

# The Diffusion and Influence of Japanese Pop Culture in China Driven by the Cool Japan Strategy: Taking the Anime Mecca Tour as an Example

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Around 2010, the Japanese government introduced the “Cool Japan Strategy”, which aims to realize overseas economic benefits through the export of the content industry (pop culture) and to attract overseas tourists to Japan in order to promote economic growth. The strategy has received a lot of attention since its inception and has received mixed reviews. However, it has played an important role in promoting the spread of Japanese culture and the development of tourism. This paper analyses the impact of Japanese popular culture on China in the social media era by examining the spread and development of “anime mecca tours” in China under the promotion of the Cool Japan Strategy, and explores whether these tours can be an incentive for Chinese tourists to visit Japan.

*Keywords:* Cool Japan Strategy, pop culture, anime mecca tour, social media, inbound tourism

Since 2002, when American journalist Douglas McGuire published an article entitled *Japan's Gross National Cool* in the American magazine *Foreign Policy*, Cool Japan has received widespread attention and has created a Japanese cultural boom around the world. Around 2010, the Japanese government proposed the “Cool Japan Strategy” in order to enhance Japan’s international image and open up new areas for economic development. Thus Cool Japan was established as a national policy.

The Cool Japan strategy focuses on 3 areas: information dissemination, overseas promotion, and inbound revitalization,<sup>1</sup> with governance focusing on developing overseas sales paths for cultural industries to attract foreign tourists to come in for sightseeing and consumption (Masubuchi, 2018). A successful case is the anime film *Your*

*Name* released in 2016, which grossed 41.44 billion yen at the global box office. The film also created a trend of “anime mecca tours” (hereinafter referred to as “mecca tours”), which made it into the top 10 Japanese buzzwords of 2016. Since then, the mecca tours, which were originally limited to anime fans, have become more popular among the general public, and have even attracted many foreign tourists to Japan to participate in the tours. It can be said that the success of *Your Name* raised the popularity of mecca tours and had an impact on inbound tourism (Masubuchi, 2018). Mecca tours is closely related to the Cool Japan strategy, which aims to export Japanese popular culture and promote inbound tourism to Japan, so an examination of the overseas spread of the anime parade is an important point of breakthrough for studying the Cool Japan strategy.

Mecca tours, which were born in the early 1990s and developed in the 2000s, are a form of travelling to visit the locations of anime and manga productions or places related to the productions or their authors (Yamamura & Okamoto, 2010). Although the study of mecca tours is still young, many scholars have conducted research in various fields such as tourism, sociology, economics, geography, and anthropology, and have obtained a lot of results. One of the leading figures, Ken Okamoto, has revealed the possibility of a new type

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office of Japan, About the Cool Japan Strategy, [https://www.cao.go.jp/cool\\_japan/about/about.html](https://www.cao.go.jp/cool_japan/about/about.html).

of tourism from the perspective of the sociology of tourism by studying the history, development, and characteristics of mecca tours, as well as the relationship between anime and manga fan groups and residents of iconic attractions. In addition, Yamamura (2011) positioned mecca tours as a branch of content tourism and, through a comparative analysis of many cases, proposed a development model that uses anime to achieve regional revitalization. Masubuchi (2010, 2018) discussed the connection between the anime industry and regional regeneration and tourism revitalization.

Mecca tours have also gradually attracted attention in Chinese academia in recent years. For example, Zhou (2019), Liu and Jiang (2020) examined the development of Japan's mecca tours from the perspective of subculture, and discussed the action patterns and consumption views of anime fans in mecca tours. Wang and Xiong (2021) analyzed the model and economic effects of content tourism and mecca tours in Japan from the perspective of economics, and explored the lessons for the development of China's content industry. All in all, prior research on mecca tours in both China and Japan has focused on Japan, and little research has been done on the dissemination and development of mecca tours in China.

The number of foreign tourists visiting Japan has grown significantly in recent years as the Cool Japan strategy has been promoted. According to the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO),<sup>2</sup> the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan was 8,358,105 in 2012 and reached 31,882,049 in 2019, a growth factor of around 3.8. Among them, the increase in Chinese tourists is particularly significant, from 1,425,100 in 2012 to 9,594,394 in 2019, growing by a factor of around 6.7. The boom in Chinese tourists travelling to Japan has attracted widespread attention both domestically and internationally, and has become the subject of academic research. Among them, there are praises that China is the largest market for Japan's inbound tourism in terms of both size and growth (Zhang and Yamazaki, 2021), and that Chinese tourists' inbound consumption is a source of increased economic benefits and employment opportunities, which makes a significant contribution to Japan's economic and regional development (Tang & Sakata, 2019), among others. There are also voices of criticism, such as those on the phenomenon of Chinese tourists' Bakubai (excessive purchasing) and etiquette, pointing out that Japan's inbound market has been fooled by Chinese tourists (Himeida, 2017), and accusing the

<sup>2</sup> Japan Government Tourist Office, Nationality/Monthly Foreign Visitors to Japan (2003-2022), [https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/since2003\\_visitor\\_arrivals](https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/since2003_visitor_arrivals).

Japanese government of adopting a headcount approach to inbound consumption policy.

There are few studies that focus on the link between mecca tours and inbound tourism. Masubuchi (2018) pointed out that the overseas spread of anime mecca tours is closely related to the increase of inbound tourists through a case study of the effect of Chinese tourists travelling to Japan triggered by Slam Dunk. Liu (2020) also examined the process by which mecca tours drive general tourist behaviour through the same case. Sakai (2020) argued that mecca tours are limited to a niche group, and cites the stagnation of the Chinese economy due to COVID-19<sup>3</sup> and the US-China confrontation as reasons for the high risk of relying on China to revitalize Japan's inbound business.

A review of the above mentioned prior research shows that the emerging field of research on anime mecca tours has barely touched upon the possibility of the spread of mecca tours overseas (in China), and thus the possibility of them becoming an incentive for inbound tourism. In this paper, we will examine the spread and development of mecca tours in China on the basis of previous research as well as explore the possibility of Chinese tourists travelling to Japan for the purpose of mecca tours.

### Changes in Cool Japan

McGray does not provide a clear definition of Cool Japan in his article;<sup>4</sup> the meaning of Cool Japan changes according to perspective and the times. It has been debated whether to view Cool Japan from the perspective of pop culture and subculture or from the perspective of the content industry. Iwabuchi (2007, p. 85) argues that "the fundamental difference between the rhetoric of Cool Japan in the twenty-first century and the cultural nationalism of the past is that the concern for the spread of Japanese culture abroad is no longer confined to mere nationalism, but is seen as an effective international strategy to promote national interests, accompanied by institutionalisation and policy at the governmental level." In other words, Cool Japan has been closely associated with the content industry since it was incorporated into national policy by the Japanese government.

The Cool Japan Strategy (2019 edition) is explained on the

<sup>3</sup> The original text used the discriminatory term "Wuhan pneumonia".

<sup>4</sup> Douglas McGray(2002) Japan's Gross National Cool. Foreign Policy, May/June:pp.44-54.

homepage of the Cabinet Office of Japan as follows:<sup>5</sup>

(1) Cool Japan is the “glamour” of Japan that the world finds “cool” (or may find cool).

(2) Cool is not limited to the scope of food, anime, pop culture, etc., but also includes various fields that reflect the changes that the world is concerned with and that contain infinite possibilities.

(3) Enhancement of Japan’s branding effect through “resonance” in the world, and increase the number of foreigners (Japanese fans) who have a good impression of Japan, enhancing Japan’s soft power.

How had the Cool Japan strategy evolved and changed before the 2019 version was introduced?

### History of the Development of the Cool Japan Strategy

The global popularity of Japanese pop culture, represented by anime, manga, and games, began around 1990. However, it was not until around 2004 that it began to receive public support from the Japanese government. Pop culture, which was once despised by the Japanese government, was transformed into the “cool” culture of Japan (Kukhee, 2010). This transformation came as a result of “external pressure” (Nakamura & Onouchi, 2006) from the increase in sales of anime, manga, and video games in overseas markets and from the high regard in which Japanese pop culture was held in foreign countries. Under this pressure, the Japanese government’s attention to popular culture has gradually increased, with the publication of McGrory’s article in 2002 and the Japanese translation of international political scientist Joseph Nye’s *Soft Power* in 2004. The Cool Japan image strategy, which takes advantage of the “cultural power” of Japanese popular culture, has become more and more popular. The Cool Japan image strategy, which utilises the “cultural power” of Japanese popular culture, was conceived to enhance Japan’s international image through the dissemination of popular culture.

In 2004, the Japanese government formally introduced policies to support the development of the content industry by enacting the Intellectual Property Promotion Plan and the Content Industry Promotion Law. In the same year, two events influenced the direction of the Japanese government: the popularity of the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* and the posting of illustrations of the manga *Footballer Tsubasa* on water trucks in support of Iraqi reconstruction. The former sparked

a large number of Japanese tourists travelling to Korea and raised expectations in Japan for the use of the content industry to revive tourism. The latter inspired the feasibility of applying pop culture to cultural diplomacy. Since then pop culture has been formally incorporated into the concrete governance of the Japanese government (Yamamura, 2018). In 2005, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACMA) published the “Report on the Investigation of Regional Revitalization through the Production and Revitalization of Video Works”; in 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) published the report on *The Use of Pop Culture in Cultural Diplomacy*. In 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the report on *The Application of Popular Culture in Cultural Diplomacy*; in 2008, Doraemon was appointed as the Ministry’s first Anime Ambassador; in 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed an ambassador for the promotion of pop culture (commonly known as the “Cute Ambassador”).

In 2010, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established the “Cool Japan Overseas Strategy Office” to promote the spread of Japanese design, anime and fashion overseas, officially launching the Cool Japan Strategy; in 2012, the second Abe Cabinet established a minister in charge of the Cool Japan Strategy. In 2012, the second Abe Cabinet established the Minister in Charge of the Cool Japan Strategy, and the Cabinet Office and the ministries began to work together to implement the strategy horizontally; in 2013, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) established a public-private foundation, “Overseas Needs Expansion Support Organization (Cool Japan Organization).” The 2018 Intellectual Property Strategy Promotion headquarters indicated the direction of development of the Cool Japan strategy in their “Intellectual Property Strategy Prospects.”

### Accession to Anime Mecca Tours

As can be seen from the above, the Cool Japan Strategy originally focused on supporting and expanding the overseas dissemination of pop culture and protecting intellectual property rights, yet did not directly address the tourism industry. The turnaround in the tourism industry came with the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) announced a proposal for the Cool Japan Strategy at the Cool Japan Meeting of Officials and Citizens in December 2011, in order to support the reconstruction of the disaster and the restoration

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Office of Japan, *About the Cool Japan Strategy*, [https://www.cao.go.jp/cool\\_japan/about/about.html](https://www.cao.go.jp/cool_japan/about/about.html).

of the “splendour of the Japanese brand”. The proposal, “Attracting tourists from all over the world to visit Japan in search of authentic products,”<sup>6</sup> explicitly incorporates tourism into the strategy. This proposal is an important turning point for the Cool Japan Strategy in the direction of tourism policy (Yamamura, 2018).

On the other hand, the emergence of successful cases such as Lucky Star and Kotone has made mecca tours an important initiative to boost the regional economy and revitalize the tourism industry (Yamamura, 2018). In September 2013, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) published a report titled *Current Situation of the Contents Industry and Directionality of its Future Development*, which depicted the whole picture of Cool Japan Strategy “the big profit”. The specific development path of the Cool Japan Strategy is proposed as follows: to create Japan Fever by spreading Japanese content products, fashion, food, tourism, etc. overseas, to build profit-boosting facilities (shops, EC, TV shopping, etc.) overseas through sales of goods and services and to attract Japanese fans to the local area (mecca) as well as to build up Japanese consumer facilities.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the Cool Japan Strategy has made the promotion of inbound tourism a key policy priority.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of this development is the term “mecca”, which is not a religious term, but rather refers to places related to anime works that appeal to anime fans. The term, which was originally a popular buzzword, has now been officially recognized, and Cool Japan’s strategic interest in mecca tours has gradually increased, with anime-related activities being actively carried out overseas.

## Mecca Tours

### Birth and Development

Mecca tours originated as a new form of tourism in the early 1990s (Okamoto, 2009) and Oishi (2011) argues that the production of *Heaven and Earth are Useless! Ghosts of Heaven and Earth*, which began production in 1992, and *American Girl Soldier*, which was released in 1992, as pioneers in promoting the popularity and popularity of the

<sup>6</sup> Proposed by the Cool Japan Officials’ and Citizens’ Conference of Sensible People, *The Creation of New Shii Japan—“Culture and Industry” “Japan and Overseas”*, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) of Japan, *Present Situation and Future Direction of Development of the Container Industry*, 2013, p. 3.

phenomenon of tourism driven by anime works.

After the 2000s, mecca tours further developed along with the development of internet technology, innovations in anime production methods, and advances in digital technology (Mori, 2017). What led to the flourishing of mecca tour was the release of the anime TV series *Lucky Star* in 2007, whose main setting stage, Washinomiya Shrine in Saitama Prefecture, attracted a large number of parades of anime fans and once became a hot topic of media coverage, thus gradually bringing mecca tour into the public’s view.

In March 2014, Nippon Dip Co., Ltd. began offering a web service called “Mecca Tour Map” (<http://seichimap.jp/>), which allows users to search for iconic attractions throughout Japan, with more than 5,000 sites to be included by 2023. In September 2016, the Anime and Manga Sanctuary Tour Association was established to promote the development of anime and manga-related products, services, and events in order to contribute to the increase of inbound consumption and the development of the regional economy. Every year, the association selects 88 Japanese anime and manga attractions that it would like to visit and publishes them both in Japan and abroad.<sup>8</sup> The mecca tours are gradually spreading overseas.

### Characteristics

Mecca tours has special features that are different from other forms of tourism. Okamoto (2012) made a detailed analysis of the formation of motivation, types of tourists, and behavioural patterns of mecca tours from the perspective of tourism sociology. According to Okamoto (2012), the necessary factors for the motivation of sacred site touring are the viewing of anime works and the acquisition of related information, which includes internal information (memory) and external information (word of mouth, blogs, news, magazines, etc.). According to the different channels of information acquisition, tourists can be classified into three types: pioneering tourists (tourists who presumably discover iconic attractions after watching anime works), following tourists (tourists who participate in tours based on the discoveries made by the pioneers and information available on the Internet), and secondary tourists (tourists who learn about and participate in anime attractions from news related to mecca tours).

Okamoto (2012) summarised the modes of action as information collection, action during travel, and action after

<sup>8</sup> Anime and Manga Anime mecca tours Association HP: <https://animetourism88.com/ja>.

travel. Okamoto (2012) points out that the collection of information for mecca tours is different from traditional travel information collection in that it is divided into “information provided by companies or local governments, etc.” and “information provided by tourists or local residents, etc.,” and that it is not a one-way dissemination to consumers, but rather has the nature of a two-way dissemination. The nature of travelling is two-way. Actions taken during travelling include: taking photographs of iconic attractions from the same angle as in the work; leaving various objects, comments, illustrations, etc. as souvenirs of travelling or as proof of one’s visit; disclosing the appearance of iconic attractions in the form of “live broadcasts” or “travelogues”; conducting interviews with local residents or other visitors; communication with local residents and other tour participants; Itasha (cars decorated with anime stickers) and role-playing. Post-tour activities are mainly information dissemination, both online and in real life.

In the light of the above analysis, the media and information are essential to all aspects of the conduct of the anime mecca tours. In other words, without the media and information, it would be difficult to carry out the mecca tours, at least not on a large scale. This is the most distinctive feature of the mecca tours, and it is precisely for this reason that it has spread far and wide abroad.

### **The Spread and Development of the Mecca Tour in China**

According to the Japan Tourism Agency’s statistics on the “Survey on Consumption Trends of Foreigners Visiting Japan” from 2010 to 2019, the number of inbound tourists aiming to visit iconic attractions has been increasing year by year.<sup>9</sup> Among them, the number of Chinese tourists has increased significantly in recent years, from about 80,000 in 2014 to 340,000 in 2018, and the number of tourists planning to visit iconic attractions in the future has increased from 220,000 to 1,070,000 (Liu, 2020). What are the reasons for the growth in the number of Chinese tourists participating in the mecca tours?

#### **Dissemination of Anime**

In the 1980s, Japanese anime works began to be introduced

to China, and in the 1990s, a large number of popular works such as Saint Seiya became popular in China, which had a profound influence on the younger generation. In particular, the “post-80s” generation has been exposed to Japanese anime since they can remember, and has gradually developed into the backbone of Japanese anime fans.

Around 2000, the Chinese government began restricting the broadcast of foreign anime on television in order to protect the development of the country’s anime industry. However, this did not stop the dissemination of Japanese anime works on the Internet (some of which are illegal), and the number of anime fans increased rather than decreased. Not only that, but various subculture activities such as comic exhibitions, conferences, role-playing, and secondary creations were also being held in China in full swing. The spread and “localization” of Japanese anime and subcultures has laid the groundwork for the spread of the mecca tours.

#### **Developed Social Media**

From the Cool Japan strategic policy approach (e.g., dissemination through social media, influencers, etc.), it can be surmised that the dissemination of Japanese pop culture and content works in China is closely related to the rapid development of social media in China in recent years. Whereas mecca tours are heavily influenced by content works that rely on media circulation, their impetus stems from the distribution and diffusion of information by individuals on retrieval sites, SNSs, and video sites (Okamoto, 2014). It can be said that social media as a source of information for individuals is an important platform for the dissemination of Japanese mecca tours in China.

China’s social media platforms have been developing rapidly since 2008, when large Internet companies such as NetEase, Tencent, and Sina started to provide microblogging services (Huang, 2021). On the other hand, the government has imposed information control on the domestic Internet, banning foreign social software such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, and YouTube, and replacing them with China-specific social media such as Weibo, WeChat, Tencent QQ and Youku. According to the China Internet Information Centre’s Internet Development in 2022, by the end of 2021 China had 1.032 billion Internet users and 1.007 billion social media users.<sup>10</sup> Among them, WeChat, which started in 2011, has more than 1.2 billion users and has grown at an astonishing rate to

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the Tourism Agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/siryoutoukei/syouthityousa.html>) for 2010-2019 statistics.

<sup>10</sup> China Internet Information Centre, 49th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, 2022, pp. 25, 44.

become the world's No. 3 instant messenger after WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

These social media platforms have been developing and evolving in the unique Internet environment in China, gradually integrating into people's daily life. They share the common characteristics of valuing interpersonal relationships, word-of-mouth, user information and fun, etc., which largely influence people's choices and consumption of content products and commodities (Huang, 2021).

### Development and Localization Tendencies

Mecca tours were first introduced to China through domestic websites. For example, on 22 August 2011, Nippon Express (<http://www.517japan.com/>), a major portal site dedicated to providing information on Japan, published an article entitled The Koumei train starts on the 22nd for Shiga's "mecca tour" on 22 August 2011, and since then, it has been introducing information about anime and iconic attractions in Japan. In addition, "ACG Criticism" (<http://www.acgpiping.net/>), which focuses on anime and secondary culture, and "Hexieshe" (<https://www.hexieshe.com/>), which provides information on anime and games, began publishing information and travelogues about iconic attractions around 2011.

There is a lot of information on mecca tours not only on portals but also on social media. Sina Weibo, for example, has many related microblog accounts, and popular bloggers such as "Soft Ice OVO," "Popo Japan Anime mecca tours," "Kinohata," and "Mantou Anime mecca tours" are themselves fans of mecca tours, and they have influenced a large number of followers by including a large amount of information and experiences of the tour in their tweets. In particular, "Soft Ice" has been uploading videos of her mecca tours on the popular video site "Soft Travelogue" since 2015. In addition, "Bilibili," one of the most famous video sites in Japan, produced a video album titled *The Incomplete Handbook of Mecca Tour* in 2013, and in 2014, it launched a tourism project focusing on mecca tours. "Bilibiliyoo" was launched in 2014, contributing to the flourishing of mecca tours.

The formal participation of Chinese anime fans in mecca tours started around 2013,<sup>11</sup> and there are two main modes: online and offline. The former is through commenting, retweeting and uploading on social media platforms such as Weibo and SNS, while the latter is to participate in the tour as

<sup>11</sup> CCTV, "Anime mecca tours" has risen by more than 300 per cent, becoming a new way for young people to travel. [http://travel.cnr.cn/hydt/20190109/t20190109\\_524475587.shtml](http://travel.cnr.cn/hydt/20190109/t20190109_524475587.shtml).

a tourist. According to the 2019 statistics of China's largest travel word-of-mouth website "Hornet's Nest," Japan is the country where Chinese tourists are most interested in mecca tours, and Kamakura, Tokyo, Hida, Kumamoto and other places are among the top 10 anime mecca.<sup>12</sup>

The mecca tours have not only spread widely in China, but have also seen a tendency towards localization. Along with the government's support for domestic animation, and the advancement of Internet and digital technology in China, the Chinese animation market has been expanding year by year. Many popular works such as *Big Fish Begonia*, *All the Best* and *I am Jiang Xiaobai* have emerged from it. The success of these works has drawn the attention of anime fans to the related locations. Fujian Tulou, the setting for *Big Fish and Begonia*, Hangzhou and West Lake for *Full-time Master*, and Chongqing's attractions and street scenes featured in *I am Jiang Xiaobai* have attracted many anime fans to go on tour. According to data released by "Hornet's Nest," Beijing, Zhejiang, Chongqing, Tibet and Hainan ranked among the top 5 popular places in China.

### Possibilities for Inbound Tourists from China

For the "80s" Dunker fans, Enoshima Dentetsu Line "Kamakura Gakushimae" station has always been a must-visit place in Japan. A large number of Chinese tourists travelled to Hida City, the setting of *Your Name*, before the outbreak of the Shinkansen epidemic. Before the outbreak, a large number of Chinese tourists visited Furukawa JR Station and the Municipal Library in Hida City, where the movie *Your Name* was set, but after the outbreak in 2020, overseas travel by Chinese tourists was restricted, and all sightseeing in Japan was suspended. This chapter examines the possibility of attracting Chinese tourists to visit anime hotspots again in the post-epidemic era.

### Changes in Chinese Tourists Travelling to Japan

Chinese tourists travelling to Japan at their own expense began with the opening of group tourist visas for Japan in 2000, but at that time, the number of people grew modestly due to the high cost and more stringent entry conditions for

<sup>12</sup> CCTV, the "Anime mecca tours" has risen by more than 300 per cent and become an emerging form of travel for young people, and the "Anime mecca tours" has become an emerging form of travel for young people. [http://travel.cnr.cn/hydt/20190109/t20190109\\_524475587.shtml](http://travel.cnr.cn/hydt/20190109/t20190109_524475587.shtml).

Chinese tourists (Zhang, 2016). Individual tourist visas began to be issued to the affluent (with an annual income of more than 250,000 yuan) in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou in 2009. In 2010, it was extended to all of China, and the economic conditions were lowered to an annual income of more than 60,000 yuan. The depreciation of the yen after 2012 further boosted the pace of Chinese tourists travelling to Japan. In 2015, Mainland China overtook South Korea and Taiwan (China) in terms of the number of people travelling to Japan and the amount of money spent on travel to the country to rise to the No.1 position, making it Japan's largest source market for tourist arrivals. Chinese tourists are widely recognized for the economic benefits they bring to Japan. The term *Bakubai* (excessive purchasing), which describes the amazing shopping power of Chinese tourists, was selected for the 2015 U-CAN New Words and Buzzwords Award.

However, in the years before the outbreak of the Shinkansen epidemic, Chinese tourists travelling to Japan had already produced changes. According to JNTO's statistics from 2015 to 2019, there are three tendencies to change: an increase in individual tours (47.8 per cent to 69.7 per cent); an increase in repeat visitors (27.5 per cent to 46.7 per cent); and a decrease in the average shopping expenditure of an individual (¥160,405 to ¥110,902<sup>13</sup>). It can be interpreted that in recent years, Chinese tourists are more inclined to choose niche experience-based tours than group tours, and place more emphasis on local cultural and traditional experiences and a sense of personal fulfilment than on purchasing Japanese branded goods or luxury goods. This is a shift from "material consumption" to "spiritual consumption".

### Behavioural Characteristics of Chinese Tourists

Understanding the dynamics of Chinese tourists is an important issue in attracting their inbound consumption, and for this reason it is important to first analyse the characteristics of their travel behaviour.

First, proximity travel tendency. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the ranking of outbound travel destinations in 2019 ranges from Thailand at No.1 to Russia at No. 10 as neighbouring

countries and regions.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese preference for travelling nearby is strongly influenced by Confucianism (Wu, 2016). In *the Analects of Confucius Liren*, there is a "When parents are present, they do not travel far, and travelling is a must." which means that parents should not travel far when they are alive, and if they have to go out of town then they must be told where to go. Confucianism, with its emphasis on filial piety, has influenced the Chinese reluctance to travel.

Second, Individual Tourist Tendency. The relaxation of individual tourist visas has contributed to a significant increase in the number of Chinese tourists visiting Japan. In other words, the predominance of group tours was once influenced by objective factors such as tourism policies, which do not adequately reflect the preferences of Chinese tourists. In addition, the tendency of Chinese people to prefer individual tours has existed since ancient times. According to Wu (2016), the free travelling of the Chinese people can be traced back as far as the Tang Dynasty, and the most far-reaching influence on the way of travelling of the Chinese public is the imperial examination system with a history of about 1,300 years. The imperial examinations led candidates from all over the country towards the examination centre to start travelling alone or with a few people. It is fair to say that solo travel has been the mainstay of the way people travelled throughout China's history.

Third, valuing word of mouth. It is well known that Chinese people attach great importance to word-of-mouth, and reviews from family, friends or online are often the determining factor in consumer behaviour and an important source of information for travel. There are two main reasons behind this: firstly, since ancient times, China has valued the bond between family or friends and trusted the information that originated from them; secondly, the counterfeit and shoddy products of some unscrupulous traders in China have caused people to lose trust in the information provided by the manufacturer and trust the user's comments more, believing that "good comments = good quality products". The popularity of the Internet and mobile terminals has also increased. Along with the popularity of the Internet and mobile terminals, word-of-mouth media in China is developing rapidly, with tourists using SNS, websites, and travel apps to collect review information and make travel plans. According to the Japan Tourism Agency's Survey on Consumption Trends of Foreigners Visiting Japan

<sup>13</sup> Data derived from 2010-2019 statistics from the Tourism Agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankochu/siryu/toukei/syuhityousa.html>).

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, National Travel Agency Statistical Survey Report 2019, [https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxgkml/tjxx/202012/t20201204\\_906493.html](https://zwgk.mct.gov.cn/zfxgkml/tjxx/202012/t20201204_906493.html).

(2017), smartphones ranked No.1 as an important source of information for Chinese tourists travelling to Japan, accounting for about 70.9% of the total.<sup>15</sup>

All in all, the fever of Chinese tourists travelling to Japan and the changes in recent years are not temporary, but are closely related to the traditional ideology, preferences and habits of the Chinese people. By correctly grasping the travel trends of Chinese tourists, the future of inbound tourism can be fully expected. So, can mecca tours become an incentive for Chinese tourists to enter the country?

### Chinese Tourists' Demand for Mecca Tour

In the future, or in the post-epidemic era, will the interrupted mecca tours in Japan by Chinese tourists be able to continue the momentum of the pre-epidemic period? Will the tour, which has already been localized, shift to the domestic market? The following is an analysis of China's animation and tourism industries.

In 2006, the Chinese government introduced a strategy for the development of the animation industry, implementing specific preferential policies and incentives to promote the production of domestically produced animation on the one hand, and restricting the introduction and broadcasting of foreign animation products on the other to provide sufficient space for the development of domestically produced animation. By 2011, China's animation production scores had ranked No.1 in the world, and the size of the animation industry will reach 217.2 billion yuan in 2020 (Zhang, 2021). However, there are many industry players who point out that domestic animation is overly pursuing quantity and scale, and the quality is low. Although some excellent works have emerged, as a whole it is still far inferior to Japan in terms of soft power such as originality, drawing quality, and story performance (Wang & Takahashi, 2015; Zhang, 2021). As a result, Japanese anime works continue to receive broad and enthusiastic support from Chinese anime fans.

In addition, although China's animation industry has made great strides, it has yet to form a mature industrial chain or show the first signs of synergistic development with areas such as tourism (Zhang, 2021). That is to say, unlike Japan, China's domestic mecca tours lack horizontal links with the government, local self-governments, tourism industry, etc., and are mainly the behaviour of anime fans chasing after

anime works, so they can be seen as a short-lived pursuit of individual popular works that lacks durability.

In 2009, the State Council issued the Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Tourism Industry, which positioned the tourism industry as a "strategic industry of the national economy", and clearly stated the guidelines of focusing on domestic tourism, actively developing inbound tourism, and developing outbound tourism in an orderly manner. Since then, the domestic tourism market has developed rapidly, according to the National Tourism Administration (NTA), domestic tourism in 2019 reached 6.006 billion trips, compared with 1.902 billion trips in 2009, an increase of 3.2 times, and tourism consumption also increased from 1 trillion 183 billion yuan in 2009 to 5 trillion 730 billion yuan in 2019.<sup>16</sup> With a 53% decrease in 2020 compared to the previous year due to the epidemic, but a 30.9% year-on-year increase in 2021, it's safe to say that future recovery and growth in the domestic market is fully expected. In short, China has formed a massive domestic tourism market and the domestic tourism industry has a strong economic position (Zhang, 2020).

Meanwhile, in recent years, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has put forward the concept of integration of culture and tourism, advocating the importance of the cultural attributes of tourism in order to achieve the healthy and sustainable development of the tourism industry. After 2014, the government has increased its efforts to support the construction of theme parks. In 2018, in the Guiding Opinions on Regulating the Construction and Development of Theme Parks issued by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), it was proposed that support be given to the use of digital technology, simulation, the Internet and other high-tech to support cultural content, and promote the integrated application of animation games and VR technology in theme park design, manufacturing and other fields,<sup>17</sup> which promoted the prosperity of domestic content-experience-based tourism. However, the policy does not cover other tourism projects related to content products and animation other than theme parks.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analyses: firstly, China's animation industry is relatively backward compared to Japan's development, and it is difficult

<sup>16</sup> Data derived from the Office for National Statistics, <https://data.stats.gov.cn/index.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China, Guiding Opinions on Regulating the Construction and Development of Theme Parks, [https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcxfb/ghxwj/201804/t20180408\\_960942.html](https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcxfb/ghxwj/201804/t20180408_960942.html).

<sup>15</sup> Japan Tourism Agency, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Survey on Consumption Trends of Foreigners Visiting Japan (2017), <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankochou/siryou/toukei/syouthityousa.html>.



for domestic animation to promote the development of mecca tours at present; Secondly, under the guidance and support of the government, China's domestic tourism market is developing at a healthy speed, but the mecca tours, which are included in the national strategy in Japan, have not been included in the object of the Chinese government's support. In other words, China's domestic mecca tours are in their infancy and are not yet able to satisfy the needs of anime fans, Chinese tourists are still highly enthusiastic about going to Japan for mecca tours.

### Issues in Attracting Chinese Tourists for Inbound Tourism

While there are ample possibilities for Chinese tourists to visit Japan for the purpose of mecca tours in the future, there are a number of issues that need to be resolved in order to further attract Chinese anime and manga fans to the country.

Firstly, there is still a lot of upside in the use of Chinese media to disseminate information about mecca tours. Tourists generally obtain tourism information through various media and use it as a reference to take action (Taniguchi & Fukui, 2017), and it can be said that media plays a crucial role in tourism behaviour. From the previously discussed role played by Chinese social media in the dissemination of mecca tours, the characteristics of Chinese tourists who value word-of-mouth and their means of collecting information, making full use of social media to disseminate mecca tours is the most effective way. However, due to the fact that social media is not common between the two countries, there is little information from the Japanese side on the Chinese side's unique social media platforms. Therefore, it is possible to co-operate with Chinese social media companies to set up public numbers on popular media such as WeChat to publish information about mecca tours. Or, we can hire popular and influential internet celebrities to experience and promote the tour.

Secondly, regionally-led overseas publicity is lacking. There has been friction between tourists and Japanese locals due to the proliferation of Chinese tourists. There has been a lot of vitriol against Chinese tourists, who bring huge economic benefits, such as overspending, but also a lack of etiquette. Behind the buzzword Bakubai is not only the expectation of Chinese tourists' spending power, but also contempt for their strong desire to buy. These frictions are essentially the result of a clash between the influx of foreign tourists into Japan and the surge of Chinese tourists who were not yet used to travelling abroad. In other words, both the hosts and the visitors lacked the experience and preparation

to deal with the new situation (Lin, 2021). With the decline of the Bakubai boom and the prevalence of individual travel, it is predicted that friction and conflict will diminish. In order to promote mutual understanding between tourists and residents, it is essential to conduct publicity campaigns led by each region. Regional campaigns can address the uneven number of tourists from each region and increase opportunities for tourists to learn about each region's tourism resources and attractions, customs and etiquette, and so on.

Finally, the language barrier. With the increase of foreign tourists travelling to Japan, more and more areas have brochures and signage in English, Korean, Chinese and other languages. However, there is still a large gap between the three major metropolitan areas and the localities, which must be further improved (Kato, 2021). Language barriers are also an unavoidable problem in the above two major topics. Correct understanding of each other's language is a prerequisite for deeper understanding of each other's cultures, especially when there are still complicated historical issues between China and Japan, and more care should be taken in the choice of language and expression in order to avoid misunderstanding.

### Concluding Remarks

Since its introduction, the Cool Japan Strategy has received mixed reviews, with success stories and initiatives and projects that have not achieved the desired results. However, it has played an important role in promoting the spread of Japanese popular culture and driving tourism development. This paper explores the spread and development of mecca tours in China as one of the Japanese popular cultures under the influence of this strategy, and demonstrates the possibility of Chinese tourists travelling to Japan for the purpose of mecca tours. How the Cool Japan strategy will be further developed in the post epidemic era is a major issue for Japan, and its merits and experiences will be an important reference for cultural dissemination in China.

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