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Comparative Analysis of K-pop Fans' Offline Support and Consumption Behaviors in China, South Korea, and Japan

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Abstract. East Asian countries, including China, South Korea, and Japan, form the major consumer markets for K-pop, which has swept across this region in recent years. Varied live event management rules, copyright protection systems, ticket selling rules, and local fan traditions make fans act and consume differently when they attend idol performances. Beyond simply playing songs online to lift chart data, local audiences devote plenty of time to offline concerts and fan meetings and keep close contact with other fans face to face. This research relies on my own experience watching live shows and long-time observation inside fan communities and compares fan behaviors in five key aspects: handmade fan merchandise, entry standards for official fan events, competitive offline fan behaviors, ticket operation modes, and venue manners. From the comparison, this paper concludes that fans based in China love creating exclusive supporting items and posting live photos online to expand their influence. South Korean audiences pay more attention to unified cheering during shows and attach great importance to artists' original music works. In contrast, strict real-name registration and copyright rules force Japanese fans to follow the most rigorous rules while chasing idols.

Keywords: K-pop fans, cross-cultural disparities, offline fan support, fan culture, consumption behavior

1. Introduction

K-pop has grown into one of East Asia's most influential pop cultural forms. Rather than merely streaming music and boosting online chart metrics, fans actively participate in offline concerts, official fan events, and peer interactions. National legislation, live event administration systems, and local cultural atmospheres fundamentally reshape how fans engage with their idols [1]. Existing academic literature largely centers on the industrial operation of K-pop, with few in-depth comparative analyses of ordinary fans' real offline behaviors [2, 3]. Accordingly, this paper relies on on-site observations to summarize distinctions in on-site performance, fan-support customs, and ticket-purchasing patterns among Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese K-pop followers [4, 5].

By analyzing authentic, firsthand live-event cases, this paper sorts out divergences in fan-chasing practices across China, South Korea, and Japan, and explains why the three regions develop entirely distinct fan atmospheres, support traditions, and consumption preferences [1, 6]. During K-pop's global expansion, China, South Korea and Japan have formed Asia's largest fan communities. Varied

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live event policies, copyright restrictions, ticketing rules, and local customs create clear gaps in fan support styles, on-site attitudes, and consumption logic. Combining real concert-attendance experience and long-term immersion in fan circles, this paper systematically contrasts fan behaviors across the three territories and generalizes their unique cultural characteristics.

2. Disparities in offline support styles and merchandise among Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese fans

Chinese fan support stands out for its large scale, abundant creativity, and strong public visibility. Domestic fan groups with mature operating systems in China raise funds by selling slogan banners, officially licensed goods, fan-designed accessories, blind box series, and various peripheral products. These fan organizations set up promotional advertisements at eye-catching locations, making it easy for visitors to post online snapshots and spread content widely. Typical ad spots include the ground floors of talent agencies, open areas outside performance venues, giant screens in downtown business districts, and subway advertising panels near concert halls, which greatly expand their public influence.

A complete commercial chain of professional fan cam creators has developed in China [7]. Their core business covers following idols to every official public schedule and selling high-definition photo packs to other fans. When it comes to offline communication at live concerts, Chinese followers produce far more types of handmade accessories than fans in the other two countries, ranging from custom photo cards and acrylic ornaments to stickers, snack gift bags, and plush toys. Swapping these handcrafted items between fellow fans is a common sight at all performance venues. Even with such vibrant fan exchanges, Chinese fan circles face many irregular management issues [7]. Some top fan clubs and official fan bases collect advance payments for custom merchandise yet delay shipment indefinitely, fail to publish transparent financial records of group fundraising, or even abscond with all the money collected from supporters.

During live concerts, Chinese audiences tend to focus heavily on capturing personal close-up footage and seizing every moment of one-on-one idol interaction. Since mainland China has no unified official cheering guidelines for concert audiences, most attendees hold up their phones nonstop to film videos and take solo shots of idols. Persistent on-site video capturing by audiences undermines the unified collective singing atmosphere and coordinated audience cheering effects during live entertainment events.

Outdoor publicity channels, including downtown display screens and subway billboards, consume a major portion of the capital invested by South Korean fan communities. This offline promotional resource is equally available to mainstream large idol groups and lesser-popular mid-tier performance teams. The essential distinction between Chinese and South Korean fan groups does not stem from the quantity of promotional campaigns, but from their fundamental value orientations toward idol culture and interactive approaches during live performances. South Korean fans regard online streaming data and original musical productions as core evaluation standards, and they offer backing to artists by raising online playback volumes [8]. Album consumption among these audiences mainly satisfies personal collection demands instead of bulk purchasing for the purpose of artificially boosting sales performance.

Spectators are allowed to shoot videos via mobile devices at South Korea's commercial live concerts, yet all pre-recording sessions for music programs enforce rigid restrictions on unapproved shooting and footage recording. Each core single released by K-pop groups is equipped with unified standardized cheering specifications, covering member-specific shouting chants, fixed fan catchphrases, and matched chorus segment coordination. Once live performances officially begin,

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most local viewers will voluntarily put aside recording devices to join synchronized group cheering, generating a powerful integrated interactive atmosphere between onstage performers and offstage audiences. During offline mutual gift exchanges, South Korean fans tend to prepare plain candies and portable light snacks and rarely invest time in manufacturing complex handmade supporting supplies.

Japanese fan culture is marked by restrained individual conduct and full compliance with venue management's official regulations. Local regulatory authorities implement stringent copyright and on-site operation rules, issuing a total ban on all unlicensed photography and video recording inside live performance venues. Any attendee discovered secretly capturing footage will be escorted away from the venue and required to delete all recorded multimedia files. Individuals with severe violation records will have their official fan club membership permanently terminated and be barred from participating in all future concert ticket lottery applications. Most local Japanese fans voluntarily follow these strict restrictions; hidden filming is mostly carried out by overseas tourists traveling to Japan, while only a very small number of local residents take secret shots at live events. Vague clips of fan service mostly originate from parade float segments and circulate exclusively within niche communities on X (Twitter). Isolated low-quality footage sells for roughly 80 RMB apiece online, failing to foster the large-scale commercial fan cam industry seen in China and South Korea.

Japanese fan groups rarely launch large-scale cross-border outdoor promotional campaigns, limiting fan support activities to officially authorized local events. Snacks and candies remain the primary items exchanged between fans offline. Shaped by indigenous live-viewing norms, most attendees at Japanese concert tours strictly follow rules and devote themselves fully to group choruses and cheering. Even at fixed-seat venues, audiences collectively stand up to watch performances during climactic segments to amplify the venue's energy, a unique cultural hallmark of Japanese live concerts.

3. Participation rules for exclusive official offline events in South Korea and fan-signing systems in Japan

Compared with the Chinese and Japanese markets, South Korea has developed a comprehensive, sophisticated system for music show pre-recordings and album-lottery fan-signing events, thereby forming unique operational norms within fan communities.

South Korean music show pre-recording applications are open to global fans without nationality barriers, yet implicit participation thresholds exist. Program producers require attendees to master Korean fan chants for the corresponding songs and to bring official light sticks to ensure uniform visual effects during recording. Overseas applicants face lower admission rates due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with cheering protocols, and historical controversies over unauthorized filming. Most idol groups reward pre-recording participants with exclusive perks, including pre-recorded photocards, packaged snacks, and brand-endorsed merchandise.

Qualifications for South Korean fan-signing sessions are allocated entirely via lotteries tied to album purchase volume, spawning a well-established overseas agency industry. Professional agents provide bulk album ordering and registration services, estimate lottery winning cutoffs based on historical event data, and offer full refunds for unsuccessful lottery entries to ease fans' concerns about missing out on fan-signing spots. Real-name identity verification for South Korean fan-signings remains loose, creating a de facto gray market for quota transfers and unapproved plus-one venues.

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Japan also uses an album-purchase lottery system to determine fan-signing eligibility, yet its identity verification standards are far stricter than those in South Korea. Venue staff cross-check three sets of information upon entry: government-issued ID, lottery registration details, and ticket purchaser credentials; entry is denied if any information mismatches. Fan-signing quotas have almost no resale market, and there is only an extremely slim chance of unauthorized entry for attendees with highly similar facial features.

Overall, offline fan competition is far more intense in China and South Korea. At public locations such as artist commute routes, radio show recording sites, official schedules, and areas outside music show venues, fans from both regions arrive hours or even days in advance to reserve front positions, generating fierce competition for close-range fan-cam shots and consuming substantial time and energy for fan-chasing.

Japanese idol fan groups barely form any mutually competitive chasing atmosphere. Local audiences stick firmly to all venue policies and copyright constraints, taking part solely in lottery events formally rolled out by talent agencies. They never gather in crowds to block idols during personal private schedules or conduct covert shooting outside concert venues, a habit that creates a calm, modest way of engaging with celebrity culture in Japan.

4. Differences in concert selection, ticketing operations, and audience manners

For mainland Chinese audiences arranging K-pop live viewing schedules, performance venues in Hong Kong and Macau rank as the primary pick on account of reduced language barriers. All interactive onstage segments at South Korean live events adopt Korean verbal exchanges, while Japan's touring performances integrate local spoken content and remade Japanese audio versions of musical tracks. These linguistic divides hinder mainland visitors' full comprehension of artists' casual onstage conversations and the implied connotations embedded in song lyrics. Live performances taking place in Hong Kong and Macau supply real-time translation services to solve this issue, and performers actively engage with audiences via Mandarin and Cantonese, building a friendlier viewing environment for mainland fans.

Distinct disparities exist in ticketing operation modes and on-site administration criteria among the three markets. Vulnerabilities that facilitate ticket resale and weak real-name monitoring solely emerge within concert ticketing pipelines, which operate independently of the lottery frameworks designed for fan signing sessions.

Ticketing industries within China and South Korea operate under high commercialization, granting audiences access to premium viewing zones through extra financial expenditure. South Korea has established real-name ticketing regulations, but the actual implementation of relevant supervision still has various obvious defects. Typical unfair behaviors include automatic scripts grabbing batches of tickets, mass pre-booking of seats, transferring identity-linked tickets, and reselling seats at marked-up prices. Hong Kong and Macau do not enforce strict mandatory real-name checks, leading to rampant scalping, bulk ticket hoarding for speculation, and overpriced second-hand sales [9]. Fans willing to pay extra fees can almost always secure front-row and standing-zone seats through scalpers and ticket brokers.

Japan adopts a multi-stage fan club lucky draw system, which forms the biggest distinction in ticketing rules among the three markets. Audiences cannot directly purchase VIP premium seats with extra money. Those wanting VIP or front-row spots must join official fan clubs to take part in the first-round draw for ordinary seats. Winners of the primary fan club draw can then sign up for an extra round of lotteries to compete for front-row positions. People who fail the second draw can only keep their original standard fan club seats without any paid upgrade options. Strict cross-checks of

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personal identity and ticket information block scalpers from reserving and hoarding large volumes of tickets. The allocation of premium seats depends entirely on lottery luck, with no reliable paid channels to get better viewing positions. Furthermore, Japanese fans hold solid copyright awareness. They reject all unauthorized filming, recording, and online sharing of concert footage, making Japan's live venues the most orderly among the three markets. In short, overly strict industry regulations restrict the diversity of fan activities and hold back the growth of newly debuted K-pop groups in Japan's domestic market [10].

5. Conclusion

Factors including local institutional rules, copyright protection policies, market environments, and the overall vibe of fan groups combine to shape separate K-pop fan cultures in China, South Korea, and Japan. Every region has formed its own idol-support styles with distinct pros and cons, and there is no absolute ranking of which culture is better.

Chinese fans pay much attention to public visibility, visual effects, and creative handmade fan supplies. Carefully crafted fan goods and large advertising projects made for online sharing can help newly debuted idol groups gain more public exposure, while enabling rich communication between different fans. Yet several tricky problems remain unsolved. Many fan clubs mismanage collective fundraising: some delay delivering ordered goods, fail to manage funds transparently, or even embezzle all the collected money. Moreover, most concert-goers focus on capturing videos rather than joining group interactions, and they compete intensely to get close to idols at all offline events.

South Korea's fan culture is closely tied to its music industry's core values. Streaming volume is the main measurement of an artist's popularity, and local fans have formed mature, unified cheering customs for live performances. Viewers tend to take part in collective stage interactions rather than record solo footage, creating a powerful live atmosphere. However, weak identity verification for tickets and fan sign lotteries has created an underground market for reselling event quotas.

Japan applies strict whole-process real-name registration to ticket sales and fan sign activities, which greatly limits scalpers' room to operate. Local fans maintain strong self-discipline and copyright awareness. Following local live show norms, they put aside recording devices to join unified singing and cheering, and all audiences standing together at performance highlights has become a unique local tradition. Taken together, these different fan traditions across the three East Asian countries form a diverse global K-pop fan community system, which fully reflects the unique and inclusive characteristics of youth subcultures in different East Asian regions.

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