



Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in China: the Construction of Chinese Identity on Television Show *Singer*

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Abstract:

Even though the People's Republic of China (PRC) is known as a culturally unified state with a nationalism propensity, it has a long multicultural history, 56 ethnic groups, a globalized economy, and a modern and cosmopolitan lifestyle. China demonstrates the qualities of a cosmopolitan country in naturalizing the cultural variety and digesting social and cultural conflicts within the nation-state. Firstly, the cultural differences in China come from not only ethnic groups but also customs from various regions. Hence, the emphasis on Chinese history and traditional culture, especially Confucius ideology, are critical factors in constructing a unified Chinese identity. Moreover, Greater China and the pan-Chinese nation are used to include people from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and all ethnic Chinese around the globe. Meanwhile, under the influence of globalization, China becomes home to people who are not ethnic Chinese. The modern Chinese community represents the value of cosmopolitanism, naturalizing the existence of foreign visitors and multiracial Chinese. As one of the most popular programs on Chinese television, under the direction of the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), the production of winners on *Singer* (also known as *I am a Singer*) reflects the construction of an imaginary modern Chinese community. Through analysis on performances, interviews and comments related to the finals of three key winners (the Mongols Chinese winner Han Lei, the Chinese American winner Coco Lee, and the British winner Jessie J), this paper will discuss the confluence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the construction of an imagined Chinese identity. The representation of *Singer* depicts an open, modern, and diversified cultural sphere, in which multiethnic, multinational, and multiracial appearances are naturalized.

Keywords: Nationalism; Chinese identity; cosmopolitanism; popular music; popular culture.

In People's Republic of China (PRC), the production and distribution of media content on all platforms, from television to the Internet, are controlled by the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA). Usually, the NRTA re-edits movies or TV dramas that are overly sexual or excessively bloody. Particularly, due to a political dispute between China and South Korea, K-pop contents have been hugely limited on Chinese television since 2016. Television drama, music, celebrities, and other South Korean cultural products were exported to China earning a record of \$5.3 billion in 2014 (Maizland, 2017, para. 3). However, in 2016, as a result of South Korea's attempt to build a missile shield system, THAAD, Chinese officials warned that "China felt firm opposition and strong dissatisfaction" (Maizland, para. 1). Consequently, Chinese television programs have rarely invited celebrities from South Korea since the end of 2016 (Wu & Wang, 2017, "What is THAAD"). As a result, the popular imported television show, *I am a Singer*, was rebranded to avoid the restriction from the ban on South Korean related content. However, after changing its name to *Singer* (henceforth, *Singer* will be used to refer to the series), this show continued to invite singers from the UK, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, and Russia. This show constructs an internationalized cultural stage that indicates the existence of cosmopolitanism in the Chinese television culture.

From censorship to strict laws on prevailing cultural products, the Chinese government shows a tendency to build this imagined Chinese community with the limited representation of media. Even though China always appears as a culturally unified state with a nationalism propensity, it has a long multicultural history, 56 ethnic groups, a globalized economy, and a modern and cosmopolitan lifestyle. Therefore, China must be a cosmopolitan country in order to digest all the social and cultural conflicts within the nation-state. Hence, by investigating the representation of cosmopolitanism on television in China and studying the music entertainment show *Singer*, this paper intends to answer these questions:

- To what extent is the "uncensoring" of unnaturalized faces on *Singer* representing cosmopolitanism in the modern Chinese identity?
- What is the relationship between the representation of ethnic minorities in *Singer* and the cosmopolitanism in Chinese identity?
- What is the relationship between the representation of greater China on *Singer* and the cosmopolitanism in Chinese identity?
- What is the relationship between the representation of unnaturalized faces on *Singer* and the cosmopolitanism of Chinese identity?

Literature review

To answer the questions above, this study will explore scholarly articles that define nationalism as well as cosmopolitanism and investigate the complexity of nationalism in China with the implementation of censorship on television.

Nationalism and cosmopolitanism in China

The existence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in China can be traced to ancient China of the Zhou dynasty. Ancient residents of China referred to the current mainland China as the Huaxia area with various states and communities lived in contestation and collaboration (Qian, 2011). Until the West Zhou dynasty united the various nations in the 11th century by establishing a centralized governmental institution of feudalism, West Zhou dynasty was seen as an “international organization” (Qian, 2011, p. 31) that intervened between the fellow states (houguo) and governed the Chinese region, which was considered the whole world (tianxia). As a result, ancient Chinese had an open view towards international relationship so that states could collaborate and maintain peaceful engagement through marriage. However, states with different political agenda and/or a non-agricultural lifestyle could not be assimilated by this union (Qian, 2011). With that said, the boundary of early China was built on lifestyle and political agenda rather than ancestry. The propensity of West Zhou dynasty set the foundation for an inclusive civilization.

Inspired by the West Zhou dynasty and its ideal of building a world government, Confucius and other scholars cultivated political influences in Chinese states and proposed the early Confucianism, a political, ethical and ideological structure for the Chinese community. With benevolence as its central ideology, Confucianism promoted the “human-heartedness consists in loving others” as the ethical standard for international communication and daily routine of citizens and rulers (Feng, 2015). However, Confucianism also considered ancient China as the civilized with the duty to civilize barbarians and assimilate other states. Confucianism functioned as the super structure (Solé-Farràs, 2014) that guides development of Chinese culture, so even Qing emperors had to adapt to the Confucianist cultural and psychological structure and present them as the Son of Heaven of Confucian ideology (Han, 2013). Even in contemporary China, Confucianism is adopted into the construction of Chinese nationalism, which leads to the complex assimilation and celebration of cultural diversity.

Since the first notion of nationalism proposed by Sun Yat-sen, Chinese nationalism have undergone several stages of development. Nationalism [Minzu

zhuyi] and Han minzu [Han majority] was introduced by Sun as the uniting force that motivated people of different languages and cities of origins against the Qing government (Gladney, 1994). After the new establishment of the PRC, the CPC considered Han majority as the more developed group and classified certain minority groups as less developed (Han, 2013). With the Marxist vision, the CPC considered it a goal of the developed Han to help ethnic minorities to reach a universal standard. As the government standardized minority languages and promoted the bilingual education with Mandarin and minority languages, they also subsidized minorities that lived in peripheral regions and encouraged Han majority to learn the cultures of minorities for better integration (Han, 2013). As the contemporary China established a new nationalism with Confucianism as the main source of community identity, the CPC considers welfare of people, great unity and loyalty to leader and love toward the PRC as the counterforce against international invasions of foreign culture, against the Han ethnocentrism, and supports CPC at the center of the national identity (Solé-Farràs, 2014). With that said, the cultural nationalism in contemporary China shows the fluctuation between assimilation and the acceptance of diversified cultures.

Multi-ethnic China

In a country with different cultural elements, nationalism celebrates the similarity among its people. By studying the 2006 season of *Canadian Idol*, Boulou Ebanda de B'éri and Ruth Middlebrook find that, through the selection procedure, the show “eliminated the contingent, plural, and multicultural dimensions of Canadian identity” (2009, p. 28). In this show, a champion from a particular region of Canada was selected to represent the multicultural country. During this process, Canadian identity was naturalized. Similarly, despite China having 56 ethnic groups, Han constitutes 92 percent of the population (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 4). Hence, modern Chinese culture is usually represented by people of Han, whereas other cultures are celebrated and embraced on national events. Nationalism allows cultural differences to prosper within the country, but it also finds this similarity among different cultural groups to unite them (Boulou Ebanda de B'éri & Middlebrook, p. 28). As a result, culture is used as a medium to communicate and unite the ethnic groups in China.

The promotion of traditional culture is part of the construction of modern Chinese identity. Tyfield and Urry illustrate that, in the dilemma between modernity and Chinese identity, nationalism was “a trump card against political challenge” (2010, p. 282). According to Tyfield and Urry (p. 283), the civil society of China is still under the huge influence of Confucius. Confucian ideology emphasizes the respect of hierarchy within family and country as well as the opposition to “scepticism regarding knowledge claims and their authority” (p. 283). In Chinese history, culture

and civilization are more important than ethnicity in constructing Chinese identity (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 14). Therefore, the Chinese identity can be seen as a convergence of the shared value of Confucianism and the emphasis of Chinese traditional history.

Greater China

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the country established a new imagined community to unite ethnic minorities within the national boundary and Chinese people who live outside the Chinese mainland. Since the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, China suffered through years of foreign invasions from imperial countries (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 5). After the war, in order to unite people from mainland China, Macau, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese immigrants in other regions, China had the need to form "a solid national identity" (Gorfinkel, p. 5). Greater China is a term that has been used to include the two Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macau, as well as Taiwan (Gorfinkel, p. 4). At the same time, "pan-Chinese nation" (Gorfinkel, p. 5) is used by Chinese media referring to all ethnic Chinese around the globe. However, since Greater China has been governed by different parties for decades, even though people from Greater China are represented on media in the Chinese mainland, their representation is under more influence of censorship.

All television and other media in the PRC are under the supervision by the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA). From the China Central Television (CCTV), which is known as "the mouthpiece of the Party" (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 55), to the provincial satellite stations, the NRTA regulates television programs to correct the direction of public opinion and creative orientation (National Radio and Television Administration, n.d., para. 3). The first appearance of an artist of Greater China on mainland television was Hong Kong singer Zhang Mingmin. Before the return of Hong Kong in 1998, he was invited to perform "My Chinese Heart" ["Wo de zhongguo xin"] at the *1984 Spring Festival Evening Gala*. As Lauren Gorfinkel illustrates, "The lyrics . . . are about a man who grew up abroad and dressed like a Westerner, but who steadfastly clung to his Chinese identity, declaring that it was something he would 'never change.'" (p. 125).

Even though the representation of Greater China has been diversified on current mainland television, respect for the PRC's political ideology is a critical part of the Chinese identity.

Multiracial China and cosmopolitanism

As China opened up in the era of globalization for economic development, foreign faces are also represented on the CCTV's Gala. China has been an important part of globalization in terms of the global flows of capital and labour, while the modernization and urbanization brought new ideologies to the younger generations in China (Tyfield, & Urry, 2010, p. 281). After the reform and opening up, Chinese citizens have been introduced to overseas idols (Tyfield, & Urry, p. 282). However, to be represented on Chinese media, foreigners were trained with Chinese language and culture. As one of the first foreign performers on Chinese television, Dashan (also known as Mark Rowswell) became popular in China after his performance of crosstalk (Xiangsheng) comedy on *the 1988 Spring Festival Evening Gala* (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 17). According to Rowswell, Chinese audience accepts him because "Dashan represents a Westerner who appreciates and respects China, who has learned the language and understands the culture and has even become 'more Chinese than the Chinese'" (as cited in Gorfinkel, p. 17). Moreover, Gorfinkel argues that foreign faces are accepted when they are trained from strange "barbarian" to civilized citizens by learning Chinese culture and expressing their love for China (p. 16). The representation of unnaturalized foreign faces demonstrates a confluence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the imagined Chinese community.

Even though television is still under strict censorship, the changing values in Chinese society reflect the trend of globalization and cosmopolitanism in China. Contemporary China has been a convergence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism as it displays both concepts of globalization and solidarity within the nation. Even though nationalism seems to be incompatible with the recognition of multiple identities of cosmopolitanism, these two ideologies are "both projects of modernity, of 'imagined communities' and 'invented' traditions" (Tyfield & Urry, 2010, p. 279). Both nationalism and cosmopolitanism emphasize the role of local experiences and media content in shaping an individual's social identity, whereas China has been a globalized nation that negotiates with modern and foreign concepts. As previously mentioned, the reform and opening up was a critical change of China towards a contemporary society that embraces global flows. Tyfield and Urry also describe China as "a 'cosmopolitan realism', that national interests can be bound in, transformed, and made more powerful through international openness and collaborations across borders" (p. 279). In brief, the construction of the political identity as a Chinese citizen shows both nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

Originate from Greek, cosmopolitanism emphasizes the openness to the world and embraces "changes through intercultural interaction" (Sobré-Denton & Bardhan,

2013, p. 11). Cosmopolitanism is a composition of Greek words “kosmo”, which means “world”, and “politias” that refers to “citizen”. According to Miller (2007, p. 24-25),

Their claim was that human beings everywhere formed a single community, governed by a law that was discovered through the use of reason—though in some versions of Stoicism cosmopolitan citizenship was reserved for the wise and the good.

However, like the invention of Confucianism world peace, cosmopolitanism was invented against statism because national states were not the dominant governmental institutions (Anderson, 1998). Both Confucianism and cosmopolitanism were initially proposed to promote “voluntary ethical community of intellectuals to a world political community grounded in right” (Anderson, 1998, p. 22). Likewise, cosmopolitanism asked for the cosmopolitan right, which is the claim for humanity and consequently the respect to citizens and other states.

The early stage of European nationalism was distinguishable from cosmopolitanism, as national culture was not confined to the territorial boundaries of state. Nevertheless, as globalized commercial transaction and production enabled the imagination beyond state borders, cosmopolitanism also encouraged mobile citizenship and repudiate the bond to territorial state, which is the opposite of the “official nationalism” (Anderson, 1998, p. 26). In result, cosmopolitanism represents a multicultural force with a goal of “common norms and mutual translatability” (Anderson, 1998, p. 13). With the multiculturalism studies in immigrant country Canada as an example, multiculturalism emphasizes the social and political integration of immigrants and an acceptance attitude towards intercultural adaptations, which requires the local society to adapt the needs of immigrants (Mann, 2012). According to Li (2003), integration to Canadian society requires immigrants to engage with local communities, contribute as local members, and connect with the local world, which is similar to the co-existence of cultural nationalism and cosmopolitanism in China that assimilates but also encourages the diversities of national minorities. However, cosmopolitanism differs from multiculturalism because of its rejection to the distinctiveness of culture. Jeremy Waldron (2000, p. 233) argues that even if someone lives only in one city their whole life, they are still influenced by the result of globalized economy and cultural interactions regardless of their self-awareness, so participation in one particular culture already displays a cosmopolitan dimension. In comparison, multiculturalism is still limited by the territorial boundary and integration of immigrants, whereas cosmopolitanism emphasizes the mobility of world citizens.

Cosmopolitanism describes an identity generated from absorbing various cultural elements of the different environments. Christensen and Jansson state that, local experiences, including where people lived and where they grew up, are critical in shaping their sociality and the sense of belonging (2015, p. 93). For immigrants living in different cultural and social surroundings, cosmopolitanism also introduces the “mobility” to identify oneself as a convergence of different identities and to switch between “identificatory categories” (Christensen & Jansson, p. 97). In other words, a cosmopolitan identifies themselves with multiple ways of belongingness and switches to one of their identities when they try to adapt to a local surrounding. Compared with traditional notion of cosmopolitanism, the recent proposal of vernacular cosmopolitanism allows the coexistence of national identity and cosmopolitan humanism, so cosmopolitans may maintain connection to their local culture while develop an openness to diversity and international engagement (Christensen & Jansson, 2015). The complicated history, the diversified cultural practices, and globalized society in China fit with the description of cosmopolitanism so that the imagined Chinese identity is constructed by representing this complex culture.

With the complexity of 56 ethnic minorities, Greater China that follows different political systems, and the unnaturalized foreign faces in China, cosmopolitanism is a more suitable means for China’s political inclusion. As a community of 56 ethnic minorities, China can be seen as a migrant country that follows the definition of cosmopolitanism (Xu & Wu, 2019, p. 5). Moreover, as cosmopolitan cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, grow and create more job opportunities, citizens migrate from small cities to cosmopolitan cities in China. As an example, Figure 1 (see Appendix A) shows the density of migrant workers in each area of Beijing. While the city of Beijing is segregated by ring roads, the center of the city is within the 1st ring road. With that said, according to Figure 1, roughly 48 percent of residents between the 4th ring road and 5th ring road are migrant workers, while almost 62 percent of residents between the 5th and 6th ring road are migrants. Similarly, Christensen and Jansson (2015, p. 87) argue that foreign migrants in Sweden live in the outskirts of the city which leads to a strong alienation between migrants and the local society. Despite migrant workers in Beijing are mostly Chinese citizens from other provinces, the cultural varieties could still alienate migrants from local citizens.

Nevertheless, as a result of globalization and digitalization in urban China, the use of social media by contemporary citizens reflects cosmopolitan values of tolerance. In a recent study, Deya Xu and Fang Wu (2019) investigated the user habit of Momo, a mobile application to make friends with strangers, and demonstrated the

changing social habit from a society of acquaintances towards a society of strangers. In a traditional Chinese society, people who live in villages used to cultivate their network based on their relatives and geographical relationships, but because of urbanization, citizens must live with strangers from different cultural backgrounds (Xu & Wu, p. 4). Similarly, Momo is a mobile application that helps people expand their networks with strangers. Hence, this app represents not only the social revolution of “neoliberal values” in China but also an openness to other people and new values, “and regard it as a routine part of city life” (Xu & Wu, p. 14). However, the authors notice that the cosmopolitan value in China is an “insensitivity to others’ rather than ‘tolerance of difference’” (Xu & Wu, p. 14). Due to the various cultural, ethnic, and political backgrounds of Chinese people and the occasional foreign visitors in China, Chinese citizens learn to behave normally towards strangers of all kinds. Still, this insensitivity shows a cosmopolitan perspective in modern Chinese identity.

Methodology

To study the complexity of the imagined contemporary Chinese community, this research analyzes the content of Chinese television show *Singer*. Due to the censorship from NRTA, television depicts China’s political and cultural inclusiveness and consequently reflects the imagined community for the construction of the Chinese identity. For this reason, content analysis on what are represented on television should provide a vivid image of the struggle between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in developing the imagined Chinese community.

Among all television stations in China, CCTV usually represents the Central Party of Communist (CPC), while satellite television stations are more commercialized. Therefore, the commercialized provincial stations reflect both the rules of the NRTA and the need of the market for “diverse themes, styles, and formats” (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 52). Specifically, Hunan Satellite TV, one of the most popular provincial stations, imported *I am a Singer* from MBC Korea in 2013 (Gorfinkel, p. 62). This Chinese version became a huge success since the first season, and its seasonal finals in 2013, 2014 and 2015 were listed in “the top 30 rating comprehensive arts and entertainment episodes on provincial channels between 2005 and 2015” (Gorfinkel, p. 62). *I am a Singer* (later rebranded as *Singer* in 2017) mostly invites well-known singers to perform and compete with various music genres and regional characteristics (Hong, 2014). Performances are voted only by 500 live audiences. After every two episodes, the least voted singer has to leave the show. Music, especially popular music, can help with the establishment of cultural identity since it can evoke and organize “collective memories and present experiences with an

intensity, power, and simplicity” (Gorfinkel, p. 4). Likewise, culture is an important tool in constructing an imagined Chinese community. In other words, under the influence of the NRTA, the production of winners of *Singer* indicates the construction of a modern Chinese community. Therefore, by connecting with existing theories and similar cases, the analysis will include reviews over the song choices and how each song is presented to grasp the representation of *Singer* in constructing an imaginary China.

This study analyses three key winners and a censored performer from *Singer*. Han Lei, Coco Lee, and Jessie J are chosen because they are respectively the first multiethnic, American Chinese, and non-Chinese winners of *Singer*. The analysis will focus on the finals, including the performances, interviews with the singers, and a few online comments regarding their winning. To analyze these singers, conventional content analysis will be adapted, so codes can be developed during the process of data analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1286). By investigating the existing literature on the construction of Chinese identity and the role of media in it, this research intends to explore the complexity of Chinese modern society via the representation of *Singer*, in order to find whether China has a nationalism that interweaves with cosmopolitanism.

Analysis

Singer, aired in January 2013, has produced seven winners up until April 12, 2019. Among seven winners of the show, Han Lei is the first ethnic minority winner from the second season in 2014. Then, Coco Lee, competed in the fourth season in 2016, is the first American Chinese winner, and Jessie J won the rebranded *Singer 2018* as the first non-Chinese winner. As the show reflects a seemingly increasing openness with the cultural and political identities of the winners, performances in finals demonstrate both the culture each winner represents and the complexity of the imagined Chinese community. On the contrary, a well-known Cantonese singer, Hins Cheung, was invited to *Singer 2017*, but he was erased from the aired episode due to public rejection. This case will also be analyzed to complement the discussion on the identity of Greater China in the imagined Chinese community.

Ethnic minority

Born in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, Han Lei is a Mongols-Chinese singer. In the final of *I am a Singer* in 2014, he performed a popular Uyghur folk song and a remix of a Mongols ethno-pop song with two of his hit songs as his final performance for the competition (Hong, 2014). The first song, “Lift Up Your Veil”

["Xianqi ni de gaitou lai"], is one of the most well-known folk songs in China. Then, Han Lei's second performance combined "Swan Goose" ["Hongyan"], a Mongolian-Chinese ethno-pop song, with "Walk to Horizon" ["Zou sifang"] and "Borrow Another 500 Years From the Heaven" ["Xiangtian zai jie wubai nian"]. The second performance started with traditional instruments, such as kobyz, mandolin, and horse-headed fiddle, to build an exotic atmosphere (Hong, 2014). "Swan Goose" originates from a folk song from Inner Mongolia ("Menggu zu ming", 2016, para. 4). This Chinese version illustrates the beautiful grassland where the swan geese settle down after travelling to illustrate the nostalgia of a man who left his hometown. In addition, Han Lei and his band members also wore traditional Mongolian costumes.

Due to the complex ethnicity of China, ethno-pop is one of the music genres that are often used to celebrate national unity. This genre in China usually combines Mandarin lyrics with music or visual elements from ethnic minorities, so it celebrates the colourful cultural diversity of China with the national language (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 85). Compared to other Chinese music genres, ethno-pop borrows elements from popular music, so it is a more commercialized genre for Chinese audiences on mainstream media (Gorfinkel, p. 85). By balancing between the diversity of minority culture and the sameness, Han Lei represents the modern Chinese identity by expressing in a shared language while "allowing cultural pluralism to flourish" (Boulou Ebanda de B'béri & Middlebrook, p. 28). Similarly, instead of directly promoting a political message, ethno-pop and Han Lei's ethnic identity are "softer representations" that highlight the talent, creativity, and cultural diversity of China (Gorfinkel, p. 111). The performances reflect minority culture's contributions to the development of a vibrant and cohesive multiethnic China (Gorfinkel, p. 111). Therefore, Han Lei's two performances can be seen as nationalistic celebrations of the national unity among different minority nationalities.

As a peripheral minority culture becomes a characteristic of the Chinese identity, ethno-pop is also used to highlight the unity in mainland China to face the cultural invasions by globalization and Greater China. In the final, Han Lei had to challenge with singers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, and Hong Kong singer G.E.M. lost to Han Lei as the runner-up of the season (Hong, 2014). When music from Taiwan and Hong Kong dominated the popular music industry, ethno-pop was one of the genres that were promoted to show the unique mainland culture (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 99). Similarly, grassroots nationalism in China worries for the cultural invasions of globalization in destroying domestic culture, regional preferences, and Chinese traditions (Gao, 2012, p. 182). According to Gorfinkel (2017), by showing tolerance and respect to ethnic minorities, China builds a positive image of a culturally diversified country to the citizens and the world (p. 92). Ethno-pop is also marketed

as a “world music” genre to diversify the Chinese modern music culture (Gorfinkel, p. 98). As an example, a YouTube user commented on Han Lei’s performance:

As a 22-year-old, I’m supposed to enjoy popular music, but I’m so tired of it. . . . Han Lei is refreshing, a quality other singers lack, and his grassland music washes away the hustle and bustle of city life . . . I do not know if people from Taiwan or Hong Kong will agree with me. (Liyao, 2014)

Facing challenges from other regions and countries, Han Lei’s folk and ethno-pop performances represent the diversified Chinese culture, so his victory can be seen as a representation of the “ethnic harmony” (Gorfinkel, p. 111) and creativity of modern China.

Nevertheless, the diversified performances of Han Lei also illustrate the cosmopolitan tolerance of the modern Chinese community. During Han Lei’s second performance, the camera displays the exotic traditional instruments, the backup singer who performed hoomei (or Mongolian throat singing), and Mongolian costumes of the performers to highlight the exotic cultural symbols Han Lei represents (see Appendix B). By interacting with a minority culture, the performance articulates the “social plurality” in developing a civil society (Tyfield & Urry, 2010, p. 279). Moreover, the lyrics of “Swan Goose” also emphasize the nostalgia of people who left their hometown, which is relevant not only to ethnic minorities but to all migrant workers who live in another city. Media has the ability to construct an imaginary “realm of belonging” for people who are alienated in the local community (Christensen & Jansson, 2015, p. 95). As a result of the 56 culturally different nations in China, ethnic minorities are living in peripheral areas, similar to the “othered” Muslim migrants in the Swedish society (Christensen & Jansson, p. 93). Specifically, Han Lei is from the Inner Mongolia, one of the five autonomous provinces in China. Han Lei’s performance constructs a nostalgic scenario that is relatable to all migrant, from ethnic minorities to cultural minorities. Therefore, *I am a Singer* allows Han Lei to mediate an imagined home to all migrants and cultural minorities in the cosmopolitan Chinese society.

Greater China

As the first Greater China winner, Coco Lee joined and won the fourth season of *I am a Singer* in 2016. Born to an Indonesian father and a Chinese mother in Hong Kong, Coco Lee moved to the United States when she was nine. After high school, she started her career in Taiwan. Therefore, Coco Lee represents all types of Greater China: Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau), Taiwan, and overseas

Chinese. In the final of *I am a Singer*, Coco Lee chose “Earth Song” by Michael Jackson and her iconic hit “A Love Before Time” [“Yueguang airen”] to compete with a mainland rock singer, a singer from South Korea, and four other Greater China singers (Hong, 2016). Her first performance featured a guest celebrity from the United States, Ne-Yo, indicating her international influence. The song “A Love Before Time” was from the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and it was nominated and performed at the Academy Awards (“Liwen”, 2001, para. 1). Since the movie tells a story regarding martial arts in the Qing dynasty, the song was arranged with a mixture of Western instruments and traditional Chinese instruments, such as xiao (Chinese flute) and Chinese zither.

Coco Lee shows her Chinese cultural root and becomes a symbol of the musical and cultural achievement of Chinese in the international cultural market. On YouTube, a comment describes her second performance: “the arrangement of this song is like from a Chinese martial arts movie, bringing people into the fantasy of a Chinese legend” (Ren Liu, 2016). Similarly, Gorfinkel suggests that people of Greater China are “compatriots” (*Tongbao*) to mainland China, and China is the “motherland” they can go back to (2017, p. 136). In other words, even though Coco Lee grew up in the US, her performance reflects how much she values traditional Chinese culture and her Chinese identity. Additionally, as performers achieve their successes in mainland China, they attract “positive family links” from Greater China (Gorfinkel, p. 160). By allowing celebrities from Greater China to pursue their career in the Chinese mainland, Chinese television becomes a reminder to Greater China that they can work with China for “economic and scientific development” (Gorfinkel, p. 160).

At the same time, the achievements of Greater China elevate the value of the pan-Chinese nation and elevate the imagined Chinese identity. As Coco Lee invited American singer Ne-Yo to perform together on *I am a Singer* (Hong, 2016), she lifted the value of this stage to an international level. Compared to mainlanders, performers from Great China were modern, trendy, cosmopolitan, and economically superior, so their appearance on Chinese television has helped to build the image of China as a country of international influence (Gorfinkel, p. 164). As the cooperation between successful celebrities from Greater China and the mainland enhances the positioning of China on the global level, it also evokes more cosmopolitan openness in the construction of the imagined Chinese identity.

By establishing her identity as both a Chinese and international artist, Coco Lee on *I am a Singer* represents cosmopolitan China as a member of the pan-Chinese nation. The final of *I am a Singer* is between one singer from mainland China, five singers from Greater China, and a singer from South Korea. Usually, Hong Kong artists

are marked with subtitles “China Hong Kong” on CCTV, while other regions are marked with “China Taiwan” or “China Macau” to indicate their political nationality (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 164). However, the representation of *I am a Singer* treats every singer equally without naming their political identity with subtitles. While cosmopolitanism is defined by global openness, the openness towards Greater China compatriots incorporates their cultural diversities to mainland China (Tyfield & Urry, 2010, p. 279). Therefore, the articulation of *I am a Singer* and Coco Lee’s victory show the cosmopolitan openness of China in accepting the cultural differences, while Greater China is accepted to represent the diversified Chinese culture.

Furthermore, not only Coco Lee’s performances reflect the cosmopolitan tastes in China, but she also indicates her mobility to switch between two different cultural backgrounds. The cooperation between Coco Lee and Ne-Yo, along with her identity as a singer of Greater China, demonstrated the diversified cosmopolitan modern Chinese tastes. Hybridity, in the mixed use of English and Chinese, was utilized by other singers to attract youth audiences (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 165). In the same way, through two culturally different performances, Coco Lee showcases her diversity and “mobility” (Tyfield & Urry, 2010, p. 279) in representing the modern Chinese community that negotiates traditional Chinese culture with Western culture. Coco Lee’s performance connects the show with an imagined global belonging. When Coco Lee performed the song she sang at the Academy Awards, the audiences temporarily “imagine and experience” (Lu & Chu, p. 367) her transnational glory. As the winner of *I am a Singer* in 2016, Coco Lee represents the openness to cultural differences and the mobility to articulate different cultural identities of the modern transnational Chinese community.

Although the victory of Coco Lee connotes the existence of cosmopolitanism in the imagined Chinese community, two events regarding *I am a Singer* display limits of cosmopolitan China. Provincial television stations may have some freedom to negotiate with the NRTA, but the basic rule is “not to cross the boundary, delimiting politically, socially and culturally sensitive content” (Zeng & Sparks, 2019, p. 61). Under the influence of the dispute between China and South Korea, as an imported show from South Korea, *I am a Singer* was rebranded with a new name, *Singer* (Hunan weishi [Hunan Satellite TV], 2016). Likewise, Cantonese singer Hins Cheung was one of the first singers joining *Singer 2017*, but the show had to erase him before the seasonal premiere. According to a social media post by the Communist Youth League of China, Hins Cheung supported several political events in Hong Kong. His multiple appearances created a supportive image for the Hong Kong independence movement (Qingnian liwang zhaoliangchen [The Power of Youth Zhao Liangchen], 2017). Even though he is a mainland-born Chinese who developed his career in Hong Kong, he was

still boycotted in the mainland on the Internet. This event demonstrates that the One-China policy is a core value in the culture of mainland China. Canadian comedian Mark Rowswell also suggests that to be represented on Chinese television, people need to understand “what is culturally acceptable to a Chinese audience” (as cited in Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 18). Since cultural identity weighs more than ethnic identity in the Chinese community (Gorfinkel, p. 14), even if Hins Cheung is from mainland China, he was still rejected by the public.

Unnaturalized faces

Despite both cases above show nationalistic limitations in the cosmopolitanism of China, Jessie J's victory indicates another cosmopolitan development of the imagined Chinese community. To compete with six other singers representing mainland, ethnic minority, and Greater China, in the first round of the final, Jessie J performed her hit song “Bang Bang” with Coco Lee and another guest singer from the Philippines (Hong, 2018). Although she did not sing in Chinese, this song was rearranged with Chinese instruments and remixed with a Chinese hit song, “Dragon Fist” [“Longquan”], performed by Coco Lee. In the second round, after Chinese rock singer Wang Feng's the patriotic “I Love You, China” [“Wo ai ni zhongguo”] and Mongolian singer Tengger's “Wolf on Earth” [“Canglang dadi”], Jessie J won the final with Whitney Houston's “I Will Always Love You”. Jessie J is not only the first non-Chinese winner of *Singer* but also the first singer who never sang in Chinese in the history of *Singer*.

Among Jessie J's interview, performance, and supportive clips from the UK, three nationalistic aspects can be found from her representations on *Singer 2018*: the friendship between China and the UK, her song choices, and the Chinese remix of her music. According to Lauren Gorfinkel, if foreigners want to be accepted by the Chinese media, they need to “appeal to a national spirit” (2017, p. 208). Similarly, the ambassador of the UK recorded a video to congratulate Jessie J's achievements on *Singer 2018*. The ambassador emphasized Jessie J's important role as a travel agent of the UK, bringing awareness and knowledge of the UK to Chinese youth (Hong, 2018). Comparing to the role of Greater China as “the great imagined Chinese family” (Gorfinkel, p. 5) on Chinese television, foreigners are usually portrayed as “friends” who love an open and modern China (Gorfinkel, p. 16). Following Gorfinkel's argument, Jessie J might first appear as a foreigner, but after being trained with Chinese culture, she grew from a “barbarian” to a “civilized” citizen (p. 16).

Although Jessie J sang English songs through the season, her songs were carefully chosen for the Chinese audience. “Big” English song refers to English classics

that require strong vocal ability, such as Beyonce's "Halo" or Michael Jackson's "Black or White" (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 63). In contrast with Chinese singers who build their cosmopolitan identity through these "big" English songs, Jessie J adapted her music choices to the understanding of Western music of her imagined Chinese audiences. The last evidence of remixing "Bang Bang" with Chinese musical elements can be understood as a mixture of nationalism and cosmopolitanism of Chinese media. From the nationalistic perspective, performing in Chinese is a pragmatic method to attract more audiences. In the first round, the traditional Chinese instrument, pipa (Chinese lute), connected the upbeat Western melody of "Bang Bang" with the Chinese song "Dragon Fist" (Hong, 2018). The song "Dragon Fist" is named after a kind of Chinese martial arts, and the guest star Coco Lee highlighted parts of the lyrics, "the world is waiting for me, the dragon hero", to appeal to local audiences. A former employee of a talent show argues that audiences are not able to connect to the English lyrics, so singers attract and resonate with audiences by choosing Chinese songs (as cited in Gorfinkel, p. 63). Hence, by mixing a Chinese song with "Bang Bang", Jessie J found a method to resonate with local audiences. However, Jessie J's performances through the season were all in English, so Gorfinkel's theory is challenged by the diversified and modernized articulation on *Singer 2018*.

From the cosmopolitan perspective, Jessie J's success on *Singer 2018* could be a result of the combination of the cosmopolitan culture of China, the double exoticism that attracts the audiences, and the insensitivity of the public to foreign strangeness. The fact that Jessie J performed only English songs on the show could mean that China has a modern, diversified, and cosmopolitan society. In Lauren Gorfinkel's work, she discusses the imported television shows that displayed an "international dimension" to the Chinese audiences in the 1980s (2017, p. 52). As these shows introduced the idea of cosmopolitanism to the Chinese audience, "becoming cosmopolitan and transcending locality has become symbolic of a stronger, rising China" (Gorfinkel, p. 52). As the Internet familiarizes Chinese citizens with foreign countries, inviting Jessie J, a symbol of an international level of music experience, to compete with Chinese singers can be seen to showcase a strong and confident cosmopolitan China.

Furthermore, the mix of traditional Chinese musical elements into a popular English song combines two exotic elements to generate a cultural innovation. On other Chinese television shows, foreigners in China tried to perform music from minority nationalities (Gorfinkel, 2017, p. 206). These performances are defined as "double exoticism" because they combine "internal and external otherness" to draw attention to the "harmonious multiethnic society" (Gorfinkel, p. 206). Likewise, the remix of "Bang Bang" shows a new possibility for the internally othered traditional

Chinese music. It also familiarizes the externally othered English pop song. As a result, they become a new and cosmopolitan product for the Chinese audience.

Finally, even though Xu and Wu (2019) only argue for the insensitivity towards strangers in the urban city as a symbol of the Chinese cosmopolitanism, their theory is also applicable to the naturalization of racial representations on Chinese television. Due to modernization and urbanization in China, Chinese citizens are insensitive to people “with different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (Xu & Wu, p. 14). In the same way, an audience commented on the final of *Singer 2018* that,

Jessie J’s win thanks to, first of all, the live audiences who voted for the music instead of the song title [referring to “I Love You, China”]; and, secondly, Hunan television station or even the NRTA who valued the professionalism over other elements, showing respects to the highest standard of the [music] industry. (Flora Y, 2018)

Instead of focusing on the nationality or the race of the singer, by allowing Jessie J to win in China, *Singer 2018* naturalizes a racially different winner and showcases a cosmopolitan China.

Conclusion

Since the Chinese economic reform in the 1980s, China gradually became a diversified nation-state allowing 56 ethnic nationalities, compatriots from Greater China, and foreigners to interact and realize their dreams. Under the management of the National Radio Television Administration (NRTA), Chinese television vividly reflects the construction of an imaginary modern Chinese community. While the censorship from the NRTA symbolizes nationalism in China, the analysis on *Singer* captures the existence of cosmopolitanism in the development of the imagined Chinese identity.

During the second season of *I am a Singer*, Han Lei as the first ethnic minority winner displays the cosmopolitan diversity in the seemingly nationalistic Chinese community. As Han Lei converges ethnic culture with national language, his music also represents every migrant worker who left their hometown whether they are part of the ethnic minority or not. The representation of cultural diversity and the mediated relocation effect of the television connect cosmopolitanism with the ethnic nationalities and cultural differences between provinces.

For people from Greater China, the representation of Coco Lee on the fourth season of *I am a Singer* shows generous acceptance, but disrespect towards Chinese

ideologies leads to a nationalistic rejection from the public. On the one hand, Coco Lee's performances in 2016 symbolize both the diversified tastes of the Chinese audience and the cosmopolitan mobility to switch between Chinese and Greater China identities. On the other hand, the rejection of Hins Cheung by Chinese audiences displays nationalistic limitations in the cosmopolitan in the imagined Chinese identity.

Finally, Jessie J is not only the first non-Chinese winner of *Singer*, but she is also the only singer who performed solely in English. Even if she expressed her love for China to develop her identity as a friend to China, her victory symbolizes the cosmopolitan cultural development of China. Therefore, as depicted on the show *Singer 2018*, China is accepting foreign cultural products, combining exotic culture for innovation, as well as developing an insensitive attitude that gradually naturalizes multiracial faces in mainland China.

Overall, the representation of *Singer* constructs an open, modern, and diversified cultural sphere as the imagined Chinese community, in which multiethnic, multinational, and multiracial appearances are naturalized. However, as this research attempts to investigate the main categories of identities in the Chinese community, it neglects many nuances, especially the multi-racial identity in China. In the future, to further complement this study, scholars could extend this study to investigate the representation of the multiracial community in China and compare if their representations differ from others.

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Appendix A

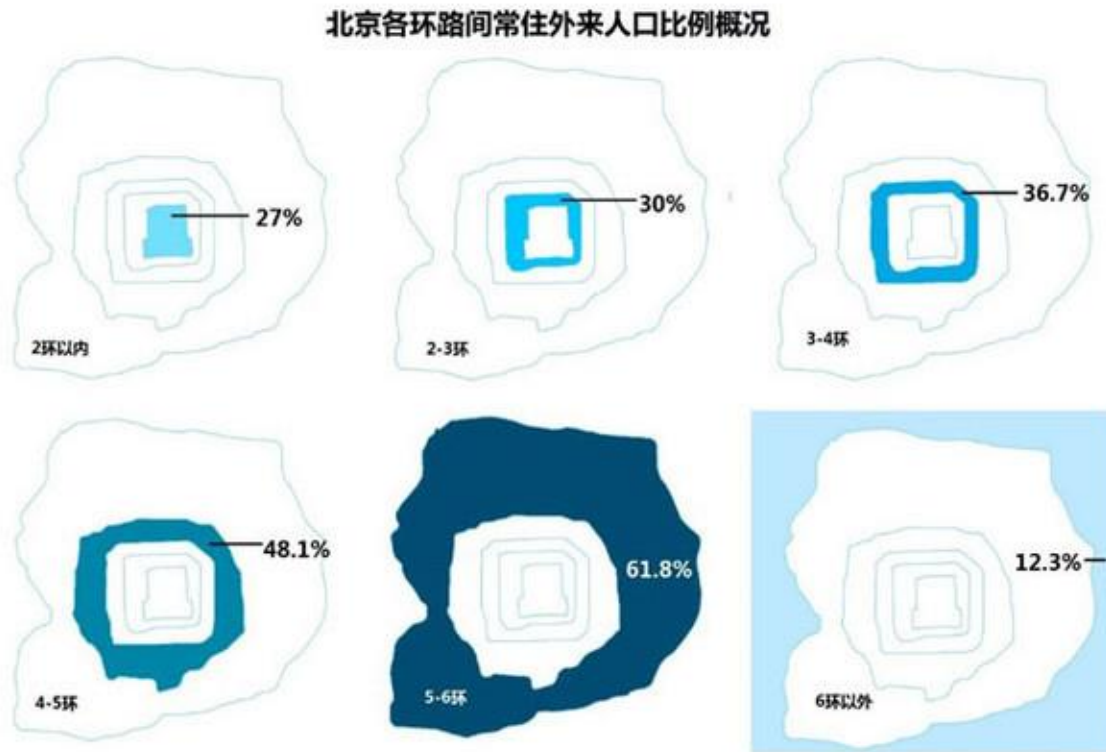


Figure 1 The proportion of resident migrants between each ring road in Beijing. Adapted from “Shuju jiedu chengshi: Beijing bendi ren VS waidi ren [City analysis through data: Beijing, local vs migrants],” by Xiaoya & Xiaolang, December 4, 2015. Retrieved April 15

Appendix B



Figure 2 Mongolian costumes and musical instruments on I am a Singer [Screenshot]. From "I am a Singer - Second season - 13th episode - Han Lei "Swan Goose" + "Walk to Horizon" + "Borrow Another 500 Years From the Heaven" [HunanTV Official 1080P] 20140404," by Ch