Borrowing Stardom: How Japanese and Korean Idol Systems Have Shaped China's Entertainment Industry

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Abstract. This paper builds upon previous summaries and outlooks on the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries. While public enthusiasm for J-pop and K-pop remains high and academic analysis of the Japanese and Korean entertainment scenes continues to deepen, there is still a lack of comprehensive research on how these two systems together influence China's entertainment industry. This paper, therefore, aims to analyze separately the impact of the most distinctive entertainment models from Japan and Korea on China's entertainment sector, with the ultimate goal of exploring how China's idol industry can develop. The paper is structured into six parts: literature review, theoretical framework, research methodology, research findings, discussion, and conclusion.

Keywords: Idol Systems, Entertainment Industry, J-pop and K-pop, AKB-style training system, trainee and audition systems.

1. Introduction

In 2025, as China's national strength continues to rise and its influence expands, the government seeks to further enhance China's global cultural presence by enhancing wider recognition of its cultural soft power. To this end, China has drawn on theories such as glocalization, cultural borrowing, and media system dependency, while combining them with domestic case studies to construct a uniquely Chinese entertainment industry. Many academic papers in social sciences and international new media studies have applied these theories to examine the formation of China's cultural system, playing a crucial role in its development.

In addition, a growing body of scholarship discusses the impact of the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries on China's entertainment sector through concrete examples. After a process of learning, adaptation, and transformation, China's entertainment industry has gradually developed into a complete system. However, despite multi-layered research on how this system was formed, there remains a gap in studies addressing key issues: how the joint influence of Japan and Korea has shaped China, how China has absorbed foreign cultural elements while carrying out self-reform, and how China's idol industry might break free from Japanese and Korean constraints to establish its own distinctive path.

Research in this area is crucial for understanding how East Asian cultural spheres influence one another, as well as for uncovering the deeper logic of China's entertainment industry. Ultimately, such research contributes positively to strengthening China's cultural soft power and its global reach.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Theory one: cultural borrowing

Cultural Borrowing refers to the process by which elements of one culture are adopted, adapted, or integrated by another culture. It is one of the core characteristics of human civilization. Originating from interactions among societies—whether through trade, migration, conquest, communication, or globalization—cultural borrowing drives the flow of cultural elements. It reflects the dynamism and interconnectedness of culture while also bringing about complex value debates.

In ancient times, trade routes such as the Silk Road facilitated not only the exchange of goods but also the spread of ideas and culture, resulting in localized cultural forms adapted to the needs of

recipient societies. In the modern era, with the rise of the internet and digital media, cultural borrowing has become more convenient. Film and television, social media, and popular culture now enable cultural elements to cross borders rapidly and integrate more efficiently.

2.2. Theory two: media system dependency (msd)

Media System Dependency Theory (MSD) is a key framework in communication studies for explaining the relationship between media and society. Its core argument is that individuals, groups, and even entire societies depend—at varying levels—on media systems for information and resources. The strength and structure of this dependency directly shape the media's influence on society.

This theory goes beyond the early binary perspectives of "strong media effects" versus "limited effects," and instead highlights the dynamic interplay of "dependency," revealing the complex reciprocal relationship between media and society. In Gao Jialu's paper, it is argued that audiences rely on the media's function of "information dissemination" to meet their needs and achieve personal goals. The theory has since been widely applied in studying media effects in politics, economics, and culture, and it emphasizes the triadic relationship among "audience–media–society [1]." This framework is highly relevant to the theme explored in this paper.

2.3. Theory third: glocalization

In Li Cun-na's article on how Chinese social science journals can go global, there is a passage: according to the 1991 Oxford Dictionary of New Words, the term first originated as a marketing term, proposed by Japanese companies in the 1980s, emphasizing that products and services disseminated on a global scale need to be adaptively adjusted to local realities. Roland Robertson was the first to introduce this marketing term into the humanities and social sciences to discuss the relationship between the global and the local in the era of globalization, stressing the coexistence and mutual influence of the global and the local, and the universal and the particular, in the process of globalization [2]. "Glocalization" is a compound concept that fuses "globalization" and "localization." It refers to the dynamic balance of a "global framework + local expression" formed when, in the course of globalization, transnational phenomena (such as brands, cultural products, and technologies) proactively adapt to local cultural, social, and market characteristics upon entering different regions. This concept overturns the singular cognition that "globalization inevitably leads to cultural homogenization," and reveals the complex relationship of both interaction and contestation between the global and the local. The essence of glocalization is the "coexistence of standardization and differentiation": while transnational actors maintain consistency in core values or products, they must embed themselves in local contexts to gain acceptance.

In general, cultural borrowing has been the theoretical basis for cultural exchange since ancient times. Nowadays, with social change and technological development, network media have become the main way of obtaining information, and society and the public are increasingly dependent on network media, forming Media System Dependency. Adjacent regions have a high degree of information interconnection and are prone to forming cultural circles that integrate various national cultures with their own, thereby achieving glocalization. These three theories help support the question of how Japanese and Korean idol culture shapes China's entertainment industry and provide it with a rich theoretical foundation. The following content will, through multiple approaches such as case studies and questionnaires, explore—via concrete examples—the influence of the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries on China.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Overview of research methods

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining text analysis, case studies, and questionnaire surveys.

First, through text analysis, the study compares the structural and content differences among idol programs in Japan, Korea, and China, focusing on aspects such as stage performance, group formation mechanisms, and modes of fan interaction.

Second, representative case studies are selected for in-depth analysis. On the Japanese side, AKB48's "training/formation model" and its Chinese extension SNH48 are taken as examples. On the Korean side, cases include SM Entertainment's trainee training system exemplified by AESPA, as well as the adaptation of the Produce 101 audition system in China. The selection of cases is based on their representativeness in their respective countries and their high relevance to the Chinese entertainment industry.

Finally, questionnaire surveys are used to collect audience perceptions, preferences, and evaluations of the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese entertainment systems. The questionnaire covers respondents' level of familiarity with the three entertainment industries, order of preference, opinions on their influence, and expectations for the future development of China's idol industry.

These methods complement each other and provide a multi-dimensional basis for analyzing how Japanese and Korean idol systems have influenced China's entertainment industry.

Text Analysis:

Relevant texts are located by entering keywords such as "Japanese entertainment industry" and "Korean entertainment industry" on academic platforms, and filtering results containing terms like "influence on China" or "development in China" to gain preliminary insights into how Japanese and Korean entertainment systems affect China's entertainment sector. In addition, searches are conducted on platforms such as Baidu and Weibo for specific cases—groups, shows, official accounts—to understand their operations, members' statements, or program processes, which can then be compared systematically.

Case Selection:

For Japan and China, the study examines the direct transplantation of the Japanese "training-based idol" model in China, represented by SNH48, alongside China's most influential idol group TFBOYS and its management system under Time Fengjun Entertainment.

For Korea, based on the widespread popularity of Korean groups and agencies in the Chinese market, the study selects SM Entertainment, home to EXO, which had a significant impact in China's mainland. To further demonstrate the continuing relevance of the trainee system in Korea, the study analyzes AESPA, one of SM's most recent debut groups.

Questionnaire Survey:

A public questionnaire was designed using the platform Wenjuanxing (Questionnaire Star) to investigate public understanding of the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries and their influence on China's entertainment sector. The survey includes the following questions:

1) How familiar are you with the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries?

2) How familiar are you with the Chinese entertainment industry?

3) What is your order of preference among the three entertainment industries?

4) Briefly describe the influence of the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries on China's entertainment industry.

5) What are your expectations for the future of China's entertainment industry?

6) What is your age group?

7) Have you ever engaged in fan activities?

After completing the questionnaire, I distributed it through WeChat Moments and private messages. A total of 21 responses were collected. Among them, 6 respondents showed almost no knowledge of the first five questions and provided overly brief answers with no reference value; these were treated as invalid samples. The remaining 15 valid samples included 10 adolescents aged 14–18 and 5 adults aged 25–50, all of whom provided relatively complete answers.

From Questions 1 and 2, the survey gathered insights into the general public's level of understanding and overall impressions of the entertainment industries in China, Japan, and Korea. This allowed for identifying similarities and differences between the Japanese/Korean and Chinese

entertainment systems. Question 3 revealed the public's preferences among the three industries, indirectly indicating which entertainment model is more widely accepted. Question 4 focused on the public's understanding of how Japanese and Korean entertainment cultures have been transferred into China's entertainment industry. Question 5 inspired the future direction of China's idol industry.

The sample consisted of ten peers (classmates of similar age) and five older adults, totaling fifteen individuals who were asked in detail. This covered both adolescent groups and those in the 25–50 age range, enabling a comparison of generational perceptions of the entertainment industry. Within the adolescent group, six had experience with or were currently engaged in fan activities, two had some knowledge of the entertainment industry but were not actively involved in fandom, and two were regular internet users with little interest in the entertainment field. This diverse selection helped capture different levels of public familiarity with the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries.

In summary, combining the results of all questions allows for an overall understanding of public knowledge of the three countries' entertainment systems and their similarities and differences in broad terms. It also reveals aesthetic preferences of the public and, by synthesizing their expectations, suggests possible future directions for the development of China's entertainment industry.

3.2. Sample selection and rationale

Case Studies: The Japanese and Korean cases selected are widely recognized examples, while the Chinese cases chosen share strong parallels with those of Japan and Korea, making them well-suited for comparative analysis.

Questionnaire Survey: For the survey, I selected friends from my social circle as respondents. Among them were individuals who pay close attention to all three entertainment industries, those who focus mainly on Korean or Chinese entertainment, and those who are unfamiliar with all three, representing the general public.

Rationale: This selection allows for understanding the perspectives of different fan groups—those loyal to a single type of entertainment industry as well as "casuals" (people who are not engaged in fandom and have limited knowledge of the entertainment world). Such diversity enhances the scientific validity of the study.

3.3. Dimensions of analysis

For the analytical framework, I divided the discussion into two main sections: Japan and Korea. Each section follows a "specific case + Chinese reference" model, where representative examples from Japan and Korea are examined in detail alongside corresponding Chinese cases.

In the following sections, the study will analyze concrete cases from the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries, integrating the results of the questionnaire survey.

4. Research methodology

4.1. The influence of the japanese "training/formation model" on china

Japanese idol culture experienced rapid growth in China at the end of the 20th century. Zhao Jing noted in her paper that films starring Takakura Ken, along with Japanese anime and TV dramas such as White Paper on Love, sparked a wave of "Japanese fan" culture in China [3]. Beyond film, television, and anime, Japan also saw tremendous success in the idol industry. On December 8, 2005, the large-scale female idol group AKB48 was officially established. Originating in Akihabara (Akiba), it recruited girls through public auditions for group or solo activities. The group's core concept of "idols you can meet" broke away from the traditional idea of "idols only seen on television."

AKB48's main selling point was its "training/growing" model for young girls, allowing fans to interact with idols face-to-face at close range. Fans supported their favorites through CD purchases, general elections, and other mechanisms. This created a tightly bound relationship between two interest groups: idols pursuing their dreams and fans nurturing them, giving fans a strong sense of satisfaction from participating in the idols' growth.

China widely adopted this AKB-style idol training model. In 2012, Japan's AKB48 management company AKS partnered with China's Star48 Media to establish SNH48 in China. SNH48 continued AKB48's idol style by recruiting amateurs—individuals without professional training—who then received official instruction. The group also downplayed Japanese labels and established theaters in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing for regular performances. Following the "main group + sub-group" model, they released albums such as Endless Rotation and Source Power, forming a dedicated "Seine River" fan community. Members' positions within the group were determined through general elections, sustaining the "idol dream-chasing" and "fan training" approach to stardom.

In 2015, SNH48 entered the "era of 100 members," undergoing reform and expansion. In 2019, parts of the group were disbanded, while digital platforms like "Pocket48" were introduced to allow closer fan–idol interaction. By 2025, with the launch of highly popular members such as Ju Jingyi, Fei Qinyuan, and Li Yitong, the fan base has continued to expand, and China's cultivation-style idol model has been continuously refined.

In China, two specific reference forms can be highlighted: lyrics as fan feedback and companionship in growth. First, as mentioned in Chapter 3, AKB48 rewarded fans through lyrics. Their record-breaking single Heavy Rotation depicted the sweetness of young love from a female perspective, with the theme "the person I like is playing in my mind in endless rotation." Repeated lyrics such as "I love you, I need you" use the second-person pronoun to implicitly cast fans as the romantic object. The song's theater performances drew unprecedented crowds, with tickets sold out immediately, and the single achieved 340,000 sales on its release day alone.

In SNH48's tenth anniversary song Absolutely Unique, the lyrics—"In a certain moment, I entered your heart. The unique emotion will reappear, overcoming time" expressed gratitude to fans.

Second, one of the most attractive elements of AKB-style idols is the sense of companionship in growth. "Training" here not only refers to fans' role in shaping stars but also to fans witnessing idols mature into adulthood. The average age of AKB48 members at entry was 13.6 years, with an average debut age of about 16. Fans experienced the journey of growing up, which fostered strong loyalty.

This same concept was observed in Lin Jiaying's paper: the TFBOYS fan club on Sina Weibo charged 84 yuan for a quarterly membership and 298 yuan for an annual membership. Benefits included access to growth diaries written by TFBOYS members, updates on their latest schedules, and opportunities for online interaction. Similarly, TFBOYS' official Fan Club under YinYueTai charged 298 yuan annually, offering perks such as personalized ringtones recorded by members, exclusive wallpapers, photos, videos, and behind-the-scenes footage [4].

Both approaches—using lyrics to give back to fans and fostering long-term fan–idol bonds—have played crucial roles in the development and perfection of China's training-style idol industry.

Based on the questionnaire analysis, most respondents (13 people) were not clear about how the Japanese entertainment industry has influenced China's domestic entertainment culture. A small number of respondents (2 people) mentioned that Japanese music had a major impact on music in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and also pointed out the influence of the introduction of Japanese "Star48-style" idols, underground idols, moe culture, and stylish uniforms on China's entertainment industry, stage performance formats, and diversified entertainment styles.

From the overall level of respondents' understanding of the Japanese entertainment industry, the main takeaways can be summarized as the training system, the idol industry, and standardized management. Among these, the "training model" was identified as the core influence of Japan on China's entertainment sector. However, in general, most respondents were unfamiliar with Japan as the origin of this training model. Instead, they were more familiar with the Chinese version of the training system, which for them served as the default reference point. Despite this, the audience base remained small, and none of the respondents expressed fervent enthusiasm for the Japanese-style training model.

4.2. The influence of the korean “trainee system” and “audition model”

In the Korean idol industry, there are two main pathways to debut: idols launched by entertainment companies through a structured trainee system, and idols formed through audition programs.

First, regarding the trainee system, Cai Yingjing’s paper provides a detailed account. Korean entertainment companies adjust their group-building strategies based on market demand in order to attract more fans. The members of these groups typically follow a similar developmental trajectory: scouts from different agencies discover talented teenagers across various locations, who then undergo rigorous training and multiple rounds of elimination. Ultimately, only those who pass are selected to debut [5].

Taking SM Entertainment’s AESPA as an example, member Kim Minjeong (Winter) described her trainee experience: she was scouted at a dance festival in her hometown of Yangsan and entered SM in 2016 as a trainee, beginning a routine of commuting between Busan and Seoul. Like other SM trainees, she underwent comprehensive training in vocals, dance, and performance expression management, with monthly evaluations. Throughout this process, underperforming trainees were eliminated and new candidates introduced. The company selected final members by balancing its internal “family concept” (e.g., SM’s “KWANGYA” virtual system) with market demand, determining the lineup, stage personas, and group style after lengthy deliberation.

Second, Korea’s homegrown audition model is highly developed. As mentioned in Chapter 5, its basic mechanism involves trainees showcasing their talents and personal charm on stage to attract the audience, while audiences vote continuously for their favorite contestants to support their debut. From 2000 to 2016, Korea introduced multiple auditions such as Youngjae Yook Sung Project and Superstar K. Till 2016, Mnet launched Produce 101, which marked the peak of the audition era. The show established a systematic format: mentor evaluations, theme song recording, public performances, audience voting, and a final debut night. This success was followed by spin-offs like Produce 48, producing groups such as I.O.I, Wanna One, and IZONE, all of which received positive feedback in Korea.

China integrated and localized both approaches by adapting them to its own entertainment market. Drawing from the trainee system, many Chinese entertainment companies were founded to provide training. For instance, Qi Gu Culture recruited girl group members in Guangzhou and Shanghai, offering training in singing and dancing, and even sending pre-debut trainees to Korea for further development. On August 10, 2015, the girl group SING debuted with their first single Confession of Youth. Over time, they refined their style to align with the Chinese market, releasing singles with strong traditional Chinese elements, such as To the Bright Moon, which gained high online streaming numbers, followed by Qianzhan and Qiyue. They also appeared in variety shows like We Are Blazing, earning public recognition.

China also borrowed heavily from Korea’s audition model. In 2018, shows such as Produce 101 China and Idol Producer attracted massive attention. Stars such as Cai Xukun, Meng Meiqi, and Yang Chaoyue became internet sensations. According to statistics, by June 23, 2018, when Produce 101 China concluded, the show had accumulated 4.86 billion views, while the related Weibo hashtag reached 10.45 billion reads. On the night of the finale, over 63 million people tuned in to the livestream across platforms. This was only the beginning of China’s idol audition boom. Since then, Tencent Video and iQiyi have launched annual audition shows, forming the “Goose series” (Tencent) and “Peach series” (iQiyi) as the two mainstream models. Other platforms followed suit with shows like All for One and We Are Young. From 2018 to 2021, nine idol groups were launched through these shows, including Rocket Girls 101, Nine Percent, and Hard Candy Girls 303, leaving a significant mark on China’s entertainment industry.

Questionnaire Findings:

Analysis of the survey responses revealed that most participants had some knowledge of Korean entertainment culture, particularly idol culture and Korean dramas. Thirteen respondents indicated familiarity with Korea’s entertainment industry, while two showed limited knowledge. Regarding Korea’s influence on China’s entertainment sector, the majority (especially respondents over 30)

highlighted the significant impact of Korean dramas, films, and variety shows. Frequently mentioned keywords included Goblin, Reply 1998, and Descendants of the Sun. Others emphasized K-pop idol groups and the influence of the Produce 101 audition format on Chinese shows.

Among the six respondents who had actively engaged in fan activities, all noted the spread of Korean entertainment elements into China, including performance formats such as music stages, audition programs, song styles, fan behaviors, and corporate business models. In summary, the Korean entertainment industry has exerted a deep and widespread influence on China's entertainment sector, with high levels of public acceptance and dissemination.

4.3. China's integration and local innovation

China's reference to the Japanese entertainment system began with the "training model," but it did not stop there. Building upon this model, China developed idols more aligned with its own social and cultural framework. As Zhu Yating noted in her paper, commercial companies often apply risk control in business collaborations; idols who conform to mainstream values and have official endorsement are more likely to attract capital [6].

Time Fengjun Entertainment exemplifies this model by disciplining its artists to align with mainstream social values. This not only garnered greater public attention but also enhanced the idols' commercial value. The company's first idol group—TFBOYS—began releasing songs, stage performances, and personal life content when members were only 13–14 years old. Popular songs such as Manual of Youth Practice, Magic Castle, and Adoration quickly became household hits, earning the group wide recognition. This system, which allowed fans to observe idols' personal lives as well as their stage growth, strengthened fan attachment. It often triggered fans' "maternal instincts," positioning them subconsciously as parental figures. In parallel, given China's cultural emphasis on educational achievement, the company also highlighted the idols' academic progress alongside their careers. This formed a unique training model that satisfied fans' desires for control, possessiveness, and vanity.

Following the success of TFBOYS, Time Fengjun launched subsequent generations of trainees, releasing regular assessment videos and variety content, and gradually developing a competitive debut system with multiple candidates vying for limited spots. This further reinforced the close link between "idols chasing dreams" and "fans nurturing idols," winning broad support for the training model in China.

China's learning from the Korean system also went beyond direct imitation. For example, Qi Gu Culture's girl group SING drew inspiration from Korean idol training but branched into multiple creative directions. Moving from Japanese-style pop to electronic Chinese-style music, they gradually infused traditional Chinese artistic elements into their work. In dance, they incorporated fan dances and imagery from Dunhuang murals, such as celestial maidens in flight. In music, they combined guzheng, bamboo flute, and classical poetry with electronic music to craft a distinctive style. In fashion, they showcased mamianqun skirts and modernized qipao. This comprehensive integration of Chinese cultural elements produced a unique musical form. Their song To the Bright Moon achieved 20 million views on platforms such as YouTube and Bilibili, gaining enormous exposure and highlighting Chinese cultural distinctiveness.

Chinese entertainment companies have also localized audition programs. For instance, Produce Camp 2021 pioneered the concept of an international boy band, breaking from the usual practice of recruiting mainly from China, Japan, and Korea under the "101 series" model. Instead, it targeted a global market, forming the multinational group INTO1. In subsequent activities, the group frequently performed songs in both Chinese and English, gaining support in countries such as the UK, the US, and Thailand, thereby expanding the global influence of Chinese culture.

Survey Results:

According to the questionnaires, a majority of respondents (8 people) had participated in domestic fandom activities, while the rest (7 people) had only limited exposure. Those engaged in fandom generally agreed that China's idol industry suffers from significant flaws, including outdated models,

excessive monetization, and chaotic fan culture. They also expressed a strong desire to see improvements in the strength of idols, the quality of performances, and the overall standard of Chinese idol music.

5. Discussion

5.1. Cultural borrowing and selective absorption

Cultural Borrowing refers to the process by which elements of one culture are adopted, adapted, or integrated into another culture; it is one of the core characteristics of human civilization.

China has rationally absorbed the core concept of Japan's AKB-style "training system"—namely, the idol's proximity to fans—by creating SNH48. The group replicated practices such as regular theater performances and handshake events, but on this basis, SNH48 also introduced its own innovations. For example, it leveraged digital platforms by developing the mobile app Pocket48, which enhanced connectivity and interaction between idols and fans.

In addition, SNH48 did not only emphasize idols who appeared vulnerable and evoked maternal instincts among fans (a common feature in Japanese idol systems). Instead, it developed more diversified idol personas, highlighting traits such as cheerfulness, perseverance, and passion. These multiple characteristics helped construct stronger emotional bonds with fans.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 regarding the features of the Japanese idol system, the following four key aspects were identified:

1) Psychological Consumption

Psychological consumption refers to non-economic activities of consumption that do not involve monetary return. Its feature is zero cost, and it mainly targets groups with spare time but limited financial means. As long as one has time, one can both produce and consume, generating empathy with idols.

2) Virtual Romance

The relationship between Japanese idols and fans is not simply admiration or worship but resembles a quasi-romantic relationship.

3) Training (Nurturing)

Here, "training" not only refers to the fan's role in shaping stars but also to fans accompanying idols as they grow into adulthood.

4) Branding and Intellectual Property Protection

By binding senior and junior members together through internal marketing strategies, a recognizable idol brand is created. This enables a new group to quickly replace another when its popularity declines, retaining fans and building a monopolistic market share [7].

Concerning these four aspects, China's idol system has borrowed culturally and selectively absorbed elements:

1) On psychological consumption: Taking Time Fengjun's TFBOYS as an example, the group was framed around the theme of youthful dreams when its three teenage members debuted, thus becoming a reflection of broader social ideals.

2) On virtual romance: Since TFBOYS debuted at a younger age than AKB-style idols, while their fanbase tended to be older, this created groups of "older-sister fans" and "mother fans." Combined with earlier-mentioned attention to the idols' academic performance, this further strengthened emotional bonds. As the idols' growth path was made entirely visible to the public, it fostered a sense of care and companionship even stronger than that of "virtual romance."

3) On training: Unlike AKB idols, TFBOYS did not rely on theaters or handshake events. Instead, their "training system" was primarily realized through online videos showcasing their songs, dances, and performances.

4) On branding: Both SNH48 and Time Fengjun adopted branding and hierarchical structures. SNH48, with its sub-groups SII, NII, HLL, and X, coupled with a graduation system, established a senior–junior dynamic. Time Fengjun has since launched four generations of trainees, organizing

family-style sports meets and engaging in cross-generational marketing, thereby creating a massive "family system."

China's learning from Korea also involved extensive borrowing but selective modification:

5) Music and cultural adaptation: Groups such as Seven Sense and SING incorporated traditional Chinese elements into their music. For instance, SING's To the Bright Moon featured lyrics like "Send my longing to the bright moon, a heart so entangled it cannot be severed. May this feeling last through the long night, flickering like the stars." For the Mid-Autumn Festival, their song Looking at the Moon quoted Tang poet Zhang Jiuling's verse: "The bright moon rises over the sea, we share this moment from afar." They also reinterpreted traditional cultural symbols such as the weapon "huāqiāng" (flower spear) and the painting Rhapsody on the Goddess of Luo River, producing songs with a distinctively Chinese style, diverging completely from Korean group aesthetics.

6) Audition innovation: While China initially adopted the Produce 101-style system, later programs introduced new creative formats. For example, The Coming One: Band Season emphasized collective identity with the slogan "having a group of partners is more important than anything else." Meanwhile, Produce Camp 2021 formed INTO1, an international boy band with members from China, Japan, Thailand, and the US, thus globalizing the 101 system and tailoring it to the Chinese market needs.

Summary:

China's entertainment industry absorbed Japan's core concept of the "training model"—the dual pursuit of "idols chasing dreams" and "fans nurturing idols"—which closely ties fans' emotional and financial investment to idol success. However, to cater to Chinese audiences, it broadened its appeal by creating "youth idol groups" that meet the preferences of younger, same-age, and older fans alike, thereby expanding the fan base. This reflects a process of adoption, adaptation, and integration of Japanese cultural elements.

Meanwhile, China's borrowing from Korea was more direct, incorporating Chinese cultural elements and new rules to modify and repurpose Korean practices. Overall, China's idol system has drawn upon the foundational mechanisms of Japanese and Korean models but prioritized integration with local culture and domestic demands. In doing so, it has sustained rapid cycles of renewal while continuously opening new markets.

5.2. The chinese entertainment industry from the perspective of glocalization

Glocalization is a compound concept combining globalization and localization. It refers to the process in which transnational phenomena (such as brands, cultural products, or technologies) proactively adapt to local culture, society, and market characteristics when entering different regions, thereby achieving a dynamic balance of "global framework + local expression."

From a global perspective, Japanese and Korean entertainment industries lead the idol sector in Asia and even worldwide. As part of this cultural tide, J-pop and K-pop have swept into China with irresistible force. Regarding the Korean wave's impact on China, Wang Cong's article on the economics of Hallyu points out:

"By the end of 2014, My Love from the Star had exceeded 5 billion online plays, its Baidu Index surpassed 4 million, its related Weibo discussions reached 15 million posts, and overall readings exceeded 1.16 billion. Kim Soo-hyun, the actor who played Do Min-joon, signed over 20 advertising contracts in 2014 worth more than 30 billion KRW (about 172 million RMB), endorsing 16 products including mobile phones, coffee shops, ice cream, chocolate, shoes, and mineral water. In 2014, total admissions for Korean films reached 2.15 billion, with box office revenue of 1.66 trillion KRW (about 10.1 billion RMB)." [8]

Similarly, in her study of Japanese culture, Cui Xueying noted:

"In Asia, Japan's cultural industry has been at the forefront, achieving remarkable progress in the past decade: its cultural output value increased elevenfold, and its share of GDP grew 7.5 times. By 2011, the cultural output value exceeded USD 1.1 trillion, accounting for 15% of GDP. Whether in traditional or creative cultural industries, mechanisms of development and management, financial

investment, or legal safeguards, Japan's cultural dissemination system has become increasingly mature and sophisticated." [9]

The successes of the Japanese and Korean entertainment industries thus provide China with an ideal template for practice and adaptation. Once Japanese AKB-style training idols and Korean trainee/audition systems entered China, they underwent full integration. For example:

1) In Chinese-style training systems, part of the attention once placed on idol performances was redirected toward idols' academic performance and personal cultivation.

2) In Chinese-style corporate training, groups were reshaped to suit Chinese market preferences.

3) In Chinese adaptations of Korean-style audition programs, platform-specific elements were added. For instance, Tencent Video's Produce Camp series created distinctive impressions ("Peach series: initial C is final C"; "Goose series: initial C may not debut"), integrated diverse performance formats such as choir, ballet, and acrobatics, and incorporated Chinese cultural themes such as Mulan and martial arts. New innovations included "cross-gender mentor collaborations," which kept the shows fresh and vibrant. Altogether, this produced a unique audition system tailored to Chinese conditions, fully embodying the concept of glocalization.

Li Cun-na's paper on the internationalization of Chinese social science journals provides a useful parallel. She notes that: "With the global expansion of Western publishing conglomerates, a global knowledge production system has formed, dominated by well-established international journals and their multinational publishing companies. Chinese journals have been drawn into this global network, often at the margins."

Similarly, as global socioeconomic and cultural industries expand, Western and East Asian (Japanese and Korean) cultures continue to spread worldwide—not only within their home countries or regions with shared traditions but also across diverse societies. Su Lin's study of the Korean wave in Malaysia highlights how "Hallyu diplomacy" has evolved into a dual strategy of standardized global dissemination and localized intercultural adaptation. In Malaysia, tailored strategies for Muslim audiences—such as value-based cultural symbols, religion-friendly tourism promotion, and collaboration between government and civil society—proved effective in cultural outreach, diplomacy, and trade [10].

This demonstrates the crucial role of cultural dissemination in enhancing national influence. Drawing from Article 2's discussion of academic journal glocalization, several points are evident:

1) Emphasizing the transmission of distinctly "Chinese" elements helps prevent the "othering" of Chinese cultural products and reduces the risk of alienation.

2) Knowledge products must be disseminated globally, requiring Chinese journals—and by extension Chinese cultural industries—to venture outward, test themselves in open environments, and avoid insularity under the pretext of language or ideological differences.

By the same logic, China's idol industry must target the global market while stressing cultural elements rooted in "Chineseness" to enhance its cultural soft power. It must also overcome linguistic, cultural, and religious barriers by following the principle of "harmony in diversity," enabling the industry to truly go global.

For instance, beginning with its fourth season, Produce Camp expanded into international markets, particularly in Southeast Asia. As noted by Chai Shuyang and Bi Jianhang in their study on audition programs, Produce Camp Asia achieved significant overseas popularity through high-quality content, diversified participation, and collaboration with mainstream Thai broadcasters. This approach showcased youthful energy and cultural exchange, underlining the importance of combining local adaptation with global reach.

In sum, from a glocalization perspective, China's entertainment industry has absorbed Japanese and Korean mechanisms, adapted them to its local context, and innovated in ways that enable both domestic growth and international expansion.

5.3. Media system dependency and fan behavior logic

Media System Dependency Theory (MSD) is a key framework in communication studies that explains the relationship between media and society. Its core proposition is that individuals, groups, and even entire societies depend—at varying levels—on media systems for information and resources. The strength and structure of this dependency directly shape the influence the media exerts on society.

In today's world, with rapid social changes and the fast development of the internet, idols can interact with fans online through multiple channels such as Weibo, Pocket48, Bilibili, and WeChat public accounts. These platforms have greatly enhanced the sense of intimacy between idols and their fans. However, the swift rise of online media has also shifted the battlefield of news from newspapers to digital outlets, significantly lowering the cost of rumor-spreading and increasing the likelihood of speculation and misinformation. This has led to situations in which fans or the public overly rely on online information, readily believing rumors spread by marketing accounts, which can harm idols' reputations and interests.

Moreover, fan communities, empowered by digital platforms, often treat the internet as an outlet for venting. This results in malicious behaviors such as insulting disliked celebrities, attacking rival fan groups, and even engaging in personal humiliation or harassment, causing severe negative social impact.

This fan behavior logic deviates from normal standards. Such phenomena largely stem from idols' own dependence on media systems, where they rely on official statements or apology letters to salvage mistakes of various kinds. At the same time, fans, overly engrossed in the internet-mediated "fan dream-making" and "idol dream-chasing" processes, lose control over their real lives. This over-dependence on media produces profound and damaging consequences.

5.4. Problem attribution and systemic risk monitoring

Throughout this research, many respondents highlighted that the entertainment industry in China is closely tied to economic interests, including those of the idols themselves, as well as issues related to broader market conditions. Within Chinese society, whether adopting the AKB-style training model or the Korean trainee-based star-making system, several problems persist, including capital exploitation, inability to debut, lack of stages, shortage of high-quality songs, and limited market demand. These factors result in high penalty fees for contract breaches, frequent physical and mental health issues among trainees, severe problems of "sasaeng" (obsessive fan) behavior, and sexual harassment that gravely harms minors.

At the root of these issues lies the lack of a systematic idol-training industry in China's entertainment market. Most people have only shallow knowledge of idols, and the demand for idols is comparatively smaller than that for songs or TV dramas. With economic profits highly tied to the idol industry, market saturation inevitably arises. Nonetheless, entertainment companies frequently continue to recruit trainees, which directly creates risks to the rights, health, and well-being of minors.

Moreover, with the continuous refinement of the training system, the age of children recruited by such companies keeps decreasing. Exposed too early to fans, the internet, and the public, children and adolescents are unable to safeguard their own interests. This often leads to neglect of their education and results in low cultural literacy.

Chapter 1 on Media System Dependency Theory has pointed out that young people's excessive reliance on new media can cause a series of negative effects, one of which is social alienation. Regarding issues such as sasaeng behavior and sexual harassment in training systems, the combined effects of internet development and children's early maturity expose them prematurely to online culture, idol fandom, and fan wars. This leads to distorted worldviews and flawed judgments, spawning numerous problems. For example, Wang Fan's paper mentioned the case of Chou Tzu-yu, who was caught in a political controversy related to "Taiwan independence." Following this, neutral audiences, anti-fans, and Chou's fan groups all issued public statements. They attempted to leverage patriotic discourse to pressure entertainment companies, using China's consumer market as leverage to push foreign capital toward aligning with Chinese fans' demands [11].

In addition, audition systems in China exposed severe problems such as capital manipulation of voting, illegal fundraising, and incidents like "milk-wasting" campaigns, where large quantities of dairy products were discarded to collect bottle caps for votes. These scandals eventually led to the permanent suspension of idol-audition programs, which had become tools of capital operations.

Over the years, as such incidents increased, the Chinese government was compelled to intervene with stricter regulations. Article 11 also notes that:

1) In February 2021, the State Council's Anti-Monopoly Committee issued the Anti-Monopoly Guidelines on the Platform Economy Sector, aiming to promote the healthy development of the platform economy.

2) In June 2021, the Cyberspace Administration of China launched the "Clear and Bright: Fan Circle Rectification" campaign, targeting behaviors such as online abuse between fandoms, vote-rigging, and ranking manipulation. Later that month, Douban dissolved relevant violating groups and banned certain accounts, while iQiyi carried out self-correction measures on fundraising and ranking.

3) On August 27, 2021, the Cyberspace Administration of China issued the Notice on Further Strengthening the Governance of Fan Circle Chaos, which proposed ten new measures—such as abolishing celebrity rankings, strictly managing artist agencies, and prohibiting the display of hostile fan conflicts. These measures became known as the "New Ten Rules for Fan Circle Governance."

Only after these interventions did the series of problems triggered by China's idol industry begin to be constrained and addressed.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Main research and findings

Through text analysis, case studies, and questionnaire surveys, this study examined how Japan's AKB-style training system and Korea's trainee and audition systems have influenced China's entertainment industry. The findings reveal that while China has borrowed extensively from Japanese and Korean idol systems, it has also integrated local cultural elements to create an idol model more suited to domestic conditions. However, persistent issues remain, including capital exploitation, market saturation, intrusive fan behaviors (sasaeng), and vote manipulation.

6.2. Response to research questions

China's idol system has been profoundly shaped by Japanese and Korean cultural influences. By engaging in bold cultural borrowing and applying frameworks such as glocalization and Media System Dependency Theory, China has developed an idol industry that aligns with its market dynamics and developmental path.

6.3. Research significance

By exploring the formation of China's idol system and identifying its shortcomings, this study contributes to addressing real-world problems. The research also emphasizes the importance of continuously exporting Chinese culture, adjusting market structures, and strengthening the protection of underage idols' safety and well-being. In addition, it highlights the need to regulate fan behavior while enhancing idols' cultural literacy, artistic

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