
On The GreatWall

5 Minute Chinese

Why Do Chinese Streamers Go Live in Wealthy Areas?



PandaWu: Hello, this is 5 Minute Chinese from On The GreatWall. I'm PandaWu.

Emma: And I'm Emma. PandaWu, I watched a video last night that looked like an alien landing strip.

PandaWu: Where was it?

Emma: On a city sidewalk in China. There were glowing circles all along the road, each with a woman sitting inside and talking to her phone.

PandaWu: Those were ring lights. You found a row of livestreamers.

Emma: All of them? I thought they were filming one enormous show.

PandaWu: No. Every ring light was its own tiny studio, and every streamer was trying to keep a different audience watching.

Emma: That sounds less like a studio and more like twenty television channels sharing one pavement.

PandaWu: With better lighting than most television channels.

Emma: People online said they were sitting near wealthy neighborhoods. Were they waiting for a millionaire to walk past and hand someone a suitcase of cash?

PandaWu: The millionaire, if there is one, is still watching through a phone.

Emma: So it is fishing, but with Wi-Fi.

PandaWu: And the fish can scroll away. There is no direct evidence that setting up closer to a rich neighborhood puts your livestream in front of more wealthy viewers.

Emma: So there is no button marked, "Please deliver my livestream to billionaires."

PandaWu: Sadly, no. But there are plenty of reasons to take your equipment outside anyway.

Emma: More alien landing strips?

PandaWu: In many large Chinese cities, you can see clusters of outdoor streamers around busy shopping districts. Some dance, some sing, and some simply sit there chatting with viewers.

Emma: Why not do that at home, where the chairs are softer and the traffic is quieter?

PandaWu: One streamer said indoor livestreaming was already crowded. She did not think she had an unusual appearance or a special talent, so an outdoor setting gave viewers something different to look at.

Emma: So the street itself becomes part of the content.

PandaWu: Exactly. At home, you are another person in front of a wall. Outside at midnight, people start wondering, "Who is this person, and why are they here?"

Emma: Oh no. The pavement worked on me.

PandaWu: The hours could be difficult. That streamer sometimes worked from nine at night until three in the morning. When the temperature was close to freezing, people brought blankets and heaters.

Emma: That is a long way to go for a more interesting background.

PandaWu: The hardship could become part of the story too. She believed some viewers felt sympathy when they saw her outside alone so late. In one reported case, a viewer sent her virtual gifts worth 3,000 yuan after two in the morning.

Emma: I've been cold for free my entire life.

PandaWu: Do not resign from your job yet. Her income changed dramatically from one night to another, and the platform and agency could both take a share.

Emma: And all those streamers were sitting together because it was safer?

PandaWu: That was part of it. People could watch the equipment, deal with unwanted attention and help each other. Some worked with agencies that also provided assistants. They looked like a team, even while competing for the same viewers.

Emma: Friends, colleagues and rivals, all under their own artificial moon.

PandaWu: That is a good description.

Emma: No one hands them money on the pavement, though. How does the money actually reach them?

PandaWu: 打赏.

Emma: What does 打赏 mean?

PandaWu: It means tipping or rewarding a creator. Viewers buy virtual gifts inside the app and send them during the livestream. The gift might appear as a flower, a car or a rocket, but it represents real money, and the streamer receives a share.

Emma: So the rocket is not real?

PandaWu: Correct. Parking would be a nightmare.

Emma: And it isn't only Chinese livestreamers trying everything they can to get more attention. YouTube creators do it too.

PandaWu: Yes. Including us.

Emma: Are we asking for 打赏 now?

PandaWu: No virtual rockets needed. If you enjoyed this episode, just share it with a friend.

Emma: Much cheaper than buying a rocket. Should we record our next episode outside the most expensive apartment building in town?

PandaWu: What would you do on camera?

Emma: Sit under a ring light and look cold.

PandaWu: That position already has twenty applicants.

PandaWu: Once again, our five minutes are up, but if you'd like to hear more authentic stories about Chinese food, history and culture, you can head to our topic page on our website, onthegreatwall.com. See you again soon. But for now, it's goodbye.

Useful Examples

谢谢你的打赏。

Xièxie nǐ de dǎshǎng.

Thank you for your tip.

给主播打赏。

Gěi zhǔbō dǎshǎng.

Tip the livestreamer.

我在直播。

Wǒ zài zhíbō.

I'm livestreaming.