

DAILY PATRIOTISM:  
CHINESE *HONGGE*'S AESTHETICS AS A MAIN  
STREAM

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## ***Introduction***

“Maybe, we could try something else,” said my instructor of vocal classes. She paused playing the piano immediately after hearing me practicing some scales. She explained, “I major in *Minzu Changfa*<sup>1</sup>(民族唱法, national singing) because my voice is high, sweet and squeaky.” She pointed out that I was not given the right voice to sing the patriotic ballad I intended to learn with tactful euphemisms, “your timbre will give special charms to another song,” but by another song, she meant another genre, for she chose a pop song instead at the very beginning of my vocal training. And since then I was officially excluded from the learning of *Minzu Changfa* and also it was when I came to realize there is surely a standard for the professionals to select voices suitable for the singing. Following how the voices are selected, it might lead to an artistic perspective to engage with Chinese patriotic music instead of the political one.

Enthusiasm for patriotic songs is genuine and constant. My instructor is at her late twenties, she works for a state enterprise during weekdays and as a vocal instructor in a music academia on weekends. During a break, she showed me a photo of her graduation performance in college. Recalling her memory for the performance, she said, “I had to pick and rent the costume myself and readjust my schedule for my piano-major friend to practice with the piano accompaniment.” In the photo, she looks exactly the same as the patriotic music singers on TV. With a smiling, high-spirited but fixed facial expression. She was wearing a heavy makeup and with her hair held up high with a twisty bun. The costume was a western style long dress of red monotone evoking the color of Chinese festivals. One of her hands was extended almost horizontal to her shoulder with the palm upward and the other

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<sup>1</sup> According to the knowledge of my vocal instructor, who was major in this genre of singing in one of the major universities in northeast China, *Minzu Changfa* is a style of singing originated from people’s daily activities such as sowing, herding and hunting across various regions of China, it is a Chinese style of singing with many western musical elements added to it in recent years.

holding the microphone with her elbow slightly apart from her body.

It immediately reminisces me of going to a karaoke bar with a group of the 50s and 60s people, when they were singing patriotic songs such as *Wo He Wode Zuguo* (我和我的祖国, My Motherland and I) and *Caoyuan Shang Shengqi Buluode Taiyang* (草原上升起不落的太阳, There Arises the Unsetting Sun from the Prairie), they were posing and smiling in the same way with my instructor in her photo. Interestingly, while being amateurs in singing, they were singing and, in a sense, competing to reach the high pitches.

“We didn’t have a lot of opportunities to sing on stage, so I prepared to make sure it went as I imagined.” The song performed by her was about praising the landscapes of the hometown and expressing gratitude to the party in bringing harmonious life. I assume her imagination includes the color and style of costumes, the way how to gesture and the instrument she chose to work with. In addition to the visual reification of her imagination, she told me that each word of singing had been pre-designed and practiced for a long while before the performance.

The singer’s interpretation of the music vitalizes the lyrics. The pre-design is a form of *Erdu Chuangzuo* (二度创作, recreation), which is a process to input the singer’s understandings of the song by adding techniques such as glides and trills that were not recorded in the original scores. And after making her own choices of the recreation, she has been performing the song in the same way. It enhances the artistic appeal along with the accuracy in singing high pitches and rhythm (Liu 2015, 161). When being asked if she was able cultivate genuine emotions on stage, she smiled as if this was not an expected question, but she answered, “when some of the little kids I’m teaching now couldn’t devote their emotions, I tell them the historical background and the sacrifices during wars, I then see

tearful eyes next time they sing. I'm sure I'm beyond that.”

My instructor and people in China share a certain way to appreciate patriotic songs and its singing techniques. It is mixed to the way how they define the relationship between the nation-state and her listening traditions. I categorize the songs performed in *Minzu Changfa* vocal style with patriotic contents as *Hongge*<sup>2</sup>(红歌, patriotic songs) in this research. It is as a branch of *Minge* (民歌, Chinese folk songs). It is recognized as an outcome out of the Communist Party's establishment in China in the 1920s after the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement (Gu 2015, 73). This categorization represents a combined genre with Chinese propaganda songs in terms of contents. They share the historical background. Propaganda songs are the ones aim to foster unity and passion in front of the opponents during specific nodal period, such as the wars and social changes; *hongge* aims to praise the nation and homeland in ballad styles.

It is examined through a cultural lens in terms of singing and performing that offers an opportunity to approach the musical style without excessive interpretations of political impacts in this paper. The more characterized works and examples to illuminate its modernity are traced back as early to China's reform in 1979 and recent presentations in the 2010s in this paper. I aim to explore patriotic songs as a musical convention that has been impacting on people's aesthetics. It keeps assimilating western elements as innovations and imposing national identity through lyrics as its core message. The listeners incessantly feel the obligations to recognize it as essential and official since it is the sound that is being played as the music of festive events and official ceremonies. It describes contemporary China and converge her with her history.

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<sup>2</sup> *Hong* (红) literally could be translated into red, and *Ge* (歌) into song, patriotic song indicates the contents of the songs and is mainly used to refer to *Hongge* in this paper instead of red song.

Patriotic ballads generate aesthetics that are exclusive to the Chinese multitude. It is expressed by the invariable musical contents. The music conveys “the abstract concepts of the unity, historical longevity, national destiny, and order of the nation” (Tuohy 2001, 124). Hamm has argued about music’s sensitivity and interaction with politics and Ho has put it as a genre of “nationalist songs” defines belonging and identity (Hamm 1991, 25 and Ho 2006, 437). The lingering patriotic sentiments are the origin of common understandings according to which people follow certain ways to reaffirm memories of the nation-state’s past and look at an obscure but grand imagination about her sacrifices. Meanwhile, the sacrifice is analogical in a parental way which is deeply embedded in Chinese traditional family ideas. Fong interprets it into “a strong sense of loyalty to China, based on the idea of an imagined community, but on the idea of an imagined family” (Fong 2004, 632).

The exclusivity confines the genre’s forms, contents and the ways how people perceive its significance. The music has been representing a long-term transition of China from her contemporary to the future. Seemingly, there is a dynamic transformation in musical arrangements alongside social changes, however, the substances of the genre are fixed and concrete. The highly thematic songs eulogize the party and nation, the vocal styles are kept constantly sonorous and clear, and the stages are grand and colorful, as a series of patterns to fulfill what *hongge* performances should look like. People over time experience a homogeneous listening experience through which a sense of permanent connection to the nation-state has been transmitted. It dialogues with the listeners “as symbolic expressions of order and musical performances as active means of organizing people” (Tuohy 2001. 109).

However, *hongge* cannot be explained by politics alone. It functions as Schultz’s narrative, the music evokes ordinary people’s awareness of political philosophies and the political contents are presented by excessive musical ornaments. Thus, from the musical

expressions, which is layered upon a non-optional political convention, there is a freshness in *hongge* deviating the genre from being neither too interactive with its audience nor too the easy-to-learn with cyclical structures. It permeates to an extent that as a haunting sense of history promptly evokes patriotic desires soon as the music begins but dissipates when the music ends. The immediacy differentiates it from the nationalism music in other regions (Schultz 2002. 309-312). Rather it exists as an inside language among people. A language recognized as “stereotype”, a moralization defined from the outside through a globalists’ point of view, but as a “culture” for the inside of the patriots’ to reveal a “national difference” (Stankiewicz 2017. 673). With a government-supported standpoint, the genre focuses on channeling official messages to the people instead of depicting daily life as *minge* used to do or individualized emotions of them as most modern genres do.

It keeps moralizing people about their close relationship with the nation-state and what makes it possible resembles Yano’s interpretation of highly patterned music. Being transmitters of national ideologies, *hongge* shares similarities with Japanese enka, a traditional genre mainly populated among the elders, as a concoction of music forms and aesthetics inherited from the past that keep fusing into modern styles. Both were promoted by the nation and evokes the nation-state’s collective emotions by superimposing the past onto present (Yano 2002, 3-7). Whereas, *hongge* is repeated and “overheard” by a larger audience, people in general (*ibid.* 7). It adheres to historical memories of life experience as what is shared by the people. It also resonates with the images of an official event, an upright cadre, and a mainstream ideology.

There arises an ethnic sense of musical aesthetics. According to Erikson’s analysis, the importance of ethnicity and nationalism in constructing personal identities has been persistent and had never decreased as many theorists predicted (Erikson 1993, 2). Songs, as

Lull has argued, “are integrated into the fundamental social operations” and “represent particular symbolic versions of reality” (Lull 1987, 141 and 156). The artistic characteristics is grounded by the genre’s explicit function. The music values overlap with resistances and exploits in historical scenes. In the analysis of art performances in socialism systems, Emily Wilcox extracts ideological control as a resource of creativities. The serial of political art pieces is produced with peculiar characteristics (Wilcox 2012, 6). A singular theme’s penetration into artworks enables chronological artistic productions to be as coherent and close to the core ideologies, immersing into a repetitive artistic form that relevant to the formation of ethnical music taste and revives patriotic atmosphere in certain occasions.

Rice demonstrates the music performed on the patriotic text as a means to define “our song” that generate patriotism feelings whenever played and even when played without lyrical contents (Rice 2014, 58). In the contemporary Chinese context, the melody and lyrics are in the same way separable and with either of which people could trace their connections with the nation-state. People recognize the melodies as a habitus formed through repetitions; the lyrical contents comprehensively attach to the messages that call for people’s patriotism motivation and efforts (Wong 1984, 112). The melody and the lyrics can be equally expressive, stage performance in terms of styles and colors are valued as a virtue to distinguish what belongs to the aesthetics of us from what does not. It exceeds music values by intersecting with and appearing in important historical nodes as becomes an integral part in building up a vernacular musical circumstance.

A genre’s typical presentation, specifically its standardized singing techniques and fixed performing patterns, gives details about the roles of music and how people appreciate it. It is consistent with Jacobsen-Bia’s discussion on a music genre’s implication of social authenticity (Jacobsen-Bia 2014, 388) However, the regularly performed patriotic songs are a

fusion of various foreign influences such as the use of instruments and styles of costumes. It has transformed from the kind of songs for the masses with simple structures to a mature musical system (Wong 1984, 116-27). What is brought by the system coheres Adorno's contention on a capitalized cultural industry whose formation hinges on the power that holds the greatest influence on a society (Adorno and Horkheimer 1969/2007, 407). The listeners might have contributed to the systemization of the genre if considered as participants in the music industry.

The aesthetical preferences are generated by the genre's change in nature. Being transformed from a free and historical socialism slogan to a modernized, politics-oriented performative genre, the listeners are at one hand receivers of ideological messages and on the other have become commentators and consumers waiting to be satisfied and catered to. The consistent enthusiasm for patriotic songs over generations respond to Shannon's analysis on emotions of nationalism music, people are presented by the valued emotions promoted by states, and people's interplay with nationalistic melodies and lyrics is an interplay with the reflections of themselves depicted in artworks (Shannon 2003, 73-75). The selves in a musical utopia/nostalgia are the participants of institutional practices and a state's movement toward change (Luehrmann 2011, 366). Politics is not a definition of patriotic songs anymore. Insensible changes have happened to the way how people view, appreciate and imagine themselves through music.

### ***The Voice, The Nature of the Genre***

There have been trials to modernize the music, but few have tried to change the contents. Dressed in white shirt and blue jeans, the young singer Ping An (平安) presented a new version of one of the most representative patriotic songs *Wo Ai Ni Zhongguo* (我爱你, 中国,

I Love You, China) in a musical talent show in 2012. It is a 4/4 metered ballad style song that blatantly expresses one's love and devotion to the nation-state. The melody is slow with many long notes of three beats. It is also a most recognized background music in official events such as National Day Parade and patriotic documentaries:

<i>bailingniao cong lantian feiguo</i>	The lark flying across the sky
<i>wo ai ni zhongguo</i>	I love you, China
<i>wo ai ni zhongguo</i>	I love you, China
<i>wo ai ni zhongguo</i>	I love you, China
<i>wo ai ni chuntian pengbode yangmiao</i>	I love the flourishing seedlings in your
spring	
<i>wo ai ni qiuri jinhuangde shuoguo</i>	I love the golden harvest in your autumn
...	...
<i>wo yaoba meihaode qingchun xiangni</i>	I'm devoting my youth to you
<i>wode muqin wodezuguo</i>	My mother my motherland

The voice could present everything. The vocal of female solos from the original versions has been the leading role in expressing emotions. It is sung in a bel-canto like vocal style with the voice being stable and clear. In both the versions of Ye Peiying (叶佩英) and Yin Xiumei (殷秀梅)<sup>3</sup>, their voices sound typically arranged with *Minzu Changfa* and bel-canto. Comparing to bel-canto, the use of which to describe *minge* was corrected several times by my instructor, *minge* voices are intended to be generated through head resonance and posited in the forward part of the head to vocal comparing with western bel-canto. Ye has in fact

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<sup>3</sup> Ye was the original vocalist of the song when it was first played as an interlude song in the film '*Haiwai Chizi*(海外赤子, Chinese Overseas)' and Yin performed and recorded this song in her album '*Nihao Chuntian* (你好, 春天, Salute, Spring)' released in 2003. The comparison between their versions show a clue of how *Minzu Changfa* could have possibly be developed its voice with western style singing techniques.

adapted a more bel-canto alike singing style compared with Yin. Voices function as the main organ both melodically and lyrically. They are remarkable as the instrumental arrangements are designated to be subordinate to illustrate the fluency and sonority of the artists' singing techniques. The frequently found vibratos, which is a second most corrected term and my instructor always replaced it with *Liudong*<sup>4</sup>(流动, flow), in each long note are usually simply ornamented by two or less instruments such as dulcimer, flute or violin being the drone or even without any at some notes at the beginning of Ye's version. Their voices are kept to a certain range within which they could reach very high pitches without squashing their throats and keep a constant timbre throughout the song.

The new version highlights both voice and music, but the newness offers other ways to categorize the performance, such as to pop or rock n roll. Ping An adapts pop singing style into his rework. His voice is also produced through a broadened throat without any squash from the beginning. As the song becomes a narrative with him conversationally singing terms such as “*lantian* (sky)” and “*wo ai ni* (I love you)” with a breathy voice. Everything appears to be mellow compared with the previous versions from the start. However, the strength of voice in expressing emotions has been intensified step by step. It starts to resemble the original versions more and more when approaching the climax of emotion. The vibratos in long notes and the sonorous timbre are brought back as it comes to the end. He even gives a stronger voice than the traditional singing in finishing it with “*wo de muqin, wode zuguo.*”

But the change in voice has transferred how people think about the song. One of Ping An's performing clip of this song has gathered more than 200 thousand views on YouTube<sup>5</sup>. Below the video, comments from Chinese viewers resonate with the nostalgic

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<sup>4</sup> It describes a feeling such as the let the breath flow as air or water. During my classes, my instructor used to replace western academic terms of techniques with descriptive terms.

<sup>5</sup> YouTube is censored in PRC, most of the mainland Chinese users are those who access from overseas.

emotions and enjoys his voice, however, Ping An's performance is commented as pop singing. The users celebrate the new and powerful rework, and some appear to become more “*aiguo* (patriotic)”<sup>6</sup> after listening (CFENSI 2012).

What bestows the rework modernity besides Ping An's singing style is probably the abundant use of percussions. The genre's musical arrangements are usually westernized orchestral with violin as the drone underneath, and necessarily in a classical sense without intensive but harmonious use of percussions. Different from the cymbals seem to be restrained and light in the original versions, western drum sets are used as a main instrumental accompaniment, it defines the rhythm to make it clear and vivid. The new version is a combination of voice and instruments as a harmonization of patriotic contents and modern singing techniques.

However, the use of percussions is only one step towards being modern which can never fade the flavor of the genre. In the song *Ai Wo Zhonghua* (爱我中华, Love My China) by Song Zuying (宋祖英) drums and cymbals are arranged to be the most supportive instrument going through the song. They are what defines the 4/4-meter rhythm in the music video. The singer changes her costumes in the video for a few times but never changes her posing style. Body movements are limited as few as possible, raising hands to the height of her shoulder is all the range of her motion. The way and how the other *hongge* singers posit their hands look just like how hands are posited in ballet, my instructor also affirmed my guess.

Song is one of the most famous female *Minzu Changfa* singers who has performed

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<sup>6</sup> Some examples of the original comments are “The song is sung into a new feeling...feel more patriotic after listening. (*ba zheshouge changchule quanxinde ganjue...ganjue tingle geng aiguo le*)” by Jing's; “Ping An has been fixed...a pop singer. (*Ping An zhege shihou qishi yijing dingxing le...liuxing gehsou*)” by 浅笑 (qianxiao).

for the Spring Festival Gala<sup>7</sup> and famous for her sweet and lively voice. Like all the other patriotic songs, the vocal details are accurate and predictable. The audience can always fathom the quality of pitches by counting the length of a long note within one breath. Not limited to the records in the video and also Song's live performances on other occasions can always restore the same vocal accuracy as in the video.

The voice is the most distinguishable element for the genre. Li Guyi (李谷一), whose song *Wo He Wode Zuguo* (我和我的祖国, My Motherland and I) was imitated by one of the 50s females I went karaoke with. The female had been training at a *Laonian Daxue* (老年大学, senior college)<sup>8</sup> in *Minzu Changfa* for years after retiring. During her singing, there was the tension in keeping the consistency of voice supported by her whole body and keeping an up-spirited and effortless face. People, regardless of professionals or amateurs are supposed to have this kind of facial expressions. She took a rest by sitting deep down into the sofa right after the song was ended. Li was probably doing the same after keeping the high and magnificent volume of voice for a few minutes. However, Li's another representative song, *Xiang Lian* (乡恋, Love for the Hometown) is labeled as a pop song. She revised the ballad singing by adding a breathy voice into her voice to make the song pop music alike.

The singing style is thus as irreplaceable in transmitting the excessiveness of patriotic emotion as it could change the categorization of two songs of the same singer. Major characteristics of singing are necessary. The new version still has to keep what essentially

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<sup>7</sup> Spring Festival Gala(春节联欢晚会, *chunjie lianhuan wanhui*) is an annual TV program broadcast by CCTV(China Central Television) in celebration to Chinese new year. Singers and artists who could perform for the gala are recognized as excellent in singing and dancing and also popular among the audience nation-wide.

<sup>8</sup> *Laonian Daxue* is a form of community college of extension education for the retired senior people who live within the area of residence. It offers courses to learn and improve their interests in subjects such as singing, dancing, painting and photography, etc. The instructors are professional, and the colleges have become very popular and competitive to enroll in some areas these years.

sounds like patriotic singing to embody the nationalist content. On one hand, the modern revision demolishes part of its traditional elements including the choices and intensity of instrumental accompaniment. On the other, the singing has been restrained to certain ranges of aesthetical standards even though being kept updated.

The quality of singing is standardized and distinguished from what was prevailing. For instance, there is a stereotype for propaganda song voices, which is assumed to be loud and harsh. It stresses each syllable and produces a clear pronunciation of each word which further ensures the contents could be fully heard and understood. Meanwhile, I was told by my instructor that their graduation performance was evaluated based on if it achieved the standard of “*Zi Zheng Qiang Yuan Shenti Mei*” (字正腔圆身体美, clear pronunciation, broadened throat, and beautiful body gestures). From the middle-age group in the karaoke to the professional young singer, when presenting and even trying to reproduce the genre with creativity, such voices have never been eliminated. However, the former and latter styles are sometimes overlapping and hard to distinguish, but regardless of the way to phrase, the voice has become the soul of patriotic singing.

Also, some elements are always expected to be found. Long notes with vibratos, passion and tension on the face, rare movements on stage and accuracy in intonation and instrumental heterophony are always taken for granted by the listeners. Everything is about standard and arrangement here. It needs careful calculation about the amount of breath spent in each syllable. The success in maintaining long and strong notes requires years or decades of training. At the top of which, singers need to obtain thorough understandings to generate patriotic sentiments on stage as the basis to pattern facial and body expressions each time.

The artistic pattern of this genre influences people’s listening habits. Long and high

pitches have become a criterion for Chinese listeners to evaluate a singer's singing techniques in all genres. The popular musical talent shows preferred the singers who add extensions to high pitches. The new version performed by Ping An gained himself a successful career afterward as a representative of successors of *hongge*. However, even the choices of instruments have always been westernized and orchestral, the acoustic atmosphere is eternally filled with a sense of Chineseness of the PRC.

A list of non-Chinese elements becomes convergent in the music and its singing, they indisputably state the vague authenticity of the genre. From amateurs to professionals, none has ever doubted the nature of the genre being socially decent and positive, as according to the judges who commented on Ping An's performance, he says, "he chose a very decent song."<sup>9</sup> The fusion of western and eastern elements becomes the sound of the nation-state.

There still is something has long been neglected that consistently provides the patriotic vibe. The musical uniqueness seems to also reside in something abstract instead of inside the music itself. The voice offers imaginations about what patriotic enthusiasm should sound like at present; the collective memories of history offers people the basis to resonate with the sound travelling from the past and make their patriotic feelings constant by frequent exposures to the music over time. The flavor of the sound is embedded in both what is symbolic that can easily recall patriotic contents and a direct visual/audio habitus of colors, stage styles and atmosphere.

### ***The Aesthetics: From Imagination to Habitus***

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<sup>9</sup> One of the judges, Yang Kun (杨坤) a very famous pop singer in China, commented on Ping An's choice of song by saying "he chose a very decent (patriotic) song, but a taste of rock n roll is there, like the style of Queen. (*ta xuande zhege ge youshi hen zheng de yige ge, hoaxing hai tingdaole yidian yaogun de weidao, nage huanghou yuedui de zhuchang*)."

All the audiences through the years have possibly just watched the same show. I stayed in an art troupe for a week during my fieldwork in northeast China in 2015. It is located in a tourist spot in Jilin Province, and once was a branch of the regional headquarter, which is affiliated with a government cultural agency. Now it is privatized, owned and managed by a former *Minzu Changfa* singer. Dancers and singers travelled from different regions of China to join the art troupe in the northeast. They present a night show with themes such as the beauty of landscape and appreciation for the right strategies in developing the hometown.



**Figure 1. The performance and stage effects of the troupe**

Their performances are designated as an entertainment for the tourists who come to this area. The tourists spend the daytime sight-seeing in the mountains and come to the show as a touristy entertainment at night. The troupes' costumes, choreography, songs and programs are quite fixed, the only thing that regularly changes is the group of audience who purchase the tickets and watch the show each night. The theme appears to be repetitive and so are the styles of performance, however, there are always a full audience and the applause from whom is said to be what can buoy up the troupe all the time by some performers.

The music reconciles reality and imagination. The costume and stage style look similar to my instructor's photo. The singer says she enjoys the job but she's leaving the troupe soon after the contract finishes for a higher income somewhere else. She is not the first one to sing the song and neither the first one who left the troupe. I have heard her performing the same patriotic song so many times during my stay in the troupe and have often become subtly skeptical about how genuine her smile and passion could be. But each time I am soon convinced as she starts singing, she makes sure the pitches are perfectly reached and looks at the audience in dark with grateful and excited eyes. She emerges herself to the song thoroughly. From children to the elders, people look serious and deferential when the singer starts performing. They listen to her and applaud for the high pitches enthusiastically without showing any exhausts.

However, the singing and dancing are mere reflections of their backstage preparations. The singers and dancers compete with the limited time of transitions between each part of the performance. They have to get each set of costumes changed within two minutes and as rushed that nobody has even ever looked up to the political/patriotic banners hanging one next to another on the walls of corridors of the backstage, printed in white on red velvet; they will be fined if the manager of the troupe found them made mistakes on stage, she sits among the audience every night to take notes; they play pop and rock music when doing makeup and taking rests in the dressing room. The audience statically watches the flawless performance and end it up with repeated cheers and applause every night. The performers are always in motion, with their true characters covered by the heroes they present on stage. They are one of those who produces the red<sup>10</sup>vibes.

Everything is prepared and confirmed to an extreme that everyone can resonate

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<sup>10</sup> The red color in Chinese culture and society is used in various occasions, rituals, festivals, national flag and also taken as a color of good luck. It here indicates the atmospheric vibe of patriotism.

when it happens. The troupe rehearses the same performance routinely every afternoon, even though nothing has really changed, the manager could always give different and specific comments on each performance. From the tiny mispositions to the technician's being late in switching lights, she enumerates everything and tolerates no accidents. It renders a similar requirement as my instructor mentions, "the breath should be as sufficient for each long note, so I calculate and plan beforehand to make the whole piece sound stable." The stability seems to be pursued in both its singing and performing. It is never about flexibility regardless of the song is challenging or not, if there are audience then there should be perfections. Perfect in a way that's only comprehensive to the audience who have been taught about, ready to respond and prepared for it since childhood.

*Hongge* performance provides identical images and messages as people remember. It repeats itself as well-processed and complete in the same form as anytime in festive events and TV programs. The stage is lightened with colors such as saturated-tone of red, purple, green and yellow, varies on different occasions, but red is never absent. The singer stands straightly in the center of the stage. The professional dancers are arranged behind her. It is professional group dancing with each movement stretching and neat, each landing of jumps light. Their dances are never easy, set as part of the background, few of the audience could really recall the splendidness afterwards but rather as a vague but unforgettable part that has constituted the full performing images of the night. But many, especially primary schoolers come to the singer after her performance for group photos. They look at her in a curious but worshipful way. I have heard people say compliments about her singing while leaving. They mentioned the singing and the grand scale of the stage with beautiful lighting, and that is all they could remember and will carry back about it that night.

They are carrying back another affirmation of the images they are used to. An image describing their belonging to the homeland without distinguishing whether it is its past or

present. When colors and styles are embedded deeply into habitus, the term aesthetics is no longer related to beauty or taste, rather becomes a common sense to the people inside and obscurity to the observers from the outside. The audience devotes their minds into the music, the performers let no patriotic sounds penetrate into their personal times. They are, however, brought together by the same theme, by the agreement on non-oppositions of the vibe's symbolic meaning, by its function to reconcile all generations' response to continue the meaning as the symbol over time. Exactly has it become the "closure", inside which people feel close to the core part of their shared memories (Hall 1990/2007, 35).

The past floats to and is mixed as part of the reality temporarily through music. None of the elements of *hongge* could be traced as traditionally Chinese, however, when they are compounded, they become inseparable and symbolic for the audience. This is what enables the category, the contents bring people's minds to the past, to the scenes none has experienced in person. The images illuminate the past in a dramatic way and emotionalize the scenes within its performing timeline. After finishing each night's show, performers remove the heavy makeups impatiently and joined each other for the after-work leisure time with their costumes scattered in the backstage as if there is no work for tomorrow. The audience, some of them take photos in front of the empty stages, most of them have started to plan the touring route for tomorrow. None is reluctant to leave, and their exact excitement and reverence will be repeated by another group of audience the next day.



**Figure 2. A priced *hongge* CD in Shenzhen’s biggest bookstore**

The genre yields familiarity. People can naturally emerge to the red vibe when there is any. What intrigues the tourists are not necessarily the excellent performing skills or colorful stage effects. But maybe a potential continuum of taking patriotic classes that has been taking place in everyone’s life from primary to high school; it is also as natural as the melody of *Chuntian De Gushi*<sup>11</sup>(春天的故事, The Story of Spring) has become a musical ramification of the reform in 1979; there is always space for the genre to reside, in the biggest bookstore in Shenzhen, *hongge* CDs are priced as commodities on a shelf on the ground floor. The music is found in all situations from formal to informal representing decant and positive; it is accessible for people to encounter wherever they are for it is permeating thoroughly and irresistibly as the bells ringing across the city. The same contents reach out to

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<sup>11</sup> *Chuntian De Gushi* is a song composed according the historical scenes of the Open-up and Reform Policy implemented since 1979, it uses spring as the metaphor of the party’s correctness in the attempt to connect Chinese economy to the world and the song starts by singing “*Yijiuqijiu Nian, Nashi Yige Chuntian, You Yiwei Laoren Zai Zhongguo De Nanhai bian Huale Yige Quan*(the year of 1979, it was a year of spring, a senior drew a circle along the South China Sea),” the senior indicates the president Deng Xiaoping’s regime.

everyone through the same ways and ultimately be imbued to everyone's memories about sounds as powerful as how people agree on the authority of the bells in telling time.

People have never expected the absence of *hongge*, it is a common short-term exposure that can encircle the insiders. It defines a community and firmly ground a territorial and social space inherited from the past (Anderson 1991/2007, 253-56). It is an aesthetics limitedly comprehensive to the people who are gathered at the right place where they feel obligatory to demonstrate collectivity and memories without any intention. The patriotic vibe lingers everywhere and when it is detected, people can recognize its form and respond immediately.

### ***Conclusion***

My instructor takes her weekend teaching job as an opportunity to keep connected to music and hopes to help those who are gifted with the right voices to explore further. The middle-age group goes to karaoke regularly and repeats their *hongge* competitions during festival seasons. The audience actually starts to look solemn when entering the auditorium seeing the grand stage decorated with red ornaments.

The connection requires no efforts from the listeners. Even on different occasions, it is naturally formed and cast off. The people are included in the retrospective scenes non-preferentially and it is no longer a process to generate patriotic emotions, but rather an unconditional response to the familiar theme and vibe. The music is relocated by the formation of its patterned aesthetics from an emotion evoker to a thematic genre. The singers devote their own emotions and wipe out themselves as individuals during the performance in evoking nostalgia and national spirits. The audience is attracted by the sonorous singing

voice, the grand stage decorations. They take the red vibe as evidence to respond in a certain way over the contents.

The aesthetics are at this moment pragmatic in explaining the way of *hongge*'s consistent dialogues with the audience. Political and nationalism was the emphasis to interpret the origin of the music. It is no longer one of the things of great importance to the Red Guards generation during the Cultural Revolution (Clark 2012, 102-03). But of importance to the contemporary by setting up criteria on what is grandness, necessity, positivity and mainstream. The shared aesthetics has been filling up the gap between politics, and reality. It is a dialogue offered to the insiders with "linguistic or cultural expertise to appreciate the genre" (Moskowitz 2009,77).

However, the aesthetics have been lingering for so long as a habitus, and another possibility could be, as a lack of idealism. The general recognition of what is representative is fixed within certain historical scenes. There are no other options with which a contemporary mainstream image is musically conveyed and promoted. The musical components, which are exchangeable with western ones, are titled with Chinese interpretations. Singing is standardized and the performing accuracy is secured through the never-replaced purity of patriotism.

It is moving as people do. Many *Minzu Changfa* majors work in other areas as my instructor does; the music becomes entertaining in a gaudy karaoke; the performers leave and new performers come to replace very soon. People's memory has made it natural and powerful as an idealized demonstration of how the past impacts the future. If the idealization is grounded by what is no longer contemporary or prospective, then it is going to be restrained within liminality and social developments.

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