From H.O.T. to GOT7 : Mapping K-pop's fandom, media, and performances in China

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**FROM H.O.T. TO GOT7: MAPPING K-POP'S FANDOM, MEDIA,
AND PERFORMANCES IN CHINA**

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Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information

2022

**From H.O.T. to GOT7: Mapping K-pop's Fandom, Media, and
Performances in China**

Sun Meicheng

Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2022

Statement of Originality

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I have reviewed the content and presentation style of this thesis and declare it is free of plagiarism and of sufficient grammatical clarity to be examined. To the best of my knowledge, the research and writing are those of the candidate except as acknowledged in the Author Attribution Statement. I confirm that the investigations were conducted in accord with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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Associate Professor LEE Sang Joon

Authorship Attribution Statement

This thesis contains material from 2 papers published in the following peer-reviewed journal in which I am listed as an author.

Parts of Chapter 1 and 3 were published as Sun, M., & Liew, K. K. (2019). Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China. *Global Media and China*, 4(4), 419–436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436419881915>.

The contributions of the co-author are as follows:

- I conducted the archival research and prepared the manuscript. Dr. Liew Kai Khiun revised the manuscript.

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Abstract

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has become a global cultural phenomenon. Its growing popularity around the world is indicative of the rise in Asian cultural power. Before entering the markets beyond East Asia, South Korean popular culture was first transmitted in China in the 1990s. Korean popular music, or K-pop, has been a key genre in Hallyu. By employing archival research and case studies, and unveiling rarely considered materials and practices, this dissertation analyzes the constant transmission of K-pop in China in the past two decades, contemporary K-pop fan practices in China, and Chinese K-pop idols' multiple identity presentations to answer the research question—why is K-pop popular in China. I propose a periodization of K-pop in China based on the different media environment in China after K-pop's initial entrance into the Chinese market in 1996. Thus, I looked at K-pop in China in the analog media period (1996-2004), the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011), and the mobile internet period (2012-present). The dissertation first examines the history of K-pop in China. Secondly, the current study uses the Chinese fandom of the male idol group GOT7 as a case study to examine contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices from the perspectives of fan consumption and fan production. Along with the categorizations of fan consumption and fan production, I postulate that fan labor has become an indispensable part in the operation of the K-pop industry, transforming it into an alternative creative industry. Lastly, I examine the multiple identity presentations of Chinese K-pop idols by looking at the case of GOT7's Hong Kong-born Chinese member Jackson as well as the political and fandom controversies engendered by such presentations. The dissertation potentially sheds new light on Hallyu studies, Korean studies, and the studies of transnational cultural flows. It also brings new insight to fandom studies and

cultural industry studies. It is my hope that the exploration of Chinese K-pop idols will also foster a rethinking of Chua Beng Huat's (2001, 2012) Pop Culture China in cultural studies, and spark new discussions in celebrity studies.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

3G	Third generation of wireless mobile telecommunications technology
5G	Fifth generation technology used in broadband cellular/mobile networks
ACG	Animation, comics, and games
AI	Artificial intelligence
AR	Augmented reality
ARPU	Average revenue per unit
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBS	Bulletin board system
BLC	Beyond Live Corporation
BTS	Bangtan Sonyeon Dan, male K-pop idol group
CCTV	China Central Television
CD	Compact disc
CD-ROM	Compact disc read-only memory, a pre-pressed optical compact disc containing data
CEO	Chief Executive Officer, a company's highest-ranking executive
CJ E&M	CJ Entertainment and Media
CN	Romanized Chinese name/title, used for television variety shows, drama series, movies, idol group names, song titles, titles of print and online media publications, and fandom terms
CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
CNSA	China Netcasting Services Association
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CP	Couple or coupling, used to indicate an imagined romantic pairing between two idols or celebrities
CPC	Communist Party of China
DSLR camera	Digital single-lens reflex camera
DVD	Digital video disk
EN	English name/title, used for television variety shows, drama series, movies,

	idol group names, and fandom terms
EOS	Electro-optical system
EXO-M	EXO-Mandarin, a Chinese sub-unit of the Korean male idol group EXO
EXO-K	EXO-Korean, a Korean sub-unit of the Korean male idol group EXO
Fancam	Fan camera videos or photographs, and fan camcorder videos
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
Gangtai	Hong Kong and Taiwan. The term is an amalgamation of the abbreviated form of the Mandarin names of Hong Kong (<i>Xianggang</i>) and Taiwan.
HSTV	Hunan Satellite TV, a television channel in China
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
ID	Identification
IFPI	International Federation of the Phonographic Industry
IP	Intellectual property
J-pop	Japanese popular music
JP	Romanized Japanese name/title, used for television variety shows, drama series and movies, and fandom terms
JYPE	JYP Entertainment, a Korean idol management and entertainment company
KBS	Korean Broadcasting System
KCCUK	Korean Cultural Centre, United Kingdom
KFC	Kentucky Fried Chicken, a fast-food chain specializing in fried chicken
KOCCA	Korea Creative Content Agency
KOFICE	Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange
K-pop	Korean popular music
KR	Romanized Korean name/title, used for television variety shows, drama series, movies, idol group names, fanbase names
LED	Light-emitting diode
Mandopop	Mandarin popular music
MAUs	Monthly active users
MBC	Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation

MP3	Moving Picture Experts Group Audio Layer-3, an audio document format most commonly used for music files
MP3 player	A portable device that plays Moving Picture Experts Group Audio Layer-3 files
MV	Music video
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics of China
NCAC	National Copyright Administration of China
NCT	Neo Culture Technology, a male K-pop idol group
NPC	National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
OST	Original soundtrack
P2P	Peer-to-peer
PC	Personal computer
PGC	Professionally generated content
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&B	Rhythm and blues, a genre of popular music
RBW	Rainbow Bridge World, a Korean idol management and entertainment company
RM	RealMedia audio and video formats
RMB	Renminbi, the official currency of the People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China. This is Taiwan's full, official name.
SARFT	State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (China)
SBS	Seoul Broadcasting System
SET News	Sanlih E-Television News, a Taiwan-based 24-hour news channel
SJ	Super Junior, a male K-pop idol group
SJ-M	Super Junior-Mandarin, a Chinese sub-unit of the Korean male idol group Super Junior
SME	SM Entertainment, a Korean idol management and entertainment company
SMS	Short messaging service
TF Entertainment	Time Fengjun Entertainment

THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TME	Tencent Music Entertainment Group
TV	Television
TVN	Total Variety Network
TVXQ	Tong Vfang Xien Qi, a male K-pop idol group
UGC	User-generated content
UK	United Kingdom
US/USA	United States/United States of America
USD	US dollar(s)
VCD	Video compact disc
VIP	Very important person
VPN	virtual private network
VR	Virtual reality
YGE	YG Entertainment, a Korean idol management and entertainment company
WHO	World Health Organization
WJSN	Woo Joo So Nyeo or Cosmic Girls, a female K-pop idol group
WMA	Windows Media Audio format
YHE	Yue Hua Entertainment

Chapter 1

Introduction¹

The morning of 16 January 2021 was a cold one. With mixed feelings, I stood in front of the big screen of the 3.3 Shopping Center in Sanlitun, Beijing. A Chinese fan organization had produced an advertisement that was to be shown on this screen to celebrate the 7th anniversary of GOT7, and I wanted to see it. My hands were frozen because I had been holding my mobile phone high up before me, waiting for around half an hour to capture an image of this advertisement. I have been an observer and participant in the fandom of Korean idol group GOT7 since 2018. My fellow fan Xixi and I decided to travel to Sanlitun only to check out the anniversary advertisement because we doubted we would see any GOT7 billboard in the future. A few days prior to the Sanlitun unveiling, it was reported that all the members of GOT7 would leave their long-time company JYP Entertainment (hereafter JYPE), and each member had individual plans for their careers. Even though the future for our idol group GOT7 is unclear, I feel that my GOT7 fan identity and my connections with my fellow fans will continue.

When I began to think about my potential Ph.D. research project in 2015, I started with a puzzle that had long piqued my curiosity—why were there always enthusiastic Korean popular music (hereafter K-pop) fans around me? I recalled an older cousin who had a large collection artifacts related to K-pop idol group H.O.T. at the turn of the new millennium; one of my high school classmates was a big fan of K-pop group TVXQ and the soloist BoA in the 2000s; and

¹ Parts of this chapter were adapted from earlier journal articles by Liew Kai Khiun and the author. For details found in those articles, see M. Sun, “K-pop fan labor and an alternative creative industry: A case study of GOT7 Chinese fans,” *Global Media and China*, 5, no. 4 (2020), 389-406; and M. Sun, & K. K. Liew, “Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China,” *Global Media and China*, 4, no. 4 (2019), 419-436.

All participant names referenced in this chapter are pseudonyms.

one of my friends frequently travels to Seoul to see the idol groups EXO and GOT7. I wondered why and how K-pop had remained constantly popular among a group of Chinese youths for more than two decades.

In recent years, K-pop artistes have not only achieved top-ranking global album sales but the growing popularity K-pop idol groups like BTS and Blackpink have also sparked heated discussions on international social media as to whether South Korean (hereafter Korean) popular culture has the potential to reshape the global popular culture landscape long dominated by the United States (S. Lee, 2015; IFPI, 2020; Twitter Data, 2020a). Utilizing fans' desires to connect with their beloved K-pop idols in some way, the Korean government and companies in South Korea (hereafter Korea) actively associate places and products with K-pop to attract international tourists and shoppers, and subsequently boost the Korean economy (Y. Oh, 2018). While rising Korean cultural power and its economic benefits in the global markets have been celebrated and researched (e.g., Hübinette, 2012; E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007; Min et al., 2018), there is still a lack of investigation on the history and the current situation of K-pop in East Asia.

Although the scale of the Chinese market for K-pop products is large and China's history of K-pop reception is long, scholarly research on K-pop in China is very limited. Due to fluctuating diplomatic relations between the two countries and Chinese governmental regulations, Korean popular culture in China has experienced ups and downs in the past decades (Park, Lee & Seo, 2019). There are a few studies focused on K-pop in China around the 2000s and in the early 2010s (L. Chen, 2018; Pease 2006, 2009). However, K-pop in China during other historical moments has been largely ignored. Most notably, L. Chen's (2018) research on Chinese fans of Japanese and Korean popular culture touched on K-pop fandom in China before 2011. Developments in K-pop fandom in China in recent years warrant updated investigation. In

addition, it is the time to rethink transnational stardom and Chua's (2001, 2012) Pop Culture China when Chinese artistes, for instance, GOT7's Jackson, have gained wide recognition in China and the world through the rising global popular culture of K-pop.

For the past five years (2017-2021), I have immersed myself in the K-pop world by attending K-pop events, communicating with K-pop fans, and collecting all kinds of K-pop-related information and resources. I initially got in touch with one of my research participants, a GOT7 Chinese fan, for the current project in the early 2017, when I was conducting research for another K-pop-related paper. My exploration of K-pop in China began in late 2017 with research on its initial entrance and early development in the country. By the beginning of 2018, I was looking up related resources on the transformation and adoption of the genre in China. My investigations eventually led me to consider the subsequent development of K-pop in China. My physical K-pop experience started with GOT7's *EYES ON YOU* World Tour in Singapore in August 2018. Since then, continuous immersion in the GOT7 fandom has enabled me to study the GOT7 Chinese fandom. My fieldwork in China and Korea was conducted in late 2019. It inspired me to compile some research findings into research papers that I have published. The bulk of my research findings, however, have been funneled into the chapters of this dissertation.

This dissertation examines rarely considered materials and practices of K-pop in China to answer the research question—why has K-pop become popular in China? Specifically, the project intends to answer two sub-questions—what are the external factors for the popularity of K-pop in China, and what are the internal factors for the popularity of K-pop in China? The dissertation will trace the history of K-pop in China, before delving into the current period of K-pop in China by looking into K-pop fan practices and Chinese K-pop idols' identity presentations. The current situation of K-pop in China is emphasized in the project because it is critical to

document and investigate the phenomenon when the data is still available to researchers. A more detailed investigation of K-pop in China in previous historical periods can be done as a future research project. I wish to address the otherwise conventional explanations, including cultural proximity and digitalization, and provide new analysis and further explanations. The case of K-pop in China demonstrates that K-pop has been adjusting to different historical conditions and showing certain characteristics in its specific overseas markets. Against the backdrop of fluctuating Sino-South Korean relations and changes in Chinese society, K-pop has evolved from an avant-garde subculture and a localized popular culture to an influential popular culture among Chinese youths. Even though K-pop has become the locus for a unique and influential transnational fandom, and an alternative transnational stardom, not much scholarly attention has been paid to this new role of K-pop in the global popular culture network. This dissertation will, therefore, add to the scant English language writings on the Korean Wave, or Hallyu, in China.

Methodology

This research project employs archival research and case studies to examine the popularity of K-pop in China in the past few decades, with specific emphasis on contemporary fan practices and Chinese K-pop stars.

Archival Research

To trace the history of K-pop in China (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), understand the factors contributing to K-pop's popularity among Chinese audiences and lay the foundation for my subsequent investigation of contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices and Chinese K-pop stars, I conducted archival research by using physical magazines, online forums, and other physical and digital materials as pop music archives. This mix of analogue media archives and digital media

references allows for more layered historicization as they provide both documentary reportage and public recollections. Magazines follow the “niche-driven economic model” or the “narrow-casting” model, which differentiates them from many other traditional media (Abrahamson, 2015, p. 2). The pop music magazines examined here are considered historical research. Following Kitch (2015), I regard “magazines as community” because they connect the culture industry with its consumers and artistes to create distinct socio-literary identities and expressions. In so doing, these magazines serve as useful archival materials.

Ever since Deng Xiaoping introduced economic reforms and opened China to foreign investment in 1978, the Chinese economy has transitioned from a centrally-planned economy to a market-based one (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). These reforms had profound impact on Chinese society, including the media (Latham, 2007, 43-86), resulting in the dramatic increase in the number of newspapers and magazines. The reduction of state subsidies and regulatory relaxations led to the proliferation of commercially oriented lifestyle and entertainment publications so much so that by 2001, there were over 9,000 such publications fragmenting the once centralized mediascape (Latham, 2007, pp. 87-108, 139-154, 193-224).

The three music and entertainment magazines used in my research cater specifically to their readers’ tastes and attract commercial cooperation. From the late 1990s to early 2000s, readers could purchase these magazines from their local newsstands or through the national postal system around the country, except in remote areas like Xinjiang and Tibet. According to the book advertisements published in the magazines and the personal information provided in fan letters, they had readers all over the country. These magazines are *Light Music* (*Qing yinyue*), later called *Cool Music* (*Qing yinyue quan rihan*) when it focused exclusively on Japanese and Korean music; *Modern Music Field* (*Dangdai getan*); and *Music Space* (*Yinyue shikong*). They

provide information on the inroads made by early K-pop in China. *Modern Music Field*, published in Harbin, Northeast China, focused on Chinese-language pop music. When it was still in print, it was well-received by young people all over China. In 1998, the music magazine *Light Music*—published in Changchun, Northeast China—aimed to introduce readers to “global music”, particularly Western pop music. However, it soon recognized the need to cover regional pop music as well. Thus, within two years, there were two editions of the magazine: one for Western pop, and another for Japanese and Korean pop. Both *Modern Music Field* (first published in 1994) and *Light Music* (first published in 1999) were run by Harbin Dazui E’yu Cultural Industry Co. Ltd., whose name, Dazui E’yu, meant “large-mouthed crocodile” in Chinese. *Light Music* was subsequently incorporated into *Modern Music Field*, which ceased publication in 2015. It covered pop music produced in China, Western countries, Japan and Korea. However, within *Music Space*, Korean content accounted for a small proportion of its articles. Nonetheless, K-pop’s presence in these 1990s magazines is indicative of its growing influence among Chinese readers who associated the genre as part of “global music”.

Case Studies

Case studies are utilized to investigate why K-pop is popular in China. To do so, I studied contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices (Chapters 6 and 7) and examined Chinese K-pop idols as transnational stars (Chapter 8). The fan practices of male K-pop idol group GOT7 are specifically examined as the case study vis-à-vis the understanding of Chinese K-pop fan practices, while GOT7’s Chinese member Jackson is analyzed as the case study for Chinese K-pop idols as transnational stars. Case studies are appropriate vis-à-vis an ongoing, contemporary real-life phenomenon over which the researcher has no control because they are reliant on

multiple resources of evidence, and need to pose “how” and “why” queries as research questions (R. K. Yin, 2009, pp. 3-24). Therefore, case studies will help us to understand why and how K-pop became popular in China.

The data on fan practices was collected through ethnographical methods, including my participant observations at K-pop events (reported in Chapter 7), in-depth interviews with eight Chinese K-pop fans (reported in Chapter 8), and the investigation of related digital and physical materials. I began the compilation of research and other relevant materials in 2016. My fieldwork for participant observations and in-depth interviews were conducted from September to December 2019. Participant observations are derived from ethnography, which can be used to study people’s practices when they may not be able to self-report all aspects and details of their behaviors (Stokes, 2002). Through my participation in fandom and observations of all kinds of fan practices, I was able to better understand, feel and document actual fan consumption and production. This form of immersion allowed me to bring rich empirical data to this study. In-depth interviews are useful for researchers attempting to understand people’s ideas, opinions, and attitudes towards an issue (Stokes, 2002). An individual’s experiences and their sense-making processes can be identified via these interviews. In-depth interviews were used to uncover the motivations, feelings and opinions of fan laborers’ as they carried out their production practices.

The practices of Chinese fans of K-pop male idol group GOT7 were used to study Chinese K-pop fan practices, while GOT7’s Chinese member Jackson is my case study for understanding Chinese K-pop idols as transnational stars. The case of GOT7 is selected because it is a unique and successful K-pop group vis-à-vis the other popular K-pop groups in the country in the mobile internet period spanning 2012 to the present (see Table 1.1). According to data obtained from the social media platforms of Twitter, Instagram, and Sina Weibo (hereafter

Weibo), GOT7 is among the Top 10 of the most popular K-pop groups in the world (Twitter Data, 2020b); and its Hong Kong-born Chinese member Jackson is among the Top 10 of the most popular K-pop artistes in China (Wang, n.d.) and the world (Kpop Radar, n.d.). This shows that the GOT7 Chinese fandom is more diverse than the fandoms of less popular K-pop groups. Some of the popular K-pop groups target the Chinese market through their Chinese members; the other K-pop groups regard this market as another foreign market, and thus present themselves without any specific forethought in regard to member composition. Groups with no Chinese members generally do not gain widespread popularity in China. However, there are exceptions. Super Junior (hereafter SJ), whose Chinese member Han Geng left the group in 2009, remains popular. BigBang, BTS, and Blackpink have no Chinese members but still achieved great popularity in China. EXO has also maintained its huge fanbase there, despite the departure of three of its Chinese members and the cessation of group activities of its remaining Chinese member Zhang Yixing (Lay) when he began focusing on his solo career. Chinese audiences tend to perceive these K-pop groups without Chinese members as purely foreign, and consider ethnically Chinese artistes like Lay of EXO to be domestic idols. Groups like GOT7, Seventeen, Wanna One, and NCT have Chinese members to target the Chinese market. Among these groups, GOT7 has been the most successful. Since the “ban on Korean performing arts activities in China” in 2016, often called the “Korea ban”, GOT7’s Chinese member Jackson and Chinese-American member Mark have been acting as solo artistes in China and members of GOT7 in other parts of the world. As Chinese GOT7 fans tend to perceive GOT7 as simultaneously transnational and domestic, their fan practices are potentially more diverse. In addition, it would behoove the researcher to explore how the Chinese K-pop idols’ multiple identities have been presented in different contexts.

Table 1.1: K-pop idol groups popular in China in the mobile internet period (2012-present)

With Chinese members	EXO, GOT7, Seventeen, Wanna One, NCT
Without Chinese members	SJ, Big Bang, BTS, Blackpink
Remarks: The Chinese member of SJ, Han Geng, left the group in 2009.	

I have participated in and observed a wide range of events where Chinese GOT7 fans consume K-pop products and services, including online and offline live performances, fansign events, waiting for idols at public places, cheering events, album purchases, and TV program recordings (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Events participated in and observed

No.	Date	Event	Location
1	7 Sept 2019	Mark's birthday café cheering event	Beijing
2	14 Sept 2019	Mark's <i>ON YOUR MARK</i> fanmeet	Chengdu
3	15 Sept 2019	Mark's <i>YIXIA</i> photobook fansign event	Chengdu
4	15 Sept 2019	Seeing off Mark at airport	Chengdu
5	22 Sept 2019	Jinyoung's birthday café cheering event	Beijing
6	26-27 Sept 2019	Jackson's <i>MIRRORS</i> album online purchase	Online
7	30 Sept 2019	Jackson's <i>MIRRORS</i> album pre-launch party	Shanghai
8	2 Nov 2019	<i>Simple Urban Plus</i> Music Festival	Chengdu
9	4 Nov 2019	GOT7's <i>CALL MY NAME</i> comeback showcase	Incheon
10	5, 6 and 13 Nov 2019	Record store visiting	Seoul

11	6 and 8 Nov 2019	Delegated purchase of GOT7's <i>CALL MY NAME</i> album	Seoul
12	7 Nov 2019	M2 cheering event for GOT7's variety show <i>Hard Carry 2.5</i>	Seoul
13	7 Nov 2019	Mnet's music chart show <i>M COUNTDOWN</i> recording	Seoul
14	9 Nov 2019	Drinks at JYP Soul Cup Café and dinner near the old JYP Entertainment building with fans	Seoul
15	15 Nov 2019	Waiting for GOT7 outside the KBS TV Station	Seoul
16	16 Nov 2019	Vlive <i>HEARTBEAT</i> Awards ceremony	Seoul
17	22 Dec 2019	GOT7's <i>CALL MY NAME</i> album fansign event	Qingdao
18	19 Jul 2020	Jinyoung's <i>HEAR, HERE</i> fanmeet	Online

In the research, I posit myself as an aca-fan, that is, an academic researcher and a fan. My identity has changed from a non-fan to a fan when I entered the K-pop fandom scene in 2018 for my research. I have been interested in Korean variety shows featuring K-pop idols since 2013, and started listening to K-pop in 2015. However, I had never identified myself as a K-pop fan or a fan of a specific K-pop group or idol until I attended GOT7's concert in Singapore in 2018. I attended the concert in order to know more about K-pop and K-pop fandom for my research. Unexpectedly, I was attracted by GOT7's leader JB's outstanding live performance and charisma, and subsequently, began to follow GOT7 news, buy their albums, and identify myself as a fan of the group GOT7, with JB as my favorite member. I also noted that my thoughts and understanding of K-pop and K-pop fandom changed when I became a fan. I have gradually

established connections and even friendships with other members in the fan community as an aca-fan, especially after I started conducting fieldwork in 2019.

Chinese K-pop fans normally have specific fan identities (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). During my fieldwork and everyday communication with other fans, I participated as an ordinary Chinese fan of GOT7 with JB (Lim Jae-beom) as my favorite member in GOT7. Even as a participant-observer, I consciously tried to keep my distance from the more problematic areas of fan practices and behaviors. I openly stated my research identity as a doctoral candidate studying K-pop fandom when interacting with fans during my fieldwork.

In addition to spending leisure time with my fellow fans, I also took down around 70,000 words in field notes (mainly in Mandarin), 3,000 photos, and 200 videos during my fieldwork in Chinese cities (Beijing, Chengdu, and Shanghai), Korean cities (Incheon and Seoul), as well as on more than ten Chinese, Korean, and international internet platforms. I also interviewed eight Chinese K-pop fan laborers to study Chinese K-pop fan production. In the course of my fieldwork research, I took raw records in the form of texts (Tracy, 2013, pp. 105-129), pictures, and videos. Most of these were taken with my smartphone because using it to type, take pictures and record videos enabled me to blend in with Chinese youngsters. Pictures and videos were sometimes taken with my compact DSLR camera when its use was unobtrusive. In many cases, after participating in an event, I wrote formal fieldnotes (Tracy, 2013, pp. 105-129) based on the raw records, pictures, and videos taken in the field. When there were consecutive events, I had no time to write formal fieldnotes. To make up for this, I would add more details to my documentation during events. The fieldnotes and interview transcripts were then put through systematic qualitative analysis. Specifically, I coded the fieldnotes or transcripts line by line, and grouped the codes to generate themes and subthemes. The relationships among the themes

and subthemes are also analyzed and presented. Findings of the data analyzed are reported in Chapters 6 and 7. Further theoretical explanations have also been made, based on the reported findings.

Introduction to GOT7

GOT7 comprises four Koreans members, namely Lim Jae-beom (JB), Park Jin-young (Jinyoung), Choi Young-jae (Youngjae), Kim Yu-gyeom (Yugyeom); one Hong Kong-born Chinese, Jackson Wang (Jackson); one Chinese-American, Mark Yien Tuan (Mark); and one Thai, Kunpimook Bhuwakul (BamBam). Debuting in January 2014, seven-member GOT7 has been among the most popular K-pop groups globally, and had been supported by JYPE (one of the leading K-pop agencies) until 19 January 2021. After their debut in 2014, GOT7 has constantly been among the top three most mentioned K-pop artistes on Twitter; this is notable because neither EXO nor BTS maintained their positions in the top three (Twitter Data, 2020b). GOT7 member Jackson is the most followed K-pop artiste on Instagram after Blackpink and BTS (Kpop Radar, n.d.). These facts demonstrate GOT7's constant worldwide popularity since their debut. This is an incredible feat given that the industry and public have witnessed significant development, such as the rise of BTS and Blackpink, in the past few years.

GOT7 had performed in China prior to the Korea ban (see Table 1.4) but had yet to achieve its explosive popularity at the time. After the so-called ban, it ceased performing in China until December 2019. However, the popularity of its Chinese member Jackson grew significantly in China after he entered the Chinese market as a solo artiste in December 2015. His entertainment activities were not affected by the ban. By October 2019, Jackson had 23 million followers on the popular Chinese social media platform Weibo, ranking 26th on Star

Weibo Chart’s list of artistes of the post-90s generation—people who were born after 1989 (Star Weibo Follower Chart, 2019a). This indicates that Jackson enjoys a competitive following among Weibo’s young Chinese idols.² Since August 2018, Mark began engaging in commercial events and brand endorsements in China. In December 2019, all seven members of GOT7 appeared as a group at an album fansign event in Qingdao, China. This first group appearance after a three-year absence in China drew 750 fans and hinted at the possible lifting of the “Korea ban”.

Table 1.3: GOT7’s activities in mainland China

Type of Activities	Year	Name	Media Channel	Location
TV/Internet program appearances	2014	K-pop idol variety show <i>I GOT7</i>	Youku, Tudou	
	2015	Variety show <i>Dream Team</i> (<i>Zhonghan meng zhi dui</i>)	Shenzhen Satellite TV, Tencent, iQiyi, Youku, Tudou	
	2016	<i>BTV Global Spring Festival Gala</i>	Beijing	

² The significance of Jackson being the 26th most followed post-90s celebrity on Weibo can be better understood with a rundown of Weibo statistics. On 1 June 2019, there were 39 celebrities who had more than 50 million followers, 36 of whom were entertainment celebrities (Star Weibo Follower Chart, 2019b). The two celebrities with the largest numbers of Weibo followers are Xie Na and He Jiong, hosts of the long-running popular variety show *Happy Camp* (CN: *Kuailie dabenyi*). Each of them has over 100 million followers. By 29 October 2019, there were 30 young Chinese celebrities in the post-90s generation who had more than 20 million followers (Star Weibo Follower Chart, 2019a). I will now break down the number of followers on these 30 celebrities’ Weibo accounts. Each of the three members of Chinese pop idol group TFBoys has more than 70 million followers. The three former Chinese members and one current Chinese member of EXO have between 40 million to 60 million followers each. 15 actors and actresses from mainland China and Taiwan have between 20 million to 60 million followers each. The national swimming athlete and world champion Sun Yang has 30 million followers. The remaining 5 idols and 2 singers have between 20 million to 30 million followers each.

		(<i>Beijing weishi huanqiu chunwan</i>)	Satellite TV, Beijing Internet Station	
	2016	K-pop music program <i>The Show</i> (<i>Han xiu bang</i>)	Youku, Tudou	
	2016	Variety show <i>College Students Coming</i> (<i>Daxuesheng laile</i>)	iQiyi	
	2016	Variety show <i>Go! Fridge Chinese Version</i> (<i>Baituole bingxiang</i>) Season 2	Tencent Video	
Internet Dramas	2015	<i>Dream Knight</i> (<i>Wan'ou qishi</i>)	Youku, Tudou	
Tours	2015	GOT7 1 st Asian Tour Showcase		Shanghai
	2015	GOT7 Fan Meeting		Guangzhou
	2015	GOT7 Fan Meeting		Shanghai
	2016	GOT7 1 st Concert <i>Fly</i> World Tour		Shanghai
	2016	GOT7 1 st Concert <i>Fly</i> World Tour		Guangzhou
Awards	2015	Best Newcomer Award and Annual Most Caring Award at the 29 th Korean Golden Disc Awards	iQiyi	Beijing

	2015	Asian New Group Award at the Youku All-Video Night Awards	Youku, Anhui Satellite TV	Beijing
	2015	Asian Fashion Power Group Award at the Fashion Power Awards		Chongqing
	2015	New Group with the Most Potential Overseas at the 15 th Annual Top Chinese Music Awards		Shenzhen
	2016	1 st in YinyueTai Weekly <i>V Chart</i> (Week 26)	YinyueTai	
Brand endorsement	2017 - 2018	Fashion Brand <i>Chaoliu Qianxian</i>		China
Fansign event	2019	<i>CALL MY NAME</i> Album Fansign		Qingdao

Remarks: Youku, Tudou, iQiyi, and Tencent Video are the most popular Chinese video streaming platforms. YinyueTai is a Chinese music video (MV) streaming platform. This list of GOT7's activities in Mainland China excludes the solo activities of its members.

GOT7's fandom is officially named "IGOT7" and grass green is the official color of the fandom. The pronunciation of IGOT7 is similar to baby bird (KR: *Agasae*) in Korean. Thus, the image of a green baby bird is often used on GOT7's merchandise, including the official lightstick. English-speaking fans usually write IGOT7/Agasae as *Ahgase*, and it is officially written as

Agase in Japan. In China, GOT7's fans are called *Niaobaobao* in Chinese, where *Niao* means bird and *baobao* means baby. Similarly, the GOT7 official lightstick, which is called *Agapong* in Korean or *Ahgabong* in English, is known as *Niaobang* by Chinese fans. *Pong* (Korean) and *Bang* (Chinese) refer to stick.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1 outlines the background, motivation, and research questions of the research project. It also identifies the gaps in the literature, and explains the methodology employed in the research. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature in Hallyu studies, fandom studies, and transnational stardom.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 consider the different media environments in China after K-pop penetrated the Chinese market in 1996. To do this, I divided K-pop in China into three periods: the analog media period (1996 to 2004), pre-mobile internet period (2005 to 2011), and mobile internet period (2012 to the present). These three chapters trace the history of K-pop in China by contextualizing K-pop in China, and detailing the development of K-pop and K-pop fandom in China in the different periods. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the analog media period (1996 to 2004) and pre-mobile internet period (2005 to 2011), respectively. The mobile internet period—our contemporary period—is investigated in greater detail in Chapter 5 as it is the focus of this research project.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on Chinese K-pop fan practices and Chinese K-pop stars in the contemporary mobile internet period (2012 to the present). Chapters 6 and 7 provide in-depth analysis of K-pop fandom in China during the mobile internet period. These two chapters investigate the fandom practices of fan consumption and fan production, respectively, within

GOT7's Chinese fanbase. Chapter 6 outlines the three types of fan consumption, explores the elements of fan consumption, and theoretically explains fan consumption. Chapter 7 categorizes Chinese K-pop fan labor as well as fan products and services, and delves into the meanings of fan labor. In Chapter 8, GOT7's Jackson is employed as a case study of K-pop idols whose presentation of themselves through multiple identities engenders controversies as a result.

Chapter 9 concludes the discussion with a summary of this research project. It also offers a prediction on the future direction of K-pop in China and the transnational flows of East Asian popular culture in regard to emerging technologies and the new global conditions that will arise in a post-COVID-19 world.

The transnational transmission of K-pop in China has a history of more than 20 years. This allows the researcher to use the long span of K-pop reception and transmission in China as a springboard to investigate the ways through which the transnational spread of present-day globally influential popular culture has evolved vis-à-vis the influences of the media, market, politics, and society. Instead of attributing the success of Hallyu or K-pop to general reasons like cultural proximity and cultural hybridity, I argue that the global popular culture landscape is a highly complex one and close attention has to be paid to the different contexts of K-pop's transnational transmission. This transnationality is particularly emphasized in the discussions of Chinese fan practices (Chapters 6 and 7) and Chinese K-pop idols' identity presentations (Chapter 8). Although internet platforms with lots of K-pop-related content, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, are blocked in China, Chinese K-pop fans are able to tap into unique media environments provided by the prospering domestic internet industry. This results in the unique practices of K-pop fans in China. Rather than understanding fan practices as non-commercial acts, the current research investigates Chinese K-pop fan practices from the

perspectives of consumption and production. In so doing, it takes into account the fact that a great many Chinese K-pop fans have already been incorporated into the media and entertainment industries through their practices, and may possibly have changed these industries. By focusing on the history of K-pop's transmission in China as well as the practices of fans and idols, this study aims to contribute to Hallyu studies and fandom studies through the presentation of new data and findings on Hallyu's important but rarely researched Chinese market.

Chapter 2

Literature Review³

K-pop in China should be viewed in the contexts of Hallyu in China, the phenomenon of Hallyu, and the transnational flows of East Asian popular culture. Previous literature on K-pop fandom as well as transnational stardom laid the foundations for the study of contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices and the multiple identity presentations of Chinese K-pop stars, as will be discussed in the sections below.

Hallyu and K-Pop

Appadurai (1990) denied the center-periphery dichotomy and emphasized the complexity of transnational cultural flows. He indicated that the global cultural economy is “complex”, “overlapping”, and “disjunctive” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 296). Thus, Appadurai (1990, p. 296) proposed a five-dimensional framework of ethnoscaples, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes to explore transnational cultural flows. While these five dimensions have their own constraints and are thus disjunctive, they are also interdependent. This is because homogeneous and heterogeneous cultural flows compete with each other in these five dimensions alongside radical disjuncture and uncertainty. Appadurai's (1990) five-dimensional framework is also inspiring for the study of the complexities of transnational cultural flows of pop culture, particularly Japanese pop culture and Korean pop culture.

The global spread of Japanese pop culture demonstrates Appadurai's (1990) idea. It has been attributed to the *culturally odorless* character of Japanese pop culture (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp.

³ Parts of this chapter were adapted from an earlier journal article by the author. For details found in that article, see M. Sun, “K-pop fan labor and an alternative creative industry: A case study of GOT7 Chinese fans,” *Global Media and China*, 5, no. 4 (2020), 389-406.

23-50). According to Iwabuchi (2002, pp. 23-50), cultural odor includes the stereotyped way of life as well as the racial and bodily images of a nation. The cultural odorlessness of Japanese consumer technologies, animation, and computer games mean that consumers in different countries and cultures have accepted them with little awareness of their origin. Thus, culturally odorless Japanese products have become ubiquitous worldwide alongside the participation of Japanese capital in the global market. However, the spread of Japanese popular culture products in Asia is indicative of the issue of cultural proximity in transnational cultural flows (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 23-50). The global and regional influence of Japanese pop culture indicating cultural odorlessness and cultural proximity at the same time is evidence of the complexity of transnational cultural flows. Noticeably, different genres of pop culture from the same point of origin may be received differently in their different overseas markets. Therefore, rather than providing general explanations for the transnational flows of the pop culture from a given country, it is more meaningful to look at a pop culture genre in a specific foreign market.

Korean popular culture is widely consumed in and beyond Asia. Consequently, researchers consider Hallyu a challenge to the US-dominated global pop cultural hierarchy and an indication of the decentered global media (Boyd-Barrett, 2013; Shim, 2006). International academic discussions on Hallyu took off in 2005 after academia observed the overnight success of Korean television dramas *Winter Sonata* (KR: *Kyōuryōn'ga*, CN: *Dongji liange*) and *Jewel in the Palace* (KR: *Tae Changkūm*, CN: *Da changjin*). Chinese academics began discussing Hallyu a few years earlier, following the rise of Hallyu in China in the late 1990s. Previous English and Chinese language scholarly writings on the subject focused mainly on the history of Hallyu, the meanings associated with Hallyu, anti-Hallyu, as well as the factors that caused Hallyu.

Earlier writings and research on K-pop were centered in Asia rather than the West. During the early period of Hallyu, Asians in Asia and other parts of the world were the main consumers of Korean pop culture. English-language scholarly writings suggest that Hallyu took off in Malaysia and Japan after the broadcast of *Winter Sonata* in their countries in 2002 and 2004, respectively (Cho, 2010; Lie, 2012). While middle-aged women formed the core audience of Korean TV dramas in Japan (Creighton, 2009), the audience groups of Korean dramas vary in other Asian countries. Some researchers have provided evidence of K-pop's popularity in foreign countries during the early period of Hallyu in the late 1990s (E.-Y. Jung, 2009), while others argued that the popularity of K-pop followed the popularity of Korean TV dramas (Cho, 2010) or that its popularity in foreign countries was modest (Lie, 2012). There are also researchers who argue that the driving force of Hallyu shifted from Korean TV dramas to K-pop in the late 2000s (D. Y. Jin, 2014; Lie, 2012). Indeed, Hallyu is not monolithic, and the reception of Hallyu varies across countries (Jo, 2018). The discrepancy in previous research implies that researchers should examine Hallyu in different countries, rather than make general statements related to Hallyu. So doing would prevent any overlooking of the nuances in regard to different geographical locations and social contexts.

Hallyu's success abroad has led the Korean government to view it as an effective diplomatic and economic strategy through which Korea's national image, international relations and national economy can be boosted, particularly in Japan (Creighton, 2009), Malaysia (Cho, 2010), and Taiwan (S. Huang, 2011). This is more so given the political, economic, cultural and social meanings associated with Hallyu. These elements embedded in Hallyu mean that it is used by the Korean government as a soft power resource (G. Lee, 2009; Nye & Kim, 2013). Economic factors—including the comparative advantages of visual inputs in Korea, the lower

cost of investment in digital content production and distribution vis-à-vis physical publications, and the greater profitability of overseas markets over the domestic one—have contributed to the success of K-pop in the global market (Messerlin and Shin, 2017). The growth of K-pop outside Korea has also contributed to Hallyu-related tourism (S. Kim & Nam, 2015; S. Lim & Giouvris, 2017). Hallyu does not only contribute politically and economically, but also culturally and socially. It has introduced new social relations, meanings, and issues to audiences in different parts of the world. For instance, it has contributed to gender relations in Japan (Creighton, 2009), pop culture and social movements in Hong Kong (L. Y. M. Leung, 2009), the meanings of fan activities and fan identities in Singapore (Liew, 2013; Williams & Ho, 2016), the lifestyles in East and Southeast Asia (D. H. Kwon, 2007; I. Oh, 2009), the Korean diaspora's identity in the United States (J.-S. Park, 2013), and pan-East Asian identity in Western countries (Ju & Lee, 2015; Scott-Maxwell, 2020; Sung, 2013). Hallyu's ability to influence audiences' perception of social relations, meanings, and issues gives researchers pause for thought, as it necessitates the consideration of the different contexts of K-pop audiences' sense-making.

While the transnational transmission of Korean pop culture demonstrates the complexity of transnational pop cultural flows, it also results in both positive and negative consequences for Korea's national image and economy. Despite Hallyu's popularity in many parts of the world, anti-Hallyu sentiments have also appeared in East and Southeast Asia. Anti-Hallyu sentiments emerged from the perception of Hallyu as a threat to local cultural industries (Ryoo, 2009), political issues between Korea and a given country (I. K. Kim et al., 2014), the lack of mutual understanding between Koreans and the local people (I. K. Kim et al., 2014), and the perception of Hallyu as a threat to China's status as the origin and center of the deep-rooted East Asian cultural hierarchy among some Chinese people (L. Chen, 2016). Furthermore, the complicated

and insurmountable political and historical issues between Korea and some foreign countries render it difficult for Hallyu stars to reconcile the Korean public's demands for them to be patriots exporting their culture, and the need to be apolitical abroad in order to win over the overseas markets (Fedorenko, 2017).

This demonstrates the important role of the state vis-à-vis the restriction of a foreign culture in a given country. As Park, Lee and Seo (2019) point out in their study on the restrictions on Korean TV dramas in China following the government's "ban on Korean performing arts activities in China", political relations can impede or foster the transmission of cultural exports from one country to another. China enacted its so-called "Korea ban" on Hallyu cultural products due to its objections to Korea's deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in 2016, but couched its restrictions on Korean popular culture imports in terms of the need to protect its nation's ideology and national security (Park et al., 2019). The constantly changing relations between countries serve as reminders to researchers to consider analyzing Hallyu from different geographical locations and historical periods.

Previous research identified four external factors that propelled Hallyu forward: the political environment in East Asia, supportive Korean cultural policies, the Korean government's motivations for cultural export, and the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The cultural protectionism in East Asian countries slackened at the end of the Cold War (Lie, 2012), and intra-regional interactions increased (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007). Unlike Japan, Korea was not viewed negatively by its neighboring countries, which in turn greatly facilitated the transmission of Korean pop culture (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007). However, Sino-Korean diplomatic relations have been unstable for more than two decades. This may indicate that the political environment is not conducive to sustaining Korean pop culture in China.

When the presidency of Kim Young-sam (1993-1997) recognized the economic value of cultural products (Fuhr, 2016, pp. 127-161), Korean cultural policies shifted from political control to the promotion of cultural exports, thus boosting the development of the cultural industry. Korea then began promoting cultural exports to Asia in the 1990s and the rest of the world in the 2000s (E.-Y. Jung, 2009; S.-H. Kwon & Kim, 2014). The Korean cultural industries also sought to develop footholds in overseas markets because of the limited domestic market and the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Lie, 2012; H. Shin, 2013). The overseas success of Hallyu stirred up feelings of national pride in Koreans that further enhanced Hallyu reproduction (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007). These factors collectively led to the rise of Hallyu. Three large entertainment agencies—SM Entertainment (hereafter SME), YG Entertainment (hereafter YGE), and JYPE—played crucial roles in the global success of K-pop (S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013). Companies other than the “Big Three” have also contributed to the dissemination of K-pop internationally. The development of ICTs likewise contributed to Hallyu’s growth, as evinced in the advent of MVs and MP3 players in the 1990s, and social media in the 2000s (Jin & Yi, 2020; S.-H. Kwon & Kim, 2014; Lie, 2012; Min et al., 2018). YouTube—a free distributor—allows K-pop to bypass conventional global music distributors and reach global audiences, though the profit margin from this platform is very low (I. Oh & Lee, 2013). Social media not only assists in the transnational flows of K-pop contents but also in the transcultural construction of meanings, affect, and identities through fans’ online fan practices and idol-fan online interactions (McLaren & Jin, 2020). The internet, as a third space, allows transnational fans to create their own cultures, generate a sense of belonging, and construct alternative identities (Min et al., 2018; C. Oh, 2020). While these factors positively contributed to the success of Hallyu within and beyond Asia in certain

historical periods, they may not be able to fully explain the continued popularity of K-pop in China for over twenty years when Sino-Korean relations have been strained.

Existing literature points to four internal factors propelling Hallyu forward: the hybridity of Korean pop culture, cultural proximity in Asia, affective affinities, and the form characteristics of Hallyu products. As Korean pop culture is a hybridization of Western pop culture and East Asian culture, it is able to simultaneously gain wider acceptance among Asians and appeal to audiences beyond Asia (Cha & Kim, 2011; S. Jung, 2011; Ryoo, 2009). Following Iwabuchi's (2002, pp. 23-50) thesis of cultural odorlessness, S. Jung (2011) used the term *mugukjeok* (non-nationality) to explain the global popularity of Korean pop culture. *Mugukjeok* refers to the hybridization of local or national cultural elements and global cultural elements in a way that results in the local or national elements becoming less culturally specific, and thus increasing their transnational acceptance. With member compositions that span multiple nationalities, the idol groups in the second Korean Wave emphasize styles over storytelling, and rhymes over the textual content of lyrics (Jo, 2018). K-pop's marriage of traditional, modern and postmodern characteristics, and the time/space hybridity of Korean society render the genre appealing to audiences in both developed and developing countries (W. Jang and Kim, 2013). Indeed, this hybridity is critical to the popularity of Korean pop culture overseas. Thus, it is important to look at how Korean pop culture localizes itself in a foreign market to achieve its popularity in the given market.

While the popularity of Korean pop culture in Asia has been attributed to cultural proximity (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007; J. Yang, 2012), this explanation should be regarded with some caution. Cultural proximity refers to “nationally or locally produced material that is closer to and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethnic, dialect/language,

religious, and other elements” (Straubhaar, 1991, p. 51). If culture is heterogamous within ethnic Chinese communities, as Chua (2001; 2012, pp. 31-50) suggests, it would be problematic to employ cultural proximity as an explanation for Hallyu in East and Southeast Asia. Yoon (2017) posits that cultural proximity is more applicable to narrative-based media genres, such as films and TV dramas. K-pop does not have much cultural proximity with China as it challenges existing Chinese gender roles and social norms (L. Chen, 2016). A large portion of China’s public audiences were shocked by K-pop male idols’ androgynous appearances (L. Chen, 2016). K-pop fans also claimed that K-pop helped them to rebel against elements of Confucianism—the shared cultural tradition between China, Japan, and Korea (Pease, 2009). Given that Korean TV dramas represent Korean society (that is suffused with Confucian traditions) and K-pop provides the imaginary plentitude to exclude traditional social elements (S. Lee, 2012), cultural proximity loses its currency as an explanation for the popularity of K-pop. Moreover, audiences’ perceptions of a certain culture tend to change over time. Specific discussions on particular pop culture genres, geographical areas, and historical periods are thus needed.

Chinese-language scholarly research offer deeper analyses on the internal factors of Hallyu. They identify cultural proximity as a double-edged sword for Hallyu in China. On the one hand, Chinese audiences are drawn to Korean TV dramas because they are curious as to the cultural differences between themselves and their East Asian brethren (J. Lin, 2005). They gravitate towards Korean TV dramas because these programs cater to their preferences in a way that Chinese-produced dramas do not. Furthermore, the shared Confucian traditions and different cultural industries between China and Korea mean that Korean TV dramas enable Chinese audiences to feel close to aspects of Korean culture (B. Liu, 2014; A. Piao, 2008). On the other hand, the differences between the two cultures were initially ignored under the cultural proximity

narrative so much so that misunderstandings have arisen regarding the historical origins and cultural ownership of Chinese/Korean traditions (B. Liu, 2014). While previous research forwarded cultural proximity as a means to explain the popularity of Korean TV dramas, it cannot explain the popularity of K-pop and Korean computer games (B. Liu, 2014). The popularity of K-pop among teenagers and students may be due to its unbridled music and dance styles that hint at the Chinese youngsters' desires to escape temporarily from the pressures of society, family, and school (G. Piao, 2003). That no such form of music existed in the Chinese pop music market may have also contributed to young Chinese people's growing interest in K-pop (G. Piao, 2003).

Chin and Morimoto (2013), Malik (2019), and Yoon (2017) have consequently highlighted affective affinity as an explanation for transnational Hallyu fandom. Through affective affinity, transcultural fans are able to be fond of a foreign popular culture, invest affectiveness towards it, and construct identities around it. The export of Hallyu content in various formats and remakes, as well as transmedia storytelling have ensured the overseas success of Korean popular culture (Jin & Yi, 2020).

There have been many English-language writings on transnational Korean pop culture experiences around the globe. In addition to referencing geographical locations in Korea's immediate vicinity, they examine Korean pop culture experiences in North Korea (S.-Y. Kim, 2013), Western Asia, South America (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007; Min et al., 2018), and Europe (Hübinette, 2012). Noticeably, despite receiving overseas attention from all five continents, the overseas success of Korean pop culture is only restricted to niche fandoms rather than mainstream audiences in most local markets (Jin & Yi, 2020). As mentioned above, K-pop's

localization could possibly be another internal factor for its popularity overseas. Other factors may also play roles in K-pop's popularity abroad.

Hallyu in China

Although the Korean cultural industries have recognized the significance of China as an overseas market (K. S. Y. Fu & Liew, 2005; J. Y. Kim & Lee, 2012; KOFICE, 2018), there are limited studies on Hallyu in China. The issue of when and in which situation the term “Hallyu” was first used remains inconsistent in existing literature. Some researchers believe the term was first used by Korea's Ministry of Culture and Tourism in the planning stages of its 1999 promotional CD titled *Korean Popular Music* in English and *Hanliu – Songs from Korea* in Chinese (Jeon & Yoon, 2005). Other scholars suggest the term was coined by the Chinese newspaper *Beijing Youth Daily* (CN: *Beijing qingnian bao*) in November 1999, to literally refer to the flows from Korea (SK Jung & Li, 2014). In a 19 November 1999 article titled “The east wind sometimes blows east” (CN: Dongfeng yeyou dongjian shi), the *Beijing Youth Daily* states that Hallyu refers to cultural and fashion trends from Korea (Bin & Yi, 2011).

Existing literature is also divided as to whether the rise of Hallyu in China is due to Korean TV dramas or K-pop. Some studies suggest that the success of Korean TV dramas in China had been responsible for the first Korean Wave in the country (D. Y. Jin, 2014; Kuwahara, 2014; I. Oh & Park, 2012). Indeed, Korean TV dramas, including *Jealousy* (KR: *Chilt'u*, CN: *Jidu*) and *Eyes of Dawn* (KR: *Yömyöngüi nundongja*, CN: *Liming de yanjing*), were imported to China in 1993 (S. H. Jang, 2012). By 1997, Chinese audiences were enthralled by the Korean TV drama, *What is Love* (S. H. Jang, 2012). Other researchers argued that K-pop played a significant role during the first Korean Wave (Ju, 2014; S. Jung & Hirata, 2012; S. I. Shin & Kim, 2013).

Proponents of this argument note K-pop began to enjoy popular reception in China around the same time as Korean TV dramas (S. Jung & Hirata, 2012). In 1999, male duo Clon (CN: Kulong) and five-member male idol group H.O.T. achieved unexpected popularity in China (Jeon & Yoon, 2005). Ju (2014) asserts that the simultaneous growth in the popularity of Korean TV dramas and K-pop male groups in China laid the foundations for Hallyu.

Unfortunately, there is limited literature on the subsequent development of Hallyu in China after its initial breakthrough in the market. L. Leung (2008) examined how Chinese local and regional satellite TV stations utilized Korean drama serials to win the competition among television stations in the country. L. Chen (2018, pp. 54-83) investigated the relationship between fandom and nationalist sentiments vis-à-vis Korean popular culture in China. She observed that the government supported the importation and consumption of Korean popular culture, especially family-oriented TV dramas, for propaganda reasons (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). L. Chen (2018, pp. 54-83) also documented how Chinese audiences' enthusiasm for Korean idol dramas in the early 2000s, such as *Autumn in My Heart* and *Winter Sonata*, led to the thriving and legitimization of Korean fan-subtitling groups and video streaming sites. By this time, Korean popular culture had found a niche market in China while its popularity could not surpass that of Gangtai (Hong Kong and Taiwan), American, or Japanese popular culture (Pease, 2009). Male idols with good looks were particularly successful in China so much so that Maliangkay and Song (2015) studied the adoption of the Korean male beauty ideal in the country.

Researchers like J. Ahn (2014) and L. Shao (2019) postulated that the popularity of TV dramas, TV programs, and K-pop idol groups among young Chinese who commonly use video streaming sites resulted in the resurgence of Hallyu in China in 2013. Korean TV drama *My Love from the Star* (KR: *Pyöresŏ on kūdae*, CN: *Laizi xingxing de ni*) was very popular, as audiences

were attracted by the beautiful actors, conservative romantic storyline as well as the main characters' pursuit of love and career success on the one hand, and the criticisms vis-à-vis the portrayals of patriarchal ideologies on the other (L. Shao, 2019). As seen in the Chinese audiences' responses to *My Love from the Star*, the cultural proximity thesis does not fully explain the spread or popularity of Hallyu (L. Shao, 2019).

While Chinese-language literature on Hallyu is consistent with the English-language literature, it emphasizes Hallyu in China. Empirical research on Hallyu's reception and audiences is scant. Chinese academics began discussing Hallyu in Chinese-language academic journals and theses a few years before their colleagues in international academia, identifying similar factors for the phenomenon of Hallyu in China (B. Liu, 2014; A. Piao, 2008; G. Piao, 2003). China researchers also attributed the global development of Hallyu after 2010 to new media technologies, such as social media and smart devices (B. Liu, 2014). However, in-depth investigation of Hallyu fandom in China is rare among Chinese-language literature.

Chinese cultural industries are very keen to learn from the successes of the Korean cultural industries and improve their own productions. Indeed, Korean TV drama production is considered a model for Chinese production studios (A. Piao, 2008). Research on K-pop idol production and promotion (Y. Huang, 2009), as well as the development of Korean variety shows, K-pop and Korean films indicate that they have become references for the ways in which Chinese cultural industries can grow and improve (Qiang & Xu, 2020; Xu & Zhou, 2018; Zhao & Chen, 2016). Chinese scholars have also studied Hallyu in China after relations between China and Korea grew tense following the latter's deployment of the THAAD system. Lv (2021) examined "fan nationalism"—a combination of fan culture and nationalism—among Chinese K-pop fans to determine the extent to which they were influenced by the China-Korea relationship

in the aftermath of the THAAD controversy in 2016. In addition to focusing on the practical implications of studies on Hallyu in China, more attention should be paid to understanding Hallyu in China from historical, cultural, and social perspectives.

The dearth of English-language literature on Hallyu in China is probably due to the scarcity of China-based international scholars. Chinese academic research on the humanities and social sciences is largely underdeveloped compared to that in developed countries. Exacerbating the underdevelopment of Chinese research in the humanities and social sciences is the emphasis on science and engineering research in China. While there is research on Korean TV dramas, academic writings on K-pop in China are limited. This is likely due to the relatively low awareness of the unofficial, informal, or underground media channels that largely enabled K-pop transmission. The number of studies on Hallyu in China generally increase when there is a well-received Korean popular product in China, or a controversy between China and Korea. This demonstrates that research on Hallyu in China is inadequate. Academia can remedy this by paying more attention to the history of Hallyu and K-pop in China, including the initial formation of Hallyu in China, and Hallyu and K-pop fandoms in China, to understand why Hallyu and K-pop have been sustained in China for more than two decades. Doing so would help researchers to better understand the contemporary global sensation of Hallyu and K-pop.

K-Pop

The term “K-pop”, though used internationally by academia and the general public, was initially used in Japan to distinguish Korean idol music from Japanese popular music or J-pop since the late 1990s (D. Y. Jin, 2020). Y. Kim, Lee, Hahm, Han and Song (2014) defined K-pop as Korean popular music and all the other cultural products related to it. As K-pop comes from Korea, it

appears to be a place-specific music. According to Negus (1997, p. 189), place-specific music has three features: material circumstances of its place of origin, musical uniqueness, and its relation to identity construction. The Koreanness of K-pop stems from the Korean music industries producing music and its related products. Lie (2012) contends K-pop is more like a brand of export-oriented music product produced by the Korean music industry with high cost performance and hardly any traditional Korean culture. It is beyond the scope of this research study to consider the Koreanness of K-pop. Instead, I define K-pop as the popular music produced by Korean music companies, inclusive of dance music performed by idols as soloists or in groups.

K-pop places a lot of emphasis on visuals. This is because it has been strongly influenced by the Japanese idol-making system and Western popular music. The K-pop idol-making system adapted many features of the J-pop idol-making system in the 1980s (D. Y. Jin, 2020). Evidence of Western popular music's influence can be seen in the facts that "nearly all songs featured English phrases; band names were often English acronyms; the music was middle-of-the-road R&B or hip-hop, with integral dance routines" (Pease, 2006). These features and the ubiquity of Western popular music may have rendered K-pop more accessible and acceptable to both local and international audiences. Following the rise in popularity of MVs in the 1990s, the Korean music industry began to shift its emphasis from music to visuals (Howard, 2006). The importance that K-pop attaches to visual images is related to the nature of the idol, who must sing while acting (S. Jung & Hirata, 2012). Within the idol-making system, Korean entertainment companies increasingly highlighted their idols' pleasing appearance, dance skills, and fashion styles (Howard, 2006). K-pop dance includes a wide range of styles (C. Oh, 2020). Successful idol groups are also leaders of youth fashion trends (Howard, 2006; S. H. Jang, 2012;

Jeon & Yoon, 2005; E.-Y. Jung, 2015). The emphasis on visuals may have contributed to the transnational popularity of K-pop as well.

International academic research on K-pop surged only after 2012 following the overnight success of male soloist Psy's *Gangnam Style* (G.-S. Park, 2013a). Scholars have extensively studied the K-pop industry (I. Oh, 2013; I. Oh & Park, 2012), and the transnational dissemination and reception of K-pop (Choi, 2015; Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). Much has also been written on K-pop's linguistic themes (Jin & Ryoo, 2012; J.S. Lee, 2004), racial issues (G.-S. Han, 2014; D. C. Oh, 2017), gender problems (Käng, 2014; J. Lee & Yi, 2020; X. Lin & Rudolf, 2017; L. Shin, 2018), and political issues (J.-H. Ahn & Lin, 2018). Although K-pop began receiving global attention from the 2010s onwards, the bulk of its income still comes from Asia. In 2017, Japan (62.5%), China (21.4%), and Southeast Asia (12.6%) accounted for 96.6% of the total export of the Korean music industry (KOCCA, 2018). Today, China is still one of the largest markets for K-pop exports. To better explain why K-pop is popular in China in the present-day, I will examine the development of K-pop in China in the mobile internet period (2012-present), K-pop fan practices in China, and the transnational stardom of Chinese K-pop idols.

Similar to the transnational flows of Japanese popular culture, the global spread of Korean popular culture has proved the complexity of transnational cultural flows again (Appadurai, 1990). For instance, cultural proximity explains the initial popularity of Korean TV dramas in Asian countries, but it does not explain why K-pop is well-received among Asian youngsters and it does not fully explain the popularity of Korean TV dramas in recent years (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007; B. Liu, 2014; L. Shao, 2019; J. Yang, 2012). It is important to consider the transnational flows of different pop culture genres in different overseas markets and in different historical periods specifically, even though the cultures are from a same origin.

K-Pop Fandom

This section looks at the literature on fans and fan practices, specifically fan consumption and fan production in the K-pop fandom in China. Fans were originally considered irrational and excessively enthusiastic, and were consequently stigmatized in many societies—even in the present-day. Given that fans were perceived to be overly passionate and unreasonable vis-à-vis their idols, their behavior was initially studied in academia as a form of pathology. The word *fan* is derived from the Latin word *fanaticus*, meaning frenzied (Jenkins, 1992b). Jenson (1992) notes that some scholars commonly use the “we/us” versus “others” distinction to explain the social and psychological pathology of fandom on the one hand, and examine the so-called excessive, deviant, and potentially dangerous behavior of fans on the other. As this form of moral dualism, which distinguishes between “others” and the self, stigmatizes people who are different from the self (Hills, 2002, pp. 18-39), academia gradually began to look at fandom from other perspectives.

Thus, other researchers sought to classify fans according to the object of their fandom. Lewis (1992) categorized three types of fans: sports fans, media fans, and celebrity fans. Zheng (2016) noted behavioral differences between different types of fans. K-pop fans could possibly be media product fans or celebrity fans, depending on whether the object of fandom is K-pop content or K-pop idols. I believe that K-pop fans are both media product fans and celebrity fans, though they may identify themselves in one category or the other. Therefore, within the K-pop fandom, individual fans tend to exhibit different behaviors.

Fan practices in China can be traced back to the 1830s when Beijing Opera audience culture flourished during the late Qing dynasty (W. Zhang, 2018, pp. 217-239). In the Chinese

language, the term *mi* has been traditionally used to convey what it means to be a fan. Instead of being negative or stigmatizing, it emphasizes a person's high involvement in something. *Mi* can be used as both a verb and a noun. When used as a verb, *mi* means to be excessively fond of somebody or something. When used as a noun, *mi* refers to a person who loses themselves to something. *Fensi* literally means mung bean vermicelli in Chinese and is the transliteration of the English term "fan/fans". The shift to use *fensi* rather than *mi* to denote fans in the Chinese language took place around 2005. This trend probably started when the TV talent show *Super Girl* (CN: *Chaoji nvsheng*) attracted a wave of online fan cultures in China in 2005 (L. Yang, 2009). Hills (2002, pp. 42-58) suggests that fans are a niche market because they do not relate to the wider market. However, this is not the case in contemporary China. In present-day China, the presence of large numbers of fans with high commitment and tremendous purchasing power have resulted in big movie production companies' employment of their idols as leads or guest-starring roles in big-budget movies for the mainstream market (Liang & Shen, 2016). Therefore, it is meaningful to revisit how fan practices interact with the entertainment industries.

K-pop fans tend to be urban middle-class young people aged between their teens to their twenties (J. Ahn, 2014; Cha & Kim, 2011; E.-Y. Jung, 2009; Maliangkay & Song, 2015; L. Shao, 2019). J. Kim (2017) indicates that Korean female K-pop fans are usually from the middle and upper classes. It is probable that most K-pop fans in China are women because more female college students than males vocalized positive attitudes towards Korean TV dramas and K-pop (Chu, Liu, & Wang, 2003). Chinese fans have a unique way of distinguishing their fan identities. They tend to identify themselves as fans of an idol, fans of an idol in a certain period, fans of an idol group, or fans of two idols (often as an imagined couple) in a group (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). Chinese fans are also zealous about their own definition of fans. L. Chen (2018, pp. 3-27)

observes that Chinese fans of Japanese male idol groups managed by Johnny's Entertainment define fans as those who had *paid* for their idols' products. This definition of fans in fandom can be seen among Chinese K-pop fans. Indeed, Chinese K-pop fans show their loyalty to their idols by purchasing legal copies of albums and associated products, despite their criticisms of the K-pop companies' manipulation of their idol groups (Pease, 2009). This demonstrates a palpable link between fans' investment or consumption and their identities in the K-pop fandom in China.

The increasing adoption of the internet, social media, and many other new ICTs by fans and the entertainment industry has contributed to the rapid development of online fan practices. The similarity and differences between offline and online fan practices have been explored by many scholars. Hills (2002, pp. 174-184) indicates that the visual orientation of the internet differentiates online fan cultures from offline ones. Williams and Copes' (2005) investigation of the straight-edge punk online fan community shows there is a tendency towards identity fragmentation and weak attachment in postmodern societies. Williams (2006) classifies straight-edges on an identity continuum, depending on whether they use the internet as a supplement to the subculture or as their primary source. Additionally, some people may not claim the label but practice according to the straight-edge subculture (Williams, 2006). Transnational online K-pop fandom has shown a similar transition from private realms into public ones (Chang and Park, 2019). Chinese K-pop fan culture, on the other hand, can be divided into offline fan culture and online fan culture whereby fans in the former maintain a strong sense of individualism based on the discourse of rationality and consumer rights offline, and fans in the latter take action under a collective and nationalistic fan identity online (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). This indicates that fandom-based friendship usually only existed online while fans' offline interactions were limited to real-life friends (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). Thus, existing academic writings on

contemporary K-pop fandom in China serve as a reminder for researchers to consider the topic in the online and offline contexts. It is likewise important to take the transnational context into consideration.

Some particular meanings can be found in the recent fan practices within K-pop fan cultures and Chinese fan cultures. J. Kim (2017) explored *ttechang*—fan chanting and singing along with the ongoing K-pop performance—and fancam (fan camera or fan camcorder video recordings) culture as the two most significant practices in K-pop fan culture. *Ttechang* is a participatory culture that incorporates listenership into musicianship so as to construct a new audienceship (J. Kim, 2017). When fans produce and consume fan-produced merchandise, they are not only resolving their dissatisfaction with official merchandise but also demonstrating their investment in the fandom (J. Kim, 2017). Cruz, Seo and Binay (2019) argue that K-pop fans' paratextual translation practice is a key step in the cultural globalization process. Furthermore, analysis of Chinese fans' reception and interpretation of Japanese and Korean popular cultures indicates that popular culture can become a resource for the construction of nationalism (L. Chen, 2018). This is because Chinese fan culture will constantly oscillate between subculture and mainstream culture as it adopts the evaluation system and hierarchy from the mainstream (Zheng, 2016). All in all, the meanings associated with certain fan practices can be further investigated.

Chinese K-Pop Fans' Consumption and Production

Fan consumption and fan production in K-pop fandom in China has to be differentiated because some aspects of fan practices are increasingly incorporated into the production practices of the media and entertainment industries. Fiske (1989, pp. 23-47) notes that consumption is cultural production since it attaches meanings to the act of consumption in a consumerist society. By

extension, fan production is a part of cultural production. Fan production is where fans produce their culture out of the commercial commodities (e.g., texts, stars, and performances) of the cultural industries (Fiske, 1992). In so doing, “fans produce meanings and interpretations”, “artworks”, “communities”, and “alternative identities” (Jenkins, 1992a, p. 214). There are three types of fan productivity: semiotic productivity, enunciative productivity, and textual productivity. Semiotic productivity refers to the meaning-making of social identity and social experience from cultural commodities (Fiske, 1992). Enunciative productivity is the public and often oral sharing of meaning generated from semiotic productivity (Fiske, 1992). Textual productivity is productivity that is close to artistic productions (Fiske, 1992). Semiotic productivity (Fiske, 1992) is the production of meanings and interpretations (Jenkins, 1992a) that is realized during fan consumption. Enunciative productivity and textual productivity, on the other hand, are features of fan production. Marx (1887 [1977], pp. 283-306) divided consumption into individual consumption and productive consumption: the former is for the individual themselves, while the latter is for the individual’s production. This division is possibly helpful for the understanding of Chinese K-pop fans’ consumption practices.

The term “fan economy” (CN: fensi jingji) has been increasingly used in China since 2014. Fan economy is the economic model that generates profits through the interaction between fans and celebrities (Liang & Shen, 2016). It does so by including the consumers’ participation in the production process so as to better meet their needs. In so doing, the fan economy targets a devoted fandom to extract huge economic benefits even though the products may be uninteresting or even criticized by the general audience (Liang & Shen, 2016). This overconsumption and high commodification in the fan economy are part of the postmodern tendency (Zheng, 2016). Fan practices largely influence the success or failure of a K-pop idol

group (Chang & Park, 2019; G.-S. Park, 2013a). Indeed, average revenue per unit (ARPU) has been used to evaluate the commercial value of a celebrity according to their fanbase's purchasing power (Liang & Shen, 2016). As S.-Y. Kim (2018, pp. 161-205) points out, the co-presence of K-pop idols and fans online and offline promotes an illusion of intimacy between the two parties that is essentially the neoliberal commodification of affect. A critical element of fan economy is the creation of an illusion of intimacy (S.-Y. Kim, 2018, pp. 161-205) or an emotional connection for fans. This intimacy increases when fans purchase repetitively or on a large scale (Liang & Shen, 2016). Digital intimacy has been identified as one of the dimensions of the transnational K-pop fandom of the internationally popular male idol group BTS (Chang & Park, 2019). As fandom has become a critical and influential part of the production process, its contribution to the entertainment industry has to be acknowledged (A. Y. H. Fung, 2019). This is particularly true in the case of China where the fan economy has come to dominate the country's media and entertainment industries (Liang & Shen, 2016). The investigation of contemporary K-pop fan practices in China will bring updated data to the understanding of fan economy in a transnational context.

Fans construct identities through their cultural consumption, and their consumption is a means through which they pledge their allegiance to their idols. Popular allegiance, however, is unrelated to social class on account of an individual's different cultural allegiances in their daily lives (Fiske, 1989, pp. 23-47), as well as the different cultural texts, practices and languages they encounter (Grossberg, 1992). Commercialized cultural products, on the other hand, are polysemic and ignore social differences so as to attract audiences (Fiske, 1989, pp. 23-47). Science fiction fans, for example, feel continuity and an alternative social community when they attend conventions (Jenkins, 1992a). Similarly, young Asian-Canadian fans have actively

redefined racial meanings, negotiated their identities, and explored cultural affinities through their cultural translation of K-pop (Yoon, 2017). As mentioned earlier, K-pop fans tend to be urban middle-class young females. This shows that social class and gender play some role in a person's identification as a K-pop fan. More specifically, it indicates that the K-pop fan identity is related to an individual's preferences and purchasing power.

K-pop fan labor is mostly unpaid immaterial labor executed through the prosumer activities of fans. Lazzarato (1996) defines immaterial labor as "labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (p. 133). It refers to the labor that utilizes computer and communication skills, and the labor that forms cultural and artistic tastes and norms but are not necessarily recognized as work (Lazzarato, 1996). In her book about branding, Banet-Weiser (2012) indicates that branding is reliant on consumers' immaterial labor. This is because the creation of a brand is a process rather than a finished product. K-pop fan labor is immaterial labor, as it constantly produces K-pop-related immaterial products and helps maintain the popularity of K-pop idols. In other words, K-pop fan labor is free labor. According to Terranova (2000), "free labor is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited" (p. 37). On the internet, users spontaneously produce affect and culture with unqualified intrinsic passion and enjoyment, while the users' production is exploited by internet platforms (Terranova, 2000). Fans' pleasure and the industry's exploitation happen simultaneously in fan labor (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). Even though fans work to add to the content instead of working for the company (Milner, 2009), the latter holds the creative and intellectual property ownership of these contents. Thus, the company invariably benefits from fan labor without any reciprocal obligations.

Existing scholarly research has identified a wide variety of fan labor in the music and entertainment industries. For instance, Swedish independent music fans promote musical bands on social media and radio, and arrange concerts and tours (Baym & Burnett, 2009). To help their idol build effective public relations and achieve fame and fortune, the fans of female Chinese pop idol Li Yuchun have engaged in online voting, made fancams, created promotional products, established a charity foundation, and took part in sales promotions (L. Yang, 2009). The repetitive short messaging service (SMS) voting for *Super Girl* competitors in the 2000s has evolved into the present-day data-ization of online fandom with increased fans' data labor and traffic data as affective objects (Y. Yin, 2020). The K-pop fandom is no different. J. Kim (2017) uses the term "K-popping" to indicate Korean female fans' active participation in music production as listeners, singers, producers, and promoters. While Chinese K-pop fan communities' group purchases were already in existence between 2007 and 2010 (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83), there is as yet no study on the classification of these types of fan labor.

Previous academic writings have paid attention to the reasons behind fan production. Creative passion, gaining the ability to serve themselves better, and scoping out prospective job opportunities in the industry are the three motivations explaining fans' engagement in fan production. First, Chinese fans undertake fan productions vis-à-vis their local pop idols because they are driven by their passion to help create a superstar (L. Yang, 2009). Their productions have been examined in terms of Confucian family values and are seen as instances of selfless maternal love (L. Yang, 2009). Fans of these pop idols feel obliged to do all they can to help "the kid" succeed (L. Yang, 2009). Another motivation for fan production is the pleasure of performance whereby fans have the opportunity to display their talents (Duffett, 2015). Second, fans are able to better serve themselves through their fan productions because their creations are

better placed to meet the tastes of fellow fans. Fans work on unofficial cultural products because they experience contradictory feelings of fascination and adoration, as well as frustration and antagonism towards official cultural products (Jenkins, 1992b). They believe their own work can realize the full potential of the official products (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992b). The desire to better serve themselves compels fans to rework publicly available materials, such as writing fanfiction that reshapes texts or the celebrity-commodity. The “officially” produced images are resources for the fans’ cultural productions and social interactions (Jenkins, 1992b). Third, some fans—as noted in a study on Swedish independent music—view their fan productions as investments towards a future career in the industry (Baym & Burnett, 2009). However, this motivation is not generally felt by Chinese fans as most of them are not attracted by the potential job or business opportunities in the volatile Chinese entertainment industry (L. Yang, 2009). While these three motivations may be true in the context of K-pop fandom in China, there are nevertheless more reasons for fan production in Chinese K-pop fandom.

Hills (2002, pp. 174-184) asserts that fandom intensifies commodification while being against it. As fans do not produce for money, they may lack economic support for equipment (Fiske, 1992). Not only does this show that fans are usually resistive to consumerism because their fan productions only hold value as items for their personal use and the use of other fans; it also illustrates that fans are not generally concerned with the exchange value of their creations in the general marketplace (Baym & Burnett, 2009; De Kosnik, 2013; Jenkins, 1992b). Due to the inevitable contradiction between commercialism and anti-commercialism in fandom, there is a split between fans where some regard themselves as commodity-completists who create new products based on existing ones and sell them, and others who see themselves as textual-conservationists (Hills, 2002, pp. 42-58). *Fifty Shades of Gray*, a fanfiction that eventually got

published and became a best-seller, is the best example of a fan production gaining legitimacy through commercialization (Zheng, 2016). In contemporary K-pop fandom, however, the informal economy is prevalent, and advanced and expensive cameras are affordable to some fan producers. S. Han, Yoon and Lee (2018) found that fancam producers were engaged in photo and video distribution as well as in the monetization of their products. This hints at the possible commercialization of fan production in contemporary Chinese K-pop fandom.

Through fan production, some fans may change their role from a consumer to a producer. Filking, a term used to refer to fans who produced songs related to certain science fiction texts circulated via tapes, brought some fan producers stardom and semi-professional careers in the 1980s in the United States (Jenkins, 1992a). As fans base the quality of their fan productions on professional standards, their fan productions gradually end up incorporated into professional production (Jenkins, 1992a). This is consistent with one of the motivations for fan production: potential career opportunities (Baym & Burnett, 2009). However, the situation may be different in the K-pop fandom. For instance, K-pop fancam producers tend to only produce images and videos of their idols with their own preferred styles, making it difficult for them to find employment as photographers or videographers in mainstream media outlets. Hills (2002, pp. 42-58) defines work as objectified labor and play as creative labor. The boundaries between labor and play are destabilized through the practices of professionalized fans (Hills, 2002, pp. 42-58). Baym and Burnett (2009) argue that fans' prosumption both empowers and exploits them, and that exploitation and just rewards are matters of perception. Since fans as free laborers, are under the control of and part of the network of the global cultural industry, subculture fandom does not necessarily result in resistance against capitalism (Sugihartati, 2017). This is certainly the case with fan productions in the K-pop fandom in China. The highly commercialized Korean pop

culture that began in the late 2000s created transnational and domestic capital by exploiting fan labor physically and financially for translation and promotion on the one hand, and increasing fan fanaticism on the other (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). S.-Y. Kim (2018, pp. 161-205) suggests that K-pop idols and fans rely on each other for self-promotion by adopting a form of mutual affection and intimacy. In this way, the boundary between affective fan labor and neoliberal self-promotion is blurred (S.-Y. Kim, 2018, pp. 161-205). In contemporary Chinese K-pop fandom, fans are likely to become fan laborers through their fan productions. Further investigation on the contemporary relationship between fan production and the K-pop industry will have to be carried out so as to determine the ways in which they impact one another.

K-pop fan culture is prospering transnationally because K-pop has become a rising global popular culture. In turn, K-pop fan practices, especially fan production, very likely contribute to the transnational popularity of K-pop. Fans engage in not only consumption but also production. Identities and meanings have been generated through fan practices. The prevalence of active and performative fan practices is largely due to the wide adoption of new media platforms and mobile smart devices. These new ICTs potentially empower and exploit fans, while transforming fan activities into profits. Fans can thus possibly take on new roles in the media and entertainment industries. Furthermore, deeper exploration of contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices will better inform scholarly understanding of the transnational sensation of K-pop.

Transnational Stardom

Transnational stardom is particularly relevant to contemporary K-pop stardom. S. Q. Yu (2012, pp. 1-30) differentiates between international stars and transnational stars. She defines an international star as “a star who achieves international recognition and fame, even if he or she

never makes a film outside his or her own country” (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-2). Many Hollywood stars fall into this definition. Transnational stars, on the other hand, are the ones who “physically transfer from one film industry to another to make films, often in a different language from his or her own” (Yu, 2012, p. 2). Chinese action movie star Jet Li (Li Lianjie) is an example of a transnational star. Transnational stardom is not only about the star’s border-crossing labor but also about their navigation through changing cultural and social contexts, as well as their own various identities. This is because transnational stars are “the performers through which audiences can imagine forms of borderless identity—especially borderless gender identities—capable of managing the tensions between the global and the local, between national identity and cosmopolitan culture” (Meeuf, 2016, p. 197). While transnational stars do connect local and global cultures, the coexistence of paradoxical or conflicting characteristics in individual stars can hide or bridge ideological gaps and cultural contradictions (Meeuf & Raphael, 2013). In the same way that transnational film stars are part of transnational film culture and Hollywood’s global domination of the movie industry (Meeuf, 2016), K-pop idols’ transnational stardom is part of transnational K-pop culture rather than an instance of the transnational flow of labor. Individual transnational stars exhibit both local and global cultures because of their personal experiences and characteristics. It makes audiences believe in the coexistence of various possibly conflicting cultural and social identities.

Existing research on transnational stardom is more focused on film stars (Meeuf & Raphael, 2013; Yu, 2012) than transnational stars in other fields (Meeuf & Raphael, 2013). Academic writings on the transnational stardom of singers and musicians are primarily focused on Western artistes, as can be seen in Raphael’s (2013) analysis of the ambivalent characteristics of Michael Jackson, and Cepeda’s (2013) exploration of the changing identity of Colombian

singer Shakira as her popularity soared in America. Given that K-pop has become a rising international pop culture, attention should be paid to K-pop artistes as well. Since SJ debuted in 2005 with its Chinese member Han Geng, there have been an increasing number of non-Korean K-pop idols training and debuting in Korea, and then performing worldwide. The transfer of stars between two given countries usually occurs in one direction (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). Similar to the talents who join Hollywood to make English-language films (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30), aspiring young talents move to Korea to join the K-pop industry and sing Korean songs so as to become transnational stars and win international recognition. The inflow of talents to Korea has made the country an emerging center for music content production in East Asia and beyond.

While the transnational stardom of Hollywood actors and actresses is useful to the understanding of the nature of transnational stardom in K-pop, there are notable cultural and industry differences. First, Hollywood started to recruit foreign talents in the 1920s (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30), whereas K-pop began recruiting non-Korean talents in the early 2000s after the pioneering K-pop idol groups achieved transnational recognition in Asia. Second, the recruitment of transnational stars benefits Hollywood's domestic and global markets because ethnically diverse stars are both politically correct and able to cater to more local markets (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). More than a decade after the debut of the first Chinese K-pop idol Han Geng, today's transnational K-pop idols are still largely confined to Asian faces. While there are emerging non-Asian K-pop idols, they have been accused of cultural appropriation and are much less popular than idols from leading K-pop companies (Tubiera, 2020). It is common to see non-Korean members in K-pop groups who are of other Asian ethnicities. Unlike Hollywood's move towards ethnic diversity, the production and consumption sides of the K-pop industry still require the artistes to present an Asian image. This is because the K-pop industry selects talents based on

multicultural rather than multiracial principles. Third, Hollywood recruits more stars rather than “raw talents” in order to guarantee and accelerate its profits (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). K-pop, in contrast, still recruits “raw talents” (Yu, 2012, p. 3) rather than foreign stars partially because of the industry’s unique training and management system. Fourth, film stars that travel between their home countries and Hollywood are recognized both nationally and internationally (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). While contemporary transnational stars have more freedom and mobility, it can be difficult for such artistes to break into the Hollywood market (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). Transnational K-pop stars are similarly more mobile between their home countries and Korea. Unlike their Hollywood counterparts, K-pop stars may localize or even depart from the K-pop industry and Korea after they carve out a place for themselves in another profitable market. Lie (2012, p. 354) deems K-pop artistes like BoA and TVXQ to be “quasi-local performers” in Japan because of their use of the Japanese language and J-pop performance style while in the country. These instances show that a more in-depth investigation on the unique qualities of transnational K-pop stars will bring new understanding to the studies of transnational stardom.

Transnational stars’ multiple identities are interdependent (Yu, 2012, pp. 146-166). Their diverse and unstable identities are part of their success in various markets (Yu, 2012, pp. 185-191). French actress Marion Cotillard’s persona in Hollywood shows how the coexistence of Americanization and Frenchness in her identities prevents her from being stereotypically French, and differentiates her from other French or American actresses (Sandeau, in press). In the case of GOT7’s Jackson, he maintains and continually hones the performance skills that he gained during his training in the K-pop industry, while adapting to the different cultures and markets by being flexible in his identity presentations. In the same way that Jet Li constantly adapts to the

different film industries in the world (Yu, 2012, pp. 185-191), Jackson actively promotes himself and his work differently in China and the United States.

The ambiguous, complicated, or polysemic images of transnational East Asian celebrities convey a sense of mystery and enhance their popularity across different contexts. For example, the career trajectory and personal life of the Hong Kong-based Chinese singer Faye Wong show that her alternative and ambiguous image brought her cultural capital, helped her to attract huge fanbases in Chinese communities around the world, and accumulated economic capital in the entertainment industry (Fung & Curtin, 2002). Thus, the commodification of her image reinforced her cultural capital (Fung & Curtin, 2002). As seen in the discourses on Japanese-Taiwanese actor Takeshi Kaneshiro's complicated and cosmopolitan images, fans of transnational celebrities also co-construct the star's various images and presentations in participatory platforms on cyberspace across the world's different languages and cultures (Lau, 2018). The different interpretations of Donnie Yen (Yen Ji-dan) and his action movies in the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese film markets demonstrate the polysemic nature of popular star personae and film texts (Funnell, 2013). While the different images projected by transnational stars do bring about positive results for their careers, they may also give rise to negative consequences for both the stars and other stakeholders, particularly in the international political arena.

In *Pop Culture China*, Chua (2001) explored the network of transnational and border-crossing trafficking and consumption of Chinese-language pop culture in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore, where ethnic Chinese people account for the majority of the population. This network, that he has dubbed Pop Culture China, is an ephemeral and occasional community built on shared pop culture consumption, different types of social lives and identities,

and heterogeneous Chinese cultures. Instead of a single homogenous Chinese culture, the extensive territory of China, the different cultures therein, and the different cultural origins of the Chinese diaspora have resulted in the development of heterogeneous Chinese cultures (Chua, 2012, pp. 31-50). Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore's distinct social contexts mean that their shared pop culture experience creates a dynamic cultural flow network without necessarily creating a collective identity among audiences. As the Chinese pop culture network is decentered with unidirectional flows, it provides a network for Japanese and Korean pop cultures to reach Chinese audiences (Chua, 2012, pp. 31-50). When Chua (2012, pp. 31-50) wrote about the Pop Culture China network, the mainland China market was still emerging. In the mobile internet period, the Chinese market would evolve into a translocal production and distribution network that is part of the global cultural network. In addition, Chinese talents in the K-pop industry are very likely to reach global audiences through K-pop's global network beyond Pop Culture China.

Conclusion

Existing research on K-pop in China—its second-largest export market—is inadequate and inconsistent (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83; Pease 2006, 2009). A fuller picture of the transnational transmission of K-pop in China can be achieved by studying the history of Hallyu, especially K-pop, and fan practices in China, as well as Chinese K-pop idols. The different ways that K-pop was disseminated in China during different periods, the evolution of K-pop fan practices, and the changing ways in which the Chinese K-pop idols present themselves demonstrate the complexity of transnational cultural flows. This study of K-pop in China will fill the gap in Hallyu studies and provide new evidence for the contradictory findings on Hallyu in China. By exploring

contemporary Chinese K-pop fan practices and the hitherto uninvestigated phenomenon of K-pop artistes as transnational stars, I will show how K-pop has evolved in its transmission outside Korea. Moreover, an in-depth look at the practices of present-day Chinese K-pop fans would help to showcase the results and meanings of their practices. Overall, this project will explore why K-pop has remained popular in China in the past two decades, and consider some of the consequences of the transnational popularity of K-pop.

Part I:

History of K-Pop in China (1996-Present)

Chapter 3

K-pop in China in the Analog Media Period (1996-2004)⁴

In 1992, Korea and the People's Republic of China (PRC) established diplomatic relations. K-pop initially entered China at a time when various exchanges between the two governments and their people increased significantly. Meanwhile, the Chinese media environment was also experiencing a noticeable revolution following the rapid development of ICTs and changes in society. On the one hand, China became more receptive and open to the world; on the other, China's openness to other cultures stirred up feelings of cultural and national insecurities that resulted in the reluctance of the Chinese to engage in cultural importation (A.Y. H. Fung, 2013).

As K-pop entered China, it circulated in the Chinese market in three phases during different media environments: the analog media period (1996-2004), the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011), and the mobile internet period (2012-present). Specifically, the media environment for popular culture consumption shifted from analog media to the internet when the television talent show *Super Girl* sparked Chinese internet fan culture in 2005 and became the starting point of the significant increase of the country's internet penetration rate in 2006 (*Southern Urban Daily*, 2005; World Bank, 2018). In 2012, the number of mobile internet users surpassed the number of the internet users who accessed the internet via a personal computer (PC) for the first time, heralding the arrival of the mobile internet period.

⁴ This chapter is an adaptation from an earlier journal article co-authored with Liew Kai Khiun. For details found in that article, see M. Sun & K. K. Liew, "Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China," *Global Media and China*, 4, no. 4 (2019), 419-436.

When data is cited in this chapter without any indication of their sources, they are a composite of data drawn from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), and China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA).

This chapter presents K-pop in China in the analog media period (1996-2004). It will discuss popular media, the context for K-pop, and the development of K-pop in China. The data was gathered from archival research in magazines, internet platforms, and other relevant materials. The main resources are the physical magazines *Light Music* (CN: *Qing yinyue*) later called *Cool Music* (CN: *Qing yinyue quan rihan*), *Modern Music Field* (CN: *Dangdai getan*), *Music Space* (CN: *Yinyue shikong*), as well as the online forum Tieba (the online forum platform launched by Baidu in 2003) and other news articles.

Following the implementation of economic reforms in China, the country opened up its economy and itself to the outside world. K-pop took off in China when relations between Beijing and Seoul improved, and the two nations conducted many political and trade exchanges. Transborder and transnational popular culture then entered China, which resulted in the local production of popular culture becoming increasingly commercialized, innovative, and diversified. The term “Hallyu” was initially used to refer to K-pop rather than Korean TV dramas, indicating the significance of K-pop in Hallyu formation in China. After K-pop entered China in 1996, audiences gained access to Korean popular culture through analog media channels until internet culture in urban areas took off in 2005. K-pop was initially played in nightclubs and radio programs in the late 1990s before its more noticeable appearance in other spaces and media channels. The peripheral, alternative, or specialized channels played a critical role in K-pop transmission in China. Other than cultural similarity, K-pop idols’ similar appearance to the ethnic Chinese, their avant-garde make-up, hairstyles and fashions, as well as intense dance movements differentiated K-pop from other competing genres in the Chinese popular music market and attracted a great number of young Chinese audiences.

The Opening up of China's Popular Media

Ever since the public responded enthusiastically to China opening itself to transborder and transnational popular media in 1949, the government has developed many ideological concerns over the formal and informal transmissions of media. Deng Xiaoping's policies of reform and opening up in 1978, and China's diplomatic progress came to profoundly influence the Chinese cultural sphere. The import of transborder and transnational popular cultural products increased, and domestic cultural production shifted away from propaganda to market demands. Even though local TV productions became more innovative and diversified, Gangtai pop continued to dominate the Chinese popular music scene. After K-pop entered China in 1996, people accessed popular media through analog media tools, such as TVs, radios, cassette tapes, Video CDs (VCDs), and print media. The internet and PCs were subsequently adopted by the urban young people for personal use. However, the internet did not become the dominant channel for the transmission of popular culture until Hunan Satellite TV's talent show *Super Girl* engendered explosive online fan culture in 2005.

After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Chinese society experienced periods of national economic recovery, socialist transition, explorations of socialism, the Cultural Revolution, and socialist construction until 1978. This meant that as transborder or transnational popular cultures embedded themselves in human feelings and gained popularity with Chinese audiences, the PRC's official media channels grappled with their ideological concerns vis-à-vis the transmission of these cultural products. Foreign music was introduced to the Chinese people in 1958 through the publication of *200 Famous Foreign songs* (CN: *Waiguo mingge 200 shou*), with the songs therein becoming sensations in urban China (X. Chen & Ding, 2018). Even though the 450 songs in the two volumes of *200 Famous Foreign Songs* (published as Part I and

Part II) were banned during the Cultural Revolution, they proved to be very popular (X. Chen & Ding, 2018). This is because these songs expressed human feelings and provided variety vis-à-vis songs endorsed by the PRC (X. Chen & Ding, 2018). Domestically made TV dramas were also used as propaganda between the 1950s and 1960s (Zhu, Keane, & Bai, 2008). In the same way, propaganda songs were prevalent in China in the 1960s and 1970s (A. Fung, 2013). However, they did not stop the soft melodies and human feelings in Taiwanese singer Teresa Teng's (Teng Li-chun) songs from making inroads in Chinese society in the 1970s (Liew, 2014). In response, government officials called Teng's songs "decadent music" and banned them in the mass media (*China Economy Net*, 2009). Her music entered mainland China through Taiwanese radio channels across the Taiwan Strait, and the audio cassettes were smuggled into China and disseminated through hundreds and thousands of instances of ripping (Jinying Entertainment, 2008). The tape recorders and cassettes used by the underground, informal, peripheral, and illegal media channels played an important role in the dissemination of Gangtai pop music when it was banned in official and mainstream media channels. In contrast, films produced in socialist countries were imported and widely shown in China. Chinese audiences were thus emotionally involved in films like *The Flower Girl* (KR: *Kkotp'anŭn ch'ŏnyŏ*, CN: *Maihua guniang*, 1972) that screened in China in 1972, and *Walter Defends Sarajevo* (Serbo-Croat: *Valter brani Sarajevo*, CN: *Waerte baowei Salarewo*, 1972) that screened in China in 1973 (X. Chen & Ding, 2018).

After China opened itself to the outside world in 1978, the country shifted from a centrally-planned economy to a market-based one (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). The reforms widely influenced Chinese society in many aspects, including popular culture (Latham, 2007, pp. 1-34). Due to the public's enthusiasm for popular music, the government eventually recognized it. In

spite of this recognition, albums from beyond China's borders were perceived as ideological threats and not officially imported (A. Fung, 2013). The official blocking of such albums notwithstanding, Gangtai pop music dominated the Chinese pop music market and has been doing so since the 1980s (Latham, 2007, pp. 35-42). The popularity of Gangtai pop music among the public eventually resulted in the gradual opening of the Chinese cultural sphere, while foreign pop cultures also entered Guangdong Province via Hong Kong, culminating in officials finally recognizing pop music as a music genre in 1986 (Baranovitch, 2003, pp. 10-53). Following protracted negotiations, the British band Wham! held concerts in Beijing and Guangzhou in 1985, becoming the first Western pop band officially permitted to perform in China (Hatton, 2015). The concerts marked China's official receptiveness to Western pop music after 1949. Along with the commercialization carried out in the name of forwarding a socialist market economy, domestic music production began in the 1980s and took on Western music forms with themes of love and romance (A. Fung, 2013).

As China opened up and forged diplomatic links with other countries, it imported more TV dramas from capitalistic societies and succeeded in domestic TV drama production in the 1980s. The imported TV dramas from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and other countries were successful in the mainland (Zhu et al., 2008). For instance, following the PRC's establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972 and the United States in 1979, selected Japanese and American TV dramas were imported and broadcasted in China, and were very well-received. These imported films and TV dramas were not in conflict with China's socialistic ideology, displayed more personal emotions, and offered viewers storylines and visuals that were more refreshing than domestically produced ones (X. Chen & Ding, 2018). TV dramas, including *The Man from Atlantis* (CN: *Daxiyangdi laideren*, 1977-1978, broadcasted in China in 1979),

Sanshiro Sugata (JP: *Sugata Sanshirō*, CN: *Zisan Silang*, 1970, broadcasted in China in 1981), *Moero Attack* (JP: *Moero Atakku*, CN: *Paiqiu nvjiang*, 1979-1980, broadcasted in China in 1983), and *Red Suspicion* (JP: *Akai Giwaku*, CN: *Xue yi*, 1975, broadcasted in China in 1984), exposed the Chinese people not only to modern fashion styles but also to modern lifestyles and social relationships (Tencent Entertainment, 2013). Domestically produced TV dramas did not succeed until popular works of classic literature were adapted, such as *The Water Margin* (CN: *Shuihu zhuan*) in 1982, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (CN: *Honglouloumeng*) in 1986, and *Journey to the West* (CN: *Xiyou ji*) in 1987 (Zhu et al., 2008).

The increasing number of foreigners who arrived in China for business, study, and travel in the 1980s and 1990s interacted with the Chinese people. The rock music cassettes brought in by these foreign residents and performance tours by Western rock bands exposed the Chinese people in large cities, especially in Beijing, to rock music and partially served as the catalysts for the emergence of Chinese rock (Baranovitch, 2003, pp. 10-53). Rock music and musicians, particularly Cui Jian, “the father of Chinese rock”, were linked to student protests in the late 1980s and marginalized by the state (A. Fung, 2013). Subsequently, the import of cut CDs (*dakou* CDs) from the West demonstrated the shift to Chinese rock rather than its death in the mid-1990s (de Kloet, 2005). The suppression of local rock and the immature state of local popular music production allowed popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan to gain traction in the mainland (A. Fung, 2013).

From 1997 to 2004, the majority of the Chinese population had access to radios and televisions, and penetration rates for these devices increased continuously. In the 1990s, television sets became more affordable for ordinary families, and the development of cable television and satellite television gave households a plethora of television channels to choose

from (Latham, 2007, pp. 43-86). While the Chinese popular media scene became more receptive to the outside world and domestic productions became more commercialized, innovative and diversified, it still emphasized nationalism as the government continued to exercise strong influence on mainstream discourse. The commercialization of Chinese TV dramas in the 1990s led to the emergence of innovative works such as *Yearning* (CN: *Kewang*, 1990) that depicted class reversals in China's new society, and brought much advertising income for television stations (Zhu et al., 2008). New genres also emerged with pre-1911 costume dramas and historical dramas entering the mainstream (Zhu et al., 2008).

The mid-1990s and early 2000s saw the rise in popularity of anti-corruption and crime dramas—especially those adapted from Hai Yan's novels—as well TV series promoting the powerful image of law enforcement institutions, until the government restricted violence and gore on TV screens in 2004 (Zhu et al., 2008). Since the late 1990s, TV dramas about everyday life, for instance, *Holding Hands* (CN: *Qianshou*, 1999), became a genre in its own right (Zhu et al., 2008). While the majority of modern-life TV dramas featured urban life since the 2000s, Zhao Benshan and his TV series on rural life won a place in the market (Zhu et al., 2008). By 2001, foreign companies were permitted to enter the satellite broadcasting field in China (Akhavan-Majid, 2004).

Unlike most of the other TV stations in China that are copycat versions of China Central Television (CCTV), Hunan Satellite TV (HSTV), which is located in a less developed province, has been operating commercially, producing alternative and entertaining TV programs, and obtaining incomparable national audience ratings and profits despite constant state regulations since 1997 (Zhong, 2010). Its adaptations of overseas programs were unconventional, apolitical, and new to Chinese audiences (Zhong, 2010). Indeed, the TV drama *Princess Huanzhu* (CN:

Huanzhu gege, 1998) that HSTV co-produced with a Taiwan-based talent agency was a big hit (Zhu et al., 2008).

Meanwhile, the updated music programs found favor with music fans and young people in urban areas (Latham, 2007, pp. 87-108). In the 1990s, industrialized Gangtai pop music represented the mainstream in the Chinese pop music market (Baranovitch, 2003, pp. 10-53). With state support, nationalistic overseas Chinese popular music, such as Andy Lau's (Lau Tak-wah) song *Chinese* (CN: *Zhongguo ren*, 1997), dominated the mainland market (A. Fung, 2013). Specialized commercial print media also became a trend. Fashion and entertainment magazines with eye-catching covers were highly popular in the late 1990s (Latham, 2007, pp. 139-154).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, cassettes and VCDs were the dominant forms of legal audio and video publications, respectively. Between 1998 and 2004, the total number of legally published cassettes rose from 104 million to 197 million, and the different types of legally published cassettes increased from 6,175 to 8,724 in that same period before dropping in 2005. The total number of legally published VCDs sharply increased from 79 million copies in 2000 to 305 million copies in 2003, and fell to 297 million in 2004. The different types of legally published VCDs significantly increased from 7,101 to 15,398 between 2000 and 2004 before dropping in 2005. Indeed, the market is much larger than the figures suggest since the Chinese music records market was 90% pirated, and illegal publishing was the main mode of K-pop distribution (Pease, 2006). China-invented VCD players ended the era of video cassettes. They not only resulted in affordable video publications but also large-scale piracy due to the ease in copying this video format. As pirated publications were cheaper than legally made ones and offered the latest content, they became highly competitive in the market (Pease, 2006). The wide

adoption of VCD players and pirated VCDs meant that television was no longer the only means of foreign TV drama consumption (Tencent Entertainment, 2013).

The public's internet use—particularly among young people in big cities—increased, though adoption was still slow in the country at large. By 2000, the percentage of the population using the internet in China rose above 1% for the first time (World Bank, 2018). Since the early to mid-2000s, use of the internet for leisure has become increasingly common among young people in big, developed cities (Latham, 2007, pp. 193-224). This is because most internet companies are private enterprises (Akhavan-Majid, 2004), and internet content providers are offering diverse contents. Popular internet functions include news, email, instant messaging, forums and bulletin board systems (BBS), and peer-to-peer (P2P) downloading.

While China opened up to the outside world following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, it still harbored constant ideological concerns in the 1980s and 1990s over that which it perceived to be untoward foreign influences. Despite these ideological reservations, the shifting of the domestic economy away from a centrally-planned one towards one open to market forces contributed to the domination of Gangtai pop music in the Chinese popular music market. Analog media channels diversified between 1996 and 2004, and increased the available channels for pop culture experiences in China. Radio, television and audio-video publications, as well as print media fed people's everyday consumption of popular culture. These media channels not only provided more variety to their audiences but also became more audience-oriented and specialized. The internet, though largely unavailable in the rural areas, provided urban youths with new means through which they could have individualized and segmented pop culture experiences.

The Honeymoon Period in Sino-Korean Relations and the Domination of Gangtai Ballads in China's Popular Music Scene

When K-pop first entered China in the 1990s, the Korean cultural industries were in the nascent stages of exporting their cultural products. This occurred concurrently with the opening up of China, which was then embracing more cultural imports. Unsurprisingly, these conditions in Korea and China fostered a great deal of governmental and non-governmental exchanges between them. The transmission of K-pop in China during this period occurred alongside the formal and informal Sino-Korean exchanges; together, they soon became an indispensable part of the early stages of the Hallyu phenomenon in China. Young Chinese audiences were attracted by the young Korean idols' dance music and sophisticated dance movements that differed from those presented in Gangtai ballads, Chinese idol groups, Japanese visual-style rock, and Western pop music.

Jin (2016, pp. 20-40) divides Hallyu into Hallyu 1.0 (spanning 1997-2007) and Hallyu 2.0 (spanning 2008-present), arguing that Hallyu 1.0 was mainly about the transnational sensation of Korean TV dramas in East and Southeast Asia, while the Korean Wave was strengthened by films and K-pop in the early 2000s. In general, this is true. However, the specificities of Korean popular cultural transmissions in different locations and contexts mean that the popularity and spread of Hallyu differed from country to country. The transmission of K-pop in China took place during a period of increased non-governmental exchanges between China and Korea. When China underwent economic reforms, the establishment of diplomatic ties between Korea and the PRC, and the export of cultural products by the Korean cultural industries occurred simultaneously. The Chinese bureaucratic authorities became less of a central controller of media and more a cooperator that engaged with private enterprises to extract interests from the

media (Akhavan-Majid, 2004). Not all forms of Chinese media were linked to ideological education, as these media that did not push socialist ideology became increasingly commercialized, specialized, and individualized. As the potential economic value of cultural products became clear to the Korean cultural industries after 1993, the Korean government started to approach culture from an economic perspective by supporting cultural industries and boosting cultural exports (D. Y. Jin, 2016, pp. 20-40). Thus, the Korean government adopted a hands-off policy vis-à-vis cultural exports between 1997 and 2007, whereby it initially promoted the Korean Wave before moving towards indirect intervention and deregulation to avoid accusations of cultural invasion from foreign countries (D. Y. Jin, 2016, pp. 20-40).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 signaled the end of the Cold War. This was followed by Korea ending its diplomatic relations with Taiwan (officially known as the Republic of China or ROC) in August 1992, and the subsequent establishment of diplomatic ties with the PRC later that year. To capitalize on Korean president Kim Dae-jung's 1998 visit to the PRC, Sino-Korean relations were elevated to the level of a "cooperative partnership for the twenty-first century" (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, 2020a).

The non-governmental exchanges between Korea and China also grew. An increasing number of Korean enterprises entered China, and more Korean students studied in China. The rising number of Korean enterprises entering the Chinese market resulted in an influx of Korean children and adolescents accompanying their parents (who were employed in these companies) and settling in China. Ujeon Soft (KR: Ujōnsop'ūt'ū, CN: Yutian Soft), a company managed by Korean businessman Kim Yoon-ho, distributed and promoted K-pop in China (Xiaohao, 2000). Individual Koreans arriving in China possibly also served as intermediaries bringing K-pop to China. For instance, a *Music Space* article once featured a Korean girl named Muno, who had

been living and studying in Guangzhou since 1994 (Juedaisanjiao, 2000). This multilingual girl loved pop cultures from Korea, China, and the West (Juedaisanjiao, 2000). According to Si Jie, Ujeon Soft's first marketing specialist in China, K-pop was already playing in 1996 in nightclubs in the Wudaokou area, located in the Haidian District, Beijing (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). As these nightclubs catered to the Korean students who were studying in universities in the Haidian District, a lot of K-pop was played (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Si Jie subsequently began listening to K-pop after his Korean friends introduced the music to him (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). This account shows that improved Sino-Korean relations and their increased exchanges led to a high number of individuals moving between China and Korea; these individuals could have played a role in K-pop transmission in China when they brought the music into the country for their own consumption.

The exchange between the two countries resulted in the formation of Hallyu in China. In 2000, China received 1.34 million Korean visitors (H.-e. Kim, 2012a). By 2003, more than one hundred Korean TV dramas had been broadcasted in China (G. Piao, 2003). As Chinese audiences learnt about Korean society from these TV dramas, they began considering Korea as a travel destination (G. Piao, 2003; K. Sun, 2006). The number of Chinese tourists travelling to Korea, inclusive of Chinese youths participating in Hallyu tours, increased greatly and reached hundreds of thousands per year by 2003 (G. Piao, 2003). Likewise, more Koreans came to reside in China. As of 2003, there were 3,000 households of more than 12,000 Koreans living in the so-called Koreatown in Wangjing, Beijing (G. Piao, 2003). This resulted in the proliferation of Korean fashion products and cosmetics, Korean beauty salons, Taekwondo and Korean language schools, Hallyu internet spaces, Korean restaurants, and Korean fitness centers in China (G. Piao, 2003).

The term “Hallyu” (*Hanliu* in Chinese) was first used to refer to K-pop and then to things related to Korea. Previous studies assert that the *Beijing Youth Daily* (CN: *Beijing qingnian bao*) first coined the term “Hallyu” in its November 1999 article on K-pop groups Clon (CN: Kulong) and H.O.T., and Korean fashion (Bin & Yi, 2011; SK Jung & Li, 2014). Male duo Clon (1996-present) and five-member male idol group H.O.T. (1996-2001, 2018-present) are both famous for their dance music, and believed to have influenced the rise of K-pop in China. However, my research indicates that four months before the term “Hallyu” appeared in the November 1999 *Beijing Youth Daily* article, Hallyu was used by *Light Music* in its July 1999 article on K-pop female idol group S.E.S. titled “Beautiful young ladies discovered through Hallyu” (CN: Hanliu juanlai de meishaonü) (Dazui, 1999b). Si Jie also points out that Hallyu was then mainly used in reference to K-pop and stars like Ahn Jae-wook, who is famous for both singing and acting (Dazui, 2001c). Music magazines identified the H.O.T. Beijing concert on 1 February 2000 as the event that established Hallyu as a cultural phenomenon in Chinese society (Dazui, 2001c; Miller, 2001). Not only did this event normalize the term “Hallyu” as a descriptor for the wave of Korean cultural entertainment products transmitted outside Korea, it also denoted K-pop’s critical role in the formation of Hallyu.

Although the term “Hallyu” was initially used for K-pop, it may have roots in the game of Go (*Weiqi* in Chinese), a sport that is mainly played in East Asia. In addition, the term had broader connotations when it was used in China in an earlier period, which contrasts against the use of the term now in many other parts of the world. B. Liu (2014) states Hallyu/Hanliu originally appeared as Hanguoliu (simply meaning “Korean-style” in Chinese) in the game of Go. When a player from a particular country develops a certain mode of playing Go or becomes good at said mode, commentators will refer to it as playing in the style of that particular country.

Aside from Hanguoliu, there are also Zhongguoliu (Chinese-style) and Ribenliu (Japanese-style) in Go. For instance, Chinese magazine *New Sports* (CN: *Xin tiyu*) used Hanguoliu in its coverage of a Go match in 1994 (C. Li, 1994). During the ninth NEC Cup China-Japan Go Challenge, Chinese player Cao Dayuan observed that Japanese player Kataoka Satoshi was unfamiliar with Korean players' style, and thus Cao employed Hanguoliu to win the game (C. Li, 1994; Yikeweiqi, 2017). The term "Hanguoliu" was also used to refer to the outstanding performance of Korean Go players in international games in the 1990s (B. Liu, 2014). After that, the term was used more generally. Thus, Hallyu in China included Korean TV dramas, music and dance, films, books, football, cars, cell phones, and one of the styles in which the game of Go is played (G. Piao, 2003).

Korean dance music differentiated itself from the mainstream ballads in the Chinese market through its emphasis on visual images. This feature not only rendered Korean dance music popular; it also became representative of Korean popular music. When Ujeon Soft CEO Kim Yoon-ho realized that the Chinese market was dominated by popular Gangtai ballads and no dance music, he had the company strategically import Korean dance music rather than Korean ballads, and highlighted the artistes' visual images through carefully selected album covers and the distribution of several VCDs (Xiaohao, 2000). Ujeon Soft's high sales proved that their strategy was successful (Xiaohao, 2000). One documented fan account in a *Cool Music* article reiterates how and why Korean dance music was attractive to Chinese youths in this period. According to this 2001 article, the fan was initially attracted by H.O.T.'s avant-garde image and the good looks of its member KangTa in a music magazine in 1998, and subsequently listened to H.O.T.'s music in 1999 (Shen, 2001). In addition, Chinese audiences could enjoy Korean dance music without understanding Korean lyrics, which was necessary for Korean ballads (Xiaohao,

2000). K-pop differentiated itself from Japanese music, even though popular Japanese bands also emphasized visual expressions. According to the artistes covered in *Light Music* between 2000 and 2001, the most popular Japanese artistes were visual-style rock bands engaged in extreme visual expressions, such as Glay and L'Arc~en~Ciel. Thus, Japanese and Korean artistes became distinct to Chinese audiences, and fans came to be divided based on personal preferences.

Chinese talent agencies recognized the market value of idol groups but did not succeed in idol production. Many idol groups emerged in China, such as Young Girls (CN: Qingchun meishaonü) and China Power (CN: Zhongguo liliang), but their popularity did not last (Maike, 1999). The similarities of these groups' images, the artistes' unimpressive singing abilities, and the companies' limited financial investments hindered the development of Chinese idol groups (Maike, 1999). It was more expensive for a production company or talent agency to transport and arrange accommodation for a group than a solo artiste whenever promotional events and performances were scheduled in other parts of the country (Maike, 1999). K-pop took hold in the Chinese market because it met the demands of Chinese youngsters for young idols (Dazui, 2001c).

Furthermore, K-pop gained acceptance in China not because of cultural proximity but because of Chinese and Koreans' similar appearances. Ujeon Soft CEO Kim Yoon-ho noted that Chinese audiences gravitated more towards Korean artistes who performed Western-style music than Western artists because of the similar appearances among the Chinese and Koreans (Xiaohao, 2000). K-pop stars also won the favor of Chinese audiences because they conformed to Confucian values by being humble and polite in public. However, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, most Chinese fans had few opportunities to see their idols in off-stage settings

practicing traditional East Asian manners. Thus, the cultural proximity thesis as an explanation for the popularity of K-pop in China becomes fragile.

As Sino-Korean economic and cultural exchanges intensified after Beijing and Seoul established diplomatic relations in 1992, the number of Korean students in China increased significantly. Individuals are just as important as governments and companies in serving as cultural intermediaries. It is through these individuals' daily music consumption and their travels across national borders that they are able share their knowledge and experiences of their music culture, and thus transmit K-pop. This culminated in nightclubs catering to Korean students playing K-pop in the mid-1990s, and eventually resulted in radio programs playing K-pop in the late 1990s. With limited popular cultural resources in their own country, some Chinese urban youngsters enthusiastically took to K-pop, the emerging popular culture favored by their counterparts in neighboring Korea. These factors were behind the initial formation of Hallyu and helped it to subsequently become a global cultural phenomenon.

We Are the Future: K-Pop's Entrance into China as an Alternative Pop Culture for Youngsters

Since the late 1990s, K-pop has quickly gained popularity among a large number of Chinese teenagers and garnered much public attention. This resulted in some scholars analyzing the popularity of the genre in China. H.O.T. first attracted attention in China in 1997, a year after its 1996 Korean debut (S. Jung & Hirata, 2012). Its popularity peaked between 2000 and 2001 (E.-Y. Jung, 2015). Thereafter, H.O.T.'s popularity, along with that of Clon, paved the way for the entrance of other idol groups, such as NRG, Shinhwa, Baby V.O.X, and S.E.S, in China (Fuhr, 2016; Jeon & Yoon, 2005, pp. 127-161). Several K-pop concerts, including Clon's 1999 concert,

H.O.T.'s 2000 concert, and Baby V.O.X.'s 2000 concert, have been identified as the key moments that entrenched the K-pop sensation in China (H. Shin, 2013). These concerts not only marked K-pop's full entrance into China but also produced a growing Hallyu fan community, dubbed "Hahanzu", meaning tribe that is crazy for Korean things (Pease, 2006). In addition, the fashions donned by K-pop artistes gained extensive media coverage (S.H. Jang, 2012). This rapidly led to the establishment of shops selling only Korean clothes and accessories in large cities like Beijing (S. H. Jang, 2012).

K-pop groups also achieved commercial success in the Chinese market when it began making inroads in China. H.O.T. was the first K-pop group to release an album in China in 1998; they were followed by NRG in 1999 (S. H. Jang, 2012). Both these groups grossed high album sales in China (S. H. Jang, 2012). By 2002, at least 50 K-pop albums had been released in China, and more than 3 million copies had been sold (Jeon & Yoon, 2005). In 2000, H.O.T. held a sold-out concert in Beijing for 13,000 fans (Fuhr, 2016, pp. 127-161). While the bureaucracy and piracy in the Chinese music market kept K-pop companies from reaching their full economic potential in China, their competitors were in the same boat (Pease, 2009). When K-pop first entered China, the industry could only make limited profits because 90% of the market was pirated albums (Pease, 2006). Sales of H.O.T. records in China, for instance, were approximately half their sales in Korea (Pease, 2006). However, K-pop idols and their agencies soon learned they could earn considerable income through brand endorsement in China (Pease, 2006).

Following K-pop's appearance in China in the late 1990s, it gradually came to be spread through peripheral, alternative or specialized channels, such as nightclubs catering to Korean students, radio and TV programs, physical magazines, and events. K-pop was therefore able to use these channels to occupy a niche market among Chinese youngsters. H.O.T.'s 2000 Beijing

concert marked Hallyu as a cultural phenomenon and profitable cultural product in China. Enthusiastic K-pop fans emerged in China, and their numbers quickly increased.

So far, we know that K-pop was already playing in nightclubs in 1996 (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). We also know from a 1998 article in *Light Music* and a 1999 article in *Music Space* that Korean group Goofy's music had been played in disco clubs in China for a few years (Dazui, 1999a; Zhou, 1998). Ujeon Soft was the only company to introduce K-pop to China before 1998 (Sansan, 1998). In fact, Ujeon Soft had been promoting K-pop through the radio program *Seoul Music Hall* (CN: *Hancheng yinyueting*) since 1996 (Xiaohao, 2000). In 1997, Si Jie became a music editor for Ujeon Soft, where he selected and edited the music he had heard in nightclubs so that they could be broadcasted over the radio (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). K-pop-specific radio programs began with *Seoul Music Hall* on Beijing FM in 1997, and several other programs followed, such as *Nighttime at Han River* (CN: *Hanjiang zhi ye*) that aired on Beijing Traffic Radio in 1999, and *Listen to Korea* (CN: *Lingting Hanguo*) on China National Radio in 2001 (S. H. Jang, 2012). The Korean all-rounder star Ahn Jae-wook became famous in China for his singing and acting around this period. TV dramas, including *Star in My Heart* (KR: *Pyŏrŭn nae kasŭme*, 1997) and *Sunflower* (KR: *Haebearagi*, 1998), and the promotion of his music on the radio program *Beijing Music Hall* shot him to fame in China (*Beijing Evening News*, 2000). In the early 2000s, he also held concerts in the major cities around the country (Sina Entertainment, 2004). However, unlike Ahn Jae-wook, the majority of the Korean singers who were popular among Chinese audiences were famous for their dance music. From 1997 to 1999, Ujeon Soft staff travelled around the country, even visiting the remote plateau city of Lhasa (in Tibet), to hold promotional events when many mass media channels were reluctant to promote this new music genre (Dazui, 2001c). According to Si Jie, the

promotional events—which included dance performances, MV screenings, and quizzes where participants could win prizes—attracted many K-pop fans between 13 and 18 years of age (Dazui, 2001c).

Ujeon Soft also cooperated with some mass media channels, namely music and entertainment magazine *Modern Music Field*, radio stations China National Radio and Beijing Radio for K-pop-specific programs, as well as HSTV (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). In 1998, Ujeon Soft published H.O.T.'s first album in China (Xiaohao, 2000). That same year, the company started promoting Korean singers through Chinese music magazines and newspapers by publishing their photographs and covering K-pop idols' activities in Korea (Xiaohao, 2000). In 1998, *Light Music* began publishing K-pop content. Likewise, *Modern Music Field*, a magazine mainly focused on Chinese-language pop, also began covering Korean artistes who had collaborated with Chinese ones. K-pop gradually received increasing coverage in *Light Music* in 1999. In January 1999, *Light Music* launched a new column called “Craze of Korean Music” (CN: Hanguo yinyue feng). In August, the column “Japanese Popularity House” (CN: Riben renqi zhai) was renamed “Japanese and Korean Popularity House” (CN: Rihan renqi zhai). In September, a new column called “Tribe that is Crazy for Korean Things” (CN: Hahanzu) appeared. Throughout 1999, *Light Music* covered 16 Korean music groups or solo artistes, including NRG, H.O.T., CLON, Goofy, S.E.S., T.T.Ma, Uptown, Koyote, FIN.K.L, Baby V.O.X, Shinhwa, Sechskies, Park Jung-hyun (also known as Lena Park), Yoo Seung-jun, Kim Hyun-jung, and Ahn Jae-wook. It could be said that K-pop was a niche market catering to youngsters rather than the general audience. This is because the mass media channels had already been segmented, and there were media channels and programs specifically targeting young audiences. The growing popularity of K-pop can be seen in the increasing coverage of K-pop in the music

and entertainment magazines that had young audiences as their main readers, in spite of these periodicals previously lumping K-pop together with J-pop.

Music and entertainment magazines played an important role in introducing K-pop to China. Magazines such as *Entertainment Unlimited* (CN: *Yule Wuxian*), *Pop Stars* (CN: *Hanju Fengtai*), and *YE* or *Fan Club* (CN: *Gemi Dashijie*) featured K-pop content, including news on K-pop idols, photographs of these idols, and fan letters (Pease, 2006). Some entertainment magazines included CD-ROMs featuring pirated clips from Korean entertainment shows (Pease, 2006). In addition to these magazines, other periodicals, including *Light Music*, *Music Space*, and *Modern Music Field*, also contributed to the growth and transmission of K-pop in China. Of the magazines covering K-pop music, *Light Music* had the most coverage of K-pop. It gave readers access to high-quality, first-hand resources. The magazine organized fan activities, including a K-pop tour to Seoul (Dazui, 2001a). It is highly likely that many Chinese K-pop fans had frequently purchased these magazines by the turn of the millennium. On the H.O.T. Tieba fan forum, K-pop audiences reflecting on their past K-pop experiences often mentioned buying these magazines at the turn of the new millennium. For example, a fan posted their large collection of magazines and posters featuring H.O.T. (Jueseshousi, 2013). The magazines, which were published once or twice per month, cost approximately 10 RMB each (around 1.5 USD) and were affordable for students in urban areas. Chinese fans also purchased Korean magazine pages as illegal imports (Dazui, 2001a). Beijing fans said that a colored page in a magazine could be purchased for approximately 30 to 40 RMB (around 4.5 to 6 USD) at Huawei Center's "Koreatown", located in Beijing's Xidan Commercial District (Dazui, 2001a). Overall, these entertainment magazines served as an essential resource for Chinese K-pop fans to receive the latest K-pop news and high-quality pictures and posters of K-pop idols.

Televised K-pop was spread through official cultural exchange activities (e.g., China–Korea Song Festival broadcasted through CCTV), variety shows (e.g., HSTV’s *Happy Camp*), and music programs (e.g., K-pop MVs broadcast on Channel V and song request programs on cable TV), etc. Official cultural exchange activities and variety shows had a significant impact due to the wide coverage they received on television channels. CCTV is China’s most influential TV station, while HSTV is a satellite TV station that is very popular among youths all over the country. One of the critical moments in K-pop’s early transmission in China occurred when NRG appeared on *Happy Camp* on 3 July 1999. As satellite television had a nationwide reach and *Happy Camp* is a well-received variety show, NRG gained popularity. Si Jie recalled that NRG’s cassettes sold almost 200,000 copies within a month after their appearance on *Happy Camp*; thus, he deemed this to be the turning point where K-pop moved out of the shadows and into the public limelight as a successful music genre in China (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Since 1999, Ujeon Soft has increasingly promoted Korean groups through television (Xiaohao, 2000). However, opportunities for K-pop stars to appear on these TV channels were limited. Such programs might have helped certain K-pop stars become famous overnight, but they did not provide continuous coverage. While previous research mentioned that the Asian music station Channel V broadcasted K-pop to Chinese audiences (Fuhr, 2016, pp. 127-161; Ono & Kwon, 2013; Walsh, 2014), this channel could only be watched at particular hotels and residential areas.

Noticeably, song request programs on cable TV channels freely exposed Chinese K-pop audiences to K-pop content on a daily basis. Song request programs were prevalent on local cable TV channels from the late 1990s to the early 2000s (Sohu Media Platform, 2016). Audience members could request a TV channel to play a MV by making a payment to the TV station, and the TV station would then broadcast the MV to its entire audience. The cost per song

varied from 10 RMB (around 1.5 USD) to 500 RMB (around 75 USD) (JJdri_, 2016; Sohu Media Platform, 2016). On the H.O.T. Tieba fan forum, some fans mentioned that they watched H.O.T.'s MVs on these song request programs (RuiinNeverland, 2015; Tata5182005, 2013; Yulumengmeng8, 2013). Sometimes, the programs showed H.O.T.'s MVs throughout the entire day (Genial_48, 2011; Wuyoutianshi, 2012). Clon's *Kungtari Shabara* (KR: *K'ungttari syabara*, 1996), *Bing Bing Bing* (1997), *World Cup Song* (1999), as well as Lee Jung-hyun's *Wa* (1999) and *Change* (KR: *Pakkwō*, 2000) were also popular K-pop songs among Chinese audiences (*Beijing Evening News*, 1999; Hujiang hanyu, 2013). As access to televisions increased among the public in China, so did the number of television channels (Latham, 2007, pp. 43-86). The song request programs on some of these new televisions channels filled in broadcast time and earned TV stations a considerable amount of money because they broadcasted all types of MVs without making any copyright payments (Sohu Media Platform, 2016). Most audience members never paid for song requests; instead, they watched the program and gained free access to K-pop on a daily basis. It is highly likely that song request programs played a role in familiarizing audiences with K-pop, attracting new audiences to K-pop, and helping to maintain existing K-pop audiences.

The popularity of K-pop was ignited by K-pop artistes, especially idol groups H.O.T., NRG, Baby V.O.X, soloist Lee Jung-hyun, and the duo Clon. Beginning in the late 1990s, K-pop groups, such as Clon, H.O.T., and Baby V.O.X, held concerts in China. Because the H.O.T. Beijing concert was a significant event for K-pop in China, *Light Music* recorded the event as follows (Miller, 2001, p.3):

On 1 February 2000, the leading Korean idol group H.O.T. held their concert in the Beijing Workers' Gymnasium. It held the greatest number of people in the audience in the history of Beijing Workers' Gymnasium. There were 40,000 people in the audience. A month after the concert, the city of Beijing was still immersed in the songs of H.O.T. People could not imagine that five Korean boys had manifested Hallyu so strongly [...] Cool dances, moving R&B tunes, modern rap beats, powerful rock songs, and trendy styles are no longer sufficient to describe the impact H.O.T. has made on to their fans. H.O.T. has already become a cultural phenomenon.

Despite the article's claims on audience numbers at the H.O.T. Beijing concert, the number of attendees is inconsistent with other records. This is because it may have included persons who were unable to obtain tickets but still gathered around the venue as mentioned by Si Jie in his interview (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Following the success of H.O.T.'s Beijing concert, Korean media and entertainment industries started to use the term "Hallyu" to refer to the sensation of Korean popular culture in China (Korean Cultural Centre, 2020; H.-e. Kim, 2012a). Through their Beijing concert, H.O.T. became one of the first K-pop groups to perform overseas (H.-e. Kim, 2012b).

H.O.T. is a phenomenal K-pop group because it was able to go beyond the avant-garde visuals it shared with other K-pop idol groups to attract Chinese youngsters through expressions of alternative themes that corresponded with their mindsets. As a high school student commented in *Light Music*, both the young and the old were critical of the love songs that dominated Chinese popular music at that time; however, H.O.T.'s songs conveyed humanistic care, family affection, and personal growth (Blue Rain, 2001). Their music expressed concerns and even doubts

regarding the existing social status quo and hierarchies; these were the same thoughts in the minds of Chinese adolescents. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, local rock and folk musicians, such as The Flowers (CN: Huaer yuedui) and Pu Shu, wrote songs on themes other than romantic love, and were thus popular among teenagers and often featured in music magazines. However, unlike K-pop groups, these artistes rarely emphasized visual aesthetics to attract the attention of young audiences. Although some audiences did not understand H.O.T.'s Korean lyrics, the themes were relayed visually and audibly. On the H.O.T. Tieba fan forum, a fan recalled that they could not understand H.O.T.'s lyrics due to the language barrier but could strongly feel the rebellion and stubbornness in the songs, and consequently connected those feelings to their own desire to be independent and free from the manipulation of others (Shidouzhi, 2015). According to the editor of *Light Music*, H.O.T. was popular among teenagers because the group demonstrated rebelliousness towards traditions, and conveyed the desire to be independent and free from adult influence through its members' appearances, singing, rapping and dance moves (Doujiao, 2001). This clearly shows that the cultural proximity theory espoused by previous literature cannot be the primary factor in K-pop's initial popularity in China. The frequently cited cultural factors, such as Confucian values, were challenged rather than preserved in the K-pop music that won popularity.

Due to H.O.T.'s Beijing concert, the popularity of K-pop increased in China in 2000. Following their 2000 Beijing concert, H.O.T. topped the music chart for five consecutive months in *Modern Music Field*, an entertainment magazine with more than one million readers (G. Piao, 2003). *Modern Music Field* held a poll for the top ten coolest idols in 2000 (Dazui, 2000). It received more than 100,000 votes nationwide. Except for H.O.T., all the other artistes were Gangtai stars. H.O.T. earned 17,488 votes and was in second place. Several thousand fan letters

for H.O.T. flooded the Ujeon Soft office (Xiaohao, 2000), indicating that they received more than ten fan letters per day (Dazui, 2001c). Multiple articles in *Modern Music Field* showed that H.O.T. was more popular with Chinese audiences in 2000 than Komuro Tetsuya in 1997 and Mariah Carey in 1998. According to incomplete statistics, H.O.T.'s albums sold 400,000 copies in China (G. Piao, 2003). In 2000, more of *Modern Music Field*'s contents were devoted to Korean stars. In August 2000, *Music Space* published a new column called "Hallyu Zone" (CN: Hanliu didai) and began covering news about Korean stars. Beginning in October 2000, *Light Music* changed from being a monthly magazine to a semimonthly one. The first volume of each month was on Western music, and the second volume was on Japanese and Korean music. Although the articles in *Cool Music* touched on both Japanese and Korean music, the magazine's K-pop content gradually increased as it covered an array of different Korean celebrities. It also started introducing Korean films and actors. In October 2000, Korean content in *Cool Music* equaled the amount of Japanese content. In 2000, large-scale concert organizers began to invite K-pop groups to perform (Xiaohao, 2000).

The popularity of K-pop continuously increased after 2000. According to the Best Artist Chart in *Cool Music* that was based on readers' votes in 2001, the number of Korean artistes had increased and they were becoming more competitive. In May 2001, there were almost as many Korean artistes on the charts as Japanese ones. Japanese popular culture was a subculture due to unstable China-Japan relations, suppression by the Chinese government, propaganda stigmatizing fans, and anti-Japanese sentiments among the public (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). However, the J-pop fandom persisted because the cultural exchange between China and Japan never stopped (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). In 2002, the famous rock band Glay visited China, held a concert and even met President Jiang Zemin (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). In the same way

that J-pop culture continued to persist in China, K-pop culture became a new subculture among Chinese youngsters. By June 2001, all the artistes on the charts were Koreans. A similar trend can be observed in magazines covering K-pop culture. *Light Music* (later called *Cool Music*) covered 16 Korean music groups or solo artistes in 1999, but soon came to cover more than 100 K-pop groups, solo artistes as well as actors in 2001. The most frequently mentioned were H.O.T., Baby V.O.X., S.E.S., g.o.d, NRG, Fin.K.L, Shinhwa, Lee Jung-hyun, Seo Taiji, Ahn Jae-wook, Kim Hee-seon, Lee Young-ae, and Song Hye-kyo. At the events held in Dalian in 2001, fifteen Korean stars performed (Dazui, 2001d). The number of fan letters received by Ujeon Soft increased from more than ten per day in 2000 to several hundred per day in 2001 (Dazui, 2001c). According to H.O.T. member Moon Hee-joon, H.O.T. as a group earned 100 billion Korean won (around 90 million USD) per year from the Chinese market in the early 2000s (Tencent Entertainment, 2015). SME, H.O.T.'s management company, subsequently debuted male idol group TVXQ (Tong Vfang Xien Qi, meaning Rising Gods of the East) in 2003 that had a name based on Chinese characters so as to target the Chinese market (J. Lim, 2020).

During the early development of K-pop in China, K-pop audiences increased all around the country. K-pop fans were located in different regions of China, according to the fan letters published in *Light Music*. Hallyu fans ranged from secondary school students to office workers (Dazui, 2001d). There were an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Hahanzu—followers of Korean pop cultures—in Beijing (Dazui, 2001c). During its peak, H.O.T. had a Chinese fan club of over eight million members (Tencent Entertainment, 2015). These fans were very passionate about K-pop. H.O.T.'s Beijing concert was a sold-out one (*China Entertainment Report*, 2000) and attracted the trendiest young Hahanzu near the concert venue (NetEaseEntertainment, 2012). The fans who obtained a ticket to enter the concert venue stood shouting, screaming, singing along,

cheering, and crying throughout the concert (*China Entertainment Report*, 2000; NetEase Entertainment, 2012). When NRG visited Dalian, a northeastern city in China, fans held handmade posters, cameras and autograph books, and waited for their idols and chanted their names overnight in front of the hotel where they were staying. Some were even brought to the police station by the security staff (Dazui, 2001d). Some K-pop fans travelled domestically or internationally. For instance, fans from Guangdong, Shanghai, and Beijing attended the K-pop events in Dalian (Dazui, 2001d). In 2001, a group of 90 Chinese fans went to Korea for a Hallyu tour (Dazui, 2001a). *Light Music* also documented a cover dance performance at a H.O.T. fan party in Tianjin in July 2001 (Dazui, 2001b). Seven male fan dance groups and one female group performed, and 300 people participated in this event (Dazui, 2001b). Online K-pop fan communities also emerged as K-pop gained traction in China (Pease, 2006).

Conclusion

In the 1990s, K-pop was introduced to China around the same time as Korean TV dramas. The initial transmission of K-pop in China in the analog media period laid the foundation for K-pop's subsequent transmission and the development of transnational K-pop fandom in China. One of the external factors for K-pop's popularity in China during the analog media period that is rarely covered in previous existing literature is the role played by individuals and companies as cultural intermediaries introducing K-pop to Chinese audiences. The transmission of K-pop in China occurred when non-governmental exchanges between China and Korea began to increase. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, heightened cultural and economic exchanges took place between China and Korea. This resulted in many ordinary persons moving between China and Korea, and interacting with one another. These exchanges, these movements of people, and

these interactions among people are part and parcel of the transnational flow of K-pop in China. Another external factor contributing to the popularity of K-pop in China during the analog media period is the utilizing of peripheral, alternative, or specialized channels. While previous academic writings have referenced the utilization of specialized radio programs, specialized magazines, and pirated video contents (S. H. Jang, 2012; Pease, 2006), their role in the spread of K-pop and the proliferation of the genre's popularity has not been fully studied. K-pop was initially played at nightclubs and on the radio. It eventually garnered attention when it was promoted at local promotional events and on mass media channels, including television, newspapers, and magazines. Nightclubs for Korean students, K-pop events, K-pop-specific radio programs, song request programs on local cable TV channels as well as music and entertainment magazines were critical in K-pop transmission.

By the turn of the millennium, Korean dance music, which was representative of K-pop in China, carved a niche for itself in the Chinese pop music market. Several internal factors were also instrumental to K-pop's popularity in China. K-pop's emphasis on visuals (Howard, 2006; S. Jung & Hirata, 2012) contributed to its popularity in China. K-pop differentiated itself from Chinese-language pop music by emphasizing visuals; it distinguished itself from Japanese pop music through different visual styles; and it outperformed local Chinese pop idols with its more mature idol-making system. Furthermore, it was an avant-garde and alternative pop culture for Chinese youngsters. Korean dance music conveyed alternative themes that corresponded to Chinese teenagers' mindsets. K-pop came to be accepted in China not because of cultural proximity (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007; J. Yang, 2012), but because of the similar appearances of the Chinese and Koreans. Due to K-pop's edgy visual styles and catchy tunes, it was able to

differentiate itself from Western pop music. As a consequence, Chinese teenagers imagined themselves as individuals who were as modern and rebellious as their K-pop idols.

Thus, the individual and organizational intermediaries as well as the variety of channels featuring K-pop made the experience of Korean pop culture in China a transnational cultural phenomenon. K-pop idols' visual styles, sophisticated dance movements, and the alternative themes of their music not only helped K-pop to secure a place in the market but also attracted Chinese youngsters who subsequently became K-pop fans. By 2000, H.O.T.'s Beijing concert established Hallyu as a cultural phenomenon in Chinese society. As Chinese fans experienced K-pop, they built up fan cultures. Some Chinese fans attended K-pop concerts, travelled domestically or internationally to engage in K-pop experiences, or participated in cover dances. The initial transmission of K-pop in China and its impact on Chinese teenagers made it indispensable in the formation of Hallyu, and laid the foundation for the subsequent rise of Hallyu.

Chapter 4

K-Pop in China in the Pre-Mobile Internet Period (2005-2011)⁵

In 2005, the media environment for popular culture experience in China shifted to a new era: the pre-mobile internet period. During the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011), all kinds of internet services became available to an increasing number of internet users. HSTV's participatory TV show *Super Girl* led to the growth of China's idol fandom on internet forums. Although internet access across the country varied according to each area's level of development, urban residents were generally able to access various unlicensed popular media contents, including Korean popular culture, on the internet. K-pop fandom also moved to the internet where internet searches, downloading sites, and communities were readily available. Despite the constant domination of Gangtai pop, TV talent shows and the internet became the new means through which new talents could gain popularity among audiences in China and come to the attention of the music industry. Chinese audiences started to see Chinese members in K-pop idol groups, and K-pop idols appeared in an increasing number of TV dramas, films and variety shows. Accessing the internet through PCs was the most prevalent way for urban young people to consume popular media when analog media became outdated and smart mobile devices were unaffordable and not widely available.

This chapter examines K-pop in China in the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011). Popular media, the context for K-pop, and the development of K-pop in China will be discussed. The data mainly comes from archival research on internet platforms and other relevant materials. The main resources are internet news and the online forum Tieba, among others.

⁵ When data is cited without any indication of their sources, they are a composite of data drawn from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), and China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA).

Rising Popular Culture on China's Internet

Chinese idol fandom came into prominence in 2005 when fans of the TV talent show *Super Girl* embraced developing internet technologies by creating user-generated contents (UGCs) on internet forums to discuss their favorite contestants (*Southern Urban Daily*, 2005). Internet use increased sharply throughout China in 2006, even though internet access was significantly unbalanced between the eastern coastal areas and the western inland areas as well as between the urban and rural areas. The wide adoption of instant messaging among young people, the emphasis on entertainment-related content, and the extensive amounts of UGCs were the main features of Chinese internet in the early to mid-2000s. Urban young people were also freely downloading music from the internet due to the availability of a wide range of software and portable MP3 devices. The suppression of Korean pop culture in the traditional media, the significant increase in internet use, and the lack of strict regulatory control over the internet at the time resulted in Hallyu experiences shifting from analog media platforms to the internet.

Rapid economic development and infrastructure construction led to the development of the Chinese internet (CNNIC, 2009). The analog media channels were, however, still commonly available to the whole population. In 2006, individual internet users comprised over 10% of the population for the first time (World Bank, 2018). By 2008, the Chinese internet penetration rate reached 23% (higher than the global average); and 91% of internet users had access to broadband internet, which offers much faster loading and downloading speeds than dial-up internet. While Beijing and Shanghai reached internet penetration rates of more than 40% in 2008, only 46% of China had internet access five years later (World Bank, 2018). This shows that the internet was still mainly used by urban residents during this period. Students, corporate employees, and the self-employed accounted for the majority of internet users. In addition, radio and television

coverage rates remained high at more than 95%. The domestic television market during this period was large and fragmented (Zhu et al., 2008). International satellite TV channels were also not commonly available to Chinese audiences (Zhong, 2010). By the mid-2000s, the fad for VCDs passed, and DVDs with higher image quality became more affordable and thus served as the main form of legal video publication.

The rapid development of the internet, rising internet cultures, and the restrictions on analog media shifted the transmission of Korean TV dramas and other popular cultural products to the internet. Due to the anti-Hallyu sentiments in society and the cultural industry, China cut the import quota for Korean TV dramas in 2006, effectively prohibiting their broadcast during primetime hours (B. Liu, 2014). After that, a wider variety of TV dramas was imported and China's TV channels began airing dramas from the United States, the United Kingdom, Korea, Japan, Thailand, India, and Singapore. However, audiences could still access Korean TV dramas through the internet. Between 2005 and 2010, fans of Korean dramas could download or watch unlicensed foreign TV dramas with subtitles produced by fans on the internet and video websites (Tencent Entertainment, 2013). This state of affairs ended in 2010 when the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) ordered these websites to remove all pirated drama series (Tencent Entertainment, 2013). Internet video websites responded by purchasing copyrighted programs and producing their own programs in 2011.

Music consumption also shifted away from physical publications to the internet. With the sharp increase in internet adoption in urban areas since 2006 and the restriction of Korean cultural content on traditional media, young audiences living in the cities were more likely to access K-pop on the internet. The audio publication of cassette and CD forms decreased despite the diversified importation sources. Online forums, video sharing sites, music streaming sites,

P2P downloading, and MP3 players became important channels for the K-pop experience. A wide range of emerging video sites served as platforms where fans could share and consume K-pop. Similar to YouTube, which was established in 2005 and blocked in China since 2007, many Chinese video sharing sites, such as Tudou, 56, Youku, and Ku6, were established in 2005 and 2006. Unauthorized videos, including K-pop-related videos and programs, were uploaded by users on these sites before SARFT mandated their removal in 2010 (Tencent Entertainment, 2013).

A plethora of music websites, including music streaming, downloading, news, forums, and music chart sites, were available during the pre-mobile internet period (Xinhuanet, 2013). Audiences could freely download all types of unlicensed music in MP3 or other formats on the internet via KuGou, Baidu Music, VeryCD, and many other software program websites regardless as to whether the physical album was officially imported. Software like KuGou, which was initially released in 2004, allowed users to search, stream, and use P2P downloading to acquire music files. As a search engine, Baidu MP3 provided users with search results and links to unauthorized music downloads in formats such as MP3, RM, and WMA. Internet users can then play the downloaded music on PCs through music playing software like Winamp, RealPlayer, Windows Media Player, Qianqianjingting (a Chinese music player software), or on their MP3 players. Internet users can even burn their favorite downloaded songs to a CD. Portable MP3 players were also popular because they could store thousands of songs. The ease with which internet users can download music resulted in a constant battle between music copyright holders and search engines over the issue of copyright infringement—a state of affairs that lasted until a legal solution was reached in 2010 (B. Jin, 2005; Jiang, 2011; China Court Network, 2008).

The development of UGCs and social media began during this period. UGC is the key feature of social media. The term “social media” became widely used after Facebook and Twitter achieved popularity as means through which people could interact with each other online. Prior to the widespread use of Facebook and Twitter, online forums that had social functions embedded in them served this purpose. In time, however, discussion forums came to be considered social media too. UGCs on the Chinese internet really took off when the TV talent show *Super Girl* and its contestants developed a cult following in 2005. The show’s many fans went online to demonstrate their support for their favorite participants. As they did so, they organized fan communities, created and shared content on the online forum platform Tieba, and created fan cultures on the Chinese internet (*Southern Urban Daily*, 2005). On Tieba, fans shared all kinds of resources, including news, images and videos, as well as their personal feelings and thoughts related to K-pop idols. The number of bloggers also rapidly increased and reached 162 million by 2008. The most active content creators were internet users aged between 18 and 24, who had attained high levels of education and were living in urban areas.

Although Chinese audiences were able to access an extensive amount of pirated foreign music online, many other foreign social media were not available to them. YouTube has been blocked in China since 2007, and Twitter and Facebook were blocked in 2009. The Chinese government’s decision to block these foreign social media platforms accomplished two objectives. On the one hand, it soothed cultural insecurities and national insecurities vis-à-vis the potential influence the content on these platforms might have on the ordinary Chinese citizen. On the other, it paved the way for national internet industries, which soon developed into a booming internet economy. Major Chinese internet companies, including Sina, Sohu, and Tencent, launched Twitter-like microblogging sites in 2009 and 2010. The Facebook-like social

networking site Xiaonei (meaning “on campus” in Chinese) was launched in 2005 and changed its name to Renren (meaning “everyone” in Chinese) in 2009 to expand its user demographics from college students to members of the general public.

The mobile internet did not immediately receive rapid or wide adoption due to the demands for new upgraded devices and higher telecommunications fees. In 2006, mobile internet users accounted for only 12% of internet users. Mobile phone internet users eventually increased due to the decreasing cost of mobile internet services, third generation wireless mobile telecommunications technology (3G), the influence of mobile internet promoters and other consumers, and low-priced unlicensed mobile phones (CNNIC, 2009, 2011). By 2010, mobile phone internet users accounted for 66% of internet users. While 80% of smartphone users had installed applications on their phones, smartphone users only made up 45% of all mobile internet users.

The rapid development of the internet meant that it soon became an indispensable channel for pop culture experiences. The prevalent online UGCs in the pre-mobile internet period differentiated Chinese youngsters’ K-pop experiences from those in the previous period, as it allowed K-pop audiences to actively produce content and interact with each other with greater convenience. Not only did it introduce new experiences to users; it also served as a space for popular culture fandom to grow. The internet and the mobile internet are still mainly used by urban Chinese citizens, especially the young people. Even though mobile smart devices were not prevalent from 2005 to 2011, K-pop fans still managed to access the internet on their PCs. The suppression of Korean pop culture in mainstream Chinese media did not significantly influence K-pop in China because fans largely relied on unlicensed internet content and online UGCs.

Improved Sino-Korean Relations and the Proliferation of TV Talent Shows in China

China and Korea have become close partners in economic development. Even though Gangtai pop was still the mainstream listening choice among Chinese audiences, the Chinese popular music scene became more vibrant through TV talent shows, and the internet bringing in new blood and attracting new audience cultures. The Chinese music industry continued its efforts to produce idol groups. To that end, Chinese talent agencies collaborated with their counterparts in Korea and the United States to improve the quality of their idol groups.

China and Korea's bilateral, economic and cultural ties improved between 2005 and 2011. By 2007, China was not only Korea's largest trading partner and largest importer but also Korea's greatest export destination (Tian, 2008; Xinhua, 2008). Sino-Korean relations improved further in 2008 when Korean President Lee Myung-bak paid a diplomatic visit to China (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, 2020b). It resulted in the two nations announcing the establishment of their strategic cooperative partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). That the trade volume between China and Korea exceeded 200 billion USD in 2010 is testament to their improved relationship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2011). Within that same year, over 200 Chinese and Korean groups in cultural fields exchanged visits as their respective governments promoted collaboration in the cultural industries of both their countries (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Korea, 2010). The Korean government has been constantly promoting Hallyu with hands-off and hands-on policies at various times. For instance, the Korean government promoted the Korean Wave in 1997-2007 (Hallyu 1.0) through a hands-off approach (D. Y. Jin, 2016, pp. 20-40). From 2008 to the present (in the era of Hallyu 2.0), the government undertook a hands-on policy whereby it increased the budget for cultural industries, and reorganized

government agencies to facilitate cultural industries and render Korean popular culture more profitable in Korea and beyond (D. Y. Jin, 2016, pp. 20-40). Thus, K-pop, which had been a music genre during Hallyu 1.0, now became the driving force for Hallyu 2.0 (D. Y. Jin, 2016, pp. 20-40). The population of Korean students in China and the population of Chinese students in Korea have also been increasing. China and Korea had the largest numbers of overseas students in each other's country in 2011, with approximately 79,000 Chinese students in Korea and some 68,000 Korean students in China (Xinhua News Agency, 2011). Due to the rapid improvement in Sino-Korean cultural and economic relations, and the close collaboration and frequent exchanges between the two nations, K-pop had more opportunities to develop in China.

The pre-mobile internet period witnessed the flourishing of TV talent shows that quickly became a popular television format in China and a driving force through which new talents were recruited into the entertainment industry (*People's Daily*, 2007). Even though the government restricted TV talent shows in 2007 (*People's Daily*, 2007), this medium of popular entertainment had already made its mark in Chinese popular culture. From the early 2000s to the early 2010s, HSTV's *Super Boy* (*Chaoji nansheng*, later revamped as *Kuaile nansheng*, 2003-2004, 2007, 2010) and *Super Girl* (2004-2006) were probably the most popular TV talent shows out of the many that were broadcasted on satellite TV channels. The *Super Boy* and *Super Girl* series were modeled on Western TV talent shows, such as *Pop Idol*, *American Idol*, *Australian Idol*, and *Fame Academy* (A. Fung, 2013; Zhong, 2010). They were televised singing competitions in which contestants would undergo regional and national eliminations, and the winners were decided by audience votes cast via SMS (A. Fung, 2013). This new TV format allowed audiences to participate in pop star formation. The explosive popularity of talent shows began with *Super Girl* in 2005. Li Yuchun won *Super Girl* in 2005 after obtaining more than three

million votes (Xinhua, 2005). This participatory, interactive, live, and seemingly real TV show attracted unprecedented enthusiasm from audiences (A. Fung, 2013; Zhong, 2010). HSTV's commercial success could not be matched by other television stations in the country. In 2005, *Super Girl* had 112,500 RMB in advertisement revenues per 15 seconds, breaking the record of 110,000 RMB per 15 seconds previously set by CCTV (Zhong, 2010). From then on, an increasing number of singers entered the popular music scene through TV talent shows. These singers achieved great success when they released their first albums because they had already gained a large fanbase during the run of the show. In contrast, artistes selected by companies did not do as well in the market because they were new to audiences when they released their first albums. Music by Li Yuchun (winner of *Super Girl* 2005) and her peers were thus identified as a new wave of Chinese pop that was distinct from the other genres in the market (A. Fung, 2013). This new wave of Chinese pop, as represented by Li Yuchun, embodied Western values, and utilized various Western cultural elements and music forms (A. Fung, 2013). Chinese culture was preserved in their music but in an unconventional way (A. Fung, 2013). Drawing on the presentation of music, lyrics and visual styles, this new music style was individualistic but apolitical (A. Fung, 2013). An examination of the list of winners of major Chinese music awards after 2005 reveals that many of these winners were previously from talent shows (Sina Entertainment, 2008, 2010). Many of them, such as Zhou Bichang (second place winner in *Super Girl* 2005) and Zhang Jie (fourth place winner in *Super Boy* 2007), continue to be active in the Chinese popular music scene in the present-day.

While Gangtai pop was still popular, internet songs were quickly capturing the attention of Chinese audiences. Apart from TV talent shows, wannabe singers could also enter the Chinese music industry through the internet. While internet songs, i.e., songs released on the internet, and

internet singers could become famous overnight, there has been some debate as to the originality, quality and value of these songs (Shi et al., 2008). Only a few internet singers like Xu Song were recognized by and joined the mainstream music industry (Tencent Entertainment, 2012). Gangtai singers continued to be popular between 2005 and 2011, with Mandopop from Taiwan dominating the mainland market (A. Fung, 2013). The most popular Mandopop singers of this period were solo artistes like David Tao (Tao Zhe) and Jay Chou (Chou Chieh-lun) whose ballads had noticeable R&B influences.

Not wanting to lose out, Chinese music companies also sought to produce idol groups with better competitiveness in the market. In 2008, EE-Media (CN: Tianyu chuanmei) in China and Doremi Media from Korea collaborated to debut a five-member male idol group called Top Combine (CN: Zhishanglihe). Its lineup is composed of four Chinese and one Korean. The four Chinese members were from HSTV's talent show *Super Boy*. Noticeably, Si Jie, who used to be a marketing specialist in Ujeon Soft, worked for EE-Media in producing Top Combine (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). It is said that they trained in Korea for half a year before their debut. Top Combine's song *Marshmallow* (CN: *Mianhuatang*, 2008) proved popular among young audiences. Another five-member male idol group MIC, managed by Taihe Rye Music (CN: Taihemaitian), also trained for four years before their debut in 2010. Coaches were invited from China and the United States to train the idol candidates. Groups like Top Combine and MIC show that the Chinese music industry had been constantly trying to produce idol groups. The success of the groups did not last long; even so, the production quality of idol groups did gradually improve, and an idol production system based on transnational collaboration was beginning to take place.

Into the New World: The Localization of K-Pop in China and K-Pop Idols' Diversified Performances

Literature on the development of K-pop in China during this period is limited. Pease (2009) pointed out that the K-pop male soloist Rain, male idol group TVXQ, and the TV drama *Jewel in the Palace* revived Hallyu in China. However, Gangtai and Japanese popular music were still more popular in China than K-pop (Pease, 2009). SME placed great hopes in the Chinese market and debuted the idol group TVXQ (KR: Tongbangshin'gi, CN: Dongfang shen qi) with the group name in Chinese characters to bring some familiarity to Chinese audiences (Pease, 2009). It also debuted a Chinese member Han Geng (KR: Han Kyōng) in the idol group SJ and a Chinese soloist Zhang Liyin (KR: Chang Ri'in) for the same reason (Pease, 2009). While these were shrewd moves on SME's part, it also led to the exploitation of fans in China. L. Chen (2018, pp. 54-83) demonstrates how Chinese fans' use of Tieba, and the subsequent criticism and stigmatization of Hallyu fans in China that had been ongoing since the early 2000s were based on Korean companies and their Chinese partners' exploitation of fan labor as well as their commercialization and manipulation of China-based Korean popular culture fandom.

Popular TV program and awards ceremony *Top Chinese Music Chart* (CN: *Yinyue fengyun bang*) began offering awards to K-pop artistes in 2008. SJ-M and EXO were awarded with the Top Chinese Music Chart Breakthrough New Artist Award in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Since the 2000s, SME embarked on the new strategy that they started with SJ, namely employing Chinese members in a K-pop idol group. This strategy soon came to be commonly used in the K-pop industry. As these idols sang and danced, and appeared in TV dramas, films and variety shows, they attracted new fans to K-pop. As more and more fans relied

on the internet to watch the latest K-pop performances as well as shows or dramas featuring their idols, fan culture gradually moved away from analog media in the pre-mobile internet period.

K-pop in China had two main characteristics in the pre-mobile internet period: the recruitment of Chinese talents targeting the China market, and K-pop idols' performance in TV dramas, movies and variety shows. After the unprecedented and unexpected success of idol groups like H.O.T., NRG, Baby V.O.X and S.E.S. in China, the K-pop industry started employing strategies to target the China market. In addition to having idols sing in Chinese and communicate to the Chinese audience in Mandarin, Chinese talents were recruited to join the K-pop industry. SME, the agency managing H.O.T. and S.E.S., held its first audition in China—the H.O.T. China Audition—in 2001 (Xia, 2020). Of the 3,000 candidates who auditioned, a Chinese youngster named Han Geng was selected to enter SME as a trainee because he was good at dance and martial arts; he later debuted as a member of the male idol group SJ in 2005 (Xia, 2020). Han Geng was the first ethnic Chinese in a K-pop group. In 2008, Super Junior-M (hereafter SJ-M), a sub-unit of SJ, debuted. Aside from Han Geng, SJ-M also had another Chinese member Zhou Mi, a Chinese-Canadian named Henry Lau (Henry), and four Korean members in its original lineup. On the whole, Chinese K-pop idols attracted more attention from Chinese audiences. In 2006, Chinese female singer Zhang Liyin debuted as a solo singer in Korea with the support of SME. Zhang later released her first Chinese album in 2008. Following SME's success with Chinese idols, the employment of Chinese talents soon became common practice in the K-pop industry. In 2008, JYPE debuted a seven-member male idol group 2PM that had an American-born Thai-Chinese, Nichkhun Buck Horvejkul (Nichkhun). In 2009, SME debuted a four-piece female idol group f(x) that had one Chinese member Song Qian (Victoria) and one Chinese-American member Amber Liu (Amber). In 2010, JYPE debuted a four-member

female idol group Miss A that had two ethnic Chinese, Wang Feifei (Fei) and Meng Jia (Jia). Twelve-member male idol group EXO that debuted under the management of SME in 2012 had in its lineup one Chinese-Canadian named Wu Yifan (Kris) as well as three Chinese, namely Lu Han (Luhan), Huang Zitao (Tao), and Zhang Yixing (Lay).

Unlike the K-pop idols between 1996 and 2004 who focused on their music careers, K-pop idols from 2005 to 2011 increasingly appeared in TV dramas, movies, and variety shows. This garnered K-pop idols more attention from the general public and promoted media content to K-pop fans at the same time. Solo singer Jang Keun-suk, Lee Hong-gi (better known as Hongki) from F.T. Island, and Jung Yong-hwa from CNBLUE also played the leading roles in the TV drama *You're Beautiful* (KR: *Minamishineyo*, CN: *Yuanlai shi meinan a*, 2009). Another successful example is Kim Hyun-joong from the male idol group SS501. His popularity soared after he starred in the TV dramas *Boys over Flowers* (KR: *Kkotpoda namja*, CN: *Huayang nanzi*, 2009) and *Naughty Kiss* (KR: *Changnansŭrŏn k'isŭ*, CN: *E'zuoju zhi wen*, 2010). When Kim Hyun-joong appeared on the Chinese variety show *Happy Camp* in 2012, that episode had the highest audience rating out of all the ones featuring Korean stars, even beating the record set by Jang Keun-suk during his appearance on the program earlier that year (Y. W. Zhong, 2012). Choi Si-won, a member of SJ and SJ-M, starred in a big budget movie titled *A Battle of Wits* (CN: *Mo gong*, 2006) that was a co-production between China, Japan, and Korea. Having Andy Lau, Ahn Sung-ki, Fan Bingbing, and Wang Zhiwen in the leading roles, it has been screened in East and South East Asia.

The K-pop male soloist and actor Rain (Jung Ji-hoon), who debuted in 2002 and is managed by JYPE, was another Korean artiste famous in China during this period for both musical endeavors and TV dramas. He has the distinction of being recognized by the Chinese

government as he was the only Korean singer performing at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games closing ceremony (Rongrong, 2008). As a K-pop soloist, Rain is famous for his muscular and sexy image as well as outstanding dance skills. In 2005, Rain held a concert at the Beijing Workers' Stadium (CN: Beijing gongren tiyuchang) for 50,000 audience members (Sina Entertainment, 2005). Within the first hour that ticket sales opened, the concert had grossed over one million RMB (*Oriental Morning Post*, 2005). The 400 most expensive tickets, known as the VIP tickets, were priced at 1,880 RMB (around 229 USD) each and sold out within five minutes (Yang, 2005; CCTV, 2005). The majority of the VIP tickets were booked as group orders by fan clubs; half of these bookings were made by Rain's Chinese fan club (Yang, 2005). Chinese fans ordered tickets on behalf of Rain's fan clubs in other Asian countries and individual fans from the US (Yang, 2005). This incident demonstrates that Rain had already become an international star, and K-pop fans were already travelling across national borders to attend his concerts.

After Rain's concerts in China, his popularity in the country rose steadily until it peaked in 2007 when his TV drama *Full House* (KR: *P'urhausŭ*, CN: *Langman manwu*, 2004) aired on several Chinese satellite TV channels. With Rain in the leading male role, *Full House* was initially broadcasted in Hong Kong and Taiwan in 2005, and in mainland China in 2007. *Full House*'s first-run audience ratings in Hunan Province in 2007 beat the record set by *Jewel in the Palace* in 2005 (Y. Lin, 2007). Through the broadcast of *Full House* on several satellite TV channels and his televised appearance on CCTV's Mid-Autumn Festival Gala (CN: Zhongqiu wanhui) and other events, awareness of Rain expanded from his fans to the Chinese general public (Lu, 2007; Sina Entertainment, 2007a). This was clearly demonstrated when Rain held his concert in Shanghai in 2007 (Lu, 2007; Sina Entertainment, 2007a). The price of VIP tickets rose from 1,880 RMB in 2005 to 3,000 RMB (around 395 USD) officially, with scalpers charging up

to 5,000 RMB (around 658 USD) per ticket (Lu, 2007; *Shanghai Morning Post*, 2007). Rain's international fan club had booked nearly 500 tickets at 2,000 RMB (around 263 USD) each (Lu, 2007; Sina Entertainment, 2007a). Seventy percent of the tickets were sold on the first day; of these, 70% were snapped by mainland audiences and 30% were bought by fans overseas (*Shanghai Morning Post*, 2007). Fans all over the country as well as other Asian countries and Australia travelled to Shanghai for Rain's concert (Lu, 2007; *Oriental Morning Post*, 2007; Sina Entertainment, 2007b; Huang, 2007). Despite the high ticket sales, it was not a sold-out concert as approximately 10% to 20% of seats remained empty during the concert (Sina Entertainment, 2007a; Huang, 2007). In 2011, Rain held concerts in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. However, these venues could only seat 10,000 people instead of the 30,000-50,000 at his previous concerts. The prices of VIP tickets also dropped to less than 2,000 RMB (around 308 USD) each in 2011 (Dong, 2011; Zhongyan Ticketing Association, 2011). It can be inferred that Rain had attracted a great number of devoted fans from different countries who were willing to spend a lot of money to travel and attend his concerts in person. However, he did not appeal to members of the general public who could only afford cheaper tickets and did not want to sit far from the stage where they could not see him perform.

As variety shows appeared to depict K-pop idols' real personalities and humorous sides, they helped the idols to attract larger followings to themselves and their music. On Douban—a Chinese social networking website where users can share and discuss information related to films, books, music, current affairs, and goings-on in Chinese cities—several persons stated that the variety show *Real Romance Love Letter* (KR: *Riöl lomangsŭ yŏnaep'yŏnji*, CN: *Qingshu*, 2004-2006) was the first Korean variety show they had ever watched (Doubandianying, 2020). The male idol group Shinhwa appeared in all the episodes of the first season of *Real Romance*

Love Letter in 2004. In the subsequent two seasons, idol groups TVXQ and SJ, the former members of H.O.T., and many other idols also appeared. Young Chinese audiences were thus exposed to this variety show through several local TV channels and unlicensed internet downloads (Hanguoqingshuba, 2020). Through variety shows, such as *Real Romance Love Letter*, *X-man* (KR: *Eksūmaen*, 2003-2007), and *Family Outing* (KR: *P'aemilliga ttötta*, CN: *Jiazude dansheng*, 2008-2010), young Chinese audiences learnt more about K-pop idols.

We Got Married (KR: *Uri kyōrhonhaessōyo*, CN: *Women jiehunle*, 2008-2017) is a Korean variety show that later gained popularity among Chinese K-pop fans. It featured K-pop idols paired up as imagined couples. In 2010 and 2011, *We Got Married* featured its first international couple when it paired Victoria from f(x) with Nichkhun from 2PM. While this couple was called “Khuntoria” in the show, Chinese fans referred to this pairing as *Weinifufu* (Winnie Couple) whereby *Wei* stood for Victoria, *Ni* stood for Nichkhun, and *Fufu* meant married couple in Chinese. Khuntoria attracted a great number of young Chinese viewers. The Khuntoria fragments on Tudou and other video sharing sites were all probably collected, subtitled, edited, and uploaded by fans. Fans of the show also possibly became K-pop fans. In the Khuntoria Tieba forum today, fans still post new content even though ten years have passed since the first airing of the show. As of the end of 2020, the Khuntoria Tieba forum has more than one million followers and over 20 million posts (Baidu Tieba, 2020b).

Tieba really took off as an important space for fandom in China, including the K-pop fandom, when *Super Girl* aired in 2005 (*Southern Urban Daily*, 2005). As an archive, Tieba shows the scale of the Chinese K-pop fan population and its fan practices in the pre-mobile internet period. Unlike Weibo, Tieba is largely inactive now. However, Tieba forums show the popularity of certain K-pop groups at their peak in China. There were many Tieba forums

created for K-pop groups that were popular during the pre-mobile internet period. As of 22 July 2020, Tieba forums for TVXQ, SJ, and Girls' Generation have more than one million followers each, and T-ara's Tieba forum has more than two million followers. TVXQ and SJ's Tieba forums have more than 40 million posts, the Girls' Generation one has more than 28 million, and T-ara's has more than 9 million as of 22 July 2020.

The internet fan communities in Tieba are hierarchical organizations. At the top, there are chief administrators or *bazhu*, meaning Tieba master in Chinese. Next in line are the subordinate administrators or *xiaobazhu*, meaning subordinate Tieba master in Chinese. For instance, the Girls' Generation Tieba forum is helmed by a chief administrator and 16 subordinate administrators. These are privileged positions in a Tieba forum. To become a chief administrator, a Tieba user has to be active in a Tieba forum with high-quality posts, comply with the existing rules of the platform, apply for the chief administrator position when there is a vacant position, and take office once the application is approved (Baidu Tieba, 2020a). The chief administrator sets the rules for a Tieba forum. All members of the Tieba forum have to comply with its regulations to be able to post content in it. A chief administrator has the authority to pin a post at the top of the page, highlight or delete posts, manage subordinate administrators by recruiting and dismissing them, manage the Tieba forum's members by banning users who violate the rules or lifting bans on users that had been previously prohibited from posting in that forum, and so on (Baidu Tieba, 2020a). Subordinate administrators assist the chief administrator by either banning Tieba members from posting or by deleting posts (Baidu Tieba, 2020a). The position of chief administrator or subordinate administrator can be seen in a user's profile (Baidu Tieba, 2020a). A three-level hierarchy of chief administrator—subordinate administrator—ordinary member is thus formed. Online fan communities based on Tieba are similar to offline fan clubs as a few

members wield power over the majority of ordinary community members. Unlike the many fan clubs formed through offline events which require real-name registration and membership fees, online fan communities are free for anyone to join or quit without revealing one's real identity.

Conclusion

K-pop in China in the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011) is clearly evident in the many online news articles and online forums that are now archives. In investigating these articles and forums, I discovered K-pop in this period had characteristics that differed from K-pop in the analog media period. These characteristics, which are only briefly mentioned in previous academic research (Pease, 2009), serve as internal factors that contributed to K-pop's popularity in China. Between 2005 and 2011, the K-pop industry started to recruit Chinese talent so as to localize K-pop in China. Even though K-pop idols have appeared in mediums other than K-pop performances in order to attract more fans to themselves as well as K-pop, this phenomenon has not been covered in previous academic writings. Additionally, there are hardly any studies on unlicensed internet content and online UGCs as external factors that boost the popularity of K-pop in China. The internet has become a new powerful medium for K-pop transmission and K-pop fandom. The K-pop fan experience became one of online forums, video sharing sites, music streaming sites, P2P downloads, and MP3 players. Fan-created UGCs also became an unofficial channel that largely helped in the transmission of K-pop. Online forums like Tieba allowed fans to engage in the K-pop experience and interact with one another. While these online forums were hierarchical organizations in the same way as in-person ones, they can be seen as a transition away from official company-organized fan clubs and the precursor of later decentralized fan networks.

TV talent shows and internet songs strongly influenced the Chinese popular music scene. The decentralized nature of the internet and the democratic voting mechanisms of TV talent shows not only challenge traditional record companies' top-down talent input process but also emphasize the bottom-up talent input process. While attempts were made by Chinese talent agencies to produce local idols, they were not very successful; and K-pop artistes and groups still dominated the idol music market in China. K-pop groups, including TVXQ, SJ, Girls' Generation, and Wonder Girls, became increasingly well known in the country during this period. However, ballads, especially Gangtai pop music, were still the mainstream in the market. Even so, the transmission of K-pop in China in the pre-mobile internet period laid the foundation for K-pop's subsequent transmission in the country. A Chinese K-pop fandom was also gradually cultivated. With the help of young Chinese K-pop fans and the internet, public awareness of K-pop increased.

Chapter 5

K-Pop in China in the Mobile Internet Period (2012-Present)

Through the wide adoption of mobile internet and mobile devices, the fast-growing internet industry, as well as the state's regulations over internet-based copyright issues, Chinese audiences have moved away from pre-mobile internet platforms to mobile internet devices. Not only are they able to experience a better managed media and internet environment, they can also use a wide range of mobile applications for all kinds of purposes. K-pop fans in China make full use of the mobile internet applications for various aspects in their fandom. In addition to the prospering mobile internet ecology in China, new ICTs—especially augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and fifth generation telecommunication technology for broadband mobile networks (5G)—are also rapidly developing and could possibly herald a new period for K-pop under a new media environment.

Since late 2012, the new leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jinping, has been promoting the Chinese Dream that sought to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (NPC, n.d.). It shows that China's new leadership envisioned the strengthening of the nation's power in all aspects. China and Korea's military and political conflicts over the THAAD system; China's subsequent imposition of economic sanctions on Korea, including the "Korea ban"; and the global pandemic have brought significant challenges to the spread of K-pop in China. Although K-pop idols are not able to be physically present in China, the continuity of K-pop in China has not been cut. This is because K-pop continues to be spread on mobile internet services and internet platforms. However, the Chinese idol music industry has been developing rapidly, especially during the "Korea ban". Thus, Chinese K-pop idols, i.e., K-pop idols who are

ethnic Chinese, are assets to Korean talent management companies during this time. With their excellent music performing capabilities honed through the K-pop training system, and their understanding of the Chinese language and social norms in China, Chinese K-pop artistes are able to circumvent the “Korea ban”. K-pop idols in China are further localized through idol survival shows and Chinese adaptations of Korean variety shows. While these television programs mainly serve to develop the Chinese entertainment industry, they also highlight K-pop and K-pop idol production process. Through these TV talent shows and variety programs, the popular music scene in China has become more diversified and now includes many other genres, such as rock, rap, and hip-hop. By including these other music genres, the Chinese pop music industry is able to expand its audience reach. Even though Chinese ballads continue to be popular, other music genres, including idol music, are fast becoming a strong force in the Chinese popular music market.

The Rapid Development of China’s Mobile Internet and the Various Platforms for K-Pop in China⁶

Chinese audiences have embraced the mobile internet and mobile devices so much so that K-pop fans in China are making full use of mobile internet applications for various aspects in their fandom. Moreover, the better regulated media and internet environment fosters the development of China’s burgeoning mobile internet ecology, new ICTs, as well as AR, VR, AI, and 5G technologies. It is likely that they will create a new media environment for K-pop in the near future, and further add to the practices and experiences of general audiences and K-pop fans.

⁶ When data is cited without any indication of their sources, they are a composite of data drawn from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS), China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), and China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA).

Mobile internet access has increased greatly and is now the main channel for internet use because it has become more affordable to access the internet through mobile phones and other devices. In 2012, internet users began shifting away from PC terminals to mobile phone terminals when they watched videos. From December 2011 to December 2020, the internet penetration rate increased from 38% to 70%. During that same period, the rate of mobile internet access among overall internet users in China increased from 69% to almost 100%. The adoption of the mobile internet greatly increased due to more affordable telecommunications fees and smart mobile devices. Beginning from 2016, most internet users only accessed analog media (traditional TV and radio, print newspapers, and magazines) infrequently. Television viewers also began to switch from traditional TVs to smart TVs. While there has been an increase in many different people using the internet for different purposes, the internet is still mainly used by urban citizens. Internet use by children, adolescents and the middle-aged increased as well, with students, corporate employees and self-employed workers making up the majority of internet users. The proportion of rural population had decreased by 2019 and now accounts for 40% of the entire population (World Bank, 2020b). The internet penetration rate in rural areas experienced a sharp increase from 40% in June 2019 to 52% in June 2020. In contrast, the internet penetration rate in urban areas experienced a slight decrease from 77% in March 2020 to 76% in June that same year. However, the gap in internet access between urban and rural areas is still large.

The government continues to obstruct citizens' access to platforms that it has already blocked, and more have been added to the list. For instance, Instagram has been blocked since 2014. However, people have been using virtual private networks (VPNs) on their mobile devices to access these platforms. The Chinese government's changing regulations over VPNs have

caused some uncertainty among foreign enterprises and average internet users over access to information on international internet platforms and communication with the international world (Reuters staff, 2018). As China is mostly cut off from the global mobile internet environment, Chinese mobile internet has developed rapidly in response to the state's deliberate policies regarding information and technology development, the huge number of users in the country, the increasing adoption of smartphones, and the fast-growing and diverse number of internet services (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). Chinese internet users are in an active and diverse domestic social media environment, even though the most visited foreign internet services, namely Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, are blocked in China (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). As of 2019, there are an estimated 820 million social network users in China, which not only account for nearly 30% of the social network users in the world but also makes China the largest social networking market in the world (Cheung, 2019; von Abrams, 2019). There was also a 95% penetration rate for the usage of social networks among Chinese internet users in 2019 (Cheung, 2019).

In the Chinese media landscape of the mobile internet period, there is a variety of internet platforms for K-pop audience to access and share K-pop contents, commodities and related information. They include platforms for music, video, social networking, instant messaging, fandom, e-commerce, livestreaming, and short videos. Fandom also utilizes supportive platforms for the payment of hotel and trip bookings. Many of these platforms are integrated. The most relevant platforms for the K-pop fandom in China will be explored below.

Music and Video Platforms

Mobile entertainment applications comprise a major type of mobile internet applications, which developed rapidly alongside the industry's shift from the pre-mobile internet to the mobile internet. Music, videos, games, and literature compose the main types of mobile entertainment applications (CNSA, 2016). From 2010 to 2015, music applications were the most commonly used entertainment applications. In 2016, video applications replaced music applications as the most commonly used entertainment applications because more viewers watched videos on mobile devices rather than PC terminals, and because it was now easier to stream videos on the mobile internet following the resolution of the copyright dispute between video sharing sites and copyright holders in 2010. As of June 2018, approximately two-thirds of China's internet users tapped into music and video services, mostly through smartphones. During this period, the Chinese internet completed its shift from the pre-mobile internet to the mobile internet. As it did so, it also emphasized entertainment, indicating the ubiquity of music and video experiences on mobile devices.

During this period, the development of music applications came under the purview of the government's strict copyright regulations. Following the implementation of the Jianwang 2015 Special Action, which sought to regulate copyright infringement in digital networks, the National Copyright Administration of China (NCAC) issued notices to internet music service providers and network disk service providers to remove pirated content in 2015 (CNSA, 2016). It resulted in the removal of 2.2 million unauthorized music tracks (NCAC, 2015; Qingmei, 2017). The Jianwang 2015 Special Action thus reduced internet-based copyright infringement, and protected copyright holders' rights in China and beyond (*People's Daily*, 2015). It ensured that music

platforms had to obtain the copyright of a song for distribution, and listeners had to pay to access or download a song when its copyright holder requires payment.

The Jianwang 2015 Special Action was a major strike against pirated content on music sharing services. It meant that only companies with strong financial support were able to purchase a great number of copyrighted music and survive in the Chinese market. However, the Chinese internet giants are still fighting regulations over copyrighted content as hosting popular copyrighted albums and tracks will bring in more users, and thus more members and more income from advertising and membership. QQ Music, KuGou Music, and Kuwo Music are managed by the Tencent Music Entertainment Group (TME) that holds the digital copyright to 90% of more than two hundred music companies worldwide (Yuledujiaoshou, 2018). In line with NCAC's policy to stop vicious competition among online music sharing platforms, QQ Music, NetEase Cloud Music (CN: Wangyiyun yinyue, owned by NetEase), and Xiami (owned by Alibaba) began sharing up to 99% of their digital music copyrights in 2017 (W. Y. Li, 2018; Qingmei, 2017; Yuledujiaoshou, 2018). Gradually, small companies were further eliminated or marginalized, and competition among the internet giants continued (Yuledujiaoshou, 2018). The increasing number of young internet users prompted the industry to provide more content for this demographic. Thus, K-pop plays a crucial role in reaching out to young internet users. Although the government attempted to control the competition over copyrights, music streaming platforms continued to compete because they could still hold 1% of exclusive copyrights. The contents of many major K-pop labels are within the 1% that can only be accessed through certain music service platforms. For instance, Alibaba holds the exclusive copyright of a part of SME's music. In May 2018, NetEase began its cooperation with Big Hit Entertainment, the K-pop label that manages the internationally popular male idol group BTS (ENet & Ciweek, 2018).

The most commonly used music sharing sites among K-pop fans are streaming platforms for copyrighted music, such as Xiami Music (that ended its service in 2021), QQ Music, KuGou Music, Kuwo Music, and NetEase Cloud Music. These music streaming platforms have the latest copyrighted music. Users can search for singers, songs, MVs, albums, playlists, and lyrics. These platforms also have social functions that allow users to post comments and share on other platforms. Users can pay for songs or albums, or they can choose to pay for membership to the music platform site. Music production companies usually have the right to set down the form in which the payment will take. On QQ Music, some songs and MVs are free for all users to stream and download, and others are only available as downloads to VIP members. VIP membership costs around 8 RMB per month, with a quota of 300 downloadable music tracks each month. The music streaming platforms release new K-pop albums on a synchronized basis with Korean or international music platforms, such as Melon, Spotify, iTunes, and YouTube. K-pop groups' Japanese albums are also available on these Chinese platforms. These Chinese platforms allow users to listen to songs and watch MVs. They also provide Chinese translations of song titles and lyrics. GOT7, for example, is popular on these Chinese streaming platforms. GOT7's most popular album on Xiami is *FLIGHT LOG: TURBULENCE* that was released in 2016; it had been played 11 million times as of 3 October 2018. There are also 0.74 million GOT7 followers on QQ Music as of 26 March 2021.

Aside from the video streaming platforms mainly providing professionally generated content (PGC), there are sites with UGC, such as Bilibili, that are equally critical to the K-pop fandom in China. Bilibili, a China-based video sharing platform launched in 2010, is famous for its danmaku, which is a barrage of moving comments "shooting" across the video as it plays. When Bilibili first launched, it mainly hosted videos related to animation, comics, and games

(ACG). But in the present-day, users can find various other content there, including entertainment. Fans produce translated subtitles for K-pop videos and edited clips that they then upload to Bilibili. For example, there are 176,000 GOT7-related videos which have been played a total of 2.2 billion times as of 26 March 2021. Users can also find a variety of K-pop-related videos on Bilibili, including professionally produced ones with Chinese subtitles made by fans, and fan-produced or fan-edited videos. As of 26 March 2021, GOT7's group variety show collection dating from 2014 to 2016—which has a runtime of more than 38 hours in total—is the most viewed (3.7 million views) and most bookmarked (107,000 users bookmarked the collection), and has the largest number of danmaku (165,000 pieces in total) among all GOT7 videos on the platform.

Social Networking and Instant Messaging Platforms⁷

Twitter has been blocked in China since 2009. In that same year, a Twitter-like social networking platform, Weibo, was launched by the Sina Corporation. Weibo is mainly for internet users living in big cities (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). Although the state sets the boundary for what can or cannot be criticized are set, Weibo is still influential as it provides a space for public discussion and sometimes sets the agenda for state-owned media (Jiang, 2014). However, this platform has become increasingly entertainment-oriented since many other hotly debated topics are perceived as sensitive, and therefore have to be censored by moderators or by the commenters themselves. As Weibo encouraged celebrities to join when it was first launched, it was able to attract a great number of users quickly and beat other domestic competitors (Negro, 2017, pp. 159-191). It also allows celebrities to interact with their fans directly and thus maintain their popularity (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). While celebrities initially used Weibo to post about

⁷ All the data reported in this segment without mentioning the date of retrieval were retrieved on 3 September 2018.

their daily lives and thoughts, they have increasingly come to use the platform as a news media outlet through which they make announcements, and release brand endorsements and commercial cooperation. Fourteen months after its launch, it was reported that Weibo already had 100 million registered users in October 2010 (Negro, 2017, pp. 159-191). In 2019, there were 360 million Weibo users in China (Cheung, 2019).

A search for “GOT7” on Weibo yields millions of results that encompass users, articles, videos, pictures, and topics. There are more than 25,000 GOT7-related users, including verified and unverified organization users, as well as verified and unverified individual users. These accounts can be classified as an official account, fandom account, and media account (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Types of K-pop Weibo accounts

Types of Account	Account Subtype
Official Account	K-pop company
	K-pop group
	K-pop artiste
Fandom Account	Integrated fan organization
	Specialized fan organization
	Individual fans
Media Account	

Official Accounts

There is a GOT7 official account (registered on 25 December 2013) with nearly 1 million followers. The Weibo accounts of GOT7's ethnic Chinese members—Jackson and Mark—have large followings. Jackson has a Weibo account with 14 million followers. The Weibo account of Mark was registered on 15 August 2018, and has 229,000 followers. Another two members of GOT7, Youngjae and BamBam, opened their Weibo accounts when they began promotions as soloists in the first half of 2021, and have 56,000 and 78,000 followers, respectively, as of 17 June 2021. It should be noted that the official GOT7 account managed by the company opened when the group was about to be launched. The individual members of the group only opened their personal accounts when they were about to start their activities in the China market. To date, four of the seven members have personal Weibo accounts. Jackson and Mark also set up official organization accounts for their China-based activities. Team Wang (registered on 27 March 2016), the official account of Jackson's Studio that focuses on the management of Jackson's work in China, has 256,000 followers. Mark Tuan Studio (verified on 7 February 2021), the official account of Mark Tuan Studio that manages Mark's solo activities, has 86,000 followers as of January 1, 2022.

Fandom Accounts

Most of the accounts found in the search results for “GOT7” are fandom accounts. These include the accounts of individual fans and fan organizations. There are also integrated fandom accounts and fandom accounts specializing in certain responsibilities. Each account may be run by a group of fans, several fans, or an individual fan.

The GOT7 Bar account is an example of an integrated fan organization account. This account has 1 million followers. It started posting on 1 January 2014 when JYPE announced they were about to launch GOT7. It has made 30,000 Weibo posts in the past four years and nine months, almost 18 posts per day. This account posts everything about GOT7, including but not limited to the latest GOT7-related updates from official accounts (both company- or celebrity-operated), media sources, accounts of enterprises linked to the group and its members, accounts of their celebrity friends and families; GOT7 news published on foreign platforms (such as Twitter, Instagram, and V Live⁸); information on delegated purchases of GOT7 albums and other merchandise; fan crowdfunding, etc. This Weibo account noticeably shares links to other platforms, such as Owhat for delegated purchase and crowdfunding pages, and QQ for fan chat groups.

Many fan accounts focus on different responsibilities. These include but are not limited to subtitling and translation, chart voting, delegated purchases for mainly foreign fan-produced merchandise (through links to a Taobao online shop), emoji, fancam photographs, cheering song productions, information transfers, etc. Many of these accounts engage in delegated purchases for albums, and fan cheering product production and distribution. Fan accounts, including the ones for delegated purchases, are focused on the group as a whole, or one member, or two of its members.

Media Accounts

Many Hallyu or K-pop media accounts distribute K-pop-related content on Weibo. For instance, Hanguome2day (Hanguome2day, 2021) is an online media platform focusing on Hallyu news. It

⁸ V Live is a South Korean video livestreaming service that was launched in August 2015 and owned by the Naver Corporation. Korea-based celebrities usually use this platform to engage with fans.

was registered in January 2012, has 0.26 million posts, and 26 million followers as of January 1, 2022. It functions in conjunction with Korean media by posting the latest news released by the latter, complete with pictures and texts translated into Chinese. The contents posted by these accounts are mainly about K-pop news.

Super Topic

Super Topic (*Chaoji huati* or *Chaohua* in Chinese) is similar to hashtags in many other social networking platforms. Unlike the hashtag, Super Topic is more like a closed community maintained by fans rather than Weibo users in general. Users can choose whether to display their posts in the Super Topic on their own Weibo pages. In this way, even if a user makes frequent enthusiastic posts about idols, their Weibo followers will not know that they do so. It is designed to achieve user stickiness that can be utilized to upgrade the user's membership according to their level of activity.

These internet services have become increasingly integrated. Weibo's main function is social networking. Meanwhile, it not only allows one-to-one instant messaging but can also host chat groups of up to 3,000 members, a commonly used feature to organize huge fan chat groups. Similarly, instant messaging platforms WeChat (CN: Weixin) and QQ also provide functions for building social networks.

Launched by Tencent in 2011, WeChat is the most used application in China. It also has users in many other parts of the world. WeChat had a total of 1,151 million monthly active users (MAUs) in September 2019, inclusive of international users (Sina Tech, 2020b). As of 2019, WeChat has 654 million users (Cheung, 2019). WeChat's strong voice message and video call functions as well as strict regulations protecting users' privacy mean that it tends to be used

among people with existing social relationships and by close communities where the members' real identities are known (Negro, 2017, pp. 193-208; X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). Besides instant messaging and video calls, this application also integrates various functions, such as file, image, and video sharing; online payment; subscriptions; and so on (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). Multifunctional social networking applications such as WeChat are not only used for communication, but are also employed by Chinese users in everyday problem solving and information searches (Yan & Schroeder, 2020).

QQ is another internet service that is commonly used as an instant messaging platform in China. It was launched in 1999 and has gained much popularity since then. As of March 2020, QQ had 694 million MAUs (Sina Tech, 2020a). However, QQ has fallen out of fashion as a platform for personal communication among trendy urban citizens as most of them prefer WeChat (X. Wang, 2016, pp. 25-56). Despite QQ falling out of fashion among some users, not all fan communities have moved to WeChat. QQ is better at forming and managing huge online communities than WeChat. WeChat allows up to 500 members in a group, but QQ groups can have as many as 3,000 members. When inviting people to join a chat group, WeChat provides a sharable QR code that expires after seven days. In contrast, anyone can invite a QQ user to join a chat group by sharing a unique chat group number. Thus, Chinese K-pop fans turn to QQ when they need to create huge chat groups for album and merchandise buyers. For local fan communities, K-pop-related local events, and close friends, Chinese K-pop fans prefer to form WeChat chat groups. In my QQ searches on 4 October 2018, I found 352 QQ chat groups that were labeled "GOT7". According to the group names and introductions, these GOT7-related chat groups were created for fans to discuss the latest news on their idols, arrange delegated purchases, make merchandise exchanges, as well as conduct sales, crowdfunding, and chart voting activities,

etc. The groups' foci vary. Some chat groups focus on GOT7 as well as other K-pop groups. Others focus exclusively on GOT7. There are even some that focus only on certain GOT7 members. Users all over the country have established groups. The number of group members ranges from 3 to nearly 2,000; the majority of these groups have less than 200 members (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Number of GOT7 QQ chat groups and their number of group members

Fandom Platforms

There are several internet applications that an idol fan can use in China. These include Oops (*Oupu*), Idol (*Aidou*), Ali Planet (*Ali xingqiu*), Super Star Fandom (*Chaoji xingfantuan*), Wefans (*Weifan*), and Owhat. They provide overlapping and distinct functions. On these platforms, a fan

can follow their favorite stars to receive related information in their news feed. These platforms are mainly for Chinese, Korean, and Japanese stars as these fandoms share similar fan cultures.

For instance, Idol is an integrated fandom platform. There are recommendations, social media updates, subscriptions, social circles, pictures, features, and news tabs. In addition to the list of recommendations, a user can check GOT7's past and future schedules, and view related pictures and videos uploaded by other users. The schedules feature lists all the public schedules of the stars, including officially released pictures and videos, program broadcasts, performance and commercial activities, airport appearances, etc. The recommendations feature mainly focuses on news. The social media updates feature allows users to find updates on GOT7 and its members via Weibo, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. GOT7-related posts and posts by the accounts to which a user has subscribed are shown in the subscriptions feature. GOT7 fans can use the social circle feature to build social connections with fellow fans. One can also purchase K-pop albums and merchandise owned by fans on Idol Shopping Mall (*Aidou shangcheng*) on the platform. Payment can be made via Alipay (CN: Zhifubao) or WeChat Pay (CN: Weixin Zhifu). A fan can also find user engagement activities on Idol, such as lucky draws for performance and fanmeet tickets.

Owhat is mainly used for K-pop merchandise purchases and fan crowdfunding. The Merchandise Purchase feature includes delegated purchases for albums and official merchandise, and purchases of fan-produced merchandise. Fan crowdfunding for cheering activities can also be found on the platform. K-pop labels sometimes collaborate with fandom platforms. For example, YGE appointed Owhat as the only registration platform for its first China Region Private Audition.

Music and videos, social networking and instant messaging services, as well as integrated fandom platforms and services are among the wide range of internet applications used by Chinese K-pop fans for their various online and offline fandom needs. The various and multifunctional mobile applications not only provide K-pop audiences with platforms for UGCs as in the previous pre-mobile internet period; they also allow K-pop audiences to actively engage in a wide range of fan production with greater convenience. Fans' consumption practices in the new media environment are also very likely to be different from the practices in the previous periods. The mobile internet period will probably last as long as these internet services continue to develop. However, it is likely that emerging technologies and services will lead to a new period for K-pop fandom in China in the near future. Some of these new technologies have already made a mark in K-pop.

In the midst of the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in 2020, SME debuted a new female idol group called Aespa that features both real-life idols and virtual avatars. In that same year, SME and JYPE drew on AR technology and launched a joint company specializing in online performances (Lee, 2020). Use of AR, VR, AI, and 5G could change audience experiences and revolutionize the practices of both the entertainment industry and fandom in the near future. Chinese mobile internet providers have been researching and developing 5G since 2012 so as to integrate several cutting-edge technologies (such as AI, big data, etc.) and change the modes of operation of many industries (Z. Li, Wang, & Zhang, 2021). Starting from 2017, the Chinese government began to promote AI development with the goal to becoming a global AI innovation center by 2030 (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2017). Researchers still need to wait on developments in the coming years before we can know for

certain if 2020 marked the beginning of a new media period in which AR and other new ICTs became the main channels for K-pop experiences in China.

China's "Korea Ban" and the Prospering Domestic Idol Industry

China and Korea's military and political conflicts over the THAAD system, China's subsequent economic sanctions on Korea—inclusive of the "Korea ban"—as well as the global pandemic have wrought significant challenges to the spread of K-pop in China. Even though most K-pop idols are unable to be physically present in China, the continuity of K-pop in China has not been cut. This is because the spread of K-pop has come to be largely reliant on mobile internet services and internet platforms. The "Korea ban", however, has slightly hampered the dissemination of K-pop in China and resulted in the rapid development of the Chinese idol music industry. Some K-pop idols are commercially competitive in China but they can hardly come out ahead of Chinese idols in a Chinese market. Noticeably, Chinese K-pop idols, i.e., ethnically Chinese K-pop idols, have the advantage as they have the necessary performance skills (honed through the K-pop training system), understand the Chinese language and social norms in China, and are not subjected to the "Korea ban". Despite the constant popularity of Chinese ballads, idol music has become a strong force in the Chinese popular music market. The popular music scene in China has become more diversified in recent years as other music genres, including rock, rap and hip-hop, have won over more audiences.

The political controversy over Korea's deployment of the THAAD system negatively affected the Sino-Korean relationship and the Korean economy. Prior to the THAAD controversy, the two countries engaged in high-level exchanges and cooperative partnerships in economy and trade, finance, science and technology, culture, and education (Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2014, 2020). However, their relations cooled over their different views in regard to the THAAD issue (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, 2020a). In July 2016, the United States and Korea agreed to deploy the THAAD anti-ballistic missile defense system in the latter to protect it from North Korea's ballistic missiles (Panda, 2016; Yonhap, 2017). The Chinese government strongly opposed THAAD because it claimed the system's radars would scan parts of China and thus pose a threat to Chinese national security (Panda, 2016; Yonhap, 2017). Undeterred by China's objection, THAAD deployment began in 2017 (Yonhap, 2017). In retaliation, China launched a series of unofficial economic sanctions against Korea (Volodzko, 2017). These sanctions have negatively influenced the Korean economy, especially in the tourism industry and export trade (Volodzko, 2017). The statistics for Korea's tourism and trade after the implementation of these sanctions show that Korea is suffering more negative effects than China (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Nearly 7 million Chinese tourists visited Korea in 2016; this was half of Korea's total inbound tourists for the year (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020). After the sanctions were imposed, the number of Chinese tourists to Korea fell to 3 million in 2017 (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020). While Korea's exports to China experienced a significant drop in 2016, it bounced back in 2017 (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2020). Tensions slowly eased between China and Korea in 2017 following the impeachment of former Korean President Park Geun-hye in March and the inauguration of President Moon Jae-in in May. In November 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Korean President Moon Jae-in agreed to normalize exchanges between their two countries (Volodzko, 2017). Moon subsequently agreed to accept military constraints in return for the lifting of Chinese sanctions against Korea (Volodzko, 2017). While the K-pop industry has been focusing on other markets—such as Japan, the United States, Middle East and Southeast Asia—in the

post-THAAD period, and idol groups like BTS have achieved great success in these markets, the K-pop industry is still heavily investing in the lucrative Chinese market (Herman, 2018). While the number of Chinese tourists to Korea gradually recovered as Sino-Korean relations thawed, it did not return to the high numbers of the pre-THAAD period (Korea Tourism Organization, 2020). By 2019, relations between the two countries improved to the point where China had become Korea's largest trading partner and Korea was now China's third-largest trading partner (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, 2020a).

The "Korea ban" that had been triggered by the THAAD controversy dealt a hard blow to the Korean entertainment industry and the hitherto thriving Korea-China co-productions in the cultural industries. However, this ban did not mean that Hallyu was suspended in China. It only meant that Hallyu had to move away from mainstream media to inconspicuous spaces or smaller communities. In July 2014, as part of the larger China-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Korea, the China-Korea co-production agreement was also enacted to allow practitioners in Korea's film and TV drama industries to enter the Chinese film and drama scene, and engage in co-productions with their Chinese counterparts (S. Lee, 2019). However, their disagreements over THAAD and China's "Korea ban" in 2016 resulted in many sudden changes to both countries' film and TV drama industries. Although the "Korea ban" was not officially announced, the Chinese film, TV, and entertainment industries implemented it as a form of self-censorship (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Due to the "Korea ban", Chinese video platforms ceased posting updates of all Korean dramas and variety shows in December 2016. The programs that were scheduled to air in 2017 were removed, and no new updates have been made since 2018. Chinese enterprises which had collaborated with their Korean counterparts also suffered economically due to the sudden implementation of the

“Korea ban” (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Unlicensed providers and fansubbers (the fandom term for a group of fans that come together to translate and add subtitles to videos) quickly filled the void left by the dearth of updates on authorized video platforms, effectively mimicking the circumstances for Korean popular media before the Chinese government’s bureaucratic bodies regulated copyrights on the internet in 2010. At the same time, many Chinese production companies and television companies still purchased or copied Korean variety shows so as to produce Chinese versions for domestic TV or online broadcasts.

K-pop was likewise affected by the ban as few K-pop performances were held in China for its duration (Bloomberg, 2019). However, music platforms synchronized their release of K-pop songs and MVs with Korea, and non-Korean artistes managed by Korean companies still actively performed on Chinese screens. An increasing number of K-pop groups have been holding fansign events or fan meetings in Qingdao, a coastal city in Shandong Province in 2019, indicating a potential lifting of the “Korea ban” (Hwang, 2019; KBS World Radio, 2019). K-pop stars have also appeared in brand endorsement advertisements in China since 2019 (Yim, 2020). Despite the return of some K-pop artistes to China, the scale and number of K-pop events are not at the levels they were before the ban.

China intends to support and cultivate Chinese cultural industries by restricting competition from foreign counterparts. The economic sanctions meted out as a response to a political and military conflict could thus be seen as a protectionist measure for local cultural industries (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Although China is the world’s second-largest economy and one of the world’s top political powers, it has not attained a similar status in modern cultural products (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Its economic deficit with Korea vis-à-vis cultural products is perceived to be a cultural deficit (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Consequently, Korean cultural

products are viewed as threats to China's domestic cultural industries (L. Y. M. Leung, 2019). Although China has lifted the ban on travel agencies selling package tours to Korea, the restrictions on cultural products are still in force (S. Lee, 2019). The continued restrictions on Korean cultural products have resulted in the development of the Chinese film industry, as it has learnt to be more creative and less dependent on foreign investments (S. Lee, 2019). In early 2021, both the Chinese and Korean governments announced that 2021-2022 would be a China-Korea Cultural Exchange Year, and CCTV and the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) signed a cooperative agreement to mark this event (X. Chen, 2021; KBS World Radio, 2021). This hints at the further recovery of Sino-Korean cultural exchanges. In its cultural relations with Korea, China emphasizes equal exchange, balanced collaboration, and learning from the more advanced Korean cultural industries instead of being a mere recipient of Korean cultural products (X. Chen, 2021).

Besides the influential "Korea ban", K-pop groups have also been on the receiving end of nationalistic backlash from China whenever they inadvertently get caught up in controversial issues that are deemed to be politically sensitive in China. Chou Tzuyu is the Taiwanese member of JYPE's female idol group TWICE. In early 2016, a picture showing Chou Tzuyu waving the Republic of China flag in the Korean variety show *My Little Television* triggered a storm on social media. The artiste's flag-waving picture, JYPE's changes of the artiste's profile on the company's website and the arrangement of the artiste's apology video triggered widespread anger and displeasure from both mainland China and Taiwan. This vociferous response from people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait exposed not only the different mindsets of the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese but also their different nationalistic feelings. It also triggered the "Diba Expedition" in which mainland netizens flooded the Facebook pages of personalities

perceived to be pro-Taiwanese independence, including Tsai Ing-wen (the Chairman of the Progressive Democratic Party and President of the ROC) and SET News. “Diba” is actually Li Yi Ba, the Tieba forum for the Chinese soccer player Li Yi. Li Yi Ba is famous for being the most popular Tieba. Interestingly, the main weapons in this internet war were emoticons, not words. Emoticons with exaggerated facial expressions and ironic words featuring the former EXO member Huang Zitao were among the most used ones. This internet war had no winners or losers. It incited a heated exchange on both sides, and even led to the ironic exchange of emoticons. In late 2020, BTS’s comments over the Korean War also triggered Chinese netizens’ anger as they mentioned the “history of pain” shared by South Korea and the US (BBC, 2020). Chinese netizens were angered by BTS’s comments because they felt the group had ignored the suffering of Chinese soldiers in the war (BBC, 2020). BTS has been blamed on Chinese social media while Chinese fans of the K-pop group told each other to lie low on Weibo (BBC, 2020). Despite the outcry from mainland Chinese netizens, I did not observe a significant decrease of BTS’s followers on Weibo during and after the incident. While K-pop artistes’ remarks on issues that are politically sensitive in China tend to trigger nationalistic responses from Chinese netizens on social media, these have not significantly influenced K-pop as a genre in Chinese youngsters’ popular music consumption or its Chinese fanbase.

The pandemic wrought by COVID-19 that started at the end of 2019 badly restricted people’s mobility locally and internationally, as governments all over the world implemented social distancing measures and border controls to impede the spread of the disease. With the significant decrease in local and global exchanges, various in-person job and commercial activities have been suspended, negatively impacting the global economy as a result (World Bank, 2020a). Many industries have adopted historical changes during the pandemic. With fewer

physical connections and in-person physical activities, the internet has become even more important. However, the internet can also be a breeding ground for political tensions, as seen in the deteriorating Sino-Indian and Sino-US political relations throughout the pandemic (CNA, 2020; Shi, 2020). India has banned more than a hundred Chinese internet mobile applications (Pham & Gupta, 2020). The United States is similarly looking to ban Chinese social media applications TikTok and WeChat on grounds of national security (Singh, 2020). While these tensions and possible banning of Chinese social media applications could affect China in the long run, it does not change the fact that COVID-19 has prevented work in various sectors from being carried out normally and has consequently led to a decrease in revenue for the entertainment industry (P. He et al., 2020). Even so, the Chinese entertainment industry appears to be making use of the pandemic to develop itself due to significantly increased demands for entertainment from people who are isolating at home (P. He et al., 2020).

Owing to the rapidly developing Chinese idol industry, it has become difficult for a single Korean idol or idol group to carve out a significant market share in China. However, Chinese K-pop idols have stepped up as competitive players in the industry. Indeed, they are actively competing with China-produced idols from later idol survival shows and other platforms. TFBoys (2013-present), managed by Time Fengjun Entertainment (hereafter TF Entertainment, CN: Shidai Fengjun) is one such group. The members of TFBoys have been trained in China since 2011, and they came to public notice after covering popular songs on the internet. The group debuted when all the members were still aged between 13 and 14. Through idol-centric internet videos and programs, music, TV shows, movies, and brand endorsements, the three young members of TFBoys have become well-known names in China, and attracted enthusiastic fans from all age groups. A celebrity's online popularity can be determined by the number of

Weibo followers they have. As of March 2021, each of the three members of TFBoys has 80-90 million Weibo followers, and they are among the most followed users on Weibo. Chinese idol Cai Xukun, who emerged from a Chinese idol survival show in 2018, has 34 million followers; and Jackson Wang, a Chinese member of GOT7, has 26 million followers as of 29 March 2021. Their high number of Weibo followers is especially remarkable when compared against the most followed Korean celebrity on Weibo, actor Lee Min-ho, who had 29 million followers at the end of March 2021. The most followed non-Chinese K-pop artistes on Weibo are Psy, Choi Si-won from SJ and SJ-M, and Oh Se-hun from EXO who have 23 million, 16 million and 11 million Weibo followers, respectively, as of 29 March 2021.

While K-pop stars are competitive in the Chinese market, they are not in a position to fully take over the Chinese pop music scene. According to the monthly popularity ranking on the fandom platform Idol that is based on fans' constant votes, 13 Hallyu stars or groups are among the Top 50 stars polled in July 2020. The number of Hallyu stars in Idol's Top 50 list dropped to ten in March 2021. K-pop groups EXO, BTS, GOT7, and Blackpink; individual idols Lay and Baekhyun of EXO; soloists Hwang Chi-yeul, Lai Kuan Lin, and IU; and actor Lee Jun-ki remained in the Top 50 in both July 2020 and March 2021. Chinese idols TFBoys and Cai Xukun are notable for constantly ranking in the Top 10, as seen in the data retrieved on 16 August 2020 and 29 March 2021. There are, however, more Korean idols in the Top 100, with 26 and 27 Hallyu stars making the list as of 16 August 2020 and 29 March 2021, respectively.

Chinese ballads continue to dominate the market, even though more music genres have been brought to public attention through music festivals and variety shows. As with the pre-mobile internet period, TV talent shows continue to bring talents, especially ballad singers, to the Chinese music industry. A good example is *The Voice of China* (CN: *Zhongguo haoshengyin*),

later revamped as *Sing! China* (CN: *Zhongguo xingesheng*), that aired from 2012 to 2020. Mandopop singers who were popular between 2005 and 2011, including Jay Chou, Stefanie Sun (Sng Ee Tze), JJ Lin (Wayne Lim Jun Jie), remained so among audiences. Unlike their Korean counterparts, Chinese popular music does not actively seek to break into global markets or globalize their products on account of the fact that the markets of ethnic Chinese groups in various parts of the world are large enough (S. Shin, 2017). Independent music, folk, rock, hip-hop, rap, electronic music, and other genres have been increasingly promoted through music festivals like the Strawberry Music Festival, Modern Sky Festival, and Midi Music Festival, as well as through music variety shows like *Sing My Song* (CN: *Zhongguo haogequ*, 2014-2016), *The Rap of China* (CN: *Zhongguo youxiha/Zhongguo xinshuochang*, 2017-2020), *The Coming One* (CN: *Mingrizhizi*, 2017-2020), *Rave Now* (CN: *Jike dianyin*, 2018), and *The Big Band* (CN: *Yueduide xiatian*, 2019-2020). According to the digital album sales ranking on three major popular music platforms, the most popular genres are domestic idol music, domestic pop music, K-pop, Chinese K-pop idols' music, Gangtai pop, American pop and rock, original soundtracks (OSTs) for domestic films and dramas, and domestic rock. Thus, idol music has grown into a complete player in the Chinese popular music market, as the music genres in the market diversified.

Hard Carry: The K-Pop-Formatted Chinese Idol Industry

Many K-pop groups and solo artistes are popular among Chinese K-pop fans in the mobile internet period. They include SJ, Sunmi, Hyuna, EXO, BigBang, and IU, who debuted in the previous period (2005-2011), as well as newly debuted groups BTS, GOT7, Winner, Seventeen, iKon, Monsta X, NCT, Twice, and Blackpink. Other popular groups are the ones that debuted through the *Produce 101* franchise of idol survival shows, including I.O.I (2016-2017), Wanna

One (2017-2019), IZ*One (2018-2021), and X1 (2019-2020). Fans of K-pop idols tend to be more segmented. There are more than 500 Hallyu stars, including actors, solo singers, and idols, on the Idol fandom application as of 16 August 2020.

During this period, an increasing number of Chinese K-pop idols have been moving back to the China market, and the Korean and Chinese entertainment industries are stepping up their collaborative endeavors. In response to Sino-Korean political tensions and the sudden ban on Korean performing arts in China in 2016, the Chinese entertainment industry has taken the opportunity to learn from K-pop and create its own domestic idols and Korean-style TV programs. The huge China market and the improved production quality of its work have also attracted talents from overseas.

Chinese Talents and K-Pop

While holding concerts in Western countries did demonstrate K-pop's global influence and promoted Korea's national image, these events only attracted K-pop fan communities and did not bring the idols' management companies much economic benefits (J. O. Kim, 2016). On the contrary, the Japanese and Chinese markets were actually more profitable (J. O. Kim, 2016). SME puts in a lot of effort in the Japanese and Chinese markets even though the business opportunities in these countries are largely influenced by political and legal issues (J. O. Kim, 2016). Since 2005, SME has been targeting the Chinese market by recruiting members of Chinese descent and having their idols perform Chinese songs (J. O. Kim, 2016). Starting from Han Geng, at least 66 artistes of Chinese descent have debuted as K-pop idols (see Table 5.2). In 2014 and 2015, three of EXO's Chinese members, Wu Yifan (Kris), Lu Han (Luhan), and Huang Zitao (Tao), filed lawsuits against SME to terminate their contracts (J. O. Kim, 2016). The case

of EXO shows that the K-pop companies' strategy of recruiting Chinese talents specifically to target the China market is useful but risky. On the one hand, these idols are relatable to the public because they have the Chinese language in common and share similar life experiences in China. On the other, they may not be able to adapt to the cultural differences and workload in Korea, and consequently prefer concentrating their activities within China where the market is favorable to idols in the mobile internet period.

Table 5.2: K-pop idols of Chinese descent

Country and Region	Years Active	Name	Family Origin	K-pop Idol Group
Mainland China	2005-2009	Han Geng	Heilongjiang	SJ, SJ-M
	2009-2019	Song Qian (Victoria)	Shandong	f(x)
	2010-2016	Meng Jia (Jia)	Hunan	Miss A
	2010-2017	Wang Feifei (Fei)	Hainan	Miss A
	2011-2011	Deng Ningxin (Yijo)	Beijing	RaNia
	2012-2013	Gao Jialang (J.G)	Jilin	Cross Gene
	2012-2014	Lu Han (Luhan)	Henan	EXO, EXO-M
	2012-2015	Huang Zitao (Tao)	Shandong	EXO, EXO-M
		Zheng Dalong (Daeryoung)	Jilin	Tasty
		Zheng Xiaolong (Soryoung)	Jilin	Tasty
	2012-2017	Chu Xiaoxiang	Shanghai	Cross Gene

	(Casper)		
2012-2018	Cao Lu	Hunan	Fiestar
2013-2014	Zhang Bichen	Tianjin	Sunny Days
2014-2014	Qin Fen (Roi)	Jiangxi	The Legend
2014-2017	Xu Xiaohan (Hami)	Hunan	D.Holic
2015-2017	Liang Hui (Hui)	Jiangsu	24K
2016-2016	Wang Jingxi	Beijing	RaNia
	(Crystal)		
2016-2019	Zhou Jieqiong	Zhejiang	I.O.I, Pristin,
	(Kyulkyung)		Pristin V
2016-2020	Cheng Xiao	Hunan	WJSN
	Meng Meiqi	Henan	WJSN
	Wu Xuanyi	Hainan	WJSN
	Liu Xiening (Sally)	Guangdong	Gugudan
2017-2019	Fu Yingnan (Ttabo)	Hubei	RaNia
2017-2020	Deng Bin (Jaebin)	Hunan	Varsity, Varsity-V
	Wang Xinyu (Xin)	Hubei	Varsity, Varsity-V
	Xiao Dongcheng	Gansu	Varsity, Varsity-V
	(Manny)		
	Qiu Bohan (Damon)	Liaoning	Varsity, Varsity-V
2018-2019	Li Jiajia (Gaga)	Sichuan	Nature
2008-	Zhou Mi	Hubei	SJ-M
2012-	Zhang Yixing (Lay)	Hunan	EXO, EXO-M

2014-	Li Wenhan (Wenhan)	Zhejiang	UNIQ
2014-	Wang Yibo (Yibo)	Henan	UNIQ
2014-	Zhou Yixuan (Yixuan)	Zhejiang	UNIQ
2015-	Xu Minghao (The8)	Liaoning	Seventeen
2015-	Wen Junhui (Jun)	Guangdong	Seventeen
2016-	Dong Sicheng (Winwin)	Zhejiang	NCT, NCT 127, WayV
2016-	Huang Renjun (Renjun)	Jilin	NCT, NCT Dream
2016-	Zhong Chenle (Chenle)	Shanghai	NCT, NCT Dream
2016-	Yan An	Shanghai	Pentagon
2017-	Han Dong	Hubei	Dreamcatcher
2017-	Jin Longguo (Longguo)	Jilin	Longguo & Shihyun, JBJ
2018-	Wang Mengyu (Aurora)	Shanxi	Nature
2018-	Qian Kun (Kun)	Fujian	NCT, WayV
2018-	Song Yuqi (Yuqi)	Beijing	(G)I-DLE
2019-	Xiao Dejun (Xiaojun)	Guangdong	NCT, WayV
2019-	Wang Yiren (Yiren)	Zhejiang	Everglow

	2020-	Ning Yizhuo (Ningning)	Heilongjiang	Aespa
Hong Kong	2008-2011	Alexander Lee Eusebio (Alexander)	Hong Kong	U-KISS
	2016-2021	Elkie Chong (Elkie)	Guangdong	CLC
	2014-	Jackson Wang (Jackson)	Guangdong	GOT7
	2017-	Wong Ka Hei (ViVi)	Hong Kong	Loona, Loona 1/3
	2018-	Wong Yuk Hei (Lucas)	Hong Kong	NCT, WayV, SuperM
Taiwan	2015-	Chou Tzu-yu (Tzuyu)	Taiwan	TWICE
	2017-2019	Lai Kuan-lin	Taiwan	Wanna One, Wooseok x Kuanlin
	2018-	Yeh Shu-hua (Shuhua)	Taiwan	(G)I-DLE
Macau	2019-	Wong Kun Hang (Hendery)	Guangdong	NCT, WayV
USA	2009-2019	Amber Liu (Amber)	Heilongjiang	f(x)
	2017-2020	Anthony Lo (Anthony)	Unknown	Varsity, Varsity-V
	2014-	Mark Yien Tuan (Mark)	Hunan	GOT7

Canada	2008-2018	Henry Lau (Henry)	Guangdong	SJ-M
	2012-2014	Wu Yifan (Kris)	Hubei	EXO, EXO-M
Thailand	2014-	Kunpimook Bhuwakul (BamBam)	Guangdong	GOT7
	2016-	Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul (Ten)	Guangdong	NCT, WayV, SuperM
USA/Thailand	2008-	Nichkhun Buck Horvejkul (Nichkhun)	Hainan	2PM
Australia	2014-2017	Henry Prince Mak (Prince Mak)	Unknown	JJCC
Germany/Taiwan	2019-	Liu Yang-Yang (Yangyang)	Taiwan	NCT, WayV

Remarks: Huang Renjun is of Korean ethnicity. Alexander Lee Eusebio is half-Chinese and half-Korean. Wong Yuk Hei is half-Chinese and half-Thai. Kunpimook Bhuwakul's mother is half-Chinese and half-Thai, whereas his father's ancestry is unknown. Nichkhun Buck Horvejkul is three-quarters Chinese and a quarter Thai.

K-pop idols have filed lawsuits against their management companies to terminate their unfair contracts before. In July 2009, TVXQ's lawsuit against their long-time management company SME to terminate their contract gave the public a glimpse into the K-pop industry's

“slave contracts” and the dark side of being a K-pop star (S.-A. Lee, 2015). A K-pop idol’s public life is fully overseen and controlled by their management company (S.-A. Lee, 2015). The idols tend to be heavily exploited with inhuman workloads and unreasonable profit distributions, as their youthful looks and popularity only last for a short period in this very competitive industry, and the management companies wish to recoup the money they invested in the idols’ training and global promotion (S.-A. Lee, 2015). According to TVXQ members’ 13-year contracts with SME, the idols had to pay a huge amount in compensation if they broke the terms of their “slave contracts” but SME is under no obligation to make restitution to them (S.-A. Lee, 2015). The collective ethos and patriarchal management style of the K-pop idol management company system have set a gray area for labor exploitation (S.-A. Lee, 2015). The three TVXQ members’ lawsuit as well as their fans’ continued activism did succeed in bringing some improvement to the industry after a few years (S.-A. Lee, 2015). However, there was no marked change in the company-artiste relationship. As the pioneering Chinese K-pop idol, Han Geng won the lawsuit that he filed against SME’s unfair contract in December 2009, and thereafter began his new music and acting career in China (Xia, 2020).

EXO is among the most successful K-pop groups in the China market. It debuted in 2012 under the management of SME. The sub-units EXO-K and EXO-M were subsequently launched to target the Korea and China markets, respectively. Of the 12 members that made up EXO’s initial lineup, three are Chinese, and one is Chinese-Canadian. The popularity of EXO greatly increased after their hit song *Growl* was released in 2013 (Dong, 2020). EXO achieved great popularity in China, winning several awards and attracting a great number of Chinese fans (Sina Music, 2013; Dong, 2014; Xinhuanet, 2014). Between 2012 and 2015, EXO endorsed various brands in China, including fast-food chain KFC, beverage Master Kong Iced Red Tea (CN:

Kangshifu binghongcha), Aima electric motorcycles, fashion mobile application Meilishuo, and mobile game *Taming Monster* (CN: *Quanmin daguaishou*). In 2021, the group is still one of the most popular K-pop groups in China, even though it has undergone many changes in the past nine years. Each of EXO's Weibo accounts, namely EXO, EXO-M and EXO-K, have between 4 and 5 million followers as of 10 August 2020. The three EXO members who opened Weibo accounts, namely Sehun, Chanyeol, and Baekhyun, have between 3 and 11 million followers as of 10 August 2020. The most popular EXO fan account, EXO Bar, has 4 million followers as of 10 August 2020. Although male idol group BTS has also achieved global success (M. Liu, 2020), it is difficult to determine if BTS's popularity has superseded EXO's in the China market. As of 10 August 2020, the two BTS Weibo accounts have 1 million and 6 million followers, respectively. The most popular fan account, BTS Big Sister Cheering Site (CN: BTS Jiejie Yingyuan Zhan), has 2 million followers as of 10 August 2020.

In 2014, EXO's Wu Yifan and Lu Han filed lawsuits against SME to terminate their exclusive contracts with the company. The intermediation between the two artistes and SME lasted two years, and ended in July 2016 when the two sides reconciled (C. Shao, 2016; J. Yu, 2016). As a result, Wu Yifan and Lu Han are allowed to perform everywhere except in Korea and Japan, and they have to share revenues with SME until their exclusive contracts with the company expire in 2022 (C. Shao, 2016; J. Yu, 2016). Another EXO member Huang Zitao filed a lawsuit against SME for its unfair contract in 2015 but lost the final appeal in 2018 (Yonhap, 2018). Thus, Zhang Yixing is the only Chinese member left in EXO. Following the three members' departure for China, a great deal of discussion has arisen as to the K-pop companies' treatment of their artistes, the physical and mental health of the artistes, the different ways in which K-pop companies treated Korean and foreign artistes, and the issues surrounding the

betrayal of the artistes' trust (Chung, 2014; Honeykisses, 2019). When Zhang Yixing started his personal agency and focused on his solo activities in China in 2015, the EXO fandom debated whether he would leave the group (Koreaboo, 2015). Even though Zhang is still officially a member of EXO, he has been focusing on his solo activities outside Korea and hardly participating in the group's activities.

The domestic K-pop idols who choose to center their careers in China have gained much larger fanbases in China than K-pop idols who focus on their careers outside China. The former and current Chinese members of EXO have been mainly working in China since 2015. A comparison of the number of Weibo followers of EXO's Korean members against those of its former and current Chinese members on 11 August 2020 shows that the latter have between 50 and 60 million followers, four times as many as the Korean members. After their return to China, Wu Yifan, Lu Han, Huang Zitao, and Zhang Yixing have been more actively endorsing many domestic and international luxury brands, such as Audemars Piguet, Chaumet, Cartier, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Burberry, Yves Saint Laurent, Bvlgari, and Valentino.

Similar to Zhang Yixing who is simultaneously in a K-pop group and pursuing a solo career in China, Jackson Wang from JYPE's male group GOT7 started his solo activities in China as the host of the variety show *Go Fridge* (CN: *Baituole bingxiang*), which is the Chinese version of the Korean variety show *Chef & My Fridge* (KR: *Naengjanggorŭl put'ak'ae*) that has been ongoing since 2015. Jackson Wang's personal agency was established in China in 2017. However, unlike Zhang, Wang continues to perform as part of GOT7 in other parts of the world, even though he acts as a solo artiste in China and has ceased activities as a GOT7 member in Japan.

The commercial success of former or current Chinese K-pop idols in China may be largely attributed to the “Korea ban” that has kept the majority of K-pop idols out of China. This restriction on foreign competitors has therefore reduced the competition in the Chinese idol industry. The previous legal cases between K-pop companies and individual K-pop idols over the artistes’ contracts actually paved the way for Chinese K-pop idols to seek opportunities elsewhere, and develop freer and more profitable solo careers in China.

K-Pop Idols and Korean-Formatted Chinese Variety Shows

The popularity of Korean-formatted variety shows in China highlights that there is an audience for Chinese versions of Korean TV programs. Thus, Chinese versions of such Korean variety shows, co-produced by both China and Korea, have garnered considerable audienceship among the Chinese general public. These shows are avenues through which K-pop idols can heighten audience awareness as to their profiles and work, and build connections with their existing and potential fans. Idol survival shows are among the variety show formats that the Chinese entertainment industry has adapted from the Koreans. More importantly, these idol survival shows have helped to develop the Chinese idol industry. The participation of former and current K-pop idols and trainees in these shows serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, it helps to develop their music and entertainment careers in the Chinese market. Secondly, they are able to assist in the development of the Chinese idol industry.

While K-pop differentiated itself from other music genres in the Chinese market in the analog media period and pre-mobile internet period, K-pop is currently experiencing a confluence with Chinese idol music. The idol survival show has become a popular format in the present mobile internet period. After the success of Mnet’s K-pop idol survival franchise

Produce 101 (2016-2019) in Korea, China began producing Chinese versions of *Produce 101* in 2018 and continues to do so in 2021. Interest in idols and Korean-style variety shows did not wane under the “Korea ban”, even though most K-pop idols could not appear on Chinese screens. To keep up with audience demands for such shows and similar idols, the Chinese entertainment industry produced idol survival shows. This, in turn, led to the flourishing of idol-style TV talent shows in China (see Table 5.3). Non-Korean K-pop idols have been invited to be mentors in the shows, and non-Korean K-pop trainees have joined as contestants. Some of the notable mentors include Song Qian and Amber Liu of f(x), former Miss A members Wang Feifei and Meng Jia, the four former and current Chinese EXO members, Mark Yien Tuan and Jackson Wang of GOT7, Wang Yibo of UNIQ, Xu Minghao of Seventeen, Cheng Xiao of WJSN, former I.O.I and Pristin member Zhou Jieqiong, and Lalisa Manoban (Lisa) of Blackpink. Former or current SME, JYPE, Cube Entertainment, Pledis Entertainment, and RBW trainees, as well as former K-pop idols like Zhou Yixuan and Li Wenhan of UNIQ, Liu Xiening of Gugudan, and Meng Meiqi and Wu Xuanyi of WJSN have likewise taken part in these shows as contestants.

Table 5.3: Localizations and appropriations of K-pop idol survival show *Produce 101* by Chinese TV and entertainment industries

Year	Title	Video Platform	Debuted Group
2018	<i>Idol Producer (Ouxiang lianxisheng)</i>	iQiyi	Nine Percent (<i>Baifenjiu shaonian</i>)
	<i>Produce 101 (Chuangzao 101)</i>	Tencent Video	Rocket Girls 101 (<i>Huojian shaonü 101</i>)

2019	<i>All For One (Yituanzhiming)</i>	Youku	New Storm (<i>Xin fengbao</i>), Black Ace (<i>Heitao A</i>)
	<i>Youth With You Season 1 (Qingchunyouni diyiji)</i>	iQiyi	Unine (<i>Youjiu shaonian</i>)
	<i>Chuang 2019 (Chuangzaoying 2019)</i>	Tencent Video	R1se
2020	<i>Youth With You Season 2 (Qingchunyouni dierji)</i>	iQiyi	The9
	<i>Chuang 2020 (Chuangzaoying 2020)</i>	Tencent Video	BonBon Girls 303 (<i>Yingtang shaoü 303</i>)
	<i>We Are Young (Shaonianzhiming)</i>	Youku	S.K.Y (<i>Tiankong shaonian</i>)
2021	<i>Chuang 2021 (Chuangzaoying 2021)</i>	Tencent Video	INTO1
	<i>Youth With You Season 3 (Qingchunyouni disanji)</i>	iQiyi	Not Applicable

Remarks: iQiyi's *Youth With You Season 3* ceased airing at the end of May 2021 when a scandal surrounding the family of the most popular contestant, Yu Jingtian, was reported, and fans of the show were criticized on the internet for spending too much money on crowdfunding and wasting resources (Yau, 2021).

The popularity of Korean variety shows in China resulted in Chinese TV and entertainment industries producing Korean-formatted Chinese variety shows. Starting from *Infinite Challenge* (KR: *Muhandojŏn*) in 2005, the Korean television industry shifted variety

show production from in-studio comedy programs to reality-based variety ones that utilize many cameras, are filmed on location, and showcase the pseudo-real personalities and personal lives of celebrities (J. O. Kim & Huang, 2017). During this period, an increasing number of Korean variety shows became popular among Chinese audiences, including *Running Man* (KR: *Rönningmaen*, 2010-present) and *Dad! Where Are We Going?* (KR: *Appa! ödiga?*, 2013-2015). Korean variety shows have been exerting a strong influence on the Chinese variety show industry, despite ongoing debates over copyright infringement among the industries and the public in both countries. Since HSTV's Chinese versions of *I Am a Singer* (KR: *Nanŭn kasuda*) and *Dad! Where Are You Going?* in 2013, many Chinese variety shows have continued to be either inspired by Korean variety shows or copying their program formats. They appear to do this openly, with or without copyright authorization. Korean production teams have been collaborating with their Chinese counterparts to produce Chinese versions of Korean variety shows. Some examples of Chinese remakes of popular Korean variety shows are HSTV's *Dad! Where Are We Going?* (CN: *Baba qunaer*, 2013-2018) and *I Am a Singer* (CN: *Woshi geshou*, 2013-2020), and Zhejiang Satellite TV's *Running Man* (CN: *Benpaoba xiongdi/Benpaoba*, 2014-2020). Unfortunately, some Chinese variety shows have changed their program titles and ceased collaborating with Korean production teams so as to keep in line with the "Korea ban". However, it does not seem to have negatively impacted Chinese variety show productions. Chinese variety programs have been developing quickly over the years to demonstrate more originality and creativity, as well as improved quality.

Despite the successful adaptations of Korean variety show formats in general, Chinese music chart shows have failed to perform well. Inspired by Korean music chart shows, iQiyi collaborated with Billboard China to produce a Chinese music chart show called *Idol Hits* (CN:

Zhongguo yinyue gonggaopai, 2018) (Hu, 2018). QQ Music followed suit and produced *Yo! Bang* (CN: *Youni yinyuebang*, 2018). These two music chart shows were produced when a group of domestic idols had emerged from the Chinese remakes of the Korean idol survival show *Produce 101* in 2018. However, these two shows did not continue after the first season of twelve episodes. It indicates that the burgeoning Chinese idol industry has not grown to a level where it can sustain idol-focused music chart shows.

Korean variety show formats and Korean production teams are employed by the Chinese entertainment industries (Zheng & Geng, 2015). Likewise, the number of K-pop idols appearing in Chinese variety shows has increased. On the one hand, the pseudo-reality nature of variety shows helps audiences to relax or escape from their real lives; on the other, such programs also assist in the building of a para-social relationship between celebrities and audiences, and trigger public discussions on hot-button issues (J. O. Kim & Huang, 2017). In this way, the reality show is a good avenue for idols to show their pseudo-real personalities, and connect with their potential and existing fans. In 2015, the members of K-pop idol groups, such as Shinhwa, Infinite, SJ, ZE:A, Block B, F.T.Island, 2AM, 2PM, VIXX, GOT7, Girl's Day, and EXID, appeared in *Dream Team* (KR: *Ch'ulbal tŭrimt'im*, CN: *Zhonghan mengzhidui*), a co-production between KBS and Shenzhen Satellite TV. A co-production between CJ E&M and Hubei Satellite TV, *Perhaps Love* (CN: *Ruguo ai*, 2014-2017), featured Kim Hee-chul from SJ, Henry Lau from SJ-M, Wang Feifei from Miss A, and Hwang Chan-sung from 2PM. This show has been dubbed a copycat version of MBC's *We Got Married*. The first season of *We Are in Love* (CN: *Women xiangai*), the copyrighted Chinese version of *We Got Married*, aired in 2015 and featured Choi Si-won from SJ. *The Collaborations* (CN: *Zuoqianba oushang*, 2016), a variety show co-produced by China's Tencent and Korea's SBS, featured collaborative music performances

between teams made up of a Chinese singer and a Korean singer. Four singers, Wang Yuexin, Hu Xia, Xue Zhiqian, and Yu Tian, are from China; while the other four, namely Jay Park, Woo Ji-ho (Zico of Block B), Kang Seung-yoon (Seungyoon of Winner), and Song Min-ho (Mino of Winner), are from Korea.

However, Korean faces disappeared from Chinese screens following the “Korea ban” in late 2016, and Chinese K-pop idols have taken their place by appearing on Chinese variety shows continuously. Through popular variety shows, Chinese K-pop idols were able to localize themselves in the China market. Although the Chinese variety show *Go Fighting!* (CN: *Jixian tiaozhan*, 2015-present) has been criticized as a copycat version of *Infinite Challenge* produced by Korea’s MBC, it has been called a phenomenal program because it achieved an audience rating of 1.2% in its first episode and its audience ratings have been increasing ever since (Duan, 2015). As a host of the show, Zhang Yixing of EXO gradually became a well-known name among the general public in China when he started his solo activities in 2015. The popularity of GOT7’s Jackson Wang also significantly increased after he became one of the hosts of *Go Fridge* (2015-present). Similarly, Lu Han’s popularity soared after he became one of the hosts of the Chinese version of *Running Man* in 2015 and 2016. Chinese-Canadian Henry Lau became well known in China after he appeared in the Chinese version of *Sisters over Flowers* (KR: *Kkotpoda nuna*) titled *Huayang jiejie* in 2016, and *Back to Field* (CN: *Xiangwangde shenghuo*)—a copycat version of TVN’s *Three Meals a Day* (KR: *Samshisekki*)—in 2017 and 2018.

Chinese Capital in the Idol Music Industries in Korea and China

In 2014, Jackie Chan's Jackie Chan Group Korea debuted a male idol group called JJCC in Korea. However, this group did not achieve sustained popularity. A Chinese multinational entertainment group and talent agency, Yue Hua Entertainment (YHE), was established by Du Hua in 2009. In 2014, YHE debuted a male idol group called UNIQ in Korea and China. This group marked the starting point for mainland Chinese companies' appearance in the K-pop industry. UNIQ is made up of three Chinese members (Zhou Yixuan, Li Wenhan, Wang Yibo), and two Korean members (Kim Sung-joo and Cho Seung-youn). UNIQ is a collaborative effort between YHE and YGE. While the group did not succeed at the beginning, most of the group members became well known subsequently. Zhou Yixuan debuted again as the leader of New Storm (CN: Xin fengbao) that had won the Chinese idol survival show *All For One* in 2019. Li Wenhan won first place in *Youth With You Season 1* (2019), and debuted as the leader and center of Unine. Wang Yibo has been one of the hosts of the popular HSTV variety show *Day Day Up* (CN: *Tiantianxiangshang*) since 2016, and became increasingly popular after he acted as a dance mentor in Tencent Video's *Produce 101* in 2018. Cho Seung-youn won fifth place in Mnet's *Produce X 101* in 2019, and subsequently debuted in X1. Kim Sung-joo has been active in variety shows and TV dramas in both China and Korea. YHE also collaborated with K-pop company Starship to debut a female idol group WJSN (also known as Cosmic Girls) in 2016. WJSN is composed of ten Korean members and three Chinese members. The company later debuted YHBoys, NEXT, Everglow, and D5 in China and Korea. The artistes managed by YHE have been active in both China and Korea's idol music scenes. For instance, Choi Ye-na, who is represented by YHE, won fourth place in Mnet's *Produce 48* in 2018, and debuted in IZ*One.

Project Banana (CN: Xiangjiao jihua) was established by Wang Sicong in 2015. Later that same year, Project Banana signed the popular K-pop female idol group T-ara. In 2016, the company signed another female group EXID, and former Miss A member Meng Jia. Trainees from Project Banana have also been active in idol survival shows in China. Chinese trainee Lin Yanjun and Chinese-Malaysian trainee Yu Chang Chin won fifth and ninth places, respectively, in iQiyi's *Idol Producer* (2018) and debuted in the group Nine Percent. Within that same year, Fu Jing won tenth place in Tencent Video's *Chuang 2020* and debuted in Rocket Girls 101 (CN: Huojian shaonü 101). NCC Entertainment (CN: Xinsheng yule) is a joint-venture company of TME and JYPE China. NCC debuted a teenage boy group Boystory in 2018. This all-Chinese boy group had been trained in Korea, and performs in Mandarin in the mainland and Taiwan. L.TAO Entertainment (CN: Longtao yule) was established in Beijing in 2018. This company's largest shareholder is Huang Zitao. It manages former SME Chinese trainee Xu Yiyang who participated in Tencent Video's *Chuang 2020*. Besides Jackie Chan Group Korea and YHE, the cases of Project Banana, NCC Entertainment, and L.Tao Entertainment demonstrate a confluence of Korean and Chinese idol industries in which Korean and Chinese companies as well as idol industry practitioners work for both markets.

The Influence of the “Korea Ban” and COVID-19 on K-Pop in China

The Chinese government enacted the “Korea ban” as a knee-jerk reaction to Korea's implementation of the THAAD system. The sanctions that it imposed on Korean performing and entertainment arts in China in August 2016 are still ongoing. Although the “Korea ban” was never officially announced or issued as a public policy, Chinese video platforms exercised self-censorship by removing copyrighted Korean TV dramas and variety shows from their websites

and ceased providing the latest episodes. Likewise, K-pop concerts were cancelled, and the images of some Korean artistes were either removed or blurred out in Chinese variety shows (NetEase Entertainment, 2016a, 2016b; Qianzhan, 2017). Jiangsu Satellite TV's music variety show *Heroes of Remix* (CN: *Gaishiyixiong*) is an example of where this occurred. The show started broadcasting on 19 June 2016. K-pop soloist and groups, including Psy, Monsta X, iKon, and VIXX, appeared in the show but suddenly disappeared from 21 August 2016 onwards when Episode 9 aired. These featured Korean artistes were probably edited out and their images in the remaining portions of the program were blurred out (NetEase Entertainment, 2016b).

However, non-Korean K-pop artistes could continue their activities in China without any obstacles. The Chinese K-pop idols who had already embarked on solo activities in China, such as Zhang Yixing, Song Qian, and Jackson Wang, experienced a surge in popularity. Zhang, Song, and Wang were still considered K-pop artistes, even though they started their solo careers in China and started to perform Chinese-language songs. They were K-pop artistes since they were under contract to K-pop companies, made use of K-pop production (e.g., K-pop music producers and MV directors), and contributed to the profits of their K-pop companies (SME and JYPE). After their debut in China as solo artistes, Zhang, Song, and Wang are still official members of K-pop groups, and Wang still performs in his K-pop group GOT7 in and beyond Korea. The Chinese idol industry has thrived during the "Korea ban" because of the market's demand for young idols and the increasing difficulty faced by fans in watching productions with their K-pop idols. Indeed, a number of Chinese idols have risen to the forefront and Chinese idol music is quickly gaining popularity. As evinced in the many instances of China-Korea co-productions in idol and variety shows, the close collaboration between China and Korea's music and entertainment industries were not cut down during the ban. This is because these Korean and

Chinese companies have worked around it. A fine example of Sino-Korean collaboration in the idol industry can be seen in the work that went on behind the scenes to produce the male idol group WayV. WayV debuted in 2019 in China, is promoted as a Chinese idol group and sings in Mandarin. On the surface, this appears to be true as all the WayV members are Chinese nationals or ethnic Chinese from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Thailand. However, WayV is actually an overseas localized sub-unit of SME's male group NCT, and is overseen by SME's China-exclusive label, Label V. In iQiyi's idol survival show *Youth With You Season 2* and *Season 3* (2020-2021), Blackpink's Thai member Lalisa Manoban (Lisa) was invited as a mentor. During the show, Lisa was introduced as a Thai celebrity, and no mention was made of her K-pop group or her career in Korea. However, after K-pop returned following the slight loosening of the ban in 2019 (Hwang, 2019; KBS World Radio, 2019), the effects of the restrictions on Korean celebrities and Korean pop culture content became clear. In a market that now had increasingly popular Chinese idols, it was harder for K-pop artistes to create a sensation in China like H.O.T., SJ, Girls' Generation, BigBang, and EXO did in the past.

The "Korea ban" did negatively influence the distribution of TV programs and TV dramas produced by Korean companies as well as the ones co-produced by Chinese and Korean companies in Chinese mainstream media channels, including satellite TV channels and online video platforms. In addition, Korean faces also disappeared from Chinese variety shows. However, when copyrighted Korean programs and dramas disappeared from licensed platforms, audiences turned to online uncopyrighted contents reminiscent of the way they would watch Korean programs before Chinese video platforms purchased Korean contents. In 2021, Netflix's Korean TV drama *Squid Game* was a big hit in China even though it has never been officially released in China (Tan, 2021). While the "Korea ban" has hurt Korean companies and their

related stakeholders' rights and economic gains, it did not significantly influence Chinese audiences' exposure to Korean-related content and their affect towards it.

As mentioned earlier, K-pop has been for a niche market in China. Consequently, the suppression of Korean popular culture in mainstream Chinese media had more of an impact on Korean TV dramas and variety shows in China than on the popularity of K-pop in the country. After the ban, K-pop artistes could no longer hold large-scale concerts and fanmeets. However, this may not influence K-pop fans in general, as not every K-pop fan could afford the expensive tickets when the concerts and fanmeets were available to them in the country. Some K-pop fans did pay attention to and spend money on local idols while some others may still travel to Korea to attend their idols' concerts, fanmeets, and other K-pop events (before the COVID-19). But the majority of fans continued to access K-pop content online and through the purchase of K-pop paraphernalia. The official release of K-pop music and MVs on Chinese music streaming platforms and the purchasing of physical albums from Korea were unaffected by the ban. In this way, the "Korea ban" has not significantly influenced the popularity of K-pop in China.

According to my observations, idol fan culture has long been seen as excessive among the public in China. Chinese K-pop fans tend to hide their fan identities and how much they have spent on celebrities in front of their parents. Even though they may enthusiastically create K-pop-related contents online, they are very unlikely to actively disclose their fan practices to others if they are not asked about it. Throughout the "Korea ban", I have not observed any lasting tensions, identity crashes, discomfort, or concerns over nationalism in Chinese K-pop fandom. This may possibly be due to Chinese fans being inured to the unstable international relations as well as their tendency to keep their fan identities hidden.

The K-pop industry has quickly adapted to the situation wrought by the global pandemic. Instead of holding concerts, fansign events, and events that require physical gatherings and travelling, K-pop companies held online concerts, fan meetings, and fansigns. SME and JYPE even came together to launch Beyond Live Corporation (BLC), an online concert company (Yonhap, 2020). Beijing Aidou Culture Media Corporation (better known as Yizhiyu) organizes K-pop idols' fansign events in China in pre-COVID-19 times. It continues to do so, albeit online. As of June 2020, the company has organized more than ten online fansign events involving Mamamoo, EXO, GOT7, NU'EST, Astro, Cravity, NCT, Lovelyz, and Park Ji-hoon (Yulexiaoguitou, 2020). Fans purchase albums through mobile internet applications or websites to join the lucky draw for a one-on-one video call with their K-pop idol. Online K-pop concerts and fanmeets have been held during the pandemic. GOT7's Jinyoung held an online fanmeet titled *Hear, Here* on the livestreaming platform Bbangya TV, and tickets for this event were sold through the Ticketlink website (Ticketlink, 2020).

The Influence of K-Pop in China Beyond Idol Music

The management strategies and fan cultures of K-pop idols have not only been utilized for Chinese idols; they have also been adopted as the idol culture for various performers in China. An example of this can be seen in HSTV's variety show *Super-Vocal* (CN: *Shengrurenxin*, 2018-2019). Unlike most TV talent shows, *Super-Vocal* is a competition among classically trained singers who perform operas and songs from musicals. While the program does not feature idol dance music, it is produced like any other idol survival show as it focuses on the candidates' personalities, good looks, singing abilities, and performance skills. These aspects of the contestants are prominently highlighted in the show and through various materials online such as

images, videos, and social media updates. In each season, six candidates would be selected to form a group, tour in China, and release albums. Another variety show by HSTV, *Sisters Who Make Waves* (CN: *Chengfengpolangde jiejie*, 2020-present), invites 30 established Chinese female celebrities, including singers and actresses, so as to train them to perform idol dance music and finally debut as a seven-member idol group.

The adoption of idol culture brings new audiences to a popular culture genre. However, it has garnered some criticism from existing audiences and the mass media, especially when it is applied to a traditional vocal art form such as xiangsheng. Xiangsheng, or crosstalk, is a traditional Chinese comedic performing art form performed overwhelmingly by males. Performed by one or more performers, a xiangsheng performance mainly involves talking, and sometimes singing and acting. Deyunshe, or the Deyun Association, is a popular commercial xiangsheng organization. Deyunshe performance videos and audios are widely disseminated online. Its performers also act in variety shows, TV dramas and movies, and run their own personal social media accounts to communicate with fans. The popularity of Deyunshe performer Zhang Yunlei began in August 2016 when he appeared in the third season of *Xiaoao Jianghu*, a comedy variety show produced by Dragon TV (Sihan, 2018). Zhang's popularity surged right after the "Korea ban" when Korean idols suddenly disappeared from Chinese screens. Starting from Zhang, young male Deyunshe performers began attracting young female fans who treated them as idols, engaged in all kinds of fan practices usually practiced by idol fans, including fancam recordings, repetitive voting and purchasing, and cheering events (Nanjiang, 2018; *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, 2019). Zhang's fans broke the rules of traditional xiangsheng audience culture when they waved their green lightsticks as he sang *Tanqingshuihe*, a traditional Beijing folk song, in effect behaving as though they were at an

idol's concert (Sina Entertainment, 2019). Some cultural commentators argued that idol culture and fan culture have negatively influenced traditional xiangsheng culture and xiangsheng audience culture, while others deemed the adoption of idol culture and fan culture as effective ways of promoting traditional cultures to the younger generations (Sihan, 2018; *Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly*, 2019).

Chinese K-Pop Fans

The majority of contemporary Chinese K-pop fans are urban females in their teens or twenties who are students or office workers. They mainly belong to the post-90s (born between 1990 and 1999) and post-00s (born between 2000 and 2009) generations. Not only did they grow up in a media-saturated, fast developing, and diversified society, they also experience unprecedented opportunities, and face many pressures from society to excel in their studies and careers (J. Fu, 2018; C. Li, 2018). The post-90s generation's non-mainstream subculture (known as *feizhuliu* in Chinese) in the mid-2000s shows that they made use of the internet to explore different subcultures and negotiate their own identities (Qiu, 2013). The post-00s generation in big cities are also "digital natives" who naturally live in the convergent media environment (W. He, 2017, pp. 1-43). Research has found that young Chinese internet users are media savvy, as they know how to carefully differentiate private and public spaces on social media, flexibly make use of different social media platforms, and put on different online identities to supplement or escape from their offline lives (J. Fu, 2018). Since 2016, the emerging *Sang* subculture among Chinese youths—through which they express feelings of defeatism, disenchantment, hopelessness, and disconsolation—demonstrates the extent to which they feel incapacitated in their increasingly competitive society but yet do not wish to challenge the national ideology or the status quo (Tan

& Cheng, 2020). Thus, contemporary Chinese youths turn to the internet and media to ease their anxiety and the pressure they feel.

During the mobile internet period, K-pop fans practice their fandom on internet platforms. Fans have come to organize themselves in somewhat more equal ways, as the structure of social networks affords them more opportunities to become influential online. The previous hierarchies in fan communities are now weakened because individual fans are able to interact with their idols and fellow fans directly on social media. As more idol-related information may be spread on social media, individual fans have come to hold less exclusive information. Fans are therefore able to use social media to gain power through new ways, including through increasing fan production. Owing to the growing power of fan communities on social media, the authority of K-pop companies vis-à-vis news and information on the idols appears to have diminished. Weibo is an important source of information for Chinese K-pop fans. K-pop fans on Weibo are very active and provide all kinds of K-pop-related information and resources. In contrast, K-pop companies and K-pop idols are not as active as fans in posting information. Thus, when fans follow fan accounts, they are able to access not only officially released information and resources but also information and resources provided by other fans. As of 16 August 2020, Oh Se-hun (EXO's most popular Korean member) has 11 million followers on Weibo, the group EXO has 3 million followers, and EXO's management company SME has only 1 million followers. Fans' reliance on fandom accounts as resources can be seen in the 4 million people following the EXO Bar fandom account as of 16 August 2020. In the succeeding chapters, I will analyze GOT7's Chinese fandom as a case study to demonstrate the evolution of K-pop fandom in China in the mobile internet period.

Conclusion

During the mobile internet period, K-pop in China came under strict state regulations due to political conflicts and public health concerns. Similar to what has been pointed out in research by McLaren and Jin (2020), Min et al. (2018), and C. Oh (2020), one of the external factors that has helped to maintain the popularity of K-pop in China is the utilization of mobile internet services, internet platforms, unlicensed internet content, and online UGCs. When cross-border travels are restricted for both Korean stars and Chinese fans, and copyrighted media content decreases, the internet and fan productions maintain the connections between K-pop and Chinese fans. A variety of mobile internet platforms are available for fan practices. They have not only changed the ways in which fans connect with their idols and fellow fans, but also fan practices and the meaning of these practices. The continued popularity of mainland and Gangtai ballads notwithstanding, the public has been increasingly enjoying other music genres, such as folk, rock, hip-hop, rap, electronic music, and American pop music. Another reason for the popularity of K-pop in China in the mobile internet period that is not covered in existing studies is the role played the prospering Chinese idol industry and its employment of K-pop talents. The local Chinese idol music industry has been growing rapidly to fill the void left by the “Korea ban”. To win over the fans of pop music, the Chinese idol industry has come to be heavily influenced by the K-pop model. It has also sought collaborations with the Korean entertainment industry. This seems to be a successful strategy as the demand for young idols in the China market has increased. Thus, it can be said that co-productions between the Chinese and Korean music and entertainment industries, the burgeoning Chinese internet industry, as well as the restrictions on K-pop during the “Korea ban” have resulted in the development of Chinese idol music. K-pop’s employment of non-Korean, especially Chinese, artistes, as well as Chinese K-pop idols’ appearances in TV

dramas, films, and variety shows help K-pop attract new fans and maintain existing fans, and in this way, contribute to the popularity of K-pop in China during this period. These internal factors for the popularity of K-pop in China have not been identified in existing academic writings. Attracted by the lucrative Chinese market, the K-pop idol system, K-pop idols, as well as K-pop programs have gradually localized themselves in China along with the flows of human resources and capital. K-pop has also been incorporated into the Chinese idol music scene, as seen in the many Chinese versions of the *Produce 101* TV talent shows. K-pop's idol culture and fan culture have been influential on other performing arts in China, even though K-pop only occupies a fragment of the Chinese popular music market. The next chapters will delve into these changing practices and their altered meanings, thus highlighting the growth of Chinese K-pop fandom in the mobile internet period in greater detail.

Part II:

Chinese K-Pop Fan Practices and Idols

Chapter 6

Fan Consumption⁹

Introduction

This chapter and the two following ones will focus on Chinese K-pop fan practices and idols in the mobile internet period. I will do so by looking at GOT7, its members, and its Chinese fandom. Chapters 6 and 7 will examine Chinese K-pop fan practices from the perspectives of consumption and production, respectively. Chapter 8 will go on to explore the issue of K-pop idols' multiple identity presentations through the case study of GOT7's Hong Kong-born Chinese member, Jackson.

This chapter is based on the data generated from my participant observations and will use my investigation of GOT7's Chinese fan consumption practices to delve into Chinese K-pop fans' consumption practices. K-pop fan consumption and production can be seen as different sides of the same coin. They have often been treated as separate topics. By employing Marx's (1887 [1977], pp. 283-306) concepts of individual consumption and productive consumption, as well as Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of social capital and cultural capital, this chapter demonstrates the uniqueness of fan consumption, how it differs from the common understanding of audience consumption, the meanings of such fan consumption, as well as how it contributes to the popularity of K-pop in China and the various Korean industries. In my analysis, fan consumption is not only about the products and services provided by the K-pop industry; it also includes the products and services provided by K-pop fans and related industries, such as media and entertainment, technology, travel and accommodation, so on.

⁹ All participant names referenced in this chapter are pseudonyms.

It is difficult to calculate the exact number of GOT7 Chinese fans. The GOT7 official Weibo account and GOT7 Super Topic on Weibo have 1.3 million and 0.3 million followers, respectively. Based on the common adoption of Weibo in contemporary K-pop fandom in China, I estimate there are between 0.3 and 1.3 million GOT7 fans. Most offline K-pop events, with the exception of concerts at stadiums that have capacities of over 10,000 people, are held on a small scale. Fanmeetings are generally open to no more than 1,000 to 3,000 persons. For other events, the participant scales are smaller, ranging from several dozen to several hundred (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: GOT7's *CALL MY NAME* album Qingdao fansign event

The GOT7 fans I encountered during my fieldwork are overwhelmingly young females living in big cities; they are mostly high school students, college students, and office workers starting out in their careers. Going by the GOT7 offline events and online spaces I have participated in, I estimate that males account for less than 1% in the Chinese GOT7 fandom. According to several female fans I met, the idols and staff treat fans of different genders distinctively in regard to matters of physical and social intimacy. Female fans will be expelled by staff if they are suspected to touch the male idols without permission, or are deemed to be getting too close to the male idols. However, at Mark's fansign in Chengdu, Mark addressed a male fan as "brother" because he recognized the fan as someone who had attended the previous day's fanmeet. When taking a photograph, the male fan could touch Mark's shoulder, a deed which would have been impossible for female fans.

Categorization of K-Pop Fan Consumption

Chinese K-pop fans consume the products and services produced by K-pop companies, media channels, K-pop stars, as well as K-pop fans, intermediaries, and related industries. Based on the data generated from my fieldwork, I propose a categorization of K-pop fan consumption delineated according to the different producers of the products and services that Chinese K-pop fans consume (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Categorization of K-pop fan consumption

Category of Consumption	Content of consumption
Formal consumption	Content and merchandise
	Fansign event

	Live performance
Informal consumption	Content and merchandise
	Agent services
	Fan event
Auxiliary consumption	Internet services
	Express services
	Financial services
	Transportation and accommodation services
	Catering services
	Advertising, fashion, cosmetics, and other consumer goods

Formal consumption refers to the consumption of products and services directly produced by the K-pop companies, K-pop stars, and the media channels permitted by the K-pop companies. These products and services are deemed official and legitimate because they are endorsed by the K-pop idol's management company. Examples of these products and services include physical and digital media content, physical merchandise, live performances, and fansign events where K-pop idols' interactions with fans is done as a form of service.

However, K-pop consumption, especially in the transnational context, has to include informal consumption whereby fans consume products and services that are not endorsed or acknowledged by the K-pop companies. These products and services are usually produced by fans and other agents. Chinese K-pop fans' consumption of K-pop is largely mediated and reliant

on informal consumption because of the existence of barriers to transnational consumption. There are three types of informal consumption.

The first type is the consumption of content and merchandise produced by fans and other parties that are not openly legitimized by the K-pop industry. Fans take pictures and shoot videos of K-pop idols using their smartphones or DSLR cameras, upload these contents on social media (e.g., Weibo and Twitter), and produce physical products (e.g., banners, fans, calendars, etc.) based on these images and videos. Peddlers also sell unofficial K-pop-related products around concert venues. The second type of informal consumption involves the consumption of agent services, including content transfer and translation as well as delegated purchase and ticketing agent services. A large number of Chinese K-pop fans can neither access foreign media platforms and contents easily nor understand the Korean language thoroughly. They consume the K-pop content that have been transferred to Chinese internet platforms (e.g., social media like Weibo and video streaming platform like Bilibili) and translated into Chinese, or subtitled in Chinese by fans. Delegated purchase is where one or more fans delegate someone else to purchase items on their behalves. Chinese fans usually purchase K-pop albums and merchandise through agents since these products are not commonly imported to China. When fans intend to reduce expenses or avoid the bothersome process of using foreign websites or making payments in foreign currencies, they would turn to agents on Chinese internet platforms. People can find purchase agents on Weibo, the online shopping platform Taobao, and the integrated fandom platform Owhat. There are famous delegate purchase agents in fandoms who are already connected to many fans on the instant messaging applications like WeChat and QQ. These agents can be fan organizations or individual fans, as well as individual agents or online shops. Chinese K-pop fan organizations have established a process for the delegated purchases of K-

pop albums at costs that are lower than the listed prices. For instance, many Chinese K-pop fan organizations, including GOT7's fan organizations, are in long-term cooperation with the Korean online shopping site Ktown4u. Other agents usually order albums and merchandise in bulk and collectively ship them to China to reduce international shipping fees. Chinese K-pop fans also encounter difficulties when purchasing concert tickets on foreign websites. Some fans prefer to sit in the best seats even if it means buying from scalpers to whom they are already connected via Weibo, WeChat, or other platforms, and paying a much higher price than the officially quoted one. Fans and scalpers work as ticketing agents too. It can sometimes be difficult to differentiate fans from scalpers. The third type of informal consumption is fan events, such as café cheering events and billboard cheering events. Fans usually get information on such events on Weibo, or from fellow fans who are connected to them on WeChat and other social media platforms.

A range of auxiliary consumption is necessary for Chinese fans' K-pop consumption. Fans are reliant on social media, video streaming sites, fandom, and payment platforms (e.g., Alipay and WeChat Pay) for media content and purchases. International and domestic express delivery services are critical to Chinese fans' acquisition of physical K-pop products. Advertising companies provide a service to fans at billboard cheering events, as they will display a K-pop idol's image or videos on billboards for a fee. When fans attend offline events, especially events held in another city, they will take part in the consumption of the online booking (e.g., websites like Ctrip, Booking), transportation, accommodation, and catering services. Fans additionally consume fashion items (e.g., clothes and accessories), cosmetics, and other consumer goods that are endorsed, recommended, or used by their idols.

Chinese K-pop fans pay for their consumption of goods and services as they are in the process of doing it, or beforehand. For instance, fans can get free or discounted tickets for live

performances if they can provide proof that they paid for official fan club membership. They can also get free gifts at fan-organized events if they have receipts to prove that they paid for official products. Transnational K-pop fan consumption builds connections between different industries, including some seemingly unrelated ones. Fan consumption does not occur in clearly delineated black and white spaces; it takes place in various areas wherein fans have to deal with different parties.

In general, contemporary Chinese K-pop fans' K-pop consumption would be impossible without the internet and smart devices. This is because many internet products and services are now in the format of mobile internet applications. Fans get information and media content on various internet platforms. Likewise, for offline K-pop events, fans mainly get information and tickets (if needed) via social media, instant messages from fellow fans, the official website of the K-pop company, or ticketing platforms. Smartphones and various mobile internet applications assist in fans' communication with their fellow fans, and connect them to various agents via social media and instant messaging applications before, during, and after consumption. They are also used for taking pictures, shooting videos, and updating social media. Various auxiliary consumptions are also done on fans' smartphones via online shopping, payment, and booking applications, among others.

Elements of Fan Consumption

Fans have to gain access to K-pop and K-pop-related products and services before they can consume them. Likewise, fans have to gain access to idols, other fans, and other related parties before they can interact with them. In order to gain access to all these different products, services, and people, a fan has to display or hide their fan and personal identities, make the necessary

preparations, speculate, and wait for these goods, services and people to become available. This section depicts the fan consumption practices of individuals and groups in the Chinese K-pop fandom.

Gaining Access

Fans have to gain access to K-pop products and services. First, Chinese K-pop fans who can afford to make trips abroad for fandom purposes may have to overcome familial, job, and border-crossing constraints. Some fans told me that they take measures to prevent their parents from noticing their fandom trips. Not only does this show that their parents oppose and restrict their fandom activities; it also reveals fans' determination to elude such restrictions and continue their fandom activities. Xiaoqing, a female fan in her early twenties who is in gainful employment, told me that her mother withheld her passport to prevent her from flying overseas to chase after stars. Tingting, a female fan working for a state-owned institution, told me that her employer sometimes did not approve of her applications to travel overseas. Moreover, some Chinese fans cannot obtain short-term individual visas to many countries. My personal experiences and observations gained from my fieldwork indicate that it is a relatively common occurrence for Chinese fans to travel domestically for GOT7 events.

Second, fans have to gain access to the event. For instance, fans have to obtain a ticket to attend events organized by the idols' management company or other K-pop-related companies. Many Chinese fans are not familiar with ticketing tactics and do not know how to navigate around foreign websites. Some also believe that fan organizations or scalpers can help them get better seats. Thus, fans with this mindset may turn to fan organizations, resellers, or scalpers to either buy tickets or get tickets with better seats. However, getting a ticket from these prevalent

but informal sources is often costly and risky. When I could not get a ticket from the official ticketing platform for Mark's *ON YOUR MARK* fanmeeting in Chengdu, I looked for a ticket at the second-hand sales platform Xianyu, and was fortunately able to buy a ticket from a reseller there at a price that was a little higher than the original. However, I could only verify the authenticity of the ticket at the venue of the event on the very day it was held. It involved me flying from Beijing to Chengdu, going to the event, and successfully passing the ticket check conducted by the staff at the venue. Probably because staff had had to deal with fake tickets in the past, some events also required fans to produce identification documents and proof of entrance, such as number cards, wristbands, stamps, and stickers. In addition to working around foreign languages and currencies when attempting to purchase official tickets and products, Chinese fans have to overcome the difficulties of accessing platforms that are blocked in China. The inability to access certain websites and platforms means that fans are sometimes hindered from accessing formal ticketing channels as well as online contents and events.

Fans similarly have to meet the requirements of fan producers or fan organizers before they can gain access to fan-produced goods and services. For example, fans give official products or fan-produced gifts to fellow fans to demonstrate their support of their idols and the fandom. Usually, Chinese GOT7 fans are required to show event tickets, purchase receipts for official GOT7 products, the official lightstick or light banner, or a certain level of membership in GOT7's Weibo Super Topic Community to prove their fan identity or devotion before they can receive the gifts (JWang Style Lookbook, 2019; Tianbeng butaitian, 2019; ZxWenG7, 2019).

Showing and Hiding Identities

Fan identities are displayed at K-pop events. When attending K-pop events, many fans wear official merchandise or clothes that their idols had worn before (see Figure 6.2). Other fans may use official and fan-produced merchandise; headbands with lights showing their idols' names or logos; sashes or banners with slogans and their idols' names; as well as pins, dolls, photocards, and earrings as decorations for their bodies, clothes, and bags. Some fans bring official lightsticks and light boards with the idols' names or logos (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Many fans wearing Jackson's official "Team Wang" t-shirt at Jackson's *Mirrors* album pre-launch party, 30 September 2019, Shanghai

Figure 6.3: Fellow fans and me at the Simple Urban Plus Music Festival, 2 November 2019, Chengdu

Chinese K-pop fans differentiate fan identities very clearly. The GOT7 Chinese fandom is an example of this phenomenon. There are perceived conflicts between the fans of GOT7 as a group and the fans who only like a certain member in the group. Group fans (known as *Tuanfan* in Chinese) mean fans of the group, while solo fans (or *Weifan* in Chinese) are fans of a particular member in the group. Fans with different identities use different objects to cheer for their idols. GOT7's official lightstick (EN: Ahgabong, CN: Niaobang) and official light ring (CN: Niaojie) are symbols for the GOT7 fandom as a whole, while the "Wang" character light board (EN: Wang board, CN: Wangpai) is a symbol for fans of Jackson and the "Duan" character light

board (EN: Duan board, CN: Duanpai) is a symbol used by Mark's fans (see Figure 6.4). There is a story circulated within the Chinese GOT7 fandom that a solo fan of Jackson had broken a group fan's GOT7 lightstick at a fanmeet celebrating Jackson's birthday in March 2019 in Beijing. Consequently, some group fans—including me—are hesitant to display our group fan identities through fan objects or items depicting certain words at GOT7 members' solo events. However, the solo fans I encountered at Jackson's solo events were friendly. It is possible that fans avoid showing extreme behaviors offline because they are seen in person. Online, however, they may behave more outrageously. Indeed, conflicts between group fans and solo fans are possibly amplified in the online fan discourses in different communities. The different fan identities in the GOT7 fandom and the conflicts they create will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Figure 6.4: Jackson, Mark, and GOT7 fan goods

From left to right: Fanmade Jackson light board (Wangpai), GOT7 official light ring (Niaojie), GOT7 official lightstick (Niaobang), fanmade Mark light board (Duanpai).

Fans may choose to hide their personal identities during offline events. I observed many fans wearing make-up, and some with hair dyed in conspicuous colors. The fans practicing this do it to attract their idols' attention rather than attention from others. Additionally, some fans

choose to wear masks during offline events. I observed that hommas or fansites' members, as well as fans who are influential in fandom are more likely to wear masks to hide their personal identities. One of my survey participants, Siqi, wore a black mask when an event started and she began filming it with her camera. When the event ended and we left the venue, she removed her mask. Event organizers would often ask participants to take group photographs and upload them on Weibo so as to publicize the event. While the fans generally oblige this request, many of them would hold up a banner with their idol's name or catchphrases to cover at least half of their faces (see Figure 6.5). I surmise that they do this because of privacy concerns.

Figure 6.5: A fansite member taking a group photo for other fans who had collected the fansite-assigned free banner before Jackson's *Mirrors* album pre-launch party, Shanghai, 30 September 2019

Fan Waiting

Based on the data generated from my fieldwork, I propose the concept of fan waiting whereby a fan spends an uncertain period of time waiting, speculating, and preparing for a fandom event that has yet to occur. While fan waiting is usually practiced by fans, it is rarely undertaken by general audiences or ordinary consumers before consumption. The time and space for fan waiting will depend on where and when the idol might possibly appear. The waiting space varies, depending on the event. In the course of my fieldwork, the waiting space ranged from a bright and spacious hall in a luxury hotel to a dark and muddy car park. A fan can wait for hours. In some cases, fans will sit on sofas or on the floor as they wait (see Figure 6.6). In other instances, fans would stand, wander around the vicinity, or squat because there are no seats available.

As they wait, fans will draw on previous experiences to either speculate or make assumptions as to the event arrangements, that which will occur during the event, and venue settings. Fans' varied fandom experience and knowledge not only influence how they behave but also the way in which they react to new experiences. The more knowledgeable and experienced fans, i.e., the fans who know the idols' habits and the usual event arrangements are likely to get more opportunities to see or get closer to their idols. Fans speculate on where their idol would appear, and the best location in the venue to capture images and videos of their idols on their devices. They will turn on their lightsticks, light boards, and others light sources to attract their idol's attention. As they do so, they also have their smartphones or cameras ready to record videos or take pictures. Sometimes, fans will raise their phones and cameras high above their heads for an extended period as they wait for their idols. However, this results in tired arms and hands when their idol does not appear. While waiting, many fans will socialize with one another,

and exchange goods and information. As they wait, fans are able to meet old and new friends; collect fanmade items that other fans are giving away; talk about their idols, K-pop events, fan experiences and future plans, and their personal lives; and play and sing their idols' songs. There are also fans who do not know other fans at the venue, and those who keep quietly to themselves. Unlike general audiences who go to an event (e.g., a concert) simply for the content, many fans try every possible means to connect with or get closer to their idols and document these moments on their smartphones and cameras. When idols' informal appearances are unpublicized, however, fans will experience some uncertainty as they wait, speculate, and prepare for the unknown moment their idols will arrive. As fans tend to go to a venue earlier than the estimated time of their idols' arrival so as to exchange and collect idol-related goods and information with other fans, the waiting time can be a long one.

**Figure 6.6: Fans waiting to enter Mnet's M COUNTDOWN studio, CJ E&M Center, Seoul,
7 November 2019**

Interaction with Products and Services

The emphasis on visuals in K-pop means that singing is an essential but not important part for K-pop live performances. K-pop live performances are usually shorter than the live performances of other popular music genres. During GOT7's live performances, background music with the singers' voices will be played while the idols' microphones are switched on. This arrangement is probably intended to focus the idols' attention on their complicated dance movements and interactions with fans. It also makes the performance sounds better. If an idol sings in a low voice, the audience will hear one clear voice. However, if the idol sings loudly, the audience

would hear two voices: a recorded voice and a live voice, which sounds weird and jarring. There are times when the idols will come on stage and dance in time to the pre-recorded singing track. The audience in the studio will often see this kind of performance in ‘live’ recordings of Korean music chart show. This is because the broadcasted clips are the pre-recorded performances. I witnessed GOT7 and other artistes do this when I participated as an audience member during the recording of an episode of the music chart show *M Countdown*. I went to several GOT7 live performances as a participant-observer, including a concert, two showcases, and a fanmeet. As fans interact with their idols by shouting, screaming, applauding, waving lightsticks, singing along, and taking pictures or recording videos, they will also keep an eye out for better locations or seats where they can get closer to their idols. Upon noticing such a spot during an event, they will then try to move there.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, K-pop companies moved away from physical events in favor of online ones. Jinyoung’s online fanmeet titled *Hear, Here* is an example of such an event. When I attended this virtual fanmeet event, the display quality was unstable, probably due to issues with internet speed. At this fanmeet, Chinese fans could view the real time machine-translated Chinese subtitles. However, the machine-translated subtitles contained errors and led to confusion. Though fans could send text messages in real time, the fixed schedule of the fanmeet and the sheer volume of texts appearing on their screens meant that Jinyoung and the host were unable to read all the individual fans’ messages. Given the problems I noticed during Jinyoung’s *Hear, Here* fanmeet, I conclude that online fanmeets are unlikely to match the experience of physical events.

In both online or offline environments, individual fans will try to talk to their idols, often saying things like “eat more,” “rest well,” and “take care”. Idols respond by addressing fans as a

group because the large number of fans in attendance prevents them from reacting to fans individually. More often than not, idols just react to fans as a whole with smiles, cute expressions, good manners, and pleasantries. As can be seen in Figure 6.7, GOT7's Youngjae smiles at the fans in the audience when there is no one in front of him. Sometimes, idols do not react to fans' shouting and screaming.

Figure 6.7: GOT7 members interacting with fans at the fansign event at Wanda Realm Qingdao Movie Metropolis Hotel, Qingdao, 22 December 2019.

Fansign events enable fans to have one-on-one interactions with their idols. A fan needs to make considerable economic input in order to be eligible for a fansign opportunity. Fansign

events provide the longest idol-fan one-on-one interaction. If a fan is eloquent, they can spend between one to two minutes talking to their idol at a fansign. Only the luckiest fans who have spent the largest amount of money are granted a fansign opportunity. A Chinese GOT7 fan, for example, needs to spend many thousand RMB on physical albums to stand a chance of winning a fansign event ticket. However, the interaction at such an event is fleeting because each fan has only one to two minutes to talk to a GOT7 member. During an offline fansign event, fans usually spend about one minute shaking hands and making small talk with each of the GOT7 members. The actual time spent interacting with an idol will vary. As attested by my survey participant Junya, the quality of the idol-fan interaction depends on whether the idol and the fan have enough casual topics of conversations. This is in turn influenced by the personalities, language skills and eloquence of both the idol and the fan. Junya and JB could only spend a very short time conversing because they both were not fluent in English. Only when an idol and a fan speak the same language—such as Korean, Chinese, English, or Japanese—will they have smoother interaction at fansign events. While an interpreter could assist in the idol-fan conversation during an online fansign session, it would reduce the time that the idol and the fan spend talking.

A two-way interaction between idols and fans is hardly achieved even though an idol and a fan interact with each other directly and individually. On the day of the Qingdao fansign, I talked to JB when I was having a hi-touch (the fandom term for a high five) with him. At that moment, I felt he heard my words and was reacting positively because he smiled at me. When I reviewed the recorded video of the hi-touch session, however, I noticed that JB was simply facing the line of fans and maintaining his smile. Although an idol might lower his head to hear a fan's voice, I doubt he can clearly hear and understand that fan's words in the noisy environment where other fans in the auditorium were talking, shouting, or screaming. Each fan spent less than

ten seconds experiencing their hi-touch with the GOT7 members. The staff would push fans to get them to move along faster without any pauses. While I was well-prepared and spoke very fast, I only spoke in short sentences to four of the seven members. My fellow fans told me that they could not speak as much as me. I did not have enough time to see a GOT7 member's reaction before I was moved along to the next member. The GOT7 members did not appear to have enough time to process and react to a fan's actions and words because the next fan would already be in front of them as soon as the previous fan spoke. I felt the warmth of JB's palm when I had the hi-touch with him because I held his hand for one second while talking to him. As I only lightly touched the palms of the other members, I have no clear memory of my interaction with them.

Fans regard the one-on-one but fleeting fan-idol interaction as exciting and valuable. I saw that fans were noticeably excited when they came out from the venue of Mark's fanmeet. They were the fans who had most likely experienced a hi-touch with Mark since many of them raised one of their hands (which had probably just touched one of Mark's), saying excitedly, "He smells so good!" After I had a hi-touch with all the GOT7 members at the Qingdao fansign event, I was very excited and both of my hands were shaking. Many fans ran off the stage after experiencing the hi-touch. I surmise this was because of their high levels of excitement. I gained a feeling of satisfaction through my connection with my idols even though it was fleeting and superficial.

Collecting objects is central to fan cheering events. Fan-produced merchandise is usually given as gifts at fan cheering events because it is a low-cost way of ensuring that all the attendees have something to take home. While the quality of these fanmade goods can vary, they are carefully designed by fans. Fans collect fan-produced gifts at café cheering events and before

offline live performances (see Figure 6.8). Some fans are willing to pay another fan to collect the fan-produced gifts on their behalves if they are unable to attend the event (Baichun keke, 2018; Yaoyiqi chilamianma, 2016).

Figure 6.8: Fans queuing in front of the café to collect fanmade gifts at Jinyoung's birthday cheering event, Sanlitun SOHO, Beijing, 22 September 2019

Lucky draws are important in both formal and informal fan consumptions. Lucky draws can be both a marketing strategy to help boost album sales as well as a game in a K-pop-related event. First, fans believe that there is a higher possibility of getting their preferred photocards for their collection and they stand a better chance of winning an event ticket, if they buy more copies of albums. A total of 49 (seven versions for each member) to 70 (ten versions for each member) photocards are typically released for each GOT7 album. Two or three of these are randomly assigned to each physical copy of the album. Fans buy more albums in order to obtain as many

different photocards as possible for their collections. They also believe that buying more albums ensures them a higher chance of winning a fansign ticket, even though this is not guaranteed in the results of the draw. Both the K-pop industry and K-pop fans employ lucky draws as a strategy to boost album sales since both parties treasure the K-pop idols' commercial success. When individual fans or fan organizations get tickets to an event, they organize lucky draws for fellow fans to win these tickets. In fandom, a fan has to meet the lucky draw organizer's criteria to be eligible for the lucky draws. Lucky draws are also commonly played games at official and fan-organized K-pop events where the prize would be a group photo opportunity with their idols, a signed photograph, or a gift.

The recording and sharing of visual materials are essential in contemporary K-pop fan consumption. As long as mobile devices are readily available, the idols, the fans, official and fanmade products, the surroundings, and the goings-on of an event will be part of the visual materials (see Figures 6.9 and 6.10).

Figure 6.9: Audience members raising their phones to shoot videos and take pictures in readiness of Jackson's appearance on stage at the SIMPLE URBAN PLUS Music Festival, Tianfu Hibiscus Joy Park, Chengdu, 2 November 2019

Figure 6.10: A fan taking a picture for three fans holding Mark-related items at Mark's fan meeting, Bloomage LIVE•528 M Space, Chengdu, 14 September 2019

From left to right: A fan holding a light board, a fan holding a basketball with Mark's signature that she won at the event's lucky draw, and a fan holding a lightstick and light boards.

The consumption of catering services is auxiliary consumption and often related to fan pilgrimage. At a café cheering event, a fan has to buy a beverage to get the cup sleeve with their idol's images (see Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11: Counter of the café hosting Mark's birthday cheering event, Sanlitun SOHO, Beijing, 7 September 2019

Visiting idol-related restaurants and cafés is a form of fan pilgrimage. One day in May 2019, my friend and I travelled to JB's hometown in Goyang to visit the yogurt bar and café run by his parents. This suburban café is decorated with candles made by JB's mother, as well as all kinds of JB and GOT7-related photographs, cartoons, magazines, and fan-written notes. I observed that the customers at the café were mostly nearby residents, and GOT7's Korean and international fans (see Figure 6.12). I briefly talked to JB's mother when she was stirring a big bucket of yogurt and JB's father made coffee for us. This experience was special to me since I factually but briefly connected with the people who are closest to my beloved idol. Fans also like to try their idols' favorite foods to acquire a sense of intimacy with their idols. Along with two Chinese GOT7 fans, I tried the GOT7 members' favorite foods at the small restaurant near the

old JYPE building in Seoul. By going to a restaurant they had frequented and eating their favorite foods, I felt as though I was experiencing a bit of GOT7's life.

Figure 6.12: Yogurt Bar & Café, Goyang, South Korea, 18 May 2019

Fans will be bored at the events they attend if they are hardly able to participate in it. An instance of this occurred at the GOT7 fansign event in Qingdao. Of the 750 fans in attendance, 200 fans got the autographs of each of the members, 200 fans had quick hi-touches with each member, and the remaining 350 fans could only sit there and witness the event. There were short game segments during the event, as well as several lucky draws where fans could win group photo opportunities with the GOT7 members, signed Polaroid photographs, and even the GOT7 members' costumes. Most fans at this fansign event simply sat there, watched what was going on, and took pictures or shot videos of the proceedings. Very often, fans in the auditorium could not even see their idols because other fans were standing in front of the idols getting autographs or

hi-touches, thus blocking the view of the audience. As a result, some fans got bored, tired, or even fell asleep. Likewise, fans became bored when the GOT7 members spoke in Korean (which they could not understand) and there was no Chinese translation available. I can only understand a little Korean. It was not enough to follow the gist of their extended conversations. Thus, I only watched GOT7's performance of their three new songs, even though I had been sitting there throughout their comeback showcase. As I was unable to understand most of their Korean conversation, I could not laugh with most of the audience. I could only take pictures to occupy my time as they talked. Yanhui, one of my interviewees, told me that fanmeets were the most boring events to her because the idols would talk a lot in Korean and she could not understand them.

Fan Interaction

The smartphones, internet, social media, and many other new ICTs are critical to Chinese K-pop fandom because they allow fans to exchange information, media content, and physical products with each other. Since 2019, I have joined 20 GOT7-related WeChat groups that have between three and more than 300 members. Fans' posts in an idol's Super Topic on Weibo can quickly attract the attention of others, which sometimes results in the posts either becoming influential among fans or heated discussions. Fan-related activities, such as event organization, socialization, and information exchanges, are largely reliant on instant messaging, social media, and other internet platforms. Thus, devoted fans would closely follow fandom and official social media accounts to get the most up-to-date information and contents. While the information shared and discussed among fans is the latest, it is often unverified. Photocard trading is a common practice

in K-pop fandom. Fans also buy photocards and other K-pop products from other fans through the second-hand trading platform Xianyu or personal connections.

Fans tend to treat other fans whom they do not know online and offline as strangers, and are accordingly cautious around them. In my experience, however, I discovered that once fans get to know each other better through online or offline interactions, they will become outgoing and frank, and interact very warmly and politely. Fans often go to events in small groups. This arrangement lends itself easily to the sharing of cars and accommodation in guesthouses. My personal experience and that of my survey participants show that fans usually attend an event together when they travel together and live in the same guesthouse. When an individual fan participates in an event alone and meets another fan they know, they will usually stay together for its duration. I have become friends with some fans after initial encounters at events and constant chatting on instant messaging platforms. In addition to talking about GOT7, we also share opinions about other celebrities and media content, our personal lives, current affairs, and so on. Fans help each other in various ways in fandom matters or everyday life. Some of the assistance offered may appear trivial, but I believe it demonstrates kindness and camaraderie, which adds to the positive feelings of being a member of the fan community. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, some fans travelled frequently to GOT7 events and they would meet each other in different cities within or outside the country. Overall, fans are well connected and constantly interact with each other online and offline. They come together in decentralized self-organized groups instead of a huge company-organized fan club.

Fans' External Interactions

The attitudes of K-pop staff towards fans vary from friendliness to arrogance to indifference. Fans' actions during an event, such as bringing in and using cameras, and moving to better seats, are dependent on the staff's implementation of the regulations. While fans can and do complain about the staff, they do not violate the staff's instructions when they know their actions are under the surveillance of the staff.

Security guards are easily distinguishable from the crowd since they are in black suits or camouflage uniforms. In my personal experience as a fan, the overwhelming majority of security guards in China were males, while some security guards in Korea were female. The security guards block the view of some fans to maintain order at an event, and prevent fans from getting too close to their idols. Fans and security guards generally behave politely towards each other. However, fans may get beaten by security guards if they attempt to rush into the venue.

On 30 September 2019, several dozen fans and I stayed with a group of security guards in front of the back door of the venue for hours, waiting for Jackson to show up after his album pre-launch party in Shanghai. I witnessed an interesting exchange of interaction between the fans and security guards. The fans tried to negotiate with the security guards to get a chance to see Jackson better, and thus capture a clearer picture or video of Jackson. The fans called the security guards *ge* (meaning older brother in Chinese) and ingratiated themselves with them by praising their height and handsomeness. A young female fan even held a young male security guard's arm to prevent him from moving in front of her and blocking her view. All the words and even actions undertaken to instill a false sense of closeness between security guards and fans were for the sole purpose of getting the guards to squat down or stop moving so that fans could have a better view of Jackson. To get the security personnel to acquiesce to their requests, fans will

engage in small talk, flattery, and promises of good behavior as they attempt to negotiate access to celebrities in fanmeets and related events. Such attempts are often not reciprocated by the security staff. The security guards actively discourage fans from waiting for their idol for a long period of time, and will persuade them to go home.

Nonetheless, there are occasions where the two groups will have more relaxed interactions. While waiting for Jackson after his album pre-launch party in Shanghai, a middle-aged security guard told the group of fans, including me and my survey participant Yongwen, that we were similar in age to his daughter, and instructed us to stay alert, even to celebrities. When Yongwen said she was very thirsty because she had not had any water for several hours, the middle-aged security guard took a bottle of water from his trouser pocket and gave it to her. Yongwen initially hesitated, but eventually accepted the water bottle and drank from it. The security guard noticed her hesitation and said, “I tell you, don’t be too naïve. (Sigh.) Later, when [your idol] shakes hands with you, you don’t know if his hand is clean.” Yongwen replied, “It’s not a problem, my hand is not clean either.” After that, she laughingly referred to his water bottle as she added, “I drank it! [...] I believe in you, so I drank it!” Fans and security guards are at opposite positions in fandom. Fans see security guards as obstacles impeding their access to the idols. The security guards see fans as problems they have to deal with as they carry out their duties. However, the two parties have to spend time together and negotiate with each other to achieve their own goals.

The relationship between fans and scalpers is based purely on business because fans are scalpers’ potential customers. Both scalpers and fans are connected on WeChat and Weibo. Money transfers are made through online payment services like WeChat Pay. Male scalpers may touch female fans shoulders, or call them *meinü* (meaning beautiful lady in Chinese) or *meimei*

(meaning younger sister in Chinese) to ingratiate themselves in a faux friendly manner. Fans may get the most up-to-date but usually unverified information and access to events from scalpers. However, some fans display negative attitudes to scalpers when the scalpers show rude behaviors or fail to get them access to an event. Other fans have an overall negative attitude towards scalpers and try to keep away from them.

Gender is not balanced in the K-pop scene. At GOT7's events, the fans are overwhelmingly young females, while the security guards and scalpers are almost all young to middle-aged males. At offline events in China, fans, security guards, staff, peddlers, and scalpers would be mixed together around the venue (see Figure 6.13). It is also difficult to distinguish male staff members from scalpers when they are all in leisure clothes. This shows that fan consumption is a complex experience in which fans have to deal with various issues and people.

Figure 6.13: Fans, staff, scalpers, peddlers, and passersby near Mark's fanmeet venue, Bloomage LIVE•528, Chengdu, 14 September 2019

Fetishism, Consumer Networks, and Fans' Individual and Productive Consumption

Marx (1887 [1977], pp. 125-177) used the term fetishism to indicate that capitalism hides the actual social relations among men (i.e., the producers or the laborers) by showing the relations among commodities (i.e., the products or the objects of human labor). Through fetishism, the objects seemingly exist, and operate independently and become mysterious. Baudrillard (1981, pp. 88-101) argued that fetishism as an ideology is the fetishism of the signifier, the concept or the form, rather than the signified or the object. The capitalistic system compels the seemingly diversified consumers' needs because they are critical to capitalistic production (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 63-87). Consumers' desires are therefore transformed into needs that can be satisfied through the consumption of the provided products. This then boosts the consumers' consummativity, which in turn is the counterpart of productivity (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 63-87). Consumption is not new in society. The imagination for and the need of commodities, money, and capital are hallmarks of modern societies, and can be seen in individuals' enthusiastic pursuit of these objects. Like the K-pop industry, fans equate the success of their idols to their commercial success in the market. In other words, fans deem a successful idol to be someone who successfully achieves fame and earns a lot of money. They contribute to their idols' success by boosting the sales figures of idol-related commodities. Meanwhile, fans' purchasing power or consummativity (i.e., their possession of commodities or the capability to consume commodities) offers them status in the media and entertainment industries, and in the fan community. Thus, both the K-pop industry and Chinese K-pop fans subscribe to fetishism. However, community members in contemporary Chinese K-pop fandom or contemporary consumer culture have to actively build consumer networks through online and offline interactions, and maximize their

contributions to the idols and the fandom through collaborations in all forms, such as group orders, delegated purchases, and so on. While these consumer networks and collaborations may or may not benefit certain industries, they help achieve their own goals as well as that of their idols.

Furthermore, Marx (1887 [1977], pp. 283-306) argued that consumption can be divided into individual consumption and productive consumption. Individual consumption is for the individual himself, while productive consumption is for the individual's production (Marx, 1887 [1977], pp. 283-306). Unlike the general audience of a popular culture, fans are more likely to engage in production related to their fan objects. This indicates that fan consumption and production can be better understood if fan consumption is divided into individual consumption and productive consumption.

Fans will engage in fan consumption at K-pop events. They practice individual consumption and productive consumption differently at such an event. When fans are practicing individual consumption, they behave like ordinary audience members or consumers. They will stare at the stage, wave their lightsticks, laugh, scream, applaud, and occasionally take pictures or videos with their smartphones during an event. Meanwhile, the fans who engage in productive consumption do so differently. Homma refers to a fan who runs a website or social media account that posts originally produced pictures and videos of an idol, and sometimes sells merchandise based on those media contents. During GOT7's *CALL MY NAME* comeback showcase, I witnessed a homma's behavior at a live performance. As the homma watched the performance, she put her lightstick on the floor and held up her DSLR camera instead. The homma was much calmer and quieter than the other fans. She concentrated on taking pictures with her camera and occasionally used her smartphone for the same purpose. However, she was

still vigilant and kept an eye on the security guards from time to time. In monitoring the movements of the security staff and using a jacket to cover her camera, she ensured that the guards did not notice her camera. At café cheering events, fan organizers take part in the celebration like any other fans. Prior to the celebration, however, they prepare gifts for fellow fans and organize the event. They also distribute the gifts to fellow fans when everyone turns up for the occasion. Even though fans consume the same product or service, the nature of their consumption—whether it is individual consumption or productive consumption—will serve different purposes and result in different consumption practices.

Repetitive purchasing of physical and digital albums is prevalent in the Chinese K-pop fandom. Jackson's *Mirrors* digital album, for example, is priced at 15 RMB (about two USD) per copy on NetEast Cloud Music. However, in order to show their support for Jackson, and participate in purchasing ranking and the lucky draw to win an opportunity to go to the album pre-launch party, a large group of fans bought more than one copy. The fans I know have spent between several hundred to more than 10,000 RMB on the album. There is a debate on Weibo as to how many copies of the album a fan should buy (Bu kuaile xingyun zhu diqiu dashi, 2019; Wang jia yidian, 2019). Some fans believe fans are obliged to buy more to show their support, while some others believe people should not judge others by the number of their purchases. One month after its release, the album *Mirrors* sold 60,000 copies. By 2019, the album had sold 814,916 copies and became the best seller on NetEast Cloud Music. When a fan obtains a high purchasing ranking, she may become famous in the fan community, and gain greater opportunities to win gifts or an event ticket. The fans' purchasing ranking on the album sales webpage encourages fans' repetitive purchase. Physical albums are important in fan consumption, even though fans are not likely to listen to the songs in the CDs. After getting the physical

albums, fans will unbox them, sort out all the gifts—especially photocards—for their own collection or to trade with other fans. Sometimes fans trade sealed albums when they buy too many copies in the belief that it results in a higher chance of winning a ticket to an album-related fansign event. Among the fans I know, Xiwen is the biggest buyer of digital and physical albums. She bought 1,600 copies of Jackson’s digital album *Mirrors* (costing approximately 24,000 RMB or 3,500 USD in total) and 127 copies of GOT7’s physical album *CALL MY NAME* (costing a total of more than 10,000 RMB or 1,525 USD). While the purchasing power of fans varies, many fans I encountered spend as much as they can on GOT7. They will cut down their expenses on food, transportation, and accommodation in order to have more to spend on their fan activities.

Repetitiveness is a significant characteristic of K-pop fans’ productive consumption. The repetitive attendance of an idol group’s concerts that consist of the same or similar repertoire hardly provides fans with new audience experiences. Nevertheless, they continue to turn out in force because it grants them the opportunity to constantly produce up-to-date photographs and videos of their idol group shot in different locations around the world. This form of repetitive consumption produces album sales figures and sold-out concerts that are valued by the K-pop industry and K-pop fandom. Fans believe that boosting album sales is a direct way of supporting their idols’ career. The purchasing of multiple albums is not just for fans’ consumption and collection, even though such collection is encouraged by the multiple versions of the various visual materials in a physical album. Many fans purchase multiple copies regardless as to whether the album is in physical or digital formats. The K-pop and related industries encourage repetitive purchases by offering fans the chance to win event tickets and gifts. Additionally, online shopping websites may provide free billboard promotion chances for their idols if the album sales on the sites reach a certain target (Aifeng GOT7 Voting Group, 2019). Repetitive

consumption offers fans the possibility of getting a rare opportunity to enhance their intimacy with the idol through one-on-one conversation and handshaking, a unique signed Polaroid photograph, or a small-scale fanmeet event. The fans who do get these rare opportunities are then able to produce idol-related images, videos, and other content that are uncommonly seen in fandom. Therefore, the repetitive consumption of albums seeks to produce an opportunity for future consumption and production.

Instead of drawing a clear boundary between individual consumption and productive consumption, I aim to emphasize K-pop fans' productive consumption and highlight the importance of such consumption in the fan economy. Individual consumption and productive consumption can be seen in the practices of formal, informal, and auxiliary consumption. However, productive consumption is prominent in formal consumption, i.e., the consumption of the products and services produced by the K-pop industry. The K-pop and related industries focus on the cultivation of devoted fans who consume K-pop repetitively and produce new cultures, products, and services based on their consumption. In turn, these spontaneous productions attract new fans to K-pop.

Accumulation of Capital

Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of economic capital, social capital and cultural capital can be used to explain fan practices. The concepts can help to explain Chinese K-pop fan consumption. Economic capital "is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights"; cultural capital "is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications"; and social capital is "made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is

convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 16). In fandom, the accumulation of knowledge and collections of objects serves as the accumulation of cultural capital (Fiske, 1992). Cultural capital distinction and accumulation is not only about social and cultural differences but also about age categories (Fiske, 1992). Thus, the young people who successfully accumulate official cultural capital and convert it to economic capital may still practice as fans in their accumulation of unofficial or popular cultural capital, thus boosting their self-esteem within the taste community (Fiske, 1992). The sometimes painful fan consumption experiences are not meaningless. Fan consumption, especially productive consumption, helps fans to accumulate cultural capital and social capital in the fan community. Fans also commonly practice repetition in their fan consumption, which is rarely seen in the consumption of non-fans.

The physical feeling of fan consumption in regard to meeting idols is generally negative. Fans need to have the physical strength and the passion to engage in such consumption. Usually, fans stand in a crowd and push each other to get a better view of the idols. That causes some feelings of unpleasantness. The uncertain period of time in which they wait for their idols to arrive at an event is mentally and physically exhausting. This exhaustion can be doubled for fans who do not want to leave the venue for a second because they fear missing out on a good position to see their idols, or even missing their idols’ appearance. I struggled to get up at 7 a.m. on a rainy winter’s day to see GOT7 at the KBS TV Station (see Figure 6.14). As I stood there waiting for the GOT7 members, my hands were freezing, and my feet were cold and wet. Even though my feet were soaked from standing in a puddle, I could not move because I was standing in a good position to see everything that was going on. Luckily, I saw the GOT7 members after a short waiting time. My survey participant Xinfei has attended many pre-recording sessions of

Korean music chart shows. Attending or trying to attend pre-recording sessions can be challenging. Fans have to watch the music chart show pre-recordings late at night, or early in the morning, or whenever the pre-recording session is scheduled. Xinfei's most frustrating experience occurred when she spent hours on a cold winter's night queuing for an opportunity to attend a pre-recording but did not succeed in getting inside the TV Station in the end.

Figure 6.14: Fans waiting for GOT7 in front of the KBS TV Station, Seoul, 15 November 2019

Fan consumption can be extremely challenging to the human body. The *SIMPLE URBAN PLUS* Music Festival is an outdoors event with no seats. Fans have to go to the venue as early as

possible in order to secure good positions from which they can see their idols. Some fans even arrived at the venue the day before and queued there overnight, even though the music festival started at 2 p.m., and Jackson (who was the last performer) was only slated to perform for 30 minutes from around 9 p.m. onwards. Xiaodong arrived at the venue at around 10 p.m. the day before. When the gate opened on the day of the music festival, fans ran to position themselves in front of the stage. Xiaodong eventually got a position in the middle of the first row of the audience. People would lose their positions if they made their way out of the crowd. As a result, Xiaodong shared that she forwent eating, drinking and going to the washroom for 24 hours, doing so only after she left the music festival upon watching Jackson's performance. This extreme experience not only afforded Xiaodong the opportunity to see Jackson at a relatively short distance but also allowed her to clearly capture Jackson's splendid moments on stage when the majority of the attendees were blocked by the audience in the front rows.

The psychological feeling of fan consumption ranges from over-excitement to disappointment. Fans will feel excited or become over-excited when seeing their idols in person. I was very excited to see my idols in perfect make-up putting in all their effort as they danced. This excitement may also bring about insomnia, headaches, and trembling hands in fans. While sorting the images and videos of the GOT7 members that I took at the Qingdao fansign, I felt elated at capturing these materials and yet jaded from the exhausting hours of tense waiting at the event. These experiences can often be frustrating and emotionally draining, especially for fans who had to deal with scalpers and security personnel to get closer access to their idols. When fans try to use a fake ticket to gain entry to an event venue, they experience fear and trepidation. This is because it may result in fans getting caught in the middle of a fight between security guards and scalpers. At Jackson's album pre-launch party, Xiaoqing said, "It was horrible. I went

up when [the scalpers] asked me to go up. People were pushing, pushing, and pushing when entering the venue; I felt like I was dying.” I felt unhappy on behalf of the fans that had to sit on the floor and bear with the staff’s peremptory behavior as they waited to enter the M COUNTDOWN studio at the CJ E&M Center to see GOT7 on 7 November 2019. However, when the idols appeared, and especially when they said something kind, the fans’ negative feelings were replaced with excitement because they felt as though their efforts had paid off. This shows that fans usually experience a mixture of feelings before, during, and after an event.

Far from being limited to the enjoyment of K-pop itself, fans also relish the sense of being connected with and needed by their beloved idols. Their consumption also imbues them with feelings of achievement. At the Digital Media City in Seoul, I coincidentally met Jingyuan, a Chinese female fan of Lee Jin-hyuk. She used to be a fan of GOT7’s Mark, and took the time to explain why she is no longer a fan. Jingyuan told me that she felt Mark and GOT7 did not need her as much because Mark is from a rich family and GOT7 is a mature K-pop group managed by one of the largest entertainment companies in Korea. Lee Jin-hyuk, on the other hand, has great potential and is a good performer, but had unfortunately suffered many mishaps in his career. Therefore, she became a fan of Lee Jin-hyuk as she felt he was more in need of her support than Mark and GOT7. This account shows that fans share in their idols’ achievements when the latter attain commercial success. After paying for Jackson’s digital album, the buyer would receive a digital image of a letter of thanks that is handwritten by Jackson. Fans would then post this letter on their social media to demonstrate their contributions to their idol’s commercial success, and thus share in their idol’s achievements.

This form of fan consumption can be understood as the accumulation of capital. While fan consumption is neither enjoyable nor profitable to fans in many cases, it nevertheless helps

fans to accumulate social capital and cultural capital. My experiences and observations of the GOT7 fandom are consistent with Fiske's (1992) findings, as they indicate that the accumulated experience, knowledge, and objects of idols and fandom are converted into fans' cultural capital. Through the consumption of GOT7-related products and services, Chinese GOT7 fans accumulate the experiences of interacting with GOT7 members, gaining knowledge about them, and obtaining GOT7-related products. In so doing, they accumulate cultural capital in the fan community. Fans' social capital are reflected in the various kinds of consumption they undertake, the direct or indirect connections they build up with the GOT7 members, and the fame they achieve in the fan community because of their constant and often repetitive consumption.

Conclusion

The data I collected in my participant observations led me to propose three types of K-pop consumption: formal consumption, informal consumption, and auxiliary consumption. In addition to the consumption of official products and services, Chinese fans' K-pop consumption is closely related to the consumption of products and services produced by fans and the players in the informal economy, as well as the various related industries in which Chinese fans' transnational consumption of K-pop is largely mediated. Indeed, the popularity of Korean popular culture has resulted in fans consuming the products and services of Korea's tourism, cosmetics and food industries.

K-pop in China is a niche market of urban young females. This is consistent with the previous research findings revealing that K-pop fans in Korea are mostly middle and upper class females (J. Kim, 2017). Scholars are divided on the impact of the niche market in the entertainment industry as a whole. Hills (2002, pp. 42-58), for example, maintains that the niche

market of fans do not relate the wider market. In contrast, Liang and Shen (2016) have demonstrated the power of fan culture in mainstream entertainment in China. As mentioned in Chapter 5, K-pop idol culture is influential in China, but K-pop idols cannot achieve the status of Chinese idols if they do not enter the Chinese market and work to be a part of the rapidly growing Chinese entertainment scene.

Fans have to gain access to K-pop and K-pop-related products and services before they can actually consume K-pop. They show or hide their identities according to the need to show their fandom to a selected audience group while avoiding conflict with others. Fans are generally friendly to each other in offline settings. When fans are online, however, some may use extreme rhetoric. This can be seen in various social media platforms. There are also stories of fan conflicts that are spread by word of mouth among fans. Not only does this show that offline and online fan cultures are different; it also indicates Chinese fans carefully distinguish diverse fan identities in idol fan culture (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101; Hills, 2002, pp. 174-184). Fans may express their emotions and opinions in much stronger ways online than they do offline.

Besides demonstrating their talents, idols display their looks, good manners, charisma, and willingness to work hard. Even though idol-fan interaction is fleeting and superficial, fans pay a great amount of money for the experience and value it because they have developed emotional attachments to their idols through constant emotive and monetary investments. The co-presence of K-pop idols and fans online and offline has created an illusion of intimacy between them (S.-Y. Kim, 2018). Through fan consumption, Chinese GOT7 fans cultivate a sense of intimacy with the idols. This illusion of intimacy is, in nature, the neoliberal commodification of affect (S.-Y. Kim, 2018). Fans with limited consummativity subscribe to the fetishism while maximizing their contribution to the idols and fandom through consumer

networks. Both Marx (1887 [1977], pp. 125-177) and Baudrillard's (1981, pp. 63-87) notions of commodity fetishism help to explain K-pop fan consumption. Fans value the commercial success of idols, and seek to achieve their perceived intimacy with their idols through their consumption of various products and services related to the idols. Marx's (1887 [1977], pp. 283-306) division of consumption into individual consumption and productive consumption is useful for the understanding of Chinese K-pop fans' consumption practices. Fans do not only consume for their current enjoyment; they also consume for their future fan production. Repetitive consumption is a characteristic of fan consumption of K-pop. It is prominent in formal consumption, i.e., in the consumption of the products and services provided by the K-pop industry. Repetitive consumption reflects the K-pop and related industries' successful practice of fan economy (Liang & Shen, 2016), and fans' consumption for their future production rather than their current enjoyment. Through repetitive consumption of K-pop products and services, fans gain a sense of closeness with their idols, a sense of being needed by their idols, and a sense of achievement. They accumulate cultural capital, and social capital through fan consumption. As Fiske (1992) suggested, the accumulated experience, knowledge, and objects of idols and fandom help fans to gain cultural capital. Meanwhile, fans' social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is also accumulated through the connections they build with their idols and the fame they gain in the fan community. Overall, the K-pop industry's commodification of affect (S.-Y. Kim, 2018) and fans' accumulation of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) explain K-pop fan consumption practices. Fan consumption in K-pop differs from the consumption of ordinary audiences. More importantly, K-pop fan consumption amplifies the popularity of K-pop through their unique consumption practices, especially repetitive consumption.

Chapter 7

Fan Productions¹⁰

Introduction

Using empirical data on the Chinese GOT7 fandom gained from participant observations and in-depth interviews, this chapter investigates fan labor and fan-produced products and services. Chinese K-pop fandom has been commercialized, with increasing focus on the fans' physical and financial contributions (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). Most noticeably, Chinese K-pop fans in the current mobile internet period use social media to influence information on their idols (Q. Zhang & Negus, 2020). Through an examination of the ways in which K-pop fan labor is practiced and incorporated into the K-pop and related industries, this study will uncover how fan labor contributes to the constant growth of the K-pop industry and the global influence of K-pop culture, and is an indispensable part of the K-pop industry. Individuals who self-identify as K-pop fans engage in specialized, managerial, or basic labor, while collaborating with fellow fans in different locations.

The eight interviewees featured in this chapter were recruited through snowball sampling. I met five of these fans in the course of my fieldwork and the remaining three were introduced to me by other fans in my personal network or by my interviewees. I conducted semi-structured interviews with my respondents so as to allow them to convey their feelings and opinions on subjects not covered by the interview questions. An appointment was scheduled with each participant, and each interview lasted for about an hour. The participants were asked to sign

¹⁰ This chapter is adapted from an earlier journal article by the author. For details found in that article, see M. Sun, "K-pop fan labor and an alternative creative industry: A case study of GOT7 Chinese fans," *Global Media and China*, 5, no. 4 (2020), 389-406.

All participant names referenced in this chapter are pseudonyms.

consent forms before data collection in order to avoid harm to the participants, maintain the security and confidentiality of their personal information, and reassure them of their right to withdraw from participation during data collection. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the native language of the participants. They were conducted face-to-face or through WeChat Voice Call in September-December 2019 (see Table 7.1). Interview questions covered the participants' K-pop fan practices, fan identities, social media usage, as well as their attitudes and thoughts towards K-pop fandom issues. I used systematic qualitative analysis to examine the transcripts of these interviews. Please refer to the appendix for a sample of the interview questions.

Table 7.1: List of interviewees

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Place of residence	Place of origin	Main fan production output
1	Yanhui	Female	23	Guangdong, China	Guangdong, China	Visual materials, cheering billboards, café cheering events
2	Xiwen	Female	23	Beijing, China	Beijing, China	Group purchase, cheering products
3	Xixi	Female	24	Beijing, China	Inner Mongolia, China	Repetitive streaming
4	Xinchen	Female	23	Beijing, China	Beijing, China	Café cheering events

5	Yujing	Female	25	Tianjin, China	Shanxi, China	Café cheering events, cheering billboards, fanfiction
6	Siqi	Female	23	Seoul, Korea	Shanghai, China	Translation, visual materials, cheering products
7	Tongtong	Female	23	Seoul, Korea	Hunan, China	Repetitive streaming
8	Xinfei	Female	22	Seoul, Korea	Gansu, China	Visual materials

K-Pop Fans: Consumption and Prosumption

Fans are closely related to creative industries because these industries produce objects of fandoms. Scholars have consequently examined the economic aspect of fandom or the relationship between fandom and the industries. Rather than a binary industry-fan relationship, Steirer (2016) suggests industry-fan interaction is more nuanced and complicated. Fans influence the industry by constructing new audienceship, creating alternative discourses to industry-produced popular texts, and manipulating the data traffic of internet platforms, among others (Brower, 1992; J. Kim, 2017; Q. Zhang & Negus, 2020). K-pop fans practice various activities that influence the K-pop industry (Tai, 2018). In the contemporary Chinese K-pop fandom, fan production is not only a culture but also an economic practice that is valuable to the K-pop and related industries.

Chinese K-pop fans comply with the K-pop industry's commodification of culture in that they value economic success and fame in a K-pop soloist or idol group's career. The new ICTs make participation in idols' careers, in the form of fan labor, available to fans. K-pop fan labor is

the space in which fans can engage in creative expression and achieve self-actualization. This form of self-actualization is connected to their beloved K-pop idols' careers. The public and the media may consider some K-pop fan productions controversial because they touch on the issues of data fraud and copyright infringement. However, K-pop companies hold an ambiguous attitude towards fan production. It is possibly because fan production does contribute to knock-on effects for the K-pop companies (such as publicity for its stars and more album sales), even if it may infringe upon the rights or take away some of the financial profits of the K-pop companies or idols. Much like the digital-game fandom where fans contribute an immaterial labor consisting of information and interpretation to the texts they esteem (Milner, 2009), K-pop fans work for the texts they value, namely their idols and media content, rather than the companies. However, the economic gains of the idols and their companies are tightly bound. This means that when fans intend to contribute to their idols, they also contribute to the idols' management companies.

The practice of the gift economy or commercial logic possibly depends on the objects of fandom and the contexts that the fans are situated in. For instance, television and video game fans in Western countries practice a gift economy in which they give rather than sell fanmade goods (Scott, 2009; Stanfill & Condis, 2014). Chinese fans of Tolkien's works also keep away from commercial logic by collecting and translating information for free (Zheng, 2016). Scholars argue that such practices exist because they choose to reject capitalist logic or because of the fans' enjoyment of the work (Stanfill & Condis, 2014). The gift economy helps fans construct fan identities and communities, and avoid copyright infringement (Scott, 2009; Stanfill & Condis, 2014). While there are some cases of fans monetizing their labor by selling their products to individuals outside of their fan community, this practice can be explained as a form of self-

protection against exploitation and monetization by the industry (Scott, 2009). However, the practices of East Asian popular culture fandom in China contradict these research findings. In the 2010s, fan organizers in the Chinese K-pop fandom were suspected of profiting financially when they helped other fans to buy albums (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). Based on her research on the China's largest fandoms, including the ACG, celebrity (Anglo-American artistes, J-pop, K-pop, domestic idols, etc.), and eSports fandoms, in the late 2010s, Y. Yin (2020) suggested that fan practices follow economic logic. The differentiation of commodities and gifts in the K-pop fandom is not dependent on the recipient's identity. K-pop fan producers differentiate commodities and gifts by cost of production. Very often, paper banners are given out for free and cloth banners are sold (Masterpiece, 2020; Pjyloveeeeeee922, 2019). While outsiders or non-fans may get free fanmade gifts at a K-pop event, only insiders or fans tend to purchase fanmade products.

Fan identities may help to explain why some Chinese K-pop fans engage in fan labor. They are often closely related to fans' everyday practices, as well as their knowledge and object accumulation (Fiske, 1992; Williams, 2006). However, fan identities in J-pop, K-pop, and Chinese pop idol cultures—a highly commercialized, niche popular culture—tend to be more closely related to fans' economic investment. In the same way that K-pop has inherited its popular culture from J-pop, and Chinese idol pop has inherited its popular culture from J-pop and K-pop, Chinese idol fan culture has also inherited its practices from its Japanese and Korean counterparts (Q. Zhang & Negus, 2020). L. Chen (2018, pp. 3-27) notes that Chinese fans, especially those of Japanese popular music groups under the management of Johnny's Entertainment, view only those who had *paid* for their idols' commodities to be fans. This results in the postmodern fans' overconsumption and high commodification of their idols' products

(Zheng, 2016). In addition, Chinese K-pop fans mainly identify themselves as fans of a particular idol, fans of a particular idol in a certain period, fans of a certain group, and fans of two or more idols in a certain group (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). The commercialization of Chinese fandom and careful categorization of Chinese fan identities probably relate to fan labor.

Categorization of K-Pop Fan Labor

Fan labor is part of K-pop fan practices. Not all K-pop fans engage in fan labor. It is not my intention to make out that K-pop fan labor is representative of the whole population of K-pop fans, nor am I implying that K-pop fan labor is representative of all K-pop fan practices. This chapter simply explores how some K-pop fans become fan laborers, and how fan labor has become an indispensable part of the K-pop industry. Existing research has classified fans according to fan practices or fan productions (e.g., Obsession-inc, 2009). However, the existing classifications can hardly demonstrate contemporary K-pop fan labor. According to Obsession-inc (2009), affirmational fans are sanctioned fans who support and emphasize the original production, while transformational fans are non-sanctioned fans who support and engage in fan production by making use of the original production to serve fans' purposes.

However, K-pop fan production may very well be a mixture of the tastes of the K-pop industry, the fan producer as an individual, and fellow fans. This is because the industry's criteria vis-à-vis an idol's attractiveness and selling points, and the fans' tastes of K-pop idols can and do influence each other over time. Likewise, a fan producer can display their own personal style in their fan productions. Busse and Gray (2011) distinguish between traditional fandom and industry-driven fandom. Traditional fandom is a spontaneous subculture, while industry-driven fandom is an industry-organized mainstream culture that has adopted new ICTs and viral

marketing strategies (Busse and Gray, 2011). The K-pop industry does tend to manage K-pop fandom. Indeed, K-pop companies commonly run official fan clubs. In the case of GOT7, their agency JYPE manages their IGOT7 Official Fan Club. Individual fans can purchase an annual membership to access exclusive digital content, attend TV program recording sessions, gain fanmeet opportunities in Korea, and get a membership card and gifts. While official fan club membership demonstrates the K-pop company's recognition of fan identity, the benefits of such a membership are largely confined to Korea. Only Korean residents can apply for and receive a gold membership, for instance. Foreign residents, on the other hand, can only register for a silver membership. The differentiation between Korean and international fan membership is shown not only in the icon of one's fan club website account, but also affects one's priority in the official ticketing system for concerts and events. Meanwhile, fans can create communities and content on internet platforms spontaneously without any control from the industry. Company-organized fan clubs and fan-organized communities can and do coexist. An individual K-pop fan can register at the company-organized fan club to join events, just as they can join fan-organized protests to fight against the company's treatment of their idols. According to Busse and Gray (2011), traditional fans are more emotionally and socially involved and invested than industry-driven, individual, or casual fans. As explained above, it is hard to categorize K-pop fans as traditional fans or industry-driven fans. Casual K-pop fans may be less involved or invested than other fans. But it does not change the fact that it is difficult to distinguish between individual fans and members of fan communities in the mobile internet period. Private individual fans have to join social networks to get up-to-date information and media content. Even if they do not interact with other fans, they will still encounter fans and their productions in social networks.

K-pop fan labor is diversified. K-pop fans produce photographic and videographic works (H. K. Lee, 2019), paintings (Koreaboo, 2017), fanfictions (Lahkim, 2016), translations (Kelley, 2017), music (GOT7_GPjifantuan, 2019), dance performances (Liew, 2013), and original creative merchandise. They also organize fan events. Some of these are run like corporate social responsibility events in which fans engage in charitable activities to enhance their idols' positive image in society (Bae, 2013). Others function as team-bonding exercises where their idols' birthdays and idol groups' anniversaries are celebrated (Ong, 2019). Chinese fans have also acted as groups or individuals that help fellow fans by taking delegated purchase orders of albums or idol-related paraphernalia from Korea, purchasing these goods in Korea or other countries, and working as ticketing service agents (Baidu Jackson Wang Bar, 2016; GOT7xuanchuannvwangyanvshen, 2017). In so doing, they contribute to K-pop fandom in China by reducing international shipping fees for fellow fans, and helping those who are not good at foreign languages and those who do not know how to use foreign online shopping platforms. K-pop fans zealously seek to boost the popularity and competitiveness of their idols by repetitively streaming specific K-pop content online, continually reposting social media posts, and voting for their idols repeatedly (EXO Voting Team, 2019).

Fan labor is not independent self-expression. Fan art producers have to produce creative works in distinguishable styles if they wanted to attract fellow fans' attention. Meanwhile, creative dependence and creative tolerance (A. Fung, 2016) are behind Chinese K-pop fan labor. Fans' creative work is dependent on the K-pop content released by media institutions, entertainment agencies, and idols. These creative endeavors have to carefully toe the line vis-à-vis their idols' rights to privacy, fair use of their idols' image, and the norms in fandom culture.

Based on the analysis of the data generated from my observations and in-depth interviews, I established three general categories of K-pop fan labor: specialized labor, managerial labor, and basic labor. Specialized labor is labor produced from the fans' creativity, knowledge, and specialized skills. Managerial labor is where fans organize events to assist existing and potential members of fandom and promote their idols. Basic labor is the fans' repetitive engagement with officially released products of their idols (such as MVs online, physical albums, social media posts, etc.) with the end goal of boosting the performance figures of the idols.

Different types of fan laborers are in different positions in the fan laborer hierarchy, even though they are all likely to belong to the middle class in society. Bourdieu (1979 [1984], pp. 99-168) indicates that classes and class factions are mainly distinguished by the overall volume of capital, mainly including economic capital and cultural capital. In addition, "overall volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these two properties over time (manifested by past and potential trajectory in social space) all together decide individuals' position in the social space" (Bourdieu 1979 [1984], p.114). This shows that Bourdieu's class theory (1979 [1984], pp. 99-168) can help to explain the fan laborer hierarchy. Among the three types of fan laborers, specialized laborers demonstrate the largest volume of capital while basic laborers show the least volume of capital. Therefore, specialized laborers and basic laborers tend to be at the highest and lowest positions of the fan laborer hierarchy, respectively. As managerial laborers hold the medium volume of capital, they would be in the middle of the hierarchy.

Specialized laborers have to possess certain skills (e.g., photography or translation), the necessary equipment, and other relevant resources to be competent. They can be influential in the entire GOT7 fandom through constant and prominent work, accumulated working experience, and monetary and labor investments. Managerial labor requires fan laborers' communication,

teamwork, and leadership skills. The managerial laborers realize their managerial ideas, produce services, or provide events for fans. However, their influence is largely restricted to the local fan communities. Basic laborers constitute the largest proportion of fan laborers. Groups of basic laborers fall under the management of managerial laborers.

One's *habitus* helps to distinguish classes through everyday practices and demonstrates the taste that represents the social space of the class (Bourdieu, 1979 [1984], pp. 169-225). Although fans work within the K-pop fan laborer community, different fans carry out different practices in their work for their idols. These differences may due to their *habitus*, which is correlated to the different class factions they belong to, or used to belong to. In the case of Chinese K-pop fan laborers, the individuals who are higher in the fan laborer hierarchy tend to belong to a higher class faction within the middle class, as they have relatively higher purchasing power or fan production capabilities to be able to engage in specialized labor. However, the individuals lower in the fan laborer hierarchy do not necessarily belong to a lower class faction in the middle class, as there may be reasons aside from their *habitus* (e.g., the level of devotion to the fandom, disposable time, etc.) that determine the type of fan labor they engage in.

Instead of being a monolithic entity, fan laborers are distinct. Additionally, a higher position in the fan laborer hierarchy also means a higher status in the fan community. In contemporary K-pop fandom, personal relations within K-pop agency staff, privileged information about idols (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83), or administrative roles in the fan community (Baidu Tieba, 2020a) are no longer guarantees of a fan's high status within the fan community; instead, one's status in the fan community is now dependent on the type of fan labor one produces, that is, what you, as a fan, can do to contribute to the idol and fandom.

Specialized Labor

Specialized labor produces creative end products that are then consumed by fellow fans. These products of specialized labor can be released online, as is the case for images, videos, translated texts, subtitled videos, music, dance performances, paintings, comics and fanfictions; or offline, as is in the case of photobooks, photocards, calendars, keychains, pins, clothing, blankets, fans, hand mirrors, and other goods based on fans' photography, paintings, comics, and designs.

Homma, or webmaster of a homepage, is an example of specialized labor. The homma runs a website or a social media account focusing on specific idols; they also post originally generated images and videos of the idols (J. Kim, 2017). In the Korean K-pop fandom, a "home" is a fansite that focuses on representing an idol; producing and distributing originally produced visual materials related to the idol; and selling originally produced commodities based on the pictures of the idol taken by the homma (J. Kim, 2017). In Chinese idol fandom, a homma is called *zhanjie*. *Zhan* means site and *jie* means older sister.

Figure 7.1: Hommas at Digital Media City, Seoul, Korea, 9 November 2019

As seen in Figure 7.1, the hommas are clearly identifiable at male idol group VICTON's mini fanmeeting at Digital Media City in Seoul on 9 November 2019. These are the people sitting or standing on ladders, and using digital DSLR cameras. The photographs taken under these conditions would then be posted on the homma's fansite. Male and female delegate photographers who take photographs and sell them to hommas, as well as ordinary fans who use DSLR cameras casually may also be among them.

Consistent with the findings that females make up the overwhelming majority of the Chinese K-pop fan population, the hommas I know are all females. The hommas I interviewed use professional cameras: Yanhui uses a Canon EOS 7D Mark II with a 100-400 mm lens, and

Xinfei uses a Canon EOS 6D Mark II with a 70-200 mm lens. Yanhui told me that some hommas also use the Canon EOS 5D Mark III. Hommas take pictures and videos of idols on and off stage in their countries and abroad, regardless as to whether photography or videography is permitted. Thus, they would attend concerts, showcases, fanmeetings, fansign events, and go to television stations, airports and other locations whenever their idol was due to appear. In 2019, Xinfei went to television broadcast recordings, concerts, award ceremonies, airports in Seoul, a fanmeeting in Nanjing, and a fansign event in Qingdao to see the GOT7 members.

After taking their pictures, some hommas immediately used their smartphones to upload previews of the images to social media. A preview is a picture taken by a smartphone. It shows the DSLR camera screen of the idol's photograph taken by the homma as well as the homma's logo. Others would go home to edit the photographs and videos before uploading them in high definition on social media. These up-to-date images and videos enable global fans to keep up with their idols, and help to maintain these idols' visibility in the public eye. Hommas are so efficient in taking and disseminating their images and videos that by the time the entertainment agencies and local hosts post the official photographs and video clips online, a large number of fan-taken versions can already be found on the internet. Many hommas have both Twitter and Weibo accounts, enabling them to post with ease. As of 30 December 2019, Yanhui has 4,000 and 11,300 followers, respectively, on her Weibo and Twitter accounts. Her Tweets and Weibo contents are often reposted by other fansites or other fans. It is hard to determine the nationalities of hommas from their social media posts, as they are likely to be multilingual.

Homma-produced images and videos are also made into merchandise, including photobooks, DVDs, blankets, fans, calendars, and so on (Definer, 2020; Markstouch, 2019). These products are usually sold to fans (Sale Everything's, 2019). Hommas have the power to

creatively tweak the styles of their idols' images. For instance, Yanhui eschews making her idol's skin unnaturally smooth like some other homma-produced images on social media. To obtain the most up-to-date pictures and videos of their idols, hommas have to expend a great amount of time, energy, and money in their fandom. In Yanhui's case, she collectively spent two months on fandom in 2019. She travelled to Korea, Japan, and Thailand to see GOT7, spending a total of two weeks in those locations. Her annual fandom-related expenditure is between 10,000 and 200,000 RMB.

Hommas often take pictures and videos during performances, even though it is prohibited. They do this by hiding their cameras from the notice of the security guards at concert venues. Experienced hommas, and novices like Xinfei do this to gain recognition from fellow fans and obtain experience in visual material production. As a college student studying in Korea, Xinfei believes the experience will help her to get a behind-the-scenes job in the entertainment industry in the future, thus enabling her to become colleagues with her idols. She attended two concerts of GOT7's *SPINNING TOP* World Tour in Seoul and tried to record one of them:

When I finished shooting that performance, I saw that no security guards had noticed me. So, I kept shooting. [...] At first, I put the camera at a lower place. [...] Then, I slightly raised the camera and continued shooting. But a hand came up behind me and pulled me away. At that time, the security guard was very severe with me. She dragged me out and told me to delete the videos. [Sigh.] What can I do? I have no experience, and had to delete the videos anyway. (Xinfei, personal communication, 15 November 2019).

Hommas gain experience through trial and error. Their specialized labor is dependent on the idols as their objects, the professional cameras as their instruments, and the entertainment agencies' policies at performance venues.

Hommas also practice managerial labor as an extension of their specialized labor. Yanhui, a homma of her favorite GOT7 member since 2016, is a case in point. In 2019, she and another homma conducted a birthday billboard cheering project for this GOT7 member. In addition to inviting a friend to design billboard posters, they also edited a video, contacted an advertising agency specializing internationally in fan cheering billboards, paid about 20,000 RMB, and got billboards in China and Korea to display their promotional content of this GOT7 member. Their 20-second fan-produced video played a hundred times each day for two days on the large LED screen on the outer wall of Lotte Young Plaza in Myeong-dong, one of the trendiest areas in Seoul.

Managerial Labor

Examples of managerial labor are the coordination of cheering events such as gatherings to celebrate their idol's birthday and idol group's anniversary at a local café, or making a billboard advertisement for their idols.

Café cheering events are an example of managerial labor. Planning for these events occur several months before an idol's birthday, and they are jointly coordinated by the event organizers, recruited fellow fan organizers, and sponsors. While the organizers usually sponsor the event, other sponsors may chip in financially without taking part in the work. Each sponsor pays several hundred RMB per event. As these events consume both time and effort, some organizers fail to find enough fellow organizers and the project falls through.

Xinchen and other organizers organized the café birthday cheering events for three GOT7 members' September 2019 birthdays (Jaycee_chen, 2019; Ruidiya, 2019; Zhenrong de zhezi, 2019). According to Xinchen, she coordinates these events to make fans happy and promote her idols. She and her fellow organizers believe that doing so would maintain the interest of current fans while attracting new ones. Xinchen and her colleagues began planning this project in June 2019. For these GOT7 members' birthday events, they selected the Sanlitun area in Beijing because of its popularity with Chinese youths. They then investigated several cafés in the area as possible venues; negotiated with café owners; sought image reproduction permission from more than ten hommas; discussed, designed, and produced freebies for attendees; collaborated with café event organizers in other cities; and utilized cheering event experience gained from other events. A few days before an event, the organizers went to the chosen café, Kurotaki (CN: Heilongtailang), in Sanlitun SOHO to decorate the place with fan-reproduced official and unofficial pictures of their idols, official dolls, and official lightsticks. On the day of the event, a homma sent a birthday cake and card to the venue; paper banners and shopping bags with the idol's images were given to fans as freebies; a lucky draw took place; and the screen in the café continuously played GOT7 videos prepared by the organizers. After the event, the organizers had to fulfill their agreement with the café owner by taking down the decorations, and making sure that the attendees posted positive reviews of the eatery on DianPing (China's most popular restaurant rating platform) and tagged the café in their Weibo posts about the event.

Xinchen explained that in planning such fan events, organizers practiced their abilities in negotiating with partners, made decisions to minimize cost and maximize benefits, and deployed their teamwork and leadership skills. While these event organizers may be well known to fans in their locality, they are relatively unknown among GOT7 fans within and without the country.

Their recognition and power, gained through the event, might not last long if they ceased to organize such events. Interestingly, fans reproduce officially released images without obtaining the entertainment agency's permission, but they carefully seek the permission of hommas and fan-artists before reproducing their images. According to my interviewees, hommas usually refuse to give permission if they intend to use the images to produce merchandise for sale. This shows that even as hommas give away part of their creative works as contributions to fandom, they will not hesitate to make use of the commercial value of their images and videos.

Basic Labor

The fans who engage in basic labor typically watch their idols' videos online a great number of times and vote for their idols repeatedly in polls.

Streaming videos and voting for idols online are examples of basic labor. Idols' recognition within the entertainment industry is reflected in the number of music chart and award shows they win. However, these achievements can be intentionally and strategically attained through fans' basic labor. According to Xixi, working for a fan streaming and voting team is very time-consuming. A streaming and voting team is an online fan community where the team leaders would assign daily tasks to team members to ensure that their idol was promoted. These tasks involve the streaming of certain songs or voting in certain charts multiple times. After graduating from university and starting her job, Xixi had more disposable income, but less time. Thus, she stopped repetitive streaming and voting, and instead travelled to other cities to see her idols. Yujing told a similar story, as the streaming and voting team she had joined required members to complete daily tasks. Failure to do so would result in immediate expulsion from the team. Thus, she left the team when she got busier. To boost the number of views a video has, it

must be streamed in its entirety continuously so that the system will not identify the views as data fraud. Fan streaming and voting teams make guides for fan labor to cope with the constantly changing algorithms of the online platforms. One of my interviewees, Tongtong, has two smartphones: one for everyday use, and another for repetitive streaming during GOT7's promotional weeks. Repetitive streaming of music videos (MV's) is exhausting, as stated by Xiwen:

When I streamed MVs on YouTube, my brain exploded. In order to maximize the time utilization ratio, I opened many browsers at the same time. Once, I opened six browsers to stream an MV. Then, the MVs in each browser ended at different times. Then, you just listen. On that day, my brain exploded. Play once, clear the cache, and manually replay the MV. [...] You need to clear the cache! If you don't, it means your streaming of the MV has already been counted! (Xiwen, personal communication, 25 November 2019).

Fans can practice basic labor if they have a smartphone and access to the internet. Basic labor is dependent on the fan's time and energy. It requires the least skills and monetary investment. Individual fans are likely to engage in different types of fan labor at the same time, even as they focus on one type of fan labor. However, fans mostly shift from one type of fan labor to another, depending on their personal circumstances or preferences.

Categorization of K-Pop Fan Products and Services

Chinese K-pop fan products and services follow the three main categories of fan labor. Thus, specialized labor produces specialized products; managerial labor produces managerial products

and services; and basic labor produces basic products. As shown in Table 7.2, the three types of fan products and services can be subsequently divided into subcategories.

Table 7.2: Categorization of Chinese K-pop fan products and services

Category of	Subcategory of Products and	Type of Products and Services
Products and	Services	
Services		
Specialized	Statistics	Statistics
products	Language and literature	Translation, fiction
	Art and design	Photography; videography; comics; sketches and paintings; merchandise design and making; cover song; cover dance
	Integrated program	Vlog; unboxing video; reaction video; fan influencer video
Managerial	Online services	Group purchase, delegated purchase
products and	Offline events	Birthday and anniversary café event
services	Advertisement and promotion	Billboard promotion; repetitive voting, posting in forums and communities, and streaming organization
Basic	Information	Content on foreign platforms or websites
products	Data	Repetitive voting, posting in forums and communities, and streaming

Specific types of products and services belong to certain subcategories. Statistics refer to the collection and analysis of data on the idol group's physical album sales or number of YouTube views for the purpose of measuring the idol group's business performance (Guaxueketang, 2020). Translation includes the translation of the text (CandyPeach Park Jinyoung Resource Blog, 2020) as well as subtitled TV programs and videos (DayNNightForGOT7, 2018). Fans also write fanfictions, which usually appear on the blog platform Lofter (Gyuemiii, 2020). Hommas produce and distribute photography and videography. Their photographs and videos would be initially distributed on social media or fansites. Fan-artists produce artwork and comics. Hommas and fan-artists may subsequently produce merchandise based on their photographs, videos, artwork, and comics. Integrated program refers to the range of videos that fans produce and upload to online streaming sites so as to share their fandom-related information and experiences with fellow fans. These videos are commonly uploaded to Bilibili and YouTube. Since many K-pop products are in foreign languages on foreign platforms, the Chinese K-pop fans with access to these products or foreign language abilities transfer such foreign content to Chinese internet platforms or translate them into the Chinese language. Meanwhile, Chinese K-pop fans also transfer physical products from foreign locations to China through the organization of delegated purchases or group purchases. These different Chinese K-pop fan products and services demonstrate how fan production serves to disseminate K-pop and maintain the interest of K-pop fans.

Translocal Connections and Division of Work

H. Shin and Lee (2020) recommend the use of the term “translocal” to refer to the relational aspects describing inter-Asia cultural flows. Translocal cultural flows occur when the scale of local dissemination of a given culture is uncertain, the global dissemination of said culture is ambiguous, and the connections among the geographically distributed actors are unable to reconcile or rationalize global-local, East-West, and North-South cultural dichotomies (H. Shin & Lee, 2020). The connections among K-pop fans in different geographical locations can also be described as translocal. Some fan organizations and individual fans serve as the key nodes in fan networks. Fans may get to know each other at in-person or online events. Apart from local cheering events, most fan works are the results of online collaborations. The coordination of fan projects is mostly done through instant messaging platforms QQ and WeChat, social networking platforms Weibo and Twitter, fan crowdfunding and retailing platform Owhat, and online payment platforms WeChat Pay and Alipay. Local fan event organizers are also connected through translocal collaborations. According to Xinchun, the September 2019 GOT7 birthday cheering events at Kurotaki/Heilongtailang (in Beijing) are part of the collaborative efforts of fan organizers from eight Chinese cities. Each city’s organizers would share the same designs for some freebies, but plan and host the event differently in their own locality.

Within the Chinese GOT7 fandom online, one can find fansites of the group, individual members, and two members. There are integrated fansites, and fansites focusing on specific fan works such as translations, purchase of official merchandise, streaming and voting, and so on. For example, the fansite to which Siqi belongs has 20 workers in total, with five or six fans working on translations. According to a former worker of an integrated fansite of a GOT7 member, there are on average 30 to 40 workers per site, of whom ten are very active. Chinese

fansites also collaborate in subbing videos (i.e., making subtitled videos), thus expediting the process. For example, according to the information posted on their social media, ten Chinese fansites are working together to subtitle episodes of GOT7's variety show *Hard Carry 2.5*. Siqui outlined the fan-subbing process as follows. After obtaining the video, one or more translators would listen to and translate the dialogue into Chinese on a text document. Then, one or more colleagues would make sure the Chinese text matched the timing of the audio in the video. After that, another colleague will compress the subtitled video, while a designer creates a poster crediting all the parties involved. Finally, the video would be uploaded to Chinese streaming site Bilibili, and the release publicized on Weibo with the poster.

As K-pop fans are connected translocally, they often work collaboratively to promote their idols. Fan productions are divided up according to local circumstances so as to minimize costs and maximize the overall benefits for both idols and fandom. During GOT7's comeback (album release and promotion) periods, GOT7 fans all over the world wanted their idols to top the music chart shows. As physical album sales, online streaming views of songs and MVs, and social media discussions are among the scoring criteria, fans purchase the albums, play songs on Korean music streaming platform Melon, stream MVs on YouTube, discuss GOT7 on Twitter, and so on. Chinese fans do their part by buying large numbers of the physical album, and streaming the songs and MVs where possible. Although only residents in Korea are permitted to register on Melon and stream the songs it hosts, there are people selling or distributing Melon accounts online to foreign fans, thus allowing some Chinese fans to stream their idols' songs. Tongtong explains that Korean and foreign fans in Korea stream the songs often on Melon, and buy the albums in bulk at local record stores so as to win a chance of meeting their idols and obtaining their autographs at fansign events. Chinese fans are less active on YouTube and

Twitter, as those platforms are blocked in China. In contrast, Western and Thai fans stream MVs on YouTube, and discuss and trend certain hashtags on Twitter because of costly shipping fees between Korea and their countries. Chinese fans, on the other hand, buy more physical albums because China and Korea's geographical proximity means shipping is more affordable. This resulted in Chinese fans purchasing 103,898 copies of GOT7's November 2019 album, *CALL MY NAME*, within the first week of its release (GetO_Together_7, 2019). According to fans' records of the Hanteo Charts, the album sold a total of 224,459 copies at the end of the first week (One and Only G7, 2019). If the statistics are reliable, this means Chinese fans bought almost half the number of albums sold in the first week.

Fans value the first week physical album sales and mainly purchase albums then because the sales figures during this crucial window impact the idols' scores in the music chart shows. Chinese fans buy the albums through Chinese fansites offering group purchases, Chinese fansign organizing companies, and online delegated purchase shops. A unique practice of Chinese fans is unshipped album purchase. This is where the physical albums purchased by the Chinese fans would be donated to charity organizations or cafés in Korea to promote their idols. Chinese fans do this to save on shipping costs and purchase more albums to boost sales figures. Of the 103,898 albums bought by Chinese fans, 42,457 were unshipped albums (GetO_Together_7, 2019). By engaging in unshipped album purchases, Chinese fans show that the K-pop fandom is more than being proud and supportive of their idols' music and image; it is also about achieving the same goal as their beloved idols in the market. Fans, including fan laborers, are well connected in the translocal networks built through their online and offline interactions.

“I don’t want to *baipiao*”: Fans’ Definition of Fans

When many fans and I queued in front of the café in Beijing to collect fan-produced freebies at Mark’s birthday event, fan organizers asked us to produce evidence that we had bought Mark’s or GOT7’s official products. They said album orders would be the best, and shipped or unshipped album purchases were fine. [...] Proof of purchase of Mark’s joint-designed products was okay too. I prepared a screenshot of my purchase of Mark’s joint-designed T-shirts, thinking this would be enough. However, when my turn came, the woman checking my phone swiped to see the photos before and after the screenshot. I was astonished that she expected to see more than one piece of evidence. [...] She asked if I bought GOT7 albums. I said I bought the albums through non-domestic channels, as I resided in Singapore. She asked me how many copies I bought. I explained that though I did not buy much, I attended their concerts. Then the woman said to the other organizers, “Here is a Singaporean [fan]!” The organizers probably agreed to give me the freebies because I was allowed to collect my gifts and pick my lottery ticket. However, in the process, I felt pressurized and judged. (Author’s fieldnote, Beijing, 7 September 2019).

Before fans could collect freebies produced by the event coordinators at Mark’s birthday event in Beijing in September 2019, organizers checked for evidence of their expenditure on official GOT7 products. If an attendee could not prove that they had purchased GOT7’s official goods, they would not be given any freebies at the birthday event. The rules were set and implemented by the fan organizers who had invested money, time, and energy to the project. A decade ago, fans who knew entertainment agency staff and had privileged information about their idols

possessed high status in the fan hierarchy (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 54-83). In recent years, investment in one's idols gives one power over fellow fans in fandom. Fans also judge fellow fans' investment in their idols.

Chinese K-pop fans define fans, non-fans, and different types of fans carefully. This is consistent with previous findings of the Chinese K-pop fandom (L. Chen, 2018, pp. 84-101). Fans define the fans of K-pop and the fans of specific K-pop idols differently. According to the interviewees who engaged in fan labor, fans defined K-pop fans as people who passionately engaged with K-pop literature, media, merchandise and updates of the artistes in the entertainment industry. However, fans of a K-pop idol group are defined as people who make the effort to “repay” the group for entertaining them. This can be done by spending their money on official merchandise, and devoting their time and energy to ensuring the success of their idol group.

A lot of official, unofficial, and fan-produced K-pop content are available online for free. To promote their idols, entertainment agencies encourage the fans' repetitive labor vis-à-vis winning the chance to see them at a studio show recording or a fansign event. If GOT7 fans want to attend the recordings of music chart shows, they must be a member of the group's official fan club, and they must have streamed the required number of certain songs (usually several hundred times) on Melon. As for MVs and other video contents, K-pop companies encourage fans to repetitively play a newly released MV on YouTube by releasing other new videos (such as various versions of dance practice videos), if the MV has been streamed in full for a certain number of times. Similarly, fans must buy physical albums at an assigned record store in Korea if they are to stand a chance of winning a ticket to a fansign event. The more albums the fans buy, the higher their chances of attending this event. Fans believe that foreigners are more likely to

buy more albums to win a fansign event ticket. The testimony of several interviewees confirms that each Chinese fan usually buys at least 100 copies of an album, spending over 10,000 RMB (over 1,500 USD) in order to win a chance to attend a GOT7 fansign event in Korea.

In the Chinese K-pop fandom, the term *baipiao* is commonly used. *Baipiao* literally means visiting prostitutes without paying, but in the Chinese K-pop fandom, it refers to self-proclaimed fans that refuse to devote money, time, or energy to the idol and fandom. *Baipiao* can also be used as a verb to describe the consumption of an idol's free content without expending money, time, and energy on fandom or the idol. Those who self-identify as fans and make the effort to "repay" their idols deny *baipiao*'s identities as fans. Tongtong explains the difference between *baipiao* and fans by comparing the former to beggars and the latter to street performers:

Many beggars look pitiful, but I won't give them money [...] because I feel they are not sincere [...]. But street performers are artistes because they actively earn money through their labor. That is the essential difference between beggars and street performers. [...] Some people call themselves fans and frequently boast that they love some stars, but they say that without doing anything to support them. (Tongtong, personal communication, 10 November 2019).

Tongtong also defines *baipiao* thus:

*Baipiao*s only want to receive, but do not want to give. (Author: What do you mean by "give"?) Giving time, energy, or money to our idols. These all count. Being a fan is not limited to the people who give money. I don't think so, at least. (Tongtong, personal communication, 10 November 2019).

Overall, fans believe that their idols' achievements are the joint efforts of the idols themselves and the fans who actively give their time, energy and money to them. *Baipiaos*, on the other hand, share in the idols' achievements without contributing to them. The Weibo fansite to which Siqi belongs was created in April 2015, and posts content related to one of the GOT7 members. As of 30 December 2019, it has 281,811 followers and 26,439 posts. When I asked why she translated idol-related content for this fansite, Siqi replied:

I don't want to *baipiao*; I want to help. [...] Through translations, I help to disseminate the latest news about him. I feel like I have contributed something. Translations help people to keep up with the latest information. (Author: You're doing this to serve other fans?) Yes, yes. I also do it to expand my idol's influence. If no one makes Chinese subbed videos, the fans of other groups may not know of him. If you make Chinese subtitles, then others will watch the video and may come to like the idol too. (Siqu, personal communication, 8 November 2019).

In the idol industry, fans are not mere consumers or audiences as they actively participate in the industry by inputting their money and labor.

According to the interviewees, the fans who spend money, time, or energy to produce products and coordinate events earn the right to set standards by determining who can access and possess their products. The gift economy still exists in the Chinese K-pop fandom. However, it is practiced very differently from the gift economy discussed in previous academic writings (Scott, 2009; Stanfill & Condis, 2014) because fan identity in Chinese K-pop fandom is now closely related to one's investment in the fandom. Many gift-givers in the Chinese K-pop fandom permit individuals to be gift recipients only if they have repaid the idol. Some fan organizers of giveaways may look at the fans' records of expenditure; others may look at the fans' records of

repetitive voting and streaming. Engaging in specialized work in fandom is usually not part of the criteria for receiving freebies, as these fans account for only a small proportion of fandom. However, a great deal of expenditure goes into many kinds of specialized work. Hommas, for example, spend a fair amount of money attending concert overseas and fansign events multiple times each year so as to take pictures and videos of their idols.

Conclusion

In the case of many Chinese K-pop fans, they are more than consumers. A great number of Chinese K-pop fans are fan laborers. These fan laborers produce a wide range of products and services, including specialized, managerial, and basic products and services, for the consumption of fellow fans and the promotion of their idols. In fact, the Chinese K-pop fan laborers themselves define fans as those who contribute to the idols and fandom. L. Chen (2018, pp. 3-27) found that Chinese J-pop fans consider only those who have paid for their idols' products to be fans. My research finds similar results in Chinese K-pop fandom. Noticeably, different individuals will define "fans" differently. Chinese K-pop fan laborers consider the ones who contribute to the idols and the fandom as fans, regardless as to whether the format of the contribution is money, time, or energy. These fans actively practice fan labor because they believe it is one way of distinguishing themselves from ordinary audience members and the self-proclaimed fans who do not expend money, time, or energy on their idols. While some fans have found ways of informally earning money from their labor, they are still consumers and laborers devoting money, time, and energy to fandom.

This suggests that the fan-industry relationship is more complicated than binary in nature (Steirer, 2016). A common reason for fan labor is dissatisfaction with official productions (J.

Kim, 2017). K-pop fan laborers work for the K-pop industry while they often criticize K-pop companies. K-pop fan laborers do not resist consumerism; instead, they are consumers or co-producers who subscribe to consumerism. They engage in fan labor because the official corporate narratives inadequately address the desires and expectations of consumers. In the same vein, the K-pop fandom's immaterial labor (Lazzarato, 1996) and free labor (Terranova, 2000) contribute to the commercial and cultural vibrancies of the K-pop industry. Fan laborers are exploited even as they seek empowerment through their labor. Unlike salaried workers, fan laborers have no formal employment arrangements and commitments, and operate on voluntary and informal engagements. Consequently, fan laborers do not perceive their labor as a conventional job. Chinese K-pop fan laborers still perceive themselves as consumers who actively seek diverse ways to "repay" the industry's cultural production. They do so even though many cultural products distributed online seemingly do not have an asking price. However, such consumers' "repayment" is a critical step in the production and distribution process of their idol groups. In this way, fan labor is an indispensable part of the operations of the K-pop industry. Thus, the binary labeling of K-pop fandom as merely passive and easily exploited consumers by capitalistic corporate institutions does not reflect the more complex experiences of these subjects. Instead, as the case study of Chinese GOT7 fandom shows, fan labor draws out the multiple prosumer identities that encompass layered levels of creative engagements in the affective economy of K-pop.

Chapter 8

K-Pop Idols' Presentations of Multiple Identities: The Case of Jackson

Introduction

K-pop has been attracting foreign audiences in East Asia and the world since the 1990s and 2010s, respectively (S. Lee, 2015; M. Sun & Liew, 2019). This resulted in some non-Korean young talents wanting to be K-pop stars, and prompted the K-pop companies' search for foreign talents (Xia, 2020). SME started holding auditions in China after the surprising success of their male idol group H.O.T.'s concert in Beijing in 2000 (*China Entertainment Report*, 2000; Xia, 2020). In 2005, SME debuted SJ with a Chinese member named Han Geng. K-pop stars perform in Korea and many other countries. The K-pop industry uses the recruitment of foreign talents as a strategy to cater to foreign markets. GOT7 is a good example of the K-pop industry's contemporary strategy of employing foreign members in its lineup of idols.

The concept of transnational stardom (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30) can be applied to the analysis of non-Korean K-pop idols' multiple identity presentations. Non-Korean K-pop idols are transnational stars because they travel from their home country to Korea for their music and entertainment careers and release Korean-language songs. While they help to localize K-pop in foreign markets and gain popularity there, they will face diverse cultural and social contexts as they do so, potentially triggering controversies. Previous literature on transnational stardom largely focused on how multiple identity presentations help transnational stars gain popularity (Cepeda, 2013; Fung & Curtin, 2002; Meeuf & Raphael, 2013; Sandeau, in press); however, limited attention has been paid to the negative consequences, including the controversies brought about by transnational stars' multiple identity presentations (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). Thus, this

chapter will investigate the negative consequences caused by the K-pop industry's non-Korean talent recruitment strategy that has long contributed to K-pop's transnational popularity.

Many K-pop trainees debut in K-pop idol groups, and some of them become solo singers a few years later. In some cases, they work as an idol group member and a solo singer at the same time. However, this strategy is controversial to the celebrity's image and the celebrity's fandom. The fans of the star will now have mixed feelings towards their divided but coexisting careers as an idol group member and a solo singer. Jackson, Mark and BamBam from GOT7 exemplify the difficulty in straddling the two roles of idol group member and solo singer. Where Jackson operates as a solo artiste in China and the United States, Mark and BamBam carry out solo activities in China and Thailand, respectively. They each present complex identities when they face audiences from different social and cultural contexts.

Although Jackson and Mark speak Chinese, and help GOT7 to appeal to fans in China, their solo careers in the mainland are very different. Jackson has more connections with mainland China and Hong Kong, and possibly has an easier time adapting to the Chinese markets than Mark who was born and raised in the United States. As Mark engages in much fewer solo activities in mainland China than Jackson, he has a significantly smaller fanbase. Moreover, Mark is an inactive Chinese-American performer in the mainland Chinese market, and does not show any strong sentiments of Chinese nationalism. In contrast, Hong Kong-born Chinese member Jackson has displayed nationalistic feelings towards China. In this way, Mark has not attracted any significant controversies over his political stance in regard to China. While Mark has fans following his solo career (known as *Weifan* in Chinese), he has a much smaller number than Jackson. Through use of Jackson as a case study, I will explore the complexity and nuances of K-pop idols' identity presentations as transnational stars.

Jackson Wang Ka-Yee was born in Hong Kong in 1994. His father Wang Ruiji, born in Guangdong Province, used to be a fencer in China's National Fencing Team. His mother Zhou Ping, born in Shanghai, was a Chinese gymnast. Both of them left the mainland and immigrated to Hong Kong. Wang Ruiji has been serving on the Hong Kong Fencing Team as coach, head coach, and fencing director since 1993, and Zhou Ping is a gymnastics coach in schools (*Dongguan Celebrity Archive*, 2013; J. K.-Y. Wang, 2018). Jackson is their second son.

Jackson took up fencing at the age of 10, won awards in 2010 and 2011 as a sabre fencer while representing Hong Kong, and even trained for the Olympic Games (*The Sun*, 2010; Zeng 2011). In an interview with a Hong Kong online newspaper before he left fencing for the K-pop industry, Jackson spoke of the ways in which music had been instrumental in the friendships he built up with Korean students at the international school he attended (*The Sun*, 2011). He expressed his appreciation of Korea culture when he told the reporter: "Do you know what is 'Hahan' [Crazy for Korea]? I would say this is my style" (*The Sun*, 2011). Due to his interest in music, dance, and Korean popular culture, he decided to take up the offer to become a K-pop trainee (*The Sun*, 2011; Zeng 2011). Jackson eventually moved to Seoul for K-pop training in 2011, after he was scouted by JYPE in Hong Kong. It was a decision that disappointed his father who had high hopes for his fencing career.

After three years as a trainee, Jackson debuted as a member of JYPE's male idol group GOT7 in January 2014 in Korea with their single *Girls Girls Girls*. He is one of the three rappers in the group, and one of the two members in charge of martial arts in their choreography. This was the official starting point of his career as a K-pop idol. In late 2014, GOT7 (including Jackson) debuted in Japan, one of the largest popular music markets in the world and one of the largest K-pop export markets. Jackson's success in Korea also took off in 2014 when he

appeared in SBS's reality TV show *Roommate Season 2*, presenting himself as a passionate, funny, and talented *maknae* (a Korean term used to indicate the youngest member in a group of people) among the celebrities living together as roommates. He won the Newcomer Award at the 2014 SBS Entertainment Awards because of his performance in this show. Jackson subsequently appeared in more Korean variety shows. Thus, Jackson's profile as a K-pop idol in Korea and beyond was raised.

Jackson's prominence as a K-pop artiste in China began when he made his debut in the Chinese variety show *Go Fridge* in December 2015. Before his appearance on this show, Jackson was only known in China among K-pop fans that were familiar with GOT7. The show raised his popularity to a new level. *Go Fridge* is the Chinese version of Korean variety show *Chef & My Fridge*. It is produced and broadcasted online by Tencent Video. The show is hosted by Jackson and He Jiong, the most popular mainland Chinese emcee of entertainment shows. As Jackson was not fluent in Mandarin at the time, he stumbled over his pronunciation in a good-natured way. This endeared him to viewers, who laughed with him, and came away with a positive impression of him. Thereafter, Jackson gained more opportunities to appear in many other variety shows broadcasted through satellite TV and video streaming platforms in the mainland. Not only did Jackson become increasingly popular among audiences, his Mandarin also improved quickly during his entertainment activities in China.

In the first half of 2017, Team Wang, the company managing Jackson's solo career in China, was established. In August 2017, Jackson released his solo English single *Papillon*, marking his attempt to break into the global markets. After the establishment of his company, he started brand endorsements and commercial collaborations in China with well-known brands like Pepsi, Adidas, Alibaba, Lenovo, and Vivo. He later released another solo single titled *Okay* that

had both English and Chinese lyrics. Jackson ceased his activities in Japan as a member of GOT7 in November 2017. JYPE initially cited Jackson's health problems and conflicting schedules as the reasons for the cessation of his appearances in Japan. Indeed, Jackson was primarily focused on his solo career in China during this time. In February 2018, Jackson was appointed Hong Kong Tourism Envoy. His song *Fendiman*, a collaboration with Fendi China, was released in May 2018 and topped the iTunes US Pop Chart (V. Chen, 2018). In June 2018, a year after he set up his Weibo account, his number of Weibo followers doubled and reached 10 million. Since then, he has been constantly working in China and Korea as a soloist and a member of GOT7. In October 2019, Jackson released his first solo album *Mirrors* internationally. His music and merchandise have been simultaneously released on Chinese and international internet platforms. By October 2020, he had 25 million Weibo followers and 19 million Instagram followers.

Jackson speaks at least seven languages, including Cantonese, Shanghainese, Mandarin, English, French, Korean, and Japanese. Since Jackson was born and raised in Hong Kong, and his father is from Guangdong Province, Cantonese is his mother tongue. Through his entertainment activities in China, he has come to be proficient in Mandarin. However, he continues to communicate with the Hong Kong media in Cantonese as both a K-pop group member and a solo artiste. He surprised audiences in mainland China, who initially saw him as a Hong Kong celebrity, when he addressed them in fluent Shanghainese. This is unsurprising given that his mother is from Shanghai. He has mentioned in TV shows and social media posts that he has been visiting his grandparents in Shanghai during school holidays since he was very young. Jackson also uses Shanghainese to talk to other artistes and TV program staff when he learns they are from Shanghai. By using the same language as the people he directly interacts

with, Jackson is able to broaden his appeal among audiences in both Hong Kong and the mainland. As he was educated in an international school in Hong Kong, he is fluent in English and can reach out to international audiences. He even knows a bit of French since it is the working language in the sport of fencing. Additionally, Jackson has gained proficiency in Korean and Japanese from his training in the K-pop industry. As a trainee and K-pop idol living in Korea for years, he speaks fluent Korean. K-pop idols commonly speak Japanese as well since Japan is K-pop's biggest market, and Jackson is no exception. When he needs to communicate with audiences and people in the entertainment industry, Jackson does so without relying on interpreters. This multilingual ability enables him to present different identities to engage with different audience groups.

Due to Jackson's unique family background and life experiences in the fencing, music, and entertainment scenes, he is an all-rounder artiste capable of breaking into the global markets. This chapter will draw on the concept of transnational stardom to analyze Jackson's presentations of his identities and the consequences of such presentations. I will do so by examining the social media accounts of GOT7 and its members, Jackson's first solo MV, Jackson's media interviews, and my findings as a participant-observer.

Jackson's Multiple Identity Representations

When Jackson appeared in the Korean reality TV show *Roommate Season 2* (2014), Korean American artiste Joon Park discovered that Jackson is an ethnic Chinese. He then asked Jackson in Korean "Do you speak Chinese, English, or Korean?" Jackson replied in English, "I speak everything." Jackson is thus presented as cosmopolitan. Chua's (2001, 2012) concept of Pop Culture China describes the network of transnational and border-crossing consumption of

Chinese-language pop culture in countries where ethnic Chinese people account for the majority of the population. However, the case of GOT7's Jackson demonstrates that ethnic Chinese artistes have already been working in the networks connecting not only the Chinese-language speaking world but also Japan, Korea, Europe, and the United States through their multilingual skills, and multicultural and multinational career experiences.

Jackson's description of himself in different circumstances changes over time. When Jackson initially appeared on the SBS variety show *Roommate Season 2* in 2014, he wore a cap emblazoned with "HKG852", showing his Hongkonger identity through the abbreviation for Hong Kong and its international telephone code. In that same show, he reinforced that identity by introducing himself as "GOT7's Jackson [...] from Hong Kong". When Jackson made his first appearance on a Chinese variety show in October 2015, the program *Real Hero* (CN: *Zhenxin yingxiong*) not only introduced him as the Chinese member of Korean group GOT7 but also used his Chinese name—Wang Jiaer. As the host of his TV show *Go Fridge* in December 2015, Jackson introduced himself as "Wang Jiaer" and said people could call him Jiajia, Jackson, or Jiaer. In Episode 10 of Mango TV's internet variety show *Who's the Murderer* (CN: *Mingxing Dazhentan*) *Season 2* that aired in March 2017, Jackson's presentation of himself shifted again. When another artiste on that show conversationally referenced Jackson as someone "from Hong Kong", he responded, "I am also from Shanghai", and proceeded to speak Shanghainese. During his visit to the US in 2019, Jackson kept introducing himself as "Jackson Wang from China" in interviews. As illustrated in these examples, the shift away from his Hongkonger identity towards a China identity became more pronounced when Jackson started to develop his solo career in China and beyond.

Jackson uses different names in different markets. In mainland China, Jackson mostly uses the name “Wang Jiaer”, which is the Mandarin pronunciation of his Chinese name. People in China also call him by his given name, Jiaer. In Hong Kong, Jackson uses “Wang Ka-Yee” (the Cantonese pronunciation of his Chinese name), his English name Jackson, and “Kaka” (a Cantonese diminutive of his Chinese name). In Korea, Jackson goes by “Jackson” or “Wang Jackson”. In the US, he is known as Jackson Wang. Nuances in the different ways that Jackson identifies himself can also be found in his social media accounts targeting the mainland and overseas markets. Unlike his Weibo ID and introduction which only shows his Chinese and English names, Jackson displays his Chinese, English, and Korean names, as well as his Hongkonger identity in his Twitter and Instagram accounts through prominent use of “852”—the international telephone code of Hong Kong—in his IDs and introductions. It can be said that his Hongkonger identity has been watered down in the mainland but emphasized overseas.

Jackson is very open about his active participation in almost every process of the management of his label and the production of his solo releases, be it music production or the direction of MVs (Herman, 2019). In this way, his first solo single *Papillon* is a good case study as to the ways in which he intentionally and unintentionally presents his multiple identities. *Papillon* was released in August 2017. By April 2021, the MV for *Papillon* had 47 million views on YouTube and 7 million views on QQ Music. While not a huge number compared to other famous artistes in the global market, it is still impressive. The *Papillon* MV was directed by Korean director OJun Kwon who had previously directed the MV for GOT7’s *Hard Carry*. Kwon would go on to direct several of Jackson’s subsequent MVs, and the MVs of many top Korean popular musicians such as BTS, Henry Lau, and Jay Park. Similar to the K-pop industry in general (G.-S. Park, 2013b), the behind-the-scenes creativity and production of Jackson’s solo

music utilizes Korean, European, and American talents, even though he emphasizes his Chinese identity to demonstrate his sense of belonging and to cater to the Chinese market. Although Jackson referred to *Papillon* as his “first single in China” (Herman, 2019), the English lyrics of the song and his frank admission of his goal to “become an international singer” in an interview with QQ Music (J. K.-Y. Wang, 2017) indicate that the song was intended to target the global markets. Key elements of the MV vis-à-vis Jackson’s various identities will be investigated below.

Journey to the West: European Traditions and Hip-Hop Culture

As seen in *Twinkle*—the MV for TaeTiSeo, a sub-unit of Girls’ Generation—K-pop MVs will contain global cultural references, especially American ones, so as to target the global markets (S.-Y. Kim, 2016). Traditional European culture and American hip-hop culture are clearly evident in Jackson’s *Papillon* MV. The European elements, including statues depicting Poseidon and a deer’s head (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2), convey meanings of power, ambition, and masculinity. The close-up shots of Poseidon and the deer’s head imply that both the MV director and Jackson intentionally emphasize those figures so as to transfer the meanings inherent in them to the song *Papillon* and Jackson himself. Indeed, Jackson raps and dances in front of the Poseidon statue (see Figures 8.3 and 8.4).

Figure 8.1: The Poseidon statue

Figure 8.2: The deer head sculpture

Figure 8.3: Jackson rapping in front of the Poseidon statue

Figure 8.4: Jackson dancing in front of the Poseidon statue

When hip-hop, a music genre originating from African American culture, was transmitted to Japan and subsequently utilized by Japanese artistes, issues of cultural appropriation, race, and the new meanings inserted by the Japanese performers into the culture have to be taken into consideration (Condry, 2007). The criticism and resistance embedded in hip-hop culture is still preserved, even though Japanese rappers use it to reveal Japan's social problems rather than the United States' (Condry, 2007). In Japan, hip-hop is employed in commercial activities and people's everyday life as a fashion style rather than a racial culture (Condry, 2007). Jackson appropriates American hip-hop culture in his music in a similar way. In the *Papillon* MV, American rapper and entrepreneur Rick Ross's albums are displayed, and Jackson pays homage to him in the lyrics: "I'll break rules like Rick Ross'd be saying" (see Figure 8.5). Ben Baller, a Korean American hip-hop musician, actor and jeweler, is one of the three main characters in the MV, and appears in one-third of the scenes as Jackson's friend or brother (see Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.5: Display of Rick Ross's albums

Figure 8.6: Ben Baller and Jackson

A Bite of Roast Duck: Chinese Tradition or PRC Identity

In the *Papillon* MV, the Chinese elements are more explicitly showcased than the European and American ones. In one scene, Jackson, Ben Baller, and Boytoy are having Chinese food and a type of Chinese alcohol known as *baijiu* (see Figure 8.7). In an interview with the mainland Chinese music platform QQ Music, Jackson explained in Mandarin that the arrangement was an expression of his Chinese taste:

[It was,] for example, my taste. My taste [adding a north China accent]. No matter where I am, I still eat roast duck [in Cantonese], roast duck [in Cantonese], that is to say, Beijing roast duck, eating roast duck, and... [Interviewer: Shanghainese food is also good.] Yes, but no... no... no... [Interviewer: Not (typical of Chinese foods).] Yes. And the alcohol [we] drink is also Chinese alcohol. (J. K.-Y. Wang, 2017).

It is telling that the MV features Ben Baller, a Korean American, and Boytoy, a Korean musician who has been producing music for JYPE artistes. Through scenes with them, Jackson is able to present and emphasize his Chinese identity in the MV. Jackson is half-Shanghainese and half-Cantonese, but was born and raised in Hong Kong. As is evident from his interview, Jackson claims he prefers Beijing food, the food from the PRC capital city, to Shanghainese food. In doing so, he implies that food from Beijing is more representative of China. However, his response shows that he is not familiar with Beijing food, uncertain as to the names of Beijing dishes, and unaware of the difference between Cantonese roast duck and Beijing roast duck. Despite this gaffe, Jackson intentionally presents PRC as his identity rather than any local identity from which he originates and is more familiar, be it Hong Kong, Guangdong, or Shanghai. In another scene in the MV, the presentation of his PRC identity is made more explicit through the use of the national flag and its colors. As can be seen in Figure 8.8, Jackson wears a red hoodie with five yellow stars on the hood. There are also two sports cars—one in red and one in yellow. Through these elements, Jackson intentionally demonstrates his identification with the PRC from which his family originated. In doing so, he is catering to the profitable mainland Chinese market.

Figure 8.7: Jackson, Ben Baller, and Boytoy having Chinese food and alcohol

Figure 8.8: Display of elements depicting the Chinese national flag

“Team Wang be my label”: The Presentation of a New Career Identity

In June 2017, Jackson announced the establishment of his studio, Team Wang, in China. His father Wang Ruiji invested in and established the Shanghai Jiaer Culture and Media Studio (CN: Shanghai Jiaer Wenhua Chuanmei Gongzuoshi) in April 2017. Team Wang focuses on Jackson’s solo activities. As Jackson is still an artiste contracted to JYPE, the public is unclear how exactly Jackson negotiated with JYPE to form his own studio, how the relationship between JYPE and his personal label works, and how profits are distributed between the two parties. However, in an interview with *Billboard* where he talks about taking charge of his own solo work and productions, Jackson said JYPE was supportive of his own label Team Wang and his solo career (Herman, 2019). In GOT7, Jackson has to follow the concepts decided by JYPE and the GOT7 members. As a solo artiste, however, he can make his own decisions. Starting from the release of *Papillon*, Jackson began portraying himself as a hip-hop artiste rather than a K-pop idol in his solo activities. His solo songs are mainly in English, with some in Chinese, and others containing a combination of English and Chinese lyrics. His music is distributed through Chinese and international digital platforms, including NetEase Cloud Music, QQ Music, YouTube, iTunes, and Spotify. Jackson’s merchandise is sold through Chinese and American internet platforms. Thus, it can be said that Jackson’s solo activities target both Chinese and global audiences.

Jackson started to demonstrate a “Team Wang” identity through his words, clothing, and gestures. The words “Team Wang Production” appear at the beginning and end of the *Papillon* MV. There are no JYPE or GOT7 logos in the MV. The copyright of the MV belongs to Team Wang rather than JYPE. Jackson uses the letter “W” that he forms with his hands to represent Team Wang (see Figures 8.9 and 8.10). Since the adoption of this gesture, he constantly uses it

in his solo activities. Fans and Jackson's collaborators also use it to show support for Team Wang. Jackson's demonstration of his newly built personal image sets him apart from his previous public image as a member of the K-pop idol group GOT7.

Figure 8.9: Jackson and his backup dancers forming “W” shapes with their hands

Figure 8.10: Jackson using his hands to form a “W” shape

Analysis of Jackson’s social media and the *Papillon* MV indicates the gradual shift of his identity presentation from Hong Kong to PRC, and the addition of a new identity as a hip-hop artiste under the Team Wang label that he personally manages. His solo work not only makes no reference to his experiences and current status in the K-pop industry but also disguises the support he receives from the K-pop company JYPE, and Korean, European, and American talents. The discrepancy between the Chinese hip-hop artiste Jackson and the K-pop idol Jackson brings possible conflicts to his career and his fandom.

Controversies Arising from Jackson’s Multiple Identity Presentations

Transnational stars tend to possess various and sometimes conflicting characteristics. For instance, transnational film stars can hardly maintain the same persona in Hollywood and in their home countries (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). By offering various and new cultural identity possibilities,

transnational stars are able to challenge the status quo (Meeuf & Raphael, 2013). The different personae adopted by the same individual may bridge different ideologies on the one hand (Meeuf, 2016), but attract criticism that the stars have abandoned their identities to cater to another market on the other (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30). A transnational K-pop idol can hardly keep to the same persona in the K-pop industry and their local entertainment industry because of the social and cultural differences in the two industries and markets. Through the internet, K-pop fans can easily get up-to-date information on their idols in another country. Content that is tailored for one market may also be consumed by the audiences in other markets and cultures. When a transnational star is favored for one persona in the home market, they very often disappoint their audiences at home when they adopt another persona to cater to another audience group. Transnational stars have to constantly negotiate their old and new identities in order to be accepted by both the new market they wish to enter and their motherland (Yu, 2012, pp. 146-166). Similar to Chinese action movie star Jet Li's flexible identity (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30), GOT7's Jackson shows different personae when he is in China, Korea, and the United States. Pop culture audiences in China that are familiar with GOT7 may already know of Jackson and liked him before he embarked on his solo career. His persona as a solo singer in China is a departure from his K-pop persona, and has attracted fans who are either not into his K-pop persona or not K-pop fans. Jackson's persona in China not only differentiates him from K-pop idols and K-pop-styled local idols but also helped him to win a place in the Chinese market. Meanwhile, he still performs as a K-pop idol in the group GOT7. Transnational stars' contradictory images bring tensions and conflicts to production and consumption, critics and fans (Yu, 2012, pp. 185-191), and fandom. Indeed, Jackson's fans in China are divided over his two personae, and conflicts have arisen in fandom over them.

The Fan Identity Controversy

Ahgase is the name of the GOT7 fandom, and *Jacky* is the name of the Jackson fandom. Jackson refers to his fans as *Ahgase* during GOT7 activities but calls them “Jacky” while engaged in his solo activities. He included a nod to his fans as “Jacky” in the lyrics of his first solo single *Papillon*: “Team Wang be my label, ride for Jacky, it’s my crew code.” A Jacky is not necessarily an *Ahgase*. This is because some individuals became fans of Jackson only for his solo activities, and are neither into K-pop nor GOT7. After Jackson’s solo debut in China in 2015 and the establishment of his Team Wang studio in 2017 to focus on his solo career, Jackson has gained a great number of Chinese fans through his mostly China-centric solo activities. Since the “Korea ban” in mid-2016, Jackson’s references to his experiences in Korea and his identity as a member of the K-pop group GOT7 have been largely weakened and blurred whenever he appeared on Chinese TV screens. Chinese K-pop idols would talk about the members of their respective groups, and their life as a trainee or an idol without mentioning the exact name of the K-pop group to which they belonged whenever they appeared on Chinese TV programs. This is probably because talking about Korea is not allowed or discouraged under the “Korea ban”, even though the exact regulations of the ban can hardly be found. Given these circumstances, it can be said that the majority of the Chinese audiences are not aware that Jackson is a member of a K-pop group. Many of his solo fans are not interested in a different K-pop style even when they find out about Jackson’s performances in the K-pop scene. There are, undoubtedly, some people who became GOT7 fans or K-pop fans through Jackson. I consider the division of his fandom to be based on the very different styles presented in Jackson’s solo career (a manly hip-hop musician) and in his group career (a soft and lovely idol), rather than any display of nationalism

since Chinese fans' debates have mainly focused on his divergent careers. The image he portrays in his solo career differs from the image he projected during his time in his K-pop group for a number of reasons, namely his personal preference, the decision-making power he has over his solo career, and a great number of K-pop-formatted Chinese idols. Tensions have arisen between the different fan groups within the GOT7 and Jackson fandoms. GOT7-related fan identities can be divided into many categories. Likewise, the Chinese fans' identities related to Jackson can be divided into at least four categories, each with their own subcategories (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Chinese fan identities related to Jackson

Category	Subcategory in Chinese	Explanation of the Subcategory in English
<i>Tuanfan</i>	<i>Tuanfan</i>	Group fan without a favorite member
	<i>Tuanpian Jia</i>	Group fan with Jackson as their favorite member
	<i>Tuanpian A-Jia</i>	Group fan with Jackson and Member A as their favorite members
	<i>Tuanpian A</i>	Group fan with Member A as their favorite member
	<i>Tuanpian A-B</i>	Group fan with Member A and Member B as their favorite members
	<i>A-Jia CP fan</i>	Group fan with Member A and Jackson as their favorite couple
	<i>A-B CP fan</i>	Group fan with Member A and Member B as their favorite couple
<i>Weiliu</i>		Fan of the six members of GOT7, excluding Jackson, and non-fans of Jackson

<i>Jiawei</i>	Fan of Jackson and non-fan of the other six members of GOT7
<i>Heifen</i>	Anti-fan

While group fan refers to a fan of the K-pop group GOT7, fan identities related to Jackson broadly fall into four categories: *Tuanfan*, *Weiliu*, *Jiawei*, and *Heifen*. The most obvious fans are the *Tuanfan*. In Chinese, *tuan* means group and *fan* means fan/fans. *Tuanfan* are fans of the group GOT7, or *Ahgase*. There are 7 subcategories of *Tuanfan* identities related to Jackson. The first subcategory is *Tuanfan* without a favorite member. These fans like GOT7 as a whole, and do not have a specific member as their favorite. Hence, these fans usually refer to themselves as *Tuanfan*. The second subcategory is *Tuanpian Jia*, where *pian* means to be favorably biased towards someone in Chinese and *Jia* is an abbreviated form of *Jiaer* or *Jiajia*, which are Jackson's Chinese given name and nickname, respectively. The *Tuanpian Jia* likes all the GOT7 members, and has Jackson as their favorite. The third subcategory is *Tuanpian A-Jia*, where *A* refers to any GOT7 member other than Jackson. Fans in this subcategory like all of GOT7 but have Jackson and another member as their favorites. The fourth subcategory is *Tuanpian A*, where *A* indicates any GOT7 member other than Jackson. *Tuanpian A* fans like GOT7 as a whole but have a member other than Jackson as their favorite. The fifth subcategory is *Tuanpian A-B*. *A* and *B* can be any of the GOT7 members other than Jackson. These fans like GOT7 as a group but Jackson is not among their favorite members. *CP fen* refers to the fans who pair up two idols as an imagined couple. The imagined couple can either have a romantic relationship or a very chummy relationship. *CP* is the abbreviation of couple or coupling, and is a term frequently used in various Chinese fandoms, including those outside the popular music scene.

Within the Chinese GOT7 fandom, a *CP fan* or *CP fen* is usually a *Tuanfan* who likes GOT7 as a group, has two members as their favorites, and more importantly, depicts the relationship of their two favorites in an imagined romantic light. The sixth subcategory is *A-Jia CP fan*. Examples of *A-Jia CP fans* include the *Yijiafen* who are fans of the Mark-Jackson CP, and the *Gougouline* fans who are fans of the Jackson-Jinyoung CP. The Mark-Jackson CP is called *Yijia* because it is an amalgamation of Mark's Chinese name (Tuan Yien) and Jackson's Chinese name (Wang Jiaer). Fans refer to the Jackson-Jinyoung CP as *gougouline* for two reasons. Firstly, *gou* means dog in Chinese, and both Jackson and Jinyoung were born in the year of dog. Secondly, in Korea, *line* is used to refer to people who are born in the same year, and are good friends. Therefore, the Jackson-Jinyoung CP is called *Gougouline*. The seventh subcategory is the *A-B CP fan* who likes two members of GOT7 that are not Jackson as an imagined couple.

The next category of fans related to Jackson is *Weiliu*. *Wei* means only, while *liu* means six in Chinese. *Weiliu* fans like all the GOT7 members, excluding Jackson because they hate him. The third type of Jackson fan is *Jiawei*. The fans in this group adore Jackson but are not fans of the group GOT7 or any other GOT7 member. The fourth type of fan is *Heifen*, where *hei* in Chinese means black or bringing shame on somebody. A Jackson *Heifen* is an anti-fan of Jackson. In other words, fans in this category hate Jackson.

Fan identities are formed alongside the career developments of GOT7 and Jackson. Fans of Jackson have speculated as to why, how and when he initially used the term “Jacky” to refer to them. There is no consensus on the origin and definition of the term “Jacky” among Jackson's different fan groups. The labeling of fan identities can be confusing and sometimes creates fights among fans. According to fan discourses on Weibo, *Jiawei* believe they are the only ones who can be called “Jacky”, which causes friction with the *Tuanpian Jia* who also consider themselves

“Jacky”. Most *Jiawei* are not generally interested in GOT7 activities. On the contrary, they became *Jiawei* mainly because of Jackson’s solo activities. All fan groups now consider the *Jiawei* to be “Jacky” because they account for the overwhelming majority of Jackson fans in China who perceive themselves thus. Meanwhile, the *Tuanfan* whose favorite member is Jackson is also an *Ahgase* or GOT7 fan. The *Jiawei*, in contrast, would never identify themselves as *Ahgase*, as they do not like GOT7 at all. Both the *Tuanfan* and *Jiawei* encounter each other at events for Jackson’s solo activities in China. When Jackson only uses the term “Jacky” to address his fans, the *Tuanfan* would feel uncomfortable because they deem “Jacky” to be synonymous with being *Jiawei* fans. The *Jiawei* are very possessive of their idol, and thus highly critical of CP fans because they are angry that Jackson has been paired with another idol they do not like in an imagined romantic relationship.

Some *Jiawei* consider the GOT7 members other than Jackson to be encumbrances to his career. They use very strong words to criticize the GOT7 members who are not Jackson, scorn them for their scandals, and disparage the quality and quantity of their work. These highly critical fans may even personally attack other fans. They are also hostile towards *Tuanfan*. In response, the *Tuanfan* refer to this type of *Jiawei* as *Duwei* where *du* means vicious. *Duwei* fans or *akkae* fans (as they are known in Korean) are vicious individual fans of a specific idol in a group (S.-A. Lee, 2015). As S.-A. Lee (2015, p. 125) notes, “Akkae fans favor one member of the group to the detriment of the other[s]... Such fans routinely sabotage other members in vicious ways in the process of putting their favorite forward.” In the Chinese fandom of Jackson, there are some *Jiawei* who are not interested in GOT7 members other than Jackson but are friendly towards *Tuanfan*. These *Jiawei* are called *Tianwei*, where *tian* means sweet. The *Tianwei* are thus the friendly fans of a specific idol.

According to my survey participants, both *Tuanfan* and *Jiawei* criticize the *Weiliu*. My personal observations confirm this. Some *Tuanfan* argue that GOT7 fans should love all GOT7 members as a group. Therefore, it is not acceptable to exclude Jackson. *Jiawei*, on the other hand, also condemn *Weiliu* in the name of criticizing *Tuanfan* who pretend to love Jackson but actually do not do so. Jackson's *Heifen* or anti-fans may have formerly been his fans. Possibly, they are *Weiliu* as well. The *Weiliu* and *Heifen* hate Jackson and criticize him through personal attacks on the internet. Fan identity is complicated and continually changing. The fan identities presented may possibly differ from fans' real identities. The boundaries between several fan identities may also be blurred.

An analysis of the number of followers on GOT7's international social media platforms reveals that Jackson is the most popular member of the group. He has 22 million Instagram and Twitter followers, whereas GOT7's group Instagram and Twitter have 16 million followers. The second most popular member of GOT7, BamBam, has 18 million followers on Instagram and Twitter. Generally, international fans are more likely to follow GOT7's group activities and Jackson's solo activities at the same time. While the levels of global popularity among Jackson, GOT7, and the other members as individuals are not very different, this is not the case in China. A comparison of the number of followers of their Weibo accounts and their Weibo Super Topic shows that GOT7 and its two most popular members, Mark and Jackson, have 1.5 million, 1.3 million, and 26.5 million followers, respectively. Jackson is overwhelmingly more popular in China than GOT7 as a group and the other GOT7 members. In contrast, the group GOT7 and Mark have roughly the same number of followers. Jackson's considerably larger following may indicate that some Chinese fans only follow his solo activities and are not interested in GOT7

activities. Seen in this light, it is unsurprising to discover that *Jiawei* are upset when their beloved Jackson travels to Korea for GOT7 activities in which they are not interested.

Besides the new identities Jackson adopted for his solo activities, the “Korea ban” is another possible reason for the division between the *Tuanfan* and *Jiawei*. After the ban, Jackson could rarely mention his experiences in Korea and the K-pop group to which he belongs. This is not uncommon behavior. Due to the ban, Chinese celebrities who had been idols or trainees in Korea use the term “overseas” in lieu of “Korea”. Fan identities, which are constantly changing, are further complicated by the complexity of K-pop idols’ career development, as well as the changing political, social, and cultural environments in the stars’ target markets.

The Political Controversy

Transnational and translocal stars face more complicated political and social environments than local stars. This situation is not unique to Hallyu stars and transnational K-pop idols; it is also a struggle faced by other transnational celebrities within and beyond Asia. Some pop culture industries work around these conflicting expectations by creating artistes who are anodyne. For example, the Taiwanese popular music industry has combined American and Japanese influences on gender discourses to create a politically odorless trio S.H.E. for the Chinese-language market (F.-c. I. Yang & Liew, 2016). Jackson, however, is anything but politically odorless.

As an artiste active in multiple different cultural environments and markets, Jackson has courted many political controversies over his Hongkonger identity and his explicit expressions of pro-China nationalism. The Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement started in Hong Kong in March 2019. It was a series of protests in response to the amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance by the Hong Kong government to allow the detention and sending of

criminal suspects to other jurisdictions with which it does not have an extradition treaty, including mainland China (*BBC*, 2019; Cheong, 2019). The protesters saw this amendment as a further erosion of the autonomy of the Hong Kong political and legal systems (Yu, 2019). The confrontation between the protestors and the police was of long duration, and the social order was disrupted. A video capturing protestors lowering the Chinese national flag and throwing it into the sea at Harbour City in Hong Kong was spread on Weibo on 3 August 2019. This video, initially posted by *Ta Kung Pao* (2019), was later reposted by *Global Times* (2019) on Weibo. The next day, Chinese state-controlled broadcaster CCTV News started an “I’m a flag-bearer” campaign whereby people were asked to repost the image of the Chinese national flag on Weibo with the text “I’m a flag-bearer” under the hashtag “the five-starred red flag has 1.4 billion flag-bearers” (CCTV News, 2019). Many celebrities reposted the Weibo post. Jackson was one of them.

Jackson’s mainland Chinese, Hong Kong, and overseas fans began discussing and debating the issue, as well as the possible consequences of this explicit expression of his political stance. GOT7 had originally planned to hold concerts in Hong Kong on 31 August and 1 September 2019. After Jackson demonstrated his support for the state-owned media’s “I’m a flag-bearer” campaign, a social media post by a *sasaeng* fan (a Korean term meaning “stalker fan”) was circulated on Twitter and Weibo. This post not only disclosed Jackson’s home address in Seoul and his flight details to Hong Kong; it also bade protestors to bring a Chinese national flag to the airport and burn it in front of Jackson when he landed at the Hong Kong airport. Fans consequently promoted a hashtag on Twitter over this issue, and asked for the cancellation of the Hong Kong concerts so as to ensure the safety of the GOT7 members and prevent Jackson from being the target of the Hong Kong protestors. The debates over this issue increased on Weibo as

well. Due to the socio-political instability wrought by the protests, GOT7 and other K-pop concerts in Hong Kong were subsequently cancelled.

When Jackson uploaded the picture of the Chinese national flag on Instagram on the National Day of the PRC in 2019, that post likewise generated heated discussions in the comments. The comment section of his Instagram post became a space for internet users, including Jackson's international fans, to share their views on politics, Chinese nationalism, Jackson as a public figure, and other related topics in English, Chinese, and Korean. While it is impossible to determine the actual locations of Instagram users and commenters through the language they choose to use, I did observe that there were long debates in English over China-related public and political issues in the comments of that Instagram post which were not necessarily related to Jackson. The discussions and debates in the comment section of Jackson's Instagram are unsurprising. It is a commonplace occurrence for the public to discuss the political opinions of public figures and celebrities. Unlike the various opinions from international commenters on Instagram, the comment area of Jackson's "I'm the flag-bearer" Weibo repost was overwhelmingly supportive of Jackson and Chinese nationalism. This may be due to a number of reasons, including most of the users on Weibo being PRC citizens rather than people from other countries, the commenters in his repost mostly coming from the huge *Jiawei* fan population, and the strong nationalistic mindset of the fans in China.

The careers and earnings of celebrities who express political opinions may either be boosted or suffer losses, depending on the political stances of their target audiences. An expression can be politically correct in one context but politically incorrect in another. As a transnational popular culture, K-pop and K-pop idols are likely to encounter much more political conflicts because of the social and political differences in different localities. The explicit and

implicit support for or against a political stance may help K-pop idols to win over a local market or become personae non grata in another market where the people generally hold different views.

Conclusion

K-pop has already established a global network from the perspectives of both production and consumption. Utilizing K-pop as a springboard, Chinese artistes have, on the one hand, joined the bigger transnational network beyond Pop Culture China (Chua, 2001, 2012); on the other hand, they are more competitive in the Chinese market with better training, management, packaging, and cultivated fandom. Jackson's case demonstrates that a K-pop idol, as a transnational star, shares some similar experiences with transnational Hollywood stars (Meeuf, 2016; Yu, 2012). This phenomenon reflects that K-pop, as Korean popular culture, is an emerging global popular culture attracting transnational talents and international audiences. As demonstrated in the case study on GOT7's Jackson, transnational K-pop stars' presented identities include their national and cultural identities, and their career identities. Transnational K-pop stars can attract criticism from the general audience (Yu, 2012, pp. 1-30), particularly over their political expressions. This shows that the multiple identities of transnational K-pop artistes also bring conflicts to fandom by upsetting the sophisticated fan identity system developed by K-pop fans. A transnational K-pop star's identities influence how the audiences view them. A K-pop artiste's multiple identities also impact how fans perceive themselves and their fellow fans. This is because their fan identities are generated through their direct and mediated interactions with the stars. Current research focuses on the negative consequences engendered by transnational K-pop stars' multiple identity presentations. For a more balanced view, I recommend that future research follow Meeuf and Raphael (2013) by investigating the

positive consequences of multiple identity presentations in transnational K-pop stardom, such as the bridging of ideological gaps as well as local and global cultures.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

The main body of this thesis is divided into two parts. The first delves into the history of K-pop in China; the second examines Chinese K-pop fan practices and Chinese K-pop idols. This research traces the history of the transmission of K-pop in China according to the changed media environment in the country, and explores how the media environment impacted popular culture transmission. In the past, K-pop has made considerable inroads in China, witnessed various changing political and social conditions, and adapted to the developing Chinese entertainment industry. K-pop is able to sustain its popularity among a group of Chinese youngsters because it has been continually adapting to the constantly changing political, social, and media environments in China. Since China became one of K-pop's most important export markets, the K-pop genre in China has evolved from an avant-garde alternative culture to a prevalent and influential culture among Chinese youths.

Unlike the general trend in Hallyu Studies, which emphasizes the impact of Korean television dramas in Japan in the early 2000s as part of Hallyu (e.g., Creighton, 2009), this research focuses on K-pop in China in the late 1990s to present a picture of earlier transnational transmission of Korean popular culture. The first period of K-pop in China (1996-2004) bore witness to more than noticeable Sino-Korea formal cultural exchanges and the development of mainstream media channels. It also led to the emergence of peripheral and informal but critical media channels and cultural intermediaries from previously untapped physical magazines and online forum resources. These findings complete the picture of the early transnational transmission of Korean popular culture, and contribute to the scant writings on K-pop in China in the early stage.

The internet has significantly contributed to the spread of Hallyu during the pre-mobile internet period (2005-2011) when the internet industry and emerging internet-assisted fan culture were prospering in China, and mobile internet applications were not commonly used. The K-pop industry had previously discovered in the analog media period (1996-2004) that the Chinese market was a very profitable one. By the pre-mobile internet period, the K-pop industry began developing specific strategies in regard to China, such as employing ethnic Chinese members in K-pop idol groups, to further tap into this lucrative market.

In the current period (2012-present), K-pop has experienced critical challenges due to the “Korea ban” that has been in effect in China since 2016. The COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the world since 2020 has added more challenges to the transmission of K-pop. Border control policies and restrictions on gatherings have been implemented all over the world. They have, in turn, become obstacles for K-pop idols that had been travelling from country to country for concerts, fanmeets, as well as TV program and magazine shoots prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. To cope with this challenging environment, the K-pop industry and K-pop audiences have adopted various mobile internet applications, and consequently brought new experiences to both sides. Indeed, the K-pop experience is increasingly mediated in such an environment. Concerts, fanmeets, and fansign events have been held online. On the one hand, online concerts and fanmeets have led to larger audience numbers and lower ticket prices. On the other, the level of fan-idol interactions has changed, and the reliance on internet speed and stable internet connectivity has engendered new problems. A typical pre-COVID-19 fansign event usually involved at least one hundred fans meeting their idols in a hall. Now, online fansign events are held one-on-one on Kakao Talk or WeChat voice call, giving fans a new experience of fan-idol intimacy. These new mediated practices bring new materials to the K-pop fandom and individual

fans' collections, as these online experiences and contents can be easily recorded—regardless as to whether they are permitted or forbidden by the K-pop management company. Meanwhile, those Chinese K-pop fans who still purchase a great number of physical albums are now enjoying relatively low shipping fees (around 25 RMB or 4 USD for one copy of a physical album), and they do not mind that international shipping may take longer during the pandemic.

While the “Korea ban” and COVID-19 have hindered K-pop idols from entering China in person, domestic players and their overseas partners are free to make their mark in the huge Chinese market. Consequently, a burgeoning number of idol agencies and idol survival shows based on the K-pop model have sprung up. They have resulted in the rise and increase of China-produced idols. The fanbases of these China-produced idols and idol survival shows are likewise influenced by K-pop, as they carry out similar fan practices as fans of K-pop idol groups. Thus, it can be said that K-pop idol culture and fan culture have already been incorporated into China's idol industry and fan culture. In the near future, it might be even harder to distinguish K-pop culture from Chinese idol pop culture. In addition, the emerging new technologies, including 5G, AR, VR, and AI, could be a harbinger of a possible new media environment for K-pop in China in the near future.

The popularity of K-pop in China is also largely due to K-pop fan practices. K-pop fan practices contribute to the development of K-pop in China because they help to transmit K-pop as a culture and add to the economic gains of the K-pop industry. This thesis has explored Chinese K-pop fan practices from 2012 to the present through the perspectives of consumption and production in the Chinese GOT7 fandom. In the chapter on fan consumption, I emphasized that K-pop fan consumption is not limited to the consumption of K-pop products and services themselves; instead, it includes the consumption of products and services provided by legally

dubious but highly relevant parties, such as fans and scalpers as agents, as well as the necessary industries. K-pop connects and benefits those industries, including some seemingly unrelated ones. Fans do not passively consume K-pop in a vacuum. Rather, during their consumption practices, fans constantly interact with different parties, namely other fans, staff, and scalpers, among others, to negotiate access to their idols and build connections with others. Drawing on Marx's (1887 [1977], pp. 283-306) concepts of individual consumption and productive consumption, Chinese K-pop fans are active consumers who not only engage in individual consumption for themselves but also productive consumption for their production. Their repetitive consumption on top of other consuming characteristics differentiates fans from ordinary audiences or consumers. This repetitive consumption is also central to the fan economy in which an individual fan's purchasing power greatly matters (Liang & Shen, 2016). Noticeably, fans' consumption, including the sometimes painful productive consumption, is not meaningless; instead, it helps them gain social and cultural capital in the fan community (Bourdieu, 1986).

Some Chinese K-pop fans are inspired by their continuous consumption of K-pop to engage in different types of fan production and become fan laborers. Through their specialized, managerial, and basic labor, these fan laborers are able to differentiate themselves from others. Similar to L. Chen's (2018, pp. 3-27) findings on Chinese J-pop fans, Chinese K-pop fan laborers only label themselves as fans and distinguish themselves from others who, unlike them, do not invest money, time, or energy directly into fan production. While fan laborers cannot represent the whole fan population, the fan laborers' mindset is prevalent among Chinese K-pop fans. Fan labor is an approach through which these fan laborers can construct their (fandom) identity, and gain a sense of belonging and satisfaction. The research also shows that fan labor contributes to the production and distribution of K-pop in a translocal network, and is not

scattered or separated. In this way, fan labor has become an indispensable part of the operation of the K-pop industry.

Indeed, fans turn to economic approaches, including the consumption and production of K-pop products and services, to satisfy their emotional and spiritual needs, such as their sense of closeness, their sense of belonging, and their sense of achievement. As they subscribe to the capitalistic logic of the K-pop industry, and value money and fame, fans therefore consume K-pop products and services repetitively, and promote their idols through their fan production. In this way, they help their idols to achieve economic success, and consequently, contribute to and amplify the popularity of K-pop.

The K-pop industry's translocal network has created opportunities for K-pop artistes to become transnational stars. This, in turn, has motivated Chinese talents to join the K-pop industry. K-pop is, therefore, able to grow in China because Chinese audiences are attracted to the Chinese faces in the K-pop industry. The phenomenon of Chinese K-pop idols navigating their identities as ethnic Chinese and Korean artistes, and the complex challenges of being a transnational K-pop star, are illustrated in the case study of GOT7's Jackson. A transnational star's sophisticated celebrity image enables them to gain popularity across various media and internet platforms. However, this image also leads to controversies because of the political, cultural, and social differences in different markets. As the K-pop industry seeks to widen its reach internationally, it has been promoting multilingual stars from multicultural backgrounds. Jackson, who meets these criteria, appears to be the right choice for the expansion of the K-pop industry in this respect. Despite his multilingual skills and multicultural background, he is struggling as an individual to find and portray his own identities in a rapidly changing and increasingly mixed social and cultural environment. Noticeably, the common concurrency of a

K-pop artiste's group career and solo career often results in conflicts within the fandom. These intra-fandom conflicts demonstrate the complexities of contemporary K-pop fandom and the complicated nature of fans' identity construction. Fans are increasingly segmented in Chinese K-pop fandom to the point where they have to identify their preferences and express their devotion carefully. These forms of segmented and careful fan identity construction are also consistent with the contemporary fan economy practiced in the K-pop industry and Chinese entertainment industry, where they seek to maximize the profits they can extract from each individual fan.

K-pop has had more than two decades' development as a transnational popular culture. As a consequence, both the industry and its fandoms have grown in complexity in terms of production and reception. The history of K-pop's transmission in China demonstrates how the K-pop industry and its associated fan cultures have evolved in constantly changing political, social, and cultural environments. It reminds researchers that a culture and its development should be analyzed in a specific time and space. While Chinese K-pop fans share some similar fan practices with their Korean counterparts, they also differ in many aspects vis-à-vis Korean fandom and fandom in other parts of the world. This may be due to the asynchronized global development of K-pop fan culture, as Chinese K-pop fans have learnt from their Korean counterparts for more than two decades since the late 1990s, whereas K-pop fans in many other nations only began learning and practicing K-pop fan culture after Hallyu gained popularity in their countries. Furthermore, detailed investigation of K-pop fan practices reveal that they have already become a critical part of the K-pop industry's practices. Fans are active players not only in their fan communities but also in the K-pop and entertainment industries. In other words, the K-pop industry and related sectors in the entertainment industry are not able to operate smoothly without K-pop fan practices. As fan practices increasingly become part of the industry's

operations, audience reception and fandom will grow and develop. Furthermore, Chinese K-pop idols' presentations of themselves as transnational Asian artistes indicate that the already established global popular culture network has evolved beyond "Pop Culture China" (Chua, 2001, 2012).

The political environment in East Asia (E. M. Kim & Ryoo, 2007) can no longer explain the popularity of K-pop in China since the continuous ups and downs in Sino-Korean relations have influenced China's import of Korean pop culture in the past two decades. As previous scholarly research indicated, the development of ICTs has contributed to the popularity of K-pop in China (Jin & Yi, 2020; S.-H. Kwon & Kim, 2014; Lie, 2012; Min et al., 2018). My research further finds that the utilization of alternative, specialized, and unlicensed media channels sparked and increased the popularity of K-pop in China in the constantly changing social, media, cultural, and political environments. Drawing on S.-Y. Kim's (2018, pp. 161-205) argument of the K-pop industry's commodification of affect, the current research further indicates that such commodification of affect triggers fans' constant and repetitive consumption and production. Such fan practices contribute to the popularity of K-pop in China. Additionally, previous academic writings have not covered the ways in which the K-pop industry's constant fine-tuning of its localization strategy have resulted not only in K-pop adapting to the changing social, media, cultural, and political environments in China but also its continued popularity in the Chinese market. In China, K-pop has developed from an avant-garde and alternative culture to a prevalent and influential culture among Chinese youths. It has also evolved from a wave to a genre. This research project completes the picture of the transnational transmission of Korean popular culture, and contributes to the scant writings on K-pop in China.

When the COVID-19 pandemic passes, transnational and border-crossing exchanges in all fields are unlikely to immediately return to pre-COVID-19 levels. However, the global popular culture network will still be able to stay connected as it uses the internet and new ICTs to carry its heavy traffic of multifarious cultural exports across borders. Aware of the confluence of K-pop and Chinese idol culture in China, Chinese and Korean entertainment industries have begun to utilize the resources of different Asian origins to develop stronger Asian pop cultural power. Given the activeness of Asian creators and artistes in the global popular culture network, the growing international popularity of K-pop has the potential to challenge the global domination of American popular culture.

As of 19 January 2021, the K-pop idol group GOT7 is no longer under the management of JYPE. Mark and Jackson went back to the United States and China, respectively; and the other members remained in Korea. Each of the GOT7 members has embarked on their own paths, with Mark and Jackson starting or concentrating on their own companies in China, and the other members signing with Korean or global entertainment companies. The members have, however, continued to deny the dissolution of GOT7 and quickly released a new song *Encore* via Warner Music. This song was released worldwide a month after their departure from JYPE. GOT7 was able to release *Encore* globally with such speed and efficiency because of the translocal production and distribution networks they had built up during their years in the K-pop industry. In turn, the release of GOT7's new song so soon after parting ways with JYPE demonstrates the primacy of the global popular culture network in the transnational transmission of K-pop.

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Appendix

Sample Interview Questions

English Version

1. When did you first learn about K-pop?
2. When did you learn about the K-pop singer/group?
3. How did you learn about the K-pop singer/group?
4. Who are your favorite members of the K-pop group?
5. Do you think you are a K-pop fan?
6. Do you think you are a fan of the K-pop group /the member(s) of the K-pop group? (If yes, go to Question 7; if no, go to Question 8.)
7. How did you become a fan of the K-pop group /the member(s) of the K-pop group?
8. What K-pop-related activities have you participated in?
9. How did you participate in these activities?
10. How do you feel about your participation in these activities?
11. What do you think about your participation in these activities?
12. What K-pop-related activities or behaviors do you do on a daily basis?
13. How did you do them?
14. How do you feel about these activities or behaviors?
15. What are your opinions of these activities or behaviors?
16. How much have you spent on K-pop consumption per month/year?
17. How much time have you spent on K-pop related practices per day/week/month/year?

18. Have you ever built personal connections with other K-pop fans? (If yes, go to Question 19; if no, go to Question 22.)
19. How did you build personal connections with them/him/her?
20. How do you feel about your relationship?
21. What do you think about your relationship?
22. What is your impression of Korea after you were exposed to K-pop?
23. What was your impression of Korea before you were exposed to K-pop?
24. What is your age?
25. What is your gender?
26. What is your marital status?
27. What is your highest education level?
28. What is your occupation?
29. Where is your place of origin?
30. Where is your place of residence?
31. What is your overall annual expenditure?

Chinese Version

1. 您是什么时候知道韩国流行音乐的?
2. 您是什么时候知道这个韩国流行音乐歌手/团体的?
3. 您是如何知道这个韩国流行音乐歌手/团体的?
4. 您在这个团体里最喜欢的成员是?
5. 您认为您是韩国流行音乐粉丝吗?
6. 您认为您是这个团体/成员的粉丝吗? (如是, 去往第 7 题; 如否, 去往第 8 题。)
7. 您是如何成为为这个团体/成员的粉丝的?
8. 您参与了哪些与韩国流行音乐相关的活动?
9. 您是如何参与这些活动的?
10. 您对于参与这些活动有什么感受?
11. 您对参与这些活动有什么看法?
12. 您每天日常做的韩国流行音乐相关活动或行为有哪些?
13. 您是如何做的?
14. 您对这些活动或行为有什么感受?
15. 你对这些活动或行为有什么看法?
16. 您每月/每年在韩国流行音乐上花费多少金额?
17. 您每天/每周/每月/每年在韩国流行音乐相关实践活动上花费多长时间?
18. 您有与其他韩国流行音乐粉丝建立个人联系吗? (如有, 去往第 19 题; 如无, 去往第 22 题。)
19. 您是如何与这位/这些粉丝建立个人联系的?

20. 您对您们的关系有什么感受?
21. 您对你们的关系有什么看法?
22. 在您接触韩国流行音乐之后, 您对韩国的印象是?
23. 在您接触韩国流行音乐之前, 您对韩国的印象是?
24. 您的年龄是?
25. 您的性别是?
26. 您的婚姻状况是?
27. 您的教育程度是?
28. 您的职业是?
29. 您的原居地是?
30. 您的现居地是?
31. 您一年的消费总金额是?