

# Live Streamed Music as a post-COVID-19 Urban Trend: Accessing TME Live in China's Mediascape as an Alternative Concert Experience

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## Abstract

Since its rapid outbreak, COVID-19 had caused a huge financial loss for all walks of life in global (Szmigiera, 2021). Seeking alternatives out of the immediately enforced social-distancing policy, music performers worldwide have turned to digitally stream-based platforms, which have perhaps discarded consumers' usual habit of accessing live music. This phenomenological study aims to explore the impact of accessing popular music in the early COVID-19 pandemic period with a focus on online events by TME Live, which appears as an innovator in China's streamed media industry. The lived experience of the phenomenologists in designated events is accounted in order to investigate China's popular music scene in the pandemic time with a special interest to problematize emerging urban trends in experiencing popular music via Chinese media post-COVID-19. This study is to offer a substantial reference in researches on COVID-19-influenced urban lifestyle through experiencing popular music in a 'new normal' cosmopolitan mediascape.

**Keywords:** Chinese Popular Music, Live-Streamed Media, Online Concert, COVID-19, Urban Culture

## Introduction

Since the rapid global outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has overwhelmed the healthcare system by the actively escalating COVID-19 cases and the mortality rate only in a few months<sup>1</sup>, people in many countries experienced an 'abnormal' life: for almost 2 years they were generally affected with recurring disruptions in the manners of 'lockdown', quarantine, COVID-19 swab

<sup>1</sup> As of March 10, 2023, COVID-19 has infected global casualties with over 676.6 million confirmed positive cases, killing about 6.9 million from the world population (Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, 2023).

polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, vaccination, getting infected or being put under surveillance, confronting with unemployment or retrenchment, and even death, or loss of family, kinship and friends. Under this living condition, the mandatory compliance of standards of procedure (SOP) for safety was suddenly made inseparable in mundane routine and industrial operations. People were suddenly devastated with rules of ultra-hygienic concerns and safety measures in socialisation. Among those measures, social-distancing has been proven as the most effective policy against COVID-19, keeping physical interactions from a safe distance and obliging people for protective gear to prevent COVID-19 spreading via human–human social contact. This enforced condition impedes the organisation of music concerts, especially those held in an enclosed environment which can potentially function as a contagious hotbed of the coronavirus. Concerts were literally forbidden (Parsons, 2020, p. 403) without compromise during the early pandemic time before the release of the COVID-19 vaccines in early 2021.

However, the advancement in mediated network communication and data streaming technologies turned out as a potent alternative to experience music without having to attend the events physically. This has enabled telecast or recorded performances to become available through stream-based digital platforms that can be accessible by audience from home. For instance, livestreaming is to use streamed technology broadcasting synchronously in real time. It is different from non-livestreaming, video-on-demand, telecast on conventional media, notwithstanding all of which are technically streaming but in a remote, asynchronous nature. Livestream service can demonstrate and deliver celebrated events to viewers across a variety of platforms. YouTube held its ‘first live-streamed event’ in San Francisco in 2008, broadcast live to the audience via the video portal (Fritsch & Strötgen, 2012, p. 56). Vandenberg et al (2020, p. 149), who investigated the influences of music livestreams on collective social interaction during COVID-19 and explored how the collective consciousness of music livestreams generated, found out that both old and new ritual activities in music access would form an online community as reported in their exploratory analysis of collective music awareness in the Netherlands’ music livestreams. Hamilton (2019, p. 227–228) analysed the influences of streamed media services on audiences’ daily music experience, collected the interviewees’ music experiences using streamed media services via online channels, and founded an online social platform to encourage interviewees to reflect on the details of the music. The results showed that the interviewees preferred streamed media services on a daily basis, although traditional ways of music communication could inspire audiences’ ‘auditory nostalgia’ better than digital technologies.

In 2020, there were a handful of successful live-streamed concerts worldwide, including “Strawberry\_Z”, “One World: Together at Home”, Mayday’s “2020 Live in the Sky” and Eason Chan’s “Live is So Much Better with Music”. In China, TME Live, a subsidiary developed by Tencent Music Entertainment which has been a leader in streamed media industry, has rose as a dominant production establishment that integrates music, audience, and the event in digital broadcast on a mediated communicative platform. Through live-streamed events with a high-quality audiovisual presentation, efforts are invested to establish an emotional resonance between popular music and the audience via multi-dimensional approaches (Li & Surng, 2020). Zhang and Negus (2021, p. 9) highlighted the role of streaming during the pandemic, exploring how it provides opportunities to reshape and showcase the experience and meaning of live music scene. Popular music, as a form of music at the centre of the

audience consumption, has been spreading music through livestreaming during the COVID-19 time, which has undoubtedly displayed a 'different' urban culture.

### **Theoretical Background, Objectives and Methodology**

This study aims to assess live-streamed concerts as an alternative concert experience resulted from the COVID-19-induced isolation, and to analyse the impact of live-streamed concerts as a developing urban culture of China through the phenomenological and mediascape lenses framed by crossing the ideas of Arjun Appadurai's 'mediascape' theory and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology theory. The 'mediascape' term can describe the audiovisual culture through digital media in global cultural flows (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299), as well as refer to 'the images of the world created by media'. This theory reveals that in the consumer society dominated by visual senses, images penetrate real life and control people's senses (Ham & Lee, 2020). Husserl's phenomenology theory focuses on the development of times, culture, and human value in the context of time, and takes cultural development as the basis for realising higher transformation (Gao, 2020). Generally, linking the 'alternative concert experience' to the phenomenological experience reflects people's consciousness choosing the experience, including perception, judgment, and other conscious behaviours.

To investigate the impact of live-streamed concerts on popular music and urban cultural development during the COVID-19 pandemic, two celebrated live-streamed concerts provided by TME Live in China from May till July 2020 are selected as research data sources. The authors who then resided in both China and Malaysia during the early pandemic time played both roles of the concert viewers as well as phenomenologists, and analysed the live-streamed concerts in terms of webometrics, repertoire, and authors' interpretation. This study is to hopefully provide a gaze to the further development of live-streamed music post-COVID-19 as a prevalent phenomenon in the global urban culture not limited to China alone.

### **Urban Culture and Popular Music in China**

#### **Chinese Urban Culture and Popular Music**

Since centralised urbanisation has much elevated human lifestyle in modern-day civilisation, trends in popular music that contain potential aesthetics have reflected a noticeable mainstream of a specific, mundane and sociable urban culture. Despite popular music, once analysed, helps researchers to grasp the developmental characteristics and hidden problems of a particular urban culture (Bennett, 2017), the social functions of popular music as stated in Theodor Adorno's *On Popular Music* can also be observed. They include: (1) a provision of 'entertainment' for leisurely pastimes; (2) a promotion of sharing among social members through inherent and psychological models; and (3) a repeal of the boredom caused by mechanised labours (Shin, 2019). While enjoying popular music, people achieve a spiritual adaptation mechanism manifested in rhythm and emotional obedience, which can serve as a social glue to promote social unity and enhance social adaptability.

Urban culture is holistically determined by various factors, such as geographic locality, political history, regionality of arts and literature, climatic environment, living habits, economic activities, and the flux of population. Interestingly, the aura of urban culture is oftentimes excavated through music popularised in an urban area, as the music not just soundtracks typical landmarks but also narrates mundane scenarios of local lifestyle with

representations of a highly characterised urban life. This illustration of an urban culture is therefore made communicable to the audience via popular music (Lehman, 2020).

Urban popular music has adapted to the living environment under the social conditions of 'new normal' triggered by the pandemic (Binson, 2020). The significant changes and impacts of COVID-19 on people's lives will also be integrated into the urban development history and culture, forming specific cultural attributes. For example, compared to classical music, which is often deemed serious and aesthetically complicated, popular music can better adapt to the fast-paced, ever-changing nature of urban life, reflect sensitively and timely the events of society, and appear as a precursor of future trends. The key influencing factors of popular music include the support of new technical resources and the reuse of folk music resources (O'Grady, 2020). The development of media technology has brought new storage carriers and ways of popular music communication, which has changed the influence of popular music in social life significantly (Carah et al., 2020). Modern, vibrant cosmopolises that encourage open attitudes towards the surrounding are deemed as the source of inspiration in popular music. This widespread operation of music resources in China is illustrated in the following examples, with translated lyrics by the authors.

"The Song for Xi'an Natives 西安人的歌" comprises lyrics such as 'what's under the Xi'an city wall lies the train of Xi'an natives/what Xi'an natives must enjoy wherever is paomo'.<sup>2</sup> In particular, this song is sung in the local dialect, evoking the emotional resonance of Xi'an citizens. In "Chengdu 成都", a well-known Chinese popular song describing the lives in the capital of Sichuan Province, comprises lyrics introducing the climate such as 'I never forget you in that rainy little city'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, lyrics such as 'walking down to the end of Yulin Road/sitting in front of the tavern along'<sup>4</sup> have made taverns a typical landscape of Chengdu. This appeared to boost the development of urban tourism and economy after this song was popularised.

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<sup>2</sup> Original text: "西安人的城墙下是西安人的火车/西安人不管到哪都不能不吃泡馍". References in the lyrics are landmarks and cultural images of Xi'an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi, such as the Bell Tower, the City Moat, and the City Walls. The characteristics of the ancient capital, once known as Chang'an, as well as its new style and features are well illustrated (Figure 1).

<sup>3</sup> Original text: "在那阴雨的小城里我从没忘记你"

<sup>4</sup> Original text: "走到玉林路的尽头/坐在小酒馆的门口"





Figure 1: Featured urban landmarks of Xi'an as illustrated in The Song for Xi'an Natives [Source: open source]

A distinguishable urban culture can be mostly observed via the media. Mass media, such as radio and television, have become the supporting force in the dissemination of popular songs (Tanyildizi, 2020). As of now, the development of internet technology and communication technology has brought new vitality to the dissemination of popular music songs and has crossed characteristics in the dissemination of urban culture (Busche, 2020). Reality singing competition shows including *I Am a Singer* and *The Voice of China* are both broadcasted on television and marketed on social media. This reflects a new dissemination process of urban culture in the 21st century, in which two segments of communication are prominent: live communication and media communication. Live communication refers to the form of music communication in which both performers and audience are placed in the same interactive space. In contrast, media communication refers to the spread of popular songs via social networks and stream-based platforms, which is conducive to promoting the communication of popular music (Weill et al., 2020).

Popular music also takes the advantage of the internet and social media to convey the typical lifestyle of cities that express urban cultures. Special names like Eason Chan, Mayday, Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong Coliseum, and the Taipei Municipal Stadium are household names that connects to collective memory of the global Chinese. The arguments above suggest that live-streamed concerts held on TME Live in the early stage of pandemic lockdown had careful concerns about the selection of performers and venues that represent the inner connections between performers, cities, and urbanites, and the whimsy in this selection is often communicated with the audience through live-streamed concerts.

### Chinese Urban Landscape Expressed in Popular Music

Popular music is a social adhesive (Pogačar, 2008, p. 819). When appreciating a song, the audience follows the beats and get immersed into the narrative of the song. Songs comprising lyrics about cultural landmarks and life plots reveal the connotation of urban culture in the form of popular music. City landmarks help music artists create trendy popular music songs via the pattern of 'Architecture as Media' (McQuire, 2020). While the vision embedded in these songs also serves the purpose of indirectly or directly conveying urban culture. Urban culture is encoded into the lyrics to establish a connection between music and city, thereby empathizing typical urbanites who can find a connection through their reflexive experience. City landmarks are believed to be the basis for establishing the connection between a city and the audience (Danielsen & Kjus, 2019). Meanwhile, music composition can manifest the specific cultural features of the city through dialectic sonority, landmarks, food, and other urban characteristics in the melody and lyrics of the song. Particularly, popular music has the characteristics of popularization, and it appears agreeable with the audience's sentiments through the urban cultural symbols implanted in the music. Moreover, the power of popular music emerges not just from the melody and the reflective lyrics but also the references of specific urban landscapes and cultural life.

In Chinese popular music, the integration of urban landscape into popular songs has long been observed. Since Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE), descriptions of architecture, natural landforms and folk cultural life in Chinese cities were accessible in Classic of Poetry [诗经]. Famous ancient cities like Chang'an [长安, modern-day Xi'an], Luoyi [洛邑, modern-day Louyang 洛阳] and Jinling [金陵, modern-day Nanjing] were often mentioned (Qu, 2017). To date, this poetic expression is still evident in many popular songs of various genres, ranging from *shidaiqu* [时代曲] to Chinese rock, as exemplified in Table 1 and Table 2 which feature major Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, Chengdu and Nanjing that contains comparatively rich layers of historical heritage and typical symbols of urban culture.

Table 1

*Notable examples of popular songs that feature urban landmarks or cultural references in five renowned Chinese cities*

City	Song Title	Musician
Beijing	北京一夜 One Night in Beijing (1993)	Composer: Bobby Chen 陈升 Lyricist: Bobby Chen 陈升, Liu Chia-hui 刘佳慧 Performer: Bobby Chen 陈升, Liu Chia-hui 刘佳慧
	北京, 北京 Beijing, Beijing (2007)	Composer: Wang Feng 汪峰 Lyricist: Wang Feng 汪峰 Performer: Wang Feng 汪峰
	北京欢迎你 Beijing Welcomes You (2008)	Composer: Xiao Ke 小柯 Lyricist: Albert Leung 林夕 Performer: Various artists

City	Song Title	Musician
	鼓楼 The Drum Tower (2016)	Composer: Zhao Lei 赵雷 Lyricist: Zhao Lei 赵雷 Performer: Zhao Lei 赵雷
Shanghai	夜上海 Nightlife in Shanghai (1947)	Composer: Chen Gexin 陈歌辛 Lyricist: Fan Yanqiao 范烟桥 Performer: Zhou Xuan 周璇
	上海滩 The Bund (Seung Hoi Tan) (1980)	Composer: Joseph Koo Kar- Fai 顾嘉辉 Lyricist: James Wong Jim 黄霑, He Hou-hua 何厚华 Performer: Frances Yip Lai-Yi 叶丽仪
	上海 1943 Shanghai 1943 (2001)	Composer: Jay Chou 周杰伦 Lyricist: Vincent Fang 方文山 Performer: Jay Chou 周杰伦
	外滩 18 号 Bund 18 (2007)	Composer: Qin Tian 秦天, Lü Wen 吕文 Lyricist: Qin Tian 秦天 Performer: Yuan Chengjie 袁成杰, Qi Wei 戚薇
Xi'an	长安, 长安 Chang'an, Chang'an (2007)	Composer: Zheng Jun 郑钧 Lyricist: Zheng Jun 郑钧 Performer: Zheng Jun 郑钧
	回西安 Back to Xi'an (2012)	Composer: Ma Fei 马飞 Lyricist: Sun Lu 孙璐 Performer: Ma Fei 马飞
	西安自画像 Xi'an Self-Portrait (2016)	Composer: Zhong Wei 仲伟 Lyricist: Zhang Shiwei 张时伟 Performer: Wang Zhou 王洲, Hu Die 胡蝶, Li Xiaodong 李晓东
	西安人的歌 The Song for Xi'an Natives (2016)	Composer: Cheng Bozhi 程渤智, Fan Wei 范炜 Lyricist: Cheng Bozhi 程渤智 Performer: Cheng Bozhi 程渤智
Chengdu	蜀绣 Embroidery of Sichuan (2009)	Composer: Liu Jia 刘佳, Yan Yidan 严艺丹 Lyricist: Guo Jingming 郭敬明 Performer: Chris Lee 李宇春
	芙蓉花开 Hibiscus Blooming (2015)	Composer: Luo Tianze 罗天泽 Lyricist: Luo Tianze 罗天泽 Performer: Yisa Yu 郁可唯
	成都 Chengdu (2016)	Composer: Zhao Lei 赵雷 Lyricist: Zhao Lei 赵雷 Performer: Zhao Lei 赵雷

City	Song Title	Musician
	胖娃儿上成都 Pangwa Goes Chengdu (2020)	Composer: You Miao 游淼 Lyricist: You Miao 游淼 Performer: Yishi Band 衣湿乐队
Nanjing	山阴路的夏天 Nanjing Summer Day (2011)	Composer: Li Zhi 李志 Lyricist: Li Zhi 李志 Performer: Li Zhi 李志
	七十里的城墙 A Wall of Seventy Miles (2014)	Composer: Chen Yifan 陈一凡 Lyricist: Chen Yifan 陈一凡 Performer: Chen Yifan 陈一凡
	秦淮夜 A Night in Qinhuai (2015)	Composer: Nanyouji Band 南游记乐队 Lyricist: Nanyouji Band 南游记乐队 Performer: Nanyouji Band 南游记乐队
	你不在南京 You Are Not in Nanjing (2016)	Composer: Wang Yuan 汪源 Lyricist: Wang Yuan 汪源 Performer: Huang Jing 黄婧

Table 2

*Featured urban landmark or cultural symbol as representation summarised from Chinese popular songs in Table 1*

City	Featured Urban Landmark or Cultural Symbol
Beijing	The Drum Tower, Beijing opera, <i>hutong</i> (alleys), Forbidden City, The Bird's Nest, Water Cube, Xiangshan Park, Bus No. 104, Houhai Lake, The Second Ring Road
Shanghai	Oriental Pearl Tower, Huangpu River, Pudong District, Huaihai Middle Road (formerly Avenue Joffre), The Bund, World Financial Centre, Shanghai School Culture, The Paramount, Shanghai's Long Tang
Xi'an	Guanzhong dialect, The City Wall, The Terracotta Army, Huis' Street, The Bell Tower, The Drum Tower, Chang'an Street, Giant Wild Goose Pagoda
Chengdu	Chengdu-Chongqing dialect, hotpot, Du Fu Thatched Cottage, Emei Mountain, Qingcheng Mountain, <i>mala tutou</i>
Nanjing	Yuejiang Lou Tower, The Yangtze River, The Drum Tower, Hehui Street, Confucius Temple, Purple Mountain, Zhongshan Park, Presidential Palace

### COVID-19 and Chinese Popular Music

#### Chinese COVID-19 Prevention Policy in Early 2020

The COVID-19 outbreak worldwide has prompted cancellation or postponement of numerous concerts and art events. Musicians and artists all around the world were trapped in the dilemma of severe risks in health or zero income. In 2020 alone, about 20,000 performances were cancelled, and the losses in the Chinese music market have reached 2 billion Chinese yuan. Countries worldwide have intensified their countermeasures against COVID-19, resulting in a situation where people's social lifestyles have undergone tremendous changes. Policies to contain the coronavirus inclined to subscribe to social-distancing and a big-scaled quarantine or 'lockdown' that was practiced in China, as this enforcement was then regarded



as a much relatively effective approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the country with strict regulations of limiting physical interactions and social contacts to minimise the spreading of coronavirus (Rusu, 2020). Therefore, a large number of concerts, concert tours and stage plays were banned or cancelled, as populated activities that were discouraged by enforcement. However, another opportunity was given a room to flourish. In the early days of 'lockdown', music awards were transformed entirely into live-streamed events, which were broadcasted to on-screen viewers by using live-streamed mediated platforms while instilling the visuals to represent the pre-pandemic 'lived experience'.

### **Development of Live-streamed Music in the Pandemic Era**

Viewers of live-streamed concerts are generally urban people privileged with the affordance in ICT devices, such as smart phones and televisions, mobile data or home wi-fi subscriptions, and fast internet speed by fiercely-competing internet service providers. They watch live-streamed show at home without a head-count limit; they avoid being trapped in the traffic before and after the show; they do not necessarily dress up to the show; they interact with the performer by means of remote digital technology that brings viewers to a close contact with the performers just across the screen. When the audience cannot participate in any large-scale activities in a physical, offline setting—including concerts, against the COVID-19 pandemic—live-streamed concerts turn out to be a popular alternative for tens of thousands of viewers to enjoy music performances through different channels at home. This experience can be also deemed unforgettable. One of the most attractive features of live-streamed concerts is that viewers can experience an audiovisual immersion of a live concert on their electronic device screens. Moreover, performers can get rid of extensive equipment as of the need of live performances, vowing viewers with styles of simplicity or minimalism, and perhaps adding the so-called sincere showmanship that predominantly focuses on the aesthetics of voice and melody with a nostalgic approach.

Tencent Music Entertainment officially launched TME Live, its dedicated subsidiary for music livestreams, in March 2020, and has induced a potent spectacle in the music livestreaming market. The emergence of TME Live also explains why the setting of *chaoji xianchang* [超级现场, literally 'super live'], a highly-acclaimed entertainment programme, is attractive to the audience, and how it symbolizes a preliminary exploration for TME Live into the commercial branding path. The original purpose of TME Live is to target the space where offline music performances and streamed music combine for additional values of interactive effects, technical facilities, and user experience. In the later stage, it plans to invest in offline tour performances. Holding more than ten well-received live-streamed scenes, TME Live has created an innovative model for the popular music industry based on the joint effort of various technical developers in online traffics and offline performances. On gaining the emotional support of the "In the Name of Love" [以爱的名义] campaign, TME Live has created a number of *chaoji xianchang* music livestreams. In the process of commercial exploration between both parties, the branding image has been added to the digital chain founded on the celebrity effect and the culture of digital communication, which has improved ways of communication in popular music.

The opportunities for physical concerts shall wait to be restored post-COVID-19, but the void of zero concerts has been creatively filled up by internet streamed media predominantly represented by TME Live which incorporates offline and online formats of music performance.

This means time and space limits in real-life music experience are broken through to enable the audience to experience live concerts through internet platforms and interact with the performers 'across the screen'. According to the official data of TME Live, as of July 2020, the average number of the audience watching the 15 live-streamed events has exceeded about 3.2 million (Table 3), of which the live-streamed concert by Mayday on May 31, 2020 alone has reached out 35 million viewers (Zheng, 2020). Moreover, during the pandemic era, the platform provided by Tencent Music also launched 'Unity is Strength, Wuhan Way to Go!' [团结就是力量, 为武汉加油!], a song-writing solicitation for charity campaign, as to strive to support Wuhan through music in the most difficult time. This campaign finally received more than 2,000 original songs submitted by thousands of musicians.

Table 3

Data summary as of July 26, 2020 on live-streamed concerts held on TME Live–QQ Music (single platform) from March to July, 2020 (Wodexiaoyuganne, 2020)

Date	Performer	Event Name	Pre-show Booking (thousand)	View Count (million)
March 14	Rainie Yang 杨丞琳	删·拾 以后 Delete, Reset, Grow	77.035	1.010
March 27	JJ Lin 林俊杰	Love Wishes	212.297	5.120
April 11	A-Lin 黄丽玲	I'm A-Lin	62.143	1.060
April 15	Wu Bai 伍佰 & China Blue	《想见你》OST 彩蛋音乐会 "Someday or One Day" Original Soundtrack Bonus Concert	43.753	1.680
April 17	Rene Liu 刘若英	陪你 For You	155.924	1.590
May 15	Tsing-Fong Wu 吴青峰	太空人 Spaceman	89.485	2.020
May 16	Tia Ray 袁娅维	Ready for Love	41.003	1.320
May 23	Ricky Hsiao 萧煌奇	周末晚宴 Weekend Dinner	3.338	0.075
May 29	Kana Hanazawa 花泽香菜	Acoustic Live Tour 2020	89.653	1.420
May 31	Mayday 五月天	2020 Live in the Sky	5,321.450	15.459
June 6	Lala Hsu 徐佳莹	放生去热爱 Sing and Love	195.751	2.480
June 13	R1SE	以曜为名 SUPER.R1SE	177.594	N/A
July 5	Henry Lau 刘宪华	OCTIV Music Talk Show	198.035	1.988

Date	Performer	Event Name	Pre-show Booking (thousand)	View Count (million)
July 11	Eason Chan 陈奕迅	Live is So Much Better with Music	Sunrise: 1,903.944 Sunset: 6,349.814	Sunrise: N/A Sunset: 5.201
July 25	Charlie Zhou 周深	晚安, 明天见 Good Night, See You Tomorrow	731.151	7.232

2020 also witnessed the milestone in which live-streamed concerts served as an independent format in music performance. After years of improvement, the formats of concerts have been accepted as well, such as 'sofa concerts', 'rooftop concerts', 'dinner concerts', 'live houses', 'cloud ensemble' and the currently trendy live-streamed concerts that have gradually matured in context. With the advantage of online real-time interaction, which allows audiences to chat and interact while enjoying the concerts, live-streaming brings more fun than that in conventional offline concerts. TME Live also prepares for live-streamed concerts with offline footage; new scenes are designated and technically achieved with montage and visual tricks in cinematography that outshine the usual 'mise-en-scène' performance as of conventional concerts, and thus this creates a synergistic panorama of both online and offline features in music entertainment. From a realistic point of view, most viewers may not follow TME Live concerts all the time like variety shows; still, TME Live has achieved the excellence in another levels. It combines diversified forms of performance, such as charity shows, special events, and music festivals, and concerts by singers, voice actors, and idols, as well as new media and technologies in digital communication to the audience's demand for music experience.

As of now, TME Live has a user group of larger than an 800-million active monthly subscription, covering an even wider range of music viewers. Supported by different celebrities and brand resources, TME Live stands out from many competitors in streamed media industry of China, such as NetEase Cloud Music [网易云音乐], Douyin [抖音], and Kuaishou [快手], and immediately brought in a transformation in live-streamed concerts, which have become a 'new normal' to experience music during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, music will bound closer to urbanites and blend into the urban culture and its developing process. Live-streamed concerts combined with internet technology has brought a new audiovisual experience, breaking through the time and space constraints in music experience, and changing the conventional boundaries in music performance that we used to know.

## '2020 Live in the Sky' by Mayday



Figure 2: Screenshots of '2020 Live in the Sky,' a live-streamed concert of Mayday (Douban Movie, 2020a)

Mayday is a Taiwanese pop band with five members<sup>5</sup> who has released more than a hundred singles since their debut and held multiple concert tours such as 'City in the Sky,' 'Noah's Ark,' and 'Life Infinite Inc.'. '2020 Live in the Sky' was presented to Chinese viewers by TME Live through multiple music platforms on May 31, 2020 (Figure 2). In this live-streamed concert, they contracted the Taipei Municipal Stadium and placed light sticks on empty seats. The reason for choosing this venue for the performance was that it was the place for the first concert after their establishment. Actually, the band uses live-streamed concerts as an emotional outlet to connect with the audience on the other end, comforting the cultural and spiritual anticipation of the general public. Performing 'virtually live' even though there was no single audience in the stadium, Mayday presented famous music works and exciting spectacles to viewers through a one-hour live-streamed concert (Table 4). As an observer, each song was an anthem for a regular fan in his recurring list of pop hits. When entering the number This is Love, Mayday went up to the empty spectator stands one by one in the accompaniment of the music. This scene mimics a music video they shot 20 years ago, perhaps being an 'auditory nostalgia' for their fans. Besides, Mayday invited Li Ronghao [李荣浩], Mao Buyi [毛不易], and Jam Hsiao [萧敬腾] to join singing 'Suddenly Missing You So Badly' via a teleconferencing facility. They used a 'cloud cooperation' to dedicate a familiar song that strikes a memory and also perfectly interprets the theme of the concert.

<sup>5</sup> Namely Monster 怪兽 (leader, lead guitar), Ashin 阿信 (vocal), Stone 石头 (rhythm guitar), Masa 玛莎 (bass) and Ming 冠佑 (drums).

Table 4

*Programme list of Mayday '2020 Live in the Sky,' a live-streamed concert of Mayday*

Timecode	Song/ Track
00:00:14–00:03:16	一颗苹果 An Apple
00:03:30–00:06:41	盛夏光年 Eternal Summer
00:06:42–00:10:50	孙悟空 Sun Wu Kong
00:10:51–00:14:45	星空 Starry Sky
00:14:46–00:23:17	[speech]
00:23:18–00:27:12	我不愿让你一个人 I Won't Let You Be Lonely
00:27:15–00:34:02	派对动物 & 离开地球表面 Party Animal & Jump
00:34:12–00:38:33	突然好想你 Suddenly Missing You So Bad
00:38:34–00:43:26	[speech]
00:43:27–00:46:34	爱情的模样 This is Love
00:46:35–00:49:32	[speech]
00:49:33–00:51:34	恋爱 ing Being in Love-ing
00:51:36–00:54:04	知足 Contentment
00:54:06–00:54:52	[speech]
00:54:53–01:00:39	诺亚方舟 Noah's Ark
01:00:40–01:05:19	倔强 Persistence
01:05:20–01:08:05	[end credits]

**'Live is so much better with Music' by Eason Chan**

Affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, physical performances have been suspended and jobs were at risk. In this regard, Eason Chan who is an artiste from Hong Kong held a series of live-streamed charity concerts to raise funds for employees in the music industry to recover from the risk of unemployment. The concert series was named 'Live is so much better with Music', commencing at 6 a.m., the sunrise, and at 5 p.m. the sunset of July 11, 2020, at the Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade and Hong Kong Coliseum respectively (Figure 3). The viewers in Hong Kong and across China accompanied the performer on TME Live. This concept was perhaps borrowed from British pop band Coldplay's concept in their concert series 'Everyday Life Live in Jordan' in August 2020, but it was the first time in the Chinese popular music history that a live performance could offer both sunrise and sunset instalments on the same day. The visible venues selected are renowned landmarks in Hong Kong. The Victoria Harbour was featured as the first backdrop for the morning show that avoided the crowd in a confined space. Back in April 2020, when Hong Kong was under lockdown because of COVID-19, Sam Hui, a 72-year-old iconic artiste, simply strummed his guitar and sang to himself in Victoria Harbour with no audience. It seems that Chan paid tribute to this senior Hong Kong pop star. Ten hours later, he performed the sunset version at the Hong Kong Coliseum, a monumental concert venue that many Hong Kong artistes aspire to hold concerts when reaching the 'superstar' status. However, it was the first time in 37 years that the Hong Kong Coliseum did not have a live audience since its establishment.





Figure 3: Screenshots of 'Live Is So Much Better with Music,' a charity concert by Eason Chan (Douban Movie, 2020b)

Chan's concert has been carefully designed from the preparation to the selection of music. Whether from the content of the popular song itself or the performance of the musicians, it is more like to convey a message to viewers through popular music, and the picture is warm and touching yet profound. This brought a possible implication that the year of 2020 has brought too many moments of losses; human beings are more fragile and weaker than they can believe in themselves. In Chan's sunset instalment, the researchers were touched by the resonance of the songs and reaped happiness at the moment of forgetting words and humour. This is also the meaning of how music could sooth people. The stage is one of the daily scenes for musicians. They gain income on the stage, and more importantly, acquire a sense of identity and satisfaction from the audience to enrich themselves and continue to create better works. Therefore, the disconnection to music, stage, and fans brought about by the pandemic era has caused huge losses. Each song selected by Chan aimed to bring hope and spiritual support to music fans in the pandemic era and integrate the songs into the lives of Hong Kong urbanites in the pandemic context, as if he pressed the 'pause button' while slotting in hopes of life to people.

Table 5

*The Programme list of "Live Is So Much Better with Music", a charity concert by Eason Chan*

Timecode	Song/ Track
00:14:01–00:18:24	与你常在 Always with You
00:18:30–00:21:52	天使的礼物 Angel's Gift
00:21:59–00:26:08	黄金时代 The Golden Age
00:26:16–00:30:00	太阳照常升起 The Sun also Rises
00:30:03–00:34:17	相信你的人 The One Who Believes in You
00:34:25–00:37:41	幸灾乐祸 Schadenfreude
00:37:56–00:43:35	你给我听好 Better Listen to Me
00:43:52–00:48:11	防不胜防 Impossible to Guard
00:48:23–00:52:30	夕阳无限好 Magnificent Sunset
00:53:01–00:57:29	沙龙 Salon
00:57:36–01:03:27	后台 Backstage
01:05:49–01:09:45	我们万岁 Long Live for Us

### Conclusion

Popular music in a combination of lived experience and cultural life can express urban culture as an artistic work. During the COVID-19 pandemic when social distance was enforced and people are less likely to participate in physical concerts, TME Live has provided a compromised artform to channel popular music through a regular feeder of online streamed concerts to household devices. Even after the global pandemic situation, TME Live has established online streamed concerts as a normalized, systematic, and professional means of communication in the dissemination of popular music. The way it handled online live broadcast that combined with offline shows in China can somehow cater for different needs, concerns and expectations of an average audience as much as possible, even in the post-COVID-19 future. We took each live-streamed concert as a phenomenon that the audience consumed and experienced music collectively at a dislocated time, which seems to illustrate that the gravity of live-streamed media that gives an impression or meaning to the audience can still be profound.

The experience and impact of live-streamed concerts is a multi-faceted discussion. To a music performer, a live-streamed concert offers a completely different packaging sense and requires atypical specification of production than what a physical concert does; in particular, such content presentation apparently establishes a production format between a music video and a physical concert. To an audience, live-streamed concerts are becoming a regular option that almost equals to a paid subscription with some on-demand features, while instant interactivity is often enabled for more topical discussions among the audience on the dedicated online platform. The organiser is also an obvious beneficiary with more commercial impact and experience. It is not controversial to state that the production of a live-streamed concert not just costs less than that of a physical one but also leads to a better distribution result. However, the business model for live-streamed concerts is still immature and its potentials to innovate continuously still need to be explored in the future.

Live-streamed concerts cannot yet completely replace physical concerts, but there is no doubt about the prospective trend of streaming media. Perhaps in the future, the integration of both can obtain better profits for the popular music industry, and the platformization of digital media can also appear as a catalyst in the development of the global music history. Studying the characteristics of live-streamed concerts in Chinese popular music during the pandemic time can provide some useful hindsight for the potentially innovative trends in popular music as a developing urban culture post-COVID-19. With the global COVID-19 pandemic, people's lives had been affected severely and some are still not recovering fully; To certain urbanites, live-streamed concerts become an important way not just for entertainment but also for life adjustment. Fabricating a possibly new form of urban culture and the cultural memory of an era for a whole generation, the experience as observed in live-streamed Chinese concerts provided by TME Live may exemplify as an exclusive means of music appreciation in cities. A trajectory of the intertwining connections and the dynamics of urban folks, cultural life, and music creativity in the post-pandemic era will continue to be explored as a potential subject of scholarship in years to come.

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