

Background Statement

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I was born in Inner Mongolia, the autonomous region in the north of China, populated by ethnic minorities. As the first composer from the area to pursue a graduate degree in the U.S., I am committed to serving as an ambassador for my culture, and for empowering minorities through my work. I hope to empower other artists from underrepresented ethnic groups, and to demonstrate through my work that my background as an Asian female from a minority group is a major asset, rather than an obstacle.

While I have learned how to infuse my work with the richness of my minority culture, my background did initially present challenges. An early barrier to learning was the lack of educational resources in my hometown, which was deeply isolated from modern civilization. However, this motivated me to actively seek the answers to define myself: I became a voracious reader, with Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe* becoming a major influence; I searched out CDs of Beethoven's piano concertos and symphonies and listened to them over and over. The resources I discovered for myself embedded the tiny seed of potential for becoming an artist. While becoming an artist in my area seemed an impossible dream, I chose to try. Without formal training on compositions from any teachers, I was admitted to X University where I majored in law and music performance. While I took full advantage of my education, I soon felt the disadvantages of a non-conservatory environment. At first, I felt as if I were working within a vacuum, without the guidance of qualified faculty, and unable to have my pieces performed. However, I learned how to use these circumstances as an opportunity: through studying other subjects such as philosophy, history, and law, I saw the chance to seek and develop my unique voice. I traveled throughout the country during the vacations, hiking into the hinterlands of the country and connecting with more minority groups hidden in the deep mountains. Living with them, learning their music and culture catalyzed in me the desire to give them a voice through my own music, and to bring their brilliant musical culture to the worldwide stage. This directly influenced my decision to pursue a graduate degree abroad. However, applying for a graduate degree in the US is never an easy thing, particularly when most programs expect a conservatory education and traditional academic path. At the time, I was concerned that my inferior, midi-file recordings would cause me to be seen as an amateur. However, I maintained my conviction that those who seek to transcend barriers will eventually be heard and recognized. Therefore, when the faculty of RU came to my university to give lectures and

performances, I inquired about their graduate program. They were surprised by my courage, and promised to review my profile.

After I was admitted to Rutgers University, the faculty told me that they had seen great potential in my portfolio. As a member of the minority group within China, I have faced barriers since I was born; therefore, I was not intimidated by the language and culture barriers I confronted upon arriving in the United States. Instead, the most pressing problem I needed to face was my dearth of knowledge of contemporary music. I addressed this issue by auditing all undergraduate music history courses, as well as contemporary music theory. I not only just audited the class, but also did all assignments and exams. I also had to build a stronger foundation in composition to compensate for my lack of conservatory training. I went to live concerts several times a week to better understand the feel and balance of a big orchestra, and spoke to the performers about detailed instrumentations after the concerts. I also frequently went to downtown Manhattan live shows to seek the inspirations of avant-garde experimental acoustics. Also, I supplemented the knowledge of operas by frequently watching operas at the Metropolitan Opera House. To develop my voice and proudly represent my minority background pushed me to actively seek approaches to transcend barriers, and to compensate for what I couldn't have learned when I was younger. Through dedication and exposure to the US's vast musical resources, I have enabled myself to compete with peers who were born with more resources and opportunities.

Throughout my studies in the US, I came to realize that my background was distinct from other Chinese composers, most of whom received musical formal training since they were young. My experience and accomplishments have shown that there is a possibility for minority groups from China to have an equal chance of musical education. Therefore, I see my mission as to give voice to underrepresented cultures, and have begun to do so by infusing my compositions with Mongolian musical elements. As a doctoral candidate, I hope to continue my research on Mongolian music and culture. By introducing their music and culture to American and global audiences, I aim to illustrate their struggles as minorities in China. Through my efforts, I hope to empower people from minority groups and raise awareness of their rich and diverse cultures. Maybe someday, I will not longer be the only composer from the group with the privilege of studying in the United States.