

PERFORMING THE SOUTH SEAS: SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA AND THE MAKING OF NANYANG-STYLE MUSIC*

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Abstract

Since the establishment of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (Xinjiapo huayue tuan 新加坡華樂團) in 1997, it has attempted to develop its approach to Chinese music differently from other international counterparts. Gradually, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra developed and performed Chinese music, reflecting Singapore's diverse cultures and identities by incorporating non-Chinese music elements from Singapore and Southeast Asia. This article examines the "Nanyang-style music" (*Nanyang feng huayue* 南洋風華樂) of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. It draws on Tu Wei-Ming's (1991) concept of 'Cultural China' and builds on Brian Bernards' (2015) work on the 'Nanyang' in Chinese and Southeast Asian literature to consider the creation and performance of new forms of modern Chinese orchestral music. I argue that the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's Nanyang-style music, which has its roots in modern Chinese orchestral music, is created and performed to present the cultural hybridity of the Chinese in Singapore society. This article shows that the Nanyang-style music is performed in two ways, namely, Chinese music combining Nanyang elements and Chinese music presenting a Singaporean identity.

Keywords

Chinese music, Chinese orchestra, Nanyang-style music, Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Singaporean identity

INTRODUCTION

Despite unequal ways,
Together they mutate,
Explore the edges of harmony,
Search for a centre;
Have changed their gods,
Kept some memory of their race
In prayer, laughter, the way
Their women dress and greet.
They hold the bright, the beautiful,
Good ancestral dreams
Within new visions,

* This article is an enlarged version of the author's Chinese paper, "Minyue zhi nan: Lun Xinjiapo huayue tuan Nanyang feng huayue zhi kaichuang yu yanxu 民樂之南: 論新加坡華樂團南洋風華樂之開創與延續," *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* 4 (2018): 42–54. I would like to thank Jack Meng-Tat Chia, Terence Ho, Lim Wah Guan, Tay Teow Kiat, Wang Chenwei, and Tsung Yeh for their support and comments. I am also grateful to the staffs of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra for their assistance and suggestions.

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So shining, urgent,
Full of what is now.

Perhaps having dealt in things,
Surfeited on them,
Their spirits yearn again for images,
Adding to the dragon, phoenix,
Garuda, Naga those horses of the sun,
This lion of the sea,
This image of themselves.

An excerpt from the poem, “Ulysses by the Merlion,” by Edwin N. Thumboo (1979).

In the poem “Ulysses by the Merlion,” Edwin Thumboo uses the Merlion as a metaphor to present the development of Singapore, from a fishing village to a vibrant and diverse global city-state. As an island-nation, Singapore features the connections between the land and the ocean. The dragon, phoenix, Garuda, Naga, and sun horses highlight the cultural diversity in Singapore. They seize the brightness and beauty of the ancient dream, shining radiantly in this brand-new vision. This poem also highlights Singapore’s constant attempts in creating new possibilities and identities, full of hope for the future.²

Singapore is a racially diverse country with three major ethnic groups: Chinese, Malays, and Indians. The Chinese form the ethnic majority, constituting approximately 75% of the total population. Despite the predominant Chinese population, the Singapore government has no intention to prioritize Chinese culture. Instead, it tries to encourage interracial and religious harmony and presents Singapore as a multicultural society. In line with the state’s multicultural and multiracial policy, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (Xinjiapo huayue tuan [新加坡華樂團]), despite being a symbol of Chinese culture, creates and performs new forms of Chinese orchestral music with Southeast Asian and Singaporean characteristics. Therefore, the development of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra reflects the symbolism of the Merlion, presenting a Singaporean identity in a culturally diverse and hybrid environment.

Previous scholarship on the Chinese in Singapore focuses on the immigration, language, economic factors, and religions of the Chinese diaspora. Scholars such as Yen Ching-hwang (1986) and Liang Yuansheng (2005) discussed the sociohistorical development of the Chinese communities in Singapore and Malaysia. Eddie CY Kuo (1985) and Charlene Tan (2006) focused on Chinese language and culture from a historical perspective. In contrast, Hong Liu and Wong Sin Kiong (2004) as well as Eugene KB Tan (2003) studied the business and economic activities of the Chinese community. Jack Meng-Tat Chia (2020) and Xu Yuantai (2013) examined the religious belief and religious practices of the Singaporean Chinese.

A number of ethnomusicologists have studied the various forms of Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese music. For instance, Qu Qiumei (1986) discussed the development of the Malacca Chinese Orchestra from the 1950s. Tan Sooi Beng (2000) investigated the adaption and survival of Malaysian Chinese Orchestra, focusing on its development and social functions. Samuel Wong Shengmiao (2010) examined the social characteristics of Singapore Chinese Orchestra from a sociological perspective. Wang Jinyi (2009) observed the amateur Chinese orchestras in Malaysia. In a chapter of her dissertation, Ching-Yi Chen (2012) examined the various Chinese orchestras in Malaysia and Singapore. Chew Yi Tien (2013) discussed the performance and practice of the modern Chinese orchestras in Malaysia, introducing four different Chinese orchestras of junior high school in Malaysia.

² The Merlion is the official symbol of Singapore. It is a mythical creature with the head of a lion and the body of a fish. For further readings on the Merlion, see for instance, Chang and Yeoh (2003) and Hayward (2012).

Scholars of Chinese music have focused on the origin of Chinese orchestras and their regional features.³ They have generally argued that Chinese music emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century under the influence of Western imperialism. This new form of music became a fusion of the traditional silk and bamboo ensemble (*Jiangnan sizhu* [江南絲竹]) and Western-styled orchestral music. Scholars have examined topics on the modern Chinese orchestra, including historical development (Han, 1979; Lee, 2014; Gao, 1965; Lin, 2007), musical instruments (Li, 1954; Yu, 2007; Lu, 2006), cultural identity (Liu, 2007; Chiu, 2008), and compositions (Sun, 2008; Liang, 2001). Some scholars have studied the development of professional modern Chinese orchestras beyond mainland China; they have studied the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (Wu, 2006; Yu, 2001), as well as several professional Chinese orchestras in other parts of China (Chen, 1994; Chen, 2013; Wu, 2013). Several recent studies focus on the development and activities of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. For instance, Terence Ho (2015) presented on the historical development of Singapore Chinese Orchestra, whereas Tan Shyr Ee (2012) discussed the Europe tour of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. Previous studies on modern Chinese orchestras have offered valuable insights into the history, development, and activities of various professional music groups. Nonetheless, they are yet to examine the creation and performance of the “Nanyang-style music” (*Nanyang feng huayue* [南洋風華樂]) of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, and to consider how the Singapore Chinese Orchestra uses this distinct form of music to interact with other modern Chinese orchestras among Chinese speaking people in the region.

This article examines the “Nanyang-style music” of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. It draws on Tu Wei-Ming’s (1991) concept of “Cultural China” and builds on Brian Bernards’ (2015) work on the “Nanyang” in Chinese and Southeast Asian literature to consider the creation and performance of new forms of modern Chinese orchestral music. I argue that the Singapore Chinese Orchestra’s “Nanyang-style music,” which has its roots in modern Chinese orchestral music, is created and performed to present the cultural hybridity of the Chinese in Singapore society. I show that the Nanyang-style music is performed in two ways, namely, Chinese music combining Nanyang elements and Chinese music presenting a Singaporean identity. This article is divided into three parts. First, I offer a brief history of Chinese migration to Singapore. Second, I discuss the history and development of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. Third, I examine the creation and performance of Nanyang-style music by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

CHINESE MIGRATION TO SINGAPORE

In 1819, the arrival of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles marked the beginning of British colonization of Singapore. A few years later, in 1826, the British colonial authorities established the Straits Settlements, consisting of Singapore, Malacca, and Penang. The colonial government introduced the concept of open market and made Singapore an entrepot. Over the next several decades, Singapore grew from a fishing village to a major port for business and trade. This created a demand for a cheap source of labor.

At the same time, China’s defeat in the Opium War and economic problems during the late Qing period motivated Chinese to seek better opportunities abroad. Mass Chinese immigration to Singapore began in the mid-nineteenth century. Many Chinese from the southern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong migrated to Singapore as a result of demand for expanding resources such

³ The modern Chinese orchestra (*guoyue tuan* 國樂團) emerged and developed between 1919 and the 1950s. The term *Chinese orchestra* has evolved because of political and cultural reasons. In some places of the Chinese Province Taiwan, Chinese orchestras maintain the term *guoyue tuan*. However, Chinese orchestras in China have generally preferred the term *minyue tuan* 民樂團, orchestras in Hong Kong and Macau use the term *zhongyue tuan* 中樂團, and those in Singapore and Malaysia use the term *huayue tuan* 華樂團.

as tin and rubber for Britain. Chinese immigrants in Singapore consist of five major dialect groups, namely, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainanese, Hakka, and Teochew (Liang, 2005).

As more Chinese migrated to Singapore, they built Chinese temples and established clan associations for mutual assistance. In 1906, Chinese businessmen established the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Xinjiapo zhonghua shangwu zonghui [新加坡中華商務總會]) to look after the economic interests of the Chinese community. They also founded schools and institutions of higher learning, such as the Chinese High School, Chung Cheng High School, Nanyang Girls' High School, and Nanyang University. In 1947, Chinese constituted 78% of the total population in Singapore (Lee, 2003: 285).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

After Singapore achieved self-governance in 1959, the governing People's Action Party founded the People's Association in 1960 to foster closer ties among different ethnic groups in Singapore. The People's Association was tasked to organize social events and cultural activities to facilitate inter and intraracial harmony in the country. Following Singapore's independence in 1965, the Ministry of Culture established the National Theatre Trust to promote arts and theatrical performances in Singapore. Three years later, in 1968, it established the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra (Xinjiapo guojia juchang yishu tuan huayue tuan [新加坡國家劇場藝術團華樂團]). Subsequently, the National Theatre Chinese Orchestra became a part-time performing unit of the People's Association Cultural Troupe and was renamed the People's Association Chinese Orchestra (Remin xuehui huayue tuan [人民協會華樂團]). Members of the orchestra have expanded from six to thirty-two over the course of 10 years (Leong, 2017: 38). Some of the early directors of the People's Association Chinese Orchestra include Wu Dajiang [吳大江], Lim Tiap Guan [林哲源], and Ku Lap Man [顧立民] (Leong, 2017: 40). Following Ku Lap Man's retirement in 1993, the orchestra invited Qu Chunquan [瞿春泉], a well-known conductor in China, to direct the orchestra. Qu encouraged Singapore's local composers to write Chinese music and organized conferences for Singaporean musicians to present their works. During Qu Chunquan's tenure as the director, the People's Association Chinese Orchestra performed mainly local compositions for the major performances (Wong, 2010: 90).

In 1997, Singapore's then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong supported the establishment of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra as Singapore's only professional national Chinese orchestra. At its establishment, the orchestra was made up of twelve members from the People's Association Chinese Orchestra and sixty-two newly recruited members from China. The Singapore Chinese Orchestra invited Hu Bingxu [胡炳旭] to be the director and increased the number of administrative staffs to manage the professional orchestra. Although the Singapore Chinese Orchestra is the youngest professional Chinese orchestra in Asia, it quickly expanded and became an orchestra comparable to its renowned counterparts in the Chinese speaking world. A year after it was established, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra invited the renowned erhu virtuoso, Min Huifen [閔惠芬] (1945–2014), to perform at its inaugural concert at the Victoria Concert Hall (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Min Huifen performing at the inaugural concert of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in April 1997.
Photo by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.**

After Hu Binxu left the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 2000, Xia Feiyun [夏飛雲] became the guest director for a short period of time in 2001. Yan Huichang [閩惠昌], who originally planned to join the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, later decided to join the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (Xianggang zhongyue tuan [香港中樂團]). In 2002, Tsung Yeh [葉聰] (b. 1950), the music director of South Bend Symphony Orchestra, was recruited to serve as the music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra where he continues till present (Leong, 2017). The music director and musicians work alongside a professional executive team to plan and manage the orchestra. According to Terence Ho [何偉山] (b. 1969), the executive director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, both the artistic and administrative members work closely to explore and develop different projects, with the aim of sharing Chinese music with Singaporeans and audiences around the world (Ho, 2015; 2017).

Since the establishment of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 1997, it has attempted to develop its approach to Chinese music differently from other international counterparts. In the beginning, the orchestra mainly performed Chinese music, but through innovative concert programming in order to attract both Chinese and non-Chinese audience. Gradually, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra developed and performed Chinese music, reflecting Singapore’s diverse cultures and identities by incorporating non-Chinese music elements from Singapore and Southeast Asia, which I will discuss later (Ho, 2015: 227). From the most basic values of the orchestra, Singapore Chinese Orchestra aims to pursue excellent performance, great teamwork, as well as persistent innovation and learning. As executive director Ho shared with me,

“Unlike other orchestras in [.....] China [...], Singapore only has a population of 5.4 million people. While a Chinese orchestra can perform all over China for more than six months with a single programme, our orchestra has to constantly innovate and create new strategies, and learn about the development and features of other Chinese orchestras in the region. Our orchestra needs to innovate, experiment, and commission more compositions to stay at the top. Singapore Chinese Orchestra is a bridge and meeting point between the East and the West. There is no language barrier to invite international musicians as our composers are able to communicate efficiently to create more opportunities. We can use the orchestra’s resources to commission bespoke works and engage in multidisciplinary collaborations such as with visual arts or film” (Ho, 2017).

According to Ho, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra values its mission and vision to promote “elegant Chinese music for a global audience” (Ho, 2017). Therefore, the orchestra’s development strategies focus on interracial and intercultural approaches in order to reach out to diverse

audiences. The programs aim to resonate with various ethnic groups. The orchestra also advertises Chinese music using Singapore's colloquial language, Singlish, as well as goes beyond the concert hall to reach out to the community, hospitals, schools, and parks.

THE NANYANG-STYLE OF THE SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

Since the inception of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, it has encouraged more local musicians to write Chinese music. Nevertheless, the orchestra initially still performed music mostly by composers coming from China because of the lack of Chinese music composers in Singapore. After becoming the music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra in 2002, Tsung Yeh began to consider developing the orchestra's positioning and specialty. He explains,

“From my past experiences in directing orchestras, I think it's significant for an orchestra to develop its own uniqueness. For example, when I was the music director of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra, I not only encouraged local composers to write new music, but also to explore and incorporate Midwestern American music elements in their compositions. When I was the music director of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta, I supported the works of Hong Kong composers. In addition, I attended events of the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong annually to meet with local composers such as Chan Wing Wah and Doming Lam” (Yeh, 2017).

Interestingly, Yeh got his inspiration for Nanyang-style music not from music, but from visual art. Soon after becoming the music director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, Yeh stumbled on the Nanyang-style paintings (*Nanyang huafeng* [南洋畫風]) by Singaporean artists Chen Wen Hsi [陳文希], Cheong Soo Pieng [鍾泗賓], Chen Chong Swee [陳宗瑞], and Liu Kang [劉抗] in an art exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum. These artworks, completed in 1952 during a painting trip to Bali, were inspired by Southeast Asian themes such as kampongs, coconut trees, tropical fruits, and rice paddies. The artists also adopted mixed painting techniques, combining Chinese ink-wash painting with Western oil painting. This encounter inspired Yeh to develop a new concept of Nanyang-style music for the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

Yeh's development of Nanyang-style music can be viewed in three phases. First, Yeh tried to study music in the Nanyang region, and he commissioned local composers to write music pieces. Law Wai Lun (羅偉倫, b. 1944) was one among the first composers. His piece *Prince Sang Nila Utama and Singa* (*Wangzi yu shizi* [王子與獅子]) is based on a local folktale about Prince Sang Nila Utama discovering Singapore and naming it the Lion City. This piece was premiered at the concert *Nanyang Musical Voyage* in 2004. Thereafter, Law Wai Lun composed several more Nanyang-style music pieces such as *The Celestial Web* (*Tianwang* [天網]) and *Admiral of the Seven Seas* (*Haishang diyi ren—Zheng He* [海上第一人]—[鄭和]). Second, Yeh organized the Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestral Composition and decided on Nanyang-style music as the theme for the 2006 competition. As Yeh explains,

“[T]he competition aims to showcase compositions written with a Nanyang flavor. That means a style or theme relating to Singapore and its neighboring countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. That could be a story related to those countries or musical elements such as the melody, rhythm, theme or instrument. It could also include music from southern China like Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka or Hainan. We include this in our definition of Nanyang because the Chinese population in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia largely originate from Southern China, provinces like Fujian and Guangdong” (Yeh, 2017).

Following the successful Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestral Composition (SICCOC) in 2006, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra organized two more competitions in 2011 and 2015, respectively. In 2011, the SICCOC was much supported by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee

Hsien Loong, who donated \$750,000 to support the promotion of Nanyang-style music. In the first competition, sixty-four submissions were received from twelve countries. In 2011, seventy-three submissions were received from nine countries. In 2015, sixty-six submissions were received from thirteen countries (Figure 2). Table 1 presents the prize winners and their compositions in the 2006, 2011, and 2015 SICCO. The prize-winning composers came from a number of Asian countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, and China with all its diverse regions. According to Yeh, an average of eight pieces were performed each season. Some of the award-winning composers were successively commissioned to compose more music for the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. To date, there are sixty Nanyang-style music pieces from both the SICCO and other commissions (Yeh, 2017).

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3月31日	报名截止日期
6月30日	作品提交截止时间
8月3至5日	初选
8月中旬	发出通知函给入围者
9月15日	入围者提交分谱
11月20日	决赛
11月21日	颁奖典礼暨得奖作品音乐会
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Figure 2: 2015 Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestral Composition. Photo by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

2006 SICCO			
Award	Composition	Composer	Nationality
1 st Prize	<i>Tapestries: Time Dances</i> 《掛毯：時光飛舞》	Eric James Watson	Singapore
2 nd Prize	<i>Ispirazione II</i> 《捕风掠影 II》	Kong Su Leong 江賜良	Malaysia
3 rd Prize	<i>Buka Panggung</i>	Yi Kah Hoe 餘家和	Malaysia
Singaporean Composer Award	<i>The Sisters' Islands</i> 《姐妹島》	Wang Chenwei 王辰威	Singapore
Young Composer Award	<i>Volcanicity</i> 《熔》	Tang Lok Yin 鄧樂妍	China (Hong Kong)
Honorary Award	<i>Admiral of the Seven Seas</i> 《海上第一人—鄭和》	Law Wai Lun 羅偉倫	Singapore

2011 SICCO C			
Award	Composition	Composer	Nationality
1 st Prize	<i>A Stroll in the Lion City</i> 《獅城漫步》	Xie Xiangming 謝湘銘	China
2 nd Prize	<i>Nine Actors</i> 《九角子》	Stephen Yip 葉樹堅	China (Hong Kong)
3 rd Prize	<i>The Silence of Borobudur</i> 《沉默的婆羅浮屠》	Zhu Yiqing 朱一清	China
Nanyang Award	<i>Cycle of Destiny</i> 《圓來緣去》	Raymond Mok Kin Yee 莫健 兒	China (Macau)
Singaporean Composer Award	<i>Dark Light</i> 《黑光》	Lee Ji Heng 李智恆	Singapore
Young Composer Award	<i>The Capriccio of the Mountain Folk Song</i> 《山謠隨想》	Wang Dongxu 王東旭	China
2015 SICCO C			
Award	Composition	Composer	Nationality
1 st Prize	<i>Arise, You Lion of Glory!</i> 《獅舞 弄清韻》	Fung Gordon Dic-Lun 馮迪倫	China (Hong Kong)
2 nd Prize	<i>The Calling from the Distant Hills</i> 《來自遠山的呼喚》	Liu Wei-Chih 劉韋志	China (Taiwan)
3 rd Prize	<i>Go Across the Rainforests</i> 《穿越熱帶雨林》	Kong Zhixuan 孔志軒	China
Singaporean Composer Award	<i>Krakatoa</i>	Wong Kah Chun 黃佳俊	Singapore
Young Composer Award	<i>Bale Bengong</i> 《夢亭》	Chew Jun An 周俊安	Singapore

Table 1: Full List of Award Winners for 2006, 2011, and 2015 SICCO C.
Source and table by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra Archives.

Third, in recent years, Yeh encouraged composers to embark on fieldwork (*caifeng* [采風]) to experience and learn the local elements and instrumentation of Nanyang musical culture. He believes that composers should learn first-hand the various forms of local music to better compose Nanyang-style music pieces for the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. Yeh suggests that the Nanyang-style music needs to be inclusive to present the cultural diversity of Singapore society. Therefore, it should not only include Southeast Asian music culture, but also incorporate Indian (such as Tamil) and southern Chinese (such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainan, Teochew, and Hakka) musical elements. According to Yeh, the composers visited various parts of Malaysia (Kuching, Sabah, Sarawak, and Malacca), Indonesia (Jakarta and Solo), and China (Quanzhou, Meizhou, Shantou, and Xiamen) to experience and learn various forms of music before composing their pieces (Yeh, 2017). More recently, Yeh has attempted to include Peranakan music and culture into Nanyang-style music, and he is collaborating with renowned Singaporean Peranakan musician, Dick Lee.

I argue that Nanyang-style music is the defining factor that distinguishes the Singapore Chinese Orchestra from other professional Chinese orchestras in the region. By looking closely at the themes and programs of the performances, I suggest that the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's Nanyang-style music, which is uniquely Singaporean, can be understood in two categories, namely, Chinese orchestral music pieces that celebrate Southeast Asian culture and those that emphasize Singaporean identity.

The first category of Singapore Chinese Orchestra's Nanyang-style music, as Yeh suggested, are music pieces that highlight the "culture, geography, history, and stories of the Nanyang region" (Yeh, 2017). Therefore, the titles of the music pieces often clearly demonstrate their "Nanyangness." For example, *Arise, You Lion of Glory!* is named after the traditional southern Chinese lion dance, whereas *Admiral of the Seven Seas* was composed in 2005 to commemorate the 600th

anniversary of Zheng He’s maritime voyages and his arrival in Southeast Asia. *Prince Sang Nila Utama and Singa* got its name from one of the well-known local folktales. Some Nanyang-style music pieces were named after places. For example, compositions such as *The Sisters’ Islands*, *Krakatoa*, and *The Silence of Borobudur* were named after well-known places in Singapore and in Southeast Asia more broadly. Figures 3 and 4 are two examples of Singapore Chinese Orchestra’s Nanyang-themed concerts. As we can see from the two posters, the orchestra not only performs Nanyang-style Chinese music, but also uses Southeast Asian cultural elements such as batik and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) for its concert posters and programs. In fact, the poster of the *Nanyang Music Journey II* concert contains text in Chinese, English, and Malay (see Figure 4).

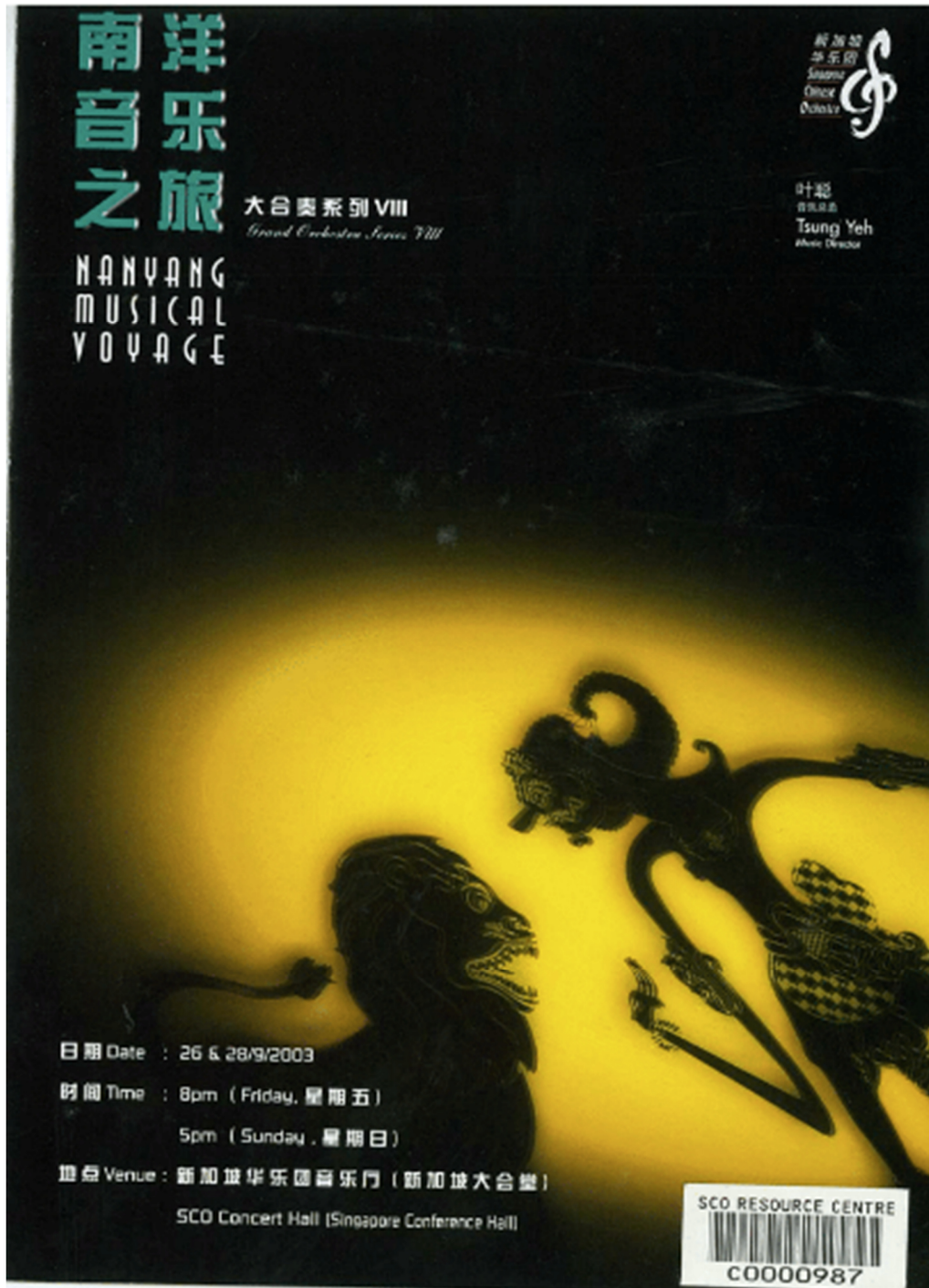
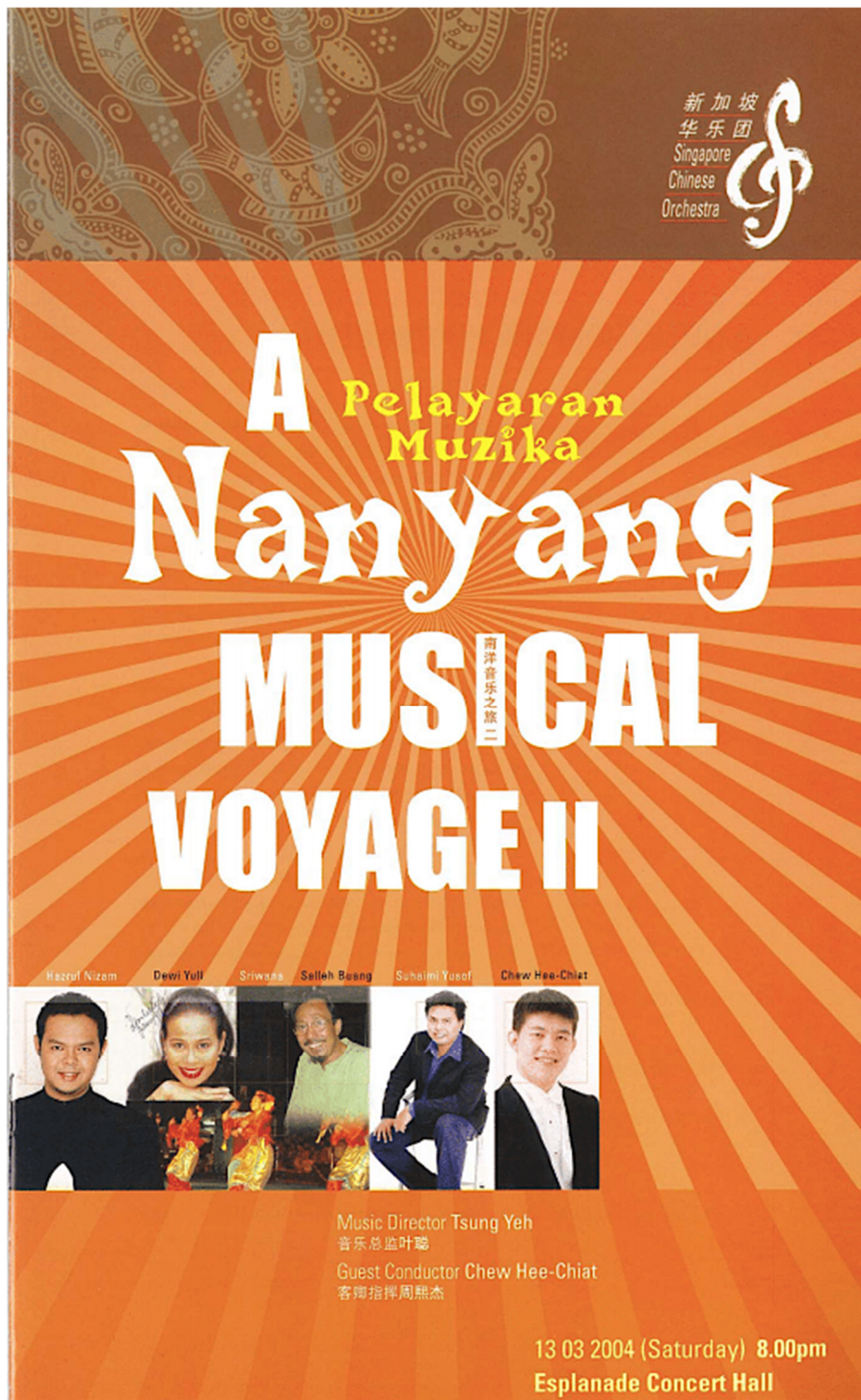


Figure 3: The concert program of “Nanyang Musical Voyage,” September 26 and 28, 2003. Photo by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.



**Figure 4: The concert program of “Nanyang Musical Voyage II,” March 13, 2004.
Photo by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.**

As I have discussed earlier, Yeh’s concept of Nanyang-style music is an inclusive fusion of Southern Chinese music elements of Hokkien, Cantonese, Hainan, Teochew, and Hainan, as well as Malay, Indian, and Peranakan music from the Nanyang/Southeast Asian region, symbolizing the diverse migrant cultures of the Southeast Asian Chinese. For example, Singaporean composer Wang Chenwei’s music piece, *The Sisters’ Islands* (*Jiemei dao* [姐妹島]), which received the Singaporean Composer Award at the first SICCOC in 2006, was named after two islands in Singapore. I observe that the two themes, namely, “Sea” and “Sisters,” are written in the Indonesian Gamelan pelog scale. The “Sea” theme is accompanied by complex rhythmic structures found in Gamelan, which is played by the Marimba and Yangqin. The main melody is played by the *sheng* [笙] and *ruan* [阮] (Figures 5 and 6). The ‘Sisters’ theme is presented in 4/4 meter in the style of

Asli, an elegant Malay dance. The composer applies the ornaments of an Asli dance to present the Nanyang-ness of the piece (Wang, 2018). The composer Law Wai Lun's *Admiral of the Seven Seas* features Chinese traditional drums and cymbals (*luogu* [鑼鼓]) and orchestration in companion with imagined Indonesian Gamelan musical structures and an abstract pelog scale.

《姐妹島》 v.13 (2018-01-06) 1/47

【一】漁島 **姐妹島** 王辰威 曲
 寬廣地 ♩=54 The Sisters' Islands WANG Chenwei
wangchenwei@hotmail.com

2梆笛 6-12小节的独奏不要笛膜
 此处用挖右拇指C孔的D调笛音最佳。F到G的半孔滑音是曲风的一部分。
 若D-C颤音有阻碍，可以改用C调笛，但需注意B和F的音准，多数笛子上会偏低

2曲笛 为了方便余调性的演奏，有些段落可能用到多种不同调性的笛子。
 若使用作者指定调性以外的笛子，则不能保证指法逻辑或音量足够

大笛兼埙 埙也可以由其他演奏者演奏
 若笛子多过5人，可以加1-2把大笛

中音笙 次中音笙音域比中音笙低4度，若乐团没有此乐器，可以由中音笙代替。
 任何在音域之外的音就省略掉，勿翻高八度。若有疑问，请联系作曲者

次中音笙 呼舌
 p

低音笙 non vib. solo 自由地
 mp

高音嗩吶 (加键) 若无加键高嘴，可用传统C调；[T]段用传统大G调
 mp poco rubato

中音管

低音管

倍低音管 若乐队无倍低音管，则把整个倍低音管声部省略掉，勿翻高八度

风声器 (Wind Machine) 若无此乐器，可以寻找其他的方法制造出风咆哮的声音

大锣

Gong Ageng (低音锣) 低音锣：声音比大锣还要低沉。用印尼的Gong Ageng最佳。
 mf

Rebana (马来手鼓) 马来手鼓：用Rebana最佳，若没有，可以由其他民族的手鼓取代。

马林巴

低音马林巴 若乐队无低音马林巴，则把整个声部省略掉，勿翻高八度
 p

古筝 避免给古筝电子扩音，当心可能破坏音响平衡
 D F# G B C solo [海]动机
 mf

中阮

大阮

【一】漁島
 寬廣地 ♩=54
 div.

大提琴 p

低音提琴 pp

E C调小笛 《姐妹岛》 v.13 (2018-01-06) 12/47

1. solo

E

Figures 5 and 6: Score for *The Sisters' Islands* by Wang Chenwei (mm. 1–7/49–52).
Page copy by courtesy of Wang Chenwei.

The second category of Nanyang-style music refers to the music pieces that present and celebrate Singaporean identity. Some music pieces are composed in order to highlight Singapore’s multiculturalism. For instance, Eric Watson’s *Singapore: A Gourmet Paradise* is a music piece named after the cuisines of different ethnic groups in Singapore. The first movement is “Roti Prata,” the second movement is “Nanyang Breakfast,” and the third movement is “Hainanese Chicken Rice.”

Singapore Chinese Orchestra regularly organizes concerts in Singapore to perform popular songs from popular local Chinese drama series (see Figure 7). Some of these songs include *The Awakening* (*Wusuo Nanyang* [霧鎖南洋]), *Kopi-O* (*Kafeiwu* [咖啡烏]), *Good Morning Teacher* (*Zao’an laoshi* [早安老師]), and *I Can Endure the Hardship* (*Wo chi de qi ku* [我吃得苦]). In addition, the orchestra commissioned rearrangements of popular National Day patriotic songs, such as Law Wai Lun’s *Medley of National Day Theme Songs*, which consists of songs such as *We are Singapore*, Kit Chan’s *Home*, and Stefanie Sun’s *One United People* for National Day celebrations. Sometimes, Singaporean singers are invited to perform alongside the orchestra. As executive director, Terence Ho shared with me, “Singapore Chinese Orchestra aims to make Chinese orchestral music accessible to all walks of life in Singapore” (Ho, 2017).

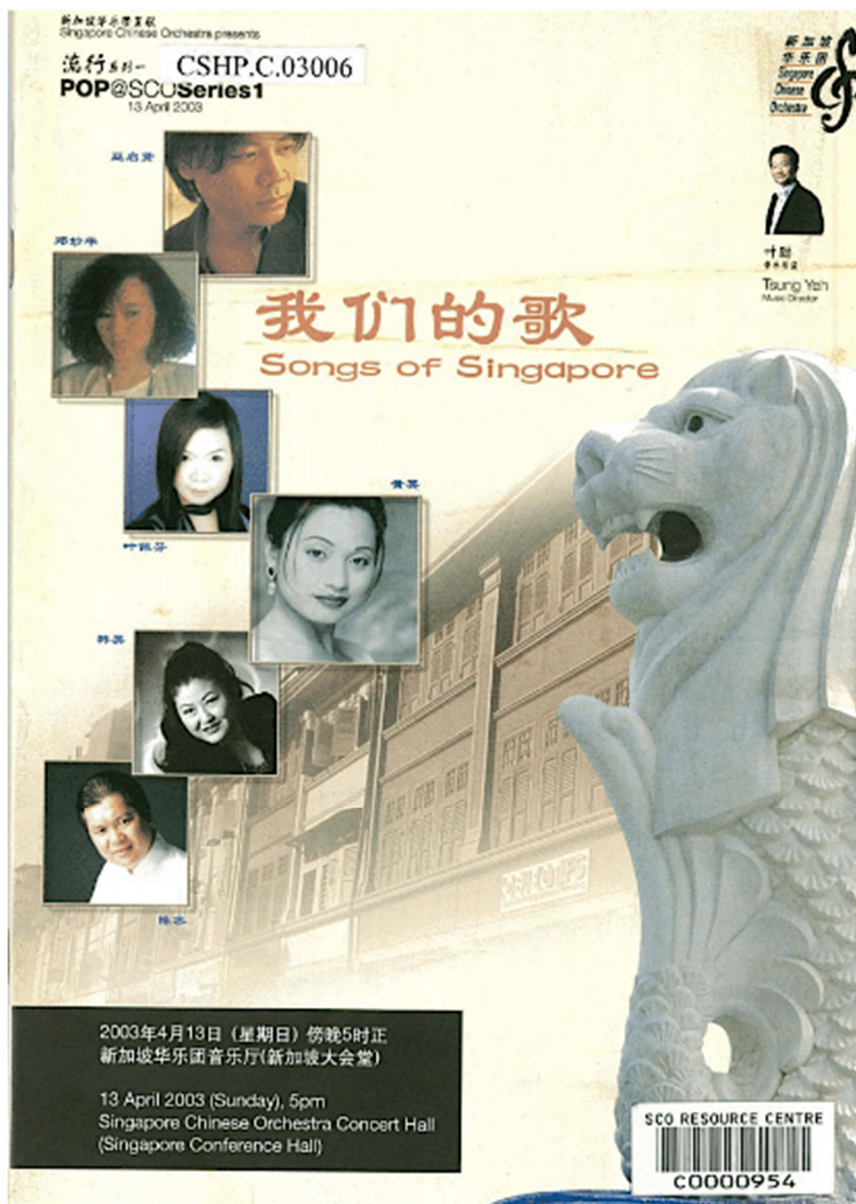


Figure 7: The concert program of “Songs of Singapore,” April 13, 2003. Photo by courtesy of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the Nanyang-style music of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. I suggest that the Nanyang-style music presents a new form of creation and performance of Chinese music beyond China, which distinguishes the Singapore Chinese Orchestra from other Chinese orchestras in the region. In his influential article, Tu Wei-Ming proposed the concept of “Cultural China” to suggest that the core values of Chinese culture can be found in regions, such as definitely in China, Singapore, and Malaysia, which have preserved Confucianism. The Chinese music of “cultural China” demonstrates a complex hybridization process. As Brian Bernards argues, “Chinese ethnic, linguistic, or regional/dialect affiliations transcend national boundaries of culture, language, and political citizenship to produce transnational or diasporic networks of literary production, circulation, and appraisal” (Bernards, 2015: 9). In the case of the Nanyang-style music, we have seen how Chinese music transcends national boundaries of culture, language, and political citizenship to incorporate diasporic and local elements into music composition and performance.

As a matter of fact, Singapore Chinese Orchestra, founded in 1997, is the youngest professional Chinese orchestra in Asia. On the one hand, it aligns itself with renowned longstanding modern Chinese orchestras with its structure and instrumentation. On the other hand, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra creates and performs music to highlight the multicultural Singaporean society as well as the hybridized identity of the Singaporean Chinese. As Bernards writes, “The Nanyang trope does *not* appeal to an ethno-linguistic Chinese-ness that supersedes the assimilatory or marginalizing force of the nation, but instead draws attention to the creolizing processes behind the formation of *multiple* national cultures: it is just capable of expressing Malaysianess, Singaporeanness, and Thainess as it is Chineseness” (Bernards, 2015: 9; emphasis added). The Nanyang-style music offers a case to demonstrate the orchestration of new Chinese music by incorporating local sounds and musical instruments. This allows the Singapore Chinese Orchestra to differentiate their music from other orchestras.

In other words, just like Nanyang literature and Nanyang-style paintings, Nanyang-style music draws the attention to the creolizing processes behind the formation of Singapore Chinese Orchestra’s music. The Nanyang-style music is an example of the expression of Singaporeanness. More importantly, it highlights the hybridized cultural identity of Singaporean Chinese. Tan Shzr Ee (2012) suggested that Singapore Chinese Orchestra’s music is Chinese culture or the imagination of it; however, in combination with urban multicultural elements, Singapore Chinese Orchestra’s expression of music is to present ethnic connections, establishing interest/likeness and approval/identity of Chinese music from diverse groups in Singapore. In other words, although Singapore Chinese Orchestra has its roots in the modern Chinese orchestra from mainland China, it strives for “cultural independency” and position itself as a node between East and West, China, and Southeast Asia (Groppe, 2013). As Edwin Thumboo writes in the “Ulysses by the Merlion”:

Despite unequal ways,
Together they mutate,
Explore the edges of harmony,
Search for a centre.

The journey in “search for a centre” is probably best demonstrated in the three movements of the composition *Legend of the Merlion* (*Yuweishi chuanqi* [魚尾獅傳奇]) by Liu Xijin 劉錫津: ‘Seek Blessings’ (*Aimin qiuyou* [哀民求佑]); ‘Raging Sea’ (*Nuhai fengbao* [怒海風暴]); and ‘Nanyang’s Affection’ (*Qingxi Nanyang* [情系南洋]) (Singapore Chinese Orchestra 2006). Similar to the protagonists in the music piece, migrants arrived in Singapore, became citizens of the city-state, and established their own identity. Their journey and their unique Singaporean Chinese music remain to be told.

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