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University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2003, 332 p.

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- 1 This book, focusing on Peking since the reforms, provides an ethnography of Chinese urban contemporary popular music. It uses an interdisciplinary approach—anthropology, musicology, literary criticism and cultural studies. After having presented the historical framework of Chinese popular music, in which the author has included rock music, it analyses three major issues related to it: ethnicity, gender and politics.
- 2 New popular music started in the early 1980s with the return to mainland China of the *Gangtai* style (Hong Kong and Taiwan music), a kind of “Western-influenced popular music that emerged in Shanghai... during the 1920s...” (p. 11), and was afterwards banned by communism. It eventually gained recognition, despite the state’s initial strong opposition to it because of its sweet and romantic character, which was considered to have a subversive anti-communist undertone. It was followed by the *Northwest Wind* style, which combined musical elements distinctive of Shaanxi province, and modern rhythms. These songs voiced a degree of direct political opposition and led to the rise of Chinese rock and roll in the late 1980s. Cui Jian’s most popular rock song *Yiwusuoyou* “came to symbolize the frustration and sense of loss harboured by a disillusioned generation of young intellectuals... who grew cynical about communism and critical of China’s traditional and contemporary culture” (p. 33). Strongly linked with the Tiananmen movement of 1989, rock became a real fad before its popularity started to decline in the mid-1990s.
- 3 After alluding to revolutionary China’s problematic relationship with its nationality groups (they have an “ambivalent and contradictory nature”, p. 62), the author shows that popular music is one area where these groups have to a certain extent been able to “negotiate their identities”. As a musical form rock music is particularly accessible and

powerful, and because it is also viable as an alternative culture, marginalised groups come to associate with it. Rock music in China can therefore be seen to be an important discourse of minority groups in China that challenges the central power (p. 103). In response, it seems, the Chinese government has, since its growth in popularity, demonstrated a flexibility that enabled and has led to an increased integration of minority groups.

- 4 The third chapter, concerning the negotiation of gender, first deals with the reconstruction of manhood and, secondly, the return of the traditional status of women linked with the rise of new feminine public voices. Rock music is associated with masculine power. The revolutionary ethos in China had denied men their sexuality, and with rock they were able to reclaim it. Chinese rock music is extremely chauvinistic and mentions the “female other” only to negate it and assert male superiority. It treats women as dangerous beings capable of domesticating the male. This kind of masculinity is significant in terms of modern-day China and the desire for Westernisation. In this context June 4th was viewed as an act of castration aimed at placing men back in their traditional woman-like role as state objects. As for women, the *Gangtai* style envisioned the return to the neo-traditional image of women waiting for men to love them. The pop scene saw the emergence of a few independent women’s voices (Ai Jing, Wei Hua/ Wayhwa) in the mid-1990s that challenged that dominant male image and view of the submissive female.
- 5 The last chapter describes the political relationship between the state and popular music. On the one hand, the state appears as oppressive, and repressive of different voices. On the other it shows a capacity for compromise. In some ways, self-employed artists and the state co-exist within a “symbiotic relationship” based mainly on a similar view of nationalism and on the same use of economic forces. Rockers have however, resisted the state through their verbal attacks, by deconstructing national symbols and by challenging official values. After having showed the degree to which Chinese rockers resist and oppose the state, the author then shows the limits of such resistance, i.e. the basic cultural unity of both sides: Chinese rock musicians are unable to separate themselves from their Chinese cultural roots nor from the collectivist ethos and nationalist discourse.
- 6 This book is an extensive and well-documented work. It includes an index and an extensive bibliography, yet unfortunately, as the heavy reliance on Zhao Jianwei’s critical book about rock shows, some sources are not always appropriately used or given their real value. The general use of parts or lines of songs that are almost never wholly translated is unsatisfying from a contextual and a scientific point of view).
- 7 *China New Voices* offers a good overview of the current situation and developments in popular music since the reforms. Positively speaking, its focus is not solely on rock, as it also shows the links between popular and rock songs. The author convincingly shows that China can no longer be divided into the popular and the official spheres. The author’s aim is to introduce a more nuanced approach to show how a web of multiple forces interact and negotiate a comfortable status quo. However, because this analysis refuses any form of structural approach, the reader is unable to understand at what conclusions the book is aiming. If Chinese popular music really is so paradoxical and ambivalent, is there a logical conclusion that can be drawn? From an anthropological point of view, more attention should have been paid to an analysis of past attitudes, that is before the communist revolution (only one paragraph is devoted to the *Book of*

Music!), which could have helped the author to find his way through the jungle that is China today. However, covering a period of twenty years, *China New Voices* gives an interesting presentation of the varied and dissenting waves and currents that still organise Chinese life: from the *Gangtai* of the early 1980s to the rock'n'roll of the late 1980s and the 1989 movement; and back again to a new kind of *Gangtai* with the decline of rock in the mid-1990s. What will come next?