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PICTURING SOUND:
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, CHEE KUNG TONG AND
PHOTOGRAPHY IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1920s

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Abstract

This article is a study of a photo of the Wellington Chee Kung Tong (Wellington Chinese Masonic Society) orchestra taken around 1925. As dominant themes, the photo especially signifies music and identity, and demands answers regarding how it might be interpreted about 100 years after its creation: How and why was the photo fashioned? What can a viewer learn about the subject matter of the photo? Attention is given to the detail of the musical instruments and their place within the image, which is the only known photo depicting members of the Chee Kung Tong and their instruments. The photo is significant for scholars across several fields of study, including music iconography, historical ethnomusicology and Chinese diaspora studies. Drawing on qualitative visual content analysis, this article interprets and discusses the musical elements of the photo as a way of contributing to knowledge about the instruments as an assemblage of meanings. The article is structured around the three dominant themes: (i) staging the image; (ii) uniforms; and (iii) musical instruments.

Introduction

In a scholarly publication addressing the convergence of sound and the still image (i.e., music and photography), Ribouillault comments that (in translation) “the permanence of the meeting between music and photography is surprising: this union is, in fact, contradictory because how can one evoke the notes, the sounds or the rhythms by means of a still image?” [my translation] (1996, 20). Through denotation and connotation, this type of paradoxical subject matter is interpreted according to the silent yet culturally resonant musical signifiers within the image, ranging from a musician in performance to a musical instrument as a marker of cultural identity.

One such union of sound and image that is especially pertinent in the history of the Chinese diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand is found in the Alexander Turnbull Library (a division of the National Library of New Zealand [Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa]), which has in its photographic collection a staged studio photo catalogued by the Library as the “Wellington Chee Kung Tong Orchestra” (WCKTO),¹ which was

1 A list of abbreviations used in the text is provided at the end of the article.

taken around 1925 by the Hardie Shaw Studios in Willis Street, Wellington (Fig. 1).² This image, which is a monochrome group portrait featuring 14 men, has music and identity at its core, not through performance of music per se, but by association through visual props. Twelve of the men are sporting what appear to be Chinese group uniforms, with another two wearing ‘western’ suits. The men in the front row of three are holding instruments in an imaginative and non-performative way, and further instruments are positioned creatively on the floor in front of them. From such visual subject matter, one might postulate that the image represents a musical organization and that it is picturing sound and celebrating group identity. It is with this kind of evocation of sound within the image that Ribouillault discusses, one that is framed by the photographer, staged by the studio and those in the photo, and produced through technological means.

As dominant themes, the photo signifies music and identity, and demands answers regarding how it might be interpreted about 100 years after its creation: How and why was the photo fashioned? What can a viewer learn about the subject matter of the photo? Other questions concerning the photo are pertinent, but focus in this article is given to the musical instruments and their place within the image.



Figure 1: Photograph of the Wellington Chee Kung Tong Orchestra, taken ca. 1925 at Hardie Shaw Studios, Willis Street, Wellington (Ref.: 1/2-169302-F). Courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library (National Library of New Zealand).

2 Further details of the photo can be found at <https://tiaki.natlib.govt.nz/#details=ecatalogue.301435>, which provides acquisition information as: “Copy of a photographic print loaned to the Library by Allan Chun, 1990”. See also: <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22336019>.

The WCKTO image has many potential meanings. It is featured in the National Library of New Zealand's online catalogue, and has been reproduced in various contexts to signify the activities of the Chinese in Wellington in the early twentieth century (e.g., Li and Turner 2017, 87; Murphy and Wong 1991, np; *Wellingtonian* 2011; Wong 2003, 120). But the interpretation of its musical and identity connotations is contested as part of "a process of *translation*" (Hall 1997, 11), and in this article that translation takes on several dimensions: historical, cultural and social. With its original purpose complicated as a result of 100 years of cultural change, recontextualization and reproduction, the photo nowadays occupies a place of new historical importance. That is, while the original intention of the photo is debatable, although conjecture is possible through contextual and visual interpretation, the image has acquired a new *raison d'être* based on its cultural associations. The photo is, nevertheless, a visual record of an important group of people and their musical organization, and a celebration of the orchestra's existence within a sphere of Chinese diasporic identity in New Zealand in the 1920s.

The WCKTO photo is significant for scholars across several fields of study. In this article, I focus on its music iconography (e.g., Baldassarre 2008; Seebass 2014) and give emphasis to the musical instruments depicted within it, but also recognise the photo's relevance to New Zealand studies in historical ethnomusicology (e.g., Johnson 2010) and Chinese diaspora studies (e.g., Ip 1996; 2003; Ng 1993–1999; Shum 2007). Drawing on the analytical method of qualitative visual content analysis (Rose 2007; Schreier 2012), I interpret and discuss the musical elements of the photo as a way of contributing to knowledge about the instruments as an assemblage of meanings. The article also compares the instruments to extant instruments housed in the Doris Chung Collection in the Turnbull Library,³ and identifies their general characteristics of instrument form and signification. For this particular study, and as the only known photo of Wellington's Chee Kung Tong (*zhì gōng táng* 致公堂) (CKT)⁴ members with their instruments, albeit not in a performance setting, the discussion provides documentary evidence of an influential Chinese organization in Aotearoa in the 1920s and how music played an important role in its activities. My research into other spheres of CKT music, performance and instruments is ongoing and will be presented elsewhere.

Known in English as the Chinese Masonic Society, the history of the CKT in New Zealand has been outlined by Murphy and Wong (1991). The organization had a history in New Zealand from at least 1907 (Ng 1993–1999, vol. 3, 163), and became

3 Doris Chung (1917–2017) was the wife of the last president of the Chee Kung Tong (Chinese Masonic Society) in New Zealand, Chung Dick Lee (Chung Chun-ying, 1903–1980). She donated to the National Library of New Zealand a large collection of the organization's artefacts, including banners, flags, divining sticks, candles, uniforms, musical instruments, printing blocks, and photographs. See: "Chung, Doris, 1917-2017: Collection relating to the Chee Kung Tong (Chinese Masonic Society) and Chinese in Wellington": <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23227386>.

4 In order to maintain consistency with archival sources, I have included well-known transliterations of Chinese words, along with *pinyin* (official romanization) and traditional Chinese characters.

popular amongst the Cantonese (Guǎngdōng) Chinese who comprised the majority of the Chinese diaspora in New Zealand at the time (Murphy and Wong 1991; Ng 1993–1999). For Cantonese, the years 1840–1937 were “the age of mass migration” (Miles 2020, 90), especially to North America and Australasia. But the Chinese diaspora was diverse in terms of ethnicity and linguistic cultures, and “two clusters of neighboring counties in Guangdong’s Pearl River delta were especially important in the rapidly expanding Cantonese diaspora, known among overseas Cantonese as the Three Counties (Sam Yap, M[andarin]. Sanyi [三邑]) and the Four Counties (See Yap, M. Siyi [四邑])” (Miles 2020, 103). While Chinese from Pānyú (in Sānyì) were predominant in New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, migrants from Zēngchéng (also in Guǎngdōng) grew in number from this time (Chan 2007, 12). Within this diverse cultural milieu, secret societies were widespread amongst the Cantonese diaspora, and “in the Americas and Australasia, Four Counties Cantonese typically dominated [the Chee Kung Tong]” (Miles 2020, 120).

Several CKT (Masonic) branches were established around New Zealand in the early 1920s (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch), but it is the Wellington branch (Wellington Chinese Masonic Society – WCMS) that forms the focus of this paper. As part of a transnational network, the CKT was a sworn brotherhood whose “members ... positioned themselves as soldiers of the deposed Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and readied themselves to wrest China from unfit Manchu rulers who governed as the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912)” (Cheung 2002, 40). The CKT had its roots in earlier Chinese secret organizations and linked internationally to some other Chinese diaspora groups (Ng 1993–1999, vol. 3, 165). By the early 1920s, Wellington was an important location of Chinese activity in New Zealand with an estimate of over 300 Chinese residing there (Ng 1993–1999, vol. 3, 165).

The CKT in Wellington submitted an application for registration to become an Incorporated Society in 1923, which was approved early 1924, with the likes of Chinese merchants, fruiterers and launderers signing the official documentation (Sedgwick 1982, 382). The WCMS was particularly active in the 1920s: it hosted national and international visitors (“Brothers & Sisters” 1922); established a ‘Chinese band’ (i.e., the WCMS orchestra) in 1923 (“Chinese Band Formed” 1923); and built a new headquarters (lodge) at 23 Frederick Street in 1925 (Wellington Chinese Masonic Society Building 2012), which was on the edge of the “Chinatown” that was centred on Haining Street (Shum 2007). Such events would have been ideal settings for performances by the WCMS orchestra, who would showcase a large number of musical instruments performed by players donning a group uniform and collectively displaying a sphere of WCMS identity. In this context, the WCMS “employed embodied and oral performance to inscribe an idealized memory of China in the space of their meeting halls” (Cheung 2002, 47). However, while the WCMS was particularly active around this time, its popularity later waned (Ng 1993–1999, vol. 3, 164). As an Incorporated Society, the WCMS was dissolved in 1979 (*New Zealand Gazette* 1979, 723).

This article is structured around the three dominant themes that emerged during analysis of the WCKTO photo: (i) staging the image; (ii) uniforms; and (iii) musical instruments. The aim of the article is to analyze the photo in order to provide insight into its context and the National Library of New Zealand’s collection of WCMS musical

instruments. The politicised photo places people with instruments and offers a staged setting that helps exhibit a sphere of the Chinese diaspora in Wellington in the 1920s. As a studio photo, I examine the background of the photographer and studio, as well as analyze the staging of the image itself. There are, however, multifarious unanswered questions that result from the study, and further research will attempt to uncover more social and cultural spheres of knowledge pertaining to the WCMS and their musical presence in New Zealand.

Staging the Image

As a technological tool with a propensity toward production and reproducibility, photography “transformed the entire character of art” (Benjamin 2008, 28). A photo is a product of human agency with various domains of negotiation and connectivity, and studio portraiture exemplifies this by placing photography “out of the realm of aesthetic distinctions into that of social functions” (Benjamin 2008, 287). That is, “in our age there is no work of art that is looked at so closely as a photograph of oneself, one’s closest relatives and friends, one’s sweetheart” (Lichtwark 1907, 16, in Benjamin 2008, 287). In this section, I build on such notions and examine the WCKTO photo’s *raison d’être* as group portraiture and the culturally relevant photographic conventions of the time.

By the 1920s, Robert John Hardie Shaw (1870–1922) was an experienced professional photographer. He had formerly worked for the Crown Studios on Cuba Street, Wellington. While working for Crown, Hardie Shaw took studio photographs of, for example, the All Blacks rugby team as well as scenic photos.⁵ Considering his large number of studio portraits, many of which are accessible online through the National Library of New Zealand’s catalogue, it seems this field of commercial photography was one of his specialist areas.

From around 1899 to 1903, the Hardie Shaw Studios were located at 3 Riddiford Street in Newtown, Wellington. From 1903 to 1927, their main studios were at 54 and 56 Willis Street, with 14 rooms “fitted with every requirement for modern Portraiture” (“Photos” 1903). From its beginnings, portraiture was at the core of Hardie Shaw’s commercial branding. He also advertised his business as “The Progressive Photographers” with the “Largest Studios in the Colony” (“The Progressive Photographers” 1906), thereby aligning the business with photography as a contemporary art and as a leader in terms of the magnitude of its premises.

Hardie Shaw was in partnership with his sisters: Margaret Shaw (based at Willis Street) and Agnes Shaw (based at the Newtown studio) (“The late Mr. R. J. Hardie Shaw” 1922). Hardie Shaw died on 15 July 1922 after a long illness (Canterbury Photography 2021), and in 1927 the business was taken over by York Studios (Canterbury Photography 2021). Wong notes that the WCKTO photo was “taken at the opening of the group’s headquarters” in 1925 (2003, 120), and, whether to mark this event or another, such as the formation of the orchestra in 1923, the photographer

5 See the National Library of New Zealand’s photographic collection.

is likely to have been one of Hardie Shaw's sisters. As noted above, the early 1920s was particularly eventful for the WCMS, so the production of such an elaborate photo – a clear expression of the significance of the organization and its financial and social influence – helped celebrate the WCMS's achievements at this time.

Of importance in interpreting the WCKTO photo is that it required the intervention of the photographer's creative skills to help the silent image signify sound amongst its other meanings (Ribouillault 1996, 20). With the expertise of a professional photographer in staging the context, utilising photographic technology of the time, and developing the image into a print format, a blend of technological and creative skills were incorporated into the photo's production. There would also be agency from the members of the WCMS in terms of how they wanted to be portrayed from their own cultural perspective, and in a way that may have been different to that of the photographer. In this setting of cultural negotiation, while the photo's subject matter as a studio group portrait points to commercial intent, the studio space was very much part of the creative process that incorporated the conventions of the time to create an image that was a product of commercial photographic art.

The Hardie Shaw Studios were well-known for their size. As noted in one of their later advertisements: "We make a speciality of large groups, having the largest studio in the Dominion" ("Advertisements" 1917). It is almost certain that the photo was shot in the Hardie Shaw Studios because there are other photos in the Hardie Shaw catalogue that have an identical setting and a similar layout of props. For example, the photo of the Wellington Girls' College senior hockey team in the National Library of New Zealand depicts the same carpet as in the WCKTO photo (Ref.: PAColl-1296-1-01).⁶ The staging of the hockey photo, which is dated around 1926 to 1930, also shows a striking similarity to the WCKTO photo regarding the staging of the props that were used to signify the photo's sporting connection. For the WCKTO photo, the inclusion of traditional Chinese musical instruments was important as a way of portraying the group affiliation of the men to music, while for the Wellington Girls' College, the purpose of the photo was to depict a particular sporting identity. This is signified in the picture with four of the students seated in the front row each holding a hockey stick and with two further hockey sticks laid out on the floor in front of the girl seated centrally in the row of five (four girls are standing in the back row). When comparing this photo with the WCKTO photo, there is symmetry in the holding of the props. For the girls, the sticks are placed in three groups: one each side and one in the middle. In the WCKTO photo, there is a flute at each end of the front row of men, and two string instruments in the middle of the front row, with each group of instruments pointing in the same direction (string instruments one way and wind instruments the other). Similar photos with props, carpet and backdrop are seen in other Hardie Shaw photos from the 1920s, including the Wellington Girls' College tennis team (Ref.: PAColl-1296-1-02) and the Wellington Girls' College basketball team (Ref.: PAColl-1296-1-03). Such comparison of similar group portraiture and use of props helps show how the WCKTO photo followed conventional studio practices of the time and, therefore, demonstrates the authority of the photographer in producing the image.

6 See <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22592931>.

As a staged image, the WCKTO photo shows 14 men in three rows, appearing as a large group of self-respecting Chinese musicians with a broad selection of their musical instruments. It would seem unlikely that the instruments were entirely props of the photo considering their number and the players' uniforms, and the photo is therefore a depiction of the men with their instruments and helps to signify their status as musicians within the WCMS. Considering the size of the group, their display of uniformity, and the number of various instrument types (discussed later), one might understandably assume that the musicians comprised highly skilled performers who had extensive knowledge of the traditional Chinese music of their homeland (e.g., *Guǎngdōng*). In such a setting, the WCKTO photo portrays a powerful representation of cultural identity focused on music within the WCMS.

With a dark backdrop, there are four men sitting cross-legged in the front row; five men seated on chairs in the middle row; and five men standing in the back row. The image is intended to depict the WCMS musicians with a degree of formality, but it does so without any intention of showing the musicians actually playing their instruments. Only the front row of men are holding instruments, but they are simply holding them as props to the photo, showing them to the viewer as emblems of their organizational musical identity. The two men holding flutes, one at each side of the front row, have the instruments held in their hands with no depiction of playing method. The same is for the two instrumentalists between them, both holding their stringed instruments in ways that are different from the actual playing position for these instruments.

The four men in the front row appear younger than many of the other men, and it is these men who are holding the instruments and have others placed on the floor in front of them. As well as the differentiation between the young men and the others, there seems to be further differentiation based on status and height. The middle row of men has the tallest of them placed in the centre, with the men on each side gradually getting smaller towards each end of the row. The man in the centre doesn't have his arms folded like the others in the row, but are placed on his thighs. (The man on the left of the back row too doesn't have his arms folded, but in this case it doesn't follow the symmetry of the other men in the photo.) As noted by Wong (2003, 120), the central figure is that of Chun Yee-Hop 陳宜合 (1870–1948), a fruitier born in Báishí Village 白石 in Zēngchéng County 增城, *Guǎngdōng* Province, China.⁷ He arrived in Wellington in 1895 and was an associate member of the New Zealand Chinese Association in 1910. By the 1930s he was treasurer and later president of the WCMS. His central position in the photo, and with his unfolded arms, points to his different status within the group, already signifying a higher position within the organization at the time the photo was taken. As noted by Wong, Chun Yee-Hop would lead the orchestra, playing the *èrhú* 二胡 (two-string fiddle), which was “one of his more enjoyable duties” (2003, 120–121).⁸

7 *Guǎngdōng* (Canton) had long been a significant province for New Zealand's Chinese diaspora (Ng 1993–1999), especially from around the Pearl River Delta region. Within this province there are various sub-cultures distinguished especially by linguistic diversity.

8 Such an instrument is not known in the collection. Instead, it may have been the *èrxian* 二弦 (found in the collection) of the *húqín* 胡琴 (two-string upright fiddle) family, which is the lead instrument in some music genres.

The back row offers a similar differentiation, but only with the tallest man who is placed in the centre and the two men in western suits and tie who are standing each side (discussed in the next section).

In the photo, looking straight at the camera, the subjects are depicted either as musicians or in a role of authority. Such positioning and differentiation was typical of group portraiture of the time (Claudy 1915; Hudgins 2010), and also in China where the Chinese portrait was at first a western construct “characterized by a rigid frontal view and level gaze” (Wu 2011, 6). The musical connection does not show the players in action playing music, nor in a performance venue, but showcases those present as subjects in an image that pictures music and identity. While the photo isn’t one captured during contemporary ethnographic research, in the present era it offers a medium for historical ethnographic interpretation. The inclusion of instruments helps the image signify sound, and group identity is established through the wearing of uniforms and the formality of the male appearance. Unlike some other WCMS photos held in the National Library of New Zealand (e.g., Ref.: 1/2-168568-F; 1/2-169003-F), in the WCKTO photo there are no self-identifying banners or other markers depicting CKT symbols that are found in some other WCMS settings.

Uniforms

As well as existing as the only known photo of WCMS members with their instruments, the WCKTO photo also displays the uniforms worn by the musicians, which were made in Wellington (“Chinese Band Formed” 1923). As with many other spheres of group affiliation, musical and group identity are strengthened by the wearing of uniforms, as they are by other choices of visual appearance. That is, “the wearing of uniforms ... are good examples of the imposition of ideologically laden systems of self-presentation” (Jaffe 1995, 40). Uniforms, or cultural dress conventions, provide a means of signifying group affiliation. While the wearing of uniforms in some settings can create “a dazzling pageant” (Tynan and Godson 2019, 12), in the staged photographic studio setting, as with the WCKTO photo, a visual way of showcasing identity across several social and cultural spheres becomes apparent: musical expertise, WCMS affiliation and Chinese diaspora. A closer look at the WCKTO uniforms helps in understanding how the photo depicts such identities and their connection with sound.

In the photo, two of the men are wearing ‘western’ suits and are standing in the back row (one each side of a central taller figure), and 12 men are donning what appear to be a formal and traditional Chinese uniforms. In the back row, and occupying a hierarchical space of authority, the two men in suits might be officials of the organization (possibly not performing musicians in the orchestra), while those in formal costumes are presumed to be the performing members of the group. The two men in suits stand out in terms of difference. They are a minority in comparison to the men wearing uniforms, and the wearing of such attire, at least in China, had a challenging position in terms of dress code and associated meanings (Finnane 2008). At the time of the photo, the western suit was a contested emblem of attire. Associated with colonialism and politics (Finnane 2008, 178–180), it was an object of wearable culture that typified discipline yet at the same time signified “a sartorial embodiment of Western democracy” (Tynan

2019, 226; see also Li and Turner 2017). Such wearing of suits by WCMS members in New Zealand is known in other photos from the same era held by the National Library of New Zealand (e.g., Ref.: 1/2-168568-F; 1/2-169003-F), which help show transculturalism and appropriation in dress code, and, for the everyday occupations of WCMS members, the western suit was conceivably associated with “worldliness, progress, action, and financial success” (Finnane 2008, 180).

The uniforms worn by the other men in the photo are a different colour in comparison to the darker western suits. The Library’s catalogue offers a description of the extant WCMS musicians’ uniforms as follows: “Ten long sleeved dark blue coloured silk shirts with pockets and mother of pearl buttons” (Ref.: 90-246-24B), and “[a single] long sleeved black coloured silk robe with blue band and metal hooks at front of robe” (Ref.: 90-246-24A). Only the dark blue shirts are shown in the photo, although appearing as white in the monochrome image. The uniforms comprise such traditional shirts and trousers. The shirt is worn outside the trousers and extends to the thigh. The shirt has its top button fastened, and the collar, which is tieless, is of a stand-up type, known as a mandarin collar (*liling* 立領). The wearing of a stand-up collar was a well-known form of Chinese attire, from which the name mandarin collar is derived. The attire helps the group photo stand for China in the New Zealand setting. This would also be apparent during formal performances with the players donning the uniforms, thereby interconnecting with the instruments used by the group (all considered traditional Chinese instruments, as opposed to the inclusion of western instruments).

The wearing of such attire – western and Chinese – helps create identity for the musicians and for those listening in the WCMS setting. While much Chinese activity in New Zealand at the time adopted the procedures and customs of the cultural milieu, the staging of the subjects in the photo in traditional and western attire creates an image that signifies immense cultural meaning, and one that would strengthen a sense of Chinese diaspora identity in New Zealand.

Musical Instruments

There are a number of traditional Chinese musical instruments depicted in the WCKTO photo, either held in the players’ hands, although none in authentic playing positions, or laid out on the floor in front of the group. For the WCKTO photo, as this article puts forward, the purpose of the image was to showcase the WCMS, their musicians and a number of their musical instruments. The image is about organizational, musical and diaspora identity. While a critical and analytical study of the instruments will help when comparing them with the physical instruments that are currently housed in the collection, and in comprehending aspects of material culture regarding performance practice and visual representation, “how much we can trust a picture over organological [i.e., musical instrument] detail and the accuracy of its representation of performance depends on many factors, of which the most obvious is the picture’s purpose” (Seebass 2014).

Only the cross-legged men in the front row are holding instruments, although it is impossible to know if they were the actual players of these particular instruments, or if they played other instruments. The two flutes (one at each end) show no distinct signs of

performance practice, and the two stringed instrument in the centre are positioned in a way that mimics a playing style, although with the instruments positioned too far in front of the players to be in an authentic playing position. If the 12 men wearing the uniforms are indeed the mainstay of the performance group, but with only 11 instruments clearly visible in the photo, then either one of the men would not be performing or there are other instruments used that are not included in the photo. The archival collection of over 50 instruments and accessories shows that many more players would be possible, as would different combinations of instruments at any one time. The instruments chosen for photographic depiction may have been used together in ensemble performance, but they also help showcase a variety of instrument types used by the WCMS, and were possibly chosen as the best to be in the photo. A closer examination of the instruments offers further insight into their form, as well as helping to illustrate the importance of music for the Chinese community in Wellington.

The instruments laid on the floor in front of the players help emphasise the purpose of the photo in portraying a group of musicians. These are some of the musical instruments of the WCMS, but they are also props for the photographer. They are featured as objects that form part of the group's musical identity, but also bring to the foreground instruments that might offer an exotic visual presence for the photographer. The instruments on the floor are varied in their form and means of sound production, and, as described below, add a further layering of pictorial sound that helps consolidate the theme of music in the image.

Traditional Chinese musical instruments are sometimes known by various names, which are differentiated according to regional or linguistic difference. While many of the instruments under discussion are known to have been made in southern (Cantonese) China (i.e., Guǎngdōng and especially its capital city, Guǎngzhōu), as identified from distinct makers' labels on the instruments, and used by the historically predominant Cantonese Chinese community in New Zealand, even in this region of China there are linguistic differences that make an accurate identification of the terms used for the instruments in the 1920s in New Zealand particularly difficult. For these reasons, general Chinese terms (especially Mandarin) have mostly been used (with traditional Chinese characters), along with an English description based on the Hornbostel and Sachs (1961) musical instrument classification system.

Using terminology that describes specific instrument types or general classifications, from left to right (when viewing the photo), the instruments in front of the players are:

- (i) *Sānxián* 三弦 (lute). This is a three-string fretless spike box lute. It has been placed on the ground with its playing side facing upward, which is characterised by a layer of snake-skin (python) covering the small sound box. In southern China, the strings are often plucked by the player's right-hand fingernails, with the binding of picks to the player's thumb and index finger another playing method elsewhere. While it is unclear if such plucking devices are shown in the photo, such small items might normally be kept separate to the instrument until it is played. There are two *sānxián* in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M17), although it is unclear if this is one of those instruments.

- (ii) *Luó 鑼* (gong). There are two small gongs in the collection that look similar to the gong in the photo (Ref.: 90-246-M08). The gong in the photo does not appear to have the large crack as found on one of the gongs in the collection. A paddle-shape wooden beater for striking the gong is shown next to the instrument. A beater with a similar shape is found in the collection, along with several others (Ref.: 90-246-M29). The inclusion of the beater adds an element that helps depict aspects of performance practice, although, while placed in front of the gong, the beater is also resting on a pair of cymbals and the gong has the end of a bow standing in it, which might add visual confusion as to which instrument the intermediary devices actually belong. After it is struck, this small hand gong changes in pitch (either ascending or descending, but unknown for this instrument). Such instruments are often known today as *jīng xiǎoluó* 京小鑼 or *jīngluó* 京鑼.
- (iii) *Bó 鈸* (cymbals). A pair of hand cymbals are lying on the floor, which are positioned in a playing position with the inside plate of each cymbal partly covering the other plate. A small decorative tassel is attached to the centre of the boss on the outside of each cymbal. There are several cymbals in the collection, with one pair very similar in form to the pair in the photo (Ref.: 90-246-M27).
- (iv) *Suǒnà 嗩呐* (oboe). Two *suǒnà* are shown in the photo. The double reed used for the instrument is placed into the end of the thin pipe at one end, which is attached to a cord that is tied to the instrument. The two instruments are of a different length, which is typical of instrument form and ensemble function, although both have been partially inserted into their larger bowl end, which is a non-playing position, the one on the left more so than the one on the right. While the instrument on the right seems to be one of the two in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M20), which have approximately the same dimensions, the much smaller instrument on the left is not known in the collection.
- (v) *Suǒnà 嗩呐* (oboe). See above.
- (vi) *Luó 鑼* (gong). A smaller gong to “(ii)” above is positioned next to the *suǒnà*. As with the earlier example, this gong is placed with its bowl opening facing upward. The gong is possibly one of the two types of such gongs in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M11). Such a small gong is also known as *xiǎoluó* 小鑼. A wooden beater for striking the gong is resting on top of its rim, which is possibly one of the four beaters in the collection that have the same form (Ref.: 90-246-M31).
- (vii) *Zhùtíqín 竹提琴* (lute). On the far right of the photo, there is variety of *húqín* 胡琴 (upright fiddle), with this one being a two-string spike tube (bamboo) fiddle and having a thin wooden sound table (as opposed to snakeskin as found on some other types of *húqín*). There are two *zhùtíqín* in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M14, M15), with the former catalogued with a bow, which helps depict the means of sound production.

With a carefully thought out symmetrical placement of the string instruments at each end, the wind and percussion instruments between them add a diversity of sonic

imagery that helps depict a range of instrument types. The instruments are laid out in front of the players in a process of ritual signification as the varied material objects that help stand for the group's musical identity.

The three lines of men are typical of group photos that aim to place people within a hierarchy. While all those present could have held an instrument, and even in a playing position, with this photo the lines of men offer a degree of difference, as discussed above. The placing of instruments with the men sitting cross-legged in the front row groups all the instruments next to the others on the floor, and, because the instruments are held by the men, the implication is that all of the men are the musicians with the instruments held as emblems of their group identity. This form of representation moves beyond the positioning of the instruments in an authentic playing position in that the instruments now showcase the musicians through association and as props that add a further layering of meaning to the image.

From left to right, the instruments that are held by the men are:

- (i) *Dízi* 笛子 (flute). The bamboo side-blown flute on the left of the photo would normally have a paper membrane glued over one hole along its upper side in order to create a buzzing tone during performance. This membrane covered hole (*mókǒng* 膜孔) is the hole next to the blow hole. The flute in the picture appears to be longer than the two similar flutes in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M25) and its current whereabouts is unknown. While the flutes are held by the players, which adds a sense of performance practice, the instruments are not in a playing position.
- (ii) *Èrxián* 二弦 (lute). This type of *húqín* 胡琴 (see above) is a two-string upright spike tube (bamboo) fiddle with a snakeskin (python) sound table. The instrument in the photo seems to be one of the four instruments in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M18). Of importance to the picture, as with the *zhùtíqín* (see above), is that it has been photographed with its bow, which helps show how the instrument is played, although not in a normal playing position. There is a bow catalogued separately in the collection that is possibly the one belonging to this instrument (Ref.: 90-246-M23). For the *èrxián*, the bow is particularly long in comparison to the length of the instrument.
- (iii) *Yuèqín* 月琴 (lute). This instrument, which is sometimes referred to in English as a “moon guitar”, is housed in the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M13). The four-string necked box lute (with two courses/pairs of strings) is visually distinguished from the other instruments by the conspicuous and auspicious characters painted in black on the surface of its sound table, 群英樂 (*qúnyīnglè*: “group, hero, pleasure/music”).⁹ Such symbolic script on instruments was common practice of the time, and was an emblem of this group's musical identity. The *yuèqín* is played with a plectrum held in the player's right hand, although it is uncertain

9 Some of the other instruments and accessories in the collection have further examples of these and other auspicious characters painted on them.

whether or not the player is holding one in the photo. While the player's right hand is not in a playing position, their left-hand fingers are positioned over the strings in a typical playing manner.

- (iv) *Zhidi* 直笛 (flute). The end-blown fipple flute on the far right of the photo appears to be one of the instruments from the collection (Ref.: 90-246-M22/M26). It differs from the *dizi* noted above in that it is end-blown, has a fipple (internal duct, which is on the side opposite the fingerholes), shorter, and has a dark varnish. The flute has a hole over which a thin membrane is placed.

With the positioning of the instruments in the photo, either held by the men or laid out in front of the group, the photographer has aimed to enhance the image with props, although in this case props that are part of the musical identity of the group. With such association, the photographer and the orchestra have achieved success in that the image has captured a material representation of sound through the visual signifiers of musical instruments (Ribouillault 1996, 25). For the musicians, the instruments represent musical performance as the core activity of the group.

Conclusion

This article has been a study of picturing sound: analyzing and interpreting the silent yet musical elements of a photo. Focusing on the only known photo that depicts members (musicians) of the WCMS in New Zealand with their instruments, the qualitative visual content analysis revealed much information about the musical aspects of the photo as an assemblage of meanings that represent an important cultural sphere of Wellington in the 1920s.

Of importance to the photo is music and identity. These are manifest in the three key themes identified for closer study: staging the image, uniforms and musical instruments. The photo depicts Chinese diasporic group affiliation and is fashioned as a result of a negotiation between members of the WCMS and the photographic studio. The group portraiture placed people within a frame of reference, one that epitomised collective identity albeit within a hierarchical setting. Identity was signified through posture, positioning, uniforms, and instruments.

The article focused especially on the iconography of the musical instruments depicted in the photo. Building on ideas offered by Ribouillault (1996, 20), who questioned how a photo can represent sound, the study showed how instruments were used as objects for the musicians, and how they were positioned as props in creative ways to enhance the musical imagery. A detailed analysis of the instruments revealed that some are extant in the collection of the National Library of New Zealand, while the whereabouts of others are not known. Pertaining to the contradiction of representing sound through a silent image, the article has shown how the instruments were arranged in order to help enhance the photo's objective of picturing sound and portraying cultural identity.

Lastly, the WCKTO photo captured an important moment in New Zealand's Chinese cultural history. The early 1920s were especially active amongst New Zealand's Cantonese Chinese diaspora, and particularly in Wellington as the nation's capital. This

era saw the consolidation of a Chinese community organization, the establishment of a large group of WCMS musicians with a considerable and diverse collection of musical instruments, the building of a new lodge, and ongoing local, national and international interaction. Each aspect contributed to a display of sound and distinctive cultural identity as exhibited in the WCKTO photo.

Abbreviations

CKT – Chee Kung Tong

WCKTO – Wellington Chee Kung Tong Orchestra

WCMS – Wellington Chinese Masonic Society

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