



24 *Jie Ling Gu* (24 Festive Drums): Imagining the 24 *Jie Ling* (Phenomena) of China in Enacting Cultural Solidarity among the Chinese Diaspora of Malaysia

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Abstract

The 24 *Jie Ling Gu* (24 Festive Drums) is a drum ensemble that consists of 24 lion drums (*shigu*) played by twenty-four drummers who move to spectacular and dynamic choreography in synchronization with the rhythmic patterns struck on the *shigu*. It is an “invented tradition” created by the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia. In response to the 1970s National Cultural Policy (NCP) which aimed toward the construction of a homogenized national identity, the Chinese founded the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* ensemble to enact cultural solidarity and unify the people toward a sense of belonging to their distant motherland in China. They created the music and movements of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* to manifest the 24 *jie ling* (phenomena) – the weather changes, agricultural activities, and natural phenomenon inherent in the 24 *jie qi* (*jie*: joints; *qi*: breath) or seasonal periods. Due to the fact that the Chinese of Malaysia have not physically experienced China but are connected to it through literature and media technology, I argue that the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* performers utilized their imagination and localized experience of Malaysia to manifest the 24 *jie ling* in China. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork and ongoing revisits to this genre through a span of more than 20 years.

Keywords: 24 festive drums, 24 *Jie Ling Gu*, Chinese drum ensemble, diaspora, *jie qi*, invented tradition

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INTRODUCTION

The earliest traces of Chinese settlements in Malaya were found in Malacca – a historical state situated along the South West coast of Peninsular Malaysia. These settlements were founded by Hokkien traders who came from China to trade with the Malaccan Sultanate around the years 1400 A.D. The Chinese men from this entourage married local women in Malacca and formed a community known as the Baba

Chinese. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Chinese from the regions of Guangdong and Fujian in China arrived in Malaya as labourers seeking new economic opportunities offered by the British mercantile and administrative presence in the Straits Settlements (Pan, 1998, p. 96). Many of them were driven by poverty and despair brought about by agrarian problems, overpopulation, natural calamities, and landlord exploitation in China. In Malaya, the Chinese found work

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as labourers in tin mines; pepper or gambier; plantations; sugar and tapioca fields (Yen, 1995, p. 1).

The current population of the Chinese in Malaysia is 6,716.9 million (20.5%) of a total population of 32,655 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). They comprise five major dialects: Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, and Hakka. These groups brought the culture, customs and practices, social etiquettes, literature, philosophy, religion, festivals, music, dance and drama from their regions of origin in China (Yen, 1995, p. 12). The early Chinese immigrants expressed strong desires to preserve their cultural identity in Malaya. This desire rose from the need to create a sense of security and belonging in a foreign country where they were a minority. Practicing, preserving, and sustaining the cultural heritage and identity was a way to stay united.

The festivals that the Chinese in Malaysia inherited from China are the Lunar New Year, Cold Meal Festival (*Qing Ming*), Dragon Boat Festival (*Duan Wu Jie*), Hungry Ghost Festival (*Zhong Yuan Jie*), Mid-Autumn Festival (*Zhong Qiu Jie*), Cowherd and Weaving Maid Festival (*Qi Xi Jie*), Nine Emperor Gods Festival and Winter Solstice (*Dong Jie*) (Stephanchuk & Wong, 1993; Wong, 1987). Professional troupes and the amateur group performed music, dance and drama genres in Malaysia. Professional troupes such as Chinese opera, Chinese orchestra (*hua yue tuan*), Chinese puppet theaters (*po te hi*), and street theaters (*ko-tai*) performed to entertain the spirits during rituals to give offerings to the Gods and deities. Amateur groups such as lion dance, dragon dance, or martial arts groups perform to accompany celebrations and festivals. Amateur troupes are usually sponsored by rich patrons and developed by Chinese clubs or associations to enhance solidarity, promote good health, and strengthen relationships among the Chinese in Malaysia (Tan, 2000, pp. 312-320). The *24 Jie Ling Gu* ensemble is an example of a relatively new amateur group. The ensemble was able to

foster relationships, team building, and performance skills, including coordination between movement and music among Chinese primary and high schools in Malaysia (Lee, Loo, & Saidon, 2015, p. 2332).

The Chinese performing arts in Malaysia went through a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. This revival was sparked by the racial riots that occurred on May 13, 1969. This event spurred the government to establish the New Economy Policy (NEP) that favored the *bumiputeras* (*bumi*: earth, *puteras*: princes) in Malaysia (Tan, 2000, p. 328). This was followed by the development of the National Culture Policy (NCP) (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2019, July 12). This concept suggested that the national culture had to consist of three elements.

1. The national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region.
2. Suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted as national culture.
3. Islam is an important component in the formulation of the national culture.

Although the NCP was practiced for a brief period, it was never established as a policy due to resistance from the people. However, this concept evoked feelings of fear, instability, and threat among the Chinese of the newly Independent (1957) country then. It created an awareness of the importance of status, rights, and identity of the Chinese in Malaysia. The Chinese began searching for their identity amidst a country of different ethnicity, religion, and culture. Ethnic identity, cultural consciousness, and community solidarity became integral to the survival of the Chinese immigrants of a newly independent nation. According to Carsten (2003), the promotion of "Greater China" and "Cultural China" in the 1970s to bridge barriers in political, commercial, and cultural barriers enabled Chinese cultural influences to penetrate Southeast Asia. Videocassettes, satellite television, international telephone, and fax lines enabled the Chinese in Malaysia to view cultural traditions from China, including their music, dances, and festivals (p. 322).

One of the ways the early Chinese immigrants sought to create cultural solidarity was by developing a new performing arts genre that manifested their identity in the diaspora. The *24 Jie Ling Gu*, an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1981) was founded by the late Tan Hooi Song and Tan Chai Puan. The late Tan Hooi Song was a music teacher from Foon Jew High School in Johor Bahru and lion dance drummer who created the first music and movement for the drum ensemble. Tan Chai Puan introduced the concept of the 24 *jie qi* (*jie*: joints, *qi*: breath) from China’s agricultural calendar, which forms the basis for the music and movements of the *24 Jie Ling Gu* (Chan, 2002). The agricultural calendar divides the solar year into twenty-four *jie qi* or seasonal periods based on changes in the weather in China. Farmers in China have used this calendar since ancient times as a guide to their farming activities.

While the concept of the 24 *jie qi* is from China, the music and movements of the ensemble were created by the local Chinese performers based on their imagination of the events that occurred during each *jie qi* in China. The music and movements of the *24 Jie Ling Gu* manifested the *jie ling* (phenomena) such as weather changes, agricultural activities and natural phenomenon related of each *jie qi*. For instance, during the Spring Equinox, *Chun Fen* (fourth *jie qi*), the *24 Jie Ling Gu* drummers mimic the activity of the farmers transplanting paddy seedlings (*Cha Yang*) to the field by moving their hands in vertical movement to the rhythmic pattern of four crochets in a bar. The drumstick is held vertically, representing the paddy shoots that are being planted in the fields. The music and movement representing Spring Equinox will further be exemplified in this article.

This article presents the relationship between the concept of the 24 *jie qi* with the music and movements inherent in the *24 Jie Ling Gu*. Due to the fact that the Chinese of Malaysia have not physically experienced China but are connected to it through literature and media technology,

I argue that the *24 Jie Ling Gu* performers utilized their imagination and localized experience of Malaysia to manifest the 24 *jie qi* in China. This imagination involves cognitive stimulation devoid of direct stimulation to the senses but from exposure to mediated images and literature from China.

In addition, the performers also integrated their localized experience of Chinese festivals and agricultural activities in Malaysia to compose the music and movements. According to Szczelkun (2018),

“imagination is the production or simulation of novel objects, sensations, and ideas in the mind without any immediate input of the senses ... it represents a sophisticated level of functioning in which playful use is made of our ability to mentally replay and combine previous experiences” (p. 33). Williamson (2016) states that “imagination is “a form of attention to possibilities, where potential realities are projected, simulated, and operated upon internally” (p. 4).

The music and movement of the *24 Jie Ling Gu* are based on the “forming of experiences in one’s mind, which can be re-creations of past experiences, such as vivid memories with imagined changes, or completely invented and possibly fantastic scenes” (Szczelkun, 2018). Therefore the *24 Jie Ling Gu* performers combine both cognitive stimulation with or devoid of input to the senses in creating the music and movements.

This article focuses on the music and movement pattern that was imagined and created by Malaysia’s pioneering *24 Jie Ling Gu* ensemble in the early 1990s to 2000s. As the Chinese began to establish themselves in Malaysia, they began to include multicultural elements in the *24 Jie Ling Gu* music and movements. These multicultural components are not discussed in this article.

The earliest term used to refer to members of the Chinese diaspora is *huaqiao* or Oversea Chinese (Wang, 1991) Wang used this term to denote “sojourners who cared enough for China to involve themself-

ves in Chinese politics as well as colonists who had the right to conceive China's protection" (Wang, 1991, p. 84). Early Chinese immigrants sought to maintain connections and ties with China through practicing and implement China's cultural heritage. Mackerras (2005) states that in the contemporary age, many Chinese have both integrated themselves into the society yet maintained their Chinese identity to a certain extent. The degree and extent to which both processes happen are complex, intriguing and addresses the issue of cultural identity" (p. 18). The performing arts is a medium that manifests the depth, degree, and diverse ways the Chinese overseas have incorporated some forms of "Chineseness" into their identity. The different dynamics of negotiation between social, cultural and political issues inadvertently shape the performing arts (Lau, 2005; Tera-da, 2001; Wichmann-Walczak, 2005; Yang, 2001). The next section summarizes how these dynamics have constructed the performing arts in the Asian diaspora.

Music in Chinese Diasporas

In California, United States of America, many of the early Chinese immigrants originated from Guangdong. In the early twentieth century, Cantonese opera became a popular tourist attraction. Famous opera actors such as Mei Lanfang traveled to the United States, Japan, and Eastern Europe in the 1960s-1970s, while Ma Shizeng (1900-1964) toured Singapore, Vietnamese, and California between 1920-1933 to perform Cantonese opera (Mackerras, 1975, 151-152; Mackerras, 2005, p. 22). Chinese opera troupes from China were often invited to perform in the Chinatown of San Francisco in California. These operas entertained many lonely Chinese aging bachelor immigrant workers who sought solace, refuge and a sense of belonging to China by keeping in touch with the performing arts from China (Yang, 2001, pp. 391-393). Watching Chinese opera appeased the feelings of nostalgia and longing for a distant homeland for the Chinese in this diaspora. The

original version was more important than the creation of new cultural performances related to a new identity in the diaspora.

Lau (2005) argues that the notion of "Chineness" is a construct that promotes selected "traditional culture" in the interest of Singapore's national agenda. As a result, many amateur music clubs in Singapore have had to change from "grassroots types of social organizations into embodiments of the national discourse on race" (pp. 38-39). Therefore, culture does not necessarily have to be created from a "living and organic shared belief and experience. It could be formed by a "fix system of claimed cultural element ... in order to justify the predetermined cultural categorization of people" (Ang and Stratton, 1995, p. 8).

In response to the forced opening of Japan to the West in 1868 during the Meiji Restoration, the early Japanese immigrants to the United States, the Issei or the first generation of Japanese in California strove to strengthen their identity by learning Japanese traditional music on the *koto* (plucked board zither), *shamisen* (plucked lute), *shakuhachi* (end-blown flute) and *biwa* (plucked lute). At the same time, Issei encouraged their children, the Nisei, to learn western classical music to assimilate and be accepted as Americans in their country of birth (Yang, 2001, pp. 398-399). The *sansei* (third generation) however, inspired by the civil rights movements of the 1960s became increasingly aware of ethnicity and cultural identity in North America. They were interested in their cultural roots and learned about the history and culture of Japan. *Sansei* also began engaging in learning to perform and create new drumming patterns and choreography for Taiko. Taiko was an emerging popular contemporary Japanese drumming in North America led by Tanaka then. Tanaka and his *sansei* students composed new arrangements that represented their experiences as Japanese Americans. Taiko was given new meaning after World War II from post-war *wadaiko* music inspired by communal music

performed by the *kumidaiko* (Terada, 2001, pp. 37-41). The construction of Japanese American identity through *taiko* has parallels with the Chinese of Malaysia 24 *Jie Ling Gu* drum ensemble. In its early pioneering years, the music and movement of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu*'s pioneering performance were based on the concepts of the natural phenomenon, weather, and festivals in China. The Chinese constructed their identity in the diaspora by imagining and romanticising the components based on literary and visual resources from China. The next section discusses the origins of the formation of the 24 Jie Ling Gu.

The Twenty-Four *Jie Qi* (Twenty-Four Joints and Breath) in The Chinese Agricultural Calendar

The Chinese Agricultural calendar is based on the earth's yearly orbit around the sun. This cyclical of the earth around the sun determines the seasons, weather and climatic conditions. It is also known as the solar calendar. Each cycle of the earth's orbit around the sun is completed in approximately 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days. This Chinese Agricultural Calendar subdivides this yearly cycle of 365 days into twenty-four seasonal periods known collectively as the twenty-four *jie qi* (Appendix). Each *jie qi* lasts about fifteen days (two weeks) and is marked by significant changes in the weather and nature phenomenon. The Chinese Agricultural Calendar was an important calendar amongst the ancient Chinese farmers and is still referred to today as it indicates significant changes in the weather and also the occurrence of the Solstice and Equinox (Wang, Chen, & Tsai, 2000).

The twenty-four *jie qi* were important benchmarks for the ancient farmers in China as it is an accurate indication of the change in the weather phenomenon which in turn guided the agricultural activities of the farmers. It serves as a reference for the farmers, indicating the phases of growth in their crops, thus determining the time for sowing, weeding, irrigating, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing. The ancient Chinese farmers possess instinctive

abilities to detect minute changes in the weather and nature through their experience, sensitivity, and intimate relationship with the earth and the sky (heavens). In short, the life-style of the farmers in China are developed according to the twenty-four *jie qi* (Chan, 2001; Palmer, 1986).

The twenty-four *jie qi* most accurately depicts the weather and climate in the regions along the Wei Ho and Huang Ho River, and on the north river valley of the *Qing Shan* (*Qing* Mountains) in the regions of Shaanxi and Hunan (Arakawa, 1969, p. 3). This area is also known as North China Plain or the "cradle of civilization" because it was the area where the earliest Chinese civilization was found. It is a densely populated area because of its fertile soil of alluvial and loess (deposits of fine, wind-borne silt or dust of glacial origin). Wheat dominates this area whilst millet, sorghum, soybean, cotton, tobacco, fruits and vegetables are also planted (Muller & de Blij, 2000, p. 452).

The meaning of *jie qi*

The Chinese Almanac or *T'ung Shu* literally translates the meaning of *jie qi* as "joints and breath". *Jie* is translated as "joints" and these "joints" refer to the endless cycle of seasons which are bonded or linked together by the twenty-four *jie qi*. *Qi* means "breath" in Chinese and refers to the never-ending cyclical process of changes in the seasons as the perpetual source of life for man, nature and animals (Palmer, 1986, p. 4). Many different terms have been used to refer to the twenty-four *jie qi*. The "twenty-four solar terms" derive from the understanding of the twenty-four *jie qi* from an astronomical point of view. The 24 *jie qi* can be subdivided into 24 sub-seasons or seasonal periods (Times Chinese English Dictionary, 1979). The Chinese Agricultural Calendar was an important calendar amongst ancient Chinese farmers and is still referred to as it indicates significant changes in the weather and the occurrence of the Solstice and Equinox (Wang, Chen, & Tsai, 2000). The Republic of China refers to three types of the calendar; the Gregori-

an, Lunar, and Agricultural Calendar. The Gregorian calendar is the official calendar of China and is frequently used because it is the standard practice in the world. This enables easy synchronization of time around the world. The Lunar Calendar is still important to the Chinese because of its associations with the Chinese festivals, rituals, and full moons.

METHOD

This research was based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru from 1998 until 2001. As a participant-observer, I learned to play the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* under the tutelage of Quah Beng Chye at Chong Hwa School in Penang. I also studied with Bernard Goh Seang Heang, who taught the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* at Chong Hwa Independent High School, Kuala Lumpur and Seremban during the late 1900s. This research culminated to my Master of Arts (Music) thesis at Universiti Sains Malaysia in 2002. The thesis discussed the relationship between the music and movements of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* with the agricultural activities; natural phenomenon in the environment; and festivals or rituals during the 24 *jie ling*.

As I reflect back on my master's thesis, the questions that kept emerging was why the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia was exclusively centralizing China and excluding Malaysian components from the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* performances. In this article, I included literature on the performing arts of Chinese diasporas in other countries. Comparing the politics, social and cultural situation of the Chinese in other diaspora deepened my understanding of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* I had studied years ago. I was also intrigued by how the Chinese of Malaysia could create these music and movement without having experienced the agricultural activities; natural phenomenon in the environment; and festivals or rituals, in China. In recent years, I also noted that the Chinese in Malaysia were struggling to continue imagining the 24 *jie ling* and are now integrating many multicultural

musical elements from Malaysia into their composition and choreography. In this article, I use the concept of "imagination" to explain the approach the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* performers utilized to compose and create their music and movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A performance of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* consists of a combination of skillful drumming synchronized with swift, gallant movements of the hands, legs, and body. Hand, leg, and body movements are choreographed into movement patterns accompanied by the drumming of specific rhythmic patterns. An ordered flow of rhythm and movement patterns in a whole performance are organized to tell a story.

This section comprises selected examples of how the music and movement of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* manifest agricultural activities, natural phenomena in the environment, and festivals or rituals. These activities vary according to the changes in weather which is distinctly marked by the 24 *jie qi*. Some of the agricultural activities reflected are spring planting, summer cultivation, autumn harvesting, and winter storing. A natural phenomenon in nature includes rainfall, blooming of flowers, falling of leaves, breeding of insects, and snowfall.

Spring, Chun

First (1st) *jie qi*, *Li Chun* (Commencement of Spring)

The Commencement of Spring, *Li Chun* is the first *jie qi* and marks the ending of winter's cold, slow and dull environment. *Li Chun* brings a new, fresh, warm atmosphere enhanced with light and hope. The cold air is replaced by the warm spring air from the east wind. The atmosphere is enlightened by a bright and sunny environment. The land is said to be "reborn" and "revived." Farmers are happy to be able to start agricultural activities. Paddy seeds are sown in nurseries, and paddy fields are cultivated so new paddy seedlings can be transferred to the paddy

fields. Farmers are very busy with agricultural activities such as plowing; hoeing and smoothing the soil; uprooting weeds, and irrigating rice fields (Hsiao-Tung Fei, 2006, p. 15).

East South West North, Dong Nan Xi Bei

In *Dong Nan Xi Bei*, the drummer plays a repeated rhythm pattern (Figure 1) while encircling the *shi gu* (lion drum) (Figure 2-5). The drummer may begin from his left by moving according to the arrangement of *Dong Nan Xi Bei* (North east southwest). He could also begin from his right, moving in the opposite direction: *Xi Ban Dong Bei* (West, North East South). The motive of circling the drum is symbolic of the change occurring in the east, south, west, and north as spring approaches (Chan, 2001, pp. 97-102; Chan, 2022).



Figure 1. Rhythm pattern for East South West North *Dong Nan Xi Bei*



Figure 2. Position 1 *Dung*



Figure 3. Position 2 *Nan*



Figure 4. Position 3 *Xi*



Figure 5. Position 4 *Bei*

Second (2nd) *jie qi*, Yu Shui (Rain water)

The second *jie qi*, *Yu shui* is characterized by short rainfalls brought by the east wind as it blows across the mountains. The melting snow provides the rivers and the lowlands with sufficient water for irrigation. During this seasonal period, the farmers start tilling, hoeing, and cultivating the soil. The land is then plowed, leveled, and then irrigated to prepare for planting paddy and other crops. The farmers sweat and toil in the fields under the sun. The 24 *Jie Ling Gu* exemplifies a phenomenon observed during *Yu Shui*. This phenomenon is Wiping Sweat, *Ma Han* (Chan, 2001, p. 102).

Wiping Sweat, Ma Han

Ma Han reflects the action of drummers wiping away sweat from their foreheads whilst working hard under the hot sun. The drummer stretches his right hand out-front at shoulder level and horizontally curves his elbow inwards to the left. The lower arm is bent to a 90-degree angle. His right hand is turned outwards so that his palm faces outwards. At this position, the palm is at eye level and covering the eyes. The drumstick is held at a horizontal position by the right hand. This is the starting position for *Ma Han* (Figure 6 and Figure 7). Drummers then begin to move their right hand to the right in rhythm with the drumming of quaver beats to the quadruple meter played by the left hand simultaneously. This movement is alternated with the same pattern on the left hand (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Beats are accented at every first beat of the bar (Figure 10) (Chan, 2001, pp. 108-111; Chan, 2022).



Figure 6. Position 1 *Ma Han 1*



Figure 7. Position 2 *Ma Han 2*



Figure 8. Position 3
Ma Han 3



Figure 9. Position 4
Ma Han



Figure 10. Rhythmic pattern for Wiping Sweat, Ma Han.

Fourth (4th) Jie qi, Spring Equinox, Chun Fen

Chun Fen occurs around the March 21 and coincides with the time where the sun is at the top of our head at the Equator line (0°). During this day, the whole world will receive the same length of day and night (Goh, 1970, p. 70). The Agricultural Calendar states that the exact time the sun will rise is 5: 58 a.m. and fall at 6:06 p.m. The weather starts to get warmer. If it rains on this day, there will be fewer people falling sick (Lee, 1986, p. 149). Farmers are busy sowing seeds and transplanting rice seedlings.

Planting Rice, Cha Yang

The 24 Jie Ling Gu imitates planting rice by using the drumstick held vertically to represent the rice seedlings. The drumstick is moved up and down vertically; mimicking the activity of the farmers as they plant the rice seedlings from the nursery into the field (Figure 11-14). This movement of planting rice goes simultaneously with a rhythm of four crochet beats to quadruple meters (Figure 15). The drummers also move to other drums in a sequence of choreographed movements. The drummer may move to the right, left or in a circle. This movement represents

the systematic planting of rice in the fields (Chan, 2001, pp. 116-120; Chan, 2022).



Figure 11. Position 1
Cha Yang 1



Figure 12. Position 2
Cha Yang 2



Figure 13. Position 3
Cha Yang 3



Figure 14. Position 4
Cha Yang 4



Figure 15. Rhythm pattern for Planting Rice
Cha Yang

SUMMER, XIA

Summer is warm and the heat is hot. By now, most of the cereals grown are full and ripe. Wheat is ripe and harvested in the Hwang Ho area (Lee, 1986, p. 150). This season is also a season where fruits such as lychee, longan, mango, pineapple and watermelon. When these fruits are ripe, they are picked and sold. In addition, festivals such as the Dragon Boat Festival are celebrated where boat competitions are also held. Summer is also associated with heavy rains that bring major floods to the people of China especially downstream of the Hwang Ho River.

In summer, residents must take care of their health due to the hot weather and heat. Those who eat too many fruits like lychees and mangoes have a risk of getting a high fever. Martial arts is practice to maintain body health and strengthen disease resistance (Chan, 2001, p. 127; Chan, 2022)

Tenth (10th) Jie qi, Summer Solstice, Xia Zhi

During the Summer Solstice, *Xia Zhi*, the tenth *jie qi*, China experiences the longest daylight period. The people participate in dragon boat competitions, a popular sport during this *jie qi*. This act held with the aim of stimulating the dragon fight in the sky so that it would rain. The festival is also held to commemorate a Chinese officer named Chu Yuan.

Gu ensemble through the swing of the player’s hand from the top left diagonal to the bottom right (Figures 16 &17) and in the opposite direction, too (Figures 18 & 19). This swing of the hand reflects the rowing movement during the dragon boat competition. The quavers in bars 1 and 3 show the boat surging forward. The drummers dip their “paddle” into the water during the two rests in bars 2 and 4. (Figure 20)(Chan, 2001, pp. 134-135; Chan, 2022).



Figure 20. Rhythm pattern of “Rowing the Dragon Boat

Eleventh (11th) Jie qi, Lesser Heat, Xiao Shu

During Lesser Heat, *Xiao shu*, the people of China are encouraged to exercise to maintain good health. The heat of the summer is nearing its peak. Sickness and diseases are prominent problems occurring during this period. Some people indulge in martial arts like *wushu* and *kung fu* in to strengthen the body’s defenses against illnesses.

The Eagle Takes flight, Da Peng Zhan Chi

Da Peng Zhan Chi is one of the preparatory fighting positions in the art of *wushu* and *kung fu*. This movement mimics the opening of the eagle’s wings as it prepares to take flight or keeps warm by trapping air inside its wings. The drummers exemplify this movement by stretching the right hand out fully diagonally up-right whilst the left hand is stretched out fully diagonally-bottom-left also. The drummer’s right leg is slightly bent backward in a diagonal position, while the left leg is stretched out as the right leg and body move downwards (Figures 21 and 22). *Da Peng Zhan Chi*’s action is quick, abrupt, and happens at the split of a second or at the length of a crochet beat (Figure 23) (Chan, 2001, pp. 141-144; Chan, 2022).



Figure 16. Position 1 Rowing the Dragon Boat



Figure 17. Position 2 Rowing the Dragon Boat



Figure 18. Position 3 Rowing the Dragon Boat



Figure 19. Position 4 Rowing the Dragon Boat

Rowing the Dragon Boat

Rowing the Dragon Boat is manifested in the performance of the 24 *Jie Ling*



Figure 21. Position 1
Da Peng Zhan Chi 1



Figure 22. Position 2
Da Peng Zhan Chi 2



Figure 23. Rhythm Pattern for “The Eagle Takes Flight, *Da Peng Zhan Chi*”



Figure 26. Position 3 *Shou Ge 3*



Figure 27. Rhythm pattern for Cutting Paddy, *Shou Ge*

Autumn, *Qiu*

Thirteenth (13th) *jie qi*—Commencement of Autumn, *Li Qiu*

During *Li Qiu*, the paddy planted in springtime ripens and is ready for harvest. Farmers are working hard in the fields, joyously cutting stalks of paddy with a sickle.

Cutting Paddy, *Shou Ge*

In *Shou Ge*, the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* ensemble mimics the movement of farmers harvesting their crops with a sickle (Figure 24-26). The drummers stretch their right hand up and bend it to an angle of 90 degrees. They then move it in a circular motion of 360 degrees over their head. The legs are slightly bent simultaneously with the movement of the arm around the head. beat These three movements occur during the second and third rest in each bar (Figure 27)(Chan, 2022).

Threshing, *Da Gu*

After harvesting, the stalks of the paddy are taken to be threshed in the granary. During threshing, the grains from the paddy are separated from the stalks. The grains are then taken to be milled and winnowed before being stored.

The 24 *Jie Ling Gu* mimics the actions of farmers threshing stalks of paddy in the granaries. Drummers clasps drumstick close together and lift both hands high above their head. Both hands are then lowered to strike the drum, imitating the action of threshing the paddy stalks. *Da Gu* is usually played with two drums, either side by side or back and front. Drummers stretch one leg, bend the other, and vice versa as they rotate, striking the side, back, or front drum (Figure 28-30). This choreography is performed in synchronization with specific rhythm patterns struck by the drummers (Figure 31)(Chan, 2022).



Figure 24. Position 1
Shou Ge 1



Figure 25. Position 2
Shou Ge 2



Figure 28. Position 1
Da Gu 1



Figure 29. Position 2
Da Gu 2



Figure 30. Position 3 *Da Gu*



Figure 31. Rhythm pattern for threshing the paddy, *Da Gu*

Winter, *Dong*

Nineteenth (19th) *jie qi*, Commencement of Winter, *Li dong*

Winter is a slow and quiet time. During this time, people are less busy compared to the hectic activities carried out during spring, summer, and autumn. They have time to reminisce on their past and their doings, whether good or bad. They dwell on thoughts about their loved ones, relatives, and neighbors. The Chinese also offer blessings for a good harvest and pray for another good year to come. This is the time that offerings, prayers, and invocations are offered to the Gods. It is also a time of meditation and sacrifices to be made.

One Thousand Hands of the Goddess of Mercy

This choreography manifests the merciful hands of the Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin, reaching out to help those in need. Guan Yin is a symbol of love and mercy for the Chinese people. The Chinese people reach out to her in their prayers for mercy in times of trauma. She is deemed the goddess with “one thousand hands” because she reaches out to assist humans

in their life challenges. This choreography involves five main hand positions (Figure 32). The drummers’ group together in a straight vertical line. The person at the front of the line will begin by stretching both his hands fully downwards. He then moves his hands upwards to the second position, whereby his left-hand points southwest and right hand, southeast. While he moves into the second position, the drummer behind him will begin the first movement. This series of staggered entrances will continue in a repetitious cyclic form. The third position sees the drummer stretching out both hands horizontally, with right hand pointing east and left hand, west. He then moves his hands upwards until his right hand points North East and left hand, North West. The last position is when both his hands are stretch out pointing towards the sky. Both hands are pointing towards north in the fifth position.

Meditation and Prayer

The aura of winter is reflected by the choreography of Meditation and Prayer. In this choreography, drummers clasp their hands together holding the drumstick in vertical position (Figure 33). This pose mimics the action of holding joss stick in their hands. This “joss stick” is held high with the palm of the hands at nose level. This choreography is accompanied by recorded music, usually from a selection of Chinese or Japanese songs. Red clothes are stretched over drummers in specific patterns as part of the choreography.



Figure 32. One Thousand Hands of the Guan Yin, Goddess of Mercy



Figure 33. Meditation and Prayer

CONCLUSION

In 2022, 34 years after its establishment in 1988, the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* ensemble continue to thrive as an area of artistic development among the Chinese of Malaysia. In its pioneering of establishment, the younger generation of Chinese in Malaysia focused on imagining China to strengthen solidarity among the Chinese in Malaysia. Drawing from combination of the concept of 24 *jie qi* from the Chinese agricultural tradition in China and the newly invented music and movements, the Chinese created a new drum ensemble.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, the Chinese became more integrated into the local environment in Malaysia. Much of its music and choreography has evolved since it was founded. The new generations of Malaysian born Chinese mingled freely with the other ethnic groups, embracing and absorbing influences from the multicultural musical and performing arts, environment, festivals and rituals, livelihood and life style; and natural environment in Malaysia. The influences of the environment and surroundings; the multi-racial society; education and exposure are being absorbed into the art as time goes by. These influences have been integrated into the music and movements of the 24 *Jie Ling Gu*. Some ensembles have also included local Malay rhythms including *joget*, *inang*, *masri* and *zapin* into their drumming rhythms. Some of the developments are due to the influences from other cultures mainly from Japan and Korea, perhaps due to its closeness with the Chinese culture (Chan, 2019).

This article recommends for further research into the evolution of the music and movement in the 24 *Jie Ling Gu* created by the new generation of Chinese exposed to different social-political situation during late 90s and early 2000s.

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APPENDIX: *The 24 jie qi (seasonal periods/ joints and breath)*

No.	<i>Jie qi</i> (Seasonal Periods/ Joints and Breath)	Sun's Longitud	Month	Normal Year	Leap Year
1.	<i>Li Chun</i> Commencement of Spring	315°	February	4	4
2.	<i>Yu Shui</i> Rain Water	330°		19	18, 19
3.	<i>Jing Zhe</i> Waking of Insects	345°	March	5	5, 6
4.	<i>Chun Fen</i> Spring Equinox	0°		20	20, 21
5.	<i>Qing Ming</i> Pure Brightness	15°	April	4	5
6.	<i>Gu Yu</i> Grain Rain	30°		20	20
7.	<i>Li Xia</i> Commencement of Summer	45°	May	5	5, 6
8.	<i>Xiao Man</i> Little Fullness	60°		21	21
9.	<i>Mang Zhong</i> Husks of Grain	75°	June	5	6, 5
10.	<i>Xia Zhi</i> Summer Solstice	90°		21	21, 22
11.	<i>Xiao Shu</i> Lesser Heat	105°	July	7	7
12.	<i>Da Shu</i> Great Heat	120°		22	23
13.	<i>Li Qiu</i> Commencement of Autumn	135°	August	7	7, 8
14.	<i>Chu Shu</i> Bounds of Heat	150°		23	23
15.	<i>Bai Lu</i> White Dew	165°	September	7	7, 8
16.	<i>Qiu Fen</i> Autumn Equinox	180°		23	23
17.	<i>Han Lu</i> Cold Dew	195°	October	8	8, 9
18.	<i>Shuang Jiang</i> Descent of Hoar Frost	210°		23	23, 24
19.	<i>Li Dong</i> Commencement of Winter	225°	November	7	7, 8
20.	<i>Xiao Xue</i> Lesser Snow	240°		22	22, 23
21.	<i>Da Xue</i> Great Snow	255°	December	7	7
22.	<i>Dong Zhi</i> Winter Solstice	270°		21	22
23.	<i>Xiao Han</i> Lesser Cold	285°	January	6	5, 6
24.	<i>Da Han</i> Great Cold	300°		21	20