

# Spring festival gala



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A Comparative Study of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas, 1984-86 and 2004-06  
Xiaoyan Xu Abstract The Spring Festival, or Lunar New Year, is the most important festival in China. On every Lunar New Year's Eve since 1983, the state-run China Central TV (CCTV), the only national TV station in China, has held a celebrating gala. This thesis attempts to examine the CCTV Spring Festival Galas as a case study of China's statist nationalism. The research questions of this thesis are: what techniques and technologies have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas used to construct a Chinese national space?

How have the CCTV Spring Festival Galas describe the Chinese national space? And what changes have taken place in these techniques and technologies as well as in the descriptions? To answer these questions, this thesis conducts a comparative research, comparing both the commonalities and differences between the galas of 1984-86 and those of 2004-06. Employing an interpretative textual analysis approach, it analyzes the videos of these six years' galas and explores the political meanings of words and programs in the galas.

This thesis finds that in order to imagine a united Chinese national space, the galas mainly represent China in terms of classes, ethnic groups and places. With the presence of minorities and people from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, the galas focus on the boundary of the Chinese nation to construct the unity of China. Furthermore, in order to construct the greatness of this united Chinese national space, the galas use heroes and sites to symbolize China. The presence of traditional elements helps create a temporal dimension of the Chinese national space.

As a result of, and in response to, the socio- economic changes in the last two decades, the techniques and technologies used by the galas have changed. Besides the great changes in stage settings and technologies, the major changes in the techniques include: in the 2004-06 galas, hosts play a much more important role in interpreting the political meanings of the programs and presenting the state's nationalist narrative to the audience, the Chinese Communist Party occupies a more central place in the galas, and home increasingly means individual family instead of the country of China.

Correspondingly, the way the galas treat singers, actors, and hosts from Hong Kong and Taiwan has also changed. Acknowledgements The past three years have passed fast. At this moment, my heart is full of thanksgivings. I am especially grateful to: Dr. Timothy Luke, my committee chair, for his advising and helping me with revising this thesis for several times, as well as for his patience. Dr. Scott Nelson and Dr. Yannis Stivachtis, my committee members, for their support and suggestions on this thesis and future research. Dr.

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Examples of these studies are Guan Ling, Zhixing Guiji [The Tracks of Knowledge and Actions] (Beijing: Beijing Radio College Press 2000); Xu Yingchun and Wang Ying, “ Dui ‘ kan chunjie wanhui’ chengwei xin minsu wenti de sikao [Some Reflections on Watching the Spring Festival Galas Becoming New Customs],” Shiting Zongheng [On TV and Radio], No. 1 (2003); and Wang Xiaoyu, “ Chunjie lianhuan wanhui de ‘ zhaohuan jizhi’ [The ‘ Calling Mechanism’ of the Spring Festival Galas],” Meiti Piping [Media Critique] (Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2005), Vol. 1, [http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk\\_wzdetails.asp?id=4891](http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=4891).<sup>22</sup> is Wang Xiaoyu’s study.<sup>34</sup> Based on the concepts of “ TV community” and “ collective memory,” Wang analyzes the “ calling” mechanism that renders individuals to join the audience of the Spring Festival Galas every year. He argues that the high viewing- audience-rates of the CCTV Spring Festival Galas can be partly attributed to the “ TV community” emerging in 1980s---that is, the phenomenon that many people gather together to watch the same TV programs. Wang argues that the CCTV Spring Festival Gala is creating a new and special “ TV community”. Many families gather to watch a TV program together, along with eating the reunion dinner. What is more, people’s discussions on the CCTV Spring Festival Galas afterwards make the galas a “ collective