

# **The Construction of a United Great China**

**A Comparative Study of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, 1984-86 and 2004-06**

Xiaoyan Xu

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Dr. Timothy W. Luke, Chair

Dr. Scott G. Nelson

Dr. Yannis Stivachtis

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## Abstract

The Spring Festival, or Lunar New Year, is the most important festival in China. On every Lunar New Year's Eve since 1983, the state-run China Central TV (CCTV), the only national TV station in China, has held a celebrating gala. This thesis attempts to examine the CCTV Spring Festival Galas as a case study of China's statist nationalism. The research questions of this thesis are: what techniques and technologies have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas used to construct a Chinese national space? How have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas describe the Chinese national space? And what changes have taken place in these techniques and technologies as well as in the descriptions? To answer these questions, this thesis conducts a comparative research, comparing both the commonalities and differences between the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06. Employing an interpretative textual analysis approach, it analyzes the videos of these six years' galas and explores the political meanings of words and programs in the galas. This thesis finds that in order to imagine a united Chinese national space, the galas mainly represent China in terms of classes, ethnic groups and places. With the presence of minorities and people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, the galas focus on the boundary of the Chinese nation to construct the unity of China. Furthermore, in order to construct the greatness of this united Chinese national space, the galas use heroes and sites to symbolize China. The presence of traditional elements helps create a temporal dimension of the Chinese national space. As a result of, and in response to, the socio-economic changes in the last two decades, the techniques and technologies used by the galas have changed. Besides the great changes in stage settings and technologies, the major changes in the techniques include: in the 2004-06 galas, hosts play a much more important role in interpreting the political meanings of the programs and presenting the state's nationalist narrative to the audience, the Chinese Communist Party occupies a more central place in the galas, and home increasingly means individual family instead of the country of China. Correspondingly, the way the galas treat singers, actors, and hosts from Hong Kong and Taiwan has also changed.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

On every Lunar New Year's Eve since 1983, the state-run China Central TV (CCTV), the only national TV station in China, has held a celebrating gala. Chinese call Lunar New Year the Spring Festival, and the gala is usually called the CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Up to 2007, 25 galas have been held. Each of these 25 galas (1983-2007) is comprised of singing, dancing, skits, comic dialogues, Chinese traditional operas, magic, acrobatics, and so on, with several hosts introducing and interpreting the programs in between to help one program make the transition to another smoothly. As an annual event organized by China's only national TV station to provide Chinese, both at home and abroad, with a chance to celebrate the Spring Festival together, the galas have become a channel through which the mainland Chinese government speaks to millions of Chinese people. Most importantly, these galas have upheld a statist Chinese nationalism and constructed rhetorically a Chinese national space. Moreover, the techniques and technologies that have been used in these galas to construct a Chinese national space as well as the description of this national space have changed considerably in the last 25 years. This thesis attempts to examine these techniques and technologies as well as the descriptions and explore their changes between 1980s and 2000s.

The research questions of this thesis, then, are: 1) what techniques and technologies have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas used to construct a Chinese national space, 2) how have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas describe the Chinese national space, and 3) what changes have taken place in these techniques and technologies as well as in the

descriptions? To answer these three questions, this thesis compares the CCTV Spring Festival Galas of 1984-86 with those of 2004-06. Using the videos of these six years' galas as a case, this interpretative textual analysis explores the commonalities and differences between these two groups of galas in their techniques, technologies, and descriptions of China.<sup>1</sup> The first research question can be examined by reviewing the common techniques that have been used by the six galas to construct a Chinese national space. The second research question can be assessed by examining the themes of the programs and words in the six galas. The third research question can be addressed by examining the differences between the galas of 1984-86 and the galas of 2004-06 in their techniques and technologies that they used and the themes of their programs and words.

The primary data source for this research is the videos of the galas of 1984-86 and 2004-06. I gathered this data by watching the videos of the galas of 1984-1986 and 2004-2006 and recording the titles, themes, and theatrical backgrounds of all the programs, and the words used by the hosts and actors in the galas. I recorded the languages used in the programs from the subtitles, if the subtitles were available in the videos. If the subtitles are not available, I recorded from the sound track. In examining the techniques and technologies that the galas have used to construct a Chinese national space and the galas' descriptions of the space, I pay special attention to the themes of the programs, the words

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<sup>1</sup> China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003); China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004); China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2005); and China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2006).

used by the hosts and actors, the theatrical backgrounds, and other symbolic differences to capture the political meanings that the programs have produced.

The galas have been organized by the CCTV, and all the gala programs have been carefully examined by CCTV and the Chinese government to guarantee their political correctness in the Chinese context. Qin Xinmin, who has participated in preparing the CCTV galas for seven years, working on the team of the directors, and fulfilling such tasks as cover propaganda, wording, stage designing, and coordination, revealed these facts about the selection process of the programs in the galas:

First, the leaders have strict control over the programs. There are four levels of leaders---the leaders of the [CCTV's] Center for Culture and Art, the leaders of the CCTV, the leaders of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, and the leaders of the Communications Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). A program, from an idea to its ultimate performance, has to pass such stages: 1) talking about the idea; 2) reading the play; 3) the scriptwriter and director team watching the brief rehearsal (sometimes more than once); 4) the leaders watching [the program] (sometimes first the CCTV leaders watch the program, then the leaders of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television watch it, but this year [in preparing the 2007 gala] usually they watch together); 5) the leaders watch [the program] again after it is revised (sometimes they watch it for many times); 6) refinements and even elimination through six rehearsals and one preparation for broadcast. Both the leaders and the key behind-the-camera personnel are "examiners".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Zhang Xuejun, "Yu chunwan zhuchuang lingjuli jiechu, Qin Xinmin: Chunwan yinian bi yinian hao [Zero-distance interview with the key behind-the-camera personnel, Qin Xinmin: the Spring Festival Galas are better year by year]," *Beijing Yule Xinbao* [Beijing Entertainment Information Newspaper], September 15, 2006, [www.stardaily.com.cn](http://www.stardaily.com.cn).



During the examinations, the words used in the program have to be refined again and again.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, by examining the themes of the programs and the words used in them, one can take a deep look at the techniques used in programs and the political meanings they hope to produce. Hence, this study can yield useful findings about how the Chinese government has promoted statist nationalism among common Chinese populace and the complexity and subtlety of the CCP's ideological strategies. Besides the themes of the programs and the words used in programs, other facts such as stage settings, background images, and the sequences of the programs are also useful for the interpretation. For example, every Spring Festival gala lasts continually for four and a half hours, usually from 8:00PM to 12:30AM. In the 10 seconds before midnight, there is a "count down" to midnight. The programs and the hosts' words around that time may have rich political meanings.

By analyzing how the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have constructed the Chinese national space and their description of the national space, this study will also provide a case study of how the Chinese government has been promoting a statist nationalism in the post-Maoist "reform and open door" (*gaige kaifang*) period as the CCP's ideological strategies have changed in response to economic and social transformation. It will also offer us a glimpse at how mass media have been involved in the CCP's ideological strategies. Finally, the Spring Festival Galas are also a key example of how the Chinese government utilizes such traditional cultural elements as the Chinese tradition of having a family reunion, wishing for prosperity in the Spring Festival, and "missing home more keenly in

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<sup>3</sup> See Han Gang and Dong Man, "The past 20 years' Spring Festival Galas," *Ziliao Kapian Zazhi* (Information Card Magazine), No. 1 (2004), also available at [www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com), April 29, 2004.

festivals” (*mei feng jiajie bei siqin*) to transform these folk customs into part of its nationalist politics.

The analysis will be presented as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the Spring Festival and the CCTV Spring Festival Galas. I will provide some background information on how the Spring Festival has evolved, how the Chinese celebrated the Spring Festival before the emergence of the Spring Festival Galas, why the Spring Festival Galas have been so popular since its emergence in 1983, and how it has become part of the celebration customs since 1983. In Chapter 3, I will briefly review the current studies on Chinese nationalism, Chinese mass media and the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, and I will explore the significance of the study in this thesis. Chapter 4 will compare the galas of 1984-86 to those of 2004-06 to find out their commonalities. I will examine how the galas construct a Chinese national space by representing China in terms of its people and symbolize it with special people and sites. In addition, this chapter also explores the political meanings of traditional elements used by the galas to construct the temporal dimension of the Chinese national space. In Chapter 5, I will explore the changes in the techniques and technologies used by the galas and in the descriptions of the Chinese national space in the galas in the last two decades, by comparing the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06. Chapter 6 will present the conclusions.

## Chapter 2. The Spring Festival and the CCTV Spring Festival Galas

### **1. Introduction of the Spring Festival**

The Spring Festival, or the Lunar New Year, is the most important festival for Han Chinese as well as over ten other ethnic groups in mainland China such as Manchurians, Mongolians, Yao, Zhuang, Bai, Gaoshan, Hezhe, Hani, Dawoer, Dong, and Li.<sup>4</sup> Han Chinese, living in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and elsewhere, also celebrate the Spring Festival by various means. Other nations such as Korea, Vietnam, and Japan also celebrate this festival. It is widely said that the Chinese have celebrated the Spring Festival since the time of Yushun, a mythical ancient Chinese leader living over four thousand years ago. When Yushun became the leader, he led his people in a sacrifice to the Heaven and set that day as the first day of the year.<sup>5</sup> In the ancient time, the first day of the year was often called *Yuandan*, or *Yuanri*, or *Sanyuan*. After the Xinhai Revolution that overthrew Qing Dynasty in 1911, China adopted the western calendar. The Chinese government then decided to call the New Year's Day of the western calendar as *Yuandan* and the New Year's Day of the lunar calendar *Chunjie*, which literally meant the Spring Festival.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cctv.com, "Chunjie [The Spring Festival]," <http://big5.cctv.com/geography/mfms/20010626/173.html>.

<sup>5</sup> www.xinhuanet.com, "Zhongguo de jieri [Chinese festivals]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content\\_695315.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/18/content_695315.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Also see Qiu Feng, "Zashuo 'guonian' [A discourse of Celebrating New Year Day]," *Hong Xiu Tian Xiang*, <http://article.hongxiu.com/a/2006-1-28/1074485.shtml>.

According to a widespread folklore, in the ancient time, there was an animal named *Nian*. This animal attacked human beings once every 365 days. Since *Nian* was afraid of red color and fire, human beings resisted it by pasting red paper, hanging red lanterns and firing firework when it was time for *Nian* to come. The next day, people got out their houses to congratulate on one another for surviving the attack by *Nian*. Later on, these activities to resist *Nian* evolved into an annual celebration, which was the celebration of Lunar New Year (*guonian*).<sup>7</sup> Traditional celebration activities of the Spring Festival used to include: dusting and cleaning, pasting couplets on doorframes, pasting pictures of those gods who were believed to be able to resist devils on the doors in days before Lunar New Year, eating a big reunion dinner or dumplings with family members,<sup>8</sup> giving red money to unmarried family members, staying overnight on Lunar New Year's Eve, sacrificing to gods in Chinese folk religions and worshiping the Heaven, firing firecrackers and fireworks, wearing new clothes, eating together with family members, and visiting relatives and friends on Lunar New Year's Day. The celebration often did not conclude until the Lantern Festival, the fourteenth day after Lunar New Year's Day. The celebration activities of the Lantern Festival include watching lanterns, watching lion dancing and dragon dancing, going to temple fairs (*miaohui*), and so on.

All these customs of celebrating the Spring Festival have existed for a long time, and they have also evolved as time passed.<sup>9</sup> Particularly, these customs have experienced drastic

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<sup>7</sup> Qiu Feng, "Zashuo 'guonian'."

<sup>8</sup> Eating dumpling on Lunar New Year's Eve is mainly a custom for people in the northern part of China. In the southern part of China, people like to eat a big dinner or some dissert.

<sup>9</sup> For example, *Lushi Spring and Autumn [Lushi Chunqiu]*, a book written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., says that Chinese had had the custom of dusting in the Spring Festival ever since around 2000 years B.C.; see <http://news.sohu.com/20060126/n241620573.shtml>. Couplets originated from Taofu made by peach wood. Around the Five Dynasties (907-960) in the tenth century A.D., some people began to write couplets on

changes since 1949. In the first years after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the celebration of the Spring Festival was overshadowed by the celebration of the communist “Liberation” (*jiefang*) and the new lives in the New China. In the 1950s, it was not surprising for a large number of workers to celebrate the festival by continuing to work in some major construction fields.<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s, the work units that many people’s lives depended on often arranged for people’s celebration of the Spring Festival by distributing movie tickets, holding games, forming New Year greeting groups, organizing cleaning activities, etc.<sup>11</sup> During the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1976, the Spring Festival was treated as a feudal remnant, and it was reformed to make it more “revolutionary”, with many customs being changed.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the celebration activities of the Spring Festival during that time were dominated by singing revolutionary songs, watching revolutionary operas, movies, and documentaries, etc.<sup>13</sup> Since the launching of the “reform and open door” program in 1978, the influence of the Cultural Revolution has declined, and many traditional customs of celebrating the Spring Festival have been revived. Such celebration activities as cleaning houses before Lunar New Year, eating a

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Taofu. Later in Song Dynasty (960-1279), people began to write couplets on paper instead of peach wood, but they still call it “Taofu.” And in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), people began to call it as “Duilian” which means couplets. See <http://bbs.hefei.cc/archiver/?tid-19410.html>. Even books written in Wei and Jin Period around the fourth century have recorded that the custom of waiting for the New Year together with family members; see Cctv.com, “Chunjie [Spring Festival].” Giving red money to unmarried family members has been a custom since Han Dynasty; see *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, “Yasuiqian Shihua [The History of Red Money],” <http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/feature/480259.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> For example, on the 1958 Lunar New Year’s Eve, over 27000 peasant workers, military servicemen, cadres, and students were working in the construction site of the Thirteen Tombs Reservoir, and they sang when working. See Zhongguo Chunjie Wang, “Wushi nian chunjie huifang: wushi niandai [The Fifty-Year Retrospect of the Spring Festival: The 1950s],” <http://www.chunjie.net.cn/rite/st/index12.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> Zhongguo Chunjie Wang, “Wushi nian chunjie huifang: liushi niandai [The Fifty-Year Retrospect of the Spring Festival: The 1960s],” <http://www.chunjie.net.cn/rite/st/index13.asp>.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Liejun, “Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years’ Spring Festival Galas],” Unpublished MA Thesis, Peking University, 2005, [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=2835](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=2835).

<sup>13</sup> Zhongguo Chunjie Wang, “Wushi nian chunjie huifang: qishi niandai [The Fifty-Year Retrospect of the Spring Festival: The 1970s],” <http://www.chunjie.net.cn/rite/st/index14.asp>.

reunion dinner or dumplings on Lunar New Year's Eve, giving red money to unmarried family members, firing firecrackers and fireworks, greeting and visiting friends and relatives on Lunar New Year Day and a few days afterward, watching lion dancing and dragon dancing, and going to temple fairs have become popular again. Other customs such as pasting the pictures of some gods on the doors and sacrificing to gods and the Heaven may have lost their original meaning, and now they only exist in the countryside of some provinces.

Since China adopted the "reform and open door" policy in 1978, the rapid economic and social changes have resulted in some new characteristics of the celebration of the Spring Festival. While remembering the past revolutionary glory and expressing one's devotion to the construction of a socialist China were the main themes of the celebration of the Spring Festival during the Maoist era, wishing for individual success and prosperity has become the main theme of common people's celebration during the "reform and open door" era. Moreover, many Chinese people believe that a joyful celebration of the Spring Festival can bring about a year's good luck. With the economy becoming the center of common people's lives, personal wishes and greetings for more wealth become more prevalent and significant in the celebration of the Spring Festival. Meanwhile, new meaning is attached to some special phenomena related to the celebration of the Spring Festival. One of the special phenomena is people's family reunions at home around the Spring Festival time. In the "reform and open door" era, tens of millions of Chinese have migrated to places far from their homes to work or study. When these people return home to reunite with their families and to celebrate the Spring Festival, they create heavy traffic

on the railways, airlines, and long-distance bus services before and after the Spring Festival, which draws great attention from mass media. In particular, since the late 1980s, many rural residents in the hinterland provinces have migrated to the coastal areas and worked there. They make up the majority of the holiday travelers around every year's Spring Festival. As a result, the images of heavy traffic created by ordinary Chinese people dominate the news on TV around that time, and "going home" has become a key theme of the celebration of the Spring Festival.<sup>14</sup>

## **2. Introduction of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas**

The first CCTV Spring Festival Gala was held in 1983, when people were gradually freed from the influence of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that emphasized the purity and dominance of the proletarian culture. Before that, from 1979 to 1982, the CCTV celebrated the Spring Festivals by holding gatherings. The first Spring Festival Gala in 1983 was not live on TV, but it was live on air through China's national radio station, the People's Central Radio Station. Since 1984, all CCTV Spring Festival Galas have been broadcast live nationwide on TV. The late 1970s-early 1980s was a period when people tended to rebel against the dominance of communist cultural purity. Influenced by pop music from Hong Kong and Taiwan, many people in mainland China also started to create and sing their own pop songs. One example was Li Guyi, a female singer from Hunan Province, Mao's home province. Influenced by Teng Lai-kwan, a very famous singer in Taiwan, Li Guyi sang such pop songs as "Love for My Hometown" (*Xianglian*)

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<sup>14</sup> Wang, "Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years' Spring Festival Galas]."

in a very feminine way. Despite the resentment of some old-guard elements in the Party and other segments of the society, the Chinese government generally tolerated, and even encouraged, new popular cultural elements and the revival of some pre-1949 traditional cultural elements. It was in such a historical background that the CCTV Spring Festival Galas emerged, as a combination of traditional folk artistic forms, statist proletarian artistic forms, and new popular artistic forms. For example, the 1984 Spring Festival Gala consisted of the following types of programs: singing, dancing, games, acrobatics, comic dialogues, skits, Chinese traditional operas, mime, magic, storytelling, and so on. The songs sung in the gala included pop songs, revolutionary songs, folk songs, and vocal musical songs. The Chinese traditional operas performed in the gala were quite diverse, including Cantonese opera (popular in Guangdong Province), Beijing opera, Huangmei opera (popular in Anhui Province), Yu opera (popular in Henan Province), Hu opera (popular in Shanghai), and Yue opera (popular in Zhejiang Province). From the very beginning, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala has defined itself as a combination of many artistic forms. In addition, CCTV Spring Festival Galas are special for two reasons: first, they have been heavily state-sponsored, and second, they have been very popular among common Chinese.

On the one hand, the galas are produced by the state under the close leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). These galas have been held by the CCTV, which is under the direct leadership of the Communications Department of the Central Committee of the CCP. As mentioned above, before a program is performed on Lunar New Year's Eve, it has to be scrutinized by the CCTV, the State Administration of Radio, Film and



Television, and the Communications Department of the Central Committee of the CCP so that the political correctness of the program can be guaranteed. In addition, the program has to be refined again and again. Therefore, the Chinese government has intervened heavily into the production of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, and the CCTV has spread the government's ideology through the galas. Despite the entertainment function of the galas, the hosts' words and the programs in the galas have to be in line with the party's ideology, and they act as a device to increase the government's legitimacy. As Song Xiangrui says, "all newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations, including CCTV, are tools for the CCP's ruling, and they are supposed to serve a single purpose, supporting the party's unchallengeable authority, and to have a single function, being the party's 'throat and tongue' (*houshe*)."<sup>15</sup> Pan Zhichang, a communication professor at Nanjing University, argues that in the galas, CCTV, as part of the state architecture, just provides a place for the nation to celebrate the Spring Festival together.<sup>16</sup> Xu Ben simply points out that the Spring Festival Galas are government-sponsored theatrical performances.<sup>17</sup>

What is remarkable about the CCTV Spring Festival Galas is not that these galas have successfully created a happy atmosphere---this is what these galas are intended to do--- but that these galas are used to help construct a Chinese national space through the

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<sup>15</sup> Song, Xiangrui, "1984: zhongyang dianshitai yu gangtai gexing---zhongyang dianshitai 1984 nian chuanjie wanhui yaoqing gexing shijian de chanshixue yanjie [1984: The CCTV and the Singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan: An Interpretation of the CCTV 1984 Spring Festival Gala's Invitation of Singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan]," 2003. <http://www.culstudies.com/rendanews/displaynews.asp?id=5458>.

<sup>16</sup> Pan Zhichang, "The Spring Festival Galas and National Imagination," in Pan Zhichang, ed., *The Imagined China's Carnival Banquet* (Beijing: China Social Science Press 2005), [http://pan2026.blog.hexun.com/2239584\\_d.html](http://pan2026.blog.hexun.com/2239584_d.html).

<sup>17</sup> Xu Ben, "Zhongguo de 'xin jiquan zhuyi' ji qi moshi jingxiang [China's 'New Totalitarianism' and Its Last Days]," *Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiu* [Contemporary China Studies], No. 4 (2005), [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=4827](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=4827).

televised celebrations. A hidden, deliberate, sophisticated fabrication of a new Chinese nation has penetrated into the performances and words in the Spring Festival Galas, and this way of construction is more effective than other political means such as campaigns, party mobilization, and so on.

On the other hand, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have also targeted a vast audience and gained great popularity among Chinese both inside and outside of China. Since 1984, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala has been broadcast live nationwide at peak viewing time of Lunar New Year's Eve. In recent years, the galas have been broadcast live globally on such satellite channels as CCTV-1, CCTV-4, CCTV-9, CCTV-French Channel, and CCTV-Spanish Channel. The 2006 gala has also been broadcast simultaneously by the state-run People's Central Radio Station and China International Radio Station. During most years, after being broadcast on the Chinese New Year's Eve, a gala was re-broadcast by the CCTV and China's provincial and local TV stations. The CCTV Spring Festival Galas have probably been one of the most watched TV programs among Chinese both inside and outside of China. Since 1994, the CCTV Survey Center has released a viewing-audience-rate report of the Spring Festival Gala every year. There are two viewing audience rates of the Spring Festival Galas: one is individual viewing audience rate, which is the percentage of surveyed individuals who have watched the gala of that year; and the other is family viewing audience rate, which is the percentage of surveyed families that have at least one member having watched the gala of that year for at least a certain amount of time. Table 1 shows the two viewing audience rates since 1994.

**Table 1: Viewing-audience-rates of the Spring Festival Galas, 1994-2006**

Year	Family Viewing Audience Rate	Individual Viewing Audience Rate
1994	NA	67
1995	NA	53.6
1996	82.4	41.2
1997	90.67	45.3
1998	94.2	61.82
1999	NA	57.8
2000	78.9	45.78
2001	NA	45.09
2002	95.1	40.44
2003	96	NA
2004	94.5	NA
2005	95.45	NA
2006	94.3	NA
Average	91.28	50.89

Sources: Wang Liejun, “Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years’ Spring Festival Galas];” Yangshi Guoji, www.cctv.com, “2004 chunjie wanhui zaichuang shoushi gaofeng [The Viewing Audience Rate of 2004 Spring Festival Gala Reaches New Height],” <http://www.cctv.com/program/tongying/20040311/100510.shtml>; Xin Hua Wang, “Daoyan gei chunwan da 78 fen, yangshi guoji wangzhan toupiao you zhengyi [The Director gives the Spring Festival the score of 78, The Voting on CCTV International Website Questioned],” www.xinhuanet.com; and Yangshi Guoji, www.cctv.com, “2006 yangshi ‘chunwan’ longzhong shangyan [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala Grandly Opened],” <http://www.cctv.com/program/tongying/20060220/101836.shtml>).

In particular, in 2003, 76.5 percent of the surveyed families watched the gala from its beginning to its end.<sup>18</sup> Since some of these surveys conducted by the CCTV's market-research company only sampled families residing in China's 100 cities, the viewing audience rates may have been overestimated because of selection bias. Yet, the popularity of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas is beyond doubt. They have been popular not only among Chinese on the mainland, but also increasingly among overseas Chinese. According to the "Beijing & Santa Clara, Calif." Report about the 2004 Spring Festival Gala, "Ringing in the 'Year of the Rooster' (2004) Gala online, Asia's largest ever live streaming event draws 1.6 millions web visits across the globe in just four hours."<sup>19</sup> In view of the significance of their producer, their broadcast time, the number of their viewers, and their function as a celebration event for the Spring Festival, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have become an important cultural phenomenon in China. According to Wang Liejun, "the CCTV even claims that watching the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, firing firecrackers, and making dumplings have become three major Chinese customs to celebrate the Spring Festivals...The Spring Festival Galas have become the symbol of the Spring Festival."<sup>20</sup> In fact, every year's Spring Festival Gala has become a "must-see event for every Chinese person, [and it] is a most welcome annual celebration."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Yangshi Guoji [CCTV International], "Zhongyang dianshitai chunjie lianhuan wanhui shoushilv dadao 96% [The Viewing Audience Rate of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala Reaches 96%]," [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newsmedia/2003-02/01/content\\_719093.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newsmedia/2003-02/01/content_719093.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Business Wire, "Speedera and ChinaCache Jointly Deliver Live Streaming of China's National TV Spring Festival," February 18, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Wang, "Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years' Spring Festival Galas]."

<sup>21</sup> Business Wire, "Speedera and ChinaCache Jointly Deliver Live Streaming of China's National TV Spring Festival."

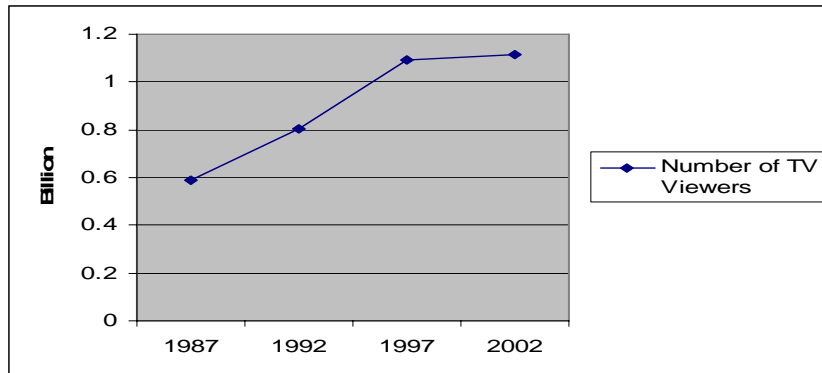
The popularity of the Spring Festival Galas can be partly attributed to its combination of TV and the Chinese tradition. First, TV is probably the most important type of mass media in China because it can reach the largest number of people, most of whom usually do not read newspapers or magazines. As Figure 1 shows, the number of TV viewers has increased dramatically in the past two decades. Nearly all Chinese watch TV. According to China's "2002 Nationwide Survey of TV Viewers," the number of TV viewers in China in 2002 was 1.115 billion, which made up 93.9 percent of the population whose ages were over four. Meanwhile, 95.8 percent of TV viewers said they watched TV "frequently" or "nearly everyday". In contrast, only 28.1 percent of TV viewers said they read newspapers "frequently" or "nearly everyday," 18.7 percent of them read magazines "frequently" or "nearly everyday," 13 percent of them listened to radio "frequently" or "nearly everyday," and 2.8 percent of them used internet "frequently" or "nearly everyday."<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, as the only national TV station, CCTV is widely accessible to most Chinese families. In the year of 2002, 94.4 percent of households had access to the channel of CCTV-1.<sup>23</sup> Second, on the Lunar New Year's Eve, Chinese people like to reunite with their family members, and watching the Spring Festival Galas naturally becomes one of the most attractive joint family activities to celebrate the festival.

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<sup>22</sup> China Central Television, "'2002 nian quanguo dianshi guanzhong chouyang diaocha' jieguo gongbu [Results of the 2002 Nationwide Survey of TV Viewers]," cctv.com Xinwen, <http://www.cctv.com/special/939/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 1: Number of TV Viewers in China**



Data source: China Central Television, ““2002 nian quanguo dianshi guanzhong chouyang diaocha’ jieguo gongbu [Results of the 2002 Nationwide Survey of TV Viewers],” cctv.com Xinwen, <http://www.cctv.com/special/939/>.

### **3. Why Construct a Chinese national space on Television**

Since all Chinese who have access to TV can appreciate the same performances at the same time in different places, the Spring Festival Galas have not only met people’s desire to celebrate the Lunar New Year, but also connected Chinese people, particularly those who live in mainland China, together. The state-sponsored CCTV stage acts as a knot that connects millions of Chinese into a community. As Benedict Anderson argues, nations are “imagined political communities.”<sup>24</sup> The shared images and feelings among the members are the key to constructing a nation. The CCTV’s construction of a Chinese national space can help Chinese imagine how to be a new community. This can meet the

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised Ed. London · New York: Verso 1991).

CCP's ideological needs in the "reform and open door" era, as the communist ideology has been declining.

The CCP's ideology has been closely related to nationalism. In fact, as John H. Kautsky argues, "Far from being something unique, [communism] can be regarded as part of the larger movement of nationalism in underdeveloped countries."<sup>25</sup> In fact, even back to the 1940s, as a practice of neo-Maoism, the CCP claimed to represent the benefits of many classes, including the peasants, the proletarians, the petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie, to oppose the imperialism and its agents in China.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that when the People's Republic of China was established on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1949, the strongest proclamation that Mao Zedong made was that "the Chinese people have stood up." Yet, after the late 1950s, the CCP under Mao's leadership increasingly adopted a radical ideology that emphasized class struggle and argued for conquering and eliminating the bourgeoisie. This ideology reached its climax in the Cultural Revolution. After Deng Xiaoping stepped up and launched the "reform and open door" policy in 1978, he could no longer hinge the legitimacy of the CCP on class struggle. Instead, Deng emphasized the unity of the nation, not only within mainland China, but also among all Chinese. In the early 1980s, Deng pointed out that the CCP should focus on three important tasks: anti-hegemonism, national unification, and modernization.<sup>27</sup> The construction of a Chinese national space is conducive to all the three tasks. It identifies Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan as parts of China that are supposed to be unified with the mainland. It

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<sup>25</sup> See John H. Kautsky, "An Essay in the Politics of Development," in John H. Kautsky, ed., *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1962), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1999), p. 91.

constructs the Chinese nation as a collective being to purge past humiliations and pursue her glorious revival, which is implied by the tasks of anti-hegemonism and modernization. Moreover, the construction of a Chinese national space is also a way to promote patriotism (*aiguo zhuyi*, or love-the-state-ism in the Chinese context). As the incumbents of the state, by promoting common Chinese's loyalty to the state, the CCP constructs a foundational legitimacy for its rule. This is particularly essential to the party as communism itself has declined as a dominant ideology in China.



## Chapter 3. Literature Review

Chinese nationalism has been the subject of many studies.<sup>28</sup> Many scholars argue that Chinese nationalism is the result of the CCP's promotion of patriotism in response to the decay of communism and the state's legitimacy crisis after 1989. As Suisheng Zhao argues, "The end of Cold War has seen the revival throughout the world nationalist sentiments and aspirations. In China, the rapid decay of communist ideology has led the Chinese Communist Party to emphasize its role as the paramount patriotic force and the guardian of national pride in order to find a new basis of legitimacy to sustain its role."<sup>29</sup> In support of these observations, by examining the CCTV Spring Festival Galas of 1984-86, I show that statist nationalism on TV has been a significant part of the CCP's propaganda at least since early 1980s. The emphasis on the love for the Chinese nation has dominated the galas of 1984-86, which was supposed to be the celebration of a traditional cultural festival.

While many studies of Chinese nationalism focus on intellectual debates, governmental documents, official statements, historical events, or Chinese foreign policy,<sup>30</sup> they tend to

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Baogang He and Yingjie Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratization in China* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000); Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2004); Gunter Schubert, "Nationalism and National Identity in Contemporary China: Assessing the Debate," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (September/October 2001), pp. 128-156; Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s," *China Quarterly*, no. 152 (1997), pp. 725-45; and Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Zhao, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for national Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s", p. 725.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see Zhao, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for national Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s;" Yingjie Guo, "Barking Up the Wrong Tree: The Liberal-Nationalist Debate on Democracy and Identity," in Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2004), p. 23-43; Mobo Changfan Gao,

neglect the ways in which the CCP has promoted nationalism among common Chinese people. Though high-level officials of the CCP have never been present in the galas except in the gala of 1990, the first gala in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, the galas have been a connection between the CCP and the common people. By examining the strategies of statist nationalism in a case as such, this thesis is intended to show the actual operation of statist nationalism in China.

The role of mass media in China's political arena as well as the impact of politics on China's mass media has also received an increasing amount of research.<sup>31</sup> Among these research works, only some of them focus on the relationship between TV media and the state's promotion of nationalism. For example, Pan and Pan et al examine how the CCP has mobilized and then "orchestrated" China's media coverage of Hong Kong's return to China.<sup>32</sup> They argue that China's media constructed a family-nation as a master frame to

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"The Rise of Neo-nationalism and the New Left: A Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspective," in Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2004), p. 44-62; and Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*; Merle Goldman, Perry Link, and Su Wei, "China's Intellectuals in the Deng Era: Loss of Identity with the State," in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 125-153; Peter Hays Gries, "Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy," in Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang, eds., *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 103-120; Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Beijing's Taiwan Policy: A China Threat?" *Issues & Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (January/February 2000), p. 76-99.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Hong Liu, "Profit or Ideology? The Chinese Press between Party and Market," *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1998), p. 31-41; Ian Weber, "Reconfiguring Chinese Propaganda and Control Modalities: A Case Study of Shanghai's Television system," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 11, No. 30 (2002), p. 53-75; Hugo de Burgh, "Chinese Journalism and the Academy: The Politics and Pedagogy of the Media," *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2000), p. 549-558; Zhang Yong, "From Masses to Audience: Changing Media Ideologies and Practices in Reform China," *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (2000), p. 617-635; and Zhongdang Pan, Chin-Chuan Lee, Joseph Man Chan and Clement K.Y. So, "Orchestrating the Family-Nation Chorus: Chinese Media and Nationalism in the Hong Kong Handover," *Mass Communication & Society*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2001), p. 331-347.

<sup>32</sup> Pan Zhongdang, "Lishi xushi ji qi jiangou zhong de zhixu: yi woguo chuanmei baodao xianggang huigui wei li [The Historical Narrative and the Order in Construct: A Case of How Chinese Media Report the Return of Hong Kong]," in Dongfeng Tao, Yuanpu Jin, and Bingzhong Gao, eds., *Wenhua Yanjiu* [Cultural Studies], Vol. 1 (2000), Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe,

represent the event through lenses of nationalism and placed the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China in the context of modern Chinese history. They describe the relationship between China's party-state and the media as state corporatism. Though these two articles argue that China's media are heavily influenced by nationalism, they also use examples to show the Chinese media coverage emphasize on harmony and unity of the Chinese nation. Still, their studies mainly focus on the relationship between the party-state and the media and particularly how the party-state mobilizes the media. In my view, the return of Hong Kong is just one special event, which is not typical. Meanwhile, Pan emphasizes the media's function in constructing the colony's history. The construction of the "return" of Hong Kong is only one of the tools to construct the nationalist narratives under the leadership of the party-state, and Pan's articles even extend to the discussion of larger market resources and the broader commoditization of cultural production.

The CCTV Spring Festival Galas have been studied by many scholars. However, most studies of the Spring Festival Galas are from an aesthetic, artistic perspective. These studies mostly discuss why the Spring Festival Gala has emerged and become popular, why it continues to exist despite many criticisms that it has received, and why many people criticize the galas but at the same time cannot help watching them.<sup>33</sup> One example

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[http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=4658](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=4658)>; and Pan, Lee, Chan and So, "Orchestrating the Family-Nation Chorus: Chinese Media and Nationalism in the Hong Kong Handover."

<sup>33</sup> Examples of these studies are Guan Ling, *Zhixing Guiji* [The Tracks of Knowledge and Actions] (Beijing: Beijing Radio College Press 2000); Xu Yingchun and Wang Ying, "Dui 'kan chunjie wanhui' chengwei xin minsu wenti de sikao [Some Reflections on Watching the Spring Festival Galas Becoming New Customs]," *Shiting Zongheng* [On TV and Radio], No. 1 (2003); and Wang Xiaoyu, "Chunjie lianhuan wanhui de 'zhaohuan jizhi' [The 'Calling Mechanism' of the Spring Festival Galas]," *Meiti Piping* [Media Critique] (Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2005), Vol. 1, [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=4891](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=4891).

is Wang Xiaoyu's study.<sup>34</sup> Based on the concepts of "TV community" and "collective memory," Wang analyzes the "calling" mechanism that renders individuals to join the audience of the Spring Festival Galas every year. He argues that the high viewing-audience-rates of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas can be partly attributed to the "TV community" emerging in 1980s---that is, the phenomenon that many people gather together to watch the same TV programs. Wang argues that the CCTV Spring Festival Gala is creating a new and special "TV community". Many families gather to watch a TV program together, along with eating the reunion dinner. What is more, people's discussions on the CCTV Spring Festival Galas afterwards make the galas a "collective memory." Wang Xiaoyu argues that the new TV community creates a pressure over individuals and calls on them to join together into a vast audience. While Wang provides an explanation for the high viewing audience rates of the CCTV galas, he does not provide an in-depth analysis of the galas' political function in China.

To my knowledge, only Bin Zhao, Yanrong Chang, Wang Liejun, and Pan Zhichang have studied the political-cultural aspects of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas. Using the 1997 CCTV Spring Festival Gala as a case, Bin Zhao examines how popular entertainment is imbued by officially sanctioned ideologies and how the CCP's long-standing policy of educating the masses through entertaining them (*yu jiao yu le*) is carried out.<sup>35</sup> Using programs in the 1997 gala as examples, Zhao analyzes not only the gala's aim to boost national pride and celebrate Hong Kong's expected return to China in

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<sup>34</sup> See Wang Xiaoyu, "Chunjie lianhuan wanhui de 'zhaohuan jizhi' [The 'Calling Mechanism' of the Spring Festival Galas]."

<sup>35</sup> Bin Zhao, "Popular Family Television and Party Ideology: the Spring Festival Eve Happy Gathering," *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 20, no. 1(1998), pp. 43-58.

1997, but also how the ethnicity embraced by the CCP has been conveyed by the programs.

Yanrong Chang conducts an analysis of the programs in the 1999 CCTV Spring Festival Gala to illustrate the nature of the new nationalism in China in the 1990s. She defines the new nationalism in China as “an ideology of confounding nation and state into nation-state through the construction of patriotism, an ideology of integration and an ideology of optimism.”<sup>36</sup> The thesis is very similar to Chang’s study in terms of research task and method. But Chang’s study only focuses on the 1999 gala. Using one year’s gala to draw a general conclusion may not be very persuasive. Compared to Chang’s study, the analysis in this thesis is more systematic, and it pays more attention to the techniques used in the galas and their changes between 1980s and the 2000s.

By understanding power in terms of relation/event, Wang Liejun analyzes the power relations in the Spring Festival galas.<sup>37</sup> He examines the rhetorical techniques employed by the Spring Festival Galas such as “contrasting the sweet present days with the bitter past” (*yiku sitian*), “contrasting positive images with negative ones” (*zhengfan dianxing suzao*), “constructing sacred image and symbols” (*shensheng xingxiang he xiangzheng suzao*), in order to explain the complexity and legitimacy of these galas as well as the reasons why the audience continue to watch them despite their dissatisfaction. In my

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<sup>36</sup> See Yanrong Chang, “New Nationalism in China in the 1990s: An Analysis of the 1999 Spring Festival Gala,” p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Wang Liejun, “*Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi* [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years’ Spring Festival Galas],” Unpublished MA Thesis, Peking University, 2005, [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=2835](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=2835).

opinion, Wang provides a very insightful analysis of the techniques used by the CCTV Spring Festival Galas to generate meanings that can serve the party-state. He uses many examples from the galas and interprets how the programs and the hosts' words have helped to construct a positive image of the party-state. However, further clarification is needed on how power in terms of event/relation has been involved in these techniques. Meanwhile, Wang's study yields many statistical findings about the Spring Festival Galas in the last 20 years, and that analysis has benefited this thesis greatly. This thesis also draws on Wang's analysis of the usage of symbols in the Spring Festival Galas. For example, Wang has also analyzed symbols for the party-state such as military servicemen, athletes, and the Great Wall, but he neglects the differences in the usage of these symbols between in the 1980s and the 2000s. Though both Wang's article and this thesis use the CCTV Spring Festival Galas as a case study, they analyze the galas from different angles. While Wang analyzes the CCTV Spring Festival Galas from the point of view of power in terms of relation/event, this thesis analyzes the galas by focusing on the ways in which the CCP promotes statist nationalism among common Chinese people.

Pan Zhichang provides a cultural interpretation of the Spring Festival Galas in order to better understand the operation of China's new ideology in the mass culture.<sup>38</sup> He defines China's ideology in the last two and a half decades as a "state ideology," as compared to the party-state totalitarian ideology before 1978. Pan argues that the Spring Festival Galas have provided many symbolic resources for the new dominant ideology to utilize. For example, in the Spring Festival galas, the dominant ideology operates on individual

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<sup>38</sup> Pan Zhichang, "The Spring Festival Galas and National Imagination," in Pan Zhichang, ed., *The Imagined China's Carnival Banquet* (Beijing: China Social Science Press 2005), also available at [http://pan2026.blog.hexun.com/2239584\\_d.html](http://pan2026.blog.hexun.com/2239584_d.html).

desire for family reunion and happy life and modifies it into a public affective space, by replacing family with the state and making the people's individual desire for reunion, good harvest, and richness into the reunion of the nation, "the security of the country and the peace of the people" (*guotai minan*), national revival, and the state's prosperity. In Pan's view, by modifying the Spring Festival from a traditional folk custom into a modern national political ritual, the dominant ideology accomplishes the collective imagination of a modern nation-state. Pan argues that with the involvement of the dominant state ideology, the Spring Festival Galas have been transformed into a calling for national identity in consistence with the state's sacred will, a "carnival banquet" of the "imagined China," a state totem that is intended to draw Chinese around the globe. It is the rhetoric of the state's dominant ideology underlying the Spring Festival Galas that have made the galas distinct. In my opinion, Pan provides many theoretical insights in pointing out that the state has appropriated a traditional cultural element like the Spring Festival and transformed it into a ritual that serve the dominant ideology. However, similar to Wang Liejun, he neglects the changes in the strategies and techniques employed by the state in the galas over these years. That is, Pan provides a general analysis of commonalities in the galas and digs out hiding political meanings underlying the galas, but does not analyze the differences among the galas. Meanwhile, while Pan offers an insightful conceptualization of the constructed national space in the galas, he fails to pay attention to its more detailed symbolic characteristics. In these respects, this study will remedy Pan's oversights and omissions by focusing more on specific and dynamic techniques used by the CCTV galas to construct the national space and the characteristics of this space.

By analyzing the techniques and technologies that the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have constructed a Chinese national space, how the galas have described this space, and why the changes in these techniques matter, this thesis may contribute to both studies on Chinese nationalism and those on mass media.



## Chapter 4. The Commonalities between the Galas of 1984-86 and Those of 2004-06

This chapter compares the Spring Festival Galas of 1984-86 with those of 2004-06. The first part examines how the galas have constructed the imagination of a Chinese national space and what common techniques have been used to do so. The second part explores what symbols the galas have used to describe the Chinese national space. The third part examines the role that traditional elements play in the galas.

### ***1. Constructing a Chinese national space***

The Spring Festival Galas, organized by the only state-run television station CCTV, have connected all people in China and all Chinese residing abroad together in the annual celebration of the Spring Festival. To construct a space of the Chinese nation with both political and cultural meanings, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas represent the Chinese nation in many ways. In some occasions, the Chinese nation is represented as being made up of Han Chinese and 55 minorities; in some occasions, the Chinese nation is represented as being territorially made up of the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan; in some occasions, it is represented as being made up of such classes as workers, peasants, military servicemen, or of urban residents and rural residents; in some occasions, it is represented as being made up of all provinces (or municipalities, or autonomous regions) on the mainland plus Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan; and in some other occasions, when the Chinese nation is referred to culturally, it is represented as

being made up of all Chinese on the mainland, in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan as well as overseas. Among these representations, the representation of the Chinese nation in terms of classes tends to categorize the Chinese people into several groups. In other representations, the 55 minorities, people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, as well as overseas Chinese are the boundaries of the Chinese nation. Interestingly, though these people may only constitute a small share of the Chinese nation in terms of population, they have received lots of attention in the Spring Festival Galas. By putting disproportionate emphasis on the boundaries, the galas have made a great effort to construct a Chinese national space. In this part, I will mainly describe three ways of representing the Chinese nation: in terms of classes, in terms of ethnic groups, and in terms of places.

#### A. In terms of classes

Representing China as being made up of several classes, such as workers, peasants, military servicemen, and so on, used to be very popular before launching of the “reform and open door” program in 1978. During the Maoist era, dividing the society into several classes was the primary way to view the world. For example, the five stars in China’s national flag adopted in 1949 were meant to represent the Chinese Communist Party and four classes: workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and patriotic bourgeoisie. This conception of the Chinese society reached its peak in the Cultural Revolution in 1966-1976, when people were constantly mobilized to fight their class enemies (*jieji diren*), and those who were labeled as so-called counter-revolutionary classes---bourgeoisie,

landlord, etc---were meant to be eliminated. This way of representation, which is consistent with the communist ideology, has been declining since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping established his power in the CCP and the government refocused on economy. However, a similar way to representation---say, imagining China as consisting of workers of multiple fields--- still occasionally appears in the CCTV Spring Festival Galas. For example, in the comic dialogue “Presenting Spring Couplets” of the 1984 gala, Zhao Yan and Ma Ji first present a spring couplet to peasants, then to workers, and then to military servicemen, and then to street cleaners, and then to people who work in the field of sports, and then to artists, etc.<sup>39</sup> In the 1986 gala, Jiang Kun and Tang Jiezhong use a similar way of representation to describe the great economic achievements in China in their comic dialogue “Taking Photos.”<sup>40</sup> They first talk about taking photos for sports stars, then for peasants, and then for workers in a steel factory, and then for intellectuals such as college students.

This panorama of several classes or fields is a remnant of the Maoist representation of China, and this way of representation seldom appears in the 2004-2006 galas. It may be because the economic development has resulted in great social mobility, and it is no longer meaningful to attach a fixed class label to anyone. Nonetheless, the idea of class has by no means disappeared. Some programs in the 2004-2006 galas tend to represent the people on mainland China as consisting of rural residents and urban residents. For

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<sup>39</sup> For 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>40</sup> For 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

example, Zhao Benshan, a most popular skit star in the China, has appeared in the CCTV Spring Festival Galas every year since 1990. He has often acted as the representative for peasants. In the 2006 gala, he acts as a peasant who together with his wife is invited by the CCTV to a talk show.<sup>41</sup> Using his humorous actions and words, he amuses everyone and represents the image of a kind, honest, and smart peasant. In contrast, his wife acts as a rural woman who pursues fame keenly but eventually fails.

What is more, to construct an affection to sustain Chinese national space, some programs utilize the interactions between rural residents and urban residents as their main topic, emphasizing the interdependence and fraternity between rural residents and urban residents. For example, in the 2004 gala, a skit titled “Brothers” talks about two men---one from the rural areas, and the other from urban areas---who were born in the same hospital many years ago and now are suspected to have been mixed up when they were born.<sup>42</sup> In order to verify their identities, these two men decide to get DNA tests. The skit mainly describes the interactions between the two men when they are waiting for the DNA test results. In the skit, despite many differences in lifestyle and income level between the two men, they gradually become like brothers as they talk and understand each other. In the end, the DNA test result comes out indicating that they have not been mixed up, but these two men also are wearing each other’s coats and behaving like each other. Finally, they decide to be like real brothers, and the urban man even decides to

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<sup>41</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2006).

<sup>42</sup> For 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, see China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

invest in the rural man's enterprise to produce "green foods." By constructing the mutual understanding and brotherhood between a rural resident and an urban resident, this skit creates a reality contrasting with many real stories. In fact, the ratio between per capita disposable income of urban residents and net income of rural residents has increased from 1.86 in 1985 to 3.21 in 2004.<sup>43</sup> The urban-rural income disparity has become a serious social problem in China.

In the "reform and open door" era, many rural migrants to the cities for jobs have been in a disadvantaged position. In the 2006 gala, there is a comic dialogue titled "Follow My Wife to Be a Maid," which is among a rural couple and an urban man in a job market.<sup>44</sup> The rural wife is looking for a job to be a maid in the city, and her husband is so afraid of losing her that he follows her to the city. The urban man is hiring her to take care of his mother. In the comic dialogue, in regards to urban residents' discrimination against rural residents, the urban man says, "Without you rural people, we urban people cannot even have a happy celebration of the Spring Festival. Who will distribute newspapers for us? Who will distribute milk for us? Who will clean garbage for us at midnight? Who will clean the streets for us at dawn? ...Yes, there are a handful of urban residents who look down upon rural residents, but their ancestors three generations before them were also rural residents...Yes, we should love cities, but we should also be grateful to the countryside, because cities have the dreams of rural residents, and the countryside has the

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<sup>43</sup> See National Bureau of Statistics of China, *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian 2005* [China Statistical Yearbook 2005] (Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe 2005), <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2005/indexch.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> See China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2006).

parents of urban residents.”<sup>45</sup> The rural man says, “Wife is in the husband’s heart, and cities are in the countryside’s heart. As long as everyone has a heart of love, none of us will worry.”<sup>46</sup> By imagining a harmonious relationship between urban residents and rural residents, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas tend to homogenize the Chinese national space. Moreover, the constructed love and friendship between the rural and the urban in the galas may become a new form of community that overshadows and dominates the facts of rural-urban inequality in China.

Nonetheless, imagining the Chinese nation as consisting of Han Chinese and 55 minorities, and as consisting of Chinese on the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas are the two ways of representation that have been most often used in the galas. For example, at the beginning of nearly every year’s gala, the hosts would extend their New Year greetings to “all ethnic groups over the country, compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and overseas Chinese.” This analysis mainly elaborates on these two ways of imagining the Chinese nation.

#### B. In terms of ethnic groups

Though minorities take up only about 10 percent of China’s population,<sup>47</sup> they are of great symbolic significance for the representation of China as a family of 56 ethnic

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> According to a survey conducted by China’s National Statistical Bureau at the end of 2005, minorities take up 9.44 percent of China’s total population. See Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, “Guojia tongji ju: 2005 nian mo, zhongguo renkou da 13.0756 yi (03/16/06) [National Statistical Bureau: China’s population reached 1.30756 billion at the end of 2005 (03/16/06)],” <http://www.china-embassy.org/chn/gyzg/t240782.htm>.

groups. This is similar to the U.S. government's representing the American nation with images consisting of Caucasians, American Africans, Hispanics, and Asians. The presence of minorities in the CCTV Spring Galas can convey the message that all ethnic groups in China are equal. Moreover, the key to constructing a Chinese national space is to focus on the boundary of the nation. By incorporating minorities into the celebration of the Lunar New Year, these galas construct the image that all ethnic groups together form the solidarity of the Chinese nation. For example, in the 1985 gala, Dilibaier, a famous Uygur coloratura soprano, sings two songs, "A Cup of Wine" and "My Song Will Fly to You". In the second song, she sings,

"In this jubilant festival,  
At this happy night,  
So many Chinese hearts are knitted into a garland.  
Even if you are at the end of the sky and he is at the corner of the sea,  
Even if we are separated by ten thousand rivers and a thousand mountains,  
My songs still fly to you.  
Alas, my brothers and sisters, and my friends,  
Please accept my best wishes in this festival.  
At this moment when we say farewell to yesterday and welcome tomorrow,  
All Chinese hearts are closely connected.  
No matter you are at the end of the sky or the corner of the sea,  
We have one heart beating, one faith, and one peaceful and happy paradise that we  
build together.  
Alas, my brothers and sisters, and my friends,  
Please accept my best wishes in this festival."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

A Uygur proclaiming her Chinese identity is a powerful testimony for the efforts at constructing an inclusive Chinese national space. In the 2006 gala, a Mongolian family sings a Mongolian-styled song “Three Lucky Treasures” in both Mandarin and Mongolian.<sup>49</sup> This also creates the image that different languages and cultural elements of all ethnic groups of the Chinese nation can mingle perfectly.

Since most viewers of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas do not know any minority language in China, clothing plays an important role in constructing the images of multi-ethnic reunion and celebration. The galas usually use several major minority ethnic groups---for example, Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Zhuang, Korean, Yi, and so on --- to signal multi-ethnicity, with dancing actors dressed in these minorities’ clothes or with actual minority singers and dancers participating. In the 1986 gala, there is a song titled “56 Ethnic Groups Singing One Song,” with many actors wearing clothes of minorities dancing together (see Picture 1).<sup>50</sup> The words of the song are:

“56 ethnic groups sing one song,  
With our voices echoing in Tianshan<sup>51</sup> and dancing with the waves of the East  
China Sea,  
Praising the fraternity and solidarity among us,  
Praising our ability to control our fates at home and the new lives,  
And praising socialism and our dear motherland.

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<sup>49</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2006).

<sup>50</sup> For 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Tianshan is a mountain range in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.



56 ethnic groups sing one song,  
With our voices dancing in the grasslands and waving with grain and wheat,  
Praising the new sceneries at our hometown and the Party's good policies,  
Praising the glorious history of all ethnic groups and the creativeness of the four  
modernizations,  
And praising socialism and our great motherland.”

**Picture 1: A song “56 Ethnic Groups Singing One Song” in the 1986 gala**



(Source: Captured from the 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

In every year's gala in 2004-06, there is a program consisting of a series of songs or dancing, or a combination of both, performed by minorities. For example, in the 2004 gala, right after midnight, there is a program with Koreans singing “The Red Sun Shining on the Borders,” Tibetans singing “The Tibetan Plateau,” Mongolians singing “The Grassland is My Home,” Uygurs singing “Alamuhan,” Yi singing “Visitors from Far Away, Please Stay,” and Han and other minorities singing “Good days.”<sup>52</sup> In the 2005 gala, there is a program titled “Kaleidoscopic Ethnic Groups” (*zhengqidouyan minzu feng*) with Han entertainers performing “Drum Dancing” (*gu wu*), the actors of Hani ethnic group performing “Clog Dancing” (*muji wu*), Tibetans performing “Tap Dancing” (*tita wu*), Zhuang performing “Praising the Spring Sceneries with Mountain Songs Every

<sup>52</sup> For 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, see China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

Year” (*shange niannian chang chunguang*), Uygurs performing “Swirling Dancing” (*xuan wu*), Koreans performing “Long Drum Dancing” (*chang gu wu*), and Mongolians performing “Chop Stick Dancing” (*kuaizi wu*).<sup>53</sup>

In addition, in the 2005 gala, after the midnight countdown, there is a segment titled “Golden Rooster Crows at Dawn” (*jin ji bao xiao*).<sup>54</sup> It is a combination of songs sung by minorities, with Uygurs singing a Xinjiang-styled love song titled “Take Off Your Veil” (*xianqi ni de gaitou lai*), Tibetans singing a song titled “Beautiful Halama” (*meili de halama*), Tujia singing a song titled “Zhiyuanside,” Miao singing a song titled “Cheers” (*ganbei*), Zhuang singing a song titled “Only Mountain Songs for Relatives” (*zhiyou shange song qinren*), Thais singing a song titled “There Is a Beautiful Place” (*you yige meili de defang*), and Mongolians singing a song titled “Toasting Song” (*zhujiu ge*). Each of these songs is characteristic of an ethnic group’s music style, and dancers wearing clothes of minorities sometimes dance in accompany with the singing. In the 2006 gala, there is a program titled “Strong Rhythm” (*xiangliang jiepai*) in which actors of such ethnic groups as Uygurs, Tibetans, Gaoshans, Koreans, Mongolians, Miaos, and Zhuangs dance hand in hand to form a large circle (see Picture 2).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

**Picture 2: Strong Rhythm (*Xiangliang Jiepai*) in 2006 gala**



(Source: Captured from the 2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

While these programs create an image of multiple ethnic groups celebrating the Spring Festival together and forming the solidarity of the Chinese nation, they tend to grasp only some superficial characteristics of the major ethnic groups and combine them together. Therefore, the images of these minority ethnic groups collected by the CCTV Spring Festivals are stereotypic, and they tend to neglect the subtlety and complexities of the cultures of these minorities. For example, the Uygur dancing is often performed by a Uygur girl with her hair in many braids and a Uygur man wearing a blue hat and playing a tambourine, and the programs performed by Zhuang tend to be a group of girls singing mountain songs. Actually, though such ethnic groups as Tibetans and Uygurs play an important role in constructing the image that all ethnic groups are celebrating the Spring Festival, the Spring Festival may not even be a festival in their cultures.

C. In terms of places

Participants from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan have played a significant role in the Spring Festival Galas, not only because they tend to bring a lot of artistic talents distinct from the performers from the mainland to the galas, but also because their identities help to construct the Chinese national space. Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan reside on the political boundary of China. By identifying participants from these regions as Chinese, the galas render the meaning of the Chinese nation become seemingly stable and beyond contestation. In fact, the CCTV has carefully labeled actors from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan in line with the Chinese government's position that these regions are all parts of China. In doing so, the galas represent China as consisting of mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan.

For example, among the five hosts of the 1984 Spring Festival Gala, two are from outside the China proper: one is from Taiwan named A Yuan, and the other is from Hong Kong named Chen Sisi. At the end of the gala, a child who have participated the gala says to Chen Sisi, "I would like to give this toy to children in Hong Kong and Macao, and please tell them that I miss them." This is designed to show the emotional connections between children in mainland China and in Hong Kong.<sup>56</sup>

The 1985 gala was hosted by three actors from the mainland as well as Zhu Wanyi from Taiwan and Ban Ban from Hong Kong. At the beginning of the gala, Zhu Wanyi says, "I want to say Happy New Year to all people nationwide. New Year's Eve has traditionally been a reunion time for Chinese, and every year at this time, all children who are vagrant

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<sup>56</sup> For 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

outside want to go home and celebrate the New Year's Eve. Now I am back, back to my large family of love. I am very excited and thankful..."<sup>57</sup> Here, by telling the audience that she is from Taiwan, Zhu alludes that she is a representative for Taiwan to attend the national reunion of all Chinese. Like minorities, a Taiwanese's identifying herself as a Chinese and viewing the mainland as her "large family of love" (*keai de da jiating*) is also a good testimony of the construction of a Chinese national space. Moreover, it is also a victory of the Chinese government's position that Taiwan is part of China, and the PRC government is the sole legal government of China. In 1985, Taiwan was under the ruling of Chiang Ching-kuo, who still argued for reunifying with China under Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People and the Kuomintang regime. Zhu's being "back to my lovely large family" in 1985 had more political implications than other Taiwanesees' participation in the CCTV galas in 2000s.

In the 2005 gala, hosts from all 32 provincial units as well as Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan present couplets to the audience.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in the 2006 gala, hosts from these places present lantern riddles.<sup>59</sup> Couplets and lantern riddles are both traditional Chinese ways to celebrate the Spring Festival, and these couplets and lantern riddles presented in the galas characterize that they represent. More importantly, these two programs treat Taiwan like Hong Kong and Macao, and these three are treated like the provincial units of mainland China. By treating representatives from all provincial units on the mainland

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<sup>57</sup> For 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>58</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>59</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

similar to those from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, the CCTV creates the image that all the people of the Chinese nation are reunited together.

Besides hosts, other people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan have also played a significant symbolic role in the galas. In 1984, a tour group comprised of students of from Hong Kong Polytechnic University is introduced to the audience, which implies that Hong Kong's youth are eager to know their motherland and are proud of the Chinese culture.<sup>60</sup> This is followed by Xi Xiulan, a singer from Hong Kong, singing three songs including a Taiwanese song "Girls in the Ali Mountain."<sup>61</sup> The 1984 gala is marked by the participation of another singer from Hong Kong, Zhang Mingmin.<sup>62</sup> While Xi Xiulan was born in Anhui Province and later migrated to Hong Kong, Zhang was a Cantonese born in Hong Kong. Though he did not speak Mandarin very well---most people in Hong Kong had never learned to speak Mandarin in 1984---he sang a song titled "My Chinese Heart" (*wo de zhongguo xin*) in Mandarin. The song later became very popular all over China. It says:

"The rivers and mountains of China are only in my dreams,  
And the motherland has been far away from me for many years.  
However, nothing has been able to change my Chinese heart.  
Though I am wearing western clothes,  
My heart is still a Chinese heart.  
My ancestors have sealed "China" on my whole person.  
The Yangtze River, the Great Wall,

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<sup>60</sup> 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

The Yellow Mountain, and the Yellow River,  
All these are heavy in my heart.  
No matter when and where I am,  
China is close in my heart.  
The blood in my heart echoes the voice of China.  
Even if I am outside my motherland,  
This will not change my Chinese heart.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1984, China was negotiating with the United Kingdom about the future of Hong Kong. While people in Hong Kong had been excluded from the whole negotiation and many of them were worried about the return of Hong Kong to the PRC, Zhang was identified as the representative for Hong Kong. Zhang’s “My Chinese Heart” was identified as the voice of all people in Hong Kong, and it created the image that all Hong Kong compatriots were eager to return to the motherland.

In 1985, Luo Wen, a singer from Hong Kong, plays the same role as Zhang Mingmin did in 1984.<sup>64</sup> After singing two songs about festival joys, Luo expresses his Chinese self-identity and his love for China. He says:

“I have sung in many places on the world, but my dream is to sing in China for us Chinese. Since my childhood, I have been dreaming of seeing such places as the Tiananmen Square, the Great Wall, and the Imperial Palace. This dream is realized now. As I know, many overseas Chinese have similar dreams, hoping to have a chance to set foot on the Chinese territory to take a look at our motherland’s

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> For 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape, see China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

landscape. I am going to sing the following song to say the words from their hearts.”<sup>65</sup>

The song that is supposed to say the words from the hearts of overseas China is titled “China Dream.” The song says:

“My dream, your dream,  
Every dream is from the Yellow River.  
Five thousand years’ countless wishes,  
All have passed with the waves of the river.  
Yet there is one wish that is still generating waves of joy and sadness.  
That is,  
How many times could we have prosperity like Tang Dynasty and Han Dynasty,  
So that our compatriots no longer need to suffer?  
One day, when China takes her steps,  
We will let the whole world fix their eyes on us.  
Flying forward to the sky,  
The dragon spreads its voice and glory.  
Let every Chinese be happy,  
With their smiles accompanying the Yellow River.  
How many China dreams are there in five thousand years?  
Yet their content has been always the same,  
...  
Let every Chinese be free and happy individuals.”

Xi Xiulan and Zhang Mingmin, who participated in the 1984 gala, also sang in the 1985 gala. Xi sings a song about the affection for one’s hometown, and Zhang sings a song with the theme that the Chinese should climb to a new height. Zhang’s song says, “Move

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



forward, China's sons and daughters; move forward, we will eventually climb to the peak...I know my efforts will bring about successes, and China's sons and daughters will one day claim to the peak of the world."<sup>66</sup> More than that, Wang Mingquan, a famous actor from Hong Kong also sings two songs titled "Praising the Great Wall and the Yangtze River" and "My Hometown." In the between, Wang says to the audience, "The Great Wall and the Yangtze River can really represent our unfailing spirit. I myself hope that one day I could go back to Shanghai and appreciate the waving Huangpu River. I am from Shanghai, and I hope one day I can go back to hold a singing party in my hometown and bring joy to the people there."<sup>67</sup>

Generally speaking, in the years of 1984-1986, hosts and actors from Hong Kong played an important role in the galas. This can be attributed to the historical agreements that China and the United Kingdom were negotiating on Hong Kong's future. By expressing their love for the motherland either in their songs or in their words, they helped to create the image that people in Hong Kong love the motherland and were eager to return to China. Meanwhile, in the galas of 1984-86, these singers from Hong Kong often had a chance to say a lot of words, and through their speeches, these singers acted as vocal representatives for people in Hong Kong. The presence of these singers from Hong Kong helped to include Hong Kong into the Chinese national space.

The songs and words of these singers from Hong Kong mainly revolve around two themes: one is overseas Chinese's missing their homes, hometown, and home countries,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

and the other is their wishes for China's strength and greatness. The first theme is consistent with a defining feature of ancient Chinese cultural resources. Emotion for home and hometown is the most important theme for poems written in Tang Dynasty, and those poems have had great impact on Chinese culture. Many Chinese believe poems of Tang Dynasty have been the best cultural heritage that they have received from their ancestors. Ancient Chinese tended to view state as the extension of home. The literal meaning of the modern Chinese word for the State is "state-home" (*guojia*). Taking advantage of Chinese culture's emphasis on the connection between home and state and its valuing the affection for the home, the CCTV galas of 1984-1986 extend overseas Chinese's individual affection for their homes and hometowns into affection for their motherland. As a result, the theme of patriotism has been praised in these galas. Overseas Chinese coming home is described as coming to the state of PRC with big home and like home.

While the participation of singers and actors from Hong Kong and Taiwan continue to have significant symbolic meaning for the construction of the Chinese national space, it has taken a different form in the galas of 2004-2006. Whereas some singers from Hong Kong---Liu Dehua, Jackie Chan, and Rong Zuer in the 2005 gala---sometimes still sing solos in the galas of 2004-06, most singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan are arranged to sing together with singers from Chinese mainland. In this situation, singers are meant to represent their regions of origin to be parts of China. For example, in the 2004 gala<sup>68</sup>, there is a singing program in which six singers sing three songs, with each song sung by

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<sup>68</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

two singers. The first song titled “Warmth” is sung by Zhao Wei from the mainland and A Du from Taiwan; the next song titled “Dragon Boxing” is sung by Zhou Jielun from Taiwan and Li Fei from Macao; and the last song “The World Outside” is sung by Qi Qin from Taiwan and Mo Wenwei from Hong Kong. In the 2005 gala<sup>69</sup>, in a program consisting of five singers with each singing one song, Fang Zuming, a young movie star from Hong Kong sings a song titled “Becoming Stronger,” and Cai Yilin, a singer from Taiwan, sings a pop song “Love 36 Tricks.” In the 2006 gala<sup>70</sup>, Twins, two singers from Hong Kong, sing in another program of singing combination named “Popular Winds.” The songs that these singers sing are just regular popular songs, and songs like “My Chinese Heart” sung by Zhang Mingmin in 1984, which expresses affections and love for the motherland, seldom appear in such programs in the galas of 2004-06. This can be partly explained by the notion that Hong Kong has been returned to China, and people in Hong Kong no longer miss their motherland.

Participants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao have great symbolic importance in constructing a united China. Even though the galas of 1984-86 tend to acknowledge that China is still political divided, they emphasize the emotional connection among mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Though unity had not been realized in reality, it has been constructed in the galas, with mainland China as the motherland.

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<sup>69</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>70</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

On the other hand, participants from the United States are identified as overseas Chinese with best wishes for China's greatness and as part of the cultural China. For example, in the 1985 gala, a Chinese American singer sings a song titled "The Offspring of Dragon." Before his song, he says, "Dear Chinese friends, my dear compatriots...I wish China will be stronger, I wish every Chinese on the world to have lives of peace, equality, and solidarity... I was born in Hong Kong, and I became a US citizen after going to the United States. However, I do not forget that I am a Chinese, a descendent of dragon."<sup>71</sup> In the 2004 gala, there is a singing-dancing combination titled "China Town." Before the program, a host says, "... At this time, no matter how far from their homes, people try to go home...At this moment, the millions of overseas Chinese must miss the motherland and their homes very much...Actually the distance between our hearts is always very short, and I believe mountains and waters cannot diminish your affections for the motherland and your relatives."<sup>72</sup> In the 2006 gala, Lang Lang, a Chinese pianist who became famous in the United States, plays a Chinese-styled piano piece titled "The Days of Being the Master," and the hosts also interpret his performance as an expression of overseas Chinese's affection for the motherland.<sup>73</sup> What is more, the galas have also tried to construct the image that all Chinese over the world are celebrating the Spring Festival together as a community. For example, in each year's gala since 1986, the CCTV galas have announced greeting letters from students who study abroad or from China's embassies and consulates in other countries. This indicates that no matter where a

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<sup>71</sup> 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>72</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

<sup>73</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

Chinese is, he or she is still part of the Chinese community and a bearer of the Chinese culture.

## **2. Symbolizing China**

By incorporating the people on the boundary of the Chinese nation and imposing on them the Chinese identity, the CCTV galas have made great efforts to construct a Chinese national space, both in terms of ethnic groups and in terms of parts of territory. In addition, the CCTV galas also elevate the Chinese national space to greatness. In order to achieve this goal, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas often use standard symbols to represent China. These symbols can be human beings such as military servicemen, athletes, astronauts, etc, and they can also be objects such as the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, the Great Wall, etc. By personifying China into a group of people and objectifying it into a few signs, the CCTV galas disregard all negative aspects and problems in real lives and set greatness as the defining feature of the nation. As a result of the constructed greatness of the Chinese nation, having led the nation to greatness, then, becomes a source of legitimacy for the party-state, and leading the nation to further greatness becomes the party-state's fresh mandate of heaven. The rest of this section outlines several symbols of the Chinese nation.

### **A. Military servicemen**

Ever since the Maoist era, being a military serviceman implies glory, heroism, and sacrifice. Military servicemen were believed to be revolutionaries who devote their lives to defending the New China, liberating Taiwan and even the whole world. In the “reform and open door” period since 1978, the glorious and heroic image of military servicemen continues to be in people’s minds. Though their communist mission of “liberating the whole human being” (*jiefang quan renlei*) has become only elusive, military servicemen as the defenders of the nation are still widely regarded. Military servicemen are often used as human symbols for the nation: they symbolize the state in that they are part of the state machine; they symbolize sovereignty in that they defend the borders; and they symbolize the solidarity of the nation in that they protect the people from foreign invasion; they symbolize the strength of the nation in that military power is a major indicator of a nation’s power and the pursuit of the national revival implies a stronger military force; and they symbolize the sacrifice for the nation in that military servicemen in China usually have to endure extreme hardship and be ready to die for the nation. In every year’s galas, there are singers and actors who themselves are military servicemen and servicewomen, including such well-known singers as Peng Liyuan, Song Zuying, and Yan Weiwen. Wearing military uniforms, they represent the glory of the military and the state. On the Lunar New Year’s Eve, when many families have their reunion dinner, imagining that the military servicemen are guarding the borders can even incite civilians’ gratitude to the state. As a result, in the galas, military songs and dances take up a great share of the programs. The symbolic meanings of military servicemen can be classified into two categories.

First, military servicemen can symbolize devotion and loyalty to the state and the nation. For example, a song titled “Waiting for the New Year for the Motherland” sung in the 2005 gala says:

“Waiting for the New Year for the motherland,  
I am a red plum blossom, a messenger of spring.  
With tears in my eyes,  
I am waiting for the New Year for the motherland.  
I use the morning sunlight to rub the golden national emblem.  
With a heart of blessing,  
I am waiting for the New Year for the motherland.  
As her child, I use my sweats to bring glories to my motherland.  
The reunion in my hometown comforts my heart;  
The moonlights beside me are like my coffee  
...  
Waiting for the New Year for the motherland,  
I am a border castle in the snow...”<sup>74</sup>

When three military singers are singing, a podium is rising on the stage, and a group of soldiers, representing the naval, ground, and air forces, are holding a national flag in their hands. The backdrop screen is showing morning sunlight, flying military aircraft, soldiers guarding the borders, a saluting soldier, tanks, etc (see Picture 3).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

**Picture 3: A song titled “Waiting for the New Year for the Motherland” in the 2005 gala**



(Source: Captured from the 2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

Second, on one hand, military servicemen sometimes symbolize the state. The civilians’ love for the military servicemen implies their love for the state and the nation, and the military servicemen’s love for the civilians implies the love of the state and the nation for the people. Constructing the love between the military servicemen and the civilians can satisfy the needs of patriotism. In 1986, a wedding ceremony was held in that year’s gala, with Bo Yibo, a high-ranked senior in the then CCP leadership team, as the chief witness (see Picture 4).<sup>76</sup> The bridegroom is Yang Sheng, a military serviceman and a hero in the then China-Vietnam border conflicts, and the bride is Yu Mingang, a solo singer in Qingdao Troupe of Shandong Province. Bo Yibo says in the wedding ceremony, “I am very glad to see you two. In this Spring Festival Gala, I am very glad to be the chief witness of your wedding ceremony. You---one is a soldier defending the southern border of the motherland, and the other is a singer singing in different places of the motherland-- - become husband and wife for a common ideal, a common goal, that is, for the

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<sup>76</sup> 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).



prosperity and strength of the motherland. This is remarkable. I wish you make more contribution to your cause and to the motherland's cause..." In the wedding, the bridegroom represents many military servicemen, particularly those soldiers defending the borders, and the bride represents many young women in the rear area and even the civilians. The wedding between these two persons symbolizes the wedding between the military servicemen and the civilians, and between the state and the people. This wedding is no longer a ritual of the people, but a ritual of the state.<sup>77</sup>

On the other hand, military servicemen sometimes symbolize the ethic of always being ready to help others. This can be traced back to Lei Feng, a military serviceman who had helped many people and whom Mao Zedong encouraged everyone to learn from in 1963. In the 2005 gala, there is a song describing the story that a common soldier has helped an old woman to look for her sons in the cities.<sup>78</sup> This is a typical story that constructs the impression that the "Lei Feng spirit" of helping others still widely exists and military servicemen love the civilians. Moreover, since military servicemen are part of the state machine and probably they are the group mostly inheriting the socialist ideology, their love for the civilians implies the party-state's love for the people.

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<sup>77</sup> Wang Liejun, "Guanxi shijiao xia de quanli shijian: 21 nian chunjie lianhuan wanhui de shehuixue jieshi [The Power Practice from the Perspective of Relations: A Sociological Interpretation of 21 Years' Spring Festival Galas]," Unpublished MA Thesis, Peking University, 2005, [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=2835](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=2835).

<sup>78</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

**Picture 4: A military serviceman's wedding ceremony in 1986 gala**



(Source: Captured from the 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

In the 2006 gala, a song titled “My Squad Leader Tells Me” is typical in describing military servicemen’s sacrifice and the love relationship between military servicemen and the mass. The song says:

“Don’t tell mom of our hardship,  
And don’t let our letters of homesickness disturb her good mood.  
We have chosen the same way as many pioneers,  
On which desert, frontier pass, river, and sunset sound common.<sup>79</sup>  
You are a star,  
And I am a star.  
We form a constellation that is connected with thousands of families, and the masses are our parents.  
Wearing this red star,  
I am ready to share the masses’ comforts and hardships.  
Dear fellow soldiers,  
We are brothers with the people as our parents.

<sup>79</sup> Desert, frontier pass, river, and sunset refer to the hardship in the lives of military servicemen. This rhetorical way of description bears reference to a poem written by Li Bai, one of the most famous poets in Tang Dynasty. That poem is about Tang’s defense against foreign invasion in the areas over northwestern China and Central Asia.

...

You are a star,

And I am a star.

We form a constellation that is connected with thousands of families, and we are the red color of our military flags.

As we are wearing the military uniforms,

The spring swarms over mountains and rivers.

Dear fellow soldiers,

We are brothers with the people as our parents.”<sup>80</sup>

This song emphasizes the military servicemen are sons and daughters of the people, and they are willing to endure many hardships. At the same time, the metaphor of red star implies that every military serviceman is part of the state machine under the leadership of the communist party and armed by the communist ideology. In particular, the song says as the military servicemen are wearing the military uniforms, which are mostly green, the spring swarms over mountains and rivers, implying that military servicemen are the country itself.

## B. Athletes

Besides the military servicemen, athletes are often be used as the symbols of the nation. They are believed to not only overcome the physical demands in their training and have strong will, but also win great honors for the state and nation---where an athlete wins a champion, the national flag will be raised. More importantly, athletes' wining medals in international athletic arena is often viewed as an achievement for the Chinese nation to

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<sup>80</sup> China Central Television, 2006 *Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

purge the humiliations that it had received in the late Qing Dynasty. When the Qing Dynasty was decaying and encountering Western aggression after the mid nineteenth century, the Chinese were often called “Sick Men of Asia” (*dongya bingfu*). As a result, the Chinese care about athletics very much. Chinese athletics’ successes can also provide the imagination of China’s ascension. Therefore, athletes often appear in the Spring Festival Galas.

In the 1984 Spring Festival Gala, Li Furong and Zhang Xianlin plays ping pong, and Song Shixiong provides interpretation for it, emphasizing athletes’ ethic of devotion and perseverance.<sup>81</sup> The 1985 gala introduces the members of China’s national women volleyball team as well as the logistical staff and the people who play with the volleyball team (see Picture 5).<sup>82</sup> These people behind the national volleyball team have sacrificed a lot, but they are seldom remembered for the honors the national volleyball team has won. The introduction of them and the emphasis on sacrifice and devotion are also consistent with the communist work ethics. In the 1985 gala, two comic dialogue actors also use the final game between the national women volleyball teams of China and the United States as a topic to praise the Chinese side’s strong will to compete and to bring honor to the country.<sup>83</sup> In 2005 gala, three Athens Olympic champions, Liu Chunhong, Liu Xiang, Shi Zhiyong, are even invited onto the stage to greet to the audience (see Picture 6).<sup>84</sup> Before

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<sup>81</sup> 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>82</sup> 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

this, the host of the gala says, “As we know, the 2004 Athens Olympic Games gave every Chinese remarkable memory: in the 2004 Olympic Games, our country’s athletes gained the second place in number of gold medals, due to the Chinese nation’s spirit of ‘never failing’.” This remark interprets the individual honors of the Olympic champions as belonging to the whole nation. To some extent, athletes’ performances in the Olympic Games are related to their countries’ economic capacity and inputs in sports. Therefore, the athletes’ honors are often interpreted as adding to the greatness of the state.

**Picture 5: Two athletes play ping pong in 1984 gala, and the members of China’s national women volleyball team present flowers to the logistical staff in 1985 gala.**



(Source: Captured from the 1984 and 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

**Picture 6: Three Athens Olympic champions and three members of China’s national women volleyball team are greeting to the audience in 2005 gala.**



(Source: Captured from the 2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

Besides athletes, martial art players are also often used in the CCTV galas. Usually, a group of actors playing martial art is a typical background to accompany programs that praise China's strength. Martial art combines the artistic effect similar to dancing in the background and the political meaning as the national strength and defending the nation from foreign invasions.

### C. Astronauts

In 2003, China successfully experimented orbiting its first manned spacecraft Shenzhou V. The astronaut riding the spacecraft, Yang Liwei, became a hero in China. He becomes the center of the midnight count down in the 2004 gala<sup>85</sup>. While many actors in clothes of minorities stand on the stage holding flowers, the host says:

“At this moment, before the bell rings announcing the advent of the New Year, we are very glad to inform you that our hero astronaut, Yang Liwei, on behalf of all the research personnel that have participated in designing of Shenzhou V Satellite and his teammates in the Astronaut Hero Team, is present here in our Spring Festival Gala. He, with the Chinese nation's glory of realizing its dream of flying in the space on his shoulders and with a passion for the motherland in his heart, has brought us the five-star flag that has flown in the space.”<sup>86</sup>

At that moment, all actors on the stage shout with joy. Yang gets on the stage and shows them the national flag. A girl in Korean clothing, who represents not only Han people,

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<sup>85</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

but also Chinese of other ethnic groups, presents him with a garland. The whole audience stand up shouting and applauding. Then Yang says:

“When I flew in the space and looked at the beautiful earth, I was proud of our great motherland and its people. I wish the human being together had a new century without war, cherishing the world peace, like the peace in the eternal heaven and earth. At this moment, when a new spring is coming, let’s wait for another dawn with our love for the motherland. Let’s salute to our great motherland.”<sup>87</sup>

On the stage, all actors of minorities gather around the five-star red flag, and many actors waving small national flags in their hands. Yang is leading the audience to worship the symbols of the nation---national flag. At the same time, he is worshiped as the symbol of the nation’s greatness. The minorities gathering around him represent the whole population of the country, cheering for him and for the national flag (see Picture 7).

**Picture 7: Yang Liwei becomes the center of the midnight count down in the 2004 gala.**



(Source: Captured from the 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

In the 2006 gala<sup>88</sup>, Fei Junlong and Nie Haisheng, two astronauts who rode the spacecraft Shenzhou VI in 2005, present a video that they taped in the space to the audience. The video is a greeting given by them in the Shenzhou VI spacecraft from the space. In their greeting, the two astronauts say:

“From the space, and on behalf of the country’s all spaceflight workers, we would like to extend our cordial greetings to all the people of the country, Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, Taiwanese compatriots, overseas Chinese, and friends of all other nations in the world. The rapid development of our country’s spaceflight can be attributed to the people’s great support and caring. Here, we express our cordial gratitude to all the people of the country. We wish prosperity and strength for our motherland, and harmony and happiness for the people. We wish mutual development for the world, and peace and friendship for the human being.”<sup>89</sup>

In this video, the two astronauts are speaking, as the representative of the state, to the people, thanking them for their support. At the same time, they are also speaking as representatives of China, to other nations, wishing peace and friendship for the world. More importantly, these two astronauts symbolize the greatness of the Chinese nation, since China is one of the few countries who can send men to the space.

#### D. Sites as the symbols of China

While constructing the national space of China and the greatness of China, the CCTV galas often use such sites as the Yangtze River, the Yellow River, and the Great Wall to

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<sup>88</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



symbolize China. By praising these symbols, the actors and singers praise the greatness of China. By expressing their emotions for these symbols, the actors and singers express their affections for the Chinese nation. The Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and the Great Wall appear in many songs and the hosts' words. For example, in the song "My Chinese Heart" sung by Zhang Mingmin in 1984, there is such a sentence as "The Yangtze River, the Great Wall, the Yellow Mountain, the Yellow River, all these are extremely heavy in my heart."<sup>90</sup> In the 1985 gala, there is a song titled "The Great Wall Never Falls."<sup>91</sup> This song is related to a TV series about Huo Yuanjia, a martial art hero who defeated many Japanese and Russian martial art experts in the early twentieth century. In the same year's gala, a song titled "A Little Flower on the Base of the Great Wall" says:

"I am a little flower at the foot of the Great Wall;  
I am a little water drop in the waves of the Yellow River.  
The little flower grows in the soil of China,  
And the water drop joins the great waves of China.  
Alas, my motherland, you gave me my bright life.  
Alas, my motherland, you gave me strong character..."<sup>92</sup>

By symbolizing China with the Great Wall and the Yellow River and individual Chinese as a flower at the foot of the Great Wall and a water drop in the Yellow River, the relationship between individual and the collective of the Chinese nation is established,

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<sup>90</sup> 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>91</sup> 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

with the former as members of the latter. In the 1985 gala, Wang Mingquan from Hong Kong also sings a song titled “Praise the Great Wall and the Yangtze River.” The song says:

“The Great Wall is five thousand kilometers long,  
And it is often in my heart.  
It is the desire in my heart,  
That China will become strong.  
The Yangtze River is five kilometers long,  
And it is flowing in my heart.  
It is the love in my heart,  
And I love to see that China will become strong.  
The Great Wall and the Yangtze River brighten my love and desire.  
Even when we went to the moon, we could still see them shining.  
The Great Wall and the Yangtze River are in my heart forever,  
And my desire and love are as long as the Great Wall and the Yangtze River.”<sup>93</sup>

By symbolizing China and praising these symbols, the singers and actors in the gala cultivate a seemingly lasting love for the country and attach this love to a few symbolic sites.

### ***3. Traditional elements to construct a temporal dimension***

Traditional Chinese operas have made up an important part of each year’s CCTV Spring Festival Gala. These operas not only meet the demand of those who are interested in traditional Chinese operas and who are usually old people, but also have two effects.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

First, the various types of traditional operas represent the different Chinese dialects or accents, and the collection of them help to construct a Chinese national space. It is noteworthy that there are over 360 kinds of local operas in China, which is larger than the total number of kinds of operas in other countries. While in different dialects or accents, the various kinds of traditional operas can also create the image that China consists of many cultures of local characteristics, and they co-exist harmoniously to form an overarching Chinese culture. For example, the traditional operas appearing in the galas include: Yu opera, Cantonese opera, Beijing opera, Huangmei opera, Yue opera, and Shanghai opera in the 1984 gala; Beijing opera, Cantonese opera, Yue opera, and Yu opera in the 1985 gala; Huangmei opera, Beijing opera, Yue opera, Shanghai opera, Yu opera, and Sichuan opera in the 1986 gala; Beijing opera in the 2004 gala; Beijing opera, Huangmei opera, Yue opera, and Yu opera in the 2005 gala; and Huangmei opera, Yue opera, Sichuan opera, Beijing opera, Yu opera, and Ping opera in the 2006 opera. These traditional operas are usually popular in different areas or provinces. For example, Yu opera is mainly popular in Henan province, Cantonese opera mainly in Guangdong province, Beijing opera mainly in Beijing municipality, Huangmei opera mainly in Anhui province, and Yue opera mainly in Zhejiang province. They are sung in local dialects and performed in different stage costume and property (see Picture 8). Even though traditional operas take up a smaller share of time in recent years than in the 1980s, they are a necessity in every gala. The combination of various kinds of local operas can help to represent China as a combination of homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Second, the traditional operas tend to represent China's past and remind the audience of China's long history that many people are proud of. The presence of the traditional operas provides the constructed Chinese national space with a longitudinal dimension.

**Picture 8: Traditional operas**



(Source: Captured from the 2004 and 2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

Actually, in the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, other traditional elements--- the twelve symbolic animals, martial art, couplets, lantern riddles, and others---also produce rich meanings. They can create a temporal dimension for the constructed Chinese national space. Since they are symbols of the Chinese tradition, their appearance in the galas can remind the audience that China is a country of a long history. As Hobsbawn observed, “What makes a nation is the past; what justifies one nation against others is the past and historians are the people who produce it.”<sup>94</sup> Relying on the symbols to signal the past, the galas help to construct a Chinese nation that has life and continuity. Thus, the goal that

<sup>94</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawn, “Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today,” in G. Balakrishnan, ed., *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso 1996), p. 255.

the CCP sets for the Chinese people, namely “the great revival of the Chinese nation” (*Zhonghua minzhu de weida fuxing*) becomes meaningful and tends to be determined by the history. Meanwhile, a reminder of the past also helps to compare the present to the past. For example, because of the existence of a temporal dimension, the term “The Great Reunion of the Heyday” (*shengshi da lianhuan*), which is the main theme of the 2005 gala, can allude that thanks to the CCP leadership, today’s China is the most prosperous time in history.

## Chapter 5. The Differences between the Galas of 1984-86 and Those of 2004-06

This chapter examines the differences between the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06 in order to explore the changes in the techniques and technologies used by the galas as well as in the galas' description of the Chinese national space.

### **1. Changes in technologies**

Even some general observations of the galas can yield findings about the great changes in the galas between mid-1980s and mid-2000s as a result of the socio-economic changes. For example, as Table 2 shows, though the number of programs in the galas of 2004-06 is not larger than that in the galas of 1984-86, the number of actors in the former is obviously much larger than in the latter (see Picture 9). In the galas of 1984-86, a singer usually can sing two and more than two songs. For example, Zhang Mingmin, a singer from Hong Kong, sings four songs in the 1984 gala. In the galas of 2004-06, not only a singer seldom has chance to sing more than one song, but also several singers often sing one song together. This may be because, as the CCTV Spring Festivals have such a large audience, nearly every singer and actor hopes to appear in the galas. Meanwhile, in order to construct the image of a great carnival for the whole nation, the galas of 2004-06 often have many dancing actors dancing in accompany with the singers' singing. By contrast, in the galas of 1984-1986, most singers sing without accompanying dancers (see Picture 10). Meanwhile, the clothing in the galas of 2004-06 is much more colorful and better designed than in the galas of 1984-86. As a result, the galas of 2004-06 have created a

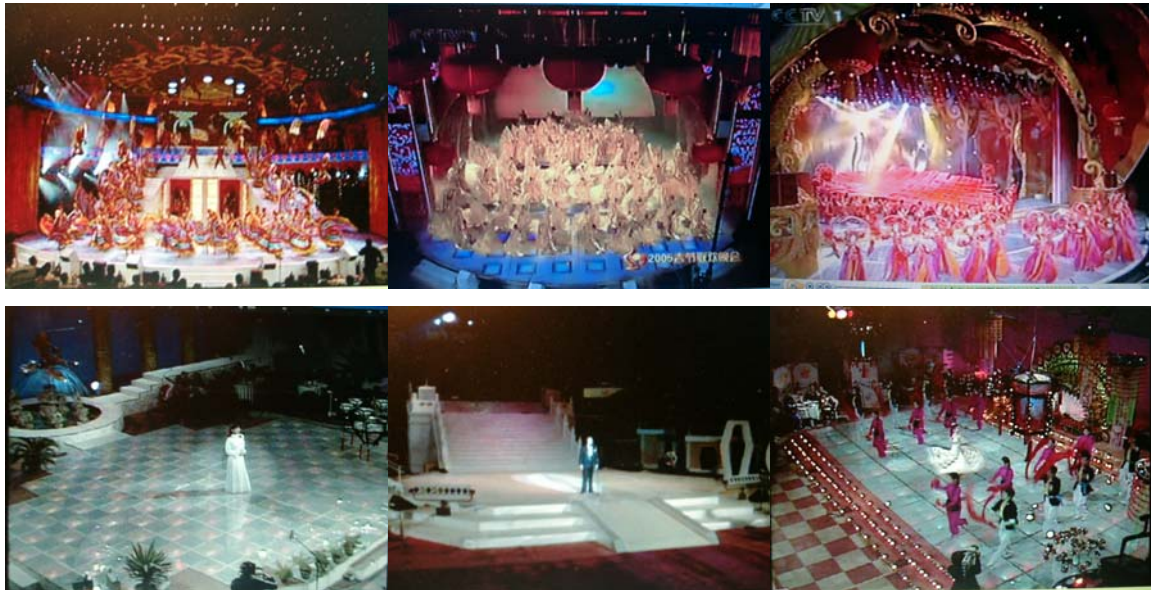
much more colorful, dynamic, intense, magnificent image of celebration than those of 1984-86.

**Table 2: Number of Programs in the Galas of 1984-86 and 2004-06**

Year	1984	1985	1986	2004	2005	2006
Number of programs	57	40	41	39	42	31

(Source: Counted by the author based on the videos of the galas of 1984-86 and 2004-06)

**Picture 9: The number of actors in the galas of 2004-06 (upper) is obviously much larger than that in the galas of 1984-86 (lower).**



(Source: Captured from the 2004-06 and 1984-86 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

**Picture 10: The galas of 2004-06 (right) often have many dancing actors dancing in accompany with the singers' singing, while the galas of 1984-96 (left) do not.**



(Source: Captured from the 1986 and 2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

While the 1985 gala was held in the Beijing Workers' Stadium, all other galas have been held in the CCTV Broadcasting Hall. In order to meet the facility requirement of major events such as the Spring Festival Galas, the CCTV has expanded its broadcasting hall for several times. The Spring Festival Galas of 1983, 1984, and 1986 were held in the CCTV Broadcasting hall of an area of 600 square meters. In 1987, the broadcasting hall was expanded to 1000 square meters. In 1998, the construction of a new CCTV Broadcasting Hall was finished. It has 1600 square meters, and it is equipped with modern facilities, advanced hi-tech sound and light control.<sup>95</sup> As a result, the stage in the galas of 2004-06 is much larger, more lavishly decorated and more technologically advanced than the one in the galas of 1984 and 1986.

There have also been great changes in the stages of the galas. The stage of the 1984 gala is surrounded by many tables, with the actors and singers sitting at the tables. It is like a gathering and a family reunion. The 1985 gala is held in Beijing Workers' Stadium, and there are a bridge, a stream, and a pavilion on the stage. In the 1986 gala, the stage is

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<sup>95</sup> See Sichuan Online-Western China City Newspaper, Feb 12, 2002, <http://ent.sina.com.cn> .



more decorated than in previous years, and it is designed to look like a peacock, a beautiful bird in the Chinese culture. Generally speaking, the stages in the galas of 1984-1986 are simple and frugal compared to those of the galas of 2004-2006 (see Picture 11). The stages of the galas of 2004-06 are generally decorated with lights of red and yellow colors, sometimes with lanterns, large balloons, colored ribbons, and large characters of *fu* meaning blessings, so as to create an atmosphere of happiness and celebration (see Picture 12). In the 2005 gala, two robots are put on the stage to dance in accompany with singing in a program. The more decorated stages in the 2004-06 may be intended to send to the audience the message that the country is progressing and our lives are better and better. In addition, the large backdrop screen in the galas of 2004-06 can play digital videos and create various kinds of background.

**Picture 11: The stages in the 1984-86 galas**



(Source: Captured from the 1984-86 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

**Picture 12: The stages in the 2004-06 galas**



(Source: Captured from the 2004-06 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videos)

## ***2. Changes in techniques and description of the Chinese national space***

In terms of techniques of constructing a Chinese national space and the description of this space, there are three major differences between the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06.

First, hosts play a much more important role in interpreting the meanings of the programs in the galas of 2004-06 than in the 1984-1986 galas. In the galas of 1984-86, the hosts, usually from mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, are not professional hosts, but often are themselves comic dialogue actors, movie stars or singers. They usually do not say much except introducing the titles and performers of the programs. Meanwhile, in those galas, the singers and actors often have chances to say some words to the audience, expressing their feelings and extending their New Year greetings. The interpretation of the programs is often done by the singers and actors in their words to the audience. The singers and actors have their own identities and speak for themselves. By contrast, in the 2004-2006 galas, hosts, only from mainland, are professional, and what they say is intended not only to pronounce the titles of programs and help to transit from one program to another smoothly, but also to interpret the meaning of the programs. The hosts can use their linguistic strategies to extract from the programs meanings in line with the dominant ideology in China.

For example, in the 2006 gala, when introducing Lang Lang, a Chinese pianist who has been the United States citizen and who is to play a Chinese piece titled “The Days of Being the Master,” the host says, “In this year’s [gala], we have invited a famous pianist. He is very young, and he will use his excellent performance to express overseas Chinese’ affection for their home country.”<sup>96</sup> As a result of this introduction, Lang Lang is no longer a pianist to play a piece of music as an action of artistic performance, but a representative of many overseas Chinese to play the piano for their motherland that they have been missing.

Another example is the hosts’ introduction for the comic dialogue “New Talk about *Raokouling*” (*xin shuo raokouling*)<sup>97</sup> performed by two comic dialogue actors from Taiwan. Before the comic dialogue, two hosts define the theme of the program by saying, “In tonight’s gala, we have invited two comic dialogue actors from the precious island Taiwan, and from their comic dialogue ‘New Talk about *Raokouling*’, we can feel they inherit the motherland’s traditional culture and develop it very well.” In this introduction, Taiwan is an island, completely eliminating any political meaning. Then it emphasizes that these two comic dialogue actors share the same motherland with us, implying that Taiwan is part of China. Last, it defines the comic dialogue as a proof for the cultural sameness between mainland China and Taiwan. Furthermore, this interpretation of the comic dialogue is confirmed by the comic dialogue actors when one of them says in the comic dialogue, “We are all Chinese.”

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<sup>96</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

<sup>97</sup> *Raokouling* is a form of linguistic entertainment in China.

In the galas of 2004-06, by taking on more responsibility, the hosts have new identity as the mediator between the state and the audience. On the one hand, they are spokespersons of the state, interpreting the programs in line of the dominant ideology. On the other hand, they act as representatives of the audience to bless the state. In particular, before every gala's midnight count down, the hosts often bless the motherland "the state being secure, and the people being peaceful" (*guotai minan*), "being more prosperous, richer, and stronger" (*fanrong fuqiang*), etc. This new role for the hosts indicates that the state and nation have been established as the center in the galas of 2004-06. It can be argued that China's nationalist politics is more state-sponsored in the 2000s than in the 1980s.

Second, the CCP is in a more central place in the galas of 2004-2006 than in the galas of 1984-86. In the galas of 1984-86, though some revolutionary songs created in Mao's era are still sung to praise the communist party, the authority of communist party is not emphasized, and programs praising the communist party tend to praise the good policies of the party and the improvement in people's lives because of these policies. Examples of the revolutionary songs in the galas 1984-86 are "Party, My Dear Mother" sung by Yin Xiumei in 1984, "Mother Teaches Me a Song" in 1984, etc.<sup>98</sup> Examples of the programs praising the policies of the party are the song "Sweetness Full of Our Hearts" (*tiantou le zande xinwo*) sung by Guo Song and a comic dialogue without title performed by Jiang Kun and Li Wenhua in 1984, the song "Celebrating New Year" (*guo xinnian*) sung by Yu Junjian, the song "Bringing Vegetables to the Cities" (*songcai jincheng*) sung by Guo

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<sup>98</sup> 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

Song, and the comic dialogue “Taking photos” performed by Jiang Kun and Tang Jiezhong in 1986.<sup>99</sup>

By contrast, in the galas of 2004-06, praising the party become more common. In the 2004 gala, there is a special program praising the CCP’s leadership in China’s efforts to control SARS.<sup>100</sup> The host says:

“The year of 2003 was a remarkable year for Chinese. Tonight, when we all over the country toast with joy to say farewell to the year of Sheep (2003), we cannot help being extremely proud of our nation, our party and our people. We are proud that, in spring 2003 when SARS struck us, we, under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council, were united together into one heart, fighting SARS. And we defeated SARS. In this wonderful battle, we once again sang the victory song of the great spirit of the Chinese nation. We once again wrote the great poem that the Chinese people bravely overcome difficulties and dared to win.”<sup>101</sup>

While the Chinese government’s measures to control SARS after it deposed the mayor of Beijing and the minister of health in 2003 were effective and noteworthy, the fact that China’s Ministry of Health and some other governmental organs hid the truth about the disease, which led to serious outcome, is excluded from the host’s introduction. For example, in weeks before the deposition of the mayor of Beijing and the minister of health, the number of SARS cases had been massively underreported. As a result, when

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; and 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>100</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

the Chinese government decided to embrace transparency on April 20, 2003, Beijing's SARS caseload was revised from 37 to 339 in one day.<sup>102</sup> Had China's Ministry of Health abided the principle of transparency, SARS should not have developed into such a serious problem. Yet, in the CCTV gala, how many people have died in the "wonderful battle" and why it has happened are excluded. The whole medical tragedy is romanticized into the Chinese nation's victory over a natural disaster under the great leadership of the communist party.

The host's introduction is followed by a song titled "Connected with the People." The song says:

"You come to us,  
From thousands of kilometers away.  
Your words tell us of your true passion.  
You ask us about our situation,  
And the people's security is your serious concern.  
Your words are plain,  
But your passion is lasting.  
Holding your hands,  
We overcome the difficulty together.  
The Party and the people have the same breath and the same fate,  
No matter in the past or in the future.  
Our hearts are connected  
...  
Connected with the people,  
You keenly care about the people.

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<sup>102</sup> Hannah Beech, "How Bad Is It?" Time, (April 28, 2003), <http://www.time.com/time/asia/covers/501030505/story.html>.

The people's health is more important than anything else.  
We see strength in your eyes.  
Brotherhood and comradeship are crystallized into a love frontline.  
Love is so true,  
And my heart is so warm.  
Your caring kindles my hope.  
Millions of Chinese sons and daughters have their wills united into a castle,  
Following you to create a bright tomorrow.”<sup>103</sup>

When the song is sung, the backdrop screen shows President Hu Jintao talking to some people and such banners as “Millions of People United into One Heart” (*wanzhong yixin*), “All Wills United into one Castle” (*zhongzhi chengcheng*), “Prevent Scientifically” (*kexue fangzhi*), “Victory over SARS” (*zhansheng feidian*), etc. It also shows the pledge ceremony of doctors and nurses before the party flag, a poster of “Fighting SARS” on the street, and all standing members of the politburo of the CCP inspecting the anti-SARS work. In this program, a public medical event is transformed into a sacred image that the party loves the people and leads the people to victory.

Later in the same gala, a song “Mr. Wang” (*Lao Wang*) praises the communist party's local cadres. After the song is sung, a host says:

“After listening to this song, are you moved? Such cadres as Mr. Wang are connected with the people in blood and flesh. Yes, the older generation of [revolutionaries] devoted their lives to attain today's Rivers and Mountains (*jiangshan*). In order to maintain the Rivers and Mountains, we need thousands of

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<sup>103</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

public servants like Mr. Wang. They are the base stones of the building of our republic. Our public servants will remember forever that the people are mountains and seas, and the people are the source of life of the communist party.”<sup>104</sup>

This interpretation is followed by a song titled “Rivers and Mountains” (*jiangshan*). The words of the song are:

“Fighting for the Rivers and Mountains,  
And governing the Rivers and Mountains,  
Whole-heartedly for the people’s happiness;  
Working for the happiness, warmth, peace, and reunion of the people.  
The people are the heaven and earth,  
And the people are the concern of the communist party forever.  
The people are mountains and seas,  
And the people are the source of life of the communist party.”<sup>105</sup>

As the song is sung, the backdrop screen shows the video of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and the other eight standing members of the current politburo of the Communist Party. Wang is one of the most common surnames in China. In the first song, by using “Mr. Wang” to name the constructed typical common good cadre of the communist party, it implies that there are many good cadres like him in the Communist Party. Ironically, you do not need to ask---or should not ask--- whether such a “Mr. Wang” really exists on the world or not. The second song is titled “Rivers and Mountains” (*jiangshan*). *Jiangshan* is a typical concept related to dynasties in the Chinese history. The basic theory underlying this concept is that when someone uses military force to defeat other competitors and establish a regime capable of controlling all

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



of China, he has the heaven's mandate to rule the country, and moreover, his descendants and the persons he designates have the heaven's mandate to rule the country generation after generation. By using such a theory typical of the ancient dynasties and by showing the pictures of Mao, Deng, and Jiang, the 2004 gala alludes that the current leadership team inherits China's "rivers and mountains" from the older generation of revolutionaries and has the heaven's mandate to rule China. Interestingly, through these two songs as well as the hosts' words, the gala first creates an image of a lower-leveled cadre who loves the people and claims that there are many lower-leveled cadres like him in the Communist Party, constructing the affection ties between the Party and the people. Then the gala uses such persons as Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu, and the other standing members in the current politburo of the Communist Party to represent the party, implying that the current leadership team is still legitimate to rule and still maintains the close ties with the people. First using an unknown---or should not be known---past party member "Mr. Wang" to construct a relationship of love and service between the Party and the people, then replacing this unknown "Mr. Wang" with the known party leaders, this technique subtly achieves two transitions and make the relationship between the current leadership team and the people a relationship of affection.

In the 2005 gala, there are no songs directly praising the communist party. However, right before the midnight countdown, along with a song titled "Peace with China" (*pingan, zhongguo*), the backdrop screen shows a video clip of the PRC's past and current leaders: Mao Zedong and other leaders standing in the Tiananmen Gate when the PRC was founded in 1949, Mao waving his hand, Mao meeting the people; Deng

Xiaoping waving his hand, Deng inspecting the army, Deng talking with intellectuals and other people; Jiang waving his hand, Jiang giving a speech before the military servicemen guarding the Yangtze River's bank against the 1998 floods, Jiang standing with other countries' leaders in the 2001 APEC summit meeting in Shanghai; Hu meeting with doctors and nurses in the anti-SARS campaign, Hu talking with agricultural experts, Hu making dumplings with peasants, Hu holding a baby standing with many people, etc.<sup>106</sup> This shows that the leader's images still take up the key moment in the gala.

It is noteworthy that since Deng Xiaoping declared Jiang Zemin as the "leadership core of the third generation" (*di san dai lingdao hexin*) in 1989, generation has become a key important concept in the CCP's efforts to generate legitimacy.<sup>107</sup> Though Jiang Zemin has never anointed Hu Jintao as the "leadership core of the fourth generation," Hu still benefits from emphasizing the notion of generation and his identity of the fourth generation. The logic essential to the legitimacy of the current leadership is that since the CCP's status as a ruling party has resulted from China's revolution and has been determined by history, and the party has passed the Rivers and Mountains from one generation to another, the current leadership has the heaven's mandate to lead China.

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<sup>106</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>107</sup> See Deng Xiaoping, "Di san dai lingdao jiti de dangwu zhiji [The Top Priority of the Third Generation of Leadership Team]," *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* [Selected Writings of Deng Xiaoping], available at [http://www.ganbu.cn/news/2005\\_7/20057411304730031.shtml](http://www.ganbu.cn/news/2005_7/20057411304730031.shtml).

The 2006 gala presents the Communist Party leadership team in a similar way as the 2005 gala. Right before the midnight countdown, two singers are singing a song titled “Millions of Families’ Happiness.”<sup>108</sup> The words of the song are:

“Love is the song of spring,  
And the river of love is flowing on the land with blooming flowers.  
How much ice is melting?  
And how many flowers are blooming?  
Your love gives me endless spring sceneries  
...  
Look, millions of families’ happiness form the motherland’s spring.  
Love flows in the spring breezes,  
And the vast motherland is beautiful and exuberant.  
Love is the song of spring,  
And you always care about my happiness and sadness with love.  
Wherever you go,  
You can always see me.  
My happiness is your commitment of love,  
And my happiness is your exhortation of affection.”<sup>109</sup>

Along with the song, in the background on the stage, dancing actors in military uniforms are spreading the national flag. Meanwhile, the backdrop screen shows many minorities extending New Year greetings to the audience. In addition, it shows fireworks, Mao standing on the Tiananmen Gate and waving his hand when the PRC was founded, Mao visiting the common people; Deng inspecting the army, Deng talking to some cadres, Deng planting a tree; Jiang waving his hand, Jiang giving a speech on the bank of

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<sup>108</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Yangtze River when it was suffering a serious flood in 1998, Jiang celebrating a festival with common people; Hu shaking hands with some people, Hu talking to children in the countryside, Hu making dumplings with old people, and Hu shaking hands with people in the countryside to say farewell. The screen also shows other standing members of the politburo of the Communist Party: Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin (receiving a hada meaning blessing from Tibetans), Zeng Qinghong giving speech, Huang Ju being with many people in the countryside, Wu Guanzheng meeting old people, Li Changchun holding Mongolian kids, Luo Gan meeting workers. The video ends with fireworks and the Great Wall (see Picture 13).<sup>110</sup>

The combination of a song of love and the videos of Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu, and the other standing members of the politburo tends to romanticize the relationship between the Communist Party and the people. By constructing a relationship of love between the CCP and the people, many key questions that modern governments confront---how is the government formed, is the government legitimate, how is the government's performance, and who evaluate the government---are automatically excluded. Instead, the 2006 gala describes the government as an eternal source of all-caring love.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Picture 13: The video before midnight count down in the 2006 gala



(Source: Captured from the 2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

Third, while the galas of 1984-86 often emphasize China as the “home” and “mother,” the galas of 2004-06 often emphasize individual home. Correspondingly, there have also been changes in the ways in which the galas treat actors and singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Since the Spring Festival is traditionally a time for people to reunite with their family members and to wish for a better new year, the CCTV galas of 1984-86 tend to derive from the traditional celebration of the Spring Festival---reunion---new meanings such as “returning to the home country” and “reunification.” They tend to use home and hometown as the metaphors for home country, and mother as the metaphor for motherland. Correspondingly, the galas of 1984-86 often call Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and in foreign countries as “wandering sons” (*youzi*). When actors and singers from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan perform in the galas, they are often welcomed back to the motherland and viewed as brothers and sisters. Even for actors and singers from other countries such as the United States, they are supposed to have an emotional connection to China. The traditional Chinese philosophy often looks on one’s family as “small home” and one’s country as “large home.” By minimizing the distinction between “small home” and “large home,” the galas of 1984-86 often describe Chinese singers and actors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America as “going home.” Examples of such a strategy are a Cantonese opera titled “Love for Hometown”

in the 1984 gala<sup>111</sup>, Zhang Mingmin's song "My Chinese Heart" in the 1984 gala<sup>112</sup>, Zhu Wanyi's words in the 1985 gala, Luo Wen's words in the 1985 gala<sup>113</sup>, Xi Xiulan's song "Love for Hometown" in the 1985 gala<sup>114</sup>, Wang Mingquan's song "Praise the Great Wall and the Yangtze River" and "Hometown" in the 1985 gala<sup>115</sup>. As mentioned above, in the galas of 1984-86, actors, singers, and hosts from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and North America have many chances to express their affections for the motherland and to bless China.

With people in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan perceived to be missing their motherland and actors, singers, and hosts from these regions perceived to be going home, the galas of 1984-86 tend to construct a tension between a Chinese national space based on cultural and ethnic bonds and a politically divided China. As a result, the appearance of actors, singers, and hosts from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan have significant symbolic importance in signaling the Chinese sorrow of being separated and legitimating Beijing's quest for reunification.

In the galas of 1984-86, singers from mainland China also use the strategy of equating motherland to home, and further to mother, in their songs. For example, in the 1985 gala,

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<sup>111</sup> 1984 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> 1985 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Zhang Jianyi sang a song titled “Motherland, My Loving Mother” (*zuguo, cixiang de muqin*). The song says:

“Who doesn’t love his own mother, with a warm heart as a son?  
Who doesn’t love his own mother, with a warm heart as a son?  
Dear motherland, my loving mother,  
The Yangtze River and the Yellow River is flowing our affections for you.  
Who doesn’t love his own mother, with his shining and beautiful youth?  
Who doesn’t love his own mother, with his shining and beautiful youth?  
In the sky and the sea is accumulating our loyalty to you.”<sup>116</sup>

In the 1986 gala, Peng Liyuan and Jiang Dawei also sing songs of this style. In her song titled “Don’t Forget Me” (*wu wang wo*)<sup>117</sup>, Peng sings,

“On the hill where I raised my cows in my childhood,  
There were many blue flowers.  
Later in a spring, I left my hometown for new life.  
My dear mother, with tears in her eyes,  
Talked to her child with thousands of words.  
She garnered a bunch of blue flowers of the hometown and held it to my heart.  
Alas, my mother called the blue flowers “Don’t Forget Me.”  
Now I have passed so many villages and have often seen the blue flowers.  
Everywhere of the motherland is my home, filling my heart with warmth.  
My mother in the mountainous village guided me climb over the mountain,  
And my mother on the waters taught me how to steer the boat.  
When we met, it was like we have not seen each other for long,  
And when we departed, we missed each other.  
Alas, my mother called the blue flowers “Don’t Forget Me.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Wu wang wo means “don’t forget me.” It is the name of a kind of flower.



In the song “The Last Dream,” Jiang Dawei sings:

“I have had the same dream for many times.  
The dream is that the loving mother and the vagrant son reunite one day  
....  
Alas, the Strait  
...  
I wish this is my last dream,  
And tomorrow we can reunite in the embrace of our motherland.  
At that time, we brothers and sisters are so happy,  
With twilights on our smiles...”<sup>119</sup>

Equating home to hometown, and to motherland, is also one of the strategies to construct a Chinese national space: the imagination essential to a nation is that its members feel at home and collectively feel as a family by symbolically bridging the Taiwan Strait.

In contrast, the 2004-06 galas put more emphasis on individual home. In these galas, home is the topic of the following programs: the skits “Telling Story” (*jiang gushi*), “Water Workers” (*song shui gong*), “Wedding Ceremony” (*hunli*), and the songs “Parents’ Hearts” (*fumu de xin*) and “Brothers and Sisters” (*jiemei xiongdi*) in 2004<sup>120</sup>; the skits “Happy Birthday” (*zhushou*), “Man” (*nanzihan, dazhangfu*), the comic dialogue “Talk about Lives” (*xiaotan rensheng*), and the songs “Home Goer” (*huijia de ren*) and

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<sup>118</sup> 1986 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui Nanwang Jinxiao: 1984-1993* [The Spring Festival Gala Unforgettable Tonight: 1984-1993] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

“Neighbors” (*linli zhijian*) in 2005<sup>121</sup>; and the comic dialogue “Follow My Wife to Be a Maid” (*gen zhe xifu dang baomu*), the skit “Afraid of My Wife” (*pa erduo*), the song “Three Lucky Treasures” (*jixiang sanbao*) and “Dinner on New Year’s Eve” (*nianyefan*), and the traditional opera “New Five Daughters Offering Birthday Felicitations” (*xin wunu baishou*) in 2006<sup>122</sup>. In the galas of 2004-06, “going home” often refers literally to returning to one’s individual home and reunites with one’s family members.

The emphasis on returning to individual homes and reuniting with one’s family members in the galas of 2004-06 can probably be attributed to the great social-economic changes in China in the last two decades. As a result of the economic development and internationalization, many Chinese have migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas or from the inland areas to the coastal areas to look for jobs, but they still maintain their connections and loyalties to their hometowns. The tensions between economic forces and social-cultural forces often characterize the struggles in many Chinese’s lives. Therefore, by promoting the loyalty to home and the ideas of “going home,” the galas of 2004-06 capture many Chinese’s hearts and satisfy their desire in such a festival of reunion. For example, in the 2004 gala, there is a skit titled “Immigrants in the Cities” (*dushi waixiangren*). It tells a story of a boyfriend and a girlfriend who migrated from Northeastern China to Southern China. In the skit, they say that “even though their lives have experienced great changes in the city, their affection for their hometown is

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<sup>121</sup> China Central Television, *2005 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2005 CCTV Spring Festival Gala].

<sup>122</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

unchangeable.”<sup>123</sup> A song following the skit describes migrant workers being missed by their family. It says, “I miss you when I look at the moon...no matter how far you go, you are still in my thought.”<sup>124</sup> In the 2005 gala, when introducing the song “Home Goers,” a host says,

“The keyword for tonight is going home. In this Lunar New Year’s Eve, no matter how far away you are from home, you will go back to reunite with your parents and relatives by all means. Even some people have to work and cannot go home, their hearts have flown back home.”

This forms a contrast to the belief in Mao’s era, when people valued working in festivals without going home.

Meanwhile, the decline in applying the concept of “going home” to the singers and actors from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas can also be partly attributed to China’s economic change. As a result of the economic globalization, the return of Hong Kong to China, and the economic integration between mainland China and Taiwan, a singer going from Taiwan or the United States to the PRC has gradually lost its sense of “going home.” Interpreting this as “going home” as in the 1980s would have been anachronistic. As a result of the changes in the meaning of “home,” the role of the Chinese state has been different. While the Chinese state is something for people in the PRC to love and for

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<sup>123</sup> 2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala videotape. China Central Television, *2004 Nian Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui* [2004 CCTV Spring Festival Gala] (Beijing: China International TV Corporation 2004).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

people outside of the PRC to miss in the galas of 1984-86, it becomes something for all Chinese to be proud of and to worship in the galas of 2004-2006.

While the galas of 2004-06 no longer describe actors and singers from Hong Kong and Taiwan as “going home,” they emphasize more that they are parts of China. Moreover, the galas of 2004-06 tend to emphasize this unity of the Chinese national space in a more forceful way. This is interesting, particularly in view of the independence-unification dispute in Taiwan.

While Hong Kong has reunited with mainland China, Taiwan has not “returned to the embrace of the motherland.” Yet, the way that CCTV treats singers from Taiwan in 2004-06 is very different from the way it treated singers from Hong Kong in 1984-86. Whereas the galas of 1984-86 provide singers from Hong Kong with many chances to sing solo and express their personal emotions for their hometowns and the motherland, the galas of 2004-06 often blend singers from Taiwan with singers from the mainland and Hong Kong so as to emphasize that Taiwan is part of China. More importantly, in the subtitle, there is a parenthesis behind the names of singers from Taiwan saying “Taiwan, China” (Zhongguo Taiwan). In this way, without any resort to individuals’ emotional ties, the CCTV galas deliberately Hong Kongize (*xianggang hua*) Taiwan to emphasize it as part of China. A typical example of this strategy is a program titled “A Hundred Surnames” (*baijiaxing*) in the 2006 gala (see Picture 14)<sup>125</sup>. It is a song sung by Man Wenjun from the mainland, Xie Tingfeng from Hong Kong, and Yu Chengqing from Taiwan,

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<sup>125</sup> China Central Television, 2006 *Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

accompanied by sword dancing performed by Li Fei from Macao as well as Chinese martial art and dragon dancing performed by a group of actors in red clothes. The subtitle for the program clearly reads, “Xie Tingfeng (Hong Kong, China),” “Yu Chengqing (Taiwan, China),” and “Li Fei (Macao, China).” With “A Hundred Surnames” as its title, the song that they sing is intended to praise the glory of the Chinese nation and the pride to be a Chinese. The words of the song read:

“With the same ancestors and same family and belonging to Yan and Huang<sup>126</sup>,  
We have the same root,  
And we have the same Han and Tang Dynasties.  
Our parents have raised us as the Chinese nation.  
In a hundred surnames you are Li and I am Zhang,  
And in our bone and blood is flowing the Yellow River and the Yangtze River;  
In a hundred surnames you are Zhao and I am Wang,  
And in our heart is the glory of the nation of dragon.”

**Picture 14: A Hundred Surnames (*baijiaxing*) in the 2006 gala**



(Source: Captured from the 2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala video)

<sup>126</sup> Yan and Huang were two mythical persons that are believed to be the ancestors of Chinese living five thousand years ago.

At the end of the singing, the actors who play martial art line up to form the shape of a dragon. By having four people from the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan perform together, this program signals a clear message that China consists of the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. The tensions between mainland China and Taiwan are ignored, and the fact that many people in Taiwan do not identify themselves as Chinese is rectified symbolically. A unified political China becomes the single natural site for a homogeneous cultural China. The emphasis on the same Chinese culture on both mainland China and Taiwan is a key principle to define the political correctness for programs performed by actors from Taiwan. For example, in the 2006 gala, there is a comic dialogue given by two actors from Taiwan, which is about a person of Gaoshan ethnicity practicing a Gaoshan-styled fast-talking. In the comic dialogue, one of the actors says, “We are all Chinese,” which contrasts with the identity controversy in Taiwan.<sup>127</sup>

Language is an important basis for politics. In the 1984 and 1985 galas, hosts from Taiwan such as A Yuan and Zhu Wanyi are allowed to extend their New Year greetings to the audience using Minnan dialect, which is used by the majority of people in Taiwan. A Yuan even sings a song using Minnan dialect in the 1984 gala. However, in the galas of 2004-2006, actors from Taiwan generally either have no chance to speak or speak Mandarin very well. Taiwanese identity is relatively diminished. This is maybe because: in the 1984-85, Taiwan was still dominated by the Kuomintang’s Chinese nationalist

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<sup>127</sup> China Central Television, *2006 Zhongyang Dianshi Tai Chunjie Lianhuan Wanhui: Nanwang Jinxiao* [2006 CCTV Spring Festival Gala: Unforgettable Tonight].

ideology with Mandarin as the only official language, and the CCTV could emphasize Taiwan's status as a province and Taipei as a local government by encouraging hosts from Taiwan to speak Minnan dialect. In 2004-2006, when Taiwan's government emphasizes Taiwan's independence and tries to promote Minnan dialect in public discourse, the CCTV tends to counter Taiwan's efforts by emphasizing the sameness in language between the two sides of the Strait.

In general, while the unity of the Chinese national space is constructed in the galas of 1984-86 as a hope and dream and through the self-expression by actors, singers, and hosts from Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is constructed as a normal state in the galas of 2004-06 in a forceful way. While the unity in the galas of 1984-86 emphasizes the connection of affection and culture, the unity in the galas of 2004-06 emphasizes it as a political reality, disregarding the disputes in reality.

## Chapter 6. Conclusions

This thesis has examined the techniques and technologies that CCTV Spring Festival Galas have used to construct a united, great China as well as the changes in these techniques and technologies in the last two decades. In order to accomplish this task, I conducted a comparison between the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06, and I find there are both commonalities and differences between these two groups of galas.

In order to imagine a Chinese national space, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas mainly represent China as being made up of workers, peasants, military servicemen, and others, or as being made up of rural residents and urban residents, or as being made up of Han Chinese and 55 minorities, or as being made up of Chinese living on the mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. Meanwhile, Chinese elsewhere are often perceived to be missing China itself. So celebrating the Spring Festival together with those in China, even though Chinese residing in Europe and North America actually enter the Spring Festival at different times, is critical for television-based community. With the presence of minorities and people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan in the galas, the galas focus on the boundary of the Chinese nation and construct an image that the whole Chinese nation is celebrating the Spring Festival together as a grand reunion. This is conducive to the construction of a united China. Furthermore, in order to construct the greatness of this united national space, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas use heroes such as military servicemen, athletes, astronauts, and so on to symbolize the Chinese nation and sites such as the Yellow River, the Yangtze River and the Great Wall to symbolize China as the “motherland.” With these persons and sites as symbols, the reality of China



is constructed in a reductive way, and these symbols are imagined to represent China. All real problems in China and all individual circumstances of people in the audience are ignored. In addition, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas also make use of a lot of traditional elements such as the traditional operas, martial art, couplets, lantern riddles, and so on. These traditional elements create a temporal dimension for the constructed Chinese nation and make the nation into an individual subject with its own continuous life. They also make a comparison between the present and the past possible so that the galas can claim the present as the best time in history and the climax of the life of the Chinese nation. Both the constructed unity and greatness of China serve the purpose of create a legitimacy basis for the CCP and the state.

As a result of, and in response to, the tremendous socio-economic changes in the last two decades, the techniques and technologies used by the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have more or less changed. Besides the great changes in stage settings and technologies used in the galas, the major changes include: hosts play a much more important role in interpreting the political meaning of the programs and presenting the state's nationalist narrative to the audience, the CCP occupies a more central place in the galas, home increasingly means individual family instead of the country of China, and correspondingly, the ways in which the galas treat singers, actors, and hosts from Hong Kong and Taiwan have also changed. As a result of the change in the role of hosts, the statist narrative has changed from being spoken by the periphery (such as singers and actors from Hong Kong and Taiwan) to being spoken by the center (the hosts). As a result of the changes in the meaning of home in the linguistic context of these galas,

China has changed from something for Chinese living in China to love and for Chinese living outside of China to miss in the galas of 1984-86 to something for all Chinese to be proud of and to worship in the galas of 2004-2006. The main thread of the galas changed from individual-family-state affective ties to the great achievements and bright future of the nation under the leadership of the party. While the galas of 1984-86 construct the unity of China through the self-expression of singers, actors, and hosts from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the galas of 2004-06 do it in a forceful way. Maybe it is due to these changes that the CCTV galas have received so many criticisms as well as have encountered much resistance since the 1990s, but they are still too important for common Chinese people to ignore.

As China's economy grows and the society evolves, great changes have taken place in many Chinese lives. The Spring Festival more and more means just a holiday that provides people with a chance to visits relatives and friends. Common Chinese are more and more interested in western holidays, and the importance of the Spring Festival is declining. Nonetheless, as long as the Spring Festival is still the biggest festival for Chinese in the near future, the Spring Festival Gala will still be an important channel for the Chinese Communist Party to speak and interact with the people and combine its ideological agenda with entertainment.

The Chinese Communist Party's ideology has faced challenges from the market economic reform, so has the CCTV Spring Festival Gala. As the only national TV in China, the CCTV has monopoly status in holding the gala in New Year's Eve and has

yielded a great amount of commercial profit from do this. However, more and more provincial TV stations have expressed their aspiration to break the CCTV's monopoly by holding a gala of similar entertainment functions yet with much less ideological agenda. Even though now they still hesitate to take actual actions to challenge the CCTV's monopoly, this is for political, rather than economic, reasons. It is possible that the CCP's ideological strategy in the CCTV Spring Festival Galas will be undermined by competition from other TV stations. In fact, many provincial TV stations are now accessible to TV viewers nationwide, and theoretically they are capable to compete with the CCTV.

The Spring Festival Galas have changed in response to the social and economic changes in China, and they have also been an indicator for China's major political and social concerns. These concerns include the rural economic reform in the 1980s, the return of Hong Kong and Macau to China in 1990s, the issue of migrant workers in the 2000s. However, the main theme of the galas has mostly been a united, great, and prosperous China. This may be the overruling theme of statist Chinese nationalism. It may be a common strategy for statist nationalism to emphasize the unity and greatness of the nationalism by focusing on people in the boundary of the nation and symbolize the national space with certain people and objects.

While there have been many scholarly discussions on Chinese nationalism, this thesis has provided a case study of how the Chinese state has promoted a statist nationalism. As an important annual event and a connection between the Chinese state and the common

people, the CCTV Spring Festival Galas have provided a unique example of the operation of the Chinese state's ideological strategy. By conducting a comparative study of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas 1984-86 and 2004-06, this thesis looked into this unique example to find out the strategies and themes of China's statist nationalism.

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## Vita

Xiaoyan Xu was born in 1978 in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province of China. She received a BA in Philosophy in 2001 and a LLM in Civil and Commercial Laws in 2004, both from Fudan University, Shanghai. She came to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to study in the Department of Political Science in 2004. She successfully defended this MA thesis before her committee on June 7, 2007.