PERFORMING THE CHINESE NATION

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

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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

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LAUREN GORFINKEL

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Contents

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 *zuguo*. As political scientist, Anne-Marie Brady (2002a:567; 2008: 188), notes, *zuguo* 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 59th 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.[1]

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[1] 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)