
Cultural Daily

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BTS's Rise to the Top, and I'm on for the Ride

Samuel · Wednesday, June 6th, 2018

BTS (a fluid acronym that can stand for BangTan Boys or BulleTproof boy Scouts or Beyond The Scenes) just won the album of the year on the Billboard Music Awards 2018 and performed their hit song “Fake Love” to a frenzied crowd that drowned out their singing. Their album, *Love Yourself: Tear* is the first non-English album to reach that height, newsworthy enough to make it to NPR and *Washington Post*. They throw in English phrases—there is nowhere in the world where there isn't a sprinkle of English words—but it's a Korean album. BTS is the crest of the KPop phenomena that has inundated most of the world and has finally made a splash in the American scene. BTS' usurpation of the Billboards is seen in the same light as the British invasion of the Beatles (they too were a boy band whose musical talent was magnified by their androgynous handsome looks that played to a frenzied overwhelmingly female crowd); but BTS is bigger than the Beatles. England and America share the same language. Korean is not even a Romance language! Uses a different part of your brain! Americans were screaming and singing words they don't know except the English refrain.

I'm scratching my head trying to figure out BTS's rise to fame and Kpop's success in this foreign soil. The screaming fans—the band calls them army—know something I don't. Don't get me wrong, I'm absolutely bonkers for this successful Korean culture exportation. Even the South Korean president, Moon Jae, tweeted congratulatory remarks wrapping this achievement with a political and cultural significance!

BTS success advantages all Korean (Asians—can come along for the ride and make racial bias that flattens ethnicities to fit color categories—work for you for a change). Trickle down economics doesn't hold water, but trickle down success does. A tidal wave of success “does” raise all boats. Goldman Sachs discovered that World Cup-winning country see its stock index outperform global indices by 3.5 percent over the following months. The losing World Cup finalist underperform by 5.6 percent. The effect lasts 3 months things and eventually normalize, but that bounce is real money!

One BTS achievement after-effect is the transformation of the Asian male into an object of sexual desire—when one BTS member flipped his shirt to show his abs the noise meter spiked and roof tiles began to fall. Kpop shatters the Hollywood created strawman of the emasculated Asian man, one of the many-tentacled propaganda-heads of racism (miscegenation is the codified version of it). Their performance made bare (pun intended) that sex appeal crosses ethnic and color boundaries. This is a truth I already personally know—ahem—but it's always good to have an outside confirmation because egos are such fragile things, and a fundamental component of our egos, let's be frank, is sexuality. We are evolutionary creatures so our sense of self is tied to “being desired” no matter how we sublimate our sexual longing in socially useful and acceptable endeavors.

Like this morning, when I was jogging through downtown Louisville, a white woman said hi to me and I was sure she saw BTS in my thin yet fit frame, and my subtler nose lines. Too bad for her that I'm taken.

More practically, BTS is going to make my parenting easier. I'm going to show BTS' performance to my children because their cultural accomplishment will do more to make my children want to learn Korean and build pride in their heritage than any of my moral pep talks (or threats) which are given as much attention as one the HVAC hums in the summer, i.e. mere annoyance. Of course, I'm hoping their pride in being a country that can produce international boy bands will lead to other interests that are more useful in their daily lives and career, like Korean history and culinary — so they can cook for me when I get too old to cook for myself. Meanwhile, I don't mind my boy walking down the school hall more confidently, and talking with non-Koreans as if he belongs in their circle, because such interactions will make him more comfortable with leadership in diversity and prepare him to be the first Korean president to lead an America where there will no longer be a majority (am I dreaming too big for my kids, like a parent?).

I will also show BTS' two interviews with Ellen DeGeneres to my wife so she will finally relent and let my son keep his hair long, even if it pokes his eyes and its summer and it creates more sweat beads because that is how BTS wear their hair and it will be one less fight between mother and son, and one less mediation for me. Go BTS for helping my parenting and setting my kid's pathway to the presidency!

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