

Reflections on Daily Manipulation based on Fans Circle Nationalism

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Keywords: Fans circle, Nationalism, Identity construction, Often-manipulated nationalism

Abstract: Theories of nationalism are constantly being infused with new connotations as the times go by, new media technologies have changed the way nationalist movements are expressed, and cyber-nationalism has emerged. Instead of dismantling the nation-state, cross-cultural communication has strengthened nationalism because of friction. Fans of idol artists, as active members of cyberspace, have promoted the emergence of a new branch of cyber nationalism, “fan circle nationalism,” with their practical actions. The reason why fan circle nationalism is considered a kind of nationalism like daily manipulation is that cyberspace is a space that breaks through the limits of time and space, in which the fans' dynamism is given unprecedented play. While there are positive aspects to the practice of fan circle nationalism, there are inevitably negative effects as well.

1. Introduction

In 2021, actor Zhang Zhehan's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in Japan and other inappropriate behavior sparked strong discontent among netizens, and the China Performing Arts Industry Association issued the “Announcement on the Industry Moral Self-Discipline Review of Actor Zhang Zhehan”, asking members to boycott Zhang Zhehan's practice. Once the announcement was made, many of Zhang Zhehan's fans said “there are no idols in front of the country” and announced that they would take off the actor. This is not the first artist to be boycotted by fans for insulting China, in 2019 South Korean artist Cui Shiyuan led a large number of fans to disaffiliate because he supported Hong Kong thugs in outside outlets, and the famous South Korean idol group Bulletproof Youth Group published inappropriate comments involving anti-American aid to North Korea, leading to public anger. In recent years, the increasingly frequent “rice circle exodus” has also become a special manifestation of the practice of online nationalism in China.

2. Nationalism and Its Cross-Cultural Practices

2.1 Nationalism and Cyber-Nationalism

Nationalism refers to ideas and behaviors that are based on safeguarding the interests and dignity of the nation, and its connotation and extension are not unchanging and will be reduced, modified, and enriched with the development of the times. The traditional theory of nationalism takes the question of the legitimacy of political ruling power as the central issue to be explored. With the

development of the colonial nationalist movement, this issue is no longer the only focus of scholars in this field, but the issue of national identity and culture has also been included in the scope of nationalism.

Anderson, a specialist in ethnic studies, has proposed a new perspective for understanding ethnicity and nationalism: the imagined community. He argues that the advent of print allowed an event within a community to be refracted into the particular imagination of a readership, which in turn profoundly dominated people's imagination with a stable, solid view of time. Anthony Smithz, on the other hand, argues that people's particular view of the world relies on more than simple imagination. The series of major events in China at the beginning of the twentieth century made the elite eager to cultivate a public conception of the nation-state, and the mass media, with its wide range, speed, and fidelity, became a tool for the elite to create nationalism, and “cyber-nationalism” also. As a result, a new chapter of nationalism was opened in China. Due to the limitations of productivity and education levels, grassroots people hardly have the opportunity to participate in nationalist movements, so the traditional flag bearers of nationalism are elites. The decentralized nature of the Internet has brought nationalism closer to the general public, enabling more people to associate nationalism with their own national identity.

In the early days of the introduction of the Internet in China, the “network” was once considered a mere tool in online nationalism, but as the Internet gradually broke the sense of space created by mass media, people found that the “network” was no longer a supporting role on the Internet. Drawing on Anderson's theory of “imagined communities” and placing it in the context of the Internet, Liu Hailong argues that “the Internet mediates or constructs the national imagination of a new generation of Internet users.” The Internet and nationalism are not a relationship of influencing and being influenced; they are interdependent. The new media technology has transformed the grassroots from “spectators” to constructors of nationalist thinking.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Fan Nationalism

With the increasing trend of globalization, scholars have also paid more attention to its relationship with nationalism and nation-states. In the process of globalization, population, technology, and resources are flowing around the globe in an unprecedented manner, and the “global village” proposed by McLuhan is becoming possible. The author does not agree with this view for two reasons: First, the subject of transnational interaction in the context of globalization is still the nation-state, and the cohesion of community consciousness is still an important element of nationalist state education, and nationalist thinking is gradually revived in the context of globalization. Secondly, in cross-cultural interaction, the anonymity of the Internet does not mean that people's identity in cyberspace is cleared, and it is difficult for people to avoid substituting their labels in real life into cyberspace, and nationality is a label that people can hardly cover up completely in online communication.

Nowadays, various social media platforms such as Twitter, Weibo, and Facebook have become the main front of online nationalist movements and the new arena of cross-cultural nationalism. In cross-cultural communication, the individual's identification with the nation-state is not only not weakened, but also generates more nationalistic frictions due to various factors such as the cultural background. Fans of idol artists, as an important branch of the netizens, are often active in the cross-cultural arena because of the need to follow the stars. Although there is an increase in nationalism, the fans' love for their idols has led to the maintenance of friendly communication across cultures, and fans belonging to one fan circle communicate with each other in a way that minimizes the conflicts and struggles arising from cultural differences. Fans avoid ideological issues as much as possible for the sake of both national image and the interests of their idols, but this does not mean

that if political or ideological conflicts do occur, fans will choose to deal with them in silence. Everyone is a “gatekeeper” on the Internet, and the content posted on the Internet is screened and filtered by the participants. Fans are post-facto gatekeepers of the content posted by their idols or of other media reports on their behavior, and in this process, they become, consciously or unconsciously, textual censors. Fans mainly focus their censorship on texts with Chinese interests, and the principle of censorship is “if you make money from Chinese people, you must respect China”. An important means by which Chinese fans construct their fan identity is through cultural consumption, such as buying albums or peripheral products. The same money is spent to help create stars, but the Chinese attitude towards following stars is gradually changing from “kneeling” to “standing”.

In recent years, fans have even chanted slogans with a high degree of political awareness, such as “no idols before the nation”, and fan nationalism has become an important branch of online nationalism. Fans participate in the practice of online nationalism, mainly through “deflowering” and “collective cursing”, while “powder circle marching” refers to fans' mass cursing or page washing on Twitter, and Facebook. This is an important form of nationalism practiced in the fan circle, and the experience of this “exotic” space itself strengthens the participants' national consciousness.

3. The Daily Maneuverings of Infosphere Nationalism

3.1 Identity Construction of Fans

Fans of idol artists are the main body of fan nationalism, and the high level of collective fervor they exhibit towards their idols makes onlookers regard them as “out-of-control” and “irrational” “brain-dead” fans. Although such comments are biased, what unites fans is their common love for their idol artists. Their various behaviors together build the “rice circle culture”. Their actions are often not understood, but the community they have built together can provide them with an umbrella of protection, and their unified attitude and actions can protect them from the outside world's “gunfire. In such a culture, fans need to construct their own identity, which enhances their sense of belonging to the fan community and is influenced by two factors: internal and external.

1)Internal: spontaneous factors

Spontaneous factors fall into two categories: cultural creation and consumer shaping. The main works of idol artists are singing and dancing on stage, while some artists enter the acting world and leave behind film and television works. The cultural creation of fans is the derivative creation of idol-related audio and video materials, which is often called “secondary creation”. In the process of secondary creation, most fans are not motivated by the pursuit of financial gain; their love for their idols is what drives them to engage in “unpaid” secondary creation. The process of secondary creation deepens the fan's affection for the artist, and the results may draw fans to the idol, while also promoting recognition of the fan by others in the fanbase. Consumption shaping is another important way for fans to construct their own identity, and can even be called one of the core features of fandom. Idol albums, peripherals, endorsement products, and advertising space are the main products that fans consume. From advertising space in New York Times Square to houses and stars, these excessive consumption practices, which are incomprehensible to outsiders, strengthen the fans' identity.

2)External: externalities.

The external factors are more intense than the internal ones, mainly in the form of conflict. The shift in the position of groupies has intensified the conflict between fans and non-fans. The first generation of groupies' main forum for groupies was the posting bar, a once-popular communication platform that featured keyword-based gatherings where people interested in the same topic could

get together. Later, with the rise of Weibo, fans shifted to Weibo as their main base for following stars. Weibo has little power to segregate different groups of fans, and there are no “boundaries” for posting on Weibo, and the content is open to the entire platform. The possibility of “focusing on one's own family” and “circling the drain” is greatly reduced, and with the advent of the era of big data, the commercial value of idol artists has become quantifiable. For the sake of their idols' development, fans have started to spontaneously “make data” for their idols, to improve their social buzz, search buzz, and other indicators that affect their business value. In addition to this, fans also need to promote positive exposure for their idols and compete for national favorability to compete for a larger “roadie” base. This series of work is difficult to be done by fans alone and requires them to work together to help their idols win over their rivals in terms of data with a reasonable division of labor and organization. In this process, fan groups are gradually organizing themselves. Fan identity is gradually being constructed.

3.2 Powder-ring Nationalism in China: a Daily Manipulation Based on Cyberspace

The construction of nationalism differs from subject to subject, and the manosphere nationalism defended by fans also carries the distinctive color of this group. This paper defines fan circle nationalism as a daily manipulation based on cyberspace because fans are skilled in new media technologies in the process of self-identity construction, and they use these new technologies to devote themselves to the practice of nationalism in cyberspace, which makes the practical dimension of nationalism gain an unprecedented strengthening. Since cyberspace is an important forum for fans to carry out star-catching activities, they are highly active in the network, and many events involving nationalism are carried out and spread in the network, so the nationalism of the fan circle has a “daily” character.

The “everyday maneuvers” of pink nationalism are events that fall between major exceptional events, such as wars or world events, and banal nationalism, which refers to common forms of nationalist expression such as flags and the wording of international news. Such “everyday maneuvers” are carried out in three ways: the censorship of texts, words, and actions for “political correctness”, the use of nationalism, and the choice of values in times of identity conflict.

1) “Political correctness” review of texts, words, and actions.

The Chinese do not shy away from talking about nationalism, and as China grows stronger, the bottom line for fans to follow is becoming clearer: idols must respect China. Fan scrutiny of whether an idol respects his or her home country focuses on texts posted by the idol, statements made, and the actual actions of the idol. If an idol's comments, for example, are insulting to China, fans will raise the alarm, and if verified, may invite a “fans circle out”. Fans are very strict in their scrutiny, and even if an idol does not express a clear attitude towards an incident, it does not mean that it is absolutely “safe”: if an idol “favorites” an abusive comment, it may only mean that the idol does not have time to view the content at the moment and hopes to read it later. If an idol clicks “favorite” on an insulting comment, it may only mean that the idol does not have time to view the content at the moment and hopes to read it later, but it may also attract fans' criticism. Second, the scope of fan censorship is broad, not only in terms of content but also in that fans may include people close to their idols in their censorship, linking the words and actions of such people to their idols. Finally, this type of censorship may also reflect generational and cultural differences. Different generations have different standards for judging whether or not a statement is “insulting to China”, and one obvious trend is that from the post-80s to the post-00s, the standards for censorship are becoming stricter. This is also related to the fact that the Internet has given the post-00s an easy channel to learn more about history. Such censorship may involve misunderstandings arising from cultural differences, but not all fans can take into account the differences in understanding

between their idols and themselves. Since a group of fans is younger, they will act relatively impulsively in the early stages and need a certain period of calmness and guidance from others to be able to look more objectively at the insults involved in their idols.

2)Exploitation of nationalism

Three main types of people are involved in the exploitation of nationalism: fans, business crowds, and anti-Chinese forces. With the increase in the number of fan groups and the maturity of the mechanisms by which fan groups operate, fans are very sensitive to outside conditions. Some scholars have suggested that fans may be making strategic use of nationalism. This exploitation mechanism may take place both inside and outside the fan community, with the ultimate goal of “eliminating dissenters. From the inside, if the “Chinese insulter” is someone close to the idol, then he or she is more likely to be attacked by fans. Usually, the person suspected of insulting China is the idol's rumored partner, but not necessarily of the opposite gender. The hype in the entertainment industry today is varied, from the old hype about heterosexuals to the hype about homosexuals, there is a market for this and it is accompanied by abuse, this is a war between “only fans” and “cp fans”, “only fans This is a war between “only fans” and “cp fans”, and “only fans” will use the banner of defending the dignity of the nation and other justice to exclude dissenters. For the “only fans”, this is a rare opportunity to take a higher stand against their idol's scandalous partner and the “cp fans” by involving their national interests. From outside the fan circle, the fans' intention to strategically exploit nationalism is even more obvious. The reason for this is that limited commercial resources make the competition between idols more of a zero-sum game, and to make their idols better, fans will not let go of the opportunity to shoot down other artists when other artists are involved in “insulting China”, fans will use it to make a big deal out of it to damage the image of their competitors. Due to the wide range of commercial crowds, we will only discuss marketing numbers as a typical case here. When a fan actively submits an insulting act by another artist to a marketing number, the marketing number will make commercial hype by posting nationalistic topics, which can quickly stimulate the fans' psychology. Whether it invites concurrence from fans of artist A or attacks from fans of artist B, it is not a bad thing for the marketing number, because the only thing they care about most is traffic. There are often marketing numbers that use such events to boost their fan base by an order of magnitude in a short period. The most important thing to be wary of is the malicious exploitation of nationalism in the fan's circle by anti-Chinese forces. They fan the flames based on facts and deliberately create conflicts and confrontations. Very often, the fans do not intend to raise the level of the conflict between the two countries, but after the malicious guidance of anti-Chinese forces, the consequences of the incident are beyond the control of the fans.

3)Choices about values in identity conflict

Fans are inherently dual-identity activists - both nationals and fans. When an idol is involved in insulting China, fans have three coping strategies: one is to adopt an “ostrich” policy. According to Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, when an individual is in a cognitive dissonance situation, he or she will take measures to eliminate the dissonant part. In a sensitive period when an idol is alleged to be “insulting”, fans will be attacked by a specific group whether they support the idol or not. Therefore, in different scenarios, fans will actively hide their nationality or nationality to achieve as much self-perceived harmony as possible. Secondly, they try their best to clear the idol from suspicion. They will use various types of search data to collect all the evidence that can prove the innocence of their idols, supporting their actions both out of their love for their idols and out of the intention to maintain the legitimacy of their fan status. If they cannot find strong evidence, fans will also post some positive events that their idols have done to try to “get back” for their idols, an act is known to outsiders as “whitewashing” and “cleansing”. This behavior is called “whitewashing” and “land washing” by outsiders. The third is to defend the country. This part of the fan base is

divided into two factions, one of which chooses to directly “take off”, while the other chooses to look for evidence and then “take off” when it is confirmed that the idol has “insulted” China.

Many fans' attitudes towards both the state and idols are not either/or, black or white. Regardless of which of these actions fans take, it is clear that fans do not want the country and idol to go to the point of absolute opposition, and more want to establish a relative balance between the country and the idol. This can be seen in the fact that fans try to avoid talking about political issues with fans of other nationalities in the cross-cultural arena. However, in the end, there are a group of fans who still choose to participate in the “fans circle arch”, which is a mixture of patriotic and fun sentiments, a mixture of personal feelings, human dignity, and patriotism. Although some fans get pleasure from the process of defending the dignity of the country, a large number of fans are suffering in the process. Even the fans who participated in the “fans circle arch” were not necessarily absolute supporters of “no idols before the state”, but were probably influenced by group pressure and group norms. The “anonymity” of the Internet does not mean that group pressure and group norms no longer play a role, but that fans feel both physical and mental pressure under group pressure.

4. Impact of Daily Drills

Because of the convenience provided by the Internet, the daily exercise of fan circle nationalism has empowered more individuals to participate, lowered the threshold for participation, and given more room for human initiative than in previous nationalist movements. However, the impact of the “fans circle march” as a major form of daily practice of fans circle nationalism still needs to be viewed dialectically.

On the positive side, the “Fan Circle Draft” is positive guidance for fans' values in general, especially for underage fans. Today's post-05s are more mature than the post-80s, post-90s, and even post-00s in their adolescence because they have been with electronic products since birth, and their early access to cyberspace makes them more mature, but their values are still at a stage where they need positive guidance. If the common phenomenon of the fan circle is still “kneeling to follow the stars” and ignoring the issues related to the bottom line of the country, then it will hurt the establishment of values of underage fans. The “fan club conscription” also has an impact on the idol industry. The main behaviors of the “fan exodus” are “de-fans” and “backpedaling,” both of which together lead to a decline in the amount of traffic that the idol can attract, although the comments related to the idol may be somewhat different for a while. Although the number of comments related to the idol may increase for a while, it is mainly negative comments and the overall trend of traffic is down. The decline in traffic for idol artists and the consequent devaluation of their commercial value. This is a reminder to the idol industry as a whole: if you want to make money from Chinese fans, you need to watch your words and behave in a way that maintains respect for China.

Although the “fans circle march” can mobilize the patriotic passion of fans, as a practical form of this not-so-peaceful nationalist movement, its “daily” exercise does have negative effects. First of all, it is likely that at certain times or occasions, under the banner of patriotism and righteousness, it will turn into a nationalist movement that is alienated, and the participants will use the “Fan March” for revenge and profit. There is nothing wrong with maintaining a strongly patriotic stance, but for one side of the fans to unite and attack the other side's idol position without solid evidence lacks legitimacy. And to achieve the purpose of attracting attention and increasing fans, the self-media sends out some unverified pieces that can mislead other groups, and the post-truth nature of appealing to personal emotions and ignoring facts may intensify in the process. Second, because of the lack of unified organizational rules and standards for reference, there may be excesses in fans' words and behaviors. From the perspective of online behavior, the fans' use of vulgar words and

lack of connotation in their “conquests” is not conducive to the construction of clear cyberspace. When the online behavior is extended to the offline, the fan groups may attack the fans who have not expressed their patriotic stance, such as skinning, “human flesh” and intimidation. Finally, on the level of maintaining friendly relations at home and abroad, anti-Chinese forces will use such high-frequency activities as the “Fan Circle Expedition” to expand their influence as much as possible, and in serious cases, they may achieve damage to diplomatic relations between the two countries from the the bottom up. Since the average age of fans is low and their ability to recognize “cloak and dagger” accounts is weak, they are easily guided by them, and eventually, the combined effect will be to expand the situation beyond the expectations and control of fans.

5. Residual Thoughts

The “fans circle nationalism” is a special form of nationalism after the empowerment of the actors by communication technology, and the “fan circle march” as its typical practice has both positive and negative implications, how to formulate internal regulations to guide this movement positively and avoid being maliciously used by anti-Chinese forces is the issue that fans need to focus on. How to formulate internal rules to guide this movement positively and avoid being maliciously used by anti-China forces is an issue that fans need to focus on.

This article is lacking in its exploration of the fans and their behavior who once shouted “no idols before the state” but chose to reclaim their manhood after some time.

Acknowledgment

Many people have offered me valuable help in my thesis writing. I would like to thank Mrs.Wen and Mrs.Xiong for tutoring me.

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