

K-POP IDOL TRAINEES SELECTION PROCESS IN THAILAND



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ชมพรรช รัตนพันธุ์ศรี : กระบวนการคัดเลือกเด็กฝึกหัดสำหรับเป็นศิลปินเกาหลีในประเทศไทย. ( K-POP IDOL TRAINEES SELECTION PROCESS IN THAILAND) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ผศ.ดร.เจษฎา ศาลาทอง

งานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้ใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกเพื่อรวบรวมข้อมูลปฐมภูมิ จากบุคคลที่เกี่ยวข้องจำนวนสิบเอ็ดคน ประกอบด้วยพนักงานสัญชาติไทยและสัญชาติเกาหลีในค่ายเพลงเกาหลีจำนวนสามคน อดีตศิลปินเกาหลีสัญชาติไทยจำนวนสี่คน และอดีตเด็กฝึกหัดค่ายเพลงเกาหลีสัญชาติไทยจำนวนสี่คน และใช้การวิจัยเอกสารเพื่อศึกษาข้อมูลทุติยภูมิ จากวิดิทัศน์สัมภาษณ์ทางยูทูปจำนวนยี่สิบตอน เพื่อศึกษาวิธีการ เกณฑ์การประเมิน และปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อกระบวนการคัดเลือกเด็กฝึกหัดสำหรับเป็นศิลปินเกาหลีในประเทศไทยและสร้างข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ต่อไปในอนาคตหรือนวัตกรรมดนตรีในประเทศไทย

ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากระบวนการคัดเลือกเด็กฝึกหัดสำหรับเป็นศิลปินเกาหลีในประเทศไทยประกอบไปด้วยสามขั้นตอน ได้แก่ ขั้นตอนแรกคือกระบวนการก่อนการคัดเลือก เป็นการวางแผนของค่ายเพลงเกาหลี เช่น การจัดการเวลา กำหนดสถานที่ และการจัดเตรียมทรัพยากรเกี่ยวข้อง ขั้นตอนที่สองคือกระบวนการคัดเลือก ใช้วิธีการคัดเลือกทั้งแบบเปิดและปิด โดยใช้ลักษณะเฉพาะและความสามารถส่วนบุคคลเป็นเกณฑ์การประเมิน และขั้นตอนที่สามคือกระบวนการหลังการคัดเลือก ซึ่งมีการประเมินเพิ่มเติมรวมถึงการฝึกหัดระยะทดลองเพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจที่ตรงกันก่อนตกลงทำสัญญากันทั้งสองฝ่าย

ทั้งนี้ นอกจากการมีสมาชิกวงศิลปินเกาหลีเป็นคนไทยภายใต้แนวคิดเรื่องการผสมผสานวัฒนธรรมระดับโลกกับวัฒนธรรมระดับท้องถิ่นจะทำให้สมาชิกวงคนอื่น ๆ ในวงเป็นที่รู้จักมากขึ้นแล้ว ยังส่งผลให้ได้รับการสนับสนุนจากแฟนเพลงชาวไทย ซึ่งเป็นผู้บริโภคสำคัญเนื่องด้วยวัฒนธรรมของประเทศไทยที่พร้อมให้การสนับสนุนคนไทยด้วยกัน ทั้งยังสร้างโอกาสสำหรับการทำกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ ในประเทศไทยเพิ่มมากขึ้น

การศึกษายังสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงประเด็นที่เกี่ยวข้องกับแนวคิดแรงงานสร้างสรรค์ โดยสามารถจำแนกได้เป็นสี่ประเด็นหลัก ได้แก่ ประเด็นแรกคือสมดุลระหว่างชีวิตการทำงานและชีวิตส่วนตัว พบว่าไม่มีการกำหนดวันหยุดประจำสัปดาห์ นอกเหนือจากการหยุดตามแต่ละโอกาสสำคัญหรือวันหยุดประจำชาติเกาหลี ประเด็นที่สองคือสุขภาพกายและจิตใจ พบว่าปัญหาหลักที่ส่งผลต่อทั้งสุขภาพกายและจิตใจคือแผนการควบคุมอาหารเพื่อลดน้ำหนักที่เข้มงวด ประเด็นที่สามคือการสนับสนุนทางการเงิน พบว่ามีการสนับสนุนค่าใช้จ่ายสำหรับการใช้ชีวิตในประเทศเกาหลีอย่างค่าที่พักและอาหารกลางวัน โดยค่าใช้จ่ายอื่น ๆ จะแตกต่างกันไปในแต่ละบุคคล ซึ่งศิลปินเกาหลีที่เดบิวต์อย่างเป็นทางการแล้วมีแนวโน้มต้องชำระเงินคืนโดยหักจากรายได้ที่ได้รับ ประเด็นสุดท้ายคือระยะเวลาสัญญา โดยการลงนามสัญญาถือเป็นการปฏิบัติตามกฎหมายและข้อตกลงร่วมกันของทั้งสองฝ่าย ทั้งนี้ยังพบประเด็นอื่น ๆ เช่น อุปสรรคด้านภาษาที่นำไปสู่ความเข้าใจผิดในรายละเอียดของสัญญาหรือการหลีกเลี่ยงการขอรับการตรวจลงตราที่ถูกต้องสำหรับศิลปินต่างชาติ

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# # 6488502620 : MAJOR KOREAN STUDIES

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This research employed qualitative methods, utilizing an in-depth interview approach with a total of eleven individuals, including three Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels, four Former Thai K-Pop Idols, and four Former Thai K-Pop Trainees for primary data. Additionally, secondary data was gathered through document research via twenty YouTube video interviews. The study aims to investigate the methods, evaluation principles, and factors influencing the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand and provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry.

The findings revealed that the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand comprised three main steps. First, the Pre-Selection Process involved logistical aspects in K-Labels' planning, such as scheduling, venue selection, and resource allocation. Second, the Selection Process utilized both open and closed recruiting methods, evaluating principles based on Individual Characteristics and Abilities. Third, the Post-Selection Process introduced additional assessments and a training trial period to ensure mutual understanding before finalizing binding agreements.

The evidence disclosed that the inclusion of Thai members, with the idea of Glocalism and Glocalization, not only enhanced the visibility of other group members but also garnered support from Thai fans, contributing to substantial consumer engagement. This was attributed to their fervent cultural support for their compatriots, potentially facilitating the leveraging of promotional activities in Thailand.

The study also shed light on issues related to Creative Labour concepts, encompassing four key areas. Firstly, Work-Life Balance lacked specified regular weekends off, with only occasional breaks or Korean national holidays provided. Secondly, Physical and Mental well-being of the individuals were highlighted through a focus on the potential impact of rigid diet plans on both aspects. Thirdly, Financial Arrangements indicated that financial assistance covered essential living expenses in Korea, including accommodation and lunch fees, and the extent of assistance beyond these expenses varied among individuals. Notably, debut idols were expected to reimburse these costs from their earnings. Finally, Contract Period was ultimately highlighted as a cornerstone of both legal compliance and mutual agreement. However, other challenges emerged, including language barriers leading to misunderstandings in contract details or the intentional avoidance of obtaining the correct visa type for foreign idols.

Field of Study: Korean Studies

Student's Signature .....

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Rationale of the Study

Over several decades, the music industry has established itself as a dominant force with significant global influence. Recently, its economic achievements have been noteworthy, with revenues rising sharply to \$26.2 billion in 2022—a 9% increase compared to the prior year, marking the highest revenue tally since 1999, according to data presented in the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) Global Music Report (IFPI, 2023b). This report not only emphasized the music industry's dedication to transparency but also offered a comprehensive view of its achievements and broader contributions. As the sector progressed, adapting to the opportunities ushered in by digital advancements and fresh business strategies, it displayed a promising potential for further expansion and increased global presence.

The IFPI Global Music Report 2023 offered an enlightening perspective on the trajectory of the Asian music market. It revealed that the sector underwent significant growth, with an increase rate of 15.4%. This impressive upswing has led three Asian nations - namely Japan, China, and Korea - to prominently position themselves among the ten leading global music markets. Within this framework, Japan clinched a commendable second rank, followed by China which settled at the fifth spot, and Korea affirming its place at number seven. These advancements not only reflected the burgeoning appeal of music from these regions but also underscored the vast global influence and economic clout of the Asian music industry. The data further reiterated the increasing significance and central role the Asian region played in shaping the contours of the international music domain.

Beyond the significant achievements in the Asian music market, three K-Pop groups - BTS, Seventeen, and Stray Kids - have gained notable recognition globally, clinching spots within the Top 10 Global Recording Artists of 2022. Their acclaim attested to immense talent and wide-reaching appeal, positioning them as some of

the year's most sought-after artists. BTS, in particular, made a marked impact by securing a notable second position globally. Their ranking was only surpassed by the renowned Taylor Swift, who showcased the profound influence of BTS and their steadily growing international following.

Seventeen, demonstrating their significant impact in the music realm, notably secured the sixth position, emphasizing their strong foothold not only in the K-Pop domain but also in the broader music industry. Their distinct musical prowess, engaging stage presence, and devoted fan community positioned them as one of the standout groups for the year under review. In a similar vein, Stray Kids achieved commendable success by ranking seventh among global recording artists. Their unique and evolving musical approach resonated with audiences both within their home territory and on the international stage, marking their steady trajectory towards significant recognition (IFPI, 2023a).

The notable accomplishments of groups like BTS, Seventeen, and Stray Kids underscored the extensive influence of K-Pop on a global scale, illustrating its capacity to bridge diverse cultural divides. Fans from various regions and backgrounds came together, unified by their collective appreciation for this music genre. The success of these groups served as a testament to K-Pop's burgeoning presence in the global music arena. Moreover, it also emphasized the steadfast dedication of the genre in challenging established norms and cultivating profound relationships with a broad spectrum of audiences across the globe.

A pivotal event in K-Pop's path to global acclaim could be traced back to a notable concert by H.O.T, a trailblazing K-Pop Idol group affiliated with SM Entertainment. Hosted in Beijing, China, in 2000, this concert's significance was manifold. Beyond drawing an impressive attendance of approximately 12,000 enthusiasts, the event catalyzed heightened interest in K-Pop and the broader nuances of Korean culture among Chinese audiences. Observing this surge in Korean entertainment's popularity within its borders, Chinese media introduced the term Hallyu, translated as the "Korean Wave" (한류, 韓流; directly translated as 'Korean Wind'). This terminology became symbolic of the rising resonance and acceptance of K-Pop in that period (Yoo, 2000).

As K-Pop began gaining significant traction on the global stage, particularly in China during the early 2000s, there was a strategic shift in the industry's approach. Integrating members from the target audience's nation, in this case, China, appeared to be an astute move. This approach aimed to facilitate a smoother transition into these international markets by enhancing local resonance and appeal. By doing so, the industry hoped to fortify its position during the globalization phase of K-Pop, ensuring its content and artists remained both globally appealing and locally relevant.

SM Entertainment, known for its pioneering efforts, took another bold step after venturing into the Chinese market in 1998. They introduced *Han Geng*, also known as *Han Kyung* in Korean, as a member of the debut lineup for Super Junior 05—a rotational all-male musical group, now more familiarly known as Super Junior. This marked his entry as the first Chinese and, in fact, the first official non-Korean member to debut within the Korean Record Label ("K-Label") in the K-Pop Industry. Super Junior gained significant media attention due to this unique position (Wen, 2009).

Han's inclusion in the group went beyond mere debut; it was a strategic move by the company to attract and engage Chinese fans (Xia, 2020), symbolizing K-Pop's increasing inclusivity. His success set a precedent, showcasing the industry's openness to international talents and hinting at a more diverse future for K-Pop.

In the following years, the K-Pop Industry witnessed another groundbreaking debut. Nichkhun, hailing from Thailand, made history by becoming the first Thai-born artist to join a K-Pop Idol boy group under a K-Label. He became an integral member of 2PM, a group formed under the umbrella of JYP Entertainment in 2008 (Lee, 2018). His rise to prominence in the K-Pop Industry underscored its increasing willingness to embrace artists from varied cultural backgrounds, reinforcing its commitment to global inclusivity. His remarkable success as a non-Korean member in a prominent K-Pop ensemble did not just boost his personal career; it had industry-wide implications. His achievements became a beacon of inspiration, driving K-Pop's outreach further internationally, with a particular emphasis on the Thai market.

Nichkhun's legacy was multifaceted. Following in his pioneering footsteps, a new generation of Thai talents has emerged, leaving indelible imprints in the world of K-Pop. Some prominent figures include BamBam of GOT7, Lisa of BLACKPINK,

Ten of NCT, Minnie of (G)I-DLE. Each of these artists has successfully integrated their Thai cultural roots with the K-Pop ethos, creating a synergy that resonates with fans worldwide. This influence extended beyond established K-Pop Idols, shaping the aspirations of budding trainees in the industry. Many Thai-born talents, inspired by prior Thai K-Pop Idols, have passionately pursued their dreams within this dynamic musical realm. Notable among them are those who made their latest debut in 2023: Natty of KISS OF LIFE, Yorch of POW, and Chiquita and Pharita of BABYMONSTER.

Their endeavors and subsequent recognition highlighted K-Pop's receptiveness to talents from diverse backgrounds. Each success story of a Thai-born artist amplifies the message: K-Pop is more than just a musical genre — it's a platform that genuinely values inclusivity, cultural appreciation, and limitless opportunities.

The journey and impact of Thai K-Pop Idols on the international music scene were undeniable. Over time, they have consistently enthralled global audiences, showcasing their exceptional talents and prowess. This has not only bolstered their individual careers but has also elevated Thailand's stature in the vast K-Pop domain, reinforcing the nation's rich reservoir of talent. Recognizing the deep well of potential in Thai artists, K-Labels have taken proactive measures. These labels have frequently organized auditions within Thailand, aiming to identify and nurture the country's prodigious talents. Their goal was clear: to unearth and foster the next wave of Thai-born K-Pop Idols who could further enrich the diverse tapestry of the K-Pop Industry.

A significant event in the K-Pop audition landscape in Thailand occurred on May 26, 2023. This notable audition was a collaborative effort between The Korean Cultural Centre (KCC) based in Thailand and Ador Entertainment from Korea. The event saw an overwhelming response, drawing the participation of roughly 2,500 eager teenagers, ranging in age from 10 to 19. Each participant arrived with hopes of being selected, envisioning a future within the esteemed realm of the K-Pop Industry. This influx of enthusiastic participants not only attested to the fervor and ambition embedded in the Thai K-Pop community but also showcased the aspirations of young talents keen on emulating their cherished Thai K-Pop role models. Moreover, the event symbolized a dedication to promoting cultural interchange and recognizing talent from

varied origins. It illustrated the essence of K-Pop as a unifying force, bridging the aspirations of artists and the admiration of fans across Thailand and Korea through a shared passion for the genre (Tangsathaporn, 2023).

Thailand's emergence as a pivotal hub for K-Pop auditions and talent discovery has become increasingly evident as the K-Pop landscape progresses and thrives. The sheer dedication, innate talent, and unwavering resolve showcased by Thai auditionees speak volumes about the universal allure of music—a medium that effortlessly bridges geographical divides and fosters connections among people worldwide.

Each K-Pop audition conducted on Thai soil not only amplifies the nation's reputation as a nexus for burgeoning K-Pop talent but also reaffirms its integral role within the expansive K-Pop global community.

## 1.2 Questions of the Study

1.1.1 What is the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand?

1.1.2 What are the recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 To scrutinize the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand.

1.3.2 To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry.

#### 1.4 Scope of the Study

The study, titled 'K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand,' aimed to investigate the methods, factors, and evaluation principles that influenced the selection of K-Pop Idol Trainees in Thailand over a ten-year span, from January 2009 to December 2019. The year 2009 was notably significant as it succeeded the debut of Nichkhun, the first Thai K-pop Idol with 2PM, thereby spotlighting Thai talents. Additionally, the study encompassed the period leading up to 2019, right before the COVID-19 outbreak, which might have impacted the selection process due to K-Labels' challenges in conducting physical selections in Thailand.

This study aimed to conduct comprehensive interviews with eleven individuals directly involved in the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand. The interviewees included staff from the Artist Development Team and Management Team of K-Labels, responsible for organizing official global auditions and selecting trainees from Thailand. Additionally, Former Thai K-Pop Idols who underwent training, debuted, and remained active for at least one year under K-Labels, and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees who were signed and trained by K-Labels but did not successfully debut were also part of the study.

The inclusion of these trainees was based on their initial selection, whether through online scouting, on-site scouting, or their participation in official auditions conducted by K-Labels in Thailand. To further enrich the research, the study sourced existing information related to the K-Pop Trainee System in Korea and the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand, primarily from interviews available in video format on the internet. However, data from individuals who did not participate in the in-person selection process in Thailand was disregarded.



## 1.5 Definition of Terms

**K-Pop Idols** A K-Pop Idol is defined as a performer, either part of a group or a solo artist, specializing in the K-Pop genre. K-Pop is a style of pop music rooted in Korea and plays a crucial role in the Korean Wave phenomenon that showcases Korean culture.

**K-Pop Trainee System** The Trainee System aims to scout, audition, and enlist young talents, typically in their early teens, who show potential to become future idols. These selected individuals are termed 'trainees' and they undergo an intensive, boot camp-style training regimen.

**K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process** The selection process is characterized by three main Recruiting Methods: street casting, online and on-site scouting, and official K-Labels auditions. The Evaluation Principles in this process prioritize individual characteristics and abilities.

**K-Labels** Korean record labels or companies specialize in the multifaceted domains of the K-Pop genre, emphasizing the intricate processes of conceptualization, production, managerial oversight, talent identification through scouting, and the comprehensive development of emerging artists.

**Glocalization in K-Pop** Glocalization in K-Pop refers to the strategy of employing a localized star approach. This involves integrating members from a specific country into a K-Pop group, thereby aiding the assimilation of K-Pop within that country's cultural milieu.

**Creative Labour in K-Pop** Creative Labour in K-Pop encompasses various aspects of K-Pop Idols' professional lives, including issues related to their capacity to achieve a work-life balance, assessments of their overall physical and mental well-being, and their financial arrangements during the contract period.

**T-Pop Industry** The Thai Pop music industry encompasses the creation, production, and dissemination of popular music originating from Thailand. This genre is diverse in its musical styles and frequently weaves Thai cultural elements and language into both the music and lyrics.

**T-Labels** Thai record labels or companies focus on the complex procedures involved in conceptualization, production, managerial supervision, talent identification through scouting, and the holistic nurturing of emerging artists within the T-Pop genre.

## 1.6 Expected Benefits and Application

1.6.1 To gain insight into the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand.

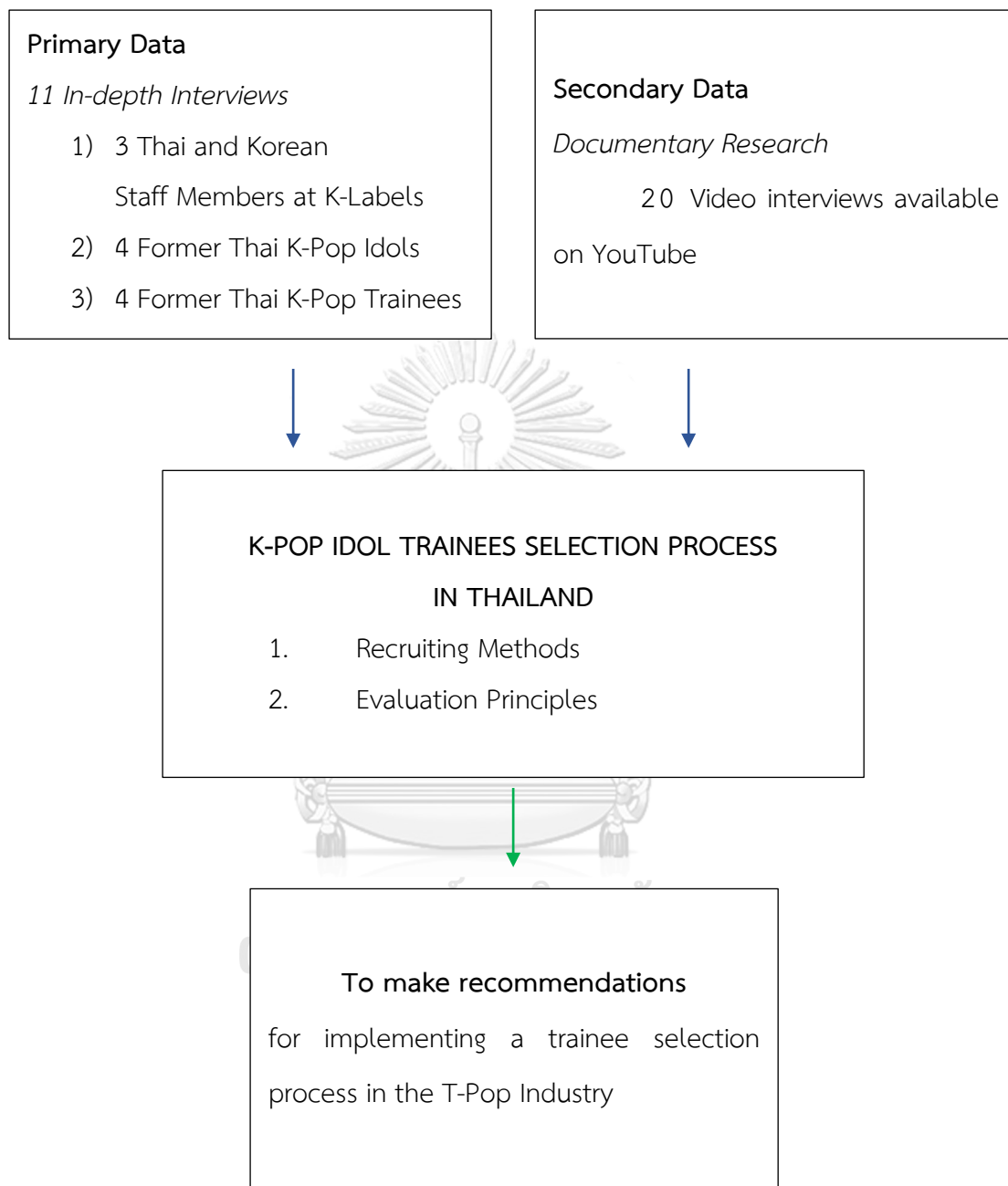
1.6.2 To deepen understanding of the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand.

1.6.3 To provide valuable insights for students majoring in communication arts or disciplines closely related.

1.6.4 To act as a detailed guide for businesses in Thailand's entertainment industry, assisting them in the selection of Thai trainees or the debut of new T-Pop idols.



Figure 1 Schematic Diagram of the Study



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEWS

In the study titled 'K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand,' the researcher embarked on a systematic investigation, rigorously examining relevant theories and scrutinizing prior academic pursuits. The synthesis of these activities laid the foundation for the articulated framework, as follows:

#### 2.1 Related Concepts and Theories

##### 2.1.1 K-Pop

##### 2.1.2 Singers and Actors Selection Process

##### 2.1.3 Glocalism and Glocalization

##### 2.1.4 Creative Labour

#### 2.2 Previous Studies



## 2.1 Related Concepts and Theories

### 2.1.1 K-Pop

The Korean music industry, especially the domain of Korean Popular Music, commonly referred to as "K-Pop," has emerged as a leading genre in global music over the course of the 21st Century. Its influence and appeal have expanded well beyond Korea's borders, resonating with audiences across continents. Factors contributing to K-Pop's widespread acclaim included its memorable melodies, intricate dance routines, and visually appealing music video productions. This harmonious integration of creativity and artistic prowess has not only garnered the attention of millions internationally but has also solidified K-Pop's standing as a significant player in the global musical landscape.

A significant factor contributing to the notable increase in export revenues has been the deliberate extension of K-Pop's reach in global markets. This extension was largely due to the active efforts of K-Pop Idols in disseminating their music and performances. They have frequently collaborated with internationally acclaimed musicians and engaged in cross-cultural initiatives across diverse platforms, aiming to appeal to a wide-ranging audience that has stretched across different continents. In addition to these efforts, digital tools and platforms, particularly social media and music streaming services, have been instrumental. These platforms, coupled with events centered around fan engagement, have facilitated deeper connections between K-Pop artists and their global audiences, effectively bridging linguistic and cultural divides.

According to a recent analysis presented by the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), data indicated a notable ascent in K-Pop export revenues by 23.6% over the duration of 2021-2022. Such an increase served as a testament to the industry's dynamic growth trajectory and underscored its potential in resonating with and captivating global audiences. The findings emphasized the industry's adaptability and effectiveness in fostering relationships with diverse international listeners (Kim & Lee, 2023).

#### 2.1.1.1 K-Pop Idols

K-Pop Idols have been central to the world of K-Pop. These talented individuals, whether they were part of gender-specific groups or shining solo, brought a unique flavor to the scene. Their captivating visuals went beyond just their physical looks; it was also about their standout styles and fashion sensibilities. In addition to their looks, their expertise in singing, dancing, and overall stage performance showcased them as multifaceted artists. They offered a comprehensive and immersive musical journey, reflecting the depth and diversity of K-Pop's artistic realm.

At the heart of the K-Pop Idol phenomenon was the deep bond that forms between idols and their passionate fans. This relationship, rich in its dynamics, bridged global divides, thanks in large part to the digital era's unifying capabilities. Through various online and offline platforms, fans connected with their favorite idols, building a deep emotional bond. This level of commitment gave rise to dedicated fan communities known for their loyalty and enthusiastic participation.

In addition, K-Pop Idols, as cultural emissaries, epitomized the fusion of music, visual appeal, and cross-cultural interactions. Their influence has left a lasting impression on the global cultural scene, showcasing the harmonious blend of different art forms and dialogues (Elfvig-Hwang, 2018).

#### 2.1.1.2 K-Pop Trainee System

Elfvig-Hwang (2018) referred to the significant work of Russell (2008), which elaborated on a unique production cycle for a trainee system. This system, introduced by the pioneering Lee Soo-Man, the innovative founder of SM Entertainment, has been popularly known as the Trainee System. It essentially served as a blueprint that laid out key phases from scouting talent to holding auditions and eventually recruiting the right candidates. Designed to spot and mold potential K-Pop Idols, this system focused on shaping raw talent. At the heart of it all were the 'trainees.' These budding artists entered a rigorous phase of training, where they polished their artistic abilities and sharpened their readiness for the limelight. Often young teenagers, these individuals symbolized the freshness and dynamism of youth,

forming the foundation on which the K-Pop Industry thrived and evolved (Elfvig-Hwang, 2018).

Aspiring trainees prepared themselves for a rigorous training experience that could be likened to a boot camp, often stretching into the late hours of the night. These training sessions were structured in gender-specific studio spaces, ensuring focused and dedicated practice. The curriculum within these environments was broad, encompassing everything from intensive dance choreographies and vocal training to simulated stage performances and even lessons in foreign languages. This comprehensive approach highlighted the diverse roles K-Pop Idols must fulfill, emphasizing not just artistic skills but also the ability to communicate across cultures.

To realize their highest potential, trainees followed strict daily regimens. These schedules were multifaceted, focusing not just on honing their artistic skills but also enhancing their overall image. Striving for exceptional dance performances and appealing visuals often meant adhering to specific diets designed to meet their physical needs. Alongside these dietary plans, there were carefully designed fitness routines aimed at improving stamina, endurance, and agility. Sometimes, to achieve the ideal idol image, some consider going beyond just diet and exercise. They might contemplate cosmetic surgeries to match the industry's beauty benchmarks. Such trends underscored the intertwining of aesthetics, performance, and the continuous drive for perfection in the K-Pop world.

Within the K-Pop training landscape, commitment was not just about honing artistic skills; it encapsulated a rigorous lifestyle that blends physical, creative, and visual aspects seamlessly. Trainees, by immersing themselves wholeheartedly in these intricate training programs, paved their way for their eventual transformation into dynamic and versatile K-Pop icons (Venters & Rothenberg, 2022).

At first glance, one might assume that the financial responsibilities of the training process would be borne entirely by the agencies. However, within the Korean Trainee System, the actual financial arrangement was more nuanced. Rather than the agency solely taking on the costs of training, there was a more complex structure in place. In the multifaceted world of the K-Pop Industry, trainees were often embroiled in a financial setup that persisted beyond just their foundational training phase.

The essence of this financial model revolved around the transition of an individual from a trainee to a revenue-earning artist. Regardless of whether a trainee made a much-anticipated debut or stayed in the background, once they started generating income, a significant shift transpired. The financial balance shifted, initiating a repayment phase. This repayment constituted a critical element of the Korean Trainee System. It was a phase where trainees began to compensate the agency for the investments made in their developmental phase, effectively repaying the costs associated with honing their skills.

This detailed framework reflected the complexity inherent in the K-Pop Industry, where financial dynamics blended seamlessly with artistic ambitions. It highlighted the delicate balance between artists and agencies, a mutual relationship that not only focused on fostering talent but also navigated the financial nuances essential for the industry's continuity. Essentially, the financial aspects of the Korean Trainee System shed light on the multifaceted journey undertaken by budding K-Pop Idols. This path was characterized by unwavering commitment, skill development, and the sophisticated merging of fiscal and creative paths (Yim, 2019).

### **2.1.2 Singer and Leading Musical Actor Selection Process**

Within the academic sphere, there was a noticeable gap when it came to specialized research on the nuances of the trainee selection methodology in the K-Pop arena. Addressing this, the researcher endeavored to delve into the selection criteria primarily employed for singers, emphasizing vocal prowess, and leading musical actors, accentuating both singing and dancing capabilities. This investigative direction stemmed from the inherent linkage of these practices to the overarching music domain. Such a domain shared an intimate relationship with the K-Pop Trainee framework, highlighting the interconnectedness of various elements within the entertainment industry.



### 2.1.2.1 Singer Selection Process

#### 1) Preliminary Phase

At the outset, the label's participants involved in the selection process delved deeply into a comprehensive planning phase. Here, they mapped out a detailed strategy, defining the ideal prototype of the singer they aimed to nurture. This step was not merely preliminary but was pivotal, setting the stage even before the actual talent scouting or recruitment initiatives kicked off. It acted as a guiding beacon, directing all subsequent procedures and decisions, ensuring alignment with the label's broader vision and aspirations (Ruangsakul, 2001).

#### 2) Recruiting Methods

Various strategies were adopted in the talent recruitment process, each of which has undergone rigorous examination by the researcher. This examination involved a thorough analysis of Ruangsakul's 2001 work (Ruangsakul, 2001), complemented by the exhaustive studies from Witchulata and Toopkaew in 2015 (Witchulata & Toopkaew, 2015). By synthesizing insights from these investigations, holistic conclusions could be drawn. These findings formed the core of the subsequent discussion.

#### 2.1) Independent Talent Search

In the sphere of record labels, identifying new talent was a detailed and complex venture. It involved a blend of strategic planning and thorough scouting activities. The depth and breadth of this process revealed the considerable strategic insight and anticipation employed by industry experts, aiming to find the next big artistic sensation. Implementing these methods demanded a meticulous coordination of techniques, all geared towards discovering outstanding individuals whose artistry dovetailed with the vision and goals of the label.

Leading this comprehensive process was the strategy of proactive searching, which went beyond traditional methods. Street casting efforts, executed with utmost care, covered various parts of the country, especially focusing on areas known to be frequented by teenagers. Such deliberate targeting showcased the industry's insightful grasp of its primary audience, highlighting the label's commitment to fostering talents that appeal to a younger demographic. This approach represented

a focus on location-specific dynamics, where the vibrancy of urban settings combined with youthful zeal offered the perfect backdrop for identifying emerging talents.

Additionally, these proactive efforts also included talent showcases, which were thoughtfully set up by agents. These showcases acted as tailored stages, carefully crafted to spotlight promising talents from among a myriad of hopefuls. By adopting such a systematic approach, the talent identification process became more efficient, ensuring that hidden talents get the recognition they deserve, aligning perfectly with the label's primary goals.

To broaden their search spectrum, agents strategically ventured beyond their own platforms to include those managed by other corporate entities. This move represented a smart collaboration, tapping into a collective network to enhance talent identification. This integration of shared industry platforms signified the interconnected dynamics of talent scouting in the expansive music industry. Furthermore, the ever-evolving digital domain played a pivotal role in this overarching strategy. Social media channels, being today's hubs of global interaction, offered a gateway to spot and onboard emerging talents who have made a mark online. This facet showcased a modern shift, marking the confluence of digital avenues with the timeless mission of discovering and fostering artistic prowess.

Together, these multifaceted pathways captured the complex character of talent sourcing within record labels. By merging on-ground precision with curated events, forging strategic alliances, and leveraging digital prowess, record labels crafted a comprehensive matrix of approaches to unearth and nurture extraordinary artistic promise. This convergence of methods underscored the industry's commitment to championing innovation and maintaining its dynamism by consistently identifying outstanding talents.

## 2.2) Direct Talent Submissions to Record Labels

Within this strategic framework, emerging talents were afforded the opportunity to interact directly with the record label, primarily by submitting thoughtfully crafted singing demos. This method not only signified their musical prowess but also offered them a platform to display their melodic skills. Thus, this approach served as a natural avenue for up-and-coming artists to establish their presence within the broad ambit of the label.

Moreover, a distinct pathway surfaced where modeling agencies became instrumental in the talent identification process. This commercial route acted as a bridge, seamlessly connecting potential talents to the record label. Through partnerships with modeling agencies, these talents capitalized on the synergy between visual allure and artistic skill, increasing their chances of recognition and subsequent partnership with the label.

Concurrently, the label adopted a network-centric strategy, characterized by the intricate connections and relationships within the industry. This extensive network encompassed talents associated with senior members of the label's leadership, as well as individuals who have made significant contributions to the selection process. Such a relationship-centric modality underscored the value of industry affiliations, offering a unique avenue for talents to integrate with the label.

Collectively, these diverse strategies illuminated the array of paths available for emerging talents to position themselves within the label's domain. As they navigated the path to artistic recognition, the blend of individual initiatives, commercial intermediaries, and robust industry ties accentuated the layered process of talent identification and assimilation within record labels.

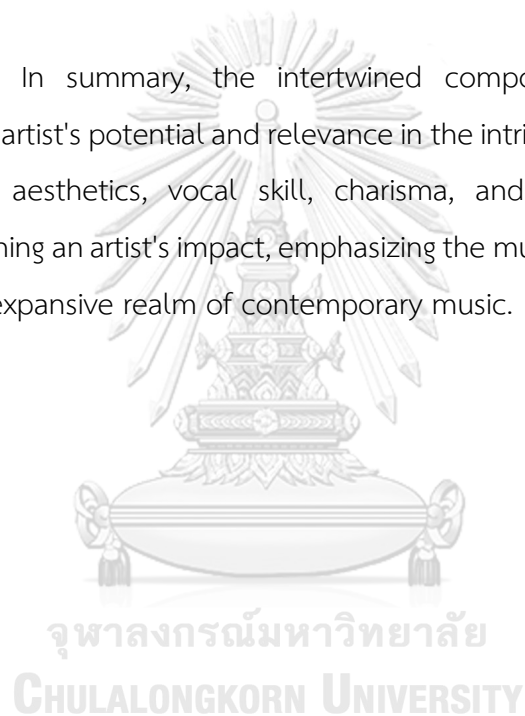
## 3) Evaluation Principles

Among the myriad of influential factors, aesthetics clearly stood out, emphasizing an individual's physical appearance, especially when radiating a captivating charm. This dimension has predominantly revolved around attributes like attractiveness, where elements ranging from weight and height to distinctive facial features merge to craft a memorable visual persona. Within the industry, these aesthetic elements extended beyond just physical appeal, embodying an individual's

unique charisma. Such allure was adeptly employed in marketing initiatives, playing a pivotal role in elevating an artist's fame.

Following closely in significance, and equally pivotal, was the realm of vocal talent. This essential attribute emerged as a distinctive hallmark, underscoring an artist's place within the musical landscape. Additionally, aspects such as personality traits, behavioral patterns, and even the tonal quality of one's voice warranted recognition. Collectively, these facets molded a unique artist identity, resonating not only musically but also making a significant impression in public perception.

In summary, the intertwined components together laid the groundwork for an artist's potential and relevance in the intricate milieu of the industry. The interplay of aesthetics, vocal skill, charisma, and varied personality traits culminated in defining an artist's impact, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of artistic resonance in the expansive realm of contemporary music.



### 2.1.2.2 Musical Actor Selection Process

#### 1) Planning Phase

At the outset of the process, three key players in musical production - the producer, director, and choreographer - joined forces with other relevant contributors to deeply probe the many facets of the production. Their goal was to precisely delineate the thematic boundaries and qualities that defined the attributes, demeanors, and visual portrayals of each character within the musical. This thorough review and synchronization acted as the cornerstone for the following stages of production, ensuring a seamless blend of creative insight and realization (Boonglun, 2012).

#### 2) Audition Modalities

In the realm of musical productions, the audition process stood out as a crucial step in talent selection. It usually took shape through two primary methods, both different yet equally important. Referred to as open and closed auditions, these methods highlighted the diverse strategies used to assemble the perfect cast for musical projects.

##### 2.1) Open Auditions

Open auditions, falling under the first category, emerged as comprehensive events known for their inclusivity. These sessions were organized on a large scale, often accompanied by extensive promotional efforts to maximize reach and participation. They were truly "open" in the sense that everyone, regardless of their past experience in musical performances, was welcome. The fact that no agent representation was needed further increased the accessibility of these auditions. This setting attracted a mix of experienced and budding artists, all vying for their chance in the limelight. Publicizing these auditions happened through various channels such as newspapers, magazines, and websites, showcasing the aim to attract a wide talent pool. The essence of open auditions lay in their egalitarian nature, welcoming a range of performers and capturing the rich diversity intrinsic to the musical genre (Medieval Times, n.d.).

## 2.2) Closed Auditions

Contrastingly, closed auditions, the second approach, adopted a more selective and specific stance towards talent acquisition. These auditions were crafted for individuals who aligned with particular criteria or qualities that the production sought. Entry to these sessions was generally limited to those who satisfied rigorous criteria, validating their skill and fit for the intended part. Once these criteria were met, individuals received a direct invitation for an exclusive audition. These private sessions took place in a more focused setting, allowing the production team a closer look at each participant. Through this individualized interaction, they assessed how well a performer aligned with the envisioned role, ensuring a detailed evaluation process (ActUpNorth, 2023).

## 3) Casting Methods

Drawing from the findings of Boonglun's 2012 study, which referenced Rutnin's 2003 book, and complemented by Wongnarathiwat's insights in 2019, a clear picture emerged. This analysis highlighted three distinct casting methods that held significance in the acting industry.

### 3.1) Script Reading

The casting committee conducted a detailed evaluation, inviting participants to partake in various testing exercises. Often, this evaluation involved script readings from either the ongoing production or other pieces, allowing for a comparative analysis. When more than one participant was involved, an interactive component was introduced, encompassing shared script readings and collaborative performances to assess their collective rapport.

For musical-based productions, there was a unique requirement for participants to showcase their vocal talents. This requirement accentuated the harmonious integration of musical aptitude with theatrical portrayal, underscoring the all-encompassing skills essential for success in this realm.

Beyond the bounds of performance, a deeper layer of assessment emerged as participants delved into thorough discussions with the discerning casting team. They engaged in dialogues centered on the narrative, thematic nuances, and the detailed characterization of the roles. Through this discourse, the team evaluated the

participants' understanding, depth of insight, and alignment with the artistic vision, determining their suitability for the designated roles.

### 3.2) Improvisational Approach

The selection panel frequently introduced unexpected changes, sometimes altering predefined plans. This intentional strategy was aimed at assessing participants' ability to swiftly adjust to evolving scenarios. But the assessment was not solely about adaptability. The panel also gauged participants' resourcefulness, a critical trait when navigating unpredicted situations.

The presented environment, constantly undergoing transformation, was a rich ground for unearthing the diverse acting skills inherent in participants. As they spontaneously reacted and improvised within the constraints of these freshly introduced situations, their depth and breadth as performers became evident. This revealed a platform where their creative expressions took shape. Observing how they instinctively embraced and maneuvered through these immediate scenarios offered a glimpse into the depth of their command over the art of acting.

Within this strategically designed trial, there was a wider story that highlighted the panel's main purpose. They were keenly looking to understand the participants' knack for spontaneous creativity, their ability to adapt to changing settings, and how well they handled evolving situations. These aspects, so essential to performing arts, were deeply influential in this specific evaluation process. At its core, this assessment symbolized the diverse challenges intrinsic to the casting domain, where each change served as a window to gauge a performer's expertise.

### 3.3) Personal-interview Method

This method was especially fitting for productions with fewer characters or when participants matched early criteria tied to the character's features. Along with these standards, the casting team, under the guidance of the director, engaged in a comprehensive conversation with the participants. This interaction went beyond basic exchanges, covering a range of discussions from informal chats, including everyday talk, to in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, thoughts, and their ability to understand roles.

The effective use of this method hinged on the specific requirements of the production. In cases with a smaller cast, or where participants showed initial alignment with the intended role, this approach offered a different path for assessment. Moving beyond traditional methods, it facilitated a more thorough investigation into the subtle relationship between the actor and the character, going beyond the usual limits of scripted scenes.

The core of this method revolved around the interactive discussions led by the casting team, with a significant role played by the director. These discussions spanned a wide range, touching on subtle aspects of participants' personalities and how they interpreted selected pieces of the script. This approach, marked by its tailored engagement and sharp questioning, showcased the casting team's dedication to finding the right match between participants and roles. It was more than just an assessment—it was a deep dive into artistic compatibility, capturing the many aspects that highlighted the detailed process of casting in the performing arts world.

#### 4) Evaluation Principles

In making casting choices for musical productions, there was a structured order of varied elements that were carefully weighed, each holding its unique importance. This structured assessment was supported by detailed planning, reflecting the accuracy and careful judgment needed in the arts field.

At the top of these crucial factors was the participant's personality and inherent traits, forming a foundational element. How well these traits aligned with the envisioned character in the production underwent thorough examination. There was a detailed matching process that looked at factors like height, physical look, voice quality, and even skin color – all aiming to blend the person and the role they might play seamlessly. Next, attention turned to the three main pillars of musical performance: acting, singing, and dancing. The balance between these skills differed, tailored to the goals of the particular production. Whether the story centered on strong vocals or powerful dance moves, these three skills were carefully considered and prioritized, showing their importance in the overall musical picture.



Recognizing the commercial aspect of musical production brought focus to another layer of evaluation. Having a strong presence or recognition in media or among audiences became especially important, considering how the art was intertwined with its commercial appeal. In this context, a participant's reputation and how they connected with larger audience groups were key, reflecting how the art form interacted with wider cultural trends.

Going deeper into the mosaic of individual qualities, aspects like personality, behavior, and attitude stood out as crucial factors in the selection process. These subtle characteristics played a role in fully bringing a character to life, with their inner nature reflecting their outer presentation.

Within this intricate picture, one factor stood out as crucial in casting: steadfast commitment and time dedication. Musical production, naturally tied to live shows, required intense rehearsal that must fit seamlessly with the entire group. This alignment, where each person gelled with the overall structure, highlighted the deep dedication needed to achieve artistic harmony (Boonglun, 2012).

### 2.1.2.3 K-Pop Trainees Selection Process

#### 1) Recruiting Methods

##### 1.1) Street Casting

Casting representatives from K-Labels might spot young individuals with striking appearances and offer them a chance for a more in-depth audition (Valley, 2020).

##### 1.2) Online and On-site Scouting

Individuals who shined exceptionally in competitions, appearances, or online were often identified by casting representatives and invited for a focused audition with K-Labels (Yoo, 2020)

##### 1.3) K-Labels Official Audition

Numerous labels regularly organized auditions to discover new talent, both locally and internationally. Typically, details about these auditions, including the timing, were shared via their social media channels, such as their official website and Instagram.

#### 2) Evaluation Principles (Isman, 2020)

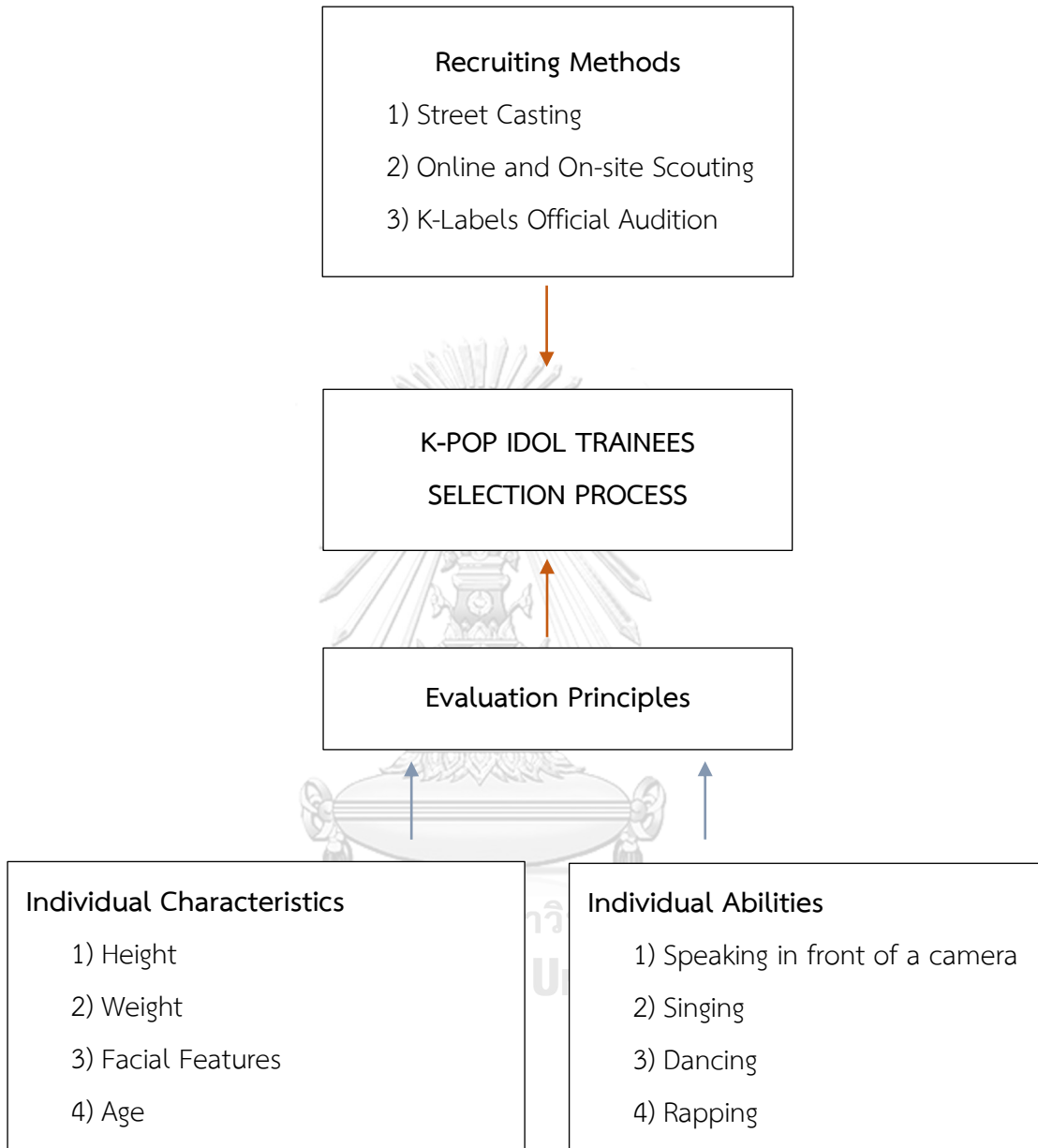
##### 2.1) Individual Characteristics

A primary factor for initial casting of individuals was their physical appearance, especially their visual appeal. This included considerations like weight, height, and facial attributes, but age also held significant importance in this sector.

##### 2.2) Individual Abilities

During the audition, those who have been given initial invitations introduced themselves on camera to gauge their speaking proficiency. They were also evaluated on their singing and dancing capabilities.

Figure 2 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process Diagram



### 2.1.3 Glocalism and Glocalization

#### 2.1.3.1 Glocalism

Glocalism highlighted how local trends could spread globally and how global influences could shape local environments. It was captured by the principle "think global, act locally," highlighting the blend of global perspectives with local actions. Glocalism explained the major changes sparked by globalization, merging global and local aspects seamlessly. Essentially, it described the deep connections between worldwide influences and local circumstances, bridging areas like human behaviors, cultures, economies, and societies. Using glocalism as a guide helped to grasp the intricate interactions and connections of today's global world (Mihir, 2022).

#### 2.1.3.2 Glocalization

*Glocalization*, a blend of the words "globalization" and "localization", became notably recognized after its introduction by the renowned sociologist Roland Robertson at the 1997 "Globalization and Indigenous Culture" conference. Robertson emphasized the complex relationship between global influences and local reactions in the broadening realm of globalization. He introduced glocalization as a framework, emphasizing the idea that effective globalization approaches should be skillfully tailored to fit distinct local circumstances.

The core principle of glocalization emphasized that for a product, service, or cultural aspect to be successful in a foreign market, it should incorporate elements in tune with the local environment. This method of aligning global initiatives with local characteristics recognized the varied and diverse nature of cultures, economies, and societies. It suggested a thoughtful and adaptable interaction with globalization's impacts. Through recognizing and blending in local specificities, glocalization aimed to reduce the potential loss of unique cultural identities and local features that might arise from unchecked global spread (Raksaseri, 2003).

### 2.1.3.3 Glocalism and Glocalization in K-Pop

Building on the discussion from Chapter 1, a turning point in K-Pop's rise to global prominence came with the remarkable success of H.O.T. This path was clearly highlighted in 2000 when H.O.T held a standout concert, attracting a notable crowd of 12,000 in Beijing, China. This event had a notable influence internationally and paved the way for further steps aimed at solidifying K-Pop's position on the global stage.

The growth of K-Pop in the Chinese market was not accidental. Recognizing China's potential, with its vast population of 1.3 billion and increasing wealth, many saw it as a goldmine for the global music industry. The numbers alone made a compelling case: a vast and growing audience was eager to consume new entertainment forms. However, the path was not without obstacles. While the potential was undeniable, there were significant hurdles to navigate. The Chinese government had strict regulations concerning the import and broadcast of foreign cultural content. Furthermore, there was a noteworthy concern regarding copyright violations. These challenges meant that while the opportunity was immense, navigating the Chinese market required a nuanced understanding and strategic approach.

To address the significant challenges in entering the Chinese market, the K-Pop Industry has adopted a unique and innovative strategy. One primary method was to identify and train Chinese talents using K-Pop's proven training system. This process aimed to produce Chinese artists who could naturally connect with and charm the local audience. Furthermore, there was a thoughtful approach to content distribution. The industry actively used Chinese digital and mobile platforms, ensuring content was accessible and in the Chinese language. By doing so, they could customize content to fit local preferences and culture better. This multi-pronged approach was not just about overcoming challenges but also about laying a strong foundation. The ultimate goal was to establish a firm and enduring foothold in China, promoting cross-cultural exchanges and fostering an enriching collaboration between artists and audiences (Shim, 2014).

After the success of the H.O.T concert, the surge in K-Pop's popularity marked a significant transformation in how the K-Pop Industry approached talent development. This change was driven by an increasing demand for new and skilled artists. In response, entertainment agencies established an extensive Trainee System designed to identify and groom potential stars. The hunt for talent broadened to include diverse sources: local talent shows, digital platforms, and even spontaneous street auditions. These platforms allowed hopeful K-Pop aspirants to present their abilities, with the most promising ones entering into contracts with these agencies. The selected trainees then embarked on a comprehensive journey of preparation. This regimen included elements like vocal and dance training, language lessons, acting classes, and sessions aimed at molding their personalities. As this meticulous training bore fruit, and many trainees attained global recognition, the K-Pop Industry's prowess in creating world-renowned idols and groups became evident. In essence, the accomplishments of K-Pop Idols, who rose through this well-structured Trainee System, set the standard for successive talent development within the industry (Russell, 2012).

In the wake of this significant event, SM Entertainment, a leading and representative label, developed and implemented a unique localization approach, which Fuhr (2015) aptly described as a localized star strategy. This strategy was tailored to tap into the growing Chinese market, full of potential. Their forward-thinking approach aimed to embed K-Pop more closely within the Chinese environment. An innovative aspect of this strategy involved recruiting members directly from China — the very heart of their expansion efforts.

An important milestone in this journey was the addition of Han Geng, who became a key figure as the first official international member in K-Pop. Han Geng's journey began when he participated in the H.O.T. CHINA Audition Casting in 2001, an event organized by the Korean talent agency and SM Entertainment. This audition came on the heels of H.O.T's successful foray into China, capitalizing on the Hallyu wave. By late 2002, Han Geng received the heartening news of his selection. This achievement was no small feat, considering the odds: the audition had a staggering competition ratio of 3,000 to 1. With newfound determination, Han Geng relocated to

Korea. There, he underwent an intensive training regimen, encompassing areas like singing, dancing, acting, and proficiency in the Korean language.

The year 2005 was a significant year with Han Geng joining Super Junior, marking a strategic move towards cross-cultural teamwork. Following this, Super Junior M (indicating Mandarin) was introduced in 2008, showing SM Entertainment's dedication to creating a strong presence in China. This version of Super Junior, tailored to resonate with the language and culture of the Chinese audience, perfectly highlighted the blend of global and local factors that glocalization aims to capture.

K-Pop's expanding influence extended beyond just China; it also made notable inroads into the Thai market as it was widely acknowledged as a pivotal market for K-Pop within Asia. This recognition was evident in how Thailand often found itself on the itinerary for major K-Pop events and tours, highlighting its importance in the regional K-Pop ecosystem.

Thailand's affinity for K-Pop has grown to such an extent that the country has been now recognized as one of the foremost Asian nations deeply influenced by this genre. Recent statistics underscored this connection: The Korea Customs Service (KCS), an arm of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, identified Thailand as one of the top ten K-Pop album importers in 2022 (Kim & Lee, 2023). This data illuminated the significant stature of K-Pop in Thailand, attesting to the genre's worldwide appeal and the fervent admiration Thai fans held for K-Pop Idols. The deep-seated passion Thai fans harbor for K-Pop Idols was unmistakably prominent. To quantify this affection, consider that in 2022, Thailand hosted close to 80 distinct K-Pop events (Shoowong, 2023). This robust engagement by Thai fans underscored Thailand's pivotal role as a central node in the K-Pop network. Their dedication did not just benefit the local scene; it contributed significantly to asserting the international prominence and influence of K-Pop.

The strategic move was marked by the inclusion of Nichkhun, a Thai artist, into the renowned group 2PM in 2008. His journey began rather unexpectedly. He was identified by a scout from JYP Entertainment during the Los Angeles Korean Music Festival. Impressed by his potential, he was invited to Korea in 2006 to train under their guidance (Highlights, 2020). With this, Nichkhun became the leading K-Pop Idol

from Thailand. The localized star strategy highlighted the delicate blend of global musical goals with culture-specific approaches, capturing the essence of K-Pop's international journey (Sereemanopat, 2017).

However, it did not manifest overnight. Thailand's fascination with Korean culture began in the early 2000s with the introduction of Korean television series, colloquially referred to as "K-Series". The inaugural K-Series that resonated with Thai audiences was "A Wish Upon A Star" (별은 내 가슴에), broadcasted on Royal Thai Army Radio and Television (TV5). Its positive reception paved the way for other series like "Autumn in My Heart" (가을동화) to be featured on Independent Television (iTV), thereby deepening the K-Series influence in Thailand. Of these series, "Jewel in the Palace" (대장금), or Dae Jang Geum, deserved special mention. Aired on Thai Television Channel 3 (HS-TV 3), it became a phenomenon. The series enjoyed such unparalleled popularity that it earned the title of the most frequently re-aired K-Series in the annals of Thai broadcasting history (Songsue Media Lab, 2018). The immense success of these dramas not only introduced Thai viewers to the enchanting realm of K-Series but also primed the nation for the subsequent meteoric rise of K-Pop.

Additionally, Thailand's formal introduction to the K-Pop music scene could be attributed to the efforts of GMM Grammy, a prominent media conglomerate and entertainment powerhouse in the country. In a notable move in 2002, GMM Grammy forged a partnership with Baby V.O.X, a pioneering group from the first wave of K-Pop Idols. This collaboration signified the deliberate entry of K-Pop into the Thai musical landscape (Namuwiki, n.d.).

With the rising acclaim of K-Pop in Thailand, the nation's role within this global musical tapestry began to undergo a profound evolution. Thailand shifted from merely being an ardent admirer of K-Pop to actively contributing to its global narrative. This change saw numerous Thai individuals vying for the coveted title of a K-Pop Idol.



In this research effort, the researcher delved into the concept of glocalization in K-Pop, with a particular focus on the localized star strategy. This approach integrated members from a specific country's local community into a K-Pop group, forging a stronger bond between K-Pop and the cultural milieu of that nation. Specifically, in Thailand, spearheading this transformative journey was Nichkhun, who not only represented Thailand but also set a precedent in the annals of K-Pop.

## **2.1.4 Creative Labour**

### 2.1.4.1 Creative Labour

In his 2002 study, Richard Florida delved into a unique group within the workforce he termed the 'creative class.' This group stood out due to their focus on innovative thinking, fostering new ideas, and expertly using specialized knowledge to craft unique products, services, or content. Largely, they operated in sectors where creativity was a key asset, including areas like technology, arts, design, culture, and other knowledge-intensive fields. Florida highlighted their main characteristic: a steadfast commitment to creating 'meaningful new forms'. Within this class, there was a range of professions, starting with empirical fields led by professionals such as scientists and engineers, who typically led in technological and theoretical innovations. This range also covered cultural and artistic sectors, marked by the works of writers and artists who captured and interpreted society and human experiences.

Beyond its core group, the 'creative class' also included a wider range of individuals labeled as 'creative professionals.' While they might not directly link to artistic roles, they were vital in knowledge-intensive sectors. These professionals operated in evolving areas like technology, the dynamic worlds of finance, specialized fields such as law and healthcare, and the ever-changing landscape of business management. Even with the diversity in their roles, they all shared one common trait: the ability to use their deep knowledge innovatively, offering solutions to complex challenges and boosting value in their respective areas (Florida, 2002).

Adding another layer to this understanding, Sombat Kusumavalee (2010) dived deeper into the characteristics of the creative class. Kusumavalee highlighted several key traits that further distinguish this group. They tended to have keen insight, a preference for complex pattern creation, and often adopted lifestyles that differed from the norm. Furthermore, they were naturally drawn to spaces and atmospheres that boosted their creative energies. Such surroundings essentially boosted their creative endeavors, ensuring they reached their fullest potential in both professional and artistic ventures (Tiammek, 2020).

Exploring Creative Labour brought forward its own set of challenges, especially when trying to measure and manage it. A large part of this challenge arose from labeling this type of work as 'immaterial labour.' This label highlighted how creative tasks, being intangible, did not easily fit into typical ways of measuring and managing most work tasks. This difficulty in measurement was rooted in Marxian value theory, pointing to the hard-to-quantify nature of creative outcomes. When applying standard billing systems based on hours spent to creative fields, it sometimes resulted in 'made-up measures of time.' While these measures might make sense in other fields, they might not fully grasp the true essence of creative work. This concept aligned with the observations made by Hardt and Negri in 2017, highlighting the blur of traditional work-time boundaries. In the contemporary landscape, characterized by flexible work schedules and the prevalence of mobile technology, the interconnection between work and personal life has reached unprecedented levels (Pitts, 2020).

#### 2.1.4.2 Creative Labour in K-Pop

Kim's analysis, drawing from Bell and Oakley (2015), suggested that the rise of the creative economy on a global scale has become a central cultural policy structure. This development, in harmony with the ideas of free-market economics and global capitalism, marked a significant change. In this new view, cultural creations were seen more as products open to business opportunities. Korea, traditionally viewed as a developmental nation, has smartly woven the idea of nurturing creativity into its strategies. This move was essential in boosting its cultural industries. As a result, there was a remarkable rise in the 'Korean Wave,' a term that described the growing global love for Korean cultural products. Interestingly, this trend really took off during President Kim Dae-Jung's time from 1998 to 2003 (Kim, 2017).

Given the distinct separation between industries and the lasting alliance between the state and key financial entities, a pressing concern emerged: the unequal contractual agreements between primary stakeholders and workers. This concern was acutely pronounced in cultural sectors, spanning from music to digital gaming. For instance, until the late 2000s, several top entertainment companies in Korea mandated K-Pop artists to sign what were colloquially termed "slave contracts." These contracts, which could extend beyond a decade, left artists with minimal leverage to negotiate or modify any terms. Such lengthy agreements frequently put younger artists in compromising positions, pushing them into tasks they might be uncomfortable with. This not only infringed upon their personal privacy but also resulted in an environment where the division of profits was opaque. If artists contemplated terminating their contracts prematurely, they would be confronted with steep financial penalties, effectively binding them to potentially restrictive or exploitative conditions (Kim, 2017).

A prominent challenge confronting creative professionals was suboptimal working conditions. This concern was starkly highlighted through a series of unfortunate incidents, including the deaths and suicides of those in the creative community. These events were attributed to difficult work and living conditions. Notably, these occurrences persisted even after the establishment of the Korea Musicians Union in 2017, which predominantly represented independent musicians, many from the Hongdae region. A spokesperson for the union highlighted a significant obstacle: the

union's capacity to influence broader industry segments, such as the idol music sector, was constrained. This sector was deeply embedded within the commercial facets of the music business (Kim & Lee, 2023).

In the context of this research, the study sought to explore the concept of Creative Labour, with a particular focus on the K-Pop Industry. This exploration included an in-depth examination of K-Pop Idols' work routines, their capacity to balance professional responsibilities with personal lives, a comprehensive evaluation of their physical and mental well-being, their financial circumstances, and the ramifications of the contract period.



## 2.2 Related Studies

### กระบวนการผลิตนักร้องของอุตสาหกรรมเพลงไทย [Manufacturing of singers of Thai popular music industry] (Ruangsakul, 2001)

The aim of this research is to explore the process of creating artists within the realm of the Thai popular music sector, encompassing the curation and development of singers across three distinct popular music genres: Thai popular music, Pleng Luktoong (Thai Country and Western), and Pleng Pua Chiwit (Song for Life).

The findings of this study revealed that potential singers within the Thai music industry typically begin their journey as individuals driven by a desire to attain popularity. These individuals possessed innate talent and skill in singing, coupled with the ambition to achieve prominence within the industry. The selection of singers involved a tripartite process within the genres examined, comprising casting operations, singer scouting, and final acceptance. Casting criteria across music genres exhibited notable parallels, encompassing aptitude, character, and physical appearance.

It was noteworthy that Thai popular music places particular emphasis on the visual appeal of singers, whereas Pleng Luktoong (Thai Country and Western) highlighted vocal proficiency, and Pleng Pua Chiwit (Song for Life) prioritized musical compositional abilities. Moreover, three primary factors exerted influence over the casting procedure: the demands of the music market, casting personnel, and the presence of nepotism.

The manufacturing process of singers was underscored by two principal facets: song production for the singers and the cultivation of distinctive singer characteristics. Notably, the approach to these facets varied across the three major Thai music genres. Thai popular music focuses on refining the visual presentation of singers, while Pleng Luktoong (Thai Country and Western) emphasized strong vocal capabilities, and Pleng Pua Chiwit (Song for Life) centered on the singers' musical proficiency. However, it was pivotal to acknowledge that these approaches were contingent upon the prevailing trends within the music market.

**การคัดเลือกนักแสดงละครเวทีประเภทมิวสิคัล [Casting for stage musicals]  
(Boonglun, 2012)**

This study investigates the processes and factors involved in casting actors for stage musicals, with a focus on leading roles, supporting roles, and ensembles. Samples were categorized into: 1) musicals adapted from novels; 2) occasion-specific creations; 3) adaptations from Broadway plays. Interviews with stakeholders, including Production Managers, Directors, and actors from 10 companies, have provided insights and the results are as follows:

1. The process of casting both leading and supporting roles in stage musicals, irrespective of whether they originate from novels, occasion-specific creations, or Broadway plays, encompassed several key steps:

1.1. Defining the primary direction and presentation style of the show, which included casting guidelines and character traits;

1.2. Recruiting actors based on specified qualifications;

1.3. Assessing candidates' proficiency in singing, acting, and dancing.

2. In casting leading and supporting roles for stage musicals, regardless of their origin, certain factors were paramount:

2.1. Holistic characteristics of actors, which covered their personality, singing and/or dancing capabilities, acting prowess, social popularity, and availability for rehearsals;

2.2. Individual attributes such as responsibility, discipline, determination, diligence, patience, devotion, and a collaborative attitude devoid of self-centeredness.

For ensembles, the casting procedure mirrored that of leading and supporting roles in stage musicals, whether derived from novels, tailored for specific occasions, or adapted from Broadway scripts. However, the emphasis on actor recruitment was less pronounced. The factors guiding ensemble casting diverge, focusing less on the social popularity of the actors. It was crucial to note that ensembles often took on multiple roles in a single performance, which necessitated proficiency in singing, acting, and dancing.

**กระบวนการคัดเลือก พัฒนบทบาทนักแสดง และการเพิ่มมูลค่าให้กับนักแสดงซีรีส์วาย**  
[The process of selection, role development and value added of Y series' main actors] (Wongnarathiwat, 2019)

This research explores the casting dynamics and the evolution of main roles in the Y series, as well as the value addition contributed by its actors. Using qualitative methods, the study gathered insights from interviews and observations involving those responsible for actor selection, role development, and value enhancement. This included prominent figures such as directors, casting teams, management, and collaborating brands. The research paid special attention to eight participants from 'Until We Meet Again' and 'Thantype The Series'.

The findings highlighted that the Y-series casting process comprised three methods: open, closed, and mixed selection. Casting for Y-series actors consisted of an initial preparation phase, an extensive testing phase, which included the Y-series-specific Performers Actor's Test, and concluded with a final casting decision. Importantly, the Y-series necessitated a thorough examination of the Y-novel to guarantee detailed role understanding for actors and vital chemistry assessments among potential cast members. Character development within the Y-series progressed from performance workshops to refining character attributes consistent with scripts, enhancing specialized actor skills, and prioritizing a nurturing atmosphere for the Y-series ensemble. This approach stood apart from traditional series, which predominantly emphasized cultivating a supportive actor environment.

In terms of value enhancement for Y-series actors, a seven-step strategy was employed: Self-skilling development, Brand alignment preparation, Utilizing social media for value augmentation, Engaging in promotions with media outlets, Building a positive reputation for Y-series actors, Pioneering trends in collaboration with partners, and Innovating new works.

These strategies revealed differences when compared to standard series protocols, notably in how Y-series actors were advised against publicizing their personal relationships. Moreover, Y-series actors were expected to have an elevated awareness and understanding to magnify and maintain their value, especially in stories that emphasize cultural sensitivity, political correctness, and inclusiveness.

### **Adaptation of South Korean Leading Music Companies' Marketing Strategy in Globalization Case Study in Thai Market. (Sreemanopat, 2017)**

This study delves into the factors contributing to the success of multinational bands in the Thai market, particularly those with members of Thai nationality from major South Korean music conglomerates. An essential objective is to dissect the emerging "G-L-G" framework within the context of K-Pop's globalization strategy. This framework gained traction following the debut of influential groups such as GOT7, NCT Unit, and BlackPink. It served as a notable paradigm for multinational bands strategically employed by significant South Korean music entities.

The findings of the study offered significant insights. Firstly, the influence of multinational bands on Thai consumers' popularity and preferences seemed limited, with a more pronounced impact arising from brand endorsers who possessed Thai nationality. The Hallyu K Star fan-page noted a positive Korean trend globally, yet brand ambassadors largely leaned towards global figures. For example, Lee Min Ho served as Oppo's global ambassador, while James Jirayu represented the brand in Thailand. This emphasized the resonance of Thai members in multinational bands within the Thai market.

Furthermore, a second key conclusion highlighted Nichkhun's role in elevating Thailand's stature in the global and Korean music industries. As the first Thai member of a prominent South Korean music company band, Nichkhun's influence was distinct. Marketing research underscored the significance of the localization strategy for penetrating music markets in countries like China, Japan, and Thailand.

The shift from standardization to a diversified globalization strategy was evident. Incorporating local members into bands has proven essential for major South Korean music companies attempting to succeed in markets like China and Japan, with examples like Super Junior M, f(x), Miss A, EXO-M, and 2PM.

In the post-2016 landscape, the "G-L-G K-Pop's Globalization Strategy" emerged in global music research. This model focused on localization strategies, with bands like GOT7 and NCT Unit as examples. Notably, within the Thai market, this model has been particularly successful as a marketing strategy, emphasizing bands as cohesive units over individual members.



**Putting creative labour in its place in the shadow of the Korean Wave  
(Kim & Lee, 2023)**

This research provides a renewed assessment of the contemporary Korean Wave, with a focus on creative labour—a dimension often overlooked in previous studies.

The study explores the relationship between the Korean state, its cultural industry, and creative workers, all of whom play crucial roles in molding the Korean Wave. It seeks to understand the standing of creative labour within the wave's achievements, centering on the perceptions and handling of labour issues by these principal entities. The research first examined the Korean state's unwavering promotion of industrial policies, contrasting it with the limited attention given to labour policies within the cultural sector. It then delved into industry justifications for unfair labour practices, which were often defended as necessary measures to nurture creative talent. Additionally, it revealed that creative professionals frequently emphasized their identities as cultural pioneers and artists, inadvertently downplaying their contributions as creative workers. Using this holistic understanding of the Korean cultural sector's evolution, the study reframed discussions about the sustainability of the Korean Wave, considering its potential and trajectory, and called for a rejuvenated emphasis on the rightful place of creative labour within this cultural phenomenon.

Despite the success of Hallyu, many of Korea's creative workers remained unrecognized and undervalued. This has birthed new political identities that intertwine creativity with labour rights. Such a transformation necessitated a thorough examination of labour conditions, ensuring workers were accorded the respect and dignity they merit. Given the emerging prominence of the 'decent work' concept across various sectors, establishing ethical labour objectives for the Korean Wave was crucial.

In conclusion, for the Korean Wave to be genuinely sustainable, creative labour must be recognized not as a secondary concern but as a fundamental cornerstone of its success.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The detailed study of the 'K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand' employed qualitative research methods. This method was chosen to reduce redundancy and make the most of in-depth interviews and documentary research. These data collection techniques aligned well with the main goals of the study.

#### **3.1 Data Sources**

This research used two main types of data: primary and secondary. The primary data were gathered from in-depth interviews with Staff Members at K-Labels and with Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees, who were formerly associated with K-Labels. Secondary data involved existing information related to the K-Pop Trainee System in Korea and the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand, with a primary focus on video interviews available on YouTube.

##### **3.1.1 Primary Source**

Primary data for this research were gathered through eleven detailed interviews led solely by the researcher. These interviews were pivotal in delving into the intricate aspects of interviewees' experiences, views, and actions within the research's framework. However, the research faced challenges in accessing certain confidential or restricted details, which made some potential sources inaccessible. To navigate these challenges, the researcher turned to an adjusted strategy, interviewing purposefully chosen individuals from known contacts and widening the interviewee range using the snowball sampling method.

To ensure the utmost confidentiality and anonymity, the data obtained from these interviews were meticulously presented without any disclosure of specific identities. This careful approach served as a robust safeguard, preventing any potential

exposure and ensuring that the information could not be traced back to individual interviewees.

For this research, the interviewed individuals fell into three specific groups, differentiated by their relevance to the study's goals. The initial interviews took place online through the Google Meet platform from August 13, 2023, to September 9, 2023. Following the committee's approval of the outlined methodology and sampling technique, subsequent interviews were conducted on the same platform, Google Meet, between October 8, 2023, and October 28, 2023.

#### 3.1.1.1 Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

This source was crucial for the study because it closely related to the information needed to meet the research objectives. The group consisted of two Thai individuals and one Korean individual, all of whom had professional roles in the K-Pop Industry. Specifically, they were linked to two K-Labels that held official global auditions and chose trainees from Thailand. Their roles spanned various functions, including being part of the artist development team and contributing to the management team's tasks. The viewpoints these individuals offer was invaluable due to their potential insider understanding of the K-Pop Trainee Selection Process in Thailand. Their unique insights came from their past experiences in the K-Pop Industry, positioning them to provide in-depth, firsthand knowledge on the subject. However, it should be highlighted that, due to confidentiality reasons, they could not disclose their identities or actively participate in the research.

The primary sources, derived from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels who personally participated in the K-Pop Trainee Selection Process in Thailand, were identified using anonymous pseudonyms and were outlined as follows:

- 1) Mr. A: A male Thai member of the Artist Development Team at K-Label A. He has nine years of experience and is currently based in Thailand.
- 2) Mr. B: A male Korean member of the Management Team at K-Label B. He has fourteen years of experience and is currently based in Korea.
- 3) Ms. C: A female Thai member of the Artist Development Team at K-Label B. She has seven years of experience and is currently based in Thailand.

### 3.1.1.2 Former Thai K-Pop Idols

The second group was composed of four Thai individuals who have embarked on the journey to become K-Pop Idols under K-Labels, particularly focusing on those hailing from Thailand. Their collective experiences and insights were essential to understanding the nuances of the selection process and the route to successfully debuting as a K-Pop Idol. They brought firsthand knowledge of the obstacles and standards associated with this journey. Engaging with Former Thai K-Pop Idols provided a richer understanding of the specific dynamics and nuances of the selection process for this group.

The primary sources from Former Thai K-Pop Idols, who had debuted and were active in Korea for at least one year, were identified using anonymous pseudonyms and were outlined as follows:

- 1) Ms. D: A female Thai who debuted in 2012 and was active for three years.
- 2) Mr. E: A male Thai who debuted in 2013 and was active for three years.
- 3) Mr. F: A male Thai who debuted in 2019 and was active for one year.
- 4) Ms. G: A female Thai who debuted in 2015 and was active for one year.

### 3.1.1.3 Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

The concluding group encompassed four Thai individuals who once aspired to secure trainee positions under K-Labels, with an emphasis on Thai representation. Their narratives and firsthand accounts were instrumental in facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the selection mechanism and the determinants that prompted them to relinquish their K-Pop aspirations. These former aspirants furnished distinct perspectives on the challenges and benchmarks intrinsic to this pathway. Dialogues with them elucidated the intricate dynamics and particulars of the selection paradigm. It was noteworthy that their preparatory durations spanned a wide

spectrum, from mere weeks to extensive years, highlighting the multifaceted experiences and insights they proffer.

The primary sources, derived from Former Thai trainees, were identified using anonymous pseudonyms and were outlined as follows:

1) Mr. H: A male Thai who started his trainee journey in 2015 and trained for just three weeks.

2) Mr. I: A male Thai who started his trainee journey in 2017 and trained for one and a half years.

3) Ms. J: A female Thai who started her trainee journey in 2016 and trained for seven months.

4) Ms. K: A female Thai who started her trainee journey in 2014 and trained for 11 months.

### **3.1.2 Secondary Source**

The selection of secondary sources used a documentary research method, focusing on already available data. This data included information about the K-Pop Trainee System in Korea and the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand, mainly derived from twenty video interviews on YouTube. Sources were selected based on their pertinence to the research goals, and information from individuals who were not directly involved in the selection process in Thailand was omitted.

### 3.2 Data Collection Tools

In this research, primary data were collected through eleven individual in-depth interviews leaning towards the informal side. These interviews began with open-ended questions designed to elicit unrestricted responses from the interviewees. The approach aimed to allow interviewees to share their thoughts and feelings openly, ensuring that the data encompassed a broad spectrum of perspectives and nuances related to the study's topic.

To structure the researcher's investigation, the questions in the outline were systematically categorized into three distinct groups. Each group was carefully delineated based on the overarching objectives of the study. Moreover, the categorization of these groups took into account the specific concepts and theoretical frameworks employed throughout the research.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted online via the Google Meet platform, as the researcher was located in a different country. This online method facilitated interactions with interviewees from any location, overcoming geographical limitations and guaranteeing consistent data collection.

For secondary data, information about the K-Pop Trainee System in Korea and the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand was gathered mainly from twenty video interviews on YouTube. These videos were searched mainly through keywords in Thai, English, and Korean: "trainee," "เทรนนิ่ง/เด็กฝึกหัด" (Thai), "연습생" (Korean), and "Korea," "เกาหลี" (Thai), "한국" (Korean). The situations depicted in the videos had to occur between 2009 and 2019, regardless of the date uploaded.

### 3.2.1 Outline Questions for Thai and Korean staff members at K-Labels:

3.2.1.1 The questions were anchored in Objective 1: To examine the selection process of K-Pop Idol Trainees in Thailand. They also drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: 1) K-Pop, and 2) the selection processes for singers and actors.

1) What preparatory steps are taken before initiating casting and auditions for K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

2) Besides official global auditions, are there other recruitment methods used to select K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

3) What evaluation criteria are used during the casting and audition processes for K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

4) Which factors play a crucial role in selecting potential talents as K-Pop Trainees?

3.2.1.2 The questions were anchored in Objective 2: To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry. Additionally, they drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: Glocalism and Glocalization.

1) What drives K-Labels to launch castings and auditions for prospective K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

2) How do K-Labels recognize the potential in Thai talents for the global K-Pop Industry?

3) What do K-Labels especially expect from Thai talents?

4) What are the potential benefits for K-pop groups in having members who come from diverse backgrounds, like Thailand?

3.2.1.3 The questions were anchored in Objective 2: To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry. Additionally, they drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: Creative Labour.

1) How do K-Labels structure the training regimen, work hours, rest periods, and days off for idols and trainees to ensure a balance between work and personal life?

2) Considering the intense training and expectations, how do K-Labels safeguard the physical and mental well-being of Thai trainees, and address cultural and language barriers to ensure they receive fair support and understanding?

3) How are financial arrangements structured for Thai trainees, and are there any financial literacy programs or resources provided by K-Labels to assist them?

4) What actions do K-Labels take to address allegations related to the 'contract period' for K-Pop Idols and Trainees?

### **3.2.2 Outline Questions for Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees:**

3.2.2.1 The questions were anchored in Objective 1: To examine the selection process of K-Pop Idol Trainees in Thailand. They also drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: 1) K-Pop, and 2) the selection processes for singers and actors.

1) What preparations did you undertake before participating in the casting and auditions for K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

2) Which recruitment method did you follow to take part in the K-Pop Trainees audition in Thailand?

3) What skills or competencies did you demonstrate during the casting and auditions for K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

4) In your view, what factors influenced the selection process that led to your acceptance as a K-Pop Trainee?



3.2.2.2 The questions were anchored in Objective 2: To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry. Additionally, they drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: Glocalism and Glocalization.

1)What motivated you to participate in castings and auditions conducted by K-Labels in Thailand?

2)Why do you think K-Labels launch castings and auditions for prospective K-Pop Trainees in Thailand?

3)What specific qualities and attributes do you believe K-Labels seek in Thai talents?

4)From the standpoint of Thai talents, what advantages do you think you can potentially bring to K-pop groups?

3.2.2.3 The questions were anchored in Objective 2: To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry. Additionally, they drew upon related concepts and theories, specifically: Creative Labour.

1)Was the training regimen structured by K-Labels, including work hours, rest periods, and days off, designed to ensure a balance between work and your personal life?

2)Given the demanding training and expectations, how did K-Labels prioritize your physical and mental well-being as Thai idols and trainees? How did they address cultural and language barriers to provide you with fair support and understanding?

3)Could you explain how K-Labels establish financial arrangements for you as Thai trainees? Did they provide any financial literacy programs or resources to assist you in this aspect?

4)Have you encountered allegations related to the 'contract period' within K-Labels? How did the contract you have signed compare to or differ from these concerns?

### 3.3 Data Exploration

Given the qualitative approach of this research, it was beneficial to analyze data continually during the collection phase. This ongoing analysis helped refine the interview questions, ensuring they align more closely with the study's objectives. Upon completing the data collection phase, the researcher intended to embark on an in-depth analytical process. This process utilized a comparative methodology, specifically tailored to interpret the findings from the three question groups.

It was essential to note that these question groups had been meticulously crafted to align with the two primary objectives of the study. Moreover, in the pursuit of a comprehensive understanding, the analysis was informed and enriched by four relevant concepts and theories foundational to the research framework.

In this approach, the researcher became the primary analytical instrument, focusing on personal interpretation without external influence. Pertinent concepts and theoretical frameworks guided the analytical process, serving as pivotal structures during each phase of exploration and comprehension.

### 3.4 Data Presentation

The data was presented using a descriptive approach, where the findings were systematically laid out and detailed in Chapter 4, ensuring they aligned with the research objectives. Following this, the research conclusions were consolidated and further discussed in Chapter 5, providing a thorough documentation and reflection on the derived insights.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research, titled "K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand," employed a qualitative research method to ensure an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the investigated topic. The findings are categorized into three distinct sections, each aligned with the predefined objectives: 1) To scrutinize the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand, and 2) To provide recommendations for implementing a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry. These objectives are rooted in the concepts and theories established at the study's inception.

The categorization is presented as:

- 4.1 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand
- 4.2 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry:  
A Theoretical Perspective on Glocalism and Glocalization
- 4.3 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry:  
A Theoretical Perspective on Creative Labour

For the collection of primary data, the researcher conducted extensive online interviews with eleven anonymous interviewees, utilizing open-ended questions through the Google Meet platform. The initial interviews occurred from August 13, 2023, to September 9, 2023, while the subsequent interview, approved by the committee, took place between October 8, 2023, and October 28, 2023. These interviewees included professionals affiliated with K-Labels and individuals with firsthand experience as K-Pop Idols or K-Pop Trainees from Thailand, all with prior associations with K-Labels. To ensure confidentiality and protect interviewees' anonymity, the data from these interviews are presented without revealing specific identities, thereby minimizing potential risks of exposure.

The list of interviewees is as follows:

1. Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels<sup>1</sup>

1) Mr. A: A male Thai member of the Artist Development Team at K-Label A. He has nine years of experience and is currently based in Thailand.

2) Mr. B: A male Korean member of the Management Team at K-Label B. He has fourteen years of experience and is currently based in Korea.

3) Ms. C: A female Thai member of the Artist Development Team at K-Label B. She has seven years of experience and is currently based in Thailand.

2. Former Thai K-Pop Idols<sup>2</sup>

1) Ms. D: A female Thai who debuted in 2012 and was active for three years.

2) Mr. E: A male Thai who debuted in 2013 and was active for three years.

3) Mr. F: A male Thai who debuted in 2019 and was active for one year.

4) Ms. G: A female Thai who debuted in 2015 and was active for one year.

3. Former Thai K-Pop Trainees<sup>3</sup>

1) Mr. H: A male Thai who started his trainee journey in 2015 and trained for just three weeks.

2) Mr. I: A male Thai who started his trainee journey in 2017 and trained for one and a half years.

3) Ms. J: A female Thai who started her trainee journey in 2016 and trained for seven months.

4) Ms. K: A female Thai who started her trainee journey in 2014 and trained for 11 months.

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<sup>1</sup> K-Labels refer to Korean record labels.

<sup>2</sup> Former Thai K-Pop Idols refer to Thai K-Pop Idols who underwent training, debuted, and remained active for at least one year under K-Labels.

<sup>3</sup> Former Thai K-Pop Trainees refer to individuals who were signed and trained by K-Labels but did not successfully debut.

For the secondary data, the researcher analyzed materials related to the K-Pop Trainee System in Korea and the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand. This analysis primarily focused on twenty video interviews obtained from YouTube, with the requirement that the situations portrayed in the videos must have taken place between 2009 and 2019, irrespective of the upload date.

#### **4.1 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand**

Within this specific segment of the research, the outcomes are meticulously presented, firmly rooted in the principal objective of the study. This objective entails undertaking a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand. The findings section is organized into three primary categories: the pre-selection process, the selection process, and the post-selection process. Within these categories, the findings are further divided into two sections: insights from Thai and Korean staff members at K-Labels, and perspectives from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees.

##### **4.1.1 Pre-Selection Process**

###### 4.1.1.1 Insights from Thai and Korean staff members at K-Labels

In the context of an official global audition organized by K-Labels, with a specific focus on a country such as Thailand—identified as one of the biggest markets for the K-Pop Industry, as reviewed in Chapter 2—the label's dedicated team embarked on an intricate and meticulous planning phase. This initial stage was critical for ensuring the success of the event and involved various essential considerations.

First and foremost, the team delved into the logistics of receiving applications. They pondered over whether to accept application forms online through digital channels or through physical submissions at the audition site. This decision influenced the accessibility and reach of the audition, catering to a diverse group of applicants. Additionally, the team contemplated whether to make it mandatory for aspiring participants to submit introduction videos. This choice reflected on how it

impacted the audition process and the potential insights it offered into the applicants' talents and personalities.

*“ Before arranging the audition, the team needs to set the budget, determine the P&L (profit and loss), and choose the location—whether it's going to be Bangkok, Chiang Mai, or Phuket. We also handle the PR, announcing that the audition will be held at the hotel where the staff is staying.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

The pre-selection process extended to the scheduling of the event. The team needed to carefully select the dates and venues. In doing so, they often prioritized locations where the label's staff would be stationed during the audition, like in bustling urban centers such as Bangkok, serene settings like Chiang Mai, and picturesque destinations like Phuket. These choices considered practicality, accessibility, and the overall experience for both applicants and staff.

Budgeting was another essential aspect of this comprehensive planning phase. The label's team meticulously calculated the expenses involved in organizing the audition, including venue rentals, equipment, staffing, and promotional activities. This process helped in determining the financial viability of the event, ensuring that it could be executed within the allocated resources, while also evaluating the potential for profit or loss.

#### 4.1.1.2 Perspectives from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

In lieu of a mere pre-selection process, the period leading up to the audition served as a preparatory stage for participants, enabling them to showcase their abilities to their fullest extent during the audition. Typically, the preparation process involved diligent practice, with a primary focus on honing their singing and dancing skills. The selection of songs was a crucial aspect, often guided by a consideration of the participant's repertoire, skills, and proficiency, or aligning the choice with the label's preferences.

Participants might engage in practice either independently or under the guidance of an academy or professional trainers. Such training served the purpose of refining their talents and achieving excellence in their performance. The preparatory phase encompassed a comprehensive approach aimed at ensuring that participants were well-prepared to impress during the audition process. This preparatory stage was not merely a time of passive planning but an active period of honing one's craft, refining their skills, and making strategic choices to align with the expectations and preferences of the label. It played a pivotal role in shaping the readiness and performance of the participants, ultimately influencing their chances of success in the audition.

Within these findings, it became apparent that the pre-selection process served as a series of preparatory steps. For K-Labels, this phase was akin to business preparation, emphasizing strategic planning and organizational considerations. In contrast, for aspiring talents from Thailand, this process took on the role of character and skills preparation, focusing on the development and refinement of personal attributes and artistic abilities.

## 4.1.2 Selection Process

This section delves deeper and presents two main insights: one about the recruiting method and another about the evaluation principles used during the selection process.

### 4.1.2.1 Recruiting Methods

#### *1) Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels*

There were two primary methods K-Labels adopted for the selection process during the recruiting phase in Thailand.

##### 1.1) Official Global Audition

This method was widely acknowledged for its reputation as an inclusive platform. These sessions were not just regular auditions; they were organized on a grand scale and were often accompanied by extensive promotional campaigns to ensure they reach and involve as many talented individuals as possible. What set them apart was their genuine "open to all" nature, which eliminated the need for agent representation. This remarkable characteristic significantly enhanced the accessibility of these auditions.

*“For the global audition, our approach involves publicizing and advertising to invite people to apply by filling out the audition application form, with the auditions primarily taking place at hotel lobbies.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

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By removing the barrier of agent representation, these auditions became a welcoming arena for a diverse range of talent. They attracted and accommodated a wide variety of individuals, each with their unique skills and styles. This openness and flexibility allowed for the capturing of the rich diversity inherent in various music genres.



## 1.2) Online and On-Site Scouting

This method was employed to identify and recruit individuals who have showcased exceptional talent on social media platforms in an age where the internet serves as an open stage for aspiring artists to exhibit their abilities. Significantly, it was often the labels themselves who initiated contact with music academies. The academies, in turn, recommended potential talents they have identified, sometimes even through participation in talent competition events.

*“When we identify promising talents on social media, we personally contact them to invite them to join our audition. Sometimes, we receive referrals from known individuals or other labels.” (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

These promising talents, whether discovered through talent competitions or contacted directly by the labels, were then thoroughly evaluated. This approach allowed the labels to efficiently narrow down their search for potential talents, carefully assessing the individuals who have exhibited remarkable skills. After this initial screening, the labels extended invitations to these talented individuals to participate in more comprehensive audition processes. These extended auditions could take place either at the official global audition venue or in private sessions, further ensuring that the most promising talents were given the opportunity to shine. This process allowed for a more thorough and selective identification of prospective artists, contributing to the label's ability to discover and promote fresh talent.

2) *Perspectives from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees*

Out of the eight individuals interviewed, it was apparent that the means by which they were recruited to participate in the audition process can be discerned into two main categories. Approximately half of them initiated the process through self-application, signifying their direct involvement in the official global audition held by K-Labels.

The other half, in contrast, were scouted by various means, including connections within music academies, personal contacts, or even during participation in music competition events.

*"I participated in a dance competition, and one of the judges was a K-Label representative. He approached me after the competition and expressed his interest in inviting me for an audition at his label. I accepted his invitation, participated in the private audition, became a trainee, and eventually debuted." (Ms. D – October 10, 2023)*

Those who were scouted for their talents were subsequently invited to engage in a more exclusive and private audition session. Unlike the ordinary applicants who participated in the official global audition held in a designated venue.

#### 4.1.2.2 Evaluation Principles

##### *1) Insights from Thai and Korean staff members at K-Labels*

The principles applied during the audition process, particularly in the idol category, considered a range of factors such as personalities, physical appearance, and various talents and abilities like singing and dancing. These attributes, combined with an individual's overall charm, played a pivotal role in the selection process.

Within different labels, the significance of these attributes varied. For instance, in Label A, the emphasis was placed on an individual's unique charisma. The label assessed whether an auditionee possesses the charm and charisma necessary to make a favorable impression on the public. Following this, the label evaluated voice character and vocal tone, examining whether they possess qualities that captivate and engage an audience. Finally, physical appearance and looks such as facial features, weight, height came into play, as these aspects were believed to have the potential to cultivate fame and a dedicated following.

*"In general, we consider personality, skills, and charisma. Especially in the artist category, we assess voice characteristics, charm, charisma, and physical appearance. The critical factor varies based on a label's criteria, but for us, charisma stands out as paramount." (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

Conversely, in Label B, age became a paramount consideration. The label valued the youth of auditionees, as it allowed for more time to train and develop their talents, ultimately shaping them into accomplished idols. Personalities, appearance, and abilities were also considered, but age stood out as a key factor in their assessment.

*"For us, the most crucial factor in selection is age; we assess whether candidates might be too young or too old, aiming to identify the most effective age range for training. Personality, facial features, and skills are also significant considerations. Additionally, we scrutinize the background history of each auditionee."*

*Even if they are skillful or intriguing, any inappropriate behavior, records, or footprints discovered will result in their non-selection." (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

In addition to these attributes, the background of the auditionees played a crucial role in the evaluation and selection process. Both analog and digital footprints were examined. If, upon inspection, it was discovered that a potential talent had a history of certain risks or undesirable records, this could weigh heavily in the decision-making process. Even if an individual demonstrated remarkable talent, past issues might influence their chances of being selected.

## *2) Perspectives from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees*

In contrast to the specific skills of singing and dancing, the majority of the eight interviewees placed a significant emphasis on attributes such as their personalities, charisma, physical appearance, and their confidence in effectively showcasing their abilities during the audition process. They collectively asserted that among the applicants, there was a commonality in terms of possessing the requisite talents and abilities.

What emerged as crucial, according to their insights, was the ability to capture the attention of the staff and judges present in the audition room. They believed that it was not solely about having the talent but also about conveying the message that they were an asset with the potential and commitment to develop into successful idols. This perception led them to focus on aspects of their demeanor, including their personalities and charisma, which they believed were integral to making a lasting impression on the evaluators.

*"Back in the day, I personally believe it was the charm and confidence I displayed during the audition that led to my selection as a trainee, especially since I didn't feel I had many skills at the time. I could sing a little, but I couldn't dance at all." (Mr. F – October 20, 2023)*

Furthermore, the interviewees shared that for those who were initially scouted through the academies, there was a particular emphasis on preparing their image and personality.

*"All the students in the academy are honing skills like singing, rapping, and dancing, similar to one another. The academy primarily focuses on helping them refine their image, guiding them on how to dress and present themselves in a manner consistent with what the label is seeking." (Ms. K – October 8, 2023)*

The aim was to align these attributes with what the labels were specifically looking for in their talent. This approach reflected the label's desire for individuals to not only possess the necessary skills but also to tailor their image and personality to meet the label's expectations. In addition, the interviewees emphasized the significance of physical appearance and their confidence, which they viewed as contributing to their overall appeal.

In the talent recruitment process, two primary methods were employed: the global audition and scouting. According to insights gathered from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees, scouting appeared to offer talents greater opportunities for selection. Moreover, in the evaluation principles applied during auditions, charisma, characteristics, and confidence were deemed pivotal, surpassing the importance of mere technical proficiency.

### 4.1.3 Post-Selection Process

#### 4.1.3.1 Insights from Thai and Korean staff members at K-Labels

Due to the confidential nature of internal operations, both Label A and Label B exercised discretion in revealing the intricate details of their process when bringing selected Thai trainees to Korea. Nonetheless, they generously shared that they typically covered the costs of the airfare for these trainees. Furthermore, before entering into formal contract discussions with a selected trainee from Thailand, the label conducted one or two additional internal assessments to ensure a well-informed decision-making process.

#### 4.1.3.2 Perspectives from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

Following their selection in Thailand, individuals typically relocated to Korea, either self-financed or supported by K-Labels through a predefined agreement. It was noteworthy to mention that none of the eight interviewees immediately signed contracts with the K-Labels. Instead, there was a considered approach in which they all underwent several additional assessments. This diligent procedure was further complemented by discussions between the labels, the trainees, and their guardians.

*“I personally underwent three additional tests after being selected from Thailand. After being verbally accepted and undergoing a trial training period with the label for about a month, I then signed with them.” (Mr. I – October 26, 2023)*

After undergoing additional assessments, a trial training period of approximately one month followed. This phase assessed their ability to endure the rigorous training required for an extended duration post-commitment. Successful completion of this comprehensive process marked the formal onboarding of trainees, and contractual agreements were finalized with the respective labels.

## 4.2 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry: A Theoretical Perspective on Glocalism and Glocalization

In this section of the research, findings corresponding to the second objective are unveiled. This specific objective endeavors to proffer recommendations for the structuring of a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry, drawing upon the comprehensively reviewed paradigms of Glocalism and Glocalization. To ensure a lucid presentation of these results, they are systematically categorized into two primary divisions. The first division provides insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels. The second focuses on the experiences of Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees.

### 4.2.1 Glocalism and Glocalization: Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

In the foundational stages, K-Labels did not specifically focus on scouting talents based on their ethnic or national backgrounds. Instead, they primarily relied on the criteria highlighted in the first section of findings.

*“Actually, when we scout for talent, we don't specify that it must be Thai or any specific nationality; that's not how our strategy works. Our primary focus is on skills. However, we have started to consider this aspect, especially in Thailand, following the trend and recognition of how having foreign members, like Nichkhun, can enhance the localization process.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

The addition of international members to K-Pop groups was seen as a strategy for localization, aiming to broaden their reach and increase profit opportunities outside of Korea. Within the unique cultural context of Thailand, the pioneering efforts of Nichkhun deserved special mention. His trailblazing contribution played an instrumental role in amplifying the visibility of Thai talents within the K-Pop Industry, emphasizing their latent potential and competencies.

Subsequent to these developments, Thailand has evolved into a primary talent hub in the Southeast Asian region. Thai individuals often displayed a natural talent which, combined with their keen interest in K-Pop, made them stand out. K-Labels noted that many have honed their singing and dancing abilities from an early age, driven by their enthusiasm for K-Pop. Insights from an interview with a K-Labels representative further indicated that Thailand's dominant position among Southeast Asian nations owed much to its vibrant cultural diversity. Its embrace of myriad cultures has given rise to a blend of racial and ethnic backgrounds, such as Thai-Chinese and Thai-Western heritages.

*“I would say that Thai people encompass various races; we have a high rate of mixed Asian heritage, whether it's Thai-Chinese, Thai-Western, or other multicultural influences. This diversity manifests in both physical appearance and personality, contributing positively to our adaptability to different cultures around the world.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

This rich cultural milieu influenced both physical appearances and character traits, enabling Thai talents to assimilate more seamlessly into Korean and global cultural contexts compared to their peers from other Southeast Asian nations.

While K-Labels refrained from imposing explicit benchmarks or anticipations for Thai talents, they placed significant confidence in their meticulously crafted training system. This program was designed to holistically develop and nurture individuals, irrespective of their ethnic or national origins. Against this context, the perception of Thai individuals was notably favorable. Their adaptability, showcased by their swift integration into diverse cultural and professional environments, and their unwavering dedication to honing their crafts and achieving their aspirations, highlighted their unparalleled stature in the industry.

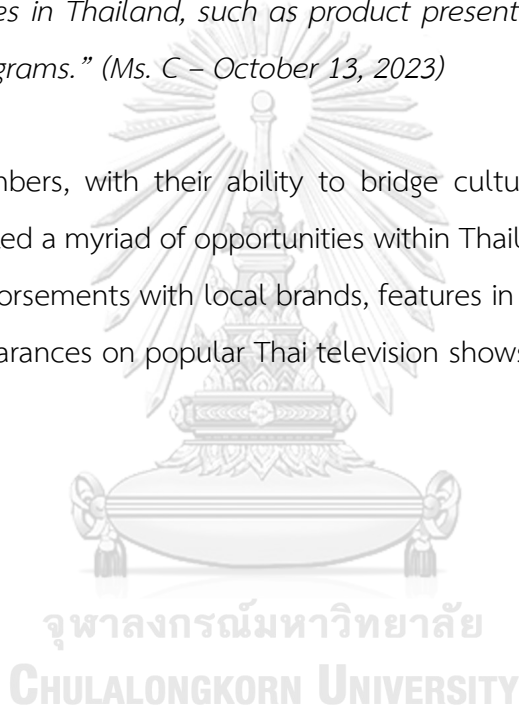
Lastly, from a marketing perspective, Thailand's expansive market was of paramount importance to the K-Pop domain. The deliberate incorporation of Thai members into K-Pop groups both amplified their localization strategies and bolstered their resonance within the local audience. The underlying rationale was



straightforward: Thai audiences have been naturally drawn to groups with a fellow Thai member, consequently boosting the group's comprehensive visibility. This preference has not been solely rooted in national pride but also in the ease of cultural and linguistic connectivity.

*“I personally think that the K-Pop market in Thailand is huge, and having a Thai member in the group can be an effective strategy to tap into the Thai fanbase, introducing the group and its other members. Additionally, it increases opportunities for various activities in Thailand, such as product presentations, magazine features, and television programs.” (Ms. C – October 13, 2023)*

Thai members, with their ability to bridge cultural nuances and language differences, unlocked a myriad of opportunities within Thailand. This included but was not limited to endorsements with local brands, features in renowned Thai magazines, and coveted appearances on popular Thai television shows.



#### 4.2.2 Glocalism and Glocalization: Insights from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

Given the success of previously debuted Thai K-Pop Idols, the K-Pop Industry and the global community have gained confidence in the exceptional talents that Thai individuals possess. These individuals have been often recognized for their unwavering determination, commitment, and resilience. Moreover, their passion and dedication strongly suggested that Thai talents were destined to excel in the arts.

*“In my view, K-Labels tend to prefer having Thai members in their groups, possibly influenced by the success of groups like 2PM and BLACKPINK, which include Thai members. Moreover, based on my personal experience, it appears that K-Labels believe Thais are inclined to engage in long-term work relationships with them.” (Ms. G – October 7, 2023)*

Korean labels observed a tendency among Thai talents to remain loyal for extended periods. This perceived loyalty could be attributed to the cultural values of Thai individuals.

Furthermore, considering Thailand's rich cultural mosaic, Thai talents have often possessed distinctive appearances and traits, making them particularly appealing to K-Labels. As Ms. D mentioned, the diverse cultural background of Thais might lead to a broader appeal in looks and attributes.

All interviewees concurred that the inclusion of foreign, specifically Thai talents, enhanced promotional and marketing efforts on an international scale. This was especially evident in Thailand, a nation with a pronounced affinity for K-Pop and a willingness to invest in the industry.

*“I believe K-Labels are well aware of the cultural sentiment within Thailand, often expressed as 'Thai people love and support each other.' If they effectively promote a group with a Thai member, Thai fans and people would be more than happy to support their fellow Thais and contribute to the group's success.” (Ms. J – October 11, 2023)*

Half of the interviewees emphasized the distinctiveness of Thai culture, noting that Thai citizens showed strong support for their compatriots. As a result, K-Pop groups with Thai members were likely to achieve significant financial success in Thailand, known for its substantial consumer spending.

Additionally, Ms. G offered a significant insight into the K-Pop Industry's decision to incorporate foreign members into their groups. She highlighted the industry's progressive shift towards embracing diversity, a notable evolution for a country traditionally characterized by its robust sense of nationalism. This strategic inclusion was not just a mere marketing tactic. Instead, it served a dual purpose: to globally promote K-Pop, emphasizing that individuals of all races and nationalities can engage with and aspire to be part of this cultural phenomenon, and to reflect the Korean population's increasing openness to diverse cultures.

The findings from K-Labels, Former Thai K-Pop Idols, and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees converged in highlighting the significant role played by the inclusion of foreign members, especially individuals from Thailand, within a group. It was proposed that this not only enriched the diversity of the group but also enhanced its appeal among Thai fans. Thai fans, recognized as avid supporters of K-pop and renowned for their substantial consumer engagement and fervent cultural support for their compatriots, were likely to extend their enthusiasm to the entire group. This phenomenon was expected to create a positive ripple effect, boosting the visibility of all group members among Thai fans.

### 4.3 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry: A Theoretical Perspective on Creative Labour

In this part of the study, findings pertaining to the second objective are presented. This objective aims to provide suggestions for the formation of a trainee selection process in the T-Pop Industry, stemming from a deep understanding of Creative Labour. To enhance clarity, the findings are divided into four key areas: issues related to work-life balance, the comprehensive physical and mental well-being of individuals, financial arrangements, and the contract period. Within each area, the initial section offers insights garnered from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels, whereas the latter section probes into the journeys of Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees.

#### 4.3.1 Work-Life Balance

##### 4.3.1.1 Work-Life Balance: Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

In the context of the trainee period, two different experiences emerged from Label A and Label B regarding the daily routines of their trainees.

*“It's similar to our regular work schedule, where we typically have a day off. During the training period, it resembles a typical school day with classes from morning until evening, including self-study sessions and evaluations.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

Label A elucidated that the life of a trainee under their guidance resembled that of a typical day in general offices or educational institutions. Specifically, trainees had a structured daily regimen that included scheduled training sessions, designated periods for self-guided practice, and autonomous study sessions. Moreover, trainees under Label A benefited from regular days off and observed standard annual holidays.

*“Our label arranges a quite tight schedule from early morning until late evening so that trainees can focus on classes and training sessions. They are only allowed a break on important national holidays.” (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

In stark contrast, Label B offered an insight into a more rigorous training environment. Trainees under this label adhered to a highly intensive schedule, pushing them to hone and enhance their skills to their utmost potential. Their daily commitments extended from early morning to late evening. As for days of respite, they were sparing. Breaks were primarily confined to highly significant holidays such as the Lunar New Year or the Thanksgiving season.

As for idols who have already debuted, their schedules and days off were invariably tied to their promotional activities. During active promotion periods, their schedules were densely packed, leaving little room for relaxation. Even the intervals outside their promotional engagements were often occupied with practice sessions, closely mirroring the routines of trainees. However, outside the promotion periods, their daily routines often reverted to those of a trainee. It was essential to note that there was an absence of regular days off for these idols. Nevertheless, once they concluded a promotional cycle, they might receive special breaks, primarily during major holidays like Lunar New Year or Thanksgiving.

#### 4.3.1.2 Work-Life Balance: Insights from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

In general, trainees followed a specific schedule and timetable encompassing self-practice, group-practice, and training sessions with their trainers to facilitate holistic development. Typically, their rigorous training schedule spanned seven days per week, dedicating approximately twelve to fifteen hours per day to practice sessions. It was important to note that this schedule might differ for Korean trainees who were required to attend school in the morning, commencing their practice sessions in the afternoon. This reflected the unique challenge they face, balancing academic commitments with the demands of their training regimen.

*“The first time I came to Korea as a trainee for my initial label was when I was 12, and the training sessions were so challenging that I gave up after one month. A year after preparing myself physically and mentally, I decided to audition after being scouted again and successfully debuted with my second label.” (Mr. F – October 20, 2023)*

The allocation of days off was often tied to significant cultural events, including Lunar New Year, Thanksgiving, and National Liberation Day. These designated breaks offered a respite from the relentless training routine, allowing trainees to recharge and reconnect with aspects of their personal lives.

Upon debut, idols experienced a shift in their routine, enjoying comparatively more relaxed or resting periods. This transition was influenced by the recognition that, as trainees, they had to exert significant effort and dedication to secure a spot for debut.

*“Based on what my debuted idol friends have shared, they mentioned that the schedule during their trainee days was significantly more challenging because they needed to compete to be selected for their debut. However, after debuting, they said it's not as hard anymore.” (Ms. J – October 11, 2023)*

However, post-debut, idols encountered new challenges related to the demands of a tightly packed promotional schedule. This period demanded sustained commitment and hard work as they navigated various promotional activities. The juxtaposition of the intense training phase and the demanding promotional period illustrated the dynamic nature of the journey from trainee to debuted idol.

### 4.3.2 Physical and Mental well-being of the individuals

#### 4.3.2.1 Physical and Mental well-being of the individuals: Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

Within the context of idols who have already made their debut, K-Labels prioritized their holistic well-being by offering a range of health-related services. Specifically, these idols were provided with regular health check-ups. In addition to these physical assessments, there was a concerted effort to address their mental and emotional well-being.

*“It is very normal for debuted idols to have sessions with psychiatrists or therapists to reduce their pressures, stress, and exposure to toxic social media for a regular period of time.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

Periodic consultations with psychiatrists or therapists were facilitated, aiming to alleviate the pressures and stresses that often accumulated during intense promotional periods. This therapeutic support was also geared towards mitigating the impact of negative online commentary, which might include cyberbullying or critical remarks.

Should these idols find themselves grappling with particular challenges, K-Labels extended their support by allowing idols to request additional therapeutic sessions. Similarly, should physical ailments arise unexpectedly, provisions were in place to address and manage these concerns promptly.

However, it was worth noting a disparity in the support offered to trainees in comparison to their debuted counterparts. Trainees, for the most part, were not beneficiaries of the aforementioned health and wellness services. But there was a silver lining for foreign trainees.

*“For foreign trainees, we will include a Korean class in their schedule so they can blend in, adapt themselves to Korean culture and context, and reduce any barriers they may feel.” (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

Recognizing the potential cultural and linguistic barriers these individuals might face, K-Labels offered Korean language and cultural classes. This initiative was seen as a bridge, smoothing over cultural differences and facilitating a more seamless mental adaptation for these trainees in a foreign environment.

#### 4.3.2.2 Physical and Mental well-being of the individuals: Insights from Former Thai K-Pop idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

In the context of physical health, there were no designated special treatments or regular check-ups provided. However, a prevailing issue arose when a trainee experienced an injury, leading the label to resort to steroid injections as a means to expedite recovery and enable the resumption of practice. Regrettably, the consequences of such a course of action have resulted in the enduring burden of chronic pain for the affected individual.

All interviewees highlighted the challenging nature of the dietary regimen, a prominent aspect of their training process. Notably, Mr. E, despite being male, offered insights into the difficulties arising from his substantial physical appearance. He elaborated on the stress he experienced, emphasizing the pressure and stringent restrictions imposed on him to adhere to a singular meal per day.

*“During the diet phase, my daily intake was limited to only 1 banana and 1 glass of milk; besides that, I was allowed to drink only water. Occasionally, the label would be kind enough to provide me with an additional chicken breast. Combined with my training schedule, which extended from 6 AM to 10 PM, I lost more than 10 kg within a month. Personally, I consider this period to be the most challenging phase I encountered back in those days.” (Mr. E – October 27, 2023)*

A noteworthy component of the dietary aspect was the daily morning weigh-ins, accompanied by strict regulations on food intake. Trainees faced scrutiny in adhering to these dietary guidelines, and failure to meet weight loss targets resulted in punitive measures, colloquially referred to as 'talk through' or scolding.



*“My trainee friend was compelled to lose weight through a combination of strict dietary measures and intense workouts, to the extent that she fainted. The situation worsened when, despite being in poor health and needing an IV drip at the hospital, the label verbally pressured her to attend practice.”*  
(Ms. K – October 8, 2023)

This detailed examination of the dietary challenges provided valuable insights into the stringent measures applied during the training process, shedding light on the physical and psychological pressures endured by trainees as they navigate the demanding expectations set forth by their respective labels.

Turning attention to the mental health aspect, particularly for trainees, the approach adopted a more conversational and empathetic tone. These instances were comparable to sessions wherein trainees engage in open discussions with label representatives, creating an environment conducive to addressing concerns. This forum allowed trainees to express their thoughts and emotions, fostering an outlook that anticipates positive outcomes, where the arduous efforts and stress invested in their pursuits would, eventually, yield rewards. This emphasis on mental well-being underscored the acknowledgment of the intricate interplay between physical and mental health within the realm of trainee experiences.

Within the linguistic and cultural realm, each interviewee received instruction in the Korean language, albeit through varying methods. Surprisingly, half of them did not undergo formal Korean language classes facilitated by lecturers; instead, the instruction was provided by label staff and fellow Korean trainees. This variance in instructional approaches underscored the diverse strategies employed within the training process.

The cultural disparity among trainees has been expressed not in terms of overt discrimination, but rather as a perceived distance from their Korean counterparts.

*“When I first came to Korea, I was shocked because I lived in the dormitory with other Korean trainees. During bath time, they were able to take a shower together to save time, but as a Thai, I could not. Because of this, I was treated as distant from them.” (Mr. H – October 16, 2023)*

*“I actually experienced physical bullying from other Korean trainees because I am the only foreigner. I remember during dance practice, a girl who later spread lies about me to the CEO tried to trip me by crossing my legs so that I would fall. Due to this toxic environment and feeling isolated in a foreign country, I was diagnosed with depression. Unfortunately, my label never provided support, and I only received proper treatment when I returned to Thailand.” (Ms. G – October 7, 2023)*

The interviewees have shared experiences highlighting a nuanced sense of detachment, revealing the complexity of cultural integration within the training environment. This aspect shed light on the multifaceted nature of cultural dynamics as trainees navigate language acquisition and cultural adaptation during their training period.

However, Ms. D, one of the interviewees, shared that in terms of mental and cultural support, it might not necessarily be an obligation for the label to provide such assistance to foreign trainees.

*“I believe it's akin to the idiom 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.' The decision to go there was yours, so I think it's your responsibility to adapt to a new environment in terms of cultures and languages. I don't think it's the label's job to provide special care just because you are a foreigner. If you don't believe you can handle it, then perhaps it's best not to go.” (Ms. D – October 10, 2023)*

According to her perspective, these decisions were, to a significant extent, made by the trainees themselves, making it their responsibility to prepare and attempt to adapt to different environments and circumstances.

### 4.3.3 Financial Arrangements

#### 4.3.3.1 Financial Arrangements: Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

Based on the information provided by both Label A and Label B, it became clear that financial arrangements for trainees were approached with a personalized touch, and these arrangements varied significantly from one individual to another.

*“We cannot provide information on a case-by-case basis. Unfortunately, our internal support policy cannot be shared publicly.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

Nevertheless, there was a foundational commitment from these labels to aid foreign trainees by offering accommodation within Korea. This gesture signified the labels' dedication to ensuring a seamless transition for these international talents. Furthermore, irrespective of their nationality – be it Korean or foreign – all trainees were entitled to receive a daily lunch meal, courtesy of their respective label.

Label B, in particular, has occasionally gone a step further. As per their testimony, in certain instances, they have undertaken the cost of an air ticket for a trainee's inaugural journey to Korea upon their selection.

*“We support accommodation fees and lunch meal expenses for foreign trainees. In some cases, we also provide support for air ticket fees under agreed conditions.” (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

It was crucial to highlight that such financial support, particularly regarding accommodation and potentially airfare, was primarily extended during the early stages leading up to their debut. The implication here was that these gestures were strategic investments, ensuring that trainees had the necessary support at the onset of their budding careers, setting them on the path of potential success.

#### 4.3.3.2 Financial Arrangements: Insights from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

The interviewees collectively conveyed that each class or training session organized as part of the training process incurred costs, presenting an inherent financial commitment within their chosen career trajectory.

*“My label actually supports the accommodation fee if staying with other trainees in the same dormitory. However, I chose to live separately for my personal space, so I need to support myself in this regard.” (Mr. I – October 26, 2023)*

Additionally, the label took charge of covering accommodation and lunch expenses. However, beyond these provisions, the financial responsibility rested squarely on the shoulders of the trainees themselves.

In the context of debuted idols, a discernible shift occurred in the financial dynamics. Earnings were directly received and overseen by the label, establishing a financial framework that imposed a unique structure. Specifically, within this system, each expenditure incurred—from the initial training phase and debut preparations to the production of songs and the implementation of makeovers—resulted in a corresponding financial obligation or debt to the label.

*“As for my group, we never received any money or salary for our performances, events, or public appearances because the label asserted that we still owed them money from the training era. There were only a few instances when we received payment directly from the event organizer, allowing us to handle money ourselves.” (Ms. G – October 7, 2023)*

This intricate financial interdependence highlighted the label's extensive financial engagement across various dimensions of an idol's professional trajectory. It emphasized the label's integral role not only in nurturing artistic development but also in facilitating the economic aspects that governed the symbiotic relationship between creativity and commerce within the expansive landscape of the K-Pop Industry.

#### 4.3.4 Contract Period

##### 4.3.4.1 Contract Period: Insights from Thai and Korean Staff Members at K-Labels

In the detailed examination of this critical issue, both Label A and Label B have emphasized that the prevailing situation was better understood as a well-structured legal action, anchored in Korean laws, formed through mutual understanding and agreement, rather than an outcome influenced by external labels' regulations or policies.

*“The contract period is an issue that both trainees and idols decide for themselves before signing, with their own wills and consideration. It is a legal agreement with mutual consent, and I do not believe there should be any other policy to address this issue.” (Mr. A – October 11, 2023)*

Label A asserted that the duration of the contract was a joint decision arrived at by both the carefully chosen trainees and idols. This agreement stood as a testament to their shared commitment, where all parties were fully informed and aware of the terms. Before entering this partnership, each individual had a clear understanding of the conditions and willingly committed to the label's vision and values.

On the other hand, Label B, drawing from its wealth of experience, argued that the contract duration aligned seamlessly with established Korean legal standards and policies.

*“Regarding this issue, I believe it is beneficial for everyone to be aware that there are transparent and clear regulations on the contract period under Korean law.” (Mr. B – October 15, 2023)*

From their perspective, a typical contract for new entrants' spanned 7 years. Renewal discussions were approached with mutual respect and understanding,

and the renewed contract period might range between 2 to 5 years, depending on the unique dynamics and needs of each group.

#### 4.3.4.2 4 Contract Period: Insights from Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees

The interviewees unanimously conveyed that the contract period was not a particularly noteworthy concern in their interactions with K-Labels. Notably, only one interviewee, Mr. H, addressed the duration aspect.

*“They offered me an 8-year contract to sign after I had been there for only 3 weeks. Faced with the challenges and the dauntingly lengthy duration of the contract, I decided not to sign and returned to Thailand. I was already 22 years old at that time, and 8 years seemed excessively long.” (Mr. H – October 16, 2023)*

However, other issues surfaced when discussing the contract topic, especially concerning the limited Korean language proficiency of the trainees, particularly those associated with smaller labels that failed to provide interpreter support during signing sessions.

*“I thought that with the change of the owner, my signed contract would be automatically terminated, but it was not. I assumed this due to my limited Korean language skills, and the label was not inclined to accurately explain the conditions to me. They did not provide an interpreter, and I couldn't afford one myself.” (Ms. K – October 8, 2023)*

There were internal label issues, with contracts purportedly believed to be automatically terminated before being transferred to new signatories. However, the interviewees, often foreigners with limited Korean language skills, found themselves in a precarious situation. They had limited options and were presented with minimal choices regarding their departure from the label. Opting to terminate the contract obligated them to pay substantial compensation. Furthermore, they were informed of

a one-year prohibition from engaging in similar activities with any company in Korea following termination.

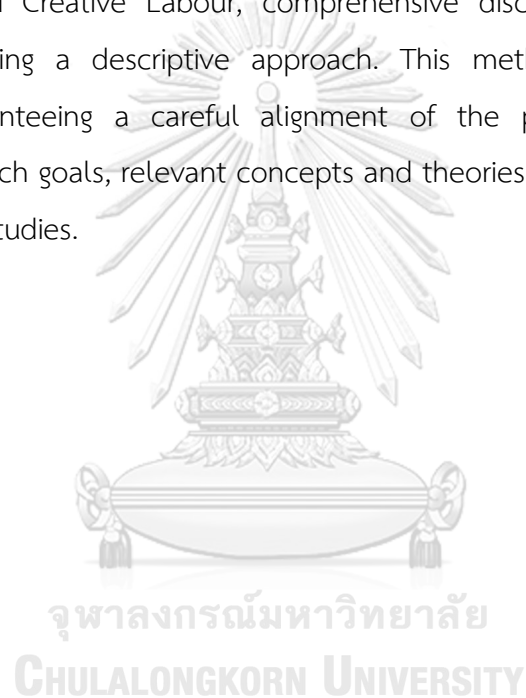
Moreover, beyond concerns related to the contract period, the issue of securing a correct visa type for trainees emerged as a significant challenge. Ms. G, who debuted with a small label, disclosed that she underwent training and made her debut without obtaining a working visa.

*“Since my trainee days, I had to travel back and forth between Thailand and Korea every 90 days because my label did not want to take the time to request a visa for me. This was due to the additional tax they might need to pay for having foreigners under their label. I found it tricky and unfair. Even though I had already debuted and had a good chance to be on broadcasted music shows, I couldn't participate because I didn't have the right visa.” (Ms. G – October 7, 2023)*

Throughout her years under this label, she had to navigate the details of Korean immigration rules, which mandated her to leave and re-enter the country every 90 days. Despite managing this, the label informed her that, while she could participate in smaller events, the opportunity to perform on nationally televised music shows was denied. The reason she shared was linked to the label's reluctance to bear additional taxes associated with having foreign performers on board.

In each of the four identified areas, the research findings revealed nuanced insights drawn from both K-Labels and Thai individuals who have undergone real-world experiences, encompassing positions as both debuted idols and trainees. This particularly held true in the exploration of the domain concerning the physical and mental well-being of these individuals, a facet notably influenced by the implementation of an exceedingly restricted diet plan.

To expound on the findings related to the selection process and recommendations, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Glocalism and Glocalization, and Creative Labour, comprehensive discussions ensued for each category, employing a descriptive approach. This methodological decision was intentional, guaranteeing a careful alignment of the presented data with the overarching research goals, relevant concepts and theories, and insights derived from previous related studies.





## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

The conclusion and the discussions in the study titled 'K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand' adhere to a descriptive approach, with a careful alignment of the presented data to the research objectives, relevant concepts and theories, and prior related studies.

#### 5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

##### 5.1.1 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand

The process comprises with the main 3 steps which are;

###### 5.1.1.1 Pre-Selection Process

The K-Labels, in their role as selectors, meticulously chart their strategy encompassing event scheduling, venue selection, and budget allocation. Simultaneously, Former Thai K-Pop Idols and Former Thai K-Pop Trainees, taking on the role of auditionees, diligently prepare to showcase their abilities to the fullest extent possible. This symbiotic process shapes the vibrant landscape of the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand.

###### 5.1.1.2 Selection Process

###### 1) Recruiting Methods

The recruitment of talents for auditions in Thailand primarily revolves around two main avenues: participation in K-Labels' official global auditions and scouting processes that occur through music academies, personal connections, or participation in music competition events. These methods form the core mechanisms for identifying and nurturing promising talents in the realm of music and entertainment.

## 2) Evaluation Principles

The principles used for evaluation during the audition can be categorized into two groups, each sorted by their respective significance:

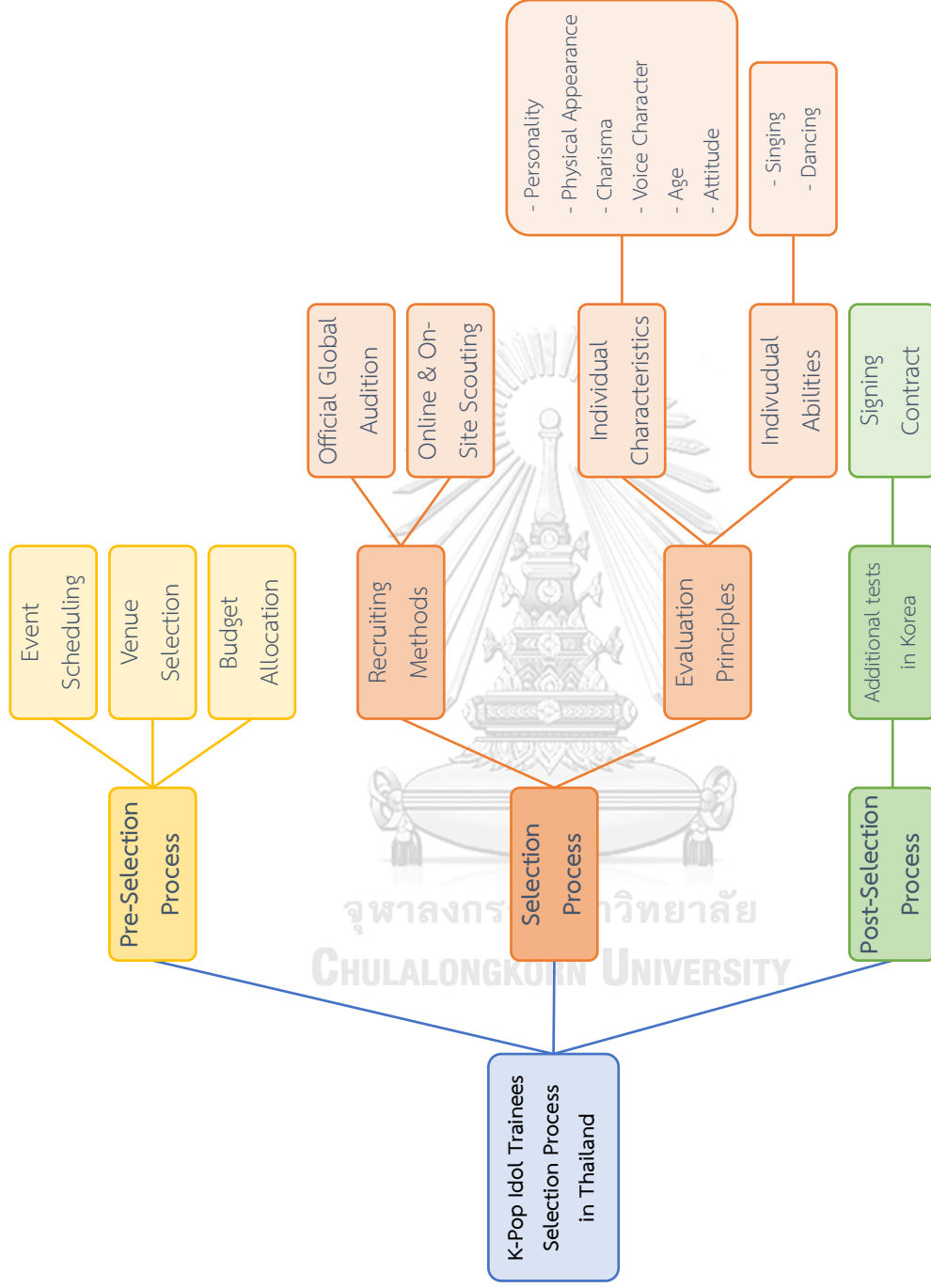
2.1) Individual Characteristics, which may vary among different labels, encompass personality, physical appearance (including facial features, weight, and height), charisma, voice characteristics, age, and attitude.

2.2) Individual Abilities, which primarily pertain to singing and dancing skills.

### 5.1.1.3 Post-Selection Process

Before finalizing contracts with trainees from Thailand, the label conducts several internal assessments after they arrive in Korea. This thorough process also involves discussions between the labels, trainees, and their guardians to ensure informed decisions.





**Figure 3** K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process by K-Labels in Thailand Diagram: Based on the Research Findings

### 5.1.2 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry:

#### A Theoretical Perspective on Glocalism and Glocalization

It is posited that the inclusion of foreign members, specifically individuals from Thailand, within a group has the potential to enhance the visibility of other group members among Thai fans. Notably, Thai fans are recognized for their substantial consumer engagement and fervent cultural support for their compatriots. This phenomenon may consequently facilitate the leveraging of promotional activities in Thailand.

### 5.1.3 Recommendations for Trainee Selection in the T-Pop Industry:

#### A Theoretical Perspective on Creative Labour

##### 5.1.3.1 Work-Life Balance

Regular weekends off are not specified, and breaks for trainees and debuted idols are typically granted during special occasions or national holidays in Korea only.

This scheduling approach is influenced by the demanding daily rehearsal routines. For trainees, it aims to secure a debut spot, while for debuted idols, it aims to enhance popularity during promotional activities.

##### 5.1.3.2 Physical and Mental well-being of the individuals

While K-Labels claim to provide regular support for health and mental well-being, such support may vary among different labels. It is noteworthy that a particularly problematic issue concerning both physical and mental health seems to be a very restrictive diet plan aimed at achieving rapid weight loss outcomes. Additionally, there tends to be reliance on steroid injections administered by medical specialists to expedite pain recovery, potentially resulting in the consequences of chronic pain.

### 5.1.3.3 Financial Arrangements

For trainees, financial assistance covers essential living expenses in Korea, including accommodation and lunch. Debuted idols also receive support for supplementary costs such as makeovers and expenses related to promotional activities. However, it is important to note that this support comes with an obligation. These expenses are considered a financial commitment to the label, and idols are expected to reimburse these costs from their earnings.

### 5.1.3.4 Contract Period

Beyond the contract period agreed upon by K-Labels and individuals in compliance with the law, more serious issues arise, such as the language barrier and the questionable arrangements employed by some labels. For instance, some labels choose to have trainees sign contracts without the presence of a proper interpreter or intentionally avoid obtaining the correct visa type for their foreign idols.

## 5.2 Discussions

This discussion is thoughtfully organized into three distinct parts, as follows:

5.2.1 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand

5.2.2 Recommendations for Thai Record Labels ("T-Labels")

5.2.3 Recommendations for Thai talents

### 5.2.1 K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process in Thailand

Based on the findings derived from primary data sources, collected through in-depth interviews, the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process can be comprehensively delineated into three key mandatory steps. These steps parallel the selection processes for singers and musical leading actors, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. However, it is noteworthy that there exist nuanced distinctions amidst the similarities within this framework, warranting a more detailed exploration.

#### 5.2.1.1 Pre-Selection Process

While the recruiting methods and evaluation principles have been widely documented in the existing literature, it is important to note that the planning steps within the perspective of K-Labels offer a novel dimension to the field of study. Although the K-Pop Idol Trainees Selection Process indeed incorporates a planning phase to strategize the entire process, this phase exhibits distinctive characteristics when compared to the selection processes for singers and musical leading actors. In particular, it introduces novel elements.

In this particular phase within the realm of K-Pop, the focus shifts towards the logistical aspects of the selection process. These considerations involve intricately scheduling the audition event, carefully selecting suitable venues, and efficiently allocating resources. Scheduling is crucial to ensure that the audition event is strategically timed to garner maximum participation. Venue selection takes into account not only the physical location but also the atmosphere and overall experience it can offer to the participants. The allocation of resources in this context involves the prudent distribution of budgetary provisions to meet diverse needs, including venue rentals, equipment procurement, staffing requirements, and

promotional activities. The distribution of resources is pivotal as it directly impacts the execution of the audition process.

Additionally, a distinctive feature is the deliberate absence of a fixed prototype for an idol. This departure from predefined molds, unlike other musical genres, highlights K-Pop's commitment to embracing a wide range of artistic expressions without adhering to a predetermined template. The industry thrives on diversity, actively welcoming various talents. The planning phase in K-Pop goes beyond conventional considerations, reflecting a multifaceted approach. This lack of a fixed prototype indicates the industry's confidence in its talent development system, designed to nurture individuals for seamless integration into different roles within K-Pop groups.

Within these groups, members are strategically placed based on considerations that extend beyond musical proficiency, taking into account individual personalities and potential contributions. This strategic placement reflects the industry's commitment to creating a dynamic and varied environment. This confidence in the system is also evident in the careful selection and positioning of members in skill positions such as main vocalist, main rapper, and main dancer. These roles carry specific responsibilities contributing to overall group harmony. For instance, the main vocalist delivers emotive performances, the main rapper adds a lyrical flair, and the main dancer enhances visual appeal with choreographic expertise.

Members are strategically placed into roles that extend beyond musical proficiency, reflecting a nuanced understanding of their individual personalities and potential contributions. Specific roles within K-Pop groups cater to distinct character archetypes, transcending mere musical abilities. For instance, the concept of "Mood Maker" (분위기 메이커) adds another layer to the diversity of roles, encapsulating individuals who embody the idiom "life of the party," projecting an enthusiastic and goofy character that contributes to the overall ambiance. Moreover, the category of "Visual" (비주얼) for instance, pertains to individuals with breathtaking facial appearances and an emphasis on physical attractiveness. Members occupying this role

may adopt a reserved and less talkative demeanor within the group dynamics (Hong, 2019).

In essence, K-Pop's approach to idol formation goes beyond musical prowess, acknowledging and valuing a range of attributes that enhance the collective appeal of the group.

#### 5.2.1.2 Selection Process

##### *1) Recruiting Methods*

The findings concerning the methods employed for recruiting K-Pop Idol trainees, particularly within the context of Thailand, unveil some subtle but noteworthy distinctions from the commonly documented recruitment practices in the broader realm of K-Pop. Notably, these distinctions encompass the absence of a well-documented street casting approach, which is a notable characteristic of K-Pop's talent scouting. In typical K-Pop practices, label representatives often traverse public spaces, scouting for individuals who exhibit exceptional physical appearance and inviting them to participate in auditions. However, in the case of Thailand, the practice of street casting appears to be limited. Several factors contribute to this, including the constraints of time and potential language barriers that may hinder effective scouting in a diverse cultural context.

In addition to the previously outlined distinctions, K-Labels operating in Thailand employ a diverse range of audition methods, deviating from traditional approaches. Although official global auditions remain a crucial avenue for talent recruitment, recent findings indicate a departure from conventional venues like hotel lobbies. This shift is not uniform across all label sizes, leading to notable variations in their approaches.

For instance, SM Entertainment, recognized as one of the largest K-Labels in Korea, introduces a pre-application process as part of its global audition strategy in Thailand. Only those who pass the pre-selection stage receive information about the specific location and time for the subsequent physical audition (@smaudition\_official, 2023). This method is designed to enhance efficiency, allowing for more focused judge-talent interactions during the evaluation phase.



Such a targeted approach enables Thai talents to more effectively showcase their skills, charm, and confidence, contributing to a more thorough and nuanced assessment.

In contrast, smaller labels adopt a distinctive approach by publicly advertising the location, date, and time of their arranged auditions. An interesting observation is that some of these labels choose unconventional audition venues, such as dance studios or academies (@dctfamily\_official, 2023). This decision not only adds a unique dimension to the audition experience but also potentially offers benefits to the students within that academy, creating a symbiotic relationship between talent recruitment and local educational institutions.

An additional layer to the audition process is the incorporation of closed or exclusive auditions. These exclusive sessions are specifically tailored for individuals initially scouted through music academies, personal connections, or participation in music competition events. This strategic approach seeks to diversify the talent pool by expanding the search beyond the confines of global auditions, emphasizing a more inclusive and comprehensive talent acquisition strategy within the dynamic landscape of K-Pop in Thailand.

By integrating these various audition methods, K-Labels ensure that a wide array of talents is considered for the K-Pop Idol Trainee Selection Process in Thailand, enriching the diversity and depth of the talent pool.

## *2) Evaluation Principles*

The selection process for K-Pop Idol Trainees shares commonalities with the methods employed in selecting vocalists and leading actors, underscoring the paramount importance accorded to individual abilities, specifically in singing and dancing. These aptitudes stand as primary evaluative criteria, highlighting the pivotal role of talent in the discernment of potential idols. Furthermore, there is a conspicuous emphasis on individual characteristics, with particular attention directed towards physical appearance, encompassing observable attributes such as facial features, weight, and height.

However, the contemporary sociocultural landscape is witnessing a transformative shift marked by an increased awareness of prevailing beauty standards and a growing advocacy for body positivity. This cultural evolution seeks to mitigate the impact of toxic beauty standards that often impose unrealistic expectations on individuals. In light of these developments, it becomes pertinent for K-Labels to contemplate a paradigm shift, one that involves embracing diversity not only in stylistic attributes but also in the domain of physical appearance within the K-Pop Industry.

Such a shift assumes significance in providing essential support to current idols who grapple with criticism for deviating from conventional beauty standards, despite being endowed with exceptional skills (Miller, 2023). These standards frequently perpetuate expectations related to attributes such as pale and fair skin, straight and white teeth, a V-shaped face, and a slim physique. In the face of these conventional norms, recognizing and incorporating a broader spectrum of physical appearances is not only a means of empowering talents that deviate from the established aesthetic but also an avenue for normalizing such differences within societal perceptions. This shift in approach holds the potential to encourage individuals, especially those still entrenched in traditional beauty standards, to broaden their embrace of the diverse forms of beauty.

In a society that increasingly values proficiency on par with aesthetics, it becomes imperative to underscore the importance of technical skills, especially in singing and dancing. This heightened significance serves to challenge and reshape conventional notions of physical attractiveness. Recognizing that proficiency and skills

are as integral as aesthetic appeal is crucial. This recognition fosters a holistic appreciation for the multifaceted dimensions that contribute to an individual's success as a K-Pop Idol (Lee, 2023).

Another noteworthy aspect is the intangible attribute of charisma, deeply rooted within an individual's persona, which stands out as paramount during the audition stages. While skills such as singing and dancing can be honed and refined over time, charisma or inherent personality traits are seen as innate qualities—challenging to cultivate or replicate and often considered as gifts one is born with. These innate attributes can enchant evaluators and profoundly influence the lasting impression an auditionee imparts.

In addition to image and personality, the individuals' committed attitude and confidence play pivotal roles in the selection process. These intangible qualities further underscore the multifaceted nature of the criteria applied during K-Pop Idol trainees' selection. It becomes evident that while Individual Abilities form the core foundation, the industry places significant importance on holistic characteristics that extend beyond technical skills.

#### 5.2.1.3 Post-Selection Process

In this specific phase, the practice of conducting additional assessments after the initial selection of candidates from Thailand emerges as a novel approach. Upon detailed reflection, the researcher posits that this multi-tiered selection process provides numerous advantages not only to the trainees but also to the K-Labels. This intermediary stage serves as a 'trial' or 'probationary' period, allowing potential artists to acquaint themselves with the training environment and understand the expected standards before committing to a binding agreement. Such contracts, which often cover extended periods, outline the regulations that trainees must adhere to during their tenure with the label.

Moreover, by adopting this methodology, K-Labels have the chance to rigorously assess the trainees' potential, ensuring a prudent investment. It is

commendable that the selection process is fortified by comprehensive discussions involving the trainee, their guardian, and the label's decision-makers. This ensures a holistic understanding and mutual agreement before finalizing any official contracts.

## **5.2.2 Recommendations for T-Labels**

### 5.2.2.1 Glocalism and Glocalization Perspectives

Despite Mr. A's assertions that talent scouting is impartial to nationality, relying primarily on a training system, the prevailing commercial imperatives and capitalist dynamics underscore the efficacy of aligning products with local sensibilities, emphasizing a strategic approach to localization. This alignment is particularly pertinent in Thailand, a pivotal market for the K-Pop Industry, ranking among the top ten importers of K-Pop albums in 2022 (Kim, 2023).

The relationship between a group's success and the label's adeptness at assimilating into the Thai milieu is crucial. Thailand, characterized by fervent national pride as encapsulated in the sentiment, 'Thai's love and unite altogether' from the Thai National Anthem, exhibits a unique propensity to rally around and support fellow countrymen. Consequently, conscientious navigation of the promotion and treatment of groups featuring Thai members could lead to substantial support from the Thai populace for both the group and the label. This alignment not only resonates with cultural ethos but also underscores the strategic significance of catering to local tastes within the broader framework of the globalized K-Pop Industry.

Turning attention to T-Labels, it becomes imperative to scrutinize and consider the cultural context of targeted countries, adopting a localized star strategy. An illustrative example is the case of T-Label 'KAMIKAZE' in the early 2000s, where the boy group 'K-Otic,' composed of members from Thailand, Japan, and Korea, gained popularity not only within Thailand but also in Korea. Invitations to the Asia Song Festival in Korea in 2009 highlighted the group's success on an international scale (Cha, 2009). In recent years, as Thai talents and Thailand gained prominence in the global music industry, SONRAY MUSIC, led by Songyos Sugmakanan, strategically debuted the

boy group 'BUS because of you I shine' from the Thai survival program '789 SURVIVAL.' This involved collaboration not only with Korean members but also with a famous Korean Designer Brand to engage the Korean audience effectively (Choi, 2023).

These examples underscore the importance for T-Labels to consider the cultural context of targeted countries and employ localized strategies for success. Furthermore, the inclusion of individuals from diverse races and nationalities in the K-Pop phenomenon serves to emphasize that engagement, contribution, and aspiration within this genre are not limited by geographical boundaries. Welcoming and celebrating foreign talents broaden the appeal of T-Pop on the global stage, contributing to the genre's ongoing globalization.

#### 5.2.2.2 Creative Labour Perspectives

Foremost among these considerations is the imperative to attend to the physical well-being of trainees and idols. A prominent issue in this regard is the prevalent use of Very-Low-Calorie Diets (VLCDs) by K-Labels to induce rapid weight loss, a practice identified by Joshi and Mohan (2018) as yielding immediate consequences such as cholelithiasis, ketosis, and elevated serum uric acid concentrations (Joshi & Mohan, 2018). In consonance with the precepts of evaluation principles, T-Labels are advised to challenge conventional stereotypes concerning idol appearances and cultivate an ethos of inclusivity that accommodates a diverse range of attributes such as skills, personalities, and charms. This not only aligns with contemporary discourses surrounding inclusivity but also positions T-Labels favorably within the globalized context of the music industry. Moreover, the adverse impact of extreme dieting extends beyond physical health, manifesting in mental health concerns, as exemplified by Ms. G's experiences.

Shifting attention to pharmacological interventions, the utilization of steroids for expedited pain relief, albeit occasionally deemed unavoidable within the demanding schedules of the industry, necessitates careful consideration under the guidance of medical specialists. Prolonged or recurrent use of steroids poses a gamut of health-related risks, encompassing infections, cardiovascular complications,

metabolic and endocrine disruptions, and musculoskeletal breakdown (Muhammad Yasir et al., 2023). T-Labels are urged to be cautious and refer to related issues from the findings on the K-Label side. T-Labels ought to prioritize the well-being of their trainees and idols over immediate operational demands or financial considerations, thereby embodying ethical standards in their managerial practices.

Mental health emerges as a critical facet of talent management. Drawing from personal experience with T-Labels, the researcher underscores the existence of communication sessions between labels and talents. However, there is a call for normalizing engagements with mental health specialists, either facilitated by the label or autonomously pursued by the talents.

Ensuring a robust work-life balance is imperative for T-Labels. While the management appears to steer clear of excessively rigid schedules, based on the researcher's firsthand experiences, it is advisable for them to establish clear policies regarding days off or breaks that align with Thai labour and employment regulations for both trainees and debut idols. This measure is essential to guarantee optimal work-life equilibrium.

Concluding considerations center on the meticulous structuring of contracts and agreements, wherein financial arrangements and legal matters, including professional resident permits in Thailand, demand careful attention. Contractual details, especially financial arrangements, should be delineated with specificity and subject to mutual agreement. It is acknowledged that each step and process in the training journey, leading up to an artist's debut, incurs financial costs primarily supported by the label. While this financial backing is inherent in the industry's operational structure, there is a need for a more transparent delineation of expenditure dynamics. Specifically, a crucial aspect often referred to as the "debt" (Yim, 2019) incurred by trainees during their training period raises questions. This financial obligation is expected to be repaid by the trainees once they transition into the role of an idol and commence earning income. The lack of explicit clarity on the magnitude of this debt, the repayment methods, and the stipulated time frame for reimbursement raises pertinent questions regarding financial transparency within the industry.

Furthermore, the legal aspects of residence and work permits in the Thai context fall within the purview of the label's responsibilities, necessitating compliance with legal frameworks to safeguard the rights and status of talents within the industry.

### **5.2.3 Recommendations for Thai talents**

#### 5.2.3.1 Glocalism and Glocalization Perspectives

Within the context of this perspective, it is strongly recommended that emerging talents proactively immerse themselves in preparations to meet the multifaceted demands of their new environment. This recommendation stems from the imperative for these budding artists to recognize and confront challenges reminiscent of those encountered during the initiation into a novel educational institution or workplace. The onus lies on these individuals to undertake comprehensive physical and mental preparations, constituting a proactive strategy aimed at ensuring a robust foundation for their foray into the competitive realm of the music industry.

This preparation, crucially involving both linguistic and cultural dimensions, transcends mere advantage to assume a pivotal role in facilitating their efficient adaptation to the unique structures and exigencies inherent in each record label. By cultivating a nuanced understanding of the linguistic nuances and cultural intricacies pervasive within the industry, these talents not only position themselves strategically but also demonstrate a proactive commitment to navigating the dynamic and evolving landscape of the music business.

Moreover, the proactive approach advocated here extends beyond the mere acquisition of language skills and cultural familiarity; it encompasses a holistic readiness that incorporates mental fortitude and adaptability. Recognizing the arduous journey that lies ahead, these individuals are encouraged to cultivate a resilient mindset, enabling them to navigate the complexities and challenges inherent in the pursuit of success in the music industry.

### 5.2.3.2 Creative Labour Perspectives

Within the comprehensive framework of well-being and workforce resilience, a domain encompassing concerns related to both physical and mental health, as well as the delicate balance of work and personal life, the pursuit of peak capacity and the honing of skills amid rigorous practice schedules inevitably demand a significant investment of time and effort from individuals. As talents immerse themselves in the relentless pursuit of excellence, it becomes paramount for them to proactively integrate necessary structured breaks into their routine.

The delicate equilibrium between continuous engagement and scheduled breaks emerges as a critical factor in sustaining not only optimal productivity but also overall well-being as highlighted in the study of Corticosteroid Adverse Effects (Lei, Kaplan, Dye, & Wong, (2018). It is essential to recognize, however, that the concept of optimal productivity and well-being may not be consistently embraced by K-Labels, which might not formally incorporate regular official breaks into their schedules. Consequently, talents need to cultivate mental and physical preparedness. This necessitates prior agreement with the labels, as discussed earlier, to effectively navigate the demanding landscape.

Moreover, while ambitions and the pursuit of dreams are undoubtedly crucial components of an idol's journey, equal emphasis must be placed on the well-being of talents. It becomes necessary for talents to actively seek help or appropriate treatment when faced with illnesses, whether of a physical or mental nature. This proactive approach to health is underscored by the example of Mr. F, who, recognizing the importance of prioritizing his well-being, chose to step back temporarily. This decision, facilitated by thorough readiness and preparation, enabled him to resume his pursuit of dreams without compromising his overall health.

This case serves as a poignant reminder that talents should prioritize their health, understanding that sustained success is intricately linked to their holistic well-being. The narrative emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach, where the pursuit of excellence is harmonized with a conscientious focus on mental and physical health, ultimately contributing to a resilient and thriving workforce within the dynamic realm of the K-Pop Industry.



In addressing the contractual challenge, a potential language barrier arises, especially when dealing with the intricate lexicon of professional terminology embedded within the contract. This linguistic obstacle introduces inherent risks of misinterpretation, potentially resulting in discrepancies in the intended meaning and implications of the contractual terms. To mitigate this challenge, the inclusion of professional interpreters, independently sought if not provided, becomes necessary to ensure the safety and accurate comprehension of all involved parties before committing to any protracted and consequential agreements. A related concern involves the legality of staying and working permits. It becomes the responsibility of trainees and idols to exercise vigilance and promptly report any irregularities, thereby avoiding precarious situations.

In addition to macro-level financial considerations, there exists a micro-level concern for the trainees themselves. Despite the financial support provided by labels during the training period, trainees must be aware that the cost of living in foreign countries, often a necessary component of their training, can be notably high. Without adequate preparation, this financial aspect has the potential to emerge as a significant impediment, possibly causing aspiring trainees to reconsider or relinquish their ambitions.

### 5.3 Research Limitations

The reliance on industry insiders and confidential sources imposes a limitation on the depth of details that the researcher can attain. The safeguarding of reputations and confidentiality agreements may hinder the disclosure of specific information, impeding a more exhaustive understanding of certain facets within the industry.

### 5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies in this Field

To enhance the depth and breadth of insights, researchers may consider incorporating blind group discussions as an additional data collection tool. These discussions offer a dynamic element where diverse viewpoints can be explored collaboratively and ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity.



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