



Influences of Music's "Chinese Style" Trend on Related Industry's Profit Making Strategy

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Abstract: "Chinese style" is a new music genre that has developed rapidly in China since the 20th century. As its popularity rises, which forms a "Chinese style" trend, the music gradually becomes commercialized and thus affects the profit making strategy of related firms. In the research, the author is going to explain and evaluate these strategies and their causes.

Keywords: Chinese style, popular music, industry, audience

1. Introduction

The rapid development of "Chinese style" popular music in China has greatly changed the field of popular music since 21 century. This popular music genre, involving traditional poetry, traditional melody, traditional culture, modern singing method, modern arrangement, and modern concept, attracts a huge number of young audiences. The author, in a new angle of view, analyses Chinese style music in the perspective of economics. Because many related industries of Chinese style music want to seize this opportunity of the music genre's popularity, various strategies are used to make a profit. The effectiveness of these strategies and their influences to the future development of Chinese style music are worth exploring. Therefore, in this study, the author analyses and evaluates the profit making strategies of the related firms.

2. Literature review

From databases such as CNKI, Wanfang, and VIP, the author found that early researches have fully analyzed the music musical features of Chinese style music in both aspects of composition and lyrics. From the view of composition, broadly speaking, the melody of Chinese style music is written "based on the pentatonic scale of ancient Chinese opera (Zhou, 2014)".^[1] Its orchestration includes not only traditional Chinese instruments such as Pipa, Erhu, and Guzheng, but also modern popular music elements like drum set and electronic sounds. Some pieces of Chinese style music may include ways of singing in Chinese operas or folk songs. Lyrics are another essential part of Chinese style music, which is regarded by about 50 percent of people as the most significant element that make Chinese style distinctive (Hou, 2015).^[2] One feature of the lyrics is the use of literary imagery. In Chinese classical literature, when people want to express their feelings, they tend to express in an implicit way using the literary imagery, mental images of things or events (Zhuang & Meng, 2010).^[3] As a result, this provides many things or events literary meanings. For example, "Willow" and "red beans" are widely used literary imageries symbolizing lovesickness. When adding these imageries in lyrics, its literature connotation can be significantly improved. Other features include the quoting of ancient poetry, which makes the lyrics to be more poetic, and the creation of classical artistic conception, which means the scene described in the lyrics is mostly in ancient times (Zhuang & Meng, 2010).^[3]

In this research, the author is going to analyze the Chinese style music not in the perspective of composing features, but in the perspective of economics. The author chooses this topic because when the increasing popularity of Chinese style music leads to its commercialization, the music has strong relationship with the economy. Another reason is that there are limited past researches focusing on the impacts of Chinese style music's popularity from the perspective of economics. Although there are past researches showing the effects of commercialization of popular music, there are no researches focusing on the particular case of Chinese style music.

3. Explanation of the term "Chinese style"

3.1 Definition

"Chinese style" is a new genre of music originated in China, featured by poetic lyrics and traditional Chinese instruments in backing track. In another word, it can be defined as "the congregation of the classical poetry, traditional music and modern elements of singing (Zhang, 2011)".^[4]

3.2 Origin

Chinese popular music originated from 1920s of the twentieth century (You, 2015). Since 1920, some musicians had already added Chinese style elements into their music pieces, but Chinese style was still a marginalized music genre before twenty-first century.^[5] The first piece of well accepted and widely-spreading Chinese style music is “Breezes into Pieces”(2003) by Jay Chou, which won numerous awards such as “MusicIn’s Song of the year in Hong Kong and Taiwan (2004)”, “Pepsi music list’s ten top ten songs in Hong Kong and Taiwan (2004)”, and “Pepsi music list’s best lyrics in Hong Kong and Taiwan (2004)”. This song was included in the album “Ye Hui Mei” which had total sales of 8200 thousands.^[6] It was the first piece that exactly matched the definition of “Chinese style”, including traditional poetry, traditional melody, traditional culture, modern singing method, modern arrangement, and modern concept.^[1] Vincent Fang’s poetic lyrics broke the gap between traditional poetry and modern music, which combined perfectly with Jay Chou’s pentatonic mode composition. After Jay Chou’s attempts, many musicians were inspired to compose Chinese style music, such as JJ Lin’s “Cao Cao (2006)”, Leehom Wang’s “Hua Tian Chor (2005)”, and David Tao’s “Susan said (2005)”. Aside from professional composers, amateur organizations were also inspired and formed to make Chinese style music. For example, the first organization of Chinese style composers, “Mo Ming Qi Miao”, was established in 2007 on internet. It soon gathered many musicians and music amateurs, which enabled them to communicate and cooperate online. People with different specialty, such as composing, lyrics, and singer, could work together to enhance the quality of music.

4. Increasing audiences

4.1 Audiences

The popularity of Chinese style music increased drastically. Before 2010, Chinese style was still a music genre of special interest and there was no category for Chinese style in music apps. The numbers boosted only in a few years. In 2019, according to “5 sing”, the biggest platform for original music, “Chinese style” already became one of the most popular genre of music. Here are the statistics of average view counts for the top 10 songs for each different genre of music in Oct.10, 2019 by “5 sing”.

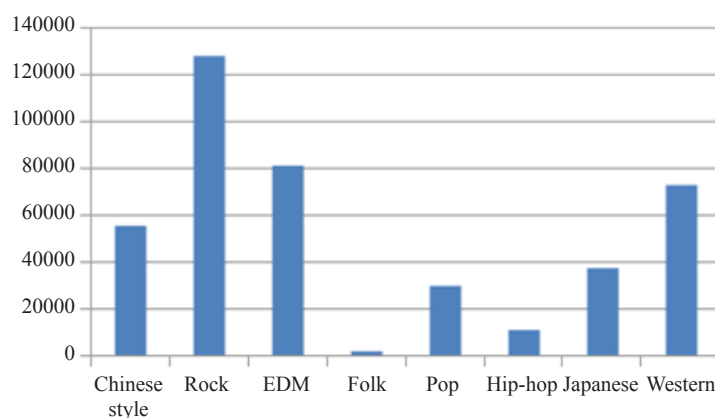


Figure 1. Average view counts for the top 10 songs for each different genre of music in Oct.10, 2019

Next the paper will explain why audiences of Chinese style music, the people who actively receive messages associated with this genre and consume its products usually or habitually, boosted so quickly in three perspectives.

4.1.1 Fashion

Chinese style music attracts many youngsters, the group of people who like to express individuality, show uniqueness, pursue fashion, and accept new things. By a phrase, more traditional, more fashionable. In Chinese style music, the combination of traditional and modern elements, which creates a romantic, peaceful and elegant mood by classical poetic lyrics and traditional instruments, is totally fresh for them and differentiates from those popular love songs they enjoy everyday.

4.1.2 Cultural identity

Nowadays, a part of Chinese people neglect their traditional cultures in this fast-paced society. While the Chinese style music may arouse their sense of culture admitting. The purely romantic stories illustrated in the music fulfill their spiritual world, enabling them to pursue elegance and refresh their mind. While for the Chinese literature fans, the philosophical and poetic lyrics, strict syllable numbers, reserved expression of sentiments, and the overall romantic mood

of the lyrics are extremely appealing for them. The Chinese style music enables fans to construct their self-identification, and deepens their sense of belonging to the motherland culture.

4.1.3 Conformity

Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms or politics. In this case, when Chinese style already becomes popular, many people may follow the trend and try to enjoy it in order to keep up to date.^[2] Many music producers are also influenced to change their music genre because many of the others made Chinese style music. It results in more popularity of Chinese style music and more people are influenced to enjoy it.

4.2 Consequence

When audiences of Chinese style music increase, preference and tastes change, and thus affects the demand for its related products. In this case, music is intangible that you may not directly describe its body as a good to be consumed, but people can buy its related products such as albums, right to use, concert tickets, etc.

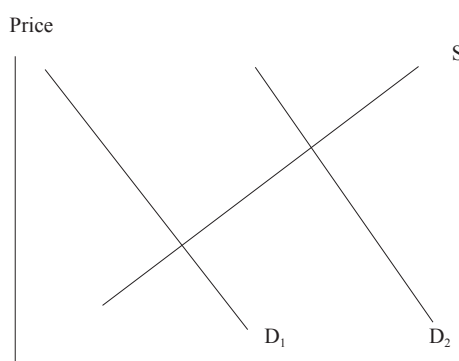


Figure 2. Quantity of products related to Chinese style music

This can be shown in a simple demand and supply model. As is shown in Figure 2, D_1 shifts to the right to D_2 and intersect the supply curve at a higher price level.

5. Firm's corresponding strategy

5.1 Firms of the music industry

5.1.1 Deal with the competition

According to Figure 2, because the prices of related products increase to higher levels, more firms make decision to join the market due to its huge potential profits. Thus, more pieces of Chinese style music are produced. This leads to a competition of music firms for the revenues from albums, concerts, and endorsements. In order to “win” from the fierce competition of market, music producers should do some improvements to make their music more popular among listeners. Firstly, firms can be creative and combine more modern elements with Chinese elements in orchestration to make the music well-accepted, because pure Chinese instrument may be not so colorful. One successful attempt is to combine Chinese style with electronic music, which is one of the most popular genre worldwide. This combination of music has excellent rhythmical sense, and is modern and refreshing. For example, “Mang Zhong” (Music links: <https://music.163.com/#/song?id=1369798757>), made by the organization “Yin Que Si Ting”, became extremely popular after it was uploaded in June, 2019. In October, it became the third place in the list of top 100 hit songs in “Netease Cloud music” and “QQ music”. Its success was mainly due to the combination of 2 genres which adapt to public tastes. Secondly, firms can focus on the lyrics that they can add more classical poetry imagery in lyrics to fulfill people’s pursue for the rich cultural connotation and the classical elegant style of lyrics. However, this approach may not be as effective as the first one, because majority of people are not able to distinguish the quality of lyrics but it may still evoke people’s aesthetic judgement and make a positive push to the public. Thirdly, firms can focus on advertising to increase their music’s popularity. Because of its crossover potential, it can easily have business cooperation with other non-music firms such as film and game firms. (This will be discussed in further sections.)

5.1.2 Further increase the number of audiences (gap breaking)

Another way to increase profit is to increase the number of audiences, which thus increase the demand for music related products/services. The music industries try to reach this goal by promoting Chinese style music from “second dimension” to “third dimension”, or from internet to stage. Although Chinese style music has already become a popular

genre of music, its main media to spread is internet that it is still regarded as the part of the “second dimension”, which means MAG (Manga, Anime and Games) . In order to have further promotion, firms decided to do some publicity works to enable it be acceptable in our real world. For instance, in November, 2018, a concert with the theme “Chinese style” was held in Beijing National Stadium and attracted more than 30 millions online and live audiences (Song, 2018). In spite of inviting the “ archaic singer”, some famous stars such as Miriam Yeung and Xu Song were also invited to the concert to overcome the gap between “second dimension”and the real world. Another example is at the same time (November, 2018), a Variety show called “The Youth of Chinese style” is started. In this show, many archaic singers performed on the stage rather than internet to show their talents.

5.2 Related industry

5.2.1 Business cooperation

“Chinese style music” has great crossover potential, which can be closely related to many other industries such as internet games and films. As a result, many of firms in these industries decided to cooperate with music firms to raise the popularity of their products. For example, since the end of 20th century, internet game associated closely to teenagers. Many of the background of popular internet games are based on ancient Chinese history. This is because many well educated teenagers were influenced by the Chinese classical literature, who may easily get interested in those games. The romantic story lines and characters with Chinese classical beauty in the game could also easily attract many teenagers to play, because the sense of reality it created can fulfill teenager’s romantic imagination. In order to further promote their games, game makers may cooperate with music firms to make Chinese style music as the game’s theme song. If the song becomes popular, people may be inspired to play the game. Identically, people who play the game also know the song when playing. Another example is the film industry. The popularity of costume drama rises significantly during the past years, and film music in Chinese style is indispensable for it. As a result, the film industry may also cooperate with music firms to make theme song with high quality to attract audiences.

5.2.2 Endorsement

Many singers/composers become famous for his/her Chinese style music and gain lots of fans. Many firms seize the opportunity to invite them to do endorsements, which thus attracts the fans to their goods/services. For example, Jay Chou endorsed the brand M-ZONE since 2003 and achieved success. The vice-president of China mobile said, “In the past three years, because of Jay Chou’s endorsement, M-ZONE has expanded to 50 million users. He played an significant role in the development of M-ZONE.” (Zhang, 2011)^[4]

6. Evaluation of strategies

6.1 Strengths

Firstly, when Chinese style music becomes more profitable, it creates more economic support, which thus provides more advanced equipment and technology for composers to enhance the quality of music. Secondly, the increasing competition between firms and composers provides them incentives to improve the quality of music in long term. In addition, for the gap breaking activities, it effectively further promotes Chinese style music to the third dimension. Chinese culture is widely promoted and spreaded through the form of music. It helps preserve the intangible cultural heritage and improves Chinese people’s national confidence.

6.2 Weaknesses

Firstly, when Chinese style music becomes more commercialized, it goes further to the “Beginner’s mind” of this genre. The fierce competition between composers causes the music to be made for adapting the taste of public and fail to express the true feeling the composer wants to express. Secondly, Chinese style music has a low entry requirement, which means it is easy to learn but hard to do well. For example, writing good lyrics of Chinese style music requires great literary accomplishment. However, some music producers don’t have the skills to write the lyrics, so they only use flowery but meaningless words instead. Therefore, when Chinese style music becomes popular, large amounts of music pieces with low quality are produced. This phenomenon is not good for the development of this music genre and may create bad impression for people who know it for the first time.

6.3 Opportunities

There are rich opportunities for the development of Chinese style music. Firstly, it can easily connect to the mainstream industries. For example, it can cooperate with film and game industries, which can quickly bring firms profits and popularities. Besides, the popularity of Chinese style is still increasing. It had not already broken the gap of “second

dimention” , so it is highly likely that there will be more opportunities in the future after the gap is broken. For the firms of other industries, there are also opportunities for them to invite Chinese style singers to do endorsements to promote their products and services.

6.4 Threats

The threats for the music firms are non-ignorable. Because a big number of firms enter the industry, many firms may not be able to grasp the opportunity due to their lost in the competition. In addition, increasing number of Chinese style music pieces are produced along with time. As a result, consumers may hold a higher expectation to the music. If the firm can't make music with high quality and creativity, it will be unable to obtain satisfying revenues.

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