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### The Korean Wave

Within the last decade or so, there has been an explosion of everything “Korean”, ranging from music, dramas, and movies to even food and language, into not just the East Asian market but around the world. This so-called explosion is called the “Hallyu Wave” or “Korean Wave”. The word “Hallyu” is derived from a Chinese term and is also the pun of the word “wave”.

Keith Howard, a professor from the University of London, came to speak about this wave and how it came to be. While the wave surrounds many different aspects of Korean culture, Howard’s presentation was mainly focused on K-pop.

There are many reasons why Korea was the center of the “Hallyu Wave”. In 1997, there was a financial crisis that spread all over Asia. During that time, Asian people turned away from Japan and gave Korean an opportunity to blossom since they all had a mutual experience and shared common principles from the crisis.

The group that first brought K-pop into the modern era and made it into what it is today was Seo Taiji and Boys. They were a hip-hop/dance group known for their upbeat rap lyrics and catchy choruses. Their song “I Know (Nan Arayo)” from their first album was extremely popular and topped the charts in Korea for weeks. Their unique style of lyrics and dance enchanted the Korean audience and set the mark for modern Korean pop.

There are four main components of K-pop. The first is dancing. Dancing in K-pop is often synced between the members and each dance is unique to the song. This synchronized dance is often filled with complicated moves. It can prove to be difficult for many reasons, one being the size of the group. Groups like Big Bang, which only has five members, might not prove to be as difficult as groups like Exo, which formally had twelve members but now has ten.

The second component is the use of different styles of music. Each band has their own distinct music style, but some of them borrow other styles of music like rap, reggae, R&B, and more. The third component is “familiar characteristics”. A main example is the use of electric guitars. Characteristics like this make K-pop more universal. Since it is universal, people from other countries can relate and make it easier to listen to.

The fourth component is the use of ballads in their albums. Generally, in K-pop albums, there is always a ballad or a ballad-type of song included. The presence of ballads in most albums is what makes K-pop different from other types of music styles. These four main components are what makes K-pop unique.

Professor Howard also introduced the concept that there is a second Korean wave ongoing right now. The first wave began in 2007 while this second wave began in 2008 and is still currently going on. A couple of the striking differences with this so-called “Second Korean Wave” are that women are much more sexualized and the men are much less sexualized and in a different way. The professor showed this through the viewing of Beast’s music video for “Breath” and Girl’s Generation’s music video for “Run Devil Run”. Early K-pop groups such as Clon or Seo Taiji and Boys were often portrayed as very masculine. These days, most male groups are portrayed as more “metrosexual”, which was non-existent back in the 90’s.

Overall, I enjoyed the presentation despite the fact that I was already aware of some of the topics that he touched on beforehand. It was very informative in showing all the progressions and background information that all assembled together to make K-pop what it is today.