THE TRANSFORMATION OF *HUA'ER* SONGS IN 21ST CENTURY CHINA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

MUSIC

MAY 2016

By

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Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, China, folksongs, cultural policy, nationalism

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for my parents

Acknowledgements

This dissertation took seven years to complete. From comprehensive exams to proposal, two fieldwork trips in 2011 and 2012, and throughout the writing and editing process, many people supported me generously along the way. I am so humbled by each one of you who taught me so much more than just the immediate subject of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I want to thank all of my contacts and interviewees during my fieldwork in China. Thank you for your trust and your interest in my research. I am forever indebted to your hospitality and generosity. This dissertation is a distillation of the knowledge that I learned from each one of you. Professor Zhang Haiyang was my very first contact for my fieldwork, from whom I was able to establish connections with nearly a hundred people who were key to my research! I will always remember your comment when I asked about ethnicity, "don't trust those modern labels. You need to focus on the people instead." I likewise want to thank the many *hua'er* scholars with whom I spoke while preparing this dissertation, particularly retired Party School Chancellor Ding Zuoshu of Kangle County, Gansu province; Ke Yang of Lanzhou University, Gansu province; and Wei Quanming of Northwestern University for Nationalities, for their willingness to share the wealth of their knowledge on *hua'er* and their extensive fieldwork experience. Your insights and scholarship guided and inspired my own research. I also want to thank all of the *hua'er* singers I interviewed and befriended for their willingness to sing and share stories with me. I appreciate the help

received from the Xining cultural department, Min county cultural department, Kangle county cultural department, Hezheng county cultural department, Datong county cultural department, Gansu Provincial Folk Artist Association, Chinese Art Anthropology Society and Qinghai *Hua'er* Research Institute in putting me in touch with key scholars and *hua'er* singers in each region.

I am especially thankful to have such a fantastic committee to work with who have provided intellectual guidance and advice. Thank you Dr. Hanlon for showing me the power of ethnography and how it gives voices to marginalized communities. Thank you Dr. Cathy Clayton who really inspired me to work on the politics of ethnicity and nationalism in China as a dissertation project. In fact, this dissertation is an expansion of the term project I conducted while taking your Ethnic Nationalism in Asia course back in 2009. Dr. Byong Won Lee, the first professor who taught me the history of ethnomusicology, ensured this is the field I love. Dr. Ricardo Trimillos, who always has inspiring comments, showed me a different perspective on representations of identity. Finally, special thanks goes to Dr. Frederick Lau, who has been my advisor, thesis and dissertation chairperson for the past ten years. Your guidance was instrumental for me to develop as a scholar. You always challenge me to think critically and in a large picture, encourage and trust me. I have a lot of respect for your scholarship and for you as a mentor.

I want to thank my friends from the Ethnomusicology Area of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa department: Sarah McClimon, Charlotte D'Evelyn, Sawa Senzaki, Mamina Koga, Clare Chan Suet Ching, Chadwick Pang, Bernard Ellorin, Justin Hunter,

Larry Catungal, Kuan Yuanyu, Heather Strohschein, and Ben Fairfield with whom I took many classes and shared meals, and from whom I learned.

I want to thank my writing circle, especially Akiemi Glenn, Monica Vidal and Laura Viana whose kind and encouraging words kept me going. Thank you so much for reading my rough early drafts and providing such constructive comments. I look forward to continuing our writing group after we graduate.

Many organizations funded my graduate study and fieldwork. I would like to first thank the East-West Center that generously supported both my husband and my graduate studies for eight years. The East-West Center Graduate Degree Fellowship made a huge impact in my life, and I am so honored to be a member of this ʻohana. I also want to thank the donors and administrators of the Arts & Sciences Advisory Council, the Chun Ku & Soo Yong Huang Award, the John Young Scholarship, the Diversity and Equity Initiative Award, the Chung Fong & Grace Ning Fund, the UH Graduate Student Organization, the Beau Grad Dixon Memorial Scholarship, the UH Music Department Scholarship and the Research Corporation of UH Graduate Fellowship for their trust in my scholarship and their provision of financial support during both my fieldwork and dissertation writing.

Last but not least, my most heartfelt thanks to my family: my parents, my mother-in-law, my husband and my baby. Thank you so much for your trust, support and love. Thank you to my parents who came in person to help with babysitting and housework in the final years of dissertation writing. I cannot say enough how much I appreciated both of you being with me at this crucial time. As a mom struggling to balance both work and

dissertation writing, it was so comforting to be able to leave home in the morning to teach and write, knowing that everything is going to be okay. I dedicate this dissertation to both of you for raising me right and helping me to become the person I am today. I also want to thank my mother-in-law who also came to help during my pregnancy and took turns to take care of Lilian so that I could focus on my dissertation. Thank you to Lilian, a newborn baby while I was writing, now a toddler. You are my source of joy and inspiration. In finishing this dissertation, I hope that one day it can show you how to keep trying, pursuing your dreams with hard work. Finally, thanks to my husband, Carl Polley, my best friend, companion and a brilliant dissertation editor. I have learned so much from you intellectually! I wish that one day I can be as articulate and able to express myself as well as you. Thank you for going through all the ups and downs of graduate school with me. I absolutely could not have done it without you. I appreciate all of your encouragement, the most honest opinions, always, love, and your professional editing. I am so lucky to have you!

Abstract

This study examines the impact of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) system and policies on a grassroots folksong tradition in Northwestern China called *hua'er*, which was named as Chinese ICH in 2006 and as UNESCO World ICH in 2009.

While analyzing the new Chinese ICH law, issued in 2011, as well as various cultural projects intended to preserve *hua'er*, I found that the Chinese national ICH process is a top-down project for the construction of national identity, in which the main goal of ICH recognition and protection is to strengthen a clear Chinese identity and a harmonious society. As a result, *hua'er* has recently undergone a great deal of reconstruction, modification and canonization.

However, *hua'er* is also a unique case study in that it was, historically, forbidden and considered as highly shameful to be sung in public because of its explicitly erotic lyrics. In addition, singing *hua'er* was traditionally often related to seeking and engaging in love affairs outside of a marriage. Singing such folksongs was, thus, generally regarded as a taboo in households and villages, especially among family members of the opposite sex.

The designation of *hua'er* as an element of ICH has transformed it from a taboo or "forbidden" song genre, practiced at the margins of rural society, into a respectable element of world and national heritage, now even incorporated into the compulsory public education system.

Singers, scholars and officials in fact utilize the opportunity afforded by ICH recognition to negotiate and "re-imagine" the practice of *hua'er* and its associated identities. In doing so, singers overcome the social stigmas they have faced in the past. Once seen only as "wild songs" sung by unruly married people who engaged in secret love affairs, *hua'er* is now being reconstructed as a romantic courtship song genre of "naive" ethnic minority groups as well as an iconic music genre that represents ethnic solidarity in the Northwestern region.

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Notes on Romanization

The Romanization of Chinese names and places in this dissertation uses the *Hanyu Pinyin* system of Romanization, which was adopted in China in 1958. Chinese names are given in Chinese order: surname first and given name second.

List of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
EMA	Erotic Musical Activity
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
IFICH	International Festival of Intangible Cultural Heritage
PRC	People's Republic of China
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
XCD	Xining Cultural Department

Chapter 1
Introduction

Project Statement

In 1972, UNESCO initiated the World Heritage Convention to recognize items of material world heritage. Then, in 2001, inspired by the Japanese concept of Intangible Cultural Assets, UNESCO started a program to recognize Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Until 2005, evaluations were held biannually, and each member state could submit only one candidature file to be evaluated for nomination to the Masterpieces list. The success of this program led to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), establishing a codified process for the protection of ICH. Specific procedures for recognition of ICH were adopted in 2006, and three lists of ICH recognition went into force in 2008, namely the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Representative List), the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (Urgent Safeguarding List) and Best Safeguarding Practices. A total of 90 items from the proclaimed Masterpieces were incorporated into the newly created Representative List. The quota on submissions by individual nation states has now been lifted, and there is currently no limit on the number of submissions that may be made by each country. The Committee also meets annually to evaluate nominations of ICH. As of January 2015, UNESCO had selected a total of 314 elements for the Representative List, 38 elements for the Urgent Safeguarding List and 12 best Safeguarding Practices (UNESCO, 2015).

Enthusiastically responding to UNESCO's project, in 2005, People's Republic of China's (PRC's) General Office of the State Council designated the Ministry of Culture to establish a system for the annual recognition of ICH at the national, provincial, municipal and county levels. In 2006, the Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center (National ICH Protection Center) was established within the Chinese National Academy of Arts, an institution directly under the General Office of the State Council. The National ICH Protection Center has since served as the coordinating institution for all Chinese ICH related policies and activities, as well as all submissions of ICH materials for inclusion on UNESCO's lists. At the same time, at the provincial, municipal and county levels, local cultural departments and newly established ICH centers have adopted policies in line with the National ICH Protection Center. Following this centralized system, items of ICH are first collected and considered at lower governmental levels before being considered at higher levels during subsequent years. To apply for ICH recognition at each of the four levels (viz. county, provincial, municipal or national), local applicants use essentially the same application package and follow the same criteria created by the General Office of State Council. However, at the UNESCO level, a different set of application materials needs to be prepared to meet UNESCO's criteria. In another words, China has adopted its own goals, criteria and methods for selecting Chinese ICH, which are separate from those of UNESCO. Whereas the UNESCO application documents emphasize community involvement and safeguarding measures, the Chinese application focus on the aesthetic value and the history of the practice.

Several institutions of higher education have also established undergraduate and postgraduate programs in ICH studies, including the Chinese National Academy of Arts and Zhongshan University. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture has named the second Saturday in June as "Chinese Cultural Heritage Day" to celebrate various items of Chinese ICH. In 2007, the inaugural ICH biennial festival, a week-long event, was organized in Sichuan province. As of 2015, five ICH festivals have been organized, drawing thousands of artists and musicians from China and around the world each year. According to Xinhua News, the fifth ICH festival, which took place in 2015, attracted people from 65 different countries, including nearly 200 ICH inheritors and 400 ICH presentations and demonstrations (Tu 2015).

Hua'er (literally "flowers") is a type of improvisational folksong that is popular predominantly in Qinghai province, Gansu province, Ningxia Hui autonomous region and in some areas of Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. Unlike the definitions of the English term "folksong" is a wide-ranging and and rather contested term, the Chinese term refers to one specific type of song. Chinese musicologist Yuan Jingfang defines folksong as "songs that are created and sung by working people during their everyday lives," highlighting the fact that "throughout the course of history, traditional folksongs were composed and transmitted orally among common people, and during such transmission they were subject to continuous arrangement, modification, elaboration and refinement" (Yuan 2000). This definition reflects how the transmission process of folksong is also a process of the continuous refinement. Chinese folksongs were transmitted orally, not composed, and since they were continuously refined there is no

such thing as an "original" nor "final version" of a folksong. In this dissertation, the term folksong I use refer to Yuan Jingfang's definition.

Since the northwestern region of China is home to many different ethnicities, *hua'er* is a singing tradition shared by as many as nine different ethnic groups. *Hua'er* is a type of improvised singing. There are hundreds of regional melodies, or *ling,* for *hua'er* songs (Wang 1992). *Hua'er* singers chose from any of these various *ling* while improvising the specific lyrics. *Hua'er* could be sung alone or by a pair of singers in either a conversational or competitive fashion. *Hua'er* songs generally contain between three to six lines of lyrics, and each has a rhyme (Wu 2008). The content of each song can vary from personal emotions to life experience, although the most common theme is romantic love (Zhao 2010). Patterns of language used in *hua'er* are typically down-to-earth, humorous, and highly metaphorical.

Love is a favorite theme in *hua'er* songs, and sex is a common desire. Many *hua'er* songs uses highly erotic language and, often, the lyrics contain explicit metaphors relating to sexual relations. For this reason, *hua'er* songs are traditionally forbidden in many situations, such as in the presence of elders or family members of the opposite sex, as well as within a household or near a village. Instead, they are sung only in the most remote mountain areas during *hua'er* festivals (Yang, 1998:213–5). *Hua'er* singers were seen as unruly people who seek out love and sexual affairs outside of a traditional marriage. For this reason, *hua'er* singers are typically called *wuhunren* (literally, "five stinky people") by others according to Yan Zongcheng, Xining Cultural Department officer (personal interview 2011). *Wuhun* is a Buddhist expression. In some Buddhist

sects, it is believed that a devout person should stay away from five specific spices that cause bad body odors, namely garlic, onion, chives, leeks, and giant fennel. The traditional belief was that such Buddhists would not only misbehave in other ways, but their stinky smells would also keep away the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. Thus, *wuhunren* is used to refer to *hua'er* singers who are considered unworthy of salvation.

During my interview in 2012 with a Tibetan Hua'er singer, Suonan Sunbin, he said that singing *hua'er* in public is considered by many to be so obscene that it is "equivalent to sharing pornography in public". In fact, in 2007, the year after *hua'er* was selected as a national ICH, Suonan Sunbin was chased out of town by a group of villagers carrying shovels, because they overheard him singing *hua'er* in his van while passing their village. Yang Mu, an ethnomusicologist, also shared a similar story, stating that, "if participants [*hua'er* singers] stray too far from the central site of a *hua'er* festival, their singing might be heard from inside the village, or even worse, their intimacies may be seen by the villagers. Sometimes morally offended villagers rush angrily out of their homes, carrying wooden clubs to beat up and drive away the 'lecherous singers'" (Yang, 1994:109).

Since *hua'er* represents multi-ethnic solidarity, as it is perhaps the only musical genre in China to be practiced by nine different ethnicities, it was recognized as an element of national ICH in 2006 and of UNESCO world ICH in 2009. *Hua'er*, thus, transformed from a taboo "forbidden" song into a respectable item of World ICH, and eleven *hua'er* singers were selected as national inheritors. Both for *hua'er* as a genre and for *hua'er* singers, this recognition was a 180-degree change in their social recognition. However, singing *hua'er* songs is a bit like having sex: everyone enjoys it, but if you

define it as “Intangible Cultural Heritage”, that makes it awkward to define, practice and then transmit it. In this dissertation, I discuss the practice of the tradition and the ironies that the new worldly recognition creates. As China established the ICH Law in 2011 to provide guidelines for the ICH preservation and development projects, new obligations are now imposed on inheritors, scholars and local government, institutionalizing *hua’er* in ways that had not traditionally existed.

UNESCO’s universalizing project has been localized in China with an added agenda. ICH programs are intended not only to preserve traditional art forms, but also to strengthen the “Chinese national identity and improve the understanding of Chinese culture over a continuous history” (UNESCOc 2015). With the newly passed ICH law as guidelines, *hua’er* underwent a great deal of reconstruction and modification. However, by giving voices to *hua’er* singers, scholars and local governmental official, we see how they are in fact active members of this reconstruction process as they utilize this global and national policy to negotiate new identities for *hua’er* and themselves in the 21st century.

The Northwestern Region and Ethnicities

Northwest China has been an important area for Chinese culture, economics and history since the establishment of the Silk Route in the Han dynasty period (206 BC–220 AD). The term “Northwest region” generally refers to three provinces and two ethnic minority autonomous regions: Shanxi, Qinghai, Gansu provinces, as well as Ningxia Hui

and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous regions as shown in Figure 1 below. People of this region were argued to be the founders of *hua'er* songs.

Figure 1. Map of China

As each Chinese citizen is identified as one of the 56 officially recognized ethnic groups, the following nine ethnic groups are commonly associated with singing *hua'er* according to the recent UNESCO application. They are Han, Hui, Dongxiang, Tu, Baoan, Sala, Yugu, Tibetan and Mongolian (UNESCOc 2015). The following are a brief introduction of each of these ethnic nationalities.

Han – (lit. “water,” 汉) The earliest migration of Han people to Northwest China was most likely after the establishment of the Silk Route during the Han dynasty period (206 BC–220 AD). However, due to conflict with other ethnicities in the region, many of the original Han settlers later moved out of the area. Today, most of the Northwestern Han are descendants of people who immigrated to the region during the Ming dynasty period (1368–1644). Originally from Jiangsu or Nanjing area, they were sent as conscripts to garrison the frontier by the Ming emperors.

Hui – (lit. “turn,” 回) Generally the descendants of Arabic and Persian immigrants, who were part of the Mongolian army, having fought at the western border of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Later, they settled down in Northwest China. They believe in Islam.

Dongxiang – (lit. “east village,” 东乡) Received the name because they lived around the Dongxiang region. According to Yang (2003), there are three possible ancestries for the Dongxiang people: descendants of the Mongolians, Arabic and Persian immigrants from the Yuan dynasty period (1271–1368), or members of the Hui ethnic group who were influenced by Han and Mongolian neighbors. Dongxiang ethnic people also believe in Islam.

Tu – (lit. “earth,” 土) Descendants of the Mongolians. They believe in Tibetan Buddhism, and their language is similar to that of Mongolians.

Bao'an – (lit. "protect peace," 保安) Descendants of Central Asians who moved to the Northwestern region since the Yuan dynasty period (1271–1368). They live side by side with Mongolians, Tibetans, and Han ethnic people, and gradually developed their own culture. They believe in Islam.

Sala – (lit. "release and pull," 撒拉) Immigrated to the Northwestern region from Central Asia during the Yuan dynasty period (1271–1368). They believe in Islam.

Yugu – (lit. "resourceful and stable," 裕固) Descendants of Uyghurs who historically interacted with the Mongolians. They believe in Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan – (lit. "hidden," 藏) Originally referred as *Tufan* and were part of *Qiang* tribes. Recent archeological discoveries indicate that they might be the aboriginal tribes of the Himalaya Mountains. They believe in Tibetan Buddhism.

Mongolian – (lit. "royal," 蒙古) Originally the name of only one tribe, after Genghis khan unified all the other tribes, the term 'Mongol' now refers to large swaths of ethnic groups that live in the region. They believe in Tibetan Buddhism (Yang 2003).

Thus, *hua'er* of northwestern China was practiced by diverse groups of nationalities who practice different religions, speak different languages and dialects and have different histories and cultural practices. In a way, *hua'er* is the only shared element of identity

that brings these diverse communities together. I will discuss how this symbolism was used in promoting *hua'er* as an element of Chinese ICH in Chapter five.

Literature Review

Hua'er

A large amount of literature on *hua'er* is written in Chinese with only a few publications in English. While most of the scholars focus on the lyrical aesthetics of *hua'er*, few scholars focus on the musicological and anthropological aspect of *hua'er* and its community. Although I found most of the works to be descriptive, there are a number of important works that I used as a guide for my dissertation.

Many early *hua'er* scholars came from the field of folklore and Chinese literature. As a result, their research on *hua'er* focus exclusively on lyrics, its rhyme, and lyrical aesthetics. The earliest extant publication on *hua'er* is Zhang's *Collection of Hua'er* (Zhang 1940). He addresses the cultural and social environment in northwestern China in the early twentieth century, defines *hua'er*, and discusses its literary aesthetics and different styles. The major contribution of this work is Zhang's collection of *hua'er* song lyrics. As the only work published on this topic before the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, this is a key foundational work for all *hua'er* scholars, even today.

As a professor of Chinese literature, Ke Yang's collection of articles in *Carnival of Poetry and Song: A Folklore Study of Hua'er and Hua'er Festivals* (2002) touches on many new topics such as Taomin *hua'er* singers, audience and singer interactions, Hui

ethnicity and *hua'er* origin, which expanded the horizon of *Hua'er* Studies. Considered one of the most authoritative and quoted scholars in the field of *Hua'er* Studies, his writings are based on many years of fieldwork.

One of the few female *hua'er* scholars, Wu Yulin, wrote a dissertation in the literature department of Tokyo University, *A General Discussion of Hua'er in China* (Wu 2008), which covers lyrics, themes, metaphors, and ethnic characteristics of these songs. She discusses in one book the history and stylistics for four different provinces and several different ethnicities relating to *hua'er*, and even includes some discussion of areas outside of China, such as Kyrgyzstan, presenting a wide range of ethnographic material. Her comparative analysis of different ethnicities is based solely on lyrics, which causes me to wonder whether there may be connections or differences in the melodic traditions in use among different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, it is one of the few publications that covers *hua'er* in Ningxia Hui Autonomous region, an area that is otherwise neglected in the rest of the literature.

Qu's (2009) work on *hua'er* from Ningxia Hui Autonomous region, continued the discussion of *hua'er* within Hui ethnic communities and their relation with Central Asia and Islam. Despite eroticism being a taboo in Chinese literature, Qu's 2009 book included a chapter on the theme of sex in *hua'er* and its cultural tradition, making it the only book that discuss this topic publicly. Furthermore, he listed a number of *hua'er* with sexual themes and even a photo taken during a *hua'er* festival of young couple playing around in the field. During my interview with him in 2012, he joked about how he was surprised that that chapter was able to pass the review and to be published. However, he

commented that "those *hua'er* [with explicit sexual content] are the best songs, because the feelings are so real." (personal interview 2012)

A limited number of musicologists have conducted research on *hua'er* or analyzed the sounds of *hua'er*. Zhang Junren's book *The King of Hua'er Zhu Zhonglu: A Folksinger in the Anthropological Context* (2004) is an autobiography of Zhu Zhonglu, a famous *hua'er* singer from Qinghai province. In his book, he transcribes about 159 songs that Zhu has sung. In addition, his personal interviews with Zhu are authoritative and provide many valuable insights on Qinghai *hua'er*. However, one limitation of this book was that the original recordings were not provided.

In Wang's *Collected Works of Hua'er Tunes in China* (2007), he provides musical transcriptions of many *ling* from Gansu, Ningxia and Qinghai provinces. Notably, he also lists the name and ethnicity of each singer he recorded, but unfortunately, the musical recordings themselves are not included in this publication.

Zhao's more than 600 pages *Qinghai Hua'er* (2010), is an encyclopedia of Qinghai *hua'er*. With some brief analysis, he documented many *hua'er* having themes relating to love and history from various time periods; brief autobiographies of Qinghai *hua'er* singers; and some of the modern arrangements of *hua'er*, such as *hua'er* operas, *hua'er* dance shows, *hua'er* theater and so on. Similarly, this collection lacks of audio examples and the transcriptions provided in his book are neatly notated according to an Western art music style, which is quite a different approach from the transcriptions I provide in chapter two.

In the 1980s, the Ministry of Education initiated a folk music collection project. More than 100,000 folklorists and musicologists collected, evaluated and edited folk music from 30 provinces and municipalities across the nation and compiled them into four volumes: the Encyclopedia of Folksongs, the Encyclopedia of Folk Instrumental Music, the Encyclopedia of Opera Music, and the Encyclopedia of Story Telling Music （《中国民间歌曲集成》、《中国民族民间器乐曲集成》、《中国曲艺音乐集成》、《中国戏曲音乐集成》). All 30 sub-volumes based on provincial and municipal divisions were completed in 2008 (Wen 2009). *Hua'er* songs were collected in Qinghai province, Gansu province and Ningxia Hui autonomous region (Liu 1992, Zhuang 1993, Huang 2000, Zhou 2000). This collection adopts a unified style for notation and symbols, and it gives the full lyrics with explanations, names of the singers, and notes regarding where each song was found. However, since they represent a government-sponsored project that dates to the 1960s, it was no doubt subject to censorship and a selection process regarding its lyrics and themes. Another weakness is that the original recordings were not published, and many of them now are lost.

I found regional *hua'er* publications to be most helpful and in depth study of *hua'er* songs (Wang 1992, Ding 2002, Guo 2007). Ding's *Lianhua Mountain and Lianhua Mountain Hua'er* (2002) discusses in detail a regional *hua'er* style from their hometown, near Lianhua Mountain. Although Lianhua mountain *hua'er* is categorized as taomin *hua'er*, one regional style of *hua'er*, however, it has a unique characteristic compared with Erlang mountain *hua'er* which is also a style of taomin *hua'er*. I will discuss these two different styles in depth in chapter two.

Wei Quanming's *Outline of History for Hua'er Studies in China* (2005) is a important work, as it outlines important publications, conferences, journals about *hua'er* since the first publication in 1940 until present day. I found his bibliographic approach provided important information and analysis for all *hua'er* scholars.

There is relatively little English scholarship on *hua'er* overall. However, the first publication is a dissertation in folklore studies, written by Sue Tuohy at Indiana University in 1988. As a folklorist, her work provides a general analysis of *hua'er*, the cultures of northwest China and *hua'er* festivals. I found her description of the Lianhua mountain *hua'er* festival and her ethnographic data to be highly valuable. Unlike many Chinese publications published at the time, she incorporated Anderson (1983, 1986), Redfield (1967), Stover (1976) and Burke (1978)'s theories of nationalism to illustrate how *hua'er* is "viewed as a multi-vocal symbol to explain how and why *hua'er* songs are considered to be local products, an expression of the spirit of the Great Northwest, and an integral and valuable part of the Chinese cultural heritage" (Tuohy, 1988:vii).

Yang Mu (1994a, 1998) has also published two articles on *hua'er* focusing on its erotic musical activity in English. His articles provide an great overview of the musical genre, its current problems for research and the politics and issues of being erotic in China. Being the first in both English and Chinese to analyze the erotic aspects of *hua'er*, his articles contain valuable ethnographic data and insights.

Kouwenhoven & Schimmelpenninck's recent chapter also shares insights on women's role in *hua'er* practices. As they conclude "they [women] do play a role in subtle and surprising ways not just as an outlet for grief or anger, not just as sexual

provocation or playfully subversive or ironic commentary or acts of consolation, but also as active pleas for more openness, more compassion, more balanced views on the position and concerns of women (Kouwenhoven & Schimmelpenninck, 2013:173). Although I appreciate Schimmelpenninck's fieldwork and analysis on women's participation in *hua'er* singing, it would be even more beneficial to include the *hua'er* lyrics in Chinese other than just English translations for other scholars. Overall, the Chinese-language scholarship has provided me with great descriptive detail on *hua'er* and valuable historical and ethnographic data, whereas publications on *hua'er* in English have inspired me with their theoretical analyses of issues relating to gender and nationalism.

Nationalism

Nationalism theories were useful in analyzing ICH programs in China. Post-modern theories argue that nation and nationalism are modern constructions. Many works discussing how such construction taken place began in Europe and later spread to the rest of the world. Marxists argue that this process is often a top-down process, whereas other scholars points out that the process could be self subscribed to the national ideology voluntarily.

Anthropologists and historians contribute to the understanding how nations use monument, national flags, or other symbols to construct national identities. Ethnomusicologists discuss how music was given various layers of meanings at different times during such national identity construction. Erenst Gellner (1983) defines

nationalism as an ideology to keep the national and political units congruently. In an age of industrialization, urbanization, and increased geographical and social mobility, various members of the elite came to believe that people needed a shared culture and cultural standardization. Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983) argue that traditions appeared or claimed to be old are often times of recent origin and some times invented for a political purpose. Anderson (1983) contests the virtuality of a nation, and argues that they are often imagined. Martin Stokes (1994) argues that music creates a sense of place, generates emotion and brings people together into a community. Such communal characteristics are often utilized by politicians and governments.

Ethnomusicologists have researched how governments and politicians have given music various meanings in order to sustain and strengthen their political ideology and dominance. Noll (1991) discusses the use of music to create difference and to strengthen the Poland and Ukraine political border. Austerlitz (1997) discusses how a political dictator Rafael Trujillos utilizes music to create a national identity in the Dominican Republic. Zdzislaw Mach (1994) discusses how Chopin was constructed as a national composer whose late Romantic style of music and his struggle to fight the world was related to how Poland first gained its independence. As Poland later became a socialist country, the use of Chopin and his music was reverted. Jonathan Stoke (1996) discusses a blind Chinese musician, Abing, as a national musician, as his low social status, and folk music fits the communist ideology. Not until recent discovery, however, scholars found out that Abing had a fairly different personal life than the one constructed by the government, such as his drug abuse and affiliation with prostitution. Similarly, Annie

Randall (2004) discusses the construction of another Chinese national composer, Xian Xinghai and his Yellow River cantata. His cosmopolitanism, studying in Paris and later in Moscow was devalued, whereas his revolutionary compositions were exaggerated. Buchanan (2006) provides an example of a Bulgarian state-sponsored song and dance company incorporating state political ideology in their performance.

Other scholars challenged the hegemonic construction of a national identity by arguing that domination is not always by force. Gramsci (1971) said that domination could be persuading the subaltern to think the way in which the dominant group thinks naturally. Foucault (1977) echoed that power comes from all levels in all directions. Yoshino (1999) divided nationalism into two types: the political nationalism usually a top-down approach by force and the cultural nationalism that is the regeneration of a national community where people preserve, maintain their cultural identity. Lau (1996) discusses the invention of a solo *dizi* repertory and argues that musicians internalized the state ideology and modified their music accordingly. Tuohy (2001) echoes the very same idea. She said that nationalism is a transformative process that makes people think in the ways how the dominant groups think.

Yano (2002) takes a different approach by discussing emotions and nationalism. She discusses *enka*, a modern song genre that sounds "timelessly old". Through the longing and nostalgia to the ideal past, the inability to return creates and "imagined community" among the listeners and musicians. As Lowenthal (1990) puts it "the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there". An ideal past, that no one has experienced before, was constructed for national building.

Sugarman said that music creates a space where we push social, political and geographic boundaries (Sugarman 1989). Askew (2002) analyzes how through competition, musicians and audiences negotiate "what Tanzanian wants to be". Guss (2000) discusses the local festivals in Venezuela and points out that the various meanings and interpretation of identities at local, national and international levels. Manuel (2000) discusses how Indo-Caribbean youth negotiate their traditional Indian musical identity, modern genres from India, with the Afro-creole and Euro-American influences in their music. Bohlman (1989) analyzes how German-Jewish community using German classical music, including the music of Wagner, who is famous for his anti-semitic view, as their ethnic music. As Bohlman puts it "it is not music that mattered, nor the anti-Semitic history, but how music brings people together, and the meaning attached to the music" (Bohlman 1989:233).

I found Duara's work also vital for my research. From a historian's point of view, Duara (1995) discusses how people who live through history don't see history the same way as historians and politicians do. He encourages polyphonic voices, especially from the ones who are often ignored or marginalized.

Thus, music plays a vital role in constructing national and individual identities in the study of nationalism. Such constructions go both ways: hegemonic top-down construction and transformative bottom-up negotiation. In chapter five, I will discuss how both constructions co-exist in the case of *hua'er*. By actively participating in the reconstruction of *hua'er*, *hua'er* singers negotiate and re-define their identity in the 21st century.

Heritage

Heritage recently attracts scholarly attention from various disciplines, including museum studies, history, anthropology and tourism studies. Many of them have focuses on the various preservation programs and its problems. Others analyze the politics of the "past", "remembering" and "forgetting".

Japan was among the first to establish the Intangible Cultural Assets program in 1954 recognizing important court and art music. Following that, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, France and other countries established similar programs as well. Today, UNESCO is the most authoritative organization recognizing world heritages.

Few scholars have examined UNESCO's ICH project or other similar projects. Howard discusses the recognition of Korea's Intangible Cultural Assets and how it changed the attitudes of many local musicians. For example, the Asset system emphasizes concert performance out of the social life which stimulates changes in the original musical form (Howard 1986). Following up on Howard's work, Lee also argues that the designation of "important Intangible Cultural Assets" in Korea leads to the standardization and fixation of the performance style and reduces the room for interjection of personal styles (Lee 1997). Smith and Akagawa discusses the history of how UNESCO's ICH project came about and its attempt to acknowledge and privilege non-Western manifestations and practices of heritage since the previous World Heritage Convention was criticized as having a Eurocentric perception (Smith & Akagawa 2009). Seeger discusses the logistics process from nomination to proclamation of ICH. As one of the ICTM review committee members, he shared many insights on this selection

process. He points out a number of problems, such as the influence of nationalism, the problems of human right issues and possible cultural-cleansing (Seeger 2009). Chao conducted fieldwork in both sides of the Mongolia and China border examining the Mongolian Long Song and its practice after being selected as UNESCO's Masterpiece in 2005 (Chao 2010). Wong discusses the impact of UNESCO's designation of ICH on Kunqu, a type of Chinese regional opera. She argues that how Kunqu as originally created by the literati has now lost its traditional habitat. With the Chinese government as its main patron and kunqu in the public domain of a mass audience, she is uncertain how kunqu will evolve in the future (Wong 2009).

Many scholars suspect the concept of "heritage" and analyze its politics. Peter Nas, for example, questions why should cultural phenomena be preserved and revitalized? Can they be preserved? Should they be preserved? What happens to culture and folklore when they are politicized through international and national government protection programs? Shouldn't tradition always be subject to change - both invention and development and decline and deterioration? He argues that the UNESCO's program has a dual rationale. On one hand, it offers opportunities to cultural traditions, yet many parts of UNESCO's ideology seem to be contradictory. For example, cultural expressions that have outstanding value may not run the risk of disappearance, whereas others that have already lost certain qualities may already be critically endangered (Nas 2002:143). Littler and Naidoo (2005) ask why afternoon tea, stately houses, upper-class lifestyles and white English-ness are chosen to represent the past of Britain. Whose past counts? They remind us that "heritage" is often racialized, gendered and classed.

A number of works discussing the politics of the past, remembering and forgetting provide valuable analysis on why countries construct heritage. Harvey (2001) argued that heritage is best identified as a 'verb' rather than a 'noun'. It is a political process of remembering/forgetting and communication. Peter Fowler (1992) said "in the beginning, it was the past", pointing out that there are endless pasts, and thus endless heritagization. In deed, the past is a process of selection, construction and making meaning. Lowenthal (1990) discusses how we have successfully domesticated the past into a marketable commodity. Wright (2009), on the other hand, provides insights on how the everyday consciousness of history is closely related to our identity. Thus, our nostalgia of the everyday life and history provides ground for the political use or abuse of the past. Another folklorist, Kirshenblatt−Gimblett (1995), points out how heritage is a value-added industry to produce the local for exports.

Timothy (2009) discusses how cultural commodification and heritage tourism are the fastest growing tourism industry. Unger & Peleggi (2006) provide a valuable case study on how historical buildings on one hand provide resources for cultural tourism and, on the other hand, are utilized for the national narrative of the Thai nation. Fowler (1992) discusses the future and the cost of the 'past'. He criticizes that when people see something of historical value is endangered, their first reaction is "let's rescue it and give it to the museum", without even considering the cost of it. From an economic point of view, he argues that the "past" does not come cheap.

Smith (2006) contributes to the understanding of heritage by arguing that the past is often constituted and utilized in the present while using original research work from

England, Australia and the United States. He said that the idea of heritage is not so much a 'thing', but a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present. Yoneyama (1999) provides case studies of how Hiroshima was remembered or forgotten among atom bomb survivors, governmental officials and city planners. She argues that we should always ask why certain events are remembered in certain ways, who is it for, from which position. As a historian, she also points out that both "memory" and "History" are political, as both of them involve the practice of power and selection. As both Renan (1990) and Peckham (2003) point out "a collective memory is central to the process of nation building". In case we forget, powerful institutions remind us of our heritage, and compel us to forget other histories. The process of political, cultural, and territorial inclusion and exclusion is nationalism.

These works are important in shaping my dissertation as I analyze the politics of selecting ICH, ICH inheritors and the impact of newly passed ICH law to safeguard ICH in China.

Politics and Chinese Music

Literature that analyze the politics of Chinese music are influential for my dissertation as well. Westernization, modernization, canonization and nationalism are some of the major themes for Chinese ethnomusicologists. Since the introduction of Western instruments and tonal theories in the late 19th century, Chinese musical instruments were seen as "unscientific" and in need of reformation and development.

Many Chinese musical instruments added more strings or frets; some fixed their tuning system according to the Western standards; whilst others were given a larger sound box to create lower tones, equivalent to the Western bass. Several works discusses those changes, such as Lau's (1996) work on *dizi*, Liu's work on *erhu*, Provine, Tokumaru, and Witzleben (2001) on *zheng* and *yangqin*. Such reformation and modernization of musical instruments is not limited to Han instruments, but also those of ethnic minorities. Marsh (2009) discusses the reformation and changes of the Mongolian horse-head fiddle. Koo (2007) analyzes the modifications of Korean ethnic minority's musical instruments in China. Kuo-Huang & Gray (1979) discuss the invention of Chinese modern orchestra, utilizing Chinese instruments, but with Western harmonic texture, tuning system and concepts. They argue that the invention of the modern orchestra today is another type of Chinese exoticization of Western concepts and esthetics in Chinese music. Kraus (1989) discusses the localization of Western instrument, the piano, in China and how they were given new meanings at different times of Chinese history from Cultural Revolution to present day. Jones (2007) discusses the ritual music of Shanxi region, and how their ritual music underwent the suppression during Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and then challenges facing China's modernization today. Yang (2012) from a new perspective, discusses how in a recent interment ritual, popular music was incorporated as part of the ritual music. He concludes by saying those popular musics are "glocalized" and given new meanings in Fuzhou.

A few Chinese ethnomusicologists discussed the canonization of Chinese music. Lau discusses the canonization of *dizi* music. He argues that the changes of *dizi* music

and its practice is a result of how players internalize the world established by the State. Thus, “State ideology is being kept in place through the invention of a new music tradition to which new pieces are allowed to be perpetually added in order to consolidate, articulate and reinvent the social order” (Lau 1996). Harris discusses the canonization of the Uyghur twelve muqam. She argues that the canonization of the twelve muqam is a way the nation develops and formalizes national identity and acquires a range of identifiable national assets, so that the Dai ethnic group is always associated with their peacock dance, the Miao ethnic group is associated with their lusheng, whereas Xinjiang Uyghur is associated with their twelve muqam (Harris 2008). D’Evelyn (2013) in her dissertation discusses the canonization of solo repertoire for the Mongolian Morin Khuur. She argues that this is an “effort that carried the instrument into the professional world of the university institution and give it a viable presence on the national stage”.

Many scholars focus on the influences of communist ideologies on music and practices. Wong (1984) and Bryant (2007) discuss how those newly emerged revolutionary songs genres serve the communist ideology. Other ethnomusicologists analyze “true” popular music that is not influenced by the CCP ideologies. Jones (1992) categorize the popular music in China into two categories: *tongsu* music and the underground popular music. He points out that where the *tongsu* is commonly state-sponsored music with propaganda themes, underground popular music such as the rock & rolls is the “true” popular music of China in 1980s-90s. Baranovitch (2003) discusses how low-cost recordings in the 1980 and 1990s enable Chinese of various social and cultural background to express their feelings and believes. Lee (1992) discusses the

importance of Cantonese pop song lyrics, and how concerns of social, cultural and political changes were expressed in them.

In line with many Chinese ethnomusicologists, my dissertation concerns topics of nationalism, modernization, and canonization. I analyze how the top-down, government-initiated preservation projects have led to drastic modifications of *hua'er* practice. The state tacitly uses ICH as a tool of nation building in order to reinforce it national ideology. At the same time, *hua'er* singers take the opportunity of ICH negotiating a new identity for themselves as well as the practice of *hua'er.*

Research Methodology

I have used a variety of methodologies to approach *hua'er* in this dissertation. Aside from archival research conducted from approximately 2010 to 2014, including books and journal articles regarding *hua'er* songs, heritage studies, nationalism, and Chinese music published in both English and Chinese, I also conducted six months of ethnographic fieldwork and analyzed music examples I recorded.

In 2011 and 2012, I conducted a total of six months of fieldwork. During this period, I travelled to Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region and Ningxia Hui autonomous region, including four cities (Urumqi, Lanzhou, Xining and Yinchuan), seven counties (Min, Kangle, Hezheng, Linxia, Datong Hui and Tu ethnic autonomous county, Huzhu Tu ethnic autonomous county and Xunhua Sala ethnic autonomous county) and many rural villages across the Northwestern region to meet with ICH inheritors, government officials, *hua'er* singers, scholars, and researchers. Being able to

visit all these areas and meeting different specialists where *hua'er* singing is prevalent provided me with valuable insights on the variations and complexity of *hua'er* practices, preservation, transmission processes and the lives of *hua'er* singers, which together led me to realize how speaking about *hua'er* as a single unified musical practice is misleading.

As part of this fieldwork, I attended six UNESCO-designated and locally arranged *hua'er* festivals, namely the *Wangjiagoumen hua'er* festival, Lianhua Mountain *hua'er* festival, the Erlang Mountain *hua'er* festival, the Laoye Mountain *hua'er* festival, the Danma Tu ethnicity *hua'er* festival, and the Xunhua Sala autonomous county *hua'er* festival. These experiences gave me insights on the differences in government-sponsored verses self-initiated *hua'er* festivals.

I met personally with nearly all of the key Chinese scholars in the field of *hua'er* research, many of whom were in their mid- to late-80s at the time of my fieldwork. I also met with and interviewed nine nationally, provincially and locally designated inheritors of *hua'er*; seventeen governmental officials who work in local cultural Department and ICH centers; and forty-four professional and amateur *hua'er* singers, of whom seventeen were female and fifteen were Muslim singers. From these meetings with *hua'er* singers, I was able to learn about their stories of how they learned *hua'er*, their families' opinions about their lives as *hua'er* singers, as well as the challenges they face in the past and today. One topic of special interest for this study was how recognition of *hua'er* as ICH had changed their lives. Given the social pressures against the participation of Muslim and female singers in *hua'er* festivals, such singers are "minorities within minorities,"

and I was especially fortunate to be able to meet and interview two Muslim female singers, Kou Hong and An Yuge, who shared their incredible life stories with me. During the meetings with governmental officials, I was able to learn about what the recognition process of ICH was like at the village and county levels. Meeting scholars and researchers who specialized in *hua'er* was also invaluable to my research. During my conversations with them, they provided me with many insights they gained over the years of their research.

One of these scholars, Wei Quanming, shared with me the first extant scholarly publication on *hua'er*, called *Collection of Hua'er*, written by Zhang Yaxiong and published in 1940. This book is so rare that, as far as I know, it is only accessible in *hua'er* scholars' private collections. Even more valuable to my research was that he was willing to share his private notes on "taboo" *hua'er* lyrics with me, which is absolutely priceless for my research, since it addresses a crucial aspect of the genre that is virtually ignored in the current literature.

During my fieldwork, I was invited to join two prestigious *hua'er* research organizations in China: the Gansu Provincial Folk Artist Association and the Qinghai *Hua'er* Research Council. These contacts with scholars in the heart of *hua'er* country kept me updated with the various events regarding *hua'er* festivals, conference and publications in China. In addition, I also attended a conference titled "The Study and Preservation of Chinese Ethnic Minority ICH" in Inner Mongolia, China, where I met leading scholars who are researching on ethnic minority's ICH.

Positionality

My different connections and identities were helpful and challenging at times during my fieldwork. I found being a student made my fieldwork a lot easier to conduct. For example, most of my initial contacts were high level governmental officials and respectful scholars due to my connection with Chinese Art Anthropology Society, Gansu Provincial Folk Artist Association, and Qinghai Hua'er Research Institute. The local cultural department officials were helpful to put me in touch with local *hua'er* singers. However, from a *hua'er* singer's perspective, I am someone related to the government or authority. Thus, I had to explain clearly that I am indeed a student who is interested in their culture.

Sex is a private topic in China. Being younger than most of my interviewees made it a challenge for me to discuss sexual *hua'er* songs with them. Many of my interviewees felt uncomfortable discussing such topics, considering that I was the age of their children or even grandchildren. My "student hat" was once again helpful for my interviewees to overcome the age difference. In fact, all of the sexual *hua'er* lyrics I was able to collect during my fieldwork, were written down and handed to me instead of being sung or spoken in my presence, even with female singers.

As someone from the capital city of China and attending an American university, some government officials, *hua'er* singers, and scholars provided tremendous support for my research, as they see my research a way to help spread knowledge of *hua'er*, while on few occasions my intentions were questioned and no help was given.

One aspect that I found unique about my positionally was that I am one of the few scholars conducting research on *hua'er* who is not from the Northwestern region of China. This made me an outsider to provincial politics, different from most other scholars, whose research is greatly affected by such politics. For example, I do not feel obligated to state whether *hua'er* originated from one particular province or another, make claims about which government is doing a better job at preserving *hua'er*, or make arguments for which ethnicity has played a more important role in transmitting *hua'er*.

Outline of Chapters

Overall, my dissertation focuses on issues concerning the construction of national identity via recognition of national and world heritage, while investigating how grassroots artistic practices are chosen to represent part of the musical identity of a nation.

Chapter two discusses the musical features of *hua'er*, including its melodies, different regional styles, themes, lyrical structure, transmission process and *hua'er* festivals. I closely examine the aesthetics of *hua'er* songs by highlighting several examples with musical transcriptions. I conclude that *hua'er* is a fluid oral tradition that there are many regional variations of it.

Chapter three explores social issues relating to *hua'er* within their historical contexts. I first address the changes of socio-political ideologies on folksongs from the early 1900s to present and how these ideologies have impacted the practice of folksongs and the lives of musicians and singers. After that, I discuss the practice of *hua'er* within

its communities. For example, *hua'er* was traditionally forbidden in various settings, such as in the presence of elders and family members of the opposite sex, within a household, or near a village. Singing *hua'er* in public was considered shameful, and *hua'er* singers were considered unworthy as they seek out love affairs or sexual relations outside of their marriage. I cite both scholarly work and personal interviews on analyzing the social stigma of *hua'er* singer's.

Chapter four provides an overview of the selection process for both UNESCO's and China's recognition of ICH. I compare and contrast different definitions of ICH, the criteria for selecting ICH, and the purposes for safeguarding ICH from the perspectives of both UNESCO and the Chinese national government. I then provide a detailed analysis on how UNESCO policies are "localized" and "reinterpreted" in China. Following this is a discussion of the various programs that China has developed to safeguard ICH, such as establishing a National Cultural Heritage Day, a-week-long Intangible Cultural Heritage Festival, ICH centers at the provincial and national levels, and new ICH law and policies on the cancelation of ICH. Through a detailed analysis of these governmental programs, I come to conclude that ICH was defined and interpreted differently at global, national and local levels. Not only new agenda were added, some agendas have contradictory values compare with the initial UNESCO intension.

Chapter five covers the politics of ICH. For example how has the ICH law impacted the documentation process and how inheritors were selected? What does it mean to own ICH as a regional government agency? What is the new obligations as national or provincial ICH inheritors? I explore the paradoxes and challenges that *hua'er*

singers face as they struggle with this new recognition in terms of their ethnicities, religions, and *hua'er* traditions. I also discuss how the recognition of ICH leads to the reconstruction of *hua'er* as farmer's love songs that are likely to result in lawful marriage, and a symbol of multi-ethnic unity through institutionalization and staged performance. I then contrast it with non-governmental organized ICH activities, such as teahouse entertainment and informal *hua'er* festivals. *Hua'er* singers, scholar and local governmental officials are actively negotiating a new identity for the art form and "forgetting" its notorious past.

Chapter Six concludes the study with several suggestions for future research. The UNESCO recognition program for world ICH has been implemented for *hua'er* via an idealistic, yet contradictory, set of cultural policies. The recognition of ICH in China in fact is a process that has transformed *hua'er* from a grassroots folk genre to a politicalized, official state art, an art that express the agendas of institutions and governments rather than its traditional practitioners. In the name of ICH, *hua'er* is thus being modified and institutionalized out of its original social, cultural and political contexts. However, *hua'er* communities actively respond to the national policy and utilize it as an opportunity to reconstruct a new identity for *hua'er* and their identity as *hua'er* singers. Through governmental sponsored *hua'er* festivals, *hua'er* singers gain regional popularity, money to support their family and opportunity to re-define *hua'er* in the 21st century. Even though the content of *hua'er* songs were largely censored on stage as well as in publication, however, naughty *hua'er* songs still exist in oral tradition and scholar's private collection.

Significance

Since 1980s, the influence of cultural studies to the field of ethnomusicology is enormous. Grounded in critical theory and literary critics, cultural studies looks at various culture phenomenon and examines how meaning is generated, disseminated and produced. Ethnomusicologists use cultural study theories to exam how music creates various meanings, and how such meanings are unstable and ever changing.

My dissertation research incorporates many cultural studies theories while covering a number of understudied yet important subjects, including music analysis of *hua'er* songs, the ethnographic study of *hua'er* communities in rural northwestern China, an in-depth analysis of the newly established ICH program, and its politics in modernized China.

In line with Gramsci (1971) and Yoshino (1999), I analyze how constructing a national identity in China is not always top-down and by force. Since the ICH project offers world-class recognition and opportunities to local communities, members of such communities are indeed actively engaged in this nation building project. In this case, it is a win-win situation where local *hua'er* artists voluntarily subscribe to national authority and legitimatize their cultural practices, meanwhile reconstructing a brand new identity for *hua'er* and their associated identities as practitioners.

The music transcriptions and analysis on *hua'er* songs in chapter two are among the first to notate the true qualities of *hua'er* songs in both English and Chinese. Instead of revising them to fit them neatly into Western notation, I point out how *hua'er* singers often sing microtonal pitches that cannot be located on a Western twelve-note scale. The

melody they sing often flows freely without being restricted to a time signature, but rather determined by the length of their own breadth. The CD I put together also are songs I recorded during my fieldwork that *hua'er* scholars did not compile.

Since many *hua'er* communities are located in rural China, my ethnographic data collected from these regions give voices to those marginalized and often ignored communities and singers. Furthermore, the issue of taboo lyrics of *hua'er* is hardly discussed in depth at all in both the Chinese and English literature. Since programs for ICH were only recently established, there is only a handful of research studies (Howard 2012, Blumenfield 2013) that examine the impact of such programs on traditional music and culture. To my knowledge, nearly all such studies to date have made theoretical arguments without sufficient ethnographic data from first-hand observation of how the process of ICH has actually played out. This study provides a view on how such policies have affected local art traditions over the past decade.

Therefore, this dissertation research is the first comprehensive study of *hua'er* in English to consider the role of world and national cultural policies under the UNESCO and national ICH projects, and to examine how *hua'er* has been romanticized and sanitized under such policies.

Chapter Two

Defining *Hua'er* Musically

In this chapter, I discuss ways in which the subject of this dissertation, *hua'er*, a grassroots folksong tradition from Northwestern China, can be defined musically. *Hua'er* (lit. 'flowers') is a generic term that refers to mountain songs of northwestern China, and it functions as an umbrella term for a collection of songs that display a wide range of regional, linguistic, and melodic variations. In different localities, it is sometimes referred to as *shaonian* (lit. 'young man [songs]') or *yequ* (lit. 'wild songs'), but since its official recognition as an element of ICH, *hua'er* has become the most predominant term by far when referring to mountain songs across the region. The geographic region where *hua'er* is practiced and preserved is limited to Qinghai and Gansu province, as well as Ningxia Hui and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regions, all of which are in northwestern China.

Most scholars of *hua'er* agree (see Ke 2002 for an overview of various views) that Qinghai and Gansu are in fact where the folksong tradition first originated, after which it was taken to Xinjiang Uyghur and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions during different waves of migration.

Hua'er can be sung alone, as Xie Chenghua, Chairman of the Xining Literature and Arts Federation (西宁文联), told me during my fieldwork that, "*hua'er* is a song for one's self. It is a form of self-expression[1]" (Xie, personal interview, 2011). He

[1] 花儿是唱给自己听的, 一种表达需要。

mentioned how, during a *hua'er* meeting in 2010, he overheard the Chairman of the Gansu Cultural Department quietly singing a *hua'er* song inside his hotel room. In this case, the *hua'er* song expressed the singer's state of mind and questions he had about himself. The lyrics were like this:

河里的冰咋这么厚的	When did the ice become so thick in the river?
河里的麻浮是咋的	How did the *mafu* (a plant) form in the river?
尕脸脑是怎么害的	When did my face become so pallid?
嘴上的血痂是咋的	How did the scar form on my lips?
	(ibid.)

While the chairman was singing on his own, it is most common for *hua'er* to be sung by a pair of singers or by two groups in either a conversational or in a competitive fashion during *hua'er* festivals in the spring and summer months. When *hua'er* is sung in a competitive fashion, each singer or group attempts to leave its opponent speechless, unable to improvise the responding verse, thus "winning" the competition. The competition can last as long as it takes until one side fails to respond promptly.

Ke discusses one example of such a case. In 1998, he heard a group of young women teasing a Tibetan monk by singing the following lyrics.

手拿斧头剁白杨	Holding an axe to cut a white poplar
年轻轻的好模样	You look young and handsome
为啥你要当和尚	Why do you want to be a monk?
	(Ke 2002:18)

Unlike Theravada Buddhism, where young men joining the monastery is a rather common phenomenon, for Mahayana Buddhism as practiced in China, the stereotype is that it is rather uncommon for young and handsome men to join the monastery. Instead, they should get married and have children. Thus, the young women posed a challenge to

the monk by asking a difficult personal question. Furthermore, since they praise the young monk's handsome appearance, they are flirting with the monk. Meanwhile, the monk responded as follows:

手拿斧头剁白杨	Holding an axe to cut a white poplar
命里算下没婆娘	Fortuneteller told me that I won't have a wife
一口气上当和尚	So I got upset and became a monk.
	(Ke 2002:18)

Not only was the monk able to respond to the personal question and flirtation, but also he answered it in a way that is humorous, surprising and left the young women speechless. He provided a reason why he joined the monastery (not necessarily true), and at the same time responded to the flirtation by confirming that he has lost his faith in having a romantic relationship with a woman. This is an example of how the "competition" goes and how a smart answer leaves the opponent speechless.

Not all singers can respond quickly with a smart answer. Below is an example of someone teasing the opponent that is not responding fast enough.

你唱了一声不唱了	You stop singing after singing one phrase
就合嘴里噙上面酱了	Are you eating bean paste
显出花儿的孽障了	Or you are not good at singing *hua'er*
	(Ke 2002:58-59)

Because Chinese bean paste is rather thick (perhaps a similar texture as peanut butter), the singer is teasing an opponent who is taking a long time to respond, comparing him or her to someone who has a hard time swallowing bean paste.

Lyrics are the heart and soul of *hua'er* songs. They are metaphorical, implicit, down-to-earth, and humorous. What makes someone a good *hua'er* singer is not that they sing in tune according to a diatonic scale, or their voice quality, but their ability to improvise smart lyrics. Xie Chenghua said that, "intellectuals and scholars can not compose true *hua'er* lyrics. They have to come from farmers themselves" (Xie, personal interview, 2011). Below is an example I recorded from Dong Fenglan, a *hua'er* singer who is a farmer from Kangle county, Gansu province (personal interview 2012).

尕妹好比红嘴绿鹦哥	Little sister is like a red-mouthed green parrot
晚上在你怀中卧	At night it lies in my arms
亮了给你搓馍馍	During the day I feed you bread
搓的少了怕你饿呢	Feed you less, I worry you would be hungry
多了怕你罢肚子别破	Feed you more, I worry your belly would explode (personal recording 2011)

This *hua'er* is sung from the perspective of a man who is in love with a woman but does not know what is the right thing to do. He cares so much about her, yet he is afraid to make the wrong move. Unlike urban love songs, *hua'er* often use images of simple things from nature to describe a person. In this case, the parrot symbolizes the beauty of a woman. Other common images in *hua'er* that serve this function, describing someone who is loved, include a young gourd, melon, swan, a white peony, vinegar, bird's nest, sea cucumber, shrimp, etc.

Here is another example I recorded in which two *hua'er* singers, Li Caie and Liu Guocheng, sang to each other.

沙石河滩刺木香，	[male] Rocky riverbed full of acacia incense
我和头缸醋一样，	I am like the first vat of vinegar
颜色不好味道香。	No beautiful color but a delicious taste
把你好比燕窝海参菜，	[female] You are like a bird's nest and a sea cucumber
虽然不吃看时爱，	I don't get to eat them, but they look great
吃上一口活想坏。	I love them even more if I can have a bite
	(personal recording 2011)

In this example, Liu was self-promoting before an audience of women. Even though he is a national ICH inheritor, he humbly compares himself with the first vat of vinegar, a common ingredient yet is essential for Chinese cooking. Chinese vinegar is generally made of fermented rice. It is inexpensive, has a dark color and intense smell, yet adds great flavor to Chinese dishes. Meanwhile, the female singer confirms that he is indeed a likable person while making a humorous comparison. Bird's nests and sea cucumber are considered delicacies in Chinese cuisine. The ingredients are rare, expensive and believed to have extraordinary health benefits. Li compares Liu to those fine ingredients since he is a locally well-known *hua'er* singer. In the last two lines, she expresses that she has never had the luck to experience something so special like him. After meeting and singing with him, she felt lively and happy. During *hua'er* festivals, it is quite common to hear a group suddenly burst into laughter after a singer finishes his or her punch line, because the responding lyrics are highly creative and humorous.

Hua'er Festivals

Ke describes the typical *hua'er* festival as "a carnival of poetry and song for ordinary people where they create beauty, enjoy beauty and express themselves " (Ke 2002: 11). Many regional *hua'er* festivals are held annually in both the summer and winter, although summer festivals are generally larger. Since both the singers and the audience members are farmers, *hua'er* festivals are scheduled during the agricultural off-season.

Yang (1998) lists several summer festival dates, though they are sometimes subject to change and typically follow the Chinese lunar calendar. The list below shows that *hua'er* festivals typically last between three to six days. Each village and county generally schedules its festival on staggered dates, so that *hua'er* fans can attend multiple festivals if they like.

> April 26-29, at Songmingyan, Hezheng, Gansu
> May 4-6, at Binglingsi, Yongjing, Gansu
> May 14-21, at Erlangshan, Min, Gansu
> June 1-6, at Lianhuashan, Kangle, Gansu
> June 14-16, at Qutansi, Ledu, Qinghai (Yang, 1998:215)

In this list, Yang includes only the biggest and the most famous festivals in the region. However, many small-scale festivals take place while participants approach the main venue of the event. Traditionally, none of these small-scale or large-scale *hua'er* festivals were organized by any governmental agencies. People of a particular region know the dates of their *hua'er* festivals and attend them voluntarily. Ke describes a lianhua mountain *hua'er* festival he attended in 1990s as follows:

> "Around the end of May, small shops and vendors already begin to set up their tents on Lianhua Mountain with food, daily necessities and farm produce. From June first to second, *hua'er* singers and *hua'er* fans of nearby counties dress up and approach Lianhua Mountain with their friends. They may hold umbrellas or colorful fans, may ride horses or walk, but nonetheless they are all excited" (Ke 2002:3).

During my fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, I found Ke's description to be true, although I did not see anyone riding horses while attending a *hua'er* festival, and the most famous large-scale festivals today are commonly organized by local government agencies. I will discuss governmental sponsored *hua'er* festivals in more depth in Chapter five.

The following four photos were taken during my fieldwork at the 2011 Lianhua mountain *hua'er* festival. Figures 2 and 3 were taken at a small-scale *hua'er* festival, the wangjiagoumen *hua'er* festival, a couple days before the main festival. It was attended voluntarily (not organized by the local Cultural Departments) and had comparatively have less participants. In Figure 2, you can see small groups of people gathered and sung *hua'er* together. Figure 3 shows some of the *hua'er* singers who attending this festival.

Figure 2. *Wangjigoumen Hua'er* Festival

Figure 3. *Hua'er* Singers

The two photos below were taken at the main venue of the Lianhua mountain festival a couple of days later. It was organized by the Kangle County Cultural Department as a staged *hua'er* competition. In contrast, we can see many more people climbed to the summit of Zisong Mountain, despite the location being more than 6,500 feet in elevation, to attend the main festival. Figure 4 is the setup of the main stage whereas photo 4 showcases the number of people who attended the festival. You may spot in Figure 5 that some small groups are gathered in the distance to sing *hua'er* ignoring the busy main stage.

Figure 4. Main Stage of the Competition

Figure 5. People Watching the Competition

Since *hua'er* are sung in various regional dialects and ethnic minority languages, many of which are mutually unintelligible, *hua'er* festivals are generally attended only by people in the same region who are likely to understand the *hua'er* lyrics being sung in the local dialects. Below is an example of *hua'er* song in both Mandarin pronunciation as well as in Hezhou dialect.

In Mandarin below:

Bái shé niáng zǐ léi fēng tǎ	白蛇娘子雷峰塔
Shuǐ yān le jīn shān sì le	水淹了金山寺了
Huó máng de shí hòu lái bù xià	活忙的时候来不下
Hái shuō shí méi qíng yì le.	还说是没情意了

In Hezhou dialect below:

Bǐ shé niàng zì lǐ féng tà	白蛇娘子雷峰塔
Fí màn liè jīn sān sí liào	水淹了金山寺了
Hú má (zì) shǐ jiàn (é jìu) lâi bù hà	活忙的时候来不下
Háng (fū sì) mè qín yí liào.	还说是没情意了

As shown above, not only most of the tones in Hezhou dialect are different from that of Mandarin, but the pronunciation of many words are totally different as well. In parentheses are words added to make it rhyme easily. Thus, making it difficult for people outside of the community to understand the lyrics. Furthermore, beyond differences in pronunciation, Ding (2001) discusses how word choice in lyrics employs local slang terms at the Lianghua mountain *hua'er* festival. This adds additional local flavor, yet it also represents a barrier for appreciation of local *hua'er* by outsiders (Ding 2001:17). Indeed, the diversity of dialects and local slangs used in *hua'er* songs was one of the challenges that I encountered during my fieldwork. Often, I would have to ask the singer to write down his or her lyrics in Chinese characters right after their song, or request a local scholar to help me transcribe lyrics I had recorded. Below is a photo of the author and Tu *hua'er* singers who sang *hua'er* in both local dialect as well as Tu ethnic language.

Figure 6. *Hua'er* Singers Who Sang in Tu Ethnic Language

Ji Xucai, a former official of the Min County Cultural Department, expressed that regional slang terms and local variations in pronunciation are the main reason why *hua'er* has gained only limited popularity outside of the region of northwestern China (personal interview 2011). Meanwhile, practitioners of *hua'er* in Gansu and Qinghai consider the types of *hua'er* sung in Ningxia Hui autonomous region and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region to be inauthentic, primarily due to the use of standard Mandarin pronunciation in their *hua'er*.

The Melodies of *Hua'er*

There are hundreds of *ling*, or tunes, for *hua'er* melodies. Traditionally, these melodies were distinctive to specific regions or ethnicities of *hua'er* singers. However, with the convenience of modern recording technology and the ease of modern transportation, *hua'er* melodies are no longer limited to geographic or ethnic boundaries. Many *hua'er* singers know not only the *hua'er ling* of their own county, but also those of

other counties or even provinces, especially if the other locations share a similar dialect. During a singing competition between two singers or groups, a singer can use any *ling* or tune to respond one another. The title of a *ling* generally reflects a particular ethnicity, such as the *Baoan ling* (lit. 'Baoan ethnic tune'), or they may describe either qualities of the tune such as *zhi ling* (lit. 'straight tune') or names of specific flowers such as *Shuihonghua ling* (lit. 'Water flower tune') or specific locations such as *Hezhou ling* (lit. 'tune from Hezhou').

Hua'er is a fluid musical expression and a living oral tradition. There is not a fixed way of singing each *ling*. *Ling* that share a single title may have regional and personal variations, which could be expected given that *hua'er* is an art form transmitted orally, highly improvised and individualistic. For example, one of the most popular *ling,* the *Hongmudan Ling* (lit. 'Red Peony Tune'), has a wide variety of regional variations. These variations are so drastic that one would not know they share the same title by listening to them. In terms of personal variation, during my fieldwork, I often discover that the same ling was sung differently based on the individual singer's origin and his or her capabilities in singing. Some singers add plenty of vibrato and ornamentation to an existing ling, whereas others may prefer to sing it in a simpler fashion. Some singers like to sing fast whereas others like to explore or sustain the notes much longer. Some singers like to sing with large leaps in the melody whereas others are keeping the melody conjunct within an octave. Therefore, *hua'er* displays a personalized singing esthetic without a standard musical scale, rhythm, singing range or singing technique used by all

hua'er singers. However, to identify whether or not a song qualifies as *hua'er*, there are two generalized musical characteristics that define the genre.

(1) *Hua'er* singers often start off by singing vocables like "a-ei" or "a-ou" or "ei-you" using two to three ascending notes to attract the listeners' attention. The opening can last between three to eight seconds.

(2) *Hua'er* singers often use natural voice while singing and use one breath for each line of lyrics. At the end of each line, singers will take a break of two to three seconds to catch their breath before singing the next line.

As more and more *hua'er* singers now being exposed to Western music, there is a trend toward standardization of *hua'er* according to Western musical tuning and fixed time signatures. These characteristics can vary drastically depending on a *hua'er* singer's musical background.

Categorization of *Hua'er*

Many scholars argue that *hua'er* generally fall into two categories: *Taomin hua'er* and *Hezhou hua'er*, based on geographic, linguistic, and stylistic differences (Wu 2008). I have found that it is also useful to consider a third category for localized *hua'er*. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss all three categories.

Taomin Hua'er

Taomin is the historical name for the region that includes the old jurisdictions of Taozhou (now called Lintan County) and Minzhou (now Min County), both of which are

located in what is today called Gansu Province. The circled area is where Taomin *hua'er* are mostly found today.

Figure 7. Map of Taomin, Gansu Province

People of the Taomin region speak similar dialects and are able to communicate with each other. As Ding puts it, compared with *Hezhou hua'er*, *Taomin hua'er*'s melodies may seem dull and stiff. However, if one also considered the variety of lyrics, *Taomin hua'er* has comparatively more lyrical improvisation (Ding 2001:12). As such, *Taomin hua'er* is typically known for its simple melodies with fewer notes yet highly improvised lyrics.

Wang Hongming further divides *Taomin hua'er* into two subcategories: a northern and a southern style. Lianhua mountain *hua'er* from Kangle County are examples of the northern style, whereas *hua'er* sung at Erlang mountain in Min County are examples of the southern style (Wang 2011:10-13). As an example of the northern style *Taomin hua'er*, Lianhua mountain *hua'er* commonly have three to five singers together with a

chuanbanzhang (lit. "leader of the thread"). The *chuanbanzhang*, unique to Lianhua mountain *hua'er*, is not necessarily a singer himself or herself, but improvises lyrics and tells the singers what to sing. Meanwhile, the singers deliver the songs by singing one line per person. The *chuanbanzhang* must be witty, creative and humorous whereas the singers must have good voices. Lianhua mountain *hua'er* is mostly sung in a competitive fashion. According to Ke, during singing competitions between groups at a *hua'er* festival, often there is no time to think. As soon as one group finishes singing their verses, the *chuanbanzhang* needs to improvise lyrics and inform his or her singers what to sing right away, or their side will lose. This is the only way to determine whether or not someone is a good *chuanbanzhang* (Ke 2002:10).

The following four photos were taken at the main stage for the *hua'er* competition at Lianhua Mountain festival in 2011. In Figure 8, one group of four *hua'er* singers wearing a team uniform competes with a mixed gender group on the right. Their *chuanbanzhang*, wearing black, stands behind the third singer and tells her what to sing next, as their first singer has already begun. The man who is second on the right, wearing a white vest and not carrying a fan like the singers do, is the *chuanbanzhang* for the second group. Figure 9 is a close up of a *chuanbanzhang*, the men in blue, telling the second singer what to sing while the first singer was delivering the first line. Figure 10 and 11 show the judges at the competition and the various prizes for the winners.

Figure 8. *Hua'er* Competition

Figure 9. *Chuanbanzhang* Tells Lyrics

Figure 10. Judges of the Competition

Figure 11. Prizes for the Winners

The most common Lianhua mountain *hua'er ling* is the *lianglianer ling*, shown in the following transcription.

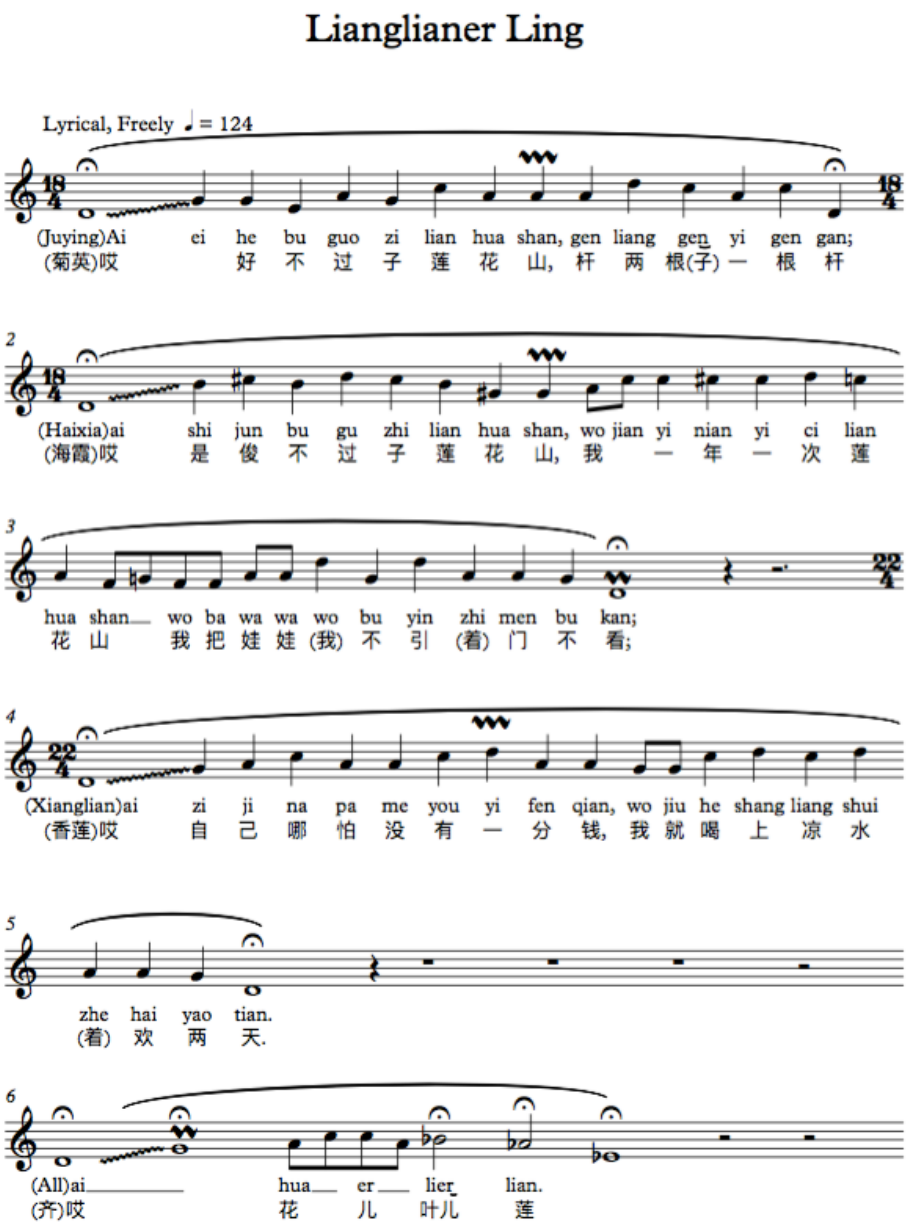

Figure 12. Transcription of *Lianglianer Ling*[2]

This *lianglianer ling* is sung by three singers: Yang Juying, Yang Haixia and Wen Xianglian. Juying sung the first line of lyrics. Haixia joined in as Juying sings the last

[2] English Translation: "The great Lianhua mountain, I come here once every year. I don't take my baby nor watch the door; I don't care if I don't have any a penny. I will drink cold water and be happy for two days."

note, D. Xianglian, then, joins in with Haixia as she sings the last note. Finally, all three singers sing the last line of lyrics "*hua'er lier lian* (lit. flowers and leaves)" together, which is the most distinctive ending for *lianglianer ling*. The example was continuous without any space or breaks in the melody. Even though I used a Western style notation for this transcription, most notes they sung fall in between the smallest division in a piano keyboard and there were many more vibrato and ornamentations used in the actual singing that is difficult to capture in this transcription. For example, the first note that Juying sung is higher than D, but lower than D flat. In addition, all three singers started off on a similar note, which is close to middle D, however, they each went off to sing the tune they'd like instead of trying to sing the exact same melody as the previous singer. Something all three singers have in common are: (1) they all start off singing a sustaining note "Ai" before introducing lyrics, (2) all melodies sung are conjunct, with no leaps larger than a fifth, (3) the first note for each singer is roughly the same as the previous singer's last note, in this example middle D, and (4) the ending phrase always follows a declining contour. Since *chuanbanzhang* assign each singer a different number of words for their line, all three singers used different amount of time to sing their line. Juying used 10 seconds, Haixia used 17 seconds, whereas Xianglian used 12 seconds. The tune is non-metrical and flows freely depends on each singer's breath. Thus, from analyzing this transcription, we can see how precise pitch and rhythm are not important in singing northern style *Taomin hua'er*. Even though lyrics are assigned to singers by *chuanbanzhang,* singers still have the freedom to express the lyrics in their own ways, as long as they start on the same note as the previous singer's last note. This is common

among amateur *hua'er* singers, as most of them have never received any formal music education nor were trained to sing in tune with the Western 12-tone scale. Nonetheless, they are locally popular singers. In fact, Wen Xianglian, the third singer in this transcription is a provincial *hua'er* inheritor.

The Erlang mountain *hua'er* from Min County, which commonly uses *Aou ling*, is a great example of the southern style of Taomin *hua'er*.

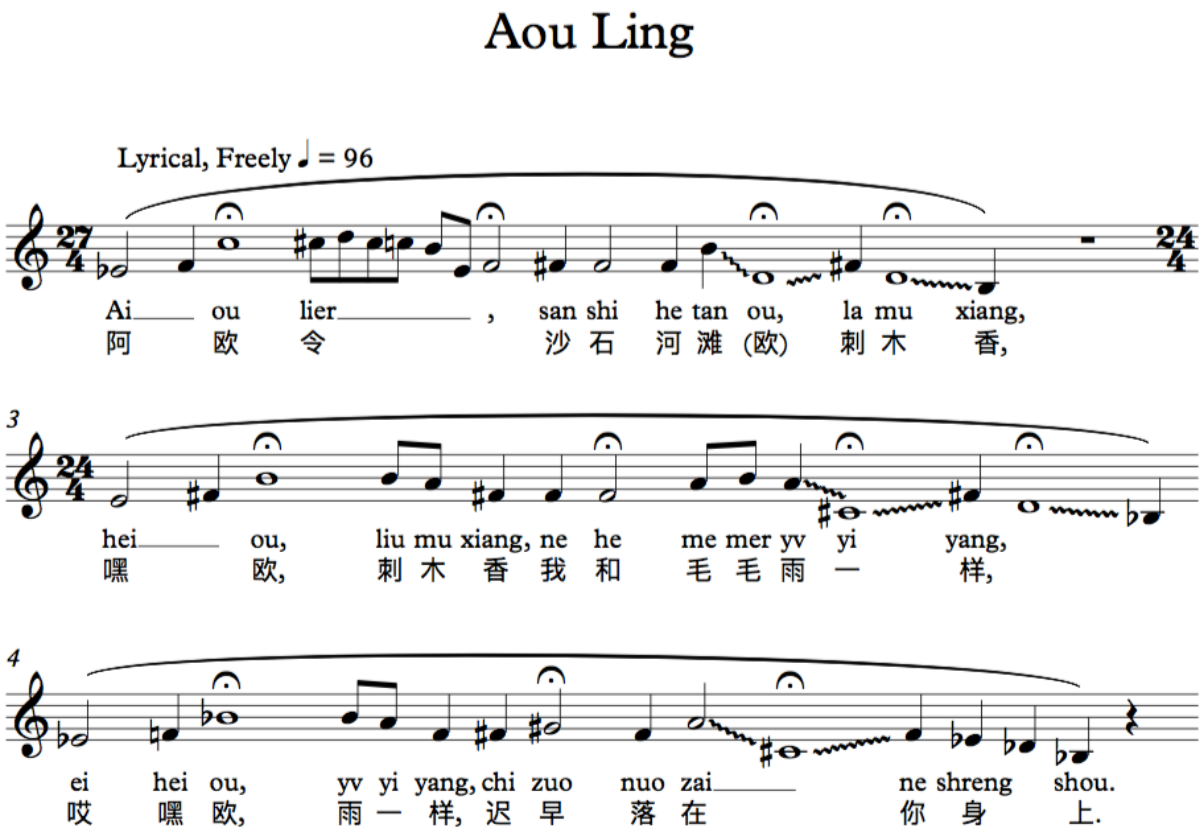

Figure 13. Transcription of *Aou Ling*[3]

[3] English translation: "Rocky river bed, fragrant acacia. I'm like the drizzling rain: sooner or later, I will fall on you."

This *Aou ling* was sung by Liu Guocheng, who is a world and national *hua'er* inheritor from Min county. As shown from the transcription, the southern style Taomin *hua'er* have three lines of lyrics. The *hua'er* singer himself is both the singer and composer as he is in charge of both singing and composing the lyrics at the same time. The tune is highly ornamented. Its pitch again does not follow the Western 12-note tuning. However, he starts each line generally on the same note, E or E-flat, and ends each line on roughly the same note, B or B-flat. With much wider leaps in the melody compared to the previous *lianglianer ling* example, Liu also starts with a sustaining note, in this case "Aou" and uses the declining ending. The rhythm is affected by the lyrics and breathing. He uses one breath to sing each line and takes a clear break before singing the next line. Taomin *hua'er* are known to be highly improvisational. During my fieldwork at the Erlangshan *hua'er* festival in 2011, I often saw groups of people of various ages who would gather together to sing. Usually, in each group, there are two main singers who carry on a "conversational competition" whereas others are there to watch and listen. Very popular *hua'er* singers may attract bigger crowds, and their audiences may gather around with recorders to record the best songs.

The following four photos were taken together at Erlang mountain festival in 2011. In Figure 14, we can see a small group of people standing on the right, whereas a smaller group squats on the left. Figure 15 shows audience members who are enjoying the *hua'er* singing. Figures 16 and 17 feature the two singers who are singing in the large crowd. The man in Figure 16 is Liu Guocheng, one the national *hua'er* inheritors. You can infer how popular he is in the region, as many people are using cell phones and voice

recorders to record his song. I interviewed Liu right after this *hua'er* festival, and he could not recall exactly what he had sung. He told me that the improvisation and singing happens so fast that he generally cannot remember what he had sung afterwards (personal interview 2011).

Figure 14. Erlang Mountain *Hua'er* Festival

Figure 15. People Listening to *Hua'er*

Figure 16. Liu Guocheng Sings *Hua'er*

Figure 17. Liu Guocheng's Opponent

Hezhou Hua'er

Figure 18. Map of Hezhou, Gansu and Qinghai Provinces

Hezhou *hua'er* is perhaps the most well-known type of *hua'er* in China due to its elaborate melodies. Hezhou was historically a city located at the border of Gansu and Qinghai provinces. According to Wang, as early as the Shiliuguo Period (304 CE to 439 CE), the geographic term Hezhou was already in use (Wang 1992). People of the Hezhou region speak similar dialects and are typically mutually intelligible. However, following the establishment of Qinghai province in 1928, Hezhou was renamed as Linxia Hui Autonomous County, while the western part of the city became part of today's Qinghai Province. This renaming of the area has led to controversy regarding the categorization of *hua'er*. Zhao Zongfu, a *hua'er* scholar from Qinghai province, tends to emphasize the contribution of *hua'er* from his own province, and has thus proposed to rename Hezhou *hua'er* as Hehuang *hua'er* (Zhao 1989:77-81). The term "Hehuang" refers to both the Huang River and the Yellow River, which flow from Qinghai to Gansu, implying that

hua'er originated in Qinghai province. Wang Pei, a *hua'er* scholar from Linxia Hui autonomous city in Gansu province, has meanwhile criticized such proposal to rename the categories, arguing that these *hua'er* should still be called Hezhou *hua'er* due to its historical roots in Hezhou (Wang 1992:4-5).

Even though there is agreement on both sides of this debate that the *hua'er* songs within the area should be categorized together, the controversy is regarding which of the modern provinces should have the honor of claiming this type of *hua'er* as its own. Thus, the question of naming has become highly political. During my fieldwork, I would often hear people from Qinghai referring to this style of *hua'er* as Hehuang *hua'er* whereas people from Gansu would continue to call it Hezhou *hua'er*. I had to be careful whenever using the terms in communication with *hua'er* communities of different province since, if I were to accidentally use the "wrong term", I would be quickly corrected and lectured on why it should be called Hezhou or Hehuang *hua'er*. In this dissertation, I will use the term Hezhou *hua'er* while recognizing that such *hua'er* may be characterized as Hehuang *hua'er* by some of my informants. To demonstrate its musical characteristics, below is the transcriptions of a popular Hezhou *hua'er* tune, *hezhou erling*.

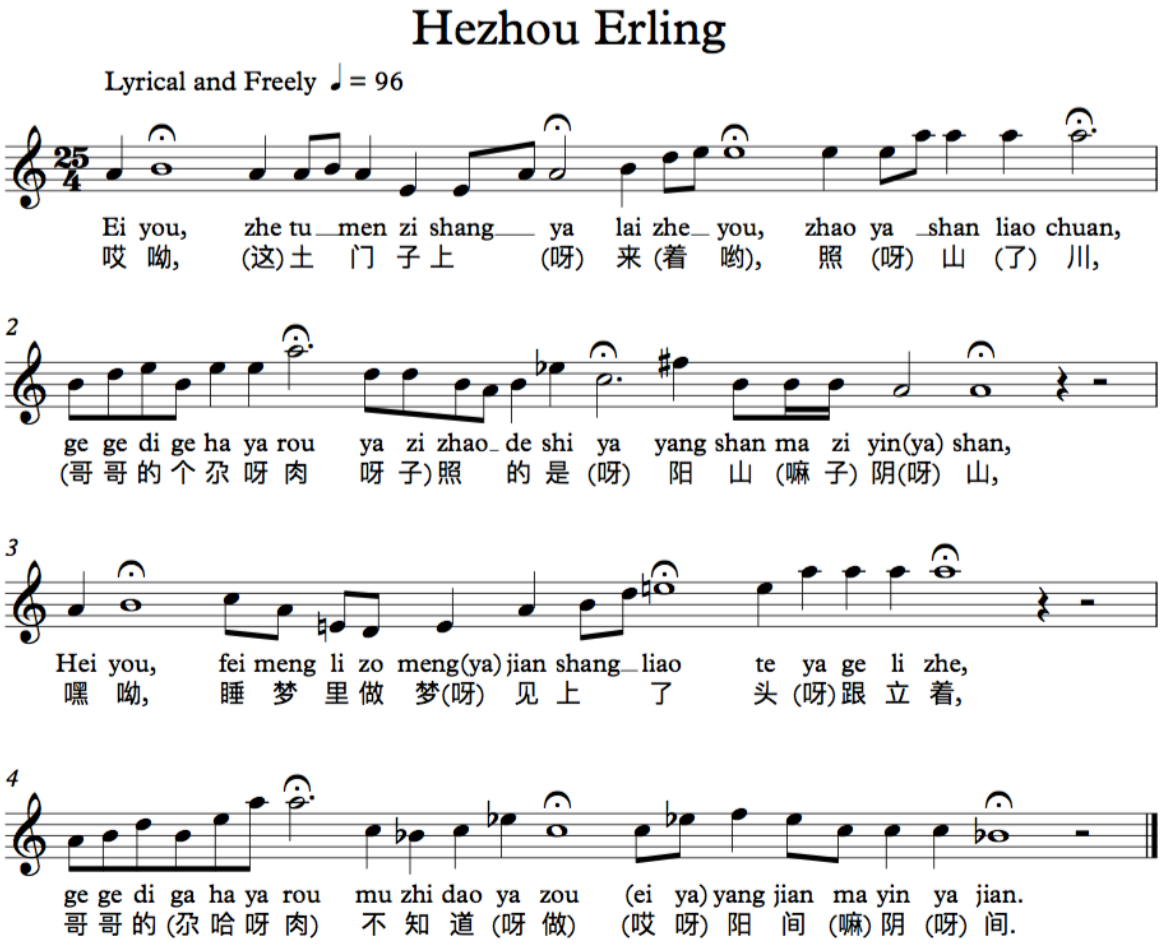

Figure 19. Transcription of *Hezhou Erling*[4]

I recorded this example, *Hezhou erling* in 2012 and it was sung by Ma Ersa. Ma Ersa has never received any formal music training. However, he had performed at many *hua'er* festivals and competitions. In this transcription, there are a few characteristics that contrast with the *taomin* examples: (1) I found his pitches are easier to find on a piano keyboard compared with the two *taomin hua'er* examples, as he tends to focus on a few main note: C, E, A, and B. This is rather common for many *hua'er* singers who sing

[4] English translation: "The sun shines on the mountain; is it a *yang* mountain or a *yin* mountain? I dreamt you were standing in front of me; was it in this lifetime or in the next lifetime?"

Hezhou *hua'er* since many have had experience performing with a digital piano or synthesizer. (2) This example contains much higher pitches and a wider range as compared to *taomin hua'er*. The two *taomin* examples are within about one octave (8 to 9 notes) and from either B3 to C5 or D4 to D5, whereas this example is from E4 to A5 covering 11 notes. (3) Compared to Liu Guocheng's singing, Ma's opening sustaining note and breaks between each line of lyrics were visible, but much shorter, making his singing fluent. (4) Ma sings expressively using vibrato and changes in volume to express his lyrics. The melody is elaborate and complex. The declining contour ending is not seen in this *ling*. Nonetheless, like the two *taomin* examples, he is not restricted to a particular time signature or pace.

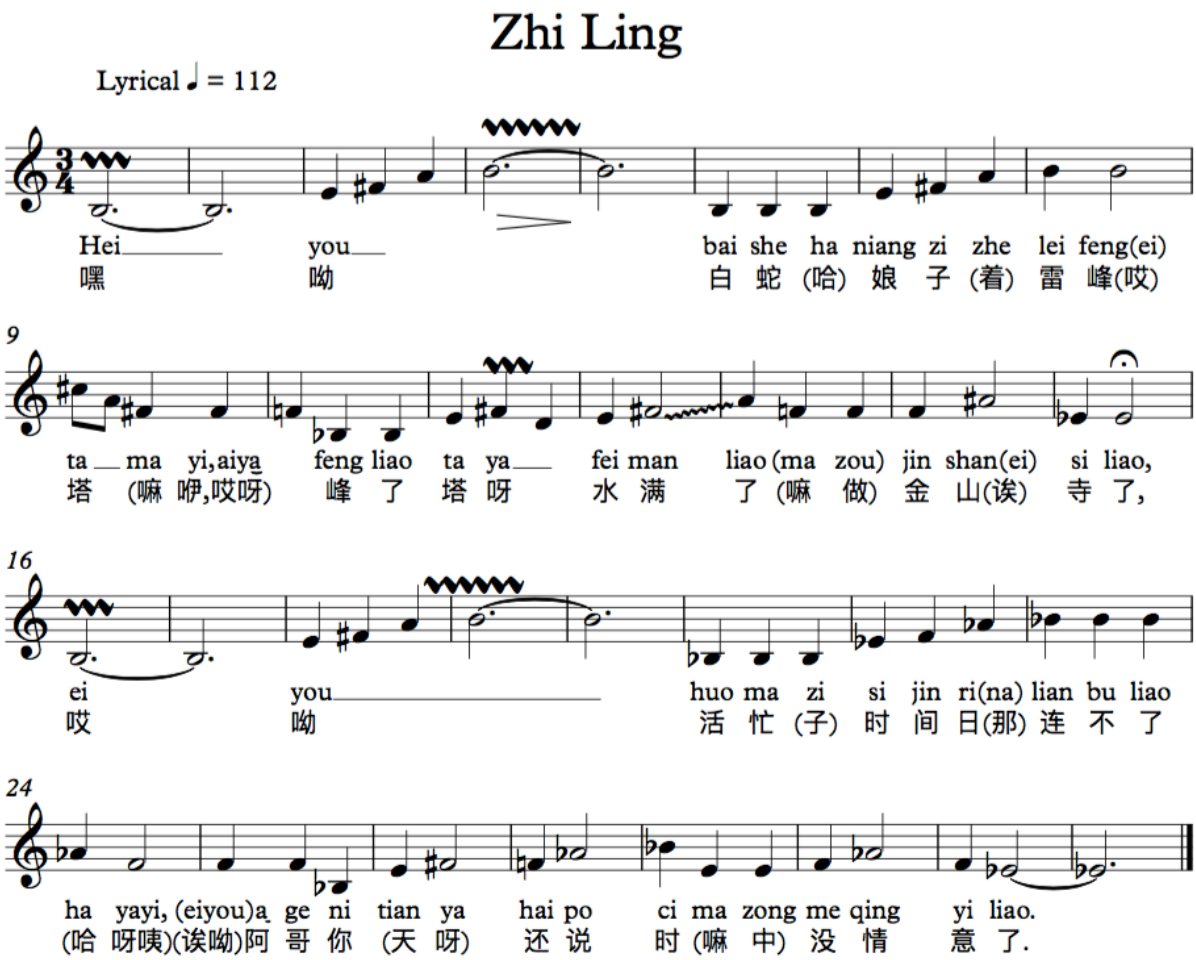

Figure 20. Transcription of *Zhi Ling*[5]

I recorded this example of *Zhi Ling* at a Datong *hua'er* teahouse in 2011. The singer's name is Liu Chenglan. She is 17 years old at the time, and often performs *hua'er* in the teahouse with a digital piano. As shown in the above transcription, her pitches and rhythm fit nicely into Western notation compared with Ma's singing, even though she has never received any formal music education. The song is sung in perfect 3/4 time

5 English translation: "White Snake is in Lei Feng Pagoda; the water fills the golden mountain temple. When we liked each other, we were too busy with our own things. Now, my lover, the time has come, but you have no affection."

signature including the opening sustaining note. Comparatively less careful with her vocal technique and faster than all the other examples, her pitches can mostly be located on a piano keyboard. Mostly self-taught, singing with a digital piano has made Liu's singing greatly influenced by the Western tuning system. This is an example of how adopting Western musical instruments has slowly standardized pitches and rhythm for amateur *hua'er* singers. Neither *hezhou hua'er* example uses the declining ending.

Figure 21. Liu Chenglan Sings in Red Peony *Hua'er* Teahouse, 2011

During my fieldwork, from 2011 to 2012, I often saw singers singing pre-composed or well-known *hua'er* songs on stage instead improvising on the spot. Perhaps this was due to a greater emphasis on the beauty of the melody and thus it is appreciated as staged performances. Below are photos from two of the *hua'er* festivals I attended in Qinghai province in 2011 and 2012. Both of these *hua'er* festivals were government-sponsored, staged performances. I will discuss various issues relating to government-sponsored *hua'er* festivals in chapter five.

Figure 22. Danma *Hua'er* Festival 2011

Figure 23. Xunhua *Hua'er* Festival 2012

Other Localized Hua'er

Due to the existence of various different waves of migration to other regions in northwest China, *hua'er* can be found in Ningxia Hui autonomous region as well as in some areas of Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. According to Wang, the reasons of migration were often related to military campaigns, new settlements of army garrisons, and workers and business people who arrived during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasty periods (1644–1912) (Wang 1992:32-45). In these cases, the *hua'er* lyrics reflect the culture of the local community. They do so by adopting Mandarin instead of Taomin or Hezhou dialects, and they are sung according to standardized melodies and fixed lyrics. There was little or no improvisation in the *hua'er* I encountered in Ningxia and Xinjiang during my fieldwork.

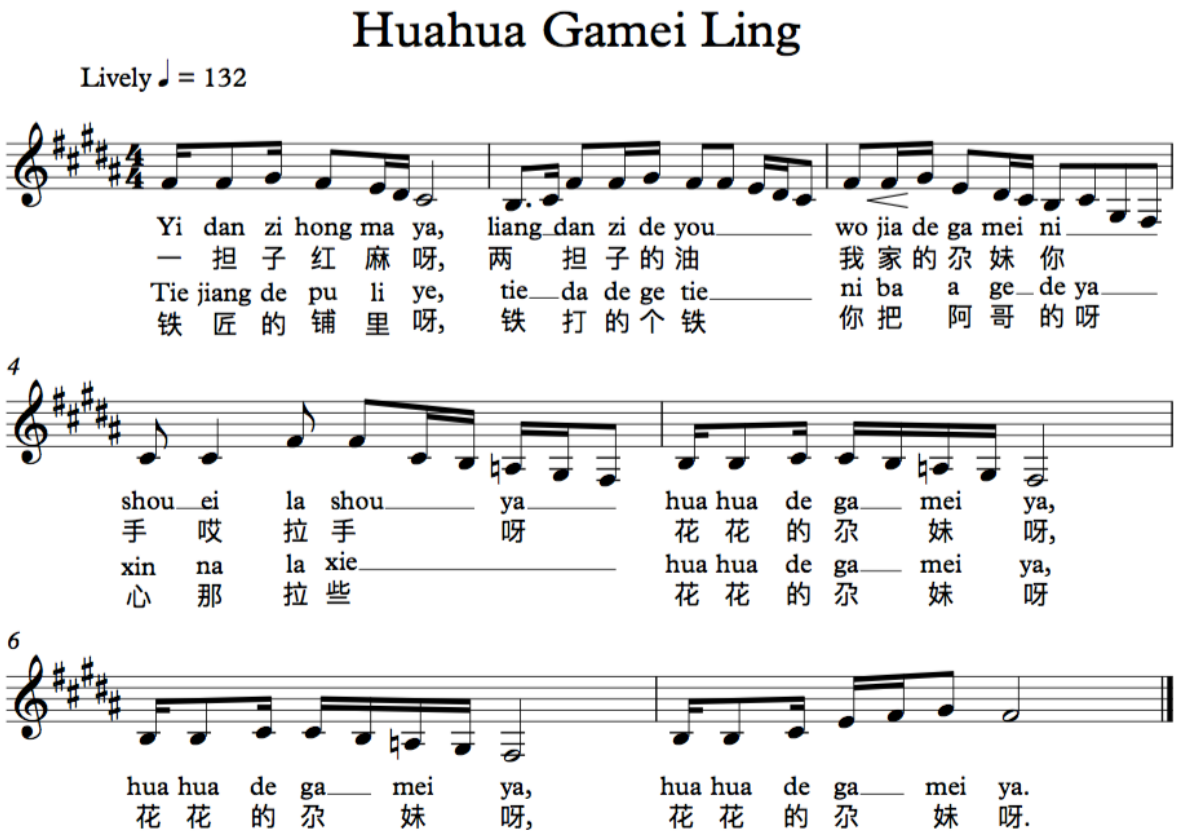

Figure 24. Transcription of *Huahua Gamei Ling*[6]

This example was sung by Su Shanlin from Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. Since the only *hua'er* inheritor from Xinjiang was Han Shengyuan, who already passed away, Su is one of the most well known *hua'er* singers in Xinjiang. He was a student of Han Shengyuan. He told me that Han was originally from Qinghai province. He moved to Xinjiang at a young age and thus brought *hua'er* to Xinjiang. Among all four transcriptions, Su's singing fits the best in the Western notation. It was sung in the key of B and in 4/4 time signature. All of his pitches can be easily found on a piano keyboard,

[6] English translation: "One bag of sorghum, two bags of oil, my love and I hand-in-hand. The blacksmith's shop makes iron; my lover makes me think of her."

and he sings with high level of energy. He improvised the last line of the lyrics into a *crescendo* cadence where each repeat of the lyrics gets louder and louder. In contrast with the earlier transcriptions, he also sang in Mandarin instead of *taomin* or *hezhou* dialect. In this case, *hua'er* has lost most of its original aesthetic qualities, such as the use of regional dialects and local slang terms, ornamented melodies and improvised lyrics. Therefore, such localized *hua'er* appear to be simplified versions of *hua'er* that are sung in localities at the periphery of the region where *hua'er* first became established.

To summarize, the first two *taomin* examples were sung in *taomin* dialect and use declining contour ending. Singers who sing *taomin* style *hua'er* enjoy a great deal of freedom in terms of pitch and rhythm. The melody was also conjunct without much ornamentation. The two *hezhou* examples were sung in *hezhou* dialect with wider range and higher pitches. Since digital pianos are often used in the region, *hua'er* singers are often influenced by the Western tuning system and a Westernized sense of rhythm. Most noticeably, the *hezhou* melodies are elaborate and *hezhou hua'er* singers use more vocal technique to express their lyrics. Finally, *hua'er* from Xinjiang province was commonly sung in Mandarin and likely to be sung by professionally trained singers. The pitches and rhythm were standardized. Thus, these five transcriptions provided herein not only showcase regional variations of *hua'er*, but also how *hua'er* is sung differently by individual *hua'er* singers based on their own unique music experience.

Structures and Categories of *Hua'er* Lyrics

Hua'er generally range from three to six lines of lyrics, and each line has a fixed number of words, depending on the tune. Mostly commonly, lyrics follow one or two rhymes.

Below is an example of *hua'er* with four lines of lyrics following one rhyme.

1. 阴山阳山倒对山 (*shan*)	Mountains in the shade or exposed to sun
2. 好不过挡羊的草山 (*shan*)	Not as good as the grass mountain blocking the sheep
3. 尕妹出来着门前站 (*zhan*)	Little sister who stands beside the door
4. 活像是才开的牡丹 (*dan*)	Looks like the peony that just bloomed. (Ke 2002:115)

In this example, the first two lines of lyrics don't have a coherent meaning like lines three and four do. Instead they are there to establish the rhyme "–an". Lines three and four are what the singer wants to say that follows the same rhyme "–an" at the end of each line.

Some *hua'er* may have more than one rhyme. Below is an example of *hua'er* with six lines of lyrics with two rhymes at the end of the sentence.

1. 生铁的锅里焜馍馍 (*me*)	Cooking bread in a caste iron pan
2. 烟灰大 (*da*)	Lot of smoke
3. 小心把手儿黑下 (*ha*)	Careful not to get your hands black
4. 网上的MM爱GG (*ge*)	Girls love boys on the Internet

5. 胆子大		How courageous
	(*da*)	
6. 心上人的话儿贴下		Leave words on his blog
	(*ha*)	(Zhao 2010:27)

In this example, similarly, the first three lines of lyrics don't have a coherent meaning with lines four, five and six. Nonetheless, they help to set up the rhyme pattern for the lines that follow. In this case, the first and fourth lines end on "–e" whereas lines two, three, five and six end on "–a". Depending on the tune, the two-rhyme *hua'er* songs may vary in rhyme patterns. Since *hua'er* singers improvise their lyrics, they need to keep the rules of tune and the rhyme in mind. Otherwise, their opponent may tease them for making mistakes with the rhyme patterns.

Themes

According to Ding Zuoshu, there are two types of *hua'er* lyrics: *Benzi hua'er*, and *San hua'er*. *Benzi hua'er* refers to pre-composed *hua'er* lyrics that recount historical events. They are generally long and have set lyrics. The composers of those lyrics are unknown—indeed, the end products may be composites of multiple singers—since *hua'er* have been passed down orally. Some examples of such *hua'er* include those in which lyrics relate famous Chinese tales such as the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, the Journey to the West, Xue Rengui's Campaign to the East, the Tales of the Marshes, and the Yang Family Generals. These *Benzi hua'er* may be performed in a household, at a wedding or a funeral, as well as at other social gatherings. During my fieldwork, I did not find any performance of *Benzi hua'er.*

On the other hand, *San hua'er* is the most common. They are a shorter type, often improvised and performed at *hua'er* festivals (Ding 2002: 37). For the *hua'er* singers I interviewed, among 70-80% of the *San hua'er* they sang were about romantic love. About 20-25% of the *hua'er* contained explicit and erotic lyrics, whereas 5% of the *hua'er* songs had other themes. For example, they may convey personal greetings, praise directed at an individual, or express thoughts regarding topics as varied as marriage, family issues, conflict, problems, philosophy, etc.

Romantic Hua'er

Love is a favorite theme for *hua'er* songs. There are many different tropes for expressing love, such as love at first sight, sweet love, bitter love, resentment, regret, passionate love, missing each other, promises, misunderstandings, affairs, etc. The love discussed in the lyrics could be entirely true or merely for flirtation. However, as Jiang Zhaowa puts it, "the affection needs to [seem to] be real and true. Otherwise, it is pointless to sing. If a couple is getting along, they could sing how much they love each other; otherwise, they may be fighting or even swearing at each other while singing." (Jiang 2012, personal interview).

Below is an example where the couple enjoys the sweetness of their love.

进去个小峡是羊沟湾	After going into the valley is *Yanggouwan*
红麻花开下的爆了	You see an explosion of *Hongma* flowers
尕妹妹的嘴比蜜甜	Little sister's lips are sweeter than honey
浑身麻给了九千	My whole body tingles so much after kissing them.
	(Ma 2012, personal interview)

Singing from the perspective of a man, he expresses his feelings and excitement after kissing his lover.

Meanwhile, this example below discusses an impossible love.

癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉,	A toad wants to taste the flesh of a swan,
吃不到口,	But can not taste it,
井底里修仙去了。	[So he] jumped into a well to practice Taoist rites.
老和尚想摸少奶奶的手,	An old monk wants to hold a young woman's hand,
真没羞,	How shameful,
公馆里化缘去了。	[So he] went to a mansion to collect alms.

In Chinese fairytales, swan and toad are like the Western "beauty and the beast". The singer compares himself to a toad that is ugly and vulgar whereas his counterpart is as beautiful and elegant as a swan. Beyond their drastic physical disparity, their social identity also prevents them from being together as he compares their love to that of a Buddhist monk who is destined to stay single forever yet falls in love with a married woman. These lyrics express the unsatisfied desire from the perspective of a man. It might perhaps be sung with the purpose of testing out whether a desired person is interested in the singer while being overly exaggerating their differences, or to tell other listeners that he has decided to move on, as it is impossible for the singer and the woman to be together.

Sexual Hua'er

Many *hua'er* contain erotic lyrics, which may be expressions of one's sexual desire or may describe a sexual experience from the perspective of either a man or a woman.

However, erotic *hua'er* are rarely discussed, whether publicly or even in the Chinese or English academic literature. Since sex is viewed as a sensitive and private topic in China, sexual *hua'er* is considered too vulgar and shameful to sing in public. As a result, *hua'er* singers are often looked down upon, and yet erotic *hua'er* are quite commonly sung during informal *hua'er* festivals and social gatherings. Since the tune of erotic *hua'er* could be the same as any other tunes, I will focus on the lyrics of erotic *hua'er*.

Li Jinhui, Xining Cultural Department folklorist and researcher, told me that, "we were told to collect only the *jinghua*" (精华, lit. 'the essence' or 'the finest') of Chinese music. In contrast, "songs with sexual and erotic lyrics are considered vulgar" (personal interview, 2013). Li himself disagreed with this prejudicial attitude toward sexual *hua'er* songs, as he pointed out that, "the language used in erotic *hua'er* is highly refined, and rich in emotion." Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I discovered that many *hua'er* scholars and researchers have their own private collections of "vulgar" *hua'er*, and that they recognize the value of these *hua'er* songs, yet are unable to publish any scholarly research about it due to its taboo nature. Nonetheless, I was amazed at how expressive those sexual *hua'er* lyrics are, in contrast to the mainstream representation of *hua'er* and other folksongs in China. Inappropriate political lyrics and sexual lyrics are likely to be removed from publications and performances, are thus almost unheard of by most Chinese.

The first sexual *hua'er* I learned of was from Ding Zuoshu, a retired chancellor of the Kangle County Party School, recounting his memory of a *hua'er* duet that he

participated in at the Lianhua Mountain *hua'er* festival several years prior. Below are the lyrics that a woman sang to him and his response.

[女] 我想你着口口儿疼	[F] I miss you so much that my hole hurts,
到底把尕想的很	Really missing you a lot,
你有啥好药打一针。	Do you have any good medicine to inoculate me?
[男] 治你的病我有好良方	[M] To cure your sickness I have a great cure,
我的针一把五寸长	My needle is five inches long,
出来进去走两趟	Go in and out a couple of times,
不由你着水水淌	You might be wet,
好呢不好你思想	But you can decide if this is the right medicine or not. (personal interview 2012).

This example demonstrates a conversational *hua'er* with erotic lyrics. The conversation starts with an expression of sexual desire expressed by a female singer, followed by an expression of willingness by the male singer. Both singers are bold and straightforward in expressing their sexual desires. This type of *hua'er* could be sung among a small group of close friends. It is possible that such a song could even result in a sexual relationship but, most importantly, the man has confirmed the woman that he understands her desire and that he is willing to satisfy her in the way she desires. Ding expressed to me that he was surprised at how bold this woman was to sing these lyrics in front of a small group, but nonetheless, he responded to the woman with even more explicit lyrics (personal interview 2012).

This second *hua'er* example was related to me by Ji Xucai, a former official of the Min County Cultural Department.

碗架头儿上摞碗呢	On my shelf are bowls,
撩襟底下有个泉儿眼呢	Under my dress is the fountainhead of a spring,
把哥哥的萝卜泡软呢	Which can soften the daikon of my lover.
	(personal interview, 2011).

Again, this *hua'er* expresses sexual desire from the perspective of a woman. She is luring her lover by openly suggesting a sexual relationship.

Below is another example of a female singer, who sang this to a male judge during a *hua'er* singing competition hosted in Hezheng County (Zhang, personal interview 2012). Flirtation is common in *hua'er* lyrics. Despite what the female singer sung, she may or may not be interested in the male judge at all.

现在的年轻人干球胆	The young men these days are useless
我喜欢你这个渣渣胡老汉	I like you, the one with the beard.
	(personal interview 2012)

Based on my fieldwork, I agree with Schimmelpenninck that female *hua'er* singers use explicit content more cautiously compared to their male counterparts (Schimmelpenninck 2013). I learned a lot more explicit *hua'er* lyrics from my male *hua'er* singers than female singers. Nonetheless, women do use *hua'er* to openly express their sexual preferences, desires and even to propose engaging in sexual relations.

This next example is from Ma Ersa, a Hui male *hua'er* singer from Linxia county.

杨四郎死在空沟里	Yang Silang died in an empty valley,
尕骡子搬领去了	A mule carried his body,
我搂着怀里还想你	I hold you in my arms yet still miss you,
再想了钻不到肉里	I miss so much that I am not yet inside you.
	(personal interview 2012)

In the example above, the first two lines allude to a famous historical story in order to set up the rhyme, and the two lines thereafter are the improvised part of the song. This *hua'er* is sung from the perspective of a man who expresses sexual desire for a woman, presumably someone who is physically present and listening to his song. He might be using this *hua'er* to test the waters and determine if the woman is interested in having a sexual relationship with him.

Besides those that suggest sexual relationships, there are also *hua'er* that describe past sexual experiences. Xu Zhengwen, a former official of the Kangle County Cultural Department, shared this *hua'er* with me:

缸二两，二两缸	A vat that weighs two ounces, a two-ounce vat
手搬肩膀脚蹬墙	Hands grabbing the shoulders, legs kicking the wall
耳环摇的吭啷啷	Earrings going kang-lang-lang as they shake.
	(personal interview, 2011)

Below are two similar examples of *hua'er* that describe sexual scenes from the perspective of a man. I learned both of these examples from Ding Zuoshu, the same source as my first example above.

酒两壶的两壶酒	Wine in two bottles, two bottles of wine,
把尕妹叫上磨里走	Asking little sister to come to the flour mill,
衬住磨扇剁两球	We make love next to the grindstone.
	(personal interview 2012)

灯盏放在了灯台上	Put the lantern on the stick
灯花们落在了柜上	Ashes fall onto the shelf
尕奶奶顶在腔子上	Beautiful breasts against my chest
尕嘴里舌头喂上	Beautiful mouth with my tongue in it.
	(personal interview 2012)

According to many *hua'er* singers I have interviewed (Ke Yang, Ma Ersa, Ding Zuoshu, etc, personal interviews, 2011-2012), arranged marriages are common in the region where *hua'er* was first popularized. Divorce, on the other hand, was almost impossible at the time. Unhappily married men and woman could thus use *hua'er* festivals as a way to find romantic love. Thus, sexual relations among singers is not at all uncommon. In chapter four, I will draw upon interviews from my fieldwork to discuss the history of *hua'er* festivals and its social context.

Other Hua'er

There are *hua'er* songs that focus on themes beyond love and sex. For example, philosophical *hua'er* is a popular theme. It often has an educational function to teach important life lessons to others.

羊皮筏不如木头筏	Sheepskin rafts are not as good as wooden ones
木头筏坐上稳哩	Wooden rafts are more stable
口头话不如心里话	Words from the mouth aren't like those from the heart
口头话把人哄哩	Words from your mouth can lie.
	(Wu 2008:204)

According to Wu, the sheepskin raft is a common way of transportation in the Northwestern region (Wu 2008:204). The singer draws a comparison between sheepskin rafts and words from one's mouth, which are not as good and trustworthy as wooden rafts and words from one's heart. This *hua'er* teaches everyone to not to be fooled by beautiful words, and that one needs to know someone's heart first.

There are other *hua'er* that describe or complain of personal issues as well. In this example, it is sung from a perspective of a man whose lover was arranged to marry someone else. Meanwhile, he was hired as a slave.

十八的姑娘要出嫁	Eighteen year old girl is going to get married
配给了十岁的尕娃	To a ten year old kid
又受孽障着又挨打	Not only she fell bad but often got beaten
把我当长工着雇下	They also hired me as their slave.
	(Wu 2008: 201)

This type of arranged marriage was especially common between the rich and the poor. A girl coming from a poor family could likely be sold to a rich family to become the wife of a much younger, older or disabled man. Not only would these girls take the responsibilities of a wife, but also those of a servant or slave (Wu 2008: 201).

Transmission of *Hua'er*

Hua'er are transmitted orally and informally. Anyone who sings *hua'er* could be considered a *hua'er* singer, and historically there was no demand for professional *hua'er* singers. Transmission of *hua'er* would begin due to personal interest, and an amateur singer would learn how to sing discreetly by attending different *hua'er* festivals and exposing himself or herself to the many *hua'er* tunes sung there, each having an individualistic flavor. The singer in training would thus learn by imitating the tunes he or she heard before starting to improvise or modify his or her own lyrics and melodies. Eventually, an accomplished singer would be able to improvise *hua'er* lyrics and

melodies with ease. This cumulative experience of hearing and singing *hua'er* songs gradually builds up a singer's capability and musicianship.

Although musicologists (e.g., Wang 1992, 2007 and Zhang 2004) have transcribed and published *hua'er* songs in neatly written cipher notation, the singers themselves do not learn their art by reading musical scores. In *hua'er* songbooks, the music is transcribed with neat melodies, time signatures and key signatures. However, in real-life performances, such musical characteristics are not to be expected. In fact, even an individual singer will sing his or her songs differently each time. This style of transmission has contributed greatly to the regional and personal diversity of each *hua'er* song, as discussed above. I will examine changes in transmission today and corresponding changes in *hua'er* aesthetics and practices in Chapter five.

Conclusion

To conclude, *hua'er* is a fluid oral tradition from the northwestern region with wide range of regional, personal, linguistic, melodic variations. In this chapter, I have provided insights on the traditional practices and aesthetics of *hua'er*, such as their highly improvisational singing style, their humorous and explicit lyrics, transmission method, and the use of local slang terms. In the following chapters, I will discuss the social and political environment of China since the 20th century as well as the social stigma of *hua'er* practice within *hua'er* communities.

Chapter Three

Defining *Hua'er* Socially

In this chapter, I will first provide insights on the social environment and the changing status of folksongs in general in 20th- and 21st-century China. Following that, I will discuss the social status of *hua'er* within the context of local communities, including local taboos concerning the singing of *hua'er* as well as the local social status of *hua'er* singers.

Social Political Environment in China (20th-21st Centuries)

Folksongs are by definition the music of the commoners, though in China they have, since the earliest written historical records, been collected and used by members of the ruling class either as a source of inspiration for the composition of court music or as a way for the rulers to understand the lives of their subjects. *Hua'er* is a form of oral history where *hua'er* singers' experiences and opinions are recorded in the lyrics. By examining *hua'er* lyrics from different periods of time in the 20th and 21st centuries, we can see how *hua'er* singers have experienced political and social tumult, and how the social status of *hua'er* and its singers changed drastically.

Searching for a New National Identity

In 1912, the Republic of China replaced China's last dynasty (1644–1912). As part of the resultant political transition, there was an emergent need for a new national

identity to be expressed through music, and folksongs filled this gap. One of the most important scholarly movements relating to non-Western music during this time was the Peking University Folksong Collection Movement, which started around 1918 and lasted until 1936 (Xiao 2007:23). Wang Guangqi, a leader of this movement, believed that to establish aesthetic standards for "national music" scholars should collect folksongs and then modify them using "scientific" Western music theory (Xiao 2007:24). Zhou Zuoren echoes the similar idea that "the purpose of the folksong collection movement is (1) for research purposes and (2) for the arts". He continues, "folksongs are important resources for folklore studies. We should collect them for research first…then evaluate and select using a critical perspective and based on their artistic merits…these will be the sounds of our nation" (Xiao 2007:27). Thus, during this period, folksongs were collected, evaluated and used as the foundation for building a national sound and identity.

Through this song collection movement, many grassroots folksongs were recognized and published for the first time in the Peking University journal (Xiao 2007:28). This transition from grassroots, oral tradition of the common folk to becoming the focus of the nation's top scholarly journal marked a drastic change that folksongs had heretofore not received. In fact, the first collection of *hua'er* songs, Yuan Fuli's *30 Hua'er Songs*, was published during this same period (Yuan 1925).

Explicit Politicization of the Arts

The Communist Leader Chairman Mao had different ideas on the evaluation of folksongs and their use for political purposes. In a series of influential speeches in

Yan'an 1942 known as the Talks to the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, he outlined two principles that would come to guide mainstream aesthetic theory in China for the remainder of the twentieth century. First, literature and art should serve political purposes, meaning the purposes of the CCP. In short, art was to have a political motivation and not to be thought of as simply for "beauty" or "art for art's sake". Second, artistic production should aim to for as wide an audience as possible, being fully inclusive, neither elitist nor exclusive, while aiming to raise the political awareness and "quality" of the masses (Mao 1967). The Yan'an talks were particularly focused on drama, novels, short stories, poetry, visual arts and music. As a result most folksongs, including *hua'er*, were modified so as to highlight overtly political lyrics.

During the Cultural Revolution period (1966–76), the leftist interpretation of Mao's 1942 Yan'an Talks took an extreme stance. Most traditional art forms were banned. *Hua'er* songs were denigrated as "poisonous weeds" and "pornographic songs" while *hua'er* festivals were no longer held. According to Ke Yang, "because *hua'er* are love songs, they were banned for the entire decade of the cultural revolution. Soldiers were even stationed on each mountain to forbid people from singing *hua'er*" (personal interview, 2012). Well-known *hua'er* singers were discriminated against and publicly humiliated, just as intellectuals and artists were across the nation. Ethnographer Zhang Junren, writing about this period, discusses the experience of a famous *hua'er* singer, Zhu Zhonglu, "the 'King of *hua'er*' [who] suddenly became the 'King of Poisonous Weed'. A large wooden sign was hung on Zhu's neck. Countless times he was humiliated and was forced to parade down the street" (Zhang 2004:75). Zhu was then called *niuguisheshen*

(lit. “bull ghost and snake spirit”) and imprisoned together with three other musicians in a cowshed for four years. A *hua’er* song Zhu composed during his imprisonment is shown below (Zhang 2004:81–82). This *hua’er* express his frustration during the period of the Cultural Revolution.

尕蛛蛛摆下的八卦阵	Small spider sets the eight trigrams,
蜜蜂哈孽障	Bees, vile spawn,
打灯蛾跌的这火坑	Moths lured into the fire pit,
死哩吗活哩是由你们整	To die or to live is up to you to decide.
尕妹妹孽障	Little sister, vile spawn,
阿哥哈跌的这难中	Your brother fell into calamity.
日头上来橙子红	The sun comes up like a red orange,
月亮上来是宫灯	The moon comes up likes a palace lantern.
豆大的眼泪哗啦啦滚	My tears are the size of peas, falling down,
阿哥哈塞的这牛棚	Your brother lives in a cowshed.

Two years after the Cultural Revolution, in 1979, the ban on *hua’er* singing and *hua’er* festivals was lifted. According to Ding and Ke, the *hua’er* festival in 1979 was quite an incredible and memorable experience, following a decade of suppression. *Hua’er* festivals popped up like mushrooms, and people were so happy to attend *hua’er* festivals and sing *hua’er* again (personal interview, 2012).

Institutionalization of Folksongs

The Peking University Song Collection movement was comprised primarily of amateur collectors and folksong aficionados’ submissions, without the involvement of scholars and academics. After the cultural revolution, a large number of scholars and

musicologists participated in the further collection and study of folk music. An important project during this period was the compilation of the "Chinese Ethnicity Folk Music Collection" from 1979 to 2009, organized by the Ministry of Culture and Chinese Musicians Association, and was recognized by the central government as one of its "Projects of National Importance". As the result of this 30-year project, ten collections of folk music from all of China's provinces and municipalities were compiled. *Hua'er* songs were included in four large volumes of the resulting *Anthology of Chinese Folksongs*, namely, the volumes on Qinghai, Xinjiang, Gansu and Ningxia. Furthermore, this project give birth to the first and second generations of modern Chinese musicologists and ethnomusicologists to do extensive fieldwork for music collection in the twentieth century. As a result, *hua'er* studies and research blossomed during this period.

This period however, is also known for Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, which drove multitudes of young people from their villages behind into the cities to find better jobs. Thus, even though folk music came during this period to be recognized for its cultural value and institutionalized by scholars, it nonetheless also faced a drastic decline in popularity among its own communities due to overarching economic and demographic shifts.

Yuanshengtai Movement

The term *yuanshengtai* was first used in August 2003 during Yang Liping's dance production named "The Grand Original Yunnan Ethnic Dance Musical: Dynamic

Yunnan" (Yun Nan Ying Xiang) (De 2004). *Yuanshengtai* literally means "original ecology", and it is used "in the context of musical styles that suggest a high level of authenticity and untouched flavor of performance" (Yang 2009). Since then, many folksongs have begun to minimize elements that are seen as reflecting "Western influences" such that the songs can be performed in their most "authentic" version. For example, folksongs may be sung in regional dialects or in vernacular languages instead of in standard Mandarin. Singers typically wear hand-made and embroidered cotton costumes, but others may decide to show more skin instead of the shiny and colorful polyester stage costumes. Performers sing folksongs without the accompaniment of Western musical instruments. The social context reflected in the lyrics often relates to a historical cultural context; for example, a song may reminisce about weaving, hunting, or a love story from the time before iPhones and computers were available. *Yuanshengtai* music thus creates a sense of exoticism that mainstream Chinese audiences had not experienced in modern memory. If a mainstream audience can understand the lyrics, or even worse if audience members share a similar social and cultural context, the *yuanshengtai* performance would be considered "inauthentic" and somehow "polluted" by Westernization and modernization.

During this time, *hua'er* singers competed with other folksongs singers on a national stage, the National Young Singer's Competition. The National Young Singer's Competition is the most highly watched event in China to focus on non-celebrity singers. Suonan Sunbin, who competed in 2006 and 2010, and Ma Quan, who competed in 2007

and 2010, introduced *hua'er* to mainstream Chinese audiences via this televised program. However, neither of them won an award in the *yuanshengtai* singing competition.

ICH Today

The term ICH was introduced to China after the 2003 UNESCO convention. Since then, Chinese scholars have attempted to differentiate this term from the many other existing Chinese vocabulary terms that relate to traditional cultural practices. Ironically, even down to current day, the abbreviation for ICH in Chinese continues to be *feiyi* (lit. 'not heritage'). Together with 518 other cultural practices, *hua'er* was named as an element of Chinese ICH in 2006. In 2009, as one among14 Chinese cultural practices, it was included in the UNESCO World ICH list.

Given the changes discussed above, from the suppression of folk music, to its collection during a period of decline, to a resurgence of popularity as *yuanshengtai* art, to its current institutionalization as ICH, we see that drastic ideological and social changes have occurred in how folk music is appreciated in China. *Hua'er* songs were first seen as needing a "scientific" touch, then were required to serve a political ideology, were later described as "poisonous weeds" and "pornography", and eventually have become elements of a nationally important collection and preservation project. At the turn of the twenty-first century, "authenticity" became important to everyone, and "heritage" is the current term for folksongs. Gradually, *hua'er* has therefore gained increasing recognition and admiration, both by scholars and by mainstream audiences. In communities where it is sung, however, its reception has been more complicated.

Social Political Environment within *Hua'er* Communities

In the following section, I will analyze the social status of *hua'er* in its local context. As *hua'er* became more known outside of *hua'er* community via the process of ICH recognition, people outside of the *hua'er* community often did not know the prejudice that *hua'er* singers must bear. In fact, it came as a surprise to me during my fieldwork that there are many taboos regarding how *hua'er* can be performed, and many *hua'er* singers and family members feel embarrassment and discrimination.

Taboos in Singing Hua'er

花椒树上你甭上	Don't climb pepper trees,
上去时树杈儿挂哩	If you do, there are thorns.
庄子里去了你甭唱	Don't sing when you go to a village,
胡唱时老汉们骂哩	If you do, old men will disapprove.

Singing or listening to *Hua'er* is forbidden for various occasions within the communities where the art form is practiced. *Hua'er* singers generally cannot sing together with a relative of the opposite gender. For example, it would be unthinkable for *hua'er* to be performed by a daughter and her father, by a son and his mother, by an uncle and niece, by a daughter-in-law and father-in-law, etc. A common practice during *hua'er* festivals, as a result, is that singers generally ask each other's family names and the village where they are from first, so as to avoid singing with anyone who could possibly be a relative (Ke, 2002: 55).

Hua'er also cannot be sung within a household or near a village. Zhao Zongfu points out that a note in Chen Yuya's *Xibei Guanchaji* ("Inspection of Northwestern

Provinces"), published in 1936, states that "Ten miles of the Baima temple region have settlements of Hui, Han and Tibetans who live side by side. There are a total of forty families, and every teahouse and flour mill has a similar rule, namely, that if Han, Hui and Tibetans argue with each other, the fine is twelve coins. For both residents and visitors, if one is found singing near a village, he or she will be whipped one hundred and twenty times" (Zhao 1989: 257). In Wang Pei's *A Study of Hezhou Hua'er*, he also points out that, "before 1949, when traveling from Lanzhou to Hezhou, when passing the mountain in Lintao, there was a goat head hanging from the tree to show that, if people sing *hua'er* here, they would be punished with a fine in an amount equivalent to one goat. Similar examples are described by Wang who states that, in Linxia and Yongjing county, there were written rules for villagers including that, "if found singing *hua'er* [in the village], the light punishment would be to pay for one goat, otherwise you may be kicked out of the village". He even described that two villagers who were found singing *hua'er* were beaten up by the landlord, and one of them was beaten to death (Wang 1992: 3). Ren discusses that, after the Cultural Revolution, "some *hua'er* singers were sent to 'special camps' with hooligans and thieves for re-education. In extreme cases, people were killed for singing *hua'er*" (Ren 1982:190). Although the fines of one goat, public whippings and re-education programs are no longer in practice, if a *hua'er* singer is found performing near a village, he or she is likely to be yelled at, and possibly driven away, even to this day. As discussed in Chapter one, Suonan Sunbin said that singing *hua'er* in public is "equivalent to sharing pornography in public," and he was personally chased out of a village by a group of villagers with shovels (Suonan, personal interview

2012). He said that, historically, *hua'er* festivals took place in the most remote areas possible, so that the performers would be far enough from the villages.

His personal experience of being chased out of a village by the villagers did not occur in the distant past. In fact, during my fieldwork in June 2012, six years after *hua'er* had been selected as a national ICH, I experienced something similar. I was invited by an official of the Xining Cultural Department to attend a *hua'er* festival in Xunhua Salar autonomous county, in Qinghai province that was being organized by the local cultural department. Xining Cultural department had been organizing staged *hua'er* festivals for several years at the time, contracting with popular *hua'er* singers from the Northwestern provinces during the *hua'er* festival season to take them on tour to perform at different locations around Qinghai province. These *hua'er* singers generally have their own day jobs, most of them as farmers. In 2011, the Xining Cultural Department organized 17 staged *hua'er* festivals in a single month, involving 56 singers from Qinghai province, together with 24 singers from other Northwestern provinces (personal interview, Xiaohua Yang 2011).

This time, they had erected a stage in Xunhua Salar ethnic autonomous county. Xunhua Salar ethnic autonomous county is the only Salar ethnic autonomous region in China, but other ethnicities including Hui, Tibetans and Han also live in the region. Islamic culture and traditions are dominant in the county, as majority of its population are Muslim. Mengda Tianchi, a mountain lake that had recently been developed into a tourist destination, was chosen as the venue for this year's *hua'er* festival. The center stage was set right at the entrance of Mengda Tianchi. According to Yan Zongcheng, the official

from the Xining Cultural Department, one of the reasons to have a *hua'er* festival at Mengda Tianchi was to attract tourist to this area, despite the fact that the area was not historically a *hua'er* festival site. Below are some of the photos taken during my attendance at this *hua'er* festival. In the Figure 25, you can see Mengda Tianchi directly behind the *hua'er* stage. Figure 26 show the Muslim audience members who are attending the staged festival.

Figure 25. The Setup of the *Hua'er* Stage

Figure 26. Local Audience

I arrived together with the performers, two nights before the festival. The night before the performance, over forty villagers came to destroy the performance stage, and were partially successful in doing so. On the morning of the *hua'er* festival, the stage had to be re-constructed before the show could go on. According to a managerial official from the Xining cultural department, Yang Xiaohua, "the local villagers are still conservative. They don't understand how much *hua'er* has changed" (personal interview,

Yang 2012). There are many reasons why the arrangement of this particular *hua'er* festival may have offended local villagers. For example, the main stage was quite close to nearby villages, and music and singing in general contradict with local Islamic teachings. But, most importantly, singing *hua'er* in public is still regarded as unacceptable despite its international and national recognition. As Yang Xiaohua puts it, "the purpose of many of the governmental organized *hua'er* festivals today is to show everyone how much *hua'er* has changed [from its vulgar to more civilized content]" (personal interview 2012). In the following section, I will discuss how singing *hua'er* are often seen as shameful.

Shame Associated with Hua'er

"Daddy, after you make enough money, could you quit singing *hua'er*?" a six-year-old boy asked his father, Yang Quanxu. Yang is a popular Tu ethnic *hua'er* singer. He admitted during an interview that, "even though *hua'er* is now a world ICH, it still doesn't change how people think of it" (personal interview, 2012). His son's classmates would even tease him about how his father is a *hua'er* singer.

Figure 27. Image of Yang Quanxu performing in 2012

In Qinghai province, there is a term called *wuhunren* (literally, "five stinky people") which refers to people who are unworthy of salvation. This term is often used when describing *hua'er* singers. Other expressions used to describe *hua'er* singers which I encountered in my fieldwork include: "wild ones", "playful people", "people who didn't learn well", "happy people", "free spirits", and "people who don't mind gossip".

Shame and embarrassment were often expressed or shown by *hua'er* singers during my interviews with them. This was the case both for nationally recognized inheritors as well as for less well-known *hua'er* singers. Such expressions of embarrassment typically occurred while discussing the act of singing *hua'er* itself, or describing romantic and erotic *hua'er* lyrics, or sometimes when admitting that they attended *hua'er* festivals. In fact, many *hua'er* singers encountered a number of obstacles in life in the course of singing *hua'er*.

Although there are many other types of love, such as parent's love for their children, love among siblings, friends, etc., such types of love are however very rarely

expressed in *hua'er* songs. In fact, the kind of love *hua'er* discusses is romantic and, so far as I am able to tell based on my studies, almost exclusively in a heterosexual context, although I did meet a single homosexual *hua'er* singer during my fieldwork. Since *hua'er* are highly metaphorical, the lyrics that this homosexual singer used could also be interpreted within a heterosexual context.

Expressing one's true feelings and love is often seen as embarrassing for singers, due to a taboo against the public display of personal emotions and feelings. When I discussed romantic *hua'er* with *hua'er* singers, both male and female singers would often blush and feel shy about it, even if the lyrics were self-composed. During my fieldwork, I constantly found people who are quiet and shy, yet who compose lyrics that were anything but. Their everyday personalities versus their personalities expressed through *hua'er* personality were almost like two different people.

As discussed in Chapter two, since sex is a sensitive and private topic in China, expressing love and sexual desire is considered quite shameful. Yang (1998) argues that Erotic Musical Activity (EMA) is widely practiced in China despite the fact that academic studies on this subject are rather inadequate. He discusses a personal experience while interviewing *hua'er* singers regarding EMA, noting how "it often appears that, when discussing their EMA with outsiders to their tradition, the local people assume that their EMA will be considered immoral and 'dirty,' and thus are reluctant to talk about it" (Yang 1998: 214). During my fieldwork, this was indeed a challenges when it came to collecting adequate data. Many *hua'er* singers were embarrassed to talk about erotic *hua'er* with me, since they were generally older, and saw me as an outsider of their

generation, which made the situation even more awkward. Often, an erotic *hua'er* would have to be written down on a scrap of paper for me instead of being sung or spoken.

The act of singing *hua'er* is often interpreted as an attempt by the singer to look for a *lianshou* ('liaison' or lit. 'connect hands,' referring to lovers) outside of a marriage. Ke Yang, one of the most important *hua'er* scholars and a retired professor from Lanzhou University, told me that arranged marriages were in the past common in the Northwestern regions. Young couples would often marry based on the advice given by a matchmaker; other times, poor girls were sold to a wealthy family. Thus, *hua'er* festivals provided an opportunity for individuals to express their desire for true love and for sex. Ke argues that, "that is why female *hua'er* singers are often married women, and not unmarried girls" (personal interview, Ke 2012). Feng and Stuart, on the other hand, argue that sexual relations happen during *hua'er* festival for a different reason. Feng and Stuart said that "in the areas where *hua'er* is sung, the necessity of marriage transcends any other concern. An individual is only a 'complete' person and deserving of the respect accorded an adult when he or she marries and has children. This mythical aura that surrounds *hua'er* legitimizes promiscuity…. Women who do not conceive after a period of marriage are relegated to the status of non-persons, even though the problem may not be theirs…. [Thus] sexual contact at *hua'er* [festivals] serves as insurance against an infertile mate" (Feng & Stuart 1994:218). Thus, attending *hua'er* festival, either as the result of a loveless marriage or a way to fix a conceiving problem, is often being interpreted as seeking and having sexual relationship outside of a marriage. Below are some examples of *hua'er* lyrics expressing love relationship outside of a marriage.

白马上骑的薛仁贵，	Xue Rengui rides on a white horse,
箭射了张口的燕子，	He shot the swallows,
头枕上胳膊嘴对嘴，	My head rest on your arm, mouth to mouth
阳世上把错事干了。	I did the wrong thing in this life time.
	(Wei Quanming's unpublished songbook)

This lyrics is composed from the perspective of a woman who express the feeling of guilt about having an affair. This does not necessarily mean she is going to end the affair, but she refers to her behavior as "wrong".

白马儿跑了五营了，	White horse went to wuying,
吴三桂陈圆圆爱了，	Wu Sangui and Chen Yuanyuan fell in love,
天大名声哈我背了，	I bear such a bad reputation [due to our affair]
你赔上别人着睡了。	You slept with someone else
	(Wei Quanming's unpublished songbook)

This resentment *hua'er* could be sung from the perspective of both a male or a female. It shows how someone lost his/her reputation because of having an affair with someone outside of his/her marriage, meanwhile, his/her lover abandoned him/her for someones else.

阳坡湾里油细细草，	Green grass in Yangpowan,
斧头剁了才现了，	It became visible after cut by an ax,
一绕二年没见你，	Two years I haven't seen you,
我阿么把你猛见了，	Suddenly, I see you,
见了时活把人心想烂了，	I missed you so much that my heart hurt,
心上的老病又犯了。	My old lovesickness came back again.
	(Dong Mingqiao, personal interview)

As discussed earlier, what happens in *hua'er* festival ends there. Not many lovers will be in touch with each other throughout the year. In this case, a man/woman saw his/her lover from two years ago and the same emotion came back. Schimmelpenninck also discusses in her article that

> Young girls in rural Gansu and Qinghai are usually forbidden to attend festivals, not so much to avoid exposure to erotic texts … but to elude confrontations with pushy men and the risk and humiliation of a premarital pregnancy. As a rule, only married women in Gansu and Qinghai are allowed to attend the festivals in which *hua'er* are sung. All the same, a woman's marital state can be problematic for different reasons: it may give her an excuse to freewheel at festivals and to maintain short-term sexual contacts. Hence the many stories about newlywed women who are told by their husbands to stop singing *hua'er*. Men may also try to keep their partners away from festivals to forestall interruptions of domestic work or child care. (Kouwenhoven & Schimmelpenninck, 2013:162).

Even though both male and female *hua'er* singers are held in low regard, female *hua'er* singers generally bear even more social pressure and obstacles than do men, perhaps due to the influence of Confucianism. Liu Yongmei (b. 1964), a female *hua'er* singer from Minhe in Qinghai province, told me that she married her ex-husband when she was only 17 years old. When she was selected by the Qinghai provincial singing and dancing troupe, her parents and husband disapproved strongly of her becoming a professional *hua'er* singer. The director of the troupe, Ma Jun, had to convince her parents and husband that being a professional *hua'er* singer would turn into a great career for Liu. However, two years after starting her work as a professional *hua'er* singer, her husband divorced her because he felt it was shameful for him to be associated with a professional *hua'er* singer. At the time of the interview, remarried with her current husband, Liu expressed that it was the first time she felt supported and appreciated for what she does.

Figure 28. Image of the Author with Liu Yongmei, 2011

Another story was related to me during my fieldwork interviews by a female singer named Dong Mingqiao (b. 1973), from Sigou village in Gansu province. She was married at age 18, and is recognized as a Chinese folk artist (中国民间文化杰出传承人) for her status as a *hua'er* singer. When I first met her, I was surprised at how shy she seemed to be, as she would constantly blush and speak quietly. Nonetheless, she was known for singing *hua'er* clearly, and she had many admirers from across the *hua'er* community.

She told me that, "generally, people have a bad opinion of *hua'er* singers, especially women. People think they are wild, not following any ethics and rules, and do not work hard." (personal interview 2012) She confirmed that it is quite common for *lianshou* liaisons to occur at *hua'er* festivals. She said that people who attend *hua'er* festivals generally know each other, and singers tend to know about each other's *lianshou*, even though their spouse may not even know. For this reason, her husband still

disapproves of her activity as a *hua'er* singer, and he is jealous about her status as a singer and her attendance at *hua'er* festivals. Ji Xucai said that "some people may have more than one lover. Fights among lovers are common scenes during *hua'er* festivals as well …[but] what happens during a *hua'er* festival, ends at the *hua'er* festival" (personal interview 2011). When a *hua'er* festival concludes, people go back to their own lives. Nonetheless, *hua'er* singers rarely divorce their husband or wife and marry their *lianshou.*

Jiang Zhaowa (b. 1962) is a *hua'er* singer from Caotan village, Gansu province. She was engaged in the age of 14, and married when she was 20. She is a farmer and is recognized at the provincial level as an inheritor of *hua'er*. When she was younger, her family strongly disapproved of her singing *hua'er*, and there were many family conflicts due to this. Now that she is 50 years old, a grandmother age in her village, her family does not care about it any more. She can enjoy attending *hua'er* festivals and sing *hua'er* as she wishes. She shared two of her favorite *hua'er* lyrics, which she saw as expressing her philosophy on life.

乘年轻是要耍呢	Fool around when you are young,
死了看它变啥呢	What will you be after you die?
变成人着可耍呢	If reincarnated as a person, you can fool around again,
变成驴着挨打呢。	If reincarnated as a donkey, you will get beaten.

死了棺板我不要	I do not need a coffin after I die,
给后辈儿孙说知道	To explain to the later generations,
年轻的时候耍上了。	How I was able to fool around when I was young.

She continued, during the interview, to say that, "I would fully support my children to sing *hua'er* as long as they like it. In the past, even my brothers and sisters felt ashamed because I sing *hua'er*" (personal interview).

Figure 29. Jiang Zhaowa (left) and Dong Mingqiao (right)

Islamic Views on Hua'er

"A good Muslim doesn't sing. He spends his time in the Mosque," said Ma Jinshan, a muslim *hua'er* singer whom I interviewed. In addition to the shame associated with singing *hua'er,* muslims from Gansu and Qinghai province are restricted from participating in musical events due to local Islamic teaching. In this case, Muslims who sing *hua'er* publicly commonly receive social pressure or discrimination from their families and from religious circles.

Ma Jinshan (b. 1946) is a Dongxiang ethnic *hua'er* singer who was selected as one of the UNESCO inheritors of world ICH. He is from Hezheng county, Gansu province,

and during a fieldwork interview he told me that majority of the Dongxiang ethnic people are devoted Muslims. Parents would rather send their children to the mosque to pray instead of to school. Ma only went to school for two years, then worked for a group of Tibetans as a shepherd. He said that Islam teaches people to stay away from music, and that even singing the Chinese national anthem should be prohibited. A good muslim should go to mosque five times a week (personal interview 2012).

Because of his passion for *hua'er*, he was often criticized and bullied. Friends and family would often ask him why he would learn Han ethnic songs, but forget about his own culture and attending prayers at the mosque? He told me that he receives no respect from his family members, religious circle and friends, regardless of how hard he works. His wife almost divorced him due to these social pressures. In 2009, he donated 580,000 RMB [about $94,544 USD] to his local mosque making it the biggest news in the area. He said that, "since then, everything has changed". People respect him for what he does, singing *hua'er*, and he finally gained some respect from his family, local government officials and religious circles. Similar stories were told by another muslim *hua'er* singer, Ma Heiya, who said that his parents, wife and religious friends all object to his practice of singing *hua'er* songs. Often, he had to lie about whether he was attending *hua'er* festivals (personal interview 2012).

Women receive more criticism for participating in *hua'er* singing among muslim communities as well. Ma Ersa (b. 1969), an ethnic Hui singer, told me that it is very rare to see muslim women singing *hua'er*. Although he knew that his wife was secretly singing *hua'er* behind his back, he is accepting of this, since he also sings *hua'er* himself.

However, he said that he and his wife will never confront each other, perform together, or even attend the same *hua'er* festival together. Ma Jinshan also pointed out the difficulties faced by muslim women who sing. He told me that, even as late as the early 1900s, the akhoond [muslim priest] who are responsible for leading religious services, would publicly beat such women and their husbands if a wife were caught singing *hua'er* (personal interview, 2012).

Kou Hong (b.1960) is the only female muslim singer I was able to interview personally. She is Hui ethnic and from Yanji in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. She is now recognized as one of the provincial *hua'er* inheritors for Xinjiang. She had a passion for singing since a young age but, unfortunately, her father disapproved of her singing as a hobby or a career, since he was an akhoond at their local mosque. She told me that her entire life was a struggle between religion and singing, and that Hui ethnic people are restricted from participating music and would be beaten by their families or akhoond if they are found singing or dancing. Her father passed away in 2002, and just before he passed, he finally admitted to her that he also liked *hua'er*, that it was only due to their religion that he could never admit it publicly. As the only female muslim *hua'er* inheritor, she feels proud, yet continues to face much pressure. She told me that singing *hua'er* is her only hobby, and she has come a long way to achieve what she has. She cited a famous *hua'er* to express her views on balancing *hua'er* and her ethnic identity:

花儿本是心上的话，	*Hua'er* are words from the heart,
不唱是由不得自家；	I can not stop singing.
钢刀拿来（者）头割下（ha）	You can use a knife to cut my head off,
不死是就这个唱法	I will sing as long as I am alive.

Figure 30. Image of the Author with Kou Hong, 2012

Conclusion

These taboos and elements of social pressure help us to understand the social context of *hua'er* in its own community. *Hua'er* singers experience much criticism and are looked down upon by many different types of people in the community. In the following chapter, I will discuss the global and then localized ICH policy in China and how they have impacted the *hua'er* communities and the practice of *hua'er.*

Chapter Four

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

In this chapter, I discuss various interpretations of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), starting with UNESCO's initial definition, goals and criteria, and continuing to China's multiple "localized" interpretations, programs and policies relating to the safeguarding of ICH. Ideas of ICH are not coherent, but instead problematic and contradictory, and ultimately a function of various competing agendas.

UNESCO's Definition

According to Keith Howard (2006), various nations have established preservation programs for safeguarding their tangible or intangible heritage since the 1950s. Japan established the Intangible Cultural Assets program in 1954 recognizing their court and art music. Korea had a similar program in 1962 recognizing not only court and art music but also folk music genres and traditions. Thailand in 1985 had a National Artists program, again focusing only on classical musicians while excluding folk artists, whereas the Philippines in 1988 developed its National Living Treasure program with an emphasis on folk music traditions. France in 1994 established a Maitre d'Art program recognizing established artists (Howard 2006). Nonetheless, UNESCO was the first and most authoritative organization to call for the recognition of both tangible heritage and intangible cultural heritage.

In 1972, UNESCO began to recognize World tangible heritage with an emphasis on monuments and historical buildings. In 2001, inspired by the Japanese Intangible Cultural Assets program, it established a program called the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, recognizing mostly performing arts and cultural practices worldwide. Before 2005, evaluations for this program were held biannually, and each member state could submit only one candidature file to be evaluated and nominated to the Masterpieces list. The success of selection of Masterpieces led to the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH in 2003.

During the convention, a plan for the protection of ICH was proposed, which was implemented in 2006. Three lists, the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" (Representative List), the "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" (Urgent Safeguarding List) and the "Best Safeguarding Practices" were subsequently created and went into effect in 2009. A total of 90 items from the proclaimed list of Masterpieces were then incorporated into the newly created Representative List. The practice of limiting submissions by member states has since been abolished, and there is currently no limit on the number of submissions that may be made by each country. As of January 2015, UNESCO had selected a total of 314 elements for the Representative List, 38 elements for the Urgent Safeguarding List and 12 best Safeguarding Practices (UNESCO, 2015).

Member States of UNESCO that ratify the 2003 convention participate in programs to safeguard ICH. Thus, ratification is an agreement made by state members and has the legal status of an international treaty. For example, since the United States of America

has not ratified the convention, it is not obligated to participate in the safeguarding of world ICH. As of January 2015, a total of 161 countries were participating in this program (ibid).

The process, from nomination to proclamation of an ICH item, typically takes about one and a half years to complete after each member state submits nominations to the ICH Secretariat. The Secretariat makes sure that applications are complete, and incomplete applications may be delayed for subsequent approval cycles. After that, the applications are sent to a Consultative Body, which is made up of international, national and regional NGOs or organizations specializing in ICH, such as the International Council for Traditional Music, an NGO that assists with UNESCO's ICH recognition. According to Seeger (2009), who participated in the recognition process in 2005, evaluators who are NGO members cannot be citizens or residents of the nominating country, but preferably they should be from the same region, such that they can offer insightful yet objective evaluations. Seeger also points out that one limitation of such a practice is that the most knowledgeable scholars for a given tradition are often living or working within the nominating country (Seeger 2009, 112-128). After the Consultative Body finalizes its evaluation, the Secretariat then forwards the results to an intergovernmental committee made up of representatives from 18 to 24 member states who makes the final examination and decision on the proposals submitted (UNESCO Convention 2003).

The Convention & ICH

The 2003 Convention recognizes that, "the processes of globalization and social transformation, alongside the conditions they create for renewed dialogue among communities, also give rise, as does the phenomenon of intolerance, to grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of the intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage" (UNESCO 2003 Convention). Using such language, the UNESCO Convention paints ICH as a victim of globalization and social transformation, especially within the contexts of developing countries. Yet how can such changes be prevented? More specifically, what kinds of changes are considered "responses to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history" or "deterioration or destruction of the ICH?". Nas (2002:142) argues that, "the UNESCO program is based on the conviction that urbanization, modernization, and globalization constitute a great danger for the variety of human culture... [UNESCO's protection method] is being employed to counteract that same globalization". In this case, one might ask whether raising local, national and international awareness could serve to contradict the stated goals of safeguarding ICH.

The purpose of the convention is "to safeguard the ICH, to ensure respect for the ICH of the communities, groups and individuals concerned; to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the ICH, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof; to provide for international cooperation and assistance" (Article 1, UNESCO 2003 Convention). With admirable intentions, UNESCO has crafted this program so as to safeguard cultural assets, raise awareness,

ensure appreciation and provide assistance to various valuable world cultural practices. However, it does not explicitly provide specific methods and guidelines to its member States. Moreover, the universalist perspective of UNESCO concerning the diversity of world culture is idealistic and problematic.

UNESCO defines ICH in the Convention as:

> …the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This ICH, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Article 2, UNESCO 2003 Convention).

This definition highlights what can be considered as ICH and establishes the importance of its status as a living art form or cultural practice. It is crucial that such art or practices remain vibrant and meaningful to communities, groups and individuals in society. UNESCO does recognize that changes can occur in cultural practices, as long as the art or and practices are recreated organically by their own communities. UNESCO is interested in all world ICH, as long as they are important to each nation-state, and provided with appropriate safeguarding measures. This definition is open and inclusive.

There are criteria created for inscription on each of the three Lists. For example, the criteria for the Representative List are as follows:

> R.1 The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

> R.2 Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity.
>
> R.3 Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element.
>
> R.4 The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.
>
> R.5 The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention (UNESCO Convention 2003).

According to these criteria, as long as an element is an important ICH recognized by a signatory state (State Party) and provided with safeguarding measures will be selected. These criteria give each State Party a great deal of authority to select and decide which culture practices are to be promoted.

In fact, according to the Convention, the role of State Parties is to "take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory; and among the safeguarding measures, identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations" (Article 11, UNESCO 2003 Convention). UNESCO, as an international organization, cannot be responsible for the safeguarding of all worlds ICH. Instead, State Parties must implement the spirit of the Convention and carry out measures to safeguard their own elements of ICH. This is highly controversial as to what is the fine line between appropriate necessary measures and inappropriate measures? UNESCO emphasizes the respect of

local communities, groups and individuals, while at the same time letting nation-states "take the necessary measures", and it nevertheless provides plenty of opportunities for nation-states to exercise their power and reinforce their political ideologies. Many scholars indeed have argued extensively on the power of such recognition and the practice of nationalism. Shepherd (2009) has criticized UNESCO's self-contradictory tangible cultural heritage program, pointing to the example of Tibetan cultural sites. He discusses how UNESCO's project coincides with Chinese national policies to strengthen political claims concerning Tibet through the recognition of Tibetan culture as an important cultural asset of China. Thus, the recognition of Tibetan culture has in fact served internationally to confirm and reinforce China's control of Tibetan culture. Furthermore, it grants legitimacy for the use of Chinese authority to continue facilitating and justifying the modernization and economic development of Tibetan culture. Thus, Shepherd argues that "UNESCO plays into the ongoing Chinese state project of creating an 'imagined community' across space and through time" (Shepherd 2009). Seeger has also discussed the same issue with respect to Gypsy musicians in Europe and how they are not mentioned on nomination forms but rather have been replaced by other professional groups. In this case, not only has the ICH program encouraged the appreciation of each nation's cultural heritage, it has also become a means of "cultural cleaning" and reduction of cultural diversity (Seeger 2009: 112).

Another issue is the term "safeguarding" itself. The convention defines safeguarding as "measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection,

promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage" (Article 2, UNESCO 2003 Convention). However, this definition is still ambiguous and controversial. For example, what should be considered as a successful case for preservation and promotion? What changes should be considered enhancement, or vice versa? Kurin notes that, "the ethnographic literature documents many cases in which well-intentioned efforts to help actually harmed local traditions" (Kurin 2002: 145). Thus, without a clear understanding of what can be considered proper preservation and promotion, safeguarding activities may cause opposite effects.

Furthermore, since cultural practices and traditions can travel, change and become localized, they sometimes may not fit neatly within geo-political boundaries. Since the Convention went into effect, there have been many debates and disputes over the ownership of certain cultural practices. For example, over the past ten years, Chinese and South Korean netizens have been engaged in heated debates over competing applications for UNESCO's ICH status. In 2005, Korean's Gangneung Danoje Festival was listed as an element of world ICH. This was subsequently criticized by some Chinese netizens as being, in fact, a tradition that originated in China. Ma Shengde, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Culture's Department for the Administration of ICH, has since clarified that, "though both [the Korean and Chinese festivals] are called 'Duanwu [Festival]' in Chinese, the Korean festival in the ROK observes different traditions than the traditional Dragon Boat Festivals in China" (Zhu 2014). As another example, in 2014, the Korean Ondol, a heating architecture in traditional houses that uses underfloor flues connected to

a stove to heat up rooms, was listed as an element of world ICH. This likewise caused another heated debate, as many Chinese netizens claimed that a similar heating structure called Nuankang is widely used in Northeastern China, and it may have a longer history than the Korean Ondol. Ma reminded Chinese netizens that, "ICH status is not exclusive, as one country's application will not disqualify other countries' joint or respective applications" (Zhu 2014). Seeger points out that, although the UNESCO process does allow for joint nominations, nations generally still prefer to claim masterpieces as their own instead of cooperating on joint applications (Seeger 2009:121).

Despite the self-contradictory goals and ill-defined measures for safeguarding that have been proposed by UNESCO, each nation-state has re-interpreted this program in its own way. China, for example, has responded to UNESCO's project with vigor. As of 2015, China had 30 elements listed on the Representative List, and 7 elements on the Urgent Safeguarding List and 1 element on the Best Safeguarding Practices List (UNESCO 2015). In the next section of this chapter, I review the administrative framework that China has established for ICH recognition nationwide.

National ICH in China

Stuart Hall states that:

> Heritage is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory. Just as individuals and families construct their identities by 'storying' the various random incidents and contingent turning points of their lives into a single, coherent, narrative, so nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding 'national story'. This story is what is called 'Tradition' (Hall 2005:25).

The term ICH translated into Chinese is *feiwuzhiwenhuayichan* (lit. “non-material cultural inheritance”, 非物质文化遗产). Ironically, it is often abbreviated as *feiyi* (“non-inheritance”, 非遗). Enthusiastically responding to UNESCO’s project, in 2005, the General Office of the State Council designated the Ministry of Culture to establish a system for the annual recognition of ICH at the county, municipal, provincial and national levels. In 2006, the Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center (National ICH Protection Center) was established within the Chinese National Academy of Arts, an institution directly under the General Office of the State Council. The National ICH Protection Center has since served as the coordinating institution for all Chinese ICH-related policies and activities, as well as for all submissions of ICH materials for inclusion on UNESCO’s list. At the same time, at the provincial, municipal and county levels, local cultural departments or newly established local ICH centers have adopted policies in line with the National ICH Protection Center. Following a centralized system, items of ICH are first collected and considered at lower governmental levels before being considered at higher levels during subsequent years.

During this process, regional specialists and scholars are instrumental in helping each county and municipal cultural department in completing their application packages. Once an application reaches the provincial and then national levels, the provincial and national ICH centers will determine whether or not the element of ICH can be upgraded to a higher geographic status. As of 2015, four rounds of recognition for national ICH have taken place. The first round was conducted in 2006 and recognized 518 items. The

second was in 2008 with 510 new items and 147 expanded items. The third round, conducted in 2011, led to the recognition of 191 new items and 164 expanded items. In 2014, the fourth around, 153 new items and 153 expanded items were added. Thus, as of 2015, there are a total of 1,836 items on the national list (Meng 2014). According to People.com.cn, China has nearly 870,000 different items of ICH, considering all applications submitted, among which more than 70,000 have been officially recognized at national, provincial, municipal and county levels. Among them, 7,109 are provincial, 18,186 are municipal, and 53,776 are county level ICH, making China the nation that has recognized the largest number of ICH in the world (Zheng 2010).

To apply for ICH recognition at the Chinese county, provincial, municipal and national level, one uses an application package that is slightly revised from the UNESCO template, and that follows a different set of criteria created by the General Office of State Council of China. While the criteria and goals established by UNESCO and those of the Chinese system overlap, China has also added its own agenda for the selection of its elements of ICH.

In 2005, the General Office of the State Council issued a document titled "Suggestions on Strengthening the Protection Work of Our Nation's Intangible Cultural Heritage", stating its mission for identifying Chinese ICH as:

(1) pushing forward the safeguarding, protection and transmission of Chinese National ICH;

(2) strengthening Chinese national identity and improving the understanding of Chinese culture over a continuous history;

(3) respecting the contributions that certain communities and individuals have had on China to illustrate the diverse culture of China;

(4) encouraging citizens, institutions and other social organizations actively to participate in the safeguarding of ICH;

(5) following the Convention for the safeguarding of ICH, improving international understanding of China's ICH and building cultural exchanges and cooperation to contribute to the diversity of human culture worldwide."

As Seeger points out, nationalist ideology plays an important role when selecting national items of ICH. Many of the elements designated as ICH "had some form of geopolitical and/or nationalist importance to the nominating country" (Seeger 2009: 121). The ways in which UNESCO's mission statement in China have been revised shows that China is using the identification of ICH as an opportunity for the construction and reinforcement of its national identity. What elements can be recognized as items of ICH are not simply any sort of valuable cultural practices, but rather those items of ICH that serve to strengthen the "Chinese national identity" and the ideology of a "continuous Chinese history".

In line with this mission, the General Office of the State Council has constructed a list of five criteria to determine Chinese ICH:

1. [that it must] showcase the exceptional value of Chinese national cultural creativity;

2. [that it must be] deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the specific community, transmitted through generations and having distinct local characteristics;

3. [that it must] enrich Chinese national cultural identity, build up social solidarity, improve solidarity and harmony among different nationalities, being an

important link for cultural exchange, using traditional techniques in extraordinary ways, and expressing outstanding standards;

4. [that it must] make excellent use of traditional crafts and skills , reflecting the superb level;

5. [that it must] prove the unique value of Chinese living national cultural traditions; and

6. [that it must] have an important impact on the transmission of Chinese national culture and, due to social changes or lack of protection, while face the danger of being lost.[7]

Although the UNESCO criteria had hardly any mention of the perceived, subjective quality of each item of ICH, the Chinese criteria is call repeatedly for "exceptional" (*jiechu* 杰出), "distinct" (*xianming* 鲜明), "extraordinary" (*gaochao shuiping* 高超水平), and "outstanding" (*dute* 独特) cultural practices, terms which imply a hierarchy of "good" versus "bad" cultural practices. While it makes sense that a national system ICH should be somehow differentiated from everyday cultural practices, so that we can keep a neat list of things that are not simply "ordinary", nonetheless, what can be considered "exceptional", "distinct", "extraordinary", and "outstanding" is a highly subjective basis for decision making, and in fact such aesthetic judgements have undergone drastic ideological changes in 20th- and 21st-century China. For example, Mao Zedong in 1942 gave a famous series of speeches, known as the Talks to the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, that once defined how "good" art should serve political

[7] (1) 具有展现中华民族文化创造力的杰出价值；(2) 扎根于相关社区的文化传统，世代相传，具有鲜明的地方特色；(3) 具有促进中华民族文化认同、增强社会凝聚力、增进民族团结和社会稳定的作用，是文化交流的重要纽带；(4) 出色地运用传统工艺和技能，体现出高超的水平；(5) 具有见证中华民族活的文化传统的独特价值；(6) 对维系中华民族的文化传承具有重要意义，同时因社会变革或缺乏保护措施而面临消失的危险。

purposes—that is, the purposes of the CCP—and how it should raise political awareness and the "quality" of the masses (Mao, 1967). In other words, from the perspective of China's ruling party, the point of art was explicitly that it should have a political motivation and that it should not be thought of as simply for "beauty" or "art's sake". Indeed, the CCP decried such "decorative" art as contrary to its revolutionary ideals.

Since early 20th century, at the same time, China has continued to promote the longstanding improvement and development of its traditional music, and the ideological currents underlying such endeavors have been separate from those expressed by Mao (1967). Chinese folk arts and music, for example, have been regarded as "unscientific", "backward" and aesthetically inferior to Western music (Rees 2012: 24). According to Lau, improvement of Chinese folk music may include the use of printed musical notation, the standardization of music scores and tuning systems, and the changing social functions of traditional music (Lau 2008: 93). Thus, according to such an ideology, "good" art should be scientific and modernized according to Western aesthetics.

Meanwhile, in 2003, a *yuanshengtai* ('original manner', lit. 'original ecology') movement emerged. This art movement emphasized the performance of ethnic minorities' music and arts to be *yuanshi* (lit. primitive) and with *xiangtuqixi* (lit. the smell of the village earth). During *yuanshengtai* performances, performers "wear traditional costumes (sometimes exaggeratedly 'traditional') and perform on traditional instruments. They sing in their own ethnic language and their melodies are carried on tonal systems that are rarely heard in the urban mainstream environment" (Yang 2009). In this case, an "unrefined and untouched" art is seen as embodying true cultural values.

These three contradictory threads of aesthetic values contribute to the complexity of determining what should be considered as "outstanding" examples of traditional music in China today. In practice, all three of these aesthetic systems continue to be considered during the selection or preservation process at various levels. Yet another criteria that has been important to China in the early 21st century is the concern for creating and nurturing a "harmonious society", a philosophy first articulated by Chinese President Jintao Hu in 2004.

Many scholars have argued that the criteria for selection of heritage in various areas have become highly political. Hevia (2001), for example, discusses how Tibetan art practices in Chengdu were recognized as Chinese Tangible Heritage. He argues that the recognition of heritage in this case was a process of "idealizing" and "de-politicalizing" arts, where everything became part of a colorful multiculturalism and the State became "invisible". Littler and Naidoo (2005), also argue that heritage is racialized, gendered and classed. Owing to the fact that there are 56 official ethnic groups in China, it is natural that the Chinese government would value the importance of maintaining a harmonious society through the process for recognition of items of ICH. That said, cultural practices that express or may lead to ethnic conflicts, and especially separatism, cannot be nominated as ICH. Likewise, those elements of ICH that become officially recognized must be—or become—politically correct in terms of their modes of cultural expression, so as to ensure that items of ICH do not cause conflicts or contribute to separatist movements. For this reason, the Chinese ICH application form asks repeatedly about the history, content, characteristics, and main value of each cultural practice.

Another distinctive characteristic of the Chinese ICH application form is its top-down orientation. Unlike the UNESCO application, which asks to identify concerned community organizations or representatives and includes sections regarding community involvement and consent, based on my fieldwork with *hua'er* communities, the Chinese national ICH application materials are prepared exclusively by local cultural department officials and regional scholars. Local communities have little say about how they would like to revitalize or preserve their tradition. In a way, the Chinese ICH application is a process where cultural practices became legitimized and nationalized.

In chapter five, I will discuss how *hua'er* has become politicized at the same time that it has become recognized as an element of ICH.

ICH Law

In 2011, China passed the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China" to provide detailed guidelines on how ICH programs should be implemented in China. This is the first national law concerning ICH in China. The ICH Law consists of six chapters and forty-five articles (WIPO 2015) and was implemented on June 1, 2011.

Chapter one of the ICH Law defines ICH and the state's positionality with regard to ICH. The ICH is re-defined here as:

> "traditional oral literature and the language as a carrier thereof; traditional fine arts, calligraphy, music, dance, drama, folk art and acrobatics; traditional artistry, medicine and calendar; traditional rituals, festivals and other folk customs; traditional sports and entertainment; and other intangible cultural heritage".

Instead of UNESCO's abstract description of ICH, this definition utilizes Chinese terminologies, making it easy to understand within the context of Chinese culture. Meanwhile, the agenda of the nationalist state is also clearly spelled out in this section. For example, articles 1, 4 and 5 state that the law has been established for the purpose of "promoting the building of the socialist spiritual civilization", that ICH should serve the purposes of "strengthening the recognition of the culture of the Chinese nation, maintaining the unification of the country and the unity of the nation and promoting social harmony and sustainable development", and that "the use of intangible cultural heritage in a distorted or derogatory way is prohibited".

Chapter two discusses the ways in which ICH shall be studied. Generally speaking, the state encourages all "citizens, legal persons, and other organizations" to conduct studies on ICH, although various levels of government should serve as the main bodies for protecting and preserving ICH. The Law also points out that certain information regarding Chinese ICH "shall be kept confidential in accordance with the law" and that overseas organizations and individuals "shall report to the departments in charge" and upon completion of their studies should provide "the investigation report and the pictures of the physical objects and the duplicate copies of information obtained" for approval (Articles 13 and 15).

Chapter three of the ICH Law focuses on the cataloguing of ICH items in China. It discusses the logistics of how an item is to be recognized at the local level and then

submitted to the national level, and how this process needs to "follow the principles of openness, fairness and impartiality".

Chapter four discusses inheritance and transmission of ICH, particularly the roles of ICH inheritors, various levels of government, schools, public cultural institutions, and individuals.

Chapter five address the legal liabilities of key staffs that are in charge of culture departments, overseas organizations and individuals, and other parties that violate the law.

Finally, chapter six adds that regional ICH centers should establish their own catalogues of regional items of ICH, using the national law as a reference and other appropriate laws that may apply, for example in cases where the use of ICH involves intellectual property rights.

Since the ICH Law was passed, it has received both praise and criticism. Being the first national policy to be publicly issued on ICH, it establishes some guidelines for different levels of government and for individuals. Meanwhile, it also expresses support at a national level for the identification and preservation of elements of ICH in China. However, there have also been debates. For example, Article 4, which reinterprets the goals first established by UNESCO, has no mention of preserving cultural diversity, like UNESCO's guidelines do. Many scholars have therefore expressed concern over whether minority communities may be left out during this recognition, while Kang Baocheng, a professor at Zhongshan University specializing in the study of ICH, has expressed concern about articles 13 and 15, which restrict overseas individuals and organizations

from conducting research freely in China (Xu 2011). He says that such restrictions may slow down the recognition of Chinese ICH at the international level, and that it may be detrimental to cultural exchanges (ibid). This concern is particularly ironic, considering that one of the purposes of UNESCO's ICH project was to promote the world recognition of ICH. Huang Tianyi also points out that, since Taiwan is also considered to fall within the scope of the term "overseas" (or *jingwai*) as used in the ICH Law, such restrictions may likewise affect Taiwanese scholars who have been instrumental in furthering the study of some of China's most widely recognized traditional arts, such as Kunqu. He states that, if such barriers cause such scholars to stop engaging in research on Kunqu, it would be a huge loss to Chinese academia (ibid).

Other debates regarding the ICH Law have centered on intellectual property rights. One question that has been repeatedly raised is whether ICH belongs to all of humanity, to individuals, to communities or to governments? The Zhongshan University ICH Research Center posted an article discussing the problem of loss of Chinese ICH to consumers from overseas, as folk artists sell the "secret recipes" and "secret tricks" of a tradition to foreigners who are willing to pay. As a result, the authors claim, traditional arts are dying in China while thriving in foreign lands. For example, the methods used for the "changing face" stage flourish in Sichuan opera are a mystery even to most Chinese, and has traditionally been limited only to inheritors of the Sichuan opera tradition. However, recently, a French woman was accepted as a student, and expressed her wish to learn how the "changing face" works, raised a stir among Chinese fans of the art tradition (Zhongshan University ICH Research Center 2014). The author notes that

"we should seriously consider whether the use of ICH items outside of China should be regarded as 'proper transmission' or a 'cultural loss' for the Chinese?" (ibid). This demonstrates how individual artistry has been elevated to a question of national security and sovereign ownership rights via the process of ICH identification. Similarly as Ucko has asked why legislators and archeologists assume that the "past" is a national asset and why the discoveries of archeologists are deemed as "national treasures" (Ucko 1989). The process of identification for items of ICH has therefore nationalized individual and communal cultural practices, such that they are perceived as national assets. Individuals and communities may stand to lose their own control of an art tradition, if it conflicts with the ICH Law.

Policies on the Cancelation of ICH

Shortly after passing the ICH law in 2011, Ministry of Culture made another important announcement - "Strengthening Protection and Management of National ICH" (The Central People's Government of the PRC 2011). This document lays out policies regarding cancelations of national ICH items.

It is translated as below:

> "Due to inadequate or inappropriate protection measures which resulting in the deterioration of national ICH, once verified, the Ministry of Culture will declare warning to the regional agency/units and a deadline for rectification. If the situation is not significantly improved, the Ministry of Culture will take away the privilege of the ICH agency/unit, its license plate, at the same time, notify the application organization and the public. Those ICH whose names need to be corrected or no longer a "living tradition" need to be confirmed by specialists of the Ministry of

> Culture, and submitted to the State Council. After that, names could be modified or taken out of the ICH list. A notification will then go out to the public."[8]

Many provincial governments have then incorporated this cancelation policy in their local practices as well. For example, Jiangsu province created a guideline to cancel recognized ICH, ICH agencies and ICH inheritors. According to Zhongshan ICH Center, the purpose of this policy is to penalize those agencies or inheritors that use ICH commercially and inappropriately (Zhongshan ICH Center 2013b). However, there are a lot of questions raised after establishing policies like this. For example, who determines the appropriate uses or development of ICH? How is the cancelation of the ICH helpful in furthering preservation and development? Nonetheless, this policy has been in force. For example, Li ethnic group's tattooing culture was one of the first to be taken out of the ICH list. Traditionally, Li women receive tattoos when reaching adulthood. In 2006, this tattoo culture was among the first to be included as a Hainan provincial ICH. However, in 2012, it was officially taken off the ICH list due to its "unscientific" and "barbaric" cultural practice. On the official cancelation notice, it reads "the tattooing culture itself violate human nature, causes enormous physical pain for Li women. Even though Li tattooing culture is an ICH, however, we can keep its record, but should not continue preserving and transmitting such culture. Furthermore, as its no longer a living

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[8] 国家级代表性项目因保护不力或保护措施不当，导致项目存续状况恶化或出现严重问题的，一经查实，文化部将对国家级代表性项目申报地区（单位）和项目保护单位提出警告和限期整改要求，并向社会公布。因整改不力，该国家级代表性项目状况仍未得到明显改善的，文化部将取消项目保护单位资格，收回国家级代表性项目标牌，对项目申报地区（单位）进行通报，并向社会公告。

国家级代表性项目因名称不当等原因需纠正的，或因客观环境改变不再呈"活态文化"特性而自然消亡的，经文化部组织专家研究认定并征求非物质文化遗产保护工作部际联席会议成员单位意见后，报请国务院批准，予以更正或退出名录，并向社会公告。

tradition, it does not qualify according to the ICH definition, thus we recommend to remove it from the ICH list[9]" (Zhongshan ICH Center 2013a). For the same reason, Li ethnic group's epic story *Tundepo* was also taken off from the list due to its "backward" and "unmoral" content (Zhongshan ICH Center 2013a). The *Tundepo* is a Li legend that talks about the creation of Li people and their cultures. Since the legend discusses the marriage between a heavenly dog and a heavenly woman, a son and a mother, a brother and sister that contradicts the traditional marital practice, it was considered "immoral" despite its cultural significance among Li people (Zhongshan ICH Center 2013a). In this case, the Chinese ICH program and its related policies not only did not safeguard and preserve cultural practices, it de-valued cultural practices, ignored the cultural significance within a community, and became a way of culture cleansing. Thus, it puts all cultural practices in a hierarchy where certain cultural practices are better than the other.

Other ICH-Related Programs

In 2006, the Ministry of Culture named the second Saturday in June as "Chinese Culture Heritage Day" to raise ICH awareness. Several educational institutions have also established ICH Studies departments as programs for undergraduate and graduate study, including the Chinese National Academy of Arts and Zhongshan University. In 2007, Chengdu initiated an International ICH Festival, a week-long festival during the second

[9] "就文身过程来说，都是违反人性的，给黎族妇女带来巨大生理痛苦，黎族文身固然是非物质文化遗产，但记录保存即可，不应该作为保护传承的项目，且此项目实际已无活态传承，不具备列入代表性名录的条件，因此建议撤销。"

week in June, which is held biannually since 2007. Since the second festival in 2009, UNESCO joined in sponsoring the event together with the national Ministry of Culture and the People's Government of Sichuan Province. During each ICH festival, international artists from all over the world come and perform with Chinese artists to celebrate world ICH.

As part of this festival, an anthem named "Searching and Anticipation" was composed specifically for the event. The lyrics were written by Sun Jiazheng, a retired Minister of Culture, and the music was composed by a well-known Chinese composer named Meng Weidong. Given the political stature of the lyricist, it is not surprising that the anthem serves to further the ideology of China's ruling party. The lyrics and the official translation of the song are as follows:

寻找与守望	Searching and Anticipation
拨开岁月的迷雾	Part the mist of the bygone days
远离现代的喧嚣	Keep away from the bustle of the modern times
攀缘峭立的山崖	Scale the steep cliffs
踏遍那荒草萋萋的古道	Travel on the grassy ancient paths
寻找 寻找 寻找	Keep searching, searching, searching
一千遍一万遍地寻找	Search for one thousand, even ten thousand times
寻找源头，寻找根脉	Search for the source and search for the roots
寻找回家的小路	Search for the homebound path
寻找我的魂牵梦绕	Search for what I have been dreaming about
多少个严寒酷暑	Many a severe winter and a hot summer
多少个孤灯通宵	Many a dimly-lit lonely night
凝视你尘封的斑驳	Gaze at your alley source covered with dust
感受你会心的微笑	Impressed by your understanding smile

守望 守望 守望	Keep watching, watching, watching
一千年一万年地守望	Keep watch for one thousand, even ten thousand items
守望初衷，守望未来	Keep watch for your original intentions and keep watch of your bright prospects
守望精神的家园	Keep watch of your beautiful home
守望一个民族的骄傲	And keep watch of your national pride

These lyrics are written from the perspective of museum workers who are working for the benefit of the nation while protecting national roots and pride. Ironically, even though the song is written to glorify the search for "intangible cultural heritage", the lyrics focus on the search for "tangible" items whether they be "steep cliffs" or an "grassy ancient path", an endeavor done at extreme conditions all year around day or night in the "hot summer" or "severe winter". Yet, braving these extreme hardships is worth it because, as the song concludes, the goal is to save "your beautiful home" and your "pride".

This anthem has also been made into a music video and is available online (Tudou 2015). The visual background for the music video displays several of China's many UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, and the Great Wall. In addition, some natural landscapes related to China such as the Yellow River, the Gobi Desert, and terraced rice fields are also included. Occasionally, the video shows historical photos and video footage of anthropologists discovering historical objects. Although the lyrics very much romanticize national roots that are understood as being situated far away from the city and located in remote areas, the music video nonetheless visually shows the very places that would most symbolize systems of centralized power and authority, located in current

and historical capital cities. For example, the Forbidden City took 14 years to construct and was the palace for 24 of China's emperors. The Terracotta Army and Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor took over 38 years to construct, and the army was meant to protect the emperor in his afterlife. The Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven and the Great Wall are all located in Beijing, the current national capital, while the Terracotta Army Mausoleum is located in the ancient capital of Xi'an.

Unlike commercial music videos, where singers and performers typically have complicated choreography and wear colorful or sexy clothing, the performers in this video stand straight and still with the lead singer Tan Jing in a number of orderly formation, and wear white knee-length uniforms. The serious facial expression and orderly line-ups are reminiscent of military formation. Perhaps this is done intentionally to express how dedicated and determined the museum workers are in their efforts to search and protect national heritage. Ironically, although the anthem was written for the ICH festival, the music video does not showcase any ICH practices at all. The protection methods implied in the video seem to be quite simple and naive, as though national heritage is a treasure waiting for someone else to steal away, and therefore physical protections are needed.

Below are a few set ups of the choreography taken directly from the video. You can see the "dancers" in their lab coat (perhaps symbolize scientists who are going to preserve historical heritage in a "scientific" way) while maintaining a military formation.

Figure 31-34. Dance Choreography at the Temple of Heaven (top left), Pagoda (top right), Greet Wall (bottom left) and the Forbidden City (bottom right)

Conclusion

In the short span of time—less than two decades—since the term "ICH" was first introduced into the Chinese language, many different interpretations of the term have proliferated. Likewise, a vast array of ICH nomination, proclamation and protection projects have been established. From UNESCO's initial goals to China's localized interpretation and its various projects, ICH has become a contradictory yet political process where different agendas and meanings are created. In the next chapter, I will consider the complexities of these competing agendas and meanings from several different perspectives.

Chapter Five

Politics of ICH

The ICH Law provides by far the most authoritative guidelines for identifying and transmitting elements of ICH and for selecting inheritors. It also spells out legal liabilities for Chinese citizens, governmental agencies and even non-Chinese citizens and organizations doing research in China that do not adhere to certain provisions. However, many articles of the law have in practice led to contradictory results. In this chapter, I will analyze the impacts on the practice of *hua'er* both from top-down governmental organized activities and from bottom-up non-governmental organized *hua'er* activities. Even though the top-down governmental organized activities leads to drastic modification of *hua'er* practice, *hua'er* singers and local governmental officials have seen themselves as benefitting from such new aesthetics and practice.

Selecting Inheritors

The ICH law was published in 2011, two years after the initial round for designation of national ICH inheritors. In 2009, eleven *hua'er* singers, listed in Figure 35 below, were selected as national and world ICH inheritors. Following this designation of national inheritors, many others were likewise named as provincial *hua'er* inheritors. The selection of national and provincial inheritors was conducted by various levels of government with help from local *hua'er* scholars. Many *hua'er* inheritors were selected

as the winner of a locally organized singing contest. Others were selected as important and influential individuals within *hua'er* communities.

Name	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**	**Associated Festival**	**Province**	**Year**
Ma Delin (马得林)	Male	Hui	Laoyeshan Hua'er festival	Qinghai	2009
Ma Mingshan (马明山)	Female	Tu	Danma Tu ethnic Hua'er festival	Qinghai	2009
Zhao Cunlu (赵存禄)	Male	Dongxiang	Qilisi Hua'er festival	Qinghai	2009
Zhang Yingzhi (张英芝)	Female	Han	Qilisi Hua'er festival	Qinghai	2009
Wang Cunfu (王存福)	Male	Han	Qutansi Hua'er festival	Qinghai	2009
Ma Jinshan (马金山)	Male	Dongxiang	Songmingyan Hua'er festival	Gansu	2009
Ma Shenglin (马生林)	Male	Hui	Ningxia Hua'er festival	Ningxia Hui autonomous region	2009
Liu Guocheng (刘郭成)	Male	Han	Erlangshan Hua'er festival	Gansu	2011
Wang Lianlian (汪莲莲)	Female	Han	Lianhuashan Hua'er festival	Gansu	2011
Han Shengyuan (韩生元) *[deceased]*	Male	Hui	Xinjiang Hua'er festival	Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region	2011
Zhang Mingxing (张明星)	Male	Han	Ningxia Hua'er festival	Ningxia Hui autonomous region	2011

Figure 35. National and World *Hua'er* Inheritors

As shown on the above list, each province is represented by several national and world *hua'er* inheritors. In contrast to how *hua'er* is often described as shared by nine different ethnic groups discussed earlier, the ethnicities of national and world inheritors

are mostly coming from four ethnic background: Han (45%), Hui (27%), Dongxiang (18%) and Tu (9%). Since the initial recognition of *hua'er* as an element of national and world ICH was completed in 2011, there have not been further rounds of identification for national and world *hua'er* inheritors. However, the identification of provincial *hua'er* ICH inheritors may still be ongoing.

Article 29 of the ICH law establishes criteria for the selection of inheritors, stating that an inheritor should be familiar with the ICH he or she inherits, that he or she should be representative and influential in a specific area, and that he or she should actively carry out inheritance activities. This article seems straightforward and reasonable, but the selection of ICH inheritors is a highly political process, which forces *hua'er* singers, *chuanbanzhang* (or composers) and scholars to compete in championing their interpretations and aesthetic judgement in debates on who should be named as inheritors. There are many factors that play important roles in the selection process, which go well beyond the ICH Law's general guidelines.

Liu Guocheng (b. 1963), from Min county in Gansu province, is one of the national *hua'er* inheritors. Liu is one of the typical farmers of Chinese medicinal herbs in Min county, who manage a simple life with their incomes. He shared with me that being able to sing *hua'er* well by itself is not enough, but also being experienced on stage is also key. He said that many *hua'er* singers could not handle stage fright well during the inheritor singing contest. Many of them were too nervous on stage. Some wore inappropriate attire, or had unnatural body movements, while others forgot what to sing. All of this resulted in their not being selected as a *hua'er* inheritor. Yet, stage presence,

coordinated body movements and appropriate attire are not traditional criteria for judging the quality of *hua'er* singers. Instead, it was traditional to assess them based on their ability to improvise great lyrics with a sense of humor. Nonetheless, the selection of *hua'er* singers in a stage-centric environment will naturally involve such unenviable criteria.

On the other hand, obedience to authority and maintaining good relationships with local officials, especially in the county government, is also important. I interviewed one of the Min county cultural department officials, Ji Xucai, who did not deny the importance of performativity when judging *hua'er* singers, but he also pointed out that another reason why they chose Liu Guocheng was that he is humble and cooperative. "When asked to perform at the government office or other venues, whenever requested, Liu was likely to be there, without any complaints," said Ji Xucai (personal interview 2012). It turns out to be the case that *hua'er* inheritors are in fact expected to attend many social functions, with little or no compensation. For example, *hua'er* inheritors are expected to be present for periods when the maintenance of ICH programs is being inspected, and when guests or scholars visit to meet with local inheritors or to hear *hua'er* songs. Liu explained to me that he found it difficult to refuse such requests, considering that he is a national inheritor, though sometimes the requests were during the farming busy season, when it was difficult for him to find time away from his land. Many times, he had to pay someone to work in his farm for him while he attended such events (personal interview, 2012). Yet, due to this loyalty to the county government, he was among the first to be selected as provincial and national ICH inheritors.

The selection of national inheritors, meanwhile, tends to be performance-oriented. People who perform on stage or can sing well tend to be selected as inheritors, yet many other important individuals carry on the tradition even though they do not sing. The clearest example of this is the *chuanbanzhang* (lit. 'the leader who connects'), a term which describes people who can compose *hua'er* lyrics for singers from Kangle county in Gansu province. As described in Chapter two, *hua'er* singers in Kangle county generally team up with a *chuanbanzhang* who improvises lyrics for them to sing. Thus, even though the *chuanbanzhang* don't sing themselves, their ability to improvise and compose lyrics is not any less important than those who deliver the lyrics. I interviewed a famous *chuanbanzhang* in Kangle county named Mi Zhaoren (b. 1949), a local farmer who fell in love with *hua'er* when he was young. Although he never even attended middle school, he learned how to sing *hua'er* from his grandmother. He said that in order to be a good *chuanbanzhang*, one must be knowledgeable, cultivated, smart, quick-witted, with a strong sense of rhyme and a great sense of humor. "Ten years of study can make someone a *Zhuangyuan* (leading scholar), yet ten years of study is not enough to become a *chuanbanzhang*," said Mi. It takes years after years of practice in order to respond to an opposing group promptly and with quick-witted humor.

Figure 36. Author Interviewing Mi Zhaoren

Liu Xiumei, a cultural official in Kangle county, argued that *chuanbanzhang* are "living encyclopedias for research about *hua'er*, and the primary means for transmitting *hua'er*; [thus] they should be the focus and research subject for the ICH project; they should be appropriately recognized and receive their stipend" (Liu 2011).[10] However, many *hua'er* singers in his county and province were selected as national or county inheritors, but not *chuanbanzhang*. Similar stories were told by Ding Zuoshu, who likewise grew up in Kangle county. He is a retired Communist School chancellor, who has attended numerous *hua'er* festivals, has published extensively on the topic of *hua'er*, has composed *hua'er* (and served as a *chuanbanzhang* himself) and even judged in *hua'er* competitions throughout his entire life. However, he was not selected as a *hua'er* inheritor either. During my interview with him, he was disappointed that scholars generally do not have a chance to be a *hua'er* inheritor in his county. As a scholar, he has

[10] 串班长是研究花儿的活字典，也是传承花儿的中坚力量，"非遗"保护中这些人才是真正的重点和研究对象，他们理应享有相应的职称，得到必要的报酬

a true passion for *hua'er* and has gained a great deal of knowledge about *hua'er* through his fieldwork. He told me that many *hua'er* inheritors from Kangle county rely heavily on their *chuanbanzhang* to improvise *hua'er* lyrics, and they do not know how to improvise *hua'er* individually, nor do they understand the history and culture of *hua'er.* They can only sing it beautifully. His comment brings up a question: are the aesthetics of singing more important than skills of improvisation and composition? Indeed, my interviews with many *hua'er* singers confirmed that, many of them do not have any experience with improvisation. Thus, in this case, recognizing ICH inheritors creates a new framework of aesthetics for *hua'er* and a new power relationship within *hua'er* communities. Within a *hua'er* community, the *chuanbanzhang* were previously regarded highly but are now being devalued in a global and de-contextualized situation, whereas *hua'er* singers are given higher status than was historically the case.

Ma Ersa (b. 1969) is a Hui *hua'er* singer who has not yet been selected as an inheritor of *hua'er* ICH. Originally from Linxia county in Gansu province, Ma now lives in Hezheng county. During my interview with him in 2012, he told me that, despite how many awards he had won for his singing, and how popular he is in Hezheng county, he never had the luck to be selected as a national inheritor, nor even a provincial one. As he is growing older everyday, he felt that maybe he ought to quit singing *hua'er* and find other jobs that pays the bills. At the time of my interview, he was working for a food truck at the Songmingyan *Hua'er* festival. I followed up on his question with the Hezheng county cultural department officer, Zhang Dingping, who told me that "Ma is too young to be considered a inheritor [Ma was 43 at the time]. We have to chose the

oldest singers before considering someone his age. Secondly, his home county is Linxia county, though he does perform here [Hezheng county], and we can not chose an inheritor from a different county. Finally, not knowing anyone in the cultural department makes it hard to be recognized" (personal interview, 2012).

The question of "who can be a ICH inheritor" is both complex and political, as each cultural department official has different views on what are the key criteria to be considered, despite the ICH Law's broad guidelines. To some, being able to sing in tune, with a good voice is important, while others may value one's scholarly contributions. Yet other officials may prefer cooperative inheritors, and others may wish to honor older inheritors. Being able to perform well could be just as important as being born in the right county, with the right cultural department officer. However, given the limited opportunities for recognition of ICH inheritors, there is a constant motivation for competition among singers, composers, and scholars. Aspects that traditionally were not crucial in defining the art form, such as age, political connections, hometown, ability to perform on stage, and cooperative personality traits are likely to rise to more important roles in defining the art form, if the existing selection process continues.

Special Advantages of Owning ICH

Article 37 points out the special advantages of owning elements of ICH, such as its "marketable potential" and "preferential tax policies prescribed by the State". Article 30 lays out measures by which county and national government agencies should support

inheritors by providing necessary funding and assistance in carrying out activities to spread elements recognized as ICH.

Once items and inheritors of ICH are selected, the home counties of the ICH items and inheritors are eligible to apply for funding from the State to carry out various activities. Such activities may include the creation of a ICH interactive exhibition, *hua'er* stages, *hua'er* schools, organizing *hua'er* festivals, etc. Knowing that the State provides funding to carry out activities related to the preservation of ICH, this policy motivates local government officials to compete for ownership of ICH items as well as inheritors. Qu Wenkun, a *hua'er* scholar also points out that, since local governmental officials consider the recognition of local items of ICH as a distinctive achievement that can be used in establishing a record of administrative success, they therefore have a personal interest in eagerly pushing forward the recognition of as many local items of ICH as possible (personal interview 2012).

Below is an image of the ICH certificate for *hua'er* displayed at the Min County Museum, Gansu province.

Figure 37. UNESCO ICH Certificate for *Hua'er*

However, it is important to note that regional governments in China have a dual positionality. On one hand, they represent the central government and are in line with their political and cultural policies. However, on the other hand, they also represent and speak for local people once it comes to applying for fundings from the central government. Thus, applying for ICH programs not only helps regional governmental officers gain successful administrative reputation, but also attracts various fundings for local development project and community building.

During my fieldwork, I learned that provincial governments are in fact quite competitive when it comes to recognizing items of ICH. Since many culture practices are shared among neighboring provinces, it is often the case that provincial officials keep their application package "confidential" to prevent other provinces from gaining information that would help their own applications. Officials may also try to press for a first claim to an item of ICH, before other provinces are able to do so. When applying for

recognition of national ICH, Gansu province was the first to submit its application, called "Gansu *hua'er*" in 2009, which has led to consternation among other *hua'er* communities. According to Wei Quanming, a Gansu province *hua'er* scholar, even though all the other provinces were added as joint provinces in the following years, *hua'er* scholars from Gansu province still feel awkward when meeting with *hua'er* scholars of other provinces, since they did not communicate with other *hua'er* scholars before submitting the application (personal interview 2012).

Wang Lianlian (b. 1958), a national *hua'er* inheritor, was born in Kangle county in Gansu province, and then married her husband, who is from Weiquan county, in 1977. According to Ding (2001:44–46), Wang was a talented *hua'er* singer since a young age. She was chosen for many provincial performance and educational activities and was nominated as a national *hua'er* inheritor in 2009. However, as her inheritor application progressed and was eventually successful, Weiquan county claimed their "ownership" of the new national inheritor, since Wang has lived in Weiquan county since 1977. Although the two counties are not far from each other, the designation as being the "home" of a national inheritor may result in different financial support and prioritization from higher levels of government in efforts to safeguard *hua'er*. The conflict between the two counties has continued into the present day. During my fieldwork in Kangle county in both 2011 and 2012, I was told by the Kangle county officials that Wang would not be worth my time to interview, and they offered to put me in touch with singers from their county only.

Similarly, the recognition of a geographic place of origin for the entire tradition of *hua'er* has also triggered conflict at the provincial level. Because the tunes and lyrics of *hua'er* are highly regionalized, different locations have different regional styles. Many provinces claim that they are the original birthplace of *hua'er*, and that their style of *hua'er* is the most authentic. Ke Yang, a professor at Lanzhou University and a leading *hua'er* scholar, jokingly told me that, "the best *hua'er* scholars are in Gansu, the best *hua'er* singers are in Qinghai, and the best government programs for the promotion of *hua'er* are in Ningxia" (personal interview, 2011). Note that Xinjiang province was not even mentioned in this joke, as Xinjiang *hua'er* is often considered "unauthentic" among *hua'er* scholars and communities as discussed in Chapter two. Su Shanlin, a Xinjiang *hua'er* singer, told me that "Xinjiang *hua'er* is a variation of the original *hua'er*. It has its unique characteristics and is valuable to Xinjiang *hua'er* communities. However, due to its modification from its original aesthetics, even though it is a ICH now, many *hua'er* scholars still think Xinjiang *hua'er* is not important to study because it is not "authentic" enough" (personal interview 2012). He points out that as a *hua'er* singer from Xinjiang province, where Uyghur culture is the dominant culture there, their *hua'er* is a marginalized practice among both *hua'er* communities in the Northwestern Region as well as within their home province as a ICH element (personal interview, 2011).

Each province has its own strategies for the use of *hua'er* in provincial development projects. Scholars from various provinces often get involved in the politics of how to define the birthplace of *hua'er*, the ethnic group who sang *hua'er* first, and distinctive stylistic elements, as discussed in Chapter three. Many scholars have taken

adversarial positions in this ongoing debate, and an answer to each of these questions is far from clear. However, the ongoing debate among government officials and scholars belies the power of identification and recognition. Whichever side wins the debate will legitimize their version of *hua'er* as the most authentic.

Documentation

Chapter four of the ICH law addresses the spread and transmission of ICH. It sets forth obligations that ICH inheritors, governmental agencies and individuals should carry out in the preservation of elements of ICH. Article 33 points out how the Chinese government encourages the compilation and publication of elements of ICH. Although the intent of such provisions of the law was to be supportive, artists that create or perform works of literature and art that are somehow deemed as inappropriate nonetheless continue to run the risk of being censored, being cut or being asked to be revised. An artist who is censored may even face related administrative or political penalties. In his article, "Academic Ignorance or Political Taboo? Some Issues in China's study of its Folk Song Culture" Yang discusses issues relating to China's study of its folk song culture, and offer insights on the relationship between political pressure and scholarly activity (Yang 1994b). According to Yang,

> For more than four decades the Chinese government has implemented a policy of eliminating or changing customs and traditions that they consider contrary to communist ideology… Since the early 1950s, every household has become aware of the government policy of *yifeng-yisu*, or "changing prevailing customs and transforming social traditions," which implies the elimination of "bad" customs by transforming them into "good" ones. According to Chinese

> communist ideology, the sexual practices associated with *hua'er* singing are decidedly "bad customs," and are to be eliminated. (Yang, 1994b:112)

He also states that "any scholars who choose to oppose this guideline [of *yifeng-yisu*] are taking a risk which, in extreme cases, may even mean the end of their academic careers" (Yang 1994b). Thus, *hua'er* songs that are politically out of line with the CCP's ideologies, and especially songs with erotic lyrics, continue to be subject to censorship.

Li Jinhui, Xining Cultural Department folklorist and researcher, told me that *hua'er* songs discussing sex, ethnic conflict, religious views or any form of negative commentary about the government or its policies are passed over during efforts a documentation (personal interview 2012). Although individual scholars may have private collections of these "inappropriate" *hua'er* songs, there is no clear venue by which such lyrics could be published in China.

Censorship does not apply only to printed materials. During *hua'er* festivals that are organized by government agencies, organizers often set up rules for performers to follow. In 2011, I participated in a meeting of the Xining Cultural Department (XCD) that summarized their month-long *hua'er* festival performances across Qinghai province. At the meeting, there were approximately 25 performers who had been contracted to sing *hua'er*, who met with an XCD official and one of the managers of the festival. During the meeting, Su Ping, a senior *hua'er* singer, told the other young *hua'er* singers that *hua'er* songs that were politically incorrect or that used offensive or erotic language would be strictly prohibited during the *hua'er* festival. Yang Xiaohua, a manager in the XCD, reiterated that if she found anyone who sang erotic, offensive or politically

incorrect lyrics on stage, those singers would not be offered a contract with the cultural department to perform at future events. She also named one performer who had not been offered a contract for the current festival, due to her insensitivity to political correctness on stage in the previous year (personal notes, 2011). Contracted *hua'er* singers are generally full-time farmers. During the farming off season, which coincides with the *hua'er* festival season, they are contracted by the XCD, and perform staged *hua'er* festivals across Qinghai province. In 2011, XCD organized 17 staged *hua'er* festivals in a single month. For each staged *hua'er* festival they perform, *hua'er* singers may sing between two to five *hua'er* songs. The program of the festival is generally fixed, but *hua'er* singers can sing any tunes and lyrics that are deemed as appropriate.

Figure 38. *Hua'er* Festival Program (Outside & Inside), 2012

Thus, publications and government organized *hua'er* festivals are all subject to censorship. Zhang Guotong, one of the singers contracted by the XCD, told me that he liked participating in non-government organized *hua'er* festivals. During those festivals, everyone sings whatever they want. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, people are

free to express their true feelings and are not afraid of anything. He said that "many types of popular music today have explicit lyrics. Why can't *hua'er* have explicit lyrics?". Nonetheless, he still performs mainly with the XCD since this arrangement allows for him to be paid to sing on stage (personal interview 2012).

As a result of the continuing censorship, new image and representations of *hua'er* have been under reconstruction. Yan Zongcheng, the Xining cultural department officer, works hard to reconstruct a new image for *hua'er* and *hua'er* singers. He said at the meeting with *hua'er* singers that "it was not easy for *hua'er* to be recognized world wide. In the past, *hua'er* is not something worth mentioning on formal occasions. Now, you must not think the same. We have to live up the expectations. You're people's artists, not *wuhunren*[11] (lit. five stinky people)" (personal interview 2011). On TV, at *hua'er* festival and in *hua'er* publications, all you can hear and read is politically correct *hua'er* songs with love being its only theme. Furthermore, *hua'er* songs have been romanticized in the imaginations of mainstream audiences as a traditional art form by which young, naive ethnic minorities and farmers can seek true love or first love in the Northwestern region. Other types of love, especially views of love that flaunt the prescriptive view of love within the confines of lawful marriage, are completely ignored, which keeps the art within the framework of the Chinese marriage law, which was first passed in 1950. What happens when a tradition is grounded on a practice that is no longer considered legal or moral? With the newly established ICH Law, not only is such a tradition deemed as

[11] 花儿走出世界不容易。以前花儿登不上大雅之堂，现在不要再这样想了。自己要争气，你们是人民的艺术家，不是五荤人。

worthy of being preserved, but importance is attached to how it is transmitted to younger generations. How, then, should scholars and inheritors handle an art form's so-called unlawful and unmoral past? Should the past be ignored or re-invented? As Li Jinhui puts it, "such are the grievances of scholars. Sex and love outside of a marriage is improper, on the other hand, it would be just and honorable in a marriage" (personal interview 2012).[12] Thus, both in documents and on stage, *hua'er* has been reconstructed to represent the honorable love within a traditional marriage instead.

A recent publication on *hua'er*, part of a series of "recommended books on the Chinese folklore oral transmission and Intangible Cultural Heritage", titled *Da xibei zhi hun: zhongguo hua'er* (The Soul of the Great Northwest: *Hua'er* in China) was written by Wang Pei and published in 2006. Wang defines hua'er in romantic terms, as:

> "Flowers are the world's most beautiful plants, and calling folksongs by the name of "flower" is a singular phenomenon in the world of folksongs. Endless love is expressed in *hua'er*, which showcases the greatest creativity and artistic imagination of the people from *hua'er* regions. *Hua'er* comes from the bottom of the heart for ethnic minority people of Northwestern China, and it is the emotional support for every ethnic people and their heart…, *hua'er* has become the medium for the people's pursuit of love and a reflection of their society…, *hua'er* are mostly love songs, and they preserve many love songs from remote antiquity, expressing vast and deep political, economic, cultural, artistic, and ethnic sentiments and folklore" (Wang, 2006:2).[13]

This is rather typical for most *hua'er* publications today, while taboo, explicit lyrics and extramarital love are left undiscussed. At the same time, new meanings for *hua'er*

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[12] 这正是现代文人的苦衷。情爱是不正当的东西，爱情是正大光明的。

[13] 花儿是世界上最美好的植物，把山歌誉称为"花儿"，在世界山歌中独树一帜，无限的热爱之情尽在其中，凝聚着花儿之乡人民伟大的创造性和丰富的艺术想像力。花儿是发自西北民族人民心底的声音，是各族人民的精神支柱和"心头肉"……，花儿成了人们表达爱情追求，反映社会的最主要载体……，花儿的主体是情歌，保留着许多远古的情歌绝唱，展现着广阔厚重的政治经济，文化艺术，民情风俗。

are being actively constructed. For example, since *hua'er* is practiced by many ethnic groups, it has thus been reinterpreted as a musical practice that symbolizes ethnic solidarity and harmony. This is in contrast to most other national ICH, which are practiced predominately by only one ethnic group and, thus, symbolize only one unique ethnic identity. *Hua'er* is argued by many scholars as representing a multi-ethnic tradition, an art form that brings ethnic groups together, regardless of their differences in language, religion or cultural practices. Despite being forbidden and looked down upon, local government agencies and scholars are eager to focus on the construction of a multi-ethnic tradition, since this narrative fits well with current government policies concerning the construction of a harmonious, multiethnic society. Meanwhile, people outside of the Northwestern region have little idea of *hua'er*'s notorious past. Like Smith said, "heritage is about negotiation, about using the past to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity" (Smith 2006). On the form used when application was made for recognition of ICH at the international level, one can read the description of *hua'er* that fits this point of view.

> *Hua'er* is a folk song created by nine ethnic groups, such as Han, Hui, Tibetan, Tu, Mongol, Dongxiang, Salar, Bonan, Yugu, and each nationality shares it with others. It is an important artistic form of cultural exchange and emotional communication among nationalities, the only folk song of its kind created and performed by multiple nationalities in China.
>
> *Hua'er* Festivals", which are large-scale grand folk song singing activities, are held spontaneously at specific times and venues annually, and these events have special value in how they reflect multi-ethnic exchanges of culture and sentiment (UNESCO 2015).

As a result, the number of ethnicities participating in *hua'er* singing has grown over the past three decades. In Ke Yang's *The Origin of Hua'er*, published in 1981, he stated that *hua'er* was popular in three provinces, namely Gansu, Qinghai and Ningxia autonomous region, among six ethnicities: Han, Hui, Bao'an, Dongxiang, Tu, and Salar (Ke 1981:60). In 1988, Tuohy listed seven ethnicities in her dissertation, with Tibetan as an addition to the original six. However, looking at the Hua'er nomination for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List in 2009, the section on "Brief Textual Description of the Nominated Element" identify more than nine ethnic groups, although it doesn't name the others beyond nine, practice this type of musical tradition, adding Yugu and Mongolians. Furthermore, *hua'er* is said to be popular in four provinces and regions of the Northwest, with the apparently recent addition of Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. It might be hasty to assume that *hua'er* studies have somehow become more advanced today and that we are simply now more aware of what had previously been the case, or that local governments might be trying to increase the involvement of different ethnic groups and regions. Questioning the apparent increase in the number of ethnicities participating in *hua'er* singing, Kou Hong, a Uyghur *hua'er* singer, asked rhetorically whether, if a Kazakh were to learn how to sing *hua'er*, should we count that as a tenth ethnic group participating in *hua'er* singing? How many singers from a particular ethnic group are necessary before we can add them to the list? (personal interview 2012). Li Jinhui, Xining Cultural Department folklorist and researcher, on the other hand, pointed out that it is misleading to include Mongols as *hua'er* practitioners, since almost no Mongolians sing *hua'er* at all. The same goes for Tibetans, since only those Tibetans

who assimilated to Han culture actually sing *hua'er*. He had overheard a Tibetan saying, "don't force *hua'er* onto Tibetan culture on our behalf" (personal interview 2012).[14] Despite the fact that ethnic minority groups may not enjoy being listed as participants in the tradition of *hua'er*, the art form of *hua'er* has been reconstructed so as to symbolize ethnic unity.

As Wang puts it, the factors that necessitate the preservation of *hua'er* as an art form each relate to its status as a multi-ethnic tradition, namely: (1) the need to preserve the most salutary aspects of Chinese culture, (2) the need to promote ethnic solidarity, (3) the need to engage in research on fields related to social sciences, (4) the need to foster socialist artistic compositions, and (5) the need to inspire cultural and ideological progress among all ethnicities (Wang 2006:106–110). Thus, *hua'er* has become an ideal example for the promotion of ethnic solidarity in the Northwestern region.

In this way, documentation projects, publications and staged performances each contribute to a normative re-construction of *hua'er*, while flirtatious, erotic and politically incorrect *hua'er* continue to be censored and despised. Instead, *hua'er* is imagined as, and then shaped into, the love songs of "naive" ethnic minority groups and peasants farmer's love song which may leads to a honorable marriage and as an example of ethnic solidarity.

Even though the government initiated documentation projects lead to drastic modifications of the content and practice of *hua'er*, many *hua'er* singers shared positive feedbacks on how they were benefited from such modification and reconstruction. As

[14] 不要把花儿强加在我们(藏族)身上。

Yong Shi, a *hua'er* scholar points out that, in the past, it was uncommon for a women to divorce their husband. Thus, attending *hua'er* festivals was a way for women to express their emotions and desires. However, today, divorce is a socially accepted phenomenon. Thus, the traditional social environment for *hua'er* has changed. *Hua'er* singers today [and in the future] have to sing *hua'er* for different reasons (personal interview 2012). Liu Yongmei said that she wants people to respect *hua'er* and *hua'er* singers. "*Hua'er* is an art, not something shameful", she said, "with the censorship on *hua'er* lyrics, now, *hua'er* can be performed in a village, home and on TV. These are positive changes for people who love *hua'er"* (personal interview 2012). She also said that as she is getting older, she appreciate *hua'er* with philosophy content instead of just flirtation. According to Teng Xiaotian, the reconstruction of *hua'er* and its content also benefitted female singers in particular as they can perform publicly on stage. (person interview 2012).

In this case, many *hua'er* singers and scholars are hopeful that the reconstruction of the content of *hua'er* may change the prejudice against *hua'er* and *hua'er* singers in the future.

Provisions on Publicity

Article 34 of the ICH law states that public cultural institutions such as libraries, cultural centers, museums should operate venues for the publicity and exhibition of elements of ICH. This article has encouraged the involvement of government agencies in *hua'er* gatherings, particularly traditional *hua'er* festivals. In the past, *hua'er* festivals were informal gatherings. People in each region would meet during the farming off

season to sing. However, since the recognition of *hua'er* as a national ICH, eight *hua'er* festivals were officially recognized, and each of them is now government sponsored, as follows:

1. Lianhua mountain *hua'er* festival, Gansu province
2. Erlang mountain *hua'er* festival, Gansu province
3. Songmingyan *hua'er* festival, Gansu province
4. Datong *hua'er* festival, Qinghai province
5. Laoye mountain *hua'er* festival, Qinghai province
6. Danma Tu ethnic *hua'er* festival, Qinghai province
7. Qili Temple *hua'er* festival, Qinghai province
8. Qutan temple *hua'er* festival, Qinghai province

Hand in hand with this government sponsorship of festivals, political lyrics have been increasingly a popular topic for *hua'er* songs. Some are perhaps composed by *hua'er* singers themselves to express their true feelings toward a political event or a national policy. Others may be composed by government officials or through government funding to educate or spread certain messages.

The earliest examples of political *hua'er* can be found in Zhang Yaxiong 1940 collection of *hua'er* songs during the war against Japanese occupation (1937–1945). He describes these new *hua'er* songs as "old bottles with new wine". The "old bottle" refers to the form and melody, whereas the "new wine" refers to the content of the lyrics. He asks, "why do we use mountain songs as propaganda tools? We indeed utilize this most primitive and convenient method, to achieve the goal of spreading the news of war.

Using folk tunes, we can call the commoners and enlarge their strength; at the same time, we could disturb our enemy's spirits, and rally the masses" (Zhang 1940:48–49).[15]

The following example is a song he collected in the early 1940s.

这样大的国家，这样多的人	Such a large nation with so many people,
猛然来了日本兵	Suddenly, the Japanese came,
用飞机轰炸我们！	They use airplanes to drop bombs,
惨啊！惨啊！用飞机轰炸我们	How sad, they use airplanes to drop bombs.
尕马儿骑上枪搭上	Ride on our horses and carry our guns,
老百姓个个打东洋	Our commoners can fight the Japanese,
收失地，夺闯潘阳	Let's take our lost land and Panyang back,
打呀！打呀！ 收失地，夺回潘阳	Let's fight! Let's fight! Take our lost land and Panyang back

(Zhang 1940:42)

It is not indicated in his collection whether this *hua'er* was composed by an individual singer, or by Party members for political purposes. However, since *hua'er* were most popular among illiterate farmers, government officials and agencies could use this medium to explain or teach people regarding new concepts and policies.

During government sponsored *hua'er* festivals, *hua'er* songs are often being used as means to spread propaganda, commercial or educational messages. The topics of such political lyrics range from the family planing to how to apply for a debit card, advice on investments, and basic understanding of national laws. Such lyrics are generally

[15] "我们为什么主张利用山歌来作为宣传的工具呢？就是要利用这种最原始而最便利的方法，已达成宣传战的效果。歌谣的利用，可以在自己的后方，做广大的号召，策助全民力量，在敌人的后方，做扰乱其军心，及夺取民众的工作"

composed as set pieces by local scholars, instead of improvised. Below is a *hua'er* encourages people to have birth control plans.

镰刀要割牛草呢，	Using a reaping-hook to cut the grass,
计划生育要搞呢，	We need to have birth control plans,
要把人口减少呢。	We need to reduce our population.
	(Dong Mingqiao, personal interview)

Ding's *Lianhuashan hua'er xinbian [New Lianhuashan Hua'er Songs]* includes a collection of *hua'er* songs he composed for various purposes. He says that, "in order [for the farmers] to gain some basic understanding of finance, and to advance personal finance capacities, at the previous year's lianhuashan *hua'er* festival, we organized a festival focusing on understanding finance. This year, our bank decided to bring these unique ethnic *hua'er* to every household, spreading deeper knowledge of personal finance. Thus, even the common people can see it, touch it, deeply feel it and can make connections, and eventually reach to the level of *juyifansan* (lit. 'shown one corner, able to point out three other corners' meaning being able to restate an idea with variations or examples, or understanding a concept inside out)" (Ding 2010:57).[16]

Here are a few examples of *hua'er* regarding money and finance.

鸡两窝的一窝鸡	Two chicken coops and one chicken coop,
法定货币人民币	The statutory currency is the Renminbi.
人人都要珍惜呢	Everyone should treasure it,
折不的来揉不的	Don't fold it or crumple it,

[16] "为了进一步宣传普及金融知识，提高公众金融素质，在去年借助"莲花山花儿会"平台，开展金融知识宣传活动的基础上，今年我行又把这具有民族特色的花儿，带进家户，带进典型，丰富内容，丰富特色，深入地开展金融子是宣传，使广大群众看得见，摸得着，挨得上，深切感受，说他联己，起到举一反三的效果"

更不要在上面签名字	Especially don't write your name on it,
乱烧乱撕是违法的	Burning it and tearing it are illegal.
	(Ding 2010:57–58)

In this *hua'er*, the purpose is to educate common people how to care for and properly use paper money. In the following examples, which were sponsored by Jinbian Zhaijuan bank, these four pre-composed *hua'er* are meant to provide information about the services that the bank provides and guidelines on how to apply for a credit card and how to take out a student loan.

腰两条的一条腰	Two waists and one waist,
金边债券声誉高	Jinbian bonds have a great reputation,
债券变现能办到	Bonds can be cashed out,
作质押能把款贷到	They can also be used for mortgages and loans,
利息稳定风险小	The interest is stable, and the risk is low.
	(Ding 2010:59–60)

银行服务变样了	Bank services have changed,
现在把过去不像了	The times have changed,
把百姓牵着心上了	The bank cares about everyone,
银行卡办者拿上了	Everyone should have a bank card.
挣上多少存上了	You can put your money in your card,
刷卡现钱拿上了	You can withdraw cash by sliding your card.
	(Ding 2010:60)

柏木解了柏板了	Cypress wood made into board,
政策想的越远了	Policies have long-term vision.
为了农民发展了	For the development of farmers,
农行发放小额贷款了	The agricultural bank gives small loans to farmers,
把事办到心坎了	Exactly what farmers want.
	(Ding 2010:64–65)

园子里的红牡丹	Red peonies in the garden,
你有困难甭颇烦	If you have troubles don't worry,

信用社在你跟（儿）前站	A credit union stands in front of you.
生源地一年贷款六千元	Shengyuandi gives six thousand loans per year.
一心帮你把书念完	They want to help you finish school,
叫你全家都喜欢	And make everyone happy.
	(Ding 2010:71–72)

These propaganda *hua'er* songs are becoming increasingly common during *hua'er* festival seasons as banks and other government agencies continue to sponsor local festivals and decide on thematic focuses for *hua'er* performance. Many *hua'er* singers and scholars have reflected on the fact that these commercially and governmentally sponsored *hua'er* tend to be short-lived among *hua'er* communities. Often, after being performed once for the specific occasion, they may not be sung again.

Despite the increasing number of propaganda *hua'er* performed during government-sponsored *hua'er* festivals, many *hua'er* singers and inheritors still prefer to attend the large-scale festivals. Some like doing so because they get paid to be there, while others like it because they enjoy being a celebrity on stage. Ma Jinshan, a contracted *hua'er* singer from Qinghai province, told me that before the governmental sponsored *hua'er* festivals, his family was strongly against him singing *hua'er.* Since he is now able to support his family with singing, his family finally accepted him. Zhang Guoquan, a contracted *hua'er* singer, told me that he simply loves to sing on stage and hear the applause from his audiences (personal interview 2012).

The writer of those political *hua'er* songs, Ding Zuoshu, told me that, "everyone likes love songs, the more racy the better! In fact, nobody likes to listen to political *hua'er*, even the Communist Party members themselves." He mentioned during my interview that, "once, there were a few government officials who came for an inspection

visit to Kangle county and requested to listen to *hua'er*, so I composed a few political *hua'er* songs praising the Party, just for them, and guest what? None of them liked it. They ask our singers to sing love songs with explicit lyrics instead!" (personal interview, 2012). He commented that political *hua'er* are superficial songs, which do not touch people's souls, and that, "those kind of *hua'er* will not last despite being performed often" (personal interview, 2012). Ke Yang also echoed by saying "political *hua'er* won't live. Family planning and afforestation are not eternal topics, but love" (personal interview 2012).

The dress code for *hua'er* singers also changed quite substantially as they perform more and more often on stage. Dressing up in colorful ethnic attire is increasingly trendy among *hua'er* singers, and may not directly reflect their actual ethnic identity. Sometimes, dressing up is actively encouraged by authorities. During the Xining Cultural Department meeting I attended in 2011, a professional *hua'er* singer named Su Ping spoke to contracted *hua'er* singers whose ethnic backgrounds were Han, Tibetan, Tu, Hui and Dongxiang. She emphasized the importance of wearing ethnic attire on stage, saying that, "ethnic minority people do not wear the cultural attire of other ethnicities in real life, but performing on stage can be an exception. Take the famous Tibetan pop singer Caidan Zhuoma as an example. She always wears Tibetan dresses on stage. It is not that she cannot afford fancy [non-Tibetan] clothes. Instead, her Tibetan attire expresses her ethnic identity, that she is not just any singer, but a Tibetan singer! If you wear the appropriate clothes, it will directly affect whether or not you will be popular… Thus, during our winter training, all of you will wear Tibetan dresses. Among

all ethnicities, Tibetan dress is the most beautiful" (personal interview, 2011). Despite the competition among scholars and regional governments regarding the origins of *hua'er* and who was the first ethnic group to sing *hua'er*, on stage, *hua'er* singers dress up in various types of ethnic attire to achieve a visual effect with heightened ethnic flavor. Many Han *hua'er* singers expressed during interviews that they have worn ethnic minority cultural attire when performing. Liu Yongmei, a Han *hua'er* singer, told me that she has worn Han, Tibetan, Hui and Mongolian cultural attire on different occasions while performing hua'er on stage. However, Zhang Dingping, the cultural department officer from Hezheng county, had a different view on cultural attires. Zhang said that since the majority of the *hua'er* practitioners and fans in the Hezheng county are Hui and believes that *hua'er* is indeed a Hui cultural practice, he often encourages Han singers to wear Hui attire to be culturally correct and appropriate. Thus, in his view, wearing a Hui ethnic attire was not only for the colorful or multi-ethnic stage effect, but also a way to recognize and acknowledge the contribution of Hui communities on *hua'er*.

The increasing number of staged performances also leads to a separation between professional superstar *hua'er* singers versus amateur singers. This is a further indication of a trend noted by Lau, who differentiates between professional and amateur singers in modern China, in that, "amateur has been turned into a code word for someone who is not hired by the government, is untrained, and lacks formal musical knowledge. They are often looked down at by government *zhuanye* [professional] musicians" (Lau 2008:25). In the case of *hua'er*, neither professional *hua'er* singers nor amateur *hua'er* singers have received any formal music training. However, since professional singers are more widely

recognized for their talent at singing, they are more likely to receive contracts from local cultural departments. After performing on stage over and over again, they become experienced in interacting with larger audiences and in entertaining them. Amateur *hua'er* singers, on the other hand, are not selected by the government and thus rarely perform on stage. As discussed in Chapter two, *hua'er* expresses one's emotions. It doesn't matter whether or not one sings in tune or has a beautiful voice. Everyone can sing *hua'er* to express themselves. According to Yong Shi, a musicologist, amateur *hua'er* singers today increasingly feel intimidated when singing in public, since they feel that they are not as good as those newly emerged professional *hua'er* superstar singers. Thus, during my fieldwork in Qinghai and Xinjiang province, I could easily find professional *hua'er* singers who were willing to sing for me, while amateur *hua'er* singers tended to shy away from the opportunity.

Inheritors' Obligations

Article 31 sets forth the obligations of inheritors, requiring that they carry out inheritance activities and cultivate talented successors, that they properly keep relevant physical objects and information (which tends not to be relevant to *hua'er* singers given that it is an oral tradition), and that they cooperate with authorities to promote the element of ICH in addition to self promotion. This article of the law also states that, if a inheritor fails to follow through with these obligations, his or her recognition could be revoked. Local cultural departments have the authority to evaluate whether or not inheritors meet the above obligations.

ICH recognition is a huge boon for *hua'er* singers. For the first time in their lives, they are now referred to as national and provincial cultural inheritors instead of *wuhunren* (lit. 'five stinky people'). Many inheritors are indeed proud of their new title, as well as their annual stipend from the Chinese government of 8,000 RMB (equivalent to about $1,250 as of 2015). This compensation is meant to be used in transmitting *hua'er* to younger generations and in organizing *hua'er* festivals.

It may seem entirely reasonable that inheritors should be responsible for transmitting their talent to younger generations. Nonetheless, doing this is a challenge for *hua'er* inheritors. Unlike the art of Qin or Kunqu, where a teacher is required and lineage of master teachers is respected, historically, *hua'er* singers did not take formal singing lessons, and there were no professional *hua'er* singers. *Hua'er* singers generally learned various tunes while attending *hua'er* festivals and hearing others sing. With time, they could eventually improvise *hua'er* lyrics with ease. Therefore, everyone who sings *hua'er* can be considered a *hua'er* singer, although some *hua'er* singers are skillful since they can improvise quickly and with a sense of humor. With the newly established ICH law, and its stipulation that inheritors must have successors, many national and provincial inheritors have begun to teach students and successors in order to maintain their titles as inheritors.

Teaching *hua'er* directly, in fact, contradicts the traditional practice itself. As I mentioned earlier, singing *hua'er* in a village context is highly inappropriate. Publicly teaching *hua'er* or discussing *hua'er* contradicts with traditional practice for the very same reasons. Wen Xianglian, a provincial inheritor from Kangle county, told me that she

is a grandmother, and thus it would be highly inappropriate to teach *hua'er* in front of her children and grandchildren. Although her family understands the concept that *hua'er* is now considered an element of national heritage, singing *hua'er* openly in her home is nonetheless still considered shameful and highly inappropriate. On the other hand, hiking up to a remote mountain just for the sake of teaching *hua'er* is equally impractical. In the mean time, she is building a *hua'er* school where she can eventually teach students without having to worry about being overheard by her children and grandchildren. Below are some photos of Wen Xianglian and her *hua'er* school under construction.

Figure 39. Author Interviewing Wen Xianglian (left)

Figure 40. Wen Xianglian's *Hua'er* School Under Construction (right)

Ma Delin is a national inheritor from Datong county in Qinghai province. As the only *hua'er* inheritor who is a folklorist, he earned his title after publishing a *hua'er* book titled *Xinbian Dazhuan Hua'er* that presents the most comprehensive collection to date of

historical *hua'er* songs from Qinghai province. Although he does not perform, he considers his work to be important, perhaps even "more than the singers" in his view. He told me that the songs he collected were very much endangered, as he collected them from *hua'er* singers who were septuagenarians and octogenarians. He felt fortunate that the nation recognizes his contribution as a folklorist, at the same time, he found it challenging that somehow he needs to transmit *hua'er* to younger generation even though he does not sing *hua'er.* Since the transmission process is often interpreted as transmitting the performance aspect of *hua'er*, in the case of Ma Delin, would data collection and documentation skills be the subject of his transmission obligation (personal interview, 2012)?

In addition, the social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of inheritors can make it difficult for them to carry out the process of transmission. In the case of Ma Jun, an ethnic Sala *hua'er* inheritor, he has considerable trouble transmitting *hua'er* publicly as a Muslim. He said that being recognized as a national inheritor has made him a famous *hua'er* singer and, at the same time, a terrible Muslim. As a Muslim, he attends his local mosque every two weeks, and each time he does so, his local akhoond or Muslim priest would try to persuade him to stop singing, despite his legal obligations to transmit *hua'er* according to the ICH law (personal interview 2012).

Similarly, Ma Jinshan, an ethnic Dongxiang *hua'er* inheritor, also faces the same challenge. As he has tried to transmit *hua'er*, he has in fact ended up having to pay students to learn *hua'er* in order to maintain his inheritor status. He points out that, "our religion [Islam] has already forbidden us from singing. If I charge a fee, who would want

to learn from me?" (personal interview, 2012). In fact, paying for students to learn *hua'er* is common among *hua'er* inheritors. Dong Fenglan, a female *chuanbanzhang* from Kangle county, likewise pointed out that, "teaching *hua'er* has became an economic burden, as I can not afford to pay for my student's transportation costs each time" (personal interview, 2011).

Figure 41. Author with Dong Fenglan, 2011

In the case of Wang Xiufang, she paid ¥50 RMB (about $8 USD) per student per class (Ding 2014). Considering that the average annual income for *hua'er* singers who are full time farmers is about $3,000 to $5,000 per year, any amount they have to pay their student presents a significant economic burden. Nonetheless, many *hua'er* singers continue to do so, in order to keep their much appreciated inheritor title.

Since *hua'er* is now perceived as a multi-ethnic tradition, *hua'er* singers sometimes have to deal with inter-ethnic politics. Suonan Sunbin, an ethnic Tibetan *hua'er* inheritor, received criticism from his Tibetan communities. Renzhong Erjia, a Tibetan singer,

criticized him publicly, asking "what kind of Tibetan is he, if he cannot sing Tibetan songs, but only Han *hua'er* songs?" Similarly, Pengcuo Zhuoma's parents asked her, "my Tibetan daughter, why don't you spread your own Tibetan culture instead?" (personal interview 2012). This is because participating in *hua'er* activities is seen as a betrayal of their Tibetan identity, since the art form is not exclusive to Tibetans. Meanwhile, Suonan Sunbin is obligated to continue singing and transmitting *hua'er* given his status as an inheritor.

Despite the religious and ethnic contradictions involved in transmitting *hua'er*, the variable spectrum of *hua'er* aesthetics further complicates matters for *hua'er* inheritors. Increasingly, *hua'er* songs are performed on stage, instead of in their traditional contexts. New venues include organized and sponsored competitions, government venues, and educational settings. In each of these different contexts, the aesthetics of *hua'er* singing can vary drastically. For example, flirtatious or even erotic lyrics may be praised in one context, whereas at other times the lyrics must reflect the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. Sometimes smooth improvisation of lyrics can show off one's great musicality, while at other times, "being able to switch from chest voice to head voice smoothly[17]" or to sing in high pitch is key. ICH inheritors continue to wonder, since they are now subject to such variable criteria, which sets of aesthetics should be transmitted? Which aesthetic ideals reflect the "heritage" to be preserved as ICH? During my fieldwork, I often saw "official" *hua'er* performed on stage that praised government

[17] This is a comment from Chao Yuanqing, a *hua'er* judge for the Second Qinghai *Hua'er* Singer Competition TV program, 2011.

policies, whereas "private" *hua'er* singing occurred off stage where "vulgar" and erotic *hua'er* were sung. Which of these are recognized as ICH?

Su Yaling, a cultural department officer from Datong county, said that the local cultural department does not completely understand what it means to "protect" a musical form. She wishes that there were more detailed guidelines concerning methods for protection. Ma Shengquan, another official from the Datong county cultural department, simply criticized the very idea of transmission of *hua'er* altogether. He said that, "the beauty of *hua'er* is that it is a gathering of free expressions by individuals. But when it is taught, everyone just sings the same. It loses its flavor and character" (personal interview, 2011).

Despite these various issues relating to the transmission of *hua'er*, inheritors must transmit something, or their status will be revoked. Thus, recognition has come with plenty of challenging obligations, which have led to rapid changes in *hua'er* aesthetics. Based on a false assumption that *hua'er* traditionally had a fixed set of aesthetics, the intended process of transmission has in fact become a process of standardization and canonization for *hua'er* songs.

Institutionalization

Article 34 says that schools should carry out education programs relating to ICH. Ningxia Hui autonomous region is known for incorporating *hua'er* in its music curriculum.

"Hua'er comes to school, how sweet it sounds"[18] is a slogan used in Yinchuan Hui Ethnicity middle school in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. This middle school was chosen as one of the seventeen schools in Ningxia as a "*hua'er* transmission center". Tang Xiang, a 55-year-old chemistry and *hua'er* teacher at Yinchuan Hui Ethnicity middle school, co-authored the first textbook on *hua'er* to cater to middle school children, *Hua'er Zongyi [The Art of Hua'er]*. As the postscript of this textbook reads:

> "...since society has developed to the stage of transmitting *hua'er* today, reliance only on natural and family-style transmission is clearly not enough, but instead we should utilize the power of school for education and transmission. Education and transmission is currently the best form of ICH protection. By relying on the power of institutional transmission, promoting *hua'er* and other ethnic folk cultural on campus, starting from the youth, we can completely change passive situation that would otherwise lead to breaks in transmission or dissipation of interest. Middle and elementary school children must be allowed to recognize and enjoy singing *hua'er*, in order to ensure that this excellent rural and ethnic folk culture of our nation is truly protected and transmitted" (Wu 2011:252).[19]

In Yinchuan Hui Ethnicity middle school, Tang teaches *hua'er* to first-year middle school students half an hour every week, making a total of twenty hours throughout a semester. For the second- and third-year middle school students, there is no mandatary *hua'er* class, but elective classes are offered for them to continue learning *hua'er* if they like.

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[18] 花儿进校园，歌声分外甜

[19] "...随着时代的发展，现阶段"花儿"的传承，仅靠传统的自然传承及家族式的传承方式显然是不够的，还需要借助学校的力量进性教育传承。教育传承是目前最佳的非物质文化遗产保护形式，只有依靠教育传承的强大力量，促使"花儿"等民族民间文化进校园，从青少年抓起，才能彻底改变传承断层，后继乏人的被动局面。只有让更多的中小学生认识并喜爱歌唱"花儿"，才能使我国这一优秀的民族民间乡土文化真正得以保护和传承."

Figure 42. *Hua'er* Classroom Figure 43-45. Tang's Open House *Hua'er* Lecture

The photos above show the classroom used for teaching *hua'er* and a classroom open house that Tang hosted for local television and educational experts to attend his *hua'er* class.

Tang Xiang, the only *hua'er* teacher at the Yinchuan Hui Ethnicity middle school, told me that he grew up listening to various music genres and is a self-taught singer. In 2004, he participated in a *hua'er* singing workshop at the Ningxia cultural department.

Since 2007, he has been introducing *hua'er* to middle schoolers as a part of their music curriculum. In 2013, he was recognized as a provincial ICH inheritor of *hua'er*.

The institutionalization and transmission of *hua'er* in middle schools is indeed innovative in many ways. As discussed in Chapters three and four, *hua'er* is often self-taught. *Hua'er* singers and inheritors, even today, face obstacles while transmitting *hua'er.* For example, Wu Yulin, the author of the *hua'er* textbook, pointed out that *hua'er* is traditionally enjoyed among middle-aged to older (30 years of age or older) illiterate farmers (personal interview, 2012). To pass on their tradition to a younger, literate and urban population outside of the *hua'er* socio-cultural community, it is surely necessary that drastic changes will happen in order to make *hua'er* meaningful in the new context.

Unlike as was the case during the cultural revolution period, when *hua'er* songs were banned and considered shameful in many rural areas, Tang comments that, "when introducing *hua'er* in a completely new socio-cultural context, there are no such taboos. Kids have never heard of these songs before, and they think they are interesting and new." "In the past", he continues, "people sang *hua'er* to seek lovers outside of a tragic marriage but, now, *hua'er* is an art. It was originally the product of a backward and feudalistic society,[20] but today, *hua'er* is a symbol of ethnic solidarity" says Tang (personal interview, 2012). In Tang's opinion, it's his responsibility to introduce the "new" meaning of *hua'er* instead of its immoral past. In other words, the historical

[20] 封闭落后的产物

socio-cultural roots of *hua'er* should be replaced by newly constructed meanings, such as its symbolism of ethnic solidarity and its themes of love.

Thus, in order to fit with a school setting, three elements of *hua'er* must be modified: the lyrics, the tunes, and the use of regional languages and dialects. Since most *hua'er* songs express strong desires for romantic love and may even involve sexual innuendo, he had to modify the lyrics so as to be more appropriate for his student's ages. An example of this school-setting arrangement for *hua'er* is the "Two Peonies" Tune, for which the original lyrics are as follows (provided by Tang, personal interview, 2012):

毛毛的个细雨里抓呀蚂蚱	A rainy day to catch a grasshopper,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
我看你呀是飞呢吗跳呀哩吧	Let me see if it's flying or jumping,
抓住个尕手手问实话	Catch your small hand to ask the truth.
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
我看你是哭呢嘛笑呢	Let me see if you are crying or laughing.
红山坡上的绿呀蚂蚱	Red mountainside and green grasshopper,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
啊噔嘎的跳呀哩也	It's jumping!
新维的个朋友啦难搭个话	Newly made friends are hard to talk to,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
啊滋咪的笑呀哩也	It's laughing!
七寸的个碟子里拾呀馍馍	Take bread from a seven-inch plate,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms
来嘛菊花把呀	Take some chrysanthemums,
啊碗子的茶呀喝也	Drink some tea.

馍馍哈就不吃着茶呀不喝	I don’t want bread nor tea,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
来嘛你给我把	Come here and
啊心上的话呀说也。	Tell me your innermost thoughts and feelings.
亲亲热热说下的话	Our intimate words,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
来嘛实实把呀牢牢的记呀下也	You should remember as well,
实实把呀牢牢的记呀下也	You should remember as well.

These original lyrics were shortened and modified to become the following (Wu 2011:43):

“Catching Grasshoppers”	
(To the tune of “Two Peonies”)	Arranged by Tang, Xiang
毛毛大的细雨里抓蚂蚱	A rainy day to catch a grasshopper,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
我看你呀是	Let me see if
飞呢吗跳呀哩吧，	It’s flying or jumping!
葫芦儿就开花着树呀搭架呀	A gourd is flowering, framed by a tree,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
花儿开败了是	After the flower dies,
葫芦儿吊呀下吧	It comes a gourd.
春天里我走进了绿呀草地呀	I walk on the green grass in the Spring,
二牡丹呦二梅花	Two peonies and two plum blossoms,
花儿和少年是一样的美丽吧	*Hua’er* and Youth are equally beautiful,
一样的美呀丽吧！	Equally beautiful!

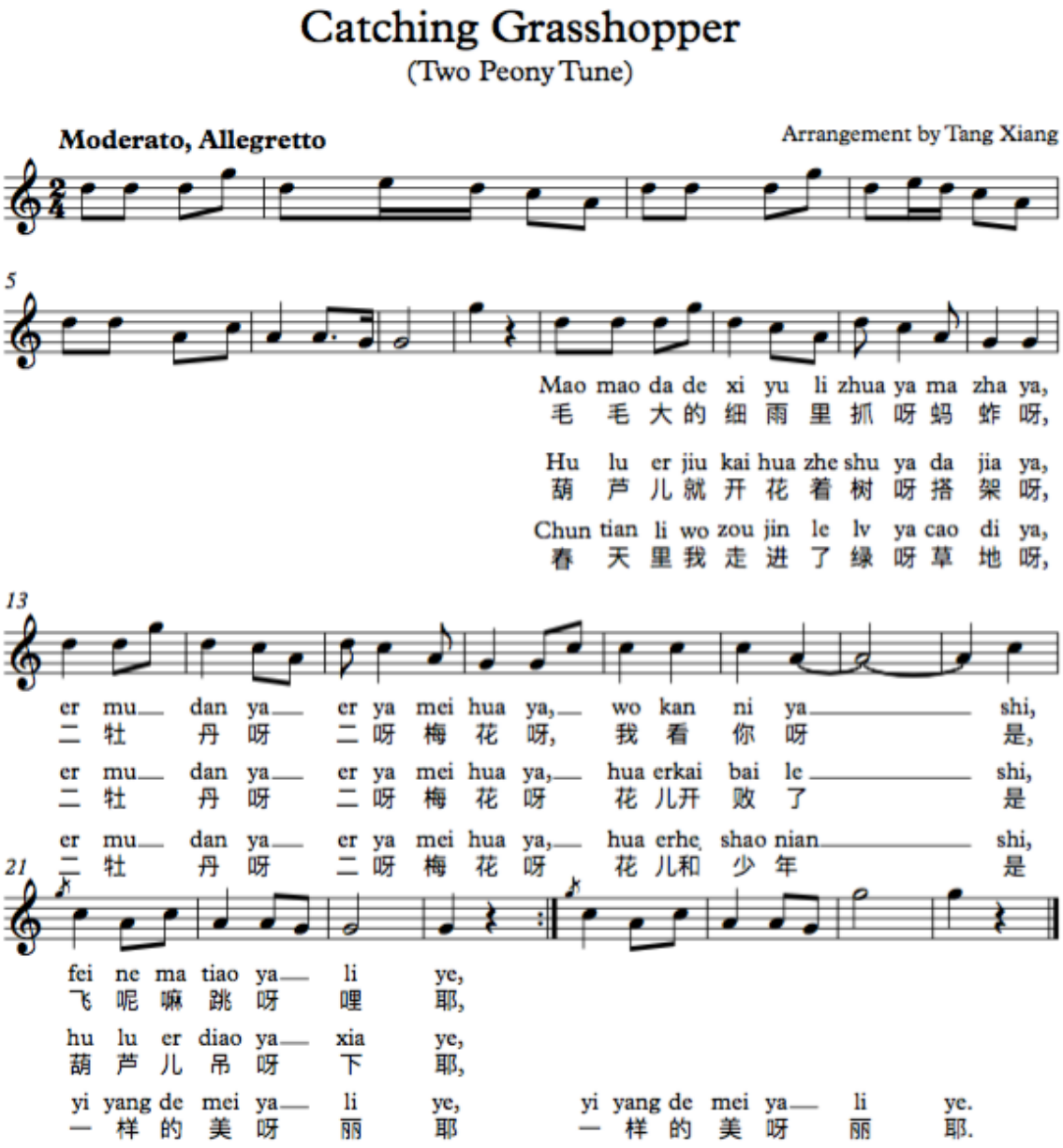

Figure 46. Notation of Two Peonies Tune

The original love theme, regarding a young man who is eager to find out about his lover's true feelings, is transformed into a song of praise of the beauty of nature and of *hua'er* folksongs. Considering the notation for the arranged version, it is set in the key of C and uses a straightforward 2/4 time signature. The melody is smooth and easy to

sing. Eight measures of introduction, likely to be played by a musical instrument, is followed by the body of the song. The song is nicely divided into four line of lyrics, each comprising four measures. As the transcriptions shown in Chapter two, *hua'er* songs are often microtonal and do not follow strictly on a specific rhythm as *hua'er* singers are not traditionally influenced by Western music aesthetics. However, in this case, *hua'er* was modified to fit their Western music centered music curriculum.

According to Tang, he has to select a *hua'er* tune for his students that fits their voice ranges. Tunes that are generally easier to sing are further simplified through arrangements. *Hua'er* songs that are too difficult to sing, such as those with wide leaps and high pitches, are reserved only for listening appreciation, not for students to sing themselves (personal interview 2012). Such types of *hua'er* are labeled as *yuanshengtai*, which implies a high level of authenticity as discussed in chapter three.

Local pronunciations and use of regional dialects are likewise often modified. Although many different regional dialects are used in singing hua'er, Tang teaches his students to sing *hua'er* in Mandarin, the official language of China. As he explains it that, "it is easier for my students to sing in Mandarin since they don't speak other regional dialects" and since all of the other classes are taught in Mandarin at their middle school (personal interview, 2012). After modifying the *hua'er* lyrics, rearranging the melodies, using standard Mandarin pronunciation, and changing the social context of *hua'er*, Tang was praised by the local cultural authorities for his success in transmitting the art form. He was interviewed on local television stations to share his experience as a

model for other school teachers and contracted by Xining cultural department to perform *hua'er* annually across Qinghai province.

The textbook that Tang uses also includes compositions of *hua'er* as piano solos or arranged for Chinese and Western instrumental ensembles, as well as *hua'er* choral music and dances. Most of the *hua'er* used in the textbook have rearranged lyrics and melodies. Below are some examples of these arrangements.

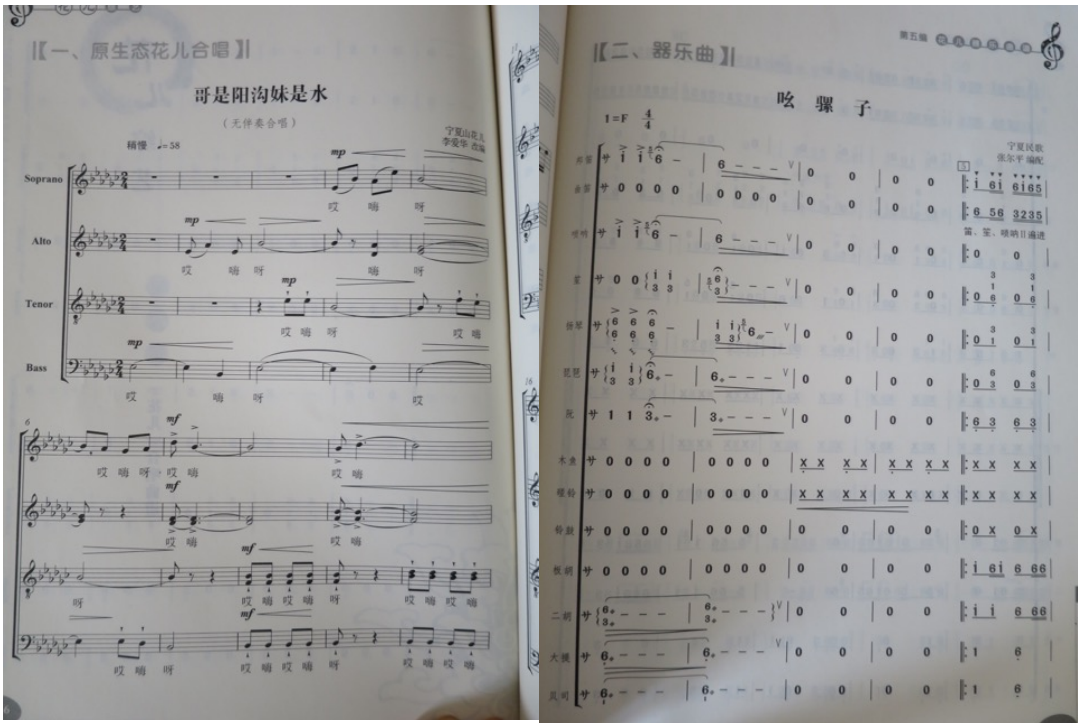

Figure 47. Notation of *Hua'er* Chorus Arrangement (Wu 2011)

Figure 48. Notation of *Hua'er* Instrumental Arrangement (Wu 2011)

Figure 46, the chorus arrangement has four parts: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. It was in the key of E flat minor and 2/4 time signature. Figure 47, the instrumental arrangement is for fourteen Chinese and Western instruments: *bangdi*, *qudi*, *suona*,

sheng, *yangqin*, *pipa*, *ruan*, *muyu*, *pengling*, *linggu*, *banhu*, *erhu*, cello, and bass. This piece is in the key of F with 4/4 time signature. These arrangements expanded the sound effect and added harmony to the original monophonic *hua'er* tunes.

Below are some of the images of newly invented *hua'er* dance choreography and movement. For example, *hua'er* hands (Figure 48) and *hua'er* foot steps (Figure 49). Figure 50 showcase some more dance steps, whereas Figure 51 explains part of a *hua'er* group dance choreography. The text in the choreography reads:

"Little sister circle: stand in two vertical lines (10 people per line) first. The first dancer of each line moves together using *hua'er* foot steps. Eventually form two circles (girls are inside, whereas boys are outside) formation" (Wu 2011).

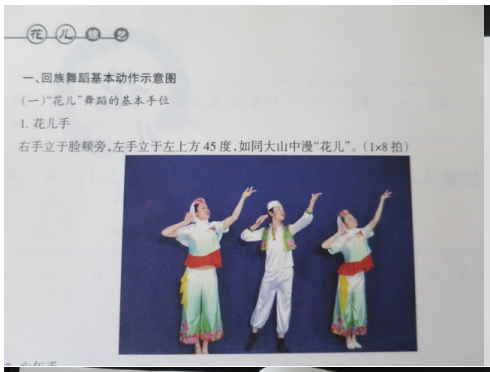

Figure 49. *Hua'er* Hand

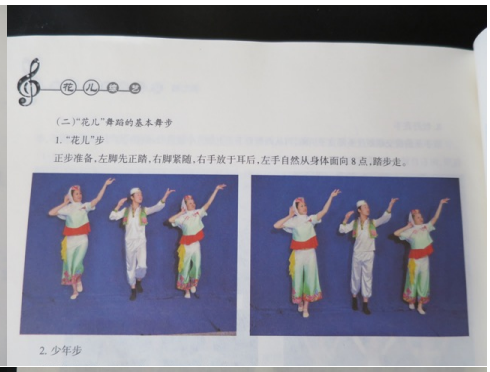

Figure 50. *Hua'er* Foot Steps

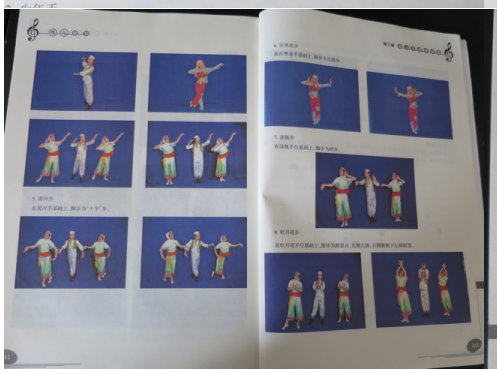

Figure 51. Other *Hua'er* Steps

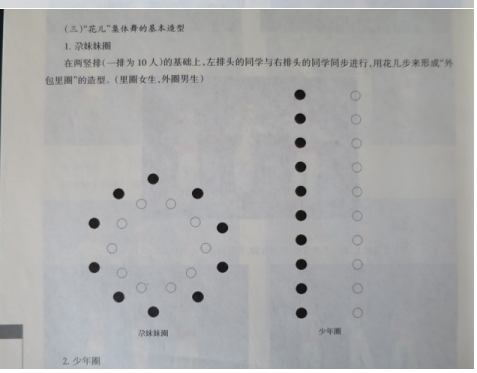

Figure 52. Examples of *Hua'er* Choreography

This choreography and movement expand *hua'er* from a singing genre to a dance genre. As Harris has pointed out, "musically the tendency of canons to gain in size and complexity of form and ensemble, and move towards fixity and ponderousness. For musical canons specifically linked to projects of 20th-century nationalism, again common themes emerged: the canon typically emerges out of repertoires which are interpreted as deep-rooted tradition. Although they exist in multiple variations, products of oral tradition, the thrust of the canonisers' work is to unify and fix the tradition" (Harris 2008:137). This is likely the case for *hua'er,* where instruments, voices and choreography were added to this fluid oral tradition. Meanwhile, its variable tunes, singing styles and lyrics are being fixed and simplified. Tang's efforts to teach *hua'er* to school students certainly meet the requirements written in the ICH law, yet they also pose a question of to what extent should institutional education be used to transmit and spread *hua'er.* If the representation that is transmitted institutionally no longer has the same lyrics, melodies, or social context, or if as in this case it is changed into a choreographed dance genre, is it still the same *hua'er* that is meant to be preserved through international ICH programs?

Despite the trends toward change discussed above that follow onto the ICH preservation measures initiated by the government, there are in fact points of ongoing grassroots resistance initiated by *hua'er* scholars and fans themselves to keep the original *hua'er* practice alive.

Unpublished *Hua'er* Songs

If I had conducted this research purely based on the study of existing publications on *hua'er*, this would be a different dissertation, as I would only be exposed to the "official telling" of *hua'er* practice. Through six months of fieldwork, I continued to uncover the "unofficial" and informal practice of *hua'er.* Although *hua'er* scholars are unable to publish *hua'er* songs that are considered "vulgar" or "uncensored" — those containing explicit content or swear words, emphasizing religious practices, or that discuss or may lead to ethnic conflicts — several *hua'er* scholars whom I met kept private collections of such *hua'er* for the sake of documentation and future research. These records were generally handwritten and collected during their fieldwork. During my fieldwork, four *hua'er* scholars admitted that they kept separate records of such *hua'er*. Only one of them was willing to share his collection, a total of five hundred uncensored *hua'er* lyrics with sexually explicit content. Despite the fact that the government despises vulgar *hua'er* and forbids it from being published, scholars do recognize their value and have kept meticulous notes for further research. These fragmented collections can provide a more complete picture of the practice of *hua'er* for *hua'er* scholars.

Hua'er Teahouses

Hua'er tea houses emerged as a cultural phenomenon in areas where *hua'er* is popular around the late 1990s. Xining is known for having the first *hua'er* teahouse in China. Today, one can find *hua'er* teahouses in many cities throughout Northwestern

China. I visited two *hua'er* teahouses during my fieldwork, (i) the Green Peony *Hua'er* Teahouse in Linxia Hui autonomous Region, Gansu province, and (ii) the Red Peony *Hua'er* Teahouse in Datong county, Qinghai province.

Linxia Hui Autonomous Region is located at the southwestern part of Gansu province. As discussed in chapter two above, it was called "Hezhou" since the Ming dynasty period (1368–1644 CE). Thus, hezhou-style *hua'er* is generally common in this area and in neighboring parts of Western Qinghai province. This region also has another nickname, "little Mecca," due to the fact that Muslims are about half of the local population, far more than in other areas of China.

The Linxia Green Peony *Hua'er* Tea House is one of the older *hua'er* tea houses in the area, and all the singers there are local celebrities. During my fieldwork in 2012, I was able to meet two co-owners and two *hua'er* singers who work at the teahouse. Ma Zhongke (b. 1968), one of the co-owners, told me that he opened his teahouse in 2006, when only one other *hua'er* teahouse had been opened in the entire city of Linxia. As an ethnic Hui and a Muslim, his family disapproved of the idea of opening a *hua'er* teahouse from the beginning, but he decided to pursue his dream. He met a *hua'er* singer, Han Yinxiang (b. 1973), who is now the other co-owner. Ma said that, "she sang *hua'er* really well, so I invited her to help me out with the tea house as a co-owner" (personal interview 2012). Han Yinxiang began to sing *hua'er* at the age of 12. Her parents loved to sing *hua'er* as well, so when she decided to pursue a career as a *hua'er* singer, her parents naturally supported her. In fact, Han was one of the few *hua'er* singers I met whose family were supportive of the idea of singing *hua'er*, whether as a career or as a hobby.

The Green Peony teahouse is located on the second floor of a small business building. It is about 800 square feet. At the opposite side of the entrance, there is a small main stage with a electric keyboard and some microphones. Large rectangular tables and chairs are placed at the center of the room, and others are along the wall, offering a good view of the main stage. The teahouse is open from 12:00 noon to 8:00 pm everyday. According to Han, their most frequent customers are farmers who come into the city to work in the early morning and go back home before sunset. Opening the teahouse later, around noon, allows farmers to work in the morning and come over during their lunch break or after work. The teahouse owners hired two female *hua'er* singers and one male singer. On a regular day, two to three singers will be on stage at the teahouse to sing *hua'er* songs for the audience. Sometimes, audience members may even stand up and sing a *hua'er* song as well. Audience members do not pay a cover charge to enter the *hua'er* tea house, but they usually order eight treasures tea, sunflower seeds, peanuts, and alcohol, which is how the teahouse turns a profit.

Ma told me that, since the *hua'er* festival is held only for a few days each year, the *hua'er* teahouse can stay open for most of the year, making it a dream come true for *hua'er* fans. Han said that the gold seasons for their teahouse business are February/ March and July/August when nearby farmers can enjoy some free time at *hua'er* teahouses before planting and harvest seasons begin in earnest. The down season for the business is May/June when farmers tend to be in their fields, and December. Moreover, during the fasting month of Ramadan, the teahouse is closed completely (personal interview, 2012).

Ma said that a majority of his customers are from Gansu, Qinghai and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions, where *hua'er* is popular. Hardly any tourists came to his teahouse; the clientele is only *hua'er* fans. Most customers are between thirty to forty years of age. People in their twenties or fifties are sometimes seen, but not often. According to Ma, since a majority of the population in Linxia city are Muslims, it's uncommon to see women at teahouses. In fact, more than 80% of the teahouse customers are men. For the few women who do come to the teahouse, it is likely that their husbands went to work in another city, and did not know that they came to the teahouse. Married couples rarely come to a teahouse together. As I discussed in Chapter four, in cases where both a wife and husband sing *hua'er,* they typically will attend different *hua'er* festivals as as to avoid singing to each other (personal interview, 2012).

Although singing *hua'er* goes against local Islamic teachings, there are nonetheless many Muslim *hua'er* singers and Muslim audience members who attend *hua'er* festivals and frequent teahouses. Ma told me that, "99% of the Muslim customers came here secretly from their family and conservative religious friends" (personal interview, 2012). However, Han is not concerned about losing her business, even though majority of her customers are Muslims since, as she puts it, "Hui people like music. During the Chinese new year season, everyone is watching the Chinese New Year Television Gala, including the akhoond. Those are entertainment as well [just like *hua'er*]. I've heard that some akhoond like *hua'er* so much, that they would disguise themselves and secretly attend *hua'er* festivals" (personal interview, 2012). During my fieldwork, I also heard stories about akhoond enjoying *hua'er* from my interviewees as well. Ma Ersa, a Hui *hua'er*

singer, said that his local akhoond used to borrow *hua'er* books from him to read. Sometimes, Ma would write down lyrics to show his akhoond and make him laugh. The lyrics would always be about love, never about religion. He Qingxiang, from Ningxia Hui autonomous region, also expressed that his akhoond liked *hua'er*, so much that he gave his akhoond some of his *hua'er* CDs to listen to.

Ma Heiya (b. 1973) is an ethnic Hui *hua'er* singer who works at the Green Peony teahouse. Ma told me that, if he were going to rank things that a good Muslim should avoid, the first would be eating pork, second would be drinking alcohol, and third would be singing *hua'er.* When he first sang, his parents, wife and religious friends all disapproved of his lifestyle choice. He would tell his family that he was working in the city, but then secretly go to sing *hua'er* instead. Later on, his family found out that he was making a living from singing *hua'er* and accepted it as a fact. As a full-time singer at the teahouse, he said that business was good, since there were many customers each day. He sings mostly love songs, with about 20% of his songs having sexually explicit lyrics. Political *hua'er* are rarely sung at teahouses, since no one appreciates them in this setting. Even though there are many karaoke places across the city, local Hui people prefer to go to *hua'er* teahouse, whereas karaoke is seen as an activity for the local Han people. Thus, the increasing number of karaoke bars was not seen as direct competition for their business at all.

Ma thinks that *hua'er* tea houses provide an ideal place for *hua'er* singers as well as *hua'er* fans, remarking that, "people come here don't judge each other, they just enjoy *hua'er* and singing" (personal interview, 2012).

Informal *Hua'er* Festivals

During *hua'er* festival seasons, aside from the large staged governmental sponsored *hua'er* concerts, there are also many small-scale, unofficial festivals. Since they are organized without government sponsorship, they are typically smaller in size, and everyone attending them enjoys more freedom of expression. However, since they are not formally organized, they are correspondingly not as well publicized, and they may happen before or after the government-sponsored festivals. During my fieldwork, I experienced only two of these informal *hua'er* festivals. Both times, it was because I knew someone who was attending one of these small-scale gatherings. As shown in the photos in Chapter three, there was no main stage set up at the festival, no fancy costumes and people were just gathering amongst themselves. If one were not aware of the location and timing of these informal *hua'er* festivals, one could easily pass it by without noticing. According to Ding, that is how all *hua'er* festivals used to be.

Another notable characteristic of these informal *hua'er* festivals is the lack of *hua'er* celebrities, such as *hua'er* inheritors and contracted *hua'er* singers. Many of the *hua'er* inheritors I spoke with during my fieldwork mentioned that becoming a nationally recognized *hua'er* celebrity had posed certain difficulties for them simply to enjoy singing *hua'er* in informal settings. For example, when they sing *hua'er,* they cannot just sing whatever they'd like to, but need to be careful in properly representing a national identity. In the case of Liu Guocheng, he told me that if he were to attend an informal festival off the government-sponsored circuit, too many people would flock around him and listen to him to sing, making his songs a public performance, with no room for

intimacy. Similarly, Yi Wanbai also expressed that he is usually too busy performing on stage during the *hua'er* festival season, and thus does not have the time to attend small-scale *hua'er* festivals (personal interview, 2012).

As a result, popular *hua'er* singers and inheritors are usually contracted by regional government agencies and tend to perform more often on government-sponsored stages. Meanwhile, amateur *hua'er* singers and fans perform at small-scale informal *hua'er* festivals. During those informal gatherings, singers can freely express themselves and keep the original aesthetics and practice of *hua'er* alive.

Conclusion

Government-sponsored *hua'er* activities shaped according to the ICH regulations have led to drastic modifications of *hua'er* and its aesthetics. Censorship of printed materials and of governmental sponsored *hua'er* festivals have led to a newly constructed image of *hua'er* as a "naive" love song genre that represents multi-ethnic harmony, as well as the use of *hua'er* to spread propaganda messages. Meanwhile, an on-stage dress code now applies for *hua'er* singers. These top-down influences have also given rise to professional *hua'er* singers, contradictory transmission obligations that all *hua'er* inheritors must follow, as well as changes to and institutionalization of *hua'er* lyrics, tunes, and languages.

Nonetheless, for the most part, *hua'er* singers individually enjoy the recognition as ICH inheritors, and they appreciate the reconstruction of *hua'er* as a "naive" love song genre and represent multi-ethnic harmony. They are hopeful that such reconstruction will

make a change on the prejudice people have against them, since they get paid while performing and gaining recognition and status as a *hua'er* celebrity on stage. Meanwhile, forms of resistances are taking place in attempts to keep the original aesthetics of *hua'er* alive. Unofficial *hua'er* continue to be documented and sung in fashions that are closer to the art form's original content and context and, for the most part, *hua'er* amateur singers and fans continue to enjoy their freedom of expression at teahouses and at informal *hua'er* gatherings.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Summary

This study has focused on the politics and impacts of the ICH identification process on a grassroots musical tradition in Northwestern China. Since UNESCO initiated its international program in 2003, China has enthusiastically commenced campaigns to recognize various levels of ICH both locally and nationally. An ICH Law was passed in 2011 that establishes overarching guidelines for ICH preservation and development projects, and that spells out obligations for Chinese citizens, scholars, governmental agencies, public institutions (museums, schools, etc.), and ICH inheritors. This analysis has been framed within a discussion of the traditional aesthetics and social contexts of *hua'er*, a comparison of UNESCO's program with various "localized" Chinese interpretations, and a close examination of the current practices of *hua'er*. The ICH Law and related cultural policies have within the past decade impacted the documentation, institutionalization, and transmission of *hua'er* as well as the selection of inheritors. At the same time, the law and related policies have established special advantages relating to ownership of ICH, and have created new obligations for inheritors. Although the ICH law is clearly on the one hand a top-down project that relates to the construction of a multicultural national identity, nonetheless *hua'er* scholars, singers, and local governmental officials have on the other hand seen themselves as benefitting from the new cultural policies.

Empirical Findings

As a grassroots folksong tradition, *hua'er* traditionally allowed for contact and communication in liminal spaces among amateur singers who, within their village lives, were often unhappily married. The act of singing *hua'er* was one way they could express their feelings and emotions, socialize with other likeminded individuals, and (re-)connect with a lover outside of their marriage. Anyone who sings *hua'er* can be called a *hua'er* singer. Thus, all *hua'er* singers traditionally were amateur singers and did not sing *hua'er* songs for living. A smooth or professionally trained voice and a capability to sing "in tune" were traditionally not important criteria for how well one sang *hua'er*. Instead, being able to improvise witty *hua'er* lyrics was more important. *Hua'er* songs have many regional variations and, even for the same tune, there is no "original" or "definitive" version. Indeed, *hua'er* singers were free to add their own unique expressions in singing. Traditionally, there was no formal transmission process by which a person would learn how to sing *hua'er.* People learned by listening and imitating. In light of this, we should consider traditional *hua'er* as a fluid musical expression having many different tunes, many ways of singing each tune, with lyrics in many regional dialects and languages. This state of affairs is akin to the practice of maqām, which has "developed out of ever-changing, variable repertories, products of living oral tradition, and as such the search for deep historical roots is essentially tilting at windmills" (Harris 2008:137).

Responding to the leveling forces of globalization and urbanization that developing countries face, UNESCO initiated its ICH program in 2003 with the intent of

safeguarding world cultural practices and expressions. Its original goals were to recognize the value of such traditions and to empower local communities. However, as a international organization trying to implement a global cultural policy, it must rely heavily on ratifying nation states to carry out specific measures that are to safeguard ICH practices. This has been a common criticism of UNESCO's project among academics, as ICH programs in many countries tend to be heavily influenced by nationalist ideologies (Seeger 2009). China is one example of how UNESCO's policies can be customized, having championed traditional arts that contribute to the development of a harmonious society, the telling of Chinese national history, and the formation of a multicultural identity. Another criterion not present in the international UNESCO system is China's aim to preserve only those arts identified as having "exceptional value", which not only politicalizes the entire ICH process, but also reinforces hierarchical modes of determining what forms of artistic expression are better than other, contrary to UNESCO's original goals.

In 2006, *hua'er* was recognized as an element of national ICH, and then in 2009, it became an element of world ICH for all humanity. This global and national recognition has had a huge impact on *hua'er* communities and *hua'er* singers. For the first time in their lives, many *hua'er* singers are referred to by a title of "national ICH inheritor" instead of the derogatory local term *wuhunren* which describes people who are completely beyond the pale. It is an irony that a musical practice previously known for its marginalization and notoriety has now been selected as an element of national heritage. Before the establishment of China's marriage law in 1950, *hua'er* was openly

practiced among married people to seek out love affairs. However, with the marriage law in place and with the new system ICH recognition, the history and the aesthetics of *hua'er* are now subject to modification and reconstruction.

According to the ICH law, local governments are responsible for publicizing *hua'er* as well as for selecting and evaluating ICH inheritors. Meanwhile, *hua'er* singers are required to transmit *hua'er*, and scholars must document *hua'er* practices. As a result, the flurry of activities that has occurred in just the past several years is indicative of an imminent and drastic modification of *hua'er* aesthetics and an incipient canonization of *hua'er* practices. Since publications and public performances are subject to censorship, the content of *hua'er* is now being reconstructed as the romanticized love songs of peasants, and it is being appropriated as a symbol of northwestern multi-ethnic solidarity. In terms of how best to transmit *hua'er,* there is no consensus on the aesthetics of *hua'er* singing, even within *hua'er* communities, and each stakeholder that participates in an institutionalized process of transmission, whether as a singer or as a government agency, is attempting to establish singing aesthetics that traditionally did not exist.

The mandatory mechanisms of transmission that are being created under the auspices of the ICH law also pose new challenges for *hua'er* inheritors who are self-taught themselves and who continue to experience discrimination or criticism from family members, friends and religious circles. In order to maintain their inheritor status and title, they must carry out actions in transmission which will foreseeably lead to the canonization of certain *hua'er* practices and aesthetics. Meanwhile, government agencies are called upon by the ICH law to take the lead on publicity efforts for recognized

elements, so many have sponsored *hua'er* festivals. As a result, *hua'er* songs are used as a way to spread propaganda, commercial, or educational messages. Together, forms of institutional transmission and large-scale sponsored festivals contribute to a clearer demarcation of professional versus amateur *hua'er* singers.

Nonetheless, by considering also the voices of local *hua'er* communities and singers, this study can provide a counterpoint to the analysis of top-down global and national policies. In fact, it is communities and individual singers who negotiate their identities within the spectrum of *hua'er* practices, deciding who they want to be and what *hua'er* will become in the early twenty-first century. As *hua'er* and its singers were traditionally being looked down upon, many *hua'er* singers are actively using the fact of ICH recognition as an opportunity to reconstruct the practice of *hua'er* and establish new social identities associated with their singing of *hua'er.* For example, *hua'er* singers who join in the reconstruction of *hua'er* by performing love songs and by wearing colorful and exotic multi-ethnic attire on a government-sponsored stage are, in doing so, able to turn singing *hua'er* into a career, to gain popularity and gradually to change the prejudices that other people have against *hua'er* and *hua'er* singers. Even though transmitting *hua'er* publicly is not a common practice, inheritors are able to find individual ways to obey the law and maintain their inheritor title, even if that means paying their students. Meanwhile, inappropriate *hua'er* lyrics continue to be documented and enjoyed by scholars and *hua'er* singers at non-sanctioned *hua'er* gatherings. They are not likely to die out due only to a lack of official documentation and representation, unless unsanctioned *hua'er* gatherings were somehow to cease. Moreover, despite the

competition among provincial and local governments when applying for recognition of ICH elements, regional governments nonetheless use their status as ICH stakeholders to apply for much-needed funds for local tourism and cultural development projects. Thus, even though the new ICH law may pose some challenges regarding the preservation of *hua'er* for certain types of singers, especially those who are Muslim or women, nonetheless it does not prevent *hua'er* singers and fans from finding ways to enjoy the art, including fans who happen to be communist party members or muslim priests.

Thus, we can see that *hua'er* means different things at local, national and international levels, and the resulting multiple layers of identity simultaneously co-exist. Recognition of *hua'er* as an element of world ICH provided *hua'er* singers, scholars and local governments an opportunity to reconstruct a new and productive identity for *hua'er* and for themselves.

Implications of this Study

The dissertation has synthesized the current state of the field for *hua'er* studies, offering insights from both the English and Chinese literature. For example, the use of music transcriptions provided in this dissertation is a first for *hua'er* studies in both languages. The in-depth analysis of sexual *hua'er* and its notorious past also provides a complete socio-historical perspective on the practice of *hua'er*, which has been glossed over in the Chinese literature and virtually ignored in the English literature. The ethnographic data collected from *hua'er* singers, scholars and local government officers and reported herein has provided insights on how these individual stakeholders engage

with the national policies and how they are negotiating productive and new identities for the art form and for themselves. This is one of the few works, in either English or in Chinese, to use a large amount of ethnographic data at the grassroots level on the topic of *hua'er*. These rich ethnographic data provide a well-rounded perspective on the current status of ICH programs in China.

Many ethnomusicologists have written about the relationship between music and nationalism. This dissertation continues this dialogue by showing in some detail the complexity of how nationalism works in China vis-a-vis cultural policies. In this case, even though the national policy does seem to be a top-down nationalistic construction, by also considering the perspectives of performers and local government officials at the grassroots level, we realize how they are also actively engaged in the negotiation and construction of their own identities.

As China continues to modernize, traditional music and practices are quickly losing their original social and cultural contexts. ICH provides an opportunity for the government and local practitioners to negotiate a productive identity for the tradition.

Limitations of this Study

Due to the scope of my research, I have not provided an in-depth analysis of *hua'er* songs that are sung in various ethnic minority languages. Nearly all of the *hua'er* examples discussed in this dissertation were sung in various dialects of Mandarin. Readers should also keep in mind that some ethnic minority groups do sing *hua'er* in their own ethnic languages. For example, during my fieldwork, I attended a Danma Tu

ethnicity *hua'er* festival and realized that some *hua'er* songs were sung in the Tu ethnic language. Such *hua'er* songs are ill researched and almost completely undocumented.

Another subject that I was not able to study in-depth while researching on *hua'er* is the extent to which other types of folksongs in the northwestern region resemble the styles of *hua'er* singing and festivals. For example, the Tibetan *Layi* is a similar type of conversational or competitive folksong singing that is popular in northwestern China. During my fieldwork in Qinghai and Tibet, I was not able to collect enough data to draw meaningful comparisons between *hua'er* and *Layi*. Further research on this could lend a new perspective for the field of *hua'er* studies.

Directions for Future Research

As mentioned in Chapter four, since 2007, the People's Government of Sichuan province has under the auspices of the national Ministry of Culture hosted a biannual International Festival of ICH (IFICH). 2015 marks the fifth IFICH, and each year's festival highlights a number domestic and international ICH. I would like to research (1) how each element of ICH is packaged and represented to a diverse audience outside of its original cultural and social context at the IFICH, and what are some of the "necessary" modifications made prior and during the exhibition/performance; as well as (2) who are the audiences for this festival, what are their expectations, and what are their reactions to the festival?

The ICH movement in China has also inspired many film directors. For example, some subjects relating to ICH are either incorporated in film plot lines. Several ICH-

related feature films have already released and are worthy of scholarly attention, including *Cuan Bei Can Meng* ("The Final Decline of the Cuan Family") which uses Yunnan Dian opera, an element of national ICH, to tell the history of the Cuan family. This is one follow-up project that I envision for research on the impact of ICH on films and popular music.

National television programs are quite powerful tools for communicating political ideologies in China, since billions of people watch such programs on a daily basis. As such, television programs focusing on *hua'er* competition that are broadcast nationwide can be influential in establishing *hua'er* aesthetics. Increasingly, regional *hua'er* competitions are being televised in the Northwestern region of China. Since many of the judges are not *hua'er* singers themselves, and tend to come from a variety of musical backgrounds, it might be worthwhile to conduct research on the impact of mass media on *hua'er* practice.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined how a folksong genre, *hua'er*, was selected as an element of national and world heritage in 2009. Ironically, *hua'er* was historically considered to be shameful to sing in public, and its singers face discrimination even today. Following the promulgation of a new ICH law in 2011, singers, scholars and local governmental officials are all now obligated to preserve and transmit *hua'er* despite its social stigma. In this dissertation, I have analyzed the ICH program in China while also giving voices to *hua'er* singers, scholars and local governmental officials. Localized ICH

programs in China serve many additional agendas beyond those of UNESCO, and these additional agendas focus on nationalist ideology and identity construction. However, *hua'er* singers and scholars are also using this same opportunity to reconstruct the past of *hua'er* and their identities as *hua'er* practitioners. Once seen only as "wild songs" sung by married people who sought love affairs outside of their marriages, *hua'er* is now being reconstructed as a love song genre of "naive" ethnic minority groups which are framed as courtship songs that can lead to an honorable marriage, as well as an iconic music genre that represents ethnic solidarity. Within its new status as an element of local, national, and international ICH, *hua'er* is now being re-invented with different meanings at each of these different levels of society.

Glossary

Aou	啊欧	Title of a *hua'er* tune
Bao'an	保安	An ethnic minority
Benzi	本子	Written *hua'er*
Binglingsi	炳灵寺	A location in Gansu province
Caotan	草滩	A village in Gansu province
Chen Yuanyuan	陈圆圆	Name of a famous person
Chuanbanzhang	串班长	'The person who connects'. *hua'er* composers from Kangle County, Gansu province
Dai	傣	An ethnic minority
Danma	丹麻	A county in Qinghai province
Datong	大通	A county in Qinghai province
Dazhuan	大传	Epic *hua'er* stories
Dizi	笛子	A Chinese transverse flute
Dongxiang	东乡	An ethnic minority
Duanwu	端午	A Chinese festival, also known as the Dragon Boat Festival
Dute	独特	Outstanding
Erhu	二胡	Two-stringed bowed fiddle
Erlangshan	二郎山	A mountain in Gansu province
Erling	二令	Second tune
Feiwuzhiwenhuayichan	非物质文化遗产	Intangible Cultural Heritage
Feiyi	非遗	non-inheritance, short for ICH in Chinese

Fuzhou	福州	The capital of Fujian province
Gaochaoshuiping	高超水平	Extraordinary
Gansu	甘肃	Gansu province
Hainan	海南	Hainan province
Han	汉	An ethnicity
Hehuang	河湟	A region in Qinghai province
Hezheng	和政	A county in Gansu province
Hezhou	河州	A county in Gansu province
Hongma	红麻	A type of plant
Hongmudan	红牡丹	Red peony
Hua'er	花儿	Flowers
Huang	湟	Huang river
Hui	回	An ethnic minority
Hui'er hui	花儿会	Hua'er festival
Huzhu	互助	A county in Qinghai province
Jiangsu	江苏	Jiangsu province
Jiechu	杰出	Exceptional
Jinbian Zhaijuan	金边债券	Bonds issued by Jinbian Bank
Jinghua	精华	Essence
Jingwai	境外	The essence or the finest
Juyifansan	举一反三	Shown one corner, able to point out three other corners
Kangle	康乐	A county in Gansu province
Kunqu	昆曲	Kun opera
Lanzhou	兰州	The capital of Gansu province
Laoyeshan	老爷山	A mountain in Gansu province

Li	黎	An ethnic minority
Lianglianer	两莲儿	Two lotus tune
Lianhuashan	莲花山	A mountain in Gansu province
Lianshou	连手	“connect hands” refer to lovers
Ling	令	Tunes
Lintan	临潭	A county in Gansu province
Linxia	临夏	A city in Gansu province
Lusheng	芦笙	Free reed bamboo pipes
Mafu	麻浮	A plant
Maio	苗	An ethnic minority
Mengda	孟达	A tourist destination in Qinghai province
Menggu	蒙古	An ethnic minority
Min	珉	A county in Gansu province
Ming	明	Ming dynasty (1368–1644)
Minzhou	珉州	Older name for Min county
Nanjing	南京	The capital of Jiangsu province
Ningxia	宁夏	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
Niuguisheshen	牛鬼蛇神	Bull ghost and snake spirit
Nuankang	暖炕	A type of heating structure in China
Panyang	潘阳	A village in Gansu province
Qiang	羌	An ethnic minority
Qilisi	七里寺	A location in Qinghai province
Qin	秦	Qin dynasty (221BC-206BC)
Qin	琴	Seven string zither
Qing	清	Qing dynasty (1644–1912)

Qinghai	青海	Qinghai province
Qutansi	瞿昙寺	A location in Qinghai province
Sala	撒拉	An ethnic minority
San hua'er	散花儿	Collected short *hua'er* pieces
Shanxi	山西	Shanxi province
Shaonian	少年	A term used in Qinghai province to refer to *hua'er* songs
Shengyuandi	生源地	Name of a bank
Shiliuguo	十六国	Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439)
Shuihonghua	水红花	A type of flower
Sichuan	四川	Sichuan province
Sigou	寺沟	A village in Gansu province
Songmingyan	松鸣岩	A location in Gansu province
Taomin	洮珉	A location in Gansu province
Taozhou	洮州	A location in Gansu province
Tianchi	天池	Mountain Lake
Tongsu	通俗	Popular music
Tu	土	An ethnic minority
Tufan	吐蕃	Term used to refer Tibetans
Tundepo	吞德剖	An epic story of Yi people
Urumqi	乌鲁木齐	The capital of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
Wangjiagoumen	王家沟门	A location in Gansu province
Weiquan	渭源	A county in Gansu province
Wu Sangui	吴三桂	A famous person
Wuhunren	五荤人	Five stinky people

Wuying	五营	A village in Gansu province
Xi'an	西安	The capital of Shaanxi province
Xianming	鲜明	Distinct
Xiangtuqixi	乡土气息	The smell of village earth
Xining	西宁	The capital of Qinghai province
Xinjiang	新疆	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
Xue Rengui	薛仁贵	A famous person
Xunhua	循化	A county in Qinghai province
Yan'an	延安	A city in Shaanxi province
Yanggouwan	羊沟湾	A location in Gansu province
Yangpowan	阳坡湾	A location in Shanxi province
Yangqin	扬琴	A Chinese hammered dulcimer
Yequ	野曲	Wild songs
Yifeng yisu	移风易俗	“changing prevailing customs and transforming social traditions”
Yinchuan	银川	The capital of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
Yongjing	永靖	A county in Gansu province
Yuanshengtai	原生态	Original ecology
Yuanshi	原始	Primitive
Yugu	裕固	An ethnic minority
Zang	藏	An ethnic minority
Zheng	筝	Plucked string zither
Zhi ling	直令	Straight tune, a particular tune of *hua’er*
Zhuangyuan	状元	leading scholar
Zhuanye	专业	Professional

Zisong	紫松	A mountain in Kangle County
Zongyi	综艺	Arts

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