

## Breakup of beloved boyband Smap shocks Japanese pop fans

*Five members have topped Japan's charts for more than two decades and split will leave huge hole in country's music scene*

①They have crooned their way into the affections of millions and provided the pop backdrop to generations of Japanese people for more than two decades.

But on Wednesday, it was reported that Smap, one of Japan's most popular bands of all time, are to break up, leaving a gaping hole in the country's music scene.

②Speculation that the boyband – now on the cusp of middle age – were to split up came after the Nikkan Sports newspaper reported that four of its five members had decided to leave Johnny and Associates, the powerful talent agency headed by the octogenarian pop impresario Johnny Kitagawa.

The cause of the split is the decision by the band's manager, Michi Iijima, to resign from the agency and, it is rumoured, launch a rival company.

③Four of Smap's five members appeared ready to join Iijima, leaving behind arguably the band's most popular performer, Takuya Kimura.

Johnny and Associates confirmed the split in a brief statement released on Wednesday, but refused to discuss the reason while the parties were “still in the negotiation phase”.

Iijima, who has managed the band almost since it formed in 1988, has reportedly been at loggerheads with Kitagawa's sister, Mary Kitagawa, who is said to be the financial brains behind the agency.

④Fans were quick to voice their shock on social media. One said: “What will we do without Smap?”, while another wrote: “All the talk at school today has been about Smap. My head hurts.”

The band's detractors expressed relief. “There is a god!” said a commenter on the Japan Today website.

⑤In the 25 years since their debut single, Can't Stop!! Loving, Smap – an acronym standing for Sports Music Assemble People – have become one of the most popular boybands in Asia, selling more than 35m records. Kimura and the band's other members – Masahiro Nakai, Goro Inagaki, Tsuyoshi Kusanagi and Shingo Katori – have released more than 50 singles and 20 studio albums, about half of which topped the Japanese charts.

⑥They also found success in other parts of Asia, including China, the location for their first overseas concert in 2011.

When they are not singing, the band's members host their own TV variety show, SmapxSmap, and have made numerous appearances in dramas and films, helping Johnny and Associates to become the country's most successful talent agency.

⑦While Nakai's tone deafness has become a running joke in the Japanese entertainment world, the band's inoffensive lyrics and innocuous musical style found audiences among all generations.

⑧Their 2003 single Sekai ni Hitotsu Dake no Hana (The Only Flower in the World) was selected as the wakeup call for Soichi Noguchi, a Japanese astronaut on the Space Shuttle Discovery mission two years later.

⑨Steve McClure, the former editor of Billboard magazine's Asia bureau who has followed Smap's career for more than 20 years, said their best days were probably behind them. “For an idol group they have amazing staying power,” he said. “They're well past their sell-by date as an idol group, so you could say that this is just a belated rite of passage.”

⑩Smap performed last month on Kōhaku Uta Gassen (The Red and White Song Battle), a fixture of Japanese New Year's Eve TV, which drew the lowest viewing figures in the show's 65-year history.

“You could say, so goes Kōhaku, so goes Smap,” McClure said. “Smap are from an era when everyone watched the same thing on TV and the market wasn't as fragmented as it is today. That's why there probably won't be another Smap.”

①croon 低くささやくような声で(歌を)歌う ②on the cusp of(...の)始まりの[で]; 過渡期の[で] octogenarian 80歳[代]の人 impresario(催し物特にオペラ・バレエ・音楽会などの)興行主,(一座の)監督; 経営者 ③arguably おそらく(間違いなく) at loggerheads with [...の]ことで(人)と仲たがいで(over) ④detractors 中傷する人 commenter 評者、注解者 ⑦tone deafness 音痴 running joke (劇・映画・テレビなどで)繰り返し用いられる冗談 inoffensive (人・言動などが)不快にさせない, 当たりさわりのない innocuous (格式)(言動が)当たりさわりのない; 無害の ⑨rite of passage 通過儀礼 ⑩fixture 定期的行事, 名物 fragment 細分化[断片化], 分裂, 分断する

### ★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. Why do you think Smap has been popular for over 2 decades?
2. The origin of the scandal is a conflict between an agency official and their manager. If you were a member of the Smap, who would you follow?
3. What qualities do you think performers should have in order to have a long-lasting career?
4. In the article, there was an opinion that there won't be another Smap because the market is already fragmented. What's your opinion about this?
5. How did the Western culture influence the Japanese music industry?
6. Make sentences using the following words: at loggerheads with, arguably, detractor Inoffensive, innocuous, fixture and fragment.

スポーツ新聞 2紙がスクープしたスマップ解散騒動は、日本メディアだけではなく、海外メディアでも伝えられた。

結局5人の謝罪オンエアで継続となった。TOKIOや嵐、関ジャニ∞(エイト)を担当する藤島ジュリー景子副社長(北川メリーの長女)と、SMAPなどを担当する飯島氏との間の、ジャニーズ事務所内「2大派閥」が表面化した形となった。東スポは事務所をブラック企業と断じている。