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Elaborate halftime show a celebration of Chinese culture, Spartan pride



Rachel Greco, Lansing State Journal 8:46 a.m. EST November 16, 2015



(Photo: MATTHEW DAE SMITH/for the Lansing State Journal)

EAST LANSING - Luyi Han's knowledge of football was non-existent five years ago.

Today the Michigan State University senior has an up-close relationship with the sport. He spends game days on the field playing trombone during halftime at Spartan Stadium, the first student from China to be part of MSU's Marching Band.

Saturday Han spent the morning tailgating with other international students before making his way to the stadium to take part in the largest half halftime show the band has ever offered.

The 12-minute show, entitled "The Art of the March: Cues from Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War,'" was a marriage of marching band technique and Chinese culture, part of [an 18-month celebration of China](http://artsandculture.msu.edu/about/focus.aspx) (<http://artsandculture.msu.edu/about/focus.aspx>) at the university that started in February.

It was also a tribute to MSU's decade-long [China Initiative](http://blog.artsandculture.msu.edu/post/2015/04/13/China-Initiative-from-2005-2015.aspx) (<http://blog.artsandculture.msu.edu/post/2015/04/13/China-Initiative-from-2005-2015.aspx>), aimed at expanding the university's presence and outreach in China.

But to Han, who's from Shanghai, it was an opportunity to celebrate the art of music too.



"I think music is a pretty dramatic but very powerful language itself," Han said. "I don't think there's any language barrier because we all speak the same language with music."

During the tailgate at Munn Arena Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon addressed the crowd of international students sitting in the stands, many dressed in green and white, with a reminder.

"You are important to the MSU community and to the global community, because you're a Spartan," she told them.



Luyi Han, a fifth-year senior at Michigan State University, gets a selfie taken with Amber Cordell of MSU's Office for International Students and Scholars, Saturday at Munn Arena before the start of the MSU vs. Maryland football game. Han is the first student from China to be a member of the Spartan Marching Band. (Photo: MATTHEW DAE SMITH | for the Lansing State Journal)

Global community

"It's special for me and for the band," Han said, of the elaborate show. "We've never done just a large and complex halftime show before so it's a unique experience for all of us. For the band members it's a chance to embrace the Chinese culture as well. They're really happy about it."

This year over 4,000 Chinese students attend MSU. Over 1,000 of them were expected to attend Saturday's football game, most obtaining free tickets during a tailgate for international students held at Munn Arena.

For many it will be the first game they've been to, according to Kurt Dewhurst, director of Arts and Cultural Initiatives for University Outreach and Engagement.

Many of them will be sitting in the stands with students who are familiar with the sport, he said. While they're learning about the game, Dewhurst said organizers hoped the rest of the crowd took in the halftime show, experiencing China from the stands.

"We know there are people who will come to the cultural events on campus, but how do you reach a new audience of the general public that maybe doesn't realize how globally engaged MSU is?" he said. "We were trying to think of something that would reach beyond the campus," he said. "We needed the largest stage we have on campus, which is Spartan Stadium."

Designed by New York- and Beijing-based artist Jennifer Wen Ma (http://littlemeat.net/words/words_CV.htm), who led the creative team for the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening and closing ceremonies, the show itself included 600 participants, smoke, a dragon and Chinese instruments. There was also audience participation. About 1,500 people in the stands held up cards to form paintings during the performance.

Wen Ma said she conducted her own research before conceiving of the concept, attending an MSU football game in September and studying marching band technique.



Halftime show co-designer Jennifer Wen Ma, of New York City and Beijing, left, and Luyi Han, a fifth-year senior and first student from China to be member of the MSU Marching Band, talk about the upcoming Spartan Stadium halftime show, Saturday during the MSU Cultural Engagement Council tailgate at Munn Arena prior to the MSU vs. Maryland football game. It will be the largest halftime show at Spartan Stadium. (Photo: MATTHEW DAE SMITH | for the Lansing State Journal)

"When I was first asked to put together this event I thought, 'Well, I don't know anything about football or marching bands, so I better do some research,' she said.

But Wen Ma said she drew her inspiration from all three subjects — the sport, the band and Chinese culture. She said the three did fit together on the field, proof of the "global society" we live in.

"That's what America is about," she said. "I think that's the nature of the world we live in today."

During preparations Wen Ma worked with the band, attending rehearsals this week. The finished product is a piece of performance art that the university and performers can be proud of, she said, and this was a chance to bring that art to a large audience.

"I hope people who see it have a shift of perspective," she said.



The audience joins in as MSU Marching Band performs "The Art of the March, Cues from Sun Tzu's Art of War," on Saturday at Spartan Stadium. (Photo: MATTHEW DAE SMITH/for the Lansing State Journal)