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5-2021

## Breaking Into the American Mainstream - Korean Pop's Expansion and American Influences

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California State University Monterey Bay

# Breaking Into the American Mainstream

Korean Pop's Expansion and American Influences

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American popular music has been constantly evolving, providing new sounds from various genres, and its latest addition has been the Korean export of K-pop. The United States has had an incredible impact in the musical world but the scope of this paper will cover that influence in Korean pop music. Specifically, this paper will answer these two questions: Why is Korean pop, or K-pop, becoming so popular globally, and what is the United States' influence on K-pop? To find these answers, this paper will explore influential periods in American musical history, draw possible links between them and current K-pop trends, discuss the current music consumer climate, and distinguish what is different in K-pop from other world genres that is making it stand out in present times.

To briefly bring readers up to speed, artists and groups in the K-pop genre have been making attempts for more than a decade now to truly break into the American market through different marketing, releasing songs in English, and having American tours ("Here's The Breakdown"). Through these attempts, success was spotty and it did not usually last too long, until recently. Two groups have broken out of Korea recently that have not only smashed into the American market, but have had global success: BTS and BLACKPINK. They have each had repeated performances on daily American television shows like *Good Morning America* and *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* (Herman, "BTS Set;" "BLACKPINK"). They have performed at big festivals such as Coachella, and have successfully appeared multiple times on the global charts (Adejobi; "BTS Chart History").

The foundation for modern popular music in Korea ultimately comes from *changga*. The origin of *changga* "can be traced all the way back to 1885, when a

missionary named Henry Appenzeller began to teach American and British folk songs to schoolchildren, replacing the original English lyrics with Korean ones” (Mersereau). The walls, if you will, of this house of K-pop can be considered the music created after American troops brought over their music while stationed in South Korea after the Korean War. By this time it was the mid-to-late 1950s, and new styles of popular music had already taken shape in the United States and were able to give a fresh influence to Korean artists hearing the music for the first time. From here on, changga and other Korean genres began to take a more Americanized form.

Next, the roof to this house would be the various forms in which these American influences take shape over the next several decades. From the country songs of The Kim Sisters, to the rock and roll of Add4, to the Bob Dylan-inspired folk songs of Han Dae-soo, South Korea’s music scene was full of American influence (Mersereau). As time progressed, American music would continue to be emulated in K-pop. For example, during the 1990s to the turn of the century, America went through a new jack swing era and saw a revival in boy bands and girl groups - and so did South Korea. Even today, current K-pop songs have instrumentals that are heavily influenced by American rap and pop genres.

The current K-pop industry is set up in a way that bears a lot of resemblance to the American pop music industry of the 1950s to 1970s as far as scouting talent, training artists, and creating music. The pop industry in America during the aforementioned time period worked like a machine. And the original intention was to create hit singles for pop artists, though it became particularly successful with black girl groups. The machine found talent (usually female vocalists), grouped them together,

gave them ready-made songs for them to record, and rinsed and repeated. Interestingly enough, during the creation of songs girl group lineups were often changed; roles were assigned and reassigned on a song by song basis; and it was usually the producers who made these choices. This particular machine became known as the Brill Building formula, and it resulted in countless hit songs.

The Brill Building formula got its name from the place where a lot of the music that resulted from this machine was made. Many great composers, lyricists, and producers like Don Kirshner, Phil Spector, Jerry Leiber, and Mike Stoller worked in the Brill Building (Rios-Ellis). The Brill Building, located in Manhattan, had just about every part of the music industry in one building. From record producers and musicians, to recording studios, to record production lines, to radio DJs, the Brill Building had it all (Rios-Ellis). This influence can be seen in the current K-pop industry with each label building. Not only do label buildings house the front office, they also have in-house composers, producers, engineers, and choreographers that will meet with artists to create songs and dances for them (J. Chua). With that, the influence of the Brill Building is seen, but another facet of the industry that has deeply influenced K-pop music today is the *idol* which was further refined by Motown.

The *idol*, formerly teen idol, was an artist framework that was more or less started by Dick Clark by way of his show American Bandstand (Rios-Ellis). The show featured hot new pop songs by young, attractive artists, often male, and a crowd filled with teens who would dance to the music. Clark owned several record companies, and due to the demand of a new fanbase in teens, the teen idol was soon born (Rios-Ellis). Record companies would scout for young attractive men who could carry a tune and

train them to be recording artists, which created a new formula for hit songs: a good looking artist, catchy lyrics, and a danceable tempo. This new formula quickly created a new fanbase with an insatiable appetite for new music from this artist archetype.

Motown's attempts to take the concept of the idol and train them up into an artist that would last longer than just the moment. Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown, wanted the solo artists to be good all around entertainers who could handle themselves properly in public as well. This was extremely important for black entertainers given the United States' social climate at the time. Motown artists were scouted first for their musical talent, and then they were trained by model school directors, choreographers, and music directors (Rios-Ellis). So, solo artists were trained in giving performances and really understood the music they were playing and singing and could even perform the choreography during their performances. Motown's "artist training machine" can be seen in the K-pop industry in the present day and has almost become an industry in itself.

In modern day K-pop, the industry has a foundation built on its ability to scout and train new talent. This process scouts *trainees* and works in a combination of Motown's training machine with hints of the Brill building formula. Though the specifics are more complex, the basics of K-pop's trainee machine is as follows:

- talent is scouted and signed (usually between the ages of 9-14)
- the talent is given music (vocal and sometimes instrument specific) training as well as dance training

- then if the talent has proved promising they are put in groups, and the new group will *debut* and officially begin their recording career. (Chong; J. Chua; Park and Schneiderman)

The Brill building influence in the trainee process will become more apparent below but immediately it is easy to say Motown's training machine is alive and well in the K-pop industry.

Since not everyone is naturally an amazing singer or dancer, in order to supplement the stream of talent that a label can have on its roster, the trainee process has become an integral part of the K-pop industry. But how do these labels find new artists, and how do they have the money to train all of them? As far as finding talent goes, it will typically fall under two categories: scouting and auditions. For scouting, the talent would have been found by an agency's talent scout, but as for how they found the talent could range from having heard or seen this person's singing or dancing or the person could have been scouted simply for their looks. If a person is scouted, they would still need to audition for the company. In an audition, the talent would have to perform various singing and dancing activities that would be judged by talent coaches or label staff. There are several stages to auditions however, so passing an audition means the person would have to go back and continue with the next steps of that label's auditioning process before being offered a contract (Chong). In either case, if the talent is worth training they would need to sign an incredibly binding trainee contract that could last from two to ten years. So what happens during the time the talent is signed as a trainee?

In the current K-pop framework all music labels have almost identical trainee programs that only vary due to the size of the label. Really this means the only difference in trainee experience from label to label is the funding. As a trainee, the talent is required to stay in company dorms with the other trainees. The dorms are segregated by gender, and trainees have several roommates around their age (Chong). Also, company dorm life is incredibly strict. According to English-born former K-pop trainee Euodias:

We only left the building to attend our normal school lessons. Other than that we weren't allowed out without permission, which was usually refused [and] trainees would have "managers" - uncle-type figures who would text us at night to keep tabs on us. If we didn't text back, then we would immediately get a phone call, asking where we were. (Chong)

It should also be noted that relatives were not allowed to visit trainees without company permission, and the request would need to be made weeks in advance. There is also a very strict dating ban for trainees and idols (Chong). Here it can be seen that there is a stark difference in the details of how present day K-pop idols are trained as opposed to teen idols of the past in the United States.

Another important detail to remember is that most trainees are teenagers and are training in addition to being a student. So aside from attending school:

[Trainees] have to take singing, dancing, acting, and even language classes to become a 'global star' and since trainees are obligated to sign a contract before beginning their training, it could be very costly to quit before their contract ends because during this time, the agency usually



bears the costs of vocal coaches, choreographers, stylists, make-up artists, accommodation, living expenses, and staff salaries. (J. Chua)

Also, trainees often go through a monthly evaluation so the company can assess their “upside” and see if they are worth keeping as a trainee (Park and Schneiderman). The companies do have the ability to kick a trainee out for various reasons and they can include: no improvement, not getting along with other trainees, scandals, or rebellious behavior. However, if a trainee quits, they will be required to pay the company back most, if not all, the money that it had spent to train them (Chong; J. Chua). Again, the details here of contracts and strictness are very different from how things were for Motown artists, yet it can still be seen that the underlying idea of training the talent still persists. Another difference is that Motown artists would receive their training after signing with the label and in concurrence with releasing music, however in K-pop, their *debut* comes after their training (Chong; Rios-Ellis).

One aspect of the trainee system and K-pop that has contributed to its global spread is the steady flow of foreign K-pop idol hopefuls. While it is certainly not new, the presence of foreign trainees and idols has definitely had an effect on the reach K-pop has. Although there are a lot of foreign trainees and have been for quite some time, their experience often differs from that of Korean native-born trainees. Being from a different country, foreign trainees often have a language barrier and have to spend some time learning the culture on top of receiving their training. Therefore, the adjustments foreign trainees have to make are much larger than that of native trainees and the expectations set up on them are still just as high.

Due to the strict nature of the trainee system, anecdotal evidence about life as a foreign trainee comes in bits and pieces from current idols or more fully from people who are no longer in the K-pop industry. Information from current idols is often very vague as they are still very restricted in what they can talk about since they are still under contract with their companies. Over the years there have been many idols that have debuted that were from China, Thailand, Japan, and Taiwan, which has inspired new trainees. However, this section will feature stories from idols and former trainees from English speaking countries. In particular, frequent references will be made from the experiences of BM of Kard and Euodias, as well as mentions from Jae of DAY6, Peniel of BTOB, and Ashley Choi.

As previously mentioned, there can be quite a few complications for trainees who are coming from another country, and the first one that typically is mentioned is a language barrier. When speaking about doing his first auditions, BM of KARD said he couldn't speak any Korean and that he had never even heard of K-pop before (Nam and Kim). This is a recurring statement from many American-born idols as they did not grow up speaking Korean at home and K-pop was not well known where they grew up. So when it was time for them to move to Korea to begin their lives as trainees, there was a steep learning curve in order to simply communicate with the people around them. For example, when BM first went to Korea he was renting a studio apartment and his landlord would sometimes swindle him out of money on his rent, and he could not really do anything to stop it because he could not speak Korean to anyone to help him (Kim et al.).

With this anecdote, BM is already in a rather unique minority as this is an unusual case. His experience is even more unique in that he was already an adult when he became a trainee. While it isn't uncommon for there to be trainees at the age of 20 or 21, they are usually at the end of their time as a trainee, however, BM was just beginning as a trainee at that age. In contrast, Peniel had a more typical trainee experience as he lived in the company dorm. Peniel was a trainee for a rather large company, so there were a lot of trainees, and at one point he was one of 13 trainees living in a three-room dorm (Kim et al.).

In Euodias' account of her time as a trainee, her stories of trainee interactions with trainers and management recount rather difficult times. In her interview with Elaine Chong she says the trainees were split into two teams, Team A, which consisted of 20-30 trainees, and Team B which had roughly 200 members. Team A was thought to have more potential and received much better treatment, but regardless of what team you belonged to, the trainers only ever called you by your trainee number, or on rare occasions, the stage name that they gave you. For the girl trainees, they were weighed every week, and they had to be under approximately 104 pounds regardless of their age or height, and if they were over they would be put on a diet. She emphasized how this contributed to a rather warped view of work ethic as trainees starving themselves was normalized and practicing to the point of exhaustion was a sign of how bad they wanted to be an idol (Chong).

From Euodias we get a much darker side of what life was like as a trainee, and both she and Ashley Choi make mentions of bullying during their trainee time. From these accounts, it is easy to gather how difficult being a trainee can be with the extreme

training regimen, isolation from family, and trying to fit the mold of the stage persona they are given. Sometimes, like in the case of Jae of DAY6, the company makes changes to what sort of group they want you to be in and it works for the best: “I was in dancing classes for three months and they came to me and said ‘and we think that’s enough’” he said jokingly about that moment as a trainee (Park and Schneiderman). Jae’s company decided to put him in a rock group as opposed to a regular K-pop group, and that decision worked out for the best for him. In contrast, Euodias company wanted her to be a persona for her group that she did not think she could match, and so she ended up leaving the industry shortly before she was slated to debut (Chong).

In K-pop, the point of becoming a trainee is in hopes of becoming a member of a group and getting to debut as an artist as a part of that group. A lot of trainees never get to debut, so it is fair to say that a trainee beat the odds by getting to debut. However, it is still an uphill battle more often than not for new *rookie* groups. It is not unheard of for rookie groups to flop and disband fairly quickly after debut, so an artist’s future is not secure simply because they made it to debut. Just like for any artist, it can be a long road to truly “make it.” Alternatively, rookie groups can receive a lot of attention as fans look for a new group to obsess over, and sometimes new artists are not ready for that amount of pressure. Due to this, another common occurrence for rookie groups is lineup changes. Sometimes artists will leave the group to put their focus elsewhere in life or simply because the pressure was too much, but on the other side of the spectrum, sometimes the company may add members to breathe new life into the group in an attempt to stop them from flopping. Some groups that had lineup changes shortly after debut include DAY6, Red Velvet, Cherry Bullet, CLC, SATURDAY, and

DREAMCATCHER (*Kpop Profiles*). Despite the uncertainty, it is this post-debut time in how the K-pop industry functions that brings some of these groups to the global stage.

A huge part of how K-pop songs start to gain traction in the United States comes from the K-pop promotion cycle. For every group, their first song is dubbed their *debut* and every time after their debut that they release a new single, ep, or album, it is dubbed a *comeback*. For every debut and comeback, the group will participate in promotions which typically include giving a large number of live performances of their new single (or single from their new album) on various music shows in South Korea. On top of the live performances, there is always a music video and a fansign (a.k.a. meet-and-greet) or some event for the group to interact with fans. Aside from these events there are still other promotions such as choreography music videos, other one off performances for shows or YouTube channels, and interviews. K-Guru outlines the most common promotion cycle for K-pop artists or groups as:

- Release date announcement
- Concept teaser with dates (usually posters)
- Individual and group teaser pictures
- Music video teasers
- Official release and showcase performance
- Music show performances, fansigns
- More live performances including award shows and festivals
- Concert tour and occasionally an album repackage

With such an intense promotion cycle and fans that are very eager to share and attend events it becomes a little easier to see how K-pop began reaching people outside of South Korea.

Another factor that has contributed to the globalization of K-pop, again, is foreigners within the industry. The impact of seeing someone from a similar background in somewhat unfamiliar territory can bring a lot of new attention to a platform. For example, there have been a lot of Thai idols debuting in successful groups in recent years such as Lisa of BLACKPINK, BamBam of GOT7, and Minnie of (G)I-DLE to name a few. The popularity of these idols in their homeland has given the genre a newer fanbase and has even earned BamBam the nickname of “The Prince of Thailand” (S. Park). While maybe the pandemonium isn’t shared in the United States, there certainly has been a growing interest in K-pop not just from artists looking to become idols, but also music producers and songwriters, as well as music labels looking to create groups in Korea.

While on the topic of growing interest from other countries, it would be important to note what has gone on in the industry to create a better understanding of why. The best way to outline the growing foreign interest, mainly American, and to tie in some stories from current idols is to go over the generations of K-pop in more detail. At the time of this paper, the K-pop industry is in the midst of its fourth generation. So when were the generations?

The first generation marks the beginning of modern K-pop and starts with the debut of the group H.O.T. in 1996. This generation also includes the artist BoA, who is a key figure not only in K-pop, but also to *hallyu*, the Korean wave, which is the term that

can be used to describe the sudden explosion of interest from other countries in Korean culture and entertainment. The first generation was somewhat experimental but borrowed from Japanese culture, American boy bands, and the new jack swing era to try and find its footing. While the first generation's timing did not really help or hurt its outcome, "the second generation of K-pop came amidst an economic crisis in Korea." Even though that would appear to be a hindrance, "K-pop became extremely commercialized and became one of the most profitable industries in the country" ("Here's The Breakdown"). From this generation, which started in the mid-to-late 2000s, came the hallmark groups of BIGBANG and Girls' Generation, which still are both incredibly successful inside and outside of Korea. And in the second half of the second generation came a push for breaking ground in other countries with world tours and the use of platforms like YouTube to promote content. Some big groups that debuted in "gen 2.5" include SHINee, 2NE1, SISTAR, and 2PM ("Here's The Breakdown").

The third generation began around the early-to-mid 2010s and is the generation that truly went global as areas already affected by the Korean wave now had their attention set on the industry and new groups that debuted. The third generation brought groups such as BTS, Twice, BLACKPINK, Red Velvet, and GOT7 and in the later half brought in groups created from survival shows (i.e. *Making the Band* or *American Idol*) like I.O.I and Wanna One ("Here's The Breakdown").

Now in the fourth generation, new groups have global exposure from the moment they are announced. A few fourth generation groups include LOONA, NCT, (G)I-DLE, and Stray Kids. As an example of the impact of the Korean wave, all the groups mentioned from the third and fourth generations, except for Red Velvet and BTS, have

at least one foreign member. This does show a strong expansion of the industry, but what is the motivation for some artists to want to pick up and leave to another country, and is it really as simple as seeing someone else do it?

In the case of American K-pop idols, Tiffany and Jessica of Girls' Generation have had an influence on many of the idols from America that followed. And while they may not have directly inspired every American idol that entered K-pop after them, Tiffany and Jessica increased labels' interest in finding talent in America. With Girls' Generation being known as "The Nation's (Korea's) Girl Group," the group being active during a time of branching out to American songwriters and producers and featuring two American members in prominent positions of the group certainly left an impression in the American music industry (C. Chua). The impression was so pronounced that even the originator of new jack swing, Teddy Riley, joined in creating a K-pop girl group in RANIA (now know as Blackswan) whose lineup has included members from all over the world ("Teddy Riley").

So what was the catalyst that got some current American idols to go to Korea? In the case of BM of KARD, his mom actually signed him up for auditions that were being hosted near his city (Nam and Kim). He passed, and it led to him receiving a ticket to Korea and being a contestant on a survival show which ultimately landed him as a member of KARD. For AleXa, she had been a fan of K-pop for some time, and while she and BM both come from a dancing background, their routes to becoming K-pop idols are fairly different. AleXa posted dance covers on social media and competed in online dance competitions, which she won and which landed her a ticket to Korea where she filmed a mini reality series that in turn led to her signing as a trainee to her current



company (Park and Schneiderman). Eric Nam was a big K-pop fan and was discovered from his K-pop song covers that he posted on YouTube (Nam and Kim). He was invited to Korea to compete on another survival show where he placed in the top 5 and soon debuted as a solo artist (Nam and Kim). The point in outlining these idols' paths to debut is to show how much attention was turned to the American market as a result of the second generation.

Another artist who has ultimately become a strong connection between the Korean and American music industries is Jay Park. He was born in and raised in the Seattle area and was a part of the Art of Movement dance group growing up. He auditioned to be a part of a survival show that would create the group One Day. One Day was later split into the groups 2PM and 2AM, and he became a member of the former (Grandmaison). He trained for about 4 years and debuted as a member of 2PM in 2008. However, a year after debut, old videos he had made when he was a trainee venting his frustrations about being in an unfamiliar country with no family, where he couldn't communicate well or understand the culture, and constantly being confined to strict rules resurfaced and were taken out of context. The result was he was kicked out of the group and Korea as well (Grandmaison).

Artists leaving groups is not unheard of, but for Jay Park to get kicked out of a group was very big news. Also, there were not many groups during generation two, which contributed to the volume of attention his departure received. Jay Park returned to Seattle and resumed b-boying and worked as a mechanic for a short time. Public opinion of him shifted after his return as it had come out that the videos and posts that caused his scandal were mistranslated and taken out of context. Fans begged for his

return to music, and he began posting song covers on YouTube. His cover of “Nothin’ on You” went viral almost immediately. When speaking about this time and restarting his music career, he said “the fans went crazy with support and people just started hitting me up. From there on everything was trial and error because I was famous but I had to start over as a solo artist” (Grandmaison).

This is where Jay Park starts to become a connection between American and Korean music industries. In returning to Korea, he became a rapper and started his own label in 2013, AOMG. This label has since signed many Korean rap and R&B artists as well as producers. And while it is a Korean-based label, because of Jay Park’s popularity and connections, several of the label’s artists and producers have worked with various American, Japanese, and Chinese acts. Jay Park started another label, H1GHR MUSIC, in 2017 with his longtime friend and producer Cha Cha Malone. Park describes this label as having both “Asian and American artists under one roof,” and the label popularizes artists in both markets (Grandmaison). As a result of his label’s popularity, its artists have world tours. And a stop in New York led Jay Park to become the first Asian signed to Roc Nation. This has allowed him to release English and Korean albums and English/Korean remixes featuring talent from America and Korea. And while Jay Park and his labels are not exactly pop centered, both he and his signees are frequently featured on and release K-pop songs (Grandmaison).

While Jay Park’s particular path to success in both Korea and the U.S. is unique, K-pop acts working with American producers and songwriters has been steadily increasing since its second generation. The United States’ influence is more than just ideals on training talent and wardrobe styling, as in recent years K-pop groups have

been creating many hit songs with credits from American producers and songwriters. For example, some recent hit K-pop songs with credits from American talent are “Bad Boy” by Red Velvet, which was produced by The Stereotypes; “Euphoria” by BTS, which was co-written by Melanie Fontana; “Ddu-Du Ddu-Du” by BLACKPINK, which was co-produced by Bekuh Boom; and “Best of Me” by BTS, which was co-produced by The Chainsmokers (Lee). With the injection of more American-styled pop production, it was only a matter of time before some groups began to garner play on U.S. airwaves.

Moreover, the increasing involvement of American songwriters has led to a few other developments within the K-pop industry. The first is that some songs have begun to feature more English, and presumably, this would be because the songs are geared more towards reaching a global audience. However, an American co-writer does not immediately mean there will be an increased amount of English in a song. For example, the song “The Truth Untold” by BTS credits seven songwriters, five of which are American, but the vast majority of the song is in Korean. Another development is that more comebacks are beginning to receive an English version. English versions have been made in the past, although very sparsely, but in the past two or so years it has started to become rather common for companies that want to push their groups to the global stage. Some recent examples of K-pop hits that have an English version are “Bad Boy” by Red Velvet, “I Can’t Stop Me” by TWICE, and “Voice” by LOONA. That said, some K-pop acts have not only made it into the American market, but the global market and have been dubbed as the biggest boy and girl groups, respectively, in the world before they ever made songs targeted to English speakers.

The two groups that have become insanely popular around the world are BLACKPINK and BTS. And while neither group is the first to have gained popularity in countries other than Korea, they are the first groups to reach this level of international acclaim. The lists of firsts and awards that these two groups have obtained is a long one that is filled with broken records along the way. And since breaking into the American mainstream these two groups have also begun to work more extensively with American songwriters, artists, and producers. But before discussing their American success, discussing the groups' formations and history will be helpful in understanding how they have reached this point.

BLACKPINK is a girl group that debuted in 2016 under YG Entertainment and consists of four members: Jisoo, Jennie, Rosé, and Lisa. The group has some unique characteristics, one of which being that three of the members speak fluent English. Also, half of the members are technically foreign, as Lisa is Thai and Rosé, while Korean ethnically, was born in New Zealand and raised in Australia (*Kpop Profiles*). Another attribute is that it is rarer for groups to have only four members as groups often have seven to nine. The group experienced immediate success with their debut songs "Whistle" and "Boombayah," but it was their hit "Ddu-Du Ddu-Du" in June of 2018, whose music video holds the record for most views in its first 24 hours, that put them directly on the world stage (Hicap). Later in 2018 the group signed a deal that would have them be represented by Interscope Records and Universal Music Group outside of Korea, which was an enormous stepping stone for K-pop as a whole (Kelly).

BLACKPINK has collaborated with American talent since their debut, but since the release of "Ddu-Du Ddu-Du," they have worked with global artists such as Dua Lipa

and David Guetta, as well as American artists like Selena Gomez, Lady Gaga, and Cardi B (Rowley). BLACKPINK is also the first K-pop girl group to perform at Coachella, and they have also appeared on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* in addition to multiple appearances on *Good Morning America* (Adejobi; Herman, "BLACKPINK"). The group has had several reality shows and a Netflix documentary, and the members have had dozens of brand deals. In October 2020 the group released their debut album, which features a long list of American talent in the credits and songs that have lyrics almost entirely in English (Rowley). BLACKPINK has become a force on the American charts with their aforementioned accomplishments and has further increased interest for American listeners of K-pop and for American artists to work with K-pop acts.

The other K-pop group to take over the American charts is BTS. BTS is a boy group that debuted in 2013 under BigHit Entertainment and consists of seven members: RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook (*Kpop Profiles*). In contrast to BLACKPINK, all members of BTS are Korean-born. BTS became known early on in their career for their electrifying choreographies. Something that makes them unique is that the rap members RM, Suga, and J-Hope have production and songwriting credits on a large amount of the group's catalogue of music (Hollingsworth). The group struggled at first, but finally experienced success in Korea in 2015 with the release of *The Most Beautiful Moment In Life* EPs part 1 and 2 and the repackage album which combined them with new songs. The group then reached global success with their *Love Yourself* series of albums which began in September 2017, which peaked top 10 on the *Billboard* 200 (Benjamin and Caulfield). The series spanned two albums and a third

repackage album that featured several brand new tracks as well as the hits from the two previous albums. Their first breakout hit “MIC Drop” came from the first album and spawned two remixes, one featuring American rapper Desiigner and a remix by Steve Aoki. Also, in 2017 they became the first K-pop group to perform at the American Music Awards and on *Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve* (Herman, “BTS Reveal”).

BTS’ 2018 hit “FAKE LOVE” further cemented their place as a consistently global charting threat, reaching number 1 and number 10 on the Korean and U.S. *Billboard* Hot 100 Charts respectively (“BTS Chart History”). Since then the group has performed at countless American music award shows, late night television shows, and held several brand deals (Hollingsworth). The group has also had several documentaries and movies. BTS has now worked with an incredibly long list of American artists and has brought a lot of attention to the K-pop scene. Even though prior to their *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* series the group’s songs only sparsely had songwriting/producing credits to American artists, BTS’s sound has been largely influenced by American artists and hip-hop production (McRady). The group has been dubbed “The Biggest Boy Band in the World” on many occasions and has further increased relations between the American and Korean music markets (Hollingsworth).

Modern Korean pop has taken many cues from America to become the tremendous content producing machine that it is today. From taking on trainees and training them in language, dancing, and singing as Motown did, to a Brill Building-reminiscent style of song producing that guarantees hit after hit, to having groups dance as they perform, and even to incorporating the genre influences of New Jack Swing, old and new school hip-hop, and R&B, the American influence runs deep.

But in order to break into a new market, it only makes sense to include sounds and influences that market is used to hearing. And with that in mind, K-pop has been gaining a lot of global attention in recent years. From breakout groups such as BIGBANG, Girls' Generation, BLACKPINK, and BTS, to having artists from foreign nations leaving home to train to become K-pop idols, the genre has steadily been earning a place on a global stage.

All things considered, K-pop is offering sounds and styles that American and other global talents are finding appealing and gaining interest in working in. With producing and songwriting powerhouses working with these acts and global labels working to promote them it is becoming easier to see how these groups have been gaining ground on the global charts in the past few years. And while the language is still foreign to most of the world, the infectious choreographies and sounds are not. But some new questions arise such as, will K-pop become more Americanized? And will K-pop become more integrated into the usual rotation of pop music in America like Latin music has? Time will tell, but for now K-pop is a growing genre that is sure to be interesting to see continue to develop.

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