

異鄉異地異文化 —— 淺談美國兩所大學國樂團的發展

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在 2022 年 12 月兩個寒冷的冬夜，美國東岸兩所大學的國樂團分別發表了期末音樂會。Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble 29 位團員和 Smith College Chinese Music Ensemble 19 位團員，各自在近一個小時的表演中呈現了 8 首樂曲，全體合奏、小重奏、歌唱與樂團、樂器獨奏、京劇演唱等，團員們並各自介紹他們的樂器。音樂會後，有觀眾前來道謝，說這是他們在美國第一次如此近距離的接觸國樂；有華裔學生說他們聽到了小時候熟悉的聲音；也有來自臺灣和中國的留學生說他們因鄉愁而落淚。

今年是我在美國指導國樂團的第十年（第 19 個學期），一切源於 2007 年的博士生時期。國立臺灣師範大學音樂學系主修二胡的我，畢業後曾在臺灣教音樂和帶領國樂團，後到英國 University of Sheffield 攻讀民族音樂學碩士學位。由於此一背景，在進入 Wesleyan University 讀博士時便擔任該校國樂團的助教，次年被聘為專任指導。到了 2020 年，又協助 Smith College 創立了國樂團。一路走來，有摸索、有挑戰、還有很多寶貴的經驗和收穫。本文將就個人經歷淺談國樂團在美國東岸大學中的發展，以及個人帶團所見所聞與感想。



2017 年 2 月，寫給二胡、琵琶、笛子和瓜哇甘美朗的樂曲 Mengimpi 在 Wesleyan 大學首演



2020 年 2 月 4 日，Smith 大學國樂團第一次練習

國樂團在美國大學紮根，學生自主爭取開課

從 19 世紀中開始，移民北美的華人逐漸將各式各樣的華人音樂帶到了美國。據民族音樂學家 David BADAGNANI 的統計，美國現今約有 170 多個國樂團在活躍著。自 1960 年代起，美國一些大學陸續出現國樂團的蹤跡，有許多是學生組織的社團，而做為學校正式課程的則為數不多。現今美國有二十多所大學開設了國樂團課程，其中就包括上述我所指導的 2 個樂團。有趣的是，兩者的成立皆非學校主動規劃，而是由學生推動才產生的。

Wesleyan University 是位於美國東北部康乃狄克州（Connecticut）的一所文理大學，1831 年成立，現有約 3,000 名大學生和 130 名研究生。1960 年代，學校的音樂系開始重視非西方的音樂文化，陸續開設了一些以世界音樂（World Music）為題的課程和樂團，包括南印度音樂、印尼爪哇甘美朗、非洲鼓等。2001 年時，有幾位對國樂有興趣的大學生，自發地聚在一起演奏，他們尋求音樂系鄭蘇教授的協助，從紐約延請王國偉老師來指導，並在 2002 年秋季正式成立了國樂團。自此，學生可以選修樂團課，取得成績和一個學分。2008 年時，我接棒了王老師的工作，之後除了曾因回臺灣做田野調查中斷三年以外，長期以來我都負責該團的規劃、授課及指揮。

Smith College 則是位於麻薩諸塞州（Massachusetts）的一所文理學院女校，成立於 1871 年，現有近 2,100 名大學生，音樂團體以西方古典音樂為主。2019 年 5 月，一群中國學生到音樂系表達了想要成立國樂團的意願，系上聯絡我幫忙，經過一連串與學校和學生的溝通，在當年底購買了一批樂器，2020 年 2 月開始試運行。一開始就有二十多位中國學生參與，學校認為有足夠的需求，就在下一個學期成立了樂團，成為一門一學分但不算成績的正式課程。

¹ 傳統中式樂器組成的音樂團體，在臺灣主要稱之為「國樂團」，在中國多稱為「民樂團」或「民族樂團」，在香港和澳門稱之為「中樂團」，而在新馬則稱之為「華樂團」。在美國的英文名稱均為 Chinese Music Ensemble/Orchestra，若有中文名稱通常會依據創立者或成員背景而定。在大學裡的樂團則由於成員的背景多元，通常沒有固定名稱，像我會稱之為國樂團，而我的中國學生們則稱之為民樂團。此文中，我將使用「國樂團」來稱呼我所帶領的這兩個樂團。

² List of Chinese Ensembles and Musicians in North America. 擷取日期 2023 年 3 月 27 日。
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TIpcGs6kNUEXPynkGinXkEsrE5ulSU-aWS48gi3k2lg/edit#>

³ 同上。



追求文化認同感，多元參與跨界交流

這 2 個樂團的組成都以華人 / 華裔居多。據我觀察，2010 年我回臺灣做田野調查之前，Wesleyan 國樂團有半數以上團員是非華人 / 華裔，但我 2013 年回到美國重新開始帶樂團後，發現華人和華裔人口的比重大幅增加了。以目前的 2023 年春季班為例，28 名學生中，只有 4 名不是華人 / 華裔。Smith 方面，由於樂團是由中國留學生催生的，開設的前 2 個學期，參與者全是中國留學生，上課說中文也沒問題，而近兩個學期來則有不少華裔學生加入。

從學生問卷中可看到，許多學生參與樂團是因為學長姐的推薦，尤其中國留學生常用微信群溝通選課事宜，據說國樂團常被推為必選課之一。問卷中也發現，許多華人 / 華裔學生選這門課是「想要更了解自己的文化」。我常聽到臺灣或中國學生說他們在自己國內時因升學壓力，沒能接觸或學好國樂，到了美國，終於有機會進一步學習；並且，能在異國演奏屬於自己文化的音樂，讓他們感到驕傲與滿足。至於在美國長大的華裔學生，有人告訴我，華人文化是他們既熟悉又不太認識的部分，而參與國樂團讓他們更加貼近自己文化。而非華人 / 華裔學生參加樂團的原因就因人而異了，有些是因為對亞洲文化或中華文化感興趣，有些是想要拓展自己的音樂視野，有些則是聽了音樂會受感動而想親身參與。

除了每學期的期末音樂會之外，國樂團也常受邀參加校內外的各種活動。校內的像是每年農曆春節的晚會、Wesleyan 亞洲 / 華裔文化節、畢業典禮時東亞研究所的聚會等；校外的則是參與許多文化交流，像是到各級學校、圖書館、或老人院等地介紹國樂。一些國樂界的大師也陸續來到 Wesleyan 與國樂團做訪問交流，包括琵琶演奏家吳蠻及高虹、安徽吹打樂隊周家班等。

國樂團也常與其他音樂形式合作，包括與猶太 Klezmer 樂團、日本太鼓樂團、韓國鼓樂團等一起演出。此外，Wesleyan 音樂系教授 I. M. Harjito 還為國樂器寫了 2 首樂曲，一首是 2009 年首演的 *Gendhing Erhu*（給二胡和爪哇甘美朗），另一首是 2017 年首演的 *Mengimpi*（給二胡、琵琶、笛子和爪哇甘美朗）。



2014 年 5 月，在 Wesleyan 東亞研究所的臉書頁面上介紹了國樂團在畢業季表演的情況

與華人世界的國樂團截然不同的困境與挑戰

看似穩定成長的國樂團，經營起來其實不太容易。以下我想談談個人在美國帶領國樂團所面臨的一些選擇和挑戰，以及處理的方法。

放眼美國大學的國樂團，也跟在華人世界一樣，有不同路線的選擇，可能是基於學校或其音樂系對於樂團的定位，也可能是基於指導者的偏好。有些樂團只招收有音樂背景的團員；有些樂團比較強調「傳統」，避免使用西洋和聲或流行化樂曲，也不設指揮；有些樂團會融合國樂器與小提琴、長笛、鋼琴等其他西洋樂器。幸運的是，兩所學校都將指導樂團事務交由我全權負責。基於想讓更多人有機會能接觸國樂的出發點，我個人的選擇是將樂團開放給所有的人，校內學生即使沒有音樂背景也可以參加，校外人士只要有興趣也能帶樂器來參與。

挑選曲目時，我也傾向多樣化：傳統、現代、流行、新創樂曲，只要是適合樂團編制及團員程度的都可以嘗試；無論是臺灣、中國、香港、新加坡、以及海外華裔所創作的樂曲，也都在我的選擇範圍內。但由於樂團的獨特性，像是編制受限於樂器數量，以及樂手程度差距大等，使得許多現成樂曲無法直接使用。有鑑於此，我會將一些現成曲子加以改編，以符合樂團需求，另外也有不少樂曲是由我或者一些有興趣有能力的學生為樂團所編寫的。

樂器不易取得及保養維修，每一件都被視為珍寶

在美國大學帶國樂團，樂器的購買與維修是很大的一個難題。這兩個國樂團屬於中型編制，有十來種樂器，團員大約在 15-30 人之間，所用的樂器幾乎都是學校提供的，只有極少數團員有自己的樂器。彈撥樂器有揚琴、古箏、琵琶、柳琴、大阮、中阮、小阮、三弦；吹管樂器有笛、簫、21 簫笙、葫蘆絲、嗩吶；拉弦樂器有二胡、中胡、高胡、京胡；打擊樂器則有鼓（排鼓、花盆鼓、堂鼓）、各種鑼鈸、碰鈴、木魚、梆子等。

樂器都是多年來慢慢累積起來的，有的是從臺灣或中國購買之後運到美國，好處是能在店中挑選，品質較有保障，缺點則是要有人親自到場提貨再搭機攜回美國，而且每次攜帶數量不能太多。另一種管道則是在網路上訂購，我曾透過美國加州、加拿大多倫多及中國的幾間樂器行下單，優點是方便迅速，缺點則是只能藉由網上的照片或影片挑選樂器，無法保證品質。

保養及維修樂器更是一大問題。美東的冬天室內會開暖氣，這使得樂器容易太乾燥而裂開。再說，樂器也經常在搬動中受到損壞。但由於美東不太有國樂器專門店，很難找到人修理或整理樂器。有時，我或樂團成員會找機會把損壞的樂器帶到紐約去找專業樂手幫忙修理，還有多次趁寒暑假回臺灣時，將樂器帶回去修復。有學生問過我，為何將樂器都當作珍品一樣呵護？我真希望他們也能親歷這一次次的艱辛，必能體會而更加珍惜。

⁴ 王國偉是來自上海的二胡演奏家、作曲家和樂團指揮，現任紐約長風中樂團藝術總監。

⁵ 學生至多能拿到 2 個學期的分數和 4 個學期的學分，超過再參與就等於是旁聽。

⁶ Smith College 和其鄰近的 4 所大學結盟成為 Five Colleges，彼此可以互相選課。其他 4 所為 Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College 和 University of Massachusetts at Amherst。有些 Smith 國樂團的成員是從其他學校來上課的。

每個學期都打掉重練，培訓新手也同時扶持樂團成長

成員的頻繁流動更是樂團持續成長的一個挑戰。由於是大學的課程，每學期參與的人員都不一樣，雖然有些人會反覆回來，但還是有不少學生第一次加入。Wesleyan 國樂團一週上課 2 次，一次 1.5 小時。而 Smith 國樂團一週只上一次課，也是 1.5 小時。這兩個樂團都沒有個別指導的老師。如何在短時間內教授十幾種樂器，帶領一個程度參差不齊的樂團，照顧好每個人不同的需求，並在只有 3 個月的時間內（扣除假期 12 週）準備好一場公開的演奏會，乍聽之下是項不可能的任務，但經過多年的摸索，這樣的任務我已經完成廿餘次，慢慢地也發展出自己帶領的模式。

第一步是選擇成員，雖然不要求新團員有音樂基礎，但希望他們有潛力和意願能在短時間內學好一門新樂器。所以，每學期的第一門課我安排了面試，在簡單介紹課程和樂器以後，學生們和我一對一面談，並看簡譜打節奏。我會選擇節奏感相對穩定又願意花時間學習的學生加入，並讓他們選一個樂器來學習。

接下來的困難是：如何能同時讓新手學習和進步，並讓有經驗的人接受到挑戰和成長。我發現，樂團的精進不僅來自於指導者的帶領，更是團員間協作合作的成果。並且，學習的安排要由淺入深、循序漸進。上課時，我常會讓老手帶著新手一起練習，或隨機配對讓團員們互相合作齊奏或重奏。

學期初的一個多月強調在基礎訓練。每學期通常會有幾位有經驗的學生，Wesleyan 還有三、四位固定的非學生成員，他們都是幫忙帶領新手入門的好助手。課堂外，學生每週都被要求繳交練習的影片，藉此我能看到每個人的學習狀況，並即時給予回饋和指導。學期中會有一次期中考，學生們個別向我演奏所學的樂曲。在基礎訓練的時期，我會不斷地觀察每個團員的程度，並思考規劃期末演出的樂曲。程度較好的學生會被賦予更難的任務，像是在大團中的獨奏部分或是小重奏、甚至是協奏。

上課的形式經常變化，有時兩、三個團員配組練習，有時整個團一起練習，有時分聲部練習，更有時分不同小組同時練習不同樂曲。團員間相互合作讓樂團不僅僅是一門課，而更像是一個大家庭，我很欣慰常看到團員們課外一起約吃飯、學習、玩樂，或者一起練習音樂。有的團員在離開後還會常回來「探望家人」，並介紹朋友來參加樂團。或許也因為如此，樂團終能穩定成長。

過去三年是疫情最嚴重的時期。對於一個使用學校樂器、很多新手、大部分成員為海外留學生的樂團來說，又是截然不同的挑戰。我盡力在疫情期間仍維持國樂團的運作，鑑於篇幅有限，關於疫情中的教學，往後有機會再另行介紹。

踏入 4 月份了，兩所學校的國樂團正如火如荼準備著即將到來的期末表演。練完團，看著團員們開心滿足的神情，想起歷年來畢業學生告訴我樂團對他們生活的正面影響，以及演出後各方觀眾傳達的正向回饋，這種種都讓我覺得自己很幸運也很幸福。我期望國樂能在美國這塊多元土地上持續發光發亮，也希望將來能和臺灣和世界各地的音樂圈有更多交流和學習的機會。

⁷ Wesleyan 國樂團初成立時，一週只上一次課，每次 2 小時。2008 年春季班，也就是我當助教的第 2 學期時，我主動提議增加一堂 2 小時的助教課。從 2008 年秋季到 2020 年秋季，樂團一週上兩次課，每次 2 小時。而從 2020 年春季開始至今，樂團一週上課兩次，每次 1.5 小時。

⁸ 一位已退休音樂圖書館員 Alec MCLANE 從樂團草創時期就加入樂團至今，經年累月下來，會的樂器有六七種之多；一位現任音樂圖書館館長 Aaron BITTEL 從兩年前到 Wesleyan 工作以來就持續參與樂團，主要吹笙；還有一位住附近城鎮的臺灣媽媽，廖修綺，從 2008 年開始就加入樂團，每學期都來幫忙，主要負責彈撥樂器。

Distinct Locations and Cultures ——— A Discussion on the Development of Two Chinese Music Ensembles in Universities in the United States

Text / Chia-Yu Joy LU (Director and Conductor, Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble and Smith College Chinese Music Ensemble)

Image / Chia-Yu Joy LU



The Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble held their fall semester final performance in December 2022

On two cold winter nights in December 2022, Chinese music ensembles¹ from two universities on the East Coast of the United States each held their final concerts. The Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble, with 29 members, and the Smith College Chinese Music Ensemble, with 19 members, each performed eight pieces that lasted nearly an hour. The program featured a diverse range of performances, including full ensemble pieces, small ensemble performances, singing with the ensemble, solo instrumental pieces, and Peking opera singing. Members also introduced their instruments, adding an extra layer of depth to the performance. After the concert, I was touched to see some audience members express their gratitude, stating that it was their first time experiencing Chinese music up close in the U.S. Some Chinese-American students shared that they heard familiar sounds from their childhood, while some international students from Taiwan and China said they shed tears due to feelings of homesickness. It was a truly moving experience for all involved.

¹ Music groups consisting of traditional Chinese instruments are known as “guoyue tuan” in Taiwan, “minyue tuan” in mainland or “minzu yuetuan” in China, “zhongyue tuan” in Hong Kong and Macau, and “huayue tuan” in Singapore and Malaysia. In the U.S., these ensembles are typically referred to as “Chinese Music Ensemble/Orchestra” in English. If they have a Chinese name, it is usually based on the background of the founder or members. In university ensembles, the diverse backgrounds of the members mean that there is usually no fixed name. For example, I call the ensemble I lead “guoyue tuan,” while my Chinese students call it “minyue yuan.” For the purposes of this article, I will use “guoyue tuan” to refer to the two ensembles under my leadership.

This year marks my 10th year leading Chinese music ensembles in the U.S. (the 19th semester), which started during my doctoral studies in 2007. As a music major specializing in the erhu performance at National Taiwan Normal University, I taught music and led a few Chinese music ensembles in Taiwan after graduation. Later, I pursued my master's degree in ethnomusicology at the University of Sheffield, U.K. My background led me to become the teaching assistant for the Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble when I entered their doctoral program, and was hired as a music director the following year. In 2020, I also played a role in the establishment of the Chinese music ensemble at Smith College. Along the way, there were explorations, challenges, and many valuable experiences and gains. This article will discuss the development of Chinese music ensembles in East Coast universities in the U.S. from my personal experience, as well as my observations and insights gained from leading the ensembles.

Chinese Music Ensembles Thrive in U.S. Universities as Students Demand Courses

Since the mid-19th century, Chinese immigrants to North America have gradually introduced various forms of Chinese music to the U.S. According to statistics compiled by ethnomusicologist David BADAGNANI, there are currently over 170 active Chinese music ensembles in the country². Since the 1960s, Chinese music ensembles have gradually appeared in some American universities, including many student-run amateur groups, but there are few that are formal courses. Today, over 20 universities in the U.S. offer Chinese music ensemble courses³, including the two aforementioned ensembles I direct. Interestingly, neither of these ensembles was initiated by the schools themselves, but rather by students pushing for their establishment.

Wesleyan University is a liberal arts university located in the northeastern state of Connecticut. It was founded in 1831 and currently has approximately 3,000 undergraduates and 130 graduate students. In the 1960s, Wesleyan's music department began to pay attention to non-Western music cultures and subsequently opened many courses and ensembles focusing on world music, including South Indian music, Indonesian gamelan, African drums, and more. In 2001, a few students with an interest in Chinese music spontaneously gathered to play and sought the assistance of Professor SU Zheng in the music department. They invited WANG Guowei⁴ from New York to come and teach, and officially established the Chinese music ensemble in the fall of 2002. Since then, students have been able to get grades and earn one academic credit by taking the ensemble course⁵. In 2008, I took over WANG's position and have been responsible for planning, teaching, and conducting the ensemble, except for a three-year interruption due to fieldwork in Taiwan.

Smith College is a women's liberal arts college located in the neighboring state of Massachusetts. Founded in 1871, it currently has nearly 2,100 undergraduate students. The music groups on campus primarily focus on Western classical music. In May 2019, a group of Chinese students expressed to the music department their desire to form a Chinese music ensemble. The department contacted me for assistance. After a series of communications with the school and the students, a number of instruments were purchased at the end of the year, and the ensemble began trial operation in February 2020. Initially, over 20 Chinese students participated, and with sufficient demand, the school established the ensemble as a one-credit but non-graded formal course in the following semester⁶.

² List of Chinese Ensembles and Musicians in North America, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TIpcGs6kNUEXPynkGinXkEsR5ulSU-aWS48gi3k2lg/edit#>, accessed in March 27, 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ WANG Guowei hails from Shanghai and is a celebrated *erhu* performer, instructor, composer, and ensemble conductor. He presently holds the position of Artistic Director for *Music from China*, a New York-based Chinese ensemble.

⁵ Students can receive grades for a maximum of two semesters and credits for four semesters. Any amount exceeding this is considered equivalent to auditing the course.



Members of the Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble played in small groups during regular class meetings

In March 2016, *pipa* virtuoso WU Man visited Wesleyan University and interacted with the Chinese Music Ensemble. The author of this article can be seen on her left

Seeking Self Through Culture, Engaging Diverse Fields in Exchange

The composition of students in both music ensembles is predominantly Chinese/Chinese-American. Based on my observation, prior to my return to Taiwan for fieldwork in 2010, more than half of the Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble members were neither Chinese nor Chinese-American. However, upon my return the U.S. in 2013 to resume teaching the ensemble, I noticed a significant increase in the proportion of Chinese and Chinese-American members. In the current 2023 spring semester, for instance, out of 28 students, only four are neither Chinese nor Chinese-American. As for Smith College, since the ensemble was initiated by Chinese international students, all participants in the first few semesters were Chinese. This meant it was not an issue to speak Mandarin Chinese in class. However, in the past couple of semesters, many Chinese-American students have joined the ensemble.

Based on the student questionnaires, it is evident that many students join the ensemble due to recommendations from their senior colleagues, particularly Chinese international students who often use WeChat groups to communicate about course selection. The Chinese music ensemble course is frequently suggested as "one of the most worthwhile courses to choose." The questionnaires also revealed that many Chinese/Chinese-American students chose this course because they "want to understand their own culture better." I often hear Taiwanese or Chinese students express the thoughts that they missed out on learning or experiencing Chinese music due to academic pressure in their home country. However, when they come to the U.S., they finally have the opportunity to do so, and playing music from their own culture in a foreign land instills pride and satisfaction in them. Chinese-American students who grew up in the U.S., on the other hand, have told me that they find Chinese culture a familiar yet poorly understood aspect of their identity, and participating in the Chinese music ensemble helps them reconnect with their roots. Non-Chinese/non-Chinese-American students have their own unique reasons for joining the ensemble; some are intrigued by Asian or Chinese culture, some want to expand their musical horizons, and others were inspired by a concert and wish to participate personally.

In addition to end-of-semester concerts, the Chinese music ensembles are often invited to participate in various events both on and off campus. On-campus events include the annual Lunar New Year celebration, Wesleyan's Asian/Asian-American Culture Festival, and gatherings for the East Asian Studies program during commencement. Off-campus events include cultural exchanges such as introducing Chinese music to schools, libraries, and senior centers. Some renowned masters in the Chinese music industry have also come to Wesleyan to visit and exchange ideas with the ensemble, including *pipa* masters WU Man and GAO Hong, as well as the Anhui wind and percussion group ZHOU Family Band.

⁶ Smith College and four other nearby colleges have formed an alliance called Five Colleges, which allows students to take courses at each other's institutions. The other four colleges are Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Some members of the Smith College Chinese Music Ensemble have taken classes from other schools in the alliance.

The Chinese music ensembles also frequently collaborate with other music forms, including performances with Jewish Klezmer bands, Japanese Taiko groups, and Korean drumming ensembles. In addition, Wesleyan music professor I.M. Harjito has written two pieces of music for Chinese instruments: *Gendhing Erhu*, premiered in 2009 for erhu and Javanese gamelan, and *Mengimpi*, premiered in 2017 for *erhu*, *pipa*, *dizi*, and Javanese gamelan.

The Ensembles' Hurdles Differ from Those in Their Homelands

The seemingly stable growth of the Chinese music ensemble is actually not easy to manage. Here, I would like to delve into the personal challenges and choices that I have encountered while leading Chinese music ensembles in the U.S., as well as the methods I have employed to tackle them.

Looking at the Chinese music ensembles in American universities, just like in the Chinese world, there are different choices of direction, which may be determined by the school or the music department's positioning of the ensemble, or the preference of the director. Some ensembles recruit only members with a music background, while others emphasize "tradition" and avoid using Western harmony or popular music, with no conductor. Some ensembles blend Chinese instruments with other instruments such as violin, flute, and piano. Fortunately, both schools have entrusted me with full responsibility for leading the ensemble. Following my desire to provide more opportunities for people to experience Chinese music, I have opened the ensemble to all, allowing students without a music background to participate and welcoming anyone interested in bringing their Chinese instruments to join.

When it comes to selecting repertoire, I also tend to be diverse: traditional, modern, popular, and newly created music can all be tried as long as they are appropriate for the ensemble's instrumentation and the members' skill level. Music composed by Taiwanese, Chinese, Hong Kong, Singaporean, and overseas Chinese composers are all within my selection range. However, the unique nature of the ensemble, including limited instrumentation and skill level disparities among players, means that many existing pieces cannot be used directly. To address this issue, I adapt some existing pieces to fit the needs of the ensemble. Additionally, many pieces are written for the ensemble by myself or some interested and capable students.

Instruments Are Treasures Due to Their Rarity and Maintenance Needs

When leading a Chinese music ensemble at American universities, purchasing and maintaining instruments pose a great challenge. The ensembles at both schools are medium-sized with over ten types of instruments and 15–30 members, and almost all of the instruments used are provided by the school. Only a few members use their own instruments. The plucked-string instruments include *yangqin*, *guzheng*, *pipa*, *liuqin*, *daruan*, *zhongruan*, *xiaoruan*, and *sanxian*. The wind instruments include *dizi*, *21-reed sheng*, *hulusi*, *xiao*, and *suona*. The bowed-string instruments include *erhu*, *zhonghu*, *gaohu*, and *jinghu*. The percussion instruments include drums (*huapengu*, *paigu*, *tanggu*), various cymbals and gongs, bells, woodblocks, and *bangzi*.

The instruments have accumulated over the years, with some purchased from Taiwan and mainland China and brought back to the U.S. While selecting instruments in-store ensures quality, it is also a logistical challenge, requiring someone to pick up and carry them back to the U.S. by plane. I have also placed orders through several instrument shops in California, Toronto, and China. Online orders provide convenience, but quality cannot always be guaranteed, as instruments can only be selected based on photos or videos.

Maintaining and repairing instruments poses another significant challenge. During the winter, indoor heating is often turned on in the northeastern U.S., which causes the instruments to be vulnerable to cracking. Furthermore, instruments are frequently damaged during transportation. Unfortunately, there aren't many Chinese instrument specialty stores in the eastern U.S., making it difficult to find someone to help with repairs or maintenance. Occasionally, we take damaged instruments to New York to seek assistance from professional musicians for repairs. I have also brought instruments back to Taiwan for repair on multiple occasions during winter and summer vacations. Some students have asked me why I treat the instruments as if they were precious treasures. I hope they can experience the hardships of maintaining and repairing instruments themselves and truly appreciate their value.



The Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble introduced Chinese music at a summer Mandarin Chinese camp in Connecticut in July 2019

Starting Anew Each Semester, Training Newcomers while Nurturing the Ensemble's Growth

The frequent turnover of members presents a challenge for the ensemble's ongoing development. As a university course, every semester sees a fresh intake of students, with some returning and others joining for the first time. The Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble meets twice a week for 1.5 hours each time⁷. Smith's ensemble meets only once a week, also for 1.5 hours. Both of these ensembles lack individual instrumental instructors, which makes teaching over a dozen instruments in a limited time, leading an uneven group of members with diverse needs, and preparing for a public performance within just three months (12 weeks, excluding holiday break) seem like an impossible task. However, after years of trial and error, I have completed this task over twenty times and have gradually developed my own leadership style.

The initial phase involves selecting members. While musical experience is not a prerequisite, I look for potential and a willingness to learn a new instrument within a short time frame. Therefore, I conduct interviews during the first class of each semester. After a brief introduction to the course and instruments, students have a one-on-one interview with me and a demonstration of their rhythmic abilities by reading cipher notation. I select students who display relatively stable rhythm and are motivated to learn, and let them choose an instrument to learn.

⁷ When the Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble was first established, classes were held only once a week for a duration of 2 hours. In the spring of 2008, which was my second semester as a teaching assistant, I proposed to add a 2-hour TA session. From the fall of 2008 to the fall of 2020, the ensemble met twice a week for 2 hours each time. However, since the spring of 2020, the ensemble has been meeting twice a week for 1.5 hours each time.

The next challenge is to simultaneously facilitate learning and progress for beginners and provide challenges and growth opportunities for experienced players. I have found that the improvement of the ensemble comes not only from the leadership of the instructor but also from the collaboration and cooperation among members. Moreover, the learning arrangement should be structured in a way that starts with the basics and progresses gradually. During class, I encourage experienced players to practice together with beginners, or randomly pair up members to collaborate and play together.

During the first month of each semester, emphasis is placed on basic training. Usually, there are several experienced students, and Wesleyan also has three or four regular non-student members who make great mentors for new members⁸. Outside of class time, students are asked to submit weekly practice videos, which allow me to monitor their progress and provide timely feedback and guidance. Additionally, a mid-term exam is scheduled during the semester, which requires each student to perform what they have learned individually. During this initial training period, I continuously assess the proficiency of each member and plan the repertoire for the end-of-semester performance. More advanced students are given more challenging tasks, such as solo parts in the full ensemble, small ensemble, or even concertos.

The format of the class often varies, with two or three members of the ensemble sometimes practicing together in small groups, the entire ensemble rehearsing together at other times, sections sometimes practicing individually, and different groups practicing different pieces at other times. Members collaborate with each other, making the ensemble not just a class, but more like a big family. I am pleased to see that members often gather together after class to have meals, study, play, or practice music together. Some members even come back to “visit their family” after leaving and encourage their friends to join the ensemble. Perhaps it is because of this sense of community that the ensemble is able to grow steadily.

The past three years have been the most severe period of the COVID-19 pandemic. For an ensemble that uses school instruments and has many beginners, and where the majority of members are international students, it has been an entirely different challenge. Despite this, I have striven to keep the ensemble running during the epidemic. Due to space constraints, though, I will relate details about teaching during the epidemic at another opportunity.

As we enter April, I am filled with excitement as both Chinese Music Ensembles at the two schools are vigorously preparing for their end-of-semester performance. After each practice, it brings me immense joy to see the happy and satisfied expressions on the faces of the ensemble members. It reminds me of the many graduating students who have shared with me how the ensemble has positively impacted their lives, and the positive feedback received from various audiences after our performances. All of these experiences have made me feel incredibly fortunate. As we move forward, I hope to see Chinese music continue to shine in this diverse land of America, and I look forward to having more opportunities for exchange and learning with music circles in Taiwan and around the world.

⁸ A retired music librarian, Alec MCLANE, has been a member of the ensemble since its inception and over the years has learned to play six or seven different instruments. Aaron BITTEL, the current director of the Music Library and the World Music Archives, has been an active member of the ensemble since starting at Wesleyan a couple of years ago, primarily playing the *sheng*. In addition, there is a Taiwanese mom, Hsiu-Chi LIANG, who lives in a nearby town and has been volunteering with the ensemble since 2008. She helps out every semester and mainly plays plucked-string instruments.

Music From East Asia

Saturday,
December 1, 2018
at 7pm
Crowell Concert Hall
FREE!

Wesleyan's **Taiko Drumming Ensembles**, directed by **Barbara Merjan**, perform the thunderous and thrilling rhythms of Japanese *kumi daiko* drumming. **Korean Drumming and Creative Music**, directed by **Jin Hi Kim**, plays a variety of mesmerizing rhythmic patterns derived from tradition and new creative sounds on various instruments. The **Wesleyan Chinese Music Ensemble**, directed by **Joy Lu**, presents both traditional and contemporary Chinese and Taiwanese musical works.

In December 2018, three East Asian music Groups of Wesleyan - the Chinese Music Ensemble, Japanese Taiko Drumming Ensemble, and Korean Drumming and Creative Music Ensemble - held a joint concert at Wesleyan University