

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.122.12617

IDENTITY BUILDING IN 'K-POP DEMON HUNTERS' FILM: CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND HYBRIDITY

Iin Rachmawati¹, Pratiwi Retnaningdyah^{2*}, Widyastuti³

¹Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia

¹English Education Study Program, STKIP PGRI Bangkalan, Bangkalan, East Java, Indonesia
iin.22009@mhs.unesa.ac.id

²Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia
pratiwiretnaningdyah@unesa.ac.id

³Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia
widyas@unesa.ac.id

Received: 01/12/2025

Accepted: 02/01/2026

Corresponding Author: Pratiwi Retnaningdyah
(pratiwiretnaningdyah@unesa.ac.id)

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the 'K-pop Demon Hunters' film depicts the processes of cultural translation, cultural hybridity, and identity formation. The study uses textual and discourse analysis, drawing on frameworks from sociolinguistics and cultural studies, to investigate how the film reimagines Korean folklore from the perspective of international entertainment. The conversion of regional mythology and shamanic rituals into breathtaking, K-pop-influenced shows that appeal to audiences across borders while maintaining cultural uniqueness is an example of cultural translation. The combination of international popular culture elements, such as idol dancing, bilingual lyrics, and cinematic spectacle, with traditional motifs, including demon imagery, hanbok-inspired clothing, and Korean language codes, results in cultural hybridity. The role of idols as cultural mediators, balancing dual belonging by expressing both local tradition and global cosmopolitanism, is fundamental to identity building. The results show how tradition and globalization are not at odds in the film; rather, they are skilfully combined to create stories of cultural belonging that appeal to a wide range of viewers. In the age of international K-pop, this study advances our knowledge of how popular media engages in cultural negotiation.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Hybridity, Cultural Studies, Cultural Translation, Identity Building, K-pop Demon.

1. INTRODUCTION

With K-pop at the core of what is frequently referred to as the 'Korean Wave' (Hallyu), Korean popular culture has been a dominant force in the worldwide entertainment scene during the past twenty years (Samosir, N., & Lionel, 2022). In addition to performing music, K-pop idols now serve as cultural ambassadors, representing and sharing aspects of Korean identity with audiences worldwide. Their widespread recognition demonstrates how South Korean cultural items are continually being adapted to appeal to a diverse range of international markets. In this sense, the phenomenal movie "K-Pop Demon Hunters" offers an intriguing example, fusing traditional Korean folklore with the spectacle of idol culture to create a story that combines local mythologies with international fame.

The film's premise, which depicts K-pop idols against mystical entities derived from Korea's shamanistic and demonological traditions, serves as an example of how cultural translation works. According to Stuart Hall as mentioned by Xie, Y., Yasin, M. A., Alsagofi, S. A., & Hoon (2022), cultural translation is more than just the straightforward transfer of meaning across linguistic boundaries; it also includes the alteration and reinterpretation of cultural rules as they are used in different situations. "K-Pop Demon Hunters" symbolically transforms regional cultural components into forms that are palatable for a worldwide audience by casting globally renowned superstars as heroes who act as mediators between the everyday and the fantastical. Originating in Korean tradition, the demons serve as cultural signifiers as well as adversaries, and their cinematic version highlights conflicts between consumerism and authenticity.

The film illustrates the blending of cultural identities in the global age from the standpoint of cultural studies (Stokes, 2021). With their bilingual training, international appeal, and integration into transnational fanbase networks, K-pop idols are the epitome of cosmopolitanism. However, the story emphasizes the balancing act between Korea's traditional past and its hyper-modern worldwide image when these characters face 'local demons'. This dichotomy poses significant queries: How can reimagining folklore for international entertainment maintain cultural authenticity? In what ways do K-pop idols function as cultural mediators between global and local identities within the movie? How does the movie reflect broader dynamics of cultural globalization, authenticity, and commodification in the K-pop industry?

Sociolinguistic viewpoints enhance this investigation by emphasizing the film's symbolic use of language, performance, and discourse. K-pop is renowned for its humorous code-switching, multilingual lyrics, and deliberate use of English to improve accessibility worldwide (Wardhaugh, R. & Fuller, 2021). This linguistic hybridity may function in "K-Pop Demon Hunters" not only through dialogue but also through musical numbers, chants, and invocations, converting religious customs into theatrical performances that appeal to viewers worldwide. The broader dynamics of K-pop concerts, fandom activities, and online discourses where localized forms of expression engage with global youth cultures are echoed by such linguistic and cultural debates.

Thus, this study positions "K-Pop Demon Hunters" as a cultural text that dramatizes the meeting point of local demons and global superstars, rather than just an entertainment commodity. This study aims to reveal how Korean cultural heritage is modified, commercialized, and disseminated in the era of globalization by examining the movie using the frameworks of cultural translation, hybridity, and sociolinguistic performance. In the end, the movie serves as an example of how K-pop keeps developing as a place where cultural lines are dissolved and regional customs are given new life via international channels.

By examining how local history and global popular culture mix in modern media, this study advances the disciplines of sociolinguistics and cultural studies. First, it shows how idol culture permeates other cultural industries by extending conversations about K-pop beyond music and fandom to include movie portrayals. Secondly, it emphasizes the function of mythology and folklore in international entertainment, showing how classic stories are reframed for fresh audiences. Third, it adds complexity to discussions of globalization and cultural hybridity by providing insights into cultural translation as a process of balancing authenticity and marketability.

This study offers academics a case study of how media texts represent the conflicts between local uniqueness and universal appeal. It offers cultural adaptation techniques that cultural practitioners might use to guide future performances that aim to strike a balance between tradition and innovation. In the end, "K-Pop Demon Hunters" serves as a symbolic platform where Korea's cultural heritage and its global cultural future intersect, mediated by the idol and the demon.

2. CULTURAL TRANSLATION AND GLOBAL MEDIA

In cultural studies, the concept of cultural translation has been extensively explored, particularly in the writings of Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, and contemporary globalization scholars. Cultural translation involves rearticulating cultural symbols, behaviors, and narratives for other audiences in addition to language transfer (Kasperaviciene, R., & Horbacauskienė, 2020)(Indriani et al, 2019). While maintaining traces of cultural specificity, cultural translation in global entertainment ensures that regional cultural components, like myths, rituals, or folklore, are presented in ways that audiences around the world may enjoy. Research on media and movies (Iwabuchi, 2019), demonstrates that cultural translation frequently involves balancing authenticity with international marketability. Cultural translation is demonstrated in "K-Pop Demon Hunters", where folklore-based demons are made globally edible through narrative adaptation and visual spectacle.

2.1. K-Pop Idols as Global Cultural Mediators

According to K-pop research (Ayuni et al., 2022; Lestari & Irwansyah, 2020; Sihombing, 2021; Suryani, 2020), idols serve as cultural goods with a global appeal in addition to being artists. By fusing Korean identity with international aesthetics, multilingualism, and internet involvement, they exemplify cosmopolitanism. Scholars have also emphasized how South Korea's method of projecting cultural influence is embodied by idols, who serve as soft power mediators (Al Thani, 2021; Kim, 2019; Wolfe, 2020). The movie represents K-pop stars as cultural mediators who unite local customs and audiences around the world by casting them as demon hunters. By extending earlier research to movie narratives, this study shows idols as characters who negotiate cultural meaning in addition to being performers.

2.2. Folklore, Mythology, and Cultural Identity

As repositories of collective memory, folklore and mythology are essential components of national cultural identity (Eka Indriani et al., 2019; Motinyane, 2022). Scholars studying East Asian media have observed how modern entertainment reimagines classic narratives. Korean demonology, which has its origins in shamanic traditions, represents social conflicts, moral standards, and concerns (Lin, 2025). Such symbols frequently change when recontextualized in globalized media, illustrating

what (De Waele, J. M., & Adam, 2022; Jang, W., & Song, 2017) refers to as glocalization, the merging of local content with global forms. This is best demonstrated by "K-Pop Demon Hunters", which raises concerns about cultural authenticity and monetization by turning regional demons into internationally identifiable villains.

2.3. Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation

A helpful framework for comprehending how cultural goods form in the 'third space', where local and global discourses interact, is provided by Homi Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity. Hybridity appears in K-pop through multilingual lyrics, fashion, and musical styles. The concept of hybridity in movies encompasses both story and performance, resulting in texts that are between being wholly local and wholly global. According to other studies (Shim et al., 2020), hybridity may be both a strength and a source of criticism because it allows for cultural growth but also has the potential to weaken cultural authenticity. "K-Pop Demon Hunters" dramatizes the negotiation of cultural meaning in a globalized media milieu by staging hybridity through the juxtaposition of local demons and global celebrities.

2.4. Sociolinguistics of Performance and Multilingualism

The purposeful use of English phrases, code-switching, and multilingual performance to optimize accessibility and worldwide appeal is highlighted in sociolinguistic studies of K-pop (Samosir, N., & Lionel, 2022, 2024). Performance itself, as Samosir, N., & Lionel (2022) implies, is a sort of social interaction where identity is produced and shown. It is possible to examine the idols' performances in "K-Pop Demon Hunters" as locations of linguistic hybridity where Korean customs are converted into international cultural codes, whether through speech, chants, or songs. (Wayne, M. L., & Castro's (2025) perspectives on language as a performative tool in cultural globalization is consistent with this.

2.5. K-Pop, Cinema, and The Soft Power of South Korea

Lastly, it is crucial to place the movie in the larger context of Korean soft power. As a means of exerting influence abroad, the Korean government has historically made investments in the cultural sectors (Kim, 2019). A new phase in K-pop's development is represented by movies like "K-Pop Demon Hunters", which go beyond music to tell stories using transmedia. As a result, the movie might be interpreted as both cultural diplomacy and

entertainment, promoting Korea's image while devaluing its cultural history.

The literature emphasizes the main conflicts at the center of this study: (1) performance (language → identity), (2) hybridity (authenticity → commercialization), and (3) cultural translation (local → global). One cultural text where these forces come together is "K-Pop Demon Hunters". It depicts how international idols stand in for Korea's cosmopolitan future while facing off against regional demons that stand in for its cultural history. This study views the movie as a place of negotiation where Korea's identity is both kept and modified for audiences throughout the world by combining sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design that combines sociolinguistic analysis with a cultural studies perspective (Selvi, 2019). The study aims to evaluate meanings encoded in the filmic text rather than measure frequency or quantify reactions because the focus is on how cultural translation, hybridity, and identity building are represented in "K-Pop Demon Hunters". The study examines how local demons and global idols are created, portrayed, and negotiated within the movie's narrative using textual and discourse analysis.

'K-Pop Demon Hunters' serves as the primary source of data, including language, story structure, character portrayal, and visual-symbolic features. Furthermore, supporting information is taken from promotional materials, such as press releases, posters, cast and production team interviews, and trailers. Another source is fan discourses (comments on social media, fan forums, and reactions) to see how audiences around the world view the balancing act between local demons and global idols. And from secondary literature, such as academic papers, reviews, and cultural criticisms, can be used to validate the cultural reading and offer context.

The analysis is based on three interrelated frameworks: sociolinguistics, the theory of cultural translation, and the idea of cultural hybridity. How regional Korean folklore, such as demons and mythical symbols, is being translated for audiences worldwide is examined via the theory of cultural translation as proposed by (Ning, 2023; Storey, 2021; Xie, Y., Yasin, M. A., Alsagofi, S. A., & Hoon, 2022). It implies that this theory aids in recognizing shifts from traditional meanings to forms that are market-driven and cinematic. Next, cultural hybridity by Tomarken (2020) looks at how the film blends local traditions with worldwide entertainment norms and

compares and contrasts idols (global cosmopolitan icons) and devils (local cultural heritage). The final one, performance in sociolinguistics, as stated by Samosir, N., & Lionel (2024), looks at how language, such as code-switching, English insertions, chants, and songs, is used to negotiate identity.

In the meantime, scene selection, transcription, and film viewing are all part of the data collection approach. The film will first be viewed multiple times, and relevant scenes involving language use, idol performances, and references to folklore will be transcribed. Important situations featuring local devils and international superstars will then be hand-picked for closer analysis. In addition, promotional interviews and audience reactions will be gathered through official media platforms, fan forums, and entertainment news websites.

An interpretive technique, as stated by Mirek (2022), is employed in the data analysis. First, textual analysis entails identifying cultural symbols, themes, and motivations that illustrate the interplay between the local and the global. Discourse analysis then involves analyzing conversations, linguistic components (such as code-switching, English usage, and Korean honorifics), and narrative strategies that generate meaning. Thematic coding is the process of grouping results into main themes, such as linguistic mediation, cultural translation, hybridity, and international reception. By relating data to concepts from sociolinguistic and cultural studies, this study also engages in what is known as interpretive discussion, which focuses on how the film negotiates authenticity, identity, and global consumption. To establish credibility, the method triangulates data from various sources, including audience reaction, promotional speech, and movie text. Comprehensive explanations of the circumstances and linguistic choices will be provided to bolster interpretations. Additionally, reflexivity will be employed to recognize the positionality of the researcher when assessing cultural texts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As seen in the fact that this study examines how cultural translation, hybridity, and identity building are represented in "K-Pop Demon Hunters", of course, it would be easier for the readers to understand first how the idols in this film are created, portrayed, and negotiated. Actually, the main focus of the film is on the representation of local demons and global idols, in which they play great roles to dramatize the whole storyline of the film. For more details, take a look at Table 1 below.

Table 1: Findings and Interpretation

Theme	Representation in Film	Example	Interpretation	Dialogue
Cultural translation	Shamanistic ceremonies and folklore were transformed into a universal cinematic aesthetic	Demon exorcisms accompanied by music, chants, and choreography, akin to idol stage shows	While keeping Korean characteristics, local cultural practices are rearticulated for consumption by audiences around the world	Rumi: "How am I supposed to fix the world, fix me, when I don't have my voice?"
Hybridity	Demon fights based on folklore, combined with the aesthetics of idol performances	Idols battle in stage costumes, which mimic the stages of K-pop concerts	Reflects globalization: regional customs incorporated into international entertainment formats	Mira: "Lights up. Formation tight. Let's end this like a finale stage."
Identity building	Idols are presented as intermediaries between local customs and audiences around the world	During shouts, idols alternate between Korean honorifics and English catchphrases	Idols are portrayed as cosmopolitan individuals with a Korean identity through language use and performance	Mira to Rumi: "Unnie—now!"
Negotiation of local and global	Reconciliation as a means of narrative resolution, as opposed to erasure	Rather than annihilating demons, idols transform or redeem them	Demonstrates cultural negotiation by adapting tradition into globalized forms rather than erasing it	Rumi to Jinu: "You don't have to disappear. You just have to remember who you were."

4.1. Cultural Translation: From Folklore to Global Spectacles

Demons, ghosts, and shamanic rituals are among the aspects of Korean folklore that are reimagined in the film using a cinematic vocabulary intended for a global audience. CGI and action-genre conventions from Hollywood blockbusters are used to stylize traditional demon representations visually. Exorcisms and other rituals are turned into orchestrated fight scenes that combine dance, music, and visual spectacle, much like idol performances. From a discourse standpoint, the film's linguistic

techniques clearly demonstrate cultural translation (Wayne, M. L., & Uribe Sandoval, 2023). To bridge cultural specificity with universal comprehensibility, Korean honorifics and mythical terminology are selectively preserved while English insertions are used in chants or spell-casting sequences. Through the judicious conservation of Korean cultural codes, this translation technique preserves authenticity while making local symbols accessible to audiences worldwide.

This is seen in the representation of demons at the textual level. Here, traditional Korean demons, which are frequently portrayed in folklore as hideous, tragic, or moralizing characters, are changed into computer-generated antagonists that seem like characters from video games, anime, or Marvel movies. Local features such as tal or so-called mask motives, hanbok-inspired garments, and allusions to shamanic symbols, such as bells, drums, and talismans, are still incorporated into their design, but they are blended with action-packed visual aspects that are well-known to viewers around the world. The negotiated act of cultural translation, as defined by Bassnett (2007), is exemplified by this process of selected retention and modification: parts are not directly transplanted but rather modified to span cultural barriers.

Further, rituals that have historically included drumming, chanting, and trance are transformed into battle scenes that are performed. Exorcisms, for instance, are arranged similarly to idol concerts, replete with coordinated movements, rhythmic chanting, and stage-like lighting effects. This combination of concert spectacle and shamanic ritual acts as both cultural translation and cultural reinvention, rendering a spiritual act understandable to viewers who may not be familiar with Korean shamanism but are accustomed to the aesthetics of international pop performances (Samosir, N., & Lionel, 2022).

From the dialogue spoken by the lead female character, Rumi, "How am I supposed to fix the world, fix me, when I don't have my voice?" (it is spoken during a musical sequence about self-doubt before they use their voices as a weapon). The line said "demon exorcism accompanied by music and chants" shows that, rather than using conventional exorcism terminology (such as Latin prayers, holy water, etc.), the characters speak more like performers pumping themselves up or 'chanting' lyrics. This point is strengthened by the fact that the movie combines battle scenes with idol performance lines, incorporating the actors' songs and words into the ritual of battling demons.

From a discourse standpoint, this translation process is reinforced by language use. Sometimes, Korean words for spirits or devils (such as *gwishin* and *dokkaebi*) are used with little to no explanation, giving the impression of authenticity and cultural uniqueness. Meanwhile, during chants or battle cries, English words and phrases are added, a type of code-switching that preserves the Korean linguistic texture while making it accessible to audiences throughout the world. This two-pronged approach guarantees that the cultural output is both internationally understandable and deeply ingrained in regional customs.

The film's narrative framing also exemplifies cultural translation. Here, demons, which are frequently dreaded or portrayed as moralistic in Korean folklore, are reframed as symbolic obstacles that modern youth must overcome, such as ambition, loneliness, or a loss of tradition. This is in line with the statement from Liang (2021) that the story converts culturally unique symbols into universally accessible challenges by fusing folklore with universal themes, allowing spectators to empathize without needing to be well-versed in the culture.

This cinematic strategy exemplifies cultural translation as a process of negotiation between local tradition and global consumption. Rather than erasing folklore, the film transforms it into a hybrid form that can circulate transnationally. It mirrors what Tomarken (2020) suggests about cultural production: meaning is generated in the in-between spaces where cultures encounter each other. In 'K-Pop Demon Hunters', the encounter occurs between Korean shamanistic heritage and global entertainment conventions, producing a new cultural artifact, a global spectacle that still carries traces of its local origins. This lends credence to Hall's idea that cultural translation is more like rearticulation than transfer. To ensure accessibility while preserving cultural depth, the demons are reframed using the global grammar of popular cinema while retaining their Korean roots.

4.2. Cultural Hybridity: When Local Meets Global

Both visually and narratively, the film exemplifies hybridity. Even in demon-hunting moments, global idols dressed like K-pop singers use lavish stage outfits, making it difficult to distinguish between a concert performance and a spiritual conflict. Multilingual lyrics (Korean, English, and occasionally Japanese phrases) are incorporated into musical sequences, exhibiting the linguistic hybridity characteristic of K-pop. The confluence of two

symbolic worlds, demons as representations of Korea's cultural past and idols as hypermodern icons of globalization, dramatizes hybridity on a narrative level. What Tomarken (2020) refers to as a 'third space', where new meanings are negotiated, is created by the tension between both worlds. The idols represent the conflict between contemporary cosmopolitanism and traditional heritage by not only battling demons but also conveying cultural values.

K-pop Demon Hunters' hybridity exemplifies De Waele, J. M., & Adam (2022) idea of glocalization, which is the blending of local cultural material (demonology and folklore) with global entertainment forms (idol culture and fantasy film). This negotiation demonstrates the simultaneous localization and globalization of Korean culture, which creates the term 'glocalization'. The second example of dialogue, "Idols battle in stage costumes, which mimic the stages of K-pop concerts", indicates that demon battles in K-Pop Demon Hunters are purposefully set up to look and act like K-pop concerts. The hunters battle demons while donning idol stage costumes that closely resemble those worn at live performances, music videos, and comeback stages. These costumes include glittering attire, coordinated color schemes, and stylish accessories. This artistic decision blurs the line between performance and ritual, turning battle into spectacle. The characters embrace visibility, beauty, and fandom-oriented images rather than hiding their identities or dressing in hallowed exorcist attire. As a result, the stage clothing becomes a hybrid artifact:

At the artistic level, dance, stage design, and costumes are ways that hybridity is portrayed. The idols who also serve as demon hunters dress style combining futuristic, high-fashion costumes reminiscent of K-pop stage clothing with themes influenced by *hanboks* (Korean traditional dresses). This results in a hybrid image that restyles local history into a universal visual language rather than abandoning it. In a similar vein, battle sequences are designed like idol shows, fusing synchronized K-pop dancing moves with motions inspired by martial arts. The end effect is a spectacle that is both recognizable within the global grammar of performance and deeply ingrained in local culture.

For more, strategic code-switching can also be called a linguistic indicator of hybridity (Lee, Y. L., Jung, M., Nathan, R. J., & Chung, 2020). Characters switch between Korean and English with ease, representing the cosmopolitan standing of idols as well as the worldwide linguistic realities of K-pop fandoms. While English phrases are included in chants or motivational speeches to appeal to a global

audience, Korean honorifics and idiomatic idioms are maintained, indicating cultural rootedness. The multilingual discourse itself turns into a hybridity performance, expressing Korean identity in a universal language. The confluence of two symbolic worlds dramatizes hybridity at the narrative level: demons stand in for Korea's spiritual and folkloric past, which is based on traditional myth and shamanic rituals. And idols serve as cosmopolitan individuals that cut beyond national boundaries, embodying global modernity.

The battle between demons and idols is not just a physical one; it also represents the balancing act between tradition and modernity, the past and the present. The conclusion, in which idols execute the transformation or redemption of demons instead of merely destroying them, demonstrates hybridity as reconciliation as opposed to erasure. The story implies that, within international cultural contexts, local traditions might be recreated rather than abandoned. Theoretically, this hybridity is consistent with Homi Bhabha's 'third space': the film produces new cultural meanings that don't fit into either the local or global categories by establishing an intermediate cultural zone where local devils and global idols collide. It is also in line with Roland Robertson's 'glocalization': The film combines uniquely Korean elements (folklore, rituals, and linguistic codes) with international entertainment forms (idol culture, fantastical spectacle, and Hollywood-style war scenes). The local gains worldwide prominence without losing its individuality, demonstrating that hybridity is not dilution but transformation.

K-Pop Demon Hunters' cultural hybridity shows how Korean popular culture balances its dual roles as a cultural text with strong roots in Korean identity and as a worldwide industry serving international consumers. The film presents hybridity as a symbolic means of surviving in the global cultural economy as well as an artistic decision by fusing traditional demonology with K-pop idols. It reinforces Korea's status as a cultural origin and a global trendsetter while conveying the idea that cultural legacy can develop into new hybrid forms that appeal to a variety of audiences.

In the K-pop industry, where fusing local customs with international pop culture is a tried-and-true tactic, the hybridity portrayed in 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' is not limited to the screen. The film can be interpreted as a narrative and a meta-commentary on the global circulation of Korean culture by fusing cinematic hybridity with actual K-pop performances. Idols in the film don hybrid outfits that combine

futuristic, stylish design with hanbok patterns. Real K-pop stages, where performers frequently integrate traditional Korean attire into international performance styles, are reflected in this visual hybridity. For instance, BTS combined heritage and modern fashion when they performed at the 2018 MAMA Awards in updated hanbok attire. In a similar vein, Blackpink and Ateez have visually anchored themselves in Korean culture while performing on a worldwide scale by including hanbok-inspired designs in their music videos (How You Like That, Wonderland) (Parc & Kim, 2020).

Salimli (2025) also said that in terms of language and lyrics, the bilingual chants in the film (Korean and English) are a reflection of K-pop's linguistic hybridity. The majority of K-pop songs use English hooks, phrases, or entire verses in addition to Korean lyrics, making them accessible to a worldwide audience while preserving Korean as the primary language. Songs like NCT's frequent code-switching between Korean, English, and even Chinese, or BTS's Dynamite (which is entirely in English), for example, show how language can be used as a tool for worldwide reach.

Moreover, the conflict between Korea's cultural past and its global present is symbolized by the main narrative tension in 'K-Pop Demon Hunters', which is idols facing and changing local demons. K-pop concerts and music videos, which usually contrast future technology with traditional cultural iconography, reflect this contradiction. For instance, the obsession music video by EXO combines symbolic allusions to Asian mythology with contemporary sci-fi imagery. Another example, it is true that K-pop is specifically framed as the link between Korea's cultural identity and its influence on international entertainment in SMTOWN's 2025 concert themes: "The Future, The Culture" (Sasso, 2025).

In the film, exorcisms are performed like concerts, with demons being vanquished or redeemed through dancing and song. This replicates the ritualistic aspect of K-pop concerts in real life, where audience engagement, synchronized light sticks, and group chanting (fanchants) turn performances into shared cultural rites. We can see how cultural hybridity is both a narrative device and a cultural practice by drawing comparisons between 'K-pop Demon Hunters' and actual K-pop performances. While K-pop as an industry operationalizes hybridity in its music, fashion, language, and performances, the film stages hybridity through idols who balance tradition and globalization. Robertson's glocalization is illustrated in both instances, when Korean local

cultural symbols are converted into forms that are internationally relevant while retaining their cultural character. The key significance of hybridity in Korea's cultural industries is highlighted by synergy between cinematic and actual K-pop practices. It goes beyond simple borrowing or mixing to create new cultural meanings that transcend national boundaries while indicating their place of origin.

4.3. Identity Building: Idols as Mediators of Cultural Belonging

Identity construction revolves around how idols are portrayed in the film. They are portrayed as go-betweens for local devils and audiences around the world. In addition to their responsibilities as warriors, their identities are shaped by their linguistic performances, which include alternating between Korean and English when speaking to demons or calling forth chants and acting in a manner that is reminiscent of both a ritual and a concert stage. According to textual research by Negus (2020), the idols' identities are created using universally relatable themes of bravery, selflessness, and solidarity, values that have their roots in Korean collectivist customs. The symbolic operation of code-switching and multilingual phrases is shown through discourse analysis: Korean invocations ground the story in local culture, but English terms resonate with viewers around the world. This process of creating an identity is an example of hybridity in action. The idols' dual roles as international celebrities and stewards of regional culture perfectly capture the cultural balancing act of contemporary Korea. They resonate with audiences around the world who also manage mixed cultural identities because they embody cosmopolitan youth who maintain a sense of cultural roots.

The identities of the idols are built on a dual role: they are both guardians of Korean history and cosmopolitan celebrities who are well-known throughout the world. This duality is portrayed linguistically through code-switching (Korean honorifics combined with English phrases), visually through their costumes (futuristic fashion with hanbok-infused designs), and narratively through their use of performance (local tradition) to defeat demons (global spectacle). Idols are thus positioned as 'in-between' characters who represent both cultural uniqueness and universality (Negus, 2020). They are perfect mediators since they are neither limited to a national identity nor completely absorbed into global culture.

For instance, it can be seen from the table above in identity building part: "During shouts, idols

alternate between Korean honorifics and English catchphrases". Battle yells sometimes blend English catchphrases typically heard in K-pop performances (e.g., "Let's go!", "Watch this!", "Now!") with Korean honorifics and kinship words (e.g., unnie, sunbae, hyung). The linguistic style of global K-pop, where Korean and English coexist as symbols of intimacy, hierarchy, and worldwide appeal, is reflected in this code-switching, which is not arbitrary. Such alternation takes place in fight scenes during critical moments (attacks, formations, or final blows), transforming war cries from conventional exorcism incantations into performative utterances akin to concert hype screams.

Discourse analysis reveals that the film uses language strategically to establish identity. By speaking to local communities and demons in Korean, idols firmly establish their national identity. At the same time, they demonstrate their global orientation by using English terms while addressing their audience or delivering climactic lines. By enabling idols to speak both from Korea and to the rest of the globe, this bilingual performance illustrates how identity is continually negotiated. This is similar to how K-pop identity is actually constructed, where idols frequently use numerous languages to introduce themselves during performances, reaffirming both their Korean heritage and their accessibility to a worldwide audience.

Also, performance as ritual is the most symbolic component of identity construction. Idols using song and dance to battle demons transform the act into a cultural performance that redefines belonging, going beyond simple entertainment. Idols update and justify old behaviors for local audiences (shamanic exorcisms reframed as idol performances). The performance gives audiences throughout the world an easy way to learn about Korean culture and makes them feel like they belong to the cultural family of K-pop. Idols are effective identity mediators due to their dual belonging, which is based on Korean ancestry but is also worldwide. Even if they do it in diverse ways, they encourage audiences from Korea and other countries to experience a sense of cultural connection.

Another fact is that the idols in the film place more emphasis on teamwork and collectivism than the Western hero model, which is frequently based on individuality, as fact told by (Stephenson, 2023). Through well-planned group performances rather than solo acts, they vanquish demons, showcasing the importance of cooperation and solidarity that are fundamental to both Korean collectivist customs and K-pop fanbase culture. Fans from all over the world

connect with this collective identity creation, creating communities around common activities like chants, streaming parties, and concert customs.

4.4. The Construction and Negotiation of Local Demons and Global Idols

The cultural fears of generational strife, tradition loss, and the intrusion of global modernism are represented by demons. While their conflicts are framed through global fantasy clichés, their physical design contains shamanistic themes, folklore motives, and traditional Korean masks. Demons, then, stand for Korea's cultural heritage, familiar yet reimagined to appeal to a global audience. Meanwhile, idols are presented as contemporary heroes with a combination of supernatural abilities, dance choreography, and musical instruments as weapons. Their persona combines the duty of upholding tradition with the glitzy atmosphere of K-pop performances, as mentioned before by Slocum, Jr., (2025) in his dissertation. They are frequently portrayed as bridges, both symbolically (serving as a mediator between local and global culture) and narratively (defending communities against demons).

By depicting idols defeating demons through ritualistic performance rather than just physical power, the story eases tensions. Musical conflicts, chants, and joint performances depict the reunification of global and local. The idols frequently change or redeem demons rather than eradicating them, indicating a compromise rather than the complete renunciation of tradition. The idols and demons dwell in a common cultural realm, creating a new hybrid form, which is a reflection of Bhabha's hybridity theory. The celebrities' capacity to interact with and reinterpret local demons legitimizes their transnational identity, signifying how Korean culture balances marketability and authenticity in a global setting.

Based on the dialogue example: "You don't have to disappear. You just have to remember who you were", this statement captures both the film's departure from traditional demon-hunter storylines and its rehabilitative ethics. The speaker reframes evil as a state of forgetting rather than as an essence of being, instead of portraying devils as things that need to be eliminated. Linguistically, 'disappear' means non-existence, while 'remember' means continuity, recovery, and identity restoration. This disagreement is a clear indication of a shift in ideology: remembering rather than destroying to resolve conflicts.

The results imply that 'K-Pop Demon Hunters'

serves as a cultural text in which identity construction, hybridity, and cultural translation are all performed at the same time. Global gods and local demons are not merely antagonistic; rather, they are continually renegotiated through performance, language, and narrative. The film uses idols as intermediaries who represent hybridity to transform Korean folklore into entertainment that is accessible to people around the world. By doing this, it dramatizes the larger cultural process of how Korea's cultural industries strike a balance between heritage and globalization.

Identity creation in 'K-pop Demon Hunters' is more than just identifying the idols; it also involves figuring out what they stand for: mediating between Korea's cultural heritage and its worldwide cultural future. By elevating folklore in contemporary entertainment, they create a sense of belonging for Korean viewers, while providing a hybrid cultural product that is both approachable and unique for audiences around the world. As cultural interpreters who make sure that regional customs continue to be visible and significant in a globalized cultural economy, the idols ultimately represent transcultural identity: they are Korean, global, and hybrid all at once.

5. CONCLUSION

'K-pop Demon Hunters' serves as an example of how popular culture may serve as a platform for cultural negotiation, bringing together local customs and international entertainment practices to create new meanings. This study demonstrates the intricate ways in which Korean cultural legacy is recreated for audiences worldwide by examining the film through the lenses of cultural translation, hybridity, and identity creation. By turning Korean folklore, which includes demons, shamanic ceremonies, and mythological symbols, into international spectacles, the film first carries out cultural translation. Demons are stylized using international film standards, exorcisms are transformed into staged performances, and Korean words are purposefully kept while being incorporated into English sentences. This procedure demonstrates how tradition can transcend national boundaries without being lost while maintaining cultural uniqueness and promoting global understanding.

Second, by fusing regional and international aesthetics, the film creates cultural hybridity. Idols combat demons in concert-style bouts that combine ritual and spectacle, wear hanbok-inspired costumes with contemporary clothing, and transition between Korean and English with ease. Such hybridity reflects

what Robertson refers to as glocalization and Bhabha calls the 'third space', a negotiation in which both the local and the global are created rather than lost. In this instance, hybridity produces a transnational and Korean cinematic form.

Third, the film places a lot of emphasis on creating an identity by showing idols as cultural bridges to a sense of community. They create a transcultural persona that appeals to both domestic and foreign audiences by playing the dual roles of global icons and stewards of tradition. Idols establish collaborative, inclusive, and hybrid spaces of cultural belonging through their performances. They invite a wide range of viewers to recognize themselves reflected in their stories, embodying Korea's dual status as a traditional country and a major player in global cultural flows.

When combined, these results show that 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' is more than just an action fantasy film. The Korean Wave's difficulties and opportunities as a result of globalization are dramatized in this cultural literature. The film demonstrates how culture is constantly translated, hybridized, and reinterpreted in ways that create new identities and communities of belonging by navigating the interplay between local demons and global idols (Slocum, Jr., 2025). At last, the film provides a powerful illustration for cultural studies of how popular media can act as a mediator between local specificity and worldwide circulation, as well as between tradition and modernity. It demonstrates how discourse techniques, code-switching, and language choice become instruments for identity construction and cultural translation in sociolinguistics. In the end, 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' shows that Korean popular culture asserts Korea's position in the world's imagination while maintaining its cultural richness by redefining cultural meanings in addition to exporting entertainment.

Cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and the study of international media industries are all impacted in different ways by the investigation of 'K-pop Demon Hunters'. First, the film shows how cultural objects serve as platforms for balancing tradition and modernity. By transforming Korean folklore into spectacles accessible to people worldwide, it

demonstrates how cultural legacy is flexible rather than fixed. This implies that cultural studies should keep focusing on the recontextualization of traditions in popular culture, especially in hybridity-driven businesses like K-pop. The film shows how globalization may be a transformative environment where cultural identities are rebuilt, rather than being seen as erasure.

Second, in a sociolinguistic context, the film's discourse practices, including code-switching between Korean and English, the layering of chants with multilingual aspects, and the careful retention of culturally particular terms, demonstrate how language becomes a symbolic tool for identity building. This is in line with broader tendencies in K-pop and international fandom cultures, where speaking multiple languages is a performative act of belonging rather than just a useful tool. The film emphasizes how linguistic hybridity shapes audiences' engagement with both local and global meanings by indexing cultural hybridity.

The film provides a model for how Korean cultural industries can maintain their appeal on a global scale while maintaining cultural uniqueness. 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' is a prime example of cultural exportation tactics that strike a balance between marketability and authenticity by establishing stars as cultural mediators and incorporating folklore into international entertainment frameworks. Future Hallyu products may be influenced by this 'glocalized storytelling' concept, which inspires other sectors to investigate how regional cultural narratives might be repackaged for international consumption without sacrificing their uniqueness.

Although cultural translation, hybridity, and identity construction within 'K-pop Demon Hunters' have been studied in this study, these insights could be further developed and expanded in a number of ways by future research, such as comparative media studies, audience reception, linguistic and discourse approaches, etc. By doing this, this study not only concludes with conclusions but also paves the path for further study and places the work within a continuing discourse in sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and global media studies.

Acknowledgment: This work was funded by BPPT (Balai Penerimaan Pendidikan Tinggi) and LPDP (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan) – Republic of Indonesia.

AI Acknowledgment: The authors acknowledge the use of Grammarly and ChatGPT to check the grammar and make sure of appropriateness. The prompts used include explaining the concept of cultural translation and cultural hybridity that appear in the film in simple terms. The output from these prompts was used to know the whole or basic concept of each term. While the authors acknowledge the usage of AI, they maintain that

they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations.

Informed Consent: The authors declare that informed consent was not required as there were no human participants involved.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Al Thani, M. (2021). Channeling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38(17), 1729–1752.
- Ayuni, N., Jenol, M., Hafeeza, N., & Pazil, A. (2022). “ I found my talent after I become a K-pop fan ”: K-pop participatory culture unleashing talents among Malaysian youth “ I found my talent after I become a K-pop fan ”: K-pop participatory culture unleashing talents among Malaysian youth. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2062914>
- Bassnett, S. (2007). Culture and Translation. In *A Companion to Translation Studies* (pp. 13–23).
- De Waele, J. M., & Adam, R. (2022). The Glocalization of the World Cup. *Soccer & Society*, 23(7), 651–655.
- Eka Indriani, D., Sahid, M., Syaiful Bachri, B., & Anugrah Izzati, U. (2019). Traditions: Radical or Peace-Building. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Religion and Public Civilization (ICRPC 2018)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icrpc-18.2019.3>
- Iwabuchi, K. (2019). Media Culture Globalization and/in Japan. In *World Entertainment Media* (pp. 155–163). Routledge.
- Jang, W., & Song, J. E. (2017). Webtoon as A New Korean Wave in the Process of Glocalization. *Kritika Kultura*, 29.
- Kasperaviciene, R., & Horbacauskiene, J. (2020). Self-revision and Other-revision as Part of Translation Competence in Translator Training. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 8(1), 117–133.
- Kim, Y. (2019). Introduction Hallyu and North Korea: Soft Power of Popular Culture. In *South Korean Popular Culture and North Korea* (pp. 1–38). Routledge.
- Lee, Y. L., Jung, M., Nathan, R. J., & Chung, J. E. (2020). Cross-National Study on the Perception of the Korean Wave and Cultural Hybridity in Indonesia and Malaysia Using Discourse on Social Media. *Sustainability*, 12(15), 6072.
- Lestari, A. F., & Irwansyah, I. (2020). Participative Fandom By Army Bts Indonesia in the Digital Comic of Webtoon Apps. *Journal Communication Spectrum*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v9i1.1872>
- Liang, L. (2021). Subtitling English-Language Films for a Chinese Audience: Cross-Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Transfer. *New Voices in Translation Studies*, 25(1).
- Lin, Z. (2025). Chinese Pop Culture’s Development in the United States among Generation Z Compared to South Korean Pop Culture. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10.
- Mirek, J. (2022). Meeting the New Normal : A Case Study of An Online Simultaneous Interpreting Course. 26, 55–80.
- Motinyane, M. (2022). Reimagining the Role of Folklore in the 21st Century: Don’t We Need New Ones? *Southern African Journal of Folklore Studies*, 32(2), 1–14.
- Negus, K. (2020). East Asian pop music idol production and the emergence of data fandom in China. 23(1), 493–511. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920904064>
- Ning, W. (2023). *The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies*. Routledge.
- Parc, J., & Kim, Y. (2020). Analyzing the Reasons for the Global Popularity of BTS: A New Approach from a Business Perspective. *Journal of International Business and Economy*, 21(1), 15–36. <https://doi.org/10.51240/jibe.2020.1.2>
- Salimli, E. M. (2025). Code-Switching in Bilingual Anglo-French Humour: A Study Across Comedy Films, Stand-Up Shows, and Jokes.
- Samosir, N., & Lionel, W. (2022). The Sociolinguistic Consumption of K-pop: Multilingual Margins. *A Journal of Multilingualism from the Periphery*, 9(2).
- Samosir, N., & Lionel, W. (2024). *Sociolinguistics of the Korean Wave: Hallyu and Soft Power*. Taylor & Francis.
- Sasso, E. (Ed. . (2025). *Minority Languages and Cultures in Audiovisual Translation*. Taylor & Francis.
- Selvi, A. F. (2019). Qualitative Content Analysis. In *In the Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 440–452). Routledge.
- Shim, A., Yecies, B., Ren, X. T., & Wang, D. (2020). Cultural intermediation and the basis of trust among webtoon and webnovel communities. 4462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1751865>

- Sihombing, L. H. (2021). Analyzing the Impact of BTS on Resolving the Problem of Youth Mental Health. *JISIP (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan)*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.36312/jisip.v5i2.1801>
- Slocum, Jr., A. L. (2025). *The Internal Cultural Complex: The Devil as a Symbol and Jungian Archetype of Change in Late Twentieth Century American Popular Culture*. University of Essex.
- Stephenson. (2023). *Collective Creativity and Wellbeing Dispositions: Children's Perceptions of Learning through Drama. Thinking Skills and Creativity*.
- Stokes, J. (2021). *How to Do Media and Cultural Studies*. SAGE.
- Storey, J. (2021). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. Routledge.
- Suryani, A. N. (2020). Bangtan Sonyeondan (Bts) As New American Idol. *Rubikon : Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 6(1), 48. <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v6i1.61489>
- Tomarken, E. (2020). Post-Colonial Hybridity in Why Theory? In Homi K. Bhabha (pp. 86-110). Manchester University Press.
- Wardhaugh, R. & Fuller, J. M. (2021). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Wayne, M. L., & Castro, D. (2025). Cultural Authenticity as Netflix Televisuality: Streaming Industry and Globally Commissioned Original Series. *Media and Communication*, 13.
- Wayne, M. L., & Uribe Sandoval, A. C. (2023). Netflix Original Series, Global Audiences and Discourses of Streaming Success. *Critical Studies in Television*, 18(1), 81-100.
- Wolfe, S. D. (2020). "For the Benefit of Our Nation": Unstable Soft Power in the 2018 Men's World Cup in Russia. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 12(4), 545-561.
- Xie, Y., Yasin, M. A., Alsagofi, S. A., & Hoon, L. (2022). An Overview of Stuart Hall's Encoding and Decoding Theory with Film Communication. *Multicultural Education*, 8(1), 190-198.