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Sisterhood and Affective Economies in China's Underground Idol Culture: Female Fans, Intimacy, and Emotional Commodities

Hanying Chen

Beihang University?, China

Abstract

Today, underground idol culture exhibits diverse developmental trends worldwide. In Japan, its birthplace and core region, this culture has evolved over years into a unique ecosystem. Despite facing numerous challenges, it remains a dynamic and significant part of the cultural market. Across East and Southeast Asia, groups influenced by Japan also exist in the form of underground idols. In recent years, China's underground idol culture has flourished, with the number of groups steadily increasing and their geographical distribution expanding. This paper focuses on female underground idols and their female fans in China, introducing the development of female underground idols in the country and concentrating on the intimate relationships and interaction patterns between female underground idols and their female fans.

This study employs semi-structured interviews and online ethnography to examine emotional connections through the framework of sisterhood. It applies the theory of affective commodities to explore the emotional practices between female underground idols and their female fans. The research aims to understand the social significance of underground idol culture through these perspectives, particularly discussing the meaning of female friendship and emotional commodities within China's underground idol context. This provides theoretical support and practical reference for comprehending this emerging subcultural phenomenon.

Keywords: Underground Idols; Emotional Commodities; Sisterhood; Intimate Relationship