

## MASTER'S THESIS

# Understanding the nation: young people's online music creating and listening practices in contemporary China: A study of Banal Nationalism in the Chinese Context

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## Abstract

People express their national identity not only through hot nationalist sentiments, but also in their daily conversations and practices. The theory of banal nationalism highlights the everyday routines and discourses through which mundane national sentiments are produced. In China, a number of young people are engaged in the creation of *Ancient Chinese-style songs* which, incidentally, reveal understanding of their national identity. *Ancient Chinese-style songs* (*Gufeng* 古风 in Chinese), a variety of digital songs that are created by young netizens online with special emphasis on traditional Chinese elements, provides data through which young people's interpretation and performance of national identity in their daily lives can be examined. Drawing on the theory of banal nationalism, this research analyzes the participants' construction of their national identity in music creating and listening activities. The research uses the qualitative method of web content analysis in order to understand the song lyrics and listeners' comments on the songs. The analysis presented here reveals various aspects of the participants' sense of banal nationhood. Findings show that the participants in *Ancient Chinese-style songs* not only provide multiple interpretations of national culture and history, but also engage in embodied performance of the nation through music creating and listening activities. In the process, the young people link their daily experience of online entertainment with national culture, and attach new meanings to the cultural elements they draw on. It is argued here that the young people exercise agency in their interpretation of the nation. Moreover, the diverse expressions of banal national sentiment created by the participants in this music style suggests that cultural traditions are not only the stereotyped concepts identified in hot nationalism studies, but that they also include everyday experiences that the young music lovers identify with.

Key words: *banal nationalism, national identity, Chinese youth, online music*

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