

The History and Future of the Idol Industry

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Abstract: This article traces the rise of China, Japan and South Korea's idol industry in the entertainment industry and its process and reasons. How the rise of the idol industry affects the Asian region and has laid the foundation for the future entertainment industry. It is closely connected with the different models of different eras, and derives new models as people's artistic pursuits gradually mature. From traditional idol groups to audiences' emerging content and to future virtual idols, idolization is always an eternal topic in the entertainment industry with opportunities and challenges. Another purpose of this article is to analyze the current problems facing the idol industry and what changes entertainment companies need to make to deal with these problems.

Keywords: Asians idol industry, entertainment industry, future, J-pop, K-pop, Chinese entertainment market, companies, challenges.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Birth of Idol Industry

Idolization has always been a topic that people talk about. Most people think that idols can encourage people, provide people with a character to be admired, and enrich existing pop culture; at the same time, as the times change, more people need a new type of entertainment industry to enrich their daily lives. With these needs, the idol industry was born. The term idol originated in Japan. In Japanese, the original meaning is people or things to admire, admiration, people with enthusiastic pursuits; in the Japanese entertainment circle, it mainly means to share the growth process with fans, existence itself is a charismatic character. Due to the improvement of people's daily life, people's demand for the entertainment industry was getting higher, and the birth of the idol industry met the needs of the people at that time. By these, the concept of idols quickly swept East Asian countries, and J-pop had become one of the fastest growing and influential music forces in Asia since the 1990s; it warmly embraced by young people in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia (Ng Wai-ming, 2004).

1.2. The Rise and Impact of the Idol Industry on South Korea and China

With the growing prosperity of the idol industry that originated in Japan, it not only had a positive impact on the economic development of the country's entertainment industry, but also increased national happiness. With the growing influence of the idol industry, some countries have also begun to try to build a local idol industry; among them, South Korea is the most successful one. "The era of K-pop began in the 1990s with the debut of 'Seotaiji and the Boys', who brought a new audience to music: teenagers. The role of idols is not only to sing but to entertain; commonly participating in other fields such as Kdramas and films, attending fan events, performing in musicals,1 variety shows, and even moving across genres in their music" (Francesca Padget, 2017). The Korean idol industry has successfully absorbed and enhanced the advantages of Japanese idols and created a new idol branch that is more in line with the Korean entertainment industry. This nascent model has created generations of idol groups, bringing classic performances and music to the audience; the birth of the kpop idol also laid the foundation for the rapid development of the entertainment industry in Korea and the export of Korean local culture. Now, the definition of idol is gradually replaced by kpop; when it comes to idols, more and more people will think of kpop instead of jpop, which just shows that South Korea has achieved great success in the exploration of the entertainment industry. There are more than 1,000 entertainment companies currently active in South Korea, with the three biggest companies being SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment and JYP Entertainment. Now it seems that the popularity of this model is unprecedented; last year, the K-pop girl group BLACKPINK sold more than 1 million albums, making it one of the five best-selling albums in South Korea. At the same time, the concept of kpop idols has had a profound impact on China's entertainment industry; "The popularity of K-pop idols in China can be traced to the 'normalization' of relations between Korea and China after 1992, which allowed for an expansion of trade and tourism, young people moving to study in China, along with media liberalization facilitating the growth of television ownership (Sun and Liew, 2019). When the Chinese entertainment market has gradually realized the potential popularity of idol groups, more and more idol groups have been established; among the more prominent ones are S.H.E, Fahrenheit and F4. These groups without exception caused a sensation at the time; the establishment of these early idol groups laid the style for the later development of the Chinese idol industry; compared to the kpop style, Chinese idols at that time were more attached to traditional Japanese idols; these groups pay more attention to music performance rather than dancing skills. Therefore, before Korean kpop culture swept China for the second time in 2014, the mainstream market for Chinese idols was around music performance.

2. Analysis

2.1. Challenges Facing the Development of Traditional Idol Industry

In market competition, the future market always represents everything, so grasping future trends is one of the most important for every area. This also applies to the idol industry with rapid development and huge market potential. Nowadays, governments of most countries are trying to support their citizens and strive to lift everyone out of poverty; therefore, in the future, more and more people's material needs can be perfectly met and they will undoubtedly begin to pursue their spiritual needs from the entertainment industry with film, music, and performance. Whether the traditional idol industry can also satisfy the preferences of newcomers has become a big question. Under the influence of increasingly mature technology and self-media, these newly joined groups have gradually raised their requirements on the idol industry to a new level. At the same time, the original audience's preferences are not static; if the

traditional idol industry cannot bring new things to the audience, then the audience's enthusiasm will inevitably decline, and the idol industry will inevitably decline. Therefore, the traditional idol industry also needs certain innovations to retain love and attract new audiences. What changes need to be made to maintain the enthusiasm of the audience has become the biggest problem facing the traditional idol industry.

2.2. The New Model of the Idol Industry

In response to the above challenges, many companies have made changes, and what most companies have done is to bring new models. For example, Yasushi Akimoto, a Japanese record producer, lyricist, and television writer, he founded the 48 idol group, and this model was very popular the 48 idol group adopts the model of theater performance and the concept of “idols you can meet”; With this kind of creativity, 48 idol group quickly became famous in Japan and launched worldwide. A new model is the most direct way to bring a new experience to the audience, “From the usual anime, drama series, and Japanese comics commonly known as manga, it can be considered that these idols groups are relatively new to the taste of Southeast Asian audience” (Jecooniah Louis Dreisbach, 2018) Simultaneously, in order to bring new elements to the audience of East Asian original idol industry, Korean entertainment companies such as JYP, SM, YG have also launched many idol groups after 2010, but they adopted a new concept — the trainee model, where the audience can follow potential new stars who are good at singing and dancing. Now it seems that the transformation of k-pop is more successful than j-pop: In the Philippines, only 3.0% of respondents said they like J-pop, and 5.4% of respondents said they like Kpop. In Thailand, only 3.3% of people like Jpop, and Kpop’s like rate is 12.2%. In Singapore, about 6.2% of people like J-pop and 9.6% of people like K-pop (Tonny Dian Effendi, 2012). Through data comparison, it can be found that the k-pop entertainment industry is better at marketing after going abroad, while the jpop entertainment industry focuses more on the domestic market; these two completely different concepts led the two models on completely different paths. In fact, the market value of j-pop music is much greater than k-pop music, “When it comes to comparison between Japanese and Korean music industries, the market size of the Japanese music industry (US\$ 2,745.9 million) is 8.3 times larger than that of Korea (US\$ 330.1 million) according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry” (Jimmyn Parc, 2018). However, with this advantage, the popularity of j-pop is lower than that of k-pop; this precisely reflects another important element of the new idol model besides novelty—whether it can be accepted by other cultural environments. On a sufficiently novel basis, the idol industry also needs to consider how to influence externally and how to make the created model accepted by the new cultural environment. Facts have proved that the external development and marketing of the idol industry are far more important than the novelty of that model.

2.3. Shortcomings

Behind the rapid development of the idol industry, some problems have gradually been exposed; some of them involve the sustained and healthy development of the idol industry, which cannot be ignored. Due to the vigorous development of the idol industry, the demand for idols is increasing day by day, and the ensuing problem is the "redundant" idol. For example, Jpop’s AKB48 has 130 members; if we count the sub-groups and spin-off groups, there are about 600 people in the entire 48 groups. The first problem is that not all idols can become famous; especially stand out among 600 people. Popularity is often full of surprises; some idols who just debuted will stand out because of hype marketing, and some truly powerful idols will be buried. The second question is where will the idol go after graduation. As

mentioned earlier, not all idols can succeed in their careers. What should be done for idols who have not become famous in their careers and are no longer needed by the entertainment industry after graduation? Currently, various entertainment companies have not yet given a more comprehensive approach. The same problem exists in South Korea, and is even more serious. The number of Korean idol trainees has officially exceeded 1 million, but as of 2016, the number of trainees who signed legal agreements with major performing arts companies was only 1,440. In other words, there is only a 0.1% probability of being favored by regular performance companies. Among these people, only 325 people have the chance to make their debut every year; even more surprising is that most of these trainees are minors. This cruel screening mechanism reflects a serious social problem; how do eliminated trainees reintegrate into society? When most underage trainees are eliminated, they will face unemployment, and the total population of South Korea is only 52 million, which means that the kpop idol industry may cause serious problems in South Korea.

2.4. The New Idol Industry in the Future

In order to improve the shortcomings of the existing idol model, many people have proposed solutions, and one of the more famous ones is virtual idols. As a virtual idol group, we naturally don't have to worry about unemployment; at the same time, we naturally don't have to worry about their dancing ability; virtual idol groups have also adopted the O2O marketing model to increase the sales of diverse peripheral products and the interaction between idols and fans. This seems to be a perfect solution, but the result is not satisfactory. Since 2017, many virtual idol groups and virtual anchors have landed in Asia, but they have not achieved significant results. The reason is simple. When some virtual idols exist, virtual idols are nothing new to the audience; therefore, virtual idols lack the characteristics required by the new model. Secondly, compared to electronic control products, what people need more is an idol who is fresh and energetic who can move the audience. There is still a long way to go to explore new idol models. With the development of the world, people's pursuit of art will become mature; people need entertainment products that can satisfy their love and belonging needs; therefore, people desperately hope entertainment products can focus more on the future, and present the most innovative entertainment model to people.

3. Conclusions

Idolization is a trend in the entertainment industry, and a new creative model is the pursuit of people in the future. At present, idolization is not limited to Asia, but is also beginning to spread like Western countries; idol culture is gradually being loved by more and more young people in the world. I believe that in the future, with the development of technology, entertainment companies and industries will usher in rapid development and bring more and more innovative entertainment models to the world.

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