The Evolution of the Concept of "The Kingdom of Fans" in the Chinese Context

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Abstract. The phenomenon of fandom has had a huge impact in China, and it has aroused huge social attention. Fans tearing at each other and scolding each other, stepping on and leading to war, and constantly touching the legal bottom line and other chaos have led to their frequent domination of the hot search list of various platforms. But so far, this popular social phenomenon has not been effectively summarized. In the Chinese context, what does "fandom" mean? How has its concept evolved? This article attempts to answer that. After a brief analysis, I found that the evolution of fandom culture in China has undergone three stages: the first group of chasers, the second stage of fans, and the current fandom.

Keywords: Chinese context · meaning of evolution · groupies · fans · fandom

1 Introduction

"Star chasing people, and star chasing souls, the people chasing stars are subordinate to people" This is the ridicule of passers-by on the behavior of chasing stars. When an idol makes an endorsement, fans will dedicate their assets to boost sales for him; when there is a scandal in a star they admire, fans will stand on his side without hesitation to criticize him; when there are offline performances, fans will hold up the cheering cards with the idol's name to shout for him, even if his throat was hoarse; on special festivals, such as celebrities' birthdays, they would also do charity and public welfare in their name to accumulate popularity for them. The chaos also followed. For example, the most famous scolding battle "Four-leaf Clover versus EXO-L's Century War" is recognized by fans in the fandom. There are also intertwined interest chains in the entertainment industry, blindly pursuing interests and instigating fans to spend money on idols, causing many adolescent children to quarrel with their parents and drop out of school. Perhaps in the eyes of the public, it is completely incomprehensible to the behavior of fans, let alone why they do everything for a person who does not know you in time, and even when fans are mentioned, they will feel that they are "brainless" and "crazy". But it is undeniable that the fandom has an increasingly influential and irreplaceable position in Chinese society. What is the definition of the self-proclaimed "fans" and "fandom" by star chasers on the Internet? This article is based on the literature. On June 18, 2022, a total of 20 papers were searched on CNKI with the title of "Fandom". This article attempts to study 20 papers, focusing on the definition and evolution of the "fandom" in the 20 papers.

2 The Basic Meaning of Fans

As a foreign word in China, Fan corresponds to fans in Europe and America. Fans are the transliteration of Fans in Chinese, which refers to people who have a strong interest or appreciation for a specific person or thing. With the development of science and technology, the emergence of electronic media and the rise of popular culture are closely related to the emergence of fans in the true sense. Popular culture is the product of electronic media, and popular culture is the basis for the generation of fans. The media provides a platform for fans. When more people participate, the phenomenon of popular culture will appear. However, the meaning of fans has also changed as the rudimentary electronic media developed into the developed social media. No matter what stage it is, what remains the same is that "star chasing" and "being fans of the idol" have always been regarded as puberty disease that causes headaches for parents. The "task" of fans is like making data, boosting sales, and chasing offline. It is a generation gap between parents and what they disagree with, which has become a kind of "abnormal, crazy, and dangerous" deep in the memory of the public culture.

3 The Evolution of the Concept of "Fandom" in the Chinese Context

Popular culture refers to the newly emerged culture in a region or country, which is believed and accepted by the public and is often spread and expressed through popular media (Internet, TV, newspapers, magazines, etc.). Mass culture is essentially a civic culture. Before China's reform and opening, there was no mass culture in the strict sense [1]. When it came to reforming and opening, the ideological emancipation movement marked the transformation of Chinese culture in the new era. At the same time, electronic media represented by television began to spread in China, laying the foundation for the mass production and widespread dissemination of cultural products in the future. It is also because electronic media uses visual images as the main communication symbols to lower the threshold of audience culture so that its communication content can reach a wider audience. Based on this background, it can be said that the development of fan culture in China can be roughly divided into three stages:

3.1 "Star Chaser"

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hong Kong and Taiwan, which developed mass culture ahead of the mainland, imported a large number of works into the mainland, represented by Hong Kong's "Four Heavenly Kings", famous Hong Kong and Taiwan stars such as BEYOND, Zhao Chuan and Qi Qin. The concerts held on the mainland have caused a huge sensation. Currently, there was a wave of stars chasing the mainland. Thousands of fans sang in unison, and the media exclaimed that there was a star-chasing group in China.

"Star Chaser", a group with students as the main body, has appeared in the public's field of vision. At that time, chasing stars was not an industry but a profession. The fanatical worship of celebrities by groupies has made it a hot topic in society for a

long time in the future, and it has also caused others to label the groupies as "losing themselves", "crazy" and "abnormal". Chasing is inherently unfair, and those chasing will be even more humble in front of celebrities.

Just as on the stage of CCTV's 35th-anniversary party in 1993, "Star Chaser" starring Guo Da, Zhao Lirong and Cai Ming fully demonstrated the phenomenon of star chasing and the public's attention and controversy over star chasing behavior in the form of sketches. In the sketch, the "star chasing girl" played by Cai Ming, chasing the four kings, still feels very happy even if her body is splashed with mud, while the father played by Guo Da evaluation of her behavior as "really crazy", This also basically represents the views and evaluations of the mainstream society at that time and even now.

The reason why the public has such a derogatory attitude towards star chasing is that in reality, there will be individual extreme events, such as the "Yang Lijuan Incident". The girl Yang Lijuan dropped out of school to chase star Andy Lau. After her parents' dissuasion was invalid, she raised money for the girl and borrowed money to go to Hong Kong to meet Andy Lau. When the parents brought their daughter to meet Andy Lau with huge sums of money and were about to go home, the daughter was still obsessed and even wanted to marry him. The girl's father was forced to commit suicide by jumping into the sea one night and left a suicide note asking Andy Lau to see his daughter again. The particularity of the event itself, coupled with the media's rendering, led people to gradually realize the serious consequences that star chasing can bring, and aroused widespread attention in society, which further solidified the public's antipathy towards star chasing.

It can be seen from this that the stars of the 1980s and 1990s were usually packaged as "gods"-like existences, who were high above and out of reach. Chasing also reminds the insurmountable distance and unequal interaction between fans and idols. Therefore, the key meaning of "star chasers" at this stage is "chasing".

3.2   "Fans Group"

The second stage started with the popular singer talent contest "Super Girl" launched by Hunan Satellite TV in 2005, which has created many miracles in the history of Chinese TV and created a new grass-roots talent culture in China. A star is no longer a distant, untouchable star, but maybe the "ordinary person" around him.

This all stems from the draft system's innovation and social media development. Fans vote for their favorite players by sending text messages, breaking the traditional production mechanism and significantly increasing the participation of fans. "Corn" and "jelly" and other fan groups named after idol names or characteristics have entered people's field of vision with an unprecedented speed and attitude, breaking the public's inherent impression of traditional star chasers. Fans spontaneously formed various small organizations. They shouted slogans, held up lights, and agreed to support their favorite players on the spot, made promotional materials, or sent gifts to passers-by to call on more people to vote for their picks. The draft has become "all-in-one". This has also formed a unique Chinese fan culture that is different from Europe, America or Japan, and South Korea, which is also the prototype of the current fandom phenomenon.

The success of "Super Girl" has led to an endless stream of talent shows in the future, and the scale of fans has grown at an alarming rate, becoming one huge group after another. It seems that "star chasers" have become a thing of the past. At this stage, the distance between fans and idols is beginning to get closer. Fans at this stage voluntarily contribute to their favorite players and send them out. At the same time, because of the efforts of fans, and idols, fans have also become the existence that they generally rely on for their backing. It can be said that some of the basic rules and operation modes of today's "fandom" also continue the traditions of the fascination group period.

The main point of the meaning of "fan group" at this stage is: fans make specific and effective support and contributions for idols.

3.3 "Fandom"

Taking 2013 as the dividing line, with the iteration of the entertainment industry and digital network technology, fan culture has ushered in innovation, and the phenomenon of "fandom" has officially appeared.

Internet companies headed by Baidu, Ali, and Tencent entered the entertainment industry, using digital networks and big data technologies to quantify and visualize a celebrity's "fame", and "traffic" began to become a celebrity in entertainment. A measure of industry status. Stars in the past needed to rely on their talents to be displayed in front of the public to gain love, increase recognition and make influential representative works, to gain the following of loyal fan groups. However, in the era of social media and big data, many celebrities no longer follow the traditional way of becoming famous but rely on the company's packaging and the characters displayed to the public on the screen to attract fans.

With the rapid development of the entertainment industry and the Internet, an emerging profession "idol", which is different from stars and actors, has become a more favorite existence for the audience. The popularity of the two idol development programs "Idol Trainee" and "Creation 101" in 2018 rapidly expanded the idol market in China. There are more than 100 trainees from various entertainment companies in the show, but in the end, only a few people can successfully form a group debut. The program team gave fans the new names "producer" and "creator" because whether the trainee players can make their debut and whether they can get some privileges in the competition are all determined by the fans. This means that fans have the initiative to chase stars, and it is up to them to determine who can debut and who can become a hot new star.

The changes in the way of making stars and the development of social media have also made the fan group more organized and the division of labor within the group clearer [2]. This feature is the root of many rice circle phenomena. For example, in "Youth with You 2", its sponsors put the QR codes to help the trainees make their debut in the milk bottle caps, and the fans group behind the players buy milk in units of 100 boxes in an organized manner. But so much milk was poured into the sewers, and sensational milk pouring incident. This caused widespread concern, which eventually led to the forced suspension of the program's recording.

Because fans have become direct participants in the production of idols, idols at this stage also give fans more attention and respect, and naturally give fans more interaction, such as releasing more targeted videos and pictures, even if just some trivial behavior

can be magnified many times through the idol filter in the eyes of fans. This creates a cycle that leads to an ever-increasing connection between the two parties. In-depth participation has gradually made the fan group in this state show an obvious exclusive group boundary, which is the phenomenon of "Fandom".

The fanatical following of fans has naturally become the object of capital pursuit, to develop a completely commercialized "traffic password": as long as all things bring the names of idols or their photos, fans can invest money, time, and emotion regardless of return, participate in the process of making idols, to use their "krypton gold" ability to make the commercial value of idols visible to more and bigger "gold masters".

"Fandom" is the abbreviation of "the kingdom of fans". A fandom is a group composed of fans, which has formed an obvious boundary phenomenon of "enclosure" outside the meaning of the original group [3]. Therefore, "circle" has a strong ideological color. Fan circle does not refer to a specific fan group. A prefix will be added before the fan circle to indicate "fan membership", such as entertainment fan circle, Korean circle, Japanese circle, etc. [4].

Currently, the distance between fans and idols is getting closer and closer, and the relationship is becoming more and more equal. No longer can only look up from a distance as before, because idols have become inseparable from fans.

The main point of the meaning of "fandom" at this stage is that fans directly participate in the production of idols, so fans' sense of identification with idols is unprecedentedly strong. Fans not only strengthen the emotional connection to their idols, but also strengthen the connection with other members of the organization, which enhances the identification and adhesion of the organization [5].

4   Conclusion

After decades of evolution, from the purchase of album posters to fundraising and support, from the event site to pick-up and drop-off, from Tieba forum to Weibo and Tik tok, the star-chasing culture has been upgraded from individual behavior to collective behavior, from avocation to a complete industrial chain. The relationship between fans and idols has changed from following, chasing, to multi-dimensional participation, and eventually even becoming the decider of the production process, becoming more self-sufficient and having the initiative to chase stars.

However, the family feelings and idols that fans see on the surface are the capital and team behind the packaging operation, which has caused many social problems. This has led many people to think that "fandom" contains some negative connotations. Therefore, we cannot superficially determine whether the change in the meaning of "fandom" is positive or negative.

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