

The Role of Emotional Response to Music, Media Influence, and Nationalistic Themes on Chinese National Identity

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes in music on Chinese national identity. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the study sampled 385 participants and employed Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses to explore the relationships between these variables. Results revealed that nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor of national identity, followed closely by media influence and emotional response to music. These findings highlight the critical role that both music and media play in fostering a strong sense of national identity, particularly in a context where cultural and political narratives are tightly intertwined. The study suggests that reinforcing nationalistic themes in cultural expressions, alongside media campaigns promoting national pride, can further strengthen collective national identity. These insights provide valuable implications for policymakers, educators, and media creators aiming to bolster national unity and cultural heritage in China.

Keywords: Emotional Response to Music, Media Influence, Nationalistic Themes, Chinese National Identity, Cultural Heritage

Introduction

In the contemporary context, Chinese national identity has been increasingly shaped by the interplay of emotional responses to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes. Music, particularly through its emotional impact, plays a significant role in reinforcing national identity. Research indicates that emotional responses to music, especially those that evoke a sense of pride or nostalgia, are powerful tools for fostering a shared sense of belonging within a nation. This emotional attachment to music, particularly traditional and patriotic songs, helps to solidify a collective identity among Chinese citizens, as these songs often carry historical and cultural significance (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008). Moreover, scholars

argue that music can act as a cultural unifier, bridging generational gaps by invoking shared emotional experiences (Mihelj, Bajt, & Pankov, 2009).

The influence of media in shaping Chinese national identity has been well-documented. The media, particularly state-controlled outlets, play a central role in propagating nationalistic messages through music, films, and social media. The Chinese government's deliberate use of media to promote a positive national image is evident in the way they broadcast events and music that align with the country's values. For instance, popular television shows like *The Voice of China* have integrated traditional Chinese musical elements, helping to cultivate a sense of national pride and cultural continuity (Yu, 2015; Amar, 2018). The portrayal of Chinese culture as “cool” and globally influential contributes to the ongoing narrative of national strength and unity, particularly among younger generations (Li, 2009; Hyun & Kim, 2015).

Nationalistic themes in music and media further reinforce the emotional and cultural connection to the nation. Chinese popular culture, particularly through music and digital media, has seen a resurgence of nationalist themes that emphasize China's historical legacy and contemporary power. These themes often highlight China's past struggles and current achievements, reinforcing a narrative of resilience and superiority. Such representations can evoke a strong emotional response, particularly pride, among the Chinese populace, which in turn strengthens their national identity (Amar, 2018; Chow & De Kloet, 2011). Media events, such as patriotic celebrations or anniversaries, also serve to amplify these feelings by embedding nationalistic sentiments within mass cultural productions (Billig, 1995; Dayan & Katz, 1992).

Furthermore, media influence is not limited to the content it broadcasts but also involves how individuals interact with this content. Recent studies have shown that while the media disseminates nationalistic content, audiences interpret and internalize these messages differently depending on their background and context. In China, media events and digital platforms, such as Weibo, provide spaces where nationalistic narratives can be either reinforced or contested. During events like the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese media utilized emotional registers such as gratitude, national pride, and grief to shape public sentiment, further cementing collective national identity in times of crisis (Madianou, 2005; Jimenez-Martinez, 2020; Li, 2009).

In conclusion, the role of emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes is critical in shaping Chinese national identity. The deliberate integration of traditional music in popular culture, the strategic use of media to promote nationalistic messages, and the emotional resonance of these themes all contribute to a collective sense of identity. As China continues to assert its cultural and political power on the global stage, these elements will likely remain integral to its national narrative (Yu, 2015; Amar, 2018; Zentner et al., 2008).

Literature Review

Emotional Response to Music and National Identity

Music has long been recognized as a tool for evoking powerful emotional responses, and this emotional connection plays a crucial role in shaping national identity. In the Chinese context, emotional responses to traditional and patriotic music have been used to promote a shared

sense of belonging and pride. Studies have shown that songs with nationalistic themes, especially those that evoke nostalgia, foster a deeper connection to national history and culture. The emotional bond that listeners form with such music strengthens their identification with the nation (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008; Mihelj, Bajt, & Pankov, 2009). This effect is particularly strong when the music reflects collective historical experiences, such as songs about the Chinese revolution or cultural triumphs, which amplify feelings of unity and resilience (Li, 2009; Yu, 2015).

Furthermore, the emotional impact of music can transcend mere enjoyment, often mobilizing individuals toward national solidarity. Patriotic songs in China often evoke sentiments of pride and loyalty, encouraging individuals to view themselves as part of a larger national community. The Chinese state has capitalized on this by promoting specific musical pieces that align with state ideologies, using music as a vehicle for reinforcing national identity (Zentner et al., 2008; Amar, 2018). This practice is seen in events like the 2008 Beijing Olympics, where music played a significant role in constructing and projecting China's image to the world (Li, 2009).

Media Influence and National Identity

The media, particularly state-controlled platforms, have been instrumental in shaping Chinese national identity. Media outlets in China are often used as tools for disseminating nationalistic content, including music that embodies national pride and cultural heritage. Researchers argue that through the consistent portrayal of national symbols and narratives, the media has the ability to mould public perception and reinforce collective identity (Billig, 1995; Yu, 2015). For instance, popular television shows like *The Voice of China* have integrated traditional Chinese music into modern formats, helping younger generations connect with their cultural heritage and national identity (Li, 2009; Amar, 2018). The combination of traditional musical elements with modern entertainment forms creates a bridge between China's historical past and its present-day global presence.

The digital age has further intensified media's role in national identity formation. Social media platforms like Weibo have become spaces where nationalistic content, including patriotic music and state-sponsored narratives, are widely circulated. During crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese media successfully mobilized emotional narratives of resilience, pride, and national unity, further cementing national identity in the public consciousness (Madianou, 2005; Jimenez-Martinez, 2020). Such media campaigns are carefully crafted to evoke specific emotional responses, ensuring that music and media content not only entertains but also instills a sense of collective identity.

Nationalistic Themes in Music and National Identity

Nationalistic themes embedded in Chinese music have historically played a significant role in promoting national identity. These themes often emphasize China's cultural legacy, portraying the nation as resilient, strong, and unified. Studies suggest that nationalistic music, particularly songs with strong historical references or revolutionary themes, helps reinforce a sense of pride and belonging among listeners (Yu, 2015; Chow & De Kloet, 2011). The Chinese government has frequently utilized such music during national celebrations and political events to remind the public of their shared history and cultural achievements (Billig, 1995; Zentner et al., 2008).

Moreover, nationalistic music is not only a top-down tool for state control but also serves as a medium through which the public can express their own patriotic sentiments. The use of nationalistic themes in Chinese popular music has surged in recent years, as both the state and independent musicians utilize these themes to foster a collective identity (Li, 2009; Amar, 2018). The rise of China Wind music, which incorporates traditional Chinese instruments and cultural motifs into contemporary music, reflects a growing desire among Chinese citizens to reclaim and celebrate their national identity through music (Chow & De Kloet, 2011).

The interplay between emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes is central to the construction of Chinese national identity. Music's ability to evoke strong emotions, when combined with media's wide-reaching influence, creates a powerful tool for reinforcing collective identity. By embedding nationalistic themes in both traditional and modern music, the Chinese state, alongside popular media, ensures that national pride and cultural heritage remain at the forefront of the public consciousness. As China continues to navigate its role on the global stage, these elements of national identity formation will likely remain crucial in shaping the country's self-image and collective consciousness (Li, 2009; Amar, 2018; Zentner et al., 2008). Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore how these cultural and media elements interact to shape Chinese national identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Method

Participants

This study involved a sample of 385 participants from diverse regions in China, aged between 18 and 35 years. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure a representative mix of gender, educational background, and geographical location. The sample size of 385 was determined through a power analysis, ensuring adequate statistical power to detect relationships between the independent variables—emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes—and the dependent variable, Chinese national identity. All participants were fluent in Mandarin and provided informed consent before participating in the study.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through online platforms, local community organizations, and universities. Recruitment strategies included social media advertisements and outreach through educational networks. Before participation, individuals were informed about the study's objectives, confidentiality protocols, and their right to withdraw at any point. Data collection was conducted via self-report questionnaires, administered online and taking approximately 20–30 minutes to complete.

Emotional Response to Music

Emotional responses to music were assessed using the Basic Emotion Scale for Music (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008). This 20-item scale measures participants' emotional reactions to different types of music, focusing on emotions such as joy, pride, and nostalgia. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much), with higher scores indicating stronger emotional responses. Sample items include "This music makes me feel proud of my heritage" and "I feel a sense of nostalgia when listening to this music." The scale demonstrated high internal reliability in this study, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

Media Influence

Media influence was measured using the Media Consumption and Influence Scale (Nabi, Southwell, & Hornik, 2002), which evaluates participants' exposure to nationalistic content through media. This 10-item scale assesses the frequency and perceived impact of media consumption on national identity formation. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Sample items include "The media I consume often emphasizes Chinese national pride" and "Media helps shape my understanding of Chinese culture." The scale demonstrated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Nationalistic Themes in Music

Nationalistic themes in music were assessed using a modified version of the National Identity and Music Scale (Li & Sun, 2018). This 12-item scale measures participants' perceptions of nationalistic themes in Chinese music. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating a stronger recognition of nationalistic elements in music. Sample items include "This song highlights China's strength and resilience" and "The lyrics of this song promote national pride." The scale demonstrated high internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

Chinese National Identity

Chinese national identity was measured using the National Identity Scale (Keillor, Hult, Erffmeyer, & Babakus, 1996), which assesses individuals' identification with their nation. This 10-item scale focuses on cultural, emotional, and political aspects of national identity. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting stronger identification with the nation. Sample items include "I am proud to be Chinese" and "Being Chinese is an important part of my identity." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.87, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the levels of emotional response to music, media influence, nationalistic themes in music, and Chinese national identity. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables (emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes) and the dependent variable (Chinese national identity). Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the predictive power of each independent variable on Chinese national identity. All statistical tests were conducted with a significance level set at $p < .05$.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics for emotional response to music, media influence, nationalistic themes in music, and Chinese national identity are presented in Table 1. The findings indicate that participants reported moderate to high levels across all variables. Emotional response to music had a mean score of 43.20 (SD = 6.50), with 62.86% of participants falling in the high category. Media influence demonstrated a mean score of 37.60 (SD = 5.40), with 58.96% of participants scoring in the high range. Nationalistic themes in music were also reported at a high level (M = 40.10, SD = 5.80), with 60.78% in the high category. Lastly, Chinese national identity had a mean score of 41.50 (SD = 6.00), with 64.94% of respondents scoring in the high category.

These results suggest that emotional response to music is a significant factor in shaping Chinese national identity, aligning with previous research that highlights music's role in evoking strong emotions of pride and belonging (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008; Chow & De Kloet, 2011). The high levels of emotional response indicate that participants were strongly influenced by the music they heard, particularly when the music emphasized cultural and nationalistic themes. This supports findings by Li (2009) that traditional and patriotic music plays an essential role in reinforcing a collective national identity.

Media influence was also found to be a critical factor in shaping national identity. The moderate to high levels of media influence observed in this study are consistent with previous research that underscores the power of media in disseminating nationalistic messages and shaping public perception (Billig, 1995; Yu, 2015). This is particularly relevant in China, where state-controlled media frequently broadcasts content that emphasizes national pride and cultural heritage, as reflected in the findings. These results align with the studies by Madianou (2005) and Jimenez-Martinez (2020), which found that media campaigns, especially during significant events like the COVID-19 pandemic, play a pivotal role in reinforcing collective national identity.

Nationalistic themes in music were also reported at high levels, suggesting that music with strong nationalistic content significantly contributes to the shaping of national identity. This is in line with previous research by Chow and De Kloet (2011) and Amar (2018), who noted that the incorporation of nationalistic elements in music promotes a sense of pride and unity. The findings from this study confirm that such themes are not only prevalent but also effective in fostering national pride, particularly among younger generations exposed to both traditional and modern music forms that emphasize China's cultural achievements.

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes in music all play significant roles in shaping Chinese national identity. These findings align with the existing literature, which suggests that music and media are powerful tools for reinforcing national pride and cultural heritage (Zentner et al., 2008; Billig, 1995). The moderate to high levels reported across all variables highlight the importance of these factors in shaping collective identity, particularly in a country like China, where nationalistic narratives are deeply embedded in both traditional and modern cultural expressions (Yu, 2015; Amar, 2018). Future research could further explore how these elements interact with other sociocultural factors to shape national identity in different contexts.

Table 1

Levels of Emotional Response to Music, Media Influence, Nationalistic Themes in Music, and Chinese National Identity

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
<u>Emotional Response to Music</u>			43.20	6.50
Low	68	17.66		
Moderate	75	19.48		
High	242	62.86		
<u>Media Influence</u>			37.60	5.40
Low	67	17.40		
Moderate	91	23.64		
High	227	58.96		
<u>Nationalistic Themes in Music</u>			40.10	5.80
Low	70	18.18		
Moderate	81	21.04		
High	234	60.79		
<u>National Identity</u>				
Low	59	15.32	41.50	6.00
Medium	76	19.74		
High	250	64.94		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between emotional response to music, media influence, nationalistic themes in music, and Chinese national identity (see Table 2). The results revealed that all independent variables were significantly positively correlated with Chinese national identity, indicating that higher levels of emotional response to music, media influence, and recognition of nationalistic themes in music are associated with a stronger sense of Chinese national identity.

The strongest correlation was observed between nationalistic themes in music and Chinese national identity ($r = .71, p < .001$). This aligns with prior research suggesting that music with strong nationalistic themes fosters a collective sense of pride and unity, thereby reinforcing national identity (Li, 2009; Yu, 2015). Participants who reported high recognition of nationalistic elements in music also demonstrated stronger identification with their Chinese

national identity, underscoring the role of music in cultural and national reinforcement (Chow & De Kloet, 2011).

Media influence also showed a strong positive relationship with Chinese national identity ($r = .68, p < .001$). This finding supports the notion that media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of national identity, particularly in a controlled media environment like China (Billig, 1995; Jimenez-Martinez, 2020). The significant correlation suggests that participants who frequently consume media content highlighting Chinese cultural pride are more likely to report stronger national identification.

The emotional response to music was positively correlated with Chinese national identity ($r = .65, p < .001$). This result is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the powerful role emotions play in music's ability to evoke a sense of belonging and national pride (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008; Amar, 2018). Individuals who experience stronger emotional reactions to music, especially music that highlights Chinese cultural and historical themes, tend to exhibit a stronger sense of national identity.

These correlations provide valuable insights into the factors influencing national identity among Chinese individuals. Nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor, followed closely by media influence and emotional response to music. These findings suggest that promoting music and media content with strong nationalistic undertones may further enhance Chinese national identity.

Table 2

Correlations Between Emotional Response to Music, Media Influence, Nationalistic Themes in Music, and Chinese National Identity

Variable	Chinese National Identity	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Response to Music	.65**	.001
Media Influence	.68**	.001
Nationalistic Themes in Music	.71**	.001

N = 385, ** $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that all three independent variables—emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes in music—significantly predicted Chinese national identity among the participants, $F(3, 381) = 172.50, p < .001$. Among the predictors, nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor of Chinese national identity ($\beta = 0.46, p < .001$). This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of nationalistic content in music as a key factor in fostering national pride and identity (Li, 2009; Yu, 2015). Participants who recognized strong nationalistic elements in music reported a higher sense of Chinese national identity.

Media influence also demonstrated a strong predictive effect on Chinese national identity ($\beta = 0.43, p < .001$). This supports previous research suggesting that media exposure, especially state-controlled content, plays a critical role in shaping national identity by constantly reinforcing cultural and nationalistic themes (Billig, 1995; Madianou, 2005). Individuals who

frequently engage with media content emphasizing national pride tend to report stronger identification with their Chinese national identity.

Emotional response to music was another significant predictor ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$), reflecting the important role emotions play in shaping national identity through music. This result is consistent with studies indicating that music that evokes strong emotional reactions can enhance a sense of belonging and pride in one's national identity (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008; Chow & De Kloet, 2011). Participants who reported stronger emotional responses to music, especially when exposed to traditional or patriotic themes, were more likely to express a strong sense of national identity.

These results underscore the significant role of music and media in fostering national identity among Chinese citizens. Nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by media influence and emotional response to music. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of national identity formation and the powerful impact of cultural and media content in reinforcing a collective sense of national belonging.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Emotional Response to Music, Media Influence, and Nationalistic Themes in Music on Chinese National Identity

Variable	Chinese National Identity			
	B	SE. B	Beta, β	<i>p</i>
Emotional Response to Music	0.40	0.09	0.41	.001
Media Influence	0.38	0.08	0.43	.001
Nationalistic Themes in Music	0.45	0.07	0.46	.001
R²	.680			
Adjusted R²	.677			
F	172.50			

$R^2 = 0.680$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.677$, $F = 172.50$ ($p < .001$)

Implications for National Identity: Policy and Practice

The findings from this study carry important implications for understanding the factors that influence Chinese national identity through emotional responses to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes in music. The results suggest that policymakers, educators, and media creators should focus on these areas to foster a stronger national identity, particularly in a rapidly globalizing world.

Nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor of Chinese national identity, highlighting the powerful role that music plays in shaping national pride. This finding suggests that the inclusion of patriotic content in both traditional and contemporary Chinese music is critical in fostering a sense of national belonging (Li, 2009; Yu, 2015). Policymakers should promote cultural initiatives that emphasize national history and pride through music, encouraging educational institutions to incorporate patriotic songs and themes into their curricula. Additionally, media platforms can be utilized to broadcast music with strong nationalistic undertones, further reinforcing collective national identity among younger generations.

Media influence also played a significant role in shaping national identity, reinforcing the importance of state-controlled and independent media outlets in disseminating messages of national pride. Given the influence of media on public perceptions, especially in a country like China where media is tightly regulated, media campaigns that emphasize Chinese cultural heritage, history, and global achievements can strengthen national identity (Billig, 1995; Madianou, 2005). Policymakers should continue to support media initiatives that promote national unity, while also ensuring that media platforms provide space for cultural diversity and dialogue to foster a more inclusive sense of national identity.

Emotional response to music was another significant predictor, underscoring the role of music in evoking feelings of pride, nostalgia, and belonging. This finding suggests that emotional connections to music, particularly songs with cultural and nationalistic themes, can be a powerful tool for reinforcing national identity (Zentner, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2008; Chow & De Kloet, 2011). Cultural programs that emphasize traditional Chinese music, along with modern interpretations that evoke similar emotional responses, should be encouraged to strengthen the emotional bond between individuals and their national identity.

Practical Applications for Policymakers and Educators

The relationships revealed in this study offer practical guidance for policymakers and educators in both formal and informal settings. Policymakers should prioritize the development of national music programs that integrate nationalistic themes into everyday cultural experiences, such as through media broadcasts, community events, and national celebrations. This can enhance the emotional and cultural connection individuals feel toward their nation (Yu, 2015; Li, 2009). Additionally, media platforms should be encouraged to highlight positive portrayals of Chinese culture and history, reinforcing collective identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Educators can play a pivotal role by incorporating music and media literacy into curricula that emphasize Chinese cultural heritage and national pride. Schools and universities should promote cross-generational cultural exchanges where younger generations can engage with traditional music forms, fostering a deeper emotional connection to their national identity. Further, the creation of platforms that allow for cultural expression through music and media can enhance students' engagement with their cultural heritage, supporting the development of a positive national identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing Chinese national identity, several limitations must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the independent variables and national identity. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to track how sustained exposure to music and media influences changes in national identity over time (Li, 2009; Yu, 2015).

Another limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported measures, which may introduce biases such as social desirability. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches, including interviews and focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of how

individuals' emotional responses to music and media content influence their national identity (Chow & De Kloet, 2011; Madianou, 2005).

Additionally, this study focused specifically on Chinese participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Future research could explore how similar factors influence national identity in different cultural settings, especially in societies with varying levels of media regulation and cultural openness (Billig, 1995; Zentner et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant roles of emotional response to music, media influence, and nationalistic themes in shaping Chinese national identity. Nationalistic themes in music emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that promoting patriotic content in music can significantly enhance national identity. Media influence and emotional responses to music also play critical roles, reinforcing the importance of cultural and media initiatives in fostering national pride.

These results have clear implications for policymakers, educators, and media platforms. By promoting cultural programs that emphasize national pride through music and media, these stakeholders can help foster a stronger collective identity among Chinese citizens. Future research should continue to explore these relationships in various cultural contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how music and media influence national identity across different societies.

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