Chaozhou Daluogu

Performance, Repertoire, Instruments, Technique, Transmission and Sustainability in an Ancient Chinese Percussion Genre

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This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.
Abstract

*Chaozhou daluogu* is a traditional art form involving percussion, wind and string instruments, which originated in the Chaoshan region, South China. The genre revolves around the *dagu*, the leading drum and conductor of the ensemble. *Chaozhou daluogu* is deeply embedded in the regional Chaoshan culture through its connection with what is usually referred to as the *youshen* (‘god pageant ceremony’).

From the legendary origins of the tradition – which its master performers trace back to the Tang dynasty – it is said to have kept original elements, but also undergone major change and development. Broadly accepted to have been re-defined to its present form by master Ou Xinu towards the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), in the middle of the nineteenth century, it has been reinvented in a stage performance setting towards the middle of the twentieth century.

This thesis examines the dynamic history and current practice of *Chaozhou daluogu* primarily from the perspectives of its senior representatives, exploring its origins and development over time, introducing the instruments and performance setups as well as playing techniques, considering both traditional and contemporary repertoire, surveying transmission and learning experiences of major exponents, and trying to provide some insight into the sustainability of the genre into the future.

The defining feature of the *Chaozhou daluogu* ensemble is the *dagu*, the leading drum, surrounded by an array of brass percussion, as well as wind, bowed and plucked string instruments. The ensemble setup for both god pageant ceremony and stage performance
varies according to the needs of the ensemble. The same applies to repertoire, which can be divided into traditional and contemporary works. The building blocks of this repertoire are the *kejie* 科介, rhythm patterns, and *qupai* 曲牌, labelled melodies. Traditional works are associated with the god pageant ceremony, which has retained widespread community interest over the years, and is celebrated in a pre-defined fashion on a specific day in the Chinese New Year. Contemporary works primarily feature in stage performances, a platform for experimentation and innovation.

At the centre of processes of preservation and innovation are the masters, leaders in the fields of performance, development and transmission of this art. Using an ethnographic approach which has become standard in similar studies since the 1980s, I have tried to map the history, performance, repertoire, instruments, technique, and transmission of *Chaozhou daluogu*. Bringing together – often contradictory – information from interviews with eight living masters of the tradition across two generations, a limited body of academic literature and other sources (almost exclusively in Chinese), and extensive fieldwork in Chaozhou, Shantou and Guangzhou, the current centres of performance and transmission (which included several months of immersion in the tradition by taking lessons, using my background as a professional percussionist), this thesis, with its extensive videography of interviews, performances, instruments and techniques, represents perhaps the most comprehensive exploration of the practical aspects of *Chaozhou daluogu* to date.

The written and recorded data presented here aim to provide a research basis for performers, scholars, government and teaching institutions passionate about the study, preservation, development, education and dissemination of *Chaozhou daluogu* as an element of the world’s rich musical diversity. In this way, this document, in its combination of text and audiovisual
resources, may serve both as a scholarly document in its own right and as an instrument to contribute to the sustainability of the tradition by informing the next generation of percussionists who wish to engage with this rich expression of China’s intangible cultural heritage.
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