Analog Hallyu: Historicizing K-pop formations in China

Meicheng Sun and Kai Khiun Liew
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Abstract
This article will revisit the beginnings of the spread of Korean popular entertainment in China in the mid-1990s to early 2000s by examining the contents of previously untapped Chinese language popular entertainment magazines and public recollections on internet forums. Considered here as critical archival resources, the authors argue that these materials are instrumental in offering both new chronologies and insights to the circulatory process of the regionalization of Korean popular cultures or Hallyu. Korean popular music (hereafter K-pop) entered China after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Instead of the often singularized, culturalist argument of “shared traditions,” this article offers a more dynamic historiography of the Korean Wave in China that is termed here as “Analog Hallyu.”

Keywords
Analog Hallyu, China, Chinese entertainment magazines, K-pop

Introduction: “we must perform in China”

Even though they could not travel to Korea, Mainland Chinese fans remained passionate and managed to send an email as well as countless telephone calls to express their condolences [to Kim Hwan-sung of NRG] . . . One would never know how many tears had been shed. Because they will never forget what Hwan-sung said before his death . . . “We must perform in China.” A Hwan-sung who will never be able to see his Mainland Chinese fans kept thinking about everyone until the end. (From “2000 Ten top news in Japanese and Korean pop,” Cool Music (轻音乐全日韩), Vol. 2, 2001, p. 3, authors’ translation)

After their debut in 1997, the South Korean pop music boy group NRG (New Radiancy Group) gained popularity rapidly at home and in neighboring China with a burgeoning following of teenage Chinese fans. The boy band’s regional projection was effected through official local distributor Music Factory that had repackaged the boy band’s CD albums into the Chinese language, as well...
as through liberally available pirated copies (Hau, 2001). NRG, together with other Korean pop groups (henceforth K-pop) like H.O.T., S.E.S., and Baby V.O.X, were considered the pioneering groups that globalized South Korea’s popular culture into what is now known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu.

As the group prepared to stage its first concert in China on 14 July 2000 (Lun, 2000), one of its members, Kim Hwan-sung, died suddenly of a viral infection on 15 June 2000. While the “NRG Live in China 2000” concert reportedly was attended by enthusiastic teenagers accompanied by their parents, there were also vacant seats in the arena (Gao, 2000). The climax was not the drastic dance and music, but the prerecorded video mourning Kim Hwan-sung. Appearing on the same page as other reports on the Japanese popular music (J-pop) scene, this news column in the Chinese popular music magazine Cool Music (轻音乐全日韩, to use its English title), reflected the growing presence of K-pop vis-à-vis its more established counterpart. The distressed Chinese fans’ efforts to send their condolences via the newly introduced computer-mediated communication of email along with conventional overseas telephone calls also revealed the increasing techno-emotional connectivity of Chinese fandom.

As the largest and most strategic market in the Asia-Pacific region, China’s position is pivotal to the circulation of translocal and transnational popular media from its neighbors. In contrast to its dominating regional geopolitical presence, post-Mao China has been a recipient of popular entertainment and culture from Hong Kong, Taiwan (collectively known as Gangtai), and more recently, South Korea (Clark, 2012). China has defined, and is in turn defined by these transnational popular media circulations as the co-production of pan-Asian pop culture (Iwabuchi, 2010). Integral to the regional pop culture ecosystem, the Chinese market validates and supports the international projections of local popular entertainment imports from its neighbors. Their popular reception reflects the global connectivity, ethnolinguistic affinity, and cultural modernity desired and referenced by the Chinese consumers as they re-plug themselves into the world of pop.

In this respect, this article seeks to historicize the role of China in the early stages of contemporary K-pop’s globalization. The local entertainment magazines like Light Music (and its later incarnation, Cool Music), retrieved from public libraries, now serve as crucial historical archives capturing the youthful enthusiasm of Chinese K-pop fans in the late 1990s, in a stage that will be termed here as Analog Hallyu. The durability of K-pop’s two-decade presence has turned its merchandise and memorabilia into archival resources of fan experiences and collective memories. By establishing empirical chronologies and locating events, the authors propose to treat transnational popular music historiographically in this study.

Based on changing media technologies, musicological aesthetics, audiences and (Korean) governmental orientations, Jin (2014) divided Hallyu into two eras: Hallyu 1.0 (1997-2007) and Hallyu 2.0 (2008-present). However, the Hallyu narrative may differ when viewed from its reception (by the consumers) rather than from the production aspects. In this respect, we bore the specificities of China in mind and propose to frame the historical development of Hallyu more specifically along three categories: Hallyu 1.0 or the Analog Media era (1992-2004), Hallyu 2.0 or the Pre-mobile Internet era (2005-2012), and Hallyu 3.0 or the Mobile Internet era (2013-present).

The Chinese state’s oscillation between liberalization and restrictions of Hallyu took place concurrently with these three media ages that did so much to facilitate the flow of Korean entertainment into China. China’s vacillating attitude with regard to Hallyu stemmed from the state of its bilateral relations with South Korea as well as its shifting approaches toward foreign imports. As it was easier for the Chinese state to control the balance between diversifying consumer choices and protecting local industries in the pre-Internet age, this article refers to the spread of Hallyu during the Analog Media era (1992-2004) as “Analog Hallyu.”
Beijing youth daily: K-pop and the post-80s Chinese fandom

Since its reopening to the outside world in the late 1970s following the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan and the United States, post-Mao China has been an active recipient of contemporary regional popular culture flows. The importation of Western and Japanese popular entertainment occurred concurrently with absorption of Gangtai entertainment through the neighboring provinces of Guangdong and Fujian (Baranovitch, 2003; Latham, 2007c). An emerging and burgeoning Chinese market, eager to emulate the modern lifestyles and aesthetics encapsulated in film, television, and popular music thus became the locus of the transnational projections of otherwise national entertainment from Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, and more recently, Seoul. In this respect, China’s position in transnational popular culture flows serves as a measurement for the appropriation of cultural modernity as well as global connectivity.

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, is a more recent manifestation of this contemporary transnational cultural phenomenon (Kim & Lee, 2012). The cultural genesis of how an otherwise newly industrialized country could punch above its weight in its pop culture projection has been the subject of active discussions. The spread of Korean popular culture in Hallyu includes Korean TV dramas, popular music, movies, online games, food, and fashion. This phenomenon, which emerged in the 1990s, has evolved from a regional to a global phenomenon (Lee, 2015; Shin, 2013). Scholarly studies on the early transmission of Hallyu have attributed this to either the inroads made by Korean television dramas (K-dramas) with themes that are culturally familiar to general Chinese households (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Jin, 2014; Kuwahara, 2014; C. Oh, 2014) or to contemporary K-pop’s appeal to a smaller youth audience (Chen, 2016; Howard, 2006; Ju, 2014; Jung & Hirata, 2012; Lie, 2012; Pease, 2009; Shin, 2013).

The various forms of broadcast media ranging from television to the have been widely recognized as instrumental in Hallyu’s projection into China (Fuhr, 2015; Jang, 2012; Latham, 2007c; Ono & Kwon, 2013; Pease, 2006; Shin, 2013; Walsh, 2014). Unlike the fragmentary English language scholarly literature on Mandarin pop from Taiwan (Mandopop) and Cantonese pop from Hong Kong (Cantopop) in the late 1970s, and J-pop a decade later, academic coverage of K-pop’s early developments in China and the region has been comparatively more updated and active.

Nonetheless, these works come across mainly as historical commentaries and conceptualizations of current developments. A more historiographical approach would entail what Hamm (2004) would describe as the empirical work of collecting and assembling raw data, and the assembling of facts pertaining to the historical development of the genre or musical life of a community. In the case of popular music, the historical assemblages entail looking at how the author-composers’ lives have shaped their specific music forms and where they are situated within the larger socio-cultural histories (Kärjä, 2006). It is in this “empirical work” of establishing chronologies and events from archival materials that the authors intend to revisit K-pop’s early formation in China in the 1990s. The following section details the primary sources utilized in this empirical work.

A note on the sources: magazines and online forums as pop music archives

To understand the transnational projection of K-pop in China in the early stages, the authors conducted archival research using physical magazines, online forums, and other online materials as pop music archives. This mix of both analogue media archives and digital media references can help to provide more layered historicization through 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), we 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, 2007e), 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 9000 such publications fragmenting the once centralized mediascape (Latham, 2007a, 2007b, 2007d).

The three music and entertainment magazines used in our current research cater to their readers’ tastes and attract commercial cooperation. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, readers could purchase these magazines from their local newsstands or through the national postal system all around the country, except 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 (轻音乐), later called Cool Music (轻音乐全日韩) when it focused exclusively on Japanese and Korean music, Modern Music Field (当代歌坛), and Music Space (音乐时空) (see Figure 1). 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 2 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 (大嘴鳄鱼), 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 early 1990s magazines suggested its growing influence among Chinese readers who associated the genre as part of “global music.”

To date, there are still substantial primary materials in the form of numerous popular entertainment magazines stored in libraries that are neither digitized nor publicly available online (Holley & Heinrichs, 2007; Patterson, 2015). In the course of our research, we discovered that individual fans, second-hand booksellers, and public libraries in China have collections of Light Music/Cool Music, Modern Music Field, and Music Space. However, no digital versions of these materials have been found online. Moreover, the magazine collections of different libraries vary. For the purpose of this research, we accessed the collections of Light Music/Cool Music, Modern Music Field, and Music Space held at the National Library of China in Beijing. All the past issues that we consulted are kept in stacks requiring a reservation in person. Approximately 10-12 issues, inclusive of supplementary illustrations like posters and cards, are compiled into one bound volume and are generally in good condition. The posters and cards forming part of the magazines’ free gifts to their readers are located in the middle of the publications.
A more detailed examination of these magazines has also proved useful in retracing the origins of the term Hallyu, which is commonly understood to have first been used in the *Beijing Youth Daily* in November 1999 (Bin & Yi, 2011; Jung & Li, 2014). It was hypothesized that the term could have been derived from earlier media expressions of styles and techniques initially linked to national representatives in sports. These expressions eventually came to be used in the entertainment scene and evolved into common descriptions like Zhongguoliu (中国流) or Chinese-style, Ribenliu (日本流) meaning Japanese-style, and Hanguoliu (韩国流) meaning Korean-style; the last of which might have been subsequently shortened as Hallyu (韩流) (Li, 1994; Yikeweiqi, 2017). However, the authors found an even earlier reference to Hallyu in a July 1999 article introducing K-pop group S.E.S. in *Light Music* (Dazui, 1999b). Si Jie (司捷), then a young Chinese entrepreneur critical to the promotion of Hallyu in China, also pointed out that Hallyu mainly referred to K-pop and Korean stars like An Jae-wook, who was famous for both singing and acting (Dazui, 2001a).

These magazines’ historicization of K-pop is also complemented by the public recollections and reminiscences of fans on cyberspace. In contrast to the documentary functions of the print magazine in formally reporting on and timestamping events and personalities, online recollections tend
to be more fragmentary and informal. Nonetheless, the internet has provided fans with the platform for these otherwise personal memories to converge into digital communities built on shared interests. These communities have grown dramatically following the widespread adoption of the internet by ordinary urban young users in the early 2000s. Thus, the internet is a media platform instrumental in projecting K-pop’s reach across borders.

A significant number of websites, discussion boards, and forums are devoted to K-pop in China (Pease, 2006). For the case of China, platforms with more enduring popularity and currency are Tieba and the Tianya Community. Unlike the Tianya Community, users can create forums on Tieba. In this way, forums on Tieba can be on more specialized topics. Tieba, established by Baidu in 2003, hosted more than 1.2 million forums on its site in 2005 (Southern Urban Daily, 2005), engendering China’s virtual fan community of K-pop.

Tieba’s forums are so popular that fans will continue to discuss inactive or disbanded K-pop groups, and share related contents. H.O.T., NRG, S.E.S., and Baby V.O.X are among the most popular early K-pop idol groups in China. So far, there are 2,484,055 threads on H.O.T. Tieba; 343,841 threads on NRG Tieba; 74,603 threads on S.E.S. Tieba; and 17,699 threads on Baby V.O.X Tieba (retrieved on 24 April 2019). The Tieba forum threads of these early K-pop groups include fan recollections of their fandom days. The authors have consequently used these conversations published online as supplementary references to the documented media reports of the past.

Finally, given the general unavailability of industry and official records, it has not been possible for the authors to draw on statistical data to quantify the projection of K-pop into China. This absence accounts for the authors’ primary reliance on the stated magazines and the data therein for this project.

**Periodizing K-pop in China: Hallyu 1.0**

Despite its two-decade presence in China, K-pop’s trajectory there is considered young by the conventional standards of Historical Studies. However, as the rapid temporalities of K-pop’s evolution intersect with developments in geopolitics and media technologies, the genre has to be periodized according to macro-historical and micro-cultural trends. Indeed, K-pop’s transnational circulation in China can be periodized according to macro-historical markers like the growth of media technologies following political liberalization, and to micro-cultural markers like population movements following the opening up of the country to the rest of the world.

The first stage of K-pop (1992-2004) really began when bilateral relations between South Korea and China were normalized in 1992 (Embassy of the Republic of Korea in China, 2015). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the hitherto frozen Sino-South Korean ties thawed and gradually came to be pivotal in propelling Korean popular entertainment into China through trade, migration, and tourism. The first indications of mass travel between the two peoples came 2 years after the establishment of diplomatic ties, with 233,675 Koreans visiting China and 140,985 Chinese visiting South Korea (Korea Tourism Organization, 2019). Two years later, the number of South Koreans visiting China doubled, totaling 532,332 (Korea Tourism Organization, 2019). South Korean businesses and students looking to expand their horizons followed suit soon after. Consequently, the increasing number of Korean enterprises and students in China led to the importation of K-pop into the country as well.

Individual Koreans probably served as intermediaries assisting in the transmission of K-pop from Korea to China. For instance, Music Space once featured Muno, a multilingual Korean girl, who had been living and studying in Guangzhou since 1994, and who was fond of Korean, Chinese,
and Western pop cultures (Juedaisanjiao, 2000). Si Jie also recalled the many Korean friends he had made in Beijing during his late adolescence, and how they had introduced him to K-pop (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). K-pop was also available in the emerging discotheques in Wudaokou (in Haidian District, Beijing), where the number of Korean students in the many universities there had been increasing since the mid-1990s (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Moreover, the relaxation of restrictions on Sino-South Korean exchanges allowed Korean individuals to move with relative ease between China and their homeland. This could, in turn, facilitate both the transmission of K-pop and Chinese consumption of it.

The transmission of Hallyu in China coincided with the Chinese state’s liberalization of the media, the resultant growth of the media industry, the rising prosperity of the increasingly independent Chinese consumers, and the rising home ownership of media devices (Latham, 2007a). Television ownership rose from 1 million in 1978 to about 232 million in 1996, with a corresponding increase in the number of television stations from a 100 to 2100 during the same period (Facts and Details, 2011). In contrast, internet users made up a modest 1.7% of the Chinese population in 2000 before sharply rising to 36% a decade later (Wang & Li, 2012). However, as the digital revolution was still in its infancy in the early 2000s, Hallyu was mostly spread through the medium of analog media. The authors term this form of Hallyu transmission as Hallyu 1.0 or Analog Hallyu because Korean pop culture was disseminated into China mainly via the analogue print and broadcast media. Based on this periodization, the following section will chronologize Hallyu 1.0 in China according to the events and trends documented in the various magazines and online recollections.

**Pre-TimeZ: a chronology of Hallyu 1.0 in China**

On 23 December 2012, TimeZ, a K-pop group comprising a mix of Chinese and Korean artistes, debuted officially in Beijing. Si Jie was publicly honored at the event for his pioneering role in Hallyu 1.0 and for his belief that Chinese artistes were comparable to their Korean counterparts on the world stage. Indeed, Si Jie responded to the debut of TimeZ by saying, “I have been waiting for this day for the past 14 years” (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Unfortunately, TimeZ did not make significant headway in the competitive K-pop industry. Nonetheless, Si Jie’s responses and experiences make it clear that Hallyu 1.0 occurred as part of China’s globalization process.

K-pop, like Korean TV dramas, was introduced to China in the mid-1990s. Whereas the latter entered households through the increasing availability of television sets, K-pop was probably first heard in discotheques that were defining the urbanscapes of post-Mao China. From the mid-1990s, Korean dance music, such as tracks by Korean music group Goofy, and K-pop were played in nightclubs targeting Korean students in Beijing (Dazui, 1999a; NetEase Entertainment, 2012; Zhou, 1998). Sensing the popularity of this new music genre among local Chinese clubbers, Ujeon Soft (宇田Soft公司), a South Korean company managed by Kim Yoon-ho, started to promote K-pop through the radio airwaves (Xiaohao, 2000; see Figure 2). Titled Seoul Music Hall (汉城音乐厅), the radio program ran from April 1996 to April 1997 (Xiaohao, 2000). The year 1997 was also marked as the year that Si Jie entered Kim’s company, Ujeon Soft, as a music editor (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). His responsibility at the time was to curate the music he had heard in the nightclubs, tailor them to local Chinese tastes and render them fit for broadcast (NetEase Entertainment, 2012).

From 1997 to 1999, the population of K-pop fans grew due to local promotional events organized by Ujeon Soft (Dazui, 2001a). During this period, Ujeon Soft seemed to be the only company
introducing K-pop to China (Sansan, 1998). Since most Chinese media outlets they had encountered were unwilling to invest in K-pop, Ujeon Soft representatives began to travel around the country holding local promotional events so as to cultivate fans in the age group 13-18 (Dazui, 2001a). The events were held in many cities, including Lhasa in Tibet, and showcased dance performances, music video (MV) screenings, and award-winning quizzes (Dazui, 2001a).

According to Si Jie, the awareness, acceptance, and popularity of K-pop in China ought to be attributed to individual young audience members rather than music editors and media producers working for mass media institutions. The first generation of K-pop fans were seemingly drawn to the R&B songs, hip-hop rhythms, and synchronized dance choreographies performed by youthful-looking Korean artistes in visually fashionable outfits (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). In this respect, the case of Ujeon Soft in pioneering the transmission of K-pop highlights a critical historical phase played by the otherwise more humble agencies in promoting what was then considered alternative music (NetEase Entertainment, 2012).

During that same period, Ujeon Soft did cooperate with mass media channels, including Modern Music Field, China National Radio, Beijing Radio, and Hunan Satellite TV (NetEase Entertainment,
In 1998, *Modern Music Field* began covering Korean artistes and their Chinese counterparts. That same year, *Light Music* began to publish K-pop content. Starting from H.O.T.’s first album in May 1998, Ujeon Soft promoted Korean singers through Chinese music magazines and newspapers by publishing their photos and covering the K-pop artistes’ activities in Korea (Dazui, 2001a; Xiaohao, 2000). K-pop gradually received increasing coverage in *Light Music* in 1999 through new columns on K-pop and Hallyu. 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, Sechs Kies, Park Jung-hyun, Yoo Seung-jun, Kim Hyun-joong, and Ahn Jae-wook.

One of the critical moments in early K-pop in China was NRG’s guest appearance on *Happy Camp*, a program on Hunan Satellite TV, on 3 July 1999. *Happy Camp* (*快乐大本营*) is a long-running and well-received popular entertainment show on Hunan Satellite TV. It began in 1997 and is still on air in China today. In each episode, invited guests were made to play games and perform popular songs for their studio audiences. NRG shot to popularity after their appearance on *Happy Camp* due to nationwide coverage of show on satellite television. Si Jie recalled that NRG’s cassettes sold almost 200,000 copies within a month, adding that he considered this event to be the turning point that brought K-pop from the underground to the foreground, and the first indication of K-pop’s nascent success in China (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Since 1999, Ujeon Soft has increasingly promoted Korean groups through television (Xiaohao, 2000). Music magazines identified H.O.T.’s 1 February 2000 concert at Beijing Workers’ Gymnasium as the event that established Hallyu as a remarkable cultural phenomenon in Chinese society (Dazui, 2001a; Miller, 2001). With about 40,000 fans gathering at the concert venue, the event was estimated to have garnered the largest audience in the venue’s history (see Figure 3).

The H.O.T. Beijing concert brought the popularity of K-pop in China to a new level. *Modern Music Field* held a poll for the top 10 coolest idols in 2000 (Dazui, 2000). The magazine received more than 100,000 votes from its readers all over the country. Except for H.O.T., all the other celebrities were Gangtai stars. H.O.T. earned 17,488 votes and was ranked second. In the Ujeon Soft office, there were several 1000 fan letters addressed to the group (Xiaohao, 2000), with staffers estimating that more than 10 fan letters were received per day (Dazui, 2001a). An examination of the different articles covered in *Modern Music Field* showed that H.O.T. in 2000 was more popular among Chinese audiences than Tetsuya Komuro in 1997 and Mariah Carey in 1998. In 2000, the three magazines of this study significantly increased their contents related to Korean stars. Beginning in October 2000, *Light Music* changed its format from a monthly magazine to a semimonthly magazine. The first volume of any given month was dedicated to Western pop music, and the second volume Cool Music covered Japanese and Korean pop music. In *Cool Music*, the contents of K-pop gradually increased. Its coverage was broadened to include news on not just individual Korean singers, but Korean cinema as well (Xiaohao, 2000). The content on Korean entertainment also started to match that of the otherwise more established Japanese artistes.

Within 2 years, the number of Korean stars featured in *Light Music/Cool Music* increased from 16 in 1999 to more than 100 in 2001. The most frequently mentioned include music acts like H.O.T., Baby V.O.X, S.E.S., g.o.d, NRG, Fin.K.L, Shinhwa, Lee Jung-hyun, Seo Taiji, and Ahn Jae-wook, as well as television drama artistes like Kim Hee-sun, Lee Young-ae, and Song Hye-kyo. During a series of events in Dalian in 2001, 15 Korean stars performed (Dazui, 2001d). The number of fan letters to H.O.T. received by Ujeon Soft increased from more than 10 a day in 2000 to several hundreds in 2001 (Dazui, 2001a). According to H.O.T. member Moon Hee-joon, H.O.T. earned 100 billion Korean won per year from the Chinese market in the early 2000s (Tencent
In terms of concert ticket sales as well as media coverage in the country’s burgeoning entertainment magazines, K-pop reached its first peak in its transnational projection into China.

However, the next few years for Hallyu 1.0 were unremarkable for the industry. In South Korea, the K-pop groups that had spearheaded Hallyu 1.0 in China, namely H.O.T., NRG, Baby V.O.X, and S.E.S., disbanded gradually from 2001 to 2005. Members embarked on individual careers, but could no longer capture public imagination in China as they previously did in their groups. Other new groups like TVXQ and Super Junior, as well as solo artistes like Rain (who shot to fame after starring in the popular Korean television drama *Full House* in 2002) filled the gap from 2005 onwards, thus defining the next phase of Hallyu in the following years.

At the same time, Korean entertainment in China started to encounter more nationalistic backlash for its popularity. Although television drama series like *Jewel in the Palace (Dae Jang Geum)* became household names for Chinese viewers, the first wave of anti-Hallyu sentiments had begun, with complaints over alleged misrepresentations of Chinese history as Korean, and the marginalization of local productions. Chinese broadcast regulators reacted by imposing formal screening...
quotas for Korean entertainment in the media outlets (Zhang & Fung, 2017). It was only with increased internet access during this decade that Hallyu 1.0 was updated to Hallyu 2.0, resulting in the migration of contents from mainstream analog media to cyberspace.

In revisiting K-pop’s inroads into China as a historical subject, we discovered that Ujeon Soft’s critical agency was central to the popularization of a form of music that started out with a small following in discotheques, and grew to achieve success in mainstream radio and television stations. An examination of the magazine sources used in this study also reveals information on the profile of K-pop audiences as well as the evolution of China’s media industry.

The Hahanzu of Hallyu 1.0

Hallyu 1.0 witnessed the engendering of the first generation of K-pop fandom outside South Korea among Chinese fans located in the different regions of China. According to Si Jie’s interview published in Cool Music, Beijing alone had estimated 20,000 to 30,000 fans (Dazui, 2001a). Labeled as “Hahanzu” (哈韩族), these fans were mainly middle and high school students between the age 13-18 (Dazui, 2001a, 2001d). At its peak, H.O.T. had a Chinese fan club of over 8 million members (Tencent Entertainment, 2015). The fans were highly enthusiastic about K-pop. H.O.T.’s Beijing concert was a sold-out show (China Entertainment Report, 2000) and attracted the trendiest (i.e. Korean-style) youths near the concert venue (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Those who managed to gain entry into the venue shouted, screamed, sang along, cheered, and cried throughout the concert (China Entertainment Report, 2000; NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Cool Music documented NRG’s visit to the northeastern city of Dalian (Dazui, 2001d), observing that fans flew from around China to attend the event with handmade posters, cameras, and autograph books as they waited for their idols. The more fervent fans were even reportedly shouting overnight in front of the hotel where NRG were staying, and had to be sent to the police station by hotel security guards (Dazui, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d).

The acceptance of K-pop in China was due more to the similar appearance of the Chinese and Korean peoples than any feeling of cultural proximity. K-pop is Western-style music performed by Koreans. As Kim Yoon-ho suggested, Chinese teenagers tended to associated more with Korean stars than Western ones because the peoples of these two countries looked similar (Xiaohao, 2000). K-pop’s popularity in China during this decade may also be attributed to the fact that its stars were seen to be publicly well-mannered and humble.

K-pop’s youthful image and visual aesthetics also appealed to the young Chinese because many of them were jaded with the saturation of romantic melodies in Chinese popular songs of that decade (Blue Rain, 2001). Fans claimed that K-pop songs resonated with the younger generation because they covered many different topics apart from love. For instance, while H.O.T. fans acknowledged the group did sing love songs, they pointed out the existence of songs touching on the broader social issues and challenges faced by young people, adding that these other songs (Blue Rain, 2001).

The editor of Cool Music attributed H.O.T.’s popularity to its rebellious image, as portrayed through the group’s outlandish fashion, irreverent rapping, and urban dance choreographies (Doujiao, 2001). The oft-attributed cultural factors, such as “Confucian values,” are noticeably absent in the literature of the magazines and the fans’ online reminiscences. Instead, both the magazine articles and online posts emphasized the youthful, edgy stylistics and cool sensuality in K-pop. Interestingly, these archival materials also show the early stages of the formations of transnational
K-pop fandoms, as the young Chinese audiences were turning an otherwise consumerist popular entertainment into affective emotional investments.

“Electrifying pages”: song requests, MVs, magazines, and the media of Hallyu 1.0

This section focuses on song request programs on cable TV as well as music and entertainment magazines. Televised K-pop was spread through official cultural exchange activities like the China-Korea Song Festival broadcasted on China Central Television (CCTV), variety shows such as Hunan Satellite TV’s Happy Camp, K-pop MVs broadcast on music programs like Channel V, and song request programs on cable TV. While televised coverage of K-pop on satellite TV was limited in this decade on account of the fact that access to Channel V were limited largely to hotels for foreigners, these activities and variety shows significantly raised the profiles Korean singers in China. Song request programs on cable TV channels exposed Chinese audiences to K-pop content on a daily basis from the late 1990s to early 2000s (Sohu Media Platform, 2016). Audience members could request MVs by making payments to the TV station, and the TV station would then broadcast the MV to its entire audience. The cost per song varied from 10 to 500 yuan (JJdri_, 2016; Sohu Media Platform, 2016). Online fan recollections claimed that their first exposure to K-pop occurred on these channels (RuininNeverland, 2015; Tata5182005, 2013; Yulumengmeng8, 2013). According to some fans, these programs sometimes put on K-pop groups’ MVs for an entire day (Genial_48, 2011; Wuyoutianshi, 2012). These programs became commercially lucrative for TV stations, which were then liberally broadcasting MVs without any copyright restrictions (Sohu Media Platform, 2016). It is highly likely that song requests were instrumental in familiarizing audiences with K-pop. In addition to the magazines covered in the research by Pease (2006), several other magazines, including Light Music (and its later incarnation, Cool Music), Music Space, and Modern Music Field, also contributed to this space. Cool Music gave readers access to high-quality, first-hand K-pop resources. Its editors and reporters identified themselves as K-pop fans first and foremost to prove that they were cultural authorities in this area. Aside from publishing the latest K-pop news, the magazine also organized fan activities, including a Hallyu tour to Seoul (Dazui, 2001b). Due to these offerings, it is likely that many Chinese K-pop fans frequently purchased these magazines. Chinese fans reminiscing about their K-pop experiences on H.O.T. Tieba often mentioned that they would always buy these monthly or bimonthly magazines for about 10 yuan, which was very affordable for urban young students in the 1990s. Chinese fans also purchased Korean magazine pages at the significantly higher prices of 30 to 40 yuan per page as illegal imports because foreign magazines were then unavailable through legal channels in China (Dazui, 2001b). Overall, these entertainment magazines served as an essential resource for Chinese K-pop audiences, as they allowed fans to receive the most updated K-pop news and high-quality K-pop idol pictures and posters.

Korean dance music, which is representative of K-pop in China, differentiated itself from mainstream Chinese language ballads by emphasizing visual styles. Ujeon Soft strategically imported Korean dance music rather than Korean ballads to fill the market vacancy in China (Xiaohao, 2000).

It also used K-pop’s visual elements to appeal to Chinese fans through carefully selected album covers and the printing of several VCDs; the sales that Ujeon Soft achieved proved the successfullness
of this strategy (Xiaohao, 2000). Indeed, a fan recalled that she started listening to H.O.T.’s music 1 year after her interest was piqued by the group’s avant-garde image in a magazine (Shen, 2001).

K-pop also differentiated itself visually from its Japanese counterpart, J-pop. In the late 1990s, Light Music had many more articles on Japanese artistes than Korean ones. Most of the featured Japanese artistes were visual-style rock bands that engaged in extreme visually flamboyant expressions, such as Glây and L’Arc-en-Ciel. As such, Chinese audiences found that they were able to distinguish between Japanese and Korean artistes, and fans were likewise divided according to their own personal preferences. Despite evident geo-linguistic differences, the often simultaneous marketing of J-Pop and K-pop as Ri-Han (日韩) in these magazines reflects de Kloet’s (2005) theory that popular music’s intertextual opacity and artificiality renders its forms of production, distribution, and marketing all the more malleable (see Figure 4).

Overall, the palette of media choices for the Chinese consumers grew during this decade. In addition to music by local artistes, music from the West, South Korea, and Japan were now available in China. However, K-pop was banded together with J-pop as more avant-garde regional

Figure 4. Japanese and Korean artistes featured concurrently in an entertainment and music magazine. Cool Music, 11, cover, 2000. The collection of the National Library of China.
popular music styles to contrast it against the linguistically unfamiliar music of Western pop, and the translocal mediums of Cantopop and Mandopop.

**Conclusion: K-pop and the cultural re-oxygenation of China**

Youth and media are synonymous in the discussion on the circulation of transnational popular culture in post-Mao China. Even though the Cultural Revolution had produced a generation that was “lost” and “rusticated” (Bonnin & Horko, 2013), the “post-70s” and “post-80s” generations have culturally re-connected and re-oxygenated China to the global capillaries of popular media flows. From Western rock to J-pop, to Cantopop and Mandopop, these genres have expanded the consumer choices for Chinese youths growing up during China’s period of reform and liberalization. Within the hegemonic superstructure of the Party-State, transnational popular culture offers alternative affectivities, aesthetics, communities, and identities for Chinese youths eager to define themselves along the trends of global capitalist modernity (Clark, 2012; Fung, Pun, & Mori, 2019; de Kloet, 2005).

Through this study of China’s youth-based entertainment print magazines *Light Music, Modern Music Field*, and *Music Space*, as well as online recollections from fans, we affirmed that it was in China that K-pop and Hallyu made their first significant impact outside South Korea. As these magazines turned historical archives have shown dynamic interactions between media and youth vis-à-vis K-pop underlie the common references made on the milestones of Hallyu in concerts in China.

K-pop has managed to become a pop culture phenomenon in China within the span of a few years because of young, enterprising individuals like Si Jie and Kim Yoon-ho. It is due to these visionaries that K-pop is seen as more than a type of music played for the benefit of Korean students in China’s discotheques. K-pop layered the youth-based Chinese popular entertainment media industry by carving out its own niche and offering more diverse pop music choices to Chinese consumers. Highly passionate and organized in their support for their K-pop groups who were performing in the various Chinese cities, early K-pop fandom in China mobilized itself into what is now known as participatory fandom (Fung, 2009). Breaking into Billboard charts and performing to screaming fans in European and American cities on stage and on talk shows, current K-pop groups like BTS and BLACKPINK are now integral to the otherwise Western-defined global popular music. However, these scenes are not dissimilar to the experiences of H.O.T. and NRG when they performed in China 20 years ago. Aside from remembering the pioneering efforts of these groups, a more historicized understanding of K-pop also shows that the post-80s Chinese fans were avant-garde in being the first fan community outside South Korea to embrace K-pop in the age of Analog Hallyu.

**Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Meicheng Sun [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7107-6796](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7107-6796)
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Author biographies

Meicheng Sun is currently a PhD candidate with the Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Information at the Nanyang Technological University. Her doctoral research covers the transnational fandom of Kpop in China.

Kai Khiun Liew is currently an Assistant Professor at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Information at Nanyang Technological University. His research interests and publications concern the regional circulation of popular culture and media within the Asia-Pacific.