

Virtual Music Idol, the Chinese Leitkultur and the Making of the World's First Virtual 'Red Diva'

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Received: February 1, 2024

Accepted: February 16, 2024

Online Published: February 26, 2024

doi:10.5539/ass.v20n2p24

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v20n2p24>

Abstract

Luo Tianyi is currently the most popular virtual music idol in China, a product of the collective imagination of her fans. She has attracted many fans because of her cute image, her music works, and the space for imagination it brings to people. The development of virtual singers in China is deeply influenced by the Japanese ACGN (anime-comic-game-novel) culture. At first, most of Luo Tianyi's fans were fans of the Japanese virtual singer Hatsune Miku or other anime fandoms with a strong subcultural nature. However, in recent years, Luo Tianyi has gradually attracted the attention of the Chinese official media and gradually shifted from subculture to mainstream culture. As a result, it has not only had a significant impact on the Bilibili Site, the largest interactive Internet platform for teenagers in China but also interacted with the official media, thus becoming an extraordinary music idol.

Keywords: virtual idol, Chinese Leitkultur, subculture, music, red diva

1. Introduction

Luo Tianyi is the most celebrated virtual sensation among Generation Z otaku in modern China. This third-generation Vocaloid by Yamaha Corporation is associated with many commercial brands and official media, making it a significant medium of leitkultur, or the mainstream discourse of the Chinese national ideology. With growing interest in virtual music, the enthusiasts from the anime-comic-game-novel (ACGN) community began to reimagine the images, voices, choreography, and personas on Luo Tianyi's original structure. However, after appearing on national television, this artefact rooted in the subcultural fanbase became an increasingly influential, phenomenal, creative product created by Chinese government media on the biggest interactive internet platform for Chinese youth. This study explores the transformation of Luo Tianyi, a Chinese music idol, from a virtual character of a subculture to the Red Diva, and examines the Chinese leitkultur it represents. This derives from a concept by political scientist Bassam Tibi. The author is currently analyzing multiple aspects of virtual singers, focusing on the specific form of music presentation and the current social significance behind it. This study hopes to understand the virtual singer's existence between virtuality and reality and clarify its complications and the multiple realities across politico-cultural boundaries in the Chinese context.

2. Definition

2.1 Virtual Idol

The development of virtual idols is closely related to Internet technology, and virtual reality technology is regarded as a computer-generated media star. At present, there are various types of virtual idols, such as virtual singers, virtual YouTuber, virtual uploader, etc. Their character images are mostly based on anime, 3D computer images, in other words, virtual idol with no physical presence. At present, virtual singers can be divided into two categories. The first type of virtual singers are voiced by real singers but appear as anime or 3D images, such as the British Gorillaz band. The second category uses a singing voice synthesizer software such as Vocaloid. Users purchase the software and input tone and lyrics to generate a vocal-like song. Hatsune Miku, a representative of Vocaloid, is also the world's most popular virtual singer. However, in the digital music age, most listeners listen to music through electronic devices, so in some way, all idols are virtual because they are not physically present (Zaborowski, 2018). The subject of this paper, Luo Tianyi, is a virtual singer who uses a Chinese sound library

based on the VOCALOID3 speech synthesis engine, with her image generated in the form of Computer Graphics (CG), Augmented Reality (AR) or full projection technology.

2.2 Chinese Leitkultur

Leitkultur is a German concept. In German lexical, "Leit" is often used as a prefix to refer to the lead, guided or dominate, while "Kultur" refers to culture. Therefore, Leitkultur is often translated as 'guiding culture' or 'leading culture' (Bao, 2018). Leitkultur was introduced in 1998 by the German political scientist Bassam Tibi in a German discussion in his reflections on the relationship between Islam and Europe. A few years later, the concept dominated the political debate in Germany about national identity and immigration (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2011). It has also gradually generalized into a representative cultural trend and policy proposition against multiculturalism in the European and American contexts. Guiding culture or leading culture is a fundamental, structured social force that binds society and a nation. Each contemporary democratic country has its own dominant culture (Bao, 2018). This article equates Leitkultur with leading culture, a common culture in which a nation-state organizes and produces, promoted through the institutions of power discourse in a certain period of social history. It embodies the mainstream values of a specific era and its core value system, which has won wide approval and is implemented as the overall way of life for the nation.

Chinese Leitkultur can be considered as the Chinese leading culture. At present, China's leading culture is the culture that embodies the core values of socialism (Feng, 2014). The core socialist values were first put forward in 2006, and a new official interpretation was put forward at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, outlining 12 core values from the perspectives of the state (prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony), society (freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law), and individuals (patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship). Socialist core values play the most basic and core guiding role in the development of Chinese socialist culture (Xu, 2013).

2.3 Red Diva

According to Modern Han Language Word Dictionary [Xiandai Hanyu Cidian 现代汉语词典] (2002), "red symbolizes joy, success, or being valued and welcomed". In addition to representing jubilation, red has political significance. The color red has been regarded as the symbol of revolution since the French Revolution adopted the little Red Riding Hood worn by the poorest peasants as its symbol. The association between communism and red originated with the founding of the Soviet Red Army in 1917. Later, with the development of communist movements worldwide, the Chinese Communist Party established the Red regime. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, a political and revolutionary red culture with a distinct communist ideology emerged. Red songs, red tourism, red movies, and other concepts with distinct Chinese characteristics and characteristics of the revolutionary era also emerged under the influence of red culture. Red culture is considered the embodiment of the core values of socialism in contemporary China (Wu, 2020). Thus, the color red symbolizes political vigilance and identification with the current Chinese red culture dominated by socialist core values.

The word 'Diva' originated from the Italian noun "diva", the basic meaning of which is goddess, and entered English in the late 19th century. The Oxford Advanced American Dictionary has two interpretations of 'diva', one refers to a famous female singer, and specifically an opera singer. Another meaning refers to a famous woman who is attractive, and it refers to a performer or singer. In this article take the second meaning is famous singer (Turnbull et al., 2010). So, to sum up, the 'Red Diva' refers to the popular singer who can spread Chinese socialism dominates culture through music.

3. Luo Tianyi: A Chinese Virtual Music Idol

Luo Tianyi is the world's first Chinese voicebank and virtual image based on the VOCALOID singing voice synthesizer software. The software collects human voice samples to form a robust database. By inputting tones and lyrics, creators can synthesize human-like songs, turning the human voice into an electronic instrument. Since Luo Tianyi officially debuted at the 8th China International Comics and Games Expo (CCG EXPO) in 2012, she has become the most popular and successful virtual singer in China.

The short anime series on the Vocaloid official website shows that Luo Tianyi is an angel who came to earth with a mission to spread music throughout the world. Luo Tianyi's official character setting is very simple, leaving space for imagination for software users and audiences. Her personality is sensual, gentle, and meticulous. According to the default setting of Vocaloid, each virtual singer has a particular skill. Luo Tianyi's skill is set to "resonance" as she is very sensitive to people's emotions by feeling the singing in people's hearts, communicating with people through singing, and using singing to help people express the melody in their hearts.

As for her appearance, in addition to the grey hair, green pupils, and the standard girly figure in the anime, Luo

Tianyi's appearance also uses many Chinese elements. These include a green jade charm on Luo Tianyi's neck, symbolizing purity and beauty. A red Chinese knotting accessory known as the Zhongguo Jie originated in the Tang Dynasty as a symbol of auspicious luck, is worn around Luo Tianyi's waist.



Figure 1. Luo Tianyi's Character Image. Source: Baidu Baike.

As of July 22, 2022, the official account of Luo Tianyi on the Bilibili website had a total of 2.954 million fans, and 88,000 videos in the Luo Tianyi channel with 1.76 billion views. Among them, the most played original music work "Ordinary DISCO" had 15.325 million hits and 355,000 comments. In addition, Luo Tianyi also has a large number of fans in other online communities or platforms such as Sina Weibo. For example, Sina Weibo @Vsinger_Luo Tianyi has 5.317 million fans, and "Luo Tianyi" Sina Weibo "ChaoHua" community has 1.21 billion hits, with a total of 56,000 posts. In TikTok, the topic of Luo Tianyi has been played 480 million times.

Baidu Tieba "Luo Tianyi" bar follows 420,000 users and has posted 5.6 million times. It can be seen that Luo Tianyi has become a well-known singer with a large number of fans in China. The name Luo Tianyi also comes from traditional Chinese culture. The surname "Luo 洛" comes from the river goddess "Luoshen 洛神" in ancient Chinese legends, and Cao Zhi 曹植 of the Han Dynasty wrote the article "The Ode of the River Goddess 洛神赋", depicting "Luoshen" as an embodiment of beauty and ideals, it has been become an object of expression of emotions by ancient Chinese literati. "Tian 天" is considered to mean "sky" or "heaven" and can be understood as a voice from heaven. In the aesthetics of ancient Chinese music, Zhuangzi 庄子, a representative figure of Chinese Taoism, who called the sounds emitted by all things in nature is "Tian Lai 天籁", and it was later used to describe the most beautiful music. "Yi 依" can be considered an abbreviation for "Yiren 伊人", "Yiren 伊人" first appeared in the Spring and Autumn Period "The Book of Odes 诗经", which means fair lady in Chinese, and later also considered to represent wonderful things. In summary, although Luo Tianyi is a virtual singer developed by Japan and the character is set to come from other planets, but she has a wealth of Chinese elements.

4. From Subculture To 'Red Diva'

4.1 Luo Tianyi and Subculture

At present, the academic community generally believes that the study of subculture originated from the sociology department of the University of Chicago in the middle of the twentieth century, scholars have studied the prominent social problems in Chicago at that time, such as crime and deviance, immigration, urban life. Even if scholars did not use the term "subculture" at that time, but their research directions and methods provided important ideas and foundations for the future study of subcultures. By the 1970s, the Birmingham School in the United Kingdom had become the forefront of subculture research, and the social class had become the center of Birmingham School of subculture research, focusing on the "style" of subcultural groups and proposing the identity and "ritual resistance" of subcultural groups. In the early 1990s, scholars began to view subcultures

through a postmodern perspective, forming a post-subculture theory. Compared to the Birmingham School, postmodernist subculture is no longer limited to race, class, family and other social status, but more emphasis on exploring the entertainment and self-identity contained in subcultural groups from the logic of consumption (Heanfler, 2023).

Currently, virtual singers are closely linked to subcultures with unique youth subcultural characteristics such as ACGN, Doujin, and fan art. Luo Tianyi is no exception. Like all Vocaloid singers, it is mainly created through UGC (User-generated content). That means everyone can fill in the lyrics and arrange the music as long as they have Vocaloid software, and let the virtual singer interpret the works. The downward shift of content production rights has stimulated the creative enthusiasm of fans. Unlike the sense of distance between traditional idols and fans, virtual idols are created by fans. Most of the fans of virtual singers use the Internet as a gathering place to create and exchange music, videos, literature and other Doujin works, thus forming a unique subcultural landscape. According to Haenfler, subcultures and fan cultures have a high degree of overlap, and there are also many common features between Doujin and subcultures. These subcultures exhibit patterns of behavior and values unique to young people, and are sometimes on the margins of mainstream cultures. The culture embodied in virtual singers is often considered as a collection of multiple subcultures.

Style, one of the key concepts in subculture research theory, shows the differences between subcultural groups and their most attractive features. There are three main aspects of style found in Luo Tianyi's fan group.

a) Character Image

First, the style is built through Luo Tianyi's unique anime character image. Luo Tianyi's anime image was designed by artist MOTH, who won the grand award of the Vocaloid China Project Chinese Imagination Contest, and it successfully attracted a group of fans from ACGN culture. Most of these fans are from Generation Z, who were born and raised during the rapid development of the Chinese Internet. They like to express themselves through the internet and have established a utopian ideal world through the interconnection of virtual network communities. They are also keen on pursuing anime, and various anime Doujin works. Many ACGN fans have different degrees of alienation or dissatisfaction with real society. They immersed themselves in the ideal world described by animation, with cute, young, and beautiful anime characters. Hence, Luo Tianyi, who has a cute image and a perfect body and can sing, caters to the aesthetic ideals of fans, thus becoming popular among the fans since her debut.

b) Shared Distinct Meaning

Second, the special vocabulary used within the fan base plays an important role in style building. During a participant observation of the Luo Tianyi fan group on the internet, I found that almost all the Luo Tianyi fan group needs users to answer a series of questions correctly before being allowed to join. Often, the answers to these questions are composed of some special words. For example, the answer to the question "What is Luo Tianyi's representative color?" is "#66CCFF" for initiation to Tencent QQ fan base group Vocaloid Luo Tianyi. 66CCFF originally refers to the hexadecimal color code that converts to RGB data format as sky blue, the overall color of Luo Tianyi's clothes. In 2012, Sugita Lang released Luo Tianyi's original song "66CCFF" on Bilibili, which appeared on the stage of Luo Tianyi's virtual concert many times. So #66CCFF has a special meaning for Luo Tianyi fans. However, if you're not a fan of Luo Tianyi, then #66CCFF is just a string of meaningless numbers and letters.

c) Voice character

Finally, the distinctive voice and singing characteristics are also important factors in establishing Luo Tianyi's "style". As a virtual singer, Luo Tianyi's voice is vastly different from real singers, with a highly recognizable electronic voice characteristic. The sound library for virtual singers is recorded through electronic equipment. During the process, the sound quality might be distorted due to the recording environment and the device itself. Therefore, the same syllable would sound different in the human voice and after recording. The unique timbre of Luo Tianyi's voice also attracted a group of fans. During the interview, netizen Luo Luo said he was shocked when he first heard Luo Tianyi's song because he had never heard such a unique sound. He soon became a fan, even though, at that time, he did not know Luo Tianyi was a virtual singer. By adjusting the parameters, virtual singers can produce voices that exceed the limit of the human being, including ultra-low/high pitch, long notes, and high speed. Luo Tianyi's original song, Rose Revolution (蔷薇革命), was one of the examples. Created in 2013, the 146 words in the song's first verse was performed in 16.87 seconds, i.e. 0.115 second per word on average. The varied pitches and rhythms made performing as a real singer difficult. Yet, this is a common style in virtual singer's works that attract Luo Tianyi's fans.

Establishing "style" is the premise for subcultural groups to obtain collective identity. The formation of subcultural fan groups is a process of creating individual and collective identities (Yuan, 2020). There are three ways to seek identity: sharing information, secondary creation, and activity organization.

The fans and creators use the Internet to share and exchange information through Bilibili, Baidu Tieba, Sina Weibo, Tencent QQ group, and other social media platforms. Through these virtual communities, they established a collective sense of identity as Luo Tianyi's fans.

Also, derivative works, or secondary creations, are common among Luo Tianyi's fans. They recreate Luo Tianyi's character images, musical works, and fan fiction. For example, music blogger Enya NYA (雅恩 NYA) has attracted 150,000 fans by publishing Luo Tianyi-related music works and fan fiction on Bilibili, thus promoting the subculture of virtual singers.

Since the launch of Luo Tianyi, many online activities have been carried out, including annual concerts, birthday celebration parties, and fan meetings. Luo Tianyi's 10th-anniversary celebration was among the grandest events. One of the online celebration events, the Luo Tianyi 10th Anniversary Creation Competition, lasted seven months, encouraged participation from creators of different levels through different awards, including special awards, excellent work awards, and newcomer awards. In addition to musical works, there was a competition for fan fiction comics and videos to celebrate Luo Tianyi's 10th anniversary. Furthermore, special avatars and the free fan game, *Song of the World Concerto*, were released to celebrate Luo Tianyi's 10th anniversary.

On July 1, 2022, Luo Tianyi's first offline theme exhibition was held in Shanghai, with an exhibition area of nearly 800 square meters. On July 12, 2022, Luo Tianyi became the first virtual singer to be exhibited at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. The same day, Luo Tianyi's 10th-anniversary concert received nearly 20 million views and 100,000 comments. The official Luo Tianyi also released various souvenirs for her fans, including digital collections, albums, drawings, cups, and bus cards, with good sales results. This shows that Luo Tianyi has established her unique style and gained recognition from her fans as a combination of various subcultures.

In summary, Chinese virtual singer Luo Tianyi has a strong subcultural attribute with a fixed fan group and fan community, formed its own unique subculture style, and established a wide range of fan group recognition. These have played an important role in publicizing and promoting the development of the virtual singer subculture in China.

4.2 LuoTianyi and Chinese Leitkultur

Since Luo Tianyi's debut in 2012, Luo Tianyi and her music works have had a strong subcultural attribute for a long time. They were distributed on a small scale among fans through the Internet. However, since her first appearance on China's mainstream media in 2016, Luo Tianyi has become well-known among the Chinese and slowly moving away as an icon of subculture. Luo Tianyi has become the new "Red Diva". Luo Tianyi is no longer a girl from outer space in the Vocaloid family; she is a diva who represents Chinese culture and Chinese Leitkultur.

4.2.1 Luo Tianyi and Mainstream Media

Mainstream media played a crucial role in Luo Tianyi's transition as a virtual singer from a subculture to a Chinese superstar. Currently, there is no unified definition of mainstream media. Its definition varies in different countries due to the country's current state, ideologies, and media systems. Chomsky (1997) argued that mainstream media, such as the New York Times and CBS, could be seen as elite media, or agenda-setting media. They have abundant resources to set up a framework followed by other media (Chomsky, 1997). They can also influence the public's opinions with audiences or readers who are authoritative figures from politics, businesses, and academia.

In China, mainstream media generally refers to newspapers, radio stations, or television stations sponsored by the government or government agencies. These media are tasked to publicize policies from government or political parties to influence the public's opinions. These media includes traditional media such as People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), and provincial television stations. In recent years, with the development of new media, many traditional official media have created official websites or social media accounts on various online platforms. These include the official accounts of People's Daily Weibo official account.

Chen and Zuo (2008) defined the concept of mainstream media in China as media that reports mainstream information for a mainstream audience in a mainstream market based on their politics, economics, and operation method (Chen & Zuo, 2008). They also attract mainstream advertisements and brand themselves as mainstream

media. They become the benchmark for mainstream media in China to have massive influence over the population and the news report.

In 2016, Luo Tianyi first appeared in mainstream media, singing Flower Naji (花儿纳吉) with Chinese singer Yang Yuying at the Spring Festival Gala of Hunan Satellite Chinese New Year's Eve. The song title is from the ancient Qiang language, meaning happy like a flower. The original singer of the song, ilem of Bilibili website Vocaloid, composed the song as a new year's greeting with inspiration from Qiang folk songs. This performance significantly improved Luo Tianyi's popularity in Chinese mainstream media, and had become the most popular virtual singer in China since.

Table 1. Summary of the Mainstream Media Luo Tianyi Performed Since 2016

Date	Television Program	Song Title / Role
2016-2-2	2016 Spring Festival Gala (Hunan TV)	<i>Flower Naji</i>
2016-9-15	2016 Mid-Autumn Festival Gala (Hunan TV)	As an announcer
2016-10-15	China Golden Eagle TV Art Festival	<i>Quan Yu Tianxia</i>
2016-12-31	2016 New Year Concert (Hunan TV)	<i>Jiujiu Bashi</i> <i>Yi Zhuiguang Shizhe</i>
2017-10-4	2017 Mid-Autumn Festival Gala (Hunan TV)	<i>Cai Yun Zhui Yue</i>
2017-12-8	Hunan TV "Day Day Up"	<i>66CCFF</i>
2017-12-31	2017—2018 New Year's Eve Gala (Zhejiang TV)	<i>Let It Go</i>
2018-3-31	Everlasting Classics (CCTV)	<i>Danyuan Ren</i> <i>Changjiu</i>
2018-12-31	2019 New Year Countdown Concert (Jiangsu TV)	<i>Da La Beng Ba</i>
2020-1-23	Celebrating the New Year in the Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest (CCTV)	<i>Jasmine</i>
2020-5-4	The Most Beautiful Youth of Struggle - 2020 May Fourth Youth Special Program (CCTV)	<i>Shao Nian</i>
2020-5-16	The Treasured Voice (Zhejiang TV)	<i>Mang Zhong</i> <i>Wan Gu Sheng</i> <i>Xiang</i>
2021-2-11	2021 New Year's Gala (CCTV)	<i>Listen to Me</i>
2021-13-24	2060	<i>Unfinished</i> <i>Movements</i>
2021-12-31	2021—2022 New Year's Eve Gala (Zhejiang TV)	<i>Calories</i> <i>Ordinary Disco</i>
2022-2-2	The Meet in Beijing Olympic Cultural Festival and the 22nd Meet in Beijing International Arts Festival Opening	<i>Time to Shine</i>
2022-2-2	Chinese Dream, My Dream-2022 China Online Audiovisual Annual Ceremony	<i>Jasmine</i>
2022-2-15	Lantern Festival Gala 2022 (CCTV)	<i>Time to Shine</i>

From the Table1, we can see that before 2018, Luo Tianyi mainly performed on provincial television stations, and most of the performances were songs that were popular on the Bilibili website to ensure high ratings for the TV programs. Then, when Luo Tianyi performed on CCTV in 2018, her performance mainly focused on the social influence of television programs and publicizing Chinese Leitkultur and traditional Chinese culture to the mainstream public. The table shows that Luo Tianyi sang the traditional Chinese folk song Jasmine in the mainstream media twice. This famous 600-year-old Chinese Han folk song first appeared in the western world in

the early 19th century and is the most widely spread Chinese folk song. It is also a cultural symbol of the spirit of traditional Chinese culture. The stage used virtual reality technology to create a stage effect with traditional Chinese artistic concepts when Luo Tianyi sang Jasmine. The combination of tradition and modern technology presented the famous folk song in a brand new way to bring Chinese Leitkultur to the public.

4.2.2 Becoming 'Red Diva'

Luo Tianyi's collaboration with mainstream media combining her original subcultural attributes and stage effect with modern technology, has gained public attention and recognition from young Chinese audiences. Luo Tianyi's growing fan base and influence have prompted the mainstream media and Luo Tianyi's business team to use Luo Tianyi as the medium to carry out a series of Chinese Leitkultur propaganda that caters to young people. This includes creating songs with Chinese Leitkultur for government events on traditional mainstream media and online mainstream new media. Hence, Luo Tianyi became the Red Diva and Singer for the Party.

In 2017, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China created an original song, Tian Xingjian (天行健), for Luo Tianyi on their official Bilibili account. The piece was written in Luo Tianyi's signature electronic dance music style with a fast rhythm. The lyrics used plenty of ancient Chinese idioms and allusions to stories that depicted Chinese people who were industrious, brave, and innovative, conveying Chinese Leitkultur to its audience. For example, the accompanying video for the lyric "Despite the terrible flood, I have never bowed my head" depicted the ancient Chinese mythological story "Yu the Great Who Tamed the Water" (大禹治水). Yu the Great, the emperor of the ancient Xia Dynasty, designed a flood control system that benefited his people for many years. The story showed the selflessness and statesmanship of the emperor.

Luo Tianyi made her first appearance on China Central Television with renowned Peking Opera artist Wang Peiyu in 2018 to promote traditional Chinese culture. Depicted as a girl who loved traditional Chinese culture, Luo Tianyi sang Dan Yuan Ren Chang Jiu (但愿人长久) from the ancient poem Shui Diao Ge Tou (水调歌头) by Su Shi, a Song Dynasty poet, with Wang Peiyu. The song showed one's longing for the family during Mid-Autumn Festival through the traditional Chinese aesthetic in the ancient poem. Luo Tianyi also performed an excerpt from Peking Opera, which she received an overwhelming response from her fans.

In celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League released an original work Di ShiKun (地势坤), in the year 2019 for virtual singers, including Luo Tianyi. The melody was composed in the style of ancient Chinese music, and the arrangement of the piece used traditional Chinese instruments, including guqin, pipa, erhu, and flute. The song's theme was about great Chinese architecture and inventions, including the Great Wall, Dujiangyan, the Three Gorges Dam, and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. The song aimed to spread the Chinese Leitkultur by highlighting national pride through the architecture.

As the most-watched TV program in China, CCTV Spring Festival Gala has been an important cultural event in China since 40 years ago. In 2020, Luo Tianyi sang "Listen to Me" on the program to promote diligence and frugality to children. This marked the recognition Luo Tianyi got from the mainstream media. This light and spirited performance was accompanied by Luo Tianyi's cute anime image, making it captivating for the children. Furthermore, the lyrics promoted Chinese Leitkultur through the traditional Chinese virtue of thrift to children.

In 2021, the official accounts of the Shandong Communist Youth League Central Committee celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in conjunction with Luo Tianyi with original songs. At the same time, the official Luo Tianyi account on Bilibili website also released an original song, "South Lake View", celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

In 2022, Luo Tianyi performed at the opening ceremony of the 22nd Beijing International Art Festival and the CCTV Lantern Festival Gala with the song "Time to Shine". In the same year, Luo Tianyi was the first musician to appear in the documentary "China on Stage". The film is sponsored and directed by the Publicity Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and co-produced by the Wuzhou Communication Center in collaboration with the BBC, Bilibili, and British Lion Productions. In addition, Luo Tianyi also sang the theme song for the documentary "I am Your Ceramic", which promotes traditional Chinese ceramic culture.

The above examples showed that the government and mainstream media used Luo Tianyi as the medium to disseminate China's dominant culture and traditional culture to contemporary Chinese youth. This caused Luo Tianyi gradually move away from subculture to China's mainstream culture. At the same time, Luo Tianyi's social influence and fan base have grown, becoming the "Red Diva" among young Chinese people.

5. The Making of 'Red Diva'

Luo Tianyi's transition from subculture to 'Red Diva' is the result of the long-term interaction of multiple factors, with fanbase, commerce, and music-makers playing an important role. As early as the study of the Birmingham School, the relationship between subculture and commerce has attracted the attention of researchers. The school believes that as subcultures form a certain scale among young people, they will be noticed and used by commercialists, and commercial groups will find ways to transform the style and innovative significance of subcultures, so as to push subcultures to the mainstream consumer market to obtain profits. When commercialism intervenes in the subculture, it will be guided by consumer demand, market-oriented, and profit-oriented as the main purpose, thus reducing the initial independence and creativity of the subculture. In other words, in the Birmingham School's view, subcultures and commerce are opposites, and once they are exploited or bought by commercial logic, subcultures cease to exist as an independent "style".

However, after the 1980s, with the advent of globalization and new media, the subcultural survival context has changed, subculture and business have shown more and more intensive interaction, and the prevalence of consumerism has made contemporary young people more dependent on commodity consumption to construct their style and identity. At present, the subculture style has been borrowed and appropriated by commerce, so that the meaning of subculture has been more widely recognized and disseminated, and the business logic consciously caters, cultivates, and promotes the generation and development of subculture. Subcultural groups also proclaim their own distinctive ways of being in a business logical way. For example, Luo Tianyi fan group, they are a huge subculture group in the online media world, they opened their own consumer market with their love for Luo Tianyi, according to the author's interview and investigation of Luo Tianyi fans, 8 interviewed fans have purchased Luo Tianyi-related goods, including animation handicrafts, posters and music albums, etc., and the strong purchasing power of fans has spawned a market-scale fan economy.

In addition, the preferences and purchasing power of fans determine the results of commercial interests, so how to attract fans has become the common pursuit of business and music creators. Since Luo Tianyi's creative method is mainly UGC, music creators and fans can switch roles at any time, which makes Luo Tianyi's music creators more in-depth understanding of the needs of fans. In fact, many well-known music creators of Luo Tianyi have become opinion leaders among Luo Tianyi fans, who are familiar with fan psychology and understand market preferences, which makes their creative and production activities closer to fans and more popular in the market. In addition, some Luo Tianyi fans have also become music creators, participating in the content creation and production of the production process, which makes musical works the common labor of music creators and fans, who are both consumers and creators of Luo Tianyi's commercial products. The huge commercial interests continue to attract music creators to move closer to the commercial group, and under the impetus of commercial interests and fans' enthusiasm for originality, the creativity of music creators continues to flow, and constantly create works that cater to fans and the market, thus promoting the prosperity of related businesses and markets.



Figure 2. The interaction between each influencing factor and Chinese Leitkultur

In China, Luo Tianyi's fan base mainly consists of young people in Generation Z. As digital natives, Generation Z is more inclined to obtain information and express opinions through the Internet. Most of Luo Tianyi's fans are from the same generation. They created an online community with their own unique subcultural "style" and discourse. However, as Luo Tianyi's fan base grew, their discourse started to involve social issues and began to

participate in and reshape the mainstream discourse. This had a significant impact on China's Internet culture and social culture. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, Generation Z accounts for about one-fifth of China's total population, i.e., 260 million people. The subcultural groups they formed have become the targets of mainstream culture and businesses in China. For example, mainstream Chinese media, China Youth Daily, published an article titled "ACGN World, You Can Understand", believing that the ACGN group was a new discourse resource for practicing the core values of socialism. Currently, Chinese Leitkultur, the leading culture and mainstream culture in China, is actively looking for a window for dialogue with young people. Luo Tianyi's huge group of fans has become their choice. For instance, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League often created original songs for Luo Tianyi on their official Bilibili account, which quickly gained fans' recognition and effectively imparted Chinese Leitkultur to young people. Furthermore, they actively interacted with virtual singers on the Internet to carry out mainstream ideological education through virtual singers so that the fans were indoctrinated unconsciously. Because of this, not only did the fans not show strong resistance to the mainstream culture, they were eager to obtain recognition from mainstream ideologies.

As a Vocaloid commercial product, Luo Tianyi's success came from systematic marketing strategies. Commercial interests and mainstream media will have to ensure that her identity as China's virtual singer is reinforced to get Vocaloid from Japan accepted by the public. Luo Tianyi's identity as China's virtual singer was emphasized and reinforced to get this Vocaloid product from Japan accepted by the public. Therefore, the core of Luo Tianyi's design and works must always relate to Chinese Leitkultur in order to ensure commercial interests and conform to market regulations (Yin, 2018)

For example, in celebration of the centenary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, Luo Tianyi's official account released the song "South Lake View". The song title referred to the First National People's Congress of the Communist Party of China that was held on a small boat in the South Lake of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, in the year 1921. The song's lyrics were written in the style of ancient Chinese poetry with a soothing and lyrical melody. Also, the musical elements of the Chinese national intangible cultural heritage Suzhou Tanci is incorporated into the song, thus expressing the Chinese Leitkultur through the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

The creation of "UGC" (User Generated Content) and "PGC" (Professional Generated Content) has made the role of virtual singer's vitality continue indefinitely. Most of the songs performed by Luo Tianyi are created and uploaded by fans or software users. A large number of contributors ensured plenty of excellent musical works for Luo Tianyi. However, many UGC works were considered vulgar or morally questionable in the early years. Due to the shortcomings of the online platform report feedback system, many works did not conform to Chinese Leitkultur. Therefore, the mainstream media and related laws have begun to monitor musical works to ensure they conform to mainstream Chinese values. On the other hand, the fame and commercial benefits the contributors gained from the recognition from mainstream media also pushed their musical works to become more commercial.

6. Conclusion

In summary, Luo Tianyi has become a phenomenal music idol. She has a substantial Chinese Generation Z fan base, music creators, and a competent operation team. Her social influence is rising with more recognition from mainstream media. In fact, Luo Tianyi is more than a virtual singer from a subculture. She is also a bridge for dialogue between the Chinese government and contemporary Chinese youth. Furthermore, she is an essential medium for disseminating mainstream Chinese culture to Chinese subcultural groups. Luo Tianyi truly deserved to be called the Red Diva.

There is a number of virtual idols, including Luo Tianyi, who have successfully turned mainstream in China. However, they are relatively unknown internationally. The number of their fans and musical works still needed to compete with other top international virtual idols. There are still many questions about the phenomenon of virtual singers going mainstream. Would turning mainstream affect virtual idols going international? Should virtual singers link to national identity? How to improve the influence of Chinese virtual idols internationally? These are all questions for Chinese virtual idols before they become a world-class diva.

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Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the valuable contribution of each team member who took the time to participate in this study. We are also very grateful to the experts and scholars who gave us advice and help during the research process.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal interests that could influence the work reported in this article.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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