



# Reference to Korean Traditional Attire in BTS's SUGA's "Daechwita" Music Video

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**Abstract.** K-Pop includes not only music and choreography, but also fashion and style. The K-Pop phenomenal group BTS member, SUGA, showed interest in Korean traditional attire in the music video for his solo song "Daechwita" (2020). This paper will analyze the Korean traditional attire and ornaments in BTS's SUGA's "Daechwita" music video from a semiotics of fashion point of view using a descriptive qualitative method; and the purpose of referencing it in his music video. In the music video for "Daechwita", SUGA finally tried to accept his real identity and criticize the music industry by combining a woven hat and a hat string that commoners in the Joseon era in Korea were forbidden to wear. Besides, SUGA also tried to do a self-reflection by killing a tyrant King who resembles his greediness and ambitions; so eventually he can be wiser, more mature, and more balanced to face the Korean music industry.

**Keywords:** Korean, Attire, BTS, SUGA, Daechwita

## 1 Introduction

In the last ten years, Korean pop music, well known as K-Pop, has developed and become one of the aspects that spread Korean culture and lifestyle. The spreading of Korean culture worldwide is called the Korean Wave. The term Korean Wave itself was introduced by Chinese media around the early 2000s since Korean dramas were popular in China [1]. In South Korea, the discovery of K-Pop has been known since the 1980s during the rapid growth of the economic state in Korea. Because of the rapid growth, Korean people may access popular culture and entertainment. At the same time, the Korean political state changed. After the assassination of President Park Chung Hee in 1979, military dictator Chun Doo Hwan was throned as president. To remove the attention of Korean citizens who did not support Chun Doo Hwan's leadership, the Korean government started to promote television and the entertainment industry [2]. Television channel V started to broadcast Korean music programs. Therefore, Korean pop music has gradually become popular in Korea.

These phenomena were supported by the spirit of nationalism in Korea. In Korea, nationalism is not considered a constraint, but rather a motivation. Koreans view globalization as an instrument with a nationalist agenda [3]. They did not want to lose against Western culture and this eventually strengthened K-Pop development in Korea and Asia. Especially in Japan and Southeast Asia, at the end of the 2000s, K-Pop was dominating [4].

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One of the most popular K-pop musicians, not only in Korea but also in the global world, is BTS. They have seven members, RM, Jin, SUGA, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook. BTS debuted on June 13, 2013, under Bighit Music Entertainment agency. Nowadays, BTS has not only become an icon of K-Pop but also an icon of global pop music in the 21st century. They broke world records, conducted sold-out stadium tours in many countries, and were labeled Entertainer of the Year 2020 by TIME magazine. BTS was nominated in the 65th Grammy Awards for Best Pop Duo/Group and Best Music Video category. They also won awards in the international world, for example, Billboard Music Awards and American Music Awards.

Many entertainment agencies prepare teenagers from a young age to be an idol. They must be able to sing and dance. At the same time, entertainment agencies look for famous producers, composers, and choreographers to make music, lyrics, and choreography for their artists. These phenomena have caused K-Pop to be recognized as a whole concept product by the agencies and focused on the visual image [5]. However, BTS is assumed to be different because all members actively participate in music production. Therefore, BTS may have authenticity and originality; they are also trying to break the stereotype of K-Pop as a commodity that does not have uniqueness and freedom of expression. In their self-written lyrics, BTS has not hesitated to be different, frequently talking about topics that were avoided by most K-Pop idols such as mental health issues and expressing their criticisms toward the music industry in Korea.

Research on K-Pop has gradually become popular. K-Pop succeeds in creating its reputation and morality in society. People nowadays can identify cultural values carried by K-Pop, and fans eventually initiate to dig deeper into the Korean language and culture [1]. However, most of the research related to K-Pop focused on fans and the success of K-Pop as a phenomenon, e.g. research to examine the impact of K-Pop in Romania [6]. Meanwhile, research that discusses K-Pop musics as a text has not yet been popular because of the stereotype attached to K-Pop as a visual image product. The research about BTS music is valuable because of the brave spirit of youth who do not hesitate to break the system of the past and embrace the good traditions that already exist. This is also the main reason for choosing BTS and their song as a theme for this paper, namely the group's musical creativity in combining innovations and modernity with traditional values in Korea. This paper will discuss one of the BTS's members, SUGA's music video, "Daechwita" (2020), from a semiotics of fashion point of view. This paper will identify the meaning of the symbol of Korean traditional attire and ornaments in BTS SUGA's "Daechwita" music video; and the purpose of his referencing those traditional attires of Korea.

It is explained that fashion has been devaluated academically because it is linked with outward appearance and women. However, academia should take fashion seriously and give it the attention and study that it deserves. Fashion is not only restricted to dress and clothing but also music, drama, dancing, painting, sculpture, architecture, household decoration, etc [7]. Moreover, it is also stated that fashion has its own internal logic, irrelevant to outside concerns such as history or even aesthetics, and is completely bound up with its own representation [8].

In the semiotics of fashion, fashion, and clothing have been seen as an advanced sign system. A signifier, which may be a garment, is given meaning by the signified.

The signifier does not stand by itself. The code which is similar to a language, is understood as the meaning of the garment. An object both denotes and connotes. Denotation refers to the garment's characteristics, such as its color or fabric. Meanwhile, connotation refers to the meaning of the garment, such as its regular users. The connotation is important to be understood since fashion gains its meaning because they are embedded in social relations and contexts. And in the end, this will bring into an open system as a form of communication [7] [9].

## 2 Result and Discussion

D-2 mixtape was released by one of the BTS members, SUGA, under his alter-ego name Agust D, on May 22, 2020. The mixtape has one main track entitled "Daecwhita" and nine side tracks. "Daechwita" also has a music video released on the music streaming service YouTube on the same day as the album release date. The term Daechwita itself refers to the Korean traditional music genre that contains wind and percussion instruments. Daechwita is performed by a military marching band as a symbol of the arrival and departure of the King. During the Joseon Dynasty (July 1392-October 1897), Korean citizens would fill the streets to witness the ceremony. Nowadays, Daechwita is played during the visits of the President of a foreign country as a welcoming honor. Besides, Daechwita is also played during the royal changing guard ceremony in Gyeongbokgung Palace and Deoksugung Palace.

SUGA said in "August D 'D-2' Mixtape Interview" released on YouTube that he sampled the real Daechwita traditional music which was performed by National Gugak Center and created a melody for his solo song inspired by the music [10].

In the "Daechwita" music video, SUGA acts as two people, the blonde-haired King and the black-haired commoner. The blonde-haired King wears a dragon-patterned traditional robe which was usually worn by Korean Kings, called *Gonryongpo*. He wears a gold earring which symbolizes power and authority [11]. He sits on the dragon-patterned throne called *Yongsang*. The dragon is one of the most important mythical animals in Korea. It represented the power of vigorous masculinity, a high class and wealthy person, or a King [12]. There is also a picture called *Ilwol Obongdo* behind his throne. *Ilwol Obongdo* is a traditional symbol of the King in Korea, a landscape painting consisting of the sun, moon, five mountains, pine tree, and waterfall. When he is sitting on the throne, Daechwita is played. Therefore, the blonde-haired man is assumed to be a real King.

However, some hints doubted him to be the real King. The most obvious sign is the fresh scar on his face. During the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, someone with a scar on his face was not allowed to be crowned as a King since it was against the monarchy norm. Besides, the robe worn by the blonde-haired man needs to be examined in detail. It is stated that in Joseon Dynasty, the King's robes followed the court dress system of China's Ming Dynasty, which is a royal dragon robe called *Gonryongpo*, with a round neckline and dragon patterns on the chest, back, and shoulders [13]. It was also traditionally red. Moreover, the robe worn by the real King has five-clawed dragons as the detail, called *Ojoryongpo*. Meanwhile, in the

“Daechwita” music video, the blonde-haired man wears a black robe with four-clawed dragons as the detail, called *Sajoryongpo*.

Also, at the end of the music video, the blonde-haired man released his long hair. The Joseon Dynasty was very strict and the King had to be polite both in behavior and appearance. It is stated that in Korea, beauty is largely accounted as the beauty of the head [14]. It was courteous to be decently dressed in the ancient Korea. Before getting dressed, the hair had to be done. The real King would tie his hair up and set it with a hat. By letting his hair flow free, the blonde-haired man in “Daechwita” turns out to be the fake King.

After the appearance of the blonde-haired man, another person acted by SUGA, the black-haired commoner, appears. During his earlier appearance in a traditional market, he wore a woven hat made from bamboo strips shaped like an umbrella called *Satgat*. During the Joseon dynasty, attire was taken very seriously due to Confucian beliefs that valued “keeping one’s hat and robes in proper order or balance” [15]. This kind of bamboo hat was only worn by commoners to hide their identity. In the music video, the black-haired man has the same scar at the same spot as the blonde-haired King. Viewers may assume he wanted to hide his scar so others could not see it. However, in the “Daechwita” music video, SUGA combines the hat with a hat string called *Gatkkeun* made from jade and ivory. This combination is unusual because *Gatkkeun* symbolizes someone’s dignity and honor, and during the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, commoners were not allowed to hang the *Gatkkeun* on their hats.

Therefore, in this scene, the black-haired man’s purpose is to show his real identity, that he is not merely a commoner but maybe the real King. One of the hints that may suggest him being the real King is he has a red coral key and a royal seal keyring made from jade. Coral and jade are considered precious gems and symbolize social status, wealth, Kings, and royal authority during Joseon Dynasty [16]. However, the blonde-haired man does not have the seals. The black-haired commoner sings these lyrics.

*Glitter, glitter, look at my crown glitter*  
*Remember, remember, days gone by, remember*  
*We so fly, we so fly, private jet, we so fly*  
*Born a slave but now a king*  
*Berserk tiger, Gwanghae flow*

“Daechwita” music video is set during Joseon Dynasty in Korea. The Joseon Dynasty had a strict class system and heavy discrimination according to the class where someone was born. People in the Joseon era were divided into four social classes namely the elites (*yangban*), middle class (*chung’in*), commoners (*sangmin*), and slaves (*cheonmin*). People who belong to the *cheonmin* class system are not considered human. They were looked at as things and traded with other people. They are excluded from all social privileges such as property rights, marriage and family, opportunities to gain employment, and social security. They are also not allowed to go into the higher class [17].

The above-mentioned “slave” refers to the lowest class *cheonmin*. However, in the music video, the “slave” becomes a “King” who resembles a “tiger”. Tiger had been a symbol of Korea and Korean nationalism. The tiger was “the fiercest and the strongest of all creatures”. It symbolizes braveness and superiority; and became the embodiment of the pride of Korea [18]. Meanwhile, the “Gwanghae” refers to a king

from Joseon Dynasty who reigned from 1608-1623. Actually, he was not allowed to be throned as a King because he was the son of a concubine, not a queen. However, people respected Gwanghae because when his father ran away from his responsibilities, the 18-year-old Gwanghae was able to lead the Joseon Dynasty against the invasion of Japan led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1592. The people wanted him to be the King, but his father felt treated because he did not want to lose his throne. He did not acknowledge Gwanghae's contribution and started political tactics to cancel the plan. In the end, although Gwanghae succeeded throned as the King, his position was never stable because during the Joseon Dynasty, to be the King, a crown prince must be the son of a Queen to prove his pure blood.

A slave who turned into a king who resembles a tiger, the story of King Gwanghae and the crown glitter mentioned above symbolize SUGA's success after the exhausting and tiring past that he had to pass through before the success came. Currently, he is famous in Korea and worldwide with his bandmate in BTS. But SUGA came from a small entertainment company and had no power in the Korean entertainment industry. During the earlier days of their career, he is discriminated against and mistreated by people around him in the industry.

"Daechwita" music video which was released in 2020 during the peak of SUGA's popularity is his inner-ego conflict. The blonde-haired King who represented SUGA in the past became a monster because of the strict system in the Korean music industry that eventually made him too ambitious to succeed. SUGA mentioned these ambitions in another solo song entitled "Interlude: Shadow" (2020), "*but my growing shadow swallows me and becomes a monster.*"

On the other hand, the black-haired commoner represents the current SUGA that gained popularity and success. To not be a monster, the black-haired commoner has to do several things. He then sings these lyrics, "*shove the past into a rice chest*". "Rice Chest" refers to the story of Crown Prince Sado, well known as Sadoseja, who died in a rice chest. Crown Prince Sado was the son of King Yeongjo. His father was cruel and often scolded him in front of other people. This action makes Crown Prince Sado suffer some psychiatric symptoms, including depressed mood, anxiety, suicidal behavior, aggressive behavior, and delusion [19]. However, that did not make the King change his behavior. He even hated Crown Prince Sado and ordered him to go into a rice chest. Eventually, Crown Prince Sado went in and starved to death for eight days. This episode of Crown Prince Sado symbolizes SUGA, who opens up about his mental health issues and has succeeded in accepting his past. The black-haired man then sings these lyrics.

*I got everything I wanted. What more will make me feel contented?*

*I wanted clothes, clothes, then money, money, then goals, goals, now what's next?*

*Yeah, what's next? Here comes my reality check, there's nowhere higher*

*I only looked up, and now I want to look down and put my feet on the ground*

The "reality check" mentioned above refers to SUGA's ambition that needs to be held. He has to look down and stay on the ground, so he will not be a monster like his past self. Besides, he has to kill the monster from his past, and this is visualized in the music video by the black-haired commoner who kills the blonde-haired King after the executioners cut the rope that tied him and gave him a gun. The executioners play a valuable role in this music video. At the beginning of the music video, the black-

haired commoner meets two butchers and makes eye contact with them. Those two butchers turn out to be the executioners who must behead the black-haired commoner after being caught by order of the blonde-haired King. However, they did not behead him. Instead, the executioners cut the rope that tied him and gave him a gun to kill the blonde-haired King.

Lastly, fashion is also described as a tool to construct, practice, and comprehend social relations [20]. Fashion is not only a message of identity, but fashion can also construct and comprehend the relationship between identities in society. In the “Daechwita” music video, the black-haired commoner not only fights for himself but also for other people. He wears modern clothes and accessories like a silver necklace with a mask pendant. *Baekjeong* from Joseon Dynasty often used this mask. *Baekjeong* refers to butchers and executioners who belong to the lowest class in Joseon Dynasty. By wearing a necklace with a *baekjeong* mask pendant and killing the blonde-haired King, the black-haired commoner represents SUGA’s success in leading and being the voice of the young generation. They are trying to lead a movement by breaking the old traditions with a modern point of view. Those perspectives resonated with all people and were visualized in the music video by the black-haired commoner doing a headbang in front of the blonde-haired King and followed by people around him.

### 3. Conclusion

The “Daechwita” music video has numerous attires and traditional ornaments with individual meanings. Those meanings have created an understanding of the music video. It is concluded that in the music video, SUGA tried to show his real identity, that he came from the lower side (commoners) in the Korean music industry, and that he never forgot his roots. However, after the hardships and with his big ambitions, he could prove to be successful (the King), not only in Korea but also in the international world. However, his enormous ambitions may someday destroy him if it is not held. So, in the music video, the tyrant king who resembles his greediness in the past is killed by the commoner who resembles the current SUGA. Therefore, he could be more mature, wiser, and ready to create the future. Eventually, the message of this music video is in order to face the future, someone needs to accept his true self and his mistakes in the past.

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