

A Cultural Sensitivity Consultancy

Creative Business Project

Report - BMTY7006

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Introduction

China is the world's most populous country, with nearly one and a half billion people living there. It is an economic powerhouse and as a result of these two factors, is also a huge music market both domestically and internationally. Artists in China can command the kind of attention that is almost unimaginable in the West. For example, Chinese celebrity Wu Yifan has 45 million followers on Weibo, and has made the transition into the West, having been cast in several major Hollywood films and even sparking a huge backlash from American music fans when in 2018 his album out-charted Ariana Grande's latest release. These numbers were so extraordinary that many accused the singer of using bots, but with no evidence found, this event goes to show the power of the Chinese music market, and how it is impacting the global music landscape.

Whilst there are the challenges that arrive with launching any musical act in a foreign country, launching a UK artist in China has added hurdles. There is a huge difference in culture but also politics within the countries. China is run by the Chinese Communist Party, which have a strict control over the lives of the people of China. Particularly the entertainment industry falls under this control and the way that celebrities and musical artists promote themselves and interact with their fans must be compliant with the views of the Chinese Communist Party. Whilst there are eight other political parties in China, the Chinese Communist Party is the only one to have ever held power in modern China.

This huge and expanding market has naturally attracted a great deal of interest from the West, and the music and entertainment world are just as keen to tap into it as any banking or engineering firm.

But entering into the Chinese market is a journey into a very different culture, in which there are unexpected pitfalls.

As with promoting an artist anywhere in the world, it is not simply about releasing the music; interviews and appearances on various TV and radio shows are crucial to promotion, and this is where my consultancy will come into its own. Artists and their companies will not only need instruction for launching in China, but advice and guidance along the way.

In 2016 the newly formed Girl Group 'Twice' managed and created by the Korean music company JYP Entertainment, released a video with all the members sitting on bunkbeds and talking about themselves as a way for fans to get to know them. One of the main marketing points for the group in this video was that the members were from a range of different countries and each of them had the flag of the country they were from taped to their bunk. At a first glance, it is nearly impossible to see anything wrong with this video, but the youngest member Chou Tzuyu, who was only 16 at the time, had a Taiwanese flag on her bunkbed, as she was born and raised in Taiwan. Unfortunately, in China this was not taken as innocently as it did to the general international audience.

The situation with China and Taiwan is a long history, stretching back 1,800 years when it was first considered to be a part of China. However, the more recent history and what is causing the current problems goes back to 1895 when Taiwan was handed over to the Japanese at the end of the first Sino-Japanese war. Japan then gave ownership of Taiwan back to China in 1945 but during the civil war that broke out in China after the Second World War and the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek was forced out of China by Chairman Mao's Communist Party. Taiwan was effectively a separate state at this point now, and implemented a democratic system in the country. When Hong-Kong was reunified with China under the 'One Country Two Systems' policy, the same offer was made to Taiwan, which they declined. "And in 2000, when Taiwan elected Chen Shui-bian as president, Beijing was alarmed. Mr Chen had openly backed "independence". A year after Mr Chen was re-elected in 2004, China passed a so-called anti-secession law, stating China's right to use "non-peaceful means" against Taiwan if it tried to "secede" from China"¹. The final view is that currently, Taiwan views itself as an independent democratic state, but China views it

¹ BBC News

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as a breakaway province, due to the long history where China has had authority over the island. There doesn't seem to be any solution in the near future, as it has such a long and complex history.

Chinese officials said that because Tzuyu had been shown with a Taiwanese flag and not a Chinese flag, it would be taken as a sign of her supporting Taiwanese independence. This quickly escalated into the Chinese government banning all JYP Entertainment artists (including actors, models and dancers) from being allowed to work in China.

The solution was one that many international onlookers thought harsh and unkind towards the teenager. JYP uploaded a video to their YouTube channel with a clearly distressed Tzuyu reading an apology to the Chinese Government and asserting that she stands by China's 'One China Policy'.

Another incident involved former WWE wrestler turned actor, John Cena. Whilst promoting the new 'Fast and Furious' movie that he stars in, Cena mentioned that Taiwan would be the first country on their promotional tour. Unfortunately this wording angered the Chinese government and caused a serious backlash on Chinese social media. In an attempt to defuse the situation, he then posted a video in Mandarin where he apologised for his mistake and stated that he understands that China is one country. However, this response went down badly with many of his international fans who believed he should not have apologised, as Taiwan has a separate ruling government to Mainland China.

Whilst the moral and ethical debates over promoting artists and working in China continue, the international music industry shows no signs of any slow down in its push to exploit the huge potential of the Chinese market. More and more artists are being prepared for launching in China, including most recently Anne-Marie, and previously Avril Lavigne who released Mandarin versions of her hit songs 'Girlfriend' and 'Hot'.

The Economist Intelligence Unit report ‘Competing Across Borders’ conducted research into the areas causing most problems:

<i>“Differences in cultural traditions in different countries</i>	<i>51%</i>
<i>Different norms of workplace behaviour</i>	<i>49%</i>
<i>Diversity of languages across countries</i>	<i>27%</i>
<i>Poor quality of translations</i>	<i>23%</i>

(Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could select more than one option.)”²

This clearly shows that the difference in culture and working behaviours is a much greater hurdle than a simple language barrier, and one that needs a very specialised approach.

My proposal is to launch a Cultural Advisory service, to help companies both large and small to launch their artists in China and avoid falling into any of the potential traps that would be inconsequential elsewhere in the world but could seriously hurt their career in China.

Importance of this project

Whilst it is important for me to discuss what I am doing with this project, it is also important to explain why I am putting this consultancy together and the need for this service in the music industry.

As I have previously stated, it is very easy to get on the bad side of the Chinese government when it comes to issues such as Taiwan's independence and other aspects of the policies of the Chinese government.

There are many ethical and moral aspects to consider when discussing international business with China and everyone will have their own views and standpoints when it comes to this. My aim with this consultancy is not to direct or make these moral or ethical decisions for people, but to guide the people who do wish to do business in China to navigate the difficult waters of the way that Chinese pop culture mixes with governmental policy.

Celebrities in China are held to a very high standard of personal behaviour. In 2018 the actress Fan Bingbing (often dubbed 'the biggest actress in the world') went 'missing' for three months after she filed a tax return including an incorrect figure earned from a Hollywood movie deal. As many had suspected, this was for tax reasons and she was placed under an extreme form of house arrest, introduced to China by Xi Jin Ping in 2012. This is known as 'residential surveillance' that makes "it legal for the Chinese secret police to detain anyone charged with endangering state security or committing corruption and hold them at an undisclosed location for up to six months without access to lawyers or family members. Sources close to Fan told me that she had been picked up by plainclothes police. While under detention, she was forbidden to make public statements or use her phone. She wasn't given a pen or paper to write with, nor allowed any privacy, even when taking showers."³ The threat of actions such as these weighs heavy over Chinese celebrities and impacts much of their actions.

³ Vanity Fair Available Online

In early 2021, Chinese mega-star, Kpop idol and former Olympian Jackson Wang released a statement that he would no longer be working as a partner of Adidas. Adidas had made a decision to boycott China, due to the issues surrounding the use of cotton from Xinjiang province where thousands of Uyghur Muslims are being held in detention camps and allegedly forced to pick this cotton without any pay. Wang's representatives released a statement that read: "National interest is more important than anything. This studio and Mr. Jackson Wang strongly object to all deplorable behaviour that smears and spreads rumours about China"⁴.

This sparked a backlash amongst Jackson Wang's non-Chinese fans, many going to social media to say how upset they were that he could support the actions of the Chinese government in this way. But knowing what we do about the way that Fan Bingbing was treated it is no wonder that Jackson Wang and his team cut their ties with Adidas when Adidas cut their ties with China. For a Chinese celebrity, it is not simply a case of stating what they believe in; if Wang and his team had continued to work with Adidas, they would have put themselves, their employees, and their families at risk of government scrutiny, and threatened their careers and livelihoods.

While international celebrities and in this case musicians are mostly safe from these more extreme measures of Chinese security, it must be noted that the Chinese government will still use its power to control the actions of celebrities promoting within China, and will expect the international artists and their teams to behave at the same exacting expectations as the Chinese artists.

There are many reasons as to why this project is important, and protecting the artists and their teams is only one of them. Another important reason is that cultural exchange between different countries, and especially at a time when political differences are so strong between China and America/European countries.

⁴ Vice

Available Online

Pop culture exchanges are hugely important, and arguably the most important form of cultural exchange for the average person. We have seen the ‘Hallyu-wave’ over the last decade cause a huge uptake in interest in South Korea and one of their major economic factors is tourism. In recent years we have seen China start to have its own pop culture wave with dramas such as ‘The Untamed’ becoming known all over the world and TikTok’s about Chinese ‘street fashion’ going viral.

Sharing pop culture is a way to humanise someone from a culture so incredibly different from a person’s own. “Although ‘culture’ has traditionally been an important focus of language education, instruction and materials have often presented culture in problematic, essentialized, homogeneous, stereotypical and caricatured ways. Such depictions of culture may only focus superficially on colourful festivals, famous people, fashion, flags, food, and folklore, for example. Furthermore, learners are positioned as touristic ‘consumers’ of commodified culture, without being asked to question assumptions about their own and other cultures.”⁵

By allowing Western artists to promote successfully in China, it will also open the door for Chinese artists to promote more in the west. This cultural diversity will hopefully break down many of the stereotypes that people from both China and western countries have about each other. Whilst globalisation is a concept that is often taken for granted, as was previously stated, when someone wants to learn about a culture different to their own, many of the formal learning resources are static and often stereotypical. Pop culture allows us to break down many of the barriers that makes us see people as ‘other’. “In the twenty-first century these topics may not be compelling for transnationally-minded undergraduate students, given the plethora of more immediately relevant pop culture alternatives competing for the attention of young - or even older - adults.”⁶

⁵ Pop culture in Language Education P.186

⁶ Pop Culture in Language Education P.187

Target Clients

The target demographic are small to medium UK based organisations, who wish to introduce artists into China. Although they may already have access to support in legal, financial and practical matters, they will need personal cultural support and training for their artist and their accompanying team, to avoid costly errors.

There are already a number of ‘big players’ in the field of cultural advice, including ECA Entertainment and Culture Advisors; Protocol Professionals; and Kwintessential. Smaller organisations include culturalsavvy.com and individual advisors, working independently. The great majority of these companies are based in the US and have a limited presence elsewhere.

ECA, who advise and act for Universal Studios, Legoland and Cirque du Soleil amongst many other famous names, provide a wide range of services designed to smooth the financial, legal and practical paths for those wishing to expand their operations overseas. Protocol Professionals and Kwintessential follow much the same route, and all offer their services over a range of different countries.

Smaller firms, like Cultural Savvy, offer both training and advisory services to companies beginning to operate overseas.

One element that they all have in common however, regardless of the size of the organisation, is their focus on the traditional ‘business’ environment. Although some general advice on etiquette and protocol is offered there is little aimed at preparing an artist for working in such a different environment.

This tends to leave artists, who must make live appearances, give interviews and perform on live entertainment shows, having to rely on ad hoc advice from individuals, who unless they are themselves involved in the performance end of the music business, may have little understanding of the specific challenges facing someone live on camera in a country that is culturally very different to their own.

Market analysis

When setting up a business, it is important to have a full understanding of the market that I will be launching into.

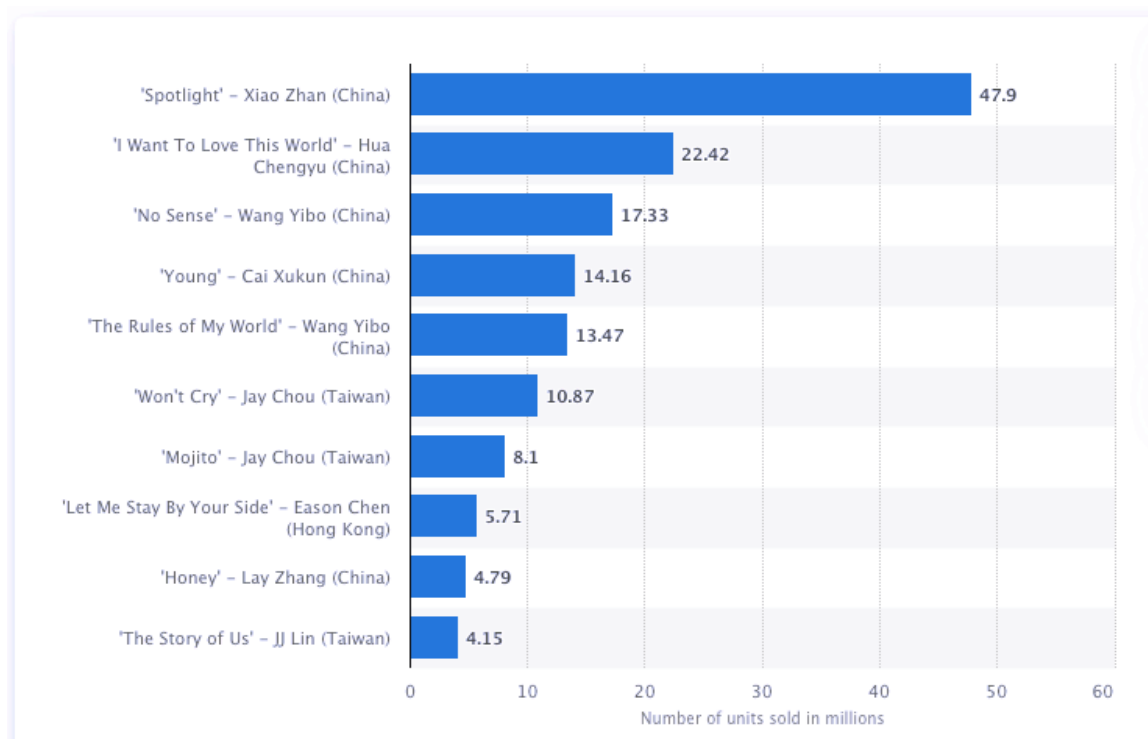
China has a huge population and as a result of that, it has a huge amount of spending power. Whilst the Chinese government will say that they are a communist state, the access that people have to international brands, including luxury and designer, and the different wages that people receive for different jobs, aligns China as being less communist and more controlled-capitalist.

This started in the 1980s with the Chinese government allowing people to set up privately owned businesses and to profit from them. The epicentre of this was Zhejiang Province, where many entrepreneurs started their businesses, including Jack Ma who in 1999 created alibaba.com.

The 'bottom up' controlled capitalism that exists in China today, is a huge part of many of the markets that exist today. Idol 'survival' shows such as 'Youth With You' give young people the chance to become part of an idol group and through that accumulate fame and wealth.

The Chinese music market is dominated by digital streaming. As China has grown to become one of the worlds largest economies and more people have more spending power, it is no surprise that most Chinese people access their music through streaming platforms. Although not all the same ones that we are used to in The West, this is because of the ‘great firewall of China’ blocking many American based internet companies from operating within China.

This chart from statista⁷ shows the all time best selling singles in China as of January 2021. Whilst all of these singles are from Chinese (or what the ruling Chinese communist party would deem as Chinese) artists, that doesn’t mean that there isn’t a place for international music within the Chinese music industry. Songs that tend to be popular in the west are often popular in China, and in the same way that in the west, songs in an unfamiliar language become popular due to their sound, English language songs in China are often based around their sound and ‘catchy-ness’ as opposed to the lyrical content. Whilst it is difficult to get statistics as to what are the most popular English language songs in China, there is a lot of anecdotal information about English songs that are constantly heard in China.



The magazine 'The World of Chinese' recently published a list of the top ten English Language songs that are heard around China:

"The Chinese love to sing, and they are not much bothered by which language they sing in either. In China, certain English songs seem to be constantly ringing in your ears everywhere you go, be it a supermarket, restaurant or tea house. And we are not talking about a bit of decent Death Metal either. Cutesy, bland, anodyne pop-songs are very much the order of the day. Some of these Western songs become so prolific as to enjoy far more popularity in China than they ever did in their country of origin. People sing these songs in KTVs, download them to their music players, even annoyingly hum them in public places such as on the subway or at the bus stops. Previously, we published a blog with 10 rather old English songs on repeat in Chinese iPods listed. This time the World of Chinese has selected another 10 English songs that are heavily overplayed across the nation.

1. "Let It Go [Frozen]" by Idina Menzel, 2013

The song originally performed by a Broadway star Idina Menzel won over the hearts of the Chinese, well, teenagers and their parents anyway. "Let it go" is played internationally and is not disappearing without a fight: the Oscar-winning Frozen soundtrack stayed No. 1 album in the US for nine weeks. No wonder, it appeals to the girls so much. The Snow Queen Elsa, who is in the original Anderson fairy-tale serves as a villain, turns into a rebel in the movie, craving for freedom. Girl power indeed. ...

2. "The Fox (What Does The Fox Say)" by Ylvis, 2013

Played by a Norwegian 'comedy' duo, the song can be heard in China's markets or on the streets. The song was so popular that the band members went on to punish children by publishing a children's book based on the song. The ditty was so popular in China, that two British laowai, or, to be more precise, two hosts from comedy news show C4 on CRIENGLISH.com Rob Hemsley and Stuart Wiggin,

dressed in panda costumes and made a parody video “The Panda 熊猫叫”. The video was staged at one of the Beijing parks, Zizhuyuan park, famous for its bamboo trees. In the weeks since its launch, the video has been watched by over half a million people on various online platforms.

3. “Bad Romance” by Lady Gaga, 2009

Though the craze for Lady Gaga, or 女神卡卡 [nǚshén kǎkǎ] has already cooled, you will still hear some catchy tunes from Lady Gaga played at various spots in China, either remixed or their original versions. She was named one of the world’s most powerful women by Forbes magazine and one of the most influential people in the world by Time magazine. “Voice of China” star 吳莫愁 [Wu Mochou] was dubbed the Chinese Lady Gaga. ...

4. “Someone Like You” by Adelle, 2011

Another internationally loved female star has also found massive popularity in China. Her single “Someone Like You” and “Rolling in the Deep” both topped the billboards in the US in 2011. In China, “Someone Like You” was a hit in karaoke bars and still is.

5. “I want it that way” by “Backstreet Boys”, 1999

Good old “Backstreet Boys” music dies hard in China. From Wudaokou to Sanlitun, it is played in clothing shops, and their remixed versions can be heard in night clubs too. Last year the band visited China and made a cameo in the well-known show “Voice of China” [中国好声音], and “I Want It That Way” was one of the songs they performed. Interestingly enough, despite the people’s love of their songs, when not on the stage, they are simply not recognised. When in Nanjing with a performance, they joined a basketball game at Nanjing Arts Institute where they were taken for strangers.

6. “You’re Beautiful” by James Blunt, 2005

James Blunt, former British Army captain, and one of the world's most annoying men is the popular song-writer and singer who performed at Beijing MasterCard center on January 4 this year as a part of his Moon Landing tour. Beijing as well as Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chengdu and Hong Kong were all on his tour list this year. We're sure James Blunt's fans used this chance to enjoy the "You're beautiful" song to its fullest.

7. "What Makes You Beautiful" by "One Direction", 2011

Another "beautiful" song caught the Chinese listener's attention. Played by Anglo-Irish boy band One Direction, the song became the debut single from their album "Up All Night" (2011) and instantly gathered vast popularity. Chinese music-lovers fell a victim to the dreadful song, which can now be heard across the nation.

8. "Lemon Tree" by Fool's Garden, 1995

Another karaoke king, pretty much everyone in the nation under 35 knows the words to this one, regardless of whether they speak English or not, and nobody knows why. A quick internet search tells me that the actual Lemon Tree, i.e. Citrus limon is actually native to China. So, it was clearly patriotism all along. Who knew?

9. "Trouble Is a Friend" by Lenka, 2009

The stunning video and simple lyrics quickly found their place in Chinese people's hearts. Lenka was born in Australia, but has Czech origin.

10. "Girlfriend" by Avril Lavigne, 2007

*Right after release, the song became a hit with the audience. Written by Canadian singer-songwriter Avril Lavigne, the song was a worldwide success. Probably, girls in China familiarise with the lyrics that made this song so big in China. It tells about Avril's protagonist who has a crush on a boy who is in relationships."*⁸

What this list tells us about the type of western songs that chart in China is that they are often the same ones that have gone viral in the West. But particularly the ones with catchy, repetitive lyrics.

Whilst it is not a prerequisite that the music an artist releases when making their Chinese debut be an upbeat, repetitive pop song, it is certainly helpful to them gaining popularity as English is not widely spoken in China, so they will be looking for a song that they can pick up easily enough to be able to follow along to, whether that be singing along with it or just listening on their phones.

As with the music industry in the Western World, ticketed events are a huge factor of the Chinese music industry. In 2019, box office revenue in China totalled 20 billion yuan, (approximately £2.5 billion). More than half of the people going to these live music events are in their twenties or teens. In the 2019 data from China.org, they stated that “Those people who were born between 1990 and the early have become the major audience for the performing arts, accounting for more than 55% of the total audience in 2019 ... The insight report also named top three artists in 2019, whose concerts were highest-grossing ones - namely pop singer-songwriter Jay Chou, rock band Mayday and singer Jason Zhang. Meanwhile, singer JJ Lin became the entertainer who toured most cities.”⁹ This young music audience is a great potential market for artists hoping to make a name for themselves in the Chinese music industry as younger music listeners are often more likely to listen to new music due to their access to, and understanding, of the internet. But there is also, across all concert goers a tendency to spend more on tickets for music concerts than other ticketed events, “The report noted that per-capita spending on concerts was higher than on other segments, with an average of 1,525 yuan, followed by musicals (1,280 yuan).”¹⁰

This high spending on music events, is not just limited to Chinese based singers, in 2016, South Korean group BigBang, became the “highest earning act in mainland China from

⁹ China.org Available online

¹⁰ China.org Available online

concert revenue ... earning 70.3 million USD from 36 concerts, accounting for 70% of the total box office of South Korean acts in China.”¹¹ Whilst it may be easier for a South Korean act to gain popularity in China than a western artist, due to the cultural similarities, the fact that a non-Chinese act is able to gain such a huge following in China proves that it is possible for foreign acts to gain a foothold in China.

Whilst BigBang is the most popular foreign act in China, according to the statistics compiled by chartmasters.org, there are also many artists that are nearly as popular in China as they are in the western world, such as Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, Avril Lavigne and Maroon Five.

From all of the data that has been presented, the types of artists and music that seems to be popular in China is very similar to what is popular in the western music world. Many of the most popular artists in China are either pop acts or a pop-fusion act, e.g. pop-rock, dance-pop or pop-rap. If an artist is heavily influenced by a non-pop music genre, it may not be as advisable for them to try and make a debut in China unless there is a strong argument to support it. However, certainly an artist with any kind of pop influence on their music may well be able to make a successful Chinese debut.

Market Research

I put together a focus group, made up of four professional musicians, three Chinese nationals working in the UK in a variety of capacities, an agent working with clients internationally, a UK radio DJ, an international film and TV casting director, and a television producer. Although not all these members work specifically in the music industry, their experience working with artists across television and film internationally made their

¹¹ LinkFang.org

contributions valuable and helped to expand the range of experiences. All had either already started to work with Chinese companies or begun to receive approaches.

They fed back that they were very aware of the existence of the cultural differences between China and the UK, but had no confidence that they knew enough to avoid unintentional offence. There was little awareness for example, of the possible outcomes of referring to Taiwan or Hong Kong, and shock that the issue of Chou Tzuyu was treated so seriously. The agent and casting director reflected that they would in future make sure that their artists working in China would have a much more thorough preparation. There had been an assumption that a translator accompanying the artist would be able to manage these situations before difficulties arose, but particularly in live appearances, even translators can be blindsided.

Marketing

While I plan to have aspects of this consultancy that will work for many different managers, artists, and their teams; a finely targeted marketing strategy must be prepared, as Sally Glick discusses:

“You need to have more structured, targeted marketing. Clients are looking for some extra hand-holding, good advice and a sense of stability. They are turning to their most trusted advisors, expecting their CPA to offer insights, ideas and innovative suggestions that are designed to help them weather the storm. As a general rule, clients are looking for experience and expertise in a particular industry or service area, not someone who knows a little bit about everything.

There are many ways to assist clients, but one of the most effective and efficient ways to address the collective needs of most clients is to host a range of targeted programs that hone in on their most significant concerns. Whether it is a cash-flow projection, an updated budget, a review of lean processes or suggestions on how to conduct layoffs, your firm is in a unique position to help clients with multiple business challenges.”¹²

While this article is discussing marketing for CPA firms, the points that it makes are very important for starting any kind of consultancy firm. As a niche business a scatter gun approach to advertising would not be cost-effective. I will focus the marketing on reaching artists and their management through social media and personal contacts.

A targeted social media campaign will focus on the stories of some of the artists who have made cultural errors, to underline the level of the risk and the financial and legal costs. Contrasting success stories will also be emphasised, such as that of Jessie J, who appears regularly on Chinese entertainment shows, and seems not to have put a foot wrong.

Potential clients will also be approached through personal contacts, offering bespoke services at preferential rates.

Referring back to the statistics from The Economist, the overriding problem that people faced when working cross-culturally was the differences in culture and traditions in other countries. However there was very little difficulty with translation, showing that more often than not, the translator is very capable with languages, but doesn't give their clients help or direction with the cultural aspects. This is where I and my consultancy will come into our own. We will be working specifically with people who have a strong understanding and knowledge of not only traditional Chinese culture but also modern Chinese culture, so as to give the best possible service to our clients.

¹² Glick

Social Media in China

Social media plays a huge part in any recording artist's career, and this is just as true in China. Weibo, is the dominant social media app in China. It takes elements of many other social media apps, but it could most be likened to Twitter. Users can make text posts (with no character limit, unlike Twitter), and attach videos and images. Where it is unique from the current mainstream social media platforms is that when creating a profile, there is a section, under the profile header, where a user can put their favourite movies and music for other users to watch/listen to (provided that it is available in China *and* through Weibo).

There is also WeChat, which many people compare to Facebook Messenger when describing it, is the other dominant app in China. Except that it is not only a messaging app, it provides, games, shopping and financial services. "WeChat offers far more than any of the Western messaging apps. In terms of comparison, it can be likened to a combination of the Chinese Facebook, Whatsapp, Google News, Tinder, and Pinterest combined. It also contains ten million third-party apps called WeChat mini-programs."¹³

For anyone wanting to gain attention in China, it is important to be active on Chinese social media, as many western websites and social media sites, are blocked in China. Some Chinese celebrities do post on Instagram, and Twitter, but for someone to be able to do this, they must have gotten specific permission from the Chinese government to be able to do this and it is not for their Chinese fans, it is for growing their international fanbases. The majority of Chinese celebrities however, have a significantly larger amount of followers on their Chinese based social medias. An example would be the actor, Wang Yibo, he has gained international attention for his role in *The Untamed*, a Chinese romantic fantasy television series. While this show is available all over the world through Netflix, he has 1.9 million followers on Instagram which is a huge number, but nothing compared to his 37.3 million followers on Weibo.

¹³ Dragon Social

However, the most famous of Chinese social media apps in the western world is TikTok. The short video platform has been picked up by people all around the world.

There are many social media platforms in China, but not all of them are relevant to an artist trying to make a name for themselves within China. It would be best for them to focus their energy on Weibo and TikTok for connecting with their fans in China. But in a less personal aspect, it needs to be noted that with Google being one of the websites being blocked in China, that means that YouTube is also banned as it is owned by Google.

YouTube is one of the main ways that people not only find new music, but also find out more about the artist, from interviews being uploaded, to music videos, live performances and more. There are three dominant video hosting sites in China, Tencent video (the most popular), IQiYi, and YouKu. Whilst it would be possible to upload content to all three, it would be time consuming. The best option for an artist trying to gain popularity in China, would be to upload content that they have on their YouTube channel, onto their Tencent channel, with Mandarin subtitles.

How my business would support artists and their teams with using social media in China would be helping them in setting up their accounts, as most Chinese social media sites don't have english translations available, we would also help with how to write captions and what kind of content they should post to make the most of their social media profiles in China.

Another aspect that would need to be taken into account when creating social media accounts in China, is that Mandarin uses a pictorial alphabet. Characters are used to mean what they depict, but can also be used simply for their sound, for example 'Italy' in Mandarin Chinese is written as 意大利, pronounced as Yì dà lì, individually these characters mean, 'intention', 'big' and 'profit', but they are being used for their sound to create a word that doesn't exist in Chinese. However, as all Chinese social media must be compliant with the government's policies, this aspect of written Mandarin Chinese can cause issues, for example, when setting up my own Weibo account, I got a notification when

making my username that one of the Characters I was using may be talking about a topic that was not allowed. Once I got further into the process of creating my account, it was fine but the problem was that I was including my name in the username. A version of the name Lucy is pretty popular in China, and is written as 露西 (Lùxī), the notification came through because the second character I was using ‘西’, has two meanings, ‘wheat’ and ‘western’. As China has very strong policies about ‘western’ propaganda, the algorithm on Weibo, sent a notification as I might be creating an account to spread information that is not allowed on the platform.

We would provide services from simply proof-reading posts before they go out, to co-writing posts, in order to help artists using Chinese social media platforms to avoid any difficult situations that may arise from not having a full understanding of Mandarin Chinese.

Services

We will provide services ranging from basic Chinese language classes (covering both Mandarin and Cantonese, depending on the region/s of China that the artists will be being promoted in) in order for the artists to be able to sing fluently or be able to answer simple interview questions, to advice for companies on how to best manage their artists in China, and avoid incidents that could have much larger ramifications than they would in the west.

China has a lot of television shows where celebrities appear and their fans can get to know them better; these range from ‘Happy Camp’ where the guests play games and compete in challenges against each other in front of a live audience, to ‘Yummy Yummy’ where the guests share their personal recipes and show the food they usually keep in their fridges. Both shows have had international guests appear on the shows, with translators. As an organisation, we would provide advice and training on the cultural differences that the artists/guests should know before appearing on these shows to be able to appeal to the Chinese audience more.

Both permanent and contracted staff would provide expert advice and training in all aspects of cultural preparation, with a bespoke programme including language tuition and etiquette. However the programme would go far beyond learning a few phrases and knowing how to hand over a business card. Participants would be given a thorough grounding in politics, behavioural norms and workplace etiquette so as to be able to navigate themselves safely through fast-moving live performances. Although artists are provided with a translator as a matter of course, a translator is not necessarily a diplomat, and cannot be expected to protect an artist and prevent them from falling into errors due to ignorance of the societal norms of their environment.

As discussed above, management of social media channels in China, would be offered.

Location

We will work predominantly online, but also belong to a working hub, such as Medius House in Soho, London. This would allow us to minimise costs for office space, but give us a London address. Soho is ideally situated for the music industry in the UK, and not only would we be able to hold meetings and training sessions there, we would also be working alongside other startups and more established businesses in the creative and media sectors.

Employees and partnerships

One of the most basic elements of any business, but one of the most fundamental, is employees. Who you employ and how can have a huge impact on the efficiency of a business.

I would start the business with a team of three, myself, an assistant and a part-time administrator. My assistant would need to have at the very least, basic fluency in speaking standard Mandarin Chinese and in reading simplified Mandarin Chinese. I specify these, as there are many dialects across China and some places in the south of China such as Hong-Kong speak Cantonese rather than Mandarin, and very few places use traditional Chinese characters anymore, and traditional and simplified Chinese characters are different enough that if a person can read one, they will be unlikely to be able to read the other.

This team member would also have to have a thorough understanding of Chinese pop-culture and how it intersects with the political stance of the Chinese Communist Party. Ideally, they will have lived in China for long enough to have a full and instinctive understanding of the nuances of social norms as well as the bureaucratic and legal structures.

These team members, if fluent in mandarin Chinese, would also be able to be part of the team that provides proof reading and translation for an artist's social media or various schedules they may have in China. Whilst these are most likely to be contracted out, it is vital that a member of the consultancy is able to keep a close eye on the content and approve it before publishing.

The administrator would not necessarily need to have as thorough a knowledge of mandarin Chinese and Chinese culture, but would need to be fluent enough to manage telephone calls and correspondence with China.

The services such as language classes and tutoring would be provided by freelancers that have been vetted and approved by the team.

Proof-reading and translation services would also be provided by freelancers, but it would be an absolute priority for us to vet and approve the people we work with personally, so that our clients would be getting the highest quality of work available.

It will be essential to build up partnerships with individuals and organisations within China, to provide reliable services such as an in-person translator, for when the artist and their team are in China. We would partner with a carefully chosen Chinese based translator agencies, so that even when they have arrived in China, the artists and their teams will feel supported and confident to go to their schedules.

The other partnership that would be essential to this business would be a visa application agency. The reason for this being that China requires a huge amount of detail on the visa as to the schedule of the visitor. Oftentimes, doing a visa application by oneself can take multiple attempts, due to the level of detail that is required. Costing £151 per person per application, it could easily mount up to huge amounts for an artist and their team, as it is very unlikely that all the applications will be approved on the first attempt.

Importance of the consultancy in having a physical and online presence

As I have previously mentioned, we will be setting up this agency with a virtual office, and using a physical space when needed. This is an integral part of this business, not just for giving it a more professional look, but also for running the business effectively. According to Kew Management, after the COVID-19 pandemic, “Only 12% of U.S. workers want to work from home full time.”¹⁴ Whilst 74% of the people in the study they cited, wanted to return to the office because of their interaction with other workers, 54% wanted to return in order to have face-to-face meetings with their colleagues, and 40% wanted to return to the office to have meetings with clients, and as SmallBizDaily says in their article about the

¹⁴ Kew Management

importance of a physical office space, “How you present your company speaks volumes, especially in terms of how that can influence the people’s perception regarding the quality of your business. This rule can also be applied to when potential clients come into the office for meetings. Without a physical office space, communication would only be limited to video calls or coffee meetings in a café. You have no control over the environment you are meeting your client in if you choose to meet in a public area. With your own business office space, you have a place that you can feel confident inviting visitors to with the knowledge that you’re representing your brand in the best way you can.”¹⁵

However the financial aspect of having and running an office space permanently at the start of a business takes a large amount of the startup money that could be invested in other aspects of the company. It incurs additional overheads including utilities, maintenance, cleaning and insurance as well as extra administration hours in managing the space.

These financial and practical issues, combined with the impact of the pandemic, makes joining a co-working organisation the best possible solution and allow complete flexibility around working arrangements.

For a fixed monthly fee, we would have access to office space and facilities, and meeting rooms as and when we need them. But just as importantly these co-working hubs provide a space where people who might become too isolated professionally as well as personally, can meet, share ideas and pool resources. Many co-working hubs become ‘themed’; attracting occupants from the same areas of business who can develop professional relationships with each other. These hubs are used both by startups and much larger organisations so would provide a valuable range of potential contacts. Some even hold networking events for their members which again could provide a valuable source of contacts.

Medius House in Soho is an ideal example, with a clientele working primarily in the arts and media fields and based in the heart of the traditional working area for these businesses.

¹⁵ SmallBizDaily

Becoming a member of Medius House would provide all the benefits of a permanent office in a suitable location, the opportunity to forge relationships with other businesses in the entertainment world, at a fixed monthly cost of £500.

But as well as having a good physical presence, a strong online presence is just as necessary for a business to be successful, as many people find businesses and services through search engines. But it is also important to have social media accounts for a business as well. As Future Access discusses in their article about the importance of having an online presence for a small business:

***“More credibility and professionalism** – Websites provide a sense of credibility and further establishes your brand as a professional service. Without a website most people will not acknowledge your products or services simply because it cannot be found online. Having a website gives you the opportunity to build a long-lasting online relationship with your clients. Giving them the reassurance they need to trust your brand.*

***Increase in customer reach** – Online shopping has blown up over the years- everything from computers and cars to food and services can all be found online nowadays. This means, the number in online shoppers have increased and since the internet doesn't have a closing time, sales are growing even after hours! Because you are able to access a website almost anywhere at anytime, the reach has become much wider, allowing your business to globally grow and target your demographic beyond your location.*

***Cost effective marketing** – Your website is working while you're asleep, on vacation, and when life gets busy. This means your website is always marketing your products and services even when you can't directly, potentially generating sales all day long! Paying that one-time website development fee is beneficial when it comes to keeping your brand relevant online.*

Your website alone is an advertisement of all of your business capabilities and can be extended through social media for further exposure. It may be a big spend on a small business' budget but it is totally worth the investment.”¹⁶

These are just some of the reasons for creating a website for a small business, and the website for my business can be found [here](#).

A strong social media profile is essential, and whilst the operation of the accounts will be outsourced, I would make the management of the content part of my own role. An immaculate presence is vital in promoting our business, as our social media presence demonstrates, perhaps more directly than other businesses, our professionalism and skill in navigating the cultural and political issues of the day in both countries.

Funding/financial aspects

As with any business proposal, one of the most important aspects to understand is how it will be funded and also how it will be able to turn a profit in the long run.

A quick google will tell you that there are plenty of banks and companies willing to make loans to startup businesses. Whilst this is certainly useful, a private loan carries risks and particularly if the business is slower to start than initially planned or hits unexpected obstacles. The experience of the pandemic, and the speed with which the world went into lockdown, is a harsh reminder that you cannot anticipate every eventuality, and that financial commitments do not go away. It makes sense to approach those lenders who have government backing which would enable them in their turn to survive difficult times and support their clients at the same time.

¹⁶ Future Access Available Online

The UK Government currently back a loan scheme which has additional safety features to help with setting up a successful business. The British Business Bank say on their website: “Apply for a government-backed Start Up Loan of £500 to £25,000 to start or grow your business. Unlike a business loan, this is an unsecured personal loan. You’ll get free support and guidance to help write your business plan, and successful applicants get up to 12 months of free mentoring. ... Start Up Loans are government-backed and charge a fixed interest rate of 6% per year. You can repay the loan over a period of 1 to 5 years. There’s no application fee and no early repayment fee.”¹⁷

I will also be using crowd funding and personal investment to raise the costs of running the consultancy for the first six months.

Initially, both my assistant and the administrator would be employed part-time, with an intention to move them onto full-time as the consultancy becomes more established and able to raise their salaries in accordance with the work they are doing.

With this in mind, I created a breakdown of the running and startup costs for the first six months of the consultancy.

Equipment:	£2,000
Professional Fees:	£1,000
Insurance:	£500
Rent/deposit (500PCM)	£3,000
Stationary	£100
Marketing	£3,000
Wages/Recruitment	£30,000

¹⁷ GOV.UK

The amount I will need to raise to start this consultancy will be approximately £50,000 but I am confident that it will be able to sustain itself once we are established and have a strong client base.

In terms of income, we will be providing several different packages to the clients who come to us for advice and help. We will also do everything in our power to work with a client's budget so that they can get the best value for money.

The majority of language tutors charge approximately £30 per hour session. If we were to provide an intensive two week course, we would have two hour sessions every other day, which would cover basic language skills and a basic understanding of Chinese culture. This could be fully provided by the language tutors as a large part of learning a language also involves learning the culture. This basic package would be fourteen hours, which we would charge £45 for per session, this would bring in £630, £420 of which would be going to the language tutors, meaning we would turn a profit of £210 on our most basic package.

Other packages would then add more in-depth education on cultural aspects, sorting out visas and help arranging and contacting translators within China. We will also be able to, as it is an important aspect in getting the visa, help with creating a functional schedule for when the artists are in China. The Chinese visa application requires a fairly detailed itinerary of where the visitors will be and on what dates, as they are incredibly tight on security.

Each of these packages would be tailored to the artist and their team as to what is provided and what they would want us to help them with. The prices will only increase from the basic language and culture lessons, but the clients will be paying for a high quality service that will be a huge help to them in their promotions in China.

Summary

To conclude this business proposal, my business will be a cultural sensitivity consultancy that will provide an industry leading service in launching UK and other western artists successfully into the booming Chinese music market, and help to bridge cultural divides through music and business.

We will tackle everything from advising on specific issues as they arise, during an artist's campaign within China, to quick preparatory courses, to even longer language and culture sessions with a team of experts in their fields.

Self Reflection

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Why I chose this project

I chose this project because I have had a strong interest in the Chinese music industry for a while. I have seen Chinese artists collaborate with western stars and to become very popular in the Chinese market, but I have also seen many non-Chinese artists and celebrities try to make it in the Chinese arts industry and fail due to their lack of understanding of the culture. These incidents cause damage not only to the artist, but to their representative agencies such as in the case of Tzuyu from Twice.

I wanted to create an agency that would be able to give help and guidance to any artist hoping to gain a following in China.

When I was first given the brief for this project, I had many ideas that I thought I could work with, but whilst brainstorming and researching to decide on which of my ideas would

become the final project, I came across an article on Music Week about Anne-Marie releasing a single with the Chinese superstar JJ Lin, as her launch into the Chinese music market. I immediately thought of the other artists I had seen make moves in the Chinese music market and how it could go very well, but also how it would only take one mistake for a huge amount of this work to be undone.

After some thought, I came to the conclusion that out of all my potential subjects for this project, a cultural sensitivity consultancy that would be able to go in depth into the aspects of helping an artist and their team to launch in China, was the best approach. As I got further into this project, I realised that there were many more aspects that an artist and their team would need help with when launching a campaign in China, such as social media.

It was not long after I had decided on this as the subject for my project, that the situation with John Cena happened. I saw the way that he was losing fans both in the west and in China. He accidentally implied that he thought of Taiwan as a country which caused him a huge amount of backlash in China, but when he apologised for this, he then started to lose fans in the west, as many people were angry with him for pandering to China.

As I already speak some Mandarin Chinese, I had not really thought about how difficult and confusing it could be for someone trying to navigate it with no understanding of the language; and when discussing this project with other industry professionals, I realised that if I had problems when setting up my Weibo account then it would be even harder for someone with little to no understanding of the language. This made me think even more about what other services my company could provide to make it a smoother and easier experience for the artist and their team.

Releasing music at any time can be a daunting task, it is something that both the artist and their team will have put months of work into and there is always the risk that it will not be as well received as everyone would hope. It is especially daunting when there is the added factor of releasing the music in a country that has such a different culture to the artist and

their teams' own. When releasing a song for the Chinese market, it would follow that part, if not all of the song would be in Mandarin Chinese, a language that is most likely unfamiliar to the western artists. This adds another layer of difficulty when planning to launch in China. My aim was to create a service that would help to alleviate the anxiety around launching a music promotional campaign in China.

To summarise why I chose this project, I believe that cross-cultural exchanges are hugely important, especially in an increasingly global world. China is the most populous country in the world and despite the actions of the government, there are nearly one and a half billion people living there, and by bringing western artists to China, it will also encourage Chinese artists to promote their music to a more global audience, and while political ties may remain strained, the cultural aspects will allow the people from various countries with different ways of life to connect through a shared love of music.

I have also seen first hand, from my own family how difficult a business venture in a country that is unfamiliar to you can be. I wanted to create a business that helps people to make their new business ventures in China as smooth as possible and to help prevent some of the issues that can arise due to the significant cultural differences between the UK and China.

What I have learned through this project

Creating and researching this project has taught me a lot. Some of what I learnt was information that was completely new to me, and some was a deeper understanding of information that I was already aware of on a surface level.

I had heard of the issues around non-Chinese celebrities, saying or implying that they viewed Taiwan as a separate state to China, but looking into it more, and the specific cases

of Chou Tzuyu and John Cena, I started to get a better understanding of the difficulties and the nuances with the situation between China and Taiwan.

I was also surprised to learn more about the history of bottom up controlled capitalism within China and how it has become an economic powerhouse over the last four decades. I was aware through general knowledge of China's economic strength as well as its huge population, but through my research I really started to develop a full understanding of how the economic and political stance of the ruling communist party has evolved since they took power and how that has impacted pop culture and the music scene in the country.

Looking more into the social media of mainland China was also very interesting to me, as I only use Weibo and had not had much need or interest in looking into the other social media apps available. It also became much clearer through my research into Chinese social media apps and websites that my business venture would need to provide support in this area too for the artists and their teams wanting to use them. Even though I can speak and read Mandarin Chinese to some extent, I was struggling with using Weibo and as I said in the previous section on Social Media in China, I had notifications because of the characters I use to write my name in Chinese. When thinking about this more, I realised how confusing and difficult this could be for people trying to gain a following in China, having to navigate not just an unfamiliar language, but also an unfamiliar social media platform and the cultural aspects of this as well.

Throughout my time learning Mandarin Chinese, I was always aware of the influence that the ruling communist party had on many non-political ventures, but the more research I did for this project, the more I found out how much of an influence it really has on the day-to-day running of the country and how that impacts everyone working in the music industry, including foreigners trying to make their mark in the Chinese music industry.

It was also interesting for me to look at how China has been impacted by the Hallyu Wave (Korean Wave) in recent years and how that has shaped the Chinese music industry, with

some of their most internationally famous celebrities having made their initial debut in Kpop groups and how ‘survival shows’ where a large group of contestants are whittled down into an idol-group, have become mainstream entertainment in China since starting in the mid 2000s in South Korea.

In the film and TV world, many Korean shows have been adapted into movies for the Chinese audience and had famous Chinese singers perform the soundtrack.

Overall, I have learnt a lot about not just the Chinese music industry, but pop-culture more generally. I feel that this will be particularly helpful when setting up and running my cultural sensitivity consultancy, as I will need to be not just educated and aware of the more traditional aspects of Chinese culture, but also modern and pop-culture so as to be able to give realistic and up-to-date advice to the people that will come to my consultancy for advice on their upcoming ventures into the Chinese music industry. This will help me to set the consultancy apart from other people who may also offer a similar service.

What went well and what could have gone better

When creating a project such as this, it is inevitable that whilst some things may go exactly as planned and the information that I am able to find back up my claims, not everything will go as I have planned it to, and there is always room for improvement in any creative project.

When I started this project, I wanted to create a service that would help to bridge the gap between China and the Anglo-European music scenes. I was inspired by an article I read in ‘Music Week’ about Anne-Marie making her Chinese music debut in a single with Chinese superstar JJ Lin. My initial thought was one of excitement but also nervousness, I had seen how easily a singer or celebrity can fall foul of China’s strict policies, but at the same time, this was two of my favourite singers collaborating and I believed that they could create a really beautiful piece of music together.

With this in mind, I started my research into how I could set up a cultural sensitivity consultancy to help any artists that also wanted to make their Chinese debuts or to collaborate on projects with Chinese singers.

I feel that the concept of this business and the services offered have gone well, and have been executed effectively. Each service provided by the consultancy all have evidence to back up why they are an important part of, and reason for starting this business.

However, there are always things with any project that could have gone better, or didn't go in the way that had been anticipated. The main one of these for me was finding statistical information, due to China's closed off nature and the lack of access to accurate information. The chart I used for the most streamed singles in China was from Statists, which is a knowably reliable source. However when it came to trying to find similar information for how popular western songs are in China, it was incredibly difficult to find statistical information about downloads and streams, so I ended up having to use anecdotal information, such as the list published in 'The World of Chinese' about the most popular English language songs in China.

Another aspect that I found difficult to navigate my way around while researching for this project, was making sure that both I and the information sources I was using were as unbiased as possible; for example when looking for information on the situation with Kris Wu in 2018 where he out-charted Ariana Grande on the iTunes charts. This was due to his large fanbase in China streaming and downloading his music through Apple, which is one of the few international music download and streaming services available in China. The fans knew that as a large fanbase, that they could achieve significant results on the American charts similar to what Kris Wu regularly gets on the Chinese music charts. Many American music analysts and journalists accused Kris Wu of using bots and when it was proved that he hadn't they then moved on to attacking the fans and saying that they had knowingly manipulated the charts. It was difficult for me to untangle the facts of the event, as the

articles I was looking at were written in English, were often biased towards the American critics interpretation of events.

Eventually I learnt that it was in-fact more complicated than either side was letting on, it was a clash of not only two very different cultures but also new and old ways of supporting artists, and two very different pop-cultures. This was three years ago and in those last three years, we have seen it become more common for fans of artists to have organised and coordinated streaming of their artist's latest release. Some older music critics accuse this of being chart manipulation, however there is no denying that this is becoming a more permanent aspect of how the music charts work in the modern age. The situation with Kris Wu was just the start of a cultural shift in the music industry.

Untangling biased information from both sides was one of the challenges that I faced during this project; information that comes from China will have been filtered through the lens of the Chinese Communist Party and is decidedly pro-China. Many of the English language articles I initially came across in my research, were written by American journalists and leant into a pro-America and anti-China rhetoric. Although this should not have an impact on how people enjoy music, the history between the two countries conflicting ideologies does in reality have an impact on how people interact with the music. I tried my best throughout this project to get as un-biased information as possible and I hope that I have achieved that.

Conclusion

Throughout this project I have learnt a lot about both the Western music industry and the Chinese music industry. While they both have many similarities, it was the differences between them that made it very interesting to learn about. I was particularly interested in how much more conscious of their image Chinese celebrities and people promoting in China have to be than in the western music industry. In the west, if a celebrity is found to

have not paid their fair amount of taxes it may cause some backlash but nothing on the level of what happened to Fan Bingbing.

The more I discovered about these crucial differences in these powerhouse areas of the music industry, the more I realised how important this project was. Whilst the music may speak for itself, these differences are of such importance that a cultural sensitivity consultancy to help western artists bridge these crucial differences will be of benefit to everyone involved.

Targeting clients who have an already established fanbase in the UK or western music industry will allow me to mitigate much of the risk involved in launching an artist in China. The consultancy would focus on expanding a pre-existing fanbase into China, rather than trying to launch an artist in China who has been unable to gain a significant following in the West. However, throughout this project, I was aware that I did not want the programmes offered by the consultancy to be only within the reach of the wealthiest music representative companies. This is why I made the decision to make the services offered tailor made to the client and their exact needs.

The difficulties in promoting a non-Chinese act in China are many and throughout this project, I hope that I have shown how a cultural sensitivity consultancy such as this one would be able to minimise the risks involved, at least from a cultural and political viewpoint. There is a huge amount of positivity that can come from sharing music across the world and how it can bring people from different walks of life together. My hope and aim with this project was to show that whilst there may be political and cultural hurdles in promoting western musical artists in China, the benefits of sharing music and business across these countries outweigh the risks and with this consultancy, these risks will be minimised as much as possible.

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