



**ATHENA CHEUNG
YUEN-CHING**

St Catharine's School
for Girls

Keeping the K in K-pop



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K-pop has been South Korea's most powerful cultural export for more than 20 years. It turns carefully selected groups into international brands, making Seoul a global music capital. But lately, the popular music that once brought parents and teenagers together is beginning to show some cracks.

A growing number of South Koreans, especially younger listeners, are turning away because of shorter, algorithm-friendly songs, English lyrics and a feeling that K-pop's unique identity is being eroded. Some local fans wonder if winning global ears must come at the cost of their culture.

The change is pervasive. Fans have described a dislocation: songs that once reflected local culture now rely on English hooks and universal themes meant to be easily shared on streaming services.

"It used to feel like music was made for us. Now it feels like music made for playlists and short videos," one South Korean netizen posted on Reddit.

The increase of songs designed to perform on social media, tightly edited segments that fit neatly in 20 to 40-second clips with snappy, repetitive choruses, has made people resist this situation.

Industry observers believe this change is due to financial motives. Accessibility is essential for global success. Shorter songs boost replay value on streaming services, and English lyrics increase interest in Western markets. Opponents say the change sacrifices subtlety.

"If your aim is to let every release virally spread, you

could end up making the music sound ordinary," a music critic from Seoul noted. "In this case, some songs that were truly made, which were not made for short videos or playlists, will be overlooked."

There is also criticism of the production model itself. Idol groups have a demanding schedule that includes frequent comebacks, complicated choreography and strictly regulated public personas. While that system has resulted in amazing performances and international tours, many idols have become exhausted. Some fans and musicians contend that the industry's factory-style approach can wear out both artists and audiences, and that the relentless pace leaves little room for an idol's freedom.

When it comes to the future of K-pop, there is a generational debate. While younger audiences are more likely to demand music that reflects their language and concerns, older fans frequently celebrate the genre's global accomplishments and the economic benefits they bring.

For many, the question is not whether K-pop should be listened to worldwide, but rather how it can be without losing the cultural uniqueness that made it so appealing.

The discussion about identity, creativity and commerce will continue as South Korea's music continues to develop. Finding a balance between business needs and cultural art is now K-pop's main challenge for attracting listeners and generating revenue.

