

The Birth of K-Pop

- Korean pop culture is the 3rd largest export industry for Korea
- Itaewon is considered the birthplace of modern K-pop
- After Korean war, many American soldiers deployed into Itaewon
 - Interested in rock and roll music (popular in the States)
 - To play for the American soldiers was like a dream for Korean musicians
- 60s were really stressful for Korea, Korean War broke out
 - A lot of young students/young people spoke out about dictatorship
 - Rock bands were taken away by the government and tortured as if criminals
 - Not allowed to play music
- Music after 1976 was really groundbreaking
 - Combination of imitation and reinterpretation
 - jazz , soul, rock
 - 24th Olympic Games in Seoul attracted many more people
 - Korean people felt more confident, able to broaden their perception of the outside world
- 90s was such a game changer for fashion, music, culture in general
 - Very European, euro-disco in Itaewon
 - Full of nightclubs
 - Hip hop culture really in Itaewon because of military base
 - Dance battles
- Common denominator in all songs in Korea was ppongjjak feel
 - Old trot music (Korean country music)
- Intricate Korean melody mixed with Western beat (introduced in the 90s) = K-pop

Seo Taiji

- Iconic, K-pop timeline is divided by “before” and “after” Seo Taiji and Boys debut
- Authentic Western music
 - African American inspired hip-hop
 - Totally different compared to what Korea was used to
 - Music and dancing performance was new
- Personality, fashion sense, more than just the music
- Expressed the struggles of young people
- The normal formula of music completely was transformed after Seo Taiji and Boys
- K-Pop from its origins borrowed concepts from other music genres and has evolved into something uniquely K-pop

First Idols

- Young girl/boy groups are called idol groups.
 - Idol is like a role model
 - Idol is more than a singer, more than a dancer
- Idol is like a very intense word
- H.O.T were the first idols
 - They were the ones that influenced the idea that singers need to be young and attractive and dancing to cool choreography
- Seo Taiji and Boys retired, and the idea of idol groups came into play
- SM took the boy group base idea of New Kids on the Block (American influence) to create H.O.T
- SM known for broadcasting, had the best music education ELITE
- People recruited for HOT trusted SM because of his impact on Korea, completely introduced black American music in Korea
- SM Entertainment wasn't a big company back then, training wasn't really a thing
- HOT had a different like vibe than Seo Taiji- more powerful and organized
- Goal for this group was to be like real mainstream artists
- First introduction to this fan culture- idol
- Idol image was inauthentic, people thought of them as not real artists because they were created by a company, manufactured- product of a company
- With S.E.S. the idol tackiness of the 80s and 90s was completely taken out
- Introduction of other idol groups from other companies started rivalries by fans and media.
- YG in Seo Taiji and Boys- started producing music after broke up
- Baby Diaries with GOD was like the first idol reality show
 - Showed off personalities
- Hallyu in China - HOT influenced
- SM kinda created a road map for where K-pop had to go

K-Pop Goes Global

- International Money Fund totally crashed Korean economy in 1997, people went bankrupt, economy was really bad, mass unemployment
- Dark ages for artists- no way to monetize the arts
- Forced the music industry to relaunch outside of Korea
- Japan has the number 2 music industry/market in the world- Korea was trying to reach out and find success in Japan (considered impossible)
- K-pop was MADE for an international artist
 - One of the original K-pop artists, BoA, started out her career living alone in Japan, her company wanted her international (SM)
 - She set an example for other artists that they can be successful internationally too
 - Hit number 1 in Oricon chart- really significant for Korean industry
- Oricon chart- Japanese music industry popularity chart
- BoA really made it because she could speak Japanese fluently
- Hallyu Market- Korean influence market overseas
- JYP pioneer, Wonder Girls first broke out into US music market 2009
 - Being known in US market makes it easy to break out globally
 - Wonder Girls really successful in Asia, so JYP thought they'd be popular with the West because they made music reflecting on the 50s and 60s
 - Toured with Jonas Brothers
 - Audience was silent, this was unfamiliar to them
 - Korean audience felt like they were being neglected because their focus market was in the US
- Audience were half Korean expats living in America, and half people who didn't know K-pop at all, Mix of English and Korean in songs
- "Point dance"- a certain dance that can be associated with the song
 - Easy and catchy dance move
- 2009 was the golden age for idol groups- competition was fierce, especially with the internet starting
- Sorry, Sorry by Super Junior was the like first song to reach popularity in Europe
- There was an idea that songs had to be in English in order to be popular in the West, but fans in Paris bought albums in Korean, didn't need to make it in English
- Gangnam Style crazy popular- song in Korean in US
 - Literally a commentary criticizing the lifestyle in Gangnam

Fandom

- Fan meetings are very important- fans from international fly into Korea to meet up, selling out huge arenas
- About 100 million K-pop fans around the world
 - They are passionate, hardcore, have a high degree of loyalty to their idol
- Fandom culture is so strong in Kpop
- Kpop idols feel the need to live up to these fans' standards, fans motivate them to work harder, not show their weak side
- First ranks in music programs, album sales, music charts are all dependent on the fans effort
 - So important, kind of unique to K-pop community, competition between the fandoms
 - Group sharing a common goal- get their idol to rank number 1
- K-pop groups last for a long time when u find that sweet spot of what the fans want to hear and what you give them
 - Like a business relationship
- There's like a strict unspoken rule of what to bring: lightstick
 - Some people make fan items/merchandise and give them out to the other fans for free
 - Fun community
- Most unique feature of K-pop is the lightsticks. Lightsticks are unique to each group
- People controlling the lighting and stage can also control the lightsticks themselves- complicated hardware
- Merchandising is a huge business in Kpop, make as much money selling merch than they do selling their music
- K-pop CDs contain little goodies to increase sales, collectable photocards
- Korea is the only country where cd sales grew by double digits
 - Kpop is built on the fans wallets, fans are willing to pay to support their favs
- Fans make artists
- Idol shows gave the chance for fans to directly influence the fate of idols
- Audition shows in Korea reached audiences outside of people who are involved in K-pop
- Shows make it feel like your friends, you can see their everyday lives
- Almost 27% of the entire Korean population voted for Produce 101 show
- The fans analyzed the final voting lineup and realized there was some rigging going on, and uncovered bribery

- Fans have the power to change the market- and shape the future of Kpop

BTS

- Kpop movements are often led by young women, multiple leaders
- Fans would subtitle fan videos, translate articles
- So much dedication to make sure their idols charted number 1
- Since BTS, alot more idols and groups have been using social media more
- Some fans think of the idols as their possessions
- As technology has evolved, it has become a lot scarier for the idols to have privacy- they are like always watched
- Cyberbullying is a really big problem for idols

Lives of Idols: Trainees

- Trainee life was very competitive- hard
- 0.1% of trainees debut
 - Chance of getting that big is harder than winning the lottery
- Can't take a break- hard to be happy, energetic, perfect all day, just humans
- Black Eyed Pilsung iconic Kpop producers
- Very stressful, never know what's gonna happen next
- People not from Korea leave their families at a young age to train in Korea for long periods of time
- Don't know if you're going to even make it, waste of time?
- No one went home until midnight, extremely competitive, many cried everyday
- Monthly evaluations determine who will be picked to debut
- Trainees attend classes, monthly evaluations, raised by these companies
- Its part talent search, part training program
- People train for four to five years
- Representative of all Korean youth, instead of waking up and studying, they go to dance class and train
- Trainees live together in dorms, get closer and share a lot more things
- Wake up with the other trainees, went to school, continued on with their life
- Some people would drop out of school and not continue their education and still fail
- No weekends/holidays for idols
- Idols need to have goals past debuting, otherwise they get sad
- A lot of celebrities are open ab their conditions and mental state
- Young kids like kpop idols because they are like animation, like perfect
- Korean public doesn't think of idols as humans
 - Ur true self needs to be hidden
- Pressure- even high profile celebrities suffer, commit suicide
- Lowkey occupational disease, idols would share stories ab their depression and panic disorders
- "It seems like this society tries to force the crown upon those who can't bear it to the point where they're crushed under the weight."
- Theres not really a system that protects them, it only promotes the idea that they should continue being perfect

Lives of Idols: Final Assessment

- In order to be liked by the public, you have to be perfect
- This follows the journey of an aspiring girl group wanting to debut, STAYC
- Image is everything
- Need to keep your record as clean as possible,
 - Dating scandals are HUGE
- Companies don't want to take any risks with scandals that will make them lose money, so they create bans
- Idols are products- products have to sell, need the fans to love you, fans
- Companies won't let their male and female trainees look at each other
- Public thinks dating is inappropriate, but idols and trainees do it behind their backs
- Trainees have penalty points- call their parents, send them home, get suspended
- Weight plays a huge role
 - Sometimes it depended on how skinny you were to secure a role in ur group
 - Many idols developed an unhealthy relationship with food, would be scared
- Female idols are held to a higher standard when it comes to weight
- Talking ab a female idols weight would be normal in the mediat
- Plastic surgery is very common
 - Homogeneous country, tend to conform to one specific standard/look
 - Uniqueness in beauty isn't valued

Making a K-Pop Music Video

- Music videos pull the audience in
- Music videos for kpop depend on the choreography of the song,, differs from west
- Idol groups now create entire lore behind their concepts, entire world
 - Fans like to dissect and analyze through the music videos
- Making a music video is extremely collaborative, its an entire process
- Music video productions are huge, 50-100 people in one studio
- So much intention behind stage design, used to just make sure it looks pretty, now it needs to connect back to the concept and allow for it to be interpreted in different ways for fans.
- Use cgi in some parts