

**DIAOHUA CHANG IN FOOD COURT SETTING IN KLANG
VALLEY, MALAYSIA.**

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**CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

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**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF
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ABSTRACT

Diaohua Chang is a place that provides nightly singing performance for the Chinese community in Malaysia. The overwhelming majority of male crowd can purchase flower garlands for the female singers as gratuity. This research focused on *Diaohua Chang* at the open-air food court where the singers perform mainly Chinese songs for the customers who are having their drinks or food. The gap of research was discovered after reviewing the literature of ethnomusicology, Chinese popular music, Chinese performing arts in Malaysia and other related researches. *Diaohua Chang* music performance which is part of the culture of Malaysian Chinese community was absent in the literature. In order to fill in the gap of research, this research looked into the characteristic, the performance style, the gender biased performers, and the customers' organization of attention of *Diaohua Chang*. The main research method is ethnography based on phenomenology as its conceptual framework. Participant observation, interview sessions and virtual fieldwork were conducted to investigate the nature, the performances, and the cultural perspectives of *Diaohua Chang*. Four most popular *Diaohua Chang* at the food court of Klang Valley were selected for the fieldwork. Research findings revealed the trend of Chinese *shidaiqu* performance and the sexualization of the female performers in *Diaohua Chang*.

ABSTRAK

Diaohua Chang merupakan suatu tempat yang menawarkan persembahan nyanyian pada setiap malam kepada komuniti Cina di Malaysia. Pelanggan yang kebanyakannya lelaki boleh juga membeli kalungan bunga kepada penyanyi yang kebanyakannya perempuan sebagai ganjaran. Penyelidikan ini memberi tumpuan pada *Diaohua Chang* di medan selara terbuka yang penyanyinya mempersembahkan lagu Cina kepada pelanggan yang sedang menikmati minuman ataupun makanan. Jurang penyelidikan telah ditemui selapas mengkaji sastera tentang pop muzik Cina, seni persembahan Cina di Malaysia, dan sastera lain yang berkaitan. Persembahan muzik di *Diaohua Chang* yang merupakan sebahagian daripada budaya komuniti Cina Malaysia adalah tidak wujud dalam sastera. Demi mengisi jurang penyelidikan, disertasi ini mengkaji ciri-ciri, gaya persembahan, seksisme terhadap penyanyi, dan perhatian pelanggan di *Diaohua Chang*. Kaedah penyelidikan yang utama adalah etnografi berdasarkan fenomenologi sebagai kerangka kerja konseptual. Pemerhatian peserta, sesi temuduga dan kerja lapangan maya telah dijalankan demi mengkaji sifat, persembahan dan perspektif budaya *Diaohua Chang*. Empat *Diaohua Chang* yang paling popular telah dipilih untuk menjalankan kerja lapangan. Penemuan penyelidikan telah memdedahkan trend persembahan lagu Cina oldies dan seksualiti penyanyi perempuan di *Diaohua Chang*.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Several researches had been done on Chinese cultural activities and performing arts in Malaysia that reflected the Chinese ethnic identity within Malaysian society (Cheu, 1996; Carstens, 1999; Clarke, 2000; Tan, 2000; DeBernardi, 2004; Loo & Loo, 2012). Meanwhile, *Diaohua Chang* as part of a Chinese cultural performance appeared to be lacking attention in scholarship. This research is the first attempt to study *Diaohua Chang*. Taking an ethnographic approach, *Diaohua Chang* at food court and its activities, performances, songs, insiders, and other cultural and social issues were examined. This research focused on the four selected popular *Diaohua Chang* at the food court in Klang Valley. Data collection was carried out for a duration of two years from November 2012 to December 2014. The research background, justification of research, statement of problem, research objective, research question, limitation and organization of study were being discussed accordingly in this chapter.

1.2 *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia

This research focused on *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia which cater for the Malaysian Chinese. Hence, the background of Malaysia Chinese serves as an introduction before proceeding to the topic. Malaysia consists of approximately 23 million multiethnic population, the Malays, Bumiputras, Chinese, Indians, and others (Asma & Pedersen, 2003). The Chinese constitute only 26% of the Malaysian population (*Ibid.*). Hence, Chinese in Malaysia are considered the minorities. Though making up only a third of the citizens, the Chinese occupied 70% of Malaysia's market capitalization (Chaulia, 2003). Chaulia also shown that the similar situation where the minorities control the economy of a country

happened in many countries; thus the minorities often being unwelcomed to the majorities (*Ibid.*). The inharmonious situation between races sometimes happened in Malaysia too among the three major races, Malay, Chinese and Indians. For instance, there was a race riot on 13th May 1969 which includes the Malays and Malaysian Chinese.

The Malaysia Chinese are being called as overseas Chinese too. Overseas Chinese are people of Chinese birth or descent but not living in China. The ancestors of today's Malaysian Chinese came from China through two main waves. The earliest wave which includes small number of Chinese immigrants happened during the 15th century at Malacca (Lee, 2011). There were around five hundred of Chinese accompanied Hang Li Po to Malacca (Frankhum, 2008). This first wave of Chinese immigrants then accustomed Malay language, costume, cuisine and married with the locals (Lim, 2003). The hybrids of Malays and Chinese are being called *babas* (men) and *nyonyas* (women) or *peranakan* (*Ibid.*).

Bigger wave happened around 18th and 19th century when about six millions of Chinese were migrated from China to Peninsular Malaya in the 19th century (Asma & Pedersen, 2003). Large groups of Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, Hainanese and Cantonese left Mainland China because of overpopulation, natural calamities, landlord exploitation and Taiping Rebellion of 1850 (*Ibid.*). The Chinese came to Malaysia for trading or working in the industry of tin mines and rubber plantations (Lee, 2011). Some of the Chinese went back to their homeland later, but most of the Chinese settled down in Malaysia.

The larger wave of Chinese immigrants did not merge with the Malay tradition as the earliest wave of Chinese immigrants. After the larger wave, in order to preserve Chinese culture and language, clan unions and clubs are organized by the Chinese society in Malaysia for mutual support (Tan, Ho & Tan, 2005). Most of the Chinese strived to sustain their culture

and language in Malaysia unlike the *peranakan* who accommodated to the local cultures. Therefore, Chinese culture has been preserved in Malaysia to date.

Malaysia is a country with thirteen states and three federal territories and most of the Chinese are populated at Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Penang, Perak and Johor. Many of the Malaysian Chinese are Buddhists while some of them are Christians, Taoists or atheists. Malaysian Chinese consist of a few main dialect groups – Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, Hainan, Min and Foochow. Most of the Malaysian Chinese are able to speak in English, Malay and Mandarin due to the education system. However, there are the Mandarin-educated Chinese and the English-educated Chinese in Malaysia (Asma & Pedersen). The Mandarin-educated Chinese opted Chinese school while the English-educated Chinese went to Malay school and lack the Mandarin reading ability (*Ibid.*).

The school plays an important role in deciding the culture practiced by the next generation. The mandarin-medium primary schools which are managed by the Malaysia government were the choice for around 90% of Malaysian Chinese children (Chow, 2008). On the other hand, the private Mandarin-medium secondary schools were the choice for less than 5% of Chinese children whom their parents were willing to pay the relatively expensive fees (*Ibid.*). Hence, most of the Malaysian Chinese could speak and write simple Mandarin.

However, most of the children were then sent to the subsidized secondary schools which are run by the government (*Ibid.*). Although Chinese could be learned at the government secondary schools, it is an optional subject. Therefore, the level of Mandarin acquired by the Malaysian Chinese was not very high. Moreover, there are more private and international schools in Malaysia where the main language being used is English. After a brief discussion on the Malaysian Chinese, performing arts in Malaysia would be talk over next.

Performing arts in Malaysia is divided into traditional or folk, theatrical and commercial performances. There are a wide range of traditional performing art for the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnics in Malaysia. For instance, the Mak Yong and Gamelan which practiced by the Malays; the Lion Dance and Chinese opera which practiced by the Chinese; and the Bharata Natyam which practiced by the Indians. Next, the theatrical performance is quite popular in Malaysia as there are plenty of societies and private organizations which train the theatre performers and hold theatre performances. For instance, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPAC) is one of the famous venues in Klang Valley which provide theatrical performances also train the performers.

Lastly, commercialized performing arts are produced to maximize the profit by providing performances which suit consumers' tastes and preferences. For instance, Genting Arena of Stars, Stadium Merdeka and Bukit Jalil National Stadium are the famous places in Klang Valley which hold concerts by local artists and artists from various countries. Apart from the concerts by recording artists, there are also small scale urban performances which held daily in music café, restaurant, food court, pub, bistro, nightclub or jazz club by the amateur performers. Those places provide cover version of popular songs or jazz standards.

Music café is a place which provides unplugged cover version of popular song performances mainly to cater the younger generation. For instance, Wings Musicafe and Station One Leisure Café are the popular venues in Klang Valley which provide daily live performances on popular songs. Jazz pub in Klang Valley like Alexis is a cozy venue where holds mainly jazz performances. Pub, bistro and nightclub usually provide unplugged, live band, sequence or karaoke style of performances on popular songs. Those mentioned are the norm to other countries. However, there is a performance that differs from those common commercialized music performances which is the *Diaohua* performance. *Diaohua*

performance is attached to the Malaysian Chinese community and has a rather different approach in its performance and setting.

Diaohua Chang (吊花场) literally means the ‘place of hanging flower.’ *Diaohua Chang* may also be called *Guahua Chang* (挂花场) or *Hua Chang* (花场), known to Malaysian Chinese community who are active at the place where provides food, drinks and staged music performance. Thereby, both *Diao* (吊) and *Gua* (挂) mean ‘hang,’ *hua* (花) means ‘flower,’ *Chang* (场) means ‘place.’ The term *Diaohua* may not reflect any meaning of the performance to someone who is unfamiliar with *Diaohua Chang*, as it represents flower garlands bought by audience for the performers during performances as a sign of appreciation or other embedded meanings that this research would find out. Despite flower garland, some of the *Diaohua Changs* also provide crown, robe, fairy stick, or colored ribbon for the customers to purchase for the performers. However, the term *Diaohua* is commonly used instead of other awarding objects. *Diaohua* performance is held during the night and at either pub, nightclub, bar, restaurant or food court.

Diaohua Chang performance consist of karaoke or sequence style of solo or duet singing performances. Majority of the singers of *Diaohua Chang* are female while most of the customers are male. Despite Malaysia, *Diaohua Chang* also appear in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar. A similar style of performance is happening in Taiwan named *Hongbao Chang*. In *Hongbao Chang*, the performers are performing mainly Chinese Golden Oldies; red envelope (*Hongbao*, 红包) are received from the customers as a sign of appreciation (Jia, 2007).

A standard programme of *Diaohua Chang* reveals a performance of mostly Chinese Golden Oldies and hence probes the question of whether it may be a revival for the *shidaiqu*

era. Chinese golden oldies are the Chinese popular songs decades before; there were once being called as *shidaiqu* (时代曲) which means ‘modern song’ or ‘song of the era’ that marks the root of Chinese popular music. *Shidaiqu*, with its root in Shanghai in the 1920s, is a genre of fusion music of Chinese folk or European jazz (Uck, Rossiter & Shoesmith, 2004). Shanghai is the highest population city in People’s Republic of China (PRC) (*Ibid.*). Most of the customers at *Diaohua Chang* are at their middle or elder ages. Hence, Chinese golden oldies being performed at *Diaohua Chang* is to cater the customers’ taste. The recent Chinese popular songs are also being performed at *Diaohua Chang*. The background of Chinese popular songs will be discussed here.

Chinese popular songs began from the fusion music, *shidaiqu*. The jazz influence in *shidaiqu* came from Buck Clayton, an American jazz musician who worked for two years with *Li Jin Hui* (Jones, 2001). *Li Jin Hui* (黎锦晖) is considered as the founder of *shidaiqu* and known as the ‘father of *liuxing* (popular, 流行) music’ (Baranovitch, 2003, p. 14). The songs consisted of simple melodies, notated in simple notation, and used the combination Chinese and Western instrument (Jones, 2001). Speaking of *shidaiqu*, *Li Jin Hui* and the female performers are the sticking points.

The ban of female performers was broke by *Li Jin Hui* in 1923 when young girls are hired for his school to perform singing and dancing (Jones, 2001). In addition, nightlife scene at cabarets cafes and nightclubs in Southeast Asia was boomed with *Li Jin Hui*’s revolutionary Chinese jazz music (*Ibid.*). In the beginning of 1930s, female singers are being called as sing-song girls (*genu*, 歌女) who provide nighttime entertainment to the people in Shanghai (Creekmur & Mokdad, 2012). The previous sing-song girls are similar with the *Diaohua Chang* singers and the Showgirl singers who performed at *Diaohua Chang* today.

Zhou Xuan (周旋) became prominent among the ‘Seven great singing stars’ in PRC because of *Li Jin Hui*’s efforts. The other famous Chinese oldies singers are *Bai Guang* (白光), *Lee Xiang-Lan* (李香兰), *Yao Li* (姚莉), *Lin Dai* (林黛) and so on. Later on, *Li Jin Hui*’s music movement led to the phenomenon of cantopop in Hongkong and mandopop in Taiwan. Thus, *Diaohua Chang* and its performances reveal a mixture of *shidaiqu* to current popular numbers (cantopop, mandopop), with its *Diaohua* culture, probes many questions to its function and meaning as a Malaysian Chinese cultural activity. The following section explains the justification for this *Diaohua Chang* research.

1.3 Justification of Research

Malaysian performing arts is a broad field which studies dance, music and drama of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and aborigines in Malaysia. Much researches had been done in indigenous music, but there were still plenty of performing arts in Malaysia yet to be researched like in the area of urban ethnomusicology. Chinese performing arts has been a popular research area in Malaysia but most of the research were on the traditional performing arts. There were only a few researches which study the folk or contemporary Chinese performing arts in Malaysia (Tan, 1981; Loo & Loo, 2012; Loo, 2013). *Diaohua Chang* performance which favored by the group of Chinese community in Malaysia is absent in the world of research. Hence, this research on *Diaohua Chang* performance is to fill in the gap of research in the field of Malaysian Chinese performing arts.

Through the field of ethnomusicology, this research studied the relationship between music and culture by discovering *Diaohua Chang* culture and the musical experiences of the performers and audiences. The cultural perspective beneath *Diaohua Chang* performance is a vital part of this research. The focus of this research, *Diaohua Chang* in the food court,

appeared to be a cheaper and more affordable form of nighttime entertainment when compared to pub. However, there were the cultural elements embedded in *Diaohua Chang* performance which make this research worth its while.

On the other side, the analysis of the programme of *Diaohua Chang* performance is also an important part which look into the *Diaohua Chang* music. Hence, the connection between the two interrelated elements, Chinese golden oldies and *Diaohua Chang* is the focus of this research. The status of Chinese popular music in *Diaohua Chang* is shown through this research. Despite documenting and analyzing the *Diaohua Chang* music performances, the performers and audience's experiences, the public concerns, the obstacles faced by *Diaohua Chang* and its achievement were also being concerned in this research. As a result, this research of *Diaohua Chang* music performance and culture can be served as a source of literature for future studies in the areas of Malaysian Chinese culture, Chinese popular music in Malaysia, and popular music performance.

1.4 Problem Statement

This research on *Diaohua Chang* focused on the few problem statements which discussed here. One of the problem statements for this research is the nature of *Diaohua Chang*. The meaning of this performance to the audience and the real function of *Diaohua Chang* were yet to be understood. As this is the first research about *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia, the characteristics of *Diaohua Chang* have been studied and discussed to understand the nature of it. The songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* were a question too and required data collection and analysis on the song selection. Although *shidaiqu* is considered outdated now, there may be a need to know why it still gain popularity among the particular community who visits *Diaohua Chang*. The songs of *Diaohua Chang* mentioned above served as another problem statement which were being discussed in this research.

Furthermore, there were social and cultural issues which attached to *Diaohua Chang*. First, it is the flower garland issue which being raised in this research. The flower garlands at *Diaohua Chang*, appeared as a tool to show appreciation to the singers but have embedded meaning that is invisible during the performance. Hence, various representations of the flower garland have been discussed through this research. Second, it is the function of *Diaohua Chang* which has been analyzed by looking at the possibility of *Diaohua Chang* as an activity which form an important continuation of appreciating *shidaiqu*. Although *shidaiqu* is performed frequently at *Diaohua Chang*, the quality of the performances and the level of appreciation by the audiences have been studied to identify the function of *Diaohua Chang*.

Third, it is the issue of sexualization which also happens world widely. Female singers who wear sexy costumes represent the phenomenon of sexualization in *Diaohua Chang*. Hence, this research also discussed the sexualization of *Diaohua Chang* female performers. Fourth, phenomenon of the mostly elder male audience watching the *Diaohua* performances by the mostly female singers is one of the problem statements too. The main foci of *Diaohua Chang* audience during the performances were being analyzed. In addition, the reasons which caused the phenomenon mentioned above were discussed in this research.

Fifth, the relation between sex industry and *Diaohua Chang* is another problem statement. The involvement of sex industry in nighttime entertainment venue is not a new thing. However, this research has studied the close connection of prostitution site and *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia. Lastly, the globalization issue is raised on *Diaohua Chang* performances in order to find out the reasons which made *Diaohua Chang* a popular venue for the particular community. From the business point of view, *Diaohua Chang* female singers seemed to be using their sexuality as a commodity. Furthermore, *Diaohua Chang* female singers might be

identified as sex object in this patriarchal society. Therefore, this research investigates the assumptions mentioned above. In conclusion, those problem statements mentioned here created answerable questions for this research to reveal the answers.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

This *Diaohua Chang* research is based on qualitative research which studies human experiences from their own interpretation, the construction of their worlds, and the meaning they found from their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, other than describing the *Diaohua Chang* performance, discussing origin and impacts of *Diaohua Chang*, and portraying the most popular songs being sung at *Diaohua Chang*, the meanings for those phenomena which the insiders established were being concerned too.

After deciding the subject matters to be focused for this research, the way to study them should be identified next. Hence, home fieldwork in the sense of urban ethnomusicology was selected as the main conceptual framework. Ethnography involves data collection which the ethnographer participates in a human's world for a long-range period to observe, interview and documenting all the data that needed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This research required data collection to be done at *Diaohua Chang* for a particular period in order to document its music performance, insiders' experiences and the other related issues.

After all, phenomenology forms the theoretical framework to allow an understanding of the meaning of music and perceptions of the insiders on all of the songs, performances, sounds, or structures that they experienced (Berger, 2008). Meanwhile, fieldwork for this research is focused on the audiences and performers' responses on the overall of *Diaohua Chang* performances, songs, programs, and sounds. Therefore, this research focused on the

meaning of *Diaohua Chang* music performance received by the community who attend to it rather than the meaning created by the outsiders.

This research on *Diaohua Chang* music performance which applied phenomenology would investigate the foci of the insiders towards the music and also the courses of events as a single subject (Berger, 2008). Either on the audiences or the performers, the organization of attention during the *Diaohua Chang* performance is being discussed in order to find the function of *Diaohua Chang* created by the insiders. Rather than analyzing the music in a very detailed way, phenomenology on popular music performance put more attention on the performers' actions on stage, involvement of the listeners, or the mediated sound which is complexly attached in the daily situation (*Ibid.*).

In short, the research design of this research is based on ethnography and phenomenology which both emphasize the experiences of the informants. The research objectives and research questions shown below were designed through the perspectives of ethnography and phenomenology.

1.6 Research Objective

This study was based on three research objectives in the quest of understanding *Diaohua Chang* as a cultural activity that consists of sing-song performances:

1. To explore selected popular sites of *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley.
2. To analyze the music performance and its programs at *Diaohua Chang*.
3. To investigate the cultural perspectives of *Diaohua Chang*.

Before a researcher is able to study a particular topic, it is a must to have a comprehensive knowledge on the topic. Hence, this research began after reviewing the literature related to *Diaohua Chang*. The origin, development and knowledge of *Diaohua Chang* are the few of

the main studies in this research. The relations and similarities of *Diaohua Chang* performances with the other art forms were being discussed too. Information was collected through primary and secondary resources to achieve the objectives of this research. The primary resources were collected through interviewing and observing the insiders of *Diaohua Chang* while the secondary resources are collected through the internet, books, newspapers and magazines.

The second research objective is to document and analyze the *Diaohua Chang* music performance as it has not been study before this. Hence, the structures of the musical performance at different *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley, Malaysia were revealed through this research. On the other hand, the topic of Chinese golden oldies (*shidaiqu*) has been a popular topic within the academic researches. This research would further the mentioned topic because the songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* were mainly Chinese golden oldies and Chinese popular songs. The choice of songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* was analyzed. Also, the musical experiences of the singers and audiences of *Diaohua Chang* were discovered in this research.

The final research objective probes deeper beyond the second objective to find out whether music is the main focus of the audience and to discuss the other issues such as sexualization, globalization and male gaze. In order to achieve this objective, research has been done to understand the customers' organization of attention during the *Diaohua Chang* performance. The functions of music in the settings of *Diaohua Chang* were shown with the application of performing arts theories. In order to reveal the meanings behind the fact, the collected findings to achieve the first two research objectives were then being discussed by relating to the cultural or social issues.

1.7 Research Questions

A total of 21 research questions were formed prior to research to help to achieve the objectives of this study:

1. What is *Diaohua Chang*?
 - a. What is the origin of *Diaohua Chang*?
 - b. What is *Diaohua Chang* and its relation to Chinese culture?
 - c. What is the role of flower offering or *Diaohua* during the performance?
 - d. Who are the important figures in managing a *Diaohua Chang*?
 - e. Who are the audience?
 - f. What is the important date, time, and venue for *Diaohua Chang* performances?
 - g. Why is *Diaohua Chang* a popular performance among its community?
2. *Diaohua Chang* Performances.
 - a. How is the structure of the performance program of *Diaohua Chang*?
 - b. What repertoires are being performed at *Diaohua Chang*?
 - c. Who are the *Diaohua Chang* performers?
 - d. What is the organization of attention from the audience?
3. Issues and Functions of *Diaohua Chang*.
 - a. Is there any embedded purpose other than sing-song performances at *Diaohua Chang*?
 - b. Why were Chinese golden oldies popular at *Diaohua Chang*?
 - c. How is the participation and reaction of the audience during the *Diaohua Chang* performances?
 - d. What makes the audience purchase flower garlands for the performers?
 - e. What are the functions of *Diaohua Chang* performances?

- f. What other activity is happening at *Diaohua Chang* during the performance?

1.8 Limitation of Study

This research is to meet the partial fulfilment of a mix-mode master dissertation. Therefore, due to the time frame and scope of study, the four *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley were covered as case studies and selection was based on the popularity of the *Diaohua Chang* as suggested by informants. Klang Valley is one of the areas in Malaysia which are popular with the scene of *Diaohua Chang*. Although *Diaohua Chang* can also be found in Penang, Johor and other states of Malaysia, this research focuses only *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley due to the reason that its popularity is growing and that it has not yet been studied except the similar performance, the Penang *Ko-tai* of Tan's research in 1984. Instead of food court, *Diaohua* performance also take place at pub or nightclub in Klang Valley and other parts of Malaysia. However, this research restricted only on *Diaohua Chang* at the food court.

1.9 Organization of Study

This dissertation comprises five chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Methodology, 4) Results and 5) Conclusion. Chapter 1 introduces the subject area and an overview of its historical background of its presence in a multiethnic country. The second chapter reviews relevant literatures concerning ethnomusicology, Chinese popular music and Chinese performing arts in Malaysia. In the chapter of literature review, all of the previous related researches are examined and reviewed. In order to show the authenticity and importance of this research, issues and arguments of the field of research are raised. After reviewing all of the related literature, the significance of research and problem statement are being justified.

Methodology is discussed in the third chapter. The approach carried out in this study was divided into three parts – pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork. The suitability of method for research was discussed in this chapter and certain approaches were identified and assured by referring to academic sources on different related methods. Finally, the results of study are being analyzed at the fourth chapter. The results are divided into six subheadings which according to the three research objectives.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis is the conclusion. Final chapter concludes the entire research by connecting the processes of pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork and examines the final result. Also, suggestions for future and further studies in this field are discussed there.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 discuss the foundation information, theories, and past writing of *Diaohua Chang* research. This research studies the culture, performance, functions and meaning of *Diaohua Chang*. Hence, this chapter looks into literatures of these three areas - ethnomusicology, Chinese popular music, and Chinese performing arts in Malaysia in delivering an investigation on available resources and to identify the gap in the literature. Writings from different scholars were bring reviewed regarding the development, definition, concept and issue of ethnomusicology. Previous studies on Chinese popular music and Chinese musical activity in Malaysia were also being traced in order to know the current trends of research topics, theories, techniques and concepts.

2.2 Ethnomusicology

As Chapter 1 defines that this study is in the area of ethnomusicology and in its postmodern context, theory of phenomenology is used. This section reviews the development of the field as an introduction to the selected conceptual framework. The term comparative musicology is used before the new term ethnomusicology emerged in 1955. Adler (1885), Haydon (1941) and other scholars claimed that comparative musicology is the study of folk music. However, the term ‘comparative’ in comparative musicology is opposed by Meyer (1960), Blacking (1966) and others who claimed that music should not be compared. After the term - ethnomusicology is established, definition of ethnomusicology was still a hot topic among those scholars. Nettl (1965) and Greenway (1962) defined ethnomusicology by describing the types of music to be studied under the field such as non-western music and music which is orally transmitted. The definitions are similar with the definitions for the

previous term - comparative musicology. On the other hand, the new term – ethnomusicology is defined differently by other scholars. Hood (1957), Merriam (1960) and Nketia (1962) defined ethnomusicology by stressing on the way of studying a music.

The way of behaving of a specific community will be directly observed for data collection in an ethnographic research (Cohen, 1993). However, nowadays data collection alone is insufficient, theories and aspects from different areas need to be used for data analysis. The study of *Diaohua Chang* is an ethnographic research in a postmodernist context, therefore literature on ethnographic music research is being discussed here. Waterman (1990), in his study on African popular music explored the social history and ethnography of the modernizing community of Africa while focusing on the relationship of music, identity and power.

Similarly, the trio, Kotarba, Fackler and Nowotny (2009) also conducted an ethnographic research on popular music; it was about Latino music scenes and focused on the concepts of scene, idioculture and place. Kisliuk (1998) used the same method of research – ethnographic research but to study the indigenous or folk music of the community of pygmies called BaAka. These three ethnographic research are based on first-hand information of the music performance while the relationship of music and culture is emphasized.

Patterns of perception which based on the viewpoint of a person's experience are studied under phenomenology (Smith, 2011). Berger (1999) and Downey (2002) employed phenomenology to research on music performance. Berger explored the phenomenology of musical experience by investigating the consciousness of the jazz, heavy metal and rock music performers during their performances. In the same way, the phenomenology of hearing is examined by Downey on the music performers of Capoeira. He stressed that the hearing experience is influence by social and cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, Goulding,

Shankar and Elliott (2002) researched on Britain rave or dance culture. Phenomenological method is used by them to understand the consumer behavior at the night club. Both Berger and Downey conducted phenomenological researches which are focusing on the performers. However, Goulding's phenomenological research focuses on the consumers.

Since the study of *Diaohua Chang* invites discussion on feminism, some literatures in this area were reviewed. The relationship of gender and music is been a popular topic especially in the recent years. Moorman (2004), Debano (2005), Gilman and Fenn (2006) and Toth (2008) researched on the relationship of music and gender discourses. Moorman investigated on the connection between gender and the music production at Musseques – a small town in Angola. Whereas Debano looked into the women-only music festival at Iran by focusing on the gender, national and Islam issues. Gilman and Fenn explored the rap and ranga music in Malawi while stressing on male involvement and macho character by undergoing the fieldwork on the competitions. Another scholar - Toth discovered the shaping of female youth status in Tokyo through J-Pop (Japan Pop) music. He studied the influence of the three selected female idol – Ayumai Hamasaki, Shina Ringo and Misia on the young female listeners.

The study of ethnomusicology, not limited to the examples discussed in this section, does reveals a development from indigenous music to current popular culture and popular music involvement in an ethnographic account. *Diaohua Chang* reflects such a case where an involvement of conventional ethnographic fieldwork with a contextual framework on phenomenology perhaps show what previous researches contributed to its methodological framework. However, there has yet to be any study done in looking into this Malaysian Chinese *Diaohua Chang*.

2.3 Chinese Popular Music

As the subject area consists of singing performances of mostly Chinese popular songs, before the commencement of this research, the background of Chinese popular music was investigated ahead. Literature of Chinese popular music in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan is being reviewed here. Literature that wrote specifically about rock music of China is being discussed too.

Chen (2005) conducted a research on Shanghai popular songs. He reviewed Shanghai popular songs from its emergence in 1930s until today. Then, he analyzed the aspects of Shanghai popular songs by using Fabbri's genre rules. The forms, meanings, audience responses, social and economy of Shanghai popular songs were discussed in his research. Another scholar – Zeng (2007) researched on the overall of popular music in China. He wrote about the evolution of Chinese popular songs after the Zhou Dynasty. He explored different types of songs from ancient time to 20th century.

On the other hand, Brace (1991) explored the struggles of popular music in China. He said that the meaning, function and existence of popular music were being questioned. Therefore, his research was to discover the views of the Chinese on popular music in China. He explored the widely consumed popular songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan (Gangtai) and the two alternative local music styles – Xibei Feng and Yaogun Yinyue. A recent research by Fung (2013) was a case study of the China singer – Chris Lee. He claimed that local Chinese popular music was being surpassed by overseas Chinese popular music, especially Mandopop (Taiwan) and Cantopop (Hong Kong). However, the emergence of the singing competition in China – *Supergirl* created a new trend of Chinese popular music of China. Chris Lee was one of the *Supergirl* competitors and she won the competition on 2005. Fung analyzed the melody and lyrics of Chris Li's songs and also discussed about her fandom.

Friedlander (1991) explained the emergence of rock music in China at 1980s. The important figure of Chinese rock music – *Cui Jian* was discussed in his research. He looked into the technology context regarding the music instruments, products (cassettes and records), recording studios and live performances of rock music in China. Another researcher - Matusitz (2009) carried out a semiotic research on the China music - rock and pop. About the same as Friedlander, he studied about emergence and development of the music genre of rock and pop and also considering the China historical incidents. In addition, political and censorship issues were discussed in his research. By investigating the music genre of rock and pop which being played after the Cultural Revolution in China, he showed the effectiveness of using sign system as a research method.

Kloet (2005) researched on the revival and new era of Chinese rock culture in the mid-1990. He explored Chinese rock music of the early 1990s (*liumang* culture) and the end of 1990s (*dakou* culture). The cut CDs and tapes being sold in China's black market generated the *dakou* generation. *Dakou* CDs and tapes were Western garbage but being smuggled to China. China youth consumed popular music and absorbed Western style due to the *dakou* CDs and tapes. In order to reveal the rock musicians' sonic tactics to adapt with the market of China and its globalization, Kloet analyzed three China bands. This research also explored how the China youth utilized popular music to create their airspace.

Moskowitz (2009) researched on Mandarin popular songs (Mandopop) in Taiwan. He looked into the various critiques on Mandopop with the concern of cultural contexts. On the other hand, Chu & Leung (2013) argued that the declination of Cantonese popular songs (Cantopop) is due to the loss of hybridity. Around 1970, popular music in Hong Kong began to be widely called as Cantopop. Hence, Cantopop reach its zenith in the 1980s due to the cover songs culture. Cover songs appeared when Hong Kong recording companies use

released popular songs of other countries; remaining the melodies but rewriting the lyrics in Cantonese. The declination of Cantopop happened in the mid-1990s. They showed that the localization influenced the popularity of Cantopop. They also claimed that people began to listen more to Mandopop after 1997, when Hong Kong's sovereignty returned to China.

Witzleben (1999) researched on Anita Mui – one of the most prevalent singer during the colonial period of Hong Kong around 1980-1997. The researcher first analyzed the Cantopop (Cantonese popular songs) in Hong Kong. Thereupon, he introduced Anita Mui's music by looking into various topics - roles, images, politics, society, ethnicity and language.

On the other side, Fung and Curtin (2002) studied on Faye Wong – the famous singer based in Hong Kong who performed Chinese popular music. Fung and Curtin explored the development of Faye's music career by inspecting her social life, songs' lyrics, and attitudes. They claimed that Faye's unconventional characteristics which differed with those earlier female singers have led her to the successful music career. Issues of gender politics, cultural capital, and economic capital were also widely investigated in their research.

Though, there is a lack of research in looking at the smaller population of Chinese and their music in Malaysia. Thus, there is a need to discuss *Diaohua Chang* and Chinese popular music as a Malaysian Chinese cultural affair.

2.4 Chinese Performing Arts in Malaysia

Chinese in Malaysia have retained some of the culture brought from China and also created their own Malaysian Chinese culture. Hereby, literature of Chinese performing arts in Malaysia is being introduced. In reviewing Malaysian performing arts and available literature, Matusky and Tan (2004) are two scholars worth mentioning credited for their work in a collection of Malaysian music.

Tan Sooi Beng also contributed a lot to the Chinese performing arts in Malaysia through her research. Tan (1981) conducted an ethnographic research about the glove puppet theatre (*po te hi*) in Malaysia. Glove puppet theatre has a lower status compared to Chinese orchestra. She concluded that glove puppet theatre is going to pass off due to the lack of concern from the masses and also the government. In another research, Tan (2000) wrote about the development of Chinese orchestra in Malaysia since 1950s. She explored the changes of the traditional Chinese orchestra by concerning the cultural and political transformation. She said that Chinese orchestra subsist in Malaysia because it is accommodate and alter conform to the local status like the other Chinese performing arts.

Ko-tai is a mixture of singing performance and comic sketches which share a lot of similarities with the subject of this research, *Diaohua Chang* as some of the *ko-tai* singers also performed at various *Diaohua Chang* as showgirl singers. Previous studies on *ko-tai* are limited and the famous one is by Tan Sooi Beng. Her ethnographic research is about *ko-tai* performance on religious festivals in Penang, Malaysia. According to Tan (1984), *ko-tai* is a Chinese urban street theatre.

In her research, she portrayed a complete picture of a standard *ko-tai* performance and concluded it by showing the functions of *ko-tai* on religious festivals (Tan, 1984). First, large crowds of the younger generation are drawn to those religious festivals due to *ko-tai*. Second, *ko-tai* performances gather both the younger and older generations. Third, the audiences can release stress by watching the funny and relaxing performances. Forth, moral values are imparted to the younger generation through the comic sketches. Last but not least, *ko-tai* is served as an entertainment for the young working class (*Ibid.*). In my opinion, the above research is merely focused on the field of ethnography but lacks of the application of different theories of performing arts.

A recent research by Loo & Loo (2012) is about Malaysia contemporary musical theatre. Among the four musical theatre organizations explored by them, Dama orchestra (Dama) and Musical on Stage Production (MOSP) are producing musical which present mainly Chinese and Buddhism adaptations and legends. The research discovered the issues regarding language, costume and music of Dama, MOSP and other selected musical theatre organization in Malaysia. The topics of modernization and technology were used to discuss the music productions of Dama and MOSP. For instance, the re-arrangement of the music, the inclusion of Western instruments, and the use of pre-recorded music accompaniment were mentioned in the research.

In the same year, Loo & Loo (2012) wrote about the development and also the musical production – Butterfly Lovers of Dama orchestra. They revealed how Dama changed from producing Chinese orchestra performance to musical theatre performance in order to attract more audiences. Also, detailed descriptions on the process of producing the modern musical – Butterfly Lovers is written by them. A year later, Loo (2013) wrote a performance review on the Magic Mirror the Musical which produced by Asia Musical Production (Previously named Musical on Stage Production). She provides an ethnographic description on the performance of Magic Mirror the Musical which was about the tales of Guan Yin.

Probably more related to the subject area of this research is Loo & Loo's study on the Chinese *shidaiqu* which took a different angle from *Diaohua Chang* in exploring the recontextualization of the *genü* and *geting* in theatre by Dama orchestra (2014); unlocking the previously stigmatized role of the songstress of what Jones (2001) described. However, in this research, the encounter of *Diaohua Chang* discussed in Chapter 4 shows how the stigmatized role of Chinese *genü* and sing-song performances of what Jones described still

call for continuation, as absent from current literature on Malaysian Chinese performance of popular songs genre.

2.5 Conclusion

Ethnomusicology is an established field of music. Its various definitions had become a popular topic in the 18th century. There are scholars who still arguing about its definition. Ethnography is a research design used by most of the ethnomusicologists. It emphasizes on the understanding of the music culture of a certain community. There are ethnographic researches on popular music or and folk music of certain communities. Music researches using phenomenological method and gender issue are also available but not on the music genre of Chinese golden oldies. Therefore, a gap of research happened due to the lack of ethnomusicological research on the communities who listen to Chinese golden oldies today.

Majority of the literature on Chinese popular music are about China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. There are literatures about the emergence and development of Chinese popular music in China. Research has been conducted on the struggles and revival of local Chinese popular music in China. Rock music of China also has been a popular topic among the researchers. Furthermore, there are a lot of literature on Chinese popular music of Hong Kong (Cantopop) and Taiwan (Mandopop). Hence, this research serves to fill the gap of research by exploring the revival of Chinese golden oldies in Malaysia context.

There are limited literatures on Chinese music in Malaysia. Although there is a research on the similar music performance of *Diaohua Chang*, *kotai*, it is a fully ethnographic research without considering much on theories or issues. There are researches that related to the revival of Chinese golden oldies in Malaysia. However, the musical activity being researched is musical theatre. *Diaohua Chang* which provides singing performances on Chinese oldies

has not yet appearing in the academic writings. Thus, this research strives to fill in the gap of research by exploring into the nature and meaning of *Diaohua Chang* as a sing-song performance favorite among some of the Malaysian Chinese community, the continuation and development of *shidaiqu* in the context of *Diaohua Chang* and feminism issues lingering around the subject.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methods for exploring the *Diaohua Chang* is discussed in this chapter. According to Maanen (1982), the way to investigate some sorts of questions is being called the research method. A well-planned research method can definitely help the researcher to undergo the fieldwork easily and systematically. The crucial starting points are not the methods but the questions themselves and how questions are understood by the researcher (*Ibid.*). Thereupon, those questions need to be related to the suitable research methods (*Ibid.*). In order to answer the posted research questions of this study, several research methods have been selected. The selected research methods are qualitative research, phenomenology, pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork which will be explained in this chapter. Four selected *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley are the field places of this research.

3.2 Qualitative Research

There are two main types of researches which are quantitative research and qualitative research. Dabbs (1982) explained that the research based on quantity focuses on amount of things which is about figures and calculations of things. On the other hand, qualitative research focuses on the nature of things such as significance, idea, explanation, feature, analogy, sign, and depiction (*Ibid.*). For the purpose of understanding the culture, performance and function of *Diaohua Chang*, qualitative research methods were being used to conduct this research. After knowing the nature of this *Diaohua Chang* research, research objectives are constructed as a guide for the entire process of research.

Researcher who uses diverse methodologies of qualitative research is called *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). A *bricoleur*'s jobs are to interview, observe, interpret personal

and historical documents, self-reflect and introspect (*Ibid.*). A huge amount of multiple tasks is performed by the *bricoleur*; he is indeed a man who undertakes odd jobs (Levi-Strauss, 1966). The results that produced by a *bricoleur* should be comprehensive and not too narrow. Therefore, the research questions for this study on *Diaohua Chang* should be focusing on various aspects such as its culture, music performance, people and function.

Qualitative research techniques are being used by researchers to understand the humans' construction and application of meanings to their daily lives; also to understand the perceptions of the people (Berg, 2001). Hence, the ways people learn about and create meanings for themselves and others are examined by researchers through qualitative techniques (*Ibid.*). Knowing the objective of a qualitative research, interview questions can be constructed during and before entering the field. In addition, a qualitative research will be providing the descriptions on occurrences and occasions of everyday activities. Therefore, the date and time for visiting *Diaohua Chang* has to be planned ahead according to its crowds and program. For instance, a visit on the weekend would be more effective in collecting data through observation compared to a visit on the weekday.

Berg (2001) said that other than participant observation and interview, qualitative research methodology also includes observing the experimental natural settings, taking photos, recording videos, analyzing the history, analyzing the text and document, studying the relationship of the people, exploring the social issues, finding out the social order of the community, understanding the human and culture, and so on. In the form of a qualitative enquiry, an ethnographic approach with the postmodern context, phenomenology, was selected as the main method in engaging fieldwork at selected *Diaohua Chang*. Thus, the theory of phenomenology is being discussed next.

3.3 Phenomenology

Among the different approaches for a qualitative research, phenomenology is the guideline for the fieldwork of this *Diaohua Chang* research. In the eyes of a phenomenologist, a research is to question how the world is experienced and also to understand human beings (Manen, 1992). Hence, this fieldwork aims to study the existence and meanings of *Diaohua Chang* and to understand the insiders of *Diaohua Chang*. *Diaohua Chang* insiders are the people who visit *Diaohua Chang* regularly such as the performers, waiters, waitresses, organizers, workers and audience or customers.

Research questions are created to investigate the secrets and intimacies which form the world (Manen, 1992). Thus, this fieldwork which based on phenomenological methodology is been done to answer the posted research questions while revealing the truths and insides of *Diaohua Chang*. The initial process of a phenomenological research is *Epoche*, which is to avoid any judgment and the ordinary modus of conceiving things (Moustakas, 1994). Hence, in order to understand the culture of *Diaohua Chang*, it is a must to erase any bias view on *Diaohua Chang* during the whole research process.

Perception is one of the important terms in phenomenology. Every perception is counted in the horizontalization of perceptions and it also added something important to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, receptions on *Diaohua Chang* performance is being investigated thoroughly in order to produce a more complete research. Music perception of playing and listening is developed by people and also deeply informed by culture (Berger, 2008). Hence, this research is to discover how the people perceive music performance of *Diaohua Chang* through interviewing and observing the audiences and performers.

According to Brentano (1973), there are two types of perception – the external perception and internal perception. The former is the physical phenomena while the latter is the mental phenomena (*Ibid.*). For instance, physical phenomenon is the audience response on the *Diaohua Chang* music performance through their applause and the purchase of flower garlands; while mental phenomenon is the insiders' experiences on the *Diaohua Chang* performance which could be known through interview sessions. On the other hand, Berger said that in order to study the peoples' musical experience which is actively and culturally composed, other phenomenon such as politics, culture and society need to be analyzed too (2008). Although this is a research about the music performance of *Diaohua Chang*, the government control on *Diaohua Chang*, the culture of *Diaohua Chang* and also the Chinese community who are the insiders of *Diaohua Chang* have been studied too.

There are three tenets for phenomenological ethnography research. First, the object of study in music analysis is the peoples' lived experience on the collection of pieces, performances, sounds, or structures (Berger, 2008). Through observation and video recording sessions, the songs being sung at *Diaohua Chang*, its performance style, the singers' singing skills and so on is being discussed and analyzed in the research. Second, the organization of attention to the music and situation of the participants need to be studied too (*Ibid.*). Through observation and interview sessions, the singers and audience's experiences on *Diaohua Chang* music performance is examined.

Third, the meaning that the research participants find in social life needs to be investigated by phenomenological ethnographers (Berger, 2008). Hence, observation and informal interview sessions have been conducted for the discovery of the insiders' background and their social life. In this research, three basic stages of pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-

fieldwork were carried out and the following sections discuss these three processes of research with the approaches taken.

3.4 Pre-fieldwork

Before conducting the fieldwork for this ethnographic *Diaohua Chang* research, plenty of preparation works and field explorations need to be done. Returning to the beginning of the process of a research, it is vital to prove the workability of the decided research subject and topic. Hence, after selecting *Diaohua Chang* as the research subject, literature review is being done in order to construct the research objectives. Books, theses, journal articles, encyclopedias and other periodicals had been looked into in order to search for related writings for this *Diaohua Chang* research. Since there is not any previous research about *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia, this research is been done as an introductory research about *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley which based on phenomenological ethnography research methodologies.

General information about *Diaohua Chang* is attained before beginning the fieldwork. In spite of the limited secondary data of *Diaohua Chang* which gained from research documents, other data such as newspapers, information from internet, and firsthand information from the *Diaohua Chang* were collected before the carrying out the fieldwork. Knowing the general information on *Diaohua Chang* assisted in generating the more realistic research objectives. Thereupon, the organization, music performances and issues of *Diaohua Chang* were being targeted as the research goals due to the absence of academic writing on the confluence style of performance at *Diaohua Chang*. Furthermore, grabbing general information of *Diaohua Chang* could ensure my cultural competency when entered *Diaohua Chang* for fieldwork. In addition, *Diaohua Chang* offering music performance of Chinese golden oldies for the elder Malaysian Chinese. Hence, researcher has to be familiar with Chinese golden oldies and

Chinese popular songs in order to merge with the insiders as *Diaohua Chang* is offering music performance of those genre.

For the purpose of this research, only few *Diaohua Chang* among many of them in Klang Valley were chosen and studied. *Diaohua Chang* informants assisted in the field selection by suggesting the *Diaohua Chang* with more crowd or years of operation. The first informant for this research, Liow Jun Yi (a former *Diaohua Chang* singer), had introduced several famous *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley. Then, more informants were found by visiting the *Diaohua Chang* introduced by Liow. After receiving suggestions from the insiders and also self-evaluation on the suggested *Diaohua Chang*, four *Diaohua Chang* have been selected to be the fields of this research.

While the researcher is judging the insiders, the insiders also judge the researcher by his or her age, sex and appearance (Freidrichs & Ludtke, 1975). In order to be accepted, researcher first has to approach the key person or ‘gate-keeper’ whose lead the insiders (*Ibid.*). Thus, permission for research needs to be gained from the gate keeper before beginning the fieldwork as a courtesy. In this case, the manager of *Diaohua Chang* is the gate keeper. Most of the *Diaohua Chang* managers did not stop me from researching the *Diaohua Chang* as long as I do not interfere the singers when they were busy.

However, I was once being told to stop taking photo or video at a *Diaohua Chang* which is not being selected as the field of this research. After looking through information from internet and newspaper, the *Diaohua Chang* had been closed down before because of police charges. Hence, the manager of that *Diaohua Chang* is being cautious about the appearance of outsiders at *Diaohua Chang*. After all, in order to interview the *Diaohua Chang* singers without interrupting their job scopes, time for field visitation has to be non-peak hour. For

instance, interview sessions have been done during weekdays or at early evening when there were less customers.

In addition, the schedule for observation was planned beforehand in order to focus on the particular subject at the particular timing. For instance, one of the visitations was to observe the music performance of *Diaohua Chang* from the beginning to the end of it while another visitation was to observe the other activities happened within *Diaohua Chang*. In this research, informal interview sometimes did overlap with the participant observation. This is because informal interview sometimes happened during my participation as an audience who purchase flower garland for the singer. After the discussion about the preparation before entering the field, the methods for completing the fieldwork are discussed below.

3.5 Fieldwork

Fieldwork is the collection of data from the field in order to test theories (Rice, 2008). Methods for data collection in this research including observation, participant observation, informal interview and virtual fieldwork which are discussed here. In addition, photography and video recording also being done while visiting *Diaohua Chang* for further reference and analysis. The direction for data collection would be based on Berger's theory on phenomenology as shown in chapter (see 3.3 section).

Home fieldwork gained popularity with the rise of urban culture (Nettl, 2005). In this study, home fieldwork was carried out at selected *Diaohua Chang* sites, with the local Malaysian Chinese community. As a Malaysian Chinese myself, I could effortlessly communicate with the insiders. Albeit *Diaohua Chang* culture is being practiced by my own society, the Malaysian Chinese, it is something new to me. Carrying out home fieldwork at *Diaohua Chang* therefore is forming the binary in me as both the insider to certain extent of

Chinese culture and an outsider to some part of its activities there were new to me. A lot of researchers have focused on home fieldwork because of the musical and political self-awareness or the involvement of lower costs (Stock, 2008). Stock also shared the qualities of home fieldwork which include: 1) shared languages, signs and songs; 2) recognition of cultural values, expression norms, and local knowledge; 3) the appreciation of mutual ownership, authority, political stance, and subjectivity; and so on (*Ibid.*).

Klang Valley is chosen as the field place of *Diaohua Chang* research due to the short distance of traveling, similar language of communication and also similar culture. The four selected *Diaohua Chang* can be reached within 30 minutes of driving. Hence, frequent visitation has been done without interrupting the daily activities and it involved lower cost compared to field place at other state or country. Also, language barrier is avoided as most of insiders speak Mandarin or Cantonese which I know. The songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* are mainly Chinese popular songs or oldies which catered for the elder Malaysian Chinese. Though I were not familiar with all of the Chinese golden oldies and some of the China popular songs but I have heard most of the famous Chinese golden oldies due to the Chinese community whom I am living with. Therefore, data collection is being done easily as I know most of the songs sung by *Diaohua Chang* singers.

Fieldwork for this *Diaohua Chang* research was being done in between November 2012 to December 2014. The four selected *Diaohua Chang* are Tai Wah Restaurant (Jalan Pudu), One Stop Food Court (Jalan Kalong), City Food Court (Taman Serdang Raya) and Serdang Food Court (Jalan PBS). Those *Diaohua Chang* are all located within Klang Valley. Klang Valley is an area combining major areas of the Selangor state and Kuala Lumpur which is one of the Federal Territories of Malaysia. Location of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia is shown in red at Figure 3.1 below.



Figure 3.1: The location of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in the map of Malaysia (Just as Delish, 2013).

Two of the selected *Diaohua Chang* - Tai Wah Restaurant and One Stop Food Court are located at Kuala Lumpur. The distance between the two *Diaohua Chang* are within five kilometers. The other two *Diaohua Chang* – City Food Court and Serdang Food Court are located at a town in Selangor state which called Seri Kembangan (currently) or Serdang (formerly). The distance between the two *Diaohua Chang* is near too which is less than three kilometers. Figure 3.2 below shows the location of the four *Diaohua Chang* at Kuala Lumpur and Seri Kembangan in the Selangor map. Figure 3.3 shows that the Tai Wah Restaurant is located at Jalan Pudu, while One Stop Food Court is located at Jalan Kalong. Lastly, Figure 3.4 shows the location of Serdang Food Court at Jalan PBS 14/7 and City Food Court at Jalan SR 1/10.

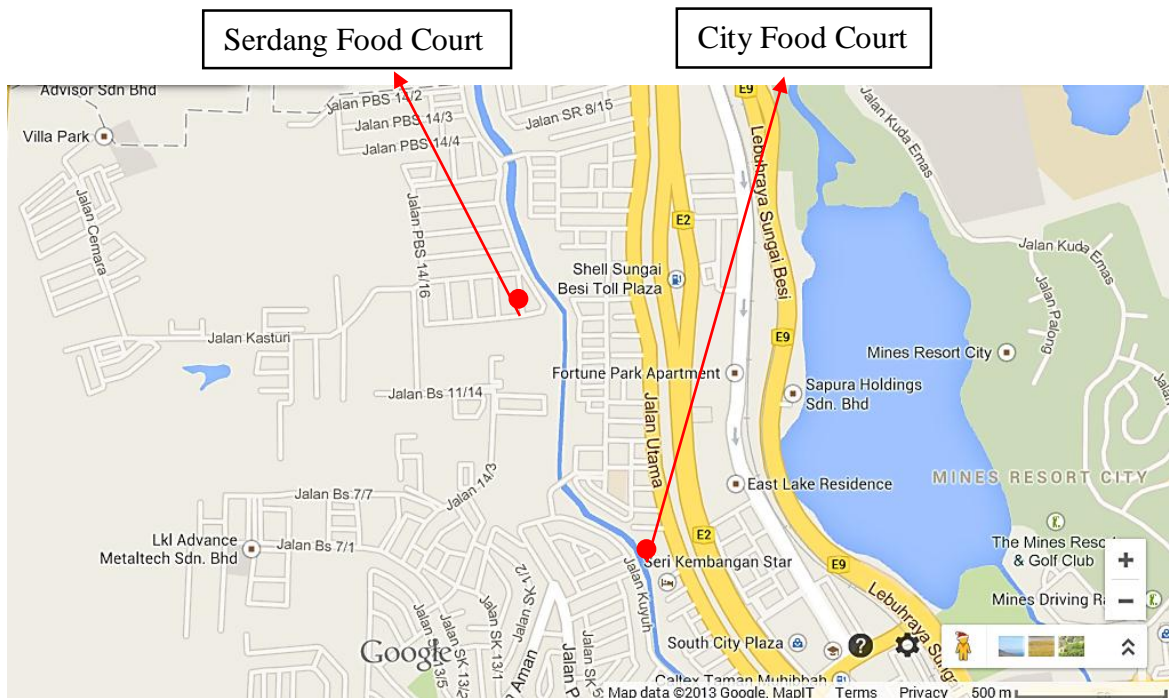


Figure 3.4: Map of the selected *Diaohua Chang* at Seri Kembangan (Google Map, 2013).

3.5.1 Participant Observation

One of the methods for data collection in this research is participant observation. Participation is the immersion in the field like those insiders to listen, watch, and start to undergo reality (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Employing the contextual framework of phenomenology, I did not participate as a singer at *Diaohua Chang* but, I did take part in the event as an audience forming theories from an audience perspective. In this research, various *Diaohua Chang* performances were being observed while participating as an audience by purchasing flower garlands to give to the *Diaohua Chang* singer which contributed an experience of *Diaohua* (hanging flower, 吊花). In addition, I have did another activity which the *Diaohua Chang* audience would do; that is purchasing an amount of flower garlands for the *Diaohua Chang* singer in order to sing a song on the stage with him/her. This participation

experiences was mentioned in Chapter 4 in order to discuss the process of flower garland giving.

According to Fink (1955, p. 63), there are four types of participation:

1. Genuine participation: Complete integration and adjustment on the part of the observer.
2. Pseudo-participation: Participation is limited by the role and purpose of the observer.
3. Incomplete participation: Little integration, but strong emphasis on the observation, which the observer overtly pursues.
4. Techniques of non-participant observation: The observer works indirectly using informants and/or interviews.

For this research, incomplete participation is used as a method of data collection. Researcher's focus is to observe the performances and activities held at *Diaohua Chang*. It is an incomplete participation because the researcher has been participated as an audience but not the performer of *Diaohua Chang*.

Friedrichs and Ludtke (1975) claimed that in order to avoid the loss of information or change of perception of the observer, pure observation should begin before the participant observation. It is possible for a researcher to change his perception when he is closer to the insiders. Hence, before participating as an audience, brief observation is done to understand the various activities that happened at *Diaohua Chang*. In the beginning, researcher usually observes the field with wide areas of interest so that the recurring style of behavior and relationships can be discovered (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). After knowing those recurring styles, researcher then can undergo focused observation (*Ibid.*). Everything that happened at the *Diaohua Chang* has been observed during the first few visits to the selected *Diaohua*

Chang. Thereupon, observation would be focusing on a few specific areas for the remaining months of field visiting.

Returning to the issue of the binary between an insider or outsider, although as a Malaysian Chinese my presence was not out of place, however, most of my visits invited unwanted attention as a younger female audience, which was rare, among a majority of elder male audience. Friedrichs and Ludtke (1975) mentioned that a researcher is a stranger who needs to build the trust of the insiders by telling them his or her purpose of existence. Although research permission has been sought from the *Diaohua Chang* manager, most of the *Diaohua Chang* performers were doubtful when photos and videos were taken. Most of the time, I was able to take photos and record videos freely at the four selected *Diaohua Chang* except I was once stopped by the Disc Jockey at Serdang Food Court when I took a photo of the flower garlands. Similar incidents were avoided by taking photos and recording videos of *Diaohua Chang* secretly and swiftly without gaining attention from the insiders.

It is difficult to seek for answers if the researcher is unwelcomed by the insiders (Whyte, 1961). On the contrary, 'if people accept you, you can just hang around and learn the answers without even having to ask questions (*Ibid.*).' As there were reporters who went to *Diaohua Chang* and wrote plenty of negative issues on newspapers, my existence was often being suspected by the insiders as one of the reporters. Thus, the data collected through observation is recorded by using electronic device such as mobile phone instead of the traditional hand-written field notes to avoid suspicion.

3.5.2 Interview

Participant observation combining with interview sessions allow the researcher to grasp the daily activities of the insiders (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There were a lot of hidden information and details of *Diaohua Chang* music performance and its performers which could not be discovered through participant observation. Hence, interview sessions are crucial in this phenomenological ethnography research. Interview sessions were recorded by using audio recorder for future transcription. According to Patton (1990), there are three general kinds of interview which are the informal conversational style, general style, and standardized open-ended style of interview, general interview, and the standardized open-ended interview. Interview sessions with the insiders of *Diaohua Chang* are mostly informal conversational interview due to the nature of *Diaohua Chang*.

For in-depth interviewing, there are four forms of interviews which are ethnographic interview, phenomenological interview, elite interview, and focus group interview (Marshall & Rossman, 1955). In this research, ethnographic interview, phenomenological interview and elite interview are used for different informants. Elite interview is to interview the influential, prominent and well-informed people of the field (Marshall & Rossman). Elite interview was being conducted with the managers of the four selected *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley. On the other hand, phenomenological interview is based on the theoretical custom of phenomenology which discusses the experiences in order to unfold a worldview (*Ibid.*). Hence, phenomenological interview has been conducted with the *Diaohua Chang* performers to understand their experiences on the music performance and the other activities happened in *Diaohua Chang*.

Conducting an ethnographic interview, the researcher need not prepare all the questions to be asked but a set of issues to be covered (Trauth, 2000). Meanwhile, plenty of questions

were being created and asked on the spot regarding the pre-set *Diaohua Chang* issues. Ethnographic interview consists of three main types of questions. The first type is descriptive questions which a sample of the insider's language can be collected. The second type is structural questions which the fundamental units of the cultural knowledge can be discovered. The third type is contrast questions which the meaning of different terminology in the insider's language can be understood (Marshall & Rossman, 1955). Ethnographic interview with the *Diaohua Chang* performers has been conducted to reveal the culture of *Diaohua Chang* in Klang Valley.

Some of the interview questions being asked to the *Diaohua Chang* keyboardists were being showed below:

1. What is the time period for your daily performance at *Diaohua Chang*?
2. Do you read Western notation or Cipher notation (*Jianpu*, 简谱)?
3. Is keyboard your major instrument?
4. What is your daytime job?
5. Do you have experience on performing at occasions other than *Diaohua Chang*?
6. Why do you work in this particular *Diaohua Chang* instead of the others?
7. What is your experience on playing *Diaohua Chang* singers?
8. What is your keyboard playing style at *Diaohua Chang*?
9. What are the songs that you played the most at *Diaohua Chang*?

Furthermore, some of the interview questions being asked to the *Diaohua Chang* singers were as followed:

1. What is your previous experience on music performance?
2. Where is the origin of *Diaohua Chang*?

3. Does this *Diaohua Chang* experience police raid often?
4. How is the pay for *Diaohua Chang* singers?
5. Why do you work at *Diaohua Chang*?
6. Why do the China female singers at *Diaohua Chang* earn more than the local or male singers?
7. What are the criterion for receiving more flower garlands?
8. Do you have a daytime job?
9. Can you share your experience on performing and also socializing at *Diaohua Chang*?
10. What are the popular songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang*?

Table 3.1 below shows the profile for some of the informants for this research:

Table 3.1: Profile for some of the informants for this *Diaohua Chang* research.

	Name	Origin	Position	Experience
1.	Liow Jun Yi (Male)	Pahang, Malaysia	Former <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer around year 2006 to 2007
2.	JJ Chia (Female)	Penang, Malaysia	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer for around 20 years
3.	Thomas Tong (Male)	Perak, Malaysia	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> manager (also a singer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part time <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer from around year 2001 to 2006 (Sang for few months then stopped for few months) • Full time <i>Diaohua Chang</i> manager and singer since 2007 until today.
4.	Suppy Yaw (Male)	Kuantan, Malaysia	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> manager (also a singer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer for around 16 years.
5.	Donny (Male)	Malaysia	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> keyboardist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> keyboardist for a few years.

6.	Zhao Ming (Male)	Klang Valley, Malaysia	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer for around 10 years
7.	Xiao Hong (Female)	China	<i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Diaohua Chang</i> singer for around 5 years

The table above shown two male managers, two female singers, two male singers and one male keyboardist of *Diaohua Chang*. The first informant in the table above is Liow Jun Yi, who suggested a few *Diaohua Chang* in the food court of Klang Valley. He is previously a *Diaohua Chang* and also *Kotai* singer. Nowadays, he is operating a music center and providing vocal lessons. He provided information about the development of *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia and its culture. The second informant – JJ Chia, who came from Penang and could only speak Hokkien dialect and simple Mandarin. She shared the changes of *Diaohua Chang* and also her *Diaohua Chang* singing experience within her 20 years of singing career.

Thomas Tong, shown at the table above as the third informant is both the manager and singer of *Diaohua Chang*. Another manager and singer of *Diaohua Chang* being the informant for this research is Suppy Yaw. They both have around 10 years or more of experience in performing at *Diaohua Chang* and also managing the *Diaohua Chang*. They have been helpful in providing the detail on managing a *Diaohua Chang* and the development of *Diaohua Chang* within this 10 years. For instance, they talked about the legal issue of hiring China singers at *Diaohua Chang*.

Donny, the *Diaohua Chang* keyboardist shared his background on music and also his experience of accompanying the singers. Another *Diaohua Chang* local male singer, Zhao Ming, shared his experience of socializing and singing at *Diaohua Chang*. Lastly, a China female singer at *Diaohua Chang* provided her journey of working in Malaysia and her job in *Diaohua Chang*. All of the informants mentioned above provide various information about

Diaohua Chang and much of the information shared similarities which is discussed at Chapter 4.

At most time, I felt like an unwanted guest during field visit, as they seem disinterested in my questions as their main task was to look for the potential customers to buy them flower garlands. I overcame this difficulty by spending lengthier time in explaining the purpose of my visit. Another surprise was my initial participation in purchasing flower garlands to the singer resulted with better response to my interview.

3.5.3 Virtual Fieldwork

Other than interview session and participant observation, virtual fieldwork is also one of the methods for this research. Virtual fieldwork is a way for an ethnographic research to collect data but through communication technology to look for the fact (Cooley, Meizel & Nasir, 2008). For instance, virtual fieldwork includes the use of internet, mobile phone and newspaper to collect data for research. Several informal interview sessions have been done for this research by using mobile phones and internet. Asking questions to the informants through phone was convenient as informants and researchers need not wasting time on traveling to a place for meeting up. However, talking on the phone was not as clear as the traditional way of interviewing as some information could not be expressed in detail.

The mobile phone applications like ‘Viber’ and ‘Whats App’ were also being used in this research to collect answers from the informants in the way of speech or text. Messages also being sent to and received from informants through ‘Facebook’ which provides the online service for social network. The functions of mobile phone and internet helped a lot in this research as questions which popped up after the face-to-face interview session could be asked without going to the field. In addition, some of the information about *Diaohua Chang* has

been found through 'Facebook' as some of the organizers use 'Facebook' to promote the *Diaohua Chang*. Hence, I could look through their previous and also upcoming music performances and events.

Furthermore, plenty of information, discussions and details about *Diaohua Chang* was spread through the internet. News reports about *Diaohua Chang* were being found through online news sites for analysis. Videos of *Diaohua Chang* performances at Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand could be watched through internet especially at 'Youtube'. Nowadays, internet forum for discussion is popular and *Diaohua Chang* often being discussed through the forum such as 'Lowyat' and 'Cari.' Hence, the opinions and views from the forums regarding *Diaohua Chang* have been read and analyzed.

3.6 Post-Fieldwork

After writing down piecemeal field notes during the visitation to *Diaohua Chang*, fuller version of field notes was completed within the next few hours. This is an important process in order to keep the data from the observation and participation at *Diaohua Chang* for the next research process, analysis. The writing up has to be within few hours after the field visit to avoid the loss of memory on every single detail about *Diaohua Chang*. On the other hand, recorded interview sessions also being transcribed for further analysis.

After having a collection of full field notes and interview transcripts about *Diaohua Chang*, revision on the data is done before writing them into Chapter 4 of this paper. Data from the field notes and transcripts was categorized into different topics or themes. For instance, data on the songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* would be categorized to the *Diaohua Chang* music performance section. This process is to organize the collected data for further analysis, discussion and writing.

Then, theories were being created from the field notes and transcripts about *Diaohua Chang* as Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) mentioned that the fieldwork aims to apply in theory which related to or developed from the study subject. The final process of post-fieldwork is to transfer the data to the research paper by combining the researcher's judgment and the collected data. In addition, selected photos that captured from the field were included in this research paper to provide a clearer picture on *Diaohua Chang* scene for the readers. Also, videos being recording were analyzed and discussed in this paper.

3.7 Conclusion

In the discussion above, the three processes of this *Diaohua Chang* research – pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork, were discussed. The methodology of this qualitative research were based on home fieldwork and the theoretical concept of phenomenology. The pre-fieldwork which includes field site selection and the study of the *Diaohua Chang* general information were being done to be prepared for the fieldwork. The main fieldwork being done for this *Diaohua Chang* research were interview and observation. Post-fieldwork were being done to organize, analyze and discuss the collected data from *Diaohua Chang*.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This chapter analyzes the data by using the approach of ethnography based on the theory of phenomenology. It discusses the culture, music and function of *Diaohua Chang* as the phenomena in query, and its meaning in the form of a live performance. The rise of *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia, settings of *Diaohua Chang* in food courts, organization of *Diaohua Chang*, *Diaohua Chang* music performances, songs of *Diaohua Chang* and issues on *Diaohua Chang* form the sub-headings of the following sections. The completion of a literature reviews, observations and interviews with informants resulted in the selection of four popular *Diaohua Changs* in Klang Valley, Malaysia:

1. One Stop Food Court (*Shiquan Meishi Zhongxin*, 十全美食中心),
2. Tai Wah Restaurant (*Dahua Fuzhidu Meizhi Zhongxin*, 大华富之都美食中心),
3. City Food Court (*Chengshi Meishi Zhongxin*, 城市美食中心), and
4. Serdang Food Court (*Shadeng Meishi Zhongxin*, 沙登美食中心).

The above *Diaohua Chang* were selected via recommendations from informants who are familiar with this specific entertainment.

4.2 The Rise of *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia

Diaohua Chang in Malaysia is considered an entertainment of songs and dance where its repertoire reflects a globalized Malaysian Chinese performance of the old Shanghai *Shidaiqu* to current popular numbers. The context of the performance at *Diaohua Chang* also reflects its origin in *Shidaiqu* since the old Shanghai days when as singer, or more commonly known

as sing-song girl (*Genii*, 歌女), performed at pubs or song halls (*Getting*, 歌厅), labelled by Jones (2001).

The difference between the old Shanghai days and today is that *Diaohua Chang* is not only showcased in pubs or an enclosed places but also in open air venues (See Section 4.3). According to informants who are experienced in *Diaohua Chang* performances – Liow (personal communication, November 26, 2012), Tong (personal communication, May 6, 2013), and Zhao Ming (personal communication, March 5, 2014), the flower garlands offering (*Diaohua*, 吊花) culture in the setting of a *Diaohua Chang* seen in Malaysia has its root from the neighboring country Thailand.

Liow (personal communication, November 26, 2012), an experienced singer who is formerly a *Diaohua Chang* singer believes that the *Diaohua Chang* culture was spread from Southern Thailand to Northern Peninsular Malaysia (see Figure 4.1) during the late 1980s. Malaysia and Thailand are separated by the northern border of Peninsular Malaysia which is also the southern border of Thailand. The cultures of Thais and Malaysians overlapped due to the proximity between both countries. Phongpahaibun (2004) reported that the lower South of Thais and the upper North of Malaysians share similar culture on culinary, housing, attire, and traditional medication.

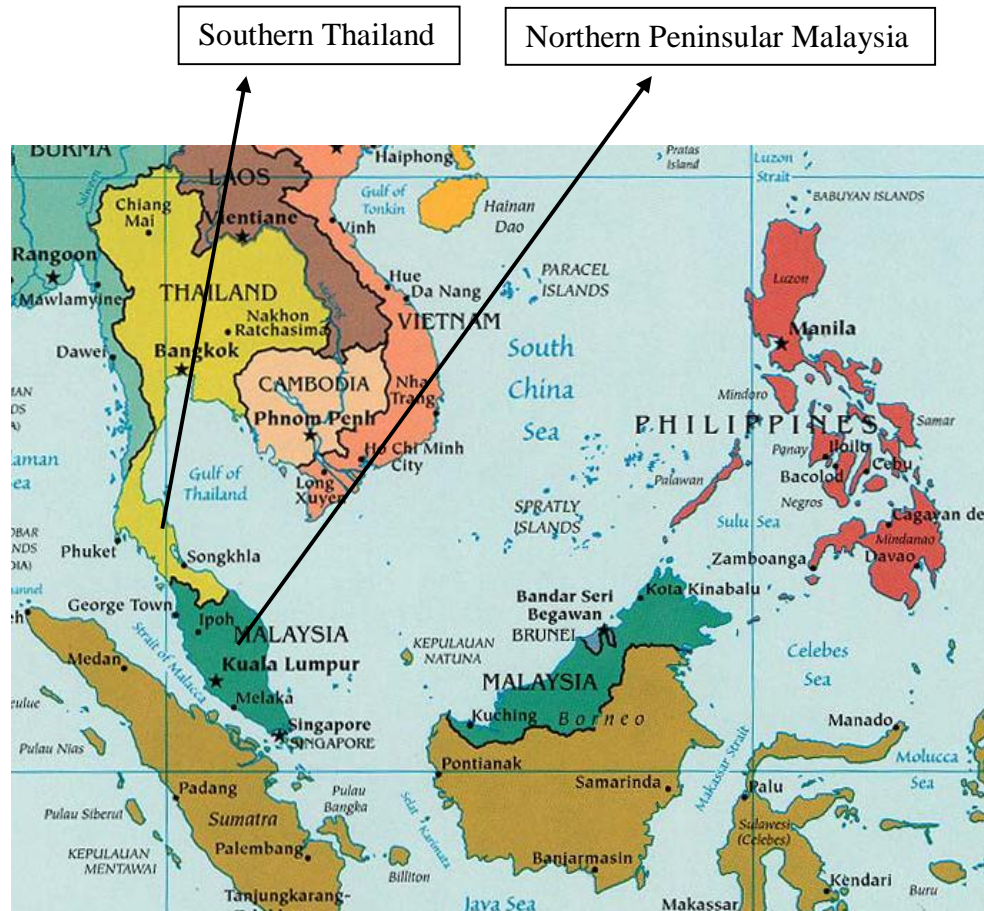


Figure 4.1: Map showing Southern Thailand and Northern Peninsular Malaysia
(Geographic Guide, 2003).

Thailand is famous for its nightlife entertainment and has influenced Malaysia. For instance, the *Diaohua Chang* culture and the famous ‘Ladyboy’ show in Thailand are also happening in Malaysia these days. Most of *Diaohua Chang* insiders in Malaysia believe that *Diaohua Chang* originated from Thailand due to word of mouth in the community. From information of informants, who are familiar with the *Diaohua Chang* in Thailand, it is known that Thai people usually called the *Diaohua Chang* as *Café*.

However, one of the *Diaohua Chang* informants at Thailand mentioned that *Diaohua Chang* culture originated from Japan and it is also known as *Café* (M. Meier, personal

communication, April 10, 2014). Further inquiry into this reveals a lack of informants with knowledge of *Diaohua Chang's* roots from Japan. Thus, based on the majority of data collected from informants and through online video browsing (Meier, 2012, 2014), the origin of *Diaohua Chang* still shows a stronger affiliation to Thailand.

Liow (personal communication, January 9, 2014) continues to share that during the 1980s, *Diaohua* culture developed in the setting of a coffee shop (*Kopitiam*, 咖啡店) around the Northern part of Peninsular Malaysia with significant presence noted in Kedah and Penang states bordering Thailand. The word *Kopitiam* is a mixture of Hokkien dialect, Hakka dialect and Malay language. During that period time *Diaohua* culture was not showcased at food courts or pubs as it is today. Although the venues for *Diaohua Chang* were known as *Kopitiam*, beer is also the standard beverage served in addition to coffee and tea (Liow, personal communication, December 9, 2014).

Hereafter, *Diaohua* culture being assimilated in Southern regions of Peninsular Malaysia (Johor) before arriving in Klang Valley (Zhao Ming, personal communication, May 3, 2014). Liow (personal communication, November 26, 2012) added that *Diaohua* culture only began to be prominent in the Klang Valley around year 2000. Conversely, more identical to the setting of the original *shidaiqu*, the *Diaohua Chang* at Klang Valley started in nightclubs instead of *Kopitiams* or food courts. *Diaohua Chang* has been providing performance on *shidaiqu* since it started in the Northern Peninsular Malaysia.

Previously, *Diaohua Chang* performance was being performed by two singers who sang in *Karaoke* style. *Cha Cha Session* was not included in the *Diaohua Chang* performance during that time. According to Tong (personal communication, May 6, 2013), the manager at one of the selected *Diaohua Chang* - City Food Court, *Cha Cha Session* was added to *Diaohua* performance around the year 2005 when *Diaohua* culture began at food courts of

Klang Valley. The stage of *Diaohua Chang* expanded as the *Cha Cha Session* took on a curtain-call approach reuniting all singers on stage. Instead of two singers, most of the *Diaohua Chang* performance at food court now hires around ten to twenty singers. It is also common for the modern *Diaohua Chang* to hire foreign singer from Thailand, Philippine, Vietnam or China.

In Malaysia, people would just refer to *Diaohua Chang* as nightclubs, pubs, or food courts depending on the venue where the word *Diaohua Chang* or *Hua Chang* is known to the insiders. Despite the dominant karaoke style of *Diaohua* performance, there are pubs which provide live band style (insiders called it as *Showband*) of *Diaohua* performances showcasing 5 to 6 performers including drummer, keyboardist, bassist, guitarist, and singer(s).

4.3 Settings of *Diaohua Chang* in Food Courts

Food court is a common term used in Malaysia that refers to a dining place either outdoor or indoor (shopping mall) which provides food and beverage stalls. The setting of a food court style of *Diaohua Chang* is similar with a normal food court - an open-air covered rooftop with hawker stalls, tables and chairs. There is an average of 100 tables at each of the four chosen *Diaohua Chang* premises. For the comfort of an open-air venue, ceiling and wall fans are provided to ensure a cool environment. The most obvious difference of a food court style *Diaohua Chang* from a normal food court is the existence of a stage. In addition, the lighting of a *Diaohua Chang* is usually dimmer than a normal food court except for the stage which is decorated with an array of lights to create a lively environment for the *Diaohua* performance.

The height of the permanent stage at the four selected *Diaohua Chang* is different due to varied settings. Comparing the settings of the *Diaohua Chang* at One Stop Food Court, City

Food Court, Tai Wah Restaurant and Serdang Food Court (see Fig. 4.2 – 4.4), the settings at One Stop Food Court and City Food Court, both in Pudu are similar where the stage is located at one end of the food court as shown in Figure 4.2 below. The tables are located in front of the stage for both One Stop Food Court and City Food Court. Therefore, the stage of City Food Court and One Stop Food Court are quite high, around 80 centimeters from the floor, in order for all customers, including those sitting far behind, to be able to watch the music performances.

On the other side of the spectrum, the stages of Tai Wah Restaurant and Serdang Food Court are lower at around 60 centimeters and 50 centimeters respectively from the floor. For Tai Wah Food Court, this could be due to their different table arrangement for their customers who are separated in front of the stage and also the left side of the stage as shown in Figure 4.3. The stage of Serdang Food Court is even lower because it is located in the middle of the food court as shown in Figure 4.4. Therefore, the tables for the customers are spread out to the front, sides and back of the stage.

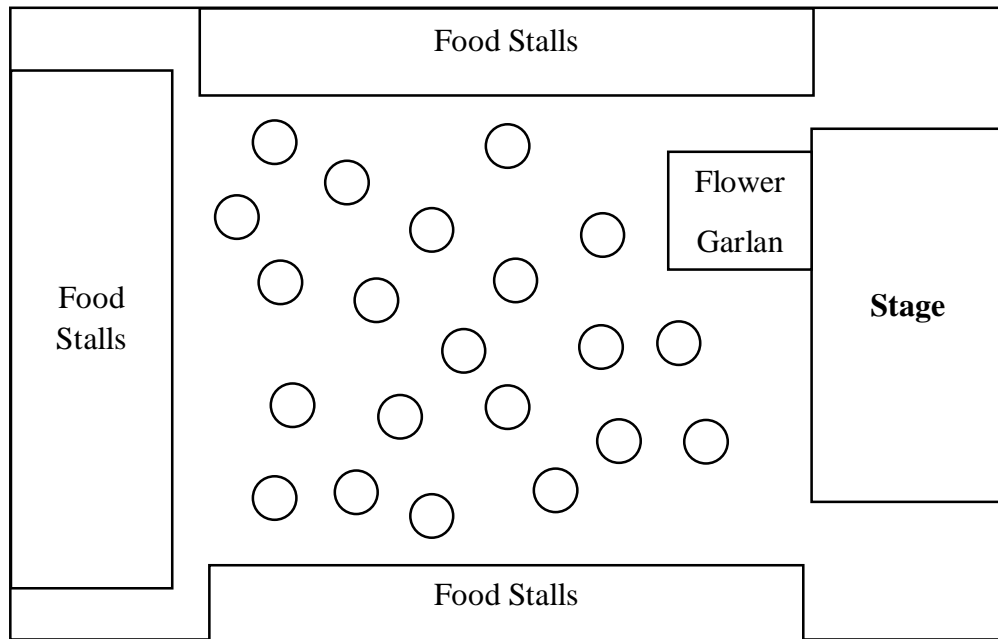


Figure 4.2: Settings of One Stop Food Court and City Food Court.

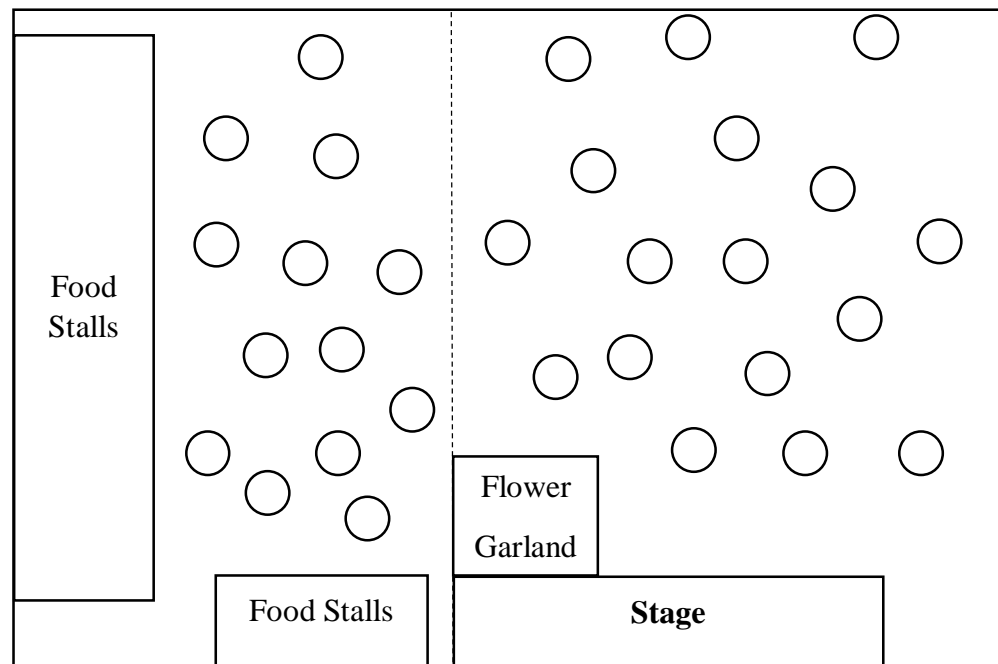


Figure 4.3: Setting of Tai Wah Restaurant.

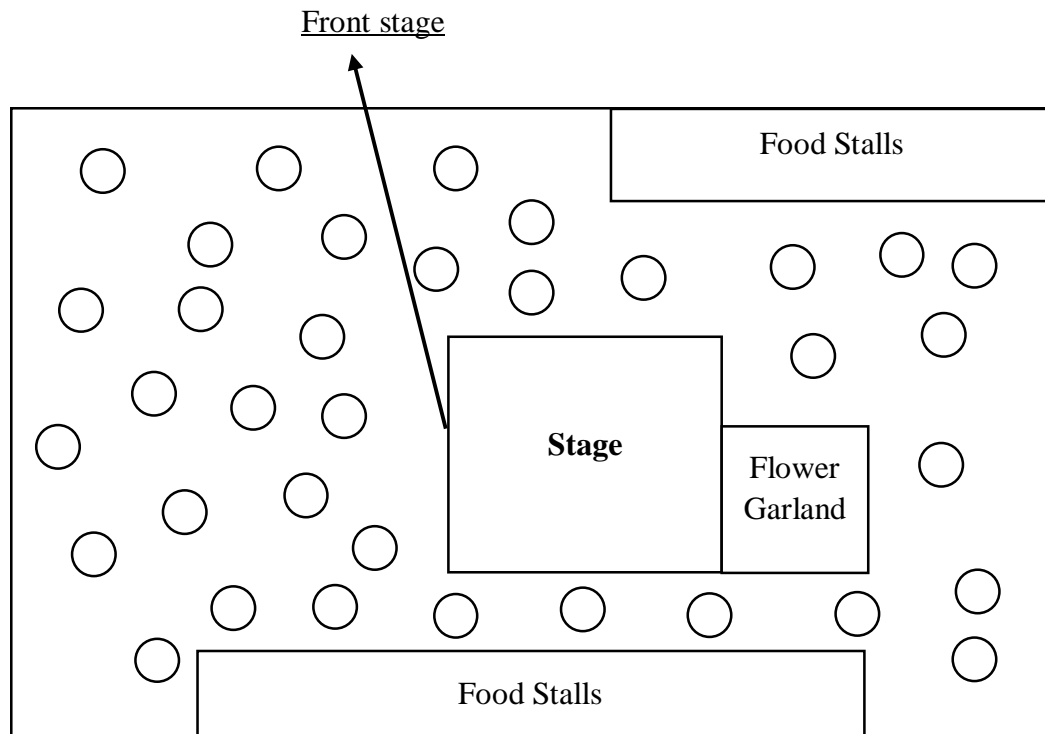


Figure 4.4: Setting of Serdang Food Court.

An obligatory rack that is reserve for hanging flower garlands, placed directly in front of the right or left corner of the *Diaohua Chang* stages in all four food courts, is an important feature that makes it unique to other performance stage. A *Diaohua Chang* stage is equipped with sound reinforcement systems (i.e. amplifiers, loudspeakers, signal processors and microphones) and stage lighting system (i.e. disco ball, fog machine, laser light, spotlight and LED light). *Diaohua Chang* provides live music performance every night. Some *Diaohua Chang* in food courts operate from morning until midnight like One Stop Food Court and City Food Court while others like Tai Wah Restaurant and Serdang Food Court operates only at night. One Stop Food Court and City Food Court operating hours are from 7am to 3am.

During the day, there are normal food courts, without *Diaohua* performance, providing karaoke session for the customers. Customers only pay three Malaysian Ringgit (RM 3) to

sing two songs on the stage. One Stop Food Court provides karaoke session from 3pm to 7pm while City Food Court provides karaoke session from 5pm to 8pm. On the other hand, Tai Wah Restaurant and Serdang Food Court operates from 8pm to 1am, only for *Diaohua* performances.

Hawker stalls which sell various kind of food can be found at *Diaohua Chang*. Catering mostly for Chinese customers, most of the hawker stalls are selling Chinese cuisine; while there are only a few hawker stalls which are selling Western, Thai or Indian food. One Stop Food Court and City Food Court have 10 to 15 hawker stalls, more than Serdang Food Court and Tai Wah Restaurant which patronage 5 to 10 hawker stalls. Beverages are provided by the owner of the food court. Food court style of *Diaohua Chang* serves beer as the only alcoholic drink unlike pub style of *Diaohua Chang* which also provide hard liquor (i.e. whisky, vodka, rum, and brandy).

Diaohua Chang in the food court style usually provides melon seed (*Guazi*, 瓜子) as snacks for customers to eat while watching their performances. The most common type of melon seed provided at *Diaohua Changs* is the sunflower seed (*Kuihuazi*, 葵花籽) as shown in Figure 4.5 below. Sunflower seed is a famous snack for the Chinese and is usually consume during Chinese New Year. The serving of melon seed at food court style of *Diaohua Changs* represents the Chinese culture as opposed to the serving of Western snack at pub style of *Diaohua Changs*.



Figure 4.5: Sunflower seeds (*Guazi*, 瓜子) served at *Diaohua Chang* (Chin, personal photograph, February 25, 2014).

The term – *Diaohua Chang* is found only on newspaper but not on the signboard of *Diaohua Chang* in food court or restaurant (only the name of the food court or restaurant is displayed). For instance, Figure 4.6 shows the signboard of Serdang Food Court and Tai Wah Restaurant. A signboard for *Diaohua Chang* in food court or restaurant is similar with signboards of any food court or restaurant. One can hardly know it is *Diaohua Chang* until one sees and hears its live music performances.



Figure 4.6: Signboard of Serdang Food Court and Tai Wah Restaurant (Chin, personal photograph, December 1, 2012; September 19, 2012).

Red lantern stage decorations are common features seen at a *Diaohua Chang* and can be identified easily as a sign of its association with Chinese culture. Red lantern style of decoration can be seen at One Stop Food Court, Tai Wah Restaurant and City Food Court. For instance, Figure 4.7 shows the red color Chinese lantern lights on the stage of One Stop Food Court which is similar to Tai Wah Restaurant and City Food Court. The red lantern in Chinese culture is an auspicious object symbolizing prosperity and life and. It is often used in festival and displayed outside business premises.



Figure 4.7: Chinese lantern lighting at One Stop Food Court (Chin, personal photography, February 18, 2014).

However, from my observation at the *Diaohua Changs* I suspected that the red lanterns may have its influence from the red light district and hence associated with the commonly stigmatized portrayal of the singsong girl (*genü*, 歌女). Red-light-districts are areas infamous for prostitution or sex oriented business transactions. Also these areas are closely related to the *Diaohua Chang* culture. The relation of ‘red-light’ and prostitution is well known in society. According to Sithanan (2006), the relationship originated since the Sung Dynasty A.D (960-1279), a period where red bamboo lamp are displayed at the entrance of ‘Wine Houses’ to notify the people of their business as brothel. Hence, the red lantern at *Diaohua Changs* seemed to be signifying the brothel.

Diaohua Chang singers are not well honored or respected, especially female singers. This situation happened decades ago. Around 1920s, the ‘Father of Chinese Popular Music’ – *Li Jin Hui*, had trained a group of mainly female singers (known as *genü* or sing-song girls) and

actresses (Baranovitch, 2003, p. 14). Similar with the *Diaohua Chang* singers today, the group of *genii* and actresses during that time were being stigmatized; the public assumed that their performance was tawdry and disgraceful (Jones, 2001).

4.4 The Organization of *Diaohua Chang*

Diaohua Chang at food court: an open-air restaurant, are similar to the local Malaysian *Kopitiam* setting with simple tables and plastic chairs. This is a more affordable recreational venue compared to nightclubs or pubs. From field visits, I discovered that both the famous One Stop Food Court and City Food Court belong to the same owner. One Stop Food Court has been operating for 15 years since year 2000 while City Food Court has been operating for 6 years since 2009.

City Food Court was previously owned by another owner until the current owner of One Stop Food Court took over its operations in year 2013. The owners of Serdang Food Court are a couple who started the business in 2008. Tai Wah Food Court has been operating since year 2007 and is owned by four owners who purchased the place from the previous owner several years ago. Operating a food court requires thousands Malaysian ringgit (depending on the scale of food court or restaurant) for licensing to the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL).

Operating a nighttime entertainment outlet would also require an entertainment license. However, amongst the managers of various food courts that I have interviewed, one honestly declared that they have been operating illegally without an entertainment license. To ensure their business is not interrupted, they pay ‘duit kopi’ or bribes of a few thousand ringgit to the local police officers monthly (personal communication, March 27, 2014). ‘Duit kopi’ is

a common term used in Malaysia. It literally translated as ‘money for coffee,’ a local term used to describe the act of giving money to the receiver as a treat for coffee.

The informant explained that open-air food court could not apply for entertainment license and only *Diaohua Chang* held in pub or nightclub could apply for entertainment license (personal communication, March 27, 2014). Hence, this means that all *Diaohua Changs* in food court setting are conducting illegal entertainment activity. In addition, the informants also claimed that most of the *Diaohua Changs* hire what Malaysian commonly labelled as *Zhongguo Mei* (China girls, 中国妹), who do not have working permit (personal communication, March 27, 2014). Therefore, *Diaohua Chang* often experience police raids (*Ibid.*). The police would confiscate their sound systems and detain their singers from China.

During one of my visits to City Food Court, the manager claimed that City Food Court is using an older set of sound system instead of the common one (personal communication, March 27, 2014). It is because he has received news that a police raid would happened within these few days (*Ibid.*). In addition, many of the singers from China will not appear due to the hearsay of a police raid (*Ibid.*). After a police raid, legal actions will be taken against the owners of these *Diaohua Changs* which the owner will be summoned with compound ranging from RM 10,000 to RM 50,000 (*Ibid.*).

Besides police and government officers seen as major ‘intruders’ to the *Diaohua Chang* community, the owner also faces challenges from local gangsters with their demand of ‘protection money’ or other extortion racket scheme. Local gangsters who are in charge of the territory where *Diaohua Changs* are situated will offer protection to the owners and their business by coercion. However, Tai Wah Restaurant and One Stop Food Court are rarely raided by police or disturbed by gangsters due to the background of the owners who has close affiliation with the local gangsters (personal communication, March 27, 2014).

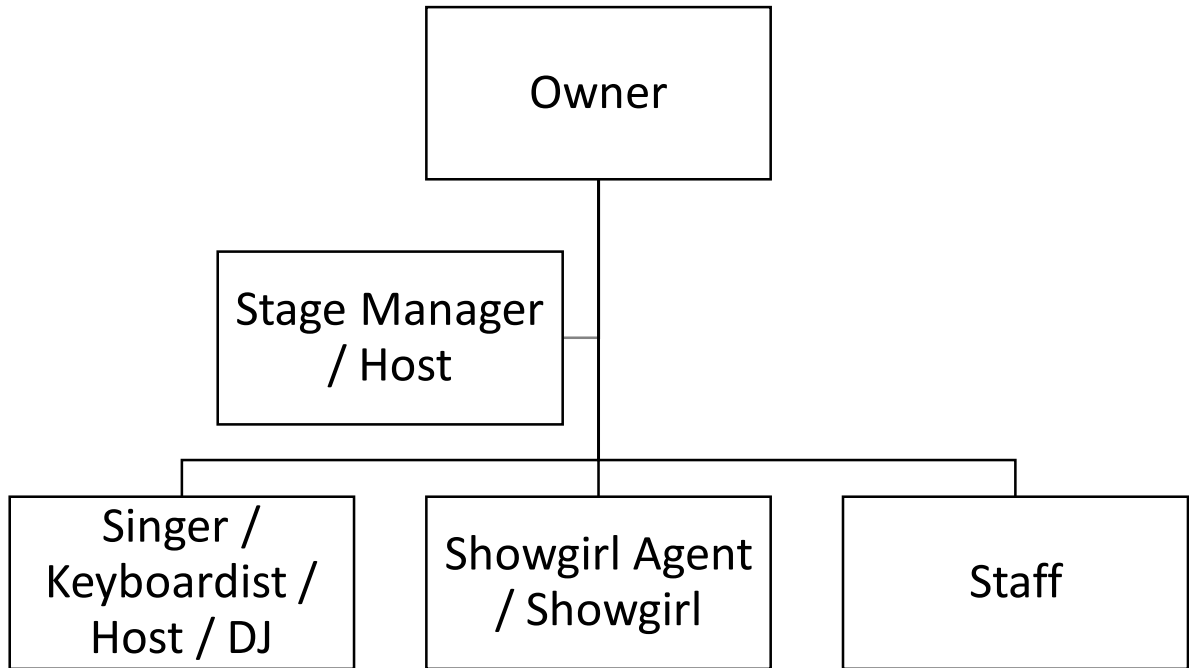


Figure 4.8: The organization chart of the four *Diaohua Chang* studied.

The organization chart of the four *Diaohua Changs* studied is shown at Figure 4.8 above. The owners of *Diaohua Changs* rarely appear at *Diaohua Chang* site. The owner usually provides capital for the *Diaohua Chang* and hires a stage manager to manage the *Diaohua* performance. A stage manager is usually the host of *Diaohua Chang* also. Thomas and Suppy are the stage manager and host of City Food Court and Serdang Food Court respectively. The job scopes of a stage manager include hiring and managing the performers and the selling-flower lady, organizing the daily stage performances and also other managerial tasks. The host of *Diaohua Chang* is usually a singer too and his job scope is to announce the song titles and singers' name during the entire *Diaohua* performance. However, the host and stage manager of Tai Wah Restaurant are two different person. Other than the main host, there will be a vice host who is also one of the *Diaohua Chang* singers.

Diaohua Chang in the food courts of Klang Valley usually hire 10 to 30 local singers and singers from China to perform daily. Most of the singers are females, a few of them are male. One of the informants mentioned that those singers from China at *Diaohua Chang* are holding traveling visa, student visa, or temporary resident visa (personal communication, December 11, 2014). None of them have working visa which needed to be able to work in Malaysia legally. Those singers from China often return to their country after a few months to renew their travelling visa. A *Diaohua Chang* singer from China who holds a student visa revealed that he is worried and afraid of being caught by the police but has no other choice in order to earn a living (*Ibid.*).

Among the four selected *Diaohua Changs*, only Serdang Food Court holds audition before hiring the singers. Through auditions, the stage manager and host of Serdang Food Court – Suppy will test the voice of singers before hiring them. However, some of the singers at Serdang Food Court did not go through the audition because they are hired by the owner. Wang said that most of the *Diaohua Chang* singers went to the *Diaohua Chang* to look for job opportunity (personal communication, December 11, 2014). Hence, the manager or owner of *Diaohua Chang* need not seek out singers.

Most of them do not have a basic salary and receive a commission of 70% from the fee paid by the customers for flower garlands. Hence, all of the *Diaohua Chang* singers receive different amount of commission by getting different amount of flower garlands from the customers. Also, there may be other means of award other than the flower garland, such as a crown or a robe. *Diaohua Chang* singers receive their commission on a daily basis. The singers receive their salary right after working hour (12am/1am) or on the next day. On the other hand, the host, which is also one of the singers at *Diaohua Chang*, will have a basic

salary but receive only 50% instead of 70% commission from the received flower garlands. The host is being paid monthly instead of daily commission like other singers.

According to Thomas, the singers at *Diaohua Chang* can earn at least RM 3000 to RM 4000 monthly. There is no any flower garlands target for the singers to achieve. However, those singers who are unable to earn around RM 3000 will stop working at City food court on their own. He added that some of the singers can earn around RM 16000 to RM 17000 monthly. Most of the singers who can earn high amount of commission are from China, only a few of them are the local singers. Some of the local singers are having daytime job as property agent, salesman, and so on. For instance, the stage manager and host of City Food Court – Suppy is selling beauty product during the day. However, most of the singers from China are merely working at *Diaohua Chang* without any day time job.

The working days of the *Diaohua Chang* singers are quite flexible as they can have their off day whenever they wish to. The working hours of the singers are from around 8pm to 1am. According to Zhao Ming, the singers at Tai Wah Restaurant have to be punctual to work as their salary will be deducted if they are late (personal communication, May 3, 2014). However, the other *Diaohua Chang* do not have the rules on deducting the singers' commission. Thomas revealed that they are *Diaohua Chang* singers who are always late for work and absent frequently (personal communication, May 6, 2014). He would give warning to those singers and stop hiring them if they did not changed.

A keyboardist will be playing for the entire *Cha Cha Session*. A *Diaohua Chang* keyboardist is usually a male. The keyboardist will play the music accompaniment for the singers. A keyboardist, Zhou, is paid around RM 2400 monthly for playing three sets of the 30-minute *Cha Cha Session* every night at City Food Court. Rarely, the *Diaohua Chang* keyboardist will also receive flower garlands from the customers and he will get 50%

commission of it. *Diaohua Chang* keyboardist is usually called as teacher in Chinese. For instance, Zhou is called as teacher Zhou (*Zhou Laoshi*, 周老师) at City Food Court. Since there is only one keyboardist at a *Diaohua Chang*, the keyboardist will be working every night. He will have to find a substitute if he cannot work temporarily.

Diaohua Chang also provides showgirl singer performance. The performance by showgirl singer is usually arranged by an agent. Most of the *Diaohua Chang* will have the performance by showgirl singer on almost every night. Showgirl singer performance lasts for 45 minutes and the showgirl would receive around RM 200 – RM 500 of basic payment for each performance. They would also get 50% commission on their receipt of flower garlands. The showgirl singers are Malaysians and they will be singing at various *Diaohua Chang* and also performing for religious festivals held by temples.

Occasionally, the local recording artists would be invited to perform at *Diaohua Chang*. Recording artists are singers who have released their own albums. Their payment would be higher than the showgirl singers which ranged from RM 500 to RM 4000 depending on their experience and popularity. For instance, *Du Xiao Feng* (杜曉峰) was invited to perform at City food court on 1st March 2014 (Saturday). *Du Xiao Feng* is a singer from *Huasheng* Recording Company [華聲唱片公司]. Hence, he receives around RM 1500 for performing at City Food Court. The Figure 4.9 below shows the advertising wallpaper of *Du Xiao Feng*. Normally, those recording artists would also promote and sell their albums at *Diaohua Chang*.

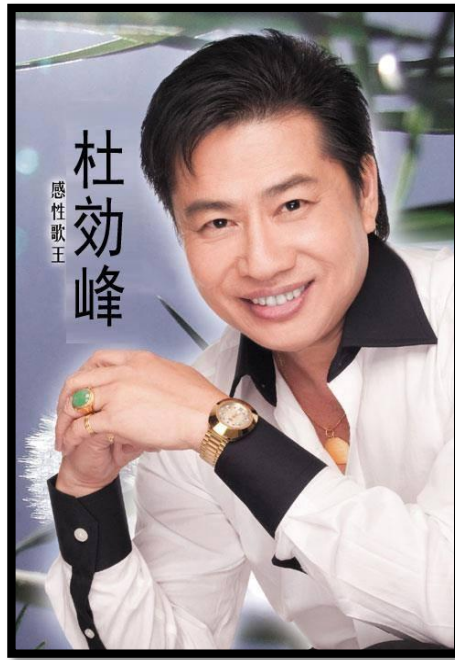


Figure 4.9: Advertising wallpaper of *Du Xiao Feng*, the recording artist from *Huasheng* Recording Company (Facebook, 2013).

Disc Jockey (DJ) is the person who in charge of the sound system at *Diaohua Chang*. The DJ's job is to play the karaoke VCD or DVD for the *Diaohua Chang* singers to sing. Most of the *Diaohua Chang* will hire either one or two DJ. For instance, there are two Disc Jockey (DJ) at City food court; each of them are being paid RM 1600 monthly. Disc Jockeys of City Food Court and One Stop Food Court would be working even before the *Diaohua* performance; they would play the karaoke VCD or DVD for the customers who want to sing on the stage during the karaoke sessions. The karaoke session for customers is around 3pm to 8pm.

The customers have to pay RM 3 for singing two songs on the stage. The Disc Jockeys are allowed to divide the money received from the customers without paying to the owner of *Diaohua Chang* (Thomas, personal communication, May 6, 2014). The Disc Jockeys at *Diaohua Chang* often help apply the party cracker towards the stage and also help the host

to announce the name of the singers and songs. A party cracker is applied when the customer paid RM 50 for the flower garlands. For instance, if a customer bought RM 100 of flower garlands for a singer, two flower garlands will be applied. However, some of the *Diaohua Chang* only apply one party cracker for each RM 100 of flower garlands.

Flower garlands are sold by a lady who walks around *Diaohua Chang*. The lady would be observing the singers and customers of *Diaohua Chang*. When the singers are singing on stage, the lady would approach the customers who talk to the singers to buy flower garland. The customers would pay the lady in order to purchase the flower garlands. Customers could choose to hang the flower garland on the singer's neck by themselves. However, the lady who sells flower garlands would be the one who hangs the flower garland on the singers' necks for most of the time.

In fact, the flower garlands do not belong to the singers even though they received them from the customers. The singers would return the flower garlands to the *Diaohua Chang* after each of their performances. Thus, the flower garlands only served as a sign for gratuity. The other workers at *Diaohua Chang* including the waiter or waitress, kitchen helper, cashier, bargirl, and so on. The waiters or waitresses of *Diaohua Chang* are usually foreign labors as of a usual food court. They serve only non-alcoholic drinks prepared by the kitchen helper to the customers. Alcoholic beverage, the beer, is served by the bargirls who also often socialize with the customers who ordered beer. Through observation, most of the bargirls are local middle-age women.

4.5 *Diaohua Chang* as a Sing-Song Music Performance

Diaohua Chang performance usually begins at 8pm and ends around 12am or 1am. Thomas (personal communication, May 6, 2014) revealed that the *Diaohua* performances

will go on until around 2am when there are a lot of customers especially on Friday and Saturday. Arriving at *Diaohua Chang* at 8pm is considered early where ample of car parking spaces are available nearby. The loud and untrained singing voice by some *Diaohua Chang* singers can be heard even before entering *Diaohua Chang*. Although the *Diaohua Chang* singers already begin their performance routine by taking turns to sing on the stage, there are only a few tables that occupied by the customers. The number of customers gradually increases. Unlike a formal concert hall scenario, only some of the customers are watching the performance while others are talking, using phone, reading newspaper or eating and this reveals the scene at a *Diaohua Chang*.

From all my visits to the field, the number of customers at *Diaohua Chang* usually rose to a peak around 9.30pm to 11.30pm where the *Cha Cha Session* and *Showtime* performance took place. The customers pay more attention to these two programme and it is observed that more customers were watching the performance during *Cha Cha Session* and *Showtime* performance compared to the solo karaoke performance. The *Cha Cha Session* began in the middle of the entire *Diaohua Chang* performance around 9.30pm or 10pm. All the *Diaohua Chang* singers went on the stage during the *Cha Cha Session* to take turns to sing part of a song accompanied by the keyboardist.

The lively atmosphere continued after the *Cha Cha Session* through the *Showtime* performance by the showgirl singer around 10.30pm or 11pm. Showgirl singers do not merely sing but usually draw attention from the audience by dancing and interacting with the them while singing. Some of the showgirl singers would talk and interact more with the audiences but some of them would just introduce about themselves and the songs being performed. Most of them would speak in Mandarin and Cantonese while occasionally

Hokkien. Most of the customers who sat near to the stage were more excited; they would interact with the showgirl singers by responding to their questions.

Though *Showtime* performance is not the finale of the *Diaohua Chang* performance, it creates the highest point of the exciting ambience at *Diaohua Chang*. In addition, some of the *Diaohua Chang* would held special performances occasionally. There are a wide range of special performances at *Diaohua Chang* such as performances by singing and dancing groups, local recording artists, pole dancers, and transsexual dancers. The special performances attract more audiences by providing an eye-opener experience for the *Diaohua Chang* regulars as well as the new customers. As organizing a special performance involves more cost, special performance only happen once in a while for the special occasion.

The last section of the *Diaohua Chang* performance is same as the first section, solo karaoke performance. *Diaohua Chang* singers get back to their routine of taking turns to sing on the stage from around 11.30pm to 12pm. The customers getting lesser during that time and a lot of them who stayed are the drunk customers. Some of the *Diaohua Chang* end the performance sharply at 12am while some of the *Diaohua Chang* end the performance later at 1am or 1.30am. According to the manager of one of the *Diaohua Chang*, the music volume would be lowered after 12am to avoid receiving complain from the neighboring household (Thomas, personal communication, March 27, 2014). Most of the customers' attention returned to talking or drinking instead of watching the singing performances during that time. Table 4.1 below shown the sequence of *Diaohua Chang* performances, the crowd and the customers' attention during each performance as discussed above.

Table 4.1: Profile for some of the informants for this *Diaohua Chang* research.

TIME	PERFORMANCE	CUSTOMER	ATTENTION
8pm – 9.30pm	Karaoke singing	Moderate crowd	Talking, eating, using phone
9.30pm – 10.30pm	<i>Cha Cha Session</i>	Full house	Watching performance
10.30pm – 11.30pm	<i>Showtime</i>	Full house	Watching performance
11.30pm – 12am	Karaoke singing	Moderate crowd	Talking, drinking

The first and final sessions of the *Diaohua Chang* performance, the karaoke performance, is a solo or duet singing performance by the *Diaohua Chang* singers. Karaoke performance is being accompanied by pre-recorded music such as karaoke VCD or DVD which played by the Disc Jockey. The use of karaoke VCD or DVD made the singing easier as the singers can look on the provided TV screen for the lyrics as if singing at the karaoke box, karaoke bar or KTV. Majority of the *Diaohua Chang* singers are not of professional standards during their karaoke performance.

One of the informants mentioned that anyone can be a *Diaohua Chang* singer nowadays regardless of her singing ability (Thomas, personal communication, March 27, 2014). Through field observation, I have heard some of them especially the China singers, failed to sing with the correct rhythm, timing, pitch or tone required from the songs. However, to an outsider like me, I was surprised that these *Diaohua Chang* singers still received plenty of flower garlands. Most of the owners of *Diaohua Chang* still hire China singers regardless of their singing skills. Hiring more singers will not increase the cost but only the profit as the singers are not receiving any basic salary. Also, increasing the *Diaohua Chang* singers could eventually increase the crowd and hence generate more profit.

Many of the *Diaohua Chang* singers could not sing well but simply because of being very skilled in socializing with the customers, they still received a lot of flower garlands. Through observation, most of the customers were being accompanied by or socialized with the *Diaohua Chang* singers except during the *Cha Cha Session* when all the singers were on the stage. *Diaohua Chang* singers would normally receive flower garlands from the customers whom they socialized with. Moreover, most of them who purchase flower garlands were the customers who came alone or with male partners. Customers who come with their wife or family members usually will not purchase flower garlands but merely watch the performance. Hence, *Diaohua Chang* singers would only approach the potential elder or middle-aged male customers who came alone or with other male partners.

For instance, I as a female audience was rarely approach by the *Diaohua Chang* singers even though I sat pretty near to the stage. However, I have been once approached by a male singer during one of my visits to Tai Wah Restaurant with my male friend. The singer greeted and shook hand with both of us before sitting down and chat with us. Therefore, I have used the opportunity to ask questions regarding to *Diaohua Chang* performance. The singer was generous in answering my questions though he was reluctant to believe that I was a student. In order to earn flower garlands, he persuaded me to sing a song with him on the stage which I need to purchase at least RM 50 for that. When more customers came, he stopped talking with us and went to greet and socialize with the other customers.

An informant mentioned that *Diaohua Chang* usually begin the conversation with the regular customers by asking, ‘have you eaten?’ or ‘how are you doing today?’ (Wang, personal communication, December 11, 2014). Most of the informants claimed that they would talk on random and various topics with the customers. According to Wang, as a single customer could not always purchase a lot of flower garlands for the singer, *Diaohua Chang*

singers socialize with various customers in order to receive more flower garlands and hence increase their income (*Ibid.*). Also, *Diaohua Chang* singers would usually go to the customers who purchased flower garlands for them after their performance. They would then greet, thank and talk to the customers who purchased flower garlands for them.

However, there are *Diaohua Chang* singers who could sing better. They are mainly the local singers who have plenty of experiences in singing performance. For instance, the local singer at Tai Wah Restaurant, Zhao Ming, was a freelance wedding singer and nightclub singer before taking the role as *Diaohua Chang* singer (Zhao Ming, personal communication, May 3, 2014). Throughout my observation, it is rare to hear a higher standard of singing performance at *Diaohua Chang*. Nevertheless, there are one or two singers from each *Diaohua Chang* who could sing very well and well-trained. For instance, the stage manager of City Food Court, Thomas, who had won in plenty of local singing competition could sing very well.

The lack of singing skill at *Diaohua Chang* appears to catch my attention as I previously assumed that singing should be the main focus of attention in this performance. However, I no longer think so after the commencement of my ethnography entry into the field. During my fieldwork, I observed and delineated three main factors that resulted in this poorer standard of singing at *Diaohua Chang*.

Firstly, the main focus of attention during the Karaoke performance appears to be socialization and not the quality of singing. According to Zhao (personal communication, May 3, 2014) and Wang (personal communication, December 11, 2014), most of the China singers offer 'extra service' to customers, as China sex workers too. According to a survey conducted by International Organization of Migration (Anderson & Davidson, 2003), the hierarchy of prostitution strongly priorities 'fairer skinned' migrant sex worker at the top

compared to the 'darker skinned' and that these Chinese migrant singers are known for their fairer complexion and ability to socialize with customers. Wang also revealed that only few of the *Diaohua Chang* singers from China who could receive plenty of flower garlands by merely socialize with the customers (*Ibid.*). Those who could achieve that are the young and pretty singers and they must have excellent socializing skills and tactics.

This lead to the second factor that resulted in the poor singing skills at *Diaohua Chang* – the continual and increasing strong support from customers to these migrant singers. The underlying agenda of prostitution becomes an attraction to customers and one of the gesture of showing interest and support is the purchase of flower garlands to these migrant singers who do not actually excel in singing. Customers no longer purchase flower garlands for the singers who sang well but the China singers who socialized or have 'special relationship' with them. As the appearance of China singers could generate more profit, *Diaohua Chang* owners tend to hire more China singers instead of the local singers who sing better.

Another contributing factor stems from the above two - the decline of local *Diaohua Chang* singers. Local singers albeit having better skills in singing are positioned at the lower hierarchy at *Diaohua Chang* since the emergence of migrant Chinese singers. The foci of attention at *Diaohua Chang* as an appreciation of a sing-song venue changed when prostitution is involved. The perspective of an audience attending a performance inevitably changed context to the perspective of a customer in migrant sex worker consumerism. Thus, local singers who originally sang as a career gradually left *Diaohua Chang* leaving more opportunity for migrant Chinese singers.

Unlike the previous times, nowadays the income of *Diaohua Chang* singers depends only on the received flower garlands. Hence, the local singers who could not generate sufficient income from commissions of the received flower garlands would eventually quit *Diaohua*

Chang. For instance, a single mother who sings in supporting the living of her daughter revealed her difficult encounter in maintaining her job at *Diaohua Chang* due to the rising and threatening phenomenon of migrant Chinese singers (“Hun Yin Po Lie,” 2009).

The lack of singing skills is more obvious during the *Cha Cha Session* or, more commonly known to the insiders as *Cha Cha Huan Jie* (环节). Some *Diaohua Chang* have only one *Cha Cha Session* per night; others included two to three *Cha Cha Session* for per night’s programme. The duration of a *Cha Cha Session* is around 45 minutes to an hour. All the *Diaohua Chang* singers and a keyboardist were on the stage for the *Cha Cha Session*. As the music accompaniment of *Cha Cha Session* is being played by the keyboardist, the singers were singing the songs’ lyrics by memory but not referring to the lyrics on the TV screen like during Karaoke performance.

Cha Cha Session was designed to showcase songs arranged in cha-cha rhythm and the tempi of songs are faster. The tempo of the drum beat being played at the four selected *Diaohua Chang* was very fast. After analysis of the recording captured during the field, the tempi collected from different *Cha Cha Sessions* ranged from 144 to 161 crotchet beats per minute. As the genre implies, the singers did basic Cha Cha dancing steps without hand movements. This curtain-call-like session is a medley of songs which singers took turn to sing different songs. For each song, only one to two verses and one chorus section were performed without repetition. For instance, the infamous *shidaiqu* made famous by Teresa Teng titled Story of a Small Town (*Xiao Cheng Gu Shi* 小城故事) was performed in the following sequence, while the original song has repetition of the chorus.

Verse one:

小城故事多 充满喜和乐

There are many stories in a small town, filled with happiness and joy

若是你到小城來 收获特別多

If you come to this small town, you will gain a lot

Verse two:

看似一幅画 听像一首歌

Looks like a painting, sounds like a song

人生境界真善美 这里已包括

The perfect realm of life is included in here

Chorus:

谈的谈 说的说 小城故事真不错

People talking, people chatting, the small town story is great

请你的朋友一起来 小城来做客

Invite your friend to come together for being the guests of this small town

During the *Cha Cha Session*, the keyboardist used the programmed music to accompany the singers. From my observation, none of the keyboardists were playing in pure cha-cha rhythm but rather a stately crotchet-beat bass drum with eight-beat ride cymbal pattern (see Figure 4.10).

Hi-hat
Rim Shot
Bass Drum

Figure 4.10: Dance drum beat.

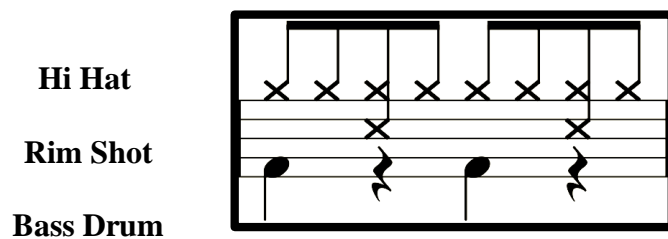


Figure 4.11: Basic drum beat.

The four crotchet beats of bass drum on each bar appears more like disco-beat and electric dance music pattern. The second pattern employed (see Fig. 4.11) is a basic drum beat (simple quadruple drum pattern) as in pop and rock music. The keyboardists also utilized the pre-programmed drum fill-in from the keyboard and this button was frequently pressed at the ending of a phrase or to signal song change. For instance, drum fill-in is played right before a verse, an intro, or a chorus. Visits to different *Diaohua Chang* may experience different drum beat or fill-in, which I observed not due to the keyboardists' composed or programmed rhythm, but because of the model of the keyboard. Although a keyboard has pre-set cha-cha rhythm, but it is obvious that at *Diaohua Chang*, even during the *Cha Cha session*, disco-style fast-pace music was played instead.

Diaohua Chang keyboardist usually plays an introduction melody for each song during the *Cha Cha Session*. Keyboardist usually plays either the melody of the verse or chorus part as the introduction and rarely play the original intro melody. For instance, melody from the verse of *Story of a Small Town* (see Fig. 4.12) was played as an introduction instead its original introduction (see Fig. 4.13).



Figure 4.12: Melody of the verse part for the song - *Xiao Cheng Gu Shi*



Figure 4.13: Intro melody for the song – *Xiao Cheng Gu Shi*.

The keyboardists played the bass line, harmony and fills between phrases according to the keys and chords for different songs. There is a variety of programmed bass line pattern from the keyboard sometimes used by the keyboardists. Hence, *Diaohua Chang* keyboardists mainly focused on playing the harmony and fill-in only. It was obvious too when a melody of a song is played as a lead once the singer could not follow in time. Therefore, the keyboardist also played a role in directing the singers. There are times when the keyboardist stopped playing the bass line, harmony and fill-in, leaving the singer to sing with only the drum beat. This happened when the singer (usually China female singer) sang with the incorrect rhythm for the entire song.

One of the *Diaohua Chang* keyboardists' role is to ensure the singers ability to perform the songs. Keyboardists usually have no choice but to accommodate with the wrong starting bar. For instance, the singers usually have to begin the singing after two bars or four bars of introduction melody; however, there are singers who could not begin the singing after the

melody introduction but delay for two bars. Hence, the keyboardist would accommodate to the wrong starting point of the verse.

The keyboardist at the four selected *Diaohua Chang* used a combination of Western lead-sheet notation and Cipher notation. Besides printed score, the keyboardists also transcribed some of the songs as lead-sheet. Figure 4.14 is an example given by an informant, Donny, showing his transcription of the song *Don't Leave if You Love Me* (*Ai Wo Bie Zou*, 爱我别走) originally sang by Irene Yeh (*Ye Ai Ling*, 叶瑛菱). The sheet music is simple as it shows only the melody of the intro and solo part and also the chords of the entire song.

Figure 4.15 shows another example of Donny's transcription using cipher notation, of the song *Love is Blind* (*Mi Mang De Ai*, 迷茫的爱) by *Guo Ling* (郭玲). The melody and chords for the intro, verse and chorus parts of the song were shown through the numbered musical notation. According to Donny (personal Communication, March 7, 2014), he is familiar with the Chinese *shidaiqu* but not the latest China popular songs. However, he needs to constantly learn new songs in order to accompany the increasing China singers at *Diaohua Chang*.



Figure 4.14: Sheet music of *Don't Leave if You Love Me* (*Ai Wo Bie Zou*, 爱我别走) (Chin, personal photograph, March 6, 2014).

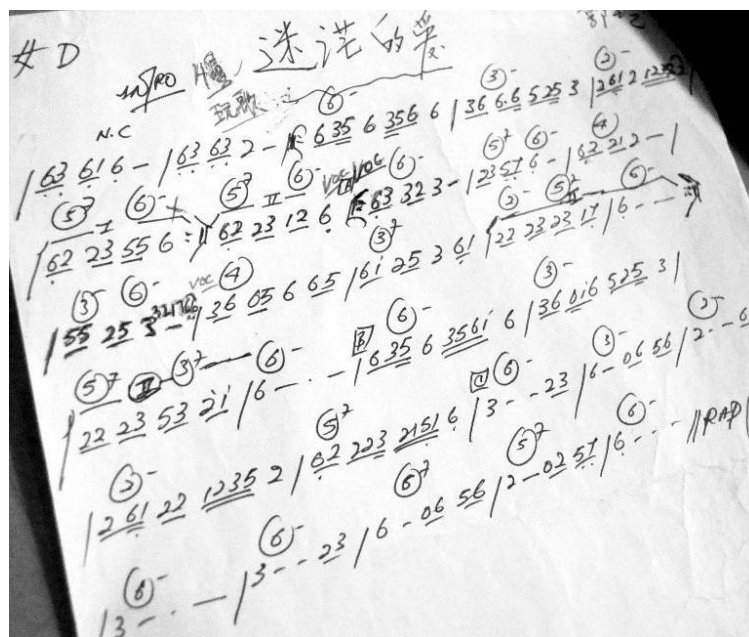


Figure 4.15: Numbered musical notation of *Love is Blind* (*Mi Mang De Ai*, 迷茫的爱) (Chin, personal photograph, March 6, 2014).

All of the *Diaohua Chang* singers were performing line dance incorporating cha-cha dance steps which moving to left, right, front and back. Dance steps for *Cha Cha Session* at Tai Wah Restaurant is less organized and seemed messy compared the other *Diaohua Chang*. Some of the singers are dancing the same steps while some of them are dancing the other steps or not dancing at all. *Cha Cha Session* at City Food Court, One Stop Food Court and Serdang Food Court is more organized. The singers would dance to the left and right for 8 bars or one section of the songs, then dance to the front and back for another 8 bars or another section of the songs.

In addition, host and vice host of City Food Court would use hand sign to guide the singers after each 8-bars to change their dance steps. Thomas mentioned that the hand sign is to ensure the singers to be dancing the same dance steps during *Cha Cha Session* (personal communication, March 27, 2014). Through field observation and also virtual fieldwork *Diaohua Chang* singers in Malaysia were performing dance steps without any hand movement during the *Cha Cha Session*. Unlike Thailand *Diaohua Chang*, where all the singers would be performing the hand movement of Thai traditional dance while dancing the steps during the *Cha Cha Session*.

The third type of music performance at *Diaohua Chang* is the *Showtime* performance which is performed by showgirl singers who also being called as *Ko-tai* singers. Those showgirl singers usually perform for various *Diaohua Chang*, festivals held by temple, wedding function and so on. The showgirl singers are Malaysian Chinese and many of them use a nickname and some believe that achieving popularity was made easier by having one, as it will be easier for the audience to remember them. During the Shanghai *shidaiqu* period, the voice of female singers were distinguished by taste like sweet, sour and salty while the appearance of the female singers also being evaluated in the magazines (Jones, 2001).

Similarly, the showgirl singers at *Diaohua Chang* were being characterized through their nicknames which reflect their voice, appearance or dancing skills. During my observation, a singer was named as Dancing Queen (*wuhou*, 舞后); another called herself Miss Red Bean (*hongdou xiaojie*, 红豆小姐) while Doll or *Wawa* (娃娃) is also another name that I gathered from the *Diaohua Chang*. Also, there were showgirl singers who named themselves with affiliation to famous popular artists, such as little Amei (*Xiao A Mei*, 小阿妹) – Amei is a Taiwan singer, Fatty Gaga (The gaga of Fattygaga refers to Lady Gaga who is an American singer) and Malaysia's Anita Mui (*Dama Mei Yan Fang*, 大马梅艳芳) - Anita Mui was a Hong Kong singer.

The duration of a Showtime session is around forty-five minutes. Thomas (personal communication, March 27, 2014) revealed that the showgirl singers bring their own recordings of minus-one in the form of VCD, DVD, or CD for their performances. Dancing while singing a song remains a norm during the Showtime performance. More movement is obvious during a fast-paced song. During my observation, I found this session provides audience more dance variety and it is obvious that some of the dances are pre-choreographed and practiced through before a performance. At times, the singers also dance spontaneously to some songs in club dancing style.

Showgirl performances were obviously more skilled in performing compared to the karaoke performances and *Cha Cha Sessions* performed by the *Diaohua Chang* singer. Most of the showgirl singers displayed better singing techniques, more interaction with the audiences, more body movements and better showmanship while singing. Unlike *Diaohua Chang* singers, showgirl singers sing with the correct pitch most of the time and interact with the audiences to create a livelier environment. For instance, I have seen a few showgirl

singers approach the audiences to dance with them for the song, Gangnam Style, and sometimes there are audiences who did stand up and danced along with the singers. Hence, more audiences were watching the Showtime performance compared to the performance by *Diaohua Chang* singers.

It is believed that their costumes also aided in attracting the attention from the audiences. Showgirl singers were usually younger and wore more tempting costumes compared to the *Diaohua Chang* singers. Figure 4.16 shows that the *Diaohua Chang* singers were mainly wearing one-piece dress which looks more decent compared to the showgirl singer who wear singlet and mini skirt as shown in Figure 4.17. There were less or none of the audiences applause after the solo Karaoke performance. However, showgirl singing performances did attract more customers to applause, sing along, cheer, and take photo. Most of the showgirl singers who dance and sing along while wearing more luring costumes could create more visual enjoyment for the *Diaohua Chang* customers.



Figure 4.16: *Diaohua Chang* singers at Tai Wah Restaurant (Chin, personal photograph, February 18, 2014).



Figure 4.17: Showgirl singers at Tai Wah Restaurant (Chin, personal photograph, October 31, 2012).

In the middle of a performance, it is norm for a showgirl singer to walk down from the stage to interact with the customers while singing. All to which I observed shook hands with customers and great them with a smile. This form of interaction minimizes the gap and distance between the performer and the audience. As the showgirls were usually clad in sexy costumes such as cabaret-style bra and miniskirt, or corset, the lessening of distance between the singer and an audience reflects a highly sexual intention, similar to what Levy (2005) described as raunch culture in a highly sexualized culture.

Hence, singers received a lot of flower garlands too as a result, and especially during the hand-shaking session when the singer approaches the audience. Therefore, it is obvious that social interaction and singer-audience communication during a song is an important factor in

garnering tips from customers, in the form of flower garlands. The main focus of the audience at *Diaohua Chang* remains close to the sexualization of the female singers.

Apart from the three types of performance mentioned above which can be seen nightly at *Diaohua Chang*, special performance such as singing performance by guest singer or dance performance by guest dancer is held once in a while too. Standard of the special performance is higher than the performance by the *Diaohua Chang* singers and sometimes the showtime singers. Many of the guest singers are local singers who have released their albums. Hence, *Diaohua Chang* also served as a place for the local singers to promote themselves. Simultaneously, guest singer performance attracted more customers, probably the friends or fans of the guest singers to visit *Diaohua Chang*.

Among the four *Diaohua Chang* being studied, only City Food Court held oldies singing competition and charity dinner annually. The extra event of *Diaohua Chang* is depends its managers as the owners usually leave it to them. The holding of oldies singing competition could transform the *Diaohua Chang* to a healthier place of entertainment for a moment as it attracts customers who appreciate quality songs performance. The charity dinner which is held once a year also attracts customers who come with their family. The performance during the charity dinner is by various local guest singers who provide a good quality of oldies performance. The collected funds from the charity dinner is donated to the Handicapped and Mentally Disabled Children Association Selangor shown in the receipt below (see Figure 4.18).



Figure 4.18: Receipt for the donation from City Food Court to the Handicapped and Mentally Disabled Children Association Selangor (Facebook, 2014).

4.6 Songs of *Diaohua Chang*

Diaohua Chang singers performed a wide range of Chinese popular songs from as early as the 1930s *shidaiqu* to the latest popular songs. Mostly mandarin songs and some Cantonese, Hokkien and other languages popular songs could be heard during *Diaohua Chang* performances. Four categories of Chinese popular songs formed the usual *Diaohua Chang* programme: *shidaiqu*, Mandopop, Cantopop, and China popular songs from the 70s to the current popular numbers.

Some of the informants revealed that the songs selection is based on the singers' favorites or other songs that are popular among customers. Most of the songs sung at *Diaohua Chang* are familiar to the Malaysian customers, but some such as the *shidaiqu* may not be familiar to the mainland Chinese. On the other hand, there are some mainland Chinese popular song

sung by the migrant singers, which may not be popular at first among the audience, but became a familiar number to returning customers.

The various type of songs collected during fieldwork form a list of popular numbers at *Diaohua Chang* in the four categories mentioned (see Table 4.2 – 4.4). On the table, the original singer and year of release for the songs were mentioned. Most of the songs are originally sung by mainland Chinese, and Taiwanese artists, and a lesser number are Cantonese pop or by Malaysian artists. These songs were once the top hits of its era and are very familiar number for the most middle-age and elderly audience during their youth. Though, for the very current popular songs remain to be absent at *Diaohua Chang* scene.

Table 4.2: Popular selection of Chinese *shidaiqu* and Mandapop at *Diaohua Chang*.

No	TITLE	YEAR	SINGER
1	When Will You Come Again (<i>He Ri Jun Zai Lai</i> , 何日君再来)	1937	<i>Zhou Xuan</i> (周旋)
2	I Want You To Be My Baby (<i>Wo Yao Ni De Ai</i> , 我要你的爱)	1957	Grace Chang (<i>Ge Lan</i> , 葛蘭)
3	The Past Can Only Be Reminisced (<i>Wang Shi Zhi Neng Hui Wei</i> , 往事只能回味)	1970	<i>You Ya</i> (尤雅)
4	The Moon Represents My Heart (<i>Yue Liang Dai Biao Wo De Xin</i> , 月亮代表我的心)	1972	<i>Chen Fen Lan</i> (陈芬兰)
5	A Lovely Rose (<i>Ke Ai De Mei Gui Hua</i> , 可爱的玫瑰花)	1974	<i>Ou Yang Fei Fei</i> (欧阳菲菲)
6	Story Of A Small Town (<i>Xiao Cheng Gu Shi</i> , 小城故事)	1978	Teresa Teng (<i>Deng Li Jun</i> , 邓丽君)
7	Love You For Ten Thousand Years (<i>Ai Ni Yi Wan Nian</i> , 爱你一万年)	1979	Steven <i>Liu Wen</i> <i>Zheng</i> (刘文正)

8	Sweet as Honey (<i>Tian Mi Mi</i> , 甜蜜蜜)	1980	Teresa Teng (<i>Deng Li Jun</i> , 邓丽君)
9	I Only Care About You (<i>Wo Zhi Zai Hu Ni</i> , 我只在乎你)	1986	Teresa Teng (<i>Deng Li Jun</i> , 邓丽君)
10	A Singer's Applause (<i>Zhang Sheng Xiang Qi</i> , 掌声响起)	1986	<i>Fong Fei Fei</i> (凤飞飞)
11	Perhaps It Is In Winter (<i>Da Yue Zai Dong Ji</i> , 大约在冬季)	1987	<i>Chyi Chin</i> (齐秦)
12	Wanderer's Love Song (<i>Lang Ren Qing Ge</i> , 浪人情歌)	1992	<i>Wu Bai</i> (伍佰)
13	Well-Intentioned (<i>Yong Xin Liang Ku</i> , 用心良苦)	1993	<i>Phil Chang Yu</i> (张宇)
14	Ask (<i>Wen</i> , 问)	1994	<i>Sarah Chen Shu Hua</i> (陈淑桦)
15	Hard To Describe (<i>Yi Yan Nan Jin</i> , 一言难尽)	1995	<i>Phil Chang Yu</i> (张宇)
16	Conquer (<i>Zheng Fu</i> , 征服)	1998	<i>Na Ying</i> (那英)
17	Can I Hold You (<i>Wo Ke Yi Bao Ni Ma</i> , 我可以抱你吗)	1999	A Mei (<i>Zhang Hui Mei</i> , 张惠妹)
18	There Are Only You And Me On The Way of Love (<i>Ai De Lu Shang Zhi You Wo He Ni</i> , 爱的路上只有我和你)	2001	Richie Ren (<i>Ren Xian Qi</i> , 任贤齐)
19	Little Wei (<i>Xiao Wei</i> , 小薇)	2002	<i>Huang Pin Yuan</i> (黄品源)
20	You Are My Eyes	2002	<i>Xiao Huang Qi</i>

	(<i>Ni Shi Wo De Yan</i> , 你是我的眼)		(萧煌奇)
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Table 4.3: Popular selection of Cantopop at *Diaohua Chang*.

No	TITLE	YEAR	SINGER
1	Lycoris Radiate (<i>Man Ju Sha Wa</i> , 蔓珠莎华)	1985	Anita Mui (<i>Mui Yim Fong</i> , 梅艳芳)
2	Friend (<i>Pang Yao</i> , 朋友)	1985	Alan Tam (<i>Tam Weng Lon</i> , 谭咏麟)
3	The Glorious Years (<i>Kwong Fai Soi Yui</i> , 光辉岁月)	1991	Beyond
4	You, For The Sake of Love (<i>Nei Nei Nei Wai Liu Ngoi Qeng</i> , 你你你为了爱情)	1995	Alice Lau Nga Lai (刘雅丽)
5	Your Name My Name (<i>Nei Dek Meng Ji Ngo Dek Seng Si</i> , 你的名字我的姓氏)	1996	Jacky Cheung (Jeong Hok Yao, 张学友)

Table 4.4: Popular selection of China popular songs at *Diaohua Chang*.

No	TITLE	YEAR	ORIGINAL SINGER
1	Flying Freely (<i>Zi You Fei Xiang</i> , 自由飞翔)	2007	Phoenix Legend (<i>Fong Huang Chuan Qi</i> , 凤凰传奇)
2	Moved Heaven And Ground (<i>Gan Dong Tian Gan Dong Di</i> , 感动天 感动地)	2007	<i>Yu Tong Fei</i> (宇桐非)
3	My Good Brother (<i>Wo De Hao Xiong Di</i> , 我的好兄弟)	2009	<i>Xiao Shen Yang</i> (小沈阳)
4	Can't Be Hurt (<i>Shang Bu Qi</i> , 伤不起)	2011	<i>Wang Lin</i> (王麟)
5	Worldwide Sister (<i>Tian Xia De Jie Mei</i> , 天下的姐妹)	2013	<i>Xu Qian Ya &</i> Phoenix Legend (徐千雅 & <i>Fong Huang Chuan Qi</i> , 凤凰传奇)

The two *Diaohua Chang* popular *shidaiqu* reveal lyrics concerning love, longing and romance and songs are *When Will you Come Again* by Zhou Xuan and *I Want to be Your Baby* by Grace Chang (see Table 4.2). The Mandopop from the early 70s to early 80s such as *The Moon Represents My Heart*, *Story Of A Small Town*, *I Only Care About You*, and *Sweet As Honey* are the most popular one where they are performed almost every night at *Diaohua Chang* (see Table 4.2). It is obvious that Teresa Teng's songs remain the most frequently selected ones.

Due to the large amount of middle-aged customer, Mandopop and Cantopop from late 1980s to early 2000s that were once popular during the school days of this age group remain

favourite selection too. This probably reflects as what Loo and Loo (2013) explain as a means of bringing back nostalgia. Table 4.2 and 4.3 show the Mandopop and Cantopop from 1980s onwards which were being sung frequently at *Diaohua Chang*. Similar to *shidaiqu*, 90% of the lyrics for the Mandopop in Table 4.2 and 4.3 is about love and romance and relationship between men and women. Most of the lyrics are in a melancholy mood and reveal sad tales of break-up and longing.

Most of the *Diaohua Chang* audiences in Klang Valley speak in Cantonese rather than Mandarin and this is an obvious scene at Serdang and Pudu area. However, more Mandopop are performed compared to the Cantonese number. This is due to many of the migrant singers from mainland China who could only sing and speak in Mandarin. Therefore, the singers who sang Cantopop were local.

Lastly, the five China popular songs from 2007 to 2013 which were being sung regularly in *Diaohua Chang* is shown in Figure 4.4. China popular songs were being sung by especially the China singers at *Diaohua Chang*. Due to the large numbers of China singers compared to local singers at *Diaohua Chang*, China popular songs could be heard as much as the Chinese Golden Oldies, Mandopop and Cantopop in *Diaohua Chang*.

In addition to Chinese popular numbers, Psy's (Korean singer) popular number *Gangnam Style* is frequently performed by the showgirl singers at *Diaohua Chang*. This is usually accompanied by the Gangnam dance seen at Psy's music video and has always secured applause and good responses from audience. During my observation, despite the drinking or eating customers cum audience, most of them will raise their head and pay attention when the singers perform this song.

Due to the popularity of the Gangnam dance, some audience stood and dance along with the showgirl singers and a lively atmosphere lit up in an instance. However, the showgirl

singers were singing for the pre-chorus, part of the chorus and of the verse only. The Romanization of the lyrics for the first section of Gangnam Style is shown below the English translation in italic and shaded text. Only the underlined words were sung by the showgirl singers. Hence, the original sound track of Gangnam Style was played during the *Diaohua* performance.

Verse:

Oppa Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Oppa is Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Najeneun ttasaroun inganjeogin yeoja

A girl who is warm and humanly during the day

Keopi hanjanui yeoyureul aneun pumgyeok inneun yeoja

A classy girl who know how to enjoy the freedom of a cup of coffee

Bami omyeon simjangi tteugeowojineun yeoja

A girl whose heart gets hotter when night comes

Geureon banjeon inneun yeoja

A girl with that kind of twist

Naneun Sanai

I'm a guy

Najeneun neomankeum ttasaroun geureon Sanai

A guy who is as warm as you during the day

Keopi siggido jeone wonsyat ttaerineun Sanai

A guy who one-shots his coffee before it even cools down

Bami omyeon simjangi teojyeobeorineun Sanai

A guy whose heart bursts when night comes

Geureon Sanai

That kind of guy

Pre-Chorus:

Areumdawo sarangseureowo

Beautiful, loveable

Geurae neo hey geurae baro neo hey

Yes you, hey, yes you, hey

Areumdawo sarangseureowo

Beautiful, loveable

Geurae neo hey geurae baro neo hey

Yes you, hey, yes you, hey

Jigeumbuteo gal dekkaji gabolkka

Now let's go until the end

Chorus:

Oppa Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Oppa is Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Oppa Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Oppa is Gangnam Style Gangnam Style

Oppa Gangnam Style

Oppa is Gangnam Style

Sexy lady Oppa Gangnam Style

Sexy Lady Oppa is Gangnam Style

Sexy lady

Sexy Lady

Showgirl singers did not sing the rapping part of the verse but merely dancing when the soundtrack being played. This because of the language barrier; it would be difficult for the local showgirls to learn to rap in Korean. Moreover, it is believed that most of the audiences gave more attention on the dance rather than the vocal part. This song actually satirizes the materialism phenomenon in Korea (Fisher, 2012) but a lot of the consumers did not know that unless they study about it. Hence, this song is popular at *Diaohua Chang* merely because of the catchy music and comical dance.

The lyrics depict a guy who meet a pretty girl and then he tells her that he is a rich man. The depiction of the lyrics and the *Diaohua Chang* phenomenon is a coincidence match. In addition, the text “Sexy lady” matched well with the intention of the Showtime performance where female singers were dressed in revealing costume while displaying sexualized movement in their dance.

4.7 Issues on *Diaohua Chang*

An ethnographic study into *Diaohua Chang* delivers some afterthought to the general layout of the presentation or performance. The underlying meaning of this tradition is analyzed. *Diaohua Chang* is a sing-song performance for customers coming in for a drink or a meal and may not be something new in the Chinese tradition; as early as Sung dynasty [960-1279] in China, Meng (1957) mentioned that there were people who serve the customers, sing songs and get paid after the customers left; they were called ‘si bo’ during that time.

However, what appears to be a sing-song performance at a food court has close similarities to what Jones (2001) defines as ‘yellow culture’ in referring to the *genü* performing and socializing at *getting* in the later old Shanghai days. At present, the yellow culture seen here

has taken another new context from the *Guazi* (瓜子) culture (Melon seed culture) known in Malaysia as a symbolic pretext for sex business, and the resulting decline in local *Diaohua Chang* performers. To answer the third research objective in this study, this immediately probes a question as to what is the main function or meaning of the current *Diaohua Chang*, an original venue of sing-song performance popular among the Chinese community in Malaysia.

Guazi which means melon seed is a type of snack served at *Diaohua Chang* as mentioned earlier. Being infamous around year 2007 in Malaysia, melon seeds as a form of snack sold in a packet becomes symbolic representation of availability of sex business. This is not new as in the old Shanghai days as early as 1821 *Daoguang* era, melon seed is a common snack at the brothel (Henriot, 2001).

However, *Guazi* culture started in Malaysia when the news article ‘Kuaci Seduction’ appeared. The article revealed that the Chinese waitresses selling melon seeds at restaurant or food court to male patrons is a gesture of offering sexual services (“The Kuaci Seduction,” 2007). The gesture of selling melon seed masked the intention of sex business and the hidden brothel to avoid police raid. When the men bought the melon seed which priced from RM1 to RM2 per pack, the China waitresses would sit, drink and have some conversation them (*Ibid.*).

The melon seed culture came to an end around 2008 due to police raid (“Cops Bust,” 2008) and the symbolic representation of sex business sold by migrant Chinese prostitute was obvious through selling the snack. However, the culture continues without the melon seed where the Chinese prostitutes commonly known as ‘China Dolls’ continue to visit a few popularly identified food court by chatting up middle or old age male customers for free drink

and meal while approaching for sexual business (Yip & Tan, 2012). One of the famous spot is One Stop Food Court which mentioned at local online blog (Ewe, 2012).

Attending the field at One Stop Food Court revealed such a case where many migrant Chinese ladies in short dress and a tiny cross bag wondering around and approaching the men with their main intention in offering sex service to the patrons (observation, May 18, 2013). It was easy for me to tell that they are not local due to the strong Chinese accent from the mainland, as being a fieldworker of same ethnicity although I am a Malaysian Chinese who speak Mandarin with a different accent. In addition, it is obvious for me to know that they are from China because of their appearances especially their facial features.

However, those China ladies were not employee of One Stop Food Court. They cautiously stay around the furthest area from the stage for their 'businesses.' At first glance, I was curious that they were allowed there by the owner and later found that they play another factor in attracting customers thus the owner did not drive them away. This created a phenomenon where the on-stage visual seduction from the singers was accompanied by prostitutes entertaining customers on the floor. The venue is no longer a place for just sing-song entertainment but one that is heavily involved with illegal sexual business. Hence, there seemed to have none or less parents who brought their children to One Stop Food Court compared to the other *Diaohua Chang* due of the environment of it.

Data gathered during a virtual fieldwork to online sites such as Aduan Rakyat Online (Pang, 2011), Lowyat Forum (Deejay_krish, 2012) and Blogspot (Ewe, 2012) shows that Pudu area is considered to be the red-light district while One Stop Food Court, New Peng Hwa Food Court and Ace Electronic Building are the most infamous place for prostitutions.

Also, it is observed that there were even plenty of ladies who stood at the outer area of One Stop Food Court soliciting for sex business.

The presence of prostitutes at One Stop Food Court brought back what Jones (2001) defines as ‘yellow culture’ as according to what Tong (personal communication, March 27, 2014), its manager told in regret that this was not the case when One Stop Food Court began to operate thirteen years ago. He added that few years later, many migrant Chinese rented the nearby apartments and prostitutes began to appear at One Stop Food Court (*Ibid.*).

After the *Guazi* culture or prostitution issue which being discussed above, the second issue, the decline of local singers, perhaps need attention. Most of the *Diaohua Chang* singers also served as guest relations officer (GRO) or Public Relation (PR) where socialization with customers becomes an important task. Despite singing on the stage, the singers would mingle around with the audiences in order to receive more flower garlands. Most of the singers would converse with only the male customers who have the possibility to buy them flower garlands. In my own experience of awarding a flower garland to a singer as part of my participant-observation, the singer does not stay to chat with me and just thanked me and left seeing I am a female young customer with my female friend (fieldwork, November 11, 2012).

Majority of the singers do not receive a basic salary but commission from the received flower garlands. Due to the nature of the salary scale, singers would try their best to attract customers to purchase flower garlands; hence the singers would rather be excel in their ‘public relation’ skills than there singing. Tong emphasized that *Diaohua Chang* is place where people survive by socializing well rather than singing well (personal communication, March 27, 2014). In short, local singers who survive through good singing skills decreased.

On the other hand, the *Diaohua Chang* performance which the mostly-female singers entertaining the mostly-male customers is a typical event for male gaze. Mulvey (1975) discussed male gaze in her cinema research that the female character which modeled accordingly is being casted as the object of fantasy by the decisive male gaze. Mulvey's concept of male gaze is a common phenomenon at *Diaohua Chang* where the mostly-male customers appear to be focusing on and visualizing the female singers as the object of probably sexual desire, singing, dancing and luring through song after song. Hence, though most of the *Diaohua Chang* singers did not produce a high standard of singing performance, there were still a lot of customers who came to watch it.

As more China singers came into *Diaohua Chang*, the style of operating has been different as last time. Originally, in order to be a singer at *Diaohua Chang*, going through an audition was a necessary process. However, audition was not held before hiring the singers at One Stop Food Court, City Food Court and Tai Wah restaurant. Audition was only held by Serdang Food Court before hiring the *Diaohua Chang* singers. The manager of Serdang Food Court, Yaw (personal communication, March 7, 2014) mentioned that he was the one who in charge of the audition for the singers but some of the *Diaohua Chang* singers did not go through the audition because they were introduced by the owner. Before happened to know the occurrence of audition at the *Diaohua Chang*, I have notice that the singers at Serdang Food Court seemed to have better singing techniques compared to the other three *Diaohua Chang* after frequent visits.

The organizers who only wanted to earn more money but neglected the quality of the singers have caused this phenomenon to happen. Singing skill is not the most important skill in becoming the most popular *Diaohua Chang* singers. A *Diaohua Chang* singer, Wong (personal communication, June 11, 2013), revealed that the singer who received the most

flower garlands was good at socializing with the customers. Hence, less news regarding to *Diaohua Chang* singing skills were reported through the newspaper. Most of the news article were focusing on the issues of the flower garlands and the illegal workers of *Diaohua Chang*.

Furthermore, Tong (personal communication, March 27, 2014) mentioned that there were prostitutes who became *Diaohua Chang* singers in order to increase their popularity and get a better price from their services. Many of the *Diaohua Chang* singers did offer special service for the customers in order to increase their income. A singer at Tai Wah Restaurant also hinted that *Diaohua Chang* singers' main focus was not singing but offering special service to the customers in order to increase their income (Zhao Ming, personal communication, May 3, 2014). This phenomenon conforms with what Sithanan (2006) explained that prostitution is happened in the appearance of operating 'Entertainment Houses' with the provision of dance, music and other performing arts to the customers.

Another issue is to delve on the meaning of the flower garlands in this sing-song performance. A flower garland is priced at RM 10 but for the audiences who want to pay more for the singers, there are different prices of crowns available for the customers ranging from RM 100 to RM 500. Moreover, different prices of ropes are available for the customers to purchase (see Figure 4.19). The price of rope are ranging from RM 500 to RM 10,000.

Song request could be made at *Diaohua Chang* with the purchase of any amount of flower garlands. Also, customer could sing a song on the stage with *Diaohua Chang* singer with a minimum purchase of RM 50 of flower garlands. As the *Diaohua Chang* singers were taking turns to be performed on the stage, customers who want to sing with the singers have to wait for their turns. Hence, customers who want to sing with the singers on stage immediately without waiting could purchase a minimum of RM 300 of flower garlands.



Figure 4.19: Robes located in the middle of the stage while flower garlands located beside the right side of the stage (Chin, personal photograph, May 6, 2013).

Tong (personal communication, March 27, 2014) mentioned that the China singers usually received more flower garlands compared to the local singers. The singers who received more flower garlands were around 23 to 35 years old (*Ibid.*). After observing and interviewing the singers, the factors for singers to receive more flower garlands were 1) good in socializing, 2) prettier and younger than the other singer, and 3) have better singing skills compared to the other singers. Socializing was the vital part in order to receive more flower garlands as there were plenty of lonely men who want companion.

Another form of rewarding the singer is party cracker when a singer received a minimum of RM50 of flower garlands; that is, one party cracker would be popped for each RM50 purchase. For instance, six party crackers would be popped when a singer receive a RM300 of crown or flower garlands. Figure 4.20 shows the used party crackers during the anniversary celebration at City Food Court. The loudness and celebrative sound of a party

cracker created an atmosphere reflecting the popularity of a particular singer and the financially rich customers who support the singers. Although the party cracker is popped for the achievement of the singer who received an amount of flower garlands; however, it may not truly represents the singer's ability in his or her performance. Besides, it seems to be a drive to draw in more purchase from the customers, and so to keep on the party crackers popping sound as a means to show that the nights' programme is happening. In addition, it also shows a mean of appreciation from the *Diaohua Chang* owner to customers.



Figure 4.20: The used party crackers at City Food Court (Facebook, 2013).

In addition, the *Diaohua Chang* singer, Wang (personal communication, December 11, 2014), said that there were customers who tried to compete on the amount of flower garlands which they give to a singer in order to attract the singer or boost their self-esteem. The popping of party crackers would allow everyone at *Diaohua Chang* to roughly know the amount of flower garlands received by the singers. Hence, the application of party crackers is believed to be able to increase the customers' willingness to purchase more flower garlands, crowns or ropes by making them feel proud.

4.8 Conclusion

The origin, settings, organization, music performance, songs, and other issues of *Diaohua Chang* have been explored in this chapter in answering the three research objectives. The setting and organization of *Diaohua Chang* which is believed to originate from Thailand were exposed in a way for readers to have an idea about the image of *Diaohua Chang*. In this globalized era where cultures and ideas spread rapidly, *Diaohua Chang* from Thailand as a place where could earn money is being copied to Malaysia and Singapore.

Rather than a place which revitalizes the Chinese Golden Oldies as what I assume to be during my pre-field stage, it seemed to be more of a place where promote yellow culture or eroticism. There were plenty of reasons that caused the statement about. First is the *Diaohua Chang* operators who divert the context of a sing-song performance to sexual business, proving a lesser intention to provide a quality music performance by simply hiring attractive ‘China dolls.’

Secondly, the uncontrollable influx of migrant Chinese female singers or prostitutes who occupy the *Diaohua Chang* singer positions made the market became worse. The local singers who could provide a quality performance were being difficult at *Diaohua Chang* because they wouldn’t receive any salary but only the commissions of flower garlands, which they did not achieve well compared to the migrant Chinese singers.

The China singers were desperate to earn money would strive to entertain the customers in anyways in order to receive more flower garlands. Although there were around 10 – 20 singers at each *Diaohua Chang*, only 1 to 2 of them who could really sing. There was a news article about the singing career of a *Diaohua Chang* singer in Penang (“Hun Yin Po Lie,” 2009). The singer compared her earlier and later singing career at *Diaohua Chang*. Her earlier

singing life at *Diaohua Chang* was great as there were a lot of customers and she can earned an average of one to two thousand(s) ringgit per night. Today's, due to the increment of singers and the influx of singers from other countries, customers of *Diaohua Chang* are scattered. *Diaohua Chang* which hire local singers to perform is hard to compete with *Diaohua Chang* which hire China female singers as China singers would strive to earn as much money as they can.

The music performance and songs choice of *Diaohua Chang* is revealed in this chapter too. The authentic style and programs of *Diaohua Chang* in the food court of Malaysia were being analyzed. Other than the negative parts as mentioned above, *Diaohua Chang* also served as a place for the senior citizens and middle-aged men to enjoy music performance with minimal payment for drinks. The Chinese Golden Oldies, Mandopop, Cantopop and China popular songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang* also portrait the current trends of songs choice with a mixture of local and China singers.

As a summary, *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia appeared to be a sing-song performance with food and beverage sales but is actually an illegal business without license and it also increasingly tied-down to sex industry. Regular news article regarding the illegal issues of hiring migrant workers without permit and operating *Diaohua Chang* without license can be seen and potential singers who come for a career in singing at *Diaohua Chang* are forced to leave due to the high unhealthy competition with the migrant singers. The large amount of money spent over flower garlands by the customers reveal another factor in encouraging singers who are lacking in singing skills. These issues are seen contaminating the current *Diaohua Chang* in Malaysia.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

The final chapter concludes this ethnographic and phenomenological research on *Diaohua Chang* at these four selected food courts in Klang Valley between November 2012 and December 2014. The discussion is divided into four sub-headings - implication of research, limitation of research, suggestion for future research, and conclusion.

5.2 Implication of Research

The first step in pre-fieldwork determined after reviewing related literatures on Chinese Performing Arts in Malaysia which reveals that there is no previous study conducted on *Diaohua Chang*. Therefore, this is an essential research to analyze *Diaohua Chang* – a part of Chinese culture in Malaysia. *Diaohua Chang* is closely related to and mirrors another face of this country with its illegal singers and licensing issues. Despite the negative aura associated with it, *Diaohua Changs* are places where middle and old-aged men go to for entertainment, to pass time and perhaps companionship. Although *Diaohua* performance might not be seen as a performance for the high class community, this study of *Diaohua Chang* is still indispensable and worthy of records.

As the pioneering study of *Diaohua Chang*, the ethnographic approach had been employed to describe the practices of insiders and cultures of *Diaohua Changs* in Klang Valley. A phenomenological framework is employed, dissecting into the meaning of this performing art genre as a tradition and a sing-song performance. One of the most valuable role of this ethnographic research is the shedding of light to as why *Diaohua Chang*, which takes its origin closely resembling the *shidaiqu* culture is still actively practiced amongst the Malaysian Chinese community.

Simultaneously, the theory of phenomenology is used for this research to study performer-audience communication and responses. The significance of music could be constructed by looking at the music perception (Berger, 2008). Music perception by the audiences (listening) and performers (playing) is the sense that they constantly attain and also in return impart back a piece of culture (*Ibid.*). In order to understand the meaning of this music, this research did not merely focus on music itself but also cultural issues happening within these *Diaohua Changs*.

The first research objective was achieved. Various *Diaohua Changs* were visited. Via informants and insiders, four popular *Diaohua Changs* were selected and researched. General style of the *Diaohua Chang's* origin, settings and organization were shown at Chapter Four after hands-on experience at the four *Diaohua Changs*. The second research objective was also achieved with approaches such as observation, participant-observation and interviews. The context of sing-song performance at a *Diaohua Chang* was studied. Repertory discussion revealed the kind of songs performed and favored by the audiences and singers.

The objective above were matched with Berger's (2008) summary on phenomenological ethnography which studies music performances and songs instead of only a music performance and a song. The third objective and final objective, strongly linked to the content of the second objective, was the investigation of *Diaohua Chang* from a cultural perspective. This is achieved by examining cultural issues on *guazi* culture, the decline of local singers and the context of flower garlands at *Diaohua Changs*. This final objective was chosen as Berger mentioned that for phenomenological ethnography, the organization of attention of the insiders is one of the important subject studied (*Ibid.*).

Collection of primary data provided information which furnished findings for all three research objectives. Observation, incomplete participation, interview session, virtual

fieldwork and internet searching had been completed to conclude results for this research.

They are shared in these six sections below:

- a. Origin of *Diaohua Chang*
- b. Settings of *Diaohua Chang*
- c. Organization of *Diaohua Chang*
- d. Music Performance of *Diaohua Chang*
- e. Songs being performed at *Diaohua Chang*
- f. Cultural Issues of *Diaohua Chang*

The origin of *Diaohua Chang* was discussed after interview sessions with insiders and information searching on the internet. Since Tan's research on *Ko-tai* in 1984, and after much literature reviewing work and interview with current *Diaohua Chang* informants, *Diaohua Chang* is strongly believed to be originated from Thailand. However, this still remains an assumption with insufficient concrete evidence.

This dissertation provide a standard layout of the settings of *Diaohua Chang* after researching the four *Diaohua Changs* in Klang Valley. In general, *Diaohua Chang* combines a food court and a permanent stage for music performances of Chinese song aficionados in a dim-lighted and cool open-aired ambience. The stage remains an important section and is significantly big proportional to fit the large number of singers as required. As a food court, *Diaohua Changs* are never to be mistaken as pubs (which are more costly).

The nature of *Diaohua Chang* in the common Malaysian *kopitiam* setting with sing-song performances gave *Diaohua Chang* its unique appeal. Its close association with the illicit sex business industry marks another one of its character - similarity to the early characteristics

of a brothel. In addition, with the absence of an entertainment license, and all these mentioned, *Diaohua Chang* conforms to the yellow culture as Jones (2001) indicated.

The organization of *Diaohua Chang* at the four food court varied more in past times according to informants. It became more unified these days when owner of *Diaohua Changs* hire a stage manager to organize and manage 10 to 20 singers for the daily music performance. The authentic music performance of *Diaohua Chang* is recorded and analyzed through this research. The karaoke performance, *Cha Cha Session*, and showgirl singer performance were a series of performances that were only displayed in *Diaohua Chang*. Except the *Cha Cha Session*, karaoke performance and showgirl singer performance is accompanied by pre-recorded music. *Cha Cha sessions* were being performed by singers and also keyboard player who played 'sequence' style of accompaniment by incorporating in rhythm of drum.

Chinese Golden Oldies were part of the songs choice that are performed at *Diaohua Changs*. Other songs that were made popular at *Diaohua Changs* are the Mandopop, Cantopop and also Chinese popular songs from mainland China. China popular songs which were not popular within the Malaysian community are also frequently performed at *Diaohua Changs* mainly due to influence by the large numbers of singers from mainland China. During recent years, a particular Korean popular song, Gangnam Style is also frequently performed. Although it is not a Chinese song, the fact that Gangnam Style is being perform frequently by showgirl singers at *Diaohua Chang* shows a globalized music culture and listening experience, where performers and audiences are influenced by what they frequently hear.

The cultural issues of *Diaohua Chang* were investigated via phenomenological conceptual framework, that is, by close observation carried out with focus on i) the communication between singer and audience, ii) meaning behind the flower garlands and iii) insiders'

organization of attention. Relating to the singers' sexy attire, the audience's organization of attention was not mainly on the music performance but on fulfillment of their male gazes and on the companionship.

Despite its appearance as a food court which provides music performances, its close affiliation with the sex industry is obvious. Although *Diaohua Chang* is a place where one could spend less to enjoy a music performance, there are people who spend more than ten thousand Malaysia Ringgit within a night in purchasing flower garlands. This led one to question the meaning of flower garlands and its role in the *Diaohua Chang* setting. Flower garland could represent i) a reward merely given to the best singer, ii) a form of fulfilment for the giver's ego or iii) deeper meaning which may be hinting for sexual service or 'special' relationship between the givers and the receivers.

In summary, the current *Diaohua Chang* is not merely a sing-song performance venue for the Malaysian Chinese community as it once was. It is a male-dominated entertainment venue heavily bonded with the sexual industry, masked behind a large stage of song and dance performance ranging for *shidaiqu* to more current popular numbers. Songs that ranged from *shidaiqu* to popular songs from the 70s, 80s and 90s were selected to cater for the middle-aged or elderly male audience. Performing these songs bring to live again popular hits of the past decades. The meaning of *Diaohua Chang* is complex. Not all audience present are to look for sexual services or to socialize with singers. Through this research, it is noticed there are audience who come simply to enjoy the songs. Still, stage positions dominated by migrant Chinese non-professional 'singers' is a main factor in changing the nature of this sing-song performance.

The method used in this research is found suitable and sufficient data was collected. However, due to the nature of a phenomenological study, I did not engage in the participant-

observation approach to be a *Diaohua Chang* singer, as in conventional ethnography. Data was collected based on observation and interview. However, due to the nature of *Diaohua Chang*, being an illegal entertainment business without a license, the informants were quite reserved during interview sessions and needed further assurance of my presence as a student from University of Malaya on a research project.

On the other hand, my presence as a younger female audience of 24 years of age with the companion of friend of my age perhaps is not a good way to engage singers into further conversation. I did reward flower garlands to the singers to note the different in their response. These singers just noted their appreciation to me and left swiftly to tend to the male audience. However, data collection via other approaches such as observation, interview with managers and other singers who are experienced in *Diaohua Chang* via appointment, social media, and communication device furnished the required information needed to fulfil the research objectives.

5.3 Suggestion for Future Research

This is a first overture on the research of *Diaohua Chang* from a music and culture point of view. In order to gain more information and reality of *Diaohua Chang*, more research should be done on it from different points of view. *Diaohua Chang* is present in the entire of Malaysia especially in Klang Valley, Penang and Johor. Hence, research should be done in various states to generalize the *Diaohua* culture in Malaysia or to compare *Diaohua Chang* of different states. Furthermore, research also should be done at countries neighboring Malaysia (i.e. Thailand and Singapore). Moreover given that, Thailand seemed to be the origin of *Diaohua* culture.

Diaohua Chang is also available in a different setting, a pub. Therefore, future research should be done on *Diaohua Chang* in a pub too. Moreover, comparisons could be done to analyze the differences between a pub and a food court style of *Diaohua Chang*. Some of the interview sessions were well-planned but a majority of the interview sessions were not pre-planned as I happened to meet some friendly *Diaohua Chang* singers who were willing to share the essence of their daily job. For future research, interview sessions with the informants need to be well-planned in order to get accurate and precise flow of information.

5.4 Conclusion

The three proposed research objectives were achieved after completion of fieldwork. Phenomenological ethnography research on *Diaohua Chang* were completed in 24 months to reveal the standard form, nature and meaning of a *Diaohua Chang* in the Klang Valley. Various issues were discussed pertaining to the legality, the participant's organization of attention, the sexualization of the female singers and the male gaze of the audiences. Although future research should be expended on this research subject, this smaller scale research serves as a pioneer study in *Diaohua Chang* and provides a cornerstone reference for future *Diaohua Chang* scholars.

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