Chinese orchestral music

The modern Chinese orchestra (huayue tuan) *combines Chinese and Western elements. While the ensemble comprises mainly traditional Chinese instruments, Western instruments such as the cello and double bass are often added. The rendering of new arrangements of Chinese and local Malay music using Western harmony reflects contemporary efforts to create a Malaysian identity.*

Eye, Dama Orchestra, one of the country's leading Chinese orchestras, is reputed for its classical and experimental music.

Bottom: The Professional Cultural Centre Orchestra. Chinese orchestral music consists of compositions for small ensembles or full orchestras, and Western instruments are often used.

Development in Malaysia

Chinese immigrants of the 19th century used to get together on an ad hoc basis to improvise regional Chinese opera and folk tunes in the various clan and regional associations. There was no conductor, but the bowed fiddle would take the lead. No scores were used. In the 1960s, the new sounds of the modern Chinese orchestra (formed in China in the 1930s) attracted the interest of Chinese associations. They began to add new instruments, played the repertoire of the modern orchestra and called the ensemble *huayue tuan*.

Prevalence

The huayue tuan enjoys much popularity, especially among Chinese youths. It plays an important function within the Chinese community, providing the opportunity for youths to socialise and interact, make music, and at the same time, learn new skills. Musical societies also provide leadership and musical training. Members help in the running of the organization by taking charge of printing scores, organizing concerts and maintaining the instruments. Membership fees of such societies or associations are relatively low, affording Chinese youths of lower socio-economic background the opportunity to join the orchestra. The huayue tuan also contributes to the development of Chinese culture and the betterment of society through annual concerts organized to raise funds for Chinese cultural bodies and activities.

The Penang State Huayue Tuan brings together the best musicians from orchestras belonging to various schools and associations.

The modern Chinese orchestra is organized as part of voluntary associations such as clan associations, Chinese school musical clubs and alumni clubs, and political and religious groups.

Chinese-medium schools play an increasingly important role in promoting the huayue tuan. In the state of Penang alone there are about 15 Chinese orchestras belonging to these schools and associations. The Penang state orchestra, formed in 1998, comprises the best musicians from these orchestras. It was formed to raise the level of the huayue tuan and nurture local talent in collaboration with internationally renowned conductors and composers, and receives sponsorship from the state government. Youths are inspired to master Chinese instruments by the performances of local professional musicians who have graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory and the Beijing Music Academy of China.

Musical styles and repertoires

Chinese orchestral music combines Chinese melodies and scale with Western musical forms, harmony and intonation, and sometimes Malay melodies and rhythms. Most of the new compositions of the huayue tuan are programmatic.

The *liuqin* (willow leaf shaped lute) is used in solo and in ensemble as the soprano part of plucked string instruments.

With titles such as 'Moonlight over the Spring River' or 'Dance of the Yao People', the music describes a specific scenery or human activity. The repertoire consists of pieces performed by the whole orchestra, compositions for small ensembles or chamber music (sometimes accompanying singing, dance or chorus) and solo pieces for the *guzheng*, *erhu*, *dizi* and *suona* (the last three usually accompanied by piano or *yang qin*).

Compositions played by the entire ensemble comprise new arrangements of folk songs played in heterophony as in regional music 'Crazy Dance of the Golden Snake', new compositions played in triadic harmony as in 'Dance of the Yao People', and mini-concertos where a soloist plays with the orchestra such as 'A New Song of the Herdsmen' for the *dizi* and orchestra.

Malaysian folk and patriotic songs such as 'Tanah Air Ku', 'Ayam Didik', 'Inang Cina', 'Burung Kakaktua' and 'Chan Mali Chan' have also been arranged for the modern Chinese orchestra. New compositions incorporating Mari dance rhythms and those using the Malay *kompang* drum such as 'Potong Padi' have been created. Groups such as Dama Orchestra (Malaysian Chinese Ensemble), the Professional Chinese Cultural Organization of Kuala Lumpur and the Penang state *Huayue Tuan* have expanded the boundaries of Chinese music by experimenting with Western chamber musicians, classical Indian instrumentalists and jazz fusion musicians. By so doing, they have been able to attract non-Chinese audiences to their performances.

Instruments of the *huayue tuan*

The modern Chinese orchestra consists of four sections:

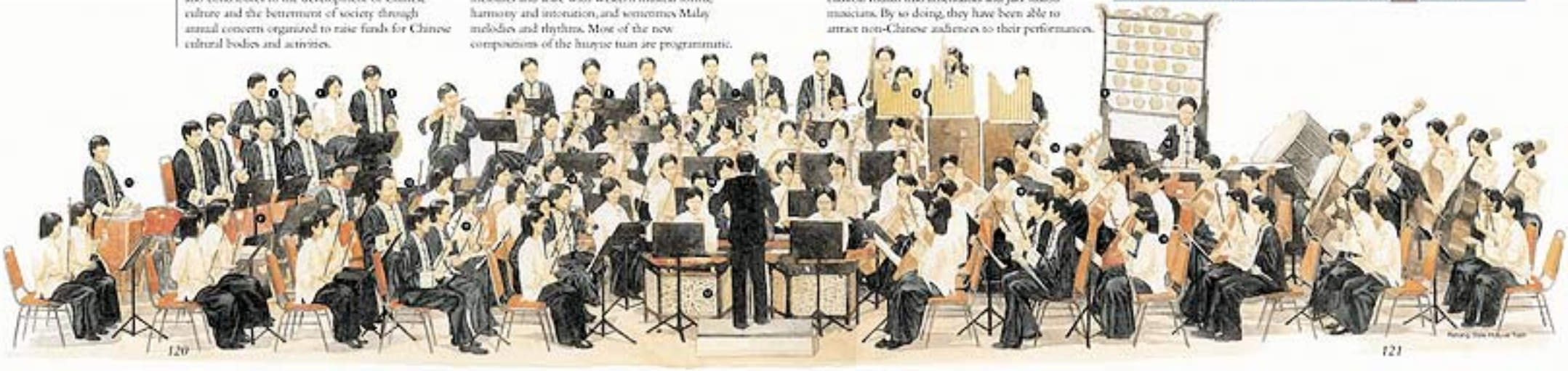
- Bowed strings—treble section: *erhu*, *banhu* and *gaohu*; tenor section: *zhonghu*; bass section: *gehu*; *beida gehu*. The cello and double bass are often added.
- Plucked strings—*pipa* (pear-shaped lute), *yueqin* (moon guitar), *liuqin* (willow leaf shaped lute), *sanxian* (three-stringed guitar), *guzheng* (zither); and strings struck by hammers, *yang qin* (dulcimer).
- Wind—*dizi* (transverse flute); *xiao* (vertical flute); *sheng* (mouth organ); *suona* (double-reed oboe).
- Percussion—*gu* (drum); *bo* (cymbal); *luo* (gong); *yunluo* (small gongs); *ling* (bell); *maling* (horse bell); *bangzi* (wood block).

Western influence is evident in the division of the orchestra into four sections with the bowed string section dominating, the presence of a conductor and in the seating of the players. As in the Western orchestra, the bowed strings are seated to the left, the bass instruments to the right, the wind instruments in front of the conductor and the percussion at the back of the stage. The design of the instruments has been modified to increase the range, to temper the scale and to increase the volume.

The *dizi* (transverse flute) is traditionally made of bamboo and produces an expressive sound.

The *erhu* is a versatile bowed string instrument.

The *ruan* comes in three sizes.

Instruments of the modern Chinese orchestra

1. *Gangqin*
2. *Paigu* (five drums)
3. *Banhu*
4. *Muyu*
5. *Jingdaiou*
6. *Dizi*
7. *Suona*
8. *Sheng*
9. *Yunluo*
10. *Tongxiao*
11. *Gaohu*
12. *Zhonghu*
13. *Liuqin*
14. *Zhongruan*
15. *Daruan*
16. *Pipa*
17. *Yang qin*
18. *Cello*
19. *Erhu*
20. *Double basses*