

# Do Chinese women believe contemporary girl-power K-pop groups influence their physical and psychological attitudes about their bodies and beauty aesthetics?

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## Abstract:

This study investigates the influence of contemporary K-pop girl groups on Chinese women's perceptions of body image, beauty aesthetics, and empowerment. Through a combination of qualitative research methods and surveys, the research reveals that while K-pop girl groups have inspired discussions on female empowerment, their influence is often superficial and commercialized. The commercialization of female empowerment in K-pop reinforces unattainable beauty standards, leading to increased appearance anxiety and mental health challenges among young Chinese women. The study also highlights the role of social media in amplifying these effects, further complicating the relationship between K-pop's portrayal of empowerment and the lived experiences of its audience. The findings underscore the need for more critical engagement with media messages and suggest that the empowerment promoted by K-pop girl groups may not fully challenge traditional gender norms or address broader structural inequalities.

**Keywords:** K-pop girl groups, Female empowerment, Beauty standards, Social media influence, Chinese women, Body image, Commercialization, Mental health, Feminism, Gender norms

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the growth of girl-power K-pop girl groups has sparked deep reflections on whether K-pop culture promotes feminist expression, highlighting the inherent tension and contradictions. K-pop groups, especially those promoting "strong women,"

have gained global popularity for their catchy music, complex choreography, and sophisticated dances (Kim, 2018). However, the industry prioritizes the visual image of performers over their musical achievements (Han, 2023). This focus perpetuates cultural biases about body image and reinforces traditional gender norms (Sun et al., 2022). Moreover, social

media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and Little Red Book instill idealized image standards in their users, further exacerbating the body stereotypes of young Chinese women (Zhang & Negus, 2020).

As many scholars have pointed out, K-pop is essentially a product of patriarchal capitalism and is full of the male gaze (Jo, 2020). The image of K-pop girl groups is often objectified and sexualized in this social context. However, driven by economic interests, K-pop girl groups and their entertainment companies have launched works falsely claiming to promote feminist ideas to attract audiences. This concept and the idea of girl groups triggered a discussion about women's discourse and self-expression. Additionally, the rise of K-pop girl groups has exacerbated the blind pursuit of unrealistic body and appearance standards by ordinary women, making low self-esteem a common phenomenon (Luminița, 2022).

The influence of K-pop girl groups on young Chinese women's beauty standards has a profound impact on their mental health. When ordinary women strive to achieve these mainstream appearances and body images, they often need to experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The relentless pursuit of these standards can lead to adverse body problems, such as eating disorders and other serious mental health issues (Zhong, 2023). Social media platforms amplify these effects by constantly displaying idealized images, creating an environment where young women feel tremendous pressure. This damages their self-esteem and fosters the development of a deficient culture.

The impact of the prevalence of K-pop girl groups on Chinese social media is bidirectional. On the one hand, their image brings appearance anxiety to Chinese women. K-pop girl groups' firm image and confident attitude inspire many young women and promote discussions about women's empowerment (Dimri, 2023). However, Liu (2022) pointed out that Korean girl groups are commercialized and only packaged as symbols of women's empowerment by the Korean pop music industry and still follow patriarchal aesthetics. Therefore, whether Korean K-pop girl groups promote women's discourse power is questionable.

This paper will analyze relevant academic journal articles and books from the past five years. It focuses on the impact of female empowerment promoted by K-pop girl groups on social media on contemporary young Chinese women's aesthetic standards of appearance. Moreover, this study was conducted to analyze the importance of K-pop culture in shaping gender roles and the true significance of female empowerment in a commercialized environment. Through this study, the research team hopes to provide new perspectives and theoretical support for

the impact of K-pop culture on the empowerment and aesthetic standards of women worldwide, especially Chinese women. As mentioned above, although K-pop girl groups' works contain elements of female empowerment, they are primarily driven by capital and market forces. It is more likely to exacerbate females' beauty anxiety and bring adverse effects on women's mental health. The female idols are carefully packaged to cater to market demand, and their commercialized female empowerment has enhanced the status and confidence of women, which remains to be explored.

## 2. Literature Review

Current research on Korean girl groups and women primarily examines the influence of Korean pop culture and the spread of feminist ideas. However, there is a significant gap in studies addressing the promotion of feminism and its impact on women's appearances within the Chinese Internet sphere.

### 2.1 Influence of K-pop Girl Groups on Feminism and Women's Empowerment

Mathematicians who study women's topics define "female empowerment" as a positive and multidimensional process. It enables women to gain power and control over all areas of their lives to make strategic choices (Sharaunga et al., 2019). According to Banet-Weiser and Rottenberg (2020), women's empowerment and feminism share common goals, including the pursuit of gender equality and the challenge to patriarchy. However, some scholars also noted that women's empowerment focuses more on women's personal growth and opportunities through practical measures, while feminism seeks systemic change to address gender inequality (Banet-Weiser & Rottenberg, 2020).

Promoting women's empowerment in social media can influence prevailing appearance standards for women. According to Cohen et al. (2019), social media platforms can advance diverse and inclusive images of women to challenge traditional beauty norms, including body shape and appearance. Social media can provide women with platforms to express their ideas and (re-)define their beauty (Cohen et al., 2019). These trends are also linked to the rise of fitness culture and natural beauty trends (Kumar, 2023). However, many scholars have noted that Chinese women have yet to escape patriarchal beauty standards (Shao, 2023). These standards span time and space, affecting women of multiple generations.

Additionally, the ideal body and beauty standards of contemporary women are strongly influenced by social media. Chinese women still pursue a slim figure, fair skin,

big eyes, and a small nose (Jung, 2018). This is consistent with the appearance and body shape of most members of today's K-pop girl groups.

## 2.2 Female Empowerment and Commercialization in K-Pop

The development of K-pop has been accompanied by commercialization, transforming music into commodities that can be bought and sold (Kim, 2017b). Commercializing the K-pop industry involves marketing K-pop girl groups as commodities for public consumption. According to Gosse (n.d.), entertainment companies often "package and manufacture" these K-pop girl and boy groups. Entertainment companies meticulously select the women members and "design" these groups, shaping their appearance, characteristics, and image to appeal to audiences. Those K-pop girl groups are promoted like luxury goods through various channels, including music platforms, movies, and social media. Additionally, entertainment companies sell related peripheral products such as albums, clothing accessories, and other collectibles to fans, maximizing the value of girl groups (Gosse, n.d.). The company behind the K-pop girl-power groups does not just profit from them but also from the anxiety of females.

Although K-pop girl groups primarily promote concepts of feminism through their music, high popularity, and exposure, the freedom and empowerment promoted in these performances and songs are superficial (Sun et al., 2022). These so-called empowerments cannot change gender inequality because they are profit-oriented and commercial. Female idols often need a specific appearance and image to attract more audiences and economic returns. This male perspective, subjectivity, and obvious female body symbolism do not alleviate previous social discrimination against women and may even aggravate it (Jonas, 2021). Therefore, despite the commercial success of these performances, they do not truly change traditional gender stereotypes or challenge patriarchal structures (Kim, 2017a). K-pop's influence on Chinese fans has significantly increased internally and externally, attracting widespread attention (Lee & Zhang, 2020). K-pop music is usually performed by young, well-trained groups focusing on singing, dancing, and stage performance (Gosse, n.d.; Cha & Kim, 2014; Sun, 2022). K-pop girl groups strive to promote female empowerment and challenge traditional beauty ideals through music and popularity (Tresna et al., 2021). Their appearance and body shape still pursue the patriarchal preferences of thinness, angelica, and exquisiteness. (Tresna et al., 2021). According to Seo (2020) and Li (2022), the appearance standards of K-pop girl groups are usually slim bodies, fair skin, and delicate fa-

cial features. In addition to being a form of musical style expression, K-pop is also a channel for conveying complex social and gender messages (Jonas, 2021). However, the contradictory behavior of K-pop girl groups in advocating female equality and pursuing patriarchal aesthetics shows that their so-called empowerment is more of a commercial pretense. This raises questions about how Chinese women interpret and internalize these potentially conflicting ideals. This study will explore whether the physical appearance of K-pop girl groups shapes Chinese women's perceptions of beauty and body image. Understanding the potential influence of K-pop girl groups on Chinese women's aesthetics helps promote healthier community environments and provides strategies for preventing mental health problems.

## 2.3 K-pop's Impact on Chinese Women's Self-Perception and Mental Health

The wide reach of Chinese social media has allowed the images and information of Korean K-pop girl groups to spread rapidly across the country. This has influenced countless young women's aesthetic concepts and self-awareness (Song & Feng, 2022; Jin, 2023). According to Zhang and Negus (2020), social media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and Little Red Book (Xiaohongshu) have emerged as essential avenues for disseminating Korean pop culture. These platforms provide a means for K-pop girl groups to advertise their music and appearance, influencing how Chinese women see beauty and body image. Liu (2022) also stated that Chinese women who frequently use social media have more stringent expectations about body image and body shape than those who use social media less frequently. This rise can be linked to individuals comparing their body image to their preferred influencers and idols (Chidester et al., 2023). Unattainable beauty ideals contribute to widespread poor self-esteem and can result in significant psychiatric issues.

## 2.4 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Current research on Korean girl groups highlights their influence on feminist ideas and beauty standards. Still, it needs to focus on how these dynamics affect Chinese women, especially within the Chinese Internet sphere. K-pop girl groups often promote superficial empowerment tied to patriarchal beauty norms, raising questions about their true impact on Chinese women's self-perception. Social media amplifies these influences, affecting beauty ideals and potentially leading to mental health issues among Chinese women. This review of existing literature shows significant gaps in research on this topic. Future research is needed to understand the evolution of K-pop's portray-

al of women on Chinese social media and its impact on women's empowerment and self-perception. Studies must explore how Chinese women interpret the mixed messages of empowerment and traditional beauty norms promoted by K-pop girl groups. Research should also examine the role of social media in shaping these beauty standards and the resulting mental health impacts. Future work should consider diverse experiences among Chinese women to understand K-pop culture's complex effects better.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Samples

This study uses qualitative research methods and questionnaires to conduct an in-depth survey into the mental health status of Chinese women and attitudes towards empowering K-pop groups. The objective is to understand the influence of Chinese female group body image and inner confidence on Korean K-pop girl groups. The advantage of quantitative research methods is the measurable data that results. While collecting questionnaires, the research team distributed them through online platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin, as well as offline channels to ensure the diversity and breadth of the sample.

#### 3.2 Research question

How is the agenda of women's empowerment promoted in K-pop girl groups manifested and accepted in the Chinese cultural context?

#### 3.3 Questionnaire and survey method

The questionnaire discusses the impact of K-pop girl groups on Chinese women's aesthetics and self-confidence, highlighting both positive aspects (promotion of self-discipline and health consciousness) and negative aspects (including pressure to conform to the beauty standard and resulting anxiety). In addition, it investigates the extent of the commercialization of female empowerment in K-pop and the limitations of its impact on challenging deep-seated social issues related to gender inequality. The questionnaire was created, distributed, and collected using the online tool Sojump (<https://www.wjx.cn>). Sojump is a data collection, analysis, and management platform that integrates online questionnaires, exams, 360-degree assessments, forms, measurements, and polls. The 'Social Media and Psychological State Questionnaire' was designed in-house based on the literature review, this study's needs, and the researchers' experience. The survey collected 1,040 responses, with 99.13% of respondents being female. Among the respondents, 29.76% were from the

southeast region, and 42.71% were and used social media for 5-8 hours a day.

Additionally, 30.63% of interviewees are exposed to feminism several times a week. More than half (655 interviewees) are highly interested in feminism topics and often buy K-pop-related products (55.07%). The questionnaire was developed around five significant topics: demographic information, social media usage, knowledge and opinions on women's health and empowerment, K-pop influence and engagement, and attitudes about body image and health. The survey included single-choice and multiple-choice questions.

After completing the survey design, four participants (two undergraduates and two high school students) conducted a pilot test. Then, the research team checked for omissions and revised the survey to solve the problems found during the pilot. These problems included questions about question design, order, and content. To improve the quality and efficiency of data collection and get as many valid mobile-phone questionnaires as possible, the research team randomly distributed electronic red envelopes of different values to encourage the respondents' enthusiasm. The research team also distributed the questionnaires on multiple social media platforms to obtain more comprehensive and objective data.

Data collection from different platforms occurred over three days; about 1,040 responses were received from 6 male and 1,026 female participants. The significant gender difference in responses is due to the platform's predominantly female user base. The data were managed and analyzed using the Sojump platform, with descriptive statistics and correlation analyses employed to explore the relationship between social media use and psychological states.

On this basis, a series of measurement indicators, such as the degree of interest, frequency, overall evaluation, and impression of the topic of women's empowerment, and bar charts, pie charts, and directional comparisons, were generated for comparative analysis.

#### 3.4 Statistical analysis

After finishing the comparative analysis, the research team analyzed the questionnaires to eliminate invalid questionnaires. The elimination criteria included duplicate IP addresses, questions left blank, and questionnaires with less than 90 seconds to answer (average duration 2 minutes and 15 seconds). The team eventually excluded 97 questionnaires, leaving 943 valid. Data analysis was performed using cross-comparison analysis and SPSS analysis using Sojump software. Descriptive analysis and simple comparative analysis were automatically performed using

the statistical function of Sojump, and variance analysis was performed using SPSS to explore the attitudes and knowledge of different demographic characteristics of the respondents on women’s empowerment and the impact of Korean pop music on women’s empowerment.

The data were managed and analyzed using the Sojump platform. Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses

explored the relationship between social media use and psychological states. A series of measurement indicators were also constructed, and bar charts, pie charts, and directional comparisons were generated for comparative analysis.

### 4. Findings & Discussion

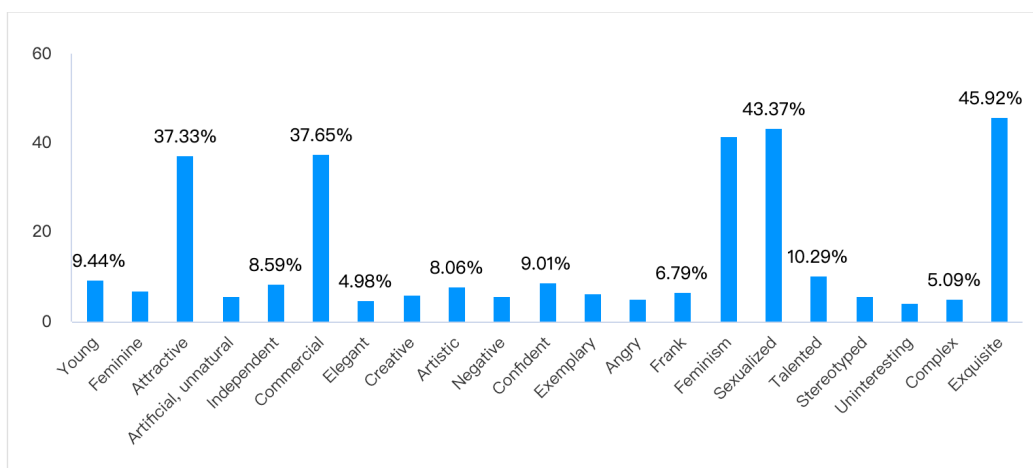
**Table 1 The interest of fans and non-fans of K-pop girl groups in products that are good for women**

<i>x/y</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<i>subtotal</i>
<i>not a fan</i>	3	12	22	9	25	22	23	18	14	14	162
<i>&lt;1 year</i>	8	32	21	35	23	36	28	14	13	9	219
<i>1-3 years</i>	5	30	26	19	34	33	39	21	11	15	233
<i>3-5 years</i>	4	17	17	20	19	25	28	16	9	17	172
<i>5-10 years</i>	5	16	10	13	19	23	14	6	2	4	112
<i>&gt;10 years</i>	2	6	5	5	4	7	4	8	3	1	45

The surge in sales of female-friendly products endorsed by girl-power-associated groups demonstrates commercial success but does not necessarily translate to substantive empowerment for women. According to Table 1, K-pop fans (781) are significantly more interested in female-friendly products than non-fans (162), and this trend increases with age (Appendix 1). While these groups often promote messages of female empowerment, the underlying dynamics reveal a more nuanced reality. Neoliberal feminism redefines beauty behaviors and consumption as pleasurable, self-selected pursuits, yet this “voluntary” choice often leads to self-objectification rather than true freedom (Gill & Scharff, 2013). Neoliberal feminism emphasizes personal success, economic freedom, and professional autonomy but tends to focus on individual agency while overlooking broader structural inequalities (Chen, 2013). Feminism portrayed in K-pop can be seen as a

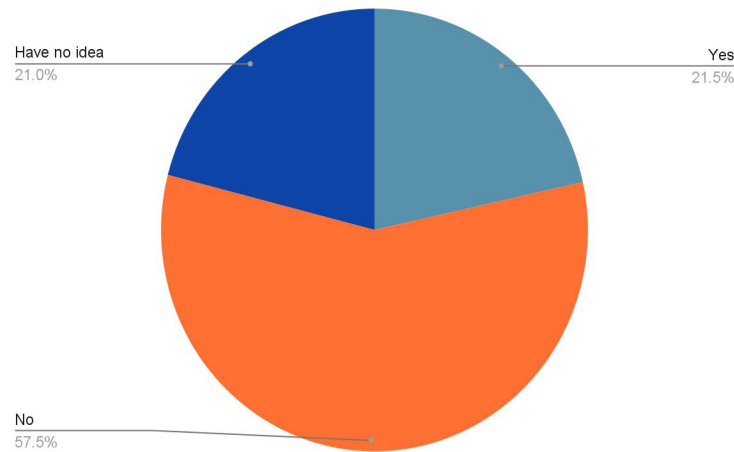
solid opposition to traditional feminist ideals, combining empowerment slogans with erotic performances that cater to the male gaze. Therefore, the influence of K-pop girl groups on women’s empowerment and consumer behavior presents a complex interplay of neoliberal feminism and commercialization.

Additionally, fans frequently need a comprehensive understanding of these products’ purpose and proper use. Marketing companies perpetuate consumerist ideologies under the guise of empowerment and continue practices like the “pink tax” without addressing fundamental issues of gender equality. Thus, while K-pop girl groups appear to promote women’s empowerment and influence consumer behavior, the underlying dynamics raise essential questions about the nature of empowerment being promoted and its long-term impact on gender equality and women’s mental health.



**Figure 1 Which of the following five options best describes the K-pop girl group?**

**Table 2 Do you think the music and performances of K-pop girl groups promote the well-being and empowerment of women?**

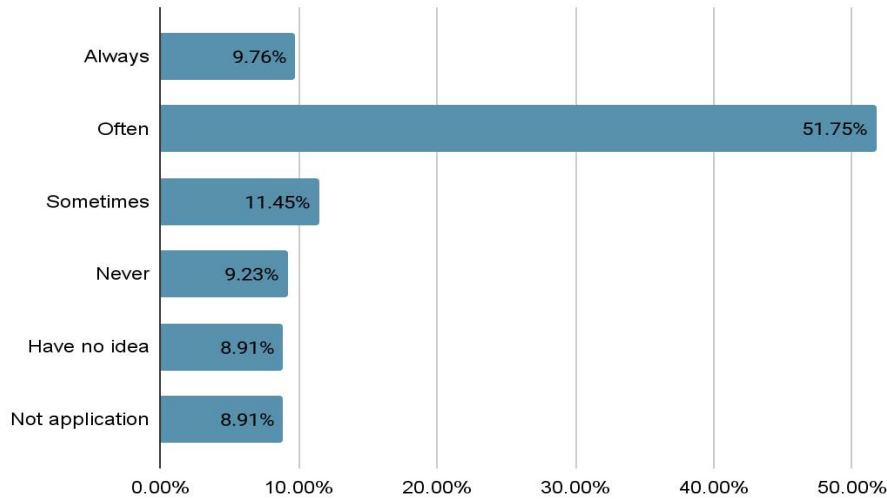


The public's view of Korean girl groups presents a contradictory view. People sometimes think that Korean girl groups are representatives of promoting female power, while sometimes they think that they follow traditional beauty standards and are sexualized (Figure 1). This polarized view reveals the possible disconnect in the public's perception of empowerment. The discussion data on the most suitable adjectives to describe Korean girl groups in the survey (Figure 1) showed that 409 respondents believed that Korean girl groups were sexualized. In comparison, 394 respondents supported that Korean girl groups were symbols of feminism. The striking similarity in the percentage of the two opposed adjectives has triggered people's reflection on whether the so-called feminist groups carefully packaged by entertainment companies empower modern women in today's society. Table 2 shows that 57.48% of the respondents believe that the music and performances of popular Korean girl groups do not contribute to the welfare and empowerment of women. 21% of respondents must learn whether Korean girl groups promote women's empowerment. Kim (2011)

stated that those with an apathetic attitude are mostly fans highly interested in women's empowerment and feminism.

The reasons behind this paradox phenomenon could be various. The interpretation of these images is highly subjective and varies based on individual backgrounds, cultural contexts, and personal understandings of feminism. What one person may perceive as empowering, another might view as objectifying. Additionally, the commercialization of feminism plays a significant role. Entertainment companies strategically package these groups with "girl power" rhetoric, blending feminist messages with marketable, often sexualized imagery. This approach appeals to a broad audience, leading to the conflicting perceptions observed in the survey. Moreover, evolving definitions of empowerment contribute to this phenomenon. In contemporary society, some argue that embracing and controlling one's sexuality is a form of empowerment, which blurs the line between sexualization and feminism (Romariz, 2021).

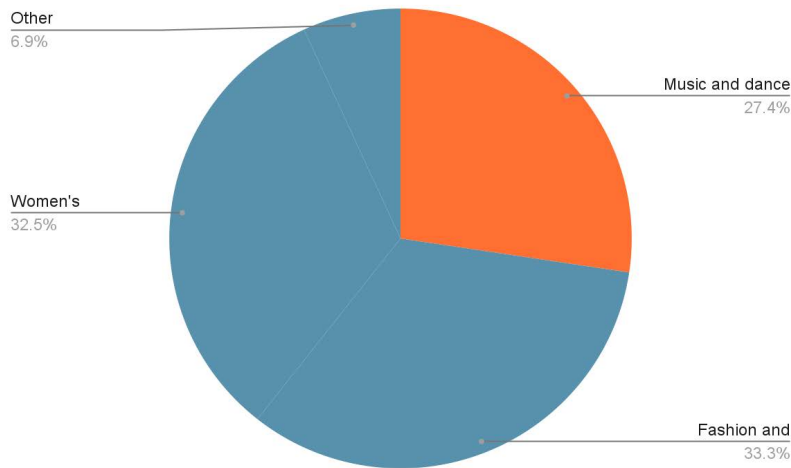
**Table 3 Listening to girl groups’ music, watching their dance videos, and learning their dances gives me confidence.**



Korean girl group dance videos have brought confidence to Chinese women to a certain extent. However, this confidence may not come from the feminism promoted by Korean girl groups but from the fast-paced and energetic performance of the songs themselves (Li, 2023). The

conclusions in Table 3 also support this argument, with 61.58% of respondents who believe that Korean girl group music and dance give them confidence generally believe that Korean girl groups do not promote women’s empowerment.

**Table 4 What topics are discussed about Korean pop girl groups on social media?**



The Korean girl power girl group is a heated topic nowadays, so the image of the group members largely influences fans and even the entire female community’s perception of beauty. Table 4 found that most people (77.2%) saw the discussion about K-pop groups as the members’ fashion and appearance on social media. Almaani (2023) also mentioned that a fashion outfit and fashion brand is one of the trends in K-Pop idols. This phenomenon shows that Chinese women pay attention not only to appearance but also to fashion.

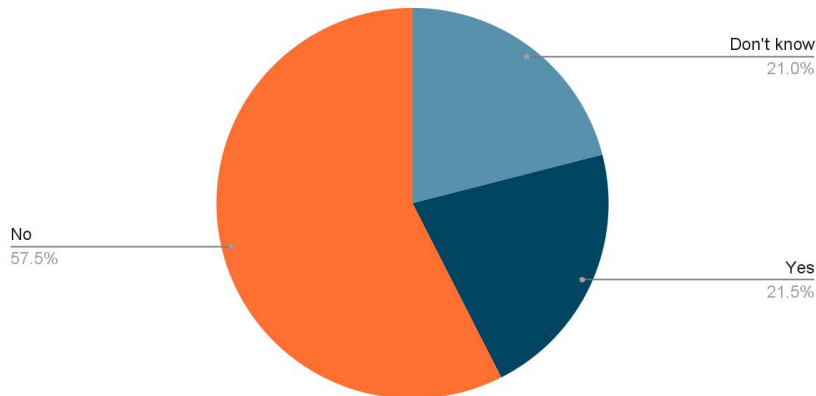
The impact of this phenomenon is two-sided. From a positive perspective, some girls may become more self-disciplined, start exercising, and pay attention to their physical health. However, Korean pop girl groups’ ideal body and appearance that meet the public aesthetic, such as slim body, fair skin, and high nose bridge, will make fans blindly admire and follow. This unattainable aesthetic pursuit has caused a series of extreme behaviors. Some girls may pursue an extremely slim body and fair, delicate appearance through sub-healthy means such as dieting, tak-

ing medicine, and even liposuction, which is also caused by self-anxiety. Since topics related to fashion and appear-

ance are often at the forefront of the public consciousness, the impact on women becomes even more critical.

**Table 5 Do Korean girl groups promote economic and professional equality for women?**

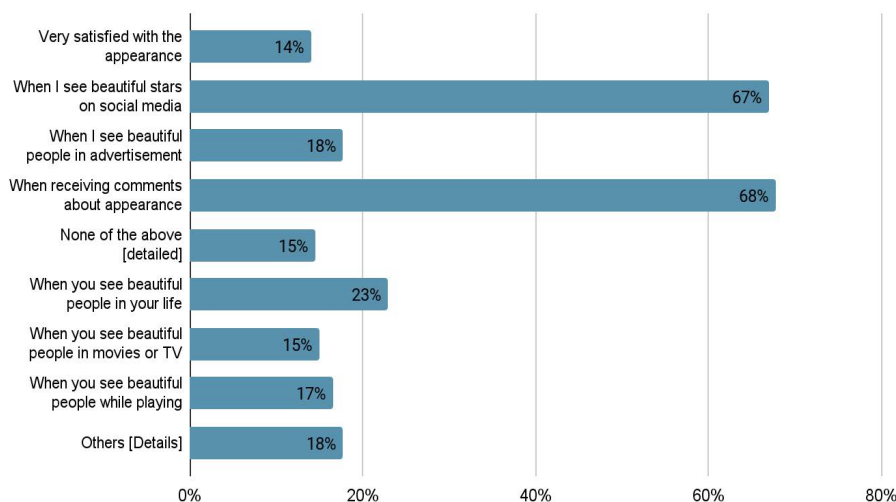
Do you think the music and performances of K-pop girl groups promote the well-being and empowerment of women?



In addition, female K-pop fans are more likely to be influenced by the unattainable economic and professional success of women promoted by idols. Table 5 shows that 57.48% of people believe that K-pop girl groups emphasize the unattainable success of women in the economic and professional fields. Jia et al. (2023) showed a positive

correlation between social anxiety, socioeconomic status, and celebrity worship. Moreover, women are more likely to follow celebrities. This phenomenon can lead to increased pressure and unrealistic expectations for ordinary women to try to achieve the same level of success.

**Table 6 Which of the following scenarios will make you feel insecure about your appearance?**



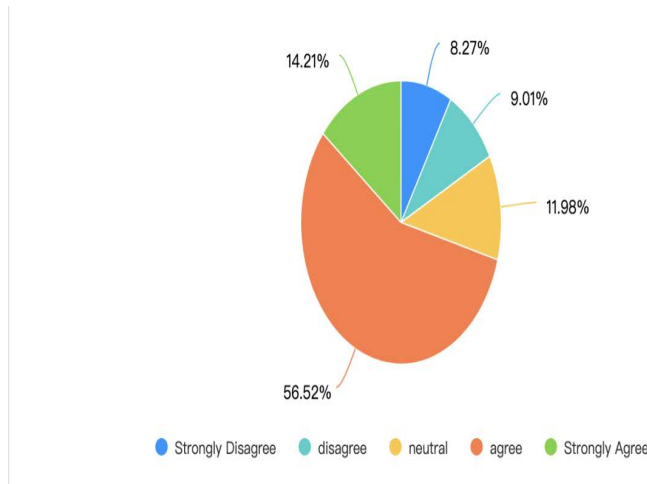
The portrayal of idealized beauty standards on social media, especially the beautification of the image of Korean K-pop girl groups, has dramatically exacerbated young people's insecurities and anxieties. This trend has further compounded Chinese women's obsession with pursuing an ideal body shape, affecting their physical and mental health. Table 6 shows that 66.91% of the respondents

feel more insecure and anxious about their appearance after seeing glamorous celebrities on social media. Zhong (2023) proved that celebrities with near-perfect figures and appearances on social media significantly exacerbated women's blind pursuit of sub-healthy aesthetics, thus bringing negative impacts on physical and mental health. In addition, most respondents who choose how often they



wear makeup daily are 18-25 years old (270) (Appendix 2). However, Smith et al. (2017) mentioned that although female college students agree that wearing makeup can bring them confidence, it also brings a certain amount of

pressure. This pressure can be attributed to social expectations and idealized beauty standards in the media, including K-pop.

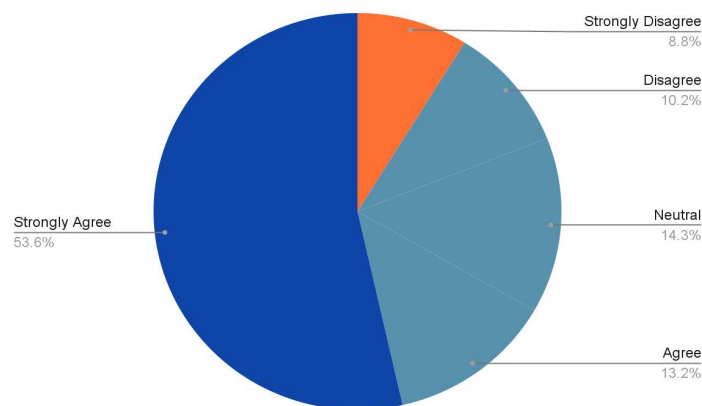


**Figure 2 I feel more confident when I receive positive comments about my selfies on social media.**

Table 6 shows the occasions and situations where Chinese women feel unconfident. The survey results show that 66.91% of the respondents lack confidence in their appearance when they see beautiful stars on social media or receive comments about their appearance. Tresna et al. (2021) stated that the exquisite appearance and slim figures of K-pop girl groups have exacerbated people’s anxiety about their appearance, causing many people to feel insecure. Moreover, more than half of the participants (67.76%) support social media comments directly

impacting their self-confidence. Pounders et al. (2016) and Zhong (2022) showed that posts about appearance lack “likes” or do not receive negative feedback, which negatively impacts self-esteem. This trend is consistent with the conclusion of the data in Figure 2: 70.73% of the respondents support the idea that receiving positive comments on appearance on social media can improve self-confidence. This further confirms people’s desire for positive feedback and the impact of social media comments on Chinese women’s self-confidence.

**Table 7 I feel more confident with makeup.**



K-pop girl groups promote women’s empowerment through visualization and semiotics. However, this notion of empowerment is often highly commercialized, mainly to cater to market demand and attract viewers and fans rather than to challenge deep-seated structural social

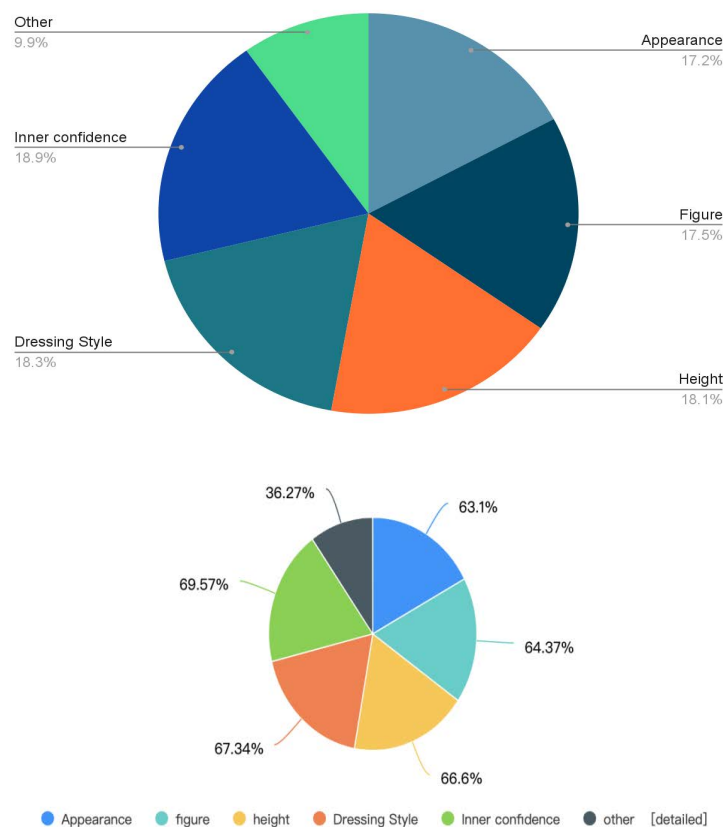
issues. Despite the success of such superficial communication in terms of breadth and the widespread attention it has received, especially in the Chinese market, its content has remained chiefly at the visual and symbolic level. It has lacked a substantive challenge to patriarchal social

structures. Chinese female viewers are often passive when exposed to these symbols of empowerment, making it challenging to think profoundly and push for fundamental changes to gender inequality. Survey data on Chinese women’s makeup frequency reflects this contradiction. According to the survey, 66.85% of respondents wear makeup daily, 14.06% wear makeup only on special occasions, and 10.51% never wear makeup (Appendix 3). These figures highlight a potential disconnect between the commercialized empowerment promoted by K-pop and the lived experience of Chinese women. The fact that a significant percentage of women feel compelled to adhere to beauty standards daily may suggest that the empowering message of K-pop girl groups is not as entrenched as it seems.

While wearing makeup is often seen as a boost to self-esteem, it also reinforces appearance anxiety. In the survey

(Table 7), the vast majority of respondents (53.55%) strongly agreed that they feel more confident when wearing makeup, with a further 13.15% agreeing. However, only 18.98% of respondents disagreed, which is consistent with the hypothesis that people with lower self-esteem are more likely to rely on makeup to boost their confidence. The data suggests that while makeup can temporarily increase subjective well-being through social comparison and external recognition, it can also lead individuals into a vicious cycle of appearance anxiety. Makeup can enhance confidence and create potentially harmful psychological pressure when choosing not to wear makeup. This duality reflects why the survey respondents expressed increased self-confidence in their appearance and the potential psychological pressure that they might feel less confident without makeup.

**Table 8 If you wanted to change one thing about yourself, which would you choose?**



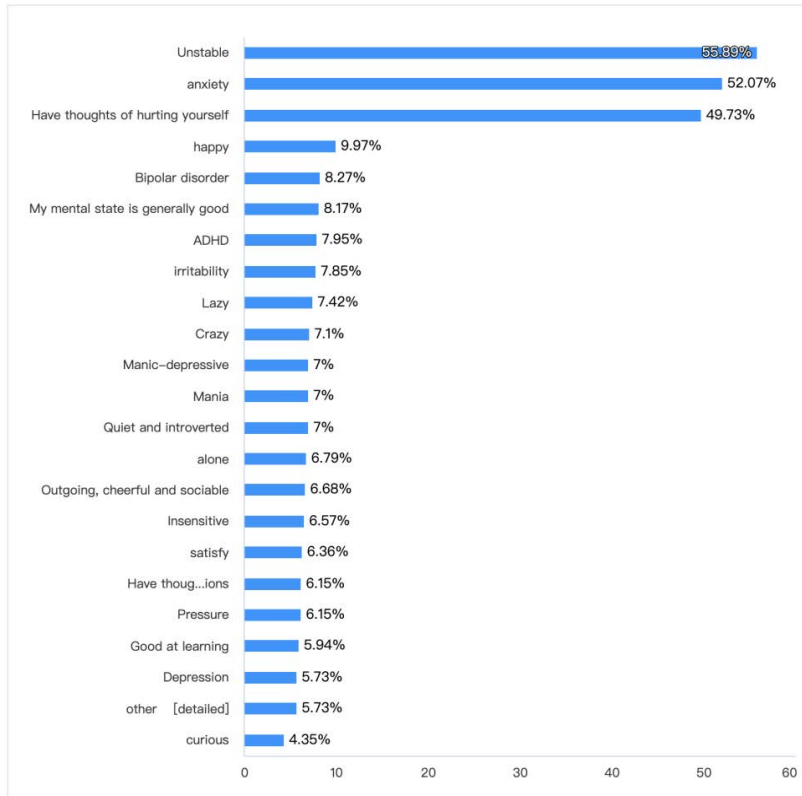
**Figure 3 What are you most satisfied with about yourself?**

The primary motivation for seeking to change their appearance and reminding is their lack of confidence in their body and appearance (Molina et al., 2012). Table 8 shows that 660 respondents (69.99%) want to change their appearance, and 639 (67.76%) want to change their body

shape. However, many respondents also said they were satisfied with their appearance and height (63.1% and 64.37% respectively)(Figure 3). According to Shridharani et al. (2010), this desire to change their appearance is closely related to their fluctuating mood. Unstable

emotions make them attractive and sometimes imperfect, especially when seeing K-pop girl groups with exquisite faces and bodies (Poulter & Treharne, 2021). This morbid aesthetic will continue to erode Chinese women’s inner

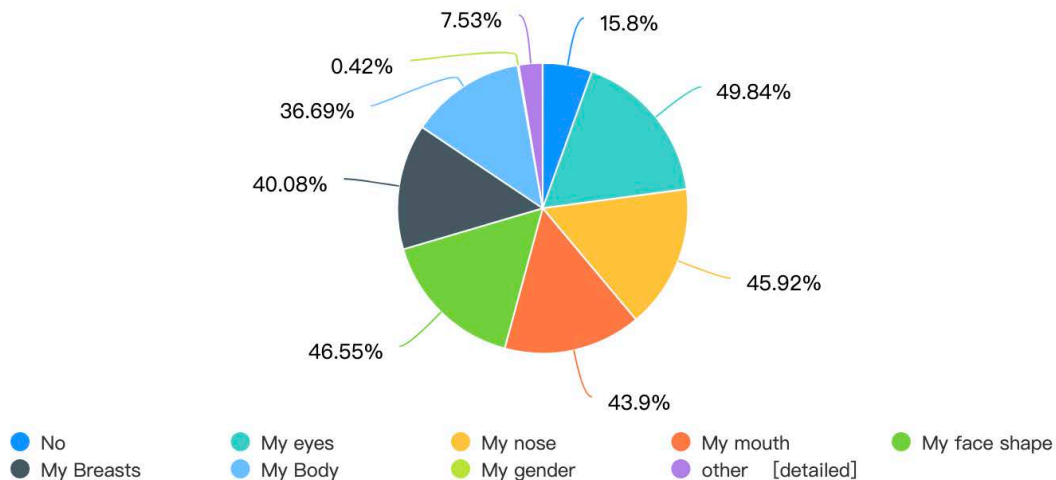
defenses and self-confidence, prompting them to change themselves and pursue appearance and body shape that conform to current aesthetic standards.



**Figure 4 Your recent mental state (most of the time)**

Mental health problems are a common problem in society, especially among college students. (Figure 4) shows that 491 people reported anxiety, 527 reported emotional instability, and 469 admitted to thoughts of self-harm. This may be due to the large amount of time people spend on social media daily (5-8 hours). According to Kushwaha et al. (2022), discussions on social media can be polarized, causing users’ moods to fluctuate between anxiety and confidence. Zhong (2022) also demonstrated that people who frequently use social media are more likely to feel

anxious and have low confidence in their appearance and body image than people who use social media less frequently. This not only exacerbates anxiety but also brings emotional risks such as depression and, in severe cases, thoughts of self-harm. This survey sample mainly comprised college students aged 21-25 with immature and unstable personalities (Western & Chang, 2000). Unstable personalities make this group more susceptible to external influences, leading to negative emotions and mental illness.



**Figure 5** Have you ever thought about or taken action for cosmetic surgery?

Moreover, some of them not only remind themselves of anxiety, but they also consider taking action. In light of the survey data (Figure 5), 794 respondents claimed they had considered or taken action to undergo cosmetic surgery. This shows that they are very interested in becoming their ideal self through cosmetic surgery and hope to become the perfect version of themselves. The main reason for this idea is that they lack self-confidence in their appearance and hope to gain confidence and recognition through minor adjustments (Zhong, 2022). Notably, 761 of the 790 respondents who had considered cosmetic surgery were fans of K-pop girl groups. Kim (2017a) demonstrated that some fans would even pursue cosmetic surgery to pursue the same beautiful appearance and slim figure as their idols. This indirectly reflects these women's deep-rooted insecurity and a strong need for external recognition (Pounders et al., 2016). This phenomenon highlights the impact of appearance recognition on some Chinese women's self-esteem and the general effect of social aesthetics on their self-perception.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research reveals the relationship between the rise of K-pop girl groups and young Chinese women's perceptions of beauty and empowerment on social media. K-pop girl groups, especially those advocating "girl power," have inspired many young women to discuss female empowerment and self-expression, presenting strong, confident images that encourage personal success and independence. However, the female empowerment they advocate is often superficial and commercialized, leading to unattainable beauty standards that can trigger beauty anxiety and further mental health issues.

The limitations of this study include the sample's lack of diversity, reliance on self-reported data, and the short-term nature of the research. Future studies should focus on these points by including a more diverse background of women, using more objective data collection methods, and conducting longitudinal studies to understand the long-term effects of K-pop empowerment slogans on Chinese women's body image and mental health.

Future research should also explore intervention-based strategies to promote media literacy and critical thinking about media messages of pop empowerment; cross-cultural comparisons to understand the impact of K-pop fans and not fans; and in-depth qualitative research using interviews to capture the personal experiences and differences of K-pop fans' understanding about women empowerment. By examining these areas, future research can better understand the true impact of women's empowerment on Chinese social media commercially. This can also effectively call on third-party organizations to develop strategies to promote healthier body image and mental health among young Chinese women.

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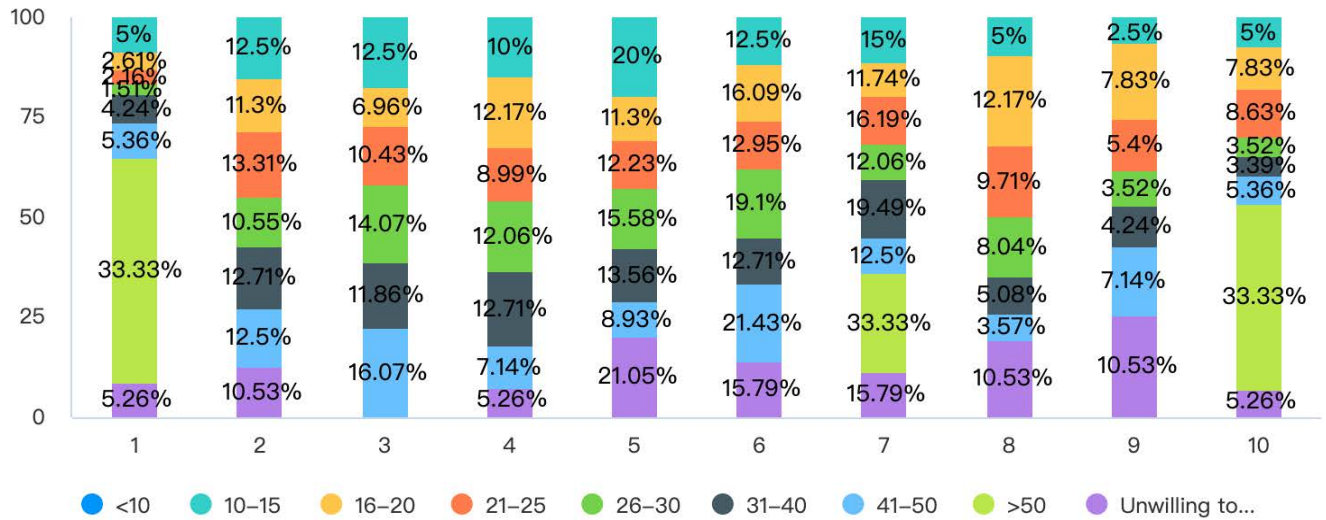
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## Appendixes

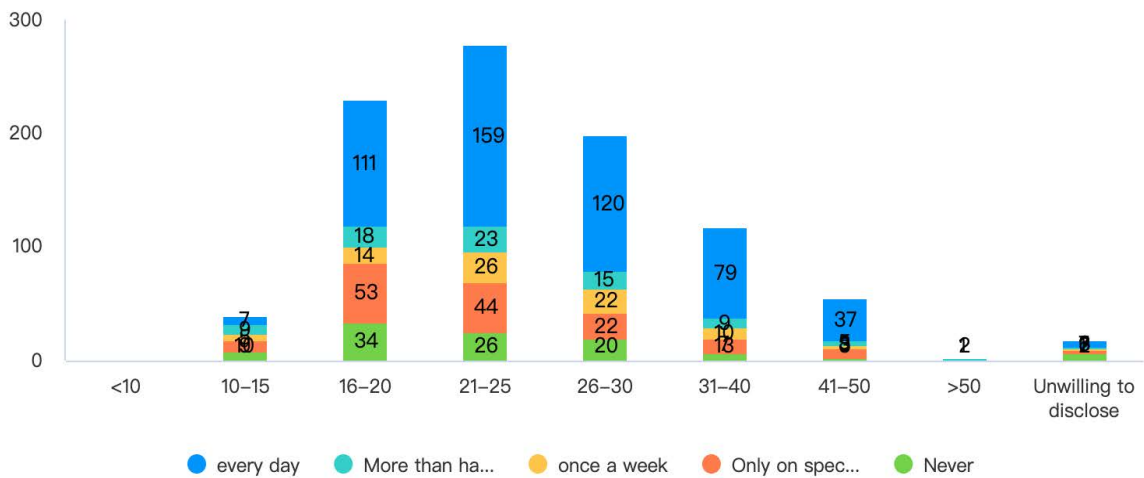
### Appendix 1:

Chinese women's interest in buying feminine products increases with age.



### Appendix 2:

Frequency of wearing makeup among respondents aged 18-25.



### Appendix 3:

How often do Chinese women wear makeup?

