



The K-pop Music Industry Strategy for the Development of the T-pop Music Industry for Chinese audience: A case of GMM Grammy

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of K-pop's business model on T-pop's development, focusing on its growing fan base and cultural identity. While T-pop incorporates traditional Thai elements into modern pop music, it faces challenges in expanding its influence. This study will analyze these challenges and propose solutions through interviews with music industry experts and a questionnaire survey of Chinese students at Thai universities. By engaging experts and audiences, this study aims to understand market trends and the evolving relationship between producers and audiences.

This study aims to develop a strategic business model for the Thai music market to guide T-pop's expansion to Chinese audiences. The study aims to identify T-pop's target Chinese demographic and analyze K-pop's key success factors to help T-pop attract Chinese youth in Thailand.

Keyword: T-pop music industry, Chinese audience, development, business model

Introduction

The K-pop wave, also known as the "Hallyu (한류)", is a musical and cultural phenomenon that involves the intentional spread of K-pop to a global audience (Laffan, 2021). K-pop music is now the 7th largest music industry in the world (shou, 2023.03.21).

The success of K-pop music is mainly realized through these 5 aspects. 1)cultural proximity 2)hybridity 3)state cultural policies 4) fandom and 5) SNS (Parc & Kim, 2020).

Korean entertainment companies have a very complete system. In the literature, they have turned stardom into a working mechanism, with very strict planning from selecting stars, training, taking classes, and then becoming a professional artist (Negus, 2015). There are 5 significant parts in this stage. These are producers, casting, training, producing, and promotion. Government support has played a large part in the development of the Korean Wave. The Korean government believes that K-pop is not only culture, but also a way to open other markets. So the Korean government invests a lot of money in K-pop (ยี่มัสชา, 2023.12.28). The Korean government is described as playing

an important role in the cultural exhibition industry, and it is also shown that the Korean government has made the cultural industry part of its national strategy (Negus, 2015). K-pop music has never stopped innovating as it has evolved, and the music industry innovates new content as the times change. The importance of innovativeness such as AI technology and the meta-universe can be seen in the literature. Lee Soo Man, the founder of South Korea's SM Entertainment, began to advocate creating his own metaverse worldview in 2021 (이민지, 2021.06.29).

The business model of K-pop music has heavily influenced the development of T-pop music (mag&partners, 2023). The success of K-pop has inspired Thai music producers to experiment with new musical styles and visual aesthetics, creating new job opportunities in Thailand's entertainment industry, such as artist management, event planning, and production (mag&partners, 2023). "T-pop fans are still "small, but the numbers climbing steadily in the last two years"(Lim, 2023). Judging from the trends in recent years, T-pop music culture is gradually going global.

Compared with K-pop, T-pop still has many imperfections. This is firstly due to the many restrictions in Thailand. and the THACCA organization was only established in 2023 (ไลฟ์สไตล์, 2023.3.20). This means that the Thai government's management of the development of music culture has just begun. Lack of funds is also a factor affecting Thai music today (ไลฟ์สไตล์, 2023.3.20). Secondly, the lack of copyright awareness is also a big problem in the development of Thai music(CEA, 2022). Unlike K-pop, Thai music incorporates many traditional Thai elements into its production. Although influenced by K-pop, it still retains its unique Thai characteristics. Today, Thai music has largely adopted the marketing and business strategies of Korean pop music(CEA, 2022).

However, Thailand has gained a lot of attention in the international market through BL dramas. It is getting a lot of attention in all sorts of areas including music, movies, and TV nowadays. The hot trend of Thai music in China is rising year by year (中国音乐财经, 2023.11.23). the main consumer group of Thai stars is "shipper" a group that has strong consumption power but is not popularized (中国音乐财经, 2023.11.23). "Shipper" means a fan who likes to watch homo-erotic themed TV series and movies. But various laws in China prevented it from growing rapidly within the country. China's views on LGBTQ are very unclear. And maintain an official attitude of silence and general restrictions, that is, "no support, no opposition, no promotion." (Mountford, 2010). the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (国家广播电视总局-SARFT) also opposes the dissemination of this type of film and TV series(Mountford, 2010).

In most of the literatures related to Thai music business oversea, only the history of Thai music, the types of Thai music, and the development process are written. Few literatures have examined the specific development of the Thai music industry in a very competitive way. From the study indicated that Korean pop music has developed rapidly mainly with the government's support, while in Thailand there is no direct support from the government yet (Xiaoli et al., 2022). A study of current T-pop music is missing in most of the studies. There is difficult to find literature written about the business model of the Thai music industry for oversea market. As Xiaoli (Xiaoli

et al., 2022). stated that the development and marketing strategies of T-pop are influenced by the K-pop industry, but the successful business model and producer-audience relationship is still limited. With the success of the K-pop industry, this study aims to identify a T-pop development business strategy model suitable for Chinese audiences, determine the characteristics of Chinese audiences' exposure to T-pop music, and explore the key success factors of K-pop in attracting Chinese young people. Through these methods, an effective business strategy model for the growth of T-pop in the Chinese market can be established.

Research objective

1. To Identify an appropriate Business strategy model for the development/guideline for T-pop for the Chinese audience.
2. To identify the Chinese audience for T-pop music.
3. To identify the success factor of K-pop to motivate T-pop Music to attract Chinese Youth in Thailand.

Research Methodology

This study is conducted on Chinese students in Thailand, with an average age between 14-40 years. The Data collection was divided into two parts: the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. The questionnaire developed by the researcher with IOC validity was administered to Chinese youth who study at high schools and universities in Thailand. The in-depth interviews with structured questions were developed by researchers with the Delphi technique for the reliability of the questions. Then, the questions will be conducted by 5 interviewees.

The data collection was conducted via online through a questionnaire disseminated via QR code to Chinese students currently study in high school and universities in Thailand, using the Yamane sampling method. The sample size will be determined using a 95% confidence level. The calculated sample size is 392. However, they were 196 returned with completion. According to data from China's Ministry of Higher Education, there are currently 21,429 Chinese students studying in Thailand (go, 2023), of which 20000 are included in the overall sample. The interviews were also applied to 5 experts related to the music industry, these including dancers, music company executives, and music project planners. Due to legal protections, their age and occupation may not be disclosed. The in-depth interviews with the structured questions develop by researchers with Delphi technique for the reliability of the questions. Then, the questions will be conducted 5 interviewees.

Then, the questionnaire collected were analyzed using SPSS.28 For Interview, the interview data were analyzed through textual analysis. In accordance with legal requirements, certain experts' names and positions will be anonymized.

Data analysis

The result of the study indicated in tables as follows:

Table 1: Chinese audience information

Study participants			
Characteristics		No.	(n=) %
Gender	Man	36	18.4
	Women	157	80.1
	other	3	1.5
Age	14-19	28	14.3
	20-25	102	52.0
	26-30	53	27.0
	31-35	10	5.1
	36-40	3	1.5
Marital status	Married	6	3.1
	Single	188	95.9
	Divorced	2	1.0
Education level	high school graduate	26	13.3
	technical college graduate	19	9.7
	college graduate	89	45.4
	graduate school graduate	62	31.6
Occupation	government officer	16	8.2
	student	127	64.8
	professor	7	3.6
	producers	7	3.6
	marketing manager	39	19.9

Source: Zenghui Shen

According to the Table 1 the numbers of the return questionnaire were 193 out of 392. Data indicated that the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including gender, age, marital status, education level, and occupation. Many respondents were female (80.1%), while males accounted for only 18.4%, and 1.5% identifying as other. This suggests that the study sample was dominated by females, which may affect the opinions and preferences reflected in the study results. The largest age group was 20-25 years old (52.0%), followed by 26-30 years old (27.0%). Younger participants (14-19 years old) accounted for 14.3%, while the older age groups (31-35 years old and 36-40 years old) accounted for significantly smaller proportions, at 5.1% and 1.5%, respectively. This suggests that the study mainly represents the views of young people, especially those in their early twenties.

Many participants were single (95.9%), with only a small number of married (3.1%) or divorced (1.0%). This is consistent with the age distribution, as younger age groups are less likely to be married. Most participants had a higher education background, with 45.4% being college graduates and 31.6% holding graduate degrees. A small percentage had completed high school (13.3%) or technical college (9.7%), indicating that the sample was composed primarily of well-educated individuals.

Most respondents, 64.8%, were students, further confirming the youth-focused nature of the sample. Other notable occupational groups included marketing managers (19.9%), government officials (8.2%), professors (3.6%), and producers (3.6%). Most participants were still in education, with a small percentage working in creative or professional fields related to media and entertainment.

Given the predominance of young, educated women in the sample, these findings are particularly relevant to T-pop's core audience, which is composed of young female consumers who are highly engaged in media and entertainment. Additionally, the high percentage of students suggests that T-pop's marketing strategy should prioritize social media and digital platforms to effectively reach its target audience. This could impact its expansion and branding efforts in China. According to data collected for questionnaire the participants could answer more than one question, then the data are analyzed as follows:

Table 2: The important part in the music industry

	Responses N	Percent	Ranking
Producer	125	15.1%	4
Casting	143	17.2%	3
Training	125	15.1%	4
Producing	147	17.7%	2
Contents	173	20.9%	1
Social media	116	14.0%	5
Total	829	100.0%	

Source: Zenghui Shen

Table 2 provides valuable insights into audience preferences for key elements of the Thai music industry. As the question allowed for multiple responses, the total percentage exceeded 100%; therefore, the ranking was used as a more accurate indicator of perceived importance.

“Content” ranked first, confirming that high-quality music content is the most critical factor in attracting and maintaining audience engagement. “Production” and “Casting” ranked second and third, respectively, highlighting the need for effective production execution and artist selection. “Producers” and “Training” tied for fourth, indicating that while they are important, they are considered slightly less important than content and production among respondents. Finally, “Social Media” ranked last at fifth, meaning it is viewed more as a promotional tool than a core aspect of music creation.

This suggests that the T-pop music industry should prioritize content quality and production standards while maintaining a solid system of artist training. Although social media ranked lowest, it is still a powerful tool for marketing, audience interaction, and music distribution. T-pop should use Chinese platforms to effectively attract a wider Chinese audience.

To expand its influence in China, the T-pop industry should prioritize content excellence, strengthen production and casting efforts, establish a systematic artist training program, and use social media for promotion. By integrating these strategies, T-pop can enhance its appeal and competitiveness in the Chinese market.

To effectively implement these strategies, it is crucial to understand the platforms on which Chinese listeners consume music. Digital platforms play a vital role in shaping music trends and audience engagement, making them a key channel for T-pop’s expansion. By analyzing the preferences of Chinese audiences for different streaming and social media platforms, it is possible to improve its marketing approach and optimize content distribution. The next section will explore the most popular media platforms among Chinese listeners and provide insights into how T-pop should leverage these channels to maximize its reach.

Table 3: The media the audience uses to listen to the music

	Responses N	Percent	Ranking
YouTube	78	12.7%	4
TikTok	135	22.0%	1
Spotify	61	9.9%	5
Bilibili	108	17.6%	2
QQ-music	101	16.4%	3
Facebook	31	5.0%	6
Instagram	101	16.4%	3
Total	615	100.0%	

Source: Zenghui Shen

Table 3 shows the ranking of media platforms used by audiences to consume music. Because the questionnaire allows multiple responses and the total percentage exceeds 100%, the “Rank” column more accurately reflects the relative importance of the platforms.

TikTok ranks first, indicating its dominance as the most popular music listening platform for Chinese audiences. Its popularity highlights the growing importance of short video apps in music consumption. Bilibili, ranked second, also received strong preference, indicating that visual-based platforms with integrated community features are essential for music discovery and engagement. QQ Music and Instagram tied for third, showing a balance between localized streaming services and global social media platforms. YouTube ranked fourth, indicating that audiences also use the platform frequently to follow T-pop, but slightly behind newer platforms. Spotify and Facebook ranked fifth and sixth, respectively, indicating lower usage, which may be due to localization restrictions or the audience’s preference for the platform.

These results suggest that to effectively reach Chinese audiences, T-pop should focus on video-dominated platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili, while integrating music into social interaction tools such as Instagram and QQ Music. Traditional streaming services can be supplementary but may not be core to the market strategy.

Given the dominance of TikTok and Bilibili, T-pop artists and record labels should strengthen their presence on platforms commonly used by Chinese audiences to maximize exposure. Bilibili and QQ Music should also be used to promote music. The strong preference for music suggests that Thai artists who need to expand in the Chinese market should optimize their presence through localized marketing strategies and collaborations with Chinese influencers. YouTube’s high engagement rates highlight the importance of producing high-quality music videos and visual content to enhance audience reach and retention. While Instagram and Facebook play a minor role in direct music consumption, they are still valuable for artist branding, fan engagement, and cross-platform promotion.

To maximize its presence in the Chinese market, the Thai music industry should adopt a multi-platform strategy, prioritize mainstream social platforms, strengthen its presence on Chinese streaming services, and incorporate T-pop’s unique identity into social media-driven promotions.

To ensure T-pop’s long-term success in China, it is important not only to build a strong presence on digital platforms, but also to understand how Chinese audiences interact with music and support their favorite artists. Analyzing Chinese audience behavior can provide industry stakeholders with valuable insights to improve promotional strategies, enhance fan loyalty, and strengthen overall market influence in China.

Table 4: The way to support artist

	Responses N	Percent	Ranking
Appreciate works	147	27.5%	1
Join fan groups	103	19.3%	3
Fan meeting	87	16.3%	4
Buy albums	117	21.9%	2
Gain popularity	43	8.1%	6
Other	37	6.9%	5
Total	534	100.0%	

Source: Zenghui Shen

Table 4 shows how audiences support their favorite artists, based on responses to multiple-choice questions. Since participants could select multiple options, cumulative percentages exceed 100%. Therefore, this analysis relies on ranked columns to accurately interpret audience preferences.

“Appreciating works” ranked first, indicating that consuming music, videos, and creative output remains the most direct and widespread way to support artists. “Buy album” ranked second, reflecting that fans still value physical or digital purchases as a form of support and emotional connection. “Joining fan group” ranked third, demonstrating the role of community and collective identity in fan culture. “Fan meeting” followed closely at fourth, showing a moderate but relevant desire for direct artist interaction. Interestingly, the “other” option ranked fifth, meaning that a minority of fans support artists through other means. Finally, “gain popularity” ranked sixth, indicating that while behaviors that increase popularity are appreciated, they are not a priority for most fans.

Given that “appreciating works” is the main interaction method, T-pop artists should prioritize high-quality music and visually compelling content to keep audiences interested. The fact that people buy albums suggests that expanding merchandise and exclusive album versions for Chinese fans can increase revenue and improve fan loyalty. As “joining fan groups” and “fan meetings” are important interaction channels, T-pop artists should cultivate strong online and offline fan engagement, such as dedicated Chinese fan clubs, exclusive content, and interactive events. Although “gain popularity” ranks low, T-pop can still implement strategies to encourage fan-driven promotion, such as marketing campaigns using platforms such as TikTok and Bilibili.

Beyond fan engagement, T-pop’s broader promotion and expansion in China requires a well-structured marketing approach. While strategies such as exclusive merchandise and interactive fan communities can help reinforce loyalty, they must be complemented by a larger digital push. Given the growing dominance of social media and streaming platforms, leveraging digital marketing

campaigns and cross-platform collaborations will be critical to expanding T-pop's visibility. To succeed in the Chinese market, T-pop must take a more strategic approach that combines content creation with systematic promotion and audience targeting. This view is reinforced by insights from industry professionals, who emphasize the role of digital platforms and structured marketing efforts in driving music trends.

The interviews provided valuable perspectives on the development of the T-pop industry and its relationship to K-pop's structured business model. While many interviewees acknowledged the success of K-pop's marketing strategies, rigorous training system, and government support, they also highlighted the cultural differences between the two industries and the need for T-pop to find its own unique approach.

Ling (dancer) noted that K-pop's success is not only due to its music, but also to its well-developed marketing strategies and media operations, which have played a vital role in its influence. She noted that Korean entertainment companies place a heavy emphasis on an artist's appearance, stage presence, and overall brand, while the Thai industry places a greater emphasis on individuality and talent. Similarly, Art argued that while some aspects of the Korean training system may be beneficial to T-pop, the intensive training structure used in Korea may not be entirely suitable for the Thai market, as Thai artists and audiences value artistic freedom more than a rigid system.

Rinrana Sonanta (singer) observed that the Thai music industry has begun to incorporate certain K-pop elements, but she believes that the rapid development of the Thai music market makes long-term training plans more difficult to implement compared to Korea. She noted that while T-pop borrows some stylistic and performance elements from K-pop, it still lacks a mature training infrastructure that can produce internationally competitive artists, which is a major reason that limits its development in China.

Regarding promotion in the Chinese market, JunMing Chen (musician) stressed that for T-pop to succeed in China, cultural integration, digital platform involvement, and deep market cooperation must be prioritized. He stressed the growing importance of social media and streaming platforms such as TikTok (Douyin) and Bilibili, which have played a vital role in shaping music consumption trends in China. He suggested that T-pop should optimize its presence on these platforms to maximize its popularity among Chinese audiences.

Lilian, who has extensive experience in the Chinese fashion industry, expressed a similar view, saying that Thailand's entertainment industry has similarities to South Korea in some respects, but needs a stronger digital presence. She suggested that T-pop artists should focus on using short video platforms such as TikTok (Douyin) and Bilibili to attract young audiences.

Art also stressed that T-pop could learn from some aspects of K-pop's digital marketing success by improving content production and audience engagement strategies. He noted that

YouTube and Instagram remain valuable to international brands, but in China, the most effective engagement strategies involve localized platforms such as QQ Music and Weibo.

JunMing Chen (musician) stressed that Thailand should learn from K-pop's success but not copy its business model completely. Instead, he argued that T-pop needs to incorporate Thai cultural characteristics into its strategy to drive innovation and differentiation. Ling added that Thai music industry leaders should invest in artist training and marketing in China to strengthen T-pop's influence in China.

Overall, respondents agreed that T-pop should strategically absorb elements of K-pop while maintaining its cultural authenticity. They stressed that structured artist training programs, improved production standards, and a well-planned digital marketing strategy are key factors in expanding T-pop's influence in China and beyond. These approaches could expand T-pop's music market in China.

Finding

This study aims to identify an appropriate business strategy model for the development of T-pop tailored to Chinese audiences, determine the characteristics of Chinese audiences who engage with T-pop music, and explore key success factors from K-pop that can be adapted to attract Chinese youth in Thailand. The study shows that K-pop's business model, strong government support, and effective use of digital platforms have had a significant impact on T-pop's development. Thai pop music has adopted many of K-pop's production and marketing strategies, but it faces several challenges, including a lack of systematic artist training, limited government support, and funding constraints. In addition, legal and regulatory restrictions have also become a significant barrier to T-pop's expansion in the Chinese market. A notable example is the Chinese authorities' strict censorship of BL content, which has been a key driver of T-pop's popularity influenced by Thai BL dramas. According to (Mountford, 2010), the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (国家广播电影电视总局-SARFT) discourages the dissemination of LGBTQ+ themed media, adhering to a policy of "no support, no opposition, no promotion". This official stance has severely limited T-pop's ability to leverage its strong BL fan base in China.

Challenges in copyright awareness and the lack of a clear positioning strategy for Chinese audiences have also hindered T-pop's rapid development. Despite the growing attention of Chinese fans, especially those attracted to BL-related content, these legal and institutional restrictions have greatly weakened its market potential. Therefore, through the study, the researchers made a business model diagram suitable for the development of T-pop in China.

Strategic Business Model for T-pop music industry

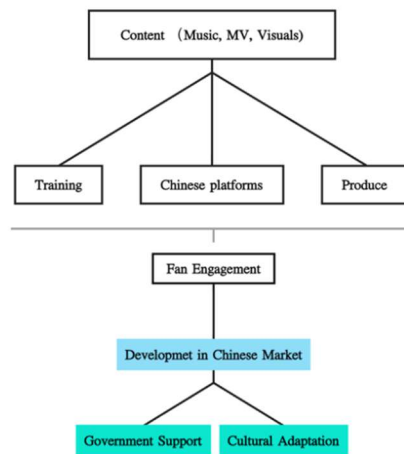


Figure 2: Strategic Business Model for T-pop music industry
Source: Zenghui Shen

The researchers analyzed the strategic business model as figure 2 developed for T-pop's development in the Chinese market and highlighted a multi-layered approach centered on content quality, audience engagement, and long-term sustainability.

1. At the top of the model, high-quality content which is positioned as the foundational driver of T-pop's success. This content is the main factor that attracts young Chinese audiences.

2. To support this content-driven strategy, three key elements were identified: artist training, Chinese digital platforms, and professional production. A well-structured training system is essential to enhance the skills, image, and professionalism of Thai artists. Distribution through widely used Chinese platforms such as TikTok, Bilibili, and QQ Music ensures that T-pop content effectively reaches its target audience. At the same time, investment in high-quality production and branding enhances T-pop's visual and sonic appeal, improving its competitive value in the music market.

2.1. These supporting elements converge into a focus on fan engagement, which plays a vital role in maintaining audience loyalty and driving interaction. Fan engagement includes activities such as joining fan groups, attending fan meetings, and purchasing exclusive merchandise, which can deepen the emotional connection between fans and artists.

2.2 As fan engagement increases, it provides T-pop with a strong foundation for the future of the industry. The broader goal of developing in the Chinese market is supported by this model and the goal of this study.

2.3 This market expansion is further supported by two driving factors: government support and cultural adaptation. Policy supports and investment provide the structural resources needed for the T-pop industry to develop, while the integration of Thai and Chinese cultural elements ensures local relevance and appeal.

The researchers believe that T-pop's path to success in China depends not only on content, but also on a strategically interconnected system of training, distribution, production, fan loyalty, policy coordination and cultural sensitivity. These elements must work in synergy to achieve sustainable growth and differentiate from K-pop.

Conclusion and discussion

This study examines the impact of K-pop business models on the development of T-pop and aims to establish a strategic business framework for the T-pop industry to guide T-pop's entry into the Chinese market.

The main objectives of this study are to identify T-pop's target audience in China, analyze the key success factors that K-pop can adapt to the Thai music industry, and develop a business strategy that will enable T-pop to attract and retain young Chinese people in Thailand and beyond.

1. The results of the study show that one of the biggest challenges facing T-pop is the lack of a structured artist training system. This finding is consistent with (Negus, 2015), who described K-pop's success as being rooted in a rigorous selection, training, taking classes and branding process. To address this issue, a systematic training model suitable for the Thai entertainment industry should be implemented. Ensure that artists are fully prepared while maintaining the personality of T-pop.

2. In addition, leveraging digital platforms such as TikTok (Douyin), Bilibili, QQ Music, and Weibo is essential to penetrate the Chinese market as these platforms play a leading role in shaping music consumption habits. The findings of this study align with previous literature that emphasizes the promotional power of digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Weibo (Laffan, 2021; Parc & Kim, 2020). T-pop's promotion strategy should focus on increasing content visibility, optimizing social media engagement, and leveraging multi-platform distribution channels to maximize audience reach.

3. In addition, content excellence and cultural adaptability are essential to increase T-pop's appeal. The finding aligns with (CEA, 2022), which emphasized the hybridization of Thai music under the influence of K-pop. By investing in high-quality music production, incorporating Chinese cultural elements, and diversifying musical styles, T-pop can differentiate itself from K-pop while resonating with Chinese audiences.

4. The lack of Thai government support highlighted in the literature (Xiaoli et al., 2022; ไผ่สไตส์, 2023.3.20) is also reflected in this study's findings. Achieving sustainable success requires more than just industry-driven efforts—government support and cross-border collaboration are

essential to providing the financial infrastructure needed for long-term growth. Public-private partnerships, targeted financing programs, and alliances with Chinese entertainment companies can accelerate T-pop's expansion and enhance its market competitiveness.

5. While K-pop fandom has been extensively analyzed in the literature as a key driver of market expansion (Parc & Kim, 2020), this study reveals that T-pop significantly lags in the development of structured fan communities. Data shows that Chinese audiences support artists by purchasing albums, joining fan communities, and participating in interactive events through online platforms. The researchers believe that establishing exclusive fan networks for Chinese fans, organizing digital fan meetings, and offering limited-edition merchandise will be key to cultivating strong audience loyalty and increasing revenue sources.

6. Invest in high-quality production and branding. To compete with the international music industry, Thailand needs to improve its production quality, from music creation to music videos and stage performances. Investing in professional production teams and advanced recording technology will help enhance T-pop's global appeal.

Ultimately, to achieve the research objectives, T-pop must develop a sustainable business strategy that integrates structured artist training, digital marketing innovation, content excellence, and strategic audience engagement. By effectively adapting the commercial elements of K-pop's success while maintaining its unique identity, T-pop can expand its influence in China, solidify its position in the international music industry, and establish itself as a long-term competitor in the Chinese music market.

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