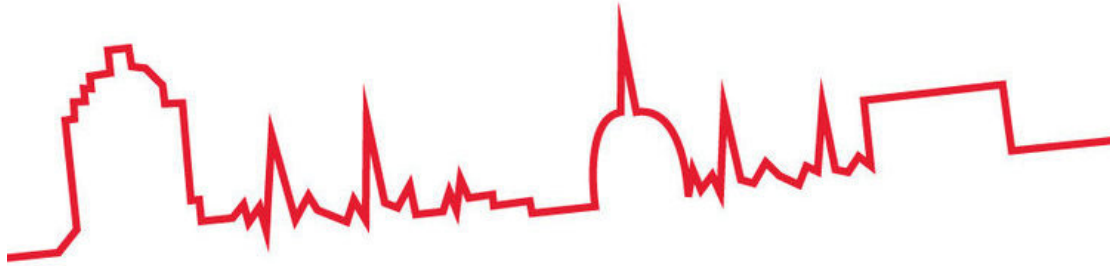


## Close, but different

By Eve Kucharski

# ARTS & CULTURE



### Three-day event highlights East Asian cultures

Art forms from Japan, China and Korea — three East Asian countries with distinct cultures — come together this week for a three-day exploration of Asian performing arts.

Tuesday morning, the Asian Studies Center at Michigan State University launched “Join the Beat,” an ambitious series of East Asian performance arts events. Each day focuses on a different cultural tradition, offering workshops, performances and chances to meet the artists. Tuesday’s events showcased rakugo, a Japanese form of comedic storytelling. Today’s events explore nanguan, a style of Chinese classical music.

Shih-Hui Chen, professor of composition and theory at Rice University, is touring with Lâm-hun-koh Nanguan Music and Theater Troupe, which performs at MSU tonight.

“The music tradition is known for its elegant and serene quality,” Chen said. “Within a piece, the tempo starts slowly and gradually accelerates. There is little fluctuation in dynamics, although minute nuances and dynamic changes occur throughout a piece.”

A nanguan ensemble usually consists of five instruments, comprising three varieties of lutes, wooden clappers and a vertically blown flute. Lâm-hun-koh Nanguan Music and Theater Troupe has been commissioned to be ambassadors of nanguan style of performance by the Taiwan National Center for Traditional Arts. The group, which consists of five musicians and three actors, will perform three traditional nanguan classical pieces, as well as scenes from traditional nanguan opera.

“We will present two theater excerpts, titled ‘Enjoying the Flowers’ and ‘Withholding the Umbrella,’ both from the nanguan opera ‘The Lychee and the Mirror,’ Chen said.

The troupe has been touring the U.S. throughout October. The group’s stop at MSU is due largely to the efforts of Tze-Lan Sang, professor of

Chinese literature and media studies and member of the event committee. She saw the group's tour as the perfect opportunity to share a new cultural experience with the MSU community.

"In the past, I have organized and hosted a Taiwanese film festival, featuring fiction and documentary films from Taiwan. This year, I wanted to do a different type of programming," Sang said. "When (Chen) pitched the idea of bringing a nanguan musical group from Taiwan to MSU, I very happily jumped on that idea."

Along with its evening performance, the nanguan troupe will offer a pre-performance reception and post-performance workshop that will allow attendees to meet the musicians and get a first-hand look at the uncommon instruments.

Thursday's "Join the Beat" program focuses on p'ansori, a Korean form of solo storytelling that has been designated by UNESCO as a world oral heritage. Chan E. Park, Korean language professor at Ohio State University, describes it as a blend of several types of performance art.

"P'ansori is a kind of storytelling — story-singing — that really has a lot of theater and a lot of drama and a lot of poetry," Park said.

Park will perform a traditional p'ansori piece, "The Song of Water Palace," for Thursday's event. Attendees can follow along with English translations done by Park.

Catherine Ryu, MSU associate professor of Japanese and chairwoman of the event committee, thinks that the three-day event will give the MSU community a better understanding of the diversity of Asian culture.

"I wanted to have Japan, Korea, China — they're all from Asia, but they're also separate, despite some commonalities," Ryu said. "Even in this global age, people still have a tendency to merge all the different Asian countries into one. It is very important for people who are not familiar with this region to see that they are different entities with their own cultural history."

A key part of the series, Ryu explained, is offering a chance for interaction — not just between the performers and the community but also between the different performers.

"Normally, they would perform on their own venues; their paths would not intersect," Ryu said. "But at MSU, they can all meet. I also wanted to include workshops for our students, so it's not just you go in and watch performance and go home, but this can be an integral part of our students' experiences. We have three main traditional performance arts put together in a way that has never happened before."

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## **Join the Beat**

### **Nanguan Pre-Performance Reception**

6:30-7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 26

RCAH Look Out! Gallery Snyder Hall (second floor)

362 Bogue Street, East Lansing

### **Nanguan Performance**

7-8:15 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 26

RCAH Theater Snyder Hall (lower level)

362 Bogue Street, East Lansing

### **Nanguan Workshop**

10:20-11:40 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 27

B310 Wells Hall

619 Red Cedar Road, East Lansing

**P'ansori Workshop**

1:30-3 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 27

Studio 60 Theatre, MSU Auditorium

542 Auditorium Road, East Lansing

**P'ansori Pre-Performance Reception**

6:30-7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 27

Snyder Hall (second floor)

362 Bogue Street, East Lansing

**P'ansori Performance**

7-8 p.m. Thursday Oct. 27,

RCAH Theater Snyder Hall (lower level)

362 Bogue Street, East Lansing

All events FREE

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