and R&D investment since 2001 due to a lack of national resources in South Korea (Korean government press office special project team, 2008).

2.2. Cultural Technology and the Training System

“I knew back in the 90s that CT would play a bigger role than IT (Information Technology). CT is a much more sophisticated and complicated solution. SM makes music through theoretical and systematic CT. The whole process of making the trainee into a ‘jewel’ is CT.”

(Lee’s speech at the Writers & Publishers Conference in Paris 2011¹⁵)

The term ‘cultural technology’ (CT) specifically refers to spreading South Korean culture, known as the ‘Korean wave’ or ‘*hallyu*’, worldwide (Kim and Seong, 2013). It is one of the most successful outcomes of South Korean government support, in particular the export of K-pop and other entertainment products (Korean government press office special project team, 2008). With regard to the *hallyu*, CT is implemented in three steps: the training system; collaborations with American or European composers who work with Korean and foreign composers and choreographers (Kim and Seong, 2013); South Korean entertainment companies working jointly with Western labels to market K-pop locally and globally. As such, K-pop idols are promoted internationally through this ‘export project’ developed within the context of the Korean entertainment industry and exemplified by the SM Entertainment Company (ibid, 2013: 350). While this commercial strategy presents and reinforces K-pop idols as constructed cultural products, from the K-pop idols’ perspective as subjects of CT, the first step involves discovering and developing skills to achieve virtuosity. Once entertainment companies have decided on their next ‘project’, they select suitable candidates from the pool of trainees who fit the ‘person specification’—the right mix of faces, bodies, gender, style, visual images and abilities. Here, I focus on the training system, the first CT step for becoming virtuosos or manufactured performers, and how the performance of *aegyo* is established in K-pop idol culture.

¹⁵ Chung, M. (2011) Lee reveals know-how of hallyu, *The Korea Times*. [Online] 12th June, Available from: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2012/08/201_88764.html [Accessed 27th February 2016]

2.2.1. The Progress of K-pop Idols in the Training Process

As the first step in the CT process, trainees' education in the main disciplines of K-pop is fundamental for marketing a finished cultural product. Education and training happens in training camps and usually takes from three to seven years. The process gradually shapes trainees into performers, giving them uniform style and talent and stripping away individual tendencies and attributes. In this manner, any trainee can be replaced by any other trainee whenever necessary. The basis for the trainee manufacturing process comes from Soo Man Lee, whose role model was music producer Maurice Starr, developer of the American idol group New Kids on the Block. Lee's education in California helped nurture his interest in the US entertainment industry. While studying for a master's degree in robotics at California State University, Northridge, in the 1980s, Lee had direct experience via MTV and Cable TV of an entertainment business that promoted visual aesthetics of performance rather than musicality. Starr and his colleague Mary Alford found in person or held auditions to recruit teenagers who showed dance and rap abilities, training them as pop stars to exploit the teenage market in the American music industry and beyond (Kim and Shim, 2013: 250). Lee adopted Starr and Alford's strategy for New Kids on the Block, who debuted in 1986 and were successful both domestically and internationally in the 1990s. Lee applied the strategy to K-pop, through OSMU, emphasising commercial significance and the aesthetic value of *aegyo* to his trainees.

The K-pop idols' production process, having developed its unique manufacturing routine, differs from that in North America. South Korean entertainment companies, in line with the OSMU strategy, are primarily interested in group appearance, visual image and diversity of talent, rather than in individual vocal skills with superior commercial value. This means that although K-pop candidates might not have innate talent when they are selected, they are seen to have potential because they look right and have the right attitude; after all, virtuosity can be developed. Hence South Korean entertainment companies' emphasis on their training system. According to Shim and Kim (2013), this system uses a star-creation method consistent with cultural and industrial capitalism. From this perspective, star ingredients can be summarised as the right appearance, youthfulness, passion, ability and talent. Entertainment companies believe that

virtuosity can be engendered through the training process, leaving appearance, passion and youthfulness as ‘innate’ ingredients.

This is also a key difference between the J-pop entertainment industry, which prioritises finding teenagers who already show talent, and the K-pop entertainment industry, which seeks potential commodities with a view to creating idols through training. Shim and Kim (2013) argue that this system established a business model in which the products are the humans themselves. A relevant example regarding professionals and amateurs from K-pop idol group Girls’ Generation and J-pop idol group AKB48, respectively, was discussed in Chapter One.

2.2.2. The Reality of Camp Life

Training camp is a unique element of the K-pop idol groups’ manufacturing process. The first manufactured K-pop idol group under the management of SM Entertainment Company was H.O.T., who debuted in 1996. The five H.O.T. members were trained in singing, dancing and foreign languages so that their ‘products’ could be exported internationally. Before and after their debut, they lived together, and their managers controlled their official schedules, limiting contact with their families and friends, supervising their diets, managing their images, in fact, managing all aspects of their everyday lives. K-pop idol girl group S.E.S. was also a product of training camp, thereby challenging the prejudice that girl groups could not be commercially successful in the South Korean music industry. After these groups, training camp influenced generation after generation of K-pop idols. For example, the online newspaper *TV Daily* described the camp of Girls’ Generation as follows: nine members living together in an apartment house that covered 3,600 square feet (Cha, 2012). The article defended the training camp model on three counts: the convenience of managing the group’s daily schedule so it ran on time, the need to manage trainees’ personal lives to protect their stage image and the need to prohibit trainees from becoming distracted by romantic relationships.

Training camp is therefore a prerequisite for K-pop idols both before and after their debuts. As to controlling teenage idols’ private lives, however, entertainment companies argue that they are protecting the teenage idols themselves. Furthermore, K-pop idols

appear to believe that the training camp's strict rules ensure their path to stardom. Indeed, this training model is by no means unusual in traditional Korean art forms such as music or dance or even sport. For example, traditional Korean music and dance trainees lived in their masters' homes for several years, learning such artistry as *pansori* (a vocal and percussive music form), *gayageum* or *geomungo* (musical instruments) and *salpuri* or *seungmu* (dance). In this manner, trainees learned not only specific techniques but also etiquette and manners, considered to be fundamental in South Korea's hierarchical society. Trainees also had direct personal experience of hierarchical social relationships. In the field of sports, South Korean national teams competing in the next Olympic games are, at the time of writing, undergoing camp training at Taeneung Training Center—the Korean National Training Center. Training camp is also a prerequisite for trainees in national or pre-elite teams from 20 different sporting events; without it, they cannot participate. Similarly to K-pop's regime, among other duties, coaches monitor their trainees' abilities, control their diets and manage their private lives.

Relevant examples outside Korean culture also exist: Russia's national gymnastics team trains at the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture and Sports. According to O'Brien (1979), Russian gymnastic training resembles strict military-institute training developed by the Soviet state. He argues that educational, military, social and competitive aspects of Russian gymnastics have supported the growth and success of this sport. All gymnasts, from primary level to university, live together, each age group modelling attitudes and expectations for younger groups¹⁶. Training camp systems in both South Korea and Russia officially manage athletes to ensure that ability levels improve. Training centres and coaches are assisted by members of national teams to ensure that national prowess and pride are maintained as much as possible. In contrast, K-pop idols are managed by individual entertainment companies as cultural products, in other words, in order to generate profit. The *raison d'être* of training camp are manufacturing virtuosity and damage limitation to trainees' images because K-pop idols are especially important to South Korean society in terms of consumption of their public and personal images. To sum up, training camp for national teams exists to improve ability and

16 Russian Gymnastics Training Center – A look inside 'Ozero Krugloye', <http://www.tunegym.com/blog/russian-gymnastics-training-center/> (Accessed 02nd June 2015)

contribute to the nation's sporting achievements and reputation, whereas K-pop idols' training process exists to develop, protect and commodify youth idols.

Similarities between South Korean and Russian national training camps and those of K-pop idols are fundamentally to do with the nature of hierarchical societies and cultures. Whether in sport, arts or the entertainment industry, specific manners or etiquette in relation to age and experience dominate social interactions, and training camp is an ideal way to inculcate these rules from a young age. Positive aspects of national training camps are that a sense of responsibility, cooperation and social regulation are inculcated in trainees. However, their privacy is infringed upon, their individuality is limited and the sense of hospitality is perfunctory. In the case of K-pop idols' training camps, we find similar positive and negative aspects. In addition, I argue that the emphasis on commercialisation impacts significantly in a negative sense on the teenage idols' physical and mental well-being. Finally, we can relate this to neoliberal politics. In American popular culture, training camp practices reveal many obvious differences from those in Korea. However, this disciplined approach to training camp has positively influenced other aspects of this culture.

For instance, US 'fitness boot camps' that have been commodified into reality television shows like NBC's *The Biggest Loser* (2004) can be considered to be a 'universal' acknowledgement that a disciplined approach has value. *The Biggest Loser* is a weekly competition to see who can lose the most weight, with a cash prize for the winner. To track their progress and measure weight loss, participants must undergo camp training with a daily workout, a restricted diet and medical supervision of their health transformations by production assistants. Contestants are monitored by these assistants on camera, and their personal lives are controlled by taking away not only their cell phones and laptops but also by prohibiting contact with their families. This 'new' American training camp is comparable to the strict K-pop idols' training programmes as well as those of Korean and Russian athletes, with the micro-management of every individual's personal life.

The Biggest Loser presents a slim body as an ideal body shape for both men and women. Its participants wish to lose as much weight as possible in the shortest possible time, directors want to show their progress and transformation and viewers want to

engage in vicarious experience by watching participants overcome challenges during this extremely strict competition. Former *Biggest Loser* contestants admit that ‘almost all of them’ have regained their weight and according to the *Daily Mail* (2015), many suffer from lasting health issues as a result. Furthermore, some former contestants have experienced such side effects as high blood pressure and neck and shoulder injuries from punishing workouts. Other participants have stated that they were prevented from calling home, making only a five-minute call once a week for six weeks, monitored by producers. These ‘fitness boot camps’ illustrate abusive commodification within American pop culture. Although K-pop idols’ training camp and fitness camp discipline are similar in their pursuit of profit through commodification, K-pop training camp, like Russian national training camps, also supports individual development of virtuosity in young people’s careers.

2.2.3. Training Camp of K-pop Idols in the Documentary Film *I AM* (2012)

I focus here on training camp due to its unique manufacturing system and the possibility of exploring how K-pop idols are made and how this system influences K-pop idols and their *aegyo* performances. Training camp is an ‘in-house system’ presented as an issue of cultural industry (Kim and Kim, 2015), but the documentary film *I AM* (2012) allows a peek behind the facade. This film, made by the SM Entertainment Company, focuses on their artists’ past, present and future, as they move from trainee to K-pop icon. In the interviews, idols express appreciation for the support they have received and acknowledge entertainment company colleagues and president Soo Man Lee, whom they revere in accordance with traditional Korean relationships between teacher and student. However, the film has its limitations. Interviews have been carefully edited by the company, so the film lacks transparency and therefore credibility; it does not explore K-pop idols’ unadulterated feelings and thoughts. This is clear from their repeated use of words such as ‘endeavour’, ‘practice’, ‘tears’, ‘dream’, ‘anxiety’, ‘fear’, ‘success’, ‘growth’ and ‘competition’. We therefore need to understand *I AM* as propaganda, as part of the SM neoliberal marketing strategy.

K-pop idols’ commodification can be interpreted as a key characteristic of the neoliberal project. For capital accumulation in cultural form, the K-pop industry necessitates the exploitation of individuals’ endeavours, passion and willpower through

competition, victimisation of creativity and the emotional labour of limited identity. According to David Harvey's (2006) *A Brief history of Neoliberalism*, the market deals with everything as a commodity. Individuals enter the labour market as socialised personal and physical beings, with considerations of gender and human capital accumulated through a range of skills. Such individuals can be considered as having cultural capital with tastes and as living beings empowered with desires, aspirations and fears (Harvey, 2006: 167). Furthermore, when labour is engaged contractually, a power relationship emerges in the hierarchy between capitalists and employees. K-pop idols' commodification begins with the audition and then forms contractual arrangements between company and trainee, in other words, between capitalist and labourer, with respect to neoliberalisation. The term commodification is used here in relation to the classical theory of commodity. In Karl Marx's critique of political economy, a commodity is understood as a class of goods or services manufactured by human labour under a form of capitalism (Cohen et al., 2010). The exchanged goods and services become the 'commodity' and the exchange value is expressed in the market. A commodity's value is thus recognised through the process of exchange and according to its 'use value'. 'Usefulness' is rationalised in accordance with the affective capability of commodification, and this affective capacity is itself 'served by the principle of rationality; what is and can be rationally calculated' (Lukács, 1971: 85). Lukács (1971) alludes to its power, describing it as qualitative, not simply quantitative: 'in essence, commodification is qualitatively affective, capable of influencing 'the total outer and inner life of society, even to the point of stamping its imprint on the entire consciousness of man'. The term commodification therefore describes the process and transformation of relationship and is the basis for Lukács' (1971) unquestioned timeless model and his theory of reification.

Commodification is criticised, or seen as insufficient, however, in relation to things that are not valued as tradable commodities, such as education and knowledge (Rigi, 2012), which would include the training systems in Russia and South Korea. According to Brancalone and O'Brien (2011: 506), however, commodities form behaviours that promote consumption and production in exchange. From a contemporary educational perspective, then, learning outcomes, here, virtuosity in the *aegyo* style, are a relevant example of educational commodification. Learning outcomes involve arrangements of social relationships, types of learning or work and its value to an economic empirical

base through marketisation and bureaucratisation (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011: 507). In exchange, the purposeful, concrete value of education is realised. At this moment, added worth (or 'exchange value') is bestowed on education by the market process. Lukács (1971) constructs a contemporary educational paradigm within which the formal commodification of education can be described as an 'important diminution of all social activities' (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011: 506–507). He asserts that the irrational system might be confined to specialists who have authoritative virtuosity and that learning outcomes include an 'illusory promise' established in the neoliberal context towards educational commodification (ibid: 514). The term 'neoliberalism' refers to the universal effect based on financial capital mobility, a decontrolled labour market and exports. Neoliberal strategies consider education as a developing process of marketisation, transforming education into a commodity for human products (ibid: 515). The relevance of this interpretation for the K-pop idol training system is immediately apparent, particularly in relation to the 'illusory promise' - the commentary from *I AM* - demonstrates.

Indeed, K-pop idols' unique manufacturing system exemplifies such educational commodification. K-pop idols' training process, their virtuosity and emotional labour are main elements in the commodification of young people in the South Korean popular music and entertainment industry within the neoliberal context. With regard to commodification and flexible commodities, OSMU has created a new type of virtuosity in its K-pop idols. Unlike a virtuoso violinist or ballet dancer, who warrant the epithet 'artist', K-pop idols are entirely constructed for production and consumption through their education (valued transferable skills) and their social relationships (embedded social relations). Idols' learning outcomes develop from the crucial three-step export process underpinning CT, and virtuosity in the *aegyo* aesthetic is one key aspect of the OSMU commodity form. Some idols do become artists (and warrant the epithet), but this is the exception, not the rule.

In *I AM*, SM's executive officials are shown asking audition candidates to demonstrate their talents by dancing, singing and even acting, and the candidates respond by attempting to create memorable impressions. SHINee member Taemin remembers his desire to be selected as a trainee while still being 'too shy to dance in front of others' and also feeling that he 'had to make an impression on the judges anyhow'. He says he

‘tried to look more confident’. His passion and determination impressed the judges, who felt that he was potential valuable cultural capital. It takes willpower to survive the training camp; thus, the ability to overcome feelings of unease and impatience is considered to be important by employers.

Donghae, a member of Super Junior, recalls a conversation with judges during his audition, ‘Can you do this? Can you act? I just said “yes” to everything. To tell the truth, I can’t. But if I practice, I can do it. Anything you want me to do, I can nail it, so please pick me’. These comments exemplify the Korean-style power relationship that traditionally exists between employers and employees. To earn a place as a trainee, the candidates believe that they must demonstrate not only their passion and effort but also willingness to obey the company and concede to all their requests and the willpower to survive the fierce competition.

Through the audition process, candidates identified as having the potential to be crafted into valuable cultural products are selected as trainees, and competitive assessments or ‘competitions’ are held every month to evaluate their progress. Trainees must demonstrate their achievements, which the entertainment company manages in minute detail. Their contracts are short-term (only after being selected as a member of a K-pop idol group can they enter into a long-term contract), and large numbers of trainees must compete against each other. If they do not demonstrate improvement each month, then they must leave. In other words, the pressure that trainees face, even after getting through the initial audition, is constant because at no point can they assume they have ‘made it’ as an idol. Intense competition affects trainees to the point that anxiety, fear, anger and disappointment emerge, as they are forever reminded that they can be replaced at any time. Super Junior member Sungmin recounts his experience on the road to becoming a member of Super Junior,

... the company put Xiah JunSu, Eunhyuk, and I together to form a three-member boy band. We worked so hard every day and caught the last train home. It was the happiest time of my life, and I had so much fun. We finished recording the album, photoshoots and all that. But the project was dropped at the last minute, and JunSu debuted as TVXQ, making Eunhyuk and I feel like we were deserted. I was so disheartened that I considered dropping out. I stopped coming in for training for a while.

(IAM, 2012)

This experience, despite a happy, fun one on the surface, communicates a trainee's deeper feelings of exploitation. In reality, trainees are seduced into monotonous, repetitive daily training, and they work towards virtuosity to win monthly competitions. K-pop idol training includes being filmed not only as a useful tool for checking progress but also for supervising and monitoring trainees. Film shots also record the date and an idol's personal comments as to their current feelings. Recordings of trainees going about their everyday lives are thus used as evidence of their perseverance and effort towards becoming a K-pop idol. Film images indicate potential idols labouring through their trainee period, and even this labour becomes a commodity for making documentary films like *I AM*. TVXQ member U-Know Yunho was filmed sending greetings during his trainee period on the eve of Thanksgiving: the recording date and his debut 'D-day' are superimposed over the dialogue. The inference here is that most K-pop idols and trainees practice regardless of holidays, and their K-pop celebrity is regarded as compensation for this commitment and non-stop effort. As part of the discourse of celebrity that has emerged from neoliberalism, K-pop idols must endure these conditions to remain in the production system and eventually graduate as a K-pop idol. Never-ending competitions force the development of K-pop idol virtuosity in performance, and we can conclude that South Korea's unique training system manufactures both K-pop idols and artistic virtuosity.

This manufacturing system, however, conceals a philosophy of economic competition and exploitation of underage individuals within the ethos of neoliberalisation. The entertainment company manages to sidestep Korean juvenile law, designed to prohibit such exploitation, and parental dissatisfaction tends to come later, once their child has become successful. The training camp process can thus be understood as a form of mass production, in which trainees, much like any product, can be replaced or 'thrown away' at any time, according to current promotions and the entertainment company's changing needs. Time dedicated to this work, however, does not guarantee a successful future, and trainees are prepared to invest so much effort because they see a path towards self-improvement. In what seems a temporary but deliberate and culturally sanctioned act of self-hypnosis, they cannot risk feeling that the company is exploiting them.

2.3. Erving Goffman's Self-presentation versus Graeme Turner's Celebrity

The film *I AM* demonstrates both directly and indirectly that the K-pop idol process is deliberate, highly artificial process of manufacturing driven by economic and cultural factors. It also, however, creates an individual image, rooted in *aegyo*, for each idol, with unique characteristics distinguishable within idol groups. These two aspects can be compared to Goffman's notion of 'self-presentation', cited earlier, which can help us understand how *aegyo* forms can be produced through the mechanisms of performance and therefore how they become embedded in K-pop trainees' performances.

In *I AM*, on the occasion of the SM Town Live World Tour Concert at Madison Square Garden in New York, SM artists were filmed introducing themselves, saying, 'I am...' and then giving their names. Some gave only their stage names, whereas others also gave their birth names. Some idols recognise that their birth names are linked to their personal characteristics, whereas their stage names are associated with their manufactured image. Some state that their front stage and personal characters are similar, whereas others state that they are totally different or describe how their former personality has changed. There is, however, a general recognition that their personality, when they examine their previous identity and their current manufactured image, has, to some degree, metamorphosed from pre-idol trainee to celebrity or star. In short, many trainees experience an identity crisis during training. Changmin experienced a major crisis, and he himself recognised the gap between his manufactured character and his real identity. He stated,

I was going through puberty, and it's funny when I look back, but I was suffering a major identity crisis. I had suddenly become a huge star and I started wondering, 'What am I doing here?' 'Is this really what I want?' For a while after my debut, I personally went through a rough period. Looking at myself in glitzy stage costume, I would wonder if that was really me. All the self-reflection and confusion stressed me out, and I cried a lot on my own. And at some point, I started realizing that people were getting comfort and joy from my singing and dancing, which gave me a tremendous sense of achievement.

(*I AM*, 2012)

Changmin's experience typifies the trainee identity crisis that results from having to sustain a manufactured identity. His main issue was confusion about his own character and his emotional development. He was attempting to realize his dreams, but

conversely, he could not recognise his exploitation by the company. He simply followed company directives, not reflecting on what he was experiencing or asking himself what he wanted or what he had to do to achieve his dream.

To return to my discussion of everyday life's theatrical aspects, Goffman (1959) describes the self as having dual features: as a performer and as a character. Goffman (1959) uses the terms 'front stage' (front) and 'backstage' (back) as metaphors for 'self as a character' and 'self as a performer', respectively. Self as a performer is the true self, in terms of personality, fabricated in everyday life performances during social interactions with others; self as a character is a role determined by social situations and relationships, and, in the case of K-pop idols, an image imposed externally by others (the entertainment companies) through the aesthetics of *aegyo*. In other words, self as a performer presents one's sensory experiences and ideas with sincerity, whereas self as a character expresses an idealised self-image constructed by others. Front stage, performers cannot conceal their character or role, and everything is visible, both literally in terms of the stage, and metaphorically, in terms of the performer. In contrast, backstage is viewed as a place where performers can take off their masks, where they are out of sight, and can relax into their 'true selves' in the privacy of a space not visible to others. The self as a performer is secure in this place (for K-pop idols, their pre-idol personality/birth name), and the audience can therefore freely relate in whatever (fanatical, amorous, faddish, etc.) way they like to self as a character (manufactured *aegyo* image). In relation to the popularity of K-pop idol groups, with the help of Goffman's concept of self-presentation, we begin to see through the careful manufacturing process of a K-pop image to the true function of *aegyo*.

In contrast to Goffman's notion of backstage self-presentation, we find that more recent studies of celebrity culture such as those by Graeme Turner (2004) and Chris Rojek (considered in Chapter Four) offer a different perspective. Here, the potential for backstage authenticity in a techno-culture of constant voyeurism no longer exists or, rather, exists as yet another performance. According to Turner's *Understanding Celebrity* (2004), celebrity is, in fact, absolutely arbitrary and both performers' everyday 'real' behaviour and their behaviour on reality television shows 'construct convincing celebrity identities for themselves'.

Turner (2004: 55) refers to the example of the Spice Girls, who were conceived as a brand, rather than as a band. The individuality of the band's members is expressed through their celebrity identity constructed by the music industry to appeal to the target audience. Thus, we have the following 'characters': Scary Spice, Sporty Spice, Baby Spice, Ginger Spice and Posh Spice. These roles are comparable with the individual characters constructed by SM for K-pop idol groups, for example f(x) and SHINee—'cute', sexy, mature and charismatic. Chapters Three and Four investigate these issues in greater detail. Members' characters thus constitute a brand, and these constructed characters appear in public and, according to Turner, are also their self-presentations backstage. In other words, celebrities express a manufactured identity both in public and 'for real,' i.e. all the time. A further example provided by Turner is that of fans at sporting events, whose faces appear on big screens and for whom this televised self-image becomes a means of legitimation. Turner (2004: 62) defines celebrity as a cultural formation embedded within a social function, and celebrity personas are skilled at negotiating the marginal differentiation involved in proliferation and the use of various cultural inputs.

As a case in point, the documentary film *I AM* claims that audiences can watch 'real' K-pop idols' everyday life. The film includes images of K-pop idols from the house at training camp, with recordings made by trainees (selfies) or by entertainment company staff who are monitoring trainees. Although these images are considered to be 'real' or live transmissions of K-pop celebrities' daily lives, it is clear that reality is constantly being constructed to produce a representation of an ideal life that can be commodified. If I agree with Turner (2004), this is simply because actions are captured on camera. In other words, the film presents K-pop idols' daily lives as backstage self-presentation, but the entertainment company also manufactures their everyday identities to promote each member's prospective character to audiences as an aspect of the group's branding. The world is always watching.

Again, according to Goffman (1959), everyday behaviours separate self-presentation on stage and backstage, and I concur with this position in respect to K-pop idols. However, if I apply Turner's (2004) perspective, K-pop idols' everyday reality, whether in public or in private, is understood to be constructed as a prospective representation. In some ways, Goffman's concepts on idealisation and maintenance of expressive control

parallel Turner's views, especially when Goffman argues that celebrities on reality television display their expected identities to offer the prospective image to the audience. Idealisation describes performers' tendency to offer their observers an idealised impression of themselves. Goffman further argues that performance can protect the constructed image, which, he adds, tends to include society's officially sanctioned values. His notion of idealisation can be applied to Changmin's interview about his identity crisis in *I AM*. Since he debuted as a K-pop celebrity, Changmin's constructed image displays to fans an idealised or prospective identity. In fulfilling the expectations of the music company as well as the audience, Changmin triggered an identity crisis in which his idealised aspects conflicted with his individuality.

2.4. Virtuosity of K-pop Idols under the OSMU Strategy

K-pop idols have now extended their entertainment activities to drama and film: some work as models, musical actors, masters of ceremony (MCs) as well as solo singers. During the training process, K-pop idols learn to excel as performers who can sing, dance and present on camera for weekly television music chart programmes as well as more generally as entertainers and hosts. From the perspective of the entertainment companies, these diverse activities are part of the OSMU marketing strategy, in which one source of content, here the K-pop idol, is created and applied to a wide variety of products. The concept has been widely used in Korea to extend the notion of cultural content since the 2000s (Gwan, 2013). OSMU occurs in Japan as 'Media Mix', a term from the advertising industry, whereas Americans typically term this concept 'media franchise', in other words, licensing the intellectual property rights of an original media work. Both these concepts resemble OSMU (ibid). According to Gwan (2013), an example of a successful entrepreneur employing OSMU would be Walt Disney and his character Mickey Mouse used to commodify a wide variety of products as well as lifestyle choices (Disney theme parks, hotels and resorts, cruise ships and even the planned residential community of Celebration).

OSMU can also be directly applied to individuals. Potential trainees are selected at audition because they possess a certain quality or uniqueness that might become a valuable commodity, not because of a talent for singing or dancing. This does not differ

from the music and entertainment industry worldwide, where savvy promoters manage entertainers' endeavours and experiences, aware of how individual characteristics can be morphed for use in a range of content. American actress, singer and model Marilyn Monroe well illustrates OSMU at work: she represents an individual, primarily seen as a commodity, whose 'content' was, and still is, systematically and repeatedly brought into popular consciousness and ferociously marketed the world over (Gwan, 2013).

Monroe's unique, sexy image supports a wide variety of commercial products: novels and films have been based on her story, and posters and commodities such as cups, clothing and bags use her image. How did this happen? Was it just a hugely successful marketing strategy like OSMU? Perhaps. It is impossible to say whether her early death was responsible for the Monroe product phenomenon or whether this tragedy, retrospectively, keeps money flowing in. Like Monroe, however, many entertainers try to create and sustain a unique image for themselves, making replacement impossible, and in the process become a type of OSMU themselves.

Similarly, today's K-pop idols and their diverse set of entertainment activities illustrate how the OSMU strategy successfully creates and markets a specific brand. Previously, the national Korean mindset was such that each person could have only one area of expertise, so K-pop idols were originally singers and nothing else. However, OSMU was applied to the K-pop industry to bolster idols' profit making and make them do more than break even as trainees. In the early days of K-pop, because music programmes were not broadcast everyday, it was difficult to promote a complete album. Of the 12 songs in an album, airtime allowed only performance or broadcast of the title song. In the 2010s, OSMU was applied, and idols now have many more opportunities to present themselves in entertainment activities in synergy with their careers as singers (Gwan, 2013). K-pop idols now prepare for this diversity during their training and learn how to extend their appeal to wider audiences. This helps maintain their careers, traditionally relatively brief: K-pop singers previously had a shelf life averaging approximately five years.

Virtuosity in a range of entertainment disciplines also gives an idol the chance to access a wider range of media. Training courses in camp typically include singing, dancing, acting, sex education, learning other languages (English, Japanese and Chinese), media coaching (how to give presentations or how to act on camera in preparation for

television programmes), and the development of individual skills for talent shows. For example, Girls' Generation member Taeyeon has remarkable singing skills. Her vocal part, however, is always limited because she has to share this role with the other eight members of her group¹⁷. To get round this, the entertainment company created the sub-group TaeTiSeo for the three members of Girls' Generation who have outstanding vocal ability. Another member of Girls' Generation, YoonA, is an actress, an MC and also a model. These days then, K-pop idols still focus on group performances as their main careers, but they can commit to other supplementary activities in preparation for new careers once they have retired as K-pop idols.

Virtuosity developed under the OSMU strategy therefore supports K-pop idols' chances of realising their dreams and assists in them carving out a better future for themselves. The second (2000s) and third (2010s) generations of K-pop idols are doing so in a different way from the first (1990s) generation. The first generation of K-pop idols could appear in the media only as singers, and after the dissolution of their group, most were without any future career even though they were only in their mid-20s. With the South Korean entertainment system's evolution, the expansion of venues for K-pop idols and their participation in various entertainment programmes nurtured additional skills that could be used in future post K-pop idol careers. As an example, some first-generation K-pop idols continued to work in broadcasting-related industries, having surfaced in the public consciousness as something between a popular idol and a retired singer.

During the first generation, the training process focused almost exclusively on synchronised group dancing in the *aegyo* style, alongside the creation of an attractive, 'cute' image. Performers' vocal ability was often lacklustre because lip-synching was then partly permitted on television music chart programmes. The concept of OSMU did not exist. To find work related to the broadcasting industry after their idol days, the first generation of K-pop idols either recreated themselves as actors or entertainers, or if they did have a strong voice, they attempted a new career as a solo singer or musical actor. Unlike the first generation, the second and third generations were encouraged to develop virtuosity in numerous areas. Current idols can no longer be considered simply

¹⁷ Girls' Generation comprises eight members since Jessica has left the group in 2014.

as short-shelf-life manufactured cultural products. With the development of social media, the OSMU strategy is also currently applied to K-pop exports to the global stage through the Korean wave.

2.5. Virtuosity in K-pop Idol Group Girls' Generation and the Concept of Mass Ornament

Contemporary K-pop idol group Girls' Generation has a reputation for its well-structured, synchronised dance performances. The group draws on hooks, catchy tunes and repeated beats, creating harmonic simplicity and a clear identity within the standardised K-pop music structure. The repetitive hooking sounds are mirrored in a 'point dance' step. In terms of aetiology, 'point dance' refers to the inclusion of two or three easy dance steps repeated several times within one song. This choreography is expressly designed to be easily remembered and copied by fans. 'Point or corner dance', as a group dance for the masses, appears to have emerged in South Korea during the 2002 football World Cup. Kim Su-ro, a South Korean actor, choreographed and performed a few dance steps on stage that were repeatedly copied and performed by fans as a way of cheering the national team during football matches. The actor used the word 'point or mark' when describing the movements during demonstrations of his dance; hence, the epithet 'point dance'. The inclusion of these dances gives each group a unique identity while simultaneously functioning to highlight key concepts in each song. Each dance has a specific name, for instance, Girls' Generation's *Jegichagi* (shuttlecock dance) in 'Tell Me Your Wish' (2009) (Figure 2.1.1); *Gedari* (crab-leg dance) in 'Gee' (2009) (Figure 2.1.2); and *Hwasal* (arrow dance) in 'Hoot' (2010) (Figure 2.1.3).



Figure 2.1.1. *Jegichagi* (shuttlecock dance) in 'Tell Me Your Wish' (2009)



Figure 2.1.2. *Gedari* (crab-leg dance) in ‘Gee’ (2009)

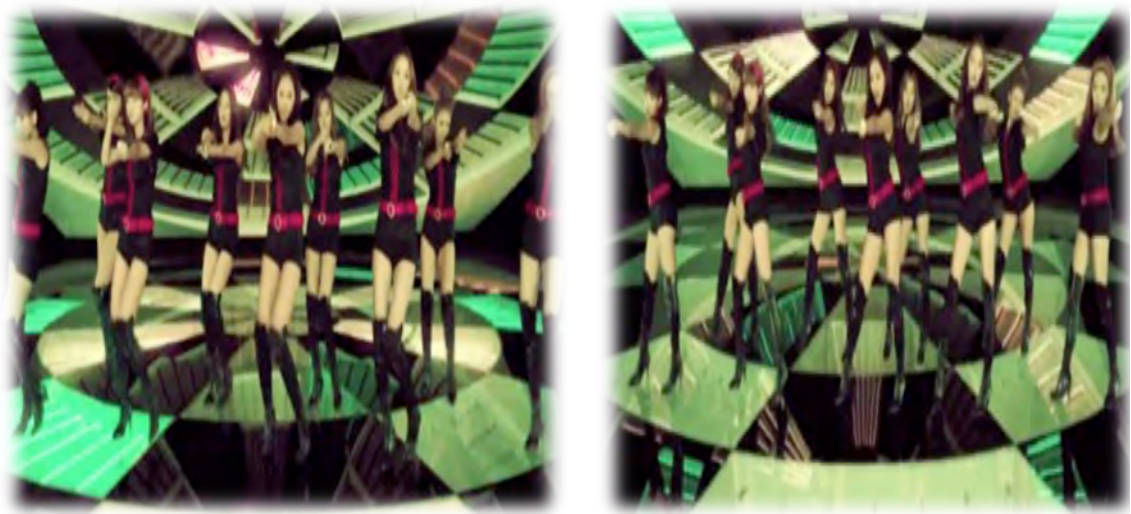


Figure 2.1.3. *Hwasal* (arrow dance) in ‘Hoot’ (2010)

Figure 2.1. Point dances in Girls’ Generation’s choreographies

The dance routines of Girls’ Generation tend to be considered as robotic, marionette-like or in the style of ‘factory girls’—representative of mass production from the K-pop industry. According to John Seabrook’s ‘Factory Girls: Cultural Technology and the Making of K-Pop’ (2012), K-pop idol girls can be legitimately categorised as ‘factory girls’, trained in CT by the SM Entertainment Company factory system. With reference to the ‘factory girls’ moniker, Seabrook (2012) cites Soo Man Lee as saying that his stars are ‘made by the star factory in a sophisticated system of artistic exploitation’. Seabrook cites the nine members of Girls’ Generation as representative examples of this ‘factory’ process, describing them as having beautiful features with an almost flawless image and dancing and singing sublimely together throughout their performances, which are fantastic, or perhaps fantastical, group spectacles. Seabrook writes that it was as if ‘the *Girls* had come to see us’. In other words, they are so perfectly manufactured,

über-human and replicated (nine of them), that for a moment, an illusion or spell is cast, as if they are actually in the room with him. The camera work in the music video, zooming in and out, together with the ‘V’ formation in the choreography, gradually produces this effect, drawing the viewer into the performance, while giving the impression that the girls are moving ever closer, out of the screen and into the mind of the audience.

Despite the standardised uniformity of their practice, the group attempts to create a different concept for each album using different visuals and designs, for example by changing their appearance, makeup, hairstyles and accessories. These superficial aspects are intrinsic to commodification and can thus be considered to be indispensable factors of the capitalist mechanism, defined by Theodor Adorno (1941) as pseudo-individualisation. Adorno’s ideas of standardisation and pseudo-individualisation within the culture industry are helpful in understanding Girls’ Generation’s dance style. However, I argue that such idol groups also have unique characteristics. According to Adorno, in a capitalist system, manufacturing must involve interchangeability to minimize the unit cost of production. On the other hand, pseudo-individualisation can make a difference when it comes to product promotion and sales. Popular music is influenced by the capitalist production principle that part interchangeability does not influence the whole structure but produces a transformation. Gendron (1986: 26) argues that Adorno overlooked the production of functional and textual artifacts in his essay on popular music. I agree with Gendron’s opinion, noting how K-pop strives to present each member’s individuality through part interchangeability (the training system aims to ensure this) as well as the significance of Adorno’s (1941) pseudo-individualisation for K-pop, particularly in terms of *aegyo*. K-pop looks like standardisation; however, I argue that it also promotes individuality.

Before presenting my argument for K-pop idol groups’ individuality, I will briefly describe the South Korean music video ‘Gee’ (there is also a Japanese version): the nine members of Girls’ Generation are standing in a store as if they were mannequins, wearing colourful skinny jeans, vividly tinted high heels and fancy accessories. Big eyes, necks slightly inclined, unnatural hand gestures and neutral faces highlight their ‘beautiful’ ‘barbie doll-like’ bodies. After the clock sings ‘cuckoo’ at midnight, Minho from the K-pop idol boy group SHINee, posing as an employee, turns off the light,

having finished his product merchandising, and looks back pointedly at the mannequins before leaving the store. Starting with Tiffani saying, ‘Listen boy, My first love story, My angel and my girls, My sunshine, Oh! Oh! Let’s go!’ the ‘mannequins’ gradually begin to move each part of their bodies, using isolated gestures of their arms, necks and legs, as if they are transforming from robots to people. The scene switches from the store to a plain white studio where the nine girls are seen wearing pink, green and yellow short pants with white or grey long shirts (See Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2. Girls’ Generation’s ‘Gee’ (2009)

All the girls’ movements follow the same pattern—geometrical figures, such as an inverted triangle, a circle, a nonagon and a curve, creating the visual effect of abstract form through group choreography. The girls change formation to highlight individual members. *Gedari* (crab-leg) ‘point dance’ is repeated in the song hook ‘gee gee gee gee’ in which they move their legs sideways from right to left or vice versa (see Figure 2.1.2). Their slim bare legs, revealed by extremely short pants, are emphasised by the mass of zigzagging bodies, accompanied by a shaking of the head from left to right as they change formation. A different movement for the same hook is also used: a ‘cat’ gesture designed to express the shyness of being in love for the first time (see the centre

image in the bottom line of Figure 2.2). Performers move lightly clenched fists to their jaws while moving a shoulder up and down and then walk stealthily, drawing their hips back in each direction as they zigzag (see Figure 2.1.2). Their arms are held close to the body while they carry their closed fists up to their cheeks. Girls' Generation's synchronised, metaphorical cat movements are part of the movement vocabulary of the *aegyo* aesthetic, meant to communicate a feminised image—'cute' and kittenish, but sexy too.



Figure 2.3. *Aegyo* behaviours in Girls' Generation's 'Gee'

The remainder of the 'Gee' video comprises more unison dance movements, changes in formation and other elements of *aegyo* such as flirtatious behaviour (see Figure 2.3), also performed in 'Kiyomi Song' as key *aegyo* movements (described in Chapter One). In the well-structured, synchronised choreography, changes in formation (moments of interchangeability) transform group dynamics wherein members endeavour to demonstrate their individual attractiveness for a brief moment through specific facial expressions and gestures based on *aegyo* (see Figure 2.4). Formation changes do not influence the whole performance, but make an impact by creating a specific visual effect. The manufactured routines of Girls' Generation tend to be considered robotic, and the girls themselves as marionettes or, to refer again to the industrial frame of reference, as factory girls.



Figure 2.4. Transformation in group dynamics based on *Aegyo*

I will now examine Kracauer's (1975) notion of the mass ornament as a means of analysing performance commodification that reflects the rationality of capitalism. *The Mass Ornament* (1975) is a collection of Kracauer's essays from the 1920s and was first published in Germany in 1963. *The Mass Ornament* refers to ambivalent, abstract and spectacular pageants from group movements of human beings or machinery. His ideas about the mass ornament are inspired by the Tiller Girls, a popular dance troupe in England, created by John Tiller in 1890. The Tiller Girls' synchronised performances displayed such geometrical exactitude that they ceased to be identifiable as individual girls but as a mass. In a mass ornament, regular patterns are constructed by a mass whose individual parts are together designated as the ornament—a quantitative object viewed in the abstract. The ornament contains a myriad of sexless bodies, and conveyors of the ornament are designated as the mass. Kracauer argues that the Tiller Girls' dances create a spectacular performance while denying the personal legitimacy of each dancer through mathematical demonstration. To create the aesthetics of abstract formation, through fundamental structures and patterns of physics, such as circles, spirals and waves in a linear system (the Tiller Girls danced side-by-side in a line, arms linked together), the performers' individuality is destroyed while mass geometrics are claimed.

Kracauer (1975: 69) posits that the formation of the mass ornament mirrors the contemporary situation. He compares the 'capitalist production process' with the phenomenon of the mass ornament, asserting that the Taylor system can also be applied

to the Tiller Girls' training process. For instance, the legs of the Tiller Girls are compared to hands in the factory. Kracauer (1975: 69) also notes the factory's use of psycho-technical aptitude tests to compute emotional tendency over manual capability. The mass ornament is understood as 'the aesthetic reflex of a rationality' desired in the prevalent economic system. In relation to totalitarianism, we see the mass ornament in military parade marches. Kracauer believes that the synchronised movements of soldiers and loyal subjects can engender a respectful attitude towards the hierarchy of class, age and experience, towards patriotic feelings and a sense of solidarity gained through the wearing of a uniform. In contrast, the mass ornament hides individuality, which is sublimated to a higher duty. I believe that K-pop idol group Girls' Generation, with its standardised dance form, can be appropriately compared to the phenomenon of the mass ornament, particularly in respect to costume and dance choreography. The *aegyo* aesthetic is similarly standardised, yet also through that medium, each performer can express something of her individuality—for each performer, 'cute' actions are the same, but their emotional expressions, or their embodiment of *aegyo*, vary.

K-pop idols' synchronised performances are honed during training camp, part of the unique K-pop production process based on values of collectivism. A group usually comprises a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 13, and the South Korean audience sees the group's harmony as an important element. The sense of collectivism is dominated not only by Korean society's cultural stereotypes but also by the entertainment company's calculated management strategy, harmony being a valuable commodity. In the neoliberal view, collectivism thus plays its part in the development of virtuosity. This is demonstrated in *I AM* in the rehearsal scenes of K-pop idol girl group f(x). Sulli, a member of f(x), is learning some choreography for a group performance. She falls behind during the rehearsal and cries silently. To overcome her limitations and avoid its negative impact on other group members, Sulli does not give up and the other members stay up all night practicing with her to support her. This example demonstrates a keen sense of cooperation, shared responsibility and camaraderie, qualities that are highly valued in a collective society.

2.6. *Aegyo* in South Korean Society and K-pop

Through music, dance, visual images and personal characteristics, K-pop idols convey the distinct ‘cuteness’ of the genre. K-pop idols’ ‘cuteness’ can be examined by considering three of its aspects: survival strategy in competition, the unique Korean training system and group collectivism. Within the framework of neoliberalisation, competition is encouraged, and K-pop idols, full of insecurity, fear, solitude and uncertainty, endure an unending number of competitive reviews. They willingly submit themselves to exploitation, and the self-sacrifice that develops is commercialised by the entertainment company. Competitiveness among trainees of every company creates a climate of survival of the fittest or perhaps survival of the ‘cutest’.

It is imperative that K-pop idols are sufficiently ‘cute’ for their debut to highlight the group’s youthfulness and present new, naïve faces, as a way of keeping the K-pop idol market fresh. During the training process, the entertainment company gives each idol member a specific image. The basis for this image is predominantly *aegyo* or the ‘cute’ aesthetic. Regardless of gender, every K-pop idol also has to conform to rules of conduct that operate in accordance with age. Group activities reinforce age and hierarchy in training camp, group classes and the concept of family among colleagues in the same entertainment company. Overall, the fundamental image of a new group is usually assessed on the basis of its ‘cuteness’ - through facial appearance, acting style and dance movements.

In a climate of neoliberalisation, infinite competition and the commercialisation of everything influences even K-pop idols’ gender behaviour, and ‘cuteness’ is pursued as a specific characteristic of the K-pop idol society. According to Im’s ‘The Neoliberal Era and Gender/Unconsciousness’ (2011), gender relationships in the neoliberal era are explored to show how gender/unconsciousness is formed in response to an insecure life and why stereotypes of the gendered role are represented both by the *femme fatale* and the naïve woman ‘playing cute’. Im (2011) argues that patriarchal ideology remains the basis for various forms of gender unconsciousness in current times, and the transitional phenomenon of this gender unconsciousness appears as the *femme fatale*, which is viewed as heretical or sinful in the neoliberal era of Korean society. Through *femme fatale* images, such as *noir femme* and *neo femme*, Im (2011) asserts that ‘playing cute’

is the new woman's image in the neoliberal era, emerging in the form of *neo femme*. As a survival strategy of the neoliberal era, 'playing cute' is habitually adopted by the conservative female in a response that differs from the avant-garde's jeopardising of the *femme fatale*. Women turn to 'playing cute' so that they can be protected by men and thus lower aggression as well as reduce their own autonomy.

With regard to K-pop idols' commercialisation, *aegyo* is adopted and marketed not only for the male gaze, which responds to the teenage girls' pure sensitivities, but also for the female gaze, which is attracted to the innocent boy image. In comparison, individual idols use the appearance of 'cuteness' in the background, in collective activities and the unique training system, as a survival strategy. In the K-pop idol manufacturing system, 'acting cute' is understood as a display of passivity and is manipulated both by the entertainment company and by senior colleagues in the hierarchical society of K-pop idols. K-pop idols' *aegyo* in a climate of neoliberalism, national stereotypes in K-pop idol culture and the professionalism process can be seen in the auditions and competitions, the OSMU strategy, and collectivist activities, illustrating why 'K-cuteness' has appeared as a characteristic of K-pop idols and how *aegyo* represents aesthetic style for both genders.

Conscious exploitation of the individual as a way to fetishise the body, through a contract between the entertainment company and the trainee (capitalist and employee) drives the 'cuteness' of K-pop idols. To succeed in the audition, candidates aim to make themselves as 'cute' as possible so that they are seen as readily malleable and passive, a potential cultural product. In this manner, *aegyo* carries the message that candidates will be easy to deal with. Once they have become trainees, *aegyo*'s aesthetic texture or tone becomes the language through which candidates can convey in monthly competitions the paradoxical double message of someone who is both innocent and seductive.

Girls' Generation member Hyoyeon said that she fit the 'cute' image concept with her new face during her K-pop idol period; on the Korean talk show *SBS Strong Heart* (2009), the entertainment company considered cutting her from the group because some felt she had lost the 'new face' feature. Her main interest was in hip-hop and she

performed with remarkable skill¹⁸. However, the company had put her in Girls' Generation, a group manufactured to present a 'cute', girly image. Hyoyeon, trained to use strong dance techniques for difficult dance routines, experienced an identity crisis. Initially, in her first single 'Into the New World' (2007), she had a 'dollified' image that capitalised on her innocent appearance: slim body dressed in white, with long white socks, shown holding an oversized candy stick. With this Lolita-type image, Hyoyeon was in conflict about all the hard training she had been through to learn difficult dance techniques and her current situation where she was just doing 'cute' dance choreography and dressing and gesturing appropriately for Girls' Generation. Like Hyoyeon, many K-pop idols are manufactured to present a 'cute' image that creates a sort of paradoxical doubleness and a sense of self-exploitation, enforced through the contractual relationship with the entertainment company.



'Kissing You'
(2008)



'Tell Me Your Wish'
(2009)



'Oh!'
(2010)



'Run Devil Run'
(2010)



'The Boys'
(2011)



'I Got a Boy'
(2013)



'Mr. Mr.'
(2014)



'Lion Heart'
(2015)

Figure 2.5. Changed images of Girls' Generation from debut to current

18 *Strong Heart*. Korean talk show (2009) SBS.

Most new faces are teenage girls and boys whose images are associated with helplessness, vulnerability and pity those being the central emotions evoked when ‘being cute’. For example, Girls’ Generation debuted in 2007, with nine teenage girls. Indeed, the group name ‘Girls’ Generation’ presents the term ‘girl’ to highlight the young women’s immaturity as well as to gesturing towards the association of most pop music with being young. The characteristics associated with ‘girls’ influenced Girls’ Generation’s group image, and the nine members presented themselves as young and ‘cute’ in their debut song. However, those nine teenage girls are getting older now; currently, the group is in the senior generation of K-pop idols. Their image has thus changed from ‘cute’, innocent girls in their songs ‘Kissing You’ (2008), ‘Tell Me Your Wish’ (2009) and ‘Oh!’ (2010) to mature women in ‘Run Devil Run’ (2010) and ‘The Boys’ (2011) and now includes various concepts such as powerful fighters in ‘I Got a Boy’ (2013) and dressing like men (tomboys) in ‘Mr. Mr.’ (2014) for their new album (see Figure 2.5).

Girls’ Generation has brand fantasy built into the name, and the product’s value is in part related to illusions around young, single virgins. The members were not allowed to have any romantic relationships even though they were in the prime of their lives for six years of performing (2007–2013). The brand fantasy of Girls’ Generation is considered to be almost inviolable in the K-pop idol ecosphere. However, Yoona, girl number one in Girls’ Generation, disclosed a romantic relationship for the first time on 1 January 2014¹⁹. Unlike for some of the other K-pop idol groups, the members’ sexual relationships were a huge issue. Since that time, Sooyoung, Tiffany and Taeyeon have also disclosed their relationships²⁰. This can be viewed from two possible angles: one is to celebrate these adult women’s coming of age, rather than trying to maintain an inviolable image as an object. The other is reflected in negative opinions about destroying the fantasy of Girls’ Generation and the desire of some fans to sustain the girl or virgin image forever in their minds. Within the specific context of South Korean society, ‘cuteness’ has become the representative cultural aesthetic of K-pop. *Aegyo* highlights the gender-based values of Korean society, and I explore this fully in Chapters Three and Four.

19 Seo, J. (2014) Lee Seong Gi and Yoona Devotion, *Hani.co.kr*. [Online] 01st January, Available from: <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/entertainment/618050.html> (Accessed 29th September 2014)

20 Choi, J. (2014) Pictures in Girls’ Generation’s Devotion, *tenasia.hankyung.com*. [Online] 19th June, Available from: <http://tenasia.hankyung.com/archives/271328> (Accessed 29th September 2014)

In 'The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde', Sianne Ngai (2005) discusses taste formation in relation to the 'cute' aesthetic and the process of 'cutification' as well as locating within the 'cuteness' etymology its polar opposite 'acute', meaning 'keen-edged', and 'acuteness' meaning mental alertness, rapidness and eagerness. This is in contrast to 'cute', defined by an aesthetic of the small, compact, soft and round. Ngai (2005: 816) analyses how the subject or audience's awareness imposes 'cuteness' upon its object and is thus 'more likely to augment rather than detract from the aesthetic illusion, calling attention to an unusual degree of synonym between objectification and 'cutification'. She describes how we can thus 'start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly or aggressive feelings' as well as the expected tender or maternal ones (ibid: 816). For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as the desire to cuddle. I understand K-pop idols' 'cutification' as a process which when taken to its extreme - purity, innocence and virginity - also evokes its polar opposite—sexiness and sexuality, seduction, glamour and power.

2.6.1. *Aegyo* in Consumer Culture

According to British sociologist Mike Featherstone's (1991) *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, body maintenance and appearance can be classified as inner and outer body in a consumer culture that aims to sustain the inner body through reinforcement of the outer body. The inner body includes health and the body's optimal functioning, which involves maintenance and deterioration from aging. The outer body refers to appearance and movement. The inner and outer body become conjoined in consumer culture, and the combined bodily concept is portrayed as a vehicle of delight and self-expression. Images of 'the body beautiful' diet, cosmetics and activities related to hedonism and leisure underscore the significance of the 'look' and appearance (Featherstone, 1991). Featherstone argues that the wide variety of cosmetic body-maintenance products—slimming, dietary and exercise—are produced and marketed to emphasise the importance of appearance and bodily preservation in a capitalist society. As an example of popular products, today's celebrities have cult status: beautiful people who perform a philosophy of delectation. Celebrities pursue images of being 'cute', youthful, beautiful and rich, within a lifestyle of self-improvement and self-exploitation,

often manufactured by marketing strategies with training systems, all associated with the individual from every perspective of his or her life.

As representative Korean celebrities, K-pop idols' bodies are often reconstructed as a means of expressing *aegyo*. Diet, exercise and cosmetic surgery are utilised to create this 'cute' image. Most Korean entertainment companies demand that their trainees forge an image of 'cuteness', and they invest in them to achieve it. SM Entertainment Company states in some investment statistics that they have invested approximately 270 million dollars over five years to create the beautiful 'outer body' of Girls' Generation's nine members²¹. Girl groups then work to maintain these beautiful outer bodies, and investment costs for entertainment companies are higher for girl groups than for boy groups. Nevertheless, the companies prefer manufacturing girl groups because the opportunities for commodifying the female body are greater. Despite the high investment in Girls' Generation, they have made the company huge profits, and their merchandise and independent activities under the OSMU strategy bring even greater returns.

K-pop idol girl group f(x) member Sulli represents the *aegyo* image in the society of K-pop idols. She was the youngest in the group and has a natural half-moon eye smile, a small, pale face and full lips. Her half-moon eye smile, specifically, is highly regarded as a complement to a 'cute' figure, and other trainees undergo cosmetic surgery in a procedure called *aegyo-sal* to replicate this look. *Aegyo-sal* adds a fold under the eyes. Through such cosmetic surgery, K-pop idols sculpt their outer bodies, and audiences consume the image as they consume other goods. Cosmetic surgery has now become very popular in South Korean society generally, regardless of age and gender. Both men and women increasingly pursue an appearance dominated by lookism and *aegyo*-infatuation. Even for men, using makeup has become part of surviving in a competitive society, and the fixation with 'cute' points to a need to endorse unaggressive, submissive attitudes. K-pop girls construct images that range from 'cute' young girl to sensual and mature young woman, and boys may go from 'being cute' to being more openly masculine and sexy. For K-pop idols, both genders are plugged into the

21 The investment budget for Girls' Generation (2012) *Enew24.net* [Online] 11th March, Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lc_gqsZStY4 (Accessed 28th September 2014)

consumer culture equation of youth = beauty = health (Rubinstein 1930, cited in the study by Featherstone, 1991: 179).

Under the broad brushstrokes of the OSMU strategy, *aegyo* is also applied to characters in drama, film, advertisements, merchandise and entertainment programmes. This is branding at its 'best'. Girls' Generation gave an archetypal demonstration of the *aegyo* aesthetic in the MBC Comeback Show *Romantic Fantasy of Girls' Generation* (2012) in their version of a '*Kiyomi* Song'. Replete with 'cute' gestures and individualised expressions of *aegyo* dance moves, they more than satisfied their fans' demand for an excessive display of 'cuteness'.

In a tvN South Korean medical drama *The 3rd Hospital* (2012), Sooyoung, a member of Girls' Generation, played a lovely, 'cute' and energetic character called Eui Jin Lee. The *aegyo* aesthetic was evoked through a 'three-step *aegyo*': 'cute' dancing while playing with fireworks, leaning on the male character's shoulder and winking with her big eyes. Her 'cute' character went down exceedingly well with the audience. In the KBS drama *Wild Romance* (2012), the character Jessica displayed a 'cute' image, despite the fact that she was bipolar. Her original character was fairly coldhearted but whenever she smiled, she became 'cute' and lovable. In the drama, she is the first lover of a male hero, but leaves him because he is unable to endure her manic-depressive personality. In one romantic scene, Jessica calls out to him, insisting that he buy her some ice cream, like a child crying and clinging in the night, in an expression reflective of immature *aegyo*. In the drama, however, Jessica's character is balanced by the depiction of a more lovely *aegyo* side.

2.6.2. *Aegyo* as the Survival of the 'Cutest'

K-pop idol collectivism relates to K-pop society's hierarchical culture, and 'cute' behaviours have become a way to survive a relationship between a senior (*sunbae*) and a junior (*hubae*). In *I AM*, Girls' Generation is seen congratulating the K-pop artist BoA on her seventh anniversary as an idol. Interestingly, the group members stand around her at something of a distance. This scene was filmed in 2007, and Girls' Generation was a new group at this time. In the film, the members are congratulating BoA, and they are proud of doing this in person. Tiffany, a member of Girls' Generation, remembers

that BoA was the reason she wanted to become a singer. Tiffany said that she could not believe that she was talking to BoA. As juniors to BoA, the members of Girls' Generation express their thoughts politely to her, with respect. In fact, their behaviour seems to resemble that of a young child relating to a respected elder sibling.

Goffman's *Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior* (1967) is useful for exploring why the *aegyo* aesthetic as embodied by K-pop idols has emerged in hierarchical South Korean society and what role *aegyo* plays in the K-pop context. Goffman explains unwritten rules that govern how people behave towards each other in social encounters. Everyday rituals such as greetings, including physical body movements, words and phrases, demonstrate these social expectations through demeanour (conduct and dress) and deference (humanity, self-control, dignity and respect). He uses the term 'face' to describe a presentation of the self, delineated according to acceptable social attributes, thus establishing a good image and good performance. To concur with position, role and relationship in the society, the self performs certain rituals. This also secures moral order, and keeping to these moral rules becomes a strategy for successful social interaction in everyday life. In the K-pop idols' social life in camp, in the hierarchical culture between seniors and juniors and in the power relationship between employer (entertainment company) and employee (K-pop idols), *aegyo* is used as a means of making a good impression and ensuring courteous behaviour at all levels of the hierarchy. The youngest members of a group, or the junior groups among K-pop colleagues, adopt and practice *aegyo* fully, for they are at the bottom of the hierarchy. Eventually, most K-pop idols begin to express things in 'cute' actions unconsciously, even in everyday life, and *aegyo* becomes symbolic of the hierarchy itself and all its associated codes of behaviour.

Clifford Geertz (1973), an American anthropologist, argues that human behaviours are symbolic actions linked to Schechner's (2002) idea of restored behaviour in the ongoing pattern of life. Everyday routines, rituals and behaviours are considered to be restored behaviours, and living behaviours are understood as having multiple forms that can be transformed into theatre. Geertz (2007) applies the analogy of drama to social life, presented as genuinely creating a characterised mode of masks and mummery, rather than faking, and rooted in ritualised forms through repetitive social actions with the dimension of performance. Symbolic behaviour that we see within the context of K-pop

image creation is also addressed by Turner in his *Liminality and Communitas* (2004), and I explore this aspect of his work in detail in Chapter Four. Turner also addresses aesthetics in the relationship between the aesthetic process and social processes in drama. He argues that social dramas influence aesthetic dramas and vice versa (cited in the study by Schechner, 2002). Any given social drama's actions are shaped and guided by aesthetic performance, and reciprocally, the visible aesthetics of a culture are informed and guided by the processes of social reciprocity (Schechner, 2002). In particular historical and cultural situations, the relationship between social and aesthetic performances is demonstrated as both effective and entertaining (ibid, 2002). Social drama's content is reflected in the latent area of stage dramas and included in the characteristic form of a given culture (the time and place); on the other hand, rhetorical message demonstrates aesthetic drama in social drama's latent structure for ritualisation, including imageries, vital opinions and ideological perspectives (ibid, 2002). Through effectively recreating reality, performance technology enhances aesthetic performance created by social and political action on the stage. On the other hand, social drama is presented through visible social and political actions that hide performance techniques.

Goffman (1967), Geertz (1973), and Turner's (2004) notions of performance in everyday life are relevant to the presentation of K-pop's aesthetic 'cuteness' in everyday Korean society. *Aegyo* is one of the representative behaviours included in K-pop idols' various 'cute' images. As a calculated performance of 'cuteness', *aegyo* demonstrates Korean age-based hierarchy (Epstein and Turnbull 2014), and it is embedded through pre-established routines in everyday social interactions. To commercialise a cultural product, in K-pop idol groups, *aegyo* is manufactured for the youngest group member's image, and audiences tend to encourage the capacity for idealisation. *Aegyo* becomes the nature of the deference and demeanour included in specific Korean hierarchical social circumstances and social rules under Confucianism. To achieve *aegyo* within the intended image, K-pop idols perform various types of *aegyo* classified on the Internet as online neologisms. To explore forms of aesthetic cuteness' in social interactions of daily life in South Korea, in Chapters Three and Four, this thesis examines how *aegyo* is represented through the forms of embedded socio-cultural positions and how performance can explain Korean popular culture through K-pop idol groups' music videos within the context of gender issues.

2.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the process of developing professionalism within K-pop culture and the commercial manipulation of *aegyo* within the paradigm of neoliberalisation. The professionalism of K-pop idols begins with the question of their position as virtuoso performing artists and as manufactured products. In the training process for this genre, specific to South Korea, a new type of virtuosity has been developed in line with the OSMU strategy, which is subject to pressures of a neoliberal political context: competition is relentless, and K-pop idols undergo an unending number of reviews fraught with insecurity, fear, solitude and uncertainty. *Aegyo*, as a baseline aesthetic embodied by K-pop idols, emerges through the exploitation of the individual and a conscientious desire in the aspiring idol to adopt a strategy of survival and ultimately success. Competitiveness among trainees of every company creates a climate of survival of the ‘cutest’. The power relationship between employers and employees encourages K-pop idol *aegyo* behaviour as a way of reinforcing idols’ feelings of powerlessness, willingness to obey and as a buffer against attacks by the entertainment company. In the patriarchal but also collectivist society of Korea, *aegyo* is a means of expressing polite, respectful attitudes towards seniors.

K-pop idol *aegyo* has been presented as an identifiable cultural form in the documentary film *I AM* and in the group Girls’ Generation, within the specific context of Korean society. In the fervent K-pop consumer culture, idol ‘cuteness’ is represented by various styles of *aegyo* and ‘cute’ images, expressed through both the internal character and the outer physical body, where both male and female bodies may well have been sculpted by plastic surgery. Entertainment companies invest heavily in ‘cutifying’ K-pop idols’ bodies, a commodity used to brand and market multiple, highly profitable products.

Chapter 3

Aegyo and Femininity: Aesthetic Categories of Female ‘Cuteness’

This chapter explores the aesthetic categories of *aegyo* in terms of gender and sexuality. It also examines how Korean feminine ‘cute’ becomes a negotiated response to both traditional Korean values and forms of modernization, influenced by particular cultural forms from the United States and Europe. Here, I refer not to popular music per se, but to the intertwining of Western pop with K-pop and its influence on *aegyo*. *Aegyo* has not emerged sui generis, but from forces and forms that have cultural history.

Furthermore, I establish a taxonomy of ‘cute’ and demonstrate its flexibility as an East Asian as well as a South Korean aesthetic. To present local South Korean popular concepts broadly related to East Asian ‘cuteness culture’ and Korean localization of East Asian cuteness in relation to female sexuality, I thoroughly analyse *aegyo* through the girl group f(x) and their hit song ‘Hot Summer’ (2011).

As for theoretical underpinning, this exploration joins work on performed femininities, focusing on the materiality of sounds, gestures and clothes of K-pop. Judith Butler’s (1990) work on gender performativity is useful in analysing the phenomenon of K-pop and the attractiveness and persuasiveness of *aegyo* within K-pop idol girl groups. In addition, I use relevant ‘performance’ theory centred on Erving Goffman’s (1959) notion of self-presentation, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘habitus’ and Judith Butler’s (1990) idea of performativity.

3.1. Aesthetic Categories of ‘Cuteness’ in East Asia and Issues of Gender Stereotyping

According to Richard Dyer’s *The Matter of Images* (1995: 11): ‘the word stereotype is today almost always a term of abuse’ and is used by diverse groups to classify their objections to the negative ways they find themselves represented in the mass media and in everyday life. Walter Lippmann (1956), who coined the term ‘stereotype’, however, did not intend it to have a wholly negative connotation. As Dyer points out, the significant function and role of a stereotype is to define the boundary in relation to different social types, legitimate or acceptable, and unacceptable, behaviour and the differences between women and men, as well as ‘to make visible the invisible’ (1995: 16). He concurs with Lippmann, and also Berger and Luckmann (1967), that stereotyping is a necessary part of the normal human activity of ordering, categorizing and representing people, in order to make sense of society and the wider world. Importantly for my thesis, stereotypes are socio-historical products that are dynamic and fluid, and they also reflect and represent the power relations in any given society. Two further relevant points: as Dyer notes, however, stereotypes have degrees of rigidity, according to the extent to which the values of the majority, or the dominant agenda, deny the reality that stereotypes are, in fact, fluid, and a stereotype is generally understood ‘to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is *from* stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups’ (Dyer, 1995: 14). I am using Dyer’s definition and his critique of Lippmann as my working paradigm for discussing stereotypes within East Asian, in particular South Korean, femininity and masculinity, and the function of *aegyo*.

With regard to gender stereotypes from within the oriental perspective, East Asian women have been represented according to traditional patriarchal ideology, Confucianism and conservative society. Women in East Asia are portrayed as submissive, dependent, shy, quiet, humble, passive, sensitive, domesticated, helpless and tender (Zhang, 2010). These characteristics of East Asian women are associated with the gender roles of traditional East Asian culture in Korea, Japan and China, and they are widely replicated in film, television, opera, music and other media. In the minds of contemporary East Asian women, coyness, modesty (bodies must not be

exposed) and passive behaviour are at the heart of these gender stereotypes, designed to build respect for and idealisation of men and to communicate virtue. Contemporary East Asian images of young women are increasingly represented through ‘eroticised innocence’ and a ‘pretty face and infantile gestures’ (Bray, 2009: 177, cited in the study by Kim, 2011: 339).

If we examine, for example, the idol girls of K-pop, J-pop and C-pop, we see the extent to which they are informed by traditional and contemporary aspects of gender stereotyping. Their facial appearances and certain behaviours are subject to what Yeran Kim calls ‘asexual infantilization’ or ‘bisexual transvestism’, visible in their innocence, tameness and child-like qualities, whereas their sexy visual images and accompanying dance movements are enhanced not only by wearing miniskirts and hot pants but also by bare legs, see-through clothing and high heels and an enforced designer (slim) body shape (Kim, 2011: 339). I believe that girls’ and women’s bodies reflect socio-cultural and historical conditioning, embodied in traditional gender stereotypes, and that bodies can be recreated by a specific aesthetic within contemporary femininity. Therefore, I now contextualise my discussion of South Korean feminine cute by exploring East Asian aesthetic forms of cute.

South Korean *aegyo* is usually considered to stem from Japanese *kawaii*. Although *aegyo* has close connections to *kawaii*, it has emerged with characteristics different from those of the Japanese *kawaii* culture. This might be because *aegyo* has very deep roots in indigenous Korean culture. *Kawaii* fashion, for example, embodies grandiosity, clearly visible in its exaggerated forms, such as enormous accessory ribbons, clothing with large puffed sleeves and overuse of intense pink and pastel shades (Kinsella, 1995). K-cute ‘child-like’ *aegyo*, however, is typically expressed through less overstatement and drama (Puzar, 2011). Additionally, however, *aegyo* is influenced by characters from Japanese animation (*manga*), for example, in relation to representations of the physical body: Traits from Japanese cartoon characters, such as big eyes, small mouths, small noses, tiny stature, infantilism and baby-like gestures, appear in ‘child-like’ forms of *aegyo*. To compare *aegyo* and *kawaii* in greater detail, as a means of establishing a taxonomy of ‘cute’, I examine and compare German pop girl group Monrose’s ‘Hot Summer’ (2007) video, then f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’ music video (Korean version, 2011) and finally f(x)’s Japanese video version of ‘Hot Summer’ (2012). First,

however, we should look briefly and more generally at East Asian forms of cuteness—Korean *aegyo*, Japanese *kawaii* and Taiwanese *ke'ai*.

3.2. Korean *Aegyo*, Japanese *Kawaii* and Taiwanese *Ke'ai* and the Context of East Asian 'Cuteness'

The concept of 'cuteness' shares widespread popularity as a cultural phenomenon across East Asia—from Japan to South Korea to Taiwan. The aesthetic quality of 'cuteness', however, manifests differently in each nation's culture. Japanese *kawaii* was first defined in the early 11th century in Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*, where it was referred to as 'pitiable qualities'. In the ideology of neo-Confucianism, *kawaii* is revealed through its concept of women as animalistic, docile and innocent (Shiokawa, 1999). *Kawaii* has evolved to become a significant part of modern Japanese popular culture, evident in behaviour, clothing and products, such as toys including entertainment products like the 'Hello Kitty' brand, as well as in food, popular fashion and J-pop idols. Various *kawaii* products have become popular in Japan, East Asia, and the United States, particularly among fans of Japanese *manga* (Japanese comics). 'Cuteness' has even been considered to be a part of national culture and has been integrated into a mascot by the national government of Japan.

The meaning of the word *kawaii* has transformed over time from the 'radiant face' of an embarrassed person to 'cute' and 'lovable'. Characteristics of *kawaii* are typically presented as endearing, attractive, elegant, appealing and desirable, but the term can also denote ugliness, goofiness and fuzzy behaviour, as well as a waddling movement (Shiokawa, 1999: 94). In terms of physicality, *kawaii* cuteness has been typified by young women in their 20s and 30s, with child-like, innocent, round faces and large eyes, with a double eyelid, that is, features depicted in *manga* characters (ibid, 1999). *Kawaii* is demonstrated not only by enacting *kawaii* behaviour such as giggling, squealing and talking in a high-pitched voice (White, 1994) but also through Lolita fashions—excessive use of ribbons, bows, lace, ruffles, bloomers, etc. and a preference for soft pastel colours (Shiokawa, 1999). In other words, *kawaii* is an all-encompassing aesthetic that includes image, fashion, physical appearance and even handwriting. Viewed chronologically, modern *kawaii* has been an important influence in young

women's fashion since the 1980s. Then in the 1990s, men borrowed certain traits of Japanese 'cuteness' usually referred to as 'irresistibility' and 'an adorable visual appearance', *kawaii* becoming, in the process, somewhat androgynous. Finally, *kawaii* has come to mean 'sexiness added to cuteness,' particularly in the fashion context (Lee, 2005).

Taiwanese *ke'ai* 'cuteness' has its own separate identity, influenced by its cultural proximity to East Asian Confucianist ideology. This has been usefully explored by the American academic Tzu-i Chuang (2005) in her article 'The Power of Cuteness'. Chuang's (2005) arguments on Taiwanese women's cuteness align with my thoughts about Korean female 'cuteness', and they share similar themes with respect to the more general characteristics of East Asian cuteness. Importantly for my thesis, like Goffman (1959) and his work on self-presentation, Chuang (2005) also writes about performance in everyday life, specifically in respect to cuteness. Chuang (2005) examines cuteness as performance, conceived as a reproduction of stereotypes of femininity, including the two opposing ideas of cute and powerful. In her understanding, both strong and weak female characteristics have led to a new gender power dynamic with wide social implications. Chuang (2005: 21) posits that cute behaviour in Taiwan is gradually transforming from 'unconsciously embodied "habitus" to a kind of performance'. According to Bourdieu's (1977) theory, habitus can be defined as a structured system governing the relation of taste between the individual and the contextual field of everyday life. A specific social group becomes organised by representations of unconsciously embedded demeanour according to history and taste (ibid, 1977). According to Chuang (2005: 22) in her discussion of Bourdieu (1977), cuteness represents social relationships within sexuality as part of background cultural habits of mind and body. Linguistic anthropologist Farris (1988) posits that cuteness is considered to be intrinsic to the female sex and is anticipated in all women. Farris's (1988) research on sex roles and language acquisition supports the notion that 'cuteness' is enacted as a habitus. In other words, previously, 'cute' values in women were an unquestioned assumption and cute behaviour conformed almost automatically to social expectations of women. In recent years, however women have become aware of social implications, or the social power, of 'acting cute'. Therefore, cute behaviour has become distinctly more playful and at times, knowingly cynical, according to Chuang (2005). With socio-economic development, cute behaviour has thus become a

powerful gender reaction, and ‘acting cute’ has become a prerequisite for acceptable female demeanour in Taiwanese society (Chuang, 2005).

If *Ke'ai* is considered to be a correct work attitude for women in Taiwanese society, then *aegyo* can be defined as a more personally attractive aspect of femininity in Korean social and cultural life. *Aegyo*, however, also reflects intricacies of ‘cute’ embedded in women’s social identity and in social expectations of women’s behaviour in South Korea, in other words, *aegyo* is a ‘habitus’. The difference between *aegyo* and *ke'ai* lies in individual women’s conscious performance of *ke'ai* to gain prompt advantages in Taiwanese society. In contrast, South Korean entertainment companies have adopted and manipulated *aegyo*, using it commercially through their female and male K-cute products. Individual women also perform *aegyo* in their daily lives, both as ‘habitus’, for example, in relationships where Confucian mores regarding age and class dictate behaviour, but also more consciously, to appear socially attractive. Contemporary relationships between men and women in Korean society are based on the Confucian idea of *samgang oryun* (삼강오륜, 三綱五倫), which dictates three bonds and five moral disciplines in human relations (Jung, 2011: 104). Confucian ethics state that a wife must respect her husband, and in a Confucian society influenced by Chinese socio-cultural mores, patriarchy supports male dominance in filial piety (Hamilton, 1990: 77, cited in the study by Jung, 2011: 103–104).

In ‘The Power of Cuteness’, Chuang (2005) also examines the political economy of cuteness through this very Confucian dictate that women must respect men; she examines the patriarchal structure’s hierarchical social order and its transformation by political development, economic growth and women’s social expectations in terms of wages. In the workplace, as mentioned, ‘acting cute’ often has a positive effect, but it can also be viewed negatively, for example, in the way that ‘acting cute’ can ‘soften the atmosphere’. We might first understand cute as innocent, naïve, child-like or babyish. For instance, soft toys seem relevant during particular stages of childhood development; this might allow ‘cute’ to be seen as pre-sexual or asexual (but still gendered). According to Chuang (2005), however, a panoply of other qualities is traditionally associated with this aspect of ‘cute’: wonder; non-intellectual (cute and intelligence do not go together); ‘dumbness’; hyper-femininity (non-physical, hyper-clean, etc.); ‘weakness’ (in need of protection) and vulnerability. For example, the film star Jean

Harlow indicated this image when she depicted a gangster's 'moll' who was clearly very clever whenever she forgot that she was supposed to 'act cute'. These aspects of cuteness are accepted in Taiwan as part of women's child-like charm, deemed necessary in work and daily life. Despite some negative opinions of 'acting cute' in the workplace, *ke'ai* cuteness in females is ultimately, according to Chuang (2005), still seen by both men and women as a way to strengthen women's social position. Chuang (2005) argues that self-aware cute performance can be part of the ongoing political debate regarding gender and power, involving reformulation of female subjectivity. Thus, *ke'ai* can be considered to be an aesthetic attitude and behaviour that challenges entrenched gender ideology and positively affects female emancipation. Cuteness itself seems to be constantly redefined by those using it, whether consciously or unconsciously. For example, cuteness is no longer automatically associated with vulnerability in Taiwan, according to Chuang (2005).

The higher the status of women, the more frequently, it seems, gender attitudes towards women reflect values regarding cuteness. The Four Asian Tigers (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea) experienced rapid economic growth from the early 1960s through the 1990s. Through their cultural proximity, these East Asian countries share similar socio-political and cultural values in their everyday lives, primarily based on Confucian ideals. If we compare Chuang's (2005) redefinition of *ke'ai* cuteness to Korean *aegyo*, K-cute *aegyo* can be understood as referring not only to similarities between these wider geo-cultural expressions of cuteness but also to their differences, for example, in the intricate display of cuteness in K-pop. Given South Korean social conditions, *aegyo* has emerged as an act of submission in women's behaviours and attitudes. However, the increasing rate of female participation in labour and the subsequent growth in their economic power influences South Korean gender relations in the same way as Taiwan's situation, as described by Chuang (2005). From housewife to career woman, women's image and social status has changed during the last 20 years in both countries. Increasing equality between men and women means that the traditional hierarchical social order can no longer be sustained. Consequently, in South Korea, we now find both women and men acting cute towards each other, as opposed to only women acting cute towards men.

In brief, as for its role in communicating dominant aesthetic categories in South Korean culture, ‘K-cute’ *aegyo*, in contrast to *kawaii*, but similarly to *ke’ai*, reflects the changing meaning of Korean ‘cuteness’, specifically within power relations that underpin gender issues. At this point, understanding how traditional South Korean representations of femininity relate to ‘cute’ and how *aegyo* is represented in female adulthood, adolescence and girlhood are important. A brief examination of women’s historical development of identity in South Korea can provide the cultural understanding necessary for a fuller discussion of contemporary South Korean ‘cuteness’. From the ancient period to the present, aesthetic ‘cuteness’ has, in fact, been embedded in South Korean culture and politics. Confucian ideology, Japanese imperialism and US military occupation have instrumentally transformed South Korean culture and aesthetics, particularly through popular music and fashion. Traditional representations of femininity have always gestured towards an aesthetic of sexy cuteness, and I argue that through the lens of K-pop, the *aegyo* aesthetic has become more visible, forming part of the unique Korean-ness and thus becoming more valuable, a potent aspect in the modern sexual commodification of K-pop idol girls and boys.

I explore ancient Korea’s socio-historical background from the 1st century to distinguish between cute femininity and sexy femininity and understand the transformation in Korean women’s representation. From the time of the Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo [37 BC–668 AD], Baekje [18 BC–660 AD] and Silla [57 BC–935 AD]) to the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392), Korean women have been primarily represented through myths and folklore, symbolically in Korean literature and in historical narratives (Kim, 2013). As the symbolic mother of the dynasty, women’s existence was represented mythically through the heroine role in the nation’s creation story (Kang, 2013). The heroine has overcome the trials of life, assisted her son in establishing a dynasty, gained others’ respect and is dauntless, patient and moral (ibid, 2013). For example, Soseono symbolically represents the hierarchy’s fluctuation (Kwon, 2008). She is Goguryeo’s queen consort and the mother of Onjo, founder of Baekje. She heroically endured ordeals, contributed to her son’s founding of the dynasty and won the people’s admiration. As another example, Queen Seondeok was not only the first queen of the Silla dynasty but also the first queen in Korean history. Queen Seondeok is portrayed as wishing to tighten her grip on power from the position of wife to the Silla dynasty’s

founder (Kim, 2013). She has dealt with challenging aspects of rule, such as violent rebellion, with wit and humour (Lee, 2010).

Ancient studies of Korean women generally focus on royal families and the roles of queen, queen consort and mother to princes—roles related to political power relationships (Kang, 2013). These women's representation is characterised by the heroine archetype as mentioned above. Significantly, however, Korean depictions of heroines differ from Western contemporary depictions of super-heroines, such as Wonder Woman and Super girl, who have special powers or extraordinary abilities and who fight for social justice and peace, protecting innocent people. Ancient Korean heroines are preoccupied with caring for their children and husbands, pursuing activities outside the home and also engaging in politics by employing their innate wisdom and morality. Ancient Korean women in the Three Kingdoms had the same family and property inheritance rights as men, and we know that the three queens of Silla (Queen Seondeok of Silla (632–647), Queen Jindeok (647–654) and Queen Jinseong (887–897) enjoyed considerable political and social freedom. During the Goryeo dynasty, women's social status was still equal to that of men as Confucian ideology had not become deeply rooted at this time and no tradition of sex preference for babies was established, that is, desiring sons over daughters.

Women's social status began to change during the Kingdom of Joseon (1392–1897). In this period, Confucian ideals and doctrines were encouraged, and Confucianism destroyed women's earlier social position. More precisely, discrimination against women began during the early Joseon period (1392–1592) and became widespread by the late Joseon period (1637–1897)²². In the early Joseon period, gender-neutral customs of the Goryeo dynasty still existed, such as equal inheritance rights and equal access to second marriage. Gender discrimination then emerged strongly in the late Joseon period as a result of Confucianism, and women's value as well as their rights and freedoms decreased radically. Women's public activities were purposefully limited, their second marriage was prohibited and women role was predominantly to produce male children.

²² The middle Joseon period was from 1592–1637.

Representation of femininity in the late Joseon dynasty, particularly since the 17th century, has profoundly influenced contemporary South Korean femininity in relation to age, class and stereotyping of women's roles within a patriarchal and hierarchical culture. We can track this transformation in women's social status through representations of their clothing and behaviour. I examine these representations in more detail, comparing periods before and after the rise of Confucianism, to explore this historical context for my discussion of *aegyo*.



Goguryeo (37 BC–668 AD)²³ Baekje (18 BC–660 AD)²⁴ Silla (57 BC–935 AD)²⁵

Figure 3.1. Female images during the Three Kingdoms

With regard to each dynasty's social circumstances, women's social behaviour was represented according to their socio-economic status, their role in public power relationships and familial and marital customs. In Figure 3.1, images of Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla show upright heads and straight backs, and their gaze communicates an attitude of dignity. In addition, their hands are held together under the breast or near the waist as a gesture of politeness, rather than on the breast, possibly implying obedience, need for protection or 'cuteness'.

²³ Hanstyle (2015) The female image of Goguryeo [Online] 11th June, Available from: http://kculture.or.kr/korean/hanstyle/hanstyleView.jsp?pt_seq=1265 (Accessed 10th October 2015)

²⁴ Joongang News (2012) The female image of Baekje [Online] 7th May, Available from: <http://news.joins.com/article/8098420> (Accessed 10th October 2015)

²⁵ Life in Korea, The female image of Silla [Online] Available from: <http://www.lifeinkorea.com/Culture/Cclothes/cclothesk.cfm?xURL=shilla> (Accessed 10th October 2015)

Women's clothing comprised long Korean-style jackets with wide sleeves to the hip and long, full skirts worn beneath the jacket. Earrings, hair accessories and necklaces had begun to appear, but common people did not use accessories or wear decorations for beauty. In Figure 3.2, the women of the Goryeo dynasty are wearing shorter jackets than those worn previously, and they use a breast tie rather than a belt. During this period, Korean-style jackets became increasingly short and tight. Relationships between men and women were equal, women could participate in various activities with opportunities to meet men; consequently, free love was possible. As a hierarchical relationship did not then exist between men and women, women's social conduct appeared stately and empowered, rather than careful and submissive.



Figure 3.2. Female image of the Goryeo Dynasty²⁶

In contrast, women's images in the late Joseon dynasty differ greatly. From as early as girlhood and throughout adolescence, Confucian ideology reinforced gender differences, and the Korean saying 'a boy and a girl should not sit together after the age of seven' is evidence of increasing restrictions imposed on women and on expressions of intimacy for both men and women. As images of adult womanhood show, whether

²⁶ KOCCA, The female image of Goryeo [Online] Available from: http://www.culturecontent.com/content/contentView.do?search_div=CP_THE&search_div_id=CP_THE005&cp_code=cp0204&index_id=cp02040082&content_id=cp020400820001&search_left_menu=10 (Accessed 10th October 2015)

upper-class women, commoners or *kisaengs* (female entertainers), the female body, including the head, is depicted as inclined to one side, creating a C-shaped line from the head to pelvis. This posture is understood to reflect obedience rather than the dignity reflected through erect posture and a straight line. In particular, upper-class women are shown hiding their faces with the Korean topcoat they traditionally wore when leaving the home. This suggests passive, closed attitudes towards women's public activities. Although adult women's social behaviour is represented differently, according to their class, all women commonly had a low status compared with that of men. Their agency and personal power were severely restricted by the moral principles of Confucian ideology, patriarchy and hierarchy.

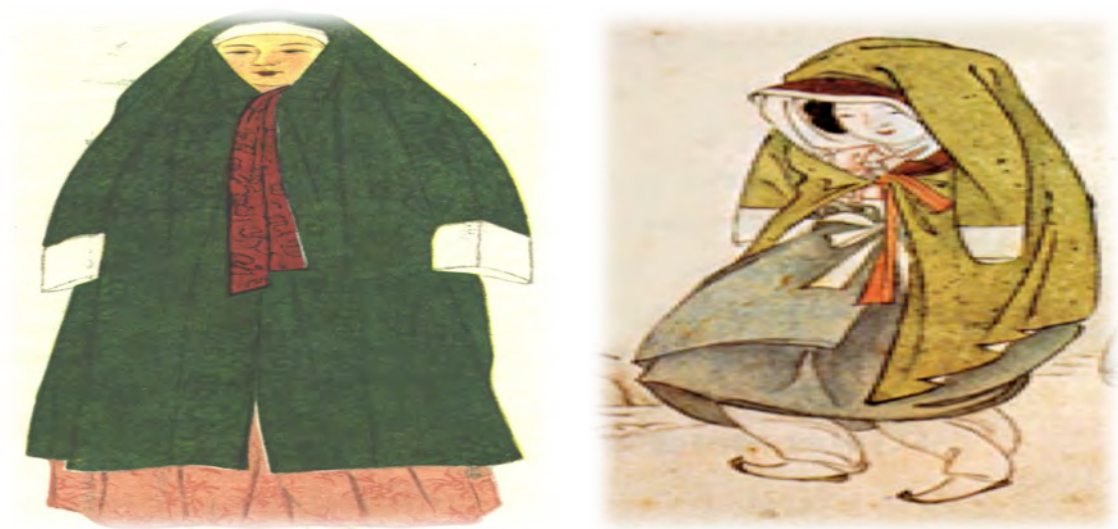


Figure 3.3. Women with cloaks mostly concealing the face and a C-shaped representation²⁷

Confucianism's concept of female virtue is a major reason for transformation of adult women's behaviour into behaviour that is characteristically passive, coy and dependent on men. Adult women's lives, once they got married, were subordinate to the husband's family and constricted by the roles of wife, mother and household labourer. Besides the

²⁷ Woman with a cloak (left image)—Song, G. (2011) Traditional costume in Joseon Dynasty [Online] 20th January, Available from: http://blog.hani.co.kr/blog_lib/contents_view.html?BLOG_ID=shk114&log_no=34410 (Accessed 12th October 2015)

Women with a cloak (right image) – KOCCA, A woman with a cloak in Joseon Dynasty [Online] Available from: http://www.culturecontent.com/content/contentView.do?search_div=CP_THE&search_div_id=CP_THE005&cp_code=cp0213&index_id=cp02130762&content_id=cp021307620001&search_left_menu=1 (Accessed 12th October 2015)

expectation of the so-called female virtue, women's social activities were few, with limited opportunities for meeting and falling in love with men, both before and after marriage. Such social confinement is depicted by the concealment of the face when going out (Figure 3.3). However, some contradiction remained in the representation of femininity, as although women from the end of the Joseon dynasty had limited social activities, the transformation in the design of the traditional costume known as a *hanbok* is thought to highlight female sexuality much more than the national costume of the previous era.



Figure 3.4. *Hanbok* during the Joseon Dynasty²⁸

Women's *hanboks* gradually became shorter, and the upper garment, or *jeogori*, became tightly fitted. The *jeogori* did not cover their breasts, so women wore another piece of clothing over it and a skirt to highlight the shape of the hips. Even though the *hanbok* did not expose any part of the female body, the gradual transformation indirectly emphasizes female sexuality, triggering curiosity about the female body's shape (Figure

²⁸ Jung, S. (2013) Joseon people are factionist before Japanese invasion of Korea, *The Korea Times*. [Online] 10th May, Available from: <http://dc.koreatimes.com/article/793613> (Accessed 15th October 2015)

3.4). In other words, Confucian ideology during the Joseon dynasty limited direct exposure of any part of the female body and expressions of sex appeal while the *hanbok*'s changing form reflected emerging desires, albeit indirectly, of men for women in a culture that overtly oppressed female sexuality. Layering the *hanbok* costume one item over another to indirectly express sexuality in line with Confucian female virtues, such as passivity and coyness, mirrors aspects of cute *aegyo* and its dialogue with female sexuality, as demonstrated by visual images of female K-pop idols.

In K-pop images, for instance, women's social behaviour is represented in such postures as leaning the body and head to one side, putting one or both hands over the mouth, gathering the hands on the breast and the eyes gazing slightly downwards, rather than gazing straight at men (this is a specific Korean antiquate adopted when in conversation with an older person). These actions exemplify Goffman's (1976) gender display—an analysis of advertising to explore men and women's images. As entries in his lexicon of women's stereotypical gestures, Goffman (1976) infers several possible meanings. Certain parts of these gestures apply to 'performances of *aegyo*' in these representations of traditional adult women in South Korea: inclining the torso and head suggest a subservient attitude towards men; covering the face and gathering the hands around the mouth, jaw or chest can be understood to evoke others' protective emotion; and lowering the face and eyes, to avoid looking directly at a man or to avoid a man's gaze, can communicate coyness rather than modesty. These behaviours are common among images of women of the late Joseon period while gestures of Goffman's (1976) sexual femininity, such as pushing the pelvis forward, letting the wrists hang down, gazing directly into a man's eyes and brushing the hair, are nowhere to be seen.

In contrast, *kisaengs*²⁹ brought female sexuality into the public domain during the Joseon era, and I understand the *aegyo* aesthetic of K-pop idol girls, particularly in its 'sexy cute' form, to refer to, indeed, to have emerged from, *kisaeng* representations of the erotic. To explore how aesthetics of cuteness are embedded in *kisaeng* artists' movement and posture and how the 'cute but sexy' aesthetic was an innate *kisaeng* characteristic, I explore the following: the late Joseon period (1637–1897); the Korean Empire during the unitary dynastic period (1897–1910); Japanese rule (1910–1945); the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea during the colonial period (1919–

²⁹ *Kisaengs* emerged from the Goryeo dynasty and the *kisaeng* culture has flourished since the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897).

1948). First, in many ways, a *kisaeng* resembles the Japanese female entertainer known as a *geisha*, and a *kisaeng* elegantly demonstrates how cuteness modified sex within the context of Confucian ideals.

During the late Joseon period and the Korean Empire, *kisaengs*' typical self-presentation, live front stage performance and drawings (the predominant visual media of the time) included not only Confucian virtues of chastity, innocence, elegance and intellect associated with women, besides obedience to men, but also indirect or covert sexual behaviour. *Kisaengs* were of low social class even though they were intellectuals and usually very knowledgeable and able to converse on various topics with male literati (*yangban*). They were considered to be exceptional women, receiving formal training in music, dance and poetry as well as commercialising sex through 'kisaeng tourism' to Japan to benefit diplomatic relations (Norma, 2014). *Kisaengs*' sex work was, in fact, mandatory during the Japanese colonisation from 1910 to 1945 (ibid, 2014). Even though *kisaengs* disappeared after World War II, prostitution was legal by 2004. Similar to the manufacturing of K-pop aesthetics by neoliberal entertainment companies, the *kisaeng* aesthetic was condoned and sanctioned by the Joseon dynasty government, bestowing *kisaengs* with legal status as official Korean entertainers, trained by and for the government to play a role in diplomatic affairs. The role of entertainer and the training process for a *kisaeng* are not different from the contemporary role of idol in K-pop, and thus we can understand the influence of *kisaeng* culture on the aesthetic categories of *aegyo*.

Kisaengs, however, are represented in many illustrations as both wicked and sexually attractive, thus as hybridised women, for example in the work of the Joseon dynasty painter Yun-bok Shin. His paintings depict eroticism in *kisaeng* and city culture based on realistic drawings of everyday life. Figure 3.5 'Lovers under the moon' (1793) depicts a secret meeting between a woman and a *yangban*.



Figure 3.5. Lovers under the moon (1793)³⁰

She is shy, her head leans to one side and her hands are held together under her face; these gestures are known to suggest coyness, tenderness and attractive femininity and, at the same time, seductiveness. Similarly, Figure 3.6 ‘A boat party on the clean river’ (circa 1805) and Figure 3.7 ‘Absorbed in playing *ssangyuk*’³¹ (also circa 1805) communicate this particular Korean female sexuality through suggested or covert erotic postures intended both to attract and arouse a male audience. In Figure 3.6, for instance, the *kisaeng* embraces the *yangban* by leaning her back against him, rather than hugging him with her arms wrapped around him. Given taboos on lovers’ behaviour, this image contributes to the cultural erotic code: The ‘embrace’ is understood to express both the woman’s coyness and sexual desire. It therefore forms part of the vocabulary of the *aegyo* aesthetic, albeit from the Joseon period, in that female behaviour is interpreted as both cute and sexy. In Figure 3.7, one *kisaeng* is depicted in a traditionally ‘cute’ sitting position, typical of a *kisaeng*, with one knee raised and both hands on that knee. The second *kisaeng* plays the traditional Korean game of *ssangyuk* with a man, and she sits

³⁰ Lovers Under the Moon by Yun-bok Shin (1793) *Doopedia-Public domain*. [Online] Available from: http://terms.naver.com/imageDetail.nhn?docId=1119119&imageUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fdbstthumb.phinf.naver.net%2F2765_000_249%2F20131031044144499_62QZ706V6.jpg%2F5478322.jpg%3Ftype%3Dm4500_4500_fst%26wm%3DN&cid=40942&categoryId=33383 (Accessed 13th October 2015)

³¹ *Ssangyuk* is a traditional Korea game somewhat like chess.

with her legs apart. Erotic code affirms that women are decent when they sit with legs crossed, for men (*yangban*) sit in this position, known as *yangban dari* (where *dari* means leg), whereas sitting with legs apart is understood as indecent or sexual behaviour. Depicting the reality of *kisaeng* life, Yun-bok Shin's paintings clearly present not only aesthetic cuteness but also female sexuality.



Figure 3.6. A boat party on the clean river (circa 1805)³²



Figure 3.7. Absorbed in playing *ssangyuk* (circa 1805)³³

During Japanese rule (1910–1945) and under the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (1919–1948) in the colonial period, *kisaeng* culture was reinterpreted through the filter of the imperial male gaze. We can gain some insight into this process by examining Japanese male fantasies about colonised women, such as *kisaengs* (Suh, 2009). These fantasies involve Joseon-ness reflected in Korea's indigenous culture, costume and etiquette, including the *kisaengs*, appropriated as part of Japanese imperialism and later becoming subsumed as part of Japan-ness. The Josean *kisaengs* were considered to be exotic erotica, arousing the colonial male gaze, an embodiment of

³² A boat party on the clean river (circa 1805) by Yun-bok Shin, *Doopedia-Public domain*. [Online] Available from: http://terms.naver.com/imageDetail.nhn?docId=1119119&imageUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fdbcsctthumb.phinf.naver.net%2F2765_000_249%2F20131031044203664_ZYI2H1GHP.jpg%2F5478343.jpg%3Ftype%3Dm4500_4500_fst%26wm%3DN&cid=40942&categoryId=33383 (Accessed 13th October 2015)

³³ Absorbed in playing *ssangyuk* (circa 1805) by Yun-bok Shin, *Mochi thinking*. [Online] Available from: <http://sakuramochi-jp.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/kisaengpainting-hyewon-pungsokdo.html> (Accessed 13th October 2015)

‘cute’ female sexuality to be appropriated and dominated in the same way as the country, its people and its culture. Japanese works of poetry, literature and painting from this era obviously refer to the hybridised ‘cute, but sexy’ *kisaeng* aesthetic. According to Suh’s (2009) ‘Representation, gender, colonialism: Joseon Gisaeng seen through Japanese Men’, *kisaengs* were seen as elegant, aristocratic and chaste, qualities understood as aspects of Joseon-ness; simultaneously, they were considered to be voluptuous beautiful women with provocative, erotic and commercially valuable images from the perspective of the utilitarian imperial (male) gaze. In other words, Japan grasped the *kisaengs*’ potential as instruments of power in the political relationship with Korea. Since the Japan–Korea Treaty of 1910, Japan’s colonial power has used *kisaengs* as sexual commodities. Their images have been used in colonial travel policies (‘*kisaeng* tourism’) in Japan to encourage diplomatic relations (Norma, 2014) and inspire a sense of exoticism in imperial males. The *kisaengs*’ colonial image is one representation of female gender and sexuality in the imaginations of imperial men, but it had such influence that *kisaengs* came to represent Joseon culture itself.



Figure 3.8. *Kisaeng* as a provocative image (1935)³⁴



Figure 3.9. *Kisaeng* as a modern sense of style (1936)³⁵

³⁴ 原竹男’s ‘官妓照映’ (1935) (朝鮮美術展覽會圖錄 14, 1982 cited in Suh, 2009: 71)

³⁵ 西岡照枝’s ‘粧後’ (1936) (朝鮮美術展覽會圖錄 15, 1982 cited in Suh, 2009: 71)

Suh (2009) explores paintings selected from an art competition of 1935, demonstrating how Japanese painters considered the *kisaeng* image and how colonial men viewed colonised women. In Figure 3.8, Suh (2009) describes a *kisaeng* sitting on a chair, with one leg raised to the chair's seat. Although a traditional *hanbok* skirt covers her leg, her posture is understood as provocative, in contrast to a posture that would be typical of a traditional Confucian Joseon woman. In Figure 3.9, Suh (2009) describes a *kisaeng* sitting tamely on the ground, wearing a *jeogori* with a striped pattern, indicating her modern sense of style despite wearing a skirt reminiscent of the traditional Japanese *kimono* costume.

Suh (2009) argues that these paintings are evidence of the effect of the imperial male gaze and men's sexual desire for colonised women. *Kisaengs* have attempted to construct their 'front stage' self-presentation to create an image that lies between docile femininity—aspects of Joseon-ness—and voluptuous beauty and sexual attractiveness—aspects of exoticism. I argue that the contradiction between restricted, subservient female social behaviour embedded in traditional Korean Confucian ideology and the exotic sexualisation of women, constructed by and for the imperial male gaze, have significantly influenced the modern aesthetic of 'cute, but sexy' *aegyo*—the unique Korean-ness embedded in the aesthetic cuteness of K-pop idol girls. Furthermore, the submissiveness of K-pop idols to the entertainment industry's power directly relates to traditional Korean socio-historical, cultural and political values of Confucianism and colonialism.

Traditional South Korean femininity has also been influenced by historical issues, for instance, the Japanese imperialist policy to obliterate Korean culture during Japanese colonialism (1910–1945) and the Korean War (1950–1953). Consequently, by 1945, most *kisaengs* disappeared, and those who still existed were recognised as intangible cultural property by South Korea's government. In fact, Korean women continued to wear the *hanbok* until the 1960s. Although *kisaengs*, wearing *hanboks* and the Joseon dynasty's royal family disappeared, female virtues enshrined in Confucian ideology and gender discrimination embodied in patriarchal ideas have remained part of daily life in South Korea. Predominant women's roles at that time were essentially marriage and becoming 'a good wife and wise mother'. Expectations of women were not only mothering and housework but also earning a living due to the harsh economic period

that followed the war. Adult women's images during post-war industrialisation and urbanisation thus depicted strong women or working mothers, representations of femininity that, notably, have not been included as part of the 'cute' aesthetic since the Korean War.

However, South Korea's rapid economic development opened its culture to media influences, such as radio and television, and from the 1960s, Korean music, including pop, was influenced by Western culture, especially because of U.S. military personnel remaining in Korea after the war. Young adults in South Korea were significantly influenced by American popular music, culture, lifestyle and fashion from the 1960s to the 1970s. Meanwhile, the Korean government's political policies prohibited songs with liberal lyrics. During this time, South Korean women were considered to be of the lowest class, used as an industrial labour force and then became victims of patriarchy during modernization of 'the fatherland' in the 1970s. As a result of the rapid economic development and industrial restructuring of South Korean society, women were considered to be cheap in every sense: cheap labour, low-paid popular entertainers for men and later as prostitutes in the sex industry.

According to Yoon and Kim's *Popular Music and Visual Images of Women during the 1970s in Korea* (2005), popular music of the 1970s represented women as dependents, labourers without power, de-sexualised and de-gendered by capitalism or as sex objects. Yoon and Kim (2005) analyse different images of femininity in each music genre according to album covers—focusing on women's positions, the camera's gaze and the image's composition. They argue that trot³⁶, standard pop, rock and folk music each produced varying representations of women. Trot presented traditional femininity, standard pop objectified women sexually and rock and folk music communicated women's resistance to patriarchy. Furthermore, standard pop represented femininity as both sexy and cute and was aimed at the male gaze while rock represented femininity as subjective sexual identity.

³⁶ Trot is a genre of Korean popular music and the oldest style formulated since the early 1900s. The name *trot* is derived from reduction of 'foxtrot', ballroom dance that affected the genre's simple two beat.

Trot played a key role in reshaping K-pop culture, influenced by Japanese *enka*³⁷ music, Western foxtrot³⁸ and the American military presence in Korea: Korean entertainers invited to military bases were influenced by the American music played for soldiers. Many trot songs' lyrics, rather than highlighting feminine beauty or elegance, referred to the extinction of communist ideas to appeal to the American soldiers in South Korea and spread propaganda against North Korea (*The Chosun Ilbo*, 2010). Most female trot singers released songs as adults—there was little or no public youth culture at this point—in contrast with current K-pop music, whose artists typically debut in their teens. Solo or sibling groups were created and popularised in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the Jung Sisters, the Lee Sisters and the Pearl Sisters (Figure 3.10). These sibling groups projected an image of cuteness, the need for protection and a type of national sisterhood. In the 1960s, femininity was represented by a wide variety of identities in South Korean society, but women's images in the 1970s were purposely limited due to extreme restrictions during socio-political and economic development.



Figure 3.10. Sibling groups popularised from the 1960s to the 1970s

³⁷ *Enka* is a genre of Japanese popular music similar to traditional forms of Japanese music.

³⁸ Foxtrot is a progressive dance similar to the waltz, with a rhythm of 4/4 time.

³⁹ Album image of Jung Sisters [Online] Available from: <http://www.maniadb.com/artist/152511?o=s> (Accessed 15th October 2015)

⁴⁰ Album image of Lee Sisters [Online] Available from: <http://www.maniadb.com/artist/108834> (Accessed 15th October 2015)

⁴¹ Album image of Pearl Sisters [Online] Available from: http://blog.daum.net/_blog/BlogTypeView.do?blogid=08zPS&articleno=13833736&categoryId=693624®dt=20080209135413 (Accessed 15th October 2015)

Later, in the 1980s, the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul and the liberalization of foreign travel in 1989 enabled Western culture, music and lifestyle to influence South Korean society more directly. The girl group Three Peers featured a girl wearing a blue denim jacket, a symbol of a Western subculture's fashion (Figure 3.11). South Korean music competitions, such as the University Music Festival (*Daehak Gayoje*), enabled young, talented female singers to come to the fore; Soo-bong Sim and trot peaked at this time. From the mid-1990s, however, Korean popular music diversified considerably with the arrival of dance pop, R&B and Rock. Women's facial appearance and physique, that is, the female body, became a focus of attention, and modern aesthetic cuteness began to emerge. With the rise of the cute aesthetic, trot became part of *aegyo* from the 2010s, and 'Orange Caramel', a subgroup of the band 'After School' is a good example of K-pop idol girl groups.



Figure 3.11. Three Peers⁴² popularised in the 1980s

⁴² Album images of Three Peers [Online] Available from: <http://www.maniadb.com/album/128261> (Accessed 15th October 2015)

3.3. German Pop Girl Group Monroe's 'Hot Summer'

K-pop idol girl group f(x) reworked the original version of 'Hot Summer' (2007) by the German pop girl group Monroe to appeal to Korean audiences' tastes. F(x) re-made the song in 2011, changing the lyrics, choreography and dance style. They later amended the Korean version slightly to make a Japanese version suited to the tastes of Japanese audiences familiar with *kawaii* culture. To explore the intricacies of *aegyo*, I examine the song 'Hot Summer' in terms of 'cute' and 'non-cute' perspectives of female pop performances, first in its original German form, then in the Korean and finally in the Japanese version. Along with this exploration, I refer to Goffman (1959), showing the relevance of his self-presentation, particularly in relation to femininity. Furthermore, I use Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity to specifically explore feminine sexuality within the *aegyo* aesthetic.

The Monroe trio gained popularity through a German talent show (similar to the United Kingdom's *X Factor*), and their first album was released in 2006. The trio's members Mandy Capristo, Senna Guemmour and Bahar Kizil, have clear individual characteristics, and the group's visual concept is sexy and cool. Their song 'Hot Summer' was produced as a dance pop song, and it differs in musical style from their previous compositions. To break away from the ballad stereotype typical of the group's earlier musical style, dynamic sounds, an up-tempo beat and elements of 1980s rhythms and house music were incorporated into the song. 'Hot Summer' was included in their second studio album *Strictly Physical* in 2007, and it graced the top of the music charts in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg while also succeeding in the Netherlands, Finland and Slovenia.

Monroe's original version is distinct from f(x)'s later reworking in certain key ways: the vocals sound hard, almost aggressive, whereas those of the f(x) versions seem to be softer. Monroe's harshness is matched by their more physical, assertive dance movements. They work up a reasonable sweat, whereas f(x)'s performance is more suggestive than assertive; they do not appear to sweat. The Monroe girls' husky voices, as opposed to the electronic sounds of f(x), help establish a young, sexy, cool image. Although white noise from a TV set is included in the Monroe's final section, it has the surprising effect of enhancing the sexy mood music. We see through this, therefore,

how the choice of rhythm, vocal accent and rhyme affect communication of the Monroe concept. One part of the original song is sung to a soft electronic melody, which adds to its sexy concept, whereas f(x)'s aesthetic is driven by 'cuteness', for example, including both childlike lyrics and rapping that create a edgier or more aggressive effect.



Figure 3.12. Monroe's 'Hot Summer'—the female members dancing with males who 'wrap' their female partners and gaze at their fragmented body parts

Monroe girls' bodies are filmed so that their dance movements are deliberately sexualised. For example, in onscreen dance duets, they appear to be very intimate with one another. Male dancers wrap their arms around their female partners' waists and gaze at their body parts—breasts, lips and eyes (Figure 3.12). Rosalind Coward (1985: 81) argues that the use of fragmented body parts has led to marketing and depiction of non-sexual body parts, previously not considered to be sexual, as sexualised (cited in the study by Lee, 2011: 208). The fragmented body has strong emotional and sexual associations and can act as a sexual stimulus to create excitement (Lee, 2011: 208).

The Monroe video has obviously been edited with manipulation and commodification of the female body in mind, an artistic possibility that is not so easily afforded by the K-pop industry due to restrictions of the government's political and cultural policies on the explicit marketing of young female bodies. Unlike the 'non-cute', that is, explicitly sexy, Monroe girls' bodies, the f(x) video was filmed with close-up facial shots, and

fragmented body parts are not shown in the same scene. Through its range of wide shots, long shots, medium shots, medium close-ups, extreme close-ups and high- and low-angle shots, the camera deliberately provides a sense of *powerlessness* and/or *powerfulness* to the Monroe group's choreography. Furthermore, camera's gaze lingers over the female performers' expressions in conjunction with the focus on their fragmented body parts, thus drawing in (male) consumers and creating powerful marketing material. The girls' bodies and body language are eroticised through the camera, feeding into a pre-existing vocabulary of desire and consumption of female sexuality and the female form.



Figure 3.13. Monroe's 'Hot Summer'—sexual postures of the female members

Deliberate use of stylised sexy or erotic poses is part of this code. For example, the Monroe singers seductively gaze at the camera while seated in a position designed to arouse: they sit together, one hip resting slightly forward on their chair's front corner. Each girl has one leg bent up, her knee stretching towards the ground in a posture that opens the pelvis and legs, drawing the viewer's gaze to the genital area (Figure 3.13). They hold their heads and necks at an angle, tilting upwards and their jaws are also raised to about a 45-degree angle. Their eyes look down suggestively. The girls' body language and posture seems to clearly suggest sexual activity. Laura Mulvey's (1975) work on visual pleasure and film is a useful reference here, for she investigates how the use of the camera contributes to fetishising female performers' bodies, objectifying them for the male gaze.



Figure 3.14. Monroe's 'Hot Summer'—close-ups of body parts

In another scene from Monroe's video, a red background is lit by a flashing light, and Mandy wears a white top, fastened with only a button in the centre so that her torso is exposed from the breast to the navel. The camera moves in very close to ensure that the viewer understands the sexual code: a red-light district and a young girl standing alone, dressed to offer her body for sexual consumption. As mentioned, we also see close-ups of body parts when the Monroe girls are dancing (Figure 3.14). Dodds (2001) pertinently explores how the moving body is depicted and reconstructed through images of intimate body parts, such as thighs and buttocks, again manipulating and commodifying female bodies for the male gaze. Furthermore, I agree with Lee (2011) when she describes how this sexual objectification encourages consumption of female performers by male audiences and how their sexualised gestures have sign value for successful marketing. I have explained how Monroe's dance choreography in the video is given sign value through their eroticised movements and poses, thus highlighting the sexual nature of the group's image. In the process, as Lee (2011: 196) indicates and as I have discussed in my section on *aegyo*'s history, sexual code is produced, consumed and then re-produced in contemporary times and is all too easily copied by fans as the group grows in popularity and becomes an icon of the era.

3.4. Towards a Taxonomy of ‘Cute’ through Analysis of K-pop Idol Girl Group f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’



Hot Hot Hot Hot Summer Hot Hot Hot Hot
Hot Hot Hot Hot Summer Hot Hot Hot Hot

I can't take this anymore.
I'm going to take care of this somehow.
I don't know anything but your old style.
If I were to produce you,
Do you have any idea how cool you can be?

From the classroom, from the office desk,
Come on, come out from your uncleaned room,
Blinding, slightly stinging sunlight rays,
Sunglasses protecting my eyes from the hot,
The tingling feeling of biting the ice in your mouth.
The sky is clear and blue

Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot Summer
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot so hot
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot Summer
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot, this is definitely my taste

Hot Hot Hot Hot Summer Hot Hot Hot Hot
Hot Hot Hot Hot Summer Hot Hot Hot Hot

도저히 이렇겐 더 안되겠어
내가 어떻게든 좀 손보겠어
낡은 스타일밖에 모르는
넌 프로듀스 얼마나
멋져질지 좀 알겠어

교실에서 사무실 책상에서
청소 안 한 방에서 어서 나와라 어서
뜨거운 광선 쏟아져 앓 따끔해
눈부셔 살짝 찌푸린 눈 선글래스
얼음을 깨문 입 속 와작 얼얼해
하늘은 파랗다 못해 투명해져

Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot Summer
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot 너무 더워
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot Summer
Hot Summer Ah Hot Hot 이게 제 맛

K-pop f(x)'s version reconstructs the Monroe original based on *aegyo* so that Monroe's erotic poses are transformed into 'cute' movements. According to their differing conceptual directions, f(x) has transformed Monroe's sexualised adult poses into 'cute', pre-adult sexy gestures, for example, using only semi-close-ups of faces, instead of including shots of other body parts. Furthermore, bodily exposure does not exist onscreen in South Korea due to strict censorship rules for broadcasting. Still, f(x)'s Korean version of 'Hot Summer' was as popular as the original Monroe song and was ranked number one by the Korean music chart *M! Countdown* (M.net) and *Inkigayo* (SBS) in 2011. In the Chinese monthly and weekly music V-chart of *YinYueTai*, the song peaked at numbers two and eight in 2011 and 2012, respectively. Additionally, the original Monroe dance vocabulary was copied and extended in f(x)'s version.

K-cute *aegyo* is a familiar concept to the audiences of K-pop culture, and it is unique, in terms of aesthetic style, to the Korean identity. K-pop idols communicate a 'cute' image through their physical appearance and social behaviour. With the development of Internet social networking systems, various new terms have appeared in connection with *aegyo*. In fact, the K-pop idol girl group f(x) embodies a definition of K-cute *aegyo* based on five neologisms, and most K-pop idols, in relation to gender issues and sexuality, can be categorised within them. K-pop performers learn through their training how to 'act cute', the *aegyo* aesthetic becoming their *modus operandi*, regardless of their personal characteristics. *Aegyo* as 'habitus' in the unconscious behaviour of everyday life is therefore explored through the following five categories: 'childlike' 'cuteness' or *kiyomi*; 'innocent-but-sexual' 'cuteness' or *bagel girl*; 'barbie doll-like' 'cuteness' or *ulzzang*; 'pretty tomboy' 'cuteness' or *unpa* and 'quaint' 'cuteness' or *byeongmat*.

What follows is a brief synopsis of f(x)'s 'Hot Summer' video that forms the basis of my taxonomy of 'cute'. This taxonomy enables deeper appreciation of the complexities of the South Korean *aegyo* aesthetic and its social and political implications in issues of gender and sexuality. The five members of f(x) enter from behind a hot-pink army tank with black stripes, parked in the middle of a city street. The camera pans in gradually from a wide shot of the street to a close-up shot of the girls (see Figure 3.15). There are red, yellow and silver sports cars parked within the boundaries of a tangle of pink wires and barrels covered with pink and grey graffiti stacked in front of a pink telephone box.

Behind this is another tangle of pink wire, and the group positions itself behind this. The music begins with the sound of the wind and then the sounds of a tank preparing to fire. A short animated image of the pink tank then appears briefly.



Figure 3.15. f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'—pink tank

The pink tank and colourful sports cars can be construed as symbols of female power and success. A tank, symbol of male aggression (a vehicle of war) and of phallic power, is here painted pink, metaphorically subverted into a symbol of female potency and sexuality. Generally, tanks are dark green and/or black. Therefore, the pink tank, in conjunction with a group of teenage girls, might also communicate that qualities of teenage, cute and innocent, but also sexually potent, can be dangerous and destructive. Throughout the video, contrast is used deliberately and consistently—images of the powerful combined with the fragile, a depiction of sexy with 'cute', a portrayal of young, innocent, pretty and feminine contrasted with tomboy, powerful mature female and masculine potency. In a wider sense, this tendency towards, or need for, contrast is a general characteristic of K-pop.

Victoria, the leader of f(x), is the first to sing. She is Chinese and comes downstage to sing her part while the others dance in formation behind her. Victoria epitomises 'innocent-but-sexual' 'cuteness' or the 'bagel girl'—the first category in my taxonomy of 'cute'. The neologism 'bagel girl' denotes a girl with a 'baby face' and a 'glamorous body' (*allKpop*, 2010). A bagel girl's physique is typically youthful, fascinating, petite

and adorable; her face has dimples, her eyes smile and she has a youthful complexion; she also has large breasts. Victoria combines this innocent *aegyo* appearance with erotic dance movements, dressing in sexy costumes that enhance her innocent, but sexualised image. In this scene, for example, Victoria's costume emphasises her slim body: a tight black-and-white, one-piece skirt with a deep-red short shirt and orange high heels.



Figure 3.16. f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'—Victoria's *aegyo*

The concept of the 'bagel girl', however, can be compared with the Peter Pan syndrome, which conceptualises the desire to remain a child and to avoid adulthood's stresses and realities. The Peter Pan syndrome in women is often understood as a psychological response to South Korean society's intense competition. Getting into a good university, for example, is a serious social issue, and most teenage students feel great pressure to do so. Similarly, most adults experience stress due to increase in unemployment, delayed marriage owing to lack of finances and the daily reality of working hard without time for leisure activities (Kanai, 2007). The need to escape into the social phenomenon of 'cute' culture might be driven by some of these social problems. In other words, even

though women are considered to be mature adults once they are over 20, their immature behaviour and appearance need to be maintained due to these social conditions, or there is an attempt, at any rate, to preserve youth and immaturity.



American Pop singer Beyoncé's
'Single Ladies' (2008)



K-Pop girl group Secret's
'Poison' (2012)

Figure 3.17. Comparison of Beyoncé and Secret's sexualised choreography and visual images

In contrast to Western pop videos such as Lady Gaga's 'Love Game' (2009) and Beyoncé Knowles's 'Single Ladies' (2008), K-pop girl groups do not dress in leotards to emphasise their sexualised image. For example, the K-pop girl group Secret included sexualised choreography called the pelvis dance (*jjeokbeol chum*, meaning 'open pelvis') in their video of 'Poison' (2012) (Figure 3.17). This resembled Beyoncé's wind down dance and the costumes in 'Single Ladies'; Secret wore jackets and short pants, making a fashion statement culturally equivalent to that of Beyoncé. Secret's choreography and clothes were a much debated topic in Korean society in regard to K-pop idol groups' sexuality. The choreography was censored due its sexual posturing and costumes, and parts were then changed at the request of the broadcasters. Even though developing media communication has enabled greater recognition of gender dynamics and sexual exploitation, Confucian taboos still exist through media censorship. Costumes that reveal parts of the body, such as the bust, back and hip, cannot be shown on Korean broadcasts because they are considered to be lascivious.

In the next scene of f(x)'s 'Hot Summer' video, a close-up, we see Krystal, a Korean American, main vocalist and lead dancer, her face illuminated by bright lighting from the white screen. Krystal embodies 'barbie doll-like' 'cuteness' or *ulzzang*, the second type in my taxonomy of *aegyo*. She is frequently described with doll metaphors because of her facial appearance and body shape. She has a small face, big eyes, smiling eyes, a high nose, a sharp jaw, and a slim body. Krystal's physical proportions are considered to be ideal from a Western cultural perspective; in other words, she has good-looking, long, skinny legs, a small face and she has the appropriate height. When the main melody begins, Krystal, wearing blue shorts, a blue shirt with white polka dots, a blue headband and blue high heels, dances in the centre of the street. In the third film location (an image of the sun's rays), Krystal's dollish image and female physique is marketed through the wearing of hot pants, a red shirt decorated with faux gems, a red jacket and a big red ring on her finger. Her long, brown-dyed hair flows in response to her dance movements, and her red high heels emphasise her long legs.

The online neologism *ulzzang* describes Krystal's type of cute because it means 'best face'. So, Krystal has, or shows us, her 'best face', a term essentially related to the commodification of Asian femininity (Puzar, 2011). According to Susan Bordo (2003), the slender body is a gendered body for the subject, and it is so widely idealised as female attractiveness that girls and women are as a result culturally inclined to eating disorders. In Korean popular culture, Krystal, representing this 'barbie doll-like' ideal, inspires the audience to consume her slender body image, assisted by commodification of information about her everyday life, including her diet, leisure activities and beauty concepts. Alongside her 'barbie doll-like' image, Krystal also displays the personal characteristic of being cool, meaning that she looks serious, is aloof, maintains an attractive, stylish attitude and does not joke around (Harris, 2000). Clearly, image is all. When the word 'sunglasses' appears in the lyrics, Krystal mimes a circle in front of her eyes, thus referring childishly to the object, and the gesture is a metaphor for the lyric (Frith, 1988, cited in the study by Dodds, 2001). The 'perfection' of her physical form is duly emphasised, and we see dual images of a mature female body alongside images that emphasise her youth or immaturity (she was 18 at this time). Both her youthful and mature images are manufactured to cultivate the audience's desire and encourage consumers to mimic her.



Figure 3.18. f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'—Krystal's *aegyo*

Krystal's self-presentation front stage is performed by her 'barbie doll-like' self, whereas her self-presentation backstage is somewhat different—she behaves like a younger sister who can be shy and coy, as her appearance in a popular TV reality show illustrated. With her 'barbie doll-like' *aegyo*, specifically her facial appearance (*ulzzang*), Krystal also illustrates South Korea's social phenomenon of lookism, which promotes the aesthetic commodity of a doll-like figure as cute. Krystal's mannequin-like physical perfection, despite being natural, seems all too perfect; in fact, it has become non-human and has inspired narcissism within 'cuteness' in Korean women who aspire to this *ulzzang* image. The 'cute' aesthetic has literally embraced plasticisation of the female form through cosmetic surgery, which typically includes the creation of double eyelids, breast enhancement, jaw and nose surgery and adoption of rigid diets as the solution to social issues like unemployment. For many men, as well as women, Krystal or the doll-like, *ulzzang* type is perfect sexual fantasy material (Figure 3.18).

Amber, the group member who enacts ‘pretty tomboy’ cute or performs the *unpa* role, the third category in my taxonomy, is a Taiwanese-American and the main rapper. She performs next in the video and sings and dances with staccato movements in the video’s third rotation. The term *tomboy* can be defined as ‘a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish’ (Merriam-Webster, 1998). The neologism *unpa* is a compound word formed from *unni* (meaning a woman’s elder sister) and *oppa* (a woman’s elder brother). Amber’s tomboy image presents her as a brother-like sister. Her image, like that of Victoria and Krystal, is hybrid, a contradictory mixture of tomboy or butch woman blended with adorable *aegyo*, reflecting her mixed background of growing up in North America as a Taiwanese-American and her career as a singer in South Korea.



Amber in f(x)

Male dancers in Monroe

Figure 3.19. f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’—Amber’s *aegyo*

From her debut, Amber has embodied this contradiction, consciously reflected in her behaviour and visual image, for example, wearing pretty blond hair short, men's shirts, trousers, vests and sneakers in bright, attractive colours—an aesthetic notably different from that of other K-pop idol girls (Figure 3.19). In this scene, Amber wears white, knee-length trousers, a green shirt with a white jacket, white walking shoes and black fingerless sports gloves. She also wears a yellow band on her right knee and under her right elbow, a sparkling baseball cap and a punk-rock steel ring. Amber's way of talking in a low voice, her deliberately over-sized gestures and her walking style are further aspects of masculinised femininity. Amber's fans know that she played basketball, was a member of her high school track team in California and also holds a black belt in Taekwondo, a Korean martial art involving jumping and both heavy and spinning kicks. Her costumes make her look like a girl dressed in men's clothing. It is sexually atypical behaviour according to gender schemas and engages in the gender role behaviour of 'masculine-typical' (Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum, 2002).

Amber reinforces this image with her movement style, which is definitively 'street' due to the inclusion of an iconic move from Michael Jackson's dance repertoire that we might call 'crotch grabbing' or hip thrust. Her dance steps also reflect a somewhat masculine image, appearing more aggressive than those of the other group members. Her vocal expression is similar to her movement style. Amber is the group's rapper, but 'f(x) Amber learns beat boxing in the most *adorable* way with KRNFX' (Soompi, 2015). During 'Hot Summer', Amber raps in both English and Korean. Her voice is low pitched, in contrast with the other members' higher tones. Rapping and vocal setting create a conversation among members that highlights f(x)'s musical style: They like to use ambiguous vocalisms such as 'talk sing', a vocal style in which narration cannot be clearly distinguished, be it song or rap. With regard to commodification, 'pretty tomboy' *aegyo* is typically used by Korean entertainment companies to appeal young girls because tomboy style is more often adopted by younger women during childhood than by older women later in life (Morgan, 1998). At school, young girls often look up to tomboy classmates, and butch girls are usually very popular. Tomboy differs from lesbian, and many girls experience a tomboy phase during their school years. For idol girl groups, one of the most influential audience groups is teenage girls, and promotion of Amber's *unpa* image is a deliberate marketing strategy.

The ‘Hot Summer’ video scene then shifts to a red-and-white studio, and Sulli, a Korean, is shown dancing and using hand gestures that might be seen in a school playground. She is enacting ‘child-like’ ‘cuteness’ or *kiyomi*, the fourth type of cute in my taxonomy. On either side of Sulli, we see Krystal and Luna, also Korean, who are play fighting, fists at the ready while Sulli stands with her arms raised to either side of her head, hands pointing inwards, palms facing outwards, with the middle and forefingers in a V-shape. This is a recognisably cute gesture and is frequently used by young people taking photos (and ‘selfies’). It is a symbolic code for ‘I am cute’ or ‘I am acting *kiyomi* cute’ (Figure 3.20).



Figure 3.20. f(x)’s ‘Hot Summer’—Sulli’s *aegyo*

‘Acting cute’ in this childlike or *kiyomi* way constitutes the fundamental behaviour of *aegyo* aesthetics. F(x) member Sulli, nicknamed ‘giant baby’, exemplifies an idol with a ‘childlike’ or *kiyomi* ‘cute’ image and whose behaviour and facial expressions embody the *aegyo* aesthetic in its childlike aspect: witness her innocent smiles, her ‘little girl’ voice, her hair in plaits, the ‘half-moon feature’ of her eyes that shows whenever she smiles (hence, the moniker ‘eye smiles’), her cute clothing, including a red ballet tutu, a casual red shirt with a black-printed smile icon and a red cap with rabbit ears, all against the background of the red-and-white dance studio. She also wears red sneakers, and her ‘little sister’ image distinguishes her from the other group members who all wear high heels.

Sulli’s girly, playful behaviour is categorised as ‘childlike’ *aegyo* even though she was a teenager, not a girl, at the time. In contemporary South Korean society, women’s ‘childlike’ *aegyo* can also be reflected in the way words are pronounced, for example, the sound made in Korean when the tongue is shortened. K-pop idol girl Hyeri from the group Girl’s Day became famous following a clip on the South Korean television variety show *Real Men*, a programme in which male celebrities are shown experiencing military life (national service is mandatory for all Korean men). As a female guest star, Hyeri appeared as one of the new female recruits and performed ‘childlike’ *aegyo* when she said goodbye, using the sound ‘a-ing’ when addressing her senior instructor. ‘Childlike’ *aegyo* is demonstrated here by using a fortis or ‘-th [-θ]’ at the end of the word. In Korean, onomatopoeic words are pronounced ‘a-ing’ or ‘h-ing’ by a person ‘acting cute’. ‘Child-like’ *aegyo* is not normally allowed in the military because this behaviour tends to be understood as a woman implying that she wishes to depend on, or attract, a man’s attention. However, Hyeri’s ‘child-like’ *aegyo* was unconscious, a momentary lapse of self-control in which she expressed her sense of loss about leaving the programme and a sense of dissatisfaction, whining like a spoilt child that she would like the hardships she endured in the difficult military training to be recognised. In her interview in *Newsen* after the broadcast (cited in *allK-pop*, 2014), Hyeri said,

I did not even know I was doing *aegyo*. Even though it was the last time, I thought it was really handsome for him to keep us on our toes until the end. But I was also sad that we were not going to see him anymore.

Hyeri's act of 'child-like' *aegyo* spread on YouTube, accumulating over 300,000 hits the day after the broadcast. Even though her 'childlike' *aegyo* might be common among Korean women's behaviours and attitudes, Hyeri's *aegyo* became an issue because it occurred in the military context where equality of the sexes is highlighted. 'Childlike' *aegyo* is normal in South Korean society because patriarchal culture is naturally embedded, i.e. it functions as a 'habitus' in terms of traditional gender stereotypes.

Returning to Sulli's movement style, it is also designed to arouse the audience's protective instinct. In contrast to Krystal, Sulli uses 'cute' hand gestures and coy facial expressions, with her eyes opened wide, to evoke this response. The camera uses close-ups and both low- and high-angle shots to make the most of her bright smile and dance movements. For example, her hands, hidden behind her back, appear at one point to show her opening her palms. This gesture is a direct reference to a Korean children's cute hand gesture known as *jamjam*, cited in my introductory chapter. *Aegyo* is replete with hand gestures, many having similar historical origins, and thus supporting my argument that K-pop reuses *aegyo* as an aesthetic inflection that has considerable history. Precisely in this inflection, however, *aegyo* is made modern, as my earlier discussion of Chuang's (2005) article implies.

In K-pop culture, as previously noted, 'childlike' *aegyo* is expressed by the neologism *kiyomi*. As mentioned in the introductory chapter's section on '*Kiyomi* Song', 'childlike' *aegyo* also includes gestures typical of babies in South Korea. Why then do some South Korean women and girls adopt this particular aspect of the *aegyo* aesthetic and how does it relate to social and historical identification? First, we need to consider the general characteristics of 'cuteness', whose concept relates to smallness, softness, compactness and pliancy, with further descriptors including helplessness, simplicity, pitifulness and despondency (Ngai, 2005: 816). As an aesthetic concept, cuteness can also provoke ugly, aggressive feelings, and it is also intended to arouse consumers' sadistic desire for domination (ibid, 2005). *Aegyo* covers various characteristics in both positive 'cute' and 'anti-cute' inclinations. It also acknowledges historical understanding of Korea, *aegyo* being embedded into the national psyche as part of the socio-cultural fabric of life and particularly gender and power relations. Some 'cuteness' traits relate to common feminine stereotypes, such as weak, innocent,

passive, dependent, soft and nurturing. These qualities tend to be associated with women and their standard roles in patriarchal society.

According to Kim's (2011) 'Idol Republic: The Global Emergence of Girl Industries and the Commercialization of Girl Bodies', the bodies of K-pop idol girls are objectified. In line with my own argument, she identifies how, through deliberate manufacture of K-pop idols, young female performers are commodified in response to a commercialised ideology of gender. She concurs with my discussion regarding body image, indicating the intense pressure in relation to performers' appearance, body shape and size, with skinny body shapes serving as fetish objects (Kim, 2011). Willoughby's (2006) discussion also concurs with my discussion, referring to the appearance, synchronised dance choreography and visual fashions of K-pop idol girl groups, noting how they are manufactured to present similar faces and body shapes (doll-like), powerful movement routines, perfectly in unison (robotic) and costumes with the same design or colour (subject to identikit branding).

Furthermore, Jung (2011: 220–229) argues from an American perspective that the marketing of femininity in K-pop music videos exploits Asian stereotypes of women: the sexually aggressive dragon lady or sexually submissive Chinese doll. This thesis posits that both perspectives (i.e. conservative femininity and the fetishisation of young bodies through sexually commercialised visuals) are represented in second-generation idol groups, such as f(x). However, I have shown that we can see a more overtly sexually objectified femininity through the portrayal of submissive Asian bodies, as well as regressive values in some idol girls, manifested through cosmetic surgery, a rigorous diet and excessive exercise. In this manner, we begin to see that in K-pop, the female form is deliberately infantilised, knowingly presented as pre-pubescent and childlike through *aegyo* as a superficial means of camouflaging sexualised and commodified bodies of idol girls. As for the taxonomy of *aegyo*, we can begin to understand how flexible, how open to manipulation and how commodifiable cuteness is because it can represent various degrees of innocence, infantilism, sexual passivity, sexiness and sexually objectified femininity embodied by idol girls.

Patriarchy denotes a social structure in which men have power over women, and patriarchal society arises where deep-rooted power imbalance exists. 'Pure love' is one

of the most common themes in K-drama, in which ‘love’ does not mean ‘sex’, but rather ‘romance’ (Kim 2012). I concur here with Kim’s (2012) view that a relationship of ‘pure love’ is not consummated and is therefore understood as love bound by the conservative sexual norms of South Korean society. In a male-dominated power structure, women often are depicted as tame, weak, soft, nurturing and innocent. These characteristics can then lead to stereotypical feminine traits and behaviours of acting vulnerable, feeling helpless and becoming dependent. Men might then adopt paternalistic responsibility to protect the very same women who seem at the mercy of male power. Thus, to obtain men’s love, women attempt to highlight patriarchal gender roles by embodying the ‘childlike’ *aegyo* aesthetic, as I have shown in my earlier discussion, in performances of both professional (as a K-pop idol or in any other career) and everyday life.

‘Cuteness’ is usually the preserve of babies and children while ‘childlike’ *aegyo* is part of the behaviour of teenagers, pre-adults and adults, including the more overtly sexy aspect of *aegyo* designed for the male gaze in Korean society. Given that South Korea is the cultural context for this phenomenon, we can see how Confucianism’s patriarchal system legitimises gender roles: Men in Korean society perform to protect women, and women are submissive to men. For instance, *aegyo* focuses on the *oppa*⁴³ in Korean patriarchy, and little discourse occurs around gender equality (Mark, 2013). A young woman can use *aegyo* to help her persuade a man (*oppa*) when she says ‘*Oppa* please!’ In other words, when the young woman pleads with the *oppa* using *aegyo*, she says ‘*Oppa* please!’ If the *oppa* denies her, she can throw a temper tantrum, just like a child, using *aegyo*. Thus, the association of K-cute *aegyo* with the *oppa* has implications for power struggles in relationships (ibid, 2013). A woman adopting the *aegyo* attitude cannot show resistance, strength, independence and assertiveness, but might express herself using *aegyo* within a patriarchal system, as described above (ibid, 2013).

Childlike *aegyo* is not confined to Korean or even to East Asian culture. In the music video for ‘Baby, One More Time’ (1999), American artist Britney Spears exemplifies childlike sexuality in an adult woman. Spears sings in an infantile voice, repeatedly thrusting out her tongue. She wears a school uniform with a short skirt, a grey cardigan,

⁴³ *Oppa* is a word used by a Korean female for a male older than herself.

tight, over-the-knee, plain grey socks, and her hair in pigtails with colourful scrunchies. This sexy, pre-pubescent image is reinforced by school shirts cropped to reveal her abdomen and shots in tight-fitting sports clothes, displaying her toned body as she performs various dance sequences. She wears only lip-gloss as makeup. Even though Spears' facial expressions display childlike cuteness, her body movements and powerful choreography are designed to communicate her sex appeal. As her debut, 'Baby, One More Time' became a global success.

Similarly, f(x)'s Victoria has a glamorous, sexy image. Unlike Krystal, Sulli and Luna, Victoria can freely express her sexuality since she is aged over 20 years (Britney was 18 when she performed 'Baby, One More Time'). Her image can comfortably make use of sex appeal; for example, Victoria's dance routine changes during 'Hot Summer' from the rhythmic group movement to an individual routine, in which she sways erotically. This is enhanced by a close-up shot of her wearing a black-and-white skirt and a low-angled shot of her dressed in a short red skirt that reveals her shape. Victoria also, however, plays with child-like, 'cute' gestures, such as using her hands to create the V-shape described above. Through this gesture, she participates in the recognised movement vocabulary for *kiyomi* 'cute' while wearing sexy clothes. There is a clear contrast between her erotic dance movements, glamorous body shape, her facial appearance and expressions, and her 'cute' body language.

In addition to other song characteristics, lyrics in the Korean language are sung rhythmically, giving songs their beat. The song is intended to reinforce the rhythm's beat, rather than to convey the lyrics' contents. In other words, in Korean, lyrics can be understood through the beat. This might be why international fans, even though they have no understanding of the Korean language, can enjoy Korean songs. A hybridised form of English and Korean in the lyrics creates a new sound, and English rap is an important feature of K-pop. With its specific talk-sing song form, f(x)'s performance style was a key factor in the international establishment of *aegyo* and the cute aesthetic.

Finally, returning to the fifth category in my taxonomy of cute, I address 'quaint' *aegyo* or *byeongmat*. Although 'quaint' *aegyo* is not represented in f(x)'s aesthetic style, it is still an important part of 'cute' culture in South Korea. F(x)'s image is manufactured in such a way that they only ever appear beautiful and professional. Rarely do they display

any behaviour that might be defined as ‘quaint’. Most idol girl groups do not ‘act quaint’ or use the concept of ‘cheesy, camp or kitsch’, useful descriptors for the *byeongmat* style, unlike some male singers and groups who occasionally adopt a ‘quaint’ or ‘cheesy, camp and kitsch’ style, for example, Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ (2012), discussed in Chapter Four. K-pop idol group Crayon Pop, however, displays ‘quaint’ *aegyo*, and Crayon Pop becomes the basis for my discussion of this ‘cute’ category.



Figure 3.21. Crayon Pop’s ‘Bar Bar Bar’ (2013)

Crayon Pop debuted in 2012, and their popularising of ‘quaint’ *aegyo* came from the video of ‘Bar Bar Bar’ (2013), in which they wore unusual outfits front stage—gym clothes, including tracksuit bottoms with skirts, and scooter helmets—and performed zany choreography in a remarkable dance routine called ‘Straight Five Engine Dance’. Their dance movements comprised shaking their semi-extended legs, jumping up and down like engine cylinders with their hands extended downwards and posing as if they were about to start running (Figure 3.21). The dance vocabulary was simple, and phrases were frequently repeated so that group members looked relaxed and almost amateurish—not a typical professional dance style associated with K-pop idol girl groups. Their performance looked very *kiyomi*-like, but their style was, and is, more quaint, zany and fun. The location for their music video was an amusement park/playground. *The Economist* magazine described their visual image as a ‘cute sister’ rather than a glamorous image. Kid-sister images and awkward performances in unusual outfits appear somewhat cartoon-like, in other words, ‘cute’ in a ‘quaint’ way.

Crayon Pop is signed to Crome entertainment company, a relatively small company, and the music video of 'Bar Bar Bar' was filmed with a budget of only US \$347. Hyun Chang Hwang, a Chrome executive, reportedly stated that the basis for Crayon Pop was to distinguish them from other K-pop idol girl groups who are sexy or sweet; hence, the comic concept pursued by Crayon Pop (Park, 2013). Hyun Chang Hwang recruited Crayon Pop's five members, who are all under 165cm, and decided that there would be no sexy image and no high school students (Kang, 2013). Consequently, the five members are aged between 23 and 25 years, and they have various careers outside the entertainment industry. Without years of hard training, their debut image was of girls living in the neighbourhood (Kang, 2013). Their second singles album was hugely successful, both domestically and internationally, and the song reached number one on Billboard's K-Pop Hot 100. *The Economist* said that the most significant about Crayon Pop was not being signed to a major Korean entertainment company. Crayon Pop capitalised on their lack of finesse and professionalism, and in so doing, unwittingly appealed to popular culture by creating a distinctly 'cheesy, camp or kitsch' image. We can clearly see how Crayon Pop cultivated a 'quaint' form of *aegyo* from their quirky dance routines, unique outfits and ordinary girl-about-town image.

Crayon Pop's 'quaint' *aegyo* relates to the online neologism *byeongmat*, which means 'stupid taste' where the context is irrelevant. In Korean popular culture, Psy's 'Gangnam Style' established a low cultural code, and its minor aesthetic concept was characterised by a sense of humour, laughter and the display of primitive emotions in a culture where people aspire to transform the joy and anger of Korean society (Kim, 2013). Crayon Pop is described as a female Psy in its use of a minor aesthetic characterised by this cartoonish 'cute' and 'cheesy, camp or kitsch' culture. On the other hand, such 'cuteness' can also be linked to the malformed and grotesque (Harris, 2000). Crayon Pop, in its very name and use of bright, simple costume colours (red, white, orange, blue and yellow), communicates this *byeongmat* image. According to Harris (2000), cartoonish cute can be defined as a type of unreality, be it derived from animation or just culturally determined as cheesy, humorous or cool. Even though Crayon Pop is not represented in an artificial or 'non-human' form by cartoon characters or avatars, the group's style signals a somewhat deformed aesthetic of 'cuteness'.

3.5. Japanese Version of f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'

Idol groups of K-pop and J-pop manifest both similarities and differences because popular culture in South Korea and Japan are mutually influential due to geographical proximity. This is despite the fact that the cultural open-door policy has been on hold since 1998 because of historical issues between the two countries. Both K-pop and J-pop idol groups have debuted with teenaged performers, promoted by national entertainment companies through their audition and trainee processes (Lee, 2012). However, the training systems have remarkably different characteristics associated with cuteness. K-pop idol trainees are educated to become rigorously trained professional performers, whereas J-pop idol trainees are educated for only six months to a year, and they become adept only after their media debut (Yeoyeo, 2010), as explained in Chapter Two. This means that J-cute, or the cuteness of J-pop idol groups, often looks insufficient and awkward, rather than professional, like K-pop idols. J-pop also relates to the tastes of Japanese audiences who expect to follow their stars' development from when they debut and are relatively unformed to when they become fully fledged professional artists (ibid, 2010).



Figure 3.22. f(x)'s 'Hot Summer' (Japanese version)

F(x)'s Japanese version of 'Hot Summer' differs from the Korean version in its melody, beat, voice, rhythm and lyrics (Figure 3.22). One obvious difference in the Japanese version is how this performance reinforces the melody more than the beat, with a cute voice and slow rhythm. We see this, for example, in the Japanese girl group AKB48, a group typical of the J-pop scene. Most of their songs are composed with a soft melody, cute vocal style and slow rhythm, rather than with powerful beats or upbeat sounds, for example, in the song 'Baby! Baby! Baby!' (2008). As a result of its 'cute' vocal style, the music presents an image of femininity that is vivacious and youthful. There is no rapping in the song, and the melody dominates throughout.

As in K-pop, the dance style is powerful, but the physical code is not too erotic, with something of the 'innocent-but-sexy' *aegyo*, communicated through facial expressions and 'cute' gestures. J-pop girl groups that embody the *aegyo* aesthetic perform *kawaii*-style gestures and child-like movements, rather than more powerful choreography and performance. For instance, AKB48's 'Sugar Rush' (2012), which was written for 'Wreck-It Ralph', the Disney animation film, shows group members decorated in sweet cakes and candies. 'Cute' concept and style are expressed in the catchy tune, in the choice of costumes and use of cute gestures. Although 'Sugar Rush' has a soft melody, it also has 'hard', electronic sounds both at the beginning and the end of the music video to communicate a racing game as a central concept. However, the video contains no powerful dance movements, and the *aegyo* aesthetic is shown through gestures and movements, as well as in *kawaii* 'Lolita' fashions.

In close-up shots of the f(x) girls' faces, we see them wearing strong blue colours, overstated accessories and heavy makeup. For example, in this Japanese version, Victoria wears a spangled blue shirt, a hat with a feather and overstated spangles, along with heavy eye makeup and black eyeliner, which highlights the size of her eyes. Her face, however, looks artificially beautiful. Unlike close-up shots of their faces in K-pop music videos, here, the girls have used the Lolita makeup style, which uses black eyeliner to make eyes look like doll's eyes. This makeup style has not been popular among Korean youth, where a more natural makeup style is common. Clear, pale skin is also highly prized (Figure 3.23). In the other video scene in front of a star-shaped property, the girls wear red outfits with red high heels or sneakers. In particular, Sulli has a schoolgirl style, wearing a red hair band, red shorts and an Alpine-style top.

Sulli's cute image communicates a slightly different mood than the earlier scene. The earlier style shows not only elegance but also innocent cuteness; the latter style expresses a more vivacious, animated image.



f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'—Korean version (2011)



f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'—Japanese version (2012)

Figure 3.23. Comparison of Korean and Japanese versions of f(x)'s 'Hot Summer'

One shot shows group members in their red outfits, throwing coloured paint at the building; they look like they are excited and enjoying themselves. In f(x)'s Korean version, this 'free play' is shown with their dance routines. Thus, the Japanese version adds a new scene in keeping with the broader tendencies of the J-pop industry. Several J-pop music videos show artists engaging in mischievous play, rather than performing dance routines. We can see some J-pop artists' individual characteristics in such scenes, and this is part of the J-pop industry's marketing strategy.

3.6. Performance of Femininity within Gender Performativity

As French feminist and social theorist Simone de Beauvoir (1974) posits, 'one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman in order to constrain the body to correspond to an historical idea of "woman", and to lead the body as a repeated corporeal project to become a cultural sign' (cited in the study by Butler, 1986: 35 and 1988: 519 and 522). Judith Butler, American philosopher and gender theorist, expands Beauvoir's idea that *sex* is recognised as naturally decided while *gender* is the cultural form embedded in the body from various modes of cultural meaning (Beauvoir, 1974, cited in Butler, 1986: 35). Butler argues that gender is not inherent, but socially practiced for a long time (Milestone, 2011). The three to seven years spent in training to become a K-pop idol provide many hours in which idol girls, for example, practice cultural meanings of female gender according to South Korean ideology. I have described this training process in detail in the previous chapter. Goffman (1974) also posits that women are socialised to present themselves as ornamental and uninstructed to display coyness and inability (cited in the study by Ziegler, 2010: 10). The gendered body is reinterpreted in Merleau-Ponty's reflection as 'a historical idea', '*reproducing* a historical situation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 and Beauvoir, 1974, cited in Butler, 1988: 521). Both Ziegler's (2010) and Merleau-Ponty's (1962) ideas are highly relevant to *aegyo* aesthetics and to inherent contradictions in my taxonomy's categories. In the taxonomy, 'acting cute' includes behaviour easily described as ornamental or with qualities of coyness and inability or awkwardness and childlike naivety—to reframe Ziegler's (2010) language slightly—and described as definitely emerging from, or being reproduced through, history and socio-historical conditions. For my analysis, I use this interpretation of gender by Butler and Goffman and a set of approaches to performance by Schechner,

whose work I cited in the first chapter. This exploration brings together aspects of performance in everyday life, relevant to the material actuality of being and to the behaviour of ‘acting cute’ or being *aegyo*.

As ‘a corporeal style’, Butler (1988: 519) describes how ‘acts’ in phenomenological theory are created by social agents in the social reality of the mundane, through their gestures and the demeanour of the symbolic social sign. Furthermore, I have referred throughout this chapter to various types of code with respect to femininity and expressions of female sexuality, in other words, symbolic signs operating in the *aegyo* aesthetic and, more widely, in South Korean gender and power relations; these are performed, or constructed and re-constructed, through their representation in images, as well as in video, television and live performance. Through particular corporeal acts, the gendered body creates acts of performativity. Butler (1993: 178) distinguishes between performativity and performance: performance is considered as a bounded ‘act’ and performativity as the reiteration of norms or the production of a series of effects. For example, we act, speak and walk in ways that create the impression of being a man or being a woman (Butler’s interview, 2011). She also posits that each individual learns to perform gender from an early age—specific facial displays, tones of voice, gestures and erotic behaviours—through television, magazines and other media and how to use body shape and all other gender performance from any given society, thus demonstrating that gender is constructed (Schechner, 2002: 130–131). Performance can be discerned as fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’, whereas performativity means repeating norms that constrain and exceed the performer (Butler, 1993: 178). If we relate this to the situation of female K-pop idols, we can identify how their stage performances comprise various self-presentations in relation to gender and sexuality. As one key aspect representative of their image, aesthetics of cuteness are expressed by K-pop idol girls through a range of *aegyo* styles, performed through reiteration of manufactured self-presentations on stage.

This constructed femininity includes cultural content determined by diverse racial, ethnic and national identities. Certainly, as a feature of human culture, femininity can be transformed by specific historical and cultural forces. Specific stereotyped behaviours and appearances are associated with particular social groups, and gender stereotyping is re-represented through media image production. With regard to the context for female

stereotypes and gender discrimination, Laura Mulvey (1975), British feminist film theorist, argues that the very structure of the image-making process, through its androcentric gaze, displays sexual discrimination. I concur strongly with Mulvey (1975) on this point, as my discussion of the German Monrose video suggests. Film, here, can include the music video context, and Mulvey (1975) asserts that scenes usually focus on the female body's curves and that the female character's role is simply to be an erotic object for both characters and spectators. This androcentric lens, according to Mulvey (1975), leads directly to female objectification. My observations regarding the erotic posturing used by the Monrose girls are a case in point. Other scholars of feminist media studies believe that limitations of the image production process can be resolved by taking control of the image and its representation of stereotypes in the media (Mulvey, 1975, cited in the study by Kim, 2009: 54). I would argue that, in most cases, including for f(x), the female subjects (objects) are still ultimately caught within the logics that Mulvey describes. Even if it were indeed true, for the majority of K-pop idol 'wannabes' signed to a South Korean entertainment company, there is very little possibility of gaining any editorial control.

In terms of gender stereotyping in East Asia, femininity has consistently been manipulated by specific socio-cultural and historical aspects of conservative culture and patriarchy. Confucian male-dominated patriarchal society has determined most social constructs and rules, together with ideological vision, and thus has influenced all East Asian female stereotypes. In South Korean society, as I have said, patriarchy is a key representative ideology. Even though South Korean women's social status has improved over the last three decades, gender roles in South Korea are still rooted in patriarchy. According to Young (1998), male bodies freely express their individual opinions and actions in patriarchal culture, whereas the female body is considered to be subject to the male gaze. Woo (2010) refers to women's image as depicted in a popular Korean drama in which the main South Korean woman is portrayed as dependent, sexually submissive, passive and weak. In her opinion, the bodies of South Korean women are objectified for the male gaze throughout this series. For example, in the way that parts of the female body such as the legs, lips, breasts and hips are fragmented onscreen, femininity becomes fetishised. Woo's (2010) argument here ties in well with Mulvey's (1975) approach discussed above as well as with my interpretation of the German video version of 'Hot Summer'.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter examined intricacies of *aegyo* in relation to Korean femininity and issues of gender and sexuality to explore aesthetic cuteness in K-pop idol girls and more widely, as it is lived on a daily basis in South Korean society. I have compared Korean *aegyo*, Japanese *kawaii* and Taiwanese *ke'ai* to establish a more balanced view of various social and cultural phenomena in East Asia. I have explored aesthetic similarities among these countries in terms of cultural proximity and their differences in terms of different histories of feminism and women's liberation in each context. I have used the concept of 'habitus' to understand how, consciously or unconsciously, individual tastes reflect embedded circumstances of diverse socio-political and economic contexts, such as age and class. Performances of *aegyo* have been influenced by historical issues, not only the Joseon dynasty's Confucian ideology and patriarchy with its concomitant gender discrimination but also through Japanese colonization, the Korean War and post-war U.S. military presence in Seoul. The female body has been deeply influenced by the negotiated product of traditional Korean feminine values and performances in a dialectical conversation with modernizing forces in the shape of popular Western culture.

Aegyo has been informed by gender performativity and embedded as a cultural form through reframing of traditional Korean and contemporary Westernised views of the female form and female sexuality, in conjunction with national stereotypes and modes of production. The female body is constructed culturally, economically and politically and becomes gendered through self-presentation and everyday performativity. This changing female form, or body image, reflects 'cuteness' in its diverse expressions, both in physical appearance and through social behaviours in Korean society. The performances of *aegyo* are described by K-pop idols through self-presentations, both front stage and backstage, and I have shown how *aegyo* is deliberately constructed according to entertainment companies' marketing strategies to fit the tastes of diverse audiences.

For instance, each member of f(x) had a distinct image akin to 'Baby Spice' and 'Posh Spice' from the 'Spice Girls'. Various types of *aegyo* embodied by each member of a K-pop idol girl group are therefore influenced by gender performativity embedded in

South Korean socio-cultural and historical aspects for the tastes of the local South Korean audience. My research evidences that the performance of *aegyo* highlights Korean-ness in respect to gender performativity.

The comparison between K-pop idol group f(x) and German pop group Monrose conspicuously revealed ‘cute’ and ‘non-cute’ aspects in gendered bodies. In the comparison between f(x)’s Korean and Japanese versions, *aegyo* and *kawaii* culture were presented in similar, but slightly different videos, thus revealing how aesthetic cuteness is expressed differently despite cultural proximity. Through an analysis of f(x)’s Korean version of ‘Hot Summer’, I have shown how the flexibility of *aegyo* has led to a range of specific ‘cute’ categories and how East Asian female bodies suggest a modern form of ‘cute’, negotiated from both traditional and contemporary cultural conditions.

F(x)’s Japanese version of ‘Hot Summer’, reworked from the Korean version, also demonstrates the flexibility of ‘cute’, in that the group’s image (or images) is constructed according to national tastes operating within Japanese popular culture, appealing to the *kawaii* aesthetic familiar to, and popular with, Japanese audiences. I have argued that *aegyo* in K-pop idols is one unique aspect of Korean-ness and that K-pop’s success is partly due to its negotiation of different cultural forms that are simultaneously sufficiently Korean, sufficiently Asian and sufficiently odourless, a useful idea popularised by Koichi Iwabuchi, Japanese scholar of cultural studies. Overall, the performance of *aegyo* as a social aesthetic has played, and continues to play, an indispensable role in the construction and re-construction of South Korean femininity.

Chapter 4

***Aegyo* and Masculinity: Stereotypes, Age and Performance**

Chapter Four explores ‘cute’ masculinity in the context of South Korean social interactions to show how *aegyo* is embedded in the stereotypes of Asian masculinity, as communicated through the music videos of male K-pop idols. Hierarchy, patriarchal ideology and the use of honorific language are key aspects of the underlying value system of South Korean society, clearly visible in its orientalism and in matters concerning age and gender.

In the previous chapter, I explored ‘cute’ femininity, represented in both traditional and modernised South Korea, to demonstrate the intricacies of ‘cute’ in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. This chapter, on the other hand, examines the remodelling of traditional forms of masculinity to elucidate the gender stereotyping that exists within Asian masculinity in contemporary South Korean society and K-pop idol culture.

To discuss masculine ‘cuteness’ in the context of the unique sexualisation of South Korean men, I refer to the following key concepts: Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Erving Goffman’s (1959) notion of self-presentation, Chris Rojek’s (2001) ideas on celebrity and Victor Turner’s (2004) understanding of liminality. With reference to K-pop idol boy group SHINee’s song ‘Replay’ (2008), I will examine *aegyo* within ‘cute’ masculinity according to the following four aspects: ‘childlike’ masculinity or *kiyomi*, ‘cartoonish’ masculinity or *kkotminam*, ‘macho’ sexuality or *kkotjimseung* and ‘quaint’ masculinity or *byeongmat*.

4.1. Flexibilities of *Aegyo* in ‘Cute’ Masculinity

In the next section, I will examine ‘*aegyo* masculinity’ as a unique aspect of Korean identity in SHINee’s music video for their song ‘Replay’, in order to show how the flexibility of ‘cuteness’ is depicted and how South Korean contemporary masculinity is a mixture of traditional social and cultural phenomena relating to age and experience, gender stereotyping and the philosophy of orientalism in South Korean society. For illustrating these phenomena, this chapter refers to four aesthetic categories of ‘K-cute’ *aegyo* that form the basis for a working taxonomy of masculine ‘cuteness’: ‘childlike’ cuteness or *kiyomi*; cartoonish masculinity or *kkotminam*; macho sexuality or *kkotjimseung*; and ‘quaint’ cuteness: cheesy, camp or kitsch masculinity, or *byeongmat*.

4.1.1. ‘Childlike’ ‘Cuteness’ or *Kiyomi*

K-pop male group SHINee’s ‘Replay’ reflects a contemporary social phenomenon within gender relationships and age issues in South Korea based on the story of a *yeon sang yeon ha* couple (usually understood as a couple comprising an older woman and a younger man). In the age-based hierarchy of Korea, the youngest member, Taemin, who was a middle-school student when the debut song ‘Replay’ was released, portrays a childlike ‘cute’ image, which is usually called *maknae* (the youngest in the group). Taemin’s ‘cute’ visual image, behaviour, voice and powerful masculine dance movements represent the ‘cute’ masculine characteristics of K-pop male groups with respect to the aspects of playing the role of *maknae* (Figure 4.1.1) in the group and as a normal teenage student. Because K-pop idol groups include five to ten members on average, entertainment companies have researched a variety of audiences in the hope of discovering the ideal type of man for these groups (Kim and Park, 2013). Most K-pop groups communicate both their group concept and the personal image of each member. In SHINee, the group's self-presentation on stage embodies ‘cute’ masculinity; however, each member has his own characteristics, or self-presentation, backstage, for instance, ‘childlike’ ‘cuteness’, ‘cartoonish’ ‘cuteness’ and ‘macho’ masculinity based around *aegyo*.



Figure 4.1.1. Taemin in SHINee's 'Replay'



Figure 4.1.2. Korean *misonyun* character Lucian Kaltz in TalesWeaver⁴⁴



Figure 4.1.3. Taemin's breaking bricks in *Idol Maknae Rebellion* (2009)⁴⁵



Figure 4.1.4. Jonghyun bows at a 90° angle as a *hubae* to K-pop idol girl group Kara as *sunbaes* who debuted one year earlier than SHINee in *The Show Season 4*. SBS MTV (2015)⁴⁶

Figure 4.1. *Maknae*, *misonyun* and the relationship between *sunbae* and *hubae*

Taemin has a childlike 'cute' image known as *kiyomi* and *misonyun* (beautiful boy) (see Figure 4.1.2), and as previously mentioned, his role as a *maknae* is related to his age and the group hierarchy. In K-pop idol groups, the *maknae* is usually an important member, usually the 'cutest', with his own set of rules. The K-pop entertainment

⁴⁴ Nexon Mobile 'TalesWeaver' latest series released (2010), *Asia Economy News*. [Online] 30th June, Available from: <http://www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2010063014434021818> (Accessed 20th December 2015)

⁴⁵ Taemin's breaking bricks, *Idol Maknae Rebellion* (2009) [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trwFCiIyWBM> (Accessed 20th December 2015)

⁴⁶ Bow battle at a 90° angle between Kara's Seungyeon Han and SHINee's Jonghyun (2015) *bntnews.hankyung.com* [Online] 10th June, Available from: http://bntnews.hankyung.com/apps/news?mode=sub_view&popup=0&nid=04&c1=04&c2=03&c3=&nkey=201506100224113 (Accessed 20th December 2015)

industry believes that if the *maknae* is popular, then the entire group is popular, and the debut age of the *maknae*, usually during their teenage years, ensures presentation of a youthful image, even though older members may be in their 20s. The hierarchy that exists may well limit some performers' expression of their talents because there are stronger leaders or older members in the group. The traditional role of the *maknae* might be summarised as weak, passive and obedient with no room to express his opinion. The television show, *Idol Maknae Rebellion* (2009) is evidence of gender performativity: the *maknae* has to 'act cute' regardless of his own personality, and this role places less emphasis on masculine traits. The programme gives the *maknaes* from K-pop idol boy groups an opportunity to express themselves more freely, and typically, they attempt to reinforce their masculinity rather than their 'cute' *maknae*. To overcome prejudice towards the 'cute' image of the youngest members, the *maknaes* participate in competitive games. Taemin appeared on this show as a guest, and he showed off his masculine image through stereotypically masculine games, for instance, breaking bricks using martial arts (Tae Kwon Do) (Figure 4.1.3), horizontal bar exercises and withstanding the pain of eating very spicy foods.

Korean hierarchical structures are classified according to class and age. In SHINee, the five members are all different ages, and they relate to each other as colleagues under the tutelage of SM. Each member relates to the social hierarchy in a traditional fashion, using honorifics such as *sunbae* and *hubae*, based on the time they joined SM as trainees. *Sunbae* and *hubae* are respectively seniors and juniors in any professional field, regardless of age and place in their social lives. The honorifics, proprieties and respect to elders or seniors in the field are significant elements in Korean society on the basis of traditional Confucianism. *Hubaes* have to respect *sunbaes* with obedient behaviour, honorifics and to bow at a 90° angle (Figure 4.1.4). Similarly, *sunbaes* have to take care of *hubaes* and set a good example for them. To show respect to *sunbaes*, *aegyo* is used by those in lower positions. The *aegyo* might include sweet gestures from the *hubae* to please the *sunbae*, like a baby acting *aegyo* to the parents, who are delighted by this 'cuteness'. However, the difference between the 'cute' actions of babies and adults lies in whether the behaviour is natural or manufactured. Here, *aegyo* is designed to please and impress the *sunbae* and is deliberately manufactured.

4.1.2. 'Cartoonish' Masculinity or *Kkotminam*

The aesthetic of *aegyo* refers to the practice of 'acting cute' towards beloved older people, audiences, lovers or *sunbaes* as part of age-based hierarchy, whereas Japanese *kawaii* is more about the 'image of cuteness' like characters from *manga* (Japanese comics), games and merchandise. In other words, *aegyo* stems in part from the pressure to flaunt in a hierarchal society, while *kawaii* is considered a national identity that highlights 'cute' images, characters and designs used in cultural products for global markets. In K-pop, the visual appearance of male idol members embraces the concept of metrosexual masculinity with *aegyo*, originally influenced by the visual characteristics of the *kawaii manga* image in which men were depicted as tall, skinny, with big, tearful eyes and pale Caucasian skin. For Pompper, the metrosexual image is indeed racialized, influenced by ethnicity in that ethnic differences reveal particular masculine identities and 'the metrosexual image-conscious man' is very concerned with lifestyle and appearance (Simpson, 2002 cited in Pompper, 2010). Ethnicity, according to Dyer (1995), however, is in the eye of the culture. In other words, ethnic difference depends on the cultural context and on the organisation of perception. Nor are the categories of difference, such as Caucasian, rigid categories pre-existing human consciousness. Relevant examples include the 'dandy' who appeared in 19th-century Europe (Kaye, 2009); the post-slavery reclamation of the male body by African Americans (White and White, 1998); the metrosexualism of middle-class, urban Caucasian men in the United States (Luciano, 2001) and the *kkotminam* ('flower-like' handsome man), the 'metrosexual', 'cross-sexual' and 'übersexual' in South Korean consumer society (Lim, 2008 cited in Pompper, 2010).

The term 'metrosexual' first appeared in an article in the *Independent* newspaper by Mark Simpson, titled 'Here Comes the Mirror Man' (1994), in which he describes the metrosexual as a young man living in an urban environment, a typical capitalist consumer. In Salon.com (2002), Simpson redefines metrosexuals as men living in a metropolis surrounded by the standard capitalist entertainments—shops, clubs and gyms—who create a fashionable image for themselves based on a certain masculine disposition but blended with feminine sensitivity in terms of facial appearance, fashion and lifestyle. The conscious expression of 'feminine sensitivity' by metrosexual men is widely understood as a reflection of changing gender roles in contemporary society.

From the male perspective, *kawaii* can be used as part of a visual image to express personal characteristics. In contrast, *aegyo* might reinforce social positions despite a personal preference for fewer ‘cute’ visuals. Western comic characters since World War II have influenced ‘adorable’ *kawaii* characters (Kinsella, 1995). In addition, K-pop idol boys embody certain features of *kawaii manga* characters, adopting an androgynous appearance known as *kkotminam* (beautiful men) (Epstein and Turnbull, 2014). The neologism *kkotminam* is a combination of the word *kkot* (flower) and *minam* (handsome man).

Similar to the Korean *kkotminam*, *kawaii manga* features can also be found in the Japanese term, *bishonen* (Figure 4.2.1), which refers to the beautiful youth. The term *bishonen* denotes an ambiguous sexuality similar to bisexuality and androgynous feminine male characters in popular K-pop culture. In terms of cultural proximity, the Japanese *bishonen* has influenced the Korean *misonyun* and the *kkotminam*; however, it is necessary to distinguish between them. Even though *misonyun* and *kkotminam* both indicate male beauty and *bishonen* male prettiness, they are different in terms of age. The term *misonyun* is a combination of the word *mi* (beauty) and *sonyun* (boy). The *misonyun* is therefore a young teenage boy, and the concept highlights ‘cuteness’ more than beauty, as seen in the effeminate and childlike characteristics of *dongsaeng*. In contrast, *kkotminam* refers to the period from the late teens to the early 20s; at this age, cosmetics can justifiably be used in Korean society. The differences between Japanese *bishonen* and Korean *misonyun* and *kkotminam* also include aspects of masculinity. The Japanese *bishonen* is understood as maleness that transcends the boundaries of sexuality, while the Korean *misonyun* and *kkotminam* in K-pop present sexuality as indistinct. In relation to masculinity, if Taemin, as a *misonyun*, appeals to older women through his innocent ‘cute’ *aegyo*, Minho (Figure 4.2.2), as a *kkotminam*, is attractive through his cartoonish masculinity and pleasant facial features.



Figure 4.2.1. Japanese *bishonen* Animation⁴⁷



Figure 4.2.2. Minho in SHINee's concert⁴⁸



Figure 4.2.3. Minho runs ahead of the *noona* in SHINee's 'Replay'

Figure 4.2. Japanese *bishonen* character and the position of the younger male and the *noona*

K-pop stars such as SHINee member Minho, Super Junior member Heechul and 2PM's Nichkhun, K-dramas such as *Boys Over Flowers* (2009) and *Flower Boy Ramen Shop* (2011), and the K-film *Flower Boys' Series of Terror Events* (2007) are representative of the concept of the *kkotminam*. Minho, Heechul, Nichkhun and other male protagonists embody this feminised beauty, in their facial features - big eyes and double

⁴⁷ Japanese *bishonen* animation [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaRRIsIglf8> (Accessed 28th December 2015)

⁴⁸ Minho in SHINee's concert [Online] Available from: <http://igocrazyforshinee.tumblr.com/post/127129521756/submitted-by-anonymous-credits-to-the-owners> (Accessed 28th December 2015)

eyelids - and in their slim, athletic body shape, all of which combine to present an androgynous image. These characteristics appeal to contemporary South Korean women who have economic power and independence. This appeal stems from the fact that the *kkotminam* arouses motherly love, and contemporary women can take care of the *kkotminam* with their increased professional power in Korean society. The typical patriarchal is understood to be less attractive to contemporary women, and the *yeon sang yeon ha* couple is a sign of this changing social phenomenon within gender relationships.

With respect to the stereotypical physique of East Asian men, Minhø's big eyes, angular jawline, small face, cherry-coloured lips and 'cute' image do not mesh with typical Asian traits such as slanted eyes and a flatter face. Minhø's physical appearance might be understood as emasculated and asexual, while his more masculine image stems from the powerful-looking dance moves and behaviour that are not typical representations of the East Asian male stereotype. In the video, Minhø demonstrates behaviours of independent, active and self-confident masculinity. He takes the *noona* to a hiding place with his friends. It is worth noting that in this scene, Minhø and the *noona* walk hand in hand, in a posture of equal status, and Minhø then runs ahead of the *noona* (see Figure 4.2.3). Traditionally, the woman would be expected to walk behind the man and according to Confucian ideology, the man is seen to control the woman by walking in front of her. She would typically be expected to show obedience to an older man by following behind him. Here, the position of the younger man leading an older woman is designed to infer aspects of an independent and active masculinity. The complex hierarchy regarding age and social position may fuel the underlying ambivalent desire within 'cute' masculinity, for any younger man would understand Confucian ideology as evidence of the superiority of older men.

In summary, the *kkotminam* role illustrates how neo-eastern Asian stereotypes differ from the standard clichés of Asian male stereotypes. The *kkotminam* has embedded Korean Confucian ideology as a characteristic of Korean masculinity. The Japanese *bishonen* represents androgynous characteristics, while the Korean *kkotminam* represents ambivalent desire as part of 'cute' masculinity. The image of the *kkotminam* reflects the social phenomenon in contemporary South Korean society that men and women are influenced by the cultural proximity of Korea to Japan. *Kkotminam* typifies

a unique aspect of Korean masculinity, and characteristics of the *kkotminam* can be connected to the more effeminate ‘cute’ body, popularised through K-pop.

4.1.3. ‘Macho’ Sexuality or *Kkotjimseung*

K-pop SHINee member, Jonghyun, is presented as a *kkotjimseung*. The term *kkotjimseung* is a combination of the word *kkot* (flower) and *jimseung* (beast). Unlike the *kkotminam*, *kkotjimseung* points to a mature, more overtly sexy maleness. The neologisms emphasise clearly the diverse characteristics of K-pop masculinity, therefore it is worth analysing the meaning of these terms. The suffix *minam* (beautiful man) in *kkotminam* and *jimseung* (beast) in *kkotjimseung* focus on masculine characteristics, and *jimseung* places more emphasis on the degree of masculinity. Conversely, the prefix *kkot* (flower) has the opposite meaning of the suffix and includes meanings implicit in the language of flowers, such as innocent, pure, beautiful, childish, coy and chaste. In ‘cute’ masculinity, the prefixes *mi* (beauty) in *misonyun* and *kkot* (flower) in *kkotminam* and *kkotjimseung* denote characteristics of ‘cuteness’ and also infer features of masculinity.

Regarding masculinity within K-pop, the neologisms *momjjang* and *jimseungdoll* can be compared to *kkotjimseung*. The three terms assume a stereotypical masculine body with a well-built upper torso and a powerful and energetic image, while *momjjang* focuses particularly on the body shape, and *jimseungdoll* refers to K-pop idols who perform acrobatic and technical dance movements with a kind of tough charisma as opposed to a pretty-boy image. In general, K-pop idol male groups present a traditionally handsome masculine image, while *kkotjimseung* includes the characteristics of *momjjang* and *kkotminam*, rather than the one-sided, strong, masculine image of the *jimseungdoll*.

According to Jung’s *Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption* (2011), K-pop singer Rain and K-pop idol boy group 2PM both gesture to the *momjjang* and *jimseungdoll*. Rain, a singer and actor, is represented as an obnoxious but ‘cute’, innocent, non-sexual pre-adolescent in the K-drama *Full House* (2004) (see Figure 4.3.2). However, as a sexual post-adolescent in his concerts, he has also performed sexy *momjjang* dance moves while sporting a naked torso exposing his well-trained,

abdominal muscles to his audience (Jung, 2011) (see Figure 4.3.1). This image is representative of the sexualised male body. In addition, his Asian appearance—his small eyes with no double eyelids—strongly emphasises a transformed Asian male stereotype. Jung (2011) argues that Rain presents a hybridized global masculinity and that this hybridised image is a significant element of his popularity in Asia and beyond. In fact, this hybridized masculinity is a reconstruction, a blending, unique to South Korea, according to Jung (ibid: 76), of traditional Korean masculinities with global masculinities, creating a country-neutral form of masculinity that can be readily adopted by Korea's Asian neighbours such as China.



Figure 4.3.1. Rain's sexy *momjjang* dance movement in 'It's Raining' (2004)



Figure 4.3.2. Rain's non-sexual pre-adolescent in K-drama *Full House* (2004)⁴⁹

Figure 4.3. The contrary images of Rain

Similarly to Rain, K-pop idol male group 2PM present a sexy and tough masculinity through their b-boy dance routines, dynamic acrobatics and athletic ('beast-like') masculinity, which is representative of *jimseungdoll* (Jung, 2011) (see Figure 4.4.1). The manufactured physique and the powerful movements reinterpret stereotypes of the Asian male body within K-pop idol boy groups. As a Thai-American member of 2PM, Nichkhun plays the role of a *kkotjimseung* (Figure 4.4.2). Although considered beautiful, it is his well-sculpted muscles that have influenced the popularity of 2PM, and its export to Thailand, Taiwan and China, with this manufactured image of hybridized masculinity as a central feature of their popularity.

⁴⁹ The most impacted main actress in K-drama/K-film in the 2000s (2014) *instiz.net*. [Online] 28th November, Available from: <http://www.instiz.net/pt/2532692> (Accessed 29th December 2015)



Figure 4.4.1. 2PM's *jimseungdoll* image in 'Without U' (2011)



Figure 4.4.2. 2PM member Nichkhun's *kkotjimseung* image in Korean variety show *We Got Married*. MBC (2010)⁵⁰

Figure 4.4. 2PM's *jimseungdoll* and *kkotjimseung*

The SHINee member Jonghyun represents a more manly, tough or macho form of masculinity, one that might be understood within patriarchal ideology as a *habitus* - Bourdieu's concept discussed in Chapter Three, of a constructed system that dominates the connection with taste in everyday life. In the video of 'Replay', Jonghyun intentionally attempts to expose his upper torso from beneath his red-checked shirt. He seems to want to show his naked masculine body, but he never quite does it. Jonghyun does not present the common features of traditional masculinity, such as sexually aggressive behaviour and rebelliousness, as Rain and 2PM do (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). With the transformation of masculinity, the *kkotjimseung* characteristics of Jonghyun might be embedded in restrictions to sexual expression imposed by society, in the influence of *bishonen* from Japanese popular culture and in the patriarchal ideology of macho masculinity as a *habitus*.

⁵⁰ *We Got Married*. South Korean variety show (2010) MBC.



Figure 4.5. Jonghyun's *kkotjimseung* image in SHINee's 'Replay'

K-pop idol males might be required to wear makeup or control their weight by dieting so that they can show off their body within the framework of *aegyo*: this is a change in the aesthetics of gender roles. The use of cosmetics, dressing up and dieting are usually considered the preserve of women, while boundaries of these gender roles are becoming more and more blurred in contemporary South Korean society. Cosmetic decoration for male K-pop idols has become an indispensable precondition for broadcasting their appearance on music programmes, and this behaviour is also a prerequisite for their musical performances and the marketing strategy for their products. To demonstrate *kkotjimseung*, Jonghyun wears eyeliner, mascara and fancy accessories such as skinny silver-chain necklaces. According to the consumerist cultural codes of the male

cosmetic industry, the characteristics of (*kkot*)*jimseong* must include a beautifully-made-up image, and as such, the neologism is part of the modern South Korean social phenomenon of shifts in gender and sexuality. As manufactured cultural products, SHINee and other K-pop male groups shed light on the process of transformation of masculinity in South Korean society.

4.1.4. ‘Quaint’ Masculinity or *Byeongmat*

With respect to the quaint in ‘cute’ masculinity, SHINee played to the image of cheesy, camp and kitsch in their ninth Japanese single ‘3 2 1’ (2013). Group members are generally referred to as ‘luxury dolls (*myung poom* doll)’ because of their metrosexual fashion styles created by designer Ha Sang Baek (a famous designer in Korea) as well as their perfectly manufactured tasteful performances. In the song ‘3 2 1’, however, they perform in a cheesy, camp and kitsch style. The song is about a game that the group members play, and a variety of toys and stationery become objects in the game. In the video, the singers wear oversized, colourful costumes with long scarves, retro-style shirts, skinny pants, pink sneakers, large necklaces, hair bands and colourful caps. They are depicted in a red studio. Minho shouts out numbers like ‘one, two, three, four’ in an authoritative voice, but it is not that serious—the performance looks like fun—and he smiles slightly (Figure 4.6.1). He wears a green shirt mixed with black and puts a large yellowish-green jacket on over white trousers, which have a blue and pink belt. His style is retro, and his movements embody an awkward ostentatiousness.

Taemin wears an oversized yellow shirt with words in English printed on it, short red trousers, long white socks with red stripes, a red cap and an oversized black scarf with a multi-coloured print (Figure 4.6.2). Onew wears a large orange jacket, oversized black print trousers, a large necklace and a black hair band over his dyed blond hair (Figure 4.6.3). Key wears skinny printed trousers, an oversized black-and-white checked shirt, a grey cap and pink sneakers (Figure 4.6.4). Jonghyun wears white skinny trousers, a large black skirt, a necklace hung with large accessories and a hat printed in various colours (Figure 4.6.5). The setting for the next scene is painted yellow, red and blue with black shading, reminiscent of pop art designs (Figure 4.6). In another scene, there is a photograph of the group in a small, white-framed picture standing on a hazel-

coloured desk in which they are wearing skinny jeans with different styles of white shirts.



Figure 4.6.1. Minho



Figure 4.6.2. Taemin



Figure 4.6.3. Onew



Figure 4.6.4. Key



Figure 4.6.5. Jonghyun



Figure 4.6. 'Quaint' masculinity of each member in SHINee's '3.2.1' (2013)

Taemin wears suspenders, Minho puts on a grey cardigan, Key wears a grey shirt and puts on a white skirt, and the other two wear plain white shirts. Then a paper cut out of each member appears as if in an animation and they walk or run over objects in the game, such as pens, a calculator, a watch and glasses, arranged in a straight line on the desk (see Figure 4.7.1). Toys are aligned in the shape of a long bridge, and one of boys appears to be running over the toys (Figure 4.7.2). Their movements appear exaggerated and ostentatious in conjunction with the repetitive melody, and they talk in a frivolous-sounding manner. At the end of the scene, the whole group get in the red toy car that has been constructed from the objects and drive along the road (Figure 4.7.3). The performers' voices, rhythm, facial expressions, visual appearance and dance movements have an artificial, exaggerated, playful and nostalgic quality. Their behaviour can be interpreted as cheesy from the way they are laughing things off. Their metrosexual fashion styles and *aegyo* can be defined as a queer parody within the aesthetics of kitsch and camp. SHINee's aesthetic style of cheesy, camp and kitsch thus displays quaint masculinity *byeongmat* with *aegyo* (See Figure 4.7).

Having now explored traditional South Korean masculinity in K-pop and contemporary South Korean society, I will examine contemporary masculinity in terms of the historical mapping of K-pop idol boy groups, in order to show how it has adopted Western aesthetic styles and thus come to represent a unique idea of Korean-ness through *aegyo*.



Figure 4.7.1.
Running over objects



Figure 4.7.2.
Running over the toys



Figure 4.7.3.
Driving along the road

Figure 4.7. *Byeongmat* in SHINee's '3.2.1'

4.2. Historical Mapping of K-Pop Idol Boy Groups

The historical mapping of K-pop idol boy groups during their first generation (the mid-1990s to the beginning of the 2000s) provides evidence for stereotypes of Asian maleness that involve contemporary constructions of masculinity; the second (the mid-2000s to the end of the decade) indicates there is a new dimension of male visuals in use that are influenced by both individuality and the manufactured images of the group concept as stated in the marketing strategies of K-pop entertainment companies; finally, the third generation (the early 2010s to the mid-2010s) clearly presents not only a re-formation of Asian masculinity in response to contemporary South Korean manliness but also a wide variety of aesthetic modes reflected in social relations. Through the changing image of K-pop idol boy groups in South Korean popular culture, we can understand how *cute* masculinity embodies a unique kind of Korean-ness, emerging in response to Asian gender stereotyping as well as to the male body, in connection with specific social values rooted in hierarchy, age and patterns of social interaction.

The first K-pop idol boy group, H.O.T., performed dynamic synchronised choreography in their first single ‘Junsa Ae Hoo Yeh’ in 1996, creating a blueprint for the first generation of boy groups. The image that H.O.T. adopted in the music video for this first single communicated a traditional, strong masculinity through its use of aggressive eye contact, powerful and energetic dance movements, muscled bodies that showed off their strength and facial expressions that gave the impression of faces twisted into a scowl. By their second single ‘Candy’ (1996), on the other hand, H.O.T. had undergone a transformation. They presented themselves as softer and happier, behaved mischievously and wore brighter clothing. The first and second singles were both based on hip-hop fashion that included baggy pants and shirts, along with oversized accessories.

H.O.T.’s tremendous popularity came in response to ‘Candy’ in which the group began their performance by emphasising each member’s individuality, all of them presenting an image of the masculine as ‘cute’, gentle, soft and humorous. The song had a catchy melody and tenderly sung vocals, and it was followed by a performance of ‘point dance’, which refers to a simplified style of movement that takes place during a musical hook, thus making it memorable. In addition, the dance routine usually echoed the lyrics.

In 'Candy', H.O.T. performed two point dances: a 'hammer dance', performed by group member Woohyuk Jang that enacted his head being hit by a hammer, and a 'hip dance,' performed by Hee-joon Moon, in which his body moved in a wave-like motion from his head downwards. The hip dance involved sitting on the stage with outstretched legs and moving forward using the hips. In addition, each member wore costumes in their favourite colour, thus creating a personal colour signature, along with 'cute' accessories such as big fur gloves and a fur hat. The oversized fur gloves and hat were designed to communicate a soft, warm and childish fantasy-like animation character, clear inflections of *kiyomi* 'cute'. They adapted hip-hop fashion to conform to an image more widely acceptable in the social and cultural circumstances of South Korea at that time, using the easily identifiable aesthetics of childlike 'cuteness' or *kiyomi*.

In the first generation, instead of mimicking original African-American hip-hop styles, for instance, using strong language, street slang and wearing tattoos, sideways caps, dark colours and dyed hair, the songs of popular idol boy groups were constructed to spread positive messages through the use of bright, colourful visuals, the wearing of 'cute' accessories and the creation of a soft, youthful, masculine appearance. Their music, dance and visual image not only reflected media censorship but also conservative social mores with respect to teenage culture. Furthermore, the boys' 'cute' figures played a role in blurring the racial stereotypes of hip-hop culture, such as the negative behaviour of juveniles and the indiscriminate appropriation of exotic culture. Here cultural appropriation refers to those situations in which particular characteristics of one culture are adopted insensitively by a different cultural group. Crystal Anderson (2013) resists generalisations about cultural appropriation in K-pop idol groups that suggest K-pop borrows black music and culture by wearing bandanas and using hip-hop beats and rap.

However, Mark's 'Aegyo Hip Hop: Cultural Appropriation at its Messiest' (2013) does assert that K-pop is problematic in this respect, that it is clearly guilty of cultural appropriation and that the manner in which it borrows from black music and culture is disrespectful to the source culture. On the other hand, he argues that the use of high-pitched rap, the wearing of character hats and the childish behaviours of K-pop idols are 'a specific brand of *aegyo* on display' (*kiyomi*), related only in general terms to the hip-hop image. Within the K-pop music industry, the appropriation of hip hop provides

evidence that the ‘cute’ aesthetic is a cultural recreation, involving a unique Korean-ness, embodied in the mischievous behaviour and attitude of its proponents, expressed as part of the choreography, in the use of colourful costumes and the adoption of soft facial expressions. These ‘cute’ factors led H.O.T. to become popular with audiences of teenage girls, and teenage boys took to mimicking the point dance.

The first generation’s use of a fluid and changing masculine image is well summed up by H.O.T. in the way their image has fluctuated between a strong, capable masculinity (in ‘Junsa Ae Hoo Yeh’) and a ‘cute’ masculinity (in ‘Candy’). This pattern was repeated in their later singles: resistant, controversial and strong masculinity in the first single of the second album *Wolf & Sheep* (1997) and soft, friendly, ‘cute’ masculinity in the second single of the second album *Happiness* (1997). This is repeated once again in the image of strong masculinity in the songs ‘We Are the Future’ (1998) and ‘Line Up’ (1998), changing to soft, emotional and sympathetic masculinity in ‘Hope’ (1998). As they grew in experience, H.O.T. evolved a more elegant and mature visual style with an appropriately hybridised strong and soft masculinity, aspects of *kkotjimseung* ‘cuteness’, visible, for example, in songs such as ‘I yah!’ (1999) and ‘Outside Castle’ (2000).

Representative K-pop idol boy groups of the first generation were primarily H.O.T., Sechs Kies (debuted in 1997), NRG (1997), Shinhwa (1998) and G.O.D. (1999). The popularity of these groups resulted in part from the performers’ adoption of a ‘cute’ masculine image, similar to H.O.T.’s in ‘Candy’. The soft, smiling, childlike behaviour; colourful costumes with small accessories; the use of point dance; the sweet melodies and the lyrics in Sechs Kies’s ‘Couple’ (1998) and NRG’s ‘I Can Do It’ (1997) made the teenage fans go crazy. K-pop idol boy groups developed a fan base of mostly teenage girls, and their tremendous popularity was the beginning of a transformation within the consumer structure of the South Korean music industry, ushering in the age of entertainers. Young girls, as the main audience, engaged in idol worship, creating fantasies about the groups’ masculine attractiveness and focusing on their individual characteristics, group image and dancing abilities. The visual styles of the first generation generally reflected hip-hop fashion, including the use of props to enhance their ‘cute’ image or macho features. This aesthetic style is totally different from the second generation of K-pop idol boy groups who wore skinny pants, adopted a more

stylish appearance and groomed themselves based on the metrosexual (stereo)type. In relation to my taxonomy of 'cute', this is the category of the *kkotminam*.

The second generation of K-pop idol boy groups adopted a new approach to visual image in which individual characteristics and their songs' central concept were subsumed within the group's manufactured image. Unlike the first generation in which changes in image followed the songs' concepts, the second generation of idol boy groups highlighted the group concept first and foremost: the name of the group, the visual image of each member and the atmosphere of the song followed from this. In the early stages of the second generation, however, idol group TVXQ, who debuted in 2003, and Super Junior (2005), both signed to SM, clearly went through a period of transition in terms of the new marketing approach.

For example, the name TVXQ from Asia, which means 'Rising Gods of the East', was designed to reinforce the group's strategic aim of having global success and popularity. TVXQ adopted a mature masculinity in most of their songs, including powerful dance choreography designed to highlight their sexy masculinity. In the case of Super Junior, the word 'junior' in their name highlighted the youthfulness of the twelve members who started their careers as teenage trainees with SM. Super Junior, in particular, are an excellent example of the One Source Multi Use strategy, the business management concept that I explored in detail in Chapter Two. They appeared in a wide variety of entertainment streams in the media, and their friendly image emerged through performances that included both 'cuteness' and masculinity. Neither group adopted the original hip-hop style of dress, instead preferring a metrosexual image. For instance, Super Junior's 'Sorry, Sorry' (2009), a commercially successful hit song, sees them dressed in dandy style, repeating a performance of simple gestures with a maturity that embodied the change in image from boys to men. In addition, the group members adopted *kiyomi* 'cute' masculinity in the media at a time when there was a '*kiyomi* battle' craze in South Korea, a concept that evolved from a popular television programme in which performers adopted a variety of images including childlike, mature, sexy or quaint.

In contrast, in terms of group image being the primary manufactured product during the second generation, idol group Big Bang, signed to YG Entertainment Company and

debuted in 2006, presented an alternative hip hop style, based on synthesised bubble-gum pop sounds and pop rap genres. This was accompanied by fancy metrosexual fashion - skinny pants, handkerchiefs and bandanas - admittedly adopted in culturally inappropriate ways. Big Bang's image incorporated a kind of luxury hip-hop fashion style and included using a range of uncensored hip-hop visuals comparing the 1990s and the early 2000s. Their image reflected contemporary South Korean social and cultural conditions that differed totally from the time of the first generation. For example, G-Dragon, a member of Big Bang and one of the fashionistas in the celebrity world of K-pop, adopted a metrosexual and kitsch masculine aesthetic, wearing funky, childlike and sporty clothes, mixing and matching his outfits, for example, wearing oversized goggles, using toys or dolls as accessories and wearing large basketball shirts. G-Dragon very much has his own sense of style and is comfortable with it, and his masculinity is definitely kitsch as well as metrosexual. In this, he can definitely be located in the kitsch or *byeongmat aegyo* category. If we look at artists signed to the big entertainment companies in South Korea, we can see that SM and YG have consciously pursued metrosexual masculinity when constructing a group's image.

The K-pop idol group 2PM, signed with JYP,⁵¹ debuted in 2009, and the group is a good example of the so-called macho neologism *jimseung-dol*,⁵² which differs from authoritarian masculinity and traditional macho masculinity. Although the third category in my taxonomy of 'cuteness', *kkotjimseung*, contains part of the same word – *jimseung* – there is a clear distinction between *kkotjimseung* and *jimseung-dol*, in that the latter does not denote any 'cute' aspects at all. 2PM has thus portrayed an entirely macho, sexy masculinity since their debut, particularly in the following songs: '10 Points Out of 10 Points' (2008), 'Again & Again' (2009), 'Heartbeat' (2009), 'Without U' (2010), 'I'll Be Back' (2010), 'Hands Up' (2011) and 'Go Crazy!' (2014). They performed acrobatic dance choreography, adopting a mock scowl to emphasise a tough masculine image and taking off their shirts to show off their brawn and sex appeal. On the other hand, 2PM also, at times, communicate through a more stylish, gentle and

51 JYP Entertainment Company, which was founded by the artist Jin Young Park (JYP), is one of the three big entertainment companies in South Korea. This company's idols have been strongly influenced by JYP, who teaches and directs African-American music to idols in whom JYP is interested. JYP's performance style is composed of a sexy image, voice and dance movements that are demonstrated by the K-pop idol girl group Wonder Girls in their songs 'Tell Me' (2007), 'Nobody' (2008) and 'So Hot' (2008), as well as by the boy group 2PM's songs mentioned above.

52 *Jimseung-dol* means beast-like men, which is a compound noun made from the words *jimseung* (beast) and *dol* (idol) (Jung, 2011).

kindly manner, for example, when conversing with women on television shows. For example, Taecyeon, a member of 2PM, has a macho, *jimseung-dol* image on stage, but in contrast, portrays a more cheerful, friendly image on reality TV programmes, making use of his *aegyo* masculinity. Good examples are his performances on SBS' *Family Outing 2* (2010), MBC's *We Got Married* (global version) (2013) and tvN's *Three Meals a Day* (2014–2015). Taecyeon was shown cooking, socialising and playing games in these programmes and displayed both awkward and confident behaviour traits. He also performed *Kiyomi* Player for Mnet *Wide Open Studio* (2013), communicating a totally different image from the one typically presented on stage. This is an excellent illustration of Goffman's idea of self-presentation on stage and backstage, which I introduced in Chapter One, and is also pertinent to my discussion of Rojek's (2001) ideas on celebrity and the veridical self, which follows the section on Psy and his unique aesthetic style.

Idol group SHINee has gone through all the changes I have mentioned with respect to contemporary 'cute' masculinity in the 2000s. SHINee, as SM's youngest idol group at the end of 2003, illustrates well the adaptability of *aegyo*, in that SM constructed their image to mainly appeal to older females, such as the *noona* fan (the word used by a younger man when addressing an older woman). The *noona* fan is a phenomenon within idol boy groups similar to the uncle fan for K-pop idol girl groups. SHINee typifies the process of change within contemporary masculinity from the metrosexual in their first EP⁵³, *Replay* (2008), and then gradually moving into a more mature sexy masculine image, for example, in 'Lucifer' (2010), 'Sherlock' (2012) and 'Everybody' (2013). In their television performances, SHINee also appear in drag, playing a wide variety of roles, wearing either girls' school uniforms or the traditional Korean costume used for historical dramas—the *hanbok*. Although the members of SHINee have been described as having a feminine appearance with *aegyo*, they have never been identified as homosexual, gay, bisexual or transgender because their visuals are a recognised part of the contemporary South Korean masculine style, which includes cross-dressing.

The third generation of K-pop boy groups is characterised by two aspects: the re-establishment of oriental manliness within contemporary South Korean masculinity and

⁵³ As 'Extended Play', EP is a musical recording that includes more than a single but less than a full album.

diverse aesthetic styles different from those of the original K-pop idols due to the extensive use of social networking. Firstly, boy groups in this generation became representative of a remodelling of gender stereotyping in line with contemporary masculine archetypes. For the K-pop generation that followed SHINee, SM launched EXO in 2011, a boy group created from two subgroups—EXO-K (K for South Korea) and EXO-M (M for Mandarin).

EXO's group concept is summed up in its name: EXO means exoplanet—a term that refers to planets outside of the solar system. EXO-K consisted of six Korean boys and EXO-M comprised four Chinese boys. Three of the four Chinese group members were forced to drop out due to a lawsuit brought by them against SM as a result of cultural differences: SM was accused of restricting their basic human right to freedom, having one-sidedly decided on the group's schedule without asking for their opinions or considering their state of health. EXO-K is still active in South Korea and EXO-M is active in China, and they do occasionally perform together. The groups have had huge commercial success with album sales reaching over 152,255 in their debut year and rapid development of a global fan base (Soompi.com⁵⁴ 2012). It is clear that this exposure and the marketing of the groups in both South Korea and China, particularly in relation to their visual style, have been part of the contemporary remodelling of gender stereotypes among South Korean young men.

In the video of EXO's debut single 'Mama' (2012), the twelve members exemplified metrosexual masculine strength and power in conjunction with sophistication in their dance routine movements, wearing the trademark skinny pants, spangled jackets, heavy eye makeup and a variety of metal rings on their fingers. This is very much the aesthetic style of macho sexuality or the *kkotjimseung*, the third category of 'cuteness' in my taxonomy. The video includes sections of animation, complete with narration in the first scene, to introduce EXO, followed by group dance performances in unison on the city street, in a desert and in a studio that has a backdrop with a geometric pattern. The musical influences are Gregorian chant and dubstep. Their voices are strong and tough, and their facial expressions are emphasised by the heavy makeup. However, there are

54 Soompi (2012) EXO-K Finishes Up "MAMA" Promotions As Top New Group of the Year, *soompi.com*. [Online] 18th July, Available from: <http://www.soompi.com/2012/06/18/exo-k-finishes-up-mama-promotions-as-top-new-group-of-the-year/> (Accessed 08th August 2015)

also personal shots showing the young men when they were boys, with the aim of communicating that the image of the childlike young boy (*kiyomi* ‘cute’) and that of the mature, strong man coexist, at least in the video (self-presentation on stage). Their youthfulness reinforces the ‘cute’ masculinity of their soft and childlike image and is very much in keeping with their appearances on reality television programmes such as MBC’s *Every1 EXO’s Show Time* (2013) and Mnet’s *EXO 902014* (2014), where their everyday *aegyo* aesthetic (self-presentation backstage) is clearly on display.

Second, a wide variety of aesthetic styles are recreated in the K-pop music industry, and the development of social networking has supported the spread of the diverse aesthetics of K-pop to the global stage. Relevant examples here are K-pop solo artist Psy and the emergence of K-pop audition programmes. In the first and second generations, the groups themselves promoted the K-pop music industry through the entertainment companies’ unique manufactured routines. K-pop solo singers, in contrast, who are not teenagers and whose images are not manufactured by companies as part of a group, have been able to popularise a greater range of aesthetic styles such as the fourth category in my taxonomy: cheesy, camp and kitsch masculine ‘cuteness’ or *byeongmat*. Since the end of the 2000s, the launch of K-pop star audition programmes for solo artists has been inspired by American and British programmes such as *American Idol* and *The X-Factor*. Through programmes such as SBS’ *K-pop Star*, Mnet’s *Superstar K* and MBC’s *Star Audition—The Great Birth*, the K-pop music industry has become more diverse and includes a greater variety of music styles and genres than before, when it was dominated by K-pop idol groups. Both new K-pop singers, as well as existing artists, have relaunched themselves through audition programmes in response to this expansion of music genres. With regard to the growth caused by social networking, various aesthetic styles and musical tastes are shared online, and Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ (2012) is a phenomenal example within the K-pop industry—his popularity soared as a result of YouTube.

Through a historical mapping of K-pop idol boy groups, from the first to the third generations, I have shown how idol boys have changed their image according to the aesthetic styles of contemporary masculinity. ‘Cute’ masculinity is part of their unique group concept, and we can assert that *aegyo* masculinity has emerged in response to remodelling both traditional and contemporary forms of South Korean masculinity.

With regard to these diverse expressions of masculinity, I will now explore the aesthetic style portrayed by Psy in his song ‘Gangnam Style’ and intend to demonstrate how he uses exaggeration, humour and an ostentatious manner to parody the typical metrosexual male living in the metropolis, enjoying the benefits of capitalist culture. He is quite different from most K-pop idol boys, whose group image or concept dictates a ‘cute’, beautiful or manly image – *kiyomi*, *kkotminam* and *kkotjimseung* respectively.

4.3. Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ as a Unique Aesthetic Style of K-Pop

The aesthetic style adopted by Psy makes reference to a cheesy, camp and kitsch aesthetic, and they are all aspects of ‘cute’ masculinity: *aegyo* category *byeongmat*. To explore this further, I will describe relevant moments in the music video for his hit song ‘Gangnam Style’.

‘Gangnam Style’ is intended as a parody of the South Korean high class. The song portrays the lifestyle in the Gangnam District of Seoul, where trendy people are shown relaxing in their leisure time, in a similar way, for example, to the residents of Beverly Hills in California. Through his song, Psy attempts to show up this behaviour as exaggerated, ridiculous, impersonal, outlandish and ostentatious. He draws on a wide range of visuals to create a playful, humorous energy, which are trademarks of his style and image since his debut in 2001. His stage name, Psy, is short for ‘Psycho’ (his real name is Park Jae-sang), and he has pursued an unconventional music career involving comedy, humour and the satire of sexuality through the use of his choreography, costumes, visuals and lyrics. He is often branded as having ‘inappropriate content,’ thought to be at risk of exerting a negative influence on children, or exposing young people prematurely to issues considered taboo in South Korean society (Rayner, 2012). One element representative of the song ‘Gangnam Style’ and its contents, is the infamous dance move in which Psy pretends to ride a horse whilst dressed in smart or classy clothes.

On the *Ellen DeGeneres Show* in California, Psy taught his horse dance to Britney Spears, and explained that the point of the song was ‘to dress classy and dance cheesy’.

This saying spread worldwide through the media and became a popular phrase with which to sum up the ‘Gangnam’ style. According to Psy’s interview with 10 Asia, South Korean Entertainment Media, he uses the word *cheesy* to denote the opposite of *classy*⁵⁵ (Choi, 2012)—apparently Psy heard the interviewer describe his clothes as *classy*, and this was the starting point for his use of the word *cheesy*. Psy has said that he typically gets asked two questions: ‘What is “Gangnam” style?’ and ‘Can you teach the horse dance?’



Figure 4.8.1.
A young boy dance



Figure 4.8.2.
Horse riding scene



Figure 4.8.3.
Thrown by snow



Figure 4.8.4.
Tennis court scene



Figure 4.8.5.
Jogging in Han River



Figure 4.8.6.
The tour bus scene

Figure 4.8. Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’

⁵⁵ 10 Asia (2012) Psy’s interview, *tenasia.hankyung.com*. [Online] 26th September, Available from: <http://tenasia.hankyung.com/archives/15491> (Accessed 17th August 2015)

In the introduction to the music video, Psy is lying on a lounge under a beach umbrella. He wears a white shirt, a long, orange scarf, pink knee-length trousers and black sunglasses (See Figure 4.8.1). He appears to be at the beach enjoying the sunshine but the actual location is a playground where children are playing on the swings behind him. A young boy looks at Psy, and he too is wearing a white undershirt with red trousers and black sunglasses. This is 'little Psy'. Then the scene changes to a stable with horses in stalls on both sides, and Psy walks down the centre dressed in a classic black suit with a white shirt and black sunglasses. The scene returns to the playground where we see Psy and little Psy dancing comically. The scene shifts back to the stable where Psy performs the horse dance. In this now legendary dance move, the hands are crossed at the wrist and move up and down while the feet jump and mimic a horse's footsteps (Figure 4.8.2). The dance move is exaggerated and made playful despite the intentional wearing of classy clothes. We then see Psy passing through a sudden snowstorm, and his sunglasses, hair, open mouth and blue suit with bow tie are immediately covered in snow (Figure 4.8.3).

Next, Psy is dancing on a tennis court, standing close to a female dancer whom he is holding at the waist (Figure 4.8.4). The next scene shows two women jogging and stepping backwards in Han River Park both wearing a visor hat (Figure 4.8.5); this image is meant to reflect the relaxed, everyday life of a middle-aged woman in South Korea. Psy exaggerates the movements of the jogging figures through his horse dance, and runs towards the women who are stepping backwards. This is a satirical comment on the behaviour of middle-aged women in Han River Park, who are known for their use of exaggerated movements when they exercise as well as for their visor hats worn to protect their faces from the sun. Psy is then shown dancing in a tour bus full of middle-aged, or older men and women, who are going travelling with their friends (Figure 4.8.6). They too are dancing and singing in the bus. Colourful lighting, a disco ball and a microphone like those typically found in clubs are set up on the tour bus.



Figure 4.8.7.
The tour bus scene



Figure 4.8.8.
Merry-go-round scene



Figure 4.8.9.
Horse riding scene

This scene is meant as a parody of South Korean leisure time for older men and women. Psy is dressed up playboy-style and wears a white shirt, light brown trousers and sunglasses (Figure 4.8.7). For figure 4.8.8., he is then shown performing his horse dance in front of a merry-go-round, and this is intended as a nostalgic throwback to childhood, appealing to the shared experience of going on amusement park rides familiar to most of us. Then Psy and three women dance between four people riding real horses (Figure 4.8.9). Using real horses and mimicking the natural movement of riding a horse provide humour and they also provide contrast with the previous image of artificial horses on the merry-go-round.



Figure 4.8.10.
A boat scene



Figure 4.8.11.
Sexual hip move



Figure 4.8.12.
Jae Suk Yoo and Psy



Figure 4.8.13.
Elevator scene



Figure 4.8.14.
HyunA in tube scene

Psy is then seen, perhaps surprisingly, taking a ride on a small boat on the Han River, doing his horse dance move and wearing a life jacket (Figure 4.8.10). He is not depicted on a luxury boat or a yacht, and other boats resembling giant inflatable ducks float around his. In an underground parking lot, we then see the popular South Korean comedian Jae Suk Yoo step out of a red sports car, wearing a smart, canary-yellow suit with yellow running shoes that make him seem more than a little eccentric. Psy, wearing the blue jacket with bow tie from earlier, is accompanied by four female dancers dressed in backless white tops and silver hot pants, gyrating their hips in an overtly sexual movement (Figure 4.8.11). The dancers run off, and Jae Suk Yoo and Psy then dance together in a wild and hilarious manner (Figure 4.8.12). In this scene, the use of primary colours (yellow, red and blue) as well as Jae Suk Yoo's crazy-but-cool behaviour highlights a playful, childlike attitude that seems totally at odds with his social status as a comedian and entertainment ambassador for South Korea.

Next comes the elevator scene, which succinctly communicates Psy's trademark hybrid style - a combination of playfulness and lasciviousness. Another well-known Korean entertainer stands astride Psy who is lying on his stomach looking at the camera. Hong Chul Noh thrusts his pelvis forward in his trademark lewd dance (Figure 4.8.13). This move could easily be interpreted as vulgar and, from a socially conservative viewpoint, illustrative of divergent sexuality. However, because of its playfulness and exaggeration, other interpretations are possible. The fact that Hong Chul Noh is known for his 'normal' character in the media in South Korea also emphasises this

juxtaposition. For figure 4.8.14, HyunA, a member of 4Minutes, a sexy icon among K-pop idol girls, then pole dances in a über sexy or sexualised manner while in the tube. She performs with the same kind of lascivious movements as in the earlier elevator scene and with the same kind of playfulness as in the horse dance (See Figure 4.8.15). Following this, Psy and HyunA perform simple hand gestures to illustrate the lyrics, along with *aegyo* gestures performed by HyunA, such as touching the tips of the index fingers together, placing both hands in front of the chest/heart and then separating them repeatedly. This is an instantly recognisable gesture from ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ and immediately locates the song and Psy's performance style for the audience within the ‘cute’ aesthetic.

In the following scene, a large group of dancers, both male and female, perform the horse dance together in a club, wearing a wide variety of uniforms such as those of a police officer, a chef, a fire fighter, an air hostess, a nurse and a nun (Figure 4.8.16). The group is lively, performing with exaggeration and playfulness, but also deliberately evoking a common sexual fantasy associated with wearing a uniform. The final scene shows an animation of the first part of the earlier stable scene in which Psy performs the horse dance, and Psy is depicted with a big, round face, short black hair, black sunglasses and a black suit, and the horses are depicted with wily eyes, baring their teeth (Figure 4.8.17).



Figure 4.8.15.
Mimicking riding a horse



Figure 4.8.16.
Wearing various uniforms
in a club



Figure 4.8.17.
Cartoonish caricature of
Psy

Overall, the video consists of a series of short cuts, illustrating key themes that make up Psy's image—exaggeration, playfulness, lasciviousness and nostalgia. These characteristics are linked to the 'cute' aesthetic style of cheesy, camp and kitsch. Before describing the fourth type of *aegyo* (quaint) adopted by K-pop males as part of their aesthetic style, I will define the aesthetics in Psy's video. Although Psy himself uses the word cheesy in relation to 'Gangnam Style,' all three terms can be associated with the video.

4.4. Aesthetic Styles of Cheesy, Camp and Kitsch

As I have noted, Psy has been quoted as saying 'dress classy, dance cheesy'. Here, he has simply chosen the norm of cheesy as a way of expressing the opposite of classy. However, we need to distinguish the proper term 'cheesy' from 'classy' because cheesy is in fact related to the terms camp and kitsch, in the sense of sharing what we might describe as a family resemblance in relation to *aegyo*. According to Newitz (2000), the term cheesy is related to a form of racism that occurs through parody, a kind of nostalgia for serious issues in history and culture such as imperialism, as well as to low-budget productions and 'the satire of narratives' associated with cheapness. Cheesiness is used to express 'blackface' jokes that raise various sensitive issues; on the other hand, blending satire with happiness, anger with pleasure, and seeing humour as cheap, can lead to humour and laughter without the experience of guilt. For Newitz (*ibid*), cheesy humour tends towards a kind of taste in which U.S. audiences laugh off the matter. Cheesy as an attitude has influenced culture and multi-cultures from Asia, the Southern and Central American islands, Canada and Australia, and is clearly related to post-imperial and post-colonial cultures, in particular capitalist culture. Modes of production addressing imperial capitalism attempt to laugh off their imperial histories (Newitz, 2000). Representative examples of cheesy images and style, consumed as cultural hybrids in the United States, are the movie *Godzilla* and the martial art Kung Fu and its major proponent Jackie Chan (*ibid*). With regard to low-budget production and cheapness within economic and cultural poverty, the phrase 'cheesy B-movie' has been used in such epithets as 'cheesy movie-of-the-week', 'cheesy Hindi movies', 'cheesy space movies' and 'cheesy Troma hard-sell' (Newitz, 2000: 61).

In Psy's 'Gangnam Style', cheesiness is evident in the song lyrics, which are based on Asian patriarchal ideas and racial issues, along with imperial capitalism in the Gangnam District of South Korea. Psy's horse dance, his exaggerated style and actions, meant as an impersonation of the spirit of extravagance and ostentatiousness, together with his extensive use of superlatives, can be easily laughed off by global audiences. The video for 'Gangnam Style' can thus be considered cheesy, notwithstanding the economics of video production: Psy's agency (YG) and the video could never be construed as having low-budget production values. In other words, the dance movements look cheesy and the video scenes are comical and humorous, yet it is a high-quality video expertly produced by YG. Psy's visual appearance and voice cannot be considered aesthetically 'cute', but the cheesy dance features and his caricatures in the music video can be recognised as a type of 'cute' within a flexible taxonomy of 'cuteness'.

In relation to the aesthetics of 'cuteness', *aegyo* can thus include racial parody, as part of the cheesy or *byeongmat* category, and as such, can further elucidate this unique idea of Korean-ness. As discussed earlier in this thesis, *aegyo* is performed every day in South Korea, irrespective of age and gender, and this naturally embedded *aegyo* in the body language of some South Korean men can be labelled cheesy according to the Western perspective. In many respects, *aegyo* can be categorised as androgynous behaviour rather than being restricted to babies, children or young women because it is also performed between friends as well as in romantic relationships in South Korea. To explore *aegyo* in the context of gender performativity, the term 'camp' might prove useful in relation to our discussion of aesthetic style.

Some characteristics of camp *aegyo* are similar to cheesy *aegyo* in its use of parody and exaggerated forms and in the way it harks back to the past, while other characteristics of camp differ: there is a certain sensibility that is difficult to describe and a way in which it is itself a form of aestheticism (Sontag, 1966). Camp taste includes elements of visual decoration, clothes and aesthetic style associated with gay men, drag culture and female impersonators. In 'Notes on Camp' (1966), Susan Sontag redefines camp as an aesthetic phenomenon predominately in Euro-America that embodies artifice, theatricality, naïve middle-class pretentiousness and vulgarity. Sontag redefines camp from a post-modern perspective in relation to the changing relationships of high art and popular culture on

the basis of the sensibilities of the time and by describing camp taste as a cult for the androgynous, highlighting pop art as well as camp pop.

As a high-profile example of camp within pop art, the work of American artist Andy Warhol displays many aspects of camp taste with its artificiality, fine images and recycling of leftovers in cartoons, advertisements and paintings, such as his painting of Marilyn Monroe. According to Kang (2005), camp pop art is a kind of fake art that ranges from the camouflaged serious to the frivolous. The significant element in camp is its seriousness and how that is turned into artificiality, humour and stylishness. Camp is present in not only pop art but also pop music genres such as glam rock. Here it pertains to the exaggerated visual style of glam performers who wear heavy makeup, have outlandish hairstyles and wear labyrinthine costumes, boots and flashy accessories.

Glam rock star David Bowie had a superb camp image in the 1970s and '80s, and his visual appearance was deliberately androgynous, ambiguous even, in terms of his gender. According to Auslander (2006: 48), it is arguably the case that glam rock's camp style, the practice of cross-dressing and the performance of drag are more accepted in the United Kingdom than in the United States. Auslander explains that historically, cross-dressing has been an accepted part of British popular entertainment (Bayles, 1996 cited in Auslander, 2006). In a similar vein, cheesy is readily accepted in the United States and the Pacific Rim according to Newitz's argument, and camp is predominately a Euro-American phenomenon according to Sontag. Going back to Psy's use of the word cheesy, his main audience is in the United States, and when he was looking for a term to help explain the concept of his video, his American label Scooter Braun's Schoolboy Records might have suggested the term cheesy based on the American cultural perspective. On the other hand, his video has also been considered camp, and it definitely draws a broad audience of viewers that live in, and are embedded in the culture of, the United Kingdom and Europe.

David Bowie's camp style suggests a new aspect to gender roles (Reynolds and Press, 1995). According to Moe Meyer's *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (1994), camp is a parody of queer, and it is both political and critical. Glam rockers present queer identities in their performances, and in so doing, suggest a new sexual identity in the masculine version to young people struggling with their gender, becoming role models

for them within fields of popular music and the mass media (Auslander, 2006).

Auslander argues that the popularity of glam rock has had the effect of extending social norms of forms of masculinity in a safe cultural space. He associates this with the idea that a performance practice is a liminal phenomenon that can be tested through alternative realities (ibid, 2006), an idea that I believe is connected to Victor Turner's theorisation of liminality. In a later section, I will look at age and experience within K-pop idol culture in performances of *aegyo* in relation to Turner's liminality.

Glam rock created space for androgyny and queer identity. It showed the interaction between performers and the audience. In other words, celebrities had authenticity in sharing a specific identity in a public space, and the audience, who might have shared in a particular identity characteristic, could feel encouraged to express this particular sexual identity. However, Auslander (2006: 233) observes that an audience constructs the performer's identity in fantasies, in terms of 'what it wants and needs that performer to be'. This idea relates to Goffman's self-presentation on stage and backstage. The audience might want a consistent front stage persona, regardless of the performers' personality offstage. To fulfil their audience's expectations and tastes, performers construct their self-presentation on stage based on fantasies around that identity (Auslander, 2006). In the case of K-pop idol boys and camp, and indeed all other types of *aegyo* masculinity, identities are constructed by the entertainment companies, so that they too reflect the ideas of specific identities according to the audiences' tastes. Regardless of whether celebrities construct their identities or not, and regardless of whether the public image and real persona are the same or different, K-pop idol boys have adopted camp *aegyo* masculinity, and it has become a significant element in K-pop.

With respect to self-presentation on stage and backstage, we can establish that K-pop idols distinguish between their identity as a real person, with a real birth name, and as a stage persona with a stage name. However, we need to carefully consider whether celebrities' self-presentation backstage is in fact their 'real' persona. According to Chris Rojek's *Celebrity* (2001), a celebrity typically attempts to separate their public face from their veridical self; however, the sense of veridical self often becomes extinguished as a result of the struggle to accomplish celebrity status. For example, Rojek argues that in a restaurant, a celebrity inhabiting their veridical self may end up

presenting their public face, for example, because of the presence of photographers. The process can bring on the accumulative extinction of the veridical self as it slowly becomes 'inauthentic' (Rojek, 2001: 12). K-pop idol boys' self-presentations on stage and backstage tend to be presented as separate on reality television programmes, and everyday photographs of them are considered to represent their veridical selves. In contrast, like Rojek's argument, the self-presentation of K-pop idols that they consider to be their veridical selves might, in fact, be 'a sense of personal extinction in the face of others' due to the struggle between the real person with a birth name and that which takes a stage name in the course of pursuing celebrity status (ibid: 12).

In relation to the aesthetics of camp, Esther Newton, an American cultural anthropologist, refutes Sontag's argument that camp is a cult. She posits that camp is comic, based on the wit of homosexual people who often have the personal characteristics of a sense of humour, disharmony and theatricality (Kang, 2005). Similar to Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity, Newton argues that all gender behaviour can be interpreted as performance through the wearing of social dress. I agree that the gender image in camp can be constructed by its social effects. Like Auslander's description of glam rock and glam rocker David Bowie's real and stage personae, the camp personae of celebrities are constructed on stage, for example, in drag queen and female performances. On the other hand, Sontag (1966) distinguishes between naïve camp and deliberate camp, where kitsch is also included as a form particular to the work. She posits that naïve camp cannot recognise poor taste and is categorised as kitsch; in contrast, deliberate camp is a subversive style of kitsch used consciously.

I am now going to explore kitsch as a term used interchangeably with camp. Looking at the visual styles of K-pop idol boy groups that fall into contemporary masculine types such as metrosexual and cross-dressing will extend this enquiry.

Kitsch can be defined as a vulgar, frivolous and lowbrow style, and it is a concept standardly applied to artwork and popular music. Kitsch visuals appeared in subcultural styles in the 1950s and 1960s, and as an aesthetic style, it has influenced contemporary cultural trends through its exaggerated clothes, excessive accessories, mismatched colours and patterns and the use of childish motifs as a means of communicating fun, playfulness and nostalgia. The origin of kitsch stems from the art markets of Munich in

the 1860s and '70s (BBC, 2014). Kitsch is derived from the word *kitschen* (to smear) in German dialect, the German verb *verkitschen* (to cheapen), as well as from a mispronunciation of the English word 'sketch' and an inversion of the French *chic* (fashionable) (ibid, 2014). For Song and Cho (2013), the historical background of kitsch shows how the vulgar style has been redefined in contemporary society, so much so that kitsch has spread to the masses as an imitation of an elite style that emerged from the Industrial Revolution after the 19th century. With the development of the machine of civilisation alongside mass communication in the 20th century, kitsch has spread rapidly in the domains of art and culture, and it influenced the dissolution of boundaries between high and popular culture in the 1950s and '60s.

Kitsch became part of mainstream culture in the post-modernism of the 1980s, and finally emerged as a pathway for the commodification of creativity. Kitsch has led to the use of fakes as a new sort of cliché—fake art, fake emotion and fake significance (BBC, 2014). For us to escape the boredom and clichés of everyday life, kitsch supports a newness of styling and fresh inspiration to contemporary consumers (Song and Cho, 2013). In K-pop, kitsch has appeared in the visual image of idols as part of establishing personality as well as simply representing enjoyment and fun. As I mentioned in the previous section, G-Dragon and Psy are both representative kitsch icons, and their visual style embodies a sense of the exaggerated, inappropriate and the excessive, deliberately mixing 'n' matching of clothes, accessories, patterns, colours and decorations, and giving the celebrities fashionable, stylish, humorous and childlike individuality.

With regard to deliberate camp, the forms of kitsch involved include queer parody, frivolous, aestheticised, feminine behaviours and the figures of the androgyne and drag queen. As a fashion trend and as an aspect of individuality, kitsch is readily consumed by K-pop celebrities, as well as the masses, having been reinterpreted as a high-quality brand in contemporary South Korean society. Kitsch style also infers a recreation of *aegyo* masculinity, indicating the possibility of a new form of gender and sexuality. Overall, the aesthetic styles of cheesy, camp and kitsch can be represented as part of quaint *aegyo*, redefining and extending the intricacies of 'cuteness'.

4.5. Gender Stereotyping within the ‘Cute’ Masculinity of South Korean Society

As I mentioned in the previous Chapter Three, ‘cuteness’ is depicted through small, round, childlike and chubby characteristics in women, and by behaviours in which one *acts* ‘cute’, for instance, through *aegyo*. In general, the concept of ‘cuteness’ can be applied to feminine behaviours and understood as a contemporary social phenomenon. ‘Cute’, however, is also a term applied to male sexuality and can be considered one of the central Asian male stereotypes from a Western perspective. ‘Cute’ masculinity is a significant aspect of Korean popular culture and includes typical East Asian male characteristics in terms of age and gender issues.

The term ‘culture’ refers to the ‘particular way of life’ of any society, including beliefs, knowledge, roles, values and skills (Williams, 1983: 90). Such aspects of culture, however, can be manufactured in industrial societies through the process of commercial production in which popular culture becomes a product to be commodified (ibid, 1983 and Storey, 2009). Through the process of socialisation and the systematic ideas put forward by social institutions in relation to particular groups of people, stereotypes and ideology can form into certain characteristic identities in popular culture. Lippmann (1956) argues that stereotypes can help us understand the ideas of aesthetic and social constructs that exist in media fictions. Although he does not distinguish forms of stereotype, he highlights how we think of ‘our’ and ‘we’ as an important issue (Lippmann, 1956). According to him, ‘stereotype is what everyone—you, me and us—thinks members of such-and-such social group are like’ and can be expressed by a representation of identifiable cultural forms in popular cultural products (Lippmann, 1956 cited in Dyer, 1999). Through media representations, every ethnic group can be represented by their own stereotypes, and their specific characteristics might be represented as a collective identity. Stereotypes can result from particular ideologies, and the existence of national and ethnic identities might be understood as ideology (Malešević, 2006).

With respect to the cultural norms surrounding Korean marriage, for instance, the standard Korean issues regarding age and gender relationships reflect the particular ideology that an ideal marriage occurs between an older man and a younger woman. This is reflected in the old Korean saying that a four-year gap between an older man and

a younger woman makes for the ideal family. Marriage customs might be a traditional way of reducing problems in the family in relation to age and Confucian status-based relationships. Contemporary relationships in Korea, however, have gradually changed, along with marriage norms. According to data released by the Korea Statistics Promotion Institute, the marriage pattern has been changing with respect to age (2009: 46). The marriage rate of couples consisting of an older man and a younger woman has decreased from about 82.2% in 1990 to about 70.4% in 2008. In comparison, the marriage rate for relationships between a younger man and an older woman has gradually increased from about 8.8% in 1990 to about 13.7% in 2008 (ibid: 46). With the increased social and financial activities of Korean women, women's position in relation to men has improved, making some progress towards equality, and this has most likely facilitated the emergence of the *yeon sang yeon ha* couple in contemporary Korean society.

With regard to age, Korean honorifics in language and speech can also be thought of as reflecting a type of discrimination in various relationships in terms of age, social position and gender. Gender roles can be thought of as the next most salient aspect after age in Korean hierarchical structures. Korean gender roles are definitely embedded in Confucian ideology and patriarchy, and we see traditional gender stereotypes at work in personality traits, physical appearance, domestic behaviour and occupations. For example, Confucian ideas are so firmly rooted in Korean thinking that in intimate relationships of contemporary Korean youth, the norm is for the man to take care of the woman, protecting and supporting her at all circumstances, much like the main character in the novel, *Daddy-Long-Legs* written by American writer Jean Webster in 1912. Regardless of age, the foremost issues that emerge in Korean gender roles are representation of younger men and the age gap, which are reflected in the adoption of 'cute' masculinity by younger men.

In relation to gender stereotyping, traditional Asian male stereotypes have been constructed by the Western discourse of power and can be summed up by the concept of orientalism. According to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the societal character and imagery of the Orient have been reproduced by Western hegemony and positional superiority. Said explores the characterisation and representation of Middle Eastern Asians by Western thinkers. The features of the 'oriental' are described as irrational,

depraved and childlike, weak and dark, while the Westerner's traits appear as rational, virtuous, mature, strong and bright. Concerning gender issues, the image of the oriental male is characterised as fanatical, brutal, cunning and violent. Orientalism is based on Western assumptions, and these ideas have tended to see an Asian's identity as singular and idiosyncratic.

However, as Said mentions, these cultural representations do not cover all oriental characteristics, and Occidentalism is clearly an inappropriate basis from which to address the perspective of misleading Asian stereotypes. These stereotypes are part of an ideology that has been perpetuated by literature and mass communication over time. The changing circumstances of socio-economic politics have transformed the nature of Orientalism in the 21st century, and distorted images have been challenged through the remodelling of traditional forms of masculinity in South Korea. Both Western and non-Western thought have been transformed and become more diverse as a result of media communication and global travel. K-pop idols embody a wide variety of masculine types in contemporary South Korean society in which the reconstruction of aesthetics within gender stereotyping has become embedded. 'Cute' masculinity in *aegyo* has been rebuilt through a hybrid of the powerful, macho and sexual, combined with the soft, childlike and innocent within the patriarchy, hierarchy and social structures of South Korean society. *Aegyo* in K-pop has emerged as a set of recognisable routines physically, visually and behaviourally—related to the socio-historical and cultural aspects of South Korea. To demonstrate recognition of the 'adorable' or 'cute' male in contemporary South Korean society, I will now describe K-pop singer-songwriter Juniel's song 'Pretty Boy (*Gwiyeoun Namja*)' (2012).

The song's concept sets forth the characteristics of the ideal Korean male from the perspective of a woman. The lyrics describe the 'cuteness' of Korean men physically, visually and behaviourally. First, physically, 'Pretty Boy' talks about a 'cute' Korean man as being of 'short height with a round face' with 'eyes that disappear when he smiles, but a guy who has a childlike smile'. The physical characteristics of this male 'cuteness' have similarities with the feminine 'cute' image and with the Asian male stereotypes advanced by Western perspectives, such as almond-shaped or slanted eyes.

Second, visually, the lyrics also provide descriptions of a ‘cute’ male appearance as follows: ‘a guy who looks good in jeans and a hoodie, a guy who looks good with curly hair’, ‘a guy who still catches my eye, even if he is as chubby as the teddy bear he sleeps with;’ they also state ‘rather than a handsome guy like a movie star, I like cute guys’. The song clarifies that although this image is considered attractive and a key part of the contemporary ideal type according to the perspective of the Korean female, this appearance may be thought of as evoking a negative stereotype of emasculation or asexuality. On reflection, when masculinity is defined according to traditional patriarchal Western descriptions as strong, self-confident, aggressive and independent, it is not surprising that the physical appearance of a ‘cute’ Korean male is described pejoratively as soft, comfortable, vulnerable, submissive and dependent. Seen from a more positive, culturally distinct perspective, a ‘cute’ Korean boy can also be described as androgynous or as having feminine traits that transcend traditional boundaries of gender and sexuality.

Third, behaviourally, Juniel’s ‘Pretty Boy’ lyrics reflect ‘a cute guy who will whisper innocent words to me’, ‘a cute guy who is like a little brother (*dongsaeng*), lovable and full of charm’ and ‘even when you pretend to be more grown-up than me, why are you so cute? Sometimes, you take my hand like a man and to me, that is so lovable’. ‘Cute’ masculinity can be classified into three main types according to these lyrics. First, the word ‘little brother (*dongsaeng*)’ refers to a ‘cute’ boy who is considered a member of the family regardless of issues of sexual attraction. With regard to Korean society’s hierarchical structure and concepts of age, the word *dongsaeng* naturally implies a ‘cute’ image due to the person being younger than the speaker. Second, the sentence, ‘you take my hand like a man’ evokes a commonly cited characteristic of patriarchal masculine stereotypes. Although the lyrics do not include any other explanation, it can be understood as a reference to gender roles and traditional masculine behaviour in Korea. Ideal images of men are typically expressed by men taking care of women, behaving in ways that are considered as independent, aggressive, active and self-confident. The act of ‘taking her hand’ implies that he is taking the lead, understood by the woman as assertive behaviour. Finally, the phrase, ‘whisper innocent words to me’ communicates feminised masculinity. Emotionally, these are sensitive and soft actions, and such phrases can be imagined by women as referring to romance or the fantasy of soft masculinity.

Through K-pop singer-songwriter Juniel's 'Pretty Boy', Korean 'cute' masculinity has been briefly introduced in relation to the emerging taxonomy of male 'cuteness', *aegyo*, in terms of physical, visual and behavioural imagery. 'Cute' masculinity has arisen in Korea because of the close connection between age and gender relationships. It therefore represents the social phenomenon of changing gender positions in modern Korea, and the idea of 'liking an older woman' is symbolic of these shifts in contemporary Korean society.

4.6. The Concept of Age and Gender Relationships in Korea

K-pop singer Seung Gi Lee's song, 'Because You're My Girl' (2004) was influenced by the idea of the *yeon sang yeon ha* couple. The music video for the song presents typical characteristics of a *yeon ha nam* (the younger man) image. The lyrics and music to 'Because You're My Girl' are by K-pop singer Psy. The song is about a younger man (*dongsaeng*) loving an older woman (*noona*), in this relationship known as the *yeon sang yeon ha* couple. The lyrics describe the development of a love relationship in which the older woman considers the young man a younger brother rather than a sexual man.

Only as a younger sibling, just that much

나를 동생으로만, 그냥 그정도로만

You think I'm adorable, but *noona* you are a woman to me.

귀엽다고 하지만, 누난 내게 여자야.

You say 'What do you know?' 'You'll understand when you're older'

니가 뭘 알겠냐고 크면 알게 된다고

You say that I'm acting rashly, but *noona*, you are a woman to me.

까분다고 하지만, 누난 내게 여자야.

With regard to the concept of age and gender relationships in Korea, older men are considered mature adults capable of taking care of a woman, and younger women assume they can rely on men, taking for granted that men support women. In contrast, younger men are thought of as immature boys by older women and not sexually

attractive. In these lyrics, the young man would like to be recognised by the female as an attractive masculine man with the capacity to take responsibility for caring for the woman. On the other hand, the older woman views the younger man as a younger sibling (*dongsaeng*), rather than as an attractive man. In order to demonstrate his mature masculinity, the lyrics express how the younger man embraces the older woman tightly and calls her ‘you’, referring to her by using the term for woman rather than using the Korean honorific word *noona*, which means a man’s elder sister. The lyrics are as follows:

So that you can feel me as a man, I’ll hold you tightly.

남자로 느끼도록, 꼭 안아줄게.

I’ll call you by your name, no matter what you say, I don’t care.

너라고 부를게, 뭐라고 하든, 상관 없어요.

Because *noona* is my woman, because you are my woman.

누난 내 여자니까, 너는 내 여자니까.

Seung Gi Lee was 17 years old when he released his debut song, ‘Because You’re My Girl’. His image was originally that of a humble but smart schoolboy who embodied the capacity for pure love from an adolescent boy. Because of his young age and honest-boy image, the song was influential in creating the phenomenon of ‘liking an older woman’. In the video, Seung Gi Lee is a high school boy and the heroine is an adult. Their relationship is initially platonic, that of a younger brother (*dongsaeng*) and his older sister (*noona*). Seung Gi Lee gradually falls in love with her, while she considers him a pre-adult *dongsaeng* and takes care of him, for example, by participating in the school consultation when he gets in trouble with his classmates. Then follows an image of him giving her a ride to work on his bicycle, wearing a tight white tank top showing off his arm muscles, a scene intended to prove his mature masculinity. He takes risks and protects her from violent gangs. His most impressive behaviour comes in the final scene when he tries to kiss her. She initially resists his passion, but later relents. With the ringing of the bell, she closes her eyes, and we understand that the older woman is starting to have sexual feelings for the younger man—no longer relating to him as a *dongsaeng*. The use of a man’s power to push a woman into a kiss is intended to show aggressive and strong masculinity, the traditional kind of Confucian masculinity. This is

likely to appeal to, and even arouse, her and an audience of older women, with its juxtaposition of ambiguous characteristics in the ‘cute’ *dongsaeng* and the masculinity of a more sexually mature man. Because of the stereotypes affecting age and traditional gender roles, such ambivalent behaviour can appear ‘cute’ in Korean society.

Since the emergence of this phenomenon of ‘liking an older woman’ promoted by this song, Korean television drama (K-drama) and films have also increasingly depicted characteristics of ‘cute’ masculinity in the phenomenon of love relationships between a younger man and an older woman. K-dramas with these kinds of relationships include *My Lovely Sam Soon* (2005), *My Sweet Seoul* (2008), *Flower Boy Ramen Shop* (2011) and *Witch’s Romance* (2014) as well as K-films *Old Miss Diary* (2006), *Crazy Waiting* (2008) and *You’re My Pet* (2011). Since relationships between a younger man and an older woman have become a more general phenomenon in South Korean society, the age gap between a *yeon sang yeon ha* couple is no longer an important issue. Changes in these perceptions can be illustrated by the K-drama *My Lovely Sam Soon*, broadcast in 2005, and *A Witch’s Love*, aired in 2014.

In *My Lovely Sam Soon*, there is a three-year gap between the heroine who is 30 years old and the male protagonist. At the time of broadcast in 2005, the idea of romance for single women over 30 was thought of as shocking, as women were considered beyond relationships and marriage at that age in South Korea. However, the idea of a relationship between a woman in her 30s and a man in his 20s was very appealing to women over 30. The younger male protagonist was depicted as a picky and arrogant man, known in online neologisms as a *kkadonam*. He was, however, also thought of as attractive for his purity of heart and self-sacrificing devotion. His behaviour could easily be considered innocent and vulnerable by an older woman. To hide his own weaknesses, the younger protagonist in this drama shows an over-reactive masculinity and displays attitudes and behaviour that could be identified by an older woman as a type of ‘cute’ masculinity.

In the K-drama, *Witch’s Romance* (2014), the heroine is 39 years old, and the younger protagonist is 25. Their age gap is about 14 years and this could not have been imagined in the mid-2000s in South Korea. This drama portrays a heroine whose career is the most important thing in her life, while the younger protagonist does not have a

professional job. The heroine initially sees him as something of a wretch, but his pure heart indicates that he is, in fact, an ‘adorable man’. The heroine of the K-drama, *My Lovely Sam Soon* (2005), depicts a lower middle-class worker, while the heroine of *Witch’s Romance* (2014) is a professional woman in a position of authority. Through these two K-dramas, we recognise that relationships between a younger man and an older woman and the increasing gap between their ages have further shifted and blurred the boundaries and the position of women in contemporary South Korean society. In K-pop, these phenomena have been explored through patriarchal ideology and hierarchical social structures. K-pop idol boy group SHINee is one representative of this exploration of *yeon ha nam* and the attraction of the *noona*; the music video for their debut song ‘Replay’ (2008) provides evidence for a variety of ‘cute’ masculine forms and the cultural shifts that we have been discussing above.

4.7. Aegyo Masculinity as a ‘Liminal Phenomenon’

K-pop idol boy group SHINee has a reputation for displaying highly synchronised and powerful dancing. They are fashion icons for the ‘SHINee Trend’ and representative of unconventional (or hybrid) Korean masculinity. SHINee draws eclectically from a wide variety of visual sources to reflect this syndrome of ‘liking an older women,’ which has changed the contemporary perception of Korean masculinity as a social phenomenon of South Korean popular culture. This neologism *yeon ha nam* (younger boyfriend) provides significant evidence for the patriarchal ideology currently operating in South Korean society. With regard to gender roles within patriarchy, the man takes care of the woman, and the woman obeys the man. However, recently in South Korean society, relationships between a younger male and older female have formed a new trend, and the neologisms *yeon ha nam* and *yeon sang nyeo* (older girlfriend) are evidence that differing gender roles are emerging from the patriarchal society.

SHINee’s debut EP *Replay* (*Noona, You’re So Pretty*) is a good example of how gendered identities have twisted away from conventional Asian masculinity stereotypes broadcast in the media. The song’s theme refers to concepts of age and the representation of a new gender ideology that reflects contemporary South Korean society, where relationships between men and women are shifting, and the psychology

and behaviour of male masculinity are dynamic and in flux. SHINee's song 'Replay' is frequently cited as representative of 'cute' *yeon ha nam* or *dongsaeng* images, in contrast to the style of K-pop idol boy groups like Super Junior that are referred to as *hyung* (the older brother). A brief synopsis of the video follows (See Figure 4.9):



Jonghyun looks at Victoria



Taemin's attracting to Victoria



Taemin leads Victoria holding hand



Group dancing on the street



Group dancing on studio

Figure 4.9. SHINee's 'Replay'

Wearing a headset around his neck, we see Jonghyun, one of the band members, passing a café, scratching his head and looking shyly at a woman. This is Victoria, a member of the K-pop idol girl group f(x) and the heroine of this video. She is working in the café and is older than Jonghyun (the lyric refers to the female as '*noona*' indicating that the

woman is older than the man). The camera suddenly cuts to a brief studio shot where the five SHINee group members are dancing in formation, wearing fashionable red-coloured street clothes. The background is black, with a few large, star-shaped lights. The scene rapidly changes back and Jonghyun has stopped walking and is now looking at Victoria through the café window, appearing to be falling in love. This is followed by a close-up shot of Taemin, a member of SHINee, in the studio. He has black hair with a fringe, a milky complexion, an angular facial shape, thin double eyelids and pink lips. He is shown against a background of bright yellow polka-dotted light. Taemin smiles with the innocent smile of a young boy, a gesture designed to excite his female audience (See Figure 4.1). The scene changes again to show the five members of SHINee dancing powerful moves outdoors in unison on a deserted patch of ground near the back of a building. They are dressed in jumpers, cargo pants, T-shirts printed with the logo of the Rolling Stones, caps and sneakers. The image is one of youth culture playing around in the sunset. The camera then focuses on Jonghyun and Victoria. Then there are close-up shots of intricate jazz steps, which then alternate with shots of the group dance routine. Next, they begin to sing.

The rest of the video consists of a series of rapid short cuts of a scene of the group dancing in the studio, close-up shots of each member's face and a graffiti-covered background street scene centred around a basketball court both day and night. The music genre is pop and R&B with sweet-sounding vocals and the singers have friendly and smiling facial expressions. In contrast, the dance choreography is powerful and precise. The lyrics point out that the *noona* heroine is very pretty, confirming that the younger man likes an older female. The group members play the role of adorable younger brothers, with the particular characteristics of each member described through the imagery highlighting childlike *aegyo* in Taemin, cartoonish masculinity *aegyo* in Minho and macho sexuality *aegyo* in Jonghyun, all within the general features of 'cute' masculinity.

Taemin, the *maknae*, articulates the feelings of a young man living within Korean hierarchical structures when he addresses an older and more important person in the K-pop idol group. In the video, Taemin's fringed hairstyle, sweet smiles, his eyes full of mischief and his naïve behaviour of walking around the heroine demonstrate childlike or innocent 'cuteness' and *aegyo*. This is one of the roles for a *maknae*: to highlight the

young age of the group. The *maknae* plays a role in portraying *aegyo* and showing obedience to the older group members as a natural aspect of the social hierarchy. Within hierarchal society, the *maknae*'s *aegyo* is seen as symbolic behaviour within K-pop idol culture as well as in everyday life in South Korea. During camp training and as a result of the philosophy of collectivism in large idol groups, the role of the *maknae* with *aegyo* can be defined in terms of performance as a social ritual. The manufacturing of the image of the '*maknae*' can be usefully compared to Turner's notion of 'liminality'. Turner (1982) conducted his fieldwork around Africa where ritual and theatrical performances are used as a tool for explaining social formations through a kind of social drama. Turner argues that social life is a performance that can be compared to the theatrical process of breach, crisis and repressive action followed by reconciliation or reintegration, and that the members of society can be understood as participating in a drama and can be thought of as the actors (Turner, 1982). These four theatrical processes are considered in terms of performance as a sort of social ritual that includes members of societies' unique culture, beliefs and social values within the collective, known as *communitas*, according to Turner's notions (1982). In *Liminality and Communitas* (2004), Turner discusses the liminal phenomenon within a network of classifications that describes how a wide variety of symbolic behaviour in many diverse societies can be defined by the expectations of social position and its associated behaviour.

Turner's term 'liminality' comes from Arnold Van Gennep, who identified the 'liminal phase' of *rites de passage*, defined as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (Van Gennep, 1909 cited in Turner, 2004: 89). Turner applies liminality to any condition encompassed by Van Gennep's term. And the liminal phenomenon in liminal entities such as neophytes is becoming an interesting representation of hierarchical systems of communication (Turner, 2004). Turner describes how neophytes behave passively in order to present an obedient demeanour to their seniors, accepting punishment without complaint. Their position can also be described as a system of kinship in which homogeneity and comradeship in initiations as well as humility and passivity are considered 'liminal symbols' in structured positions (Turner, 2004). The social life of individuals and groups has its own developmental cycles according to each individual's experience of structure and transition. Symbolic behaviour can be classified according to social structure,

circumstance and hierarchical community, in which age and social position are expressed through organised, ritualised behaviour as a type of performance. With regard to gender and sexuality in the context of liminality, a man's *aegyo* is safely accepted in the cultural space of K-pop and South Korean society. As I mentioned above in the case of glam rock and the performance of queer identity, the performance of *aegyo* is used positively and actively by men in K-pop and everyday life in South Korea.

A remarkable socially ritualised act occurs in the use of honorific language every day in South Korea. Respectful terms are agreed upon at the first meeting between two people based on age and/or social status as a means of forming the social structure of hierarchical community. The honorific language takes the form of nouns, verbs and adjectives in order to present polite equivalents or denote the subject's superiority. In K-pop idol culture, honorific words are significant symbols used to establish the hierarchy among the idols. Age and experience are key criteria, and the most common terms in K-pop idol culture are *sunbae* (senior colleagues) and *hubae* (junior colleagues). The roles of *sunbae* and *hubae* are applied to idols, colleagues in the same company or members of the same group. *Aegyo* is one of the traditional symbolic behaviours between a *sunbae* and a *hubae* and is usually displayed in the behaviour and demeanour of the youngest (the *hubae* or *maknae* like Taemin) through sweet gestures or 'cute' movements. In this sense, *aegyo* masculinity is demonstrating gender performativity within K-pop and South Korean society.

In SHINee's 'Replay', the term *noona* appears as an honorific word, and the symbolic behaviour between the heroine Victoria and the five boys indicates the relationship of *noona* and *dongsaeng* (a younger sibling regardless of gender). The *noona* is meant to take care of the *dongsaeng*, whose behaviour is considered 'cute' in relation to her. The *dongsaeng*, however, performs *aegyo* to affirm his masculinity as an adult rather than as a *dongsaeng* with childlike actions, attractive visuals or macho sexual behaviour. SHINee's group concept has been to target older women (*noona*) fans rather than younger girls. This is a different marketing strategy when compared to other K-pop idol boy groups⁵⁶. The music video for 'Replay' sums up the feelings of younger men who carry a torch for older women, as depicted through the personal characteristics of the

56 Taemin's interview (2008) *Wild Entertainment News* [Online] 6th June (Accessed 02nd May 2014)

five members. Their visual appearance, sound, voice, behaviour and dance routines embody this aspect of ambivalent desire, cited earlier within *aegyo* masculinity, towards a *noona*.

To show off the young men's attraction for the *noona* heroine, their images represent various socio-cultural aspects of South Korean contemporary society. The song needs the *noona* to elucidate its theme. Presented as an ideal heroine for Korean men, the *noona* wears a white shirt and trousers and has long wavy hair, designed to emphasise her innocence. The five boys adopt postures and behaviour of specific types (see Figure 4.9.1). Jonghyun looks casually ahead towards the woman while maintaining his distance from her. His husky voice, his clothes and facial expressions are designed to make him appear sexually mature and attractive—he wears a tight white vest over a red checked shirt, displaying his arm muscles, a red skull-print scarf around his neck and a large silver-chain necklace. In the street scenes, he is also shown wearing a T-shirt printed with the Rolling Stones' logo. To emphasise his macho masculinity, his brows are furrowed when he dances.



Key's attracting to
Victoria



Onew takes care of
Victoria



Taemin's powerful
dancing

Figure 4.9.1. SHINee's 'Replay'



Taemin leads her to the group



Group dancing of SHINee

Figure 4.9.1. SHINee's 'Replay'

As a feature typical of the relationship between a younger male and an older female in Korea, the character of Taemin is noteworthy in terms of his physique, appearance and behaviour. Taemin represents a mischievous boy dressed in a golden-bell, tree-yellow jumper, and he follows her, lifting up his skateboard and smiling slyly, then grinning charmingly as he approaches her. His 'adorable'—coy and winsome—visual appearance is highlighted by his fringed hairstyle (bowl cut), innocent-looking eye smiles, small red lips and his milky complexion—visible in the close-up shots—his colourful clothes and soft voice. His mischievous behaviour brings to mind the image of a child, as if he were an innocent younger brother to the heroine, and his behaviour allows her to feel comfortable and relaxed rather than uneasy.

In the music video, the members of SHINee present the emotions of *yeon ha nam* in remodelling traditional forms of masculinity. *Aegyo* is evident, expressing a significant element of 'cute' masculinity in the patriarchal and hierarchal culture of South Korea and in relation to the use of honorific language and its attendant symbolic behaviour. With respect to the role of the youngest person in a hierarchical society, regardless of gender, 'cute' behaviour is naturally embedded in the body, and through such displays, reflects someone in the position of youngest person in a relationship in either age or social class in South Korea. This song establishes 'cute' masculinity as one of the contemporary South Korean masculinities that appear differently from typical Asian male stereotypes through its blurring of identities. The reproduction of gendered behaviour is represented in this 'cute' masculinity, as is the new phenomenon of relationships between younger men and older women. This has led to greater variety within the *aegyo* aesthetic for 'cute' masculinity in K-pop—now also visible further afield in various South Korean social phenomena.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter has explored *aegyo* masculinity within the intricacies of different aesthetic categories of ‘cute’. *Aegyo* masculinity is representative of a remodelling of traditional forms of gender and sexuality within contemporary South Korean society. The characteristics of the metrosexual and cross-dressing types provide us with evidence that *aegyo* masculinity is a distinct aesthetic style, rather than one associated with the aesthetics of gay, bisexual and transgendered presentations of masculinity. With regard to specific South Korean socio-historical and cultural circumstances such as age, experience, hierarchy, patriarchal ideology, Asian gender stereotypes and the use of honorific language, K-pop idol boy groups have a natural affinity for the production and performance of *aegyo*. I have established a link between gender performativity and the construction of *aegyo* masculinity.

I have also examined stereotyping within orientalism as proof that the changing nature of South Korean society is influencing this remodelling of traditional forms of masculinity. Like the example of glam rock and the identity struggle of glam rockers in terms of their real and performance personas, the audience affects the self-presentation of *aegyo* masculinity in K-pop idol boys. However, as a result of manufactured ideology or as a means of attaining celebrity status, K-pop idols’ veridical selves tend not to survive on stage, and their real personas often feel inauthentic and their public faces alien.

Unlike Japanese *kawaii* culture, which is based on imagined characters, *aegyo* culture is part of the South Korean habit of showing off to other people. K-pop idol boy groups use ‘cuteness’ to play a role, with respect to both their personal characteristics and the group concept. Regarding age-based hierarchies and gender relationships in South Korea, the blurred boundaries of these concepts support the ambivalence of gender and sexuality. This occurs because K-pop idol boys have embedded the *aegyo* of traditional patriarchal ideology and hierarchy within contemporary South Korean social phenomena. The changing representation of the Korean male body has become a specific feature used to attract fans with a variety of aesthetic tastes in Korea and beyond. The four neologisms cited above in my taxonomy of *aegyo* have provided evidence for ‘cute’ masculinity becoming a trend in Korean popular culture, and the K-

pop idol boy group SHINee is representative of the cultural phenomenon of 'cute' masculinity.

The aesthetic styles of cheesy, camp and kitsch have been redefined as quaint *aegyo*, and this reformulation of 'cute' has also included childlike, cartoonish and macho masculinities as the three other parts of a taxonomy of the versatility of 'cute'. In *aegyo* masculinity, the prefixes and suffixes of the neologisms point to a combination of 'cute' and masculine characteristics. SHINee has given us insight into the intricacies of *aegyo* as part of a demonstration of how 'cute' masculinity circulates in K-pop and how the taxonomy of 'cute' can be fleshed out through these different categories. In the music video of the song 'Replay', SHINee members, through each of their personal traits (physical, visual and behavioural), present the feelings of young men who carry a torch for older women. Ambivalent desire in 'cute' masculinity is embedded in the deconstructed East Asian male stereotype and in unconventional masculinity. In summary, I argue that *aegyo* suggests a new paradigm for masculinity in terms of gender and sexuality and that *aegyo* masculinity points to a fundamental change in the nature of South Korean society.

Chapter 5

The ‘Liveness’ of K-Pop in Mediatized Performance

In this concluding chapter, I explore the phenomenon of live K-pop, analysing the performance context of ‘liveness’ as exemplified by the K-pop boy group Super Junior at a concert in London. The term ‘liveness’ is derived from Auslander’s work of the same name and denotes all forms of cultural production that occur live. In previous chapters, I examined the emergence of *aegyo* and how it has developed and is used in South Korean society (Chapter Two). Furthermore, I examined the specific characteristics of aesthetic ‘cuteness’ in gender representation and how *aegyo* is expressed in forms of cute femininity (Chapter Three) and forms of ‘cute’ masculinity (Chapter Four).

K-pop is available to all consumers in South Korea, mainly through music videos and, as extensions of them, through weekly television performances. Three main music programmes are broadcasted live four days a week, and international audiences attend these shows either in a studio or outdoors at site-specific venues. The music programmes are concerts, so viewers watch a 90-minute performance by a current K-pop idol group. In these live performances, groups attempt to imitate or recreate the original music video or television performance, mainly by closely replicating the choreography and settings used in these mediatized performances. Importantly, the ‘liveness’ in K-pop groups’ performances is based on techno-media forms. In other words, this is a contradictory form, and its contradictory nature is explored in this chapter.

Auslander (2008: 4) borrows the term ‘mediatized’ from Jean Baudrillard and uses it to denote a product of media technology or mass media. A ‘mediatized performance’ is thus a performance spread via television, audio-visual recordings and other technological forms of reproduction (ibid). For Auslander (2008), mediatized performance can be reproduced by recording a live performance, but he argues further

that a live event can be considered to be ‘real’ just as mediatised events might be categorised as ‘secondary’ and as ‘artificial reproductions of the real’ (cited in the study by Dixon, 2007: 123).

The concept of remediation can be usefully applied to K-pop performances’ aesthetic form, in relation to the existence of an audience thoroughly familiar with televisual mediation and performances that are then re-mediated into an experience of the ‘live’. I demonstrate, from a phenomenological perspective, how the relationship between performers and audiences at live concerts proceeds and reveal how concepts of ‘liveness’ and remediation are relevant to live K-pop performances. Mediatised performance, in particular, suggests its relevance for ‘liveness’ and remediation. Here, I hint at how reproduction becomes the site of original production in some meaningful sense. My investigation of mediation is also a means of deepening my investigation of *aegyo* and exploring whether, if we understand ‘cute’ as a repertoire of gestures that are almost quotations, it is, at heart, a form of remediation that benefits from the emphatic mediation it obtains in short film and hologram mediation. One clear example is the use of superheroes to emphasise masculine ‘cuteness’ in Super Junior’s live performance in London, discussed in more detail below.

5.1. Television Music Programmes in South Korea

Since 2000, the Korean popular music industry has developed rapidly in response to the growth of new digital media, televisual mediatisation and technologically mediated performance. K-pop’s proliferation is enhanced by weekly live music broadcasting systems in 114 countries. Specifically, KBS’s Music Bank started broadcasting live in 72 countries in 2011 and has aired in 114 countries as well as on Internet social media, such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, since 2014. Lina Yoon, in *Time Magazine*’s *Korean Pop, with Online Help, Goes Global*, writes,

For many artists in Korea’s booming music industry, social media like YouTube and Twitter have become crucial tools to reach audiences in formerly hard-to-access markets like the U.S. and Europe. Korean artists are bypassing traditional outlets like radio and television, ‘aggressively steering their efforts to go international via the Internet’, says Bernie Cho, president of DFSB Kollektive, a

Seoul-based agency specializing in the international marketing of Korean pop acts. ‘Social-media-savvy K-pop stars are now tweeting, YouTubing and Facebooking their way up music charts across and beyond Asia’.

(Yoon, 2010⁵⁷)

Yoon (2010) states that K-pop performers sidestep television and radio, whereas I state that television and its connected forms, such as the music video, are crucial for how this material appears on social media and in live pop performances. K-pop idols perform in front of audiences for ‘live’ weekly music chart programmes, and images are then transmitted to television and Internet on-air broadcasts for immediate viewing. The three main national Korean television networks broadcast weekly live music-chart programmes such as KBS’s *Music Bank* every Friday, MBC’s *Show! Music Core* every Saturday and SBS’s *The Music Trend* every Sunday. Other Korean broadcasts include Mnet’s music television programme *M! Countdown*, which airs live every Thursday. The ‘winner’ of the weekly music chart is calculated by combining digital music chart positions, album sales and social media points from official YouTube music video views and SNS points. Live voting for only the top three candidates is conducted from the stream of ‘live’ television broadcasts, through mobile text messaging, mobile apps and television talk voting by viewers.⁵⁸ Audience participation in voting for weekly charts highlights this televisual immediacy, and the computed classified total is announced through multi-mediated screens, a practice now known as hypermediacy (formerly multimediacy) (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). The proliferation of media and digital technology has influenced contradictory imperatives of culture for immediacy and hypermediacy. This is the double logic of remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 5).

⁵⁷Time Magazine (2010) ‘Korean Pop, with Online Help, Goes Global’ [Online] 26th August, Available from: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2013227,00.html> (Accessed 03rd June 2014)

⁵⁸How the K-pop weekly music chart is calculated:

- *Music Bank*. K-pop weekly music chart TV programme (2014) KBS. [Online] Available from:

http://www.kbs.co.kr/2tv/enter/musicbank/chart/index.html?bbs_pr=/mode:2/seq:387251 (Accessed 28th May 2014)

- *Show! Music Core*. K-pop weekly music chart TV programme (2014) MBC. [Online] Available from: http://www.imbc.com/broad/tv/ent/musiccore/chart_ranking/ (Accessed 28th May 2014)

- *The Music Trend*. K-pop weekly music chart TV programme (2014) SBS. [Online] Available from:

http://program.sbs.co.kr/builder/endPage.do?pgm_id=00000010182&pgm_build_id=&pgm_mnu_id=5250&tpl_typ=&mnu_nm=&bbsCd=ct_gayo8&contNo=1&backUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fprogram.sbs.co.kr%2Fbuilder%2FprogramMainList.do¬icePage= (Accessed 28th May 2014)

- *M! Countdown*. K-pop weekly music chart TV programme (2014) M.net. Available from: <http://mwave.interest.me/mcountdown/main.m> (Accessed 28th May 2014)

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1996), scholars in the field of communications, promote the concept of remediation as a significant contribution to how we think about media, history and perhaps, especially, cross-format media. Bolter and Grusin (1996) note that remediation is ‘the representation of one medium in another’ (339) and ‘new technologies of representation proceed by reforming or remediating earlier ones’ (352). Immediacy and hypermediacy are two complementary strategies used in remediation, where hypermediacy aims to remind the viewer deliberately of the medium of visual representation, whereas immediacy, also known as transparent immediacy, aims to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium, regardless of what it is. In this manner, viewers come to believe that they are in the actual presence of the object(s) of representation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

Korean television music programmes transmit ‘live’ performances of around 17 K-pop idol acts and are typically watched in private spaces, such as the home. To prove their attractiveness within the limited time (3 minutes per group) and space (studio stage) allotted during the 90-minute programme, performers strive to make the most of their song’s concept by clever use of graphic design in their stage settings. ‘To fulfill our insatiable desire for immediacy’, these performances are enhanced by camera angles, digitally controlled stage lighting and sound controls that transmit directly to digital and high-definition television (HD television) in ‘live point-of-view’ television music chart programmes (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 5). Viewers thus ‘really’ sense that they are witnessing a live event, for the medium itself seems to disappear. Bolter and Grusin (1996) argue that this is the logic of immediacy, and we can find many examples in the K-pop context, dating from the early 2000s. Since then, the Internet and the availability of remediated performances have transformed K-pop from a local cultural success story to a global phenomenon.

On television programmes, live K-pop performances are structured in the following manner: three to four groups perform consecutively, without an interval, and the master of ceremonies (MCs) are primed, briefly and humorously, to introduce each block of songs in advance. After the MCs’ introductions, the idols perform continuously while maintaining eye contact with both the audience and the camera to create a live or instant dialogue between them and the live audience as well as the viewers at home. In this manner, communication is immediate or felt to be immediate. Every performance,

however, is not necessarily live. Some performances are live, whereas others are pre-recorded live performances. Because of multiple media and elaborate editing technology, television viewers are unable to distinguish between the two and become convinced that they are watching live music. Even though the pre-recorded live performances are edited into hypermediated performances, the studio environment is the same as in live broadcasts, particularly in respect to the ever-present live audience. Communication between performers and audiences who cheer their favourite stars has been a key component of viewing pleasure for live online users and live ‘group’ audiences—a mobile group of friends in continuous contact via texting or phone calls (Couldry, 2004: 356-7)—and television viewers experience a strong sense of immediacy, proximity and intimacy through images and cheering sounds from their television sets.

Thus, using Bolter and Grusin’s (1996) concept of remediation (defined above), we have established that directors of South Korean music programmes use multiple media to create immediacy and ‘liveness’. Directors of music videos, however, also employ multiple media to construct suitable conditions and thus arouse in the viewer ‘the desire for the immediate’ (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 9). Other sources concur with my research: according to Couldry (2004), the television music chart programmes in South Korea highlight a media image of ‘presentness’ and ‘immediacy’ in K-pop idols’ live performances. Audience participation, for instance, live voting via mobiles and television talk voting as ‘online liveness’, enhances direct communication and interaction between performance and audience to achieve ‘liveness’. On a slightly different point, but worth noting for its relevance to my discussion of K-pop and the subtle distinction between forms of mediatised performance, Paek (2011) asserts that these television programmes can provide an audience with an experience similar to the ‘liveness’ of an actual performance, whereas music videos are unable to provide similar ‘liveness’ due to the production process involved in a video’s pre-recording and the editing process used for this type of short film. However, I wish to highlight how media liveness is reconceived through K-pop, so much so, in fact, that aspects such as music videos become relived through techno-media forms within remediation.

Television music programmes are hypermediated by graphics and texts for live voting, as mentioned, and by MCs who introduce the music video for each song. These ‘stage

productions' are further evidence of a hypermediated event (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). It is possible, therefore, to recognize that one medium is reforming or improving another. Specifically, the South Korean entertainment industry deliberately pursues such borrowing, 'repurposing' properties and qualities by moving them from one medium to another (ibid: 45). This is the essence of Bolter and Grusin's (1996) notion of remediation, as I understand it, and it is highly relevant to my discussion of K-pop and mediated performance as the basis of live performance. Mediated performance is reproduced as closely as possible, live in concert to maintain and recreate this 'realism'. Most K-pop idol performances are thus doing no more than duplicating their television acts when performing live, and this perfectly dovetails with the expectations of the audience, who already have (a pre-recorded) image in their minds of what they want. In other words, television is working with a concept of 'liveness' re-employed in the live K-pop concert setting.

In concert, K-pop live performance typically aims to create a type of show or spectacle similar to that of Vaudeville. This might involve synchronised dance performances: digital technology to represent a music video or television; recital of different song genres from artists' album collections; media technology to create a wide variety of sound effects; performances in drag with deliberate *aegyo*, mimicking well-known performances by idol girl groups; computer graphics as an intrinsic part of staging; magic shows; and video recordings of the daily lives of absent group members. Here, it is important to grasp that *aegyo* is itself a form of remediation. I am following Sontag in her 'Notes on "Camp"' (1964) when she suggests that camp can be interpreted as a style of ironic quotation, relating to *aegyo* in a similar sense, in that an *aegyo* performance cannot be described as 'performed authenticity' in the way that a rock concert might. In other words, K-pop live performances on weekly television music chart programmes are re-employed and amplified front stage through these special effects. The particular nature of televisual mediation as a form that orchestrates and is limited by time and space in a specific way, however, is still carried over into live performance and synchronised dance performances, although now with added 'liveness', to maintain the previous relationship with time and space.

K-pop idols appear in broadcasts that are most important for them to market themselves and gain popularity in the South Korean music industry. Promoters tend not to use

concert performances to gain popularity for their acts, i.e. to develop a new audience, but as a way of offering a particular experience to audiences who already know the acts from their television performances. If we compare the ‘liveness’ of a television image and a live concert performance in terms of Paek’s (2011) discussion on communication, the television image stimulates an audience’s visual sense, whereas live performance is reinforced by corporeal, psychological and sensual aspects of communication as well as by empathy between performers and their audiences. Live concert performances of a world tour are coterminous with the global expansion of television programmes via the growth of television channels and the Internet. K-pop idols’ live performances, as mediatised performances, are a fundamental part of my exploration of ‘liveness’ and remediation in live concerts.

5.2. ‘Liveness’ in Live Performance

In my discussion of *aegyo* in ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ (Chapter One), I referred to gestures associated with movements typically made by babies in South Korea, such as ‘*Gonji Gonji*’ and ‘*Jam Jam*’. I have also commented on daily life performances of these baby-like actions by pre-adult or adult females and males, along with the adoption of a child-like voice, movements and clothing. K-pop idols bring these everyday *aegyo* behaviours to their manufactured, stylised performances on television and in music videos. In other words, *aegyo* emerges from the lived experience of daily life and enters a created K-pop form. Professionalisation and industrialisation of those forms are presented to us on television and in music videos.

K-pop idols’ performances of *aegyo* have been disseminated in documentary films, television programmes and music videos as ‘mediatised performance’ within conditions of live performance mentioned by performance studies scholar Phillip Auslander (2008). In a live performance, ‘liveness’ in mediatised performance demonstrates K-pop’s aesthetic cuteness in terms of gender, representation and performance. To explore *aegyo* in mediatised performance, we can investigate ‘liveness’ in relation to the everyday life performance of *aegyo* in Korean culture and constructed performance, and by association, K-pop performances’ constructed bodies, including idol groups’ self-presentation front stage and backstage.

In terms of my discussion, the concept of ‘liveness’ is usefully explored by Peggy Phelan and by Auslander—in particular, contradictions existing within the discourse of ‘liveness’. Phelan, an American feminist scholar, argues for ‘liveness’ as the fundamental ontological premise in theatrical acts:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.

(Phelan, 1993: 146)

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Phelan (1993) posits ‘presentness’ and ‘temporary’ as ontological facts of performance. Performers and audiences must exist in the same time and space; in addition, performers’ bodies must be ‘alive’ on the stage. Phelan, cited in the study by Auslander (2008: 44), further argues that performance exists only in the memory of audiences and is linguistically independent from technological mass reproduction—performance is non-reproductive as a form, whereas language is reproductive as a form, and therefore, writing cannot capture performance. Today’s mediatised culture, however, and the repeated visual capture and reproduction of performance, for example, in the music industry, cannot be denied. Although performance cannot escape mass reproduction in an economy of repetition, Phelan (1993: 7) still reaffirms this ontological fact in the face of technologies of reproduction, describing how, in the relationship between live and mediatised forms, television camera angles can support only an ‘image’, whereas theatre can present the living truth. In relation to my argument on K-pop’s ‘liveness’, the inverse appears to be true and legitimate because of its commercial success. It is hard not to agree with Cubitt (1994: 283–4), cited in the study by Auslander (2008: 45), when he says, ‘In our period of history, and in our Western societies, there is no performance that is not always already a commodity’. To grasp the relevance of this, we need to understand the essential relationship between the commodity and mediation, in other words, the commodity presupposes some form of durable reproduction that can be circulated and exchanged.

In contrast, convergence between digital and live performances has become increasingly visible in live theatre, dance and interactive performances since the 1990s (Dixon, 2007). According to Dixon's *Digital Performance* (2007), new forms of digital performance exist within old forms of theatrical technology to map changes in the representation of the body, space and time. From the classical Greek drama *Deus ex machina* to Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Dixon considers transformation between theatrical work and contemporary digital performance within surrealism, futurism and other multimedia pioneers. For example, digital performance artists such as Nam June Paik, Merce Cunningham and Laurie Anderson have presented their work variously as video art, robotic performance and virtual reality via webcams and online communities (ibid). These performances have challenged dominant theatrical approaches to digital performance by creating theatrical spectacles with mediated performance (ibid). With its multiple, remediated expressions and forms, K-pop extends this challenge even further.

Furthermore, with mixed-media performances increasingly combining mediated representations and live presentations (Auslander, 2008: 40), boundaries between 'liveness' and virtual 'liveness' become obscured and blur distinctions between physical and virtual spaces, live and absent bodies of performers as well as physical and digital images (Paek, 2011). For example, a live performance incorporating media technology increasingly uses interactive installations, webcams, the Internet, digital images and software in the new media, as in the work of Canadian theatre artist Robert Lepage, George Coates's performance works and The Builders Association, which collaborates with actors and uses digitally manipulated screen images (Dixon, 2007: 1).

Auslander (2008) applies ontological characteristics of live television performance as an oppositional form of live performance that challenges Phelan's example of the inverse form in film. Auslander (2008: 13) contends that as a dominant cultural medium, television can construct a historical relationship with theatrical aspects different from those of film, making it possible for television to colonize 'liveness'.

... The essence of the televisual was understood, from television's earliest appearances, as an ontology of 'liveness' more akin to the ontology of theatre than to that of film. Television's essence was seen in its ability to transmit

events as they occur, not in a filmic capacity to record events for later viewing. Originally, of course, all television broadcasts were live transmissions.

(Auslander, 2008: 12)

Compared with film, television can remediate theatre as immediacy at the ontological level of 'liveness'; television can also remediate live performance and film, whereas film can never remediate television and can only remediate theatre (Auslander, 2008: 13). Like theatre, but unlike film, a television broadcast can be characterised as performance in the present; in addition, pre-recorded television programmes can retain the television image as a performance (ibid: 15). Through television technology, performance can be expressed by the ideology of 'liveness' in diverse cultural contexts, and live performance now attempts to duplicate television, film and video, including digital media (ibid). The reason for the replication of a television performance in live performance is suggested by Benjamin's (1986) concept of mass desire for proximity and intimacy. Benjamin (1986) describes how the style of perception in mass culture - the intimacy of watching performers close up on television - can provide viewers experiences of proximity and intimacy (cited in the study by Auslander, 2008: 39). Benjamin refers to

The desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.

(Benjamin, 1986: 31–32)

In mediatised performance's 'liveness', emotion, along with the audience's acknowledgement and experience, is dealt with as a significant factor in 'liveness'. Proximity, intimacy and immediacy, as properties of television, can be created by replicating television in live performance. Audiences might also imagine a certain realism, or realistic nature, from the recreation of the feel of television in live performance (Auslander, 2008).

From this overview of some key theoretical positions on 'liveness', virtual 'liveness', proximity and immediacy, performance seems to have stepped outside traditional

limitations of space and time, become subject to the many layered process of remediation, become endlessly reproducible for all types of platforms, including the live stage, and as such, is endlessly commodifiable. Many K-pop industry case studies cited in previous chapters show evidence of this reframing of performance in response to modern global, mediatised culture. Some commentary on dance for camera is also relevant to these issues and to my discussion of K-pop's mediatised performance, discussed briefly below.

In *Documentation, disappearance and the representation of live performance*, Matthew Reason (2006) refers to dance video to describe differences between live and non-live representation, comparing them with the relation between theatre and film. Reason (2006: 93) cites screen reworkings of live performances, such as 'stage-to-film representations of theatre' and 'stage-to-television adaptations of dance,' to explore the spectator's various experiences in response to the recognition of authenticity. Reason (2006) argues that live dance has greater impact than non-live dance due to 'cognitions of authenticity'. In the ambiguous relation between live and non-live representation, Reason (2006) stresses that in dance, there are no built-up words to distinguish live and non-live dance—similar to the relation between theatre and film.

According to Sherril Dodds's *Dance on Screen* (2001), video dance is a hybrid form: 'a fusion or amalgamation of two distinct sites in which the codes and conventions of each medium are inextricably linked'; further, 'it enables video dance to transgress the concepts of both dance as live performance and of screen media' (cited in the study by Reason, 2006: 101 and 102). She also argues that video dance is the relation between a part of a film or television performance and the medium of dance (Dodds, 2001: 69). The dancing bodies in live performance are written into a 'popular image' for commodification in films or television in the same way that dancing bodies front stage are created for the camera to translate to the screen (ibid: 37). 'Space-time-energy limitations' are a significant method of translating dance theatre to screen (ibid: 69). From this perspective, ideas of dance for the camera can be applied to *aegyo* performances. In regard to K-pop idols' self-presentation, performances of *aegyo* are demonstrated as manufactured versions of front stage and everyday backstage behaviour.

Manufactured front stage *aegyo*, adopted as an aspect of virtuosity, is created for mediatised performance because it must fit the limited time and space available in television music programmes or music videos. As for backstage self-presentation, we have examined *aegyo* in K-pop idols' daily lives, as shown in the documentary *I AM* (Chapter Two) and in reality television shows. On the other hand, we need to consider carefully Graeme Turner and Chris Rojek's celebrity studies (Chapters Two and Four). As a mediatised performance, K-pop idols' backstage self-presentation might not actually exist but simply be an additional representation of public image. In contrast, 'liveness' is relevant to K-pop idols' backstage self-presentation, and it can also be included in the discussion of staged authenticity. Here, I am referring to my assertion that *aegyo* is central to K-pop as a highly mediated and remediated cultural form. In fact, the wider question of why *aegyo* is central to K-pop is fundamental to my overall discussion and can be addressed here by recollecting that *aegyo* is a type of ethnic performance that has staged authenticity, infused with South Korea's traditional and contemporary cultural forms.

The concept of 'staged authenticity' was introduced by Dean MacCannell in the context of ethnic tourism (Chhabra, Healy and Sills, 2003). MacCannell refers to Goffman's self-presentation as a way of presenting the problem of authenticity that exists between structure and consciousness through social experiences and tourism (ibid, 2003). He posits that touristic openings into backstage of society are omnipresent and that individual style is produced by each individual's association with touristic opportunity (MacCannell, 1973: 595). In other words, personal belief as an authentic experience is opening social ubiquity. He cites guided tours of social establishments, in which the educational or social organisation designs the tour. The tourist simply follows the signs. In this sense, MacCannell argues that the phenomenon of being a tourist shows how a backstage area can be 'a kind of living museum' rather than the institutional 'backstage' defined by Goffman's term (ibid: 598). With regard to this 'staged' back region, we can consider Tony Bennett's cultural pedagogy studies of museums. Cultural pedagogy demonstrates how and what culture teaches us. This includes, for example, those cultural practices embedded in the body and learning aesthetic emotional responses relevant to issues of class, behaviour and self-improvement. Bennett argues that museums teach something other than what they intend, such as the need to stay quiet

and observe, to pay attention to other observers and to move along a certain path established for the exposition.

According to MacCannell and Bennett's discussions, tourism and museum culture play educational roles, and visitors' self-presentation in backstage regions of these cultural institutions can be understood as having staged authenticity. MacCannell argues, 'To the degree that this package (an appealing package) alters the nature of the product, the authenticity sought by the visitor becomes "staged authenticity" provided by the touree' (MacCannell, 1976: 596 cited in Chhabra, Healy and Sills, 2003: 705). He suggests that the concept of 'staged' that tourists demand in their search for something original means they become 'victims of staged authenticity' (ibid: 705). Staged authenticity can be usefully incorporated into my discussion of *aegyo* in K-pop and South Korean society.

Overall, I consider performances of *aegyo* to be ethnic performances that have staged authenticity. Here, staged authenticity is an aspect of K-pop idols' industrialised professionalism and also of the unique idea of Korean-ness. Performances of *aegyo*, however, are not a folk idea but rather a cultural concept for a 21st century global marketplace. Ethnic performance is part of the scope of interdisciplinary research using anthropological and ethnographical methodology in ethnomusicology, ethno-theatre and ethnic dance (Kim, 1999). According to *Ethnic Dance* by Young Il Hur (1999), a Korean scholar in ethnic dance studies, this discipline includes socio-historical and cultural aspects of each nation embedded as part of specific ethnic identities. Ethnic dance is performed on stage, and this is a crucial difference from folk dance, which is performed on 'unsettled' stages, for instance, on the street or in the front of a garden. Evidently, then, performances of *aegyo* can be defined as ethnic performance rather than folk because they can be choreographed to be performed on stage. In other words, performances of *aegyo* also occur as part of everyday South Korean culture and not just as manufactured K-pop versions (described in Chapter Two). Staged authenticity is included in K-pop idols' self-presentation on the front stage as a new type of virtuosity in neoliberal society to present the aesthetics of sentimental responses, for example, the survival of the 'cutest' and indicate the role of polite behaviour in a hierarchical social atmosphere.

In terms of gender performativity, staged authenticity is expressed by idols' self-presentation backstage in a remodelling of traditional and modernised forms of South Korean femininity and masculinity, in line with their personal images as K-pop idols (explored in Chapters Three and Four). South Korean men and women who experience differences in gender, age and socio-cultural and historical aspects of South Korean society naturally have different perspectives when it comes to aesthetic style. Traditional South Korean values are shown in new forms of femininity and masculinity coming from, and connecting with, Western pop music. As a significant aspect of the unique idea of Korean-ness, clearly, performances of *aegyo* can be defined as ethnic.

With regard to the concept of 'liveness' in mediatised performance, we can explore K-pop idols' performances of *aegyo* at live concerts, where large video screens are employed at both sides of the stage to show live K-pop idols, synchronised dancing bodies and a video simulcast of K-pop idols' performances of *aegyo* (Auslander, 2008). Audiences can focus on the performers' real-life bodies, or they can focus on a screen. Under these 'live' performance conditions, audiences can compare the live K-pop idols and their dancing bodies on the screen (ibid, 2008). Combined live and screened images are another way of discussing Benjamin's concept of proximity. Auslander argues that a holographic project is a fusion rather than a juxtaposition of the live and the digital. Auslander refers to *Poles* (1996), a digital performance by PPS Dance of Montreal in which two live dancers combine with holographic counterparts to produce the effect of dematerialising bodies. He presents figures through a grotto-like space in which 'the three-dimensional dancers seem as able to enter into the two-dimensional projected space as the wraith-like holograms' (Auslander, 2008: 42). The hologram is represented as a fusion incorporating live elements into a digital environment. In this sense, Auslander describes it as 'Dance + Visual = Visual' (ibid); he posits that the digital does not differ from the televisual and that digital production can be described as the assimilation of a wide variety of materials (ibid). He argues that, like a simulation, the hologram, the digital body and real status are co-presented in the live (ibid). Although the audience acknowledges the real performers' presence, the 'alive' body does not exist in the hologram in live performance. In terms of Phelan's ontological facts of 'liveness', the hologram lacks the 'present' but 'exists' in a specific time and space, although Auslander's 'liveness' of mediatised performance might have value within the media culture. To explore mediatised performance between live and screened bodies, I

examine the hologram concert of K-pop groups Psy and 2NE1 in London and discuss ambiguous boundaries between ‘liveness’ and virtual ‘liveness’ in the context of live performance’s ontological values, as viewed from a phenomenological perspective.

5.3. K-pop Hologram Concert

The K-Pop Hologram Showcase 2013 was held at the Korean Brand & Entertainment Expo 2013 (KBEE) at Old Billingsgate, London, on 4th–6th November 2013. Now in its fourth year, KBEE’s aim is to promote Korean culture and industry to the world. To celebrate the 130th anniversary of amity between the UK and South Korea, KBEE occurred in London. The world’s first K-Pop hologram concert with holographic technology was a part of exhibitions of IT convergence technology. K-Pop star Psy and K-Pop idol girl group 2NE1 consecutively performed for 15 minutes. On the exhibition’s first day, 12 hologram concerts were shown from 10 a.m. to 5:20 p.m.; PSY and 2NE1 performed six times each. The hologram was produced by Next Interactive K (NIK), along with Korea Telecom, d’s strict and YG, the entertainment company to which Psy and 2NE1 are contracted. To provide an experience of new pop music for the audience and expand into pop music-related derivative businesses, NIK is attempting to create new entertainment platforms by combining new media technology like 3D and hologram experiences.



Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’



Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’



Psy's 'Gentleman'



Psy's 'Gangnam Style'



Psy's 'Gentleman'

Figure 5.1. Psy's 'Gangnam Style' and 'Gentleman' in hologram performance

As illustrated in Figure 5.1, Psy's hologram concert showed a life-sized figure of Psy in which his virtual avatar was projected onto the stage via 3D images. Seeing Psy, a superstar K-pop singer, perform live is rare, yet in this showcase he could be watched performing repeatedly. As if in person, Psy sang his songs 'Gangnam Style' and 'Gentleman' in a spectacular digital setting (for brevity, I focus here on the hologram of 'Gangnam Style'). On the huge main screen, Psy and several backup dancers, whose bodies were like bronze statues, performed his trademark 'hore dance.' Three small screens hung above the stage, the central one showing 'PSY Hologram Concert' and the other two showing the dancers and Psy himself. Accompanied by an intricate laser show and spectacular sound quality, with elaborate computer graphics that appear and

disappear, covering ancient times to the present, up-to-date photo booths using images of audience members and the giving of presents to communicate with his audience, Psy's performance created the special atmosphere of a 'real' concert. In other words, it was similar to watching screens at a live concert. For instance, if audiences attend a pop concert held in a huge venue, some audience members seated far from the stage usually watch the big screen(s) because they get a closer, more detailed view of the performers than by watching them front stage. In Psy's hologram performance, all the audience members were standing, and they had the opportunity to have a greater feeling of proximity to the performers via screens. When Psy greeted the audience, they cheered him on and enjoyed their communication. Being in the same place, i.e. at a live performance, gave them a feeling of immersion in the experience, even though it was a one-way interaction.

To interact and communicate with the audience, for example, photos of the audience were used in graphics for the hologram concert (see Figure 5.2 focusing on the words Psy is saying). Before the show began, the audience could use the live photo zone to take their own pictures, which were then used for the hologram concert. Front stage, the holographic Psy appeared to vote for and then randomly select some of these photos, which were then projected on the screen. In this manner, the audience felt Psy's presence, although the show was all pre-recorded. The audience could be said to have participated spontaneously in the event, and the relationship between Psy and the audience had a temporary sense of intimacy and immediacy - as an aspect of hypermediacy. Clearly, however, the voting process is a perfect example of a manufactured work that strives to bring about feelings of intimacy and immediacy, partly because photos of each audience are available only for their show. In other words, photos taken in the live photo zone were projected as part of the hologram concert. The pictures appeared temporarily for each 30-minute show and were disposed of afterwards, disappeared or erased, in time for the next hologram concert and a new round of fan portraits. The concept of 'liveness' can be applied to such audience participation and use of photos during the performance as well as to their disappearance. This ephemerality is now also a feature of some social media sites such as Snapchat and was, of course, a strong feature of original television. Even though audience members acknowledged simulacra of 'liveness' as a form of hologram technology, they also felt that they were participating in the show and communicating with the pre-recorded Psy.

This type of illusory 3D immersion comes from the immediacy of virtual reality (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 162).

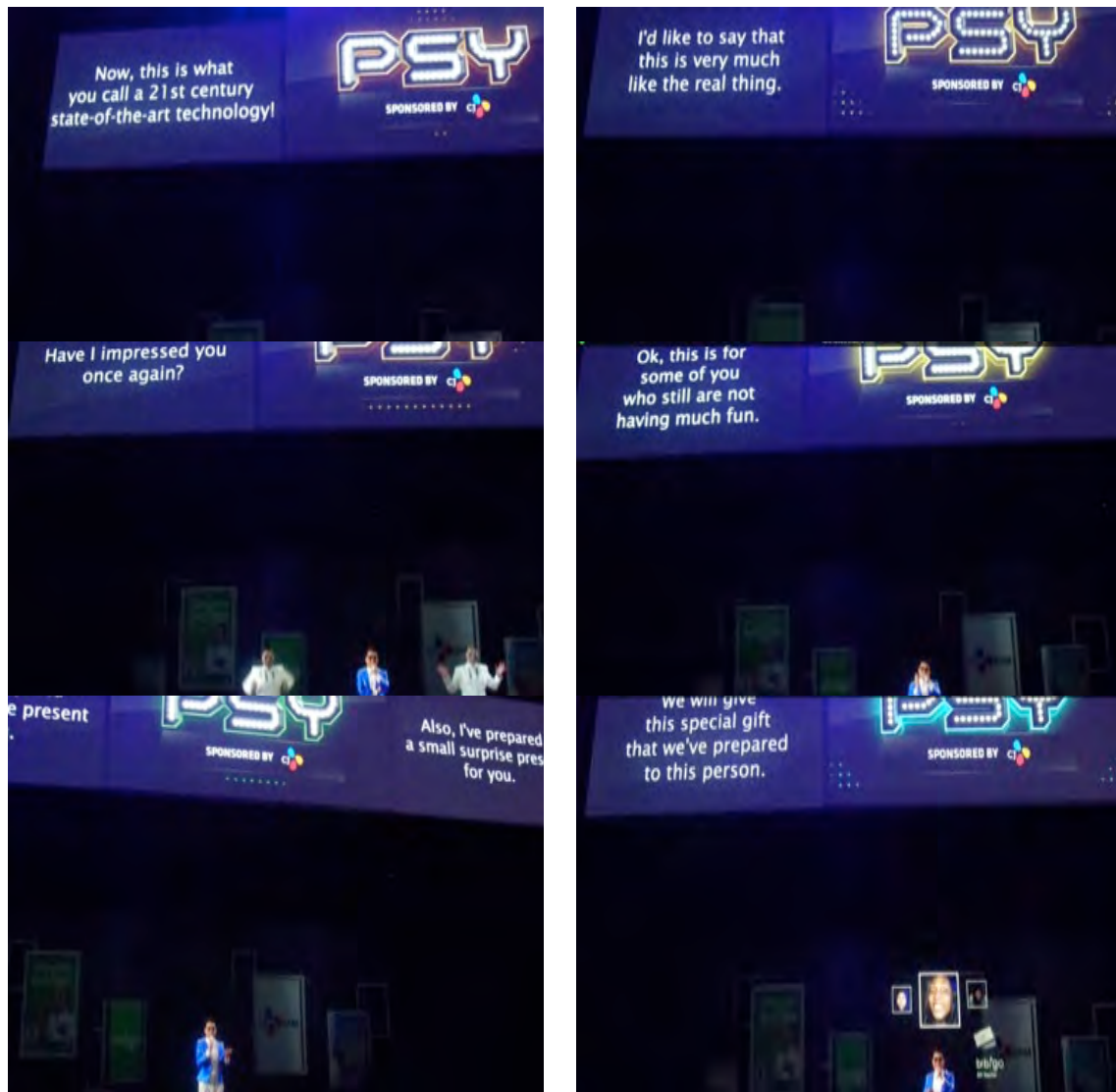


Figure 5.2. Psy's communication with the audience

Another example of interaction and communication was water blasting. Obviously, some audience members recognised the virtual reality created before them, but others seemed unconsciously to suffer under the illusion that it was real. For instance, in the introduction to his concerts, holographic Psy announced, 'and for the people that don't know how to enjoy a show ... you will be water blasted!' At the end of his first song 'Gangnam Style,' he briefly communicated with the audience and squirted water from a toy gun. Real water was also squirted in the one-minute time lag between Psy's words and the image's action of shooting water. Some audience members unconsciously

moved to avoid the illusory water, and others started to react because they had just been sprayed with real water. The short timing gap demonstrates technology's limitation, and this brings to mind virtual 'liveness', as the hologram is clearly problematic despite its ambitions. Even though the project intended to create difficulty in distinguishing living bodies from holograms, as well as playing with dematerialising bodies (Auslander, 2008), Psy's hologram definitely highlighted some inherent problems. On a different note, a wide variety of digital graphics and abundant sounds added to the spectacle, creating interesting things for the audience to watch. In contrast, the use of dynamic digital graphics, such as moving ancient Western tombstones, the sudden disintegration of contemporary buildings and the appearance of men and women wearing contemporary clothes also lent a sense of unreality and created the feeling of both fantasy and fiction onscreen. Even though Psy's image had been created by simulacra of a 'live' singer surrounded by a background of digital projections, some audience members experienced 'liveness', whereas others felt a sense of virtual 'liveness' of mediated performance.

With regard to performances of *aegyo*, Psy also modelled the aesthetic style of 'cheesy,' camp and kitsch *aegyo* (see Chapter Four for precise definitions). Psy's hologram tended to highlight these characteristics, for example, through 'quaint' *aegyo* illustrated, among other things, by his point dances (the horse dance), his 'classy' fashion style and his synchronised dance movements replicated in multiple images of himself. As discussed in Chapter Four, he selected the term 'cheesy' for his dance movements as a way of distinguishing them from his elegant, 'classy' style of dress. In the hologram, his clothes - a white suit, blue jacket and black sunglasses or a white suit, white shoes and white sunglasses - created a classic image, whereas his quaint dancing, with the silhouette of his potbelly showing through his tight white shirt, and his supercilious facial expressions, communicated a camp, kitsch and quaint aesthetic or *byeongmat*. Although Psy displayed masculine behaviour, with physically powerful and dynamic choreography, the digital backgrounds created a camp and kitsch ambience to reinforce Psy's quaint image.



Figure 5.3. Digital artwork in Psy's hologram

As illustrated in Figure 5.3, like screen sculptures used by Nam June Paik in his digital artwork, multiples of Psy's face were displayed on television screens, randomly stacked one on top of the other as a piece of video art, his holographic image elegantly demonstrating the practice of remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000): two small screens showed a range of different images or Korean translations into English, a role usually played by a translator in his live performances. Between the screens, the logo 'PSY' and the words 'Sponsored by CJ' appeared. In this way, one large screen was divided into four smaller ones, and the audience experienced hypermediacy, but what they experienced is also remediation. Some scenes represented images similar to those in the music video, whereas others depicted movements from the spectacle, giving the audience a fantastic experience of a mediated performance. A man, who played the South Korean comedian Jae Seok Yoo, wearing a yellow dress, and a woman, HyunA, who is a member of K-pop idol girl group 4Minutes danced together suggestively, replicating movements from the video, thereby evoking the real performers. This reminded the audience of the music video. The elevator man was enacted by a man wearing a large mask of a horse whose body was covered by a tiger-patterned fabric. These scenes were recreated from the music video of 'Gangnam Style' and were thus hypermediated. In relation to the concept of 'liveness', however, we are thinking of the 'presentness' of time and space, and the lack of an actual live, performing body might still be problematic.

All in all, this is the aim of the hologram: the ‘live’ performer does not appear, but the audience feels they are watching the real, moving body of the performer. However, Psy’s hologram demonstrated that a sense of the ‘real’ and the ‘non real-like’ is shared because the audience recognised edited images in the scenes through the use of various digital technology skills. For instance, Psy changed his outfit or seemed to have disappeared every time he turned around. Images of Psy were recognised as those of a ‘live’ performer, even though onscreen images replaced Psy’s real body. Using a wide variety of interesting scenes can reinforce the digital technology; however, it can also interrupt the ‘liveness’ felt by the audience.

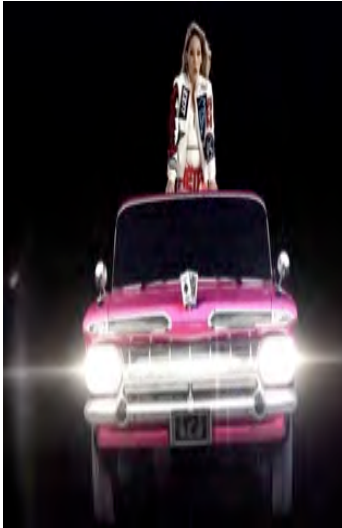


Figure 5.4. 2NE1’s live performance at the KBEE in London

The second hologram at the KBEE expo was of idol girl group 2NE1, a group with four members—CL, Dara, Borm and Minzy. 2NE1 performed two songs, giving their first show in London since their debut (see Figure 5.4). After the live performance, 2NE1’s hologram concert began, providing an optimal opportunity to compare ‘live’ and ‘screened’ bodies or ‘liveness’ and virtual ‘liveness’. In live performance, ‘liveness’ includes notions of ‘presentness’, ‘existence’ and ‘immediacy’—experiences evoked in the audience through their connection and interaction with live performers. In contrast, the hologram performance contained a wide range of interesting images, more spectacular than the live performance, but the elements of ‘liveness’, cited above, despite the holographic project’s aims, were missing. 2NE1 gave a more hyper-realistic holographic performance than Psy according to various aspects of digital technology.

For example, as a group of four girls, the holographic projection used a quadrangle frame to show 3D images of them disappearing and reappearing. Frames then changed to the image of a playing card. The audience became immersed in the onscreen virtual reality and focused on the media technology. The range of interesting images, the graphic design, lasers and fire shows together created the immediacy of virtual reality, yet the digital image clearly cannot provide the immediacy of an audience's experience of 'liveness'. The digital image can only transmit to an audience: it is not possible to interact with the digital image in any meaningful way. The hologram seemed to show a reproduction of the music video due to additional editing of various images. To create hypermediacy, the hologram was preceded by a pre-recorded video of the group's daily life, shown onscreen. Scenes showed the transparent immediacy of the performers' bodies magnified onscreen, driving a luxury car onto the stage, followed by the disappearance of the car, and then performing 'magic'. In terms of hypermediacy, virtual reality recreates the experience of interactive technology, both live and virtually live, and virtual reality has the effect of remediating all past technology (Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

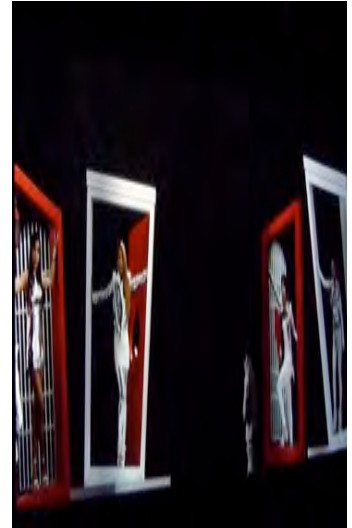
The aim of the hologram performance was to pursue the audience's desire for 'liveness'. If we compare Psy's hologram with 2NE1's, 2NE1 communicated remoteness and dignity, whereas Psy's hologram communicated intimacy and proximity. This might be due to the technology used in editing. Excessive use of digital technology can make the present moment seem far away even though the scenes' concepts are themselves magical or super-real, for example, a pair of hands floating in the air, playing cards and Borm's body riding across the stage on a magic carpet (see Figure 5.5). The use of digital technology to such spectacular effect was hugely entertaining, but the hologram's purpose of creating liveness did not seem to have been realised, at least in this performance. In Psy's case, the disappearance and reappearance of backup dancers showed some attempt to entertain using technology. These effects can be achieved only via these technologies. In other words, they are media-specific effects and are therefore connected to notions of remediation. These media-specific effects highlight the creation of virtual reality and can thus also be identified as hypermediacy. The quadrangle frame as a key feature of the holographic projection lent a 3D nature to images provided by the media-specific effects, and these effects appeared and disappeared again through the remediation process.



CL in 'I Am the Best'



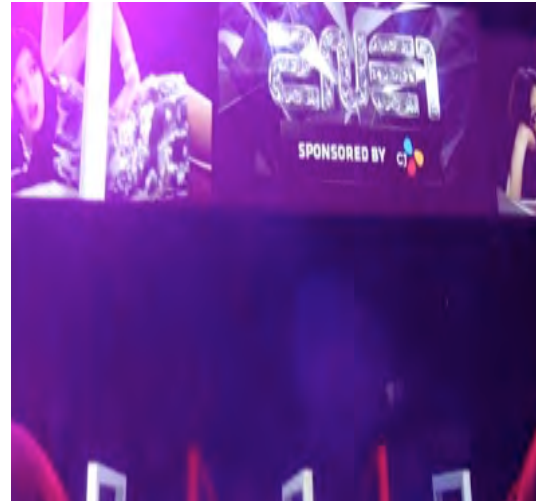
Dara in 'I Am the Best'



2NE1 in 'I Am the Best'



Borm in 'I Am the Best'



Minzy in 'Fire'



Borm in 'Fire'



2NE1 in 'Fire'

Figure 5.5. 2NE1's 'I Am the Best' and 'Fire' in hologram

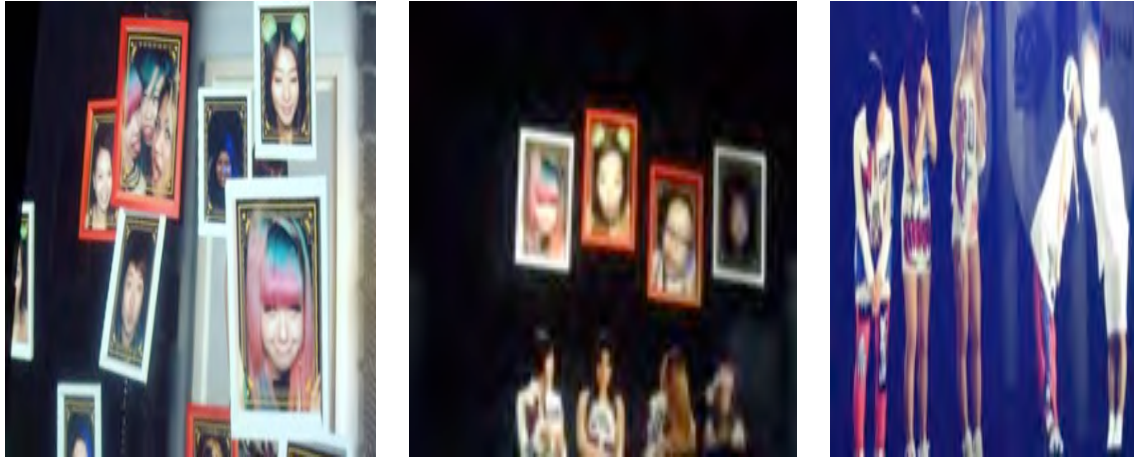


Figure 5.6. 2NE1's event with the audience

2NE1's music video points to the attempt to make a piece of digital art, even though virtual bodies are meant to look lifelike, and immediacy and intimacy are evoked in the audience as part of the communication process between them and the mediated form. For instance, 2NE1 also used an event, like Psy, to place audience photos on the giant screens above the stage, and they also selected an audience member to receive a gift (Figure 5.6). To simulate 'liveness' in mediated performance, audience participants, the digital body and the live body were combined in this virtual reality. However, this does not necessarily narrow the gap between a live performance and one that uses digital technology - in the end, the super real is more surreal than real in its effect. In a holographic performance, interaction with the audience is the most significant factor, followed by representation of a real body. These factors are also related to the main elements of 'liveness,' mentioned above. Psy and 2NE1's holograms were to include these crucial aspects as part of an experiment using 'liveness' in mediated performance to overcome the geographical distance between Seoul and London.

In its *aegyo* style, 2NE1 has the group image of strong, edgy women. One reason for this image, as opposed to the typical K-pop idol girl innocent 'cuteness', is their music style. 2NE1 focuses on hip-hop, reggae and electro-pop, influenced by their entertainment company YG, a representative hip-hop label in South Korea. Most K-pop idol girls dress classically or in cute fashions; in contrast, the members of 2NE1 adopt a more quaint, 'cute' style with much decoration, heavy make-up and particular hairstyle design. Their self-presentation front stage can be summed up as unique, strange and powerful, whereas each member's self-presentation backstage conforms much more to

the expected ‘innocent-but-sexual’ ‘cuteness’ (Borm), ‘Barbie doll-like’ or ‘quaint’ ‘cuteness’ (Dara) and ‘child-like’ ‘cuteness’ (Minzy as a *maknae*). CL, the leader, is an exception, presenting a strong female image both front stage and backstage, reinforced through the same image on her solo album. Although strong or quaint female images appear in their music videos as well as in this hologram, their self-presentations backstage appear with diverse aspects of *aegyo*, despite their music style. For example, Dara’s high voice, slim body and small face suggest Barbie doll ‘cuteness’, and her fashion style and her hair tied like a pineapple (‘pineapple hair’) represent quaint ‘cuteness’; Borm’s big, smiling eyes and her slow child-like speech and Minzy’s round face and her role as the youngest are evidence of *kiyomi* ‘cuteness’.



Figure 5.7. 2NE1’s ‘Fire’

As illustrated in Figure 5.7, for their song ‘Fire’, Dara dresses in a hip-hop style, with large red pants and long shirts, wearing a cap back to front like a ‘cute’, naughty boy. The same images are shown onscreen and front stage. The screen hanging from above the stage sometimes emphasises *aegyo* by focusing on a particular body part of one performer, in other words, on a fragmented body performing an *aegyo* gesture, whereas the big screen centre stage shows a member’s entire figure. Into the wide over-hanging screen is inset a smaller central screen with ‘2NE1’ constantly displayed. On the larger screen, specific *aegyo* characteristics and gestures appear randomly, reminding the audience of hypermediatisation and remediation and, of course, 2NE1’s ‘cuteness’. Furthermore, as part of this mediatised form of K-pop performance, holographic projections enhance the group’s ‘cuteness’ by digitally repeating particular illustrations of the *aegyo* aesthetic and certain well-known ‘cute’ movements and gestures.

In contrast, we need to consider the ontological facts of ‘liveness’ and mediated form in Psy and 2NE1’s K-pop holographic concerts. According to Phelan, existence of the ‘alive’ performer and communication between performers and the audience are sufficient requirements for a live performance. In a holographic concert, however, the live performer does not exist, and a mediated image substitutes for the live body. Unlike Phelan, Auslander argues that in the digital environment of holographic performance, live and digital bodies are a co-presented synthesis. He believes that reciprocity exists between them and the audience and that ontological ‘liveness’ and mediated form are undifferentiated. With regard to the live performance’s identity, the hologram can be repeatedly screened without limitations of time and space. Unlike a temporary event, a holographic performance can be repeated, and, rather than performers’ human error, technological error might lower its quality. Although the hologram depicts a mediated image and its communication is limited by the manufacturing system, the illusory experience of ‘liveness’ and its accompanying feeling of immersion provide a new way for the audience to enjoy a ‘live’ performance, along with the realism of the original music video or television programme.

As for aesthetic style, 2NE1’s songs are more generally definite expressions of ‘quaint’ feminine ‘cuteness’. This is illustrated in particular by their kitsch fashions, which also allow them to display aspects of their individuality, for instance, Dara’s pineapple hairstyle mentioned above. 2NE1 presents a strong feminine image totally different from that of other K-pop girl groups and the average South Korean woman, for whom ‘cuteness’ or sexiness is paramount. If we compare them with f(x), who debuted in the same year, 2NE1’s members’ average age is higher, and both their group and song concepts are definitively hip-hop. However, this is not surprising since they are signed to an entertainment company’s hip-hop label.

The holograms of Psy and 2NE1 represent these performers’ live bodies with 3D images. The hologram has also been defined as a ‘virtual concert’ or ‘V-concert’ in South Korea. Through their virtual avatars, performers can (appear to) give front stage performances. In this virtual digital reality, the performers’ live and screened bodies co-exist, and I agree with Auslander’s assertion, in relation to ‘liveness’, that the hologram can be understood as a mediated performance. Although K-pop holographic performance represents virtual ‘liveness’ through its excessive use of spectacle and its

restricted interaction with the audience, it does, however, propose a state-of-the-art form for 'liveness' as a mediated performance. As such, it becomes another manufactured work or cultural product available for K-pop entertainment companies' marketing strategies.

5.4. The Mediatized Performance in Remediation

The 'liveness' of mediated performances can be explored using Bolter and Grusin's (2000) concept of remediation. With the rapid development of new media forms, our culture wants both to multiply and erase its media *at the same time* (ibid). Live television programmes or music videos rely on multiple media and editing to achieve the desire for immediacy and 'liveness.' Through these live images and sounds and through devices such as Internet live viewer voting, television can now simultaneously offer immediacy and hypermediacy.

Television music programmes, aware of interactivity's commercial value, publish web pages of weekly pop charts, and consequently, they become hypermediated. Bolter and Grusin describe immediacy and hypermediacy in CNN newscasts and on the CNN website; their argument also applies to South Korean television music programmes - using the same logic of remediation. The CNN website and televised newscasts are examples of immediacy and hypermediacy in action. Specifically, the CNN website is hypermediated through graphics, videos and texts with hyperlinks, and it borrows immediacy from televised CNN newscasts (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 9); televised newscasts are published on similar web pages, simultaneously using hypermediacy (ibid: 6).

The style of televisual remediation can also be analysed according to the logic of remediation. Both music programmes and music videos depend on media and digital editing to create an immediate, spontaneous style (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 9). Like newscasts, sports programmes and events, hypermediacy is preferable for programmes and videos (ibid: 187). On the other hand, transparency is preferred for drama, soap operas, real-life programmes and talk shows. Most television programmes demonstrate immediacy, as shown by the experience of watching television (ibid). In other words,

digital media borrows from its analogue predecessors to give viewers immediacy (ibid). Television's claim to superiority over film is precisely that a television broadcast can be 'live' (cf. Feuer, 1983: 12–22 cited in ibid, 2000: 187). Flitterman-Lewis (1992) argued the distinctions between film and television to describe 'presentness' within 'liveness.' He writes that

A film is always distanced from us in time (whatever we see on the screen has already occurred at a time when we weren't there), whereas television, with its capacity to record and display images simultaneously with our viewing, offers a quality of 'presentness', of 'here and now' as distinct from the cinema's 'there and then'. It is television's peculiar form of 'presentness'—its implicit claim to be live—that founds the impression of immediacy.

(Flitterman-Lewis, 1992: 218)

With regard to Phelan and Auslander's ontological fact of performance for liveness, then, Auslander applies ontological characteristics of live performance on television as an oppositional form to live performance, which challenges Phelan's example of the inverse form in film (Auslander, 2008). Film can be experienced, as a result of the editing of images, at specific times and spaces 'from a distance', whereas television attempts to show immediacy with 'proximity' through live transmissions. To deploy immediacy and hypermediacy transparently, television accepts various cultural and visual styles to remediate media rather than film (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). This visible multiplicity is adapted to television more easily than to film, and the purpose of supporting multiple mediations is to supply immediacy (ibid). On live television music programmes and in live performances of popular music, immediacy and hypermediacy occur through duplication to fulfil the need for proximity and intimacy from the screened body on television to the live bodies on a real stage and in the audience. To transmit the 'liveness' of these live performances, media technology is provided on television, and viewers watch by following camera angles as a function of 'point-of-view technology' (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 192).

As in live performances on television, performers attempt to replicate onscreen performances in their live concerts. In a stadium for a live performance, an audience can watch not only the live image front stage but also the images on huge screens. To record the live performance or hologram, audience members use devices such as cameras,

camcorders or cell phones. Thus, the audience watches live performance through the lenses of their devices or via huge screens. Interactive multiple mediation in television programmes and this aspect of live performance clearly demonstrate remediation. The audience's experiences on television and in a stadium are therefore created by remediation and provide 'proximity'. In 'liveness' of mediatised performance, remediation is emphasised through sophisticated media technology and the audience's experiences. The obscured boundaries between the live body and non-live or virtual body are led by remediation to borrow immediacy and intimacy as factors characteristic of ontological 'liveness'.

Regarding online communication networks, these new forms of 'liveness' are also discussed in terms of an audience's emotional experiences. Nick Couldry (2004) refers to 'online liveness' as Internet 'liveness' and 'group liveness' as social 'liveness' to discuss mediated relationships between human beings, resulting from technological development. With the free-form, unstructured nature of time online, two new forms of 'liveness' arise in the 'limited to specific performer–audience interactions', which allow a 'sense of always being connected to other people, of continuous, technologically mediated co-presence with others known and unknown' (Couldry, 2004: 356–357 cited in the study by Auslander, 2008: 61). Online 'liveness' provides a sense of co-presence among users of Internet-based media (Auslander, 2008). Large international audiences experience 'liveness' through small-scale chat rooms as well as large-scale websites (ibid). Group 'liveness' indicates a sense of connection to others via multiple platforms such as mobile phones and instant messaging. These experiences of 'liveness', both online and in group settings, are relevant to the relationship between performers and audiences when it comes to communicating intimacy and proximity.

With regard to the holographic project as digital performance, the visual reality of the hologram creates immediacy. The interaction between the virtual body and the audience, along with the illusion of three-dimensional (3D) immersion, comes from the immediacy of virtual reality (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 162). As part of this new paradigm, virtual reality views the computer as a graphic engine. The interface user is understood as falling through a window, wearing a head-mounted display, into the world of computer graphics (ibid). Audience members immerse their physical bodies in the stylised visual environment to pursue immediacy through hypermediacy. Randall

Walser, a computer graphics expert, argues that virtual reality depends on previous media so that

... a spacemaker sets up a world for an audience to act directly within, and not just so the audience can imagine they are experiencing an interesting reality, but so they can experience it directly ...

(cited in Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 162)

As mentioned in the previous section, the K-pop hologram concert attempts to support a sense of presence to achieve realism for the audience. In respect to ‘liveness’ of mediatised performance, performers conduct their performance using mediatised technology and lead the audience to participate and share in experiencing virtual reality. Like a simulation, the hologram performance can provide the audience with immediacy, intimacy and proximity. To explore the ‘liveness’ of a mediatised performance in a remediated context and appreciate further why this concept has been adopted in live K-pop performances, I use a phenomenological approach to describe K-pop boy group Super Junior’s live performance in London.

5.5. ‘Liveness’ in the Mediatised Performance of K-pop’s Super Junior

Super Junior held its first performance in the UK, Super Show 5 UK, in Wembley Arena in London on 9th November 2013. As a world tour concert, Super Show 5 began in Seoul in May 2013 and was sold out in London despite its being the group’s first UK concert. It then travelled to 15 countries across Asia, Europe and South America. The group’s commercial success has been influenced by the Internet and by social ‘liveness’ in the relationship between performers and international audiences. Most audiences of official Super Show 5 UK are members of the Super Junior fan club Ever Lasting Friends (E.L.F.). Members of the British E.L.F. communicate with others internationally, both known and unknown, through Facebook and Twitter, to share fan products such as chants, banners, flash mobs and information useful for cheering the group on at their concert. Major and minor fan activities are kept up to date for international fan club members and individual audiences. Images of the group members are regularly uploaded by fans in real time on social networking sites (SNSs), for

example, Super Junior's arrival at London's Heathrow Airport. Members of Super Junior also uploaded their own photos upon arrival in London, letting E.L.F. know that they would see them soon, thereby establishing their virtual proximity and meeting their fans' expectations for immediacy and connection.

For the concert, light sticks, balloons and glow sticks turned Wembley Arena blue, which is Super Junior's trademark colour. The concert began with the film 'Super Junior Super Heroes' shown on a huge screen above the stage. In it, group members play superhero roles in a kind of science fiction film with a range of scenarios: flying between skyscrapers, fighting a gun battle and riding motorcycles away from a fiery car explosion. In other words, they utilize a well-known genre, performed in a knowing and camp or 'cute' *aegyo* manner. As illustrated in Figure 5.8, each member is playing a particular role: Wolverine (Eunhyuk), Captain America (Siwon), Iron Man (Donghae), the Hulk (Shindong), Thor (Kangin), Spiderman (Ryeowook), Loki (Kyuhyun) and Karate Kid (Sungmin). Superheroes certainly embody a masculine ideal through their costumes, aesthetic style, behaviours and gestures. For example, Eunhyuk comically and campily, or 'cutely', highlights Wolverine's whiskers and hairy chest, wearing pink rollers in his hair and colourfully decorated sharp claws. His exaggerated facial expressions and feminine decorations indicate both camp masculine 'cuteness' and a kind of menacing presence. Ryeowook, wearing a Spiderman costume, expresses an *aegyo* gesture—he cups his chin with his hands and winks his eye (earlier described with 'Kiyomi Song'; see Figure 1.5 in Chapter One). Kyuhyun also demonstrates this high-camp superhero look, dressed as Loki and attempting to attack a girl holding a lollipop, but at the same time, following her instructions to jump and dance while she points her candy at him. The whole film has a colourful, animated, comic- and game-like background. Super heroes are traditionally characterised by hypermasculinity, physical strength and masculine sexuality (Brown, 1999), attributes subverted by Super Junior's *aegyo* aesthetic that introduces the 'cute', camp element. The duality of Super Junior's superhero performance is indicated by their *aegyo*/cute gestures, mischievous behaviour with each other, intense facial expressions and vocal imitations of the heroes when talking with the audience.



Wolverine (Eunhyuk)



Spiderman (Ryeowook)



Loki (Kyuhyun)



Captain America (Siwon)



Thor (Kangin)



Iron Man (Donghae)



Holding paper phones



Game battle imitation



In live performance

Figure 5.8. Super Junior's Super Heroes

The audience experiences this 'realism' of screen media through the stream of recorded images and is thus immersed into immediacy and realism. Hypermediacy arises when audience members record screen images using their cell phones, tablets or cameras. Through their emotional engagement with the performers and experiencing the event, for instance, with excitement, desire, enthusiasm and fandom, 'liveness' is created. Both performers and audience are aware of the role of immediacy and hypermediacy. After the film, group members appear front stage, screaming with excitement, their enlarged

shadows extending behind them. Group members then perform synchronised choreography to the song ‘Mr. Simple’ in an exact replica of their pre-recorded music video performance and their staged live performances for South Korean television music programmes (see Figure 5.9). The audience also experiences the group’s ‘presentness’ and immediacy in response to the live performance and their ‘alive’ bodies.



Super Junior’s ‘Mr. Simple’



Super Junior’s ‘Spy’

Figure 5.9. Synchronised choreography in the live performance

Super Junior originally debuted in 2005, with 12 members; currently, however, only nine members are active due to South Korea’s mandatory military service. Eight members performed in Super Show 5 UK. As one of the largest K-pop groups, Super Junior can divide into subgroups and sing in a wide range of genres, thus broadening their commercial appeal and fan base. On this occasion, Super Junior gave a spectacular performance, in particular showcasing these eight members’ synchronised dance choreography. Super Junior’s live performances tend to include distorted sound structures, upbeat synthesised sounds, vigorous choreography and synchronised group dances, all helping to create spectacle and lending the performance its trademark dynamic energy. These characteristics are, in fact, trademarks of the SM Performance style (so-called SMP)⁵⁹ and form the basic aesthetic style of all Super Junior performances.⁶⁰

⁵⁹The performance director supports SM artists with artistic direction in choreography, costume and camera work, so that they look better on stage and in music videos. The SM Entertainment Company was

After the show's opening (the film and 'Mr. Simple'), Super Junior members introduced themselves in Korean and English. Of the eight members, four spoke Korean translated to English by a female translator behind the stage and the other four spoke English. They like to communicate with the audience about their daily lives in much the same way as they might in close relationships with friends and family. This gives their relationship with the audience a personal feel, creating a sense of intimacy. First, the performers wanted to communicate with their official fan club, E.L.F.. They asked the audience, 'Where is E.L.F.?' and E.L.F. fans shook their blue light sticks, clearly showing that they surrounded the stage. The group noticed a variety of national flags and asked audience members to call out the name of the country they represented—France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway and Greece. They also expressed gratitude to their Korean fans in the UK. Super Junior's physical presence and their interaction with the audience established 'liveness', and the group's proximity and 'presentness' supported this realism. Online 'liveness' and social 'liveness,' on the other hand, connect performers with international fans in the non-physical realm, i.e. virtually.

As K-pop celebrities, Super Junior members embody a national stereotype with respect to their pride in and duty to spread South Korean culture worldwide. This is comparable to pride expressed in the film *I AM*, where, on the occasion of the SM Town concert in New York's Madison Square Garden, artists acknowledged being the first Asian singers ever to perform there. They had achieved a dream by performing at a venue that has hosted performances by so many popular artists. For example, BoA is recorded in 2001, before she became popular, as saying, '... and across the street from here is Madison Square Gardens. Madonna, the famous female artist, performed here. I dream of becoming a famous artist one day and performing there.' The film sequence intersects her past with the present, showing how BoA has achieved her dream. Personal achievements tend to be connected to national pride for those K-pop artists who have led the Korean wave: they see themselves as cultural ambassadors and patriots. In Super Show 5, Super Junior expressed pride at giving a concert in the UK, reflecting the growing status of K-pop there.

the first to introduce formally a performance director for its idol groups. Sang Hoon Hwang and Jae Won Shim were the first two.

⁶⁰Interview from web magazine *IZE*, 13th August 2013 (Accessed on 28th December 2013)

The live Super Show 5 had four key characteristics: singing in solo, duet and group performances; dance parodies and comedy sketches; acting in film sequences of various genres shown onscreen; and personal ‘talk-show’ dialogues with the audience. This comprehensive programme reflects central aspects of my thesis explored in previous chapters, such as the manufacturing of K-pop idols’ bodies (Chapter Two), ‘cute’ masculinity (Chapter Four) and, of course, ‘liveness’ in mediated performances (this chapter). For artists and entertainment companies, a live K-pop concert is the culmination of all their previous work, drawing together all the different aspects of K-pop, embedding them in a marketing strategy and creating a singular cultural product. In relation to the SM Entertainment Company’s manufacturing system, Super Junior’s concert fully demonstrates how modes of production and commercial promotion have evolved to attract international audiences. In relation to *aegyo* and further to elucidate K-cute aesthetics in terms of gender, representation and performance, I examine Super Show 5 through the lens of phenomenology.

According to Steve Connor’s (2000) *Making an issue of cultural phenomenology*, cultural phenomenology is centrally concerned with habits, rituals, processes, obsessions and modes of feeling. In Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Levinas, the reflection of aggregate or impersonal life is affected by phenomenological tradition. Cultural phenomenology, in Connor’s view, can be understood as a way of ‘stirring reflection on the nature of collectivity and association’, ‘homing in on substances, habits, organs, rituals, obsessions, pathologies, processes and patterns of feeling’. Crucially, Connor’s view indicates the importance of intersubjectivity and ‘would take care to steer clear of precomprehended problems, under rubrics such as power, identity, ideology, gender, sexuality, “race”, ethnicity, the body and postmodernism ...’ (Connor, 2000: 5). Connor (2000: 3) suggests that ‘if cultural phenomenology would mean a way of doing phenomenology to culture, it might also usefully put a bit of culture into phenomenology’. Cultural phenomenology can be applied to Super Show 5 London in terms of the relationship between K-pop idols and the audience. At Wembley Arena, K-pop idol boys performed in front of international audiences, some of whom were familiar with Korean culture or K-pop. For others, it might have been a completely new cultural experience. Super Junior planned superhero events and drag performances as part of their concert because they were considered them interesting. They were also considered comic and fun by the Korean audience, and they showed how much effort

idols put into entertaining. However, the international audience, stadium atmosphere and degree of the international audience's cheering showed a mixed response, even though these events led to one of the concert's main performances. Thus, Super Junior's high-camp, quaint *aegyo* is embedded with a remodelling of traditional and contemporary Korean culture as a unique idea of Korean-ness. From the perspective of cultural phenomenology, their 'cute' masculinity needs to be understood according to South Korean issues of gender, sexuality, power, ethnicity and identity. To focus on a cultural form as a living phenomenon, I apply cultural phenomenology to Super Show 5 UK.

Super Show 5 was recreated as closely as possible to live television music chart programmes. At one point, one Super Junior member referred to three other members who could not join the concert due to military service. As a specific issue within South Korean society, no exception is made for K-pop idols (Korean men) who are aged over 20⁶¹. Super Junior's natural rotation of members has been part of the group's structure since they became a K-pop idol group. In Korea, audiences knew about military service and called out names of the absent group members. At Super Show 5, other performers were happy to recall absent members for their audience. It gave them the opportunity to show pre-recorded images of absent performers during the live performance and thus make good use of mediatised performance.

As a cultural product, Super Junior is marketed as a multi-skilled entertainment group in which each member has a specialty such as singing, acting, modelling, dance, comedy, being a radio host or MC. Super Show 5 looked exactly like a Korean music programme that broadcasts a weekly competition in which the most popular K-pop idol groups perform live. Between performances, some artists host the next show, taking the role of an MC, whereas others highlight recent unusual events, such as a drag performance, and still others sing ballads to share music created by some Super Junior subgroups. In turns, they perform different roles in the main group: main vocalist, lead vocalist, sub-vocalist, main rapper, lead rapper, main dancer and lead dancer.

⁶¹With regard to mandatory military service for Korean males, Super Junior's natural rotation of members began when Kangin entered the army in 2010. The natural exchange of members applied to this concert in that only eight of the eleven performed, and this rotation might become an advantage for Super Junior as the largest K-pop group.

Music for Super Show 5 came from various genres and also included some fan chants - another method of interaction between performers and the audience. The SMP-style performances and synchronised choreography derive from live performances for television and have obviously been constructed for the screen in a television studio's confined space, rather than for a live concert, as performers did not use the whole stage when they danced. These performance styles can be explained as a cultural phenomenon, influenced by K-pop idols' increasing popularity in the Korean music industry.

Lyrics included repeated melodies and hook songs. The international audience sang along to parts in English, and they could also follow the unique rhythm of the Korean lyrics, rather than having to know the Korean language per se. Evidently, international fans can easily follow K-pop dance music, even though on occasion the audience was silent and did not sing the fan chants, for example, when the performers played some rhythm and blues (R&B) and sang ballads. This may well be because R&B numbers and ballads have more monotonous rhythms and many words, making the language barrier more difficult for some international fans. In this case, communication between the performers and the audience did not happen as easily, and there was little spontaneous participation in the stadium. Most digital platforms provide captions or subtitles in diverse languages, including English, for example, on television or YouTube, but Super Show 5 did not. This is problematic for a live performance when compared with liveness online, where audiences can find Super Junior lyrics in their own languages and thus experience hypermedia through the Internet.

At one point during the concert, Super Junior began a version of Stevie Wonder's song 'Isn't She Lovely', and the audience started to sing along. Then, Shindong performed comically on the harmonica, trying for some laughs. Kyuhyun and Ryeowook sang a ballad together as part of the subgroup K.R.Y. was formed through OSMU strategy to include three members with greater singing ability. Of the three K.R.Y. members, two sang live and the other member Yesung, who is in the army, appeared onscreen. The audience screamed at Yesung's image, which created a sense of his presence and greatly resembled the daily visual of him shown on television (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). As in Figure 5.10, Yesung was dressed in a white suit, as were the other two. A screen image distinctly differs from screened hologram bodies. Clearly, however, absent

members' huge visual onscreen images provided connection, proximity and a reinforced relationship with audience. Yesung's romantic image and the ballad songs presented a very different ethos than that of the military, so perhaps this mediated image was an attempt to negotiate the gap by 're-cutting' Yesung for the audience. Thus, the audience could connect to his innocent-but-sexual, 'cute' masculine figure, surrounded by soft melodies and blue lighting, involving intricate computer-generated patterns of flowers. That moment made absent members seem present or gave them 'liveness'. It also gave the audience an opportunity to recall them and distinguish temporarily between their screen images (absent bodies) and the 'alive' bodies of the performers front stage. In other words, the moment also communicated pseudo-'liveness' simultaneously with 'liveness'. Such moments, which must inevitably be replicated endlessly in virtual Internet reality, excellently illustrate the blurring of boundaries between the real, the unreal, the super real and the surreal explored in this discussion of mediatised performance.



Figure 5.10. Super Junior's subgroup K.R.Y.

As part of their live performance, Super Junior also dress as women. This is part of the cultural norm for South Korean fans, understood as a parody of K-pop female idol groups by male idols who want to express concepts of feminine sexiness and 'cuteness'. In relation to Bolter and Grusin, we can also see this as a form of remediation, for, to some degree, clothing is a cultural technology that mediates people and their personas.

Many K-pop idol boy groups engage in these parodies, mimicking female K-pop celebrities on South Korean music variety shows.

These drag performances by Super Junior are designed to provide variety and to get a laugh from the audience as well as to create immediacy and intimacy (see Figure 5.11). Some international audience members did not seem to have the same cultural reference points, however, and did not understand this performance's social code signifying humour. In the concert hall context, cross-dressing was problematic and highlighted different entertainment social receptors. According to some reviews for Super Show 5, international fans posted a range of responses that fell into two main groups: one that communicated understanding that cross-dressing was seen as a form of enjoyment by male audience members, and the other, that they had no idea why the group dressed as women. Drag performance can, however, highlight issues of gender and sexuality using the global stage as a vehicle. As for cultural relativity, international fans accepted the drag performance; however, Super Junior and SM also need to accept that when they export K-pop globally, some international tastes might differ from those in South Korea and that adjusting their programme accordingly might make sense.



Siwon in Dambi Son's
'Saturday Night'



Kangin in Gain's 'Bloom'



Sungmin in Hyuna's 'Ice
Cream'



Kangin, Siwon, Ryeowook and Sungmin in Sistar's 'Alone'

Figure 5.11. Cross-dressing performance

Members of Super Junior often make short films of themselves, created especially for the audience who, in terms of hypermediacy, need to see the performers' images as well as the group in person. Their actual physical bodies provide immediacy and intimacy, and the short videos - their digital presence - create hypermediacy. Super Junior members like to play a range of characters from diverse film genres: spy, action adventure, gangster, comedy, romance and science fiction. These visuals are then re-used for the live concert, duplicated on concert screens. The pre-recorded and previously viewed images appear onscreen next to 'real' bodies performing live front stage, and this juxtaposition or co-existence creates 'liveness' and 'presentness' as well as virtual 'liveness', for the audience. Co-existence is connected to remediation in that audiences recognise the characters through the group members' role-play, hypermediated via stage screens. Repetitive patterns between 'liveness' and virtual 'liveness', for example, when the 'Super Junior Super Heroes' film (described above) is shown, are a fundamental part of techno-media forms that not only give the effect of 'liveness' but also enable fantasies about Korean-ness or about masculine ideals, such as the camp *aegyo* masculinity of Asian bodies.

Unlike the documentary-film format generally used for the group's videos, which, incidentally, were screened in interludes between song performances, Super Show 5 also screened videos that highlighted each member's individuality. The video superhero figures in 'Super Junior Super Heroes', for instance, were reproduced front stage through costumes when the group parodied iconic superheroes - Thor, Iron Man, Wolverine from X-Men, the Hulk, Captain America and Spiderman, among others. The volume of fans' screaming revealed the degree of each group member's popularity. As multi-skilled entertainers, Super Junior members focused on their individual strengths to give the best possible, most dynamic performance. Modes of production and commercial promotion for the concert were evidently based on a highly iconic wardrobe and on each member's talents as strategies for attracting international audiences.

To encourage audience participation and interact with the audience, performers taught them some of the choreography. The movements were 'cute' gestures based on Korean *aegyo*, and international fans were familiar with *aegyo* as part of Korean popular culture's aesthetics. After teaching the choreography, Super Junior members and fans performed together to the music. Super Junior showed off their various images, such as

‘masculine’ with powerful dance moves, ‘cute’ with dainty gestures, ‘sexy’ with parodies of K-pop idol girls, ‘elegant’ with several changes of smart clothing and ‘friendly’ through communication with the audience. These diverse activities and performances arguably lifted the audience’s spirits, making the fans feel good.

Hierarchical words of respect appear in K-pop culture, and international fans use them even though they represent various aspects of the gender relationship between performers and audiences. At one point in the concert, Eunhyuk and Donghae sang the song ‘*Oppa Oppa*’, and they asked the fans to say ‘*oppa*’. Eunhyuk said, ‘I say “Eunhyuk,” you say “*oppa*.”’ The completed phrase, of course, was ‘Eunhyuk *Oppa*’. Donghae did the same, resulting in ‘Donghae *Oppa*’. The term *oppa* is used by Korean women when addressing older men. Use of *oppa* by an international audience familiar with this word can be appreciated through the lens of cultural phenomenology. In relation to gender stereotyping and age hierarchy, words of respect exist in Korea. For example, a young person cannot use the name of an older man but instead should use terms of respect such as *oppa* and *unni* when addressing them. *Oppa* implies that the older man must protect the younger woman, who is ‘cute’ and needs help. In K-pop culture, *oppa* is often used by the female partner in a romantic relationship to address the male partner and encourage him to act ‘cute’. K-pop male stars consider themselves *oppas*, even though they are still young and they also relate to female fans like sisters. With regard to their treatment of fans, K-pop stars take care of fan club members, treating them like sisters. Fans also play a role as their idols’ protectors, calling them *oppa* or *hero*. This means that the idol is their *oppa* forever, irrespective of age. However, international fans might have a different interpretation of *oppa* even though they rushed to call it out during Super Show 5. Donghae spoke in English to the fans, as follows:

Sometimes, you’re my hero, sometimes you’re my girlfriend, sometimes you’re my sister and sometimes you’re my baby. Without you, I couldn’t see. Without you, I could never hear. Without you, I could never have happy tears in my eyes. Thank you very much. I love you all.

When Donghae uttered each phrase, their fans’ noise level indicated their response. When Donghae said, ‘Sometimes, you’re my hero’, the fans screamed. When he said,

‘sometimes you’re my girlfriend’, the screaming became louder. However, when he said, ‘sometimes you’re my sister’, there was little or no response and the audience seemed confused by the phrase. Then, when he said, ‘sometimes you’re my baby’, the crowd screamed again. However, when the star referred to fans as ‘sister’, international fans responded negatively. If they had been Korean fans, they would have responded positively. This is another example of K-pop’s cultural relativity; in this instance, cultural norms of the South Korean Confucian worldview came into relationship with socio-political norms of Western society.

Although the response for Super Junior’s drag performance was similar, as mentioned earlier, I have established that performances of *aegyo* can be accepted as an aspect of ethnic diversity in South Korea and that *aegyo* can be understood within it as part of the South Korean aesthetic of K-pop. Although performances of *aegyo* represent the aesthetic mode of K-pop in South Korea and are widely accepted in East Asia as a result of cultural proximity, *aegyo* is still unfamiliar to most countries beyond East Asia. In different ways, I have shown how performances of *aegyo*, in relation to issues of gender and sexuality, point to a unique idea of Korean-ness embedded in traditional and contemporary South Korean culture. *Aegyo*, as indicated in this chapter, is also an aesthetic form of remediation emphatically reproduced, re-emphasised and redistributed through the specific medium of the digital film/hologram, with its 3D characteristics, use of virtual bodies and quality of virtual ‘liveness’.

5.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, K-pop live performance is influenced by the mediatised culture through immediacy and hypermediacy, the two strategies available in the practice of remediation, in which new media refashion prior forms of media (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). To achieve the desired realism for the audience, K-pop live performances reproduce televisual images from live television and pre-recorded music videos as closely as possible in the live concert setting. Through online and social ‘liveness’, performers communicate with their audience, no longer confined by the limitations of space, and this ‘liveness’ is connected to K-pop’s commercial success on the global stage. With regard to K-pop’s marketing strategies, the appearance of the weekly

television music chart programmes is one of the most significant commercial strategies for performing a world tour, currently and in the future. To create a culture of ‘watching music’ rather than simply ‘listening to music’ in our mediatised culture, SMP-style performances are choreographed to be as magnetic as possible, within the limitations of time and space. Live K-pop performances in mediatised form are cultural products that have emerged from intensive manufacture of K-pop idol groups’ virtuosity, over several years, best viewed through digital platforms.

With regard to the concept of ‘liveness’ and its building blocks of presence, immediacy, proximity, existence and disappearance in the remediated context, K-pop performance is recreated to achieve ‘liveness’ in new fields of digital performance such as holograms and mediatised performance. Mediatised performances, as described, highlight and rely on interaction between performers and audience, and are, in fact, necessary in relation to the possibility of globalized performances using remediation. In the ‘liveness’ of the mediatised performance, absent bodies are represented through virtual images, and the audience’s desire for immediacy is fulfilled through the hypermediated illusion of immersion. Through a phenomenological analysis of ‘liveness’ in a mediatised performance (Super Show 5), performances of *aegyo* have been reinforced as a key aspect of K-pop’s unique aesthetic and established as culturally relative.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Aesthetics of ‘Cuteness’ in Korean Pop Music

This thesis has explored the aesthetics of K-pop ‘cuteness’ in relation to issues of gender, representation and performance. Vital aims have been to examine the concept of *aegyo* and the unique aesthetics of K-pop ‘cuteness’ that represent embedded traditional and contemporary cultural forms in South Korea. Furthermore, the thesis investigated gender representations of ‘cute’ femininity and ‘cute’ masculinity through a study of K-pop idol girl and boy groups. In this light, *aegyo* has been examined as a form of performance from daily life, and performances of *aegyo* have been presented as competitive - survival of the ‘cutest’ - or as behaviours deliberately manufactured for commodification. As a starting point, ‘cute’ behaviour has been defined in relation to everyday-life behaviour in South Korea and as part of a dance fad adopted by K-pop idols.

In my discussion of ‘*Kiyomi Song*’ in Chapter One, I examined the fundamentals of *aegyo* as an aesthetic style and showed how differences between male and female versions of the song gave rise to a flexible lexicon of ‘cute’, which was determined by diverse factors, including issues of gender and sexuality. K-pop idol *aegyo*, in one respect, is a tool for demonstrating individual identity or self-presentation backstage; it is also deliberately manufactured and gradually becomes embodied by K-pop idols throughout their training. This I define as self-presentation front, or on, stage. K-pop idol boys and girls perform *aegyo* battles on television programmes as part of their self-promotion, and it is evident that the commodification of aesthetic ‘cuteness’ plays a crucial role in the K-pop industry.

In Chapter Two, I explored cultural technology (CT), idol training and virtuosity to indicate how the process of professionalism involves the commercial manipulation of *aegyo* performances within the neoliberal socio-political paradigm of South Korea. In a climate of survival of the ‘cutest’, K-pop idol *aegyo* is an indispensable behaviour in a

highly competitive society, and it can be classified as repetitive action, according to the concept of performance and gender performativity. Performances of *aegyo* can be defined as a new type of virtuosity - part of the strategic and profitable appropriation of K-pop trainees. Commodification of aesthetic 'cuteness' within K-pop fulfils a range of purposes, and performers fulfil various roles within the field of entertainment in line with the OSMU marketing strategy. My central argument focuses on performances of *aegyo* and how they have been influenced by issues of gender representation and sexuality, as witnessed through feminine and masculine styles of 'cuteness' in South Korea. To demonstrate the flexibilities of 'cuteness' in relation to gender differences, I established taxonomies of *aegyo* for 'cute' femininity in Chapter Three and for 'cute' masculinity in Chapter Four.

Although I have argued that performances of *aegyo* have been manufactured for commodification, the aesthetic categories of 'cuteness' have emerged from a confluence of traditional and contemporary South Korean historical and cultural imperatives. I have explored East Asian representations of the feminine in ancient drawings and poetry, as well as in contemporary media, specifically the emergence of *aegyo* in the figure of the *kisaeng*, although modern *aegyo* has masculine as well as feminine forms. In fact, *aegyo* has had consistent expression through changing socio-historical and political conditions. I have also described similarities and differences between Korean *aegyo*, Japanese *kawaii* and Taiwanese *ke'ai* and put the case strongly for performances of *aegyo* as forming a unique idea of Korean-ness. In my research on feminine 'cuteness', I examined K-pop idol girl group f(x) as a way of introducing the feminine taxonomy of *aegyo* according to five aesthetic categories: child-like 'cuteness' or *kiyomi aegyo*, followed by 'bagel-girl' 'cuteness' or 'innocent but sexy' *aegyo*; then *ulzzang* or 'Barbie doll-like' *aegyo*; fourthly, *unpa* or 'pretty tomboy' *aegyo*; and finally, 'quaint' or cheesy, camp, kitsch 'cuteness', also known as *byeongmat aegyo*. These categories combine types of 'cuteness' with Internet neologisms that have emerged in response to the need to define and categorise *aegyo*.

Applying Butler's ideas on gender performativity, I analysed various types of *aegyo* codes within femininity, and symbolic signs of female sexuality within gender and power relationships; I reconstructed representations of K-pop idols' images. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and Goffman's notion of self-presentation provided theoretical

underpinnings for an exploration of manufactured individual propensities in idols' performances of *aegyo*, while I stressed how aesthetic 'cuteness' is embedded within the traditional and contemporary cultural contexts of Korea. In other words, in South Korea, entertainment companies have adopted and manipulated *aegyo*, using it commercially through their female and male 'K-cute' products. Within the K-pop industry, *aegyo* is thus also performed by boys in what has effectively become a remodelling of traditional forms of Korean masculinity. I have examined *aegyo* within 'cute' masculinity according to the following four aspects: 'child-like' masculinity or *kiyomi*; 'cartoonish' masculinity or *kkotminam*; 'macho' sexuality or *kkotjimseung*; and 'quaint' masculinity or *byeongmat*. Through examining stereotypes, age and performance, I have stressed that K-pop idol boy groups have a national compatibility for cultural production as well as for the performance of *aegyo* based on Said's Orientalism.

I presented the example of glam rock to show the identity conflict of glam rockers in terms of self-presentation both on stage and backstage, while I suggested that K-pop idols' veridical selves cannot distinguish between their public and private faces and how their personas rely on a notion of celebrity, usefully provided by Rojek. Turner's understanding of liminality assisted me in establishing the power relationship not only between employer (South Korean entertainment companies) and employee (K-pop idols) but also between seniors (*sunbae*) and juniors (*hubae*) in K-pop idol culture, relationships influenced by performance of *aegyo* as a means of survival. In terms of gender, representation and performance, my discussion of *aegyo* has been informed by a historical and cultural contextualisation of South Korea as well as an elaboration of types of femininity and masculinity within K-pop, using a typology of feminine and masculine 'cuteness'. To depict accurately the phenomenon of *aegyo* I am interested in, I have completed a phenomenological analysis of Super Junior's live concert Super Show 5. This thesis is my contribution to research into *aegyo* in K-pop and the conditions in wider South Korean society that underpin this ethnic performance.

Furthermore, this thesis has explored commercial manipulation of *aegyo* to demonstrate how *aegyo* is performed, how it is used in K-pop, why it has appeared in K-pop and what role it plays. The thesis has also located the practice and performance of *aegyo* within the field of performance studies, taking up key concepts from the work of

Goffman and Schechner and applying them to *aegyo* and its function within K-pop and wider South Korean society. Although I have isolated this particular aesthetic style, I have entirely focused on SM Entertainment Company's K-pop idols. Further research should also consider performances of *aegyo* in a more diverse range of K-pop music genres and in different entertainment companies, as well as the complexity of *aegyo* gestures used in daily life. *Aegyo*, wrongly assumed to be influenced by Japanese *kawaii*, has its roots in South Korean culture itself, emerging initially through the traditional *kisaeng* figure. Contemporary 'K-cute' *aegyo*, as a baseline aesthetic embodied by K-pop idols, emerges through a process of exploitation of the individual and a conscientious desire of the aspiring idol to adopt a strategy of survival and ultimately success. This thesis contributes to the demonstration of the aesthetic style of 'cuteness' in K-pop as flexible and potent, with multiple categories and modes of expression, and as an increasingly self-conscious performance practice that participates in the dynamic dialogue between idol and audience, company and trainee, South Korean and global citizen.

In my thesis, I have argued that *aegyo* is the most significant aesthetic in K-pop because it is a style of ethnic performance that possesses staged authenticity and is embedded in traditional and contemporary Korean cultural forms. Further research should examine the tastes of diverse ethnic audiences in respect to the process of making popularised commercial cultural products through digital media and live performances on the global stage. Current research does not deal with recent K-pop idol groups, such as those of the third generation that have debuted since the 2010s. Aesthetic modes are being recreated through the media. However, aesthetic styles within the taxonomies of 'cuteness', which I suggest in this thesis, in themselves are sufficient to suggest a path for the future of aesthetics within K-pop. I hope that the aesthetics of K-pop continue to be explored through diverse case studies, arousing scholarly interest in both media and cultural studies, as well as in performance studies, as a means of refining the term *aegyo* or remediating it through a digitalised aesthetic of Korean-ness, an approach that will hopefully consider the demands and needs of the global stage, as well as continue to value the relative notion of an ethnic performance aesthetic.

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