

# DEVELOPING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH MINORITIES' TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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## Abstract

Looking back over the past nearly 70 years since the People's Republic of China was established, it seems that the meaning of 'place' has varied and changed, especially since the turn of the millennium. 'Place' usually refers to a specific geographical area, but it can also reference an imagined space – that is, a sense of place is assembled through experience, feeling, perception and identification. To date, Chinese scholars have paid more attention to the close relationship between traditional music and its locale, or the place in which its original owners resided, but there has been little research that moves beyond a geographical conceptualization. However, the dimensions of place in China are more complex when we consider ethnic minorities rather than the majority Han Chinese: minority musicians represent themselves through their music, while the central government emphasizes the integration of diverse cultures within the Chinese nation. Representations of place, and how these relate to music, therefore differ. This chapter examines, using Feld's and Basso's (1996) term, what the 'sense of place' is for minority musicians, and how within contemporary China musicians and the state have developed different 'senses of place'.

**Keywords:** Minorities, Traditional music, Sense of place, Contemporary China

## FROM 'PLACE' TO A 'SENSE OF PLACE'

The definition of Sense of place (Feld & Basso, 1996: 8) was well known when it firstly proposed by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso. In their ethnographic work *Sense of Place* (1996), based on cultural geography, it was said that "We seek to move beyond facile generalizations about places being culturally constructed by describing specific ways in which places naturalize different worlds of sense...we take seriously the challenge to ground these ethnographies closely in the dialogue with local voices that animated them in the first place—that is, we take seriously the challenge to register a full range of discursive and non-discursive modes of expression through which every day and poetically heightened senses of place are locally articulated." Additionally, the authors of this work "locate the intricate strengths and fragilities that connect places to social imagination and practice, to memory and desire, to dwelling and movement." This concept enlightened me on rethinking the changes and situation of China's ethnic minorities' music.<sup>1</sup>

In China, the concept of 'minority', shaoshu minzu, mainly refers to ethnic minorities; 56 ethnic groups have since 1953 been officially identified (Fei Xiaotong, 2005), consisting of the majority Han Chinese and 55 ethnic minorities. There are also some groups, such as the

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<sup>1</sup> The author started working on this topic earlier in the context of a conference held at SOAS in 2017, which was dedicated to the "Presence Through Sound: Place and Contemporary Music in and from East Asia". The event was widely supported by The SOAS Centre for Korean Studies. Many thanks go to Keith Howard and Catherine Ingram for their continuous support while improving this study.

Mosuo and Qingmu peoples of Yunnan respectively, who have not yet been, fully recognized as having unique cultures, but are widely regarded as minorities. The ethnic minorities have their own histories and cultural traditions. They are considered to be politically, equal to the Han and are regarded as important within the national fabric under The Pattern of Diversity in Unity in the Chinese Nation (Zhonghua Minzude Duoyuanyiti Geju)<sup>2</sup>. In the past century, many minorities generally lived in relative isolation,<sup>3</sup> dwelling in hometowns where their ancestors had lived. They speak their own languages, live and behave in their own ways, singing and dancing in locally characteristic but distinct manners. In the past, when considering minority arts and music, place simply meant where the people of a given minority lived. This gradually changed from the 1950s, especially following the nationwide social and historical investigations of minorities and their cultural forms carried out from 1956 to 1964 (Xia and Chen 2012: 7). These investigations allowed minorities to either willingly or unwillingly, reveal themselves and their cultural forms to others, even though the others, mainly, were scholars, musicians and governors.

When musicologists undertook fieldwork<sup>4</sup> to collect the music of ethnic minorities in association with these ethnic identification projects of the 1950s and 1960s, they recorded and transcribed the collected music, wrote introductions to it, and identified what they regarded as the representative genres of each minority. Their efforts helped the public and the academic world to discover more about minority culture. When composers obtained transcriptions of minority music, they analyzed its scalar, rhythmic and melodic characteristics, and used these features as the basis for minority-style compositions such as songs, choral and instrumental works. Generally, the audiences for their works, which were largely Han, were unfamiliar with the places where a given minority lived, and thought that the ethnic minorities were simply far away from them, living toward distant frontiers. Minority-style pieces played a role in developing an imagined profile of China's border territories. So composers took a part in constructing the sense of ethnic minorities living in geographical spaces in a manner that matched how national ideology set up the frontiers of the Chinese state.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) is generally considered a dark period when the performance of traditional music was severely curtailed. However, elements of traditional music continued to exist in a constructed genre, namely, in *Yangbanxi* Revolutionary opera and some other related forms like *Yuluge*<sup>5</sup> and *Zhongziwu*<sup>6</sup>, and in this form, all Chinese could sing it. '*Hongdeng ji*/Red Lantern' was the most famous of the eight model works<sup>7</sup> allowed during this period, and it was adapted to fit forms associated with minorities. One of the most

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<sup>2</sup> Fei Xiaotong proposed the definition of Zhonghua Minzude Duoyuanyiti Geju. He used this term as the title. In this work, Fei considered Zhonghua Minzu as a whole, which was not equal to altogether 56 groups but was perceived as a higher level above them (Fei Xiaotong wenji [费孝通文集], 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Minorities immigrated historically from other places to the central part of China, especially during times of the Yan and Qing dynasties. When Mongolians build up their country, the Manchu people were mainly placed in the Mongolian grassland and the northeastern part of the country.

<sup>4</sup> Before the term 'fieldwork' was implemented in China by some Chinese anthropologists around the 1920s, the central government also had a method of collecting data called Caifeng. It started during the times of the Zhou dynasty and is still used nowadays. However, during the broad collecting activities in the 1950s and 1960s, musicologists worked together with anthropologist and scholars from other areas changing to the term 'fieldwork' which the author is going to use here.

<sup>5</sup> *Yuluge* is a kind of song invented during the Cultural Revolution. *Yulu* means quotations from Chairman Mao, and *ge* means song. Some melodies of *Yuluge* derived from common folk songs.

<sup>6</sup> *Zhongziwu* is a kind of dance with the shape of Zhong character that was used during the Cultural Revolution. *Zhongzi* is a Chinese character meaning loyalty, and *wu* means dance. Some melodies of *Zhongziwu* derived from common folk music.

<sup>7</sup> The eight *Yanbanxi* works were established in 1968. They include the modern revolutionary operas called *Hongdeng ji*, *Shajiabang*, *Zhiqu Weihushan*, *Qixi Baihutuan*, *Haigang*, *Longjiangsong* and ballet drama *Baimaoni*, *Hongse Niangzijun*.

popular adaptations was the Uyghur version first performed in 1975, which although based on ‘*Hongdeng ji*’ story, employed material from Uyghur *maqam*, and was sung in the Uyghur language. Adanm Yusaiyin<sup>8</sup>, who took an important role in this adaptation, recalled in a 2013 interview how:

“Three parts of the twelve *maqam* were used in the composition, and excellent composers from Xinjiang used rhythms close to those of *Jingju* (Peking opera). After continuously exploring, they successfully created this opera.”<sup>9</sup>

Revolutionary operas were understood as a symbol of the national ideology, and the Uyghur adaptation served the same political function. Thus, minority music was used in a modified, re-composed way to develop the sense of nation, so that ‘place’ came to mean the whole of China rather than the locality of an ethnic minority.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the meaning of place moved further beyond its geographical conception, embracing the more complex reality that since the 1980s has emerged, because of the influences of globalization and modernity on China’s ethnic minorities as well as on its Han majority. As communications and the expansion of the mass media brought all of China closer together and thereby increased the awareness of a world beyond the geographical locale that once constituted ‘place’ for ethnic minorities. All Chinese people have had to learn the Han Chinese language – if, within ethnic minorities, they did not already use it – to better communicate and to interface with the wider world. Minority peoples have also made changes to their lifestyles and their use of traditional culture in order to participate in contemporary life. As the eastern seaboard and urban centres have grown and created economic and educational opportunities, more and more young people, including many from China’s minority communities, have chosen to leave their home regions and participate in urban life. Some seek better job prospects, some try to provide their children with better education, and others seek fame.<sup>10</sup> Such developments have had an impact on traditional music among China’s ethnic minorities. Some minority musicians have remained in their home regions and continue transmitting their music in traditional ways, but the flow of modern information and pop music through radio, television, the internet and through visiting tourists increasingly impacts minority communities. It is easy to find videos about minority ceremonies that new cultural elements from other places has emerged and even performed by them. For example, square dancing, which is usually performed on squares mostly with pop music and popular in each city, can be part of the Miao traditional ceremonies.<sup>11</sup> Traditional rituals and external cultures were performed in one field. It indicated the influences of globalization and modernity on minorities’ life and their music. The displacement of youth from rural hometown to cities, and the agencies adapting themselves to new situation and lifestyle in rural communities directly contribute to changing musical concepts and styles.<sup>12</sup> Alongside these phenomena, the beginning of the new

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<sup>8</sup> Adanm Yusaiyin performed a male leading role Li Yuhe in 1975 Uyghur *Hong Dengji*.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.guancha.cn/video/2013\\_07\\_30\\_162086.shtml](http://www.guancha.cn/video/2013_07_30_162086.shtml), last accessed 25 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> In this paper, the author discussed a general situation. Of course, there were also some specific cases for China’s minority music. For example, young people still stay in their home place and keep performing and transmitting their traditional music using the support provided by the Chinese government, NGOs, and individual scholars. *Yuanshengfang* is an NGO in Yunnan province.

<sup>11</sup> Fieldwork outcomes uploaded on the internet are one of the effective methods applied in this study. The author took a look at many videos that were shoot by scholars, travelers and insiders. They all proved what had happened and what was happening in minorities’ living places. The Miao’s ceremony consisting of a specific dance is one valid evidence.

<sup>12</sup> Except for those who still stay in their hometowns, transmit, and foster the changes of the traditions, young people who migrate to cities still practice traditions in their own ways. Some of these young people still return to their hometowns and perform on important days and ceremonies. They even can sing together via Wechat, another event review in this journal issue can prove this (Xiong Manyu, 2020).

millennium brought with it a rise in concern for intangible cultural heritage, introducing attempts to preserve and sustain traditional culture. This has implemented policies, established inheritor system, carried out communicating activities, and the government applied more funding on academic studies and musical creations.

The result of all this is that, in contemporary China, minority people who wish to retain or maintain their musical traditions face many challenges. The way in which minority musicians present themselves and realize their identification through music remains crucial. What, then, is the ‘place’ of minority peoples’ ‘sense of place’ in the new millennium? Here, I present three case studies that indicate some general trends: the first concerns the Chinese Korean *p’ansori* (epic storytelling through song), as presented on nationally televised competitions for young singers. The second explores Chinese Mongolian bands and their use of commodified ‘world music’,<sup>13</sup> while the third considers the section for minority performance in CCTV’s famous *Chunwan* (Spring Festival Gala) show.

### CASE 1: *P’ANSORI* AND THE YOUNG SINGERS’ NATIONAL TELEVISED COMPETITION

*P’ansori* is a genre of Korean story-singing that is often glossed as ‘epic storytelling through song’, which originated in Chŏlla province in the south of the Korean peninsula. It was carried to northeastern China probably with migrant workers in the 1930s, and is still transmitted in China’s Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture (Ning Ying, 2017)<sup>14</sup>. However, it was for most of the twentieth century virtually unknown by ethnic Chinese – and was little known among those who may have belonged to the Korean-Chinese. This situation changed following the national Youth Song Competition (Quanguo Qinnian Geshou Dajiangsai) in 2006, when *p’ansori* singer Bian Yinghua won the second prize. Subsequently, *p’ansori* began to attract more attention due to its unique singing method and performance style. It has gradually been considered as a typical musical form among the Korean-Chinese.

The 2006 competition brought attention to previously little-known musical genres. It was the first time that a live competition organized and directed by a national television station – China Central Television, or CCTV – showed singing styles of ethnic minority groups. The competition had been organized since the 1980s, and had previously included a number of singing divisions such as bel canto and the conservatoire-style of national folksong singing, whereby each division was judged separately. By 2006, the influence of intangible cultural heritage protection policies brought a new division when the singing style known as *yuanshengtai changfa* (original ecology folk singing style)<sup>15</sup> was added (Rees, 2012: 34–35). This concept was used to represent the close link between musical traditions and the environment where they were generated. It referenced traditional music, and, as a result,

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<sup>13</sup> Here, I use the term ‘world music’ to denote the commodified recordings that proliferated since the 1980s (for further discussion, see Howard 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Scholars pay more attention to the *P’ansori* in South Korea than in China. Except for Korean-Chinese scholars researching in the US scholars from UK such as Rowan Pease is focussing on *P’ansori* studies in Yanban China. One chapter of her doctoral research is referring to singing in Yanji (the capital of Yanbian) and included *P’ansori* through the lense of gender and discusses about transitions among three generations of female *P’ansori* singers well known in the area of Asian or Korean studies. This thesis is not accessible yet known to the author, who did herself studies on the Yanbian *P’ansori* since 2006. Except for having found a similar result as Rowan Pease, the author tried for more comparative studies between the *P’ansori* in South Korea and in mainland China. She found the transition root of the Yanbian *P’ansori* music and reveals its own features in her doctoral dissertation that is based on fieldworks in both countries.

<sup>15</sup> *Yuanshengtai changfa* was firstly translated to *original ecology folk singing style* by Helen Rees. In Chinese context, *yuanshengtai* means cultures emerged in their original ecology, and different ecologies cause diversities of different cultures. Helen Rees’s translation is a specific and accurate description of *yuanshengtai*. Therefore, it is applied here. (Helen Rees, 2012: 23-54).

*p'ansori* and other common forms were included within it. The competition features multiple rounds, and singers from each province can apply to participate, first performing at provincial level, then those considered sufficiently good competing on behalf of the province in the national round. One result of this is that singers from the same ethnic group but from different provinces can theoretically become competitors at national level.

The competition not only provided a new platform for traditional styles but also changed singers' destinies. Every singer wants to win and get fame, but how can one triumph in the competition? How can one attract attention? None of this was easy for folk singers, since not only were they expected to sing as well as possible, but they were also required to answer questions about music and about general knowledge. The total points awarded were the result of adding together their marks for all three aspects. While the questions might seem simple to many urban participants with a relatively high level of education, most original ecology folksong singers are farmers living far from cities, and many had never attended school. How can they know what a musical staff is, what rhythm is or who Beethoven or Mozart are? How can they know where America is and what its flag looks like? Yet, singers enjoy participating and are willing to adapt to succeed. Most importantly, audiences love the competition.

Bian Yinghua's success provides a good example for the standards used to evaluate different singing methods as well as how a vocalist can score in the competition. Firstly, she was successful thanks to good vocal training and her ability to learn a new mixed style. She is a third-generation Yanbian *p'ansori* singer who studied with Kang Chǒngja, a second-generation singer at the Yanbian Art Institute. When *p'ansori* was first performed on Chinese soil, the first generation of immigrant singers sang it in the way they had learned back in Korea, namely by using the vocal style that is still today employed in South Korea. Nevertheless, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) *p'ansori* singing was prohibited, and the second-generation Kang learnt bel canto. In the 1980s, she returned to teach *p'ansori* and folksongs at the Yanbian Art Institute. However, she had changed her vocal style, mixing elements of bel canto and traditional *p'ansori*, which created a new singing tradition that was passed down to her students, including to Bian Yinghua (b. 1983). Meanwhile, the systematic training that Bian received in the institute differed from the oral/aural training methods of traditional *p'ansori* teachers, who taught students one phrase at a time. In Yanbian, Western methods were introduced to singers, which mean that the entire generation of Bian is familiar with Western vocal training and techniques (Ning Ying, 2017).

Secondly, Bian was successful thanks to her good looks and grace as well as her high and light tessitura, her good 'musical sense', and her suitable choices of music set to brisk rhythms. Both the audience and the competition's judges admired all these qualities. Because the listening habits of most Chinese have been shaped through Western classical music which was firstly learned from some Western countries and Japan by musicians residing in China or traveling since the 1920s, people have become accustomed to high and bright vocal styles. Nevertheless, Bian's mixed style was still felt unique and special for keeping the distinct musical features of the Korean ethnic group. Therefore, it not only catered to peoples' imagination about the Korean-Chinese people, but also matched their listening preference. Qiao Jianzhong (quoted in Han Kuo-Huang, 1989) commented that Bian Yinghua sings very well; I have not met any singers who sing as well as she does (Qiao Jianzhong & Ning Ying, 2015).

Thirdly, Bian was successful thanks to her educational background. The Korean Chinese community attaches considerable importance to education, and, unlike other ethnic groups, Korean traditional music is taught, along with Chinese and Western music, in Yanbian's schools and university. In the competition, singers with a better formal education are capable

of answering the most questions, although, when Bian was asked to answer a question about the date of a Chinese historical event and to distinguish a piece of music from the Beatles, she still could not give the right answer.

The fame Bian gained through the competition helped her obtain a permanent position as a soloist in the Central Minzu Song and Dance Troupe (*Zhongyang minzu gewutuan*) in Beijing.<sup>16</sup> Over the next ten years, her singing style kept changing. She stopped singing the long *p'ansori* episodes, but instead sang short easy-listening songs to cater for the troupe's audiences across China. She only sang *p'ansori* when she went back to Yanbian to perform for her teacher and other *p'ansori* singers. She told me in 2013:

“I must make changes to cater to my audience while simultaneously keeping my Yanbian Korean features. My style is not only different from the South Korean *p'ansori* singing style, but also differs from the vocal styles of Korean singers in other places across China.”

In this case, place – for Bian and her audiences – refers to a specific ethnic group who lives in a specific locality. In the competition, singers like Bian constructed a sense of their group and the place where they lived through a specific mixed singing style.



Figure 1: Chinese-Korean singer Bian Yinghua is referred to as ‘the Queen of Korean Folk Song’ on the cover of the magazine *Guangbo gexuan* [Broadcast songs], March 2010 (open source material).

<sup>16</sup> *Minzu* can be translated as ‘ethnic group’ or ‘nationality’. It is a Chinese socio-political construct (Howard & Ingram, 2020). While ‘*minzu*’ in the name of this performance troupe considers all 56 recognised ethnic groups, in this context it does not allude to the Han but to the 55 minorities.

## CASE 2: MONGOLIAN BANDS AND THE WORLD MUSIC SCENE

Many Chinese people have always imagined that ethnic minorities are ‘good at singing and dancing’. Mongolian music is well-known, because Mongolia is an important part of China’s history. Mongolia is particularly linked with China, which was ruled by Mongolians during the time of the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). Indeed, the Mongolian-Chinese population is larger than that of most other minority groups<sup>17</sup>. Various Mongolian traditional musics have been used as the style-foundation for many Mongolian works composed and performed by both Mongolian and non-Mongolian musicians – including, for example, Dedema, Tengge’er, Sanbao and Hu Songhua. The popularity of Mongolian music is mostly attributable to two events. The first was the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1964. During the celebration, a revolutionary music and dance film, *Dongfang hong* (The East is Red), was produced by 3500 artists. It is regarded as a remarkable work in Chinese contemporary history (Zhang Wenhe, 2014). The film included a Mongolian styled song called ‘Zange/Song of Praise’, which became extremely popular. This was an adaptation of a Mongolian folksong, and its melodious long song (*urtiin duu*) style attracted Chinese audiences. The second event was the story of a heroic deed performed by two Mongolian girls. This story is also believed to have occurred in 1964. It formed the basis for a cartoon, *Caoyuan yingxiaong xiao jiemei* (Heroic little sisters of the grassland), and a *pipa* concerto composed by Liu Dehai, Wang Yanqiao and Wu Zuqiang, *Caoyuan xiao jiemei* (Little sisters of the grassland), both produced in 1965.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, many Chinese people associate Mongolia with the grassland, with the *morin khuur* (horse-head fiddle), and various vocal genres such as *xhoomei* (multiphonic singing), as well as with long songs and with drinking songs. To some extent this perception ignores differences among local styles, but it forms a profile of a style that to the Chinese represents the entire Mongolia. Thus, the sense of place for Mongolian music extends to an idea of ‘the great Mongolian’. In recent years, some young Mongolian-Chinese musicians have established bands showcasing a new style of Mongolian pop music. Examples include the Anda Union (Union of Sworn Brothers) established in 2003<sup>19</sup>, Hanggai in 2004,<sup>20</sup> and the Haya Band in 2006<sup>21</sup>. Most of these work with management companies to ensure successful commercial careers. Unlike solo singers who often use only one local style, bands feature members from different areas in China but they are all Mongolian, and even from the Republic of Mongolia, performing music that draws on a range of local styles, and using instruments from different places. Besides showing the features of Mongolian-Chinese music, they project an image of a ‘great Mongolia’ that mixes traditional music with pop.

Anda Union can be considered as one of the most successful from the perspective of adaptation. The nine members (two women and seven men) were at the time of writing this article around 30 years of age. Most hail from different places in Inner Mongolia and were previously singers or instrumentalists with the Inner Mongolia Song and Dance Theatre (*Nei Menggu Minzu Gewutuan*). Qiqigema, the female soloist, is a Buryat from the borders of

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<sup>17</sup> According to the census data in 2010, the Mongolian population inside Mongolia Autonomous Region is 4.226.093.

<sup>18</sup> According to the story, two Mongolian girls risked their lives in the snowstorm, spending more than 20 hours preventing a flock of sheep from getting away and– an important because sheep was considered one of the most important living goods for Mongolian. They were highly praised by the Chinese government in the People’s Daily and hailed as the heroic little sisters on the grassland for their brave and noble behavior (source inaccessible).

<sup>19</sup> <https://weibo.com/andaunion>, last accessed 8 November, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> <https://weibo.com/hanggaiband>, last accessed 8 November, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> <https://weibo.com/hayamusic>, last accessed 8 November, 2020.

China, Russia (the Buryat Republic) and the People’s Republic of Mongolia. He is considered an expert performer of Buryat folksongs. Others can play more than one Mongolian instrument – such as the *khel khuur* (jew’s harp), *morin huur*, and *khucheer* (four-stringed fiddle). Some have learnt great *xhoomei* from the master, Baterr Audosurong (in China written 巴特尔·敖都苏荣) from the Republic of Mongolia. When they perform, they integrate these various strands into a single piece. Like Bian, they also became prominent through the 2006 young singers’ competition, winning a first prize in the group category of original ecology songs. Several years later, the group members left their theatre, signed with a management company and began touring. In a 2015 response to the question as to why they left the theatre, their group leader Narisu (2017) stated: “It’s not important where we work. Most important is what we’re doing. We are making Mongolian music! We hope we can transmit this kind of music to the whole world.”



Figure 2: Poster advertising Anda Union’s performance in Beijing on 25 June 2017, in a concert entitled *Guxiang* [Homeland] (open source material).

My research indicates that Narisu’s views are shared by the members of other Mongolian bands. In 2011, the first *Beijing Anda yinyue jie* (Beijing Anda music festival) was held in Beijing, a location which previously had no direct connection with the Anda Union. It was the first festival to take the name of a minority music group. Sixteen Mongolian bands performed across two days in the Maque washe performance space. The festival continued to be held annually until Maque washe closed in 2015.

Bands such as Anda Union contribute to the development of a sense of the great Mongolia by shaping global audience imaginations. Yet, these bands are categorized within the music industry as world music, leading to two dimensions of placelessness. One occurs through a reduction in difference among local Mongolian ways of singing, despite the members of the bands believe that those differences still exist in their music. The second is invoked through the global commodification of their music, and its subsequent co-existence with other similarly displaced ‘world musics’. Anda Union shows that place can refer to an ethnic group in a multi-local and glocalised context, where minority agency and identity are represented by musicians through both local and globalized aspects. Today, bands formed by other Chinese minorities with relatively large populations, a range of musical styles and a long history of



institutionalized music transmission such as among the Yi, Korean and Tibetan ethnicities feature in national and international arenas. These bands not only adapt common folk songs, but also compose new songs based on traditional music elements and rules. Although songs are from different places and different groups, and although musical styles differ, the groups all share the aim of presenting a unique ethnic culture within and beyond China.

### CASE 3: MINORITY PERFORMANCE SECTION IN *CHUNWAN* (SPRING FESTIVAL GALA)

Every lunar New Year eve, Chinese across the world watch the *Zhongguo Zhongyang dianshitai chunjie lianwanhui* (China Central Television Spring Festival Gala) – usually abbreviated as *Chunwan*. This massive live show is co-hosted by all levels of Chinese government and has been broadcast by the national television station, China Central Television (CCTV) since 1983. It usually runs from 20.00 to around 00.30. Unlike my previous two case studies, *Chunwan* is pure entertainment, including performances by the best singers from across China, and has a clear political orientation. It not only serves as a review for what happened in the past year, but it exhibits the strong developing nation, and it also gives attention to the present and the future. And, because its aim is to welcome the coming year, almost all the performances are high-spirited and hopeful.

Every *Chunwan* features an important section displaying minority singing and dancing. Performers from different ethnic groups and regions typically perform one after another and then together. To date, the performers who are invited onto the *Chunwan* stage have come only from the better-known ethnic groups with relatively large populations such as the Mongolians, Koreans, Yi, Tibetans, Uyghurs and Zhuang – a suggestion, possibly, that *Chunwan* does not offer equal opportunity for all. In contrast, programs were elected in the province for they could refer to all the ethnic groups.



Figure 3: Song and Dance Performance from the Miao Ethnic Group at *Chunwan*, 2011. The singer in the centre is Song Zuying, one of the most famous singers in China. Photo by Wu Mingshi (open source material).

The minority section of the program has two levels of extraordinary significance for the Chinese people. In Chinese, the home country is ‘Guojia’ [国家], meaning ‘nation’[国] and ‘family’ [家]. The origin of this term is old, but it has a contemporary meaning, particularly in *Chunwan*, where bringing together the music of representative ethnic groups indicates the harmony of China’s 56 ethnic groups living together and also gives a sense of the entire nation, that is presenting the central administration of the Chinese Communist Party through musical choices. At the same time, each ethnic group is implicitly portrayed as an essential member of a single, big, Chinese family. Thus, *Chunwan* serves to develop a sense of the nation, China, and of a family, the Chinese nation. An important feature typical of the minority-style music broadcast is that it is adapted from, or composed on the foundation of, traditional music elements. The arrangements definitely incorporate Western techniques. The justification for using a composed repertoire is to cater to the aesthetic tastes of China’s mainstream audience. However, it may as well reflect an approach that has become common to employ traditional material in the service of ideological purposes. For example, since the 1920s, following the slogan of ‘learning from the West’ (Xiang Xifang Xuexi), scholars began collecting local or foreign common song melodies to add new lyrics. These were used for students to sing at school, and were known as *xuetang yuege* (school songs). From the 1930s to the 1940s, under the policy of ‘learning from the folks’ (Xiang Minjian Xuexi), musicians collected traditional music to compose new pieces with the intention of inspiring nationalistic pride. During the construction of Communist China in the 1950s and 1960s, traditional music not only became important in the process of recognizing ethnic groups, but it was also used in compositions from songs to symphonies. This was designed to shape the wider imagination about minorities and their existence in China’s borderlands. Contemporary musical activities, such as the performances in *Chunwan*, are no different in substance. Some argue that the phenomenon of integrating minority groups together to develop the sense of a single Chinese nation, started as a result of the Communist Party’s leadership. Yet this process is not unique to the twentieth century China – for instance, China’s Tang Dynasty also presented a strong nation through gathering different musics in the court while creating new musical works based on traditional sources. The phenomenon was not reliant on leadership, but came about because of communication across cultures living together in places referred to by names. All these names denote the Chinese nation – not an unchanging geographical country, but, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson (1983), an ‘imagined community’.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored what ‘place’ is within ‘the sense of place’ in contemporary China, and how minority musicians present themselves and realize their identification through music. While the meaning of place can vary and keeps shifting, both musicians and government authorities (including state-run broadcasters) work to develop a sense of place through minority music. The three cases I have examined are just indicative of what I argue are three distinct ways of developing a sense of place in relation to the cultures of ethnic minorities in contemporary China. Yanbian *p’ansori* singers have developed a sense of being a Korean ethnic group by shaping a new singing tradition distinct from older or contemporary South Korean practice. Mongolian bands and their management companies have developed a sense of ‘Mongolian-ness’ that can be disseminated across the world, reshaping audiences’ imaginations of the ethnic group through ‘world music’ with traditional elements. And, *Chunwan* has supported the development of a sense of a multi-ethnic state, a single family within one nation, by juxtaposing music of different ethnic groups on the same stage with contemporary musical tools. The factors operating in all three examples cannot only be

attributed to the effects of globalization and modernization, but reveal the impact and deliberate incorporation of political ideology across time.

Globalization and modernization are features of today's China. These features were emphatically stated in President Xi Jinping's 2013 proposal to build a 'Silk Road economic belt' and a 'Maritime Silk Road in the twenty-first century'. In the same year, President Xi outlined a strategy to construct a powerful cultural nation (*wenhua qianguo*). His proposals attracted attention among Chinese academics as well as the international community, and during the few years since they were announced, scholars and musicians alike have worked on a sense of Silk Road through aligning traditional music from different ethnic groups, both those who resided along the ancient Silk Road and those minority groups living in China. As a result, the meaning of 'place' has been further extended, to refer to a geographical and cultural space in history that is simultaneously perceived in relation to the moment in which we live. How to interpret the sense of Silk Road is or will be a big and complicated issue for scholars not only in China but also all over the world.

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