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TITLE: K-Pop Idols from Around the World

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ONIX

All of Us

Not Mentioned in the EP

A. Introduction

- a. This is KPOP Sundae brought to you by KPOP Sunbae, before you have to go back to work on Monday.
- b. We are your hosts Onyx, Min, and JR!

B. Episode Breakdown

- a. Today, we're going to talk about foreigners in K-pop, this means people who aren't half-Korean or born in Korea. We might at a later point make an episode all about half-Korean idols like: Lee Michelle or Seventeen's Vernon? **Another thing we want to mention is that this episode is meant to be a celebration of diversity--to show love for these idols, and while there are many foreign idols in the industry, we wanted to focus on the ones that have made notable contributions and the events that were industry-changing. We also may not bring up certain controversies that come to mind while listening to this episode simply because we do not feel the need to bring them back up.**
- b. So Let's start with, Who Was The First Foreign K-pop Idol?

C. The earliest foreign K-pop idol -- Circle & Ida Gene Simmons

- a. This is the earliest "idol" we could find, there has probably been more non-Korean or half-Korean singers in Korean Music before the 90s, but it's hard to find, and we have to make the cutoff somewhere. We also have to take into account the current definition of idol, which really came about at and after Seo Taiji and Boys.
- b. First "international group"
 - i. Circle "씨클"
 - 1. Members were Japanese, Korean, Chinese
 - 2. Debuted in December 27, 1998
 - 3. <http://hallyuwood.co.kr/archives/3402>
- c. Kim Isak of "Isak N Jiyeon" (이삭 N 지연)
 - i. She was one half of the R&B duo from SM Entertainment, that was relatively short lived.
 - ii. German-American, Ida
 - iii. 2002-2004
 - iv. http://www.halfkorean.com/?page_id=384
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Isak GLEAN INFO FROM HERE

D. Idol Groups that Marketed themselves as “international” and failed ??

- a. We're separating there to groups from Korean Ent./distributed from 'foreign' made groups, that may or may not have appeared on Korean shows or been sold in Korea.
- b. These are groups that heavily promoted the fact that they had foreign members, but soon after disappeared into the void lol
- c. Esquire
Said to be the first international kpop boy group.
It was formed by Avance Entertainment (They mainly focus on getting foreign talent into kpop) 2011, and consisted of 5 members, all from Canada. One of the original members Marko, who is fully italian, left the group before their debut due to Visa Issues.
 - i. In 2013 they debuted with the album: E.S.Q. 리시우스 (Lysius)
 - 1. Which didn't even feature a Music Video. The song itself was distributed by KongG music.
 - ii. So they never had a “real” debut, but they where made multiple articles about and where on Korean TV
 - iii. [MBC video about them](#)
- d. The Gloss 2014
 - i. Was marketed as the “first” group with a non-asian member, Oliva from France, they where set to debut in November of 2013.
 - ii. Prior to their “debut” they made multiple song covers on YT, and their member lineup did change a bit before their debut.
 - iii. and they actually held their debut showcase in Paris. They released a digital single, but not an official MV, and their social medias went quiet in early 2014.
- e. O My Jewel
 - i. Marketed as ‘the first K-pop group with a Caucasian Member’
 - ii. The group was originally a 4 member girl group, under AcousticCompany.
 - iii. 2 of the members were Korean, Seo, Sana, while & Jeonghee (Crystal) is from China, though but the most promoted member was Sophia, who is russian, and the groups main rapper & dancer.
 - iv. They made their debut in 2017 with the single, Tambourine, and in comparison to the other groups, they had a MV.
 - v. A month after debut, Jeonghee, left the group due to health reasons and 4 months after that, in April of 2018 the whole group disbanded.
- f. Lime
 - i. The group was formed in Vietnam & all the members are Vietnamese
 - ii. The trio debuted in 2015 and released 3 singles, all which either vere fully in Korean or had Korean versions
 - iii. Their single “Part of Me” was featured on [KBS World Radio](#), but I'm not sure it was ever featured on any form of music shows.

- iv. They continued to make music, but it seem they gave up on K-pop in 2017, but continued to make music in Vietnamese in 2017-18, "[Baby Boo](#)" & "[I'm Your Fan](#)", but seems to have disbanded by now.

E. Groups from large companies -- do they treat their idols better lol no

- a. I want to make a quick point before jumping into this that these companies actively seek out Foreigners/Koreans born in other countries. If you scroll through any of these agencies social media platforms you will see that they have casting sessions literally all over the world.
- b. SUJU
 - i. So quick history in Super Junior -- they debuted in 2005 as Super Junior'05 with the song "Twins (Knock Out)". They initially had a graduation type system, but eventually dropped the "generation" idea (about a year later) and Kyuhyun was added to the lineup, making it thirteen members.
 - ii. Of those 13, there was a member named Hangeng -- for a good hour we thought he was the first ever foreign idol or even the first Chinese idol. As we've already heard that is not the case, but he is the first Chinese *male* idol!
 - iii. A South China Morning Post article details his time as a kpop idol and explains that due to visa restrictions he was unable to promote like the other members. About three years later, Super Junior-M was formed, SuJu's chinese subunit, of which he was the leader.
 - iv. Henry being added -- ONIX
 - v. Just one year later, on December 21, 2009, he filed a lawsuit against Sm Entertainment seeking to terminate his **13 YEAR SLAVE CONTRACT**, excuse me contract. He actually had been secretly accumulating evidence and going to law offices prior to the lawsuit. According to a soompi article from the time, the litigation stated that he had not been given a single day of rest since debut. That is almost four years my dudes. Among that there were also reports that the distribution of pay was unfair among the members. It's kind of crazy so I highly suggest looking at the legal documents. Honestly, it's heartbreaking.
 - vi. Since then, slave contracts are no longer used (at least in this way, usually they're about 7 years long), although they usually are in favor of the company and not necessarily the trainees.
 - vii. In July of 2010, he released his first solo album -- a year later in 2011 he had officially left SM and Super Junior.
 - viii. Since then he's been super active in China, releasing music and acting, and gaining international recognition, from being a torch bearer for the 2008 Beijing Olympics to making a cameo in a Transformers movie. On top of all this, just a few months ago he married his wife, actress Celina Jade.

- c. EXO -- quick mention -- Long story short Lay is the only surviving foreign member.
 - i. A quick disclaimer, we'll probably have a deep dive on EXO so I'll keep this short. SuJu will probably get one eventually too but there's 15 years of content to deal with there.
 - ii. The SM 12 member group debuted in 2012, with four Chinese members.
 - 1. Their schtick was that the group was divided into two, with EXO-K being the Korean group, and EXO-M the one that would be promoted in Chinese or Mandarin as the "M" denotes.
 - iii. Two years into their debut, Kris Wu and Luhan left the group (In May and October respectively). Both of them cited unfairness between them and the Korean members among other issues. The lawsuits went on for a while until Kris was officially left
 - iv. Then on August 24, 2015 Tao became the third member to file a lawsuit against SM. Part of the reasons for his departure was that he was injured but SM allegedly refused to let him rest properly.
 - v. In 2016, Kris and Luhan settled with SM, with part of that being they will still be under their contracts (which will end in 2022), with their management coming from outside of SM. Tao's lawsuits have been very back and forth on the other hand. I found a 2018 article that stated that the last court trial has happened, but it ruled in favor of SM, meaning that his contract is still valid (for how long, I am unsure).
 - vi. That being said the members have done fairly well in their solo activities, acting and also releasing solo music.
 - vii. Fun Fact: Kris Wu and SuJu's Hangeng acted together in a movie called Sweet Sixteen in 2016.
- d. NCT
 - i. Literally three SM groups in a row, BUT there have been no NCT departures so far so whoooot.
 - ii. NCT kind of picks up on the rotational concept that Super Junior was going to use. Essentially the group as a whole is named NCT, and under that umbrella name there are an infinite amount of potential subunits. The idea is that the groups can be based anywhere from Chicago to Vietnam. As of right now there are four official units, and of the four the only truly "foreign" group is WayV, their China based unit (the members are either Thai or Chinese).
 - iii. Of the current 21 members, there are 10 foreign members (also two of the Korean members were born outside of Korea, but they are still ethnically Korean, even in their nationality is not).
 - iv. Many of the members were introduced through SM's predebut team SM Rookies.
 - v. In a 2016 press conference, Lee Soo Man took to the stage to introduce five projects and a new boy group -- that is NCT. The conference will be

linked with subtitles and a timestamp for when he officially starts talking about the boys (its super thematic and you can see the members when they were practically babies).

- vi. Essentially the group is meant to be heavily marketed to international fans, with no limit to the amount of members or groups -- in fact, their introduction for a time was "To the world, here is NCT" (if I'm correct they no longer use this when introducing themselves, a girl is crying).
- vii. In all the units, from U to 127 to Dream to WayV, there are foreign members. Specifically NCT 127, has been especially popular in international circles, mostly in the US where they have appeared on countless late night shows, radio stations, and more.
- viii. WayV debuted in 2019, but I remember there was confusion as to whether they were truly part of NCT or not (this is partially due to their branding).

e. BP Rania

- i. Alex 2015 - African american member who was a rapper for the group and the leader. She was already a singer-songwriter in the US, but was marketed in Korea as being the foreign member. Tada
- ii. Interview with Grace - 2019 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WfgB4bnMOI>
- iii. First African American to be in a kpop girl group. (Insooni (Hee Sisters, 70s) is half Korean, but possibly the first black woman in Kpop). Alex was announced to be added to the group on November 4th, 2015, as Saem and Jooyi left the group. *~lots of big mess happened~*. On August 15th, 2016 Alexa was announced to be the groups new leader. *~More mess~*. On February 14th, 2017 it was announced that Alex would be in the entire choreography of a Rania song for the first time. *~Acting mess & releases~*. August 19th, 2017, it was announced that Alexa had left the group.
- iv. Her twitter statement 2 days later:
- v. *People think they can push you around, take advantage of you, manipulate you, violate you then throw you in the trash and walk. Dead wrong.*
- vi. Fairy Godmotha Reid (@thealexreid) [August 21, 2017](#)

f. TWICE

- i. The JYP girl group debuted in 2015 and consisted of Sana, Momo, Mina, Tzuyu, making almost half of their nine members are foreigners!
- ii. The group officially debuted in Japan (home of Momo, Mina, and Sana) on June 28, 2017 and have since topped Oricon charts multiple times and broken records for the highest album sales, the first K-Ppop girl group to go platinum in Japan, and have held multiple concerts there.

g. CLC

- i. The group debuted on March 19, 2015 under Cube entertainment. Of the members in the group there are two foreign members, Sorn and Elkie.
 - ii. In 2017, Thai member Sorn did an interview in which she explained that she and Elkie were getting paid much less than the Korean members of the group, personally I remember the outrage on the internet, but I also do not remember ever getting an explanation for why that is. As this is something that has been mentioned multiple times in regards to foreign members, I wanted to mention this since Sorn brought a lot of awareness to the issue. There will be links explaining this better than I will right now, but it seems that there is an organization that holds foreign (whether that means all foreign or just Chinese and Thai celebrities I do not know) celebrities money for a time because the processing of money is different between South Korea and other countries. Since the interview, Sorn has come out and said that she has received all the money that was due to her.
- h. I*Z ONE
 - i. This group comes from the third season of Produce 101 entitled Produce 48 -- the name comes from the fact that this was a mixture of trainees from Korean companies and J-Pop group AKB48. Unlike the other seasons, there were 12 final members as opposed to 11.
 - ii. Something weird that I found while researching for this was that the only people that could vote were Koreans (which was usual for the series), but seeing as a Japanese group was promoting you would think Japan would be able to vote as well. Obviously that was not the case.
 - iii. Of the 12 members, there are three Japanese, and one Taiwanese/Chinese member.
 - iv. Upon making it into the group, the three Japanese members halted their activities with AKB48 in order to promote with I*ZONE.
 - v. A year after their debut in Korea, they debuted in Japan on February 6, 2019 with their single "Suki to Iwasetai" which went platinum!
 - vi. I dunno if we're gonna talk about this, but after the manipulation of the Produce series came out there was concern over whether I*ZONE and the group's most recent series's winners X1 would disband, unfortunately X1 did disband, but I*ZONE thankfully was saved from that fate.
- i. The groups that we just mentioned are not the only groups currently in K-pop with foreign members, these were just some notable ones we wanted to talk about

F. A Response

- a. Chad Future -- 2013
 - i. He's not a K-pop Idol, but he did collab with multiple idols including NU'EST's Aron and VIXX's Ravi.
 - ii. He was a former member of Michigan local group Heat Street and then a Heart2Heart member (they only released one song), then he made covers

of K-pop Songs on his [YT Channel](#), before releasing his very first single. Most of his singles are a mix of English & Korean

- iii. He stopped releasing music in 2015.
He doesn't seem to have performed on any Korean Shows, but he did perform on the KCON 2013/12(debut??), main stage.
- iv. [Song with Ravi](#), [Song with Aron](#) (of Nu'est), [Song with Jamie Seo](#) (?), [Song with U.JI](#) (of Bestie), [another song with Jamie Seo](#), [song with Ha Sung Woon](#) (of Wanna One, prod. By DEAN)
- v. He announced that he would be making a 2020 comeback at the end of last year.

b. EXP Edition -- 2014

- i. "Do you have to be Korean to be an idol?"
- ii. The project was started by Bora Kim, a master's student at Columbia University (not the actress, or the LoL pro player) with this question in mind. In addition, Karin Kuroda and Samantha Shao worked on this experimental film project, that was meant to be somewhere between a reality show and fiction that would result in an actual k-pop boy band.
- iii. 2014 - 'I'm Making A Boy Band' (IMMABB) was created
- iv. April 26, 2015, Their first(?) performance of [LUV/WRONG](#), then a 6 member group
- v. May 8th, 2015, [The Kickstarter](#) for the "I'm Making a Boy Band" project was launched. A day later an [announcement video](#) was posted. The Kickstarter was active until Jun. 7th, 2015.
- vi. The original website for the group was taken down, but here are some archives of it:
[May 0716](#), [April 2116](#), [april 2017](#),
- vii. Something actually pretty cool about this group is that they were able to promote on many music shows --
 - 1. Nov. 6th, 2015, First MV "[LUV/WRONG](#)".
 - 2. Jan. 1st, 2016: First (?) KBS "[mini doc](#)"
 - 3. April 16th, 2017, Official debut single release "[Feel Like This](#)"
 - 4. April 26th?, 2017, [Debut showcase](#) on Show Champion EP. 226
 - 5. Jan. 10th, 2018, 2nd single "[Stress](#)", their most recent, and last release.
 - 6. Jan, 16(?), 2018, comeback stage on [Show Champion](#), EP,255
 - 7. Feb. 22, 2018, they performed on [M Countdown](#), EP.559, they where the second group to perform (first being [Nara - Jealousy](#))
- viii. This group might have been the inspiration for the NigaHiga parody group, BgA. Their first MV, released on May 13th, 2016 "[Dong Saya Dae](#)", ([Announcement video](#)), their 2017 followup single: "[Who's It gonna be](#)"

c. Let's jump over to another Youtube based group:

- d. Coco Avenue -- 2017
 - i. African-American duo, made up of KPOP youtubers Jenny Lyric & Jenna Rose. They only released one song "[Eottae](#)", and it was never aired on any Korean networks, so we can't really count it as a "true" kpop song.
- e. Oli London -- 2019
 - i. The more extreme Chad Future, basically known as Jimin Plastic surgery dude, he has been on Arirang, and has been on news in Korea multiple times, released multiple MV's but never actually performed on any music shows.
 - ii. He has been having multiple surgeries since 2013 in order to look like BTS's Jimin.

G. Trivia Question

- a. Who was the first Korean-American KPOP idol?

H. Song of the Day

- a. 1995 - [R.ef - Rave Effect!](#) - Debut album - "[Silent Scream](#)"
- b. 2010 - [B2ST - Shock of New Era](#) - EP 2 - "[Shock](#)"

I. Ending

- a. Thanks for listening! If you enjoyed this episode then be sure to like, follow, subscribe, and tell your friends about us! If you want to interact with us or find more of our content then you can follow us on twitter [@kpopsunbaes](#), or on our tumblr pages which will be in the show notes along with the sources used for this episode. Our next episode comes out on March 15th, 2020, so please be on the lookout for that! Thanks everyone, bye!

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