CHAPTER 3

Music, Identity, and Community

3.0 Introduction

Paul Kendall

Academic research on China and the Sinophone world has largely dismantled the Orientalist conceptualisation of a 'traditional' Chinese music existing in threatened opposition to 'Western' music by means of research on genres as diverse as Cantopop, revolutionary opera, silk-and-bamboo (*sizhu* 丝竹) instrumental music, and Tibetan hip hop. Such genres are not only diverse in relation to each other, but also internally complex, drawing on various regional, national, and global influences. In the following paragraphs, I examine another type of diversity, which is the ways and the extent to which the experience of music contributes to a sense of self and/or community. I examine this diversity of musical experience from three perspectives: as a simultaneously shared experience of organised sound; as integral to the imaginings of wider national, regional, ethnic, political, and generational 'communities'; and as superficially heard amid the sensory overload of contemporary cities.

From the first perspective, musical performance constitutes an intimate shared experience which can create or reinforce strong emotional bonds among participants. A classic example from recent PRC history is the performance of the rock singer Cui Jian in May 1989 in Tiananmen Square. Peng Lei (2019) describes how this performance, taking place in the nation's 'symbolic central space', carried an 'explicit political message' of support for its audience of student protestors. Indeed, much has been written of early Chinese rock music's involvement

in the production of a politically aware, questioning youth culture in the late 1980s (e.g. Jones 1992). Since those heady days, rock music in China has increasingly refrained from involvement in collective political statements. However, its performance still plays an important role in the production of identities, which are not necessarily grounded in a sense of either the political or the collective. For example, Peng Lei also describes the more individualist rock bands and identities of the 2000s, particularly those associated with the venue D-22 in Beijing's university district. Moreover, non-mainstream music does not have a monopoly on the ability to produce a sense of identity or community. Thus, in this volume, Zou Sheng examines the recent patriotic singing of 'red songs' by flash mobs throughout the Sinophone world. Whereas these revolutionary (and post-revolutionary) songs have continued to be performed by the elderly in parks and other urban spaces during the post-Mao era (see Kendall 2019), these 'choral flash mobs' are notable for bringing together young groups of nationalists. Zou understands these gatherings as providing an occasion for what the ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino refers to as 'sonic bonding', as participants perform their sense of belonging to a national community through singing and movement.

In none of these examples is the sense of self or community solely restricted to the experience of music as a shared moment in space. This brings the article to a second, interrelated perspective on the modern experience of music. Revisiting two of the examples above, Cui Jian's album, *Rock 'N' Roll on the New Long March*, would have been heard by many students on cassette players prior to his performance in Tiananmen Square, just as participants in flash mobs might brush up on their renditions of 'red songs' via online streaming before singing in public. Looking to earlier technologies, the invention of the gramophone in the late nineteenth century enabled the separation of musical sound from time and space, so that a performance could be frozen and then reproduced far beyond the geographical and temporal limitations of its acoustic space. The invention of the radio, in turn, reproduced across vast spaces the previously local experience of musical sound as simultaneously heard, so that music came to play an important albeit sometimes underestimated role in the construction of 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983).

These imagined communities are not just of the nation, but also of region, ethnicity, generation, and political orientation, among others. For example, Yiu-Wai Chu (this volume; 2017), has argued for the importance of Cantopop in reflecting and defining a specifically Hong Kong identity, with lyrics about not only (a sometimes distanced) Chineseness but also the city itself. Elsewhere, Anna Morcom (this volume; 2015; 2018) has written of how Tibetan popular musics have created proud representations of Tibetan geography and culture. The social groups that shape – and are shaped by – these musics are not necessarily the cuddly, bounded states of collective existence that the term 'community' typically (and uncritically) implies, but rather exist in complex and sometimes antagonistic relations with other imagined communities. For Morcom, Tibetan popular musics' representations of ethnic identity partially align with the PRC's own colourful representations of the Tibetans as a distinct

ethnic group within the imagined multicultural community of Chineseness, but sharply diverge when accompanied by political demands. In neighbouring Xinjiang, the state has actively encouraged certain Uyghur musical practices but as secularised, staged performances of PRC heritage, rather than as more local, religious expressions of identity (Harris 2020). Moreover, in recent years, even state-sanctioned, sanitised Uyghur musics have been treated with suspicion and replaced by genres more associated with the Han Chinese (Harris, this volume; Anderson and Byler 2019).

There is also, of course, conflict over music within the narrower boundaries of an acoustic space, particularly in cities, where the ubiquity of music can create the perception of music as noise (see Frith 2002). For Beijing, Caroline Chen (2010) has shown how folk dancing amid the city's architectural and demographic density has led to generational conflict, as elderly dancers (and their music) irritate parents trying to maintain a quiet study environment for their children. For Hong Kong, Winnie Lai (2018) has described how pro-democracy demonstrators sang *Happy Birthday to You* to drown out, confuse and embarrass their opponents during the Umbrella Movement. Face-to-face (or ear-to-ear?) communities of musical sound are not necessarily warm and cuddly either.

Focusing on the dense soundscapes of urban spaces also suggests a third perspective on the experience of music, as an ubiquitous but relatively unheeded element of everyday life that does not significantly contribute to a sense of community or even self. My own research on a small city in Guizhou province explores this aspect of music, as struggling to exert significant influence amid a dense, high-decibel soundscape (Kendall 2019). Georg Simmel ([1903] 1997) famously argued that the city dweller becomes indifferent as a defence mechanism against the sensory onslaught of the metropolis. In the contemporary world, even a small Chinese city presents an aural onslaught, so that, unless played at particularly high levels, music may simply be tuned out by urban residents.

In the city of Wuhan, Samuel Horlor (2021, 25) finds that street performances 'exude a mundane quality, manifest not only in their settings and circumstances, but also in the underwhelming collective responses…that they provoke'. These loosely-bound collections of individuals may be more typical of everyday urban musical life than the 'exceptional, underground or minority cases' of music-making that scholars tend to prioritise (Horlor 2021, 90). And for these mundane musical gatherings, the notion of community needs to be radically conceptualised, away from the idea of '*a* community' that denotes a 'collection of people to which individuals belong, enduring bodies defined by the duality of insiders and outsiders' and towards 'community' as an uncountable noun 'evoking a descriptive quality of a situation or strip of activity' (Horlor 2021, 11). Only then does it become possible to grapple with the full extent of music's relationship with senses of self and community, as sometimes a powerful force—amid close interactions of bodies and sound, as well as in the wider production of social belonging—but also as sometimes fleetingly and superficially experienced amid the complexities of contemporary urban space.

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3.1 Performing Devotion: Revitalized 'Red Songs', Choral Flash Mobs, and National Identity

Sheng Zou

As nationalist sentiment climaxed in Mainland China in the wake of the Hong Kong protests and amid the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of

the founding of the PRC, new life has been breathed into a number of classical propagandistic songs, or 'red songs' (*hong ge* 红歌), which were both broadcast and performed *en masse* across the country. One of the revitalised songs is 'My People, My Country' (*wo he wo de zuguo* 我和我的祖国), a propaganda anthem from 1985 that has recently been covered by Chinese pop diva Faye Wong with a new musical arrangement for a hit Chinese movie of the same name. The song is included in the catalogue of 100 red songs released by the Central Propaganda Department to celebrate the anniversary.

The revival of classical red songs has taken a participatory and performative turn, as patriotic singing competitions and choral flash mobs spread across Chinese communities at home and abroad. In August, patriotic Chinese students around the world took to the streets, waving national flags while singing together to defend and honour their homeland. In September, pro-Beijing demonstrators in Hong Kong gathered in malls to sing China's national anthem and classical red songs such as 'Ode to the Motherland' (*gechang zuguo* 歌唱祖国), which constituted a counter-voice to 'Glory to Hong Kong', an anthem adopted by Hong Kong protesters to foster internal solidarity. Meanwhile, organisations and communities across China, large and small, held singing competitions where citizens performed patriotic songs live.

This fervent wave of choral flash mobs and singing competitions constitutes a re-emerging sonic infrastructure grounded in local and identity-based communities where music is circulated and practiced in the service of national cohesion. Over the past decades, from loudspeakers and radios, to tapes and CDs, and further to digital devices and apps, practices of music making and listening have been radically decentralised and personalised; yet these recent flash mobs signify a return of the collective in people's everyday experience with music. In the following, I will discuss how music could be deployed to consolidate national identification; how choral flash mobs allow for a kind of sonic and bodily bonding (Turino 2008; McNeil 1995) due to their distinctive participatory and performative properties; and how these flash mob performances relate to cultural/national identity formation.

Much attention is paid to the ways music is deployed as a means of political resistance, such as the iconic protest song 'March for the Beloved', which, since South Korea's Gwangju Democratisation Movement, has inspired other social movements in Asia. Nonetheless, music can also be harnessed as a medium of political and ideological control. In China, political and ideological control via music is achieved through appeals to people's nationalist sentiment and identity. Since the late 1970s, patriotic red songs, sung by a few professional singers employed by state troupes, often featured metaphoric terms such as 'home'/ 'homeland' (Baranovitch 2003), in order to blur the line between political nationalism and cultural nationalism, or to transfer people's love for the nation to the Party–state. However, with the market-oriented reforms in China's media and cultural scenes and the influx of foreign music genres, many of these red songs gradually lost their grip on people, especially younger generations. On

the one hand, other music genres, such as hip-hop, have been incorporated into propaganda campaigns (Zou 2019). On the other hand, attempts have been made to revitalise the red songs through new renditions and covers.

The power of music in evoking nationalistic tendencies should be analysed in terms of both its sonic and symbolic qualities. Music is often seen as a vehicle for lyrics, but as Revill (2000, 602) observes, the 'physical properties of sound, pitch, rhythm, timbre' work on and through the body, granting music 'a singular power to play on the emotions, to arouse and subdue, animate and pacify'. Therefore, the sonic, rhythmic, and melodic qualities of music that give rise to particular sensory, somatic, and mental experiences should be examined in their own right. In this sense, the ideological power of patriotic red songs stems largely from their rhythmic and melodic qualities that induce particular emotional orientations, such as solidarity, solemnness, or conviviality.

The symbolic quality of music—realised through meaningful lyrics or associated memories and tropes—constitutes another major source of musical power. Music is made at a particular time in a concrete place; its specific temporal and spatial dimensions allow it to carry memories and mark spatial boundaries. Bohlman (2004), for instance, argues that nationalistic music not only contributes to ethnic consciousness, but also serves nation-states in their struggle over contested territory. Likewise, red songs such as 'My People, My Country' and 'Ode to the Motherland' not only give people access to a symbolic past, but also invoke 'cultural geographies of exclusion and inclusion' (Revill 2000, 598). Such terms as 'people', 'country' and 'motherland' have definitional boundaries that demarcate the in-group from the out-group, reinforcing a sense of national sovereignty and integrity.

Memories, however, are not just 'transmitted' by these songs to new generations; they are also reconstructed, reformulated, and re-inserted into contemporary structures of feeling. The symbolic open-endedness of these patriotic songs makes this reformulation possible. Faye Wong's cover of 'My People, My Country' manifests another technique to re-insert memories of the past into the fabrics of contemporary life in ways legible to the contemporary audience.

The choral flash mobs as an embodied sonic infrastructure further contribute to the consolidation of national identification. Different from the top-down Red Culture campaign operative from 2008 and 2012 in Chongqing, the latest wave of patriotic flash mobs appears to be spontaneous and self-organised. The participants, as both singers and listeners, gather together to make collective sound, live. The liveness of flash mob performances—manifested in the acts of singing, cheering, or moving together in synchrony—has the potential to create 'strong emotional links between the individual and the group' (Eyerman 2002, 450). Group singing as a participatory and performative ritual leads to a sense of unity and intersubjective connection, similar to what Victor Turner (1991, 96) calls 'communitas', namely a state of 'homogeneity and comradeship' among individuals in rituals. In the context of nation–states, Benedict Anderson (2006,

145) observes that people singing national anthems on national holidays share an experience of simultaneity that he characterises as 'unisonance'—a sonic and embodied experience of an imagined community.

In these choral flash mobs, people also have a similar embodied experience of simultaneity as they sing the same verse to the same melody. During a flash mob taking place at a shopping mall in Hong Kong on September 12, pro-Beijing demonstrators sang the 'Ode to the Motherland' in unison, while facing toward a large national flag hanging from the second floor. Many of them were also waving small national flags while singing. In much the same way individual voices converged into one, the individuals merged into a homogeneous group where particularities were temporarily cast aside. Choral flash mobs provide an occasion for 'sonic bonding' (Turino 2008), where people make collective sound, move in synchrony, and experience a sense of togetherness. Participants perform not only music, but also their devotion to the nation-state, when their sense of national identity and pride is challenged by the ideological and discursive battles of the latest geopolitical crisis. Characterised by liveness, embodiment, participation, and performance, choral flash mobs enable a spectacular and aesthetic representation of national identity, where top-down ideological governance coalesces with bottom-up nationalist sentiment.

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3.2 Rethinking Hong Kong Identity through Cantopop:
The 1980s as an Example

Yiu-Wai Chu

'Music, like identity, is both performance and story,' argued by Simon Frith in his often-cited essay 'Music and Identity': it 'describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social' (Frith 1996, 109). In the context of Hong Kong where more than 90 percent of the population speak Cantonese, Cantonese popular songs (Cantopop) have functioned as a major source of the city's cultural identity by connecting the individual and the social. I have argued elsewhere that the story of Cantopop, the voice of the city, was also the story of Hong Kong identity (Chu 2017, 40–41). While it is widely believed that Cantopop has been declining in the past two decades or so, it is not surprising that Hong Kong identity has also been waning. In June 2019, the anti-extradition bill movement opened a Pandora's Box that the Hong Kong government has still failed to nail shut. Arguably, the diminishing Hong Kong identity and its relation to China is one of the important controversies related to the saga. Given the limited scope, the 1980s will be used as an example to explain the cultural politics of identity (trans)formation in Hong Kong when Cantopop played out across society in that decade of changes.

It is well known that 'Below the Lion Rock' (1979), originally the theme song of a Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) television drama, is the unofficial anthem of the city. The song written by the Cantopop godfathers Joseph Koo (melody) and James Wong (lyrics) signalled the dawning of a new era of local identity. As astutely noted by David Faure in 'Reflections on Being Chinese in Hong Kong', 'If the Hong Kong Chinese up to the 1970s were Chinese sojourners in Hong Kong, the generation of the 1970s [were] Hong Kong people of Chinese descent' (Faure 1997, 104). Cantopop turned a new page in the history of Hong Kong identity by singing the city in the subsequent decades. If the recent anti-extradition saga had pit Hong Kong against the Mainland, the crises in the early 1980s brought forth various imaginaries between the former British colony and its motherland. In 1982, the then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher fell on the stairs in front of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, which stirred up a confidence crisis among Hong Kong people. Hong Kong's relationship with China was somehow a major issue shortly before and after that infamous slip. It was argued by Esther Cheung (1999), my late dear friend, that Hong Kong popular music (including Cantopop and Mandopop) has generated intensely vigorous imaginations of homeland, nation, and 'Chineseness' in that special context.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Cantopop industry has long been dominated by romantic ballads, mainstream songs did present various national allegories. For example, Cantopop diva Liza Wang's big hits 'Always Love across Ten Thousand Waters and One Thousand Mountains' (1981) and 'The Brave

Chinese' (1981) expressed Hong Kong diasporic and national sentiments respectively in the early 1980s. It should not be difficult to tell from the titles that 'Ode on the Great Wall' (1983) and 'Call of the Yellow River' (1983) (sung by the then leading Cantopop singers Roman Tam and Adam Cheng respectively), among others, are good examples of rethinking if not glorifying Chineseness as the cultural root of Hong Kong identity. Besides 'Below the Lion Rock,' interestingly, Roman Tam also sang 'The Chinese Dream' (1983)—almost three decades before President Xi Jinping's version of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation. The song was so popular that Tam was invited to perform the Mandarin version on the 1985 Spring Festival Gala of China Central Television (CCTV, state television broadcaster), the immensely popular show watched by countless Chinese families on Chinese New Year's Eve. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's root-searching stories were perfectly summarised by the Side A of Teddy Robin's vinyl disc *Extraterrestrial Man* (1984), which was a medley comprising of five songs sharing the motif of longing for home. Not just to be found in the north, home could also be constructed locally, with conceptions of the past, present, and future. Agnes Chan's 'Hong Kong Hong Kong' (1982) was a lavish praise of the then Hong Kong as a home as well as an energetic city. 'Fond Memories of Hong Kong' (1983), theme song of the RTHK television programme bearing the same title, was nostalgic as well as forward-looking at once, trying to imagine a new future for Hong Kong through the examination of its history of developing from a small island into a world city.

   Alongside mainstream pop songs, Hong Kong folk songs were also good examples of creative hybridisations. Different from the highly commercial mainstream Cantopop, the wave of folk songs generated across the territory in the early 1980s represented the visions of young literary hipsters back then. Not unlike the examples mentioned above, however, many Hong Kong folk songs were root-searching, and Ivy Koo's 'My Home My Land' (1982), as implied by the title, is a convenient example. *Suite of Hong Kong City* (1982), a concept album masterminded by Armando Lai, was a pioneering attempt to use different districts of Hong Kong as the setting-cum-theme of all the songs except '1997,' which is a bold reflection of Hong Kong youngsters' bewilderment toward the future after Hong Kong's reversion to China. Besides folk songs, band songs also imagined different futures for Hong Kong at that critical historical juncture. Shortly after the official signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in December 1984, Hong Kong music industry witnessed the advent of band music, which continued to hybridise different imaginaries toward the future beyond 1997. The group 'Island,' the forerunner of this wave of band music, released its debut album entitled *Island* in 1985. Similar to 'Fond Memories of Hong Kong,' the main plug 'Legend of the Island' retold the story of how Hong Kong developed into a metropolis. While the legendary rock band 'Beyond' targeted the establishment with their pointed critiques of social issues, the duo 'Tat Ming Pair' voiced out the concerns of the lost generation of Hong Kong youngsters when facing an unknown future. In short, the

cultural identity of Hong Kong was an intricate hybridisation of the national, the local, and the global.

Hong Kong people's sense of belonging was fostered, according to Gordon Mathews, Tai-lok Lui and Eric Ma (2008, 146), 'through the "bottom-up" experiences of ordinary people's everyday lives'. Back in the 1980s, Cantopop was one of the most important sources of those kinds of Hong Kong everyday experiences. To borrow Frith's terminologies, Cantopop was a beautiful example of how popular music, like identity, is both performance and story of the city during times of uncertainty. Its decline in recent years has inevitably exerted negative impacts on the sense of belonging of Hong Kong people.

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3.3 Tibetan Popular Music: Politics and Complexities

Anna Morcom

In today's Tibet, popular music is showcased vigorously by the state on television and in festivals, and in fact, popular music emerged in Tibet from state institutions. At the same time, it is widely seen as subversive or patriotic for Tibetans, or at least assertive of Tibetan identity. Here, I explore some layers of complexity in the politics of music in contemporary Tibet.

A deeply-loved song of 2012 that exemplifies how Tibetan pop music powerfully embodies Tibetan identity is Tsewang Lhamo's 'Glory of the Ancestors' (2012). The lyrics praise the distinct Tibetan language, writing, culture, and

Fig 3.3.a: Still from Glory to the Ancestors' music video.

customs, and the video showcases the beautiful landscape in particular. I focus here on the video.

Rather than a land that is worked and is the basis of life, the Tibetan scenery, animals and clothes in the video evoke *aesthetic beauty*. Tsewang Lhamo is pictured mostly in grasslands with sheep and yak, yet is clearly not a herder, and the person herding is a small dot in the background who appears momentarily (see Fig 3.3.a.). The three sumptuous Tibetan outfits she wears are a long way from what Tibetans who live on the land wear.

Such a view of the land is a vision from a distance, one that shows a fundamental separation from the land, and belies a modern and urban viewpoint, as I have explored (Morcom 2015). It is in fact a classic example of what has been termed the 'landscape idea' by the geographer Denis Cosgrove (1998 [1984]), a way of looking associated with the rise of capitalism, the transformation of land into a commodity, the movement of people from subsistence living off the land, and a shift to urban rather than rural centres of power.

This vision in Tsewang Lhamo's song is particularly clear when we compare it to the way land and nature are portrayed in the lyrics of pre-modern oral folk songs. For example, this is a housebuilding song, from a book by Dawa Dolma (2012):

The rammers resembling southern dragons built a wall, resembling the blue sky.
The rammers resembling white-chested eagles built a wall, resembling a white
rocky mountain.
…
The rammers resembling fierce tigers built a wall, resembling a forest.

In seven lines (three shown here), the humans working are compared to ordinary, rare, and mythical creatures, and similarly, the wall they build, intertwining people, animals, and environment. The parallel lines (an age-old characteristic of Tibetan oral poetry) outline a 'vertical' hierarchy of cosmos, religion, society, where land and animals and nature and environment are an integrated part, rather than contemplated in and of themselves as beautiful. In pop songs, in contrast, we have a 'horizonal' view of the land as territory, the Tibetan land. This is ultimately a nationalist vision of ownership. But it is also a fundamentally ambiguous one, as it could be seen as 'China's Tibet', or a 'Tibetans' Tibet'.

It is crucial to note that the celebration of Tibetan identity *per se* is not restricted and cannot be said to be resistant or subversive *in and of itself*, as I have explored (Morcom 2018). Tibetans as a distinct people with distinct culture is not denied, but rather, is core to the structure of the Chinese multi-cultural nation, the *minzu* 民族 system. Assertions of Tibetan identity are not fundamentally subversive (unless this framework changes, which it may).

The pristine landscapes and glossy representations of Tibetans and their culture in music videos are often equivalent to what we see in tourist magazines and publications produced by the state to showcase Tibet as an exotic, beautiful paradise that they nurture. Tibetans in these videos look well-to-do, wealthy and successful, and, crucially, not dirty, and not embedded in rural life and work. This encapsulates the process of development, urbanisation, and transformation of Tibet under China in recent decades.

The gloss and high production standards of pop music are also a key part of the larger ideology of modernisation and development led by the state. As I have argued (Morcom 2007), the ballet-based, Sinicised dance style of state troupes aesthetically embodied socialist progress; it then surfaced in popular culture, its polish and professionalism utterly salient for market- or capitalist-based development too. The song 'Tibetan' (*Gangchanpa*), by the singer Dolma Kyab, for example, is seen as extremely powerful and subversive in its description of the Tibetan people and their primordial history, yet the dancing and costumes as performed here in a festival are entirely that of the state troupes, born of the socialist era (2006) (see Fig 3.3.b.).

In Tibet, rapid development and its ideologies subsume life, and people naturally seek to do well in this climate. Glossy portrayals of Tibet and Tibetans and slick, highly professional performance are inevitably appealing. Given the prevalence, still today, of Chinese stereotypes of Tibetans as backward, it is hardly difficult to understand how songs that assert Tibetan identity and culture and portray it richly are loved, and also fuel patriotism and to some degree, anti-state emotion. Nevertheless, the value of such a popular culture to the state should not be underestimated. State promotion of Tibetan language education or Buddhism is much less enthusiastic and comprehensive than popular music, to say the least.

Tibetan hip hop is an interesting new space where we can see Tibetan identity being created in ways that break from these state visions, with the presence

Fig 3.3.b: Still from 'Gangchanpa' music video.

of anger, swear words, and the portrayal of urban lives that are gritty or tough or poor (see Su Buer's article on Tibetan hip hop (2019)). Negative emotions that present Tibetans as not happy, wealthy, successful, etc., have in fact played a part in politically potent songs before, notably, the deep sadness in Dadon's songs of the late 1980s, described by Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (2005). With the state all-controlling, negative emotions of the people point directly to its failures and wrongs. However, many hip hop songs are strongly focused on a personal feeling of alienation or anger, undermining the potential for political critique of the state.

In a different mode, some songs, particularly from Amdo, also exhibit a style of video very different to the glossy norm. An example is 'Lamentation' (*Kyo bod*), by the singer Pema Trinley (2013). The lyrics are a searing complaint against the state of affairs in Tibet as ruled by the Chinese communist Party and the singer was arrested for this song. The video, however, is more subtly subversive, and on its own would not get anyone into trouble. There are some shots of landscaped land typical of music videos, but they are paired with more bleak shots and overall, the style is not glossy, but DIY, or even ethnographic (note DIY was central to the protest of the Punk movement). There are no costumes or exotic locations and much more closeness to Tibetan people and their lives. For example, from 56 seconds into the video, the camera lingers long on a crowd of real-looking rather than merely picturesque Tibetans, then after a shot of meadow flowers, it enters into and underneath a web of prayer

Fig 3.3.c: Still from 'Lamentation' music video.

flags where people sit here and there (see Fig 3.3.c.). There is no professional shot composition. Rather than aestheticised and landscaped and a view from outside, this is animated, sensuous, and immersive.

I would describe this video as having 'thickness', as in 'thick description'. If, as Sherry Ortner analyses (2006, 42–62), scholars failed to adequately analyse and understand resistance due to a lack of ethnographic thickness, we can see how 'thinness' in pop songs and videos potentially undermines resistance, and how the state, with its thin, stereotyped portrayals of Tibetans, exerts control. I would add, 'Glory of the Ancestors', even as it portrays culture and identity in a glossy and landscaped way, still has richness, especially in lyrics, and the potency people perceive arguably lies in this. This is even more the case for Dolma Kyab's 'Tibetan'.

In terms of high production standards, gloss, slickness, sheer wealth, power, conspicuous grandeur, material success and upward mobility, the state is always more powerful, and these are its terms of modernity. Music videos that speak on these terms can, inadvertently, support state structures, even if in other ways they challenge them or assert within them. But 'thickness' of representation is another dimension, beyond and contrary to the way power is wielded by authoritarian states.

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3.4 Music in the Disciplinary Regimes of Xinjiang's 'Anti-Extremism' Campaign

Rachel Harris

Beginning in 2017, news began to leak out from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the construction of a huge, secretive network of detention camps, dubbed 'transformation through education centres' in official Chinese sources. Overseas journalists and scholars began to piece together the evidence, and by mid-2018 international organisations (CERD 2018) and national governments (U.S. State Department 2018) were raising concerns that well over a million Muslims—primarily Uyghurs but also Kazakhs and other Muslim peoples—had been interned in the camps for indefinite periods of time

without formal legal charge. Reports by former detainees, teachers and guards, supported by satellite imagery, revealed a network of over a hundred newly built or greatly expanded detention facilities, heavily secured with barbed wire and surveillance systems, some of them large enough to hold up to 100,000 inmates.

Government documents leaked in autumn 2019 (Ramzy and Buckley 2019) used the language of epidemic to justify these extraordinary abuses. Detainees were said to have been 'infected' by the 'virus' of Islamic extremism and must be quarantined and cured. In practice, as careful documentation by human rights organisations (HRW 2018) has revealed, enormous numbers of people have been detained simply for the peaceful pursuit of their faith, or because they had travelled abroad, or installed 'suspicious' apps on their phones. Detainees include hundreds of prominent academics (UHRP 2019) and Uyghur cultural icons.

In the testimonies of former detainees, regimes of forced repetition and self-criticism feature strongly. Detainees recount being made to recite repeatedly, 'We will oppose extremism, we will oppose separatism, we will oppose terrorism'. Before meals they were required to demonstrate their gratitude to the Communist Party by chanting, 'Thank the Party! Thank the Motherland! Thank President Xi!' As Gerry Shih (2018) observed, 'the internment program aims to rewire the political thinking of detainees, erase their Islamic beliefs and reshape their very identities'.

Musical performance has played a key role in the 're-education' program. A leaked video clip which circulated on Uyghur exile networks in 2017 showed two rows of Uyghur detainees holding plastic bowls and singing the revolutionary song, 'Without the Communist Party there would be no New China'. Former detainee Abduwali Ayup explained that these inmates were singing for their food; a daily practice noted in many accounts (Byler 2018a). Outside the camps as well, Uyghurs in villages and towns across the region were mobilised in weekly mass singing and dancing. Their repertoire included the canon of revolutionary songs, but also Chinese pop songs, notably the internet hit 'Little Apple'.

Chinese media reports explicitly linked these activities to civilising projects: countering religious extremism and fostering modernity. I have argued that these activities were intended to break down the embodied norms of Uyghur culture by enforcing forms of public behaviour that violated religious expectations (Harris 2017). This was particularly striking in the case of the images of dancing Uyghur imams (religious clerics) which circulated on social media, and this singing and dancing formed part of a raft of measures including bans on beards and headscarves, beer drinking competitions, and proscriptions on halal food.

In this context of mass incarceration and documented abuse, such coercive use of musical performance may be understood as an example of the 'weaponisation' of music. Suzanne Cusick (2008) has described how US forces in the Iraq war also used music in detention centres as part of a package of measures designed to break down an individual's identity and will. In Abu

Ghraib, music videos were used against Muslim detainees as part of a set of attacks on their ethical sense of self. In Xinjiang's detention camps we find detainees subject to very similar processes, in which the coerced singing of revolutionary songs is used to break down the embodied habits of religious and cultural identity, as part of a set of attacks on detainees' will and sense of self.

Musical performance was also to the fore in the carefully choreographed visits to the camps organised in 2019 by the Chinese authorities for selected international media organisations (Blanchard 2019). Staged in response to international concerns about mass human rights abuses, these visits sought to reassure the international community that the camps were in fact voluntary 'vocational training centres' designed to re-educate people led astray by extremist ideology and prepare them for gainful employment. Assembled inmates sang the English song 'If you're happy and you know it clap your hands' for the press crews. The irony of these coerced displays of happiness was highlighted by international observers, but this was no more than the latest manifestation of the long-standing practices of the staged representation of China's minority peoples through singing, dancing, and smiling.

In the measures it has employed, and the ideological justification of its actions, China's project to securitise Xinjiang and re-engineer its Muslim peoples can be read as a colonial project. As Dibyesh Anand (2019) has argued, built into colonial projects is the assumption that the Other is inferior to the progressive Self, which has the duty and the right to mould the violent and backward Other into its own image. The focus of the Xinjiang campaign on embodied practices is far from unique; we can find many similarities in its approach to re-engineering Uyghurs in other, historical colonial projects around the world.

In the Americas, studies of colonial rule reveal an almost obsessive interest in the embodied, performative practices of the subjugated—rituals, songs and dances—suggesting that colonial elites understood the importance of these practices for the expression and transmission of identity and memory. Diana Taylor (2003) suggests that an important aspect of the colonising project throughout the Americas consisted in controlling and discrediting indigenous ways of preserving and transmitting cultural identity. There are many parallels between these historical accounts and the events unfolding in Xinjiang in the twenty-first century. Just as Uyghur religious and cultural practices are dubbed religious extremism and terrorism in China, for example, so indigenous performance practices were dubbed devil worship under colonial rule in the Americas.

But Taylor's account also makes clear that the persistent attempts by the colonisers to erase these Indigenous performance practices were matched only by their obstinate resurgence. She summarises: 'the performance of the prohibitions seems as ubiquitous and continuous as the outlawed practices themselves. Neither disappeared'. Lessons from history warn against easy assumptions that the campaign in Xinjiang will achieve its goal of erasing the religious and cultural identity of its subjects and rewiring them as patriotic automatons.

In the crowded cell of the re-education camp where Gulbahar Jelil was held in 2018, the detainees were under constant surveillance, and strict punishments

Fig 3.4.a: Worshippers at the Imam Aptah shrine near Khotan, one of many religious sites destroyed in the recent campaign. Image courtesy of Rahile Dawut, former professor of folklore at Xinjiang University, detained since December 2017.

were enforced against anyone seen to be performing the movements of prayer. Gulbahar recounted how the women in her cell whispered to each other to 'pray on the inside' (Byler 2018b). Even when they cannot be sounded out, the sonic traces of Uyghur cultural identity may be reactivated—internally, repetitively—through these simple acts of remembering engrained bodily practices. Such small acts of resistance hint at the possibility of sustaining embodied memory even under extreme conditions of coercion and control, and they suggest the inevitable failure of state projects of re-engineering.

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