When a Hundred Flowers Blossom: (Re)assembling the Chinese Orchestra in Contemporary Malaysia as a Cultural Ecosystem

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Abstract

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia is a significant cultural emblem that represents the Malaysian Chinese identity, yet it remains understudied and widely misunderstood, generally construed through antiquated historical and descriptive perspectives that decontextualizes its existing struggles and adaptiveness to contemporaneity. Cultural ecology concepts from Titon (2020) and ecological metaphors from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are adopted to frame the Malaysian Chinese orchestra as a complex and interdependent cultural ecosystem that is resilient and adaptable to environmental changes. Mainly, this study refreshes the perspectives of current and new audiences of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia through a reassembling of its dynamics, constructs, and operations in the 2020s. Research methodology consists of experimentation and expert interviews, supported by the author's own autoethnographic observations as a cultural insider. The *gaoyin ruan* modification experiment aims to enhance its musical versatility, and Experiment Ensembles are conducted to study organization, performativity, space, resilience, and musical hybridity. Collected data are coded and visualized for a balanced quantitative and qualitative analysis. A theoretical network is used to map opportunities and challenges through rhizomatic writing, along topics of spaces, performativity, identity, multiculturalism, musical hybridity, digitalization, and cultural sustainability. Findings reveal the Chinese orchestra's roles and values in the search for a Malaysian Chinese identity in a multicultural country, while examining its resilience and adaptive management plans towards disruptions and socio-cultural shifts. There are conscious and subconscious efforts towards sustainability for both the cultural ecosystem and the natural environment. Cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaborations are budding to advance the value of *huayue* in creative practices and musical hybridity, fostering interculturalism. Finally, the proposed Cultural Sustainability Web is a model to outline sustainable future trajectories for traditional cultures and provide strategies for social cohesion, that can generate a long-term impact on the Malaysian Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem.

Keywords: Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, Chinese music, cultural ecosystem, ecomusicology, resilience, sustainability

Preface

The Chinese orchestra and Chinese music are two interconnected themes that hold a special place in my heart; my passion for the Chinese orchestra began in 2010, albeit in a different capacity from when I initially started. This writing serves as an extension of my master's dissertation, further investigating into the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem with the aim of contributing to its ongoing development and sustainability.

Unexpectedly, the Covid-19 pandemic hit during the commencement of my research, halting all in-person activities of the Chinese orchestra, a significant impact to the cultural ecosystem. Despite the challenges, the Chinese orchestra demonstrated resilience in its post-Covid rebound efforts. Simultaneously, the pandemic inflicted life-changing situations to me, resulting in an undesirable delay in my research progress.

Nonetheless, I was fortunate to receive ample support and encouragement from members of the Chinese orchestra community, who shared my eagerness to revive the ecosystem. Their innovations to adapt and sustain the community during the pandemic surpassed expectations, leading to a quicker and more robust rebound.

The resurgence has opened new avenues for the future of the Chinese orchestra scene in Malaysia. Interacting with practitioners throughout this research (and beyond), I have come to believe that the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem is undergoing positive transformations, fostering endless collaborations, creative explorations, and expansions.

I aspire for this thesis to contribute to new literature on the Chinese orchestra community by remapping its current operations and imbuing meaning beyond existing historical and traditional narratives. This is a showcase to the world that the Chinese orchestra, particularly in Malaysia, has much more to offer—socially, culturally, economically, politically, artistically—beyond general perception. I hope my writing will serve as an inspiration to others and enrich the understanding of the Chinese orchestra's manifold contributions to arts, culture, and society.

Acknowledgements

From the beginning, I express my eternal heartfelt gratitude to my supervisors, Prof Joanne Lim and Dr Sergio Camacho, who 'upgraded' from being my sources of inspiration to become my actual guiding supervisors for the final level of my tertiary studies.

Dr Joanne continues to inspire me with her unwavering passion for work and dedication to research. She never fails to amaze me with her ability to maintain a work-life balance amidst a flurry of endless projects and events. I appreciate her understanding and patience during my moments of being stuck in a rut, and I am grateful for the numerous teaching and research opportunities she presented through her recommendations. Thank you for your high confidence in my ability to produce excellent work, and for entrusting me to do whatever is necessary at the right time. As I always say, I would do anything for you, Joanne!

A significant thank you to goes Dr Sergio for being my creative muse throughout my entire research journey. His willingness and patience to listen to my complains, and to provide all the creative ideas I would not have thought of on my own has been invaluable. The flow of passion projects, teaching, writings, and conferences he involved me in provided profound meaning and lasting smiles that I will cherish forever. Thank you for making sure that these additional roles align with my field of study and career goals, always taking my greatest interests to heart, and encourage me to stay positive. 'I have to finish my PhD' has become my mantra, and I eagerly anticipate engaging in more exciting collaborations in the long run.

I express my deepest thanks to both my supervisors for involving me as a teaching assistant, fueling my interest to pursue the career of a university lecturer. Your guidance has been invaluable, not only for my research but for life decisions. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Furthermore, I am fortunate to have received continuous support of all staff members from the University's School of Media, Languages and Culture since the inception of my degree studies. I have spent almost a decade of my life at the university, and over the years we have come to grow as a family. I will always treasure the connections with professors and lecturers at the school. Thank you all for caring about my wellbeing throughout my studies. A special thanks as well to Dr Khoo Gaik Cheng, who is a wise mentor in guiding me with postgraduate matters and personal development.

In addition, I made meaningful connections with two remarkable figures of the Chinese orchestra from Singapore, Wang Chenwei and Lee Ming-Yen. Chenwei's inspirational contributions to Chinese orchestra composition and the exploration of hybrid music have left a lasting impact on me, while Ming-Yen's encouragement and motivation have played a pivotal role in sustaining my passions for my academic pursuits in the study of the Chinese orchestra. I would also like to convey my sincerest appreciation to Mr. Simon Kong for extending the invitation for me to attend the SCMF forum and concert in Singapore. This experience greatly aided my research and provided an opportunity to meet several important practitioners in person.

A special note of thanks to Mr. Hew Kok Leong and Mr. Soh Zhong Yang for warmly welcoming me into the team to produce the book on the history of Chinese orchestras in Malaysia—*The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia,* 《华乐情·薪传路》. I am appreciative of this huge effort and believe it is a meaningful project for both the community and the public.

Equally important, I express profound recognition to the 14 participants of the two Experiment Ensembles. I commend you for your dedication to practice a series of new songs without complaint for a full month, successfully completing all the assigned tasks. Your commitment has culminated in a final public performance within such a short time. To all the professional practitioners and friends interviewed, thank you for generously sharing your time despite your (extremely!) busy schedules and providing additional material for my research. I am deeply grateful for your hard work and contribution to the Chinese orchestra ecosystems worldwide.

As I conclude this thesis, I recognize that this is easily the commencement of another beautiful journey and increased commitment to preserve and advance the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia from an academic perspective. I eagerly anticipate the engagement in more intercultural projects involving Chinese music and collaborative research on the Chinese orchestra. Once again, my thanks go out to all contributors to the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem, which I am confident is vitally evolving and growing.

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Reflexive Account and Justifications

From an anthropological standpoint, my journey as a Chinese orchestra musician since the age of 15 is integral to the narrative of this research. I find it important to bring up my experience in the Chinese orchestra from the very beginning, as it influences my role as both a researcher and a cultural 'insider'. Bearing the label of a 'researcher' implies heightened responsibility to mitigate researcher's biases, especially considering that the research directly impacts the community in which I am personally involved in. Fortunately, my familiarity and established relationships with practitioners in the community facilitate communication and access to resources, albeit some complications when requesting for research assistance due to busy schedules and non-responses. In addition to that, certain aspects of this research's discussions stem from my firsthand experiences and observations (autoethnographic accounts), supported by interviews. I acknowledge and address any conditions, considerations, and resistances throughout the research process, committing to transparency and integrity in balancing my roles.

With a background in Western classical music from a young age, my venture into the Chinese orchestra began in 2010 with Lee Rubber Chinese Orchestra, Kuala Lumpur. Initially, I aspired to learn the *yangqin*[1], but swiftly changed my musical pursuits when I encountered the violoncello (cello) during a demonstration session and found its presence in the Chinese orchestra to be quite interesting. I ultimately embraced the cello, and it became the instrument I most strongly identify myself with[2], in the Chinese orchestra. As 'un-Chinese' as the cello may sound, it plays an integral role in the Chinese orchestra[3].

However, playing the cello became less gratifying[4] as I often faced questioning about my position in a 'Chinese' orchestra without playing a Chinese musical instrument. This led me to pick up the *pipa*, then the *ruan*, and I eventually self-taught to play several other Chinese musical instruments. Although I occasionally offered classes and musical advice to

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[1] It is challenging to secure a position to learn the *yangqin* in any orchestra, primarily because of the scarcity of instruments and available openings.

[2] The *ruan* family became what I identified myself with to present my 'Chinese-ness', also due to their versatility in musical collaborations.

[3] The cello, double bass and other expanded Chinese bass instruments are foundational sections in the Chinese orchestra.

[4] Regardless, the decision to learn the cello provided me with versatility and opportunities to play both Western classical and Chinese music. Interestingly, my experience mirrors many professionals I have interviewed, as it is a common trajectory to begin the journey into Chinese orchestra by learning the cello.

juniors, the opportunities for formal training or skill development were limited due to my other commitments.

Moreover, my encounters with Western symphony orchestra players highlighted that my cello skills were not as refined, despite fulfilling a different purpose in the Chinese orchestra. The discrepancies in musical education from different teachers and arguments about what is 'correct' also raised my curiosity about the lack of synchronicity in the education of musical skills, even in commonly known instruments like the *erhu* and *pipa*. Factors such as instrument construction and material have also sparked debates within the community, prompting my contemplation about the development and expansion of instrument families in the Chinese orchestra in relation to their musical potentials.

Throughout my involvement, I cultivated a network in the community through numerous invitations to participate in orchestra activities, playing different instruments across diverse regional and cultural contexts of Mainland China and Taiwan. These included festivals, concerts, workshops, exchanges, and more, that exposed me to a myriad of teaching, learning, and performing styles. As an observer, I frequently compare instructors and groups, noting similarities in musicality and differences in the execution of plans and operations, subject to various external factors.

Interestingly, this comparison between regions (or orchestras) is not limited to my own observations, but is also an open subject of debate within the Chinese orchestra community, either through watching performance videos online or through word of mouth, if not having experienced the difference themselves. In addition to the comparative discourse is the discussion of Malaysia as the region that faces the most challenges in terms of Chinese orchestra development. The dynamic surrounding the defensiveness of identity is fascinating, and I found it worthy of examination, thus leading me to my master's dissertation on the decolonization and cultural identity of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia (see Tan E., 2019). Interviewing instructors and conductors from other countries provided valuable insight into Malaysia's Chinese orchestra landscape and its future possibilities, laying the groundwork for my current research.

From 2019 to 2021, I collaborated with some Chinese orchestra musicians on a non-profit project to document the history of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. We have travelled across the states of Selangor, Melaka, and Johor to interview the senior practitioners and pioneers of the Chinese orchestra during its early years in Malaysia. Although the project

was meaningful and well-received, it unfortunately had to be halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, slowing to occasional online interviews. It was later retaken in full force when the pandemic subsided, but I became occupied with other matters and ceased to participate in it. The publication, *The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia* (2022), serves as the newest reference for the history, development, and key actors of Chinese orchestras in Malaysia. This brief involvement enriched my resources and contacts that are useful for my ongoing research.

Since starting my undergraduate degree, I am active in the University of Nottingham Malaysia Chinese Orchestra (UNMCO), participating in all but its inaugural concert. The 2020 concert faced cancellation due to Covid-19, leading to challenges such as reduced membership and participation, which motivated the theme of the resilience of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem when confronted with obstacles or 'disruptions'.

Additionally, UNMCO collaborates with the University's musical theatre productions as a 'blended orchestra' that integrates Chinese and Western instruments. The artistic initiative overseeing these projects, known as *Uni Per Arts*[5], is founded by my co-supervisor, Dr Sergio Camacho, with consistent support from my principal supervisor, Prof Joanne Lim. I am also an active part of *Uni Per Arts*; we engage the UNMCO and other musical groups to create hybridized musical compositions with Chinese instruments.

I am also a member of a hybrid music band that incorporates Indian, Chinese, and Spanish instruments, experimenting with musical styles across various cultures. Arguably, while musical hybridity in Malaysia has coexisted with sociocultural and political evolutions, there are more recent efforts to present music beyond superficial representations of multiculturalism. This paper will provide an in-depth exploration of multiculturalism and associated artistic endeavors.

Despite my passion in music, I did not pursue a musical career, even though my extensive years of musical experience and expertise are provisions for success had I chosen that path. Instead, my background in media, communications, and cultural studies allows me to align my research with my musical passion that fosters the growth of the Chinese orchestra community in a different way. As mentioned, my master's dissertation laid crucial

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[5] The aim of the platform is to bring together students, staff, alumni and the extended community, to elevate the prominence of performing arts in the University of Nottingham Malaysia and beyond.

foundations for this study, and my other publications have added insight to the limited literature on Chinese orchestras in Malaysia.

My strong affinity for environmental matters has inspired me to draw connections between the cultural formation of the Chinese orchestra and nature. This research demonstrates that music and humans are intricately rooted to the environment, consciously acknowledged or not. For this, Titon (2020: 170) compellingly argues that culture is not an entity to be owned; much like nature, culture is living and renewable, and those who support culture sustainability act as its stewards. Identifying with this role, I seek to instill in everyone an enthusiasm for the preservation, education and outreach of cultures and traditions in their lived spaces.

With increased research experience and a deeper understanding of the Chinese orchestra, I now investigate advanced theories of culture and society at a postgraduate level, with aspirations of creating an updated overview of the Chinese orchestra landscape in Malaysia through the analogy of a cultural ecosystem. Besides that, I assembled a series of sustainable strategies, or blueprint, that details the diverse trajectories taken by actors of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, all while exploring novel intercultural approaches to present Chinese music in a globalized landscape.

In my process of discovery, I have realized that there is no single, clearly defined pathway within the Chinese orchestra, echoing Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the assemblage and rhizome. It is precisely this complex assemblage that renders the Chinese orchestra fascinating and worthy of study in terms of its resilience and sustainability. Therefore, I would like to position myself in discourse alongside Titon, and Deleuze and Guattari, with the role as an individual within this network of actors, as a steward who safeguards the intangible values of the Chinese orchestra. Further to that, I invite others to join me in this perpetual journey of stewardship, dedicated to the shared preservation of our cultural and natural resources.

Key Terminology and Definitions

Prior to any further discussions, it is essential to clarify and define recurring key terminologies throughout this study. These terms generally fall into three categories: terms pertaining to the Chinese orchestra; ecology and ecosystem-related terms; and terms associated with concepts and theories.

a. Chinese Orchestra

The primary keyword at the forefront of this research is, inevitably, 'Chinese orchestra'. Essentially, the nomenclature, in the Chinese language, varies across four main active regions of the music—Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore and Malaysia. Briefly, Taiwan retains the original China nomenclature of *guoyue* (国乐), denoting 'music of the nation', whereas Mainland China rebranded it as *minzu yinyue* (民族音乐) or *minyue* (民乐), signifying 'people's music', after the CCP changes its narratives to cater to its new political orders; in Hong Kong, it is renamed *zhongyue* (中乐) (*zhonghua*'s music 中华的音乐), translating to 'music of the Chinese', to dissociate from the PRC (Lee, 2018a: 103). In Malaysia and Singapore, it is referred to as *huayue* (华乐), meaning 'Chinese ethnicity music'.

Table 1: Main Regions of the Chinese Orchestra and Its Nomenclature

Region	Romanized nomenclature	Chinese characters	Literal meaning
Hong Kong	*Zhongyue*	中乐	Chinese music
Singapore, Malaysia	*Huayue*	华乐	Chinese ethnicity music
China	*Minyue*	民乐	People's music
Taiwan	*Guoyue*	国乐	Nation's music

Together, Wong (2009) observes that the naming of the Chinese orchestra in these four main regions combine to form the word *zhonghua minguo* (中华民国) or 'Chinese Republic'. He suggests a political meaning to this uncoincidental nomenclature across

regions[1], that also reflects the history of the inception of the Chinese orchestra. A product of the New Cultural Movement in China, the Chinese orchestra—although now bearing multiple meanings—carries a deeper significance of cultural identity in the Chinese language. In English, the nomenclature is widely recognized with a single denomination. This highlights differences in cultural perception rooted in language and semiotics. Within this thesis, 'Chinese orchestra' consistently refers to discussions about the subject *in Malaysia*, unless otherwise stated.

In Chinese, '*huayue*' (华乐) adds semantic complexity with interchangeable implications depending on the context. The versatility of *huayue* is better illustrated through word combinations in Chinese, often carrying a dual denotation of 'Chinese orchestra' and 'Chinese music' (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A Summary of Contexts for the Mention of '*Huayue*' during Interviews

Firstly, *huayue* in the context of this research refers specifically to two types of music—traditional or folk Chinese music and any music presented in the Chinese orchestra formation, as denoted by its referred regional nomenclature in Malaysia and Singapore. *Huayue* does not encompass musical styles of the popular music industry but rather is a

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[1] There are practitioners who argue that this is merely a coincidence, suggesting that people might be ascribing too many meanings to such linguistic variations, creating what they perceive as conspiracy theories that contribute to keeping the regions divided.

specific form of Chinese music with regional and folk music origins, often associated with traditional Chinese culture. Regardless, over time, the significance of *huayue* becomes somewhat blurred as it undergoes hybridization, modernization, and deviations from predefined traditional Chinese musical characteristics in contemporary compositions. Therefore, the umbrella term *'huayue'* will be used interchangeably with 'Chinese orchestra' or 'Chinese music' in certain contexts of this research to convey the representations of this particular form of Chinese musicality.

Secondly, the concept of 'Chinese orchestra' extends beyond a full orchestra formation that takes after the Western orchestral system (*huayue tuan*, *tuan* (团) meaning 'formation' or 'organization'). At times, it can incorporate different forms of ensembles and solo musicians, although they are equally represented in preexisting denominations[2]. 'Chinese orchestra' stems from musicians who participate in different musical formations to play Chinese musical instruments, which may also include some Western musical instruments.

Comparing the Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese orchestra environments, both originated from the emigration of the proletariat Chinese from Southeast China and are referred to by the anglicized acronym 'CO'[3]. In Malaysian English, the term 'Chinese orchestra' and its abbreviation 'CO' encompass the denotations related to *huayue*, such as when referring to learning Chinese instruments ('learning CO', *xue huayue* 学华乐), or when indicating rehearsal locations or going for practice (both 'going to CO', *qu yuetuan* 去乐团, *qu lianxi* 去练习). Overall, this umbrella term carries multiple, interchangeable meanings that are more particularized in Chinese. 'CO' is strategically applied to facilitate comprehension in the multicultural and multilingual Malaysian society. Regardless, this context of 'Chinese orchestra' consistently connects to Chinese musical instruments such as the *pipa, erhu, dizi*, and extends to include some non-Chinese instruments. This linguistic dichotomy is a manifestation of the unique characteristic of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra landscape.

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[2] One example is the naming of the University of Nottingham Malaysia Chinese Orchestra—*malai xiya nuodinghan daxue huayue tuan* (马来西亚诺丁汉大学华乐团); its current number of members and range of instruments are insufficient to form an actual orchestra but rather an ensemble.
[3] There are differences in the semantic significance of CO due to disparities in the primary language of the respective populations. In Singapore, 'CO' is the dominant representation, whereas in Malaysia, the community predominantly uses the original Chinese term '*huayue*'.

On the other hand, the research explores the Chinese versus Western music/orchestra (*huayue* (华乐) versus *xiyue* (西乐)) dichotomy, directly translated from their original Chinese context. 'Western music' refers specifically to European classical music, while a 'Western orchestra' is the typical symphony orchestra comprising woodwind, brass, percussion, and string sections ('Western instrument(s)'). I acknowledge that the term 'Western orchestra', when presented in English, is somewhat problematic, as this orchestral formation is now globalized, no longer confined to regions of Europe. Nonetheless, the Chinese orchestra's origins are rooted in this dichotomy and is unable to escape its implications. There is no intention to impose additional connotations to the controversial East-West binary.

As a general practice, new Chinese terms or significant translations will be introduced in italicized romanization and/or their corresponding Chinese characters, meaning, or definition, where necessary. Subsequently, they will only be written in italicized romanization. A glossary in Appendix I lists relevant Chinese terms with translations.

b. Ecology and Ecosystem-related Terminology

(Cultural) Ecosystem, Ecology

Ecological studies have long sought to delineate and understand the ecosystem using various scientific approaches, including, firstly, the organism-centric approach, secondly, the conceptualization of ecosystems as processes emphasizing matter and energy flow, and thirdly, the consideration of geographic areas with similar topology, climate, and biota (Blew, 1996). However, over time, the definition of ecosystem remains equivocal and is heavily contingent on its theoretical underpinning, or sometimes the absence thereof (Tsujimoto et al., 2018). In the scientific structure, ecosystem components form three hierarchical levels that function cohesively: organism (individual), population (neighborhood), and community (city). The ecosystem is established within a geographical area—both natural and built environments.

Along a similar trajectory, the examination of the Chinese orchestra in this research aligns with approaches of Blew (1996)— the Chinese orchestra is the focal point that expands to include broader contextual structures; the ecosystem is conceptualized through an assembling of connections and interactions among its actors; and lastly, the geographical landscape plays an important role, given the diverse functionalities of the Chinese orchestra

across different regions. Yet, cultural considerations add complexity to this analytical framework.

The application of the ecosystem to music in a less structural and functionalist manner would entail the interaction of musical communities with physical and cultural factors of its musical environment (Titon, 2020: 156). Consequently, there is a fundamental distinction between the natural and cultural (or musical) ecosystems: cultural ecosystems can experience increased interconnection to form networks or rhizomes (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), avoiding hierarchical structures. Individuals may engage in multiple ecosystems, unlike organisms in natural ecosystem confined to a single population. Nevertheless, any form of ecosystem always comprises a community of diverse living organisms of different populations (biotic components) and their environment (abiotic components), interconnected through nutrient cycles and energy flows.

In the same sphere, 'ecology' is the study of relationships and interactions of living organisms with other living organisms and the surrounding— 'the biology of ecosystems'. Major ecological issues today that involve human activities include pollution, global warming, and species extinction. Effectively, 'cultural ecology' is developed by factoring the human element into ecological studies, attempting to make sense of human behavior and activities. Frake (1962) defines it as 'the study of the role of culture as a dynamic component of any ecosystem', while de Bruin and Southcott (2023) sees cultural ecology as 'a collective fusion of horizons and possibilities'. Undoubtedly, culture and its environment thrive when both operate in harmony, and one can never be disassociated from another in search of expansion, much less the preservation of culture.

For this research, 'ecosystem' and 'cultural ecosystem' are interchangeable terms, unless specified otherwise. 'Ecosystem' is consistently applicable in reference to the natural environment. Similarly, other terms are also transposable between the natural environment and the built cultural environment of the Chinese orchestra.

Sustainability, Resilience

'Sustainability', or 'sustainable development' was first defined by the United Nations as 'development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 41). Since then, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that integrates the safeguarding and promotion of

cultures. Cultural heritages and creativity are recognized for their impact on economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (Hosagrahar, 2017).

Within the framework of this research, sustainability acknowledges the interconnectedness of practices impacting the environment, society, economy, and other necessities of present and future generations. It aims to achieve a stable ecosystem while managing internal changes (adaptive management method) to ensure the continuity, diversity, and resilience of future communities.

Then, 'resilience' is crucial in sustainability as the ability to rebound after a change of state to a less desirable one (Titon, 2020: 198). A resilient system can recover and retains its integrity and core functions despite disturbances (Gunderson, Allen and Holling, 2009: xiv-xvi). Advocating resilience as a strategy ultimately leads to sustainability as the overarching goal. For this research, resilience pertains to the Chinese orchestra's self-regulating capability, as a cultural heritage, to rebound from obstacles imposed upon the ecosystem, rather than resisting change, which is counterintuitive to music-making practices.

c. Theoretical Terminology

Binaries of 'East/West', 'traditional/modern', 'nature/culture', etc. persist in discussions because they have historically constructed the Chinese orchestra formation. It would be dismissive to overlook this historical development to impose a non-binary research lens. Instead, binaries expand vast possibilities of what could otherwise be. To avoid being constrained in a research perspective that is blinded from other possibilities, the ethos here is to deconstruct these binaries by discussing them and recognizing the spectrum of hybridity in between and potentially beyond. Clear definitions and clarifications of these concepts at this point would facilitate understanding in future elaborations.

Traditional/Modern

'Traditional', as defined here, is not a relic of the immemorial past, but a living entity shaped by constant creation and adaptation to the contemporary. It is intimately linked to identity, with its nostalgic resonance becoming most prominently felt when a community or society undergoes transformative shifts in its way of life (Graburn, 2001). Tradition reflects a carefully curated cultural continuity that extends beyond a fixed, historical construct, and

undergoes complex revolution processes towards an idealized societal vision to create a sense of shared heritage[4].

Along the spectrum, the Chinese orchestra paradoxically occupies a 'modern' stance as it is a relatively recent formation, holding the idea of novelty, creativity, and a deliberate departure from constraining definitions of tradition. This conventional conception of modernity poses difficulties in understanding tradition and prompts a critical question—is modernity inherently antithetical to tradition, precluding any possibilities of coexistence? As argued by Graburn (ibid.), tradition does not operate in opposition to modernity; it instead fortifies modernity by empowering people to create meanings in life.

In this research, tradition continues into modernity, or the contemporary, although the public perception of *huayue* is often intertwined with nostalgia, embedding it in the past. This study argues for the coexistence of tradition and modernity, challenges rigid definitions and polarizations of the traditional/modernity dichotomy. An example of flight from this framework, traditional Chinese musical instruments, despite being labelled as such, undergo modifications that transition into the contemporary. The Chinese orchestra—akin to other contexts—exists in modernity as a tradition passed down and modified by successive generations. Therefore, the consistent coining of the Chinese orchestra as '*modern*' is problematic since it disregards its inherent traditionality and perpetuates a false dichotomy of it as something of the past once its modernity translates into traditional. Instead, the Chinese orchestra should be understood as a continuation of tradition into the contemporary, like the Western symphony orchestra, which does not require modifiers to support its traditionality.

West/Westernization

It is fundamental to reiterate that the 'West' (and all associated terms) in music primarily denotes Europe as the birthplace of the classical music genre and the symphony orchestra. However, the concept extends beyond geographical confines to include regions like the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, among others, metaphorically representing a civilization that incorporates geographically non-Western nations that have embodied Western values (McNeill, 1997: 514).

'Westernization' refers to the process where society adopts Western ways of life, often carrying concepts of modernity and coloniality, a complex connection of heterogeneous

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[4] The examination of traditions and identity is discussed in my earlier work (Tan E, 2019) using Raymond Williams' notions of dominant, residual, and emergent.

nodes within historical contexts (Mignolo, 2011: 66-67). The Chinese orchestra is firmly embedded in this matrix of power as a direct product of Westernization efforts in China under the New Cultural Movement. However, China has also selectively embraced Western strengths while retaining its 'core' identity (ibid.: 35).

Regardless, the influence of Westernization with its colonial implications is inherent in the Malaysian society. Cultural and identity politics shape Malaysia's traditional arts landscape. The significance of the colonial discourse is acknowledged when investigating the Chinese orchestra's unique context from a decolonizing perspective, without succumbing to grand narratives.

Globalization

'Globalization', associated with Western modernity, is composed of processes that transform human affairs by connecting and expanding activities across regions and continents (Held et al., 1999: 15). Analogous to Westernization, globalization involves the confluence of global forces across multiple assemblages. In this study, 'globalization' is a catalyst for cultural modernity and urbanization, enabling the circulation of Chinese orchestra and its music (as cultural products) beyond its geographical origins.

Multiculturalism

Accompanying globalization are multiple notions of '-culturalism'—multiculturalism, interculturalism and cross-culturalism. Multiculturalism describes a society with several cultural groups that may not interact extensively. On another level, interculturalism involves mutual cultural exchanges, fostering strong relationships among constituent cultural groups. Conversely, cross-culturalism entails a dominant culture contrasting with the remaining, without leading to collective transformation (Schriefer, 2016). These concepts are essential to interpret the Malaysian society and understand *huayue* innovations. Multiculturalism is favored by the Malaysian government to manage its plural society, upholding the idea of 'ethnicity' in its political discourse (Noraini and Leong, 2013: 724). Although instances of interculturalism do exist, this paper generally employs multiculturalism to represent the plural social structure in Malaysia. Cross-culturalism is often associated with musical collaborations involving different ethnicities.

Hybridity/Hybridization

'Hybridity' is contentious. Crucial for discourses on music, 'heterogeneity' is frequently utilized interchangeably with 'hybridity', signifying a novel level of complexity resulting

from amalgamation, borrowing, appropriation or influence, irrespective of logical coherence (Hallin, Mellado and Mancini, 2023). Its binary opposite is 'homogeneity', uniformity, or similarity in structure.

The concept of 'cultural hybridity' implies colonialism, cultural mixing, power exchanges, control, even globalization. In culture, hybridity is defined as the separation of existing forms and their recombination into new practices (Rowe and Schelling, 1991: 231). Linking music and culture, Mori (2009: 230) argues that hybridity is not an outcome of globalization, but 'constitutes the origins of all popular culture'. Hybridity combines social practices of different origins to generate a new structure, with its diverse variety supported by globalization. Today, it has become a catch-all phrase (Hallin, Mellado and Mancini, 2023) and represents the mixing and fusing of cultural elements to create an imagined homogeneity (Ackermann, 2012: 22).

The Chinese orchestra community in Malaysia can be affirmed as heterogeneous, coming from a nation state with a colonial history. This characterization arises from the assembly of individuals with diverse backgrounds coming together to pursue shared cultural values, thereby fostering conditions conducive to hybridity.

Authenticity

The term 'authenticity' or 'legitimacy' carries multiple conceptualizations in music. Palmer (1992: 32-33) defines absolute authenticity in music performances as being artistically and culturally representative, performed by practitioners of the culture for its members in a recognizable cultural setting, using specified instruments and the correct language. Wise (2008: 84) suggests that pressures for authenticity persist in non-Western world music despite their hybrid nature. This definition raises questions about whether culture can remain authentic when staged for external audiences, or when it assimilates non-origin components.

Essentially, authenticity is a political decision to blend cultural, religious and/or political values into a homogenous culture (Roessler, 2012: 447), creating tension within the concept itself. Thus, authenticity is dynamic, dependent on the setting, context, and attitudes of subjects towards cultural objects. While this research is unable to generalize a single position for its definition, Chapter 4 further explores fundamental models of hybridity within *huayue*, and challenges notions of authenticity and tradition in hybridized music.

Introduction

1. Research Background

The Chinese orchestra, carrying the appearance of an ancient tradition that is believed to have dated back to antiquity, is a fallacious notion perpetuated by a lack of its historical interpretation. In reality, it is a recent cultural product with a historical trajectory of approximately 100 years, catalyzed by political reformation orchestrated by New Culture leaders in China in the 1920s (Han, 1979: 12-13). Contrary to the misconception that likely stems from its association with traditional Chinese music and instruments that date back to the Tang dynasty, the Chinese orchestra is developed in response to the cultural needs of the early Republic of China, driven by the imperative to embrace modernity (Wong, 2009: 47-48).

Discussions of the overall Chinese orchestra history are based on several significant moments from the New Cultural Movement, Cultural Revolution, to the contemporary period. The origin of Chinese orchestra music is entangled with socio-political implications, wherein art served as a conduit to disseminate propaganda under the communist government. New Culture leaders first advocated the integration of Western cultural elements due to the perceived economic and technological prowess of the West. This period saw the establishment of music conservatoires and research endeavors aimed at improvising a modern Chinese national music. However, the Cultural Revolution (1949) was a critical juncture marked by profound changes as musicians adapted to stringent political restrictions. The impact of this period is apparent in influential compositions that emerged during these tumultuous years (Lee, 2018a). It ushered a period of dormancy for the Chinese orchestra, as it was perceived to embody 'bourgeois' expressions. Instead, the reformed Peking opera, known as *yangbanxi* (样板戏), or 'model opera', became the exclusive form of music sanctioned for political propaganda, in which its musical accompaniment incorporated both Western and Chinese instruments (Lau, 2008: 135).

Chinese orchestra music traces its roots back to traditional *Jiangnan sizhu* (江南丝竹) ensembles from the southern areas of the Yangtze valley, first organized in ensemble formations. The Chinese orchestra formation emerged in 1935, with its first concert held in 1942 (Han, 1979: 15). While regional or folk music such as Teochew operas and Yunnan folk music have been systematically preserved in their traditional forms in China, the Chinese orchestra is taking its distinct trajectory as a representation of China's or Chinese modernity,

undergoing rigorous processes of assimilation and development to culminate in an encompassing 'new national music'.

In 1956, Mao Zedong proposed the strategic adaptation of Western perspectives into Chinese art forms, stating the 'let a hundred flowers bloom' approach to Chinese arts for its better understanding in society (Lee, 2018a). Post-Cultural Revolution, the Chinese orchestra experienced a period of rapid advancement in musical skills and instrument design, consolidating to the formations observed today. The upheavals caused by the Cultural Revolution prompted a diasporic movement among Chinese musicians, compelling them to seek more favorable circumstances beyond the political restrictions in China.

In the 1970s and 80s, Singapore became a haven for these musicians. The government's supportive stance toward the Chinese orchestra and relaxed regulations against communism fostered an environment conducive to its growth and development. This influx of Mainland China musicians elevated performance standards and active participation in the Chinese orchestra scene in Singapore[1] (Wong, 2009: 71). Singaporean musicians, who gained musical expertise, engaged in a reciprocal exchange with Malaysia. Skilled musicians from Singapore were subsequently enlisted as conductors and educators to impart their knowledge and expertise in Malaysian Chinese orchestras (Chan, 2003: 150).

Early efforts of Westernization and modernization should not be misconstrued as the abandonment of pre-existing Chinese culture and traditions. Scholars agree that the Chinese orchestra is a product of modernization while preserving its traditional elements. Chinese culture integrates utile Western influences while upholding Chinese aesthetics (Han, 1979: 14; Lam, 2008; Tan E., 2019). Despite perspectives that cast Western music as 'artistically and technologically advanced' compared to the purported 'antiquated and stagnant' Chinese music, Chinese music persists and evolves alongside new Western elements (Tsui, 2002: 228).

The assertion that the 'West [is replacing] the East', and the 'New [is replacing] the Old' (Wang, 2009: 328) coexists with the present reality that the essence of Chinese instruments and styles fundamentally remains, even as new elements are adopted to hybridize Chinese music. One such early day experimentation is the assimilation of the violoncello and

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[1] The decision to migrate to Singapore is political and economic in nature. Insights from past interviews with practitioners of Chinese nationality in Singapore indicate a correlation between their choice to depart from Mainland China during challenging times and when Singapore was actively recruiting professionals for the Chinese orchestra, aiming to enhance the nation's cultural standing.

double bass into the Chinese orchestra to expand its bass range, a practice established into the present, although there are independent Chinese instrument inventions.

Similarly, *minjian* (民间) music—folk or people music—retains its diversity of styles, and is conserved for its cultural value in the lives of the people (see Chapter 2). Music conservatoires in Mainland China play a central role in preserving and promoting *minjian* music by emphasizing its study alongside Western and other world musical forms. Additionally, *minjian* music is preserved at a social level by communities in their naturalistic lived environment.

The Chinese orchestra in different regions have embarked on distinct trajectories of modernity and hybridity, evident in their musical presentations. While certain compositions hold universal significance across regions, each locale endeavors to create music emblematic of its culture and identity. In Malaysia and Singapore, there is an apparent divergence from China due to the heterogeneity of multicultural societies. A noteworthy example is the emergence of 'Nanyang music', aimed at establishing Singapore's distinguishing identity in the Chinese orchestra scene (Chapter 4.3). Malaysia, on the other hand, is neither lacking its own composers who highlight Malaysian traditions in their music, the most representative being Yii Kah Hoe and Simon Kong who are renown on the global stage.

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia has undergone a transitory trajectory from its nascent days as working-class ensembles playing improvised opera tunes to the contemporary landscape characterized by full-scale *huayue tuan*s performing complicated repertoires. Initially serving essential social functions within the Chinese community, it acted as a symbol of Malaysian Chinese ethnic identity, reinforcing its distinctiveness in the multicultural Malaysian society (Tan, S. B., 2000). As Chinese associations formed orchestras with regular practice schedules and recruited new members, the orchestra continued to foster healthy culture, encourage musical talents, and promote social cohesion within the community. Over time, the cultural landscape of *huayue* has shifted from primarily symbolizing cultural identity to becoming a leisurely musical activity for in-person social connection and interaction, especially among the younger generation. These historical transformations are elaborated in Chapter 1 of Findings and Discussions.

Previous studies have highlighted the biggest concern of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra—the lack of support and funding from both the government and society, which then leads to other challenges (Yong, 2016; Tan E., 2019). Interviews suggest that Malaysian

Chinese grapple with particularly demanding conditions for survival, prompting the development of unique coping mechanisms. Interestingly, the 'difficult situation' faced by practitioners in Malaysia brought international recognition to the Malaysian Chinese orchestra scene (Tan E., 2019). The notoriousness is partly attributed to the resilience exhibited by practitioners in overcoming obstacles. Unfortunately, due to the current landscape, practitioners seeking career advancement often feel compelled to relocate to other regions such as Singapore or Mainland China, where more favorable opportunities for livelihood and career expansion are available. Some of these sentiments are consistently articulated by practitioners over the years of development.

In contrast, the Chinese orchestra in Singapore benefited from government support during its early development—although as a political agenda—which led to the influx of professional musicians from China and the establishment of orchestras nationwide, thus elevating its standards and generating public interest (Wong, 2009). Government support is an aspiration for Malaysian Chinese orchestra practitioners, although its realization remains uncertain in the current landscape. Regardless, there is constant effort to forge connections between Malaysia and other locales for support from local authorities.

A systematic comparison with Singapore indicates the resilience of Chinese orchestra ecosystems. Through this analogy, it is evident that cultures, even those originating from the same geographical location and cultural origins, can pursue distinct trajectories after being subjected to an assortment of social, political, and economic factors. Despite these divergent pathways, these ecosystems exhibit a duality—they are simultaneously self-sustaining and interdependent. During independent growth, ongoing dialogues and exchanges stimulate mutual development across different geographic regions.

During the pandemic, several disruptions to the orchestra had significant repercussions on the community, also prompting the exploration of digitalization. Post-pandemic, practitioners redirect their focus towards *huayue* education and finding greater social and governmental recognition. Values of collaborations and creativity in presentations are realized during the gradual effort to revitalize the Chinese orchestra. The Malaysian Chinese orchestra displays remarkable resilience through its vital rebound from the pandemic with a prolific surge of performances in 2023 (Chapters 5.1 and 5.2).

The lens of the rhizome positions the Chinese orchestra as a decentralized, interconnected network that facilitate multiple entry and exit points. Its rhizomatic nature

accommodates adaptive management strategies within the community to foster sustainability and resilience. Extended from it is the Cultural Sustainability Web, which this research proposes, derived from practitioner insights. Creative adaptive management strategies become sustainable lines of flight, or pathways, for the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem to pave the way towards an enduring cultural heritage.

2. Problem Statement and Research Gap

This research addresses the prevailing challenge of the significant gap in current literature, which is outdated and lacks exploration in knowledge concerning the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. Existing scholarly discourse is notably limited, predominantly focusing on historical and operational aspects, with only sporadic recent case studies and scattered dissertations. There are also relatively little published and publicly accessible reference materials, especially in English, with the most significant one being Tan S. B.'s work in 2000[2].

Conversations with Singaporean *huayue* scholars corroborate local practitioners' sentiments regarding the deficiency in its scholarly discourse in the Southeast Asian region. Practitioners from other regions also carry lasting impressions that the Malaysian Chinese orchestra is constantly facing hardships despite its widespread community practice, without comprehending the actual reasons or current state of being. Moreover, literature from other regions often address socio-cultural facets that lack direct applicability to the Malaysian environment due to diversity in cultural representations, or lack insider perspective. Hence, a homogenous illustrative framework should not be applied to generalize the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem in Malaysia. This acknowledgment accentuates the research's regional importance for addressing this gap.

Additionally, the general public holds the common perception that the Chinese orchestra and *huayue* are 'old-fashioned', brushed off as a cultural artifact from Chinese history. Indeed, although some instruments and music of the Chinese orchestra has roots in tradition, it is a modern development driven by political motivations (see Research

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[2] The narrative presented herein stems from the author's recollection of personal experiences in earlier days. The author presently holds no active engagement with the Chinese orchestra. This distinction emphasizes that insights shared are reflective of a historical perspective (over 20 years ago) rather than a cotemporaneous involvement in the activities of the Chinese orchestra. This clarification is essential to understand the temporal context and the author's current relationship with the subject matter, hence the importance of this research to update the references on the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.

Background). Also, the knowledge of the public is limited to public performances of festive songs or cliché Chinese music; it is unsurprising that the most common instruments to the Malaysian laymen are the *erhu*, *pipa*, and *guzheng*, contacted from (mostly improper) media portrayals. Only those initiated to Chinese orchestra concerts will learn to appreciate its diverse contemporary repertoires and expanding sociocultural values.

The increasingly discernable detachment in growth since the independence of Singapore from Malaysia also harbored growing urges from the community to seek increased cultural value and negotiate a defined identity as *the* Malaysian Chinese orchestra of the Malaysian Chinese community—something prestigious and internationally recognized (accepted as Chinese), yet distinguished (Malaysian)[3]. These wide gaps in local and international perspectives of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra motivates this study to reposition the cultural product within the contemporary Malaysian environment and global context.

On the other hand, the correlation between cultural environment and human activities merits consideration, alongside pressing environmental issues such as sustainable development. Cultural ecology, as a framework, scrutinizes changes within a cultural context as methods of adaptation. It considers a range of relationships that encompass individuals, organizations, spaces, and places—an observation unsurprisingly analogous to structures of a natural ecosystem. In this thematic framework, sustainability is essential, as the Chinese orchestra has limited governmental support and depends on public interest. This research juxtaposes the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia with a natural ecosystem, with its operation model, stakeholders, relations, and challenges resembling those found in nature.

In the arts, Markusen et al. coins the artistic network as 'arts and cultural ecology', where the aforementioned components are regarded as 'complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings' (2011: 8). Ingold (2011) challenges the notion of equilibrium and closed interconnection in ecology, likening it to a 'meshwork of interwoven lines', a perspective aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome. Cultural ecology, in this research, encompasses the study of human adaptations to the environment through the practice of the Chinese orchestra, allowing for an investigation of social, cultural, and political movements inherent in *huayue*, thus positioning the Chinese

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[3] In this respect, I think that the 24 Festive Drums is a good example of a transcultural product that appears Chinese, but is Malaysian. The Malaysian lion dance has also successfully gained international recognition for its many inventions in techniques.

orchestra as a cultural ecosystem. The multicultural background of Malaysia offers fertile ground for such heterogeneous associations.

Within this ecological framework, there is an assumption that the Chinese orchestra possesses the capacity to sustain itself and evolve over time. Through active engagement, partnerships, and broader connections, stakeholders can collaboratively stimulate musical continuity and transformative developments, culminating in stewardship to ensuring the sustainability of the cultural ecosystem. Moreover, post-pandemic, the research speculates on the Chinese orchestra's capability to rebound and recuperate from perturbances, drawing an analogy to natural resilience.

Although my previous research touched on aspects of identity (Tan E., 2019), this line of enquiry only partially encapsulates the comprehensive analysis required to deconstruct the present state of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, although it provides a fuller contextualization of the identity and racial problems faced by the Chinese orchestra community. In response, as a personal choice, this study employs the conceptual framework of ecomusicology to reframe the Chinese orchestra, introducing a new line of flight that can furnish both practitioners and academics with a refreshed perspective of its trajectories towards cultural sustainability.
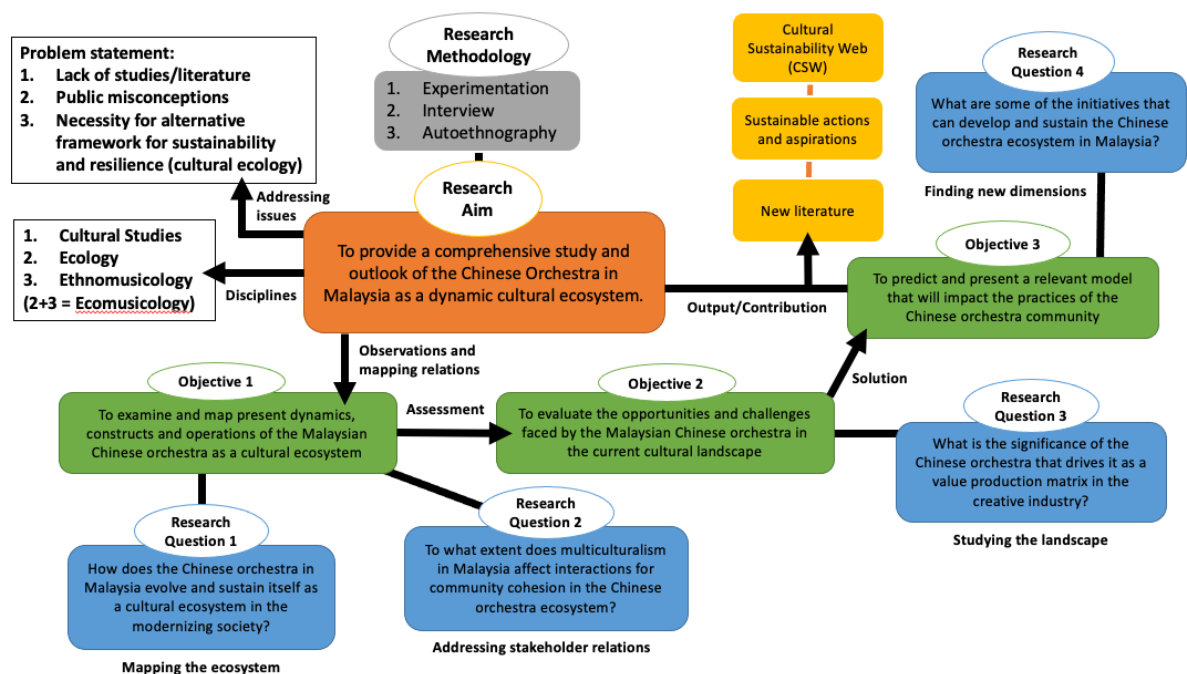
Figure 2. Research Design Mind Map

3. Research Questions

Observations of the general situation of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia generates four research questions that align with the aim and objectives of this research:

i. How does the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia evolve and sustain itself as a cultural ecosystem in the modernizing society?

The first and foremost inquiry involves the remapping of the Chinese orchestra's trajectory to illustrate its social relevance from past to present. The research question also positions the Chinese orchestra as a fluid cultural ecosystem that is resilient in adapting to societal changes and disruptions.

ii. To what extent does multiculturalism in Malaysia affect interactions for community cohesion in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem?

Next, since the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia exists within a multicultural society, the second research question directs attention to the Chinese orchestra's interactions and implications within both the Malaysian Chinese community and the wider society. This line of enquiry intends to ascertain the existence of cultural exchanges among ethnicities and discern their nature—whether they are positive or negative to community cohesion, or whether the community embodies multiculturalism or interculturalism in its interactions.

iii. What is the significance of the Chinese orchestra that drives it as a value production matrix in the creative industry?

The following question examines the role of the Chinese orchestra in cultural production, as part of the culture/creative industry. Besides its social and cultural value as a cultural emblem of the Malaysian Chinese ethnicity, this question outlines the importance of the Chinese orchestra as a cultural capital that is also essential for the sustenance of the livelihood of its practitioners. Inherent in this investigation is the acknowledgement that cultural activities harbor distinct value and importance to their hosting communities.

iv. What are some of the initiatives that can develop and sustain the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia?

Finally, the fourth research question proposes an assemblage of solutions to overcome challenges and obstacles faced by the community, and to maintain a sustainable culture. This deduction is predicated on the conviction that the identification of solutions would project a positive trajectory for future development. Nevertheless, this research is not dismissive of

pre-existing efforts; these methods are enquired, acknowledged, and incorporated in accordance with methodologies that will assist the community to flourish and thrive.

It is noteworthy to mention that the research questions and their extensions stems from my firsthand experience and observations of the Chinese orchestra. These questions align closely with central themes that are significant to practitioners, particularly issues that transcend mere theoretical considerations and are deeply entrenched in practical challenges of operations and music. This is especially associated with the explorations pertaining research questions two and three. To corroborate and refine these observations, interviews with practitioners across Malaysia have been conducted, to provide an empirical basis for the identified challenges and disruptions. The methodological triangulation of this research fortifies the research questions to ensure that the research is intimately attuned to the lived experiences and concerns of the stakeholders directly engaged in the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem.

4. Aims and Objectives

In general, the research questions cumulate into the main aim of this research, which is to provide a comprehensive study and outlook of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia as a dynamic cultural ecosystem. This research seeks to establish a robust theoretical connection between three interdisciplinary fields of study—cultural studies, ethnomusicology, and ecology, thus offering a multiplicity of understandings of the contemporary Chinese orchestra ecosystem that escape disciplinary boundaries.

Three objectives are identified to address the main research aim. First, the study seeks to examine and map present dynamics, construct, and operations of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra as a cultural ecosystem. This entails a comprehensive examination of the current state of the Chinese orchestra, introducing its stakeholders and their relations and interactions with the wider social, political, and economic structure. This observation and ensuing discussions are situated within the framework of the cultural ecosystem, to assess the relationship between the community, its musical expressions, and the encompassing environment.

Secondly, the research seeks to evaluate the opportunities and challenges faced by the Malaysian Chinese orchestra in the current cultural landscape. This objective extends the ecological perspective to study and analyze issues confronted by the community in its

contemporary situation. Topics such as the preservation and capitalization of traditions, perceived threats of modernity, the role of the Chinese orchestra and *huayue* within the cultural industry, the support of stakeholders, and other disrupting factors to the ecosystem are considered. The feasibility and efficacy of adaptive management strategies of the Chinese orchestra community are revised to examine cultural sustainability.

Finally, the study aims to predict and present a relevant model that will impact the practices of the Chinese orchestra community. It involves the development of a pragmatic strategy—the Cultural Sustainability Web—that would guide the growth in practices of different trajectories in the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem. Grounded in insights derived from research findings, the Cultural Sustainability Web serves as a tangible outcome that offers actionable resources for the community's sustainable development and resilience in the face of contemporary challenges.

Literature Review

1. Literature Review

Looking from a macro perspective, literature on traditional performing arts in Malaysia is rare, largely narrative that lack in-depth assessments, and are confined to local practices. Even less research is conducted on the Chinese community, or involve cross-disciplinary studies. Hence, the lack of sufficient prior research materials accentuates the future significances of this research.

There is some literature (non-exhaustive) that comment on the overall performing arts landscape in Malaysia, including that of Tan S. B. (1990) and Hoffstaedter (2009). Arguably, the conditions in Malaysia have not changed much over the years, although Hoffstaedter's study focuses on tourism, *Mak Yong*, Islamic art, and activism, while Tan S. B. provides a more generalized overview of the conditions across various cultural groups and ethnicities. One aspect is the government intervention in the performing arts that resulted in paradoxical images and representations of Malaysia to the local and international scene. Outwardly, the state portrays a touristic image of multiculturalism that concurrently reinforces cultural differences, while locally, cultures face biases where certain art forms are emphasized and funded over others. The other is that cultural groups are trying to express new ideas and undermine forms of control to create a sense of belonging. To Hoffstaedter, Malaysia's globalization and interconnectedness, despite existing tensions, facilitates the discovery of new identities through the domestication of global debates. Regardless, the subversion is a continuous process, and this is accomplished through the creation or demarcation of spaces.

Matusky and Tan S. B.'s (2017) work is a compilation of history and analyses that serves as a guideline to the various forms of performing art in Malaysia that involve music. Although the book has the title of 'music', it elaborates as well on a variety of dance and theater performances—all intrinsically interconnected. The subject is classified into classical, folk, syncretic, popular and contemporary, with its temporality ranging from the pre-colonial to post-independent period. Other traditional performing arts related research include that of Johor Old Temple's Parade of Deities and its embodiments for ritualistic performances (Lee and Chan, 2019), the localization of religious rites and processions within the Chinese community in Penang (DeBernardi, 2009), sacred performances of rice farming rituals amongst the Penampang Kadazan in Sabah that became cultural performativity in secular

events (Hanafi, 2008), and efforts to retain indigenous instrumental music in Sarawak that is increasingly transformed and made contemporary (Lim and Mohamad Fadzil, 2010).

Returning to literature with a focus on the Chinese orchestra, Han's exploratory article in 1979 is the earliest to extensively cover the Chinese orchestra's ancient backgrounds, musical repertoires, and layout. Meanwhile, scholarly work addressing the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia is relatively scarce. Existing literature on the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia primarily focuses on historical narratives, challenges confronted by the community, and its aspirations, in works by Tan S. B. (1990, 2000), Chan (2003), Chew (2013), and Yong (2016). A more recent independent publication, *The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia* (2022), narrates the history of regional music, contributions of notable practitioners, and specific orchestras. Despite these contributions, the overall body of literature remains limited, with certain publications being inaccessible, and there may be more potential local writing in Chinese.

In Singapore, a neighboring country with a more active academic scene, there are more recent literature and commentaries on the Chinese orchestra by scholars and musicians. For this reason, literature on Singapore and Malaysia are discussed in tandem. Goh (1998) compiled the history of the Chinese orchestra in Singapore that briefly mentions the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia before Singapore's independence, as well as some later collaborations between the two. This historic writing is succeeded by Ling (2023), who has written a more commentative examination of Chinese orchestra history and development in Singapore from a cultural perspective, in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the Singapore Chinese Music Federation (SCMF). Other writings include Wong's (2009) doctoral thesis on the Chinese orchestra in Singapore and the *TENG Guide to the Chinese Orchestra* (Wang, Chow and Wong, 2020), a collaborative publication by prominent Chinese orchestra figures that features instrumentation and orchestration.

In his thesis, Wong depicts the characteristics and complex relationship dynamics of the contemporary Chinese orchestra scene in Singapore that arose from historical events. He marks the Singapore Chinese orchestra landscape with disunity and competition due to oppressive work environments and stressful learning conditions (Wong, 2009). This observation resonates with the landscape in Malaysia, as highlighted by Chan's (2003) historical account detailing the development of the Chinese orchestra in Kuala Lumpur from 1955 to 1995. Central to Chan's writing is a summary of actions discussed from a 1979 conference that highlights the enduring challenges faced by the Chinese orchestra and

suggested improvements. The conference emphasized the need for harmony among practitioners to raise standards, professional instructor training courses, and Chinese orchestra music festivals to promote Chinese cultural activities (ibid.: 146). Intriguingly, the first conclusion calling for harmony suggests that practitioners in Malaysia were not as united as it appeared, even in the 1970s. Indeed, this issue persists, as indicated by interviews conducted in my previous (Tan E., 2019) and present studies, where disharmony among instructors due to power struggles remains a topic of taboo.

Various case studies examine school Chinese orchestras in different areas of Malaysia, including Yong's (2016) study on secondary school Chinese orchestra practices in Perak, Ipoh, focusing on the history of SMJK Ave Maria Convent, Ipoh. She asserts that the formal education setting in Malaysia provides a platform for young individuals to encounter the Chinese orchestra. The support of educational institutions for the Chinese orchestras has been instrumental in the rapid development and propagation of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. However, a recurring theme, including that of Chew (2013) on secondary schools in Selangor, highlights that student participation is often limited to their schooling days, with a general disconnect from the Chinese orchestra after graduation. It is also noted that the main activities in secondary schools revolve around performances and competitions, reflecting current dynamics within these educational settings.

Another common theme is the longstanding aspiration to establish a professional Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. The conception of this professional or semi-professional Chinese orchestra dates back to the 1980s, driven by a collective ambition to raise musical standards and elevate the status of the Chinese orchestra within the Malaysian society (Tan, S. B., 1990: 147-148). Later, Tan S. B. (2000: 119) notices increased efforts towards professional groups, including initiatives like the Dama ensemble and the Penang State Chinese Orchestra. However, Dama has since restructured into a bilingual theatre company (Dama Asia, 2023), and the cessation of the Penang State Chinese Orchestra have left the dream of a professional Chinese orchestra in Malaysia unfulfilled. Malaysian practitioners aspire to establish a Chinese orchestra similar to the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, aiming to enhance the standards of *huayue* and to acknowledge talented musicians with governmental support (Yong, 2016: 40). On a side note, Mok (2019) discusses the rise or revival of *guzheng* ensembles in the Klang Valley, citing challenges of human resources and finances as major obstacles to the *guzheng* ensemble's expansion. In the current thesis, there are brief mentions of the *guzheng* that link closely to Mok's observations.

The nature of Chinese orchestra music is interconnected with diverse cultural productions and practices. Influential works from the Mao Zedong period often served political propaganda, reflecting the era's motto to 'use ancient material in a modern way, and the Western style in a Chinese way'[1](Mao, 1956), emphasizing the synthesis of both Chinese and foreign elements into a cohesive whole, while preserving distinct Chinese characteristics that underlay the changes made (Lee, 2018a: 104). Lam (2008) asserts that Chinese orchestra music 'embodies interactions between China and the West since at least the late 1950s', continually infusing foreign musical elements. This cultural product, seen as a hybrid product of musical globalization, constantly evolves and reconstructs Chinese identity as a coping mechanism for changing demands. Over time, differences are blurred, and traditions have shifted. Regardless, Chinese music fundamentally wishes to represent an idealized past, that gives it authenticity and purpose.

The global Chinese are adept at locating Chinese-ness through music and cultural practices, including rituals and festivals. These activities aid in the production of imagined and re-imagined Chinese identities and the meaning of being Chinese across localities. Tan S.B. and Rao (2016) identify musical cultures of the overseas Chinese as heterogenous and diverse, and could be examined from their respective socio-political and historical conditions. The authors use 'Sino-soundscapes' in reference to this richness in Chinese cultural diversity, sounds that encompass musical, opera, and much more. Regardless, these communities undergo constant interaction and possess networks between them. These networks and identities continue to thrive and be constructed, adapting cultures for mediation and creating multiethnic musical soundscapes in the process.

One of the prominent outcomes of hybridization is the concept of Nanyang style music. Lee Ming-Yen, an ethnomusicologist based in Singapore, studies this presentation through the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO). Her research (Lee, 2018b) discusses SCO's aspiration to distinguish the culture of Singaporean Chinese orchestras from their counterparts in Greater China by promoting Nanyang style music. Strategies include the commissioning of composers to create music that encapsulates a uniquely 'Singaporean' essence, attracting audiences beyond the Chinese community. SCO further commits to foster this identity by organizing the International Competition for Chinese Orchestral

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[1] *Gu wei jinyong, yang wei zhongyong* (古为今用，洋为中用).

Compositions, with the criteria of 'Chinese orchestral works with strong Nanyang flavor', thereby building a repertoire that embodies this distinctive musical style (SCO, 2020).

One case study by Lee (2019) examines Wang Chenwei's[2] *The Sisters' Islands*, which skillfully integrates multicultural elements, including the Indonesian Gamelan, Malay dance, as well as Middle Eastern influences. The composition's popularity among Chinese orchestras in the region serves as a testament to Singapore's success in establishing its distinct musical identity. This approach to multiculturalism contrasts with Greater China's, which typically involves the Han people and minority groups. Singapore's approach to multiculturalism incorporates Southeast Asian elements without being tethered to the emphasis on Han music (ibid.: 101). In this context, Singaporean multiculturalism promotes hybridization beyond the conventional dichotomy of Han music and minority music elements.

As a prominent Chinese orchestra composer in Singapore, Wang Chenwei has also spoken in academic symposiums and published several commentaries through his personal blogging space. Among that which is pertinent to this research is his conceptualization of ways of fusion and hybridity in his discussion of musical styles (Wang, 2019). In another discussion, Wang (2020) delineates three archetypes of Chinese music—'unwesternized', 'semi-westernized', and 'fully westernized'—under the influence of globalization on the Chinese musical landscape. Wang explains the distinction between the individuality and collectivity of instruments, connecting their functionality and limitations in solo and orchestral settings. Besides that, he advocates the acceptance of Western influences and advancements, and the role of westernized works in delimiting the boundaries of Chinese music.

Malaysia's trends of music hybridity parallel those observed in Singapore, although not as neatly 'packaged'. The Malaysian Chinese packages a transnational form of cultural identity under multiculturalism; Chinese musical works cross boundaries while maintaining Chinese cultural markers (Tan, S. B., 2023). They have been affected by varied narratives and challenges to identity across time, constantly revising the notion of Chinese-ness and national identity to accept and evolve their own Malaysian styles accordingly. Additionally, Chew's (2013) study of secondary school Chinese orchestras supports Tan's idea that the

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[2] My personal acquaintance with Chenwei allowed me to access his research materials and articles. Additionally, his introduction to Ming-Yen has expanded my network of scholarly connections, fostering collaborative opportunities and enriching the current research.

diverse interpretations and intentions of repertoires is influenced by globalization, that results in the hybridization of musical styles. Malaysians have the capacity to listen to and produce a wide array of musical styles, but Chinese performing arts in Malaysia face additional challenges to compete with other ethnic cultural products, necessitating efforts to attract audiences and sponsors for financial security (Loo and Loo, 2012: 339-340).

Researchers also examine Dama Orchestra's innovative repackaging of *Butterfly Lovers,* blending musical styles through Chinese and Western instruments to create a hybrid sound that appeals to audiences with interests in global styles and the group's aesthetics (Lee and Wong, 2018: 75). However, Dama's trajectory towards a Westernized theatre production company, despite still incorporating Chinese instruments, resulted in an exclusive urban middle-class audience due to high theatrical production costs and ticket pricing. Although its sustenance is maintained by enthusiasts dedicated to this hybridized art form, it remains independent from the Chinese orchestra community.

From another perspective, Chiu (2017) explores the relationship between traditional Chinese music and tourism[3] by studying a series of Chinese music genres, including the Chinese orchestra, expressing concerns about westernization that diminished appreciation and interest in these artistic forms, potentially leading to the discontinuity of such traditions. Chiu proposes tourism as a possible avenue to revitalize Chinese art forms, advocating for the integration of tourism design with cultural popularization—a perspective with intriguing implications for the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.

2. Theoretical Framework

Titon first proposed the concept of musical cultures as ecosystems in the 1980s, but it has only recently gained significant scholarly interest. His later contributions in applied ethnomusicology and ecomusicology emphasizes sustainability and social responsibility in safeguarding and perpetuating cultural phenomena (Titon, 2020). Titon's foundational framework likens music cultures to ecosystems with four core principles—cultivation of diversity, recognition of limitations to growth, interconnectedness and interdependence, and stewardship (in Cooley, 2019: xvii; Titon, 2020: 155). These principles form a robust framework for effective cultural policies and sustainable cultural management practices.

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[3] Several efforts have been made to request for the conference paper, without response.

In today's era of environmental concerns, cultural activities are of the same gravitas as natural environments since they constitute our lived environment in society, with inevitable interactions and interconnections that necessitate mutual engagement. Titon's ecological perspective informs the present research by offering insights from the preservation of traditions to commercialization in the culture industry. The musical environment—or 'musical habitat'—hosts both physical and cultural dimensions of music, encompassing organisms, populations, and communities. Heritage preservation is best achieved by nurturing the 'cultural soil'—collaborating with stakeholders to safeguard and cultivate community musical traditions (Titon, 2020: 158). Guattari's (1989) notion of the 'ecosphere', involving social, mental, and environmental ecologies, supports this angle of theorization and merits future exploration.

Sustainability, through cultural ecology, is a multilayered construct involving 'social action, cultural practice, and relationships with other people, other living beings, and the environment' (Cooley, 2019: xxiii). Cultural sustainability is central to ecology, wherein human activities impact the global environment and ecological systems. In applied ethnomusicology, sustainability is defined as a music culture's capacity to preserve and evolve its musical expressions both in the present and foreseeable future (Titon, 2020: 173). However, recognizing that not all cultural practices demand sustainability, the 'sustainability-change' model aligns with Titon's resilience framework (ibid.: xxv).

Ecosystem sustainability hinges upon resilience and adaptive management. Resilience is 'a system's capacity to recover its integrity, identity, and continuity when subjected to forces of disturbances' (ibid.: 213). It operates in tandem with adaptive management as its implementation, to attain and sustain the most desirable state for a system, although not necessarily in equilibrium. Titon challenges conventional sustainability beliefs in agency within nature, suggesting that the attribution of unnecessary 'good intentions' to nature maybe a misguided approach (ibid.: 196-197). The resilience paradigm thus denies agency of nature, questioning the notion of equilibrium in natural systems.

Along those lines, Titon ascertains characteristics in complex systems that enhance resilience. He identifies Foucault's theory of biopower to elucidate the tensions between 'coaching' and 'managing' communities, suggesting that adaptive management is more socially acceptable and effective in achieving sustainability goals as it resembles coaching (ibid.: 214-215). Furthermore, Titon also explores social cohesion, referencing the concept of a 'sound community'—a participatory and united group whose music resonates with both

creators and audiences (ibid.: 258-261). This notion not only fosters social justice, but, in my own interpretation, a sound community that is co-present and interconnected would also facilitate stewardship, which is a crucial element in two of Titon's ecological principles. The concept of 'sound ecology' encompasses interactions between the environment, community and society, economic exchanges, and music. It forms the basis for 'being in, knowing, and acting in the world' (ibid.: 8). Thus, viewing the Chinese orchestra community as a 'sound ecology' implies a holistic understanding of the relationship between its components.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) discussions on the rhizome and assemblage along culture, ecology, and music further challenge linear progressions in complex phenomena, encouraging a reevaluation of cultural dynamics such as those found in music cultures. This entanglement is illustrated by Bussotti's musical score in the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus*:
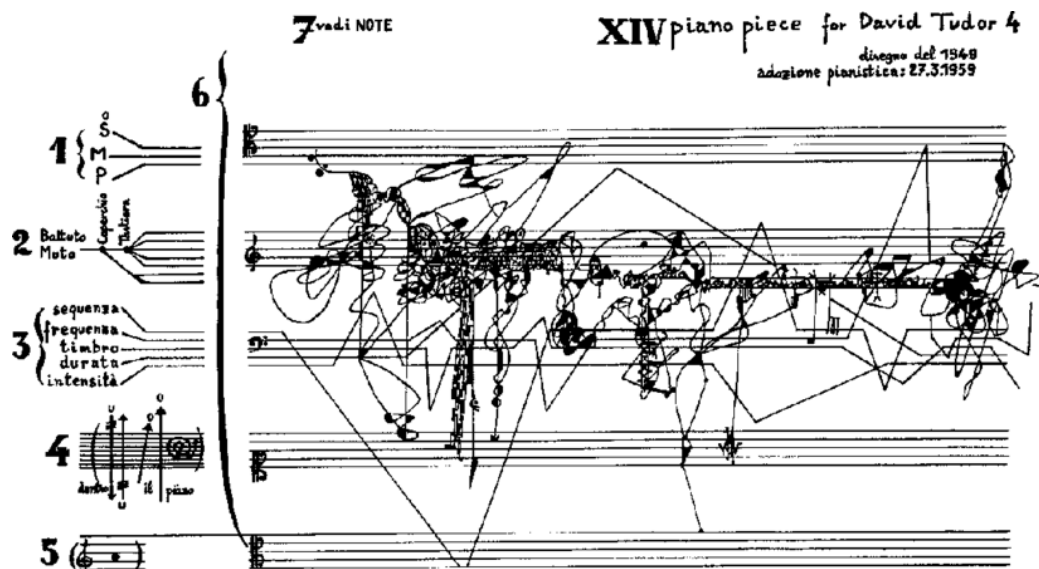
Figure 3. The Illustration at the Beginning of Chapter 1, 'Introduction: Rhizome'— Piece Four of Bussotti's *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3)

These concepts have resurfaced in newer musical and artistic studies related to community music-making, emphasizing the complex and non-linear nature of creation and engagement processes within communities. The learning and transfer of knowledge simultaneously challenges conventional vertical assumptions about how musical experiences are transferred, meanwhile acknowledging the interconnectivity between communities (de Bruin and Southcott, 2023). *Musical Ecologies* (ibid.) explore global music communities, including the Chao Feng Chinese orchestra in Melbourne, Australia, that shows the

commonality in music-making practices of Chinese diasporas worldwide. Chan (2022) also notes a similar sense of belonging within the Chinese community in Toronto, Canada, that shares this notion of music-making.

Another relevant theory addressing the connectivity of society and space is Castells' notion of the network society (Castells, 2004; 2010). Castells proposes a system that constitutes the informational society through networks, nodes, and switches. As society evolves into the technological paradigm, these networks exhibit three main features of flexibility, scalability, and survivability (Castells, 2004: 5). He suggests that culture in the network society operates by shared protocols of communication to foster diversity within an open-ended network where cultural meanings coexist, interact, and modify each other. When applied to the cultural ecosystem, this concept adds to the exploration of the environment and networks of relations between stakeholders.

Expanding on culture and society, Mercer (2002) argues that the recognition of culture and its constituents is essential for sustainable development. To structure his analysis, Mercer creates a framework with four sets of indicators to measure cultural development in a particular society—cultural vitality, diversity, and conviviality; cultural access, participation, and consumption; culture, lifestyle, and identity; and culture, ethics, governance, and conduct. This framework is also linked to cultural ecology as one of the conceptual bearings and architecture towards cultural citizenship (ibid.: 62). Mercer's discussions revolve around themes of social cohesion and citizenship, promoting effective cultural planning that nurtures cultural expressions and actively engages and empowers the community in the development process.

A noteworthy concept in Mercer's framework is the cultural indicator/value production matrix of five distinct value stages that echoes Du Gay et al.'s (1997) theoretical framework of the Circuit of Culture model. Both conceptualizes the various stages of cultural production, consumption, and reproduction within a society. Mercer's focus on these stages explains the dynamics of cultural value creation, dissemination, and reception, that elucidates the complex network between culture and society. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate these processes.
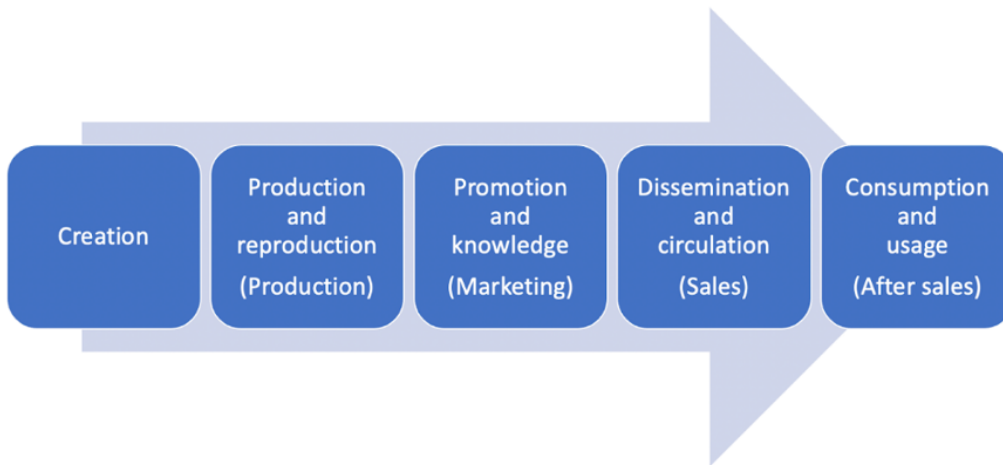
Figure 4. Value Stages in the Cultural Indicator/Value Production Matrix (Mercer, 2002: 116)
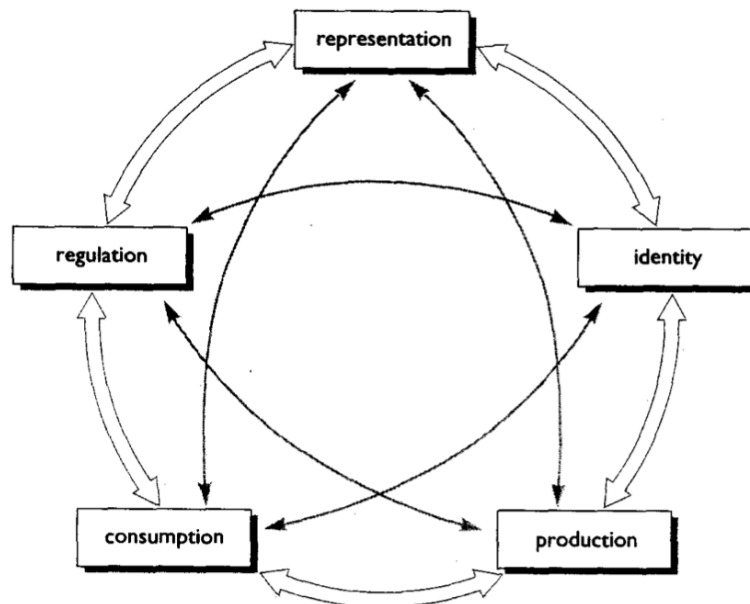
Figure 5. Circuit of Culture (Du Gay et al., 1997: 2)

Next, Mercer also proposes a framework and agenda for cultural mapping and planning, drawing on Castells to develop a robust form of global information (Mercer, 2002: 165-177). The assimilation of these cultural concepts is integral to the ongoing discourse on stakeholder relations and consumer consumption of *huayue*. By borrowing Mercer's cultural indicator and value production matrix to examine cultural vitality, access, participation, consumption, identity, and other dimensions, this approach provides a strong foundation to understand the roles and values of *huayue* in contemporary society.

In examining spaces and geography, *The Place of Music* by Leyshon, Matless and Revill (1998) presents a collective discussion on the production and consumption of music in various geographical locations. The volume raises issues such as the globalization of music, the use of hybridized music for resistance, the creation of soundscapes, and the shaping of national identity. The environment that hosts music is a value carrier and social adhesive subject to regulatory measures. Music, in this context, serves as the entry to further exploration of environmental culture (ibid.: 23-24). These subject matters resonate with this research to study the importance of geographical space on the functionality of music.

Aside from that, Rogers examines the performing arts in relation to spatialities (Rogers, 2012; Rogers, 2018). She proposes three spatialities—landscapes, places, and cities—to explore the interdisciplinary exchanges inherent in the geography of performances (Rogers, 2012). Rogers contends that a lively and diverse synergy exists between space and performances; although temporary, performances wield long-term effects on the community, environment, and built infrastructures. In cities and their peripheries, urbanization and development influence the content and meaning of the performing arts. Policies surrounding multiculturalism can also further promote or inhibit the representation of intercultural performances in cities.

In her later research, Rogers (2018) conceptualizes cultural interconnections by leveraging Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome theory, which is incidentally in line with the ecological approach adopted in this research. Interculturalism is her critical language to analyze spaces of cultural interaction, allowing researchers to study ways of manifestation, interaction, and intersection of aesthetics in the performing arts, while still considering spatial politics of cross-cultural encounters.

This study adopts Ted Cantle's proposal of community cohesion and intercultural relations, especially the intersections of interculturalism with environmental considerations (2024a). Community cohesion essentially envisions a diverse society that embraces interculturalism as a way of life, in which cultural exchange aims to promote a shared and inclusive society. Cantle (2024b) asserts that community cohesion can dismantle stereotypes, place value on diversity, address inequality, and provision equal life opportunities, fostering

trust and strong, positive relationships. His argument prompts a reevaluation of multiculturalism in suggestion of a transition towards interculturalism[4].

In the new context of globalization, interculturalism reframes identity and establishes new power and political structures. An interdisciplinary approach, like this research, illuminates the transition and allows the comprehension of complex relationships in multiculturalism to move on to a new conception of difference (Cantle, 2024c). Although framed in multiculturalism, a balanced analysis of multiculturalism and interculturalism aids the understanding of dynamics in the Malaysian cultural environment and sheds light on their implications for the Chinese orchestra community.

2.1 Theoretical Network

Originally conceived with the background of ecomusicology, this research's theoretical framework has expanded into a network of intertwined concepts and theories, herewith proposed as the 'theoretical network'. Following the assemblage, this theoretical network is devoid of any specific order or hierarchy; each concept holds equal weight to elaborate the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, reflecting the notion that no single aspect of culture is more important than another. By considering the nodes, patterns, and lines of flight in this research, a network is generated—a concise web of relations that may not be elaborated succinctly in the discussion chapters due to the inherent complexity of such schematics.

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[4] Other scholars argue that multiculturalism and interculturalism should not be seen as binary opposites but as complementary models. Meer and Modood (2012) contend that interculturalism offers a more persuasive discourse that enhances multiculturalism rather than replacing it. Instead of advocating for the outright dismissal of one concept in favor of the other, scholars suggest that they are mutually reinforcing, coexisting with tensions at various levels. This research agrees with this perspective.

Theoretical Network (Framework)

Key:
Author/Theorist
Main Concept/Theory
Concept/Theory Elaboration
Supplementary / Extended

Raymond Williams — Dominant, Residual, Emergent*

Mainland China

Benedict Anderson

Malaysia

Imagined Communities*

Ted Cantle

Diaspora & Identity

Multiculturalism / Interculturalism

Community Cohesion

Network Society

Manuel Castells

Chinese Orchestra Cultural Ecosystem

Amanda Rogers

Cultural Indicator / Value Production Matrix

Cultural Citizenship

Geography

Spaces & Places

Cultural Mapping

Colin Mercer

(Du Gay et al., 1997)

Circuit of Culture (concept)

Andrew Leyshon, David Matless, George Revill (Eds.)

Rhizomatic Writing & Mapping

Cultural Sustainability Web (proposal)

Rhizome

Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari

Cultural Stewardship

Adaptive Management, Resilience

Plateau

Sound, Music

Lines of Flight

Ecological Soundscapes

Assemblage

Cultural Sustainability

Ecomusicology

Leon R de Bruin, Jane Southcott (Eds.)

Musical Ecology

Cultural Ecology

Timothy J. Cooley

Aaron S. Allen, Kevin Dawe (Eds.)

Jeff Todd Titon

Figure 6. Theoretical Network (Concise)

As the research focuses on the mapping and analysis of the Chinese orchestra, it does not delve into the extreme details of each theory. Instead, it selects concepts that are most pertinent to the study, given the broad scope of individual theoretical frameworks. The discussion topics simply deserve further exploration from the departure of each of the theories proposed in this theoretical network and beyond. Nonetheless, following the conceptualization of rhizomatic connections and ecological webs, the theoretical 'network' should, in reality, be much more complex in its representations, as demonstrated in the following figure:

THEORETICAL NETWORK (FRAMEWORK)
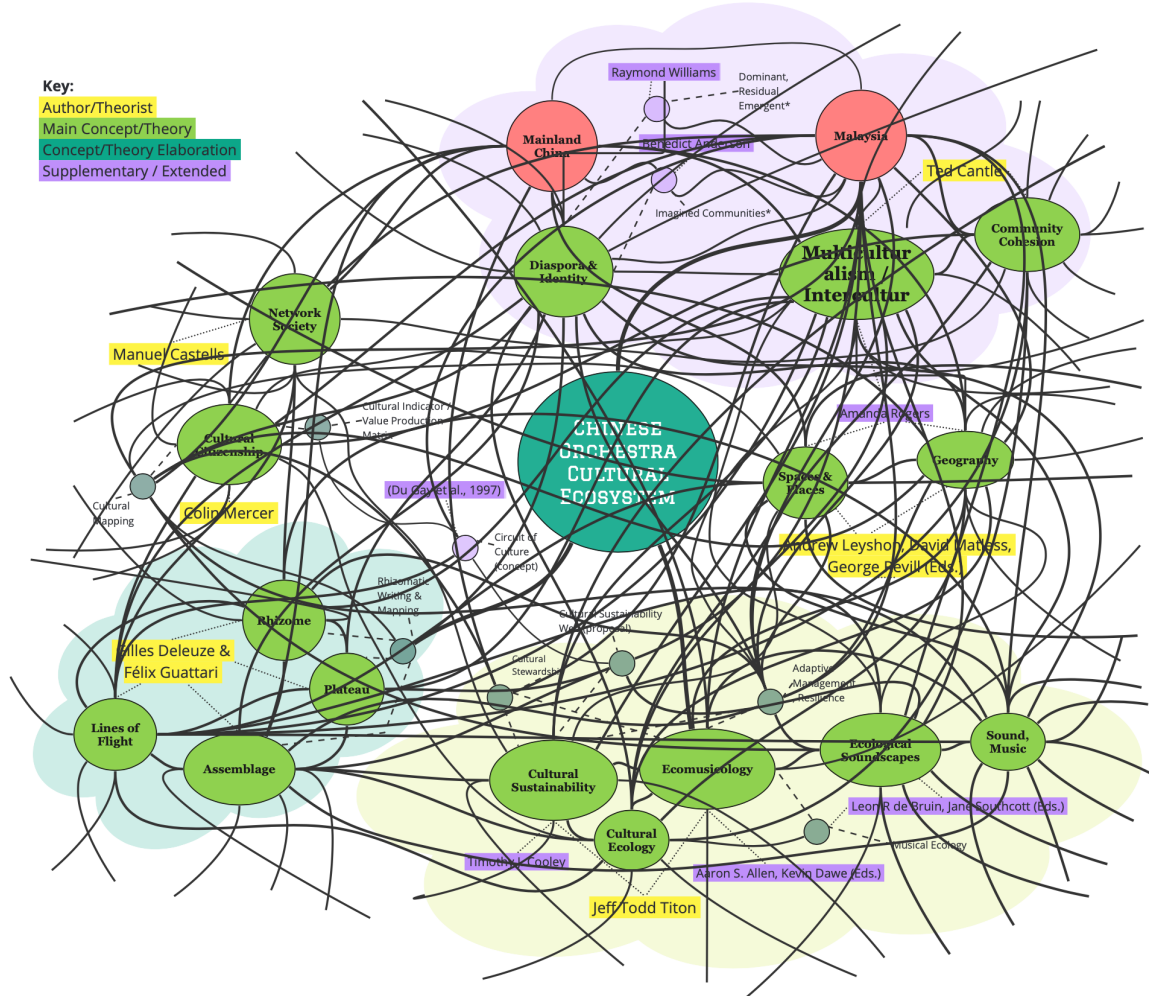
Figure 7. Theoretical Network (Lines of Flight Representation)

Such complexity, while it exists and should not be ignored, needs be reduced in theorization and discussions to avoid making the thesis overly long and complicated. Regardless, this reduction does not imply that other connections cease to exist in those circumstances. Rather, it exemplifies stronger connections relevant to the distribution of chapters. Even though certain concepts are not encapsulated in the main theoretical framework, they are intrinsically related, and the lack of their discussion does not signify a detachment from them or imply that they are ignored; they are merely different approaches to address the same issues.

The eventual choice to compare the Chinese orchestra to an ecological network and link theories in this manner symbolizes the ecological theme of the research. This choice is a priority of the research, demonstrating one trajectory of exploration while acknowledging that many other different paths could be pursued.

3. Research Significance, Scope, and Limitations

The scope of this research undertakes an assemblage of themes and conceptual frameworks that link the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia as a cultural (and natural) ecosystem, focused on its contemporary development in the 2020s. It involves stages from observing the community and the external factors influencing it, engaging in theoretical discussions derived from these observations, towards formulating collaborative and creative action plans for the Chinese orchestra's future. At its core, the research investigates the Malaysian Chinese orchestra's alignment with the characteristics of a cultural ecosystem.

The thematic exploration within the ecosystem framework fundamentally centers the mapping of interactions and relationships among the stakeholders of the Chinese orchestra and explores innovations with the musical culture. The cultural ecosystem framework, encompassing both living components and the environment, engages community cohesion and the geographical and spatial dimensions of music-making.

For a comprehensive research outcome, practitioners of a wide range of location, age, and experience are selected for interviewing. Despite having a national research scope, there are several boundaries to the geographical scope of this research, primarily due to uneven distribution (some areas only have one or two prominent teachers, or there is a lack of orchestras in certain states) and accessibility (practitioners in certain locations are not reachable). Interviewee selection is elaborated in the methodology section, whereas geographical information for different states is discussed in Chapter 3.3 of Discussions and Findings.

Besides that, the study also examines how social, political, and economic base structures, as well as disturbances to the cultural ecosystem, can impact its vitality. It explores the ecosystem's resilience in face of these elements, viewing the Malaysian Chinese orchestra as an open ecosystem that engages in dynamic interactions between stakeholders and the external environment, wherein 'human-induced' factors come into play. For this reason, the research addresses a network of topics such as modernity, capitalism, hybridization, cultural citizenship, the impact of Covid-19, and digitalization.

To provide a comprehensive rhizomatic assemblage of connections, the discussions of several sub-components are acknowledged by this study. Nevertheless, exhaustive elaborations on certain areas are avoided for the following reasons:

Firstly, the primary goal of this research is not an exhaustive exploration of the historical background of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. Instead, it aims to map the contemporary and future trajectories of the Chinese orchestra while acknowledging the ongoing scholarly exploration of the Chinese orchestra's historical aspects[5]. Ample attention is devoted to furnish a concise historical background in the Overview, Research Background, and Chapter 1 of Findings and Discussions to offer contextual knowledge, including a chronological timeline and major transformations that have shaped the present scenario of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. This background informs readers who are unacquainted with the Chinese orchestra landscape, for more informed engagement before subsequent theoretical discussions.

In addition, this study provides limited elaboration on the technical aspects of Chinese music, such as scoring, instrumentation, orchestration, instrumental history and structure, and performance techniques. Where necessary, relevant information is presented within its appropriate context or offered as supplementary references in footnotes. Readers do not require technical musical knowledge to understand the discussions in this study. The main theme involving musical instruments focuses on design modification for their enhancement.

Next, this research is not a full comparative analysis of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem vis-à-vis other regions, although it references literature and makes comparisons with them. These serve as valuable points of reference to visualize the Malaysian context and inspire new ideas. Furthermore, given the underlying differences in value production across regions, certain concepts are not transferable. Hence, to address inter-regional connection, the research incorporates delocalized perspectives of practitioners engaged abroad within the same industry.

Singapore remains as an exception; as Singapore shares a common history with Malaysia and maintains close ties and geographical proximity to Malaysia, the inclusion of its ecosystem for certain topics help to elucidate current contexts in Malaysia. Additionally, this research acknowledges the limitation that an exhaustive analysis of each state in

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[5] A scholar compiling the historical database of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia is also interviewed. The researcher, originally from Mainland China and based at a Malaysian university at the time of publication, shared significant information from an outsider's perspective. He mentioned that there are Chinese-authored works in China about Malaysia's Chinese orchestra history. However, I observed that the community inclines towards literature written by Malaysians ('cultural insiders') over those produced by 'outsiders'. This preference indicates a desire for locally contextualized perspectives that are sensitive to and resonate with their own cultural and historical experiences.

Malaysia is unable to be carried out due to the research scope and aim, although there are comparisons to illustrate uneven development in different locations, caused by socioeconomic factors.

Lastly, the research does not adopt a comparative approach against other local arts and cultural ecosystems, despite their interconnected role in shaping the Malaysian arts landscape. While acknowledging the dynamic and collaborative nature of cultures, this study emphasizes the operations of the Chinese orchestra rather than directly examining various forms of performing arts in Malaysia. It is recognized that certain themes and occurrences concluded from this study are not particular to the Chinese orchestra, such as other forms of Chinese art forms that share similar identity and power struggles in Malaysian society, or traditional art forms that face risks of extinction due to forces of modernity. The research touches upon topics of music hybridity, crossover collaborations, and experimentation, but does not delve into a comparative analysis of different performing arts forms.

Constraints on the scope and capacity of the current research requires setting aside certain topics. Experiments conducted within this research are rudimentary and serve as an introductory exploration into the uncharted potentials of the Chinese orchestra. These foundational discoveries provide a springboard for more comprehensive experimentation with *huayue* in upcoming studies. Collaborations with other cultural workers could unlock fresh opportunities for practitioners of world music. The limitations inherent to the present research amplify the need for continued exploration, and lay the groundwork for cross-disciplinary investigations on the same topic in future.

Research Methodology

1. Methodology Design

This research emphasizes its qualitative nature by creative and participatory action research methodologies. They involve collaborations between the researcher and skilled participants in *huayue*, with the aim of instigating change to the community.
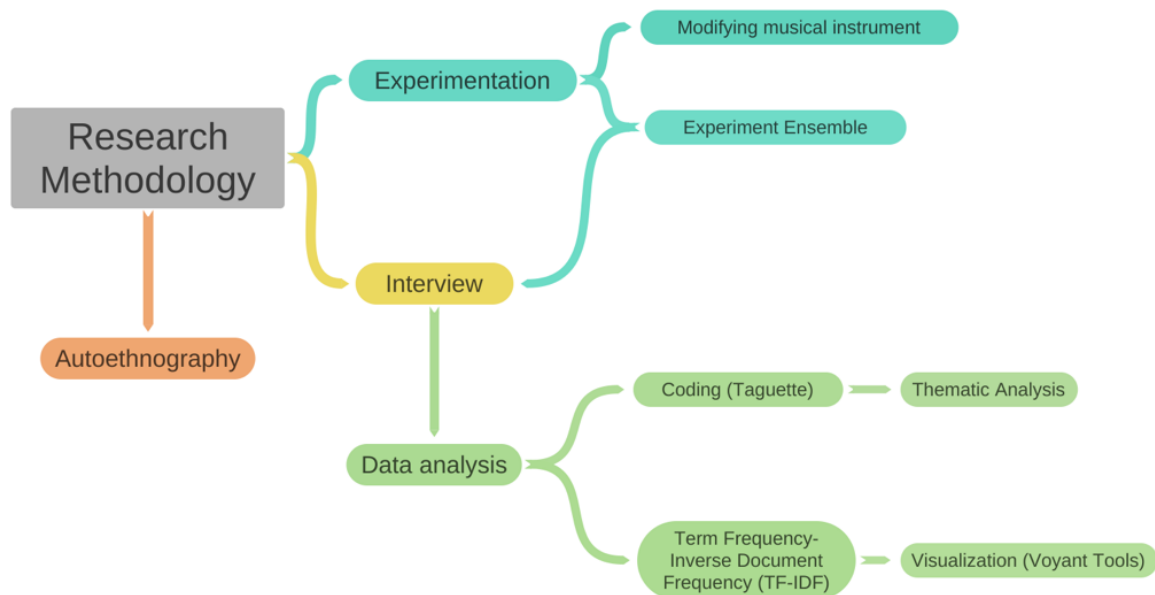
Figure 8. Research Methodology Flowchart

To achieve the study's objectives, a dual method of experimentation and interviews is employed. The methodology design aligns with qualitative data collection methods that are grounded in disciplines of ethnomusicology and cultural studies. The research design is reinforced by von Soest (2023), who suggests combining expert interviews, experiments, and online interviewing to enhance the richness and depth of collected data. The qualitative foundation is further supported by the incorporation of statistical quantitative analysis and visualization.

These methods are complemented by researcher observations in the form of autoethnography, providing an additional perspective from my own experiences—my personal background in music and extensive involvement in the Chinese orchestra. These inform my choices for selected methods in this research. As an artist and insider in the Chinese orchestra landscape, my role aligns with the principles of artistic research, infusing the research with a 'particular kind of intensity', derived from the 'intensive processes [I] know and use daily while making art' (de Assis, 2018: 12). Autoethnography is especially

pronounced in transdisciplinary research, where the combination of methods facilitates the exploration of artistic avenues and serves as a catalyst for producing artistic results, especially in experimentation.

Additionally, artistic research involving active participation from those familiar with the art form balances quantitative and qualitative methods. Interestingly, artistic research methods employed in this study correlates with Deleuzian concepts, particularly the assemblage, which is intricately linked to the investigation of cultural ecosystems. This approach helps to understand the arts and performances from the positionality of an in-betweenness of science and nonscience (ibid.: 14-15).

Resilience involves agency, as such, there is participatory action through various strategies and approaches to keep traditions alive, in other words, sustainability measures. Hence, the experimentation method for this study integrates artistic research with participatory action research for an in-depth investigation of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem. It delves into the organization, dynamics, synergies, social cohesion, hybridization of music, performativity, and the role of the Chinese orchestra in the cultural industry. The vitality and resilience of the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem is examined via a series of obstacles and opportunities that are presented during the process of creation and presentation.

In the social sciences, experiments are carefully crafted scenarios designed to gain a deeper understanding of specific aspects of social structures and processes. In an experiment, the researcher intentionally manipulates independent variables to measure a targeted dependable variable (Webster and Sell, 2007: 191). However, the methodology of 'laboratory-style' experiments in the social sciences faced criticism for being conducted within a closed system. The act of simplifying social events is argued to alter the nature of the phenomenon, introducing an artificiality to the results, rendering them non-generalizable to the complexities of real-world phenomena. Additionally, the lack of random sampling further contributes to concerns about the external validity of the findings (Martin and Sell, 1979: 582). Despite these limitations, proponents of this experimental precision refute that the exactness provided by controlled experiments allows for the formulation of statements that can explain and predict a variety of behaviors in communities that possess equal properties to those of the experiment (ibid.: 584). These statements that are generated, though

not universally applicable, can undergo theoretical replication across different instances of the same phenomena.

While acknowledging the constraints of small-scale social experiments in deriving universal theories, they serve as valuable pointers of potential outcomes within specific segments of society. The fluid conception of culture adds complexity to these investigations because of models and patterns that exist in multitudes across situations, (Adams and Stocks, 2008: 1902). Adding on to that, cultural phenomena can be scrutinized through questions that are carefully designed to refer to theoretically relevant aspects of the subject matter (Webster and Sell, 2007: 205). Experiments conducted in this research can henceforth be replicated in other scenarios. As mentioned before, artistic research involves the active participation of those who are familiar with the art form. Thus, experimentation mediates the state of the existing art form (control) and the experimental variable to achieve a balance between quantitative and qualitative research. Successful outcomes of experimentation have the potential to bring about widespread changes in the long run.

1.1 Modifying Musical Instrument

The first smaller-scale experiment focuses on technical modifications of a musical instrument to enhance its versatility and broaden its repertoire. Practitioners often make custom modifications to align instruments with specific musical needs, a practice supported by research interviewees, who express positive sentiments. Inspired by my personal interest and experience with global music, and addressing challenges in the symphonization of Chinese musical instruments and their adaptability, the outcome proposes a new trajectory for the instrument's development. This experimentation contributes to the ongoing discourse on instrument adaptability and offers insights into the intersection of tradition and innovation within the technical aspects of the Chinese orchestra.

The Conceptualization of Experiment to Modify a Musical Instrument

Observation 1: Chinese musical instruments undergo expansion of instrument family, modifications, improvisations, and reinventions

Observation 2: Interviewees express positive sentiments towards the modification, improvisation, and invention of musical instruments

Observation 3: Musicians alter musical instruments in various ways to play specific songs with ease

Relevance for experiment to modify Chinese musical instruments

Researcher's interest in playing music from more diverse genres

Experimenting with different string materials

Tuning system modifications to open strings

Method

Modification of gaoyin ruan

Alternative trajectory for instrument development to support symphonization

Outcome

Enhanced versatility during performances

Performing larger musical repertoire

Rationale for choosing gaoyin ruan

Personal interest and knowledge of the instrument's playing techniques

Timbre as a solo instrument, yet blends well into music ensembles

Hybridization of music

Parallel characteristics of the ruan family to guitar-like instruments from other cultures

Versatility to play multiple instruments with similar fingerings

Figure 9. Conceptualization of Musical Instrument Modification Experiment

Wang (2020) discusses the blending of culture and science in instrument design, craftsmanship, and performance, emphasizing that continuous reinvention, while labeled as 'untraditional', catalyzes the expansion of instrumental performances. This innovative spirit is evident in instruments such as the *wenqin* (文琴) and the Eco-Huqin Series[1]. These examples illustrate that the intersection of tradition and modernity within the Chinese orchestra facilitates the preservation of culture heritage, but also nurtures an environment conducive to creative exploration, experimentation, and sustainability.

For this research, the *gaoyin ruan* (高音阮, the highest sounding instrument in the *ruan* family) is modified. The selection of this instrument is grounded in my personal investment in the instrument and knowledge of its playing techniques. More generally, the timbre of *ruan* family instruments blends into music ensembles besides solo performance, as well as the parallel characteristics it shares with guitar-like instruments from other cultures. The latter attribute facilitates the hybridization of music and the versatile playing of multiple instruments with similar fingerings.

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[1] A short discussion is written about the *wenqin* in Chapter 1.2, and the Eco-Huqin in Chapter 6.2.

The modification involves open-string tuning adjustments from the conventional 'G3-D4-G4-D5' tuning to 'G3-D4-A4-E5', like a violin or mandolin, to overcome limitations of the standard 'GDGD' tuning when playing chords or different musical modes.

Ironically, the *zhongruan* (中阮) a lower-sounding instrument in the same family, operated on three tuning systems, including the desired 'GDAE' tuning. This tuning configuration was the earliest, modeled after the violin. However, it has been largely abandoned by *ruan* practitioners, recognizing its impracticality in performance of Chinese tunes (Beijing Opera Forum, 2010). The 'GDGD' tuning then became the industrial standard.

Despite being an ideal candidate for direct transference of the 'GDAE' tuning system, the existing standardized measurements of *gaoyin ruan* strings are unsuitable for supporting the increased tension required for tuning two semitones higher. As a result, there is a necessity to search for an alternative that can withstand the bigger tension, such as changing the strings, or adjusting the instrument's neck length, to ensure successful implementation of the new tuning system. It is believed that the successful adoption of this tuning system can assist in future endeavors of music hybridization and cross-cultural collaborations.

While a more straightforward approach for this experiment would involve collaboration with engineers for a scientific calculation of string tensions using different materials, to determine the most suitable set of strings that is durable, flexible, environmental-friendly, and cost-effective, the experiment is conducted within budget and resource constraints, by actively sourcing and purchasing the instrument and strings. Nonetheless, the decision to conduct the experiment within these limitations align with my commitment to hands-on engagement and a pragmatic approach to explore the practical feasibility of the proposed tuning modification.

1.2 Experiment Ensemble

The conception of the Experiment Ensemble is grounded in the pragmatic need for a functional and effective method of data collection, inspired from insights gained through prior research findings (Tan E., 2019) and current observations of the Chinese orchestra community and *huayue* development. Informed by the research's theme of music and cultural ecosystem, the Experiment Ensembles are designed to discuss topics of environment, resilience, adaptive management, and sustainability.

Experiments and tasks aim to study the organization and synergy of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem, music hybridization, and performances and performative spaces. Mimicking a scientific experiment in a laboratory, the goal is achieved by using two formats for comparative analysis: the Control Group, which follows pre-existing practices; and the Variable Group, which undertakes innovative tasks. Instead of having one experimentation group, which ultimately presents itself as a case study, a methodical approach of two groups enables systematic analysis in a controlled environment, compared to an ethnographic observation.

The experiment strategically investigates three main topics to address research questions— the performance landscape of the Chinese orchestra (Chapter 3), the impact of multiculturality on the hybridization of musical compositions (Chapter 4), and the resilience of the Chinese orchestra amid disruptors and opportunities (Chapter 5). This method is both theoretically informed and grounded in the lived experience and practicalities faced by Chinese orchestra practitioners.

Several themes are introduced in this experiment as follows:

1. Space and place

The first theme examines alternative live and digital spaces of performance to understand if unconventional spaces can attract new audiences and enhance the sustainability of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Traditionally, performances are confined to concerts, events, and Chinese festivities, within established norms. The experiment uncovers if these spaces can support the Chinese orchestra effectively in new ways and boost community cohesion.

2. Resilience

Resilience in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem is investigated by introducing interference scenarios, juxtaposed against a control setting (the Control Group) to evaluate the adaptability of the ensemble and strategic adaptive management measures undertaken to overcome these obstructions.

3. Authenticity and Tradition

Hybrid music that blends *huayue* with unconventional elements challenges preconceived notions of authenticity and tradition. They interrogate whether musicians and audiences recognize, acknowledge, and classify these innovations as *huayue*. An intersection of artistic

interpretation and legal considerations[2] prompts an examination of how cultural norms, legal frameworks, and audience expectations converge to shape the boundaries of creative exploration and expression.

The researcher takes a semi-participant role that balances between participant and non-participant. This approach is critical in qualitative research to enhance data quality, aid in interpretation of findings, and formulate new research questions and hypotheses (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). During the experiment phase, the researcher engages in discussions and responds to queries but maintains a non-participatory role to avoid influencing Experiment Ensembles' activity directions, although participants are free to seek help, guidance, or clarification at any time.

1.3 Interview

Interviews in this research is a qualitative, descriptive, and themed research method that explores the subject's consciousness for an understanding of the world through his or her viewpoints, interpretations, meanings, and narrations (Skinner, 2012). Kvale (1996) advocates for interviews as 'conversations' co-produced by interviewer and interviewee, constructing knowledge of the phenomenon during the process. As such, interviews conducted with experts, particularly Chinese orchestra practitioners in this case, prove to be highly effective to understand decision-making and institutional behavior, then enhancing experimental findings with qualitative context and commentary (von Soest, 2023). Therefore, interviewing is a solid method for this research, especially when conducted together with the Experiment Ensemble.

Interviews are semi-structured, following Adam's (2015) recommendation that this format is useful to examine 'uncharted territory' and adds depth to other research methods. To increase participant willingness to share information, open-ended and reflexive questions are posed to interviewees (Knott et al., 2022). A broad set of guidelines covers five overarching topics designed to address research questions with detailed accounts, ranging from personal experiences to broader enquiries. Besides expert interviewing, group interviews are conducted with the Experiment Ensembles. They are structured differently and

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[2] There is an ongoing debate surrounding this issue, as renowned instrumental pieces are subject to reproduction with different instruments, and the reinterpretations become normalized. However, challenges arise, particularly in copyright, which compel composers to restrict the presentation of their work to the instrument that the composition is originally intended for. See Chapter 5.4 on this copyright issues.

conducted in person, with questions formulated mostly on-site, although some overlap with the Interview Guide.

Online interviewing is chosen to interview practitioners, for its effectiveness in covering the wide geographical area of the study. While previously framed as inferior for its potential decontextualization, technology offers scheduling flexibility and convenience (Knott et al., 2022). Von Soest (2023) suggests that synchronous online interviews with experts ensure validity and balanced snowball sampling, although a systematic review is required to assess potential biases. Participants unanimously defaulted for online interviews without any researcher prompting.

Mobile instant messaging interview (MIMI) was initially proposed as an alternative for participants with limited availability. The method, using WhatsApp, aimed to ask the same questions as online interviews. However, it was discontinued after one session due to the participant's slow and insufficient responses (months to complete) despite repeated prompting. Although this method had significant limitations, it provided insights into long-distance interviewing possibilities for busy participants. The single MIMI conducted was recorded as an interview response (Interviewee 5).

2. Data Collection Methods

Alongside the *gaoyin ruan* modification experiment and Experiment Ensembles, two types of interviews are conducted in this research—interviews with practitioners (expert interviews) and two group interviews or post-mortem sessions for the Experiment Ensembles.

To ensure objectivity and organization during data collection, a reflective journal is maintained to document all contact details, significant events, and participant interactions. Ethical considerations are rigorously upheld, with ethics application, consent forms and participant guidelines prepared before data collection.

2.1 *Gaoyin Ruan* Modification

For the *gaoyin ruan* modification experiment, various open-tuning alternatives are attempted, including 'G3-D4-A4-E5' and 'F3-C4-G4-D5', against the original 'G3-D4-G4-D5'. This process involves a trial-and-error approach using strings made of different materials (nylon/steel/fluorocarbon) and diameters to achieve the necessary tensions for the desired

pitches. Two *gaoyin ruan*s are used: one from the renown *ruan* maker Song Guangning (宋广宁), and another from a random factory supplier in Mainland China. Findings of this experimentation are detailed in Chapter 4.6.

2.2 Experiment Ensemble

This research methodology involves a series of experiments conducted through a selected group of musician participants, collectively referred to as the 'Experiment Ensemble'. Throughout the thesis, 'Experiment Ensemble 1' (EE1) or 'Control Group' (华乐实验小组固定组) refer to the same group and is used interchangeably, as is the case with 'Experiment Ensemble 2' (EE2) or 'Variable Group' (华乐实验小组变化组). Table 2 summarizes the details of data collection:

Table 2: Summary of Experimentation with Experiment Ensembles

Number of participants	:	14 musicians identified in general as the 'Experiment Ensemble', divided into two groups with one leader each:
		
		  i. Experiment Ensemble 1/Control Group
		      (8 participants, identified as EE101-108)
		  ii. Experiment Ensemble 2/Variable Group
		      (6 participants, identified as EE201-206)	

Timeline	:	End of March 2023	Recruitment of participants
		2 April 2023	Introductory meeting with participants
		April 2023	Rehearsals and tasks assigned for each rehearsal
		29 April 2023	Experiment Ensemble 1 performance
		1 May 2023	Experiment Ensemble 2 recording
Participant demographics	:	Musicians in the Klang Valley with experience in performing Chinese music/musical instruments and/or Western musical instruments, who are interested in creating hybrid music styles. Participants are recruited through snowballing of connections with leaders of both groups.	
Recordings, Journals, Communication	:	i. Video recordings of rehearsals are consistently taken throughout the experiment period.	

		ii.	Each participant maintains a journal documenting their experiences, emotions, and thoughts throughout the experiment period.
		iii.	Experiment Ensemble 1's live performance is simultaneously streamed and recorded on Facebook Live. Experiment Ensemble 2's performance is recorded and posted on Instagram.
		iv.	Two separate WhatsApp groups are created to facilitate communication for the experiment. Interactions within the group are observed and analyzed. The researcher only intervenes when necessary. Participants are encouraged to communicate freely within the group about anything related to the experiment.
Reimbursement	:	Lunch offered during post-mortem as informal token of appreciation.	

The initial recruitment phase via snowballing successfully engaged 13 participants proficient in Chinese and/or other musical instruments, who could commit to the month-long process. The Control Group has seven members whereas the Variable Group has six. During the first rehearsal, an additional musician joined the Control Group, resulting in a final count of eight participants in Experiment Ensemble 1. Each participant gave explicit consent before their involvement.

Two separate WhatsApp groups are created for communication. Participants are encouraged to freely discuss experiment-related topics. Both groups remained independent of each other, except for one participant (EE107), who was in both groups[3]. This structure maintains separation between the groups, ensuring unbiased experimentation and ease of data analysis.

The researcher facilitated the first meeting with the two Experiment Ensembles on 2 April 2023 to provide an overview of the research process, address any queries, and commence the experiment phase. Both ensembles were granted complete autonomy to organize their own activities, including meeting frequency, location, choice of instruments, and music presentation, to keep the outcome as organically produced as possible. Musicians had the freedom to alter musical scores as they see fit to accommodate ensemble formations and instrumentation limitations. This freedom included the choice of musical instruments,

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[3] The decision to exclude EE107 from certain discussions and details regarding other groups was a result of their dual role as the group leader of the Control Group and a participant in one of the tasks for the Variable Group. To maintain the integrity of the experiment and prevent any potential bias or influence, the participant was instructed to refrain from discussing matters related to the other group until after the completion of the experiment.

difficulty of the score, performability of the scores, performance formation, and presentation style. The groups could also seek external musical guidance or assistance if needed. Ultimately, the objective of this section is to evaluate the Chinese orchestra's adaptive management and resilience to undergo musical reorganization that suits the skills of its existing members and fulfills their performative needs.

During the timeframe, participants are instructed to complete a set of allocated experiments and tasks designed to gauge the Chinese orchestra's proficiency in surmounting obstacles and challenges (see ensuing subsection). Two sets of musical scores are provided to the groups—*Spring Poem* (春诗; contemporary piece) and *Merging Together* (融合; experimental percussion piece). All outcomes, including rehearsals and performances, are documented as video recordings and uploaded to Google Drive for analysis. This documentation provides an accessible repository to scrutinize the developments, innovations, and challenges encountered by each group.

The experiment culminated in a final public performance. The Control Group performed live at a creative market in Klang, Selangor, simultaneously streamed on Facebook. The Variable Group opted to record their final output and uploaded it to Instagram[4]. Post-mortem sessions were conducted during lunch to gather feedback and further inquiry that were essential for data analysis.

The following flowchart summarizes the sequence of events happening for Experiment Ensembles within the timeframe of one month:

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[4] Specific locations and websites are not mentioned to protect participant privacy and anonymity.

Experiment Flowchart
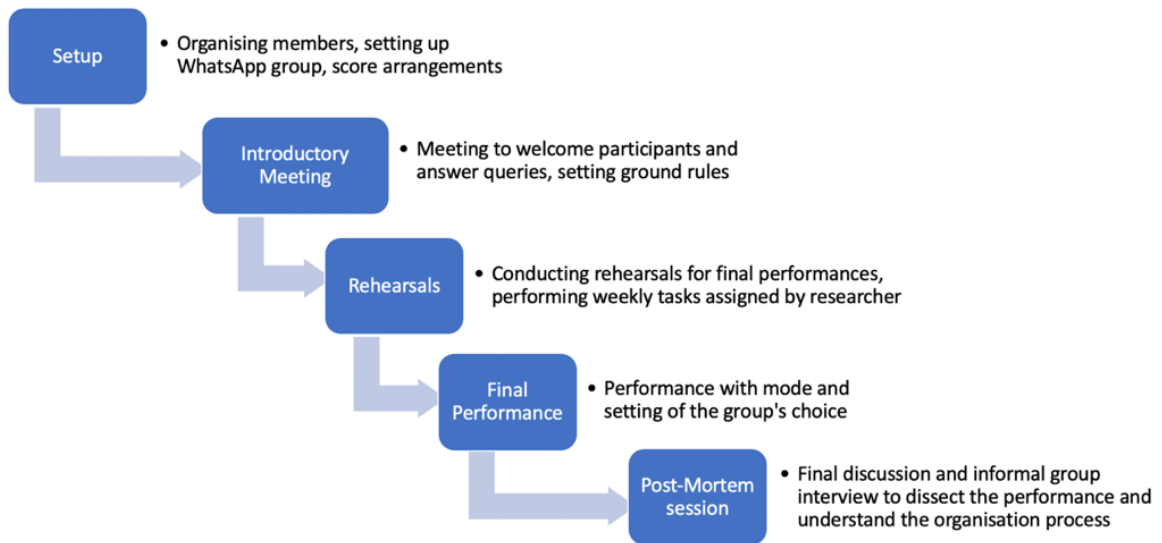
Figure 10. Experiment Ensemble Sequence of Events

Each participant maintains a reflexive journal throughout the experiment, submitted digitally at the conclusion of the experiment. Reflexive journaling encourages participants to reflect on their own involvement in the Chinese orchestra (Smith, 1999), enhances their understanding of the field, and facilitates self-assessment of their musical skills.

The extent and depth of journal entries varied among participants, with some producing more substantial entries than others. These journals provide information such as rehearsal notes, documentations of activities, thought processes, feelings, and opinions. Typically, group leaders noted organizational aspects, while group members focused on their experiences, communication, thoughts, and feelings. Aspects include:

- Meetings and rehearsal notes (time and location, activities, participants present etc.)

- Process of event organization

- Special occurrences and incidents

- Any musical consultations, changes to scores

- Thought processes that lead to creative decisions

- Personal and group discussions and outcomes

- Individual experiences and feelings

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2.2.1 Experiments and Tasks

'Experiments' encompass general events to observe various phenomena from organizational aspects to presentation methods. Meanwhile, 'tasks' are specific sets of instructions to be executed during the data collection period. These tasks are designed to study the strategies and resilience demonstrated by the Chinese orchestra ecosystem when it experiences obstacles and 'disruptors'. The number of tasks conducted by the Experiment Ensemble is flexible, contingent upon the actions taken by the Control and Variable Groups. For certain tasks, group leaders are consulted shortly before implementation, for smooth execution. Table 3 explains the experimentation method and variations in both groups:

Table 3: Summary of Experimentation in Control and Variable Groups

1	Music	Two intermediate-level musical manuscripts are supplied to both groups—one contemporary Chinese orchestral music and one experimental Chinese percussion music. Both groups are allowed to select one additional traditional musical composition of their choice. Participants can alter the music within the scope set by the researcher. The goal is to assess how the Chinese orchestra can reorganize itself musically to suit the skills of its members and their performative needs.
		
		The approach varies between the Control Group and the Variable Group:
		
		  i. **Control Group**: Execute the provided music as is, with alterations limited to adapting scores for the ensemble setting.
		
		  ii. **Variable Group**: Rearrange the compositions to include elements of hybridization in musical styles before rehearsals begin, tailored to the group's characteristics and preferences.

2	Rehearsals	The groups conduct as many rehearsal and discussion sessions as needed within a month to complete the assigned musical pieces. Rehearsal times and locations are flexible according to their convenience. Specific tasks are announced in the WhatsApp group chats throughout the month-long rehearsal period.
3	Performance	Each group is required to produce a minimum of one presentation or performance towards the end of the experiment period, which is recorded. The final performance details are left to the groups, as long as they adhere to the general criteria set by the researcher. The researcher is present for the final performance.

		i.	**Control Group**: Perform in a conventional performance space (later modified to an atypical setting).
		ii.	**Variable Group**: Seek a new creative space online (Instagram).
4	**Post-Mortem**		A final discussion session is conducted between the Experiment Ensembles and researcher for debriefing, feedback and further enquiry into details required for data analysis.

The experiment includes a series of smaller 'tasks', or instructions given to the Experiment Ensemble halfway through the data collection period to be carried out organically. Rather than informing participants of all tasks from the beginning of the experiment, they were made aware of an 'element of surprise' to study various themes of the ecosystem.

Table 4: Summary of Control and Variable Group Tasks

Control Group	Variable Group
1. *Studying space*	
• Performance at unconventional location (typical performance format) • Loss of rehearsal spaces (to seek alternatives)	• Performance at unconventional location • Digital challenge, presenting music online
2. *Studying hybridization of music*	
• Impromptu improvisation and altering of music scores	• Playing with non-Chinese instruments* • Inserting non-Chinese musical styles* (Jazz music) *Informed in the beginning to facilitate rearrangement of musical manuscript
3. *Studying disruptions or opportunities to the ecosystem*	
• Removing musicians • Sight-reading pieces for performance with little to no rehearsal beforehand	• Inserting new musicians • Swapping instruments among musicians

1. Performance and space

The Control Group initially planned to perform at a school nearby, or a typical performance space. However, midway through the experiment, they are challenged to perform in an atypical venue, such as a cafe or restaurant-like setting with free-flowing audiences. In contrast, the Variable Group opted to present their music online via social media, aligning with the initial aim to explore the digital realm.

2. Hybridization of music

The second set of tasks requires Experiment Ensemble 2 to incorporate non-Chinese musical styles into one of their pieces and perform their traditional piece with parts played by non-Chinese instruments. They chose to add a jazz scale section into the experimental percussion piece, *Merging Together*. The task was assigned in the introduction meeting to facilitate score arrangements. Experiment Ensemble 1's music alterations are allowed to arise organically.

3. Disruptions or opportunities to ecosystem

The Control Group is tasked with removing one musician without losing any musical parts. Meanwhile, all musicians of the Variable Group had to swap instruments and perform the same pieces with a different instrument. In another week, the leader of Experiment Ensemble 2 is contacted to accommodate a new participant into the group to assess if the new musician introduces disruptions or opportunities to the ecosystem. On the other hand, Experiment Ensemble 1 faces the challenge of losing their rehearsal space due to an electricity shortage, rendering the original planned task unnecessary. In their final performance, Experiment Ensemble 1is requested to increase their performance numbers and sight-read some pieces. They had to adapt the musical pieces to their existing ensemble formation, with the added rule of having only one or no rehearsal session for these pieces.

Experiment Ensemble outcomes are detailed in Chapter 5.5.

2.3 Expert Interviews and Experiment Ensemble Group Interviews

All individual interviews follow a standardized process, conducted via Microsoft Teams (except for the outlier conducted via MIMI). Meetings are recorded through the software with an autogenerated transcript.

This research method engaged a total of 33 participants[5]. They are naturally drawn from the Chinese orchestra community, with inclusion criteria based on their involvement and performative engagement with the Chinese orchestra ecosystem. The sampling method used is purposeful snowball sampling, which is particularly effective for analyzing specific populations and establishing social networks (Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019). This method, propelled by active recommendations from research participants, not only broadens my research network with new practitioners but also the research scope.

To accommodate participants' fluency and preferences, language flexibility is offered, with interviews conducted in either Chinese or English. Most interviews are conducted in Chinese, except two interviews involving participants based in Singapore and USA, who only referred to key terms and idioms sparsely in Chinese.

Table 5 summarizes interview specifications, whereas Appendix III details the careers and interview themes of each participant.

Table 5: Expert Interview Specifications

Number of participants	:	33 in total
Timeline	:	March to September 2023 (6 months)
Duration	:	1.5-3 hours per interview session
Interview format	:	Semi-structured, audio-recorded, notes taken, conducted in Chinese or English language
Participant demographics	:	Chinese orchestra practitioners from professions of instrument teachers, conductors, composers, performers, music enthusiasts or researchers, and instrument repairers. Participants were identified based on their location, specialty and contributions to the Chinese orchestra community

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[5] Three participants withdrew from the study, and an additional practitioner declined to participate.

There are several considerations for interviewee selection. Firstly, to enhance geographic representation, participants are recruited from diverse regions across Malaysia and beyond national borders, with a deliberate focus on Klang Valley, given its density of Chinese orchestra practitioners. Malaysian conductors, composers, and musicians who currently reside outside of Malaysia are also engaged for perspectives from other regions, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Nanyang region). It also includes 'rising stars' who have garnered acclaim for their creative contributions. Notably, interview participants from the states of Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Perlis are absent, due to the practice of hiring Chinese orchestra teachers from other regions, and significantly low Chinese orchestra activities in certain states[6].

Table 6: Interviewee Demography by State

State	Number of Interviewees
Kedah	1
Pulau Pinang	2
Perak	1
Selangor/Kuala Lumpur (Klang Valley)	15
Melaka	3
Johor	3
Sabah	3
Sarawak	2
Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Perlis	0
Not in Malaysia	3

Secondly, participants' professions exhibit a degree of overlap in responsibilities assumed by practitioners within the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. The role of instrument repairer is identified as an additional profession through insights provided by interviewees during the research.

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[6] Later interactions reveal a reshuffling of instructors post-pandemic, where they are hired across a wider geographical area, no longer limited to their home or neighboring states. This requires further updating in future research.

Table 7: Interviewee Demography by Profession

Profession (Overlapping Roles)	Number of Interviewees
Instrument teacher	24
Conductor	12
Composer	7
Performer	17
Music enthusiast/researcher	5
Instrument repairer	2

Finally, the selection of participants based on their expertise in musical instruments examines how different instruments contribute to the overall dynamics of the Chinese orchestra. Although the *guzheng* is not a conventional staple in the Chinese orchestra formation, its inclusion aims to explore its occasional collaborations, current synergies, and expansion potentials with the Chinese orchestra, particularly since it is an independent instrument. The *guqin* is omitted from this study, given its marginalization from the Chinese orchestra formation and its autonomous role within the broader Chinese music scene.

Table 8: Interviewee Demography by Instrument Group

Instrument Group	Number of Interviewees
Dizi	4
Suona	1
Sheng	1
Guzheng	1
Yangqin	2
Liuqin	1
Pipa	3
Ruan	4
Percussion	1
Erhu	6
Cello/Double Bass	2

The Interview Guide (Appendix IV) is structured to guide in-depth discussions with participants, covering topics from self-introduction to exploring and mapping the Chinese

orchestra. Participants share their perspectives of the current state and dynamics of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia and beyond. Additionally, some questions discuss aspects of music and organization, exploring opportunities, challenges, and growth. The final category addresses the future of the Chinese orchestra. Some participants are prompted with branching questions based on their expertise and the topics they naturally brought into the conversation.

On the other hand, two independent sets of group interviews are conducted with the two Experiment Ensembles with curated discussion topics generated from observations of rehearsal recordings and final performances. These sessions serve as both debriefing and feedback opportunities. Both sessions are audio-recorded with detailed notes taken for analysis.

The first group interview involves the Control Group immediately after their live performance, in the same space. Additional questions are designed during the performance based on observations, and the interview began in a semi-structured format. However, excited participants engaged in an informal and friendly conversation with occasional off-topic banter. Despite having a predefined list of questions, the interview unfolded as an unstructured group discussion.

Table 9: Interview Specifications for Experiment Ensemble 1 (Control Group)

Number of participants	:	8 in total
Setting	:	29 April 2023, in a coffee house/performance space in Klang post-performance
Duration	:	40 minutes
Interview format	:	Unstructured interview, audio-recorded, notes taken, conducted in Chinese
Participant demographics	:	High school students, college students, university students or fresh graduates from the Klang area of Selangor who are members of the same community orchestra

Discussion topics	:	1) Performance:
		   i. Song selection and sequence, opinions
		   ii. Instrument use
		  iii. Scores: source, type, digitalization
		   iv. Audience source
		   v. Performance space
		   vi. Introduction of performers and performance

	vii. Reasoning for method of presentation
	viii. Room for improvement: organization, skills
	
	2) Organization:
	  i. Rehearsals
	  ii. Rehearsal and performance formations
	 iii. Impact of Covid-19
	 iv. Tacit agreement, coordination
	  v. Relationship between individuals
	
	3) Post-experiment debriefing:
	  i. Continuing the ensemble after the experiment
	  ii. Personal thoughts and interesting experiences

The second group interview is conducted with Experiment Ensemble 2 on the day of their final video recording. EE107 is present during the session, who is part of the string quartet ensemble comprising all Variable Group members, and attended their regular rehearsals. EE107 is interviewed individually earlier during the session with Experiment Ensemble 1, sharing insights into participation in Experiment Ensemble 2, specifically for the 'disruption or opportunity to the ecosystem' task.

Unlike the informal approach with Experiment Ensemble 1, an initial attempt is made to conduct the interview with the Variable Group in a semi-structured format. However, due to group members' passivity and the need for direct prompts to elicit responses, the approach is swiftly adjusted to a structured interview format.

Table 10: Interview Specifications for Experiment Ensemble 2 (Variable Group)

Number of participants	:	7 in total
Setting	:	1 May 2023 in a restaurant in Rawang, Selangor, the afternoon after the group's performance recording
Duration	:	1.5 hours
Interview format	:	Structured group interview, audio-recorded, notes taken, conducted in Chinese
Participant demographics	:	Young participants, including high school students, recent graduates, and a practitioner from the Klang Valley area, who established a string quartet ensemble together

Interview questions :	1) Personal background in music.
	2) Thoughts on tradition and modern *huayue.*
	3) Reason to choose this method for the performance task.
	4) Thoughts on songs performed.
	5) Satisfaction with final recording/outcome.
	6) Thoughts on learning both Chinese and Western instruments.
	7) Familiarity in reading different methods of notation.
	8) Thoughts on swapping instruments.
	9) Thoughts on impromptu playing, sight-reading, playing without a score, and playing jazz music.
	10) Thoughts on adding a new performer, coordination, impact on original setup.
	11) Interest to continue playing experimental music.
	12) Impact of Covid-19 on musical practice.
	13) Personal practice and methods of improvements.
	14) Initiation of the string quartet.
	15) Usual rehearsal moods and methods for improving the coordination between performers.
	16) Performance in public settings, out-of-the-ordinary performance experiences, audience reception.
	17) General communication styles.
	18) Final thoughts on the experiment.

3. Ethical Considerations

The research involves no risk or physical harm to participants. At the start of each interview session, participants are briefed on the implications of their participation in this research, including:

- The voluntary nature of participation
- Freedom to withdraw at any point
- Use of recordings solely for research purposes
- Confidential treatment of information
- Assurance of anonymity
- Opportunity to review and revise direct quotations or naming before publication

Specific requests and preferences are accommodated; some interviewees expressed interest in being named and requested a copy of the thesis upon its publication.

During the first group meeting, Experiment Ensemble participants receive an additional set of Experiment Guidelines that clearly communicate all ethical parameters. An open platform for questions and clarifications is encouraged to ensure full information on participant rights and duties, and to voice any distress or concerns. Participants are aware that performance recordings would be publicly released and that journal submissions would remain confidential. Any sharing of these materials outside the research context requires mutual agreement among group members. Additionally, participants can retrieve their materials after the experiment upon informing the researcher.

Some participants in the Experiment Ensemble are high school students around the age of 18, which is often considered the threshold for adult consent. Prior ethical approval was obtained for research involving minors. Nonetheless, the participants' existing status as performers with explicit parental consent mitigates potential risks associated with their involvement. Extra measures are taken to ensure that their privacy and data protection requirements are fully met.

Research participants agree that their outcomes could be published, but the research maintains a cautious and honest approach to content and information filtering during data collection and analysis. Participants do not receive any direct benefits or compensation, nor are they exposed to any risks or potential harm during the research. They are free to withdraw at any time, and their data is securely stored for at least 7 years.

There have been no reported ethical issues from any participant, either post-interview or post-experiment, indicating successful adherence to ethical standards throughout the research process. The research topic itself is deemed to be of low risk, reinforcing the overall ethical integrity of the study.

4. Limitations

The research faced potential limitations in accessing data and collecting sensitive, incomplete, or inaccurate data. In interviews, self-censorship due to rivalry could affect the honesty of responses. Previous studies (Wong, 2009) documented such issues in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Singapore, where interviewees were inclined to add 'disclaimers', withhold certain information, or attempt to defame others. This study encountered milder incidents in which participants insist that their data is 'solely [their] perspective and is not

representative'[7], with minimal self-censorship. Indirect language or implied contexts are mutually understood by researcher and participant.

Participants are selected from diverse locations and backgrounds to improve representativeness. Nevertheless, some crucial participants may have been inadvertently missed due to lack of awareness[8], and there is a high concentration of participants with similar qualifications. Geographical limitations are addressed using technology, but connectivity issues sometimes led to summarized responses and incomplete recordings. Moreover, the MIMI method proves inefficient for busy interviewees, due to slower, shorter, and less elaborate responses.

In the Experiment Ensemble, early efforts to engage professional performers were unsuccessful due to scheduling conflicts, concerns about commitment, and fear of not performing well. Consequently, young musicians are recruited. Although possibly taking different approaches from professional musicians and being less experienced due to the pandemic, they had solid performance backgrounds to produce meaningful findings for the majority demographic of youth Chinese orchestra musicians under the age of 25. Additionally, the one-month timeframe from ideation to performance limits the observation of long-term organizational dynamics within the Chinese orchestra community. Rehearsals and performance quality were constrained by participants' skill levels. Extended rehearsal times would unlikely yield significant improvements due to the performers' overall experience.

Fortunately, most research limitations are surmountable and pose low significance. Awareness of these constraints allow me to take necessary precautions, or create new opportunities for future research outcomes.

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[7] Regardless, the prevalence of these 'personal thoughts' is discovered to be more widespread among practitioners than they perceived.
[8] This limitation exists despite the snowballing method to connect with new interviewees. An example is the late discovery of practitioners in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu.

5. Data Analysis

The data collection phase yielded three types of materials—interview recordings, performance recordings, and journal entries. These sources are subjected to specific analysis methods and frameworks, including thematic analysis, content analysis, and narrative analysis. Emphasis is placed on interviews as the primary source to extract a substantial corpus for analysis.

A mixed-methods approach is adopted for data analysis, combining qualitative coding, TF-IDF statistical keyword optimization, and Voyant Tools visualization. Qualitative coding organizes textual data systematically to analyze themes and patterns, while TF-IDF statistical keyword optimization identifies significant keywords and enhances analysis precision. Voyant Tools provide graphic representations to visualize data correlations and relationships. Through triangulation, this approach improves researcher subjectivity and enhances research findings in a scientific manner.

Interview recordings are obtained from Microsoft Teams and transcribed verbatim to ensure faithful representation of interactions. Two interviews in English are translated to Chinese to maintain coherence across the data set, pragmatically preserving authenticity and contextual richness of the original interviews.

In this study, performance recordings and reflective journals are analyzed manually for content and narrative. Content analysis of video recordings examines task execution and musical topics. Journal entries narrate the rehearsal process, challenges, and participant opinions. Both textual and visual data contribute to the understanding of organizational dynamics, cultural implications, and the resilience of the Chinese orchestra to external influences.

Based on the findings, hypotheses are formulated and supplemented by autoethnographic observations. The results answer to research objectives and questions, offering insights into stakeholder relations, obstacles and opportunities for the Chinese orchestra, multiculturalism, music hybridity, identity reinforcement, community values, and prospective trajectories. The study draws parallels with existing research, and elaborate on the implications of analysis results in Findings and Discussions.

5.1 Coding of Interviews

In qualitative research, coding stands as a critical procedure in organizing and categorizing of data to derive meaningful insights. For this study, Taguette is chosen as the software to code interview transcripts due to its user-friendliness. This process involves content analysis, where essential phrases are labeled to organize information. Thematic analysis is then implemented to identify recurring patterns and overarching themes within the dataset.

Figure 11. Taguette Interface (https://app.taguette.org)

The coding process involves systematically scanning documents to identify and tag essential quotes or references with relevant themes. As analysis progresses, new themes may emerge and be incorporated. Key themes discerned include instrument modification, performance spaces, hybridization of music, audience reception, the societal value of the Chinese orchestra, pandemic influences, and the future of digitalization. Participant background, roles, and specialties are also quantified through tagging.

However, the software's limitations pose challenges in further classifying coded data into subcategories to generate broader themes. This predicament is addressed by grouping generated tags separately to identify key themes and categories within the analyzed data.

5.2 Keyword Extraction and Data Visualization

In the concluding phases of data analysis, Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) and Voyant Tools are employed to identify significant keywords and craft interactive visualizations of keyword occurrences. This statistical approach is essential to extract insights into patterns, trends, and relationships revealed through a systemic examination of textual data. By leveraging the quantitative potentials of TF-IDF measures and the visualization capabilities of Voyant Tools, research findings are enhanced to reveal correlations in certain topics. The subsequent figure illustrates the workflow to compile keywords and generate visualizations:
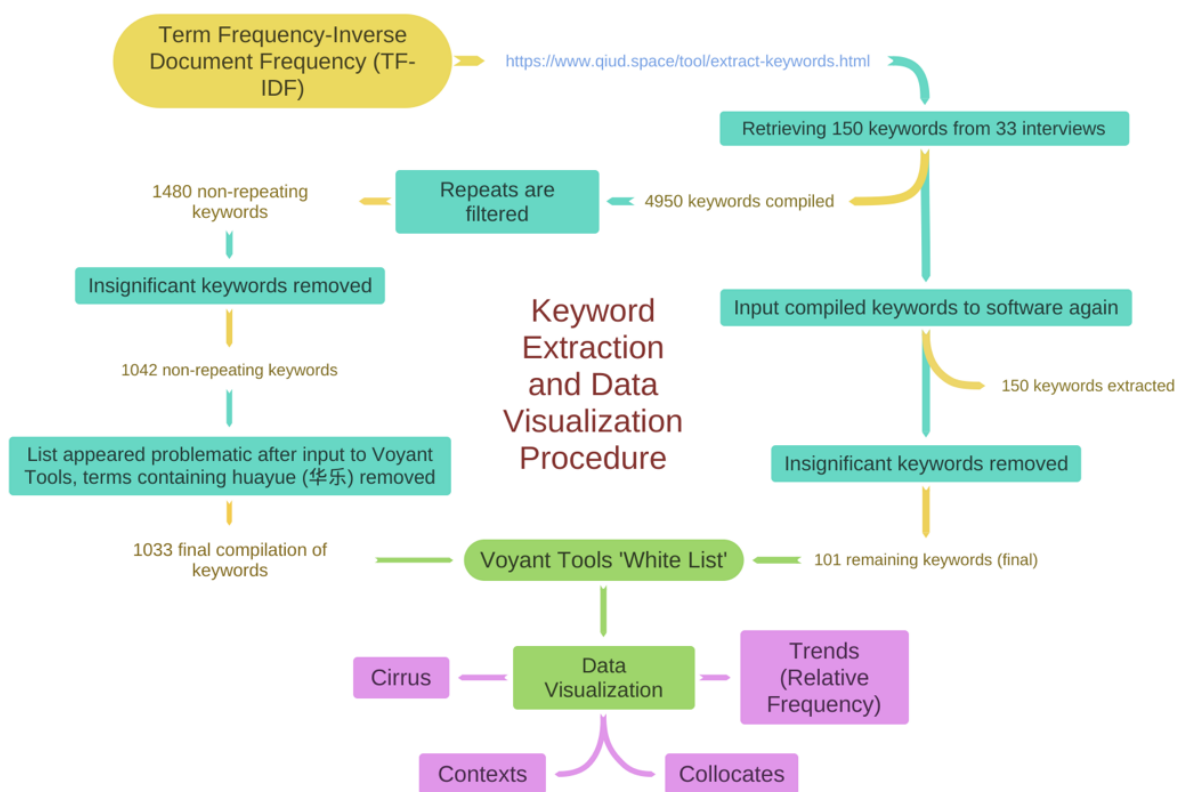
Figure 12. Keyword Extraction and Data Visualization Procedure

Due to limitations with Chinese language processing in Voyant Tools, a new approach is needed. Instead of relying on its default functionality, a whitelist of keywords is generated using TF-IDF mechanisms. TF-IDF is a statistical computation that quantifies the weight (significance) of a term within a document and across a corpus[9]. However, traditional TF-IDF rely on word frequency, which is not optimal for Chinese.

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[9] It commonly assesses the weight of term relevance of a document by comparing the frequency of the term within the document (Term Frequency, or TF) to its importance across all documents in the corpus (Inverse

After exploring various solutions, the website QIUD (合道社) is discovered as the best platform for Chinese keyword extraction for its compatibility, open-source nature, and satisfactory keyword extraction tool (关键词提取)[10]. QIUD provides a quantitative measure of each keyword's importance within the corpus. Its interface is as follows:

Figure 13. QIUD Keyword Extractor Interface (https://www.qiud.space/tool/extract-keywords.html)

The keyword extraction process in QIUD is straightforward and the resulting keywords are largely significant to the overarching theme of the Chinese orchestra. The application generates a table presenting all relevant keywords and their associated TF-IDF weights. However, there are issues with the extracting process, such as the inclusion of insignificant keywords such as 'one' and 'looks' in the weighted output. To overcome this issue, an expanded number of 150/101 keywords is extracted to provide coverage of relevant terms while allowing broader margins for error (see Appendix V).

Regrettably, the application lacks the capacity to directly extract keywords from a compilation of all 33 interviews. Hence, the keyword extraction process is performed

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Document Frequency, or IDF), in other words, the ratio of the length of document in the corpus (Saadah et al., 2013). The resulting calculation is the weight of the term.

[10] https://www.qiud.space/tool/extract-keywords.html

separately for each interview document, generating a total of 4950 keywords. These are then repeatedly reprocessed to eliminate duplicates and insignificant terms[11], resulting in a final compilation of 1033 for Voyant Tools analysis.

On the other hand, duplicates are eliminated from the 4950 total keywords to yield 1480 keywords for input into Voyant Tools. Despite these efforts, issues arose, leading to further keyword removals, to arrive at the final compilation of 1033 keywords utilized in the Voyant Tools analysis. The earlier Figure 12 outlines this sequence of events encompassing the TF-IDF keyword extraction process and Voyant Tools analysis.

Figure 14. Voyant Tools Interface (https://voyant-tools.org/)

Voyant Tools offers several functions essential for this research, namely Cirrus, Trends, Contexts, and Collocates. Cirrus (top left panel) is a word cloud visualization that displays the most frequently used words in the corpus (Figure 14). Trends (top right panel) enables the exploration of word frequency distribution across documents, depicted as a line graph. Similarly, Contexts and Collocates features shed light on the contextual usage and frequent pairing of keywords and terms. However, other functions are omitted due to limitations in handling the Chinese language. Voyant Tools outcomes are integrated into relevant discussions to illustrate research findings through statistical data.

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[11] Figure 14 indicates the problematic nature in using the 1042 compiled keywords as the whitelist, that results in a predominance of *huayue* (华乐)-related terms in the cirrus visualization. A targeted series of 9 keywords containing the term *huayue* are manually removed to diversify the data presentation.

5.3 Analysis of Video Recordings and Journal Entries

Manual content analysis of Experiment Ensemble video recordings offers a detailed examination of musical performances, evaluating instrumentation, performance quality, and task completion. This approach allows a vivid study of performativity, audience reactions, and participant interactions, while factoring participant demography and background.

Meanwhile, reflexive journal entries provide insightful qualitative data through participants' thoughts and feelings. While not subjected to formal coding, these entries offer rich narratives and sentiments analyzed using content and narrative analysis methods. For instance, a participant's reflexive account on the rehearsal of the contemporary piece highlights challenges of ensemble coordination and musicians' self-reflection on performance improvement. Such narratives deepen qualitative understanding that resists conventional coding, to preserve the ecological context and capture lived experiences within the ensemble.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The current study faces several inherent limitations that indicate potential for future research, particularly in refining data analysis methodologies. A predominant limitation of data analysis concerns the Chinese language and the requisite software. Addressing these limitations would enhance the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis in qualitative research, particularly in contexts of multilingual and complex linguistic data.

1. Processing multilingual interviews

Interviews conducted in '*rojak*' Malaysian Chinese with English and other languages require human processing. Existing transcription software struggles to capture the Malaysian Chinese accent and nuances, necessitating manual transcription and translation, which introduces the possibility of human error. Future studies could explore innovative approaches to refine and automate transcription and translation tools, to enhance accuracy and streamline the data analysis process. Nonetheless, the Chinese language challenge would persist in contexts where linguistic shifts have occurred, with a mixture of dialects. Studies on the Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora would require tailored approaches to ensure accuracy in linguistic analysis of verbal data.

2. Software accessibility

Proprietary qualitative data analysis software like NVivo may be cost-prohibitive. Upcoming studies are encouraged to engage with advanced coding software to expand analytical approaches in qualitative data analysis. Additionally, geographical restrictions, particularly in accessing Chinese software and websites, hinder the usability of these tools for analyzing Chinese language documents. Future research endeavors could investigate alternatives, such as the programming of specialized Chinese data analysis tools or platforms tailored to Chinese grammar and linguistics.

3. Programming language

Another limitation is the researcher's proficiency in programming languages like Python and R, which are often required for handling complex non-English linguistic data. Improving proficiency in these programming languages could overcome limitations associated with existing open-source software and facilitate more robust Chinese data analysis.

4. Chinese keyword extraction

Various research identified the difficulty of Chinese keyword extraction using the traditional TF-IDF formula (Song et al., 2019; Li and Ning, 2021). Currently, manual checking is necessary for better data generation, at the expense of quantifying qualitative research data. Hence, software refinement or new software development is encouraged to better align with the complexities of the Chinese language.

5. Data volume

The substantial volume of textual data requires advanced text processing techniques to overcome researcher error and software limitations—this research generated transcripts with over 700,000 words from interviews alone, rejected for processing by many software. Future studies may consider advanced text processing techniques or distributed computing solutions to efficiently handle extensive textual data.

Findings and Discussion

Rhizomatic Writing

The Findings and Discussions Chapters embody the rhizomatic theoretical framework of Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizomatic methodologies in written discourse embrace non-linear, separate conceptualization to comprehend connections between, across, and within discourses from diverse data sources. Correspondingly, rhizomatic thinking draws lines of flight that map onto either machinic or collective assemblages of enunciation in one's mind (Thornton, 2020: 16), in other words, mapping onto the physical body or signs and norms associated with the body. This approach integrates the researcher's voice as a legitimate line of flight (trajectory) in the complex web of assemblages, giving rise to 'plateaus' that acknowledge multiplicities (Honan and Sellers, 2006).

To elaborate, the concept of the assemblage entails a pattern combining disparate elements that may or may not amalgamate into a unified whole, which then interact through 'a series of machinic relations' (Thornton, 2020). Lines of flight represent connections that escape this assemblage structure, cross boundaries, and extend into external assemblages to enable 'becoming' –a transformative process between environmental structures.

Becoming, a constant 'in between-ness' of two, thus signifies a form of 'escape' from the original assemblage to perceive the relationship of the body to something beyond itself, trajectories made apparent through lines of flight. An emphasis on the importance of memories and experiences in the process of 'becoming' becomes especially important, navigating an assemblage to another, tracing lines of flight of 'becoming-Chinese orchestra musician' and 'becoming-researcher' that intersect with the broader thematic framework at hand.

The essence here lies in the notion of 'transformation' within structures that occur like a kaleidoscope where patterns emerge from the same components but are never exactly replicated. Such transformations occur when the line of flight successfully connects to another assemblage, but they are not always with success, often blocked or recaptured by the original assemblage. A simple illustration would be where progress of the Chinese orchestra to a different trajectory is impeded by challenges, setting it back to its initial assemblage, ready for another line of flight.

Inspired by the structural framework of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), the Chinese orchestra is discussed autonomously as sections within chapters (distinct

plateaus), allowing for independent reading and comprehension. With the dynamism of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem and its capability for rebalancing, there exists no definitive start or endpoint, nor is there a hierarchical structure or full equilibrium within the active ecosystem. However, the sequential development of chapters adheres to chronological progression. Rooted in assemblage theory, this analytical approach discusses the Chinese orchestra from an angle of multiplicity, accounting for the interconnections and interactions between sections through signposting.

Throughout the crafting of these ensuing chapters, a balanced writing style is maintained to ensure academic rigor and reader accessibility. This approach addresses the requests of practitioners who wish to access the thesis post-publication. The granting of voice to participants invokes power that traces into the mapping and cultivates the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Narratives are constructed to deterritorialize power relations while balancing the researcher's insider perspective. This rhizomatic approach indirectly demystifies antiquated perspectives through different voices from the Chinese orchestra.

The goal of the chosen approach is to cater to readers with varied backgrounds and expertise, meeting the needs of practitioners while facilitating an inclusive learning experience for general readers. Ultimately, this accessibility-oriented narrative design empowers all readers and foster meaningful dialogue between specialized academic insight and broader public awareness, henceforth extending the appreciation of the musical culture to a wider audience.

Additionally, the headings of sections are curated using selected musical pieces and concert titles to delineate themes and infuse the essence of *huayue* into the narrative. This creative effort adds musical resonance to plateau-like narrations, exemplifying the diversity and applicability of musical compositions to everyday life. Footnotes are used to elaborate on the context and rationale of these titles. English titles of the compositions are either self-translated or adopted from existing translations; primary or authoritative names are predominantly in Chinese.

The discussion of linkages or lumpy nodes within the rhizomatic root system does not discard the inherent complexity of 'machinic'-ally categorized sections. Building on the notion of interwovenness of assemblages, it is important to reiterate that this thesis structure does not imply a singular or suggested trajectory. Multiplicities persist within this framework as escaping lines of flight, reinforcing the dynamic nature of discourse and its ability to

traverse established boundaries (think of the Theoretical Network with extended lines of flight, Figure 7). Moreover, the use of diagrams in arborescent structures simplifies the rhizomatic structure, offering a navigable representation that improves comprehension while capturing the complexity and interconnectedness of the rhizome.

Throughout this research, the writing process involves back-and-forth transitions between chapters. The choice of node to begin the mapping process was arbitrary yet deliberate and exploratory. Summed by Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes are 'always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo' (1987: 25). This entanglement aligns with Honan and Sellers' (2006) observations that discourses merge, connect, and cross over. This process entails interpreting discrete fragments to (re)assemble meanings into a collective expression with amplified impact.

All factors considered, this creative undertaking of rhizomatic methodologies resonates with the project theme and title which centers around the '(re)assembling' of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. The rhizomatic structuring symbolizes that Chinese orchestras operate autonomously with unique narratives, collectively forming a larger, cohesive plot that constitutes the overarching ecosystem, resembling a rhizomatic root system. Through a detailed orchestration of individual subcomponents via rhizomatic writing, this project aspires to invigorate the Chinese orchestra ecosystem within the Malaysian context and illustrate the potential for harmony and resonance that emerges through the purposeful assembly of its divergent elements.

Chapters Overview

In accordance with the overarching framework of the rhizome and assemblage, the body of this research unfolds across 6 discussion chapters with different themes that conjunctively answer research questions, presented herewith:

Chapter 1 lays the foundation for this research by surveying the historical background of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. It traces narratives of pioneering practitioners from the migration of Chinese communities to Malaysia (then Malaya) and discusses the formation of Chinese ensembles and traditional music that preceded the present-day Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese orchestra. The chapter concludes by examining the global influence of Chinese music, using *Jasmine Flower* as an illustrative model for the evolution and pervasiveness of the Chinese orchestra in the modernizing society.

Subsequently, Chapter 2 portrays the Malaysian Chinese orchestra as a dynamic cultural ecosystem through mapping and visualizations. It examines the interactions among stakeholders, the formation and activities of the orchestra, and the challenges it faces, including financial issues, relationships, government and social support, and Chinese education. The chapter highlights the roles and contributions of the Chinese orchestra to Malaysian society, that gives it significance as a value production matrix in the creative industry.

Next, Chapter 3 explores performative dimensions of the Chinese orchestra by scrutinizing the lived and built spaces and places of rehearsals and performances, including virtual platforms. It discusses the influence of socioeconomic disparities, the role of the internet, and the Experiment Ensemble. The chapter also looks at the consumption and reception of *huayue* in contemporary Malaysian society, as well as networking and support systems, and experimental initiatives of spaces and places that challenge traditional notions of performativity.

Following that, Chapter 4 addresses the research question concerning multiculturalism in Malaysia and its implications for the Chinese orchestra. It compares tradition and modern/contemporary musical expressions, deconstructs the hybridity of music and the Nanyang style, and examines the role of food and musical education in shaping cultural identity. The chapter includes an autoethnography of the researcher's personal experiences and discussions of research experiments from the musical aspect.

Chapter 5 evaluates adaptive management methods for the resilience of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. Navigating challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, digitalization, the expanding landscape of creative collaborations and innovations, compositions and copyright issues, and the initiatives of the Experiment Ensemble, this chapter critically studies the Chinese orchestra's capacity to navigate and respond to changes and novel encounters in its surrounding environment.

Finally, Chapter 6 contemplates the current and future state of the Chinese orchestra through sustainability. It proposes the Cultural Sustainability Web and examines the relations between the Chinese orchestra and nature from its repertoire and musical instruments, the impacts and future of digitalization, models of operational sustainability, and envisioned future possibilities by practitioners. The chapter synthesizes these elements to propose

sustainable models that can foster the resilience and vitality of the Chinese orchestra community in Malaysia.

This research emphasizes interconnectedness of its topics, with signposting included to direct readers in viewing relations between different sections. Readers are recommended to begin with the introduction of each chapter (except Chapter 1) to grasp the overarching themes, contexts, and theoretical framework. Sections within chapters can be read independently. Readers are also invited to discern their own connections among discussion topics, looking beyond the immediate confines of research findings and drawing new lines of flight. Conclusions drawn in this research do not preclude the existence of broader connections and intersections. The relation map below illustrates some of these identified linkages using solid and dotted lines:
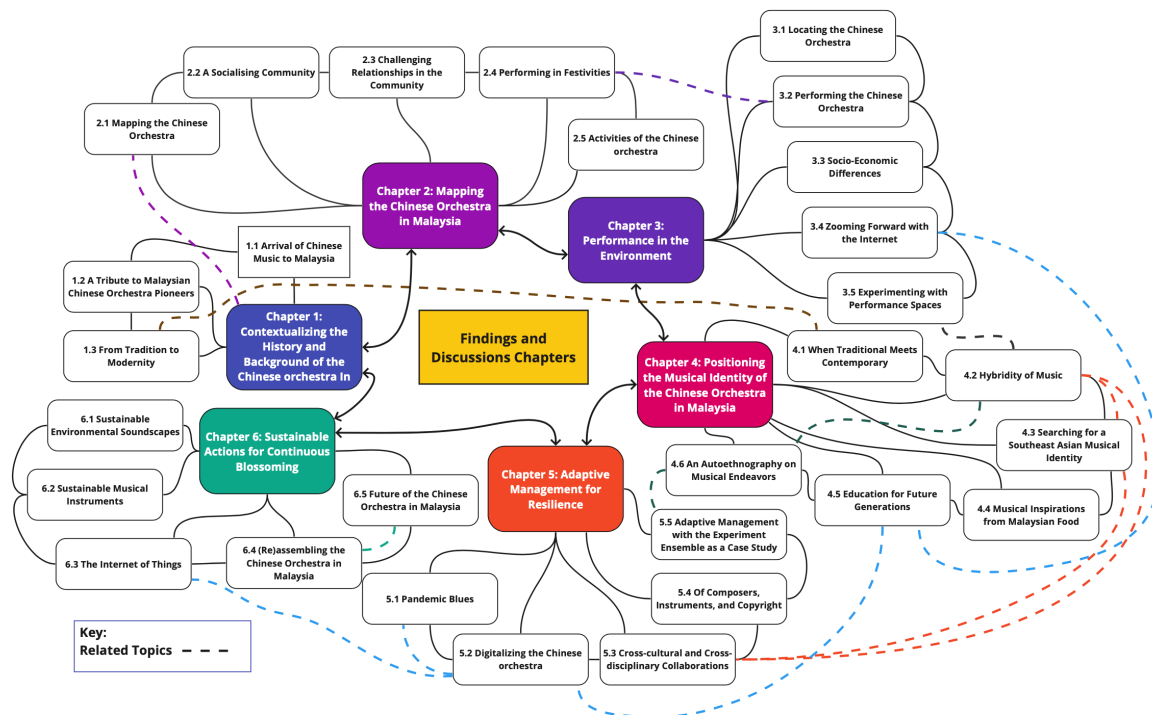
Figure 15. Chapters Relation Map

Essentially, visual aids such as schematics and diagrams simplify complex concepts, reveal outlines of invested interests, highlight symbiotic relations within nature and cultural environments, and allow new ways of questioning and becoming through imagination and inspirations. Assemblages, when visualized, allow the determination of lines of flight or modes of deterritorialization away from rigid, authoritarian, and destructive structures, thereby providing a clearer understanding of cultural dynamics and imagining new modes of

becoming (Bazzul and Tolbert, 2017). These schematics and diagrams support the objective of cultural mapping and facilitate readership.

Other data sources, including interviews, secondary literature and autoethnographic insights, are integrated to thoroughly elaborate the topics in each chapter. Translated from the Chinese language, interviews are presented in a few ways, either through direct quotation or paraphrasing:

i) Direct naming of participant (with consent)

ii) Via codes assigned to each participant (interview list in Appendix III)

iii) Fully anonymous (in circumstances where participants would be easily identified)

Besides that, autoethnographic writing from personal experiences use the first-person perspective ('I') to distinguish them from other data sources, complementing other data sources by enhancing the depth and clarity of the discourse while maintaining balance in power relations.

Chapter 1—Contextualizing the History and Background of the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia

1.1 *Pelayaran* (*Voyage*) (漂洋过海)[1] – Arrival of Chinese Music to Malaysia

The journey (or voyage) of Chinese music to a greater region traces its origins to Mainland China, primarily involving the migration of laborers from Southern China to Malaysia and Singapore between the early 19th and mid-20th centuries. To provide a clearer illustration, it is essential to consider the Chinese orchestra's concurrent development in China and Malaysia, as these processes are reciprocal. Furthermore, early migrants reinforce their identity and sense of belonging through connections to the motherland China, especially in the early stages of migration (see Chapter 1.3 for a comprehensive discussion).

It is important to emphasize, once more, that while the inception of the Chinese orchestra began in the 1920s, its full development occurred later in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and was inherently a political movement. The prevalent musical landscape during mass migration of laborers from the Southern parts of China consisted of regional music, folk music, opera, or the infamous *Jiangnan sizhu*, performed in ensemble formations.

Interviews show that discourse on the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia often criticize its political emergence and compare its unifying nature to the standardization of the Chinese language that resulted in the declination of many dialects (Interviewee 24). Similarly, regional music either becomes marginalized or assimilated into the Chinese orchestra. Some liken this unification to Qin Shi Huang's unification of ancient China, viewing it as an essential process to professionalize Chinese music and elevate its global status.

In another historical depiction, Interviewee 07 outlines that the Great Unity Music Society (大同乐会) in Shanghai spearheaded innovations for the Chinese orchestra, promoting the inclusion of all ethnic elements into a unified 'Chinese culture' through Mao's 'let a hundred flowers blossom' (百花齐放) political invocation (see Chapter 2.1). This led to the absorption of ethnic minority cultures and the mimicry of Western symphony elements

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[1] A piece of Wang Chenwei (王辰威), commissioned by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 2018, and later a symphony orchestra version in 2023 by the Asian Cultural Symphony Orchestra. The composition describes migrants' voyage from China to the Malay Archipelago in search of a new life, braving hardships when travelling by sea to arrive at Singapore. The title is adept for discussing this journey of immigrants from Southern China, who brought along with them the music of China.

into the mainstream Han culture. However, *minyue* is distinct from symphonic pieces in its eloquence in the linear expression of melody rather than harmony.

Consequently, this raises questions about the Chinese orchestra's authenticity in representing Chinese music. Interviewee 08 describes it as a compilation of instruments from various Chinese cultures. The Chinese orchestra's initial conception thereby becomes a type of structure, a form or body that encompasses various ethnic instruments and musical styles it favors (Interviewee 01). Furthermore, many Chinese instruments historically originated from foreign cultures, such as the *yangqin*[2] (dulcimer) and *suona*[3] from the Middle East. Another interviewee suggests, with a digital term, that the Chinese orchestra is an 'airdropped' culture.

The entangled relationships of the Chinese orchestra position it as a cultural product that embodies both the traditional and the modern, a continuum in a transformational process of becoming and engaging with the world. This cultural product manifests in various forms across the diaspora, from traditional formats to globalized approaches, all identifying as the Chinese orchestra and therefore requires accommodation to preserve its cultural significance[4].

Contrary to homogenizing or erasing China's cultural diversity, the Chinese orchestra, as a relatively young formation, holds immense potentials of development to highlight regional and ethnic diversity through localization. For example, Taiwan compositions emphasize local folk songs, *minyao* (民谣), while Hong Kong embraces an experimental approach, mirroring its cosmopolitan society.

In Southeast Asia, *huayue* extends to countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, typically in smaller ensembles. However, the Philippine Cultural College Chinese Orchestra (PCCCO, 侨中学院民乐团) is an exception. The diaspora exhibits varying levels of vibrancy, attributed to factors including cultural environment, historical context, degree of cultural assimilation, and government support. Regrettably, the Chinese orchestra in Brunei no longer exist.

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[2] *Yangqin* teachers comment that the instrument originated from traders who brought the Middle Eastern *santur* or European dulcimer to the coasts of Guangdong and Shanghai during their voyages. Supposedly, the instrument was systematically improvised and even adopted by some regional operas.
[3] From my understanding of world music, the *suona* draws parallels to the *zurna*, or similar instruments originating from the Middle East, translocated to China through the Silk Road.
[4] This explains why the recognition of *huayue* seems limitless and manifold, from playing traditional Chinese tunes using non-Chinese instruments, to playing any genre of music, as long as they contain Chinese instruments. Chapter 4 explores the hybridity of Chinese music in different scales.

With a strong ethnic identity rooted in historic cultural politics and limited assimilation into local communities, the history of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia and Singapore closely follows Mainland China's evolution. This refers to the surge of *minyue* in the 1950s and 1960s, which aimed to integrate Western symphony orchestra formation and harmony.

Since the era of British rule (or earlier), Chinese immigrants to Malaysia and Singapore included five dialect groups: Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Teochew and Hainanese. These migrants, driven by political instability in China or coerced into slave labor, facilitated trade of Chinese goods to the Malayan peninsular (Ling, 2023). Initially, Chinese immigrants held low social standing, working as laborers, farmers, hawkers, and other manual jobs. Ling asserts that musical culture preservation was not a priority, functioning solely for entertainment or to alleviate homesickness. After work, Chinese immigrants from Southern China provinces would gather to play and sing tunes from their homeland, fostering unity (Tan, S. B., 2000: 109). Popular forms of performing and martial arts at the time, particularly professional opera and puppet-theatre troupes, emerged to perform during festivals, besides amateur cultural organizations like martial-arts and lion-dance associations (Tan, S. B., 2023). This practice helped disseminate Southern China music and opera genres to the Nanyang region (Luo and Chung, 2010).

Chan (2003) describes the Kuala Lumpur landscape in the 1950s, where Chinese people primarily entertained themselves by listening to and singing opera. The Chinese orchestra is related to regional music, particularly the troupes accompanying opera singing, which captivated the youth. Criticized for their 'weak concept of the motherland', these young individuals sought alternatives to regional opera music, propelling the contemporary *huayue* movement and the rapid development of the Chinese orchestra from the 1970s[5].

In the 1960s, Chinese orchestras faced an extremely difficult environment for growth due to Chinese communist ties and racial riots, but these adversities fueled strong determination and passion for *huayue*. Clan associations (会馆) played a crucial role in uniting Chinese communities and promoting the Chinese orchestra, demonstrating the

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[5] Currently, there are not many existing full-time Malaysian Chinese opera practitioners who are able to pass down the art, and even lesser learners due to the amount of dedication required to become a Chinese opera artist, besides reducing career opportunities. Although it is now recognized as an intangible cultural heritage and is actively preserved in China, the accompanying opera music is sidelined by most younger Malaysian Chinese orchestra generations as they operate separately, even if they are fascinated by it. There are still minority sections of the Chinese society who are actively upkeeping the cultural activity.

importance of *minjian* effort in its development to this day. These associations hold regular practice sessions, to promote friendship and provide entertainment, fundraising for the community while maintaining social connections with China (Tan, S. B., 2023).

With increasing migration and a growing Chinese population, Chinese ensembles expanded alongside international trends. Singapore's socio-economic stability attracted performers and resources from Mainland China, contributing to the dissemination and advancement of *huayue* (Luo and Chung, 2010). The Chinese orchestra evolved from mere entertainment to a cultural cornerstone, taking on added roles of cultural communication, relationship maintenance, and cultural heritage preservation, to become the spiritual life of the Chinese community (Ling, 2023: 37).

The promotion of the Chinese orchestra during the 1970s and 1980s was influenced by sentiments of cultural preservation. The New Economic Policy and National Cultural Policy (1971) are perceived as a way of social restructuring that sidelines non-indigenous cultures, adding a layer of self-conscious marker of Chineseness to the Chinese orchestra (Tan, S. B., 2023). This period induced creativity for the local Chinese community to assimilate with local art and music forms for relevance, that leads to more freedom for cultural activity. A senior interviewee recalled the 1970s as a period of limited Chinese cultural activities due to socio-political circumstances, including the fear of being labelled as leftists during the White Terror (白色恐怖) era[6]. Despite these challenges, the community worked hard to preserve and pass on their cultural heritage, often through performances backed by clan associations (Interviewee 15). This 'difficulty' fostered collaboration and unity, training new musicians to ensure cultural continuity.

In the 1980s, many Chinese orchestras ceased operations due to the economic crisis (Chan, 2003). Passion remained a driving force in preservation efforts. Practitioners argue that the goal of maintaining the Chinese orchestra is for the love and passion for music, in essence 'art for art's sake', although conversations with senior practitioners do indicate strong traces of struggles for national identity, or 'art for the people'. Interviewee 15 reflects that school Chinese orchestra members joined out of a deep passion to maintain Chinese cultural heritage, driven by a sense of calling, or *ganzhao* (感召). This responsibility and passion led

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[6] There are countless stories of hardships from the initiation days, narrated by pioneers. Some narrations I have heard including 'those days' where orchestra (then ensemble) members had to organize rehearsals in their houses, or deal with government officials trying to shut down their operations. There were even enthusiastic musicians who were thrown into jail for attempting to defend the cultural activity, that had nothing to do with communism.

to the assembly of Zhuan Yi (专艺) in 1988. *The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia* (2022: 97) writes that 10 individuals pooled their resources to establish Zhuan Yi, with goals of independence from clan associations, importing teachers and instruments, and addressing other challenges. The impetus was to self-sustain through instrument sales and teaching activities while building relationships with Singaporean conductors and teachers. Zhuan Yi Chinese Orchestra (ZYCO, now known as Professional Cultural Center Orchestra (PCCO)) emphasizes cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaborations, accommodating musicians from all walks of life (see Chapter 5.3).

The Chinese orchestra in the 2000s is the 'Golden Age' (Interviewee 08), characterized by its expansion into educational institutions, abundant competitions, exchanges, and 'share and review'[7] programs. These activities foster a strong, collaborative community among musicians (see Chapter 2.5). Nonetheless, the flourishing period also faced challenges that persist to this day.

A key challenge of the ecosystem is the recognition of limits to growth, Titon's proposed second ecological principal (2020: 157), which suggests that unchecked growth is unsustainable due to natural limits of finite resources. In Malaysia, younger instructors struggle to assume leadership roles because older instructors need to maintain their livelihoods. Moreover, rising living costs, salary disparities, and tensions with supporting institutions further complicate the landscape. Internal conflicts within organizations like Zhuan Yi also led to divisions and the emergence of multiple major forces in Kuala Lumpur. Immersed in the Chinese orchestra environment in Kuala Lumpur, I have heard of these historical accounts and rumors from different parties. However, as suggested by Interviewee 29, the next generation should move forward and focus on cultivating a positive environment rather than dwelling on past conflicts.

The ecosystem's changes affect interconnectivity—interactions are essential to question the adaptivity of musical culture (ibid.). The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia and Singapore have embarked on distinct trajectories. Post-independence, Singapore's progress benefitted from favorable environmental conditions and strong government support, arriving at a leading position in Southeast Asia. Singapore Chinese Orchestra's assemblage of musicians of high standards and social influence impact beyond the Chinese community (Luo and Chung, 2010; Ling, 2023). Ling further argues that Singapore's predominantly Chinese

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[7] For lack of a concrete translation, the 'share and review' session refers to *guanmohui* (观摩会).

demographic and government agenda to promote multicultural social cohesion have accelerated its cultural and artistic development post 1980s.

In contrast, Malaysia's socio-political circumstance stereotypes it as the most challenging environment for Chinese orchestra development among the main regions. Early-day interconnectivity between Malaysia and Singapore was solid, with practitioners sharing skills and resources. After the disjunct, Singaporean pioneers continue to support Malaysian counterparts through educational exchanges, masterclasses, advice on competitions and festivals, and the dissemination of localized Singaporean works (ibid.). This mutual support indicates an interdependent symbiosis between the two countries.

Over time, this connection has waned, albeit existing, to interactions among a selected few[8]. The historical link is noteworthy because of its contrast with the present, reflecting a past 'glorious days' of communal collaborations. Singapore's distinct environment has allowed it to achieve most of its initial cultural goals, and set newer, larger-scale ones. My visits to Singapore magnify these experienced differences of ecosystem diversity and vibrance, particularly in arts initiatives and cultural promotion efforts through organizations like the Singapore Chinese Music Federation (SCMF). Attending its Music Development Forum[9] in 2023, that aimed to promote the development and collaboration of *huayue* in Southeast Asia (Singapore Chinese Music Federation, 2023), I returned with fresh perspectives, further convinced of the necessity for academic discussions and debates about the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.

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[8] There is strong connection between southern Malaysia and Singapore to this day, as well as several new connections formed with independent orchestras across the country.
[9] The forum is chaired by a Malaysian composer, Mr Simon Kong, with guests from several Southeast Asian countries, attended by many distinguished practitioners in Johor and Singapore.

Figure 16. Poster of the Southeast Asian Chinese Music Development Forum 2023 (Singapore Chinese Music Federation, 2023)

Throughout its history, the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia remains *minjian* (民间), a community sustainability effort. This history has also divided Malaysia's Chinese orchestra community into several 'chunks' that remain largely united nationally but divided locationally. This distinguishing geographical factor is adopted in this study, namely northern Malaysia[10] (Penang, Kedah, Perak), Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), southern Malaysia (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor), East Malaysia[11] (Sabah and Sarawak), and 'the rest' (Perlis, and East Coast states—Terengganu, Kelantan, and Pahang).

In brief, orchestras in these areas operate in common yet dissimilar styles depending on their instructors. Due to limited resources, practitioners within these areas travel across states (occasionally across the country, depending on expertise and need) for their teaching and performances. As a result, the developments of these locations are uneven and sometimes

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[10] See Chapter 2.3 on factions.
[11] Sabah and Sarawak remain less connected due to their geographical position away from the Peninsular. Sabah Chinese orchestras are united within the state due to its historical context with Mr Teo. However, Sarawak remains scattered for its already isolated cities (see following section).

independent, based on practitioner goals and aspirations. These are also affected by population density and other factors.

During the writing process, I recognized a significant limitation in contextualizing the history of the Chinese orchestra that accentuates the fragility of existing literature, including my own. Conventionally, historical accounts focus on main areas, such as Kuala Lumpur, and overlook differences and alternative perspectives, perpetuating an incomplete understanding of the overall ecosystem. The fragility is evident as narrations from major areas tend to sideline minority perspectives. Each literature inevitably falls short of covering all aspects, because, in certain states, there is not much divergence from the main historical frame since they are run by the same practitioners, or are limited by socio-economic disparities that lead to unequal development and representation (refer to Chapter 3.3).

My interactions with interviewees also reveal a common theme—practitioners who study abroad often concentrate their research on specific areas, locations, states, or instruments that they are most familiar with. Despite this focus, the compilation of historical documentation requires substantial efforts and could not be narrated by a single literature. The diversity of geographical locations in research showcases the vibrancy, interconnectedness, and resilience of the Chinese orchestra across Malaysia.

Malaysia's ecosystem faces unique struggles of race and identity, and the absence of a fully professional Chinese orchestra contributes to its distinctiveness. Unlike orchestras with symbolic cultural heritage roles for the diasporic community of particular localities—such as the Chao Feng Chinese Orchestra in Melbourne, Toronto Chinese Orchestra, and the Philippine Cultural College Chinese Orchestra, Malaysian Chinese orchestras have a composite, overlapping, and complex community. Future research should aim to decentralize the history of the Chinese orchestra, articulating identity from an assemblage of contexts, especially given its multicultural landscape.

The unique history of the Chinese in the Nanyang region (mostly Singapore and Malaysia) should not be disjunct from their present development. Its diverged line of flight from Singapore is often lamented, as many aspire to learn from and mirror its achievements. As demonstrated by history, the identity formation of the Southeast Asian Chinese community involves constant negotiation between its homeland, new environment, and subsequent cultural integration (Williams, 1977). Despite Malaysia's significant Chinese population, it displays various limitations on its path towards cultural sustainability.

<u>*Epilogue:*</u> Wenqin *(文琴)*

The *wenqin*, a prominent instrument invention originating in Malaysia in 2002, is a compelling case study of Malaysia's contribution to international music history. Wen Zhengqiu (文正球) conceptualized the *wenqin* to address practical challenges of the *erhu*, that was subject to weather conditions and tonal limitations at higher pitches. The *wenqin* is praised for its expressiveness, environmental friendliness, better resonance, and ability to merge into most *huayue* repertoires (*The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia*, 2022).

Interviewees have mentioned the *wenqin* as a representation of Malaysia's multicultural landscape. Interviewee 13 compares this innovation to the merging of cultures, reminiscent of Peranakan culture in Melaka, emphasizing the clashes and exchanges that resulted in the new cultural product. After years of modification and promotion, the instrument has forged its own developmental trajectory, distinct from the rest of the Chinese orchestra. It has gained international recognition, won innovation prizes, and formed its own ensembles in Mainland China (ibid.: 233-234). Moreover, advancements such as 3D printing techniques signify ongoing efforts for accessibility and ecological conservation.

1.2 *Adorable Kampung* (可爱的甘榜)[12] – A Tribute to Malaysian Chinese Orchestra Pioneers

The history of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia is adequately documented, although scattered across academic publications and independent writings by practitioners[13]. What stands out are the plateaus of '*yumcha*[14] narratives' or informal conversations that interactively piece together the history of the Chinese orchestra.

The nomenclature of *huayue* marked a turning point in defining the identity of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia and Singapore. Coined by Lin Zhi Guo (translated, 林志国)

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[12] Composed by Teo Seng Chong (张诚忠) in the 1980s, the piece describes the travel of Chinese ancestors to Nanyang and their assimilation into the Nanyang society, like daffodils planting its seeds in a foreign ground. It pictures Chinese villages in combination with the local *kampung*s, as a breeding ground for a hybridized Malaysian cultural life (Wong, 2023). The title is ideal for the section, as it discusses Teo's journey from a pioneer to a respectable figure of the Chinese orchestra.

[13] Historical accounts often vary. While the research allows a personal glimpse into this history, it refrains from detailed historical analysis, as there are other ongoing scholarly explorations from this approach. Most key characters of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia are already compiled in *The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia* (2022).

[14] See Chapter 2.2 on *yumcha* culture.

from Melaka alongside some Singaporean friends in the 1960s, the term replaced initial terminologies of *sizhu* or *minyue* ensemble, which no longer 'fit' the current national conditions of Chinese music (ibid.: 61).

In earlier days, port cities like Melaka, Johor, Singapore, and Penang homed many founding fathers of the Chinese orchestra, likely due to their high concentrations of Chinese immigrants. In the 1950s, Chinese music was mainly performed by regional music ensembles. These ensembles gradually found their way into schools, initially serving as accompaniment for opera music and positioned as a 'healthy' youth cultural activity. This development split the trajectories of the Chinese orchestra and regional music ensembles, bestowing new significances and roles upon the Chinese orchestra, and leading to occasional borrowing of musicians well-versed in both forms.

Musicians who began with regional music transition smoother into the Chinese orchestra. My own direct encounters with regional music happened by chance, only 13 years after being in the Chinese orchestra. Despite an invested curiosity in learning more about Chinese musical traditions, I find difficulty in adapting to the different notation and performance systems of these ensembles. When expressing this disparity to others (in one of these *yumcha* sessions), similar sentiments were shared, alongside recognition of the importance to familiarize oneself with these musical forms. I am grateful to be acquainted with several pioneers who ardently preserve regional music, who are also well esteemed in the Chinese orchestra community.

In the formative days of institution Chinese orchestra, the extracurricular activity was often named as an ensemble—*huayue xiaozu* (华乐小组), *huayue dui* (华乐队)—before transitioning to the more common term, *huayue tuan* (华乐团), denoting an orchestra. This transition symbolizes the elevated stature of the Chinese orchestra, expanding to accommodate larger bodies of members in schools, sometimes exceeding a hundred members.

A researcher on the history of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, Interviewee 06 emphasizes the importance of secondary schools in nurturing first-generation Chinese orchestra pioneers. These figures continue to actively promote *huayue*, shaping the orchestra's growth and cultivating future generations. Indeed, the expansion of Chinese orchestras in secondary schools laid the foundation for their institutionalization in the

community today, with Chinese independent high schools playing a crucial role in transmitting Chinese cultures and values (see also Chapter 2).

However, the younger generation is criticized for not grasping the determination of seniors towards *huayue* education. Interviewee 21 emphasizes the long-term nature of education, in that its results may only blossom after decades of cultivation. He stresses the importance of building upon the legacy of previous generations to witness the blossoming of our efforts in the future.

As a trailblazer of the Chinese orchestra in Johor, Pahang, and Sabah, Mr. Teo Seng Chong[15] provides valuable insights based on his extensive experience in education and Chinese orchestra development, as an important figure of *huayue* promotion and expansion, hybridization, and modernization. In his formative days in Johor, he lamented that learning in the Chinese orchestra was extremely difficult. He narrates, 'Our teacher was a Chinese opera musician, and they did not read scores. Learning was by oral transmission and mimicry. All the latter members were rejected from other societies at school. We were minding our own business, playing traditional songs. Somebody suggested to play something more popular, so I went to Melaka to learn how to arrange songs from Lin Zhi Guo. Those Opera songs were difficult to be accepted by youngsters, and I thought we should play some popular songs that the public is familiar with. Finding a teacher is the right path I have taken'.

I would like to highlight the situation East Malaysia, which has often remained out of the spotlight, but the establishment of Chinese orchestras there is primarily associated with schools. The states of Sabah and Sarawak has apparent detachment from the rest of Malaysia, and their development did not come easily. In the 1970s, it was the community that advocated the necessity for having a Chinese orchestra in Sabah as a cultural emblem, hence Lin was invited to assist in its development at Tshung Tsin Secondary School. As a result, Teo, Lin's composition student at the time, accepted the role and migrated to Sabah in 1986, along with his family. Since then, he has expanded over 10 Chinese orchestra in the state, alongside chairing state and nation-wide musical festivals and education initiatives. Teo also mastered instrument making and repairing (SabahSongs, 2012).

Meanwhile, the current circumstances in Sarawak parallels West Malaysia during its earlier developmental stages. Geographical isolation has led to independent development of

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[15] SabahSongs (2012) contains a biography on Teo.

Chinese orchestras in different cities, resulting in scattered and limited resources[16] (Interviewee 31). Historical information on Sarawak is scarce, and efforts are often dependent on personal exploration and persistence due to a shortage of teaching resources. Teachers are invited from other localities for concentrated learning in musical camps (Interviewee 33).

Regrettably, my investigation into Sarawak's inception was inconclusive, but previous interactions with Sarawakian musicians left a lasting impression for their tenacity and determination in learning, leading to commendable musical skills despite resource limitations. Geographical factors are crucial to determine the development trajectory of Chinese orchestras in Sabah and Sarawak, where a fortunate combination of timing, location, and human factors (天时地利人和) contribute to their growth.

The expansion of Chinese ensembles necessitated a wider musical repertoire and more instruments which were difficult and expensive to acquire. Pioneers displayed remarkable creativity in overcoming resource obstacles. In an interesting recollection, a pioneer narrated a collective decision to improvise a double bass by 'inventing' a similar instrument out of a barrel. Lin's ingenuity also shone through as he crafted his own instruments like the *banhu* (板胡) out of locally accessible resources like coconut shell, bamboo, and silk strings, and even using plastic pipes for wind instruments (*The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia*, 2022: 60). Some of these instruments eventually found acceptance within the Chinese orchestra repertoire as regional variants.

During my interactions with seniors, I encountered intriguing tales of innovation, such as a practical solution involving a metal casing with wheels to transport the *sheng*, a bulky instrument. In the past when transportation options were limited, the resourceful practitioner designed the metal casing to attach to the back of his motorcycle like a trailer, enabling easier transportation of the *sheng*. These stories of ingenuity demonstrate resourcefulness, connection to the natural environment, and deep passion to sustaining *huayue* practice in an environment of lack.

Those days, musical scores were either transcribed by hand from tunes on radio stations and cassette tapes imported from China or self-composed (Goh, 1998; Chan, 2003). These scores were highly valued for their scarcity, particularly in the 1960s due to China's revolution, which closed its doors to the world and halted the circulation of musical publications beyond the nation (Goh, 1998). Interviewee 01 further explains that it was

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[16] See Chapter 3.3 for a brief discussion on Miri, Sarawak.

impossible to obtain scores like *A Well-Matched Fight* (龙腾虎跃) 30 years ago, hence musicians had to transcribe them from recordings.

The dissemination of scores was also complicated. Musicians had to copy scores by hand or by carbon copy, then physically mail stacks of scores back and forth for sharing and collaborations. Interviewee 04 shared some interesting anecdotes about pioneers' resourcefulness:

'I know of a senior who copied musical scores by hand, with beautiful handwriting. To this day, he still practices music with the same set of handwritten scores (see Figure 17). Last time, we had to copy it onto wax paper and go through a printing process to duplicate the scores, unlike these days where you could just photocopy or print them.'

He also visited Mr. Lee Soo Sheng[17] (吕书城), the founding father in northern Malaysia, recalling that one would 'see heaps of his handwritten scores if you visit his room'. These scores, safeguarded by his children, are significant contributions to the Chinese orchestra as ground-breaking localized compositions. I have seen some of these hand-written originals and used them during rehearsals, some heavily photocopied and shared among orchestras, tracking the dissemination and inheritance of heritage from one generation to the next.

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[17] Tan, S. B.'s (2023) interview with Lee identifies him as an advocate for the Chinese orchestra from the 1960s, through the Dejiao Hui in Alor Setar. He experienced various bans and obstacles, to then witness the flourishing of the Chinese orchestra in recent years. Mr. Lee is widely acknowledged for his contributions towards the localization of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia for arranging local folk songs and patriotic songs that promote values of the local multiethnic society.
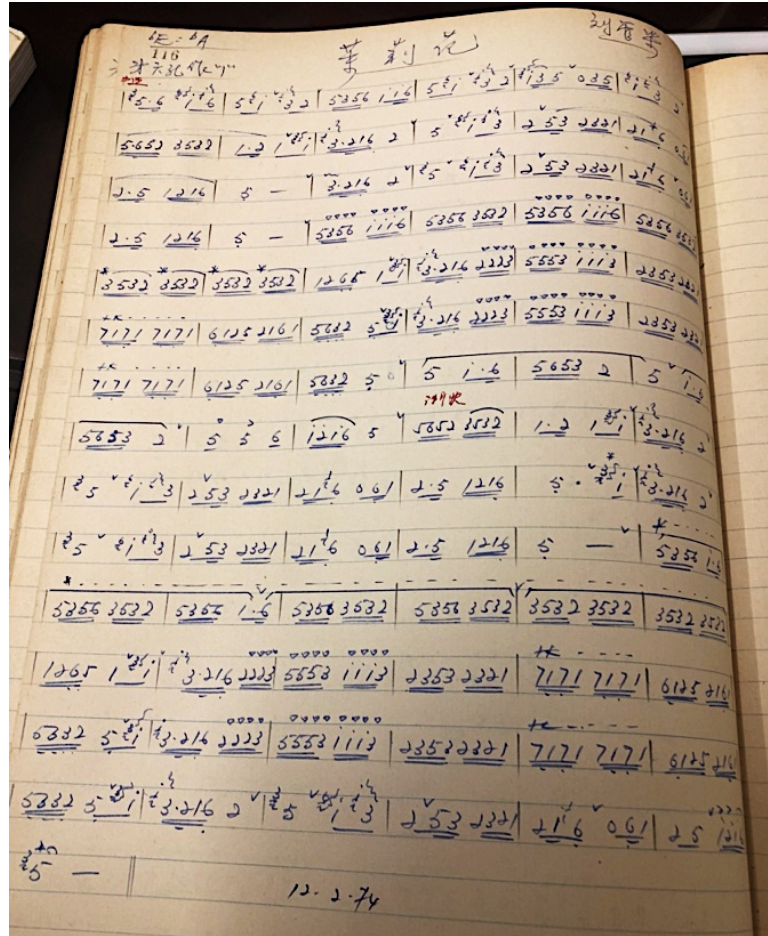
Figure 17. *Jasmine Flower* **Manuscript**, with publishing permission by document owner. A handwritten original of the folk tune, not the internationalized version, transcribed in 1974. Coincidentally, this photo is the *erhu* score of *Jasmine Flower* (see Chapter 1.3), originating from a conversation in 2019 referred to by Interviewee 04.

Early practitioners of the Chinese orchestra encountered formidable challenges, including difficulties securing full-time employment and resource constraints. Additionally, for a prolonged period, songs labeled as 'red music' (红色音乐) were banned due to the underground communist movement in Malaysia, even inviting official warning and arrests. Interviewee 04 continues with the narration on cultural upheaval and issues with communism:

> 'They were sensitive to everything. People were jailed or fined because of cultural activities. They had to apply for performance permits and change song titles. In KL, the officers would sometimes know the content of the songs and made things difficult. In the North, it was easier. Maybe they tell the officer "*itu lagu nelayan* (it's a fishermen's song)" and was let off.'

Most of the times, the community playing these repertoires did not perform them with any political intention, even if they did imply communist undertones. The desire was simply to play good music. Interviewee 04 recounted a story about Teo, who was gifted a *guzheng* during a visit to a teacher in Singapore. Despite its considerable size, Teo hand-carried it across customs back to Malaysia, treating it as a cherished treasure. This anecdote reminds us to learn the perseverance and determination in pursuit of one's passions.

I suppose that there is no vocabulary sufficient to translate the intensity of passion, enthusiasm, or ardor, 热忱 (*rechen*), of initial-day practitioners. Many dedicated their time and energy to *huayue* despite having families and full-time jobs (Interviewee 20). Some individuals from this generation continue to financially support the Chinese orchestra, expressing regret for not being able to pursue an arts career due to livelihood constraints (Interviewee 27).

Any individual of the generation would be able to share anecdotes of the past with a passion that 'just exists in their blood, without knowing where it is from' (quoted from an informal conversation). Teo perceives his life journey as one meant to be full of hardship, in the fight for one's ethnic culture. It is one that describes the migration of Chinese laborers to Malaya, and the subsequent struggle to survive:

> 'This is a multicultural country, but we face an abnormal fate due to political factors. I say this because my father came from China. He was sold as slave labor (卖猪仔, literally 'selling piglets') to Malaysia. He only brought a *dizi* with him when he came, hung it on the wall, and played it in his free time. When I was twelve, I tried to play it, and managed to make it sound without anybody teaching me. I learnt it by mimicking the way he played it. Everybody was amazed. That was my first encounter with *huayue*. *Huayue* made me realize that our ethnicity was not only oppressed in our livelihood, but even our music was looked down on. I was assigned to the *huayue* ensemble in school because the wind ensemble was fully occupied, and nobody wanted to join *huayue*.'

In comparison, later generations of the Chinese orchestra have progressed significantly from the past, resolving many problems faced by early practitioners. Interviewee 03 suggests that 'we are doing quite well, from the perspective of the past on the present', with improvements in resources, instruments, spaces, and teachers. Additionally, Interviewee 06 observes that the establishment of Malaysia's diplomatic relationship with China has

enhanced opportunities for further study and elevated performance standards reducing the skill gap with Mainland China.

Second-generation Chinese orchestra practitioners who are now active in the scene have inherited their passion from their parents, particularly their fathers. These individuals have not only embraced their heritage but carved out their own identity and fame. An example is the children of Teo, who pursued music-related careers. Similarly, other interviewees, like Interviewees 09 and 16, have accepted this responsibility to inherit the cultural heritage, and are finding innovative ways to expand the Chinese orchestra.

To Teo, the Chinese orchestra is about growing together as a community and creating harmony through music. His journey into a lifelong dedication to the Chinese orchestra was marked by a series of twists and turns. Reflecting on his path, he acknowledges the fortune of embarking on the path to *huayue* as a trailblazer, marking a new path at the forefront. 'We are the first school Chinese orchestra in the south of Malaysia, the earliest to participate, contact, and discover,' he recalls. At the time, playing together was entirely impromptu, based on 'feels'. It served more as a form of entertainment to play the same melody all at once, from having to learn from the *minjian* artists to now having readily available teaching resources, to be playing music for an audience, rather than self-entertainment.

Despite challenges faced in the past, Teo believes that the evolution of the Chinese orchestra over time is akin to the blossoming of a brilliant *huayue* flower, highlighted by processes of localization and collaborations (see Chapters 4 and 5). His relationship to *huayue* is rather poetic. To him, *huayue* is not a lucrative pursuit—those who dedicate themselves to its cultivation have the option to pursue more financially stable careers. However, its cultural inheritance brings a deep sense of fulfillment to the soul. He advices an open-minded and open-hearted approach to *huayue*, coupled with a lot of perseverance, to cultivate the sense of community built up by the earlier generation, cooperation within the community, and positive relations.

Due to environmental conditions, Malaysia could not compete internationally in terms of technique and standards, but its people's passion for *huayue* remains unmatched. Historical actions taken to defend the cultural heritage indicate unwavering dedication and resilience, serving as invaluable lessons for future generations. This chapter prompts critical reflections on the significance of cultural heritage preservation. Lessons should be taken from history to

honor the struggles and sacrifices of antecedents while learning about our identity and cultural heritage.

The multitude of narratives and versions of history described by different people may not be easily summarized, but the act of listening to and recording them holds immense value. As Teo poetically expresses, the stories and actions are 'symbols of history (历史的符号)' and 'records of life (人生的记录)', important to be published and shared. Therefore, the inclusion of this topic is vital as a reminder to acknowledge, respect, and give voice to those who have shaped the evolving landscape of today.

1.3 *Jasmine Flower* (茉莉花) – From Tradition to Modernity

The melody of *Jasmine Flower*, also known as *Xian Hua Diao* (鲜花调), *lameihua*, and *yuemeihua*, originates from East Central China, in the Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. It carries profound symbolic significance within Chinese culture, particularly in representing the regional Jiangnan identity south of the Yangtze River. Due to its association with the Han majority, *Jasmine Flower* is adopted as a national icon, inserted into the Han narrative as a symbolic strategy to reaffirm Han superiority over ethnic minorities (Lau, 2018: 84-85).

This song's political cause brought it global fame, prompting Chinese musicians, composers, and cultural workers to view it as a significant national music and cultural icon in China. My personal connection to the piece, with observations and curiosity, motivated the discussion of globalization of Chinese music through this song. *Jasmine Flower* is a staple in my fusion band repertoire to represent the Chinese, performed even by musicians without 'being Chinese'.

Beyond personal affinity, an example of its globalization is its unexpected appearance in an Australian drama series, where it was sung by an Australian girl advocating for oppressed Chinese groups. This choice is presumably for the song's widespread global recognition and symbolism of Chinese-ness. Ironically, the piece does not represent the minority that the character is fighting for, although the tune is commonly known. Besides popular culture, *Jasmine Flower* has been adapted and hybridized in numerous ways by the Chinese orchestra[18]. Iconic arrangements by composers like Liu Wenjin and variations

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[18] See Chapter 4 for the transition of traditional music into the contemporary landscape through the Chinese orchestra, and hybridity in the Southeast Asian context.

featured in compositions such as Guan Naizhong's *guanxian sizhu zhi duoshao* (管弦丝竹知多少) demonstrates the song's versatility and adaptability in modern musical contexts.

Initially, *Jasmine Flower* is conceived as a metaphor to trace the Chinese orchestra's transformations from the past to the present in the process of modernization and globalization. The transition of traditional regional and folk music into the repertoire of the Chinese orchestra in the contemporary landscape is poetically described through its lyrics, mirroring the gradual and graceful blooming of the jasmine flower:

> 'Aromatic and beautiful, in full blossom here and there; Fragrant and pure, praised by all.' ('芬芳美丽满枝桠，又香又白人人夸。')

This lyrical metaphor also aptly captures the essence of growth and expansive influence of Chinese musical culture, via its migration to other parts of the world along with its diaspora.

Further research consolidates the significance of *Jasmine Flower*, mentioned in numerous interviews (11 times), all unprompted, generally related as *the* traditional music of the Chinese orchestra, discussed on regional music appropriation, and its representation of Chinese culture. We can establish the premise that *Jasmine Flower* carries musical and compositional importance, frequently featured in ceremonies, performances, and digital media, thus reaffirming its global position as a token of Chinese identity.

Lau's insights on *Molihua* provide valuable context to understand its cultural implications. He comprehends the multiplicity of *Jasmine Flower*'s existence and image as a subject of 'politics of new subjectivity, construction of ethnicity, articulation of difference, and the formation of nationhood' (2018: 82). Furthermore, the evolution in meaning of *Molihua* is influenced by cultural expectations, history, desires and imaginations, and the dynamic economic and political relationship shaping China's global interactions. In its own essence, the discussion here is not a political discourse on the significance of *Jasmine Flower*, nor does it investigate the music and its meanings. Rather, this association allows inferences to fathom the relational complexities between the Malaysian Chinese and the wider Chinese ethnic identity, and the changing role of Chinese music as a symbol of 'Chinese-ness' in a globalized present.

Earlier discussions ascertained the Chinese orchestra as a cultural soft power representing the modernity of China by blending 'Chinese aesthetics and Western functionality'. In the developmental journey of *huayue*, Chan (2003) suggests two key

traditions—the confluence between music and literature in compositions, and the sustenance of the traditional '*yùn* (韵, rhythm, allure)' in musical expressions. He argues that Chinese culture uses literature as a vehicle for moral teaching, in contrast to the individualism and personality in Western philosophy. The loss of *yùn*, or the essence of Chinese-ness, is a cultural loss from globalization (ibid.).

Interviews with scholars studying in Mainland China indicate efforts to sustain *yùn* through a revival of regional and folk art forms, aiming to understand and preserve these cultural expressions. Elements of regional music are weaved into contemporary compositions as part of symphonization. According to Interviewee 21, the diverse array of existing art forms across China, alongside modern symphonized compositions, could become models for further development and expansion. While not all models may influence the general direction of music, the potential for expansion beyond pre-existing models is emphasized. Arguably, this approach is a process of localization, where minority traditions are thoughtfully incorporated into modern expressions, blending tradition with the modern.

During tumultuous periods in China's history, Chinese emigration led to the global dissemination of contemporary Chinese musical instruments and revived regional cultures (Lam, 2008). In this transformation, the temporality indicated by folk music like *Jasmine Flower* is blurred, reinforcing the notion that tradition and modernity are processes rather than fixed in time. *Jasmine Flower*'s complex symbolism as a regional emblem, globalized presentation of Chinese-ness, or internalized recognition for cultural identity, makes it unique to each listener. Interviewees therefore label it as a 'classic' (经典) rather than 'traditional' (传统) piece. Younger participants in the Experiment Ensemble mentioned *Jasmine Flower* as traditional despite not knowing what traditional represents—traditional music is something of the previous generation; the association of *Jasmine Flower* with this idea is due to its mid-1900s politicization and popularization by China.

Fluctuations in meaning and representation of *Molihua* parallels China's shifting global relations, from a marginalized power to a respected nation. From 'an object of Western exotic gaze', the music became a respected icon of the nation (Lau, 2018: 94-95). For diasporic Chinese communities, *Jasmine Flower* symbolizes Chinese identity and ties to their imagined homeland[19]. China continues to influence its diaspora's cultural identity to maintain

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[19] Anderson (1983) defines the 'imagined community' as people who are timelessly attached to a constructed nation or homeland, with imaginative values.

this process of imaginary identity construction, reinforced by the belief that future directions will follow China's lead (Interviewee 06).

The globalization of music and the pervasiveness of Chinese music shape cultural flows. Along this vein, music changes as it traverses regions, with China influencing culture through exchanges and top-down initiatives like the establishment of the Chinese orchestra and adoption of Western functionality in music. Ensembles like the Twelve Girls Band (女子十二乐坊) popularized Chinese music in the 2000s, challenging perceptions of it as traditional and irrelevant to contemporary lifestyle, and inspiring individuals like Interviewee to venture into *huayue*.

Moreover, media representations, like films by Stephen Chow and Zhang Yimou, feature music by Tan Dun and Zhao Jiping, reviving interest in traditional Chinese customs and appealing to diverse audiences. Interviewee 23 proposes three actors in the musical ecosystem—composers, performers, and the audience—with media shaping cultural perspective through their interaction. Social media creators contemporize Chinese music by playing trending songs on traditional instruments like the *guzheng*. Audiences then associate these performances with pre-existing Chinese culture, blurring the boundaries between tradition and modernity. However, these representations often present a one-sided, globalized facet of Chinese-ness, rather than the totality it embodies.

Returning to *Jasmine Flower*, its position as a cultural symbol of Chinese-ness is solidified through media, globalization, and constant renditions. The positive audience reception towards my band's performance of this tune underscores its iconic status. Interviewee 28 expresses similar acclaim at an international musical instrument conference where *Molihua* represented China. Additionally, Interviewee 16 affirms its global popularity, stating that many audiences, including foreigners, appreciate traditional pieces like *Spring on a Moonlit River* (春江花月夜) and *Ambush from Ten Sides* (十面埋伏), and *Molihua*. This composer-performer-audience loop sustains *Jasmine Flower*'s reputation as inherently traditional and Chinese.

Nonetheless, the trajectories contributing to the fame of *Jasmine Flower* is problematized as it is, after all, a deliberate curation by the PRC. Although it is viewed as a classical piece, it seems out of place when played on 'ancient' instruments like the *guqin* or *bianzhong* (Interviewee 32)—it oversimplifies millennia-long Chinese history into a singularity of Chinese-ness, ignoring the cultural and historical differences in greater regions

that include now Japan and Korea. What, then, is the role of traditional music for a diaspora? Reversely, is the diaspora's role to preserve traditional music?

For the Malaysian Chinese diaspora[20], *Jasmine Flower*'s significance extends beyond general consumption and popularization of politicized cultural products, but indicates a complex web of cultural relations and identity that attaches the Malaysian Chinese to their cultural heritage[21]. In a global context, *Jasmine Flower* is emblematic of Chinese culture. Along lines of desire and imagination of the Malaysian Chinese is the imaginary construction of ethnicity and identity after its displacement from the original culture. The prevalence of music as such resembles not only a preservation of cultural heritage, but also a testament to the enduring ties between the Malaysian Chinese diaspora and Mainland China, or the 'mother culture'.

An interviewee notices another extreme Chinese diaspora attitude towards a new culture, when conducting the New York Chinese Music Ensemble, that it 'does not really immerse into the New York culture'. Musicians play existing tunes together, without engaging in the creation of new musical expressions. This phenomenon reflects cultural translocation rather than immersion, where practices from one place are replicated in another, differing from that of Malaysia.

Similarly, the playing of traditional music is viewed as a core value of Chinese-ness, in the Chao Feng Chinese Orchestra, Melbourne, Australia, although there is not a clear definition for it. Chinese-ness is built upon the imagined perception of essential Chinese culture elements and values, through shared cultural connectivity that felt familiar. The Chinese orchestra provides such respite to those who understand the participation in Chinese music-making as a major part of Chinese culture, and who wish to ascertain their cultural identity through this means of social support (Southcott and Liao, 2023).

As a scholar, the interviewee raised questions about the preservation versus evolution of Chinese culture within diasporic communities—does that mean maintaining the Chinese culture? Should they preserve, stay the same, or should they evolve to something else? In Malaysia, the Chinese orchestra has always played a crucial socializing role, but there is an added significance for the Chinese community to assimilate into the multicultural fabric

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[20] Multiculturalism and identity of Southeast Asian Chinese is discussed across Chapter 4 and 5.3.
[21] Multiplicities in identity is discussed in my Masters dissertation (Tan E., 2019), in terms of Williams' (1977) theorization of the dominant, residual, and emergent in relation to power relations that underlie the Malaysian Chinese's cultural identity.

without losing its cultural heritage. Although *Jasmine Flower* is a 'must-have' and 'must-learn piece' in Chinese music education, the traditional must adapt to nurture new talents alongside existing resources. According to Interviewee 02, 'if the same pieces are taught for 30, 40 years, there would be no progress [of the Chinese community in Malaysia]'.

Examining the travel of music in assemblage terms reveals it as a constant process of becoming and transformation, rather than a product. Tan S. B. and Rao (2016) assert that movements of musical practices and cultures are sustained by transnational networks and connections, in a fluid, contextual, and negotiable relationship. The focus should be on the exploration of cultural frameworks that shape the existence, creativity, and consumption of music, rather than merely celebrating the global flow of music and commodities as a 'world cosmopolitan millennial culture' (Lau, 2018: 97). Identity across space and time comprises of conscious decisions to produce emergent Sino-soundscapes that are met with either negativity or creativity during the process of intercultural contact (Tan, S. B. and Rao, 2016). In other words, music always impacts and is impacted by the cultural landscapes it encounters in this mutual process of becoming. The line of flight of 'becoming-Malaysian Chinese' is in perpetual negotiation with its new environment.

Culturally relevant to early-day Chinese migrants to Malaya in the late 1800s and early 1900s, *Jasmine Flower* now holds more of an imagined significance. Its multiple versions are known simply as *Molihua*, in the politicized version. The handwritten score (Figure 17) presented earlier highlights the loss of regional culture due to homogenization. As a younger generation exposed to the globalized version, the senior's manuscript appears foreign to me. Peers who learned this variation expressed that 'it does not sound like *Molihua*'. This transformation process gradually removes the representativeness and *yùn* of the region, leaving behind previous experiences and an imagined regional identity for newer generations.

Education in the *Jiangnan sizhu* style is limited in Malaysia. Interviewee 08 states, 'I can sing *Molihua* or *Zizhudiao* (紫竹调), part of the *Jiangnan sizhu*, but have I learned the music as it was supposed to be? No. I share beneficial things with students but wouldn't say I'm preserving Chinese culture, just promoting it, because preservation has a different approach.' This illustrates the superficiality of cultural preservation efforts in Malaysia. On one hand, there is a nostalgic attachment to cultural symbols like *Jasmine Flower* and cultural activities that may no longer authentically represent contemporary Chinese culture but are upheld due to their association with an imagined community or homeland. On the other hand,

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there is a desire to modernize and escape heavily stereotyped Chinese traditions to integrate into the society they live in.

This paradox raises questions about Chinese culture preservation in the modern world. In Malaysia, cultural identity is ironic as people need to acknowledge Chinese heritage, yet detach from it to become 'Malaysian'. This reflects the Malaysian Chinese's quest for a distinct identity, with the Chinese orchestra emerging as a means of self-representation. Arguably, expressions of music in the Chinese diaspora involve interactions and negotiations between the host country, ties to the homeland, aspirations of individual musicians, historical consciousness, and internal cultural conflicts (Zheng, 1994: 276). The identity fluidity offered by *Jasmine Flower*'s complex global position proves that subversion of prescribed cultural meanings is possible through music.

Lam (2008) asserts that music 'allows contemporary Chinese to construct and negotiate their Chinese self', according to strategic imaginations and daily realities, as well as historically and culturally rooted ideologies and practices. In the Malaysian Chinese orchestra, this tension manifests as a clash between tradition, modernity, and even localization, with intentions of learning traditional Chinese pieces to maintain Chinese-ness while embracing localized compositions that are contemporary to Malaysian life. Chinese orchestra concerts are compelled to include a mixture of traditional, contemporary, popular, and local repertoire to sufficiently express the multiplicity in identity, positioning it as a cultural heritage that is Malaysian, Chinese, globalized, modernized, relevant, assimilated into the local, preserving Chinese culture… all at once.

Singapore pioneers the development of Nanyang style music (see Chapters 4.2 and 4.3). However, it is still a work in progress (Interviewee 12). This emergence is central to the development of Southeast Asian *huayue* as Singapore has strong technical and financial capacity to experiment with musical styles, to then provide clear possibilities for the Malaysian community. Malaysia has abundant cultural resources for this expansion—composers are in between stages of mimicry and self-expression, learning to create the Malaysian flavor and exhibit them on international stages, mainly through commissions of professional orchestras elsewhere. Albeit slower than the rest, the contemporary Malaysian *huayue* identity is one that is under construction.

Essentially, Lau (2018) suggests that music, in its entanglements with the environment, can transform meaning and altering modality. The tonality of *Molihua* has

modulated beyond its identity as a regional folksong. A similar transformation is occurring in diasporic communities worldwide. The globalized Chinese music—*Jasmine Flower*—is contemporary and hybridized, imbued with meanings far beyond its origins. *Jasmine Flower* stands out as one of the hundred flowers that continually blossom, carrying multiple meanings within the global Chinese community and to the rest of the world.

Chapter 2 – Mapping the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia

Folk music, the foundation of the Chinese orchestra, is adaptable and pragmatic, utilizing any available materials (Richards, in Revill, 2005: 700). Similarly, in the Chinese diaspora, the values and purposes of the Chinese orchestra become localized when adapting to its new environment. Performers, as main actors of the ecosystem, creatively shape their repertoire and practices to fit social situations and sustain cultural activities in the local *minjian*. This embodiment of a multiplicity of experiences, attachments, and associations forms the heterogenous assemblage of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem.

In Malaysia, grassroot efforts are important for the Chinese orchestra's development due to the lack of government support (Tan E., 2019). As a result, the Chinese orchestra depends on the *minjian* for promoting and funding (Yong, 2016), unlike regions where professional Chinese orchestras benefit from government or corporate backing. This reliance contributes to a sense of inferiority in Malaysia that requires an update of the Chinese orchestra's values to enhance its societal relevance and secure authority support.

This community-driven model reflects the pragmatic and adaptive nature of cultural practices highlighted by Richards (in Revill, 2005), and stresses the potential for the Chinese orchestra to expand the assemblage through continued grassroot efforts. Assessing the relationship between the Chinese orchestra community and its surroundings becomes vital to understand its social value and role in the creative industry. The mapping of the cultural ecology focuses on flows, networks, and relations instead of discreet entities (Mercer, 2002). This matrix metaphor captures the dynamics of a permeable cultural field, in recognition that cultural policy considerations do not always come from within existing frameworks.

Recognizing the need for a timely exploration, this research aims to remap the Chinese orchestra's trajectory by interpreting its historical relevance to contemporary Malaysian society. This chapter answers research questions by delineating the Chinese orchestra's social functions, examining its evolution into the present society as a fluid cultural ecosystem, and recognizing its value amidst societal changes and disruptions.

Due to its size and relevance, the networking of the Chinese orchestra is presented as a mind map in Appendix I. The mapping, akin to a rhizome or assemblage, visualizes the web of relations among stakeholders, activities, musical styles, and spaces of interactions, that

resembles a natural food web in an ecosystem[1]. This systematic outline facilitates the inquiry into the development of the Chinese orchestra as a cultural heritage in modernity.

Overall, Chapter 2 meets the first and second research objectives: mapping the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia as a cultural ecosystem, and evaluating its opportunities and challenges. Its sections interconnect to elaborate on three main challenges identified in this research—money, relationships, and support.

In earlier days in Singapore, challenges included external environment issues and internal problems such as funding, information, location, instruments, and teaching resources (Goh, 1998). Malaysia faced similar challenges, in which Chen (1999) identifies seven categories of development—outstanding performers, high quality instruments and repair services, localized compositions, robust management and operations system, professional conductors, unified administrative and development agencies, and professionalized systems. Figure 18 streamlines Chen's flow of thought regarding Malaysia's developmental trajectory:
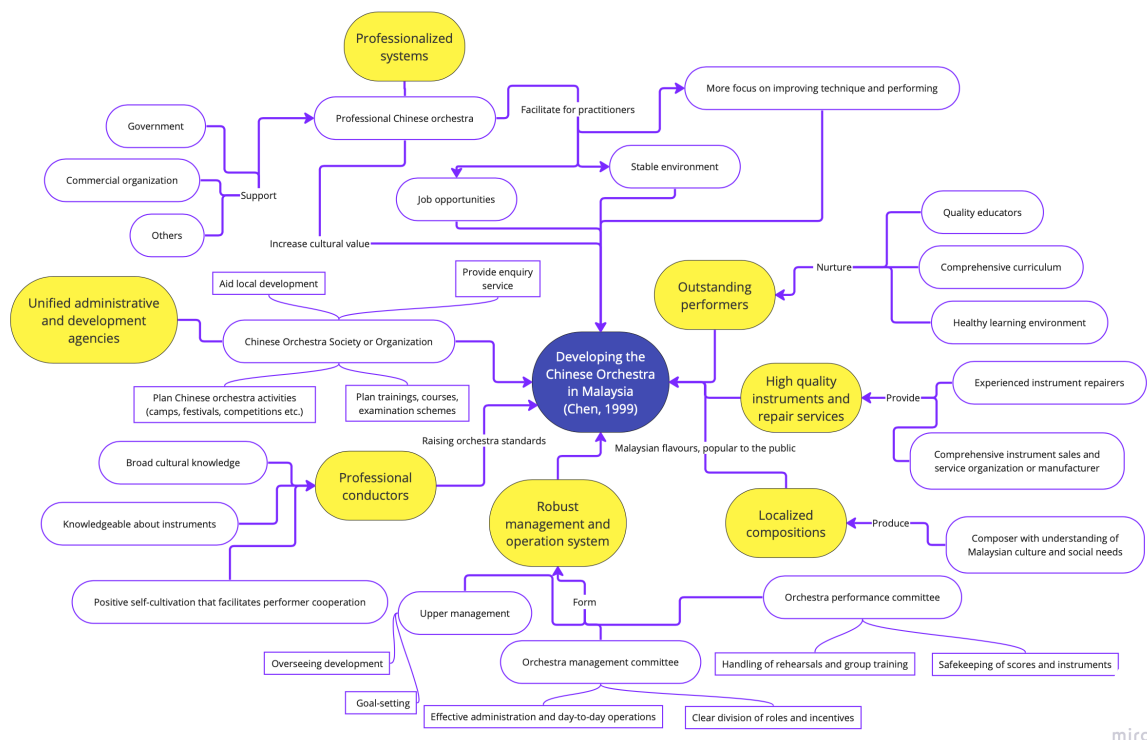
Figure 18. Developing the Malaysian Chinese Orchestra (Chen, 1999)

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[1] Defining the relations in the Chinese orchestra community as a 'food web' is imprecise, as it lacks hierarchical levels; most stakeholders exist in parallel. Nonetheless, this analogy shows the structural similarity between the Chinese orchestra community and natural ecosystems.

This historical mapping from over 20 years ago still resonates today, as aspirations and development strategies in Malaysia's Chinese orchestra community remain similar (see final chapter). Both Chen and Yong (2016) cite the importance of professionalization[2] (专业化) for job creation and talent nurturing, although persistent funding and support challenges have shifted priorities over time.

At present, institution orchestras, particularly Chinese independent schools, serve as the backbone of the Chinese orchestra community, reflecting strong ethnic identity, and the spirit of Chinese education. However, this distinctiveness presents itself as a challenge, as school orchestras face regulatory changes and limited support (ibid.), often needing to cultivate relationships with organizations and school management to uphold their values.

Efforts to address financial issues must navigate interconnections between human and environmental dynamics. Mercer (2002) points out that cultural mapping responds to issues in the global cultural and communications economy and requires an understanding of local cultural resources and their roles, then recognizing and enhancing the relationships between local and global contexts. Hence, this chapter seeks to outline obstacles specific to Malaysia and propose strategies for the Chinese orchestra.

Firstly, Chapter 2.1 borrows the title of this thesis, *When a Hundred Flowers Blossom*, to metaphorically encapsulate the rhizomatic 'blossoming' of the Chinese orchestra and its diverse mappings. The section explores the significance of this phrase and presents a visual cultural mapping of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem, emphasizing the role of the *minjian* in its evolution.

Chapter 2.2 discusses activities that foster community cohesion among orchestra members, such as *yumcha* sessions, which strengthen interpersonal relationships and create a sense of belonging. These activities contribute to community ties and unity within diasporic Chinese communities.

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[2] 'Professionalization', in this case, refers to the process towards establishing a professional orchestra in Malaysia. It is an internalized comparison to other main Chinese orchestra regions where there are government- or corporate-supported orchestras capable of hiring full-time musicians with exceptional performance skills, such as the Singapore Chinese Orchestra or Suzhou Chinese Orchestra. This perceived class and standard of professional Chinese orchestras means that professionalization is perpetually an unattainable dream as long as the orchestra is community-run, regardless of the technical proficiency of its musicians. There are, arguably, several orchestras and ensembles in Malaysia that possess similar levels of performance standards and music rigor, but are not acknowledged by the community as 'professional'. Chapter 6 discusses further about professionalization aspirations.

Following that is Chapter 2.3, which addresses funding and support obstacles that impact relationships within the Chinese orchestra community, including the third challenge asserted by Yong (ibid.) concerning the attitudes and relationships of orchestra members. Raised in this section is the less openly mentioned, but equally significant issue of competition and infighting among practitioners in a relatively small market. Internal dynamics must be unpacked before external environmental issues can be effectively tackled.

Next, Chapter 2.4 examines audience composition audiences for concerts and commercial performances. It explores the performance of Chinese identity through commercial performances during festivities and deduce roles and values of the Chinese orchestra to the Malaysian Chinese community, as well as social attitudes and reception towards these performances. The influence of market demands on the creative industry questions the choice of actions between 'art for art's sake' or 'art for money's sake'. The value of the Chinese orchestra through societal willingness to 'pay the prices' is also a key consideration for tensions between artistic integrity and financial sustainability.

Finally, Chapter 2.5 outlines various activities conventionally organized by the Chinese orchestra, including competitions, Chinese musical instrument examinations, *guanmohui* ('share and review' sessions), music festivals, music exchanges, and training camps. The section also elaborates a few challenges such as funding and organizational difficulties.

Reflecting on cultural relations, Castells proposes that 'networks are essential but are not the end of the story' (2023: 944). This statement underpins the importance of establishing connections in culture but not essentializing it, in recognition that culture is living and changing. Navigating changing values in the Chinese orchestra community within the contexts of modernity and globalization presents a complex challenge. Despite extensive interviews with practitioners, the question of the Chinese orchestra's significance remains difficult to answer when recurring challenges are presented, highlighting a need for continuous introspection and adaptation to remap the Chinese orchestra.

2.1 When a Hundred Flowers Blossom (百花齐放) – Mapping the Chinese Orchestra

The title of this thesis, *When a Hundred Flowers Blossom*, is rooted in the expression 'let a hundred flowers bloom' (百花齐放) for the arts and 'let a hundred schools of thought contend' (百鸟争鸣) for literature, famously endorsed by Mao Zedong in his 1956 speech.

During the Cultural Revolution, the motto 'let a hundred flowers blossom, discard the old for the new' aligned with the Chinese Communist Party's interests, leading to significant changes in Chinese orchestra compositions of that era (Lee, 2018a). Musical works from this period held core values of 'service to the people' and 'compatibility with the Communist Party and with socialist thought'.

According to Interviewee 07, the era before the Cultural Revolution aimed politically to achieve a state of 'fifty-six flowers [representing] fifty-six ethnic groups, like a hundred flowers blossoming' (五十六个民族五十六朵花，百花齐放), integrating all ethnic elements into Chinese culture, and it sparked official interest in the *minjian*, or minority cultures. The objective was to absorb these diverging minority cultures into the greater Chinese cultural framework.

The enduring significance of this term is evident nearly 80 years later, as it continues to be organically referenced in discussions about the development of the Chinese orchestra. Specifically, it was mentioned by 11 interviewees 15 times and highlighted during the SCMF forum I have attended.
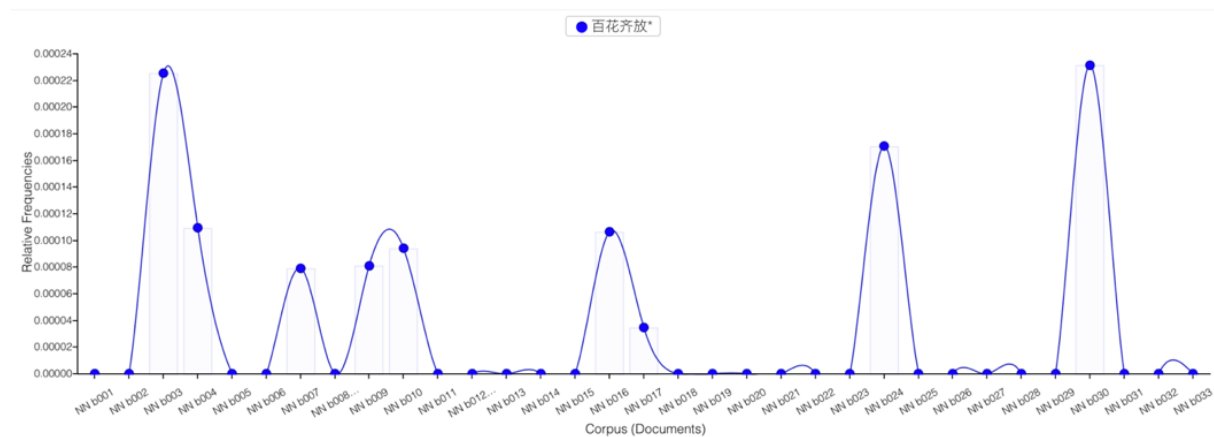
Figure 19. Trends of '*A Hundred Flowers Blossoming*' in Voyant Tools Analysis

What happens when a hundred flowers blossom? The analogy does not carry any political significance to Malaysians but symbolizes the community's dynamism and vibrancy in the literal sense of letting a hundred flowers blossom. This analogy is essential to express *minjian* cultures and is commonly used by practitioners to describe the diverse trajectories of growth and variety in the community:

D..	Left	Term	Right
⊞ N...	不一样的，就大家有各自不同的方向？？，那是一定的。这	百花齐放	是一定要讲的，如果大家的方向都是一个，那可能就
⊞ N...	音古筝，电子古筝，蝴蝶筝。这些都进来，我都觉得好啊，大家	百花齐放	，但我们也不批评他，就如果你有本事你去做一个
⊞ N...	的，你不要担心出丑，出错。我觉得大家一起这样子，那	百花齐放	那种感觉就很好。
⊞ N...	歌。打开，开放的接触其他好的因素，好的音乐，那我们就	百花齐放	吧。
⊞ N...	的这个大概就是五十六个民族五十六朵花，	百花齐放	的一个状态。那么他就要求你把所有的民族的东西统
⊞ N...	持续发展下去，然后慢慢的把这个环境氛围做好了，过后才	百花齐放	，齐放的好就继续做，斗争也比较少。所以未来。。。给我
⊞ N...	也是用回这个rojak的比喻，就是马来西亚怎样还是会	百花齐放	，就算是没有职业乐团这方面走。大家都有大概这一个共同
⊞ N...	找一个真正专业老师也很难找。也没有的。其实后来就	百花齐放	，其实蛮多毕业的学生有去学这个回来，有很多走
⊞ N...	很多机会。所以我觉得很棒啊。现在的整个华乐是	百花齐放	的，我是开心的，然后我差不多就可以退休了。
⊞ N...	我会觉得有。可是现在我看到比较好的就是其实已经	百花齐放	了，有一点像我想要的那个发展，就是你很hardcore
⊞ N...	觉得这几年来是会比较好一点点，至少可以说是	百花齐放	，因为10多年前的话还是会有一枝独秀的这种现象
⊞ N...	阶层，不同文化不同背景的观众群。所以我是觉得必须要	百花齐放	。每个乐团在社会的定位是什么，这个也是非常非常的重要
⊞ N...	下去，直到你不能玩为止的。其实当然我希望的就是说	百花齐放	，因为每一个人每一个阶段的话，他都有需求不一样
⊞ N...	我们做这个古筝协会，还有包括我们做了很多活动，都希望	百花齐放	，因为我看到华乐有一个现象，就是可能有一点点，比较
⊞ N...	古筝 的圈子，我觉得大家都属于各有各做，算是比较	百花齐放	这样子。这样子古筝跟华乐这一方面你们会怎样去

Figure 20. Contexts of '*A Hundred Flowers Blossoming*' in Voyant Tools Analysis

For instance, Interviewee 10 (seventh context above) compares the analogy to the parallel metaphor of the *rojak*[3] to argue that the Malaysian Chinese orchestra will continue to flourish due to its uniqueness, multiplicity, and flavors. Another notes an improvement in community relations compared to past competition for 'the spotlight on a single flower' (一枝独秀). Generally, the Chinese orchestra ecosystem is recognized to be moving in the right direction.

Now, the Chinese orchestra welcomes members ranging from as young as 5 years old to old age, primarily students. They are present in all states, organized by different bodies—educational institutions, alumni associations, clan associations, religious groups, freelance ensembles, music education centers, and others. Although the exact number of Chinese orchestras is unknown, estimates indicate that there could be up to 300, including permanent ensembles and temporary formations.

Nonetheless, this blossoming is not continuous—it resembles the circle of life, a natural cycle of blossoming, wilting, and renewal. Just as Goh (1998) describes the Chinese orchestra in Singapore in the 1970s, progress is not a path of uninterrupted growth, often interspersed with challenges and setbacks, particularly when supporting structures are disassembled and require rebuilding. Recognizing the cyclic nature of growth, the cultural mapping of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem draws inspiration from Titon's (2020) proposed lessons in the ecology of music. These four lessons include the importance of *diversity* through competition and adaptation for survival, the recognition of *limits to growth* in a cycle of production and consumption that requires sustainable thinking, *interconnectivity* for better

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[3] Chapter 4.4 discusses the *rojak* alongside other food, multiculturalism, and community operations.

sustainability by understanding populations, communities, and habitats, and the *stewardship* of cultural stakeholders in the community.

As a culmination of the finding of this research, this cultural mapping is visually presented as Appendix I. It includes locations (regions, performance venues), musical elements (instruments, mode of performance, type of music played, education and learning), activities, and interpersonal relations (actors/stakeholders, careers). Along another vein, a Word Cloud generated from data analysis visually presents keywords in sizes that correspond to their weightage:

Figure 21. Voyant Tool Cirrus (Word Cloud)

The Word Cloud encompasses 105 key terms listed in Appendix V, with few synonyms (e.g. popular music =流行歌, 流行曲). The predominant occurrences of '演奏会' (*yanzouhui*) and '音乐会' (*yinyuehui*), both connote 'concert', or 'performance'. Interestingly, the term 马来人 (*malairen*, Malay people) is a significant surprise, demonstrating the influence of Malay ethnicity and multiculturalism on the Chinese orchestra's collaborations and development (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Besides that, the theme of 'development' (发展) surfaces in this research to set the stage for the Cultural Sustainability Web (Chapter 6) by embodying notions of promotion (推广), direction (方向), and aspiration (希望, 感想). Another focal point is the locational comparison of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Malaysia to Singapore and Taiwan, their

counterparts. The issue of 'comparison' (比较) holds significance to the community, likely due to the proximity and similarity of Singapore, and Taiwan as a main site for tertiary education.

Additional keywords from the Cirrus, non-exhaustively, can be grouped into a few thematic categories:

- Music-related (mainly Chapter 4):
    - Concert/Performance (演奏会/音乐会), Modern/Traditional (现代/传统), Western music (西乐), Popular Music (流行歌/流行曲), Solo Performances (独奏), Repertoire (曲目), Composers (作曲家; Chapter 5.4), Compositions/Pieces (作品/曲子), Sound (声音)
- Learning- and education-related (Chapter 4.5):
    - Schools (学校), Secondary Schools (中学), Chinese Independent Schools (独中), Teacher and Student (老师, 学生), Teaching (教课), Rehearsals/Practice (排练/练习), online classes (网课)
- Community-related:
    - Musicians (乐手), Orchestra Members (团员), Collaboration (合作), Professional (专业), Exchange (交流), Audience (观众)
- Themes:
    - Locality (地方), Culture (文化), Nature (大自然), Pandemic (疫情, MCO – Chapter 5.1), Digitalization (Online – Chapter 5.2), Crossover (跨界 – Chapter 5.3)
- Instruments (乐器):
    - Modification (改良), Section (声部), *Dizi* (笛子), *Suona* (唢呐), *Pipa* (琵琶), *Yangqin* (扬琴), *Erhu* (二胡), *Guzheng* (古筝), *Zhongruan* (中阮)

Together, these keywords contribute to visualize the conceptual map and discussion in subsequent chapters, despite challenges in Chinese keyword identification. They help to examine the network and interactions of the Chinese orchestra with broader social, political, and economic base structures, revealing organizational structures and community dynamics that contribute to community cohesion and resilience of the ecosystem. Finally, they also give attention to tensions between tradition and modernity in preserving cultural heritage.

When a hundred flowers blossom, diversity flourishes among Chinese orchestras. Central to the resilience and vitality of the Chinese orchestra is the notion of the *minjian*, an inherently strong rhizomatic structure that is rooted in humble origins. It is symbolic of the 'power of the people'—the collective agency of practitioners, local initiatives, and interconnected relationship with all other stakeholders of the ecosystem. Despite its unassuming nature, *minjian* remains steadfast and impervious to external forces, a metaphorical resilient entity capable of withstanding external pressures while maintaining structural integrity.

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia exhibits diverse musical competence and operating styles because of varied organizational structures. Interviewee 24 notices this shift over the past decade from the dominance of a few orchestras to a landscape catering to audiences of disparate tastes and social niches, with orchestras occupying different positions in society. Without a professional orchestra, some aspire to attain that level, whereas others prioritize entertainment or specific demographics, such as seniors or young learners.

This diversification mirrors Herbert's (1998) classification of bands into three levels based on competence and ambition. The first group, led by professional conductors, holds great influence. The second is a subset of the first, slightly less proficient but ambitious and well-organized. The residual group is content with their standards but imitates more accomplished counterparts. Orchestra styles also vary within similar groups, depending on the participants, and they affect rehearsal and performance attitudes. In some instances, closer member relationships may lead to questioning of the conductor's decisions, while professionally oriented settings maintain strict adherence to conductor instructions. This hierarchical structure parallels the spectrum of proficiencies and aspirations of the Chinese orchestra.

Currently, the landscape offers more job opportunities for specialized instrument instructors (Interviewee 09), raising overall standards, and alleviate job displacement and competition concerns (Chapter 2.3). This transition towards a diversified instructional model is marked by fewer conflicts of interests, although some areas still experience complications and conflicts (Interviewee 14).

Despite improved working conditions and job satisfaction, the Chinese orchestra community faces challenges like salary discrepancies and the scarcity of successors in school orchestras. The entrenched perception of the value of *huayue* instructors remains rooted in

outdated paradigms from the 1980s and 1990s (Interviewees 02 and 03) despite increased social support. This does not translate into higher salaries or more opportunities for advancement. The growing pool of instructors and stagnant number of orchestras compel existing instructors to relinquish their roles due to market saturation (which they are almost certainly not willing to), and perpetuates the involution (内卷)[4] trend of undervalued instructors reluctantly accepting positions with lower remuneration. Addressing these systemic challenges is necessary to ensure equitable compensation and opportunities for all practitioners.

Music, as Callon remarked (in Revill, 1998: 202), embodies the duality as both a social and technical activity. Performing music generates meaning by connecting technological and social elements from notation, instrument making, to architectural designs of concert venues, promotional economics, musician training, engineering, designing, and audience-performer socializing dynamics. This holistic production and consumption of music intersects aesthetic norms and critical discourses with practical considerations and social dynamics.

Huayue education relies on Western music frameworks, which, while occasionally illogical, prove pragmatic, especially in fundraising (Interviewee 26). However, promotional strategies often prioritize youths, capitalizing on contemporary trends to engage a diverse audience. This symbiotic relationship between older generations and younger enthusiasts fosters the modernization and sustainability of the *huayue* industry. Amidst this landscape, the *huayue* industry is compared to a free market that accommodates diverse entities and allows individual pursuits without 'stepping on others' (Interviewee 17).

Huayue stakeholders extend beyond participants to become distinct cultural agents within stable and defined groups (Bauman, 1997, in Hoffstaedter, 2009: 539), or cultural stewards who safeguard and promote musical culture (Titon, 2020). Tan S. B. (2000) notes that most Chinese orchestra members are from the working class. Arguably, there is an evolving presence of professional musicians within the orchestras now, albeit dependent on location. Regardless, community orchestras face notable age disparity that necessitates careful management strategies to accommodate varying skill levels and nurture progression (Interviewee 26). These strategies involve grouping members by performance ability, with provisions for newcomers and advancement opportunities.

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[4] The term is an internet slang in reference to trending practices or activities that are self-serving.

Delicate interpersonal dynamics are essential for smooth operations in community orchestras. For instance, the Malacca Teo Chew Association Chinese Orchestra avoids recruiting high school students with emphasis on internal training and recruitment to mitigate member overlaps and scheduling clashes. Conversely, Interviewee 29's orchestra allows members to participate in other orchestras, which in turn introduces logistical complexities due to working members' diverse professions and busy schedules. In this case, effective management and performance preparation requires meticulous rehearsal planning and adaptability. Interpersonal relationships are central to navigate orchestra operations.

Besides practitioners, numerous behind-the-scenes stakeholders are integral to Chinese orchestra operations. Goh (1998: 145-146) lists a network including resource managers, administrative personnel, event organizers, cultural organizations, media operators, representatives from culture and education ministries, as well as school principals and teachers-in-charge. Although often unseen, these stakeholders contribute to facilitating orchestra activities and sustaining the ecosystem. In Singapore, Chinese orchestras have invigorated the local Chinese society, symbolizing cultural and economic growth. Realizing this potential requires concerted efforts towards cultural and musical awareness from both the public and government sectors (ibid.: 58). Thus, the environment is key to the blossoming of the Chinese orchestra, serving as significant cultural institutions that foster its continuity and development.

However, despite their central role in educational institutions, Chinese orchestra practitioners face an arduous process to secure support from school stakeholders. Interviewee 25 recalled a three-year struggle to convince Chinese independent schools to incorporate *huayue* into their syllabus, a milestone to *huayue*'s social recognition. Collaborative efforts between organizations, foundations, and the government are recognized as the best way to promote and support the Chinese orchestra, ensuring stable funding and acceptance (Interviewee 04).

The orchestra is additionally supported by alumni donations and contributions from Chinese communities to pass on the cultural heritage and nurture the next generation of Chinese musicians (Interviewees 06 and 33). Nonetheless, the absence of government support and funding poses a perennial challenge that relegates the Chinese orchestra to the *minjian*. This challenge is comparable to the difficulties faced by Chinese independent schools in receiving government funding and recognition, relying instead on Chinese community support to maintain its vitality.

Reflecting on the Chinese orchestra's journey, pivotal events such as the 1979 Chinese Orchestra Forum organized by the Chin Woo Athletic Association cannot be overlooked. Over four decades ago, the forum established three fundamental principles that continue to resonate with the *huayue* community today. Firstly, it emphasizes the need for unity among orchestras, urging the elimination of sectarian biases and mutual elevation of *huayue* standards[5]. Secondly, it aspired to establish *huayue* educator and conductor masterclasses, inviting professionals to impart their expertise. Lastly, it advocated the organization of *huayue* festivals to promote activities on a broader scale (Chan, 2003: 146-147). These aspirations remain relevant and require central forces and organizational cooperation for their achievement.

2.2 *The Wine Song* (酒歌)[6] – A Socializing Community

The Chinese orchestra community is inherently social, fostering social cohesion through a diverse array of activities (Chapter 2.5) and the *yumcha* culture (see following). Socializing is fundamental to the orchestra's operation, creating spaces for individuals to discuss challenges, share experiences, and build interpersonal connections, which in turn influences coordinated and harmonious music performances.

Cohen (1998) highlights music as a focal point in social gatherings among immigrants, establishing and fortifying interpersonal relations. Music frames significant events such as weddings and religious festivals, heightening their symbolic significance to set them apart from daily activities. Such musical practices, involving everyday social interactions, help establish and maintain social relations while defining material and geographical contexts for social action (ibid.: 287). Interviewee 21 echoes that many Chinese music compositions are outward expressions to cater to social needs for communal gatherings, such as weddings and funerals, yet there is a perceived gap in addressing individual music satisfaction.

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[5] Although there is increased awareness of the harms of factionalism towards the unity of the Chinese orchestra, the issue persists to the present (overtly and covertly) and has become a 'topic of taboo'. Practitioners instead opt to avoid conflict and only work with those who are open to collaboration; this promotes community unity to a certain extent. Refer to Chapter 2.2 and 2.3 on more discussions about unity and factions.

[6] Composed by Lu Lianghui (卢亮辉) in 1978, it depicts the Yi tribe singing and dancing under the moonlight, capturing the spirit of festivities and communal gatherings.
Guided listening (Hsinchu City Youth Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDlXW1YayYo

Elsewhere, Herbert's analysis of the brass band movement shows how it marked a significant milestone for working-class individuals, disseminating art music to new audiences on a massive scale (1998: 105). Despite regional variations in development, the movement fostered a cohesive and national vision characterized by shared musical values. Similarly, the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia faces uneven development due to socio-economic differences yet share a common goal of cultural preservation.

The concept of community is often described as a shared sense of belonging, constructed within imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). These beliefs are enacted via shared musical practices (De Bruin and Southcott, 2023: 228). Socializing is thereby crucial, as seen in diasporic communities in Australia, where members prioritize social interaction over music, providing a sense of belonging, support, self-confidence, and reducing stress and anxiety in English-speaking environments (Southcott and Liao, 2023).

In Canada, Chan finds that Chinese orchestras serve as social hubs to connect community members to the homeland and provide stability in a foreign country, while also allowing individuals to explore their cultural roots (2022: 57-58). Initially focused on the preservation of traditional Chinese music, these orchestras evolved to seek collaboration with other cultures (Chapter 5.3), and relevance to contemporary society and younger generations. This mirrors the current trajectory of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, which, beyond its musical role, serve as an emblem of cultural identity and heritage preservation, bridging generational gaps and fostering external connections.

Tan S. B. describes the initiation into a Chinese orchestra as 'a relaxed and informal process', providing Chinese-educated youths with opportunities for socialization, music making, and skill development (2000: 112, 123). This essence of community remains unchanged. My own journey in a community Chinese orchestra (detailed in Reflexive Account) began as a newbie (新生) taking music theory classes and recreational activities, then progressing to involvement in the main *hezou* group (大合奏). Subsequent involvements in other orchestras were always met with warm welcomes, expanding my network of acquaintances across regions.

Even with reduced music participation today, each Chinese orchestra event attended inadvertently becomes a reunion with old friends as we engage in conversations about life and recent developments in the Chinese orchestra world. Concerts serve as a major form of socializing, although the audience pool then becomes insular, with orchestras supporting each

other's performances[7] (Chapter 2.4). These events, such as the visit of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, become eagerly anticipated major gatherings. Additionally, online platforms provide valuable spaces for sharing latest updates within the Chinese orchestra community (Chapter 3.4).

The *yumcha* (饮茶/喝茶, Cantonese for 'drinking tea' or teatime) culture plays an essential role in bonding within the Chinese orchestra. This supper or teatime culture extends beyond curbing hunger; it is a cultural practice shared among many performing art cultures that signifies communal bonding after rehearsals and performances (Interviewee 16). Sometimes, it becomes the orchestra's culture where members autonomously visit the same *mamak* after each rehearsal.

Interviewees discuss the *yumcha* culture as a key time for connection between teacher and student, to build relationships through discussions and reinforce friendships:

	Term	Collocate	Count (context)	
☐	喝茶*	老师	9	Teacher
☐	喝茶*	讲	8	
☐	喝茶*	学生	8	Student
☐	喝茶*	联络	7	Connect
☐	喝茶*	文化	6	Culture
☐	喝茶*	讨论	5	Discuss
☐	喝茶*	朋友	5	Friend
☐	喝茶*	感情	5	Relationship
☐	喝茶*	地方	5	Place
☐	喝茶*	团体	5	Organization
☐	喝茶*	约	4	
☐	喝茶*	演出	4	Concert
☐	喝茶*	没	4	
☐	喝茶*	排练	4	Rehearsal

Figure 22. Collocates of '*Yumcha*' in Voyant Tools Analysis

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[7] This is not always the case, as it depends on the quality of relationships. If the rapport is poor, individuals may choose not to attend. However, some factors such as the appeal of the musical pieces or the presence of renowned musicians can influence attendance (Interviewee 20).

Some interviewees share that numerous issues or concerns regarding the orchestra are addressed and resolved during these informal *yumcha* settings. They facilitate discussions on day-to-day administrative actions, performance planning, and musical repertoire decisions. Gossip, while sometimes seen as a distraction, also helps members learn more about one another beyond their musical interest.

However, an indulgence in the *yumcha* culture may blur teacher-student boundaries. For example, Interviewee 17 has reduced socializing with students to maintain these boundaries. Interviewee 23 suggests that attendees should focus more music and performance reflection rather than gossip. Similarly, Interviewee 09 believes that musical activities like camps and concerts should be the primary means of bonding rather than *yumcha*, as they enhance musical involvement and development, improving the sense of achievement and generate community cohesion. Nonetheless, the *yumcha* culture remains a central part of the Chinese orchestra community's social bonding. As highlighted by EE206, food-sharing is an effective way to enhance relationships and connect with others[8].

Communal activities in Chinese orchestras are similar to those in brass bands, which appeal to the working class's work-time/leisure-time rhythm (Herbert, 1998). Similarly, the Chinese orchestra's socializing functions cater to individuals passionate about Chinese music, resulting in the establishment of many community orchestras, including ProArt Chinese Orchestra (Penang) and Southern Chinese Orchestra (Johor). However, participation in community orchestras is voluntary and reflects personal relationships and interests that add complexity to human interactions. Adult orchestra members possess the autonomy to join multiple orchestras or leave if dissatisfied. This flexibility extends to arranging rehearsals and performances around work commitments (Interviewee 29).

Within the orchestra, instructors or conductors are pivotal to oversee concert preparations, training, and repertoire selection. The ideology of the conductor agrees with committee members' preferences for existing methods than inducing changes. Besides that, member composition also affects socializing and relationships. Effective interaction fosters common goals and boosts morale for optimal performance. However, interpersonal dynamics can be challenging despite the emphasis on community. Friction or awkwardness among members and guest conductors, and conflicts 'for no reason' are common issues (Interviewee 17). The presence of factions (派系) with disparate characters and performance styles further

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[8] Refer to Chapter 4.4 for more on food and multiculturalism in Malaysia for social cohesion.

complicate community cohesion and integration, creating chaos or disorganization (Interviewee 04).

Rather than issues of language or religion, the ultimate contributing factor that affects the unity of the Chinese orchestra community in Malaysia hinges upon the interpersonal relationships of its practitioners, that extend to other members of the orchestra. 'Community' and 'unity' are recurring themes of practitioners who recognize their role in shaping the Chinese orchestra's landscape. Unity is essential, especially as teachers in different areas tend to operate independently without communication and collaboration, simply because 'it is troublesome' (Interviewee 18). Conversely, there are passionate individuals who are willing to travel long distances to assist other orchestras, and alumni who support their orchestra during challenging times. According to Interviewee 03, Chinese orchestras must operate based on genuine love for *huayue* to ensure sustainability. Strong relationships among orchestra members are forged through mutual aid that extends into daily life; this love of the orchestra provides support and a sense of belonging to orchestra members. Community strength and cohesiveness is vital to sustain the Chinese orchestra.

Unity is paramount in school-based and community-based orchestras, as long as practitioners reduce prejudices and focus on their duty to educate (Interviewee 06). Sadly, some orchestras have restrictive regulations that limit communication between members and other teachers or orchestras. Nonetheless, most orchestras now display flexibility to accommodate members' commitments, recognizing the backgrounds of participants from different states and affiliations with teachers and factions in dispute. Despite disparities, unity can be cultivated through an inexplicable chemistry among members (Interviewee 29).

Essentially, the social value of the Chinese orchestra lies in its ability to foster community cohesion and generate networks while adapting to evolving social expectations, cultural shifts, and the aspirations of successive generations. As the community grows, its attitudes and values follow suit, to ensure continued relevance and meaningful contribution to its members and society at large.

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2.3 *Bull Fighting Tiger* (牛斗虎)[9] – **Challenging Relationships in the Community**

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia faces a competitive job market, creating relationship challenges and implicit rivalry among practitioners. According to Leyshon, Matless and Revill (1998: 12), the interaction between institutions, actors, and practices shape performers and performances, localize musical practices, and commodify and universalize cultural values. Moreover, it involves the exchange of social and cultural capital.

However, the network society operates on a logic to include and exclude participants simultaneously, impacting all human experiences (Castells, 2023: 941). Like the brass band, the Chinese orchestra deals with tensions concerning its social function and musicality. In Herbert's (1998) analysis, bands gravitate towards the standards and values of the broader movement although most of them originate from specific localities and rely on locals for financial support. The resulting community is 'esoteric, self-contained, and self-conscious', subscribing to shared values, rules, and obligations.

In Malaysia's cultural landscape, the arts are less emphasized within the Malay community due to religious reservations about entertainment, whereas the Chinese orchestra is a significant cultural heritage for the Malaysian Chinese community. In fact, its presence is socially essential in Chinese independent schools (独中) to the extent where 'a Chinese independent school without a Chinese orchestra has no soul'[10] (Interviewee 26, quoting a school principal).

The significance of Chinese cultural activities in Malaysia is further interconnected with political and ethnic considerations. From Interviewee 31's viewpoint, the Chinese community's support for Chinese orchestras is driven by a desire for a better life and the preservation of cultural heritage and roots. Nonetheless, there is tense relationship between the community and the Malaysian political landscape due to racial and religious issues, as it challenges the significance of Chinese education (华教). The support fundamentally comes

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[9] The percussion piece arranged by Wang Baocan (王宝灿) depicts the strength of a bull and ferocity of a tiger during a confrontation. This scenario parallels current interpersonal relation struggles faced by the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.
Guided listening (B.C. Chinese Music Association): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ti6OPnPBb3c
[10] There is a complex combination of factors that selectively promoted the necessity for Chinese orchestras in educational institutions. Perhaps, related to its historical context, the Chinese orchestra is first established in several schools as a healthy youth activity while cultivating the Chinese identity. The subsequent expansion arose from the growing social perception of the Chinese orchestra as a cultural emblem as it becomes recognised, for its increased advocacy in Mainland China. Its status also improved in association with performance spaces (See Chapter 3), and in many cases, thriving school orchestras are directly sponsored by prominent society figures who loved the music. As a musical form with diverse repertoire, the Chinese orchestra is better accepted and desired as an activity for institutional pride once it is 'seen in action'.

from the Chinese community rather than the wider ethnic landscape. Interviewee 26 suggests that cultural sustenance sometimes rely on identity-conscious slogans to connect and garner Chinese community support.

Earlier in 2000, a Chinese orchestra performance was held by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture in Istana Budaya, that received great support and feedback. It was believed that the performance refreshed the perspective of government officials on the Chinese orchestra and expressed ample passion by the people towards cultural heritages. However, Chan's inquiry (2003) is pertinent to problematize its subsequent lack of increased acceptance in Malaysia— 'why is *huayue* still not accepted into the mainstream development of national culture'?

Arguably, Malaysia's National Culture Policy, established in 1971, has not provided the necessary backbone to support Chinese (or other) cultural activities[11]. Its current stipulation of 'suitable elements from the other culture' that are in accordance and accepted by national provisions, interests, and values (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2019) are subject to political manipulation[12]. Practitioners cite examples from China, where provinces receive government funding for orchestras, as a model for future growth. Otherwise, the Chinese orchestra, alongside many other Chinese cultural activities, would be limited in their growth. Within the community, there is a growing call for national policies and government support to ensure the Chinese orchestra's continued development, arguing that community resources alone are insufficient for meaningful progress.

From its foundation, Chinese orchestras in schools face challenges of inadequate financial support and resources allocation. Schools often establish orchestras to fulfill social pressures for cultural pride, without sufficient follow-up support, with some administrations posing added difficulties when applying for funding. This results in underdeveloped orchestras that struggle to raise funds for instrument purchases and other essentials. Success in obtaining provisions 'depends on luck' for good relationships with the school board, principal, and teacher advisor (Interviewees 4, 11, 13 and 16). Consequently, concerts and external sponsorship become the main source of income for the Chinese orchestra.

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[11] I have made elaborated discussions on the National Culture Policy previously, when discussing about Chinese identity (Tan E., 2019: 37-39).

[12] Some instances of government involvement are narrated in Chapter 2.5 (competitions) and Chapter 5.3 (cross-cultural collaborations). However, these are limited to individual efforts. Even then, the activities are heavily regulated to 'fulfil national values'.

Bureaucratic hurdles and restrictive school policies further hinder the procurement of instruments and resources. In some regions, internal sponsorship from alumni and parents are essential due to prohibitions on public fundraising, reasoned to conflict with school reputation and interests. Some fortunate regions like northern Malaysia benefit from regular budget allocations for orchestras, albeit still insufficient to meet all needs. In less supportive environments, school boards may resist investment in cultural activities, creating barriers even when external support is available. Interviewee 04 narrates a situation where donated instruments were rejected by a school's board of directors, who expect cultural activities to be free of costs. Without adequate startup funds, the recruitment of members and sustenance of the orchestra become challenging. This extends to wider socio-economic factors across Malaysia, elaborated in Chapter 3.3.

Further issues of declining student enrolment in Chinese independent schools compound to the need for wider social recognition of the Chinese orchestra's values to sustain preservation efforts. As Interviewee 28 expresses, many schools prioritize sports over music, viewing it as more rewarding for institutional honor. This lack of support extends to competitions and instrumental resources that compromises the quality of music education. The interviewee laments that without investment, there is no capital to strive for improvement.

At present, a comparative model to Singapore—where alumni and seniors teach juniors—helps reduce operational costs while continuing the Chinese orchestra heritage (Lin, 2024). Community orchestras that operate on a voluntary basis with minimal to no member fees face a dilemma—maintaining low fees to increase participation rate may compromise financial sustainability, breeding reliance on funding from other sectors of society. It is a significant challenge to balance accessibility and financial stability, requiring innovative solutions and broader support for long-term viability.

Meanwhile, the hiring process for Chinese orchestra instructors or conductors depend on the organization's financial capability and level of cooperation. Some institutions expect instructors to manage administrative tasks alongside teaching responsibilities, while others assign teacher advisors to handle non-*huayue* duties, allowing instructors to focus solely on music education[13] (Interviewee 02). As financial conditions improve, Chinese orchestras

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[13] For example, Interviewee 16 is engaged in both school administration and music guidance. He dedicates considerable time to communicate with students and teacher advisors of the orchestra to implement reforms that streamline and systemize the orchestra's operations.

increasingly hire multiple instructors. Typically, the process involves contracting an instructor who then arranges for teaching assistants based on funding capability and agreements with the school (Interviewee 13). However, constraints such as limited budgets have historically led to instructors being hyper-focused on the orchestra and have minimal cooperation with others (Interviewee 18). The current improved financial landscape now allows more comprehensive professional instructions and collaborations with other institutions that greatly benefit students.

Despite these improvements, the Chinese orchestra scene in Malaysia remains fragmented, partially driven by financial motivations. Practitioners in West Malaysia face intense competitions due to limited opportunities, making it challenging to sustain a livelihood solely with a few orchestras. Conversely, in Sabah and Sarawak, where there is a shortage of teachers, the Chinese orchestra scene is still budding (Interviewee 11). Sometimes, this competitive mindset among teachers and orchestras can lead to significant territorial disputes.

Interestingly, challenges surrounding interpersonal relationships and employment dynamics within Chinese orchestras persist as an implicitly discussed topic rather than open dialogue. Interviewees often allude to the presence of infights or conflicts (内斗, 纷争), particularly in the northern states of Malaysia. While not explicitly disclosed, these subtle references and implications suggest underlying challenges that fuel *yumcha* gossip within the community.

Insights from several interviewees[14] reveal a longstanding triangular territorial competition observed in northern Malaysia among three main factions operating in Penang, Kedah, and Perak[15]. Described as 'intense', 'a vicious cycle', 'prejudiced', and 'probably like what you have heard', stemming from 'self-interest' and 'business-oriented motivations', groups of orchestras under either one of the three alliances of instructors operate

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[14] Their identities are protected to prevent further conflict; over 8 interviewees openly or covertly discussed the dynamic of factionalism. One interviewee responded that the obvious presence of factions leads to the avoidance of the topic and even rejections of my interview requests, driven by fears of ostracization. The history of factional struggles remains vivid among practitioners, as a reminder of past challenges.

[15] A complete perspective of northern Malaysia could not be obtained for this reason. Only one of the practitioners have accepted my interview, yet avoided the topic. Among the other two factions, one have rejected my interview request, and the other was uncontactable. As a result, most information are collected from third party narrations.

independently from each other. This rivalry garnered notoriety across Malaysia, casting an unfavorable shadow over the *huayue* ecosystem[16].

Although similar relationship issues are prevalent in other parts of the country, they are not as overt or intense. Practitioners attribute infighting to be cultural and inevitable in the Chinese music community, observing patterns where initial cooperation turn into discord when interests diverge, or if there is a disbalance in investment outcomes. Even in East Malaysia, where the atmosphere appears more harmonious, conflicts do arise but are usually resolved amicably. Most East Malaysia practitioners maintain a friendly copresence with collaborative efforts such as cross-school teaching arrangements. However, cultural outsiders occasionally remark that 'the Chinese orchestra community is squabbling all the time', with community members frequently fussing over trivial matters and orchestras engaging in covert competition. From the perspective of an interviewee from the *guzheng* community who interacts frequently with the Chinese orchestra, there are concerns about constant gossip and conflicts of interests within the landscape, perceived as complex and unhealthy. Consequently, the interviewee is hesitant to actively participate in Chinese orchestra activities.

Today, self-interest and economic considerations continue to shape dynamics within the Chinese music community, with resources and influence dispersed among different factions competing for local leadership positions. This pattern of fragmentation is not unique to Malaysia and is prevalent in other main regions. A comparable scenario persists in Singapore, although the presence of a national Chinese orchestra and federation concentrates resources to some extent. On the other hand, China faces similar dynamics of criticism and gossip that are somewhat mitigated by the larger market with ample spaces of development.

However, Malaysia has magnified interpersonal relationship issues with its considerably smaller and more limited market. The reasons for these conflicts remain complex and localized. Some practitioners attribute them to inherent conservatism and financial disagreements within the community. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of interaction and collaboration between teachers from different regions, who focus on their individual pursuits (Interviewee 18).

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[16] Interpersonal relationship challenges include instances of awkwardness when discussing other teachers and their operating styles, boasting about one's performance quality and instructor while criticizing others, and incidents where students of certain teachers are absent from competitions held by rivals.

Despite certain efforts to promote unity through music camps and collaborative concerts[17], these initiatives often go unnoticed or disregarded. Concerns about territory and student retainment hinder some full-time instructors from collaborating with unfamiliar counterparts. Logistically, Interviewee 13 adds that recent decline in secondary school enrolment translates to fewer future community orchestra members, therefore inducing rivalry to attract these members. Additional challenges include students not owning personal instruments post-graduation and relocating due to life changes.

The emergence of young practitioners in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem introduces its own misconceptions and challenges. These professionals, educated in tertiary institutions abroad, are sometimes perceived as wealthy or privileged, undermining the rigorous training they undergo, which include mastering various musical courses. This misunderstanding highlights the ideological disparity within the Chinese orchestra community.

The perspective divide is further aggravated by the tendency to offer criticism without constructive feedback. An interviewee provides feedback that 'people like to give their opinions especially after attending concerts', founded from the competitive attitude. *Huayue* colleagues and enthusiasts are urged to offer suggestions rather than biased and unfounded critiques, which lack empathy and professionalism. Handling any issues through dialog and mutual respect over a *yumcha* session is suggested, rather than complaining or writing negative articles online. Interviewee 15 highlights self-respect and confidence to overcome unconstructive criticism.

Furthermore, new practitioners evoke fears among the existing generation regarding job security and relevance. Some perceive these newcomers as threats, accusing them of undercutting fees or attempting to take over orchestras with new teaching methods. An interviewee acknowledges that some may rely on this career to support their families, making them more guarded. Nonetheless, struggles and conflicts of interest should lessen with a shift towards economic stability.

Despite financial interests and power struggles causing new relational conflicts, practitioners state the need for a mentality shift towards collaborative growth to nurture a healthier ecosystem. Young educators have implemented various strategies to create a more supportive environment, refraining from speaking ill of others (Interviewee 28). They seek teaching feedback from students and school teacher advisors for self-improvement or turn to

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[17] Chapter 5.3 discusses crossovers—cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaborations.

their mentors for guidance (Interviewee 02). Otherwise, some create new opportunities by establishing new orchestras or instructor positions.

Many practitioners remain optimistic about improving the overall landscape. Although conflicts are unavoidable, there is a shared commitment among practitioners to advance *huayue* (Interviewee 03). The pandemic has prompted smaller orchestras to collaborate for cohesive strength, a realization by Interviewee 26. Nonetheless, orchestras across Malaysia demonstrate favorable progress and growth past the intense factional conflict. In this regard, Interviewee 25 warns against potentially detrimental effects of excessive conflict, emphasizing the need for balance. Moreover, Interviewee 16 recognizes the challenges posed by ideological differences but values variation in perspectives to prevent monotony.

Lately, young practitioners with broader perspectives are rejecting the rivalries inherited from the previous generation, favoring collaboration and unity for a more cohesive community. Interviewee 23 articulates that fighting is meaningless as there are always others who excel. The new generation form new alliances to consolidate their influence and strengthen their standing, irrespective of their teachers' affiliations and disputes. Previously, problems arose from a desire to preserve personal interests, but nowadays, assistance and collaboration are extended even when developing independently (Interviewee 28). Younger generations are also increasingly immune to conflicts and misunderstandings that contribute to negative interpersonal relationships (Interviewee 29).

The reassembling of the Chinese orchestra's relationship dynamics requires effective leadership, open communication, and a supportive community. Interviewee 29 realizes the importance of creating a nurturing atmosphere within the orchestra, where members feel valued and supported, to safeguard the orchestra's reputation. *Yumcha* and team building activities foster community cohesion and solidarity, acting as a shield against inevitable external criticism and rumors.

The heterogenous combination of human and nonhuman entities constantly form connections and produce new networks of social meaning (Callon in Revill, 1998: 201). Within this assemblage, there is a recognized need for influential figures to lead positive environmental change. However, Interviewee 30 notes that such a key person is still lacking in Malaysia's ecosystem. Governmental policies and structural limitations of Malaysia's creative industry further complicate the emergence for such a character. Amidst this

complexity, Interviewee 32 stresses collective problem-solving and interdependence, advocating for a fairer merit-based system where everybody presents their character through interactions and performances.

Ultimately, these relationship issues trace back to the limited job market and the nature of artistic pursuit in Malaysia's creative industry. The small space for development necessitates a survival-of-the-fittest mentality to secure finances, support, and opportunities. Moreover, the embedded career paths of first or second-generation practitioners restrict newer talents unless the established practitioners retire or are dismissed. Added with the inherent tendency for infighting and competition, practitioners require refreshed perspectives of the ecosystem to improve the overall landscape while securing their individual careers.

2.4 *Festive Dance* (节庆欢舞)[18] – Performing in Festivities

The Chinese orchestra concert repertoire can generally be divided into three categories—unison, inspired by the *Jiangnan sizhu*; ensemble, with harmony; and solo-ensemble pieces, comparable to a concerto that features virtuosity of a particular instrument (Plafcan, 2023: 21). Interviewee 18 highlights the main challenge in organizing ensemble and solo concerts—solo instrument recitals, in particular, present greater obstacles of potential audience disinterest stemming from unfamiliarity with the instrument. Often, non-regular concertgoers consist of the local community.

Primary audiences of Chinese orchestra concerts include friends, family, school alumni, past members, and existing Chinese music enthusiasts (Interviewees 16 and 17). However, Interviewee 18 notes that the *huayue* fan base tends to remain constant with limited growth. Nevertheless, certain orchestras gain recognition and cultivate a loyal fan base over time (Interviewee 31).

Currently, Interviewee 17 estimates that there are only around 100 consistent *huayue* enthusiasts in Malaysia. He proposes intensifying efforts to convert audience members into dedicated *huayue* fans to achieve cultural sustainability. By nurturing genuine interest in Chinese music and enhancing visual appeal, audiences are encouraged to attend concerts out of heartfelt appreciation rather than solely to support close relations. As local audiences

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[18] A commissioned composition by orchestras in Taiwan by Lu Lianghui (卢亮辉), the title is a literal interpretation of the Chinese orchestra hired for performances during festive events.
Guided listening (Sabah Chinese High School Chinese Orchestra):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLwzXAR42g0

develop a natural affinity for *huayue*, the orchestra may rely less on external funding, sponsorship, or aggressive ticket sales to meet concert budgets. Does the value of Chinese music also become subjective if it is subjected to the interpretation of both the producer and the receiver?

Audience composition significantly influences repertoire selection and concert themes. For example, Interviewee 16 upholds specific annual themes for coherence in repertoire, in consideration of audience preference and expectation, that coincidentally attracts new audiences and promotes the Chinese orchestra. For school events like Teacher's Day, instructors often pass the deciding opportunity to students, provided it aligns with the theme and meets instructor expectations. There are also factors such as the orchestra's capabilities, the audience, and the nature of the event (Interviewee 03).

Interviewee 16's personal experience exemplifies this shift in concert organization approach, rebranding from a 'concert' (演奏会) to a 'music performance' (音乐会) to make the *huayue* experience publicly relatable and enjoyable for a wider audience. Accessibility and engagement are important to foster audience appreciation for *huayue* and effectively promote cultural understanding (Interviewee 24).

Regardless, concert audiences are predominantly Malaysian Chinese. Reflecting on the broader context, Interviewee 24 expresses the need to expand the reach beyond the Chinese community. Interviewee 17 supports this, suggesting external outreach efforts to help orchestras stand out. In this respect, another interviewee highlights two challenges pertaining to cultural outsiders of *huayue*—the perception that *huayue* is outdated, and its relegation to background music—that hinders this expression. Nonetheless, language barriers and cultural segregation in Malaysia's multicultural landscape pose greater challenge to expanding audience reach. For this reason, many institutions adopt a bilingual approach—English and Chinese—to position *huayue* as a universal form of music and art[19].

In contrast to concert settings, commercial or public performances overcome audience reception issues, particularly given the challenge of attracting audiences to traditional concerts. The consumption of Chinese music for its 'Chinese-ness' during various festivities and events prove to be a given prescription. Moreover, event organizers frequently request

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[19] Due to the international nature of the University of Nottingham Malaysia, UNMCO concerts are promoted in English, thus attracting audiences from other cultures and nations, offering them an eye-opening cultural experience.

specific songs to be performed, reinforcing existing stereotypes and cultural biases associated with the Chinese orchestra and the broader Chinese identity.

Similar to the revival of *guzheng* ensembles (Mok, 2019), commercial performances of the Chinese orchestra peak during festivals like Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as for weddings, company events, and open houses. In Taiwan, this practice is prevalent across events from temple fairs to weddings and funerals. Commercial performances typically occur in public spaces like plazas, parks, shopping malls, banquet spaces, restaurants, or temples[20], aiming for financial gain. The audience demographic tends to be more diverse compared to concerts due to the free and public setting, with *huayue* often acting as background music or complementing the festive ambience (Interviewees 16 and 28). In regional music contexts, performances by opera troupes in small areas serve as familiar entertainment during important dates or festivities (Interviewee 22). The substantial function of music in these contexts can be challenging to articulate due to varying audience expectations, but normally represent Chinese identity.

Experiment Ensemble 2 attempted something novel by presenting Chinese New Year songs in both Western string quartet and traditional Chinese instrument formats. Audience support mainly came from friends, family, and passing spectators, who expressed appreciation through donations, including a memorable contribution from a foreigner in a red packet, which felt like a blessing. Their performances took place in two venues—a mall and a temple, the latter at the invitation of a member's mother who ultimately favored Chinese music for its richness over string quartet music. Ensemble members found *huayue* simpler and easier to perform, contrasting with the more artistically complex arrangements of the string quartet.

However, the economic repercussions of the pandemic led to a significant reduction in commercial performances for festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival. Organizers who previously promised future engagements blamed budget constraints, resulting in fewer invitations for public performances. Financial considerations are paramount in commercial performance contexts, with the local adage 'no money, no talk'. Orchestra members participating in commercial performances typically receive allowances for their contributions[21] (Interviewee 29).

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[20] Visit Chapter 3 regarding performance spaces.
[21] Commercial performance rates vary based on factors such as duration, ensemble size, and repertoire complexity. Amateur orchestras earn between RM300 and RM1000 for half-hour-long performances.

Alongside that, the contemporary value of the Chinese orchestra remains elusive, symbolized by an indeterminate question mark even after extensive discussions with practitioners. This uncertainty surrounding its worth relate to challenges of social support and perception. An illustrative example is the audience demographic based on ticket pricing. More expensive tickets attract audiences inclined towards *huayue* (aforementioned), whereas cheaper tickets ranging from RM20 to RM30 attract local attendees. Free public performances during festivities may attract diverse audiences, including those unfamiliar with Chinese music (Interviewee 02).

The Chinese orchestra finds itself in a paradoxical situation where it anticipates 'cultural payment' (文化收费) for its performances to sustain its operations and livelihood of musicians. Yet, there is a prevailing expectation for these performances to be freely accessible as contributions to cultural preservation. This tension caused by societal undervaluation of the Chinese orchestra affects the pricing of commercial performances, which tends to be comparatively lower than hiring Western ensembles. Recognizing financial constraints faced by certain organizers, some practitioners negotiate reduced 'cultural fees' for certain events to ensure some payment while advocating for a shift in societal perception to 'no longer let *huayue* be cheap', essentially calling for societal recognition of the Chinese orchestra as a significant art form deserving of higher value.

Meanwhile, Interviewee 13 emphasizes financial obstacles associated with event organization, suggesting that losses may occur despite well-managed day-to-day operations. The organizing of events by individuals is made complicated as the responsibility is not shared; cultural events ultimately rely on companies to fundraise, sponsor, and advertise the event. Interviewee 16 elaborates on the costs of venue rental and acknowledges the role of collective support from sponsors and alumni to sustain the Chinese orchestra.

The value of *huayue* is one that is constantly questioned by the Chinese orchestra community as it is not easy to preserve Chinese heritages in Malaysia. By learning *huayue*, Interviewee 28 asserts that Chinese culture is preserved despite its limited integration in festivals and customs. While funding and contributions are required to develop the Chinese orchestra, the value of *huayue* remains under scrutiny within the community. Nonetheless, the

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Professional musicians may command higher payment. Ultimately, the pricing is subjective and negotiated based on the performer's self-valuation and the event organizer's requests.

social acceptance of *huayue* is constantly increasing with other ethnicities showing interest in learning *huayue*.

Currently, the connection of the Chinese orchestra to Chinese society is best reflected through Chinese independent schools, who designate their Chinese orchestras as the top choice to entertain and perform for school guests or participate in community-run events (Interviewee 27). In this situation, Interviewee 02 doubts the depth of cultural inheritance as there is a demand without practical support, suggesting a need for society to provide more than superficial cultural projection. However, what more value can the Chinese orchestra command and achieve in the current environment?

2.5 *A Well-Matched Fight* (龙腾虎跃)[22] – Activities of the Chinese Orchestra

The Chinese orchestra engages in a diverse spectrum of activities, listed in Figure 23 below. Beyond regular rehearsals and performances, these activities contribute to the Chinese orchestra's vitality and provide orchestra members with opportunities to improve their music skills and connect with the community.

De Bruin and Southcott (2023) argue that socio-musical activities, beyond performances, shape identity and satisfy human needs for challenges, learning, and exploration. Participation in these activities foster connections and solidarity among participants, with motivations extending beyond solely music-making. For instance, orchestra committee members develop leadership skills by seeking funding for activities, including fundraising and sponsorship efforts (Interviewee 13). Sometimes, recreational or team-building activities are organized to promote the orchestra and recruit new members, highlighting their social role within the community (Interviewee 14).

Activities like exchanges and *guanmohui*s are significant in building a strong Chinese orchestra community by fostering inter-orchestral relationships. Interviewee 17 emphasizes the openness of practitioners towards exchanges, joint activities, and the promotion of concerts or events during orchestra practices. These events help members expand their

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[22] This composition by Li Minxiong (李民雄) in 1980 is originally conceived as wind and percussion music, incorporating elements from folk music. The selection of this musical title aptly captures themes of strength, vigour, and courageous progression, resonating with activities undertaken by the Chinese orchestra. As historical data for major historical events are recorded elsewhere, this section focuses on the operations, role, effectiveness, and community contribution of these activities.
Guided listening (Muar CHCO): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6on2dzI3TlM

horizons and establish new networks, while also stimulating student interest and providing direction and experiences (Interviewee 33).


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Competition (华乐比赛)                              Concert (音乐会, 演奏会)

Examination (考级)                                 Commercial performance (商演)

Training camp (集训营)    Chinese Orchestra         Guanmohui (观摩会) - 'Share and Review'
                         Activities
Exchange (交流会)                                  Festival (华乐节)

                                                   Rehearsal (排练)
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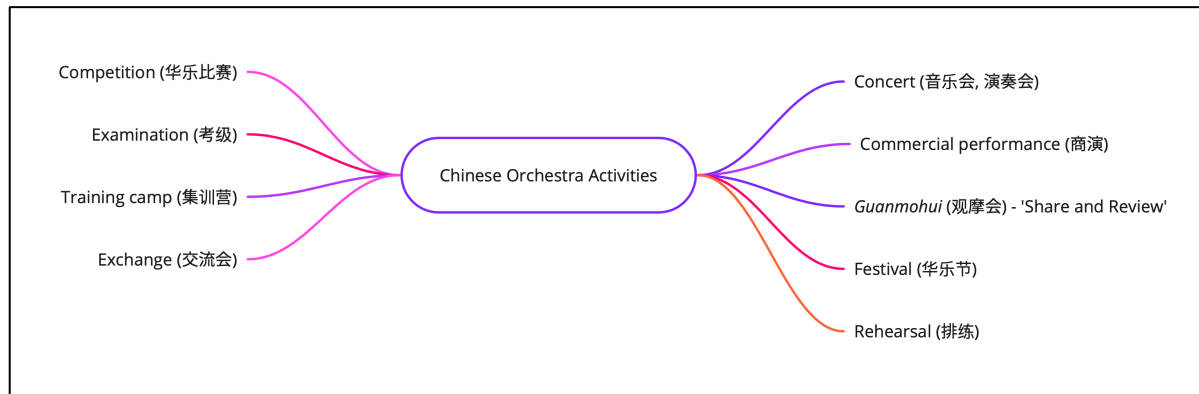
Figure 23. Activities of the Chinese Orchestra

The following discussions elaborate individual activities:

1) Competitions

Various Chinese orchestra competitions are organized annually in states of Penang, Perak, Johor, and the Klang Valley, driven by strong local forces. Due to the high costs associated with traveling, participation is often localized. According to Interviewee 04, these competitions aim to raise the standards of *huayue* in Malaysia, but still face societal and financial challenges. For example, the Chinese Orchestral Competition Malaysia organized by the Selangor and Federal Territory Hainan Association youths struggles with high operational costs alongside decreasing participation, leading to suggestions for collaborative national competitions to pool resources and foster cooperation (*The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia*, 2022).

The pandemic gave temporary popularity to online competitions, which, though now mostly replaced by live events, continue to enable participation across regions. Even orchestras from Sabah and Sarawak monitor orchestra competitions in West Malaysia, arranging for students to compete in national competitions where feasible, in solo or ensemble categories (Interviewee 11).

Revill (2005) explains that competitions foster local pride and identification that require substantial investment in time, coaching, practice, and costume preparation, with minimal outlay. They promote a common understanding of musical idioms and standardization (Chapter 3.3) (Herbert, 1998: 122). In Malaysia, especially in the northern regions, competitions are vital to improve performance standards, showcase school

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competitiveness, and gain reputation for their orchestra and/or institution. After all, competitions demand a threshold of proficiency, and Interviewee 31 remarks that orchestras focus on avoiding mistakes while demonstrating strong musical interpretation and uniqueness in order to win.

For student orchestras, competitions present the challenge of playing music tailored for professional orchestras. This focus on mastery can lead to adverse effects on students' musical development, causing them to lose interest and resort to rote learning. Interviewee 24 realizes that these students become less inclined towards deeper understanding and autonomous thinking in their musical education. This phenomenon highlights the importance to reevaluate educational approaches to ensure meaningful *huayue* learning (see Chapter 4.5).

Yong (2016) advocates competitions as an avenue for orchestras to accumulate experience and recognition, through a grading system where every orchestra has the chance to win a prize. This encourages and affirms the efforts of all participants. Recently, to overcome unhealthy competition, many Chinese orchestra competitions have changed ranking-based systems (first prizes, second prizes, third prizes) to rating-based systems (platinum, gold, silver, bronze awards) based on achieved scores. The modified format is more inclusive and recognizes every orchestra that attains certain standards.

The professionalizing process in Malaysia (detailed in Chapter 6.5) is difficult as government regulations limit organizations to *minjian* efforts. While professionalization generates higher fees and better rewards, the Ministry of Education imposes restrictions that prevent organizations from charging registration fees or operating commercially. As a result, some organizations refrain from activities like exams and commercial performances to avoid commercialization. To gain government acknowledgement, Interviewee 23 sacrifices registration fees for competitions. However, this format is unsustainable because participants still expect prizes. Additionally, the current system, which produces multiple winners, increases running costs. Previously, despite Malaysia's lack of professional resources, competitions were lively. Now, limitations imposed upon certificate recognition from government bodies cause frustrations because many schools request for this recognition to allow their ensembles or orchestras to participate in external activities.

This conundrum creates a vicious cycle—without ministry recognition, schools may withhold support for transportation reimbursements or approval for purchasing new instruments. Without new instruments, orchestras cannot practice major works or compete

using designated compositions. Competition organization without sufficient funding is challenging as nobody wants to operate at a loss. Nevertheless, competitions receive community and social organization support, along with backing from politicians and companies that support cultural activities, despite the lack of official government funding.

Interviewee 31 elaborates that competitions motivate students to present their music more thoroughly in pursuit of victory. The competitive spirit inherent in competitions encourages students to improve and fosters communication as they collectively strive for success.

2) Examinations (音乐水平考级)

Examinations of Chinese musical instruments, since the 1990s, aim to enhance performance standards (Tan S. B., 2000: 118). These exams are now more localized or independent, catering to students in private classes or specific schools. They draw inspiration from Western music exam boards like ABRSM and Trinity (Interviewee 13) and require coordination from local music academies and interested parties. Additionally, independent examinations, not institution-certified, are more closely associated with *guanmohui* events.

Renown exam boards for Malaysian learners include the Central Conservatory of Music (北京中央音乐学院), operating through its own Malaysian organization, and the TENG Chinese Instrumental Music Grading Examinations (Singapore). An interviewee comments that the TENG grading is more suitable for the Malaysian environment, including its pieces and system.

Examinations primarily cater to amateurs or learners because they serve as a tool to assess skill levels and provide improvement advice (Interviewee 07). Ultimately, teachers bear the responsibility of addressing technical issues and evaluating student performance for further progress; examination grading is merely a tangible outcome. The fundamental obstacle in Malaysia is the shortage of qualified teachers capable of providing effective guidance.

Post-pandemic, practitioners deviate from examinations to advocate a more holistic learning approach, emphasizing non-examination music conducive to skill development (Interviewee 33). Additionally, Interviewee 09 highlights an evolution where his students have the option to submit performance videos for online grading (similar to ABRSM's online examination guidelines). This personalized grading process is conducted in collaboration

with teachers in China, to offer more extensive content and evaluation criteria compared to overseas examinations.

3) *Guanmohui* (观摩会)

For lack of a concrete translation, *guanmohui* (观摩会) refers to a 'share and review' session, a common activity run by most orchestras to provide learners with the opportunity to perform before an audience and receive constructive feedback from teachers. It functions as a hybrid of a forum, exam, and recital, designed to sharpen performance techniques, musicality, courage, and stage presence through mutual learning and observation, besides making new acquaintances.

Usually held internally within orchestras, these sessions involve inviting guest instructors to assess students' solo performances, mirroring an internal examination. Sometimes, they can resemble achievement presentations or mini solo recitals for both novice learners and seasoned members, with invitations extended to parents and friends to witness the orchestra members' growth.

The most nationally renowned *guanmohui* is the Johor and Melaka Chinese Independent High Schools *huayue guanmohui* (柔甲独中华乐观摩会), held biannually since 1987 (*The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia*, 2022). Besides individual assessments, these events incorporate elements of musical exchange and collective performances involving all students. According to Interviewee 16, the *guanmohui* promotes interaction and friendship-building among students across schools of the two states. This fosters close community cohesion, leading to strong relationships between orchestras of Johor and Melaka.

4) Music Festival (华乐节)

Chinese orchestra festivals are platforms for diverse and inclusive cultural expressions involving various organizations collaborating to create innovative performances (Interviewee 13), including crossovers (Chapter 5.3). These festivals are sometimes held in large venues like stadiums, drawing in broader audiences and stimulating local economic activity. Cultural festivals are held in rotation between states, offering widespread opportunities for participation. However, financial constraints and limited manpower are significant obstacles to organize such large-scale events.

Significant Chinese orchestra festivals include the Perak National Chinese Orchestra Festival (霹雳全国华乐节), Red Sonata Fiesta International Arts Festival (华总国油杯国际艺术节), and the Sabah Chinese Music Festival (沙巴华乐节). They feature a series of activities such as camps, workshops, talks, and recitals. Recently, the Sabah festival has rebranded as the Sabah Ethnic Music Festival (沙巴民族音乐节), expanding its scope to include multicultural presentations and celebrate the state's diverse local music traditions.

5) Music Exchange (交流)

Exchanges are organized by school instructors to provide students with the opportunity to experience different learning cultures. They can be day-exchanges, weekend trips, or longer, depending on the schedule and organizing capacity of the host orchestra. These exchanges broaden student engagement with external communities and offer a wider perspective of the Chinese orchestra landscape (Interviewees 03 and 18).

Interviewee 27 notes minimal interaction between orchestras from different regions (Northern, Central, Southern, Eastern), limited by geographical constraints and school policies that restrict students from participating in exchanges outside their local areas. Funding and logistics issues hinder exchanges between East and West Malaysia; exchanges mostly occur between orchestras in Sabah and Sarawak alone due to closer proximity. Even with established connections, music exchanges are rare and involve only those who can afford the trip.

6) Training Camps (集训营)

Sometimes, exchanges occur through training camps, which focus on intensive full-day music training, typically held over weekends or school holidays, for various reasons—prepare for an upcoming concert, build team cohesion, and enhance collective skills. They may include motivational talks by external instructors to inspire and guide students. For example, holiday camps that bring together musicians across university orchestras expose participants to different organizational cultures while forming new networks. They promote inclusivity, allowing smaller orchestras to collaborate and experience playing pieces that require large orchestral formations (Interviewee 26).

Interviewee 25 organize training camps to develop not only musical techniques, but also critical thinking, leadership, and organizational skills, which are crucial to strengthen the orchestra and foster community cohesion. Additionally, overnight stays during these camps

encourage independence. However, these training camps face challenges as students increasingly demand reduced practice time.

Challenges:

Post-pandemic, there has been a visible decline in leadership and organization skills among Chinese orchestra student learners, necessitating a gradual rebuilding process. Although the new generation is beginning to grasp these skills, they have not yet reached the maturity as before, relying on returning alumni to pass down knowledge (Interviewee 16, see also Chapter 5.1). One of the primary challenges in organizing activities post-pandemic is the alteration of school timetables, leading to chaotic training hours that require reorganization and adaptation to sudden changes. This adjustment period has been particularly difficult as schools prioritize education and exams over extracurricular activities.

Relationship-wise, Interviewee 27 expresses concerns of disputes that may lead to personal grudges. Personally, I have experienced some of these 'under the table' conflicts that do affect the harmony within the orchestra and sometimes result in individuals leaving the community. Understandably, these situations arise in any large collective, and their navigation require mutual support and collaboration to resolve differences.

Furthermore, while the process of music learning is straightforward, cultural and language differences complicate participation in activities beyond music rehearsals and performance. Singapore, for instance, conducts rehearsals in English, which facilitates the participation of other ethnicities in the English-oriented society (Interviewee 24). In Malaysia, non-Chinese students in the orchestra typically have a Chinese educational background and have decent command of the Chinese language, but they remain an extreme minority. It is suggested that this communication barrier hinders further participation of other ethnicities in Chinese orchestra activities, indicating a need for more inclusive language practices to broaden engagement.

Chapter 3 – Performance in the Environment

Initially performed as a *minjian* form of social entertainment on public streets, *huayue* can now be heard on performance stages and in concert halls; this malleability in environment between social and staged performances inscribe the Chinese orchestra with expanded layers of cultural value. At present, the Chinese orchestra is perceived both as a *minjian* cultural product that is close to the heart of the Malaysian Chinese, and as a prestigious performing arts form with its own musical merits.

Concepts of space and place are simple, yet challenging to define due to their abstract nature and interconnectedness. A 'place' is a specific physical location infused with meaning from embodied, lived experiences, while 'space' is more elusive, with infinite potential for expansion and multiplicity. Effectively, places exist within spaces, but the distinction blurs in various environment and cultural contexts, making them sometimes interchangeable.

Spaces are assigned values, with or without specific meanings attached (hence space can contain a place, when ascribed with connections). In this research, space is understood as 'built space' and 'lived space'. It aligns with Lefebvre's (1991) triad of space—perceived space (spatial practice), conceived space (representations of space), and lived space (representational space)—but with its own distinctions. The first conception of 'built space', encompassing Lefebvre's conceived space, refers to environments designed for specific uses, like performance venues. The second, 'lived space', is associated with emotional and symbolic dimensions, and reflects lived experiences and imaginaries. Lefebvre's perceived space, a physically organized space for activities, overlaps with both built spaces (intentional design) and lived spaces (experiences and memories), whether intentionally designed or organically infused with social and artistic purposes.

Lefebvre posits space as a social product that extends beyond a container, simultaneously produc*ing* and being produced. Scholars like Leyshon, Matless and Revill (1995), Cohen (1998), Watkins (2011), and Rogers (2012) agree on the dynamic nature of space, especially in the context of music and its environment. In this framework, place becomes a tangible outcome of spatial dynamics. The 'placement' or 'location' of music involves recognizing that place. Like identity, place is a construction produced through social and cultural interactions.

Place-based identities involve geography and imaginaries scaling from local communities to global contexts. Musical environments provide spaces for activities,

interactions, and representations within immediate physical settings, influencing broader identities, power relations, and performance practices (Horlor, 2021). Beyond that, music engages the senses as a part of processes that produce places and their associated identities. In essence, music establishes a sense of belonging to a particular place ('this place'), while 'marking kinship, alliance, and affinity with places elsewhere' through shared cultural elements (Cohen, 1998: 277). The dynamic between 'this place' (Malaysia) and 'that place' (homeland, China) is relevant in shaping the relational identity of the Malaysian Chinese community through its musical practices.

Music transcends physical spaces, transforming them into abstract experiences (Watkins, 2011; Rogers, 2012). This dynamic is evident in parts of Chinese music that musically represents sounds of nature, animals, festivities, impressions of locations, and others[1], to relive experience and evoke memories and emotions (Cohen, 1998). Music representations foster strong cultural connection to create hybrid styles that are embraced as authentic and traditional expressions of culture. The invocation of the homeland elicits strong emotions and sentiments tied to cultural identity and heritage[2].

According to Leyshon, Matless, and Revill (1995, 1998), the creation, consumption, and dissemination of music are influenced by aesthetic, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. It is important neither to isolate musical practices from their environmental settings, nor to confine them to geographical boundaries. Building upon this notion, Rycroft, as cited by Leyshon, Matless and Revill, asserts that cultural ecology emerges from music performed in specific environments, adding meaning and potential (1998: 23). In urban settings, musical cultures define and are defined by their spatial surroundings, reinforcing social cohesion and power structures (Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1995: 426, 431).

For instance, the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas (DFP), housing the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, symbolizes superiority in Malaysia's musical landscape. This hierarchy affects how other groups like the Chinese orchestra perceive their performances at this venue as significant achievements[3]. Spatial politics also contribute to the conception and regularizing of performances (ibid. 425), besides influencing performance norms and concert

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[1] Relations between place (natural environment) and music production are draw in Chapter 6.1.
[2] See Chapter 4 for topics of localization, cultural identity, and Chinese music hybridity in Southeast Asia.
[3] Chapter 3.1 maps and unpacks power hierarchies in relation to performance spaces currently occupied by the Chinese orchestra.

etiquette, that transform spaces occupied by the Chinese orchestra and redefine their symbolisms[4].

Understanding built and lived spaces (environments) helps visualize the performativity and staging of culture—performances within environments with preconstructed meanings, distinct from natural environmental sounds. Performances in concert halls deconstruct and reconstruct meanings, as these formal settings allow the Chinese orchestra to transcend its folkloric origins for higher social status and cultural power, also from layering pre-inscribed symbolisms of concert halls onto Chinese music.

In comparison, community ensembles performing in social spaces manifests emotional and cultural connection, for entertainment and social bonding to nurture communal identity. Revill (2005) argues that experiences and attachments with specific locations are shaped in heterogenous assemblages, where vernacular (or *minjian*) spaces emerge as active sites to produce spatial relations that reflect everyday social dynamics. History and memory therefore shape lived experiences through historical events, cultural traditions, norms, rituals, and collective memories.

De Bruin and Southcott (2023) suggest that the place and environment of musical performances create unique and idiosyncratic assemblages of music, embodying the feelings and memory of musicians and audiences that shape the overall experience of the performance. Chinese orchestra practitioners take pride in their versatility to adapt performances to spaces from sidewalks to concert halls. This adaptability reflects the orchestra's ability to navigate and negotiate different spatial context, that in return influences the reception and meaning of their performances (Chapter 3.1).

What about the tensions between staged performances and lived cultural traditions? Chapter 3.2 focuses on the organic musical interactions in lived spaces of the Chinese orchestra. Cultural events like festivals prompt doubts about their superficiality and potential to reinforce or challenge cultural stereotypes (Rogers, 2012: 69). This chapter makes connections between ritualistic and daily practices of the Chinese orchestra, Chinese culture, and their performance environments. Performance intentionality relates to community function and is influenced by audience expectations and reception. Ultimately, culturally

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[4] In Chapter 3.2, discussions of rituals and performativity of the Chinese orchestra connects to traditions and the expansion of cultural heritages when performed in new spaces. This exploration reveals how new symbolisms are inscribed into performance spaces, intersecting with artistic expressions. Additionally, the chapter explores how different spaces and audiences influence the choices of music and practices adopted by the Chinese orchestra.

linked activities and performances are interconnected lived experiences to uphold traditions, affirm identities, and strengthen social cohesion within the Chinese orchestra community.

Then, the environment also alters the musical experience. The choice of performance space significantly influences the interpretation and reception of the music. The Chinese orchestra performing at the DFP subverts perceived high culture, while the same performance in a community auditorium might connotate mass culture. These spatial dynamics also reveal broader power structures, such as socioeconomic differences that create disparities in the impact of similar practices (Chapter 3.3). To a translocated culture, this transition involves constant negotiations between identity and broader location connotations, besides tensions between tradition and modernization. Additionally, performances in certain places can evoke memories or contest identities through engagement with place-based politics, challenging power relations, fostering togetherness, emotional intimacy, belonging, and representing national and racial identity (Rogers, 2012).

Discussions on space also consider the role of globalization in the music's economic processes and the blurring of spatial boundaries from expanding interconnectedness. Popular music can subvert geographical identities, owing to its pervasiveness and fluidity (see Chapter 4.1). A product of globalization, concerns about the potential loss of tradition in *huayue* emerge as concert hall culture replaces traditional tea house culture, sparking conversations on cultural heritage preservation (Chapters 3.1 and 3.2). Moreover, social disparities between areas highlight geographical tensions across Asian cities, exacerbated by the effect of globalization on local cultural identities (Chang and Lee, 2003: 140). Questions arise about available spaces for indigenous cultural economies and the importance of supporting local arts initiatives. In Singapore, the creative environment is shaped by globalization and localization, indicating an increased multiplicity in contemporary arts ecosystems. The researchers argue that urbanization and redevelopment impact performing art forms, content, meaning, and location, reflecting the diversity in urban cultural expressions.

Incorporating these ideas into Chapter 3.3, interactions between rural *kampungs* and urban cities through the lens of the Chinese orchestra are discussed. This examination of geographical issues resonates with Rogers' (2012) conceptual framework of three synergies—landscapes, places, and cities. Cosgrove, as cited by Rogers, emphasizes the role of performance in articulating landscape complexities, to reveal the interconnectedness of nature, culture, and human imagination within spatial contexts. Building upon this, Rogers'

perspective extends to the second concept of place as an ecological assemblage, an approach to the natural world that responds to diverse exchanges and interactions.

Cities emerge as vibrant hubs of cultural, social, and economic diversity, being dynamic arenas for performance-based politics and sociality (ibid.: 68-70). Particularly in Malaysia, urban centers like Kuala Lumpur and Penang are social, cultural, and economic centers where the Chinese orchestra thrives alongside the vibrant Chinese community. Performances in these cities reimagine urban spaces for artists to create cultural gathering places and understand the city through performance networks. However, varying socioeconomic dynamics of performance spaces across local, international, rural, and urban landscapes require the Chinese orchestra to navigate its position, adapting activities and performances to resonate with disparate social and cultural contexts.

Chapter 3.4 investigates digital space, which has assumed greater prominence following the Covid-19 pandemic. This section explores how virtual spaces become platforms for music activities and education, by paving new pathways of learning and examining how practitioners engage with these digital environments. This blurring of real and digital boundaries of Chinese orchestra practices metaphorically aligns with the idea of music as a virtual representation of social and natural spaces. Treating music as a virtual environment blends abstract concepts with tangible experiences in the convergence of nature and culture (Watkins, 2011: 407), highlighting how music transcends physical limitations to negotiate relationships between real and digital spaces.

Music and its environment mutually construct each other; music not only marks social space but also transforms it (Stokes, 1994) by actively shaping the dynamics, atmosphere, and social interactions within its social space. With this potential, one might question about the necessity for the Chinese orchestra to break from its current spaces or whether it is sufficient to continue with existing practices. The multiplicity ranges from the presentation of an authentic, traditional culture (in itself debatable) to lines of flight towards untapped spaces for creative expansion. Chapter 3.5 explores how the Experiment Ensemble and other practitioners engage with newer environments for artistic, creative, or financial purposes.

Finally, Rogers suggests that coexistence in a place with people of different understandings or attachments triggers questions and facilitates dialogue, enabling interculturalism (2012: 70). These complexities transcend a single chapter, particularly to permeate Chapters 4 and 5 which examine multiculturalism and the localization of music in

Malaysia. These chapters explore how music becomes intertwined with the construction of place, especially for translocated communities.

Overall, it is interesting to note how despite the passage of time, the themes and relations of readings in this chapter remain relevant to Malaysia today. Although changes are inevitable, the overall environment of the Chinese orchestra seems to have retained its fundamental characteristics. My own experience in the Chinese orchestra since 2010 reinforces this observation of continuity in timeline that underscores the enduring challenges and issues in the Chinese orchestra's spatial relations within the Malaysian environment. It suggests the need for continued exploration and dialogue to navigate cultural tradition while embodying creative expansion, as the wider environment continues to evolve.

3.1 *Days at the Pasar* (那些巴刹的日子)[5] – Locating the Chinese Orchestra

Musically, *huayue* is a sonic canvas that illustrates landscapes from natural environments of mountains and oceans to cultural environments of bustling markets and cityscapes. Notwithstanding, the Chinese orchestra's performance spaces are less imaginative, maybe even stereotypical, albeit varied, ranging from borrowed or private spaces to concert halls and performing arts centers (PACs). Initially a casual pastime, the Chinese orchestra has evolved to perform in more substantial venues.

Indeed, the Chinese orchestra's versatility in performance spaces impacts its societal positioning. As Rogers (2012) notes, performing arts transform identities through place-based politics, and Watkins (2011) highlights the cyclical nature of music in different spaces. For example, concert halls like the DFP reinforce newer concert traditions, symbolizing heightened glory of the Chinese orchestra, while performances in religious spaces emphasizes its role in reinforcing Chinese cultural identity.

Interviewee 03 illustrates this versatility: 'We performed in a shopping mall and were laughed at as a "five-foot way" orchestra, but the next day, we performed at the DFP. The stage size matters less; what is important is the heights to which you can push *huayue*.' Similarly, Interviewee 09 notes the past decade's diverse concerts and programs but calls for

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[5] Malaysian-born Junyi Chow (赵俊毅) composed this piece for the Chinese Orchestral Competition Malaysia 2019, with the intention of stimulating contemplations on the themes of the Chinese orchestra, culture, and what it meant to be 'Malaysia' (Lee, P. L., 2019).
Guided listening (Elements Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gs0JXqltASI

better concert venue design and sound engineering to enhance performance quality in Malaysia. Horlor (2022) also emphasizes that the built environment shapes concert experiences; this suggests that more care in nurturing the Chinese orchestra experience in newer arts spaces could improve audience engagement and appreciation of the arts.

Despite ample performance locations for the Chinese orchestra, there is a paradoxical sense of insufficiency, with many venues being less-than-ideal or restricted to private associations, rendering them inaccessible to outsiders. Interviewee 13 articulates the absence of dedicated professional venues in northern Malaysia, whereas in Sabah, spatial resources comprise mainly of school auditoriums or cultural centers that serve the performance purpose, despite not being ideal in acoustics for the orchestra (Interviewee 11).

Any musician of the Chinese orchestra would have experienced performances in suboptimal venues like school auditoriums and multipurpose halls. These spaces often have poor acoustics and inadequate facilities, detracting from the concert experience. Musicians, including Interviewee 24, encounter problems with audio systems, hence stresses the need for dedicated concert halls equipped with proper rehearsal rooms, high ceilings, and effective sound absorption.

Historically, the Chinese orchestra has compromised with these less-than-ideal locations due to limited funding and associated esteem with better venues. Amateur or school orchestras often encounter these space and resource challenges. However, as professionalism and performance quality improve, so have the venues. In this respect, Interviewee 24 believes it is time for *huayue* to break away from traditional confines; *huayue* deserves to be showcased in more comprehensive settings with advancements in performance quality and artistic expression. This would allow audiences to experience more profoundly the diverse range of genres and performance styles of the Chinese orchestra, challenging its preconceived notions. The interviewee remarks that 'it can reach high levels'.

Achievements of the Chinese orchestra in occupying premier spaces like the DFP and Istana Budaya (IB) are milestones cherished by practitioners. Interviewee 15, who has performed in both venues, notes that the intrinsic value of *huayue* became more recognized after these performances. This newfound standing motivated parents to support their children to learn *huayue.* Another interviewee shared their experience performing the *liuqin* at the DFP as part of the venue's arts education program, which included a workshop to introduce participants to the instrument, offered at a low fee.

When considering the environment where the Chinese orchestra aspires to perform, concerts generally aim to establish a hermetic musical environment that suppresses 'normal' environmental sounds (Watkins, 2011: 407). This goal is often only partially achieved. Even purpose-built sites like IB are deemed better suited for opera or theatre performances than for concerts as they require soundproofing and enhanced sound systems. Better-designed seating for audience comfort is also called for. Some practitioners self-impose limitations on performance spaces to prioritize audience experience, such as intentionally limiting audience number in venues like Thean Hou Temple to prevent overcrowding (Interviewee 21). These considerations prioritize auditory and spatial comfort, to sustain positive concert experiences for audiences and encourage their attendance for future events.

Under these conditions, traditional auditoriums and multipurpose halls appear even more inadequate. High-end venues like DFP fulfill concert requisites but are often too expensive for most Chinese orchestras. However, there is observed increase in Chinese orchestra events at the DFP, partly due to the venue's own youth and education programs and the hosting of esteemed groups like the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO).

To address this issue, more middle-end performance spaces have been constructed and are gaining traction within the Chinese orchestra community. These dedicated performing arts spaces, PACs, like the Kuala Lumpur PAC (KLPAC), Damansara PAC (DPAC) and Petaling Jaya PAC (PJPAC), offer variety in areas with vibrant and active cultural scenes[6].

Figure 24. *Perayaan* **(2023).** Photo of a concert of the Malaysia Century Chinese Orchestra (MCCO), held at KLPAC.

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[6] There was a performing arts center in Penang, the PenangPAC, that unfortunately closed down permanently in 2022 due to financial unsustainability in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Practitioners often refer to these centers as 'a bunch of whatever PAC' ('那些什么 PAC 什么 PAC 一大堆'), due to the acronym. These PACs, although primarily designed with black box theaters in mind and not the most ideal for concerts, are a step towards higher standards and recognition for the Chinese orchestra, by helping to establish concert etiquette (see following section). Interviewee 02 commends these locations as 'something to look forward to'[7].

Venue size is not a major concern, according to Interviewee 03, who assures that there are multiple performance spaces options. Venues such as the KLPAC offers numbered audience seating, avoiding noise issues from chair movement (Interviewee 24). Moreover, these spaces constantly upgrade their technology, like KLPAC's new LCD screens for digital projections, that significantly alters performance planning and concert experience[8]. However, these technologies can pose additional financial challenges for organizing committees (Interviewee 29).

Spaces hold constructed social meanings that differ across societies (Lefebvre, 1974) and are continually reproduced. The normalization of PACs as venues for Chinese orchestra performances re-signifies these spaces as symbols of cultural prestige within the Chinese orchestra community. A positive relationship with venue management can expedite the rental process, and secure discounted rates[9], further endorsing the cultural value of Chinese orchestra performances in concert format.

I assert that there remains a distinction between the prestige associated with PAC performances versus venues like DFP and IB, because PACs are multipurpose and accessible to any arts organization that can afford the rental. In contrast, the DFP and IB command higher prestige as exclusive spaces reserved for high art forms, with stringent booking processes for cultural gatekeeping. However, ongoing governmental efforts to improve the local arts scene introduce new venues like the Encore Melaka[10] performing arts theatre and

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[7] Another performance venue gaining popularity among the Chinese orchestra community for its affordability and professionalism is the Shantanand Auditorium in the Temple of Fine Arts Kuala Lumpur. The venue has in-house sound engineers who have become adept at sound balancing for Chinese instruments. I have successfully collaborated with the venue several times, including the *Ethereal Blossoms* (2024) concert of the UNMCO.

[8] See Chapter 5.2 on digitalization.

[9] Otherwise, funding to secure the performance venue depended on regular commercial performances and other sources. PACs are also facing their own funding issues that affect their sustainability and increase risks of closure. Like other cultural spaces, they require public support, organizational backing, or government funding to effectively upkeep them.

[10] Interviewee 26 takes pride in his Chinese orchestra's achievement of selling nearly 1000 tickets for a performance at Encore Melaka, a record attendance at a high-class venue as such where tickets are pricier. Rental costs of this venue to outsiders are now in the tens of thousands.

the Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House[11]. These modern venues are equipped with advanced stage and digital technology, offering opportunities for performances alongside world-class arts events, thus enhancing the presumed status and recognition of the Chinese orchestra within its cultural environment.

On the other hand, the popularity of specialized performance spaces does not mean the abandonment of older venues but signifies a blossoming of Chinese orchestra concerts across diverse settings. Factors like association and funding still influence venue selection. For example, school orchestras typically hold concerts within their own auditoriums.

Figure 25. Chung Hwa High School's Hall of Performing Arts. Photo taken during the high school's Chinese orchestra concert in 2019.

In earlier days, school auditoriums were the primary option due to basic amenities like air conditioning, large stage, and adequate seating (Interviewee 02). Over time, some schools have upgraded their auditoriums to professional standards in recognition of the need for better arts appreciation. An example is Muar Chung Hwa High School's (麻坡中化中学) Hall of Performing Arts, engineered to deliver exceptional acoustics and eliminates the need for microphones.

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[11] Ticket pricing here is surprisingly cheap, from RM38 to RM188 (as of 2023).

Performance organization becomes straightforward in educational environments where performance amenities are supplied by the institution. Interviewee 17 shares that it is a fortune to secure the main university hall in public universities, for their up-to-date facilities. However, these spaces come with control and regulations, such as restrictions on political content and sponsorship sources. Essentially, institutional policies and state indoctrination hold a strong influence on event content in public educational settings[12].

Public university concerts are more likely to be approved if they include cross-cultural collaborations, affecting repertoire decision (see Chapter 5.3). Additionally, resource fees may be attached to performance venues, which are sometimes waived or require nominal payment. Conversely, private universities have more freedom in performance content but may only have multipurpose halls available and they typically charge for the use of these amenities.

Community orchestras, ensembles, and soloists occasionally collaborate with venue organizers for revenue sharing. Interviewee 18 recounted an experience where a venue organized the performance and provided services like sound system and photography, and he received a 20 percent profit share. These collaborations allow musicians to gain performance opportunities without risking low audience attendance at larger venues. Moreover, such concerts help semi-professional musicians gain recognition, to demonstrate that professional music pursuits are attainable even without being full-time musicians.

Nonetheless, challenges associated with performance spaces are subjective. Some argue that it is no longer an issue to find suitable spaces for Chinese orchestra concerts. Interviewee 28 asserts, 'Once you find the funds you are willing to spend and the necessary transportation for your large instruments, the availability of performance spaces is not a problem.' Interviewee 02 concurs that large-scale venues are easily sourced. Instead, the real challenge lies in finding smaller, less mainstream spaces.

Financial considerations often dictate the venue decision, with concerns about ticket sales, rental costs, and other expenses influencing early concert planning stages. This situation requires seeking sponsors and additional support to mitigate financial challenges, alongside careful ticket pricing to balance audience expectations and the covering of expenses (see following section). Limited budgets lead orchestras to utilize spaces like the

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[12] Similarly, the *Mak Yong* is subjected to state control, only allowing sanitized performances in controlled performance spaces, so that it does not pose a religious threat to the Islamic state in Kelantan (Hoffstaedter, 2009: 532). Continue with Chapter 3.2 on traditions and rituals under cultural regulation.

Thean Hou Temple or school auditoriums, which in turn require fundraising for additional equipment (Interviewee 04). Interviewee 24 proposes subsidies or rebates to alleviate financial pressures that come from venue rental costs.

Despite difficulties in finding suitable locations, the Chinese orchestra remains committed to the concert tradition. Watkin's notion that 'music is forever moving in place' (2011: 408) resonates with the rhizome and cultural sustainability approaches, where the Chinese orchestra community continually evolves and adapts to its settings while maintaining tradition and resilience. In search of spatial expansion, spaces like 'livehouses' offer opportunities for soloistic crossover performances (Interviewee 21). Innovative spaces therefore diversify the presentation of *huayue* by reconstructing meanings and values of the culture (see Chapter 3.5). Online concerts have also emerged as a cost-effective alternative for accessibility and dissemination[13].

In contrast to Singapore and Hong Kong's thriving performing arts scene, where events require year-long advanced venue booking, Malaysia's cultural landscape appears underdeveloped, with a shortage of performance sites. This distinction highlights the necessity for government and public efforts to further develop cultural infrastructure in support of cultural and arts industries, meeting the growing demand for diverse performance spaces.

3.2 *Buka Panggung* (开台)[14] - Performing the Chinese Orchestra

The performativity of Chinese-ness through the Chinese orchestra community's rituals and norms offers a fascinating glimpse into the intersection of tradition, religion, and art. At a concert I attended (*Thunderous Resonance*, held at a rented auditorium of a primary school; see also Chapter 6.2), the experience began with a prayers ceremony before the performance—an unexpected sight featuring a makeshift altar at the school's entrance and performers collectively seeking blessings from the gods with joss sticks. The practice of Chinese religious rituals infused the concert with a peculiar spiritual dimension; the

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[13] See Chapter 3.4 on digital spaces, Chapter 5.2 on digitalization, and Chapter 6.3 on the future of live and digital music.
[14] Malaysian Composer Yii Kah Hoe's (余家和) composition from 2006, *Buka Panggung* refers to the opening of the stage, a preshow ritual in the Malay *wayang kulit* tradition. This piece serves as a tribute to the cultural traditions of Malaysia and offers an exploration of rehearsal and performance rituals—ceremonial aspects inherent to the Chinese orchestra performance experience.
Guided listening (Taipei Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u62Uk-0bk1M

ceremony is not a common practice of the Chinese orchestra, but it made sense in the moment for the community to carry out deep-rooted Chinese traditions and beliefs alongside artistic expression.

Transactions and convergences of modern and traditional elements within Malaysia's local environment shape the identity and experience of the Chinese orchestra. Originating from regional Chinese music ensembles that accompanied roadside opera shows (offerings to the gods) and teahouse opera singing (community entertainment), the Chinese orchestra traditionally perform in spaces like Chinese temples during festivities such as Chinese New Year celebrations or prayer ceremonies.

Interviewee 32 narrated a serendipitous encounter with opera music that presented a twist of fate. In his youth, he was moved by a *yanqgin* player of a roadside Chinese opera performance, finding the music to be humanizing and sparked his eventual interest to join a local regional music ensemble. To his surprise, he later discovered the coincidence of likely participating in the same group he encountered many years ago. To the interviewee, music that emanates from the heart holds great power to captivate its audience and connect the local community, a true embodiment of music in the society it lives in.

Other practitioners recount performances for Vesak Day celebrations on the street (Interviewee 33) and in temples for Chinese New Year (Experiment Ensemble 2). I have performed in such contexts in which Chinese orchestras are hired (or for Chinese orchestras affiliated with religious organizations, performing for free) to entertain religious worshippers with festive-appropriate music. While many of these performances do not capture the 'authentically traditional' essence of Chinese music, they serve as outward symbols of Chinese identity, only partially manifesting in religious expressions of traditional Chinese culture.

Thunderous Resonance also incorporated rituals of a typical symphony orchestra concert[15], including speeches by VIPs, a *gong*-hitting opening ceremony, tuning led by the concertmaster, conductor speeches educating the audience about concert etiquette and Chinese music, and an encore piece to conclude the concert (customarily, the shouting of 'encore!' is guided by backstage crews). Social norms for dress rehearsals, guest welcoming, and post-performance *yumcha* sessions (Chapter 2.2) further reinforce the concert tradition.

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[15] There are nuances even in formal performances. According to Interviewee 24, 'in a show business environment, you need to choreograph your movements differently. In a concert hall, you're expected to be more reserved. In a more lively atmosphere, your posture and attire need to reflect a different image.'

In comparison, performances in non-concert hall settings reduce these concert rituals to almost none. Hence, are these rituals adopted to emulate Western classical music traditions and their perceived aura of elitism? Critics argue that even in symphony orchestras, such rituals can alienate new audiences for implying elitism and snobbery (Sachon, 2012). Ignoring this statement, does the Chinese orchestra adopt these traditions for validation and reinforcement of a more superior cultural identity when performed in a concert setting?

As per Cohen (1998: 287), music is effective in shaping identity, preserving cultural memories, and creating sensory experiences associated with specific places. It acts as a cultural map to navigate various imaginary geographies while articulating both individual and collective identities. This influence affects the authenticity of performances and cultural presentations. Nonetheless, whether performed on stage or as part of cultural embodiment, *huayue* contributes to a particular developmental trajectory, either to reinforce or subvert existing norms.

Music performance, reception, style, and activity evoke certain images and experiences, an alternative discourse to everyday speech through its embodiment of movement and collectivity, along with the ambiguity of its symbolic forms (ibid.: 286). Unconventional spaces and formats challenge traditional norms; for instance, Interviewee 31's 'walking orchestra', where the orchestra marched around the performance venue, aimed to impress audiences and create new learning experiences.

Practitioner 08 advocates the exploration of performance settings beyond the concert stage, suggesting site-specific performances in places like tea houses to recreate traditional atmospheres like the *Jiangnan sizhu* in Shanghai, or pop-up shows (快闪) to surprise and engage audiences. The trend in professional musicians performing in public places is a budding concept to make *huayue* more accessible to local communities (Interviewee 02). Some organizers innovate concert spaces by performing among the audiences or interacting with them directly, breaking away from the strict performance-only atmosphere[16] (Interviewee 04).

Effectively, the meaning of a music performance within a specific location is determined by its participants and intended purposes. Rogers (2012) points out that performances may lack ecological mindfulness if they fail to cultivate responsive and

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[16] Chen particularly attempts to break concert norms through these stage innovations and crossover projects (see Chapter 5.3 for the case study).

responsible relationships with their immediate surroundings. Musical events and practices are involved in the social production of neighborhoods (ibid.), not only becoming cultural representations but also contributing to individual income generation and economic growth in the community.

The primary driver for concert pricing is the venue rental cost, accompanied by nature of the orchestra. For example, ticket prices for a high school Chinese orchestra concert in its school hall may be as low as RM10, or between RM20 to RM50 in a concert hall. Contrastingly, more professional community orchestras performing in the same concert hall can charge higher prices from RM30 to RM100. These pricing decisions reflect public perception on professionalism, prestige, and cultural significance attributed to performances.

Similar perception of cost and accessibility exists in Singapore, where tensions between the global and local are evident in its social environment (Chang and Lee, 2003: 137). In Malaysia, audience expectation for cost-free cultural experiences over paid performances are also influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, perpetuating the public sentiment that 'Chinese people should help each other'. Unfortunately, this predisposition towards 'cheap cultural activities' poses challenges for practitioners to acquire audiences beyond their immediate circles[17] (Interviewees 14, 16, 18, 29).

Interviewees express frustrations over the difficulty in selling tickets that often results in reduced prices and free tickets that perpetuate the negative cycle. Recognizing financial challenges, professional musicians price their performances at significantly higher rates to elevate the perception of *huayue* and reduce *huayue* undervaluation. Despite the combination of reasons[18] for the reception and valuation of a Chinese orchestra concert, positive audience responses to professional orchestra performances suggest 'hope' for change in the broader cultural appreciation landscape[19].

The comparison between traditional performing practices like the *Mak Yong* ritual and the Chinese orchestra highlights less-than-positive societal attitudes towards cultural heritage and artistic expressions. Interviewee 22 argues that, compared to performances for rituals in their original lived environments, standardized performances on modern stages lose their

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[17] See Chapter 5.2 on the role of the internet in expanding audience reach.

[18] These reasons span several topics, from interpersonal relations, financial considerations, to the influence of globalization and the internet.

[19] Perhaps internalized bias and stereotypes within the Chinese orchestra community lead to the presumption that audiences do not appreciate the arts and are deterred by higher ticket prices. Contrary to this belief, audiences might interpret higher ticket prices as indicative of a quality performance and attending them feeds into a higher valuation of their own identity.

authenticity and intrinsic value to the community; sanitized versions lack human touch and true embodiment of the ritual's purpose. Therefore, is it better to preserve a tradition and risk its extinction from external complications, or to resuscitate it on an artificial stage and risk the dilution of its ritualistic essence or distortion of its meaning? The intended impact of preservation efforts is a rhetorical question worth pondering.

Regardless, it is somber, and even unfair, to consider the Chinese orchestra under the same extinction risk as the *Mak Yong*. While they may share certain ritualistic functions in their original traditions, they exist within different cultural, historical, political, and economic frameworks, and it is important to recognize and respect their unique attributes and significances.

In the Malaysian environment, the performativity of the Chinese orchestra also occurs in 'contested spaces' (Hoffstaedter, 2009), conflicting narratives and agendas with the socio-political landscape. These discussions (from Chapter 2.4) intersect with the rituals of the Chinese orchestra—patterns of behaviors that carry symbolisms—that we can extrapolate into the practices of the Chinese orchestra. What happens in between the conception of a performance and the stage? Processes in rehearsals, stage preparations, and post-performance activities are also ritualistic and reflect artistic expression that construct cultural identity, representation, and belonging, and they happen in the spaces in-between.

Placing a performing culture into a binary framework risks overlooking the everyday environment or 'perceived spaces' (Lefebvre (1991), presented in the chapter introduction) where community life happens—ritualistic processes beyond performances like rehearsals, stage preparations, and post-performance activities. These spaces bridge all kinds of performances in expression of interactions, feelings, and experiences, resisting easy definition to produce and reproduce meaning through activities and interactions. The prayer ceremony before the concert is an appropriate example of how various elements of Chinese culture intersect in constantly evolving spaces.

Rehearsal spaces for most Chinese orchestras are easy to secure as they are usually bonded to specific places—schools, association buildings, neighborhood spaces. School orchestras typically have their own dedicated music rehearsal rooms or at least a storage space for instruments. In some cases, practitioners may have the luxury of running their studios from home for private classes (Interviewee 26, 28).

However, for community-based orchestras without such affiliations, it can be much more daunting to find proper rehearsal spaces. Interviewee 15 stresses that 'there is not a single Chinese orchestra in the country that can rent a venue just for rehearsals.' Rental costs for rehearsal venues may not be sustainable with orchestra funds (Interviewee 09), and if there are no affiliations for a fixed rehearsal space, instrument storage becomes an additional hurdle (Interviewee 21).

Under challenging circumstances of venue instability, the Malaysia Century Chinese Orchestra (MCCO, 马来西亚世纪华乐团) has shown resilience by adapting to various rehearsal spaces, moving between a member's relative's place (that was then recalled to be converted into a house of worship), a warehouse, a studio, and rented spaces at a PAC. The orchestra also accommodates working members by encouraging home practice while ensuring attendance at crucial rehearsal sessions. This adaptability highlights how the sustainability of cultural practices often depends on the resilience of community-generated spaces rather than tying their identity to a specific location.

Nonetheless, disparities in resource allocation affect access to rehearsal spaces. This includes private and public educational institutions, also in universities Chinese orchestras[20] where resources depend on management bodies, despite a more relaxed approach to managing tertiary level society activities. Interviewee 17, with experience in university Chinese orchestras, notes the luck of private universities to have sufficient rehearsal spaces, but struggle with instrument storage as orchestras expand in resources. Public universities, on the other hand, often relegate rehearsals to semi-open areas with poor acoustics and environmental hazards. The booking of decent rehearsal spaces requires semester-long advance applications, sometimes denied because their rehearsal timing falls outside regular office hours. This series of interconnected problems in an unconducive environment makes difficult the effective practice of complex or professional pieces. As a workaround, simpler compositions are chosen to avoid complications that may arise from inadequate rehearsal time and unfavorable acoustic conditions.

Rather than spatial challenges, school orchestras face rehearsal *time* issues. Most Chinese orchestras rehearse two or three days a week, with sessions for instrumental group

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[20] University Chinese orchestra members are generally a melange of graduates from high schools orchestras nationwide, accustomed to performing grand compositions that require musical maturity, a large orchestra, and stable institutional support. However, universities often lack the practice time and resources for members to master technically challenging pieces or assemble a sufficient number of musicians for proper presentations of music, limiting accessibility to such compositions.

rehearsals (分组练习，小组练习), orchestral run-throughs (大组练习，大合奏，团练), and/or sessions for new learners (新生练习). However, changes in school management and state policies can disrupt these schedules. An interviewee from Johor describes how the alteration of the weekend system from Sundays to Fridays led to constant postponements and cancellation of rehearsals. This scenario is common in primary schools, where new school leaderships sometimes discontinue extracurricular activities, citing lack of rehearsal space or time as a primary excuse to eventually disband their Chinese orchestras.

Post-pandemic, the Malaysian environment experienced a blossoming in Chinese orchestra performances by both professionals and amateurs (see Chapter 5.1). This includes professional concerts, visits from esteemed orchestras, and access to prestigious venues like the DFP, therefore stimulating the growth of Chinese orchestra concert traditions and associated rituals[21]. Since the milestone event for Chinese orchestra development, *The Journey* in 2019, barriers between orchestras have diminished, improving inclusivity in musician recruitment regardless of their orchestra affiliation (Interviewee 22). This growing rhizomatic network enhances the exchange of performance cultures among musicians from different areas, fosters unity and elevates the status of the Chinese orchestra while establishing new norms.

In these environmental conditions, the blurred roles and significances of the Chinese orchestra creates questions about its primary purpose. Is it a living tradition serving cultural and religious purposes, or is it reduced to an accessory to display identity and pursue economic gains, losing its traditional ritualistic values when performed in a built environment? Can performances maintain their essence when relocated from their original environment to the stage to sustain the economy of the community, creating newer contexts for its performance? Or can both scenarios coexist, allowing traditions to evolve and generate newer interpretations and manifestations of the music culture?

These open questions invite readers to reexamine dichotomies between built versus lived environments and nuances of cultural authenticity in evolving traditions. The evolution towards a globalized and standardized concert model interacts with audience expectations and experiences, suggesting that the interpretation and impact of music embrace a multitude

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[21] The caveat is the limited pool of available musicians in Malaysia, resulting in a repetitive audience and performer base. An interviewee complains that musicians participate in multiple concerts, leading to conflicts in rehearsal schedules and prioritization among orchestras. This scattered rehearsal approach reflects a lack of professionalism and produces less refined music performances. It is hoped that musicians do not adopt a casual attitude focused solely on completing performances.

of trajectories and embodied experiences. As Interviewee 22 goes, 'Once I step on stage, from the moment the first note is played, the control is no longer in my hands; audiences receive whatever unfolds in the moment.' In this environment of multiplicities, perhaps it is sensible to encourage a free flow of Chinese orchestra performances, opening new spaces for growth.

3.3 *Kampung and City* (甘榜与城市)[22] – Socioeconomic Differences

> Some might find the choice of strings played quietly and peacefully for over ten bars to be excessive. You will resonate with it if you are a night owl or if you wake very early between 4 and 5am. The village is silent. All you hear is the environment, your heartbeat, or the wind. Slowly, the call for *azan* in the nearby *surau* is made using the bass *sheng*, announcing the sunrise. The day breaks with plucked strings emerging from the darkness. As society develops, some things are inevitably destroyed, a natural law not everyone accepts. There is a fear of loss. Then, the village grows into a bustling city with tall iron and concrete buildings, busy traffic, and noise, yet there is still order in the chaos. You can feel the different expressions through the music (Interviewee 24, describing *Kampung and the City*).

Varying perceptions of the environment and conflicting geographical imaginations shape distinct cultural politics—environmental consciousness significantly defines meanings attributed to localities and their infrastructure, affecting socioeconomic trajectories. Before considering strategies of growth, Malaysia must first diagnose its inherent socioeconomic disparities, not only internally among local areas, but also in wider geographical contexts.

Spatial dynamics vary across places and impact cultural practices like the Chinese orchestra. Mercer's cluster of indicators of 'culture, lifestyle and identity' lists several criteria that are helpful in analyzing disparities in Malaysia's Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Factors include demographics, location, and income, that influence individuals' access to resources

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[22] Another composition by Junyi Chow (赵俊毅), inspired by his experience in Indonesia, that juxtaposes a village and city coexisting side by side. Standing on the border and realizing their perpetual connection, Chow portrays the intrinsic bond between these apparently disparate environments. In this subtopic, the dichotomy of kampung versus city is used to articulate the socioeconomic differences across states of Malaysia that influence the performance levels of the Chinese orchestra in diverse Malaysian settings.
Guided listening (MCCO): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDwmwejI25A

for affirming their chosen lifestyles (2002: 81-84). Individuals or groups exercise cultural knowledge, skills, and resources (cultural capital) to define their lifestyle and identities.

An analysis of cultural capital in different localities involves dissecting Chinese orchestra practices and identifying challenges to understand existing disparities that affirm localized identities. Cultural practices change through space and time, escaping the control and influence of institutional frameworks, causing shifts in cultural perception, production, and consumption. Although there are many factors contributing to the relationship between culture and environment, this discussion delineates three boundaries of examination—comparisons between Malaysia and other main Chinese orchestra regions, localities within Malaysia, and the urban/rural divide.

Firstly, the socioeconomic disparity between Malaysia and other main Chinese orchestra regions is striking because Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore host professional Chinese orchestras, unlike Malaysia. Malaysian practitioners studying in Mainland China or Taiwan often face limited opportunities upon return, in music teaching or participation in amateur orchestras that often lack funding and stable payment for musicians. Interviewee 19 questions, 'We don't even have a professional Chinese orchestra, so what reformation are we talking about?' Without such a platform, Malaysian Chinese orchestra practitioners lack opportunities to engage in wider global discourse about Chinese music development.

Drawing an analogy to New Villages (新村) across Malaysia, Interviewee 26 suggests that Malaysia's small Chinese orchestra community should embrace the Taiwanese spirit of cherishing small and beautiful things, to value our independence and individuality over brand ambitions. He points to Taiwan's flourishing independent music scene as a testament to their philosophy. Along this vein, Interviewee 16 notes Taiwan's admiration for the cultural resilience of the Malaysian Chinese as a diaspora who successfully preserve their mother tongue and music in a foreign land, which has led to substantial financial and human resource support for Malaysian Chinese orchestras.

In comparison to Singapore, Malaysia's cultural environment appears stagnant despite an increasing number of individuals pursuing this field. However, this contrast does not imply Singapore's superiority over Malaysia. The global perception of Malaysian Chinese orchestra students is positive, with praise for their independence and self-initiation. Singaporean instructors value Malaysian students' dedication to learning, which they aim to

cultivate among their own students. Although Singapore benefits from comprehensive government support for the arts, full-time musicians face challenges in their livelihood due to market competitiveness. Conversely, Malaysia's organizations rely on ticket sales for sustainability[23] due to the deficit in comprehensive government arts planning (Interviewee 20).

Economic sustainability is a concern emphasized by Interviewee 07, particularly when comparing the Chinese orchestra to the Western orchestra in Malaysia, such as the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO). The practitioner finds it unrealistic for the Chinese orchestra to visualize same professionalization goals due to funding constraints. In China, government support covers performance costs for professional orchestras, as ticket sales alone cannot cover the high costs of musician payment for rehearsals, performances, and venue rentals (typically between 30,000 to 150,000RMB per night).

Professionalization in Malaysia is not immediately viable as it requires large-scale and long-term funding. However, amateur activities remain sustainable because people participate in them out of interest rather than economic necessity, covering their own expenses. This interest-driven approach is what sustains the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia. Interviewee 21 adds that, when transposed to Singapore or Hong Kong, where the ecology is healthier and audiences are more substantial, there is room for economic failure. Without the same environment, Malaysia lacks this margin of error and must navigate funding challenges more cautiously.

A 'kampung and city' disparity extends to education opportunities in Chinese music higher education. Practitioners who pursued tertiary music studies in Mainland China and Taiwan found themselves at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts from main Chinese regions. China's specialized music education system fosters professional-level training in music theory, sight-singing, and listening from a young age. Interviewee 31 witnessed the effectiveness of this education and emulates the education locally, seeing some progress in this effort. To propel Malaysia forward, government investment in music education and professional trainers is necessary for a stronger education structure[24].

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[23] Chapter 2.3 discussed funding and support.
[24] Further discussions on music education are made in Chapter 4.5.

The variation in the geographic distribution of the Chinese orchestra is linked to ethnic demography, specifically the distribution of Chinese communities[25]. This demographic pattern affects community support, resource access, and the development trajectory of the local Chinese orchestra. Evers proposes that the Chinese mental map predominantly centers on major urban areas, influencing urbanization and urban ecology. This urban-centric mindset ingrains geographical origin and identity across generations, including cultural expressions like music (1977: 211). It perpetuates a self-conscious differentiation of identity across localities and emphasize distinctions between cities of different tiers (e.g. second/third-tier cities, 二/三线城市) to justify developmental inequalities.

Discussions about Miri highlights its status as a relatively young second-tier city in contrast to Kuching, the state capital. Miri faces challenges in preserving traditional elements, on top of limited resources and a lack of collaboration and awareness among practitioners. When the orchestra travels to West Malaysia, they encounter an unfamiliar competitive and individualistic environment[26], compared to the reserved nature of Miri students. Despite these differences, there is a desire to foster exchanges and collaborations between Miri and West Malaysia. Financial constraints sometimes induce the bringing of musicians to Miri to improve the local arts scene. Disparities across geographical areas stem from their interactions with immediate surroundings and communities. Like how the status of the Chinese orchestra is elevated by occupying high culture spaces (see Chapter 3.1), the invitation of prestigious foreign Chinese orchestras to certain locations boosts society members' confidence in the value of the Chinese orchestra (Interviewee 16).

With scarce external support, smaller towns thrive through collaborative efforts among small orchestras, yielding outcomes greater than the sum of their parts. Similar collective forces emerged in smaller localities to bridge divides between their encompassing Chinese orchestras, like an initiative to organize music camps for orchestras from places like Terengganu and Kelantan. Such collaborations unite students, enable participants to experience larger musical compositions, and access learning opportunities that may be limited in smaller ensembles.

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[25] I have attempted to locate official data on the population breakdown of Chinese ethnicity by state, but to no avail. Nonetheless, unofficial sources indicate that the population correlates with the number of Chinese orchestras in each state.

[26] This can be attributed to the urban/rural attachments created by place identity, although they are becoming more nuanced in recent decades. Residents of rural areas have a stronger sense of place and community attachment, while city-dwellers are more isolated and face more economic competition (see Belanche, Casaló and Rubio, 2021).

Festivals and *guanmohui*s are larger-scale examples (Chapter 2.5) to promote cultural exchange in alignment with Mercer's notion of the 'management of identities' and active cultural engagement within the multiethnic Malaysian context. These events contribute to the construction of lifestyles and identities by providing platforms for community participation and expression (2002: 81-84). In Mercer's cultural indicator/value production matrix, they play a role in producing and reproducing spaces in small towns, utilizing various facilities, venues, networks, and opportunities to affirm culture (ibid.: 118).

Like Miri, southern Malaysia faces economic challenges due to geographical limitations. The participation in distant competitions incur substantial costs for schools to transport and accommodate student orchestras. Interviewee 16's orchestra finds it economically unfeasible to participate annually, to attend large-scale competitions once every few years. Consequently, Melaka and Johor bond through localized and economically viable inter-school exchanges. In reference to the *guanmohui*, an interviewee emphasizes, 'we have a small ecosystem here that has an inter-school exchange every two years, so teachers are relatively familiar with each other's situations.' Even within the two states, disparities in resources and size among orchestras indicate the need to reconsider competition and programs for better inclusivity and equitable opportunities for smaller orchestras.

Noteworthy arts scenes often emerge unexpectedly in smaller places like Terengganu and Seremban, where place-based experiences like festivals and competitions contribute to economic growth through tourism, and define a town or city[27] (Rogers, 2012: 70). The Chinese orchestra scene is particularly vibrant in towns like Ipoh due to their dense Chinese population. The supportive environment and conducive atmosphere offer greater access to cultural capital and ensures the vitality of its cultures.

The success of Perak in nurturing the Chinese orchestra is due to strong community support and heightened risk awareness among smaller orchestras with limited resources. In my understanding, most secondary schools in Perak host a complete range of Chinese instruments with dedicated instructors, and they yield favorable competition outcomes. Every school in Ipoh, including English-medium schools, have a Chinese orchestra, and they generate the highest figures compared to other places (Interviewee 18). However, orchestras in Ipoh operate more independently compared to Kuala Lumpur[28]. In small-town settings,

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[27] Activities of the Chinese orchestra have been discussed in Chapter 2.5, whereas Chapter 3.5 will highlight a few festivals and performances held in the natural environment.
[28] Recall the challenge of factions between practitioners of northern Malaysia, in Chapter 2.3.

there is less competition between forms of entertainment (or cultural activities) for learners' attention (Herbert, 1998: 122-123). Arguably, as these towns develop into larger cities, the availability of options increases without reducing performance standards expectations for Chinese orchestras.

In the long run, abundant support and resources for cultural activities may lead to complacency for cultural preservation, and reduced value of the cultural scene. Unlike the first generation of *huayue* pioneers who fought for its preservation, younger generations sometimes fail to appreciate the struggles of their predecessors. The more apparent issue, as articulated by Interviewee 18, is the accumulation of resources and increased standards over time, that cause reduced maintenance efforts and a lax attitude towards upgrades and instrument ownership; students use existing public instruments with the perception of *huayue* as just a compulsory extracurricular activity. Sadly, this lack of ownership results in the neglect of common resources, that sometimes end up in poor condition. Personally, I have known many talented performers who abandoned the art after secondary school because they utilized school instruments during their studies[29].

In the southern part of Malaysia, the state of Johor presents itself as an interesting case study due to its peculiar geographical relationship with Singapore and other parts of Malaysia, which places its various localities in different socioeconomic conditions[30]. Johor Bahru's proximity to Singapore provides enhanced access to educational resources and expertise. Interviewee 27 notes that some localities frequently seek assistance from Singaporean instructors, particularly Muar and Kluang, due to their geographical proximity and professionalism in adhering to strict standards. Many locals who studied *huayue* professionally end up working in Singapore. Furthermore, there is a different education system in Singapore where many schools contract companies to supply *huayue* instructors that generate achievements for the school. In comparison, Johor faces the challenge of lower salaries for local instructors, despite having one for each instrument. Being paid by the session, teachers are less punctual and are unavailable if they have other commitments.

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[29] For this reason, the Chinese orchestra exists mainly in schools and depend on them for nurturing new talents (Yong, 2016).
[30] In contrast to the situation in northern Malaysia, the narratives of Johor and Melaka practitioners reinforce one another, indirectly highlighting the effectiveness of networking and collaborations for a harmonious relationship between these areas, likely due to the Johor and Melaka inter-exchange program. Johor also fosters a good relationship with Sabah in East Malaysia from Mr Teo's efforts (Chapter 1.2).

The education situation is not much different in Muar, where the instructor of a prominent high school established connections with Singapore and relied on these connections for external resources until about a decade ago. However, the reliance on connections with Singapore for external resources has shifted with the advancement of the internet, expanding the network of southern Malaysia to a global scale, including online learning opportunities[31] (Interviewee 16).

However, challenges persist, such as the scarcity of instructors and resources in the smaller town (Interviewee 26). It is more difficult to retain students and instructors as they migrate to more urban places in search of better opportunities. Also, local learners are more reluctant to pay higher tuition fees for teachers from out of town, whereas instructors are also hesitant to travel to rural areas for their lower teaching rates. The instructor acknowledges the locality limitation that restricts *huayue* to local operations, thus choosing to be involved in local community-building efforts in Melaka and Muar. He emphasizes, 'it is not that we are noble [for choosing more rural locations], we just happen to be in this place. Naturally, the Chinese orchestra anywhere will grow as long as somebody is willing to work on developing it.'

In contrast to educational support, concert ticket pricing in Johor reflects lower production values and audience expectations on perceived musical standards that shape the surrounding community's engagement with Chinese orchestra events, particularly since its actors are primarily secondary school students. Malaysian concertgoers would opt to attend performances across the border, to Singapore, for higher musical quality and tailored repertoires by professional orchestras like the SCO[32]. This value gap begs the inherent questioning of the value of *huayue* to the local Malaysian communities beyond its position as a traditional cultural heritage to be preserved.

Rogers (2012: 70) explores interactions between city spaces and intercultural differences in performance in the urbanization process. Each location is unique to its inhabitants; the assembling of people with diverse understandings and attachments can spark questions and enable dialogues. Resulting from these individual differences, development models cannot be uniformly applied, as their effectiveness depend on the specific local context, varying from region to region. Interviewee 16 acknowledges this variability through

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[31] Chapter 5.2 discusses the impact of digitalization on *huayue* education.
[32] Tickets for Chinese orchestra concerts in Singapore can be priced at 15SGD, affordable for the society's higher economic capacity, but tickets in Malaysia at only RM10 require careful considerations (Interviewee 17).

communication with teachers nationwide, and finds that methods do not universally succeed. Consequently, flexibility and adaptability are essential for successful approaches to the Chinese orchestra across regions.

Indeed, individuals exhibit different mentalities and organizational cultures from the urban/rural divide. Interviewee 09 observes that students in big cities tend to be more independent and 'street smart', whereas those in small towns are more likely to follow instructions obediently. Interviewee 16 notices the changing public perspective on traditional Chinese music instruments, with an increasing number of people learning instruments like the *zhongruan* and *pipa*. Many parents in major cities view this exposure as beneficial for their children's cultural knowledge. Similarly, parents in second-tier cities growingly acknowledge and support *huayue* learning for its cultural heritage value. Nonetheless, to further cultivate and sustain this trend, the practitioner advises more professional and systematic guidance and training in Chinese music.

Do these socioeconomic differences within Malaysia and its interactions with the greater region translate into challenges? If urban areas drive expansion and development, what are the implications for the rural? They risk being left behind for disparities in resources, infrastructure, and engagement opportunities. However, can the gap be reduced (or is there such a need to do so)? The Chinese orchestra ecosystem involves interconnected actors such as local authorities, structures, institutions, community organizations, and individuals. As voiced in Rogers and Mercer's literature, each locale's distinctive identity and routine are shaped by the diverse experiences brought by its people, contributing to a micro community of independent individuals that form a cohesive whole. It brings us back to the intersection between tradition and modernity in each place's journey, with neither inherently superior. It is an understanding of how these elements converge to shape distinct trajectories over time.

3.4 *Guest From Afar, Please Stay* (远方的客人请你留下来)[33] – Zooming Forward with the Internet

Our immersion in the digital world is more extensive than we realize, almost as if we inhabit parallel universes. During rehearsal breaks, orchestra members now instinctively reach for their phones to attend to various tasks or scroll through social media, replacing the traditional diligence in practicing parts. Traditional sheet music is replaced by digital scores displayed on iPads (see Chapter 5.2). During the pandemic, I participated in recorded online concerts and competitions, that created a surreal experience of viewing myself performing on screen instead of being physically present on stage. It was a dissociative experience[34].

Moreover, interviews for this research are exclusively conducted online, demonstrating the normalization of digital interactions, living in between worlds. Practitioners sometimes detach the digital landscape, referencing it as the 'computer world' ('电脑世界'), or, with artificial intelligence advancements, the 'ChatGPT world' (Interviewee 25). The navigation of this virtual landscape requires flexibility; an adaptation to both contemporary and traditional practices, discerning between abstract and tangible experiences. The internet is viewed as an opportunity to accelerate developmental steps of the Chinese orchestra, rather than going with the flow.

Hutchinson, cited in Cooley (2019: xxx), argues that the internet has expanded sociability and traditions must adapt for survival. An investigation of music in the virtual is thus quintessential for traditions to catch up with contemporary society, especially given the prevalence of social media. As Interviewee 25 states, there is no inherent reason to resist the confluence of traditional practices with digital innovations. The internet serves as a rich resource for knowledge acquisition and information updates; community members leverage platforms like YouTube to learn about Chinese Orchestra pieces through videos uploaded by professional orchestras.

Scholars have extensively debated the societal roles of the internet and digital technology. Hence, their general societal roles are not elaborated here. However, this topic offers insights into how the Chinese orchestra utilizes these technologies and current modes

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[33] This folk music piece is distinguished by its distinct ethnic style and vibrant emotional appeal, capturing the essence of the Sani ethnic group's joyous festive celebrations as they welcome guests from afar. The title is aligned with the advantage of online platforms to connect Chinese orchestra communities of distant places. Guided listening (Suzhou Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YLFY_Dz1Ho

[34] Personally, I harbor reservations about digital music (distinct from electronic music) when compared with live performances.

of online interaction. The digital environment accommodating the Chinese orchestra encompasses many aspects, including social media and conferencing platforms used for teaching and learning. While its effects are widely studied in many contexts, Chinese orchestra activities pose little variation to the digital experiences of other musical cultures. Nonetheless, post-pandemic, digital spaces have assumed greater prominence within the Chinese orchestra community.

Primarily, the internet is a boundless space for community connections and bridging geographical distances. Working in Singapore, Interviewee 20 relies on Facebook to stay connected with Malaysian counterparts, maintaining ties to the Chinese music scene in Malaysia through social media platforms. Moreover, social media, popularly Facebook, effectively supports the promotion and communication of musical events and happenings within the Chinese orchestra community. Earlier research by Haussmann and Poellmann (2013) highlights its effectiveness due to its affordability, instantaneity, wide reach, and ability to materialize multimedia content, such as participation in performances[35]. Particularly, communication facilitated by 'word of mouth' through these platforms spreads information and generate excitement about upcoming events (ibid.: 158).

In early 2024, a sensational news within the Chinese orchestra community was the announcement of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO)'s first tour in Malaysia, scheduled for August 2024. For many within the community, the prospect of experiencing the HKCO live in Malaysia was akin to the arrival of a globally renowned artist like Taylor Swift. Social media, especially Facebook, was the primary resource for the dissemination of this information that sparked discussions about ticket purchasing, repertoire, and show attendance. Facebook pages and groups serve as spaces for the promotion of knowledge and events, transcending geographical regions and creating resonating chambers where a network of actors connects, interacts, and obtains latest information about the Chinese orchestra. Dedicated sources[36] such as the Malaysian *huayue* information page (马来西亚华乐资讯网), The Association of Zhonghua Music of Malaysia (马来西亚中华民族音乐协会), Pipa Group (琵琶群组, international), and Liuqin Zhongruan Camerata (柳琴中阮同好会,

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[35] See Chapter 5.2 for sustainability and the digital realm, as well as adaptive management actions taken by the community.
[36] There exists a plethora of communities dedicated to specialized instruments and general information about the Chinese orchestra across the platform, spanning diverse cultures and languages, making it challenging to compile and summarize their contents comprehensively. However, this gives an idea of the range of activities of the Chinese orchestra that occur in the social media space.

international), to name a few, offer valuable local and global resources, knowledge, and information, besides instantaneous access to updates across several main Chinese orchestra regions.

Along this vein, Interviewee 30 notes the indispensability of online promotion in today's digital age, that is more effective in reaching a wide audience. However, its negotiation is not always straightforward, demanding a combination of knowledge and creativity to capture public interest in Chinese music and instruments. Notably, I observed that many practitioners adopt a formulaic approach to their online presence, curating posts on their Facebook profiles to include performance, competition and examination announcements, rehearsal sneak peaks, instrumental music covers, student progress updates, gatherings with other musicians, and musical knowledge. This concerted effort in online self-promotion satisfies several goals to amplify self-visibility, expand opportunities, and promote the musical culture, although its effectiveness increases for those with robust networking.

The internet stands out as the most expansive virtual environment for the facilitation of learning opportunities and advancement of Chinese music education. Influential instructors in the Malaysian Chinese orchestra scene leverage online platforms and real-world engagements to gain student following and extend their impact within the community. For instance, Interviewee 20 summarizes the benefits of online engagement, including access to an extended community, resources such as scores and recordings, and the convenience of a digital learning environment. He accentuates how online competitions, whether domestic or international, push skill development and talent recognition in Chinese music education.

While I am yet to explore online learning of *huayue* firsthand, the pandemic propelled video conferencing platforms like Zoom to the forefront for digital music education. Zoom (and other platforms) was integral to sustain the vitality of the community during the pandemic, and the activities have continued to thrive since then. During this period, the number of online classes is reported to have increased two to threefold (Interviewee 30). Interviewee 28 expresses relief for the availability of online classes, citing their flexibility and convenience, an advantage for instructors with busy schedules. Online classes become a remedy to prepare for exams, performances, and competitions.

Additionally, as Malaysia has limited professional teaching resources, online classes transcend geographical barriers, enabling students to access instruction mentorship from teachers in distant locations. This convenience economically benefits both instructors and

students; some parents may not be able to afford extra fees for drop-in teaching, and travelling to meet the teacher may be impractical due to distance (Interviewee 23). Interviewee 30 has a vested interest in online learning and consequently established an online *guzheng* academy during the Movement Control Order (MCO) to cater to students in remote areas who lack access to regular *guzheng* instruction. Equally, students living closer in proximity, in the city, take advantage of online classes to save time. The practitioner found the benefits of digital learning to outweigh its drawbacks, democratizing access to music education.

Not only that, the internet also became the biggest stage where quality content can attract attention from a global audience. Online academies, like the one of Interviewee 30, receive students across continents, reaching as far as Australia. Despite potential challenges like language barriers and instrument accessibility, the internet has proven effective in overcoming these obstacles:

> Some foreign students from places like Indonesia and Vietnam would require teaching in English. […] It would be easier if they speak Chinese, like some Indonesians. Those who do not speak Chinese would learn in English. As for those who do not know either, I cannot do much. They would find interpreters, but it became more difficult over time, because the interpreter could not always attend according to the class schedule.

Similarly, Interviewee 02 highlights the accessibility of online class for foreign students who find it challenging to find local qualified instructors. Regardless, some practitioners advocate for physical classes to complement online classes, and occasionally visit students' homes to support their pedagogy (Interviewee 28).

Despite its imperfections, online classes facilitate guided practice sessions and communication with teachers abroad, allowing students to submit recordings for evaluation and feedback (Interviewee 20). Interviewee 31 adds that, since the pandemic, there is a significant increase in courses offered for worldwide participation, providing students with access to professional resources and enriching learning experiences. The interviewee attended a conducting masterclass held in Singapore, that offered networking and collaborative research opportunities, a positive learning experience for all participants.

However, this newfound global accessibility presents challenges to local instructors. There are concerns about the proliferation of online group classes or masterclasses offered by

renowned teachers from Taiwan or Mainland China at significantly low costs. The allure of learning from famous instructors, even if not on a one-to-one basis, compels students to opt for those classes. Interviewee 26 raises concerns about the drawbacks of large class sizes and generalized content delivery, which may not be as effective as targeted, personalized instruction. To ensure optimal learning outcomes, the interviewee stresses the importance of maintaining a balance between online and physical instruction.

Currently, technological advancements in education are still challenged by accessibility to the digital landscape, when considering notions of the digital divide and socioeconomic disparities across physical locations. Access to hardware is an essential issue for the feasibility of online classes. Students may struggle with online learning due to constraints such as limited access to suitable devices and poor audio quality (Interviewee 07 and 24). Moreover, virtual presence conveys only a partial image of the performance of the body. It is difficult to pinpoint the source of problems for fundamental technical skills, that involve detailed aspects of body positioning. As a result, it is only possible to produce a general 80-90% accurate assessment of the student's performance based on the audio alone. Even if this gap is bridged, there are other inherent issues like latency that impede online education and widen the education gap as students may struggle to understand certain topics (Interviewee 28).

At the intersection of digital innovation and music, there are emerging trends where the network is envisioned to create digital music directly, as opposed to using the digital environment as a platform for the recreation of traditional music ensembles. However, latency presents an obstacle for digital performances of music, influencing the musical result (Guaus et al., 2024)[37]. Since these platforms are not tailored for musical purposes, they fail to resolve many related problems such as audio synchronization. However, a compromise solution has been found through methods like one-directional recording and editing, using click tracks to synchronize the tempo. Through this approach, training is still possible where orchestra members can practice their parts individually.

The internet improves convenience, efficiency, and inclusivity in long distance collaboration and communication—discussions made to establish and operate the Experiment Ensemble via WhatsApp is a good example, since it eliminated geographical barriers and reduced the need for travel. When orchestra members meet, they could merge their music

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[37] The future of digitalization in music depends on solving inherent issues of networking; see Chapter 6.3.

with ease, thereby reducing rehearsal time for leisurely travels and bonding (Interviewee 15). These forms of academic exchange are seen as positive outcomes of the internet. Additionally, Interviewee 07 reflects on the evolution of music seminars and exchanges in Shanghai to adopt hybrid models that combine online and offline components to accommodate larger participant rates, although large-scale conferences are still held offline.

The change in landscape has profoundly altered the way in which interactions occur. The digital space propels a global acceleration of speed, according to Interviewee 32, that results in a culture of inability to endure hardships— 'everything has to be quick, like fast food'. However, despite the desire for the stage spotlight, many individuals give up due to the amount of effort required behind the scenes. Arguably, the digital environment fosters an imagery of instant gratification that obscures social media users from the reality of situations.

Fundamentally, our relationship with the digital world is cultivated through individual agency and quests for self-improvement. There is different communicative value of the online space for communal music creation and sharing, that could bring joy and entertainment to all involved, instead of playing online games (Interviewee 31). Interviewee 20 exclaims that life has become too convenient and comfortable with readily available digital spaces, leading the younger generation to distance themselves from nature and isolating them from cherishing it, thereby reducing their willingness to engage with the natural world and 'go outdoors'. Amidst our increasing reliance on digital environments, an awakening is required to return to nature, to rekindle our musical connection with the natural world.

In essence, much like the physical world, the digital environment presents its own set of opportunities and challenges, relinquishing any superiority of either space. The Chinese orchestra demonstrates an inherent resilience to integrate virtual spaces into its various operations, albeit having some resistance towards overreliance on digital platforms and products. Further exploration of technology and digitalization that affects the sustainability and future trajectories of the Chinese orchestra are detailed in Chapters 5.2 and 6.3.

3.5 *The Eternal Kedah River* **(永远的吉打河)**[38] **– Experimenting with Performance Spaces**

The exploration of non-traditional performance spaces has to serve a purpose beyond novelty; urban environments garner its meaning and potential through musical happenings (Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1998: 23). This requires deeper community engagement to connect with audiences and attach the value of the musical culture to the location. Urban environments offer potential for the renewal and sustainability of culture in the globalizing world, where venue selection must strike a balance between meeting expectations and pushing boundaries. On one hand, familiarity with existing spaces breeds relatability, comfort, and acceptance, while on the other hand, experimental attempts provide refreshed perspectives and possibilities for cultural expansion. In the search for appropriate soundscapes for an environment, transformation is key to ensure that the musical presence leaves a lasting impact, localizing tradition in the process of its performance, despite practical limitations on the use of space.

However, not all accept the value in using novel performance spaces to generate new cultural meanings for the Chinese orchestra. Practitioners sometimes dismiss them as inconsequential or unworthy of significant attention. For example, Interviewee 03 characterizes experimental performance spaces as gimmicks rather than something to be replicated or emulated by others. Meanwhile, Interviewee 28 suggests that commercial performances in non-conventional locations are opportunities to earn money, placing little emphasis on their potential for cultural transformation. Essentially, many view these atypical performances as having little independent value.

Nonetheless, Chang and Lee (2003: 140) advocate a more open and spontaneous use of public spaces like parks and malls to make artistic connections with the public. This approach calls for a combination of built and natural environments to create new experiences for the Chinese orchestra. Sociocultural events, as they are now performed more regularly, become integrated into the conventional spaces occupied by the Chinese orchestra. Several

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[38] Composed in 1982 by Lee Soo Sheng (吕书成), with lyrics by Lai Jingwen (romanization, 赖敬文), the song is a tribute to the landscape of Kedah, with elements of nostalgia for the homeland in China. Accompanied by the Chinese orchestra in the original version, it now stands as a significant piece within the Chinese orchestra's repertoire alongside other compositions by Lee. This song holds particular significance for this topic of experimentative performance spaces, as there were performances of this song along the banks of the Kedah River. This title selection also pays homage to Lee, a pioneer Malaysian composer celebrated for his iconic contributions of local Chinese orchestra music.
Guided listening (short documentary with Chinese orchestra background music):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3vdKNB0-n0

interviewees mentioned commercial engagements, or 'gigs', at places like malls (shopping centers), restaurants, ballrooms, conference spaces, wedding venues, and private residences, still primarily driven by financial interests (Interviewees 11, 16, 28, 29).

For the Chinese orchestra, contracted commercial performances lack novelty or experimentation typically associated with other settings. As a cultural emblem, the Chinese orchestra is accustomed with the mall environment for performances during Chinese cultural celebrations such as Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival, typically presenting in ensemble or full orchestra formations. Drawing from ample personal experience, mall performances often entail a transactional arrangement with mall management or event management companies to offer cultural entertainment to shoppers during festive seasons, alongside performances like the lion dance and 24 Festive Drums (二十四节令鼓). The specifics, including formation, duration, and repertoire, are dictated by the hirer's budget, with some orchestras establishing long-term collaborations with these establishments.

Another common practice involves small ensembles performing at social gatherings hosted by affluent individuals in their private residences, especially during Chinese cultural festivities and celebrations such as open houses and birthday parties, to serve as a representation of the host's cultural identity. These performances demand precision and expertise, prompting organizers to hire professional practitioners, rather than students, to entertain guests. For instance, Interviewee 15 shares an experience where a Chinese ensemble was commissioned to perform at a prominent figure of society's birthday celebration, making a grand entrance on a towboat by the sea as the highlight of the event. Similar events are extended to wedding banquets and corporate events, with the same cultural associations.

As the Chinese orchestra seek to grow out of its conventional performance spaces and capitalize on newer opportunities, there is a risk of positioning financial gain over artistic integrity or cultural preservation. In many situations, the orchestra's role is relegated to background music, contributing to the overall ambience of the event[39]. Interviewees exclaim that there is little emphasis on the sharing of knowledge about Chinese culture or showcasing Chinese music, although incidental publicity does lead to more job opportunities. The alternative route of busking, a means of livelihood for many musicians, is uncommon among *huayue* musicians, but there are exceptions, such as a performance at a Covid-19 vaccination

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[39] On a larger scale, an interviewee recalled a performance experience at Wang Leehom's concert in Malaysia, held in Stadium Merdeka. The orchestra was invited to provide Chinese music accompaniment, a recurrent feature in the artist's songs. Said concert has generated further opportunities for the musicians involved.

center for financial reason[40]. For practitioners who make a living out of commercial engagements, these seemingly special contexts are not substantially different from performances in traditional concert halls.

Interviewees share compelling anecdotes about sociocultural performances at atypical locations. Interviewee 04 recounts *huayue* performances at wedding banquets to accompany the welcoming of guests and serving of dishes. Additionally, Interviewee 11 highlights accounts of funeral performances where the ensemble was engaged for individuals who loved Chinese music and had been supportive of the Chinese orchestra. However, in these contexts, some parents hesitated to allow their children to participate due to cultural taboos.

Interviewee 30 collaborated in a *guzheng* performance with a Japanese bonsai artist in a furniture store during the Georgetown Festival[41], creating a futuristic ambience with contemporary music. Other instances include a street parade held during a school anniversary celebration (Interviewee 16), as well as flash mobs organized to promote upcoming concerts to potential audiences in public spaces like malls and food courts (Interviewee 03). These mostly non-profit initiatives require prior agreement between the orchestra and the venue, with the mutually benefitting aim to entertain onlookers and promote the Chinese orchestra to new audiences.

Besides personal experiences in various performance environments and contexts mentioned earlier, I participated in an ensemble performance at a media event hosted in a Spanish restaurant, which garnered media publicity for the unique appearance of Chinese music in a distinctive setting[42]. Sometimes, such creative performances are initiated by the Chinese orchestra itself, driven either by a desire to explore new avenues or to further promote Chinese culture through unconventional means. Regardless, performances in restaurants and cafes are increasingly popular among Chinese orchestras as they are easy to organize with an existing audience base and offer opportunities for students' skill development and confidence building. Interviewee 09 fondly recalls an experience at a café

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[40] A *guzheng* and *erhu* duo was showcased during the busking session, in compliance with pandemic safety measures. It remains unclear why the authorities chose Chinese music for this scenario, though it could be related to initiatives for artistic recovery in the country. The same musician had prior experience busking in locations such as train stations and at the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur. He notes, 'it is convenient to perform the *erhu* anywhere with your own speaker and microphone, accompanied by karaoke tracks.'

[41] More instances of collaborations are elaborated in Chapter 5.3.

[42] A fusion of Chinese and Spanish music was played during the event; it received positive feedback for the hybridization of cultures.

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owned by a student's relative, emphasizing the simplicity and intimacy of such gatherings over the formality of concert halls.

For this study's exploration of Chinese orchestra spaces, Experiment Ensemble 1 is tasked to find a restaurant or a café for their performance[43]. A participant found an arts and craft space owned by a friend, who is also an alumnus of the same high school. The venue was intriguing on its own—a quaint arts space housed in a repurposed vintage building, tucked away in an unassuming back alley. Downstairs, a café offered coffee, homemade desserts, and local Malaysian food. Ascending a narrow set of stairs to the second floor, there is a craft space resembling a bazaar that displays several local artisan businesses like handcrafted shadow puppets and resin products. The back area of the space hosted a series of events from arts workshops to indie music performances.

It was in this dainty space that the ensemble was set up, with limited seating for the audience, using a tripod in the center of the room for the live streaming of their hour-long performance. Afterwards, the same space was transformed into a dining area, with a large centerpiece table where performers enjoyed food from the café. The adaptability of this space was captivating to witness, considering the crossover of meanings between its historical origins (likely a Chinese residence) and incarnation as a space that infuses Malaysian flavors with a revitalized arts approach. Rogers (2012: 65) asserts that site-specific performances are inherently linked to the living communities of the place. In this case, although the performance may not be explicitly responding towards social issues, it possesses the capability to generate new meanings for the performers, venue organizers, and even the space itself.

During the interview, Participant 103, who sourced for the venue, shared insights into audience feedback regarding newer learners in the orchestra who lack stage experience. Cultural outsiders expressed strong support for small-scale chamber music performances held in alternative venues like cafes. According to the participant, these public settings offer valuable learning experiences for students to handle new situations, capture audience attention, overcome nervousness, and practice performing before a live audience. She recalled her nervousness in previous solo performance experiences, but appreciated the opportunity, while reflecting that there are always unforeseen issues in live performances.

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[43] Findings are detailed in Chapter 5.5.

The performance was promoted online in advance, and concurrently livestreamed on the art venue's Facebook page, attracting over 500 views. Although the live and online audience was not large, it included Chinese orchestra supporters, friends of the ensemble members, as well as patrons of the venue and passers-by of the café downstairs who were curious about the music, and offered words of encouragement.
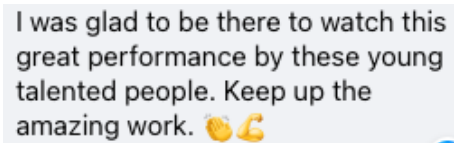
I was glad to be there to watch this great performance by these young talented people. Keep up the amazing work. 👏💪

Figure 26. EE1 Performance Feedback (Facebook). Screenshot during the live stream (source and page anonymized).

Although the digital format is an unplanned outcome of this experiment, it demonstrates shifts in the arts scene with the rise of social media towards hybridized presentation formats, driven by the adaptation to pandemic restrictions on audience size. Online events expand the reach beyond physical audience limitations, although their success is determinant on a variety of factors, particularly in non-traditional spaces for Chinese orchestras, such as audience receptiveness to their presence in seemingly unrelated environments. Digital performances are more than often a transition between worlds of real and virtual that blurs boundaries of space and place. Bridging these worlds, Interviewee 24 specifically mentioned rare involvement in television productions, where the Chinese orchestra appears in traditional media as live accompaniment to pop music, or in cultural documentaries promoting Chinese culture.

The digital realm is another built environment with infinite room for construction and expression of identities and representations. Experiences in these spaces reconnect with previous discussions about digital spaces and their uses. During the pandemic, socializing spaces like Clubhouse gained popularity among musicians for connecting and networking, although live group performances are impractical due to latency issues. As a result, musicians resort to video compilations or individual live performances as more viable options (see Chapter 5.1 and 5.2 for pandemic-related digital activities).

In this regard, Experiment Ensemble 2 is tasked to create a digital performance, and they chose the most straightforward option of simply recording and uploading it to their social media page, rather than exploring more creative possibilities. This decision is justified by claiming practicality as their biggest concern. This choice led to my disappointing

realization that the virtual world, despite its supposed vastness, lacks flexibility to accommodate variations in performances. Instead, it leads to formulaic approaches where everyone essentially adopts the same method of presentation and promotion is proven to be effective. This limitation makes it challenging for orchestras like Experiment Ensemble 2 to stand out and captivate their audiences in the digital space.

There are more extravagant and imaginative uses of space that manifest in contexts that are less likely permeate into everyday life but remain within possibilities. These settings often lean towards natural environments—jungle, riverbank, parks, boats in lakes… I assert that connections to natural environments enhance the experiential aspect of performances for both musicians and audiences. This link may also stem from music's ability to connect to nature, where both playing music that reflects or mimics nature and being immersed in natural surroundings intensify the overall experience. From my observations, performances in nature are generally tied to elements of wood (parks, forests) and water (lakes, rivers, beaches)[44].

Interviewee 03 describes a collaborative performance at the beaches and paddy fields of Sekinchan, but lamented that these settings serve as opportunities to 'enjoy the sea breeze' than as serious performance venues. Interviewee 04 adds that performances in open spaces, such as lakesides and riversides, are becoming more common. He cites a performance for a music camp by the Kedah River, and an arts festival hosted at a town jetty in 2022.

Similar natural settings have become hotspots for cultural events due to their scenic beauty and 'nature' association, providing ideal stages for immersive cultural experiences. For example, Interviewee 15, through cross-cultural collaborations, participated in a music festival in Nanning (南宁), held amidst paddy fields, lakes, and hills. Locally, the Rainforest World Music Festival in Sarawak is a prominent festival that embraces nature to its heart, fusing Chinese music with other cultural expressions against the backdrop of the Bornean rainforest.

The deliberate choice of festival locations represents the harmonization of culture and nature through music, working through environmental values (Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1998: 23). Firstly, it offers attendees a new experience in an exotic location, attracting crowds and contributing to the economic success of the event. Moreover, these unique locations

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[44] Oddly enough, tourism and the Chinese orchestra often involve water. For instance, an interviewee stated the enlisting of the HKCO to record a performance on a cruise ship, aiming to draw in tourists post-pandemic. This experience came with its own set of acoustic challenges. Similarly, there was a performance held on a lake in Putrajaya for a tourism festival, and another in Pangkor Island.

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generate new connections between the audience and the cultural expressions. In a world increasingly dominated by constructed environments, natural settings tap into a fundamental human desire for connection with nature. However, this trend simultaneously appropriates natural spaces for cultural endeavors. Despite enriching the cultural experience of attendees, it prompts inquiry into whether humans are asserting ownership over nature by infusing it with cultural significances.

To a certain degree, the concept of nature is also a human construct, presenting a catch-22 scenario in arguments of these unconventional performance venues. Could this inclination towards nature-themed places signify a subconscious attempt to reconnect with the presumed 'natural' origins of Chinese music? This relates to the broader introductory reading about Chinese musical elements that are attached to space and land, redefining the symbolic significance of a place and infusing newer meanings of cultural representation and identity through music. While the contemporary relationship between Chinese music and nature may seem less pronounced, there is concerted effort to revive this connection. Maybe, as contemporary Chinese music evolves towards greater abstraction, spatial experiences become a way to safeguard heritage, by anchoring Chinese music to its foundational roots through physical space[45].

In China, where Chinese music occupies a stronger *minjian* role, performance in natural settings like parks reflect the maintenance of cultural heritage. It is common to see people playing Chinese music in parks, whether for leisurely outings of locals or for travelling musicians to generate new experiences (Interviewee 10 and 15). These instances reflect localized sociocultural expressions, where communal musical interactions establish a safe space for the community to express their creative identities (Rogers, 2012). It is in these lived spaces where 'authentic Chinese-ness' is often expressed. In the evenings, parks become gathering spots for small music communities to perform for their own entertainment, with onlookers participating in the communal experience and integrating musical culture into everyday life.

In comparison, Chinese orchestras in Malaysia occupy more enclosed built spaces with less ingrained sociocultural purposes. Malaysian performers encounter issues related to permits and licensing for public performances, even for leisure purposes. These bureaucratic obstacles stifle creativity and hinder the expansion of artistic expressions. Interviewee 02

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[45] See Chapter 6.1 on the rekindled interest in natural soundscapes.

recounted an instance where park authorities required performers to attend workshops to obtain permits for park performances. Subsequently, the ensemble opted instead to seek other venues for related musical activities. Why might there be restrictions on playing music in a public space intended for general use, when it is not an issue in other similar settings?

Performances in new spaces often involve challenges, particularly when striving for optimal sonoric experiences in public and open spaces. Natural elements complicate audio reception and projection[46]. Surprisingly, musicians often fall short of necessary support and resources, even for basic amplification in outdoor settings, let alone professional microphones or equipment tailored to the Chinese orchestra. This deficit is apparent in unconventional circumstances like experimentative performances requiring performer movement. These attempts are presented with logistical hurdles such as the need for many wireless microphones and the complication of moving larger instruments[47].

In some situations, audio system provider may overlook or struggle to fulfil musician requests for professional equipment that are essential for performers to gain feedback from their own performance, such as monitor speakers or earphones. In most cases of performances in conference halls or wedding venues, basic resources may be absent altogether. Consequently, although audiences hear the performers, performers may struggle to hear themselves, leading to insecurity during the performance[48]. These challenges are intensified by sound engineers' lack of auditory knowledge of ethnic instruments or the availability of specialized equipment providers. Improvements within the music industry are needed to address these issues, to provide better support for performers in extraordinary and experimentative spatial arrangements.

Putting aside technical challenges posed by unique acoustic environments, Interviewee 03 observes that the Chinese orchestra prioritizes collaborations and audience

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[46] An interviewee whose orchestra experimented with alternative performance spaces of Guide Town (归德镇) at the source of the Yellow River (黄河) and in a forest in Nanjing (南京) stated technical issues as the biggest challenge.

[47] Interviewee 31 experimented with a performance of *Train Toccata* (火车托卡塔) that required orchestra members to parade around the location. Despite facing numerous logistical and auditory challenges, the interviewee expressed that it was a valuable experience for the orchestra students.

[48] Interviewee 27 shared an anecdote of a concerto performance where the audio company attached a pickup to his solo *erhu*. Although the pickup sounded satisfactory independently, it became drowned out during the performance with the orchestra, necessitating a switch to a regular microphone. However, in another performance, a similar microphone yielded better results. This highlights the importance of feedback to achieve the optimal performance, dependent on the selection of appropriate microphone for the instrument and the according volume adjustment of the monitor. Conditions during performances are strongly influenced by the venue, and adjustments can be challenging due to discrepancies between rehearsals and actual performance. As a result, performers often rely on other instruments to make relative adjustments to their own.

interaction methods over spatial arrangements. In another narrative by Interviewee 24, indoor settings and conventional performances are preferred because most orchestra members are not full-time musicians and may not have the capacity to handle excessive demands. These performative and relational concerns aim to minimize pressure on performers and nurture a supportive environment. Non-concert spaces are still perceived as secondary to the performance itself—as a by-product of other circumstances—rather than being valued in their own right.

Given its potential to inhabit and transform diverse spaces for performance, ranging from humble street corners to prestigious venues like the DFP, what is the extent of adaptability achievable by the Chinese orchestra? This intriguing juxtaposition between Chinese musicians' historical roots as street entertainers (still evident in current busking activities) and its current presence in upscale locations invites contemplation on creative possibilities that stem from such spatial versatility. Despite the normalization of performances in malls and sociocultural settings, interview responses suggest a lingering perception, even from the community itself, that non-concert settings are unconventional, non-mainstream, or even gimmicky and commercialized.

Ultimately, this leads to a critical question: as the Chinese orchestra's spatial diversification is already evolving naturally in the trajectory of becoming, should there be deliberate pursuit of new performance spaces to fully realize its evolutionary potential? If the Chinese orchestra wishes to amplify its position in contemporary society, instead of simply maintaining existing practices, we should consider how new spatial opportunities can transform the values and perceptions of *huayue*. A shift in focus from performance-centric approaches to a curiosity of spatial dynamics could offer fresh extensions for the Chinese orchestra's growth as a cultural ecosystem.

Chapter 4 – Positioning the Musical Identity of the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia

In the examination of cultural ecology, it is essential to recognize the importance of relationships rather than enforcing strict separations and demarcations, to recognize diversity and richness of elements that constitute culture (Mercer, 2005). The Chinese orchestra fits into this frame, in tandem with Mercer's other concept of the value production chain analysis to analyze its strengths and weaknesses across stages of production from supply to demand ('input-throughput-output').

Chapter 4 examines two main research questions of this research, firstly to discern the cultural value of Chinese music within the cultural ecosystem, and secondly to determine the impact of multiculturalism on community cohesion, particularly through hybridity and localization. Informed by the current state of the Chinese orchestra, some conclusions of this chapter argue for the cultural value of *huayue* and some of its philosophical implications that gives importance to its sustained education. Meanwhile, the exploration of multiculturalism improves the understanding of diversity in Chinese music, particularly in the Malaysian context.

Chapter 4.1 first seek definition of the dichotomy between traditional and modern music, introducing various musical styles that are currently practiced in *huayue*. In relation to this, an interesting and compelling metaphor of the 'house of *huayue*' is introduced by Interviewee 17 that compares the Chinese orchestra to the frame of a house, where the interior design represents the choice of musical presentation without altering the overall structure. This metaphor suggests that *huayue* remains consistent in identity as long as Chinese instruments are used; just as decorations can be swapped to enhance the aesthetics of a house, the selection of music enriches the *huayue* experience and possibilities for both the performers and the audience.

However, considerations for audience preferences are important for effective marketing, requiring common cultural language and grasp of the music's essence. Like literature, concepts of tradition and modernity evolve, where contemporary works potentially become future classics. The value of elements in music is subjective and can only be determined over time.

After establishing the boundaries of *huayue* musical styles, the chapter's focus shifts to hybridized and localized music in Malaysia. Folk fusion styles challenge the notion of pure, stable, and authentic folk traditions (Revill, 2015). Revill argues that thinking in

generalized folk culture terms is insufficient for music that is already multi-regional, multi-national and occurs in an urban-rural hybrid. Similarly, the localized Chinese orchestra requires an analysis of intersections between folk culture, experience, tradition, and modernity, as materials give them identity and definition (ibid.).

Using Mercers conceptual framework of placed-based cultural ecology, we must reconsider *huayue* as a cultural practice deeply rooted in place and identity, acknowledging that ecologies have similar connections, but their elements vary by context (2005: 5). This reevaluation becomes relevant in the context of hybridity and localization in Malaysia, where *huayue* transforms into a unique expression of the Malaysian Chinese identity. Connections and ties are used to reify and 'protect' a culture that sees itself under threat; movement towards the revival of localized culture is a reaction towards globalization (Hoffstaedter, 2009: 533).

From general to specific, Chapters 4.2 to 4.4 discuss *huayue* hybridity, localization, Southeast Asian identity, and the relation of music to Malaysian food. Much of these discussions involve Singapore, especially the Nanyang style (Chapter 4.3). Due to the scarcity of academic discourse on *huayue* in Malaysia, Singapore serves as a focal point to explore local music advancements. Despite their recent separation, Malaysia and Singapore share historical and cultural ties in Chinese culture and music, allowing for a unified cultural assessment (Luo and Chung, 2010: 50). Chapter 4.3 also challenges notions of authenticity within the localized yet globalized Chinese orchestra context in Malaysia.

Chapters 4.2 and 4.3 highlight superficial presentations of multiculturalism in Malaysian *huayue*, pointing out a lack of genuine hybrid fusion due to the tendency to superficially showcase diversity rather than an authentic embodiment. Malaysian composers receive more recognition overseas than domestically due to local limitations, although recent efforts have been made to promote local compositions. The reliance on Singapore for literature and academic forums voices the need for independent platforms for cultural expression and discourse in Malaysia.

The *rojak* metaphor in Chapter 4.4 explores the embodiment of Malaysian essence and cultural hybridity in other aspects of life. The discussion on food suggests that Malaysian cuisine is a unifying force that transcends race and religion. Through food, the Malaysian identity is reified, demonstrating that cultural hybridity in Malaysia exists more pervasively than imagined.

The final two sections transition from the cultural value of music to the philosophical. Chapter 4.5 discusses *huayue* education, in which practitioners have differing opinions on the foundational aspects of learning, whether to emphasize technical skills or musical expression. Interviewee Ong is featured in this section, for his extensive background in music education and holistic approach to *huayue* education that balances logic and emotion. The experiential learning approach is an effective pathway for the sustainability of the Chinese orchestra.

Changes are inevitable, as Jiang asserts, 'to build a bridge between the Eastern and Western musical cultures, and to bring Chinese music to the world'(1991: 89). Finally, Chapter 4.6 engages the experiment of the *gaoyin ruan* modification in emphasis of the need for enhancements in music-making. Increased musical embodiment can be achieved by experiencing a wider range of musical styles. The ongoing debate between technicality or musicality includes examples from my personal musical endeavors.

In further pursuit of the philosophical values of Chinese music, it becomes evident that a comprehensive understanding from multiple angles is essential to effectively express the *yùn* of the musical subject. Jiang's statement that 'ideas of infinitude of life and the universe can be expressed by simple means' stresses the depth of Chinese musical expressions. Arguably, Chinese music holds deeper philosophical significances, particularly regarding the concept of nature within human relations and ethics, which gives it cultural value.

4.1 *Coalesce with Sparks* (尘烁与存)[1] – When Traditional Meets Contemporary

In Mercer's (2005) framework, a vibrant and diverse cultural ecology provides avenues for cultural participation and access to cultural capital. This concept emphasizes not only the volume of cultural production, but also the accessibility and facilitation of differences. According to the value production chain logic, *huayue* is both a product and socio-cultural capital, with values contributing to provisions for the Malaysian society's 'quality of life'. The value of the Chinese orchestra lies in its musical possibilities, which in turn enrich cultural life and promote social cohesion. An assessment of the circulation and promotion of *huayue* thus enables the examination of how effectively it leverages its cultural capital for broader community cultural engagement and enrichment.

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[1] UNMCO's 2022 annual concert title, used to describe the coalescence of traditions in contemporary (present) society. 'Modern' is avoided as it can very soon transition into the traditional.

The Chinese self is heterogenous, although this diversity is often downplayed. Native elements are highlighted for their fundamentality, saliency, and discipline, while foreign, hybridized elements are universal, learned, and gained (Lam, 2008: 31). In music, 'Chinese-ness' is thereby significant in essence more than presentation. As younger generations are attracted by new music over traditional forms, modernization and Westernization became synonymous among those studying in conservatoires who gravitate towards newer musical styles.

Musically, what is *huayue*? Interviewee 01 explains the debate to define *huayue* through the metaphor of language speaking, explaining that individuals can express themselves through different languages while achieving the common goal of communication. Traditional techniques and concepts of ensemble playing (*hezou*, 合奏), and unison playing (*qizou*, 齐奏) are carried forward into contemporary Chinese orchestra music, retaining its distinctively Chinese sonic texture that evokes traditional practice while incorporating Western influences.

Huayue can be expressed through various musical instruments or styles, but its essence remains rooted in its symphonic structure. This format of Chinese music is now widely accepted as a globalized and hybridized Chinese expression. Contemporary *huayue* is a product of changes in social structure and taste, a 'logical result' of a society's attempt to modernize while preserving traditional elements (Han, 1979: 13-14).

Beginning with 'traditional', Revill (2005: 702) proposes that tradition is an emerging property of cultural practice rather than its foundation. It involves borrowing and remaking, influenced by social power and remains sustainable as long as it serves a purpose in people's lives (sustainability)[2]. This perspective challenges preconceived notions of traditional as static and place-bound, conversely, modernity as mobile and globalizing. Similarly, the Chinese orchestra argues, with a consensus, for the continuity of traditions into contemporary times, with a fluid definition that sways between ancient Chinese music pieces and earlier compositions for the Chinese orchestra.

From the understanding of several *huayue* practitioners (Interviewees 02, 07 and 08), traditions originate from contemporary practices, and, over time, transition into tradition as it comes to past. In this sense, we can create future traditions, or modify them, to be inclusive

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[2] For example, *Moon Reflected in the Second Spring* (二泉映月) was played in the past with a feeling of rage, but nowadays it often sounds melancholic.

and progressive, else its restrictions will risk it being abandoned altogether. While tradition encompasses elements from the past, it often refers to narrower concepts like ethnic traditions that are standardized and widely disseminated, such as folk music like Teochew opera or Cantonese opera, which have established norms within their respective communities.

Tradition consists of a multiplicity of interpretations, lacks fixed definitions, and varies with context (Revill, 2005: 702). Unlike Western music, traditional music does not follow a predetermined trajectory, with its classification evolving over time along with social acceptance. The classification of compositions with traditional musical language can be ambiguous, subject to scholarly interpretation and contexts. Moreover, as modern individuals interact with traditional music, they infuse their own touch to them and add new layers of meaning (Interviewees 01, 04, 20, 27, and 33). Through this explanation, tradition becomes coexistent with modernity, fortifying its definitions in the process (Graburn, 2001).

Generally, the notion of 'traditional music' (传统曲) is less definable. According to interview outcomes, there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes 'traditional music'. However, practitioners use a few criteria to distinguish traditional and 'modern music' (现代曲)[3]:

1.   Temporal period

This classification is comparable to Western classical music by era or year of development, which is still flawed for its overlap with other definitions.

Traditional: Compositions created after the establishment of Chinese orchestras, especially from the 1930s-40s (*Moon Reflected in the Second Spring,* 二泉映月) or 1980s-90s (*Dance of the Yao People*, 瑶族舞曲) that have become listed in textbooks. Jiang (1991: 90) includes music from the 1920s as traditional, where composers recreated traditional or folk melodies using modern concepts and techniques.

Modern: Music composed in the 21st century, sometimes adapting Chinese music, or music ensembles adapted from traditional *sizhu* ensembles since the 1950s and 1960s.

2.   Composer

Traditional: Some examples are Gu Guanren (顾冠仁) and Peng Xiuwen (彭修文). Many composers were musicians themselves, perhaps from folk backgrounds, with a distinct

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[3] Specific interviewees are not listed in the summary. These definitions are compiled from interviews, unless cited. Some categories are specific to traditional or modern music.

composition style against the academic group. Audiences often prefer these composers because their music is very melodic and relies less on musical theory and techniques.

Modern: Composers like Jiang Ying (姜莹) and Li Bochan (李博禅). However, an interviewee cites Peng Xiuwen to be representative of modern Chinese music, in relevance to the period definition (1950s as modern).

3.　　Duration

Traditional pieces are shorter, but contain the essence of Chinese music. Music beyond 10 minutes is sometimes considered as new generation music. It is criticized that composers nowadays earn money based on the length of the piece. As a result, the piece may sound good at first, yet lacks durability.

4.　　Composition technique

Traditional techniques bring out the instrument's distinct musical language through characteristics like tones and melodic lines.

Newer pieces have contemporary elements of music that are not in traditional pieces. They employ techniques derived after the 1930s, from European concepts of music such as the 12-tone scale, overtones, and microtones, with more particular chord progressions. The music can lack a melody or theme, sounding discordant with dissonant tones, or sounding like noise, approaching experimental or avant-garde modernism. Different systems and harmonic combinations are experimented. However, it does not sound exactly like Western art music, although counterpoints and harmonies display those characteristics (Lam, 2008: 45).

Boundaries are blurred with this categorization because modern music can be written using traditional techniques. *Wandering around Wuchou, Mesmerized by Jincheng* (神游浯州醉金城) is nominated by two interviewees, one as modern, and another as traditional.

5.　　Musical Language

Traditional: Often percussion heavy, with certain styles associated. Folk music like *A Well-Matched Fight* (龙腾虎跃) have a relatively traditional composition method with wind and percussion parts, including a drumming solo in a pattern called '18-6-4-2'. Only those who understand the musical language would recognize it and consider it as traditional.

Modern: Can have ethnic flavors, but modern in composition style and musical language. It could be present or futuristic, but not novel because it appeared in Western classical music

much earlier. The composers' mindset and attitudes are different. Demands of the performance and the environment alter the expression of the music.

6. History (traditional)

Court music, or music passed down from ancient times, before the Ming and Qing dynasties (e.g. pipa pieces like *Ambush from Ten Sides*, 十面埋伏, and *Blossoms on a Spring Moonlit Night*, 春江花月夜).

7. Regional or folk music (traditional)

Folk music has intentions related to festivals, labor work, seasons, and rituals. These traditions are sets of practices that are mature and defined, maintained within a specific region or country. Pieces with regional elements like Hokkien *nanyin* (南音), Teochew music, and Cantonese music undergo natural development with minimal Western influences. For this reason, Experiment Ensemble 2 chose *New Sound of Sizhu* (丝竹新韵) as their traditional piece. The music is passed down and inherited, with a certain accepted presentation. It is important to preserve them while creating new things, building new paths based on traditions.

8. Pentatonic scale (traditional)

Experiment Ensemble 1 chose *Stepping High* (步步高) as their traditional piece for its representative pentatonic scale. The pentatonic scale can be used to create more modern traditions, while retaining the original. It is naturally suited for Chinese instruments, allowing unison over harmony in Western ensembles. However, there is criticism to the perception that Chinese music is solely based on the pentatonic scale, as ancient instruments like the *bianzhong* (编钟) already incorporate chromaticism and the 12-tone temperament.

9. Instrumentation (traditional)

Some broadly regard all music with the use of traditional instruments as 'traditional music'. It can also be the music that Chinese instruments are supposed to play, for example, regional opera uses *banhu*, *zuihu*, or *jinghu*. The original expression and musical form of the instrument is important. There are also some who classify music played by Chinese instruments as *huayue*, and Western instruments as Western music. Fusion music arises from their mixing.

10. Difficulty (modern)

Due to its abstract nature as an artistic form that requires more imagination, modern *huayue* sounds are difficult to be accepted due to a required artistic level for its understanding. Modern pieces need stronger technical skill and has lesser impressions—more difficult to be remembered without having a melodic line. There are stages of modern music to improve its understanding and appreciation.

The following table lists the compositions named and categorized into various musical styles by interviewees. Those highlighted in red are disputed.

Table 11: Musical Pieces and Styles Categorized by Practitioners

Traditional 传统曲	Classic 经典曲	Modern 现代曲	Contemporary 当代曲	Pop 流行曲
步步高 丝竹新韵 茉莉花 二泉映月 春江花月夜 十面埋伏 阳春白雪 塞上曲 寒鸦戏水 瑶族舞曲 黄河大合唱 梁祝 昭君怨 将军令 龙船 龙腾虎跃 老六板 三六 送我一支玫瑰花 神游浯洲醉金城	茉莉花 瑶族舞曲 一剪梅 我只在乎你	神游浯洲醉金城 第一二胡狂想曲 印象国乐 霸王卸甲 云想花想 春 太阳颂	彝族舞曲	青花瓷 孤勇者 大鱼 雪落下的声音 菊花台 小苹果 Rolling in the Deep Despacito

If we recall Bussotti's music in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Figure 3), the situating of *huayue* is just as postmodern and can be similarly compared to its messiness, especially when the traditional intersects with the modern/contemporary. Considering the numerous methods used to categorize *huayue* compositions, Interviewee 33 concludes its subjective nature, particularly those adapted over decades and have become difficult to be classified according to age, such as *Dragon Boat* (龙船), originally composed for the *pipa* but adapted for the *yangqin*.

Subsequently, the alternative approach is to consider everything in the contemporary as modern, as suggested by *pipa* master Liu Dehai (刘德海). This blurring of distinctions occur when modern techniques are incorporated into traditional compositions (*The Conqueror Unarms*, 霸王卸甲) and vice versa (*Clouds and Flowers Fantasia*, 云想花想).

Nevertheless, some performers adhere to older techniques in the defense of tradition, albeit less effectively (Interviewee 18).

On a side note, the keyword 'classical' (经典曲) is less discussed, but sometimes used interchangeably with traditional music, in the western sense (Interviewee 13). In some cases, songs like *Jasmine Flower* and *Dance of the Yao People* are classified as pieces that have become 'timeless traditions'.

Meanwhile, the concept of contemporary music (当代曲) is also subject to understandings that are interchangeable with 'modern' in the Chinese language, but these are misconceptions and they are inherently different[4]. According to Interviewee 08, contemporary music is created in the present time, with many faces, from experimental to avant-garde music, that are abstract and challenge conventional understanding. Known for their diversity, contemporary works sometimes combine elements from multiple sources and venture into rhythmless and atonal territories (Interviewee 13). Artistic freedom demands advanced technical proficiency. However, their engagement for competitions and concerts serve as means for musical growth. To the younger generation, sense-making of contemporary Chinese music is relative to experiences and exposure (Experiment Ensemble 2).

Along another vein, Interviewee 07, a musicology scholar, offers insights into the definition and conceptualization of avant-garde music through its comparison with traditional, modern, and contemporary music. Firstly, traditional music is rooted in folk music since ancient times, whereas contemporary music is a broader concept that encompasses music in the current temporal period. Modern and avant-garde music are similar styles that emerged post-World War II.

Modern music itself has different interpretations, depending on historical context and cultural backgrounds. In Europe, modern music refers to avant-garde music, but this is interpreted differently from the Chinese perspective. In the United States, it instead refers to genres like jazz. Meanwhile, avant-garde music is experimental and pioneering with its typical characteristic of being incomprehensible or anti-traditional (反传统) for lacking melody, rhythm, or certain other elements of traditional music.

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[4] To illustrate the unclarity in definitions, some interviewees nominate *Dance of the Yi People* (彝族舞曲) as contemporary because it is a recently composed piece for the *pipa*, despite preserving traditional techniques and having strong melodic lines.

This understanding aligns with Mauceri's (1997: 188) definition of experimental music as new modes of musical expression, referring to contemporary, avant-garde, or electronic music genres, in which many Chinese orchestra composers are already exploring. However, Interviewee 07 highlights a common misperception: compositions with Western music elements are not avant-garde because it is a transplantation of the musical genre. Avant-garde music must exhibit originality and anti-traditionalism, challenges conventional understanding and requires a theoretical foundation for its appreciation. Consequently, it is impossible for avant-garde music to spread among the masses. Both Western and Chinese orchestras focus on folk, conventional or traditional styles, which are more comprehensible to the general population.

In Mainland China, musical genres coexist in multiple parallel lines (re. assemblage and lines of flight) with traditional folk music and newer compositions alongside avant-garde music, primarily in small academic circles in cities like Shanghai and Beijing. This niche movement is foreign to Chinese culture; due to its experientialism and inherent anti-traditionality, it is considered as an independent art form. Despite this, avant-garde techniques like dissonance and atonality, albeit fragmented, are incorporated into some Chinese orchestra compositions, depending on the composer's personality.

Regardless, the avant-garde music scene in Malaysia remains niche and not widely embraced. After all, the lack of tonality and unconventional use of noise frames it into small communities[5] that value experimentalism over traditional norms. It demonstrates the vibrance of the artistic community and its ambitions to break free from traditional confines and subvert established modes of expression, a line of flight from the existing modes in Malaysian music.

Interviewee 10 supports the movement towards experimental or avant-garde music as a representation of musical progress, comparing it to a fashion show where new ideas are showcased and then eventually adapted to the everyday or forge new trends. Despite some criticisms of 'change for the sake of change', the development of experimental music is important to rationalize concepts and motives behind innovative methods.

Malaysia lacks deep understanding and systematic training in normative academic terms and theories related to music. Many conceptual interpretations and examinations are often not standardized or precise. However, even in Mainland China, these terms are only thoroughly understood and defined over the past fifty years. The general perception of

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[5] Refer to Soundbridge festival in the next section on contemporary hybrid music.

huayue in earlier times often revolved around classic old songs ('oldies', 经典'老歌') like those of Teresa Teng's, but the two are coexistences of the same era with diverging trajectories[6].

It is no wonder for the diverse perceptions on traditional music, since Chinese-ness in itself is ambiguous and fluid based on the meanings the music could generate. Regardless of its critics or interpretations, it is inherently 'a musical sound that embodies interactions between China and the West' (Lam, 2008: 43), returning to the idea of the negotiation of realities and identities (Chapter 1.3). This vagueness stems from the reconstruction of Chinese-ness through its philosophical essence or spirit (*yùn*, argued elsewhere in this thesis), with the understanding that music 'helps distinguish their self from the other'.

From this presumption, we should avoid the trap of binaries, to see Chinese music in the globalized context, not trapped in its essentialized past or philosophies. Yet, with this intertwining of the traditional in the contemporary society, its importance is emphasized as the foundation of other musical styles, to enhance musical interpretation and improvisation across contemporary musical genres including jazz and pop (Interviewee 31). While traditional elements have value of preservation and must be sustained, the contemporary world raises more questions about the significance of *huayue*. If *huayue* is difficult to be framed, how do we determine and sustain the values of its components? Is any of its manifestations more valuable than others? What about situations when audience education is necessary for its appreciation, as with avant-garde *huayue*?

With understanding of how *huayue* is perceived and categorized, the value of particular styles can be inferred, that comes with understanding and relatability to them. Comprehension and connection with a musical piece are proportional to the values attributed to it. This is especially apparent in the pop music industry where an artist's following grows through audience resonance and market appeal (however capitalistic). Similarly, traditional *huayue* pieces derive symbolic value from cultural identity and are reinforced through their subsequent interpretations. However, contemporary compositions may not be as readily appreciated due to their novelty, complexity, and unfamiliarity. Therefore, popular music enters the assemblage as a bridging component to break stereotypes, cultivate appreciation, and increase comprehension of traditional and contemporary *huayue* music.

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[6] Oldies, popular in their time, later evolved into the current Chinese popular music industry.

As its name suggests, popular music (流行曲) consists of pre-existing, trending songs from the popular music industry that are rearranged for the Chinese orchestra[7]. It has substantial value in the Chinese orchestra, not for its musicality, but for its role as a tool for audience education, particularly in connecting *huayue* to contemporary social contexts and appealing to younger audiences (Interviewee 17). Recognizable and accessible, popular music resides in the metaphorical house of *huayue*, despite being instantaneous and gimmicky. Recognizing this strength, efforts to infuse traditional Chinese music into popular music resulted in New Chinese Music (新民乐), popularized by the Twelve Girls Band about 20 years ago. Sadly, the initiative was questioned regarding its exact nature and has faded. Nonetheless, the band achieved its cultural expansion goals by sparking the interest of many—including several interviewees—to join the Chinese orchestra.

Popular music is appealing for commercial performances due to audience acceptance. It is also a better option for solo performances where it can be easily accompanied by MIDI backing tracks (Interviewees 15 and 18). Its simplicity in transposition makes it suitable for any instrument, although the lack of technique renders it less suitable for formal concerts or competitions[8]. However, some musicians incorporate traditional techniques into popular music to accentuate their instruments' colors (Interviewee 32). Popular music in performances is now common across traditional cultures, using ethnic instruments. Although this adoption is normalized, the fundamentally dissimilar concepts of popular and ethnic music should not necessarily be classified together (Interviewee 07).

In *huayue* learning, practitioners often attract new learners through popular music due to its audience resonance and appeal, before gradually instilling traditional and contemporary *huayue* concepts and values. Popular music has a particular role in fostering audience acceptance and increasing the appeal of solo instruments. Besides that, its ease of learning is ideal for beginners to quickly grasp and perform.

Similarly, in concert settings[9], practitioners emphasize a balanced repertoire of pop songs (including oldies, for reminiscence) and *huayue* music, often carefully curated in a

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[7] Pop music has little to no technical requirement, hence is easy to rehearse and perform, but linked to the idea of 'disposable music'. Some favourite sources of pop music covers are ones trending on social media, film, and video game music. These arrangements consist of a melody line and accompaniment, achievable by practitioners and students with basic music theory knowledge. Some can even be purchased online.
[8] There are exceptions, such as an ensemble that won a competition playing *Sada Borneo*.
[9] Nonetheless, there are orchestras that take the popular route to play commonly understood songs, like the Nanyang Polytechnic Chinese Orchestra (Singapore). These organizations are often university orchestras because of its nature that lacks members, rehearsal time, and resources.

combination of orchestra (conductor, musician, organizing committee) and audience preferences. Concerts are often themed, with the tone set by complementary songs (Interviewee 04). However, other factors affecting genre proportions include audience demographics, performer skill levels (professional, amateur, or student orchestra), event purpose, organizer requirements, budget, and venue. Sometimes, repertoires include pieces requested by students, that also matches the performance level of the orchestra.

Traditional and classical music are highly valued in Chinese orchestra performances for their expression, musicality, technique, and depth, to introduce the richness of Chinese instruments and *huayue* to the audience (Interviewee 09). Meanwhile, as social media content becomes more instantaneous, shorter music length makes pop songs good encore music[10] to enliven the mood towards the end of performances. Pop songs are inevitable due to generational shifts in musical aesthetics but are performed to minimally to prioritize *huayue* compositions. Some foresee popular music gaining equal significance as traditional compositions, driven by the preferences of the younger generation for mainstream music genres (Interviewee 26).

However, the inclusion of popular music is sometimes criticized because orchestras sometimes perform outdated songs, like *Rolling in the Deep,* which is over ten years old. Arguably, these songs can still have the 'wow' factor for their unexpectedness in *huayue* performances. To maximize impact, a composer argues for constant new arrangements of currently popular songs[11], as their lifespan may only be one or two years unless they become classics. Some traditional-minded individuals reject pop songs, viewing them as not truly representative of Chinese music[12]. Earlier-generation Chinese orchestra pioneers also have a stronger emotional attachment to traditional music, considering it more authentic.

Currently, the bigger fear is the push towards 'modern' (popular) music if society rejects classical music due to a lack of education and understanding. Regardless, the popular music trajectory is sometimes necessary due to challenges such as shortages of instruments for contemporary pieces which are more technically demanding, besides having limited

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[10] Interviewee 11 argues for playing pop songs only in the encore, as it is a demonstration of *huayue*'s versatility, not for giving audiences the wrong impression that the Chinese orchestra is transforming towards popular music.

[11] For example, Interviewee 13 raises the current trend of diversification resulting from generation gaps, preferring Jay Chou to Black Pink even in a short temporal difference. Interviewee 17 says that one needs good 'sense' to predict popular music that would appeal most to the audience. Sometimes, if the wrong choice is made, it does not have the intended 'wow' effect.

[12] Years ago, an interviewee received hate calls and mails for promoting popular music through *huayue*.

channels of access to new works. Orchestras in Malaysia are lagging in the global environment, including those in educational institutions.

Contemporary and 'grand' orchestral compositions (大曲) are more difficult for the general Malaysian audience to fully appreciate; an entire concert of these pieces can easily cause aesthetic fatigue (Interviewees 17 and 31). However, these pieces must be retained as some audience members attend concerts specifically for them. As such, Interviewee 09 suggests that concerts are opportunities to introduce audiences to other musical styles that can be performed by the Chinese orchestra.

In current repertoires, Malaysia should prioritize newer, more contemporary music, especially localized works (see ensuing sections), in its ongoing search for its *huayue* identity. The normalizing process to include certain music of Malaysian elements and social trends can attract a wider audience, stimulate interest, and showcase Malaysia's *huayue* artistic style. In Interviewee 25's words, Malaysia should seize the opportunity to accelerate its development by embracing the intersection of different musical worlds. The metaphor of the digital world is used to suggest leveraging current trends to drive progress. Essentially, riding the waves of globalization allows *huayue* to evolve and expand its ecology.

Some practitioners recognize the value of experimentation and diversification to expand tastes and horizons, hence offer performance choices from classical to contemporary and fusion music. Others propose that two forces exist in an epoch, in which the traditional is compared to wine—the longer its fermentation, the richer its taste. These perspectives raise important questions about the value and position of huayue in the creative industry, especially when its traditional context or essence is diminished. Without its essence, *huayue* risks becoming a mere recreation of other music models, diminishing its significance as a cultural product. Down the line, the traditional versus contemporary debate ultimately calls for a balance between heritage and innovation.

4.2 *Confluence* (融) [13] – Hybridity of Music

Malaysia's neighboring country Singapore has a deep appreciation for the relationship between music and cultural identity, alongside strong nationalism. The concept of the 'Nanyang style' is linked to cultural identity in search for a distinctive Singaporean sound (Zhang, 2021). In Zhang's article, interviewee Lum's research reveals the inclination of young musicians towards non-traditional or novel music on traditional instruments, stemming from the belief that innovation is required for traditional music to remain relevant in contemporary contexts, especially when the cultural identity and background of Singaporean musicians is distant from traditional Chinese music origins.

In the same interview, Wang articulates his aspiration as a composer to incorporate his individuality through composition techniques and cultural nuances. Wang (2019) identifies two formats of fusion in music—fusion in presentation and fusion in content. Fusion in presentation involves cross-cultural performances and multicultural combinations, argued as a surface-level manifestation comparable to the visual presentation of ethnic costumes or playing songs from other cultures. Lum shares this view where cultural fusion implies spontaneous communication and innovation. The act of fusion provides opportunities that reflect cultural inheritance and shape identities. He cautions against being entrapped in superficial traditional appearances, yet also preserving the symbolic essence in the process (ibid.).

Conversely, a deeper level of fusion involves the fusion of musical content[14]. This form of fusion encompasses degrees from successive, contrapuntal to hybrid fusion, illustrated through the following visualization:

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[13] Composed by Wang Chenwei in 2009, this musical piece represents the vibrancy and harmony within Singapore's multi-racial society. It fuses Indian and Malay-Indonesian musical styles with Western compositional techniques, performed on Chinese instruments. This section transposes the essence of this composition to describe the hybridization of *huayue* in Malaysia's culturally and ethnically diverse society. Guided listening (SCO Virtual Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6So-0HvJXA

[14] This concept of fusion bears resemblance to Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of the emergent in cultural identity, where new cultural forms arise through interactions among existing cultural elements.

Figure 27. Degrees of Fusion (Wang, 2019)

Wang proposes that successive fusion (left) occurs when elements A and B exist consecutively, maintaining the individual identities of each element while coexisting within the composition. The second, contrapuntal fusion (center), occurs when two elements appear simultaneously in counterpoint through the application of harmony techniques. The final degree of hybrid fusion (right) is a transformative synthesis of elements A and B, resulting in a new product that embodies the characteristics of both while not belonging to either, fused into one.

In the movement to establish a more vibrant ecosystem, definitions are less important than education and cultural promotion (Lum in Zhang, 2021). Thus, a 'Singaporean sound' should, not only represent the country, but be unique to individuals, in a personal search for one's voice and identity. This manifestation of identity within the Southeast Asian Chinese community is reflected in its musical development, a fusion of folk music from the motherland, ethnic music, world music, and an intersectionality of theatre, opera, musical genres, and instrument timbres.

From this example of Singapore, can the Malaysian Chinese orchestra cultivate regional forms of music hybridity and representation to create a stronger sense of belonging to the country it resides in, then finding the unique identity of the Malaysian Chinese through localized music? Luo and Chung (2010) argue that identities manifest in language, cultural sites, and cultural activities; the coexistence of dialects and local languages demonstrate the diverse nature of the Southeast Asian cultural landscape[15]. For example, Wang (2019) analyzes the musical style of Macau as an assemblage of Cantonese and Portuguese cultures, when it does not possess a unique musical style of its own. Individually, these cultures do not represent the musical identity of Macau. Instead, what gives rise to its musical landscape is the amalgamation of their independent cultural elements.

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[15] See the concept of '*rojak*' in Chapter 4.4.

Generally, the concepts of homogenization and fusion have no definite boundaries because they are highly contextualized and may not be a positive process. The Chinese orchestra itself is a hybrid product of Chinese and Western symphony orchestras (Interviewee 12). In China, musical hybridization renews its national identity as a modernized state. Under this pretext, Jiang argues that modernization is inevitable but does not imply the Westernization of Chinese music or the discarding of Chinese musical traditions (1991: 95). In the West, world music is understood as a fusion of local musical styles and genres with Western musical forms and instruments (Leyshon, Matless, and Revill, 1998: 17). However, some critics oppose the Westernization process, believing that it forces different personalities together.

Returning to Malaysia, Interviewee 23 highlights the challenge to unify robust cultural systems like Chinese and Malay cultures, where cultural integration often involves one dominant culture assimilating a smaller one. This clash of cultures is evident in the hybridity of *huayue* in Southeast Asian, where elements from different traditions coexist without 'blending together', but 'being together' side by side, in the form of successive and contrapuntal fusion proposed by Wang. Moreover, the Malaysian Chinese adopt a series of identities, when subjected to environmental influences, to produce hybrid forms of music that refer to malleable Chinese cultural markers. These are performed by using musical elements from different parts of the world while expressing Malaysian identity through local multicultural elements (Tan, S. B., 2023).

Drawing parallels to language learning, Interviewee 23 insists that collaborations between cultures are possible, but complete fusion may not be achievable due to inherent differences in instruments, as if 'creating Malay sounds with *huayue*'. Interviewee 21 stresses the importance of preserving one's original identity even after learning a foreign language: 'You can learn languages from two different countries simultaneously and master both; there is no conflict. The essence is sufficient, and you don't have to be an expert to learn a foreign language.'

However, language can also be a barrier to cultural integration. Interviewee 15 questions the interest of other ethnicities in attending traditional performances, in observation that traditional performances mainly attract audiences from the same ethnic background; this also indicates a lack of interest or understanding among ethnic groups. Despite so, interactions with different people bring about the opportunity for cultural understanding; subtle exchanges occur in seemingly homogenous settings (Interviewee 22). For instance, the

resemblance between a Malay instrument (unspecified) and the *guzheng* hints at organic cultural exchange that is not explicitly acknowledged.

In Malaysia, fusion and cultural integration appear as ongoing processes rather than finite outcomes. As Titon proposes, music making is a process of becoming; the self becomes knowing in experiencing through the presence of other becoming, knowing selves (2020: 82). Experiment Ensemble 2 members find the task to blend *huayue* with foreign music elements exciting, as it offered an opportunity to learn and grow beyond conventional Chinese orchestra repertoires. In their opinion, Chinese music is trending towards avant-garde music rich in rhythm, presenting a valuable opportunity for discovery[16]. Fusion music becomes enjoyable once mastered, with the journey of initial confusion to eventual appreciation of the music adding to the fun (Participant 204).

Experiment Ensemble 2 embarked on the task of hybridizing music by incorporating jazz elements into the experimental percussion piece, *Merging Together*, using non-Chinese musical instruments (see Chapter 5.5 for details). The original composition has elements like quintuplets and sextuplets that were difficult to grasp.

Initially, Participant 206 rescored the piece to a simplified version of quintuplets, but the group still encountered difficulties in its coordination and performance. Eventually, the music was further simplified to match the musical proficiency of the group. As the percussion music had no chords or a distinct melodic direction, the adoption of a 12-Bar Blues musical style facilitated clearer rhythmic direction and tempo, easing the ensemble's immersion into the revised arrangement. The following table briefly describes the product of fusion for songs allocated to Experiment Ensemble 2, described by Participant 206.

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[16] However, the participants would not identify *Merging Together* as Chinese music.

Table 12: Modifications to Music of Experiment Ensemble 2

Title	Musical Description
New Sounds of Sizhu	The combination of Chinese and Western instruments creates a dialogue between the *erhu* and violin in the final section to showcase the harmonic possibilities in Chinese music.
Spring Poem	Tradition is combined with modernity, fusing the glockenspiel with traditional melodies of *erhu* and *guzheng* to create a sense of crossing time and space.
Merging Together	The middle part of this piece is selected for development due to its overall complexity. It incorporates Chinese timbres of *guzheng* and *yangqin* with the Western string quartet, bringing out new musical variations through 12-bar blues.

Hybrid genres of music offer a middle ground for individuals who dislike traditional music for sociological reasons or those of Western educational backgrounds (Han, 1979: 25). Essentially, the intention of the musician is crucial to the improvisation of music. Drawing from experience, Participant 206 asserts that fusion music is a new frontier, capable of propelling Chinese music tradition forward to some extent. Participant 107 supports this trajectory of improvisation, adding that the concept encompasses a broader spectrum of abilities, such as the ability to listen to a popular song, identify its chords and melody, then spontaneously play it. Adaptive in nature, improvisation requires a solid understanding of one's instrument and ample training to effectively execute the music, also involving real-time problem-solving and collaboration skills within a musical ensemble. Some growing music genres like rap and hip-hop display similar influences of the local, the authentic, the hybrid, and the mobile, in the blending of styles from different cultural backgrounds (Leyshon, Matless, and Revill, 1998: 18).

The *confluence* of musical traditions has visible impacts on both cultures—it is a new creation, a hybrid, that also narrates the current globalized and interconnected world we live in. Moving into the 2020s, music has evolved locally with distinct trajectories taken by composers and musicians, with a strong desire to maintain Chinese identity through musical expressions. The journey of innovation and diversification is also met with changes in music preferences among the younger generation who are increasingly influenced by popular

culture. As a result of this generational gap, there is a need to actively incorporate elements of modern music trends into the Chinese orchestra, besides localized works (Interviewee 17). This strategy is effective in its appeal to a wider audience demographic to showcase the uniqueness of *huayue* within the Malaysian music scene.

Despite fears of modernization, hybridization is essential to portray localized, modern life in a more enriching manner, much like how Malaysian cuisine blends cultural influences (see Chapter 4.4). Motivations for hybridization and cultural preservation in Malaysia differ from Singapore, leaning less towards nationalism and more towards racial positioning. Colonization has shaped Malaysian culture; the result is the synthesis of traditional and folk cultures like *Joget* and *Branyo*—products of European and Southeast Asian influences. For the Malaysian Chinese, cultural integration aims to maintain significance and connection in Malaysian society. Indeed, some view hybridization as an ingrained aspect of the Malaysian Chinese cultural identity (Interviewee 08). It can happen anywhere through a natural process as cultures settle down in different environments, blending with others to form a unique and representative identity (Interviewee 26).

Localization (本土化) is a proposed trajectory to promote the integration of the Chinese orchestra into Malaysian society by its fusion with local elements. Interviewee 31 considers localization as an important trend, recognizing Malaysia's incomplete interpretation of its local music. The tendency towards modern music hybridization indicates shortcomings in addressing traditional music, which does not receive adequate attention or justice due to limited exposure and immersion in a predominantly Chinese environment. The primary challenge lies in interpreting and capturing the essence of local music to fuse them with *huayue*. According to Interviewee 17, 'Malaysia is a multicultural country, so we must encourage more local productions instead of simply imitating China.'

Interviewee 24 outlines several ways to localize (or hybridize) music, invariably involving a connection to ancestral roots to preserve disappearing cultural elements such as folk music or opera. Additionally, elements from other races can be integrated to step beyond the confines of Chinese music. For example, the Peranakan culture, which synthesizes Chinese and Malay cultures, can be a source of inspiration for this hybridization[17]. Similarly,

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[17] Hybridization in Malaysia is nothing new. Since the Peranakans, the Straits-born Chinese, and before, multiple identities are constantly under negotiation to create eclectic cultures. There are mixtures and innovations in language, drama, and musical activities, combining Chinese, Malay, English, and other cultural themes. However, this more lively and diverse form of hybrid identity exploration is reduced since the formation of the Federation of Malaya; communities were forced to identify themselves with particular races, essentializing their ethnic identity to the present (Tan, S. B., 2016).

an exploration of traditional Malay culture, including folklore and mythological tales, not only captivates audiences but also preserves cultural legends. This approach acknowledges the shared challenges of cultural preservation as societies progress and traditions risk fading away.

The hybridization process is subtle yet apparent on a macro level. Interviewee 10 reflects on his growth as a composer who creates localized music from the use of tunes and melodies of various ethnic groups in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. Over time, the approach shifted from direct imitation to incorporating elements like phrases, melodies, or colors from different ethnic groups in Southeast Asia (successive fusion). Then, techniques like gamelan timbres and structure become adopted into the compositions (contrapuntal fusion). Eventually, the composer created his own musical language (hybrid fusion), representing a synthesis of influences for personalized expressions of identity through music.

Despite Malaysia's outward promotion of multiculturalism, race-based societal division persists, hindering genuine cultural integration (Interviewee 14). Consequently, Chinese music is perceived as belonging exclusively to the Chinese community, rather than being part of a broader Malaysian national identity. This ambiguity leaves Malaysian Chinese as cultural outsiders, torn between their Chinese heritage and Malaysian citizenship, without a nationally recognizable Malaysian cultural identity (Interviewee 02). This observation raises broader arguments about the feasibility of interculturalism in Malaysia's racially complex environment (see Chapter 5.3).

After all, the depth of multiculturalism in Malaysia is projected in its extent of music hybridization, but it becomes an inherent obstacle to the process of hybridization and localization in the country. The nature of multiculturalism in Malaysia becomes questionable when the characteristics and diversity of each ethnicity are not fully understood and appreciated, especially for indigenous groups in states like Sabah and Sarawak (Interviewee 31). There are inherent challenges in the promotion of cultural integration and appreciation for the arts in Malaysia, in which interviewees suggest would require greater support from the national level to address them. The promotion of the arts has struggled to be normalized across Malaysian society, with the media playing a significant role in fostering inclusivity by providing greater coverage and visibility to cultural events across language and ethnicity.

However, how far can multiculturalism go if ethnicities are protective of their own culture, afraid of assimilation? Some expresses fear to appear as a group reliant on gimmicky

collaborations for financial support. To surpass these biases, some advocate taking pride in preserving Chinese cultural heritage while incorporating elements of Malaysian identity into Chinese music. The importance of reinforcing cultural identity through localization parallels Taiwan's emphasis on its own national music rather than solely Chinese music. With strong ethnic pride, cultural integration can be challenging and may serve to reinforce ethnic superiority. However, even for reasons of standing out or receiving support, localization is a step forward in multiculturalism.

Will there be any changes to the depth of musical presentation towards hybrid fusion? Arguably, in the foreseeable future, significant changes to hybrid fusion may not occur despite budding efforts of hybridization; they are limited to the coexistence rather than creation of completely new and hybrid products. Regarding composition, Interviewee 12 stresses the importance of respecting the culture being incorporated into the work. With increased accessibility to resources and better understanding of cultures, composers have no excuse not to conduct proper research and consultation to provide accurate representations.

Borrowing the words of Interviewee 08, hybridizing music 'requires knowledge of the world, society, and philosophy', and that 'the Chinese orchestra is a tool, or a medium to achieve those means'. Many local ensembles like Eight Twelve and ITA attempt to break the ice through fusion approaches that incorporate Western, Chinese, and other instruments in their music experimentation[18]. Moreover, musical initiatives like Soundbridge offer platforms for local contemporary compositions, that blend local and regional influences and traditions through cultural and instrumental hybridity. Over the years, Soundbridge has attracted participation from several Chinese orchestra composers and performers, and it has growing prominence in the Chinese orchestra community. As musicians continue to experiment with instrument and musical variations, fusion and hybridized music hold promising potential for innovation and artistic expression in Malaysia.

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[18] Interviewee 30 proposes that these innovative works are necessary in the multicultural Malaysian society. In this environment, musicians have to be versatile in adapting and fighting for different achievements in the industry, navigating academic, commercial, and creative worlds.

4.3 *Originally Sabahan* (沙巴汉)[19] – Searching for a Southeast Asian Musical Identity

The performance of *Originally Sabahan* in a Chinese orchestra concert in Sabah, by improvisation, depicted the rainforest and encouraged audience participation in its chorus (Wong, 2023). The concert also featured a collaboration with a Malay teacher and students who recited a Chinese poem, a multicultural and cross-genre musical choices. Teo remarked on the beauty of these efforts, in expressing the Malaysian identity and satisfying audience desires for a renewed and lively musical experience.

These endeavors to localize Chinese music prompt reflections on the authenticity of music, particularly in diasporic communities like Malaysia where identity is no longer limited to Chinese expression. In the Malaysian Chinese diaspora, exposure to new cultures, lifestyles, and traditions in a new environment led to cultural shifts to blend into the new environment and represent their displaced identity (Interviewee 20). A piece of music's authenticity and meaning stems from its expression of an idealized past (and present) to legitimize the negotiation of the Chinese self (Lam, 2008: 54). In this sense, globalized Chinese music cannot be presumed authentic in specific and essentialized ways.

Critics of cultural imperialism point to acts of local appropriation and adoption of cultural forms, which, while not organically originating from the communities celebrating them (being 'inauthentic'), are consumed in locally distinctive ways, outside mainstream cultural production (Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1998: 17). Memories of the home culture help to define the sense of self and culture in the new environment (Lau, 2008: 142), while new connections are explored. Music plays the role of communication and preservation of cultural heritage; the Chinese orchestra becomes a safe space for community cohesion through expansive collaborations with other cultures (Chan, 2022: 4).

The reliance on traditional music shapes cultural belonging and is slowly integrated into daily life, accumulating functional value—an 'ingrained memory'. Localization is a slow-moving process that represents 'geographic identity, social identity, and even faith in life' (Luo and Chung, 2010). Technique is argued as a limiting factor to the crafting of new localized styles, requiring a process from 'direct borrowing', 'transcribing and arranging', to

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[19] The Chinese orchestra rendition of *Originally Sabahan* covers a pop song that celebrates the people of Sabah, with the original album released in 2018 by Atmosfera featuring Floor 88. In search of a Southeast Asian or Malaysian cultural identity, the title of this piece localizes the topic to explore potentials of incorporating local compositions into *huayue* repertoire, thereby navigating broader questions of 'what is Malaysian?' and 'how does multiculturalism affect community cohesion in Malaysia?'
Guided listening (Tshung Tsin Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kArOt7sOdFo

'original composition'. This identification resonates with the notion of degrees of music fusion discussed in the previous section.

Wang (2019) introduces three levels of recognizability in culture—trait, specialty, and icon. They differ in the level of recognizability and representation, from not being recognized by cultural insiders, to locals having insider recognition but not outsiders, and where everybody identifies with as an essence of the place/community. It highlights the significance of musical identity in differentiating oneself and raises questions about the boundaries of identity tied to nations and the role of nationalism. In resonance, Interviewee 09 identifies Malaysia's challenge in finding works that belong to the local. The process for full absorption and digestion of localized music occurs naturally in their own timing across communities (Interviewee 07).

Next to Malaysia, Singapore aspires to embody an ethnically Asian but English-speaking nation with its constructed traditional and modern elements, and its strategic efforts gained it an ambassadorship of 'Chinese culture overseas in ways that China cannot' (Tan S. E., 2012). However, Singapore is juxtaposed in dual identities that oppose yet reinforce one another. The nation is compelled to 'showcase contemporary Chinese music' that 'include well-acclaimed works with Southeast Asian elements' to appeal to Western audiences of perceived higher cultural sophistication (ibid.). Chinese citizens emphasize their Singaporean-ness while Singaporeans struggle to assert their Chinese-ness to their Chinese counterparts.

Cultural inferiority manifests differently in Malaysia and Singapore. Interviewees suggest that Malaysia is always in self-questioning about its roots, especially concerning religion and race. Motivations for assimilation or differentiation are philosophically driven by concerns about identity insecurity. From different starting points, *huayue* in Malaysia can be associated with either China or Malaysia, because it is a culture entering the domain of another, in a premature stage of discussion. (Interviewee 07).

The identification of culture and belonging depends on public familiarity, fostered through government, school and media publicity (Wang, in Zhang, 2021). The formation of identity in music operates through both top-down (institutions propagating commonly agreed unspoken principles or representations) and bottom up (individuals ignoring racial categorization and embracing music created by Singaporeans as 'Singaporean music') approaches. In this environment, Luo and Chung (2010) argue that conditions and

opportunities for pluralism are readily available, especially composers with a broadened perspective of culture and enriched musical knowledge, as expressed in localized works.

Nonetheless, in the construction of ethnic and national identity, Singapore is particularly successful in promoting the Nanyang style (南洋风)[20]. According to an interviewee, Nanyang style is introduced by Yeh Tsung, the Emeritus Conductor of Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO), inspired from a visit to a Nanyang art exhibition[21]. He once commented his reluctance to carry the impression of traditional Mainland China pieces to Singapore as it was reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution. While this commentary may seem exaggerated, it reflects a conscious effort to redefine Singaporean Chinese-ness and its constructed cosmopolitanism (Tan S. E., 2012).

SCO developed two composition trends in its 20 years of 'Nanyang style *huayue*'— '*huayue* compositions with Nanyang characteristics' (incorporating culture, geography, history, or legends of Nanyang regions), and 'Nanyang style that has Singaporean features' (TV theme songs and National Day songs[22]) (Lee, 2023). Rooted in indigenous Southeast Asian music, Nanyang style infuses *huayue* with a distinct flavor (Chang, 2016), challenging composers' mastery of Chinese musical instrument techniques and timbres in assimilating to the Nanyang style. Lee also asserts that the expansion of the Chinese orchestra beyond the Chinese market would require the adoption of different musical styles. Nanyang style therefore provides abundant opportunities for creative exploration of local soundscapes.

Nanyang style music normally incorporates Malay music elements—understandably so given the region and its identity—including *gamelan* music, other Malay traditional music, and occasionally Indian music. Recent compositions have started to include regional music from Southern China migrants or express the modernized and developed multicultural landscape of Singapore (Zhang, 2023). The question of authenticity emerges once again when fusing several traditional music elements. Interviewee 12 remarks that 'it is probably worse if

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[20] SCO held the Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestra Composition in 2006, 2011 and 2015, aiming to establish a repertoire of Nanyang- and/or Singapore-inspired Chinese orchestral compositions (SCO, 2015).

[21] This story is an oral narration from an interviewee. Nanyang region includes Vietnam, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines.

[22] Interviewee 12 notes that most Singaporeans would associate Singaporean music to National Day songs, mostly pop songs, that have lyrics evoking a sense of Singaporean identity. However, there is limited awareness among the public about musical styles that imply Singaporean-ness. The definition of Singapore music depends on government promotion of the Singaporean identity, in which efforts are made to increase the representation of local composers and orchestras by featuring their compositions and recordings in places like school textbooks.

you don't play in an authentic way, than doing something entirely unrelated'. Currently, Nanyang style has not hybridized to the extent to involve alternative tuning systems[23].

Given the diverse racial makeup of Malaysia and Singapore, many other elements could be incorporated into the Nanyang style. Interviewee 20 contends that localization is a superficial imitation falling short of authentic representation without genuine cultural immersion. Discussions of the artistic value of localization requires contemplation of cultural inclusivity. Often, a culture dominates due to better understanding of one's own cultural heritage, that poses challenges to true inclusivity. For that reason, crossover creations take long processes of discussions and compromises to ensure that each segment authentically reflects its cultural influences while blending elements together. But what if the Chinese orchestra does not take center stage in promoting Nanyang music?

Regardless, I argue that localized music is difficult to arise naturally due to the influences of globalization. After all, Nanyang music is an induced effort inspired by visual arts. The organic evolution of Nanyang music is inherently unlikely because the sounds in Singapore's highly modernized and interconnected society are mutually affecting. From another angle, the *rojak* nature (see next section) of the Nanyang region is its specialty. Consequently, the Singaporean identity is in constant negotiation with its environment. Nanyang style seeks to reconcile cultural influences and assert the Singaporean identity amidst global pressures and expectations.

In Malaysia, Penang-born composer and conductor Chew Hee Chiat's compositions are complimented for their 'localized Malaysian' musical style and language. This localized musical language may appear foreign to those accustomed to traditional *huayue* compositions, requiring some adjustments for their acceptance and comprehension (Chan, 2003). Arguably, Chew's works are contemporary and not always understood (see Chapter 4.1), but they have gained resonance in recent years, due to increased musical appreciation and emphasis on local composers. Chan notes that Chew's compositions create a localized Malaysian Chinese language, new vocabularies that are not mechanically assembled from Malay or Indian music, but a convergence of independent components through compositional techniques.

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[23] *Gamelan* music sounds off-pitch in its most authentic presentation as it does not adhere to the 12-tone temperament. There is minimal standardizing of *gamelan* instruments to preserve their characteristics across areas, such as the Javanese and Balinese *gamelan* (Interviewee 23).

During a conversation with Chew, he elaborated on the impact of his background on his embodiment of the Nanyang style:

> Malaysians are not monolinguistic; our language use happens synchronously. It's not that I speak a particular language in a particular context. At home, I speak simultaneously with my parents in two dialects. Similarly, our multiculturalism happens synchronously, which sometimes makes our musical elements seem too rich and not unified in style. Some would criticize other criticisms, saying that one should understand that non-uniformity *is* our style. I find that very interesting.

Chew illustrates the *rojak* culture in Malaysia through the metaphor of language. For example, French, Spanish, and Italian are all Latin-based languages, but Malaysians speak Chinese dialects, Malay, English, and others simultaneously, all from different language systems (sometimes in a single sentence!). These *rojak* experiences are unintentionally reflected in his compositions. He continues that a professional composer must be able to handle any musical style according to requirements without deviation[24]. With creative freedom, there is no necessity to deliberately exhibit that identity; the compositions naturally reflect their Southeast Asian roots, differing from other regions in sometimes inexplicable ways.

Local composers have varied perspectives on the Nanyang style. Among them, Interviewee 33 takes a selective approach, incorporating Nanyang elements only for compositions thematically focused on Nanyang scenery. Similarly, Interviewee 01 also incorporates Southeast Asian components contextually, depending if the concert calls for Nanyang impressions. This approach enables thematic flexibility while maintaining a connection to Nanyang impressions when appropriate.

On the other hand, Composer 08 expresses reservations about the nomenclature of 'Nanyang music' in preference of 'Southeast Asian music', as Nanyang limits itself to a Chinese perspective. He questions the branding under the Nanyang label and its reliance on *gamelan* elements. By delimiting the self from a strictly Malaysian identity, the broader perspective allows opportunities out of geographical confines.

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[24] The challenge returns to the issue of local composers writing music commissioned for professional orchestras (Chapter 5.4). Although they are excellent pieces, they are not suited for Malaysian standards. For this reason, Interviewee 26 advocates for local composers to design pieces for learning students, in a balance of Malaysia's majority performing level.

Interviewee 33 perceives Chinese music as a symbol of cultural development in Malaysia that contributes to the nation's multicultural identity. It is believed that localized Chinese music holds social value on the global stage, representing the Nanyang style of Malaysia and Singapore. To Interviewee 24, it is about 'having our own voice'. As other main regions develop their distinct music repertoires, Malaysia should also have its own multiethnic form that showcases its abundance of inspirations and resources. However, there is a lack of products due to low supply and demand, linked to broader issues of monetization and livelihood of composers (see Chapter 5.4).

Nanyang music, generally understood to include Malay elements, lacks precise definition and is still under development. There is a myriad of opinions on the developmental trajectory of localized music. Among that, 'uniqueness' is familiar topic to all Chinese orchestras, for differentiating *huayue* from other traditions. Interviewee 06 stresses the need to cultivate this uniqueness by incorporating traditional Malay instruments into Chinese orchestras.

One notable response to this suggestion is the invention of the *hi-rebab* (elaborated in Chapter 5.3). To enhance uniqueness, the general concept of 'local' or 'Malay' music should be specified into detailed elements, such as specific techniques, structures, or sound effects, to deepen the authenticity and complexity of Malaysian music (Interviewee 07). However, Interviewee 23 warns against attempts to perfectly pitch notes of the *gamelan* ensemble, that otherwise could be replaced by the Chinese *yunluo* (云锣) with very similar timbre. Such substitution could undermine the uniqueness and purpose of the original instrument.

Currently, there is still limited integration of Southeast Asian influences into Chinese music. In reflection of Nanyang style compositions, some musical integrations appear to be forcefully merging distinct musical systems, leading to compositions that feel unnatural. However, it is these differences that contribute to the uniqueness of *localized* huayue. According to Yii in *The Historical Melody of Chinese Music in Malaysia* (2022), there should be more profound artistic considerations when inserting the Nanyang style to represent it in its entirety. This includes the examination of ecology[25]. Malaysia's rainforest, with its harmonious coexisting and interconnection of elements, generate heterophony musical structures different from other regions, just like *rojak*.

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[25] More about Yii is discussed in Chapter 6.1.

Therefore, there is an imperative for greater reflection and critical discourse on localized music in Malaysia, that can be established through academic forums. These forums would develop *huayue* localization by addressing potential pathological problems and underlying issues in the localization process (Interviewee 23). Moreover, it is crucial to recognize the importance of ecology and technology in art, as the foundation to define distinctive regional styles. A point of departure could be the exploration of indigenous instruments or classical works of traditional Malay music, which showcases Malaysia's unique musical style and cultural characteristics (Interviewee 13).

Malaysia has the potential for distinctively localized works, depending on composers who advocate this approach. Nonetheless, the quest for music that 'belongs' to Southeast Asia is an ongoing experimentation rooted in musical creativity rather than technical complexity alone. Essentially, Nanyang music aims to embed local life, aspirations, and spirit, blending ethnic influences with contemporary elements to create a distinct and identifiable musical presentation. Through collective endeavors with Singapore, Malaysia can further enrich itself in the ongoing process to establish its position as a distinctive Chinese orchestra ecosystem, thus contributing to the diversity of the wider Chinese music environment.

4.4 *Izpirazione II* (捕风掠影 II: 刺的回味)[26] – Musical Inspirations from Malaysian Food[27]

Under the pretenses of multiculturalism and unity, the Malaysian identity is a sensitive topic of debate, especially concerning race and religion. However, one aspect of 'being Malaysian' that consistently captures the interest (and outrage) of Malaysians is the shared topic of food. Malaysian cuisine is probably the most biased yet simultaneously neutral element in the construct of Malaysian identity. It is biased in the sense that Malaysians generally believe in

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[26] *Izpirazione II*, composed by Malaysian *huayue* composer Simon Kong, achieved notable recognition as it was awarded the 2nd prize of Composition Award at the Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestra Composition 2006. The composition is special for its portrayal of three distinct local fruits and their flavours—durian, rambutan, and *tarap*—in which their unique essence is translated into a sonic experience. This short section uncovers the symbiotic relationship between culinary richness, musical hybridity, and cultural diversity that creates a unique flavour to define Malaysia.
Guided listening (Singapore Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O45YYBkBmpY
[27] I have later discovered the concept of 'Nusantara aesthetics', or regional aesthetics, that involve Malay *kacukan* (mixing). According to Hakim (2014), Nusantara culture is a product of assimilation of different world civilizations; they contributed to cultural development in the Indonesian Archipelago (Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines). See also the publication by Johan and Santaella (2021) on Nusantara and popular music from the region. This is a potential pathway for future research on the fluidity in representation of multicultural identity through the Chinese orchestra.

the superiority of their food to neighboring countries. Yet, it is also neutral as the cultural topic that goes without much argument among Malaysians who recognize Malaysian food as exceptional. For that, food becomes a potent metaphor for cultural integration and acceptance that seams the Malaysian cultural fabric together in unity—what better to argue for than the ownership of *nasi lemak*, *bakuteh*, and chicken rice by Malaysia and not Singapore[28]?

This discussion of food can be linked to Hoffstaedter's (2009) exploration of 'transethnic solidarity' and aspirations for a unified 'bangsa Malaysia' (Malaysian identity/race) within its cosmopolitan space. He asserts that this solidarity is insufficiently supported to become a foundational element of Malaysian politics, leaving a distinct Malaysian culture yet to emerge, with no signifiers for a 'truly Malaysian identity'. Moreover, while tourism promotes the concept of 'unity through diversity', it falls short as merely a slogan without substantial expression in the arts or music scene, remaining superficial in outward representations of unity[29].

Just as Malaysians mix different ingredients in their cuisines, they also embrace cultural hybridity in other facets of life, including music and language. This '*rojak* culture' is something special to the Malaysian Chinese community (Interviewee 10). Using Malaysian food as a metaphor, a practitioner articulates his position as a Malaysian Chinese to others in the global Chinese orchestra scene:

> Since we live in a multicultural society, we must keep an open mind to accept anything into our lives, like curry chicken, *murtabak*, and *pisang goreng*. But we need to know what our original culture is. When I give lectures abroad, people ask, "How do I know if you are a Malaysian Chinese?" Firstly, you need to have the characteristics of a Chinese. Secondly, you need the diversity of a Malaysian Chinese, like how we always have curry in our economy mixed rice, and chili and cucumber slices in our chicken rice. Other places do not have such things.

I argue that the arts shape Malaysian identity by pushing the boundaries of acceptance through hybridity of its lived manifestations. Beyond mere tolerance of cultural plurality, the arts actively integrate multiple identities of a Malaysian Chinese/Malay/Indian/others into a cohesive whole. In a way, this process reflects the recognition of identity complexities

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[28] As a Malaysian, and a vegetarian, I still biasedly agree that the Malaysian dishes smell better!

[29] Hoffstaedter (2009) argues that there are two faces to the state—internal and external, where the internal face homogenizes and essentializes, whereas the external displays the country outwardly as pluralist, multicultural and touristic. Malaysia is portrayed touristically as diverse in culture, that perpetuates multiculturalism and cultural performativity. Chapter 5.3 problematizes Malaysian cultural identities in cross-cultural collaborations.

through Williams' (1977) notion of the dominant, residual, and emergent in cultures, transposed to a convergence of cultural elements of the current (new nation, Malaysia), past (motherland, China), and the evolving (hybridized Malaysian identity) (Tan E., 2019).

Interviewees of this research organically adopt the term '*rojak*'—a mélange of ingredients (like a salad) with sweet, sour, salty, spicy, and savory tastes all in one, that comes from the Malay word meaning 'mixed'. It symbolizes the unity in cultural diversity and inclusivity to create a distinct Malaysian flavor. This *rojak* multiculturalism is not limited to the Chinese community alone. Interviewee 17 highlights the *rojak*-ness in the fusion of Malay pop with foreign elements like rap; 'Malaysia is full of elements, even in Borneo'. Although the term implies random mixing of cultural materials into one (like a mashup), bonded together by a sauce, music of the Chinese orchestra, or Malaysian culture, is more than that—*rojak* metaphorically represents something that everybody recognizes and enjoys, regardless of its content or nutrition value.

Hoffstaedter's argument suggests that Malaysian identities are all *rojak*, but prone to essentializing identities to fundamental characteristics and silencing or marginalizing minority identities (2009: 540). Nonetheless, artistic expressions are important to portray the *rojak* nature of Malaysian identities. These hybridized or *rojak* works embody the diverse elements within a unified whole, navigating the tension between external plurality and internal cohesion. Moreover, hybridization is pervasive in daily life, as observed by Interviewee 24, who likens the fluidity in music genre performance to the diversity of Malaysian cuisine. According to the interviewee, one could find Malay, Indian, Chinese food, or food of other ethnicities in the same street, adding, 'You don't have to go to a particular place to see this. You encounter different cultural backgrounds together whenever you go outside.'

Composers and performers of the Chinese orchestra creatively infuse Malaysian cuisine into their music to illustrate cultural hybridity. For instance, Interviewee 01 has an entangled relationship with food and his compositions (redacted):

> I like to use food as a metaphor. Sometimes, I add small elements into my compositions, such as fruits and other food to exhibit some of our local culture. You can tell the culture by the way you eat. When you are eating *charsiew* rice, and see that someone else's curry rice looks delicious, you will just add the curry into your own rice. In economy mixed rice, there is no issue adding curry chicken to it. If you

add curry chicken to duck or *charsiew* rice, forcibly… it's still OK once or twice, but it doesn't work if you normalize it. Everything has its own logic. Culture means your values, practices, aesthetics, and tastes. The taste makes the culture.

Applying this food logic to music, it becomes apparent that hybridity occurs naturally, akin to cultural integration and the assimilation of what works into one's own culture. As with food, some musical components blend harmoniously while others do not, and this is discovered through collaboration and experimentation. Moreover, the acceptance of new musical styles or compositions vary depending on the cultural context. Interviewee 21 proposes *rojak*-ness as an ingrained, distinct Malaysian feature, allowing local composers the freedom to mix different styles and perform them locally. However, these experimentations might encounter resistance and manifest differently elsewhere:

> [Music appreciation is] natural. People would know Malaysian *huayue* once they listen to the compositions. They wouldn't say that it's from Hong Kong or Mainland China. We play the musical instruments with our soul; that's natural. When you listen to Malaysian *huayue*, there's Malay flavors. If a Malay song is performed by Taiwan or Hong Kong, there would be China flavors, because they eat different flavors from us. We eat curry, and they eat chilis—the type of spicy is different, hence the performance outcome is different too. (Interviewee 25)

This example underscores the significance of localization and adaptation to the local environment in which a community resides. In different locations, the presentation of food (or music) may vary due to unique local conditions, even if the names remain the same. Amidst these variations, cultural identity remains a constant presence. Interviewee 01's statement, 'cultural identity not a search, but a reflection,' prompts a reevaluation of how identity is perceived. The idea challenges the notion of cultural identity as something to be sought after, suggesting instead that it is inherently part of one's existence. In Malaysia's deeply multicultural society, there is a call to recognize and celebrate this hybridity as a forte.

Furthermore, Interviewee 10, in observation of the resilience of the Chinese orchestra, describes this *rojak* as one that will 'blossom no matter what, even without a professional orchestra'. It highlights the adaptability of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra to its immediate surroundings and circumstances. This identification with *rojak* also symbolizes cultural and religious harmony, as indicated by Interviewee 03's translation of it into cross-cultural

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performances titled 'Rojak 1.0' and 'Rojak 2.0', which celebrate diversity through multicultural collaborative efforts.

However, in its essence, *rojak* approaches should be treated with caution. Aptly put by Interviewee 17, while it signifies freedom and diversity, a randomized clash of cultures may lead to fragmentation within a capitalized but limited market. Nonetheless, the interviewee's perspective maintains that *huayue* should not be confined to a single market trajectory.

Relating back to Wang's (2019) earlier conceptualization of hybridization in Chapter 4.2, Malaysian cuisine can be viewed as 'fusion in content', to present cultural hybridization that surpasses presentation, into Hoffstaedter's vision of the transethnic solidarity society. To another level, it is a step towards interculturalism, like food that is accepted by the entire society, to recognize the role of each ingredient in constructing the dish but not overpowering in individual flavors. Instead, the resulting Malaysian food delights the palate, its flavors reminiscent of the diverse cultural expressions of the Malaysian society.

4.5 *Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* (竹林七贤)[30] – Education for Future Generations

Recent Chinese music development started to distinguish between basic education (基础教学, amateur teaching) and artistic education (艺术教学, professional teaching). This distinction differentiates approaches to teaching: amateurs typically prioritize skill development but may lack in areas such as logical or critical thinking, whereas professionals emphasize all-rounded skill acquisition. The divergence in teaching philosophy has significant implications. Some prioritize subjective feelings over technical precision, while others emphasize pitch and rhythm to achieve synchronization. Although these measurement factors carry negative connotations towards amateur learning, they underline the importance of aligning pedagogical approaches with the aspirations of *huayue* learners, whether for hobby or professional pursuit.

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[30] The selection of Sulwyn Lok's (骆思卫) composition for this topic holds double significance. Firstly, the composer is a Southeast Asian (Singaporean) dually based in New York. The duality of his first instrument of the *ruan* and current film composition trajectory demonstrates the fluidity of humans and music that transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. The composition itself is a conversation between time (3rd century and 21st century) and space (bamboo grove and performance hall), and an exploration of musical genres and performance techniques. The second layer of meaning lies in its theme—the Seven Sages are ancient Chinese scholars who opted to live in a bamboo grove and engaged in artistic endeavors for refuge from corruption and court matters (Zhang, Wong and Lok, 2023: 117). Under this context, *huayue* educators are like the Seven Sages, who inspire others by provoking philosophical thought during musical education.
Guided listening (Singapore Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xcGgqY3HnA

Beyond teaching styles, there are also differences in education models between Malaysia and other regions. For example, China's *minyue* education focuses more on nurturing individuality and solo performances. Conversely, Taiwan places greater importance on harmony and ensemble playing. Students who have experienced education in Taiwan remark on the distinctiveness of their experiences (Interviewee 23 and 31). In Taiwan, rehearsals have a faster pace and requires adaptation. Interviewee 18 thus bases his teaching methods on experiences with orchestras from different regions, despite not being a professional.

The divergence in *huayue* education stems from a combination of factors, including the influence of the teacher, school ethos, family support, and the student's own interest, depending on their perspectives on the role of *huayue* for education and personal development. However, a prevailing impression persists in some communities that the arts are more suited as hobbies rather than professional pursuits, leading to parental discouragement of their children's artistic endeavors (Chang and Lee, 2003: 137).

From Interviewee 28's perspective, only students who excel are encouraged to pursue a professional career in *huayue*. Otherwise, the career path may present challenges unsuitable for some students. Instead of blindly encouraging all his students, the educator takes a personalized approach to consider each student's circumstances and talents, analyzing their realistic career prospects and counseling them to pursue other fields if they possess better aptitude or opportunities in those areas.

Practitioners calculate that *yangqin* students constitute the largest group studying abroad professionally among all *huayue* instruments[31]. University education abroad provides opportunities to adapt to new environments and find new solutions to challenges. However, Malaysian students face considerable hurdles in pursuing overseas education due to intense competition and the need to match the proficiency level of peers from Mainland China or Taiwan (Interviewee 20). Interviewee 07 highlights the benefit of studying abroad where exposure to different teaching methods and techniques can lead to rapid skill mastery. He suggests that teachers who have studied abroad can raise technical proficiency and performance quality, benefitting the overall ecosystem.

Theoretical understanding in music requires professional training in conservatoires. This form of education covers subjects such as music history, sight singing and ear training

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[31] This is presumably due to long-term efforts of existing *yangqin* teachers to nurture young talents.

(视唱练耳), music theory, and piano, which were hardly conceptualized in the past (Interviewee 09). After studying in Taiwan, Interviewee 23 notes a lack of emphasis on fundamentals in Malaysian *huayue* education, which focuses extensively on practical skills and exam-oriented learning. Feeling compelled to change the environment, the instructor returned to Malaysia to nurture students for deeper musical understanding, rather than pursuing a better career in Taiwan. Commonly, practitioners draw from their experiences studying abroad. Regardless of career pursuits, students are required to learn all fundamentals for a professional outlook. Interviewee 31 offers opportunities to students to learn from professionals in China, to then return to promote and expand the art form.

In southern Malaysia, Interviewee 27 implemented a structured education model for new students, that consists of ten classes covering various instruments. The goal is to ensure that students achieve basic mastery and self-learning ability of the instrument. The standardized formula of tracking each freshman's learning progress facilitates the transition between instructors to target the students' weak points and effectively teach them in a personalized manner.

This plan is gradually being implemented across schools and could become a widespread model to ensure continuity in education progress. At present, the model faces challenges in consistent execution across instrument sections due to large group sizes, but it remains a long-term goal for *huayue* education. Emphasis is placed on equipping freshmen with the necessary skills to play music at a certain level with their instrument, laying a solid foundation for their future musical journey. The interviewee is currently focused on guiding students and instructors through this process, with an eye towards future improvement.

We return to the perennial question of priority in *huayue* education and presentation—technique or musicality first? Some educators teach specific songs to master techniques instead of aimless practice. Chinese instrument exams require students to achieve allocated techniques and speed requirements at certain levels. After completing challenging pieces, students improve in sound quality, with better interpretation of simpler pieces as they overcome technical barriers. Even so, they need to learn techniques taught by the teacher. Over time, music selection for different training encourages deeper challenge of inner exploration.

There is a faction that believes in the indispensability of technical skills, asserting that technical proficiency comes before music interpretation and tone quality. Interviewee 30 uses

the metaphor of 'weapons in battle'[32] to urge for solid foundation practices so that the students can effectively communicate their musicality. In other situations, Interviewee 32 also cautions against stopping at the skill level, even when the teacher is experienced. As a *huayue* instructor, one must have solid theoretical knowledge, singing abilities, and an understanding of basic chords. Self-development is advocated for instructors to ensure that they are equipped to enrich the students' music education experience.

Formal education of the percussion section is often neglected. Interviewee 29 notes that many percussion instructors focus on rhythm or symbols, or some schools lack percussion teachers altogether. There is also a reluctance among drum learners to engage with melodic instruments like xylophones. The stereotype is perpetuated that percussion is solely about hitting drums, overlooking other aspects of tone color and music expression. It relates to the imperative for the systematic learning of music theory; instead of solely reading numerical notation, percussionists should also adapt to staff notation for instruments like the drum kit and timpani.

On the other hand, interviewees lament that Malaysian educators tend to prioritize technique over the essence of Chinese music (musicality). This imbalance focuses on solving technical challenges rather than exploring deeper meanings and expressions inherent to the music (Interviewee 21). It is essential to strike the balance or at least educate students about the composer's intended expression and thematic elements. There is a call for *huayue* education to incorporate cultural understanding, especially through the study of traditional music, to appreciate the cultural heritage embedded within the music (Interviewee 09). Pop songs, although products of modernity, can be the entry point to comprehend classical and traditional music (Chapter 4.1). According to Interviewee 32, 'if students cannot even distinguish good pop songs and listen only to viral songs, how would they learn to appreciate classical music?'

Experiencing music's place of origin enhances musical knowledge (Watkins, 2011: 404), indicating the importance of cultural immersion and experiential learning in musical education, aided by digitization (Chapter 5.2, 6.3). The resulting understanding is ecological, transcending rationality and sensibility. Interviewee 25 calls for spiritual depth by instilling higher level thinking in *huayue* education, starting with the incorporation of *huayue* into textbooks—already implemented in Chinese independent schools—to show that *huayue*

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[32] Similar to the Chinese proverb, 工欲善其事，必先利其器, one must sharpen his weapons before it can be useful in battle.

imparts life principles on top of technical skills. Instructors should acknowledge their shortcomings for continuous improvement, setting a role model for students (Interviewee 32).

On the presentation level, participation in the Chinese orchestra contributes to character development. Interviewee 16 argues that character holds priority over technical prowess to improve students' learning attitudes. Educators should instill moral values such as remembering one's origins (不忘本), integrity, and diligence, while cultivating leadership qualities and responsibility. A strategy taken to reinforce these moral beliefs and commitment include the organization of motivational lectures (Interviewee 25).

An interesting perspective of music education comes from Ong, a pipa instructor who believes strongly in the fostering of critical thinking skills to encourage self-reflection and personal growth. He is concerned about the lack of understanding of music theory, rhythm, harmony, and historical knowledge in Malaysian Chinese music education[33]. He questions students' future trajectories in musical interests and studies, noting a lack of diversity and a tendency to choose music to avoid academic studies. Where will their love of music take them? Will they venture beyond *huayue* to explore Chinese opera music or local music traditions?

It is therefore necessary for educators to inspire inquisitiveness towards different musical genres and traditions for an inclusive learning experience. Ong's holistic teaching approach encompasses mind, body, and soul through self-initiated learning that ignites the students' enthusiasm, interest, and curiosity. In traditional education, technique and exams are sole motivators; in pursuit of technically difficult pieces, learners become robotic in their learning and lose their musicality. Instead, Ong encourages interest-based learning, where students develop emotional connections and meaningful emotional expression.

Certainly, this approach still acknowledges the significance of technique, but Ong asserts that technique should serve the music, stressing the importance of balance. He describes two types of performance gestures—slow techniques that produce pleasant sounds, and fast techniques that showcase virtuosity but may sacrifice sound quality. Contrary to conventional methods that prioritize a progression from slow to fast tempo, Ong teaches his students to play at regular speed, believing that beginners usually overemphasize on producing good tones, which can hinder their future ability to execute rapid passages.

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[33] Arguably, the current state is improving with a common consciousness towards education reformation.

Ong also highlights the importance of understanding basic techniques and mechanics of other instruments to grasp concepts like breath control. Each instrument section presents unique challenges that students should be aware of, for effective cooperation in ensemble performances. Moreover, music appreciation is crucial to appreciate the broader context of a piece. This involves researching its narrative, historical background, instrumentation, and composition rationale, beyond isolated pieces of information from the scores alone. Extending from his own Waldorf education experiences, Ong advocates comprehensive learning in *huayue*, one that integrates technicality and musicality to grasp the essence of Chinese music, equipping students for versatile and expressive performances.

The image of Bussotti's score, as referenced in *A Thousand Plateaus*, depicts the musical score as 'a realm of pure speeds (duration, frequency, sequence) and affects (intensities, timbral qualities)' (Bogue, 2014: 487). This description performs the score through the adherence of the various components of speeds and affects, 'in simultaneities assembled in the virtual memory space of coexisting sheets of the past'. It may not be as farfetched to consider *huayue* education in similitude wherein Ong suggests looking beyond the surface value of music to incorporate elements of logic and emotion (in Bussotti's case, speeds and affects) for music appreciation. Without this awareness, music may not be fully realized in its essence.

In Ong's framework, the qualities of music are divided into five aspects under two sections. On the rational (理性) side are pitch accuracy and rhythm, while the emotional (感性) side involves volume, timbre, and speed variations. These correspond to the left and right sides of the brain and are interconnected. Ong observes that students with a strong sense of rhythm tend to excel in mathematical logic, usually males. Conversely, students with better pitch accuracy—mostly females—have stronger language abilities for their tonal sensitivity. Supposedly, the mastery of pitch can enhance one's charisma and attractiveness for effective communication.

Without this balance, the learning of solely rational components limits musical expression. Rational elements of timbre and dynamics can be quantified to some extent, but they also involve personal interpretation. Supporting them are the emotional aspects— musical sensitivity (音受力) and intuition/musicality (感受力, 音乐感)—that train sympathy and discernment, in resonance with the soul. Understanding music requires listening to its

content while sensing nuances of tone and tapping into the innermost feelings of the performer, much like interpreting someone's speech.

Experiential music education helps individuals perceive and moderate intensities, gaining a deeper consciousness of music, and consequently, of their own being. Additionally, Ong advocates drama and acting in musical expressions to infuse emotions into music and achieve a balanced personality. Although music learners may not possess the same depth of knowledge as those studying opera or theatre, they develop heightened sensitivity and empathy, becoming attuned to others and less susceptible to deception. Essentially, by visualizing musicality through these components, individuals can enhance their inner depth and enrich their life experiences.

Modern students are increasingly immersed in their digital world, academic studies, and relationships, often reluctant to participate in extra-curricular activities of long practice hours like the Chinese orchestra. Possibly, they also turn to digital platforms for learning instead of traditional resources like DVDs or VCDs (Interviewee 09). Following this shift in behavior, educators have to adapt their teaching methods accordingly.

In the past, strict discipline may have yielded progress, but instructors now use alternative approaches to engage and inspire students. Interviewee 31 has reduced discipline but raised expectations, discussing performance improvements with students and researching music interpretation. This sometimes leads students to take ownership of their learning process and actively seek improvement, to engage in higher-level thinking.

However, it can be challenging to create an environment conducive to proactive learning. Interviewee 28 express the lack in resources and an inspiring atmosphere in Malaysia to motivate students to persevere. A pressing issue is the concern of shortage of teachers in certain instrument sections, as students may learn incorrect techniques or practices from their peers without understanding its scientific basis[34] (Interviewee 24). Furthermore, *huayue* educational activities face challenges from government regulations, particularly regarding competition organization for educational institutions. Regulations of the Ministry of Education stipulate that competitions with government recognition on certificates cannot charge registration fees (voluntary nature), posing logistical and financial hurdles for organizers. Also, the lack of mainstream recognition of Chinese music in Malaysia makes it

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[34] Interviewee 02 narrates the learning experience in educational institutions, where most knowledge is passed down from seniors. Those who are more musically inclined catch up faster, while some are left behind and eventually quit the Chinese orchestra.

difficult for universities to incorporate it into their curricula, complicating the education landscape (Interviewees 13 and 23).

Some interviewees reflect on the significance of Chinese education (华教) in Chinese society and the complexities of preserving its philosophies, claiming that the Chinese community may be overly protective of these educational values that indoctrinate ideologies of cultural oppression to the new generation. They interrogate the effectiveness of Chinese education and the need for adaptation to modern contexts while upholding traditional cultural values.

In several locations, educators are working to establish *huayue* education frameworks from primary to secondary school, paving the way for further study at universities abroad. Interviewee 13 envisions a model of dedicated Chinese music programs in high schools with direct overseas university admission, similar to Taiwan and Mainland China. Some systems are already in place; however, their realization requires societal acceptance and a fundamental mindset shift. Passion for music is essential, but interest alone is unsustainable to pursue the *huayue* pathway, highlighting the need to prioritize the development of *huayue* education and provide opportunities for returning professionals.

Educators are central to the advancement of *huayue* education, to nurture open-mindedness and exploration among students in eschew of a closed community for personal fame or financial gains. Education should emphasize proper training in both technicality and musicality, alongside the cultivation of morals and character. Additionally, there is a growing recognition of advanced technical training through solo or chamber music settings that require higher technical demands. Interviewee 07 asserts that the blossoming of these ensembles would elevate technical standards and refresh the Chinese orchestra environment. More details on reassembling directions are elaborated in Chapter 6.4.

Overall, practitioners across Malaysia are united in their efforts to advance Chinese music education in Malaysia, that require perseverance and dedication. As Interviewee 21 remarks, 'Chinese orchestra education is not instant gratification'; the impacts of current efforts will only become apparent in future generations.

4.6 *Travel with Rhythm* (宇・乐)[35] – Philosophizing through Music Endeavors

Part 1: Finding the essence of *huayue*

In my personal journey, I have realized that my attachment to *huayue* transcends technical proficiency or mastery of complex compositions. Despite lapses in practice and a lack of expertise in playing technically demanding music, my heartfelt performances have garnered praise, which is a puzzling paradox—how can I be praised when I have stark shortcomings?

Upon reflection, I believe that what truly resonates with listeners is the sincerity and emotion infused into the music when playing from the heart—something that sounds entirely subjective and metaphysical. For me, music's allure lies in the inherent qualities of each instrument and the artistic conception (意境) of the composer and performer. Albeit limited by technical skills, I seek to convey my deep-seated connection to music through genuine expression.

Seasoned *huayue* practitioners emphasize attitudes and philosophies that a musician should cultivate for a holistic music-making experience, growing oneself as a 'musician' (音乐家) beyond a 'performer' (演奏家). These attitudes include:

- 心态 (*xintai*; mindset)—the right mental disposition and attitude in musical practice to face challenges, continuously learn, and improve oneself.

- 素养, 修养 (*suyang*, *xiuyang*; cultivation)—developing appreciation for musical styles and traditions, cultivating values and characters of the self, both personally and musically.

- 内涵, 深度 (*neihan*; depth)—connection with the 'soul' of the music, understanding its historical and cultural contexts, technical and artistic interpretations, and conveying this depth into musical performance.

- 灵性 (*lingxing*; spirituality)—connection with the spiritual experience, or the inherent power of music, and channeling it through performance (somewhat ritualistic).

- 诠释 (*quanshi*; interpretation)—in combination of previous elements, giving meaning and personal touch to the music with one's own emotions and experiences, conveying its 'essence'.

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[35] This is the title of the UNMCO's 2016 annual concert, in which I have curated a repertoire of world music, including *Mukala-mukala* (India), *Pulau Bali* (Indonesia), and *Katyusha* (Russia), as the Performance Director.

After attempts to find this philosophical embodiment through various instruments in the Chinese orchestra, my vested interest remains in the *ruan*, despite frustrations when my technical skills do not match my expressive intentions. This prompts me to ponder what makes the *ruan* such a captivating subject of interest by so many? Is it its timbre, versatility in musical styles, range of expression, cultural representativeness, connection to nature, or something else entirely[36]?

During an interview with an experimental *ruan* player whose music deeply touches me, I inquired about his attachment to an old instrument, his views on the functionality of the *ruan* and the necessity for professional instruments in enhancing musical expression. He explains that musicians often select instruments based on their tonal qualities, using brighter tones to stand out in solo performances and more muted tones for orchestral playing. Ultimately, the decision is a matter of finding an instrument that forms a connection with the player, regardless of price or material. It boils down to *shougan* (手感), the one that *feels right to the touch*.

Is musical affinity all about the *feels*, one's emotional connection with music? Earlier, in Chapter 1.3, the concept of *yùn* (韻) in musical compositions is elaborated, which imbues them with Chinese essence or identity. Translated into performance, each sonic experience becomes unique to its spatial and temporal context. Participating in an orchestra and in solo contexts evoke different emotions and dynamics. Orchestra performances emphasize teamwork, both within instrumental sections and across the entire orchestra. In contrast, ensemble and solo performances demand a different set of coordination and strong musical intuition with attention to detail. This skill is often nurtured outside the orchestral setting, where individuals have greater autonomy for creative expression, and it is where holistic music cultivation becomes essential.

Interlude: Modification of the *ruan* family

It is probably this perennial quest for soul-nourishing music that drives musicians to continually optimize their instrument skills. In this study, an experiment of the modification of the *gaoyin ruan* is conducted, with the rationale to transpose its fingering to match that of a mandolin or violin, simplifying the swapping of instruments for a multi-instrumentalist

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[36] This rhetoric and philosophical question is yet to be answered.

(like myself) while retaining the timbre and *yùn* of the *gaoyin ruan* when playing music from other cultural traditions[37].

Several attempts are made to alter the instrument's open strings from its original tuning (G3-D4-G4-D5) to match the mandolin (G3-D4-A4-E5), or a lower-pitched alternative mimicking mandolin fingering (F3-C4-G4-D5). Using a *gaoyin ruan* purchased from the renown *ruan* maker Song Guangning, experiments are attempted using strings of various materials such as nylon, metal, and fluorocarbon, including strings designed for guitars and *liuqin*s, and even fishing lines of different gauges.

Despite multiple attempts, all efforts to tune the first string higher to E are inconclusive and ungeneralizable. Meanwhile, the tuning of the second string from G to A is accomplished without issue, as more options are available for the lower register. Nonetheless, this modification alone is unsuccessful as it does not address the concurrent E tuning, thus rendering it unnecessary. As an alternative, tuning the third and fourth strings lower to F and C appeared as a better and more viable option. However, the readjustment produces lower string tension to sustain the notes, leading to a compromise in timbre and brightness in these two strings for playing a wider range of notes.

In light of the challenges encountered, another *gaoyin ruan* is acquired from a different factory supplier, which, surprisingly, came at a smaller size. The shorter overall length of this instrument's neck means that it requires lower tension. Indeed, without effort, the new instrument instantly provided the desired G3-D4-A4-E5 open string tuning without necessitating a change of strings[38]. This successful outcome accentuates another problem— the lack of standardization in instrument specifications[39]. This means that the replication of tuning method is still a challenge; as instruments vary in dimensions and construction methods, the GDAE tuning is still ungeneralizable. Unfortunately, this wider challenge can only be addressed by instrument manufacturers in China.

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[37] An interviewee questions the intention of making an instrument become another: 'If you play the *ruan* as a guitar, what is the point? Why not just play the guitar?' However, the purpose of this experiment is not to erase its essence but to expand its possibilities. My personal motivations for choosing this experimentation on this instrument have been explained in the Methodology chapter.

[38] The first string still broke after some time, showing that it is unable to hold higher tension in the long run.

[39] Apparently, non-standardization is a prevalent issue across many instrument families, especially expanded ones, where Chinese manufacturers create instruments based on their own technology. Unlike Western instruments, which often adhere to standardized specifications, these Chinese instruments vary significantly in terms of dimensions and construction methods. Consequently, instruments require parts from the original manufacturer for repair. More on this in Chapter 6.2.

Regardless, although it is a personalized experiment, the new resulting tunings have been utilized in various hybridized music performances. Although the strings endured many performances, and provided pleasant experiences, the use of fluorocarbon fishing lines proved impractical due to constant unexpected string breakage. As a result, the direct route is to revert to the original strings with the original tuning of the *gaoyin ruan*. This presented other concerns; although professional grade, the standard strings still have durability issues of rusting and breaking quickly.

The modification experiment concluded that standardization for newly invented instruments like the *gaoyin ruan* is not yet feasible, when specifications are still in flux. Instead, context-specific modifications are necessary. In the wider environment, the alteration of open strings is a common practice on numerous instruments, including the *ruan* family, particularly for playing additional lower notes and for the convenience of multi-instrumentalists. Musicians generally tune the strings lower as an easier route, which, in the wider environment, facilitates the exploration of new compositions and music genres.

Among these ventures with is the composition *Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* by Sulwyn Lok[40]. It demonstrates music hybridity by incorporating jazz and metal genres. Moreover, in the review of this piece, I am delighted to discover that the composer has similar ideas; the composition tunes the open strings of a *zhongruan* and *daruan* lower than usual. Specifically, the second *zhongruan* is instructed to be tuned to FCGD, and the second *daruan* to CGDA. According to the composer, 'the loosened strings provide a unique sonority reminiscent of traditional Chinese music and also open new possibilities in idiomatic performance techniques on the *ruan*' (Zhang, Wang and Lok, 2023: 118), echoing my initial rationale to modify the *gaoyin ruan*.

From another angle, Experiment Ensemble 2 also had an organic attempt at instrument modification. The cellist (Participant 201) is assigned to play the *daruan*[41] for *New Sounds of Sizhu* due to its convenient design. Instead of its contemporary DADA tuning (a fourth lower than the *zhongruan*), the *daruan*'s tuning is adjusted to CGDA (same as the cello) to facilitate sightreading. Historically, the *daruan*, invented to expand the bass range,

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[40] I had a serendipitous encounter with this piece online when searching for a title for the previous section, only to later discovered that it is included in the *ruan* anthology I purchased during my trip to attend the SCMF forum in Singapore in 2023. Detailed description of the composition can be found in Chapter 4.5.

[41] The adaptive management is elaborated in Chapter 5.5, whereas discussions on the expansion of instrument families can be found in Chapter 6.2.

first adopted the CGDA tuning to mimic the cello and lacked dedicated compositions. Under this convention, cellists are often assigned to play it due to similar fingering[42].

However, as the *daruan* gained prominence and became featured with dedicated solo and exam pieces, many orchestras began training dedicated *daruan* players from among *ruan* musicians. Consequently, in the innovation and symphonization process, both DADA and CGDA tuning become common in *daruan* compositions. The DADA tuning likely became the convention to amplify the *daruan*'s timbre and sonic texture, and to merge with other plucked string instruments, rather than duplicating the cello's role in the Chinese orchestra.

Essentially, it is to my deduction that the *gaoyin ruan*'s adaptation to GDAE mandolin fingering is more challenging and not a rationale for modification, because conventional *ruan* education is based on GDGD tuning. *Zhongruan* players are already well-versed with this tuning system, to then expand to the *gaoyin ruan* and *daruan*. However, in cases like the Experiment Ensemble, the adaptation to match the *daruan* to the cello's CGDA tuning is a practical solution to leverage the existing skills and familiarity of musicians in their instrument transition. Instead, the primary purpose of modifying the *ruan*'s tuning, such as the alternative FCGD, may be to expand its repertoire and sonic capabilities by increasing its lower note range, a more versatile and sustainable innovation.

Part 3: From technicality to musicality

Returning to question the meaning of *huayue* and music, the journey undoubtedly starts out with mastering the instrument's basic sound production before any deeper meaning can be instilled. Achieving musical proficiency requires significant effort from reading and rehearsing musical scores to improving technical skills. In Experiment Ensemble 2, several modifications are made to ease the task of instrument changes[43], including the adaptation of scores to facilitate sightreading on the new instrument. This adaptation is aided by computer programs to directly convert between staff notation (五线谱, *wuxianpu*) and numbered notation (简谱, *jianpu*), as well as adjusting clefs and key signatures as needed. Although digital tools increase the convenience of score-reading, transitioning between different fingerings and playing styles is a minor challenge for musicians accustomed to specific notation systems for each instrument (e.g. *jianpu* for the erhu and *wuxianpu* for the violin).

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[42] This statement is made based on oral history.
[43] The Experiment Ensembles also made modifications to adapt to the ensemble size. Visit Chapter 5.5.

In my experiences of ensemble performances, it is common practice to change instruments and adapt scores based on available musicians. Commercial performance would prioritize the melody line throughout the song, regardless of instrumentation or accompaniment available. However, these present challenges of copyright are usually overlooked in Malaysia (see Chapter 5.4), besides requiring musical coordination and strong musical sense to maintain musical coherence. In comparison, Chinese orchestra concerts tend to have better regulations and serious rehearsals, with strict adherence to scores and instrumentation regulations.

Which should come first? Technicality or musicality? Some argue that musical sense (音乐感) is not innate but can be nurtured through practice and exposure; others believe that music affinity leads to the desire for technical improvement. Regardless, the path to music cultivation depends on the right attitude (心态) and openness to encounter new cultures, languages, and music, taking the initiative to understand them and broaden perspectives (Interviewee 15).

Musical presentations vary based on the nature of the orchestra and overarching ideology of a particular locality. For example, I have experienced Taiwan's demand for high technical precision and heightened musical expression in my interactions with its schools and professional orchestras. This contrasts with my experiences in Malaysia, where certain pieces are deemed too challenging due to differing conditions and expectations.

Besides mastering pieces through repeated rehearsal, positioning oneself in diverse environment and musical contexts also provides opportunities for training and growth. My experiences in these environments deepened my appreciation of music and strengthened my connection to it. Malaysia's diversity offers the ideal breeding ground for learning and overcoming challenges to nourish the musical self.

I had countless instances of musical hybridity experiences in this environment, such as the formation of a hybrid orchestra at the university to accompany musical theatre productions, merging Chinese and Western instruments (in which I have played the *ruan*, cello, double bass, and piano). Another particularly exhilarating moment was a spontaneous performance with the Indian Samba Rock singer Darkkey, an entirely impromptu collaboration out of shared passions for music. During that performance, I improvised on the *daruan* as an electric bass. Who would expect a *daruan* playing *Samba Rock* music, other than in Malaysia? However, the encounter was fitting for the Malaysian context.

Due to its environmental factors, music practice in Malaysia might be challenging but highly rewarding in the accumulation of diverse and creative experiences and opportunities. Performances in diverse settings such as bars, busking, and impromptu jamming sessions with other musicians provided me with the opportunity to explore new musical horizons. In collaborating with musicians from different cultures and backgrounds, I break free from many traditional constraints of classical music training inherent in the Chinese orchestra education framework. This journey requires me to overcome reliance on scores and develop improvisation skills, which is unconventional in the orchestra setting. The transition from an orchestral mindset to a more soloistic role has been gradual, requiring mental rewiring and adaptation to various musical styles and performance techniques.

Essentially, musicality comes alongside technical improvement; both require cultivation for elevated musicianship. The intrinsic value of *huayue* transcends technical proficiency, embodying the transformative power of music for a fruitful journey with encounters that contribute to personal and collective growth and an appreciation of the world we live in. This exploration ends the chapter as an indirect response to the question on the Chinese orchestra's significance in value production. Music, at its core, embodies the spirit of cultural traditions; it is a profound philosophical reflection that invites contemplation on the very nature of humanity itself.

Chapter 5 – Adaptive Management for Resilience

Discussion topics in Chapter 5 explore themes of resilience and adaptive management strategies within the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia. For better comprehension of these concepts, it is crucial to grasp the fundamental characteristics of a healthy ecosystem—stability, sustainability, and resilience to external stressors.

Environmental science defines a healthy ecosystem as one that is active and sustain its organization and autonomy over time, despite external pressures (Costanza et al. in Costanza and Mageau, 1999: 107). In other words, an ecosystem's health, measured through resilience, is its ability to uphold its metabolic activity, internal structure, and organization. This resilience enables the ecosystem to link its various processes while adapting to changes.

Altogether, this scientific understanding of ecosystem health positions it in the context of its larger systems and components that comprise it (biotic and abiotic factors, webs of organization, etc.). It resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the assemblage, where heterogenous elements interact to form a cohesive whole. Hence, a diversity of management methods and growth trajectories is crucial for sustainability, providing the community with greater adaptational advantages for a greater chance of survival, as emphasized by Titon (2020).

Considering that the definition of an ecosystem's health depends on its context and environment, it is worth examining independent factors that challenge the ecosystem's resilience and stimulate adaptive management strategies. Returning to the rhizome metaphor, disruptions represent moments of asignifying rupture, where the rhizome (or ecosystem) may be broken or shattered at any spot, but has the potential to rebound along existing trajectories or forge new paths (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). For the Chinese orchestra ecosystem, these challenges include pressures of pandemic, digitalization, societal influence, and other sociocultural reasons that affect its trajectories—choices to ensure the vitality of the cultural ecosystem. Each of these challenges represents a 'limitations to growth', Titon's (2020) second ecological principle.

To evaluate the health of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem, we must examine its response to various adversities and environmental shifts. By scrutinizing its resilience and adaptive management strategies, we gain insights into its vitality and long-term sustainability. To begin, the resilience and adaptability of the Chinese orchestra can be gauged by its response to two interconnected phenomena—the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapter 5.1) and the

ongoing process of digitalization (Chapter 5.2). These disruptions compelled the evolution of the Chinese orchestra's existing practices.

The pandemic's significance extends beyond its immediate health implications to its profound impact on natural and cultural ecosystems. The Chinese orchestra, like most arts cultures, faced unprecedented challenges due to their reliance on physical presence for activities. Despite these concerns, the community is gradually rebounding, potentially emerging even stronger. Nonetheless, the long-term effects are still under scrutiny, calling for a comprehensive examination of the ecosystem's state of health and future trajectory.

Data analysis through Voyant Tools reveal strong relationships between the keyword 'internet' and the 'future'[1] (网络；未来, 129 counts), as well as the 'effect' of the 'pandemic' (疫情；影响, 127 counts), out of a total of 1652 identified contexts for both keywords. This indicates the community's strong perspective on the significance of technology in shaping future trajectories and responding to current challenges.

Figure 28. Collocate Counts for 'Internet-Future' and 'Pandemic-Impact' in Voyant Tools Analysis

Specifically, discussions of digitalization is underscored by its collocates that include the pandemic (网络；疫情, 52 counts), online teaching (网络；教学, 38 counts), and the impact of the internet[2] (网络；影响, 35 counts):

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[1] The future of digitalization is discussed in Chapter 6.3.

[2] To the Malaysian Chinese, '网络' (*wangluo*) is interchangeable to mean digitalization, online, internet, or connectivity, among other things.

	网络*	疫情	52
	网络*	样子	49
	疫情*	学生	44
	疫情*	课	43
	疫情*	期间	43
	网络*	说	42
	网络*	教学	38
	疫情*	样子	37
	网络*	话	35
	网络*	影响	35

Figure 29. Collocate Counts for 'Digitalization-Pandemic', 'Online-Teaching', and 'Internet-Impact' in Voyant Tools Analysis

Chapter 5.2 emphasizes technology, the internet, and its transformative impact on the Chinese orchestra community pre- and post-pandemic. Unlike Chapter 3, which focuses on the digital realm primarily as an alternative educational space, this section examines the broader contributions of technology, particularly in facilitating information access. Although technology was not introduced during the pandemic, its influence has been profound, radically shifting and propelling engagement with digital resources and the consumption of online content. The adaptive management strategies reflect not only a reaction to the pandemic, but also a response to the new platform for presenting the Chinese orchestra in a globalized, interconnected, and hybridized world.

Next, Chapter 5.3 shifts to the Chinese orchestra community's collaborations, commonly known as crossovers (跨界). These collaborations with other cultures and disciplines are essential for the survival and outward expansion of the Chinese orchestra. Baron and Walker (2019) propose that resilience is reinforced through living traditions shaped by external forces and interactions with other cultures. They suggest that, similar to nature, management responses must adapt or be resilient towards new species; exchanges with external factors are part of resilience and the building of multiple cultural identities. Thus, sustainability hinges on cooperation, interdependence, competition, and reconciliation, creating newer forms of tradition.

Broader discussions of interculturalism uncover limitations in Malaysia from the underlying 'us vs them' binary. Taylor (2012) highlights interculturalism and the breaking of

barriers of misunderstood dynamics between cultural groups, suggesting collaboration to resolve conflicts. Of course, this may seem like an evident solution, but it contains deeper nuances affecting its implementation, depending on the overarching environment. It also relates to issues of national identity and cohesion that leads to hybridity or its rejection, already discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

Under this section, several local examples of the Chinese orchestra's collaborations are assessed in convergence of cultural sustainability and community cohesion themes, revealing the ecosystem's management in a multicultural society where external interactions are constant and inevitable. Simultaneously, these interactions also reinforce and reshape the identity of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, in the process of becoming, towards sustainability in a new environment. Music serves as a source of cultural understanding and exchange, promoting intercultural dialogue and social cohesion (Crooke et al., 2023: 2). Neither multiculturalism nor interculturalism is inherently better or worse; the recognition of diversity and addressing of multiculturalism is a step towards collaboration and unity within the overall Malaysian sociocultural fabric.

In Chapter 5.4, adaptive management extends to issues faced by Chinese orchestra composers regarding scores and copyright. Titon (2020) stresses that sustainable music requires stewardship, a key element in formulating policies to protect and preserve music cultures. Composers occupy an important node in the rhizomatic structure of actors in the Chinese orchestra, generating music that sustains and grows the culture. Without their creative contributions, there is no music culture, making their survival and livelihood integral to the ecosystem's sustainability.

In this section, I have identified a cycle, or perhaps cycles within cycles, of copyright issues in Malaysia. While some view copyright challenges as obstacles to overcome, others resort to creative evasion tactics. Unauthorized alterations of musical scores are relevant topic affecting composers in the Chinese orchestra community. Interviews with practitioners shed light on small but impactful challenges related to copyright and score modification. Adaptive management strategies employed by both composers and musicians are critical to navigate these complexities and merit further discussion and action.

Ultimately, Chapter 5.5 presents findings from the experiment designed to determine the younger generation's adaptability to a globalized world within the Chinese orchestra community in the Klang Valley. The Experiment Ensembles are case studies that expand into

the macro, allowing for a broader examination of adaptive management strategies among young practitioners. Additionally, the concept of community cohesion (Cantle, 2024b) is adapted to the context of smaller group interactions. Observations from the experiment contributes to broader orchestra dynamics, as ensemble playing gains traction in the Chinese orchestra community. Community cohesion is particularly relevant, as symphony orchestras, innovative repertoires and productions are introduced to engage and adapt to the preferences of the younger generation (Szedmák, 2021: 164).

Chapter 5's exploration of resilience and adaptive management steers the Chinese orchestra ecosystem towards sustainability. Recognizing that any ecosystem is inherently subjected to 'perturbation, disturbance, and flux' (Titon, 2020: 215), diverse adaptive management methods contribute altogether to the ecosystem's vitality. Resilience theory and adaptive management practices aim to identify vulnerabilities within music cultures and strengthen resilience to mitigate regime shifts.

5.1 *Recitation of Leisure* (闲居吟)[3] – Pandemic Blues

Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic ('pandemic') provided an opportunity for orchestras to reconsider their business models, giving those adaptable to new circumstances a competitive edge (Szedmák, 2021). The pandemic imposed lasting changes to the Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem, from aspects of organization, human relations, to education, while accelerating the digitalization of performing arts. The pandemic period, from roughly March 2020 to mid of 2022, showcased the community's resilience and adaptive management strategies to navigate challenges and innovate, emphasizing the importance of crisis planning for post-pandemic recovery and growth.

Although the immediate impact of the crisis may have subsided, its lingering effects are significant. While not reviewing past events in detail, this study addresses the aftermath of the pandemic to examine the Chinese orchestra ecosystem's resilience. Detailed discussions of government cultural policies during the pandemic are deemed irrelevant here because government funding and support is a longstanding challenge of the community,

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[3] An essential figure of the *erhu*, Liu Tianhua (刘天华), composed this piece in 1928, during the earlier stages of modifications that lead to the establishment of the Chinese orchestra. The musical creation expresses his holiday mood, infused with thoughts about the future during a period of uncertainty—similar to the collective experience felt by many during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Guided listening (*erhu* master Xiao Baiyong, audio only): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEMhoLPvQFM

suggesting that these policies may not significantly alter the landscape, and the industry is gradually returning to equilibrium with a refreshed perspective. However, the Malaysian government's reputation management strategy is worth a brief mention.

Reputation management refers to the amount of funding allocated to the arts and culture sector to ensure its sustainability post-pandemic, and to attract tourists (Nikolaysen, 2022: 30). Recognizing the importance of the creative and culture industries, and the necessity of survival and sustainability of arts and cultural practitioners, the Malaysian government allocated RM17 million and an additional RM8 million in 2021 through national recovery programs managed by CENDANA, the country's Cultural Economy Development Agency (BERNAMA, 2021).

Despite so, Chinese orchestras in Malaysia, primarily run by education institutions or community-based organizations, may struggle to access these funds due to limited awareness or unmet eligibility requirements. Regardless, some registered organizations and those with established government collaborations have successfully secured the funding (see Chapter 5.3 on PCCO's crossover efforts).

The Chinese orchestra appears to be innately resilient in response to challenges posed by the pandemic. Constanza and Mageau (1999: 108) identifies a healthy (eco)system as one that upholds sufficient resilience to survive various minor disturbances. Resilience is measured from two aspects—the duration needed to recover from stress, and the magnitude of stress the system can withstand before reaching its thresholds to absorb stressors. The pandemic acts as a disruptor, altering the ecosystem's equilibrium towards the undesirable. A resilient system would show a quicker rebound and recovery from this previous change in state, 'retaining sufficient integrity to keep performing its core functions', as stated by Gunderson, Allen and Holling (2009).

The strategies employed by the Chinese orchestra can be viewed as a form of experimentation and adaptation in anticipation of changes (Titon, 2020: 198). In contestation, Pickett and White (1985) argue that disturbances and changes are inherent in any complex system, but there would be temporary states of equilibria when tipping points are reached. Resilience strategies aim to navigate these fluctuations to arrive at the most desirable temporary state during periods of flux. In this case, disturbances include regular challenges of the Chinese orchestra, and unforeseen ones, such as the pandemic.

However resilient, the Chinese orchestra is fragile as a cultural and arts product. This fragility can be likened to the grassroots in a forest fire—the surface may be devastated, but the roots run deep and are the first to regrow. Interviewee 25 philosophically reflects on lessons learnt during this period, in relation to nature (paraphrased):

Greatness becomes very fragile in the pandemic. Accept it naturally because our existence is miniscule in the face of nature's forces. The pandemic wreaked havoc on us, but animals are returning, the sky is clearer; nature has reclaimed its vitality. There is a silver lining—we learn the value of persistence without stubbornness, balancing personal pursuits with adaptability. The extended period of reflection allowed us to reevaluate our priorities and approach life with a balanced perspective. Ultimately, everybody is equal during the pandemic, no greater, no worse.

Similar introspections prompted some to question the indispensability of the Chinese orchestra. An interviewee pondered, 'If you have to eliminate many things, retaining only what is necessary, where do you position the Chinese orchestra within yourself?' The Movement Control Order (MCO) was also likened to a wake-up call that revealed the vulnerability of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Another individual equated the MCO to a sudden slap in the face, saying, 'When we cannot collaborate, perform together, and express the strengths of our culture's musical instruments, I realized the fragility of the orchestra ecosystem we have.' The interviewee continued, 'it is inherently weak; otherwise, why would we feel such a heavy impact on our profession? How do we create our value? I dare not that I have the answer. In fact, we still need to keep up with social progression. We need to bridge ourselves to the society…'

The pandemic served as a sobering revelation, exposing inadequacies and room for improvement in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem. This realization highlighted fundamental questions about the core value of the Chinese orchestra that necessitates its preservation and expansion. As stakeholders grapple with these challenges, an acknowledgement of the Chinese orchestra's vulnerability drives an extensive quest of recovery and growth for the sustenance of its societal values and meanings.

Interviewees shared a spectrum of responses, capturing both challenges and unexpected joys. Many faced significant frustrations, particularly performers who encounter financial strain due to the cessation of live performances. Despite so, composers were largely unaffected as the pandemic provided an uninterrupted period for focused composition work.

The cessation of live performances even increased demand for commissioned works, demonstrating the Chinese orchestra's ecosystem in sustaining creative endeavors and disruptions.

Interviewee 01, a full-time composer, commented that his workload, mostly from foreign countries, remained steady. Similarly, Interviewees 08 and 12 reported an increase in commissioned works during the pandemic, keeping them occupied. It is stated that 'composers are less affected than performing musicians because they have been working from home since forever'. The digitalization trend inspired composers, with Interviewee 08 creatively composing a piece that 'will never line up' to ridicule network latency.

On the other hand, practitioners in other roles encountered common frustrations, particularly regarding students and performances. Performers faced significant financial strain due to the cessation of live performances. Interviewee 30 remarks, 'There is huge financial impact because we are freelancers and our work involves exchanging time for money, equal to labor work'. Nonetheless, most Chinese orchestra practitioners remained resilient by holding dual positions, mitigating the financial impact through educational roles or other part-time jobs.

The concept of holding dual (or multiple) occupations in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem parallels the rhizomatic structure, where multiple lines of flight represent pathways for adaptative management and resilience. Unfortunately, due to the difficulty of maintaining a living by solely relying on one career in this industry, many practitioners have diverse skillsets and sources of income to withstand disruptions and ruptures in the ecosystem. Performers generally partake in other roles[4] as a safety net while nurturing their passion for *huayue* (refer to Appendix III for this breakdown). Some felt fortunate for not pursuing a full-time pathway in *huayue* (Interviewee 17), having *huayue* as a side income (Interviewee 16), or achieving a balance between teaching and performing (Interviewee 24), believing that their livelihoods would be heavily affected otherwise. This well-known resilience strategy of diversification in economics is one that Titon (2020: 200) highlights. Just as a rhizome's horizontal spread, connecting multiple points of growth, the multiplicity in career paths bolsters challenges and ensure sustainability in times of crisis.

Confoundingly, rumors circulated about practitioners leaving their jobs during the pandemic, with some supposedly changing their career paths to unrelated fields due to

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[4] The exception to performers having multiple-role, Interviewee 22 is also a part time English language teacher.

difficulties faced during the pandemic. However, the authenticity of these claims remains uncertain, and practitioners expressed reluctance to disclose such information. Interviewees note that they have not personally known anybody who made such a change, although they have heard of 'someone changing career paths', besides disclaiming that 'even if [they] knew, it isn't [their] position to disclose who it was'. The conjecture is that individuals might have sought temporary part-time employment outside the industry to sustain their livelihoods during the period of suspension, then returned to the Chinese orchestra scene once activities resumed.

During the period of inactivity, the less fortunate had to seek alternatives means to sustain an income. Interviewee 20, as a school instructor and performer, narrates that subsidies were provided by schools, whereas those who work in performances and gigs had a much more difficult time. Although there were indirect accounts of practitioners briefly engaging in delivery services part-time, many refrained from openly acknowledging these diversions, likely due to social stigma regarding the instability of their chosen careers during the crisis.

Pandemic experiences shared by the community reflect strong adaptability to new circumstances, allowing practitioners to continue their professional activities while mitigating the impact of pandemic-induced restrictions. The transition to virtual platforms presented a series of opportunities. Digitalization alleviated the need for physical travel to orchestras in diverse locations, saving time and travel expenses. This reduction in expenditure proved beneficial in navigating financial challenges posed by income reductions, and offered perks of focus and inner peace. For instance, Interviewee 27 described the MCO period as the happiest moment in his teaching career as it provided joy and relaxation.

Several practitioners found additional time to accomplish previously challenging goals due to time constraints, such as practicing their instruments for personal development and learning new composition skills. Additionally, by leveraging digital tools during the pandemic, practitioners explored new avenues for artistic expression, including video editing and graphic design, diversifying their skill set for an increasingly digitalizing landscape.

This period also fostered connection and collaboration within the community. Interviewee 33 mentioned organizing an online concert with other teachers to provide comfort and hope to audiences. A series of live solo performances aimed to alleviate the fear and isolation experienced by individuals stuck at home during the MCO. According to

Interviewee 23, online performances and recordings are valuable tools to promote *huayue* and expand its dissemination to a broader audience, including students from distant locations. These adaptive strategies not only helped practitioners sustain their livelihoods and further self-develop, but also fostered resilience within the Chinese orchestra ecosystem by enabling continued engagement and innovation despite the pandemic disruptions.

Another innovation is the production of 'cloud performances' (云合奏), where musicians record their parts separately and then use audio-visual editing to create a final product. Regardless, there are criticisms of online performances, like Interviewee 17, who express fatigue with the technical demands of editing, missing the live elements of playing together. Monetization is also challenging, as audiences expect free online content that hinders ticket sales. The interviewee contemplated requesting for donations as 'cultural fees', but the attention was shifted to alternative funding sources. Sponsorship came from software companies, and public universities allocated funding more generously due to reduced competition from other societies. Nonetheless, the Chinese orchestra community values live performances over online ones[5], in the beginning transitioning to hybrid synchronous performances, but gradually returning to live music once the pandemic subsided.

As mentioned, online education[6] emerged as the primary source of income for many practitioners. Depending on the institution, instructors faced varying salary scenarios, ranging from partial or full payment to no payment at all due to paused classes. Private students played a minimal role compared to school orchestra students and did not significantly impact finances. The transition to digital platforms for teaching and learning spurred creativity in curriculum development, including new organization strategies, follow-along practice sessions, and workshops on instruments, compositions, composers, and general music appreciation.

The transition to online teaching posed challenges for both teachers and students, with some initial resistance. Interviewee 33 describes a delay in starting online classes due to discomfort with the new format, which required a period of adjustment, but online classes became manageable, though not necessarily better than in-person sessions. Additionally, interviewee 16 details strategies to ensure the orchestra's progress and adaptation to online formats:

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[5] See Chapter 6.3 for an examination of possibilities for a digitalized future.
[6] Chapter 3.4 details online education in the exploration of virtual space.

Everybody knows it is ineffective, but it is to maintain enthusiasm. We attempted many things, such as seminars, and tried to normalize it like in-person rehearsals. We have instrument practices and orchestra rehearsals, so that students have a feeling of normalcy. We cannot rehearsal together, although everybody is practicing individually with their cameras and microphones off. We conducted all our planned programs, including music camps and student conductor training. If we don't train them, it becomes daunting when we return in person.

One significant aftermath of the pandemic is the decline in average standards, particularly affecting musical and interpersonal skills among secondary students aged 14 to 16, who were in the beginner-intermediary stages of learning. This isolation gap led to the inadequate transfer of knowledge from senior to junior, a crucial format of learning in the Chinese orchestra (Interviewee 02), necessitating a restart upon the resumption of in-person activities. Nonetheless, adaptation management and environmental factors result in varying standards across regions, with some schools in northern Malaysia showing improvement post-pandemic while others in central and southern Malaysia struggle to recover, observed during post-pandemic orchestral competitions (Interviewee 28). Moreover, Interviewee 33 notes that changes to the economic structure led to a reduction in funds from sponsors, resulting in fewer activities.

Overall, practitioners acknowledge this transitional phase, expecting recovery over subsequent batches of students. however, it is imperative to recall that successful adaptive management is not uniform across the Chinese orchestra. Some struggle with member and audience engagement during the pandemic, with students losing interest in online classes (Interviewee 05). Interviewee 29 even described it 'as if the orchestra died during the pandemic'. Efforts to engage members and audiences digitally had mixed responses, with some unwilling to participate. Others left the orchestra post-pandemic, attributed to fear of the virus and changes in life circumstances. The orchestra management is dumbstruck by non-response, delays, and loss in scheduled activities.

There is a rupture in generational continuity due to the two-year period of online classes and activity stagnation. Before the pandemic, Interviewee 27's orchestra boasted around 300 students, a highly robust scenario. However, shifts to online learning led to approximately 100 students leaving the extracurricular activity from academic stress and online fatigue. As physical interactions resumed, the temporary downturn in population gradually recovered, with resurging sense of community and passion for *huayue*. Similarly,

Interviewee 13's school in the north saw a rebound from its steep decline of 80 to 15 members. The rebound also signifies the ecosystem's resilience and capacity for renewal.

On the other hand, Experiment Ensemble participants express feelings of isolation and disappointment stemming from the shift to virtual platforms, where the sense of community and social interaction is diminished. A recent high-school graduate from Experiment Ensemble 1 recalled his disappointment during his orchestra's online farewell ceremony, feeling alone in a virtual community. Current students also lamented missing out on concert performance opportunities that would have been organized under normal circumstances.

Educators express shared concerns about the pandemic's impact on social interaction and personality development, noting decreased comprehension, a slower rate of learning, and 'weird personalities' attributed to the lack of physical interactions during online learning, besides distractions from immersion in the digital world. Interviewee 23 remarks that students often just stare without understanding, a sentiment echoed by Interviewee 09. This challenge is not only apparent in the Chinese orchestra, but also academic studies and interpersonal relationships. Students show disinterest in 'doing too much', voiced by the school to cancel extra rehearsal sessions during holidays. Moreover, the lack of organizational skills and the need for assistance in running activities are noted by Interviewees 16 and 23, due to the generation rupture mentioned earlier. Fortunately, younger generations of students are gradually returning to normalcy.

Early-stage learners struggled with inaccessibility to instruments or clear goals, potentially regressing during the pandemic. New students joining during this time struggled with physical adaptation and lacked group learning experience, unable to fully connect during physical rehearsals. For younger Experiment Ensemble 2 members, the pandemic disrupted their *huayue* journeys but spurred exploration and growth in music-related hobbies. Those involved in different orchestras have increased productivity during the pandemic, facilitated by regular individual practice sessions and online classes, highlighting the importance of supporting structures for engagement and motivation.

In part, the adaptive management of institutions and practitioners play an important role at the onset of the pandemic. Nikolaysen (2002: 23-24) asserts that leaders, in crisis management, are required to create alternative pathways, and the struggles of leaders are important to be recognized and overcome. Indeed, there are vigilant practitioners who

instructed students to bring instruments home before the MCO, or adjusted teaching methods for new students who lacked basic instrument knowledge. Regardless, limitations in hardware and environmental disruptions hindered practical learning. The work-from-home environment proved to be inconducive for online learning, and the digital realm pose challenges to musical learning and presentation, especially in gauging volume and collaborating effectively without physical presence, resulting in lower practical standards and a reliance of sonic imagination.

Changes in administrative leadership within educational institutions, on the other hand, can impact the operational efficacy of school Chinese orchestras. Interviewee 16, believing in the universality across schools, highlights the pivotal role of teacher advisors in facilitating the transition during administrative change, further adding, 'if you are unlucky, you will go into war'. The thriving or collapsing of the orchestra management depends on factors like the level of involvement of the *huayue* instructor in administrative tasks, dynamics between the instructor and new teacher advisor, the teacher advisor's familiarity with society management, and their administrative style. Furthermore, Interviewee 11's school experienced a stroke of luck when the school administration revamped their management policies to include board directors overseeing the revitalization of major societies. Adding to their good luck, the appointed director was supportive and actively aided in fundraising efforts.

The Chinese orchestra, in its complex and unpredictable networks of formations, must remain prepared to adjust to unforeseen changes. Titon suggests that resilience strategies require living with a degree of uncertainty, with a thinking that captures and embraces the dynamic nature of the world (2020: 199-200). He advocates a consideration of partnering with cultural organizations, to identify changes in regime and thus implement resilience strategies. I extend this consideration to include all stakeholders involved in the Chinese orchestra, such as the school management and social organizations, to embrace an adaptive mindset, ready for collective collaboration and management, empowering practitioners to thrive amidst unpredictable circumstances.

Post-pandemic, Nikolaysen (2022: 82) suggests the examination of the permanent impacts on concerts and performances, especially due to financial burdens of the audience. She notes an increase in younger audience participation, along with a shifting perspective towards technology and online presences. However, the implication in Malaysia seems more pronounced among practitioners than audiences, potentially due to the distinct context

between professional orchestras and amateur ones. Additionally, Malaysia's unique environment and audience dynamics further complicate the small analysis of its small audience pool.

Since 2022, the Chinese orchestra ecosystem witnessed a re-flourishing of live performances, dubbed as 'revenge performance' (报复性演出), peaking in mid-2023. As expressed by Interviewee 30, 'we are now having concerts like a revenge'. This surge stemmed from both the resumption of canceled performances and the introduction of new ones, injecting vibrancy into the community. Yet, it also introduced challenges such as audience dilution, and scheduling conflicts due to performers participating in multiple concerts. Talent attrition during the pandemic and competition for specialized performers post-pandemic compounded these challenges (Interviewee 15).

In the earlier stages of return to the Chinese orchestra scene, there was a plethora of performances to attend, offering me ample opportunities for connection and networking. The resilience of the Chinese orchestra community becomes evident; concerts serve as social gatherings where community members support concert organizers and reconnect with one another, the full house in attendance marking a positive trajectory of growth. Although not fully realized, the communal value of the Chinese orchestra is strong since its inception, its position in the creative/cultural industry fortified by its persistence in upholding intrinsic values in society.

The pandemic prompted a critical reassessment of crisis handling within the Chinese orchestra, leading to extensive reorganizations aimed at ensuring sustainability. Leaders and their teams are tasked with the role of assessing and navigating challenges presented by the crisis, learning lessons for future management strategies (Nikolaysen, 2022: 86). Interviewee 16 emphasizes the profound influence of leadership decisions for promoting character development over technical proficiency. An inheritance of appreciation towards the importance of heritages is a critical direction to sustain the values of the Chinese orchestra.

Ultimately, 'pandemic blues' presented the Chinese orchestra community with a unique opportunity for introspection and rebound. Poetically capturing sentiments expressed by various interviewees, this period of disruption catalyzed a deeper appreciation for the inherent richness of the Chinese orchestra, sustained by grassroot communities. This juncture forced a deliberate pause for practitioners to contemplate the collective trajectory to elevate the Chinese orchestra's social standing.

Here, we finally revisit the metaphor of the rhizome and its rupture. Like a rhizome with roots buried deep, the Chinese orchestra is difficult to be broken down, possessing remarkable ability to rebound from the lines that it draws away from the rhizomatic structure. This can be compared to Deleuze and Guattari's principle of asignifying rupture (1987: 9), akin to ants, resiliently rebounding even after critical destruction. Placing this back to the context of the Chinese orchestra, the nature of the ecosystem's structure is changed in the process of crisis and disruptions, but its lines (connections) still tie back to one another—the Chinese orchestra retains its fundamental integrity in the development of new adaptive management strategies. At the time of writing, the Chinese orchestra appears to be rebounding well, with promising prospects for the future.

5.2 *Digital Stream* (数码溪流)[7] – **Digitalizing the Chinese Orchestra**

Digitalization for adaptive management within the Chinese orchestra community involves two aspects—using digital resources, and creating and consuming digital content. Nikolaysen (2022: 52-53) identifies increased interest in technology for performances and productions in recent years. For example, there is more active social media presence, replacing sheet music on paper to digital formats using iPads, online concert streaming, apps for podcasts, shared recorded music and videos, and many more. Digital concert halls further expand the orchestra's reach and enables remote audience interactions, during times of restricted gathering. Although not entirely new, in the Chinese orchestra, there is an apparent shift towards technological solutions to fulfil musical aspirations and organizational needs.

Research participants concur the pandemic's role in promoting the use of digital resources and online content, although there is rebalancing of online-offline dynamics post-pandemic. Nevertheless, the internet has created alternatives and new directions for the Chinese orchestra, with its strong roles in disseminating to a wide audience (Interviewee 33). Social media has also transformed personal profile crafting and community engagement, fostering musician collaborations, with Facebook and YouTube as principal platforms for the Chinese orchestra community.

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[7] This creative project (2021) by Wang Chenwei (王辰威) is crafted for digital presentation amid Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, depicting fast-evolving technology that accommodates the flourishing arts (Wang, 2021). The title reflects the rapid transition to the digital realm in the modernizing society.
Guided listening (Ipseity): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VQBs82Bctk

The 'new normal' integrates technology for virtual communication and collaboration through the virtual world, saving time and eliminating travel needs (Participant 04). Moreover, digitalization is seen as a step towards environmental sustainability, although it remains debated (Skovbon, 2024: 222). The pandemic has shown the internet's value as an alternative to in-person communication. Digital platforms increased efficiency for the convenience of online meetings between schools located far apart, and students submitting their homework through cloud platforms like Google Drive (Interviewee 03). This shift saves significant time and energy in educational settings.

'Digital thinking' in the musical ecosystem calls for the rethinking of values and ways of reaching audiences, and digitalization has become an inevitable reality in modern existence. Participant 25 illustrates this paradigm shift by reflecting on the evolution from cumbersome early digital input of Chinese characters to the current indispensable role of mobile phones. With the ascent of AI technologies, there is a compelling need to reconsider how *huayue* can effectively adapt to the digital. Yet, although digital resources offer significant benefits, it is crucial to balance them with traditional platforms to preserve the personal touch and uniqueness of human creativity[8]. Therefore, the recognition of digital limitations ensures this balance is maintained.

As digitalization progresses, basic electronic devices like tuners and metronomes have transformed into mobile phone applications, offering users with practicality and convenience. Remarkably, these applications now possess levels of sophistication comparable to traditional physical hardware. Participant 23 and other practitioners increasingly promote the use of apps like metronome and tuner for musicians, recognizing that manual tempo keeping can be inconsistent and additional gadgets can be costly for learners. Recording apps also benefit students by allowing them to listen and reflect on their own playing. Experiment Ensemble members note accelerated improvement through the observation of audio and video recordings. According to a participant, viewing themselves from the audience's perspective generate resonance with their experiences and feelings, helping them to identify and address issues more efficiently.

Besides that, technology and the internet have revolutionized score acquisition and dissemination, transitioning from traditional mailing methods[9] to digital sharing. Research participants emphasized the convenience of accessing and sharing scores via cloud platforms

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[8] Chapter 6.3 debates the differentiated perspectives of live and digital music.
[9] Revisit Chapter 1 for past practices.

like Google Drive, as well as the option to purchase them directly from composers through social media. Interviewee 24, experienced in score management, prefers digital scores due to concerns about handwritten scores' quality and reliability, the time-consuming process of transcribing between different notation systems, and the need for checking during rehearsals.

The adoption of tablets for displaying musical scores offers significant environmental advantage by reducing paper usage. Skovbon (ibid.: 211-213) suggests that digital sheet music is more sustainable than printed scores, although its effectiveness depends on factors like device cost, annotating methods, and screen comfort. In the Chinese orchestra, scores are usually sent via cloud platforms, with musicians either printing physical copies or simply displaying them on their devices. This trend is particularly noticeable, in my observations of younger generation musicians who use tablets and page turners (foot pedals). Overall, the transition is practical for performers, as it reduces problems of lost scores, unclear photocopies, and environmental disruptions like wind.

However, the transition requires a period of adaptation to new methods of digital annotation and score navigation. While I occasionally use digital scores for impromptu rehearsals or last-minute performances, I am more accustomed to physical scores. The extent of digital score usage is influenced not only by personal preference but also two key factors—purchasing power and digital technology adoption. In community-based Chinese orchestras, where financial resources are limited, the acquisition of score-reading devices like tablets relies on the musicians' personal investment (score-reading is an added benefit of owning the device), while school orchestras usually foster a culture of physical scores for better management and uniformity. Moreover, children and senior musicians may lack digital literacy or access to these devices, limiting their engagement with digital score technologies.

The ease of digital score access opens doors to risks such as unauthorized access and illegal sales of compositions on online platforms, challenging composers to safeguard their intellectual property rights. As a result, manual policing becomes necessary to address misuse in the digital landscape. Copyright concerns also arise, as practitioners must determine which music content can be legally shared online (see Chapter 5.4).

Despite these challenges, digitalization offers opportunities for innovation and efficiency in music education and performance practices, providing a platform for exploring new teaching methods and gaining new musical knowledge. A significant benefit from the internet is the revolutionized access to music resources for the Chinese orchestra—*huayue* in

all various forms and styles can easily be obtained online. The need to source and purchase physical audiovisual materials is eliminated. Interviewee 15 notes that the internet provides tangible proof that 'we are right in our past practices', assuaging uncertainties in teaching and performance approaches.

Interviewee 29 reflects on the impact of the internet on information accessibility, especially for younger generations. With globalization, the traditional senior-teaching-junior model is supplemented by self-directed online searches, enabling students to access a diverse range of information to enhance their musical skills and techniques. However, there is a caveat to the resourcefulness of the internet. With the convenience offered by the internet to purchase instruments through online shopping platforms, 'modern parents' tend to unduly trust their online searches, inadvertently purchasing low-quality or non-functional instruments for their children without consulting instructors (Interviewee 28).

Nonetheless, in education, online platforms are useful for visual teaching aids. Interviewee 23 explains how digital platforms allow visual demonstrations of techniques for instruments like the *dizi*, saying, 'I couldn't possibly cut my throat open, so I will show them the breathing method and such using physical anatomy videos'. This innovative approach addresses the limitations of traditional classroom settings where certain physical demonstrations may not be feasible, enhancing student comprehension and mastery of abstract musical concepts and techniques.

Visual aids come in many formats, illustrating the wealth of imageries and inspiration from the internet without the need to physically attend distant performances. Interviewee 23 adds an example of accessing Mongolian folk tunes and glimpses into Mongolian life through YouTube, no longer having to physically visit the region. However, the challenge for educators is guiding students to use the internet as a knowledge repository rather than entertainment— 'if you use the internet for useless things, then it is really useless' (Interviewee 23).

Several practitioners agree on the value of online videos for learning and inspiration. This knowledge is not limited to Chinese orchestra presentations; practitioners also mentioned learning from world-renown symphony orchestras like the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra[10] and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which promoted digital concert live streams

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[10] I have found that the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra is a consistent 'academic reference' for Chinese orchestra practitioners I am connected with. They frequently share news and resources from the orchestra on social media, including the referred Digital Concert Hall, which I have also accessed for free during the pandemic.

during the pandemic. Interviewee 23 reiterates the fortune to access to expensive and high-quality resources made available at the time.

Concurrently, Szedmák (2021: 165) observed a surge in live streaming during the pandemic, with accessible social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Instagram becoming popular for performance. Despite this trend, online activities have reduced post-pandemic as physical venues reopened. Researchers like Skobvon show interest in examining the continued use of streaming services post-pandemic (2024: 214). Essentially, impacts of digitalization are already evident in various aspects of the Chinese orchestra. The abundance of materials uploaded during the pandemic has left lasting digital footprints that remain as references (Interviewee 13). Moreover, digitalization prompted more delicate handling of musical pieces, with musicians making repeated recording for the best musical performance, in contrast to the less thorough attitude toward ephemeral physical performances.

An interesting concept of refinement (精致化), a refined processing of music for higher performance standards, is raised by a few interviewees, regarding the pursuit of excellent performance quality within the Chinese orchestra (more in Chapter 6.4). I assert that this aspiration for refined performance is influenced by digitalization, where performers strive to emulate the high standards set by professionals on social media platforms. The pressure to deliver exceptional performances is heightened by the awareness that physical shows are now recorded and shared online, extending their reach to international audiences and prolonging their lifespan. Consequently, there is an increased emphasis on achieving high standards in both live and digital presentations to meet rising audience expectations across various platforms.

The 'celebrity effect' (明星效应), highlighted by Interviewee 21, is another outcome of social media. Global Chinese orchestra enthusiasts are familiar with orchestras like the Hsinchu City Youth Chinese Orchestra (新竹青年国乐团) from Taiwan and their annual Hsinchu Chinese Music Festival (竹堑国乐节), a successful model of publicity through YouTube. Its conductor and individual performers are pursued like 'celebrities' within the younger Chinese orchestra community. Similarly, orchestras like the Suzhou Chinese Orchestra become idols and role models, increasing their traction among audiences and driving the need to upkeep their professional status.

Intriguingly, Suzhou Chinese Orchestra maintains a presence on 'Western' online platforms like YouTube despite China's Great Firewall. How and why is this achieved?

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Firstly, it reflects the orchestra's strategic efforts for international appeal, showcasing its performances, repertoire, and cultural heritage to a global audience. Furthermore, its established international audience attracts continuous funding and support from patrons, sponsors, and audiences, thereby ensuring financial sustainability and artistic growth. However, under the 'halo effect' (光环效应), it is crucial to maintain a balanced perspective to acknowledge that a polished public image may conceal underlying issues present in every orchestra.

Nonetheless, these digital appearances exemplify successful adaptive management methods in the broader Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Nikolaysen's observation of symphony orchestras demonstrate a growing recognition for the imperative to digitalize and revitalize their business models, a trend accelerated by the pandemic (2022: 71). Indeed, the prevalence of pre-planned videos on YouTube showcases the increasing integration of digital technology in creative endeavors. For example, HKCO leverages 5G technology to create immersive effects (Interviewee 04). Moreover, other practitioners admire the skillful camerawork and video editing in professional orchestra productions. This calls for Malaysian Chinese orchestras to embrace innovative artistic possibilities of digitalization and new technology, although some still resist due to antiquated mindsets about the digital realm.

Malaysian orchestras' reluctance to upload their videos online raises questions. An interviewee comments that many do not dare to publicize their performances to showing unsatisfactory performances. However, students of institution orchestras should not feel ashamed of going wrong. This phenomenon requires further research as it involves complex associations. Factors like organizational culture, perceived audience expectations, competitiveness, sense of inferiority, performance standards, and copyright are preliminary limitations that hinder the publicizing of performance materials. A better understanding of these motivations and barriers would foster a more collaborative environment to promote the sharing of music by Chinese orchestras in Malaysia for educational or artistic purposes.

According to Szedmák (2021: 162), digital transformation is fundamentally reshaping organizational operations and value delivery. Ultimately, economic growth of an orchestra is essential for its sustainability, hence requiring business model innovation. One notable transformation is the adoption of online ticketing systems, moving away from door-to-door sales. Although not all Chinese orchestras have embraced this new ticketing avenue, those aiming for professionalism often do.

Interviewees 24 and 29 particularly discuss the challenges of traditional ticketing methods that prompted their transition to online platforms. Traditionally, concert ticket sales relied on personal connections and manual promotion, limiting audience reach and efficient sales procedures. Moreover, the evolving media consumption landscape complicates traditional media promotion. However, Interviewee 29 explains how online ticketing systems and outsourcing to ticketing agencies expanded their audience base beyond the Chinese community and streamline sales processes. This transition allowed their orchestra to focus on performance, with the agency handling financial transactions.

Similarly, Interviewee 24 comments on challenges of audience control in traditional ticket selling methods and its economic impact on the orchestra. Digital ticketing platforms not only streamline sales but also broadcast the event to new audiences, unlocking a different crowd. With improved digital literacy, digital marketing efforts are increasingly common among Chinese orchestras. Universities such as UCSI and UTAR are leading examples of institutions that effectively engage multimedia content to promote concerts and educate audiences, using promotional clips and campaign videos (Interviewee 17). Despite this, most Chinese orchestras still rely on traditional marketing and ticketing methods because of financial restraints and institution control.

In promoting and connecting the Chinese orchestra community, Facebook remains the primary social media platform, supplemented by YouTube resources. Presumably a generational preference for Facebook, practitioners leverage social media to promote themselves, their institutes, workshops, and performances. They also use as their résumé to obtain job and teaching opportunities. Facebook groups dedicated to specific musical interests become centralized hubs for information exchange, including members from countries like Japan and Korea (refer to Chapter 3.4).

The internet has revolutionized global musical collaboration and connectivity. Social media platforms empower professionals to share performances, network with others worldwide, and access learning resources without geographical barriers (Interviewees 15 and 23). Social media is particularly powerful for student recruitment and job opportunities in the industry. Many individuals who are interested in learning Chinese music search for local orchestras and practitioners through online platforms (Interviewee 26 and 27). Additionally, social networking sites can lead to unexpected collaborations, such as an agency hiring local *huayue* musicians to perform in a China artist's concert in Malaysia.

There is a growing use of Instagram and Tiktok among the younger generation for promotion and connection. Interviewee 30 shares the strategies for a global appeal of learning the *guzheng*, by offering online courses with English subtitles. Social media helps demystify stereotypical perspectives of traditional instruments like the *suona*, attracting younger learners through viral videos and content to explore its unique sounds and cultural significance (Interviewees 26). Previously viewed as traditional and noisy, 'playing for the dead' (in funerals), the *suona*'s newfound online fame, revolutionized into a cool and trendy instrument, revitalized interest in the instrument for sustained learnership among secondary school Chinese orchestras.

The Experiment Ensemble's experience highlights the internet's central role in adaptive management for organizational purpose. Social media apps and chat apps like WhatsApp and Messenger streamline communication for performances and rehearsals, information sharing, and the coordination of bonding activities. Added together, this demonstrates the significance of digital media in fostering community cohesion and improving organization efficiency.

However, alongside these advantages, several participants express concerns about the potential drawbacks of online activities. Interviewee 17 mentions digital fatigue, leading to exhaustion and diminished interest after prolonged online engagement. Similarly, Interviewee 12 suggests that overreliance on digital productions could also lead to unhealthy perceptions and devaluation of online cultural performances.

Despite these valid concerns, a natural shift away from extensive online media consumption has occurred post-pandemic, with a return to live performances evident in the 'revenge performance' trend of 2023 (see previous section). This shift indicates a natural adjustment in consumption patterns as individual seek communal experiences offered by in-person events. Interviewee 26 compares success in the music industry with politics, emphasizing the importance of fostering meaningful relationships and connections with the local community. In other words, the practitioner is detached from its people in the digital realm; with lesser community cohesion, the impact of cultural promotion becomes inconsequential.

Szedmák's comparison of orchestras' experiences in physical and digital spaces during the pandemic concludes that different models and productions are required, as successful performance models may not translate well online (ibid.: 169). This brief theme of

digitalization offers a glimpse into the Chinese orchestra ecosystem's adaptability to a changing environment, showcasing resilience and innovation in embracing alternative modes of operation, performance, and audience engagement.

5.3 *Merging Together* (融合)[11]– Cross-cultural and Cross-disciplinary Collaborations

In Titon's summary of resilient communities, a resilient system can diversify and localize operations without compromising the integrity of its whole, including its innovation capabilities. This resilience often relies on informal networks, rooted in deep trust, to overcome disruptions (Zolli and Healy, 2012, and Walker and Salt, 2006, in Titon, 2020: 201-202). One potential trajectory to enhance resilience and expand of the Chinese orchestra, like lines of flight across multiple planes, is collaborating with other communities.

To thrive in a multicultural landscape like Malaysia, adaptation to new elements and fostering cultural identity are essential for a community's survival. This imperative for crossovers becomes apparent when considering cultural understanding and acceptance, as practitioners question the accessibility of traditional Chinese music to non-Chinese audiences, and the likelihood of such audiences attending unfamiliar cultural performances. The candid response is likely negative, reflecting the demand for innovation in presentations. Actual collaborations are versatile in form and context, including commercial performances, theatre and experimental shows, digital music, and more. Aptly described by an interviewee, such collaborations are necessary as 'a rule of survival in Malaysia'.

The Chinese orchestra has its own interpretation of the concept of 'crossover' (跨界, *kuajie*). Interviewees typically perceive it as collaborations with elements beyond the confines of the Chinese orchestra and traditional Chinese music. This understanding can be further divided into two concepts of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary activities. Cross-cultural endeavors usually entail multiculturalism and collaborating with other ethnicities, while cross-disciplinary initiatives explore connections with various art forms or performance genres beyond the traditional scope of the Chinese orchestra.

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[11] This fusion for trio percussion is composed by Leong Ching Chiang (梁禎祥) in 2019 as a component of his master program's assignment. Adequately chosen as the title, this piece part of the Experiment Ensemble's repertoire and resonates with the theme of hybridity of music, its nature as a hybrid percussion piece that experiments with different musical writing techniques and utilizes both Western and Chinese percussion instruments.

Practitioners have extensively discussed crossover collaborations, generally responding well towards these endeavors. The prominence of collocates such as 'crossover-collaboration' (跨界；合作), 'crossover-music' (跨界；音乐), 'crossover-instrument' (跨界；乐器), 'crossover-performance' (跨界；演出) and 'crossover-audience' (跨界；观众) indicate the significance of multicultural collaborations to the Chinese orchestra community (see ensuing figure).

Figure 30. Collocates of 'Crossover' in Voyant Tools Analysis

Collaborative efforts are essential to transcend conventional boundaries of Chinese orchestra repertoires and innovate beyond traditional confines of *huayue*. From the 1990s, with the liberation government policies, there is an increase in cultural exchanges and collaborations to create new content and multidimensional works in different spaces, attracting a wider range of audiences across boundaries (Tan, S. B., 2023). Despite so, many practitioners recognize *huayue*'s limitations and advocate for cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary performances, viewing them as avenues for innovation and creativity. Interviewee 20 notes a bottleneck in the expansion of *huayue*, with a lack of new concepts and repetitive approaches, emphasizing the need for experimentation and cultural exchanges to expand possibilities beyond the *huayue* path.

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Crossover experimentations require out-of-the-box thinking to embrace diverse musical styles, instruments, performance types, and audience experiences. Especially for Interviewee 22 who is an independent performer, crossover performances are both a livelihood and a pursuit of personal growth as a musician:

I felt unable to compete with music majors, so maybe I could open a pathway of my own. The future is full of surprises. Performing with different people widens your horizon and perspectives, dismantling your pre-existing frames of thought.

Some practitioners similarly acknowledge the confining 'loop' in the Chinese orchestra landscape, having prevailing narrowed frame of thought about *huayue* and its performances, which may not appeal to broader audiences. Interviewee 26 sees crossovers as paths to promote *huayue* through fresh perspectives and increase visibility in other cultural circles, with the recognition that audiences seek new experiences from Chinese orchestra concerts.

Crossovers often involve the merging of multiple elements, organizations, and disciplines, sometimes incorporating new locations and technologies. Unlike conventional performances, the diversity offered by crossovers generate a revitalizing and impactful experience to both performers and audiences. Ultimately, crossovers bring people together to promote cultural exchange and expand the reach of the respective cultures to new audiences, achieving the goal of cultural expansion.

Cross-disciplinary collaborations have sparked innovative and enriching experiences. Interviewees recount events that transcend conventional and non-conventional disciplinary boundaries, including dance, choir, theatre, lion dance, and even Buddhist ceremonies, demonstrating the adaptability of Chinese orchestra musicians to diverse sociocultural contexts. Interestingly, many collaborations are initiated by external parties, indicating a growing recognition of the Chinese orchestra's cultural significance and musical potential.

Successful crossover experiences often become integral to long-term plans for the orchestra. Interviewee 16 recounts his first collaboration with the school choir that attracted over a thousand audience members and paved the way for future crossovers to raise awareness of *huayue* in the local community. This elasticity of the Chinese orchestra connects

diverse audiences and disciplines, with the added benefit of valuable learning experiences for students involved. Most intriguingly, the orchestra has even performed an abacus concerto[12]!

Occasionally, cross-disciplinary endeavors extend to performances with Western musical instruments or fusion music (e.g., pop-Chinese music), presenting challenges like adapting foreign compositions into Chinese orchestra scores for performance with a Western string ensemble. Additionally, Interviewee 21, who had experience with jazz music, faced enjoyable encounters that shifted his classical music mentality to the frame of jazz music. These examples indicate the extra coordination efforts required for developing crossovers, which may be an impediment for practitioners.

Certain practitioners borrow innovative approaches from the Western symphony orchestra, like cosplay, to attract younger audiences. Interviewee 17 criticizes the involution for cosplay performances in symphony orchestras, but recognizes the potential appeal of video game soundtracks for the Chinese orchestra. For instance, his university orchestra experimented with music from video games like *Genshin Impact*, *Honkai Impact*, and *PUBG*, aiming to update its repertoire and engage youth musicians and audiences. This approach reflects a willingness to adopt external elements to expand and sustain music culture. In comparison to the Chinese orchestra of other regions, those in Malaysia appear slower in adopting globalized trends and diversification efforts.

The HKCO sets a precedent with its bold exploration of crossover collaborations with other art forms, labeled as 'cross-media', that pushes the boundaries of traditional artistic expressions. These projects include tea ceremonies, visual art, calligraphy, and multimedia presentations featuring soundscape recordings and videos. Despite unconventional presentations, even more audacious. Nevertheless, questions arise about ventures of this nature. Who bears the responsibility for initiating such collaborations, while gatekeeping the integrity of its participants' identity and the preservation of 'authentic culture'? What hinders the realization of creative endeavors despite widespread aspirations for escaping the *huayue* involution cycle?

Although crossover projects appear to be a growingly widespread practice, they remain unorthodox and encounter resistance from the community, partly attributable to entrenched mindsets and gatekeeping of what *huayue* should be. Due to fears of reproach, according to Interviewee 26, those who are interested struggle to initiate such collaborations,

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[12] This performance video is available on YouTube under the Chinese title《算盘回旋曲》.

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uncertain of how and where to begin. Furthermore, resistances arise in uncertainties of working together with disciplines like dance, adding complexity to its coordination (Interviewee 17).

Within certain circles of the community, efforts targeted to expand the Chinese orchestra's audience are sometimes viewed as marketing and attention-grabbing gimmicks, rather than genuine artistic and cultural promotion efforts. Focusing his work on collaborations, Interviewee 20 faces skepticism and questioning about his intentions behind them, often labeled as weird, unconventional, and deviating from established conventions. Yet, he insists on the exploration of innovative performance methods while avoiding extremities to cater to the mainstream Southeast Asian audience's tastes influenced by commercial music.

Crossover products further complicate the definition and conventional knowledge of *huayue*, as they are 'bits and pieces of everything'. As a result, Interviewee 20 emphasizes the need to preserve the traditional 'soul' in innovations, 'repackaging elements into something else but preserving the value and relevant to modern society requests'. Audience appreciation of crossover works requires familiarity and connection to eliminate biased perspectives and characterizing of its assemblage of elements. This angle consequently invalidates these works from being *authentically huayue*.

Despite efforts to balance tradition and innovation, certain practitioners remain cynical about the authenticity of crossovers, claiming that they deviate from tradition, without fully grasping their underlying intentions. This cautious 'safeguarding' behavior also assumes the duty of heritage preservation to certain parties, fueled by concerns that regime changes would erode tradition (Titon, 2020: 201). However, this paradigm tends to freeze in time what is presumed as tradition, disregarding its adaptability to environmental shifts. This behavior represents another form of adaptive management, albeit in response to perceived threats, and can hinder progress and cohesion within the community. The disparity in interpretations of tradition when navigating crossover initiatives would require improved communication and understanding for greater cohesion among practitioners.

Nevertheless, many research participants express openness to collaboration ideas if given the opportunity, citing personal reasons for their disengagement. Particularly, Interviewee 33 faces logical challenges in initiating engagements and connecting with like-minded individuals from different disciplines and cultures. Meanwhile, Interviewee 31

focuses on teaching and developing *huayue* in the local community, missing out on crossover opportunities. Generally, interviewees desire more local cross-cultural collaborations to create new fusion compositions and expand the reach of *huayue*.

In its musical sense, cross-cultural collaborations encounter more critical resistances than cross-disciplinary initiatives. Why the resistance? A plausible explanation is the pre-existing racial tension within Malaysian society[13], a theme presented in Chapter 4 concerning issues of hybridity and identity. In Malaysia, cross-disciplinary collaborations have lesser racial undertones, whereas cross-cultural collaborations require a heightened degree of open-mindedness. The strong 'us vs them' narrative in the discourse of Chinese orchestra practitioners reflects entrenched racial prejudices and societal segregation that permeate the Malaysian society. For effective cross-cultural partnerships, racial barriers must be dismantled, and social cohesion promoted.

Irrespective of cross-cultural collaborations, the mention of 'Malay' and 'Indian' people is constantly observed in interviews, signifying the prominence of racial segregation within the Malaysian Chinese community. This showcases the effectiveness of top-down-indoctrinated 'three main races of Malaysia' (马来西亚三大种族) narrative in Chinese education. The enduring prevalence of racial categorization and limited mention of other ethnic groups suggest that deeper notions of multiculturalism remain elusive among the Malaysian Chinese.
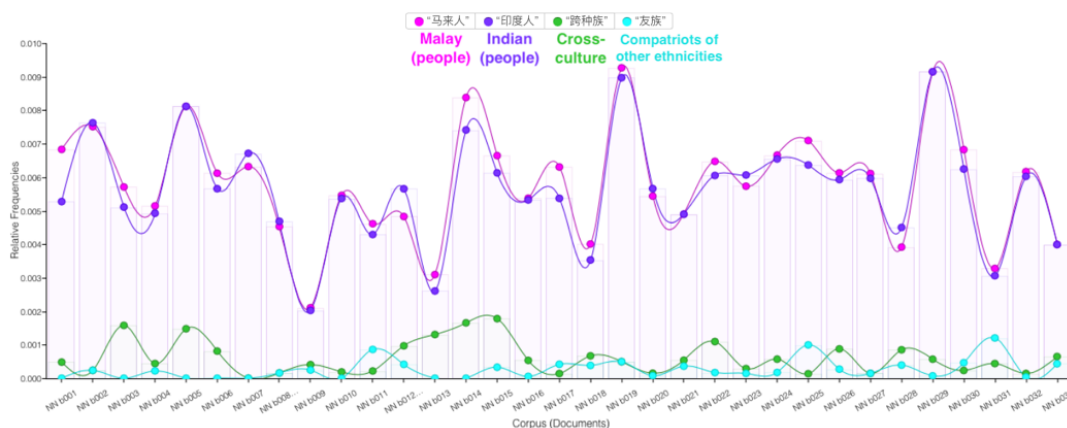
Figure 31. Relative Frequencies of Ethnic Mentions in Voyant Tool Analysis[14]

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[13] This tension, that arises from the nation's essentialism of races into Chinese, Malay, Indian and 'others', creates long-lasting impacts on its citizen's perception of national and cultural identity. As an outcome of cultural and economic policies of the country, its people struggle to navigate official calls to be 'Malaysian' while simultaneously be prefixed into racially segregated columns.

[14] Regrettably, due to software limitations outlined in the Methodology section, precise keyword tagging cannot be achieved when differentiating between 'Malay' (马来) and 'Malaysia' (马来西亚), as they share common

Interviewee 14 voices uncertainties about conservative attitudes surrounding cross-cultural collaborations, problematizing the 'us vs them' dichotomy and the general possessiveness and reluctance to engage with other cultures:

'The aspect of Chinese culture is the preservation of tradition. But the feeling became… what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours. Malaysia prides itself as multicultural, but I feel that we are not doing it. I do reflect on my position as a Chinese. What is the problem for isolating other ethnicities, not letting them in? Is it our problem, not fitting into their society, or is it something else? For developing the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia I think I need to be careful of this, the insulation between races.'

Another interviewee attributes the reluctance to deeply ingrained racial stereotypes and consciousness among different ethnic groups. This discourse, like many others, is nuanced with racial differencing, claiming that the Chinese community has a diligent commitment to cultural preservation, while other ethnicities are not putting in comparable effort.

All in all, underlying fears of 'us vs them' reside in the anxiety that an equal collaborator would erode existing practices. Many practitioners approach cross-cultural collaborations with the belief that differences must be accommodated and tolerated, other cultures have to be 'educated' and 'updated', reflecting a subtle form of discrimination where Chinese music is stronger and more adaptable than others. The commentaries are neither wrong, nor should they be normalized; this paradigm seems safer and more sensible, but it ultimately perpetuates a hierarchical cultural dynamic where trust must be earned before equal partnership is accepted (Taylor, 2012: 420).

Essentially, this phenomenon is also cultural safeguarding in play, manifesting as outward cultural superiority layered atop the paradoxical secondary sociocultural positioning out of racial politics that breed a sense of cultural inferiority and insecurity within the community. Delving deeper into these issues would necessitate the full unpacking of racial dynamics and cultural politics underlying the racial discourse and ideologies of Malaysia's diverse communities, all which inevitably influence its musical landscape.

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characters. Consequently, the keyword 'Indian people' (印度人) is used for fair comparison with 'Malay people' (马来人), omitting the keyword referring to a generalized 'Indian' (印度). Additionally, attempts to track the frequency of indigenous people using various keywords yielded negligible results.

In brief observations, I argue that racial politics in Malaysia perpetuate race-based narratives that hinder cultural assimilation or integration and promote a parochial understanding of multiculturalism. The current Malaysian context echoes Cantle's suggestion of a persistent 'primordial sense of national identity' in democratic societies (2014: 318). Ironically, diversity *is recognized* in the multicultural Malaysia—although traditional identities and differences are clung onto rather than eliminated—hence the juxtaposition for cross-cultural activities. Relating to the that, Taylor (2012) further contends that longstanding inequalities remain normalized and unquestioned. Multiculturalism circulates the understanding of how one should behave in society, based on assumed social footing and distance.

Cantle sees multiculturalism now as more intricate than categorizing majority and minority groups based on factors like race and socioeconomic status. Instead of merely accommodating cultures into a national framework, contemporary discourse stresses the examination of evolving identities across all segments of society, including those in the majority group. Globalization heightens the interconnectivity of the world, henceforth influencing how modern interactions transform collective identities (2014: 313). In an ideal *inter*cultural society, positive language like 'integration' is enforced, breaking away from existing identity politics (Cantle, 2024c). Interculturalism requires more than preservation and coexistence to foster interaction and dialogue.

Nonetheless, successful integration does not imply the homogenization of cultures, but involves a meaningful fusion of elements from each culture[15]. However, the depth of intercultural practices in Malaysian society warrant scrutiny. It is conceivable that many cross-cultural collaborations lack authenticity and fall short of genuine cultural confluence, resulting in superficial representations of cultural diversity. Interviewee 12 humorously illustrates this scenario through a stereotypical yet common performance practice:

> It can be as superficial as one Chinese musician wearing Chinese clothes, Malay musician wearing Malay clothes, and Indian musician wearing Indian clothes, and then they play something like *Fly Me to the Moon*.

At present, fusion attempts offer fleeting impressions of its constituent cultures, suggesting that the degree of cultural integration depends on a profound understanding and appreciation of each cultural element involved (Interviewee 07). Thus, genuine cultural

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[15] Recall the concept of levels of fusion and hybridity, raised by Wang (2019) in Chapter 4.2.

integration demands specialized composer training and an ethnomusicology mindset to create cross-cultural works of common artistic value (Interviewee 12). Additionally, collaboration becomes straightforward with mutual acceptance and understanding of each other's cultural products and values (Interviewee 04). Despite a conscious desire for cultural integration, seemingly simple solutions are paradoxically complex to achieve in the Malaysian society. While cross-cultural collaborations can promote cultural understanding and unity, there are lingering doubts about the necessity and extent of Chinese music integration into Malaysia's multicultural landscape. This uncertainty impedes a truly inclusive and blended cultural environment.

Building on Taylor's proposal for interculturality, which advocates collaborative efforts between the majority and minority groups to resolve conflicts (2012: 421), it becomes imperative for active engagement from both dominant and marginalized communities. This scenario requires the former to reach out to the latter, to erase minority fears and participate in inclusive interactions. However, uncertainties surrounding cultural appropriation and censorship in supposedly mainstream traditional practices contribute to the hesitance of Chinese orchestra practitioners to initiate collaborations, despite excitement for these projects. Religious considerations further complicate the decision-making process, especially regarding conflicts with Islamic doctrine in traditional art forms like *wayang kulit*, *Mak Yong*, and *Main Puteri*. Consequently, Interviewee 22, as a frequent crossover musician, adopts the strategy of selectively awaiting cross-cultural collaboration invitations from the Malay ethnicity, rather than initiating contact. Most times, successful collaborations were initiated by 'them' for fusion band performances.

Amidst the confounding mess of racial discourses, localization[16] stands out as a central aspect of cross-cultural collaborations, as it allows the creation of Malaysian-inspired flavors and reinforces Malaysia's racial harmony and distinctive identity. Interviewee 03 proposes the formulation of a Malaysian musical style that celebrates diversity instead of imitating cultural norms. Accordingly, Interviewee 25 agrees to collaborate with indigenous musicians and instrument makers to nurture inclusivity. However, hybridization faces challenges due to differences between traditional music systems, especially in performances with traditional Malay ensembles (Interviewee 23 and 26), Following that, successful

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[16] Its musical application is detailed in Chapters 4.2 and 4.3.

localization and cross-cultural processes require effective musical coordination, such as when incorporating elements from traditions like the *kompang* or *gamelan*.

These sentiments are echoed by an interviewee with extensive experience in promoting indigenous collaborations. Initially refreshing cross-cultural collaborations soon encountered practical hurdles—indigenous musicians, bound by colotomic structures in music (playing in a loop), were reluctant to depart from their traditions[17] and soon felt overshadowed by the 'very exciting' *huayue*. Later collaborations faced rejection due to concerns over funding imbalances, increasing intercultural tensions. Unwaveringly, continuous collaboration efforts are advocated, for transparent processes and mutual accommodation to find compatible partners.

Along this vein, successful *minjian* efforts[18] offer glimpses of cultural harmony, unfortunately without erasing racial undertones, such as Interviewee 17's experiences in Malay ensembles, and Interviewee 26's positive feedback for a crossover performance of *Sada Borneo*, featuring the *sapeh*, that indicated audience preference for unconventional musical experiences. In performing a Melaka-flavored pipa piece titled *Bunga Telang*, Interviewee 18 reviews the cross-cultural collaboration with a Malay musician, who established the authenticity of Malay elements in the composition.

Although Malaysia portrays an abundant and diverse culture and arts scene, collaboration opportunities are often limited by subconscious racial barriers, necessitating *minjian* efforts for deconstruction. Nonetheless, sustainable transformation requires complementary top-down initiatives for more effective participation and integration towards interculturalism. Cantle (2024c) posits that the movement towards interculturalism demands leadership and vision from political structures and the masses alike, to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding. Hence, the government is a key stakeholder in shaping educational direction and implementing cultural policy structures.

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[17] Traditionally, the colotomic structure, polyphonic or heterophonic textures of many traditional music are utilized as accompaniment for communal events rather than commercial performances. This relegation of music to the background, overshadowed by the dominant presence of Chinese instruments, can result in a sense of cultural inferiority and a lack of confidence in the allure of the musicians' own cultural traditions. In my fusion projects, these imbalances are mitigated by allocating solo and improvisation sections to each instrument to enhance their individual presence.

[18] Upon nearing completion of the section, I noticed an absence of detailed narratives concerning collaborations with Indian musicians (my fusion band is an example), although they were mentioned in passing. These references appeared to either be an afterthought, suggesting a normalization of such collaborations, or were expressed without encountering significant obstacles, aside from minor differences in the virtuosity of Indian classical music.

Perhaps Malaysia's National Cultural Policy requires updating to better reflect the changing identities of its citizens. Practical challenges persist, as the Chinese orchestra seems to be lacking comprehensive support from the government. Interviewee 31 notes that financing and support from Malaysia's cultural department are essential to advance these collaboration goals, but productivity may be lacking. In this environment, the Chinese orchestra persists in its *community* efforts to expand independently through initiatives and resources conducive to cultural growth. Amidst these limitations, some Chinese orchestras adeptly navigate hierarchical structures to their advantage.

Then and again, crossover initiatives are the strategic tools in the resilient response of the Chinese orchestra to secure funding and diversify its audience base across various ethnicities, expanding the cultural ecosystem. The case study of Mr. Chen Kam Chien (曾剑青) and the Professional Cultural Center Orchestra (PCCO)[19] narrates the effective management of relationships with the government and community stakeholders that require the understanding and application of multiculturalism and interculturalism.

Chen, a well-respected senior practitioner of the Chinese orchestra in the Klang Valley, envisioned decades ago that the Chinese orchestra's future requires multicultural music fusion and expansion to other disciplines, to combine forces for widespread and effective cultural development and promotion (Chen, 1999). Guided by Chen's vision, the orchestra seeks government and society recognition and support, to eventually establish a professional Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. Today, PCCO distinguishes itself through crossover performances, integrating instruments from diverse cultures and disciplines, and was the earliest to perform at prestigious venues like Istana Budaya and Dewan Filharmonik Petronas.

In his interview, Chen narrates the delight of encountering unexpected surprises in crossover projects and stresses their importance for the promotion of Chinese music. He shares his performance experiences in the Aseana Percussion Unit, where their fusion of elements receives enthusiastic responses from global audiences. Chen's involvement with the PCCO highlights the value of experimentation and creativity in organizing musical performances, including innovative collaborations across disciplines like poetry recitation, calligraphy, and dance. These efforts aim to attract a wider audience and break away from traditional concert formats, showcasing local talents.

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[19] Its history was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1.1. Chen announced his retirement in 2024.

During its twentieth anniversary, PCCO remodeled towards an open-door policy, prioritizing innovative performances that balance tradition and modernity. The orchestra's central mission is to integrate *huayue* into Malaysia's mainstream cultural landscape. To achieve this, it collaborates long-term with institutions such as the National Department for Culture and Arts (JKKN) and the Malaysian Traditional Orchestra (OTM). Chen considers his involvement with OTM as a major accomplishment, through the inclusion of Chinese orchestra members in its inauguration concert. Additionally, Chen contributes to traditional instrument innovation by developing and promoting the '*hi-rebab*', a contemporary adaptation of the traditional Malay *rebab* to a soprano register.

At the *Inheriting Initiator* (风雷传承)[20] concert in 2023, I witnessed the surprises Chen described in his interview. The concert featured a diverse repertoire that blends traditional and modern music elements, including *xinjiang* dance performances, Chinese opera, multicultural singing... The orchestra also invited the OTM conductor to collaborate on pieces that featured the *hi-rebab* and *kompang*. Held at the Malaysia Tourism Centre, the event adhered to government protocols, from event flow, ushers, a multilingual emcee, to projections. Interestingly, the audience composition was diverse with a significant presence of Malay attendees, surpassing the typical audience makeup of a Chinese orchestra concert.

Other interviewees involved in PCCO note that multicultural exchanges facilitated by the JKKN have led to a 5 to 10% increase in societal support. However, these collaborations require ongoing efforts to address music coordination issues. Collaborations with government organizations require flexibility, such as adapting to bilingual formats for multicultural audiences. While government sponsorship and support have their advantages, they impose conditions that may detract from the artistic vision. Stringent concert protocols and governmental restrictions on repertoire selection limit creative freedom and spontaneity, argued by Chen that the concert has lost the element of surprise and special effects. For instance, last-minute instructions to include a local composition, then replacing the planned performance of *Rasa Sayang* with *Chan Mali Chan* due to geopolitical disputes[21], demonstrates the need for adaptive management.

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[20] Coincidentally, the concert title aligned with this research's focus on sustainability of cultural heritages.
[21] The directive to include folk music was given three days before the performance. *Rasa Sayang* was selected, then restricted at the last minute due to the dispute with Indonesia over the song's origins. Allegedly, *Rasa Sayang* has been barred from official events to sidestep this controversy. Even so, the folk song remains as a staple piece in Chinese orchestra performances to showcase multiculturalism and localization.

Despite the financial and resource advantages associated with government support, Chen cautions about potential challenges and conflicts that may arise in collaborations with government agencies. He recalls incidents where performers withdrew due to resistances towards these government protocols. Additionally, some individuals within the Chinese orchestra community exhibit ethnic biases, looking down on other cultural instruments and refusing to collaborate with them. Chen stresses the importance of managing such situations diplomatically and maintaining flexibility to address unexpected issues.

Challenges arose from certain audience groups, with some boycotting performances. However, Chen emphasizes the importance of determination, flexibility, communication, a positive mindset, and open-mindedness in successful collaborative music-making. He criticizes narrow perspectives and sense of cultural superiority within the Chinese orchestra community, that impede collaborations for fear of being overshadowed. Besides that, differing political stances and ideologies also affect support for PCCO's crossover endeavors.

In cross-cultural collaborations, Chen underlines the need for effective communication with traditional musicians by providing general instructions about desired elements of the piece and allowing the musicians to improvise based on those guidelines. He also advices utilizing recordings and transcripts to ease the integration process. According to Chen, confidence in one's culture and skills is crucial to gain recognition and avoid being looked down upon by others. Open discussions about innovating and elevating cultural collaborations are essential to adapt to the partner. An example of a *rebana* musician is given, where Chen articulated the base rhythm and gave the performer clear instructions for elaboration, resulting in a successful collaboration. Ultimately, the sharing of knowledge and experiences encourages creativity and mutual respect among musicians in collaborative music-making.

Music, as a universal language, transcends linguistic and racial barriers to foster cultural understanding, diversity and resilience within communities (Interviewee 03). It serves as a powerful medium for message transmission and emotional expression (Interviewee 24). Through music as a shared social and psychological feature, Crooke et al. (2023) concludes that music cultivates empathy, compassion, and understanding between cultures in intercultural engagements, although there are complexities and challenges to different levels. In this pretense, music becomes the catalyst for broader societal transformation.

The call for interculturality indicates the need to rebrand multicultural policies towards newer power and political structures, and implement community cohesion policies and practices that actively dismantles barriers, prejudices, and stereotypes that may lead to injustices and segregation (Cantle, 2024b, 2024c). In this light, multiculturalism should not be seen as a system that requires overhauling, but rather having its inherent challenges systematically addressed. By cultivating genuine partnerships and embracing cultural diversity rather than division, the Chinese orchestra can be directed towards sustainability and expansion in the Malaysian society.

Revisiting the framework of cultural ecology (and applying it to the Malaysian context), it becomes apparent that culture undergoes evolution in response to a confluence of sociopolitical forces. The scrutiny of contextual factors unveils power structures and recalibrates them, to redirect the course of intercultural initiatives (ibid.). Essentially, the community's adaptation to its surroundings is profoundly influenced by these determinants.

Considering the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits and challenges to crossover collaborations in Malaysia, one may ponder upon their current lack of popularity in the Chinese orchestra community. If crossover collaborations are driven by the imperative for adaptation, survival, and cultural expansion, besides offering dialogue and cohesion, should this demand not be sufficient to overcome all obstacles? Despite the layers of challenges, the reluctance to immerse in these projects ultimately stem from practitioners' inherent apprehension about exploring unfamiliar territories, thus limiting the growth of the ecosystem.

Certainly, the absence of outward expansion does not immediately endanger the cultural ecosystem. A useful analogy is the closed terrarium—a self-sustaining miniature ecosystem within its confined space. However, its growth is limited by the container's size and abiotic factors like heat and humidity. Effectively, it requires ideal conditions to thrive; any imbalance can leave the terrarium highly vulnerable. In a multicultural society like Malaysia, cultural exchange is fundamental in daily life where diverse communities coexist. Without diversity and adaptability, the cultural ecosystem becomes susceptible to external changes, leading to its potential collapse.

This closed terrarium metaphor helps with the reflection on the sustainability of traditions in an evolving environment. Just as it relies on the established ecosystem for survival, traditional cultural practices face challenges in adapting to changing circumstances.

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This topic of cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaborations introduces the difficulties encountered, and encourages adaptive management strategies to ensure the resilience of cultural ecosystems.

5.4 Of Composers, Compositions, and Copyright[22]

In any music culture, composers occupy probably the most significant yet overlooked role in the ecosystem. Despite their relatively inconspicuous presence compared to performers or conductors, composers are the indispensable translators of culture to infuse traditions and heritage into musical language.

Through constant creation and innovation, composers foster musical dialogue, expand musical repertoires, and form identities within orchestras and broader musical communities. As stewards of music culture, composers are the guardians of artistic expression for communities like the Chinese orchestra and would require partnerships in their care for the musical traditions they upkeep (Titon, 2020). What comes along this acknowledgement is a movement to protect composers' rights and ensuring the sustenance of their creative autonomy.

The contextual analysis of the keyword 'copyright' (版权) in Voyant Tools correlates a frequent theme or keyword—'problem' (问题). Repeated correlation between 'copyright' and 'problem' indicates that copyright-related challenges are a central concern within this discourse.

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[22] This is the only theme that could not be paired with a song or concert title due to the context.

Figure 32. Contexts for Mentions of 'Copyright' in Voyant Tools Analysis

After removing the interviewer's questions (in red) and repeating sentences (in black), the term 'copyright' is mentioned 35 times, often with expression of concerns ('problem'), raised 11 times. The prevailing opinion perceives copyright as a pressing issue within the Malaysian context. However, a composer stated not to have experienced any issues in Malaysia, ascribing the responsibility to control the dissemination of their works to themselves.

From my observations and interactions with composers and instructors, several interconnected factors create multiple cyclical and catch-22 effects in the Malaysian scene:

1. Financial constraints

Economically, Chinese orchestras in Malaysia face funding issues that deter them from commissioning works at the same rates as (professional) orchestras elsewhere. They recurrently share scores without proper permission of use and performance, or simply 'arrange' their own versions.

2. Performance standards and resources

Even with funding, Malaysia's Chinese orchestras are, regrettably, not on par with the performance standards and do not possess physical resources of professional orchestras in other regions. This forces composers to tailor works to the orchestra's limitations, which can

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compromise their creative vision. An interviewee substantiates that his works are adapted to the proficiency of professional orchestras, hinting that they are too challenging for conventional Malaysian orchestras. The improvement of the situation would require an extensive review and remodeling of new compositions or finding suitable alternatives.

3. Mentality regarding respect of copyright

The lack of respect for copyright is a paradox where orchestras recognize the need to purchase copyrighted scores but are hindered by financial constraints. They resort to unauthorized use, perpetuating a cycle that diminishes the value of purchasing copyrighted material. Moreover, an interviewee characterizes Malaysians as lacking initiative, suggesting that 'they are usually just lazy to go through the process' to obtain proper permission. This cycle persists until a fundamental shift occurs in mentality to emphasize the importance of respecting copyright laws and composer rights.

4. Copyright knowledge and education

Misconceptions about the acquisition of scores for practice and performance are prevalent. Many orchestras and individuals often struggle to navigate the processes and channels to obtain scores and believe that loaning or purchasing scores is prohibitively expensive. This stems from inadequate education about copyright laws and proper permission of use. An interviewee suggests more proper education on copyright to ensure responsible handling by the next generation.

5. Copyright regulation and enforcement

Malaysia lacks effective copyright regulation compared to regions with stringent copyright measures in professional orchestras. This deficiency leaves composers vulnerable to unauthorized use of their intellectual property, undermining their rights and financial interests.

6. More opportunities for commissioned works abroad

The need for financial sustainability and frustrations with local challenges drive composers to seek better opportunities elsewhere. As a result, composers delegate themselves to orchestras in other regions with more advanced infrastructure and performance capabilities, contributing to a deficiency of local compositions in Malaysia.

7. Difficulty for composers' career advancement in Malaysia

To break free from this cycle, some composers leave Malaysia for better prospects abroad, perpetuating talent migration and artistic stagnation. However, few internationally established composers continuously strive to elevate the global reputation of Malaysian composers.

Further discussion requires an examination of how copyright functions in music composition and orchestral performance, which varies depending on the commissioning orchestra and the composer's own management strategies. However, there tends to be a mutual understanding and agreement on both ends.

Typically, for commissioned works, the copyright belongs to the composer, while the commissioning party reserves exclusive and non-exclusive rights locally and internationally for specified or indefinite periods. Different orchestras may have varying requirements[23]; some opt for simpler arrangements where composers retain ownership after the premiere of the piece. For example, for Composer A, SCO reserves exclusive rights to the composition for the first three years domestically and the first year internationally, with non-exclusive rights thereafter. For Composer B, SCO retains its exclusive rights for one or two years, with the composition ultimately remaining as the property of the composer. In contrast, the popular music industry often involves labels buying full rights from composers, a practice of buying out (买断), criticized as one that is financially lucrative but relinquishes the composer's ownership of their creations.

Another interviewee suggests a better direction of commissioned works by professional orchestras that follows clear guidelines and agreements. This interviewee charges score rental fees (借谱费) and live performance royalties (演出费) from those interested in rehearsing and performing his compositions, lamenting that the understanding of copyright in amateur orchestras differs from professional orchestras, with a 'share share lah' attitude that overlooks intellectual property rights.

In Mainland China, copyright enforcement varies based on location and organization. According to Interviewee 14, there is a heightened emphasis on copyright protection in music conservatories, but it is believed that there are lesser copyright concerns beyond. Despite this, Interviewee 07 notes an increase in strict copyright enforcement to protect creators' rights and interests. There is a clear division of labor and procedures for obtaining permission to perform a piece. Major orchestras in China have dedicated law departments to handle

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[23] The approach is not standardized, rather on a composer-by-composer basis.

copyright matters, ensuring proper procurement and enforcement. Composers are typically informed of performances, and costs are negotiated directly, depending on 'the composer's mood' and factors such as the composer's reputation or the nature of the performance. Some composition students in conservatories accept minimal compensation between peers and colleagues.

In 2023, a Malaysian composer had an open discussion on Facebook regarding the unauthorized sale of his commissioned work on the Chinese platform Taobao (along with many others put on sale by the same seller), highlighting a broader issue of illegal sales of compositions online. It was surprising because the parties involved vowed copyright protection, and the merchant feigned ignorance when questioned about the source of the scores.

Unauthorized sales of intellectual properties go undetected unless composers actively search for them or are informed by others. Effective mitigation requires proactive measures, including stricter enforcement structures and heavier penalties for infringement, alongside greater awareness among consumers about intellectual property rights and ethical consumption practices. Essentially, a reduction in demand for illegally sold works can contribute to the decrease in copyright infringement.

Generally, the sentiment on copyright in Malaysia is negative among composers and practitioners. This problem is related to the overall landscape and attitude towards copyright in the country. An interviewee acknowledges the limitations on disseminating performances online, due to the lack of obtained performance rights. Interviewee 07 states additional issues that hinder the proper observance of copyright for music from other countries, such as the difficulty for composers from Mainland China or Taiwan to monitor performances in Malaysia due to geographical distance. Unauthorized uses are often overlooked because of the perceived 'difficult situation' faced by the Malaysian community, and the absence of an enforcing organization perpetuates poor copyright practices.

Eventually, the livelihood and sustainability of composers' careers are at stake. Interviewee 19 questions the source of funding to commission compositions, emphasizing that the expectation for composers to create music for free under the guise of promoting *huayue* is neither feasible nor fair. Adding to that, Interviewee 24 notes the importance of supply and demand dynamics; composers must be adequately compensated to maintain their craft.

A composer interviewed for this research concurs that the composer must personally oversee copyright matters like a business venture. He stresses the necessity of shaping their business identity—ensuring that the compositions are promoted and accessible, but not improperly distributed. Certain management methods include agreements to acknowledge terms of use and to redirect public inquiries to the composer. In Malaysia, direct communication with the composer is proposed for two-way communication and smooth transactions.

Interestingly, the composer recounts instances of unauthorized sharing in Mainland China that gave him publicity, describing it as 'free advertising' despite some financial loss. The business-like approach to copyright management is pragmatic; he is willing to permit educational and personal use of his music while still requesting prior permission for public performances. Compensation terms are flexible and negotiable on a case-by-case basis, ultimately placing the responsibility to secure funds on the party seeking to use his music.

Surprisingly, the scene in Malaysia is better than Mainland China, for giving composers more appreciation and respect. Despite improvements in Malaysia's copyright landscape, reluctance to initiate contact with the composer remains, with a variety of excuses such as feeling burdened or shy. An interviewee acknowledges that dealing with copyright matters, particularly involving publishers, can be cumbersome and time-consuming, leading some individuals to avoid the process altogether. However, copyright matters should be treated with seriousness, professionalism, and maturity.

Some interviewees contend that performances in Malaysia largely uphold composer rights and comply with copyright laws. There is a notable bias wherein orchestras may have secured proper permission for performances, yet there is a prevailing assumption that they have not, reflecting the widespread disregard for copyright in Malaysia. Since scores are usually photocopied and passed around, there is a tendency to assume that performances lack proper authorization.

Orchestras like MCCO, as discussed in Chapter 4.3, are leading efforts to address copyright acquisition issues by proactively approaching composers to purchase scores. Interviewee 29 observes that the common practice of circulating scores without proper authorization is widespread in Malaysia, noting that orchestras might be 'performing them secretly', implying a lack of transparency in obtaining permissions. New scores should be obtained through legitimate channels rather than relying on informal and potentially

infringing practices. In addition, MCCO has extended invitations to composers to attend their performances. While the exact royalty remains undisclosed, composers have been appreciative and accommodating by charging low fees in consideration of the circumstances faced by Malaysian Chinese orchestras.

The performability factor underscores the importance of collaborative exchanges between the composer and performer to ensure proper channels for their use. Several complaints are voiced regarding the current state of music composition and performance:

1. Contemporary compositions often prioritize technical virtuosity and complexity over musical expressions to showcase the beauty of Chinese instruments. Promotion of the music is difficult when it does not make an impression upon the audience (Interviewee 28).

2. Malaysia lacks avenues to obtain new compositions and has lesser information about their availability, leading to a trend of performing the same pieces or struggling with compositions that are too difficult for rehearsal, especially for secondary school students (Interviewee 07).

3. Composers tend to create 'big orchestral music' (大曲) tailored to professional orchestras with large instrumentation requirements, neglecting smaller-scale compositions that may be more accessible and suitable for various performance settings (Interviewee 27).

4. Some composers achieve fame with a successful piece but struggle to maintain the same standard in subsequent compositions. With inflated egos from unjustified fame, they may dismiss concerns from performers about unplayable sections, blaming performers' abilities rather than evaluating their compositions (Interviewee 23).

In the composers' defense regarding unplayability, some points are raised regarding instrument range and complexity, besides the importance of showcasing the unique characteristics of Chinese instruments. Interviewee 12 compares Chinese orchestras to Western orchestras where instrument ranges are well-defined, giving little room for mistakes. In contrast, Chinese orchestras have unstandardized instrumentation that may lead to discrepancies between written scores and practical performability, even occasionally misjudged by professional composers. In response to the first complaint, Interviewee 08 advises composers to consider the distinctive timbre and performance techniques of each instrument.

On the other hand, composers also express frustrations with 'innovations' to overcome playability issues. One such practice, the 'everybody join in' ('能上一起上') attitude, involves unauthorized editing of scores to fit the available instrumentation, even if it means assigning parts originally written for one instrument to be played by another. Interviewee 12 recounts a performance of his composition where a *guzheng* player, feeling isolated due to a lack of parts for the instrument, joined in with a *zhongruan* part. However, this resulted in the *guzheng* playing in the wrong octave and was amplified too loudly, leading to the composer's confusion— 'since when did I write a *guzheng* concerto?' While such adaptations are aimed for inclusivity, composers argue that precomposed pieces should ideally remain unchanged to preserve their integrity.

In fact, practices of modifying scores to suit available instrumentation is prevalent among Chinese orchestras in Malaysia, in which I have personally witnessed and have been involved in on numerous occasions. Unlike symphony orchestra compositions where specific number of instruments are allocated, many Chinese orchestra pieces, particularly traditional ones, lack such specifications. When certain instruments are unavailable, orchestras allocate parts to other instruments or even replace them with similar-sounding alternatives. Unfortunately, such situations often arise with the *guzheng,* as experienced by Interviewee 12. In student orchestras, members may rehearse and perform using scores intended for other instruments.

Not only that, the landscape of Malaysia motivates a culture of creative improvements in orchestras to enhance their performances. Among that is the arrangement of amateur covers of existing music to better suit the orchestra's capabilities or accommodate instrument availability. However, concerns about potential copyright issues often accompany this practice. For instance, Interviewee 17 avoids performing grand pieces in fear of copyright repercussions. Instead, he arranges his own music for educational purposes within universities. When performers encounter difficulties in playing certain parts, adaptive management strategies are taken, either by amending scores or dedicating additional rehearse time to work through the challenging sections.

Additionally, to meet audience demand for diverse and popular music selections, instructors often arrange popular song covers to cater to audience preferences while showcasing the orchestra's musical versatility. This practice is a longstanding adaptive practice since the first generation, mainly through listening and transcribing (Chapter 1.2). It also fosters self-initiated learning and creativity among students. Interviewee 31 provides

feedback and guidance to student composers, thus encouraging them to take ownership of their musical development and ensuring their continued interest and growth in the Chinese orchestra.

Practitioners propose various management and action possibilities for improvement. Interviewee 24 suggests the establishment of a centralized agency or publisher in Malaysia to streamline the process of score acquisition and promote ethical practices. Another perspective presented by Interviewee 04 highlights the need for experimentation for sustainable *huayue* development, to promote new compositions that serve broader artistic goals. Simultaneously, livelihoods of composers should be considered to guarantee their financial sustainability. Furthermore, Interviewee 27 stresses the significance of technically accessible compositions that incorporate local elements and provide an enjoyable experience for performers.

Despite multiple challenges, the adaptive management strategies employed by the Chinese orchestra demonstrates resourcefulness and creativity in overcoming limiting factors to growth. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize that these strategies may not always be ethically and legally sound. Shared frustrations of composers and musicians accentuate the necessity for better mutual understanding and communication, besides a more streamlined and transparent process for copyright acquisition.

Discussions surrounding compositions and copyright in the Chinese orchestra require considerations for the future, especially regarding fair use, compensation, and the protection of composers' intellectual property rights. Regardless, the situation in Malaysia is evolving. Although challenges persist in the Malaysian landscape and there are grey areas within existing legal structures, it is vital to acknowledge the significance of artistic works, and strive to obtain performance permissions through appropriate channels to uphold the integrity of musical creations.

Moving forward, efforts should be directed in a multiplicity to address the challenges and to ensure a fair and sustainable environment for composers and musicians. This includes raising awareness and education of copyright laws, promoting adherence to proper procedures for obtaining permissions, enforcing legal actions against infringement, and tackling broader issues of funding and resource allocation. By doing so, orchestras can uphold the integrity of artistic creation while giving the recognition and compensation composers deserve, for a sustainable contribution to the musical ecosystem.

5.5 *Stepping High* (步步高)[24] – Adaptive Management with the Experiment Ensemble as a Case Study

Traditionally, community cohesion is an approach to address racial barriers and multiculturalism, necessary for the unity of diverse groups in a common location (Cantle, 2024b). However, it is also applicable to singular communities where differences exist—in background, experiences, opportunities, relationships, and more. In the context of the Experiment Ensemble and ensemble playing at large, I propose that community cohesion is a strong social factor for effective musical presentations. This cohesion, consciously or not, requires adaptive management strategies from musical and interpersonal aspects, implemented throughout rehearsals and performances. The ensemble's collective interpretation is a result of an understanding of each other's musical interpretations; every action fosters an environment that constantly adapts to the collective, transcending individual intentions to act as a unified whole (McCaleb, 2014).

Recognizing the dynamism of human interactions, this thematic discussion explores the adaptability and resilience within the Chinese orchestra community, particularly among younger practitioners, as they navigate disruptions and opportunities that impact community cohesion. The experiences and sentiments of the Experiment Ensemble (EE)[25] members' reflective journals and interviews shed light on how challenges and opportunities like musician changes, sight-reading, instrument swapping, score alterations, and rehearsal space issues are managed. The distribution of key tasks for the EE is summarized as follows:

Table 13: Summary of Experiment Ensemble Tasks/Challenges

	EE1 (Control Group)	**EE2 (Variable Group)**
Week 1		Score modifications
Week 2	Removing musician	Swapping instruments
Week 3	Loss of rehearsal space	Adding musician
Week 4	Increasing performance numbers, sightreading scores	

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[24] Experiment Ensemble 1 selected this Cantonese music for their first assignment, considering it as 'traditional music'. Originally composed by Lui Man Shing (呂文成) in 1938, they chose Ma Sheng-Long (马圣龙)'s arrangement. This selection carries a deeper connotation, indicating that regional music, often blended into the Chinese orchestra repertoire, symbolizes Chinese music with significant cultural value.
Guided listening (Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, Peng Xiuwen's arrangement):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7GFs4knEwY

[25] In this section, Experiment Ensemble 1 is referred to as EE1, and Experiment Ensemble 2 as EE2.

<u>Experiment Ensemble 1</u>

EE1 experienced additional considerations during their rehearsals because they were performing to a live audience. The unpredictability during rehearsals and performances required numerous spontaneous decisions, showing the participants' good adaptive management skills honed over their formative years. All EE1 members belong to the same community orchestra; organizing EE rehearsal sessions before the orchestra rehearsal facilitated smooth transitions between the two. EE1 conducted a total of 4 rehearsal sessions before their final performance.

Initially, the Control Group had seven participants. Participant 108 was invited to join simply because she happened to be present during the initial meeting. The decision was made casually and straightforwardly— 'why not?' The group's rehearsal recordings are filled with moments of cheekiness, signifying the cohesion between friends and a relaxed attitude in rehearsals among peers.

<u>Task 1: Removing musician</u>

The task to remove a musician from the team while maintaining the structure of the music aims to assess the resilience of the community when a part of the group is non-functional. Instructions were given through WhatsApp, sparking joking responses from participants who volunteered to remove themselves. Nonetheless, the challenge proceeded smoothly. Throughout the task, group members frequently paused individually due to uncertainties in their musical parts, without any deliberate interruptions to the group. The process mirrored common practices during orchestra rehearsals, where remaining members continued playing to sustain the music's flow when a fellow musician 'gets lost'. Eventually, the musicians would find their way back and resume playing at a suitable interval. Participants were adept with this challenge and quickly resolved it without significant issues.

<u>Task 2: Loss of rehearsal space</u>

EE1 faced an environmental setback due to an electricity shortage at their rehearsal venue in the third rehearsal week, compelling them to seek an alternative location right before the session. Intriguingly, the organic occurrence of this task meant that its assignment became unnecessary. Due to the blackout, the group went for a *yumcha* session instead, and

rescheduled their practice session after their orchestra rehearsal. Participant 105 commends the group's professionalism in adapting to changing circumstances with minimal impact on productivity.

Task 3: Sight-reading new performance numbers

The final task required EE1 to expand their repertoire, sight-read some music, and adapt them to their ensemble formation. This challenge served to evaluate participants' collective creativity in handling last-minute performance assignments and their impromptu skills. An extra regulation was introduced where they had limited time for this challenge, but surprisingly, they had already decided on additional pieces, some of which had to be played impromptu due to time constraints.

The group generated a list of 20 songs, but only nine were performed in their final presentation, including the required three. Participant 106 reflects in his journal about the stress of this task as a percussionist. He describes the process of learning newly added pieces an hour before the performance, having to grasp the tempos and beat styles while remembering them for later. This also required on-the-spot creativity and adaptability of the percussionist for successful coordination with the group.

Unintended challenges

Unintended challenges arose during EE1's first rehearsal, in which a *pipa* instructor (arriving early for the subsequent orchestra rehearsal) unexpectedly joined the ensemble's rehearsal because 'he thought it looked fun'. The group leader initially saw it as an opportunity to incorporate the *pipa*'s sound. However, the instructor's presence, given his elevated position and expertise, deterred her from addressing musical issues, presumably out of respect for the senior performer.

Additionally, despite all members being present on one of the rehearsal days, the environment was noisy and distracting, making it difficult for members to hear each other. Frequent interruptions from the movements of others and the occasional pause of group members to attend to other tasks further disrupted the continuity of the rehearsal session.

<u>Performance</u>

I attended EE1's performance at a backroom of a crafts market, contacted by Participant 103 as the venue organizer (see chapter 3.5 for discussion on creative performance spaces). The hour-long performance attracted roughly 10 in-person audiences, including shoppers, families, and an orchestra friend, alongside an online streaming audience. The repertoire featured a blend of traditional, contemporary, and popular pieces, showcasing the group's versatility and adaptability to audience tastes. Interestingly, all participants used digital tablets to display their scores.

The performance commenced with an introduction by the event space organizer, followed by the ensemble's rendition of *Merging Together*[26]. This compulsory piece was chosen as the opening piece because the ensemble thought that audiences would find it difficult to understand the experimental piece; this experimentative music is then manipulated as their instrument introduction. According to the group leader's (Participant 107) journal, this arrangement is not in line with the composer's intentions, and neither the audience nor the performers are familiar or interested in it. Regardless of either perspective in the composer-performer-audience cycle, there is no meaning for its performance. The significance of this piece in the repertoire was questioned by several members.

Throughout the performance, traditional and classical songs received more applause and resonated better with the audience due to their familiarity. Participant 103, acting as the emcee, consistently emphasized the familiarity of certain songs, a sentiment validated by positive audience reactions. Table 14 lists the performance repertoire of nine songs.

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[26] EE1 opted to perform the first section of the piece by playing the notes using their regular instruments instead of percussion. The leader assigned roles to different performers based on their capabilities and instrument suitability, using the cajon to provide tempo.

Table 14: Experiment Ensemble 1 Final Performance Repertoire[27]

Song Title (Chinese)	Song Title (English Translation)	Remarks
融合	*Merging Together*	Designated experimental piece for this research
步步高	*Stepping High*	Self-selected traditional piece for this research
春诗	*Spring Poem*	Designated contemporary piece for this research
命运是什么	*What is Fate*	Local composition
月圆花好	*Full Moon and Blooming Flowers*	Classical Chinese music, song from the film *Romance of the Western Chamber* (西厢记)
铁血丹心	*Iron Blood and Loyal Heart*	Classical Cantonese music, song from the film *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (射雕英雄传)
不再犹豫	*No More Hesitation*	Pop-rock song by Beyond (Hong Kong rock band)
真的爱你	*I Really Love You*	Pop-rock song by Beyond (Hong Kong rock band)
龙之组曲[28]	*Dragon Medley*	Local arrangement of songs from classical films and TV series—*The Last Emperor* (末代皇帝), *Genghis Khan* (成吉思汗), *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (射雕英雄传), and *The Bund* (上海滩)

A feedback session was held shortly after the performance while enjoying tea from the café downstairs (an actual *yumcha* session!). Some participants left early due to other personal commitments. Several questions are raised to the performers, mostly performance observations, that are analyzed together with journal entries:

1. *Wearing face masks during the performance*: This is a creative choice induced by the pandemic and was collectively decided before the event. Rather than a safety measure, the masks apparently conceal unflattering facial expressions while playing.

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[27] Having played the *Dragon Medley* in the Chinese orchestra without watching the films, my lasting impression was that the music are all Chinese, until further research for this study informed that the sources of music in this performance repertoire are quite diverse to include Cantonese and Western films. My realization about *The Last Emperor* is an example of the versatility and adaptiveness of Chinese music to various cultural contexts. Despite Chinese-sounding in this arrangement of *Dragon Medley*, the original soundtrack is composed by a Japanese, English, and Chinese, in a hybrid Western-Chinese orchestra format! This fusion of styles highlights the interconnectedness of global cultures, and demonstrates how Chinese music is successful in its cultural transformation, cultural integration, global marketing, and audience resonance (see Chapter 1.3 on the pervasiveness of *Jasmine Flower*).
Guided listening (SMK Chung Hua Miri Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zcGzyJ-u5M

2. *Song selection*: The group selected and discussed a repertoire of 20 songs in the final rehearsal, listed in the WhatsApp group. However, due to rehearsal constraints, only nine of them were performed. Participant 105 documented in his journal that the group decided on ensemble pop song arrangements, because, in his experience, these songs 'would resonate with audiences who did not have extensive knowledge of Chinese orchestral ensembles'. They are also believed to be more universally appealing across different age groups.

3. *Percussion innovations*: Participant 106 utilized the cajon for all pieces due to its flexibility and portability, 'perfect for the small ensemble team'. Modifications of the *paigu* (排鼓，a set of five tuned drums) and other percussion instruments were made intuitively, albeit difficulties in catching up with foreign rhythms. The percussionist, often playing the role of the metronome, constantly improvises through trial and error to find new beats that could fit the piece and simultaneously lead the group.

    The participant would refer to the conductor's score and imitate patterns of other instruments, succeeding most of the time. The conductor score thus serves two purposes, according to the percussionist—to identify core melodies and decide on the appropriate beat, and to identify percussion sections for the cajon.

    As it happens, the cajon has grown popularity among Chinese orchestras and ensembles, including several I have participated in, to provide a 'one size fits all' variety of rhythmic color to the diverse musical styles of the Chinese orchestra. Its global growth is attributed to its simplicity, versatility, and portability, ideal for small acoustic ensembles (Merlino, 2015).

4. *Emceeing and presentation*: EE1 went beyond expectations by incorporating emceeing to enlighten audiences about their orchestra and performers, introduce instruments, as well as offer insights into the context of some songs. The initial plan included brief introductions about each song, but the idea was abandoned due to commitment limitations. Instead, Participant 103 stepped up as the emcee, for seeing the importance to maintain audience engagement and prevent awkward silences during the performance. It is commented that previous performances were presented similarly to enhance interaction with audiences.

    Additionally, the group spontaneously shifted the context of the performance from an experiment for research purposes to a promotional platform for their

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Chinese orchestra. This decision advertises the orchestra for new member recruitment. Participants identify this form of promotion as something normal, as audience members would often enquire about *huayue* learning opportunities and the background of the performers. This research was intentionally omitted to avoid confusing the audience with additional contexts.

The success of EE1 is credited to strong cohesion and effective communication among members that facilitated rapid problem-solving and adaptation to environmental changes throughout the rehearsal and performance process. Their adaptive management strategies, including flexible scheduling, impromptu decision making, and creative problem-solving demonstrates their ability to adjust to unforeseen circumstances and optimize performance outcomes.

Experiment Ensemble 2

EE2 is led by a Chinese orchestra conductor and composer (Participant 206). All members are involved in a string quartet/ensemble, experienced in both Chinese and Western classical music. This dual background uniquely equips them to tackle the challenges of hybridization of music[29], incorporation of non-Chinese instruments and insertion of non-Chinese musical styles.

EE2's adaptive management strategies demonstrate its members' ability to address issues beyond their comfort zone. EE2 successfully combined Chinese and non-Chinese instruments in all songs (even for *Spring Poem*), despite only being requested for the traditional piece, *New Sound of Sizhu*. Notably, the violin is used for this task, following the group's background, and rearranged according to the teacher's composition knowledge while preserving the composers' original intentions. However, the adaptation of *Merging Together* presented the biggest challenge, as it is originally intended for percussion. To address this issue, a segment of the piece is modified to incorporate the 12-Bar Blues style, simultaneously addressing the task to incorporate a new musical style. Further simplifications of rhythmic patterns are made during rehearsals to accommodate the performers' proficiency level.

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[29] Discussions on hybridization outcomes are made in Chapter 4.6.

Table 15: Experiment Ensemble 2 Instrumentation of *Spring Poem* and *Merging Together*

Participant	*Spring Poem* (春诗)	*Merging Together* (融合)
201	Cello	Cello
202	Glockenspiel I, *Dizi*	Viola
203	*Erhu I*	Violin II
204	Glockenspiel II, *Erhu II*	Violin I
205	*Guzheng, Dizi*	*Guzheng*
206	*Yangqin*	*Yangqin*

Task 1: Swapping instruments

The task to perform a piece using different instruments aims at experimenting the versatility of instruments in playing Chinese music and the adaptability of musicians towards different instruments, relating to the theme of 'creativity' in adapting scores for the Chinese orchestra with its limitations (discussed in the previous section). For this task, the ensemble has decided to conduct the instrument swap for *New Sound of Sizhu* as follows:

Table 16: Experiment Ensemble 2 Task of Swapping Instruments for *New Sound of Sizhu*

Participant	Original Instrument(s)	New Instrument(s)
201	Cello	*Daruan*
202	Flute, *Dizi*	Viola
203	Violin, *Erhu*	Violin
204	Violin	*Erhu*
205	*Guzheng, Sheng*	Glockenspiel
206	*Yangqin*	Xylophone

The task highlights the group's adaptability and eagerness to explore new instrument and techniques. In the experiment, each participant faced challenges that were approached with creativity to maintain the integrity of the musical scores, assisted by the teacher. Despite playing difficulties, participants found the task exciting and refreshing.

Participant 201, for instance, grappled with key changes and adaptation to the bass clef for the *daruan*, which required the teacher's intervention to modify the instrument's open strings for a smoother playing process (see Chapter 4.6). Similarly, Participant 202's switch to the viola was aided by score alterations to the alto clef. Participant 203 encountered technical challenges like glissando and fingering differences, regretting not trying other instruments. Meanwhile, Participants 204 and 206 found that the new instruments did not

blend well into the music, preferring the originals. Participant 206 especially struggled with the xylophone due to its design, expressing the importance of pre-planning when composing for different timbres and techniques. Among all, Participant 205 found the experience to be most enjoyable.

Despite diverse experiences and obstacles, the ensemble successfully performed the completed piece during the same rehearsal, although it consumed the entire session. This short experiment emphasizes the musicians' adaptability in short durations, albeit with compromises in performance quality and incomplete adaptation of music using the new instruments. The task could have been more effectively executed with additional time for practice and adjustments.

Task 2: Inserting new musician

The addition of a new musician to an established ensemble presents both challenges and opportunities to group dynamics and cohesion. This specific challenge fulfilled the objective to introduce disruptions or opportunities to the ecosystem, as the addition of new musicians provided both chances of creating different music and the difficulty of making adaptations for a new member in the group. In this experiment, the group leader reached out to Participant 107 (EE1 group leader) to participate in this task as a cellist. Given the participant's established relationship EE2, the adaptation process was relatively smooth on both ends. The group welcomed the new member, benefitting from her seniority and experience that enriched the group's musical dynamics.

Reflecting on this, Participant 203 writes that the addition of the new member felt normal. This transition provided opportunity for growth and learning. Participant 107's presence served as a model and inspiration for others, for example motivating the performance of the existing cello player, positively impacting the group's overall performance. This added value emphasizes the importance of diversity and acceptance in ensemble-playing, in which the adaptability of musicians to external changes is manifested through an openness towards new collaborative opportunities.

However, the group leader, who holds a broader perspective on the ensemble's musical performance, raised concerns about the disruption to the established chemistry and volume balancing. Original members were accustomed to rehearsed music dynamics. The new member's unawareness disrupted them, thus hindering rather than enhancing the group's

musical cohesion. To address this, the group leader suggests the integration of new musicians through long-term rehearsal sessions and a deeper understanding of each other's musical styles and preferences.

<u>Other adaptive management methods</u>

Throughout the rehearsals, the group leader exhibited strong problem-solving skills by addressing issues faced by ensemble members. Particularly in the case of musical scores, adaptive modifications are effective to improve the auditory appeal of the pieces (Participant 206's journal entry). Other participants also reported adaptive strategies to enhance their performance, including fingering changes for smoother playing. To better prepare for rehearsals, some participants made additional efforts to practice beforehand, using tools such as metronomes (tempo control), tuners (pitch accuracy), and digital resources like online videos and MIDI files (musical references). Participant 203 sought guidance from her *erhu* teacher to refine her solo section in *Spring Poem*. Previous recordings proved to be valuable for identifying areas of improvement, which led to the refining of bowing techniques for better visual presentation. However, recordings did not fully capture live music subtleties, although participants felt satisfied with their recorded performances.

After five rehearsal sessions, EE2 concluded their final recordings, ultimately selecting the last take of each song as the best. During the subsequent interview-cum-post-mortem discussion, participants shared their individual experiences and satisfaction with the recording process. In general, participants observed improvements since the first rehearsal, summed up with an acknowledgement of the importance of problem-solving throughout the process. Despite making small mistakes due to nervousness, everybody presented their best efforts and standards with seriousness.

The final performance, after editing, is uploaded to their string quartet's Instagram account, marking the end of the experiment. Participants reflected on their personal growth, resilience, and strengthened friendships, accentuating the transformative power of shared experiences amidst inevitable imperfections.

EE1 and EE2 exhibit stark distinction in their organizational and communication methods, distinguishing digitally integrated and traditional community structures. EE2 communicates less frequently in the WhatsApp group, preferring face-to-face discussions for logistics and organization. Members are expected to adhere to these instructions without further reminding, like many orchestras, presumably for easy management of a large community. In contrast, EE1 inclines towards online channels for sharing, organizing, and socializing. The difference in preference indicates member adaptiveness towards varying community interaction and coordination styles.

Additionally, group dynamics result in different forms of cohesion within the ensembles. With regards to rehearsal patterns, self-directed practices without strong leadership (EE1) lead to a lack of direction, and result in more chaotic and inefficient rehearsals. Although most participants in EE1 expressed positive sentiments during the experiment, an individual's negative feelings underline the challenges of unsupervised rehearsals among peers that produce a casual and 'unserious' nature. The participant expressed frustration and a sense of unproductivity—as if rehearsing 'in a loop', 'a waste of time and money'—due to the non-professional skill level and non-attendance of participants. This dissatisfaction was apparent throughout rehearsals and several considerations were made to accommodate the participant's concerns. However, the participant remained unhappy with certain aspects of the performance, speculatively leading to the removal of a piece from the repertoire[30]. Cases as such indicate minor ruptures in ensemble cohesion, relaying the importance of managing interpersonal dynamics for effective musical presentation.

In contrast, rehearsals under the guidance of a teacher (EE2) are more structured and disciplined. Members closely follow the leader's directions, resulting in coordinated rehearsals. Unlike EE1 where members depend on accumulated skills and knowledge for rehearsals, the teacher in EE2 improves technical proficiency and provides clearer direction. In the group interview, Participant 204 articulates her dependence on a more senior member (Participant 203) who also plays the *erhu*. Peer support helps reduce performance anxiety and facilitates self-directed learning. Simultaneously, the senior returns similar sentiments of

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[30] The piece is arranged as a practice piece by another member of the group who is informally learning music composition.

comfort during collaborative learning, contributing to a conducive learning environment during rehearsals. However, individual skills remain as a limiting factor in performance.

Both rehearsal approaches have inherent strengths and weaknesses. Ensemble-playing among peers of similar proficiency, like EE1, require self-directed learning and precision (精准度) in each musician's performance. Without a dominant musical leader, individual experiences significantly influence music interpretation and facilitate smoother rehearsal processes as members independently process their parts.

Participant 103 raises concerns about the over-dependency on conductors in the current Chinese orchestra education system, emphasizing the need to develop independent musical interpreting skills. This autonomous approach allows greater flexibility to adapt and refine interpretations collaboratively. The participant also observes a tendency among ensemble members to simply practice without attention to detail to appease unacquainted audiences. Therefore, the self-directed ensemble approach poses challenges in consistency and cohesion without a central guiding figure or 'auditor' character to oversee rehearsals or evaluate rehearsal outcomes.

Community cohesion between group members is crucial in ensemble playing. Commitment and sense of community shape group dynamics and overall playing experience. EE1 participants show lower levels of commitment, not due to closeness among members, but because most are working adults or students with other priorities. Participant 105 notes that work or school obligations during weekdays restrict rehearsal time to weekends. Additionally, the perceived seriousness of the performance (playing 'for fun' or a professional setting) and anticipated audience reception also alters the attitude and commitment to a good performance (Participant 103).

In comparison, EE2 members demonstrate higher curiosity, interest in exploration, and dedication to the ensemble, potentially influenced by their younger age, student status, or instructor mentorship. Participant 203's enthusiasm for new musical knowledge like the 12-Bar Blues exemplifies this dedication. Another member grappled with mental health issues like low self-esteem and anxiety, but gained confidence through peer support and challenges offered during rehearsals.

Moreover, EE2 exhibited a strong sense of belonging, a factor of community cohesion (Cantle, 2023b), through music as a platform for social bonding and shared passion. An example of this cohesion is the collective celebration of a member's birthday during

rehearsals. The participant, whose parents were seldom present, deeply appreciated the arrangement, commenting that music means coming together with a common passion for it.

Nonetheless, as close friends, there is strong coordination and chemistry among EE1 members. In Participant 105's journal, effective communication helps to navigate melodies that demand coordination among performers. Particularly noteworthy was the lessened stress to perform *Merging Together*, as a member injected entertainment to alleviate the heavy mood associated with the strive for perfection. Participants with prior experiences in small group playing recognize the advantages of heightened attentiveness to the performance of others and strong individual responsibilities, given the absence of backup performers to cover mistakes. Consequently, EE1 demonstrates that precision and cohesion are aspects of a successful ensemble performance.

The ensemble performance experience is both enjoyable and enlightening for most participants. Beyond music, friendships and bonding built over *yumcha* sessions add extra enjoyment to the experience (Participant 107). Generally, EE1 desire similar performances in future, indicating a positive reception to this ensemble approach. Regardless, this research provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the ensemble performance format. Participant 105 contemplates a 'to-go' version of ensembles, a concept of 'high-caliber musicians practicing for a short period of time, perform, and move on to the next performance'. He suggests that changes in society have shifted its quality towards productivity-focused rehearsals and performances. Concerns about future opportunities arise for musicians excluded from these small, clique-like ensembles, or novice learners who may struggle to keep up with their intensity. The participant notes an increase in similar ensemble formats, usually friend groups, that are trending in the development of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia (more in Chapter 6.4).

During the interview, Participant 203 expressed curiosity about the outcomes of the other group to learn from their adaptive methods. Although the recording was well-executed, she recognizes room for improvement, and that 'knowledge is infinite' (学无止境). The participant wishes that future rehearsals maintain a similarly serious attitude. EE2 returned to their string quartet practice after the experiment.

This experiment highlights the significance of adaptive management and community cohesion in achieving successful ensemble performances, demonstrating resilience amidst challenges. McCaleb's research (2014, 2016) emphasizes the need for environmental

awareness, interpretive flexibility, and technical fluency for effective ensemble performances, assessed by performers, peers, and audiences. His findings encourage students to increase ensemble cohesiveness and musicality through reflection.

Experiment results parallels McCaleb's pedagogical research, concurring the need for performers to continually refine their musical abilities and exhibit professionalism. However, the foundational question remains: what is the ensemble's purpose? The purpose, along with factors such as organizational structure, communication methods, and individual experiences, also influences the ensemble's community cohesiveness, management strategies, and performance. Fundamentally, I argue that successful ensemble performances come from accumulated experiences in a lifelong learning journey, hinging on the synergy between adaptive management strategies and the resulting ensemble cohesion.

Chapter 6 – Sustainable Actions for Continuous Blossoming

Circling back to the theme of ecomusicology, Chapter 6 addresses the first research question to examine how the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia evolves and sustains itself as a cultural ecosystem in the modernizing society. Sustainability, a key concept of ecosystem health, refers to the system's ability to maintain its structure (organization) and function (vigor) over time despite external pressures (Costanza and Mageau, 1999). Additionally, Baron and Walker (2019: 3) approach sustainability by using metaphors to structure the intangible and indeterminate concept of culture and the environment. This research also already utilizes metaphors extensively, which supports the aim of this study to point out the concordances and departures between nature and culture.

Rather than postulating a singular imperative, the chapter collectively addresses the final research question—discovering initiatives that can develop and sustain the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia. This inquiry is interwoven into various topics to form a cohesive narrative that threads the entire study. Moreover, by reframing the Chinese orchestra as an assemblage and plateaus, we gain a deeper understanding of equal representation where each component within the assemblage follows its own trajectory, yet collectively converges to form the cultural ecosystem in a complex web of interconnections.

The analogy of the bamboo is appropriate to visualize this network as it is an indispensable material for the construction of Chinese instruments such as the *sheng* and *dizi* that gives them their distinctive timbres. As a rhizome, the bamboo symbolizes sustainability and resilience with its durable structure. Practitioners attest to the sustainability of bamboo as an instrument material; its abundance and rapid growth make it a perennial resource that is sustainable without the fear of depletion.

To answer the final research question, the Cultural Sustainable Web (CSW) is proposed as a responsive framework designed to nurture cultural systems in a rapidly changing global environment. Drawing inspiration from the Value Stages in the Cultural Indicator/Value Production Matrix (Mercer, 2002, Figure 4) and Circuit of Culture (Du Gay et al., 1997, Figure 5), the Cultural Sustainable Web embodies a similar flow:
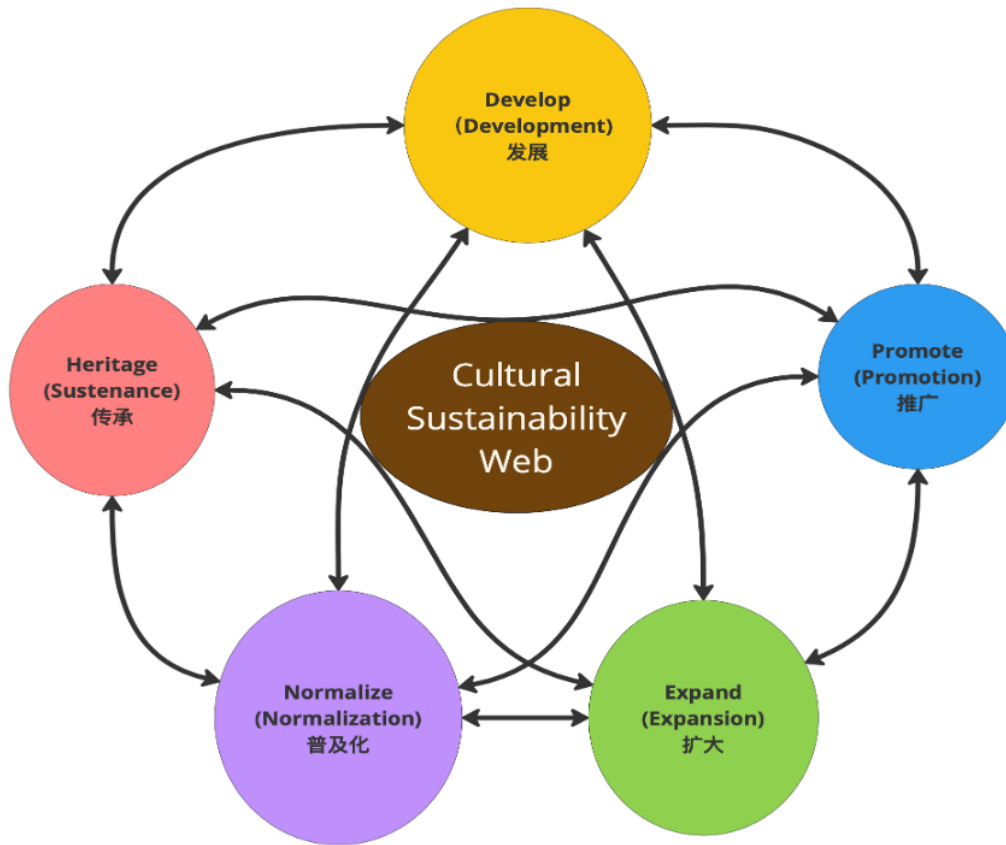
Figure 33. Model of the Cultural Sustainability Web (CSW)

The CSW model embodies a non-linear and pluralistic approach towards cultural sustainability, diverging from singular pathways and allowing for multiplicity. Here is an overview of the rationale behind the model:

- In the **development** stage, strong, decisive actions are crucial to consolidate a particular trajectory within the cultural ecosystem. It involves the shaping and formation of ideas.

- Once ideas are consolidated, the **promotion** phase disseminates these concepts to a wider audience, amplifying awareness and engagement.

- **Expansion** is an organic process that could follow—once a cultural concept is promoted, the culture is naturally expanded, or it could be induced through collaborations or increased activities. If the idea faces resistance, it could regress to earlier stages.

- With the establishment of culture, **normalization** occurs. At this stage, the cultural practice is generally accepted and becomes a normative behavior within the community.

- Over time, the practice evolves into a cultural heritage or tradition, that requires **sustenance** through development to adapt to contemporary realities and maintain relevance in changing spatial and temporal conditions.

The CSW is conceptualized as a dynamic 'web' that recognizes the ever-evolving nature of living cultural ecologies. It acknowledges constant ebbs and flows, that full equilibrium is never static, but evolves dynamically over time, as indicated by the non-linear connectors between stages. Following the initial design phase, the stages parallels those identified by Mercer, thus suggesting their applicability in the cultural industry. This parallel also allows the transposition of concepts and strategies across different cultural contexts.

Although there is less direct parallelism between the CSW and Circuit of Culture when observed along with the Value Stages, the Circuit of Culture's overarching structure and flow remain influential in shaping the CSW. By incorporating elements of cultural representation, production, and consumption, the CSW enhances its capacity to address the complexities inherent in cultural sustainability. This integration allows a comprehensive understanding of cultural products and their impact within the broader cultural ecosystem.
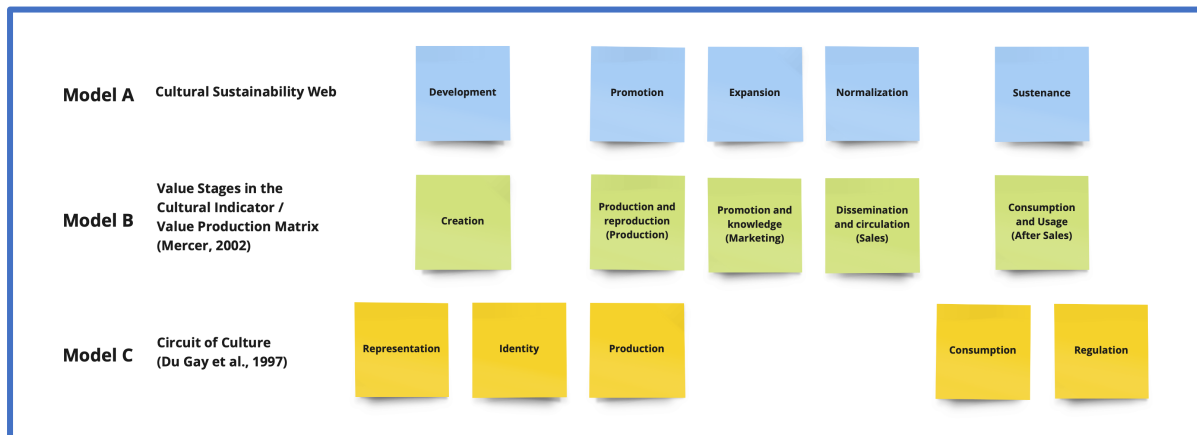
Figure 34. CSW Model Comparison

Other notable parallels found in Chinese orchestra literature further support the CSW. Luo and Chung (2010) portrays the cultural shift of traditional Chinese music in Southeast Asia in a comparable process of transmission, inheritance, conflict, preservation, interaction, and fusion (传播-传承-冲突-保持-交流-融合). While they propose a cyclical pattern of cultural shift in similar terminologies, the CSW, however, depicts an ongoing cultural process that exists within a different assemblage where lines of flight connect the two processes and potentially lead to new trajectories.

Additionally, Lim in Yong (2016: 38) identifies normalization and sustenance (普及性，华乐传承性) processes in the development of the Chinese orchestra that also align with elements of the CSW. These stages are vital in educational institutions (schools) as an insurance for the sustainability of the Chinese orchestra. The CSW recognizes normalization as a weak link, signifying the necessity for intensified efforts to advance towards this stage. The achievement of normalization involves finding ways for acceptance and integration of the Chinese orchestra into Malaysian society as a commonplace and valued cultural entity.

All the keywords associated with the stages of the CSW are derived from practitioners interviewed for this research. They contribute valuable insight that not only bolster but enrich the foundation of the CSW. By drawing on the perspectives of cultural insiders themselves, this research clarifies the processes at play in cultural sustainability, while underscoring the importance of engaging with cultural stewards—those taking charge to protect and sustain the cultural ecosystem.

Chapter 6 features interviews with practitioners and their perspectives on ecology and sustainability. Chapter 6.1 is an examination of sustainability through the direct relationship between Chinese music, environmental soundscapes, and nature. Yii is highlighted as the Chinese orchestra composer in Malaysia who investigates soundscapes and the human-nature relationship.

Next, Chapter 6.2 carries the theme of Chinese musical instrument expansion and modification, in consideration of their ecological impacts and sustainability. Emphasis is placed on debates surrounding symphonization and various responses through innovations, instrument repair, and the case study of the Shao Workshop (韶笙唢工作坊) for the promotion of wind instruments in Malaysia. The ensuing Chapter 6.3 reassesses the spectrum of opinions regarding the future of digital versus live music in light of technological advancement, answering the question 'is the internet the future of *huayue*?' in this age where rapid digitalization is inevitable.

The final two chapters are interconnected, focusing on the roles of cultural stewards in their responsibility to nurture the musical culture, managing the cultural soil for a sustainable yield (Titon, 2020: 158). Chapter 6.4 delves into trends and measures within the Chinese orchestra community in Malaysia, proposing sustainable models based on the CSW. Themes of the *guzheng* ensemble, educational and organizational reformations are aimed at fostering the long-term viability of the Chinese orchestra. Central to these discussions is the

notion of 'refinement' (精致化), projected to be achieved through the expansion of ensemble and chamber music groups. Shifting the spotlight to the future, Chapter 6.5 envisions the future of the Chinese orchestra, narrating collective ambitions and goals for sustainability. From here, continuity is recognized as practitioners seek community cohesion and cultural preservation. The section explores initiatives of the community that could eventually lead to professionalization and elevate the prospects of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra in the global landscape.

6.1 *Sounds of Nature* (来自大自然的声音)[1] – Sustainable Environmental Soundscapes

The Anthropocene narrative often blames humanity and cultural modernization as the culprits of extinctions and environmental degradation, presenting a limiting nature/culture binary in its portrayal of cultures in conflict with nature (Baron and Walker, 2019). However, the relationship between living beings ('culture') and the environment encompassing them ('nature') appears more intertwined when viewed from the flow of sounds in the environment, indicating a copresence that bonds the community (Titon, 2020: 235).

The music and soundscapes of the Chinese orchestra accentuates this environmental connection in its historical manifestations. A poetic example dates back 3000 years to the legend of Boya and Ziqi in the Zhou dynasty. The *guqin* piece, *High Mountains and Flowing Water* (高山流水), is the referential music of few interviewees as embodying a 'metaphorical, natural artistic conception', a legacy of Chinese music in the philosophizing of nature.

Most traditional *huayue* compositions depict scenarios or imageries, tell stories, or marvel at locational beauty. These sounds may not directly come from nature or mimic it, but the music often expresses reverence for nature, created in awe of the experienced scenario, with musical styles, expressions, and instrument techniques visualizing the imagery (Interviewees 28 and 30). Moreover, Chinese instruments, crafted from natural materials[2],

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[1] Yii Kah Hoe composed this piece in 2019 for the *sapeh* and Chinese orchestra, inspired by the auditory assemblage of the Sarawakian jungle and indigenous communities. The use of this composition as the title for this topic symbolizes a symbiotic relationship of the Chinese orchestra with the natural environment, raising questions of environmental sustainability. The success of *Sound of Nature* demonstrates that cross-cultural compositions can benefit both Chinese and Sarawakian communities (Chalil, 2019).
Guided listening (*The Journey* concert, 2019): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGk9msNxirE
[2] Sustainability concerns led to the exploration of synthetic materials to reduce animal slaughter. Nonetheless, Chinese instruments are still made from natural resources (see following section).

produce sounds that evoke comfort and harmony. Interviewee 20 states that Chinese instruments are distinct in their ability to mimic natural sounds. Some metaphorical associations[3] include: *dizi*/bird, *erhu*/horse, *guzheng*/flowing water, and *yangqin*/cicada. The pentatonic scale is also interpreted as a representation of this ebb and flow of nature.

Interviewee 01 explains that *huayue* songs have *minyue* (民乐) roots, with many musical techniques derived from *minjian* traditions like acrobat troupes, where animal sounds are made as performance tricks. Another category, *wenqu* (文曲), are songs of scholars who describe their emotions through musical instruments. From the 1950s, compositions were often associated with seasons, labor activities, and festivities. These traditions eventually evolved into contemporary *huayue* that is more symphonized and Westernized.

Indeed, the traditional essence and spirit of *huayue* is abstract and full of nature-related imageries (Interviewee 33). From ancient Chinese philosophy to postmodern perspectives, the desire to unite music with nature is reflected in the naming, theme, or the intention of compositions (Interviewee 06, 07). Traditional music embodies this intrinsic relationship with the natural environment, whereas contemporary music explores the built environment we now occupy (Chapter 4.1).

Some argue that *huayue*'s connection to nature is gradually abandoned for symphonization, departing from the literal correlation. Others express diminished stimulation and appeal of new compositions in this disconnection from nature. New pieces written in the pentatonic scale are dismissed as 'just another *huayue* song', unable to compete with their predecessors, contributing to a preference for Westernization and modernization (Interviewee 02). Hence, Interviewee 25 suggests sustaining both traditional and contemporary forms simultaneously, comparing them to railway tracks moving parallel in the same direction.

The transition of living environment due to modernization and assimilation of diasporic communities into local environments echo changes in human/nature dynamics and influence the digress in musical styles. The relationship is rather straightforward; characteristics of a piece often tell its geographical origin, from the culture and lifestyle of the people performing it. As Yii observes, each locale has unique artistic pursuits, and the understanding of other cultures help identify resonant elements (*The Historical Melody of*

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[3] Some examples of iconic solo pieces are *A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix* (百鸟朝凤, *suona*) and *Horse Racing* (赛马, *erhu*).

Chinese Music in Malaysia, 2022: 130). Interviewee 01 contrasts the relationship in different environments[4]:

> Mainland China compositions are more dynamic, fast, and expansive, because of their rapid pace of development and living. Their need for stimulation and instant gratification results in songs without long intros to guide into the main theme. In contrast, music in the 80s is slower and more expressive, when composers were coming out from their villages. Now, it's quite impossible because orchestras may have to perform the song soon after it is written. The songs are all fast paced for the context.

Under circumstances of development, reconciliation between the sonic profile and the environment occurs to accommodate the community or society residing in it. As a result, new music adapts to specific spatial and temporal conditions. Contemporary music requires contemporary safeguarding methods, transcending the nature/culture binary to reinforce our connection to nature. Simultaneously, this evolution does not disintegrate the preexisting relationship with nature but reflects a yearning to return to a less constructed condition of living.

In Malaysia, Chinese orchestra practitioners regard Yii Kah Hoe as the foremost figure in the sonic exploration of nature. An interviewee recounted a conversation with Yii where he emphasized that the sounds of a particular location change over time, reflecting the development of the cityscape and its impact on the continuity of natural sounds. Will these sounds eventually vanish? Although many of these auditory impacts do not affect the Chinese orchestra, they are profoundly related to human experiences. Issues of overdevelopment and pollution pose big challenges to sustainability and humanity. Yii captures these themes and emotions, expressing them through *huayue* as a performance medium.

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[4] In a casual conversation, a musician remarked on the contrasting lifestyle between East and West Malaysia, in observation of the more relaxed and leisurely pace of life in East Malaysia compared to the hectic life full of noise in developed cities in West Malaysia.

Figure 35. 'Listening to the Sound of Nature' (Yii, 2024). The soundscape illustrations show how music is closely linked to the environment, when they align with the visual appearance of the natural environment. It also bears resemblance with Bussotti's music (Figure 3).

Undoubtedly, the essence of these compositions lies in their awareness impact rather than the instruments used. Yii's work transpose soundscapes from the jungle to urban audiences (Interviewee 31). He explores potentials of the Chinese orchestra in the local scene, like the incorporation of Kelantan *wayang kulit* and indigenous Sarawakian culture. There is an organic form of social responsibility in documenting an environment through music after detailed study (Interviewee 24).

Through Yii's music, expressions of the *orang asli* (natives) are conveyed through tempo and instrumentation. In Interviewee 24's assessment, the similarity in rhythm of life between the *orang asli* and urban dwellers becomes apparent through the displacement of sounds, despite differences in lifestyle and geography. Recognizing these connections helps deconstruct entrenched ecological binaries and challenge divisive power dynamics.

According to Rogers (2012: 63), performances impact ecology due to the mutual interdependence of organic and non-organic components. Interviewee 20 adds that the depiction of nature in artistic expression is inherent in human cultures, in mutual affect. Perhaps the underlying message to cherish nature for its role in sustaining us. Music helps individuals harmonize their inner states in natural environments, although this practice has

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waned. The interviewee suggests that our connection to nature goes beyond the need to preserve it; nature inspires creative works and shapes our cultural and ethnic identities.

Today, the boundaries of sound are delimited from immediate environments. *Huayue* educators encourage students to decipher the imagery conveyed through the music they perform. This association is also extended to cultural and historical environments, as music depicting history or exotic locations require research for full comprehension. For instance, Interviewee 31 highlights the challenge of conveying the visceral experience of a hot and humid desert to students in Malaysia's consistent rainforest climate. Educators use alternative methods such as YouTube videos to simulate the natural elements embedded within music from other regions[5].

Educators like Interviewee 32 creatively engage students through activities like hiking, interactive games, and metaphors[6] to evoke the sensory aspects of the natural world. These firsthand experiences and exposure transform musical expressions by connecting students with qualities of the natural world. In emphasizing connections and removing conventional definitions of nature, the use of metaphors broadens connections between humanity and the surrounding environment.

Earlier chapters questioned whether the Chinese orchestra is genuinely at risk and in need of safeguarding. Given its trajectories and assemblages across the world, it is adaptable to diverse environments and contexts, appearing unendangered and even highly sustainable as a cultural ecosystem. However, the changing global environment may cause a disconnect from traditional practices. Despite its resilience, long-term sustainability actions are required to keep the Chinese orchestra relevant to contemporary audiences.

In sound-making communities (performers and listeners), exchanges through physical covibration create interconnectedness, social cohesion, solidarity, and unity within the community, therefore also enabling economy and ecology (Titon, 2020: 260). In resonance, Interviewee 26 underlines the connection between community formation and nature, emphasizing music as the medium to express it. He argues that Malaysia is still in the early stages of advocating for nature, focusing on humanities, to have songs that go into the *minjian* to promote the Chinese orchestra.

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[5] Return to Chapter 4.5 for discussions about the use of visual materials in education.
[6] Interviewee 32 visualizes the transition of darkness to light by gradually opening curtains for sunlight to enter when students play the music from low to high pitched instruments. The sensory approach enhances their 'feel' and immersion in musical interpretation.

Viewing human connections with nature as a rhizome—a network without hierarchies—clarifies that nature and culture are intertwined entities. Such endeavors symbolize a return to the people and the environment. Interviewee 13 suggests fusing *huayue* with yoga or meditation, or using natural sounds to create music, to reinforce this linkage to nature. Instead of changing the music, the relationship between the Chinese orchestra and the environment is seen in societal and cultural constructs, like establishing musical halls in community areas. As people engage with cultural activities in their surroundings, they develop a greater appreciation for nature and sustainability.

6.2 *Dance of the Golden Snake* (金蛇狂舞) [7] – Sustainable Musical Instruments

New attendees of a Chinese orchestra concert would be surprised by its symphony orchestra characteristics. It is divided into four sections, organized similarly as a typical symphony orchestra[8], but with Chinese instruments (Tan, S. B., 2000: 108). Although the instrumentation is largely standardized since the 1960s, modification and expansions are ongoing. Presently, the instrument sections of the Chinese orchestra have expanded into the following:

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[7] This 1934 composition by iconic musical figure Nie Er (聂耳) is a joyful festive piece arranged from a folk tune. Aptly named, the title is a literal description of the section—the python skin used to craft *huqin* instruments.
Guided listening (Southern Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiUSnwVSbFQ
[8] The Chinese orchestra's layout is based on the conductor's sound balancing ideals. However, a common arrangement involves positioning the conductor at the center, with the string section on both sides and the rest fanning out. Figure 36 shows an example of the Chinese orchestra instrument sections.
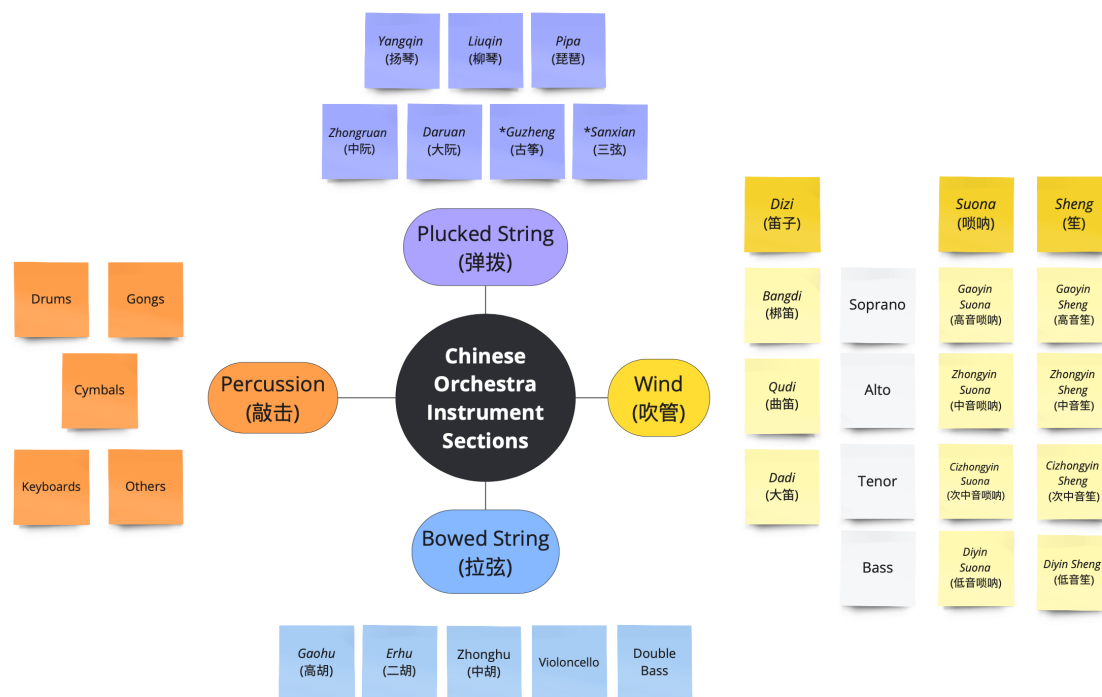
Figure 36. Chinese Orchestra Instrument Sections. Some instrument uses depend on specific instrumentation requirements of a composition.

To ensure growth and sustainability, instrument modification in the Chinese orchestra initially aimed to expand its range, volume, and normalize the 12-tone temperament (Han, 1979: 18-19). Since most Chinese orchestra instruments are originally of higher registers, the invention of low-register instruments thickens the mid and lower registers for a fuller orchestral sound, essential in the symphonization process—Western harmony requires SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) voicing (Interviewees 12, 19, and 24). The most prominent expansions occur in the *suona* and *sheng* families (as illustrated in Figure 36), where new *zhongyin* (alto), *cizhongyin* (tenor), and bass instruments are introduced[9] to replicate the depth of the symphony orchestra's brass section. The wind section has room for development since instruments of the plucked string section already have very individually strong Chinese characteristics, and the bowed string section[10] has completed its expansion.

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[9] Interviewee 19 elaborates that the *suona* system is mature with mid-range instruments developed for over 30 years, and the bass *suona* over the past decade, all borrowing mechanics from woodwind instruments like the clarinet and oboe. However, earlier keyed (加键) instruments are poorly made and require specialized repair skills.

[10] Instruments like the *gehu* (革胡) and *laruan* (拉阮) are invented to increase 'Chinese-ness' of the bass section, but their normalization face obstacles involving cost and timbre. Interviewee 26 comments that the *erhu* is historically smaller with stronger 'flavors', but some of its essence and character are compromised to amplify its volume by adding resonators or changing its body design, also the invention of the *shaoqin* (绍琴).

According to Interviewee 19, these instruments are still improvised with additional mechanical keys for modern compositions that require chromatic scales and frequent key changes. However, for traditional and folk melodies, traditional instruments remain fundamental to maintain their essence. For that reason, the traditional *gaoyin suona* still holds an important position in orchestras and is irreplaceable. Similarly, the new keyed *sheng* (键笙) is used in orchestras for its harmony, but solo performances often continue using the traditional *sheng* (传统笙)[11].

Additionally, symphonization introduced foreign key signatures that induce the creation of new instruments like the *xinguan* (新管)[12] by teachers from the SCO (Interviewee 19). Interviewee 16 adds that students can easily learn this new instrument with minimal practice. However, its timbre has become discernibly different, resembling a clarinet, and the traditional version remains favored for its characteristic sound.

Among all instruments in the Chinese orchestra, the *dizi* presents the greatest challenge for reformation because its design limits accuracy in chromaticism[13], a crucial aspect of Western harmony. Traditional Chinese music values techniques like glissando, an identifying characteristic at odds with Western standards. This contradiction poses difficulties for musicians for the diverging paths of musical traditions (Interviewee 21).

The trajectory of instrument modification is influenced other main Chinese orchestra regions, especially Mainland China's push towards harmonious, Westernized symphonization (Interviewees 12, 21, and 26). However, Western music influence concerns those who advocate the preservation of Chinese essence, despite its powerful presence in folk music and extensive student base. An interviewee argues that only the Chinese modify instruments for

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[11] The modernization of the keyed *gaoyin sheng* has ergonomic advantages and masks shortcomings of its traditional original, but sacrifices technical and artistic characteristics in playing traditional pieces, using it for accompaniment. Interviewee 14 states that conservatories uphold teachings of traditional *sheng*s (commonly the 24-reed and 37-reed). The 37-reed *sheng* preserves traditional fingerings, blowing techniques, skills, and perform modern pieces. It is commented that 'anybody can play the keyed *sheng*' (I participated in an orchestra competition playing the *gaoyin sheng* after little practice).

[12] The *guanzi* (管子) has double reeds and is difficult to master. In contrast, the *xinguan* appears as a clarinet—single reed, mechanical keys. Interviewee 16 speculates its development into a major section in the orchestra supporting the alto and bass ranges. Additionally, this evolution reduces costs by using the conventional clarinet reed.

[13] *Dizi* maestro Chen Zhongshen (陈中申, Taiwan) invented the semitonal *dizi* (半音笛) to improve pitch accuracy and eliminate the need for multiple *dizi*s for key changes. However, its popularity is limited due to the requirement to learn new fingerings. Critics argue that removing the membrane or adding keys would strip the *dizi* of its character, becoming no different from a Western flute. Moreover, Interviewee 11 opposes material modifications such as plastic instead of bamboo or eliminating the membrane, citing negative impacts on the instrument's timbre, considering them as 'unnecessary developments'.

orchestral use, contrasting with traditional music ensembles from countries like Korea and Turkey, which prioritize their ethnic characteristics. This raises questions about removing one's cultural strength in favor of unfamiliar standards.

Amidst debates over Chinese identity preservation versus symphonization, Chinese instruments have long been undergoing technical and mechanical advancements. Instruments modifications are easy to recognize as they usually contain mechanical parts (e.g. keys, tuning mechanisms), taking after the scientific design of Western instruments for more consistency. Practitioners identify two types of modifications—reformation (改革), overhauling the instrument[14] (e.g. *sheng*), and improvement/enhancement (改良), overcoming technical issues (e.g. *erhu*). These modifications encompass three main areas of exploration—changes to the instrument, its music, and its playing techniques. Some improvements are discussed with practitioners[15]:

1. *Guzheng*

The *guzheng* is experiencing a fascinating evolution to overcome its traditional pentatonic scale limitations. Innovations like the butterfly *zheng* (蝶式箏), key-changing/new *zheng* (潘氏箏) and cylindrical *zheng* (滾筒箏) aim to streamline key changes in concerts, reducing the need for multiple instruments. However, the removal of the pentatonic feature is criticized to result in a harp timbre, and mastering these innovations present conceptual challenges.

2. *Yangqin*

The *yangqin* is undergoing structural and technique modifications to stand out among dulcimers. An innovative advancement of the pedal (踏板/制音器) mutes sustained notes for cleaner sound, enhancing expressiveness. It is viewed positively as a transformative innovation for future sound quality (Interviewee 28 and 33). Currently advantageous in competitions, it is still less demanded in Malaysia. Mini *yangqin*s for young learners and compact models for outdoor use are also developed.

3. *Pipa*

The *pipa* is fitted with extra frets for semitonal playing and technologically enhanced with reinforced strings (Interviewee 09). However, some are considered non-essential

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[14] The *liuqin* is reformed from two strings in opera ensembles, to three, then four strings as part of the Chinese orchestra, enhancing its functionality.
[15] Modifications to the *ruan* have been discussed in Chapter 4.6.

developments like the addition of a fifth bass string, criticized to increase purchase expense for dedicated compositions. This introduction can be considered as a revival of the ancient *pipa*, preserved in Japan.

Interviewees 10 and 13 identify critical considerations—upholding the instrument's timbre (to retain its *yùn*), respecting traditional playing methods, and maintaining its visual appearance[16]. Improvisations should enhance ergonomics, stability, sound quality, tonal color, techniques, and elevate the orchestra's overall performance. In agreement, Interviewee 20 highlights the importance of intentionality in modifications, whether for showcasing new techniques, exploring musical possibilities, achieving special effects, or to fulfil artistic creations. Similarly, Interviewee 07 questions reforms that prioritize tone color or materials without clear direction and purpose. Ultimately, the goal is to make the instrument more scientifically sound, improving its functionality while respecting its traditional roots.

The construction of instruments presents ecological challenges due to their derivation from precious woods like rosewood (花梨木), redwood (红木), and sandalwood (檀木), which are becoming scarcer and more expensive. This leads to the substitution of inferior alternatives, raising concerns of overpricing and fraud (Interviewees 3, 7 and 26). Sometimes, instruments made of expensive materials may still have intonation issues due to poor craftsmanship. Sustainability efforts to use recycled wood or carbon fiber face mixed reviews (Interviewee 10).

On a positive note, increased animal protection advocacy have led to changes, such as the replacement of tortoiseshell (玳瑁) with resin for artificial nails and finding eco-friendlier alternatives for cow or pig skin parts (like drum membranes). Plastic drinking straws (吸管哨) are made into *suona* reeds, suitable for beginners or casual playing for their affordability and durability, although they are considered inferior.

Regardless, the introduction of the Eco-Huqin (环保胡琴) by the HKCO[17] marks a significant step towards sustainability, replacing python skin membranes with synthetic materials (Yuen, 2022). The synthetic membrane invention also offers tangible benefits of enhanced sound stability, elasticity, sustainment of high-pitched notes, timbre consistency

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[16] Several interviewees express ambivalence towards changes in appearance. Some argue that such changes are unnecessary; instead, technique is important to accentuate the instrument's sonic characteristic and flavors. The stylistic output depends on the musician's training, and improvisation should focus on playing technique and not altering the instrument's structure. Otherwise, any modifications would be futile.

[17] The HKCO has always pioneered the Chinese orchestra ecosystem with its adoption of staff notation and avant-garde compositions (Han, 1979: 26).

across instruments, resistance to temperature and humidity fluctuations, and deterioration (Interviewee 07, 10, 16, and 17).

However, the Eco-Huqin received criticism, for prioritizing environmental concerns over sound quality; some erhu players express dissatisfaction with the reduced tone color and essence for solo performance[18]. Additionally, the instrument has limited accessibility due to its higher cost and the requirement for entire orchestras to adopt it for sonic consistency. There are also claims that the synthetic membrane cannot maintain tonal quality over extended durations.

These instrument modification developments bring significant implications to the sustainability of Malaysia's ecosystem, particularly instrument in schools suffering wear and tear from neglect or damage by students. Although minor repair and maintenance work can be handled by any carpenter, there is a culture of disposing instruments from a lack of after-service, and the repair price is sometimes comparable to buying a cheap second-hand instrument. Some propose that instrument sellers should provide after-sales services to address this issue. However, professional repairers prefer to solve wear and tear issues with expensive instruments like the *sheng* and *suona* (sometimes the price of a car), as they may be made with better materials worth repairing rather than replacing. These conditions highlight the importance of instrument repair in Malaysia.

Capital constraints in Malaysia's *huayue* ecosystem cause reservations about investing in research and development, leading many to suggest 'saving breakthroughs for China and follow their footsteps'. A shortage of experts in professional instrument servicing means Malaysians have to send instruments for servicing at significant costs (e.g. *suona* in Johor, *erhu* in Sabah, *pipa* in Singapore). In comparison to Singapore or Taiwan of higher capital, Malaysian orchestras have less access to affordable repairs and tuning services (Interviewees 24, 25, and 26). Furthermore, repairmen can only modify instruments but not redesign; major structural and dimension modifications falls on factories (Interviewee 19). Discrepancies in instrument specifications across makers also challenge general repair works.

The future of the Malaysian ecosystem calls for skilled technicians to support the growth of Chinese orchestras, given the rarity of professionals in repair crafts and high costs of overseas repair. Some practitioners intend to venture into repair work because of this

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[18] Interviewee 25 notes the expensive cost of snakeskin, up to 1000RMB a piece. He experimented with timpani membranes, but there are still discernible differences. Taiwan also has its own synthetic membrane research.

shortage. However, instrument repairers express difficulty in finding trainees[19] due to difficulties in livelihood as a niche profession, the demanding nature of the work, and the need for extensive research and study (Interviewees 19 and 25). Many professionals do part time repair work, remaining committed to promote and provide quality instruments.

Figure 37. *Thunderous Resonance* concert by Shao Workshop. Seated: *Dizi* (left), *Sheng* (center), *Suona* (right). Standing: Percussion. Wind and percussion music (吹打乐) is essential in regional music. The instrumentation of many pieces is expanded to include the new alto and bass instruments.

Shao Workshop, founded by Malaysian *huayue* wind section musicians, aims to disseminate instrument knowledge and expand their audience base. Beginning with friends interested in *sheng* repair and maintenance, the company's mission is to promote, educate, and to provide sales and repair services of the *sheng* and *suona*. It held its first concert in November 2023 (Figure 37). In his teaching, the interviewed practitioner also promotes the traditional *sheng* and its maintenance skills, hoping to increase professionalism among local musicians.

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[19] Even with expressed interest, an interviewee recounts the challenging conditions of learning from a craftsman in China. He was keen on preserving his 'trade secrets', and made the learner vow not to share the knowledge to anyone but his children.

When instruments like the *zhongyin* and *diyin sheng* were introduced through symphonization, performers were reassigned from existing parts to fill temporary positions. It is challenging for most orchestras to acquire these expensive instruments, let alone individuals. Initiatives like Shao Workshop are pivotal in normalizing these innovations in Malaysia by integrating them into new repertoires, educating about them, uncovering their potentials, fostering appreciation, and providing sales and maintenance services. This demonstrates significant growth towards the sustainability of the ecosystem.

6.3 *City of Tomorrow* (明日之城) [20] – The Internet of Things

From the establishment of the digital environment (Chapter 3.4) to the digitalization process of *huayue* (Chapter 5.2), we have now reached a critical juncture: the debate about the 'internet of things' and its implications for the future of *huayue* as a live traditional music culture in an increasingly globalized world.

Undoubtedly, digitalization pose challenges and limitations, and caution is advised against undue reliance on online platforms for the future of music-making. However, before passing judgement on the internet, we must ask: Does the community see the internet as the future of *huayue*? This question harvested a spectrum of responses, some firmly believing in the internet as the future (yes), already underway in shaping the landscape (no), or doubt its ability to replace live music experiences (no). While there is no clear consensus, many practitioners express concerns about the compatibility of the internet with the essence of musical interactions. The general feedback agrees that the internet is not necessarily the optimal trajectory for the future of *huayue*.

Interviewee 10 underscores the importance to retain interpersonal connections through live performances in the internet-prone future. While the internet offers widespread promotion and outreach, the essence of live interactions on stage remains central. Without them, performances risk losing the human dimension, replicable by solitary digital renditions. Using a food metaphor, Interviewee 01 narrates our musical experiences on the internet:

> A complete internet of things is not possible. Let's say that you like to eat Korean Shin Ramyun. Without trying it, you would wonder about its spiciness with a certain

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[20] Composed by Junyi Chow in 2019, *City of Tomorrow* is an innovative experiment containing a section that requires audiences to record and replay the performance using their mobile devices, purportedly projecting the present into the future. Examining sound in past, present, and future allows considerations of the 'tomorrow' of *huayue* amidst rapid digitalization and globalization.

anticipation. Then, it feels amazing when you finally eat it in Korea. But now? Korean Shin Ramyun is everywhere; I can eat it without going to Korea. It is almost the same experience, hence the anticipation decreases, but your affinity to it increases. Similarly, with SCO, their music is amazing, and I really want to listen to it. However, they are always online now. When it becomes common, the experience is just…

Would we still want to visit Korea after seeing media resources of it, or make virtual tours of its streets on the internet? The answer would probably be 'yes', as the digital realm offer glimpses, but it cannot replace the immersive and multisensory experience of physical embodiment. Likewise, live music provides an irreplaceable experience through the atmosphere and environment of the moment.

Central to the debate on the internet of things is the indispensable role of live performances in giving *huayue* its value as a musical culture, versus the possibilities of an online transition. Harper (2015) contends that online performances lack the 'jouissance', or pleasure, of attending a physical event. Citing Benjamin's concept of mechanical reproduction, he suggests that digital technology distances the artist and audience, in turn causing diminished response and validation. Interviewee 16 supports this by noting the barrier in online music that diminishes resonance and personal connection.

All interviewees unanimously agree that music must be experienced in person to be fully appreciated. Interviewee 20 highlights the vibrant atmosphere of live arts compared to screens, whereas Interviewee 28 elaborates on the awe of physical concerts, noting the limitations in impact of online videos. Online platforms supplement but do not replace physical events, which offer superior sensory experiences.

The live or digital music debate revolves around the 'essence' of music (refer to Chapter 4.6), with digital music facing criticism for their compressed and processed nature. Meanwhile, the live atmosphere allows experiences of real acoustic sounds and organic vibrations, which digital music cannot replicate (Interviewee 24). At its core, digital music enables connections and organization, yet fail to replicate the jouissance in a situated experience (Harper, 2015: 22, 26). Performers have to become actors with heightened performativity, embodying a new mindset and concept, and even a team of people working together to leverage the power of the internet.

Interviewee 20 contrasts the dynamism of live arts and the mechanical quality of digital presentations. While digital music offers a fantasy, it lacks the human essence found in live performances. Although technology can be integrated into performances, the question remains: what is the intended product? Concerns arise about technology, including AI, potentially overshadowing artistic expression. Despite advancements in technology and AI, which may rapidly analyze and respond to prompts, live performances are valued for their human touch and interactivity.

From a philosophical perspective, Interviewee 03 emphasizes the face-to-face connection of live music that touches the soul, over digital music. Meanwhile, Interviewee 24 reflects on the omnipresence of digital music, being an avenue that is less appreciated. Live music offers a more visceral encounter with its imperfections, reminding audiences of life's complexities. In this process, live concert attendees engage with a holistic sensory experience, fostering introspection and slowing down, regenerating the human touch that is fading in contemporary society.

In short, post-pandemic trends show a preference for live music (see Chapter 5.1), where online presentations alone are insufficient to sustain the ecosystem's vitality. Several practitioners regard the internet as a tool rather than the future of the Chinese orchestra. Interviewee 29 predicts the gradual decline of online performances due to waning enthusiasm, limited income, and their role as casual entertainment. This perspective places the internet as a supplementary instead of a complete replacement.

Disagreeing that the internet will dominate the future, Interviewees 17 and 22 acknowledge its existing indispensability in contemporary society, but as 'just another option' (Interviewee 04). Additionally, Interviewee 11 sees the internet as helpful but not definitive of the future. Interviewee 33 makes a strong argument, stating that 'this saying sounds as if Chinese music has no future without the internet'. In retrospect, sole reliance on the internet for the sustainability of the Chinese orchestra appears bleak. Instead, the internet should be seen as a useful channel for rapid information dissemination.

Current digital technology advancements redefine concert experiences, expand audience reach, and overcome geographical barriers (Szedmák, 2021: 167). The internet is a valuable tool for networking, cultural dissemination, and promotion, that expands the *huayue* ecosystem. Online content offers longevity, with performances videos allowing audiences to relive memorable moments (Interviewee 03).

Simultaneously, the online space fosters collaborative networks and converges communities in music learning (Waldron, 2020: 26; Interviewee 24 and 28). Despite technological advancements, proximity is preferred in situations like private classes, for better sound quality in learning (Interviewee 18). While the internet remains useful for classes or workshops, efforts invested in online initiatives may not always match outcomes, as the novelty of virtual interactions diminishes with the resumption of physical events. Online platforms also bridge geographical gaps and discover editing talents.

Interviewee 31 identifies technological drawbacks in music that will be eliminated in the future. The current digital landscape has technical issues that compromise sensitivity to tone, dynamics, authenticity, and the rawness of music, along with latency and hardware challenges (Interviewee 07 and 22). With a skeptical lens, Interviewee 02 questions the internet's dominance, noting its ties to physical environments and real-time sound production. Even at present, connectivity issues impede the transition to digital formats for classes. Physical musical instruments are not well-suited for online representations, and online performances lack significant impact on the audience. However, Szedmák's (2021) study shows how digital innovation for business in the cultural industry could benefit orchestras by improving operations and audience value, emphasizing the balance of economic profitability and generating positive social impact, that preserves traditional values.

The transition to digital environments requires new skills and coordinating efforts to effectively integrate technological hardware. Interviewee 20 is exploring possibilities of multimedia to create immersive stage experiences through sound and light, considering various factors and challenges associated with the incorporation of additional elements. Examples like the use of LED screens, holograms, and other projection technology in Cantonese opera at the Xiqu Centre in Hong Kong demonstrate innovative applications of technology that could be adapted to augment audience experiences and sustain traditional cultures in a globalizing world.

Changes in the sonic environment have reshaped how listeners interpret music. Contemporary compositions like *City of Tomorrow* and *Digital Stream* (Chapter 5.2 title) creatively integrate digital elements to bridge the gap between humanity and technology. These compositions introduce new rhythmic profiles and multiply experiences for analogical perceptions of music (Watkins, 2011: 406). Consequently, the sustainability and viability of online ventures in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem are being reevaluated to assess their effectiveness and contribution to overarching objectives. It is rational to envisage a future

wherein technology and humanity has blurred boundaries, given that the posthuman is coming to reality. With the digital becoming integral to human life, there is potential for it to become its own musical expression. Performance, in future, would return to question regarding the preservation of *yùn*, or as Harper (2015) suggests, jouissance in live music.

6.4 *Towards a Bright Future* (光明行)[21] – (Re)assembling the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia

In early 2024, Lin's article reported a Singaporean secondary school's decision to replace its Chinese orchestra with a *guzheng* ensemble, sparking widespread online discussion in Malaysia's Chinese orchestra community, perplexed as to why institutions would lose support for the Chinese orchestra when it has strong cultural significance. This issue has become particularly prominent in Singapore, where there are growing concerns about the dominance of *guzheng* ensembles over Chinese orchestras.

The *guzheng*'s pentatonic scale design makes it challenging to assimilate into orchestras, leading it to follow a solo path with ensemble formats (Mok, 2019). Besides my observations, interviewees confirm the mainstream popularity of *guzheng* ensembles in Singapore[22], attributed to declining birth rates that reduced the number of students participating in Chinese orchestras. Moreover, the symphonization trajectory of the Chinese orchestra also pose financial burdens on educational institutions. Thus, the *guzheng* ensemble becomes a viable alternative that requires lesser resources of only one or two instructors compared to six to ten for the Chinese orchestra, making them more practical and cost-effective to maintain.

Although not as normalized in Malaysia, Mok's research shows a growing interest in *guzheng* learning. Limited availability of educators and increasing number of *guzheng* learners made the ensemble format an effective alternative to individual classes and

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[21] Maestro Liu Tianhua (刘天华), a pioneer of modernized *erhu* compositions, composed this classic work in 1931. Initially, the modernization of Chinese music faced skepticism, but Liu Tianhua defied stereotypes by blending Western composition techniques alongside Chinese flavors. Symbolically, this composition reflects the Chinese orchestra' capacity to overcome barriers and pave its own way.
Guided listening (combined performance by China National Traditional Orchestra, Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, and ZhongHua Chinese Orchestra Taiwan): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0lF4o1Sgy0
[22] The *guqin* is also sustainable with rising popularity, for its associations with prestige, wealth, and its designation as an intangible cultural heritage (Interviewee 26).

performances[23]. This shift is recognized as an active 'revival' effort, driven not only by practical considerations but also by a deeper commitment to preserve cultural identity and Chinese heritage amidst influences of Westernization. Like the Chinese orchestra, they showcase the instrument's essence and contribute to its promotion and normalization among a wider audience.

From the perspective of a *guzheng* instructor, *guzheng* ensemble expansion efforts in schools are not without challenges, especially when the public confuses *guzheng* ensembles with the Chinese orchestra. This lack of awareness of the distinctions and contributions of each tradition perpetuates the perception of them as interchangeable or mutually exclusive within the cultural ecosystem.

Addressing this, Interviewee 30 suggest stimulating interest by proposing *guzheng* groups in international and primary schools. This method is seen as potent way to popularize the instrument rapidly and effectively. However, due to the dominance of the Chinese orchestra, many still question the necessity of an additional *guzheng* group. In addition to school-based initiatives, online platforms are leveraged, with bilingual courses to promote the *guzheng* to individuals across Southeast Asia.

The formation of single-instrument ensembles like *erhu* and *pipa* ensembles in Malaysia is one of the directions that answers to the stages of the Cultural Sustainability Web from development, promotion, to expansion of the Chinese orchestra, all proven to be quite successful to sustain the Chinese orchestra. Departing from the traditional landscape of the Chinese orchestra, these ensembles offer benefits such as ease of establishment, teaching, and lower operating costs, besides enhancing skill levels of members, who also participate in Chinese orchestras. *Huayue* in Malaysia is recognized to require this adaptability in its organizations to sustain itself.

It is unfair to view single-instrument ensembles as a threat to the existing ecosystem; they contribute to the collectively aspiration to expand *huayue* in Malaysia. Amidst declining Chinese orchestra learners, Lin (2024) continues to emphasize the importance of attracting 'new blood' into Chinese orchestra communities.

Inevitably, the direction taken by each school for their performing arts groups depend on their management. According to Interviewee 21, school administrators hold responsibility

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[23] An interviewee expressed similar ideas regarding the *pipa*, suggesting the formation of ensembles due to time constraints to individually teach a growing number of students.

in recognizing the value of the Chinese orchestra and treating it seriously, supported by Interviewee 33, who proposes that schools should incentivize *huayue* achievements of students with genuine interest and contribution to Chinese music. This gives students a pragmatic and utilitarian reason to pursue *huayue* in alignment with societal needs and personal aspirations.

Malaysia's *huayue* normalization is limited by insufficient institutional and governmental support, that dissuades student from pursuing *huayue* as a career path. Without substantial state backing, *huayue* risks being confined to folk activities and hobbies, impeding its potential for growth (Interviewee 19). From a societal level, there is collective longing for sponsors to invest in the establishment of a professional Chinese orchestra[24], to create job opportunities and promote the culture on a broader scale, a necessary future pathway for the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia (Yong, 2016).

Even if support is ample, Interviewee 17's reflection on the fragmented nature of the *huayue* industry paints a picture of discord and disunity in the community. He illustrates this scenario with the metaphor of an elephant trampling around. *Huayue* advancement is contingent upon collective collaboration within the Chinese orchestra community. Considering financial limitations, social integration is another pathway to seek assistance, rather than stubbornly relying on own ideas (Interviewee 16, supported by Interviewee 26).

A humble stance and cultural integration would cultivate increased social support while elevating the values of Chinese music. Interviewee 25 conceptualizes 'unity in diversity', to advocate promotion through education, from multiple directions. Despite the multiplicity in strategies, from commercial performances to traditional orchestras and ensembles, there is a noticeable disinterest in working together, with some prioritizing financial gain (see Chapter 2.3). Regardless, practitioners remain optimistic that each segment will find its niche and contribute to the development of Chinese music without undermining one another's efforts.

Since its inception, the improvement of the education landscape is a recurring topic with a consensus. Yong (2016) and Interviewee 19 explicitly state that school Chinese orchestra are vital as the main supporting force in Malaysia for cultural sustenance and heritage. However, a reliance on school orchestras may hinder progress beyond the stage of normalization, preventing the creation of localized Malaysian music for its learning curve

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[24] See following section on the future of professionalizing the Chinese orchestra.

limitation. With this focus, a pressing issue is the lack of community platforms for Chinese orchestra members after graduation, much less choosing to further study in Chinese music.

In Lin's proposition (2024) regarding the interconnectedness of Chinese orchestra development from school to community and professional orchestras, concerns arise about the potential jeopardization of the symbiotic relationship between these Chinese orchestra entities if institution Chinese orchestra activities were to cease. As the most sustainable and culturally relevant Chinese orchestra environment, institution orchestras are fiercely protected, whereas there may be less concerns about the absence of community orchestras (Interviewee 29). It is a rejuvenation of cultural heritage through the involvement of youth musicians, to ensure the continuity of the tradition (Chan, 2003). Indeed, twenty years after Chan's statement, educational institutions continue to serve as prime nurseries for the sustenance of Chinese orchestras.

From the aspect of music education, several practitioners advocate for educational initiatives and student exchanges to build character and improve technical skills (Chapter 4.5). Interviewee 02 highlights the significance of mentorship in nurturing coming generations of proficient stakeholders that are central to the *huayue* ecosystem. It is suggested that existing resources should be leveraged while existing practitioners are still available to bridge the generational gap and ensure continuity in *huayue* development (Interviewee 17).

To achieve progress, Interviewee 13 thus summarizes three key areas—music education training, cultural exchange and cooperation, and local community involvement and promotion. A robust and coherent educational framework is essential to equip young musicians with knowledge and skills. Furthermore, cultural exchanges, international festivals and collaborative projects can strengthen relationships and broaden horizons. Community engagement through concerts and digital media platforms are vital steps to increase the visibility and popularity of local Chinese orchestras.

For *huayue* expansion, educators consider establishing academies to meet increasing demands for specific instruments. Their sense of responsibility for cultural preservation drives the imperative for development in locations across the country. Several practitioners have short-term plans to create new spaces with hopes of fostering a supportive community with less criticism. Regardless, Interviewee 09 acknowledges that this is a gradual process and emphasizes the importance of careful planning to expand the Chinese orchestra, starting with the increase of teaching resources.

In conjunction with environmental progress, reformation (改革), transformation (转型), and innovation (创新) in Chinese music are also advocated, through refinement (精致化) in technique and music styles, for reasons such as increased investment in children's education and overcoming limitations to musical expansion and opportunities for returning professionals[25] in the existing Chinese orchestra ecosystem.

Many practitioners discuss reassembling *huayue* through refinement, including Interviewees 02 and 27, who suggest a line of flight from the orchestra format towards chamber music or smaller ensemble formats[26] (室内乐, *shineiyue*, or 小组, *xiaozu*) that perform more specialized and sophisticated music in a wider range of styles and genres. Interviewee 07 believes that the popularity of chamber music groups in the cultural environment will lead to a noticeable increase in technical skills, musical comprehension, and presentation.

Experiment Ensemble participants also call for the ensemble format, proposing that *huayue* education should transition from orchestral to ensemble formation once individual performance standards have reached a certain level. Compared to orchestral performances, ensemble groups offer advantages of community building through performances with friends, larger music variation, bolder repertoire selection, motivation for self-improvement in technical skills, easier organization, lower economic pressures, and flexibility in adapting to changes (Experiment Ensembles, Interviewees 06, 07, 21). Despite the involvement of the same musicians across different ensembles, the shift in direction in Malaysia is evident, albeit occurring slowly and trailing behind other regions by 15 to 20 years.

With their increasing prominence in Malaysia, ensembles have growing audience turnout and positive reception. Interviewee 06 believes that a focus on these formations could elevate the overall standard of Chinese music and increase societal recognition and appreciation for it. However, the lack of performance opportunities in the Malaysian environment challenge professionals who have graduated from tertiary studies and have the desire to return to Malaysia (Interviewees 07, 14, 26). Malaysia constantly faces difficulties

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[25] To foster a more sustainable ecosystem of Chinese music, Interviewee 27 aspires to improve the systematisms in his area, particularly in favor of professionals. This involves creating positions for individual professionals to contribute to this field with relatively satisfactory salaries, encouraging them to remain in their homeland for the pursuit of their passion.
[26] For instance, a group with only a *sheng*, *yangqin*, two *erhu*s, and a double bass. It appears that there is a 'magic number' of three to five musicians in the ensemble, recommended unanimously by Interviewees 4, 6, and 7.

in attracting talent, despite having skilled individuals who could contribute to improving the level of technique and performance quality. Sadly, the challenges in providing practitioners with adequate opportunities link to other issues that cannot be easily resolved through singular solutions.

Ensemble playing is also viewed as an alternative to the symphonization trend in Chinese orchestras. There are other attempts to redirect the Chinese orchestra towards the refinement and ensemble movement from the music angle, also encountering numerous obstacles. For example, a practitioner's individual pursuit for refinement of the *zhongruan* is met with criticism and misunderstanding. Although his works are common in modern and postmodern art movements, many criticize them without understanding his motives.

Some musicians explore other avenues, including the development of musical genres like pop music and crossover collaborations (Interviewee 32). On one hand, Interviewee 12 stresses that musicians should delicately handle hybridized music to guide audiences towards a refined appreciation of this form (revisit Chapter 4.2). A critical shift in mindset is required to assess the integration of musical styles beyond mere cultural mashups, especially with the help of trained composers and ethnomusicologists to digest multicultural music and combine elements to create *huayue* with artistic value.

On the other hand, there is a push for the revival of traditional, ethnic flavors with a twist. Interviewee 23 highlights the difficulty to perform traditional music for their regional characteristics and Malaysia's disconnection from their conception, even comparing it to learning a new language. It is fascinating how a personal concert experience (depicted in the following image) highlights the shallow appreciation and understanding of diverse Chinese traditional music styles among Malaysian audiences. Some express a lack of comprehension for the musical content but find that the imageries are sufficient to evoke their imagination and immerse themselves into the artistic conception and resonate with its Chinese essence (elaborated earlier in Chapters 4.6 and 6.1).

Figure 38. *Bamboo Airs*, **a Dizi Solo Recital by Chan Hoi Phang (April 2024).** The concert weaves traditional and regional Chinese music styles from *Jiangnan sizhu* to *Kunqu* (昆曲) and Mongolian music. This formation showcases the refinement and chamber music trajectory, and merges the traditional and contemporary through the inclusion of the cello to perform regional music, and the use of digital devices.

Inevitably, there are also concerns about potential exclusivity or elitism in the trend of ensembles performing complex or contemporary pieces that may lead towards involution, a meaningless, cyclical progression (Interviewee 27). In response, Interviewee 04 suggests a multidirectional approach to the development of Chinese music formations. The diversification to chamber music levels skill disparity among performers and facilitates desired effects. Subsequently, the narrative returns to professionalism and the creation of sustainable platforms and opportunities for these musicians. However, its timeline for realization remains uncertain.

As orchestras move towards grandiose orchestral performances, practitioners occasionally yearn for simpler musical presentations, fearing organizational and aesthetic fatigue, and a loss of focus on fundamental aspects of music-making. The involution creates a gap between large and small orchestras. Is there a way to achieve balance and bridge differences? An approach could involve diversifying programs to include full orchestra performances and smaller concerts, besides collaborations between orchestras. However, it

requires concerted effort to reevaluate priorities and open dialogues to find a more balanced future for the ecosystem.

The restructuring of Chinese orchestra trajectories towards sustainability requires revisiting ecosystem structures at the organism level. Alongside traditional solo recitals, digital technology offers a viable pathway. Musicians can perform solo melodies using accompaniment tracks (Interviewee 02), that aligns with the rise of busking activities in the local arts scene. Social media promotion is also long advocated for individual musicians to sustain their livelihoods and simultaneously promote *huayue*, without needing further coordination and profit-sharing with other musicians.

The cultivation of intellectual growth aligns with the mentality shift. Firstly, students should be granted autonomy to explore other facets of *huayue* beyond their primary instrument (mentioned in Chapter 4.5), thus enhancing their musicality for more holistic understanding of *huayue*. Furthermore, the diversification of styles helps to break stereotypes, by organizing instrument-specific themed concerts. It is also a social experiment to evaluate audience preferences for diverse musical presentations (Interviewee 31). Innovation to concert repertoire is a strategy that not only provides opportunities to young professional musicians, but also stimulates community interest by showing them possibilities of *huayue*.

Besides fostering student growth, the self-development of practitioners is also fundamental to continuously expand their knowledge and skills. This ongoing self-reflection keeps practitioners' passion for *huayue* alive while offering reassessments of their own value and commitment to the ecosystem. Practitioners must adapt to new generations of students as they bring generational experiences to the Chinese orchestra that constantly reshapes its development trajectory (Interviewee 21). Intellectual stimulation is important to ensure that practitioners remain relevant and effective in their education approaches, also to benefit returning musicians by providing them with an increasingly supportive environment.

Then, we return to assess the cultural value of the Chinese orchestra. As an emblem of Chinese identity, Interviewee 06 emphasizes the importance of keeping pace with China's cultural developments, anticipating increased cross-regional interactions, cultural exchanges, and the growth of local professional education. This perceived value of Chinese orchestra performances is still under question, particularly through its low economic value when it comes to ticket pricing. Henceforth, target audience and orchestra members are crucial in

charting the orchestra's trajectory. Interviewee 17 similarly suggests that a thriving *huayue* market could support core stakeholders—educators, performers, conductors, composers, etc. Financial stability is correlated to career satisfaction and improvements in the overall environment.

Nevertheless, grievances and frustrations are inevitable in community interactions, when performances do not achieve a particular standard, or when there are disagreements to orchestral practices. Technical and humanistic limitations to growth signal a need for a mentality shift, central to reassemble the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem towards sustainability and resilience.

Towards professionalization (see following section), there is a vision for a business model of a city-run orchestra with its own academy in Kuala Lumpur, where its principal players double as instructors. This model would create a sustainable revenue stream through tuition fees, which could then be reinvested into the orchestra. With a steady income, the orchestra could rent larger venues for performances and long-term educational activities, maximizing resources and opportunities for growth. This envisioning includes inviting professional conductors or external instructors to enhance the orchestra's development, opening gateways for government recognition, and becoming a representation of the nation. Already, practitioner efforts have borne fruit, as demonstrated by events like the HKCO's concert in Malaysia and collaborations between local orchestras and Singaporean conductors. Where amateur groups are more common, performances are important to provide a platform to showcase talent. Interviewee 29 emphasizes the importance of organizing at least one large-scale performance annually, considering it the most feasible and sustainable model to secure funding, and maximize existing resources.

Whether in local or global ecosystem, Chinese orchestras exist in interdependence for resilience. The safeguarding of music entails enhancing habitat conditions to enable continuous, diverse music creation in various approaches, for different reasons. Ideally, a healthy music-cultural habitat accommodates both innovation and tradition (Titon, 2020). As proven by the assemblage of proposals and initiatives from practitioners, there is a multiplicity of pathways toward the ideal development of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. Along this network, progress should be maintained within the community to prevent regression, which could endanger the entire ecosystem.

The deterioration of the quality of school environments is concerning, as they are essential to nurture talents and promote musical activities. Economic factors contribute to the dwindling numbers in secondary schools and a shift of focus towards chamber music and small ensemble performances (Interviewee 21). Refinement then becomes a double-edged sword that could end up replacing the Chinese orchestra format. In Singapore, there is a tangible threat with the gradual replacement of *guzheng* ensembles in schools. However, such trends are mere lines of flights and are not universal to the Chinese orchestra ecosystem; Malaysia's orchestra has shown resilience through creative adaptive management methods that promote diversity and strengthen the ecosystem. When one approach encounters challenges, the entire ecosystem does not collapse. Instead, it draws strength from diverse facet to adapt and evolve to changing conditions.

Ultimately, these reassembling trajectories of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem echo Titon's (2020) four lessons of ecology—diversity, limits to growth, interconnectivity, and stewardship. Firstly, diversity is evident in the organizational structures and activities proposed for sustainability, from promoting chamber music and small ensembles to integrating different musical styles and instruments. There is a recognition of broad-spectrum initiatives to ensure variety.

However, the development and expansion of the ecosystem faces inherent constraints. While some strategies thrive, others encounter obstacles that require cooperation among stakeholders to navigate challenges like the dwindling number of orchestras and declining interest in *huayue*. Next, interconnectivity is central to link individual musicians, community orchestras, and the broader cultural environment. Interconnectedness means that collective decisions and actions create ripple effects, thus requiring careful coordination to maximize the ecosystem's resilience.

Finally, stewardship shapes the Chinese orchestra through its participants. Stakeholders act as stewards entrusted with safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring long-term sustainability in music and socio-cultural elements. This role demands collective responsibility and commitment, proactive engagement, resource stewardship, and adaptive management methods to preserve (or conserve?) the ecosystem.

6.5 *Endless* (生生不息) [27] – Future of the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia

Sustainability, as elaborated by Titon (2020: 171-172), involves the capacity of a culture to preserve and advance its music at present and in the future. This notion links to the Cultural Sustainability Web proposed by this research—in essence, every stage links to cultural sustenance. In cultural ecology studies, Allen (2019: 51) argues for a shift in studying music sustainability by integrating environmental foundations. Sustainability thus becomes a framework for conservation, analysis of current situations and recommendations for future actions.

Mercer's (2002) Cultural Indicator/Value Production Matrix calls for attention to stakeholder interests, requirements, and ambitions for 'policy' dialogue (in this case, trajectories). In response, the final interview question solicits suggestions (建议), thoughts (感想), personal aspirations (个人计划) and wishes (心愿) for the future of the Chinese orchestra. Composers interviewed share their aspirations for the development and promotion of the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia. Interviewee 12 emphasizes, in the development stage, the need for compositions that highlight Malaysia's strengths and characteristics while tailored to local orchestra abilities and contributes to its artistic refinement.

On the promotion front, Interviewee 08 observes a shift in priorities within the local Chinese orchestra community towards actively promoting newer forms of Chinese music, with some composers achieving both cultural and financial success in the process. This demonstrates the potential of *huayue* as a powerful tool for cultural promotion and engagement. Meanwhile, Interviewee 01 identifies a critical gap in Malaysia—the lack of *huayue* composers—and advocates raising awareness of Malaysian composers within the global circle of Chinese orchestra compositions. The promotion of the Malaysian Chinese identity and incorporation of local cultural elements to celebrate Malaysia's local heritage and musical identity is also recommended. Additionally, smaller, independent efforts focus on composing new music for dedicated instruments and organizing concerts to raise the profile of *huayue* within local communities (Interviewee 14).

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[27] The final selection by Chen Si'ang (陈思昂), in the discussion of the future, is a contemporary piece that celebrates the ecosystem and life itself, through its five movements named after animals under conservation. Its Chinese title reflects themes of environmental stewardship and the interconnectedness of living beings. With its use of Western compositional techniques and harmony, the title is a fitting conclusion to the chapter on the future of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia.
Guided listening (San Yuk Chinese Orchestra): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flgNTPLR7XU

A central theme in Malaysia is multiculturalism and nationalism, linked to the Malaysian Chinese cultural identity. Interviewee 15 envisions a future where Malaysian cultural elements are fused with traditional Chinese music through 'Malaysianization'. This involves musicians having more confidence to collaborate with other musical cultures, and embracing Malaysia's cultural multiplicity to cultivate its distinctive characteristics (Interviewee 03). By drawing inspiration from successful models in other regions, Malaysian Chinese musicians can pave the way for future innovations.

From another point of departure, ambitions for professionalization (专业化) in Malaysia have been discussed extensively. Chan (2003: 148) argues for theoretical discussions, deepened knowledge, and correct thought direction to sustain *huayue* as an art form. Sole reliance on passion may lead to a fleeting trend in the Chinese orchestra. Therefore, practitioners would require self-sustenance and professionalism to expand their pathways.

Inevitably, discussions of professionalization draw comparisons with Singapore, which is considered a neighboring beacon of success. Some Malaysians hope for government support like Singapore, or aspire to have an orchestra like SCO. The trajectory of Malaysia's Chinese orchestra is suggested by many to follow the footstep of other regions, especially Singapore, that already offers numerous visions and models for the Malaysian community.

Decades ago, Goh (1998: 147) reflected on Singapore's focus on quality over quantity due to its small size. Efforts are required to raise audience appreciation standards and develop localized *huayue* repertoire for a unique Singaporean Chinese orchestra identity (Nanyang style). He proposed the establishment of a music conservatoire to nurture local talents, adding that a clear identity would strengthen the orchestra's significance.

Presently, Singapore is the role model for Malaysia, having achieved most of Goh's aspirations. The transformation towards multiculturalism and Nanyang style has been successful, with public education to normalize *huayue* (Ling, 2023). As a cultural soft power, Singapore cultivates Nanyang cultural roots for its identity, while promoting research and innovation. Besides that, the rising professionalism is fostered by government support for the development of music and arts, sustained through uniting forces like the SCMF.

The comparison with Singapore's ecosystem stimulates aspirations for similar achievements in Malaysia, despite acknowledged challenges and limitations. For instance, Interviewee 04 recognizes disparities in financial resources, environmental conditions, and

personal conflicts that hinder collaborative efforts[28]. Furthermore, the shortage of professional talents poses another significant bottleneck to this endeavor (Interviewee 16). Without the prerequisites, professionalism could only be treated as a wish.

Despite so, there is collective hope that the Chinese orchestra can attain a professional level accepted by all, given its cultural and musical value. Interviewee 16 suggests that private initiatives or foundations could support *huayue*'s recognition and establishment of a sustainable professional national Chinese orchestra, if not from the government. Meanwhile, there are independent desires in different areas towards professionalization, including Interviewee 31, to establish a local professional orchestra and music academy that transcends Chinese music. This aspiration stems from the recognition of incorrect training methods and divergent directions in the current landscape, which underutilizes talented individuals.

The varying perspectives of professionalization reflects the complex realities of the Malaysian environment. For instance, Interviewee 07's skepticism demonstrates its non-feasibility due to financial, audience engagement, and performance quality challenges, besides an absence of a strong social foundation. The realistic scenario in Malaysia is that the Chinese orchestra does not exhibit much economic growth despite its vibrant community. In this context, the consideration of professionalization measures first requires the addressing of fundamental issues and the expansion of the orchestra's influence beyond existing circles.

Interviewee 24 advocates for a middle ground, recognizing the importance of technical professionalism while acknowledging current limitations in societal demand—if the demand is low, time and money investment is not justifiable. Instead, he suggests a semi-professional approach as a blueprint, emulated within community orchestras, for gradual progress towards professionalism while assessing environmental readiness. This nuanced perspective appreciates the Chinese orchestra's cultural significance and calls for long-term investment.

The transition or 'transformation' (转型) of the Chinese orchestra model, Interviewee 15 notes, requires a certain level of success and unity. Although national support may be lacking, community support sustains the orchestra to some extent. However, reliance on

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[28] These human or social considerations involve questioning if all orchestras will become members of the professional leader? Will they accept this Malaysian Chinese orchestra? Depending on who takes charge and manages it, Interviewee 04 suggests that the proposition sounds ideal yet is ridden with practical manpower and financial considerations. There exists still many factions from schools, associations, and other groups with personal issues of fights and bickering. It requires better understanding of the entire social condition and mentality to advance towards a better environment for a professional orchestra.

external support, whether from foundations or companies, may provide short term stability but does not address underlying issues such as conflicting mindsets and termination of cooperation.

Along with that is a call for self-sufficiency and empowerment. Interviewee 13 desires the democratization of access to resources and empowerment of talented individuals to drive sustainable growth. This involves breaking free from a mindset of impoverishment and dependency, towards taking ownership by staying true to one's original intentions (初衷) and passion (热忱) for *huayue*, while boldly pursuing visions for the future. The interviewee's wishes to proudly proclaim Malaysian origins, contributions, and resilience to the global Chinese orchestra ecosystem.

Elsewhere, there are inspirations for the Chinese orchestra as a cultural product for tourism promotion, recognizing the intrinsic value of cultural soft power in attracting investment (Interviewee 04). Hence, initiatives to build a viable cultural landscape involve engagement and collaborations with other ethnicities to build social cohesion and mutual cultural confidence (Interviewees 6 and 15). Furthermore, Interviewee 24 extends this collaborative spirit to explore new avenues for creativity and expression, such as cross-genre collaborations and the development of contemporary operas and ballet performances. Similarly, aspirations for communication and collaboration with collectives from different areas aim to advance the Chinese orchestra community collectively. Although individual ambitions vary, they resonate with the common goal of building fame for the Chinese orchestra and expanding its reach beyond traditional boundaries (Interviewees 05, 29, and 32).

Education is pivotal to cultivate appreciation and cultural growth. Interviewees highlight the need for expanded Chinese music education, combining music theory with formal learning for a comprehensive educational approach (Interviewees 23, 26, 27, and 30). It is reflected that Malaysia lacks consistent teaching methods, which can lead students to realize after years of learning that they have a non-standardized playing technique. To overcome that, Interviewee 30 believes that returning graduates should make it their mission to educate Malaysian learners with correct skills and attitudes.

The organization of academic forums is imperative for structured discussions on *huayue* development in Malaysia, addressing critical topics like Malaysian identity and compositions (Interviewee 23). These forums provide authoritative musicians with formal

spaces for dialogue, a more effective alternative to foster inclusive discussions and inspire younger generations than informal gatherings, to generate major shifts in the *huayue* ecosystem.

Interviewee 16 commends the flourishing of the *huayue* industry compared to its tumultuous past. Its normalization within educational institutions makes a solid foundation for the preservation and promotion of the Chinese orchestra, fulfilling a basic responsibility for cultural sustainability (Interviewee 24). However, it is the lower limit of the Chinese orchestra's potential growth. Interviewee 09 stresses the need for ongoing enhancements to attract external attention and ensure the blossoming of flowers of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra community.

One such promising avenue for blossoming, highlighted by Interviewee 16, is transitioning towards instrument repair, recognizing the shortage of professional talents for instrument maintenance in Malaysia. On the other hand, Interviewees 09 and 24 envision the establishment of a centralized agency to provide support services, alleviating logistical burdens and allowing practitioners to focus on artistic endeavors, leading to a healthier ecosystem. Meanwhile, Interviewee 31's pursuit of arts management education in Mainland China is a strategic step for the advancement of the community towards this logistic goal.

Overall, these ideas converge to articulate the significance of collaboration across talents and disciplines, with music as the medium for community building, comparable to a return to nature. A vital musical cultural ecology must then provide sufficient opportunities for participation and be accessible for all, while adding value to the quality of life of the community it fosters (Allen, 2019). As Interviewee 27 suggests, the ecosystem's health relies on the strength derived from diversity. However, beyond music, the overall arts sector in Malaysia requires improvement to elevate cultural products (Interviewee 31). Additionally, regional disparities and disengagement from other grassroots efforts (Interviewee 26) remain challenges to normalizing *huayue* in society.

Development and progress generate a multiplicity of contemporary music styles, yet some practitioners remain committed to preserve traditional music, recognizing its enduring significance. Among them, Interviewees 29 and 32 emphasize the importance of balancing innovation with tradition, reminding all to uphold cultural heritage amidst the proliferation of new musical directions. Moreover, Interviewee 21 wishes for active exploration of the roots

of Chinese musical instruments in Malaysia by urging a deeper understanding of traditional music's cultural and historical significance.

The generational transition from folk to academic training led to a loss of purpose in traditional skills and musicality, thereby a loss of origins, homeland, and the way forward (Interviewee 21). For the interviewee, the approach to traditional music requires reconnections with regional and folk music to cultivate identity and purpose. In the context of sustainability, these reflections support resilience within the Chinese orchestra community by filling the space between cultural sustenance (preservation) and contemporary development (innovation).

Along this vein, passion is essential for persistence in the face of distractions and temptations in modern society. Interviewees 09 and 11 stress the importance to remain dedicated to teaching while progressing and adapting, nurturing a mindset focused on progress and communication, encouraging collaborative endeavors to advance collective goals that contribute to the vitality of the overall ecosystem. This sentiment is echoed by Interviewee 13, who cites that 'opportunities are reserved for those who are prepared'. Rather than complaining, he opts for proactive efforts in reformation and action.

Interviewee 13 concludes his reflections by outlining key areas for the Chinese orchestra's development—education and training, enhancing knowledge, nurturing talents, professional development, localization, cultural exchanges and cooperation, mutual support, local community involvement, fundraising and sponsorship, and effective management practices. They encapsulate the shared aspirations of most interviewees of this research.

Revisiting the concept of 'becoming' explored earlier in rhizomatic writing, it is evident that the thought processes and lived experiences of practitioners—as cultural stewards or insiders—are constantly transformed as they navigate the process of 'becoming Chinese orchestra'. These ambitions, many of which are lines of flight from established norms, form the basis of interconnectedness and dynamism of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Living traditional practices, deeply rooted in history yet present, evolve through engagements with external influences and cultural exchanges, which enliven and reinforce resilience.

'Continuity'—a perpetual process demanding perseverance, adaptability, and personal growth—emerges as mandatory to sustain the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem. Essentially, every actor embarks on their own journey, wherein deliberate investments of

effort determine their ultimate destination. In other words, the sustainability of cultural ecosystems thrives on cooperation and interdependence, reconciling differences, and generating healthy competition (Baron and Walker, 2019: 13-14). What also holds significance is the commitment to root oneself in a purposeful mission and fighting for it within their spheres of influence.

Conclusion

1. Key Findings

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia is a healthy and resilient mini ecosystem that stands out because of its distinct trajectory from other main Chinese orchestra regions. As a multicultural society undergoing processes of modernization and globalization, Malaysia offers a unique cultural landscape for the thriving community-based Chinese orchestra, where it seeks to establish its local and global presence and relevance. By addressing its challenges, opportunities, and cultural significances, this research enriches the growing discourse on the preservation and evolution of *huayue* in the currents of contemporary social transformations.

In recognition of public misconceptions and knowledge gaps, the study ultimately unpacks an updated, comprehensive understanding of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia and its potential for growth and development as a dynamic cultural ecosystem within the global Chinese orchestra environment. This first-of-its-kind research aligns broader ecological principles with the mapping of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. It provides a multiplicity of understanding of the Chinese orchestra's formation, activities, operations, actors, and engagements with other social and cultural facets—an examination of culture, ecology, space, and identity in relation to traditional music and performing arts.

Informed by personal and community experiences and empirical data, research findings fully support research questions and fulfils research aims and objectives. This interdisciplinary approach unfolds the Malaysian Chinese orchestra ecosystem's evolution from its initiation to its sustenance in the present landscape in the 2020s. The research contextualizes the history and global context of the Chinese orchestra in a balanced portrayal of perspective and power relations that then addresses its inherent financial, interpersonal relations, and support challenges, as well as its opportunities for growth as a creative practice in Malaysia. Besides that, the discussions of this research confront issues of multiculturalism and hybridity in Malaysia, assess its societal and cultural roles and values, and propose viable future solutions through the Cultural Sustainability Web model.

As Hopfinger (2022) suggests, the unpredictabilities of human and non-human actors subject performances to changes. The broader environment plays an essential role in shaping the future trajectories of a cultural ecosystem. Recognizing the symbiotic relationship between human activities and the surroundings, interconnections between built and lived environments are explored in this study, opening avenues to novel perspectives of the world

we inhabit, through an ecological lens that integrates the concept of the assemblage. The Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia is diverse in its management style and standards across localities and performance venues, determined by a myriad of socio-economic and political factors.

Essentially, *huayue* education is recognized as a critical component to sustain the Chinese orchestra ecosystem, as it determines the perceived value of the Chinese orchestra by different actors in society. Through in-depth interviews with practitioners, the study reveals a consensus that considerable efforts must be directed towards the updating of the *huayue* learning system and the revitalizing of Chinese music knowledge in general academic curricula. In the self-sustained *minjian* environment, education is the quintessential method to stimulate awareness and motivate its preservation and promotion among public stakeholders (also cultural stewards in the ecosystem). Not only that, from within the community itself, there is a call for more inclusive and rejuvenated pedagogical approaches towards the music education of younger Chinese orchestra musicians to elevate their musical skills and sustain their interests.

On the other hand, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaborations are the key to address broader discourse related to cultural identity in the multicultural Malaysian society, that is also caught in the intersection of tradition and modernity. By cultivating genuine partnerships and embracing cultural diversity, the Chinese orchestra can soon achieve effective expansion and sustainability in Malaysian society. An appreciation of the dynamism of musical cultures, in relation to nature, can actively contribute to the harmonious coexistence of a myriad of cultural elements, fostering a sense of unity, inclusivity, harmony, and shared identity in a multicultural environment like Malaysia.

The creation of hybridized and localized music amid contemporary social transformations—now in a *rojak* state—is an ongoing search for recognizability in the global context as *uniquely Malaysian huayue*. Through the non-hierarchical rhizomatic approach, conventional linear perspectives of multiculturalism are challenged, in viewing them as assemblages of diverse elements selected for the process of identity creation. The traditional art form exhibits sufficient resilience in response to changing spatial and temporal settings and contexts while retaining Chinese-ness.

Thus, in line with Titon's (2020) suggestion, an adaptive and resilient mindset is necessary to illuminate pathways towards cultural sustainability. The Experiment Ensemble,

acting as a microcosm of the broader Chinese orchestra cultural ecosystem, successfully explore key themes and issues regarding space, music, and organization. Its discussions offer a pragmatic analysis for wider discussions that link music and culture, enriching understanding of the Chinese orchestra's resilience and adaptability.

As the Chinese orchestra's role evolves beyond its traditional significance for racial identity, new generation practitioners who embrace a cosmopolitan lifestyle shaped by globalization and modernization have to search for new meanings in the practice. However, this paradigm shift also juxtapositions new challenges like conflicts between generations, new geographies, and musical resonances, ultimately related to the intrinsic value of the practice. Findings of this research has proven the creative community's resourcefulness and adaptability to diverse and changing circumstances position it to seize new opportunities and overcome obstacles, ultimately ensuring its survival.

Moreover, strategic responses are necessary to adapt to times of uncertainty like the Covid-19 pandemic, and temporal challenges including digitalization. Despite limits to growth, the inherent resilience in the cultural ecosystem hints at untapped potentials in both virtual and physical spaces. Informed decisions and strategic planning is required to better equip orchestras to navigate the digital landscape, both in the present and in the future. To overcome barriers to digitalization and musicality, orchestras must continuously experiment and adapt to changing audience expectations and global dynamics.

Finally, the Cultural Sustainability Web (CSW) proposed in this research forecasts future trends of the Chinese orchestra based on current developments, like refinement and professionalization. It aims to give practitioners a clearer, informed outlook for actionable insights, aiding the community to navigate the evolving ecosystem from collective perspectives. Responding to the final research question, practitioners' thoughts, initiatives, and suggestions correspond to stages of the CSW, making a blueprint for potential trajectories of the Chinese orchestra in the Malaysian cultural ecosystem. Such insights also add a significant chapter to the narrative of traditional musical cultures' resilience and adaptation.

After better recognizing its intricacies, this study invites audiences to reconsider the Chinese orchestra—or this practice of Chinese music—as a living entity that embodies multiplicity in its actors, interactions, and intensities. The research is a reminder of the inherent unpredictability of music and ecosystems, where each performance and decision reshapes the trajectory of the assemblage. As we map future trajectories, it is important to

remain mindful of the ecosystem's nuances and strive for a vibrant and sustainable future where the Chinese orchestra community can blossom in diversity, while also pausing to question if this direction aligns with our true aspirations.

2. Research Contributions

In terms of methodology, the research is significant for introducing several innovative approaches—Theoretical Network, rhizomatic writing, and the Experiment Ensembles. These approaches extend beyond traditional research methodologies to offer practical insights that directly benefit the studied community. The Theoretical Network allows an assemblage-like application of theories that connect to one another in equal importance for discussing about the cultural ecosystem. Meanwhile, it is quintessential to acknowledge that the journey towards sustainability is neither linear nor fully determined, yielding manifold conclusions, shaped by the assemblage component in rhizomatic writing—each chapter section functions independently yet forms a cohesive whole. Presented in this non-linear, non-hierarchical, or non-arborescent format, interconnectedness is accented, making it challenging to reach singular conclusions; there are still unexplored potentials within existing topics, highlighting the ongoing process of evolution and becoming. Additionally, data collection process and findings derived from the Experiment Ensemble serve as a valuable research method model that could be extrapolated to practical investigations in other cultural contexts.

This research makes several substantial contributions to the field of study that transcends the confines of academic inquiry to actively engage with and present a contemporary perspective beneficial to the Chinese orchestra community, scholarly discourse, and members of the public who are interested in Chinese culture. The main contribution of this research is the comprehensive remapping of the Chinese orchestra, filling a considerable void left by the last major academic work that portrays its overall landscape, now two decades old. Since then, the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia has changed in various ways as it adapts to the contemporary society and environment. The present study offers more than scholarly insights by revisiting and updating this foundational understanding; it is a guide for a clear and informed direction of the current Malaysian Chinese orchestra community. The study provides an inside perspective to local and international audiences who may hold antiquated perspectives or assumptions about it, addressing a myriad of

historical, cultural, and contemporary challenges of the Chinese orchestra that culminates with a potential roadmap of futures of the cultural activity.

By articulating findings in English, the research not only broadens the accessibility of the subject matter beyond the conventional Chinese language medium, overcoming linguistic barriers, but also amplifies the diverse voices of Chinese orchestra practitioners in Malaysia. There are also plans to translate and publish sections of the research in Chinese, further extending its reach to the public. Public accessibility of research outputs (this thesis and its associated publications) can contribute to the diversification of content and resources available on the Chinese orchestra. This commitment aligns with my intended aim to disseminate valuable insights and knowledge for heightened awareness of the current Chinese orchestra landscape, therefore making a positive impact for its promotion and preservation.

In addition to the revitalization of the scholarly landscape surrounding the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia, a novel perspective is introduced through the framing of the Chinese orchestra as a cultural ecosystem that is resilient, constantly growing, and evolving. This innovation is a conceptual framework that transcends traditional narratives and paradigms to acknowledge the Chinese orchestra as an adaptive cultural ecosystem. The application of the cultural ecosystem concept on the Chinese orchestra is a pioneering effort for a holistic assessment of its resilience and adaptive management methods, bridging the gap between cultural and musical sustainability. Furthermore, the combination of cultural and natural environments allows for a more flexible and lived approach to study the dynamics of a traditionally controversial musical culture adapting to modernity within a multicultural context.

Practitioners generally remark on the importance of this research in enhancing contemporary insights into the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia. They suggest its capabilities of enhancing literature and propelling public understanding of the community. Furthermore, the research is commended for posing insightful questions that prompted self-reflection among the interviewees and promoted deeper engagement with the topic. These research inquiries provoked introspection and provided opportunities for practitioners to articulate their perspectives and take inspired action that could induce changes within the cultural ecosystem. This recognition adds relevance to advancing the understanding and discourse surrounding the Chinese orchestra in the Southeast Asian context from an insider perspective.

Resonating with the overarching aim to provide a comprehensive outlook of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia as a dynamic cultural ecosystem, this research adds a significant chapter to the narrative of traditional musical cultures' resilience and adaptation in the face of changing times. As a whole, this research has potential to make noteworthy contributions to broader discussions surrounding the sustainability of traditional music as cultural heritages. It is believed that this interdisciplinary approach will set a precedent for future research endeavors on Malaysian cultural heritages and performing arts.

3. Suggestions for Future Research

The Chinese orchestra in Malaysia remains as a budding topic with significant potential for initiatives aimed at its demystification by updating knowledge and enriching existing literature about it. This study identified several promising research directions, each offering unique insights into the Chinese orchestra landscape.

Firstly, there is an opportunity for the development of specialized software and expertise to analyze interviews conducted in the Chinese language. This initiative requires a technical background in computer science to enhance quantitative analysis and deepen the decoding of perspectives shared during interviews. Further research should focus on refining data analysis methods, integrating advanced technologies, and developing frameworks for languages beyond English to overcome linguistic challenges. Such advancements could provide comprehensive analytical frameworks, improve cultural sensitivity, and nurture a more inclusive research landscape. Additionally, the unexplored themes of digitalization and artificial intelligence within the context of *huayue* stand out as a potential transformative force for the arts. The current research provides only a cursory exploration of issues pertaining to digitalization.

Musically, practical research is needed to explore the hybridity of music in Malaysia, particularly the integration of Chinese music into the nation's multicultural fabric, in order to further the search for the 'Malaysian identity'. Moreover, comparative studies assessing the Chinese orchestra's position and challenges relative to other traditional art forms in Malaysia could shed light on interculturalism and foster greater understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural elements. This, in turn, contributes to community cohesion and the preservation of Malaysia's rich cultural heritages.

Another less-explored potential field of study is the gender dynamics of the Chinese orchestra community. Although not elaborated, a noticeable gender imbalance is observed throughout this research, which adds to the challenges of sustaining a livelihood, alongside cultural norms that dictate women to adopt a more stable lifestyle after starting a family. A study on gender imbalance among practitioners could unveil insights into the challenges faced by female musicians due to societal expectations and stereotypes.

Lastly, a larger-scale collaborative research effort could be initiated for a comparative study between various regions of the Chinese orchestra, including the main Chinese regions and diasporic orchestras and ensembles in countries like the USA and Australia. Such a comparative study would significantly contribute to the knowledge of the multiple trajectories and adaptations of Chinese orchestra ecosystems globally, in response to their immediate surrounding environment.

Nonetheless, future research could build on this study of cultural ecosystems by delving deeper into various aspects explored or extending it to other cultural forms in Malaysia. Increased collective research efforts can enhance our comprehension of living traditions and cultural ecosystems, ultimately contributing to the betterment of the communities under study.

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Appendix I – Mapping of the Chinese Orchestra in Malaysia
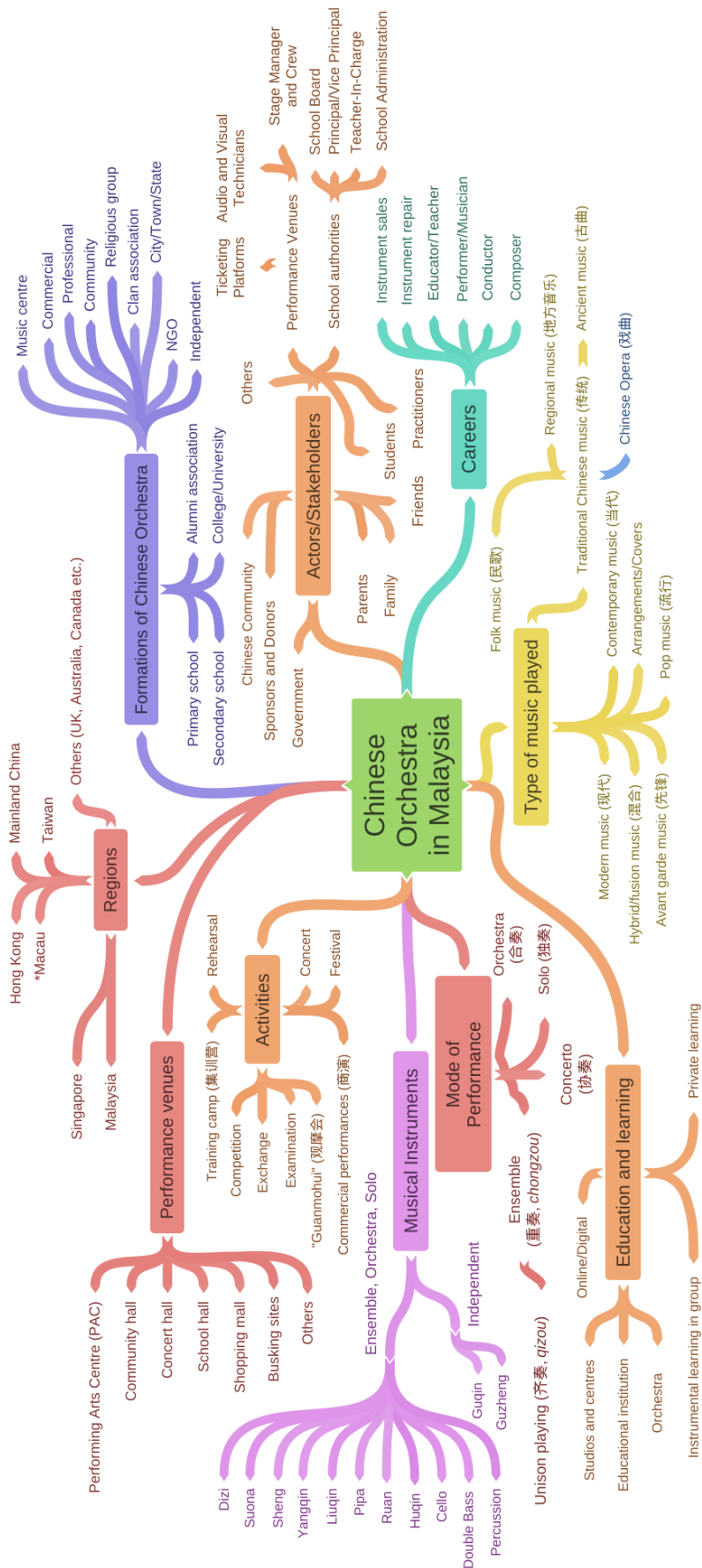
Appendix II – Glossary

Term (Mandarin)	Romanization/Pinyin	Translation or Meaning in English
百花齐放	*bǎihuā qífàng*	Flourish, blossom (Literal: A hundred flowers blossoming)
版权	*bǎnquán*	Copyright
报复性演出	*bàofù xìng yǎnchū*	'Revenge performance'
保障	*bǎozhàng*	Insurance
本土化	*běntǔ huà*	Localization
比较	*bǐjiào*	Compare, comparison
播种	*bōzhǒng*	Sowing seeds
常态化	*chángtài huà*	Normalized
传承	*chuánchéng*	Inherit
创新	*chuàngxīn*	Innovation
初衷	*chūzhōng*	Original intentions
大环境	*dà huánjìng*	Larger environment
多元	*duōyuán*	Multi (cultural, music etc.)
发展	*fāzhǎn*	Development
方向	*fangxiàng*	Direction
改革	*gǎigé*	Reformation
改良	*gǎiliáng*	Improvement, enhancement
感受力, 音乐感	*gǎnshòu lì, yīnyuè gǎn*	Intuition, musicality
感性	*gǎnxìng*	Emotional
感召	*gǎnzhào*	Sense of calling
根	*gēn*	Root, heritage
光环效应	*guānghuán xiàoyìng*	Halo effect
喝茶, 饮茶	*hēchá, yǐnchá*	Drinking tea, teatime
合奏	*hézòu*	Ensemble playing
华教	*huájiào*	Chinese education
环境	*huánjìng*	Environment
环境条件	*huánjìng tiáojiàn*	Environmental conditions

基础	*jīchǔ*	Foundation
架构	*jiàgòu*	Landscape, structure
江南丝竹	*jiāngnán sīzhú*	A regional music style
交流	*jiāoliú*	Exchange
竞争	*jìngzhēng*	Competition
精致化	*jīngzhì huà*	Refinement
精准度	*jīngzhǔn dù*	Precision
刻板印象	*kèbǎn yìnxiàng*	Stereotype
昆曲	*kūnqǔ*	A musical style
扩大	*kuòdà*	Expand
理念	*lǐniàn*	Belief
理性	*lǐxìng*	Rational
灵性	*língxìng*	Spirituality
流失	*liúshī*	Outflow
买断	*mǎiduàn*	Buyout
美化	*měihuà*	Enhance, beautify
民间	*mínjiān*	Folk
民谣	*mínyáo*	Folk song
明星效应	*míngxīng xiàoyìng*	Celebrity effect
内斗, 纷争	*nèidòu, fēnzhēng*	Infight, conflict
内涵, 深度	*nèihán*	Depth (of self)
内卷	*nèijuǎn*	Involution
派系	*pàixì*	Faction
培养，栽培	*péiyang, zāipéi*	Nurture
培训	*péixùn*	Training
平台	*píngtái*	Platform
普及	*pǔjí*	Normalize
齐奏	*qízòu*	Unison playing
诠释	*quánshì*	Interpretation
热忱	*rèchén*	Ardor, passion, enthusiasm

人性化	*rénxìng huà*	Humanized
融合	*rónghé*	Merge, confluence
容纳	*róngnà*	Accommodate
生活化	*shēnghuó huà*	'Incorporated into daily life'
生态	*shēngtài*	Ecosystem
手感	*shǒugǎn*	Touch
弹性	*tánxìng*	Elasticity
体系	*tǐxì*	System, body
条件	*tiáojiàn*	Conditions
推广	*tuīguǎng*	Promotion
文化收费	*wénhuà shōufèi*	'Cultural payment'
希望, 感想	*xīwàng, gǎnxiǎng*	Aspiration, wish, desire
心态	*xīntài*	Attitude
性质	*xìngzhì*	Nature (of something)
素养, 修养	*sùyǎng, xiūyǎng*	Cultivation of oneself
延续	*yánxù*	Sustain
演奏会	*yǎnzòu huì*	Concert, performance
样板戏	*yàngbǎnxì*	Model opera
意境	*yìjìng*	Artistic conception
音受力	*yīn shòu lì*	Musical sensitivity
音乐感	*yīnyuè gǎn*	Musicality
音乐会	*yīnyuè huì*	Music concert, performance
营养	*yíngyǎng*	Nutrient
韵	*yùn*	Rhythm, allure
专业化	*zhuānyè huà*	Professionalization
转型	*zhuǎnxíng*	Transformation
资源	*zīyuán*	Resources
自主性	*zìzhǔ xìng*	Self-initiation

Appendix III – Interviewee List

Interviewee Code	Profession(s)							Unique Themes of Interview
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
01		X		X				Local compositions
02	X		X					Education, Performances
03	X		X			X		Music learning, Performances
04			X			X		History, Performances
05	X		X					Music learning, Performances
06					X			History
07			X	X		X		Comparison, Music
08	X		X	X		X		Music, Compositions
09	X		X					Music learning, Instrument, Performances
10		X		X				Conducting, Music, Compositions
11	X	X		X				Location condition
12				X		X		Comparison, Music, Compositions
13	X	X					X	Location condition, Organization
14	X		X	X			X	Instrument, Performances
15	X	X	X				X	Collaborations, Organization
16	X	X						Education, Location condition
17		X		X				Education, Music, Compositions
18	X		X					Music learning, Performances
19			X		X			Instrument, Instrument repair
20	X		X	X				Collaborations, Performances
21	X		X					Education, Music
22			X					Collaborations, Performances
23	X		X					Education, Location condition
24	X	X	X				X	Organization
25	X	X			X	X	X	History, Collaborations, Instrument repair
26	X	X	X					Collaborations, Performances, Location condition

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
27	X	X	X					Education, Location condition
28	X		X					Performances, Music learning
29			X				X	Music learning, Collaborations, Instrument
30	X		X				X	Music learning, Instrument
31	X	X	X					Education, Location condition
32	X		X					Education, Music, Instrument
33	X		X	X			X	Music learning, Instrument, Location condition

Profession key:

1 Educator
2 Conductor
3 Performer
4 Composer
5 Instrument Repair
6 Researcher
7 Organization person-in-charge

Notes:

1. Interviewees are assigned codes for anonymity, to adhere to ethical considerations of participant protection. Those who are named gave permission to publish.

2. Detailed information such as demography, geographic location, and gender are not disclosed as they can be overly identifying.

3. Main profession(s) highlighted does not mean that interviewees do not occupy additional roles. Many performers are educators, teaching their specialized musical instruments. Conductors out of necessity of working in educational institutions are generally not highlighted as a main profession.

4. Discussion topics with all interviewees include those of ecosystem, performances, pandemic, and digitalization (see next Appendix for Interview Guide).

5. The theme of 'Music Learning' indicates the teaching and learning of Chinese musical instruments, whereas 'Education' implies school and university institutions.

Appendix IV – Interview Guide (Bilingual)

Interview Guide (Chinese) 采访指南

Part 1: Self Introduction 自我介绍
- Please provide a brief introduction of yourself and your experience in the Chinese orchestra, besides your current role in the Chinese orchestra community
- 请简单的自我介绍，你在华乐界的个人经历，目前担任的职位/活动

Part 2: Overview/Mapping of Chinese orchestra 华乐团概括

Objective 1	To examine and map present dynamics, constructs and operations of the Malaysian Chinese orchestra as a cultural ecosystem among its stakeholders.
RQ 1	How does the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia evolve and sustain itself as a cultural ecosystem in the modernizing society?

1. Can you provide an overview of what you think is the current conditions of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia?
   - 请解说你对马来西亚华乐界目前的概况有什么了解
2. Could you describe the dynamics or relationship among stakeholders (practitioners, teachers, conductors, composers, students, community)?
   - 请你形容华乐界人士之间的动态和关系(包括乐器老师，全职/专业演奏者，作曲家，指挥，学生，社会人士/大众)
3. Do you see unity among the Chinese orchestras/performers? How is that promoted?
   - 你对华乐团之间或演奏员之间的相处和团结有什么看法?如何推动友好关系?

2.1 Specific: Teachers, Conductors
1. How does the orchestra you are teaching/conducting in operate, in terms of organization, day-to-day, source of finances? Is there any overarching structure supporting the Chinese orchestra?
   - 请说一说您现在指导的华乐团在团体组织，日常活动，财务方面的操作。有没有一个整体的结构或系统支撑你所在的华乐团?
2. Are there any special cases you know of that has a different mode of establishment?
   - 有没有特别案例有着不同的成立模式?

Part 3: Opportunities, Challenges, Growth 机遇、挑战、成长

Objective 2	To evaluate the opportunities and challenges faced by the Malaysian Chinese orchestra in the current cultural landscape.
RQ 2	To what extent does multiculturalism in Malaysia affect interactions for community cohesion in the Chinese orchestra ecosystem?
RQ 3	What are some of the initiatives that can develop and sustain the Chinese orchestra ecosystem in Malaysia?

3.1 Multiculturalism/Audience 多元文化/观众

1. Have you had students or audiences of other ethnicities? (Provide details)
   o 你有其他种族的学生或观众吗? (请提供详情)

2. What is your perspective on the situation and position of the Chinese orchestra among performing arts activities in Malaysia?
   o 相比起在马来西亚其他种类的表演艺术(无论现代或传统), 你对华乐团的现状和地位有什么看法?

3. What aspects of the Chinese orchestra do you think serve as a unifying factor in the community (e.g. music, operations, activities)?
   o 你认为华乐的什么方面/元素能带来团员或华乐界的和睦相处/统一(例如音乐, 组织, 活动)?

4. How do people receive the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia? How is that shown?
   o 马来西亚/世界大众怎么看待马来西亚华乐团? 他们如何表示?

5. How much value and significance do you think the Chinese orchestra possess to the Chinese community and to society, in general?
   o 你认为华乐团对华社和马来西亚整体社会带来什么价值和意义? 重要性在哪里?

3.2 Opportunities/Challenges/Sustainability 机遇/挑战/可持续性

1. (Personal) What are your biggest motivations for your decision to pursue this pathway/future in the Chinese orchestra?
   o 个人方面, 你从事华乐为正/副职最大的动力是什么?

2. Could you describe how your opportunities of education came by? Did you receive any formal education? (If yes,) Why have you decided to further study in Chinese music? Was it supported by people around you (friends, family, others)?
   o 你华乐的教育机会从何而来? 有没有接受正式学习? 为什么会选择深造华乐而不是其他专业? 有没有受到身边的亲友支持?

3. If you are comfortable sharing, how did you work out your personal finances? Are you comfortable with your job opportunities and position now? Why? How can it be improved?
   o 如果你方便分享, 你的薪金/财务状况如何? 从华乐事业中足够支撑自己吗? 你对现在的工作机会和职位满意吗? 为什么? 如何改善目前状况?

4. (General) What are some of the challenges and obstacles you think the Chinese orchestra community is facing? Is there support from external parties?
   o 你认为马来西亚华乐界现在面临什么挑战或难处? 有没有外界的资助?

5. Are the spaces for rehearsals and performances sufficient? Is there a particular reason for choosing these venues?
   o 平时排练和演出的场所/场地足够吗? 容易获取? 为何选择这些场地?

6. What are some ways for the Chinese orchestra to relate to nature and the environment we live in? Are there any sustainability strategies currently in place?

- 关系到大自然和周围环境，华乐团与我们的大自然和环境有没有什么直接或间接联系？目前是否有任何可持续发展的策略(如绿化环境)？

7. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the Chinese orchestra and/or your livelihood? (elaborate) How is the recovery from it? Was there sufficient support?
   - 疫情对华乐团有什么影响？对你个人的生计有何影响？恢复如何？有没有得到足够的资助？

8. (Covid-19) What are some strategies to overcome the barrier of physical activities being stopped? Were there any that you find to be particularly interesting?
   - 疫情当时无法面对面进行活动，有什么应对技巧或策略？有趣或创意的策略/案例/事情发生？

3.3 Music/Performances 音乐/演出

1. What is your opinion on the type of music being practiced and performed by the Chinese orchestra?
   - 你对华乐团排练及演出的曲目，音乐类型有什么看法？

2. What are some feedback that you have received from concert or performance audiences? What are some best received pieces and music styles that audiences enjoyed listening to?
   - 请说说你从之前演奏会或演出的观众收到过什么样的回馈？最受欢迎或接受的歌曲和曲风是什么？

3. What is the envisioning of audience reception or a future trajectory that led to these musical decisions?
   - 你所做的音乐选择是为了达到什么观众反馈或未来轨迹而做出？

3.4 Experimenting/Hybridity (Performers, Conductors, Teachers) 实验/跨界音乐

1. Do you have any performance experiences that are out of the ordinary, i.e. not following the conventional performance routines?
   - 你有什么特别或新鲜的演出经验吗？

2. Are there performances conducted in spaces that are not conventionally for musical events? How often? Have you ever thought about trying it?
   - 有没有什么演出是在不寻常的场所演奏(非音乐厅类)? 多常? 有没有想过尝鲜?

3. Describe any collaborations with "non-Chinese" music or musicians. Why was this collaborative decision made? Was it successful? What do people think of it?
   - 说说和"非华乐"的音乐或演奏员的跨界合作。为什么会进行这项合作？成功吗？大家对此有何看法？

4. Would you say that the Chinese orchestra is progressing towards more presentations of "innovative", non-stereotypical or "forefront" music? (Elaborate with examples)
   - 您是否认为华乐的曲目和演绎朝着创新，不落俗套，前沿的方向发展？请举例说明。

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5. Between "traditionally Chinese" pieces and contemporary ones, which is performed more often?
   o 拿"现代"的曲目与"传统"华乐曲目相比，那一类型的音乐演奏频率较多？
6. What do you think about the improvisation/modification/development progress of Chinese instruments?
   o 你对华乐乐器的改良或开发有什么看法？

3.5 Specific: Composers
1. Tell me a little about your history/experience in composing. Any obstacles in your coming to be?
   o 说说你作曲的背景和资历，经验。在成长途中经历过什么障碍？
2. What is your own compositional direction/philosophy? Where does your inspiration come from?
   o 你的创作趋向，哲学是什么？你的灵感从哪而来？
3. (Both commissioned/personal interest) What is the work that you are most proud of? What is the work that you find most interesting? What musical elements do they contain?
   o 在受委托作品和个人爱好而创作的曲目中，你最自豪的作品是哪一首？你认为最有趣，独特，有意思的是哪一首？他们有着什么音乐元素？
4. Being a Malaysian/Southeast Asian, how much has local music elements influenced your compositions? Do you intentionally insert that? Why (identity?)?
   o 身为马来西亚/东南亚作曲家，你的曲风收到本土音乐元素的多大影响？你会有意地把东南亚元素插入你的作品吗？为什么(例如身份)？
5. Have you received any requests for particular musical styles?
   o 你受委托的作品有没有要求过要特定的音乐元素/曲风？
6. What about music involving non-Chinese instruments/non-Chinese music genres?
   o 那涉及非华乐乐器(其他种族/音乐类型)或非华乐的音乐流派呢？
7. Do you face issues of ownership/copyright?
   o 你有没有面对任何所有权和版权问题？

Part 4: Future 未来

Objective 3	To predict and present a relevant model that will impact the practices of the Chinese orchestra community.
RQ 4	How does the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia evolve and sustain itself as a cultural ecosystem in the modernizing society?

1. What is your opinion on moving towards the online platform (in terms of teaching & learning, performances)? Do you think the future is online?
   o 你对于使用网络进行教学，表演等的形式转变有何看法？你觉得网络是华乐的未来吗？
2. What do you think is the most sustainable model currently for the Chinese orchestra?

      ○   你认为目前华乐团最可持续发展的模式/形式是什么?

3. What is your envisioning of the best Chinese orchestra model? Are there any examples in other parts of the world? Is Malaysia on par or left behind?

      ○   你对最好的华乐团模式/形式有什么设想? 其他地方有没有这样的例子? 马来西亚是同等还是落后?

4. Do you have any suggestions or thoughts on a projected future of the Chinese orchestra in Malaysia (direction in general, unity, musically)?

      ○   你对马来西亚华乐团的未来有什么建议或感想(总体方向, 统一性, 音乐方面)?

5. Any personal projects, wishes or dreams you may have of the Chinese orchestra?

      ○   对华乐憧憬的个人计划, 项目, 目标, 愿望或梦想?

6. Final thoughts?

      ○   最后感想?

Appendix V – Keywords Extracted via TF-IDF

List of 150 keywords compiled from all interviews

Keyword	Weight
华乐	387
乐团	328
*OK	317
马来西亚	258
乐器	257
演奏会	246
*我要	235
音乐	212
老师	210
二胡	206
演奏	191
华人	187
西乐	185
跨界	176
演出	176
*那种	173
传统	171
疫情	170
*好像	169
*样子	166
新加坡	161
*很多	160
*觉得	159
*其实	159
比较	157
东西	153
古筝	150
观众	147
*一点	146
音乐会	145
曲目	143
曲子	139
学生	138
*想要	138

Keyword	Weight
学校	137
*里面	136
*比如说	134
喜欢	131
现在	130
*真的	130
问题	127
应该	126
专业	124
*不会	124
以前	122
排练	122
大自然	122
*基本上	122
*可能	120
*看到	117
中学	115
*一下	112
作品	112
*知道	111
*来讲	111
*我会	110
现代	110
*一直	109
作曲家	108
*这种	107
*回来	107
*慢慢	106
中阮	106
MCO	106
教课	104
扬琴	104
感想	103
*没有	103
*整个	102

过后	99	*不要	78
*变成	97	马来	78
作曲	97	接触	77
办法	96	台湾	75
吉隆坡	96	*大概	74
独奏	95	尝试	73
*方面	94	肯定	73
乐手	94	*算是	72
之前	93	华乐界	70
团员	93	KL	70
*一定	92	*不同	70
*讲到	92	方向	70
*这方面	92	学习	69
文化	92	声音	69
感觉	90	*哈哈哈	69
*一个	90	事情	69
表演	90	乐队	67
推广	89	指挥	66
合作	88	全职	66
合奏	88	唢呐	66
需要	87	练习	64
时间	86	朋友	64
*已经	86	*每个	64
*能够	84	*最近	63
考级	83	华族	63
*他会	82	认识	62
网课	82	希望	62
独中	82	改良	62
Malaysia	82	*很大	61
concert	82	声部	61
*有没有	82	*对华	61
笛子	81	发展	61
交流	81	容易	60
*有时候	81	个人	59
网络	81	南益	59
*不到	80	MCCO	59
地方	79	online	59
马来人	79	流行歌	58

琵琶	58	槟城	56
场地	58	流行曲	56
*很少	56		

* = Insignificant keywords that have been removed (Final list contains 101 keywords)