

# Research on the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra

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**Abstract:** *Throughout the development of western music, the instrumental music tends to be a diversified direction, and the exploration of new timbre is one of the directions of its exploration. After the 20th century, the modern and contemporary music is no longer satisfied with the auditory effect brought by the traditional timbre, and the exploration of the compound new timbre has become a new topic and trend. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is an emerging product born on the development of Chinese dizi music ensemble art. It is the first contemporary dizi music ensemble orchestra. Different from the traditional dizi performance, the ensemble form of the bamboo flute orchestra is more arranged in terms of the number of personnel than the former. In the repertoire works specially written for the orchestra, the vocal relationship is more complex, and the variety of dizi involving different shapes and tonality is richer. At present, the form of the dizi ensemble is still in the embryonic stage. As a practice base on the road of bidirectional exploration of the theory and practice of the dizi, the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is of great significance to the development of the Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art. The development of Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has been accompanied by the author's growth and study for many years. The author intends to conduct research on its founding reasons and development context, so as to provide more reference for the relevant research on bamboo flute orchestra and research on Chinese traditional music in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra; dizi; Ensemble; Zhang WeiLiang; Western Culture*

## 1. Introduction

With the influence of Western musical ideas, Chinese musicians were no longer limited to playing and teaching traditional music. Instead, they learned Western orchestral models, form large orchestras and ensemble. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra was established under such situation. So, the performances we see of *dizi* today are very rich, including solo, duet, ensemble, etc. The orchestra was founded by Professor Zhang Weiliang of the Chinese Conservatory of Music in 2012. As a new product born from the development of Chinese flute art, it is the first flute ensemble orchestra in China. Aside from the *dizi* there are other musical instruments, including *xiao* and *xun*.

The performance of Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is different from the traditional ensemble of bamboo flute, and the relationship between the sound part is more complicated in the repertoire specially written for the orchestra, and the kinds of flute involving different shapes and tonality are more abundant. At present, the form of the bamboo flute ensemble is still in its infancy. As a practical base on the two-way exploration of bamboo flute theory and practice, Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is of great significance to the development of Chinese bamboo flute ensemble art. With the aim of scientific innovation, the Chinese Bamboo flute Orchestra provides a practical base for experts and scholars engaged in the performance, creation and theoretical research of bamboo flute instruments. On this platform, bamboo flute players with different styles and genres can show their talents and show their ideas; composers with different styles use this platform to explore deeply in the field of bamboo flute creation. In particular, the orchestra encourages outstanding young players to be able to innovate and improve their talents in the field of bamboo flute instrumental music creation and performance. At the same time, the orchestra welcome the outstanding musicians, whether engaged in theory or performance, who can support the practice of bamboo flute orchestra with their research results, and constantly sum up and explore the experience and rules of the development of bamboo flute art, as well as the characteristics of different styles and schools, so as to promote the communication between bamboo flute and more extensive domestic and foreign musicians. Chinese bamboo flute orchestra has forward-looking vision, based on contemporary, seeking development. The purpose is to continuously open up and innovate the creation and expression space of bamboo flute instrumental music, to examine the style and characteristics of creation and performance from the angle of oriental aesthetics, and to refine and sum up the experience of instrumental music playing and skill training.

## 2. About The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra

This chapter frames the historical context of how the Chinese Bamboo Flute orchestra (Zhong Guo Zhu Di Yue Tuan) was established. I will also discuss the instrument of orchestra and the consists of orchestra, its performances and the experiences of the members. I will also highlight the contemporary music traditions that the Chinese Bamboo Orchestra adapted and the implications of its new musical expressions.

The Chinese Bamboo flute Orchestra was founded by Professor Zhang Wei Liang of the Chinese Conservatory of Music in 2012. As of 2022, the Orchestra has gone through ten years and has attracted great attention in the industry and related fields.<sup>[1]</sup> As a new product born on the development road of Chinese *dizi* art, it is the first flute ensemble orchestra in China of *dizi* and its musical instruments, including *xiao* and *xun*. During the past ten years, the orchestra has performed in Korea, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Japan, Germany, France and other countries and regions. It has performed in many well-known concert halls at home and abroad, such as the Chinese National Theater, Zhongshan Music Hall, Xinghai Concert Hall, Hong Kong City Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Korea's Gyeongju Concert Hall, Taipei Grand Theater, and has cooperated with several world-class artists including Ye Cong, Joel Hoffman, David Murphy, Teruhisa Fukuda, Ohei Nishikawa.

The performers of the orchestra are composed of the *dizi* professional teachers, doctoral students, master's students and undergraduates. As the students face the problem of novice admission and graduation, it is not fixed. The officials of The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra are: Zhang Weiliang, Artistic Director and Head; Hu Biao, Conductor; and Zhang Jian, Deputy Head/*dizi* Player.

### 2.1. Mr. Zhang Weiliang, the Founder of the Orchestra

Mr. Zhang Wei Liang is a forward-sighted musician. His *dizi* playing is highly skilled and expertise at composing, he went to France dozens of times in the last century to study composition and electronic music. Unlike other *dizi* players, he has an international vision. Every work and move is innovative and a breakthrough in the history of the *dizi*.<sup>[2]</sup>

Over the years, Mr. Zhang Weiliang has been working hard to build a scientific and systematic *dizi* teaching system. The establishment of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is also intended to provide a new teaching method and training platform for students to cultivate students' team spirit and cooperation ability. Students majoring in instrumental performance usually focus on solo training in traditional professional courses. *dizi*, as a horizontal melodic instrument, cannot play longitudinal harmony texture like harmony instruments represented by piano, which leads to the congenital deficiency of harmony training in *dizi*. Although harmony training has long been a basic compulsory course in professional music colleges, the vast majority of students majoring in *dizi* have a high sensitivity to harmony through piano lessons, ensemble lessons, visual singing and ear training.

The establishment of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is not only caused by the subjective will and ideas of the founder. The more important reason is that due to the development of *dizi* music culture and the development of Chinese traditional music, the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra has emerged in such a development process. In other words, if Mr. Zhang Weiliang had not founded the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra, other musicians would have created other-named bamboo flute orchestras. For the *dizi* expression form, it has experienced hundreds of years of change and development. From small ensemble and opera accompaniment, developed to solo. According to this law to continue to develop, the use of the same or similar instruments to play and form an ensemble is in line with the law of the development of music history, and it is very necessary. From the perspective of the development of Chinese national instrumental music, it is also the only way to learn the western orchestral ensemble mode after learning the western orchestra mode.

However, it has to be said that if other musicians founded The Bamboo Flute Orchestra, and not Mr. Zhang Weiliang, then the *dizi* ensemble form and the bamboo flute orchestra would not have reached the current height and standard. It is necessary to understand and analyze Mr. Zhang Weiliang's musical experience and musical thoughts here. Similarly, it is particularly important to review and analyze the development and status quo of the Chinese national instrumental music in modern times, and to understand and explore the causes of the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra.

In my opinion, the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra was founded not only because its founder was Mr. Zhang Wei Liang, but because of his ideas which has led to the success of the orchestra. There are many other bamboo flute orchestras in China. For example, almost all professional music colleges have bamboo flute orchestras. These orchestras all imitate each other. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is the most successful bamboo flute orchestra at present, not only because it is the first bamboo flute orchestra in China, but also because its achievements cannot be surpassed by other orchestras. In

addition to including China's top *dizi* performers, Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has a fixed conductor and composer and has cooperated with well-known foreign conductors and composers for a long time. Every work of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is original and tailored by the composer for the orchestra. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is also the only *dizi* orchestra to go out of China and stand on the world stage.

## **2.2. Instruments of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra**

The instruments used by the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra are mainly *dizi* and *xiao*, which also integrate other traditional Chinese instruments, western orchestra instruments, piano, and vocals.<sup>[3]</sup> In short, the orchestra uses multiple *dizi* or *xiao* as the foundation, according to the requirements of different music, using other instruments or vocal music collocation, so as to produce different sound colors and effects. Representative works include *Mang Yuan* which uses bamboo flute orchestra, black tube, timpani, harp, two cellos; *Moonlight*, which uses bamboo flute orchestra and marimba; *Three Scenes of Taiwan* for bamboo flute orchestra and piano, percussion instruments; *Sizzle* for bamboo flute orchestra and violin, cello, cloud gong; *Yihe* for bamboo flute orchestra and *guqin*, percussion instruments; and *Plug on the Music* for bamboo flute orchestra and *pipa*. Composers who have composed for the orchestra include: Zhang Weiliang, Cui Quan, Yang Qing, Joel Hoffman, and Kohei Nishikawa.

## **2.3. Performances and the experiences of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra**

As of July 2023, under the guidance of head Mr. Zhang Weiliang, the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra main performance, communication and a total of 42 activities, including 30 special concert, exchange countries or regions including Britain, South Korea, Japan, France, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, performance type mainly divided into the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra special concert or participation performance, including academic exchange, sympathy, invited performances, recording CD records and video.

## **3. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra And Its Influences**

This chapter focuses on the concepts and ideas that the significance and influence of the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra on the development of Chinese *dizi*.

### **3.1. The Development of Chinese Traditional Instrumental Music In Modern Times**

In the middle-18th century, western powers opened the door of China, and the majority of intellectuals were deeply influenced by western ideas and advocated imitating the Western system, which made western music culture quickly flow into China, and western music penetrated into the life of Chinese people at this time. Under the influence of "science" and "democracy" advocated by the May Fourth Movement, Chinese folk music has also embarked on the road of revival, and some music associations have been established. Some progressives developed the playing techniques of folk music, explored the new teaching methods of folk music, and made great contributions to the development of new folk musical instruments. The founding of the People's Republic of China marked the arrival of the new world. The state and the government set up large and small folk music performance art troupes and music education schools, so that some endangered music scores, music and instruments can be preserved. The collection and arrangement of folk music also made good achievements in recent decades.

There are three different viewpoints in the conflict between Chinese and Western musical culture. There is a view that the western music culture is advanced, and the Chinese people must wholeheartedly learn the western music. Another view is that the western music culture is not suitable for China, and it will assimilate the culture, and that the people must go their own way. These two views are very different, from the struggle in the late Qing Dynasty to today. But one should not just stare at the opposite of the two but should gradually reconcile the problems of the century. The third view is that China can be open and inclusive and should absorb the excellent achievements of other nations and other countries on the basis of inheriting and developing China's excellent music culture. Obviously, the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra is the product of the third view. The orchestra uses Chinese instruments to play the works created by western musical creation techniques to express the melody with Chinese characteristics and convey the idea of modern Chinese music to the world.

### 3.2. The Influence of Western Music Culture on the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra

To explore the influence of western music culture on The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra, it is perhaps necessary to expand the scope to the influence of western music culture on Chinese traditional music, because The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is originally the product of western music culture affecting Chinese traditional music culture.

Since ancient times, China has been a country with diverse geographical environment and rich agricultural social experience. Therefore, in ancient China, the completion of everything is given by heaven, relying on the gift and accumulated experience during work, sensibility is greater than rationality. To get rid of the shackles of the old feudal ideas on the old continent, the early immigrants in the West went to the new continent to establish a new life. To survive in the harsh natural environment, they pursued rational thinking to seek ways to fight all things. One sensibility, one rational, is the difference between Chinese and Western ways of thinking. This difference in thinking, extending to music, makes even more differences. Traditional Chinese music thought advocates harmony and believes that adapting to nature is far more important than conquering and transforming nature. In front of nature, there is no desire, and the spirit of being satisfied with the material life is obviously completely opposite to the idea that western countries conquer nature and transform nature and think that natural material should serve human beings. Western music thought takes humanism as the mainstream and reconstructs the thought that emphasizes people themselves. In the core world view of western culture, seeking change is the most important spirit. Only by constantly breaking conventions and constantly innovating, can we obtain more truth and master more knowledge, so as to accelerate the pace of the development of society and The Times.

Therefore, traditional Chinese music usually aims at the purpose of pleasing itself, not pursuing the rhythm and intonation, the resonance of instruments and the accuracy of the score while Western music strives for the ultimate accuracy in the rhythm, intonation, resonance, and the music score. Therefore, after China's reform and opening up, and after the influx of western culture into China, it is a common phenomenon and trend to measure and judge Chinese music with western music standards.

The influence of western music culture on Chinese bamboo flute orchestra can be embodied in two aspects: music creation and expression form. In terms of music creation, the influence of western music culture on the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra can be seen through the creation method and creation theme. The traditional way of creating *dizi* music works is for the performers to break and reorganize the rhythm according to the melody of Chinese folk songs or operas, adapt the melody, and create the music works with the single part melody of the *dizi*. Music works usually use numbered musical notation to write music, in most cases even written by hand. The works of the Bamboo Flute Orchestra are all created by professional composers using stave production software. The main melody of the works is not limited to Chinese folk music but can be atonal and impressionist in style. The expression form of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is also influenced by western music culture. The form of ensemble of similar instruments did not exist in traditional Chinese music in the past, and the concept of ensemble was also the first feature of western music culture. The *dizi* is often used as a solo melodic instrument because of its bright timbre and great personality. And ensemble needs to pursue commonality, seek unified and harmonious harmony color. Western music and even world music exchange and integrate, but not only this. After absorbing the rigorous and scientific western music, these methods need to be used to express the sound of *dizi* ensemble, which is a bold and new attempt.

### 3.3. The Impact of Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra on the Development of Chinese *dizi* Art

The expression form of the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra is based on the *dizi* ensemble. *dizi* ensemble is a relatively novel form in *dizi* art. Compared with solo, ensemble makes up for the deficiency of *dizi* as a single melody instrument, which can form various forms, and enrich the sound color and expressive force of *dizi* playing, so that it can show more musical connotation. Under the new situation of the deepening and integration of cultural exchanges between the East and the West, the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has created new possibilities for the development of *dizi* art.

The establishment of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra marks a breakthrough in the *dizi* ensemble. From the perspective of configuration structure, it is no longer limited to the two-part, three-part and four-part *dizi* ensemble. The use of numerous *dizi* in the orchestra provides more space for the musical imagination to make new compositions that explore the rich and complex sound possibilities of the instrument. The repertoire of the *dizi* ensemble is not limited to a single display of works but can have numerous possibilities such as concert works.

The required technical proficiency in playing the repertoire of The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has resulted in higher skills in playing the *dizi*. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra training requirements

is a complete system from the timbre adjustment and breath training of *bangdi*, *qudi*, bass *dizi* and double bass *dizi* to the explanation of intonation, timbre, volume, rhythm, harmony, musical expression, and performance method. By playing in the orchestra, students also learn the lessons in cooperation and playing with other musicians.

The number of professional works has increased significantly as The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has necessitated its creation. At a certain level, the single and fragmented *dizi* ensemble repertoire (including etudes) cannot completely improve and enhance the performance ability of the *dizi* players to play in the ensemble form. There also few new works for the *dizi* ensemble. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra since its founding, has brought together a group of excellent local and foreign composers to create new works for its repertoire. The orchestra itself with the unique timbre of *dizi* can excavate huge development potential in the instrument, promote rigorous professional training, and open inclusive music attitudes to understand new musical expressions. The founder and leader, Mr.Zhang Weiliang, innovates the concept of *dizi* music, combining Chinese traditional elements with his international vision which has led the orchestra to develop vigorously. So far, he has accumulated a considerable number of excellent works for the orchestra. The CD recordings and music performances of The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra has been highly regarded by music critics and audiences all over the world.

Today, with the rapid development of *dizi* art, the aesthetic appreciation of performance constantly promotes the increasingly diversified performance forms of *dizi* music art. In people's inherent concept, the sound of *dizi* is high and bright and extremely distinctive timbre, which has always been its distinctive characteristic as a good single melodic playing instrument. Even since ancient times, the *dizi* plays in folk opera, or in modern national orchestra, or with soft strings and grand drums. It is under such an idea of subverting the traditional ideas, through continuous training, practice and readjustment to prove that the *dizi* can make breakthroughs in the tolerance and common aspects of what it is not good at and can form a new style characteristics of the *dizi* music art.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the research of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra, I have not only an understanding of the orchestra itself, but also a comprehensive understanding of the many aspects of the *dizi* and the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra. This study has: the history and culture of *dizi* and evolution of *dizi* performance, the development of modern Chinese instrumental music, the founding reasons of the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra reasons, performances and experience, the instruments and representative works, also includes the Chinese bamboo flute orchestra on the influence of Chinese *dizi* art.

The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is based on the *dizi* ensemble as the first form of performance. Of course, the views of the Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra are also mixed. Some people believe that Chinese traditional Musical Instruments have too strong personality and too low integration, so they are not suitable for playing. And more people believe that traditional Chinese instruments need to develop, innovate, and break with tradition. Traditional Chinese musical instruments are born with national characteristics. Walking out of tradition is not to deny tradition, still less to lose its national character. The difference of its music culture fundamentally lies in The Times, rather than the national nature, so the background of The Times can shape the different ways of expression of a kind of Musical Instruments. The contemporary spirit of traditional Musical Instruments is reflected in the pursuit of music creation itself. Therefore, the musicians and practitioners of Chinese traditional Musical Instruments need to explore the unprecedented sound collocation, and constantly make the revolution to produce subversive changes and develop them, which is also a manifestation of *dizi*'s competence for various forms.

The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra must play a positive role in promoting the development of the *dizi* art and the traditional Chinese instrumental music. While inheriting and innovating the interpretation of Chinese *dizi* music art, the orchestra has developed the form of *dizi* ensemble to an unprecedented height. The Chinese Bamboo Flute Orchestra is of great significance to the development of Chinese *dizi* art, both in its creation, performance, teaching, research, discipline construction and talent training.

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