

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

## The Birth of Cool- Boy Bands

Korean pop music or 가요(ga-yo) has become increasingly popular since the genre was introduced in 1992 in South Korea. Korean music has become popular in America because of the prevalent wave of Korean idol groups into the country to promote their music. Listening to Korean music is not a common interest to say the least, but it is still quite popular in America and other parts of the world. There are many different aspects of Korean pop music that attract people to listen to it. For one thing, some people are fond of the Korean language. It is a beautiful language that utilizes a simple writing system. Another likeable characteristic of Korean pop music is that the music is catchy. People become hooked on a song because it is fun and easy to listen to.

The main reason why Korean pop music is so popular is because of the entities that promote Korean pop music: boy and girl groups. Korean pop music has spread to other countries such as China, Japan, and the United States with the help of these idol groups. Korean pop groups are abundant in South Korea; having roughly over 70 groups make their debut in 2012 alone (Wikipedia). More groups are starting to form because Korean pop music is becoming known in other countries. Music entertainment companies are not missing a chance to make a profit by promoting new girl and boy groups while the popularity of Korean music is still high. Even though boy and girl groups are both popular today, boy groups were the first to be formed.

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

Boy groups or boy bands were not suddenly formed overnight. There were elements that sparked the beginnings of the formations of these groups that gradually transformed overtime. Going back to around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, boy bands were derived from barbershop quartets. Barbershop quartets were “usually a group of males [that] sang in four part harmonies” (Wikipedia). The origins of boy bands lie in barbershop quartets in various ways. For one thing, barbershop quartets were the start of musicians coming together to sing a song. Boy bands usually consist of 5 or so members that alternate singing parts of the song. Barbershop quartets signaled the start of that phenomenon. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, doo-wop music further expanded on the barbershop quartet style. It wasn't until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that actual boy bands were formed. Deriving their roots from the barbershop quartet style, boy bands in the 1960s started to emerge. The term “boy band” is used in an incorrect way, even though it is still used today. Boy bands are defined as “a vocal group consisting of young male singers…[that] do not play musical instruments, either in recording sessions or on stage…[and] dance as well as sing, usually giving highly choreographed performances” (Wikipedia).

The earliest known boy bands formed in America in the 1960s. The Osmonds, The Jackson 5, and The Monkees were the groups that established a framework for future boy bands (Wikipedia). In Korea, the first evidence of boy bands occurred in 1992 with Seo Taiji & Boys. The main importance of the popularity was the help of the “boys”. The dancers and rappers were exciting and appealing to the audience

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

and it was a sudden change in the music that was listened to during the time (Seoulist).

Boy bands became popular because of a number of reasons. Boy bands usually have a personality concept. Each member of the boy band has a specific personality or image such as the “bad boy, the cute one, the baby”, etc (Wikipedia). This sparked the mainly female audience’s attention. Since boy bands usually consisted of many members, the audience would be likely to have at least one member that they liked, if not all. Pop groups promote a song or an album over the course of several weeks. Most groups release a music video for one song on the album to entice consumers into buying the full album (or mini album, depending on what is released). The different charms of each of the members draw fans into supporting the group which in turn increases their popularity.

American boy groups have died down, but Korean boy groups are numerous and popular in South Korea as well as many other parts of the world, even including America. Many of the fans of these boy groups were fans of American boy groups such as N’SYNC and The Backstreet Boys. American boy groups have broken up and lost popularity in the States. N’SYNC, for example, disbanded and the members have been involved in other forms of entertainment. Justin Timberlake who was a popular of N’SYNC now promotes music that is far from the image he once held in the early 90s. America is fast paced and is always looking for fresh and new styles. It was

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

inevitable that boy bands would lose their popularity because America is not a country that lingers on one thing for too long.

Korean boy groups have remained popular because the genre of music, Korean pop, is the most popular in South Korea. As previously stated, in America, music is always changing. There is always something coming out in America that replaces the old. South Korea embraced the Korean pop music that spread and made it even more popular through entertainment companies. Music industry entertainment companies that are well known in South Korea include SM Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, and YG Entertainment. The companies scout people to become trainees to be placed into a group after years of training in the music industry. The group debuts after being well trained in singing and dancing. The companies regulate everything from the music the groups perform, the choreography, and the image of the members (Washington Post). Because boy groups are styled by entertainment companies, everything seems perfect and without flaws. Fans of boy groups model after the members and try to obtain the same look that the group promotes. Trendy fashion and hair styles are mimicked by fans that have come to love the groups that appear to be so perfect in everything they do.

Despite the good looks of pop groups, the Korean idol group industry is not a pretty one to say the least. Groups are managed by the entertainment companies with every detail being planned out. Contracts bind the members to the company for years and if they are broken they are subject to being fined. SM Entertainment, one

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

well known music entertainment company in Korea, has trainees with “contracts that range from 5 to 13 years” (Asia-Gazette). One of the members of the popular boy group Super Junior even admitted that he would have liked to switch agencies but the “compensation he would have to pay would be too much to handle” (Asia-Gazette). Members of a group are essentially puppets that the entertainment companies have complete control over. What the members eat, how long they exercise for, what languages they learn, when they sleep, what they where is all decided for them and they have no say whatsoever in what they want to do. There is a harsh reality to the industry. The members may all seem perfect on stage and on variety shows but it is all smoke and mirrors. The members do not have their own identities. They are what the companies want them to be.

With every detail being formulated, Korean boy bands have become popular even today because of the catchy music and almost too perfect members. Despite what goes behind the scenes of the Korean music industry, Korean idols have become popular because of their perfected images and synchronized dances. Boy bands are only one method in spreading Korean pop music throughout the world...girl groups are a completely different story!

Maisem Jaloudi  
February 28, 2012  
A1 Short History

#### Works Cited

Chu, Emilie. "Korean Boy Bands 101: Old School Edition." *Seoulisist*. N.p., 5 Feb. 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.

<[http://seoulismag.com/articles/read/korean\\_boy\\_bands\\_101\\_old\\_school\\_edition](http://seoulismag.com/articles/read/korean_boy_bands_101_old_school_edition)>.

Daniele. "K-Pop's Slave Contracts – a Glance at South Korea's Entertainment Industry." *The East Asia Gazette*. N.p., 21 May 2012. Web. 28 Feb. 2013. <<http://asia-gazette.com/news/south-korea/146>>.

Fisher, Max. "Visual Music: How 'Gangnam Style' Exploited K-pop's Secret Strength and Overcame Its Biggest Weakness." *Washington Post*. N.p., 18 Oct. 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/10/18/visual-music-how-gangnam-style-exploited-k-pops-secret-strength-and-overcame-its-biggest-weakness/>>.

"K-pop." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 13 Feb. 2013. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K-pop>>.

"List of South Korean Idol Groups (2010s)." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Feb. 2013. Web. 28 Feb. 2013.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_South\\_Korean\\_idol\\_groups\\_\(2010s\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_South_Korean_idol_groups_(2010s))>.

"Seo Taiji and Boys." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 02 Sept. 2013. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seo\\_Taiji\\_and\\_Boys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seo_Taiji_and_Boys)>.