This dissertation discusses the relationship between the collection of the popular traditional songs and the process of the formation of the local consciousness in the Nineteenth Century France. Previously, some studies indicated that in France, there was few relation between the formation of the national consciousness and the collection of the popular oral traditions such as the songs. The antecedent studies declared such French case exceptional, comparing to other European countries. This kind of opinion is commonly accepted without revealing detailed factors which made the France exceptional. It should be scrutinized the different processes of the collections of the popular traditional songs. For this purpose, this dissertation treats the case of l’enquête Fortoul, the enormous project of the collection of the popular traditional poetries and songs all over France, executed by the Ministry of the Public Instruction.

Chapter 1 and 2 aim to observing the principal characters of l’enquête Fortoul. These chapters focus on the point of view of Fortoul, who was the Minister of the Public Instruction, and the Committee of the Historical Studies of the Ministry of the Public Instruction, which was in charge of l’enquête Fortoul. The members of this Committee argued with each other about the definition of the popular traditional songs. Chapter 2 deals with the structure of the Committee of the Historical Studies of the Ministry of the Public Instruction, which spread over the whole land of France. Chapter 3 and 4 analyse the texts (for example, the popular traditional songs’ reports and the published works) written by local elites, who devote their free times to academic study of their
home land, and cooperate with the Committee of the Historical Studies to collect the popular traditional songs.

As a result of our examination, we have obtained the following knowledges: first, the objective of l’ enquête Fortoul, which was often perceived only as the origin of the ethnomusicology of France, was criticized. The Minister Fortoul and the members of the Committee of the Historical Studies were mainly concerned with studying the popular traditional songs from historical and philological approach, rather than musicological one. In fact, l’ enquête Fortoul was started as one of the Collection of Inedited Documents of French History Series by the Ministry of the Public Instruction.

Second, the relation between the government and the local elites was clarified: the example of l’ enquête Fortoul shows that neither Parisian members of Committee of the Historical Studies nor the Minister Fortoul could wield strong influence over the local members. Rather, the development of l’ enquête Fortoul depended on the local members’ decision; because it was them who could choose whether to cooperate the Committee’s research project or not. Consequently, Fortoul determined to involve the teachers at primary school and primary school inspectors in l’ enquête Fortoul.

Third, the significance for the local elites of cooperating with l’ enquête Fortoul was evidenced: in French Flanders, a local elite named Louis de Baecker expressed himself as a representative of his region and tried to propagate the greatness and the prominence of his region at Paris. For him, l’ enquête Fortoul seemed to be a good opportunity. On the other hand, there existed another local elite in the same region named Edmond de Coussemaker who accentuated his local identity as a single French territory in whole Flanders, with examining the characteristics of the lyrics and the melody of the French Flemish popular traditional songs. Through collecting and studying their local popular traditional songs, these two local elites established their identity as French Flemish, which should be distinguished from other regions in France and from other countries in Flanders, like Belgium and the Netherlands.

Fourth, the characteristics of the discourse of the reports of the popular traditional song sang in French and its dialects were clarified: it was the peasant’s old traditional customs that centered the local elite’s interest. It was not always easy to discover the origin of popular songs inherited in traditionally French spoken areas, therefore, the local elites expressed only little concern over the historical and philological aspect of popular traditional song’s origin. The popular song reports written by the local elites in French spoken regions tended to highlight the contrast between the local “tradition” and the Parisian “civilisation” or “modernity.” This kind of reports pointed out the regional variations of each commune’s traditional songs and dialects. Just like these variations of traditional songs, the local elites of French spoken regions were inclined to represent local consciousness of every subdivided small unit, for instance, the commune. Nevertheless, such a representation of the local consciousness was those of peasants imagined as it would be by the local elites.

As can be seen, the relationship between the collection of the popular traditional songs and the process of the formation of the local consciousness in France varies according to the historical, linguistic, and cultural attributes of the region. It suggests two types of formation of local consciousness of the local elites: on the one hand, there are those who tried to differentiate their region from others, on the other hand, those who tended to observe a slight difference within one’s region and to construct the local consciousness subdivided into the communes.