

# **PERFORMING THE CHINESE NATION**

---

**The Politics of Identity in China Central  
Television's Music-Entertainment  
Programs**

**LAUREN GORFINKEL (高睿)**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

International Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Technology, Sydney  
2011

### **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

---

LAUREN GORFINKEL

## Acknowledgements

This study would not have come to fruition without my expert team of supervisors. Professor Louise Edwards with her infectious enthusiasm first got me on track to begin a PhD and saw it all the way to completion. Along the road, she provided valuable feedback on drafts and encouraged me to partake in a variety of activities that benefited not just the project but my understanding of broader issues surrounding it. When Louise moved to Hong Kong, I was exceptionally fortunate to have on board the equally expert and energetic professor, Wanning Sun, who had just arrived at UTS. Wanning's expertise in Chinese media and identity was vital in helping me form the theoretical and analytical framework that became the backbone of this work. Professor David Goodman also provided early supervisory support and took an interest in the work all the way. I'd also like to thank my supervisors for their generous support and encouragement to attend conferences and workshops both in Australia and overseas.

The following people – all fellow PhD students – deserve a huge thanks for their encouragement, proofreading and discussion of drafts: Jennifer Cheng, Wang Pan, Gao Yue, Maria Chisari, Mehal Krayem, Kelly Chan, Susan Bruck, and Suyin Hor. I am particularly indebted to Johanna Hood for her exceptionally detailed proofreading of the final draft. A special thanks also to UTS librarian Cai Wei for helping to access information and send articles while I was in China, and for allowing me to participate in her Chinese language and media class. Dr Katrina Schlunke's higher degree research sessions were extremely valuable, and Claire Moore, Ming Liang, Lei Gong, Lina Tan, Jingqing Yang, Chongyi Feng, Juleigh Slater, and Sandy Schuck all provided prompt and friendly administrative assistance along the way.

Also at UTS, I'd like to thank the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Professor Theo van Leeuwen, as well as Dr Emilia Djonov, for the chance to help organize the Fifth International Conference on Multimodality (1-3 December, 2010) and in the process gain further

insights into the current state of international research on multimodality as well obtain feedback on my work. I also received encouraging words and useful suggestions from participants after presentations I gave on aspects of this thesis at a number of other conferences, including the 'China's Appeal and its Discontents' symposium at Hong Kong Shue Yan University in 2011; the 'Auricle: Sound Cultures of the Future' conference at UTS in 2010; the 'Tenth International Conference on Cultural Diversity in Music Education' and the 'Preserving Tradition: Facing the Future in Asian Musical and Visual Cultures' Conference at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2010; the 'Chinese Studies Association of Australia Conference' held at the Australian National University in 2011 and at the University of Sydney in 2009, and the 2009 and 2010 UTS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Student Conferences. I'd also like to thank Dr Haiqing Yu for the chance to present some of my PhD material to undergraduate students as a guest lecturer for her course on Chinese media at the University of New South Wales in 2011. Sections of this manuscript also benefited from feedback from Professor Keith Howard, editor of an article due to appear in a forthcoming volume, *Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Policy, Ideology, and Practice in the Preservation of East Asian Traditions* (Ashgate), and from two anonymous reviewers and editor Dr Shelley Brunt for an article submitted for the popular music journal *Perfect Beat*.

In terms of practical experience, I'd like to thank the staff at Radio Beijing Corporation who organized the inaugural *Global Chinese Storytelling Competition* and China Central Television (CCTV) for the opportunity to experience television production from the other side of the camera in 2009. I'd also like to thank the Beijing Olympic Games Organizing Committee (BOCOG) and Steve Dettre from Infostrada for the chance to work for the Olympic News Service in 2008 where I gained strong insights into the very different political agendas of the Western media and the Chinese organising committee from my base at the Main Press Centre.

The following people also offered advice and/or moral support at various stages of the PhD process: Wang Ning, Yu Gongjie, and Eve Leung enthusiastically gave their time to share personal insights into the music and television industries in mainland China and Hong Kong and helped me access materials; Dr Chantal Crozet provided valuable assistance in drawing up the project in its initial stages; and staff at Kunming University (formerly Kunming Teacher's College), where I taught from 2004-2009, gave substantial moral support.

Finally, a big thanks to mum and dad, as well as Dale, my grannies, uncles and aunties for their strong support; honorary family, including Katy Bruck, for daring to read sections of the thesis; and most exceptionally, my husband, Xuezhong (Steven), for his continuous encouragement to undertake and complete this research, his enthusiastic assistance in double checking some of my translations, and for the good times we've had practicing the songs we picked up from the TV.

This project was funded by the Australian Government through an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA).

## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abstract .....	ix
A Note on Style .....	xi
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Performing ‘Chineseness’: My Experience and Thoughts on Identity .....	1
Research Questions, Timing, and Approach .....	11
Constructing Chineseness: Investigating Institutionalized Frames of Identity .....	17
From Class Identity to National Identity .....	19
National Identity and Television .....	27
The Politics of Entertainment .....	33
Gaps in the Study of Televised Music .....	38
Chapter Overview .....	42
<b>Chapter 1. Frames of Chineseness .....</b>	<b>47</b>
1.1 Multi-Ethnic Chineseness.....	47
State Unity and the Construction of Majority and Minority Nationalities in China .....	47
Performing Minority Nationality .....	51
1.2 Global Ethnic Chineseness: ‘Cultural China’ and ‘Greater China’ .....	57
‘Cultural China’ and the Revival of Confucianism as a Symbol of Unity .....	58
‘Greater China’ and the Re-Centring of the PRC .....	62
Hong Kong.....	64
Macau .....	68
Taiwan .....	71
Overseas Chinese.....	80
1.3 Chinese by Civilization and Attraction .....	83
Civilizing and Absorbing the Foreign ‘Other’ .....	83
Friendship and Love for China .....	86

<b>Chapter 2. China Central Television and the Politics of Entertainment .....</b>	<b>92</b>
2.1 The Party, the Market, and Television Entertainment.....	92
Television in China: From the Mao-Era to the Market-Era.....	92
The Development of CCTV in a Competitive Media Environment .....	95
Globalizing CCTV – A Hard Push for a ‘Softer’ National Image.....	100
CCTV and the Politics of Depoliticization .....	107
Dynamics Within CCTV: A Theory of Hard and Soft Television .....	113
2.2 Overview of the Data: CCTV’s Music Entertainment Programs.....	117
<b>Chapter 3. Analysing TV Texts – Multimodality, Performativity, and Identity.....</b>	<b>129</b>
3.1 Merging Multimodal Analysis with Theories of Performativity.....	130
3.2 The Politics of Performing Identity through Language, Music, and Visuals .....	139
3.3 Conceptualizing Audiences in a Textual Analysis of Television .....	157
<b>Chapter 4. Performing the Multi-Ethnic Family .....</b>	<b>165</b>
4.1 The Politics of Authenticity .....	167
4.2 Orthodox Performances of the Collective Multi-Ethnic Nation .....	170
The ‘Orthodox’ Style.....	170
Central Red, Colourful Peripheries.....	174
Hand-in-Hand, Striding Towards the Future .....	178
4.3 Ethnic Inspirations and the State in Contemporary Pop.....	180
Ethnic-Pop and the Multi-Ethnic State .....	180
Tibetan-Chinese Pop.....	182
Korean-Chinese Pop .....	191

Han-Chinese Pop .....	195
4.4 <i>Yuanshengtai</i> and the Nationalization of ‘Original’ Difference .....	197
The Discourse of <i>Yuanshengtai</i> .....	197
<i>Yuanshengtai</i> on CCTV .....	203
Folksongs China .....	205
The CCTV Youth Singing Competition – <i>Yuanshengtai</i> Category.....	210
Conclusion.....	217
<b>Chapter 5. Performing the Greater China Family .....</b>	<b>223</b>
5.1 Re-Centring the PRC.....	223
5.2 Performances of Unification.....	228
Celebrating Hong Kong’s Return .....	229
Celebrating Macau’s Return .....	236
Imagining Unification with Taiwan.....	245
Performing Solidarity with Overseas Chinese in the West and Japan .....	250
5.3 Performances of Global Chinese Cosmopolitanism.....	260
Promoting Pan-Chinese Nationalism – Xie Tingfeng .....	263
Defending the Dragon and the ABC Identity – Wang Lihong .....	270
Experimenting with Difference – The VEGA .....	276
Embodying Hybridity – Fei Xiang .....	280
Conclusion.....	285
<b>Chapter 6. Performing China-Loving Foreigners .....</b>	<b>288</b>
6.1 China’s Soft Power and the Re-vitalization of the Middle Kingdom .....	288
6.2 Performances of Foreigners’ Attraction to China and Chinese Culture .....	291
Performing Global Harmony in China .....	291
Promoting Foreigners’ Attraction to China’s Language and Culture.....	296



Attraction to Traditional Han Culture and Civilization .....	304
Playful Foreigners and Rediscovering Exotic China.....	306
Marrying China and Mixed Families in the Olympic Year.....	309
6.3 Foreign Stars and the Building of a Cosmopolitan China-Centred World .....	315
Mixing Red and Black – African Brother, Hao Ge .....	316
Internationalizing China – Russian Superstar, Vitas .....	323
Dynamic Cultural Exchange with Korea – the Korean Wave .....	326
Pop Culture, Nostalgia, and Japan – Qiao Shanzhong (Joe Yamanaka) .....	332
Conclusion.....	335
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>339</b>
The Framing of Chineseness .....	339
Strategies of Production – The Political Significance of Linguistic, Visual, and Musical Modes in Interaction.....	343
Spaces for the Negotiation of National/State Identity in Entertainment.....	347
A China-Centred World.....	349
Local-National-Global Interactions .....	351
Future Studies .....	353
<b>References.....</b>	<b>356</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>378</b>
Glossaries .....	378
Key Terms by Chapter .....	378
Personalities .....	382
Song Titles .....	383
Television Programs .....	385
Films .....	386

## **Abstract**

This thesis analyses how the Chinese nation is being constructed in music-entertainment performances on China Central Television (CCTV). Taking the perspective that all entertainment has ideological implications, this study argues that programming on China's monopoly, national-level, party-state network offers a vital site for examining the politics of Chinese identity in contemporary times. It uses the music-entertainment genre to examine how ethnic and national boundaries are being drawn, and the cultural and political tensions that underlie contemporary conversations on 'who the Chinese are'.

Three main frames of Chinese nationalism are highlighted: a multi-ethnic Chinese frame consisting of 56 nationalities residing within China; a Greater Chinese frame that extends beyond the borders of mainland China to include Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and overseas Chinese; and a global Chinese frame constructed through emphasizing foreigners' attraction to China and assimilation of Chinese cultural practices. The study argues that the three privileged frames attempt to produce images of unity and harmony amongst all Chinese and support for China by Chinese living outside the mainland and by foreigners. Such notions of national harmony, unity and stability, delivered to the Chinese people via the party-state media, are used to achieve ongoing support for the Chinese Communist Party as it seeks to continue to lead the Chinese nation well into the future, both domestically and on a global level.

A fine-grained textual approach to analysis is used to examine how musical, visual and linguistic modes interact to create interpretable messages about Chinese national and cultural identity for both domestic and global CCTV audiences. The study argues that the different modes interact in ways that offer a spectrum of reading positions. At one end, visuals, language and music reinforce each other to form relatively 'hardened' reading positions,

where messages of a solid, unified, state-centred national identity are foregrounded. At the other end of the spectrum, the audio-visual modes ‘undermine’ each other to create ‘soft’ boundaries around the ‘Chinese’ nation, allowing the party-state to present itself as more cosmopolitan and outward-looking. The programs reveal a tension between the desire to construct China as strong and unified, with a solid, self-assured national identity, and as nation-state that is open to change as it engages with non-mainstream cultures domestically, and with other cultures around the world.

While the global debate over China’s rising status is often marked by fears of monolithic party-state control, this study argues for a more nuanced understanding of state nationalism whereby China’s own party-state propaganda machinery is projecting an image that is oscillating in its own imagination of who the Chinese are, and how China should position itself in a global context.

## A Note on Style

Doing a study on the interactions of visuals, music and language on television, I was quite keen to bring to the reader some of the multimodal joy that I experienced as I watched the television programs. Initially, I was planning to cut snippets from DVDs of programs I recorded directly from Chinese television in China throughout 2008 and attach them to the thesis in DVD form. After struggling with the technology, I eventually realized that there were already many people who had already done the job of repackaging the television programs in a form that could be easily shared – through the Internet. I found a large number of the programs had been uploaded on the Internet presumably by fans on sites like *YouTube* and Chinese equivalents like *YouKu*. Many were programs in their entirety. While CCTV now streams most of its programs in real time, netizens and CCTV are actively maintaining a repository of CCTV programs online for viewing on demand. Where I have found the relevant programs online I have provided links to the websites in footnotes so that readers may examine the clips and make their own assessments on the programs and my commentary. These links, some better quality recordings than others, were current as of August 14, 2011. Throughout the main part of the text I have also incorporated key phrases from lyrics. Most of the songs discussed in this study can be freely downloaded from websites like Baidu.com.

All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. No two languages can be translated perfectly word for word, and I have had to make plenty of choices in the words I have used to translate from Chinese into English – as well as from visual and musical ‘languages’ into English. Such choices have a significant bearing on how my text in turn will be interpreted. One example worth noting was to use the word ‘motherland’ throughout as a translation for *zuguó*. As political scientist, Anne-Marie Brady (2002a:567; 2008: 188), notes, *zuguó* literally translates as ‘ancestral land’ and has been used by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authorities to legitimize its rule

through equating feelings of patriotism and filiality to both the Chinese nation-family and the CCP as the vanguard of the Chinese nation-state. I use the less literal translation, ‘motherland’ in this study to reflect both a common translation and because in CCTV’s own programs the notion of *zuguo* is often gendered as feminine. For instance, in the program *Happy in China – National Day Celebration Special – Charming Macau* broadcast in October 2008 celebrating the 59<sup>th</sup> birthday of the PRC, female host Zhang Lei emphatically noted that it was a celebration for ‘*zuguo muqin*’, the ancestral country *mother*. Although a masculine sense of national identity is also present in some nationalistic songs, the female gendered construction of *zuguo* appears to be stronger in the music-entertainment realm, and can also be found in other domains such as children’s textbooks. Also, in this study I refer to the ruling Party, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and governing body of the state jointly as the ‘party-state’ (*dangguo*) or ‘government’.

In this study, I use the *pinyin* system of Romanization, while simplified Chinese characters for translations are included in the glossary. The *pinyin* system and simplified characters are both standards in the PRC, and mainland PRC television uses simplified characters. It thus makes sense to mirror their use in my text. The choice also reflects my own Chinese language training initially in Australia and then through self study while living in China for five years, as well as the growing reality of China’s ‘soft power’ which has made the mainland’s system of romanization more popular than that which is promoted by Taiwan. Furthermore, I began to study Chinese in 2003, in a context where the growing strength of the PRC made the mainland’s simplified characters more accessible than the traditional characters still used in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and which were previously the preferred object of study at universities outside of the PRC. The PRC’s official version of Chinese spoken language, *Putonghua* (to which the *pinyin* system corresponds), also became the more trendy option abroad compared to other ‘dialects’ and corresponding systems of Romanization. CCTV almost always uses Hong Kong and Taiwanese

singers' Mandarin (not English or Cantonese) names with simplified characters. Following CCTV's use, I use the pinyin version of their Mandarin names, with simplified characters in the glossary. I realise that I am making a political decision in choosing to maintain the Mandarin names (in Romanized *pinyin* form) of all performers as they appear on the CCTV screen and as announced by CCTV hosts. This applies for ethnic minority nationalities who may be known by non-Mandarin names in other contexts, Hong Kong stars whose names are pronounced and Romanized differently to Mandarin names and who often use English first names (e.g. I use Xie Tingfeng instead of Nicholas Tse), and foreigners whose non-Chinese names are likewise rarely, if ever, revealed on CCTV. As well as for maintaining consistency, I also retain the CCTV names to encourage readers to visualize how all performers are incorporated into an officially-sanctioned television context in mainland China. I also maintain the Chinese word order for names where the family name comes first. For instance, for Hong Kong singer Xie Tingfeng, Xie is his surname and Tingfeng is his given name. However, in referencing Chinese authors of scholarly texts published in English, I follow the English convention, placing the surname last.

While I would like to signal my unease with the use of certain terms like 'ethnicity', 'minority', 'mixed-race', 'Chinese', 'Australian', 'black', 'white', 'motherland' and 'nation', I have decided not to use quotation marks every time they appear for reasons of style. Without an internal editor, almost every word may have been wrapped in qualifying quotation marks and that, I believe, would have been quite distracting to the reader. Television program names and names of films are printed in italics while names of songs are marked by inverted commas.

Finally, I have used Harvard style referencing throughout this study following the lead of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, which has been the source of a number of important works cited in this study. Since the journal began in 1998, the style of referencing has changed

slightly. I have decided to follow the format of a recent version (May 2011) – a special issue on transnational television – as it seems the most streamlined.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See International Journal of Cultural Studies submission details, <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200946/manuscriptSubmission>. Refer to published articles for specific referencing formats.

*“It was obviously not enough for me to have black eyes, black hair and yellow skin, I must say it, sing it, perform it. Chineseness, I began to understand, is not merely a biological category, but a social performance.”*

Yiu-Fai CHOW (2009: 545)