PATTERNS OF REPERTOIRE AMONG TORONTO CHINESE ORCHESTRAS

Cui Yao [崔瑶]

Abstract

Toronto, among the most diverse cities in the world, is home to a massive Chinese diaspora and hosts no fewer than five Chinese orchestras. Varying in size from 20 to 60 members, and in status from professional to amateur, these orchestras have been providing a home for Chinese instrumentalists and exposing Torontonians to Chinese music since 1993. In this article, I analyze the repertoire choices of three of these orchestras since 1993 to consider how their repertoire relates to their members’ identities and the organizations’ goals. In particular, I argue that the repertoire represents complex negotiations of diasporic communities, both with their audiences and among the orchestra members themselves; for instance, these orchestras’ directors seek the balance between new repertoire and old repertoire without losing audiences. Moreover, these negotiations demonstrate the impact of transnationalism (Zheng Su, 2010) and hybridity (Ang Ien, 2003) on diasporic Chinese communities in Toronto. The city’s multicultural environment enables these Chinese orchestras to collaborate with musicians and music groups from different cultural backgrounds. This article provides insights into how the history of Chinese orchestras in Toronto contributes to our understanding of how Chinese diaspora music history is actually Canadian music history.

Keywords

Chinese orchestra, Diaspora, Music repertoire, Hybridity, Transnationalism

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHINESE ORCHESTRA IN CHINA

According to ethnomusicologists Kuo-Huang Han and Judith Gray, the modern Chinese orchestra emerged in Nanking, China, in 1935 and was based on the Jiangnan Sizhu ensemble. It is widely accepted that this type of ensemble was adopted as the model for the modern Chinese orchestra: “judging from the early instrumentation and repertoire of the modern Chinese orchestra, and from the fact that the Jiangnan Sizhu ensemble, though a local genre, employed the most popular Chinese instruments, it is fairly accurate to accept this conclusion” (Han and Gray, 1979: 14).

After the invasions of China by the West and Japan in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, “Chinese intellectuals realized the necessity for modernization” (Han and Gray, 1979: 12). Therefore, the modern Chinese orchestra was highly influenced by the Western symphony orchestra. Even now, although instruments in Chinese orchestras are mainly Chinese instruments, some Western instruments, such as cellos and double-basses, are included because of the need for a bass part to accommodate Western instrumentation (Han and Gray, 1979). In addition, different instruments, such as marimba and harp, are sometimes added to an orchestra to meet the needs of the repertoire.

There are four instrument sections in the modern Chinese orchestra: plucked strings, bowed strings, winds, and percussion. As in the Western symphony orchestra, the musicians typically sit in a semicircle around the conductor (Figure 1). In Chinese communities, this type of ensemble is called a “xiandai minzu guanxian yuetuan” (modern folk philharmonic orchestra), a “xiandai guoyuetuan” (modern national orchestra), or the like (Tsui Ying-fai, 2001: 264).


2 Jiangnan Sizhu ensemble takes its name from the “silk and bamboo” music from south of the Yangtze River, featuring bowed, plucked, and struck strings (the ‘silk’) and bamboo flutes and mouth organ (the “bamboo”) (Witzleben, 2001: 223).
TORONTO-BASED CHINESE ORCHESTRAS

In the Greater Toronto Area, there are five main Chinese orchestras: Toronto Chinese Orchestra (TCO), Ontario Chinese Orchestra (OCO), Canadian Chinese Orchestra (CCO), North America Chinese Orchestra (NACO), and Canada Oriental Chinese Orchestra (COCO).

TCO was founded in 1993 and is the longest running in Canada and the largest Chinese orchestra in Ontario, consisting of about 60 members. The orchestra has both professional and amateur musicians and is composed of five groups: TCO, Toronto Community Chinese Orchestra (TCCO), Toronto Youth Chinese Orchestra (TYCO), Toronto Community Orchestra Chambers Players (TCOCP), and Apex Drumming Team. TCO holds two concerts each year: an annual concert and a small concert. The annual concert is usually held in June and the small concert in December (TCO 2021).

The original members of TCO were a group of Chinese music enthusiasts who had immigrated from Hong Kong to Toronto. In the first decade, they initially played Chinese and Cantonese music. However, in the past 10 years, with the rapid development of Chinese music in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the orchestra started to get in touch with composers and conductors from those regions, with whom they often cooperate.

OCO was founded in 2007 and is the first professional Chinese orchestra in Canada. The orchestra consists of 20 professional Chinese musicians who immigrated to Toronto. The orchestra has an annual concert. Most elements of the repertoire are brought in by professional musicians from mainland China, but it is also influenced to some degree by Cantonese music, as the founder is from Hong Kong.

CCO was founded in 2017. This orchestra features amateur musicians and consists of two orchestras: the Canadian Philharmonic Chinese Orchestra (CPCO) and the Canadian Youth Chinese Orchestra (CYCO). The CPCO consists of 19 members, and the CYCO has 30 members. The orchestra hosts an annual concert.

NACO was established in 2011. The orchestra has about 20 professional performers from the Toronto area serving as resident tutors. With the attraction of some outstanding students who were members of the Chinese Orchestra of the Toronto Chinese Conservatory of Music, the orchestra has also absorbed some amateur Chinese musicians in the Toronto area to form a Chinese orchestra, with nearly 60 members (NACO 2021).

COCO was established in 2017 with about 30 people. Amateurs from the mainland with good levels of performing techniques account for one-third of the orchestra, and the other two-thirds are professionals. They are all from the mainland, and most of them are young. The repertoire is relatively new and is performed at a concert held every year.

Because I am dependent on the availability of archival repertoire records, my paper concentrates on the repertoire of three of these five orchestras: the longest running Chinese orchestra (TCO), which is composed mostly of amateur musicians; the second longest running Chinese orchestra (OCO), which is composed of professional musicians; and one relatively new Chinese orchestra (CCO) with amateur musicians, including youth. The reason why I chose these three rather than other Toronto-based Chinese orchestras is that the records for the NACO (2011) are unavailable to me; the records for Canada Oriental Cultural Orchestra (2017) are too limited to reveal any patterns and also unavailable.

I collected these data on repertoire from the personal collections of program books compiled by directors of the orchestras involved (Figure 2). The program books are not complete; I am currently missing OCO’s 2007–2011, 2012, and 2014 and TCO’s 1993–2007 program books.
CATEGORIZING CHINESE MUSIC

Categorizing Chinese music in diaspora, specifically in Toronto, presents many challenges. First, categories by region may conflict with categories by genre (Figure 2). Indeed, my charts combine both geographic categories and musical genres without clarifying the process of categorizing or possible overlapping categories (e.g., contemporary Korean music). Second, specifying subcategories of music would generate unmanageable degree of complexity.

To capture as many works and performances as possible in a manageable way for my research, I devised the following categories: traditional (except Guangdong music/Cantonese music\(^3\)), new Chinese music, Guangdong, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japanese music, Korean music, Western (except Canada) music, Canadian music, original composition, and world premiere.

According to Wang Yaohua and Du Yaxiong (1999), Chinese traditional music refers to the music created using the methods and forms characteristic of national cultural heritage recognized within the Chinese nation. It includes not only the ancient works composed in history and passed down from generation to generation but also those by contemporary Chinese people with the inherent characteristics of their own nation (Wang Yaohua and Du Yaxiong, 1999).

Since the 1920s and 1930s, people have used “national music” to refer to music passed down from ancient times and preserved in modern times and “new music” to refer to that written by people who have studied Western music and that draws more from Western musical genres and features (ibid., 1999). Therefore “national music” here refers to ‘Chinese traditional music’.

Chinese traditional music is roughly composed of the following four genres: folk (minjian) music, literati music, court music, and religious music. Folk music is divided into folk songs, singing and dancing music, narrative song (说唱音乐), opera music, instrumental music, and comprehensive music. The other genres are less comprehensive. “Court music in China has essentially disappeared as a living tradition, although its legacy lives on in Japan and Korea. Literati music centers on the qin zither and kunqu opera. Ritual music includes state and court ceremonies along with music

\(^3\) The original members of TCO all immigrated from Hong Kong to Toronto. In the 1990s, they initially played Chinese traditional music and Cantonese music. Based on this, I think Guangdong music/Cantonese music merits its own category in a repertoire analysis of Chinese diaspora music in Canada.
performed by Buddhists and Daoists in temples and in other contexts associated with popular religion” (Witzleben, 2001: 129).

### Repertoire Analysis

To better analyze the repertoire, I sorted all the repertoire in the program books of each orchestra into Excel spreadsheets in chronological order of their concerts. I also listed the title, composer, arranger, time period, genre, and performer of each piece of music (Figures 3–13).

![Figure 3: TCO’s repertoire (2010–2011).](image)

![Figure 4: TCO’s repertoire (2008–2009).](image)

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4 All tables and graphics used in this article are created by the author according to her own findings.
Figure 5: TCO’s repertoire (2014–2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Repertoire</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
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Figure 6: TCO’s repertoire (2012–2013).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Repertoire</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2013</td>
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2012–2013 repertoire changes include: [details]

2014–2016 repertoire changes include: [details]
**Figure 7: TCO’s repertoire (2017–2019).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Venue</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Chinese Folk Song</td>
<td>Taipei</td>
<td>National Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Chinese Folk Song</td>
<td>Taipei</td>
<td>National Palace</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>Chinese Folk Song</td>
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<td>Chinese Folk Song</td>
<td>Taipei</td>
<td>National Palace</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**2020 Concert Schedule:**
- **January 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **February 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **March 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **April 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **May 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei

**2021 Concert Schedule:**
- **January 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **February 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **March 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **April 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
- **May 1:** Chinese Folk Song, National Palace, Taipei
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-01-01</td>
<td>Opening Ceremony</td>
<td>Location A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-01-02</td>
<td>Welcome Speech</td>
<td>Location B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-01-03</td>
<td>Keynote Speech</td>
<td>Location C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-01-04</td>
<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td>Location D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-01-05</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Location E</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017-01-06</td>
<td>Closing Ceremony</td>
<td>Location F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Notes:**
- Event was sponsored by XYZ Foundation.
- All sessions were recorded and available for viewing online.
- A designated social event was held on the evening of 2017-01-04.
The repertoire is a significant place to trace musical and social evolutions in Chinese diasporic orchestras. Similarities and differences between the three orchestras in Toronto speak to the patterns of engagement, with types of music, members, and other individuals or organizations.

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Jan 9, 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Feb 10, 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Mar 25, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Apr 23, 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>May 10, 1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Jun 27, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Jul 11, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Sep 25, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Oct 27, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Chamber music concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Nov 29, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Concert</td>
<td>Toronto Chinese Orchestra Hall</td>
<td>Dec 21, 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Toronto Chinese Orchestra (TCO) is committed to raising the standards of Chinese music. We have both amateur and professional musicians working together, with a focus on excellence. We regularly participate in national and international musical exchanges with other Chinese orchestras. We are creating our own repertoire, inviting composers to create new works for our orchestra.
unique Canadian identity. Music is constantly evolving. To continue to grow and thrive in Canada, we must also encourage the creation of new compositions for traditional Chinese instruments and ensembles. We are excited to work with composers to bring new music to our audiences locally and abroad (TCO, 2019).

TCO mission statement:
- Make the best possible music
- Unite lovers of Chinese orchestral music
- Sustain Chinese orchestral music in Canada
- Inspire a future generation in the performance of Chinese orchestral music
- Collaborate with international artists as ambassadors of Chinese orchestral music (TCO 2018; Concert Program Book)

In the 1990s, the TCO played mostly Chinese classical music and music from Guangdong province since people from Cantonese-speaking areas, such as Guangdong, accounted for a large proportion of Chinese immigrants in Toronto at that time. In the past 10 years, alongside traditional music, they have incorporated newer repertoire, and so have cooperated more with music groups from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as non-Chinese musicians and composers. They have also introduced original compositions and world premieres into their concerts (Figure 13).

![TCO Repertoire](image)

**Figure 13: TCO’s repertoire.**

Their program books show that they usually perform some pieces that Chinese audiences are familiar with in order to secure the ticket sales and then include some new pieces. Every year, TCO repeats a few repertoire pieces from the past decade, except for the 2016 concert that consisted of mostly concertos. They also play various genres of music including traditional Chinese music, new Chinese music, Western classical music, popular music, and Canadian folk songs. In this way, the repertoire of TCO is hybridized; it is a fusion of multiple genres of music. The repertoire of their 2017 concert, ‘Canada 150: A Chinese Mosaic’ celebrates some integration with the host culture in the inclusion/selection of Canadian folk songs.

TCO sometimes has cooperated with other music groups. For example, in 2011, they invited Leung Sing Tak School Chinese Orchestra from Hong Kong to Toronto to perform with them and also
invited local groups such as “Spire” band, an East/West fusion band and Center for Information & Community Service’s ‘Ah-Mazing Choir.’ TCO occasionally integrates Chinese and Western instruments, as well as other art forms, into their concerts. In May 2010, they invited a pianist to perform a piano concerto with their orchestra and a dancer to accompany a percussion performance.

Their concerts usually consist mostly of orchestra performances and a few solo performances, but sometimes concerts that mainly consist of concertos are performed by the professional musicians in the orchestra. In 2016, they named the concert “Virtuosos” to reflect a program of performances by member and guest virtuosos. Similar to OCO, TCO has a theme for each concert: ‘Boundless Songs of Love,’ ‘Butterfly Lovers,’ and ‘New Horizons’.

According to my conversations with the musicians of this orchestra, there is a split among its members: one group wants to keep playing old music that people are familiar with; the other wants to perform new music and the music of different composers. The former group does not find new music interesting or attractive; as amateur musicians, their performance level is generally not high, and new music is difficult and unfamiliar to them and there is no way to improve quickly. Some younger members, however, express their yearning for semi-professional development.

Despite this resistance, since 2010, TCO, uniquely, has developed a well-established pattern of producing, supporting, and performing original works. Finally, in 2017, they started a composition competition – TCO Composition Competition – that sought to connect emerging Canadian composers with Chinese orchestral music in order to produce new compositions. However, the composition competition ceased in 2018 because the director did not have the energy or resources to host an annual competition. The orchestra’s announcement serves as a basic introduction to the competition:

**BACKGROUND**

The TCO is proud to announce a composition competition. This competition seeks to connect emerging Canadian composers with Chinese orchestral music in order to produce a new composition. Winning composer(s) will have their work premiered during the TCO’s 2017-2018 concert season, at their 25th Anniversary Gala Concert in June 2018 (TCO 2018; Concert Program Book).

**ELIGIBILITY**

The competition is open to emerging Canadian composers (citizens or permanent residents). There are no age restrictions. Jurists, TCO artistic leadership, and TCO board of directors are ineligible to apply (TCO, 2018; Concert Program Book).

There were two winners in this competition: Qinglin Bruce Bai and Lucas Oickle. Bruce Bai was born in China and pursued his musical education and career as a composer, songwriter, sound designer, and solo-performing artist in Vancouver. He has focused on combining Eastern and Western music, and his goal is to ‘learn from tradition and innovate for the future’ (TCO 2018; Concert Program Book). Unlike Bruce Bai, Lucas Oickle has no Chinese cultural background. He was born in Nova Scotia and received his Bachelor of Music and Master of Music in Canada. He has won various composition competitions and received many awards. ‘He is always open to new projects-commissions, arrangements, collaborations, creating education materials, music from the film, video games, and more’ (TCO, 2018; Concert Program Book).

Similarly, my fellow graduate student in Ethnomusicology, Marko Koumoulas, participated in the TCO composition competition in 2017. He told me he knew nothing about those Chinese music instruments before he composed. His composition was largely based on his Western composition
knowledge and his own vision in Chinese music. In this sense, he was essentially composing Western music (maybe with some Chinese flavour) for Chinese instruments.

On the one hand, the orchestra invites Canadian composers in Canada to participate in this competition as a way to encourage Canadian composers to engage with Chinese music and contribute their own interpretation and understanding, as well as composing techniques (Western or non-Western), into Chinese music to produce new music. In this sense, this initiative could be considered to be a process of localization. On the other hand, such development can be seen as globalizing. It allows Chinese music to expand beyond the limits of the Chinese community. In this sense, its encouragement of hybrid compositional techniques works against the ghettoization of Canadian ethnic enclaves to promote cultural exchange. But it is a back-and-forth process allowing for adjustment of the repertoire depending on the experience of rehearsal and the availability of performers.

In recent years, the TCO’s repertoire has been partly determined by the TCO music director’s personal networks and, especially her communication with the conductor of the Taiwan Little Giant Chinese Chamber Orchestra, which is based in Taipei and is famous for incorporating new repertoire. The Taiwanese conductor gives the director some suggestions and helps the TCO to choose repertoire. Through his own professional networks, the Taiwanese conductor has access to scores of new repertoires. In this way, TCO not only has new repertoire but also has gradually kept up with the pace of Taiwan.

ONTARIO CHINESE ORCHESTRA

Similarly, the OCO has roots in a Cantonese-speaking diaspora. A professional orchestra founded in 2007 and the first professional Chinese orchestra in Canada, the vision of OCO is to ‘provide a reliable and effective platform for ... performers allowing them to bring their expertise of Chinese folk music to this multi-cultural community to be accepted and enjoyed by the community and at the same time, allow them to continue to flourish their musical talents’ (OCO, 2016; Concert Program Book). The objective of the orchestra is to ‘introduce and leverage Chinese folk music to the Canadian society and provide an opportunity to the community to enjoy high-quality professional performance’ (OCO, 2016; Concert Program Book).

In the past decade, OCO’s repertoire has been almost exclusively Chinese music. They do not usually play popular music or non-Chinese movie theme music. Their repertoire also does not include any Canadian music. Unlike TCO, they do not repeat their repertoire often. Peter Bok, the president of the OCO, is a Chinese music enthusiast originally from Hong Kong. He wanted to provide a platform where Toronto-based Chinese professional musicians can get together and present their talents (Bok and Cui Yao, 2020). He pays the musicians to rehearse and perform, and the orchestra must generate sales in order to cover his costs and perhaps even make a profit. Compared to the other two orchestras, the professional OCO uses a more profit-oriented model; therefore, audience preferences strongly influence the selection of repertoire. Bok is the main person who decides the repertoire. George Gao is the music director of the orchestra and sometimes helps Bok to choose the repertoire. However, Bok, as president, feels that he knows best what the audience will like: ‘I know my target audience. 70% of them are from Hong Kong. I know what they want. And I know their taste, so that’s how I decide’ (Bok and Cui Yao, 2020).

The proportion of traditional music in OCO’s repertoire is waning year by year; new music is growing; but Guangdong music/Cantonese music is almost always present. From 2016, original compositions begin to appear (Figure 14). Bok says the orchestra performs Guangdong music to draw the attention of audience members from Hong Kong, especially those over 60 years old; they usually only play one or two pieces of Guangdong music, unless the whole concert is devoted to Guangdong music (Bok and Cui Yao 2020). This consistent pattern of Guangdong music representation shows the director’s identity.
Figure 14: OCO’s repertoire.

I asked Bok to tell me what change had taken place in OCO’s repertoire in the past decades. His response was ‘a lot.’ He explained that OCO used to play old music; it was outdated, so they tried to expand their repertoire. Bok has had to find the balance between new and old. Otherwise, OCO would risk losing some audience members. Bok explained ‘we always try to insert at least some new idea or new music because otherwise, if we are not improving, we are staying the same and we get left behind.’

Bok uses many approaches to choosing repertoire. The easiest is going through other orchestras’ past concerts and adopting the themes, then creating the OCO’s own repertoire. For example, a concert theme may be movie music that comes from a movie’s soundtrack. Another approach is catering to the guest artists they invite for each year’s concert by seeking repertoire suitable for the artist.

At the beginning, OCO engaged only its own members as performers in their concerts, but because after six or seven annual concerts the repertoire had lost its novelty, they began to invite guest performers. OCO has invited guests from mainland China and Hong Kong through the personal connections of the music director, Bok, and the orchestra members. OCO aims to bring Chinese professional musicians to perform on the stages of Toronto. Most of the members of OCO graduated from Chinese conservatories. They are deeply linked with their homeland, and they know famous professors and musicians from China.

The increase of Chinese immigrants in the ethnoscape in Canada has certainly enhanced the Chinese music scene in Canada. Before the 1990s, Chinese associations in Toronto were mostly organized by immigrants from Hong Kong. In 1992, immigrants from mainland China established their own associations (Wang Shuguang and Lo, 2005). Starting in the 1990s, numerous professionals from mainland China immigrated to Canada, including many professional musicians. Their arrival has improved the overall level of Chinese orchestras in Canada and enabled their repertoire to keep pace with that of mainland China.

In her book ‘Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America’, Zheng Su states that

“in the field of music making, an individual musician’s network moves beyond immediate kin to include several other sets of social relations. The primary set consists of the people to whom the individual musician can relate in terms of premigratory homeland experience, such as ex-colleagues, conservatory alumni, people in the same musical circle from the same city, or simply others from the same homeland” (Zheng Su, 2010: 132).
It can be seen from OCO’s choice of guest artists that the individual network plays an essential role. For example, in 2018, they invited Liu Changfu, a renowned erhu virtuoso, educator, and composer from mainland China, who also happens to be the father-in-law of the resident erhu soloist of OCO, Baixue. They also invited Anna Guo, a Chinese Canadian yangqin master, and Liu Jiayin, a pianist and daughter of Liu Changfu, to perform for their concert. Liu Changfu performed two of his original works.\(^5\) Through members’ networks, the orchestra has continuously invited guest artists from mainland China to perform in Toronto in the past decade.

**Canadian Chinese Orchestra**

The CCO supports new repertoire and collaboration in its programming. Founded in 2017, the CCO is a nonprofessional orchestra with two groups: the CPCO (whose mostly middle-aged members are generally amateurs, with some professional instrumental teachers) and the CYCO. The CCO states that their goal is to challenge the boundaries of Chinese music-making and Chinese music communities from within and create a healthy environment for both the professional players and the music enthusiasts. It will also serve as a platform for musicians to challenge themselves to new repertoires and ensemble playing. The CCO seeks to improve by collaborating with different organizations in the future to promote Chinese musical culture and arts (CCP 2019; Concert Program Book).

I primarily focus on the CCO Youth Orchestra because of the availability of the concert program books and live performance. Their repertoire includes both ‘classical Chinese favorites’ and popular music, which allows younger players members to show off their technique and ‘coolness.’ Among these three orchestras, CCO’s repertoire reflects more cultural and musical diversity including, for example, Japanese movie/animation music, Chinese and Korean TV series music, and popular music from mainland China and Taiwan (Figure 15).

![CCO Repertoire](Figure 15: CCO’s repertoire.)

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\(^5\) The information is based on the orchestra’s 2018 program book.
Amely Zhou, the director of CCO, tends to select pieces that are melodically rich and comparatively new. Zhou notes that, under her direction, the orchestra also makes new arrangements; for example, when some members of the youth orchestra expressed interest in playing the ‘Star Wars’ theme music, Zhou suggested that the members arrange the music themselves and supervised them in doing so. In this way, the youth orchestra members influence the choice of repertoire to some degree and can show their initiative in choosing and performing music. In recent years, more and more arrangements and original compositions from youth members of the orchestra have appeared in their repertoire.

Zhou sometimes invites musicians from different cultures to perform with the orchestra. For example, in 2019, she invited Korean musicians from Toronto to perform with them. She applauds the fact that in Toronto we have such rich resources and opportunities to encounter different cultures and music. Since the youth members are also interested in learning about their own culture, she wants to instill in them the idea that cultures need to work together and communicate with each other.

On October 17, I was invited to watch their 2020 online live concert, which was held on YouTube at 7 pm. It was a fundraising concert called ‘Confluence’.

“...For the purpose of reconnecting everyone through music during this distant time, CCO presents our first-ever virtual fundraising concert – ‘CONFLUENCE 融.’ ‘Confluence’ means merging and rejoining, representing the welcoming and inclusive theme of the concert as well as the aim of reuniting through these distant times. The show presents the audience with a grand music feast featuring a variety of Chinese traditional instruments through solos and duets. All proceeds raised in the concert will go toward supporting CCO to provide opportunities such as purchasing new orchestra instruments, supporting the scholarship programs, and providing better rehearsal space for the near future. We hope you join us in our cause for a more diverse, inclusive, and culturally aware community!” (CCO, 2020: n.p.).

This concert demonstrates yet another variable in repertoire correlated to age and level of technique. Since all members of both groups who were interested in this concert were allowed to participate in the performance, the participants were made up of more amateur musicians ranging from teenage to middle age. This online live concert was internally organized so the members had the opportunity to choose the music themselves. From this concert, it can be seen that the younger generation tends to play their favorite music and music that can best reflect their performance level. By contrast, middle-aged and elderly members prefer to play ‘classic Chinese music.’

An interesting fact I found from their repertoire was that in recent years, more and more arrangements and original compositions have been presented. These pieces were composed by members of the youth orchestra. This indicates that the orchestra encourages and supports young musicians to be more creative and have their own ideas.

**Repetoire Repetition**

Here is the repeating repertoire of TCO, OCO, and CCO.

**TCO Repertoire Repetition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Guests from Afar</td>
<td>2008,</td>
<td>2013,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night of the Torch Festival</td>
<td>2008,</td>
<td>2012,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonlight over Spring River</td>
<td>2008,</td>
<td>2011,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying Apsaras</td>
<td>2008,</td>
<td>2013,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest Festival</td>
<td>2009,</td>
<td>2014,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao Dance (Dance of Yao People)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2010,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring over Xiang River</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flying Dragon Leaping Tiger</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Lament of Lady Zhao Jun 2012, 2015
Layers ll 2013
Wild Game 2015, 2017

**OCO repertoire repetition**

Joyous 2015, 2017
Autumn Moon on a Placid Lake 2011, 2015
Beautiful Flowers under Full Moon 2011, 2015
Moonlight over Spring River 2013, 2015

**CCO repertoire repetition**

Chrysanthemum Terrace 2017, 2020
A Stroll at the Embankment Su 2017, 2020

**TCO, OCO and CCO shared repertoire**

Autumn Moon on a Placid Lake OCO 2011, 2015; TCO 2014
Beautiful Flowers under Full Moon OCO 2011, 2015; TCO 2014
When the Grapes Are Ripen TCO 2013; OCO 2015
Lament of Lady Zhao Jun TCO 2012, 2015; OCO 2018
New Racing Horse, Racing Horse TCO 2012 CCO 2017
A Stroll at the Embankment Su OCO 2017; CCO 2017
Spring Arrives at Xiangjiang TCO 2008, 2011; CCO 2020
General’s Command TCO 2009; CCO 2018
Night of the Torch Festival TCO 2008, 2012; CCO 2019
Hanging the Red Lantern OCO 2017; CCO 2019
Dream of Red Chamber Suite, Dream of Red Chamber Overture TCO 2014, CCO 2019
Moon Reflects on the Second Spring TCO 2009, OCO 2015, CCO 2017

From the list above, we can see that every orchestra repeats the repertoire to varying degrees. Among the three orchestras, TCO has the highest repetition rate. I believe the reason why TCO repeats music so frequently is mainly that they lack music scores and there are fewer sources and approaches to obtain music scores. In contrast, OCO has rarely repeated music in the past decade. Almost all of the orchestra members graduated from conservatories and have accumulated many music scores. In addition, they also know numerous people in the industry and can obtain music scores more conveniently and quickly. CCO is the youngest orchestra among these three, with only less than 5 years of performing history, so they have not needed to repeat music yet. The repertoire items shared by these three orchestras have been mostly composed before 2000. These titles are ‘regular’ repertoire selections of Chinese orchestras and ensembles in mainland China.

**CONCLUSION**

These three orchestras represent the longest established professional and young orchestras in the Toronto area. Each orchestra’s repertoire has its own characteristics that reflect their identities, performance level, generational makeup, and relations to trends of transnationalism and globalization. Choosing repertoire is a complex back-and-forth process. It relates to a series of issues: Who is available (guest artists)? What kind of music do they want on the program (both guest artists and the orchestra director)? Should the program be focused or varied (the orchestra director)? If varied, what kind of variety is appropriate (the orchestra director)?

Evidence from their repertoire lists shows that each orchestra changes over time. Over the years, these orchestras have frequently cooperated and exchanged ideas with musicians and composers.
from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and their main target audience is the Chinese communities within the group. At the same time, Toronto’s multicultural environment enables these Chinese orchestras to collaborate with musicians and music groups from different cultural backgrounds. Through these twin influences, the repertoires of these three Chinese orchestras have gradually kept up with the pace of change in mainland China and also that of other countries and regions, while paying attention to original music and arrangements. As my analysis shows, these orchestras are evolving in separate but related ways in their repertoires. Each provides a window into distinct diasporic musical experience and possibility.

REFERENCES


