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**Authenticity in Chinese Minority Popular Music: A Case Study of Shanren, a Multi-Ethnic Indie Band**

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the ethnic minority indie music band, Shanren, which presents a representative example of such musicians and their association with authenticity and culture in modern China. Ethnic minority indie bands are interested in shaping their own identity in contrast to the officially promoted minority music scene found in mainstream media. Shanren, as an example, seeks to represent themselves as connected with “nature and reality,” instead of being motivated by modern trends in music and culture. They achieve a sense of authenticity through visual (instruments, movements, clothing and album cover art) and aural (vocal and instrument timbre, music structure and lyric) production associated with the social aspects of ethnic minority life, especially the migrant workers’ life, represented in their songs.

## Introduction

After 1976, the year of Mao Zedong’s death, mainland Chinese society went through a dramatic social change under the successive leader Deng Xiaoping, who led China from 1978 through 1992. The period of the 1980s through present were known as *gaige kaifang* (改革开放, meaning “reforming and opening”).<sup>1</sup> During the Mao period (1949-1976), popular music was regarded as low-level culture production and western cultural trash. However, when it emerged in late 1970s and early 1980s, it developed as a symbol of cultural modernization. It also impacted both the commercial and political life of mainland Chinese people, both the majority Han ethnic group and minority ethnic groups. After the majority ethnic Han population grew the interest in popular music during the 1990s, popular musicians from larger minority ethnic groups such as Tibetan, Mongolian and Uyghur, as well as smaller groups from the regions of Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi provinces emerged on the mainstream media. In the 2000s, indie musicians who were ignored by the mainstream media started to gain the popularity among urban young generation who were born in 1980s and 1990s. Such indie musicians were mostly ethnic Han. However, there were also indie musicians from minority ethnic groups who wanted to make their popular culture different from either mainstream minority music or Han indie music. Some minority indie bands, such as Hanggai and Shanren, have emerged in recent years as part of the indie popular band movement and are increasingly accepted by the current generation youth culture.<sup>2</sup>

In this new era, however, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still runs the mainstream media, promotes a kind of mainstream music called *zhuxuanlv* (主旋律). This translates as “main melody,” referring to popular music that represents the official government-promoted Chinese ideology. Military and patriotic songs are considered mainstream, while sometimes love songs

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to a program of Chinese Economic reforms, “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” starting in December 1978 by reformist Deng Xiaoping. Successive leaders Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping continued these reforms.

<sup>2</sup> Hanggai (杭盖乐队) is a Chinese Mongolian music band in Beijing that specializes in a blend of Mongolian folk music and more modern styles, such as punk rock.

and satirical songs are not characterized as mainstream regardless of their album's sales. This official determination also rejects some mainstream popular songs from the Western world; for example, the government will not condone popular music with content suggestive of violence, money, or sexuality. Mainstream popular music is only recognized when it is "harmonic, patriotic and healthy"<sup>3</sup> for the Chinese society.

Under such cultural environment, three major types of popular singers exist in the modern Chinese music market today: official mainstream singers, who sing orthodox songs and use the *Minzu Changfa* (民族唱法), the National singing style;<sup>4</sup> pop-singers, who are commercial entertainers with companies, such as Taihe Rye music Co., Ltd.;<sup>5</sup> and indie popular musicians, who are self-supporting—neither supported by government nor commercial companies. The latter type of music is produced independently from major commercial record labels or their subsidiaries. Musicians in this group follow an autonomous, do-it-yourself approach to recording and publishing. Many indie popular bands, discouraged by the government, intentionally seek to make music different from the mainstream music, either by including content on sensitive social issues, such as government bureaucracy and sexuality, or playing music in styles different from the National singing style, such as heavy metal and punk music.

The audience of the indie popular music mainly composed with the working urban middle-class and college students. In contrast of the new elite group who had achieved economical success and much more appreciated western music culture, the working middle classes pursued lifestyles considered more genuine and connected with China's own culture, reflected in a preference for native styles of music. Thus the youth born of these middle class families represent more typical people of China. Such Chinese youth, comprised of both Han and ethnic minorities, often find their personal identity and spiritual lives in crisis. Their search for a sense of authenticity is reflected in the themes of the music they support. *Wenyi qingnian* (文艺青年, meaning "literary and artistic youth"),<sup>6</sup> a kind of urban youth that appreciates indie rock music, became particularly prominent in the 1990s and 2000s. They are most interested in so-called "real music" and characteristically renounce all material desires in order to free

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<sup>3</sup> Hou Linqi, *Wangluo yinyue de duoshijiao yanjiu* 网络音乐的多视角研究 [Multiple views about online music in China], Beijing, China: Beijing youdian daxue chubanshe 北京邮电大学出版社 [Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications Press], 2013: 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Minzuchangfa*, or Chinese National singing style, combines Western opera vocal technique and Chinese folk song style. Most of the National singing style singers were trained in the Conservatory of Music or served as military singers. The most famous national style singer is Peng Liyuan (b. 1962) who reached huge popularity during 1980s, and also today was known as the wife of President Xi Jinping (b. 1953, assumed office in 2012). The most popular ethnic minority national style singer is Song Zuying (ethnic Miao, b. 1966), who reached her heyday in 2000s.

<sup>5</sup> Taihe Rye Music Co. Ltd. (北京太合麦田音乐文化发展有限公司) was founded in 1996, and originally a subsidiary of Time-Warner Music Group. It is the largest private commercial music company in mainland China.

<sup>6</sup> Da Di, "Wenyi, duoshao jiaoqing jiaruzhiming – wei wenyinsheng bamai" 文艺, 多少矫情假汝之名—为文艺女声把脉 [Wenyi, how many tweens are using it as an excuse, diagnosing female wenyi vocalists], *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末 [Southern weekend], last modified May 2010, accessed July 25, 2015, <http://www.nbweekly.com/magazine/cont.aspx?artiID=11235>.

themselves from attachment, false ego, and a sense of proprietorship. This literary youth culture encourages greater interest in and acceptance of ethnic minority music as an authentic musical style.

Within Chinese literary youth culture, the notion of authenticity and its counterpart presents as a pair of antonyms in Chinese urban slang language—*tu* (土, folk, native and authentic) and *chao* (潮, fashion, artificial and modernized). “Tu,” which originally had negative associations of being backwards and lagging behind, reflects the attitude many youth express through a love of native Chinese arts, including music, and take pride in being referred to as “tu.” Those who identify as *chao* represent the fashionable and modernized aspects of popular culture, including imports from outside China. In popular music, *chao* preferences tend towards non-Chinese styles, as evidenced by the heavy influx of Westernized Korean and Japanese popular music appealing to generations born in the 1980s and 1990s. The popularity of Gangtai and Mando-pop music, indigenous to China, continues to decrease among this group. Popular music on mainstream television is similarly regarded as *chao*. In comparison, Chinese indie popular music, ethnic minority popular music in particular, strives to be less modernized and infused with a do-it-yourself sensibility. Literary youth describe this as *tu*, or authentic, in comparison to mainstream musicians. Minority popular music that maintains connection to its Chinese rural roots, such as music performed by Shanren, is considered more authentic than other Chinese Han-associated mainstream popular music.

Shanren’s music style is called “tu” by their urban fans. “Tu” refers to a style being “raw, essential, and vital,” as well as indicating the meaning of “reality.” “Tu” actually represents a style of “authenticity” in English terminology. However, instead of being negative about this *tu* style of music, the fans show mostly a love of the style to represents their respects of Chinese native music style that used into popular music, which is considered as western culture. These phenomena illustrate the challenge of both Han majority and 55 other ethnic minorities in China in the new era. However, the Han majority and 55 other ethnic minorities in China are challenged on varying levels with regards to changes in their society. While the Han people attempt to preserve their cultural heritage from globalization, minority groups are faced with threats of modernization to their traditional culture, as well as their minority status in the face of Han hegemony. Minority populations are sensitive to the preservation of their heritage, but also strive to be accepted by the Han majority through an awareness and incorporation of modern activities. For their part, the Han population considers minorities as representative of a connection to authentic rural life that is rare to find in Han urban communities. They presume ethnic minorities hold a spiritual purity through their religious beliefs, which is considered fascinating by many Han youth in particular, having grown up with no dominant religion.

The revival of ethnic awareness in China in the last two decades of twentieth century led to a significant increase in studies focused on China’s minorities. One important theme addressed within many of these recent studies is the negotiation of minority identities and their representation. Since the revival of scholarly interest in ethnicity in China, it has been recognized

that minority people have some degree of agency in defining themselves. This agency has been demonstrated best in several studies that point out the existence among certain minorities of perceptions, narratives, and practices related to their ethnic identity that refuse to conform to, and sometimes even contradict, those constructed by the CCP.

In the new millennium, traditional rural minority music has gained a large following throughout Chinese social media. *Yuanshengtai* (原生态, natural style of music), associated with several minority media icons, such as Yang Liping (杨丽萍, b.1958) is now among the most popular music types in Chinese mass media.<sup>7</sup> Some minority musicians of *yuanshengtai* adopted Western popular musical elements to create new styles of popular music, such as dance and vocal techniques, like *khoombe*. Though such musicians typically do not have a modern education, they are talented performers with musical knowledge unique to their ethnic traditions. They represent the movement of minority musicians towards modernization and globalization. Because these minority musicians also came from rural regions, agricultural images, anti-industrialization and anti-urbanization sensibilities were also important in the style's creation. With the general public's increasing interest in minority traditional music since the 1990s, many minority popular bands emerged in urban areas of China. One such example is the indie minority popular band Shanren (山人, meaning "Mountain Man"), which formed in 2000 in Yunnan province of southwest China.

Like many minority musicians, Shanren's music style is not overtly rebellious towards the Chinese government, especially after moving to the capital city of Beijing. Instead of getting involved in political issues, the band prefers to describe their life in the city and images of their home in rural China. The lyrics of their music tend to focus on the life of rural ethnic people who now live in Beijing. Such elements distinguish them from Han rock bands that emphasize politically sensitive issues. Minority rock bands, such as Shanren, prefer eco-friendly themes, such as "returning to nature" and "escape from the noisy cities," reflecting their attitude towards urbanization in the Reform and Opening period in China.

Shanren is a multi-ethnic band formed in 1999 in Yunnan province of southwest China. The name of the band means "mountain men," suggesting an association with nature and an environmentally friendly lifestyle. The name also highlights their alternative interest in using mountain minority village elements, like instruments and melodies, in their music.<sup>8</sup> The five band members include a combination of different ethnic groups within China, as well as abroad. The lead vocalist and primary composer is Qu Zihan (瞿子涵), a Han Chinese who prefers to call himself Guizu (贵族), which means "noble group," but also sounds like a new ethnic group, i.e., *Gui* people (*Zu* meaning "ethnic" in Chinese). The youngest singer calls himself Xiaobudian, meaning "Little Dot," and is from the *Buyi* ethnic group residing in Guizhou. The original bass musician and rap singer was Aiyong, from the *Wa* ethnic group found on the border of China and Burma. Recently, Li Guohua, from the *Yi* ethnic group, has joined the band to replace Aiyong.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Liping is a Chinese modern dancer from the *Bai* (白) ethnic group in Yunnan province.

<sup>8</sup> Minority ethnic groups in Yunnan usually live in rural areas.

The drummer is Ou Jianyun, a Han Chinese. The band also has an English interpreter, Samuel Debell, from the United Kingdom, though his Chinese name is Xi Tian, meaning “summer.” This diverse makeup helps make it possible for the band to write both Han and minority lyrics in their songs.<sup>9</sup>

Shanren started as a local indie band in Yunnan province. Over the past decade, they have established themselves in Beijing and attained an international following. The lead vocalist, Qu Zihan, left his former band, called Kuafu, in 1998 and founded Shanren with the drummer, Ou Jianyun, and Wa bassist, Aiyong. From 1999 to 2005, Shanren’s performances were mainly in Yunnan province and followed Cui Jian’s style of rock music that emphasized Han Chinese music elements, such as instruments and indigenous melodies, but also featured ethnic minority elements in their music. In 2006, they moved north to Beijing, as part of the “north drift”—a slang reference to the young people who migrated to Beijing in search of work without having a Beijing residence (known as Beijing Hukou).<sup>10</sup> Their musical style at this time shifted to include more ethnic minority features, while the rock music emphasis was minimized.

In 2006, Little Dot (Xiaobudian) joined the band and became a key member. He had previously been a street singer, who lived around Guijie Street (簋街).<sup>11</sup> Located near the indie music center of South Luogu Alley, which includes many nightclubs on the square and plaza, Little Dot’s notoriety in this area helped to attract an audience to Shanren performances. His musical abilities also enabled him to quickly learn ethnic minority instruments, such as the *kouxian*, a jaw harp; *bawu*, a Yi flute; *qinqin*, a Han lute; *shuye*, a leaf whistle; *niujiangaoqin*, a Wa buffalo horn whistle; and *lusheng*, a pipe-organ from Hmong people in China, as well as Western instruments, such as guitar. He could also play a variety of world music percussion, such as bongo (hand drums) and *kalimba* (lamellophone). Little dot also provided backup vocals to some of the songs. The inclusion of world music instruments due to Little Dot’s contributions helped build a fan base for Shanren, particularly on their international tours of Europe and the United States.

With the band’s move to Beijing and the addition of Little Dot to the roster, the character of Shanren began to change from a Yi folk rock band to a multi-ethnic musical band that emphasized instrumental performance from different ethnic groups. In 2009, all the band members conducted fieldwork in Yunnan province to seek music materials from mountain ethnic groups, such as the Nu people, who lived in Gaoligong Mount, a mountain that is 7000 meters in altitude and considered one of the most isolated places in China. After this fieldwork, the band’s image and musical style became even more mountain-related, as they portrayed themselves as an agricultural rock band opposed to the urbanization of rural areas, as well as the modern lifestyle that faces migrant workers when they move to urban areas.

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<sup>9</sup> “Shanren yuedui jianjie” 山人乐队简介 [Introduction to Shanren], *Jinri puer wang* 今日普洱茶网 [Puer today], last modified November 5, 2012, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://bbs.jrpe.cn/thread-42372-1-1.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Beijing means “the north capital,” as it is located in northern China.

<sup>11</sup> Guijie Street is a famous street in Beijing frequented by late-night food vendors and public street musicians.

Although Shanren shies away from political metaphor, the portrayal of the reality of living in Beijing reflects fundamental issues that have occurred during the Reform and Opening period (1980s to present). For example, their song “Thirty Years,” reflects the challenges rural people face living in large urban areas during this period. Instead of singing about how happy they are about the economic development of China, like mainstream media’s minority songs, they express doubt and mock themselves throughout their songs, as well as reveal an intense desire to be honest with themselves. They strive to be self-aware and authentic in representing themselves to their listeners.

In Shanren’s Case, authenticity in their music is presented through visual, aural, linguistic and social aspects, which are linked to their own roots as minority people, as well as the original traditions of Yunnan local folk music. They also strive to identify with the migrant working classes that live in urban regions, as they themselves have followed in a similar manner.

### **Visual Authenticity**

Shanren’s interpretation of authenticity in the visual aspects of their performance is expressed through their use of ethnic minority clothes and musical instruments, as well as album covers designs. Visual authenticity is also represented through movement, such as gestures inspired by the lifestyle of Yunnan’s rural people and dance movements adapted from these ethnic groups. The venues where Shanren usually performs also reinforce their sense of authenticity, most often performing in ethnic minority theme bars and for festivals that relate to the Southwest Chinese minority groups, such as the Lijiang Snow Mountain Festival held in Yunnan every year in June.

#### *Appearance: Fashion Style, Instrumental Image, and Album Covers*

The first marker of minority popular bands is usually their performing clothes indicating the ethnic group they want to represent. The members of Shanren, as an example, wear fashions from various ethnic groups, as well as distinctive haircut styles. Qu, the main vocalist, most often wears a colorful Yi vest or loose black pants typical of Yi village people. Little Dot similarly wears loose pants, but dons a long haircut style and typically wears a kerchief or headband that represents his Buyi character. Aiyong, the Wa member of the band, is recognizable due to his darker skin tone, which differs from the lighter pigmentation of the Han. He usually wears Wa style clothing to perform. The drummer, Ou, and translator, Samuel Debell, wear Yi style ethnic clothes to suggest a connection to Yunnan province.<sup>12</sup>

Shanren also features a variety of ethnic minority instruments in their image and performances. The electric guitar and bass, as well as drum set, play supporting roles. The Yi moon lute, played by lead vocalist, Qu Zihan, is the primary instrument for many songs, not only

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<sup>12</sup> “Shanren yuedui jianjie.”

for Yi songs, like “Drinking Song” and “Left Feet Dance”, but also songs without any ethnic association, such as “Thirty Years” and “Mountain Man”. For example, on one of the posters of Shanren’s performance, the performers display the following instruments, *cha*, qinqin, Yi moon lute, and *dabiya*. The other minority instruments are not used to represent a particular music from a specific ethnic group, but nevertheless promote an ethnic minority image to audiences.

The moon-lute is an instrument used in Han music, as well as by many minority musicians. The Yi moon lute (彝族月琴) found among the Yi ethnic group refers to it as *xianzi* (弦子, string instrument), *kuzhu* (苦竹, bitter bamboo), *sixian* (四弦, four strings), *bajiaoqin* (八角琴, octagon lute), or *longtouqin* (龙头琴, dragon head lute), due to its top being shaped like a dragon head. These names differ from the Han moon lute, such as the *Yueqin* (月琴, moon-lute).<sup>13</sup> It has a short fretted neck and four strings tuned in courses of two (each pair of strings is tuned to a single pitch). Each pair is generally tuned to the interval of a perfect fifth. The Yi moon lute is traditionally tuned at the pitches D and A with the plectrum made from bamboo. This instrument usually accompanies Yi dances, such as *Axitiaoyue* (阿细跳月, Axi People Dance Under the Moon).<sup>14</sup> The Yi moon-lute played by Qu Zihan is 68 cm long and made from the tong tree with colorful painting and cloud-shaped carved patterns on the body. The style of the instrument is designed similarly to the cloth color and traditional patterns of the Yi people in Yunnan. His moon lute features prominently on Shanren’s album covers, such as *Shanren* (2007) and *Thirty Years* (2009), to symbolize the band’s association with the Yi ethnic minority.



Figure 1: Shanren’s leading vocalist and composer Qu Zihan plays the Yi moon lute. Photo taken by the author, August 30, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> The Han moon lute is so named because of its round, hollow, wooden body. However, the Yi moon lute can have different body shapes and is always colorfully painted.

<sup>14</sup> *Axitiaoyue* is a center-dance genre from the Yi community. *Axi* is the name that Han people in Yunnan call Yi people in the region. “Tiaoyue” means “dance under the moon.”



Another instrument associated with ethnic minorities from Yunnan is the *dabiya*, a pipa-style<sup>15</sup> lute from the *Nu* ethnic group. The *Nu* have a population of roughly 20,000 people living isolated in the Gaoligong Mount in Yunnan. Known as the *Nu pipa*, the instrument utilizes some of the most ancient playing techniques that have already disappeared from Han music culture, such as playing the instrument behind the neck and couple performance where a man and woman are intertwined as they play each other's instrument.

Other instruments that Shanren use to reference ethnic minorities from Yunnan include the *kouxian* (bamboo jawharp, see figure 3) found among the *Yi*, *Wa*, and *Nu* people, as well as the “water buffalo” whistle common to the *Wa* ethnic group. The *qinqin* (秦琴), a round-body lute of the Han, is also featured in Shanren's instrumentation, rather than an American banjo. Although the timbre is similar to the banjo, the image of the *qinqin* emphasizes their connection to local roots rather than the influences of American and popular culture.

These instruments and associated performance customs appear on Shanren album covers, such as the carving patterns of Qu Zihan's *Yi* moon-lute. The band also utilizes calligraphy stylized to look like a mountain, particularly with the “Shan” character, which means “mountain”. In the anime music video for *Thirty Years*, Shanren incorporated a paper cutting style from Yunnan province to illustrate a direct reference to ethnic minority culture heritage.

#### *Dance Movements and Gesture from Minority culture*

Shanren performances include imitation of folk dance movements, as well as the rural people's posture and physical demeanor. The band's anti-industrialization attitude is reflected in their imitation of rural regional work activities on the stage. For example, the song “Tiantianxiangshang (天天向上)” references a typical rural primary school associated with Chairman Mao's quote, “Haohao xuexi, tiantian xiangshang (好好学习, 天天向上)”, which means “study hard, then you will improve day by day.” During a performance at Jianghu Bar, Shanren imitated the movements of primary school children, when Little Dot used the Communist Young Pioneers' saluting style. This scene is typically seen at rural primary school yards, when students perform their morning radio exercises.<sup>16</sup>

Shanren's dance movements are most frequently inspired by the *Nu*, *Wa*, and *Yi* ethnic groups, particularly in association with hunting and Dionysian spirits, as well as the drinking culture common to Yunnan province. During many songs associated with dance, the band

<sup>15</sup> The *pipa* (琵琶) is a four-string pear-shaped plucked lute that is commonly used in Han music traditions. The instrument has a varying number of frets ranging from 12 to 26, while the *Nu dabiya* has no frets.

<sup>16</sup> “Radio exercises” (广播体操) are also called “radio calisthenics” or *rajio taiso*. Originating from Japan during 1930s and 1940s, and introduced by Mao Zedong in 1951, these warm-up calisthenics became the most popular in mainland China (as well as Taiwan). Used primarily at schools (primary school, middle school, and high school in mainland China) as warm up for physical education classes to encourage students to raise their energy and promote good health. They were also introduced to rural schools of mainland China to popularize the government health program “Everybody Exercise (Quanmin Jianshen)” from the 1990s to present.

members move less like rock stars, and more like rural folk dancers. In the song, *Left Feet Tune*, they borrow movements from the Yi folk dance, “Left Feet Dance” from Chuxiong County in Yunnan, which is identified by a kick of the left foot on the last beat of each sentence. In “Wa Drink Song,” which Shanren performed at Indonesia’s Spring Spirit Festival, a guest Wa female dancer from Siligang, Amei, performed the Wa dance, called “Hair Dance” that incorporates the choreography of spinning her extremely long hair in a circle.

Finally, the Dionysian spirits, which are mostly associated with simple and absolute happiness, is most important in Shanren’s stage performances. For example, in the song, “Yi Drink Song,” the band members all create their own style of getting drunk: Qu Zihan, usually encourages the others to drink more alcohol; Ai Yong gets drunk quietly and almost falls asleep; and Little Dot, the most active member, is often bouncing and vivacious across the stage, even jumping into the audience.

### *Venues: Auditoriums, Bars, and Music Festivals*

The bars on South Luogu Alley have stylish names to attract young audiences, the literary youth in particular. Shanren prefers to perform in these bars to meet the *qingdiao* (情调 meaning “sentiment”) style that distinguishes such venues from those associated with mainstream music. For example, “Jianghu bar” (江湖酒吧), a favorite destination for Shanren and their fans, is hidden away in a *siheyuan* (四合院).<sup>17</sup> The owner of the bar is a friend of Shanren, a Beijing-born Han indie musician. The informal nature of the venue encourages a comfortable and casual atmosphere. The bar is small, such that the audience and musicians are close to each other, encouraging a stronger relationship between the band and their fans, in contrast to those of mainstream musicians that are more distant physically and emotionally from their audience.

Although Shanren draws on rural roots for inspiration, their audience is mostly urban literary youth. Like the bar’s name, Jianghu suggests “seclusion” inspired by Taoist philosophy, reflecting the taste of literary youth to live naturally without ambitions.<sup>18</sup> The literary youth, who are mostly from middle class or wealthy families, became tired of luxury and fancy clothes. This is reflected in their fashions, as they typically wear t-shirts, jeans, and canvas shoes, as well as big glasses, even if they have clear vision. They like to play computer games, go hiking and read books. The women wear no make-up and dress “nerdy” in school-style clothes, rather than “sexy” in tight dresses and the latest fashions. Many famous indie musicians have performed in this small bar, such as Wang Feng (汪峰, b. 1971), and Xie Tianxiao (谢天笑, b. 1972), Shanren frequents it in part because of its unpretentious spirit.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Siheyuan is an ancient type of residence that commonly in the northern China, especially the areas of Beijing. It is a courtyard houses unit, surrounded by houses on all four sides.

<sup>18</sup> Jianghu in this context references people who are considered outlaws by the mainstream political world, but who fight for justice of the common folk.

<sup>19</sup> Wang Feng is a rock musician popular during 2010s in Beijing. He is also a judge on the Voice of China. Xie Tianxiao, also a rock musician, became the new mentor of Beijing rock music after Cui Jian in the 2000s.



Figure 2: Author with Shanren in Jianghu Bar: Xiaobudian, Xiaorong Yuan (author), Ou Jianyun, and Qu Zihan. Photo taken by the author, August 30, 2015.

### Aural Authenticity

The aural authenticity that Shanren presents is shown in the following aspects: vocal and instrumental timbre; adaptation of ethnic minority folk tunes into a popular music style; and use of local dialects in their songs.

#### *Nature Music: Images of Mountain Life*

An important aspect of Little Dot's character is that he uses his body and voice to create the sound of an instrument. His musical talents shine onstage, shifting fluidly between instruments, such as Qinqin (jaw harp), Yi Xiao (a bamboo flute from the Yi people), and Wa (a buffalo horn whistle used by the Wa people), to vocalized imitations of the sounds of birds, a train, flowing water, and echoes between mountains. In the songs "Tingshan" (听山, meaning "listen to the mountain") and "Niaoyu" (鸟语, meaning "Birds' Language"), Little Dot became the main "instrumental" background to Qu Zihan's lead vocal.

Instrumental timbre also contributes to the "mountain" music style. Although played throughout China, the *kouxian* (a Chinese version of the jaw-harp made of either bamboo or metal), for example, is particularly popular among many non-Han ethnic groups, such as Yi, Buyi, and Hmong in the provinces of southwest China, such as Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guizhou.<sup>20</sup> This plucked idiophone has a lamella that is mounted in a small frame and is held over the player's open mouth, which serves as a resonance chamber. Highly rhythmic with unique over-tone sounds, the *kouxian* plays an important role in creating the distinctive sound and

<sup>20</sup> The *kouxian* has many different names depending on the associated ethnic group: Yi, "hoho" or "nongo"; Lisu, "mage"; Bai, "bixie"; Dai, "bai"; Wa, "helang"; Qiang, "aju"; Jingpo, "zhanggong"; Xibo, "maken"; Dulong, "manguo"; Li, "kougong"; Lahu, "ata"; and, Elunchun, "mingnuka."

feeling of minority musical culture.<sup>21</sup> Several ethnic minority popular bands utilize versions of the kouxian, including Shanren, where Little Dot is considered an exceptional performer of the instrument.

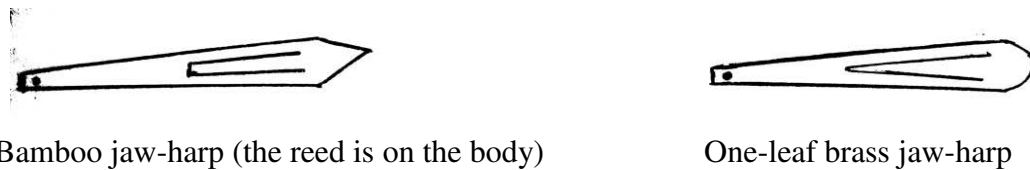


Figure 3: Kouxian (jaw-harp) types used by the Yi people. Pictures drawn by author.

The bamboo jaw-harp used by Shanren is 10 cm long and is from the Yi people. Its fundamental tone, considered by Shanren as a low “sol,” and overtones sound simultaneously. The instrument is primarily used to add another layer of rhythm and offer a unique timbre quality. For example, in “Laomudeng,” which is a hunting song of the Nu people adapted by Shanren, the kouxian overtones and rhythmic pattern mesh with folk-style tunes and dance to portray a “Mountain people” scene to the audience.

“Left Feet Dance” is a song from Yunnan heard among the Yi that uses the Yi moon-lute to accompany couples dance. The dance is from a Yi legend: Once there was an evil dragon that destroyed the Yi people’s homes and farms. The Yi warriors went to fight the dragon. They caught it and covered it with stones and mud. Then they called everyone in the village, young and old, men and women, to come out and step on the dragon. It took them three days and three nights to kill the dragon. The step uses the left foot, hence the name of the dance. Everyone uses the same movement on the same beat to imitate stepping on the dragon, mainly with the left foot.<sup>22</sup>

Qinqin, a Han plucked-lute, was originally manufactured with a wooden body, slender fretted neck, and three strings.<sup>23</sup> The instrument is a banjo-like instrument with a membrane resonating face. There are two types of qinqin in modern China: the traditional version, characterized by raised frets made of wood or bamboo, and the modern version, which uses metal frets. The modern version closely resembles an American banjo in that its body shape is usually round. The drum head is most often made of sheep or python skin. The modern qinqin usually comes with three strings, though the tuning is not consistent from musician to musician. Shanren

<sup>21</sup> Ying Youqin, “Lun Gaoshan, Yi, Lisu, Jingpo deng minzu kouxian yinyue de yinzhuzhi tezheng” 论高山、彝、傈僳、景颇等民族口弦音乐的音组织特征 [The characteristics of the note structures of the jaw-harp music from Gaoshan, Yi, Lisu, and Jingpo Peoples], *Zhongyang yinyuexueyuan xuebao* 中央音乐学院学报 [Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music] 2 (2004): 25-30.

<sup>22</sup> “Shanren concert,” Highland High School, Granger, Ohio. Video filmed by author, December 24, 2014. This story was related by the English translator, Samuel Debell, then revised by the author.

<sup>23</sup> The qinqin is used in some regional silk-and-bamboo ensembles in southern China, such as Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, as well as Hong Kong and Macau. A similar instrument, the two-stringed dan sen, has been adapted from the qinqin for use in the traditional music of southern Vietnam.

uses a modern style Qinqin in their newly composed songs, such as “Thirty Years” and “Mountain Man.” The lead vocalist, Qu Zihan, composed these songs and uses the instrument to simulate the banjo, feeling that the qinqin encourages American audiences who consider it more familiar than other Chinese lutes. The other string instrument they use is the *dabiya*, a wooden pear-shaped plucked lute with four strings. The two inner strings play the main melody, while the two outside strings provide harmony. Shanren tunes the *dabiya* strings to a-c-e-a, and use the instrument as a substitute for a guitar in the emotional song, “Nu love song.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Ethnic Minority Music Form*

Strophic form is also called “verse-repeating” or chorus form, and applies to songs where all verses or stanzas of the text are sung to the same music. As ethnic minority folk songs are usually composed in strophic form, many ethnic minority popular bands in Beijing, such as the Mongolian band, Haggai, use the strophic form with additional instrumental solos and khoomei virtuosic displays. Shanren’s song, “Thirty Years,” which is their most popular, follows this form. Other folk style songs, such as “Birds’ Language,” “Laomudeng,” and “Nu Love Song” similarly follow this form.

Beijing bands often use verse-chorus form, which is common to popular music forms found in blues and rock music since the 1940s. The chorus in verse-chorus form is heard more frequently with the verse playing a supporting role. The chorus often sharply contrasts with the verse in melody, rhythm, and harmony, and generally has more variance in dynamics and musical activity, often with added instrumentation.

However, based on many Chinese folk songs, especially Yi folk songs often used by Shanren, the melodies are difficult to convey in the Western notation system. They sometimes change the original phrase in order to fit into more standard popular song forms. For example, an original Yi drinking song from the Chuxiong Yi community that contains twelve measures (see figure 4) is condensed in the Shanren version to follow a more standard form of only eight measures. Shanren then creates an original chorus based on an inversion of the main motif from the folk tune.

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<sup>24</sup> “Shanren concert.” The lyrics of the “Nu Love Song” translates as, “I see you in the forests, I see you in the fields. I see you in the dance group. But I can’t talk to you.” The typical context is a boy plays the *dabiya* and sings to a girl. He wants her to love him. But the girl responds to him by playing a specific *kouxian* tune to answer “no.”



Figure 4: Original Folk Version of Yi Drinking Song. Transcription by author, 2015.

Verse

Chorus

Verse

Figure 5: Shanren's version of Yi Drinking Song. Transcription by author, 2015.

Another important song, “Mountain Man,” is an example of a story-telling song that uses a medley structure, rather than strophic form, due in part to its length of over seven minutes. Qu Zihan, the composer, follows the structure of a Yunnan local opera style, called “Qupai lianzhui, which translates literally as “tunes-locks,” suggesting that the main melodies are “locked” in the same key, called *gongdiao* (宫调).<sup>25</sup> The melodies are either complete or fragments of the original tunes usually from local folk and children songs. The transcription below shows the main

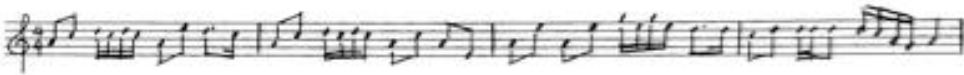
<sup>25</sup> This is a traditional structure common to local folk opera genres, such as *huadengxi* opera, a local opera common to southern China. Its history is traced to 500 years ago in *kunqu* opera, which was the national opera prior to Beijing opera. In Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, the most popular folk opera is Yunnan *huadengxi*, a genre that uses the “tunes-lock” structure for composing melodies and associated narrative.

tunes used in the song and how they are linked together and how they performed the song differently in in the live-house or bars and performance on TV program *Sing Out Your Song 2016* (figure 6).

Tune 1:



Tune 2:



Tune 3:



Tune 4:



Tune 5:



Figure 6: The five tunes used in “Mountain Man.” Transcription by author.

The five tunes above were used in “Mountain Man” differently according to the situation. In the live version observed by the author in 2015 at the Jianghu Bar,<sup>26</sup> the song were mostly a story-telling structure that make the whole story timeline of mountain man immigration (see figure 7, Jianghu Bar version). However, on the TV show *Sing Out Your Song 2016* on CCTV (China Central Television), Shanren performed this song in a different structure which is much

<sup>26</sup> Qu Zihan, Xiaobudian (Little Dot) and Samuel Debell, interviewed by the author, August 30, 2015. Conducted in standard Mandarin. Henceforth “Interview with Shanren.”

more similar to the modern mainstream popular song writing especially they made the tune 3 repeating 3 times, which results this tune became the same function of a chorus.<sup>27</sup> This change led the music more flow, while the story became fragments because of the break of the tune 3 (see figure 6).

**Jianghu Bar version (performance attended by the author):**

Intro:	Tune 1 (Speaking with instrumental accompaniment)
Narratives 1, 2, 3	Tune 2 (Melodic story-telling over)
Vocal melody	Tune 3
Vocal melody	Tune 4 (Repeated once)
Ending	Tune 5 (Speaking with instrumental accompaniment, repeated once)

**TV version (live performance on *Sing Out Your Song*):**

Intro	Tune 1 (With very short spoken text)
Narrative 1	Tune 2 (Melodic story-telling over)
Vocal melody 1	Tune 3 (Becomes same function as a chorus)
Narratives 2, 3	Tune 2 (Melodic story-telling over)
Vocal melody 1	Tune 3 (As a chorus)
Vocal melody 2	Tune 4 (Repeated once)
Vocal melody 1	Tune 3 (As a chorus)
Ending	Tune 5 (With very short spoken text)

Figure 7: Two song structures of based on different versions of “Mountain Man.” Transcriptions by the author, 2016.

Although fans prefer typical song structures, such as the strophic and verse-chorus forms found in “Drinking Song,” “Thirty Years,” and “Left Feet Dance,” the band regularly performs “Mountain Man” in their concerts as their introduction to the audience. The atypical form and

<sup>27</sup> *Zhongguo Haogegu* 中国好歌曲 [Sing out your song 2016], CCTV official video, 1:16:44, from a performance televised by CCTV on April 1, 2016, accessed April 3, 2016, <http://tv.cntv.cn/video/VSET100181076033/c1b8a36aa1754aa2b4c356f3ef2dbf04>



length of the narrative makes “Mountain man” difficult for audience members to follow and remember. Also of note is the use of standard Mandarin for the melodic sections, while the Yi, Nu, and Wa languages are used for the narrative sections. This practice of performing narrative in a local dialect and using standard Mandarin for the sung sections is also common practice in Peking opera.

The song is also distinctive for its form following the practices of a Yunnan opera form, known as *huadengxi*, rather than the national opera—Peking opera. This form incorporates narrative, plus melodic content, similar to a medley, as is sometimes found in Western popular music. A medley is a composition comprised of parts from existing pieces played one after another and sometimes overlapping. Though unclear if Shanren was inspired by the local opera style or western popular song’s medley style, Qu, the lead composer for Shanren, asserts that, as a native listener of Yunnan local opera, he was strongly influenced by this style of music.

Han musicians sometimes draw from Peking opera compositional styles, which are based on *banqiangti*, meaning the rhythm shapes the melody.<sup>28</sup> Although their later songs no longer use the medley forms, instead returning to normal structures as with other bands, most of their other songs were much simpler and more easily remembered by Beijing audiences. However, “Mountain Men” represents the “indie” character that the band wants to promote—making them distinctive from other bands in Beijing, maintaining a distance from the mainstream music culture as part of Beijing’s indie music world.

### *Multi-Language Lyrics with Minority Rural Roots*

Shanren also distinguishes itself from mainstream popular musicians and other indie bands through its use of the Yunnan dialect or other ethnic minority languages in its lyric composition, rather than standard Mandarin. For example, for their concert tour of America in 2014, the English interpreter, Samuel, asked the audience if anyone could understand their Chinese lyrics performed in the minority style. Although there were several Chinese audience members, including the author (a standard Mandarin speaker), only a few raised their hands. Some songs, such as “Bird Language (Yi lyrics),” “Wa Drink Song (Wa lyrics)” and “Love Song (Nu lyric)” were performed in the associated ethnic group’s language, while others, although sung in Mandarin, still sounded unfamiliar, because Yunnan Mandarin differs from northern Mandarin in some aspects, such as articulation of certain phonemes.

For example, in the Mandarin song, “Mountain Man,” the difference between standard Mandarin and Yunnan pronunciation is generally found with the vowel “o,” and the consonants “h” and “g.” The Mandarin pronunciation of the character, 着, as an example, would be “zh-a-o,” while it would be pronounced as “zh-u-o” in the Yunnan dialect. The first pronunciation tends towards an open mouth tone, “ae,” while the second sounds with a more

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<sup>28</sup> Peking opera’s tunes are basically two tunes called “Xipi” and “Erhuang.” Compared with Peking opera, some southern operas, such as Kunqu (ancient local opera in Jiangxi province located in south China) and Chuangju (local opera in Sichuan in southwest China), use a “tune-lock” style of writing, which suggests fixed melodies.

closed mouth, as in pronouncing “u.” Similarly, the consonants “h” and “g” have distinct pronunciations with Mandarin sounding more nasal, while the Yunnan dialect is heard through the teeth, like a “z.” Such differences make the song unique among other Han language songs. The differences can also lead to some misunderstanding of the meaning.

The *chenci* (衬词 stress words)—an interjection style that adds localized language to the end of a phrase or links two phrases or words—also illustrates how the Yunnan dialect is distinct from standard Mandarin. For example, to express “the white plane flies every day” in Mandarin, would be “*babai* (big and white) *feiji* (plane) *meitian* (everyday) *fei* (fly),” while in the song, “Mountain Man,” the lyric is pronounced as, “*dabo* (Yunnan dialect of “big and white”) *feiji* (plane) *catian* (Yunnan dialect of “everyday”) *fei* (fly).”<sup>29</sup>

Shanren was not the first indie band to use local dialects in their songs instead of official standard Mandarin. Several Han indie bands used “old-fashioned” regional languages to distinguish themselves from mainstream popular music. The Han indie band, Second-Hand Rose, for example, used the Dongbei hua dialect found in Dongbei, Changchun and Ha’erbin, three northeastern provinces in China. Many local slangs and idioms are also broadcast in Beijing because of its migrant populations from other parts of China.

These aspects above contribute to the unique “mountain style” popular music that Shanren performs, which distinguishes them from the mainstream popular singers, as well as other Beijing indie musicians. The vocal and instrumental timbres refer to the use of instruments typical among the mountain ethnic groups of Yunnan province. It also refers to the high-pitched nasal timbre and vocalizations imitating nature, such as bird songs, running water, and echoes in the empty valley. Shanren’s use of ethnic minority folk tunes as inspiration for their compositions also represents an effort to remain connected to the rural culture they promote. Language is also important, as the group incorporates slang local to minority ethnic groups and intentionally changes the syntax of modern Mandarin to fit the Yunnan language style. This mountain style of popular music was considered *tu* for urban youth. However, instead of looking down on this style, the Beijing youth respect Shanren’s work as a voice of rural people, especially the migrant workers who also rapidly related to the urban life after the “reforming and opening” policy. Beyond the music itself, the human reality and concepts emphasized in Shanren’s work were also an important way to gain the respect from the urban literary youth.

### **Social Authenticity: The Migrant Worker Theme in Shanren’s Music**

Qu Zihan, the lead singer of Shanren, used to reference the band’s efforts to bring attention to social and economic inequities in China during the “reforming and opening” period. For example, in the song “Thirty Years,” the lyrics focus on a poor young man who is unable to find work or a girlfriend. Considering the title and images presented, the song highlights more

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<sup>29</sup> This phrase is used to demonstrate differences in *chenci* (衬词, stress words) between Yunnan and Mandarin pronunciation.

than just the miserable life of the main character, but indirectly references the thirty years of “reform and opening up” of the Chinese government. Changes during this period prompted growth in migrant workers, a shift towards urbanization, as well as increasing pollution that has become a prominent consequence of the growth in Chinese modern society. The song relates the plight of the migrant workers during the first decade of the Reform and Opening period when people (especially rural) moved to cities in search of jobs, leaving their homes that were considered poor and hopeless. However, after two decades (1980s and 1990s) of rapid development, the new city workers found they could not attain the good life they had hoped and, even worse, lost their rural homes and farms. Since the 1980s, orthodox songs, such as “Walking into the New Era” (1997) performed by Zhang Ye, included themes that promoted China’s society as highly developed due to the government’s Reform and Opening policy. Song Zuying’s orthodox song, “Getting Better and Better,” similarly promoted the idea that the standard of living was annually improving for Chinese people. However, lower class laborers, such as construction workers who were mostly rural migrant workers, found their situation worsening, rather than improving. The gap between rich and poor widened, while the environment became increasingly polluted over the twenty-year period. Considered worse was the failure of the social security system to keep up with the rapid growth of the economy. This magnified the separation between rich and poor classes. Such subject matter, however, was ignored in orthodox songs, but became a focus of indie music culture.

The life situation of Little Dot, the young Buyi singer who grew up in the poorest mountain region of Guizhou Province, illustrates the challenges of migrant life. As the son of a cow herder and member of the small Buyi minority, Little Dot left home when he was nineteen years old, followed his older brother and other folks from his village to travel to Beijing. In order to buy the train ticket to Beijing, he spent his high school tuition. He relates, “I wanted to see what was on the other side of the mountain.”<sup>30</sup> While this may seem like a simple goal, his life changed forever as a result. After arriving in Beijing, he lived with his brothers and kinfolk in the Siheyuan area where poor people settled. Without the possibility of a college music education, he taught himself to play music. His experiences with migrant workers helped him to understand their lifestyle, which helped him to quickly adapt to Shanren’s musical style and motivations.

Qu Zihan, Shanren’s primary composer, also mentions, “Those folk song singers should be respectful. They are like the grass, lived as the roots of other music, and we should learn from them with much careful attitude.”<sup>31</sup> Like other ethnic minority rock bands, Shanren not only represents the minority groups’ anti-industrialization attitude, but also promotes agriculture rock as representative of a social group of grassroots people regarded as the lowest class of modern Chinese society. While the grassroots people are composed mainly of migrant workers from rural

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<sup>30</sup> “Minyao zai lushang” 民谣在路上 [Folk rock on the way], *Youku* website, interview with Shanren, July 10, 2010, filmed byBG2RHY studio, accessed October 10, 2015, [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMjI0MDM1NjAw.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjI0MDM1NjAw.html). Translated by the author.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

regions of the country, the music also speaks to ordinary people who live in conditions below the middle-class.

Shanren connects with this grassroots population through images that symbolize and promote them as part of migrant worker culture. For example, one representative poster of shanren performance shows that Qu Zihan wearing a T-shirt that reads “good economizer” in Chinese; bass player, Ai Yong wears a miner hat, a common job for migrant workers; and the drummer, Ou Jianyun, wears clothes and stands with a posture typical of the traditional farmer.

Migrant workers (*nongmingong*) in China are notoriously marginalized, especially with regards to residency, called *hukou* (citizenship), which requires permits for a person to receive social welfare benefits. Migrant workers are typically in the greatest need of such benefits, as they survive on low wages with long working hours and poor safety conditions. The lack of social security puts them at risk for untreated occupational diseases, such as alcoholism, and poor education for their children, who are unable to attend school without established residency. This creates the dilemma for migrant workers who must either bring their children with them to urban areas where they will not receive schooling, or require them to stay behind in their home communities without a parents’ care. Often the children become delinquents lurking on the streets and wind up in the bottom social class. Furthermore, the rural regions from where these migrant families originate must endure the problem of their population aging when the younger generation does not return, particularly in areas of Northeast China, such as Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjian.

In Shanren’s song “Mountain Man,” such social situations for migrant workers provide the inspiration for the lyrics, which relate the life experience of migrant workers in urban regions:

...Those urban people laugh at me as a bumpkin... enter to city I need a place to live, I could only wear my sheep-skin coat... those color scene is lying to me, don’t believe those phony kindness... let’s go only for RMB (i.e., mainland Chinese currency)<sup>32</sup>

Such lyrics relate the feeling of migrant rural people who struggle in the city. However, instead of anger with the situation, the melody and lyrics are happy and dance-like, almost satirical. They consider how migrant workers often dream of traveling to the city, which can be regarded as an honor for their family. This hopefulness, however, often changes when they discover their lack of rights and respect, such that happiness in the city becomes like a daydream. The song shifts to a sarcastic tone to reflect the continual bullying they experience from others, as well as among themselves.

In “Mountain Men,” band members also imitate the movements of laborers as they correspond to a whistle and march in a “one-two-one” rhythmic pattern. “One-two-one” in Chinese is “Yi-er-yi,” which is associated with the marching bands or military style of marching.

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<sup>32</sup> “Shanren de Douban xiaozhan” 山人的豆瓣小站 [Shanren’s Douban blog], accessed November 10, 2015. <https://site.douban.com/shanren/>. Translated by the author.

Similarly, when migrant workers walk in the city, they also march, particularly when they are doing construction work, such as coal mining or safety-related work. They also employ this pattern when doing their morning radio exercise training.

Shanren often performs at folk music festivals that attract migrant workers, such as the Yunnan Puer Rural Music Festivals (普洱乡村音乐节).<sup>33</sup> The audience typically includes migrant workers and urban music fans. As such patrons are Shanren's primary supporters, it is important the band performs at these events.

Yuanshengtai minority music appears in Shanren's songs as symbolic of anti-industrialization. Shanren's website introduces their purpose for creating "agriculture" music:

When the Beijing Rock and Roll bands blindly chase Western metal music as a fashion, Shanren, the native people from Yunnan, are willing to go in another direction... Shanren is going to preserve the "Diku" [slang for "underwear," used as a metaphor for "the last line of defense"] of Chinese rock and roll music. They are going to play agricultural-style Rock music, which is more laid back, calm and beautiful. This nature-driven rhythm must counter the rapid speed of industrialization. So they will clean up your ears, bring you back to the plateau [referencing Tibet and Yunnan and Guizhou regions], back to the countryside, back to the childhood to feel the soul. Shanren's music is never backward, not simple, never conservative. They try everything new while never giving up tradition.<sup>34</sup>

This introduction represents their attitude towards the use of yuanshengtai music to defend against the rapid industrialization process that has affected other Beijing bands. Other bands, such as Hanggai, have also accepted this attitude, integrating Chinese rural style popular music in their performances. Like many agriculture rock bands, Shanren characterizes their agriculture rock character in three ways: folk instruments are included along with modern instruments, such as guitar, drum-set and bass; folklore, in the form of traditional rural customs and references to rural folk in their lyrics; the lyrics present the reality of people's lives, often in an ironic or satirical style. The latter often includes a play on words or Chinese linguistic tones.

Shanren's song, "Love Story between Wang Fugui and Jia Meili" illustrates these characteristics. The main figures in the story have names common to rural populations—connecting to rural customs. The man's family name, Wang actually utilizes the second tone in its original pronunciation. Shanren utilizes the fourth tone in its pronunciation of "Wang," changing the meaning to "mirage." The original pronunciation of the woman's family name, Jia "贾" utilizes the third tone. Shanren's pronunciation, however, utilizes the same tone as the Chinese character "假" (which means "fake").<sup>35</sup> As a result the pronunciation of the original

<sup>33</sup> "Shanren yuedui jianjie."

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author.

<sup>35</sup> Mandarin Chinese utilizes five tones affecting the pitch contour of pronunciation, referred to as the first tone (high), second tone (rising), third tone (falling-rising), fourth tone (falling), and fifth tone (neutral).

tones blur, intentionally misleading the listener to hear the words “mirage” and “fake.” Additionally, the given name of the man Fugui means “reach,” and the given name of the woman Meili means “beauty.” The names suggest that their dreams of becoming rich and fashionably beautiful are an unrealistic fantasy. Rather than a romantic love story, the song is instead filled with ironic imagery of the harsh reality of life for migrant rural workers in the city, even though mainstream television media depicts them as having happy lives in the modern period.

In describing rock and roll music, Qu Zihan states, “Yaogun [“rock and roll” in Chinese] is a spirit.”<sup>36</sup> Shanren’s connection to “mountain” culture appeals to the general interest of Han culture in Taoist ideology, which suggests “the most beautiful (music) is from nature.”<sup>37</sup> Many Taoist musicians and literary figures, such as Ji Kang (223-263 CE) and Tao Yuanming (365-427 CE), discussed their musical inspirations as coming from nature. Taoism, in this context, refers to philosophy, rather than specific religious influences, such as Zen Buddhism. The Taoist philosophical school was founded in the Chunqiu (Spring and Autumn) period (BCE 770 - 403) in ancient China. This philosophy developed parallel to Confucianism, which encourages people to become involved in politics and society. Taoism, in contrast, suggests that life unfolds naturally; being in connection with this nature and the natural flow of life is considered essential. Following this ideology, the Taoist musician believes music should be beautiful without artificial human emotions. A Confucianist musician would suggest that music must serve to uplift morality and ethical behavior, as well as educate people to obey accepted social principles. Taoist ideology is simply described as *chushi* (出世), meaning “to avoid and escape from being overwhelmed by human society,” while Confucianism encourages the attitude of *rushi* (入世), meaning “to get involved with society.” Both the Confucianist and Taoist schools of thought have been important influences in Chinese history for more than 2000 years, affecting art, music, and literature, as well as economic and politic structures. Shanren preserves the Taoist ideology in their anti-industrialist attitude and eco-friendly activism, rather than the Confucianist emphasis on the growth of society, which in today’s context suggests urbanization.

## Conclusion

Urban youth who search for native style of rock and roll consider Shanren and such minority bands as having an authentic (or “tu”) style, in part because they perform in bars and concert halls where they can be in close proximity to the audience. When these bands perform, their stage presence is informal, friendly and modest. They tell anecdotes about themselves and connect directly with the audience, as if they were their co-workers, family members, or neighbors. They often sing about current events, shared by the fans and their neighbors. They write their own songs, using themes related to their own lives with lyrics that are concrete,

<sup>36</sup> “Minyao zai lushang.”

<sup>37</sup> Cai Zhongde, “*Zhuangzi zhong de yinyue meixue sixiang*”《庄子》中的音乐美学思想 [The musical aesthetics from *Zhuangzi*],” in *Zhongguo yinyue meixueshi* 中国音乐美学史 [Chinese musical aesthetics history] (Beijing: Renmin yiyue chubanshe 人民音乐出版社 [People’s Music Press], 2003), 154-155.

simple, and personal. They express a wide range of emotions and are passionate in their singing. Their music is rough and energetic with rural origins. They sometimes wear working clothes and are conscious of the tendency for hard-core fans of this musical style to move on when a club becomes too popular among dilettantes and sightseers, in search of a more remote locale and other bands they consider more authentic and known only to a small number of dedicated fans.

Using Shanren as an example, the below chart shows the relationship of ethnic minority popular bands with their primary audiences among rural communities (Yunnan ethnic groups and migrant workers) and urban literary youth. It further expresses this relationship in regards to authenticity as well (Figure 7).

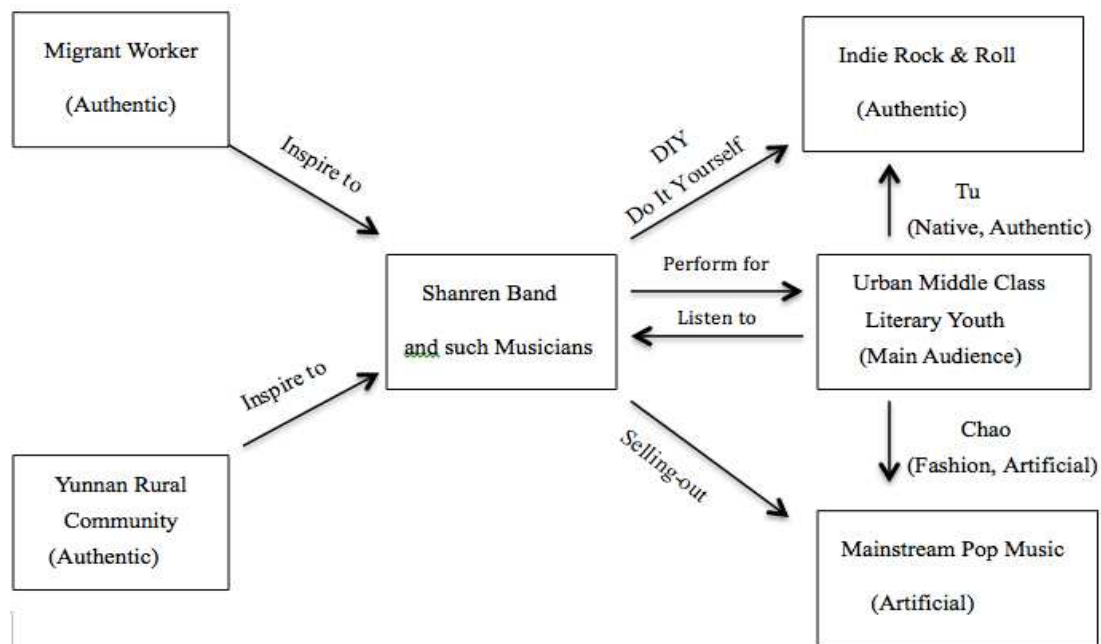


Figure 7: The relationship of ethnic minority popular musicians with their primary audiences. Chart created by the author.

Because members of Shanren came from Yunnan rural communities, they are strongly tied to their ethnic minority musical roots. Having moved to the capital city of Beijing, the band also identifies with migrant workers and thus better understands their lifestyle, as their lives parallel this transition as well. Their music reflects these two inspirations, utilizing rural-style melody, movements, and singing techniques, as well as singing in minority languages that clearly identify them as distinct from urban musicians with minority backgrounds who instead emphasize standard Mandarin and conservatory-style vocal performance. Their clothes and instruments also represent the tu sensibility for most urban middle class youth, reminding them of the migrant workers who still wear rural clothes and listen to folk music from their home.

Shanren, for example, has achieved a growing popularity in recent years. In their earlier

performances, they always spoke directly to the experiences and emotions of their audience. Their ticket prices were low and the fans were few, but growing and enthusiastic. As recently as February 2016, they appeared in a mainstream competition on CCTV (2016), the national media. Though their hard-core fans were proud that their favorite band achieved such success, the price of Shanren performance tickets rose rapidly, endangering their perception of being *tu* and worrying many that the band would lose their authentic appeal. This became an important issue for fans of Shanren via social media. While the band was recognized as maintaining their unique style of music, the increased popularity brought concern among their literary youth fans as to whether or not the band would “sell-out” and change their musical style to gain a larger audience, as is typical of the mainstream music industry, which they consider *chao* (i.e., artificial). For fans of Shanren, such as this researcher, the hope is that the indulgences and temptations of financial success and public notoriety will only come as a fringe benefit of ethnic minority popular musicians remaining steadfast in their dedication to ethnic minority music and culture. If so, then their motivations, though perhaps questioned by others, may never waiver among the band members themselves or their dedicated audience that regards them as exemplars of authenticity in the modern world.



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