

The Reasons for The Success of *The Phantom of The Opera* And Its Impact on The Chinese Musical Industry

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Abstract. In recent years, the rapid development of musicals in China has been witnessed. The acceptance of musicals among the young population has been continuously rising, and both domestic and international musical productions are frequently staged. Against this backdrop, this study focuses on the classic musical *The Phantom of the Opera*. Through literature research, questionnaire surveys, and field interviews, it is found that its success stems from factors such as the integration of classical and pop music, immersive stage design, global operation, and localization adaptation. Meanwhile, it has a profound impact on China's musical industry in terms of market enlightenment and technological upgrading. However, it also exposes the shortcomings of China's musical industry, such as the lack of depth in scripts and the lagging development of original IPs. The study argues that *The Phantom of the Opera* has achieved its enduring and powerful global influence through multi-dimensional innovations. Although China's musical industry has achieved certain development, it still faces problems such as insufficient originality. It needs to take targeted actions in strengthening originality, improving script quality, and activating the development of original IPs. By actively exploring and seeking substantial breakthroughs, it can steadily advance and shine uniquely in the highly competitive musical market.

Keywords: The Phantom of the Opera; Chinese musicals; creative concepts.

1. Introduction

The Chinese musical market has grown rapidly in recent years. Professional venues in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai frequently introduce foreign classic productions, with increasing performance numbers, box office revenue, and capital inflows. For example, Shanghai WenGuang Performing Arts Group has imported international shows like *Les Misérables* and *The Phantom of the Opera* under its "Shanghai See!" brand, while creating immersive dramas like *Sleep No More* to drive cultural-commerce-tourism integration [1]. Original domestic musicals are also emerging, with younger generations showing growing awareness and acceptance. Musical-related topics trend on social media, and fan events nationwide attract large youth audiences. As a historical classic, *The Phantom of the Opera* has achieved global success and profoundly influenced China's musical industry. This paper analyzes the multi-dimensional reasons behind its success—artistic creation, stage presentation, IP operation—and discusses its impacts on China's creative concepts, production standards, talent development, and market cultivation, aiming to provide insights for industry growth.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly perspectives on *The Phantom of the Opera*'s success broadly fall into two categories. The first emphasizes the work's intrinsic charm. In music, it exemplifies excellence by blending bel canto with pop, appealing to diverse audiences—from classical enthusiasts to pop lovers [2]. Its stagecraft is equally striking: elaborate scenes like the falling chandelier and underground maze deliver visual spectacles, while the "play within a play" structure and eerie atmosphere immerse audiences in a fantastical world [3]. Actors' physical expressiveness is also critical; their precise body language (three-dimensionally shapes characters, enhances emotional resonance, and elevates artistic quality [4].

The second category highlights its international operation model. Strategies like film adaptations and IP linkage leverage the musical's existing script, high-quality music, and large audience base [5]. In China, the English original version achieved remarkable success: 59 sold-out shows in Shanghai with an ¥80 million box office, demonstrating its popularity [6]. These performances attracted audiences, cultivated a fan base, and raised public awareness. While high ticket prices initially limited accessibility, musical films broadened its reach, merging with cinema to expand global influence and solidify its classic status [7].

3. Research Methods

This study employs mixed methods—literature review, questionnaires, and interviews—to investigate audience-attracting elements of *The Phantom of the Opera* and shortcomings in Chinese musicals.

3.1. Questionnaire Survey

The research subjects are mainly young people aged 16-30, mostly white-collar workers who are interested in musicals.

The questionnaire consists of 12 self-designed questions, including 7 single-choice questions and 5 multiple-choice questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Audience Research on *The Phantom of the Opera*

Number	Question
1	Your gender?
2	Your age group?
3	Your occupation?
4	Through which channels did you learn about <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> ?
5	What do you think is the most attractive element of <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> ?
6	Which of the following stage scenes impressed you the most?
7	Which song impressed you the most?
8	Do you support the localization of classic musicals?
9	What do you think is the main impact of the success of <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> on China's musical industry?
10	What do you think are the main shortcomings of Chinese musicals?
11	Are you willing to pay more than 500 yuan for excellent musicals?
12	Which musical-related derivative peripherals have you purchased?

A total of 210 questionnaires were recovered, all of which were valid data.

3.2. Interviews

After the questionnaires were recovered, during the analysis of the questionnaire results, it was found that the results of some questions were not specific enough. Therefore, special interviews were conducted.

The interviewees selected three people: a college student interested in musicals, a person engaged in the musical industry, and a music major student. Table 2 shows the interview outline.

Table 2. Interview Outline

Number	Question
1	Before contacting <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> , what was your preference for music? For example, favorite music genres, singers, etc.
2	What specific impacts has the music in <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> had on your musical aesthetics? Has it made you start paying attention to classical music, musical soundtracks, or changed your understanding of musical emotional expression?
3	What do you think is the most unique musical element in <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> ? How does this uniqueness affect your evaluation and appreciation of other musical works?
4	After watching <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> , has your aesthetic in daily life regarding architecture, interior decoration, fashion design, etc., changed? Have you particularly paid attention to certain design styles or elements?
5	Is there a specific stage art design (such as the underground maze, chandelier falling scene, etc.) that you have used as one of the criteria for judging the quality of stage art when appreciating other stage performances or film and television works?
6	Which character in <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> is your favorite? Why? How has the shaping of this character (personality, experience, emotions, etc.) influenced your emotional aesthetics?
7	After contacting this work, are you more willing to appreciate other types of comprehensive art performances (such as ballet, drama, etc.)? Why?
8	Do you think <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> will continue to influence your aesthetics in the future? In what way?
9	For those who have not seen <i>The Phantom of the Opera</i> , how would you describe the impact of this work on your aesthetic preferences to encourage them to appreciate it?

The interview process lasted about 15 minutes per person, and the interview was recorded on audio. After the interview, the audio materials were analyzed.

4. Research Results

4.1. Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire survey (as shown in Figure 1) shows that 55.71% of the respondents believe that music and songs are the most attractive elements of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Arias such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Music of the Night* integrate bel canto and pop elements, retaining the artistic depth of opera while being widely spreadable.

24.29% of the respondents paid attention to character shaping. The contradictory personality of the Phantom (a lonely genius with dark traits) and Christine's emotional struggles are three-dimensionally presented through delicate lyrics and actors' body language (such as the mystery of the Phantom moving through the underground maze), triggering the audience's empathy for the complexity of human nature.

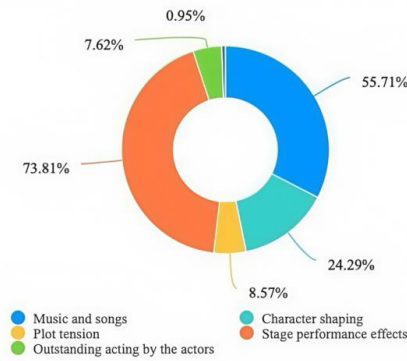


Figure 1. What are the most attractive elements of *The Phantom of the Opera*?

73.81% of the respondents believe that the stage performance effect is the most attractive element of the opera. Scenes such as "chandelier falling," "underground maze," and "masked ball" create an immersive experience of interweaving reality and illusion through the combination of mechanical devices, lighting effects, and stage art. As shown in Figure 2, the falling scene of the crystal chandelier becomes the climax of the whole play, and 24.76% of the respondents were most impressed by this scene.

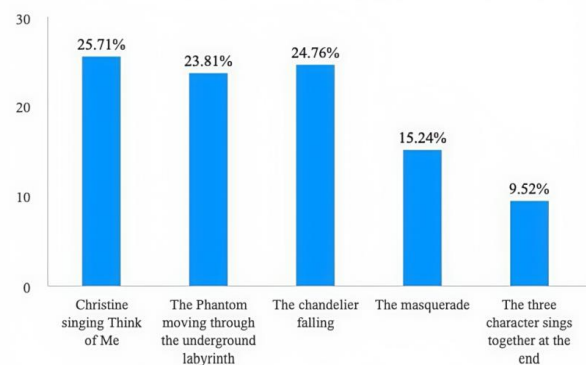


Figure 2. Which of the following scenes impressed you the most?

Multi-media IP linkage is also an important reason for the success of the play. As shown in Figure 3, the film adaptation of the musical (such as the 2004 film version) has shifted the ticket price threshold from "niche" to "mass," and 42.38% of the respondents learned about *The Phantom of the Opera* through films and derivative works, achieving cross-media communication of "musical-film-streaming media." As shown in Figure 4, 89.05% of the respondents in the questionnaire have purchased peripherals such as program books, sheet music, and co-branded drinks, indicating the commercial potential of IP derivative development.

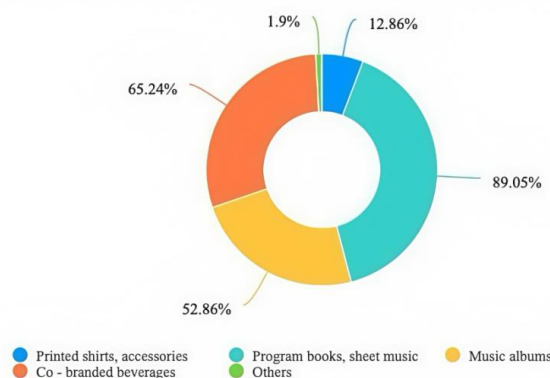


Figure 3. Through which channels did you learn about *The Phantom of the Opera*?

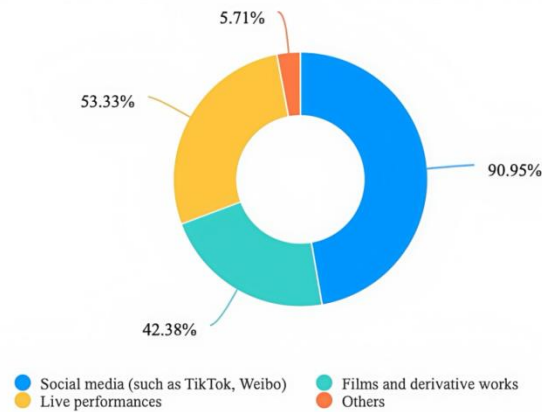


Figure 4. Which musical-related derivative peripherals have you purchased?

Regarding Chinese musicals, *The Phantom of the Opera* has raised domestic audiences' expectations for the narrative complexity of musicals. As shown in Figure 5, 92.86% of the respondents believe that it has promoted the improvement of Chinese audiences' aesthetic standards, prompting local works to pay more attention to musical originality and three-dimensional character shaping. To undertake the tour of *The Phantom of the Opera*, theaters such as the Shenzhen Binhai Art Center have invested more than 1 billion yuan to upgrade equipment (such as crystal chandelier lifting systems and dry ice special effect devices), and 46.67% of the respondents believe that it has promoted the progress of China's stage art technology. The original version of *The Phantom of the Opera* created an 80 million yuan box office and a 100% attendance rate in Shanghai, and 59.52% of the respondents believe that it has attracted more capital investment into China's musical industry and promoted the expansion of the performance market.

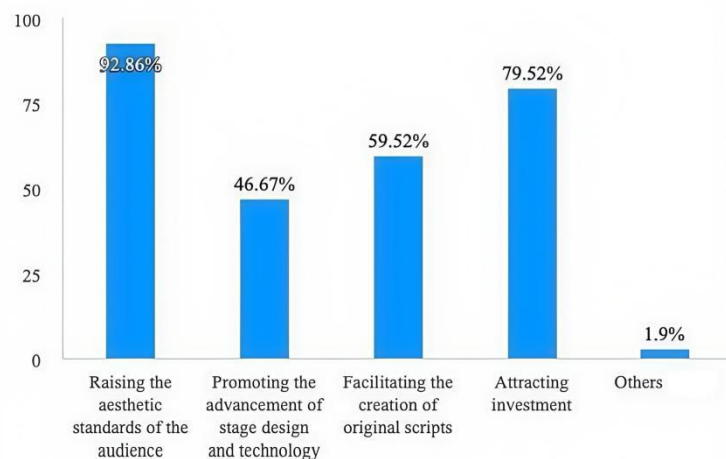


Figure 5. What do you think is the main impact of the success of *The Phantom of the Opera* on China's musical industry?

As shown in Figure 6, 77.14% of the respondents listed "lack of depth in the script" as the primary shortcoming of Chinese musicals. More than 60% of local plays focus on historical and mythological themes, lacking exploration of modern social issues. 54.29% of the respondents pointed out "insufficient comprehensive abilities of actors," as local actors lack talents who can handle the highly difficult roles requiring "singing, dancing, and acting" integration in *The Phantom of the Opera*. 24.76% of the respondents pointed out the lack of originality in music, as some plays directly copy pop song melodies or blindly imitate Western musical arrangements, resulting in style fragmentation.

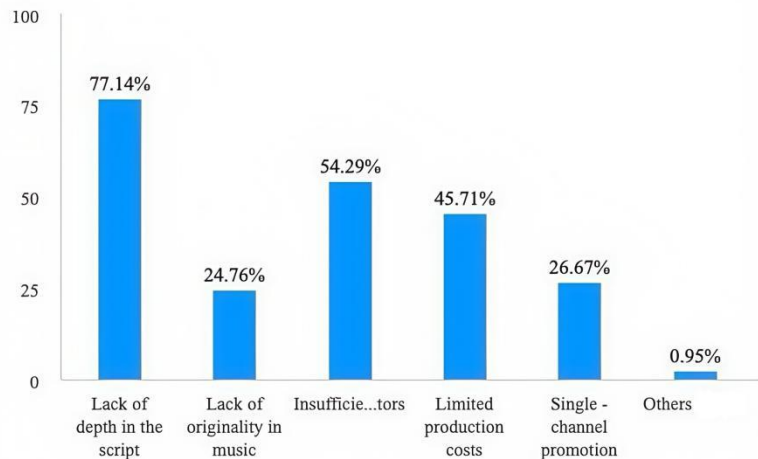


Figure 6. What do you think are the main shortcomings of Chinese musicals?

4.2. Interview Results

This study interviewed three musical lovers, focusing on aspects such as musical aesthetics, stage design, character shaping, and personal influence. They unanimously agreed that *The Phantom of the Opera* triggers strong emotional resonance through its music that combines classical and pop elements and its three - dimensional character shaping. Songs like *All I Ask for You* have given college students a new understanding of music, and the complex emotions of the characters have revealed their multi-faceted nature.

In terms of stage presentation, the show is a technical benchmark. Scenes like "the chandelier falling" and "the masked ball," with the perfect combination of lighting, machinery, and music, offer audiences a stunning immersive experience and even influence their daily aesthetics. In contrast, local musicals have issues such as limited production costs and cultural symbol piling-up, and they should learn from the concept of "technology serving the narrative" of *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Regarding IP operation, *The Phantom of the Opera* has a lasting influence through multi-media dissemination. College students have seen the potential of derivative peripherals through online and offline experiences; backstage workers have entered the industry because of live tours; and music college students have been inspired to explore more musicals. This reflects the cross-media penetration of the show's IP. However, Chinese musicals rely on imports and have single-dimensional derivative development. They need to strengthen short-video promotion, campus education, and diversified monetization to build their own ecosystem.

In conclusion, *The Phantom of the Opera* excels in art, technology, and IP operation, providing a reference for the development of Chinese musicals. For Chinese musicals to transform from imitation to innovation, efforts must be made in enhancing audience aesthetics and promoting technological innovation among practitioners, so as to create more distinctive works.

5. Discussion

5.1. Key Success Factors of *The Phantom of the Opera*

5.1.1. Integration of Classical and Pop Music

Andrew Lloyd Webber combines classical music, rock, and pop elements to create a musical structure that balances artistry and commerciality. The theme song *The Phantom of the Opera* reinforces character emotions through repetition and variation, with a catchy melody and dramatic tension that resonates widely.

5.1.2. Immersive Stage Design

The stage design, modeled on the 19th-century Paris Opera House, creates an immersive experience through elements like crystal chandeliers, underground lake scenes, and elevating stages. While performing the main plot, actors also stage mini-operas such as Hannibal, The Dumb Waiter, and The Triumph of Don Juan. This "play within a play" structure, combined with dynamic stagecraft, enriches the narrative without discrepancy, deepening the plot's emotional layers [8].

5.1.3. Global Operations

Since its 1986 premiere, *The Phantom of the Opera* has become a global benchmark in musical theater, reaching 46 countries and over 160 million audiences through international tours, multilingual versions, and resident performances. Its premium pricing strategy (e.g., average ticket prices exceeding ¥500 in Shanghai) and high attendance rates (e.g., 96% in Shanghai 2024) exemplify the balance between artistic integrity and commercial success. This model has set a "win-win" standard for global musical industries and provided valuable insights for China's performing arts market.

5.1.4. Localized Adaptation

The Chinese translation team of *The Phantom of the Opera* prioritizes both accuracy and poetic rhythm in Chinese. For example, the line "Past the point of no return" is translated as "Pass the point of no return," aligning with lip movements while preserving emotional intensity. Additionally, Chinese embroidery is integrated into costume designs, echoing the original's fascination with Oriental elements while reducing production costs. This dual strategy of "precise linguistic translation + visual cultural integration" offers a paradigm for adapting international IPs by respecting original essence while activating local aesthetics.

5.2. Impacts on China's Musical Industry

The musical's influence on China's industry manifests in three aspects:

Market Enlightenment and Audience Cultivation: The English original version's success in Shanghai—cultivating audiences, raising awareness, and attracting capital—has fueled market growth.

Technical Upgrades and Hardware Modernization: Hosting *The Phantom of the Opera* tours has accelerated the internationalization of China's theater facilities. For instance, the Shenzhen Binhai Art Center upgraded equipment to align with global stage technology standards.

Exposure of Industrial Shortcomings: China's musical market still relies on 70% imported productions, with lagging original IP development and homogeneous themes. Issues like shallow scripting, talent gaps, and challenges in balancing Eastern aesthetics with Western dramatic roles persist, highlighting the need for localized innovation.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Research Innovations

This study expands beyond Webber's musical innovations to analyze his commercial models, systematically evaluating impacts on China's industry across creative concepts, production quality, talent development, and market cultivation. By quantifying audience perceptions through surveys and social media data, it reveals deep drivers of local acceptance. Contrasting mature Western models (e.g., London's West End no-cast-preview policy) with China's "star-driven" trends (e.g., blind casting controversies in *The Phantom of the Opera*), it proposes a "quality-driven" transformation strategy and calls for standardized actor training and evaluation systems.

The Phantom of the Opera's success stems from multidimensional innovations in storytelling, music, stagecraft, and commercial operations, alongside its global cultural influence. While China's industry

has expanded through imports and localization, challenges like low originality, technical dependency, and cultural integration require urgent solutions.

6.2. Research Limitations

The research has two limitations. Firstly, the geographical coverage is inadequate. The questionnaire respondents are mainly from first-tier cities, lacking data from second and third-tier cities and rural areas, making it hard to reflect regional differences. Secondly, there is insufficient analysis of the international competition environment. Without comparing China's musical industry in the global context, there may be an over-evaluation of local achievements, and its international position and development space remain unclear.

6.3. Future Research Directions

Incorporate second/third-tier cities and middle-aged/elderly audiences to analyze regional preferences (e.g., integrating local opera elements) and intergenerational aesthetic differences.

Conduct longitudinal studies on audience retention and consumption habits, while comparing global strategies (e.g., streaming) to optimize China's industry ecosystem and enhance international competitiveness.

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