



# Historical research of music cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia

Ren Yanran<sup>1</sup>, Marzelan Salleh<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Malaya, faculty of creative arts doctoral student, kuala lumpur, Malaysia, 46200

<sup>2</sup> University of Malaya, faculty of creative arts doctoral student, kuala lumpur, Malaysia, 46200

\* Corresponding Author: [marzelan@um.edu.my](mailto:marzelan@um.edu.my)

**Citation:** Ren, R., & Marzelan, S. (2025). Historical research of music cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, 25(1), 214-219.

## ARTICLE INFO

Received: 01 April 2024

Accepted: 26 April 2024

## ABSTRACT

Malaysia is a country with a long history and has had close relations with China since ancient times. Relying on the political and economic exchanges between the two countries, it has promoted their music cultural exchanges. The frequent music cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia have strengthened the friendship between the two peoples and promoted the mutual absorption and common development of music culture in the equal conversation. This study mainly reviews the historical context of political, economic and cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia, discusses the development of music cultural exchanges since ancient times, and points out effective strategies to strengthen music cultural exchanges in response to the existing problems, in order to build a bridge of music cultural exchanges between the two countries, promote the deepening of China-Malaysia relations, and provide references for better inheritance and promotion of Chinese music culture.

**Keywords:** China; Malaysia; Music cultural exchanges; Development

## 一、POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EXCHANGES

### (一) Beginning-Maritime Silk Road (from Han Dynasty 202BC-220AD)

During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, *Zhang Qian* made a mission to the Western Regions. However, the Xiongnu placed obstacles in the way, sent cavalry to attack the Chinese envoys. In addition, the land route needs to pass through many regions with harsh natural conditions, such as the Gobi Desert, high mountains. Therefore, China and India started the Maritime Silk Road, and Malay Peninsula was found by China around the 1st century AD as a transit point to India, which became a meeting place for Indian and Chinese traders. It can be proved by many fragments of pottery of Qin and Han dynasty unearthed in the Johor River valley<sup>[1]</sup>.

### (二) Development (3-16AC)

From 3rd to 6th century (Three Kingdoms, Wei, Jin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties), the countries of the Malay Peninsula sent envoys to China to pay tribute continually as a sign of obedience or alliance. In fact, the tribute between China and Malaysia became a form of trade, in which the tributary side brought its own goods in the name of "presenting tribute", and the recipient side rewarded them with the corresponding Chinese specialties in return, so as to achieve the purpose of commodity exchange. Therefore, the tribute was actually a barter trade relationship between governments.

From the Tang Dynasty (618-907AC), the Sino-Malaysian trade began to expand from luxury goods for the royal family to the daily commodities such as medicines and spices, which were in greater demand among the public. This meant that the formerly officially controlled tributary was gradually transformed into a larger and wider participation of folk trade.

With the development of navigation technology, during the Song and Yuan dynasties, China and the Malay Peninsula countries had very closed and friendly relations, and formed stable market trade.

In the early 15th century, the kingdom of Malacca was born during the Ming Dynasty of China, there were frequent political visits between the two sides. *Zheng He* reached the kingdom of Malacca five times during his seven voyages to the West, and left many historical relics. The earliest Chinese immigrants to Malaysia can also be traced back to this period.

From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Sui Dynasty, the number of Buddhist monks also increased, and Buddhism became an important element of cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia<sup>[2]</sup>.

### (三) Stagnate phase- Chinese labors abroad (16c-19c)

During the 16th-18th centuries, due to the constant harassment of the Chinese coastal areas by Portugal and the Netherlands, so the late Ming Dynasty implemented a more stringent sea ban policy in the coastal areas to prevent aggression. In this period, exchanges between China and Malaysia fell into a stagnant state.

In the 300 years from the mid-Ming Dynasty in the 16th century to the Opium War in the 19th century, China entered the late stage of feudal society, with increasing feudal exploitation and oppression, which led to the bankruptcy of the rural peasants and craftsmen, and many people ventured abroad to work as laborers. In 1786, the British occupied Penang Island of Malaysia, and had a great demand for labor. In order to obtain Chinese goods and develop the Malay Peninsula, the British colonists abducted a large number of "indentured laborers" from Guangdong and Fujian from the 19th century<sup>[3]</sup>.

From the 1820s to the 1970s, Malays and Chinese have waged countless struggles, fought together against the British colonists. During this period, Chinese workers became the link that maintained the cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia.

### (四) Anti-Japanese era - prosperity, stasis

After World War I, the number of Chinese workers in Malaya also increased, and trade between China and Malaysia reached a boom period between 1919 and 1931.

During Chinese Xinhai Revolution, Malaya became the center where supported for the revolution by overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. *Sun Yat-sen* visited Malaya many times, received warm reception from the local people and overseas Chinese, and obtained many help for the revolution of 1911. But his revolutionary activities in Malaya was not plain sailing<sup>[4]</sup>. At that time, the middle class of Nanyang like petty dealers and workers became enthusiastic participants in the revolution, they were more receptive to Sun Yat-sen's political ambition to transform old China with revolution.

Until the Japanese occupied Malaya in 1942, both China and Malaysia were under the Japanese rule of terror, and there were few exchanges between the two countries for three years and eight months.

### (五) The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia

Federation of Malaysia established on August 31, 1963. However, under the influence of the Cold War, the two countries failed to normalize their relations. By the early 1970s, because the international situation was easing, the relations between Malaysia and China were improving. At the 26th UN General Assembly in October 1971, the Malaysian representative voted in favor of restoring China's legal status in the UN. After 1972, cultural exchanges between the two countries increased<sup>[5]</sup>.

On 31 May 1974, China and Malaysia issued a joint communique announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations. Malaysia became the first country to establish diplomatic relations with China after the founding of ASEAN. With the joint efforts of the governments and people in two countries, China-Malaysia relations have turned a new page. This has contributed to peace, stability, prosperity and development in Southeast Asia.

### (六) The Belt and Road

In 2013, Chinese president *Xi Jinping* proposed the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and Malaysia was one of the most enthusiastic and positive responders to China's Belt and Road Initiative. When Xi Jinping visited Malaysia on October 4, 2013, the leaders of the two countries unanimously decided to upgrade their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership of "The Belt and Road", that made China-Malaysia relations entered a new period of development<sup>[6]</sup>. Since then, leaders of the two countries have exchanged frequent visits and conducted extensive economic and trade cooperation in manufacturing, construction, and other fields.

Malaysia has become a pioneer in the construction of the "The Belt and Road" in Southeast Asia, helping China to strengthen economic and cultural ties with other regions, and contributing to the realization of the goals of the "The Belt and Road". Malaysia is China's largest trading partner in ASEAN, the trade volume between the two countries accounts for about a quarter of the total trade volume between China and ASEAN.

## 二、CULTURAL EXCHANGES

Malaysia is a multi-racial country composed of the Malay, Chinese and Indian three ethnic groups. It's Constitution guarantees the right of each ethnic group to use its own language and culture, and a new cultural form has been formed through mutual exchanges, assimilation and penetration of the cultures of all ethnic groups. Malaysian Chinese culture is formed through adjustment and development under the influence of objective environment and living conditions after the spread of Chinese culture to Malaysia and its roots in Malaysia<sup>[7]</sup>. In October 2016, after Malaysian President *Najib Razak's* visit to China, the two countries issued a joint Statement, jointly committed to the implementation of "*the agreement on cultural cooperation*" and "*the Implementation Plan 2014-2019*", encouraged cultural institutions and cultural groups of the two sides to conduct mutual visits and exchanges, and supported the establishment of Chinese cultural center in Malaysia.

### (一) Literature

Malay dictionaries appeared in China as early as the 16th century<sup>[8]</sup>. In the later period, there were successively launched Malay Chinese dictionaries such as "*Hua Yi Tong Yu*", "*Tong Yu Jin Liang*", "*Tanah Melayu Talk*", "*The Cantonese*

*Transliteration of Mala Language*", *"Zhengke Transliteration of Tanah Melayu"*, *"Magazine Album"*, *"The Moraiyou Verbal meaning under Qiongnan sound proficiency"*, and so on. With these dictionaries, Chinese traveling to Malaysia can achieve smooth communication with the local people, which promotes two-way cultural exchanges. Therefore, the dictionary compiler are regarded as pioneers in cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia.

Since the 1960s, Malay literary works and Malay Pantun, such as *"Life under the Knife"*, *"Selected Malay Short Stories"*, *"Shrimp and Salt"*, *"Children of Keta Yang"*, *"Little Writer -- Sara"*, *"Morning Twilight"* and *"Kelantan Travel Notes"*, ect, have been gradually translated into Chinese. At the same time, a large number of classical Chinese literature and historical novels have been translated into Malay, such as *"Six Stories of Floating Life"*, *"Life and Death"*, *"The Three Kingdoms"*, *"Journey to the West"*, *"Selected New Chinese Poems"*, *"The Road of a Doctor"*, and *"The Eternal Light"*, ect. During this period, China and Malaysia have promoted the development of each other's literary undertakings in the process of literary and art exchanges<sup>[9]</sup>.

On May 28, 1998, famous Malay writers such as Usman Awang and Shahnnon bin Ahmad visited China at the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Culture, which opened the exchanges between the two countries in the field of literary creation.

In April 2018, the "The Belt and Road Publishing Center of China-Malaysia" and the "Chinese Theme Book Editorial Department in Malaysia" were officially inaugurated in the building of the National Language Bureau of Malaysia, which was jointly initiated by China Social Science Academic Press and the Chinese Culture Center of Malaysia, aiming to promote the development of book translation and publication industry, enhance the understanding and strengthen the friendship between the two countries.

## (二) Education

In June 1997, China and Malaysia signed *"The Memorandum of Understanding on Education Cooperation"*, which provided institutional guarantee for systematic and targeted educational exchanges, marked a turning point in China-Malaysia educational cooperation. In September 2003, the Ministry of Education of China accredited some outstanding private institutions in Malaysia, prompting more students to choose study in Malaysia.

In 2009, the two sides renewed the *"Joint Action Plan for Strategic Cooperation"*, which promoted the further development of Chinese language education. In April 2011, China and Malaysia signed the *"Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Degrees"*, clearing away the biggest obstacle in the education cooperation. According to UNESCO statistics, Malaysia recruited 60,244 international students in 2015, with Chinese students ranking first, accounting for 19% of the total<sup>[10]</sup>.

In 2016, China and Malaysia renewed *"The Memorandum of Understanding on Education Cooperation"*, marking a deeper development of education cooperation between China and Malaysia.

The first Confucius Institute was inaugurated in December 2019 at the University of Malaya, followed by SEGi University, Universiti Malaysia Pahang, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and University of Technology Sarawak, which greatly promoted the in-depth development of China-Malaysia educational cooperation. At the same time, Xiamen University Malaysia Branch was officially opened in Malaysia, attracting students from 22 countries and regions along "The Belt and Road". This was a new milestone in the higher education cooperation between China and Malaysia, and has innovated the form of China's foreign cultural exchanges.

In 2022, Hainan Normal University established the "Chinese Bridge" project and organized a professional team to build a bridge of cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia in the form of live online Chinese teaching, cultural lectures and cultural tape-broadcast courses.

## (三) Academic research

The Chinese Ministry of Education and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission have set up a number of research bases and centers in Chinese universities that focus on Malaysia, such as the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Xi'an Siyuan College, the Institute of Malaysian Studies at Xiamen University, the Center for Malaysian Studies at Huaqiao University, ect. In 2017, Sino-Malaysian Cultural Exchange Center of "The Belt and Road" was built by Changjiang Normal College and the Ministry of Education of Malaysia<sup>[11]</sup>. These research institutions in universities have held the China-Malaysia Language, Culture and Translation Seminar, Guangzhou Forum on China-ASEAN People-to-people Exchange, China-Malaysia "The Belt and Road", International Symposium on Maritime Silk Road and other academic forums, which has had a certain influence in the academic world.

# 三、 MUSIC CULTURAL EXCHANGES

In 607, the Sui dynasty sent envoy, *Chang Jun*, to Chitu( the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, called Jintuoli in ancient times), where Indian music was played at the welcome ceremony. Chitu was an important intermediary country for Indian culture to enter China, including Indian Tianzhu music<sup>[12]</sup>.

According to *the book of Sui*, (After Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty ascended the throne, he recruited talents who could travel to distant places. In 607s, he sent Chang Jun, the chief minister of the Tuntian, Wang Junzheng, the chief minister of the Ministry of Yu, and others to visit the Chitu as envoys. The king of Chitu was very pleased and rewarded these envoys a set of clothes that was commonly used at that time, one hundred horses and one hundred pieces of silk, and sent them back. At the same time, these envoy also brought 5,000 items of Sui Dynasty articles to Chitu.....The envoy headed south to Jilong Island and arrived at the border of Chitu. The king of Chitu sent Brahmin Kumara as the leader, driving 30 ships, blowing a kind of musical instrument made of shells, and playing the drum, to welcome the envoys of the Sui Dynasty, all the way to the palace. Chang Jun and other envoys was ordered by the king of Chidu to sit in the seat of honor, while the others all sat in the seats

below. After Chang Jun and others sat down, the king ordered to play Tianzhu music.....In the following days, the king of Chitu would invite Chang Jun and others to a state banquet, which was just like the first reception.....Envoys such as Chang Jun were given a very noble seat, drank in golden vessels, watched various kabuki performances, and received a lot of gifts.....) when Emperor Yang sent envoys to Chitu, the king of Chitu greeted them with drum music, accompanied by Tianzhu music at a banquet in the palace, and finally sent him off with drum music. This series of music activities shows the profound friendship between the two countries, and also reflects the highly developed music culture of Chitu.

The ancient Malays also introduced foreign musical instruments through trade, and Chinese musical instruments such as qin, ruan, drum and clapper were very popular among Kelantan people.

Wang Dayuan, a famous navigator, sailed to the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and as far as the east coast of Africa twice between Yuan Dynasty and Zheng Dynasty. After returned from abroad, he wrote a book called "Daoyi Zhilue" ("Kelantan has a chieftom system, where local people obtain salt by boiling seawater and mainly rely on weaving kapok to make a living. The country produces products such as acronychia pedunculata, betel nut, yellow wax, turtle tube, crane top, and also has a small port outside, producing a large amount of fish and fine linen. It's trade items include tangtou city cloth, zhancheng cloth, qingpan, huawan, red and green xiao zhu, qin, ruan, drum, clapper and other goods." ), which recorded the terrain, products, customs and traditions of various island countries<sup>[13]</sup>. Kelantan is a country in the Malay Peninsula, it's maritime trade goods included qin, ruan, drum and clapper.

When Zheng He set out from Quanzhou on his fifth trip to the West in the 15th to 17th years of Yongle (1417-1419), most of his soldiers came from Fujian province, and were accompanied by musicians from Quanzhou. Later, many of the soldiers stayed in the Malay Peninsula, which created conditions for the spread of Chinese music and opera. By the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, musical dramas in southern Fujian, especially Nanyin, were widely disseminated and developed in Southeast Asian countries, and their musical cultural influence continues to this day.

Chinese opera was already popular in Malaysia in the first half of the 19th century and was performed in the streets, villages, temples and theaters, such as Beijing opera, Cantonese opera, Fujian Gaojia opera, Qiong opera, Han opera, Xiqin opera, Guangdong puppet show and Fujian string puppet show, etc<sup>[14]</sup>. The performances of various Chinese operas in Nanyang not only include colorful traditional plays, but also new and civilized plays that promote revolutionary ideas and the spirit of the times.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Chaozhou music spread widely in Malaysia, where Chaozhou dialect department overseas Chinese lived. Many artists, including Hong Peichen and Su Wenxian, went to Nanyang to spread their arts. They recruited a large number of disciples in Singapore and Malaysia, made poetry and string music popular<sup>[15]</sup>.

During this period, the south Yangzi string and pipe ensemble was also spread in Malaysia, among which the most famous music included: Sanliu, Allegro, Liuqing, Joy Song, Zhonghua Liuban, Xingjie and Siheyi, which became the repertoire frequently played by National music society, which laid the foundation for the creation and development of Hua music.

In the mid 1920s, people could buy "Essential Reading of String Songs" written by Qiu Hechou in the region of Nanyang in 1917, which included popular musical scores such as "Raining on the Bajiao" and "Zhaojun's Complaint". At that time, there were masters from Guangdong teaching Guangdong music and establishing Guangdong music societies in Malaysia, and also formed two performance forms, namely, the hard bow with five heads combination (two-stringed, violin, three-stringed, yueqin and flute) and new musical instrument combination (gaohu, yangqin, qinqin, yughu and caveman). In the 1930s, Cantonese music was already quite popular in Malaysia, which was related to the means of dissemination of Cantonese music. At that time, there were several batches of Cantonese music records sold from Hong Kong and Shanghai to Malaysia, and each batch of new songs were accompanied by Gongche notation(GCN). That provided convenience to learn Cantonese music by many local music lovers in Malaysia, even they could learn without teachers. It has broken through the constraints of traditional oral teaching way in transmitting music<sup>[16]</sup>.

In the early 1950s, Chinese national orchestras were soon introduced to Malaysia. Although the two countries did not establish diplomatic relations at that time, but the Chinese new folk music was still widely spread through records and radio broadcasts, and new Chinese orchestras and bands were established in Malaysia<sup>[17]</sup>.

In the 1980s and 1990s, cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia became increasingly frequent, and some Chinese experts, scholars and music schools were invited to Malaysia for guidance and exchange.

In May 1992, the Malaysian Institute of Art hired Professor Qian Zhaoxi, a Chinese national composer, as a visiting professor to teach Chinese music theory and to conduct Chinese music guidance training courses.

The 24 Seasons Drum jointly created by Malaysian Chinese Chen Huichong and Chen Zaifan in 1988 is an outstanding representative of the achievements in Sino-Malaysian music exchange. In 2009, the Ministry of Culture in Malaysia declared the 24 Seasons Drum as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is one of the only two national intangible cultural heritages created by the Chinese in Malaysia<sup>[18]</sup>. In 2008, Chen Huichong became the first Chinese to receive the "National Cultural Figure" award in Malaysia.

In 2017, breakthroughs were made in the construction of the "One Belt and One Road". The Music Education Alliance actively carried out music cultural exchanges for countries along the road, built academic exchange platform for music and culture, and strengthened education and teaching cooperation with music academies of other countries. But it can be found that Malaysia is absent from the above-mentioned musical exchanges between China and the countries along the Belt and Road<sup>[19]</sup>.

The main reasons for the obstruction of music cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia are as follows: first, there are frequent visits between senior leaders of the two countries, but few contacts between local governments and the people; Second,

the two countries have more interaction in the political and economic fields, while the communication in the music field is obviously insufficient; Third, China takes the initiative to promote its own music culture and carry out music cultural exchanges activities to Malaysia, but Malaysia is not good at promoting local music culture to China<sup>[19]</sup>. This points out the direction for the development of music cultural exchanges between China and Malaysia.

At present, Chinese media has always maintained the status of mainstream media in Malaysia and are very popular among local people, such as *The Little Red Book* and *Tiktok*. At the same time, there are 18 Chinese newspapers in Malaysia, among which the most influential are *Xingzhou Daily*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *China Daily*, *Guangming Daily* and *Oriental Daily*, etc. These Chinese newspapers play an important role in inheriting Chinese culture, safeguarding Chinese interests and promoting Chinese language education<sup>[20]</sup>.

Therefore, in order to strengthen the music cultural exchanges and promote the development of the music culture of between China and Malaysia, it is necessary to make full use of the advantages of the Chinese language media, build a music exchange platform, carry out diversified music cultural exchange activities. This will enhance the feelings between the audiences of both side, jointly promote the construction of the "The Belt and Road" through music cultural exchanges, and realize the common prosperity of the music industry of China and Malaysia.

### Data Availability

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation."

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared that they have no conflicts of interest regarding this work."

### Funding

The work is not supported by any funding."



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