

## A Study on the Chinese Audience of K-Pop under the Background of Globalization

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**Abstract:** The Korea-Pop (abbreviated as K-POP) is gradually integrating into globalization, which also has a certain fan market in China. In this paper, taking EXO Chinese fans as the research object, it analyzes and researches some aspects, such as fan characteristics and psychology, as well as fan community. K-POP fans are attracted by the unique forms of K-POP, who are mainly young women, and most of whom are students and white-collar workers, and distribute in the first and second tier cities. K-POP fans generally have the psychology to meet the needs of aesthetics and appreciation, who can produce motivating emotions by taking K-POP artists as idols. The internal division of the fan community is clear and organized; and the topic discussions on K-POP music artists are both rational and perceptual, and fans are willing to produce consumer behavior whose occurrence also has a certain process and organization for.

### 1. Introduction

“K-POP” refers to the influence of Korean culture on other regions, including basic necessities of life as well as Korean movies, TV plays, music and entertainment. The word K-POP, firstly proposed by the Chinese media, is widely used by the global media nowadays. Since the 1990s, the culture of Korean films and TV plays has gradually entered the Asian market, and the ratings remain high, such as *Blue Ghost* topped the list with 54.4 percent in 2000. Meanwhile, the classic Korean plays will even be remade by Asian countries, and the cloths matching and theme songs in the plays have also become the focus of the audience, which shows that the audience loves the Hallyu culture deeply. With the opening of the TV series market, the theme song and interlude in the play have also begun to attract the attention of Chinese viewers.

The Korea-Pop (abbreviated as K-POP) is mainly a combination of electronic music and hip pop music. And the early K-POP is represented by the man's group, which is named HOT whose songs are lively and cheerful in form, accompanied by rhythmic dance, reflecting the vitality and unruly of young people and driving a large number of young people.

The global medias have been paying more attention to the culture of K-POP, which not only reflects the strength and influence of Asian music culture, but also represents the main elements of the current popularity of young people in Asia. K-POP artists not only master at singing and dancing, but also vigorously develop the quality of performance and variety.

A south Korean singer, G-Dragon, who made his debut on the official home page of Grammy in the first half year of 2012, is the first Korean singer to be introduced. In 2019, a South Korean group, named Bulletproof Boy Scouts (BTS), became the first South Korean artists to appear on the Grammy stage as an award guest. In July 2012, a South Korean artist, psy, published *Gangnam Style* which hit the maximum limit on Youtube with a number of nearly 3 billion times, breaking the Guinness World Records and becoming the most popular music video in history. With all of these achievements, K-POP is heading for the world.

The influence of K-POP in China should not be underestimated. In 2018, the new album made by Bigbang, a K-POP group, sold more than 1 million albums on QQ music platform in China within just 85 hours. Moreover, in 2019, on the digital album list of NetEase Cloud, a K-POP group, Bulletproof Boy Scouts (BTS), ranked fourth, selling 291,933 albums.

In recent ten years, the demand for K-POP in the mainland has been on the rise. The number of sales in China's mainland market is considerable, and fans are also in high spirits, who are willing to repeat purchasing albums to increase sales for supporting their idols.

EXO is a men pop singing group with 12 people, which was officially launched by Korea SM Entertainment Co., Ltd on April 8, 2012. Since its debut in 2012, EXO has sold millions of albums and won more than 170 annual awards. It has a high popularity in South Korea and overseas.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Globalization Background and Cultural Exchange**

In the new era, the exchanges among various countries and nations has been gradually closer. With the continuous increasing process of globalization as well as the constant improvement on mode and content of development and integration, it has been made more scientific. Professor Wang Ning, from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, pointed out that: the contemporary globalization is mainly reflected in four aspects -- internationalization, liberalization, globalization and universality, which reflect the common differences in different countries and nations. A more globalized world requires countries and nations to approach each other culturally.

[1] Mainly discusses the cross-cultural communication, who believes that the cross-cultural communication refers to a kind of communication and information dissemination of people from different countries in different growing environments and backgrounds. In the process of diversified communication, each continue accepts the injection of fresh blood from foreign culture on the basis of retaining their original characteristic culture.

The new media has the characteristics of relatively high efficiency in the time and space with the realization of zero-distance and zero-time difference, so we can be able to accurately accept the information of each country without going abroad. In addition to this the emergence of social media software has also contributed to the interaction of peoples. [2]said that the emergence of new media promoted the global business media system, and also enhanced the globalization of economy and culture.

[3] Believes that globalization is the trend of diversified development in the future, and we can feel it more distinctive during our daily life. People's basic necessities of life, on the one hand, accept foreign culture, on the other hand, still retain the unique culture of our country.

In the context of *The Harmony of Multiculturalism Under the Background of Globalization*, [4]mentioned that the politics, economy and culture in the world form a mutually penetrating and intermixed situation. The diversified conflicts and compatibility are alternating with each other. In order to promote the cross-cultural exchanges well, the people from all countries continuously draw on the knowledge of external culture. In addition to this, nowadays, in-depth exchanges among the leaders of various countries have not only contributed to the relations among states but also brought new opportunities for their own country.

Ken leyton-brown and Ru Dongyan (2019) introduced cultural soft power and related concepts in *The New Development on the Concept and Content of Soft Power Under the Background of Globalization*. It takes the United States as an example, who carries on the cultural infiltration to other countries through the media and other means to export its own films and related cultural content in order to highlight its own democracy. It is a means adopted by all over the world today that exporting our own culture through the media. Stars from all over the world also carry out a variety of fan exchanges and interactions at home and abroad, in order to bring each other closer and promote the spread of national culture in this form.

### **2.2 Korea-Pop (K-Pop)**

[5]put forward the characteristics of K-POP which are popular all over the world, that is music style, behind-the-scenes group creation, the internationalization trend of artist background as well as the highly professional and systematic operation system.

[6]stressed in *A Study on the Intercultural Communication of Korea-Pop* that in the era with the

high development on Internet, the transformation of music form, from “listening to music” to “watching music”, has directly led to the global popularity of music and dance. In addition, she analyzed the artist factors behind the high-quality K-POP, that is, Korean brokerage companies generally have higher requirements for artists, and both groups and individuals need to live as practitioners for a few years before they make their debut, and then they have the opportunity to be chosen. Therefore, the quality of the artists is basically high, not only has the ability to sing and dance, but also gives full play to the interpretation and variety.

[7]mentioned in the context of *South Korean Cultural Industry Spreads All Over Asia* that South Korean artists emphasized the development trend of diversity and internationalization, and group members should learn the languages of other countries, as well as other forms of art such as films and music drama. K-POP artists hold large-scale concerts and sales fairs in Asia and other countries. In the group, there are a lot of internationalization elements and the group members come from all over the world, and the company has been interested in developing artists to the international market before their debuts.

### **2.3 Research on Fans**

[8]pointed out in her paper *Exploration on the Path of Artist Communication in the Context of New Media* that in the new era of mobile Internet, the spread of artist information and the path contacted by fans can be divided into the following categories: one is to optimize artist information and related information through search engine, the second is to interact with fans in online games, and the third is that layout can make artists have more resources to get better development with the help of IP resources.

[9]mentioned that the “fan group” has a certain consumption capacity which is persistent and habitual and can gradually promote the improvement of the music copyright and the development of the industrial chain. In the view of [10], the essence of the fan economy is a kind of economic type which is caused by the spiritual needs, whose property is the cultural industry and whose economic type belongs to the attention economy, so it is not the basic material need of the people, but the consumption needs arising from the psychological and spiritual needs. [11]believed that under the star economy model, the product mainly relies on a powerful fan group of stars, as well as the purchase emotion and the desire will be stimulated by the fans' general feelings about the religious beliefs of stars. This model takes the star as the core of the industrial chain, and the star symbol is attached to all kinds of products, which correspond to a huge fan consumer group, and make cross-domain integration on the basis of the one-way mode of product-consumption.

## **3. Research Methods**

### **3.1 Interviewing Method**

I have known two fans who have rich experience through the K-POP fan group on Weibo. They not only understand the content and form of K-POP well, but also have some views and ideas on Hallyu culture, who have been traveling to and from China, South Korea and the United States for a long time. The content of the interview starts with personal information, involving the views and consumption of K-POP, as well as whether K-POP has changed the mode of making friends in life and which aspect of K-POP should be paid attention to. Through the above questions, this paper will deeply explore the impact of K-POP on fans and industrial model.

### **3.2 Observational Method**

In this paper, a case study on EXO has been carried out. The platform for investigation and observation involves Baidu Tieba, “EXO bar”, EXO topic on Weibo, K-POP official account on WeChat, and it goes deep into the fan group from the social platform to observe the daily activities, exchange and share information within the group, in order to understand the topics of current concern and hot content, meanwhile the author will also make a speech and related discussion in the group, and learn about the operation model of K-POP, the impact of EXO activities on Chinese fans,

as well as the behavior and ideas of fan groups.

## **4. Characteristics and Psychology of Fans**

### **4.1 Characteristics of Fans**

Through the participation and interaction in the topic post, the author finds that the fans of EXO are mainly women, students and office workers, and there is a intersection among the three features. And they contact with EXO mainly through domestic variety, such as Happy Camp, or Korean Variety and Music Station. Female fans are generally attracted by EXO's performance on the stage, clothing accessories and singing and dancing. This kind of strong visual impact effect is different from the domestic singer on the stage. The appearance of EXO members is mainly handsome and pretty with a great change on outfit in the album, as well as the great potential on shaping, and this group has the variety which is specially created for them, and the heat of variety play continues to attract a large number of female group to pay attention to the group, which fully grasps the psychology of female fan group, and this kind of initial and free contact for the fans can bring certain psychological satisfaction to the fans.

According to the data released by the “Yin Yue Tai”, a domestic platform, in 2017, the proportion of fan groups from the ages of 20 to 29 is up to 47 percent, and the number of star fans with bachelor degree or above reaches 53 percent, which is mainly concentrated in the first-tier or second-tier city such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and so on. It can be seen that the young group has led the fan event market.

### **4.2 Psychology of Fans**

Nowadays, with the continuous development of the media, the idols and stars have more stages and ways to show their personal charm. Through the precision operation of the externalized package and the media company, the idols and stars have attracted the eyes of countless audiences, which makes the audiences have a new understanding and the pursuit of the aesthetic. The idols and stars are not only a representative of an age, but also the goal of the people's desire and pursuit. Meanwhile, the emergence of new media has also enabled the fans to have a platform for communication and interaction, so that groups can have a sense of identity.

The group of fans has three distinct characteristics: identity, possession and exclusiveness, all of which have shown the possessive desire of an idol in a fan's heart, and make it different from the other fan groups and the social status, and the stars can find their own existence value and identity through the fan group.

Fans have a clear and orderly division of labor in their propaganda and planning activities, and they are willing to inject emotion and money into their idols, because fans can find their self-worth and yearning goals in the process of chasing stars. This behavior of fans has imperceptibly become the potential business value behind the idol groups. According to the author's investigation, most fan groups regard EXO as the goal of hard work and struggle, and hope that they can realize their personal ideals and values by trying to achieve their personal ideals and values, just like the star members in EXO. And the positive energy brought by EXO can easily infect the heart and the mood of the fan groups.

In addition, an idol with a good-looking appearance is more likely to attract the attention of the social community. In the early stage of star fans, a member of a group will boats a large number of fans due to his or her prominent appearance. As fans learn more about the group, some fans tend to the members who have unique charm or personal skills in this group. This phenomenon proves that fans are more likely to pursue members with “uniqueness” and “fine appearance”.

The theory of “use and satisfaction” is also applicable to explain fans' behavior and psychological motivation. EXO has a large number of members who boast various personalities, which can meet the inner needs of fans for “charm, sunshine, aloofness” and other personality types. At the same time, with the increase on the number of hits on the Internet of EXO-related video information, the popularity of EXO itself has been improved. In turn, idols have a high degree of

attention will also make fans feel satisfied.

## **5. The Operation Mechanism in Fan Group**

The development of Internet economy brings a brand-new community. In China, web Tieba, Weibo, forums, and the fan groups are everywhere, and in these huge virtual groups, there are many content that is worth exploring and digging in-depth. Fans are composed of individuals, and in the virtual network world, it has changed from the initial form with free speech of personal views to the later form of multi-person discussion for a group, which has gradually expand and formed their own operating mechanism and system. The emergence and growth of fan group not only integrates and standardizes the scattered fans, but also has a certain influence on cultural consumption and public opinion orientation in today's society.

### **5.1 Group Hierarchy and Clear Division of Labor**

The formation of the powder group is mostly spontaneous. At the beginning of the creation of the EXO fan group, the relationship and understanding among members are relatively simple. The frequency of interaction among them depends on the frequency of the star's topic. The level of the idol's activity in the front of the stage tends to be in direct proportion to the discussion of the related topics in the behind-the-scenes discussion within the fan group. During the group's internal discussion, the fans with related high activity and more information are more likely to get the supports from other fans and become the “core fans”. In the “virtual community”, everyone will act as a different role, and in the constant development, the internal operation mode of the fan group is gradually formed.

Within the online fan group, each fan member has formed a mode of mutual supervision and management. There are obvious differences between the concentration and oneness of this kind of communication and the “community group” in the real world. While compared with the “community group” in the real world, the operation of EXO online fan group is more systematic and standardized.

In terms of operating a large group of fans, firstly it needs to understand the psychological demands of EXO fans and maintain a speaking atmosphere within the group. In general, the head of the group will select the responsible person from the group as the deputy head and other positions in order to establish a strong and stable core management team, and release the relevant information of EXO in real time, and at the same time do a good job in supervising the content of internal fans. For members in the fan management team, it is necessary to consume a great deal of time and energy to search for relevant information about the EXO and master the network platform at home and abroad, in order to build a bridge between the fans and the idols, so as to realize the efficient and accurate information transfer of the idols.

At an important occasion, such as the day that released a new album, the birthday, and the anniversary of the idol's debut, the fans' internal management team will organize the fans to actively take network votes to the idol group for publicity. At the same time, it can prepare for the fund-raising work before the idol's birthday, and the fan leader and the management team will be sent gifts to the idols through the meeting, the airport pick-up and so on.

According to the author's observation, the purchase of the idol's album and related products is usually counted by the fan groups, and then they will be uniformly purchased by the fan members or managers. Moreover, off-line, EXO fan community will uniformly determine the destination in order to hold regional fans offline events. EXO has come to the mainland for a period of time when is the most active period for fans. The fans will exchange in the group in order to arrange relevant assistance, and the members of the organization will carry out the assistance activities at the designated time and place. To some extent, the mechanism and operation model of the fan groups are more like the division of cooperation within the enterprise, and even boast higher cooperation capacity.

## 5.2 Topics in the Group

The fans are also divided into “fan for a group” and “fan for individual”. Fan for a group refers to a fan who likes everyone in a group, while fan for individual means that a fan likes one member alone but is not interested in other members. In the topic, the subject will be discussed with respect to a member or group that covers from the appearance and the dress to the individual's life.

Some fans will deliberately speculate on star preferences and personal life issues. Through the author's observation, the internal cultural level of the fan group is different, high or low, and some fans pay too much attention to the star's appearance, so most of the topic posts are about the appearance and the external changes of the star. But there are also some senior fans, who will comprehensively examine the advantages and disadvantages of each member, and analyze the changes of stars from the inside to the outside, so as to achieve rational pursuit of stars.

In the topic post, in addition to the discussion of relevant stars, sometimes it also involves personal topics of fans, for example, the personal study, work, life and emotional status of fans. Most of their family and friends know that they are fans via observing, and fans also post relevant pictures and videos to the personal social pages.

In the application of EXO, it is divided into four parts: photo, topic, news and itinerary. Fans can express their own views and post on this application through the binding of Weibo and QQ account, and the main topics are about the reasons to like EXO, birthday celebration, album return days, debut anniversaries and so on.

Fans spend a lot of time on the news as well as interviews released by EXO on various social platforms, which are discussed as topics, and fans can know the personalities and characteristics of stars and their roles in the team through interviews and reality TV show.

On-line, the fans will use the star's nickname to draw up the title in the daily posts and the news, and the poster will usually match some pictures, photos and characters to attract the other fans to interact, while the other way is to attract other fans to pay attention to their posts by uploading a recording video of star's concert and several rare new posters with a high-definition version, and ask questions to let other fans express freely or re-post them with a thumbs up.

With the rapid development of the Internet, the channels and ways to expand the number of EXO fan groups have become more and more abundant. The method for expanding the number of posts and forums can improve the popularity of post bars and forums through “related topic hype”, “online activities”, “internal publicity”, “external links” and “guest invitations”, which attract more scattered fans to join the group in the fastest way. With the rise and growth of social software, fans have set up a series of chat groups in QQ, WeChat through the internal discussion in the post bar, so that members can express their personal views and opinions in chat groups within social software at any time, which is no longer limited by time and network.

## 5.3 Consumption Behavior of Fans

Fans usually have a variety of ways and channels to buy star's album and related products. In the WeChat or QQ fan group, the number of albums and related products needed to be purchased will be counted by a senior administrator or a group leader in the group, who will go to Korea for regular purchases and then mail them back to the country in a unified way.

At present, there is a cooperative relationship between the relevant entertainment app and a number of entertainment economic companies in South Korea, which make people convenient for buying the related products through online order and offline consumption and ensure the safety and quality of these products.

In addition to that, if the purchase of albums has reached a certain amount, fans will have the opportunity to participate in the star live handshake meeting and signing promotion, who will eventually be screened by the brokerage company, so there are many fans who buy a large number of albums and sell them again in order to get the opportunity to shake hands with the stars at close range.

## 6. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, K-POP is generating a profound impact, whose different forms of expression and a variety of artist styles are affecting a new generation of young Chinese audience. In China, K-POP already has a lot of fans who are willing to pay for it and even have reached the point of madness. Moreover, they have a set of rigorous division of labor mechanism and group operation mechanism, which shows the vitality of K-POP. However, it remains to be seen that whether the vitality of K-POP can be maintained in the future.

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