

Singing “Flying Over the Rainbow” with ethnic minority kids

by Fang Wang, Secretary General of the Green Pine Care Foundation and Choir Director, People's Republic of China

It was November 12th, 2019 when I received the messages from Yunnan, Guizhou, Xinjiang and Taiwan saying, ‘The kids are home safely.’ When the last message came from the Tibetan kids in Qinghai, I could finally be at ease.

Between November 4th and 11th, more than 300 ethnic minority kids from various regions of the frontier had come to Shenzhen to sing in a multi-ethnic children's chorus concert. They were here to put on a wonderful show on stage, but they also went to several schools to present their own culture and music while enjoying the prosperity of Shenzhen, a metropolis which is extremely different from their hometowns.

The children were members of 12 Chinese minorities: the Tibetan, Gaoshan (Bunong, Paiwan), Kazak, Naxi, Lahu, Tajik, Yugu, Yao, Miao, Dai, Bai, and Ewenki minorities. The Green Pine Care Foundation's musical project for ethnic minority children, Chanson de Montagne, was launched 14 years ago. It was thanks to its tremendous efforts that these kids, the inheritors of their minority musical traditions, were invited to take part in this concert in Shenzhen.

Back in 2007, a group of people who had just listened to a concert by the Vienna Boys' Choir walked out of Shenzhen Concert Hall in a state of great excitement, and founded Chanson de Montagne in order to further China's traditional multi-ethnic orchestral and vocal culture. They went on to hold many multi-ethnic chorus concerts in Shenzhen and other regions. As the director of the chorus for nearly 10 years,

I've seen countless dusks and dawns, encountering infinite beauty while travelling around the frontier towns of China. So many children with their innocent eyes; so many earnest voices; so many diverse colours. They are the motivation that urges us onwards.

12 years later, on November 9th, 2019, at the end of a concert by the multi-ethnic choir entitled The Archaic and the Earth, as the last note of the night was disappearing, I wept uncontrollably and hugged my colleagues, who were also moved. I have personally served as the Secretary General of the Foundation since 2013, and over that time my compassionate team (generally women) have experienced countless physical and psychological ups and downs, but the splendour of China's multi-ethnic culture and the innocence and simplicity of the children are so strong. Everyone in my team is inspired by them, feeling deep love and great tolerance in our hearts, and the tenacity cultivated from this experience has helped us grow.



Chanson de Montagne Multi-Ethnic Children's Choir

In 2015, the Chanson de Montagne's Kazakh Children's Choir performed in the 'Jade Mountain Music Festival', singing together with children from the Gaoshan (Bunong) minority in Taiwan. Between 2016 and 2017, more than 20 children from ethnic minorities sang *The Harmony of Mountains and Sea, Flying over the Rainbow* in Aksai, which is located on the north-western frontier, and the south of Kunming. We all have an abiding dream that all of the children living in undeveloped frontier zones in China will be able to fly far away, broadening their horizons and growing in self-confidence thanks to their talent and love for singing, their dedication to the chorus, and the effort they dedicate to it.

*"Mummy, I want to fly across the rainbow and sing forever."
Flying over the Rainbow*

In 2019, Shenzhen Concert Hall collaborated with the Chanson de Montagne and the Cultural Hall of Futian to sponsor a multi-ethnic children's choir, hoping to promote the art of choral singing. Manxue Hu, then conductor of the Shenzhen Senior High School Lily Girls Choir, was appointed the conductor and artistic director of this choir. Kids from four minorities performed their first show along with the Shenzhen Senior High School Lily Girls Choir. It was an extraordinary and eye-opening experience for these minority children from undeveloped areas to come together and sing with their new friends and absorb international culture. They also showcased their own minority cultures in their performance and realized that they were appreciated, gaining confidence from the applause.

These children, who love singing and are good at it, are writing the history of China's multi-ethnic musical culture. Their singing is a testament to China's diversity. As for me, the director of this project, I am impressed by it and have

learned from it. Every meeting with the kids is full of joy and beauty, while every farewell brings sadness. At these moments, my thoughts turn to the song *Reluctant to Say Goodbye* by member of the Naxi minority Naluo Li:

I can sing songs as much as the flowers on the hills, but none of them is about closure. I can express as much as the tea leaf on the hills, but I won't say goodbye.

Indeed, in my mind, in the Chanson de Montagne, there is only sunshine and songs, no darkness or separation. Serving the kids, helping them to open the doors of life, is a way for me to perceive the river of my life flowing onwards.



Fang Wang is Secretary General of the Green Pine Care Foundation and Director of the Chanson de Montagne Cultural Exchange Centre, as



well as Head of the Chanson de Montagne Multi-Ethnic Children's Choir.

Translated from Chinese by Rui Tao

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