A Study on the Sustainable Development of Hip Hop Music Culture in China's Localization in the New Media Era: Based on the Long Tail Theory

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Abstract: Hip-hop music originated in Brooklyn in the United States, and was introduced to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan in the 1980s. Subsequently, with the development of the Internet and China’s acceptance of foreign culture, hip-hop music culture gradually spread to the mainland. In this paper, the sustainable development of hip-hop culture in China was studied by using the perspective of the long tail theory. It is pointed out that the 21st century is the fastest time for the spread of rap in China, but at the same time, a series of problems have also been generated. The young age of hip-hop listeners brings challenges to its development space, and Chinese hip-hop music has not formed a unique local cultural characteristic, which leads to the success of localization of hip-hop music culture in China. The following policy suggestions are put forward: to introduce more typical representatives of rappers in the corresponding age group, so as to improve the understanding, awareness and participation of different age groups of listeners in hip-hop music culture. Reduce the imitation of foreign rap, add Chinese cultural elements, innovate the lyric content, and endow hip-hop music with Chinese localization characteristics.

1 Introduction

With the continuous development of network technology in the 21st century, the spread of information has been greatly promoted, and the exchange of culture has also been promoted. In the 1980s, China first came into contact with hip-hop, a popular culture, and it was introduced to the mainland from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan in the early 2000s. It not only attracted wide attention from young people but also entered various variety platforms, accelerating the speed of dissemination, and becoming a trend culture easily accepted by young people. In this situation, the research on hip-hop music culture has become more and more active, and a lot of research results have been achieved. This research field mainly focuses on the development process, communication channels, localization characteristics and existing problems of hip-hop music. For the localization of hip-hop music culture, there are few studies on sustainable development, and there is no systematic research. In the current network era, the rhythm of cultural communication is extremely fast. As a foreign culture driven by network communication, it is of great significance for hip-hop music to realize the sustainable development of localization in China.

2 Literature review

Through the academic review of the existing research, it was found that most of the research tended to focus on the rise, promotion, and operation of hip-hop culture in China. For example, Zhao Hang (2021) analyzed how the hip-hop industry chain makes profits in the era of digital media[1]. Zhang Jingye (2021) made an in-depth study on the promotion and development of hip-hop culture in the era of new media.[2] From the perspective of the above research objects, most of them studied hip-hop music as an industry, but lack of research from the perspective of hip-hop music as a foreign culture.[2,3,7,10] From the perspective of research issues, most of the above studies focused on the economic benefits and communication channels of hip-hop culture in China, and few paid attentions to how hip-hop culture should be localized. The research methods of the existing research are based on the existing evidence and examples, such as the research on the variety show "China's New Rap", without the research from the perspective of economic theory.

On the basis of the existing research, this paper enriched the research objects of the existing research, excavated more in-depth research questions, and used research methods that cannot be explained by the traditional economic theory to study the sustainable development of Chinese localization of hip-hop music culture in the new media era. As for the research object,
most of the existing research discussed a single research object such as the consumers of hip-hop music or the operators of hip-hop music. This paper discussed the connection between the consumers and suppliers of hip-hop music as the research object, which expands and enriches the research object of this research field. The existing research mainly focused on the development and characteristics of hip-hop music itself. This paper took the development of hip-hop music itself into the macro background supported by the social and economic environment into the research perspective and explored the sustainable development of hip-hop music localization. From the perspective of research methods, the existing research has not paid attention to the role of the Internet economy in the communication of niche culture in the new era. Based on the role of the long tail theory in promoting the communication of niche culture under the new media economy, this paper used the long tail theory as a research method, hoping to provide reference significance and practical value for the sustainable development of hip-hop localization.

3 The relationship between the long tail theory and hip-hop culture

The long tail theory refers to the idea that if the cost is low enough and the distribution channels are sufficient, the previously insignificant goods will be bought as long as they are sold. Hip-hop music culture, which was just introduced into China in the 1980s and was only popular in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan regions, to a variety of inland labels, variety shows and hundreds of millions of viewers at present, is perfectly in line with this law. In the beginning, hip-hop music culture was just a niche culture introduced from the United States. Under the background of the new media era, with low-cost communication channels and convenient promotion modes, it links the mutual communication between the listeners who like this niche style and the music creators and operators. In addition, the production cost of hip-hop music is not high, and the audience is often the creator, who can produce songs independently and promote them through various new media communication channels under the background of the Internet as a producer. Due to the reduction of production and circulation cost, as well as the increase of transmission scale and the acceleration of transmission speed, all kinds of niche music can quickly lock in the audience matching its cultural style, achieving the balance between supply and demand, and promoting its development, thus connecting the hip-hop music to long tail theory. [5,9]

4 Local development of hip hop music

From the perspective of the localization development of hip-hop music, it has mainly experienced three stages of development.

The initial stage of hip-hop localization. Since the 1980s, China and Western culture have made formal contact. First, there has been a trend of "wind from the west to the east" in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Represented by young people, rock and heavy metal music has become a trend in The Times in China. In this process of gradually exploring and learning foreign music, rap music also began to be introduced into China. For example, in the 1980s, with the international first rap album Run-DMC's "Raising Hell" introduced into China, which brought new music culture enjoyment to the domestic audience, rap music is favored. [6,8] However, the understanding of the connotation of rap music culture was not deep. At that time, the understanding of the rap culture of Chinese people had certain limitations, and they stayed on the surface, thinking that as long as rap elements were added to the work, it would make it "cooler".

The development stage of hip-hop localization. In 1993, Xie Dong and Yin Xiangjie released a rap album called So-and-So, and rap was recognized as a unique musical style, which promoted the spread of hip-hop music culture in China. At the beginning of 2000, record companies seized the great development opportunity of domestic rap music and decided to cultivate Chinese local rap groups and occupy the rap music group market before foreign record companies entered.[8] For example, Jingwen Records signed two black fear groups, namely Hidden Group and the cmcb band. These two groups put on the "oversized" T-shirt, not only the packaging is very "black fear", but also rap elements into the music performance, which can be said to be the first Chinese rap music group, bringing opportunities for the localization of Chinese hip-hop music development.

The localization of hip-hop music has entered a challenging period of mainstream development. With the advent of the Internet era, the Internet has provided more convenient services for the spread of rap music, making rap music more popular. For example, the emergence of "8 Miles Underground" and "China's New Rap" has conquered many listeners. NetEase data showed that the effective market share of "China's New Rap" in 2020 is as high as 14.35%, which is more than 2-3 times that of other popular programs of the same kind. It can be seen that rap music has been accepted by the public, and it is in the development stage of moving from niche music to the mainstream music market. However, it is also facing competition with mainstream music, showing various changing trends in the challenge and confrontation.

5 Problems and challenges in the localization development of hip-hop music

In the process of hip-hop localization development, there are many problems, which are mainly divided into two aspects. First, the audience is predominantly post-90s, and the development space of market share is not enough to support it to occupy the mainstream market. Rap became popular in China in the early 21st century, and the Internet is the main way of communication. Therefore, the first batch of listeners is naturally the new generation skilled in playing with the Internet, while the previous generation generally like China's "Four Kings", etc., whose musical
style is completely different from hip-hop, so rap did not capture more listeners in the previous generation. Therefore, the localization development of hip-hop music has the dilemma of challenging greater market share. Second, as a foreign culture, it is difficult for hip-hop music to establish a unique local style in China. In fact, many Chinese rappers have developed by imitating foreign rap styles. Rap in the United States began with black people in Brooklyn neighborhoods, used to express their various conflicts between gangsters, white supremacist dictations and so on. But when it was introduced to China, since China did not have the kind of humanistic and social environment that American hip-hop music produced, Chinese hip-hop was initially based on imitations that did not fit their own national conditions. However, this imitation has become a rap trend, which lacks Chinese cultural elements and connotations, does not form a real background of Chinese localized rap, does not form a unique mode of Chinese localized rap, and has the problem of simple imitation or even plagiarism. For example, Chinese rappers who imitate European and American rappers can be found everywhere, such as Asen, hitterbrothers, Nachwove and so on. These rappers are popular on the Internet, and some people even quip that "who have English in their rapper is a real rapper". Chinese rap has always said "to keep it real", but there are still many people imitating and copying, not singing "Chinese style" at all.

6. Conclusion

In view of the problems raised above, we hope to promote the localization of hip-hop music in China through the following suggestions and expect the localization development of hip-hop music to successfully show Chinese characteristics, Chinese culture, and Chinese confidence. First of all, given the narrow age range of the audience, this paper proposes to change the rap content and correct the stereotype that it is limited to a specific age group so as to obtain more listeners of different ages to join the field of hip-hop music culture, and to expect listeners of different ages to bring suggestions for the improvement of hip-hop music localization, so as to jointly promote the development of localization. For example, more typical rappers of the corresponding age groups are introduced to drive the participation of listeners of the corresponding age groups, and some "OG" (Original Gangster) rappers are used to influence people of different ages, in order to improve the understanding, awareness and participation of listeners of different ages in hip-hop music culture. Secondly, the theme of American gangster rap is generally "luxury cars, robbery and murder, and beautiful women", which is also partially borrowed in China. As a result, the localization development of hip-hop music culture departs from China's national conditions and Chinese cultural literacy, focuses on imitation, and lacks innovation. This paper argues that for those rappers who focus on imitation and lack the connotation of Chinese cultural elements, they should change their rap style, inject more local content, expand the direction of diversification, and not just show off their wealth or provoke others. Rappers can try to challenge a wider range of music creation, such as the world environment, religion, personal emotions and so on. Some rappers in China have been on the road to changing the style of hip-hop music, such as PO8. Learning the "more meaningful" rap brought by these rappers may attract more listeners and make people think of rap as a rhythmic music style, rather than the cultural dross of killing and robbing banks. Chinese rap needs Chinese cultural elements, Chinese cultural inheritance, and Chinese cultural innovation, so as to truly realize the sustainable development of hip-hop culture localization. Rap imitation is a link between learning and progress rather than the ultimate goal, but many rappers in China rely on imitating foreign rappers to "eat", this mode of only relying on imitation without innovation is not desirable, nor sustainable. The elements that rap brings to China are very simple, such as rapping in Chinese dialect like Gai, full of Chinese flavor. Also, they can use rap accompaniment with traditional Chinese instruments and a series of things that can let the audience hear the Chinese style. The localization of hip-hop music in China can be accelerated by enriching the rap elements and styles of Chinese style.

Reference: