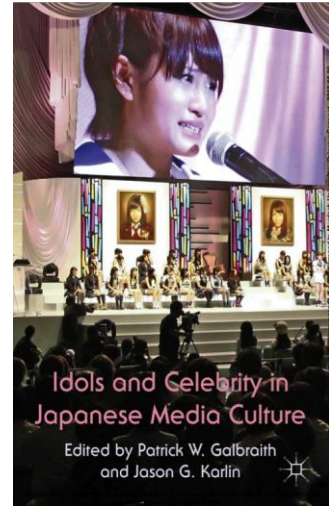


Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (Eds.), **Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture**, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 239 pp., \$59.85 (hardcover).

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Although it seems that K-pop idols currently dominate the Asian music market, Japan has a long tradition of producing pop idols. Indeed, Japan ruled the pop idol market before the rise of K-pop in the late 1990s. Japanese idol culture, which dates back to the 1970s, has had a tremendous influence on Japan's entertainment industry and media. Moreover, Japanese pop idols have contributed to the global distribution and consumption of Japanese popular culture. However, as the editors of **Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture** point out, "despite sitting at the center of one of the biggest media markets in the world, idols have until recently for the most part been overlooked in scholarly debates about the Japanese mass media" (p. 2). Editors Patrick Galbraith and Jason Karlin argue here that previous research dealing with idols and celebrity in Japan has mostly focused on introducing Japan rather than digging into issues related media culture. This collection, by contrast, emphasizes "the use of theory to challenge notions of Japanese uniqueness" and employs interdisciplinary approaches "outside the study of Japan" (p. 4). The book's 10 chapters, in four sections, focus our attention primarily on Japanese idols, celebrity, the entertainment business, and fandom culture. In their discussion of Japanese media, however, the authors of the articles untangle cultural trends that extend beyond Japan and interpret these trends at a broader level through critical and cultural theories. As a result, the book allows readers to explore both the uniqueness of Japanese media culture and popular culture in general.



"Systems," the first section, details the ways in which the glamorous world of idols and celebrity operates, paying special attention to the capitalization and commercialization of entertainment systems. Chapter 1 discusses the power of *jimusho*, a management office in the entertainment business that "mass controls" (p. 37) everything related to Japanese idols and celebrity. Under the heavy influence of commercialized systems, Japanese popular culture has come to value commercial success "over creative works" (p. 51). *Jimusho* plays a central role in the ongoing commercialization of Japan's media industry. Chapter 2 looks at the Sakai Noriko drug abuse scandal of 2009 to examine capital-oriented celebrity culture in Japan. Comparing the media obsession with this scandal to tabloid journalism, the author argues that Japanese corporate media and audiences are so engrossed in celebrity that they are more interested in "gossipy infotainment and celebrity triviality" (p. 67) than they are in the truth behind a scandal. Chapter 3 addresses the commercialization of Japanese television, introducing the notion of affective economy. By blurring the lines between programming and advertisements in which idols often make appearances, TV producers and advertisers exploit fans' loyalty.

"Desire" investigates fans' desires for idols and celebrities. Chapter 4 argues that Johnny's, the most famous jimusho in Japan, promotes aspiration among female fans to maintain male idols' popularity. The "empty" image of celebrity that jimusho plans is filled with "a variety of fantasy narratives" (p. 98) that female fans develop based on their own imaginations. Chapter 5 examines the purposeful performance of homoeroticism between two members of Arashi, a male idol group. The writer concludes that this gender performance is part of a "fan service" (p. 120) for female fans who are engrossed with *bishonen* culture and enjoy reading boys' love or *yaoi* manga. That is to say, the performance is, in fact, "carefully calculated" (p. 123) to satisfy female craving for male-to-male sexuality. Chapter 6 introduces readers to the influence of popular culture on sexual minorities. Two celebrities, Mishima Yukio and Misora Hibari, regardless of their own sexual orientation, used their performances in the media to inspire and encourage homosexuals to express their desires and thus led "the opening of the public sphere for *homo*" (p. 137).

"Difference" branches out into non-Japanese idols and celebrity, examining current issues that Japanese women confront. Chapter 7 centers on Agnes Chan, a female celebrity who transformed herself from a cute and innocent female idol to an educated working mother and influential media personality. Chan's unconventional career (married, gave birth, and returned to work with her child) sparked a heated discussion of motherhood, social and legal support systems for Japanese women, and female idols' status and position in society. Chapter 8 unveils what lies beneath "Yon-sama fever," which refers to the Korean male actor who starred in *Winter Sonata*, a Korean drama that became a mega movie hit in Japan. According to the author, this phenomenon extends beyond female admiration for an attractive male celebrity. The enthusiasm among middle-aged women for Yon-sama clearly points to "their dissatisfaction with how the sociohistorical construction of gender in Japan has made them wives, mothers, and caretakers, and denied them as individuals and as women" (p. 174).

"Image," the final section, unpacks the idea that idols and celebrity are merely products of capitalism. In chapter 9, the author discusses *otaku*, a unique fandom culture in Japan, and concludes that otaku is "facilitated and exploited by consumer capitalism" (p. 201) and "the idol is a symptom not just of man, but also of consumer-capitalist society" (p. 199). Chapter 10 introduces a type of celebrity unique to the digital era: the virtual idol that appeared in the 1990s and early 2000s. Fans of the virtual idol are able to own, control, manipulate, and modify their beloved "celebrity." In essence, fans are promoted to acting as producers. The virtual idol's lack of physicality is offset by digital fantasy.

*Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media* applies multidisciplinary approaches, from ethnographic interviews to qualitative analysis of media content to a variety of issues related to contemporary Japanese idols and celebrity culture. Unfortunately, the book does not include any voices from within the community of idols and celebrities. What do idols themselves think of the culture to which they belong? What does it mean to be an idol and celebrity in Japan? How do they negotiate their own desires as artists-idols? How do they position themselves to survive in a contested territory full of idol commodities? Although it would undoubtedly be difficult to obtain completely honest responses from idols—most are trained on what to say during interviews—any research on idols' lives, including anonymous interviews, could be valuable. Idols' perspectives could add more diversity to this collection and help scholars to reveal hidden aspects of media culture, thus promoting a stereoscopic vision of the media landscape.

In spite of this minor weakness, *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media* is a wonderful anthology that offers an overview of media culture, idols, and celebrity in Japan through intriguing case studies whose topics range from the entertainment industry to idols to otaku to the digitally created idol. The book's greatest strength is that, despite its narrow focus on Japan, the authors' insights and discussions can be applied to other countries in the global context of the ongoing intensification of capitalism and consumerism. Overall, the book provides an excellent introduction to the social, cultural, and economic issues intertwined with media culture.