
Research Article**The Monomyth in Momoiro Clover Z's Narrative****Astera Khirana^{1*}**¹Faculty of Language and Culture, Universitas Darma Persada

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This research explores the narrative of Momoiro Clover Z, a Japanese female idol group that defied traditional idol conventions that came into popularity in Japan, in mass media. The research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing various electronic and printed media sources to gather data on Momoiro Clover Z's concept and narratives assessing them through the lens of the monomyth framework. The result shows that Momoiro Clover Z's image construction is depended on their distinct concept and narrative trajectory to stardom. The study reveals a correlation between Momoiro Clover Z's narrative and the monomyth pattern, encompassing stages such as the Call to Adventure, Tests, Allies, and Enemies, and the Ordeal. This examination leads to the conclusion that the utilization of the monomyth framework significantly contributed to shaping Momoiro Clover Z's image and fostering their popularity in the Japanese entertainment landscape.

Keywords: Idol; Media; Narrative; Monomyth**1. Introduction**

Female idols in Japan are commonly marketed as relatable figures, representing the archetype of the girl next door. They are characterized by cuteness, a life-sized appearance, and above-average qualities. It is expected that they possess a balanced combination of attractiveness, intelligence, and skill, without excessive emphasis on any single aspect (Aoyagi, 2000). The late 1970s and early 1980s are often referred to as the "Golden Era" for Japanese female idols due to the rising popularity of solo idols like Yamaguchi Momoe and Matsuda Seiko. However, the preferences of the public shifted towards bands and solo singers during the 1990s, leading to a decline in the popularity of female idols. In 1999, the establishment of Morning Musume, a female idol group formed by the singer-songwriter Tsunku, played a significant role in initiating the

contemporary Japanese idol industry. The subsequent rise of AKB48, a second female idol group created by Akimoto Yasushi, followed the success of Morning Musume. AKB48 achieved extraordinary popularity, with their singles consistently achieving top positions on the Japanese music charts. The subsequent period was dubbed the Idol Warring Period (Aidoru Sengoku Jidai) due to the rapid emergence of numerous female idol groups seeking to capitalize on the prevailing trend. Notably, because of AKB48's dominant presence on television, no female groups were perceived as direct competitors to AKB48.

In 2012, AKB48 faced a formidable challenge to their success from a five-member female idol group known as Momoiro Clover Z, also referred to as Momoclo. Momoclo experienced a significant surge in popularity that year, largely due to being labeled as the rival of AKB48 by the Japanese media. Distinct from AKB48, which boasted a large

membership of over 50 individuals, Momoclo's philosophy directly opposed that of AKB48. By rejecting the conventional idol archetype, Momoclo successfully captured the public's attention. Their fame stemmed from various factors, including their vibrant color-coded costumes inspired by the popular Japanese television series franchise Super Sentai, their energetic songs and choreography, and their audacious demeanor. These elements played a crucial role in establishing Momoclo's popularity among the general public.

AKB48 enjoys the advantage of a substantial membership size, providing fans with a wide array of options to swiftly select their preferred member. Conversely, Momoclo faced the limitation of having only five members, which deprived them of such a privilege. Consequently, Momoclo heavily relied on the concept of *kyara* to compensate for this drawback. *Kyara*, in contrast to genuine demeanor, is perceived as an alternative reality that exists apart from the real world. It does not aim to portray an idol's authentic personality; rather, it serves as a means for fans to distinguish one member from another (Nishi, 2017).

Moreover, the existence of a renowned celebrity or iconic figure can be perceived as "void," enabling fans to autonomously generate and indulge in personal narratives or fantasies about them (Herwitz, 2008). Japanese idols emulate this phenomenon through the organization of handshake events, where idols and fans engage in brief conversations, fostering a sense of proximity between fans and their idols. This practice stems from the idol's image being centered around commodified, standardized, and mass-produced manifestations of human desires (Galbraith, 2012).

Klossowski, drawing on philosophical works by Nietzsche and Sade, developed his own concept of simulacra to describe this particular line of thinking (McGinnis,

2017). Every living body interprets codes, signs, and symbols as responses within stimulated situations, resulting in the reproduction of images from past and future events, a phenomenon referred to as phantasm (Klossowski, 1969). Phantasm, although no longer communicated or understood, exerts a compulsive influence (Smith, 2005). However, the consumption of idol images can be understood as a form of simulacrum, where images, words, and texts are employed to represent and interpret phantasms (Velez, 2019). This could be seen in Kazumi Nagaike's research on female fantasies related to idols from the Johnny's entertainment agency. Nagaike's work focused on the establishment of a pseudo-relationship between female fans and male idols, presenting these idols as *shounen* (young men) with a semi-professional demeanor. This particular portrayal created a fragmented perception among fans, preventing them from fully comprehending the idols' complete image and thereby enabling the development of individual narratives (Nagaike, 2012).

Momoiro Clover Z achieved a remarkable feat by surpassing AKB48 as the most popular female idol group in Japan in 2013, just a year after being acknowledged as AKB48's rival (Nikkei.com, 2013). During their peak of stardom, Momoiro Clover Z's media appearances consistently recounted their past experiences and struggles, often framing their narrative within the paradigm of the archetypal heroic journey.

This research aims to explore the narratives surrounding Momoiro Clover Z, specifically by examining their alignment with the Hero's Journey framework which was popularized by Joseph Campbell in his book "The Hero of a Thousand Faces" (Campbell, 2012). The Hero's Journey or the monomyth, is known as an archetype usually applied to myths and legends. Folklorists argue that Campbell's monomyth theory is biased because he selectively constructed it by citing stories

that aligned with his predetermined framework, while neglecting equally valid narratives (Toelken, 1996).

However, the monomyth framework is still popular among scholars as seen in previous researches. For example, Wahyuni (2018) conducted research about the monomyth in Agatha Christie's novel, *Murder on the Orient Express*. The research used descriptive approach and sequenced the storylines of the novel using Campbell's monomyth. The research concluded that the entire novel storylines fitted with all stages in the monomyth with some adjustment. Another research about the monomyth was also done by Sadri (2020), which focused on the relevance of monomyth in various contemporary young adult fictions. The research argues that the monomyth can be applied to various texts and media, and is a useful tool for analyzing narratives in contemporary popular culture, despite its flaws and criticisms. The author also argues that the monomyth is not a rigid or fixed, but a dynamic and evolving structure that can be reconfigured and updated for the modern age.

Different from the previous researches mentioned above which focused in the narrative of fictional story, this research tries to bring a new perspective of the monomyth outside fictitious narratives. By examining the narrative of Momoiro Clover Z, this research seeks to elucidate the monomyth in the group's narratives that contributed to their image construction and their rise as one of the most influential female idol groups in Japan.

2. Methods

This research will adopt a qualitative approach to investigate the subject matter. It will focus on analyzing and comparing the concept of Momoiro Clover Z with the broader notion of Japanese idols. Various electronic and printed media sources will be utilized to gather relevant data, enabling the identification of similarities and

differences between Momoiro Clover Z and other idols. Specifically, the narratives surrounding Momoiro Clover Z, as portrayed in diverse media outlets, will be examined within the framework of monomyth. The data analysis will be structured according to the different stages of the monomyth cycle. While the specific tenets of framework may not be applied rigidly, they will serve as a guide for identifying narrative patterns in Momoiro Clover Z's storytelling, ultimately contributing to the construction of their image within the Japanese idol industry. The subsequent evaluations will shed light on how Momoiro Clover Z's concept and storylines enable them to establish a distinct identity from conventional Japanese female idols.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Concept of Momoiro Clover Z

Momoiro Clover Z emerged as a distinct deviation from larger and more accomplished groups, such as AKB48 and Morning Musume, during the Idol Warring Period. Being a female group conceived within this competitive period, Momoiro Clover Z gained favor among audiences by introducing a unique and unprecedented concept that had not been explored by other female idol groups. Notably, the group stood out from the majority of Japanese female idol groups prevalent during that time due to their management's steadfast refusal to objectify them as sexual commodities, emphasizing a distinct focus on their non-sexualized image.

Momota Kanako, the leader of Momoiro Clover Z, consistently conveyed to the media their group's conscious disassociation from the *kawaii* notion. In Japanese culture, the concept of *kawaii* entails the depiction of females in feminine attire and a submissive demeanor, eliciting a desire in others to protect them as objects (Galbraith, 2012). In contrast, Momoiro Clover Z actively resisted and distanced

themselves from the kawaii culture. Despite this rejection, it is undeniable that the members of Momoiro Clover Z possess attractive physical attributes. This attractiveness was counterbalanced by their deliberately unfashionable costumes, which were associated with their color-coded identities and drew inspiration from the Super Sentai series. Furthermore, the group incorporated clothing styles and themes influenced by various Japanese subcultures such as salaryman, wrestler, and even mecha esthetics.

As mentioned earlier, Momoiro Clover Z extensively relies on the concept of kyara (characterization). Each member of the group possesses a distinct personality, coupled with a color-coded identification, facilitating easy recognition and differentiation among them. However, it is important to note that these characterizations have undergone transformations over time. For instance, Tamai Shiori was initially associated with the tagline “everyone’s little sister” (みんなの妹) due to her portrayal of a spoiled, younger sibling-like character. As she grew older, this slogan became incongruous with her evolving demeanor, leading to its modification to “Momoclo’s young general” (ももクロの若大将) to better reflect her present disposition.

Momoiro Clover Z embarked on their musical journey following a common trajectory observed among female groups, initially presenting bubblegum-pop songs centered around romantic themes. However, a pivotal shift occurred after their transition to a different record label, which prompted them to distance themselves from such song styles. This change was largely influenced by their new music producer, who possessed limited experience in crafting music for female idol groups and predominantly focused on producing anime songs (anisongs). Notably, Momoiro Clover Z frequently engaged in collaborations with various musicians, including Tomoyasu Hotei and

the renowned American rock band, KISS. According to Ian Martin of Japan Times (2013), while the songs of most female idol groups tend to be perceived as regressive, Momoiro Clover Z’s musical compositions exhibited a more progressive quality.

The prominent divergence between Momoiro Clover Z and other female idol groups was primarily manifested in the absence of handshakes and similar interactive activities. The management team’s rationale behind this decision stemmed from their belief that the popularity of individual members could be measured through handshake events, yet subjecting them to such events while they were still minors was deemed unduly harsh. However, this approach created a division between Momoiro Clover Z, the idols themselves, and their followers. Despite adopting the motto “idol you can meet right now!”, the group’s accessibility outside of their concerts was practically non-existent. Consequently, fans were constrained to relying solely on media appearances as a means to grasp and comprehend the image and persona of Momoiro Clover Z.

The mass media also purposefully positioned Momoiro Clover Z as an idol group capable of appealing to a broad demographic, encompassing individuals of all genders and age groups. This strategic approach was manifested through the portrayal of the group as resembling a sports team rather than conforming to the traditional image of female idols. An illustrative demonstration of this can be observed in the media’s decision to conduct interviews with fans who did not perceive the group as objects of desire, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

[当時21歳 男性 大学生 ファン
歴：1年]

やっぱ、僕らはあまりももクロを女性として見てるんじゃないくて、頑張ってる子を応援するとか...親目線じゃ

ないんですけど、高校球児を応援して
るような感覚に近い感じで...

(日本テレビ, 2013)

(21 years-old, male, university student.
Being a fan for one year.)

Well, we do not really see Momoclo as a
female, but more like supporting children
who are doing their best... Of course, I
don't see myself as a parent, but more like
supporting a high-school baseball team...

(Nippon TV, 2013)

Furthermore, Momoiro Clover Z garnered
recognition for their portrayal as “strong-
willed” rather than conforming to the
kawaii (cute) stereotype. In line with this
characterization, the management of
Momoiro Clover Z proactively embraced a
“family-friendly” image, implementing
measures such as offering diverse seating
options during their concerts and catering
to the needs of young families within the
venue, including the provision of nurturing
rooms. These concerted efforts allowed
Momoiro Clover Z to distance themselves
from the conventional idol archetypes that
are often objectified and perceived as
targets of men's sexual desire.

3.2 The Narrative of Momoiro Clover Z

In 2008, Momoiro Clover Z made a modest
debut under the name Momoiro Clover
with a performance held at Yoyogi Park in
Tokyo. Despite their affiliation with
Stardust Promotion, Inc., a prominent
talent management company in Japan, they
embarked on their career as street
performers, engaging in singing and
dancing activities during weekends. The
formation of Momoiro Clover was initiated
by Kawakami Akira, a manager associated
with the organization, during the period
characterized by intense competition
among idol groups, known as the Idol
Warring Period (Aidoru Sengoku Jidai).
Despite lacking prior experience in
managing idol groups and primarily
serving as the manager for the company's
renowned actress, Kawakami undertook

the establishment of Momoiro Clover. It is
notable that their creation was largely
influenced by the more established and
widely recognized Japanese group,
AKB48, as evident in their catchphrase
“the idol you can meet, now!” which
parodied AKB48's concept of “the idol you
can meet.”

Momoiro Clover experienced a series of
lineup modifications during the initial
phase of their professional journey,
ultimately establishing a stable
composition comprising six members
shortly before their independent debut.
This six-member configuration persisted
until April 2011 when Akari Hayami
decided to depart from the group.
Subsequently, the remaining five members
made the decision to rebrand themselves as
Momoiro Clover Z following Hayami's
departure. Throughout this period,
Momoiro Clover/Momoiro Clover Z
continued to organize various engagements
such as handshake events and picture
events, which are commonly conducted by
other similar organizations. However, in
March 2012, it was officially announced
that their fifth song would mark the
conclusion of their singles that provided
access to the handshake events.

The popularity of Momoiro Clover Z has
experienced an exceptional surge after the
discontinuation of handshake events and
other similar engagements. This surge is
exemplified by their remarkable feat of
selling out their event held at the Seibu
Dome, boasting a capacity of 37,000
individuals. Furthermore, this
accomplishment resulted in their inclusion
as one of the performers in NHK's
esteemed year-end music event, Kouhaku
Uta Gassen, in that particular year.
Astonishingly, a mere two years following
their participation in NHK's Kouhaku Uta
Gassen, Momoiro Clover Z achieved the
distinction of being the first female group
to hold a concert at the National Stadium,
attracting an audience of 110,000

individuals over the course of two consecutive days.

According to annual surveys conducted by Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Momoiro Clover Z maintained their position as the most popular Japanese female idol group consecutively from 2013 to 2018. Nonetheless, the group experienced yet another alteration in their lineup in January 2018, as one of their members, Momoka Ariyasu, departed, resulting in the group's composition transforming into a quartet shortly before their tenth anniversary. Although the group's name remained unchanged following this lineup adjustment, it symbolized the initiation of a new era referred to as "ZZ". The history of Momoiro Clover Z can be delineated into four distinctive periods, as shown below.

Table 1
Timeline of Momoiro Clover Z

Years	Members	Era
2008 – 2009	Fluctuative	Pre-debut
2009 – 2011	6	Momoiro Clover
2011 – 2018	5	Z
2018 – Now	4	ZZ

The pinnacle of Momoiro Clover Z's notoriety was observed during the timeframe spanning from 2013 to 2016. As evidenced by the aforementioned table, this notable surge in popularity coincided with the "Z" period. During that time frame, Momoiro Clover Z was invited as a guest on various television stations, where their group history was showcased. Regardless of the broadcasting channel, certain narrative elements were consistently incorporated, independent of the specific television station airing the content. The televised narratives exhibited a similar structure to the official documentary of Momoiro Clover Z. In broad terms, the following is a comparative analysis of the

narratives presented on two television stations and the official documentary:

Table 2
Comparison of Momoiro Clover Z's Narrative

Nippon Television (1 March 2015)	NHK (21 August 2015)	Official Documentary (2018)
Formation		Formation
Street Performance	Street Performance	Street Performance
Wagon Tour	Wagon Tour	Wagon Tour
		Major Debut
	Change to "Z"	Change to "Z"
NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen	NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen	NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen
National Stadium	National Stadium	National Stadium

The table shows that three programs documenting Momoiro Clover Z's history share similarities. All programs covered street performances, wagon tours, appearances at NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen, and concerts at the National Stadium. The street performances and wagon tours reveal the group's challenging journey before gaining popularity, while their participation in NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen and hosting concerts at the National Stadium highlight their impressive achievements. Overall, this suggests that the narrative of Momoiro Clover Z focuses on their enduring struggles and notable accomplishments. Moreover, the consistent presentation of their history on television signifies their intention to establish recognition not solely on the basis of their physical attributes, but rather on their enduring struggles and noteworthy accomplishments.

3.3 The Monomyth in the Narrative of Momoiro Clover Z

Having established an understanding of how Momoiro Clover Z was portrayed in television and media, this part expounds upon their narrative through the prism of the monomyth framework, also known as the Hero's Journey. The theoretical

construct of the Hero's Journey was brought into prominence by Joseph Campbell. Campbell delineated a sequence of 17 distinct phases within the monomyth, classified into three overarching acts: "Departure," "Initiation," and "Return." It is noteworthy that there exists no obligatory mandate for each narrative to encompass all 17 phases. Building upon Campbell's model, Vogler offered a more condensed rendition of the monomyth, paring down the stages to 12 while retaining the three-act structure (Vogler, 2007). Below is the visual representation of Vogler's streamlined monomyth cycle:



In the show *EVERYBODY Haran Bakushow*, which aired in March 2015, it was clearly mentioned that Momota and Tamai were at risk of losing their contracts because they didn't have any work in the entertainment industry. This situation highlights their seemingly normal life, resembling the initial stage of a monomyth pattern known as the "Ordinary World." Moving forward to the subsequent phase, the establishment of Momoiro Clover can be seen as an initiation to embark on a fresh journey. This marks their entry into the entertainment industry as idols, akin to the concept of a "Call to Adventure." In a manner reminiscent of the monomyth archetype, their path as idols had a challenging inception. It was characterized by frequent alterations in their lineup and a

sense of uncertainty among members about the continuation of their pursuits. This can be interpreted as a form of "Refusal of the Call." The final composition of the group was only solidified a year after its formation.

Transitioning to the stage "Mentor", due to the dominant role their manager, Kawakami, played from the outset, he can be regarded as the guiding mentor of Momoiro Clover. Kawakami predominantly directed their activities, including the innovative "wagon tour," where they traversed Japan using discounted highway tickets to stage performances near Yamada Denki outlets, a prominent chain of electronics stores in Japan.

Regarding their "First Threshold," their significant debut could be seen as fulfilling this role. It represented their endeavor to make a mark in the prominent idol arena in Japan. During this phase, they gained acknowledgment as a potent contender within the Japanese idol sphere, although they had not yet attained substantial coverage in the broader media landscape.

Momoiro Clover encountered their initial trial when Hayami Akari chose to depart from the ensemble, prompting their transformation into Momoiro Clover Z. This juncture also introduced them to fresh "allies" within the entertainment sector, such as pop vocalist Matsuzaki Shigeru, a regular presence at their concerts, announcing upcoming venues.

With their mounting popularity, they achieved a milestone by successfully filling their first dome concert and being invited to NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen in 2012. Concurrently, they garnered extensive media attention, earning them recognition as contenders against the more established AKB48. Intriguingly, their narrative during this phase revolved around the unlikely scenario of a relatively small group like theirs challenging the colossal AKB48, reminiscing the tale of David and Goliath. Nonetheless, this chapter can be described

as the stage leading to a pivotal confrontation, resembling the “Approach to Inmost Cave” and the subsequent “Ordeal.” Here, Momoiro Clover Z (the heroes) confronted the ultimate adversary of the Japanese idol realm, AKB48. While they faced defeat in terms of record sales and merchandise, they held their own in concert attendance and popularity. In contrast to the conventional hero’s narrative where the protagonist vanquishes their primary rival, Momoiro Clover Z’s journey mirrored more of a race, competing with other idol groups in the *aidoru sengoku jidai* to attain the top. They achieved this feat in 2013, clinching the top position as the most favored female idol group in a survey conducted by Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

The year 2014 witnessed their realization of a long-held dream, becoming the youngest act and the first female idol group to headline a concert at the National Stadium. In the context of the monomyth framework, this achievement can be interpreted as their “Reward.”

Having secured their deserved accolade, the narrative course transitioned to the subsequent phase, identified as the “Road Back.” Following their triumphant National Stadium performance, the trajectory of Momoiro Clover Z maintained its momentum. In this phase, the group was no longer ensnared in the fervor of sensation, yet their popularity remained stable. However, akin to the archetypal monomyth pattern, an ultimate trial emerged—the departure of Ariyasu Momoka from the group, occurring prior to their tenth anniversary. This juncture assumes the semblance of the group’s “Resurrection.”

In the phase encapsulating the “Return with the Elixir,” the hero retraces their steps to the “Ordinary World,” bearing with them an elixir, treasure, or insightful lesson garnered from the “Special World” that holds potential utility for the broader community. In the context of Momoiro

Clover Z’s saga, while their return might not entail the conventional reversion to the “Ordinary World” by means of retirement or disbandment, their significant contribution to society was manifest through a series of concerts held across rural cities in Japan. This endeavor aligned with the intent to bolster revitalization initiatives in these areas, thereby exemplifying their role as agents of social and communal betterment.

Table 3
Comparison of Momoiro Clover Z’s Narrative and Monomyth

Momoiro Clover Z’s Narrative	Monomyth
Before formation	Ordinary World
Formation	The Call to Adventure
Street performances, frequent member changes, independent debut, wagon tour	Refusal of the Call, Mentor
Major Debut	The First Threshold
Departure of Hayami Akari, changed to Z.	Tests, Allies, and Enemies
Concerts in large venue with full attendance, appearance in NHK Kouhaku Uta Gassen	Approach to the Inmost Cave
The first female group to hold a concert in National Stadium	The Ordeal, Rewards
Post-National Stadium, Ariyasu Momoka’s departure.	The Road Back, Resurrection
Holding concerts in rural cities in Japan.	Return with the Elixir

4. Conclusion

Based on the previous discussion, it can be seen that Momoiro Clover Z, as a Japanese female idol group, consistently portrays themselves differently from typical female idol groups by distancing themselves from the *kawaii* concept and presenting themselves as strong women. To support this concept, Momoiro Clover Z is presented to the public as hardworking individuals who started their careers as ordinary people and eventually reached the peak of fame. This narrative consistently appears in various media. From a

narratological perspective, the narrative held by Momoiro Clover Z aligns with the monomyth pattern, which is a classic pattern often found in myth and legends. This is interesting to note because with this narrative, Momoiro Clover Z has successfully captured the hearts of their fans, who sympathize with their career journey. By contrasting themselves with traditional idol concepts and being supported by a narrative similar to the monomyth, Momoiro Clover Z has solidified their image as strong women and has become one of the most influential female idol groups in Japan.

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