

The Pervasive Influence of Shipping Culture in K-pop and Its Impact on Gender Dynamics

Keyi Yuan*

Shenzhen College of international education, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, 518000, China

* Corresponding Author Email: s22772.yuan@stu.scie.com.cn

Abstract. Among the KPOP culture, it involves different fan activities for example music, dancing. This article discusses the relationship between shipping couple culture and gender issues. The shipping couple culture refers to the phenomenon of being enthusiastic about combining two or more fictional characters into a romantic relationship. This article analyzes the background, characteristics, and influence of this culture, and explores its interaction with gender issues. Firstly, the article discusses the impact of the couple culture on gender expression and identity. Secondly, this article explores the potential of this type of culture in creating new gender models and shaping gender equality concepts. Then, this article analyzes the gender stereotypes and binary oppositions in the culture of drug abuse, as well as the limitations and challenges to gender diversity and inclusivity. Finally, the article points out the significant impact of the interaction between shipping couple culture and gender issues on individuals and society and proposes some future research directions.

Keywords: KPOP; Korean; Gender.

1. Introduction

KPOP which is also known as Korean pop music have attract mass popularity since 2000. This kind of music represents a miniature of the modern culture in Korea also a mix of other culture. Before the World War II (1910), Korea have begun to rule by the Empire of Japan. During the Japanese occupation period, large amount of the solders has been stationed at Korea. A traditional genre of music in Japan called Enka have been introduced to Korea at this period. It has been welcomed among solders. Solders forced the comfort women in Korea began to learn how to sing Enka. However, this kind of music were disparagingly called as "Japanese-tinged". People in Korea decide to mix both Enka and their own folk music. Around 1920s a new genre of music called Trot music appeared in Korea. After World War II, America military entered Korea territory. They bring rock music to the Korean Peninsula. They mixed American rock music and their own kind of folk music together, and therefore formed Korea Rock music which is the earliest prototype of KPOP.

Around 1980s, several demonstrations have been taken place in South Korea because people in Korea realize they need change in their economic structure. In 1993, Culture industry Bureau have published policies to encourage the development of film and media which they believe can bring them large amount of income. Unfortunately, in 1997 Asian financial crisis appeared. An economist team from IMF (international monetary fund) have been brought to Seoul to discuss a "bailout package". This condition forced the South Korea government had to follow some policies and programs like new labor market. Neoliberalism have been introduced into Korea market in this way.

The main concepts of neoliberalism are eliminating price control, deregulate capital market, lower the trade barrier, reduce privatization and austerity. Neoliberalism encourages everyone to have their own personality and give as much freedom as they can. Korean Idol industry have taken those characteristics as their markets' main concept.

Korean wave has changed people's stereotype on the celebrities in some degree. Along with the rapid growth of KPOP fans and its influence, various types of fandom culture appeared. Shipping couples have been welcomed in most of the fandoms. which is the desire by the fandom for two or more people to be in romantic or sexual relationship (from Wikipedia). So, this essay will delve into how



this kind of culture have been formed in KPOP and how is the influence on gender problems. Some cases, surveys and interviews will be used to complete this study.

2. Literature Review

Xi Lin in Korea University examines the relationship between K-pop consumption and gender attitudes. The study finds that a higher level of spending on K-pop related items is associated with less egalitarian gender attitudes. The study also highlights the cultural differences in gender attitudes among different nationalities. The findings suggest that K-pop may reinforce traditional gender roles and obstruct gender equality efforts [1]. The study found out that Blackpink's queerbaiting tactics are evident in their music videos, stage performances, and interactions with fans [2]. These tactics often involve subtle hints, such as close physical contact, lingering glances, or suggestive choreography among the group members. Additionally, the members themselves play along with these hints in interviews and social media interactions. This deliberate ambiguity provides an opportunity for fans, especially queer fans, to interpret the group's actions and create their own queer narratives. Some article examines the relationship between LGBT communities and popular music [3], particularly from the one written by Emily Roach focusing on boybands like One Direction and solo artist Harry Styles [4]. It discusses how boybands are often marketed to both homosexual men and heterosexual teenage girls and explores the phenomenon of fan fiction that imagines romantic relationships between band members. The article also explores the concept of "queerbaiting" in the music industry and argues that this term may not accurately describe the complex interactions between pop stars and their fans. It emphasizes the transformative and affirmational impact that queer coded pop and homoerotic subtext can have on queer fans, but also highlights the potential harm that can occur when fan activism becomes toxic. The article delves into the complexities and implications of pop music fandoms, particularly in relation to queer audiences. Liz Jonas examines the portrayal of male and female bodies in the idol industry and how they are marketed to the public. It discusses how male idol groups often have agency in their content creation, while female idol groups lack agency and are marketed towards the male gaze [5]. The paper argues that women in the industry should have more agency over their work, as their male counterparts do. It also highlights the discrimination faced by women in a feminized labor market and the infantilization of female idols to appeal to male consumers. The paper calls for a conversation on these issues in feminist academia. Another paper from Payton Primer explores the rise in popularity of K-Pop music in South Korea and the United States over the past 5-10 years. It examines the factors that contributed to this rise, including the role of social media and technology. It also investigates the demographics of K-Pop audiences, particularly in terms of age and nationality [6]. Furthermore, the paper explores the differences between male and female K-Pop idols in terms of success and popularity. It argues that gender roles play a significant role in the industry, with Western ideals emphasizing traditional gender roles and Asian beauty standards playing a role in Korean audiences' support of idols. It suggests that male K-Pop idols tend to receive more support, creating an industry that is more male-friendly and encourages the success of men over women [7]. Another paper from Ingersoll explores the construction of gender, specifically soft masculinity, in K-pop performances and the power structures at play. It is framed within a feminist and queer Marxist theoretical framework, drawing on studies of pan-Asian masculinities and gender performativity. The paper examines terms such as Talnori, Kkonminam, Flower Boy, Aegyo, and girl crush as important factors in understanding K-pop's construction of gender [8]. Layoung challenges previous studies on K-pop fandom in South Korea by arguing for a broader focus that includes queer fans. Previous research has primarily focused on heterosexual female fans' desire for male K-pop stars, but this paper argues that K-pop also serves as a means for cross-gender identification for female fans. The concept of "fan cosplay" or "fancos" is explored as a way for young female fans to explore gender and sexual identity [9]. The paper also examines how K-pop influences local queer subculture in terms of gendered styling, pairing, and terminology. By studying the historical changes in the popularity of fancos, the paper reveals the transformation of homosexuality recognition and backlash in Korea, as well as the strategies of the queer subculture. The inclusion of queer fans in K-pop studies

complicates heteronormative assumptions and sheds light on sexual politics in South Korea. Chuyun Oh also further developed the queering spectatorship in K-pop [10].

3. Research Method

To evaluate how shipping couple culture have been prevalent and how it affects gender problems, the author gathered people who are CP fans and those not CP fans and asked them to complete an 8 questions questionnaire. The questionnaire includes questions like the type of couples they enjoy shipping (female-female, male-male or female-male), people's opinion on the authenticity of those couples, people's stereotypes on the KPOP couples, and there perspectives towards homosexual couples, queer baiting, and whether they believe those couples can bring positive effects on gender problems. There are 255 people involve in this questionnaire.

There are two extra questions should be mentioned as well. The first question is a picture of one of the most famous male-male couples in KPOP and 5 people involve in this questionnaire are there fans, another one is also a Male-Male couple in KPOP but is less popular than the first one and none of the respondents are fans of the second couple. Except for those 5 fans, others all believe the picture of the first couple have a sense of sexual innuendo. Those 5 fans comment that they enjoy watching those pictures. However, when switched to the second couple, all of the respondent think they tried too hard for queer baiting and give people a sense of cheesy.

4. Result

As for the 255 respondents, 250 of them have involved in shipping couple activities and 230 of them are very familiar with couples in KPOP. 190 people enjoy shipping Male-Male couples, 120 people enjoy shipping Female-Female couples (80 of them enjoy shipping both Male-Male and Female-Female couple). Only 20 people enjoy shipping Female-Male couples (they enjoy shipping all types of couples). Near 45% of people believe the couples they shipped are real, 30% of them have believe they are fake. The rest of them doubt their authenticity. As for queer baiting 60% of people enjoy watching it, and 30% of people can accept this behavior, only one person (5%) feels terrible about those activities. Only 20 people argue that shipping couples are harmful to gender problems. About 180 people believe they have positive affection. Some of them believe that the prevalent of shipping couple helps people learn more about LGBTQs and can ameliorate the stereotype on gender roles. The rest of the people suggest that all the couples are marketing strategies, they have little effect on gender problems, one of them suggest that shipping couple can even increase people's revulsion towards LGBTQs.

As for the extra question only 20 people involved in it. 5 of the participants are the fans of that famous male group. Except for those 5 fans, others all believe the picture of the first couple have a sense of sexual innuendo. Those 5 fans comment that they enjoy watching those pictures. However, when switched to the second couple, all the respondents think they tried too hard for queer baiting and give people a sense of cheesy.

5. Discussion

With the increasing number of fans in Shipping couple culture. According to survey above and information provided in social media platform like: Weibo, Instagram, Twitter and so on.

Whether the gender stereotype can be improved after the prevalent of shipping couple culture?

The gender stereotype has been decreased because of this type of culture. Traditionally, we can only see heterosexual couples from media platform. However, along with the prevalent of KPOP culture, there comes increasing number of homosexual couples. Fans who ever join in this kind of activity may think over the social norm they obtained initially, such as male is more powerful than female. Moreover, especially in some female-female couples, they often establishing an independent,

powerful and powerful image for women and encourage female to participate in activities that were once defined as exclusive to men such as build muscles. Gender stereotype have been broken at this situation; this brings positive effects on female particularly those teenagers. As for male, they seem to involve less in those kinds of activities. According to interviews to males who are heterosexual around the author, male who haven't involve in this kind of activities often considered this as a kind of insults to male. Because, they have the social norms that male should be muscular. Also, they seen female-female couples as impossible, as they believe that women are subordinate to men. This may lead to increasing conflicts between male and female. As female, believe they have various of opportunity to choose the way they live, and male believe that they need to gain muscle and they are afraid to see female being much stronger and even obtain higher social status than them. Moreover, some radical people may still maintain their origin perspectives on gender role and start to attack people especially those involving in shipping couple culture. They criticize their view that female "can be much powerful" than male and go against the feminists.

As a result, shipping couple activities do have both positive and negative effects on breaking gender stereotype.

Whether shipping couple culture can contribute to gender equality? There is hardly any improvement after involving those activities. There are increasing probability of gender conflicts between female and male due to the awakening of female consciousness after involving in those kinds of activities. However, in order to decrease the possibility of conflicts between gender more education about the gender norms should be provided instead of only providing knowledge about the traditional gender role. The most important improvement is that education institution should try to provide more knowledge to students about gender equality and knowledge about "male is always the dominant" should be decrease. Also, some restrictions should be set on the social media platform to ban people abuse other people who have different opinions with them. Some radical people on social media have strong condemnation on people who believe woman should have more opportunities, they considered they status in the society and opportunity may fell to increasing number of those kind of people.

Whether there is any positive influence on LGBTQs? It can bring more attention towards LGBTQs obviously. People who aren't those group of people can obtain more knowledge about this group which can increase people's comprehension toward the minorities. People who are LGBTQs, can find out there are increasing acceptance toward their behavior and choices. Moreover, people who do not know LGBTQ may finally realize their orientation after involving in shipping couple culture and have the courage to keep what they choose. Though it let people more acceptable to LGBTQs, there are still some negative impacts. For instance, people may pretend to be LGBTQs in order to obtain more follow with interest. It is common to see some Youtubers pretend to be those people in order to gain more followers and earn more. However, they may spread some wrong things about it and may lead to people's misunderstanding to those kinds of people. Nevertheless, it's not easy to take any action to prevent this happened, all that can be done is try to spread more positive statement about those kinds of people.

6. Conclusion

In pace with the prevalent of shipping couple culture in KPOP and increasing attention towards gender problems. It can be found out that this type of culture does bring both positive and negative impacts. Firstly, as a form of collective and shared creation, shipping couple culture provides fans with a platform to freely express and explore gender identity and relationships. Its diverse creative forms provide people with more choices and possibilities. Secondly, this culture is not only a form of entertainment, but can also serve as a source of social motivation, driving society's understanding and discussion of gender roles and identities. However, there are also some issues with the shipping couple culture. Firstly, some works may contain parody, gender discrimination, or other negative content, which requires fans and creators to work together to correct it. Secondly, while promoting specific romantic relationships, the couple culture may not express enough tolerance towards other

non-mainstream relationships. This requires the joint attention of the cultural industry and the general public to ensure that everyone can receive equal representation and recognition in this kind of culture. In terms of gender issues, the shipping couple culture provides a platform for thinking about gender roles and identities, which helps to break traditional gender stereotypes. However, some existing couple works, and discussions are still influenced by traditional gender concepts, further reinforcing some negative gender stereotypes. We need to pay more attention to and actively participate in this culture to promote values of gender equality and diversity. In summary, the shipping couple culture and gender issues are closely related, making it a dynamic and promising field. Through in-depth research and active participation, we can promote the development of this culture towards greater inclusiveness, equality, and diversity. This will help to break traditional gender concepts, enhance social awareness of gender issues, and promote more equal and diverse social development

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