

Origins of K-Pop

For many people, Gangnam Style is their first exposure to Korean pop music, more commonly known as K-Pop. Psy's song, Gangnam Style, has sky-rocketed his fame and exposed the world to this ever growing K-Pop culture. The song became so popular that it even started playing on American radio stations and has been heard throughout the world, thus establishing K-Pop in cultures all over the globe.

So, how did K-Pop come into existence? When Korea was liberated from Japanese rule in 1945, the freed Koreans became exposed to the different forms of American music. Pop music gradually replaced traditional music and the cultural influences of "Americanization" began to spread throughout the country. However, in the 1980s, Park Chung Hee, Korea's president, commissioned the Gwangju Massacre, resulting in the resistance of many youthful Koreans to their military dictator through the means of rock music. Since then, the resistors turned to Japanese pop music, and Koreans also acted in a similar manner, causing a period of time called "Japanization" to arise. Due to the blended cultures of Americanization and Japanization, K-Pop has become what we know of today.

In 2002, the decade of the "Korean Wave" began as a new trend. Since then, K-Pop has become even more accepted through a wide range of artists and songs such as Girls' Generation's "Gee," Taeyang's "Wedding Dress," "Psy's "Gangnam Style" and will be ever changing as the American culture revolutionizes.

Dalla Wong and Cynthia Luong
Features Editors

Korean Pop: Its Worldwide Impact

K-Pop is a music genre that has grown increasingly popular since 1992, when a group called Seo Taiji and Boys incorporated elements of American music, such as rap and techno, into their songs. It was soon dubbed the Korean Wave by Beijing journalists who were surprised by the ever rapid spread of the Korean culture and entertainment. K-Pop is a mixture of a variety of components, such as repeated hooks, rap, trendy Western music and aesthetic visuals.

The South Korean government views K-Pop as a great tool for gaining revenue. In 2011 alone, approximately \$3.8 billion dollars of revenue was added to the South Korean economy. The Korean artists' fan base has expanded from Asia to other parts of the world, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in South Korea, from broadcasting to publishing.

Through social media, more Korean artists were able to enter the American market. Ever since 2006, Korean artists began touring in America and Girl's Generation became the first K-Pop group to make an appearance on talk shows like Late Show with David Letterman and Live! with Kelly. As a result, Korean artists' popularity rose immensely in America. In 2009, the Wonder Girls became the first K-Pop group to debut on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart and also the first K-Pop group to have their own American TV show, MTV Wonder Girls. In 2012, Twinkle, the debut EP--extended play, by the first sub-unit formed by Girls' Generation, peaked at No. 136 on the Billboard 200, the highest rating K-Pop album on the chart so far.

After the drama Winter Sonata was aired, the Korean Wave occurred in Japan. Following the success of the drama, other Korean groups then decided to make their debut in Japan. Numerous artists were able to make it to the top of the Oricon Weekly Singles chart and perform concerts at places, such as the Tokyo Dome.

Korean artists also had a great impact in Europe. When SHINee arrived for a concert, the airport was temporarily overwhelmed by enthusiastic fans. Furthermore, within the first minutes of ticket sales, the system crashed for the first time due to the unexpected large response.

In Turkey, the Korean culture is quickly catching on as more and more Turks use their electronic devices to explore this society. Turkish teens are now watching Korean movies online, downloading K-Pop songs and creating their own Korean culture clubs.

Nowadays, the use of the Internet and mobile devices make the globalization of K-Pop occur much more rapidly. As the world continues to grow and change, many find their culture's and music tastes intermingling with others, causing a more connected and enriched society.

Deborah Chen
Copy Editor

"K-Pop was a different language and it surprised me how their music could still be able to connect with the audience even if there was a language barrier. [Also,] their music is catchy and different,"
Stephanie Wong Su, sophomore

"In K-Pop, the artists have really good singing, dancing and rapping skills that simply amaze me. They always have variety shows that let me get to know their personality better. They always have new songs, so I've been listening to [K-Pop] since my freshman year," Lily Ly, junior

"The way some groups use different genres for each comeback makes each song they sing different, yet familiar,"
Janet Guan, sophomore

"This contract seems unfair and dangerous; it reminds me of slavery,"
Katrina Jung, junior

"Disregarding the process of how they became idols, I think K-Pop idols are a miracle because they all look the same,"
Wendy Chen, junior

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Courtesy of Google

An Idle Life Before an Idol Life

Beginning in the 1990s, K-Pop music has gradually spread globally in the 21st century and has become one of the most widely known music genres, even in America. Most people know about Psy's Gangnam Style these days even if they just think it is a pointless video of an unattractive guy stomping dance moves that could rival those of the Alhambra's All-Male dance team. However, Psy is an exception in the K-Pop world because he did not have to experience the strenuous discipline of the Korea's pop industry. Nearly every idol had to endure years of training before slowly rising to popularity. Many are unaware of this tedious process K-Pop trainees undergo.

The first step to this process is getting into a K-Pop management company, usually through auditions unless the trainee is scouted. Trainees are usually kids not much older than eleven years old. The audition process is fairly simple and direct, and is split into three auditions: the walk-in, the "call-back" and the final audition. Walk-in auditions are typically held every weekend in Korea and the United States. The call-back is held at the company's headquarters and the final round is held before the head of the company. These auditions are extremely competitive and an online article from Seoul Beats claims that, "The closest thing to K-Pop auditions in the United States would probably be the first few episodes of American Idol."

After being accepted into the company, the person is required to sign what the public considers a "slave contract" that binds them to the company for several years, training with low pay. The company will then, in a sense, mold and manufacture the person into their ideal image of a celebrity. Along with the severe training courses and diet plans, the trainees do everything together with their group, such as dancing, singing, exercising, sleeping and cooking. The Fair Trade Committee inspected twenty entertainment industries and found that the artists' contracts consisted of ridiculous statements demanding the artist to tell their agency exactly where they are at all times and, if an artist cancels their contract, "the Star must stop all activities relating to or resulting from the Star's celebrity status." Joy, a former member of RaNia, also mentioned in an interview that they did not have phones before they debuted. They could not call, hang out with their friends, or have a boyfriend. The trainee's life is essentially there for the industry to control. Without friends or phones, a majority of the teenagers today would not last a day under these entertainment agencies.

Once a trainee is within the agency, the final step is simply to do their best to gain popularity. Inside the company, there are several opportunities to audition for dramas and commercials in order to gain popularity. Yoona and Yuri of the nine-member K-Pop girl group formed in 2007, Girls' Generation (SNSD), admitted that they had auditioned about 100 to 200 times for those.

The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) nicely compresses all this information into one informative sentence, "[...] some of K-Pop's biggest success stories were built on the back of so-called slave contracts, which tied its trainee-stars into long exclusive deals, with little control or financial reward."

Jenny Lee
Staff Writer

K-POP FACTORY

