“Why Are the Flowers So Beautiful?”
Changing Cultural Policies for a United Chinese Identity

A Study of the Hua’er (Flower Song) Tradition in the Northwest of China

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Hua’er, literally “flowers,” is a folk song tradition in the Northwest of China named after the custom of comparing female beauty to flowers in the lyrics, with most songs written about love and sex. As these subjects were condemned as “immoral” or “crude” by Islam and Confucianism, the songs were banned for many decades by the ruling authorities. However, hua’er are a tradition shared by people of over nine different ethnic groups in the northwestern region, and the genre is considered an important artistic form by the communities that practice it as a part of their ethnic identity and nowadays the genre is presented at over 100 public hua’er singing gatherings and government-sponsored festivals annually as well as through state-media broadcasting. This talk highlights the purpose of the “changing” cultural policies on the hua’er tradition, investigating how and why a musical tradition (which was once forbidden in the 1960s and 1970s) has been co-opted as a tool for political propaganda and creation of a national cultural heritage, even a symbol of “nationalism” reflecting a united Chinese identity as the Chinese government acts on behalf of its own interests by instituting policies that serve the state’s sovereignty and well-being.

Wednesday, November 16, 2011
12:00 noon
4130 Wesley W. Posvar Hall

Bring a lunch or snack and join us! All are welcome.