

K-POP 101

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What is K-POP?



KPOP stands for Korean pop music. It has a heavy influence from the pop music of Europe and the U.S., but stands on its own.



Although mainly Korean, most KPOP groups sing and perform in Mandarin Chinese and Japanese as well.



In Korea, there are a few main entertainment companies that represent the KPOP industry: YG Entertainment, SM Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment are the BIG THREE.



Characteristics of K-POP

Boy or girl groups, usually 4-9 members, or solo artists.

Singing and entertaining dance numbers

Can sing with microphones in hand while performing complicated dance numbers

Characteristics of K-POP

Catchy tunes with English sprinkled in for effect (usually the title of the song/chorus)

Usually a “rapper” status assigned to at least one member

Although lyrics can be suggestive, live performances are encouraged not to be (this tends to be true for the girl groups)

Usually, music videos are of high production value and can even include many different versions (dance version, movie version, and even different versions for different languages)

Making of a K-Pop Idol

All artists start as trainees for management companies and can train and work as backup dancers for star acts for 2 to 6 years. Jo Kwon of 2pm served as a trainee for over 7 years. Sometimes groups are formed and disbanded over and over again within the trainee pool. Most are recruited from auditions and scouts. Some entertainment companies hold talent searches throughout Korea and abroad.

Most artists and trainees are discouraged from scandals, dating, and partying/drinking to keep their idol image.

Artists and bands debut with a single album which they promote for a few months, then they retire the album to start work on a new album. Then, they have their “comeback” for their new work. Sometimes a comeback is only a few months after the retirement of their previous promotions of an earlier album.

Making of a K-Pop Idol

Most videos and performances include the lyrics and dance practices/dance versions to drum up popularity of the songs so that their fans can learn the words and the movements.

Most bands and artists create a public image that is an alter-ego of their private selves.

Usually bands will designate a member or two that will make the rounds on variety and talk shows to represent the group. It is very popular to have the maknaes and popular members of the group as the face and voice of the group.

Most artists and groups become the spokespeople for brands through magazine shoots and CFs (commercials). Sometimes fake series or shows are created and centered around a product or brand.

K-POP Terms

Maknae: The youngest member of a group

MV: Music video

Oppa: Brother (Mostly used by girls to describe an older male as “close”; “Sweetie”)

Hyung: Term younger males use when talking to or referring to an older male

Hallyu Star: Someone Korean who is “world famous” or famous throughout Asia

Hallyu Wave: The spread of Korean music outside of Korea.

K-POP Terms

Netizens: Members of internet and forum communities

Selca: Self-taken picture; KPOP stars love to post these for fans

Hwaiting/Fighting!: Words of encouragement and support; “Go!”

Ulzzang: “Best face” ; Beautiful man or woman

Ssanti: “Cheap” in a goofy or raunchy way (usually a dance)

Kkap: Overreacting or overdoing that it’s almost annoying; “Jo Kwon”

How It All Began



Korean singer Seo Taiji and two dancers, Lee Ju-no and Yang Hyeon-seok (YG)*, joined forces as Seo Taiji and the Boys in 1992 to give us the jewel known as Nan Arayo (I Know).



Nan Arayo was heavily influenced by early 90s hip hop, and was widely accepted by Korea's young people but panned and shunned by the older generations. In Korea today, Nan Arayo is THE karaoke song and almost every single KPOP performer knows the song/dance.

Evolution of K-pop

1.5 Generati on of K- Pop

Modern K-pop "idol" culture began in the 1990s, as K-pop grew into a subculture that amassed enormous fandoms of teenagers and young adults.

After a slump in early K-pop, TVXQ and BoA started a new generation of K-pop idols that broke the music genre into the neighboring Japanese market and continue to popularize K-pop internationally today.

2nd Generati on of K- Pop

As soon as the first generation of K-pop ended, new record labels were established by the and just to name three of them, YG, JYP, SM. These three labels made more and more money and released their new groups. Such as Super Junior, Big bang, Girls Generation, SHINee.

Big Bang holds a major role in evolution of K-Pop because of there new style of music they become unquestionable number 1 in Korean and in other countries as well.

3rd Generatio n of K-Pop

K-pop's increasing popularity forms part of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave: the popularity of South Korean culture in other countries. K-pop is increasingly making appearances on Western charts such as Billboard. The development of online social media has been a vital tool for the Korean music industry in reaching a wider audience. As part of the Korean Wave, K-pop has been embraced by the South Korean government as a tool for projecting South Korea's soft power abroad, particularly towards overseas youth.

YG Entertainment


Founded by Yang Hyun Suk after the breakup of Seo Taiji and the Boys



Label is stronger influenced by hip hop and R&B



Expanded into the foreign markets in 2005, with artist Se7en the first to expand into the rest of Asia.



Label of 1TYME, 2NE1, Big Bang, Gummy, and Se7en.

JYP Entertainment

Founded by singer Park Jin-young (JYP)

Merged with J. Tune Entertainment

Label is known for having artists with the best English speech (more open to signing artists from America)

Label of Rain, Miss A, Wonder Girls, 2PM, 2AM, 8eight and represents a lot of actors.

Former label of G.O.D. and K.Will.

JYP has the most artists to tour the U.S. out of the other BIG THREE Entertainment companies.

SM Entertainment

Founded by Lee Soo-man

Lee surveyed teenage girls or what they wanted and created boy band H.O.T. and girlband S.E.S. in the late 90s.

Problems began to pop up with SM after the breakup of H.O.T. Then S.E.S. followed by leaving SM a year later. Band Shinwa left them in 2003 (Group chose new management outside of SM instead of breaking up).*

Label of BoA, TVXQ, Girls' Generation, SHINee, TRAX, and Super Junior and Super Junior-M.

* SM is known for their "13 Year Slave Contract" which has led to lawsuits and group breakups, most recently that of TVXQ (see TVXQ for more info).



THE GIRLS OF K-POP

Usually “cuteness” before “hardness”.

Emphasis on legs and eyes, usually accompanied by cute hand movements and facial expressions, although there are exceptions.

Usually have 5 or more members.

There is always a designated leader

THE GIRLS OF K-POP

Outfits are usually highly color/style coordinated

Most girl groups are highly regarded not only for their music and performance, but their style and body shape.

Most girl groups, like almost all KPOP stars, are discouraged from dating. If a KPOP star is rumored to be seeing someone, it becomes a scandal.

Black Pink



Blackpink is a South Korean girl group formed by YG Entertainment, consisting of members Jisoo, Jennie, Rosé and Lisa. The group debuted in August 2016 with their single album Square One, which featured "Whistle" and "Boombayah", their first number-one entries on South Korea's Gaon Digital Chart and the Billboard World Digital Song Sales chart, respectively.

Blackpink is the highest-charting female Korean act on the Billboard Hot 100, peaking at number 13 with "Ice Cream" (2020), and on the Billboard 200, peaking at number two with The Album (2020), which is also the first-ever album by a Korean girl group to sell more than one million copies. They were the first Korean girl group to enter and top Billboard's Emerging Artists chart and to top the Billboard World Digital Song Sales chart three times. Blackpink was also the first female Korean act to receive a certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) with their hit single "Ddu-Du Ddu-Du" (2018), whose music video is currently the most-viewed by a Korean group on YouTube.



THE GUYS OF K-POP



Usually go for more sexy than cute image, although the maknaes of each group exudes cuteness upon debut.



Groups are usually 5-7 members, although there are exceptions, usually due to group breakups or a member or two being dropped right before or after a debut. There is always at least a main vocal and main rapper in each group.



It is not at all unusual for male KPOP stars to change their hair color to extremes (very very blonde is a commonplace color).

THE GUYS OF K-POP

Most groups are considered hip hop and R&B. Younger groups and those in early debut stages tend to lean more towards pop to reach their core fan-base (teen girls).

Male KPOP bands have far more fanclubs than their female counterparts. Some bands even hold Guinness Book of World Records numbers for having large members in their fanclubs.

Unlike female KPOP groups, males in KPOP are encouraged to show off their skin and show their abs on television shows, MVs, and modeling ads. Their abs are even referred to as “chocolate abs” in the KPOP world.

It is not unusual for male KPOP idols and bands to wear eyeliner and other forms of makeup while performing.

BTS



BTS, also known as the Bangtan Boys, is a seven-member South Korean boy band that was formed in 2010 and debuted in 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment. The septet—composed of Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V, and Jungkook—co-writes and co-produces much of their own output. Originally a hip-hop group, their musical style has evolved to include a wide range of genres.

Their lyrics, often focused on personal and social commentary, touch on the themes of mental health, troubles of school-age youth and coming of age, loss, the journey towards loving oneself, and individualism. Their work also often references literature and psychological concepts and includes an alternative universe storyline.

K-POP MUSIC OUTLETS

Music Bank: Music program broadcast on KBS every Friday night. The K-Chart is the countdown chart used on the show. Artists who rank #3-20 perform on the show. The top 2 artists are announced on the show and #1 gets a prize.

Friday night

M! Countdown: Broadcast every Thursday night on Mnet. Ranks popular Korean music using a certain formula of voting collected from different sources.

Thursday night

Sunday

Inkigayo: "The Music Trend" Airs every Sunday on SBS. The latest and most popular musical acts perform live, with a rookie artist/group performing every week.

Saturday afternoon

Music Core: Airs every Saturday afternoon on MBC. Artists perform live.

K-POP MUSIC OUTLETS

