

Cultural Connections Through Music:

Finding Belonging

By

Patty Chan

218362400

Major Research Paper

Faculty of Graduate Studies

Master of Arts

Graduate Program in Music

York University

March 2022

Supervisor: Louise Wrazen

Second Reader: Rob van der Blik

Abstract

There has been little documentation about the history and development of Chinese music, specifically traditional Chinese orchestral music, of the Chinese diaspora in Canada. Music is an important link for immigrants to their homeland and serves to bring people together and preserve cultural heritage. After generations of living in Canada, music can also bring connection to Chinese Canadians who are searching for their cultural roots. Finally, this music can help bridge with cultures outside of the Chinese community. In this paper, I will explain the role of the Chinese orchestra in the diaspora, document its history and development, impact on individuals and their communities, their challenges, and successes. The history and legacy of Toronto's first Chinese orchestra, the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto, will also be explored. I will summarize firsthand interviews with traditional musicians, leaders, and founders of Chinese orchestras across Canada, providing valuable insight into their experiences in this artform, far away from Asia. An essential application of this research is to discover ways for these musicians and orchestras to work together, exchange ideas and find solutions to ensure the future and development of this unique and valuable musical genre.

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Chinese Diaspora and the Traditional Chinese Orchestra	8
Chapter 2: Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto	13
Chapter 3: Chinese Orchestras Across Canada	27
Chapter 4: Traditional Chinese Musicians in Canada	51
Conclusion: Looking at the Future	57
Glossary	60
Reference List	61
Interview List	63

Introduction

Canada has an international reputation for embracing and promoting multiculturalism, equality, and inclusivity. In reality, however, there remains a social and economic gap between “established” European ethnocultural and visible minority groups. Governmental policies have been slow to address this disparity, though Canada has become increasingly culturally diverse. As a result, racism and discrimination remain a constant barrier to visible minorities as they navigate through life as Canadians.¹ In the past year, there has been a surge in anti-Asian sentiments during the COVID-19 pandemic, with reports of racist attacks tripling from 2020 to 2021 (Eligh, 2021). While it is impossible to address the many inequalities in society, it is important to listen to the stories and experiences of people of colour - to open a dialogue and begin to build bridges between communities so that we can move forward together.

In the Chinese diaspora, especially for new immigrants, the preservation of culture, arts, and language is greatly valued. Music is an important link for immigrants to their homeland and serves to bring people together and preserve cultural heritage. Traditional Chinese orchestras are community hubs of social and cultural activities that link different generations, offer a safe and supportive space to immigrants, and provide a bridge for Chinese Canadians to connect with their distant roots. As well, some orchestras have begun to venture beyond the Chinese community, reaching out to the mainstream and collaborating with musicians from other cultures. These orchestras use primarily traditional Chinese instruments, along with western orchestral instruments like cellos, double basses, and certain percussion instruments. Currently, there are Chinese orchestras in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal. For the most part, they are isolated from one another, each dealing with their own challenges.

¹ See Government of Canada, “The Politics of Multiculturalism,” (2015).

While there is a growing body of research undertaken on some of these Chinese orchestras (e.g., Vancouver ethnomusicologists Alan Thrasher and Gloria N. Wong offer a brief description of the history of BC Chinese Orchestra in *Yueqi: Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance* (2011)), previous studies have failed to link these orchestras nationally. This is an important avenue for study since these diasporic orchestras face many common obstacles despite their geographic distance. My study will explore some of the experiences of members of Chinese orchestras across Canada through the perspective of its participants. It will examine the roles that Chinese orchestras play within the diasporic Chinese community and within their broader Canadian context by addressing the following questions: What value do these orchestras hold for community members? How do they interact with activities of other ethnocultural groups and musical practices in Canada? This research will explore ways people have found to work together, exchange ideas and find ways to connect through musical activities. Through firsthand interviews with founders and leaders of Chinese orchestras across Canada, this paper will document the history and development of these cultural institutions, their impact on individuals and their communities, and the leaders' goals for the future. A corollary of this research, which draws on members of orchestras across Canada, will be to connect these orchestras, to facilitate and encourage communication and mutual support, strengthen relationships, and foster a united effort in ensuring the future and development of this unique and valuable musical genre.

In examining the Chinese orchestra, the individual paths of various traditional Chinese musicians also will be explored to learn of their immigrant experience. Unlike western classical musicians whose skills are accepted and recognized in North America, these musicians face the difficulty of having to create a market or niche for themselves in order to commodify their music. How have they adapted to life in the west? Have they been able to continue in their

artistic endeavours? Has their music changed? What impact have they had on the music community? My conversations with these individuals forms a necessary part of this research, since it gives Chinese musicians a voice, a rare opportunity for each of them to tell their stories and open the dialogue about belonging, and their struggles to fit into the Canadian tapestry.

My own position offers a unique perspective to this study. As a second-generation Chinese Canadian, I have grown up immersed in Chinese music, joining the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto at the age of twelve on the *erhu*². My identity has been shaped by this music and it is my passion to share this part of my heritage in hopes of building bridges with the next generation and other cultures. Much of my work as a performer, educator and author is about creating cultural bridges. My composition for erhu and viola da gamba, *Redemption: The Chan Kol Nidre* develops themes of connectivity and exchange through a fusion of Jewish melody and Chinese musical elements. I have taught erhu and Chinese music at York, Ryerson and Carleton Universities, and I am the author of several books, one of them *Playing Erhu: Bridging the Gap* (2011) is the world's first English-language erhu instruction book. My children's storybook *That Sounds Like...* (2020) introduces a new generation of readers to Chinese musical instruments in English, French, and Mandarin. I am the Music Director and Past President of the Toronto Chinese Orchestra, which is Canada's longest established traditional Chinese orchestra, and the Founder and Director of Centre for Music Innovations, which is creating a Chinese music database and provides Chinese music workshops and resources for composers and musicians. I have travelled many times to Asia, bringing musicians and Canadian music so that we can continue to build cultural bridges. Through the Toronto Chinese Orchestra, I have also been able to bring artists to Canada and deepen our

² A traditional Chinese 2-stringed bowed instrument.

friendships with Asia. In 2019, I co-founded the PhoeNX Ensemble with third-generation Chinese-Canadian harpist Sanya Eng, with the mission to tell stories and legends through mixed ensemble, visual art, and dance. We will use music to share our experience as Chinese-Canadians. I will use my experiences and observations to further suggest and illustrate the impact that this music can have on the diasporic community and beyond in finding belonging, building understanding, and strengthening connection.

This essay offers another means to examine the Chinese-Canadian perspective, providing an insiders' view of the role of traditional music, and giving a glimpse of the struggles and successes these artists and ensembles face in Canada. In tracing the paths taken, we can then continue its legacy with thoughtful intention: introducing music of other cultures to school curriculums, growing world music programs in universities, connecting music students to ensembles of other cultures, etc. There is much that can be done to show how valuable this music is to the Canadian tapestry. The main challenge is to put this knowledge into action as there are still many barriers and gatekeepers.

Chapter 1: Chinese Diaspora and the Traditional Chinese Orchestra

The purpose of this chapter is to set the background for this research. It provides a brief history of the Chinese Canadian experience from when the first immigrants arrived in Canada until current times, the changing demographics and how this impacted music and the arts. This will include the history of the traditional Chinese orchestra in Asia and how it began in Canada. There is little documentation of this topic in existence. Since I was a member of the first Chinese ensemble in Toronto, I will also draw on my own experience, and will include my interviews with the founders of the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto (CIMGOT), which began in 1969.

Chinese Diaspora History in Canada

To understand the development of Chinese orchestras in Canada, the history of the Chinese diaspora must be explained. The Chinese in Canada come from many different parts of Asia, and therefore, this broader community varies culturally and linguistically and now also includes several generations of Canadian-born Chinese (CBC).

The first Chinese arrived in Canada in the 1850s predominantly from Guangdong province (Toishan) in southern China. They came to Canada in search of a better life, but instead of the promises of prosperity at Gold Mountain (named for the 1858 gold rush in British Columbia), they encountered racism, abuse, and poverty. About 16,000 Chinese were recruited as cheap labour to help build Canada's transcontinental railway and they were given the most dangerous jobs. Thousands died during the railway's construction. They constructed roads, dug canals, worked on farms and factories, and though they contributed a lot, they were still considered outcasts in society. Since 1860, "the House Assembly of the Colony of British Columbia had tried to pass discriminatory legislation against the Chinese, setting the anti-

Chinese trend of the government for the next one hundred years” (Lee, 1994, 18). In the years that followed, the government passed a Head Tax to discourage Chinese immigration. In 1923, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed: no Chinese were allowed to immigrate to Canada. This was not repealed until 1947. Even then, only wives and children under eighteen years of age could enter Canada. It wasn’t until 1962 that discriminatory racial wordings were finally removed from regulations (Lee, 1994).

With their turbulent experiences in Canada, music was a way for these immigrants to escape from the harsh realities and remember their homeland during the moments they could gather together. They formed benevolence societies that gave financial assistance, and small arts groups that enabled social gatherings to strengthen their community. For Chinese immigrants, there has been a long history of discrimination, and also feeling perpetually like the “other.”

In the 1960s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants began to arrive in Canada. These were predominantly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and many came to study. It was during this time that the first traditional Chinese instrumental music ensemble began in Toronto.

Recent Research in Diaspora and Music

The Chinese diaspora has a history of over 170 years in Canada, but even in 2022, they remain “foreigners,” easily targeted as visible minorities. Racial discrimination, whether manifested overtly or through microaggressions, causes psychological and emotional trauma and deep feelings of rejection and lack of belonging. It is therefore not surprising that turning to music and the arts helped build connection within the Chinese community (Rao, 2016).

According to economist Aloys Prinz, immigrants will face similar struggles to find belonging either through assimilation into the host country or within their diasporic community,

no matter what their home country. The cultural identity of an individual's sense of self is derived from belonging to a group that shares common ethnic traditions and cultural customs (Prinz, 2019). Interestingly, Prinz also found that immigrants tend to either turn "inward" towards the diasporic community, or "outward" towards assimilation. Some factors that affect this are the size of the diasporic community, the barriers, and opportunities that the immigrants experience, and the degree of cultural distance between the immigrants and the host country. There is a tenuous balance between turning "inward" and "outward" that I will explore through this research. As an example of turning "inward," Cantonese opera in North America served as entertainment, an escape, and a hub for social gatherings and activities, bringing the Chinese community together and offering respite from the difficult life in a new country that had Chinese exclusionist policies and immigration control (Rao, 2016).

According to American ethnomusicologist, Mark Slobin, the term "diaspora" "marks the existence of an identified population that feels that it is away from its homeland, however imagined, however distant in time and space" (Slobin, 2011, 97). Though he recognizes that there is some sort of separation from the immigrants' homeland, it is more than physical. There are many factors that influence their displacement and, therefore, their musical expression and practices. In researching the history of CIMGOT, both first and second-generation Chinese felt this displacement, to varying degrees. The question of diasporic identity figures greatly, though varies depending on their social and cultural experiences, regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Slobin, 2011). Slobin also highlights the diverse approach to musical hybridity or intercultural collaborations with different cultural groups. Ethnomusicologist Su Zheng concurs with Slobin's observation in noting how expressions of music in the Chinese "are conditioned and shaped by constant multilevel interactions and negotiations between the host country, the

homeland, the aspirations of individual musicians, historical consciousness, and internal cultural conflicts” (Zheng, 1994, 276). Colin McGuire’s study of Chinese martial arts in the diaspora reveals the challenges of promoting and preserving tradition and suggests “not just preserving, but also improving on the received transmission in order to take it to another level” (McGuire, 2014, 299). Over time, if this musical genre is not supported, taught, or shared, it will not be able to develop here in Canada.

In the 1960s, a new wave of Chinese immigrants began to arrive in Canada. They were predominantly from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and many came to study. It was during this time that the first traditional Chinese instrumental music ensemble began in Toronto. Other Chinese ensembles formed in Canada, their demographics also shaped by the different periods of immigration. Heidi Chan’s research about the Millenium Orchestra shows the value of a community ensemble for Chinese seniors that provides a social and creative space and enriches lives in the diaspora (Chan, 2015). Vancouver has many Chinese immigrants, and some research has been undertaken on some Chinese orchestras there. Ethnomusicologists Alan Thrasher and Gloria N. Wong published *Yueqi: Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance* (2011), which offers a brief description of the history of British Columbia Chinese Orchestra (BCCO). Huai Sheng Qiu, a visiting scholar at the University of British Columbia also investigated the emergence, development, and structure of the BCCO and the University of British Columbia Chinese Ensemble, examining their repertoire, their history, and the impact these ensembles have had on the community (Qiu, 2005). In Toronto, there has been no in-depth account of Toronto’s first traditional Chinese orchestra and the role that it has played within the diasporic Chinese community. Interviews with the founder, first- and second-generation members of the Chinese

Instrumental Music Group of Toronto, along with archival material are gathered to document CIMGOT's history and legacy.

Chinese Orchestras in Asia and Canada

In Asia, the traditional Chinese orchestra has a surprisingly short history of approximately one hundred years. Before this, music served the purpose of rituals, processions, and court entertainment. The Chinese orchestra had its start in the 1920s when musicians wanted to take the best qualities of the Western music and “modernize” it while retaining the roots of Chinese music. They wanted to create an orchestra that showed their national identity. It was formed with four sections: winds, plucked strings, bowed strings, and percussion. Initially, these orchestras played arrangements of folk songs. The musicians learned to read scores written in *jianpu*³ and follow the conductor. In 1966, China's Cultural Revolution stopped orchestral development and musicians were sent to labour camps for “re-education.” In 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended and orchestras slowly started again, but for the purpose of political propaganda (Wang, et al., 2020). During these years, China was isolated from the rest of Asia where orchestral music continued to develop. The Taipei Chinese Orchestra was established in 1968 and the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 1974. In Hong Kong, many community orchestras were formed, and eventually the professional Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra was established in 1977. A great majority of the orchestral repertoire from those times were based upon folk tunes and ancient melodies from China. However, gradually, each orchestra started to use more of their own regional elements, creating their own unique musical identity. It is interesting to see how this genre established in Canada.

³ A simplified numbered musical notation.

Chapter 2: Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto

Introduction and Methodology

My research to document the history and development of the first Chinese orchestra in Toronto comprises interviews with the founders and members of the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto (formerly the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of the University of Toronto (CIMGUT)), also known as CIMGOT. After analyzing the information from these twelve musicians, I have grouped the topics of the interviews thematically and have included my brief auto-ethnographical account. The archival photos and videos of the orchestra's activities will be used in a documentary about CIMGOT.⁴

After obtaining ethics permission, I either video recorded the interview at the musician's home or recorded over Zoom⁵ for musicians who are currently out of the country. During each interview, the musician would introduce themselves, their background, discuss their time at CIMGOT, and reflect on its impact on their life. The historical timeline of CIMGOT can be divided into two phases: 1969-1972 (CIMGUT) and 1973-1987 (CIMGOT). CIMGUT became CIMGOT after many of the university students graduated. From the mid 1970s, these musicians began teaching youths in the community. I have interviewed members from both phases and have categorized them according to the following themes: first/second generation immigrant experience, music as connection, music and community, and music and identity. A Glossary of instruments is provided at the end of this paper.

⁴ The condensed version of the documentary film about CIMGOT, "Finding Belonging," has been selected to be released in Spring 2022 at CERC in Migration and Integration's *Under the Tent* Festival.

⁵ As this research was conducted in the middle of a pandemic, most in-person communication had shifted to the video platform Zoom.

Forming CIMGUT

Before traditional Chinese instrumental music ensembles formed in Toronto, there were Cantonese opera groups, which consisted of amateur singers and some musicians that would gather informally to socialize, rehearse, and perform in the community. Most Chinese immigrants were from Guangzhou, then later Hong Kong, where Cantonese operas were popular. In 1967, a University of Toronto engineering student from Hong Kong, Ming Chan, started to perform on the *erhu* at the Chinese Overseas Student Association's annual "China Nite." Born in 1946 in Hong Kong, Ming Chan currently has homes in Guangdong, China, Hong Kong and Sydney, Australia. He had stopped his musical activities after leaving Canada in the mid-1980s, but has recently resumed playing *erhu* in the past few years. Ming Chan has a musical background in piano, cello, and *erhu*, and was part of a community Chinese orchestra as a teenager in Hong Kong. His connection with the conductor, Mr. Hon Wah Yuen, and years of orchestral experience gave him the confidence and resources to start an orchestra in Toronto when he saw interest from the Chinese university students. Some students knew how to play Chinese instruments and some wanted to learn, so Ming Chan decided to order instruments from Hong Kong and ship them to Toronto. They purchased *erhus*, *dizis*, *yangqins*, *pipas*, *sanxians*, *liuqins* and drums. When the instruments arrived in the summer of 1969, they formed the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of the University of Toronto (CIMGUT) with the purpose of playing and having fun together. Mr. Hon Wah Yuen provided music scores, and they would also do their own arrangements for the instruments that they had. CIMGUT's first home was in the office for the Chinese Overseas Student Association (COSA) at the University of Toronto.

Ming Wong was also one of the original members of CIMGUT. He was born in Hong Kong in 1949. His father had come to Canada as a teenager. Ming and his mother moved to

Winnipeg when he was twelve years old, then to Toronto for university. Ming Wong met Ming Chan at the University of Toronto and became a key leader in this orchestra, staying until it disbanded in 1987 (as CIMGOT).

MING WONG: I had learned piano while in elementary school in Hong Kong. After I moved to Canada for high school, I learned the violin. Ming Chan then introduced me to *erhu*, *dizi*, *zhonghu*, and *xiao*⁶. I also picked up cello and double bass when I joined CIMGUT. Chinese music reminded me of my childhood in Hong Kong and I loved the simple melodies. Playing music together was also a good diversion from studying. (Interview with Ming Wong, October 11, 2020)

Ming Chan would let Ming Wong listen to his traditional Chinese ensemble records. Ming Wong's musical background was more western classical and pop, though he would hear Chinese music on occasion at festivals and celebrations in Hong Kong. Not only did he find Chinese music to be simple and the melodies touching, but it reminded him of his childhood in Hong Kong.

As an amateur group, CIMGUT did not have any formal administrative structure. Matters were discussed amongst a few key members (no fixed number), then brought to the entire group for further discussion and a final vote. They realized that they could not force members to do things they did not agree with as they were not a professional organization. Fortunately, they did not encounter any major issues and things ran rather smoothly. They performed at the University of Toronto's Chinese Overseas Students Association events, Queen's University Chinese New Year Celebration (1970), Mariposa Festivals at Centre Island, the Science Centre, and held free Chinese community concerts at libraries and schools. Their repertoire consisted mostly of Chinese folk songs and works composed during the Cultural Revolution (also known as "Red" songs), as most of the music came from mainland China. The scores were written using *jianpu*

⁶ See *Glossary*.

(simplified numbered) notation. Some examples of repertoire are “Song of Emancipation,” “Beijing has a Golden Sun,” “Carrying Grain to the Commune,” and “Dance of the Yao People.” The works were tonal with a simple melody, and quite memorable, as they were based on folk tunes. The titles and lyrics of these works were altered from the original folk songs to promote China’s political agendas. However, since they played orchestral works, there were no lyrics and the members’ focus was on the beautiful melodies rather than the political messages. During rehearsals and concerts, some members with more musical experience would take turns conducting the orchestra.

MING CHAN: I used to be in the orchestra in Hong Kong, so I know what were the popular songs at the time, and then I was connected with the conductor of the orchestra that I played with it at the time. It was a Chinese instrumental orchestra, there was no professional orchestra or Chinese music orchestra in Hong Kong at that time. So Mr. Yuen – I was in communication with him and he sent me scores, and we do arrangements ourselves because that's not that hard, we don't care about the effect really, the sound effect, whatever. As long as everybody has a part to play – so we do the scores ourselves. Well, I do a lot of them, Ming Wong does some of them, and other people does some of them ... That was it. And when we organize concerts, we write who wants to play solo but most people want to play. The only reason we are keeping them back is whether they are confident enough, so that's how we organize concerts. Every concert would have two halves and every half would be like 40 minutes or so. So how many performances? And that's how we arrange it – it's very simple. (Zoom interview with Ming Chan, October 11, 2020)

Forming CIMGUT met a need among the Chinese student community to gather and participate in a fun social activity. They did not intentionally set out to create anything that would impact others, yet with the time and efforts that they invested in the orchestra, planning rehearsals, concerts, finding repertoire, administrative work, and all the other duties needed in running an organization, the results surpassed their expectations.

CIMGUT: Music and Connection

As foreign students at the University of Toronto, they wanted to form social connections, and many joined the Chinese Overseas Students Association (COSA), which tried to connect with the Chinese community in Toronto. They taught Chinese language to Canadian-born Chinese, organized activities, and supported the formation of CIMGUT. Albert Wong, born in 1947 in Hong Kong, was also part of COSA.

ALBERT WONG: In those days, there were very few Chinese students in Toronto. I remember there were less than 120 Chinese students in a population of 18000 students there, so we sort of cling together and try to help each other... We participate in a lot of sporting competitions and things like that, so the Chinese students started mix up with the local community. I think before that it is two different groups, they never get connected together, but because of these years of work, I think we somehow work as a group and creating a lot of different functions and activities for local communities. (Interview with Albert Wong, October 11, 2021)

Albert Wong believes that in those days, students were more proactive in their beliefs. Not only that, but these foreign students were able to build strong relationships with each other by creating these activities (like forming CIMGUT).

ALBERT WONG: When I was at U of T in the late 60s and early 70s, I think that's a time that the world changed a lot, especially within the university, I think the students become more active, more participation, not just what's happening within the university, but what's happening in the world. At that time, the Chinese students in Toronto feel the push or the urge to do something aside from helping build a bridge between the university and the Chinese community... Since we have no family here, all the students, all the Chinese from overseas, to each other we are brothers and sisters at that time, we take care of each, helping each other, we try to organize things that aside from studying, we have something to do. (Interview with Albert Wong, October 11, 2021)

Being so far from home, these students came together for connection and support and formed deep friendships. This illustrates the turning "inward"- finding comfort within the diasporic community where language, customs, and traditions are common.

Frank Leung, born in Hong Kong where he learned the *erhu* as a teenager, also valued the time spent at CIMGUT rehearsals as a student at the University of Toronto in 1974 because of the friendships formed. Every Friday night, he would travel from the Scarborough College campus to the St. George campus in downtown Toronto to rehearse with the orchestra. The friendships that began in the 1960s and 70s still exist today, half a century later.

FRANK LEUNG: Music kind of put us together and we play and the friendship grows and be... Becomes close friends. And it's amazing. So the music kind of bring us together and this friendship start from there... and it's kind of like forming a community, we develop a lot of good friendships along the way. That's good. And it's a good memory for me. Now, we're still getting together having potlucks dinners sometimes. (Interview with Frank Leung, October 16, 2021)

Other CIMGUT members echo the same sentiments about forming connections through these early community-based music activities. The act of getting together to rehearse and perform music that they could share with the local community was enjoyable and rewarding. In addition to the music activities, they also held social gatherings (picnics, parties, short trips, etc.), which strengthened their relationships. Aileen Wong was a University of Toronto student from Hong Kong in 1968. Though she had no traditional Chinese instrumental background (she learned the piano in Hong Kong), she joined CIMGUT with some friends and learned how to play *pipa*.

Some members who had learned Chinese instruments in Hong Kong would teach beginners the basics of the instruments and reading *jianpu* notation. If no members knew how to play a certain instrument, they would learn through reading instruction books and listening to recordings. Janet Chan, born in 1948 in Hong Kong, joined CIMGUT through meeting Ming Chan. Ming assigned her the *yangqin* and taught her how to play, since the orchestra needed a *yangqin* player. She was attracted to the folk music, which were the familiar melodies of her childhood. With the regular Friday night rehearsals, social activities, and concerts, she felt a

group solidarity. Another musician was Stephen Li, born in 1949 in Guangdong, China, who grew up in Hong Kong. His background was in western music, learning violin, piano, guitar, and percussion. Interestingly, he considered himself a western musician, as he had little knowledge about Chinese music. His percussion professor at the University of Toronto, Russell Hartenberger, encouraged him to learn more about Chinese music. Stephen Li then collaborated with CIMGUT for his recitals, playing Chinese percussion, and also briefly tried conducting CIMGUT, but he still felt like an outsider:

STEPHEN LI: Privately I thought, maybe I'm not competent at this job (as conductor of CIMGUT), in fact, I didn't know much about Chinese music. I didn't know how to handle Chinese music, the way I was approaching Chinese music was from the western musician's eyes, their viewpoint. Basically, I'm still a Western musician, I play some Chinese music. Now, I know more about the Chinese theory... Now, more than before but I am not ranked as a Chinese-Chinese musician, I'm a Western-Chinese musician. (Interview with Stephen Li, September 17, 2021)

Ming Wong summarizes the reasons why CIMGUT brought these students together:

MING WONG: I think a lot of the reasons are first social reasons, because those people in the group were my friends and they were good friends. The second main reason is I love the music that we play and so honestly, we have no noble feelings other than self-serving reasons. This nice social weekly, event that I see our good friends and play and that play together also was very enjoyable... And each of us take away different enjoyment from that, some are more music-oriented, some are more social oriented, but those are the two main ingredients for I think an amateur group, there's no professional reason that you're together, you're not paid. It's more for your own benefit, so what are those benefits: one is for social and maybe two is for self-interest, that's something you'd like to learn, and you like to improve on, something you're gonna be better at. You like to play the flute or play the *erhu* to a certain enjoyable level and you feel satisfied that and secondly, you're seeing your good friends again and sometimes you compare your progress on each one, urge each one on or something like that.. I think they're both important factors and then how the group stay together in those days... (Interview with Ming Wong, August 21, 2021)

The purpose of CIMGUT was to provide a social activity that was fun and would help bring these overseas students together. It happened to be music that linked them to their heritage, but it would be the friendships built through this orchestra that would continue over fifty years later.

Transitioning to CIMGOT: Music and Community

CIMGUT had regular free performances that were free to the public at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) auditorium, which CIMGUT was able to secure for free because a member worked at OISE. These concerts were filled with a mix of Chinese and non-Chinese audience and were advertised in the university community as well as Chinatown. The performances had an MC that introduced each piece in the program with a brief background in English. These concerts were very well received and always had a full house.

CIMGUT also gave workshops and performances in elementary schools, libraries, and other universities. The musicians would introduce their instruments and repertoires to their audiences. Ming Wong reflects on these early activities and their purpose.

MING WONG: I think when we formed a group, our goal was to introduce Chinese music to society, both the Chinese and the Canadian society. I remember the early years, we went to elementary schools, Ogden School and play for the students there, and we went through all the other student - Chinese student associations. We went to Waterloo, Queens, some other universities to perform during their cultural performances... And we try to promote our passion, which is traditional Chinese music, to more people, which during those days wasn't very popular there, relatively unknown to the public in general. (Interview with Ming Wong, August 21, 2021)

By 1972, many of the members of CIMGUT had graduated from the University of Toronto. They moved from the Chinese Overseas Student Association to renting a house on 205 McCaul Street, to the Lung Kong Association (also on McCaul Street), to Heydon Park Secondary School, then finally to a garage at the back of the Chinese Benevolent Society on 29

D’Arcy Street as their rehearsal space. As they were no longer associated with the university, they changed their name to the Chinese Instrumental Music Group of Toronto (CIMGOT). Their community performances caught the attention of local Chinese families, and they were asked to teach children Chinese instruments. Other musicians in the community also joined as CIMGOT’s reputation grew. Herman Lee, born in 1943 in China and moved to Hong Kong at the age of twelve, immigrated to Toronto in 1973 in search of a better life. He joined CIMGOT playing *gaohu*, *erhu*, *pipa*, and *sanxian*. With his strong background in Chinese music, he also conducted CIMGOT and taught the youth. The more experienced musicians also became instructors. During their Friday night rehearsals, Ming Chan (*erhu*), Ming Wong (*dizi*, *erhu*), Janet Chan (*yangqin*), Frank Leung (*erhu*), and Herman Lee (*erhu*, *pipa*) would teach on rotation in several rooms at the Chinese Benevolent Society. They created their own curriculum using folk songs from books and writing simple studies in *jianpu* notation. Ming Wong explains this next phase in the history of the group.

MING WONG: Initially, there was a group among friends of the same age or same generation. Later on with the injection of the younger generation, we became more the instructors or the seniors in the group, and the group took on new blood and new vitality maybe, and that changed the group a bit because it's not... No longer a gathering of university students - they are younger high school age students. And that was a big change for us. Those days, I worried about the next generation maybe how to pick their interest and get them progressing and how they keep them... We became less of a social group, suddenly having the responsibility of teaching the next generation! Eventually the original members started to leave as demands of work and family became too much. (Interview with Ming Wong, August 21, 2021)

The older musicians from CIMGOT took this responsibility seriously. They organized a “Closed Concert” every three months for the youths to gain performance experience. The students would prepare a piece to perform in front of their peers, instructors, orchestra members, and family. Each performance was evaluated and the “Most Improved Player” would be awarded

a prize. The best players would be selected for community performances. These Closed Concerts also served as auditions into CIMGOT. Eventually, twenty youths from ages nine to fifteen joined CIMGOT in the mid to late 1970s. They were mostly second-generation Chinese Canadians whose parents wanted them to learn about their culture. The older CIMGOT musicians from felt a sense of accomplishment in having a positive impact on the next generation.

CIMGOT: Music and Connection

For the youths that joined CIMGOT, most of whom were born in Canada, it was a safe place – where they did not face racism, and where they could learn about their culture. They were amongst peers that understood what it meant to be a second-generation Chinese Canadian, to be considered a foreigner yet having no experience living outside of Canada. Some had a long family history in Canada, like Henry Yip, whose great-grandfather had worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late 1800s. For Henry, playing Chinese music with CIMGOT allowed him to also see a different perspective and learn about his heritage, since all the older members were from overseas.

HENRY YIP: It was establishing some roots for a long time, because being born here, you don't get that opportunity, you just don't... And for the most part, it was fantastic, I thought from hanging out, like I said, a tweener with older university students was actually quite an invigorating, educational, they were like big brothers or sisters to me, and you just can't sort of... I'm very grateful for that opportunity. And then it took on a life of its own.. My brother eventually joined, my brother Jason joined the group.. but I really enjoyed my time, 'cause I guess the music was important, I participated with playing as opposed to organizing or things like that, or even doing some of the music, the sheet music and what not. But the social aspects, getting to know more of the culture, because a lot of the folks that participated in that were very much Chinese. (Interview with Henry Yip, August 14, 2021)

Soo Gane Won, born in Toronto in 1966, also joined CIMGOT with his two older sisters. His parents wanted their children to learn Chinese culture and enrolled them in Chinese language school, Chinese dance, and Chinese music. Soo Gane played the *erhu*, *gaohu*, *zhonghu*, and the double bass, whereas both his sisters played the *pipa*. Soo Gane's father would play tapes of traditional Chinese music in the car so that his children would be familiar with the tunes; they would occasionally travel out of town for performances. The time Soo Gane spent rehearsing, performing, and traveling with the orchestra gave him a sense of community.

Another youth was Ian Pun, born in Hong Kong in 1965, but moved to Toronto when he was a toddler. As with the other young members, his parents enrolled him in Chinese language school and had him join CIMGOT in 1978. His first instrument was *yangqin*, then *erhu*, and finally the *dizi*. Ian enjoyed learning from the instructors and spending time with his peers. Chinese music allowed him to experience and embrace his culture with his friends, combining music and community. He looked forward to every Friday night rehearsal.

Music and Identity

For the musicians in CIMGUT, having grown up in Hong Kong before coming to Toronto, they had already a strong sense of cultural identity associated with their homeland. They found connection and community through joining CIMGUT, where the music was familiar and they were happy and proud to share with Canadians. They did not experience a great deal of racism as students at the University of Toronto – although there was the occasional encounter where they were told to “Go back to China” or “Go to the back of the bus.” They saw these as a fact of life, a part of living in Canada.

The youths in CIMGOT had more struggles with identity. I was one of these youths. As visible minorities, we experienced bullying and being perceived as foreigners at school. Being

Chinese became a burden and the struggle to assimilate meant setting aside language and culture in order to fit in. Alternatively, having been raised in Canada, immigrant Chinese considered us as “Bananas,” meaning yellow on the outside, but white on the inside; or *jook sing*, which is a derogatory term for local-born Chinese implying we are not fully Chinese nor fully western: *Jook-sing* is literally the section of a bamboo with two segmented ends where nothing can go through either end – meaning we are neither here nor there. Our parents’ fears that we would lose our Chinese identity resulted in their efforts to instill Chinese language and culture in us. As well, through their own experiences with racism, we were told that we had to work harder, keep our head down, and try to blend in. We lived with this constant tension between cultures, both of which considered us as outsiders. CIMGOT provided a safe place for us: where we learned music of our heritage, were mentored by the older musicians, and built friendships based on our common experiences and backgrounds. CIMGOT, for the youth, was a place where we could turn “inward” towards our diasporic community (Prinz, 2019), and every Friday night, we could feel understood. The rest of the week, we needed to turn “outward” and try to blend into white culture. We saw many Chinese, who did not have this anchor, reject their heritage in order to adopt western culture.

SOO GANE WON: Definitely playing with players that were older than me, but then also playing with players who are about the same age allowed me to grow up through my adolescence, and again, just keeping myself exposed to that Chinese culture really, really helped me understand where the roots of the music and also the culture, in terms of like the older folks would actually have... A lot of them were students or are graduate students from the University of Toronto, they brought a different perspective that I would have considered otherwise... I wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. But of course, they were all like, students that had come over from overseas, from Hong Kong or from China, but so just through osmosis meeting and talking to those people and performing with those people really gave me a sense of where my culture was prior to my existence. (Interview with Soo Gane Won, September 5, 2021)

Similarly, being a part of CIMGOT allowed Henry Yip to see a different perspective from his Canadian upbringing.

HENRY YIP: That's compared to me growing up in Canada.. so very different... I wouldn't say values, but a very different way of looking at things, and that sort of allowed me to sort of have a different perspective or in... Perspective is always good. Right? They may have allowed me to be more Chinese than it was in past... And then that's great. I mean, Chinese were always identified as not Canadian, there you go, in today's age, it's tough to be a non-white, basically minority. With my history, because I was one of two families living in the neighborhood, we were always the minority, and you learn how to survive, and so this is... If we thought Canadians were nice before and they were... I think the minorities that live with amongst them in the early days, like my early days, we were even nicer, we had to be nicer. Nice... Before, I wouldn't... Maybe complacent. Not complacent, but more careful about what you said, what you did and those kinds of things. Right, very, very good in terms of what we did, what it taught me, I really appreciated that time.. (Interview with Henry Yip, August 14, 2021)

Henry offers a nuanced understanding of the negotiations navigated by this generation of Chinese Canadians within Canada during this period. By 1987, most of the members from CIMGOT had entered university or started working and their priorities shifted. CIMGOT disbanded.

Legacy

The founders and original members of CIMGUT did not set out to impact the community. Their goal was to socialize and have fun while making music together. As the demands of work and family grew, they gradually left. Though they no longer play music, they still gather each month to eat together and stay connected. Ming Wong considered his time with CIMGOT to be a big part of his life and a worthwhile investment of his time and energies. Ian Pun appreciated the passion that these university students had to learn, then teach and promote Chinese orchestral music to the next generation. He credits their efforts as the reason why he is passionate about music to this very day. Ming Chan is happy to see how he has had an impact on the community:

MING CHAN: We didn't do that deliberately. I think it must have [impact], especially for guys like yourself who was born in Canada and who has no connection to China... Then all of a sudden, we have this group. I think there were quite a few of them, people like yourself, 10-20 of you who grow up that way. And that's your connection with China other than through your family. So in that sense, I guess we have achieved something.

I didn't set out to want to create or to do something. To me, just knowing some friends: we work together, we study together, we play together, and along the way, we play Chinese music, we can bring a little bit of Chinese culture to the Chinese community as well as the Canadian community.. that's a good thing. (Zoom interview with Ming Chan, October 20, 2020)

These CIMGOT leaders – Ming Chan, Ming Wong, and the others – became my role models. I saw their dedication and appreciated their efforts to teach us about music and our culture. It ignited my passion for Chinese music and later as a leader, fueled my efforts to connect and provide a place of inclusivity in the Chinese orchestra. I understand the pain of being an outsider. I am Chinese, yes – and I continue to learn about my roots to this day – but I am also second-generation Canadian and I want to play music that also reflects my Canadian experience. I am finally learning to embrace both sides of my identity. As a result, my work in this genre as an orchestra leader, musician, educator, and author is intentional: to help others find belonging through music and connection.

My Chinese music journey began when I found belonging in music of my heritage. It continues with me trying to pass it forward to the next generation as well as teach and encourage Canadians of all backgrounds to learn and create new works with these traditional instruments. CIMGOT had left an indelible mark in shaping me into the person that I am today.

Chapter 3: Chinese Orchestras Across Canada

This chapter expands beyond Toronto to consider other Chinese ensembles in other parts of Canada. Through my interviews with the leaders and founders of these Chinese orchestras, this section will explore the reasons for creating and running these ensembles. It considers questions such as: How have these orchestras impacted their members and their community? What are their struggles and successes? How do these leaders see their future? These are some of the questions that will be addressed, beginning with Toronto.

Toronto Chinese Orchestra (TCO)

In the early 1990s, an increasing number of immigrants arrived from Hong Kong as fears of the 1997 handover from British to Chinese rule mounted. Many families moved to Canada while the fathers remained in Hong Kong for work, becoming known as “astronauts” as they flew back and forth between Canada and Hong Kong. As they settled, they started to look for community and activities that would remind them of home. In 1993, a group of Chinese music enthusiasts came together to form the Toronto Chinese Orchestra (TCO). The majority of the members were from Hong Kong and they all played Chinese instruments, mostly at an amateur level.

The Toronto Chinese Orchestra is a non-profit organization with a Board of Directors, President, Secretary, Treasurer and Librarian. They have a Music Director and Conductor that are paid a small honorarium. In the early years, they held annual concerts at local venues such as Markham Theatre and the P. C. Ho Theatre at the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto. The members remained primarily from Hong Kong. After 1997, many members decided to return to Hong Kong as their children had grown and the political situation seemed stable there.

TCO's membership shrank to approximately ten to fifteen players from the original forty-five players. In the mid 2000s, they decided to merge with another local Chinese orchestra: the Overseas Chinese Orchestra, to strengthen their numbers and share resources. Whereas the Overseas Chinese Orchestra was more focused on maintaining a casual social gathering, TCO's leadership wanted to raise the musical standards and implemented auditions. This created tension and some players left. The membership fluctuated over the years and they saw an increase in players coming from mainland China, though few stayed long. The cultural and linguistic differences between the mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese, especially among older members, created some challenges.

With the end of CIMGOT, I missed playing in an orchestra, so I decided to try joining TCO. The members were generally welcoming, though surprised that a CBC could play *erhu*. I remember hearing some people scoffing at the idea that a *Jook-sing* would be able to play a Chinese instrument properly. This attack on my identity - the familiar feeling of not belonging - resurfaced, but made me want to prove myself, though I was angry at having to do so. I eventually became the concertmaster. All the rehearsals were held in Cantonese. We still played mostly the repertoire that I had played while in CIMGOT, music from the 1970s to 1980s, which was a bit disappointing. The repertoire that was played gradually shifted to that from the 1980s and early 1990s.

Hong Kong International Festival of Chinese Orchestras (HKIFCO): Building Bridges

In October 2008, I, together with several TCO members, arrived in Hong Kong for the first Hong Kong International Festival of Chinese Orchestras (HKIFCO) event, where

representatives of Chinese orchestras from over ten different countries and regions were invited together to play, perform and exchange ideas. The HKIFCO was jointly organized by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (HKCO) and the Hong Kong Chinese Instrumental Music Association. TCO, with members of the BC Chinese Orchestra and Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica, represented Canada. During this eight-day event, we were able to meet and establish connections with many orchestras from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Australia. Everyday, there were concerts and rehearsals taking place all over Hong Kong.

One of the many highlights of the festival was being able to play and perform with the HKCO, fulfilling one of my childhood dreams. We performed with the Hong Kong Juvenile and Youth Chinese Classical Orchestra and with the Wang Kwong Orchestra. As well, we joined with other orchestras to play with HKCO for two concerts. The final performance had musicians from many of the orchestras perform en masse. As there were hundreds of musicians, many were performing from the balcony too. It was an unforgettable experience.

I learned a lot from this trip. I saw what we, TCO, can aspire to. There was much passion and energy from all the musicians there: to learn, grow, and share this beautiful music with others. After this experience, I maintained my connections with musicians that I had met at the festival. In 2010, the Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica organized a Chinese orchestra festival, bringing orchestras from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Toronto to perform together, strengthening connections and building friendships. Inspired, I decided to visit Taiwan's Little Giant Chinese Chamber Orchestra (LGCCO) in the summer of 2010, having met the founder and music director, Dr. Chih-Sheng Chen at both 2008 and 2010 Festivals. The music was fantastic: I had not experienced this calibre of orchestral music-making before, certainly not in Toronto!

LGCCO was established by Dr. Chen in 2000 and consists of music students and graduates. His purpose was to provide a platform for young musicians to play contemporary orchestral works, keeping them in top form so that they would always be prepared for professional opportunities. As a result, many of his musicians have been recruited by professional Chinese orchestras throughout Asia. LGCCO is well-known to be one of the finest Chinese orchestras, with a focus on encouraging young composers, premiering ten to twenty new works every season. They have produced thousands of audio and video recordings. Although Dr. Chen's doctorate was actually in Mycology, his passion for Chinese music led him to fund and build LGCCO through his own income as a scientist, while also earning his masters in conducting. I was inspired by all that he has done.

Upon my return, I started organizing exchanges, bringing Chinese orchestras to Toronto and also bringing TCO players to Hong Kong and Taiwan. I understood the power of cultural exchange! I brought new compositions from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan to Toronto. I became President and Music Director of the Toronto Chinese Orchestra and created a youth orchestra and community (adults/seniors) orchestra for training purposes, as well as a professional ensemble to focus on new and challenging repertoire. Our demographic for the main orchestra has become younger over the years as our repertoire has grown more challenging. Most members are in their twenties with the ages ranging from thirteen to seventy-five years old. My vision for TCO is to create connections to the Chinese community and beyond. In order to make this possible, we needed to build a strong community within our orchestra family. We held social gatherings and I organized yearly trips to Taiwan for our members to play with orchestras there. We needed to inspire our players: to find repertoire that is challenging and interesting, we have played traditional, contemporary, pop, film, and Canadian works; we were invited to collaborate

with the professional Taoyuan Chinese Orchestra at their Music Festival in 2018, which also featured our own soloist; we presented concerts in Taipei and Hong Kong that showcased Canadian compositions. We needed to bring our communities together: in Toronto, we've held piano, conducting, and composition competitions which enabled new artists and musicians to learn about Chinese orchestral music. In 2018, TCO began to run the annual Central Conservatory of Music from Beijing (CCOM) examinations in Toronto, in collaboration with the BC Chinese Music Association. Each year, we have approximately 200 students participate, with examiners flown in from CCOM. I am hoping that TCO will be a place for these students to explore Chinese orchestral music. In 2018, we collaborated with local Japanese Taiko drummers for a fresh take on a traditional Chinese percussion work.⁷ In 2019, we invited drummers from Korea to perform a Canadian premiere with us in a two-day event that featured music workshops and demonstrations, and a main concert that also showcased visual artists from the local Korean and Chinese community.

During the 2020 pandemic, we continued to meet online on a weekly basis, working on virtual recordings, holding recitals and workshops, and trying to keep our players active and engaged. I organized a joint video presentation that allowed us to collaborate with other Chinese orchestras in Canada during the 2021 Lunar New Year, linking this community together nationally.⁸ In the autumn, we were able to gather for in-person rehearsals, and in lieu of our usual December concert, I decided to focus on producing some video recordings. This helped keep our musicians active and motivated.⁹ As we are currently in the midst of pandemic

⁷ Li, Minxiong. *Soaring Dragon and Leaping Tiger* (2018), Toronto Chinese Orchestra, Inner Truth Taiko, Apex Drumming Team. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f3oTQh4QK8>

⁸ Traditional, *Chinese New Year 2021*, Toronto Chinese Orchestra, BC Chinese Orchestra, BC Youth Chinese Orchestra, Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica, Calgary Chinese Orchestra, Montreal Chinese Instrumental Ensemble. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3BcMDv1Sx0>

⁹ Traditional, *Alamuhan* (2021), Toronto Chinese Orchestra, Toronto Community Chinese Orchestra. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJEcmXa1F9A>

restrictions once again, we have produced a 2022 joint Lunar New Year video with BC Chinese Music Association.¹⁰ This year, the other orchestras were unable to participate as they face their own challenges during this ever-changing situation with lock-downs and members falling ill. We will continue to try to offer online events to include the other orchestras and the general audience in order to stay connected.

Felix Yeung (TCO)

In 2019, Felix Yeung became the Toronto Chinese Orchestra's new president. He was born in Montreal, but spent his childhood in Hong Kong, then returned to Canada as a teenager. While in Hong Kong, he started learning the *ruan*, *liuqin*, and *sanxian*¹¹ when he was twelve years old. He had applied to join many clubs in his school, and the Chinese orchestra accepted him and assigned him to learn ruan. He reflects on his tenure with the orchestra.

FELIX YEUNG: I have studied on and off with teachers and self-study for over 25 years. I had regular lessons in the first few years, maybe even a few lessons each week, taught by my school's senior ruan player. Later on, I had some lessons in Canada (from a retired Chinese music professor) and attended a summer program in Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Since I have joined TCO 23 years ago, financial support remains a barrier to expansion of projects and performances and keeping a long-term conductor. I am proud that we have contributed to the development of next-generation leaders in the Chinese music community in and around Toronto. We are the longest-running Chinese orchestra in Canada and have collaborated with other orchestras, musicians and conductors from Asia. Improving and maintaining the CCOM examinations in Toronto is also helping to keep Chinese instrumental music alive here. My advice to other Chinese orchestras in Canada is to make sure to keep going! Some years may be more challenging than others,

¹⁰ Traditional, *Chinese New Year 2022*, Toronto Chinese Orchestra, BC Youth Chinese Orchestra, BCCMA. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80IZmGoikY0>

¹¹ See *Glossary*.

but I have not seen a problem so critical that the orchestra cannot overcome and keep improving. (Interview with Felix Yeung, October 20, 2020)

At age thirty-eight, Yeung is leading the next generation of musicians in TCO. I remain the Music Director but would like to find a successor. In order to do this, I believe we need to find more financial support, as it is a challenging position that requires a great deal of time and dedication. TCO has relied on annual membership fees (\$100/year), community performances, and training orchestras (Youth and Community) for income. This income covers rehearsal and concert venue rentals, operating expenses, and honorariums. For concerts, we seek sponsors to also help with costs. We are grateful to have received some project grants from the Markham Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

There has been great support over the years since the HKIFCO in 2008 by connections that we had made in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, BC, and Edmonton. The musicians in Asian countries are amazed that musicians in the diaspora have this passion for Chinese orchestral music and have been very generous in helping us find scores. Our Canadian compositions have also peaked their interest in TCO; Asian ensembles have always been the source of orchestral works, but now we are starting to create our own. This is leading to a broader, more reciprocal, dialogue among diasporas and homeland communities.

Chinese Music in Montreal, Quebec

Chinese immigration to Montreal followed the same trend as western Canada, with the early settlers predominantly from Toishan in Guangdong province, followed by Hong Kong and Taiwan, then the mainland Chinese from the 1990s and onwards. The following considers some musicians from this city.

Vivian Yang Li (MCIE)

Vivian Yang Li (in her 40s) is an *erhu* player from Wuxi, China, who moved to Canada in 2006. She first started the violin at the age of four and studied for six years. At one of her violin performances an *erhu* teacher approached her and asked if she wanted to study the *erhu*. She fell in love with the sound of the *erhu*, began to learn the instrument at the age of nine and studied it for over ten years. After Li moved to Montreal, she decided to form a small Chinese instrumental group in 2018. Her ensemble, Montreal Chinese Instrumental Ensemble, consists of professional Chinese musicians. There were many challenges in developing Chinese music in Montreal: in particular, very few children were encouraged to study these traditional instruments, and it was mostly seniors who wanted to learn Chinese instruments. Li started this ensemble through meeting other musicians at performances, and they currently have nine members. Their ensemble consists of two *erhu*, two *pipa*, two *dizi*, one *guzheng*, one *yangqin*, and one *suona*. Most had extensive ensemble experience in China, and the ages of the members range between forty and seventy years. The musicians came from Hebei, Nanjing, Hunan, Dalian, and Heilongjiang provinces. The newest member came to Canada in 2017. Only the *pipa*, *suona*, and *erhu* players are full-time musicians. As an ensemble, they do not have a formal administration; rather, they have one leader that connects to the community, arranges transportation and logistics, and one Music Director (Li) that plans events and arranges music. They rehearse weekly in a member's home, and the performance fees go to the individual members. Vivian Li describes the group's activities and challenges.

VIVIAN LI: We played for some world music festivals in Montreal, Sherbrooke and Quebec City and we played with the Jiangsu Chinese Orchestra (three players). I think we will have more challenges and responsibility in the future. We played Chinese traditional music and mixed ensembles with instruments of different cultures a lot. Sometimes, we also play contemporary music and with arrangement. All players are comfortable playing both traditional and contemporary repertoire. We accepted all types

of performance. We played in the Chinese New Year Gala for the Chinese community and played in French and English schools, universities, and libraries. Around one performance per month.

Financially, it's really difficult (to expand and grow). Right now, we have some support from the community, but it is far from enough. We have performance and transportation expenses. We need more help from the community and government. We did receive a grant from Maison culture, Chinese Garden Foundation in 2014. (2014 - Cultural Centre grant: conseil des arts de Montréal). (Zoom interview with Vivian Li, October 15, 2020)

With the COVID-19 situation, some of the members have had difficulty returning to Canada and they have not been able to rehearse together. However, Li remains hopeful for the future of Chinese music in Canada.

VIVIAN LI: “My advice for other Chinese orchestras in Canada: we need to learn the foreign culture and absorb more elements from the world. Express our culture in an international way to be more comprehensive and more visible. National culture only can be international when it is connected to the world. Play music from other cultures - exchange and collaborate.” (Zoom interview with Vivian Li, October 15, 2020)

The Toronto Chinese Orchestra collaborated with Li in 2019. She was the *erhu* soloist for *The Butterfly Lovers*, a famous violin concerto, composed by Zhanhao He and Gang Chen in 1959, which had been arranged for *erhu* and Chinese orchestra. We hope to have the opportunity to work together with the Montreal Chinese Instrumental Ensemble in the future.

Chinese Music in Calgary, Alberta

The Calgary Chinese Orchestra (CCO) was formed under the Chinese Cultural Centre in 1997. It was led by David Yin, who was a *dizi* player from Wuhan Conservatory. He moved to Vancouver in 2017 and has since passed away. Yin was hired by the cultural centre to form and direct the CCO. He partnered with Winnie Ng (*dizi* player from Hong Kong), now in her sixties

and retired, and Ming Lee (*dizi, erhu, bawu, guzheng, hulusi, xun, xiao* player from Hong Kong),¹² now seventy-four years old and retired. They eventually separated from the cultural centre. Jeffery Chao, an *erhu* player from Taiwan, joined shortly afterwards. They had twelve musicians in their ensemble. Yin arranged music, recruited players of all ages, increasing the number to thirty musicians.

Jeffrey Chao (CCO)

Jeffrey Chao is fifty years old and is from Taiwan. He started studying the violin at eight and has played for sixteen years, when he was introduced to the *erhu* by a classmate in high school. He had attended a winter music camp, which consisted of five days of musical activities, and shortly after, he joined the school Chinese orchestra as an *erhu* player. He had some private and group lessons, and his violin background enabled him to learn quickly. In university, he studied mechanical engineering, but continued in the Chinese orchestra as a conductor. After he immigrated to Calgary and joined the CCO, David Yin retired in 2010 and asked Chao to take over the position of conductor. Chao was single and had time to arrange music and lead the orchestra, so he agreed. He spent a year training the orchestra and added more challenging repertoire. During this transition, the membership shrank to twelve to fifteen players. They performed in the community once or twice each year, mostly in seniors' homes.

In 2014, Chao married; then in 2015, he and his wife had a daughter. Suddenly, he had far less time to devote to the orchestra. Around this time, Joe Li, a *pipa* player and computer programmer, joined CCO and began to help with music arranging. He also brought his son (*yangqin, suona* and *sheng* player) and daughter (*erhu* player) to join the orchestra. Li's

¹² See *Glossary*

contributions helped Chao greatly. They performed mostly traditional music, then one or two contemporary pieces. With Li's continuing help, they are also planning to arrange and program some film music in the future.

In 2017, Jiajia Li (in her thirties), a professional flautist and amateur *dizi* player from Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, joined CCO. She received her undergraduate music degree from Toronto and her Masters in music from Germany. Jiajia had many connections, and was able to readily acquire music, find professional musicians and performance opportunities. She helped CCO apply for grants and set up online courses.

CCO's demographics consist of the very old and very young, with the age range between seven and seventy-four. Half are seniors, 20% adults, and 30% are children. Only one is CBC; the majority are from China and Hong Kong, two from Taiwan, and one non-Asian *erhu* player (professional oboe player). For concerts, they generally need to ask for help from professional cellists, bassists, and percussionists. In Calgary, there is only one professional *erhu* player from the Central Conservatory of Music, but orchestra is not her priority, so she did not join CCO. CCO's board consists of five members: President (Winnie Ng), Artistic Director (Jiajia Li), Conductor (Jeffrey Chao), a Treasurer, Librarian, and Secretary. This committee was formed recently in order to provide structure and also enable them to apply for provincial grants.

In 2018, CCO moved to Mount Royal University (MRU). Members paid \$400 per year (September - June) and registered with MRU as part of their school program. MRU provided a rehearsal venue with storage space free of charge, and they paid the Conductor and Artistic Director. As a result, CCO was able to become more connected with other groups at MRU and other institutions. MRU students also have the opportunity to participate in the orchestra. Jeffrey Chao described ongoing challenges.

JEFFREY CHAO: Our challenges remain the lack of funding and talents to grow. We also find it very difficult to accommodate different age groups - the music cannot be too challenging for the seniors, and not too easy for the youths. I am proud that though Calgary's Chinese population is relatively small, we are able to have a Chinese orchestra. Over the years, we have had opportunities to collaborate with other groups, perform in different locations, and begin to reach out to other ensembles. I look forward to the day that we can find a conductor to replace me so that I can just enjoy playing *erhu* in the orchestra! (Zoom interview with Jeffrey Chao, October 21, 2020)

This research and study have allowed me to learn about other ensembles. As a result of hearing this, I suggested that Chao discuss this with MRU: they may be able to collaborate with their conducting program so that young student conductors can have the opportunity to work with CCO. This would be a valuable experience for the students, as well as possibly find a future conductor for CCO. I also suggested that TCO and CCO work together virtually through recitals and workshops during this COVID-19 period. As a result, with the pandemic, their youth have been taking online lessons with Charlie Lui (*dizi*) and Nicole Li (*erhu*) from BC Chinese Orchestra, Jiajia Li and Chao. Chao was excited about these ideas. Chao's advice to other Chinese orchestras in Canada is "Be passionate about what you love. Believe in it. Take action. Share it. Keep your doors open. Also remember that seniors are the backbone. Youth come and go."

Chinese Music in Edmonton, Alberta

Jason Wong

Jason Wong is the president of Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica Association (ECPA) which manages the Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica Orchestra. He is fifty-nine years old and was originally from Hong Kong. Initially, he studied the violin, then the *erhu* from 1977-1987, *gehu* (Chinese version of the cello) from 1980-1990, and the cello 1990-present. He also plays

zhonghu (alto *erhu*) and percussion. He decided to learn Chinese instruments because he loved the music from the old Cantonese dramas and movies when he was a child in Hong Kong.

In 2001, Wong and seven other Chinese music enthusiasts (including a professional *erhu* and a professional *guzheng* player) formed the Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica Association in order to share Chinese music locally and nationally. These eight were from Hong Kong, Brunei, and China. They recruited more members through word of mouth, concerts, and advertising. There were fewer than thirty Chinese instrumental music teachers in Edmonton at the time, with a Chinese population of 41,290, as of 2001.¹³ By the second year, their members doubled in number, with sixteen players. In 2017, they had the most members, which was thirty, but in 2020, they have twenty-six musicians. There are six seniors (aged 60+), twelve adults, and eight students. They are a nonprofit organization that has a structured administration with an executive committee that has a two-year term and are voted in by members. The committee consists of the President, Vice-president, Music Director, Secretary, Treasurer, External Affairs, and Internal Affairs. There is no board of directors. This committee plans the activities of the orchestra. ECPA is financially supported by membership fees, sponsors, donations, some provincial funding, and performances.

ECPA performed mostly traditional Chinese repertoire from the 1950-2000s, occasionally Hong Kong compositions and at their 2014 concert, Canadian compositions. Their members were from Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Brunei, and some Canadian-born. Their rehearsals are run in English mostly, and occasionally in Mandarin for those that have difficulty understanding. They have strong bowed string and percussion sections, but are missing some

¹³ See *The Chinese Community in Canada*. 2001. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2006001-eng.htm>

winds and plucked string instruments. They perform locally in the community (hospitals, senior homes, schools) for events like Chinese New Year, Canada Day, and the Heritage Festival. Some of their members have also participated in performances abroad: Hong Kong International Festival for Chinese Orchestras (2008) - four members; and with the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra (2012) - six members.

Edmonton Chinese Philharmonica Association has managed to host three International Chinese Orchestra Festivals: in 2010, 2014, and 2019. They were able to receive funding through a work program with the local casinos. ECPA has connections with the Hong Kong Music Lovers Chinese Orchestra, Hong Kong Juvenile and Youth Chinese Classical Orchestra, Shanghai Himnory National Chamber Band (2014), Little Giant Chinese Chamber Orchestra (Taiwan), Xianse Temple Chinese Orchestra (Taiwan), Da Chung Chinese Classical Orchestra (Taiwan), Singapore Keat Hong Chinese Orchestra, Vivo Experimental Orchestra (Malaysia), and Chao Feng Chinese Orchestra (Australia). Toronto Chinese Orchestra has also had the opportunity to take part in the 2010 and 2014 festivals. During the festivals, we rehearsed together, performed at local schools and malls, then held a large-scale concert where each orchestra was featured, then ending with a couple of collaborative pieces.

Jason Wong's advice to other orchestras in Canada is to build up connections nationally and internationally. If budget is a concern, he suggests first starting with inviting a few musicians, and then it can gradually grow.

During the 2020 pandemic, ECPA was inactive, until I offered to include them in the Toronto Chinese Orchestra's virtual activities and they joined us for our joint Lunar New Year video presentation.

Chinese Music in Vancouver, British Columbia

In 2016, Vancouver, British Columbia had 474,655 Chinese in a population of 2,463,431. Vancouver ranks second highest in Chinese population in Canada, second to Toronto¹⁴. Similar to the Chinese music development in Toronto, the early immigrants were from Guangdong province and their memories of home included enjoying Cantonese opera. There were many Cantonese opera societies, which became social hubs for many of the Chinese. Small instrumental ensembles started in the 1960s, followed by a growing interest in Chinese orchestral music. In the mid 1980s, the Vancouver Chinese Folk Orchestra was established in Chinatown; it ranged between twelve to twenty players. They had weekly rehearsals and performed in the community (Thrasher and Wong, 2011). This orchestra disbanded in the late 1980s. Until the mid 1990s, there were a few startup orchestras, but they did not last. Finally, in 1995, the BC Chinese Music Association (BCCMA) was established, along with the BC Chinese Orchestra (BCCO). Bill Lai was one of the founders of BCCMA.

Bill Lai (BCCMA)

Bill Lai was originally from Hong Kong. He had always loved the sounds of the Chinese orchestra and had grown up watching movies and dramas that used Chinese instruments. He had a late start, beginning with *erhu* lessons in 1978 at age thirty-five, then switched to percussion in 1979 so that he could play in a Chinese orchestra. In Hong Kong, he joined Wang Kwong Chinese Orchestra, one of the oldest local Chinese orchestras. It has now been over forty years of Chinese music making and he has not stopped. After Lai arrived in Canada, he decided to start

¹⁴ See *Canadian Census 2016*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7&wbdisable=true>

BCCMA and BCCO in 1995 with other music lovers because he enjoyed playing in an ensemble. It met the social and musical needs of many immigrant Chinese.

As a successful businessman, Lai was very careful in forming a proper administrative structure. The ensemble has a thirteen-member volunteer committee (by invitation) consisting of a President, two Vice-presidents, a Secretary, and a working team, each serving two year terms. For over ten years, Lai financially supported the orchestra. Since then, membership fees (\$100/year), sponsors, some government projects and fund-raising concerts have helped fund their operations. BCCMA became a registered charity in 1999.

BCCMA's mission is to promote the Chinese music culture within Canada's multicultural society. Their first public concert in 1997 had thirty musicians and they have performed twice a year since then under the direction of professional conductors and instructors. They had both professional and amateur musicians from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China aged thirty to sixty years old. Eventually, they also formed the BC Youth Chinese Orchestra (BCYCO) and the BC Children's Choir (BCCC) in 2001 for players twenty-five years old and under, and the BC Chinese Music Ensemble (BCCME) in 2003 for professional musicians. They organize lectures, master classes, instrument exhibitions, fundraising concerts, intercultural innovation projects (Thrasher and Wong, 2011). BCCMA has collaborated with the Central Conservatory of Music of China to jointly host the "Overseas Standard Grade Chinese Music Technique Exam and Theory Exam" in Canada from 2006 onwards. This was recognized in 2007 by B.C. Ministry of Education as part of the Ministry's External Credentials Program, a secondary school graduation credit program. All these activities were supported by endowment funds donated by local music lovers. Initially, their repertoire consisted of traditional Chinese works, but they have now started to expand to more contemporary works. Their performances

are primarily in Vancouver, though some members have also performed in Toronto, Edmonton, and Hong Kong. They continue to be connected with the Wang Kwong Chinese Orchestra in Hong Kong, and Hui-Chang Yan, Music Director of the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra. Both have supported BCCMA by helping them find repertoire. The Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing has also been a good connection for them.

Lai's enormous financial and administrative contributions to BCCMA and his many connections with musicians local and abroad has helped build a vibrant Chinese music community in Vancouver.

BILL LAI: We successfully promoted Chinese instrumental music to Canada. Our challenges remain in finding players (especially wind players), developing young players, and costs of finding repertoire. My advice to other Chinese orchestras in Canada is to continue to promote the learning and performance of Chinese instrumental music here. Also, for future development, you need a professional conductor. (Phone interview with Bill Lai, October 29, 2020)

Lai hopes that BCCMA will have a long life. At seventy-seven, he knows that the next generation will need to take the reins, though he has some concerns. At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, all orchestral activities have stopped, though they are working on resuming in-person rehearsals and activities in 2022.

Charlie Lui (BCCO)

Charlie Lui is part of the next generation of BC Chinese Orchestra. He is thirty-eight years old, and immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong at the age of fourteen. Lui's father, a cellist and conductor, was a graduate of the Shanghai Music Academy and had a great influence on him. Lui began studying the cello when he was six years old, and the *dizi* when he was in high school in Hong Kong. When asked why he selected *dizi*, he said he was curious: he happened to

pick it up from a classmate and was able to make a sound. After immigrating to Vancouver, he and his father were introduced to Bill Lai. Lui started studying *dizi* with James Pan (one of the founding members of BCCO), and joined BCCO in 1996. Since then, he has been part of the Music Affairs committee for four to five years, and was also President for four years.

Lui observed that of the BCCO, 40% were seniors, and 60% were adults and students. The large population of students and seniors were there to enjoy themselves, but the generation gap was evident: the seniors liked only a certain type of music of which the younger generation were not interested. They also repeated repertoire every couple of years, which the younger players did not enjoy. The BCYCO tried to address this by bringing the youth to perform different music at different events. For the youth, music was not for the purpose of nostalgia. This was a training orchestra and they tried to find repertoire that would appeal to a new generation. For example, Lui arranged a *Super Mario Theme Song* for them.

CHARLIE LUI: Our challenge is that administratively, we don't have enough help. Students graduate and leave; adults leave due to lack of challenging repertoire, or they only attend rehearsal right before a concert - this affects morale. We should expand to a diverse audience through repertoire choices. People are not proactive: due to COVID-19, we have had no rehearsals nor programs for our members. (Zoom interview with Charlie Lui, October 16, 2020)

Though Lui feels discouraged about the current situation, he acknowledged that they've had many successes. The members enjoyed playing together; they had many performance opportunities and they enjoyed meeting socially. BCCMA helped build up the Chinese music community, was a bridge between professional and amateur musicians, and introduced Western composers and musicians to Chinese instruments. His advice for other Chinese orchestras in Canada is to be inclusive, diversify the music, and to embrace changes.

Gloria Wong (BCYCO)

Another Chinese music leader is Gloria Wong, forty-two years old, and a second-generation Chinese Canadian that has served as the BC Youth Chinese Orchestra (BCYCO) conductor since 2011. She always had a strong interest in music. As a high school student, she played flute, trombone, double bass, and cello. At that time, she was interested in Canadian music and folk song adaptations for piano. Since she did not want to take any math courses, she decided to study music in university: Wong studied piano (her major in university for the first two years) and voice (her major for the last two years). Her parents were supportive of her decision. Her father sings, plays harmonica, *erhu*, *dizi*, and conducts on the side. They liked Chinese music but preferred western music and did not introduce her to Chinese instruments. It was not until Wong took an undergraduate world music survey course that she became interested in studying music of other cultures.

In 2001, Wong started studying different Chinese instruments with local teachers. She learned *guzheng* from Mei Han for a year, then Wei Li for a few months, and *pipa* with Guilin Liu for a year. Other instruments that she studied on and off over the years were *erhu* from Song Yun, *dizi* from Charlie Lui, *zhongruan* from Zhimin Yu, *sanxian* from Geling Jiang, and Chinese percussion from Alan Thrasher.

Wong graduated with her doctorate from the University of British Columbia in 2010. Through a New Horizons Canada grant (through BCCMA), her research involved encouraging the elderly to stay active in the community and share their knowledge about Chinese music. She became Alan Thrasher's research assistant and during her research, became acquainted with Bill Lai. Wong was active in the UBC Chinese Ensemble, which had some players that were part of BCCO. Wong and Thrasher also co-authored a book about Chinese instruments and Chinese

musicians in Vancouver: *Yueqi: Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance*. When BCYCO's conductor returned to China in 2011, Bill Lai asked Gloria to conduct and lead the young orchestra.

GLORIA WONG: At first, we played small ensemble arrangements like Full of Joy (Xi Yang Yang) and Purple Bamboo. Later, Dr. Chih-Sheng Chen (Taiwan) introduced some Taiwanese repertoire, and I wanted the students to try to play more traditional Jiangnansizhu and Cantonese works. The students prefer non-Chinese pieces like "Kungfu Panda," "Super Mario," songs by Michael Buble, and "Summer" (from a movie soundtrack). I tried to introduce Alberto Ginastera arrangements by Canadian composer John Oliver, and a work by Mexican composer Jose Elizondo that I arranged too. However, due to the pandemic, we could not finish them. (Zoom interview with Gloria Wong, October 26, 2020)

BCYCO's membership peaked at about twenty-one players earlier on, but steadily declined over the years, and currently they have eight players. Their ages range from eleven to eighteen years old. In order to try and increase the numbers, they relaxed their auditions so that more could join. However, the different levels are a challenge. They are usually missing instruments like cello, percussion, *ruan*, *pipa*, *sheng*, and *dizi*, but they have a strong *erhu* section due to Song Yun's (a local *erhu* teacher) relationship with the ensemble. The majority of the players are from China, some coming to Canada at a young age, and there are currently three CBCs. The rehearsals are held in English, and occasionally in Mandarin. The conductors are mainly Gloria Wong and Peter Sun, who also arranges music. Tim Chan and Peggy Hua, local professional conductors, also help when needed. Tian Ip has recently joined as Artistic Director.

Over the years, BCYCO has had some challenges. The number of students has been declining, partly due to other youth ensembles starting up. Azalea Ensemble was created by Zhimin Yu and Gloria Wong for the Vancouver music school in 2015, and as a result, some players have joined Azalea rather than BCYCO.

GLORIA WONG: Other orchestras have a large group of teachers that support them through referring students. I will need to develop these relationships. I've looked into applying for grants, but this is also time-consuming. There is a lot of work to do after getting the grant. I have been doing all the administration work: aside from deciding the repertoire, I do the grant applications and communications with parents. (Zoom interview with Gloria Wong, October 26, 2020)

Wong is proud of the positive impact BCYCO has had on the students and their musicianship. Despite the struggles, she believes the results are worthwhile.

GLORIA WONG: My advice to other Chinese orchestras in Canada is to explore the more traditional genres like opera, Cantonese and other folk music that led to the orchestral genre. Arrange more works, and finally: stay the course and don't give up! (Zoom interview with Gloria Wong, October 26, 2020)

Wong hopes to possibly develop a way for students to receive professional training and a degree afterwards, produce some recordings, and increase their online/social media presence. All these ideas may hopefully lead to increasing the numbers in BCYCO. I suggested that she enlist the students' help for ideas and practical assistance (social media ideas, administration, etc.). This would give them a sense of responsibility and ownership of the ensemble, give them great experience, relieve some of her tasks, and also enable the students to gain volunteer hours for school. Wong was excited about this idea and will try to implement it. During the pandemic, it has been difficult to hold rehearsals. They have tried limiting the numbers to only a few players at a time, and splitting up the times, but it has been challenging. I have invited her orchestra to take part in the Toronto Chinese Orchestra monthly virtual recitals and she happily agreed to ask her members to try.

Since this interview, BCYCO has joined in some TCO online activities. We hope to continue to stay connected and once the pandemic restrictions are lifted, possibly organize some exchanges together to Asia. Sharing ideas have certainly been helpful – we are not alone in this -

and these links to other Chinese orchestras have inspired our members to look forward to future collaborations.

Chinese Orchestral Development

Reaching beyond the Diaspora: Marjolaine Fournier (TCO)

Marjolaine Fournier is of French-Canadian heritage and is a double bass player for the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) in Ottawa. She has always had a love for music and different instruments. Aside from the bass, she plays organ, viola da gamba, violone, trumpet, piano, erhu, suona, daruan, hurdy-gurdy, clarinet, and others. She has been a member of the Toronto Chinese Orchestra since 2013.

Fournier's interest in Chinese music began a few years ago when NACO was planning a tour to China. She found it daunting, wondering how would she be able to connect with this foreign culture and language. She had heard of the *erhu*, so she purchased an *erhu* and a method book, which was the one that I wrote (Chan, 2011). As a result, she contacted me and started coming to Toronto for lessons. During one of her lessons, I asked if she was interested in playing double bass with the Toronto Chinese Orchestra and she enthusiastically agreed. She describes her experience.

MARJOLAINE FOURNIER: I didn't know Chinese orchestras existed! By playing bass, I could be part of the orchestra without worrying about the instrument. There were so many different colours - the dizi (bamboo flute) and sheng (mouth organ) really stood out. The writing of the music was so different - even for the bass. The music was not I-IV-V-I; sometimes we don't even end on I. I felt lost at times because it was not instinctual playing. The western bass line is more rhythmic, helping to keep the tempo in western music. Now [in the Chinese orchestra] sometimes the plucked strings take on this role. At rehearsals, I was surprised that English was spoken - then I found out about the different Chinese dialects, so English was the common language. After rehearsals, we would go out to eat and talk. The tables at the Chinese restaurants are round, so there was

no head of the table. It was much more communal and I enjoyed the camaraderie and friendships. (Zoom interview with Marjolaine Fournier, October 29, 2020)

Fournier's experience in TCO and studies on the *erhu* helped her to feel less worried about her trip to China. While there, she discovered Beijing opera and was able to attend a performance. She continues to be fascinated by this genre and her love of Chinese music has continued.

MARJOLAINE FOURNIER: Chinese music has its own musical language that I am still learning. [At TCO], it's the best way to communicate with each other - by playing together and being part of a community. There are pieces that everyone knows, which are comforting - they heard this music as children. There is also more contemporary or structured music, where the Chinese orchestra sound is harnessed for massive works. Playing in a Chinese orchestra takes me out of time and takes me out of my world of western music. Even playing the bass is a challenge! I feel joyful because it is a guided exploration of a new world of music. (Zoom interview with Marjolaine Fournier, October 29, 2020)

Fournier has noticed certain challenges that the Chinese orchestra faces that western orchestras do not: the mix of people, from professionals, advanced amateurs, young people who are curious, to seniors who want to learn - western orchestras do not usually have such a big variety. To meet everyone's needs and to keep them all interested is a challenge. For some players, they want memories of home, others want difficult music, some want easy music, traditional vs. contemporary, etc. These reasons are not necessarily why musicians play in a western orchestra. Nevertheless, the Chinese orchestra is a hub where work, family, friendships all overlap. New immigrants or visitors are always welcome, finding it a familiar, safe place to be: a close-knit community with a shared love for Chinese music.

As a professional orchestral musician, Fournier has offered advice for better efficiency during rehearsals, such as reminding us that section leaders set the tone, the mood, and the standards for others to follow; there should be discipline and procedures; and a balanced program

of old (easy) and new (hard) which will incorporate training from easy to challenging. The easy pieces create group unity and are familiar to the audience. The challenging pieces will stretch the players musically. Her final suggestions are to continue to do exchanges, and never lose our generosity and inclusivity.

In February 2021, the Toronto Chinese Orchestra joined Orchestras Canada, a national association for Canadian orchestras. We are the first traditional Chinese orchestra to join. My initial conversation with the Executive Director, Katherine Carleton, was very positive. She was excited to hear of our existence and was very surprised to learn of our accomplishments. I took this initiative because I felt that we should try to learn as much as we can from other established orchestras, as I believe we share many similar challenges. At the same time, they can become aware of orchestras from other cultures – we can begin to dialogue. They hold many workshops and conferences throughout the year and advocates for orchestras. TCO has also been a recipient of their Resilient Orchestras grant. This may help us reach beyond the diaspora, further connecting us with the broader community.

It was a pleasure to meet with these musicians and listen to their stories. We discovered common challenges that each orchestra faces. As they shared their histories, they also remembered their love for this music and this seemed to strengthen their resolve to continue their efforts in keeping their orchestras alive. With the pandemic, it is easy to feel helpless and suspend all activities. However, using technology, we can also explore new options – we are now able to connect all these orchestras from across Canada! We can look towards future possibilities and opportunities to work together and also support one another.

Chapter 4: Traditional Chinese Musicians in Canada

In this chapter, I explore how traditional Chinese musicians have adapted their career here in Canada. Why might some focus on cultural preservation whereas others on intercultural exploration? Drawing from their experience, what are their recommendations for other musicians? To my surprise, these contrasting paths resulted in very different outcomes and outlooks.

Cultural Preservation

I approached four musicians that had focused on cultural preservation for interviews. Unexpectedly, I encountered reactions of bitterness and reluctance to share their stories for this research. However, as they had told their stories to me in the past, I include them here as part of a narrative that protects their identities; they will remain anonymous and very few details will be shared. These four musicians left China in the 1980s, thinking they could succeed as Chinese musicians here in Canada. But it was a struggle to remain in the music field. They faced language barriers, and stayed within the Chinese community, performing traditional Chinese repertoire, and teaching Chinese students. Two of the four musicians eventually had to change professions to make a living and provide for their family. The other musicians relied on importing and selling instruments, part-time teaching, and occasional performances. At the same time, they watched as their colleagues in China rose into high positions at prestigious music conservatories and achieved lucrative careers as soloists. They felt deep regret for leaving, since they were unable to find success here in Canada.

Intercultural Exploration

To investigate intercultural exploration, I interviewed two traditional *pipa* musicians that chose this musical path. Qiu Xia He is based in Vancouver, Canada, and Wendy Wen Zhao in Toronto. These artists were eager to share their stories.

Qiu Xia He (pipa)

Qiu Xia He was born in Shaanxi, China in 1963, during the Cultural Revolution. She was fortunate to be able to attend a school that specialized in the arts, as she loved dance and music. However, she was not allowed to continue in dance as her legs were not considered long enough for a future in dance. She was assigned the *pipa* and excelled in her training. At the age of thirteen, she auditioned and joined the Shaanxi Music and Dance Troupe that consisted of approximately twenty musicians, twenty dancers, and twenty singers. They would live together and train intensively together during the week, and return home briefly on Sundays (if they lived nearby) and holidays. Qiu Xia learned a great deal about all aspects of theatre and production: staging, sound, lighting, etc. They were also brought to study at conservatories at regular intervals to further their musical training. Being with this troupe taught her independence, gave her performance experience, and instilled a sense of pride at being able to earn some income at a young age.

When the universities began to open again, she studied hard and was accepted into the Xian Music Academy, though her high school years were spent touring with the performing troupe. She was intimidated by the other students, but she realized that she had experience that they did not have: six years of traveling, touring, and performing with musicians, singers, and dancers. It gave her a different perspective and her confidence grew. She focused on her studies

and excelled. Upon graduating, she was immediately offered a teaching position at the university, which she accepted. After a few years, she felt that academic life did not suit her. She wanted to play and felt frustrated being at the “bottom of the ladder” at the university. An opportunity came when she was selected to play at some music festivals in Canada. She arrived in Vancouver in August 1989, shortly after the June 4th Tiananmen Square massacre. After her Vancouver performance, she defected, stayed in Vancouver, and did not continue the tour to Toronto and Quebec City.

Qiu Xia stayed with a Canadian couple and focused on learning English and tried to plan her life in Canada. She found a job as a waitress, but would bring out her *pipa* whenever she could, playing at parties and casual events. She played traditional Chinese music. Gradually, she connected with other Chinese musicians and performed with them, joining the local ensembles. She started to meet musicians from other cultures and enjoyed exploring music with them.

QIU XIA HE: ...your ears started opening up with all sounds from all cultures, specially, whoever you meet. And then you realize music is not just one type... I used to think the Chinese music, the only one type or classical Western music or Mozart or Beethoven that's it. I didn't know there's other music... No, there's no other music existed, and then the more I meet other musicians then the more... I learned their music, the more I realize every culture, every corner has their own uniqueness of sound, a way of a playing, how they play and a very interesting... (Zoom interview with Qiu Xia He, October 17, 2021)

Qiu Xia’s musical world opened up and she would immerse herself in different genres and music from other cultures, building up her musical knowledge so that she can move easily from her traditional Chinese music past. Her free-spirited and fluid approach to music-making allowed her the flexibility to perform at many different types of events, from concert halls to salons. Though she loves her life as a musician, she is realistic about her profession:

QIU XIA HE: A lot of the Chinese musicians come from Mainland China, they think they can be a star of some sort. So that part is not here, you're a minority, you're not a major pop star kind of environment, you can be a pipa player.. Become a super star No, you can't... And you cannot make a big bucks, you can't demand like Yo Yo Ma..., you

know what I mean? You can't demand your fees like that, so when you raise your fee your client says, Oh, we cannot afford you. So I think unless you love what you do, we can't survive here.... You can't... Because you got, to love, what are you doing. Which is, I've been doing since seven and thirteen - I told you. So for me, this is our life, this is a kind of life I have, that's the kind of way I do the thing is like how I, enjoy doing things, and then that has me to this thing sustainable, because I don't need anything, I just need a music. (Zoom interview with Qiu Xia He, October 17, 2021)

Qiu Xia is currently teaching pipa at the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra School of Music, and tours internationally with her own group, Silk Road Music, and other world music ensembles such as ASZA and Jou Tou. She has been featured as a soloist with the Vancouver Symphony and the Glacier Symphony of Montana. She frequently gives educational workshops in elementary schools as well as arranges and composes music for her ensembles. She enjoys her life in Canada, collaborating with many world musicians, and exploring new possibilities.

Wendy Wen Zhao (pipa)

Wendy Wen Xin Zhao – *wen* means culture, *xin* means blooming. She was born during China's Cultural Revolution, in 1967. It was a time of change in music, opera, and the arts. Her first song on the *pipa* was “Beijing Loves Tiananmen Square.” Wendy initially wanted to learn the harp, but western instruments were difficult to find and expensive to purchase during that time. It was also discouraged to learn western instruments during the Cultural Revolution. Chinese instruments were encouraged so they could play “red” songs. Her mother suggested she learn the *pipa* at age six. During that time, children only attended school for half a day, so her mother would have Wendy practice her *pipa* the entire afternoon. When she was twelve years old, she auditioned and joined a youth orchestra in Beijing, which allowed her to have many performance opportunities to play for foreign dignitaries. Eventually, she decided to become a professional musician and studied music in university. She graduated in 1989, the year of the

Tiananmen Massacre, and began working at the Beijing Opera Institute and teaching on the side. However, her parents decided that she should leave China due to the political uncertainty at the time. They enrolled her in college in London, England and she left China in 1990. She attended ESL for a year in London, adjusting to living in a new country where she did not know anyone. She met other Chinese musicians from Beijing at a free outdoor performance and joined them, busking in different places in London. She attended college, focusing on community music and workshopping. She was inspired by this program and learned about improvising and methods for community outreach. While in London, she experienced racist micro-aggressions. For example, after asking Wendy where she came from, the second question would always be: “When are you going back?” She stayed in London for seven years, traveling to different schools and presenting Chinese music workshops, and then decided to move to Canada to raise a family with her husband, drawn to its multicultural reputation. In Canada, she noted that no one has asked her when she will be going back to China. She felt accepted.

Wendy believes in reaching beyond the Chinese community, ideally in a workshopping format, not just private lessons. Though she'd like to do more, she feels there is a lack of support within the local Chinese community to organize and bring out/share their culture with others. She feels schools should try to promote music of other cultures through workshopping. Looking back, she feels no regret for leaving China. Instead, she appreciates all the learning opportunities that she has had to expand her musical experience, gaining knowledge that helped her develop further as an artist. Currently, she feels no need to work for money and is therefore able to select projects that resonate with her, performing traditional and contemporary concerts in Canada and China. She has performed with the Toronto Chinese Orchestra. She frequently plays with musicians from other cultures and has toured with Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. She has

started to incorporate singing in her performances, recently began learning the *guqin*, and arranging music for the *ruan* and *pipa*.

This chapter has shown that there are different pathways for traditional musicians in Canada. Pursuing a career in the arts is generally challenging – the difficulties for an artist in traditional Chinese music can be insurmountable, especially outside of Asia. While preservation of tradition is important, to reach a broader audience requires stepping beyond one's own diasporic community. Both Wendy and Qiu Xia embraced chances to learn and collaborate with musicians and ensembles from other cultures. They felt a freedom to explore and create. These are opportunities that were not available to them in China. As a result, they are able to pursue and develop their careers here and are happy about their decision to make Canada their home.

Conclusion: Looking at the Future

This essay has provided a history of Chinese orchestras in Canada and offered an insight into individual experience through my interviews and conversations with participants. This has been reinforced by my own long-standing involvement in Chinese orchestras. What value do these orchestras hold for community members? For the Chinese diaspora, these orchestras were a social hub that brought members of the community together. It fulfilled the needs of the new immigrants to feel closer to their homeland and provided an anchor for those searching for their roots. Finding scores, instruments, and musicians was challenging and remains difficult in Canada. Initially, these orchestras were focused on preserving traditional music and drew members that had this common goal. As a result, they mostly stayed within the Chinese community. Did they interact with other ethnocultural groups in Canada? Not at the beginning due to language barriers, difficulties in reading western staff notation, and lack of interest – they had different priorities. Later, orchestras like the BC Chinese Orchestra and the Toronto Chinese Orchestra began to search for opportunities to collaborate with other cultures. These long-established orchestras started to look for ways to be relevant to a younger generation and reach beyond the Chinese community.

When looking at CIMGOT, it fulfilled its purpose as a social hub, using music to connect its members and the community. But it's more than about the music. These musicians remain close friends a half century later. They impacted a generation of CBCs, helping them to find pride in their heritage.

Music evolves. While it is important to preserve tradition, to inspire, we must continue to develop and explore. Music that has traveled to Canada, brought as a reminder of our roots, helps immigrants reminisce and reflect. Moving forward, we can use this music to connect with the

broader community and also bring different generations of the diaspora together. Music is a bridge and can help keep a link to heritage but also gently connect with other cultures. In education, moving beyond Eurocentric arts and music will introduce and lift music of other cultures, sparking curiosity and bringing appreciation of diversity and new perspectives.

In the process of doing the interviews for this paper, I have observed how the Chinese orchestra has had an impact on both the leaders and musicians personally. Though many of them felt discouraged with the similar challenges of few resources, funding and the current low morale during the pandemic, they were reminded of the importance of this valuable music community. For the Chinese diaspora, it is a place of memories, discoveries, connections, and identity. It is also a safe and inclusive community that is multigenerational. Unfortunately, it is also fragile. It can easily stagnate and dissolve if it does not adapt. Not only do we need to reach the next generation, we need to go beyond the Chinese community, learn from other cultures, and create Canadian works. Preservation of tradition is important and with regular exchanges to Asia, we can continue to strengthen our roots while balancing it with our Canadian experience. During these interviews, every leader appreciated the opportunity to share their stories. In doing so, they also started to remember why they formed/joined a Chinese orchestra. They had experienced its impact on their lives.

Through this research, I was also able to connect more directly with other Chinese ensemble leaders. They welcomed my suggestion of connecting our orchestras together to strengthen and learn from each other. During this pandemic, I have invited them to join our virtual recitals and recording projects so that they can stay active. We had our first joint virtual recital with BC Youth Chinese Orchestra and BC Chinese Orchestra, along with Dr. Chih-Sheng Chen from Taiwan and it was wonderful! The young players were excited to share their music

with us. There are already more musicians signed up for future virtual recitals and performance projects. Once it is safe to travel again, I will arrange national and international exchanges with Chinese orchestras in Asia. From my personal experience, these are powerful motivators for every musician. Rather than each orchestra struggling on their own, we can hopefully find solutions together.

I had never thought that I would lead a Chinese orchestra. It started with wanting to make better music and create a welcoming, inclusive place where people can feel safe and be able to use their strengths. The Chinese orchestra was this place for me as a youth, and I am grateful for that. Now I want to pass it forward. My journey has allowed me to experience many amazing moments, immerse myself in music that moves me, meet gifted musicians, and best of all, introduce this genre to a new audience. With determination and commitment, these orchestras will continue to flourish as long as we continue to build and strengthen these cultural bridges nationally and internationally.

My friend and mentor, Dr. Chih-Sheng Chen from Taiwan, told me when we first met to make my passion contagious. He also told me that this was not enough, but to take action, and “you will be astonished to see what is possible.” I am excited to continue on this musical adventure.

Glossary

bawu: a transverse wooden flute with a reed

dizi: a transverse bamboo flute with a membrane

erhu: a two stringed bowed instrument with a snake skin covered sound box

guzheng: a 21-stringed harp with moveable bridges for changing keys

hulusi: a wind instrument made from a gourd and bamboo pipes

liuqin: a small high pitched wooden plucked string instrument played with a plectrum

pipa: a wooden plucked string instrument played with the 5 fingers of the right hand

ruan: a wooden plucked string instrument that is played with a plectrum and produces a mellow sound

sanxian: a 3-stringed plucked instrument with a sound box covered in snake skin

sheng: a reeded wind instrument that has many pipes held together in a small chamber; a mouth organ

suona: a double reed wooden wind instrument, similar to the oboe

xiao: a vertical bamboo flute

xun: an egg-shaped vessel flute made from clay

yangqin: a trapezoidal shaped instrument that is played by bamboo mallets striking strings; a dulcimer

Reference List

Canadian Census 2016. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7&wbdisable=true>

Chan, Anthony B., 2013. "Chinese Canadians." *The Canadian Encyclopedia Historica Canada*. Last Edited May 22, 2019. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-canadians>

Chan, Heidi. 2015. "Life Enriching Music Enriching Life: A Short Tour with the Millennium Orchestra." *Canadian Folk Music* 49, no 4: 8-11.

Chan, Patty. 2011. *Playing Erhu: Bridging the Gap*. Toronto: Centre for Music Innovations.

Chan, Patty. 2020. *That Sounds Like... Emma Discovers Chinese Musical Instruments*. Toronto: Centre for Music Innovations.

Chinese Community in Canada, The. 2001. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-621-x/89-621-x2006001-eng.htm>

Chow, Claire S. 1998. *Leaving Deep Water: Asian American Women at the Crossroads of Two Cultures*. New York, NY: Plume Penguin Group.

Government of Canada, Department of Justice. 2018. "The Politics of Multiculturalism," *Cultural Diversity in Canada: The Social Construction of Racial Difference*. https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/jsp-sjp/rp02_8-dr02_8/p5.html

Dere, William Ging Wee. 2019. *Being Chinese in Canada : the Struggle for Identity, Redress and Belonging*. Madeira Park, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.

Djao, Wei. 2003. *Being Chinese : Voices from the Diaspora*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Eligh, Blake. 2021. "Anti-Asian discrimination on the rise in Canada, U of T researchers find," *U of T News*, March 25, 2021. <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/anti-asian-discrimination-rise-canada-u-t-researchers-find>

Lee, Wai-man. 1984. *Portraits of a Challenge: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Canadians*. Toronto: Council of Chinese Canadians in Ontario.

Li, P. Stephen K. 1989. "Cantonese opera in Toronto." MA thesis, York University. National Library of Canada.

Library and Archives Canada. 2017. *History of Canada's Early Chinese Immigrants*. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/early-chinese-canadians/Pages/history.aspx>

McGuire, Colin Patrick. 2014. "Music of the Martial Arts: Rhythm, Movement, and Meaning in a Chinese Canadian Kung Fu Club." PhD diss., York University.

McRae, Matthew. *The Chinese Head Tax and The Chinese Exclusion Act*. Canadian Museum for Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-chinese-head-tax-and-the-chinese-exclusion-act>

Morris, Kim Chow. 2013. "'Small Has No Inside, Big Has No Outside': Montreal's Chinese Diaspora Breaks Out/In Music." *MUSICultures* 36: 49-82.

Prinz, Aloys. 2019. "Migration, Cultural Identity and Diasporas – An Identity Economics Approach." *IZA Journal of Development and Migration* 3: 1-20.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/izajodm-2019-0001>

Qiu, Sheng Huai. 2005. "Chinese Traditional Music in Greater Vancouver." *Canadian Folk Music* 39, no. 1: 1–5.

Rao, Nancy Yunhwa. 2016. "Transnationalism and Everyday Practice: Cantonese Opera Theatres of North America in the 1920s." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 25, no 1: 107–130.

Slobin, Mark. 2011. "The Destiny of 'Diaspora' in Ethnomusicology." In Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, eds. 96-106. *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge

Thrasher, Alan R. 1985. "The Role of Music in Chinese Culture." *World of Music* 27 no. 1: 3–18.

Thrasher, Alan R. and Wong, Gloria N. 2011. *Yueqi: Chinese Musical Instruments in Performance*. British Columbia Chinese Music Association

Wong, Deborah Anne. 2004. *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*. New York: Routledge.

Wong, Samuel, Wang, Chenwei, and Chow, Junyi. 2020. *The Teng Guide to the Chinese Orchestra*. Singapore: World Scientific.

Zheng, Su. 1994. "Music Making in Cultural Displacement: The Chinese-American Odyssey." *Diaspora* 3, no. 3: 273–288.

Zheng, Su de San. 1990. "Music and Migration: Chinese American Traditional Music in New York City." *World of Music* 32, no. 3: 48–67.

Interview List

Chan, Ming. Interview (Zoom), October 11, 2020.

Chan, Janet. Interview (Zoom), November 17, 2021.

Chao, Jeffrey. Interview (Zoom), October 21, 2020.

Fournier, Marjolaine (Zoom), Interview, October 29, 2020.

He, Qiu Xia. Interview (Zoom), October 17, 2021.

Lai, Bill. Interview (phone), October 29, 2020.

Lee, Herman. Interview (live), October 24, 2021

Leung, Frank. Interview (live), October 16, 2021.

Leung, Susie. Interview (live), October 16, 2021.

Li, P. Stephen K. Interview (live), September 17, 2021.

Li, Vivian. Interview (Zoom), October 15, 2020.

Lui, Charlie. Interview (Zoom), October 16, 2020.

Pun, Ian. Interview (live), October 2, 2021.

Won, Soo Gane (live). Interview, September 5, 2021.

Wong, Aileen (May) (live). Interview, October 11, 2021.

Wong, Albert. Interview (live), October 11, 2021.

Wong, Gloria. Interview (Zoom), October 26, 2020.

Wong, Jason. Interview (Zoom), October 11, 2020.

Wong, Ming. Interview (live), October 11, 2020; August 15, 2021.

Yeung, Felix. Interview (Zoom), October 20, 2020.

Yip, Henry. Interview (live), August 14, 2021.

Zhao, Wendy. Interview (Zoom), October 25, 2021.