

Twenty-Four Drums, Two Lands: Performing Glocalization of the 24 Festive Drums in Malaysia and China

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Abstract

The enormous sound amplitude of the 24 Festive Drums is a thrilling performative spectacle in Malaysia's cultural scene. Being native to the Malaysian sonic landscape, the drums exhibit distinguishable Chinese characteristics in nature: it was established in 1988 when renowned Malaysian intellectuals Tan Chai Puan (陳再藩) and the late Tan Hooi Song (陳徽崇) integrated the conception of the "jieling" (節令) into the drum design and the stylistic performance. The spirited, captivating rhythm of the membranophones was then an instant success as a well-received cultural feast, eventually making the performing art a highly regarded national heritage. This ethnographic study examines explicitly the 24 Festive Drums that flourished in Malaysia and China. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 professionals involved in the 24 Festive Drums in China and Malaysia, this study investigates how the performance with Chinese cultural characteristics displays a combination of globalization and localization. The findings indicate that, in the context of globalization, the drum demonstrates "glocal" attributes in the process of Chinese cultural dissemination and reflects these characteristics in the "glocal" identity construction among the practitioners. It suggests that the identity is not an isolated individuality, but a composite identity constantly constructed and reshaped in the cultural flow of integration between global and local cultures.

Keywords: 24 Festive Drums, cultural heritage, performing, glocalization, ethnography

二十四節令鼓在馬來西亞和中國敲響 兩地全球本土的淵源

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摘 要

二十四節令鼓，作為一種在馬來西亞充滿華人特色的文化表演，是由知名文化人陳再藩和已故音樂家陳徽崇於 1988 年共同創造。他們將中國節令和中華文化元素巧妙融入鼓的設計與演奏之中，使得這種鼓樂具有強烈的節奏感和獨特魅力，迅速贏得了廣大馬來西亞人民的喜愛，並在 2009 年被認定為馬來西亞的國家級文化遺產。它不僅在馬來西亞迅速傳播，它的影響力還擴展到海外多個區域，其中許多地區也組建了自己的鼓隊。本文採取民族誌的方式探討二十四節令鼓在馬來西亞及中國的發展軌跡。通過 15 位在中國和馬來西亞該領域的專業人士的深度訪談，作者分析這一帶有濃厚華人文化特色的表演藝術如何展現全球化與本土化相融合的特點。研究結果揭示，二十四節令鼓不僅在中華文化的傳播過程中呈現出全球本土化的屬性，在華人的身分構建上也顯現了同樣的特徵，反映了二十四節令鼓從業者的身分並非單一純粹，而是在全球與本土文化流動中不斷構建與重塑的複雜過程。

關鍵詞：二十四節令鼓、文化遺產、表演、全球本土化、民族誌

1. Introduction*

The 24 Festive Drums, known in Malay as “Gendang 24 Perayaan”, represent an artistic performance originating in Malaysia, embodying a fusion and re-creation of Chinese cultural elements. Culturally, the cultural acceptance of “jieling” (節令)¹ constitutes one of its key elements. This performance art comprises 24 drums, each representing a solar term in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. And each solar term is written in Chinese calligraphy on each drum. From a performance standpoint, its central instrument is the lion dance drum, integrating rhythm, body movement, and audio-visual elements into a cohesive artistic expression.² Since its inception in 1988, this art has gained popularity not only in Chinese schools but also led to the establishment of numerous professional troupes in Malaysia, such as “Hands Percussion” (手集團) and “Orang Orang Drum Theatre” (人人人鼓劇場).

In 2009, the 24 Festive Drums were listed on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Malaysia.³ As conceptualized in the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, it emphasizes the heritage’s intrinsic connection to geographical location, community identity, and the cultural alignment with community traditions.⁴ It represents collective memory,

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¹ Jieling is a unique blend of astronomy, natural rhythms, and folklore, which has contributed to a diverse range of jieling cultures and has become an integral part of traditional Chinese culture. For more detailed content, see 林永匡、王熹,《中國節令》(北京:北京聯合出版公司,2020)(Yongkuang Lin and Xi Wang, *The Jieling in China* (Beijing: Beijing United Publishing, 2020)).

² Giano Siu, “Musicalbody: A Study of Malaysian 24 Festive Drums with Specific Reference to Pan-Asian Performance Theory” (PhD diss., University of Lincoln, 2020), 22.

³ 〈二十四節令鼓:鼓動世界!〉,《南洋商報》,2018年10月12日,2024年2月10日檢索, <https://www.enanyang.my/副刊/二十四节令鼓-鼓动世界> (“24 Festive Drums: Drum up the World!,” *Nanyang Siang Pau*, October 12, 2018, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.enanyang.my/副刊/二十四节令鼓-鼓动世界>).

⁴ Malaysian National Heritage Act, *Laws of Malaysia. Act 645, National Heritage Act 2005*:

shared knowledge, and the wisdom and aspirations of ancestors. The transmission of heritage transcends mere nostalgia, serving as a crucial means of maintaining community identity and fostering a sense of belonging.⁵

Within globalization, the ongoing evolution and redefinition of cultural traits and the assimilation of and adaptation to other cultures and new contexts are increasingly apparent. This process of adaptation not only facilitates the safeguarding and transmission of traditional culture but propels the innovation and evolution of cultural heritage. For example, some scholars have highlighted incorporating local elements into traditional lion dance performances in overseas Chinese communities,⁶ underscoring the fluidity of cultural practices and their ability to evolve and integrate into different social environments. The 24 Festive Drums is also an example of the flow of Chinese culture, demonstrating how Chinese culture interacts, merges, and evolves with local environments in the context of globalization. In Malaysia, the birth of these drums results from the collision and fusion of Chinese culture with local society environments, highlighting a cultural performance that combines globalization and localization. As drum teams are established in various countries overseas, they also reflect the coexistence of globalization and localization. Hence, this study aims to explore the coexistence of globalization and localization in this performance and the multiple meanings of the performance in the context of globalization.

Incorporating All Amendments up to 1 June 2006 (Kuala Lumpur: The Commissioner of Law Revision, Malaysia, 2006), 16.

⁵ Perla Innocenti, *Cultural Networks in Migrating Heritage: Intersecting Theories and Practices across Europe* (London: Routledge, 2015), 17.

⁶ Madeline Anita Slovenz-Low, "Lions in the Streets: A Performance Ethnography of Cantonese Lion Dancing in New York City's Chinatown" (PhD diss., New York University, 1994), xii.

2. Literature Review

(1) Nomenclature of the Drum

To date, there are still ongoing debates on the Chinese nomenclature of the 24 Festive Drums. There was a heated debate in 2003 on whether the drum should be named the “24 Jielinggu” (二十四節令鼓) or the “24 Jieqigu” (二十四節氣鼓). It was Tan Chai Puan (陳再藩), one of the founders, who compiled a large amount of information for rectification of the name,⁷ apparently putting an end to the controversy. However, on June 28 2022, Hoong Song-kean (洪松堅)⁸ published an article in *Sin Chew Daily* (《星洲日報》) entitled “There Are Only Twenty-Four Solar Terms, Not Twenty-Four Jieling” (〈只有二十四節氣，沒有二十四節令〉), challenging the appropriate name of the drums again. He gave three reasons for this: firstly, the term “twenty-four jieling” cannot be found in all Chinese dictionaries. Instead, one can easily find the wording of “twenty-four solar terms”, and this implies that “twenty-four jieling” is of nonexistence. The second is that China Central Television (CCTV, 中國中央電視台), which is perceived as a representation of authority, includes regular announcements during the actual days in the solar terms. Thirdly, the solar terms have served as weather forecasts for agricultural societies. In one of the ancient dramas, it was shown that during the Ming dynasty, when it did not snow during Chinese New Year, the emperor led a hundred officials to make sacrifices to the heavens, and this is what is exactly meant by a timely snow that promises a good harvest (瑞

⁷ 安煥然，〈「文化新山」的邊城風景——戰後馬來西亞新山華人社會文化研究〉(廈門大學博士論文，2009)，249-253 (Huann Jan Onn, “Cultural Construction of the Johor Bahru Chinese Community: A Socio-Cultural Study on the Chinese Community in Johor Bahru, Malaysia after World War II” (PhD diss., Xiamen University, 2009), 249-253)。

⁸ Hoong Song-kean was formerly Deputy Editor in Chief of *Sin Chew Daily*, Editor in Chief and General Manager of *Guang Ming Daily* (《光明日報》), Editor in Chief of Nanyang Siang Pau. Nineteen years ago, he suggested changing the name of “Ershisi Jielinggu” (二十四節令鼓) to “Ershisi Jieqigu” (二十四節氣鼓).

雪兆豐年).⁹ On July 6, Tan responded again, stressing that the 24 Festive Drums should be renamed appropriately. According to Tan, one cannot rely solely on dictionaries to defy the existence of jieling when considering the popularity of solar terms. The rationalization of this issue requires an understanding of “Chinese solar terms in history”. In contrast, most Chinese in both Singapore and Malaysia lack the knowledge in the field of Chinese folklore. In addition, Tan provided numerous examples to refute each claim made by Hoong.¹⁰

“Jieqi” (節氣, solar terms) and jieling, rooted in ancient Chinese time management and observation of natural phenomena, play an essential role in the traditional Chinese calendar. Generally, jieling refers to the annual cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, each with its transitional characteristics. Jieqi, with greater detail, segments the year into 24 phases, each associated with specific natural occurrences and agricultural practices, such as the “lichun” (立春), “xiaoman” (小滿), and “liqiu” (立秋). These concepts underpin the ancient Chinese understanding of time, providing essential guidelines for agricultural activities. In a predominantly agrarian society, jieqi and jieling were vital for determining the optimal times for sowing and harvesting, and they also permeated daily life.

Furthermore, numerous traditional festivals and customs, including the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival, are synchronized with these periods, embodying the community’s reverence for and adaptation to nature.¹¹ Thus, the role of jieqi and jieling in Chinese culture

⁹ 洪松堅,〈只有二十四節氣,沒有二十四節令〉,《星洲日報》,2022年6月28日,2024年2月10日檢索, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/20220628/3904279/> (Song-kean Hoong, “There Are Only Twenty-Four Solar Terms, Not Twenty-Four Jieling,” *Sin Chew Daily*, June 28, 2022, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/20220628/3904279/>).

¹⁰ 陳再藩,〈廿四節令鼓不需更名——回應洪松堅〉,《星洲日報》,2022年7月6日,2024年2月10日檢索, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/news/20220706/yl/3923176> (Chai Puan Tan, “Response to Hoong Song-kean: There Is No Need to Change the Name of the 24 Festive Drums,” *Sin Chew Daily*, July 6, 2022, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/news/20220706/yl/3923176>).

¹¹ Lin and Wang, *The Jieling in China*.

transcends mere calendrical function to profoundly influence agricultural practices, festive observances, and cultural heritage, laying a fundamental groundwork for the Chinese perception of time and lifestyle. Hoong's observation may primarily highlight the agricultural or natural observational aspects of jieqi, potentially overlooking their extensive cultural and social implications.

The drums' nomenclature in the English language is also rather unsettling, as the English translation of the term "jieling" is almost an impossible task in linguistics. Although it was given an official English name by the Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry in 2009,¹² there is no academic consensus on using of "the 24 Festive Drums". Here are a few commonly used names as seen in related literature: 24 Seasons Drums;¹³ 24 Jielinggu;¹⁴ Twenty-Four Festive Drums;¹⁵ and 24 Festive Drums.¹⁶ In an interview with Tan in May 2022, he emphasized that the 24 Festive Drums connote festive drumming rather than chiming.¹⁷ Regarding the naming of the drums, it embodies the significance of festivals, which are intrinsically connected to the cultural elements of jieling. Hence, its Chinese name and the official English name are complementary to each other.

¹² Peggy Loh, "24 Festive Drums' Dramatic Art of Drumming," *Peggy Loh ~ My Johor Stories*, September 15, 2016, accessed February 10, 2024, <http://ppunlimited.blogspot.com/2016/09/24-festive-drums-dramatic-art-of.html>.

¹³ Vincent Tee and Garry Kuan, "The Yin and Yang of 24 Season Drums for Physical and Musical Literacy among Medical Students: A Narrative Review," *Education in Medicine Journal* 13, no. 2 (June 2021): 1-12, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.21315/eimj2021.13.2.1>.

¹⁴ Soon Foon Lee, "Cultural Representation of Music and Performing Arts in Johor Old Temple's Parade of Deities in Malaysia," (PhD diss., Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2018).

¹⁵ Leng Poh Gee, review of *The Next*, by Hands Percussion, *Asian Theatre Journal* 30, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 526-532, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2013.0030>.

¹⁶ Siu, "Musicalbody," 22.

¹⁷ Chai Puan Tan, interview by Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, May 10, 2022.

(2) Glocalization of the 24 Festive Drums

Since its inception, the popularity of the 24 Festive Drums has been extraordinary, evolving into a critical cultural symbol for the Chinese community in Malaysia. Furthermore, it symbolizes resilience and sustainable development within the Malaysian Chinese community. It has become customary for Chinese institutions, corporations, and community organizations in Malaysia to support a drum troupe capable of delivering cultural performances for social functions and festive occasions. Furthermore, for decades, it has been a widespread practice for almost every Chinese national-type or Chinese-medium school in Malaysia to maintain an active drum troupe for performances. In cities with a significant Chinese majority, such as George Town, Penang, public performances of the 24 Festive Drums are a common sight at official functions and Chinese festive events.¹⁸ Tey suggests that the rapid growth of the drums in Malaysia and its progression to the international stage can be attributed to its comprehensive dissemination mechanism.¹⁹ The drums have significantly extended their influence through cultural centers, lectures, and competitions, thus becoming a cultural icon in Johor Bahru and throughout Malaysia. These performances hold a crucial role in the opening ceremonies and various social and cultural events within the Chinese community.

a. Globalization

The concept of globalization, though only named in the latter half of the twentieth century, encapsulates the burgeoning interdependence of world

¹⁸ Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, "Study on 24 Jieling Drums as Urban Cultural Landscape in Malaysia," *Asian-European Music Research Journal* 8 (2021): 55, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.30819/aemr.8-6>.

¹⁹ 鄭詩濱,〈扎根本土, 面向世界: 論馬來西亞二十四節令鼓對傳統鼓樂的繼承、創新與全球傳播〉,《華僑華人文獻學刊》4 (2018): 206 (Shi Bin Tey, "Rooted in the Local Community, Facing the World: Discussion of Inheritance, Innovation, and Dissemination of Malaysia 24 Festive Drums," *Journal of Overseas Chinese Literature* 4 (2018): 206)。

economies, cultures, and populations. This phenomenon is propelled by cross-border exchanges in goods and services, technology, and the flux of people, capital, and information. Historically, countries have entered into economic partnerships to bolster these exchanges, a practice that has spanned several centuries. The term “globalization” gained prominence post-1990s.²⁰

The vocabulary of globalization has extended beyond English, permeating other languages with terms such as “quanqihua” (全球化) in Chinese, “gorobaruka” (グローバル化) in Japanese, and “globalización” in Spanish, illustrating its widespread recognition and impact.²¹ Fundamentally, globalization signifies the confluence of economic and cultural activities, intertwining the realms of arts and entertainment. It denotes a global fusion in the production and consumption of art, architecture, fashion, design, media, food, and entertainment, catering to an international clientele.²² This integration highlights the economic dimensions of globalization and its profound cultural implications. By facilitating the global sharing and exchange of cultural products and practices, it contributes to enriching global culture.

The 24 Festive Drums have not merely flourished in Malaysia but have also been exported to neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and to China, where they have emerged as a novel and swiftly proliferating art form within the globalization context.²³ For instance, the introduction of the 24 Festive Drums to China occurred in 1997 by a Malaysian Chinese student at Huaqiao University (華僑大學). On July 1 of that same year, the inaugural team was established at Huaqiao University in Fujian (福建) Province.²⁴ The United Kingdom witnessed

²⁰ Peterson Institute for International Economics, “What Is Globalization? And How Has the Global Economy Shaped the United States?,” Peterson Institute for International Economics, last modified October 24, 2022, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.piie.com/microsites/globalization/what-is-globalization>.

²¹ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Red Globe Press, 2005), 51.

²² Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 265.

²³ Onn, “Cultural Construction of the Johor Bahru Chinese Community,” 239-240.

²⁴ 陳首丞、王暢、段卿帆，〈華僑大學舉辦廿四節令鼓公演，紀念世界節令鼓創立

the formation of its first 24 Festive Drums team in 2011 at the University of Liverpool, initiated by a Malaysian Chinese student.²⁵ In the United States, four Malaysian students collaboratively established a 24 Festive Drums team while studying at Oklahoma State University.²⁶ In 2022, drum teams were established in Africa, respectively in the countries of Swaziland and the Kingdom of Lesotho.²⁷ Consequently, it becomes apparent that the global promotion of the drum significantly benefits from the active involvement of Malaysia students.

b. Localization

Since the late 20th century, globalization has become a prevalent term to describe profound transformations impacting the global economy, culture, and society. It is characterized by the heightened frequency and complexity of cross-spatial interactions among cultures, business models, information, and people.²⁸ Many critics argue that globalization is leading to a convergence of global cultures and that traditional ways of life worldwide could be subsumed under a

30周年》，《中國新聞網》，2018年5月27日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.chinanews.com.cn/hr/2018/05-27/8523701.shtml> (Shoucheng Chen, Chang Wang, and Qingfan Duan, “Huaqiao University Hosts a Public Performance of the 24 Festive Drums to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the World Festive Drums,” *Chinanews*, May 27, 2018, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/hr/2018/05-27/8523701.shtml>).

²⁵ Siu, “Musicalbody,” 151.

²⁶ 〈24節令鼓登場表演，NBA觀眾大開眼界〉，《星洲日報》，2010年4月6日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.sinchew.com.my/20100406/24节令鼓登场表演·nba观众大开眼界/> (“The Appearance of the 24 Festive Drums Performance Left NBA Audiences Amazed,” *Sin Chew Daily*, April 6, 2010, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/20100406/24节令鼓登场表演·nba观众大开眼界/>).

²⁷ 張賽玉，〈二十四節令鼓向非洲邁進！實現遍佈世界六大洲目標〉，《星洲日報》，2022年8月15日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.sinchew.com.my/20220815/二十四节令鼓向非洲迈进！实现遍布世界六大洲目标/> (Sai-yu Zhang, “Towards Africa March Twenty-Four Festival Drums! Six Continents of the World Have Been Covered,” *Sin Chew Daily*, August 15, 2022, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.sinchew.com.my/20220815/二十四节令鼓向非洲迈进！实现遍布世界六大洲目标/>).

²⁸ Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 213.

Western-dominated paradigm, potentially consigning cultural diversity to history.²⁹

Contrary to this perspective, however, some scholars argue that while globalization increases global interconnectedness, it also promotes greater cultural diversity through the process of “localization”.³⁰ Localization highlights how global phenomena — such as communications, markets and social movements — are adapted to different local contexts, allowing global products, news and social movements to take different forms and have different impacts in different cultural, social and political landscapes.³¹ This process of adaptation allows global influences to integrate with local traditions and preferences, fostering a diversified rather than homogenized global culture.

Following the introduction of the 24 Festive Drums into China, their influence expanded beyond the formation of drum teams in universities, middle schools, and elementary schools. Folk troupes such as “Chaoxiang Gushe” (潮響鼓社), “Fanyin Zao” (凡音造), and “Lichun Gushe” (立春鼓社) were also established, signifying their integration into the community. Moreover, the 24 Festive Drums have graced official stages on multiple occasions. In 2019, the “Spring Festival Chinese Opera Gala” (春節戲曲晚會) on CCTV’s opera program and Hunan TV’s (湖南衛視) “A Worldwide Celebration: Chinese New Year 2019” (2019 全球華僑華人春節大聯歡) featured the 24 Festive Drums Team from Huaqiao University.³² The Ministry of Education of the People’s

²⁹ Theodore Levitt, “The Globalization of Markets,” *Harvard Business Review* 61, no. 3 (May 1983): 92-102.

³⁰ Scholte, *Globalization*, 376.

³¹ Miguel A. Jiménez-Crespo, “Localization,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Globalization*, ed. Esperança Bielsa and Dionysios Kapsaskis (London: Routledge, 2021), 376.

³² 陳加琳，〈驕傲！華僑大學二十四節令鼓隊將亮相央視戲曲春晚和湖南衛視華人春晚〉，《華僑大學》，2019年2月，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.yikaochacha.com/shougang/fujianbenke/HTML/5146773.html>（Jialin Chen, “Huaqiao University’s 24 Festive Drums Troupe Will Participate in CCTV Spring Festival Chinese Opera Gala and Hunan Satellite TV Chinese New Year Celebration,” *Huaqiao University*, February 2019, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.yikaochacha.com/shougang/fujianbenke/HTML/5146773.html>）。

Republic of China highlighted the cultural impact of this art form by launching the “Action Plan for the Promotion of Original Cultural Excellence in Universities” (高校原創文化精品推廣行動計劃), which distinguished Huaqiao University’s “*Erli, 24 Festive Drums*” (《而立》，二十四節令鼓樂) as the sole music genre project in Fujian Province.³³ Moreover, the troupe at Huaqiao University has garnered several accolades in Chinese competitions, with the most recent being the Third Prize of the Original Music Award at the 2023 Fujian Music and Dance Festival for their original piece *Pass the Flame* (《傳薪》).³⁴ Additionally, the piece *Nankong Bamboo Drums, Greeting the World* (《南孔竹鼓，禮迎天下》) by Lichun Gushe from Quzhou (衢州), Zhejiang (浙江) Province, was showcased at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou (杭州), China.³⁵ Thus, in China, the 24 Festive Drums, through creations that weave local culture into their performance, have received recognition and affection from the public.

c. Glocalization

The term “glocalization” emerges from the melding of global and local elements. Its roots can be traced back to the Japanese word “dochakuka” (土着

³³ 李學清，〈震撼節令鼓「打」出血脈認同！華僑大學廿四節令鼓隊亮相多個春晚節目〉，《海峽導報》，2019年2月21日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.hqu.edu.cn/info/1070/84274.htm> (Xueqing Li, “Blood Identity Is ‘Beaten’ by Shocking Festive Drums! The 24 Festive Drums Troupe of Huaqiao University Participates in Many Spring Festival Gala Programs,” *Haixia Daobao*, February 21, 2019, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.hqu.edu.cn/info/1070/84274.htm>)。

³⁴ 李思遠，〈我校節目獲福建音樂舞蹈節原創音樂獎三等獎〉，《華僑大學新聞網》，2023年10月11日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://news.hqu.edu.cn/info/1019/366671.htm> (Siyuan Li, “The Show Sent by Huaqiao University Won the Third Prize of Original Music Award in Fujian Music and Dance Festival,” *Huaqiao University News*, October 11, 2023, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://news.hqu.edu.cn/info/1019/366671.htm>)。

³⁵ 張斌、賴小蘭、鄭晨、周雲奇，〈浙江衢州立春鼓社：一群「素人」登上亞運舞台〉，《中國新聞網》，2023年9月27日，2024年2月10日檢索，<https://www.china-news.com.cn/ty/2023/09-27/10085636.shtml> (Bin Zhang, Xiaolan Lai, Chen Zheng, and Yunqi Zhou, “Lichun Gushe from Quzhou, Zhejiang: A Group of ‘Amateurs’ Appeared on the Asian Games Stage,” *China News*, September 27, 2023, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/ty/2023/09-27/10085636.shtml>)。

化), which initially referred to the adaptation of farming techniques to local conditions. This concept has since been embraced by the business sector as a strategy for glocalization,³⁶ signifying the term's origin and conceptual development within Japan. Roland Robertson elaborated on the English usage of glocalization, noting its common application among Japanese marketing experts. The term describes products tailored to local tastes and interests yet possessing a global appeal and application.³⁷ Robertson contends that the local and the global are not mutually exclusive but interconnected; what is often considered local is, in fact, part of the global sphere. In its broadest interpretation, globalization denotes the compression of the world, fostering interconnectedness at a local level.³⁸ Hence, glocalization highlights the amalgamation of local cultures and identities with globally circulated goods, information, cultures, and values within the globalization process, resulting in distinct local manifestations. It underscores the interplay and fusion of global and local elements.

From the above discussion, 24 Festive Drums manifest characteristics of both globalization and localization. However, there has yet to be a universal consensus on these views. Therefore, this study will focus on exploring the contrasting perspectives on globalization and localization, especially their impact on the interpreting the drums. Through a detailed analysis and comparison of these perspectives, the goal is to gain a deeper insight into the cultural significance and social role of the 24 Festive Drums in the contemporary context, as well as their development and evolution under the combined forces of globalization and localization.

³⁶ Habibul Haque Khondker, "Globalisation to Glocalisation: A Conceptual Exploration," *Intellectual Discourse* 13, no. 2 (2005): 184.

³⁷ Roland Robertson, "Globalisation or Glocalisation?," *The Journal of International Communication* 1, no. 1 (1994): 36, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.1994.9751780>.

³⁸ Victor Roudometof, "Theorizing Glocalization: Three Interpretations," *European Journal of Social Theory* 19, no. 3 (August 2016): 392, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431015605443>.

3. Method

This study is based on an ethnographic method, with data primarily based on interviews conducted in Malaysia and China during fieldwork. Documents, performance videos, fieldwork and concert are additional data sources. The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit participants, with the criterion being that participants must be active in the industry and have at least three years of experience in drumming. A total of 13 participants were involved (Table 1).

Table 1. Profiles of Interviewees

I. Focus Group Interview			
Name	Gender	Nationality	Identity
Wang Ke (王軻)	Female	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Liang Yiqing (梁漪晴)	Female	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Du Ersina (都爾斯娜)	Female	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Zhang Sizhe (張思哲)	Female	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Wen Yating (溫雅婷)	Female	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Lin Enli (林恩立)	Male	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Li Yujie (李雨傑)	Male	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Xiao Rui (肖睿)	Male	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
Zhou Guanghuai (周光淮)	Male	Chinese	Drummer in Huaqiao University, China
II. One-to-one Interview			
Name	Gender	Nationality	Identity
Bernard Goh (吳聖雄)	Male	Malaysian	Founder of Hands Percussion; The President of 24 Festive Drums Association Malaysia.

(Continued on next page)

Jimmy Ch'ng Lip Hann (莊立翰)	Male	Malaysian	The Assistant Artistic Director and Principal Percussionist for Hands Percussion; A member of 24 Festive Drums Association Malaysia.
Jarratt Leong Shi Kit (梁士杰)	Male	Malaysian	Coach in Johor Bahru, Malaysia; A member of 24 Festive Drums Association Malaysia.
Liu Wei (劉位)	Male	Chinese	Coach in Quanzhou, China: such as Huaqiao University.
Quah Beng Chye (柯明財)	Male	Malaysian	Coach in Penang, Malaysia; Acting President of 24 Festive Drums Association Malaysia.
Tan Chai Puan (陳再藩)	Male	Malaysian	Co-founder of 24 Festive Drums based in Johor Bahru, Malaysia; Consultant to the 24 Festive Drums Association Malaysia.

During the interviews, the researcher inquired about themes of identity, globalization, and localization related to the 24 Festive Drums. For those involved with the drums, their experiences and upbringing are intricately linked with these themes throughout their drumming journey. The interviews ranged from one to two hours, contingent on the depth of the participants' responses, and all interviews were conducted in Mandarin. Following the interviews, the researchers continued interactions with key informants through WeChat and WhatsApp to address issues that arose during the data analysis phase.

The selected video, a musical work titled *Dashu* (《大暑》), has been chosen as a representative example for examination. The video was designed to investigate how the solar terms, representative of the agricultural lifestyle in ancient China, have been woven into a performance piece set against the backdrop of Malaysia's tropical environment. Another concert piece is *Drumhouse* (《鼓典南洋》), which serves as supplementary material to illustrate the relationship between globalization and localization. While this study extends across two lands, its primary focus is on two drum teams as the central subjects

of research: the Hands Percussion from Malaysia and a team from Huaqiao University in China. It is important to note that this study primarily focuses on the Malaysian drum teams. Including Chinese troupes serves as supplementary data, enriching the analysis of the glocalization process of the drums and offering a broader perspective on this cultural phenomenon. Consequently, the scope of this study only covers the circumstances of some drum teams globally.

4. Glocalization of 24 Festive Drums

(1) Cultural label in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation. According to official figures, Malaysia's population by citizenship has reached 30.4 million, with ethnic Chinese accounting for 22.6% of the total population by Malaysian citizenship.³⁹ Although this community broadly identifies as “Chinese” or “Huaren” (華人) in Mandarin, on a more detailed level, they also have a deep identification with their specific language groups, such as Hokkien (福建話), Cantonese (廣東話), Teochew (潮州話), and Fuzhou dialect (福州話). These distinct language groups maintain connections with their historically continuous identities. Some groups have undergone profound cultural localization processes to the extent that new local Chinese identities have been formed. Localization entails cultural adaptation to local geography and social environments and developing a sense of identification with the local community. This cultural adaptation represents not just a passive acceptance of local influences but an active engagement in participation and innovation.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ministry of Economy Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, “Current Population Estimate, Malaysia, 2023,” July 31, 2023, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/current-population-estimates-malaysia---2023>.

⁴⁰ Chee-Beng Tan, “Chinese Identities in Malaysia,” *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 25, no. 2 (1997): 103.

This localization is manifested in various aspects, such as lion dance (舞獅),⁴¹ “huayuetuan” (華樂團, Chinese orchestra),⁴² and Chinese opera.⁴³ However, before the appearance of the 24 Festive Drums, people needed to become more familiar with the cultural elements of the solar terms. Due to Malaysia’s unique geographical environment, the change of seasons here is not as pronounced. Quah pointed out that if it were not for the 24 Festive Drums, he would not have been aware of the existence and significance of the solar terms. He believes that the 24 Festive Drums taught him about the solar terms, allowing more ethnic groups to understand this culture, understand the Chinese in Malaysia, and appreciate the wisdom of Chinese ancestors.⁴⁴ Therefore, regarding the creation of compositions themed around the solar terms, creators tend to integrate them with the local environment.

In 1999, Foon Yew High School (寬柔中學) created a work entitled *Drunken Souls*. The reason for this is that it broke away from the relationship between farming activities and movement-drumming performances and was utilized as a medium for expressing the contemporary views of young people. However, after further development, the drummers wondered if it was time to return to the theme of solar terms and festivities. In this way, the piece called *Dashu* was born in 2009.

The theme of the piece depicts a group of people working hard under the hot sun in anticipation of rain. Both the theme and the budget were met by the

⁴¹ Fung Ying Loo and Fung Chiat Loo, “Dramatizing 1Malaysia in Contemporary Chinese Lion Dance,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 139, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2016.0008>.

⁴² 廖聖捷,〈「如何華樂? 怎樣馬來?」:「居鑾中華中學華樂團」交織擺盪的「華性」與「馬來性」〉,《臺灣音樂研究》第27-28期(2019年5月):103,2024年2月10日檢索, [https://doi.org/10.29785/FJMR.201905_\(27_28\).0004](https://doi.org/10.29785/FJMR.201905_(27_28).0004) (Sheng-Jie Liou, “The Making of the ‘Huayue and Malay’: ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Malayness’ within Kluang Chong Hwa High School Chinese Orchestra,” *Formosan Journal of Music Research*, no. 27-28 (May 2019): 103, accessed February 10, 2024, [https://doi.org/10.29785/FJMR.201905_\(27_28\).0004](https://doi.org/10.29785/FJMR.201905_(27_28).0004)).

⁴³ Patricia Matusky and Tan Sooi Beng, *The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk and Syncretic Traditions*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), 97.

⁴⁴ Beng Chye Quah, interview by Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, October 2, 2022.

white vest chosen for the performance costume. Leong was involved in this performance and said:

Dashu is one of the solar terms, and Malaysia just does not have four seasons, it's summer all year round. Additionally, there was a budget issue, and we could not design a complex costume. So, we decided to wear a white vest for the performance.⁴⁵

Drummers use drums as props, dragging or carrying them on ropes as they slowly enter the stage accompanied by lighting and music. Based on the opening movements, it is evident that the drummers are portraying scenes of laborers working in the heat of the summer. The actors' bodies are oiled and watered to depict the hard-working laborers as vividly as possible, yellow lighting simulates the hot sun, and they move very slowly during the lifting process. A musical interlude called "Water" was borrowed from the soundtrack of a Chinese film *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (《天地英雄》)⁴⁶ as it accompanied the entire opening act. The music is depressing throughout the opening scene, adding a different dimension to the performance, and making it easier for the audience to follow the performers. During the performance, fire-breathing devices were used. Interestingly, according to Leong's recollection, the device was available on the premises and was improvised into the performance echoing the theme.⁴⁷ Eventually, the drummers hit the ground with their sticks to simulate the sound of rain falling from the sky as they face the sky and meet the rain, then the song ended.

Notably, many works of the 24 Festive Drums are not related to solar terms or ancient agricultural civilization but instead draw upon a variety of themes for expression. Quah pointed out that:

⁴⁵ Jarratt Shi Kit Leong, interview by Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, May 10, 2022. All translations from Chinese into English of the present article are by Yunxi Yang.

⁴⁶ Directed by He Ping (何平) in 2003, this film tells the legend of a fugitive and a constable, who are rivals and heroes to each other during the Tang Dynasty.

⁴⁷ Leong, interview by Yang and Chow, May 10, 2022.

The 24 Festive Drums repertoires will still consider the current environment and solar terms, such as “dashu” or “qingming” (清明). If it is a scene like the “Jingzhe” (驚蟄), it is more through the description of the text and videos on YouTube. However, the fact remains that most of the various repertoires are not about the festivals.⁴⁸

Artists in Malaysia interpret each solar term according to its traditional and symbolic meanings, incorporating these elements into their performances. Leong feels that the concept of the solar terms is more like a cultural symbol in the performance of 24 Festive Drums. He explained:

As a set of drums about festivals, it is the spiritual idea of a traditional culture based on the twenty-four solar terms. Tan, one of the founders, once said that we were also used to festivals that year and month, so he designed and created this set of drums based on the festival. It is a cultural symbol intended to remind people that the 24 Festive Drums are symbols of Chinese culture in Malaysia.⁴⁹

Moreover, the purpose of integrating the solar terms into the Drums is not to replicate the solar terms in temperate regions but to celebrate cultural heritage and demonstrate the versatility of this art form in a local context. The aim is to use the symbolic meanings of the solar terms to create performances that reflect the values, traditions, and cultural identity of the Chinese in Malaysia while preserving the essence of the Drums from Chinese culture.

Leong, when explaining the rationale behind the creation of *Dashu*, remarked that:

The 24 Festive Drums have been going for 20 years, with all kinds of themes, but they seem to have gotten off track, that is, they were not related to the solar terms or festivals over time, so we just tried to steer them back on course during those years. It appeared, however, that no one cared about the traditional things we care about due to the

⁴⁸ Beng Chye Quan, interview by Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, April 18, 2022.

⁴⁹ Leong, interview by Yang and Chow, May 10, 2022.

competition. Other troupes were progressing very quickly, and they were not exploring the same issues as we were. Hence, in the face of the competition system, we have no choice but to explore other themes.⁵⁰

In a large society such as this, different rules and factors can have an impact on the formation of individuals or even whole troupes. There may be traditionalists and innovators or different schools of thought as a result. It is perhaps a question that the 24 Festive Drums troupe is currently debating whether to continue with tradition or to innovate.

(2) Globalization and Localization

The interaction between global and local is exemplified in the 24 Festive Drums performance art, leading to varying interpretations of its “localization”. This is because the 24 Festive Drums is not a single inheritance nor a borrowing from Chinese culture, but rather an artistic expression that exhibits cultural fusion and re-creation.⁵¹ In Chinese scholar Wang Shuyuan’s research, she observed that the performance of 24 Festive Drums have incorporated Malaysian indigenous art forms, and sometimes Malay music is also borrowed in the creation of drum scores.⁵² When this drum was first publicly performed in China, Malaysian scholar Ang Yee Ling described the event as:

The 24 Festive Drums returned to the Mausoleum of Emperor Yan (炎帝) in Hunan (湖南) Province, China, to worship the ancient ancestor Shennong (神農) with a group drumming performance depicting the

⁵⁰ Leong, interview by Yang and Chow, May 10, 2022.

⁵¹ 卓高鴻，〈大陸高校境外生中華傳統文化傳播管理研究——以華僑大學為例〉（華僑大學碩士論文，2017），37（Gaohong Zhuo, “Chinese Traditional Culture Communication Management Research by Overseas Students in Chinese Mainland Universities: A Case Study on Huaqiao University,” (master’s thesis, Huaqiao University, 2017), 37）。

⁵² 王姝媛，〈節氣文化的境外活態傳播——以馬來西亞為例〉，《歌海》2020年第4期：113（Shuyuan Wang, “Living Transmission of Festival Culture Abroad: A Case Study of Malaysia,” *Songs Bimonthly* 2020/no. 4: 113）。

crystallization of ancestral farming wisdom. It symbolizes the return of culture and art born in the southern cities of Malaysia to the embrace of the ancestral land, following the cultural lineage. It immerses everyone in the powerful drumming performance.⁵³

Moreover, in recent years, the 24 Festive Drums have become a famous performance in Chaozhou (潮州) City, Guangdong (廣東) Province, China, with numerous reports focusing on this drumming. Among these, one of the subtitle that wrote “Teochew Sound Returns Home” (潮州之聲返回家鄉). The Teochew Sound here refers to the 24 Festive Drums. In this news, the founder of the Chaoxiang Gushe, Li Kangdi (李康迪), explains why he named it “Chaoxiang”. He says, “Chaoxiang” means “the sound from the hometown of Chaozhou, which is consciously handed down by the Chaozhou people so that it can return to its original homeland.”⁵⁴

These perspectives place a greater emphasis on the origins of Chinese culture. The concept of sinocentrism aptly encapsulates these viewpoints. It creates an imaginary distinction between China and the rest of the world, often elevating Chinese culture as superior or unique. It embodies a form of cultural pride where Chinese intellectuals emphasize the Chinese dimension in addressing universal problems. This viewpoint may lead to the romanticization or fantasization of everything in China, often portraying it as superior or unique compared to other cultures or global contexts.⁵⁵ In these perspectives, the

⁵³ 洪一麟,〈令人自豪的二十四節令鼓〉,《星洲日報》,2007年9月30日,2024年2月10日檢索, <https://www.chinaqw.com/hqhr/hrs/200709/30/89656.shtml> (Yee Ling Ang, “Proudly 24 Festive Drums,” *Sin Chew Daily*, September 30, 2007, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.chinaqw.com/hqhr/hrs/200709/30/89656.shtml>).

⁵⁴ 趙映光、黃士、王沫依,〈潮州廿四節令鼓文化館成古城熱門打卡點〉,《羊城晚報》,2021年11月4日,2024年2月10日檢索, <http://ep.ycwb.com/epaper/ywdf/resfile/2021-11-04/YD09/ycwbdfb20211104YD09.pdf> (Yinguan Zhao, Shi Huang, and Moyi Wang, “24 Festive Drums Culture Centre Has Become a Popular Tourist Spot in the Ancient City of Chaozhou,” *Yangcheng Evening News*, November 4, 2021, accessed February 10, 2024, <http://ep.ycwb.com/epaper/ywdf/resfile/2021-11-04/YD09/ycwbdfb20211104YD09.pdf>).

⁵⁵ Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” in *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow

authors think that they overlook the distinctiveness of the Chinese in Malaysia, suggesting that it fails to recognize the unique cultural identity that has developed within this diaspora.

The perspectives of the scholars and their emphasis on a return to Chinese roots are not widely shared by the majority of Chinese in Malaysia. Instead, the understanding of globalization among Chinese in Malaysia tends towards the viewpoint of promoting the 24 Festive Drums globally. Leong states that:

Chinese in Malaysia created this drum set [...] it is originally local, so why should it be localized? As soon as we discuss localization, the term local is used in this context. You may think that the Malay is the local, the Indian is the local, so you may ask whether it has been localized. For me, it was originally created in Malaysia, so why does it need to be localized?⁵⁶

Benny Leong also published an article in *Sin Chew Daily* in 2005 entitled “24 Festive Drums, Cultural Export or Return” (〈廿四節令鼓：文化的輸出或回歸？〉). He explains that the 24 Festive Drums is a performance created by the Chinese in Malaysia with Chinese culture as its basis. As a cultural performance or ceremony, the 24 Festive Drums has already branched out of Johor Bahru, where it originated. It has become an essential cultural emblem for the Chinese community in Malaysia, influencing other Southeast Asian countries. Benny Leong suggests that the spread of the drums may not represent a return to ancestral roots but a cultural export, a product of the Chinese community’s efforts over many years in Malaysia.⁵⁷ Similarly, a report by Tan in *Nanyang Siang Pau* (《南洋商報》) highlights that while many cultures have

(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 1-24.

⁵⁶ Jarratt Shi Kit Leong, interview by Yunxi Yang and Ow Wei Chow, May 6, 2022.

⁵⁷ 楊邦尼, 〈廿四節令鼓：文化的輸出或回歸？〉, 《星洲日報》, 2005年9月19日, 2010年2月27日轉貼, 2024年2月10日檢索, <https://signifer27.wordpress.com/2010/02/27/廿四節令鼓：文化的輸出或回歸？/> (Benny Leong, “24 Festive Drums: Cultural Export or Return,” *Sin Chew Daily*, September 19, 2005, reposted February 27, 2010, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://signifer27.wordpress.com/2010/02/27/廿四節令鼓：文化的輸出或回歸？/>).

been imported into Malaysia, the drums stand out as a locally developed art form that has gained international recognition and exportation.⁵⁸ These viewpoints emphasize the Malaysian origins of the drums, underscoring their significance as a cultural export and a symbol of the Chinese identity in Malaysia.

These two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive or conflicting; they are complementary, underscoring the multifaceted nature of Chinese cultural flow. From the perspective of cultural flow, the global migration and dispersion of the Chinese community highlight the globalization aspects of Chinese culture. Chinese emigrants have transported Chinese customs, culture, and artistic expressions to various corners of the globe, concurrently enabling the exchange and amalgamation of these cultural elements with the cultures of their host countries. In the localization process, the Chinese in Malaysia, influenced by the local political and cultural milieu, have created the 24 Festive Drums by amalgamating and innovating upon Chinese cultural elements. It signifies the Chinese community's efforts to preserve and evolve their cultural traditions and endeavours to reconstruct and articulate their cultural identity within new contexts. It further exhibits the adaptability and innovative capacity of Chinese culture. Hence, in this context, the drums epitomize both a manifestation of globalization and an outcome of localization.

From the vantage point of cultural flows, the Chinese diaspora has not merely transplanted Chinese culture into Malaysia but has innovatively forged the distinctive art form of the Drums within Malaysia's unique socio-political milieu. Furthermore, Chinese culture intrinsically exhibits traits of globalization, evidenced by the worldwide migration and dispersion of Chinese communities. This diaspora has facilitated the spread of Chinese customs, culture, and artistic expressions across the globe, fostering exchanges and assimilation with diverse regional cultures. The circulation of the drums reflect this cultural and social development.

⁵⁸ "24 Festive Drums: Drum up the World!", *Nanyang Siang Pau*.

From the 24 Festive Drums perspective, it originated in Malaysia and gained international promotion, with communities in various countries and regions founding drumming ensembles. These groups engage in robust exchanges and interactions with local cultures, allowing the Drums to assimilate local idiosyncrasies. This cross-cultural engagement has led to the emergence of performance troupes that exhibit distinct local characters. Therefore, from a cultural standpoint and specifically through the lens of the 24 Festive Drums, this performance art encapsulates characteristics of globalization and localization.

However, this cultural flow and interaction have also sparked discussions about cultural heritage when introduced to China. It raises a question about ownership of cultural heritage. Referring to the word “dangerous”, Tan summarized the various issues surrounding the 24 Festive Drums in China. He pointed out that there are two meanings to the word “dangerous” The first meaning in China is the tendency to make a big show out of something, but that neglects the original spirit. The second meaning is that Chaozhou city would like to apply for the drums to be recognized as Chaozhou’s intangible cultural heritage,⁵⁹ because some people believe that the drums was influenced by “Chaozhou daluogu” (潮州大鑼鼓) during its creation. Tan explains that the culture of the Chaozhou daluogu has some influence on 24 Festive Drums, but they are different. The Chaozhou daluogu is drumming while the drums include drumming and dance.⁶⁰ Tan rejected the proposal.

The development of the 24 Festive Drums in China, spanning 27 years, has yet to see as rapid a dissemination as witnessed in Malaysia. The biggest

⁵⁹ 潮州市文化廣電旅遊體育局，〈關於政協第十二屆潮州市委員會第三次會議第 27 號提案答覆的函〉，2019 年 6 月 25 日，潮州市人民政府，2019 年 8 月 2 日張貼，2024 年 2 月 10 日檢索，http://www.chaozhou.gov.cn/zwgk/jytabl/content/post_3610486.html (Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Tourism, and Sports in Chaozhou, “Response to Proposal No. 27 of the Third Meeting of the Chaozhou Municipal Committee of the Twelfth CPPCC,” June 25, 2019, The People’s Government of Chaozhou Municipality, posted August 2, 2019, accessed February 10, 2024, http://www.chaozhou.gov.cn/zwgk/jytabl/content/post_3610486.html)。

⁶⁰ Tan, interview by Yang and Chow.

challenge facing the 24 Festive Drums in China is sustainability. Liu pointed out that,

In China, the 24 Festive Drums have not spread as fast as in Malaysia, although there are many Malaysian students coming to the university to establish drum troupes, so why have not these drum troupes affected the schools nearby as they have in Huaqiao University?⁶¹

In recent years, many 24 Festive Drum teams have been established in China, but it displays a pronounced regional character. According to the authors' incomplete statistics, approximately 77 teams exist across China, with 34 situated in Chaozhou City alone and the remainder distributed among other cities. Additionally, it has gained access to numerous official promotional platforms in China, including the recent performance at the 19th Asian Games held in China. Media coverage has predominantly concentrated on the cultural implications of the *jieling* rather than the drum music itself. With the 24 Solar Terms recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO,⁶² their incorporation into daily life and creative endeavours has notably expanded in recent years. One such instance is the evening program of the "Wonderful Tour" (奇妙遊) series produced by Henan TV in 2021,⁶³ showcasing their application in contemporary media and creative productions. Conversely, in Malaysia, creators tend to promote *jieling* as a cultural label, marking a departure from the focus of Chinese media reports. This variance underscores that the primary challenge for drum music in gaining widespread recognition as a performance art in China is effectively showcasing

⁶¹ Wei Liu, interview by Yunxi Yang, April 20, 2021.

⁶² 游雪晴,〈二十四節氣入選世界非遺名錄〉,《科技日報》,2016年12月1日,2024年2月10日檢索, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-12/01/content_5140793.htm (Xueqing You, "24 Solar Terms Have Been Selected into the World's Intangible Cultural Heritage List," *Science and Technology Daily*, December 1, 2016, accessed February 10, 2024, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-12/01/content_5140793.htm).

⁶³ 朱顏,〈河南衛視「奇妙遊」傳統節日晚會的創新策略研究〉,〈河北大學碩士論文,2022〉,16 (Yan Zhu, "Research on Innovation Strategy of Henan Satellite TV's 'Wonderful Tour' Traditional Festival Evening Party," (master's thesis, Hebei University, 2022), 16).

its unique Chinese cultural attributes within the performance. Therefore, although this musical genre has gained a certain level of popularity in some regions of China in recent years, its future development requires ongoing observation.

(3) Glocal Identity

In Malaysia, Chinese cultural activities, such as huayuetuan, lion dance, and Chinese opera, not only function as a method to exhibit the facets of Chinese culture but also represent the profound identity of the Chinese community. Furthermore, these activities contribute to establishing a degree of differentiation between the Chinese community and other ethnic groups.⁶⁴ A review of the era, when the two creators of the 24 Festive Drums created it, reveals that it was produced during tense racial conflicts in Malaysia in the 1980s and a high level of anxiety among Malaysian Chinese.⁶⁵ The drums used for the 24 Festive Drums are the “shigu” (獅鼓), the sole instruments used during the lion dance. The lion dance is one of the most prominent heritage practices of Chinese culture in Malaysia and politics. In Malaysia, the lion dance played an important role in the political controversy from 1970 to 1990 due to ethnic tensions. Based on findings from a variety of sources, there is an indication of a causal relationship between the state and the Chinese community, which results in a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the effects ethnic Chinese Malaysians have endured economically, politically, and culturally. In addition to holding a solid Chinese cultural identity, the 24 Festive Drums and Lion Dance are also cultural symbols of Chinese resilience and sustainability in Malaysia. Leong mentioned,

When we comprehend the historical context of the era in which these drums were manufactured, as Tan stated earlier, it was because of

⁶⁴ Liou, “The Making of the ‘Huayue and Malay’,” 93.

⁶⁵ 安煥然，〈二十四節令鼓與馬華文化的創造〉，《閩南風》2011 年第 6 期：14 (Huann Jan Onn, “The Creation of 24 Festive Drums and Mahua Culture,” *Min Nan Feng*, 2011/no. 6: 14)。

Malaysia's political and cultural atmosphere in the 1980s that the drum was produced.⁶⁶

Quah also expressed a desire for a similar answer, so he explained:

Our country is multi-racial, but many of the impressions other races have of Chinese ethnicity are negative and selfishness. I believe that the 24 Festive Drums have a unifying effect, since it is also a group activity, and by doing this it unites the spirit of the people. In other words, it has a protective effect upon us. Further, this illustrates Malaysia's adherence to the spirit and culture of the Chinese in Malaysia, which is better understood by foreigners. It is like the Acrobatic Lion Dance which was created by Chinese in Malaysia and has also been exported abroad along with the 24 Festive Drums.⁶⁷

Consequently, the 24 Festive Drums was created in a relatively oppressive cultural climate.⁶⁸

24 Festive Drums became the cultural label of Chinese in Malaysia, and it has also become a way for the next generation to understand Chinese culture. Chinese ancestors had a stronger sense of belonging to Chinese culture during World War II than the next generation, suggesting a shift in cultural attitudes and perceptions over time. Historical events, globalization, and multicultural influences could have contributed to this change in perspective among the younger generation. However, the experience of Boyz Chew, the composer of *The Memories* (《記一個時代》),⁶⁹ when he taught the 24 Festive Drums at Tsun Jin High School (循人中學) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, illustrates the problem of student identity. The uncertainty surrounding their cultural identities affects their perception of the 24 Festive Drums training, where they view it as a physical

⁶⁶ Leong, interview by Yang and Chow, May 10, 2022.

⁶⁷ Quan, interview by Yang and Chow, April 18, 2022.

⁶⁸ The authors posit that several factors may induce to the creation of the 24 Festive Drums, including the National Culture Policy in 1970, the New Economic Policy in 1970 and 13 May Incident of 1969.

⁶⁹ *The Memories* was created by Orang Orang Drum Theater in 2017.

exercise rather than a performance art.⁷⁰ Therefore, this piece was created in response to this context.

Growing up in Malaysia, the younger generation may find it challenging to identify with a singular culture. The professional drumming troupes of the 24 Festive Drums offer a clearer view of the shifting characteristics of cultural identity. As Nithyanandan pointed out, Hands Percussion, in its early years, participated in many international stages overseas, yet the troupes' identity was ambiguous and unclear.⁷¹ One of the troupes' members, Ch'ng mentioned their first performance in Europe, where foreigners did not realize they were Malaysians, mistaking them for Japanese or Koreans.⁷² Following this incident, they began to consider that the team should emphasize Malaysia's multicultural characteristics. It was one of the main reasons they included Gamelan in their repertoire in 2007. Beyond providing a melodic aspect to the monotonous drum sounds, Gamelan also serves as a cultural label of the Asian region, endowing the ensemble with a unique cultural identity.

For Hands Percussion, integrating different ethnic music cultures within Malaysia began with exploring the Malaysian Chinese identity. Chan's further investigation into Hands Percussion revealed that Malaysian identity is not static but dynamic, continuously evolving in response to global influences while maintaining connections with local traditions. This transformation reflects a broader trend in contemporary cultural expressions, where identity is increasingly influenced by the complex interplay of local and global forces.⁷³ Hands Percussion's evolution from a Chinese-only drumming ensemble to one that incorporates elements from various Malaysian ethnic musical traditions,

⁷⁰ Siu, "Musicalbody," 247.

⁷¹ Jotsna Nithyanandan, "Hands Percussion: Moving Towards a Malaysian Identity" (Master's thesis, University of Malaya, 2015), 68.

⁷² Jimmy Lip Hann Ch'ng, interview by Yunxi Yang, November 23, 2022.

⁷³ Clare Suet Ching Chan, "Principles and Values Influencing Hands Percussion Malaysia Cosmopolitan Musical Creations in Collaboration with Global Alliance," *IICACS: International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Arts Creation and Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 35.

further influenced by global music, showcases the fluidity of cultural identity. This transformation reflects the changing identity of Malaysians, becoming more cosmopolitan and representing the fusion of local and global cultural elements. Exploring one piece of their repertoire, *Drumhouse* performed in December 2022, reveals a similar change.

Drumhouse was a collaborative and co-creative effort involving individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. Zamzuirah Zahari, a Malay traditional dancer, joined forces in the show with a contribution by singing an excerpt from Teochew opera “Peach Blossom Takes the Ferry” (〈桃花過渡〉) in translated Malay lyrics. Additionally, she performed a solo song titled “Hadir Mu” in the Malay language, which is translated as “Your Presence”. Discussing the creation of this piece, Goh explained:

I feel it represents the presence of art and culture. When she [Zamzuirah Zahari] sang this song, she dressed in pink silk made from traditional fabrics of different ethnicities, including Chinese silk, Malay sarong, and Iban traditional textiles. Essentially, I aim to convey that our cultures are intimately interconnected.⁷⁴

The development of this repertoire was not just superficial incorporation of instruments or melodies from different ethnic groups; it emphasized the customs and emotions of Malaysia, thereby ensuring the piece’s seamless integration into the local milieu. Furthermore, the adaptation of Teochew opera to suit the local environment entailed the incorporation of both Teochew and Malay languages in a duet format, alongside a significant transformation of the costumes, marking a localized form from traditional Teochew opera costumes (Figure 1).

⁷⁴ Bernard Goh, interview by Yunxi Yang, February 17, 2023.

Figure 1. Malaysian actors and musicians performing “Peach Blossom Takes the Ferry” in *Drumhouse*. This song was adapted from Teochew opera *Su Liuniang* (《蘇六娘》). Photographed by Yunxi Yang on December 7, 2022.



Hence, the 24 Festive Drums, both traditional school teams and professional groups, have extended beyond the framework of purely Chinese culture, thus progressing towards a more multicultural performance approach. However, this evolution does not signify a complete departure from Chinese cultural elements or an intentional pandering to other ethnic groups. This trajectory of multicultural creation unfolds naturally, as the composers themselves are part of a multicultural society. Goh states that:

During my coming of age, I was immersed in a diverse array of musical influences, thanks to my friends who are Malays and Indians. This naturally led me to incorporate these cultural elements into the 24 Festive Drums, as my upbringing in this multicultural environment deeply influenced my artistic expression.⁷⁵

The introduction of Malaysia's Vision 2020 in 1991 and the "1Malaysia" concept in 2009 aimed to promote ethnic harmony and national unity. These initiatives were essentially established to foster understanding and integration among Malaysia's varied ethnic communities. In this context, the 24 Festive Drums initiative is just one of many artistic efforts aiming to bridge the gaps between ethnicities. Other Malaysian artists are engaging in similar creative pursuits. A prime example is the band Inner Voices, led by Ken Hor, which has produced a composition titled *Let's Go Mamak*. This piece serves as a vibrant demonstration of how various musical traditions in Malaysia can come together and evolve through collaborative efforts.⁷⁶ As a result, these musicians are aspiring to create a new musical genre that not only resonates with but also distinctly reflects a uniquely Malaysian identity.

Overall, the 24 Festive Drums aimed to showcase an ethnic Chinese identity early on. Many compositions sought to express a distinctly Malaysian Chinese or Malaysian identity over time, particularly in their development's middle and

⁷⁵ Goh, interview by Yang.

⁷⁶ Inner Voices Productions, "Let's Go Mamak @ KLPAC, 2008 & 2009," Inner Voices Productions, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://inner-voices.weebly.com/lets-go-mamak.html>.

later stages. Fieldwork conducted at the Universiti Putra Malaysia, Chong Hwa Independent High School in Kuala Lumpur, and Hands Percussion revealed the participation of Malay and Indian members. However, ethnic Chinese still formed the majority. Consequently, the authors believe the drum carries a deeper layer of complex identity. It is not merely an identity representing Chinese, Malaysian Chinese, or Malaysian but an artistic form with a unique identity at the intersection of globalization and localization. Under these conditions, it carries a complex glocal identity, underscoring the fluid boundaries between Chinese cultures in a globalized world. It emphasizes the role of multiple factors in shaping and reshaping cultural expressions and identities, highlighting the dynamic interplay between global influences and local traditions.

5. Conclusion

The popularity of the 24 Festive Drums represents more than just the transmission of Chinese culture. It also demonstrates the dynamic interplay and mutual influences between Chinese culture and the global and local contexts within the framework of globalization. Through the investigation on selected drum troupes in China and Malaysia, this inductive study discovers that this interaction not only facilitates the innovation and evolution of traditional Chinese culture but also fosters a shared cultural identity within the global Chinese diaspora, enhancing the sense of connection and belonging among Chinese communities in diverse locales. Moreover, in the time of globalization, the drum unveils the fluid nature of cultural identity and the permeability of cultural boundaries, illustrating how the global Chinese community actively engages in worldwide cultural exchanges while preserving traditional elements, thereby creating cultural activities that embody both a global outlook and local attributes. Nevertheless, issues of glocalization on Chinese music in regional and global contexts are rather complex with many intertwining social, economic and political factors, as more insights are in a great demand for us to understand its cultural flow, performative identity and artistic characteristics through various perspectives in further research.

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