

What the Idol Industry will add to the integration phenomena in East Asia?

SAKAI Masayoshi, Deputy-Director, Media & Content Industry Div., METI

Throughout the last two decades in the recent century, life-style of the youth in East Asia have got resembled apparently. Not only the goods consumed in daily life, but also the cultural activities outside school. They appear to share a certain sense or concept in common, which I will express as 'KAWAII'

Although the sense of KAWAII was deeply curved in the history of Japan, it was only 70's in which the most recent movement of KAWAII appears on the surface of the Japanese society. In the 80's, KAWAII is accepted widely by peoples in NIEs and in the next decade we saw their domestic and native KAWAII culture and products would come out. Many reports indicate 'Japanization' of Pop-culture in East Asia have already been brought to China. But Japanization appears to be not one way phenomena but an aspect of similarization of Pop-Culture in Asia.

After the wave of Japanization, Japan herself has been fallen to 'new' love for Asian Pop-Culture, which is represented by stars originated in other part of East Asia like KANESHIRO Takeshi, YOON Sohnha, BoA and so on, without any sense that they were influenced by their own Japanese Pop-Culture. We are on the mouth of new age of equal-relationship in East Asia, in which Pop-Culture can be welcomed beyond border, no matter what nationality the content is.

Long before the 18th century when Nation-State system was founded in Europe, many wises including Mencius, ZhuXi in China, Ibn-Khardun in Magrib discussed about the relationship between Nation and State, or Society and Government. It seems that Nation-State is not the one solid existence but is just a system in which the nation and the state are deeply tied up. The state must be supported by community of the nation, the community of the nation is a system outlined by borders drawn and maintained by the state. Not a group itself is a community, but the community itself exists on the base of the 'we-feeling' coming from communication among mass of people. Therefore, the re-balance between the state and the community of the nation will need, when overseas communication realize 'we-feeling' over borders.

We have seen that 'Borderless exchange of Pop-Culture in East Asia', and we know that this phenomenon in the level of society, in other words, the community of nationals, could cause a change in State-level, in other words, a political change.

On the course of our study about the phenomena caused by Japanization of

Pop-Culture in East Asia, an interesting figure has been found. That indicates, as for Korean youth, attitude for Japanese prime minister's ceremony in Yasukuni-shrine (which cause a controversy between Japanese and Korean governments every year) differed according to whether he/she is a fan of Japanese Pop-Culture or not. Rate of 'Acceptable' of the Fan for Japanese Pop-Culture is 10% up to that of Non-Fan.

As for the influence to community, Idol Industry is the most important among so various activities within Pop-Culture Industry. While Idol is often said to be the type of stars unique to Japan, that has already come to be popular in East Asia widely too, as I myself have observed it for many years.

Why is the Idol Industry so important? To get an answer, we must understand what the Idol is, discussing about the characteristic of Idol system. Idol is distinguished from Superstars typical in Hollywood by "lack". Idol lacks many thing like beautifulness, strength, beautiful voice and talent for acting and so on (at least one of them), while it is sure that they're talented something which is required to be "in center of people." As far as I analyze, Idol has opposite way of relationship between the star and fans. Superstar like a Hollywood Star is one kind of charisma and makes fans go after him/her, on the other hand, Idol is a kind of icon and used by fans to play of 'worshipping', or making him/her an Idol by themselves. Fans of Idol might be enjoying 'we-feeling' throughout the play of worshipping.

It is because the Idol business will try to form, maintain and vitalize community of fans, which will make her/him an Idol, maintain her/his activities as an Idol and let her/him proceed the way to a superstar. Action of promoting international community is built in the International Idol Industry.

We should never forget that 'we-feeling' of the community is made around one real Idol. An Idol is deeply tied with an image of something behind her/him, including her/his mother country.

I am affirmative for the idea of Trans-Nationalism that mass of the people with strong compassion form a community, and that prevent states on it from going to war against each other. Not only the communication accelerated by the IT Revolution, but the unification of Pop-Culture and activities of Cultural Industry, especially Idol Promotion industry might realize a trans-nationalistic phenomenon.

EU is unified by a Superstar named Jesus the Christ. East Asia could be waiting for Idols which unite hearts of nationals.