

# Analyzing Reasons for the Aesthetic Transformation of Dance Culture in Chinese Generation Z--Taking Otaku Dance as an Example

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## Abstract:

With the growth of China's Internet, Generation Z has gradually become a group that couldn't be ignored. Their preference and transformation of cultural aesthetics are closely related to the future direction of the consumer market. Meanwhile, the reasons for transforming and developing the Chinese Z generation's aesthetic appreciation of Otaku Dance culture become a worthy topic. This article analyzes three reasons that affect the aesthetic transformation by exploring Otaku dance's style transformation and localization development. Firstly, reshaping cultural memory brings cultural confidence, which made Generation Z more inclined to spread traditional Chinese culture and dance aesthetics. Secondly, the recognition of Chinese traditional culture by Generation Z has made Chinese style aesthetic evident in Otaku dance creation, which especially shows in transforming Japanese ACG costume into a symbolic representation of wearing Han Chinese Clothing. In addition, the development of China's original ACG industry is mutually influenced by the aesthetic preferences of Generation Z. It enables Generation Z in China to develop an aesthetic preference towards traditional Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Otaku dance; Chinese generation Z; dance aesthesis transformation; Chinese traditional culture

## 1. Introduction

Generation Z in China, born from 1995 to 2009, is a generation that has grown up during the Chinese Internet development period. The convenience of transmission brought by the Internet has enabled Japanese popular culture to enter the life of Chinese Generation Z faster, especially the mainstream Japanese ACG culture after 2000. ACG culture refers to A (comic animation), C (comic animation), and G (game). It is a new form of art originating from Japanese popular culture, and it is the main constituent foundation of the anime culture. Young people widely influence it in China. Generation Z has become the main audience for ACG culture in China, and the influence of ACG culture and its subculture on the younger generation in China is gradually deepening [1]. In 2020, the consumption scale related to ACG culture in China reached approximately 14.28 billion US dollars [2]. Nowadays, ACG culture has become an indispensable presence for Generation Z. Due to the many enthusiasts, Bilibili, a website based on Japanese ACG culture, was launched in 2009 and quickly became the most important online communication video platform for Japanese ACG culture in China. The various extension cultures of ACG culture have been edited by video creators and uploaded to online platforms, which has resulted in widespread dissemina-

tion, including a type of dance called Otaku Dance.

Otaku dance is a subculture of ACG, particularly closely related to anime and games. Usually, performers wear costumes related to ACG culture, imitate the dance style of anime or game characters, follow lively theme music, and dance in a cheerful and jumping style. After Chinese Otaku Dance enthusiasts uploaded Otaku Dance videos, the popularity and click rate of those videos increased fast in the short term on Bilibili, which has even prompted the website to build a new area called „Otaku Dance area“ for users to search and watch related videos more convenience. Over time, the popular video styles of Bilibili dance have changed [3]. The popularity of otaku dance videos has gradually declined over the years. However, the click ratio and discussion about traditional Chinese culture and related dance videos have significantly increased. Therefore, the reasons for the aesthetic changes in dance among Generation Z have become a topic worth exploring.

## 2. Development and Transformation of Otaku Dance

### 2.1 Origin, Characteristics, and Reasons for Popularity

The source of Otaku Dance is created on a Japanese ACG

culture communicating website, NICONICO. Japanese ACG culture amateurs imitated dance movements from ACG productions in the beginning. They recorded dance videos and uploaded them on NICONICO. With the development of Otaku Dance, performers are no longer dissatisfied with imitation. They have started to create a choreography of Otaku Dance and bring a specific manner into the visual impression. Otaku Dance choreographers use music-related ACG culture as accompaniment and wear Lolita-style dresses or Japanese high school students' pleated skirt uniforms to dance. They dance lively and adorable, with jumping movements at home or in an environment close to the background in the ACG scene, to record videos for uploading [4].

Otaku dance culture spread into China, beginning with ACG culture receivers sharing and imitating dance videos. The most popular Otaku Dance videos were trans pond from the Japanese bullet comment website NICONICO to the Chinese bullet comment website Bilibili by ACG culture fans, especially Generation Z. Soon, Otaku Dance videos 's number of views increased rapidly on Bilibili, which affected Generation Z in China be interested in the new type of art. Because of undemanding dance movements and less professional performance requirements, some amateurs in China tried to imitate popular Otaku Dance at home and recorded videos to share on Bilibili. The audience liked imitated dance videos and provided high evaluations to dancers, which made dancers confident in recording and uploading new Otaku Dance videos online. In the wake of increasingly increasing Otaku Dance amateur sharing their dance video on Bilibili, Otaku Dance Area has become special and important on the website. It was a signal that proved Otaku Dance became a significant section of ACG culture in China.

## 2.2 Transformation Process

### 2.2.1 The Japanese anime-style period of curtilage dance

In the early stages of development in China, the manner of Otaku Dance exhibited a high imitative of Japanese ACG culture, including the perspective of music, clothing, and dance performance style. Imitators present lively and cheerful dances with more anime attributes as Japanese Otaku Dance. In 2017, a phenomenal Otaku Dance called Gokuraku Joudo spread apace, the staple of conversation in Bilibili, even making Otaku Dance more popular. The original video of Gokuraku Joudo gained three million views in only five months, and its click ratio and number of related videos increased rapidly [4]. The number of related flipping videos and clicks among Chinese Generation Z enthusiasts has also increased exponentially on Bilibili, which formed a wave of imitation. Since Chinese

Otaku Dance performers were no longer satisfied with the imitation of Japanese Otaku Dance manner, the creation of Otaku dance began to incorporate more Chinese style elements.

### 2.2.2 The period of mixed Chinese and Japanese styles in Otaku dance

The first change in integrating Chinese style into Otaku dance was integrating visual Chinese style elements. With the development of local Chinese anime and games, more Chinese cultural elements have been incorporated into character costume design. Chinese Otaku dance performers began creating dances based on original Chinese anime characters. They replaced Joshi Kōkō (JK suit) and Lolita dress with Chinese Element costumes based on characters from Chinese ACG production. Although the costume type blends in traditional Chinese elements, it still keeps the visual effect close to the Japanese ACG aesthetic. In the meantime, Chinese Otaku dancers chose a cheerful dance and music style in performance, which is more in line with the aesthetic preferences of Japanese Otaku dance.

### 2.2.3 Chinese style Otaku dance period

With the revival of Chinese traditional culture on the Internet, Chinese Otaku dance performers began to choose more aesthetic expressions closer to Chinese traditional culture when creating new performances. As a result, the clothing, music, performance movements, and arrangement of otaku dance underwent a significant transformation from the early Japanese aesthetic style. More and more Chinese Otaku dance creators are choosing to wear Han Chinese clothing with a sense of restoration. They have combined ancient music with Chinese syllable characteristics and used more distinctive traditional Chinese dance movements for choreography. Finally, a new type of local house dance unique to China was formed--"Chinese style Otaku dance." The only dance district creator among the top 100 Bilibili creators in 2023 is a Chinese-style Otaku dance creator [5]. It can be seen that the interest in Chinese-style Otaku dance among Generation Z in China is gradually increasing. At the same time, the attention and video clicks of Chinese-style Otaku dance creators have also significantly increased.

## 3. Reasons and Manifestations of Aesthetic Transformation

### 3.1 Promoting Cultural Confidence through Cultural Memory Rebuilding

From the perspective of China's national policy direction, the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly emphasizes the importance

of strengthening cultural confidence. It emphasizes the importance of reviving traditional Chinese culture for the country's development [6]. In response to policies and to achieve the goal of enhancing cultural confidence, more and more online platforms are focusing on deepening and rebuilding cultural memory to help the younger generation enhance their cultural confidence, including Bilibili. According to renowned professor Astrid Erll, three key factors in forming cultural memory are medialization, re-medialization, and public domain presentation [7]. The Bilibili Website, which has over 78% of active users from Generation Z, is one of the main platforms for the younger generation to form cultural memories in China. In 2021, Bilibili collaborated with Henan TV to launch a dance cultural variety show, Millennium Dance. The show followed the backdrop of documented historical stories, gathering professional dancers to interpret classic Chinese traditional dance and present through new media technologies. It created a new type of cultural variety show that attracted the attention of the young generation and achieved the first key of medialization for forming cultural memory. The beautiful visual media dissemination was formed by the audience that attracted praise and interest and by the show, which triggered a creative trend among video creators. Variety creators on Bilibili shared their comments through video creation. Meanwhile, dance video creators learn and imitate dances on the show and share them online. The continuous re-medialization dissemination has formed a widespread and sustained impact as the second key to forming cultural memory. Generation Z actively promoted Chinese traditional culture on social media in the past few years. Young generation video creators have speared more original videos related to Chinese dance culture through social media in Chinese and international platforms, such as Bilibili, TIKTOK, and YouTube. Therefore, under continuous dissemination, the presentation of multiple public domains as the third key has led to a positive rebuilding of cultural memory among Chinese Generation Z audiences, which significantly impacts the younger generation's cultural confidence. It is reason to believe that under the guidance of policies and the continuous promotion of social media, the cultural confidence of Generation Z in China will be significantly enhanced in the continuous formation of excellent cultural memories, and more young generations will lean towards Chinese style dance aesthetics.

### 3.2 Self Cultural Identity Transformation Based on Meaning Cognition

Jerome Seymour Bruner once stated that human cognition of oneself is centered around meaning [8]. Because they recognized Japanese ACG culture and aesthetics, Chinese Generation Z received dance subculture videos from

Japanese online and shared them on the Chinese Internet. Moreover, the name of the Otaku dance in Japanese is translated as Try to Dance. The recognition of ACG otaku culture transformed it into a more distinct cultural expression when transferred to Chinese. Because the type of dance is favored by otaku people and is performed by otaku men and women at home, it's called in Chinese and translated as Otaku Dance [9]. At the same time, completely imitating the Japanese style of otaku dance is also a way to express Generation Z's recognition of Japanese aesthetics. However, with the improvement of cultural confidence and the transformation of preferences shown by the young generation, Chinese Otaku dance performers bring in local cultural significance when transitioning from imitators to creators. It formed new cognition and cultural preferences, and it demonstrates the transformation of cultural identity in Generation Z. For example, the transition of dance costume from Joshi Kōkō (JK suit) and Lolita dress to Han traditional clothing in Chinese style Otaku dance is a symbolic representation of the further enhancement of traditional Chinese cultural identity. By 2021, the size of the Chinese traditional Han Chinese wear market has reached approximately 1.485 billion US dollars, and it has a consumer base of 10.21 million people, of which Generation Z accounts for 51.3% [10]. More and more Generation Z people in China have become interested in traditional Chinese culture and wear traditional Han clothes on more formal and informal occasions. They pay attention to the correctness of Han traditional cloth regulations in various dynasties. As a representative part of Chinese culture, it is one of the important manifestations of the transformation of self-cultural identity in the localization process of Otaku dance creation.

### 3.3 The Influence Between Chinese ACG Development and Chinese Generation Z's Aesthetic

The mutual influence between China's Generation Z and the excellent original development of China's ACG industry enhances the weight of traditional Chinese culture in the aesthetic system of Generation Z. For example, a game called Justice launched by NetEase as an original online game representative that integrates traditional Chinese cultural elements. The game provides a new path for promoting traditional culture. Justice mainly targets the young generation as the most important user group, and it guides players to project emotions into game characters through the plot and becomes an experience and disseminator of traditional culture through play strategy. Some players gradually got a wonderful experience from traditional Chinese culture through playing the game. Otherwise, NetEase also deliberately links with traditional Chinese culture when promoting online to attract the target

audience's attention and attract more Z-generation players who enjoy Chinese aesthetics to become new players in the game. Whenever a new game character is launched, Justice's marketing team invites renowned young Chinese dancers to dance the character and edits high-quality videos to publish on Bilibili's official game account. Under the perfect performance of young dancers, each Justice's character's related dance videos have received over a million clicks. Especially in 2021, the dance Hong Yin performed by Tang Shiyi in Dunhuang style has reached millions of views in a single video [11]. Under the positive influence of Chinese ACG originality and Generation Z aesthetic preferences, more emphasis is placed on the beauty of traditional Chinese culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

Generation Z in China will inevitably transfer their aesthetic preferences about Otaku dance from a style closer to Japanese ACG culture to a preference for traditional Chinese cultural aesthetics. Firstly, the rebuilding of cultural memory brings about an increase in cultural confidence, which is one of the important factors contributing to the aesthetic changes in dance among the younger generation in China. The memory of traditional Chinese dance aesthetics is reshaped through dance variety shows; it leaves Generation Z amazed by the outstanding traditional Chinese culture. They spontaneously spread Chinese traditional dance culture overseas and received positive feedback, enhancing their cultural confidence. The cultural confidence generated by Generation Z from the inside out creates a new aesthetic system and preference for dance culture. Secondly, the cultural identity transformation brought by cultural confidence is also significantly reflected in the aesthetic changes of Generation Z's dance aesthetics. The shift from an indispensable dance costume in the Japanese ACG cultural style to wearing traditional Han Chinese clothing reflects the recognition and admiration of traditional Chinese cultural symbols by the younger generation in China. In addition, the development of China's original ACG industry and the cultural aesthetic preferences of Generation Z in China are mutually influencing, making more and more young people interested in Chinese style and gradually constructing Otaku dance aesthetics as the mainstream aesthetic preference. As more Chinese traditional dance-related content spreads on the

Internet, it is believed that more young people will widely know Chinese traditional dance culture from different cultures worldwide, and the output of its related cultural content will be more diverse. Under the integration of different cultures, it is more likely to generate new cultural and aesthetic systems in the future. Therefore, the observation of the cultural and aesthetic development of Generation Z in China is a topic worthy of continuous research.

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