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***MUSICAL PRACTICES, CULTURAL POLITICS AND HUMAN MOBILITY  
IN THE MACAU CHINESE ORCHESTRA***

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**Abstract:** *Political and social transition in a territory raises a set of variables that affect music developed by groups of individuals involved in this process. The study of musical performance of the Macau Chinese Orchestra allows us to understand how local identities are constructed and represented. The presentation and representation of the Orchestra abroad is made by Chinese instruments and a repertoire that, according to this institution integrates various musical genres from traditional Chinese melodies, song adaptations produced in Portugal, western music and contemporary Chinese music. Founded by the Macau Cultural Institute in 1987, this orchestra has forty musicians and already has performances in various countries around the world, such as the Special Administrative Region of Macau, China, Portugal and other European countries. The structure and the public presentation of the orchestra is made in accordance with type of audience and performance space and time of year. Musical performances carried between this orchestra and Portuguese musicians are one of the main cultural programs developed by Macau Cultural Institute. In addition, most musicians of this orchestra were born in Mainland China and Taiwan, with few exceptions of Hong Kong and Macau. The cultural policies implemented in musical education structures and the cultural and regional context are described by these musicians as crucial elements in the music they produce, specifically in instrumental performance. Expressive practice produced in the context of this orchestra is characterized by a specific cultural program that is mediated and communicated by musical practice developed by these musicians and the musical partnerships between them and Portuguese musicians.*

**Keywords:** *musical practices, cultural politics, human mobility, Macau Chinese Orchestra*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork (2014) conducted in Macau Chinese Orchestra allowed one study and understand the functioning of this cultural structure at various levels. The cultural program and musical performance of the orchestra are determined by the Cultural Institute of the Macau Special Administrative Region. The establishment of this cultural program and the type of musical materialization is made according to a specific set of circumstances, including the place of performance and the historical and cultural landmarks considered relevant by the inhabitants, power structures and local representation.

The organization of concerts in partnership with Portuguese musicians was done on a regular basis, thus constituting one of the most prominent expressive materializations of institutional discourse:

... the orchestra will continue to play the role of cultural ambassador of the Special Administrative

Region of Macau. Whether abroad or within China, the orchestra (...) aims to promote the [Macau] city as a melting point of single cultures where East meets West<sup>1</sup>.

The history of Macau was marked by a period of Portuguese sovereignty. Macau's sovereignty was transferred to China in 20th December, 1999. This political and social transition was a very important moment for Macau's inhabitants and diplomatic relationship between Portugal and China. One of the main cultural institutionalizations was the foundation of Macau Chinese Orchestra (1987). In the late 80s the orchestra was characterized by the creation of an amateur Chinese orchestra. During the 90s the orchestra acquired the ability and the means to become professional. In that way, Macau Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from "Programa da Temporada de Concertos 2013-2014", p. 20.

Orchestra was founded and used to sustain and intermediate the local cultural politics, in specifically determined by Cultural Institute.

In the beginning of my fieldwork I was confronted with institutional discourse, where the orchestra was presented like a united entity with well defined sound and music. However, after spending several days interviewing various musicians that make up this orchestra, I realized the existence of another perspective and discourse about musical practice developed under this cultural institution. The majority of the musicians talked about personal experience in a special professionalization process and the way that it influenced the music and the relationships developed between them and their musical instruments. Besides that, the great majority of these musicians came from Mainland China and Taiwan, a fact that is very relevant and extremely important for understanding how the Macau Chinese Orchestra was made and different influences that determined the musical performance constructed and presented by this orchestra.

The main purpose of this article is to present the study about how Macau Chinese Orchestra works and how different personal experiences of the musicians are integrated in the institutional and musical activity of this orchestra. The relation between human mobility and cultural politics will be one of the central points of this article.

## 2. KNOWING THE FIELD

The uniform presented by the orchestra is black. The men wear suits and the women a black sweater and a long skirt. The disposition of the orchestra is analogous to a Western classical orchestra. In the absence of the conductor, the concertmaster (Zhang Yueru) is responsible for setting the direction of the orchestra. According Phoebe [a cultural institute officer], when necessary, the orchestra is divided into two groups which are used to support smaller concerts. At the time of the larger concerts the orchestra is conducted by Pang Ka Pang in the *tutti* form (...) In the case of this concert, most of the pieces use the Western notation (pentagram) as opposed to numerical notation (简谱 *Jianpu*), Macau, February 20th 2014<sup>2</sup>

This concert was very important for my fieldwork because was the first contact that I had with the orchestra, specifically with the officers and musicians. Visual and sonic aspects were the main parts that I considered important to register and understand. The constitution of this particular performance presented a specific formal wear,

disposition and repertoire. The visual presentation was characterized by the usage of black formal wear and by an adoption of a specific instrumental disposition, one that is commonly used and adopted in western classical orchestras. The instruments were all Chinese with exception of cellos and basses. The repertoire was composed mainly of traditional Chinese music and Hong Kong popular movie soundtracks. The public was Chinese. Besides the institutional discourse, one important aspect of this orchestra was the relation and adaptation of musical practice to different kinds of audiences and performance spaces, which are predominantly Chinese or specific Macau cultural contexts.

Interviews introduced other perspectives about this musical practice. Several musicians underline the importance of their personal experiences, more specifically their cultural background and musical professional experience. In their opinion these factors had a presence in their musical practice, so I started to be interested in the study of these relations and, more importantly their effect in the expressive practice that is produced and carried out by Macau Chinese Orchestra. On the other side the cultural program delineated by this orchestra brings a variety of other questions concerning the sound and musical production not by a single musician, but by a group of musicians (orchestra).

Knowing this field was the major and most useful way to understand and study of how musical practice affects local identity. Rehearsals, concerts and meetings, and after that interviews, were the key moments of my fieldwork because through them I gained the opportunity to be recognized by the people, by the officers and musicians.

## 3. MACAU CHINESE ORCHESTRA

The central idea of the Macau Chinese Orchestra institutional discourse is that Macau is a place of meetings and dialogue between Western and Chinese cultures. In the presence of this discursive activity, I was interested in understand how such representations are created and communicated by this cultural institution, particularly in the expressive practices developed by this orchestra. The construction of institutional discourses about the orchestra is made by the media and through the promotion of the Cultural Institute.

Gonçalo Magalhães, an official of the Cultural Institute, says that the work in this area of communication is mainly characterized by the meeting and subsequent selection of videos, and photographs that convey the concepts that the

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from the field diary.

institution intends to promote<sup>3</sup>. For example, the videos of the orchestra presentation are produced and adapted to different destinations. This adjustment is made depending on the objectives of the tour and above all according to the cultural contexts involved in the orchestra performances of reception (e.g. China, Portugal, Macau). Towards this reality, I formulate the following question: what are the contents of the various adjustments made on the promotional narrative of the Macau Chinese Orchestra? How does institutional promotional discourse affect the expressive practice developed in the context of the orchestra?

My fieldwork allowed me to view activities of this musical group in two distinct geographical and cultural contexts including in Macau and Portugal. By comparison, I found that the institutional promotional speech was adapted and acquired a particular character in relation to the geographical contexts previously referenced. The institutional discourse founded in Macau identifies the orchestra as a means of artistic promotion and solidarity and social intervention. During the tour in Portugal, it underlined the concept about dialogue between Chinese and Portuguese culture. In short, the institutional discourse of the orchestra is based on the idea that the orchestra is a means of local representation (Macau) and dialogue between East and West. However, the way this idea is communicated and enhanced varies with the spatial and contextual performance spaces.



Fig.1 Rehearsal for concert "Hope for the future"  
(Macau, March 21, 2014, 17:30)

In Macau I found a variety of performance contexts. Concerts in *Lou Lim Ieoc* garden, Chinese temples, museums and big concert halls had well determined cultural experiences associated with a specific public. This audience is characterized predominantly by the local Chinese.

The repertoire is compound by traditional Chinese music, soundtracks from Hong Kong movies, contemporary classical Chinese music and some folk songs. However, concerts produced in tourist areas included, in the institutional perspective, a large variety of music, more specifically songs and music that are easily recognized by both local inhabitants and foreigners (e.g. "Greensleeves"). Some concerts in Macau included Portuguese music (e.g. Fado) and western classical music.

Musical collaborations between Portuguese musicians and the Macau Chinese Orchestra are well featured in each annual cultural seasonal program. Portuguese musicians, usually Fado singers and Portuguese guitar players, are invited by the Cultural Institute. The contact normally is established because some musicians play in local musical festivals (e.g. "Festival de Artes de Macau"). These concerts present Chinese music and music from Portugal, ordinarily Fado and traditional music (e.g. "Tia Anica do Loulé"). Concerts in Portugal have a well determined structure. The first part of the concert has some Chinese music and music specifically produced for this orchestra (e.g. "Macau" by Rão Kyao). The second part presents a considerable amount of Fado and traditional Portuguese music:

(...) The OCHM prepared three different programs to display on the 16th, 18th, 19th and 21st of July in the Largo do Teatro São Carlos in Lisbon, Fórum Luisa Todi in Setubal, Teatro Cine in Torres Vedras and Quinta das Lágrimas in Coimbra respectively showing the charm of Chinese traditional music. This tour to Portugal takes place on the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Portugal and China, so it has even more meaning (...) promoting the exchange of culture and strengthening the friendly relations between China and Portugal. the OCHM, under the baton of its artistic director Pang Ka Pang, has commissioned works representative of the area's culture and will collaborate for the first time with the famous singer Maria Ana Bobone (...) and again with the composer and Portuguese flute player Rão Kyao, under the theme of the 6th Festival of Coimbra Arts "Cultural Heritage (...)"<sup>4</sup>

In these concerts, the orchestra supports harmonically one main melodic line (vocal or instrumental) that is played by specific musicians. Soloists are very important in these performances, normally they are Portuguese musicians like, for example, Rão Kyao, guitar players (e.g. Pedro Caldeira Cabral) or Fado singers (eg. Maria Ana Bobone). Musical arrangements are written by

<sup>3</sup> Gonçalo Magalhães interview on October, 21th 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt taken from Macau Chinese Orchestra press release (translation from Portuguese to English).

Chinese composers and sometimes by Portuguese musicians (Rão Kyao) according to the type of concert and musical collaborations. In the absence of Portuguese guitar players or Fado singers, the melodic line that would be supported by them in the original version is played by alternative instruments (eg. Portuguese guitar replaced by *liuqin*<sup>5</sup>). Instrumental choices are defined by the orchestra department and composers. The reasons that underline this kind of instrumental choices are justified by the sound similarities between some Portuguese musical instruments and Chinese musical instruments.

The Macau Chinese orchestra musical performance is produced and defined by and under a great variety of local and cultural circumstances. People involved in this musical practice are characterized by particular, and in some cases, well defined musical experience. Besides institutional discourse, I thought it equally important to understand other perspectives and discourses about music produced carried by this orchestra. The next section will be used to explain the orchestra musicians perspectives about the relationship between music and local and cultural circumstances.

#### 4. MUSICIANS

The vast majority of the songs we play are traditional Chinese and each of us is better at playing the repertoire that is part of our cultural universe" (Lai Yi-Shan, Macau, March 31, 2014).



Fig.2 Erhu player of the Macau Chinese Orchestra

Over the past two years I considered it important to include the life stories of different actors involved in the Macau Chinese Orchestra. The life paths of these musicians are a key element to understanding the influence that the historical, cultural and political past have in musical

professionalization and the expressive practice currently produced by them. The major historical events that have shaped cultural activity in China, specifically mainland China, Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan, were the establishment of the Republic of China (1917), the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949) and Cultural revolution (1966-1976). Cultural policies, the emergence of power bodies (cultural institutions, education systems, communication and distribution facilities) have determined the appearance, thought, activity and reception of expressive practices, in this case music. The political and social history of China has a very strong presence in the speeches of the musicians of this orchestra. The testimonies that follow are Zhang Yueru and Lai I-Shan orchestra musicians.

Cultural and geographical contexts related to naturalness and the musical professionalization processes of Zhang Yueru and Lai I-Shan determined the expressive practices developed by them. The aim of this study was to understand where and how the musical practice of these two *erhu*<sup>6</sup> players was built and defined.

The learning pathways and professionalization of these musicians are characterized by contact with Western and Chinese musical teachings, musical education acquired from public schools (conservatories), and for the access and attendance of higher education, which in both cases meant going to other major urban centers such as Beijing and Shanghai.

I was born [in 1979] and grew up in Shanghai. I started studying *erhu* too early. One day we received people at home. Their goal was to find children with the capacity to learn music. With just a few years I was subjected to a series of tests (...) I start learning percussion instruments and read *jianpu* [Chinese notation]. Years later, I went to the Shanghai Music Conservatory, where I learned to play *erhu* and to read Western notation. In the Shanghai Conservatory I received my graduate degree in *erhu* and then did my specialization in *gaohu* [instrumental variant *erhu*]. In 2004, I went to the China Central Orchestra and was admitted as concertmaster in the Macau Chinese Orchestra<sup>7</sup>.

In Taiwan, children begin to learn to play an instrument at 9 years. I started studying *erhu* when I was 11 years old, until that age I was learning piano. One day my mother decided that I should choose another instrument. At age 11 I started learning to play *erhu* with a teacher in Taiwan. At 13 I changed to another teacher from China

<sup>5</sup> Four stringed Chinese plucked musical instrument.  
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<sup>6</sup> Two stringed bowed Chinese musical instrument.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Yueru, interview on March 20th, 2014 (Macau).

[mainland]. Teaching had become more typical and traditional. Between 16 and 18 I continued my studies in high school in a music school where all classes were devoted to musical practice. At 18 I went to the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music, where I studied for six years. Compared to teaching music in Taiwan, I think Beijing is more typical and the transmission of knowledge is more direct. In China there is more concentration on a single activity. If you touch the piano, you start to play the piano at 5 years and dedicate your whole life to it. In Taiwan, there is a more diverse study (music, Chinese, English, mathematics ...) and, it is more comprehensive<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding higher education in music, both Zhang and I-Shan stressed the regional specificity with which the *erhu* is practiced in northern and southern China. According to Zhang Yueru, the fact of having been born in Shanghai and having acquired his musical education in this city were factors that contributed largely to his subsequent specialization in cantonese *gaohu*. Regional specificities marked the understanding that musicians have about musical repertoire, as well as the physical and cultural relationship (body posture, instrumental performance technique and associated school) with personal musical instruments. In the case of *erhu* there are definite regional differences in instrumental performance and the size of the instrument, which in turn affects the timbre and volume level of the instrument.

The *erhu* position varies depending on the regional context and type of musical performance. In northern China, specifically in Beijing, this tool is supported under the left leg of the instrumentalist, while in Shanghai, the instrumental variant *gaohu* is supported between the player's legs. This difference of support and position between the *erhu* and Cantonese *gaohu* are due to the fact that in Shanghai, especially in the context of Cantonese opera, the function of the *gaohu* is to perform a melodic accompaniment of the vocal section. According to Zhang, the support of the *gaohu* between the legs enables the control of volume and the tonal expressiveness of the sound produced. Variations of expressiveness and sound volume of the instrument are conducted and produced by the body movements of the musician, specifically the fluid movements of the legs, torso and right wrist. In Beijing, the *erhu* is an instrument with a strong presence in solos. The instrumental performance techniques, particularly how the musician moves, accurately and fluidly, and the arch through the right wrist produce maximum sound volume.

The association between regional culture and the sound of the *erhu* is referred by some orchestra musicians as an important relationship to stress. Mandarin and Cantonese are tonal languages. The range of heights and the amount of accurate intonations characterize the expression of these languages. Many musicians say that when they touch their instruments, they always think of a sung melody. The fact that the Mandarin accent in Beijing is presented at a greater volume is seen by some musicians, notably by I-Shan, as an element that characterizes and influences the way sound is produced by musicians who learned to play *erhu* in this context. In turn, in Shanghai the most used language is Mandarin along with the local dialects. The Mandarin accent in Shanghai is softer and has a lower volume. In the Canton region it is found that, compared to Mandarin, the Cantonese dialect presents a greater range of heights and intonations. These linguistic differences are taken by these musicians as factors that influence the expressiveness of musical instruments. In southern China, the sound produced by the *erhu* and its instrumental version, the *gaohu* is described by Zhang Yueru as having a softer and lower volume.

From these two musicians I could understand how important and decisive the cultural and political contexts in the musical professionalization of each of the orchestra musicians. The institutionalization and the resulting standardization of teaching and musical professionalization process have, in my view, a direct relationship with the cultural policies enacted by local power structures. In short, the existence of the different forms of execution and conceptualization that these musicians have over their musical practices have resulted in a set of performances that, from both the physical point of view and from the sound and expressive points of view, reflect the variety of regional characteristics, educational systems and even different cultures represented in musical performance.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Cultural policies, the emergence of cultural institutions, educational systems, communication and distribution facilities have determined the activity and the receipt of expressive practices, in this case the creation of contemporary Chinese orchestras. Contemporary Chinese orchestras were created from the application of the structure and instrumental arrangement used in Western classical orchestras at Chinese music, specifically the traditional Chinese music groups consisting mainly of string and wind instruments (e.g. *Jiangnan*

<sup>8</sup> Lai I-Shan, interview on March 26th, 2014 (Macau).

*Sizhu*) (Lau, 2008). Understanding these realities allows us to understand the interactions between the life stories of musicians, with special focus on the professional process, and the discursive and expressive practices that the Macau Chinese Orchestra produces and represents. Concerts are regularly organized with the participation of Portuguese and Chinese musicians. The study of these musical partnerships is important to understand the cultural policies of the institutions and geographical areas involved. The construction of the identity representations of Região Administrativa Especial de Macau (R.A.E.M.) are meticulously planned and adapted to the objectives of the concerts and the circumstances of the performance space.

What determines the activity of this orchestra are rehearsals, meetings and concerts, along with the spaces in which they are held relationships are defined according to a set of rules, where each agent and each space acquires specific functions and roles. Rehearsals are a place to explore different ways of sound production, concerts are where a musical performance is produced and communicated, and the meetings are part of an important moment in the daily lives of musicians and staff who work daily with the orchestra. The management of ideas and impressions about R.A.E.M. is done continuously through the creation of annual programs, behind the scenes and public exposure to the musical group and to groups of musicians, which are characterized by mobility between specific spaces (China, Portugal, Macau):

It has been suggested that the object of a performer is to sustain a particular definition of the situation, this representing, as it were, his claim as to what reality is (Goffman, 1956:53)

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