reflections & conclusions:

1. Japanese idols as cultural exports constitute a "brand" that promotes a lifestyle of urban affluence (relate to Kwantisch’s theories on cultural odor & ‘mukokuseki’);

2. Idols provide a point of reference for making sense of the changing social and workplace conditions that accompany economic growth and "modernization" in Asia; enhance the understanding of commonalities and a potential Asia-Pacific identity across Asia.
Idols & Fandom in Asian Popular Culture

AKB 48

http://headlines.yahoo.co.jp/hl?a=20140123-00000034-rbb-ent
Myth Revisited

a Barthesian/semiological approach
myth is the hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings, which are specific to certain groups, are made to seem universal and given for a whole society. Myth allows the connotative meaning of a particular thing or image to appear to be denotative.
myth of AKB 48?
myth of Asian/Japanese entertainment industry;

of beauty, sexuality and femininity?
image icon
icon: "an image that refers to something outside of its individual components, something (or someone) that has great symbolic meaning for many people"; they are "perceived to represent universal concepts, emotions, and meanings"...

Nevertheless, we always need to note that "their meanings are always historically and contextually produced"
Marilyn's LAST sitting (LIFE magazine photoshoot proofsheet, 1962)
At the **denotative level** this is a photograph of the movie star Marilyn Monroe. At a **connotative level** we associate this photograph with Marilyn Monroe's star qualities of glamour, sexuality, beauty - if this is an early photograph - but also with her depression, drug-taking and untimely death if it is one of her last photographs. At a **mythic level** we understand this sign as activating the myth of Hollywood: the dream factory that produces glamour in the form of the stars it constructs, but also the dream machine that can crush them - all with a view to profit and expediency.

--Susan Hayward
prosumer: Chinese Way of Creating a superstar

Ling Yang
Li Yuchun (Chris Lee)
2005 winner of hit reality show Super Girl
her fan groups are self-labelled as the Corns
with the emergence of "participatory culture", fandoms such as the Corns have been able to participate in the star-making process of music-entertainment industry on an unprecedented scale and depth. ----Ling Yang p528
besieged music industry +
new mode developed by Hunan TV's Super Girl

star system

prolonged contest schedule + extensive publicity campaign + other tactics (SMS voting; professionalized artist management & marketing etc.)
fan-producers VS fan-consumers

**prosumer:** integrates fan production, fan promotion and fan consumption all in one

**prosumption practices of Corn fandom**

Internet and local media formats have been actively utilised to promote Li's star status, which includes the proposal for a global Corn conglomerate
pop idols and the Asian Identity

Hiroshi Aoyagi
80s~late 1990s

a. popularity of Japanese-style "pop idols" in Asia
b. localized, home-grown idols modeled on the Japanese prototype
pop idols and the industries that produce them contribute to the formation of a pan-Asian identity or consciousness among young people of diverse nationality, in an era in which the Asia-Pacific region is considered energetic and "hot", with high expectations not just for economic growth, but for growing cultural influence on the rest of the world as well.
Japanese pop idols

life-sized, cute & above-average
toshindai (life-sized) & gijiteki-nakama (quasi-companions): indexes of idol-fan relationship

playing on young people's social needs, Japan's life-sized pop idols are produced and marketed as personifiers of a typical "girl or boy next door", chosen to become "lucky stars" and to represent their generation

"their role cannot be accomplished unless they keep pace with the people all around them...they cannot run ahead too fast, or lag too far behind"

NEVER say no to their customers; practices to build up intimacy include "handshaking ceremonies" (akushu-kai); get-together with fans (fan no tsudoi); public photo shoots (satsuei-kai); autograph ceremonies (sign-kai)
kawaii----cuteness

rooted in its earlier historic period, the modern term of **kawaii** emerged in the 1970s when Japanese teenagers, mainly female, began using an informal and “cute” style of writing;

cute, child-like and therefore somehow immature/unpretentious physical features, behaviors and styles that evoke the feeling of adoration; female-centered, in the 1980s "kawaii" was considered the cultural expression by the Japanese females who desire independence from marriage life.
天国のキッス
松田聖子
¥700
idol boom & Japanese society
idol and idol boom are the results of orchestrated efforts by the mass media, the entertainment industry, the advertising business and retail corporations specializing in the creation of profit-generating teen-oriented trends, fashions, and products.

socio-economic background: boom appeared at the height of Japan's postwar economic miracle---a new consumer culture fed by rising incomes and enjoyed by a new generation intent on differentiating themselves from their elders not just by working hard but also by enjoying the fruits of their labor.

lifestyle as more dynamic, complex and catering to the contemporary urban life

idols on the wane:
1) socio-economic explanation: "the fading of idols reflects the current economic recessions, in which the people have lost the energy they once had to move forward together toward social and economic growth";

2) transformation of the entertainment industry itself: under pressure of Internet, rise of social network and so forth. demand for more versatile artists/celebrities; stronger, less-tamed/outstanding performers
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promotion/talent agency: the Johnny's Founder: Johnny Kitagawa specializing in scouting and promoting boys group.
SMAP

http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/xdnjp647/52449645.html
reflections & conclusions:
1. Japanese idols as cultural exportations constitute a "brand" that promoting "a lifestyle of urban affluence" (relate to Iwabuchi's theories on cultural odor & "mukokuseki");

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AKB48 No Flower Without Rain, 2013
AKB 48: Japanese girl idol group, brain-child of Akimoto Yasushi; active since 2005; based upon the "idol you can meet" concept, with its own performing theater at Akihabara, and the teams alternate in daily performance & fan-oriented activities there.

within Japan, there are NMB 48/HKT 48/SKE 48(NAGOYA)

OVERSEAS groups: Shanghai & Jarkarta
mechanism:
1) **division of teams; fluid content, rigid form** (kenkyusei; overseas groups etc.): possible to alternate and perform on a daily basis; possible to transit between center-peripheral; and between generations;

2) **customer-centered & media-intensive:**
highly-competitive, prolonged-activity schedule, fully-exposed, highly-commercialized: massive audition; election (only possible after you purchase the latest album); ranking; punishment & elimination; fast development of accessories besides music products
a narrative structured around the Center but who is really at the Center?

pyramid

punishment

sustaining the "dream" narrative?
question:
1) What is the myth of AKB 48, if they have one?

2) Is such an idol group built upon the idea/mechanism that an "individual" replaceable at any time? If so, does it conflict with the idea about talent/star as unique individual? Could we relate it to some further observations about Japanese social culture?

3) Is the idea of "culture industry" appropriate for critique here? What do these mechanisms for generating and maintaining stars have to do with mass media and fans/consumers? Aren't the idols themselves the "products"?