

Analysis of the Korean Wave's Evolutionary Trends and Causes from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: The development of Korean Wave culture has gained more and more attention, and it has also caused a lot of controversy. The causes of the current trend of the Korean Wave are examined while specifically focusing on female empowerment within a feminist context. This paper examines the causes of the current Hallyu trend, with a special focus on women's empowerment in the context of feminism. This study analyzes the development process of the Korean Wave since the late 1990s and the characteristics of its different stages. Specifically, this entails studying the transition from the initial success of Korean dramas to the music industry, which ultimately led to its unique cultural identity as a symbol of Korea. The article specifically discusses the reasons that led the Korean Wave's culture to focus on women's empowerment, including the awakening of women's consciousness, the social and cultural environment, and business. This study argues that the development of K-pop should focus on women's rights, pay attention to the research gap between feminism and women's consciousness, and actively use this opportunity to promote gender equality. This article believes that Korean Wave culture should take the initiative to convey the correct women's thoughts and values, cooperate with the brand's marketing and concept guidance, and let more different types of women be seen by the world.

Keywords: Korean wave, feminism, K-pop culture, perception of gender performance, girls power

1. Introduction

While the term "K-pop" can be used to describe any pop or popular music from South Korea, even music from as far back as 1940, this paper focuses on a narrower interpretation that refers to any Korean music and artists connected to the nation's entertainment and idol industries, regardless of genre, and emphasizes the modern Korean wave "idol" culture and fandom groups that started in the 1990s. "Hallyu", is used to describe the phenomena of Korean popular culture, which is a large-scale cultural phenomenon that refers to the global spread and popularity of South Korean entertainment and popular culture. It became popular in mainland China and Southeast Asia in the late 1990s [1]. Although Korean theatrical releases and other musical genres are also a part of the phenomenon, the wave primarily comprises two media, television serials and pop music (K-pop) [2]. Nowadays, female empowerment seems to be the key trait of the "Hallyu", and how South Korean popular music promotes neoliberal feminism through a discourse of resilience, arises as a new problem for producers

[3]. The current study has emphasized highlighting female subjectivity and empowerment is commercialized and serves to reinforce patriarchal gender norms [4].

However, there is not enough analysis of the positive effects on female audiences, such as the awakening of female consciousness. As a result, this paper attempts to make an effort to analyze the causes of the current Korean Wave trend while paying particular attention to female empowerment in a feminist context. This essay examines in additional detail the perspectives that are omitted from current academic discourse and considers the indicators and development direction that this current pattern offers for the future development of the arts and entertainment sector based on the majority of academic research already available. This study aims to examine the following hypothesis. The improvement of women's status and the awakening of women's consciousness have prompted the Korean pop industry to pay more attention to women's empowerment in the production process, while commercialization has made society have a positive impact on gender equality.

2. Case Description

2.1. The Evolution of Korean K-pop Culture

As previously mentioned, the Korean Wave is undergoing significant globalization and has become an increasingly significant cultural phenomenon. At the same time, each stage of the process contains distinct attributes and symbols that contribute to its intricate nature. Hallyu began with K-drama in the late 1990s, South Korean TV dramas have gained worldwide popularity, with a particular following in Asian countries. Urban romance is a prevalent genre among these dramas. Nevertheless, it quickly jumped to the maturity stage of Hallyu 4.0 (K-style) via Hallyu 2.0 (K-pop music)--More focused on independent singers or dancers, musicians, etc, and Hallyu 3.0 (K-culture). By the mid-2000s, Hallyu was closely associated with the K-pop explosion led by Korean idol groups [1]. In the early stage of cultural introduction, music was mainly discussed, and the aesthetic of idol groups was more in line with the fashion aesthetic of European and American countries, such as tall bodies, hip-hop music, and facial features in line with the "Oriental fantasy" of Westerners.

During this period, companies were focused on establishing the music market in South Korea. Once its popularity reached a certain level, they began to try to internalize it as a music industry with Korean characteristics. To be able to understand what is popular, it is inevitable to refer to the ideas of social members, which can make the main consumers consume and help the company expand its market share.

Nowadays, the entertainment industry chain has developed to a fairly sophisticated level, and some scholars argue that the image of idols is artificially shaped by the layers of management oversight due to the widespread use of exploitative management in idol production [5]. It has therefore been argued that the emerging concept of "girl crush" and the trend of emphasizing women's empowerment in the Korean pop industry is a highly commodified form of feminism that essentially maintains the patriarchal status quo and underlying gender dynamics in the Korean pop industry [4].

2.2. The Evolution of Korean Wave Culture in Feminist Tones

In postfeminist society, a large amount of work has jumped out to challenge patriarchal dominance. Many supporters of feminism now refrain from radical methods of demonstration and shout their slogans in favor of more gentle methods, such as the use of artistic means to convey the importance of women's empowerment through literary and artistic works and to reawaken the consciousness of women's independence. There is an example a previous researcher used to show how female idols of the "girl crush" genre generally use the lyrics of the song to display assertive "girl power," defying the patriarchy by infusing feminist messages into their works, in contrast to the cliches of female idols being charming and docile. The girls in the music video and lyrics no longer perform as the

stereotyped females, who show their soft, submissive, tolerance-based femininity. Conversely, this girls' group just acts as a small sisterhood and speaks out like "I'm Tomboy," thus trying against the compression of patriarchal society and the bias of females [6].

Not only in the performance in videos or TV shows, some K-pop female idols are trying to show their hybrid or transgender femininity to challenge the stereotype of gender performance. It is encouraging that they stand out to break the implicit role of female media workers. Typically, they have short hair, which is combined with their action or appearance in reality-variety shows. For example, in a variety show, they are in charge of the protection of others or a power-type role [7]. Both represent so-called "tomboyish", and androgynous characteristics. As we are all aware, the Internet era has greatly accelerated the spread of information, and the high interactivity of these media platforms allows for the cross-media, barrier-free, widespread dissemination of information for Internet users and potential audiences who are interested in these mixed personality types or artistic creations that emphasize female power. With the help of the media, their social influence prompts her fans to continue spreading her mediated image on the Internet, and the antithetical hybrid temperament type they exhibit is recognized or potentially accepted by a wider audience, thus achieving the goal of reshaping their fans' aesthetic preferences as well as causing more people to rethink their identities.

In addition, the refraction of the celebrity effect can be seen in the above example. As Chang mentioned, celebrities have a great influence on the fans' thoughts and attitudes towards gender issues, and thus this trend has led to the emergence of conceptual themes in the entertainment industry that emphasize women's empowerment and girl power [8]. Female groups try to maintain their characteristics as professional artists rather than just entertainers and show their professionalism and strong working abilities toward their careers. This kind of behavior can help to break the stigma that female artists are often stared at and the social norms of what an attractive woman "should be".

3. Reasons and Inspiration

3.1. The Change of Culture

The first stream is primarily from a social perspective, with the proliferation of propaganda and iterations of media images pushing audiences to change their aesthetic preferences [9]. Such as the image of Sunni (strong sister), which pushes audiences to focus on women's empowerment [10]. The subconsciously held beliefs of the majority of the population will then force the producers of the entertainment industry to follow the tastes of the audience, thus solidifying the importance of the epitome of feminism in K-pop productions today.

Cultural change is global and fluid. Since fandom groups are typically collective and centralized, the identity of fans can impact and shape one another from both a social and psychological point of view. The Korean Wave primarily appeals to young people as potential audiences, with their need for speed in updating information much higher than that of the audiences of the initial stage of the Korean Wave for movies and TV dramas. Currently, gender issues are highly publicized, so it is one of the most attractive topics that are easy to draw attention to. Based on the promotion and publicity of the media, aesthetic tastes will also be reshaped and changed.

Fan culture can help women's consciousness awaken to a great extent, and the obvious characteristics of fandom culture are group sex and high interaction. As mentioned above, female fans have been "selectively accepting the part that favors them" rather than accepting the femininity displayed by girl idol groups without using their judgment—female idols serve as role models and projections of their self-consciousness, but they are also unique parts of themselves. As a result, they are also changing the self-identity of their fans, with fans being more criticized and participatory culture in the context of K-pop fandom—it is the way to show girls power and affect more people.

3.2. Development of Female Consciousness

The social status of women is consistently improving with the development of education. Moreover, the rising wave of feminism is expanding all over the world. Consequently, the traditional stereotypes in past performances, such as sexy, docile, and beautiful female idols, are no longer the only preferences of the contemporary audience. Instead, they are individuals with a sanguineous temperament who emphasize their independence and extroversion. Same-sex relationships have become increasingly popular among some viewers, reflecting a willingness to embrace unconventional relationships. This demonstrates that women are not completely disciplined by the patriarchal society; they have their thoughts, choose their outlook on life and values, and then reflect them in the worship of the idol, in the kind of specific charm they show.

The awakening of female self-consciousness can also be reflected in the fact that female fans will also reflect their ownership and ability to control their property through the consumption of their favorite idols, thus providing strong evidence of female independence: they can not only meet the needs of life with money but also become more spiritually rich and able to support their favorite idols. The internet's high interactivity allows feminist supporters to unite and broaden their reach, exposing more viewers to the importance of women's contributions in the workplace. This objective approach fosters critical thought among those who previously lacked awareness or inadvertently overlooked the value of women's contributions to the workplace. Fans should be aware that impulsive consumption is not a long-term way to change gender inequality, and it may be a better solution to seize the advantages brought by the group, through tweets, community discussions, and other ways to cooperate with entertainment companies to promote positive female power.

Starting from the orientation of female consciousness, developing to the image of female idol and the projection of female role models in the eyes of fans, it is obvious that women's self-subjectivity is constantly being reconstructed, and female fans are also completing their self-construction through otherization to achieve better growth. Optimistically, perhaps in the future, Korean pop culture will become more inclusive and open, allowing feminism to be seen by the audience on the stage in a more straightforward way.

3.3. Commercial

The current trend of the Korean Wave is both a product of artificial interventions by capitalists and production companies as well as influencing society in turn, and it flows in both directions. There are some main branches of discussion in current academia, one of which is from a commercial perspective. Early scholars mentioned that while the focus on the plight of sexual minorities is good, in the eyes of those with vested interests, this feminist concept has been commercialized as the entertainment industry chain continues to mature, with companies emphasizing the so-called anti-"traditional female" stereotypes more out of the heat of the topic and the many supporters of the target to get more return on investment and benefits [11].

However, the maturing entertainment industry strategically addresses current global topics while promoting women's independence and courage by showing feminist themes in its productions, thus transforming an exotic hip-hop culture into a cultural industry with Korean characteristics, attracting global audiences to become K-pop followers, and promoting national economic development. Rather than discussing how women can overcome current difficulties and resist the perpetuation of stereotypes that promote homogeneity and submissiveness among women, it is preferable to make the implantation of commercial or more straightforward and simplistic themes.

Although this paper hopes to think from a positive perspective, there are inevitably some bad phenomena in the market. As the question said, the chaos of "consuming women" is still reflected in the lack of correct guidance from the brand side and too much emphasis on gender opposition.

Therefore, in the future, producers should avoid overcutting the actual content and appeal of the topic in the form of "women's rights." They should pay attention to the real female opinion expression and dilemma breakthrough, and Consciously convey "girls' power" by creating positive female role models. Additionally, it is believed that under such a large wave of the Korean wave, market supervision will also be strengthened.

From a critical point of view the commercialization of "women's rights" cannot be only seen as a tool for companies to make profits because tight conformity with the current trend is an important condition for the basic operation of any firm, rather than the so-called "consumption of women". Indeed, this study rules out the use of artistic techniques that could dilute the embodiment of patriarchal benefits and inadvertently deepen gender stereotypes. The principles of freedom and equality pervade all aspects of society, and women's consumption in the entertainment industry not only pleases them but also contributes to social and economic development.

4. Conclusions

The study examines the historical background and current trends of the Korean Wave, analyzing previous achievements and shortcomings. Additionally, this paper introduces the status of Korean Wave universality and cultural characteristics during different stages of its development. This essay examines the advantages and drawbacks of female empowerment within K-pop culture through various lenses and analyzes the reasons why the Korean wave culture developed towards women's preference. Emphasizing feminism and encompassing business, social development, and gender. With the awakening of female consciousness, women gradually realize that they need to emphasize their ability in this society, and their hobbies, such as spending money for their favorite idols, have become a specific form of personal empowerment, and female fan groups have therefore become a major force in the economic development of the entertainment industry. Therefore, producers are gradually attracted by feminist theme marketing, reflecting female power and female values in the presentation of works. Patriarchal stereotypes have restricted the notion of "masculinity". This paper posits that the Korean Wave is incorporating feminism from a more novel perspective. According to the causes of the current situation of the Korean Wave, the article points out the existing problems that should be eliminated in the future, such as the lack of market supervision and value guidance, and the fan base can help more women become better themselves not only through purchasing power but also through appealing power.

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