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# Folk Songs and Popular Music in China: An Examination of Min'ge and Its Significance Within Nationalist Frameworks

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POMONA COLLEGE

SENIOR THESIS

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Folk Songs and Popular Music in China:  
An Examination of *Min'ge* and Its Significance  
Within Nationalist Frameworks

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## CHAPTER 1

### Folk Songs and Nationalism in China

#### Introduction

In China, there are 56 ethnic groups, with the Han ethnic group being the largest.<sup>1</sup> After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in the early 1900s, the creation of a “Chinese identity” became an important issue for the Chinese Nationalist Party, because national identity was a novel, Western concept.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the “Chinese identity” became associated to the Han ethnicity to the extent that many scholars refer to Chinese nationalism as “racial nationalism”, because it promotes the myth of a uniform Han race with a common descent and culture.<sup>3</sup>

Under the current Chinese Communist Party (CCP), however, this racial nationalism has become problematic, as ethnic groups such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs have increasingly voiced their desire for independence.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, domestic issues such as pollution, corruption, and inequality have become publicized sources of discontent among the general population.<sup>5</sup> Thus, promoting nationalism in China, but in a more inclusive way than with the conventional focus on Han nationality, has become more important today than it has been in the last ten years for the continuity of the CCP.

The CCP’s cultural policy is a significant element of its promotion of nationalism.<sup>6</sup> And music, which is an influential vector of nationalist discourse, features predominantly in its

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<sup>1</sup> Dru C. Gladney. "Ethnic Identity in China: The New Politics of Difference." *China Briefing*, 1994. Ed. William A. Joseph. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993. 171-92.

<sup>2</sup> Enze Han. *Contestation and Adaptation: The Politics of National Identity in China*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Van Wie Davis. *Ruling, Resources and Religion in China: Managing the Multiethnic State in the 21st Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Wai-Chung Ho. "Social Change and Nationalism in China's Popular Songs." *Social History* 31.4 (2006): 435-53.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, eds. *Chinese Politics: State, Society and the Market*. London: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Sujian Guo and Baogang Guo, eds. *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008.

cultural policy.<sup>7</sup> This thesis explores folk songs, or *min'ge*, because folk music is an essential part of ethnic identity. Folk music in China dates back more than 3,000 years and reflects the social, emotional, and spiritual lives of the people.<sup>8</sup> In China, there are hundreds of types of folk songs differentiated by region, ethnic group, and the occasion in which the songs are performed. These folk songs range from courting songs of the Dai minority in southern China to religious songs performed by Tibetan monks.<sup>9</sup> By definition, the creation and popularization of *min'ge* is an organic process, but since the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, where Mao Zedong encouraged the use of folk songs to spread Communist ideals, there has been the tendency for Han artists and composers to appropriate ethnic minority folk music for both political and nonpolitical reasons.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the diversity of traditional folk music, revolutionary songs, or *hong'ge*, are homogeneous in content and written for the sole purpose of propagating and glorifying Party policy or the wisdom of its leaders.<sup>11</sup> *Hong'ge* is perhaps more well-known by its English translation, “red songs”. In addition to praising the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) leadership and achievements, *hong'ge* also promotes revolutionary idealism and ethics associated to the Chinese communist movement.<sup>12</sup> The development of *hong'ge* and its popularization during the Communist Revolution reflects a significant turning point in Chinese music, as much of the music composed after the 1940s was similarly politicized.<sup>13</sup>

In China today, *min'ge* exists alongside *hong'ge* and enjoys a comparable amount of popularity and state support. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear many different kinds of ethnic

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<sup>7</sup> Jingzhi Liu. *A Critical History of New Music in China*. Trans. Caroline Mason. Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Chengju Huang. "Power, Ambition, and Arrogance: Lessons of Bo Xilai's 'Singing Red Song' Campaign as a Political Communication Project." *Global Media Journal: Australian Edition* 8.1 (2014): 1-13.

<sup>12</sup> Liu, 85.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 90.

folk songs on state-sponsored television channels, and the study of *min'ge* is a mandatory part of curriculum at most music conservatories.<sup>14</sup> However, the genre of *min'ge* has significantly changed from China's pre-Communist era to present day.<sup>15</sup> Thus, *min'ge* today may not be as representative of ethnic identity today as it was before the 1940s. These observations led to the following questions: why does the CCP support and promote *min'ge*, and what is the nature of *min'ge* today?

In order to make sense of the current policy of supporting and promoting folk music, I will analyze the musical forms of popular music from three different time periods: the 1930s - 1960s, 1960s - 1970s, and the 1970s - 1990s. These time periods reflect major changes in CCP policies and important historical events, including the Second Sino-Japanese War, Yan'an Forum, Cultural Revolution, and Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy. I will then explore the genre of *min'ge* in depth and compare its development to the development of popular music in general. Finally, to determine the basis of the current support for and promotion of *min'ge*, I will examine the utility of *min'ge* in the context of the current dynamics of nationalism within China. Ultimately, my goal is to provide new insight into the mechanisms of Chinese nationalism, and shed light on the CCP's relationship with ethnic minorities.

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<sup>14</sup> Clarissa S. Montefiore. "How China Distorts Its Minorities Through Propaganda." *BBC Culture*. BBC, 16 Dec. 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Liu, 76.

## Literature Review

### **What is “Chinese Nationalism”?**

In the broad body of literature on nationalism, there are two main schools of thought. The modernist school of thought focuses on actions undertaken by individuals, mostly intellectuals, with the specific purpose of engendering sentiments of nationalism within a specific group of people.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the modernist view is that nationalism is in a sense *man-made*, and born out of the structural conditions of modern society. The primordialist school of thought focuses on the natural tendency of humans to organize into distinct groupings based on an affinity of birth.<sup>17</sup> The primordialist view is that nationalism is *inherent* in human beings, and is a natural phenomenon.

The study of nationalism tends to lend itself to the modernist point of view, due to the artificiality of national identity.<sup>18</sup> In China, this is consistent with the fact that the concept of nationality only developed in the late Qing dynasty. Chow states, “Chinese intellectuals looked to language, custom, history, and religion for the common bond of a nation. They found none”.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the concept of *hanzu*, or “people of Han lineage”, was artificially created by anti-Manchu scholars to attack the Qing dynasty.<sup>20</sup> Influenced by the Western concept of “race”, these revolutionary scholars began to search for new identities for the Chinese nation in order to create a distinction between the ruling Manchus and the people.<sup>21</sup> Since its creation, the concept of *hanzu*, which I will refer to as the “Han identity”, has been utilized for a number of political

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<sup>16</sup> Sarah Cole. “Nationalism and Modernism”, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 48.2 (2002): 453.

<sup>17</sup> Josep R. Llobera. “Recent Theories of Nationalism.” *University College London Working Papers* (1999): 3.

<sup>18</sup> Yingjie Guo. *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity Under Reform*. London: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Kai-wing Chow, Kevin M. Doak, and Poshek Fu, eds. *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Chow, Doak, and Fu, 75.

<sup>21</sup> Gladney, 180.



purposes, including resistance to the Japanese during the Guomindang's rule.<sup>22</sup> Thus, most authors view nationalism from the early 1900s to end of the Mao era in the 1970s as created by the state.<sup>23</sup>

However, although national identity in China is inherently a modern construct, the dynamics of nationalism have evolved over time. For example, popular nationalism, which is Han based but receives support from minorities as well, supports the idea that national identity can originate from the people, as posited by the primordialist theory.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Gries argues that the emergence of this popular nationalism has become a threat to the government, resulting in the formation of “pragmatic nationalism” in recent years.<sup>25</sup> Guo also notes that cultural nationalism, though primordialist nature, is often an extension of state nationalism in China, which is inherently modernist.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the lines between primordialist and modernist thought are blurred in the analysis of contemporary Chinese nationalism, requiring one to gain a more nuanced understanding of whether nationalism is a top-down or bottom-up phenomenon.

The following four categories of nationalism are selected for examination: state nationalism, Han nationalism, popular nationalism, and pragmatic nationalism. The analysis of music and nationalism requires examining these topics in depth, because each category sheds light on a unique aspect of Chinese national identity. Furthermore, although the four categories are distinct and seemingly unrelated, they should be viewed as a whole in order to understand the various mechanisms through which nationalism is constructed. Thus, music is important in this framework because it has the potential to provide the bridge between these four categories of nationalism. While the following sections will provide overviews into the four categories, the

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<sup>22</sup> Davis, 130.

<sup>23</sup> Gladney 1994; Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds. *China's Quest for National Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.; Chow, Doak, and Fu 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hays Gries. *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: U of California, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Gries, 116.

<sup>26</sup> Yingjie Guo, 53.

discussion section of this chapter will highlight the apparent distinctions between the theories and offer new insight into how music fits into these nationalist frameworks.

## **State Nationalism**

One way of analyzing state nationalism is to examine the state's cultural policies and their effects on national identity. Enze Han presents a thorough analysis of state nationalism by distinguishing between three periods of "nation-building": 1. The tolerant and pluralistic policies of the early years, 2. The cultural destruction and political repression of the Cultural Revolution, and 3. The return to a more pluralistic approach, but with significant limitations in today's society.

During the first stage, the CCP's policies towards ethnic minorities were relatively inclusive.<sup>27</sup> Although the CCP did not include a clause allowing ethnic minorities to pursue self-determination in its constitution, minority languages were promoted and protected. For example, Article 53 of the Common Program, the provisional constitution for the PRC passed in 1949, "guaranteed ethnic minorities the right to develop and use their native languages and scripts... and promised government assistance in those efforts".<sup>28</sup> In addition, the 1952 General Program for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy, the 1953 Election Law, and the PRC Constitution of 1954 all mandated proportional minority membership in legislative bodies, pledged that ethnic minorities would have the same rights as the Han majority, and banned discrimination based on ethnicity.<sup>29</sup>

During the late 1960s, many of these policies were reversed. Dittmer notes, "During the Cultural Revolution, radical factions of the CCP grew impatient with the slow pace in national

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<sup>27</sup> Han, 50.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>29</sup> Sujian Guo and Baogang Guo, 140.

integration”.<sup>30</sup> Bilingual education for ethnic minorities was either stopped entirely or drastically curtailed in, ethnic minority organizations were disbanded, and passages dealing with minority autonomy in the Constitution were eliminated.<sup>31</sup> Many autonomous units were dissolved and ethnic minority leaders were deposed, and often persecuted.<sup>32</sup> Most importantly, the suffering caused by these policies created irreparable damage to the relations between the Han and ethnic minorities.<sup>33</sup>

The return to more tolerant and pluralistic policies began after Mao’s death in 1976.<sup>34</sup> Members of the old minority elites were restored to their previous positions in government, legal reforms provided more institutionalized autonomy and rights for various ethnic minority groups, and bilingualism was once again permitted and promoted.<sup>35</sup> In addition, affirmation action for minority students applying to university, exceptions to the one-child policy, and quotas for representation in the government were all instituted to ensure equality between ethnic minorities and the Han.<sup>36</sup> In recent years, it appears as though the government not only accepts minorities, but intends to highlight China’s diversity on the international level through supporting initiatives such as creating films on ethnic minorities and developing ethnic tourism.<sup>37</sup>

However, despite the many policies favoring minorities, many authors agree that these policies are only superficial attempts at promoting equality, and in effect, minorities continue to be marginalized in society.<sup>38</sup> Some authors even criticize the Chinese government’s lack of proactive and effective policy as a deliberate neglect, because it is obvious that the laws

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<sup>30</sup> Dittmer and Kim, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Han, 112.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, Lida V. Nedilsky, and Siu-Keung Cheung, eds. *China’s Rise to Power: Conceptions of State Governance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Clarissa S. Montefiore, "How China Distorts Its Minorities Through Propaganda."

<sup>38</sup> Suijian Guo and Baogang Guo 2008; Lee, Nedilsky, and Cheung 2012; Han 2013.

governing ethnic-minority cultural rights and political autonomy are becoming increasingly inadequate in the context of the rapid economic and social change in China.<sup>39</sup> For example, although preferential university admission for minority students is still in place, the system through which the government would automatically assign jobs to university graduates is not.<sup>40</sup> Thus, ethnic minority students often find themselves at a disadvantage when competing with Han Chinese students for jobs that require substantial proficiency in Mandarin Chinese.<sup>41</sup> In addition, with economic development focused in the urban centers where Han Chinese are the majority, more and more ethnic minority individuals, who are disproportionately male, have chosen to leave their villages for economic opportunities.<sup>42</sup> This has ultimately threatened the survival of ethnic minority culture, because many of these men do not return to village life and instead choose to assimilate into the Han culture and way of living.<sup>43</sup>

## **Han Nationalism**

As discussed previously, the concept of *hanzu*, or the “Han identity”, is undoubtedly artificial and highly politicized. The CCP, like the Guomintang and the revolutionaries before them, has utilized the Han identity to create a sense of pride among people who supposedly share Han cultural values, and to gain support for their political agenda of unification.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the boundaries between cultural nationalism and state nationalism are undoubtedly blurred because the two categories are closely related.<sup>45</sup> However, whereas state nationalism focuses on policies directed at ethnic minorities, cultural nationalism focuses on the indirect subjugation of ethnic

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom. *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2010. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Yongnian Zheng. *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

minorities – for example, through the portrayal of the Han as superior, and the indirect pressures on ethnic minorities to assimilate. From a broader perspective, the CCP has effectively combined cultural and state nationalism to create a new type of nationalism - Han nationalism.<sup>46</sup>

From the beginning of the People's Republic, the Han people have been celebrated by the Communist Party as the “vanguard of the people's revolution”.<sup>47</sup> For example, a cable issued by the Central Party Propaganda Office of the New China News Agency in 1949 stated, “The Han occupy the majority population of the country; moreover, the Han today are the major force in China's revolution. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the victory of China's people's democratic revolution mainly relied on the industry of the Han people”.<sup>48</sup> In the Ethnic Identification Project, the Chinese government classified minority groups according to what historical development stage it considered them to have reached. The Han majority group was classified as the one that had progressed furthest into the feudal stage, while other groups were labeled “primitive”, “slave”, or “feudal”.<sup>49</sup> Though today, there are laws prohibiting the explicit discrimination of ethnic minorities, Han superiority is still asserted in implicit ways.

In a subtler way, the policies of the CCP today assert the superiority of the Han by pressuring ethnic minorities to adopt the Han language and customs. Many authors refer to the assimilation of ethnic minorities as “sinification”, or *huanhua*.<sup>50</sup> Han notes, “Today, it is very hard for younger-generation ethnic-minority people to grow up in a monolingual environment. Mass media, modern communication channels, pop culture, and all the conveniences and excitements offered by contemporary Chinese society all require one, especially a young person,

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<sup>44</sup> Gladney, 188.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>46</sup> Zheng, 214.

<sup>47</sup> Gladney, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>49</sup> Chow, 156.

<sup>50</sup> Gladney 1994; Han 2013.

to conform, acculturate, or assimilate into the majority Han language and culture”.<sup>51</sup> Recent nation-building policies such as the prohibition of under 18 years-olds from praying at mosques and the banning of civil servants and students from fasting during the month of Ramadan are examples of even stronger measures taken to accelerate sinification.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, the dynamics of the Han identity under the CCP reflect the purposes of Han nationalism. Gladney argues, “the identification of certain groups within China as ‘minorities’ and the recognition of the Han as a ‘unified’ majority played a fundamental role in forging a unified Chinese nation, because minorities were induced to follow the Han example”.<sup>53</sup> Chow also notes the importance of the Han identity in politics. He notes, “This myth [of a *hanzu*] also sustains a belief that there is a majority ethnic group that is running the government, therefore justifying domination over ‘minority ethnic groups’ such as the Tibetans and the Uighurs, who are ‘less civilized and advanced’”.<sup>54</sup> However, Chow also points out that the Han identity “has allowed political leaders to hide conflicts and tensions between ethnic groups within the *hanzu*”.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Han identity is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive - reflecting the CCP’s desire to consolidate power in the “Han majority” and weaken the autonomy of ethnic minorities.

## **Popular Nationalism**

Whereas state nationalism and Han nationalism focus on the dynamics of ethnic identity, popular nationalism and pragmatic nationalism focus on allegiance to the state. In some ways, these differences can be demarcated as internal and external nationalism – where internal

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<sup>51</sup> Han, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Emily Rauhala. "The Politics of Pop in China's Xinjiang Region." *Time Magazine*, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Gladney, 185.

<sup>54</sup> Chow, Doak and Fu, 160.

<sup>55</sup> Chow, Doak and Fu, 160.

nationalism refers to how one ethnic group within a country perceives themselves in comparison to other ethnic groups, and external nationalism is how citizens of a country perceive themselves in relation to other countries.

Although many Western scholars insist that Chinese nationalism has always been a top-down phenomenon, it is clear that popular nationalism has been prevalent throughout modern Chinese history, and in fact, has defined much of its course. The Boxer Rebellion in 1900, for example, was an uprising in northern China against the spread of Western and Japanese influence.<sup>56</sup> Members of this group, known as Boxers, were peasants mainly from the Shandong province, which was struck by several instances of famine and flooding during the late 1800s. In the 1890s, China had given territorial and commercial concessions in this area to several European nations, and the Boxers blamed their poor standard of living on the foreigners who were colonizing their country. This rebellion, as one of the first instances in modern Chinese history where the masses united to protest against foreign imperialism, set the precedent for popular nationalism through the end of the 20th century and provided inspiration for other anti-imperialist protests, such as the May Fourth Movement in 1919, where students protested the Chinese government's weak response to the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the Boxer Rebellion and May Fourth Movement gave rise to the “victim narrative” that united the Chinese people with the idea that China needed to be strong in order to avoid being continually victimized by foreign powers.

Since its creation, the CCP has relied upon popular nationalism to gain and maintain support. In line with Marxist thought, much of their success in the Chinese Civil War came from their ability to appeal to the masses – indeed, the CCP positioned themselves as the “party of the

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<sup>56</sup> C.X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu, eds. *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 129.

people” with the goal to “liberate” the masses from oppression by the Guomindang and imperialist forces.<sup>58</sup> However, after the 1949 “liberation” by the CCP, the lines between popular and state nationalism became difficult to distinguish. Although the state dictated the goals of nationalism during this time, expressions of nationalism were as much influenced by the people as they were by the state. Ultimately, the cult of personality achieved by Mao Zedong, combined with the lasting fervor of revolution, led to popular nationalism defined by fanaticism and xenophobia.<sup>59</sup>

The CCP continued to play a significant role in influencing popular nationalism even after Mao’s death. The anti-Japanese protests of 1996, 2005, and 2012, for example, all reflected the internalization of the victim narrative perpetuated by Jiang Zemin’s patriotic education campaign.<sup>60</sup> Instead of emphasizing how China “stood up” to foreign aggressors during World War II as his predecessors did, Jiang Zemin supported a narrative that emphasized the victimization of the Chinese, especially by Japan.<sup>61</sup> For example, Chinese textbooks emphasized Japan’s invasion of China, but it made no effort to inform Chinese students that postwar Japan was democratic and pacifist.<sup>62</sup> This education has exacerbated existing Sino-Japanese tensions, causing disputes over the Diaoyu islands and other issues such as Yasukuni shrine visits to easily spark nationalist outbursts by the people.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Zheng, 115.

<sup>59</sup> Lei Ouyang Bryant. "Music, Memory, and Nostalgia: Collective Memories of Cultural Revolution Songs in Contemporary China." *China Review* 5.2 (2005): 151-75.

<sup>60</sup> Jianrong Zhu. "Japan's Role in the Rise of Chinese Nationalism: History and Prospects." *East Asia's Haunted Present: Historical Memories and the Resurgence of Nationalism*. London, England: Praeger, 2008. 180-89.

<sup>61</sup> Zheng Wang. "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China." *International Studies Quarterly* 52.4 (2008): 783-806.

<sup>62</sup> Zhu, 185.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



## Pragmatic Nationalism

Popular nationalism, however, is not always beneficial for the state. Just as the masses can rally behind anger towards the actions of foreign countries, they can also unite to express their dissatisfaction towards the state. Both the Boxer Rebellion and May Fourth Movement, for example, expressed anger towards the Chinese government in addition to foreign countries. In a more contemporary example, although the protests against Japan's claims over the Diaoyu islands were inherently anti-Japanese, protesters were also largely unsatisfied by the Chinese government's response. In fact, in the 1996 national bestseller *China Can Say No*, the authors maintain that "China has been too warm and accommodating towards Japan" and implicitly condemn the government for suppressing popular anti-Japanese protests.<sup>64</sup>

Popular nationalism also appears to be undermining the state's agency. Gries states, "In China today, popular networks are challenging the state's hegemony over nationalism, threatening to rupture the Chinese nation-state".<sup>65</sup> For example, in the midst of popular protests about the 1999 Belgrade bombing, 2001 spy plane collision, and more recent island disputes, Chinese leaders had no choice but to condemn foreign nations and adopt a hard-line approach to discerning who was "right" and who was "wrong".<sup>66</sup> As a result, the CCP recognized that nationalism could be a double-edged sword and began approaching nationalism in a more careful way, leading to what scholars such as Peter Gries and Suisheng Zhao call "pragmatic nationalism".<sup>67</sup>

Pragmatic nationalism is, in essence, reactive in nature. It does not have a fixed, objectified, or defined content, and is not driven by any ideology, religion beliefs or other

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Hays Gries. *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: U of California, 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Gries 2004; Suisheng Zhao. *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004.

abstract ideas.<sup>68</sup> Instead, it is an instrument of the state to bolster the faith of Chinese people and hold the country together during the period of rapid and turbulent transformation from a Communist to a post-Communist society.<sup>69</sup> For example, in response to popular calls for the government to take a tough position against the United States and Japan, CCP leaders have mainly adopted a two-pronged strategy.<sup>70</sup> On the one hand, they have tolerated and even encouraged the expression of popular nationalism to make their own policy positions more credible to the U.S. and Japan on issues involving China's vital interests such as the sovereignty of Taiwan.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the state has been very cautious to prevent the popular sentiment of Chinese people from getting out of hand and causing backlash in both domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the CCP has maintained that nationalism must be "channeled" in its expressions, which has led to the restraining or even banning of popular anti-American and anti-Japanese demonstrations.<sup>73</sup>

## **Discussion**

It is apparent through the examination of these four types of nationalism that there is an obvious disconnect between state and Han nationalism, and popular and pragmatic nationalism. Each set presents one primordialist and one modernist theory on nationalism, but the basis of these two sets seem to be unevenly divided between anthropological and political theories. Specifically, discussions about state and Han nationalism tend to focus on national and ethnic identity, whereas discussions about popular and pragmatic nationalism tend to center on allegiance to the state and the sense of unity among the citizens of country. The discussion about

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<sup>68</sup> Gries, 140.

<sup>69</sup> Zhao, 130.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>72</sup> Gries, 140.

<sup>73</sup> Zhao, 158.

folk music in China, however, may be related to all four types of nationalism. For example, while music is a primary means of creating identity, it can also be used to create feelings of loyalty towards the state. On the other hand, because the popularity of Chinese folk music has not spread overseas, its significance in the context of nationalism may be limited to its domestic influence, and thus it may play a greater role in internal nationalism than external nationalism. In the next section, the role of music, generally, in the discourse on nationalism will be discussed.

## The Importance of Music in Nationalism

In examining the importance of music in nationalism, it is crucial to discuss two theories: ethnosymbolism and banal nationalism. First, the primary argument of ethnosymbolism is that “the persisting features in the formation and continuity of national identities are myths, memories, values, traditions, and symbols”.<sup>74</sup> From this perspective, music, as the medium through which the features in the formation and continuity of national identities is transmitted, is a particularly important aspect of nationalism.

Folk music, however, can play contradictory roles in creating unified national identity. For example, Leoussi and Grosby state, “the appropriation of folk music often amounted to a straightforward extension of the policies of Communist regimes following World War II”.<sup>75</sup> However, the revival of traditional genres was sometimes “a direct response to nationalist tensions”, such as when Serbian folk epics accompanied by gusla became popular during the 1990’s.<sup>76</sup> This example directly relates to the dynamics of *min’ge* that will be discussed later in this thesis. Whereas revolutionary songs reflected a “straightforward extension” of CCP policy, the ability of certain minority groups to preserve their traditional folk music can be seen through as ethnosymbolist lens as a form of resistance to Han nationalism. Thus, music not only plays a significant role in the nation-building efforts of the Communist regimes, but also in the resistance of ethnic groups to assimilation.

Furthermore, in ethnosymbolism, state-sponsored transformation of folk music is not a novel concept. For instance, in Belgrade in the 1990’s, turbo-folk, a fusion of “orientalized” traditional folk melodies and techno-pop, was created as a “a flashy, escapist alternative to

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Elliot Grosby and Athena S. Leoussi, *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism: History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 88.

Western pop and rock”.<sup>77</sup> Just as turbo-folk “came to stand for conservative, nationalistic values, well attuned to, and promoted by, the Milosevic regime”<sup>78</sup>, the CCP’s transformation of *min’ge* may represent a new genre of music that promotes loyalty to the Communist Party and Han nationalism.

Banal nationalism does not focus on the features in the formation and continuity of national identities, but rather on the subliminal nature of national symbols.<sup>79</sup> The term “banal nationalism”, coined by Michael Billig, refers to “the everyday representations of the nation which build an imagined sense of national solidarity and belonging amongst humans”.<sup>80</sup> Examples of banal nationalism include the presence of flags, sporting events, symbols on money, national songs. Billig argues that power behind modern nationalism is its “hidden” nature, and because it remains largely unexamined and unchallenged, it has become the basis for powerful political movements, and for most political violence in the world today.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, nationalistic songs, due to their popularity, accessibility, and prevalence at everyday events, are powerful mechanisms for states to promote their agendas.

In this way, the continual presence of *min’ge* in state-sponsored concerts and on the China Central Television’s (CCTV) programs is likely very influential in promoting nationalism. Not only do concerts such as the Chinese New Years’ Gala amass over 700 million views annually, CCTV’s accessibility and popularity has enabled it to “unconsciously educate the Chinese people about their nation, the party, dominant ideologies, and current government policies”.<sup>82</sup> The incorporation of nationalistic messages into *min’ge* could, therefore, be intentional. Gorfinkel notes, “the creative packaging of political and ideological lessons, or the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>79</sup> Michael Billig. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Books, 1995.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, Nedilsky and Cheung, 134.

masking of politics in popular entertainment, is thought to make propaganda more effective. By rendering audiences oblivious to their own indoctrination, the state reinforces among the public the efficacy of its governance”.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, due to the “hidden nature” of its nationalistic elements and its popularity, *min’ge* could be another extension of the state’s cultural policies.

The theories of ethnosymbolism and banal nationalism give us a clearer picture of the role of music in promoting nationalism. However, it is still unclear what the role of folk music, and specifically *min’ge*, in China’s nationalist framework is. In order to answer this question in depth, the following chapters will be structured as follows: Chapter 2 will include an analysis of the nature of popular music from the 1930s to the 1990s in order to identify relevant trends. Chapter 3 will focus on the development of the specific type of folk song promoted by the CCP today, and introduce the concept of “cultural hegemony”. Chapter 4 will discuss issues of representation and national identity that arise from the popularization of the *min’ge* genre. Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the main findings of this paper, and place the findings within the broader context of Chinese nationalism and the importance of music in creating a national identity.

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<sup>83</sup> Lee, Nedilsky and Cheung, 140.

## CHAPTER 2

### Chinese Music Trends from 1930s - 1990s

Author Sue Tuohy states, “In twentieth-century China, much musical discourse takes no pains to hide music’s associations with political goals”.<sup>84</sup> This musical-political connection has not been a recent development, but rather a persistent theme throughout the history of Chinese music.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, *Shijing* (Book of Songs), divided music according to states, and it is believed that Confucius could discern a state’s character by hearing its music.<sup>86</sup>

For the purposes of this chapter, I begin my inquiry with the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War, due to its significance in creating new types of music that were distinctly Westernized and nationalistic. I will then outline important historical events from the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 to the 1990s, and describe the musical trends that resulted from the dramatic changes in the political environment. Although there have been many significant developments in Chinese music since the 1930s, I will focus on the trends that have influenced popular music and folk music, and explore certain intersections between the two genres. Additionally, because the type of *minge* analyzed in this thesis pertains mainly to vocal music, there will be a particular emphasis on trends in vocal music, as opposed to instrumental music.

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<sup>84</sup> Sue Tuohy. "The Sonic Dimensions of Nationalism in Modern China: Musical Representation and Transformation." *Ethnomusicology* 45.1 (2001): 110.

<sup>85</sup> Jingzhi Liu. *A Critical History of New Music in China*. Trans. Caroline Mason. Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

## Music of the 1930s – 1950s

In 1937, the Second Sino-Japanese War began, disrupting many elements of society, including the arts.<sup>87</sup> Music began to be even more heavily politicized, and many pieces were composed solely to unite people in the war efforts against the Japanese.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, composers of these nationalist songs, such as Nie Er, Xian Xinghai, and Zhao Yuanren, were deeply influenced by Western music and developed new types of musical compositions that incorporated Western elements.<sup>89</sup>

However, the war was not the only impetus for change. The nationalist songs at the time reflected the desire for cultural and political reform that had began since the May Fourth Movement in 1911.<sup>90</sup> During this time, intellectuals revered Western ideals and many studied abroad in Europe, America, or Japan, including the famous composers Xian Xinghai and Zhao Yuanren.<sup>91</sup> This altered the form of music in China, as well as the content. Before, songs were often descriptive or narrative in nature, but after the concept of nationalism was imported to China, many composers focused their work on the fate of the country, and patriotism was an essential element of popular music.<sup>92</sup> Author Wai-Chung Ho goes as far to say, “music was determined not by musical quality but by its political intention”.<sup>93</sup>

One important musical trend that was a direct product of this politicization of music was the Mass Singing Movement.<sup>94</sup> The socio-political movements of the 1930s required music to

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<sup>87</sup> David Holm. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Liu, 98.

<sup>90</sup> Tse-tung Chow. *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Boston: Harvard UP, 1960.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathan D. Spence. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.

<sup>93</sup> Wai-Chung Ho. "Social Change and Nationalism in China's Popular Songs." *Social History* 31.4 (2006): 440.

<sup>94</sup> Isabel K.F. Wong. "Geming gequ: Songs for the Education of the Masses." In McDougall, Bonnie S., ed. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: U of California, 1984.



mobilize the masses against a common enemy, but there were no preexisting Chinese musical forms that would achieve this purpose.<sup>95</sup> Thus, composers began to develop a new type of vocal music that would be “taken up by the people”, based upon marching songs from the West.<sup>96</sup> Musicians and educators also formed small groups such as “Singing for Resistance against Japan” and the “National Salvation Movement” to promote the revolutionary spirit.<sup>97</sup> Ho notes, “In Shanghai alone, twenty formal music organizations were formed, which initiated Mass Singing Societies to lift the national spirit in schools and in the countryside”.<sup>98</sup> Li Baochen, a major organizer of the mass singing movement, noted the movement’s impact:

“Not very long ago, the Chinese people thought that singing in public gatherings was either childish or undignified. The new war songs, however, brought a new understanding of group-singing; they became a real stimulation of patriotism in their expression of youthfulness and cooperation. Governmental officials actually opened their mouths in singing the National Anthem in meetings, and old people gradually caught on to the spirit and joy of singing with their grand children at home. China became group-singing conscious”<sup>99</sup>

The success of the Mass Singing Movement reinforced the idea that music could effectively serve political purposes, and thus both Nationalists (Guomindang) and Communists utilized music to further their own campaigns.<sup>100</sup> In the New Life Movement, launched by the Nationalist government in early 1934, songs were used to teach people about the concept of a “nation” and urged citizens to cultivate their moral character.<sup>101</sup> Five years later, in the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement, mass singing was used as a means to rally people behind the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>96</sup> Tuohy, 116

<sup>97</sup> Ho, 441.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Baochen Li. *Shanmu Zhai Hua Dangnian (Reminiscences of Li Baochen)*. Taipei: Zhuanji Wenxue Chubanshe, 1967.

<sup>100</sup> Wong, 132.

<sup>101</sup> Holm, 78.

Nationalist government.<sup>102</sup> The national anthem adopted by the Guomindang during this time reflects the new spirit of patriotism that these massing singing campaigns promoted. Its lyrics state:

*San Min Chu-I* (Three Principles of the People),  
Our aim shall be:  
To found a free land,  
World peace, be our stand.  
Lead on, comrades,  
Vanguards ye are.  
Hold fast your aim,  
By sun and star.  
Be earnest and brave,  
Your country to save,  
One heart, one soul,  
One mind, one goal...<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, during the Long March (1934-1935), the Communist Party and People's Liberation Army used song, drama, and dance to appeal to the rural peasant population.<sup>104</sup> In 1929, Mao Zedong called for the formal inclusion of revolutionary songs in soldiers' training programs, and a committee was established to "produce appropriate songs".<sup>105</sup> The Lu Xun Arts Academy established in 1938, in particular, focused on revising local folk music with new ideological content, and organized musical companies of all types to popularize this new type of Communist music.<sup>106</sup>

However, Mao not only emphasized music as a means for revolution, but also took great importance in defining the characteristics and purpose of "revolutionary music".<sup>107</sup> At the 1942 Yan'an Forum, held at the city of Yan'an in Communist-controlled China, Mao dedicated an

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<sup>102</sup> Gregory B. Lee. *Troubadours, Trumpeters, Troubled Makers: Lyricism, Nationalism, and Hybridity in China and Its Others*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted from Lee, 86.

<sup>104</sup> Wong, 133.

<sup>105</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, ed. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: U of California, 1984.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>107</sup> Maria Galikowski. *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*. Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 1998.

entire segment to describing the role of literature and art in the country.<sup>108</sup> Specifically, Mao's intent was to "ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy, and that they help the people fight the enemy with one heart and one mind".<sup>109</sup> Because of its long-lasting influence on Chinese music, the following section will explore the Yan'an Forum in detail.

### **The Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art**

From the beginning, Mao recognized the importance of the arts in promoting revolution.<sup>110</sup> He stated, "Writers and artists... produce works which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment".<sup>111</sup> Because literature and the arts were important in both instilling a sense of revolution and creating a sense of unity among revolutionaries, Mao wanted to ensure that they followed the "correct path of development".<sup>112</sup> From his standpoint, literature and art could only support his goals of overthrowing the Guomindang and attaining national liberation for China if they: 1) focused on workers, peasants, and soldiers as their primary audience; and 2) served the advancement of Marxism.<sup>113</sup> In other words, author Liu Jingzhi notes, "literature and art were subordinate to politics".<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>111</sup> Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Trans. Bonnie S. McDougall. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1980.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Liu, 210.

Mao's first decree was that writers and artists should know their audience and understand the "language of the masses".<sup>115</sup> Because workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie made up the largest section of the population, Mao believed that literature and the arts should be exclusively tailored to these groups of people.<sup>116</sup> He stated:

"Our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and most steadfast of our allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants... which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the laboring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and for the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term co-operation with us".<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, he implored writers and artists to think of ways to educate the people because much of the population was illiterate.<sup>118</sup> He also criticized writers and artists for being aloof from the masses and urged them to engage in self reflection, stating, "prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants, and soldiers is the task of learning from them".<sup>119</sup>

The second defining characteristic of revolutionary literature and art according to Mao was the adherence to Marxist principles. Because promoting Marxist ideas required a thorough understanding of Marxism and society, he stated, "It is right for writers and artists to study literary and artistic creation, but the science of Marxism-Leninism must be studied by all revolutionaries, writers and artists not excepted".<sup>120</sup> Specifically, Mao insisted that writers and artists study the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions in order to produce literature and art that is "rich in content and correct in orientation".<sup>121</sup> Although he was particularly critical of Chinese opera because it was a courtly art form, he encouraged artists to draw from China's artistic legacy as well as international art forms in order to further

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<sup>115</sup> McDougall, 120.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Mao, 77.

<sup>118</sup> McDougall, 122.

<sup>119</sup> Mao, 79.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

socialism.<sup>122</sup> He stated, “We must take over all the fine things in our literary and artistic heritage, critically assimilate whatever is beneficial, and use them as examples when we create works out of the literary and artistic raw materials in the life of the people of our own time and place”.<sup>123</sup>

The third issue that Mao addressed was the debate between popularization and raising the standard of the arts.<sup>124</sup> Mao insisted that these two goals were intertwined, and that improving the quality of the arts was not possible without it appealing to the masses.<sup>125</sup> Because the workers, peasants, and soldiers set the “basis from which to raise”, Mao argued that it was imperative for artists and writers to first learn from these groups of people before raising the standard of the arts.<sup>126</sup> In Mao’s opinion, improving the arts meant “raising the level of literature and art in the direction in which the workers, peasants and soldiers are themselves advancing”.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, he noted that because these groups of people had not been properly educated and were engaged in fighting for liberation, the popularization of revolutionary arts was much more important than raising the standards of the arts.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, he added that popularization would not be a hindrance to the development of the arts, because “the work of popularization... prepares the necessary conditions for us to raise standards in the future on a much broader scale”.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> McDougall, 130.

<sup>123</sup> Mao, 85.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 92.

One immediate change in Chinese music that resulted from the Yan'an Forum was a growth in the respectability of folk styles.<sup>130</sup> In fact, after the Forum, a large-scale campaign was implemented in the Communist-controlled areas to educate the largely illiterate rural population in Communist ideology by means of folk tunes set to revolutionary words.<sup>131</sup> These altered folk songs became known as *hong'ge*, or red songs, for their revolutionary content. One such song was “Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China” (“*Meiyou gongchandang jiu meiyou xin zhongguo*”). Written in 1943, its lyrics state:

Without the Communist Party, There Will Be No New China.  
Without the Communist Party, There Will Be No New China.  
The Communist Party toiled for the nation.  
The Communist Party of one mind saved China  
It pointed to the road of liberation for the people.  
It led China towards the light.  
It supported the War of Resistance for more than eight years.  
It has improved people's lives.  
It built a base behind enemy lines.  
It practiced democracy, bringing many advantages.  
Without the Communist Party, there will be no new China.  
Without the Communist Party, there will be no new China<sup>132</sup>

Clearly, “Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China” reflects the deeply political sentiments of revolutionary music. In the bigger picture, the idea that literature and the arts were integral parts of the “revolutionary machine” became even more important after the foundation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949.<sup>133</sup> It came to be understood that folk, popular, and revolutionary music were essentially the same genre, and the only genre of music permitted.<sup>134</sup> Additionally, because the Communist Party was more interested in popularizing music than improving its quality, the development of new musical

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<sup>130</sup> Timothy Cheek. "The Fading of Wild Lilies: Wang Shiwei and Mao Zedong's Yan'an Talks in the First CPC Rectification Movement." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* No. 11 (1984): 25-58.

<sup>131</sup> Wong, 134.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted from Wong, 134.

<sup>133</sup> Cheek, 28.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

forms in the Communist-controlled areas was stalled, and music did not move beyond the level of basic school songs for a long period of time.<sup>135</sup> However, although Mao's Talks at Yan'an set the precedent for government control of the arts, the onset of the Cultural Revolution ensured that any remaining degree of freedom in the arts was stifled.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Liu, 284.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 290.

## Music of the 1960s – 1970s

The music from the 1960s to the 1970s was almost entirely influenced by the Cultural Revolution.<sup>137</sup> The Cultural Revolution was a sociopolitical movement that took place from 1966 to 1976, with the goal to purge remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Party.<sup>138</sup> Many believe that Mao instigated the Cultural Revolution because he was losing political power, and his need to regain authority extended beyond politics to all aspects of life, including music.<sup>139</sup> During these ten years, all works of literature or art that did not fit in with the political aims or suit the tastes of Mao and his wife Jiang Qing were repudiated and destroyed.<sup>140</sup> Liu states, “Literature and art shifted from serving the Party to serving Mao and Jiang, and from being a means for the Party to enforce obedience they became a means for Mao and Jiang to enforce obedience”.<sup>141</sup>

One of the most well-known pieces created during the early 1960s was “The East is Red” (“*Dong fang hong*”).<sup>142</sup> Produced in 1963 to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, the musical film retells the history of the Chinese Communist Party from its founding in 1921 to its victory over the Nationalists in 1949.<sup>143</sup> It was directed by Wang Ping, one of the few female music directors during this period, and was an epic song and dance production, involving over 3,000 workers, students, and peasants.<sup>144</sup> The film became a cornerstone of Mao’s cult of personality, and its title song, also called “The East is Red”, became

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<sup>137</sup> Huihe Wang, *Zhongguo jinxindai yinyueshi (A History of Modern Chinese Music)*. Beijing: Remin yinyue chubanshe, 1984.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>139</sup> Galikowski, 190.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Liu, 479.

<sup>142</sup> Ho, 443.

<sup>143</sup> Wang, 120.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



the unofficial national anthem during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>145</sup> The song was based on a northern Shaanxi folk song, but given new words that compared Mao to the sun in the heaven.<sup>146</sup>

The lyrics state:

The east is red, the sun is rising.  
From China comes Mao Zedong.  
He strives for the people's happiness,  
Hurrah, he is the people's great saviour!

Chairman Mao loves the people,  
He is our guide  
to building a new China  
Hurrah, lead us forward!

The Communist Party is like the sun,  
Wherever it shines, it is bright  
Wherever the Communist Party is  
Hurrah, the people are liberated!<sup>147</sup>

Today, many people still think of *Dong fang hong* as one of the most popular and influential musical productions from the 1960s.<sup>148</sup> At the time, it was the model from which many later revolutionary pieces were composed.<sup>149</sup>

After the onset of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, gained tremendous power over the arts.<sup>150</sup> In 1966, she convened a Forum of Literature and Art Work in the Armed Forces.<sup>151</sup> At the forum, it was decided that the People's Liberation Army would play a decisive role in any socialist cultural revolution, and the re-education of cultural cadres was prioritized.<sup>152</sup> Zhou Yang, the cadre in charge of cultural affairs at the time, was forced out of power by Jiang,

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<sup>145</sup> Ho, 443.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted from Liu, 285.

<sup>148</sup> Ho, 443.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> McDougall, 211.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Galikowski, 200.

who claimed that his cultural policy was a “black revisionist line”.<sup>153</sup> More importantly, the forum “signaled the end of 17 years of work in literature and art since the founding of the PRC, and the beginning of Jiang Qing’s ‘revolutionary *yangbanxi*’”.<sup>154</sup>

Although Mao banned traditional Peking opera as “feudalistic and bourgeois”, he recognized its popularity among the people and sought to reform the genre to suit his revolutionary goals.<sup>155</sup> Thus, while traditional styles of singing, music, accompaniments, costumes and gestures were preserved, Jiang Qing rewrote the plots and dialogue of traditional operas and added Western symphonic instruments to enhance the dramatic development of the stories.<sup>156</sup> This led to the development of *yangbanxi*, which were operas and ballets produced during the Cultural Revolution that told stories from China's revolutionary struggles against foreign and class enemies.<sup>157</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, eight *yangbanxi* provided the only source of entertainment for entire population.<sup>158</sup> This led to the joke, “Eight hundred million people watched eight shows” (“*Ba yi ren kan ba ge xi*”).<sup>159</sup>

In creating *yangbanxi*, Mao and the Gang of Four demonstrated their pragmatism through exploiting all works of art that could work to their advantage and eradicating any which were damaging or useless to them.<sup>160</sup> Along these lines of pragmatism, almost all music during the Cultural Revolution was vocal music, because Jiang Qing believed that instrumental music was difficult to utilize as a propaganda tool.<sup>161</sup> As such, composers began inserting lyrics into ballets and symphonies such as “*Hongse niangzijun*” (“Red detachment of women”) and

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<sup>153</sup> Liu, 379.

<sup>154</sup> Liu, 378.

<sup>155</sup> Galikowski, 201.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Quoted from McDougall, 214.

<sup>160</sup> Liu, 381.

<sup>161</sup> Wong, 140.

“*Shajiabang*”.<sup>162</sup> Even the *Yellow River* concerto, the only truly instrumental piece promoted at the time, had subtitles which exhorted the audience to “Raise high the great red banner of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought and advance fearlessly”.<sup>163</sup> Sayings of Mao set to music, known as quotation songs, were also very popular from the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 until 1969.<sup>164</sup> These, along with other songs glorifying the Communist Party and Cultural Revolution, contributed to revolutionary frenzy of the time period and reinforced Mao’s cult of personality.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Liu, 400.

<sup>163</sup> Quoted from Liu, 467.

<sup>164</sup> Wang, 120.

<sup>165</sup> Lee, 143.

### Music from the 1970s-1990s

In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, a strong emphasis was given to redefining the role and direction of the arts.<sup>166</sup> In successive meetings and conferences, cultural leaders criticized the mistakes of the past and suggested models for musical reconstruction.<sup>167</sup> The necessity for art to be in line with politics was reiterated, but new leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang encouraged music workers to “build on the traditional legacy of the Chinese civilization” and incorporate foreign elements that would be helpful to the development of Chinese music.<sup>168</sup> The Central Committee also met with music educators and composers to correct the “unsophisticated singing styles” of the performers during the previous two decades and eliminated songs that merely promoted slogans from the Cultural Revolution.<sup>169</sup> Music textbooks and anthologies were revised to “reflect the new period”.<sup>170</sup> Finally, Mao’s prioritization of state goals over the arts was repudiated, and the government slowly began to support raising the quality of the arts.<sup>171</sup>

One of the defining characteristics of this post-Cultural Revolution period was the ability for composers to express their individuality.<sup>172</sup> In what Liu calls the “New Wave” period, the ability for free creation and self-expression was monumental, because individuality was consistently criticized and punished from the 1940s to the 1970s.<sup>173</sup> However, although composers embraced freedom of expression and Western influences in their music, many were

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<sup>166</sup> Lee, 162.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Curt Kraus. *The Party and the Arts in China: The New Politics of Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

<sup>168</sup> Kraus, 33.

<sup>169</sup> Liu, 485.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Brace, Tim. "Popular Music in Contemporary Beijing: Modernism and Cultural Identity." *Asian Music* 22.2, Views of Music in China Today (1991): 43-66.

<sup>172</sup> Liu, 510.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

still influenced by Mao's legacy.<sup>174</sup> In fact, setting Mao's poems to music was a popular activity even after the Cultural Revolution, and many works from notable composers such as Zheng Lücheng, and Tian Feng were inspired by Mao's words.<sup>175</sup>

It was not until the announcement of Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy in 1978 that China's popular music began to develop in a direction free from politics and cater to a younger generation.<sup>176</sup> As a result of Deng's Open Door Policy, the economy grew at an average annual rate of 10.5 percent from 1979 to 1994, and many coastal cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai underwent rapid development.<sup>177</sup> This economic growth transformed the music industry, because young people in the cities could now afford to buy recording and pay for concerts.<sup>178</sup> The import of foreign technology and the consequent availability of modern domestic and personal media appliances such as radios, cassette players, and television sets also accelerated the development of popular music.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to foreign genres, young people became enamored by popular music from Hong Kong and Taiwan, known as *Gangtaiyue*.<sup>180</sup> *Gangtaiyue* had smooth flowing melodies that were neither fully Chinese nor fully Western, and a light disco dance rhythm with high-pitched vocals reminiscent of Chinese folk song styles.<sup>181</sup> Because music in Hong Kong and Taiwan was not as strictly controlled by their respective governments, composers were able to write with much more freedom.<sup>182</sup> Liu asserts, "In Taiwan and Hong Kong, the environment for

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<sup>174</sup> Wang, 140.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Nimrod Baranovitch. *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender, and Politics, 1978-1997*. Berkeley: U of California, 2003.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Charles Hamm. "Music and Radio in the People's Republic of China." *Asian Music* 22.2, Views of Music in China Today (1991): 1-42.

<sup>179</sup> Hamm, 13.

<sup>180</sup> Baranovitch, 112.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ho, 444.

both music creation and research has been freer than in Mainland China”.<sup>183</sup> Thus, composers were able to write music dealing with taboo subjects such as love, which allowed *Gangtaiyue* to become immensely popular among the younger generations. Singers like Deng Lijun (also known as Teresa Teng) also stimulated the growth of an underground popular music scene in China.<sup>184</sup>

Not surprisingly, *Gangtaiyue* was criticized for being too Westernized, and the government was wary about *Gangtaiyue*’s role in the new youth culture.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, although most popular songs during the 1980s were nationalistic in nature, they did not necessarily support the government.<sup>186</sup> For example, Hou Dejian’s “The Descendants of the Dragon” (“*Long De Chuanren*”) was an iconic song during this period of time, and it became one of the anthems for the student protests on Tiananmen in 1989.<sup>187</sup> Its lyrics state:

In the Far East there is a river, its name is the Yangtze River  
In the Far East there is a river, its name is the Yellow River  
In the Ancient East there is a dragon, her name is China  
In the Ancient East there is a people, they are all the heirs of the dragon  
I grew up under the claw of the dragon, after I grew up I became an heir of the dragon  
Black eyes, black hair, yellow skin, forever and ever an heir of the dragon

In the Far East there is a river, its name is the Yangtze River  
In the Far East there is a river, its name is the Yellow River  
Although I’ve never seen the beauty of the Yangtze, in my dreams I miraculously travel  
the Yangtze’s waters  
Although I’ve never heard the strength of the Yellow River, the rushing and surging  
waters are in my dreams

A quiet night a hundred years ago, the deep dark night before a revolution  
The sound of guns and cannons broke the silent night; surrounded on all sides by the  
appeasers’ swords  
How many years do the cannons ring out, how many years and how many more

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<sup>183</sup> Liu, 629.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>186</sup> Ho, 445.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

Great dragon, great dragon, rub your eyes and awaken; rub your eyes and awaken forever<sup>188</sup>

It is clear that the racial nationalism promoted in the song through lines such as “Black eyes, black hair, yellow skin, forever and ever an heir of the dragon” is different from the state nationalism promoted by revolutionary songs. Therefore, although the CCP did not ban these songs from mainstream media, it did not support them either.<sup>189</sup>

Another genre of nationalistic pop music that became quite influential in the mid-1980s is *Xibeifeng*.<sup>190</sup> *Xibeifeng* adapted folk song melodies from the northwestern part of China to pop accompaniment developed in Hong Kong and Taiwan.<sup>191</sup> These folk songs used a Western-style fast tempo, strong beat, and forceful bass lines, but also included Chinese traditional instruments.<sup>192</sup> In contrast to Canto-pop, *Xibeifeng* songs were sung loudly and forcefully, and this rough vocal style gained popularity because of its folk roots.<sup>193</sup> In fact, the rise of *Xibeifeng* was aided by the *Xungen* (seeking roots) movement that began in the late 1980s. This cultural and literary movement in mainland China celebrated local and minority cultures, and strived to preserve the Chinese identity against the flood of foreign cultural influence.<sup>194</sup>

However, although *Xibeifeng* songs’ revolved around nationalistic content, such as the Long March and scenes from the countryside, this genre also gave rise to Chinese rock and roll, or *yaogun yinyue*, which became a means of protest against the government.<sup>195</sup> For example, Cui Jian, considered the father of Chinese rock and roll and a leading figure in the *Xibeifeng* genre, was often banned by the government because his music and political lyrics were thought to

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<sup>188</sup> Quoted from Kraus, 234.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Andrew F Jones. *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music*. Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell U, 1992.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ho, 445.

<sup>193</sup> Brace, 50.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Hao Huang. "Yaogun Yinyue: Rethinking Mainland Chinese Rock 'n' Roll." *Popular Music* 20.1 (2001): 1-11.

present a bad example to young people.<sup>196</sup> His song, “Nothing to My Name”, tells the story of a poor boy pleading with his girlfriend to accept his love though he has nothing, but also symbolizes the feelings of disillusionment and dispossession that were present among the younger generations at the time. Its lyrics state:

I have asked endlessly,  
when will you go with me?  
But you always laugh at me, for having nothing to my name.

I want to give you my dreams [goals],  
and my freedom,  
but you always laugh at me, for having nothing.

Oh! When will you go with me?  
Oh! When will you go with me?

The ground beneath my feet is moving,  
the water by my side is flowing,  
but you always laugh at me, for having nothing.

Why is your laughter never enough?  
[Why does your laughter never end?]  
Why do I always have to chase you?  
Could it be that in front of you  
I forever have nothing to my name.

Oh! When will you go with me?  
Oh! When will you go with me?

I tell you I’ve waited a long time,  
I give you my final request,  
I want to take your hands,  
and then you’ll go with me.

This time your hands are trembling,  
this time your tears are flowing.  
Could it be that you’re telling me,  
you love me with nothing to my name?

Oh! Now you will go with me!<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Jonathan Campbell. *Red Rock: The Long, Strange March of Chinese Rock & Roll*. Hong Kong: Earnshaw, 2011.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted from Campbell, 33.



Because of its double-meaning, “I Have Nothing” became another student anthem at the time of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.<sup>198</sup> Although the rock music was briefly banned after the protests, rock and roll continued to function as a means for the younger generation to express their discontent towards government repression. Jones states, “with their “disturbing” hairstyles and costumes such as long hair, torn up jeans, gothic style silver metal ornaments and black leather jackets, rock artists represented a non-conformist attitude and were welcomed by the youth who wanted a change from the uniform and state-controlled culture.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, the popularity of rock groups continued to increase during the late 1980s, and by the 1990s, there were three rock bands with large followings: Huxi (Breathing), Cobra, and Zang Tianshuo.<sup>200</sup>

The true demise of Chinese rock was spurred by economic reasons.<sup>201</sup> In 1992, Deng Xiaoping made his Southern Tour to Shenzhen and other cities to defend his Open Door Policy.<sup>202</sup> As the economy once again embraced market-based reforms, the music industry became increasingly commercialized.<sup>203</sup> Canto-pop and other forms of popular music that had a wider public appeal and fewer government restrictions became more attractive investments to record companies than rock music.<sup>204</sup> Thus, Canto-pop regained its popularity while rock music quickly became isolated from mainstream popular culture.<sup>205</sup> This downfall of rock music caused some rock artists such as Tian Zhen and Xu Wei to adopt the Canto-pop style and achieve commercial success, to the disappointment of other artists like He Yong, who desired to keep the integrity and spirit of Chinese rock.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>199</sup> Jones, 295.

<sup>200</sup> Campbell, 70.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>202</sup> Baranovitch, 128.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Baranovitch, 130.

<sup>205</sup> Jones, 302.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

During the 1990s, it seemed as if the government was losing control of the growing popularity of western popular music styles.<sup>207</sup> For example, many foreign artists held concerts in China for the first time and international music festivals, such as the Beijing Jazz Festival, were inaugurated.<sup>208</sup> In addition, foreign record companies began to expand into Chinese markets in the 1990s, and many popular singers such as Na Ying and Liu Huan signed contracts with companies such as EMI and Sony.<sup>209</sup> Thus, the government began to think of ways to counter the internationalism of popular music in China by reinforcing its nationalistic policies. In 1994, the CCP Propaganda Department issued the “Fundamental Principles on Implementing a Patriotic Education”, which endorsed traditional Chinese customs and Confucian values.<sup>210</sup> The Patriotic Education Campaign also renewed emphasis on patriotic songs as a means to unite China’s people under the concept of “one China”.<sup>211</sup> As a result, revolutionary songs, or *hong’ge*, from before 1949 were revised and popularized in the 1990s.<sup>212</sup> Classic Maoist revolutionary songs were reworked with R&B and reggae rhythms, and “The East is Red” was even rewritten with disco beats.<sup>213</sup> Although this new style of *hong’ge* never achieved the same popularity as Canto-pop or rock, they nonetheless were successful in reviving revolutionary songs that been marginalized by the Westernization of popular music.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Campbell, 125.

<sup>208</sup> Ho, 448.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Wang, 210.

<sup>212</sup> Kraus, 140.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Wang, 234.

## CHAPTER 3

### Exploring Traditional and Contemporary *Min'ge*

Although *min'ge* translates directly as “folk songs”, the term itself does not represent the entire spectrum of folk songs in China. In both music research and education, traditional *min'ge* is usually separated into two categories: *shaoshu minzu min'ge* (ethnic minority folk songs), and *hanzu min'ge* (Han folk songs).<sup>215</sup> However, these distinctions are semantically problematic – besides ethnic differences, there are many layers of regional and stylistic differences that are not reflected in these broad categories.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, I argue that due to the commercialization and modernization of traditional music, as well as the impact of certain government policies, a third category of contemporary *min'ge* has emerged. More importantly, the creation, performance, and popularization of contemporary *min'ge* reflects the cultural hegemony of the Chinese Communist Party and Han majority. This cultural hegemony, derived from the ability to manipulate cultural products, leads to issues of representation and national identity which will be explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>215</sup> Central Music Institute Chinese Music Research Institute. *Minzu yinyue gailun* (Outline of National Music). Beijing: Yinyue chubanshe, 1980.

<sup>216</sup> Yang Mu. "Academic Ignorance or Political Taboo? Some Issues in China's Study of Its Folk Song Culture." *Ethnomusicology* 38.2 (1994): 303-20.

## Traditional Folk Music

### **Definitions**

First, before comparing traditional and contemporary *min'ge* styles, it is important to define the scope of “folk music” in this analysis and discuss its unifying characteristics. While it is agreed upon that folk music originates from the masses, scholars often debate the degree to which folk music can be changed without losing its traditional identity.<sup>217</sup> For example, Rachel Harris defines traditional folk music as “unwritten oral traditions”, but also acknowledges that the genre of folk music has changed significantly since the importation of musical notation and recording devices.<sup>218</sup> Additionally, Baranovitch highlights that there have been even greater changes as a result of the commodification of folk songs.<sup>219</sup> However, while both Harris and Baranovitch view these changes as threatening to the traditional value of folk music, Mackerras regards these changes as natural. He asserts, “Folk songs, like other performing art forms, are a developing tradition and consequently subject to change”.<sup>220</sup>

While acknowledging the inevitable changes in music composition, I will define traditional folk music as songs free of political influence, originating from and created for the people of which the music is supposed to represent. Although the categories of “traditional” and “contemporary” imply temporal distinctions, it is impossible to assign a given time period to each category, because traditional folk music can still be composed today.<sup>221</sup> Thus, “traditional” is more synonymous with “original”, and “contemporary” can be thought of as deviating from

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<sup>217</sup> Helen Rees. “Authenticity” and the Foreign Audience for Traditional Music in Southwest China.” *J. of Musicological Res. GMUR Journal of Musicological Research* 17.2 (1998): 135-61.

<sup>218</sup> Rachel Harris. “Wang Luobin: Folk Song King of the Northwest or Song Thief?: Copyright, Representation, and Chinese Folk Songs.” *Modern China* 31.3 (2005): 385.

<sup>219</sup> Nimrod Baranovitch. “Between Alterity and Identity: New Voices of Minority People in China.” *Modern China* 27.3 (2001): 359-401.

<sup>220</sup> Colin Mackerras. “Folksongs and Dances of China's Minority Nationalities: Policy, Tradition, and Professionalization.” *Modern China* 10.2 (1984): 200.

<sup>221</sup> Richard Curt Kraus. *The Party and the Arts in China: The New Politics of Culture*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

the original form. However, it is important to note that many songs of the *min'ge* style composed after 1942 will not be considered traditional *min'ge* for the purposes of this analysis. I highlight 1942 as the pivotal year for folk music, because, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the Yan'an Talks inspired many changes – one of which included the assignment of composers to the countryside to learn about folk melodies and rewrite folk songs with revolutionary lyrics. In addition, after the Yan'an Talks, revolutionary music, or *hong'ge*, became the only acceptable form of music, causing many genres of music, including folk music and Western classical styles, to be assimilated into this category.<sup>222</sup>

### Unique Characteristics

In traditional *min'ge*, there are many layers of diversity. For example, although the label of “Han” implies a unity of folk customs, Han folk songs can be separated into eleven different “culture areas”: the Northeastern Plain, Northwestern Plain, Jing Huai Plateau (northern Jiangsu and northern Anhui), Jiang Zhe Plain (south Jiangsu), southern Anhui, Zhejiang, Min Tai (Fujian and Taiwan), Yue (Guangdong), Jiang Han Plain (Hubei, southern Henan), Xiang (Hunan), Gan (Jiangxi), Southwestern Plateau, and Kejia (Hakka people of various places). These “culture areas” differ in not only their geographic locations, but also their customs, dialects, and musical traditions.<sup>223</sup>

The diversity of the *shaoshu minzu min'ge* is even greater. Even though it is well known that each of the 55 minorities preserves its own characteristic local music, there are many types

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<sup>222</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall, ed. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: U of California, 1984.

<sup>223</sup> Han Kuo-Huang. "Folk songs of the Han Chinese: Characteristics and classifications." *Asian music* 20.2 (1989): 110.

of folk songs not accounted for.<sup>224</sup> In fact, Chinese musicologists often divide the folk songs of each minority into several categories.<sup>225</sup> For example, there are nine representative types of Mongolian folk songs that are often divided into the broader categories “long songs” (*chang diao*) and “short songs” (*duan diao*), depending on their function, tempo, lyrical content, and accompanying instruments.<sup>226</sup>

Besides the divisions within Han *min’ge* and ethnic minority *min’ge*, there are differences between the two categories in terms of instrumentation, tonality, vocal styles, and tempo. For example, Mongolian folk songs are often accompanied by the horse-head fiddle, *yoochin*, and *Khuuchir*, whereas Han folk songs usually feature the *suona*, *chuigushou* and the *luo* (commonly known as a gong).<sup>227</sup> The singing styles of each minority are also very different. Uyghur folk songs, for instance, have many ornamentations in the melodic line, whereas Han folk songs, such as mountain songs (*shan’ge*), have much more straightforward melodies.<sup>228</sup> The tempo of traditional folk songs also varies significantly – whereas some are not metered, like the “long songs” of Mongolian origin, others, like the Uyghur *sanam*, feature percussive instruments that play complex rhythms.<sup>229</sup> Traditional folk songs also have unique tonality – for example, Mongolian throat singing, or *Khoomei*, is a type of overtone singing, where the performer produces a fundamental pitch and simultaneously adds one or more pitches over the first pitch.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Central Music Institute Chinese Music Research Institute. *Minzu yinyue gailun* (Outline of National Music).

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>227</sup> Jie Jin. *Chinese Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>230</sup> Central Music Institute Chinese Music Research Institute. *Minzu yinyue gailun* (Outline of National Music): 85.

## Preservation and Influence

Unfortunately, the preservation of these songs has been difficult. Folk music, along with many other types of music mentioned in Chapter 2, suffered many negative consequences from the Cultural Revolution. For instance, the singing of folk songs was forbidden and many talented singers were persecuted.<sup>231</sup> Those who collected folk music were also under attack because folk songs were considered traditional elements of society to be eradicated.<sup>232</sup> Today, many of the elderly who would potentially be capable of passing on these folk song traditions, are too traumatized from the Cultural Revolution to sing.<sup>233</sup> Schimmelpenninck states, “In the Wu area<sup>234</sup>, many people are still afraid because of their past experiences and do not want to sing any more, certainly not in front of a microphone”.<sup>235</sup>

Furthermore, the attitude towards folk music has changed, with both the younger and older generations considering folk songs to be obsolete in the dynamically modernizing world.<sup>236</sup> Young people who develop a professional interest in singing usually become students at urban conservatories or art schools, where an operatic and polished style of singing is taught, which has little in common with traditional rural performance styles.<sup>237</sup> Many of the elderly also seem to have internalized the idea that traditional customs are no longer relevant, or even welcome, in the modern era.<sup>238</sup> When elderly Wu singers were asked why they no longer perform their songs in the fields, they remarked, “We cannot do that. People would laugh at us; they would think us

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<sup>231</sup> David Holm. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>233</sup> Antoinet Schimmelpenninck. *Chinese Folk Songs and Folk Singers: Shan'ge Traditions in Southern Jiangsu*. Leiden: CHIME Foundation, 1997.

<sup>234</sup> Wu are ethnically Han, but have their own dialects. They reside in southern Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas (Schimmelpenninck, 15)

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>236</sup> Geremie Barmé. *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.

<sup>237</sup> Baranovitch, 360.

<sup>238</sup> Schimmelpenninck, 30.

mad”.<sup>239</sup> This is a stark contrast from the prevalence of folk song singing before the Cultural Revolution, when singing folk songs were considered a part of daily life and a very important tradition of the villages.<sup>240</sup>

These difficulties in the preservation of traditional *min'ge* and its declining influence has set the pretext for the emergence of contemporary *min'ge*. Additionally, the diversity of traditional *min'ge* explored in this section will be contrasted to the homogenization of contemporary *min'ge* highlighted in the next section.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>240</sup> Mackerras, 190.



## Contemporary *Min'ge*

### **Development and Politicization before the Cultural Revolution**

In the beginning, contemporary *min'ge* was not political. The first song to have Mandarin lyrics set to traditional minority folk music was “Dabancheng Girl” (“*Dabancheng de guniang*”), written in 1938 by Wang Luobin, a Han composer who gained a tremendous amount of fame for composing songs with in a Uyghur style.<sup>241</sup> The lyrics, which are in Mandarin, describe the beauty of girls from Dabancheng, a city in the Xinjiang province. The lyrics are as follows:

Dabancheng girls have long plaits and two eyes so pretty.  
If you get married, don't marry anyone else, you must marry me  
Bring along your wealth, and your little sister, come along on your horse-drawn cart!<sup>242</sup>

Now considered a quintessential Uyghur folk song in many folk song anthologies in China, the song was most likely inspired by the Turkic carters who passed through Lanzhou, where Wang settled during the Second Sino-Japanese War.<sup>243</sup> According to Harris, “Dabancheng Girl” was very popular among Chinese audiences in Lanzhou, where it was performed by Wang's theater troupe, but there is no evidence that it became popular in other areas of China at that time.<sup>244</sup> In fact, it is highly unlikely, due to the fact that Wang's troupe performed only locally.<sup>245</sup>

However, even though Wang's music did not have a tremendous following at the time, his idea of writing Mandarin lyrics for traditional minority *min'ge* was echoed by many composers during the 1940s. As Mao's Talks at Yan'an were internalized and many composers

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<sup>241</sup> Harris, 382.

<sup>242</sup> Quoted from Harris, 383.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 384.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

were sent to the countryside to “learn from the people”, a large amount of contemporary *min’ge* was created.<sup>246</sup>

Unlike Wang’s initial songs, however, these new *min’ge* were explicitly political. In fact, the only defining characteristic between these *min’ge* and other revolutionary types of music such as *hong’ge* was their use of minority folk tunes.<sup>247</sup> For example, the song “The Sun in the Grassland Rises Never to Go Down” (“*Caoyuan shang shengqi bu luo de taiyang*”), written in 1952 by Meili Qige, is often referred to as a “Mongolian folk song” due to its melodic lines, slow tempo and free rhythm that are characteristic of traditional Mongolian folk music.<sup>248</sup> However, although Meili Qige was ethnically Mongolian, he wrote this piece in Mandarin for his students at Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and its main purpose is to extol Chairman Mao.<sup>249</sup>

The lyrics state:

White clouds float in the blue sky, under the white clouds horses gallop  
Waving whip sounds all around, a hundred birds hover together.

If people ask me what place is that  
I proudly tell them: this is our home.

People here love peace, and have deep love for their native land  
They sing about their new lives, they sing about the Communist Party.

Chairman Mao, ah! The Communist Party! They are bringing us up to maturity  
The sun in the grassland rises never to go down...<sup>250</sup>

This reflects the policy of “coming from the masses and going back to the masses” that was the basis of the creation of contemporary *min’ge* during the 1940s and 1960s.<sup>251</sup> This mass-line policy, in the context of music, essentially describes the process of taking melodic material

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<sup>246</sup> Central Music Institute Chinese Music Research Institute. *Minzu yinyue gailun* (Outline of National Music): 70.

<sup>247</sup> Holm, 210.

<sup>248</sup> Baranovitch, 362.

<sup>249</sup> Huihe Wang. *Zhongguo jinxiandai yinyueshi* (A History of Modern Chinese Music). Beijing: Remin yinyue chubanshe, 1984.

<sup>250</sup> Quoted from Baranovitch, 362.

<sup>251</sup> Charles Hamm. “Music and Radio in the People's Republic of China.” *Asian Music* 22.2 (1991): 1-42.

(folk melodies, tempos, singing styles, etc.) from the people, then giving it back to them in a new form that is “coordinated and systematized after careful study”.<sup>252</sup> However, folk music was not only to be arranged and harmonized by professionally-trained musicians, but also sanitized in this process. Hamm states, “Not incidentally, in the process it [folk music] was purged of ideologically incorrect associations – folk music’s connection with the “superstitions” of religious and pagan ritual, and Chinese classical music’s historical association with the privileged classes – and was offered in a new, ideologically correct environment”.<sup>253</sup> This new type of *min’ge* was then popularized through performances by state ensembles, and publicized and praised by the state press to “encourage the masses to embrace this music as their own”.<sup>254</sup>

### **Development after the Cultural Revolution**

While the trend of setting folk songs to revolutionary lyrics in Mandarin persisted throughout the 1940s to the 1960s, all remnants of folk culture were harshly banned by the government during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>255</sup> However, after the Cultural Revolution, folk songs were slowly recovered and the content of contemporary *min’ge* began to shift away from the glorifying Mao.<sup>256</sup> Instead, minority folk songs focusing on pastoral life, love, and women became extremely popular.<sup>257</sup>

In 1982, the Minister of Culture, Huang Zhen, made a speech in the closing of the All-China Minority Nationalities Performing Arts Festival that became the official source for policy

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<sup>252</sup> Ralph A. Litzinger. "Memory Work: Reconstituting the Ethnic in Post-Mao China." *Cultural Anthropology* 13.2 (1998): 224-55.

<sup>253</sup> Hamm, 13.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, the only forms of entertainment permitted was *yangbanxi*.

<sup>256</sup> Litzinger, 230.

<sup>257</sup> Harris, 390.

toward the performing arts of minority groups.<sup>258</sup> His speech can be summarized into these five essential points:<sup>259</sup>

1. The cultural cadres, folk, and other artists of the minority nationality performing arts who were suppressed by the gang of four should be reinstated.
2. The minority nationalities should enjoy “full autonomy and power of initiative” in their performing arts, and “be the real masters in their own house of culture”.
3. While variety in the arts should be encouraged, Party policy should be applied in all areas, with literature and arts being no exception.
4. Cadres should work to build the cultural enterprises of the minority nationality areas and make sure remote areas are not left out.
5. All performing arts work must aim to promote unity among the nationalities, including that among Han and minority workers in the performing arts, as well as that among the various minority nationalities themselves.

Although these points seem to suggest a rather open policy towards minority arts, there are many contradictions which ultimately reinforce the cultural authority of the Party. For example, while Huang encouraged minorities to be “the masters in their own house of culture”, he reinforces the fact that all literature and art is still subject to Party policy. Furthermore, Huang’s instructions to “promote unity among the nationalities” are less heavy-handed than Mao’s requirement that all literature and art be “revolutionary”, but minority arts are still mandated to serve Party goals, which clearly limits their agency.

While contemporary minority *min’ge* composed today avoids explicit glorification of the Party, they are not entirely apolitical.<sup>260</sup> In fact, many contemporary folk songs that borrow ethnic *min’ge* styles have lyrics that carry implicit political messages.<sup>261</sup> One example is the

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<sup>258</sup> Jingzhi Liu. *A Critical History of New Music in China*. Trans. Caroline Mason. Hong Kong: Chinese UP, 2010.

<sup>259</sup> Mackerras, 191.

<sup>260</sup> Gregory Lee. "The ‘East Is Red’ Goes Pop: Commodification, Hybridity and Nationalism in Chinese Popular Song and Its Televisual Performance." *Popular Music* 14.01 (1995): 95-110.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

song “Road to Heaven”, released in 2005 by half-Tibetan singer Han Hong.<sup>262</sup> The song’s music video features video clips from the construction of the Beijing-Lhasa express train, and expresses the singer’s anticipation of the railroad reaching her hometown.<sup>263</sup> The lyrics state:

At dawn I stand in the fresh green meadow  
And find a sacred eagle carrying the morning rays on its wings  
Like an auspicious cloud flying across the sky  
To bring good fortune to the Tibetan peoples

At dusk I stand high up on the hill  
To watch that railroad be built to my hometown  
Like dragons crossing the mountains one after another  
To bring welfare to the snow-capped plateau

That’s a heavenly road of wonder ahh...  
To carry the warmth of the world to the border area  
Making mountains and roads no longer inaccessible  
And bringing the peoples together through laughter<sup>264</sup>

Even though the song never directly mentions the CCP, the song glorifies one of the CCP’s projects, and thus indirectly praises the government’s policies. Furthermore, in several lines of the song, the Beijing-Lhasa express train is portrayed as the savior of the Tibetan people. For example, the comparison between the train and “an auspicious cloud flying across the sky to bring good fortune to the Tibetan peoples”, and the reference to the train as “a heavenly road of wonder”, all serve to reinforce the image of gratitude from the Tibetan people towards the government.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Yangdon Dhondup. “Dancing to the Beat of Modernity: The Rise and Development of Tibetan Pop Music.” *Tibetan Modernities* (2008): 285-304.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>264</sup> Quoted from Dhondup, 290.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

## Commercialization and Modernization

As explored in Chapter 2, economic growth during the 1980s transformed the music industry, and the commodification of music accelerated the development of popular music, as well as contemporary minority *min'ge*.<sup>266</sup> Minority *min'ge* now had to compete with *Gangtaiyue*, and many composers exploited the “exotic” qualities of traditional minority folk music as economic capital.<sup>267</sup> In fact, in a response to the flood of foreign influence after the Open Door Policy of 1978, many people were drawn to minority *min'ge* because it retained the authenticity that genres such as *Gangtaiyue* seemed to lack.<sup>268</sup> Like the *Xibeifeng* songs of the mid-1980s, minority *min'ge* became even more popular during the *Xungen* movement because it represented a type of music that celebrated its cultural roots.<sup>269</sup>

However, contemporary minority *min'ge* was also greatly influenced by the genres of pop and rock that became popular during the 1980s.<sup>270</sup> For example, the song “I Want to Go to Tibet” (“Wo Xiang Qu Xizang”) that was popularized by Wulan Tuoya, a Mongolian *min'ge* singer, is an interesting crossover between *min'ge* and pop.<sup>271</sup> Although the style of singing features a nasal tone and guttural ornamentations that are typical of traditional Tibetan and Mongolian folk songs, the song has an upbeat pop rhythm that reflects the importation of an entirely Western concept.<sup>272</sup> The incorporation of this rhythm became commonplace among many minority themed songs during the early 2000s.<sup>273</sup> In fact, the only elements of these new *min'ge* pop songs that allude traditional minority folk music is the use of certain traditional

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<sup>266</sup> Liu, 382.

<sup>267</sup> Harris, 389.

<sup>268</sup> Dhondup, 300.

<sup>269</sup> Lee, 112.

<sup>270</sup> Jin, 246.

<sup>271</sup> Dhondup, 290.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Jin, 246.

singing techniques and lyrics emphasizing the allure of China's periphery regions.<sup>274</sup> In this particular song, the lyrics describe the singer's admiration and longing for Tibet:

Buddha's halo breaks endless bleakness,  
A chant sounds rejoicing and soothing.  
Early morning, I lift my wings of clouds  
Late in the evening, I crawl towards your Heaven.

New life flows along the Yarlung Zangbo River,  
Memory stretches long in the Potala Palace  
The grand grassland is opening its arms  
To welcome me, a gentle sheep.

I want to go to Tibet.  
I want to go to Tibet!  
To worship its grand snowy land,  
Beautiful scenery and lush green grass.  
The pasture in my heart is everywhere!

I want to go to Tibet.  
I want to go to Tibet!  
To worship Samsara and Nirvana.  
In loneliness and long dark night,  
A Snow Lotus blossoms in my heart!<sup>275</sup>

Parallel to the influence of pop and rock, Western classical styles also became commonplace in the composition of contemporary *min'ge*.<sup>276</sup> Today, professional and amateur musicians alike will associate the term "*min'ge*" to a style that is a hybrid between traditional Han *min'ge* and Western classical styles.<sup>277</sup> This style of *min'ge* belongs to a genre of music that Hamm refers to as "light music", or what Liu categorizes as "New Music".<sup>278</sup> In Hamm's analysis, light music encompasses "instrumental arrangements of Chinese traditional melodies, new pieces by Chinese composers based on similar melodic material, folk songs arranged for

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<sup>274</sup> Dhondup, 291.

<sup>275</sup> Qtd. from Dhondup, 290.

<sup>276</sup> Barmé, 100.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Hamm 1991; Liu 2010.

voices with instrumental accompaniment, and recent vocal compositions drawing on elements of traditional Chinese style”.<sup>279</sup> Although this music possesses traditional “Chinese” qualities, the melody is based on a pentatonic scale, and the songs usually feature a string-dominated ensemble including both Chinese and Western instruments.<sup>280</sup>

Thus, this style is often seen as not entirely Chinese or Western. One of the most “Chinese” elements of this type of *min’ge*, in fact, is its connection to *hong’ge*.<sup>281</sup> Like the revolutionary songs developed in the 1920s and 1930s, many songs are fervently nationalistic and exult loyalty to the state.<sup>282</sup> In “My Motherland”, for example, the chorus states:

I love my country, I kiss my country,  
Kiss you with my warmest part of my heart,  
I love my motherland, I kiss my motherland,  
Loving you is my life’s sustenance<sup>283</sup>

However, although these songs have origins from the early revolutionary songs, they are noticeably more sophisticated and complex.<sup>284</sup> For example, most of these songs include both Western orchestras and traditional Chinese instruments as accompaniment, and feature Western-influenced forms and harmonies, tempered tuning, virtuosic effects, fixed rhythmic interpretations, and melodic ornaments.<sup>285</sup> The style of singing is also very refined – it features the nasal tone of traditional Han folk songs, but incorporates Western operatic techniques and tonality to create a fuller sound.<sup>286</sup>

On the one hand, this reflects the greater importance placed on raising the quality of the arts after the Cultural Revolution, as explored in Chapter 2. The adaptation of Western models

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<sup>279</sup> Hamm, 7.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Kraus, 75.

<sup>282</sup> Lee, 105.

<sup>283</sup> Quoted from Lee, 105.

<sup>284</sup> Jin, 311.

<sup>285</sup> Hamm, 10.

<sup>286</sup> Jin, 312.



of harmony, intonation, and instrumentation can also be seen as attempt to “modernize” Chinese music, because Western music was seen as more modern and scientific than traditional Chinese music.<sup>287</sup> Hamm notes, however, that this development was not unique, but followed a Soviet model.<sup>288</sup> Chinese conservatories of music were reshaped in the 1950s according to the Russian system, and the Soviet model of large “folk” ensembles playing arrangements created by professional composers of traditional tunes became the example for many contemporary Han *min’ge* ensembles today.<sup>289</sup> Nonetheless, this new “national music culture”, with contemporary Han *min’ge* as a center point, became essentially, “Chinese folk melodies + western professional techniques”.<sup>290</sup>

On the other hand, the Westernization of *min’ge* may reflect the practical demands of the state. The revolutionary songs of the 1920s and 1930s fell into disfavor among much of the Chinese population after 1978 because of their association with attitudes prevalent during the Cultural Revolution, and since then, the government has attempted to “repackage” these songs in order to maintain their appeal.<sup>291</sup> The growing openness to foreign culture after the Open Door Policy also gave the Chinese population a chance to choose from among a much wider range of musical styles.<sup>292</sup> Therefore, it is clear that contemporary *min’ge* is a practical adaptation of *hong’ge*, because the older genre is no longer capable of rousing and maintaining mass enthusiasm for the state.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Liu, 222.

<sup>288</sup> Hamm, 11.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Holm, 297.

<sup>292</sup> McDougall, 345.

<sup>293</sup> Hamm, 9.

## Societal Changes

Besides the three trends in music mentioned thus far (modernization, commercialization, and politicization), there were also several societal changes that affected the *min'ge* genre significantly. First, the professionalization of the performing artists drastically changed the development of minority folk music.<sup>294</sup> Although minority artists were employed by professional companies since the Communist Party came to power, the emphasis on minority recruitment after 1975 contributed to significantly greater Han control over minority music.<sup>295</sup> Yang Mu notes that Zhou Enlai encouraged the Central Nationalities Song and Dance Troupe to have 50 percent representation from minority artists, but by 1984, the percentage had already reached 57 percent.<sup>296</sup> Mackerras adds, “by its enthusiastic sponsorship of the mass arts of the minority nationalities, the CCP has been willing and able to control the type of arts revived and performed, to choose the artists, and to ensure the ideological suitability of anything that appears on stage”.<sup>297</sup>

However, while some would argue that this Han influence is threatening the preservation of traditional minority folk music, Mackerras points out that artists who are recruited into state-run professional troupes are given many benefits that are often denied to other performing artists, such as access to social services and a stable salary.<sup>298</sup> Thus, Mackerras asserts that these artists are better off in professional troupes than they were before, when the state did not sponsor minority arts.<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, this method is suggestive of a carrot-and-stick approach – by controlling access to these benefits, the government is able to retain its control over yet another aspect of popular culture.

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<sup>294</sup> Mackerras, 215.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Mu, 310.

<sup>297</sup> Mackerras, 215.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, the education of minority artists in a system of training that is of Han origin denies any opportunity for these artists to break away from Han influence. In discussing the new dynamics of professionalism in music, Baranovich states, “Minority artists and intellectuals were trained in Han-dominated official institutions, acquiring politically correct knowledge about their ethnic identity and learning how to represent it artistically in politically accepted venues”.<sup>300</sup> Thus, the revival of minority folk music and accelerated recruitment of minority artists may have created the image of diversity that Huang intended when he encouraged minorities to be “the real masters in their own house of culture” – however, whether or not these trends have benefited the development of traditional minority music is extremely questionable.

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<sup>300</sup> Baranovich, 346.

## Discussion

### **Cultural Hegemony of the CCP**

The development of contemporary *min'ge* has essentially redefined the understanding of folk music as grassroots, oral musical traditions that have been passed down through generations. As mentioned earlier, the changes in this definition of folk music have been influenced by the commercialization and modernization of music, certain government policies, and societal changes in terms of the professionalization and education of musicians. However, although each of these factors have contributed to the development of contemporary *min'ge* in different ways, it is important to recognize that all of these processes assert the cultural hegemony of the CCP, where cultural hegemony is defined as the ability to control cultural production and assign cultural significance.

First, the policy of “coming from the masses and going back to the masses” clearly outlined the intention of the government to gain control over all types of popular music, including folk music. By determining developing and refining certain elements of traditional folk songs, but eliminating others, such as any pagan and religious significance, the CCP transformed the composition of folk music and accelerated the development of contemporary *min'ge* – a style of music which Wang Luobin first introduced. Additionally, the government’s rigorous efforts to popularize this type of music and inspire people to “embrace it as their own” reveals the CCP’s supervision over not only the production of *min'ge*, but also its influence.

Although Huang Zhen’s 1982 speech appears to be less dictatorial than Mao’s talks at Yan’an, in reality, it reiterated the tremendous amount of control the government maintained over minority arts. In the end, minority music was still subject to the policies of the Party and functioned to serve the Party’s goals. While “serving the Party” no longer requires the explicit

glorification of the CPP, songs like “Road to Heaven” are reminders that contemporary *min’ge* can function as government propaganda in multiple ways, including by celebrating its actions or projects.

Similarly, though the commercialization of music suggests that the development of contemporary *min’ge* was not solely influenced by the government but also by economic forces, the modernization of *min’ge* tells an entirely different story. While the modernization, or Westernization, of music is not unique to the genre of *min’ge*, the one of the main purposes behind the incorporation of Western musical elements was to revive old revolutionary songs. In this way, the modernization of *min’ge* reflects the government’s strategy of repackaging revolutionary *hong’ge* to be more palatable for the contemporary audience.

Finally, the education and professionalization of musicians has given the government a tremendous amount of control in terms of the creation and performance of *min’ge*. Although there are important economic benefits to the professionalization of musicians, the government’s complete authority over the selection and training of minority individuals to state professional troupes effectively stymies any potential agency minorities have in terms of overturning the cultural hegemony of the CCP from within these Han-dominated institutions.

## CHAPTER 4

### Issues of Representation and National Identity

Cultural hegemony, defined as the complete authority over cultural production and significance, is not necessarily a novel concept. In fact, the cultural hegemony of the CCP and the Han majority has been explored by both political scientists and anthropologists, and has led to related concepts such as “internal Orientalism”, which focuses on the exoticization of minorities.<sup>301</sup> Beyond highlighting the privileged and dominant role the Chinese state has in constructing and representing ethnic identities, however, this chapter will also explore the significance of cultural hegemony in the context of different theories of nationalism, and its implications on Han-minority relations.

At the first level of analysis, there are, essentially, two identities created by *min'ge*. One is the representation of minorities as primitive and exotic, and the other is the representation of the Han as Westernized and advanced.<sup>302</sup> The two representations work simultaneously to reinforce the idea of the Han as the enlightened leaders, similar to the “benevolent dictators” of China.<sup>303</sup> A more in-depth analysis of *min'ge*'s role in Chinese nationalism presents the following contradiction: the same voice of the minorities that is popularized through *min'ge* functions to stifle their political voice. There have, however, been exceptions, and these will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

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<sup>301</sup> Louisa Schein. "Gender and Internal Orientalism in China." *Modern China* 23.1 (1997): 69-98.

<sup>302</sup> Dru C. Gladney. "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53.1 (1994): 92-123.

<sup>303</sup> Han 2013.

## The Dynamics of “Otherness”

The issues of representation associated with the cultural hegemony of the CCP are particularly important to examine within *min’ge* due to the subliminal nature of its messages.<sup>304</sup> At a first glance, it is difficult to distinguish anything negative about the depiction of minorities. In fact, the tunes and lyrics are extremely appealing because they depict such picturesque scenes. “The Beautiful Grassland is My Home” (“*Meili de caoyuan shi wode jia*”), for example, became one of the most well-known “Mongolian” folk songs due to its alluring representation of the pastoral lifestyle of the Mongolian people.<sup>305</sup> The lyrics idealize life in the countryside:

The beautiful grassland is my home,  
The wind blows through the green grass  
and there are flowers everywhere  
Colored butterflies are flying  
and hundred birds are singing,  
The glow of the sunset is reflected in the blue water  
The coursers are just like the beautiful clouds,  
Flocks and herds are just like the pearls on the grassland.  
Ah ... ah ... he...  
Shepherd girls are singing openly,  
their delightful voices fill the skyline.

The beautiful grassland is my home,  
I love its clear water and beautiful grassland.  
The grassland is just like the green sea,  
and the yurts are just like white lotus flowers.  
The herdsmen depict a happy landscape,  
and the beautiful spring scenery is just like a picture  
that extends ten thousand miles...  
Ah ... ah ... he...  
Shepherd girls are singing openly,  
their delightful voices fill the skyline.<sup>306</sup>

Although the song does not have any malevolent intentions in its portrayal of the Mongolian people, it clearly does not reflect reality. Firstly, it is important to note that despite

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<sup>304</sup> Billig 1995.

<sup>305</sup> Anne Henochowicz. "Blue Heaven, Parched Land: Mongolian Folksong and the Chinese State." *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 6.1 (2008): 39.

<sup>306</sup> Quoted from Henochowicz, 40.

the songs reference to “shepherd girls”, there are few, if any, shepherds who are women.<sup>307</sup>

Secondly, the pastoral lifestyle depicted in the song is not representative of the lifestyle followed by most ethnic Mongolians in China today. Baranovich states, “Most Chinese and non-Chinese alike would probably be surprised to learn that of the 2,489,780 Mongols who inhabited Inner Mongolia in 1982, only 18% were pastoral nomads; most of the rest were agriculturalists”.<sup>308</sup> The percentage is even smaller today, with the government actively pursuing nomad resettlement policies.<sup>309</sup> Intended to restore the grasslands in Inner Mongolia, the initiatives provide subsidies to herdsmen for selling off their flocks and moving to towns or cities.<sup>310</sup>

Furthermore, while the song portrays the Mongolians as a peaceful and content minority, there has been a history of conflict between the Han and the Mongolians since the Qing Dynasty.<sup>311</sup> Ethnic issues are even more tense now, due to the ever-increasing levels of Han migration to the area – only 20 percent of the population in Inner Mongolia today is ethnically Mongolian.<sup>312</sup> In fact, in 2011, protests erupted after a Mongolian herdsman was struck and killed by a Han coal truck driver, which resulted in many students, professors and herders being taken into custody.<sup>313</sup> Although the truck driver was eventually convicted and given a death sentence, the protests reflected the underlying enmity tied to longstanding grievances about the ecological destruction from the mining boom, the perception that economic growth

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>308</sup> Baranovich, 369.

<sup>309</sup> Andrew Jacobs. "Ethnic Protests in China Have Lengthy Roots." *The New York Times*, 2011.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Robyn R. Iredale, Naran Bilik, and Fei Guo. *China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> John An. "Herdsman's Death Reported to Inspire Protests in Inner Mongolia." *The Epoch Times*, 2011.



disproportionately benefits the Han, and the rapid disappearance of Inner Mongolia's pastoral tradition.<sup>314</sup>

However, outside of Inner Mongolia, these issues are little known.<sup>315</sup> After the 2011 protests, the government worked rapidly to restrict Internet access in the area, shut down several Mongolian news sources, and placed schools in areas with large ethnic Mongol populations on lockdown.<sup>316</sup> The main source of information for foreign news outlets regarding the protests was the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, which the Chinese government accused of possessing ulterior motives and sensationalizing the incident.<sup>317</sup> This lack of information regarding ethnic conflicts allows for songs such as "The Beautiful Grassland is My Home" to maintain their popularity despite their strikingly inaccurate portrayals of minorities.<sup>318</sup> On the other hand, the continuing popularity of "The Beautiful Grassland is My Home" also ensures that this idealized, pastoral image of Inner Mongolia will continue to influence the perception of the public.<sup>319</sup>

Thus, these "symbols of minority otherness" within *min'ge* effectively undermine the minorities' abilities to portray their own realities. Baranovitch writes, "through emphasizing the symbols of minority otherness, the state is trying to conceal or divert attention from activity that is destroying the reality of that otherness".<sup>320</sup> This is very much related to Huang Zhen's 1982 speech, where he emphasizes that all performing arts work "must aim to promote unity among the nationalities, including that among Han and minority workers in the performing arts, as well

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<sup>314</sup> Jacobs 2011.

<sup>315</sup> Iredale, Bilik, and Guo 2003.

<sup>316</sup> An 2011.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Henochoicz 2008.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Baranovitch, 370.

as that among the various minority nationalities themselves”.<sup>321</sup> Although this policy might have been formulated with good intentions, it invariably silences an important aspect of minority discourse – the reality that unity cannot be achieved without acknowledging the grievances of minorities. By emphasizing unity and integration, *min’ge* serves the state’s goals of appearing committed to multiethnicity, but distorts the reality of the peoples it supposedly represents. This has caused to authors such Ann Anagnost to assert that “most officially produced minority songs are more about minorities than of or for them”.<sup>322</sup>

While *min’ge* raises many issues of representation, it is important to recognize that the effect of a particular song on its audience may be unintentional. Baranovich, for example, points out that the last four lines of “The Sun in the Grassland Rises Never to Go Down” (“*Cao yuan shang sheng qi bu luo de tai yang*”), portray the Mongols as needing the guidance of Chairman Mao.<sup>323</sup> They state: “Chairman Mao, ah! The Communist Party! They are bringing us up to maturity...” (*Mao zhuxi ah! gongchandang! fuyu women chengzhang*).<sup>324</sup> Baranovich then asserts that this song reflects the Han people’s patronizing attitude towards minorities. However, this argument is too simplistic because it does not take into consideration the fact that the composer, Meili Qige, is ethnically Mongolian, and many songs during this era (the 1950s) have similar messages of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party guiding the people.<sup>325</sup> For example, in “The East is Red” (*Dong fang hong*), the lyrics refer to Mao as “the people’s great savior” (*Ta shi renmin da jiuxing*) and “the one who will lead our way in order to construct a new China” (*Ta shi women dailu ren, weile jianshe xin zhongguo*).<sup>326</sup> Thus, the lyrics to “The

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<sup>321</sup> Quoted from Mackerras, 191.

<sup>322</sup> Anagnost, 297.

<sup>323</sup> Baranovich 2001.

<sup>324</sup> Quoted from Baranovich, 362.

<sup>325</sup> Anagnost 1997.

<sup>326</sup> Quoted from Lee, 100.

Sun in the Grassland Rises Never to Go Down” simply reflect the musical trends of that time period, and may not have an alternative meaning.

However, regardless of intention, *min’ge* can reinforce the image of minorities as primitive and backward, which strengthens Han chauvinism.<sup>327</sup> While certain motifs such as the image of a patronizing Mao are prevalent in both Han minority folk songs and ethnic minority folk songs, these motifs are given a new significance within *min’ge* precisely because they involve the appropriation of minority cultures.<sup>328</sup> For example, because the image of the primitive minorities versus the advanced Han was established since the founding of the PRC, it is often believed that the Han should assist the minorities on the path to modernization.<sup>329</sup> Thus, songs such as “The Sun in the Grassland Rises Never to Go Down” that portray minorities as welcoming the assistance of the Han people can appeal to this kind of Han chauvinism, even though they were not necessarily written with this intent.

Furthermore, the portrayal of minorities as requiring the aid of the government is not always as explicit as the lines in “The Sun in the Grassland Rises Never to Go Down” calling for Chairman Mao’s guidance are, but often carry the same problematic representations of minority peoples. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the song “Road to Heaven” praises the Party by expressing the gratitude of the Tibetan people for the Beijing-Lhasa railway. Although the railway was a controversial project that was met with local protests from the Tibetan communities, the song reinforces the benevolence of the Party and glorifies the railroad as “carrying the warmth of the world to the border area” and “making mountains and roads no longer inaccessible”.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Gladney 1994.

<sup>328</sup> Harris 2005.

<sup>329</sup> Han 2013.

<sup>330</sup> Quoted from Dhondup, 290.

The popularity of “Road to Heaven” also diminishes mainstream knowledge about the concerns of the Tibetan communities regarding the railway.<sup>331</sup> The song, written by Han composers Yin Qing and Qu Yuan, and performed by half-Tibetan singer Han Hong, gained significant recognition through being featured on the CCTV Chinese New Year Gala in 2005 and recently regained its popularity on the “I am a Singer” (*Wo shi geshou*) singing competition in 2015.<sup>332</sup> However, despite the song’s positive portrayal of the railroad, there have been numerous complaints that the railway’s \$4.2 billion price tag is almost triple the amount Beijing spends in Tibet on health care and education, and concerns that an influx of long-term migrants will threaten the Tibetans’ cultural integrity.<sup>333</sup> With no unified resistance however, the government has continued to expand the railway line. In August 2014, China opened a \$2-billion extension of the railway to Shigatse, the traditional seat of Tibetan Buddhism’s second-highest figure, the Panchen Lama.<sup>334</sup> According to Reuters, China is also currently planning to build a second railway line linking Lhasa to the southwestern city of Chengdu, and will eventually extend the railway to the borders of India, Nepal and Bhutan by 2020.<sup>335</sup>

In addition to the “primitive” representation of minorities, the focus on the female form is another aspect within *min’ge* that reinforces a hierarchy between the Han and the minorities.<sup>336</sup> To Han composers, love songs focusing on the female form are common in all types of folk songs, and therefore considered acceptable, and even highly appealing, material for the creation of *min’ge*.<sup>337</sup> However, the objectification of the minority female by Han composers inevitably

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<sup>331</sup> Baranovich 2001.

<sup>332</sup> Yan Zhang. "Tianlu Han Hong Yanchang Gequ (Road to Heaven Song Profile)." *Baidu Baike*.

<sup>333</sup> Carin Zissis. "Chinese Train Carries Controversy." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2016.

<sup>334</sup> Ben Blanchard. "China Opens \$2-billion Extension of Controversial Tibet Railway." *Reuters*, 2014.

<sup>335</sup> Michelle Florcruz. "China-Nepal Railway Through Mount Everest: China Plans To Expand Controversial Tibet Railway To Nepal." *International Business Times*, 2015.

<sup>336</sup> Anagnost 1997.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*.

recreates the power dynamic between the creator and his creation.<sup>338</sup> In ethnic minority music, this power dynamic takes on another layer of meaning. For example, the song “Dabancheng Girl”, composed by Wang Luobin, is essentially the translation of a Uyghur folk song called “Qämbärkhan”.<sup>339</sup> Phrases such as “Lift up your veil, let me see your face” and “Don’t marry anyone else, you must marry me” have basis in the original folk song.<sup>340</sup> However, the Mandarin lyrics have caused a controversy among Uyghur music critics, mainly due to the fact that the composer is Han.<sup>341</sup> Harris notes, “the same objectifying gaze on a woman’s body is perceived very differently when it is expressed by the Other, in this case the Han Chinese”.<sup>342</sup> This may be due to the fact that similar to how the subordination of women reinforces the elevated position of men, the objectification of minority women implicitly establishes the dominance of the Han.<sup>343</sup>

The minority female is also portrayed as more sexual than the Han woman in many instances.<sup>344</sup> For example, the marketing of Uyghur *min’ge* often utilizes provocative images of Near Eastern belly dancers, highlighting the commodification of the minority female.<sup>345</sup> This has caused significant resentment from the Uyghur community because, as Gladney notes, “As Muslims, they [women] are generally much more conservative than Han Chinese in the public sexual sphere”.<sup>346</sup> However, this sexualized representation has continued, highlighting the insensitivity many composers have towards the cultures from which they derive creative inspiration.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, this tendency to appropriate the female Other is also common to

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<sup>338</sup> Schein 1997.

<sup>339</sup> David Makofsky. "The Artist and the Artisan in Xinjiang: The Changing Uyghur Muslim Culture." *European Journal of Applied Social Sciences Research* 1.1 (2013): 30.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Harris, 398.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Gladney 1994.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Harris 2005.

<sup>346</sup> Gladney, 114.

<sup>347</sup> Makofsky 2013.

many other forms of art, including fine arts and cinema.<sup>348</sup> This trend in the arts hints at its utility in defining ethnic relations in China. Ultimately, the sexualization of minority women contributes to the exoticization of minorities, which strengthens the imagined identity of the Han and reaffirms Han feelings of superiority.<sup>349</sup>

The emphasis on the “otherness” of minorities has its limits, however. Rachel Harris notes that in many recording of “Dabancheng Girl”, the unique characteristics of Uyghur folk songs are “ironed out and replaced with a stereotyped pseudo-exotic sound”.<sup>350</sup> She hypothesizes that this process is similar to the Orientalism present in Western music, in which Eastern musical forms are stereotyped and used as motifs representing repressed sexuality and the unknown.<sup>351</sup> For example, while Wang Luobin’s songs maintain the stereotypical upbeat tempo of Uyghur dances, the asymmetric rhythms of many Uyghur songs are replaced with a regular four-beat, and the complex modality of Uyghur music is adapted to the pentatonic scale.<sup>352</sup>

These changes are particularly salient in another one of Wang Luobin’s songs, “Mayila”, which recently gained another surge of popularity through a Han *min’ge* singer named Chang Sisi.<sup>353</sup> In the music video, Chang Sisi and her background dancers appear in Uyghur style costumes that are altered to reveal their midriffs.<sup>354</sup> Additionally, she performs “Mayila” with a smooth, nasalized tone and adds many ornamentations typical of Western coloratura arias.<sup>355</sup> The result is a very culturally muddled production, but it is precisely this dynamic of “exotic-with-limitations” that contributes to its popularity. Harris notes, “That Wang Luobin’s songs are

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<sup>348</sup> Gladney 1994.

<sup>349</sup> Gladney, 116.

<sup>350</sup> Harris, 396.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Jin 2011.

<sup>354</sup> *Chang Sisi Mayila Bianzouqu*. Dir. Qian Wang. Perf. Chang Sisi. *Iqiyi.com*, 2009.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

re-presented in the style of contemporary Chinese popular song but with a stereotyped exotic twist, as the performers mediate and as it were tame the wildness of the feared Other, is key in understanding their popularity and selling power”.<sup>356</sup>

Thus, while contemporary minority *min’ge* has been celebrated for promoting diversity and national unity, the limits placed upon “otherness” and authentic representation undermine its ability to have true cultural significance. As Han composers assert their ability to pick and choose the most favorable and appealing qualities of traditional minority folk songs, and as these songs are continually considered “authentic”, the perception of minority peoples will always be influenced by the stereotypes that these songs perpetuate.

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<sup>356</sup> Harris, 397.

## The Dynamics of Westernization

In Chapter 2, I introduced new forms of popular music that were influenced by the West, and subsequently in Chapter 3, I explored the Westernization of *min'ge* in relation to the commodification and modernization of Chinese music. In Chapter 3, I also introduced another type of contemporary *min'ge* influenced by Western classical styles that can be characterized as a refined and “repackaged” version of *hong'ge*. In this section, I intend to further detail the development of this type of *min'ge* and explore its significance, especially in terms of maintaining and strengthening the Han identity. The significance is essentially twofold – (1) its popularization has facilitated the erasure of differences between the Han and created a myth of shared traditions, and (2) its imitation of Western classical styles contributes to the modern and advanced image of the Han.

In some ways, Westernized *min'ge* merely imitates musical forms promoted by Communist countries. Its two defining characteristics – the manipulation of folk tunes for glorification of the state and the assimilation of Western classical elements – are very similar to the folk songs popularized by the Soviet government during the 1990s.<sup>357</sup> The homogeneity within this genre has also led scholars such as Liu to sympathize with Mainland composers who are “muzzled by the Communist Party’s policy on literature and art” and unable to express their individual styles.<sup>358</sup> However, although the cultural hegemony of the CCP may be attributed to the authoritarian nature of Communist governments, the manipulation of traditions for the purposes of nationalism has been studied in a variety of contexts, giving rise to the theory of ethnosymbolism.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Grosby and Leoussi 2007.

<sup>358</sup> Liu, 398.

<sup>359</sup> Grosby and Leoussi 2007.



In the theory of ethnosymbolism, the formation and continuity of national identities is dependent upon myths, memories, values, traditions, and symbols.<sup>360</sup> In line with this theory, it is important to recognize that the significance of folk culture has been tied to political preferences since the early 1900s.<sup>361</sup> For example, during the May Fourth Movement, there was a brief revival of interest in folk music because folk traditions represented a departure from Confucian values and the elitist traditions of the literati.<sup>362</sup> Returning to indigenous culture was viewed as a means to improve society, and thus, Eminov asserts, “folklore journals came to be filled with the idea of using folklore studies in order to modernize society”.<sup>363</sup> However, as modernization became increasingly synonymous with Westernization after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the study of folk music was cast aside.<sup>364</sup> In fact, folk culture came to be regarded as hazardous and reactionary during the Chiang Kai-shek regime, and the “anti-superstition” campaign of the 1920s deemed many folk songs inappropriate for the modernization of country.<sup>365</sup> It was not until Mao’s Talks at Yan’an that folk culture was once again celebrated – this time, due to its connection to the peasants, who were instrumental to the Communist revolution.<sup>366</sup>

However, Mao not only re-popularized folk music, but also selectively changed its characteristics.<sup>367</sup> As Mao demanded that the only acceptable forms of art were those with revolutionary meaning, folk music assimilated revolutionary lyrics and composers reintroduced folk songs to the masses in more Westernized forms.<sup>368</sup> On a superficial level, the purpose of

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Eminov 1975.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Eminov, 260.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Duara 1991.

<sup>366</sup> Mackerras 1984.

<sup>367</sup> Anagnost 1997.

<sup>368</sup> Hamm 1991.

this transformation, as stated by Mao in the Talks at Yan'an, was to promote the revolution.<sup>369</sup> However, Mao differed from the other leaders and intellectuals before him who treated folk music as a means to achieve political goals. Besides promoting revolution, Mao utilized folk music to create a new national identity.<sup>370</sup> Thus, beyond merely promoting folk music as others leaders had done before, Mao actively controlled the artistic process and redefined the meaning of "folk".<sup>371</sup>

This myth of shared traditions that Mao promoted was especially significant to Han nationalism, because it promoted the erasure of inter-Han differences.<sup>372</sup> For example, to overcome the communication difficulties associated with the multitude of mutually unintelligible dialects within the Han community, the government was faced with the challenge of instituting a national language.<sup>373</sup> Although Mandarin was already the official language of China under the Guomindang, the Communist Party reinstated an official language policy in 1956 to accelerate the adoption of a national language.<sup>374</sup> The instruction of singing in Mandarin and simultaneous popularization of Mandarin songs became two important ways by which the government promoted their language policy.<sup>375</sup> Incidentally, the spread of Mandarin also affected *min'ge*, which was traditionally sung in local dialects.<sup>376</sup> Tuohy states, "Vocal music proved to be a vehicle for the dissemination of national standard speech, and that speech became the dominant language of the national musical voice".<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Anagnost 1997.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>372</sup> Han 2013.

<sup>373</sup> Ramsey in Blum and Jensen 2002.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Tuohy 2001.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Tuohy, 117.

Still, some scholars believed this myth of shared traditions would be fragile and easily rejected. For example, Eminov, in exploring the modernization of Chinese theater, states, “It still remains to be seen whether the Chinese Communist Party’s persuasive propaganda techniques, as manifested in the modern theater as well as in other genres, are powerful and subtle enough to eradicate a tradition so central to the lives of the people, and to replace it with the products of modern socialist realism”.<sup>378</sup> Similarly, Liu warns, “Insincere works, whether of literature or music, which are composed simply to demonstrate loyalty to a political regime, will in time fade away”.<sup>379</sup> Westernized *min’ge*, which include refined versions of old revolutionary songs, would therefore never be influential due to its politicization and artificiality.

However, in the case of *min’ge*, although many people still prefer traditional art forms of the past, such as Beijing opera or traditional folk songs, it is clear that the CCP’s “persuasive propaganda techniques” are indeed working.<sup>380</sup> As Rees notes, “many Chinese musicians, especially those professionally trained in national conservatories such as the Central Conservatory and the China Conservatory in Beijing or the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, see no contradiction in calling this modern style [of contemporary *min’ge*] ‘traditional’”.<sup>381</sup> Furthermore, Professor Liu Huimin, a vocal instructor at the China Conservatory of Music, notes that today, the term *min’ge* is synonymous with contemporary *min’ge* much more so than traditional *min’ge*.<sup>382</sup> If one is referring to traditional minority *min’ge*, for example, one would have to use the term *shaoshu minzu min’ge*.<sup>383</sup> This suggests that Mao’s policy of “coming from the masses and going back to the masses” was extremely effective – more than 50 years later,

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<sup>378</sup> Eminov, 270.

<sup>379</sup> Liu, 619.

<sup>380</sup> Jin 2011.

<sup>381</sup> Rees, 160.

<sup>382</sup> "Professor Liu: Min'ge Performance and Vocal Techniques." Personal interview. 4 Jan. 2016.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

even the professionals who would be aware of the politicization of *min'ge* accept contemporary *min'ge* as traditional.

Beyond the categorization of this genre of music as both “folk” and “traditional”, it is also important to note that Westernization is viewed as natural and inevitable in the process of modernization. As explored in Chapter 2, the marching songs and patriotic anthems composed for the Mass Singing Movement were all inspired by the desire to modernize China after the May Fourth Movement of the early 1900s. During the May Fourth Movement and for many years after, modernity was often equated to Westernization and thus new forms of popular music continued to be Western importations.<sup>384</sup> Liu discusses the development of this “New Music” as follows:

“As one element of the relationship between China and the West since the mid nineteenth century, the development of New Music in China over the past hundred years has been motivated by a desire to emulate the music culture of the great powers of Europe and to modernize, i.e., Europeanize, the ‘backward’ music of China. It has involved experimenting with a range of ideas, from ‘Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning for practical application’ to ‘total Westernization’. Although, superficially, this does appear to have produced some music with a Chinese flavor, it has in fact resulted in the implementation of a policy in which education, performance, and composition have all been dominated by European music”<sup>385</sup>

Although Liu could be dismissed as possessing a Eurocentric view, he also asserts his optimism in the ability of Chinese music to develop independently. He states:

“The twenty-first century is the time when the Chinese music world should regain its confidence, when it ceases to see the West as superior to the East, and does not need to see the East as superior to the West but makes use of the power of the West to allow the full development of the might of the East”<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Tuohy 2001.

<sup>385</sup> Liu, 631.

<sup>386</sup> Liu, 635.

However, today, as so-called “traditional” styles such as *min’ge* become even more influenced by Western classical styles, it appears that Chinese music may be moving in a direction opposite of Liu’s predictions.

The changes in voice instruction, for example, illustrate the preference for Western styles. In my interview with Professor Liu Huimin, she notes that the genre of *min’ge* today is not much different from Western classical opera (*mei sheng*).<sup>387</sup> She states, “The singing techniques are essentially the same – the only thing different is the style (*feng’ge*)”.<sup>388</sup> In my interview with Professor Wang Sufen, another voice instructor at the China Conservatory of Music, she conveyed a similar view of the recent developments of *min’ge*, noting that many *min’ge* voice teachers at the university level will instruct their students to sing in a “Western operatic” way and emphasize Western singing techniques to produce a fuller sound.<sup>389</sup>

This Westernization has produced a fundamental contradiction within the current definition of “traditional” Chinese music that is applicable to *min’ge*. Hamm ironically notes in his description of “light music” that many of these so-called “traditional” tunes sound like “Muzak or Easy Listening FM programming” to Western ears.<sup>390</sup> Likewise, when an ensemble from the Central Conservatory of Music performed a program of “traditional” Chinese music in Durham, England as a part of an Oriental Music Festival in 1979, foreign music scholars were hesitant to accept it as authentic, due to the fact that the music used Western forms and harmonies and featured modern European instruments.<sup>391</sup> In response, the leader of the Chinese delegation, Fang Kun, argued:

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<sup>387</sup> "Professor Liu: Min'ge Performance and Vocal Techniques." Personal interview. 4 Jan. 2016.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> "Professor Wang: Min'ge Performance and Vocal Techniques." Personal interview. 5 Jan. 2016.

<sup>390</sup> Hamm, 7.

<sup>391</sup> Hamm, 12.

“We really felt that they did not entirely understand the circumstances surrounding Chinese music and its development... The pieces that we played were traditional pieces of either classical or folk origin... Some of them contain many newly composed elements, some a few, but all of them are linked to the same flesh and blood as Chinese traditional music. When we selected a program like this it was because we recognized that in order to understand traditional music, it is not only necessary to understand its classical and folk origins, but also to understand its modern evolution... The approach that we suggest for traditional music is based on making the past serve the present, weeding out the old to bring forth the new, selecting the fine and discarding the rubbish, and eliminating the false and retaining the genuine”<sup>392</sup>

With this statement, Fang’s views seem to align with Mackerras’ view that folk music is “a developing tradition and consequently subject to change”.<sup>393</sup> In fact, many Chinese music scholars dismissed the criticisms from foreign scholars as Eurocentric comments that intended to discourage the development of Chinese music.<sup>394</sup> However, even though the ability for Western scholars to define traditional Chinese music is questionable, the continual Westernization of *min’ge* highlights certain aspects of Chinese nationalism that are critical to the understanding of both the Han identity and Han-minority relations.

Since the establishment of the PRC, government officials have recognized that singing is an important element in constructing the state’s image.<sup>395</sup> This image is the basis for influencing popular nationalism, or how the citizens of China perceive themselves in relation to other countries.<sup>396</sup> For this reason, one of the first problems addressed by the Communications Office of Musical Issues (*Yinyue wenti tongxunbu*) was whether conservatories should adopt Western singing methods, or retain traditional methods of instruction.<sup>397</sup> According to Tuohy, most music scholars believed that schools should assimilate the best qualities of both, but under Mao,

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<sup>392</sup> Fang quoted from Hamm, 12.

<sup>393</sup> Mackerras, 194.

<sup>394</sup> Hamm 1991.

<sup>395</sup> Tuohy 2001.

<sup>396</sup> Gries 2004.

<sup>397</sup> Tuohy, 117.

“something stained with the association of ‘foreign’ could be troublesome”.<sup>398</sup> Therefore, Western song forms were adopted but the singing techniques were still authentic to folk styles.<sup>399</sup>

After Mao, however, the increased Westernization of singing techniques reveals not only a more welcoming attitude towards foreign influences, but also the desire for China to appear more Westernized and modern on the global stage. The image of a Westernized, modern China plays into the “victor” narrative outlined by Peter Gries, who notes that the CCP has relied on the victor narrative to dispel the previous image of China as the “sick man of Asia”.<sup>400</sup> In comparison to the “victim” narrative, which is often xenophobic, the victor narrative, which emphasizes how China “stood up” to the West and has successfully modernized while maintaining “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, seems most relevant to *min’ge* today. Contemporary *min’ge*, with its highly Westernized elements but Chinese flavor (or *feng’ge*) is the epitome of the modern but distinctly “Chinese” image that the government strives to achieve.<sup>401</sup>

Besides allowing the Chinese people to see themselves as equals to other Westernized countries, the Westernization of *min’ge* also allows the Han to view themselves as more advanced and superior to the “backward” minorities. Whereas the adoption of minority folk songs often emphasizes the “otherness” of minority cultures, the Westernization of *min’ge* tends to promote homogenization. This dynamic is particularly important within Han nationalism as Gladney notes that the representation of the Han as “normal” and “un-exotic” is critical for distinguishing the Han from the minorities.<sup>402</sup> However, the Han identity is not only strengthened through the exoticization of the minorities, but also through the proactive creation

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<sup>398</sup> Tuohy, 118.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Gries 2004.

<sup>401</sup> Jingwen Zhang. "Xi Calls for Preservation of Chinese Culture." Chinese Radio International, 2014.

<sup>402</sup> Gladney 1994.

of cultural products that highlight the modernity and progress of the Han majority. Because the concept of ethnic groups or *minzu* did not exist in China until the end of the Qing dynasty, reinforcing the myth of a shared history and culture between the Han people has been a critical part of nation-building.<sup>403</sup> Within this nation-building process, the concept of the Han as being the most civilized and advanced ethnic group has justified the Han majority's authority to aid the minorities in changing their "backward" ways.<sup>404</sup> Thus, the Westernization of contemporary *min'ge*, which is fundamentally a Han creation, reinforces the divide between the "modern" Han and "backwards" minorities.

The portrayal of the Han as closer to modernity and the West is also reflected in the performance of contemporary *min'ge*. For example, whereas traditional *min'ge* will often be performed in the traditional dress of a certain minority, Westernized *min'ge* is performed in Western concert attire (e.g. tuxedos and gowns).<sup>405</sup> Furthermore, contemporary *min'ge* is often placed in the same category as Western classical for singing competitions, while traditional *min'ge* is considered a separate category.<sup>406</sup> For example, in the Youth Vocal Singing Competition (*Qing Ge Sai*), one of the most well known competitions for professionals, singers can compete in the categories of contemporary *min'ge* and Western opera, but traditional minority *min'ge* is separated into another competition by itself.<sup>407</sup> Although difficulty in judging the different styles of regional *min'ge* has been one of the considerations for this separation<sup>408</sup>, this clear divide between traditional and contemporary *min'ge* reiterates the idea that

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<sup>403</sup> Han 2013.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> "Professor Liu: Min'ge Performance and Vocal Techniques." Personal interview.  
(See Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Appendix for photos)

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.



contemporary *min'ge* represents progress and is therefore on par with the West, whereas traditional *min'ge* cannot be judged by “modern” standards.

## Voices of Resistance

The cultural hegemony of the CCP has not existed without resistance. Baranovich, for example, notes two prominent minority artists, Teng Ge'er and Lolo, who have been working to create more realistic representations of their respective ethnic groups through their music.<sup>409</sup> Like the voice of resistance that rock music provided in the 1980s, these artists have been successful due to their popularity. For example, the song "The Land of the Blue Wolf" by Teng Ge'er articulates a clear sense of opposition the state and Han control in Inner Mongolia.<sup>410</sup> The lyrics state:

The sun moves back and forth between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer  
The herding people wander on the temperate grassland  
I heard once  
That the nomadic people were the masters of the mainland  
Aha! Ya hu! A hu! Ya wei hu!

The sun comes up and goes away again  
All thing on earth grow and then disappear  
Several hundred years have already passed by in the world  
My rulers of former days where are you now  
Aha! Yu hu! A hu! Yu wei hu!

The steeds have lost their masters  
The hunting dogs have lost their steeds  
The land of the blue world is yellow sand  
How lonely is the grassland in the wind  
Aha! Yu hu! A hu! Yu wei hu!<sup>411</sup>

Such subversive lyrics would normally be prone to censorship and result in negative consequences for the composer, but due to the widespread recognition of his music in Inner Mongolia as well as Taiwan and Hong Kong, the government has allowed Teng Ge'er to become a representative of the Mongolian people.<sup>412</sup> After a brief period of censorship in 1992, Teng

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<sup>409</sup> Baranovich 2001.

<sup>410</sup> Baranovich, 367.

<sup>411</sup> Quoted from Baranovich, 367.

<sup>412</sup> Henochowicz 2008.

Ge'er has performed regularly on Chinese TV, including on state-controlled venues such as CCTV programming.<sup>413</sup>

However, although Baranovich considers Teng Ge'er an example of successful resistance from minorities in regards to reclaiming their identities, it is important to note certain limitations to their resistance. For example, while the government has accepted Teng Ge'er as a representative of the Mongolian people, CCTV only broadcasts his song, "The Mongol", which is much less radical and politically charged than "The Land of the Blue Wolf".<sup>414</sup> Furthermore, Henochowicz notes that Teng Ge'er often sings songs promoting mainland Chinese identity, reflecting compromises made to attract a larger audience and avoid political persecution.<sup>415</sup> Thus, political and economic interests often temper the resistance from minorities within the realm of music.

Still, the growing popularity of minority artists who aspire to create a unique identity for themselves and their ethnic groups suggests that the cultural hegemony of the CCP may not be as pervasive as before. For example, artists such as Haggai, a Mongolian rock band, and Ablajan, a Uyghur pop star, have gained significant popularity both within and outside of their home bases.<sup>416</sup> Although these artists nonetheless face the pressures of being monitored by the state, a growing number of alternative performance sites and music festivals has allowed them to enjoy an unusual degree of financial security and cultural prominence.<sup>417</sup> Their success may indicate an optimistic future for minorities reclaiming the representation of their identities through music – one day, perhaps *min'ge* will be truly reflective of the diversity within China.

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Henochowicz 2008.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>416</sup> Jonathan Kaiman and Andrew Jacobs. "Ethnic Music Tests Limits in China." *The New York Times*, 2011; Rauhala 2014.

<sup>417</sup> Kaiman and Jacobs 2011.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I established two main areas of exploration within this thesis: (1) the nature of *min'ge* today, and (2) why the CCP supports and promotes *min'ge*. Here, I will summarize my findings and relate my conclusions to the theories of nationalism discussed in the literature review.

#### The Nature of *Min'ge*

Through my analysis of the changes within *min'ge* in Chapter 3, I was able distinguish between traditional and contemporary *min'ge*. While traditional *min'ge* reflects the diversity of the people, contemporary *min'ge* is a product of the CCP's cultural hegemony, and therefore not truly representative of the people. Because the preservation of traditional *min'ge* has been difficult due to the persecution of folk singers during the Cultural Revolution and the overwhelming influence of modern popular culture, contemporary *min'ge* has emerged as a genre that assimilates aspects of traditional *min'ge* into Western forms. The politicization of contemporary *min'ge* after the Yan'an Talks reflects the CCP's control over cultural production and significance, which I refer to as cultural hegemony. Through asserting this cultural hegemony, the CCP has been able to shape *min'ge* into a mechanism for the promotion of Chinese nationalism. However, there are unintended consequences from the promotion of this genre – like the *minzu* policy, the *min'ge* policy was intended to encourage the minorities to follow the Han example, but ultimately, it also allows minorities to distinguish and celebrate their own identities.

## The Utility of *Min'ge*

One of the reasons why *min'ge* an ideal mechanism to the state is due to its ability to bridge state nationalism, Han nationalism, popular nationalism, and pragmatic nationalism. In terms of state nationalism, Huang Zhen's 1982 speech on the Party's policy towards the performing arts of minority groups reflects the more tolerant and pluralistic attitudes in the state's cultural policies after the Cultural Revolution.<sup>418</sup> As the only representation permitted under Huang's banner of promoting diversity is the "carefree and happy" minority, *min'ge* is an extension of state nationalism which intends to celebrate China's cultural policies. In reality, however, contemporary *min'ge* exposes the relatively little progress that has been made in addressing the marginalization of minorities.

The discrepancy between the image of minorities presented in *min'ge* and reality places the shortcomings of the CCP's cultural policies in the spotlight in a very literal sense. Indeed, the pastoral image often emphasized in contemporary Mongolian *min'ge* contradicts the ethnic tensions and environmental degradation present within Inner Mongolia today – similar to how the gratefulness of the Tibetans for the Beijing-Lhasa express train expressed in "Road to Heaven" completely dismisses the concerns that were raised during and after the construction of the railroad. This clear contradiction between the minorities' voices within *min'ge* and the lack of voice from the people has caused significant tension and even inspired forms of resistance from those familiar with minority issues. However, for the majority of the Chinese population, the continuing popularity of *min'ge* reinforces its ability to undermine the voices of the minorities and conceal the shortcomings of the CCP's cultural policies in promoting equality and diversity.

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<sup>418</sup> Han 2013.

In addition to weakening the voices of the minorities, *min'ge* also serves to strengthen the unity of the Han people through promoting the myth of a shared identity and asserting Han superiority. In line with the theory of ethnosymbolism, because *hanzu* is an artificial concept, it must be maintained through a variety of mechanisms, such as promoting a common language, redefining folk traditions, and emphasizing the “otherness” of the non-Han.<sup>419</sup> As detailed in Chapter 4, *min'ge* has played a pivotal role within each of these mechanisms. Beyond strengthening the Han identity, *min'ge* also serves to legitimize the CCP's rule. The repetition of symbols of otherness within contemporary *min'ge* such as the sexualized female form, stereotypically “exotic” musical patterns, and appreciative attitude of the minorities reinforces the view that the minorities are less civilized than the Han, and therefore require guidance and modernization. Simultaneously, the Westernization of *min'ge* portrays the Han as more modern and advanced, alluding to their role as the “vanguard of the revolution”, and justifying their dominating position as the leaders of the country. In this way, the Han nationalism evoked by *min'ge* serves both to create a sense of unity among the Han, and to legitimize power of the more “civilized” majority.

While it is clear that *min'ge* creates false representations of both minorities and the Han, the problematic elements of *min'ge* are often difficult to detect because they have been accepted as the “norm”, and – particularly in regards to the exoticization of minority *min'ge* – often serve as crucial selling points. The hidden nature of these dynamics is what also makes *min'ge* so powerful, as posited by the idea of banal nationalism.<sup>420</sup> Thus, despite the very obvious distortions of reality, immensely popular songs such as “Road to Heaven” and “The Beautiful Grassland is My Home” are able to maintain a favorable image of the government and Han-

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<sup>419</sup> Grosby and Leoussi 2007.

<sup>420</sup> Billig 1995.

minority relations. The government has also bolstered the recognition and airtime of *min'ge* on popular state sponsored programs such as the Chinese New Year Gala on CCTV (China Central Television), where over half of these programs is consistently devoted to *min'ge*.<sup>421</sup> This state-sponsored promotion of *min'ge* suggests that the CCP's policy of "coming from the masses and going back to the masses" from the mass line ideology is still effective. As these "refined" versions of traditional folk songs are assimilated into the mainstream, their artificiality is often ignored which validates their utility to the state.

*Min'ge* may also play an important role in external nationalism.<sup>422</sup> Popular nationalism, a type of external nationalism as explored in Chapter 1, is often xenophobic and influenced to a great extent by the victim narrative. However, while some famous *min'ge* songs such as "My Motherland" that were written during wartime have shades of xenophobia<sup>423</sup>, contemporary *min'ge* today mainly focuses on the greatness of China and its achievements. This shift away from the victim narrative perpetuated by Jiang Zemin towards a victor narrative reflects the general caution of the government towards popular nationalism, and suggests that *min'ge* may be an extension of pragmatic nationalism. In fact, as tensions in the South China have not ceased, the CCP may be incentivized to monitor any xenophobic popular nationalism that may pressure the state to take unnecessarily aggressive actions. Furthermore, the victor narrative plays into the idea of "Chinese exceptionalism", where China is able to modernize without democratizing or following an entirely Western model. A part of this Chinese exceptionalism draws on the historical notion that China was once the "Middle Kingdom" with the most powerful and

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<sup>421</sup> Kraus, 113.

<sup>422</sup> Where internal nationalism refers to how one ethnic group within a country perceives themselves in comparison to other ethnic groups, and external nationalism is how citizens of a country perceive themselves in relation to other countries. (See Chapter 1)

<sup>423</sup> The song comes from a 1956 film about the Korean War, sung by a female soldier. At one point the lyrics describe enemies as "wolves". (Peter Ford, "How Pianist Lang Lang Stirred up Trouble for US and China at a White House State Dinner", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2011.)

advanced society in the world.<sup>424</sup> The Westernization of *min'ge*, therefore, reflects the desire to emphasize the modernization of China while simultaneously highlighting the distinctiveness of Chinese culture.

Thus, my initial hypothesis that *min'ge* is more relevant to internal nationalism must be rejected. While I hypothesized that *min'ge* would be more relevant to internal nationalism because its popularity is limited to mainland China and its subject matter often draws from ethnic minorities, I have discovered through in-depth analyses that the scope of the utility of *min'ge* extends to external nationalism. In terms of internal nationalism, it functions to hide the CCP's cultural policy failures and promote Han unity and superiority. The cultural hegemony that is the foundation for *min'ge* also exacerbates ethnic tensions, as the privilege of representation is limited to the Han. However, in a broader sense, *min'ge* creates the image of a "modern" and "Westernized" Chinese people, which is important to not only monitor xenophobic sentiments common to popular nationalism, but also to emphasize Chinese exceptionalism. The utility of *min'ge* is also strengthened by its hidden nature and popularity, which ensures that its messages will continue to be unconsciously accepted by the masses.

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<sup>424</sup> F. Zhang. "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations." *European Journal of International Relations* 19.2 (2011): 305-28.



## Final Comments

Despite the cautionary and critical nature of my thesis, I cannot conclude without qualifying any condemnation of the CCP. Indeed, it is unfair to point to the politicization of *min'ge* and its appropriation of folk traditions as a unique phenomenon. First, the politicization of music in China has roots in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as explored in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the CCP's cultural hegemony follows a Soviet model, as the appropriation of folk music was often a straightforward extension of the policies of Communist regimes following World War II.<sup>425</sup> The manipulation of folklore is also common to non-Communist states, however. Gladney notes that the invention of folklore in Germany was "based upon 19<sup>th</sup>-century romanticist attempts to describe the unity of their nation based on a common cultural and historical heritage that was reconstructed from relics of ancient traditions in German folk customs and narratives".<sup>426</sup> Folklore in Latin America has also been manipulated by ruling elites. Kaarsholm and James note that in Argentina and Brazil, folklore "became part of the legitimation of 1940s and 1950s populism through which leaders attempted to keep an ear to the ground and shape policy in accord with perceived responses from 'the people'".<sup>427</sup> Thus, while *min'ge* plays into China's narrative of exceptionalism, it is clear that China is not so exceptional after all.

However, despite its obvious exploitation of folk tradition, the solution to appropriation is not simple – Harris points out that the legal protection of indigenous peoples' cultural assets is often not protected by domestic or international law.<sup>428</sup> Moreover, the development of *min'ge* has led to certain benefits for minority musicians. In addition to the economic benefits mentioned in Chapter 3, the popularity of *min'ge* has also allowed minority musicians to push

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<sup>425</sup> Grosby and Leoussi 2007.

<sup>426</sup> Dru Gladney. *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2004. 106.

<sup>427</sup> Preben Kaarsholm and Deborah James. "Popular Culture and Democracy in Some Southern Contexts: An Introduction." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26.2 (2000): 201.

<sup>428</sup> Harris, 392.

the boundaries of representation within the CCP's system of cultural hegemony. This reflects the contradictory role folk music can play in the creation of a unified national identity, as posited by the theory of ethnosymbolism. As musicians such as Teng Ge'er and Haggai slowly gain recognition, their music may turn the tides of Han nationalism in favor of ethnic nationalism, just as the popularization of Serbian folk epics during the 1990s was a form of resistance against nationalist tensions. In that case, *min'ge* would have achieved the opposite of what the CCP intended – as minorities reclaim their music, their voices become all the more powerful.

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## APPENDIX

FIGURE 1. Performance of traditional minority *min'ge*.



Source:

Huffington Post, “Spectacular Chinese Performance at World Peace Gala in Chicago”, 2011.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-luce/spectacular-chinese-perfo\\_b\\_421001.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-luce/spectacular-chinese-perfo_b_421001.html)

FIGURE 2. Performance of Westernized *min'ge*.



Source:

All-China Women's Federation, "Song Zuying Performs in Los Angeles", 2013.  
<http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/news/celebrity/15/770-1.htm>