

Current Situation and Cross-Cultural Influence of Live Houses in China

ZHANG Xinyue, NI Xintong

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Live houses emerged in China during the 1990s as the country's rock music scene began to flourish. Today, live houses can be found in almost every major city in China and have become an essential part of the country's music culture. The growth of live houses in China has been driven by changing consumer tastes, the expansion of the music industry, and a desire for new and innovative forms of entertainment. These venues offer a unique and intimate setting for music lovers to experience live performances, fostering a sense of community and connection between artists and audiences. The cross-cultural influence of live houses in China has been substantial, with international musicians and audiences increasingly drawn to the country's vibrant music scene. Chinese live houses have hosted a diverse range of international artists, providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and collaboration. As a result, live houses have become a hub for promoting Chinese culture and soft power, enhancing global cultural diversity, and increasing the visibility of Chinese artists on the international stage.

Keywords: live house, cross-cultural, Chinese music industry, industry insight

Introduction

Live houses have become a thriving part of China's music industry in recent years, with a growing number of venues spread across the country's major cities. These small, intimate spaces have provided a platform for emerging and established Chinese musicians to showcase their talent and connect with audiences, while also attracting international artists to explore China's diverse music culture.

The rise of live houses in China has been fueled by several factors, including the growth of the music industry, changing consumer tastes, and a desire for new and innovative forms of entertainment. Live houses offer a unique and intimate setting for music lovers to experience live performances, creating a sense of community and connection between artists and audiences.

The cross-cultural influence of live houses in China has been significant, with international musicians and audiences increasingly drawn to the country's vibrant music scene. Chinese live houses have hosted a diverse range of international artists, providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and collaboration.

This paper will provide an overview of the current situation and cross-cultural influence of live houses in China. It will examine the history and development of the live house industry, the impact of live houses on the Chinese music scene, and the cross-cultural exchange and collaboration that has taken place within these venues.

ZHANG Xinyue, undergraduate, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

NI Xintong, undergraduate, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

It is hoped that analysis will highlight the important role that live houses play in promoting Chinese culture and soft power, and their potential to enhance global cultural diversity.

Current State of Live Houses in China

Currently, live houses in China are primarily operated in two forms: independent and franchise (Li, 2023, p. 1). Independent live houses, such as Euler Art Space and Yugong Yishan, are typically managed independently, and each venue has its own unique development approach based on its location. Franchise live houses represent a newer business model that has emerged in recent years, often initiated by independent operators or established entertainment management companies. After establishing a strong presence, they expand by opening franchise outlets in other first and second-tier cities, extending the live house brand nationwide. Additionally, some live houses incorporate elements like dining and cultural creativity to attract a wider audience.

Since the breakout of the variety show “Summer of the Band” in 2019, live houses culture has become more and more popular in the public sphere and started to be loved and carried forward by the Generation Z, which has also led to a bonus period. Even during last year’s epidemic, many new live houses opened, and the live houses market still shows a considerable growth trend compared to before 2019. According to the report “May Day Performance Observation 2021” released by DAMAC.com, the annual compound growth rate of performance venues is 23.1% in 2021 compared to 2019, and the live houses viewing audience has also risen by 326%.

For live houses, compared to concerts, music festivals and other large-scale performances, the scale of venues, associated teams are smaller thus less complex to organize, and the pace of recovery is faster.

Especially after the full opening of the epidemic, live houses, new mode of fire, whether it is a big city or three, four, or five tier small cities, are gradually forming a new trend of offline entertainment consumption. Live houses are from the niche into the public; the young three or two are crowded into the live houses. According to the statistics of the show moving and other ticketing platform, only in February this year, Beijing has more than 110 live houses performance, and the performance in March has also reached more than 30.

China’s live houses industry continues to grow and develop, providing a unique and valuable platform for musicians and music lovers alike. The industry has become an important part of China’s cultural landscape, and its influence is becoming increasingly evident both within China and on the international stage.

Development Dilemma

No matter the market, cost, or hardware problems, the development of live houses in China is facing difficult problems, especially in the post-epidemic era, which has experienced the impact of such catastrophe; the market and people’s concepts have undergone great changes.

The Survival Dilemma in the Post-Epidemic Era

While the most severe phase of the pandemic has passed, its impact lingers on and continues to endure. During this time, the live houses industry in China has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, with many venues adopting online streaming and other innovative solutions to maintain their operations. However, live houses in China still face challenges, including limited government support, lack of regulations, and fierce competition from other entertainment sectors. Many live houses have been forced to face the situation that they cannot make ends meet due to the impact of the new epidemic that has lasted for nearly three years. Live houses

themselves are characterized by gathering and openness. These characteristics have become a barrier to their normal development during the epidemic.

In addition, there is a strange phenomenon spreading in the entertainment industry between 2021 and 2022. Many bars have changed their names and added the word “live houses” to catch up with the fashion, and every city will search out numerous bars named directly after “live houses”. Live houses have gradually become a mark of abuse; people may be misled into bars and other consumer traps, resulting in resistance to the real live houses, which is really engaged in the main business of live houses. This is not good for live houses, which is really engaged in the main business of performance.

Difficulties in Industry Market Expansion

Based on the current market situation, it is not difficult to find that live houses performances are still inefficient in third and fourth tier cities, especially in fifth tier cities, and many nationals know little about live houses. From the point of view of the number of performances, the weekend schedule of live houses in first- and second-tier cities is very tight, but the early and mid-week schedule is loose, and it can do more than 250 performances a year. But in the third, fourth, and fifth tier cities, live houses lack performance content; many bands in the planning of the tour simply will not go to these cities. For the band side, from 100 people field to 500 people field, then to a thousand people field, and finally go to thousands of people scale theater and tens of thousands of people stadium, they almost will not return to the small performance venues. This also means that although small and medium-sized live houses undertake the start-up and development stage of original musicians, they cannot participate in the box office revenue share of their performances after they become famous. In order to develop a brand new live house team, it is not only necessary to set up a coordinated, high-quality band in a short period of time, but also requires thorough preparation in advance, taking into account the full range of costs such as fire protection, location, and possible nuisance of the performance venue. It is a long way to go to organize a brand new live house band in a short period of time.

Despite the strong consumption power in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, there is no shortage of performance content, but most survive in a fully commercialized environment; rent, water, and electricity are hard expenses, everything depends on themselves, and live house survival costs are also relatively high. In addition, because most of the live houses are currently taken with the artist team share of the way to profit, in addition to charging the rent of the performance venue and ticket revenue, artist team needs to be proportional share; in addition to the drinks, peripheral income is difficult to compare with it, basically with the venue operator wages two offset. Considering the current tight schedule of artists and the increased cost of signing, the industry’s profitability is more difficult. The “2022 China live Houses Survival and Development Data Research” released by Small Antler shows that from the perspective of profitability, over 50% of live houses are still not profitable so far.

In addition, for live house, the real test lies in the soft competitiveness compared to the competitive advantages of hardware facilities such as stage equipment, lighting system, and sound system. Live house is highly mobile, and its content, talent, aesthetics, and operation are difficult to truly standardize and replicate. For example, MAO, which is at the forefront of chain-orientation within the live house industry, has opened 10 stores across the country, but despite having a unified brand, relatively consistent hardware standards, and slot management, it is difficult to achieve unity in the overall content model. The quality of different bands in different areas cannot reach a uniform level, which will also affect the industry’s reputation, market value, and future scale development.

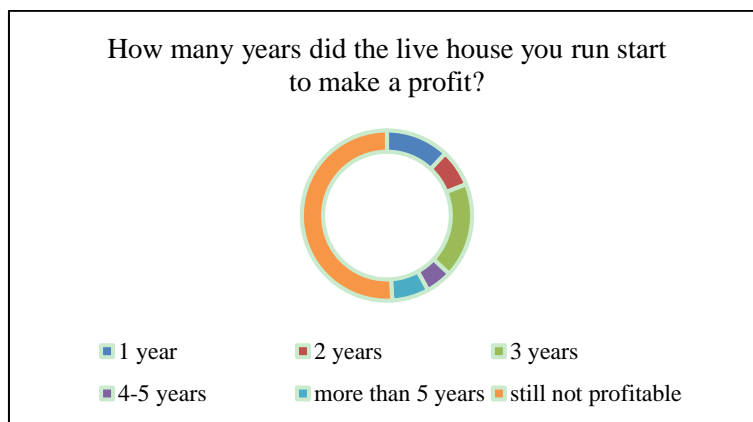


Figure 1. Profitability of the live house.

Cross-Cultural Influences of Live Houses in China

More and more excellent musicians and bands from foreign countries have the opportunity to perform in China. As the main platform for performance, live house has played an important role in cross-cultural exchanges.

Chinese Cultural Elements in Live Houses

As a cultural power with a thousand-year history, the live house that has flourished in China has inevitably incorporated many features of traditional Chinese culture. In recent years, there has been a wave of “national fever”. The organic fusion of these traditional Chinese cultural elements with live house has largely enriched its cultural connotation, and with the increasing internationalization of China, these live houses with distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics have gradually been recognized and welcomed by international live house enthusiasts and musicians, and live house has become an important medium for spreading Chinese culture in its development. The development of live house has become an important medium for spreading Chinese culture.

Chinese live house bands often have a separate member in charge of the folk music section, such as Mainland Chinese rock band Secondhand Rose, founded in 2003. This is not only an example of how Chinese musicians are pushing the boundaries of traditional Chinese folk music with the development of the music market, but also a good example of how traditional Chinese culture can interface with foreign music culture.

In addition, Chinese live house bands not only use foreign instruments such as drums and electric guitars, but also consciously bring traditional Chinese instruments to the stage, such as the flute, pipa, etc. The use of these Chinese instruments allows the public to have a clearer understanding of the uniqueness of traditional instruments, and allows more and more Chinese people to realize that traditional Chinese instruments can also play their own unique charm in the new era. As Chinese live house gradually goes abroad, the unique sound of Chinese instruments in the music can make people around the world perceive the Chinese language, thus making live house play an increasingly important role in the cross-cultural aspect.

The lyrics of Chinese live house music also often contain elements of Chinese culture. For example, one of the songs “Up and Down the Mountain” by the famous Chinese rock band Mountain Man has a large section of the song with the Chinese hundred surnames as lyrics. Expressing these obscure Chinese cultures to the youth of today through music, which has a stronger and wider dissemination capacity, enables Chinese culture to go out of China and into the world in a friendlier and harmonious way.

The Impact of Cross-Cultural Fusion on China's Live House Scene

According to a partial inventory, nearly 40 overseas musicians have chosen to tour Mainland China this year, performing in over a hundred shows, spanning various genres including rock, hip-hop, jazz, pop, electronic, and punk.

Cross-cultural fusion has brought different music styles from various countries and regions to China's live houses, enriching the diversity of performances. International musicians and cultural artists have offered Chinese audiences a wide array of music experiences, spanning from pop, folk, rock, jazz, and more, providing a broader spectrum of musical choices. Furthermore, the performances of foreign musicians and cultural artists have facilitated the exchange of cultural elements, including expressions of culture, dance, and attire from different nations and regions.

For example, Knaho Yakoshiji, a highly popular music monk from Japan, embarked on a live house tour themed "Happiness and Hope" in eight Chinese cities. On stage, dressed in a monk's robe and cradling a guitar, he became an iconic figure. Hailing from a family of monks, his music incorporates more elements from scriptures and Zen Buddhism.

In recent years, themes of human connections, existential pressures, media buzz, and more have emerged as shared concerns among young people worldwide. Despite different languages and backgrounds, they face similar challenges and stresses, making it essential to heal through the universal language of music. Live houses in China provide a platform for such healing.

Furthermore, cross-cultural fusion has attracted a broader audience, including international attendees, enhancing the recognition and appeal of Chinese live houses. This aids in expanding the audience base, increasing the success and profitability of performances. International exchanges have also ignited innovative spirit within China's live houses, propelling them to elevate the quality of shows and management standards. Through learning and collaboration, Chinese live houses can offer more professional concerts and cultural events, attracting a greater number of musicians and audience members.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current situation and cross-cultural influence of live houses in China are both significant and growing. These small, intimate music venues have become an essential part of China's music industry infrastructure, providing a platform for emerging and established musicians to showcase their talents and connect with audiences. Moreover, live houses in China have played a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural exchange and fostering international collaboration in the music industry. These venues have attracted international artists and provided a platform for Chinese musicians to connect with audiences around the world, promoting a positive image of China's rich and diverse cultural heritage. Their continued growth and development are likely to contribute to the further diversification and dynamism of China's music and cultural scenes, promoting cross-cultural exchange and understanding both domestically and internationally.

References

- Dalius Music Industry Research Institute. (2019). *2019 China live houses market report*. Retrieved from <https://max.book118.com/html/2022/0614/5110003111004242.shtm>
- Li, C. (2023). On the development status of live house industry in China's new first-tier cities—Taking Dahua 1935 and Euler Art Space as an example. *Cultural Industry*, 16(1), 147-149.
- Tu, M. Y. (2022). Loss, collapse, rebirth, live houses escapes from the life and death line. *Fortune Life*, 6(7), 56-59.

Wu, D. (2022-03-15). China live houses 20 years stands at the crossroads of commercialization. *First Financial Daily*, A12.

Zhao, M. Y. (2021). The development and dissemination strategy of niche music in the art management perspective: The live houses music scene as an example. *Shenzhou*, 12(5), 37-39. doi:10.12217/j.1009-5071.2021.05.019