

Implications for the Cross-Cultural Development of the Japanese Idol Model for the Chinese Entertainment Industry

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Abstract:

Japanese entertainment culture has been progressively influencing young Chinese groups against China and Japan's growing cultural interactions. Among them, as an extension of ACG culture, Japanese idol culture has attracted wide attention in China and provided new ideas for developing Chinese idol culture. From the perspective of cultural communication, this paper analyzes the development of the nurturing system idol model in China and deeply probes into the three main characteristics of the nurturing system idol model in Japan: spiritual consumption, virtual love, and copyright protection. At the same time, the paper discusses in detail the problems encountered by local Chinese idols when they adopted the Japanese idol model and integrated Chinese elements into social media. This paper argues that to promote themselves more effectively on social media, local idols should adopt a more reasonable way, and fans should also exercise moderate restraint on their behavior. In the process of shaping the idol image, in addition to correctly using Chinese elements, it is necessary to dig deep into the value of local culture to create a unique local characteristic of the idol image.

Keywords: Japanese idol, Cross-cultural communication, Japanese pop culture, Chinese idol, localization

1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, with the rise of social media, Japanese fan clubs became increasingly well-known in China. Specifically, the emergence of the Bilibili platform has increased the impact of Japanese entertainment culture on Chinese youth, which is a hot topic in China.

In 2014, Chinese local idol groups cultivated by local groups based on the Japanese idol model were like a whirlwind, sweeping the entire Chinese entertainment circle with youthful vitality [1]. It aptly illustrates how Japanese idol culture influenced Chinese pop culture. These groups have achieved explosive growth in fans through online and social media communication strategies and localization strategies by using "face-to-face idol" and "nurturing system" as the cornerstones of an entirely new star packaging technique that departs from typical stars.

Idol culture is an important and unique part of Japanese pop culture. This culture's unique selling feature is not its superb singing and dancing, exceptional interpersonal skills, or stunning appearance—rather, it is its youthful vitality, dreams, and extraordinary affinity. "Cultivating" idol refers to the entertainment company's pursuit of "cultivating" and "accompanying growth" to sell the real growth process of group members [2]. Fans get a sense

of "participation" and "identity" from accompanying and witnessing their idol's emergence from nothing. It is possible to characterize the idol industry in modern Japan as a kind of national "cultivation" game, which has helped China reach a new economic tipping point and evolved into a standard symbol of Japanese popular culture [3].

The existing research on the concept of "idol" and "star," "singer," and "artist" is still in a state of confusion. As a unique cultural model, domestic and foreign scholars rarely study Japanese idol culture. Existing studies focus more on the characteristics of the Japanese idol model and less on the localization of the model in the Chinese environment.

From the perspective of cultural communication, this paper will use literature analysis and observation to discuss the characteristics of Japanese idol culture, as well as the localization strategy to cater to the Chinese audience, and based on this, explore the inspiration and suggestions for the development of the Chinese idol industry. This paper aims to fill the research gap in the Chinese localization of the idolization model, provide a new perspective for understanding the mechanism of cross-cultural communication and cultural influence, and provide a richer reference for the theory and practice of Sino-Japanese trend cultural communication.

2. Characteristics and Causes of the Idol Model of the Japanese Nurturing Department

The Formative Idol model is a unique way of training that selects ordinary people as potential team members. Audiences continue to watch and witness their growth. Fans support newcomers' debuts by buying merchandise and voting. In this process, fans gain a sense of accomplishment, just like parents witness the growth of their children. Japanese idol culture mainly has the following characteristics.

2.1 Spiritual Consumption under High Pressure

Amidst the economic recession, individuals hesitate to engage in excessive material consumption and instead prefer to purchase inexpensive cultural products like TV dramas, novels, and movies. This type of consumption, which involved consuming material goods, was dubbed "spiritual consumption" by Japanese academic Sumi Tanaka [4].

Idol culture is developed under the background of the prevalence of spiritual consumption. At first, only a few people performed the idol group's theatrical performances. It gained popularity following the onset of the subprime mortgage crisis in 2007 and 2008. An online "spiritual consumption network" is created when supporters of idols read the stories they provide about their experiences and reflections on social media [5]. Whether it is a virtual or actual idol's growth and struggles or the personalities that surround them, it is a "story" made just for the fans. Idols are linked to romance and aspirations, demonstrating their followers' need for self-expression and individuality. More than their artwork, the idol's resonance is typically what moves the fans.

Another distinction that exists between Korean and Japanese idols is their spiritual consumption. Japanese fans treasure the backstories of their heroes. Their personality also reflects their charisma, which is evident on stage. As they mature, the audience must devote more time and attention to helping them find their beauty.

Idol culture provides a way to escape from the high-pressure Japanese society [6]. People are eager to find a relaxed and pleasant paradise in the tedious and depressing life. Idol activities, music, shows, and other forms provide young Japanese with a quick escape from the daily grind of life, allowing them to temporarily forget the stress and relax. This pleasant entertainment experience brings laughter and pleasure to the audience and gives them a mindset to regain energy and face challenges again.

2.2 Virtual Love in a Lonely Society

Japanese idols and their admirers have a relationship

beyond simple admiration, including possible love. In the contracts of members of Japanese idol groups, it is stipulated that "love is forbidden" [7]. These regulations, which force participants to forgo their spiritual needs, are intended to mold followers into "lover" roles. The idol frequently answers the fans in the songs, which is the best example of this virtual love.

The characteristics of Japanese idols are formed in Japan's social environment. Modern Japan is undoubtedly a highly developed economy, but urbanization has also brought about the side effect of the extreme contraction of interpersonal communication. In the city, individuals are given a high degree of freedom to develop and individual behavior is regarded as private and unconcerned, further aggravating the weak human feelings among members of society. In disaster-prone countries, people need unity and harmony to live together. Another problem in maintaining such harmony is the sense of alienation caused by insufficient communication between people [8].

By creating virtual and idealized "lover" images, Japanese idol culture enables young people to find emotional sustentions in the digital world. These idols become an emotional bond, providing individuals a novel and welcome alternative. The audience can feel the emotional experience of being understood and cared for through the interaction with the idol, thus establishing a unique sense of connection in the virtual world.

2.3 Strict Copyright Protections Seeking Emotional Companionship

Japan is very focused on copyright, also reflected in the Japanese idol marketing model. "Brand" idol is the fundamental way for brokerage companies to ensure sustainable development. One group can only swiftly fill another group while in decline, retain supporters, and build a monopoly market share by creating a recognizable idol brand and constructing the "bundling" model of predecessors and descendants within the organization. In addition, the brokerage company protects legitimate rights and interests, actively develops legal related products, monopolizes fan consumption channels, and ensures the company's profits. Protecting the right to their idol image is also convenient for the company to maintain it [5].

3. The Transformation and Dilemma of the Nurturing Department Model in China

The Chinese idol model has been shaped by Japanese and Korean pop culture for a considerable time. As a result, "tolerance" has become the defining characteristic of this culture. Chinese idol culture has transitioned into the "civilian idol era" due to the popularity of entertainment

programs in the twenty-first century, particularly talent shows. The emergence of civilian idols heralds the beginning of a period in which consumers select, create, and consume connected cultural objects.

While absorbing the experience of Japanese idol cultivation, China has fully considered the characteristics of local culture and social environment and made corresponding adjustments to the cultivation of local idols. This adjustment is not only to respect traditional culture but also to better meet the needs of Chinese audiences. However, these adjustments still face some challenges and room for improvement and need to be further enriched and perfected in terms of training mode, image building, and publicity strategy.

3.1 Cultural Integration between China and Japan

After 2010, Japanese idol culture has made great progress in China and has impacted China's idol industry. The development of the Bilibili platform has made Chinese young people more aware of Japanese pop culture. As an important part of Japanese pop culture, nurturing idols have attracted the attention and love of young Chinese people. Influenced by Japanese idol groups, several new idol groups have emerged in China, especially nurturing model idol groups that have attracted much attention and expectation. It is worth mentioning that although Chinese local idols retain the main characteristics of the "nurturing system" model described above, they do not simply copy the Japanese nurturing system model but carry out localization adjustments in the development process of China. Localization refers to "indigenous, not transplanted from other regions, born to serve the people of the region." Accordingly, the localization method of cross-cultural communication research should also be rooted in the specific culture and pay attention to people's experience in the specific culture.

Many Chinese are emotionally reluctant to engage with Japanese culture in China, except for a small group that likes Japanese culture [9]. It is difficult to get rid of the brand of Japanese culture; they have always appeared in front of the audience with the image of cute girls, although the various teams have subdivided the handsome and sweet style trend, but in general, "cute" as the main logo, in a subculture group that people regard as established, the symbol conveyed by the image of the idol is easy to remind people of Japan. Even though it repeatedly emphasizes that it is a local idol group, it is difficult to make people with strong nationalism love it.

3.2 Use of Social Media

In Japan, idol fans mainly gather around small theaters,

and maintaining low ticket prices and frequent contact with the people is the key to survival. But because China is such a large country, supporters congregate online, and the actual geographic coordinates are dispersed throughout the nation, the expense of attending handshake encounters or small-scale theater productions rises many times. As a result, idols find it challenging to engage in intense offline communication with followers. Instead, online live broadcasting more closely mirrors real-world national circumstances [9]. China boasts a more developed network environment than Japan. The official website, Baidu Post Bar, Weibo, WeChat, and other social media sites are where fans are most engaged. The developed social network infrastructure also gives Chinese fans a platform for high-density, low-cost communication.

In China, the Japanese idol model clearly understands media integration. In the initial stage of the idol's development in China, traditional media publicity was limited due to limited funding and a weak fan base in China. However, its main audience is the deep users of Internet users, and it is also the core group of otaku culture and cute culture [10]. The company focused on the "we media," built a communication strategy centered on Internet thinking, and attracted fans through new media publicity platforms such as mobile apps, websites, and forums, achieving no small success. New fans spread through Weibo and gradually entered traditional media, and their fans gradually increased. At the same time, communication in China also adopts event marketing communication through producing and organizing news value activities to attract the attention of the media, the public, and fans and improve exposure. Propaganda from conventional media keeps tabs on the dynamics of new media, directs public attention toward new media content, and acknowledges the reciprocal exchange and integration of new and traditional media.

However, due to fan culture's pan-entertainment characteristics, many public Spaces are crowded out and over-entertained in the social media environment [11]. Compared to other news search applications and today's top articles, social media platforms typically provide more amusing content, and the growth of fan culture has only made these platforms' entertainment value greater. For example, on the Weibo platform, fans have greater control over comments, and some fixed comments are usually posted by the number one fan and are praised by most fans, placing them in the front row of the social media comment section. This "front-row" behavior is a common way for fans to promote their idols, but as a result, the real thoughts and feedback of ordinary netizens cannot be fully presented. As a public space, the social media platform has been occupied by many fans, which has triggered

strong feelings of antipathy among some netizens. The increasing trend of pan-entertainment and idolization on social media has raised public concerns about the negative impact of fan culture, resulting in negative evaluations of groups supported by fans.

3.3 Make Adjustments in Line with the Aesthetic Taste of Chinese Audiences

In recent years, China has gone from emphasizing the promotion of traditional Chinese culture to the national tide boom and then to the popular Internet hot word “Chinese current is the top current” this year, fully reflecting the continuous improvement of Chinese young people’s national identity. Traditional Chinese elements, such as Hanfu and cheongsam, were incorporated into the idol members’ image packaging and costume design, as well as the stage performance to show Chinese customs. This adjustment makes the image of the members more in line with the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese audience. Make the overall image closer to the local audience’s cognition and preferences. Stage performance is an important way for idol groups to display, integrating Chinese dance and traditional stage elements into the stage performance, making the overall style more in line with the Chinese audience’s aesthetic expectations of stage performance.

By emphasizing Chinese elements, it makes the members more approachable and more acceptable to the Chinese audience. It also supports idol groups to build their brand image in the Chinese market. In the face of the huge Chinese market, the cultivation of idols has improved its competitiveness in the local market through localization adjustment. Adapting to local culture and audience needs will help attract more fans and increase visibility and influence.

However, although idol groups in China increasingly incorporate Chinese elements, the change is only superficial. A deep dive into the use of these elements will largely reveal several mistakes, such as narrating inaccurate historical story segments or wearing improper traditional clothing. At the same time, in terms of stage and musical styles, it has not yet formed a clear national characteristic.

4. Inspiration and Suggestion

There is no difference between the model of forming an idol and the traditional way of creating a star. They cater to different groups of fans, driven by dominant cultural and commercial interests. They must adapt to the needs of The Times, adapt to the changes in consumer society, and build their value.

The Chinese people should adopt a more tolerant attitude towards the rich and developed pop culture of Japan and other countries and truly face up to and respect the ex-

cellent cultural achievements of other countries. While actively accepting learning, China should also adhere to its culture’s core values and maintain its independence and uniqueness. By learning from the popular culture of other countries, China can broaden its horizons, absorb innovative elements, and inject new vitality into its local culture. In accepting and learning, China can also explore common points and promote cultural integration by deeply understanding different cultures. Such an open mind will help strengthen international cultural exchanges and cooperation and provide new impetus for the innovation and inheritance of Chinese culture.

Although China has made some achievements on the road to building local idol groups, it still needs to dig deep and use its cultural characteristics based on references. The development of the idol group needs to meet the spiritual needs of the audience more comprehensively. In contrast, the idol group members need to pay attention to their strengths and the study of traditional arts. Truly understanding and learning traditional culture not only helps to enhance the cultural confidence of the group but also can show richer cultural connotations on the stage.

In addition, idol groups should pay more attention to interaction with fans when promoting on social media. Through regular interactive activities, sharing experiences and expectations on social media use, and establishing more open communication channels, fans can deepen their understanding of the group and form closer cohesion. At the same time, it encourages fans to engage in positive and constructive discussions. It creates a more positive and healthy social media environment for the group through reward systems or special events to motivate those fans who transmit positive energy and actively support their idols. This in-depth interaction helps establish a stronger emotional connection between idols and fans and provides strong support for the group’s sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

In general, while learning from the Japanese model, China has actively retained the core features of the model - spiritual consumption, virtual love, and copyright protection. At the same time, various localization adjustments have been made in the style and communication mode, including the integration of Chinese and Japanese cultures, the use of social media, and the adjustment in line with the aesthetic of Chinese audiences. Although the development of the Japanese idol model in China faces some challenges, there is still room for improvement in integrating Chinese elements and publicity methods. Still, the core concept of “cultivating the idol” and positive localization ideas successfully represent the trend of China’s new idol

culture and fan consumption culture, officially opening the golden age of the development of Chinese civilian idols.

This paper focuses on the positive impact of Japanese idol culture on Chinese idol culture, analyzes the shortcomings in the development of Chinese idols, and provides relevant suggestions to provide beneficial support for the sustainable development of the Chinese idol industry. It is hoped that it can provide a reference and help for future research on the dissemination and development of Chinese and Japanese idol culture.

Although this paper makes an in-depth study of the Chinese localization of the Japanese model, there are still some limitations in the study. In future studies, we can dig deeper into China to develop the system icon mode of local features and explore its different regions, groups of adjustment, and adaptation. In addition, future research can also focus on fan culture to understand the role of the evolution of fans in the formation of idols and the substantive impact on the development of idols. Continue to explore how to adjust the Chinese localization to better meet the audience's needs and promote the in-depth development of idol culture in China.

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