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## The Rise of Korean Pop Music

In the modern world, a new star in the music area is rising at a very fast pace, Korean Pop Music (K-pop). K-pop as a specific type of music which is based on Korean has gained more and more fans around the world in recent years, and it gradually moves from the Asian market to Europe and the U.S. market. Therefore, this paper will explore how business tactics and strategies, such as trainee, physical appeal, and targeting several countries' markets at once, have helped K-pop gain popularity, even among fans who don't speak Korean.

First of all, K-pop is the latest word that is derived from a word named Hallyu (the Korean Wave) (Choi, Maliangkay 1). Within a long period of time, K-pop has begun to depart from the earlier waves of Korean popular culture in its mediational route, geographic scope, and generational specificity (Choi, Maliangkay 1). Hallyu 1.0, a number of Korean pop groups that succeeded very much in their first show in the international range, appeared between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s (Choi, Maliangkay 1). At that time, Korean music industries were able to make both male pop groups (e.g. H.O.T) and female pop groups (S.E.S) (Choi, Maliangkay 1).

What's more, the most essential factor behind the fast rise of K-pop in modern society is its marketing strategies. This is a long story as it covers a whole business tactic from picking group members to the born of this group. To start with, there is a professional noun, *trainee*, that was created by K-pop pioneer---SM Entertainment, which is a sort of K-pop cultural technology (Johan 34) and guarantees a super enough back support of K-pop. One very obvious

fact is that K-pop is very popular around the world, so if the local system of producing K-pop products is not effective, unique, and qualified, Korean music industries will find it too difficult to maintain K-pop status in today's worldwide music area (Johan 34). The three major agencies, SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, train their trainees in a very mature system and control over their trainees' careers, and they share the same goal of training---vocal, dance, language, and even acting (Johan 34). Take SM Entertainment as an example. The aim of it to audition teenagers to be its trainees is to "find talent, train talent, and produce talent" (Johan 34).

Besides holding regular auditions, they also order agents to discover potential K-pop stars and invite them to become trainees outside of the audition. Some existing K-pop stars were discovered in the street, like Se-hun Oh from EXO. Even if all trainees are not guaranteed to join the group in the future since industries choose a few members from an aspirant pool of 300,000 most of the time, a lot of aspirants still began their trainee's life when they were really young, even from around 5 years old (Johan 35). Since that time, they needed to train 5 hours per day during school day and more hours during vacations. Due to the big success of the influence of K-pop in the world, 21 percent of all preteens in South Korea wanted to be K-pop star as their future job, and K-pop star is the most popular job in South Korea (Johan 34). Consequently, this marketing strategy provide a strong base for the popularity of K-pop.

Plus, K-pop industries are very good at gaining global attention by focusing on K-pop stars' physical appeal. This will be explained in several aspects. Firstly, both male and female members share idealistic features, such as a handsome and tall frame for the male, and slim and cute facial expressions for the female (Johan 37). Secondly, those industries found the most

attractive forms were a boy-, and girl-band template, and their stage performances were singing and dancing simultaneously with specific stage designs related to different themes (Johan 38). One very significant marketing strategy they use for a group is keeping all members' influences at a relative-equal level because if one member leaves or gets sick, the industries are still able to operate this group, and there won't be a big negative impact on it (Johan 38).

Besides focusing on idols physical appeal, as for entering other countries' markets, the industries target several markets at once in order to be more effective (Johan 38). This could also answer why trainees need to accept language training, and most language training are Japanese, Chinese, and English. One very typical example is EXO, which was created by SM Entertainment in 2012. EXO, a name derived from "exoplanet" which e is silent, was grouped by 12 members who were Korean and Chinese and divided into 2 small groups equally, EXO-M (who mainly worked in China) and EXO-K (who mainly worked in Korea) (Johan 38). Their song and choreographies were the same, though, EXO-M mainly focused on Chinese (Mandarin), and EXO-K mainly focused on Korean. Therefore, it's very clear that they targeted the Chinese and Korean markets at the same time, and EXO gained plenty of fans from the two countries. Another two good examples are one female group---F(x), whose members are from Korea, China, and the U.S., and the other male group---2 pm, whose one member is American-born Thai-Chinese and explores the Thailand music market successfully (Johan 42).

Similarly, another marketing strategy for entering other foreign markets like Europe, the U.S., and so on, they invite a lot of plenty of composers, directors, choreographers, and so on, to finish many albums of K-pop music together. For instance, a total of twenty international composers who were from Norway, the UK, and so on, produced f(x)'s 2013 album "Pink Tape"

together (Choi, Maliangkay 4). The last but not least, their lives went to the world stage gradually. For example, in 2013 alone, a lot of K-pop concerts were held in New York, Paris, London, and so on (Choi, Maliangkay 2). Then, it began to spread to more parts of the world, like Lima (Choi, Maliangkay 2). K-pop has become more and more international, but it keeps “Korean” as its most important essence (Choi, Maliangkay 4). All of these strategies give the titles, “international”, and “global-accepted”, to K-pop. Those titles act like the entry ticket for K-pop, so recently, K-pop industries have focused more on the U.S. market since American music is evaluated as a “golden standard”. After BTS (a K-pop male group) was invited to the Grammy Awards, more and more K-pop groups were encouraged to join the U.S. music market. In the 2024 Grammy Awards, 7 K-pop groups have applied for it.

Moreover, another indispensable part of K-pop is its huge fans around the world. All of them combine as a lot of discourse communities. For example, K-pop industries have official Instagram accounts for themselves to post all news about all their groups. They also have specific account for each group, which only works for this group. K-pop idols share their daily life on their own Instagram accounts, so fans can discuss their idols’ fitting style, daily activity, and even their future job arrangements under the comment areas. In addition, YouTube, as a discourse community for K-pop, plays a very important role in promoting communication between fans, idols, and industries. The most monumental event in K-pop history is a music video about *Gangnam Style* produced by PSY, a K-pop star, reached, for the first time in YouTube history (Ono, Kwon 199). After that, K-pop industries began to open their channels, the same as the way on Instagram, to share a variety of videos about K-pop idols, including their stage performance, music video, concert, or other TV programs. Besides talking about their idols with

other fans, most of them who like dance also post their K-pop dance videos on YouTube with the same song and choreography, similar costumes and stage background, with similar shooting ways as well. There's no doubt that people who don't know K-pop might go to find the original video and get to know what K-pop is. Thus, those specific accounts on Instagram and specific channels on YouTube set up the discourse communities for K-pop, which are pretty-novel and promote the popularity of K-pop.

In recent years, K-pop becomes increasingly popular and famous in the worldwide range. More and more K-pop groups begin to enter the foreign market as early as possible. Most of them hold worldwide live show. Take BLACKPINK, constituted by 4 girls, as an example. Starting from Oct.2022, YG Entertainment (the company for BLACKPINK) held the second worldwide show of this group for almost a year. The show started from South Korea, passing the U.S., France, China, Saudi Arabic, Australia, and so on. Tickets for each concert were sold out since these four girls have gained a lot of fans since their first worldwide show in 2019. Besides holding concerts, they also held their performance in many other famous stages, like Coachella in the U.S. and Hyde Park in Britain. In BLACKPINK's show in Coachella 2023, According to media outlet Indie 505, over 125,000 people attended BLACKPINK's Coachella 2023 performance in-person during weekend one of the festivals (Kendall Koreaboo.com). They enjoy their music and performance with their fans who are different parts of the world, speak different language, and listen to diverse type of music before. Because of their big influence, they are ambassadors of many well-known products brands. The most representative brands are Chanel, Dior, YSL, and Céline. What's more, in Nov.2023, they were invited by Britain government to join in the dinner party held in Buckingham Palace and received the praise and award from King Charles.

As the music industry behind them, YG Entertainment also gained a huge revenue from them. Figure one is the financial statement for YG Entertainment. It's clear to see that the revenue in 2022 is much higher than that in 2021, and the most prominent activity for YG in 2022 is the second worldwide show for BLACKPINK. It starts in Oct.2022, so only two months left in a year could make a huge revenue gap between 2021 and 2022, which could show the strongness of BLACKPINK's popularity.

Fiscal year is January-December. All values KRW Millions.						QUARTERLY	ANNUAL
	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	5-year trend	
Sales/Revenue	391,175	321,636	255,262	253,579	269,016		
Sales Growth	21.62%	26.00%	0.66%	-5.74%	-		
Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) incl. D&A	274,493	233,380	185,192	189,568	184,397		
COGS excluding D&A	261,065	222,234	169,421	172,861	176,402		
Depreciation & Amortization Expense	13,428	11,146	15,772	16,707	7,995		
Depreciation	12,211	10,083	13,758	13,509	3,613		
Amortization of Intangibles	1,217	1,063	2,014	3,198	4,382		
COGS Growth	17.62%	26.02%	-2.31%	2.80%	-		
Gross Income	116,682	88,257	70,070	64,011	84,619		
Gross Income Growth	32.21%	25.95%	9.47%	-24.35%	-		
Gross Profit Margin	29.83%	-	-	-	-		

(Figure 1)

All in all, there are the reasons why K-pop is so popular even famous around the world with its base of Korean. For one thing, Korean music industries have a set of mature marketing strategies, including training potential K-pop idols, making music and stage form, and participating in the international market; for another thing, K-pop has a huge amount of fans who support them forever. All of them are really interrelated with each other and constitute a very mature marketing operation system. Due to this system, K-pop is named by world music, rises in this world, and exists forever.

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